

“An Irresistible Phalanx”: Journeyman Associations in Western Europe, 1300–1800

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The whole journeymen of the Metropolis who will form an irresistible phalanx and greatly superior to the united energies of the Masters.

London employers to the government, 1813*

The paths of historical research resemble the forces in the sea. As some topics surface and rise to ever greater heights, others may be dragged to the depths of silence and cease to affect the beating of the waves. In most western European countries, research on journeymen has suffered this second fate. Along with the decline in interest in guild-based economies, the issue of whether pre-industrial journeyman associations were predecessors (or perhaps adumbrations) of modern trade unions,¹ which had inspired widespread debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, faded from the agenda following World War II. This trend does not mean that the new generation of social historians has blithely ignored disputes involving journeymen. Nevertheless, many authors designate such events as crowd movements or view them as obvious forms of traditional resistance.

In the 1960s and 1970s, British crowd historians painted a consistent picture of social relations on the eve of the Industrial Revolution and

* Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London*. John Gast and His Times (London, 1979), p. 58.

¹ The forerunner function of the journeyman associations for the labour movement and the continuity between them have been emphasized by Guillaume Des Marez in Belgium, Henri Hauser in France, Lujo Brentano, Georg Schanz and Rudolf Wissell in Germany, and the Webbs in Great Britain. For Germany, see R. Reith, “The Social History of Craft in Germany: A New Edition of the Work of Rudolf Wissell”, *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), pp. 92–102, and R. Reith, A. Griessinger and P. Eggers, *Streikbewegungen deutscher Handwerksgelesen im 18. Jahrhundert. Materialien zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des städtischen Handwerks, 1700–1806* (Göttingen, 1992), pp. 2–3. The importance of corporate traditions for the formation of labour movements has recently returned as a topic of debate. See J. Kocka, “Craft Traditions and the Labour Movement in Nineteenth-Century Germany”, in P. Thane *et al.* (eds), *The Power of the Past. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 95–117; J. Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism, 1750–1850: The Formative Years* (London and New York, 1988); F. Lenger, “Beyond Exceptionalism: Notes on the Artisanal Phase of the Labour Movement in France, England, Germany and the United States”, *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), pp. 1–23; D. E. Devreese, “Ambachten, arbeidsmarkt en arbeidersbeweging. Vorming van de moderne arbeidersbeweging te Brussel, 1842–1867”, in B. de Vries *et al.* (eds), *De kracht der Zwakken. Studies over arbeid en arbeidersbeweging. Opstellen aangeboden aan Theo van Tijn bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar Economische en Sociale Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht* (Amsterdam, 1992), pp. 108–138.

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provided new insights into the nature, the significance and the purpose of collective actions. Although they frequently disagreed and emphasized different aspects, their general messages were fairly similar and resulted in four closely related conclusions.

First, they depicted eighteenth-century society as a bipolar sphere of influence in which the ambitions and strategies of those with power were to some extent held in check and corrected through collective action by those with little power (the plebs). The exercise of authority took place within a complex framework of reciprocity, which, though undoubtedly characterized by structural inequality, nevertheless reflected an “equilibrium of paternalism and deference”, as stated by E. P. Thompson. If the elite unilaterally and deliberately upset this balance by refusing to fulfil its duties or by flouting established practices and customs, then labouring people felt resistance was justified: “The plebs as often as not resists, in the name of custom, those economic rationalisations and innovations which rulers, dealers, or employers seek to impose.”²

Second, these historians maintained that crowd actions, which usually had carefully defined and direct targets, were brief and involved some form of (often ritualized) violence and were most likely to occur when a community existed as a substratum. According to John Bohstedt, “riots were quintessentially local politics. Mobs typically mustered groups of people who shared a praxis of common experience and perception.” Consequently, both horizontal and vertical social relationships came into play. The mobilization of vertical networks was related to the patron relationships between the elite and the other members of the community.³

Third, most authors agree that the crowd’s main historical significance lay in its reaction to the formation of states and the development of capitalism. The effects changed economic policy, thus explaining why food riots became more frequent during the eighteenth century. Local communities responded more frequently and more violently as their rights as consumers came under attack, and the authorities grew more reluctant to respect the rules of the moral economy and to protect the interests of consumers.⁴

² E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), *passim* (quotation from p. 9).

³ J. Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790–1810* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), *passim* (the quotation on p. 3). See also W. M. Reddy, “The Textile Trade and the Language of the Crowd at Rouen, 1752–1871”, *Past and Present*, 74 (1977), pp. 62–89, and A. Randall, “Worker Resistance to Machinery in the Case of the English Woollen Industry”, in ESRC Working Group on Proto-Industrial Communities, *Workshop Papers*, 1 (Warwick, 1987), pp. 86–105.

⁴ Several authors consider food riots the most typical form of social protest during the eighteenth century. They include: H. Burstin, “Conflitti sul lavoro e protesta annonaria a Parigi alla fine dell’Ancien Régime”, *Studi Storici*, 19 (1978), pp. 743–744; G. Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York, 1980), p. 136; I. R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain. Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984), p. 152; A. Fox, *History and Heritage. The Social Origins of the British*

Fourth, protests from the bottom tended to be socially conservative, as “it was within the paternalist framework itself that an ideology [. . .] was sought”. This quality did not mean that the plebeian culture was ideologically dominated by the elite. While labouring people defended their own standards and values, they usually legitimized their collective actions on the basis of statutes or old rights (i.e. precedents). So, “the plebeian culture is rebellious, but rebellious in defence of custom”.⁵

The prevailing focus on the defence of consumer interests and on the crowd’s efforts to regulate the market has pushed producers’ protest movements on to the sidelines. It is as if artisans and industrial workers have been engulfed by the crowd. Any research on their collective actions tends to categorize and interpret them on the basis of custom and moral economy. George Rudé claimed that craftsmen initially responded as consumers: “In times of hardship workers were more prone to seek redress from grain factors and millers than from their own employers.” Although they obviously organized strikes to obtain better working conditions, “disputes over wages were informed by the same concern for ‘justice’ and the restoration of a lost right rather than by the ambition to win the wage-earner a larger share of the cake”. By the end of the eighteenth century, “the forward-looking element was still skin-deep [. . .] and popular protest [. . .] still looked to the past”. Consequently, strikes “developed into riots in which strikers broke machinery, either to save their jobs or to bring their employers to heel through collective bargaining by riot”.⁶

Historians who take for granted that the confrontation between the new type of market economy and the customary moral economy of the plebs set the tone for actions and reactions among pre-industrial craftsmen tend to assume that their resistance was comparable to the food riots: all groups of activists strove to obtain “the right to have their interests considered and taken account of by the established authorities”.⁷ Skilled workers clung to the paternalistic legal legacy as a standard for judging the just exercise of authority. Their collective actions, from peaceful negotiations and petitions to lively protests that entailed ritual-

Industrial Relations System (London, 1985), p. 63; J. Rule, *Albion’s People. English Society, 1714–1815* (London and New York, 1992), p. 196.

⁵ E. P. Thompson, “English Trade Unionism and Other Labour Movements Before 1790”, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 17 (1968), p. 21; *idem*, “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?”, *Social History*, 3 (1978), p. 154; *idem*, *Customs*, pp. 8–10.

⁶ G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History. A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (New York, 1964), p. 66, and his *Ideology*, pp. 136, 141, 144. On “collective bargaining by riot”, see E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers”, *Past and Present*, 1 (1952), pp. 59–60, reprinted in his *Labouring Men* (London, 1968), pp. 7–8, and E. Hunt, *British Labour History, 1815–1914* (London, 1981), p. 195.

⁷ R. W. Malcolmson, “Workers’ Combinations in Eighteenth-Century England”, in M. and L. Jacob (eds), *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London, 1984), p. 152.

ized violence, primarily served to obtain regulatory redress for their grievances.⁸ The moral economy was therefore also an umbrella ideology among the journeymen and industrial workers, who personified this economy in their workshops and on the market.⁹ Adrian Randall has concluded that it would be anachronistic to assume that their motives, actions and expectations were based on any economic rationality, or that their negotiating strategies resulted from an understanding of the principles of supply and demand. The modern appearance of their strikes was merely an illusion, as the eighteenth-century craftsmen, like the other members of the larger community to which they belonged, were primarily concerned with “threats to custom and customary relationships to non-economic aspects such as apprenticeship and the organisation of work”.¹⁰

Some historians even assert that eighteenth-century journeymen and industrial workers were unable to grasp the economic situation. Andreas Griessinger considered their cognitive horizon too limited to distinguish the economy from other types of social relations. As these workers’ perceptions of the world could not accommodate an economic outlook, they were unable to understand or accept the economic principles that arose among the elite towards the end of the eighteenth century. Craftsmen focused on honour, entailing symbolic capital. Their collective actions were not based on a cost-benefit ratio, nor was their primary intention to protect the craftsmen’s material interests. Rather, these actions were rituals of purification intended to restore the group’s moral integrity whenever it became tarnished by unacceptable interference from the authorities, employers and fellow workers. Because eighteenth-century craftsmen continued to assess all disputes in terms of violations of conventional standards and values, they were unable to pinpoint structural aspects that undermined their position.¹¹

⁸ J. Rule, *The Experience of Labour in Eighteenth-Century Industry* (London, 1981), pp. 211–212. See also J. Brewer and J. Styles, *An Ungovernable People. The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1980), “Introduction”, esp. pp. 13–14, and R. Price, *Labour in British Society: An Interpretative History* (London, 1986), p. 29.

⁹ A. Charlesworth, “From the Moral Economy of Devon to the Political Economy of Manchester, 1790–1812”, *Social History*, 18 (1993), p. 213.

¹⁰ A. Randall, “The Industrial Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers in the Eighteenth Century”, in Rule, *British Trade Unionism*, pp. 29–51 (the quotation on p. 47).

¹¹ A. Griessinger, *Das symbolische Kapital der Ehre. Streikbewegungen und kollektives Bewusstsein deutscher Handwerksgelesen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Ulm, 1981), *passim*, esp. pp. 179, 439, 450–455. See also H. U. Thamer, “On the Use and Abuse of Handicraft: Journeyman Culture and Enlightened Public Opinion in 18th and 19th Century Germany”, in S. L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture. Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin and New York, 1984), p. 296, who equally argues that artisans “perceived and reacted to social, economic, and human problems through the notion of honor and its restitution. The journeymen’s strikes, too, did not serve primarily

Given this situation, the emphasis on changes in social protest during the Industrial Revolution is not surprising. Although “the sharp dichotomies implied by a necessary and universal transition to factory production have given way to more open-ended studies of various forms of commodity production”, as Michael Sonenscher noted,¹² prevailing views continue to stress the differences between the collective actions of pre-industrial artisans and those of nineteenth-century workers over the similarities: organized and permanent means of articulating grievances and presenting demands were being developed, workers’ combinations became more self-assertive and much less deferential, and collective bargaining by riot gave way to an increasing sophistication of tactics, with trade union activity and strikes becoming the most common means of defending living standards and keeping a proper control on the conditions of labour.¹³ Dick Geary acknowledged that the “early forms of protest were not as unstructured as used to be imagined”. Nevertheless, he made very clear that the Industrial Revolution was a turning-point, “for they nonetheless exhibit significant differences to later forms of action, especially the strike, in lacking organization over time, in the diffuseness of their social composition and in the fact that they did not constitute conflict in the labour market between employer and employee.”¹⁴

Some of these approaches and interpretations have evoked criticism in recent years. Thompson has conceded that he had not devoted sufficient attention to the middling orders in his earlier work and that his bipolar model of English society during the eighteenth century “may have more relevance to rural, small town and, especially, manufacturing districts expanding beyond any corporate controls [. . .] than it does to the larger corporate towns and, certainly, to London”. Thompson also warned against indiscriminate use of the concept of moral economy: moral economic values alone are not synonymous with a moral economy, as a moral economy entails specific interventions to regulate the market. Thompson is therefore not overly enthusiastic about Randall’s “industrial moral economy”.¹⁵ Other authors object to the emphasis that many studies place on

economic interests. They were, even in disputes over wages, mediated by the idea of honor. And therefore the strikes too were a ritual of purification and followed forms of symbolic action.” See the comments by J. Kocka, *Weder Stand noch Klasse. Unterschichten um 1800* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 183 and 277, n. 75.

¹² M. Sonenscher, “Journeyman, the Courts and the French Trades, 1781–1791”, *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), p. 106.

¹³ Malcolmson, “Workers’ Combinations”, pp. 155 and 157; J. Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700–1832* (2nd ed., London, 1992), pp. 137–138, 324–325; C. Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 38–40.

¹⁴ D. Geary, “Protest and Strike: Recent Research on ‘Collective Action’ in England, Germany, and France”, in K. Tenfelde (ed.), *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung im Vergleich* (Munich, 1986), pp. 368–369.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Customs*, pp. 88, 338–339.

the overriding importance of custom and moral concerns in the daily life of eighteenth-century journeymen. Sonenscher has argued that vaguely equating custom to popular culture incorrectly implied that standards and values formed the sole basis for their collective actions.¹⁶ Furthermore, new studies on British unions have revealed that they go back further than the rise of factories and the formation of the modern proletariat: eighteenth-century journeymen often used aggressive and forward-looking tactics.¹⁷

Such views provide a useful basis for a more comprehensive reassessment of both the character and the motivations of workers' combinations and collective actions in pre-industrial Europe. Some reservations are in order. Current knowledge precludes a consistent and detailed overview of the variations related to place and time in the establishment, the degree of organization, the strategies and the tactics of journeymen associations. Even in England, France, Germany and the Low Countries, where research on journeymen associations was more extensive than elsewhere in western Europe, the information available is insufficient to draw systematic comparisons. This essay merely aims to provide general ideas about the role of workers' combinations in defining the social characteristics of urban craft production based on skilled and highly mobile labour. To this end, the essay covers a period far longer than customary in studies on the formative years of trade unions. By focusing on the second half of the eighteenth century, authors on this subject seem to imply that prior collective actions by skilled workers were entirely different. Consequently, the period around 1750 may be considered a chronological divide. This essay contends that combined forms of action were indigenous to late medieval and early modern craft production and that the tactics of specific groups of journeymen could certainly not be designated as crowd action or traditional resistance. It therefore addresses not only formally constituted institutions and public disputes, but also informal social networks and less visible strategies developed by journeymen to achieve their own objectives.

“PROPERTY IN SKILL” AND LEGAL ENTITLEMENTS

E. P. Thompson has mentioned that the upper-class tendency to lump all working people together as “the lower orders” during the first half of the nineteenth century conflicted with the experiences and perceptions of many craftsmen, who were keenly aware of the social (and in some respects also cultural) divisions between skilled journeymen and semi-

¹⁶ Sonenscher, “Journeymen”, *passim*, esp. p. 90; S. L. Kaplan, “La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail à Paris au XVIIIe siècle”, *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 36 (1989), pp. 361–412, and his pioneering study “Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700–1815”, *Revue Historique*, 261 (1979), pp. 17–77.

¹⁷ J. Rule, “The Formative Years of British Trade Unionism: An Overview”, in *idem* (ed.), *British Trade Unionism*, pp. 8–10, 22–23.

skilled or unskilled workers.¹⁸ This situation also existed during earlier periods. Although the meaning of skill during the *ancien régime* is a subject of debate,¹⁹ journeymen's sense of possessing property in skill undoubtedly distinguished them from common workers. Still, mastering the techniques required for transforming raw materials into finished products was not the decisive factor. The true significance of skill varied according to the trade. The key variable was the collective status of the journeymen involved in the production process or on the labour market.

Urban occupations that required major investments of capital offered journeymen little prospect of setting up their own workshops, except along the periphery of the trade, where the revenue from independent production did not necessarily exceed wage income. Consequently, many workers chose regular and well-paid journeywork over a promotion to master craftsman. In some of these trades, production entailed fairly complicated technical processes that were integrated within a single establishment, thus requiring workers to co-ordinate their schedules.²⁰ For example, large or medium-sized concerns for dyeing, book printing or hat making could operate smoothly only if the journeymen were willing to work as a team to link productivity to quality. While this system could cause friction, it also necessitated close co-operation. This complex and highly integrated distribution of labour enabled journeymen to emphasize the collective nature of their property in skill and resulted in their demanding the authority to train apprentices and to control their recruitment.

Collective work was highly conducive to the establishment of journeymen associations, as shown by the printers of Lyons. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Lyons became a centre for quality book printing. From the beginning, the journeymen involved realized that the close and well-disciplined co-operation required at each workshop provided them with a strong basis for negotiations. They secretly founded the Company of the Griffarins, which expanded into a large and powerful organization during the 1520s and 1530s. Its members manipulated old and respected institutions into circumventing the prohibition on assembly. The Company of the Griffarins was not only a formidable weapon in the battle for better working conditions, as became clear during the lengthy strike of 1539. It also improved the journeymen's self-awareness and their sense of worth, which resulted in their radical view of the

¹⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (rev. ed., Harmondsworth, 1968), ch. 8.

¹⁹ Compare J. Rule, "The Property of Skill in the Period of Manufacture", with M. Sonenscher, "Mythical Work: Workshop Production and the *Compagnonnages* of Eighteenth-Century France", in P. Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 50–53 and 104–105.

²⁰ M. Sonenscher, *Work and Wages. Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 135–136.

relationship between labour and capital. Although most journeymen bore little hope of becoming masters, the Griffarins did not consider themselves dependent on wages, but believed they were “free men working voluntarily at an excellent and noble calling”, as capital and credit counterpoised to property in labour. In fact, “the name Printer should truly be reserved for [us, since we] perform the greatest part of printing”, the journeymen asserted with pride.²¹

This feeling of togetherness and solidarity could also result from the geographical mobility of large numbers of journeymen in the same line of work. In many urban trades, the demand for skilled labour fluctuated wildly. Large workshops therefore maintained a small core of sedentary, married workers and used wandering journeymen, who were usually young and single, during the busy season.

Tramping, a characteristic feature of the social constitution of the crafts in Central Europe²² and very common in England and France,²³

²¹ N. Z. Davis, “A Trade Union in Sixteenth-Century France”, *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 19 (1966), pp. 48–69. For a later period, see P. Minard, *Typographes des Lumières, suivi des “Anecdotes typographiques” de Nicolas Contat (1762)* (Seysssel, 1989), ch. 3.

²² R. Wissell, *Des altes Handwerks Recht und Gewohnheit*, vol. I (rev. ed., Berlin, 1971), pp. 301–368; *Internationales handwerksgeschichtliches Symposium, Veszprém, 20.–24.11.1978*, ed. Ungarische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Veszprém, 1979). For the late Middle Ages, see W. Reininghaus, “Die Migration der Handwerksgelesen in der Zeit der Entstehung ihrer Gilden (14./15. Jahrhundert)”, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 68 (1981), pp. 1–21. For the early modern period, see H. Bräuer, “Wanderende Handwerksgelesen um die Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts in Chemnitz”, *Beiträge zur Heimatgeschichte von Karl-Marx-Stadt*, 24 (1980), pp. 77–89; R. S. Elkar, “Umriss einer Geschichte der Gesellenwanderungen im Übergang von der Frühen Neuzeit zur Neuzeit”, in *idem* (ed.), *Deutsches Handwerk im Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1983), pp. 85–116, and his “Schola Migrationis. Überlegungen und Thesen zur neuzeitlichen Geschichte der Gesellenwanderungen aus der Perspektive quantitativer Untersuchungen”, in K. Roth (ed.), *Handwerk in Mittel- und Südosteuropa* (Munich, 1987), pp. 87–108; J. Ehmer, “Gesellenmigration und handwerkliche Produktionsweise”, in G. Jaritz and A. Müller (eds), *Migration in der Feudalgesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 1988), pp. 232–237. For the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see K. J. Bade, “Altes Handwerk, Wanderzwang und Gute Policey: Gesellenwanderung zwischen Zunftökonomie und Gewerbereform”, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 69 (1982), pp. 1–37, and U. Puschner, *Handwerk zwischen Tradition und Wandel. Das Münchner Handwerk an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1988), pp. 227–238.

²³ P. Labal, “Notes sur les compagnons migrants et les sociétés de compagnons à Dijon à la fin du XV^e et au début du XVI^e siècle”, *Annales de Bourgogne*, 22 (1950), pp. 187–193; R. Sprandel, “Die Ausbreitung des deutschen Handwerks im mittelalterlichen Frankreich”, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 51 (1964), pp. 66–100; B. Geremek, “Les migrations des compagnons au bas Moyen Age”, *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*, 5 (1970), pp. 61–79; U.-C. Pallach, “Fonctions de la mobilité artisanale et ouvrière – compagnons, ouvriers et manufacturiers en France et aux Allemagnes (17e–19e siècles)”, *Francia*, 11 (1983), pp. 365–406; R. A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers. The Six Centuries’ Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism* (London, 1979); M. Sonenscher,

forged bonds that transcended local communities and that enabled journeymen to establish a wide network of communication through their *Trinkstuben*, *cayennes* and houses of call. As these inns served as job centres in addition to providing accommodation, journeymen often had better access than local employers to information on the supply of labour and vacancies at the various production centres. This type of mobility was therefore conducive to the establishment of intercommunal associations of journeymen in the same line of work.

Abundant evidence shows that journeymen associations in the late Middle Ages realized that they could become powerful wherever urban production required a flexible supply of skilled labour. Until about 1350, only journeymen weavers in German and Swiss towns had autonomous organizations. As skilled workers became more mobile between communities during the second half of the fourteenth century, similar associations mushroomed. By 1400, shoemakers, tailors, furriers, bakers and smiths all had their own organizations, serving all towns along the Upper Rhine and even centres outside that region. In each case, journeymen took the initiative, realizing that the rapidly growing demand for skilled labour that resulted from extensive demographic, economic and social changes enabled them to force wage increases, provided they approached the masters as a united front.

Journeymen's self-awareness was apparent, as they began to distinguish themselves from common workers by wearing special hats, trousers or other signs of identification. In particular, they adopted a special attitude during labour disputes: they rejected any interference from guild officials and negotiated directly with their employers. The journeymen associations organized numerous – frequently intercommunal – strikes to add weight to their demands. Despite repressive measures taken by the municipal authorities, they generally emerged victorious, as borne out by the continuing rise in actual wages during the first quarter of the fifteenth century. No wonder the journeymen considered themselves equal partners of the masters and even of the civic administrations. In 1421, when the magistrate of Zurich tried to mediate the dispute between the master shoemakers of Lucerne, Schaffhausen, Zurich and other Swiss cities versus the journeymen associations, the latter came forward with a “king” as their leader as negotiating partners with equal rights and as the contracting party.²⁴

“Journeyman's Migrations and Workshop Organization in Eighteenth-Century France”, in S. L. Kaplan and C. J. Koeppe (eds), *Work in France. Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Ithaca, 1986), pp. 74–96.

²⁴ K. Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen und Lohnarbeiter. Untersuchungen zur oberrheinischen und oberdeutschen Stadtgeschichte des 14. bis 17. Jahrhunderts* (Sigmaringen, 1985), *passim*, esp. pp. 68–81, 171–183, 265–295, and *idem*, “Bemerkungen zur Diskussion um die Handwerksgesellen und über den Umgang mit Quellen”, *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 73 (1986), pp. 355–361.

The history of skilled labour in pre-industrial Europe was of course highly diverse, thus making it difficult to explore journeymen's traditions, values and practices. Any general statement must be modified according to regional and local variations or changes in the fates or fortunes of individual trades that might undermine or consolidate the position of the workers. For example, fullers in the large cities of Flanders, Brabant and Holland were continually pushed further on to the defensive after the late fifteenth century because the traditional textile trade lost ground to new draperies and because entrepreneurs increasingly used mills driven by wind or water power. As a result, journeymen were no longer able to defend their property in skill, despite their strong organization. After the 1520s, their collective actions became very infrequent and in no way reflected the journeymen's self-confidence and belligerence of days gone by. Town administrations belittled their public demonstrations as "street unrest".²⁵

Nevertheless, other groups of journeymen did manage to preserve or obtain power, as evidenced by their definition of their relationship with the masters as reciprocal at the end of the *ancien régime*. The journeymen did not believe in an "equilibrium of paternalism and deference". As employers and employees both depended on the production process, they needed each other and were equally indispensable to preserve the trade and the commonwealth, the Free Artificers of the City of London stated in the middle of the eighteenth century.²⁶

Journeymen on the Continent subscribed to similar views. Throughout the early modern era, master artisans in France, Germany and the southern Netherlands deplored the arrogance and insubordination of their journeymen, who refused to behave as servants and made extravagant demands for independence and liberties, as if they were their employers' equals. In letters to their colleagues in other towns, in speeches addressing civic administrations and in their defence during court cases, members of journeymen associations presented themselves as free workers who were entitled to determine where, when, for which duration and, above all, with whom and at which rate of pay they

²⁵ G. Des Marez, *L'organisation du travail à Bruxelles au XVe siècle* (Brussels, 1904), pp. 8–16, 118–119; G. Willemsen, "La grève des foulons et des tisserands en 1524–1525 et le règlement général de la draperie malinoise de 1544", *Bulletin du Cercle archéologique, littéraire et artistique de Malines*, 20 (1909), pp. 156–190; F. Favresse, *L'avènement du régime démocratique à Bruxelles pendant le Moyen Age, 1306–1423* (Brussels, 1932), pp. 48, 99–102, 117–119; R. Van Uytven, "The Fulling Mill: Dynamic of the Revolution in Industrial Attitudes", *Acta Historiae Neerlandica*, V (1971), pp. 1–14; R. M. Dekker, "Getrouwe broederschap: organisaties en acties van arbeiders in pre-industrieel Holland", *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 103 (1988), pp. 2–3, 5; M. Boone and H. Brand, "Volksoproeren en collectieve acties in Gent en Leiden in de 14e en 15e eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 19 (1993), pp. 172–190.

²⁶ M. Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft. Entwicklung, Struktur und Politik der Londoner Gesellenorganisationen, 1550–1825* (Göttingen, 1991), pp. 150–151.

worked.²⁷ Their vehement rejection of deference is obvious from their nicknames for each other: “Liberty”, “The Obstinate”, “Disrespectful”, “Victor”.²⁸ It is therefore not surprising that the journeymen distanced themselves from menservants, day labourers and other common workers. In 1529, journeymen printers refused to participate in the Grande Rebeune of Lyons, with mobs storming religious houses and the homes of prominent burghers, plundering corn-lofts.²⁹ During the general strike of 1791, the journeymen of Hamburg disdainfully rejected an offer of solidarity from the plebs, which included cotton workers and sailors, to assist them by plundering and attacking the guards.³⁰

Undoubtedly, the expansion of skilled workshop trades where production required teamwork or a flexible supply of labour encouraged increasing numbers of journeymen to conspire to protect their interests. Urban corporatism facilitated the rise of organizations exerting collective labour pressure because the statutes of craft guilds provided a legal basis for property in skill.

Formal craft guilds were certainly not a prerequisite for collective action. Agitation among textile workers, especially weavers and fullers, and among journeymen cordwainers, saddlers, tanners and bakers dates back at least as far as the thirteenth century.³¹ Back then, few craftsmen

²⁷ S. L. Kaplan, “The Luxury Guilds in Paris in the Eighteenth Century”, *Francia*, 9 (1982), pp. 288–290; M. Sonenscher, “The *sans-culottes* of the Year II: Rethinking the Language of Labour in Revolutionary France”, *Social History*, 9 (1984), pp. 321–327; Griessinger, *Das symbolische Kapital*, pp. 70–75; C. Lis and H. Soly, “De macht van vrije arbeiders: collectieve acties van hoedenmakersgezellen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (zestiende-negentiende eeuw)”, in C. Lis and H. Soly (eds), *Werken volgens de regels. Ambachten in Brabant en Vlaanderen, 1500–1800* (Brussels, 1994, forthcoming).

²⁸ C. M. Truant, “Independent and Insolent: Journeymen and Their ‘Rites’ in the Old Regime Workplace”, in Kaplan and Koeppe (eds), *Work in France*, p. 170.

²⁹ Davis, “A Trade Union”, p. 66.

³⁰ Griessinger, *Das symbolische Kapital*, p. 119. See also I. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979), pp. 4–5, 26, 36; Kocka, *Weder Stand noch Klasse*, p. 185; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990), p. 106.

³¹ M. Mollat and P. Wolff, *Ongles bleus, Jacques et Ciompi. Les révolutions populaires en Europe aux XIVe et XVe siècles* (Paris, 1970), esp. pp. 42–48, 106, 108. On England, see E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England* (12th ed., London, 1962), vol. I, pp. 393ff., and G. Unwin, *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (2nd ed., London, 1963), pp. 48–51. On France, see G. Fagniez, *Etudes sur l’industrie et la classe industrielle à Paris au XIIIe et au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1877), pp. 75–76; E. Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l’industrie en France avant 1789* (2nd ed., Paris, 1901), vol. I, pp. 310–311, 314–315, 599–602; B. Geremek, *Le salariat dans l’artisanat parisien aux XIIIe–XVe siècles. Etude sur le marché de la main d’oeuvre au Moyen Age* (Paris and The Hague, 1968), pp. 102–103; A. Leguai, “Les troubles urbains dans le Nord de la France à la fin du XIIIe et au début du XIVe siècle”, *Revue d’Histoire Economique et Sociale*, 54 (1976), pp. 281–303; B. Chevalier, “Corporations, conflits politiques et paix sociale en France au XIVe et XVe siècles”, *Revue Historique*, 268 (1982), pp. 17–44. On the Low Countries, see W. P. Blockmans *et al.*, “Tussen crisis en

had corporative status, or operated as informal guildsmen,³² and, both in cities that prohibited autonomous associations of artisans (such as Nuremberg) and in trades that never underwent corporative organization (such as cotton printing), some groups of skilled workers managed to pressure their employers into improving working conditions.³³

Nevertheless, it is hardly coincidental that journeymen who acquired collective power during the late Middle Ages or the early modern era usually worked in guild-based industries. Although corporative statutes were primarily intended to protect the masters, they provided the journeymen with a legal base to defend their interests. The masters' exclusive rights, especially their production monopoly and legal control over membership, enabled journeymen to restrict competition on local labour markets. This opportunity was also provided by the apprenticeship system, which in part existed to pass on skill, and hence the ability to uphold certain standards of quality,³⁴ as this institution made it possible to define skill as a right of ownership: only those who had served their apprenticeship were entitled to practise the trade. The statutes of many craft guilds also stipulated that a master was not allowed to take on more than one or two apprentices. While these clauses were intended to protect small manufacturers, or at least to restrict competition, they enabled journeymen to limit the supply of labour, thereby strengthening their collective leverage for negotiations.³⁵

Nevertheless, the actual significance of legal entitlements should not be overestimated. Guild officials and courts were not easily inclined to

welvaart: sociale veranderingen, 1300–15500", in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. IV (Haarlem, 1980), pp. 67–68, 71.

³² S. A. Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), pp. 50–62. On the origins of craft guilds in Flanders and Brabant, see C. Wyffels, *De oorsprong der ambachten in Vlaanderen en Brabant* (Brussels, 1951).

³³ On Nuremberg, see W. Lehnert, "Nürnberg – Stadt ohne Zünfte. Die Aufgaben des reichsstädtischen Rugamts", and A. Griessinger and R. Reith, "Obrigkeitsliche Ordnungskonzeptionen und handwerkliches Konfliktverhalten im 18. Jahrhundert: Nürnberg und Würzburg im Vergleich", in Elkar (ed.), *Deutsches Handwerk*, pp. 71–81 and 117–180. On trade unionism and strikes among journeymen calico printers, see, for example, Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 115–116, 182, 185.

³⁴ Epstein, *Wage Labor*, pp. 103–111, 123–125.

³⁵ For England: Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp. 61–64; S. Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 104–110, 269–270; I. W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 125–129; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 104–125. For France: H. Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé, XVe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 1899), *passim*, and E. Coornaert, *Les corporations en France avant 1789* (2nd ed., Paris, 1968), *passim*. For Germany: A. von Dirke, *Die Rechtsverhältnisse der Handwerkslehrlinge und Gesellen nach den deutschen Stadtrechten und Zunftstatuten des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1914); A. Knoll, *Handwerksgesellen und Lehrlinge im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1931); Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 254–256; K. Wesoly, *Lehrlinge und Handwerksgesellen am Mittelrhein. Ihre soziale Lage und ihre Organisation vom 14. bis ins 17. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1985).

prosecute employers that flouted apprenticeship clauses. While the mere threat of a suit from the journeymen was sometimes effective,³⁶ legal arguments were rarely sufficient to curtail the activities of capitalists who sought to exceed the customary fair limits. Journeymen could claim legitimacy from the charters and ordinances of their trades, and in England from the Statute of Artificers approved by Parliament in 1563,³⁷ to protect their property in skill, but those unable to exert collective labour pressure usually lost.

Of course, some disputes between masters and journeymen were settled in court, both in England and on the Continent during the late Middle Ages and during the early modern era. Skilled workers hired solicitors to challenge ordinances in court that violated their collective natural or civil rights, to appeal corporative decisions that conflicted with prior regulations, to sue employers who failed to comply with official restrictions concerning apprentices, and so on. The importance of these strategies is not only obvious from the archives maintained by journeymen associations of relevant verdicts and decrees, but also (and especially) from their efficient use of legal arguments, in which they often pitched rival jurisdictions against one another.³⁸ For example, in the Austrian Netherlands, higher courts were repeatedly obliged to accept journeymen as plaintiffs and to accede to some of their demands, given that the workers concerned belonged to mutual aid societies with charters that had been ratified by municipal magistrates in the early seventeenth century.³⁹

To do justice according to the law is one thing. To argue that lawsuits were the most common form of protest among workers (at least in eighteenth-century France), as claimed by Sonenscher,⁴⁰ is an entirely

³⁶ M. G. Davies, *The Enforcement of English Apprenticeship, 1563–1642. A Study in Applied Mercantilism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

³⁷ See Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 106–111, and “Property of Skill”, pp. 105–107; K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor. Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 5, esp. pp. 243 and 252; S. L. Kaplan, “Social Classification and Representation in the Corporate World of Eighteenth-Century France: Turgot’s Carnival”, in Kaplan and Koepf (eds), *Work in France*, pp. 176–228; A. Griessinger and R. Reith, “Lehrlinge im deutschen Handwerk des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts. Arbeitsorganisation, Sozialbeziehungen und alltägliche Konflikte”, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 13 (1986), pp. 186–192; U Puschner, *Handwerk zwischen Tradition und Wandel*, pp. 245–247; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 318–340; Lis and Soly, “De macht van vrije arbeiders”.

³⁸ Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, ch. 8; Minard, *Typographes des Lumières*, p. 121; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 128–129, 262–270.

³⁹ Lis and Soly, “De macht van vrije arbeiders”.

⁴⁰ Sonenscher, “Journeymen”, p. 90. See also his *Work and Wages*, chs. 3 and 8. It is significant that Sonenscher does not provide definite information on the number of suits initiated by the journeymen. While his work suggests that they did sometimes approach the courts on their own, it appears that these occasions were rare and that guild masters took journeymen to court more often than vice versa.

different matter. Even assuming that French journeymen turned to courts more frequently than their counterparts in other western European countries, which has yet to be proven, the limitations of this strategy deserve note. Pursuing a case in court was both expensive and time consuming and could entail such a severe deterioration in trade relations during this period that new, more serious disputes might arise. Furthermore, journeymen could use courts to their advantage only when the other side had defied clearly defined, official rules. Even in these situations, journeymen did not necessarily prevail, as many legal stipulations could be interpreted in different ways.⁴¹

Journeymen in France may have taken legal action more often than elsewhere. Nevertheless, no court was expected “to arbitrate on claims arising from conditions in the trade, but to adjudicate on whether certain practices or innovations were admissible or inadmissible”, meaning that “questions of precedent and jurisprudence outweighed argument derived from detailed analyses of the material circumstances in which journeymen lived”.⁴² It was therefore often impossible to settle conflicts by trial, at least in the journeymen’s favour. This condition was true for wage demands as well as for disputes caused by the refusal of employers or fellow workers to follow the directives of journeymen associations. In these cases, only direct confrontations could show which party determined the distinction between admissible and inadmissible practices.

PATTERNS OF ASSOCIATION

Available sources show that workers’ combinations became more common during the late Middle Ages, that they became more permanent and that they virtually always resulted from journeymen in trades with corporative statutes. The first cases of formal, continuous journeymen associations are from the fourteenth century and concern textile workers (especially weavers and fullers), tailors, leather workers (especially shoemakers), furriers, smiths and bakers. They posed as fraternities that

⁴¹ Discontent with the administration of justice was common and often led to more radical action. After the court of appeal declared their complaints about two ordinances implemented by the municipal administration of Brussels in 1683 inadmissible, even though recent events conflicted with earlier decisions, the journeymen hatters of Brabant definitely turned their *Bourses communes* into strike funds. Lis and Soly, “De macht van vrije arbeiders”. In 1792, the establishment of the London Friendly and United Society of Cordwainers also followed a court judgement that was considered unfair. The journeymen claimed a strike fund was necessary, for even “if the laws of this country were much more perfect than they really are, still we must *purchase* their protection; and it is much to be lamented that the expenses of a lawsuit far exceed any journeyman’s ability. Hence it often happens that power overcomes right, and innocence itself proves no real security from punishment”. Quoted in Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 264–265.

⁴² Sonenscher, “Journeymen”, p. 97.

organized religious activities and also served a social purpose by providing material and financial aid to needy members. While their ideological and charitable activities were considerable, the collective actions undertaken by some of these journeymen fraternities proved their usefulness in disputes, not only against illegal workers (i.e. craftsmen who had not served their apprenticeship), but also against masters that hired them or refused to raise wages. Both guild officials and civic administrations were aware of this danger, as reflected by their attempts to control existing journeymen associations and to prohibit the establishment of similar organizations. The available evidence suggests that these measures rarely had the desired effect, even when magistrates from various cities adopted a consistent policy. In 1436, town governments along the Upper Rhine decided to join forces against the growing movement of journeymen. Craftsmen were forbidden to operate their own *Trinkstuben*. As a result, their fraternities came under the supervision of guild masters, who were responsible for preventing members from organizing any meetings without explicit permission from the authorities. Only guild officials were authorized to settle labour disputes, so that journeymen were no longer able to place interdicts on employers or take justice into their own hands in any other way. Finally, to nip any feelings of communal togetherness in the bud, an additional stipulation forbade workers who practised the same trade from wearing any type of external signs to distinguish themselves from others. By 1473, the entire region from the southern Vosges to the Black Forest was subject to these *Knechtsordnungen*. Consequently, journeymen practised secrecy from then on, using their fraternities as covers to circumvent these restrictions and prohibitions successfully, as revealed by the new wave of disputes at the end of the fifteenth century.⁴³

During the late Middle Ages in England, France and Flanders, formal and overt associations of skilled workers were apparently less widespread than in (parts of) Germany and Switzerland. Still, the question remains as to the information provided by the scarce data. Were civic administrations simply more reluctant to recognize these fraternities, were members less likely to challenge the authority of the guild officials openly, or does the information simply reveal the current stage of this research? Whatever the case, frequent complaints about workers' combinations in various trades show that the journeymen concerned also had access to a form of organization and that their fraternities, whether legal or illegal, were no more ephemeral than those of their German counterparts.⁴⁴

⁴³ W. Reininghaus, "Die Strassburger 'Knechtsordnung' von 1436. Ihre Entstehung und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Gesellengilden am Oberrhein", *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 126 (1978), pp. 131–143; Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 81–98.

⁴⁴ On England, see L. Brentano, *On the History and Development of Gilds, and the Origin of Trade Unions* (London, 1870), pp. 7, 94–101; W. J. Ashley, *Surveys, Historic and Economic* (London, 1900), chapter on "Mediaeval Urban Journeymen's Clubs";

While the *Gesellenvereine* of the Rhineland and Saxony did increase their organizational power during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and take even greater distance from the guilds,⁴⁵ journeymen associations in London and other English towns came “under the governance” of the masters and “disappeared”. This trend coincided with another process. Many companies were increasingly split between liveries, dominated by wholesalers, and yeomanries, comprising the bulk of the artisans. The rise of yeomanries as organizations for employers and workers did not necessarily force workers into subordinate positions. On the one hand, masters and journeymen often appeared as equals in the event of disputes. On the other hand, certain groups of skilled workers continued to conspire. In the second half of the sixteenth century, informal associations of wage workers arose in some companies within the yeomanry, while journeymen in other companies even gained recognition as a separate group.⁴⁶

Journeymen were not, of course, immune to the economic, social, political and religious changes of the early modern era. The present level of research in this field precludes determining for every country in western Europe which organizations continued their operations as before,⁴⁷ which underwent some transformation and which disbanded. This issue of continuity versus discontinuity is even more complicated, as the disappearance of an overt formal structure does not prove that members also abandoned informal meetings and agreements, nor does the appearance of organized institutions necessarily indicate the absence of such establishments during the preceding period. While journeymen book printers and hatters were definitely the first to establish their own associations, it is unclear whether the fraternities formed by other groups of skilled workers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were truly

Unwin, *Industrial Organization*, pp. 50–54; S. L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor, 1948), pp. 29–32; C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 99; Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp. 42–45; H. C. Swanson, “The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns”, *Past and Present*, 121 (1988), pp. 44–46, and his *Medieval Artisans. An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 115. On France, see Geremek, *Salariat*, pp. 112–117, and B. Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1982), pp. 87 and 169. On Flanders, see H. Van Werveke, *De medezeggenschap van de knapen (gezellen) in de middeleeuwse ambachten* (Brussels, 1943), and M. Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen, ca. 1384 – ca. 1453. Een sociaal-politieke studie van een staatsvormingsproces* (Brussels, 1990), pp. 82–83, 88, 92.

⁴⁵ Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 100–116; H. Bräuer, *Gesellen im sächsischen Zunft Handwerk des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar, 1989), pp. 129ff.

⁴⁶ Unwin, *Industrial Organization*, pp. 58–61, 103–125; Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp. 45–51; Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, pp. 219–223; Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*, ch. 4; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 34ff.

⁴⁷ In many German cities the *Gesellenvereine* remained stable organizations throughout the early modern period. See especially Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 129–162; Wesoly, *Lehrlinge*, “Conclusion”; Griessinger, *Das symbolische Kapital*.

unprecedented. In addition to old and new fraternities, common boxes became increasingly widespread and were viewed as mutual aid societies by these journeymen, in addition to being recognized by town administrations in many cases.⁴⁸

This situation did not diminish the suspicion of central governments and local authorities towards journeymen associations. In fact, the *Reichspolizeiordnung* of 1530 prohibited journeymen throughout the Holy Roman Empire from administering justice to their fellow workers and from abandoning the workshops *en masse*.⁴⁹ The ordinances of Villers-Cotterêts, Orléans, Moulins and Blois from 1539, 1561, 1566 and 1579, respectively, outlawed workers' combinations and stipulated that each brotherhood had to relinquish its funds to the municipal authorities or risk imprisonment and heavy fines.⁵⁰ The English law of 1549 made it illegal for "confederacies and conspiracies" of working people to determine rates of pay or the amount of work to be done in a given time, and these clauses were renewed until their repeal along with the Combination Acts (1799–1800) in 1826.⁵¹ Nevertheless, repressive measures were rather ineffective, as revealed by the rise and continuing expansion of French *compagnonnages*, which were especially popular among wandering journeymen. In the second half of the sixteenth century, tailors, cabinetmakers, shoemakers and locksmiths established inter-communal and even national networks. During the next century, many other occupational groups followed their example, despite all prohibitions.⁵²

The similarities between late medieval journeymen fraternities and their early modern counterparts are striking. First, the same urban trades formed these associations during both periods. Except for industries that lost their significance (such as fulling), or that flourished only from the sixteenth century onward (such as book printing), the groups of journeymen with their own association are largely identical for both periods. Furthermore, the lists of labour disputes in England and Germany during the eighteenth century, despite being far from exhaustive, show that these groups remained in the limelight.⁵³ Second, most journeymen

⁴⁸ See, for instance, E. Huys, *Duizend jaar mutualiteit bij de Vlaamsche gilden* (Courtrai, 1926), and E. M. A. Timmer, *Knechtsgilden en knechtsbossen in Nederland* (Haarlem, 1913).

⁴⁹ H. Proesler, *Das gesamtdeutsche Handwerk im Spiegel der Reichsgesetzgebung von 1530 bis 1806* (Nuremberg and Munich, 1954), pp. 1–5. See also W. Wegener, "Der Reichsschluss von 1731 (Die sog. Reichszunftordnung)", *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis*, 5 (1956), p. 40.

⁵⁰ Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé*, pp. 167, 174–175.

⁵¹ Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, p. 51.

⁵² E. Coornaert, *Les compagnonnages en France du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris, 1966), pp. 294–301; J. R. Farr, *Hands of Honor. Artisans and Their World in Dijon, 1550–1650* (Ithaca and London, 1988), pp. 65–72.

⁵³ C. R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen. A Prehistory of Industrial Relations, 1717–1800* (London, 1980), pp. 22–26, 154–170; Reith, Griessinger and Eggers, *Streikbewegungen*.

associations served multiple purposes throughout the period. Fraternities often combined religious, charitable and recreational activities, and members of mutual aid societies set great store by all forms of sociability, as they stimulated a sense of collective identity. Third, there were undoubtedly very few journeymen associations that failed to protect the economic and social interests of their members from individual masters, the guild officials and civic administrations. From the late Middle Ages onward, skilled workers in many urban trades were well aware that a powerful organization was the most effective tool for forcing concessions from employers, and, even more important, for preventing them from taking on men without the proper qualifications.

THE WEAPONS OF THE POWERFUL

By means of fraternities or mutual aid societies based in a specific locality as well as more extensive associations, such as *Gesellenverbände* or *compagnonnages* (which catered to wandering journeymen), skilled workers drew perimeters around their trades to regulate the labour market. Their strategies were intended to control access to the trade through apprenticeship, to exclude interlopers and intruders and to enforce closed shops.⁵⁴

To limit the labour supply as much as possible, journeymen demanded that their employers observe the ordinances and statutes restricting the number of apprentices. They vehemently resisted each attempt to circumvent these restrictions, as the short-term effect of such efforts involved more apprentices and a larger supply of cheap labour, while the long-term effect entailed an increase in skilled workers, along with all the ramifications. As early as 1321, the journeymen fullers of Paris accused their masters of taking on too many apprentices, though the rules stated that no one should have more than one.⁵⁵ The increasingly controversial nature of the institutional limits on the scale of industrial enterprise through restrictions on the number of apprentices in each workshop is borne out by the frequency with which they were reiterated during the early modern period. During the eighteenth century, when the increase in exceptions permitted by central governments and courts stripped the ordinances and statutes of much of their use as legal weapons, powerful journeymen associations exerted collective pressure to force entrepreneurs to follow their directives on recruiting apprentices.

Evidence abounds of efforts by skilled workers in many urban trades to exclude interlopers and intruders since the late Middle Ages. Between

⁵⁴ See the useful comments by J. Rule, "Artisan Attitudes: A Comparative Survey of Skilled Labour and Proletarianization Before 1848", *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 50 (1985), pp. 22–31.

⁵⁵ Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières*, vol. I, p. 313. See also Geremek, *Salariat*, p. 102.

1475 and 1644 in Southampton, tailors undertook four collective actions, coopers two, shoemakers two and blacksmiths one to obtain relief from the competition of craftsmen in their occupations who were “coming to the port in carracks, galleys, and ships of Spain, Portugal, Germany, Flanders, etc.”⁵⁶ Though intense competition from immigrant workers could cause resentment amongst domestic artisans, even informing their political outlook during a crisis,⁵⁷ actions against employing foreigners were rarely motivated by xenophobia. The overriding preoccupation of journeyman associations concerned defending their labour market from infiltration by illegal or unfair artisans, whether native or foreign. For example, journeymen hatters in Brabant and Flanders fought tooth and nail against the employment of skilled workers from England, Germany and the Principality of Liège, whereas they never objected to hiring French immigrants, who were considered free workers because they were from organizations (*compagnonnages*) in which members observed the rules of the *Gemene Bussen* or *Bourses communes* in the southern Netherlands.⁵⁸

Skilled workers invoked the apprenticeship clauses not only to prevent large manufacturers from hiring unqualified men, but occasionally to exclude women as well. When the unemployment rate among adult males continued to rise during the second half of the seventeenth century, the ribbon weavers of Antwerp protected their property in skill by denying women access to the trade. Other groups of craftsmen obliged guild officials to change regulations so that a widow could continue to operate her late husband’s business only if she entrusted management of the workshop to a journeyman and agreed not to take on any apprentices.⁵⁹ In Central Europe, the social and economic disruptions of the Thirty Years War also led craftsmen to restrict women’s productive roles in goods manufacturing.⁶⁰

Journeyman not only fought to retain restrictive and regulative customs and practices of their trade concerning issues including apprenticeship, recruitment and job demarcation. They also enforced their own closed shops, carefully controlling access to and dismissal from the shop floor. As early as 1423, London journeymen blacksmiths obtained control over

⁵⁶ M. Roys Baker, “Anglo-Massachusetts Trade Union Roots, 1130–1790”, *Labor History* (1973), p. 366, n. 32.

⁵⁷ See, for example, T. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 200–204.

⁵⁸ Lis and Soly, “De macht van vrije arbeiders”.

⁵⁹ A. K. L. Thijs, *Van werkwinkel tot fabriek. De textielnijverheid te Antwerpen, einde 15de – begin 19de eeuw* (Brussels, 1987), pp. 174–182, 401; K. Daems, “Vrouwenarbeid te Antwerpen in de 18de eeuw” (unpublished “licentiate” thesis, Ghent University, 1988).

⁶⁰ See J. H. Quataert, “The Shaping of Women’s Work in Manufacturing: Guilds, Households, and the State in Central Europe, 1648–1870”, *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), pp. 1124, 1131–1132.

the admission of new labour to the trade.⁶¹ During the early modern era, this placement control became the primary labour strategy of the expanding group of permanent journeymen who had no prospect of becoming masters or independent producers. By the middle of the seventeenth century, journeymen hatters in Brabant and Flanders had transformed their closed shops into union shops. They equated free labour with membership of the *Bourse commune*, thereby obliging employers to hire only members of these organizations.⁶²

In France, the enforcement of closed shops was also a top priority of many journeymen associations. Both fraternities and *compagnonnages*⁶³ increasingly prevented guild masters from recruiting non-members. They did not hesitate to resort to collective actions against anyone who refused to observe their rules regarding selection and exclusion.⁶⁴

This situation also prevailed in England during the eighteenth century. In 1741, wool combers in Leicester demanded that their masters hire only members of their club and decided to place an interdict on any employer with the audacity to hire other workers. In 1765, tailors in Liverpool abandoned their work when a master hired a journeyman that was not a member of their association. In 1777, a London hatter complained to a Committee at the House of Commons that the threat of a strike had forced him to dismiss five of his fifty employees when these five refused to pay their weekly dues to the Congress of journeymen hatters.⁶⁵

Many journeymen associations successfully used tramping to regulate the labour market. Wherever wandering journeymen accounted for a large part of the labour force, whether on a permanent basis or seasonally, both native and foreign individuals seeking work had to register at the local inn or tavern that served as a job centre. Newcomers had to pay fees and sometimes even for drinking sprees. Next, a representative of the local journeymen would send them to a specific workshop or accompany them from one master to another. If no work was available, newcomers received compensation for their travel expenses and were sent on to other towns.⁶⁶ To reap the maximum benefits from tramping, journeymen associations needed to establish formal ties with similar organizations elsewhere.

⁶¹ Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, p. 263.

⁶² Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

⁶³ On the distinction between confraternities and *compagnonnages*, see D. Garrioch and M. Sonenscher, "Compagnonnages, Confraternities and Associations of Journeymen in Eighteenth-Century Paris", *European History Quarterly*, 16 (1986), pp. 25–45.

⁶⁴ See below.

⁶⁵ S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1920), pp. 36–37, 44–45; Unwin, *Industrial Organization*, pp. 214–215.

⁶⁶ See, for example, R. Reith, *Arbeits- und Lebensweise im städtischen Handwerk. Zur Sozialgeschichte Augsburger Handwerksgelesen im 18. Jahrhundert, 1700–1806* (Göttingen, 1988), pp. 145–147.

By the late Middle Ages in the Upper Rhine region and in Saxony, various groups of skilled workers had established intercommunal networks of *Trinkstuben*, which served as clearing houses and job centres.⁶⁷ The ties that existed between fullers from forty-two towns in the southern Netherlands and neighbouring regions by the middle of the fifteenth century⁶⁸ reveal a similar network. Isolated cases suggest that the tramping system dates back to the late Middle Ages in other western European countries as well. Not until the second half of the sixteenth century, however, do the records reveal significant evidence that the *compagnonnages* of some French trades had instituted a labour placement service.⁶⁹ It also appears that the houses of call in England became important only during the eighteenth century.⁷⁰

The combination of placement control and geographic mobility was a powerful tool that could limit competition for jobs, force fellow journeymen to comply with collective agreements and exert pressure on employers who tried to reduce labour costs. During slow periods, it was possible to reduce or even eliminate tensions on local labour markets by giving newcomers and sometimes even fellow workers who were single money for travel to go tramping in search of work elsewhere. These tactics also served to force masters to take on certain workers. If they refused, journeymen would blacklist their workshops by placing an interdict on them, thus barring anybody from accepting a job there and forcing those already employed to leave as quickly as possible. Journeymen who failed to comply with these directives or who worked for less than the going rate suffered intimidation as well as warnings to leave the area and possibly even beatings. In the event of a general dispute with local masters, the tramping system enabled large numbers of journeymen to leave town and to settle elsewhere temporarily to force concessions and to escape the jurisdiction of their legal authorities.

From the second half of the fourteenth century, various groups of skilled workers in the Holy Roman Empire and the Low Countries used this *Auszug* or exit to protect their interests and to reinforce their claims. Sending away several journeymen at once proved highly effective, provided the dispute remained in one city and could be sustained long enough, thus requiring strong local organization and close intercommunal co-operation. Although the journeymen who organized these collective actions continually maintained that their fraternities served exclusively religious and charitable purposes, it is indisputable that they also drew

⁶⁷ K. Schulz, "Gesellentrinkstuben und Gesellenherbergen im 14./15. und 16. Jahrhundert", in H. C. Peyer and E. Müller-Luchner (eds), *Gastfreundschaft, Taverne und Gasthaus im Mittelalter* (Munich and Vienna, 1983), pp. 221–242.

⁶⁸ Des Marez, *Organisation du travail*, p. 118.

⁶⁹ Farr, *Hands of Honor*, pp. 63–72.

⁷⁰ Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen*, ch. 3; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 179, 185–191, 271–272.

on the funds of their associations to arrange work stoppages in their own communities and to support colleagues from other towns involved in disputes with their employers. Both the ten-year duration of the *Auszug* by the Alsatian bakers of Colmar (from 1495 to 1505) and its eventual success attest to their brotherhood's substantial financial leverage as well as to the unwavering support of their colleagues throughout the Upper Rhine region.⁷¹

It would be wrong to draw a clear distinction between the *Auszug* and other types of work stoppages, as participants withheld their skills from local employers in all cases. Although several terms have been used throughout history to describe concerted withdrawals of labour from production⁷² in various manifestations, all boil down to strike activity.

The centralizing administrative and legislative trends of the early modern era reduced the effectiveness of the strategy of leaving town, as they made it easier to prosecute journeymen by means of ordinances that covered vast areas.⁷³ Nevertheless this element of the repertoire persisted.⁷⁴ Wherever skilled workers could rely on the tramping system, they continued to use geographic mobility as a weapon. Gradually, however, their strategy changed. Instead of all leaving town at once, these workers opted increasingly to send off small groups to immobilize operations at carefully chosen workshops. Only in case of an escalating dispute did they resort to a general exodus.⁷⁵

The scope of work stoppages that did not coincide with the departure of journeymen also grew more limited. From the sixteenth century onward, legal measures to force workers to fulfil their contractual obligations increased. Anyone who disregarded the term of notice could be subject to prosecution. Therefore, sudden general work stoppages entailed a danger that employers would complain that the strikers were violating their contract and that they would demand that the civic administration intervene. It was much more difficult to take measures

⁷¹ P. A. Merklen, *Les boulangers de Colmar, 1495–1513. Episode inédit de l'histoire des coalitions ouvrières en Alsace au Moyen Age* (Colmar and Mulhouse, 1871); G. Schanz, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Gesellenverbände* (Leipzig, 1877), pp. 78–92; Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 110–116.

⁷² See the useful comments by Reith, Griessinger and Eggers, *Streikbewegungen*, pp. 8–13.

⁷³ R. Dekker, "Labour Conflicts and Working-Class Culture in Early Modern Holland", *International Review of Social History*, 35 (1990), pp. 391–392.

⁷⁴ Charles Tilly introduced the concept of the repertoire of collective action to historical and sociological discourse: "Getting it Together in Burgundy, 1675–1975", *Theory and Society*, 4 (1977), pp. 479–504; "European Violence and Collective Action since 1700", *Social Research*, 53 (1986), pp. 159–184; *The Contentious French. Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1986), pp. 390–398; "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834", *Social Science History*, 17 (1993), pp. 253–279.

⁷⁵ Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp. 18–19, 55–58, 72–74, 92–95; Reith, Griessinger and Eggers, *Streikbewegungen*, pp. 22–25.

against journeymen who simply refused to sign a new contract or to offer their skills to certain employers.⁷⁶ While blacklisting a given master (i.e. placing an interdict on his workshop) could be considered conspiracy, the occasions when this practice resulted in legal prosecution were surprisingly rare. Employers were not interested in filing lawsuits that might drag on or incur high costs if the outcome was uncertain. On the one hand, masters able to continue their operations were rarely willing to testify for the prosecution. On the other hand, the strict rule of secrecy among journeymen associations made it difficult to prove that those accused were guilty of conspiracy. Even the Combination Acts, passed in England in 1799–1800, had little impact on printers, hatters, shoemakers, tailors or other groups of skilled workers with travelling societies and houses of call. In 1824, a master hatter said: “The law cannot hold of these men for they leave gradually, man by man, and get employed at other places; thus the Combination Laws are by that means avoided.”⁷⁷

Changes in labour legislation and criminal justice were only part of the reason that journeymen resorted increasingly to shop-by-shop strikes during the early modern era. As long as production tended to occur in small workshops – whether the guild masters worked independently or depended on merchant entrepreneurs that used the putting-out system – it was useful and even necessary to apply collective labour pressure to all employers at once. If the rise of capitalism entailed a concentration of production, however, thus giving an edge to the more prosperous masters or entrepreneurs outside the corporative framework, then journeymen had good reason to select their targets. This principle was especially true because the growing contrast between large and small enterprises caused disunity among employers, thereby enabling workers to form temporary alliances with one group (see below) and to resort to intimidation. The limited scope of most work stoppages organized by journeymen hatters in the southern Netherlands from the middle of the seventeenth century onward was far from coincidental: centrifugal forces in the trade prevailed over corporative interests, as prosperous hatters expanded their workshops at the expense of poorer colleagues, thus causing tension and disputes. This rift among masters not only enabled

⁷⁶ See the astute observations of E. Martin Saint-Léon, *Le compagnonnage* (Paris, 1901), p. 65.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, p. 113. See also A. E. Musson, *British Trade Unions, 1800–1875* (London, 1972), p. 24; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 41–43; Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 174–176, 180–181. On the effect of the Combination Acts, see the recent articles by J. Batt, “United to Support but Not Combined to Injure: Public Order, Trade Unions and the Repeal of the Combination Acts of 1799–1800”, *International Review of Social History*, 31 (1986), pp. 185–203, and J. Moher, “From Suppression to Containment: Roots of Trade Union Law to 1825”, in Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism*, pp. 74–97.

journeymen to turn their mutual aid societies into unions, but also to use strikes more selectively. They would suspend operations at one or two large concerns and threaten the other manufacturers through similar actions. If this method proved ineffective, the journeymen did not hesitate to call a general strike, although they rarely had to use this measure of last resort.⁷⁸

The relative infrequency of general strikes in many skilled workshop trades during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries therefore does not indicate organizational weakness among the journeymen. In fact, they used other, more effective tools, especially placement control and geographical mobility. The nature of the labour process created the placement measure, whereas the organization of production made it possible to use tramping as a pressure tactic. These journeymen derived their power from their extensive network of associations, which served both as mutual aid societies and as unions. Their increasing preference for rolling strikes reflects their awareness of negotiating strategies as well as their collective strength.

As the members' power depended on their solidarity and co-ordination of activities throughout the various centres of production and frequent changes of employer, a sense of a shared identity was a necessary effect. Shared experiences and practices outside the work environment enhanced this feeling: initiation ceremonies, oaths, ritual greetings, distinguishing marks, festivals and, last but not least, "social drinking".⁷⁹ These expressive measures delineated the group and cast competitors as outsiders, not because of local preferences or sectorial bigotry, but as a result of the need to control the labour market. Repetitive and ritualized practices continually reminded members that they belonged to a group with its own standards, values and rules, which had to be obeyed everywhere and at all times on pain of exclusion. The crucial nature of group cohesion explains why journeymen associations used violence against

⁷⁸ Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

⁷⁹ There is an enormous literature on the customs and rituals of journeymen in the skilled workshop trades, from which we have listed only a few important items. For England, the most useful introduction is Rule, *Experience of Labour*, ch. 8. On the ritual and ceremonial of French journeymen's associations, see Martin Saint-Léon, *Le compagnonnage*, pp. 207–281; Coornaert, *Les compagnonnages*, pp. 341–348; Davis, "A Trade Union", pp. 58–61; C. M. Truant, "Solidarity and Symbolism among Journeymen Artisans: The Case of *compagnonnage*", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21 (1979), pp. 214–226; J. Lecuir, "Associations ouvrières de l'époque moderne: clandestinité et culture populaire", *Revue du Vivarais* (special issue on *Histoire et clandestinité, du Moyen Age à la Première Guerre Mondiale*; Albi, 1979), pp. 273–290; D. Roche, "Work, Fellowship, and Some Economic Realities of Eighteenth-Century France", in Kaplan and Koeppe (eds), *Work in France*, pp. 65–69. For Germany, see especially W. Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung der Gesellengilden im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden, 1981), pp. 169–171, 191–193, 300–335; Wesoly, *Lehrlinge und Gesellen*, pp. 161ff.; Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 171–184; Greissing, *Das symbolische Kapital*; Thamer, "On the Use and Abuse of Handicraft", *passim*.

their own members more often than against employers. Despite repeated prohibitions, members held illegal court meetings, where decisions were usually reached through a majority of votes. These gatherings not only served to prepare collective actions against employers, but also (and more importantly) to settle disputes between members internally and to punish colleagues who defied directives concerning rates of pay and working conditions or who failed to fulfil their obligations. The general assembly could blacklist a journeyman who refused to abide by its verdict for not being a free worker, which prohibited anyone from employing him. Any employer caught violating such a restriction was subject to an interdict, and no member of the journeymen association would work for him any longer.⁸⁰ The need to preserve the organization's autonomy and its self-regulating mechanisms explains the tremendous emphasis on principles such as honour, custom and tradition. These values did not mean that the pre-industrial workers' aristocracy was a victim of the corporative idiom. Journeymen with a powerful shop-floor organization primarily reached their goals through calculated bargaining, as the following section will show.

FAIR WAGES AND NEGOTIATIONS

There is ample evidence that groups of skilled workers collectively set the rates at which they were willing to sell their labour *before* guild masters hired them to perform specific tasks. By the end of the thirteenth century, civic administrations had already attempted to curtail these practices through ordinances that decreed fixed or maximum wages for various categories of workers. Although the municipality of Paris took such a measure in 1293, it was clearly ineffective, as a royal edict imposing the same restrictions was issued three years later.⁸¹ Nor did London construction workers submit to official wage regulations. In 1298, carpenters swore to ignore a recent city ordinance reducing their wages. Throughout the first half of the fourteenth century, carpenters and masons were repeatedly accused of flogging fellow workers who accepted lower wages than those agreed to by the majority.⁸²

⁸⁰ For England, see Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 199–201, and Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 376–379. For France: Coornaert, *Les compagnonnages*, pp. 214–227. For Germany: G. Deter, *Handwerksgerichtbarkeit zwischen Absolutismus und Liberalismus. Zur Geschichte der genossenschaftlichen Jurisdiktion in Westfalen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 74–76 (with further bibliography). For the northern Netherlands: R. Dekker, "Arbeidsconflicten in de Leidse textielindustrie", in H. A. Diederiks *et al.* (eds), *Armoede en sociale spanning. Sociaal-historische studies over Leiden in de achttiende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1985), pp. 69–87, and "Labour Conflicts", pp. 393–395. For the southern Netherlands: Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

⁸¹ P. Boissonnade, *Le socialisme d'état. L'industrie et les classes industrielles en France pendant les deux premiers siècles de l'ère moderne* (Paris, 1927), p. 138.

⁸² Roys Baker, "Anglo-Massachusetts Trade Union Roots", p. 385, n. 70.

Enforcing solidarity was necessary to exert pressure on employers and required some type of organization. To determine the monetary value of their labour, journeymen also needed to grasp market forces and negotiating techniques. Only then could they understand what was economically feasible and which concessions they might obtain from employers through negotiations.

The ordinances that were implemented in several European countries shortly after the Black Death to help the wealthy cope with the economic aftermath of the plague⁸³ were mostly ineffective. Craftsmen in many trades realized they could benefit from the labour shortage, provided they put up a common front. John Wyclif, an English reformer, correctly noted that construction workers “conspire together that no man of their craft shall take less for a day than they fix [. . . and] that none of them shall do good steady work which might interfere with the earnings of other men of the craft”,⁸⁴ as may be deduced from the pay raises they obtained during the second half of the fourteenth century.⁸⁵ Any inhibiting effects of the Justices of Labourers (and subsequently the Justices of the Peace) on the increase of wages existed primarily in rural areas. In the cities, informal leagues and unlawful religious fraternities established by skilled workers countered this pressure.⁸⁶ In France, a similar situation prevailed. Although the Great Ordinance of 1351 limited pay raises to one third, within a few years employers were paying construction workers twice as much as before the plague.⁸⁷ During the first quarter of the fifteenth century, guild masters in many towns along the Upper Rhine were also forced to increase wages substantially because of the tremendous labour shortage combined with powerful journeymen associations. Their employees were so well organized and proved so militant that they were rarely mentioned by municipal administrations in ordinances that decreed maximum wages.⁸⁸

Increasing economic differentiation during the early modern era made it impossible to place a uniform national cap on wages. The Statute of

⁸³ C. Lis and H. Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks, 1979), pp. 48–51; R. Schröder, *Zur Arbeitsverfassung des Spätmittelalters. Eine Darstellung mittelalterlichen Arbeitsrechts aus der Zeit nach der grossen Pest* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 75–82; Epstein, *Wage Labour*, pp. 232–242.

⁸⁴ Quoted by L. F. Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1923 ed.), p. 120.

⁸⁵ J. E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1866–1902), vol. I, p. 321, and vol. IV, p. 524. See also Brentano, *On the History and Development of Guilds*, pp. 77–80, and Roys Baker, “Anglo-Massachusetts Trade Union Roots”, p. 356, n. 7.

⁸⁶ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages. Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 218–219. See also S. A. C. Penn and C. Dyer, “Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws”, *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 43 (1990), pp. 372–374.

⁸⁷ Geremek, *Salariat*, pp. 132–135.

⁸⁸ Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, ch. 5; Schröder, *Zur Arbeitsverfassung*, pp. 97, 180–185.

Artificers, which was passed in 1563 and served as a legislative standard for English labour for over two centuries, authorized local administrations to determine annual ceilings for rates of pay.⁸⁹ On the Continent, only the central government of the Hapsburg Netherlands still tried to impose uniform standards. As the ordinances of 1588, which stipulated that wages should either be returned to their 1585 levels or be reduced by one third, were totally ineffective,⁹⁰ the central government subsequently entrusted local authorities with the issue of maximum wages.

Incomplete information suggests it was mainly small manufacturers who urged town administrations to set maximum wages, to outlaw paying or receiving higher rates and to force journeymen to work for official wages.⁹¹ The explanation lies in the increasing integration of their trades in national and international commercial networks for supplying raw materials and selling finished products, which benefited entrepreneurs with substantial resources of capital and credit. Both guild masters who depended on these putting-out merchants and those who faced expansion resulting from the concentration of production had good reason to want authorities to fix the price of labour. The first group could increase its profit margin only by exploiting journeymen and apprentices, while the second group faced large entrepreneurs who were delighted to lure skilled workers away with higher wages.

Discord among masters obviously made it extremely difficult to enforce legal ceilings on wages. Even when employers stuck to an agreement, however, journeymen often refused to accept fixed standards and demanded fair wages, thus determining the price for their own work. Their success depended mainly on the demand for their labour and on their organizational ability. The groups of skilled workers – construction workers, clothiers and dyers – who demanded pay raises in Antwerp during the sixteenth century used bad timing on only two occasions. Six other collective actions occurred during periods of economic prosperity and all succeeded. Furthermore, the town government repeatedly raised the maximum wages without strikes, which indicates that these workers obtained better working conditions through different means.⁹²

⁸⁹ D. Woodward, "The Background to the Statute of Artificers: The Genesis of Labour Policy, 1558–63", *The Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 33 (1980), pp. 32–42. The evidence reviewed by the same author, "The Determination of Wage Rates in the Early Modern North of England", *ibid.*, 47 (1994), pp. 22–43, suggests that official attempts to control wage rates were largely unsuccessful.

⁹⁰ E. Scholliers, *Loonarbeid en honger. De levensstandaard in de XVIe en XVIIe eeuw te Antwerpen* (Antwerp, 1960), pp. 145–146; C. Verlinden and J. Craeybeckx, *Prijzen- en lonenpolitiek in de Nederlanden in 1561 en 1588–1589. Onuitgegeven adviezen, ontwerpen en ordonnanties* (Brussels, 1962).

⁹¹ See, for example, Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, p. 395.

⁹² See especially E. Scholliers, "Vrije en onvrije arbeiders, voornamelijk te Antwerpen in de 16e eeuw", *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, XI (1956), pp. 309–321, and his *Loonarbeid en honger*, pp. 127–142. Also Thijs, *Van werkwinkel tot fabriek*, pp. 399–405.

Indeed, setting new maximum wages sometimes simply fixed the official rates at the level of the actual wages or confirmed a compromise between masters and journeymen. Such agreements could result from peaceful negotiations or rolling strikes and might be brought before the authorities by both parties, to ensure “that the bargain would be observed and could be imposed on any minority of masters who could not be brought in by agreement”. Consequently, government regulations often served “not so much as law imposed from above, but rather as law to make firm and general the results of confrontation and negotiation”.⁹³

As previously noted, it is certain that many wage increases passed only after concerted withdrawals of labour from production. Nevertheless, direct and peaceful negotiations were of considerable importance. This practice dated back to the late Middle Ages, when town administrations began to designate public places where masters wishing to take on a journeyman and workers in search of a job could meet. Clearly, these outdoor job centres enabled journeymen to discuss their situations and act according to mutual deliberations, in spite of any prohibitions.⁹⁴ Journeymen with their own associations obviously had the best opportunity for forcing employers to settle without resorting to a strike. While journeymen of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries often relied on guild officials or representatives of the local authorities⁹⁵ to negotiate with employers, their successors increasingly tried to handle these matters themselves.

Back door negotiations were reported only when employers were unrelenting, when a minority refused to accept an agreement or when disputes arose afterwards and did not necessarily concern the same issue. Therefore, social historians have not studied this type of collective bargaining in depth. Nevertheless, available sources suggest that skilled workers who were able to control or at least strongly influence placement tended to negotiate directly with their employers for wage increases. If the market was expanding, the threat of a rolling strike was usually sufficient to achieve their goal. It is far from coincidental that complaints of excessive demands made by certain groups of skilled workers in France and in the southern Netherlands multiplied after the middle of the seventeenth century. These workers obtained concessions without direct confrontations with employers and civic administrations, probably because of their leverage in negotiations. Their leverage resulted partly

⁹³ W. R. Cornish, *Law and Society in England, 1750–1950* (London, 1989), p. 291. See also Woodward, “Determination of Wage Rates”, p. 32, and Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen*, pp. 75–77. On the late Middle Ages, see E. Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Spätmittelalter, 1250–1500* (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 326.

⁹⁴ Geremek, *Salariat*, pp. 126–131; Thijs, *Van werkwinkel tot fabriek*, pp. 372–373; Dekker, “Getrouwe broederschap”, p. 7.

⁹⁵ Unwin, *Industrial Organization*, pp. 50–51, 54; Scholliers, *Loonarbeid en honger*, p. 142; Davis, “A Trade Union”, p. 64; Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt*, p. 326.

from prevailing economic and social relationships and especially from their organizational ability. The workers' intercommunal and sometimes even international networks operated so smoothly that the mere threat of being blacklisted often sufficed to sway employers.⁹⁶ Remarks from their contemporaries that "certain journeymen associations were writing the law for everyone" should therefore not be dismissed as rhetoric. Equal truth lies in a comment that appeared in a London newspaper in 1761: "The 'fair' wages and hours set by the tailors, curriers, wheelwrights, smiths and shoemakers are generally more favourable than those enforceable in the courts, where disputes turn on the 'usual' or 'customary' conditions for the trade."⁹⁷ Many groups of skilled workers in London established box clubs that set a common policy for rates of pay and preferred direct negotiations associated with the threat of a strike to the authority of magistrates.⁹⁸

In evaluating strategies developed by skilled workers in pre-industrial Europe to obtain fair wages, it is necessary to distinguish between the expectations and objectives of groups with a lot of leverage in negotiations and the tighter margins of others.⁹⁹ The view that "the protest of the manufacturing poor was conservative in its focus: in its appeal to custom, paternalist legislation and in its seeking to reinforce traditional usage"¹⁰⁰ is correct in that it refers to craftsmen who, for whatever reason, were unable to control access to the trade, to organize and expand intercommunal networks of solidarity, or whose resistance was eventually undermined by economic or technological change. These groups' main concern involved safeguarding old rights and customary wages. This effort required mobilizing vertical networks, as they needed co-operation from fair-trading masters and support from paternalistic authorities to retain their position.

The impression that protests among pre-industrial workers were defensive and socially conservative results primarily from the excessive emphasis placed by (mostly British) historians on actions led by textile workers during the eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ The main objective of contemporary journeymen weavers was to protect their status and welfare from encroaching capitalism. Consequently, they used the legal precedent

⁹⁶ G. Martin, *Les associations ouvrières au XVIIIe siècle, 1700–1792* (Paris, 1900), pp. 135–142; Martin Saint-Léon, *Le compagnonnage*, pp. 46 and 65; H. Hauser, *Les compagnonnages d'arts et métiers à Dijon aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1907), pp. 10–11; Kaplan, "La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail", pp. 380–381; Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

⁹⁷ Quoted in Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen*, p. 39.

⁹⁸ Christie, *Stress and Stability*, pp. 132–133. For greater detail, see Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, part III.

⁹⁹ See the interesting remarks of Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 253–255.

¹⁰⁰ Rule, *Experience of Labour*, p. 212.

¹⁰¹ See the pertinent remarks of Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, p. 215.

symbolized by the Statute of Artificers to justify their actions. These groups submitted petitions to the authorities demanding *minimum* wages and were sometimes successful, as with the Spitalfields Act (1773) and its counterpart from Lyons (1780), which were both passed to restore social peace in the silk industry.¹⁰²

Other actors also deserve note. First, it is important to remember that their predecessors sometimes developed entirely different strategies, as clearly shown by the collective actions of fourteenth-century journeymen weavers in the Upper Rhine region. Second, other groups of skilled workers in the eighteenth century continued to organize autonomous and offensive actions, which were often successful, both in England and on the Continent.

DISCORD AMONG EMPLOYERS

Since the late Middle Ages, employers in many urban trades attempted to resist journeymen associations and even to break their power, whether indirectly by urging civic administrations to prohibit these organizations, or directly by joining forces to establish counter-combinations. This direct strategy was especially appropriate when a large portion of the labour force consisted of travelling journeymen with an extensive network of communications, as these conditions prevented employers from resisting without the support of their colleagues elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising that the first intercommunal leagues of guild masters covered regions where tramping was common. As early as 1352, bakers from eight towns around the middle of the Rhine discussed joining forces against the journeymen. In 1361, the millers of Colmar, Mulhouse, Schlettstadt (Sélestat) and ten smaller Alsatian settlements agreed to set and enforce a maximum rate of pay. By 1383, the smiths of Frankfurt, Mainz, Speyer, Worms and five other towns reached an agreement to cope with the demands of their journeymen. Around this time, tailors' guilds from twenty-eight towns along the Upper Rhine made a commitment to set a maximum wage and to exclude any worker that had deserted his previous employer.¹⁰³

Although most town administrations provided legal support to the measures of the intercommunal *Handwerkerbünde*, these concerted

¹⁰² On the Spitalfields Act, see J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer, 1760–1832* (London, 1919), pp. 205ff.; Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen*, pp. 88–89; Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 111, 114, 186. Wage regulation in Lyons is discussed by M. Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1970), pp. 589–590, and D. Longfellow, "Weavers and Social Struggle in Lyon During the French Revolution, 1789–1794", *French Historical Studies*, 12 (1981), pp. 9–10.

¹⁰³ F. Göttmann, *Handwerk und Bündnispolitik. Die Handwerkerbünde am Mittelrhein vom 14. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1976), pp. 26ff., 45ff.; Reininghaus, *Die Entstehung der Gesellengilden*, pp. 61–62; Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 68–81.

efforts were ineffective, as borne out by the continuing rise in nominal and real wages. While their lack of success probably resulted both from the growing demand for labour and the resistance ability of journeyman associations, discord among employers was also a major factor. For example, frequent disputes between millers and bakers made it difficult to enforce maximum wages, as both parties tried to win the journeymen's sympathies. Skilled workers in many trades also took advantage of the contrast between small and large masters because the larger manufacturers' view of labour regulations and wage control was entirely different from that of their poorer colleagues. During the last quarter of the fifteenth century, when small linen weavers of the Upper Rhine region tried to reduce wages, they encountered opposition from the guild officials, all of whom were *Tuchermeister* (drapers) interested in taking on as many qualified workers as possible.¹⁰⁴

In corporations with relatively little social differentiation, masters usually restricted competition, both in theory and in practice. For this reason, regulations concerning the number of apprentices and the size of enterprises were rarely disputed. A different situation prevailed in urban trades experiencing rapid growth, as the prospect of higher profits inspired affluent artisans to expand their operations. This move caused tensions and disputes, especially because of their eagerness to lure journeymen away from small masters through offers of better wages. During the late Middle Ages, this practice was outlawed throughout western Europe.¹⁰⁵ Repeated implementation of these ordinances nevertheless indicates their ineffectiveness.

During the early modern era, the accelerated growth of capitalism exacerbated the discord between guild masters in many urban trades. Small manufacturers tried to protect their interests by making it more difficult for journeymen to become masters and by urging guild officials and authorities to take measures against entrepreneurs who circumvented corporative regulations and against workers who deserted their employers. New, far stricter prohibitions were implemented against hiring someone else's journeyman before his contract expired or while his previous master retained any claim to him. Employers who violated these rules risked heavy penalties. The same principle applied to journeymen who failed to observe the customary term of notice. More and more stipulations appeared barring skilled workers from leaving their

¹⁰⁴ Schulz, *Handwerksgesellen*, pp. 65–66, 395.

¹⁰⁵ H. T. Riley, *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth and XVth Centuries* (London, 1868), pp. 226, 232, 238, 240, 244; Brentano, *On the History and Development of Gilds*, p. 72; Des Marez, *Organisation du travail*, pp. 67–68; W. Weber and T. Mayer-Mahy, "Studien zur spätmittelalterlichen Arbeitsmarkt und Wirtschaftsordnung", *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, 166 (1954), pp. 380ff.; Geremek, *Salariat*, p. 131; Schröder, *Zur Arbeitsverfassung*, pp. 181–182; Swanson, *Medieval Artisans*, pp. 113–114.

employer without his explicit permission, and some corporations even introduced written certificates.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, it proved impossible to control journeymen and to force all artisans to comply with specific rules concerning competition at the same time.

Journeymen's sympathies varied in the standoff between small and large manufacturers. Their interest in maintaining corporative stipulations concerning apprenticeship led them to side with the small masters whenever these regulations came under attack. Rarely, however, did journeymen object to the expansion or concentration of production, as more prosperous entrepreneurs usually paid higher wages. This situation made them less concerned about the number of workers than about whether these individuals were free workers (i.e. journeymen who had completed the appropriate number of years in training and who respected their association's directives concerning rates of pay and working conditions). As long as they accepted placement control, capitalists who disregarded corporative stipulations regarding workshop size encountered no resistance from journeymen associations. As a matter of fact, undermining the regulating and stabilizing purposes of guilds enabled skilled workers in flourishing urban trades to strengthen their own organizations. For example, journeymen hatters in Brabant and Flanders grew increasingly free to do as they pleased from the early seventeenth century onward, as guild officials became less successful in taking decisions that were accepted by all the masters. By the time the larger manufacturers realized they had relinquished a valuable weapon by eroding corporative authority, it was too late. The free workers were so well organized that it was impossible to reverse their usurpation of corporative prerogatives. Journeymen hatters used their intercommunal and international contacts to obtain complete control over the labour supply and to prevent employers from hiring non-members.¹⁰⁷

In the event of waves of strikes, employers sometimes joined forces or even established counteractive organizations. The collective actions of journeymen clothiers in Leiden, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Hoorn, Gouda and Rotterdam between 1636 and 1639 were the direct cause for the establishment of a synod of all guild masters engaged in this trade in nine cities in Holland. The objectives of these employers involved identifying and excluding subversive workers and equalizing wages throughout the province.¹⁰⁸ A century later, between 1740 and 1750, cloth manufac-

¹⁰⁶ Hauser, *Ouvriers du temps passé*, pp. 67–72; Scholliers, "Vrije en onvrije arbeiders", *passim*; G. K. Schmelzeisen, *Polizeiordnungen und Privatrecht* (Munster and Cologne, 1955), ch. 8; Thijs, *Van werkwinkel tot fabriek*, pp. 381–382; Bräuer, *Gesellen*, pp. 39–40; Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, pp. 238–240. See also R. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor. The Employment Relations in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill, 1991), *passim*.

¹⁰⁷ For more detail, see Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

¹⁰⁸ N. W. Posthumus, *Bescheiden betreffende de provinciale organisatie der Hollandsche lakenbereiders, de zgn. droogscheerders-"synode"* (Amsterdam, 1917), and his *De nationale*

turers in Sedan, Verviers (in the Principality of Liège) and Monschau (in the Duchy of Jülich) also joined forces against journeymen clothiers, who repeatedly blacklisted dishonourable masters and illegal workers.¹⁰⁹ In 1764, the hatters of Mechelen, the centre of production for the Austrian Netherlands, agreed to stop luring journeymen away from one another with higher wages and to hire workers only if they possessed a certificate of discharge.¹¹⁰ By the end of the century, English employers in the cutlery trade and paper manufacturing industry had united to resist wage demands and to collect funds to prosecute strikers.¹¹¹

These counteractive organizations were nevertheless exceptional and were usually ephemeral and ineffective. The unstable core-periphery structure of many urban trades created such tension that centrifugal forces eventually prevailed over guild interests. While all guild masters agreed that placement control was a powerful tool among journeymen and that any counteractive measures required a formal system of corporative registration, internal discord nearly always undermined their attempts to establish permanent job centres.

Corporative registration not only made it more difficult for regular employers of labour to obtain the required number of journeymen at the right time and to offer them higher wages if necessary. It also prevented them from taking advantage of the disciplinary tactics of journeymen associations over their own members. These associations had their own councils, courts and laws to pass judgement on members whose conduct had caused complaints among fellow workers or employers. Honourable masters could actually rely on this informal justice to enforce labour agreements and to maintain order in their workshops. Journeymen who betrayed their master's trust, who engaged in frequent and violent disputes during working hours or who otherwise obstructed an efficient working relationship incurred stiff penalties and were even expelled from the association in the event of recidivism. By setting and enforcing rules for good behaviour in the workplace, journeymen associations helped implement the labour discipline that was essential in large enterprises, especially if the production process required teamwork or if the labour supply was highly mobile.¹¹²

organisatie der lakenkoopers tijdens de Republiek (Utrecht, 1927). See also Dekker, "Labour Conflicts", pp. 392, 409–410.

¹⁰⁹ G. Gayot, "La longue insolence des tondeurs de draps dans la manufacture de Sedan au XVIIIe siècle", *Revue du Nord*, 63 (1981), pp. 105–134. See also L. Dechesne, *L'avènement du régime syndical à Verviers* (Paris, 1908), pp. 52–54; E. Barkhausen, *Die Tuchindustrie in Montjoie, ihr Aufstieg und Niedergang* (Aachen, 1925), pp. 80–96; and P. Lebrun, *L'industrie de la laine à Verviers pendant le XVIIIe et le début du XIXe siècle* (Liège, 1948), pp. 106, 213, 259–260.

¹¹⁰ Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

¹¹¹ Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 173–174.

¹¹² L. Voet, "The Printers' Chapel in the Plantinian House", *The Library*, 5th ser., XVI (1961), pp. 10–14; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 38; W. Reininghaus, "Die

Internal discord nearly always caused French corporations to lose the battle to control the labour market in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as revealed by the case of the cabinetmakers' guild of Dijon. In 1637, a minority refused to accept the office of the *clerc embaucheur*, which the guild had established in 1624 to register new journeymen. The town administration supported the majority and implemented two ordinances obliging master cabinetmakers to address the labour placement officer. The larger entrepreneurs appealed this decision at the Parliament of Dijon, which supported them by decreeing that they could hire workers on their own, just as journeymen were entitled to offer their services to workshops of their choice. In 1677, when the small masters approached the town administration to deplore the scandalous conduct of the journeymen, who were disguising subversive meetings as drinking sprees, their more affluent colleagues defended the *compagnonnage*, claiming that its members were very honourable and that their rituals served only to promote sociability. Twenty years later, the small masters went back on the offensive. They argued that it was intolerable that newcomers asked the *rôleur* of the *compagnons du devoir* for work, especially because some employers took advantage of this illegal practice by circumventing corporative restrictions concerning the maximum number of journeymen to a workshop. Although the municipal magistrate responded to their complaint and entrusted the *clerc embaucheur* with placement control, the larger masters appealed this decision again and achieved a new victory. In 1699, the Parliament prohibited both the *rôleur* and the *clerc embaucheur* from handling worker placement. It also permitted employers to hire as many journeymen as they pleased. This judgement benefited not only the large entrepreneurs. It also increased the power of *compagnonnages*, as noted by Henri Hauser: "The Court thought it was securing absolute freedom for labour contracts. In fact, it abolished only the official and visible office of the *clerc embaucheur* and had no effect on the clandestine and highly effective position of the *rôleur*." Over the following decades, the journeymen associations acquired so much power that the more affluent masters eventually changed their position and urged the civic administration to restore the corporative authority of the guilds. The die was cast, however. The journeymen cabinetmakers regarded the prohibition on assembly implemented by the Parliament in early March 1740 as a declaration of

Gesellenvereinigungen am Ende des Alten Reiches. Die Bilanz von dreihundert Jahren Sozialdisziplinierung", in U. Engelhardt (ed.), *Handwerker in der Industrialisierung. Lage, Kultur und Politik vom späten 18. bis ins frühe 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 230; Sonenscher, "The *sans-culottes* of the Year II", pp. 322-323; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 130-133; J. Materné, "Social Emancipation in European Printing Workshops before the Industrial Revolution", in T. M. Safley and L. N. Rosenband (eds), *The Workplace before the Factory. Artisans and Proletarians, 1500-1800* (Ithaca and London, 1993), p. 215; Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

war and placed an interdict on all workshops. The general strike lasted eight months. In the end, the employers formally requested that the authorities rescind the new regulation, thus granting the journeymen a full victory. The same situation occurred in 1768–1769. This strike was so successful that the larger entrepreneurs eventually acknowledged the actual authority of the *rôleur* to be on the safe side.¹¹³

The attitude of English employers was equally ambiguous. On the one hand, they considered the houses of call useful institutions that quickly provided them with the number of workers they required for any length of time, even a single day. On the other hand, they realized that the existence of these institutions enabled journeymen to exert collective pressure. The union activities of journeymen tailors in London reflected this disadvantage. Around 1700, five clubs became confederated in a central union that soon used the houses of call against the masters. In 1720, when the journeymen demanded both a reduction in their hours of work and a pay raise, the masters tried to reverse this situation. They established a committee of resistance, which designated alternative houses of call and set up a sickness fund for workers who withdrew from the union. The union immediately called a general strike, which dragged on for months and caused Parliament to pass an act in 1721 that prohibited combinations of journeymen tailors and fixed their wages and hours of work. In spite of the act and the conviction of several strikers of conspiracy, the Tailors' Union persisted. Like their French counterparts, London journeymen took advantage of the rising discord among the masters, some of whom refused to support the committee of resistance in an effort to continue their operations. New attempts to enforce the act were ineffective because the larger employers kept their distance and even used the wage disputes to expand their operations at the expense of the smaller masters, as Sir John Fielding noted in 1760: "The master taylors [. . .] have repeatedly endeavoured to break and suppress the combinations of their journeymen to raise their wages and lessen their hours of work, but have ever been defeated [. . .]; and this has been in some measure due to the infidelity of the masters themselves to each other; some of whom, taking advantage of the confusion, have collected together some of the journeymen, whose exorbitant demands they have complied with, while many other masters have had a total stop put to their business."

There was really no alternative. By 1760, the journeymen tailors had the most powerful union in London, with forty-two affiliated clubs, which each included several hundred members and made increasing use of the tramping system to deprive employers of potential scabs in the event of wage disputes. During the general strike of 1764, the masters

¹¹³ On these events, see the important study by Hauser, *Les compagnonnages*, pp. 59–68 (the quotation on p. 63). See also Farr, *Hands of Honor*, pp. 73–74.

established nine private houses of call and used this network to recruit over 1,000 hired hands from outside London, a number that paled in comparison to the 6,000 journeymen who had left town at the urging of the union. The larger employers soon yielded and agreed to raise their journeymen's wages in spite of all prohibitions and prosecutions.

Their attitude was somewhat understandable. These entrepreneurs realized that the substitute job fairs were no match for the houses of call supervised by the union. They could afford to provide better working conditions than the small masters, who were caught between a rock and a hard place when both the work stoppages and the pay increases put them in dire financial straits. Furthermore, the most efficient entrepreneurs were aware that the houses of call enabled them to solve specific labour problems. In 1811, Francis Place wrote:

In large concerns, it is very common for the master to send to a house for a "Squad" of 10 men and a captain, and to another for 6 men and a captain, and so on – The "captain" is a man known to be a good workman, and he alone receives the job from the master or the foreman of the concern. The captain, knowing the competency of the different men of his squad, distributes the job amongst them and takes care that it is properly done in due time. He alone is answerable to the master, as he alone receives the instructions and undertakes the management of the job.¹¹⁴

The strength of many workers' combinations and the absence of a monolithic or united front among employers made it very difficult for central governments during the eighteenth century to enforce laws prohibiting journeymen from controlling the labour market, from leaving their master's workshop without observing the proper term of notice, from reaching agreements with fellow workers in other cities and from generally resorting to intimidation or other forms of conspiracy. Even if these laws were not exclusively intended to strengthen political authority and to maintain public order, but also served economic purposes, they rarely satisfied the expectations of both the capitalist entrepreneurs and the small guild masters.

Although they had good reason to restrain journeymen associations, the support of German town administrations for the restrictive legislation of the Empire and the larger territorial states was at best half hearted, as the central authorities aimed to curtail *all* aspects of corporative autonomy. This policy ran counter to the interests of many guild masters and threatened to undermine social stability as well. The Imperial Decree of 1672 prohibited journeymen from administering justice to fellow

¹¹⁴ This account is based upon F. W. Galton, *Select Documents Illustrating the History of Trade Unionism*. Vol. I, *The Tailoring Trade* (London, 1896, reprinted 1923), "Introduction", and pp. 2, 5, 9, 35, 41; Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, pp. 95–98; Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen*, pp. 39–40, 60–73, 124–126; Rule, *Experience of Labour*, pp. 152–156; Moher, "From Suppression to Containment", pp. 78–80; Schulte Beerbühl, *Vom Gesellenverein zur Gewerkschaft*, pp. 185–189, 201–202, 411–416.

workers and dishonourable masters, from breaking their contracts and from organizing strikes. This decree also forbade manufacturers to fix prices and stipulated that the high fees associated with applying for the title of master were to be reduced considerably and that intercommunal communication between guilds would henceforth be considered a punishable offence. The decree was never enforced, as borne out by the Imperial Patent of 1731, which contained identical provisions. Its only new stipulation was that itinerant journeymen had to produce a certificate, a *Kundschaft*, attesting to their loyal service to their previous master. The legislator intended both to discipline tramps and to prevent journeymen associations from using placement control and geographic mobility as a tool for social protest. Still, the central authorities did not manage to terminate the autonomy of the journeymen associations. While their failure resulted mainly from the journeymen's own resistance, manifested by their frequent strikes (which were often successful), the contrast between the capitalist pressure groups and the majority of artisans was an additional factor. This source of discord enhanced the leverage of the journeymen associations.¹¹⁵

Efforts by the central authorities in France during the eighteenth century to curtail illegal labour regulation were equally unsuccessful. The *lettres patentes* of 1749, which were registered by all parliaments, not only forbade industrial workers to organize *cabales* during disputes with their employers, but also to leave without their written permission. The vague wording of the act rendered it subject to various interpretations and subsequent litigation. Nevertheless, precedents soon proved that journeymen leaving their jobs without a *billet de congé* risked being designated and convicted as vagrants. Furthermore, journeymen who requested their *congé* (leave) as a group could be prosecuted for organizing a *cabale*, along with those who argued with masters that unfairly refused to issue the certificates. These disputes were to be settled by guild officials or police commissioners. Nevertheless, this legislation had little effect, as demonstrated by Steven Kaplan. Many journeymen continued to leave their jobs without giving notice or requesting a certificate, both as individuals and in groups. They rarely had any difficulty obtaining employment elsewhere, even though it was illegal to hire them. Again, the explanation lies in the organizational ability of the journeymen

¹¹⁵ Proesler, *Das gesamtdeutsche Handwerk*, pp. 35–37, 49–51; W. Fischer, *Handwerksrecht und Handwerkswirtschaft um 1800. Studien zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsverfassung vor der industriellen Revolution* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 24–25; Griessinger and Reith, "Obrigkeittliche Ordnungskonzeptionen", p. 173; Thamer, "On the Use and Abuse of Handicraft", pp. 278–281; U. Puscher, "Reichshandwerksordnung und Reichsstädte. Der Vollzug des Reichsschlusses von 1731 in den fränkischen Reichsstädten", in R. A. Müller (ed.), *Reichsstädte in Franken*, 2 vols (Munich, 1987), vol. I, pp. 33–45, and her *Handwerk zwischen Tradition und Wandel*, pp. 199–202, 230–232; Deter, *Handwerksgerichtsbarkeit*, pp. 76–93.

associations, which continued to dominate the labour market, and the complicity of masters who preferred risking a fine to coping with labour problems. The *lettres patentes* of 1781, which stipulated that all journeymen employed in cities with corporations had to carry a *livret* and register with the town authorities, were largely ineffective for the same reasons.¹¹⁶

This situation also prevailed in the southern Netherlands, as evidenced by the fruitless battle successively waged by the Austrian, French and Belgian authorities against the *Gemene Bussen* managed by the journeymen hatters. The edicts of 1775 and 1784, which entitled masters to hire an unlimited number of workers at any conditions they wished, missed their mark. The journeymen associations' counteroffensive was so effective that most hatters soon abandoned their efforts to hire non-members of unions and even agreed to raise wages. The ordinance of 1786, which abolished the apprenticeship system and prohibited *Gemene Bussen*, was not enforced. The French Le Chapelier Act, which came into effect in the Belgian departments in 1795, prohibited coalitions among workers on pain of stiff fines and imprisonment, and the act of 1803, which authorized the police to arrest and incarcerate any worker without a *livret*, only inspired the journeymen hatters to exercise still greater secrecy and choose intimidation as their battle strategy. In 1810, a high official of the central government recommended searching the houses in all centres for hat manufacturing and to start legal prosecutions. The appropriate minister responded that it simply was not possible to gather sufficient evidence. He concluded: "We must acknowledge that acts and political regulations are powerless against these workers associations." By 1843, Brussels hatters saw no changes. Their journeymen still used the same methods of selection and exclusion, controlled the labour supply and made sure that only members of their union or of foreign organizations with which they had reached agreements for mutual assistance could work in closed shops, that manufacturers hired no more than one apprentice every two years and that the tasks in each company were distributed according to their guidelines.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Since the 1980s, historians have increasingly taken a cultural-anthropological view of labour under the *ancien régime* and have devoted

¹¹⁶ For more details, see the important articles of Kaplan: "Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail", pp. 43–59, and "La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail", pp. 373–409. See also Martin, *Associations ouvrières*, pp. 149–152, 155–162, 174–176; J. Cavignac, "Le compagnonnage dans les luttes ouvrières au XVIIIe siècle. L'exemple de Bordeaux", *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 126 (1968), pp. 399–404; Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, pp. 287–291; P. Delsalle, "Du billet de congé au carnet d'apprentissage: les archives des livrets d'employés et d'ouvriers (XVIe–XIXe siècle)", *Revue du Nord*, 75 (1993), pp. 286–292.

¹¹⁷ For a detailed analysis, see Lis and Soly, "De macht van vrije arbeiders".

more attention to the formation of symbolic capital than to economic positions and material interests. This approach has provided more information on the daily experiences and practices of artisans, both inside and outside the workshop, and has shown the language of labour to be far more complex than assumed until recently.¹¹⁸ There is a tendency to equate differing cultural codes with fundamental differences, however, thus making it impossible to address the aspirations, motivations and actions of pre-industrial craftsmen in the same way as those of their modern counterparts. Historians stress that, beginning with the Industrial Revolution, workers started to look ahead, calculate, establish unions, organize strikes and become class conscious. Their predecessors, on the other hand, had been submerged in a world of tradition in which honour, paternalism and deference prevailed. This situation caused workers to be primarily concerned with threats to custom and customary relationships, protesting only when their established rights were violated, acting primarily as consumers and forming a crowd together with others in the local community when the moral economy came under attack. When the pre-industrial journeymen did come forward as producers, they rarely succeeded in establishing continuous associations, in forming coalitions with fellow workers in other places or in organizing collective actions motivated by economic rationality.

The multitude of variations on this theme is often somewhat more sophisticated than this slightly distorted impression suggests. Nevertheless, black and white contrasts prevail, while only short periods of transition feature shades of grey. This essay does not offer a comprehensive reassessment of such views. It discusses only one segment of the working-class population and generally overlooks regional variations because of the absence of comparative studies. Yet an analysis of both the character and the motivations of skilled workers' combinations and collective actions in pre-industrial Europe does make it possible to question selected standard interpretations.

It is indisputable that the expansion of skilled workshop trades in various parts of Europe during the late Middle Ages and the early modern era coincided with the rise of journeyman associations that exerted collective labour pressure on employers. These associations sought not only to defend their property in skill, but also to obtain higher wages and better working conditions. Changes in the formal structure of workers' combinations and in the formal nature of concerted

¹¹⁸ The debate on the language of labour dates from the publication of the thought-provoking book by William H. Sewell, Jr, *Work and Revolution in France. The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980). See also the excellent collection of essays edited by Kaplan and Koepf, *Work in France*. For useful comments, see S. Cerutti, "Ricerche sul lavoro in Francia: rappresentazioni e consenso", *Quaderni Storici*, 64 (1987), pp. 255–274, and L. R. Berlanstein, "Working with Language: The Linguistic Turn in French Labor History. A Review Article", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33 (1991), pp. 426–440.

withdrawals of labour from production should not be overanalysed. The main issue is that many pre-industrial journeymen associations were far from ephemeral, that their objectives were not radically different from those of nineteenth-century labour unions and that strikes pertained to their standard repertoire. Consequently, sharp dichotomies that juxtapose the traditional versus the modern are inappropriate.

While crowd, plebs, custom and moral economy are of great heuristic value for designating certain phenomena and processes, they are not universally applicable. Michael Harrison wrote: "It is a sort of historians' Chinese whisper that has reduced Thompson's claims to absurdity: the article has become about 'the crowd' in the eighteenth century, about the motivations of 'pre-industrial crowds' in general, and about 'traditional protest'."¹¹⁹ Careful research on the courses of action taken and the reasons for choosing them reveal vast differences between the groups with powerful shop-floor organizations and those that were weaker. The first group could develop negotiating techniques and organize strikes, whereas the second usually had to resort to petitions, street demonstrations and riots.

Journeymen who managed to cut off their masters' direct access to sources of labour became equal partners of their employers. Capital and credit could be exchanged for property in skill, a commodity the journeymen provided under conditions they determined, as free workers, through consultation with each other. This collective right of self-determination resulted in the organizations they established and in the collective actions they undertook. Their fraternities and mutual aid societies obviously served several purposes, as religious and charitable activities did not independently evoke resistance, and, more importantly, the members needed various services. The nature and objectives of many of these collective actions nevertheless reveal that these associations often operated like unions and demanded a larger share of the profits during periods of prosperity.

It was possible to control access to the trade and to regulate the labour market by taking advantage of contradictions inherent in both urban corporatism and in the nascent capitalist system. Although formal craft guilds were not a prerequisite for workers' combinations, these institutions could benefit journeymen because the corporative laws and regulations intended to curtail competition among masters could also serve as legal weapons to defend property in skill and to legitimize actions directed against "illegal" workers and "dishonourable" masters. It is not entirely coincidental that the victory of urban corporatism accompanied the rise of many journeymen associations, both legal and illegal. Skilled workers had good reason to support some aspects of the

¹¹⁹ M. Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790–1835* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 13.

guild system, although they were equally interested in adapting other elements to meet their own needs and in rejecting others. Consequently, many fraternities and mutual aid societies eventually withdrew from the authority of guild officials and gathered their own weapons. The establishment of autonomous organizations that regulated labour and provided various services enabled these journeymen to become emancipated so that they could not only reject any type of patronage, but could also give solidarity a new meaning.

The growth of capitalism also enhanced the sense of collective identity among members of journeymen associations. Increased concentration of production and defensive responses from small masters undermined corporative loyalty and impeded upward social mobility. There is no doubt that the capitalist transformation of the relationships between journeymen and masters was disastrous for certain groups of skilled workers. Others took advantage of the polarization between guild masters to achieve their own objectives, however. The expansion of urban trades based on tramping and characterized by a highly integrated division of labour within each enterprise created specific problems for entrepreneurs, which they were unable to solve on their own. Journeymen associations that were able to regulate the highly mobile labour market and to discipline their members could therefore mediate negotiations and demand payment for their services, both through higher wages and better working conditions and through placement control. These mutual benefits made violent and open disputes rather exceptional, and parties usually reached a compromise through direct negotiations.

The conventional view that skilled workers in pre-industrial Europe staunchly defended the guild system and resisted economic rationalization and innovation “in the name of custom” should be abandoned. Dualistic terms of resistance and subjugation fail to convey the attitude of many journeymen associations toward capitalist modernization. These associations objected not to expansion and concentration of production, but to efforts to curtail their autonomy and to tamper with their negotiating leverage. Permanent journeymen with powerful shop-floor organizations nearly always managed to withstand these attacks. Furthermore, their knowledge of market forces enabled them to develop negotiating techniques and to organize offensive strikes that were frequently successful.

To exert collective labour pressure, it was crucial to develop networks of association, which required strong cohesion and solidarity. It was necessary to bridge gaps in time and space, as members worked in various centres of production. This objective required transforming physical absence into mental presence, which meant creating a feeling of shared identity. Collective labour and geographic mobility stimulated solidarity based on reciprocal relationships that benefited individuals as well as groups. This cohesion was further strengthened by cultural codes, which distinguished members from other workers and permitted internal

social control by distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable conduct, both in the workshop and outside work. Cultivating honour, custom and tradition served a similar purpose. Permanent journeymen who worked in large, market-oriented concerns and had negotiating leverage could use the aspects of the corporative idiom that promoted group cohesion, stressed their organization's autonomy and legitimized certain actions. It was their perception of labour as a commodity with a price that might increase by withholding it from the market, however, that informed their aggressive strikes. These journeymen's experiences and expectations differed radically from those of skilled workers engaged in workshop trades that featured small-scale production with a concurrent journeyman-master relationship or those without any power to make economic demands. These groups based their defensive protests on symbolic capital of honour. Any significance of the corporative idiom in the early labour movement may be ascribed to their collective memory as well as to that of small masters (many of whom had been downwardly mobile since the late eighteenth century), rather than to the aspirations of a workers' aristocracy.

Simply designating journeymen with powerful shop-floor organizations as wage earners disregards their strong autonomy, self-regulation and self-awareness. Their attitudes towards work, their insurance systems and their forms of sociability were inextricably linked as integrating elements of their self-determination, which was based on horizontal networks of solidarity. Their concerted withdrawals of labour from production were not rituals of purification or crowd actions. Nor can they be dismissed as adumbrations of modern strikes. Placing an interdict on workshops was the most effective way to obtain concessions from employers, given the risk of political repression. As early as 1907, Henri Hauser wrote of the cabinetmakers of Dijon: "Their interdicts of 1739–1740 and 1768–1769 were far more comprehensive and effective than any strike could be today and reveal the true extent of their power."¹²⁰

Translated by Lee Mitzman

¹²⁰ Hauser, *Les compagnonnages*, pp. 67–68.