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The Unskilled and Industrialization

A Transformation of Consciousness

The cleavage between skilled and unskilled workers constitutes the most obvious and durable division in the working class throughout the industrial revolution. The division has had profound consequences for both trade union and socialist movements, most of which had to contend not just with internal jealousies between the two groups but with widely differing expectations and capabilities. Until the late nineteenth century the most successful labor groups survived by ignoring the unskilled altogether, and though a marriage was more commonly attempted after the 1890s consummation has never been entirely complete. Beneath these rather familiar outlines fall a host of different experiences, in family formation, job expectations and behavior, that have left a lingering mark on the labor force as well. Most significant, well into the twentieth century it remained unusual for a worker who initially chose or was forced into a completely unskilled job ever to emerge into skilled ranks, and uncommon also for a skilled worker to fall beneath his initial station, at least until the onset of old age. The line was firm, and only a minority ever transgressed it in terms of personal experience[1].

Ironically, industrialization was not the sole cause of the division, despite our persistent temptation to judge preindustrial workers as well integrated with their jobs[2]. If we view the preindustrial labor force overall, the vast majority of workers were in many ways unskilled. What skill rating should be given the ordinary peasant is not clear, and there were gradations within the rural community. But the skilled workers formed a minority, in terms of occupations where formal training was required. Peasants defended their economy, where they could, by property ownership; deprived of this, their negotiable skills were minimal. Only that minority of rural producers engaged in at least parttime manufacturing work, plus of course urban artisans, can really earn a skill rating. None of this is intended to distract attention from the disruption industrialization caused. Population growth, indeed, even before industrialization, began to challenge traditional peasant property control (however modified by manorialism) and thus to create the more modern framework for the skilled-unskilled dichotomy. But it is important to realize that the dichotomy itself was not new, that many displaced rural workers had no clear concept of skill. On the whole, popular impressions to the contrary, industrialization helped shift the

1 This point is explored more fully later in this essay. See *David Crew*, Definitions of Modernity: Social Mobility in a German Town, 1880—1901, in: Journal of Social History, 1973, pp. 51 ff.

2 For the fullest statement of the bucolic view, see *E. P. Thompson*, The Making of the English Working Class, New York 1963; see also *J. L. and Barbara Hammond*, The Village Labourer, London 1911; *E. P. Thompson*, Patrician Society, Plebian Culture, in: Journal of Social History, 1974, pp. 382 – 405.

balance toward an increase in skilled workers, though not without great stress and confusion. In the very long rund industrialization set up a modest mobility ladder, in which many traditional unskilled learned that they, or their children, could rise a notch or two higher; so that unskilled jobs, dwindling as a proportion of the whole (particularly with the decline of agriculture but also with changes in industry) are left to »someone else« – during the most recent decades, usually foreigners.

The unskilled-skilled gap is frequently mentioned in labor history, but it has rarely been detailed. For the most part, once the gap is mentioned, attention rivets on the skilled, who are by definition more active and articulate[3]. Disagreements about the nature of the skilled persist, and we must return to these; but knowledge of the unskilled is almost nonexistent. This essay, without pretending comprehensive coverage, will focus more on the unskilled, with the predominant theme of their gradual, if incomplete, phasing out. A subsidiary theme, somewhat more familiar and certainly more widely accepted, will be treated as well: the persistent inability of the unskilled to mount organized protest of any sort, an inability virtually absolute during the first stage of industrialization and still visible, in comparison to the situation of skilled workers of all sorts, at the end of the nineteenth century. The essay focuses on western and central Europe, particularly France, Germany, and England. It is not comparative, in the sense that elaborate juxtapositions of one country to the next will be offered, though it is obvious that England, which urbanized her poor and unskilled more thoroughly and quickly than France and Germany, will offer some general contrasts. Nor is strict attention paid to periodization within the century of industrialization, though some precise trends can ultimately be indicated. The purpose, initially, is to use a variety of evidence from various places and times to get beneath the important but sometimes superficial generalizations about skilled and unskilled, particularly through deepening a knowledge of the latter.

Within the factories during the first decades of industrialization the gap in pay between a skilled and an unskilled male could range up to 600 % (in France, where it was hard to lure skilled workers from the crafts); it seems to have been about 250–300 % in England. These high differentials, which long persisted, formed the basis of quite different possible lifestyles. Clearly the skilled did not have to associate with the unskilled outside the plant; they often consciously lived in better neighborhoods, as a mark of status[4]. But note a corollary implication as well: one of the reasons for the high differential was the unwillingness of unskilled workers to take the training to become skilled. This is, frankly, an employer's eye view. The lament could be found in any early industrial setting. The metallurgists in Decazeville found that it was fifteen years after they launched their operation before they could begin to dispense with English workers, imported at great expense and sometimes by no means satisfactory; and the reason was the unwillingness of the local popula-

3 *Eric Hobsbawm,* The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth-Century Britain, in: *Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torb,* ed. by *John Saville,* London 1954, pp. 201 – 239; *William Sewell,* The Working-Class of Marseille under the Second Republic: Social Structure and Political Behavior, in: *Workers in the Industrial Revolution,* ed. by *Peter Stearns* and *Daniel Walkowitz,* New Brunswick, N. J., 1974, pp. 75 ff. Sewell does, as we shall see, make at least an effort to sketch the unskilled, but finally dismisses most of their characteristics as unknowable.

4 *Otto Jeidels,* Die Methoden der Arbeitsentlöhnung in der rheinisch-westfälischen Eisenindustrie, Berlin 1907; *Daniel Walkowitz,* Statistics and the Writing of Workingclass Culture: A Statistical Portrait of the Iron Workers in Troy, New York, 1860 – 1890, in: Labour History 1974, p. 428.

tion to seek advancement. The rural population had no clear skill concept, quite apart from the unfamiliarity of metallurgical work. The most obvious entrepreneurial inducements, higher pay for more productive work, were not fully appealing; rural expectations long dampened the creation of anything approximating the acquisitive economic man[5]. These barriers would gradually break down, though more commonly among the sons of the unskilled than among the unskilled themselves. This would ultimately, among other things, reduce wage differential, as the supply of skills became more abundant. But the differential, familiar enough in itself, is a vital prerequisite toward understanding not only material culture but also value systems.

If we look at a different group of unskilled, not new but growing rapidly in the industrial era, dockers and builders' laborers, we can certainly enhance the understanding of the material gap. While unskilled factory laborers were probably unemployed more often than their skilled brethren, at least if voluntary job changing is excluded, such was certainly the case with the unskilled outside the factories. In the summer of 1901 in France, at a season when their jobs were usually at a peak, 6 % of all ditchdiggers were unemployed, while five years later the rate was 7.1 %, as against overall national rates of 3.3 % and 3.6 %. Unions of building trades workers, here mixing skilled and unskilled, reported over 15 % unemployment between 1901 and 1944, while unionized dockers averaged 26.9 % annually from 1904 onward. In London a mass of irregularly employed men shifted among small jobs in construction, printing, engineering, as well as going to the docks[6]. Fifty percent unemployment was common in Liverpool and Bristol docks during the 1890s. In London in 1901 there were 7000 more dockers available daily than were used at maximum, and 9000 more than were used on the average – which assured that on a typical day 36 % of all dockers would lack work[7]. In Hamburg in 1895 only 9 % of all dockers worked over 210 days a year; 7 % worked 106 to 210 days, while 83 % had between a single day and 106 days. Obviously many skilled workers suffered as well, though miners and metallurgical workers were fairly immune in this turn-of-the-century period. But only clothing workers, in a dying domestic trade, even remotely rivaled these rates; food workers had 12 % unemployment at maximum, while metalworking, printing and the like hovered around a five percent average. It is fair to say, for the end of the nineteenth century and probably well before, that the unskilled worker was three times as likely to suffer unemployment as his skilled counterpart in either factory or crafts.

Again, a material fact of tremendous importance, but also a psychological fact. The unskilled could not afford the ties to job or profession that skilled workers, even in the factories, maintained. Unemployment encouraged drifting, while drifting promoted unemployment, for without job attachment many groups, such as builders' laborers, had few features that would distinguish them from any other unskilled group. Unemployment also fed, and was fed by, a distinctive notion of what the work pace ought to be. Well into the twentieth century many dockers worked 36 hour shifts, alternating these with stints of unemployment or gardening at home. The irregular arrival of ships set the framework for

5 Archives de la Compagnie des Houillères et Fonderies de l'Aveyron (Archives nationales, France, 84AQ), reports of 1844 – 1846.

6 *Royal Commission of Labour, Minutes of the Evidence, Group »B« (Transport by Water, Transport by Land)*, London 1896, C 6708, vol. I, p. 292.

7 *William H. Beveridge*, Unemployment, a Problem of Industry, London 1931, p. 93; *Select Committee on Distress from Want of Employment, Report*, London 1896, HC 321, p. 27.

this pace, but many workers were used to it and resisted efforts as regularization. More generally the unskilled, when they had work, accepted extraordinarily long hours – up to 18 hours a day, still in 1900, in the case of many carters or garbage collectors. They survived these hours by a slow pace of work, plus absenteeism, in some cases, or unusual pride in being able to assure support for the family, in others. They would be one of the last large groups of workers to rethink what work meant in their lives, and to ask for lower hours as a result. In contrast urban artisans were particularly alert to the advantages of lower hours, perhaps first to protect their employment opportunities by spreading the work but also soon to provide for a fuller life off the job. With only a slight lag, alert factory workers did the same, like the wool weavers in Blackburn who proclaimed: »If we do not intend to make ourselves the slaves of machinery, the sooner we reduce our working hours the better«[8]. Again, motives ranged from a desire to prevent unemployment to a real conception of a defined period of leisure of the job; it was British metalworkers, pressing for reduced hours in 1913, who argued simply on grounds of »the desire on the part of the workers for a fuller and more complete life«[9]. Unskilled workers would gradually be won to a similar approach, as we shall see, but it came harder. Jobs were too valuable to curtail, given high unemployment. The tradition of episodic work limited an interest in the regularization of labor that set, daily hours implied. Hence a common reaction to the whole idea of sweeping limitation of hours: »Why not let us work as we wish«[10].

The overwhelming difference between the non-factory unskilled and skilled, in terms of employment, lay in the different rates of joblessness. »I daresay none of you know what it is to be out of work«, one man noted to a British Royal Commission. »I wish that some of you had that experience. There are always crowds at the dock gates and wharf gates, even at the best of times, who are fighting and struggling for employment«[11]. Periods of intense work alternated with anxious, often fruitless waiting, in makeshift sheds and according to rather random periods of call[12]. Unemployment rates encouraged favoritism and toadying beyond anything known in the factories or mines. Most employers tried to keep a cadre of steady workers, among builders' laborers, quarry workers, and dockers, while periodically distributing work among enough others to maintain a labor force adequate to any sudden boom. In Hamburg dockers were divided into three classes, with the minority of »steady workers« given first crack at every job[13]. This preferential treatment helped divide the unskilled, and it was formalized toward the end of the nineteenth century by company unions that defused agitation by assuring preferential hiring for a quarter to third of the dockers[14]. But for the majority of casual workers jobs came through foremen or hiring bosses. In the German ports innkeepers served as placement agents for dockers and especially seamen, taking healthy bribes in the process; British dock foremen were often

8 *Blackburn and District Power Loom Weavers' Association, Annual Report* (1895), p. 6.
9 *Archibald T. Kidd,* History of the Tin-Plate Workers and Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers Societies, London 1949, p. 183.
10 *Henri Lorin, L'Industrie* rurale en pays basque, in: Musée social 1906, p. 371; see also Bulletin de la Chambre syndicale des ouvriers peintres en bâtiment de la Seine, May, 1909.
11 *Royal Commission,* Minutes, vol. I, p. 75.
12 *Ben Tillett,* History of the London Transport Workers' Strike, London 1911, p. 14; *Carl Legien,* Der Streik der Hafenarbeiter und Seeleute in Hamburg-Altona, Hamburg 1897; *Eleanor Rathbone,* Report on the Results of the Special Inquiry into the Condition of Labour at the Liverpool Docks, Liverpool 1904, p. 20.
13 *Léon de Seilhac,* Les Unions mixtes des patrons et ouvriers, Paris 1908, pp. 51 ff.
14 *Rathbone,* Report, passim.

bribed[15]. Favoritism afflicted other categories of workers, of course, but never to the same degree. Unskilled work was thus degrading as well as unpredictable for masses of workers. But these objective facts should not obscure the point that, even if only in reaction, many unskilled workers themselves retained a distinctive attitude toward work, a kind of alternating rhythm of intensity and slack that recalled some of the traditions of agricultural labor.

Against their distinctive material setting, unskilled workers long maintained other preindustrial traditions that most skilled workers shed. Late marriage, and in some cases comparatively low average marriage rates, was one. Daugthters of the London poor in the early twentieth century married at an average age of twenty-five, as against 22–23 for most factory categories[16]. In 1900 only 36 % of all sailors in Bremen were married at all[17]. This partly reflected their youth, of course. And in this case it is true that skilled workers in the craft tradition preserved or restored something of the same tradition. British artisans also married a full three years later than miners and most factory workers; in Germany only half of all printers were married by age 29, and in one study only 21 % of all bakers were married[18]. But most urban artisans were moving toward a newer, semi-bourgeois family pattern, in which marriage was vital, even if it came at a relatively late age – only twelve percent of German printers never married, for example – and in which conscious limitation of birth after marriage helped preserve the living standard and assure a proper future for the children born. The same urban poor in England who married late had an average of 3.9 children born per family in 1911, as against 2.8 in artisanal families. Factory workers had yet another style, neither traditional nor proto-bourgeois, in which high marriage rates and early marriage produced a middling level of children. Only the unskilled, in other words, tried to cling to peasant tradition virtually unaltered, at least in the outlines of their family life[19]. Inevitably they continued to suffer unusually high rates of child mortality. They also, peasant-wise, thought of children as economic assets, which delayed their willingness to reduce the numbers born.

Yet traditionalism was not a material product alone. Here too, at least by the end of the nineteenth century, one can see distinctive attitudes at play. Unskilled workers in the city could not preserve traditions without alteration. Most important, if and when they married they faced the problem of what they found it appropriate for their wives to do. It was a virtually universal working-class impulse to seek to keep the wife at home. She might work there – doing domestic manufacturing (particularly in countries like France, where extensive clothing and textile production long remained on a home manufacturing basis), occasional work such as the making of artificial flowers, or keeping house for a lodger – but to let her work outside was a confession of failure. Only drunks, the sick, the incapacitated would let their wives work in a shop or factory. Again, with some exceptions in the

15 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hannover, Polizeiakten des Oberpräsidenten der Provinz Hannover, Hann. 122 a XI, pp. 70 – 72.

16 *Census of England and Wales,* XIII: Fertility of Marriage, London 1917, Cd. 8678.

17 *Paul de Rousiers,* Hambourg et l'Allemagne contemporaine, Paris 1902, pp. 249 ff.; *M. Pappenheim et al.,* Die Lage der in der Seeschiffahrt beschäftigten Arbeiter, Leipzig 1903.

18 *Walter T. Layton,* The Relation of Capital and Labour, London n. d., p. 77; *Walter Abelsdorff,* Beiträge zur Sozialstatistik der deutschen Buchdrucker, Tübingen 1900; *Konrad Fink,* Zur Lage der Bäckereiarbeiter, in: Die Neue Zeit 1904 – 1905, tom. I, pp. 624 – 630.

19 *Peter N. Stearns,* Working-Class Women in Britain, 1890 – 1914, in: *Suffer and Be Still,* ed. by *Martha Vicinus,* Bloomington 1972, pp. 105 – 107.

textile factories where married women more commonly persisted in employment, this was a near-unanimous reaction to the strangeness of industrial life. The woman was to be the home center, the budget manager, the mother. As such, it must be noted, she retained vital economic functions, quite apart from any earnings she produced while in the home. Her ability to make do on a meager budget, and particularly to manipulate it to assure the man's ability to work regularly, in terms of adequate nutrition and clothing, was essential to the family economy. But from the man's standpoint more may have been involved. The wife in the home preserved another vital rural tradition, for except in a few seasons married women's agricultural jobs had mainly focused on gardens and livestock near the cottage. With this as a base the ability to keep the wife in the home became a symbol of masculine pride, in a period where threats to established work methods might challenge this same pride. Now, within this universal impulse, the unskilled had a distinctive problem but also a distinctive zeal. Their problem was economic. More of them had to allow their wives to work outside the home, simply to make ends meet. In Germany around the turn of the century wives provided 3.5 % of the income in the families of skilled workers, 7.7 % for the unskilled. Even in textiles 50 % of all married women working claimed they did so because their husband earned too little, with only 17 % noting a desire for a better life, 18 % the stark fact of widowhood, and less than ten percent because they did not like housework. But while economic compulsion is obvious, the equally important point is that the unskilled defined compulsion in a far different manner from the skilled. Among Berlin metalworkers, 17 % of the wives of skilled workers held a job, and only 25 % in the unskilled category [20]. This small gap in no way reflects income differential. Unskilled workers in German cities would pull their wives off the job when their incomes rose to subsistence levels of 20 marks a week; skilled workers, wanting above all an extra bedroom in their flat, waited until their earnings were 25 or 30 marks. This reflects the difference in consumption expectations already cited. But put another way, it means that unskilled workers long preserved the desire for as traditional as possible a family setting, which included the wife in the home, at the expense of other consumption possibilities. Surely it is not farfetched to assume that the pervasive traditionalism of the values of the unskilled, extending from consumption through work pace to family, might cushion the shock of hardship, preserving at least a myth of continuity even amid great change.

And one final factor, which set the basis for much traditional behavior in other respects: the unskilled retained greater contacts with the countryside. This is hardly a surprise in the early stages of industrialization, though it reinforces the vital notion that the unskilled came from a rural culture that was itself largely lacking in skill definition. A study of Marseilles around 1848 – one of the only that has touched with any precision on the unskilled at this early period of industrial history – lists not only the predictable high turnover rates from job to job and even occupation to occupation, but also the frequent movement in and out of the city for the unskilled segments of the labor force [21]. Three fourths of the unskilled had been born outside the city, compared to half of the skilled group, and many worked in Marseilles for only a year or two before returning home. Similarly, about twice as many had no permanent domicile in Marseilles even while working there, than was

20 *Dora Landé*, Arbeits- und Lohnverhältnisse in der Berliner Maschinenindustrie zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, Leipzig 1910; *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Neue Folge, vol. 202 – 222 (see especially vol. 202, *Berufsstatistik*, from the 1907 census).

21 *Sewell*, Working Class, passim.

true of the skilled group. Less likely to marry in the city, their sights and goals remained rural.

All of this is unsurprising in the context of early industrialization, with its massive migration of peoples, though it remains important to note the kind of relationship which movement and skill bore to each other. Many skilled workers too, after all, were born out of town. But prior training gave them more basis for settling down; many were schooled under a village artisan. (This remained true in late-nineteenth century Germany, where factory workers born in the countryside were three times more likely to come from craft than peasant backgrounds[22].) But more than this: better physical health and strength, and differences in personality that we can only guess at at this point, made the city more congenial to them, the desire to settle easier to come by. The unskilled were not always untrained prior to their arrival in the city. If, on the surface, they seem exploited drifters, caught in a vicious circle in which the unrewarding quality of their work prevented commitment to any given job, which in turn assured the inability to develop negotiable skills, they were to an extent also caught in a different value system, which told them that what was rural was best, and that urban work might be endured only insofar as it facilitated return to the countryside.

And this differentiation tended to persist. Of course it was modified as the industrialization process matured. More and more unskilled were city-born and never set foot in the countryside. One of the major sources of builders' laborers in Britain, around 1900, for example, were the misfits of the big cities themselves – products of broken homes, the ill, and the retarded[23]. But still the rural bias existed overall. In the early 1890s, when 81 % of London bookbinders and 66 % of all London printers had been born in the city – a sign that skilled labor was becoming ever more urban in its orientation – 78 % of all railways laborers came from other areas. The most obvious case of rural influence cropped up within the new inflow of foreign workers, whose attitudes and behavior patterns so closely mirrored those of early industrial workers two generations before. There was one difference: thanks to the railroad the unskilled now moved farther in search of work than did the skilled, whereas in the classic early industrial pattern skilled workers, more highly motivated, were the ones who risked long journeys if they were not born in the town itself[24]. With the rails, sheer physical displacement could occur without special talents and without displacement of rural values. At the Daimler plant in Stuttgart, for example, a third of all day workers came from some distance, compared to only a fifth of the locksmiths[25]. But this was because the rails facilitated return as well as arrival. Among 4105 Italian workers in the Longwy steel industry in 1903, for example, there were 1618 departures for home; next year, 1589 departures from among 4148 workers. Most of these workers deliberately left their families at home, because of the firm intention to return. They worked intermittently and were

22 *Maria Bernays*, Berufswahl und Berufsschicksal des modernen Industriearbeiters, in: Archiv für Socialwissenschaft und Socialpolitik 1912, pp. 123 ff.

23 *De Peyerimhoff*, Les Charbonnages français, in: Musée social 1913, p. 148; *H. Leduc*, A Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, in: Voix ouvrière 1910, pp. 685 ff.; Musée social 1908, p. 291; *Norman Dearle*, Problems of Unemployment in the London Building Trades, London 1908, passim.

24 *Fritz Schumann*, Auslese und Anpassung der Arbeiterschaft in der Automobilindustrie, Leipzig 1911; *Arthur Redford*, Labour Migration in England, 1800 – 1850, London 1926; *John Modell*, The Peopling of the Working-Class Ward: Reading, Pennsylvania, in: Journal of Social History 1971, pp. 71 – 96.

25 *Redford*, Migration; *Modell*, Peopling.

held to lack ambition – this was noted, for example, of unskilled Flemish miners who traveled to work every week by train, for their expectations were not high and they found no reason to commit themselves to the work itself. Even with the earnings of the unskilled, and by dint of crowding into cheap company barracks, the migrants were able to send significant savings home, which affirmed their ties to the past; 500,000 francs were annually sent to Italy from the Villerupt postoffice alone[26].

The situation of foreigners simply exaggerated the characteristics of unskilled native migrants. German shipbuilding, traditionally the province of local craftsmen, was supplemented during the 1890s by hordes of unstable rural workers, many of whom regularly left to do agricultural labor. The fact that this migration heightened, if massively, a traditional seasonal influx of workers from the Weser confirmed the traditional element involved in the process; the movement itself was not new and by the same token many Italian rural workers had been accustomed to travel in search of work during a good part of the year[27]. The numbers involved and the entrance into factory production, not the goals of the migration, constituted the only novelty involved[28]. In France Breton workers, sometimes recruited as strikebreakers, entered the Parisian transport and construction fields and the mines of the Nord. Some remained, though keeping contacts with the home village from which they continued to receive food (thus enabling them to accept low wages and avoid any sense of new class consciousness). But where the nature of the work was really novel, as in the mines of the Nord as opposed to the casual labor of construction or hauling, upwards of three quarters of the recruits left within four months[29].

But migration was not the whole story, though it usefully reminds us of the tremendous flux within the labor force even in the more mature stage of industrialization. Even settled unskilled workers were more likely to preserve a rural ambiance than their skilled colleagues. Dockers in London, convinced urbanites crowded into the East End, often maintained little truck gardens and kept goats. Here was an obvious economic fillip, but the suggestion of ties to the rural economy remains interesting. A railway factory near Swinton found only the skilled workers living in town, while the laborers usually lived in the villages and came in on the train[30]. Polish workers in the Ruhr, even when they abandoned the hope to return home and buy land, made a concerted effort to keep their traditional costumes and festivals, to the despair of local landlords who tried vainly to forbid smoking hams in tiny apartments[31].

In certain instances, in other words, rural-urban distinctions between unskilled and skilled workers were becoming sharper in the later nineteenth century than they had been before. Urban craftsmen, particularly, tightened their ranks against outsiders, and this meant that

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26 *Schumann,* Auslese; *H. Demain,* Migrations ouvrières à travers la Belgique, Louvain 1919, p. 70 and passim; *Hermann Beck,* Lohn- und Arbeiterverhältnisse in der deutschen Maschinenindustrie, Dresden 1902; *G. Reynaud,* La Colonie italienne d'Homécourt, in: Musée social 1910, p. 212; *Serge Bonnet,* Political Alignments and Religious Attitudes within the Italian Immigration to the Metallurgical Districts of Lorraine, in: Journal of Social History 1968, pp. 123 ff.; *Georges Hottenger,* Le Pays de Briey, Paris 1912.

27 *Louise A. Tilly,* Comments on the Yans-McLaughlin and Davidoff Papers, in: Journal of Social History 1974, pp. 452 – 459.

28 *Josef Neumann,* Die deutschen Schiffbauer, Leipzig 1910.

29 *Léon de Seilhac,* Les Grèves du bassin de Longwy, in: Musée social 1906, pp. 390 ff.

30 *Alfred Williams,* Life in a Railway Factory, London 1915, pp. 115 ff.

31 *Wilhelm Brepohl,* Industrievolk im Wandel von der agraren zur industriellen Daseinsform, dargestellt am Ruhrgebiet, Tübingen 1957.

big-city origins predominated. In Berlin printing, for example, 50 % of all workers were born in the city itself, far above the overall population ratio; while in all of Germany only 29 % of all printers had been born outside large cities, again a proportion well below the ratios even within the big-city populations. These extremes would admittedly not carry over into skilled factory workers, whose recruitment was more diverse. But it remains true that the skilled worker rarely had an agricultural background; where data exist it is clear that this extends even to the occupations of grandfathers. They were increasingly urban and, even if born in the countryside, could accept the city. The unskilled were disproportionately agricultural in background; more likely actually to have been born in the countryside; and above all, still attuned to a host of rural values, often confirmed or renewed by residence in villages or periodic visits.

It was thus a durable culture as well as the vital distinctions in material circumstances that explains the best known, and most politically significant, differences between the skilled and the unskilled from early industrial decades through the first part of the twentieth century: the almost total contrast in their protest patterns. The unskilled simply do not rise, save occasionally, before the industrial revolution began, as part of an urban mob. This latter phenomenon, however, was almost entirely confined to southern Europe, in cities like Naples and Rome, where porters, dockers and fish-sellers might join skilled artisans and apprentices in popular riots, presumably because of the singular duration of urban traditions. Even here, the unskilled rarely rose alone, and they were as likely to be found on the side of monarchy and aristocracy as identified with any radical cause [32]. With this partial exception, and certainly by the time of industrialization's advent, the protesters and revolutionaries came from the ranks of skilled workers. This even applies to the countryside, where, with the important exception of the Captain Swing riots of 1830 in England, the pure agricultural laborer generally stayed away from agitation. Rural rioters were disproportionately village craftsmen – these provided the leadership even in the Captain Swing movement – domestic textile workers and middling peasants [33]. In the cities the list of crafts that produced revolutionary crowds changed somewhat during the first half of the nineteenth century, with metalworkers coming to greater prominence, tailors receding a bit, but never did crowd composition include a significant unskilled element in the more purposeful riots [34]. Where the climate of unrest was prolonged they might be found among bands of drunken workers singing revolutionary songs late at night and even battling with policemen directly. They were not immune from political propaganda; hence, among rioters in Marseilles during the whole period 1848–1851, the unskilled were about half as likely to participate in collective unrest as the most agitated groups of craftsmen. But even in this extraordinary effervescence the unskilled largely stayed out of any organized political activity, while those few involved were far from any leadership level [35].

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32 *Eric Hobsbawm,* Primitive Rebels, New York 1959, pp. 113 ff.

33 *Charles Tilly,* Collective Violence in European Perspective, in: *Violence in America,* ed. by *Hugh Davis Graham* and *Ted Gurr,* New York 1969, pp. 4 – 45 and: The Changing Place of Collective Violence, in : *Essays in Theory and History,* ed. by *Melvin Richter,* Cambridge, Mass., 1970, pp. 379—394; *Eric Hobsbawm* and *George Rudé,* Captain Swing, New York 1968.

34 *David Pinkney,* The French Revolution of 1830, Princeton 1972, pp. 252 ff.; *Rémi Grossez,* Les Ouvriers de Paris, Paris 1966; *Franco Valsecchi,* Le Classi popolari e il Risorgimento, in: Cultura e scuola 1965, pp. 82 – 93.

35 *Sewell,* Working Class, pp. 96 ff.

The bases for this major distinction have often been analyzed. The poorest people lack the resources to afford time off from the quest for bread or work, and an economic crisis can only heighten their dilemma. We must see their limitation literally on a biological level; deprived of adequate caloric intake even in prosperous times, the unskilled lacked the energy to participate in extensive physical violence during those subsistence crises that marked every major period of unrest in the early industrial period. Their constant wandering prevented the formation of personal or community ties, and many had no organizational tradition to refer to in any event. Craftsmen, in contrast, had a sense of defined skill under threat. Their risings were sparked by new material hardship, but they had some physical reserves of energy and they protested more than momentary dislocations. And they had an organizational tradition, often bolstered by residence in common craft neighborhoods such as the famous Saint-Antoine quarter of Paris, that gave the needed framework for even an apparently spontaneous riot[36].

Should one go on to add that the unskilled, driven by desperation to measures of individual protest, replaced collective action by crime? It is plausible to see crime as a first step on the road to protest, among people confused by an urban environment and lacking the sort of values necessary to mount a strike or riot. Certain kinds of crime can, as Eric Hobsbawm has shown, drift toward primitive protest, when bands of criminals tacitly emulate the Robin Hood tradition and express the resentments against the rich and powerful not only among their own bands but among the unskilled peasants or townsmen who harbor them[37]. Without forecasting later, more successful collective action, Louis Chevalier, in his rambling portrait of the Parisian poor in the first half of the nineteenth century, suggests that crime must have been the protest surrogate for the surging numbers of unskilled that crowded into the capitol[38]. And there is little question that many property owners, aristocrats as well as bourgeois, saw the unskilled as increasingly bestial, with rising crime rates a frightening expression of their complete depravity.

Without doubt, crime increased in the early industrial revolution and the unskilled obviously played some role in this. Actually, however, big cities like Paris and London, where the urban unskilled were most concentrated and most feared, were not the centers of the most dramatic changes in crime rates during the early industrial period. This was particularly true with regard to crimes of violence such as assault. In the rural tradition, property was carefully protected; relatively more crime was perpetrated against people. Moving into new cities, men from the countryside tended to maintain the traditional response to tension, attacking individuals more often than property; whereas in older cities like Paris or Breslau a more distinctively urban crime pattern prevailed, with theft overwhelmingly predominating. The rates of crime increase and the prevalence of a high component of violence were less notable among cities with concentrations of unskilled, such as Marseilles, than in fast-growing industrial centers where the percentage of skilled workers was relatively high. In other words, what knowledge we have of the social bases of crime during the early industrial period suggests that rates and type may bear some relation to the rural background from which new workers came; but they do not bear out

36 *Ch. Tilly*, Collective Violence; *George Rudé*, Crowd in History, New York 1964, passim.
37 *Hobsbawm*, Rebels, passim.
38 *Louis Chevalier*, Dangerous Classes and Laboring Classes, New York 1973; see also *Gareth Stedman Jones*, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society, Oxford 1971.

any contention that continued unskilled status in the city predisposed to unusual criminality[39].

In fact, facile images of the relationship between the unskilled and both protest and crime omit important aspects of the social history of the sub-proletariat during the early industrial period. Rapid urban growth seems to generate crime (the slower growth of the later nineteenth century brought a leveling of the rates of crime increase and even a reduction in certain crimes of violence). But we do not know that the unskilled were disproportionately involved. The fact that crime tended to go down when collective violence increased suggests in fact that on some occasions skilled workers, probably particularly younger apprentices and journeymen, may have tried their hand at crime, turning to more concerted protest when the time seemed ripe. Many unskilled workers may have avoided crime just as they avoided protest. The risks and energy involved played a role here, but so did the existence of alternate value systems. It is quite true, as students of protest have pointed out, that the skilled craftsmen who swelled bread riots and street revolutions alike could do so because they had values to refer to, values now under challenge. The implication, rarely pursued, is that the unskilled could not follow suit not only because of their material disadvantage but because they lacked a clear value system at all. We have tried to suggest that this is improbable, pointing out (as have other students of the working class who have dealt with the culture of poverty; the conclusion is by no means completely new)[40] that the unskilled might have a well-formed culture, most often through preservation of rural contacts and values but not always thus. In contrast, certain kinds of skilled workers might be far more confused about their situation.

And here we must turn to some specific illustrations, for there is danger in dwelling too long on undefined categories of skill or lack of skill. Almost any work can be improved with experience. Assuming no deterioration of strength, the carter or agricultural laborer is probably more adept after five years at a job than when a complete novice. Any effort to draw boundary lines must be fuzzy, for it is rarely true that an employer can pick at random from the street without potential loss of efficiency, even when it comes to ditchdigging. But we may characterize the unskilled as lacking in any formal training program; relatively easily replaced since their work involves physical strength rather than learning – paid, as one French manufacturer put it, »solely for his physical strength, his brute force, to carry, pull, push, turn, as a horse would do, or a piston, or a wheel«[41]. Beyond this we have noted that the unskilled usually remained unskilled precisely because, whatever the learning potential of their job, they tended not to stick to a single occupation. They drifted, if not geographically then from one type of work to another; builder's laborer one day, docker the next. Their whole definition of job varied from that of the skilled, and enhanced the actual differences both in earning potential and concentrated knowledge.

Agricultural work predisposed most people rather to the unskilled approach. We have suggested this already and it is obviously open to debate. The agricultural working classes, if one can impose a somewhat anachronistic term, were not differentiated directly by skill. Apprenticeship was informal. Working alongside one's father, contracted out as servant to

39 *Howard Zehr,* The Modernization of Crime in Germany and France, 1830—1914, in: Journal of Social History 1975, passim.

40 *Laura Oren,* The Welfare of Women in Laboring Families: England, 1850 – 1860, in: *Clio's Consciousness Raised,* ed. by *M. Hartman* and *L. Banner,* New York 1974, pp. 226 – 244.

41 Société d'encouragement pour l'industrie nationale, *Exposé de la situation de l'industrie française considérée dans l'intèrêt de tous les travailleurs,* Paris 1848, p. 16.

another farmer[42] – neither of these common options provided for specific training. And although there was some specialization of agricultural labor, with herding, for example, or with the different jobs normally assigned to men and women, the peasant typically avoided any particular concentration of skill. Of course individual talents varied in agriculture. This helped produce changes in property relations which were the real emblem of status in the agricultural world. But there was no ethic of skill, and when property relationships were overwhelmed by the population revolution of the eighteenth century a host of now entirely propertyless people cast about for work. Naturally they headed primarily toward unskilled jobs, not simply because rural skills meshed poorly with urban but because the whole idea of skill was foreign. But they were not valueless, which is why, as unskilled workers, they preserved so many elements of the rural tradition, not only the concrete desire for periodic contact with the countryside but also family patterns and the attitude toward work itself. The jobs they took might prod them toward some reevaluation, as in the case of domestic spinning or weaving, two of the most logical alternatives to pure farming. Often begun on a parttime basis, rarely involving elaborate training (even lacemaking took less than a year to learn), a new outlook toward skill and work might develop which would be the source for much of the skilled segment of the urban working class a generation or two later[43].

But for those unconverted or incompletely converted, but finally forced or lured into the cities, what jobs were available? What was an unskilled job in the early industrial city? The answer, inevitably complex, can take us toward a more concrete understanding of who the unskilled actually were. For newly-urbanized women the choice of job was overwhelmingly servanthood. There were more than twice as many female servants as female factory workers in England in 1871 and the occupation's growth rate remained higher[44]. The maid-of-all-work needed little specific training; her ignorance was often the source of immense despair to her mistress, but the demand for servants was so great that few advance stipulations were set. For the girl, servanthood had the advantage of being fairly close to tradition. Many teenaged girls served in other houseoulds in the preindustrial countryside; now they did so in cities. The milieu changed, and this must have been frightening, but the values did not. Hence many servants dutifully saved their money to send home or, slightly more individualistic, to build up their own dowry. They might pick up some new talents, including literacy, as part of their servant experience, but rarely would they become skilled workers, rising in the servant hierarchy; for every cook or governess there were always ten or twenty maids-of-all-work. For the typical servant quit after five or ten years of work, often having changed jobs many times in the interim. With marriage as her goal, work-based protest was irrelevant. Theft might be more tempting, and because of abuse on the job or sometimes the sheer easier earnings involved not a few servants became prostitutes; at the other extreme a minority of servants took on semi-middle-class values and moved upward in society, mainly through marriage[45]. But most servants, and a third or more of

42 *Peter Laslett,* The World We Have Lost, London 1965, pp. 1 – 21.

43 *Rudolf Braun,* Industrialisierung und Volksleben, Winterthur 1960, and: Sozialer und kultureller Wandel in einem ländlichen Industriegebiet, Zürich 1965; on a special aspect of change, *Edward Shorter,* Female Emancipation, Birth Control and Fertility in European History, in: American Historical Review 1973, pp. 605 – 640.

44 *Census of England and Wales, 1871,* p. xliv.

45 *Theresa McBride,* Social Mobility for the Lower Classes: Domestic Servants in France, in: Journal of Social History 1974, pp. 63 – 78, passim.

all urban working-class females held this post for at least a brief period of life, found that servanthood confirmed many traditional values of deference. It certainly convinced most of them of the importance of marriage; and while they might have improved their work potential as housewife, they had not become skilled.

Among males, unskilled categories are harder to define. We can readily agree on carters, ditchdiggers, and the like – the kinds of pepole who crowded into Paris to help build the new city walls during the July Monarchy. But for precision's sake, let us look at two specific categories where interpretation is particularly chancy. Dockwork is a fascinating case in point. Listen to one historian, peculiarly sensitive to distinctions in the early industrial working class of Marseilles: »The dockworkers did not need much skill; but they were the best organized, the most stable, the highest paid, the most exclusive and all in all the most privileged workers in Marseilles«[46]. So he goes on to rate them skilled, which so inflates his estimate of the city's skilled workers that he emerges with a two-thirds skilled/one-third unskilled total ratio. There is no question that dockers were an unusual group among the unskilled, but they were not in fact unique save in their organizational abilities. Like many unskilled categories, dockers had a certain hierarchy among them; shiploaders, for example, were better paid, required more knowledge, than men who simply worked on the wharves. But dockers of many types were grouped in guildlike structures which helped assign jobs in a situation where employment was inherently unstable. Belgian dockworkers as late as 1900, in the smaller ports, were organized in *nations,* each consisting of up to 60 chiefs, or *bazen,* who served essentially as subcontractors, and about 300 workers. The nations imposed stiff rules on absenteeism, drinking, and the like and in return could assure fair rotation on available jobs. Similar corporations existed in ports like Flensburg, in Germany. Yet, unlike the guilds, these organizations were rarely politicized; dockworkers rarely participated in the unrest of the revolutionary decades of the first half of the nineteenth century. If, in Marseilles, they were highly urban and literate, in the more typical smaller ports they, and merchant seamen as well, often lived in villages around the city, which helped account for their sporadic work shifts. Even around Hamburg many dockers, until the late-nineteenth century expansion of the port, either alternated dock work with garden agriculture or at least returned home every weekend. Here was a case, then, in which organization might replace skill partially to protect a trade. But most dockers in other respects resembled unskilled workers more generally. They shifted jobs and employers frequently; they retained a strong traditional, often semi-rural base; and they tolerated the long hours and slow pace typical of the traditional worker. Dockers can actually be used to illustrate aspects of the unskilled worker's outlook, particularly the existence of a sense of values, of orientation in society; their distinctiveness, admittedly important in terms of the economy in which they operated, consisted of a somewhat greater identification with a particular line of work and an ability to organize on this basis.

Factory and heavy industrial workers, on the other hand, were normally unorganized during the early industrial decades, until the distinctive industrializations of eastern and southern Europe late in the nineteenth century. This has led some to conclude that they were unskilled, save in metals and metallurgy where a high percentage of the labor force required extensive training. But a miner typically worked several years as a hauler, then was specifically apprenticed for a year or two to a miner, before being allowed to work

46 *Sewell,* Working Class, p. 82.

the pitface in his own right. Although a twenty-year old could begin to work a new weaving machine after only a month's training, typically he or she had had some factory experience previously, as an aide; and maximum efficiency, even on simple mechanical looms, was attained only after five years[47]. Without meaning to overwork the terminological problem, the fullfledged miner was a skilled worker, the mechanical weaver at least a semi-skilled worker. Unskilled work there was in the factories and mines, but it consisted of rummaging through slag heaps, carting, and loading – not the main production jobs. Insofar as factories tended to draw in unskilled people from the countryside they might actually begin the long conversion toward a more skilled labor force. The absence of major protest from the factory sector until after 1848 (with some exceptions for England) stems from the diversity of backgrounds of the workers combined with the fact that the skills were new; it was hard to apply a clear frame of reference. Add to this the fact that, because new skills required some attractions, most adult factory workers were carefully paid over the going rate for unskilled labor, and protest was normally inhibited either by satisfaction or confusion or both[48].

Thus the accurate generalization covering the early industrial situation must be more complex than the initial protest equations suggested. Unskilled workers rarely protested, and if they did protest they showed little sense of direction. But they were not without some margins on occasion; they would use these, however, more typically for individual purposes, such as returns to the native village, than for urban-based action. They were not valueless, even if their values were not in tune with those that were coming to dominate the articulate working class. In a few cases, they were even capable of organization despite clear lack of skill. On the other side, among the skilled, a division opened up between the new skills or semi-skills the factories demanded, and the traditional crafts. With rare exceptions, protest came only from the latter.

As the wave of early industrial unrest subsided with the better times of the 1850s, the skilled in some areas moved to define their position with greater clarity. With guilds now definitively destroyed in western Europe, the formation of the craft union served as clear successor. And, particularly in England, certain kinds of skilled factory workers could follow the same model. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, most of its members admittedly working in fairly small units and with hand-powered equipment, behaved just like the other New Model craft unions of England, seeking respectable bargaining with employers and self-improvement. Local analogues could be found among skilled workers in France, while the Hirsch-Duncker movement in Germany reproduced similar motives, though proving far less attractive numerically. In individual factory towns it was always skilled workers, like molders and puddlers in metals, who produced the first, and clearly skill-specific, unions[49]. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, deliberately excluded, remained silent. Hints of change came in the destruction of some of the exclusive dockers' corporations that had protected jobs; that of Marseilles was ruined in a strike of 1864. But restatement of established traditions, not restructuring of the labor force, remained the order of the day.

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47 Archives de La Blan et Compagnie (located in the offices of the company, 165, avenue de Bretagne, Lille), minutes of the shareholders' meetings, 1840 – 1848.

48 *Peter N. Stearns,* Patterns of Industrial Strike Activity during the July Monarchy, in: American Historical Review 1965, pp. 371—394.

49 *Walkowitz,* Statistics, pp. 427 – 428.

This should not delude us into an assumption of stagnancy, however. Increase in the numbers of unskilled laborers was beginning to slow. Basic here was the fact that the agricultural population ceased significant growth, which meant a limitation on the largest single unskilled sector. Within the countryside divisions between owners and wage laborers became more distinct, but the countryside increasingly sent the whole of its surplus population into the cities. Many of the immigrants would remain at an unskilled level; in France and England, for example, the 1860s and 1870s saw the peak growth of female servants. Potential competition on the docks and among builders' laborers increased, though here precise numbers are lacking. At the same time the rapid rise of factory employment exposed many workers to the possibility of some change in their skill levels. Metallurgical employers in Decazeville, that major coal-and-iron complex formed around 1830 in an isolated rural region of France had, as we have seen, despaired of inducing local workers to rise to the highly skilled jobs, such as puddling, during their first two decades of operation. It was difficult enough to entice the peasants into the factory even for higher wages, and to suggest new learning and responsibilities for still higher wages still made little sense at all; hence the long and expensive dependence on imported English hands for the top jobs. But by the 1850s local promotion became increasingly possible, as the sons of the original unskilled workers found new incentives at least partially attractive, modifying traditional jobs expectations and living standards in the process. Krupp workers would undergo similar mobility patterns a decade or so later. In Troy, New York, Irish immigrants settled into a life of unskilled metalwork, proud that they could regularly provide for their large families; but some of their sons moved into skilled levels[50]. These are extreme examples, perhaps, but in general the expansion of the factories allowed related expansion of skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Some recruitment came from rural artisans, who thus moved laterally on a conventional mobility chart, though their wages might improve. But migrants from the countryside, and even more their sons, as the strict ties with rural tradition were loosened, shifted levels. Possibly the overall skill ratios in the cities did not change much, but they may have tilted slightly away from the unskilled. We have cited the $^2/_3$ skilled: $^1/_3$ unskilled ratio put forth for Marseilles, and while suggesting that redefinition of dockers might change this estimate substantially it is difficult to offer greater precision for any point of the early industrial period. If female servants are included, a fifty-fifty split seems more likely. But this was already a higher skill ratio than prevailed in the countryside, so we can tentatively suggest that rapid urbanization, at its peak rate in France and Germany after 1850 and still proceeding rapidly in England, modestly upgraded the skill levels of the working classes as a whole.

Pending more precise investigation, however, we must view the mid-century decades as preparatory for more dramatic changes yet to come. For the real break in the traditional relationships, or lack of relationships, between skilled and unskilled began with the final decades of the nineteenth century. This break must be stated carefully, for it was incomplete; many distinctions were retained. In particular, the skilled did not suddenly lose rank or sense of station. But there was new movement among the unskilled, and this would ultimately have decisive consequences for the labor force as a whole.

Having used protest as a crude measure of the situation of the two main groupings within the working class for the early industrial period, let us return to the same measurement for

50 *Walkowitz*, Statistics, p. 457; *Richard Ehrenberg* and *Hugo Racine*, Krupp'sche Arbeiter-Familien, Jena 1912.

the more mature industrial society around the turn of the century. Drama draws attention to the unskilled. The great dock strikes of London, 1889; Hamburg, 1896; Marseilles, 1899–1901 suggest a real watershed in labor history. The industrial unions that formed in their wake seemed based on the proposition that unskilled workers could provide by mass what skilled workers had previously obtained by rare talent. This is a common theme particularly in English labor history, but it has been applied elsewhere[51]. We now can see

Table I
Industrial Strike Rates, 1899—1914[52]

	Britain					France					
	Construction	Mines	Engineering	Textiles	Transport	Construction	Mines	Metals	Textiles	Transport	Wood
1. % of total strikers	2.8	49.4	11.2	17.1	17.0	18.5	24.4	12.7	22.4	12.5	4.2
2. % in major industries last census date	10.0	10.5	13.9	11.6	13.9	11.7	4.8	6.6	14.2	13.6	9.2
3. 1 ÷ 2	0.3	4.7	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.6	5.1	1.9	1.6	0.9	0.5
4. % of work force striking anually (based on last census date)	0.7	11.8	1.9	3.7	3.0	4.0	13.0	3.0	4.1	4.1	1.0

	Germany						Belgium					
	Construction	Mines	Metals	Machines	Textiles	Wood	Construction	Mines	Metals	Textiles	Transport	Wood
1. % of total strikers	21.6	26.3	6.6	10.0	5.2	6.1	2.3	51.9	5.3	14.9	10.5	1.9
2. % in major industries last census date	17.8	7.3	19.1	19.1	9.7	6.4	10.5	9.0	7.5	15.4	10.8	7.9
3. 1 ÷ 2	1.2	3.6	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.9	0.2	5.8	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.2
4. % of work force striking annually (based on last census date)	2.6	7.6	1.2	2.7	1.1	2.0	0.4	11.1	0.5	1.9	1.9	0.1

Totals (category # 4): Britain, 2.5; France, 2.7; Germany, 2.1; Belgium, 1.9.

51 *Hugh A. Clegg* et. al., A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, vol. I, New York 1964.

52 The Figures are derived from juxtaposing total number of strikers, 1899 - 1913, to the last census of the period in each country. Belgium, Ministère de l'industrie et du travail, *Les Grèves et Lock-outs en Belgique, 1899 - 1910,* 3 vol., Brussels 1904 - 1912, continued in: Re-

how exaggerated it is. Industrial unions had flourished before among miners, cotton workers and the like; industrial union and lack of skill should not be equated. The new unions of the genuinely unskilled rarely survived, save in small localities. Dockers in Flensburg and Sète used their new union (in Sète, obtaining an actual union shop) to replace the old corporations as devices to allocate work fairly and prevent undue unemployment. But in Britain, in Antwerp, in Marseilles and in Hamburg the unions were long beaten down. In other words, we see signs of new motives among the unskilled, but not, initially, newly corresponding capabilities, which will illuminate not only working-class diversity but two equally successful methods of innovation, compared to that of the early period, among the unskilled.

This produces, frankly, a complex protest pattern. A few groups of unskilled not only agitated for the first time but with a distinctive method and tone. But skilled workers still dominated the protest movement; there was no general overturning of the previous base. And most of the unskilled still did not agitate at all, because they could not or did not choose to.

Overall strike rates reveal this fairly clearly. The bulk of the strike force came from the urban crafts and from the older industrial skills (Table 1). Thus in Germany, where on the average 2.1 % of the labor force went on strike annually between 1901 and 1913, construction workers had a 2.6 % rate, (and if the purely skilled were isolated it would undoubtedly be higher) printers a 5.0 % rate, and miners a whopping 7.6 % rate. Belgian statistics show transport workers, another mixture of skilled and unskilled in that railroad workers, dockers and land haulers all fall in the same category, matching the national average of 1.9 % of the labor force on strike each year (1899–1913). But construction was extremely low, at 4 % per year, a phenomenon repeated in Britain. Only in France did high levels of agitation among navvies, as well as skilled construction workers, push the construction rate up, while transport manifested a high rate as well. Everywhere clothing, another low-skill category, manifested an extremely low annual strike rate, well below the national average.

These, frankly, are unduly gross figures, for no category isolates unskilled workers specifically. Even the uniformly high rate of miners' strikes leaves questions unanswered. The big strikes that push the miners' per capita strike rate far above that of any other industry for the pre-war period involved all types of miners. But there were also a host of small strikes impelled by young, unskilled haulers, sometimes acting alone or even aginst the disapproval of their skilled elders. Efforts to break down industrial categories into skill groups have somewhat mixed results. In France, for example, a recent study plausibly contends that in most industries the skilled workers struck more frequently and forcefully than the unskilled. Shoemakers thus produced two-thirds of the strikes in the general leather and hides sector, with less-skilled tanners and so on producing the small remainder. The low level of clothing strikes is attributed to the decline of skilled tailors and the rise

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vue du Travail; *Recensement général de la population,* 1910, Brussels 1912; Germany, *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs. Neue Folge,* vol. 178, 259, and 269; for the 1907 census, 202 – 222; Britain, Board of Trade, Labour Correspondant (later Labour Department), *Report of the Strikes and Lockouts of 1899 – 1914; Census of England and Wales in 1911,* especially vol. X, *Occupations and Industries,* London 1914, Cd. 7018; *Twelfth Decennial Census of Scotland,* London 1913, Cd. 6896; France, Ministère du commerce (later, Ministère du travail), Direction du travail, *Statistique des grèves et recours à conciliation, 1899 – 1914;* Ministère du travail, *Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population, 1911.*

of low-skilled clothing workers. Metalwork reveals a huge range of strikes depending on the skill involved (for some skills were threatened by new methods, others not; some organized in factories, others, like shoeing-smiths, still largely rural). Metal-polishers and turners thus headed the list. New skills, such as those of electricians, joined the purely traditional categories in a low rate. But even here the level of strike activity was well above that of the industry as a whole, which means the unskilled were really not striking at all. In transport, only dockers produced a high strike rate. Carters' activity actually declined before World War I, as their methods were displaced by newer means of hauling goods; furniture movers, garbage collectors, and so on were almost completely inactive. Only in construction, as suggested by the figures above, did France present a major surprise; masons and carpenters, both skilled groups, struck at a high rate, but so did navvies, who outperformed painters, stonecutters, roofers and other craft groups [53].

In general data from other countries confirm this general picture, with French construction the major exception. Strike rates in factory industry (textiles, metals and the like) were not particularly high, but they reflected at least three major internal differentials. Some skilled groups were unusually stable, because they did not feel that their skills were threatened and/or their pay was rising satisfactorily. Skilled metallurgical workers form a classic case in point. Techniques were changing with some rapidity, but since piece rates kept fairly steady the skilled workers could realize that they benefited from the change; in some cases their work became lighter and their production and earnings more regular as a result. Articulating a general sentiment, the British smelters' union supported technological change »provided we get a fair share of the plunder« [54]. Metals were more volatile, but certain groups, such as factory smithies, struck rarely, just as they changed jobs infrequently [55]. Workers facing frequent alterations in methods and piece rates, like turners, had a host of individual pay disputes as well as a general sense that their skills were being eroded; from them came the bulk of strike activity. And finally, the third category, the unskilled, pro-

53 *Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly*, Strikes in France, 1830—1968, Cambridge 1974, pp. 203 ff. Shorter and Tilly needlessly complicate their accurate general point by overstressing the word artisan and by the following statement: »If [...] the median size of [... the] establishments [struck] was below seventy-five workers [...] we considered it to have remained largely artisanal« (p. 218). A shop with 75 workers was no longer artisanal. But its strikers *were* commonly highly skilled and often had directly artisanal backgrounds; they struck in part because their business forms no longer coincided with their expectations. And even in larger units, such as mines, where the term »artisan« has little place (though Shorter and Tilly needlessly apply it) skill, as we have seen, played a leading role in major strikes. Shorter and Tilly make a valid general point, in other words, and their subsequent definitional problems should not becloud it. Against this is the conclusion of another fascinating recent study of French strikes: *Michelle Perrot*, Les Ouvriers en Grève; France 1871 – 1890, 2 vol., Paris 1974. Perrot notes a predominance, though a lesser one, of skilled workers in her strikes (vol. I, pp. 337 ff.), but she later stresses the rise of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the strike movement. This of course is true, as we have stated, but only if we recall that it remained a minority phenomenon. Perrot's statistical base is shaky on the point. She prefers the sweeping assertion: »the strike [...] made its triumphal entry into big industry« (vol. I, pp. 337 ff.). This also is correct, if we remember that the average strike and striker were still located in smaller units – the only »big industry« in which strikes became at all regular being mining – and that, most important for our purposes, that »big industry« contained a host of skilled workers who are, as noted above, usually found dominant in the major strike movements. It is precisely the confusion suggested by Perrot, that big industry and skill are somehow antithetical, that needs careful reconsideration.

54 *Aaron L. Levine*, Industrial Retardation in Britain, London 1967, passim.

55 *Landé*, Arbeitsverhältnisse, passim.

duced almost no agitation at all. In one factory industry after another the unskilled and semi-skilled are largely silent, whatever the divisions among the skilled groups.

Outside the factories the unskilled were somewhat more volatile. Dockers and, to a lesser extent, seamen produced rather sporadic strike movements. In Britain, for example, the huge wave of strikes 1889–1892 was defeated by concerted employer resistance and a new recession. For almost two decades only isolated agitation occurred, usually in smaller ports, like Swansea; but then in 1912 a new outburst erupted. Marseilles dockers and seamen were thoroughly beaten after five years of attack, in 1904, but emerged with a more sedate but significant movement in 1910. Overall, however, the ports at least matched the national strike average and usually surpassed it, in the quarter-century before the war. As we have seen the same thing holds true for unskilled workers on French construction sites, though in no other country. The influence of revolutionary tradition in Paris and the special strength of revolutionary syndicalism among skilled construction workers may play some role in the special French case. This applies particularly to Paris, where the unskilled worker alongside convinced syndicalist masons; but syndicalist leadership was active among navvies as far away as Aix-en-Provence[56]. More significant, however, was the high level of construction activity at the time, particularly from 1906 onward. The building of the Paris subway, improvements in port facilities in Le Havre, and after 1910 construction of new barracks in eastern France brought jobs to a host of unskilled workers, sometimes, as in the case of subway work, under peculiarly difficult conditions. Here were motive and opportunity alike, and the fact that the French builders' union embraced skilled and unskilled without distinction aided what amounted to a significant uprising. Germany may have witnessed something of the same combination, for here too public works activity was high and unions vigorously recruited laborers as well as craftsmen, though of course the syndicalist element was not present. But in Britain and Belgium construction activity was not so prosperous. In Britain skilled workers retained the craft union tradition and shunned the unskilled; they were, furthermore, able to win many of their demands without striking at all, through well-established collective bargaining procedures. So the unskilled, unable to organize seriously on their own, were left out in the cold[57].

And so were most of the other urban, unskilled workers. Impressions confirm the French statistics. A few groups of hauling workers, if employed by a city administration, might mount some agitation, for politicians were vulnerable to pressures that private employers could avoid[58]. But furniture movers and the like struck very rarely, in extremely small groups. Taxi drivers, a newer but essentially unskilled category, were a bit more active, but it would be farfetched to claim a wave of new unrest among the bulk of the urban unskilled, outside the port cities.

So we have both contrast and continuity with earlier protest patterns. Continuity, in that most of the unskilled remained quiescent, in the factories and outside. The reasons for

56 *Peter N. Stearns,* Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor, New Brunswick, N. J., 1971, passim.

57 One other unskilled group must be added to the list of »actives«: In France and Britain, where railways were in private hands, railway maintenance men rather than skilled workers triggered the biggest strikes in the industry, in the Parisian yards in 1910 and in Liverpool in 1911. In both cases skilled workers followed their lead with somewhat lesser vigor. *Stearns,* Syndicalism, passim; *A. G. Rouchy,* Les Grèves dans les chemins de fer, Paris 1912; *Philip S. Bagwell,* The Railwaymen, London 1963, passim.

58 *Alexander Knoll,* Geschichte der Straße und ihrer Arbeiter, vol. III, Leipzig 1929, passim; *Emil Dittmer,* Die Stadt Berlin und ihre Arbeiter, Berlin 1906.

their apparent tranquillity may have changed, as we will see, but they were little more able than before to develop durable organizations or a special sense of identity. But key groups of unskilled were now actively in the fray, and this was largely new. In the case of the dockers they built to an extent on the fact that they did have organizational traditions. In the great London dockers' strike of 1889 it was grain loaders, a special group with a longstanding sense of identity, who triggered the movement; the more general run of dockers simply followed their lead (abetted by leaders like Tom Mann and John Burns whose experience came from union among skilled machine workers). But if the unusual traditions of the dockers, among the unskilled generally, help explain how they could begin to mount powerful unions and strike movements, they do not explain why they did so at that particular time. Finally seamen and the few other groups (particularly, building and railway laborers in certain areas) that began to agitate frequently lacked even a hint of organizational tradition; here we must definitely look for change in situation as the basis for change in collective action.

For their part skilled workers present far from an even picture. There were great differentials in strike rates. Bakers, for example, rarely agitated. On the continent the majority were still housed and fed by their employers, in the old craft tradition. They might move toward a bit more freedom, as in wanting the right, and sufficient wage, to eat out occasionally, but they often identified with the employer interest, planning to inherit the business in many instances[59]. We have noted divisions among skilled workers in the factories, depending on the impact of new technology, the frequency with which piece rates were adjusted and so on. But on the whole skilled workers present a more consistent ability to protest and unionize, just as they had before. Factory workers typically strove, though often in vain, for what outright urban craftsmen were achieving in defense of their skill. From Britain through Germany printers, carpenters and the like used strikes and bargaining to limit apprentices, ban piecework as a speed-up method, and in general cushion the impact of the changing organization of work. Many skilled factory workers attempted precisely the same ploys. They might lose, as in their inability to control training for new machines and their uniform yielding to the imposition of piece rates – this was most notable in metalworking – but they clearly had the same sense of stake in established methods of work[60]. Hence more consistent protest rates and commitment to organization in defense of rights.

Yet the skilled also shared some relative moderation in the demands they raised through protest. We will see this clearly in studying their reactions to the new job challenges that faced them. This was no longer, save for a disgruntled minority, a revolutionary group. In strikes the skilled sought realistic gains – moderate wage raises, a modest reduction in hours of work – and normally avoided excessive rhetoric. They had learned that frontal attacks on the industrial order were self-defeating, so they sought more gains within it. They built more of their lives outside the job, participating in the new interest in sports, music-halls

59 *Richard Calwer,* Das Kost- und Logiswesen im Handwerk, Berlin 1908, passim. In Verviers, Belgium, 95 % of all bakers expected to become employers in their own right, and believed they had essentially the same interests as their bosses: *Laurent Deschene,* L'Avènement du régime syndical à Verviers, Paris 1906.

60 *James B. Jefferys,* The Story of the Engineers, London 1946, passim; *Peter N. Stearns,* Lives of Labor: Work in Maturing Industrial Society, London 1975, passim.

and movies as well as older recreational forms such as drinking[61]; their interests, both old and new, tended to distract from the problems of working-class life. Music-hall culture indeed specifically converted key problems, in dealing with difficult situations ranging from a grumpy employer to a nagging mother-in-law, into sources of humor. So if the skilled worker went on strike it was with a clear sense of purpose but a rather specific one as well; and typically collective bargaining was preferred to the strike in the first place. Only when police provocation was excessive, as in some miners' strikes, (Wales, 1909; the Ruhr, 1912) was this pattern seriously challenged[62].

But when the unskilled could rise at all, they typically displayed a different mood. Their strikes were more likely to be violent, though of course some dockers' efforts, such as London 1889, were noted for their decorum. They frequently sought a major change in their lot. Marseilles dockers, who had long endured shifts of up to 36 hours, suddenly emerge in 1899 with a demand for an 8-hour day, plus a huge increase in wages. Hamburg dockers in 1896 were more modest, asking for fixed rest periods, limitations on night hours, and no more than thirty-six hours of work at a stretch; the commitment to radical gains was by no means universal. But Berlin street car workers, on shifts of fourteen to seventeen hours, burst forth with a nine hour day demand in 1900. Boatmen on the Paris canals had long petitioned for a twelve-hour day, but when they summoned the courage to strike, in 1908, they asked for ten hours[63].

And the rhetoric accompanying direct action could be fully as impassioned as the demands. The insecure skilled worker might certainly produce his laments. Blasting the conversion of shoemaking from shops to factory, a Parisian worker said: »If I want the revolution it's not to do any harm to people but to be able to destroy all these machines«[64]. From British machinists: »We are driven like dumb cattle, in our folly, until the flesh is off our bones, and the marrow out of them«. »The millman has no pleasure of his life; for it seems to me that we are living to work, and not working to live«[65]. But there was division here. Many German weavers noted the improvement modern methods had brought, even when they went on strike: »We don't want the good old days back again, for things aren't bad in the factory compared to what they used to be«[66].

When the unskilled cried out, their focus broadened to the basic dignity of man. French carters wanted to be treated as something more than »beasts of burden«[67]; some merchant seamen felt that they were »impelled by a sense of dignity« to revolt against their tyrants,

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61 *Gareth Stedman Jones*, Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870 to 1900. Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class, in: Journal of Social History, 1974, pp. 460 – 508; *Michael Marrus*, Social Drinking in the »Belle Epoque«, in: Journal of Social History 1974, pp. 115 – 141.

62 For amplification of these admittedly terse points about the particular style of skilled workers, see *Stearns*, Lives passim.

63 *E. Francke*, Die Arbeitsverhältnisse im Hafen zu Hamburg, in: Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im deutschen Reich 1898, p. 944; *Zentralverband der Bäcker, Konditoren und verwandten Berufsgenossen Deutschlands, Protokoll der ordentl. Generalversammlung*, 1899; Archives de la Préfecture de police de la Seine, B/a 1359; *Andre Sayous*, Les Grèves de Marseilles en 1904, Paris 1904; Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands, Correspondenzblatt, Apr. 9, 1900.

64 Ministère du travail et de la prévoyance sociale: office du travail, *Enquête sur le travail à domicile dans l'industrie de la chaussure*, Paris 1914, p. 369.

65 *British Steel Smelters, Monthly Report* 1902, p. 163.

66 *Robert Wilbrandt*, Die Weber in der Gegenwart, Jena 1906, p. 126.

67 Archives de la préfecture de police de la Seine, B/a 1359, report of Oct. 6, 1909.

and they wanted the world to know that »sailors are not pariahs, they have the same right as any man to aspire to improve their lot«[68].

Here, then, is the basic anomaly which an overview of direct-action protest conveys: a minority of the unskilled, identifiable particularly in a few key trades, had become ardent strikers and articulate egalitarians. We will see that their actions often matched their words. In contrast the skilled segment, though more consistently able to mount collective protest, had largely settled down to a defense of existing rights plus a quest for piecemeal gains. Yet the majority of unskilled – those employed in factories, those serving as land transport workers, and many construction laborers – were quiet despite the varied tide of agitation rising around them. As a protest category, the term »unskilled« was losing its utility as a single descriptive unit.

And here we must turn to the heart of the matter, of which protest activity served only as surface manifestation. Several basic changes were occurring in the lot of the unskilled by the end of the nineteenth century, and their implications were frankly contradictory.

First, the traditional sources of recruitment of the unskilled were gradually drying up. This would tend to improve conditions for the unskilled save where employers could take compensatory action.

Second, a few new sources of unskilled labor were increasing in importance or becoming newly visible. This partially countered the first trend and helps explain the large group of unskilled who were unable to protest.

Third, the unskilled generally, as opposed simply to those involved in factory labor, were now undergoing the industrialization process. They encountered new technology, new business forms, a new effort to speed up their work. This could impel bitter protest.

Fourth, as part of this same process of maturing industrialization a host of jobs were being converted from unskilled to semi-skilled, so that the worker able to accept some innovation might better his earnings and his lot. This could, obviously, work against protest.

Citation of these four factors may sound too much like yin and yang. As we pursue them it will be obvious that they manifest one underlying consistency: the traditional mentality of the unskilled was being undermined, whether this was expressed in protest or in adaptation to change – or both. Relatedly, the four trends form the basis for the kind of relationship between skilled and unskilled labor within the working classes that prevails today.

One can easily find examples, still, of the kind of unskilled urban worker who was common in the earlier phase of industrialization. Wenzel Holek, of Czech-German origin, received some craft training in the countryside where he was born but then everything went awry. He was unable to afford formal apprenticeship, so the traditional crafts were closed to him. His physical stamina was low, so several factory jobs ended in dismissal. He was also a belligerent soul, unwilling to kowtow to foremen. So he ended in a button factory at a miserable wage. He was an ardent, even bitter socialist, but otherwise he showed all the signs of a worker for whom tradition had gone sour without being replaced by anything better. He sired six children, well above the working-class average, fought with his wife who found it hard to make ends meet particularly since, against their joint traditional expectation, none of the children died, and in general had a throughly miserable life[69].

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68 *Adrien Veber,* Mouvement social, in: La Revue socialiste 1901, pp. 361 - 362, statements by individual sailors in the 1901 strikes, the first in Le Havre and the second in Marseilles.

69 *Wenzel Holek,* Lebensgang eines deutsch-tschechischen Handarbeiters, Jena 1909; see also *Moritz Bromme,* Lebensgeschichte eines modernen Fabrikarbeiters, Leipzig 1905.

Silesian workers coming into the Ruhr from estate agriculture, the Flemings commuting to the Belgian mines, may have preserved traditional expectations in a new setting with greater success. The Silesians expected to work steadily, and criticized the more experienced Ruhr miners as »bums« for slacking off on the job. They did not expect high wages, for what they found already surpassed their expectations; so the Ruhr natives criticized them in turn for their willingness to accept any conditions as long as there was a bit of money left over for some small new expenditure such as cigarettes[70]. Thus recruitment from among the agricultural unskilled continued, and those recruited might survive on barely-modified traditional styles of life or turn bitter as they found that traditions made urban life more difficult.

But the pool of agricultural labor was smaller than before, and the slowing of the rate of urbanization is only one measurement of this. Furthermore some agricultural workers were entering industry precisely because of its novelty, not because they were forced out attempting to fulfill traditional expectations. Dorset agricultural laborers flooded into the mines of Wales with a fairly precise notion of how they wished to improve their standard of living. They were quite ready to assimilate new skills and the protest forms of the trade they had entered. Unskilled background, in other words, less often reflected some special hardship or docility. This was strikingly apparent in the case of the significant number of female domestic servants who began to enter industry around the turn of the century. In France the number of female servants actually began to decline by the 1890s. In Britain it stabilized while in Germany its expansion fell well below the growth of the employed female population. Servanthood had been an obvious haven for unskilled females, as we have seen. Though in a radically new urban setting, it preserved many traditional features of job choice, home environment, and deference to an older mistress or master. Now a number of young women were casting these advantages aside. More clearly than before, factory jobs paid better than servant positions; and the docility demanded in the home, the long hours and lack of personal privacy, were newly resented as well. Hence a sense of joy at conditions in the factories: workers who came to a Bristol confectionary from domestic service found »more life« in the factory. German women who made a similar switch noted that, »the foremen were not nearly so coarse as the gracious ladies«. Other German women who claimed that industrial jobs conveyed higher status than servanthood, in part because of some opportunity to rise to supervisor level, were making an even clearer career choice in the factories[71].

In sum, traditional sources of unskilled labor were less numerous than before and many people from unskilled backgrounds deliberately rejected customary job choices and manifested a variety of new expectations. This does not mean that they were discontented with what they found. Women workers did notably increase as a percentage of the total manufacturing force, particularly in Britain and Germany; they rose from 17.3 % to 18.2 % of the total manufacturing and transport workforce in Germany between 1895 and 1907, from 31.7 % to 33.1 % in France, 1896–1906, and from 21.5 % to 23.0 % in Britain, 1891–1911. But their outlook toward their job had not changed so greatly. They

70 *Leo Uhen,* Gruppenbewußtsein und informelle Gruppenbildung bei deutschen Arbeitern im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung, Berlin 1963; *Adolf Levenstein,* Aus der Tiefe. Arbeiterbriefe, Berlin 1908, p. 120.

71 Mrs. *J. R. MacDonald et al.,* Wage Earning Mothers, London, n. d., p. 14; *Heinrich Herkner,* Probleme der Arbeiterpsychologie, Leipzig 1912.

still viewed formal employment as a temporary part of their life, to be ended, usually fairly quickly, by marriage; only in Germany did the percentage of married women employed go up even slightly. So, while working, they could afford to change jobs when conditions did not suit them (within any given industry they would change jobs more frequently than men), accept fairly low wages without complaint since they were living at home and could, even with their low pay, afford some personal pleasures and save toward a dowry. But they were touchier than before on issues of personal dignity, and would often be found complaining against a forman, or indeed a forewoman, who treated them too harshly. Which returns us to the theme that recruitment of docile unskilled workers, accepting their lot however meager, was not as easy as it once had been.

Supply problems were, on the whole, reflected in wages. In Germany, between 1902 and 1913, money wages in most of the industries commanding a significant percentage of the unskilled rose faster than some of the prosperous, skilled industries. While wages in chemicals rose 30 %, for example, those in inland shipping mounted 51 %, in overseas shipping 31 %; in quarrying 32 %; in »conveyance« 33 %; in construction 39 %. Among industries where the percentage of skilled workers clearly predominated only mining matched these figures, at 46 %; wages in machine building rose 29 %, in glassmaking 31 %, in printing 20 %[72]. As with all these general figures desired precision is lacking, but it seems at least probable that the fabled gap between skilled and unskilled remuneration, in urban industry, was declining somewhat. In Britain the fact that, between 1900 and 1913, the wages of agricultural laborers increased, at 11 %, far more than the wages of skilled building trades workers (4 %), machinists (5 %), and miners (10 %) suggests again that the balance was shifting. To attract purely unskilled labor into the cities, wage rates here too must have risen disproportionately; or, as we will examine in a moment, the unskilled must themselves have been upgraded to more skilled levels, which would redound to their benefit while again reducing the overall wage differential[73]. And, as we have suggested in the case of women workers, changes in the wage balance convey only part of the story: employers had to learn to treat the unskilled with a bit more courtesy, lest they face individual resignations or outright strikes.

Given the continued necessity for unskilled work, employers naturally sought to counter what to them were unfavorable trends. Where their dependence was particularly great they brought in foreigners. The influx of Poles and Italians into lesser-skilled positions in heavy industry in the Ruhr and eastern France is well known. Skilled German miners complained, for example, that their pay was kept down because they alone could work the more difficult pitfaces; the Polish newcomers were capable only of the easy work. Maritime workers faced at least a handful of more exotic foreigners. Dockers in Britain and elsewhere called for a national strike against Chinese labor, while sailors in Marseilles struck several times against foreign, particularly Arab, workers[74]. A full 20 % of all builders' laborers in France were foreign, mainly Italian and Spanish[75].

In other industries new numbers of women, rather than foreigners, provided a source of relatively unskilled labor. We can see women benefiting from new entry into factories

72 *Ashok V. Desai,* Real Wages in Germany 1871 – 1913, Oxford 1968, pp. 109 – 110.
73 Board of Trade, Labour Department, *Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom,* 1914, pp. 66 ff.
74 Docker's Record, Dec., 1913.
75 *Georges Mauco,* Les Etrangers en France, Paris 1932.

while at the same time, because of the traditional sex-based wage differential, helping employers keep their costs down. The young formed another vital group. Not child labor, at this point, for this had largely disappeared save for a remnant in textiles. But many workers, entering industry at 14 or 15, would face a prolonged period of unskilled or semi-skilled work. This was not a new phenomenon, but it deserves reemphasis as one explanation of the behavior of unskilled workers in the factories. Many were unskilled only as a short stage of their working career, and besides were carefully controlled by their skilled supervisors, who in more cases than not were fathers or uncles. They might have a host of grievances about their situation, which along with the ebullience of youth could have produced unrest. But the control imposed by their elders, plus the knowledge that they themselves would rise to the skilled ranks soon enough, kept them quiet. Older textile workers often, as in Britain, prevented even the unionization of their aides. Unskilled metallurgical workers were inhibited by the active hostility of the skilled group. Where unskilled work constituted essentially a training period, job satisfaction and wages might both be low, but it was unlikely that a distinctive consciousness would be formed.

In fact, however, the average age of the unskilled worker in the factory was higher than that of the skilled, and here we come to one of the most important features of unskilled labor during the turn-of-the-century period. A disproportionate number of workers in this category were old, many of them fallen from the ranks of the skilled. For many, old age, from an occupational standpoint, began by 40; indeed British railway companies rarely hired anyone over 30. British metalworkers, claiming that work speedups caused premature aging, lamented that too many of their employers judged them »too old at forty«[76]. Some were fired outright; the British cotton spinners' union criticized a tendency to dismiss older workers to make room for the promotion of piecers, who could adapt better to faster machines and who had greater physical vigor[77]. Among older Belgian, French and German workers those who were not dismissed often found themselves demoted within the factory. In the mines they were often returned to hauling, when employers could find strong young replacements for the pitfaces[78]. Even more significantly, report after report on German metal and engineering factories revealed that the bulk of the unskilled labor force was composed of workers over 36, who had lost their original skill rating and had given up all hope of improvement[79]. Naturally they had to be docile, whatever their frustrations, for it was all important to cling to the job. They worked more steadily than younger workers, changed jobs far less often, and of course were less likely to strike[80].

And some spilled out of the factories, into vaguer occupations or outright unemployment. Older workers in France, in 1906, were twice as likely to be without a job as were workers as a whole. Small wonder that they sought occasional pay by working on the docks, as cab drivers, and so on. In France in 1911, 29 % of all male workers over 65 were listed as

76 *W. T. Stephenson,* The Railway Conciliation Scheme, 1907, in: The Economic Journal 1911, p. 505.

77 *Edward G. Howarth* and *Mona Wilson,* West Ham, London 1907.

78 L'Ouvrier mineur 1907, p. 17; *N. Dethier,* Centrale syndicale des travailleurs des mines de la Belgique, Brussels 1950, p. 127.

79 Some, of course, cushioned their decline by their ownership of house or other property, purchased in the days of better earnings. This was true of many who worked for a small wage as watchmen; *Walkowitz,* Statistics, p. 447.

80 *Marie Bernays,* Auslese und Anpassung der Arbeiterschaft der geschlossenen Großindustrie, Leipzig 1910, passim.

general laborers. Parisian taxi drivers included former valets, artisans and mechanics, while in both Paris and London there were about fifty per cent more drivers than cars by World War I[81].

For the simple fact was that few workers could yet afford to retire. The absence of any general retirement possibility emerges clearly from a juxtaposition of the 1901 and 1906 French censuses. The procedure is inherently inexact, but it produces interesting results. We first add less than half of the 55–64 year old cohort from the 1901 data (reduced to allow for the group still under 60) to the 65 plus, among active manufacturing workers; deduct from this 10 %, which is meant to exaggerate the number of workers likely to die in the five year interval, according to the life expectancy then prevailing (about 1 % a year for the overall male population 60–70 years of age); and then apply this to the over-65s still working in 1906. In the one French industry with a retirement plan of long-standing, railway service, only twenty percent continued in the workforce of those who had been 60–65 in 1901 and were still alive in 1906; some of these had parttime jobs, but most were to some extent genuinely retired. But where pensions were small or too new to have effect, the behavior pattern was quite different. Applying the same formula to mining reveals that 54 % of the older labor force remained in 1906. In manufacturing overall, 65 % of men and 68 % of all women persisted. Thus most workers labored until death or disability forced them out of the workforce, but they suffered in the effort, for their persistence swelled the ranks of the unskilled. Census figures catch this movement, if again only in a rough sense. In 1911 only 1 % of French printers were over 65, only 2 % of all male metal workers. Textiles was a bit more generous, at 3.7 %. But 59 % of all general laborers recorded ages over 65[82]. In other words, while some skilled workers retired, others were definitely forced to the bottom of the labor pool.

This extreme situation may have been modified in Germany, where pension plans were older and more extensive. But here, and even more in England with regard to union plans, many workers saw pensions as protection for their families upon their own death, not as means of retirement[83]. So a general picture in which many workers would be demoted within their own industry around age 40, and then often forced into a catch-all unskilled labor pool fifteen or twenty years later, has real validity.

The new sources of recruitment of the urban unskilled – and even the elderly must be counted as new if only because, in the earlier days of industry, there were far fewer older people in the cities – had several implications. It certainly helps explain the difficulty many groups of unskilled continued to have in mounting any protest effort. Protest was irrelevant for many women workers and foreigners, too risky for many older workers. Unskilled workers with a high level of grievance were indeed likely to turn on their own, as in the many attacks by dockers and builders' laborers on foreign workers. The composition of unskilled labor made it easy for skilled workers to maintain their traditional

81 Public Record Office, HO 55943, report of 1890; *L. Bonnef*, La Grève des taxi-autos, in: La Grande Revue 1912, pp. 353 ff.

82 Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation, *Trois journées pour l'étude scientifique du vieillissement de la population*, Paris 1948, vol. II, p. 48 and passim; Ministère du commerce, *Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population*, 1901 and 1906.

83 In England, however, seniority systems, defended by the unions, kept more old workers at or near their original skill levels; and relatedly unemployment among old workers was little higher than the general average. *B. Seebohm Rowntree* and *Bruno Lasker*, Unemployment, a Social Study, London 1911.

scorn of the breed, if on somewhat new bases. Foreigners were not usually seen as a direct threat to skill, for they were assigned the most menial tasks; but when they did surface they could be bitterly condemned, as when British cabinetmakers blasted machinery for allowing »Jews and boys to do the work of Englishmen«[84]. Attitudes toward the old were more subtle, but many young workers scorned the conservatism of their older colleagues trying to cling to their jobs and defend established methods. This was a source of conflict in German shipbuilding, for example, when young workers accepted new equipment that would help boost their wages through higher productivity, while older workers resisted[85]. And certainly the influx of women into unskilled or semi-skilled manufacturing labor called forth a host of anguished comments. A French printer summed up a widespread sentiment: »They're too implusive. One day they're enthusiastic for our work, the next day they've changed their minds. The only way to resolve this problem would perhaps be by absorption. Each male typographer would marry a female typographer. That would be a solution«[86].

Yet with all the sources open to them, and with all the conflict these sources inspired within the working class, employers found themselves short of adequate numbers of unskilled. Wage trends, as we have already indicated, suggest their problem. Where precise census figures are available they reveal unskilled workers increasing at a slower rate than the labor force in general. Transport workers rose rapidly in number but evidence from Britain, at least, suggests that more of this came among railway labor, where significant skills were involved, than the unskilled components of transportation; other land transport, in particular, stabilized. In construction both skilled and unskilled gained in numbers, though during the industry's recession, between 1901 and 1906, the unskilled lost ground. When prosperity returned, the skilled element increased far more rapidly. In Britain construction laborers had declined from approximately 40 % of the total labor force in the industry in 1901, to 33 % in 1911. What was happening in the factories is harder to determine. In German machine building the skilled increased by 145 % in the decade after 1895, while other categories rose by 187 %, but at the same time the »other« workers were ever more likely to be semi-skilled than unskilled outright (or to be young workers essentially apprenticed as aides for a time, in this fast-growing sector). Similarly in British engineering trades, 60 % of the labor force remained skilled in 1914, about the same level as two decades earlier; but of the remainder only 20 % were unskilled, a sharp drop. Without pretending absolute precision, then, it seems probable that the unskilled were becoming harder to find and, in some industries, less useful[87].

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84 *Dearle,* Problems, p. 53.

85 These disputes occurred, for example, between young workers using riveting machines in the Bremen shipyards, with a considerable pay advantage, and workers in older divisions of the company who cut their production levels to protect their jobs; and in Berlin instrument manufacture. *Neumann, Schiffbauer,* passim; *Carl Severing,* Mein Lebensweg, Berlin 1950, vol. I; *Herkner,* Probleme; *Walter Jolko,* Untersuchungen über die Entlöhnungsmethoden in der Berliner Metallindustrie, Berlin 1911, p. 71; Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hannover, Polizeiakten des Oberpräsidenten der Provinz Hannover, Hannover 112 a XL, p. 70, report on Bremen, 1903.

86 *Fédération française des travailleurs du livre, Dixième Congrès national,* Paris 1910, p. 53.

87 This is not to ignore the displacement of some key rural and shop skills, in leather, shoemaking, wood, and other industries. Machine-less shops still survived – 33 % of all furnituremaking shops in Germany in 1907 had only hand tools, for example – but they were on the decline. Few skilled workers were actually displaced, but many had to send their sons into different

And this relates to the third major trend affecting unskilled labor. While skilled workers could still set themselves off rather clearly from the outright unskilled, particularly when these were elderly, female, or foreign, the fact was that, far more than during the first phase of industrialization, the unskilled were being subjected to the same basic economic processes as their skilled brethren in factories and crafts. Their reactions, however, inevitably differed, because to them the pressures were new while their traditional basis for resistance or collective adaptation was slighter.

The most obvious innovation was technological. On docks and construction sites new gasoline-operated cranes threatened unemployment and reduced the size of work crews, making some workers believe, rightly or not, that their pace of work was mounting. The spread of steam ship angered many sailors, who felt that the ship had become less their own and who specifically noted that their rise to officer levels was now blocked by a new class of heaters, who came from various backgrounds instead of the traditional sources of the merchant marine[88]. Small wonder that refusals to work with the new equipment or outright Luddism were reported widely among the unskilled. In 1912 dockers in Swansea refused to work on an electro-magnetic loader, until prevailed upon in lengthy negotiations by their own union organizer. Construction workers in Dortmund threw sand in a crane in a 1900 dispute; Le Havre dockers pushed cranes into the ocean on at least two occasions; unskilled loaders in Lorraine metallurgy destroyed machinery in the 1906 strike. Belgian grain loaders, threatened by the spread of grain elevators, burned one of the structures in 1907[89].

Skilled workers, in crafts or factories, might verbalize very similar fears, like the German printers who urged that all the new composing machines »be tossed on the junk heap«. But their reactions differed, and never did they actually indulge in Luddism. In some cases their unions were strong enough to delay unduly rapid introduction of new equipment; this was true not only in many crafts but also in textiles, where French and German weavers definitely slowed the imposition of multiple looms. Relatedly, when the machines came they could usually be made palatable. Printers, whatever their initial fears, accepted the new composing machines because they could surround them with satisfactory stipulations: the number of apprentices was reduced, to protect employment, and training had to begin with manual operations, not machines; hours of work were cut, again reducing unemployment threat; and pay for machine work was elevated over manual levels. The result was widespread satisfaction among the workers actually on the machines, and little sense of loss of skill. A few machine workers noted greater nervousness or undue specialization, now that they could not see a whole manuscript through production. But others claimed that work with two hands instead of one proved something of a challenge, while others found it interesting to be able to deal with more materials, of greater diversity. These men did not regard themselves as reduced in status, and they had no desire, either, to return

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industries. But since all of the rapidly-growing industries involved a high skill element (machine building, mining, construction, and so on) the skilled labor segment was realigned, but increased rather than reduced in size. See *Stearns,* Lives, Chapter I. This does not mean, of course, that displacement was not feared even so.

88 *Pappenheim,* Lage, vol. II, passim. Dockers' Records, Sept., 1912.

89 Staatsarchiv Münster, Regierung Arnsberg I 73, Mining agitation 1908 – 1909; *Emile Vandervelde,* La Belgique ouvrière, Paris 1906, p. 242; *Léon de Seilhac,* Les Grèves du bassin de Longwy, in: Musée social 1906, p. 390.

to hand composing, which was scarcely more interesting and involved lower pay and longer hours[90].

To assert that the unskilled regarded new machines as a threat, while the skilled found ways to turn them to their own benefit would be an oversimplification, as we will see. But it is true that machines were entirely new for unskilled categories like dockers, and the temptation for a visceral, violent reaction was strong. The skilled were frightened, but had enough experience with the mechanization process to adapt without losing their sense of job worth.

The same differentiation applies to reactions to the imposition of new, more impersonal business forms. For metallurgical and mine workers, big business was hardly new, and its growth caused little direct challenge. Work in some ways became more personalized, as management increased the ratio of foremen and supervisors per worker. Here, worker outlook depended more on the personality of the foreman than on business structure in the abstract, and though of course intelligent socialists realized that the foreman was merely the tool of the structure the majority of workers still took their grievances out on people, not systems. In the crafts a sense of structural change was greater, for more and more construction workers, printers, and furniture makers were being pushed into units of 50 workers, and a few into larger groupings still. Few faced total lack of contact with employer, for these were not giant factories, but a sense of uneasiness was undeniable. Overall, however, craftsmen found a fairly successful counterploy in the strengthening of their own craft unions; collective bargaining now supplemented or even replaced individual negotiation, and a sense of participation could remain. Not all workers were so happily served. Metalworkers, particularly, who did see huge factories grow up in their industry, were successful in winning collective bargaining only in units of fifty workers or so. This pattern was striking in both France and Germany, where otherwise craftsmen had great success in bargaining efforts. In Germany by 1913 there were only 1376 collective agreements in metals and machine building, covering 207, 472 workers – the vast majority, obviously, in fairly small units[91].

But while admitting huge problems of adjustment for many skilled workers, those of the most articulate unskilled were greater still. At the outset big shipping, warehousing and construction companies meant closer or at least less sensitive supervision. Many disputes by tram employees broke out when a new administration, bent on rationalizing inherently decentralized procedures, decided to tighten its grip. A strike in Charleroi resulted when inspectors flooded a line without warning, soon after tram lines in the Center had been consolidated; a conductor was accused of falsifying figures on the electricity he used in his daily run, and fired. His reply summed up the outraged dignity that characterized so much of the agitation of the unskilled: »You not only want to rob me of my bread, but also you want to dishonor me«[92].

The reaction to larger units of organization was particularly keen in the seaports. Sailors

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90 *Hans Hinke*, Auslese und Anpassung der Arbeiter im Buchdruckgewerbe, Berlin 1910, passim; *A. E. Musson*, The Typographical Association, London 1957, p. 253.

91 Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt, Abteilung für Arbeiterstatistik, *Die Tarifverträge im Jahre 1913*. On the personalization of reactions to big business, and of supervision itself, see *Stearns*, Lives, Chapter V and *Elaine Glovka Spencer*, Between Capital and Labor: Supervisory Personnel in Ruhr Heavy Industry, in: Journal of Social History 1975.

92 *Jules Lekeu*, A Travers le Centre: Croquis et mœurs: Enquête ouvrière et industrielle, Brussels 1907, p. 109.

were touched not only by big companies but by the increased size of their ships as steam won the day from sailing vessels. French seamen had long been under tight discipline; the state gave captains immense disciplinary authority, including corporal punishment, while desertion or rebellion were punishable by military law. This was not new, but organized resistance was; and the trigger clearly was the new structure on board ship. Particularly in Marseilles, in the period of recurrent agitation on both docks and ships between 1900 and 1904, attacks on ship captains were endemic. Many a captain, accused of strict discipline, had to quit in order to prevent a company-wide strike; ultimately the captains unionized on their own to protect themselves. Sailors more generally complained that the »familial« relations that used to prevail on board had given way to a strict hierarchy of command. The Marseilles outburst was unique, but German seamen similarly agitated against despotic captains. And in Britain big business brought a more specific complaint, particularly in the years immediately before World War I. Medical examinations, an obvious part of rationalized personnel procedures, seemed an intolerable intrusion[93]. Sailors felt »mauled about and handled as though they a piece of New Zealand mutton«[94].

Clearly the advent of big business, more than any other innovation, caused the extraordinary outburst among many unskilled workers, in word as in deed. Disruption of personalized direction brought an intense desire for greater dignity and liberty. Ironically the advent of big business corresponded with the settling down of many previously nomadic workers; so a traditional outlet for resentments against employers, simply wandering to another area, had less validity – again resulting in the demand for freedom on the spot. Quarry workers in Argenteuil asked for abolition of obligatory company housing and canteens. Marseilles sailors insisted on abandonment of the »red book« in which any dereliction of duty was recorded and which could serve as the basis for a general blacklisting, claiming that they were »impelled by a sense of dignity« to »revolt against our tyrants«[95].

This was the kind of outburst that impelled certain groups of the unskilled, particularly in the ports, into the mainstream of the labor movement for the first time. As we have seen the effort at frontal attack could easily misfire. The big shipping companies set up preferential hiring lists with only a hint of worker representation in their governance or, as in Parisian construction in 1909, enforced a lockout, and the wildest effervescence was over. The result was that during most of the pre-war years unskilled workers were exposed to big business without real intermediaries, for their unions had been beaten down. But grievances remained, even if they had to be rephrased. Concern about new technology and big business was heightened by the fear of competition from new kinds of workers, notably foreigners; and the fact that foreigners had frequently been deliberately imported to break the big strikes added to this special problem. In this situation, within a decade or two, the unskilled workers with the greatest sense of job commitment, again particularly dockers and seamen, could return to the fray with a calmer, better-organized union structure. Their demands would still differ somewhat from those of the skilled workers, for basic issues of union recognition and job conditions were crucial to port strikes as in London

93 Archives de la préfecture de police de la Seine, B/a 1359, report of Oct. 6, 1909, on a carters' strike; *Adrien Veber*, Mouvement social, pp. 361 – 362; Archives nationales (France), F 7 13887 on strikes in the merchant marine; Labour Gazette, July, 1911.

94 *Charles Booth*, Life and Labour of the People in London, London 1894, vol. IV, p. 310.

95 *Stearns*, Syndicalism, p. 85.

and Antwerp right before the war[96]. But the bitter, personalized disputes, against an individual hiring boss or captain, gave way to more structured, usually calmer struggles. British sailors in 1911 thus asked not that medical examinations be abolished but that they or the union be allowed to supply the doctor; they sought no return to personalized hiring but wanted control to be taken out of the shippers' office, to be shared at least by the union[97].

Basic to this entry of the unskilled into the mainstream of the labor movement was the fact that new machines and business forms had their positive as well as negative aspects. Business rationalization could reduce casual employment and even unemployment. When German shippers set up a job office workers welcomed it, despite its unilateral character, for it eliminated the traditional corruption by which jobs were obtained through personal contacts with inn-keepers, often with a generous dosage of bribes. In the 1890s Hamburg sailors had specifically complained about the expense of working through middle-men, who paid no heed to their professional competence but charged them considerable fees and often dictated where they could sleep or buy uniforms. Big companies like the Hamburg-Amerika line, and then the shippers' union, eliminated this problem. Still more clearly many unskilled workers stood to benefit by new equipment, even though they had nothing like the control over its introduction that many artisans gained. Unemployment levels did not in fact increase on the docks. Machines reduced physical strain for many, and a few upgraded their skill by learning to work the cranes themselves. Machines could also regularize work; German dockers found that the work adjustments induced by employer investment in capital equipment helped the development of a more stable work force, limiting the oscillation between short bouts of intense work followed by unemployment. Hence, whatever their continuing fears, most dockers and seamen found that they could live with mechanized work. There was no overnight transition to adaptability. Many dockers claimed actually to prefer irregular employment, resisting the schemes that the shipping companies tried to establish to create a more predictable labor force[98]. But traditionalism was dented. When first challenged by innovation it produced a major outburst in the ports. This yielded to the well-organized, forward-looking labor movement that was taking shape by World War I, in which firm defense of rights, rather than efforts to recapture the past, characterized the general approach.

In the factories the forces of innovation did not create a distinctive or separate labor movement, but they did further changes of perhaps even more decisive importance. Here new technology involved less fear of unemployment, and to the benefits of machinery in reducing physical strain was added a wage above traditional unskilled levels and the related opportunity to rise to semi-skilled status. Machine workers in the French automobile industry, most from an unskilled background, were thus long satisfied with their work despite the growing speed and sophistication of their machines, showing no interest in unionization or even in a reduction of hours of work. As an important category of the lesser-skilled,

96 Belgian dockers were thus 23 % more likely to invoke job conditions as strike demands than the average striker in the country, and a bit more likely to pursue trade union issues; British and French transport workers showed slighter edges in the same categories. See strike statistics, note 52, for sources.

97 *E. H. Phelps Brown,* The Growth of British Industrial Relations, London 1959.

98 *Rathbone,* Report; *L. S. Woolf,* An Experiment in Decasualization: The Liverpool Docks Scheme, in: The Economic Journal 1914, pp. 314 – 319.

women showed no resistance to technological change in industries such as printing and machine building, where their numbers increased rapidly in the semi-skilled categories.
The combination of new sources of recruitment for the unskilled, a shortage in numbers resulting in some improvement in conditions, and new technology and business organization meant that the traditional unskilled laborer was increasingly a relic of the past. With one major exception: the turn of the century period saw increased use of foreign laborers for some of the least attractive jobs, thus tapping a traditional mentality at long distance, a mentality that would accept low pay in hopes of fulfilling rural aspirations or simply, tragically, for want of any employment alternative at home. Obviously, the tendency for equation between unskilled labor and foreignness would only increase with time, and transformed and probably rigidified a major division within the working classes. When older workers were more substantially removed from the ranks of the unskilled, by seniority systems and retirement plans, reliance on foreigners translated the longstanding difference in mentalities between skilled and unskilled into a literal inability to communicate[99]. But at the same time the number of the unskilled in the labor force had substantially declined and the outlook of the traditional indigenous unskilled was substantially changing. In the ports the change was indicated primarily by the rise of a solid labor movement, with demands that could impel wages and hours comparable to those of other segments of the working class for the first time on any large scale. In the factories (and in the decline of servanthood) the new outlook was indicated by the growing desire as well as ability to escape the ranks of the unskilled altogether, again with the result of conditions more similar to those of other workers. For this group, protest was not initially necessary to upgrade working conditions beyond traditional levels. Some similar movement was possible on the docks, where workers learned to operate cranes, and increasingly in the hauling of goods, with truckers replacing carters, but the growth of the semi-skilled category was particularly important in the factories. The category was not entirely new, as we have seen in the case of textiles; it simply extended now into key branches of chemicals, metals, and machine construction. Here was real chance for mobility, which many young unskilled workers, including large numbers of women, took quick advantage of. We should not exaggerate this movement; one study of mobility in Bochum indicates that only 20 per cent of unskilled workers moved to skilled or non-manual categories between 1880 and 1900, while 15 % of all skilled workers fell to the semi-skilled/unskilled category. This reminds us that the gap between skilled and those below had not really been closed, for skill still required training that was too expensive and sometimes too elaborate to contemplate for many from unskilled backgrounds. But the same study does indicate movement within the unskilled ranks, as 65 % of all day laborers shifted into mines or factories; the lack of movement of the unskilled already in the factories reflects the fact that they were either too old to risk change or were themselves benefiting from improvement to semi-skilled status. Many sought no elaborate upward movement anyway[100]; but rarely, now, was there a desire to linger at an unskilled job when a better alternative was available that

99 *Stephen Castles* and *Godula Kosack*, Immigrant Workers and the Class Structure in Western Europe, London 1973, passim.

100 A metalworker implicitly disclaimed mobility aspirations as irrelevant when he told his fellows »to take care that our children think just as we do and that they also in the future become loyal and diligent workers«. *Bericht über die Jubelfeier des Bochumer Vereins*, Bochum 1894, p. 9. Cited and discussed in *Crew*, Mobility, p. 50.

would not place undue demands on learning or savings. The unskilled no longer accepted a purely traditional place in the work hierarchy, even when they acted purely individually. And for sons, prospects were even better; over a quarter would move to outright skilled status and another 6 % into non-manual work [101]. Similar upward movement had occurred for well over half the sons and grandsons for unskilled workers at Krupp and for all sons of employment age at Daimler. So a minority of the unskilled were on the move, not geographically this time, but on the status ladder. And for this period the conventional measurements of mobility are themselves too broad, for what was overwhelmingly important was the expansion of semi-skilled opportunities, in which a worker would receive quick training on a new machine and thereby qualify for higher pay and greater job stability than a purely unskilled laborer [102].

In some cases, of course, this very movement would threaten the skilled group. A dramatic case has been described among glassworkers in Carmaux. New machinery introduced in the 1890s allowed skilled to be displaced by semi-skilled. A major clash resulted, in which the skilled lost, and this brief crisis should not be minimized. But within another decade the skilled had sent their children into higher, non-manual occupations, while the semi-skilled, themselves satisfied with their improvement, calmly worked the new machines [103].

More generally, the shrinkage of the traditional unskilled, while undeniably challenging skilled factory workers and some craftsmen, had subtler effects. It greatly expanded the potential base of the labor movement. Already evident on the docks, this trend would move into the factories after World War I, with semi-skilled workers for the first time taking the lead in strike activity [104]. In some cases the new consciousness of the less-skilled workers, whether dockers or factory semi-skilled, would fuel political radicalism. The unskilled were not, initially, likely converts to political consciousness, as we have seen, with some exceptions in large port cities like Marseilles and Hamburg. They were now more open, and might indeed bypass the moderate socialism of skilled workers [105]. Even a vague equation of political stance and skill level must await the sort of correlation between voting and occupation that we rarely have for the past. It does seem clear that the initial working-class bastions of socialism came from among skilled ranks – miners, machine workers, craftsmen, and some textile workers [106]. After World War I this configuration might change, with the new semi-skilled taking positions more definitely to the left [107].

Within the factories, the transformation of consciousness and position of the traditional unskilled brought them closer to the outlook of the skilled, in terms of personal expectations. Closer, but not even. Family patterns would still differ, with the semi-skilled having

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101 *Crew*, Mobility, passim.

102 It was this sense, frankly impossible to measure with total precision for a large population, that induced a British statistician to claim that wages were doing up even when rates seemed to be falling, because of the massive upgrading of workers to higher skill categories, most notably from unskilled to semi-skilled. *Arthur L. Bowley*, The Change in the Distribution of the National Income, 1880 – 1913, Oxford 1920, p. 11.

103 *Joan Scott*, The Glassworkers of Carmaux, Cambridge, Mass., 1974.

104 *Shorter* and *Tilly*, Strikes, passim.

105 *Annie Kriegel*, Aux Origines du communisme français, 1914 – 1920, 2 vol., Paris 1964 and: La Croissance de la C. G. T.: Essai statistique, Paris 1966; *Shorter* and *Tilly*, Strikes.

106 *Claude Williard*, Le Mouvement socialiste en France: Les Guesdistes, Paris 1965; *Harvey Mitchell* and *Peter N. Stearns*, Workers and Protest: The European Labor Movement, the Working Classes and the Origins of Social Democracy, Itasca, Ill. 1971; *Paul Göhre*, Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter, Leipzig 1913.

107 *Kriegel*, Origines.

the larger number of children. Job satisfaction would definitely differ, as it does to the present day. Semi-skilled workers expect less from their work and are pleasantly surprised when it catches their fancy; they work largely for the pay. But they are less hostile to management than skilled workers are, for they really do not expect the right to participate. Skilled workers, with more precise expectations about their supervisors' functions and their own right to independent judgment, are at once more pleased with their jobs and more critical of the boss. The semi-skilled preserve elements of the traditional mentality in vaguely wishing for better jobs but admitting, in final analysis, that what they have is all right »for the likes of us«. What is newer is their frank instrumentalism, in which work must produce improved life off the job if it is to be worth its while[108]. Skilled workers, forced now into subtler distinctions from the semi-skilled than they could maintain vis-a-vis the traditional unskilled, nevertheless keep their distance. They can no longer compel the deference of the early factory setting, in which they used the familiar in addressing a laborer but expected »Mr.« in return. Their dress is less likely to set them apart than when, as late as the 1890s, the unskilled workers expected to afford no overcoat while his skilled counterpart equally firmly expected to have one. But higher earnings, greater job commitment and satisfaction still set the skilled worker off. To this extent historical continuity has been preserved.

But the overriding impression, through the first major stages of industrialization, must be the disruption of the position and outlook of the unskilled. The disruption involved could be tragic, for more often than not the unskilled were collectively defenseless as they underwent the most painful change. But when the traditional mentality itself was broken, new opportunities as well as new pressures were responsible. That the skilled-unskilled distinction hampered working-class action has often been noted, and correctly so; its remnants haunt the labor movement still, even with the subtler gradations of skill and semi-skill. But the measure of the change is in the necessity to seek from traditional societies, on the fringes of Europe and beyond, the smaller number of unskilled workers still economically essential. And the equally tragic measure is the fact that not only skilled but semi-skilled have, at least until very recently, been able to compound the traditional neglect of the unskilled segment by ethnic and racial prejudice. From docks to factories the unskilled who initially poured out of the local countryside won their stake, through collective action or personal upgrading or both; the transition was largely achieved around the turn of the century. With the unskilled removed from majority status in the labor force, with their outlook and expectations opened to change, the imported minority who mirror their own early stages of development can too easily be ignored or even feared. Ultimately, they will have their history too.

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108 Polls that distinguish between skilled and semi-skilled reactions to work include particularly: *H. de Man,* Joy in Work (1928) in which 67 per cent of German skilled workers and 44 % of unskilled said they felt more pleasure than distaste for their work; *Sar. A. Levitan,* ed., *Blue Collar Workers,* New York 1971 (on contemporary U. S.); *Dorothy Wedderburn* and *Rosemary Crompton,* Workers' Attitudes and Technology, Cambridge 1972. See also *J. R. Tréanton,* Les Réactions à la retraite, in: Revue française du travail 1958, p. 156, and *Heinrich Popitz,* Das Gesellschaftsbild des Arbeiters, Tübingen 1957.