

“The Great End of All Government . . .”: Working People’s Construction of Citizenship Claims in Early Nineteenth-Century England and the Matter of Class*

MARC W. STEINBERG

In the heat of the battle for parliamentary reform William Cobbett preached to the working people of England in his inimitable blustery dictums. “[I]f you labour honestly,” he counselled, “you have a right to have, in exchange for your labour, a sufficiency out of the produce of the earth, to maintain yourself and your family as well; and, if you are unable to labour, or if you cannot obtain labour, you have a right to maintenance out of the produce of the land [. . .]”.¹ For honest working men this was part of the legacy of constitutional Britain, which bequeathed to them not only sustenance but, “The greatest right [. . .] of *every man*, the right of rights, [. . .] the right of having a share in the making of the laws, to which the good of the whole makes it his duty to submit”. Nonetheless, he warned, such rights could not legitimately negate the toiling lot that was the laborer’s fate: “Remember that poverty is decreed by the very nature of man [. . .]. It is necessary to the existence of mankind, that a very large proportion of every people should live by manual labour [. . .]”.²

Cobbett’s declarations on the rights to sustenance and suffrage, the reciprocities between men and state, and the inevitable inequalities of a class society highlighted several key themes in the protean concept of citizenship formed in the collective struggles of the early nineteenth century. As both a template and product of these battles they also foreshadowed the balance between civic equality and class inequality that T.H. Marshall distilled from this history in his analysis of the growth of citizenship.³

In his now classic exposition Marshall argued that citizenship required a “direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to a civilization which is common possession”.⁴ However, its maturation upon this foundation of mutuality lay in the tension between the class structure

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¹ *Two Penny Trash*, 9 March 1831, p. 204.

² *Ibid.*, 1 November 1831, pp. 104, 109.

³ Marshall, indeed, recognized Cobbett as a key actor in the realization of civil rights, see T.H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (New York, 1965), p. 81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

of capitalist societies and politically inclusive and egalitarian claims. Rights expanded over the course of the nineteenth century to mitigate the “less defensible consequences” of the class divide.⁵ Marshall presented the dynamic between class and citizenship as a progressive evolutionary enlargement of the bundle of recognized rights due all members of the English nation – from the civil protections of the law, to the political power of the vote and finally the economic guarantees of social welfare. In Marshall’s history social rights in particular had existed prior to the advent of the Industrial Revolution, but had been severed completely from citizenship with the rise of industrial capitalism and the *laissez-faire* state in the early nineteenth century.⁶ The class struggles of the nineteenth century provided the essential engine of change to create these rights anew.⁷

Recent work on both the consciousness of nineteenth-century working people by Patrick Joyce, James Vernon and Linda Colley and the history of citizenship by Margaret Somers now questions the evolutionary character of rights and the quintessential role of class in Marshall’s thesis.⁸ Partly focusing on issues of collective identity, these revisionists

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88, 91, 97.

⁷ J.M. Barbalet suggests that there is a much more complex and ambiguous relationship between social citizenship and class inequality in Marshall’s work than is frequently recognized. He also notes Marshall considered industrial rights to be a fourth and secondary bundle of collective rights connected to trade unionism which workers could not pursue individually. Barbalet rightly observes that industrial rights are as fully universal and central to the construction of a citizenship status for working people as any other of the three types. He maintains that such claims are distinct from civil rights, which are essentially individualist and not collectivist in nature. However, I believe that the construction of such a fourth category of workers’ rights claims can be seen as connected with the other three types of citizenship through the historical prism I sketch below. Such a fourth category for collective labor only makes sense in lieu of a history in which civil rights were first depicted through Lockean and political economy discourses. In these discourses the individuated, legally-free and propertied male was the reference point for the origination of claims. See J.M. Barbalet, *Citizenship: Rights, Struggle and Class Inequality* (Minneapolis, 1988), pp. 24–27. As Giddens argues, “economic” and “political” citizenship had to be separated in a process of state transformation. See Anthony Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 173–174. As I discuss below, recent work by feminists, including Ursula Vogel and Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, analyzes how the liberal social-contract model of public sphere relationships partly derived from political economy also served to sever women from the category of citizen. See Ursula Vogel, “Is Citizenship Gender-Specific”, in Ursula Vogel (ed.), *The Frontiers of Citizenship* (New York, 1991), pp. 58–85 and Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “Civil Citizenship Against Social Citizenship? On the Ideology of Contract-Versus-Charity”, in Bert van Steenbergen (ed.), *The Condition of Citizenship* (London, 1994), pp. 90–107.

⁸ See Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), and “A People and a Class: Industrial Workers and the Social Order in Nineteenth-Century England”, in M.L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe Since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London, 1992), pp. 199–217; Linda Colley, “Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750–1830”, *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), pp. 97–117 and *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–*

explore issues of rights consciousness largely absent in Marshall's treatise. In the process they counter with alternative histories emphasizing the local and uneven development of citizenship identities and the shifting and contingent nature of the claimed rights contained within them. Most importantly many of these accounts either relegate the role of class conflict to a lesser causal role, or deny its relevancy to the development of citizen and national identities altogether.

In this paper I defend the role of class struggle in the development of citizenship and argue that a national perspective should remain an important vantage-point for our understanding of its development. In particular, I argue that the contingent and uneven development of a bundle of rights understood as citizenship in the early nineteenth century was heavily indebted to class conflict played out in struggles over state policy on trade and labor. Further, I maintain that class struggle intertwined with gendered conceptions of property ownership and independence to not only create a masculine understanding of citizenship but also to anticipate and facilitate the development of the separate spheres ideology of later decades. In making this case I seek to integrate the non-additive, historically contingent and non-class elements of the transformation of rights consciousness offered by the revisionists with the relational perspective on class emphasized by British cultural Marxism. I argue that the rise of a bourgeois ideology of rights as articulated partly through political economy precipitated a class response from working people engaged in claims-making.

The struggles that serve as the centerpiece of my analysis are the collective actions of silk weavers in the late 1820s for wage protection

1837 (New Haven, 1992); Margaret Somers, "Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation", *Social Science History*, 16 (1992), pp. 591–630, "Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy", *American Sociological Review*, 58 (1993), pp. 587–620, and "Rights, Relationality, and Membership: Rethinking the Making and Meaning of Citizenship", *Law and Social Inquiry* (1994), pp. 63–112; James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993) and "Who's Afraid of the Linguistic Turn?: The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents", *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 81–87. Further, recent sympathetic critics conclude that Marshall is both too Anglocentric and evolutionary. See Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques*, pp. 171–172 and Michael Mann, "Ruling Class Strategies and Citizenship", *Sociology*, 21 (1987), pp. 33–54. In his monograph on citizenship and capitalism Bryan S. Turner seeks to extend the analysis of the growth of rights to non-class conflicts such as those of ethnicity and gender. Though a direct dialogue with Marshall, his argument is most centrally geared to contemporary issues, see Bryan S. Turner, *Citizenship and Capitalism* (London, 1988). Rogers Brubaker in his discussion of citizenship, territoriality and social closure also focuses on the non-class dynamics of citizenship with a particular emphasis on ethnicity, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). Both Giddens and Mann add a geo-political dimension to which I will return in a different context. Barbalet presents perhaps the most careful and reflective critique of Marshall, though he does not take it as a central task of his monograph to foreground class and institutional processes not discussed by Marshall: see Barbalet, *Citizenship*.

legislation that would shield them from the rapid degradation they were experiencing. While weaving populations were located in distinctive regions with divergent histories – London, Macclesfield and Manchester to name three major centers – their rights consciousness as members of a nation coalesced around this shared national struggle. First I briefly review the revisionist positions and then detail the actions of the silk weavers.

REVISIONIST HISTORIES

Few of the new histories of working-class consciousness and identity speak directly to Marshall's work, but all have important repercussions. Common to all these new interpretations is the attenuation of the link between class struggle and identity formation. Margaret Somers provides the most direct, compelling and far-reaching challenge to Marshall in her analyses of citizenship and narrative identity. Using both institutional and narrative approaches to analyze collective identity Somers argues that consciousness of citizenship was the shifting product of local struggles between working people, employers and state authorities centuries prior to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. She locates this process of identity construction in the divergent patterns of collective actions of working people in pastoral and arable regions of the country as they claimed rights due them within a national legal or public sphere. This public sphere was a product of crown actions dating back to the twelfth century and was firmly established in the Elizabethan statutes of Apprentices and Artificers.⁹ The actualization of laws into recognized rights was based on local action by cohesive groups most generally located in the rural-industrial/pastoral regions of England where textile production was significant. Cemented by concrete ties of community, family and trade these working people made claims of citizenship through the procedural justice of the local magistracy; they thus structured narratives of their rights as citizens based on uniform national codes through local institutions tied to the state.¹⁰ Struggles over labor conditions were thus always enacted through the appropriation by the "people" of the law. Rights as "free-born Englishmen" were not simply provided by the state but were based in contingent collective claims pressed by working people within the local node of a national legal structure.

Somers by no means wishes to abandon Marshall's insights on the multiple dimensions of citizenship, but she does suggest that his emphasis on class is misplaced: "there is no firm relationship between social classes

⁹ Somers, "Law, Community, and Political Culture", p. 597, and "Rights, Relationality, and Membership", p. 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 96, and Somers, "Law, Community, and Political Culture", p. 607.

as categorical entities and patterns of citizenship formation”.¹¹ Rather, collective identities of citizenship were always constructed and pursued through a language of rights that combined and refracted class and political claims. The central narrative through which such claims were actualized was one in which “working people had inviolable *rights* to particular *political* and *legal* relationships. They claimed these rights as citizens and focused on a particular understanding of the law, a particular understanding of the ‘people’ and their membership in the political community, and a particular relationship of the people and the law”.¹² This narrative tenaciously endured through the centuries and remained central to working people’s conceptions of citizenship even in the face of the expansion of Lockean natural rights arguments with the growth of a bourgeois political culture. Nineteenth-century movements such as those for the Factory Acts, Chartism, and the growth of trade unionism “were built primarily on the efforts, political identities, and social activities of rural industrial working peoples” through this narrative identity of the people.¹³

The collective identity of “the people” has also received considerable attention in the work of Patrick Joyce and James Vernon. Though occupied with the dismantling of Marxist class analysis and the construction of a new narrative of working people’s actions based in political language, their work weighs heavily on class and the consciousness of citizenship. Both construct new narratives of the development of nineteenth-century working people’s collective identities keyed to the languages of popular politics and culture. Sifting through the symbolic artifacts of community life, social cohesion and political conflict that called forth collective subjects, Joyce and Vernon reconstruct grand narratives of popular politics from the Reform Bill to the latter part of the century. For both Joyce and Vernon then, working people at times may have had a consciousness of class, but rarely a class consciousness.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

¹² Somers, “Narrativity, Narrative Identity”, p. 612.

¹³ Somers, “Law, Community, and Political Culture”, p. 611, and see also “Rights, Relationality, and Membership”, p. 75.

¹⁴ Both Joyce and Vernon begrudgingly admit that production-centered languages existed. Joyce finds popular languages of labor emphasizing reciprocal rights and duties of trade membership, the respectability derived from independence and domestic life, and the moral limits of the market in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, these languages do not qualify as signaling class consciousness because they did not focus on exploitation in production, nor did they disparage employers or capitalism as fundamentally evil. He also discerns a limited maturation of class consciousness in the language of late nineteenth-century workplace relations: see Joyce, *Visions*, pp. 57–58, 90–92, 94, 99, 100, 108–109, 336. Vernon asserts more confidently that class is a political construct that “could only ever be comprehended through language”: see Vernon, “Who’s Afraid of the Linguistic Turn?”, p. 89. He maintains that the use of oppositional languages by working people is an insufficient marker of a class language and that popular political

Their collective identities were forged in the languages of people and nation, and their claims of citizenship were constructed in these political terms. Both authors link the transformations of the concept of the people to the gender identities increasingly structured by separate spheres.

Joyce maintains that the languages through which workers constructed their consciousness were part of a family of populisms (including radical and liberal varieties) which were “extra-economic in character”.¹⁵ Surveying a wide-ranging array of popular cultural material from the worlds of politics, work and leisure, Joyce argues that workers’ identities were formed in the highly inclusive concept of “the people”. This populist identity cross-cut and often subverted any notions of class cohesion from its local roots through its national extensions as it provided the basis for popular engagement in institutional politics. Workers made claims upon the state through languages of people and nation, and “class did not lurk behind the image of the people”.¹⁶

Vernon argues that the melodramatic master narrative of popular constitutionalism gave shape to working people’s core identity, and institutional politics and not labor struggle provided the most stable foundation for shared identity. “What was at issue here,” he observes when discussing nineteenth-century political conflict, “was who possessed the independence and virtue to qualify as citizens, who should be included within the political nation and brought within the pale of the constitution”.¹⁷ The struggles for rights and the identities which guided them thus were constructed in and through this broadly inclusive language. Importantly for this analysis, what Vernon terms the language of labor, while sometimes assuming class inflections, was principally rooted in this constitutionalism of the independent propertied citizen. Other languages could mix with it, but only popular constitutionalism provided the narrative and vocabulary of morals and rights for collective action.¹⁸

Vernon’s account of post-Reform politics is one of how working people were progressively disenfranchised as the public sphere was constricted and the language of popular constitutionalism became a disciplinary force rather than a vehicle for popular articulation and empowerment. This story of citizenship is one of lost rights and narrowed action. He also argues that popular constitutionalism, combined with a language of skill and manly labor, fashioned both property and politics as masculine

economy and cooperative and Smithian socialisms were lesser languages in the construction of shared identities: see Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 297, 309–311, 330.

¹⁵ Joyce, *Visions*, pp. 8, 16–17, and see also Joyce, “A People and a Class”, p. 202.

¹⁶ Joyce, *Visions*, p. 30, and see also Joyce, “A People and a Class”, p. 203.

¹⁷ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 208, and see also pp. 328, 334–335.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 311–313, 316, 324–326, 331, 334–335, and “Who’s Afraid of the Linguistic Turn?”, pp. 92–93.

domains and contributed to the solidification of separate gendered spheres.¹⁹

In her recent analysis of the origins of a modern British identity Linda Colley agrees with the above revisionists that reform politics was conducted through the terms of nation and people, providing more encompassing identities than any class language had to offer. From her vantage-point the turbulent years of the late 1820s and early 1830s in particular “were arguably the only period in modern British history in which peoplepower – as we have seen it operate in parts of eastern Europe in the late twentieth century – played a prominent and pervasive role in effecting significant political change”.²⁰ Questions of citizenship brought together all divisions with the nation – including those of gender and class – to find common ground on the meaning of Britishness. Civic participation in a country which denied suffrage to the vast majority of working people could only be effected through some collective consciousness of nation, and not one largely and deliberately engineered by the state elite and upper classes.²¹ This was quintessentially forged in war as British men and women defined themselves as participating in a common struggle for the preservation of a shared culture and politics. For men, particularly those in the working class, military training was the crucible of a national identity. For women the lesser role of angel of the state, while not providing access to claims of citizenship, legitimated participation in the polity. Radical agitators might use the “people” and the “nation” as pragmatic guises for their political impulses and middle-class politicians bent on a more exclusive politics called on the same. Yet this was not just duplicity, for all held some common identity as Britons, an identity which was the hub of collective political life. As she argues in an earlier essay, “Crudely, but also fundamentally, class and nation in Britain at this time were not antithetical but two sides of the same historical processes.”²²

The revisionists’ emphasis on the linguistic and contingent production of working people’s identities fills a clear gap in Marshall’s analysis of citizenship. By focusing on the claims to citizenship in both quotidian life and collective action they effectively decouple consciousness and political culture from *de jure* standing. This decomposition provides a more nuanced and less linear account of the ways in which multiple themes and languages served as the materials for citizenship claims and identities. At the same time the emphasis on political language serves as a wedge to separate class conflict from these claims and identities, sublimating class to the idioms of “people” or “nation”.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 312–315.

²⁰ Colley, *Britons*, p. 362, and see pp. 339–340.

²¹ Colley, “Whose Nation?”, pp. 105–109.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 100, and see *Britons*, pp. 280, 312, 337–342.

Two common threads serve to tie these new revisionists in their relative antipathy to class analysis. First, all more or less delimit identification of class language and consciousness to articulations concerning the immediate social relations of production. The relationship between class identities and citizenship claims thus becomes attenuated if not severed. Second, all of the revisionists find that an identifiable *political* language is the primary vehicle for such claims. Class identities as vehicles for collective claims-making are either sublimated to or excluded by collective conceptions and languages of “people” or “nation”. The revisionists thus either create divisions between social relations, institutions and languages characterized as economic and political, or argue that the former are largely manifestations of the latter. In either case these linked themes almost wholly displace the relationship between class conflict and citizenship so central to Marshall.

The often explicit opposition posed between class and popular and national identities in the construction of citizenship creates reified and false divisions. As Margaret Somers cogently argues, the construction of collective identities is always *relational*.²³ From such a relational perspective I maintain that class conflict, stirred by the dynamics of an emergent modern capitalism, created an essential set of oppositions by which working people produced concepts of their collective rights as citizens. Class, conceived in the Thompsonian sense as the friction of interests between opposed groups, became a pivotal point for the articulation of citizenship claims in the early nineteenth century. Working people, particularly male workers, argued for a categorical protection by the state because of their generalized position in the labor market. They claimed rights of protection not for a particular wage structure, but for their labor *in general* and against the predatory actions of all employers.

I agree with Somers that citizenship identities always cohere around specific bundles of claimed rights and that we must abandon a presentist and simple evolutionary account of those claims found in Marshall. However, in so doing I claim that we find in the battles of the early nineteenth century a watershed in which working people formulated novel claims based on their common position as the nation’s wealth producers. The rise of class as an explicit component of these claims was in response to bourgeois articulations of rights claims structured in part through the language of political economy. The hegemonic influence of this language, particularly in parliamentary battles over legislation, marked a critical turning-point in working people’s articulated claims of citizenship by partly shifting the terrain on which such contests were

²³ Somers, “Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action”, pp. 607–609, “Law, Community, and Political Culture”, p. 595, and “Rights, Relationality, and Membership”, p. 71.

conducted.²⁴ As opposed to being products of regional relations they were more distinctly national claims, in part because the discourses of political economy depicted rights in such generalized terms and in part because the political contests were decisively shifting to the national forum of parliament. Moreover, these claims were articulated as compared to and against those of other classes.

Contrary to Joyce and Vernon, I am arguing that working people's claims to citizenship rights through popular Constitutionalism and the analysis of property rights, freedoms and government protection were counter-hegemonic and therefore *class* strategies to meet capitalists' claims over the use and control of their labor. As James Epstein argues, class struggle generally occurred within a shared language or idiom and "the struggle becomes that of appropriating shared forms of rhetoric and symbolism to a particular class position, of restructuring this shared language from a class perspective while maintaining an appeal to a presumed system of national political and cultural values that transcend class".²⁵ In the early nineteenth century citizenship became infused with class contention as capitalists, propagandists of political economy and their disciples in parliament partly refashioned the discourses of rights and citizenship in contention over industrial policy. In these contests English working people's collective identities were transformed through a prism whose angles were cut simultaneously by perspectives of class, nation and internationalism, as Margot Finn suggests in her analyses of post-Chartist radicalism.²⁶ Adding the angle of gender to this prism we can understand both how the shifting positions of contention changed these visions of citizenship over time and how class was almost always a central feature of the resulting patterns of rights claims. We can see the dynamics of the process in motion in the struggles for wage protection among the silk weavers in the 1820s.

²⁴ Elsewhere I analyze this as dialogic process of class conflict. Marc W. Steinberg, "The Dialogue of Struggle: The Contest Over Ideological Boundaries in the Case of London Silk Weavers in the Nineteenth Century", *Social Science History*, 18 (1994), pp. 504–542, and "'The Labour of the Country is the Wealth of the Country [. . .]': Class Identity, Consciousness and the Role of Discourse in the Making of the English Working Class", *International Labor and Working-Class History* (forthcoming, 1996). Dialogic analysis emphasizes that subordinate groups primarily contest ruling definitions and depictions of the world through a piecemeal and contingent process of appropriating the language of power-holders for their own advantage.

²⁵ James Epstein, "The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth-Century England", *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1990), p. 568; see also "Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History", *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (1986), p. 201.

²⁶ Margot Finn, "'A Vent Which Has Conveyed Our Principles': English Radical Patriotism in the Aftermath of 1848", *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), pp. 637–659, and *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics 1848–1874* (Cambridge, 1993). See also Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques*, pp. 179–180 and Mann, "Ruling Class Strategies", pp. 340–341.

THE SILK WEAVERS AND WAGE PROTECTION

Though now dwarfed in the annals of the Industrial Revolution by the growth of cotton and wool, silk was recognized as a substantial cloth industry by commentators in the early nineteenth century. Encouraged by parliamentary protection and stimulated by the immigration of Huguenot weavers to London's Spitalfields district in the late seventeenth century, both silk throwing and weaving made generally steady gains throughout the course of the eighteenth century. Originally incorporated as the Royal Lustring Company in 1692 silk weaving gradually escaped London's confines, establishing distinctive branches in a number of towns including Coventry, Manchester and Macclesfield.²⁷ By 1830 over three million pounds of variable capital was circulating in wages, duties and profits, about a tenth the amount of the cotton trade, but a substantial sum nonetheless. Estimates of the total employment in weaving were sketchy and varied with trade fortunes. By the late 1820s Spitalfields (the historical heart of the weaving trade) contained a relatively stagnant number of some 13–14,000 looms and perhaps 150 manufacturers. Manchester, a relative late-comer to the trade in the early 1820s, counted at least 8,000 for silk goods and perhaps half that many in mixed fabrics with about 50 manufacturers, while Macclesfield claimed around 7,000 working looms and 70 masters. The ribbon trade of Coventry registered at least 5,000 narrow looms and between 70 and 100 manufacturers. Given the domestic nature of most of the weaving trade and the ancillary processes surrounding weaving itself one loom could be responsible for the employment of several people, particularly a male weaver's wife and children.²⁸ Indeed, an unknown but significant number of women were themselves weavers by this period, though they were mostly dependent on their spouses for the contraction of work.²⁹ In Spitalfields alone

²⁷ In addition to these towns other significant centers for both silk throwing and the production of both broad cloth and narrow goods included Colchester, Congleton, Leek, Norwalk, Norwich, and Paisley. Additionally, the hosiery industry of the Midlands was another major producer of silk goods, though framework knitting was more detached as a trade from other forms of production. See Gerald B. Hertz, "The English Silk Industry in the Eighteenth Century", *English Historical Review*, 24 (1909), pp. 710–727; George R. Porter, *A Treatise on the Origin, Progressive Improvement, and Present State of the Silk Manufacture* (London, 1831); and Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry in the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London, 1921).

²⁸ Unlike the other centers, production in Macclesfield was often organized in weaving sheds appended to the throwing mills which had spurred the cloth trade: see C.S. Davies, *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester, 1961), p. 133.

²⁹ For an analysis of women's employment in silk mills see Judy Lown, *Women and Industrialization: Gender at Work in Nineteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis, 1990). The male weavers of Spitalfields had tried to prevent women from entering the trade in the 1790s, but ultimately the tug of the domestic budget overcame male exclusion. In 1811 parliament passed an act extending wage protection to women. By the 1820s girls were regularly apprenticed outside their own families. One Spitalfields weaver, thoroughly disgruntled with women at the loom, estimated that female labor comprised one-third of

weaving was said to be responsible for employing 45–50,000 people. Throughout the land well over 100,000 people were tied to the fortunes of the weaving trade.³⁰

While islands of weaving mushroomed about the country there was little national trade culture even by the advent of the 1820s. Each node of weavers existed within distinctive trade systems and local political cultures, and interregional communications were rare. Spitalfields, subject to its own restrictive trade legislation (of which I say more below) considered itself the legitimate and honorable home of broadcloth production and the weavers were generally extolled as peaceable, loyal, modest in their habits and a credit to their community. Steeped in a history of paternalistic corruption, cordial relations with parish officers (who were generally small tradesmen and merchants) were thickly woven with mutually beneficial economic ties in vestry affairs. In times of dearth the parish championed the weavers' cause, particularly in the later 1820s.³¹ The ribbon weavers in Coventry likewise carefully cultivated a culture of artisanal independence, being described by one historian as "working men with bourgeois virtues".³² The vast majority of these weavers owned one or more looms and production was a male-dominated domestic industry. In addition to being one of the single largest respectable

his trade. Except for the relatively rare cases in which a widow sought to scratch out a living as a weaver the male head of the household bargained with the manufacturer for piece rates on behalf of his dependents. See *Parliamentary Papers* [hereafter *PP*] (Commons) 1835 [572] VII, pp. 10–11; *PP* (Commons) 1818 [211] IX, pp. 44, 148; *PP* (Lords), 1823 [57] CLVI, pp. 5, 56, 62, 102, 126–128; W.M. Jordan, "The Silk Industry in London, 1760–1830, with Special Reference to the Conditions of the Wage-Earners and the Policy of the Spitalfields Acts" (M.Litt., University of London, 1931), p. 12; Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1780–1850* (London, 1969), pp. 168, 176–177; *Trades' Newspaper*, 23 October 1825, 23 February 1828.

³⁰ *PP* (Commons) 1832 [678] XIX, pp. 153, 210, 741, 811, 834, 936–937; *PP* (Commons) 1833 [690] VI, pp. 295–296; *PP* (Lords) 1823 [57] CLVI, pp. 5, 186; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter *Hansard's*], New Series, 10 (1824), c. 1312; *ibid.*, 14 (1826), c. 757, *Hansard's Third Series*, 10 (1832), c. 1030; *An Account of the Proceedings of the Committees of the Journeymen Silk Weavers of Spitalfields; in the Legal Defence of the Acts of Parliament, Granted to their Trade [. . .]* (London, 1823), p. 59; Davies, *Macclesfield*, p. 133; Porter, *A Treatise on the Origin*, p. 80; Peter Searby, "Paternalism, Disturbance and Parliamentary Reform: Society and Politics in Coventry, 1819–32", *International Review of Social History*, 22 (1977), pp. 198–225, 200, 206, and "The Relief of the Poor in Coventry, 1830–1863", *The Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), p. 346; Warner, *The Silk Industry*, p. 152.

³¹ *PP* (Commons) 1834 [36] XXXV, App. 2, B. 2, Pt. 1, pp. 83ff.; *PP* (Commons) 1817 [642] VI, p. 31; Tower Hamlets Library, Local History Collection, London, Christ Church Spitalfields Vestry Minute Books, 1828–1831; Phillip McCann "Popular Education, Socialization, and Social Control: Spitalfields 1812–1824", in Phillip McCann (ed.), *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1977), p. 3; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government From the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: The Parish and the County* (London, 1906), pp. 79–90; *Trades' Free Press*, 22 January 1826, p. 435; 29 January 1826, p. 455; 3 June 1827, p. 373; 14 February 1829.

³² John Prest, *The Industrial Revolution in Coventry* (Oxford, 1960), p. 52.

trades, under the old town charter they were freemen (having served seven-year apprenticeships) and thus were vociferous and central political actors. The ribbon weavers were both much courted by politicians and attentively relieved by parish overseers (a group disproportionately controlled by ribbon manufacturers). While not operating under the aegis of trade legislation, masters and weavers met periodically to set town-wide piece rates, almost always avoiding the rancor and violence of collective action.³³

Macclesfield also adhered to standard piece rates established through bargaining up until 1815 when the manufacturers broke both the practice and the union in an attempt to increase sagging profits. Yet despite their numerical significance and their ability to maintain wages up to this period the weavers never seemed to have attained the honorability of their southern cousins. In part this was because the weaving trade was literally an appendage to silk throwing with about half of all weavers being employed in weaving sheds attached to throwing mills. By the 1820s the Macclesfield silk weavers inhabited the world of the degraded outwork, leading to increasing tensions between manufacturers and weavers and riots in 1824 and 1826.³⁴ For their trade kin in nearby Manchester the situation was even gloomier. Most of them were cotton weavers who entered silk as a desultory trade, with no organization or corporate memory or standing.³⁵

Moving into the 1820s silk weaving thus had no national organization or constituency. Indeed centers such as Manchester and Macclesfield were seen to be in open competition with Spitalfields. Collective claims raised by weavers as well as their repertoires of collective action were, until the 1820s, largely keyed to local trade dynamics. What unified the trade, therefore, was not the machinations of production but the politics which surrounded it, and this politics had a distinctly class and national character.

The silk trade's particular history was, in the words of one historian, "mercantilism at its best". The Coventry MP Edward Ellice noted that "No department of our internal trade has probably occupied so much time or attention of the legislature as this manufacture, since its first introduction and establishment in this country."³⁶ Parliamentary protec-

³³ British Library, London, Francis Place Collection of Pamphlets and Newspaper Clippings [hereafter Place Coll.], Set 16, v. 2, "Silk", f. 6; Prest, *Coventry*, pp. 28, 53, 55, 59, 69; Peter Searby, "'Lists of Prices' in the Coventry Silk Industry, 1800-1860", *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 27 (1973), and "Paternalism, Disturbance and Parliamentary Reform", pp. 207-209, and "The Relief of the Poor", p. 347.

³⁴ Davies, *Macclesfield*, pp. 133, 189; Warner, *The Silk Industry*, pp. 133-134; *PP* (Lords) 1823 [57] CLVI, p. 55; Place Coll., Set 16, v. 2, "Silk", ff. 36, 44, 48.

³⁵ *PP* (Commons) 1832 [678] XIX, pp. 203, 408; *PP* (Commons) 1833 [690] VI, p. 306; Duncan Bythell, *The Handloom Weavers* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 260-261.

³⁶ Hertz, "The English Silk Industry", p. 727; *Hansard's*, New Series, 5 (1826), c. 736-737.

tion figured almost from the trade's inception, with statutes passed under James II and William and Mary to foster both the throwing and weaving trades. However, it was the Spitalfields Acts, a series of statutes the first of which were passed in 1773, that were identified as the epitome of protective legislation and the flashpoint of controversy. They regulated the conduct of the weaving trade only within the Spitalfields district in London's East End, though they had far-reaching effects. Within the district they mandated a minimum wage determined either through arbitration between masters and weavers or magisterial intervention, with an established list of piece rates for all goods being a public document. They also limited apprentices and prohibited masters from distributing work outside the district at lower piece rates if they employed any weavers within it. Most importantly for the national trade, the Acts prohibited the importation of foreign wrought goods, largely insulating the trade from French and Far Eastern competition. By the late 1810s the Acts had become a touchstone for continued conflict between protectionists and political economists and the debates on trade protection gave rise to two select committees, one a Commons committee on the ribbon trade and the other a Lords committee on the Acts themselves. In 1823, prompted by a petition from large London manufacturers, the Commons began a protracted debate that led ultimately to the Acts' demise in 1824 and the establishment of a series of duties on silk goods in their stead.³⁷

The large wholesalers found fast allies among parliamentarians who sang the praises of free trade. Stalwarts such as Huskisson, Hume, Grant, Poulet-Thompson and Ricardo himself effectively controlled debate over economic policy from the early 1820s as the ruling Tories adopted a pragmatic attitude to the rising of the dismal science.³⁸ Wedded together

³⁷ A.E. Bland, P.A. Brown and R.H. Tawney (eds), *English Economic History: Select Documents* (New York, 1919), pp. 547–551; J.H. Clapham, "The Spitalfields Acts 1773–1824", *Economic Journal*, 26 (1916); Alfred Plummer, *The London Weavers' Company 1600–1970* (London, 1972), pp. 328–329; *PP (Commons) 1818 [211] IX*, p. 190; *PP (Lords) 1823 (57) CLVI*; *Letters, Taken from Various Newspapers, Tending to Injure the Journeymen Silk Weavers of Spitalfields, with and Attack against the Acts of Parliament, Regulating the Prices of Their Work [. . .]* (London, 1818); Barry Gordon, *Economic Doctrine and Tory Liberalism 1824–1830* (London, 1979), p. 19; *Hansard's, New Series*, 9 (1823), c. 146–149. See also *An Account*, for a partial history of the weavers' defense.

³⁸ For the Tories and political economy see Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (London, 1991); Gordon, *Economic Doctrine*; Boyd Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce: The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815–1830* (Oxford, 1977), and *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* (Oxford, 1988). A.C. Howe argues that the City merchants largely stayed aloof from the debates over protection debates during the 1820s despite the famous address to the Commons in 1820 in support of free trade: see A.C. Howe, "Free Trade and the City of London, c. 1820–1870", *History*, 251 (1992), pp. 391–410. While this may be true, the advocacy of the large silk manufacturers is quite clear. William Hale, an old manufacturer and friend of the weavers, told a Lords committee

they provided a potent phalanx for the removal of protective legislation. The original petition of the London wholesalers foreshadowed the type of argument with which weavers were to do battle in the 1820s and 1830s as they sought some measure of protection. “[I]t is not so much their desire to seek relief from their operation in the particulars lastly stated,” they noted in reference to the workings of the Acts, “as to be exempted from the arbitrary, injurious and impolitic enactment which prevents them, while they continue residing within certain districts, from employing any portion of their capital in such other parts of the kingdom as deemed most beneficial; thereby depriving them not only of their *privileges as free subjects*, and totally preventing all public benefit which would arise from a competition between the London and the country manufacturers, but depriving them also of all hope of ever participating in the foreign trade of the empire.”³⁹

Contained within this petition and in the language of many subsequent debates were far-reaching assumptions concerning the nature and scope of the rights of members of the nation. This phalanx of free traders combined the concept of *doux commerce*, a theory of natural rights, and possessive individualism, and topped it off with a nascent imperialist sensibility.⁴⁰ As an advocate of political economy explained, “the object of all political institutions is negative rather than positive – the prevention of evil rather than the bestowment of good. The security of property, life and freedom of the subject, at the smallest possible expense of the revenue, is, or ought to be the ultimate end of all governments”.⁴¹

Behind these arguments stood a composite picture of a free Briton – a man who was the proprietor of his own personhood, engaged in the civic virtues of free commerce with the property he possessed, enjoying the negative rights of unfettered trade in the open market, all of which realized the glory and destiny of his nation in the process. The repeal process was one piece of what Corrigan and Sayer have termed the cultural revolution in state-making that occurred during these decades. As they note, new forms of moral and social classification were vehicles for participation in state processes. Among the most important to both the working class and women were the discursive transformation of

on the trade that the fancy goods manufacturers believed “that the Disposition of the Government is with us, and that the Eyes of the Country are open to the better principles of Political Economy [. . .]”, *PP* (Lords) 1823 [57] CLVI, p. 28.

³⁹ *Hansard's*, New Series, 9 (1823), c. 148–149.

⁴⁰ For the classic analysis of possessive individualism see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962). For a discussion of *doux commerce* see Albert O. Hirschman, “Rival Interpretations of Market Society: Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble?”, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 20 (1982), pp. 1464–1466.

⁴¹ *Observations on the Ruinous Effects of the Spitalfields Acts to the Silk Manufacture of London: to Which is Added a Reply to Mr. Hale's Appeal to the Public in Defence of the Act* (London, 1822), p. 66.

labor from a collective and differentiated category to atomized and homogenized property and the construction of civil society as the sphere of “men of property”. Both were part of a protracted process in the construction of state and citizenship in which new standards for worthiness of recognition in the polity became the basis for claims-making.⁴²

The repeal of the wage regulations in 1825, and the installation of a new set of duties in 1826, profoundly transformed the silk trade both in and beyond the confines of Spitalfields. To begin, it created a more nationally uniform industry and solidified the position of large manufacturers or “wholesalers” who had been in the process of usurping control from small masters for over a decade. The small master had been at the heart of a web of commercial transactions as the trade matured in the eighteenth century, but with both large traders gradually insinuating themselves into the trade in London and throwsters appending large weaving sheds to their mills in the northern towns the small masters increasingly were squeezed out by the muscle of large capital. Most of these wholesalers were unschooled in the trade, and in the case of London lived well apart from the cramped confines of the weavers’ and small masters’ neighborhoods. They were decidedly less interested in trade custom and harmony and much keener on high volumes and large profits. As one manufacturer from Coventry complained of the London market, “[T]wo or three individuals exercise more power over the silk trade than the government have the power to entirely counteract [. . .]. The trade requires more protection against the power of these men than against foreign competition.”⁴³

Additionally, the repeal of the Acts ensconced most weavers in a maelstrom of degradation and distress. It created both more uniform piece rates, closing the gap between Spitalfields’ previously protected prices and those in Manchester and Macclesfield, and caused a precipitous drop of piece rates of between 30–50 per cent in the major production centers in the late 1820s. It was estimated that Spitalfields alone had an aggregate loss of £300,000 in wages per year. Unemployment skyrocketed, reaching over 50 per cent in some years such as the

⁴² Phillip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 116–119, 133, 149–150. Corrigan and Sayer’s emphasis on the process of cultural individuation echoes the classic statement by Karl Polanyi noted many decades ago on the rise of the liberal creed. Nancy Fraser more recently parallels their observations on gender and state-making when she argues that the development of social welfare policies contains a highly masculine tint on concept of social citizenship. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, 1944), p. 163 and Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 151–152.

⁴³ British Public Record Office, Kew Gardens [hereafter PRO] Home Office Papers [hereafter H.O.] 44/18, W. Merry to Wellington, 8 May 1829; see also Place Coll., Set 16, v. 2, “Silk”, f. 32.

depression of 1826, and relief requests in parishes heavily populated by silk weavers more than quadrupled in Macclesfield and Spitalfields.⁴⁴

The silk weavers responded with a repertoire of collective actions increasingly typical of working people throughout England. In Coventry, Macclesfield, Manchester, Spitalfields and weaving centers across the country they gathered to petition parliament for redress. As Charles Tilly notes, collective action from the late eighteenth century through the 1830s metamorphosed from largely informal, local and patronized action to claims-making forged in mass action that was public, formal, national and autonomous.⁴⁵ The rise of the mass platform was the most striking form of this transformation in radical politics, but labor actions, particularly after the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824, increasingly assumed this character.⁴⁶ Outworkers and artisans menaced and engulfed by degradation turned to the national forum of parliament for relief. In part, with the repeal of the Statutes of Artificers in 1814 (and other trade specific legislation such as the Spitalfields Acts), some of the local foundations for action had been undercut.⁴⁷ In the particular case of the silk weavers, the severity of their distress, and its clear connection to governmental action made parliament an indubitable target.

From the start of the post-repeal era through the end of the decade silk weavers made numerous appeals for various forms of prohibition and protection. As they sank into the increasing squalor left in the wake of repeal the Spitalfields leader William Wallis told his fellow weavers that "it was now time to demand their rights".⁴⁸ Often they directed their energies at wage protection, and in that they had considerable company. John Gast and his General Association of trades (in which

⁴⁴ PRO H.O. 40/24, 10 August 1829, Whatton to Peel, ff. 110–111; *Hansard's*, New Series, 10 (1826), c. 756–757, 21 (1829), c. 748–749, 864; *Hansard's*, Third Series, 10 (1832), c. 923–924; *PP* (Commons) 1832 [678] XIX, pp. 62, 66, 341, 387–389, 476, 479, 732; *PP* (Commons) 1834 [556] X, pp. 4, 324; *PP* (Commons) 1834 [44] XXIX, App. A, Pt. III, pp. 107a, 109a; John Prout, *Practical View of the Silk Trade* (Macclesfield, 1829), p. 23.

⁴⁵ See Charles Tilly, "Britain Creates the Social Movement", in James Cronin and Jonathan Schneer (eds), *Social Conflict and Political Order in Modern Britain* (New Brunswick, 1982), p. 25.

⁴⁶ See John Belchem, "Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform", *Social History*, 6 (1981), pp. 1–32 and "Orator Hunt": *Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985); Clive Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990); and T.M. Parssinen, "Association, Convention, and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771–1848", *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), pp. 504–533.

⁴⁷ For accounts of the repeal of the statutes see T.K. Derry, "The Repeal of the Apprenticeship Clauses of the Statute of Apprentices", *Economic History Review*, Second Series, 3 (1931), pp. 67–87; Iowerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (London, 1979); and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966).

⁴⁸ *Trades' Newspaper*, 23 February 1828, p. 246.

the Spitalfields weavers were represented) championed such legislative protection in 1827, and the besieged handloom weavers launched a major petition drive to secure it in the spring of that year.⁴⁹ Weavers had agitated for a minimum wage or protection as far back as the 1790s, but in these years it took on an intense urgency. Their destitution, Thompson noted in his classic chapter, “gave a particular moral resonance to their protest [. . .] they appealed to essential notions of human fellowship and conduct rather than sectional interests. It was as a whole community that they demanded betterment [. . .]”.⁵⁰

Thompson’s observation reflects a transformation in the conception of citizenship as represented through claims-making: With the repeal of protective legislation and the rise of political economy as a hegemonic discourse working people such as the silk weavers found themselves captive to a new language and idioms for the assertion of their particular bundle of rights. To argue for protection as citizens they in part had to contest and appropriate the language of political economy that increasingly defined civic worthiness. This intertwined, as Colley and others argue, with an emergent concept of national identity.⁵¹ Citizenship for most working people therefore involved a weave of formally recognized and valorized allegiances between state and people behind which lay a more abstract notion of membership in the nation. For the English working class in the early nineteenth century laying claim to these citizenship rights within this emergent political culture required an explicit struggle to be recognized not as homogeneous labor, members of a particular trade or community, nor as individuals, but as a *class* with legitimate rights and claims.

In her recent analysis of the gendered discourse of citizenship among early nineteenth-century working people Anna Clark observes that working-class radicals wrestled with shifting notions of rights claims during these decades.⁵² She argues that a combination of Painite radicalism with its emphasis on family welfare, and the appropriation of republicanism which widened the discourse of civic humanism, created discursive space for women as rights claimants. Particularly in the case of

⁴⁹ For Gast’s view and the resolutions of the General Association see *Trades’ Newspaper*, 16 April 1826, pp. 635–636, 11 February 1827, pp. 242–243 and 25 February 1827, p. 259. On 6 June alone the Commons was presented with a dozen petitions from around the country for a wage regulation bill: see *Journal of the House of Commons*, 82 (1823), p. 523. One of the most vocal advocates was William Longson, who served as member of the Stockport silk weavers trade committee. Longson conducted a protracted debate with Francis Place in the pages of the *Bolton Chronicle* during the petition drives (Place Coll., Set 16, v. 1, ff. 13, 24, 183, 278, v. 2, “Cotton”, ff. 5, 13, 17, 24, 34, 46).

⁵⁰ Thompson, *The Making*, p. 295.

⁵¹ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 19.

⁵² Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995), esp. ch. 8.

northern textile workers, in their combination of economic issues with Constitutional radicalism, this was “the first time radicals began to define the People as including women”.⁵³ However, this gender inclusive discourse always stood in tension with other strains of radicalism and was largely displaced by the chivalrous ideals developed during the Queen Caroline affair.⁵⁴

The silk weavers’ case can be used to expand on Clark’s analysis to demonstrate how, in engaging the liberal social-contract model of citizenship woven into possessive individualism, male weavers accepted a masculine vision of rights claims in several respects. First, this definition of citizenship presupposed an individual free to engage in contractual relationships, particularly those involving the disposition of property, in the public sphere. As Ursula Vogel and Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon have emphasized, this model precluded women from the status of citizens. Either as wives who by law subordinated their will to that of their husbands, or as single women who were not perceived to have sufficient rational-legal competence to act independently, women legally were written out of the definition.⁵⁵ This definition of citizenship meshed with the patriarchal structure of the domestic workshop in which the husband contracted with a manufacturer for himself and all of his dependents.⁵⁶ Second and relatedly, because working women were thus construed as subsidiary and dependent laborers within this discourse, previous constructions of the industrious woman who could legitimately make claims upon polity as an independent contributor to the national prosperity were sublimated within working people’s rights discourses. As Deborah Valenze argues in her recent analysis of women in the Industrial Revolution, the discourse of political economy marked a radical transformation in the depiction of working women, solidifying a new conceptualization of poor women as morally deficient and incapable of independent action in the public sphere of the market.⁵⁷ Together

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵⁴ Clark also suggests that libertine ultra-radicalism of the London underground was highly misogynist in its discourse, and precluded women from participation and dampened a more gender inclusive understanding of the people, though this was ultimately displaced by the chivalrous ideal. See *ibid.*, pp. 153, 174.

⁵⁵ Vogel, “Is Citizenship Gender-Specific?”, pp. 62, 71–75, and Fraser and Gordon, “Civil Citizenship Against Social Citizenship?”, pp. 95–99. For the marginal positioning of women in liberal moral theory see Ruth Smith and Deborah H. Valenze, “Mutuality and Marginality: Liberal Moral Theory and Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England”, *Signs*, 13 (1988), pp. 277–298.

⁵⁶ Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, p. 142. See also Carloe Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988).

⁵⁷ See Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 129–130, 138–139. Diane Willen’s work on women and poor relief in early modern England demonstrates that this was at variance with earlier conceptions of women’s capacity to act as independent members of the public sphere. In an analysis of the role of women in dispensing relief in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London and Norwich she shows that women were

these discursive constructions of liberal social-contract theory only recognized working women's citizenship claims as indirect, represented by the independent male who pursued the rights of the other producers of the household.

Male silk weavers pursued such rights of protection by combining and appropriating elements from the language of political economy, emergent nationalism and popular Constitutionalism. Their claims were class specific in that they directly confronted the individuation of citizenship rights contained in political economy, elaborated notions of the privileges of all wealth producers in the nation, and explicitly cast the Constitution as a social contract between groups with divergent (and often opposed) interests.⁵⁸ They frequently made claims to citizenship rights as wealth producers and distinguished their worthiness from others, including merchants and employers, on this class basis. This discursive struggle simultaneously tied their rights claims to those commanded by aristocrats and employers yet differentiated their worthiness for such rights by their unique and opposed position as workers.

The place of the weavers in the nation was perceived through the contested meaning of the ancient Constitution so favored by radicals.⁵⁹ Weavers and their allies argued that their legitimate standing in the

presumed to have competence to care for the poor, were trusted to engage in transactions for their support and were remunerated (albeit poorly) for their efforts. Willen argues that this participation was founded on an understanding of the private and public spheres that provided a bridge between the two for women. See Diane Willen, "Women in the Public Sphere in Early Modern England: The Case of the Urban Working Poor", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988), pp. 559–575.

⁵⁸ For discussions of the development of distinctive working-class discourses, particularly in relation to political economy, see Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money, and the Millennium: From Moral Economy, to Socialism, 1815–1850* (Cambridge, 1987), and *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989); Thomas A. Horne, *Property Rights and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605–1834* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*; Adrian Randall, "New Languages or Old? Labour, Capital, and Discourse in the Industrial Revolution", *Social History*, 14 (1990), pp. 195–216; John Smail, "New Languages for Labour and Capital: The Transformation of Discourse in the Early Years of the Industrial Revolution", *Social History*, 12 (1987), pp. 49–72 and "New Languages? Yes Indeed: A Reply to Adrian Randall", *Social History*, 16 (1991), pp. 217–222; N.W. Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis 1816–34* (Cambridge, 1984), and *The Market and Its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1988). For works that uphold class interpretations of radicalism in lieu of the new revisionism see Richard Ashcraft, "Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century England", *Political Theory*, 21 (1993), pp. 249–272; John Belchem, *Industrialization and the Working Class: The English Experience, 1750–1900* (Portland, OR, 1990); James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England: 1790–1850* (Oxford, 1994); Neville Kirk, "In Defense of Class. A Critique of Recent Revisionist Writing Upon The Nineteenth-Century English Working Class", *International Review of Social History*, 32 (1987), pp. 2–47; Steinberg, "The Labour of the Country".

⁵⁹ For the constitutional idiom see Epstein, *Radical Expression*; Thompson, *The Making*; and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (London, 1991).

polity was guaranteed by the Constitutional mandate for a social compact between all major groups within a delicately woven social system. John Powell articulated this conception in his defense of the Spitalfields Acts. Arguing that political economists disgraced its very essence he observed, "For what is the British Constitution? Why an arbitration, founded on the simple and self-evident axiom, 'that no man is a good and impartial judge in his own cause – and therefore requires the concurrence of the three estates to all its Acts'".⁶⁰

Powell found a ready homology in the Spitalfields Acts whose mechanics worked toward the same beneficent ends, and he noted that "competition sustained at the expenses of the working classes will derange all legitimate interest in society [. . .]".⁶¹

Arguing for the enforcement of this social compact the male weavers appropriated the language of property to articulate their collective interests. This was more than just a property of skill argument as discussed by John Rule, which James Epstein links to the Constitutionalist tradition.⁶² For in co-opting bourgeois discourse the weavers argued that labor itself, in whatever degree of refinement, deserved protection. The Spitalfields weavers explicitly appropriated Locke in their most elaborate appeal for wage protection, and did so in reaction to the manufacturers' claims for freedom of control over their property and capital.⁶³ "[I]t is labour alone which gives value to the land and the raw material for manufactures", they argued, and this, their property, was equally deserving of protection as land and capital.⁶⁴ "[A]s the Artisan's power of labour is his only property, it is irreconcilable with every sense of justice, and of *common right*, that the incomes and property of all other classes should be protected, whilst the Artisans and Labourers alone are left a prey to be plundered by needy, rapacious, and unprincipled Employers."⁶⁵

There seems little doubt that these rights claims were those of class interest, and not extra-economic in character. Throughout their attempts

⁶⁰ British Library, Add. MSS 27805, John Powell, *A Letter Addressed to Weavers, Shopkeepers, and Publicans, on the Great Value of the Principle of the Spitalfields Acts: In Opposition to the Absurd and Mischievous Doctrines of the Advocates for their Repeal* (London, 1824), pp. 2–3.

⁶¹ Powell, *A Letter*, p. 5.

⁶² For Rule's discussion of the property of skill see John Rule, "The Property of Skill in the Period of Manufacture", in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Historical Meaning of Work* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 99–118. For the link between labor as property and constitution see James Epstein, "The Constitutional Idiom", p. 565.

⁶³ For the use of Locke see *Report Adopted at a General Meeting of the Journeymen Broad Silk Weavers, [. . .] to take into their Consideration the Necessity of Petitioning the Legislature for a Wage Protection Bill [. . .] To which is Appended, The Petition* (London, 1828), pp. 12–14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7, emphasis in the original.

to secure protection the weavers proffered a concept of freedom in sharp contrast to the negative rights spelled out by free traders. In the freedom of the market they found the power to oppress the workers and deny them of their right to a comfortable living. As the Macclesfield weavers pronounced,

Is labour free? – Yes – for the rich capitalist to command it at his will and pleasure, and generally speaking, for what price he chooses [. . .].

Is labour free? – Yes – to pay immense taxation, enormous pensions, and a standing army in time of peace, a great part of whose employment is to keep the people in awe, which, if properly paid for their labour, would be loyal and obedient subjects.

Is labour free for the operative to fix the value of his labour? We answer, no; for though he is not compelled by the law of the land to work for what is not a living price, yet he is compelled by necessity – his poverty renders him dependent – his masters' will is his law, and he has no alternative but to work or absolutely perish.⁶⁶

As the MP for the silk town of Colchester admonished the Commons, the weavers' motto was "Equal rights for unequal conditions".⁶⁷ Few phrases could be more prescient of Marshall's analysis.

As opposed to the atomized freedoms offered by political economy the male weavers demanded collective freedom for themselves and their dependents as wealth producers. A frequent theme of their claims-making was that the state had a responsibility to protect workers from the power of capital and insure that they received the benefits of their labor. "Many state-politicians", chided the Stockport weaver William Longson, "with all of their disinterested patriotism [. . .] offer the feeble and ridiculous apology of 'EXPEDIENCY' for voluntary injustice and manifest violations of civil rights [. . . T]here are various societies in the community, in which the principle of *expediency*, without being perceived or acknowledged, prevails against *common justice and natural right*. What can be a greater outrage of the one and the other than for a nation to make a law, or a society a rule, to prevent men from exercising, in an honest way, the abilities God has given, for their maintenance?"⁶⁸

The weavers expected a life of toil, the necessity of "living by their labour" as they constantly pronounced, but they claimed as a right government protection for their lot. "The great end of all government", pronounced the Spitalfields weavers in a treatise on wage protection, "is to prevent individual, or associated rapacity, from taking advantage of the labouring classes, and to secure all under its control in the possession of the fruits of its industry [. . .]. It is the duty of government to keep down all monopoly, and to maintain one great community of

⁶⁶ *Trades' Newspaper*, 9 July 1826, p. 829.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 April 1828, p. 315.

⁶⁸ Place Coll., Set 16, v. 1, f. 13.

equal rights and privileges. The possession of capital alone gives to individuals a species of monopoly, which is equally the duty of government to keep within due bounds."⁶⁹

The silk weavers did not presumptively deny the rights of capitalists to benefit from others' labor. What they maintained was that the state was duty bound to insure their rights as productive members of the nation, and prevent the common good from being disassembled by what they termed partial interests. So long as they were prepared for a life of toil the state had a duty to insure the male weavers' right to seek a living for their families. "[W]hen I was bound apprentice", reminisced a Spitalfields weaver before a select committee on the silk trade, "the government of the country had protected the trade and I considered were bound to protect it; I thought I had done the same as purchased an annuity for life, as something by which I should be enabled to get a living for my family; I considered the government to have protected the same, as every other species of property."⁷⁰

The weavers based their rights claims on more than the lineal promises of the Constitution or the lineaments of freedom and security guaranteed in class wisdom on common law. In constructing their collective image as Britons, male weavers argued that their contributions as defenders of and producers for the empire created clear entitlement to protection.⁷¹ This claims-making status reinforced the masculine definition of citizenship, linking it to both defender of the nation and implicitly to the household as well. Certainly many weavers saw stints of military duty: "the silk Trade is the greatest nursery for the Navy we have" noted one observer in a Lords' committee hearing.⁷² The Spitalfields weavers were quick to remind the government that their patriotic service was the valid currency for the purchase of a fair hearing for trade protection. In a circular handed to the Lords during the repeal debate the weavers' and King's arms appear in tandem supported by a soldier and musket. Beside the weavers' arms are the words "Spitalfields Acts" and underneath the figures the motto "our trade was shielded by a generous Parliament, and thereby inspired with true loyalty. We left our looms in defence of our much beloved King and country, and are always ready to do so again [. . .]".⁷³ Within this logic of rights one shield begat another in a kind of mutual pact. Moreover, patriotism, defined as respect for and duty to nation, diminished in the absence of this mutuality. "When the industrious artisan becomes a pauper," cautioned the

⁶⁹ *Report*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ *PP (Commons) 1832 [678] XIX*, p. 734.

⁷¹ As Clark argues military prowess had long been linked to citizenship claims. See Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, pp. 143, 163.

⁷² *PP (Lords) 1823 [57] CLVI*, p. 30.

⁷³ *An Account*, p. 45. For other statements linking patriotic duties with rights see also *ibid.*, pp. 28–29 and Place Coll., Set 16, v. 2, "Silk", f. 66 for an October 1826 address.

Macclesfield weavers, “his affection for his country becomes alienated, his patriotic spirit lost, and the country to which he belongs rendered incapable of retaining her proud pre-eminence in the scale of nations”.⁷⁴

The contributions of working people extended beyond military service in this discourse. Male silk weavers argued that it was the enormity of their combined efforts as gallant fighters abroad *and* as wealth producers at home, which provided opportunities for the great figures of the nation to raise high the Union Jack in exaltation. “What but the industry of the British labourer had realised the empire to the eminence upon which she now stood?” asked a Macclesfield weaver.⁷⁵ These sentiments were echoed by the Spitalfields union activist Robert Noquet in his arguments for wage protection:

[H]e thought that the operative classes were entitled to protection. The aristocracy, the commons, the landed and funded interests, were all protected, and none but the weakest were left unprotected [. . .]. He defied the world to produce such a class of men as English mechanics. On what part of the ocean, or in what embattled field, where man to man, arm to arm, and knee to knee, did they not prove themselves the bravest of the brave? And he would ask, was not their skill and industry at home only to be equalled by their bravery abroad? Did they not produce every thing that could give contentment, ease, and luxury to their more fortunate fellow-countrymen?⁷⁶

If, as Colley asserts, the currents of national identity flowed from the springs of war this identity was hardly still water. Hugh Cunningham has demonstrated how volatile the concept of patriotism was when contested between rulers and radicals.⁷⁷ Likewise, English male workers seized upon the notion of Englishness to validate their class claims for a secure livelihood. Through this discourse they could both argue for their claims as independent actors in the public sphere and their role as masculine champions of the indirect claims of their dependents as wealth producers.

Increasingly a collective identity was forged in *internationalism*, for workers found their industries pitted against those of continental (and

⁷⁴ *Trades' Newspaper*, 9 July 1826, p. 828.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1827, p. 313.

⁷⁶ *Voice of the People*, 29 January 1831.

⁷⁷ See Hugh Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism, 1750–1914”, *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), pp. 8–37. Though he disagrees with some of Cunningham’s analysis Miles Taylor, in his analysis of the changing image of John Bull, comes to conclusions which similarly support my argument. He maintains that, “[. . .] in order to understand the transformation of patriotism we need to analyze those political arguments or contexts of which patriotism was a component part, rather than focus our attention on the historical origins of those phenomena – such as race and nationalism – with which patriotism has become inextricably associated in the twentieth century”. See Miles Taylor, “John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712–1929”. *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), p. 126. For the silk weavers patriotism was not an unconditional devotion to King and state, but predicated on the protection that power provided the poor.

in the case of the silk weavers even Asian) competitors. “The nineteenth-century world economy”, Hobsbawm reminds us, “was *international* rather than cosmopolitan.”⁷⁸ For advocates of political economy internationalism was connected with the mutual benefits of free trade, as increased commerce fueled ever-expansive and more efficient uses of labor and capital.⁷⁹ But from the perspective of working people subject to the increasing immiseration of open markets, an international orientation served to differentiate themselves as Britons and freemen from the other workers and their oppressive conditions abroad. The silk weavers of Manchester, picking up on the theme that British capital had no peers, structured their collective identity as English workers in opposition to the weavers in Lyon who robbed them of employment.⁸⁰ “We wish to know, how the French Artisan can produce fabrics which the English cannot Equal. Are we inferior to the French in practical skill, or do we rank lower in the scale of intellect? The very idea is preposterous and ought to be scouted. We say, and we say it confidently, that British artisans, are equal to those of any country in the world.”⁸¹

Beyond military battles economic competition served to define membership in the nation and its privileges by highlighting the debasement of *other* peoples in *other* nations at the hands of the tyrants and oppressors. The silk weavers and other workers thus defined their citizenship rights *as opposed to* their absence in other countries, legitimating them with the latent ethnocentrism of popular Constitutionalism. As “Silurus” argued in a debate with Place on wage protection: “Restrictive laws also were judiciously and beneficially enacted, to give the *home labourer the whole benefit of his native markets*, and which was nothing more than his *indisputable birthright* [. . .] petition the legislature incessantly to *protect* you from the consequences of admitting the labour of *slaves* into competition with the necessarily and justly higher rated labour

⁷⁸ See Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 25. Barbalet perceptively observes that “Another important although frequently ignored factor in any account of the expansion of national citizenship is the condition of the international order”: Barbalet, *Citizenship*, p. 35. He emphasizes that the international as a realm of threat to national rulers usually serves as a trigger for repression, though it can lead to an inclusive reformism and the extension of rights.

⁷⁹ See for example Huskisson’s speech during a debate on renewing protection in 1826, *Hansard’s*, New Series, 14 (1826), c. 763–808.

⁸⁰ Free trade advocates in the silk trade debates often confidently asserted that British capital, if unfettered in the world market, would triumph over its competitors. Typical is the sentiment of Charles Grant, vice-president of the Board of Trade, who declared in an 1826 Commons debate that “The superior capital of this country would sure to be victorious, under circumstances equally advantageous”, *Hansard’s*, New Series, 14 (1826), c. 845. That this was a developing bourgeois nationalism can be seen in the glossing of the tension between the inherent superiority of the British and the supposed blindness of markets to national origin.

⁸¹ *Trades’ Newspaper*, 2 April 1826. See also J. Pymot, *Strictures on the Wisdom and Policy of the Present Measures Relative to the Importation of Silk* (Macclesfield, 1826), p. 7.

of *freemen*. Petition for this as your indisputable right as Englishmen, as Britons [. . .].”⁸²

In the battles for wage protection male silk weavers thus asserted congruent class claims to a bundle of rights as workers, and national claims as Britons. Equally important, however, was the manner in which their claims as male heads of households explicitly defined the masculine bounds of citizenship. Recent writers such as Sonya Rose and Anna Clark have demonstrated how both the rise of paternalistic labor practices and the contentious class battles over the New Poor Laws, the Factory Acts and the Charter partly molded an ideology of separate spheres.⁸³ These struggles in the 1830s and 1840s served as the terrain for solidifying discourses and practices of masculine control and feminine quiescence among working people. In the case of the silk weavers we can see how earlier campaigns such as those for wage protection laid the foundations for the exclusion of women from later battles over citizenship rights. It is important to recall that under an extension of the Spitalfields Acts in 1811 women were accorded the same privileges of wage protection as their male counterparts, and thus had some *prima facie* legal claim to equal status *as workers*.⁸⁴ However, with the shift in claims-making to arguments concerning the rights of property-holders and the privileges

⁸² *Trades' Newspaper*, 12 February 1826, p. 486, emphasis in the original. In a recent essay Jurgen Habermas argues that inclusive citizenship claims defined by nationalism stand in tension with the liberal social-contract ontology of the citizen as external to the state: see Jurgen Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity”, in van Steenberg, *The Condition of Citizenship*, pp. 25–26. While this contradiction may predominate in the annals of theoretical political debate, the case of the weavers’ claims-making suggests that the relationship between nationalist and social-contract discourses is more historically mutable and based in contemporary social conflicts.

⁸³ See Sonya O. Rose, “‘Gender at Work’: Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism”, *History Workshop*, 21 (1986), pp. 113–131, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), and “Gender and Labour History: The Nineteenth-Century Legacy”, in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *The End of Labour History? (International Review of Social History, 38 (1993), Supplement)*, pp. 145–162; Anna Clark, “The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s”, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 62–88, and *Struggle for the Breeches*; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1983). For additional work on masculinity and factory work see Mary Freifeld, “Technological Change and the Self-Acting Mule: a Study of Skill and the Sexual Division of Labour”, *Social History*, 11 (1986), pp. 319–343; Carol E. Morgan, “Women, Work and Consciousness in the Mid-nineteenth-century English Cotton Industry”, *Social History*, 17 (1992), pp. 23–41; and Marianna Valverde, “‘Giving the Female a Domestic Turn’: The Social, Legal and Moral Regulation of Women’s Work in British Cotton Mills, 1820–150”, *Journal of Social History*, 21 (1988), pp. 619–634. For material on the Factory Acts see Robert Gray, “Factory Legislation and the Gendering of Jobs in the North of England, 1830–1860”, *Gender and History*, 5 (1993), pp. 56–80; and on skill and masculinity see Keith McClelland, “Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the ‘Representative Artisan’ in Britain, 1850–1915”, *Gender and History*, 1 (1989), pp. 164–177.

⁸⁴ See Clapham, “The Spitalfields Acts”, p. 462.

due national defenders, definitions of citizenship rights shifted further away from the tenuous grasp of women. Working men's struggles with capitalists and state proponents of political economy rebounded in the politics of succeeding decades by laying some new foundations for women's marginality. Both Joyce and Colley demonstrate that women were precluded from citizenship, but their dismissal of class leaves them unable to appreciate how class struggle intertwined with this gendered division.

These male claims to rights could be coupled with patriarchal images of the male breadwinner, which during the campaigns for wage protection served as a moral buttress. As Anna Clark notes for the Chartist period working people were able to twist the declarations of an Evangelical bourgeoisie into arguments for a living wage, using religion as a foil against political economy.⁸⁵ The male weavers of Macclesfield, for example, declared to parliament that the man's "industry which should promote the welfare of his family, ultimately hastens to its ruin [. . .], his family reduced to wretchedness and – his strength and constitution impaired by his exertions, he beholds his helpless family bereft of their natural protector [. . .]. Our only desire is to live by our labour and support our own families by our industry."⁸⁶ These constructions of the male breadwinner were captured in the protest songs of the weavers such as *The Weavers Address*, in which they lament,

It is not Spitalfields alone, but the country all through,
In Coventry and Manchester there's but little work to do,
What few their [sic] is employed their wages run so low,
They can't maintain their families their hearts are full of woe.⁸⁷

The gendering in political economy discourse thus-called forth an explicitly configured masculine discursive response by male workers that paralleled the implicit presumptions of masculine independence imbedded in liberal social-contract theory. Class struggle was a catalyst in solidifying a model in which men were the active claimants of citizenship

⁸⁵ Clark, "The Rhetoric", p. 83. As Barbara Taylor and Dorothy Thompson argue, this discourse of domesticity was not simply passively accepted by working-class women, but was actively negotiated to find avenues of participation among increasingly narrowed options: see Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 80–81, 112, and Dorothy Thompson, "Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: The Problem of Authority", in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 64–65. Deborah Valenze analyzes how the emergent discourse of middle-class domesticity opened working-class life to the prognostications of middle-class moralists and reformers: see Valenze, *First Industrial Woman*, pp. 141–154.

⁸⁶ *Trades' Newspaper*, 9 July 1826, pp. 828–829. For similar statements of the breadwinner role see *Trades' Free Press*, 2 July 1826 and 13 May 1827; *Weekly Free Press*, 3 May 1828. The Spitalfields weavers used this middle-class model of patriarchal authority in the household to contend that inadequate wages would lead to the moral collapse of the nation, see *Report Adopted at a General Meeting*, pp. 9–11.

⁸⁷ Place Coll., Set 16, v. 2, "Silk", f. 153.



Figure 1. The Spitalfields silk weaver as a respectable artisan

Source: Arthur Armitage, "The Spitalfields Weaver" (London, n.d.), Tower Hamlets Library, Local History Collection, L.P. 1644 680.2 (presumably from a popular magazine of the late 1820s or early 1830s)

rights on behalf of their household and women were the moral supporters of their efforts defined by their domestic responsibilities. This emergent model was to resound with significant consequences in subsequent decades.

CONCLUSION

"Call that an Englishman?", we fancy some compassionate reader exclaiming within himself, as he ponders the "picture of misery" in Figure 1. It must be acknowledged that "the Spitalfields Weaver is but a sorry representative of our national characteristics. The honest yeoman [. . .] might well regard with complacent distrust the claims of such a dwindled specimen of humanity to the honors, rights and privileges of a free-born Briton."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Arthur Armitage, "The Spitalfields Weaver" (n.d.), Tower Hamlets Library, Local History Collection, L.P. 1644 680.2 (n.d.), p. 265.

CROWN AND ANCHOR.

NOVEMBER 11, 1829.

SIR,

THE Committee of JOURNEYMEN WEAVERS, appointed on the 19th October last, venture to address you on behalf of their suffering Brother Tradesmen, who, owing to the low rate of Wages are utterly unable to get the common necessaries of life. They beg of you to consider the ruinous Reduction which has lately taken place, and humbly solicit you to meet the whole of the Manufacturers to agree to an Advance on the Price of Labour, which is admitted by every one as not sufficient; for after working hard for fourteen or sixteen hours per day, very many are compelled to hear their children cry for Bread, and have none to give them. The Trade hope you will take it into your serious consideration, and by a small Advance make many thousands comparatively happy. That we may meet with your consent, is the sincere wish of,

*2 Causes
Impoverishment of foreign field
Interference
To join with
of wages for working up
in 3 longish -*

SIR,

Your obedient Servants,



✓ JAMES WHITE,
✓ JOSEPH ROSTER,
✓ JAMES LAZARUS,
WILLIAM WARD,
JOSEPH JONES, } Committee

P. S. If the Manufacturers consent to make an Advance of Price, and let the Workmen have Money on account, the Journeymen will guarantee the Payment for any Piece which may be cut or embezzled by the Workmen, on the Prosecution of the Offenders, when found; and the Committee respectfully request you to send an Answer in writing, with any suggestions you may have to make, addressed to the COMMITTEE, *Crown and Anchor*, which will be thankfully received.


E. J. STEPHENS & SON, Printers, 61, Brick Lane, Spitalfields.

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Figure 2. A request for a piece rate increase submitted by the Spitalfields weavers to manufacturers after a violent spring strike of 1829

Source: Public Record Office (Kew Gardens), Home Office Papers, Series 40/24, f. 267.

Such was the judgment of a writer for the popular press in post-repeal London, but the Spitalfields weavers and their brethren around the country had strongly contrasting notions. Cobbett's strictures in the *Two Penny Trash* harmonized with everything they knew and believed of their place in the nation, as free-born Englishmen (despite appearances) and defenders of the empire. These claims of citizenship were partly articulated through a language of law and the popular Constitutionalism which was a mainstay of radical politics. Yet the silk weavers also staked a claim to government protection as members of the laboring classes, creators of all wealth whose rights claims held equal status to those lords of the land and loom. To argue that their language of citizenship


 DIAMANT & PERLE
 Loyalty with Union.
Rules and Orders
 To be Observed by all Trade Societies of **JOURNEYMEN SILK WEAVERS** that Join the General Trade
U N I O N.
 Instituted FEBRUARY 24th, 1824.

PREMABLE.
ANOTHER TRADESMEN,

ARTICLE I.

ARTICLE II.

ARTICLE III.

ARTICLE IV.

ARTICLE V.

ARTICLE VI.

ARTICLE VII.

ARTICLE VIII.

ARTICLE IX.

ARTICLE X.

ARTICLE XI.

ARTICLE XII.

ARTICLE XIII.

ARTICLE XIV.

ARTICLE XV.

ARTICLE XVI.

ARTICLE XVII.

ARTICLE XVIII.

ARTICLE XIX.

ARTICLE XX.

FLOWER POT. BENNY DO LAY, J. P. HARRIS WILLIAM HARRINGTON.	APRIL & CROWN. THOMAS DEERY, ANDREW HAY WILK, THOMAS CHAPMAN.	SPRINGING COCKS. CHARLES BRYNNE, WILLIAM HARRINGTON, JOSUPE CHAPMAN.	MALE SINGERS. WM. SWIN, JOSEPH BRYNNE, BERNARD BRYNNE.	SOAR LEAVES. SAMUEL DEWTE, WILLIAM GAVILE.
DOPE. THOMAS DEERY, WILLIAM DEWTE, BENNY CHAPMAN.	PHENIX. WILLIAM HARRINGTON, JOHN WILLIAMS, JOHN WILLIAMS.	REDS & QUEENS. BERNARD BRYNNE, SAMUEL FITZGER, JAMES BLACKBURN.	DOES OF BLOOMINGTOWN. THOMAS DEERY, EDWARD HARRINGTON, NATHAN MARRIAGE.	RAM & HAAPHEL. THOMAS DEERY, WILLIAM GAVILE.

JAMES CHAPMAN, Secy.
1824
U N I O N.

Figure 3. The rules and orders of a general trades union of Spitalfields silk weavers attempted during the repeal campaign Source: British Library, Manuscript Collections, Francis Place Papers, Add. MSS 27799

rights was simply one more strain of populism or part of a matrix of legal relations is to ignore their trenchant battles with free traders and the responses they forged within new idioms and languages to press their claims. Class language intertwined with a nascent nationalism, radical politics and a model of a male citizen and breadwinner, but it



[Pelham Street, Spitalfields.]

Figure 4. A street occupied by weavers in Spitalfields: distinctive attic windows mark the workshop areas

Source: Charles Knight (ed.), *London*, vol. 2 (London: Henry G. Bonn, 1851), p. 385

was neither crowded out nor obscured by these other bases for claims. The weavers recognized that with the rise of large manufacturers and the opening of the markets that the dynamics of their trade had dramatically and possibly irreparably changed, and their rights claims reflected this awareness. “You tell us, ‘it is in the interest of all manufacturers to get work done as cheap as possible’”, responded an activist weaver in a public letter to Joseph Hume. “It certainly is the present, temporary, private interest of each of them, to get work done cheaper than all the rest. It is this very interest meeting with too much power, in the hands of men who do not care what ruin they produce, which makes the

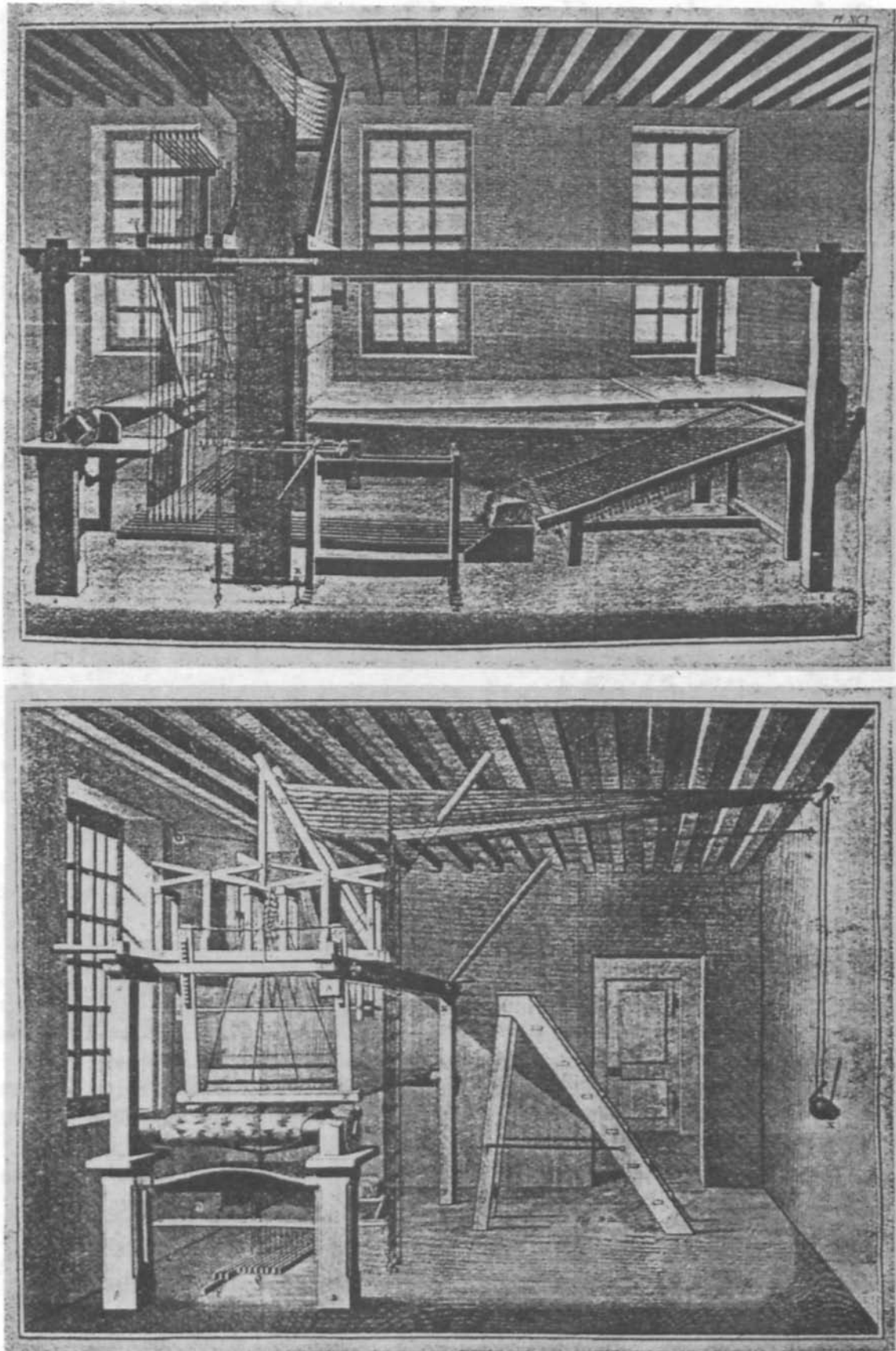


Figure 5. Looms used for the figured fabrics that represented the fine art of the trade
Source: Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry in the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Drane's, 1921), opposite p. 453

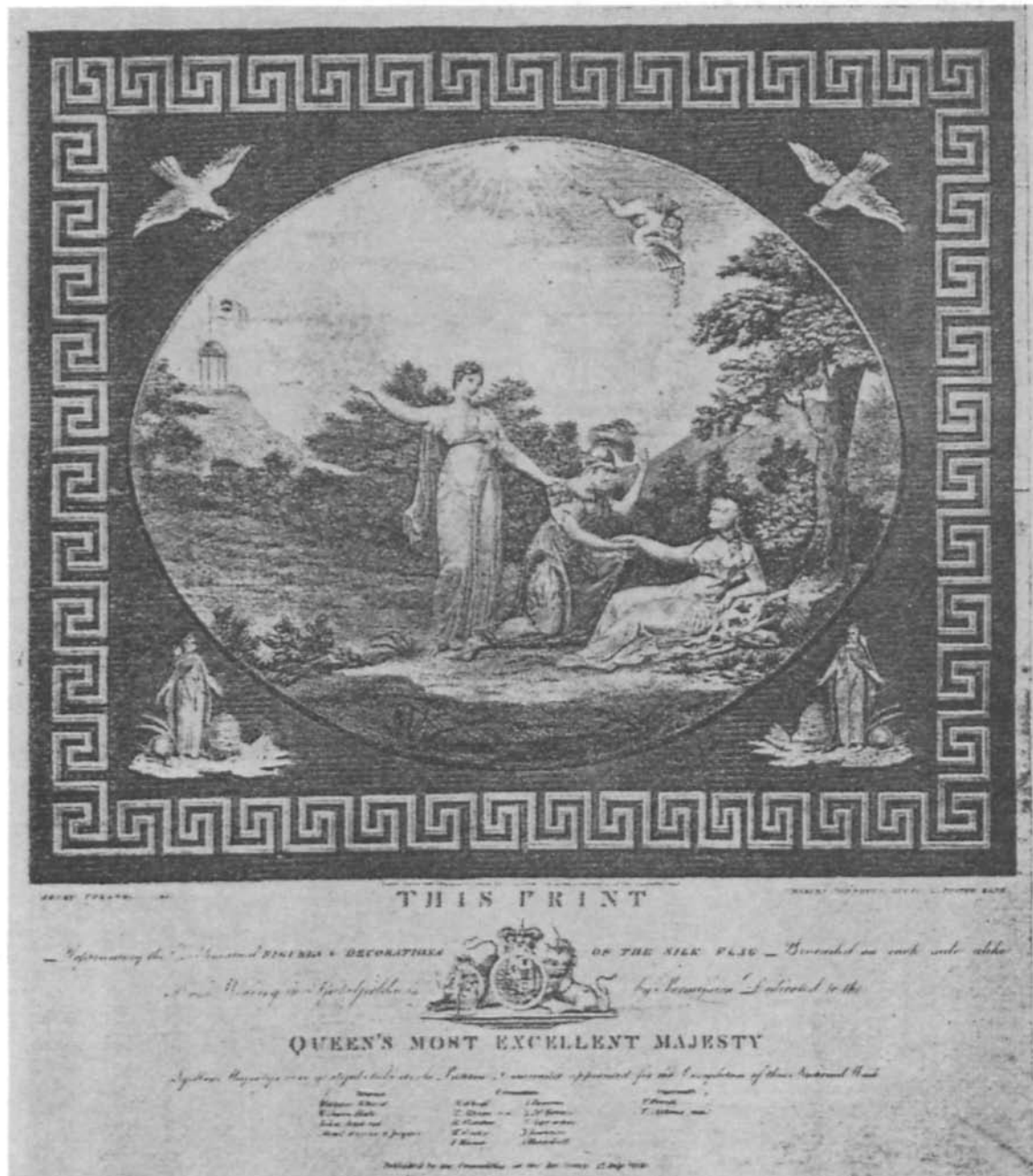


Figure 6. The design for a proposed flag for a Spitalfields union of 1810

Source: Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry in the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development* (London: Drane's, 1921), opposite p. 509

interference of the law necessary”.⁸⁹ Even in the face of recent revisionism it is not too much to read in these lines what Marshall saw decades ago: class dynamics lay behind citizenship claims. This is not the whole history, but it surely remains a vital part.

⁸⁹ Place Coll., Set. 16, v. 2, “Silk”, f. 18.