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THE LUDDITE RIOTS: CAUSES AND PARLIAMENTARY REACTION

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Part I: Three Revolutions

The Luddite rioting of late 1811 and 1812 in the textile manufacturing counties was perhaps the most significant domestic episode of the entire Napoleonic period in England.\(^1\) The full significance of the riots lies not in the amount of property damage done — the buildings burned, the expensive knitting frames destroyed — not even in the number of lives lost in violence and on the scaffold. Rather it lies in the recognition of the riots as a product of great economic, social and psychological forces. Therefore the aspect of the Luddite Riots that will concern us in this study is not so much the deeds of violence themselves — beyond an outline of the general direction they followed — but an examination of the tangled web of causes that induced such a social expression; and the reactions of those Englishmen in Parliament who had to take legislative action. Our task is to draw a picture of the problems and status of the English textile laborer at a critical point in the early developmental years of the machine age; and to attempt an evaluation of the attitudes, the "rationales", of the governing classes toward the new industrialism and the problems of labor.

In this study we shall use the name "Luddite Riots" in the widest possible sense to refer to that whole picture of domestic unrest
in the counties of Nottingham, Derby, Stafford, Cheshire, Lancaster, Leicester, and Yorkshire in 1811 and 1812. The Luddite rioting began in Nottingham on or about the 10th of November, 1811; and we shall find many specific reasons why that county was unsettled at the time. But there had been riots, in Nottingham and elsewhere, before 1811 — there had been frame-breakings and frame-breaking laws. The Luddite story must, therefore, begin with an attempt to fix the economic and social life of the textile counties in an historical perspective — a perspective which includes three fundamental changes: in industry, in agriculture, and in population. In this section in order to localize and personalize these great "revolutions" we shall relate them, whenever possible, to life in the county of Nottingham, a fairly typical textile county and the point of origin of the Luddite Riots.

Nottingham and the other textile manufacturing counties experienced in the 18th and early 19th centuries a dynamic disequilibrium as a result of a succession of inventions of such social import as to alter profoundly the old way of life. These inventions and their far-reaching effects we have come to call the Industrial Revolution.

In the textile industry the first of the inventions that heralded the eventual coming of the factory system, and the death of domestic or cottage industry, appeared in 1733 with the flying shuttle of John Kay. Kay's shuttle was the first major improvement in the old weaving loom in over a century, and it enabled wider cloth to be woven and speeded up the process. Weavers, however, instantly sensed that the shuttle would put many of them out of work. In 1753, Kay's own
home was sacked by weavers and the harassed inventor was forced to flee to France. Interestingly enough, manufacturers who liked the shuttle also united against Kay, on occasion, in protesting the collection of royalties for use of the invention. Despite opposition, however, the flying shuttle had come into general use in the Lancashire cotton industry by the early 1760s and to a lesser extent in all branches of the textile industry.

The reaction to John Kay's invention was not a new phenomenon in English history. Kay's unhappy career recalls the equally disastrous one of William Lee, who invented the original stocking frame in 1598. Lee, who lived near the town of Nottingham, was also forced to leave England. Fleeing to France he found weavers there quite as inhospitable as the English. And yet Lee's knitting frame, in the course of the 17th century, displaced hand knitting, and played a large part in the creation of that economic organization in which weavers rented knitting frames, secured their raw materials, and returned the finished product to "merchant-manufacturers" - the capitalists of the pre-factory era.

As Kay's shuttle won wide acceptance, an unbalance in the textile industry had unfortunate effects and seemed to cry out for redress. The shuttle enables weavers to work so much faster than spinners that a shortage of thread and unemployment among the weavers resulted. The 1760s, however, saw the invention of two machines that swung the unbalance in the other direction. By 1768, both the spinning jenny of James Hargreaves and the water frame of Richard Arkwright had been introduced.

Hargreaves's jenny spread rapidly, everywhere relegating the old spinning wheel to dusty attics. By 1788, ten years after Hargreaves'
death, there were 20,000 of his machines in England, the smallest of which could accomplish the work of half a dozen or more hand spinners. But the reception of Hargreaves and his machine was nearly as tempestuous as that given Kay. Hargreaves was driven from his native Lancashire when Blackburn workers broke into his house to wreck his jennies. After moving to Nottingham, where the textile industry was in dire straits because of the inability of spinners to keep pace with weavers, Hargreaves was faced by a combination of manufacturers who refused to pay him for the rights to use his invention; and the courts finally ruled his patent invalid.

It should be noted at this point that neither Kay's shuttle, nor Hargreaves' jenny took the weaving and spinning processes out of the cottages and put them into factories. These inventions merely increased the productive capacities of spinners and weavers, and even seemed to give the domestic system new life. With Richard Arkwright, however, came a radical departure from the domestic system. Arkwright's water-frame itself - so called to distinguish it from the jenny which was worked by hand - was not a great advance on an earlier spinning machine of John Wyatt and Lewis Paul in 1738. But Arkwright was an establisher of factories, and made spinning a factory task.

In 1768, Arkwright moved to Nottingham and erected a cotton spinning mill. The machines in this first mill were horse-powered, but later in his career Arkwright was to utilize the steam engine as motive power in a Nottingham factory. Arkwright factories appeared elsewhere in England. After securing the financial backing of two merchant capitalists, Need of Nottingham and Strutt of Derby, Arkwright erected
a large spinning mill at Cromford near Derby which utilized water power
to run the frames and was employing 300 workers by 1779. Several
Akwright factories were also established in Lancashire - the fast-growing
center of the cotton textile industry. The new era had begun for better
or for worse. But the onset of the factory system was not uncontested,
and Akwright - like the others - met opposition. Late in 1779, for
example, came a systematic attack on the new machines, especially
Akwright's carding and roving machines. During the rioting in Lancaster,
a mob attacked Akwright's largest factory at Birkacre near Chorley.
The description of the attack, we shall see, is the same as descriptions
of Luddite rioting in the same county some thirty years later: On the
4th of October, said one of the proprietors of the mill, "a most riotous
and outrageous mob assembled in the neighborhood -- and after breaking
down the doors of the buildings, they entered the rooms, destroyed most
of the machinery, and afterwards set fire to and consumed the whole
buildings."

With the advances in the spinning process after the contributions
of Hargreaves and Akwright, the weaver now lagged behind the spinner.
It remained for the French Revolutionary period to produce the two
inventions which finally transformed the textile industry, and restored
its technological balance - the inventions of Samuel Crompton and Edmund
Cartwright.

Crompton's spinning machine, the mule (invented sometime between
1774 - 79), combined the principles of the jenny and the water frame to
produce a strong, fine thread. Like the jenny, the mule was first made
small enough for use in cottages. As the century closed, however, the
mules were more and more collected into factories where the power was supplied by Watt's new steam engine — first used in a cotton mill in 1785.10 The mule became the last word in spinning machines. In 1812, before petitioning Parliament for a money grant in recognition of his contribution, Crompton surveyed the textile industry to describe the advance of his invention and noted that his mule was being used in hundreds of factories with a total of four or five million spindles.11

The jenny was gone, and with it the last traces of the cottage industry in the cotton spinning process — the first textile trade to adopt the factory system.

The disproportion between spinning and weaving reached a peak around the turn of the century. Fifteen years before, in 1785, Edmund Cartwright had patented his power loom, but the new weaving machine was slow coming into general use. Part of the delay was due to imperfections in the loom itself — imperfections which took several improvements to straighten out — but part of it was due to the opposition of the weavers. For the power loom, despite the apparent need to speed up the weaving process, was very unpopular. A factory containing 400 Cartwright power looms was burnt in 1792,12 and this was only one example of the early protest against the loom. By 1809, when Cartwright petitioned Parliament for a money grant, he could point out that his machine was extensively used in the county of Lancaster, less widely elsewhere.13

Power loom weaving had only begun its development in the first decade of the 19th century. The loom was still being attacked and destroyed by weavers during the Luddite Riots of 1811 — 12, and it had by no means transformed the woolen industry of Nottingham from the domestic to the factory stage by 1811. Only the theoretical technological problem
had been solved.

For nearly a century, then, before the time of the Luddite Riots, the textile industry had seen one revolutionary change after another. Those changes, we have seen, were not accomplished without arousing opposition. And if the life of the inventor, machine, or factory owner was not always easy, neither was the life of the weaver or spinner who suffered from altered conditions in industry. Hammond has stated the problem well: "Men and women who see their livelihood taken from them by some new invention can hardly be expected to grow enthusiastic over the public benefits of inventive genius. A larger view and a vivid imagination may teach them that the loss to their particular occupation may be temporary only; but then, as it has been remarked, men's life is temporary also." 14

The use of the new machinery and the adoption of the factory system was a gradual process taking place first in the cotton industry, which was new, unhindered by traditional practices, and concentrated (largely in Lancashire). The old woolen industry was scattered throughout many towns and villages in several counties, and was still provincial and local at the end of the 18th century. 15 In 1803, for example, over 90% of a cloth woven in the West Riding of Yorkshire (the area of greatest factory concentration in the woolen industry) was produced not by the factories but by master weavers in the workshops. 16 In Nottingham the percentage was even higher and remained so throughout the Napoleonic period.

Looking at the county of Nottingham in particular, the picture around 1811 was one of diversified industrial life in various stages of
development. The cotton spinning industry had adopted the factory system, and there were numerous cotton mills in the county. At Mansfield one mill was employing 160 hands by 1801, and another mill in the town of Nottingham employed 300 including women and children. Lace-making, after slight adaptations in the stocking frame had made it suitable for lace manufacture, was also an important industry. In 1810, 15,000 men, women, and children were employed in the manufacture of point-net lace alone. Of course, the woolen industry remained the staple Nottingham trade, and although we have noted that this woolen industry was still largely "domestic" in 1811, it should be emphasized that by domestic is not meant an industry made up of independent artisans in the traditional and romanticized sense. "The domestic worker was in most cases virtually a piece-working wage earner, not always owning his own tools - for the more expensive implements such as knitting frames were often rented from capitalist owners." Paralleling the Industrial Revolution throughout the years we have surveyed was the great enclosure movement in agriculture - a movement which had been in process much longer than the industrial transformation. The years between 1759 and 1800 saw 112,880 acres enclosed in Nottingham alone; 18,596 more between 1802 and 1826. At an ever increasing rate the unenclosed land - the land of the common and open fields - became enclosed property.

Under the impetus of the new ideas of agricultural efficiency and more scientific farming methods, and to increase their dwindling personal wealth, the landed nobility began experimenting on their property.
A milestone in the formulation of the new agricultural ideas was the publication, in 1731, of Jethro Tull's *Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation*. In the interests of efficiency and increased production the open field system could not be sustained by the aristocracy.

As a result of the enclosures, small freeholders and cottagers lost their land and were evicted from the commons. Consequently many either fell into the ranks of the agricultural laborers or were left unemployed. "The whole trend of the times," says the Nottingham County History, "was towards the elimination of the small tenant and the small freeholder, while the agricultural laborer - suffered from the diminution in the number of his employers and the necessity of his services." Goldsmith's "deserted village" was by no means an isolated phenomenon as the depopulation of many rural villages became a fact.

For many of the dispossessed, manufacturing proved the only recourse. The use of the new machines of Hargreaves, Arkwright, and Crompton, especially in cotton spinning, drew many people from the countryside to the growing factory areas. In Nottingham it was the woolen industry that absorbed large numbers of those whose sole occupation had formerly been the land, or with whom weaving had been only a second occupation.

A study of the enclosure movement reveals that this revolution, like the revolution in industry, was not a peaceful one. Villagers often protested against the drastic changes. These protests were sometimes in the form of petitions, sometimes in the form of demonstrations and riots. After 1760, when the enclosures were stepped up, the rioting also increased.
The fact is clear that in agriculture as in industry, in the rural cottages as in the towns, the eighty years or more preceding the Luddite Riots had been unsettled, uncertain years in the lives of the lower classes.

The list of changes preceding the time of the Luddite Riots must include still another of fundamental importance - the change in population itself. At the time of the Revolution of 1688 the population of England was estimated at five and a half million; according to the census of 1801, the population was nearly 8,900,000 - an increase of some 3.4 millions in slightly more than a century. However, between 1601 and 1811 alone the population showed an accelerated growth of 1.3 millions making the total over ten million at the latter date. The population of England was beginning to boom: in ten years it had increased more than it had throughout the entire 17th century. Actually the great increase began in the first half of the 18th century, became even more noticeable in the second half, and was characteristic of the 19th century.

What were the reasons for this growth, and what is its significance for our study? Population studies reveal that the transition from a relatively stable agricultural economy where birth and death rates are fairly constant to an increasingly urban - industrial society is accompanied by an upsurge in population. The reasons for the growth cannot be found in the birthrate; concentration in towns does not necessarily mean an increase in the birth rate. As a matter of fact, the English birth rate probably fell during the period of increasing
population growth from 1760 - 1815. The evidence does point, however, to a falling death rate in the same period, and especially a decrease in infant mortality. The steady improvement of town sanitation and public health - especially in the development of a purer urban water supply - was certainly a major factor in the declining death rate. If the 18th and early 19th century towns, the new industrial centers, seem squalid and disgusting (as indeed they were), they were still improved in many ways over the towns of the Middle Ages. Significant advances were made in medicine, also: scientific midwifery appeared, and the vaccination came into ever wider use after 1800. "The factory system," one social historian remarks, "may have stunted and maimed its victims but it did not kill men off nearly fast enough to offset the sharp decline in infant and child mortality." 

The county of Nottingham shows a population increase similar to that of the kingdom as a whole. From 140,000 in 1801 a population increase of nearly 16% to 162,000 in 1811 is recorded. The full significance of this population growth as a factor in lower class unrest which accompanied the industrial and agricultural changes, especially in the Napoleonic Period, will be better appreciated later. It is enough to point out that in time of industrial dislocation, scarcity of work, and food shortage, an ever increasing number of mouths to feed and hands to keep working is a social problem of the first magnitude and a contributor to general unsettlement.
Part II: The Causes of the Luddite Riots

When the poet Thomas Hardy looked back on the continent of Europe in the period of the Napoleonic wars and noted in his poem, The Dynasts, how men were moved like puppets by an unsympathetic imminent will, it was unfortunate that he did not focus his attention for a while on the textile counties of England. Nottingham, for example, in 1811 was all the great pessimist could have asked for. There were men sorely oppressed by conditions over which they had no control and little understanding. The onset of actual rioting in early November 1811, simply meant that the limit of tolerance had been reached; or as Charlotte Bronte describes it: "Distress reached its climax. Endurance, overgoaded, stretched the hand of fraternity to sedition."

The Gentleman's magazine pictures the beginning of the riots - the "outrages of the weavers" - in the following manner:

For some time past, the wholesale hosiers who have stocking weaving establishments at Nottingham have been obliged to curtail their hands, and the journeymen were reduced almost to a state of starvation. They murmured, but were pacified by representations that importations of silk would be allowed to give them employment. Their riotous spirit was, however, early roused a second time by the trade having brought into use a certain wide frame for the manufacture of stocking, etc. by which was produced a considerable saving in manual labor, tending further to decrease the number of hands. On Sunday the 10th (of November) a number of weavers assembled in the vicinity of Nottingham and forcibly entered the houses of such persons as used the frames...

The Luddite Riots spread quickly in area and scope. The weavers, and other aroused citizens, were soon attacking millers and corn dealers
in protest against the high price of bread. Haystacks and barns were set afire. By December the rioting had spilled over into the neighboring counties of Derby and Leicester. Of the latter county, the alarmed Gentleman's Magazine reports that the "evil disposed rioters," not content with stocking frames and corn dealers, broke into a temple housing a statue of Venus and destroyed the monument. 3

Local authorities from the start were unable to deal with the disturbances and the government was forced to dispatch troops. Home Secretary, Richard Ryder announced that between the 14th of November and the 9th of December some 900 cavalry and a thousand infantrymen were sent into Nottingham, "a larger force than had ever been found necessary in any period of our history to be employed in the quelling of any local disturbance." 4 Parliament debated and made frame-breaking a capital offense in March of 1812.

But the rioting spread further: into the populous Lancashire and Cheshire cotton manufacturing areas, and into the woolen clothing industry of the West Riding in Yorkshire. The uprisings in Lancashire and Yorkshire were perhaps more serious than those in Nottingham. The Lancashire machine-wreckers concentrated on the new power looms, and in Yorkshire the object was often the shearing machines which had thrown many wool cutters out of work. 5 There were numerous violent deaths in these areas, and executions under the new frame-breaking law (eight Luddites were executed at Manchester, fourteen more in Yorkshire). 6 In many instances food riots occurred either in connection with the machine-breaking and factory raiding, or by themselves in various parts of the kingdom. 7
Two accounts of the Luddite activity in the Lancashire-Cheshire-Yorkshire area taken from Cobbett's *Political Register* may help to recreate the atmosphere of the more serious riots.

A dispatch from Leeds on April 13, 1812, tells of an attack on a Cartwright mill at Rawfolds after midnight on Saturday night: "The mill was attacked by Luddites . . . and the windows and the door of the mill were assailed by a furious mob, who commenced their assault by the firing of arms and the beating of hammers and hatchets. The guard of the mill instantly repelled the assault by a steady, firm, and well-directed discharge of musketry from within." The attack described cost the lives of four "deluded wretches." Rioters later threatened the life of Cartwright himself.

The next day a report from Chester announced: "We are threatened with scenes of riots and disorder, occasioned by the distress experienced among the lower orders from want of employment and high price of provisions. Two attempts have lately been made in Stockport, one in Spencer and Company's in Hillgate . . . a weaving factory of vast extent where the work is done wholly by children. Part of a window was taken out and several torches put in . . . In Stockport threatening letters have been sent to people signed 'Ned Ludd.' On Saturday night a ball was fired at the proprietor of a factory where the looms were worked by power."

Contemporary observers were always impressed by the organization of the Luddites and the strictness with which they observed absolute secrecy even under duress to avoid incrimination of one another. The *Nottingham County History* describes the Luddites in that county as
organized into four gangs and directed by a committee which appointed men
to destroy frames.9 Outside of Nottingham the Luddite Riots often seemed
more popular in character, but the weight of critical opinion is against
the idea of a mass rising.

They (the Luddite Riots) were not a 'mass movement' in the modern sense - that is the Luddites did not constitute the bulk of the population in the counties (Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, and Lancashire) where they mainly operated. They were a picked band of daring and desperate men who received the passive support and countenance of their fellow workers.10

The passive support of the majority, however, made capture and convictions difficult and kept alive fears of a general revolt - a fear not without some justification. Some Lancashire manufacturers believed a general rising would come on May 1, 1812 (of all days!), and prepared to meet an emergency which never materialized.11 And the careful Napoleonic historian J. H. Rose speaks of the threat of civil war as looming large in the peak months of Luddite activity during 1811 - 12.12

At the same time the organization of the Luddites, and the secrecy which their position forced upon the, gave rise to cries of treason and subversive activity, of "Jacobinism." The Annual Register told of "deep and dangerous" designs and "levelling notions" among the Luddite leaders.13 The House of Lords committee investigating the disturbances referred to the views of some of the persons involved in the Luddite Riots as extending to "revolutionary measures of the most dangerous description."14

For several months the northern counties continued to be the scenes of innumerable outbreaks of violence, demonstrations, or seemingly
pointless milling about by crowds of workers. Of the demonstrations surely one of the more humorous took place early in 1812 when a mob paraded through the town of Nottingham behind too poor women elaborately costumed as "Madam and Lady Ludd." The restless, dissatisfied, and unruly mob was for many months a most important domestic fact of English life.

The peak period of Luddite activity, late 1811 through the summer of 1812, was followed by intermittent outbreaks - food riots and frame-breakings - continuing on beyond the end of the war with France. By the end of 1812, however, the Annual Register could report that tranquillity was restored in most of the troubled areas, but added that it was not yet safe to withdraw "the strong hand of coercion." Thus did the Luddite Riots run their course.

What, then, were the causes of the outbreak of those violent acts which so alarmed Englishmen of the day. We have already noted the background of economic and social disequilibrium as a result of the progress of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions and the rapidly increasing population. Into this picture of general unsettlement must be thrust the complication of the long war with France (1793 - 1815). We shall see how the war, in many important respects, had little to do with contributing to the unrest of the time; but we shall also see how it made other problems acute and greatly increased the severity of conditions.

Two of the most obvious causes of unrest in 1811 - the high grain price, and depression in industry - were both traceable in large measure to the war. That the grain shortage and high price of provisions (especially
of bread, the great staple of the poor) played a large part in the Luddite Riots in undeniable. As a matter of fact, food, or food price riots, were a not uncommon phenomenon throughout the Napoleonic period in England. Bread riots are recorded in Nottingham in 1795, in 1800, and were one aspect of the Luddite protest of 1811 – 12.17

The mere statistical listing of yearly shillings per quarter price averages of wheat in wartime England provides a significant key to the understanding of economic and social conditions, and a partial explanation of the Luddite Riots.18 An examination of the wheat price table on page 44 shows clearly the instability of the price of grain. The chart reveals sharp peaks reaching hitherto unattained heights and troughs which at their lowest do not reach the pre-war level. The years of extremely high grain prices are 1795, 1799 – 1801, 1804, and 1809 – 12. The two periods, 1799 – 1801 and 1809 – 12, when the shortage was particularly acute and prices disturbingly high over long periods of time, may properly be called "grain crises." We shall see how a combination of factors made the year 1811 perhaps the most critical of all.

England in the Napoleonic Period was still able, despite population growth, to supply most of its grain needs by home production. In years of good harvest, with the aid of enclosures, utilization of waste-land, and application of new agricultural methods, the population of England could provide itself with an estimated 95% of its grain.19 In times of poor harvest, of course, this percentage fell and England was forced to depend to a much greater extent on imported grain. The primary foreign source of grain for the British at this time (before the vast wheat fields of Canada and the U. S. were available to England) was the Baltic area –
Russia, Prussia, Denmark and Sweden. In view of these facts of economic necessity, the series of bad harvests which periodically plagued England in the war period - especially in 1795, 1800, and 1811 - must share responsibility with the war itself for the provisions troubles. Bad harvests cut the domestic crop and the war disrupted importation of grain at a time when any tempering with ordinary trade meant a threat of starvation at home.

A comprehensive analysis of any over-all increase in the cost of living in wartime England is beyond the scope of this thesis; but a general price rise - especially in provisions - is noted on all the tables and graphs. Rostow, in discussing the grain crisis of 1795, speaks of such a general increase in the cost of living: "Although money wages rose, they rose 'in a very inadequate proportion to the increased price of the necessaries of life'. There was widespread evidence of physical distress . . ."20 Perhaps the bread riots themselves are sufficient evidence of such an increase in price beyond the means of the laborer to pay, without the necessity of elaborate statistical comparisons.

The descriptions of bread riots and mass meetings, of petitions and measures dealing with the crisis followed a similar pattern throughout the wartime period. In describing the outbreak of rioting in Nottingham, Coventry, and several other localities in April, 1795, the Gentleman's Magazine cites one mob, for example, as breaking into butchers' and bakers' shops and demanding meat at 4d. a pound and bread at 6d. a quartern loaf.21 Later in the same year a mob is reported in London which was only dispersed when bread was distributed.22
Government action in 1795 also set a precedent for future grain shortages. The prohibition on distillation from grain (1795 - 6) was repeated in 1800 - 01, and 1808 -12. Resolutions urging frugality in the use of bread, and the offering of bounties for importation of foreign grain were also repeated.

The grain shortage was not as severe, and disturbances not so unsettling in 1795 as in later years; but this first wartime crisis is significant because of its influence on the thinking of men like Thomas Paine, Malthus, and Edmund Burke. The latter's *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, written in 1795, will be considered later when the Parliamentary reaction is discussed.

It is in the two long grain crisis periods, however, that the double effect of war and bad harvest can be seen most clearly as contributing to the misery of the laboring classes - many of whom had only recently left rural occupations for full time jobs in the growing textile industry. In the year 1800, the Armed Neutrality of the North, which cut off the Eastern European grain lands from England, and a bad home harvest combined to drive wheat prices to an all-time high. In many parts of England - including London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Norwich, Oxford, and Plymouth - riots in protest against the high price of provisions and the scarcity of bread interrupted markets. Angry crowds forced farmers and bakers to sell their foodstuffs at a lower price or face destruction of their shops or their produce. In London incendiary handbills boldly asked:23
How long will ye quietly and cowardly suffer yourselves to be imposed upon and half starved by a set of mercenary slaves and government hirelings? Can you still suffer them to proceed in their extensive monopolies while your children are crying for bread? No! Let them exist not a day longer. We are the sovereignty; rise then from your lethargy.

Speculators ("Forestallers") who attempted to anticipate the market by purchasing grain in advance in order to raise the price, or who held off their grain waiting for higher prices, often fared ill at the hands of inflamed mobs. It was impossible, said John Ashton, to take up a newspaper of the time and not find mention of a food riot. 24

Parliament was flooded with petitions crying for alleviation of distress. The Committee on the High Price of Provisions presented six reports in 1800, and seven in 1801; and debated the problem on the floor of both houses. 25 Again lavish bounties were offered to secure foreign wheat, oats and rye, 26 the distilleries stopped using grain, and George III attempted to set a frugal example by ordering that only stale bread should be served on the royal table. 27

The grain crisis was not eased until late in 1801. In March of that year the pro-Napoleon Czar Paul was assassinated and his successor Alexander proved more favorable to the English. In April, Admiral Nelson forced Denmark to withdraw from the northern league, thus completing the break-up of the Armed Neutrality. The opening of the Baltic and a better home harvest eased the tense domestic situation. By the end of 1801 the price of wheat, according to the Winchester College tables, had dropped to 68 shillings per quarter after a high of 172 shillings per quarter in the fall of 1800. 28
The shortages and high prices returned with a vengeance, however, in 1809. After the treaty of Tilsit (July, 1807) Prussia and Russia were forced to do the bidding of Napoleon. Part of the humiliation of Frederick William was his agreement to close his ports to the English.29

The year 1809 saw another lean harvest in England, and Sweden joined the Continental System. Thus with the harvest bad and the grain ports of Riga and Danzig closed, widespread famine in England seemed not an impossibility. Rose maintains that famine in 1809 and 1810 was only averted because Napoleon, clinging to the mercantile faith, confiscated British exports to the continent wherever he could find them, but at the same time he allowed many commodities— including wheat— to leave the ports of France and Italy for England.30

Several factors combined to make the years 1811-12 the most critical "grain years" of the Napoleonic era. The winter of 1810-11 proved very harsh and the summer dry making poor harvests general throughout Europe. "In some parts of England it was said to be the worst (harvest) since 1800 with wheat little more than half the average crop."31 Napoleon was forced to tighten up on grain exporting, for the continent, too, needed wheat. Also, Napoleon was assembling his vast army for the Russian campaign (made inevitable by Czar Alexander's break with the Continental System on the last day of 1810), and he needed provisions. The second great grain crisis of the 19th century in England did not ease until the Grand Army was routed and forced into disastrous retreat from Russia, which led to the opening of the granaries of Eastern Europe to English shipping.32 A good harvest in 1813 still further brightened the picture and prices fell once more.
It was during the months of scarcity and high prices that the Luddite Riots broke out and were most serious. The violent reaction against high provisions prices was almost as characteristic of the Luddite Riots as "machine-breaking." Very early the Nottingham rioters were heard swearing vengeance "against millers, corndealers, and all others concerned in raising the price of bread;"* With trade depressed, the unemployed laborer often could not afford the barest food necessities, and the Gentleman's Magazine once referred to journeymen laid off work as "reduced almost to a state of starvation."*4

Wherever the Luddite rioting spread in 1811 -12, food riots remained a characteristic of the protest. A report from Bacclesfield in April, 1812, graphically tells of an attack on a local merchant, one Daniel Dawson.*5 The mob assembled outside of town and when sufficient force was mustered they entered the market place. "They proceeded to inquire how potatoes sold, and not approving the price, began to throw them about the streets . . . (then) the whole body set forward to the premises of Mr. Rowson on Mill Street. Here they demolished all the windows, broke the door of the shop, and rolled the cheeses and other articles through the streets."

One fact is clear: any correct assessment of the true causes of the Luddite Riots would have to take into account the reality of human hunger. "Their sight," said Charlotte Bronte of the distressed rioters, "was dim with famine; and for a morsel of meat they would have sold their birthright."*6
It was a cruel jest of fate that made the second grain crisis coincide with a period of industrial and commercial dislocation in many ways unparalleled in English history. Unemployment and falling wages at a time when the harvest was bad and bread was selling at a near famine price made desperate men out of men who might otherwise have endured in silence.

The trade depression was largely due to the economic phase of the war: the war of Napoleonic Decrees, and English Orders in Council. At the peak of his power following the treaty of Tilsit, Napoleon once again faced England alone, and determined to "conquer the sea by the land." So began the rigorous application of the "Continental System." In November, 1806, Napoleon had issued his Berlin Decree declaring the British Isles under blockade and forbidding trade to or from Great Britain. Although Napoleon could not, with his inadequate navy, blockade Britain effectively, he could prevent shipping from entering or leaving the continental ports.

The treaty of Tilsit, itself, had given Napoleon great power to implement his decree. Under provisions of the treaty both Prussia and Russia agreed to close their ports to England. Russia declared war on England on November 8, 1807. With Sweden and Denmark under the system, and Etruria, the Papal States, Bremen, and Hamburg under Napoleon's "protection," the continent was — with the exception of Portugal — sealed, in theory, against British goods and forbidden to export to England.37

All this time, however, the English had not been idle. As early as 1803 the British government had declared the coast of Europe blockaded from the Elbe to the Weser. In May of 1806, an Order in Council placed the entire North Sea and Channel coasts of the continent under blockade.38
Following the Berlin Decree, the Orders in Council of January 7, 1807 prohibited even neutral trade between ports under French control or under the control of France's allies. Then, stung by the Russian declaration of war, the British government issued, on November 11, 1807, new orders in council: the famous "November Orders" which were to cause so much debate in Parliament and such a loud reaction from English laborers and manufacturers alike.

According to the November Orders all ports of France, or any place else where British trade was excluded, were to be considered under blockade. Exceptions permitted neutral trade to reach the continent by stopping enroute at an English port. The significance of the Orders was far-reaching:

It was hoped to make England the center of neutral commerce. There was to be "no trade except through Great Britain." Even from these exceptions were excluded most articles of foreign manufacture or cultivation. These articles could be "re-reported" only by special license from the British government. This gave rise to an extensive traffic in licensed goods. But since English goods did not have to be licensed, wherever English manufacturers could supply the continental demand, English goods were likely to get the preference. Thus the Orders in Council were a scheme not alone of retaliation against the Continental System, but likewise an endeavor to force English goods upon the continental market in so far as any goods at all might be admitted.

When Napoleon countered the November Orders with his Milan Decree (Dec. 17, 1807) which made subject to seizure any ship submitting to British search or stopping at the British Isles, neutrals — notably the United States — had to choose between obeying British Orders or French Decrees. Either choice was perilous.
The American government's various attempts to deal with the dilemma are well known. From late 1807 until March 1809, the Embargo Act cut out all trade with the belligerents. After the repeal of the Embargo, the Non-Intercourse Act still prevented American trade with England and France, with the provision that trade should be renewed with either belligerent that revoked its decrees. In May 1810, the so-called Macon Bill No. 2 renewed trade with the world with the stipulation that trade should be closed to either England or France if the other would call off its decrees. Napoleon quickly announced that his decrees would no longer be in effect after November 1, 1810, if the United States could force England to respect her neutral trading rights. Napoleon's ruse worked, and in February 1811, Congress renewed non-intercourse with Great Britain.

On June 19th of the following year America entered the war against England. Throughout the period 1807 - 12, their English commercial relations with the United States were seriously hurt; and the results of the loss of the American trade had far-reaching implications in English domestic life.

English laborers and manufacturers alike were not slow to perceive the dire predicament in which the loss of the American market would leave them. As early as March of 1808, petitions from London and Liverpool merchants and manufacturers supported their pleas for repeal of the Orders in Council with cogent arguments: 40
The annual value of British manufactures exported to the United States of America exceeds 10 millions sterling and ... as our consumption of produce of that country falls far short of that amount, the only means of paying us must arise from the consumption of the produce of America in other countries, which the operations of the Orders in Council must interrupt, and in most cases totally destroy ... 

By the destruction of the neutrality of the only remaining neutral state, all possibility of intercourse with the rest of the world being removed, trade cannot possibly be benefitted but must necessarily be annihilated.

The petitioners exaggerated very little. The "Textile Counties" were extremely susceptible to the consequences of commercial war. Even without decrees and Orders in Council, the textile industry was unsettled because of the continuing technological revolution with its periodic unemployment and sudden changes in the industry. In Nottingham, the lace-making trade, for example, under the most favorable conditions had proved subject not only to the whims of fashion but to changes in the lace-frame. The woolen industry, too, was unsteady. In Nottingham where fine, but dispensable, woolen goods were manufactured there was perhaps even more fluctuating of demand and sale than in Yorkshire where the manufacture of coarse cloth suitable for army uniforms made for a more stable wartime demand. The cotton spinning industry, of course, was hardest hit. In 1809, only 5 million pounds of raw cotton could be obtained from Asia and the Portuguese colonies of South America in place of the 32 million pounds formerly imported from the United States; and of the 38 cotton spinning mills in the growing textile center of Manchester only six were in operation.

The loss of the American market hurt not only the cotton industry by cutting off its chief source of raw material, but all industry. For
America, after the closing of the continent, was the leading purchaser of manufactured goods of all kinds.

Opposition to the Orders in Council continued from 1808 until their belated revocation in the summer of 1812. As the unhappy year 1811 drew to a close the cry against the Orders became louder and more insistent. Petitions poured into Parliament from all parts of England. They came from London, Manchester, Lanark, Bolton, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Shropshire, Sheffield, Glasgow, Worcester, and numerous other localities. A mere listing is an impressive indication of economic and social disturbance. The petitions came from wool-weavers, pottery-makers, ship-owners, and cotton-spinners; from journeymen and manufacturers alike. 44

The petitions of 1811 and 1812 in their ornate and picturesque language tell a story of depressed trade, unemployment, hunger, of once self-supporting people reduced to charity, and of widespread misery and discontent. A petition from Manchester in May 1811 described the petitioners as "reduced to the greatest distress from the extensive depression of the various manufactures occasioning a deficiency of employment, and from the great reduction of wages, which circumstances, added to the high price of provisions, have subjected them to the most unexampled privations." 45

The framework knitters of Leicester coupled their plea (March, 1812) for repeal of the Orders with a hint of an injustice being done to them by Parliament: "The petitioners feel themselves sorely aggrieved on account of the sad depression in their trade; and it most clearly appears to them that the Orders in Council, as they relate to America, are the cause of this falling off of our commerce; and the petitioners
have been kept at restricted employ by the various speculations which have been carried on by their employers, in the hope that the Orders in Council would be repealed." The petition concluded with the remark that "The petitioners see with much concern the charter of the East India Company about to be renewed, seeing they engross the whole of the trade to the Eastern Seas without any advantage to the country but only to themselves, and pray the House to take their petition into early and serious consideration."\(^{46}\)

One of the most prophetic pleas for revocation of the Orders came from Birmingham where the signers urged Parliament "not to involve this kingdom in a war with its most valuable commercial connection, America, a country linked to England by the powerful affinities of common origin, similarity of language, laws, and manners," and warned the government "not to force America on her own resources and oblige her to become a manufacturing nation much earlier than, in the normal course of events, would be the case."\(^{47}\)

An impressive petition was one from Liverpool (April, 1812) signed by 6,560 citizens who told of the "more laborious parts of the inhabitants" and their families reduced through the depression of trade "to a state of unexampled suffering and distress."\(^{48}\)

Even more personal than the petitions was the occasional testimony of individuals, like that of cotton-manufacturer Jeremiah Bury in May, 1812.\(^{49}\) Declaring that he had never seen as great distress as at the present time, he lamented that "when we lost the continental trade we had America to depend upon, now that we have lost America we have no regular markets to depend upon."
However, the most spectacular illustration of lower class dislike of the Orders in Council and an example of the reckless and rebellious spirit of the times was the reaction to the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on May 11, 1812. As Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Portland ministry Perceval drafted the controversial November Orders in Council. Throughout the period of his government service - he became Prime Minister in August, 1809 - Perceval had always defended the Orders as measures forced upon the government by the necessities of war. In the course of the Parliamentary debate over the Orders in Council a crazed assassin, John Bellingham shot and killed Perceval in the lobby of the House of Commons (for reasons unrelated to the English domestic situation). Immediately, in many of the northern manufacturing districts—Nottingham, Leicester, Sheffield, etc.—occurred wild demonstrations of joy. The author of the Orders in Council was dead! Of the rejoicing at Perceval's death, no account is more interesting than that of the irrepressible William Cobbett in his Political Register. The death of Napoleon himself, said Cobbett, would cause no less rejoicing among the "hired newswriters of London" than the news of the death of Perceval to the people of Nottingham, Leicester, etc., "who expressed their joy by signs most unequivocal . . ."

Cobbett continues:

And why? Why did so many people in England rejoice at Perceval's death? Because they regard it as a good thing for the country. To Perceval's death we owe, in all probability, the repeal of the Orders in Council . . . The people of Nottingham and elsewhere felt that these benefits were likely to result from his death, and, therefore, they rejoiced, and not from any bloody mindedness which the hirelings in London had the baseness to ascribe to them and to the whole of the working classes in England.
The phenomenon of Englishmen rejoicing at the death of a Prime Minister is not common in modern English history, to say the least. That such celebrating did take place in 1812 is all the more evidence of the seriousness of the domestic situation.

Several of the petitioners mention the "speculations" of their employers during the years 1809-10. Chief among these speculations was the brief but intense trade with South America. After the intervention of Napoleon in the Iberian Peninsula in 1808, the Portuguese government moved to Brazil. And, since the House of Braganza had a commercial agreement with England, new markets in Central and South America were opened to British goods. The promise of a new market was hysterically seized upon. British exports, which had declined steadily in 1806, 1807 and 1808, revived sharply in 1809 and 1810. More Manchester goods were sent to Rio de Janeiro in a few weeks than had been consumed there during the previous twenty years, and in Nottingham speculators invested in the hosiery manufacture in the belief that a vast new permanent market was opening up. An upswing in Nottingham industry occurred: men were hired, new machines were put to work, and there was a revival of hope despite the high grain prices.

But the South American market was glutted by the end of 1810, and the speculative mania was partly to blame for a severe commercial crisis in 1811. The loss of the market was inevitable:

Such an excess of speculation was certain to ensure whenever Napoleon's Continental System broke down in any part. The outlet was sure to be choked by an excessive export trade.
And so England entered the critical year of 1811, a year of food shortage and unemployment, with the added burden of a commercial crisis. The number of bankruptcies, said the Annual Register, soared "to an aggregate to which no former year exhibits a parallel." The sudden collapse of the South American market and the commercial depression could only serve to increase the discontent of labor. To allay the growing bitterness of the workers, employers occasionally held out vague promises of future "booms." Shortly before the outbreak of rioting in Nottingham, for example, weavers were told of coming silk importations to provide work.

But all the while poverty increased. Between 1801 and 1812 the poor rate jumped from four million to six and a half million pounds. In Nottingham, county records show a rise in the number on relief until, by 1812, half the population of the three parishes was on the poor rates. Late in 1811, when all the promises of relief had failed to materialize, rioting began to break out.

The grain shortage and trade depression are the most obvious causes of misery and unrest, but these factors, fundamental as they are, do not tell the whole Luddite story. Looming large in the Luddite picture was the growing tension between laborer and manufacturer. The progress of the industrial revolution was forcing upon labor an ever increasing class consciousness. We have seen how, time after time in the decades preceding 1811, new textile inventions and their inventors had been the objects of violent attacks. The growth of factories and the placing in them of ever more efficient machines led to the transference of ill-feeling from the inventor to the manufacturer, his machines, and his factories.
But the estrangement was not entirely due to machinery and the recurring periods of technological unemployment. The ever growing power of the manufacturer was another reason for conflict. Coupled with the absolution of the employers, the adoption by the political and social leaders of the period of a laissez-faire attitude in domestic economic matters left the laborer ever more to his own resources. Of the laissez-faire attitude in Parliament we shall have more to say later; but it is evident that by 1811, many of the unfortunates were convinced that redress of obvious grievances was not forthcoming from Parliament.

Machine-breaking was, perhaps, the most striking visible characteristic of lower class discontent in 1811 - 12. During the peak months of the Luddite Riots in dozens of towns throughout the textile counties machines of various types, factories, and proprietors of factories or their homes were objects of attack by individuals or mobs. These machine-breaking activities, as we have already shown, were not at all new in English history. The first act designed to prevent anti-machine riots dates back to 1769, and in 1788 machine-breaking was made punishable by transportation. The four or five decades preceding the Luddite Riots are sprinkled with outbreaks in the cotton and woolen industries similar to those of 1811 - 12. The Luddite rioting is unique only in the extent and duration of the demonstration. In this study we shall consider machine-breaking as part of a growing employer - worker tension.

The Gentleman's Magazine tells of the outbreak of the Luddite Riots in Nottingham as being incited by "the use of a certain wide frame for the manufacture of stockings, etc." And one of the earliest incidents of rioting (November 10, 1811) is recorded when a mob from the
town of Nottingham entered the houses of persons using the frames and destroyed them. 60 The frame-breaking epidemic thus began, and before the end of the year hundreds of frames were destroyed throughout the county. 61

The so-called "wide frame" which proved so objectionable in Nottingham was not a new machine, but an adaptation of an old machine to a new use. The frame-work knitters of Nottingham proved in no mood to accept the innovation. The wide frame and its use has been described as follows: 62

A stocking frame is narrow, but there were in existence a large number of wide frames for knitting pantaloons and fancy stockings called "twills." Twills had gone out of fashion; pantaloons, whose chief market was the continent, could not be sold because of the war. Unscrupulous owners had their weavers weave large pieces of cloth on the now idle wide frames and then cut the pieces by scissors into the shape of stockings, gloves, or whatever it might be. These "cut-ups" were then stitched up; having no selvedges like the true stockings they rapidly fell into pieces. But the shoddy was ruining the market.

Kantoux refers to this destruction by the stocking-knitters of the wide frames as "their customary weapon against their employers." 63 The facts support Kantoux's generalization. Eye-witness accounts of the rioters in Nottingham told how "the framewokers were very vociferous in their condemnation of their employers ..." 64

Some writers, however, have attempted to draw distinctions between the rioting in Nottingham and the rioting in Lancashire and Yorkshire, calling the former "anti-employer" riots and the latter "anti-machine" riots. 65 Such distinctions are perilous at best. The term "Luddite Riots" has been used in this paper to refer to that entire picture of domestic
unrest in the textile counties: in Nottingham, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, etc. In each of these counties, though local conditions varied, the essential nature of the reaction, like the fundamental causes of unrest, was the same. In every instance where machines were destroyed in the course of rioting there was an element of both hatred of machine and hatred of either the inventor or, later, the capitalist owner. How foolish it would have been to oppose or object to a machine as such - as though it were a special creation of some sort.

In Nottingham, then, the Luddite rioters directed their anger against "cut-ups" produced on wide frames, which, by glutting an already overstocked market and cheapening production, resulted in lower wages. Interestingly enough, in their protest against "cut-ups", the Luddites of Nottingham had the support of some of the more far-sighted employers who realized the ill-effect that such unscrupulous methods of production would have on their trade. To the workers, the wide frame was a symbol of the abuse of power on the part of unprincipled employers.

Outside of Nottingham the peculiar wide frame was not extensively used and attacks were made on other machines. In Lancashire there was a general discontent with the power looms. Cartwright's original invention in 1785 had been improved by William Radcliffe of Stockport in 1803 and 1804, and steam driven power looms were first attacked by Stockport weavers. One of the most striking examples of the protest against steam looms was the burning of the Howe and Duncough weaving factory at West Houghton on April 24, 1812.

In the county of Lancaster, where the cotton industry was greatly depressed, wages low, and food prices at the famine level, workers were
most bitter, class lines most clearly drawn, and rioting assumed most
nearly the character of a mass popular rising against food sellers and
owners of power loom factories. The mass, popular nature of the
Lancashire protest against the intolerable economic conditions is perhaps
best seen in attacks like that of April 20-31, 1812, on the Burton power
weaving factory at Middleton. This attack took the form of two sharp
pitched battles between a mob of hungry people (who had demonstrated the
day before in Oldham against the high price of meat and provisions) and
Burton and his servants in the factory - who were aided on the second day
of fighting by a contingent of the military. Ten rioters were reported
killed.69

In the West Riding of Yorkshire the introduction of still other
types of machines was objected to. The shearing frame, a machine which
cut off the nap from the cloth, which had been raised in one of the
earlier processes, is a notable example. In Yorkshire, the cloth shearers
had long been regarded as skilled artisans; and their resentment at the
introduction of new machinery, especially during trade depression, was
strong indeed. The shearers organized themselves as efficiently as the
Nottingham frame-breakers and began (during February, 1812) to destroy
the frames at Leeds, Huddersfield, Rowdon, and other towns. Probably the
most famous shearers' attack was the unsuccessful attempt on April 11,
1812, to sack the Cartwright mill at Rowfolds (already described, Pt. II,
pp 3-4). Cartwright's popularity with the laboring classes was further
diminished in this attack when he refused medical aid to two dying
Luddites outside his factory-bastion until they confessed the names of
their associates. Both men died without betraying their fellows.
Cartwright, on more than one occasion during the Luddite Riots, narrowly escaped assassination. Cartwright was more fortunate than another prominent manufacturer and introducer of new machines, William Horsfall, who was shot and killed on April 28, 1812. Horsfall's murderer, one George Mellor, is reputed to have long cherished a hatred for the industrialist as an oppressor of the poor. Once Mellor held up before Horsfall, as the latter rode past him on his horse, the body of a shearer's child dead of starvation. Horsfall struck Mellor in the face with a whip.

Opposition to the gig-mill, which had figured largely in the Yorkshire disturbances and Parliamentary investigation of 1802, was still alive in 1811-12, also. The gig-mill was another machine innovation which raised the nap on the cloth fibers—a process earlier accomplished by hand. An account from Leeds in April, 1812, told of a furious assault by Luddites or "Snappers" on a gig-mill resulting in several casualties.

Everywhere, the introduction of labor saving machinery was bitterly resented when depression, unemployment and food shortage were widespread. In an emergency, the employer arguments—no matter how well founded—about the ultimate material benefits to be secured from the new machinery failed to impress the workers. Arthur Young, in his criticism of the enclosure movement (1801), correctly assessed the feelings of the dispossessed agricultural laborer who could not see the long range benefits from enclosures but only knew that he had had a cow and lost it through an act of Parliament. Similarly, the laborer could only see that he had had a job and, following the introduction of new machinery into his trade by a—to him—merciless and unscrupulous manufacturer, he had lost it and at a very precarious time. The Hammonds have accurately
It was not the introduction of power-loom weaving that ruined the hand-loom weavers, and the revolt of the frame-work knitters of Nottinghamshire is mistakenly conceived, if it is conceived as an uprising against machinery. The real conflict of the time is the struggle of these various (laboring) classes, some working in factories, some working in their homes, to maintain a standard of life. This struggle is not so much against machinery as against the power behind the machinery, the power of capital. There were a number of persons who suffered when machinery superseded hand labor, or one machine superseded another; there were more who expected to suffer; but the incidence of the new power was not local or particular, but universal. The whole-working-class would come under it.

With the progress of the Industrial Revolution, the laborer was gradually coming to realize how great was the power of the new industrial magnate. In 1797, Frederick Eden, a disciple of Adam Smith, declared:

"The man who has only the unsubstantial property of labor to offer in exchange for the real visible produce of landed property, and whose daily wants require daily exertion, must, from the very nature of his situation, be almost entirely at the mercy of his employer." The position of the worker is, perhaps, even more strikingly defined by the Combination Act of 1800 in such statements as:

"... Every journeyman or workman, or other person, who shall at any time after the passing of this act enter into any combination to obtain an advance of wages, or to lessen or alter the hours or duration of time of working, or to decrease the quantity of work, or for any other purpose contrary to this act -- -- shall be committed to and be confined in the common gaol ..."
During the Napoleonic period, the growing recognition by the laborer of the precariousness of his position in the face of Parliamentary-backed employer absolutism was a leading cause of his discontent. Confirmation of this is amply provided by examination of the Luddite Riots. The period of the rioting is coincident with the breakdown of two traditional safeguards of the security of the worker in the interests of the manufacturers. These were the apprentice system and the system of governmental regulation of wages.

English laws regulating apprenticeship, of course, date back to the Middle Ages. The Elizabethan Statute of Artificers held that no person could work at a trade without a 7-year apprenticeship, limited the number of apprentices in proportion to the number of masters, and provided a means of securing a sort of hereditary monopoly in the trades. The existence of these laws was not compatible with the progress of industry in the 18th century. The new industry, employers reasoned, did not require a long apprenticeship and a limitation in the number of apprentices. With a relatively short period of training anyone could learn to operate one of the new machines, and more and more workers were needed to run them. Furthermore, the traditional progression from the apprentice to journeyman to master in a trade became increasingly impossible to maintain, and an urban proletariat, in the modern sense, rapidly appeared. Consequently, employers began to attack the apprenticeship regulations and secure their repeal in certain industries, or, when this was not possible they flagrantly abused the regulations.

The abuses of the system included the hiring of large numbers of "apprentices" paying them the low apprentice wage, and subjecting them
to discipline. The deals between the parish and the manufacturer, in which the former handed over batches of workhouse children to the latter, were so notorious that a "child serf system" developed not at all unlike the slave trade. 77 "The practice of apprenticing poor children . . . resulted in supplying employers with laborers over whom their power was almost absolute and for whom they were responsible to no one." 78

Inevitable as the demise of the apprentice system might have been, both its passing and its abuse during a time of industrial depression was bitterly resented. The increasing population, labor saving machinery, and the agricultural enclosures had swelled the number of laborers available. The abuse or abrogation of the apprentice system meant an increased competition for the available wages. The masters were, in effect, flooding the trades with cheap labor, and journeymen who had finished their apprenticeship were not hired. "Under this arrangement," says Hammond, "the masters got all the benefits without observing any of the obligations of the apprentice system." 79 The effects of employer abuse of the apprentice system seems to have been most strongly felt in Lancashire, where the labor supply was already abundant and competition for jobs especially keen due to an extensive immigration from Ireland, in addition to the steady migration to the industrial towns of rural laborers following the enclosures. It was a common opinion among workers in all the textile counties that excessive hiring of apprentices at the low apprentice wage was responsible for unemployment.

Beginning in 1803, Parliament began the annual suspension of the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers as it applied to apprenticeship regulation. 80
In 1809, repeal had effect in the woolen industry. The final outright repeal of the Elizabethan Statute came, as an anticlimax, in 1814. Workers throughout the Napoleonic period fought for restoration of the old laws or the adequate enforcement of them when their original purpose was twisted beyond recognition. A petition of journeymen calico-printers of Lancaster and other counties in 1804 begging Parliament to introduce the apprentice system illustrates the workers' feelings on the issue:

... Great numbers of the petitioners and other journeymen calico printers have, for a series of years past, been greatly distressed for want of work in their trade, and that this distress has chiefly arisen from a very general, if not universal, practice of the master calico printers in the counties above enumerated, who systematically carry on said trade by employing in it, in many instances, a greater number of out-door apprentices than journeymen... a practice of great injury to the petitioners and their families... 

During the Luddite Riots the workers' anger over the loss of the Elizabethan legislation was one more incentive to violence. Examples of the destruction of frames run by unapprenticed or improperly apprenticed workers can be shown. The House of Lords report on the Luddite Riots notes that the rioters "particularly sought the destruction of frames owned or worked by those who were willing to work at the lower rates." Another relic of Elizabethan "social legislation" disappeared in 1813 when the law empowering Justices of the Peace to fix rates of wages was repealed. The system had long before fallen into disuse, and employers had decided that interference with wages was both economically unsound and invasion of their rights. During the economic crises of the long French war, however, the worker demand for a minimum wage several times
forced itself upon Parliament. In 1795, during the first grain shortage, Samuel Whitbread brought in a bill providing a temporary minimum wage which was thrown out at the insistence of William Pitt. After the combination Act had deprived the workers of any chance to act for themselves to secure a living wage, Whitbread tried again to fix wages in 1800 - but again to no avail. At the insistence of the workers, especially in the cotton industry, Pitt did consent to the Arbitration Act of 1800 which provided for the bringing of wage disputes before two arbitrators appointed by employers and employees, with the Justice of the Peace as a last resort to break stalemates. By using various extra-legal methods, however, the employers, who would not tolerate this abridgment of their "liberty", rendered the law a dead letter by 1804.

In 1807, at the instigation of cotton weavers in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire, still another minimum wage bill was introduced. In one petition calling for legislation the cotton weavers declared that they suffered "great hardships" from reduced wages. "Whenever the demand for goods becomes slack," they noted, "many master manufacturers adopt the expedient of reducing wages, thereby compelling the petitioners to manufacture greater quantities of goods at a time when they are absolutely not wanted." The refusal of Parliament to act in their behalf resulted in riots among the cotton weavers in 1808 - a forshadowing of the more widespread trouble in 1811.

Low wages and bitterness at employers for wage cuts were of fundamental importance in the Luddite Riots. Hammond's declaration that the Luddite Riots "were a resort to violence on the part of workers who had failed to persuade Parliament to protect their interests" by enforcing earlier
interventionist legislation such as that providing for wage regulation is an oversimplification but part of the truth, nevertheless. Wages in 1811 had dropped to new lows in many trades. Manufacturers themselves realized that wage cuts were a cause of the rioting and, in some instances, tried to use the lure of a wage increase to pacify the workers. The Gentleman's Magazine reports that at a meeting of hosiery and lace manufacturers at Nottingham on December 4, 1811, it was resolved that "as soon as it shall be clearly manifested that the peace of the county and town is restored, the trade in general are willing and desirous to receive and consider proposals from their workmen, for the purpose of removing any grievance which may appear to exist." Throughout the rioting in the county of Nottingham, hosiery manufacturers and workers negotiated - the Combination Act notwithstanding; and it has been estimated that wages in the county were raised two shillings a dozen by the Luddite rioting, though they soon lapsed back when the violence abated.

One ingenious employer wage practice which proved particularly irksome to Nottingham workers in the crisis period of 1811 - 12 was the payment in goods instead of money. The receipt of linen-drapery or shoes (always overpriced) instead of money with which to buy food was strongly opposed.

In the case of wage regulation as well as in the matter of the apprentice system, employer interests were served, despite the objections of the workmen. But bitterness, and even bloodshed resulted.
The struggle between commoners and enclosing landlords in the villages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has its counterpart in industry, in the struggle of the workmen for the maintenance or the revival of customs and laws, from which the employers wish to be free. The employers are for unchecked enterprise; the employed, and in some cases the smaller masters, are for restoring or putting into practice regulations that had been imposed first by the guilds and then by the state.

We have analyzed the major causes of unrest among the laboring classes which contributed to the rioting of 1811-12. The war, bad harvests, and a growing population made the food shortage severe; again the war and unsound speculation had depressed trade and initiated a financial crisis; the new machinery and surplus labor had made industry even more unsettled than war would have ordinarily meant; and relations between employers and employees were more strained than at any time since the Industrial Revolution had begun.

Few courses were open to the workers in their desire to express their discontent and seek relief. Besides violence, petitioning Parliament was practically the only recourse. The petitions in the months immediately preceding the rioting contain a new note of urgency and radicalism in their demands. In May 1811, a petition from distressed Paisley and Lanark cotton workers called for broader representation in Parliament: "The present mode of returning members to the House by such a small part of the population is the primary cause of the evils which this country labors under . . . A full, fair, and free representation of the people in Parliament is absolutely necessary . . ." 96

Another petition in May of 1811 called for a minimum wage law, and was particularly bitter in its tone toward employers for their
"irregular mode of payment", their "ill-directed parsimony" and prayed for
the House to take up "the urgent case of the laboring classes." 97

The Parliamentary reaction to that "urgent case" which the domestic
events of 1811 - 12 forced upon it must now receive our attention.
Part III - The Parliamentary Reaction

The actual legislative reaction of Parliament to the Luddite Riots is not difficult to outline. In March of 1812, after a short debate, two measures immediately concerned with the riots were passed: the so-called Framework Bill, and the Bill for the Preservation of Peace in the County of Nottingham. The Framework Bill changed the penalty for frame-breaking from a 14-year transportation period to death. The Nottingham Peace Bill gave county authorities the right to select special constables from the male inhabitants over 21 years of age and to establish a watch and ward in various troubled districts. The operation of both bills was limited to March 1, 1814. The belated repeal of the Orders in Council on June 24, 1812, also may be considered part of the legislative response to the riots - though we must later carefully qualify this statement.

But the actual laws, in this case, are only a small part of the Parliamentary reaction. The debates themselves must be examined and the arguments and presuppositions underlying them analyzed. Furthermore, we shall see that what Parliament did not enact during the Luddite Riots is just as important in assessing the reaction, as what it did enact.

The first point to be discovered, however is whether or not the causes of distress and unrest were sufficiently clear to the members of Parliament to make their reaction an informed one. Did any member of Parliament, for example, have so little knowledge of the situation in the textile counties as to excuse such a blatantly misinformed statement as the following which appeared in the London Times of April 11, 1812:
"We did hope that we should have had only the disturbances in our enemies' domains to record – there is some cause for them."\(^1\)

Here it is safe to say that the major causes which we have already outlined were recognized in Parliament. From the opening speech of Home Secretary Richard Ryder on the 14th of February, 1812, introducing the Frame-Breaking and Nottingham Peace Bills, it was clear that Parliament was enlightened. In the course of the debate the factors of the war and subsequent decay of trade, the decrease of employment, falling wages, and hunger were noted. Also the unfortunate effects of the failure of the South American market, the new labor saving machinery, and the growing tension between employers and workers were correctly ascertained.\(^2\)

A most penetrating and realistic account of the overall industrial crisis came on June 16, 1812, when Lord Henry Brougham, the philanthropic Benthamite-utilitarian, delivered a long speech to the House of Commons in which he moved for a repeal of the Orders in Council.\(^3\) "It is my severe duty," Brougham began, "to make you acquainted with the distresses of the people and principally of the lower orders." Brougham rightly perceived that the Luddite Riots and the petitions from the industrial centers urging repeal of the Orders were parts of a single problem. And though one may seriously question his conclusion that the unsettlement needed only the repeal of the Orders in Council to remove the tension, one cannot deny that he saw the whole problem and made it known to his fellow members.

Brougham vividly described workers in one locality where trade was depressed as "silent, still, and desolate during half the week, during the rest of it miserably toiling at reduced wages for a pittance scarcely
sufficient to maintain animal life in the lowest state of comfort." He
told of Lancashire families who had only one meal of oatmeal and water a
day, and of thousands of restless unemployed workers in the West Riding
of Yorkshire crying for relief.

On one point only were the Luddite Riots obviously misunderstood
in Parliament, and this was on the question of the wide-frames which were
so resented by workers in Nottingham. Nottingham workers objected, as
we have already shown, not to a new labor saving machine but to the
unethical use of an old frame. Yet the House of Lords report of July,
1812, on the Luddite Riots tells how they began with the destruction of a
great number of "newly invented stocking frames." This mistake, though
puzzling, is not a serious gap in the Parliamentary understanding of the
situation. The significance of the attack on the wide frame in Nottingham
is the proof it illustrates of a considerable antagonism between worker and
employer. Parliament was not unaware of the extent of such antagonism
during the Luddite crisis. With this exception, then, Parliament, in
the light of what we know of the Luddite disturbances, was essentially
well-informed as to the causes of unrest.

Of the two laws dealing specifically with the Luddite Riots the
Framework Bill is the most significant from our point of view because of
the debate it evoked. The debate on the Nottingham Peace Bill, never very
heated, was not even recorded in Hansard's Parliamentary Debates after
February 26. The Framework Bill was introduced in the House of Commons by
Home Secretary Richard Ryder; and Ryder and Prime Minister Spencer Perceval
were the chief backers of the bill. In the House of Lords, Lord Liverpool, who was to become Prime Minister in June following Perceval's assassination, defended and guided the measure through.

In essence the position of the ministry, while recognizing the seriousness of the plight of the working classes, nevertheless emphasized the necessity of strong coercive action to prevent the destruction of property and quell the rebellious spirits in the northern counties. "Circumstances however deplorable," said Secretary Ryder, "could not justify the measures pursued by the rioters." The destruction of property made such a severe measure necessary. The same note was sounded by Spencer Perceval when he declared that "from whatever cause the riots arose, would anybody deny the necessity of putting them down?" There was a fatalism and an obstinacy about Perceval's defense of the Framework Bill similar to his unyielding support of the Orders in Council. In the case of the Framework Bill, however, Perceval had the overwhelming majority of the House behind him, while his long continued support of the Orders was in the face of strong Parliamentary opposition - opposition which eventually, after his death, repealed the Orders. Both the Prime Minister's stands made him extremely unpopular with England's lower classes. The "fatalism" in Perceval's support of the Framework Bill took something like the following form: The progress of invention and science could not be stopped. The war could not be ended. Relief was not possible. There was no help. Endurance was the only recourse of the poor. It should be remembered that Perceval's arguments (identical with those of Liverpool in the House of Lords) secured the sanction of all but a few members of the British Parliament. The vote in favor of the Framework Bill at the second reading
on February 18, was 94 to 17.

The opposition to the Framework Bill was small but distinguished, and its arguments were strong and effectively presented. The objections to the bill were largely on two points: First, it was ardently believed by some that capital punishment should not be applied in the Luddite case — that there were already far too many crimes in England which were punishable by death. In the second place, it was believed that the mere application of the death penalty would not touch on the real causes of domestic unrest, and was therefore no remedy. By and large, those who pointed out the inadequacy of the Framework Bill to solve the basic problems were the same ones who opposed the employment of the death penalty on humanitarian grounds. The leader of the objectors to the further extension of capital punishment was Sir Samuel Romilly. And the most memorable statement of the insufficiency of the bill to deal with the roots of the domestic trouble was made by the poet Lord Byron in one of the great addresses in the history of the English Parliament.

Sir Samuel Romilly (1757 - 1818) was a pioneer in the long struggle to improve, to humanize, the penal code of Great Britain, which listed well over 200 capital crimes in 1812. In 1808, Romilly had announced to the House of Commons that he intended to devote himself to the reform of the Criminal Code by diminishing the number of capital offenses. His cause was to meet with only slight success during his lifetime. In 1808, Romilly did finally persuade Parliament to pass his bill abolishing the death penalty for the crime of picking pockets of goods valued at twelve pence; but he failed three times between 1808 - 10 to remove the death penalty from the theft of five shillings from a shop. And, of course,
he lost ground in 1812 over the Frame-work Bill.

Romilly argued that the certainty of capture and not the severity of the punishment was the chief deterrent to the commission of the crime. He also correctly pointed out that where the punishment was so out of proportion to the seriousness of the crime judges and juries often refused to convict and the laws went unenforced. All these arguments Romilly repeated in his speech in opposition to the Frame-work Bill on February 17, 1812. The earlier statute requiring a penalty of 14-year transportation had often gone unenforced, he reasoned, why then should the penalty be increased? "The great evil to be complained of was that the law had been converted into a mere dead letter, that it had been made only a lifeless scarecrow, from which custom had removed even the terror that might originally have been felt on beholding it." 9

Though his cause was still a losing one in 1812, Romilly had secured allies in Parliament including Samuel Whitbread, Richard Sheridan, as able a statesman as he was a dramatist, and James Abercromby in Commons, and Byron, Lord Holland and Lord Grenville in the House of Lords. Abercromby noted that the death penalty would afford the rioters even more incentive to union and secrecy, which was already so strong as to make detection well nigh impossible. 10 Lord Grenville reiterated that "the great fault was not in the weakness of the punishment of the present law (requiring 14-year transportation), but in the want of execution," and he stoutly declared that he "would never consent to put it in the power of the crown to put a fellow subject to death for damaging a piece of cotton or lace." 11

The opposition to reform of the Penal Code always had a familiar sound: 12
The main arguments brought against even mild changes in the savage penal code were that national character and manners were moulded by the criminal law; that the removal of even one cog of the machine of punishment might bring disaster, and that the fear of death was essential to restrain the evil doer.

The idea that the horror of the death penalty was needed to secure property rights was given classic expression during the Framework Bill debate when a supporter of the bill declared that "the peace of the country would be cheaply purchased by the forfeiture of a few lives in order to deter future outrages on the property of individuals." Other supporters of the bill warned the House not to be taken in by any "puling feeling of humanity," and asked "were not the sufferers by these outrages sufficient objects for that humanity?"

The question of the extension of capital punishment was, however, a side issue - albeit an important one - in the Luddite debate. More fundamental was the objection to the bill by a few in each House on the grounds of its inadequacy - almost its irrelevance - in view of the complexity of the problem. These objectors also opposed the haste with which the Perceval ministry was forcing through the measure without consideration of any other solution (The Framework Bill, introduced on February 14, was passed on February 20). Typical of this objection was the following remark by Abercromby:

The distressed state of the country ought to make a deep impression on the House and induce them to reconsider those measures which had plunged us into this dreadful situation. There were some effects arising from the decay of trade, which it was yet in the power of Parliament to control; and (the members of the House) might be assured that while the cause of the evil remained in full force, and the remedies which they might apply would
be found as unavailing as the prescriptions of a physician, directed merely to remove the outward symptoms of a disease, instead of communicating health and vigor to the whole system.

Similar pleas were made in Commons by Romilly, Sheridan, Whitbread, and others. Whitbread, a leading Whig spirit in opposition and earnest opponent of anything savoring of oppression and abuse, called for a more thorough investigation of the evils which induced the Luddite disturbances, declaring that "the present bill did not seem calculated to reach these evils" and that "its very principle was objectionable." Hutchinson spoke of "unparalleled distress" as the cause of rioting — distress which the Framework Bill could not alleviate — and urged the government to question its own policy as perhaps contributing to the unsettlement. Like protests were voiced in the upper house by Lords Holland, Grenville, Grosvenor, and others.

In general critics of the Framework Bill and of the Perceval ministry saw the repeal of the Orders in Council as the most effective measure of relief possible. The repeal of the Orders, they said, would restore trade, employ more workers, raise wages, and thus cool tempers. The eventual repeal of the Orders some four months later may, therefore, be regarded in one sense as legislative reaction to the distresses of the lower classes. It should be remembered, however, that the Tory government held off until the last possible minute before surrendering to the clamor for repeal of the Orders; and that repeal was at least as much, and probably more, a response to the petitions of masters and manufacturers. As a relief measure the repeal of the Orders in Council was indeed a grudging one.
It remained for Lord Byron to deliver the most noteworthy statement of the inadequacy of the Framework Bill, and by all odds the most unqualified support of the lower classes and clearest call for relief of some form or other. Byron stands apart from the rest of the opposition to the Framework Bill. He was not a practical Benthamite reformer like Brougham. Byron was always a romantic revolutionary. Somervell distinguishes Byron and "Byronism" from both the "Old Tory Orthodoxy" (Burke, Lord Eldon, Liverpool, etc.) which ruled Parliament until the period of the Reform Bill, and from the "Benthamites" or Whig opposition (Brougham, Sheridan, Whitbread, etc.). Byron lacked the fear of democracy, even of the mob, which both the other groups shared in varying degrees. Yet Byronism supplied an element in the opposition to the "Old Toryism" that could have come from no other quarter. Byron's speech on the Framework Bill, his maiden address in the House of Lords, was delivered on February 27, 1812. Beginning with a description of the distressed condition of Nottingham which he had seen first hand, Byron launched into a severe rebuke of his fellow Lords:

All of this has been transacting within 130 miles of London, and yet we, "good easy men, have deemed full sure our greatness was a ripening," and have sat down to enjoy our foreign triumphs in the midst of domestic calamity. But all the cities you have taken, all the armies which have retreated before your leaders are but paltry subjects of self congratulation, if your land divides against itself, and your dragoons and your executioners must be let loose against your fellow citizens.

You call these men a mob, desperate, dangerous, and ignorant; and seem to think the only way to quiet the "many headed beast" is to lop off a few of its superfluous heads. But even a mob may be better reduced to reason by a mixture of conciliation and firmness, than by additional
irritation and redoubled penalties. Are we aware of our obligations to a mob? It is the mob that labor in your fields and serve in your houses, that man your navy, and recruit your army, that have enabled you to defy all the world and can also defy you when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair.

When the Portuguese suffered under the retreat of the French every arm was stretched out, every hand was opened . . . all was bestowed to enable them to re-build their villages and replenish their granaries. And at this moment when thousands of misguided but most unfortunate fellow-countrymen are struggling with the extremes of hardships and hunger, as your charity began abroad it should end at home. A much less sum, a tithe of the bounty bestowed on Portugal, even if those men (which I cannot admit without enquiry) could not have been restored to their employments, would have rendered unnecessary the tender mercies of the bayonet and the gibbet. But doubtless our friends have too many foreign claims to admit a prospect of domestic relief.

I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey, but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the very heart of a Christian country. And what are your remedies? After months of inaction, and months of action worse than inactivity, at length comes forth the grand specific, the never-failing nostrum of all state physicians from the days of Draco to the present time. After feeling the pulse and shaking the head over the patient, prescribing the usual course of warm water and bleeding, the warm water of your mawkish police, and the lancets of your military, these convulsions must terminate in death, the sure consummation of the prescriptions of all political Sangrados.

In the majority response to criticism of the adequacy or relenance of the Framework Bill the characteristic attitude of the British ruling classes toward labor in the pre-1832 period is revealed. We have already noted the "fatalism," the reluctance to employ any state power except the police power, on the part of the ministry. "No advantage," said Perceval, "could be derived from a committee investigating causes of the disturbances."
The majority attitude maintained that the Framework Bill was the only action Parliament should take to meet the crisis of the Luddite Riots. There should be, it was felt, no further governmental interference in the domestic economy. Lord Liverpool faced the issue squarely in an address to the House of Lords on March 2, 1812. He admitted that speculation in South America had resulted in a glut of the market, and that the result of this glutting was distress among the workers. Yet this distress was inevitable, he believed: "So long as the spirit of speculation existed among traders, and so long as in this free country no restraint was put on any man's use of his money, so long those circumstances (lower class distresses) must occur from time to time."

Prime Minister Perceval expressed the same idea when told that part of the distress of the workers resulted from irregular modes of payment (payment in goods, etc.). Partial payment by the employers in goods was improper, Perceval agreed; but "the master and his workmen, in making their agreement, were the best judges of their own interests, and it would be highly impolitic in the House to interfere . . . any interference might be attended with the most dangerous consequences."

The very fact that Parliament was considering the causes of the riots at all was called into question by at least one member of Commons who would not admit that the workers had any rights at all: Any inquiry, therefore, into employer-worker tension as causing the riots could only serve "to inflame the minds of workmen, who generally concluded that they had rights which were infringed upon by the masters, and that they were justifiable in retaliating violence on them for infringement of their supposed rights."
Statements like those of Perceval and Lord Liverpool illuminate one of the motivating principles governing the reaction of Parliament to domestic economic and social problems during the Napoleonic Period in general and the Luddite crisis in particular. Arthur Bryant's conclusion that the prevailing economic philosophy of England at the time was "frantically opposed to any protective regulations of the conditions of employment" is sustained by examination of the Parliamentary record. The origins of the principle of domestic laissez-faire, of the retreat of government before the arguments of the new manufacturers who reasoned that their personal interests were the interests of the nation as a whole, would require a long backward look into the 18th century which is inappropriate to our study. But the Parliamentary reaction cannot be fully understood without reference to the role of the classical economists - especially of Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Malthus.

Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), rejected the elaborate system of regulations which had long been a part of commercial policy supposedly designed to benefit industry and commerce. Regulation was to be replaced by a "simple system of natural liberty", as Smith called it. The theoretical justification of laissez-faire in Adam Smith was given further emphasis in the writings of Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832), one of whose utilitarian principles was that every man is the best judge of his own interests and hence should be left free to pursue those interests without the interference of legislation.

Thomas Malthus (1766 - 1834), whose *Essay on Population* first appeared in 1798, was another influential contributor to classical economics. The rate of population increase, said Malthus, is greater then
the increase in food production; and scarcity (caused by vice, misery, famine, disease, and war) checks the excess population. The implication of the "iron law of population" was that population would increase until economic conditions reached the starvation level. David Ricardo (1772 — 1823) set forth the theory of the "iron law of wages" whereby it was assumed that wages were determined automatically and inevitably by supply and demand. Thus all agitation designed to raise the wage standard was certain to fail, and, in so far as it interfered with the "simple system of natural liberty", to leave matters worse than before. Permeating the spirit of the "iron laws" of population and wages was the conception of economic fatalism which incensed all those who were interested in bettering the conditions of the poor.

In considering the contributions of the classical economists, however, it is essential to keep in mind that it was not so much what their doctrines really said as what they were interpreted by the ruling classes as saying. So Trevelyan correctly remarks:

The effective political economy of this period that guided the action of Parliament, of the Justices of the Peace, of the new mill owners, and of the enclosing landlords, was a selection and exaggeration of those parts of Adam Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo which suited the acquisition of wealth by the wealthy, and a quiet ignoring of the other doctrines of those eminent philosophers.

Adam Smith, Trevelyan notes, opposed protective duties and state interference against combinations of workmen. Malthus favored factory acts, and both Malthus and Ricardo supported Parliamentary reform and fought for repeal of Pitt's Combination Acts against trade unions.
If the theoretical basis for domestic laissez-faire was laid in the decades preceding 1793, the French Revolutionary Period saw the triumph in practice of the doctrine. Of the modern period, a modern student of the function of government, Robert MacIver, has said:27

There is no more remarkable example in history than this of the ineptitude of political men to adapt his institutions to the needs of the times until the tragic results at length drive him to change his preconceptions. The wealth and power that the new industry conferred on the more fortunate conspired with a neat doctrine of the beneficence of the "simple system of natural liberty," freed from any interference by government, to blind men to the social ravage of a new order in which the lot of the worker was left to the mercy of the market for labor. The traditional controls, such as the statutes concerning laborers and apprentices, and the restrictions of mercantilistic policy, whatever their merit or demerit under earlier conditions, were hopelessly antiquated, but those who rightly demanded that they be swept away did not see any necessity that new controls should take their place.

No one was more influential during the period in directing the thought of the English ruling classes than the great traditionalist, Edmund Burke. Though Burke died in 1797, his influence on Tory leaders, like Lord Eldon and William Pitt, justifies Somervell's designation of him as "the prophet of the old Toryism." Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution (1790) set the conservative, anti-revolutionary temper of the times, which, all too often, degenerated into an unreasoned fear of Jacobinism and the reading of subversive activity into the agitations of laboring men and the proposals of social and political reformers.

Far less well-known, but nonetheless important, is another Burke essay which appeared in 1795 during the first English grain crisis of the war. In this essay, "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," Burke set
forth principles of domestic laissez-faire which were to guide Parliamentary leaders throughout the Napoleonic Period. Burke begins his essay, "The great function of government," Burke begins his essay, "is as a restraint." Its functions should be to supply "information" and "timely coercion . . . to regulate our tempers." Government can prevent evil but can do little positive good. The distresses of the poor, all too evident in the grain crisis of 1795, Burke recognized. But he wanted no lamenting of the plight of the poor; "Patience, labor, sobriety, frugality, and religion should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright fraud." Burke then raised the question for himself of what should be done in hard times when a man cannot live and support his family by his labor. Should not government intervene? His answer is unequivocal: "Labor is a commodity, an article of trade. If I am right in this notion, then labor must be subject to all the laws and principles of trade and not to regulations foreign to them . . . The impossibility of the subsistence of a man who carries his labor to a market is totally beside the question, in this way of looking at it. The only question is, What is it worth to the buyer?"

One of the proposals to combat the grain shortage during the crisis called for the setting up of government granaries in the market towns to eliminate the middle man and regulate the price of grain in the interests of the consumer. Burke expressed the utmost contempt for such a plan: "The best, and indeed the only good granary, is the rick-yard of the farmer, where the corn is preserved in its own straw, sweet, clean, wholesome . . . The moment that government appears at market, all the principles of market will be subverted." Burke concluded the essay with the expressed conviction that "the state ought to confine itself to what
regards the state or the creatures of the state; namely, the exterior establishment of its religion; its magistracy; its revenue; its military force . . . in a word, to everything that is truly and properly public."

Such principles as to the function of government guided the Parliamentary majority throughout the Napoleonic Period. They are echoed again and again in the debates over the Combination Acts, the repeal of the Elizabethan Apprentice and Wage Regulation systems, and the proposals to pass minimum wage laws. As previously noted, from 1803 on Parliament began the suspension of the regulations governing apprenticeship with final repeal coming in 1814. Minimum wage legislation was proposed but not adopted in 1795, 1800, and 1807; and finally in 1813 the Elizabethan law enabling magistrates to fix wages was repealed outright.

The wholesale sloughing off of Parliamentary responsibility came at a time when the laboring classes were experiencing one crisis after another from the price of provisions, the trade depression, changes in industry, and growing differences with their employers. The problems of labor, we have seen, grew ever more acute with the approach of the year 1811. We have seen that, following the defeat of a minimum wage bill urged on Parliament by cotton weavers in 1807, sporadic rioting broke out in Lancashire. Significantly, Prime Minister Perceval, who had no intention of supporting any government wage regulation, only allowed the bill to be brought in because: "it was better that the cotton weavers should be disappointed after a discussion of the merits of their application by the House of Commons than by a refusal to submit it for consideration."29

In the Spring of 1811, on the very eve of the Luddite Riots, non-interventionist principles were again invoked in responding to petitions
from distressed workers in Lanark, Ayr and Renfrew shires, and from Manchester and Bolton. The tenor of these "eleventh hour" petitions was one of extreme urgency. The thousands who had affixed their signatures to the petitions (40,000 on the Manchester petition alone) could bear their ills quietly no longer. The Manchester petition begged the House, if it were impossible to end the war or repeal the Orders in Council, to find some other means of ameliorating their distresses. From Bolton came a petition pleading for "such salutary laws as will give employ and suitable wages to the industrious inhabitants of that exceedingly distressed part of the empire." From Manchester the petition begged the House, if it were impossible to end the war or repeal the Orders in Council, to find some other means of ameliorating their distresses. From Bolton came a petition pleading for "such salutary laws as will give employ and suitable wages to the industrious inhabitants of that exceedingly distressed part of the empire."  

In referring the petitions to a committee for study on May 30, 1811, Spencer Perceval guardedly hoped that something might be done to alleviate the miseries in the textile counties, but warned that the committee would have to consider "whether it would be practicable to afford sufficient relief, and as a necessary branch of that consideration, whether, if sufficient relief could not be afforded, the attempt might not excite expectation which could not be fulfilled, and by so doing aggravate instead of alleviating the distresses."  

With such instructions from the Prime Minister the results of the committee report were, of course, a forgone conclusion; but the clarity and explicitness of the statement makes it unusually informative. On June 13, 1811, the report on the petitions was read to the House. The report declared the suggestions made for the alleviation of depression and want in the aforementioned towns were "exposed to insuperable objections." After dismissing the various relief proposals and lamenting the great distress of so many industrious persons, the report concluded that
"no interference of the legislature with the freedom of trade or with the perfect liberty of every individual to dispose of his time and of his labor, in the way and on the terms which he may judge most conducive to his own interest, can take place without violating general principles of the first importance to the prosperity and happiness of the community" and "without establishing the most pernicious precedent." And above all: "Grants of pecuniary aid to any class of persons suffering under temporary distress, would be . . . most objectionable in all points of view, could not fail of exciting expectations unbounded in extent, incapable of being realized, and (would) most likely destroy the equilibrium of labor and of employment in the various branches of manufacture, of commerce, and of agriculture."

A committee member, one Colonel Stanley, expressed regret that no relief could be granted but was glad the petitions had been referred to a committee since "the petitioners would be better satisfied, when they found that although the House could give no relief, they had bestowed their serious attention to the case." And another member hoped the petitioners would "have the good sense" to see "the impossibility of the House interfering to compel the masters not to lower their prices, and would wait with patience till the circumstances of the county would effect their relief." The weavers, as we have seen, were only patient until November, but even their desperation rioting could not (as the debate on the Framework Bill amply illustrates) shake the faith in non-interventionism.
Part IV - Significance

In one perspective the Luddite Riots may be regarded as another incident in a long series of disturbances which accompanied the industrial revolution in 18th and early 19th century England - made more severe by war, the press of an increased and shifting population, and a growing consciousness on the part of laborers of their position in the emerging industrial England. If we enlarge our view of the riots still further, they can be seen as part of a long tradition of lower class protest in English history extending at least as far back as Wat Tyler's Rebellion in the time of John Wyclif. And this tradition of riotous proletarian protest in a nation which has always extolled its peaceful constitutional development did not end in 1812. As late as 1816, Luddite executions are still recorded in Nottingham, for example; and that county, among others, sent a contingent to "Peterloo" in 1819.¹

In view of the complex and far-reaching causes of lower class unrest in 1811-12, the Parliamentary legislative reaction can only be regarded as superficial - to choose a milder word for it. Yet when one considers the attitude of the Parliamentary majority, of the "Old Tory Orthodoxy", toward innovation, and its adoption and practical application of the laissez-faire ideology, the harshness of a Framework Bill can at least be explained as probably inevitable. Looking ahead once more, repressive legislation of the Framework Bill variety appears again as early as 1819 with the infamous "Six Acts."

There were, however, some more hopeful straws in the wind during the Luddite crisis. The cause for which Samuel Romilly argued without
much success in 1811 was at least alive, and in the next two decades
important reform in the criminal code was affected.

Even more important was the survival, noted during the Luddite
debates in speeches by Whitbread, Sheridan, Hutchinson, and others, of
the element of liberal reform in England. Trevelyan has sensed the
historical importance of this survival:

If the whole of the privileged class had joined
Pitt's (and later Perceval's anti-Jacobin bloc, and had
been brought up in the neo-Tory tradition, the constitu-
tion could not have been altered by legal means, and
change could only have come in nineteenth century
Britain along the same violent and bloodstained path by
which it has come in continental countries.

For the oppressed in 1811–12, however, there was no relief,
and the long suffering and pitiful rioting of the hungry, underpaid, and
unemployed laborers makes the Luddite episode a tragic one in English
history.
**Chronological Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 16, 1606</td>
<td>Order in Council blockading coast from the Elbe to Brest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 31, 1806</td>
<td>Berlin Decree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 7, 1807</td>
<td>Order in Council prohibiting trade between French Ports.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 7 - 9, 1807</td>
<td>Treaties of Tilsit.</td>
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<td>Sept. 2-5, 1807</td>
<td>Second Copenhagen Expedition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 11, 1807</td>
<td>Order in Council permitting trade with France only through England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 17, 1807</td>
<td>Milan Decree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 21, 1807</td>
<td>Embargo Act.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar., 1809</td>
<td>Repeal of Embargo Act, Passage of Non-Intercourse Act.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1, 1810</td>
<td>Macon Bill No. 2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 31, 1810</td>
<td>Alexander breaks with Continental System.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb., 1811</td>
<td>United States revives Non-Intercourse with England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19, 1812</td>
<td>United States declares war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 24, 1812</td>
<td>Repeal of the Orders in Council, Invasion of Russia by Napoleon.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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FOOTNOTES

PART I

1. The frame-breakers called themselves "Luddites" after a mythical apprentice, one Ned Ludd, who was supposed to have avenged himself on his cruel master by destroying the latter's knitting frame.


18. Ibid., p. 299.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 297.


24. Ibid., ch. 3.


26. Ibid., ch. 3.

27. Ibid., ch. 7.


29. *Nottingham County History*, p. 301.

PART II


3. Ibid., p. 582.

11. Ibid.
17. Nottingham County History, p. 300.
18. The "quarter" was a unit of capacity of eight bushels or four pecks or eight gallons.
22. Ibid., v. LXV (Part Two, 1795), p. 697.
27. Rose, Napoleonic Studies, p. 209.


32. On June 14-15, 1813, Russia, Prussia, and England formally allied at Reichenbach.


34. Ibid., p. 581.


38. Ibid., p. 374.


41. *Nottingham County History*, p. 299.


44. For lists of petitions see *Hansard*, First Series, v.s XIX-XXIII.


46. Ibid., v. XXI (March 17 - May 4, 1812), pp. 1-2.

47. Ibid., pp. 426-427.

48. Ibid., p. 1058-1059.

54. Rose, Napoleonic Studies, p. 194.
58. Nottingham County History, p. 302.
60. Ibid.
61. Nottingham County History, p. 300.
64. Nottingham County History, p. 355.
67. Ibid., p. 273.
68. Ibid., p. 284.
69. Ibid., pp. 287-289.
73. Bland, Select Documents, p. 537.


76. Bland, Select Documents, p. 628.


78. Nottingham County History, p. 301.


80. 43 George III c. 136.

81. 49 George III c. 109.

82. Bland, Select Documents, p. 573.

83. Nottingham County History, p. 300.


86. Ibid., v. XXXIV (1798-1800), pp. 1426-1436.


97. Ibid., pp. 1019-1020.
PART III


2. The debate on the Framework and Nottingham Peace Bills is found in Hansard, First Series, v. XXI (January 7- March 16, 1812).


6. Ibid., pp. 810-811.

7. Ibid., p. 822.


10. Ibid., pp. 827-828.

11. Ibid., pp. 977-978.


15. Ibid., p. 849.


17. Ibid., p. 839.


20. Ibid., p. 821.

21. Ibid., p. 1082.

22. Ibid., p. 821.
23. Ibid., p. 848.


26. Ibid.


31. Ibid., p. 343.

32. Ibid., pp. 608–610.

33. Ibid., p. 744.

34. Ibid., p. 745.

PART IV

1. *Nottingham County History*, p. 301.

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Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (London, 1922), Fourth Series, v. V.