Marc Linder

European Labor Aristocracies

Trade Unionism, the Hierarchy of Skill, and the Stratification of the Manual Working Class before the First World War

Campus Verlag · Frankfurt
Chapter 5
Marx and Engels and the Labor Aristocracy of Mid-Victorian Britain

The present chapter serves the dual purpose of systematizing and evaluating Marx's and Engels' views of the labor aristocracy by confronting them with a comprehensive empirical analysis of the contemporary British labor aristocracy. The former task derives its justification above all from Marx and Engels' influence on subsequent generations of Marxist political leaders who relied heavily on this source for strategical inspiration. To the extent that revolutionary politics were informed by these discussions, their analysis transcends the history of ideas. Subsidiarily, Marx and Engels must be regarded as authentic contemporary sources as a result of their firsthand knowledge of British working class leaders from Chartism to New Unionism.

A. The Structure and Distribution of Skills within the Manual Working Class

The very fact that Marx's and Engels' scattered and often passing remarks on the labor aristocracy have first to be systematized, provides prima facie evidence that they did not constitute a coherent theoretical structure for analyzing this phenomenon let alone uncover "the laws of the formation of the working class." (1) Marx and Engels originally became interested in the notion of a labor aristocracy in connection with its widespread usage in Chartist circles. (2) At first, Marx and Engels wrote within this tradition; that is to say, the issue which they saw confronting revolutionaries in the United Kingdom did not relate to the absence of a socialist movement --the strength of which they in fact overestimated--but, rather, to its slow progress. In contrast with the Chartists, however, Engels in particular shifted his attention from a privileged stratum to a privileged nation of proletarians. (3) Thus as early as 1851 Engels, referring to a movement to found schools
and libraries for the working class, informed Marx that the freetraders of Manchester were using "the prosperity or semi-prosperity in order to buy the proletariat." (4) Despite Engels' undifferentiated mention of "the proletariat," it is manifest that in practice schools and libraries could be of use only to the actively literate who also had some leisure time at their disposal—in other words, to an elite. (5)

This emphasis on the privileged status of the British proletariat as a whole, although arriving at a contrary result, was based on an argument similar to one deployed in the Communist Manifesto written at the outset of the cyclical depression in 1847-1848.

The interests, the life-situations within the proletariat tend more and more toward equality inasmuch as machinery more and more obliterates the differences of work and depresses wages almost everywhere down to an equally low level. (6)

Here Marx and Engels insisted upon the levelling influence of capitalist industrialization on the skill and hence income hierarchy within the working class. (7)

Once the cyclically determined conditions of the working class improved, however, the increasingly uniform and unifying effects of a national capitalism contributed to a diminished resistance to capitalist exploitation. Writing in the midst of a strong upswing in 1850, Marx and Engels argued:

There can be no question of a real revolution in this general prosperity in which the forces of production of bourgeois society are developing as luxuriantly as is altogether possible within bourgeois relations. ... A new revolution is only possible in the wake of a new crisis. The former is, however, just as certain as the latter. (8)

Marx and Engels saw no reason to alter their view of the long-term dynamic levelling influence of capitalist industrialization; indeed, whole chapters of Capital are devoted to an investigation of the transformation of working and living conditions wrought by the ascendancy of the machine qua capital. The origin of the stratification of skills within the manual working class could be found, according to Marx, in the preceding period of (capitalist) Manufaktur. (9) Here a new division of labor evolved within the artisanal producing unit. (10) Various operations, formerly performed by a single craftsman, now became life-long activities of individual workers. At first, these work-processes were assigned by matching the various requisite degrees of strength, dexterity and mental attention
with the natural attributes of the available labor force. Once
the manufactory system had created its own basis, it began to
develop "workers who by nature are fit only for a one-sided
special function." (11)

At this point a two-fold stratification process unfolded
consisting of a continuum of and a sharp division between
groups of skilled and unskilled workers.

Since the various functions of the aggregate worker are
simpler or more complex, lower or higher, its organs, the
individual workers, require very different degrees of train-
ing and therefore possess different values. Manufaktur
thus develops a hierarchy of workers to which a scale of
wages corresponds. (12)

But the new stage of social production did not limit its impact
to the creation of gradations of skill; it also seized upon the
simplest operations present in even the most skilled work-
processes and designated laborers to perform them.

Now they too are released from their fluid connection with
the more substantive aspects of the activity and become
ossified as exclusive functions. Manufaktur thus produces
in every craft which it embraces a class of so-called un-
skilled workers which the craft shop strictly excluded. ...
The simple separation of workers into skilled and unskilled
emerges alongside the hierarchical graduation. (13)

This two-fold process of de-skilling also involved a general
downward pressure on wages by reducing the training required
by the skilled and eliminating that accorded the unskilled.
Marx did not, however, venture a qualitative, let alone a
quantitative, evaluation of the consequences of the redistribu-
tion of skills on the redistribution of incomes within the work-
ing class. In other words, he did not state whether the
transformation of the skill structure—from one in which,
preumably, a relatively large number of relatively highly
skilled workers predominated to one in which the skill level
was shifted downwards along the entire continuum so that the
new lower end became more prominent—issued in a more or
less equal skill distribution.

This already ambiguous perspective was further complicated
by two modifying counter-movements. The first, which Marx
termed an "exception" to the general trend toward diminished
training time and cost, derived from the circumstance that the
decomposition of the labor process in certain instances generated
new synthetic functions, little known or unknown in craft
production, which necessitated lengthier apprenticeships. (14)
And it was precisely the jealous and tenacious protection of apprenticeship rights and other customs by adult male workers which Marx singled out as having been chiefly responsible for the fact that during the entire period of Manufaktur the number of unskilled remained "very limited by the predominant influence" of the skilled. (15)

The victorious advance of large-scale, mechanized industry in competition with various lower stages of production entailed, according to Marx, an acceleration of the de-skilling trends already adumbrated. The new division of labor became one of the distribution of workers under the subordination of specialized machines; at this stage Marx saw the emergence of the second counter-movement: the formation of a crucial distinction between those really employed at machine tools and their helpers (mainly children). Apart from these two "major classes" he enumerated a "numerically insignificant" sector, occupied with the control and repair of machinery, including engineers, machine-builders and joiners: "It is a higher, in part scientifically trained, in part artisanal working class, outside the circle of factory workers and only attached to them." (16)

With the exception of this latter grouping, which Marx evidently considered marginal, manual laborers were therefore experiencing deteriorating and increasingly homogeneous conditions. The tendency of Manufaktur to turn the worker into a crippled abnormality, to deprive him of his knowledge, skill and autonomy, combining them with concentrated force in the form of antagonistic capital, (17) underwent an intensification: exploitation by capitalistically employed machinery brought in its wake an increasingly common experience of a tyrannical factory regime, an assault on bodily organs and functions and intensified and lengthened working day devoted to a progressively less substantive activity. (18)

The relatively inconspicuous role played by skilled labor in modern industrial capitalism reappeared in Marx's discussion of the reduction of complicated to simple labor in connection with possible objections to his theory of value. While observing that the character of average unskilled labor varied from country to country and cultural epoch to epoch, Marx insisted that, "Simple labor forms by far the greatest mass of all labor of bourgeois society. ..." (19) To this claim he appended the contention that an examination of "any set of statistics" would corroborate the preponderance of unskilled labor. (20) Unfortunately, Marx neither adduced such data nor explicated their long-term trends. In point of fact, given the quality of
census data in the United Kingdom during Marx's lifetime, such an analysis would have proved a major and complex scholarly undertaking.

Marx returned to this issue in Capital in which work he was inclined to illustrate skilled labor by reference to jewelers who numbered but several thousand in 1861, the last census year for which material was available to Marx while writing the first volume of Capital. (21) Marx's choice of an occupation so clearly rooted in a former stage of production techniques and so obviously marginal to contemporary capitalist production raises the suspicion that Marx was presenting a distorted image.

A possible explanation of Marx's procedure emerges from a footnote which Marx attached to the aforementioned reference. (22) In his scepticism of the claims of exceptional talent and training required of skilled labor (23) Marx echoed the sentiments expressed by Adam Smith nearly a century before. (24) Marx underscored the importance of factors lying outside the sphere of economic and technological necessities.

The difference between ... "skilled" and "unskilled labour" rests in part on mere illusions, or at least differences which have long since ceased to be real and only linger on in traditional convention; in part on the more helpless situation of certain strata of the working class which permits them less than others to obtain the value of their labor power by sheer obstinacy. In this context accidental circumstances play such a great part that the same kinds of labor change place. Where, e.g., the physical substance of the working class is weakened and relatively exhausted, as in all countries of developed capitalist production, brutal kinds of labor, which demand much muscle-power, are in general converted into higher kinds of labor vis a vis much finer kinds of labor which descend to the rank of simple labor, as, e.g., the labor of a bricklayer ... in England occupies a much higher rank than that of a damask weaver. (25)

Since this passage is crucial to an understanding of Marx and Engels' subsequent views of the labor aristocracy, it is imperative to analyze it in some detail. It was evidently Marx's conviction that the elimination of the need for arcane knowledge and elaborate manual skills, which had been effected in the wake of the supersession of handicraft technology by a machine-based division of labor, had progressed so far that virtually or tendentially all modern manual labor could be performed by most individuals with a minimum of training. (This is not to argue that Marx deemed the rigorous specialization associated with the capitalist division of labor necessary or desirable in a socialist society.)

52
Marx specified two major sets of causes underlying the continued social recognition—i.e., in the form of higher wages—of technologically obsolete skills. (26) One derived from the power of certain trade unions to enforce the maintenance of lengthy apprenticeships and limited access to the trade, thereby preserving an artificially high wage rate relative to other trades. (27) The other referred to the ability of some organized workers to mitigate the tyrannical oppression of their immediate employers.

Given Marx and Engels' thesis according to which only the fear of trade unions could impel capitalists to pay workers the value of their labor power, the latter of the two foregoing cases is logically unexceptionable. The former, however, appears more problematic. Empirically, relatively few trade unions—encompassing relatively even fewer workers—in the latter part of the nineteenth century were able to enforce apprenticeship regulations stringent enough to restrict entry into a trade. The Webbs singled out the Boilermakers, the Sheffield Cutlers and the Stonemasons as the only larger unions effectively maintaining such rules, whereby only the Boilermakers were completely successful. Of the approximately 1,500,000 trade unionists recorded in 1895, the Webbs estimated that 900,000 were protected by no apprenticeship rules; 500,000 belonged to unions professing adherence to apprenticeship rules yet in fact permitting free entry (these included the metal, building and printing trades); only 90,000 were covered by apprenticeship rules which were actively enforced, whereby only 15,000 belonged to unions effectively restraining entry. (28)

Even if Marx had been correct in asserting that socially relevant numbers of trade unionists were able to enforce payment of wages, over the long-term, in excess of the current reproducible value of their labor power, then he would not only have contradicted his own application of the law of value to wage determination, but would still have had to explain how the subjective volition of a factor of production could overcome the dual workings of capital accumulation in destroying the basis of craft privilege and creating a reserve army of the unemployed to act as a wage-depressant. (29) Under these circumstances it appears more plausible to propose the working hypothesis that Marx and Engels erred in exaggerating the extent to which capitalism had, already in their time, undermined the genuinely craft occupations; similarly, they tended to underestimate the extent to which new skilled occupations were being created. (30)

To be sure, in the context of the many vague definitions of skilled labor which abounded at that time and later, Marx's scepticism was scarcely unfounded. Thus Palgrave's Dictionary
of Political Economy reported that skilled labor ordinarily implied "general intelligence, foresight, energy, and honesty," qualities which depended "largely on inherited race character, and on early environment and training." (31) In a further definitional move, the Dictionary posited that skilled labor could be distinguished from the unskilled variety by the fact that its transfer to another area involved a greater "industrial loss" than was the case among the unskilled. (32) This criterion is either tautological—because it equates the loss of high wages with "industrial loss"—or, in some instances, empirically untenable.

Yet it is clear that some criteria must be adduced. Three which focus on essential distinctions between grades of labor are: 1. "a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of processes involved in the work"; 2. "the exercise of considerable independent judgment"; and 3. "a high degree of manual dexterity." (33) Occupations demanding such skills are clearly ones that cannot be mastered within a short period of time; both theoretical knowledge (of natural laws) and experience are necessary. The fact that "independent judgment" plays an important part implies that the work flow is not repetitive since new and unexpected though perhaps predictable problems may arise.

Although the skilled-unskilled spectrum constitutes a continuum without fixed borders, it is possible to specify certain occupations requiring these qualities and others characterized by their absence. (34) Thus a group of carpenters who can build a house on their own are as skilled according to these criteria as the laborers who fetch the lumber are unskilled. This distinction does not imply, however, that these laborers, by virtue of years of observation and practice, could not become carpenters without a formal apprenticeship. Nor, on the other hand, does it imply that all carpenters are skilled, (35) for a further division of labor and the introduction of machinery may alter the skill requirements so that none of the three aforementioned criteria is fulfilled. (36) A serious investigation of the role of the skilled in nineteenth century British industry would, therefore, presuppose a concrete study of the changing technological requirements of labor in each major branch. But neither Marx nor any subsequent economist has conducted such a study. (37)

To return to the factors bringing about an "accidental" division between skilled and unskilled trades: the specific examples adduced by Marx seem ill-suited to prove his point. The premium supposedly paid for physical strength in countries characterized
by physical debilitation and exhaustion of the proletariat should be detectable in the wages of such workers as hod carriers or bricklayers' helpers who performed literally backbreaking labor. Yet the large and relatively constant wage differentials between these two groups and building trades journeymen during the nineteenth century suggest that skill was not a negligible factor. (38)

The only empirical evidence Marx offered in support of his claim that skilled labor occupied an insignificant position within the aggregate British national labor supply stemmed from Samuel Laing's *National Distress*, published in 1844. Here Marx found data indicating that of a total English and Welsh population of eighteen million, the existence of eleven million rested on unskilled labor; the fact that Laing reckoned better paid factory workers and bricklayers among the working middle class amused Marx. (39)

Although Marx's choice of a man as a witness who in Marx's time had become a respected figure in government suited his scholarly and propagandistic tactics of allowing the bourgeoisie to indict itself, it was not appropriate to documenting his historically more sweeping assertions. To begin with, Laing's book appeared in the same year as the results of the occupational census for 1841. (40) As a result, Laing apparently had no access to the latest data, for he cited data from 1831; (41) the data cited by Marx referred, according to Laing, to the "present," but no date or source was mentioned. (42) At the time, in other words, Marx published *Capital* (43) these data were three to four decades old; from 1830 to 1870 enormous changes had marked the British economy which it was incumbent upon Marx to show as having further diminished the positional value of skilled labor. Yet Marx, who devoured virtually every statistical work published by the British government, made but sparing published use of the decennial censuses.

Laing's value as a source on living conditions in mid-century Britain was further vitiated by the fact that his perceptions were strongly shaped by the severe immiseration which textile operatives—who represented 28.3 per cent of all manufacturing workers in 1841 (44)—had undergone during the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus Laing noted that the hand-loom weavers, who together with their families numbered 800,000, were counted among the lowest level of employed persons although at the outset of the century they had "stood at the head of British operatives in amount of earnings, intelligence, education, and general respectability." (45) Laing projected the experience of the hand-loom weavers into the future of all unskilled adult manufacturing labor, making "exception of a
comparatively small number of skilled labourers and artisans." (46) Of 2,500,000 persons deriving their subsistence directly from manufacturing, one-third were "plunged in extreme misery, and hovering on the verge of actual starvation"; another third, however, were earning "high wages, amply sufficient to support them in respectability and comfort." (47) But even this "upper class of highly-paid workmen connected with machinery" came to know distress in the years following the crisis of 1837. (48)

Laing persisted, however, in giving prominence to the distinction between common laborers "and all the superior descriptions of workmen, such as carpenters, shoemakers, &c., who exercise what is strictly speaking a handicraft, in contradistinction to common brute labour, and to labour which is mechanical or a mere link in the operations of a great machine." (49) Although Laing incurred Marx's scorn for having included manual workers in the middle class, he exhibited ambivalence in this matter. On the one hand he specified that only "a few of the best paid and most respectable operatives" belonged to the middle class; indeed, he modified this stratification even further by conceding that, "The lower members of this class, such as the bricklayers, masons, &c., hardly come within the denomination of the middle class." (50) On the other hand, he insisted that the skilled artisans did occupy "an intermediate position between the common labouring class and that of retail dealers, &c." (51) Laing introduced yet another stratum, observing that common handicraftsmen, exercising a craft that demanded some period of apprenticeship and earning wages decidedly superior to those of common labor, were in fact closer to the laboring classes in education, feelings and habits of life, although they could theoretically attain the same standard of civilization as small shopkeepers. (52)

The upshot of this review of Laing's essay is the insight that, despite the assault which capitalist industrialization had mounted against the working and living conditions of millions of British workers, differentials between/among manual working class strata apparently widened. Although Laing may be interpreted as having implied that the base of the proletarian stratification pyramid had become broader over time, he also appears to have witnessed an increasing distance between top and bottom.

But Laing could not report on the burgeoning of new methods of production calling for a large increment to the stock of skilled workers. Although the latter may, in terms of versatility, have lagged behind their predecessors, they nevertheless differed sufficiently from "average" unskilled
laborers to have rendered it profitable for their employers to pay them above-average wages regardless of the abolition of apprenticeship and entry restrictions. (53)

Attempts by nineteenth century British economists to resolve these issues were unsatisfactory, in part because they relied on generalizations dictated by political-ideological needs of the late-Victorian English bourgeoisie confronting growing socialist agitation rather than on empirical studies. (54) One of the most prominent "optimists" in the field was Robert Giffen (55) whose opinions were often elevated to standing dogma. (56) Giffen's only support for the claim that the aristocracy of labor had, by the 1880s, become a greater proportion of the working classes than fifty years earlier, and that a "substitution of artisan classes for rude labourers" had taken place, consisted in the argument that, "It would have been a miracle if with all the increase of machinery and development of artistic skill which had been going on, any other change had taken place." (57) Although machinery may have exerted the influence alluded to by Giffen—as, for example, when the operator of a complicated excavating machine replaces manual shovelers (58)—there is no a priori reason to assume that this was in fact the case. It would be equally justifiable to make the apodictic statement that the thrust of mechanization was, as had been the case in textiles, to replace skilled men with unskilled men, women and children. (59) For in point of fact, males above the age of twenty as a share of all those employed in manufacturing declined from 60.5 per cent in 1841 to 49.8 per cent in 1881; the corresponding figures for textiles and dyeing were 43.6 per cent and 28.1 per cent respectively. (60)

Apart from direct evidence supplied by concrete studies of individual trades (see below), there is still another indicator supporting the view that a shift in the skill structure took place in favor of the more highly skilled. (This argument does not provide sufficient proof that a labor aristocracy was formed, but merely that the number of unskilled diminished whereas the number of those with at least a modicum of skill rose.) The source of this evidence is George Wood's generally accepted observation that approximately three-eighths of the increase in real wages between 1850 and 1900 stemmed from a shift in employment from the lower to the higher paying branches. (61) Marx's analysis of capitalist development did not lead to this result; on the contrary, Marx saw capitalist mechanization and division of labor as steadily operating to create ever simpler labor tasks so that the skill structure was being and would continue to be compressed downwards. (62) In terms of income, Marx would also have expected a negative shift effect
---diametrically opposed to that discovered by Wood---to make itself felt in the long run; in other words, apart from wage movements in individual branches or occupations, the average wage level would, in Marx's view, be depressed by shifts from higher to lower paid categories. (63)

If Wood's analysis is acknowledged as correct, then one of two possible moves is available from Marx's position. Either Marx's conception of wages' following, in the long-term, a course parallel to that of the value of labor power (including training costs) is propounded---in which case it would have to be conceded that the shift to higher wage categories reflected a shift to higher skill categories; or, a divergence between wage and value of labor power (in particular the skill component), resulting in a long-term excess of the price over the value of labor power, must be assumed.

As strange as it may appear, (64) Marx and Engels did opt for some variant very close to the latter possibility. By having rejected the general notion that skill would continue to play a significant part in the capitalist division of labor; and by having further denied that wage differentials were based on corresponding real skill differentials; and, finally, by having become convinced that (the allegedly widespread) long-term apprenticeships did not rest on technological necessities, Marx implied and Engels expressly argued that for almost a half-century of unprecedented capitalist growth the trade unions organizing such skilled workers had been able to impose their will on employers and the state. (65)

Marx's published work does not indicate that Marx was aware of and/or troubled by this theoretical inconsistency. This lack of concern rested on at least two considerations: 1. Marx (and Engels) adhered to the view that the social and technological forces of capital accumulation would soon sweep these remnants away (66); and 2. Marx expressed scepticism about the size of differentials within the working class. It was not differences in material well-being as such that Marx perceived as possible sources of proletarian disunity, but rather the effects of exclusionary trade unions on political consciousness and action. (67)

Engels, on the other hand, doubtless in part because he led an active political life during the socialist renaissance of the 1880s and 1890s, felt compelled to resolve the aforementioned theoretical inconsistency. In Britain's world market and colonial hegemony he found the economic basis of the profits which enabled capitalists to pay to skilled workers wages in excess of the value of labor power. Engels was considerably less precise, however, with regard to the motivations of capitalists
in dispensing this largess; but he hinted that a probable goal was political co-optation, which at times was extended to the entire British working class. (68)

B. Working Class Income

One of Marx's earliest and most detailed empirical discussions of aggregate working class income is found in his inaugural "Address of the Working Men's International Association." (69) In it Marx underscored the disparity between the unprecedented industrial progress recorded in Britain between 1848 and 1864 on the one hand and the unalleviated poverty of the masses on the other. (70) He conceded that a minority of workers in Britain (and Europe) had obtained an increase in real wages although for most workers rising money wages had been neutralized by rising prices. (71)

Both this short outline and Marx's much more detailed account in Capital (72) have been criticized on the grounds that Marx did not adduce conclusive empirical evidence of the direction in which aggregate or average working class income changed during this period. (73) This objection is justified in the sense that Marx did not present any aggregate real wage indicators; the wealth of unsynthesized data cited by him referred mainly to the "badly paid" part of the working class which he claimed—without documentation—formed, together with agricultural laborers, the majority of that class. (74)

Several factors may be responsible for this logically incomplete approach. First, a significant segment of contemporary public and scholarly opinion upheld the notion that the working class had shared little if any in the expansion of British production. (75) Second, Marx had devoted earlier sections of Capital to historical illustrations of deteriorating conditions within the process of production which he deemed an essential component of immiseration. (76)

Moreover, the theoretical objections to Marx's claim of unabated poverty have been inadequate to the task. The basic argument runs as follows: during the period in question the two basic sources of an interior, exogenous reserve army of the unemployed—agricultural migration and competitive destruction of handicrafts—were becoming exhausted; at the same time, commodity exports were increasing rapidly enough to overcompensate for capital's own endogenous superannuation of workers. Consequently, the reserve army of the unemployed did not operate to depress wages. (77)
With regard to the first factor, the release of agricultural workers actually peaked during the period under review. Whereas the number of male agricultural laborers and indoor farm servants above the age of twenty had risen in England and Wales from 762,594 in 1841 to 812,447 in 1851 (an increase of 6.5 per cent), between the latter date and 1871 it declined to 655,718 (a decrease of 19.3 per cent). (78)

As far as handicrafts are concerned, although the only relevant data from this period do not allow of a direct comparison, (79) a random examination of them corroborates the theoretical expectation that the average number of employees per industrial establishment was on the rise. In this context the plausibility of the assumption that the shift of labor from the pre-capitalist and petty-capitalist sectors to the capitalist sector of industrial production ceased during this period is diminished. (80)

Testing the claim that the growth of exports to the non-capitalized world created more employment than was lost through the mechanism of an increasing organic composition of capital is extremely complicated. Nevertheless, an attempt may be made to approximate some orders of magnitude. From 1851 to 1871 employment in manufacturing in Great Britain rose by about twenty-two per cent. (81) During the same period, exports of manufactured goods from the United Kingdom rose by about 122 per cent. (82) Although total exports to Northern, Western and Central Europe, the United States and Canada grew more quickly than those to the rest of the world, (83) the data as a whole enhance the plausibility of this particular claim.

There are, additionally, three indicators of labor market conditions which do not confirm the view according to which the reserve army of the unemployed was not being replenished. First, unemployment among skilled trade unionists—the only available data—averaged about five per cent from 1851 to 1871, reaching a high of 11.9 per cent in 1858 and peaking again during the crisis and depression of 1867-1869. (84) Figures for individual unions such as the Iron Founders and London Compositors neared one-fifth in some years. (85) The level of unemployment was, moreover, as high as at any time in the latter half of the nineteenth century. (86)

Second, the number of paupers in receipt of relief (exclusive of vagrants) in England and Wales rose from 860,893 in 1851 to 1,081,926 in 1871. (87) This increase of 25.7 per cent was only marginally lower than the growth of total population. (88)

The third indicator of a general redundancy on the labor market was the explosive growth in emigration after 1847. (89)
In order to avoid confusing British with Irish emigration, United States immigration data can be used as an illustration. From the inception of the collection of such data in 1820 until 1847, the number of British immigrants never exceeded 24,000; then from 1848 through 1851 the average annual level doubled to more than 48,000; from 1852 to 1861 the annual average declined to about 39,000; and finally from 1862 to 1871 it jumped sharply to more than 67,000. (90) Although it is patent that emigration of this magnitude must have relieved some of the downward pressure on the wage level deriving from the unemployed, even the new amalgamated trade unions began to despair of the efficacy of emigration funds as an expedient to reduce surplus labor. (91)

It must, finally, be noted that even at this time British capital export represented a significant channeling of investment away from potential employment opportunities in the United Kingdom. In this sense it weakened the bargaining position of British workers by braking capital accumulation and hence the demand for labor. (92) Although the relative weight of capital export in the British economy was to grow later in the pre-World War I period, even in the third quarter of the nineteenth century the commitment was sizable. Thus, whereas in 1855 the gross trading profits of companies had been sixteen times larger than net property income from abroad, by 1875 they were less than seven times greater. (93) It has been estimated that "Britain's foreign wealth had swelled by 1875 to £1,200,000,000." (94) The possible connections with stagnating real wages were manifest enough for contemporary middle-class radicals to express concern about the trend away from domestic and toward foreign investment. (95)

But perhaps the most telling reason for seriously considering Marx's summarization of working class living standards during the 1850s and 1860s lies in the fact that more recent scholarly studies have not only confirmed Marx's views, but have also revealed that Marx judged the improvement in the condition of the better paid workers too favorably. According to this body of literature, real wages (with unemployment taken into account) did not reach and consolidate a new plateau until after the crisis and depression of 1866-1868. (96) Moreover, the data indicate that the wages of skilled workers rose no more rapidly than those of the mass of workers. Thus an index of the real wages of London artisans reveals that the values recorded in 1850-1852 were not permanently exceeded until the years following 1869. (97) Other detailed wage studies have revealed similar trends. (98)
The evidence pertaining to the functional distribution of income also supports Marx's position. Three independent surveys of the wage share all show a decline. According to a contemporary statistician, Leone Levi, this share of total income declined from 43.5 per cent in 1866-1867 to 41.4 per cent in 1882-1883. (99) A decade later, Arthur Bowley estimated that from 1860 to 1891 average manual labor wages had risen forty per cent compared with an increase of forty-seven per cent in total national income on the average. (100) Finally, a modern study indicates that income from employment as a share of total domestic income declined from 52.1 per cent in 1855 to a low of 46.2 per cent in 1871, and did not surpass the initial value until 1883; if net property income from abroad is added to obtain gross national product, then the share of employment income in 1900 (50.9 per cent) was lower than in 1855 (51.0 per cent). (101)

In Capital, the first edition of which was published three years after Marx had written the "Address" for the First International, Marx returned to the theme of the better and worse paid sectors of the working class. Although Marx cited the limits of his book as the reason for focusing on the badly paid workers, (102) his two-fold conviction that they formed the majority and that "the misery of the working masses" would continue unabated under capitalism (103) doubtless reinforced the design of the expository architecture. In this context, his sparse and unsystematic comments on the best paid workers did not serve to contrast the two groups, but rather to underscore the insecurity, poverty, deprivation and misery shared by both. (104)

In a short passage devoted to miners, Marx noted that they purchased their wages—which made them one of the highest paid categories of British workers—at the expense of very poor working and housing conditions. (105) Then in a separate section (106) Marx very briefly discussed the effects of the crisis of 1866-1867 on "the best paid part of the working class, its aristocracy," namely iron shipbuilders in London. (107) The heart of the passage consisted of a very lengthy quotation from a newspaper documenting how hundreds of men, who had previously belonged to the best paid skilled workers of Britain, had been compelled to seek shelter in workhouses because their reserves had been exhausted. (108)

It is significant that Marx chose to dwell on these two factors in his brief references to the best paid. For he was manifestly convinced that: 1. capitalist mechanization would both undermine the technological basis of higher craft incomes
and lead to a deterioration of working conditions; (109) and
2. during periods of crisis and depression the aggregate working class, subject to tendentially homogeneous conditions, would coalesce politically.

Marx and Engels retained their conviction that revolutionary movements ebbed and flowed in intimate connection with the upswings and downswings of the industrial cycle. (110) In later years, however, they refined this causal nexus. Engels in particular sought to demonstrate that a generation of the English working class, enjoying historically unique privileges based on the world market supremacy of British capital, would be succeeded by a proletariat reduced to standards of living common to other European national working classes. The correlation between economic misery/immiseration and revolution came to be more stratum-specific. Thus Engels warned Eduard Bernstein that the misery of hand-weavers, engaged in a fruitless struggle with capitalist industry, could make them susceptible to socialist views but that those in a hopeless situation would reach out for any available means of rescue. (111) Trade unionists, too, would have to experience hard(er) times before anything could be "done with them." (112)

Numerous indicators show that both of the leveling/unifying factors imputed to Marx's conception of capitalist progress were operating during the period in question. An illustration from a branch with which Marx had some acquaintance may suffice here. From August 1859 to February 1860 a large and intense building trades strike-lockout took place around the issues of a nine-hour day and union recognition. (113) Marx, reporting on the beginning of the strike for a German emigre newspaper, spoke of the "brutal obstinacy of the masters" who had arrogated to themselves the same authority vis a vis their "hands" as American plantation owners vis a vis their slaves. Acknowledging that such attitudes and treatment generated "that concentrated, conscious class hatred ... which is the most certain guarantee of a societal overturn," Marx praised the sacrifices suffered by other workers throughout Britain who were providing financial support to those on strike or locked out. (114) In spite of strike and lockout benefits, (115) men who had been earning five and one-half shillings per day (116) soon exhausted their funds. (117) In summarizing the "state of open war" which had raged between labor and capital, the Registrar-General stated:

This distress produced ultimately a sensible effect on the mortality of the men and their wives. As long as there was bread, the poor children, however, apparently had it; until
weakened, cold, ill-clad, they at last died in unusual numbers as the severe weather came on towards the close of the year. (118)

Although de-skilling brought about by technological change remained marginal in the building trades compared with the transformations other industries were undergoing and/or had already underwent, it was none the less advancing. Painting in particular, subjected to increasing "jobbing" between the 1830s and the 1860s, was flooded by unskilled painters and became casualized. (119) As a result, painters were known as the unhealthiest occupational group during these years. (120) In carpentry and joinery, labor-saving tools and a further division of labor served to undermine the position of the tradesmen. (121) Largely as a result of the piecework connected with subcontracting and sweating, wrote one of the deans of orthodox political economy, "A carpenter in London, and in some other places, is not supposed to last in his utmost vigour above eight years." (122)

C. Marx's and Engels' Progressive Disillusionment with British Trade Unions

Despite his relativization of the socio-economic disparities between the majority of poorly paid workers and minority of better paid ones in Britain, (123) Marx remained sceptical of the trade unions of the skilled in their contemporary form. An understanding of Marx's position is, however, complicated by the fact that his criticisms were sometimes directed against trade union leaders, at other times against the membership and at still other times against the entire working class. Thus in 1864 he made the failure of the continental European revolutions of 1848 responsible for the ensuing "castration" of the British working class. Large scale emigration, induced by the discovery of gold in California and Australia, deprived the labor movement of irreplaceable members. Finally, other former leaders, "bribed" by the "bait" of greater employment and temporarily higher wages, swam with the current. On the other hand, the apathy of the masses reached historically unprecedented levels so that the working class became reconciled to its political nothingness. (124)

Marx's position becomes even more ambiguous in light of the growing class polarization of wealth and poverty which he described for this period. (125) By allowing such exogenous
factors as the discovery of precious metals, the failure of other national labor movements and corruption to counteract the theoretically predictable outcome of an extended period of capital accumulation, Marx, to be sure, punctured the rigorously economist categorical framework often attributed to him; (126) at the same time, however, he did not succeed in plausibly uncovering systemic causes of the course pursued by the labor movement and the British working class as a whole.

During the 1860s Marx appears to have sustained the hope that the trade unions of the skilled would expand the scope of their operations to include the organization of the worst paid workers, participation in and leadership of general social and political movements and mobilization of the masses for the overthrow of "wage slavery." (127) In connection with the recruitment of trade union support for the International at the end of the 1860s, Marx was convinced that he had made some progress in converting several trade union leaders to a perspective closer to his own. (128) He was particularly impressed by Robert Applegarth, the secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. (129) Engels, who in general was even more sceptical of English trade union leaders than Marx, became so enthusiastic as a result of an attempt by a member of the House of Lords to elicit Applegarth's support for the preservation of landed property in exchange for legislation favorable to trade unionism, that he ridiculed M.P.'s who fancied that they had the whole labor movement "in their pocket" because a few leaders had flirted with them. (130)

Soon, however, Marx's attitude toward existing trade unions became increasingly critical. (131) By the early 1870s (132) Marx stated at a session of the London Conference of the International that he had altered his views on trade unions which he now considered

an aristocratic minority. The poor workers could not belong to them: the great mass of the workers, who were driven daily by economic development out of the villages and into the cities, will long remain outside the trade unions, and the poorest of the poor would never belong to them. (133)

Marx then proceeded to disparage the achievements of trade unions which, in his view, were powerless without the International. (134) Although these remarks must be read in connection with a proposal to attain administrative decentralization by means of an international federation of trade unions, (135) the sharp tone revealed that Marx had been deeply disappointed by the failure of the trade unions to adopt an aggregate anti-
capitalist approach. It also underscored the baselessness of Bakunin's charge that Marx and Engels viewed the "wretched proletariat" "with the deepest contempt" and founded their revolutionary strategy on the privileged stratum of bourgeoisified workers. (136) A year later, at the Haag Congress of the International, Marx made his opinion of the "so-called leaders of the English workers" even more explicit, claiming that they "were more or less bought by the bourgeoisie and the government." (137)

Toward the end of the 1870s Marx's condemnation of the British trade unions became even more comprehensive. Speaking of the years following 1848 as "the period of corruption" which had mired the working class deeper and deeper in demoralization until it had become "the tail" of Liberal Party capitalists, Marx charged that the leadership had definitively passed into the hands of venal trade union leaders and professional agitators who devoted themselves more to supporting Liberal foreign policy than to coming to the aid of starving strikers. (138)

Numerous factors may account for the transformation that occurred in Marx and Engels' assessment of British trade unions. Certainly not the least important was their disillusionment upon discovering that the Reform Bill of 1867 and other election and voting reforms, to which they had attributed great potential significance, (139) had not galvanized the working class into building its own party or pursuing a course independent of that set by the bourgeoisie. (140)

Marx's reactions did not prove to be unique; much less radical socialists shared them. Thus the Webbs, writing in the 1890s, set forth an indictment which corroborated many of the charges made by Marx. (141) They observed, for example, that the legislative recognition achieved by trade union leaders had been gained at the price of abandoning the class approach of compulsory maintenance of the standard of living in favor of the bourgeois principle of freedom of contract for the individual worker. (142) They also confirmed that adherence by the officially acknowledged leaders of the trade union world to bourgeois economic views had led to a growing disaffection among the rank and file from that leadership. (143) The class collaboration that followed in the wake of legislative recognition, made so much of by Marx, also occupied a prominent place in the Webbs' narrative. (144) Finally, the Webbs agreed fully with Marx's assessment of the political labor movement as the tail of the Liberals. (145)

Engels, too, shared these views. In the most explicit and ambitious analysis of the labor aristocracy ever published by
him or Marx, Engels not only set forth what was to become a standard Marxist explanation in terms of England's world market hegemony, but also sketched the political strategy employed by the bourgeoisie in cultivating working class passivity. According to Engels, Chartism's extinction, taken together with the renewed economic upswing after 1848, enabled the industrial bourgeoisie, flushed with victory in the wake of the abolition of the corn laws, to attach the English working class to its own Liberal Party. Moreover, strong common sense instructed the capitalist class in the impossibility of establishing complete social and political dominance without the support of the proletariat. (146)

Engels' evaluation of the allegedly conciliatory class politics pursued by English industrialists was influenced by Marx's conception of the peculiar class structure prevailing in England.

In no other country have the intermediate stations between the millionaire commanding whole industrial armies and the wages-slave living only from hand to mouth so gradually been swept away from the soil. There exist here no longer, as in continental countries, large classes of peasants and artisans almost equally dependent on their own property and their own labour. (147)

Modern scholars have also stressed the fact that at least through the third quarter of the nineteenth century, England differed from continental European countries in lacking a significant number of relatively prosperous petty bourgeois, farmers, civil servants and office workers. (148)

In lieu of more precise cross-national data for nineteenth century Europe, the following selected comparative data may serve to indicate relative orders of magnitude for Britain, Germany and France. Between the census years of 1841 and 1891 the number of farmers and graziers in England and Wales fluctuated between 225,000 and 250,000. (149) In France, 3,266,705 farms were enumerated in 1866 and 1,967,590 in 1896. (150)

Seen in terms of relative population size, these figures reveal that in the mid-1860s, when the French population was one and three-quarters times as great as that of England and Wales, French farmers were more than thirteen times as numerous as their English and Welsh counterparts; by the mid-1890s, when the French population was only one and one-quarter times as large, French farmers were still almost nine times as numerous. (151)
Careful estimates for Germany show that between 1855 and 1895 the number of independent farmers, woodsmen and fishermen rose from 2,130,000 to 2,564,000. (152) Thus with a population only seventy to eighty per cent larger than that of England and Wales, Germany accounted for eight to eleven times as many farmers. (153)

Although the relative number of civil servants, professionals and white collar employees appears to have been roughly equal in Britain, Germany and France in the latter half of the nineteenth century, (154) the number of employers and self-employed in manufacturing, handicrafts and trade appears to have been at least twice as great in the two continental countries as in Britain. (155)

In spite of this empirical verification of the relative insignificance of buffer classes between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in Britain, the generally plausible interpretation built by Engels on this basis reveals itself, when applied to concrete measures and policies, as undifferentiated, in particular with regard to historical timing. For a quarter-century passed after 1848 before significant sections of industrial capital could be said to have accepted labor organizations and the principle of collective bargaining. Not only does Engels seem to imply that the years immediately following 1848 were marked by a new phase of capital-labor relations, but his language also suggests that the change derived from a voluntaristic strategy, consciously and unilaterally formulated by industrial capitalists as a social and political class. (156)

This historical image unequivocally contradicts Marx's analysis of the struggles surrounding the passage of the Ten Hours Act of 1847 and subsequent acts. Marx stressed that the capitalists at first fought passage of the bill, then sought to undermine its effective enforcement and, finally, had recourse to judicial maneuvers. Marx, moreover, left no doubt that enactment was due mainly to working class struggles to assert its "political economy" vis a vis that of the middle class and subsidiarily to Conservative support in revenge for the elimination of the corn laws. (157) More striking still is the fact that Engels' account in the 1880s contradicted not only the notes which he made in 1868 of the relevant passages from Capital, (158) but also his own articles on the Ten Hours Act written in 1850. (159)

Similarly, it was decades before manufacturers "cajoled and protected" trade unions as beneficial institutions (160) if indeed they can be said ever to have done this on a societally relevant scale in the nineteenth century. Numerous viciously conducted strikes and lockouts in the 1850s and 1860s scarcely contributed
to an environment of conciliation. G.D.H. Cole is therefore almost certainly justified in stating that prior to the 1870s "most employers were ... far more intent on smashing Trade Unions than on negotiating with them." (161) It was not until the success of the leading trade unionists before the Royal Commission on Trade Unions from 1867 to 1869 in allaying the fears of some segments of the ruling classes concerning the goals of the unions, (162) and especially not until these classes perceived that an enfranchised working class would not engage in disruptive political activity, that trade unions received legislative sanction. (163)

To recapitulate, then, Engels appears to have interpreted events of the 1850s and 1860s too deterministically in terms of the capital-labor constellation of the 1870s and 1880s. That the trade unions of the skilled and their employers had come to terms with each other within the existing socio-economic framework he took to have been the result of long-term class planning reaching back four decades. In so doing, Engels deprived the various struggles for enhanced democratic rights and better working and living conditions of their appropriate positional value within the history of mid-Victorian class conflict; instead, they were derogated to a secondary role of empirical contingencies causally ornamental to the decisions and policies of capitalists and their venal allies in the leadership of the labor movement. The social, political and cultural complexity inherent in the ascendancy of a social stratum and its interactions with the ruling classes was abandoned in favor of apodictic generalization. Ironically, for example, it was precisely the debate surrounding the Reform Bill of 1867 that for the first time underscored the conscious class tactic of granting privileges to a part of the working class as a means of influencing it (see below section G), yet Engels failed to comment on this stratum-specific course of action. It remains to be determined whether Engels' economic explanation was equally mechanistic.

Marx's and Engels' views on the British labor aristocracy have been faulted on other grounds. As the Chartist traditions became progressively dissipated in the 1860s and 1870s, (164) Marx and Engels reformulated the issue of the political context of the labor aristocracy: the failure of an existing revolutionary movement was transformed into the total absence of anti-capitalist organizations within the working class. A modern critic has construed this sequence to mean that Marx and Engels tried to explain the rise of a non-socialist trade union movement by having recourse to the thesis of the labor aristocracy
because "(t)he obvious interpretation—that a certain share of the new wealth created by the development of industry under capitalism went to the mass of the workers—had to be rejected." (165)

This line of reasoning displays a number of weaknesses. First, Marx and Engels neither devised the thesis of a labor aristocracy nor applied it first to this particular turn of sociopolitical events; others and they themselves had employed it in partial explanation of a different phenomenon. Second, far from rejecting—let alone having to reject—"the obvious interpretation," Marx and Engels did, as was noted above, take account of rising wages and their consequences for revolutionary action. The third and most decisive weakness relates to the implication that Marx and Engels believed that the existence of the labor aristocracy explained why no revolution had taken place in Britain. (166)

This question clearly encompasses a much broader spectrum of social forces than those focusing on the causes leading to the rise and consolidation of an exclusionary trade union movement pursuing peculiarly narrow social and political goals. The key role of a labor aristocracy in such a trade union movement suggests itself much more readily than in the context of the failure of a revolutionary political movement to emerge. For even superficial considerations would place crucial emphasis on the conditions and consciousness of the mass of workers—and not of the labor aristocracy—in any evaluation of the reasons underlying the absence of a revolutionary party. And in point of fact, Engels did plump for this kind of analysis although it proved at times to be at loggerheads with other arguments used by Marx and Engels.

The relationship between trade unions and revolutionary parties/movements is an extremely complicated one which Marx and Engels never analyzed in detail for Britain. In fact, apart from historical illustrations in the first volume of Capital, which do not deal with this issue directly, neither Marx nor Engels wrote any serious, scholarly study of politics and economics with special reference to the labor movement of Victorian England.

D. The World Market

Engels' original contribution to the debate surrounding the labor aristocracy consisted in his insistence upon Britain's
world industrial hegemony and colonial dominance as the material basis of bourgeois support of a favored stratum or, as Engels often expressed it, of the entire English working class. (167) Engels, as already noted, had broached this subject in a letter to Marx as early as 1858. In the 1880s Engels' private correspondence was replete with variations on this theme. To Marx he motivated his decision to suspend his cooperation with the weekly, The Labour Standard, by referring to the lack of public influence generated by his articles. The basic cause of this failure Engels saw in the fact that, "The British working man just doesn't want to go any further, he must be shaken up by events, by the loss of the industrial monopoly." (168) A year later Engels returned to the subject, once again implicating the entire working class. In response to a query from Karl Kautsky concerning the attitude of the English workers towards Britain's colonial policy, Engels wrote that in this matter and all other political matters they thought as the bourgeoisie did, presumably because they were "also feasting smartly upon England's world market and colonial monopoly." (169)

The next year Engels explained to the leader of the German Social Democrats, August Bebel, that "a really general labor movement" would not arise until the workers felt that England's world market monopoly had been broken; for as long as they remained the tail of the bourgeoisie in the economic exploitation of this monopoly, they would remain the tail of the Liberals. (170) Engels underscored the significance of foreign trade profits for domestic class struggle by using the negative example of Germany. In view of the strategy of German exporters—namely, to demand protective import tariffs in order to compensate for the losses incurred in dumping abroad—, it became necessary for German industrialists to replace the surplus value not realized on the world market by depressing wages. This inversion of the English model would, according to Engels, lead to an exacerbation of class conflict in Germany. (171)

That Engels was convinced of the historically unique conditions underlying the comparatively tranquil period of English labor relations was revealed by his prediction that no single country—nor even the United States—would ever be in a position to assume the monopolistic role enjoyed by England between 1840 and 1870; competition among Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom would, moreover, lead to chronic overproduction on world markets and an inevitable deterioration of working class conditions. (172) Engels continued to hold such views into the 1890s. (173) Engels thus conceived
of the labor aristocracy—particularly that of a whole national working class, but in lesser measure that of a stratum too—as absolutely restricted in time and place. The peculiar historical conditions giving rise to it would be replaced by those generating intensified class struggle throughout the world.

It is important in this connection to separate analytically from this specific set of world market factors another class of factors that, in Engels' mind, set Britain apart from other countries of the second half of the nineteenth century. Although chronologically and causally related to the aforementioned set, this class exerted its own influence. This class of factors was rooted in the circumstance that British capitalists, as the representatives of the period's premier industrial capitalist nation, were subject to "a law of modern political economy" that insured the gradual abandonment of practices of fraud so characteristic of the precapitalist sphere of circulation. With the growth of the market, bilking consumers and other businessmen became counterproductive compared with other uses of time. As industry expanded, analogous changes in the forms of direct exploitation of wage laborers also asserted themselves: industrial magnates "had better things to do" than to devote themselves to devising and executing new methods of "gypping" their workers. Consequently, numerous reforms such as the abolition of the truck system were carried out. (174) Moreover, as the scale of industrial plants grew, capitalists and managers realized that "unnecessary quarrels" with workers and their representatives should be avoided since the loss of production and profit associated with them exceeded their potential benefits. As long as such "concessions" remained the prerogative of large capital, they also served the purpose of squeezing out smaller business that could not yet afford such enlightened attitudes. (175)

Since Britain was the first capitalist society to have eliminated such abuses, at least in the leading branches, the British working class was relieved of such chicanery at a time when continental workers were feeling the brunt of it. To be sure, Engels also interpreted this differential development to mean that the British working class would also be the first to recognize the source of its misery in the capitalist system itself rather than in its abuses. (176)

In spite of this extended pre-history of private observations on the effects of England's world market domination on the proletariat, it was not until 1885 that Engels published his views—that is to say, at a time when this monopoly was already "irretrievably broken." (177) Here, for the first time, Engels
introduced a stratum-specific modification, noting that whereas the working class as a whole participated in the resulting advantages "to a certain degree," the latter were distributed "very unequally": "the privileged minority pocketed the greatest part," but even the masses received temporary benefits. (178) For this reason socialism had expired with Owenism and for the same reason it would be renewed with the collapse of the world market monopoly. (179) Since Engels believed that this collapse had already taken place, it must be assumed that he considered a time-lag necessary until the English proletariat became conscious of its altered situation.

This assumption is corroborated by a remarkable letter written by Engels to Bebel several months after having composed the article cited earlier. As one of the by-products of the international overproduction crisis anticipated by him, Engels hoped that the old trade unions would be swept away.

These have retained the character of gilds, which has clung to them from the very beginning, and it is becoming more unbearable every day. You people believe perhaps that any worker in the branch can join up with the mechanics, carpenters, masons, etc. without further ado? Not at all. Whoever wants to join has to have been attached as an apprentice for a series of years (mostly 7) to a worker who belongs to the union. This was supposed to limit the number of workers, but was completely useless—except that it harvested the teacher money for which he in fact did nothing. This lasted until 1848. Since then, however, the colossal upswing in industry has produced a class of workers just as numerous or even more numerous than the "skilled" workers of the Trades Unions, who do as much work or even more but can never become members. These people have been bred as it were by the gild rules of the Trades Unions. But do you think that the Unions would ever consider doing away with all this old rot? Not in the least. ... (T)hese fools want to reform society according to their own views, but do not want to reform themselves in accord with society's development. They stick to their traditional superstition which only hurts them instead of getting rid of this stuff, thus doubling their numbers and power and in fact becoming what they less and less remain, namely unions of all workers of the trade against the capitalists. I believe that will clear up for you much of the behavior of these privileged workers. (180)

The context in which Engels made these remarks suggests that he was implying that England's world market domination had
acted as a shield behind which unions of the skilled had been able to enforce apprenticeship and entry regulations in which employers could acquiesce. Such a thesis is problematic for two reasons. First, as already noted, Marx and Engels appear to have held an exaggerated notion of the extent to which restrictive entry practices were successfully enforced by trade unions toward the end of the nineteenth century. (181) Second, the correspondence between the leading export branches and those allegedly or actually characterized by restrictive apprenticeship systems was marginal. The textile industry, which from 1860 to 1890 accounted for about two-thirds, and until 1913 for more than one-half, of all United Kingdom exports of manufactured goods, (182) lacked a skilled labor aristocracy based on lengthy apprenticeship. (183) Other industries with larger numbers of labor aristocrats, such as printing and building, were hardly involved in exporting at all. The working conditions in another major export trade, namely coal mining, precluded the emergence of an aristocracy of labor. (184)

In point of fact, only three major industries employed large numbers of labor aristocrats and simultaneously relied heavily on the world market—iron and steel, machinery and shipbuilding. The British iron and steel industry, which exported approximately two-fifths of its output in the latter half of the century, (185) accounted for 46.0 per cent of world pig iron and 35.9 per cent of world steel production between 1875 and 1879; not until the 1890s was it supplanted by Germany and the United States as the leading producer, and it was only in the first decade of the twentieth century that Germany attained the first rank as exporter. (186) In machine tools, Britain maintained its supremacy in almost all fields during the nineteenth century. (187) Finally, Britain accounted for three-fifths of world shipbuilding tonnage well into the twentieth century. (188)

Of the unions in these three industries it was generally true that they restricted membership to the skilled although only the United Society of Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders preserved full apprenticeship rights. (189) Vitally strengthened by this enforcement, the Boilermakers proved to be the only one of the unions in these industries which organized virtually all the skilled in its trades. (190) The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, on the other hand, managed to represent only one-third to one-half of the skilled machine-tool workers after 1875. (191) The Amalgamated Association of Iron Workers, an organization almost exclusively of iron puddlers, experienced a drastic decline in membership in the 1870s. (192) The
Engineers rejected the admission of the unskilled until as late as 1912. (193) The Boilermakers went so far as to organize the defeat of platers' helpers in a dispute in 1882, while the holders-up were admitted in the same year under the condition that they not participate in unemployment or superannuation benefits. (194) In the iron and steel industry, even where entry by the unskilled was formally permitted, it was to little avail since the union afforded them no protection against their de facto employers—the (sub-)contractors such as puddlers and rollers who formed the leadership of the union. (195)

These three branches, all belonging to the metal industries, witnessed explosive employment growth in the latter half of the nineteenth century. From 1851 to 1881 the number of men employed in England and Wales in the manufacture of machinery, ships and iron and steel rose from 176,400 to 408,000. This increase of 131.7 per cent exceeded by a large margin that of: all manufacturing (86.9 per cent); all males in manufacturing (29.8 per cent); the entire occupied population (37.8 per cent); and of the entire population (44.8 per cent). As a result, these occupations represented 18.2 per cent of all males employed in manufacturing in 1881 compared with 10.2 per cent in 1851. (196) Alone from 1851 to 1871, iron and steel manufacture rose from the twenty-fourth to the tenth largest employer, while engine and machine making rose from thirty-seventh to eighteenth place. (197) By 1881, only coal mining and carpentry occupied more male manual workers than iron and steel manufacture. (198)

During this period metal trade unions also expanded their membership apace. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which numbered 5,000 at its formation in 1851, counted 46,101 members in 1881; the Iron Founders grew from 4,073 members in 1850 to 11,448 in 1881; similarly, the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders numbered 20,676 in 1881 compared to 1,771 in 1850. (199) Union membership clearly grew at a more rapid rate than employment in these branches, although this fact was largely a function of the extremely low initial values. But even if the 1860s are taken as a starting point, membership in the engineering and shipbuilding unions grew more quickly than employment. (200) An estimate of a fifteen per cent degree of organization for the entire metal, engineering and shipbuilding sector for the year 1888 (201) would also serve as an upper limit for earlier years. (202)

These metal-based industries represented a significant deviation from the type of trade in which the highly skilled and paid artisanate traditionally had worked. Formerly, the bulk of such craftsmen had been employed in small-scale crafts
such as printing, silversmithery, carpentry, etc., which had been relatively little affected by capitalist industrialization. (203) This vast new increment to the labor aristocracy tended to be concentrated in large works, confronted by huge masses of machinery. Thus according to the factory returns of 1871, the almost 100,000 English and Welsh establishments covered by the Factory Acts employed, on the average, about twenty-one persons. But in the manufacture of machinery the average was eighty, in iron mills, 141; at blast furnaces, 236; and in iron shipbuilding, 426. (204) The approximately 2,500 establishments in these three branches, representing 2.5 per cent of all those covered, accounted for twenty-nine per cent of the moving steam power reported. (205)

The emergence of these industries as new sources of, and Engels' annoyance with labor aristocrats are ironic when it is recalled that Marx and Engels discounted the possibility of the creation of significant numbers of skilled workers by industrial capitalism. In machine making, for example, although the transition from handmade to machine-made machine during the first four decades of the nineteenth century led to the demise of the all-round millwright and the emergence of a division of labor among turners, fitters, pattern makers, erectors and others, the development of machine-using industries placed greater demands on machines so that greater accuracy and speed were required of the operators. Moreover, the new machine-making machines "still left the major proportion of the engineering work from patternmaking to fitting and erecting, in the hands of the skilled worker with hand tools." (206) From the 1850s to the 1880s, little basic change in engineering technology occurred other than increased specialization of the fitter; investment assumed a labor-using character. (207) Textile machinery manufacture, in particular, "was the outstanding nineteenth century case of a skill-intensive monopoly." (208) It appears that the majority of engineering workers remained skilled until World War I. (209) Not until after the 1890s, at any rate, did capital intensive technological change begin to oust engineers from their position as labor aristocrats. (210)

In these areas, machine making probably stood mid-way between shipbuilding, with its rigid apprenticeship system, (211) and the regulated occupational progression of the steel industry. (212) In shipbuilding, scattered returns from various parts of Britain between 1866 and 1883 revealed an almost invariant fifty-two per cent share of total employment accounted for by the skilled. (213) Similar data for iron and steel production pointed to the skilled as a sizable minority, averaging about two-fifths of the work force. (214)
Engels was, consequently, correct in claiming that the economic upsurge of the second half of the nineteenth century brought in its wake a capital intensification and division of labor which ushered in the era of the unskilled industrial worker who was largely excluded from trade unions. From a moral and political perspective similar criticisms had been made earlier by laissez faire liberals and Christian socialists. (215) Orthodox economists, too, bemoaned the fact that exclusionary unions of the skilled (such as bricklayers) were fast becoming "an oligarchy of manual laborers" aspiring to protect privileges. (216) Aristocrats condemned them for their tyranny. (217) What caused this course of events to appear particularly odious to Engels was his apparent conviction that these new skills, unlike those that in fact necessitated long periods of training, were artificially maintained by union-controlled apprenticeship programs. Although this view exaggerated the unions' strength, (218) it was true that the New Model unions in building, engineering and shipbuilding helped shape a tracking system which insured that boys, upon entering a trade, were virtually "labelled as future skilled craftsmen or as future unskilled labourers, with little or no chance of rising into a higher grade." (219) A few occupations, on the other hand, did demand uncommon skill and strength, which could not be acquired over short periods of time. (220)

Engels was not without predecessors with regard to the claim that the working class could achieve a more advantageous material position as a result of the superiority enjoyed by sectors of the national capital in producing industrial commodities for the world market. Robert Torrens had discussed this possibility as early as the 1830s. (221) And Thornton had mentioned the "qualified monopoly" held by the United Kingdom in coal, iron, cottons, woollens and machinery as having enabled unions in these trades to increase their wages without jeopardizing the advantages accruing to their firms on the world market. (222) In contrast with these economists, however, Engels insisted that the gain, though unequally distributed, accrued to the entire national working class.

It is therefore necessary to dwell on the mechanisms that might have permitted a rise in the level of real wages in accordance with Engels' assertions. To begin with, Engels' position involved certain inconsistencies. If, as Engels maintained, the restrictive practices of trade unions represented an attempt to thwart technical progress, then the leading British industries must have been disadvantaged vis-à-vis their European and United States competitors. Yet despite
contemporary entrepreneurial complaints to that effect, (223) modern research does not attach great significance to these putative blocks in explaining Britain's economic decline prior to World War I. (224) If, on the other hand, the competitive position of British capital was not adversely affected by trade unions, then it is not clear how the latter were harming themselves, as Engels claimed.

A further inconsistency in Engels' conception of world market-supported gains to the working class relates to the chronological course of development. Explanations of British trade union opportunism based on that country's world industrial supremacy are "obviously inadequate" because the set of labor aristocratic attitudes and policies became particularly salient at the time "when English capitalism grew rather niggardly." (225) Table 1 documents the decline of the United Kingdom as the world's leading industrial producer.

Table 1. Shares of World Industrial Production, 1820–1920 (in per cent) (226)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus until approximately 1870, the industrial output of the United Kingdom was a great as that of the United States and Germany combined; by the first half of the 1880s, however, the United States surpassed the United Kingdom, and by the second half of the first decade of the twentieth century Germany achieved the same result. (227)

Although Britain's share of world industrial markets held up much longer than its share of output, it too experienced a decline, albeit one differentiated according to product. Other estimates than those underlying Table 2 indicate a similar trend. (229) Although Britain's competitiveness on the world market continued at a high level, it had peaked about 1870, before Germany and the United States emerged as industrial powers. (230) Thus in the thirty-two years between 1840 and 1872, manufactured exports of the United Kingdom increased 352.9 per cent compared to a rise of only 51.4 per cent in the following thirty-two years. (231) That Britain's
world industrial trade monopoly was being broken is illustrated by the high but declining shares in the three sectors under discussion.

Table 2. Shares of World Exports of Manufactured Commodities, 1880–1913 (in per cent) (228)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Britain's Share of World Exports in selected Metal Industries, 1880–1913 (in per cent) (232)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1899</th>
<th>1913</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iron and steel</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal manufacture</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ships and railway material</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, Britain's export position in these sectors deteriorated even more than these figures reveal because exports tended to be concentrated in older product lines (such as locomotives, ships and textile machinery) rather than in "the most recently developed products" (such as motor vehicles, machine tools and electrical machinery). As a result, "Britain by the late nineteenth century could not compete effectively with American and German domestic production" of iron and steel goods. (233)

But even if British industrial supremacy were granted, it would still have to be shown how British workers benefited therefrom. To begin with workers directly employed in one of the leading export branches: it is feasible to arrive at a rough estimate of the extent to which they were able to "feast smartly"on this world monopoly. In 1871, the United Kingdom exported machinery valued at £ 4,257,000. (234) Factory returns from the same year showed that 166,981 persons were employed in the United Kingdom in the manufacture of machinery. (235) If seventy per cent of the workers are assumed to have been skilled, and fifteen per cent of the exported value is reckoned as gross profit, (236) then somewhat
less than £ 5.5 would have been available per worker for
distribution. If it were further assumed that one-fourth of
this sum had been "converted into 'crumbs,'" (237) this portion
would not have amounted to the average weekly wage of an
engineer in Manchester in 1871. (238) Even if a much smaller
group of workers were taken as the recipients of these benefits,
such as the membership of the Amalgamated Society of Engine-
ers, which was 38,000 at this time, (239) the "monopoly
premium" accruing to them would still have accounted for only
one-fifth to one-sixth or less of the difference between the
annual wages of a mechanic and those of the average worker
in the United Kingdom. (240) In order to control for skill as
a variable, unskilled laborers in favored world market branches
may be compared with those employed in other branches. In
point of fact, the wages of laborers in the iron and steel
industry were no higher than those of the average town
laborer and only little higher than those of agricultural
laborers. (241) Along these lines, then, it is not possible to
prove that world market-induced "premia" skewed the distribu-
tion of income within the favored branches any more than
between them and other branches. (242)

Even apart from the complicated theoretical issue of whether
one nation can exploit another by means of foreign trade
alone, (243) it is difficult to reconcile such exploitation with
the fact that British exports were largely destined not for
"the inhabitants of Africa, Asia and the Americas," (244) but
for the other capitalist countries of the world. In 1880, for
example, thirty-eight per cent of British iron and steel exports
got to the United States (245) at a time when wages there
were higher than in Britain. (246) But even with regard to
colonial countries such as India, a question arises concerning
the mechanism by which imports of steel or of machinery would
have led to the exploitation of Indian workers and the partici-
pation therein by English workers producing those exports. (247)
Rising productivity and hence profits appear to offer a much
more plausible interpretation of branch-specific higher wa-
ges. (248)

Two approaches have been formulated to marshal support
for the claim that British workers as a whole benefited from
Britain's colonial-imperial position. (249) The first refers to
cheap food imports which began to reach Britain in the
1870s (250) from colonial areas. Strong corroboration of this
view is provided by the fact that Britain alone of the major
capitalist nations experienced a decline in the cost of living
during the last third of the nineteenth century; partly as a
result of this circumstance, real wages also grew most quickly
in that country. (251) Despite the perspicacious objection that such gains were scattered and fortuitous, (252) this approach appears plausible yet lacks any stratum-specific validity.

The second approach emphasizes the huge stock of foreign investment accumulated by "Britain". This fund increased approximately ten-fold in the six decades preceding the First World War, (253) while net property income from abroad rose fifteen-fold from £13 million in 1855 to £200 million in 1913. (254) As a share of net national product, such income tripled from 2.2 per cent in 1855 to 6.6 per cent in 1885, while it more than tripled as a share of domestic non-employment incomes, rising from 4.3 per cent to 14.1 per cent. (255)

Although these were large sums in the aggregate, per capita distribution would, again, have been marginal. In 1867, for example, R. Baxter included about 841,000 adult males in his class of "higher skilled labour and manufactures." (256) In the same year, net property income from abroad totaled £28,000,000. (257) If the assumption is once again made that one-quarter of this amount would have been available for redistribution to a labor aristocracy, little more than eight pounds sterling would have accrued to each labor aristocrat in England and Wales. This sum would have represented approximately one-eighth of such a worker's annual income (258) and even less of total family income. If Engels' notion of the corruption of the entire working class is employed as the basis of calculation, then the per capita sum would have amounted to one or two pounds sterling per annum, or perhaps two per cent of the income of a manual working class family. (259)

Regardless of the quantitative dimensions of this "bribery account," (260) a question still remains concerning the socio-economic mechanism facilitating the redistribution of colonial-imperial incomes from the primary recipients to the final consumers. A relatively straightforward procedure—and one analogous to that mentioned in the case of foreign trade profits—would have required domestic industrial companies to re-channel some of the profits appropriated in the putative super-exploitation of colonial and other workers to their English employees in order to secure their good will. In point of fact, however, British industrial firms were only marginally involved in direct overseas investment during the nineteenth century. (261)

A notable exception to this tendency was the large-scale involvement by British railway construction contractors in Europe, Asia, North and South America and Australia. (262) A patron-labor aristocrat relation, however, emerged only very faintly in this context. (263) In the first instance, railway
construction laborers (navigators or navvies) were, for the most part, not highly skilled. (264) They received wages on a par with those of other industrial laborers, (265) although in little industrialized areas their wages may have exceeded those of country and agricultural laborers "in consequence of the lawless body of men employed, the urgency of the work ... and the men being perfectly aware of the necessity that there was for this work being completed by a given time. ..." (266) The reputation for "fairness" acquired by such contracting magnates as Thomas Brassey rested not on their recognition of and negotiations with trade unions, (267) but rather on their intervention in the subcontracting system in order to eliminate abuses. (268) Finally, considerable doubt attaches to the aristocratic stature of a group of workers referred to as "the refuse of the Community." (269)

The possible redistributive effects of the receipt of foreign investment income depended on the socio-economic composition of the primary recipients. The major investors in British foreign capital issues (270) were: 1. the increasing number of late-Victorian middle class professionals; 2. the wealthy; 3. the commercial classes of large trade centers; 4. rentiers; and 5. banks and life insurance companies. (271) Aside from directly eleemosynary objects—which would not have benefited labor aristocrats—such income recipients would have spread their largess basically by virtue of their purchasing power to employ "those who produce personal services (e.g. to gardeners and domestic servants) and ... those who make luxury goods" such as artists and dressmakers. (272) In point of fact, the period from 1851 to 1881 witnessed a very large increase in the number of domestic servants—63.9 per cent compared to an increase of 30.6 per cent in manufacturing employment and of 44.9 per cent in population in England and Wales. Artists experienced similar growth, while outdoor servants (included among the aforementioned domestic servants) increased almost five-fold. (273)

Such occupations have not traditionally belonged to those associated with manual labor aristocrats; they were largely filled by women and remained virtually unorganized. Moreover, such a vast siphoning of investment funds either abroad or to unproductive employment in Britain must have diminished the demand for productive labor and hence improved the bargaining position of employers. (274) In this context, the suggestion that workers "will probably be worse off than before" becomes plausible. (275)

Although aggregate gains to the working class may have been slight, the significant shift of British capital interests
(and hence, indirectly, of employment interests) from the
domestic to the world market might have had positive political
ramifications for the bourgeoisie if it had been accompanied
by working class support for Britain's "international posture".
Engels alluded to such support when he spoke of working
class adherence to bourgeois foreign policy. Yet the urgency
of such advocacy did not manifest itself until the colonial
issue emerged more sharply from the 1890s onwards. (276)
But in more subtle ways the perception of joint interests made
itself felt even earlier. In the 1860s, for example, the leaders
of the Engineers and of the Ironfounders declined to seek
membership in the First International because, it has been
reasoned, their unions could bargain successfully with employ­
ers as a result of Britain's world market position; and since
one of the main points of attraction of the International to
unions consisted in its aid in dissuading foreign strike-breakers
from coming to or remaining in Britain, the leaders of these
particular unions saw no practical need for cooperation. (277)

On balance, then, the alleged positive correlation between
world market dominance and aggregate working class or labor
aristocratic reconciliation with the ruling class has found only
a modicum of support. Foreign trade profits could have been
shared to some extent with the direct producers of the relevant
branches, but they would have accounted for but a small part
of skilled-unskilled wage differentials, which contemporaneously
obtained in other capitalist countries without access to world
market monopoly profits. Theoretical arguments, moreover,
render recourse to this mechanism of economic lass cooperation
suspect. The cheap food thesis retained the greatest plausibil­
ity, but it was devoid of a stratum-specific dimension. This
argument would, nevertheless, be difficult to reconcile with
Engels' implicit use of it because the cost of living did not
begin to decline until the 1870s, that is, after the "enormous
upswing" of the 1850s and 1860s and during the "chronic state
of stagnation" in the 1870s and 1880s. (278) Finally, gains
resulting from the redistribution of foreign investment incomes
were found to have been not only moderate in size (as a
consequence of a luxury consumption-triggered multiplier
effect), but acquired by non-surplus value producing salaried
strata.
E. Economic and Social Differentiation within the Working Class

In order to arrive at a better understanding of Engels' position, it is necessary to review the picture he drew of the consequences of Britain's unique economic dominance for working class incomes. The following major points can be distilled from his presentation: 1. even during the "unheard of expansion" between 1848 and 1868, the mass of workers experienced only a temporary improvement of their situation, which was constantly being counteracted by the effects of the reserve army of the unemployed; 2. although Engels offered an ambiguous account of the 1870s and 1880s, he seems to have implied that economic stagnation had brought in its wake a general deterioration of working class living standards; (279) and 3. a permanent (i.e., for the period from 1848 to 1868) improvement was the privilege of two groups of workers: a. factory workers whose working conditions were subject to legislative protection enjoyed an enhanced state of health and "moral superiority" owing to their concentration in large numbers; and b. trade unionists in branches employing (almost) exclusively adult males who had theretofore resisted attempts to devalue their labor power or to usurp their jobs altogether by the introduction of women, children and machinery. For certain workers, such as engineers, carpenters and joiners and construction workers, Engels apparently perceived the period of privilege as having extended into the 1880s since he considered that the best proof of the undoubted improvement of their situation was the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been extremely satisfied with them, but they too have been extremely satisfied with their employers. They form an aristocracy in the working class; they have managed to exact a relatively comfortable position, and they accept this as final. They are the model workers of Messrs. Leone Levi and Giffen (and also of the philistine Lujo Brentano), and they are indeed very nice, tractable people for every reasonable capitalist in particular and for the capitalist class in general. (280)

When Engels concluded that, at the time of writing, a privileged minority was still excepted from the misery and insecurity of existence that still haunted the mass of workers, (281) it is unclear whether he included both "protected departments of the working class" among the elite.
In order to clarify Engels' position, it is necessary to dwell shortly on these two departments. The number of English and Welsh workers covered by the Factories Acts in 1871 totaled about two million of whom about one million were males above the age of eighteen; another 400,000 Scots (of whom about 200,000 were adult males) and 125,000 Irish (including 50,000 male adults) were also protected. (282) Although the condition of the women and children may have improved, they may be neglected as politically irrelevant for Engels' analysis; the Irish workers will also be omitted from discussion because of the dependant status of Ireland. Of the remaining 1,200,000 adult males one-half were employed in metal manufacture and building, two trades in which males predominated. An additional 130,000 adult males earning above-average wages in branches employing few women or children may be counted among this factory elite. (283) In other words, approximately 730,000 men or three-fifths of the men (or three-tenths of all persons) covered by the Factories Acts in Great Britain in 1871 could be included under the rubric of privileged workers.

For the year 1870 it has been estimated that little more than 140,000 workers were trade unionists in the United Kingdom. Almost all the trades represented by them were mentioned in the preceding paragraph (coal miners being the major exception); the vast majority of them were employed in metal manufacture and building. (284) It may, therefore, be supposed that the significant overlapping that existed between these two "departments" became more extensive in the 1870s and 1880s. (285)

With this clarification, it is possible to proceed to a point not discussed by Engels in this context. Although obscured by the aforementioned overlap, the distinction between the older stratum of the skilled (such as printers, coachbuilders, jewelers and carpenters) and the newer stratum (employed especially in metal manufacture) must be emphasized because of the differential material foundation and ideological perspectives of the two strata. The former group was concentrated in industries as yet little affected by capitalist mechanization and de-skilling; these craftsmen retained varying degrees of autonomy vis a vis their small employers and often considerable access to self-employment and even employer status. (286) Journeymen, having long enjoyed relatively high social status, (287) strove to defend their position against future down-grading. The new skilled workers, on the other hand, "did not possess any societally recognized status, but were intruders" in the existing "hierarchy." (288) Not only did this new stratum have "to prove its active loyalty vis a vis the
system if its life ideals were to be bound up with that system," (289) the technological demands of the new machine-based industries as well as the latter's owners and managers actively solicited its identification with the social system. (290)

In the light of this differential movement of technology and ideology, it would be misleading to suggest that the Engineers were developing trade unionism in the same environment as the Carpenters or Stonemasons for example. At the same time, however, the two strata evolved neither in isolation from each other nor as ideal types. Thus, although the general tenor of trade unionism during these years may have been one oriented towards reconciliation with capital, other currents never disappeared. As the secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, William Allan, testified before the Royal Commission in Trade Unions in 1867, (291) the interests of employer and employed were not identical. "I scarcely see how that can be, while we are in a state of society which recognizes the principle of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. ... And you can never reconcile those two things." (292)

Engels' theses can now be analyzed point by point.

1. The discussion of the period from 1848 to 1868 has already shown that (Marx and) Engels' assessment of working class incomes has been verified by modern research. For this, as for the subsequent period, a question remains concerning the mechanisms by which capitalist society secured the allegiance of a class whose incomes were not only not rising, but actually declining in the aggregate compared to those of the ruling classes.

2. The issue of real wages for the period through the middle of the 1880s is not so straightforward. It has been firmly established that the general index of money wages rose through 1874 at which point it began to decline; the fall continued through 1879 with the previous peak not surpassed until 1890. (293) At the same time the cost of living declined sharply enough to offset the fall in money wages until the mid-1870s; at this point real wages fell several percentage points. Not until 1883 was the previously recorded peak level of real wages exceeded. (294) But even if average time lost on account of unemployment is considered, real wages did continue to climb, albeit at a considerably slower rate. (See Table 4.)

Such aggregate data do not suffice to test Engels' claims since they may conceal the stratum-differentiated aspects that constitute the core of Engels' position. (296) It is necessary, therefore, to employ a series of indicators in order to approach this issue. One significant indicator of the spread or abatement of extreme poverty is the extent of pauperism. (297)
Table 4. Rates of Increase in Average Real Wages in the United Kingdom, 1865-1884 (adjusted for unemployment) (295)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Rate of Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1865-69 to 1870-74</td>
<td>13.0 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-74 to 1875-79</td>
<td>4.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-79 to 1880-84</td>
<td>3.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Number of Paupers (exclusive of vagrants) in Receipt of Relief in England and Wales on January 1, 1870-1890 (298)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Paupers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>1,079,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>1,081,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>977,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>887,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>829,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>815,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>749,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>728,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>742,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>800,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>837,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>803,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>797,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>799,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>774,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>784,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>807,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>817,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>825,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>810,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>787,545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the peak value in 1871 to the lowest value recorded in 1877, the number of paupers on relief declined by more than 350,000, i.e., by almost one-third; the period through the 1880s witnessed a small rise, but the average of approximately 800,000 for the years 1878 to 1890 represented an historical low since records had been kept beginning in the 1840s. Given an increase in population of 27.8 per cent between 1870 and 1890 in England and Wales, (299) a sharp drop in the rate of pauperism ensued. (300)

Another sign of the failure of late-Victorian capitalism to undermine the foundations of generations of urban misery and degradation was the discovery by Charles Booth and his co-workers in the mid-1880s that almost 1,300,000 Londoners, equivalent to 37.4 per cent of the working classes or 30.7 per cent of the total population, had to be classified as "poor" or "very poor." (301) Findings such as these have led one cautious
modern investigator to conclude that, although "gains clearly predominated over losses," after the 1860s it was still possible, and indeed likely, that the absolute number of those whose lot deteriorated was equal to or greater than it had been in the early decades of the century, for the overall growth in numbers permitted this sector of the population to diminish relatively, yet to increase absolutely. Moreover with the growth in the absolute size of the areas of dilapidation and dereliction, in the East End of London and in the provincial cities, the degree of degeneration possible within them might well have increased. (302)

Still a further approach to the measurement of the course of wages among the mass of workers consists in comparing the latter's nominal wages with the price index and with the general wage index. Money wages began to decline in general from their peak at the turn of the industrial cycle from prosperity to depression in 1873-1874; they continued to decline during the period under review until after the depression year of 1886. (303) A composite, weighted average index showed a decline of about five per cent. Most industries clustered about this point. Whereas the printing and cotton industries disclosed a small rise during these years, coal miners and iron puddlers, subject to a sliding scale which geared wages to the prices of the commodities they produced, experienced disastrous declines of one-third or more. Yet with a simultaneous decline of more than one-fifth in the retail price index, almost all industries registered real wage gains. (304)

In summary, then, it has not proved possible to derive an unambiguous synthetic judgment of the change in wages of the mass of workers during the 1870s and the first half of the 1880s. For although official pauperism declined, concentrated urban poverty apparently did not diminish; and although a fall in the cost of living more than compensated for the fall in money wages, unskilled labor both in the branches covered by Bowley's and Wood's wage surveys and in those outside these studies may have fared worse than their statistically recorded co-workers. On the whole, however, whatever aggregate gains were won do not appear to have been large and stemmed largely from cheaper overseas food. Thus, even if Engels' position is partially confirmed with regard to this point, the bourgeoisification of a class experiencing stagnation or immiseration remains to be explained.
3. Engels' most interesting remarks were reserved for the strata he characterized as labor aristocrats. Since the 1850s and 1860s have already been discussed, the following analysis is limited to the 1870s and 1880s.

In the first instance, Engels appears to have exaggerated the ability of the unions of the labor aristocrats to defend and improve their conditions. There is, for example, no evidence that construction workers successfully thwarted the introduction of machinery; the Amalgamated Society of Engineers certainly failed in its industry in 1852 and 1897-1898. The fact that relatively few women and boys were employed in the building trades (305) presumably had at least as much to do with the strenuous nature of the physical requirements of the trade as with trade union exclusionism. (306) Finally, "the best proof" of the improvement of the condition of the labor aristocracy does not, contrary to Engels' claim, consist in pointing to the aristocrats' alleged satisfaction with their employers, but rather in an examination of that condition.

Data on the living and working conditions of the best paid trade unionists are, fortunately, relatively plentiful. Tucker's index of the wages of London artisans reveals that money wages declined from 1872 to 1887; but a significant decline in the cost of living led to a rise in real wages of 37.2 per cent. (307) If, however, these data are compared with the general indices constructed by Wood, a surprising result emerges: money wages (which are cited here because Tucker and Wood used different cost of living indices) of the London artisans declined by 1.0 per cent during this fifteen-year period while Wood's general wage index rose 2.1 per cent; with 1870 and 1885 as the reference years, the general index rose twice as much as that of the London artisans—12.0 per cent as opposed to 6.1 per cent. (308)

There is general agreement that in particular the latter half of the 1870s was marked by declining money wages and rising unemployment among trade unionists. (309) The greater degree of organization normally enabled unions to offer greater resistance to wage reductions. (310) Yet Bowley's wage indices show that the level of money wages in the building trades stagnated from 1876 to 1890. (311) Similar patterns were registered in engineering and shipbuilding as well. (312) Data from individual trade unions reveal different patterns. The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners recorded a decline in monetary wages beginning in 1874; the Operative Bricklayers in 1876; the Operative Stonemasons in 1877; the unionized building trades as a whole experienced stagnation from 1876 through the 1880s. (313) Wood indicated that the
Amalgamated Society of Engineers did not achieve any general increase in wages for its members from 1866 to 1882, while most other skilled trades recorded declines in the 1870s and 1880s. (314)

In spite of the gains in real wages, setbacks in certain areas did plague the better paid workers during the 1870s and 1880s. In some cases working hours, which were shorter for organized workers, (315) were lengthened again during this period. (316) Moreover, with the transition from daily to hourly wages in the building trades, "a man could be dismissed at a moment's notice when the hour's work was up, and therefore, although they might reckon so many hours a week for the man to earn 39s. 4½ d., it was a very rare thing for carpenters to earn full money." (317)

The relative development of conditions between labor aristocrats on the one hand and the mass of the workers on the other can, furthermore, be examined in the light of the available information concerning differentials between them. There is, first of all, ample testimony of a qualitative nature from contemporaries. Although it was not unambiguous, the predominant current from the 1860s onwards (318) tended to view the economic and social gap between labor aristocrats and the "residue" either as a new phenomenon or as significantly wider than in earlier times. Thus one observer of the working class contended that "the disparity between the wages of artisans, mechanics, and labourers" had been "less" when he had been a youth than in the 1860s. (319) About the same time an image was invoked that became common in subsequent years—namely, that the skilled "look on the other or labouring class as one with whose members they cannot associate out of the workshop, while in the workshop the labourers are treated as servants." (320)

By the 1880s contemporaries were convinced of the existence of a widening gulf between the skilled and the unskilled. (321) The growing rates of unemployment among the organized toward the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s (322) were accompanied by a surge of demarcation disputes among unions. (323) The renewed increase in official pauperism probably indicated an even sharper deterioration in the employment situation of the unskilled. (324) Whether they denounced or extolled labor aristocrats, political observers were obviously more impressed by the latter's socio-economic status than they had been in recent decades. (325) In particular the Industrial Remuneration Conference, held in 1885, heard several participants stress the widening gulf between "the aristocracy of labour" and "the residuum", the former having "gained very
considerably" and the latter but "a little" during the previous generation. (326) Edith Simcox went so far as to assert that

there is more difference between the skilled artisan of today—an educated trade unionist, politician, and, probably, social reformer,—and the residuum of the industrial population, than there was a century ago between the steadiest mechanic and the most loutish labourer. (327)

But no empirical data were adduced to support this far-reaching claim of intra-working class polarization. (328)

A more direct procedure for analyzing wage differentials between the skilled and the unskilled consists in comparing the available data for each group. This task is complicated by the unsystematic nature of data collection in the nineteenth century. As a result, no comprehensive comparisons exist.

At the outset it is worth noting that the aggregate differential is composed of two analytically separable components: 1. differentials between the skilled and the unskilled within branches; and 2. differentials between relatively high-paying and relatively low-paying branches. The aggregate differential is, furthermore, determined by shifts in the ratio of skilled to unskilled workers and of those employed in high-paying to those employed in low-paying branches. Most studies of wage differentials in the nineteenth century have focused solely on differentials within branches.

In the 1880s contemporaries were divided on the issue of whether labor aristocrats represented a larger or smaller proportion of the manual working class than in previous times. (329) And in retrospect it is difficult to reconstruct their share. Nevertheless, several indicators are useful. The fact, for example, that the wage pyramid was flattened by the mass shift of workers from the lower to the higher-paying industries meant that in order for a widening of wage differentials to have expanded the aggregate differential, it would have had to have offset this considerable shift effect. Since, moreover, the data underlying the formation of the wage pyramid refer to occupations as well as to industries, a widening of intra-branch differentials would require further explanation.

Hobsbawm has offered such an explanation by having recourse to "peculiarities in the British labour market"—to wit, the large supply of female and child labor which "depressed the standards of many non-aristocrats." (330) Two major objections may be raised to this argument. First, on the theoretical level it is based on the mistaken—and for a Marxist, like Hobsbawm, self-contradictory—notion that "(t)he main
reason" for wage differentials between the skilled and the unskilled "under capitalism is that the industrial reserve army of unemployed and underemployed, which determines the general movements of wages, affects different categories of workers differently." (331) Although fluctuations in the price of labor power are determined by supply and demand factors synthesized in the changing size of the reserve army, the level of wages is determined by the reproduction value of labor power which includes a component for skill (i.e., training costs). During the last six decades of the nineteenth century—a period long enough to provide some notion of the value of labor power in contradistinction to that of fluctuations in its price—the wage level of the skilled was higher than that of the unskilled not because many replacements were always available for the latter but not for the former; rather, many replacements were always available because little skill was required. Although Hobsbawm is justified in stressing the significance of precapitalist labor market factors such as custom in wage determination, his exclusive reliance on supply and demand disregards the transformation of occupational skills brought about by differential capital accumulation.

Second, the reference to the oversupply of female and child labor could have been relevant only if its variations had coincided with those of the wage differential. In point of fact, however, the proportion of women and children among those employed in manufacturing actually declined slightly from 1851 to 1881. (332)

It is, therefore, not surprising that a comparison of the average weekly wage of a London artisan with that of a town laborer reveals a narrowing of the differential during the nineteenth century. (333) Other general studies of wage differentials for the period beginning with the 1870s do not indicate any notable widening of differentials. (334)

The following observations can be made with regard to individual industries: in the building trades, following a small widening in the 1850s and 1860s, the gap between the skilled and the unskilled narrowed in the 1870s and 1880s; (335) in shipbuilding, differentials moved in different directions in different localities; (336) the gap between the wages of fitters and laborers in Manchester engineering firms declined during the 1870s; (337) in the cotton industry, the differential between spinners and weavers rose somewhat; (338) in other industries, particularly in those with few labor aristocrats, differentials appear to have risen. (339)
No body of data, then, has been adduced that supports the claims advanced by contemporaries concerning the widening gap between labor aristocrats and the remainder of the working class. This discrepancy may be explained by two factors. First, often contemporaries meant "the residuum" when referring to other segments of the working class; this lowest stratum—not to be confused with the bulk of the nonskilled—may in fact have been undergoing absolute and relative immiseration as witnessed by the increasing number of paupers in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Second, the less skilled may have been subject to considerably more unemployment than the skilled; this would have resulted in lower annual earnings and worse conditions in general than could have been captured by the foregoing daily or weekly wage data.

Some additional data are worth citing in order to supplement the analysis of Engels' assessment of the "comparatively comfortable situation" that labor aristocrats were alleged to have gained for themselves. Although contemporaries were agreed that labor aristocrats were better situated than other workers, opinion was divided with regard to the degree of their prosperousness. Again, the participants at the Industrial Remuneration Conference shed considerable light on the matter. Edith Simcox, for example, insisted on a comparison between the skilled artisan and the yeoman of yesteryear.

Unstinted food, clothes of the same pattern as the middle class, when house-rent permits, a tidy parlour, with stiff, cheap furniture, which, if not itself luxurious or beautiful, is a symptom of the luxury of self-respect, and an earnest or better taste to come, a newspaper, a club, an occasional holiday, perhaps a musical instrument. ... We may even go so far as to admit that the prosperous operative is better off in comparison with the unprosperous middle-class man than ever before. (340)

And although Alfred R. Wallace disagreed inasmuch as he denied that the incomes of the skilled allowed of "much leisure for intellectual culture and the refinements of existence," (341) both touched on the indispensable prerequisite of the "moderate comfort" enjoyed by the "highest skilled" (342)—steady employment. Simcox formulated it indirectly when she noted that trade union benefits were "a poor substitute for wages" and a temporary one at best; (343) Wallace went further in reminding his listeners that periods of depression thrust the unskilled as well as the skilled into pauperism and starvation. (344)
A number of social statistical surveys conducted in the mid-1880s served to stress the potential fragility of labor aristocratic prosperity (345) at a time when estimates placed the magnitude of this upper stratum at between one and two million. (346) A report on the wages of manual laborers in 1886 revealed sharp differences in the distribution of earnings among industries. Table 6 synthesizes the aggregate data.

Table 6. Distribution of Wages in the United Kingdom, October 1886 (in per cent) (347)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Lads/Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half timers</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 10s.</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10s. to 15s.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15s. to 20s.</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20s. to 25s.</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25s. to 30s.</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s. to 35s.</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35s. to 40s.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 40s.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average

weekly wage 24s. 9d. 12s. 11d. 9s. 2d. 6s. 5d.

Apart from the enormous differences between the men and the other groups—most adult men earned above 20s. per week whereas the vast majority of women and children received less than 15s.—, among the men eighteen per cent earned more than one-quarter more than the average of slightly less than 25s. for all men. In the following industries, however, more than one-half of the adult male employees received more than 30s. weekly (the figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of men earning such wages): printing and engraving in newspaper printing works (77.2); tin plate works (63.5); cooperage works (56.3); wood shipbuilding (55.5); building trades (51.6); brass work and metal wares (50.1). (348) Iron and steel shipbuilding, pig iron (blast furnaces) and engineering fell into an intermediary grouping with percentages of 46.4, 20.9 and 24.7 respectively. (349)
Among the chief industries in which an above-average share (i.e., above 24.0 per cent) of the adult male workers earned less than eighty per cent of the aggregate male average (i.e., below 20s) were: china clay works (88.6); linen manufacture (57.6); jute (57.3); silk (53.6); distilleries (53.6); roads, pavements and sewers (48.7). (350) Significantly, the higher paying metal industries also contained large groups of such low paid workers: shipbuilding (18.9); engineering (29.5); and pig iron (blast furnaces) (33.5). (351)

The foregoing data provide a misleading account of the income situation of manual workers inasmuch as they do not take into consideration the losses resulting from unemployment and other absences from work (caused, for example, by sickness and accidents). The building trades may be taken as an example of the effects of time lost on wages. According to the survey of October 1886, 10.9 per cent of building tradesmen earned less than 20s. per week. A survey of London, conducted in March 1887, revealed that twenty-seven per cent of the 30,000 men covered were out of work; the corresponding rates of unemployment in the building trades were: carpenters and joiners, twenty-seven per cent; masons and bricklayers, thirty-seven per cent; painters and plumbers, thirty-three per cent. Similarly, whereas fifty-three per cent of the total sample had experienced some unemployment since October 31, 1886, the corresponding figures for the aforementioned building tradesmen were considerably higher—fifty-nine, seventy-nine and seventy-two per cent respectively. (352) As a further illustration of the dire straits into which skilled workers could fall, this survey also revealed that a greater percentage of out-of-work carpenters and joiners were receiving charity assistance than of all persons sampled. (353)

Charles Booth's survey of London in the 1880s and 1890s disclosed a similar pattern. Many highly paid and well organized artisans such as building tradesmen, coopers, shipwrights, bookbinders, engineers and goldsmiths, suffered very large losses from unemployment, ranging from one-sixth of expected annual incomes among building tradesmen to two-thirds among caulkers. (354) In numerous trades, moreover, considerable deductions resulted from a relatively short working life caused by particularly dangerous or unwholesome conditions. Thus in 1867 the secretary of the London Master Builders' Society informed the Royal Commission on Trade Unions that the average working life in the building trades was shorter than that of all classes; he instanced bricklayers, who could expect to work 9.2 years. (355)
A final and, as a synthetic expression of the circumstances of an entire working and earning life, particularly informative indicator of comparative occupational prosperity can be constructed from data on wills and letters of administration in 1858. Of the 102,049 men who died during that year, 15,558 (i.e., 15.2 per cent) left wills valued, on the average, at £ 3,469. (356) Since the occupational rubrics applied to those leaving wills correspond but imperfectly to the ones used in the Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages (for 1860-1861), only rough estimates can be made, on an occupational basis, of the proportion of those who died and left wills and letters of administration. In comparison with the one man in five who left a will or letter in the total population, one in ten tailors, one in fourteen boot and shoemakers and three in five farmers left such documents; among bakers and carpenters the proportion was equivalent to that of the aggregate average. (357) Much more precise data, however, can be derived concerning the size-distribution of wills according to occupation. Unfortunately, they do not distinguish among employers, employees and the self-employed; consequently, the differences among occupations may in part be a function of the varying sizes of retained profits in accordance with differences in average sizes of establishments. Table 7 shows the percentage of will valued at less than £ 20 and more than £ 1,000.

Table 7. Percentage of Wills left by Males in England in 1858 valued at below £1,000, by selected Occupation (358)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>below £20</th>
<th>above £1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All males</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esquire, gentleman, independent</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician, surgeon</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draper</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocer</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

96
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Below £1,000</th>
<th>Above £1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton manufacture</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial clerk</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel keeper</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipwright</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter, plumber, glazier</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butcher</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer, machine and tool maker</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariner</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardener</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot and shoemaker</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter-undertaker</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list, which is ordered from the highest to the lowest percentage of wills valued at more than £1,000 and which contains all occupations in which more than one hundred men were enumerated--engineers and shipwrights, though below this threshold, were included for comparative purposes--, shows that such "aristocratic" occupations as carpentry and bricklaying were located much closer to common laboring than to white collar, business or professional categories. In fact, only these trades and shoemaking registered more men leaving less than £20 than more than £1,000. On the other hand, the table also discloses significant gaps between laborers and other manual workers with regard to the ability to save and to bequeath sums ten to twenty times greater than annual income. This lifetime bottom-line perspective, as it were, underscores the overall differential in levels of living standards and in life-
chances for the next generation between aristocrats and non-aristocrats, although it does not, unfortunately, reveal how such differentials evolved over time.

F. Engels' Accusation of Class Collaborationist Trade Unionism

If, in connection with charges of tractability and docility, Engels had merely meant that craft unions had not developed into fortresses of anti-capitalist guerrilla warfare, then few contemporaries would have contradicted him. If, however, as has become evident, he was also denouncing trade unions and their members for having abandoned the principles of combative confrontation in favor of a conscious policy of subordination to capital and its agents in exchange for meager privileges, then additional proof would have to be adduced to support Engels' position.

Engels' own presentation is self-contradictory since it fails to explain why employers would have been "satisfied" with workers who were allegedly strong enough to thwart the former's will with regard to the introduction of machinery. Even if such behavior was, from Engels' standpoint, reactionary because it hindered the development of the forces of production, it would scarcely have made unions appear "tractable" to employers. Second, Engels was doubtless exaggerating when he claimed that nine-tenths of all strikes were provoked by capitalists in order to check overproduction. The most obvious counter-evidence is to be found in the building trades in which strikes for shorter working hours and in opposition to wage-cutting by speculative builders constituted two major types. In part because the building trades experienced trade fluctuations almost immediately, construction workers were characterized by an "infectious habit" and "irrepressible impulse" to strike. (359) Significantly, building accounted for 398 or more than one-quarter of all recorded strikes during the 1870s; the carpenters and joiners participated in more strikes during this time than any other occupational group. (360) The strike in favor of the nine-hour day, which was contested by 10,000 workers in London for twelve weeks, illustrated the lack of satisfaction that workers and employers felt for each other. The divisive attitude on the part of the Stonemasons, however, indicated that the unions of the skilled were often not "satisfied" with one another; this lack of solidarity—even among aristocrats—constituted one of the aspects of narrow-mindedness that Engels was attacking. (361)
The strike in support of the nine-hour day conducted by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1871 was a further example of aristocratic militance, especially since it also embraced successful efforts at organizing additional workers. (362) Evidence of the continued confrontation between capital and aristocratic labor was also provided by the Stonemasons' strike in London in 1877-1878, the unsuccessful outcome of which--brought about by the depression, the importation of American and European strike-breakers and harsh anti-union penalties imposed by the judicial system--led to a drastic decline in membership within a few years. (363)

Although the major source of militance during the period prior to the rise of New Unionism was located outside the aristocratic unions--in mining, textiles and agriculture (364)--, representatives of the employing class were convinced that trade unions were still "maintaining, in a modified form, their belligerent character and aims." (365) Yet neither group of unions mounted a concerted assault on the foundations of capitalism. Non-aristocratic unions such as the Miners accepted the principle of classical economic orthodoxy according to which wages should fluctuate with coal prices. (366) And in spite of the lack of proof that trade unions based their strategy on the assumption that capitalism was eternal, (367) their day-to-day economic struggles--beyond which they did not proceed once male suffrage had been secured for most eligible workers--did not call into question the social status quo. (368)

Nevertheless, even the most aristocratic unions remained ideologically prepared and economically compelled to struggle against the deterioration of conditions that capitalist development periodically mandated and as the subjective agents of which employers were perceived as remorselessly functioning. (369) Although the goals pursued by trade unions and their aristocratic members may have been narrowly economic and even selfish, such an orientation was not unique to Victorian England or to the most highly skilled workers. The peculiarities of British trade unionism in the nineteenth century resulted in part from the pioneering nature of British capitalism and in part from Britain's classical social structure; the latter reflected rapid proletarianization which the more homogeneous ruling class was able to manage more efficiently than was, for example, the case in Germany where a political role was virtually foisted upon the labor movement. But even in Britain deep-seated social conflicts were incapable of permanent peaceful channeling. In particular, "The contradiction could not be borne forever" that "a man cannot be simultaneously proud and prostrate; but on that contradiction was founded the
respectability of the Victorian working classes." (370) The coming decades would force the British working class to make decisions about the reconcilability of its goals in the context of a rapidly changing socio-economic formation.

G. The Second Reform Bill: The Parliamentary Debate on the Political Co-optability of the Labor Aristocracy

The Parliamentary debates leading to the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867 disclosed the keen interest taken by the ruling classes in the division of the working class into what they perceived as two sharply distinguished strata. The fact, however, that such discussions had been conducted as far back as the time of the Reform Bill of 1832 (371) indicated that "the great Victorian shibboleth and criterion, respectability," (372) had, in very material forms, staked its claim to societal validity long before the advent of post-Chartist tranquility.

The whole point of the complicated Parliamentary wrangling over the appropriate residential rental level as a criterion for enfranchisement consisted in devising a procedure to separate the "lower class of artisan" and mechanic, that is, "the rank and file of the industrial army," from the "upper class artisan." For although the two classes, to some extent, shared the same opinion, the latter had "a position to maintain," and it was "his interest to stand well with the upper classes." (373) During the debates themselves, John Bright, for example, enunciated the principle that "the residuum" had to be excluded from the franchise, whereas "the intelligent and honest working-men" were to be accorded voting rights. (374) While Gladstone was at pains to reduce the rates sufficiently to enfranchise the skilled, (375) Robert Lowe, a bitter opponent of extending the franchise even to "the elite of the working class," elicited laughter from his colleagues by referring to the politics of laborers earning eight shillings per week. (376)

Some elements of the ruling classes, aware that suffrage would have to be broadened to some extent in any event, feared that the poorer strata of the working class would prove to be too erratic in judgment to be susceptible to the proper electioneering cues. Experience with the "upper class workmen" who had been voters prior to the Reform Bill of 1867 (377) indicated to some at least that they were "amenable to influence from their masters." (378) Yet opinion on the issue was divided.
R. Dudley Baxter, the statistician, stated at one point in his testimony that the "lower class" workers would not be amenable to the same influence as the "upper class" artisans, (379) but later testified that the "mill hands" would also vote with the masters "except when it came to a question of labour." (380) Others feared that, precisely because he was "intelligent," the "superior" artisan was "the most easy game for the agitator." (381) Still others--as different as Bright and Lowe--feared that venality would result from the enfranchisement of a dependent class, while others, clearly speculating on this possibility, welcomed the opportunity. (382)

The fact that no M.P. had, at the outset, envisioned the Reform Bill that ultimately emerged from the Parliamentary maneuvering casts considerable doubt on the thesis that the ruling classes had formulated a strategy to co-opt the labor aristocracy. (383) Such a thesis is further weakened by the fact that passage of the bill was hastened by riots and other disturbances brought on by the economic crisis of 1866 as well as by the incorporation of many trade unionist artisans into the Parliamentary struggle as a reaction to a court decision in 1867 declaring unions to be in restraint of trade and hence ineligible for friendly society status. (384) The lowering of the rental limit to five pounds sterling meant, moreover, that a large segment of the male urban working class--and not merely the better paid strata--became enfranchised. (385) The diffusion of suffrage to virtually all sectors of the working class--with the exception of the poorest urban casual laborers and agricultural laborers (386)--underlay Prime Minister Derby's famous "leap in the dark," which was tantamount to the admission that co-optation had not been the guiding strategy of those in power. (387) Although some employers and political leaders may at times have cherished the notion that a tutelage could be exercised over the more literate strata of the proletariat, considerable suspicion--if not outright fear--of the current and potential power of trade unions caused second thoughts. The latter focused not only on the so-called Sheffield outrages, but also on the strength manifested by organized workers in long-term strikes. (388)

By the 1870s, new nuances were becoming perceptible in the relations of employers to the skilled unionists and in those of the latter to the unskilled. Legislative recognition of trade unions, achieved between 1867 and 1875, discouraged strikes that might have exhausted carefully accumulated assets. (389) The increased emphasis placed by unions on the ability of members to earn the standard union rate (390) reflected, from the perspective of the working class as a whole, not so much
a polarization of the skill continuum (391) as an attempt to avoid dilution of membership regardless of dilution of skills. In certain trades, however, that were relatively little threatened by mechanization and thus exposed to a comparatively minor competitive threat from the unskilled, unions sometimes supported efforts at organizing the unapprenticed. (392) Nevertheless, the general estrangement of the skilled and the unskilled—especially insofar as they coincided with the organized and the unorganized—had progressed far enough to induce a foreign observer to venture the prognosis that at some future time the unskilled, severed off as a fifth estate, would be compelled to accomplish their goals on their own. (393)

British observers, too, were already speaking of a "gulf" that had become "fixed" between artisans and unskilled laborers. Thomas Wright synthesized this view of sectional antagonism based in part on the differential effects of a "habitually overstocked" labor market. (394)

The artisan creed with regard to labourers is, that the latter are an inferior class, and that they should be made to know and kept in their places. In the eyes of unionist and non-unionist mechanics, any clever or ambitious labourer who shows a desire to get out of his place, by attempting to pick up or creep into "the trade" to which he is attached as an unskilled assistant, is guilty of deadly sin. ... In the same way artisans' wives hold the wives of labourers to be of a lower social grade, and very often will either not "neighbor" with them at all, or else only in a patronising way. (395)

This attitude on the part of the skilled could have been vitally reinforced by two phenomena: 1. a tendency toward de-skilling that was rendering the formally unapprenticed potential competitors in certain industries undergoing technological change; and 2. a desire on the part of the skilled to place as much distance as possible between themselves and the unskilled at a time when the Liberals and the Conservatives were casting about for politically reliable sections of the working class. Such a constellation would have represented evidence in support of Engels' position since: 1. indicated that a former elite stratum was fighting a rearguard struggle against the effects of technological change on the structure of the labor force; whereas 2. pointed to an attempt at class cooperation between the more farsighted elements of the ruling classes and the upper stratum of the working class. (396)

The plausibility of this line of reasoning is impaired by the circumstance that employers would have had little motivation
to form an alliance with skilled workers who stood in the path of the processes of de-skilling that mechanization necessitated. (397) The counter-argument, according to which many Radical employers in large firms traded union recognition for political support, appears insubstantial. (398) Two further counter-arguments are, however, more promising. One locates the acceptance of the unions of the skilled by large employers in the latter's perception that the former contributed to the exhaustion of "those sources of secondary exploitation" that had formerly sustained smaller competitors. (399) This thesis gains plausibility in branches of the newer, large-scale metal industries, (400) but fails to explain why the skilled recorded their greatest successes in the old crafts marked by small firms. (401) The other counter-argument stresses the fact that some farseeing employers recognized "the exposed position of property and of its need to find outside support." (402) Although, once again, eminently plausible, this claim fails to explain the obvious shortsightedness of a policy that, by consciously alienating the majority of workers, would have only exacerbated class antagonisms and prepared an even more destabilizing explosion in the future.

H. Engels on New Unionism

In order to document the argument that what Marx and particularly Engels deemed so opportunistic in the unions of the labor aristocrats was not solely a function of their allegedly privileged position, it is worth examining Engels' own assessment of the New Unions of the unskilled that were formed at the end of the 1880s.

From the outset, Engels wrote with great enthusiasm about the fact that the dockers' strike of 1889 had demonstrated that the most immiserated stratum of unskilled workers, concentrated in the largest slum in the world, was capable of organization. (403) Moreover, he took pains to emphasize that the unions of the unskilled "differed completely from the old organizations of the labor aristocracy and cannot pass on to the same conservative paths" because their members were too poor and their jobs too insecure. (404) Although formally similar to the old trade unions, the new unions were strike and struggle organizations as opposed to friendly societies. Whereas the old unions accepted the wage system as a "definitive fact" once and for all, the unions of the unskilled
were formed at a time when the faith in the eternal nature of the wage system had already been broken. The leaders were either conscious or emotive socialists, while the membership was "free of the inherited, 'respectable' bourgeois prejudices that confuse the minds of the better-situated 'old' unionists." (405) Given the claim that the unskilled looked with scorn upon those who preached the identity of interests between labor and capital, and given, further, Engels' optimism concerning the future of socialism in Britain, it was no surprise that Engels also predicted the coming defeat of the aristocratic unions. (406)

Yet from the very beginning Engels seems to have been conscious of the dangers inherent in the organizational efforts by and on behalf of the unskilled. Thus, although he perceived and indeed welcomed the aid provided the dockers by merchants and the "great mass of the bourgeoisie" who hated the "dock monopolists" for their exploitative policies toward customers as well as toward workers, (407) he was later constrained to admit that the dockers had been "spoiled by the subsidy of the philistines and don't want to spoil things with the bourgeois public." (408) In addition to fearing that leaders such as John Burns and even Tom Mann might have fallen victim to various baits of respectability set by the bourgeoisie, (409) Engels became alarmed that the Dockers had not only refused to cooperate with the Gas Workers, but had also begun to close their membership lists and even to protest against the immigration of "foreign paupers" such as Russian Jews. (410) The gradual debilitation of the Gas Workers and of the Dockers led Engels in 1891 to complain that the old unions were once again in control. (411)

This was not the place to explain why "(t)he 'new unionism' of 1889 thus became uncomfortably like the 'old unionism' it had once fought." (412) The point was, simply, to illustrate that low wages, concentrated poverty, casual labor and the absence of monopolizable skills were not, contrary to Engels' recurrent enthusiastic outbursts, guarantors of a politically connected, let alone socialistically oriented trade unionism.

I. Conclusions

This chapter has shown that Marx's and Engels' analysis of the labor aristocracy contained significant gaps; further reflec-
tion will reveal that their analyses were in fact self-contradictory. For Marx, the overriding developmental process in the context of the formation of the working class was the increasing homogeneity of working and living conditions attendant upon capitalist industrialization. The increasing organic composition of capital, accompanied by a deepened division of labor and a diffusion of de-skilling, produced and would continue to produce technological and socio-economic conditions that swept away the barriers between and among working class strata that had been erected, particularly during the period of Manufaktur.

Such a sequence of events left little room for the rise and expansion of a skill-based labor aristocracy. Consequently, Marx tended to see the origins of the labor aristocracy in various remnants of pre-capitalist custom and convention as well as in a series of non-essential, accidental features of British capitalism in the nineteenth century.

Engels introduced the notion that Britain's world market and colonial monopoly lay at the base of its labor aristocracy. Paradoxically, then, the labor aristocracy was being fostered, from this perspective, by the same set of forces that, according to Marx, were leading to its demise—namely, the fact that capitalist industrialization had made its breakthrough in Britain. Although Engels did periodically add a stratum-specific component to his analysis in the form of an unequal distribution of foreign profits within the working class, he reversed the meaning Marx had given to the homogenization of the working class: now the British working class as a whole was perceived as having been elevated to the status of a privileged national proletariat vis à vis other proletariats.

This position was, however, interpreted as merely temporary; with the collapse of Britain's unique world economic domination, its favored proletariat would be depressed to the level of other national working classes. Increasing competition and overproduction would eliminate the possibility of the rise of a labor aristocracy in other nations. Engels conceived of this stratum as a historically unique and nationally specific phenomenon. (413)

The logical hiatus in Marx's and Engels' argumentation emerged between the fundamental economic theory, which predicted the submergence of intra-proletarian disparities, and the manifest existence of a numerically significant and socio-politically powerful sector of skilled trade union members. This gap was bridged by means of recourse to a set of unmediated conjectures concerning the voluntaristic aspirations both of these artisans to underpin their position and of their immediate employers (and of the latter's political representatives) to
weakens the proletariat by appealing to the venality of its more prosperous members and leaders.