I. Industrialization, the development of the working class and the beginnings of the trade union movement around the middle of the nineteenth century

In order to understand what was "new" about the labour movement, and the trade union movement in particular, and to appreciate the achievement of the union pioneers, it is necessary to form a picture of the economic, political and social situation in the first half of the nineteenth century. After all, the formation of trade unions was a response by sections of the working class to the challenge of the Industrial Revolution and the "social question", which left their stamp on the first, tentative moves to form unions.

1. *Industrialization and the emergence of the working class: the development of the "social question"*

The emergence of the working class and the development of the "social question" were the direct consequences of industrialization, which in the nineteenth century began to transform the face of Germany and the lives of its people. Although paid labour, poverty and distress existed in pre-industrial society, too, they were formerly accepted as the will of God, whereas the wage labour and mass impoverishment of the nineteenth century triggered off demands for (radical) social change. Unlike its consequences, the causes of industrialization have not been fully clarified; at best it is possible to point to a number of interlocking conditions that are cause and effect simultaneously.[1]

The prerequisite and driving force of industrialization were above all the technical innovations that transformed the exploitation of mineral resources and increased the productivity of labour. The great novelty was, more than anything else, the introduction of machines to generate power and their use as machine tools. Important stages in the process of mecha-

1 See: Friedrich-Wilhelm Henning: Die Industrialisierung in Deutschland 1800 bis 1914 (Paderborn, 1976); Gerd Hohorst, Jürgen Kocka, Gerhard A. Ritter: Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch. Materialien zur Statistik des Kaiserreiches 1870–1914 (Munich 1975); Jürgen Kocka, Lohnarbeit und Klassenbildung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1800–1875 (Berlin and Bonn 1983)

nization, which began in England, were the invention and construction of the steam engine (1765), the spinning machine (1769), the power loom (1786) and the steam locomotive (1803–4 and 1814). However, these were slow to reach Germany, where their spread was patchy. If one places the entire emphasis on the introduction of new technologies, as far as Germany is concerned the decades from 1830 to 1850 may be regarded as the prelude to industrialization, which developed from the middle of the century onwards – thus somewhat later than in England, but more rapidly.

A few facts will suffice to illustrate the course of events. Whereas in 1849 there were only 651 permanent steam engines with an output of 18,775 horsepower throughout the Rhineland and Westphalia, a quarter of a century later there were 11,706 producing 379,091 horsepower. Railway construction was both a consequence of and a spur to economic growth: it not only created jobs in the iron and steel industry but also brought a whole new system of transport into being, giving many areas access to a nationwide market for the first time. Whereas Prussia had 3,869 km of railway in 1850, by 1870 this had risen to 11,523 km, and the number of locomotives had increased in the same period from 498 to 3,485. Railway construction – for the whole of the German Reich – also highlights the acceleration of industrialization after the formation of the Reich (1871): the railway network expanded from 28,000 km in 1875 to 65,000 km by 1913.

The way in which Germany lagged behind England on the one hand, and the pace of industrialization after the formation of the Reich on the other, are evident from the example of German pig iron production – which may also serve to illustrate the development of heavy industry, the leading sector in turning Germany into a highly industrialized nation. Between 1850 and 1871 it rose from 200,000 to 1.6 million tonnes, reaching some 14 m tonnes in 1910; whereas in England, with an output of 6.7 m tonnes in 1871, it had "only" risen to a little over 10 m tonnes by 1910. The rapid increase in iron manufacturing, which was even exceeded by steel production, was also due to technical innovations that did not change the working patterns of heavy industry until the second half of the nineteenth century. Steam engines had been used since the 1840s for pumping water out of the coalmines and transporting men and materials, making it possible to open deeper coal seams and increase output. A rise in coal output was a precondition for the growth in the production of iron and especially steel, which was given a boost by the Bessemer converter in 1861 and the Thomas process in 1878–79.

The effects of mechanization in the first half of the nineteenth century are clearly illustrated by the textile industry, which in Germany – unlike

England – was in the vanguard of industrialization only in its early stages. In 1800, 77 spinners were still needed to operate every thousand spindles; in 1865–69, only 14. As, moreover, machine work was considered light work, it was increasingly women and children that were recruited. In 1830, children under fourteen comprised almost one third of the Saxony cotton mill workers, and more than half were women.

Industrial growth was greatly stimulated and favoured by general political and legal conditions. Let us recall the "liberation of the peasants" in Prussia, which in the decades after 1807 encouraged the emergence of a rural underclass of former serfs, now made available as "free" labourers. Another crucial factor was the legal backing given to the freedom to conclude contracts of employment; for instance, Article 134 of the Prussian Trade Regulations of 17 January 1845: "The relations between independent tradesmen and their journeymen, assistants and apprentices shall be laid down by an agreement freely arrived at by the parties."[2] The text is based, of course, on the illusion that employers and employees are economically equally powerful parties in negotiations. In addition, mention should be made of the dissolution of the craft guilds and the gradual introduction of freedom to practise a trade in the period 1810–45, resulting in overmanning in some trades and a consequent increase in competition. Again, it should not be forgotten that the foundation of the Zollverein (customs union) under Prussian leadership brought some 23 million people together into a united customs and trading area in 1833–34. The creation of a uniform exchange and commercial law in the early 1850s and 1860s and the standardization of the currency and coinage systems and the postal service following the foundation of the Reich in 1871 did much to facilitate economic activity in the long term. Government reforms thus created favourable legal and political conditions for economic development on the one hand; on the other, by "liberating" the peasants and guaranteeing the freedom to conclude contracts of employment, they led directly to the formation of the "modern" working class.

Finally, it was of major importance that capital was required to set industrialization in motion and to keep it moving. The nineteenth century saw the triumph of industrial capitalism as an economic system, with its stress on private ownership and private access to capital. This capital is invested in companies that produce and sell goods for profit. Capitalism's profit-mindedness – epitomized ideologically by Manchester liberalism – unleashed tremendous forces for economic development. On the one hand, it brought about the rise of the bourgeoisie, which became the lead-

2 Preussische Gesetzessammlung 1845, p. 41 ff.

ing economic stratum, and before long the leading social stratum, too. But, on the other hand, it created or exacerbated social evils on a scale not seen before. It thus gave rise to the clash of interests between capital and labour, between the employer as the owner of the means of production and the wage-earner who owned neither the machines and tools nor the raw materials, still less the finished products made by him.

There were soon growing numbers who were bitterly aware of their economic and social situation and saw the employers as their adversaries; but the contradiction between capital and labour by no means created a united "working class" that thought and acted as one man. The workers were and remained split and divided – by social origin, sex, trade, industry, income, religion, political conviction, age, marital status, domicile and so on. It is all these factors taken together that comprised, as they still do, the individual's political consciousness, which is moulded not by one basic contradiction alone but by many different social and political influences, personal experiences and so forth. The labour movement would time after time reflect the divisions within the working class; for at no time – least of all in the early years around the middle of the nineteenth century – was the working class consciousness as unified as many theoreticians and politicians expected, in view of the opposing positions of the "workers" and the "employers".

Alongside the triumphal progress of technical innovations, the changes in the overall legal and political conditions and the advance of capitalist economic forms, another significant feature of the nineteenth century transformation of society as a whole was population growth. The population of Germany rose from 24 million in 1800 to more than 36 m in 1856 and to 56 m in 1900. The chief reason for this population increase, which not only provided manpower but also created a market for mass-produced goods (albeit limited by restricted purchasing power), was declining mortality due to improved hygiene, medical treatment and nutrition.

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What did industrialization mean to the people concerned? Work, the environment and every aspect of human life was affected. A rough idea of the advance of industrial capitalism can be gained from changes in the numbers of those employed in the various sectors of the economy. Although continuing to rise in absolute terms, the number of those engaged in agriculture as a proportion of the entire working population fell from 59 per cent in 1825 to 55 per cent in 1850 and 38 per cent in 1914. By way of contrast, the proportion of those engaged in trade and industry

rose over the same period from 21 to 24 to 37 per cent, and those working in the service sector of the economy increased from 17 to 21 to 25 per cent.

From the mid-nineteenth century on it was already possible to see which were to be the key industrial centres. Heavy industry, dependent on iron and coal deposits, began to set its stamp on entire regions: Upper Silesia, the Ruhr and Saar areas became industrial landscapes to which people streamed in their thousands. The population of the Ruhr district grew from 360,000 in 1850 to 3.5 m by 1914. The number of major cities increased rapidly. Whereas in 1800 there were only two German cities with a population exceeding 100,000 – Berlin (172,000) and Hamburg (130,000) – there were three in 1850 (Berlin, Hamburg and Munich), eight in 1871, and 48 by 1914.

Just as industrialization and urbanization changed the human environment, the industrial mode of production transformed working life. The operatives "served" the machines, whose operating speed and "capabilities" determined the course and duration of the work process. Division of labour and the fragmentation of production to the point of routine monotony; filth, noise, stench and health hazards; the separation of workplace and home; subjection to the dictates of the "millowner" in all matters of time and work – these phrases must be sufficient description of the process of "alienation" that the industrial mode of production imposed on growing numbers of working people.

The surplus of labour – former farmers and serfs, journeymen and craftsmen from trades in decline – had noticeable effects on the labour market. Owing to the competition between workers, the burdens of economic competition could be shifted on to the working people in the shape of more ruthless exploitation. Despite differences between occupations, companies and regions, the thirteen-hour day was the norm until the middle of the nineteenth century. Until the early 1870s, real wages had been pushed below the level of the early years of the century. In fact, the wage situation had in many cases been made worse by the truck system, that is, payment in goods instead of in money. Housing conditions also reflected social distress: it was by no means unusual for whole families of six or more persons to inhabit one or two rooms.

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The working class – male and female workers and their families – were largely defenceless against the disastrous social phenomena that accompanied the rise of capitalism. The beginnings of state intervention were first seen in the protection of children and young people. Prussia was first to

restrict child labour in 1839, partly at the insistence of army officers who feared that their "recruitment material" might be harmed. It was no longer permitted to employ children between nine and sixteen for more than ten hours per day in factories and mines; night work and working on Sundays and holidays were prohibited. But as these regulations were not always complied with, under the Prussian Trade Regulations of 17 January 1845 the local police were instructed to ensure that where journeymen and apprentices were employed due heed was paid to the "preservation of health and morals".

These measures to protect workers, particularly children and young people, from the worst excesses of industrialization were, however, confronted by political and legal obstacles designed to prevent any independent, organized defence of the workers' interests. Article 182 of the Prussian Trade Regulations forbade any agreement by trainees, journeymen or factory hands to strike on pain of up to one year's imprisonment; the "formation of associations by factory hands, journeymen, trainees or apprentices without police permission is punishable by fines of 50 Talers or up to four weeks' imprisonment for the instigators and leaders, and fines of up to 20 Talers or a fortnight's imprisonment for other participants, unless more severe penalties are laid down in law."[3] As growing numbers of workers became aware that their position was determined by economic and political factors and hence open to change, their readiness to get together and organize increased – but so did the determination of the employers and the State to resist.

2. *Towards the formation of the first trade unions*

There was a long way to go before the emergence of the first workers' organizations. This reflected the arduous learning process that culminated in the realization by journeymen and workers – prompted by earlier experiences and supported by socially committed people from outside the working class – that their interests would be best represented by organizations of their own.

In the first decades of industrialization, that is the 1830s and 1840s, there were seldom any moves towards more permanent forms of organization in associations. Earlier forms of organization were the friendly societies (Unterstützungskassen), designed to provide mutual help in

3 Preussische Gesetzessammlung 1845, p. 41 ff.

cases of sickness and death, and support for members "on tramp" (Wanderunterstützung). There were also the educational associations (Bildungsvereine) – for example, those of Berlin (1844), Hamburg (1844–45) and Hanover (1845) – and strike associations formed for specific cases. These educational associations gave impetus to the idea of autonomous organization, even though it was representatives of the middle classes and the Church who were often instrumental in setting them up and running them. The protest movements of the years preceding the March revolution of 1848 showed through countless petitions to employers and the authorities the people's growing discontent with social and political conditions. It was not so much the hunger riots, isolated cases of machine-wrecking and the protests of craftsmen and home workers against distributors and merchants, as in the Weavers' Revolt of 1844, that new, trend-setting forms of militancy emerged, but in the strikes and boycotts organized by journeymen and railway navvies. Organization and social protest – these were the two elements of social development around the middle of the century that were to bind the labour movement together.

But it was not the poorest of the poor who became the champions of organization as an idea. Rather, it was the artisans and journeymen. Day labourers and home workers had neither the organizational tradition and experience nor the self-esteem; neither did they have the financial resources to lend permanence to sporadic and short-lived revolt by means of expensive organizations. Even taking into account the numerical weakness of the industrial working class around the middle of the century, it is not surprising that skilled manual workers were the chief advocates of organization. With their professional self-esteem rooted in the pride of the pre-industrial craftsman, they felt the capitalist version of the employment relationship and the change in working conditions to be an attack on their own hopes and expectations. While in the old days the journeyman could assess the appropriateness of his wage by comparing it with the price of the commodity, and the demand for a "fair wage", allowing a "reasonable" standard of living, was perfectly realistic, the calculations behind modern industrial production were impenetrable. Furthermore, work became fragmented by the increasing use of machines and craft skills were devalued. Finally, whereas the journeyman had previously risen to be an independent master craftsman as a matter of course, for most journeymen this was now unattainable. It was not workers but journeymen who set up the first associations, the aims of which were partly professional and partly radical and democratic.

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A professional awareness of tradition in combination with social and political experience of the present thus favoured the emergence of workers' organizations. That is shown by the journeymen's associations (Gesellenbünde), which, while harking back to a medieval tradition of combination and militancy, would have been unlikely to arise had it not been for the fear of social decline and the liberal, democratic ideas with which itinerant journeymen came into contact, particularly in Switzerland and France. Worth mentioning is the secret, radical democratic "League of Outcasts" (Bund der Geächteten), formed in Paris in 1834 by emigrated intellectuals and journeymen. It was from this that the "League of the Just" (Bund der Gerechten) split away in 1837. The League of the Just was initially dominated by the social revolutionary ideas of the Magdeburg journeyman tailor Wilhelm Weitling. Later, in 1847, under the influence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, it renamed itself "The Communist League" (Bund der Kommunisten).

The importance of this League and its basic principles to the subsequent development of (not only) the labour movement cannot be overestimated. February 1848 saw the publication in London of the Communist Manifesto. Taking as their starting point the materialist conception of history, according to which the "history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles", Marx and Engels – with developments in England before their very eyes – laid bare the workings of modern capitalism. The basis of man's dependence on man, the basis of exploitation and oppression, the basis also of the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie was the private ownership of the means of production. As it developed, society would split up into "two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat". But "the development of Modern Industry [. . .] cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates product". For as capitalism becomes increasingly established, the working class becomes ever stronger. And so the bourgeoisie "produces, above all, its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are inevitable".

The Communists' aim was to bring about this victory by "formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat". Hence the necessity of abolishing private ownership of the means of production, and the "forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions".The concluding sentences resounded like a clarion call: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!"

Although the Communist Manifesto was later to achieve major polit-

ical significance, in the mid-nineteenth century it was out of step with the political and social situation in Germany. The proletariat was not yet a mass, there were no proletarian mass organizations, and the nascent working class had yet to develop an awareness of its common interests. Without doubt, the 1848 revolution speeded up this process of consciousness-raising by politicizing the people.

With its main aims of national unity, parliamentary democracy on a constitutional basis and equal suffrage, the revolution of March 1848 was essentially a bourgeois revolution. The accession of Friedrich Wilhelm IV in Prussia in 1840 had awoken hopes among the liberally minded middle class of an end to absolutist supremacy. Then, against the background of the 1840s famine crises, disappointment at the lack of reform allowed the February revolution in France to spread to Germany. But the revolution was chiefly enacted by artisans and workers, who took to the barricades not only for democracy but also for their own social and economic objectives. The direct result of the revolution was the convening of the Frankfurt Parliament in spring 1848, which drew up a constitution in St Paul's Church. The few months of the revolution and the pre-revolutionary period, when it appeared as though the monarchies could be turned into democracies, were sufficient to give the idea of organization its breakthrough.

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And so in 1847–48 the first Catholic and Protestant workers' associations were set up, linking up with early socially critical reflections by Christian laymen and clerics and the tradition of devout and charitable associations. They were under clerical leadership and thus caught up in the Church hierarchy, and were intended to promote faith, culture and conviviality and to raise the worker's class awareness, thus helping to find a solution to the "social question".

Concurrently with the development of the first working men's associations, Adolph Kolping's idea, first achieved in 1847, of Catholic journeymen's associations, designed to provide bachelors with religious instruction, occupational training and a comradely home atmosphere, gained ground; in 1855 the journeymen's associations had 12,000 members, and by 1870–71 some 70,000.

Efforts of this kind to attract the workers, in particular, found favour with the Catholic Church. Special mention should be made of Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel Baron von Ketteler, who, beginning with his Advent sermons of 1848, repeatedly came out with growing vehemence in favour of improving the social and political position of the working class. The Pro-

testant Church, on the other hand, tended to stand back; Johann Heinrich Wichern's support for social welfare as part of his "Inner Mission" programme was almost an exception to the rule. But in the mid-1800s, both Catholic and Protestant social reformers were agreed that the "social question" was above all a question of morality, regarding the reform of people's hearts and minds as a task for the Church. Their plan was to establish associations *for* the workers.

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But the revolution brought home to growing numbers of workers the need for organizations of their own. This realization was encouraged by the March revolution, which created the necessary legal conditions for the expansion of workers' and journeymen's organizations by establishing freedom of the press, association and assembly. Furthermore, the Frankfurt Parliament was "discovered" as the right address for demands to include democratic and social reform in the constitutional discussions.

Here we might point to the initiative taken by the typesetter, Stephan Born, who in April 1848, with the Berlin Central Committee for Working Men, called a General Congress of German Workers to meet in Berlin in late August and early September that year, when the "Fraternity of Working Men" (Arbeiterverbrüderung) was founded. This, the first German working class "mass movement", derived its support chiefly from journeymen and skilled workers and partly also from master craftsmen. The September 1848 social policy programme of the Fraternity not only recommended the traditional ways of social self help – support for journeymen on the tramp, death and sickness benefits – but in addition to calling for the introduction of a certificate of employment, also stated its aims of establishing producer and consumer cooperatives and obtaining legal backing for the ten-hour day. It also published its own journal, "The Fraternity".

In any case, as early as June 1848 the Berlin Central Committee for Working Men had approached the Frankfurt National Assembly with pioneering demands. These included: the setting of minimum wages and fixing of working hours by committees of workers and master craftsmen or employers; regulation of the number of apprentices a master was allowed to take on by similar committees; a commitment by the workers to adhere to the agreed wage; the abolition of indirect taxes, the introduction of progressive income tax with exemption for those with only the barest necessities of life; free schooling and free public libraries; the repeal of all special travel laws for working men, the general right of domicile

Fighting on the barricades in the Alexanderplatz, Berlin, on 18 March 1848

anywhere, freedom to move and safeguards against official highhandedness; the employment of the jobless in state-run institutions, the creation of model workshops by the state and state support for the destitute and all those disabled at work; reduction of the minimum age of candidates for the Prussian Chamber to twenty-four. But this initiative foundered, like other proposals for social reform, on Parliament's liberal-minded majority, whose sole aim (and the importance of this should not be underrated) was to win the bourgeois freedoms and achieve national unity. At any rate, social affairs were given short shrift in the constitutional discussions.

The Fraternity of Working Men did, however, break new ground in another, more wide-ranging sense. Under the slogan "One for all, and all for one", it turned the principles of self help, solidarity and social reform into cornerstones of the labour movement. Self help and unity were the watchwords of the early labour movement. Everywhere – for instance, in the appeal by the Central Committee of the Fraternity of Working Men to all workers and workers' associations of 18 September 1848[4] – the mess-

4 Quot. Horst Schlechte, Die Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverbrüderung 1848–1850. Dokumente des Zentralkomitees für die deutschen Arbeiter in Leipzig (Weimar, 1979), pp. 338–40

age was: "We workers must help ourselves." And here, too, we find the call to close ranks: "Be united, then you will be strong." The dividing lines between association, political party and trade union were very fluid around the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus it was that at different times not only did a number of local trade societies, such as that of the Berlin mechanical engineers, belong to the Fraternity, but in 1850 the cigar-makers' association, which along with the printers' association was one of the first German trade unions, was also affiliated to it.

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The first national trade union was established at the initiative of status-conscious journeymen printers and printing office proprietors. They – that is, the delegates of 12,000 printers and typesetters – founded the National Printers' Association (Nationaler Buchdrucker-Verein) at a congress held in Mainz from 11 to 14 June 1848. Their purpose, according to their petition to the Frankfurt National Assembly[5], was to defend themselves against "being forced into factory work", which they feared would be the outcome of the introduction of the steam engine and high-speed printing press. The association's main aims were protection from social relegation and other risks, especially the consequences of seasonal employment and falling wages. These aims were emphasized in its petition to the National Assembly, which also called for the setting up of a ministry of labour, the abolition of all laws discriminating against workers, the supervision of apprentices' training, the regulation of machinery and the creation of a comprehensive insurance scheme. The demand for agreed national rates of pay for typesetters and printers met with the opposition of the proprietors and led to a number of industrial disputes. As a result the wage agreement decision was amended at a second congress – held in Frankfurt in late August 1848 – which prompted the journeymen to leave the General German Printers' Association and set up the Gutenberg League in Berlin in late September–early October 1849.

According to the League's constitution of October 1849[6], its aim was to "justify, improve and secure the material and spiritual welfare of printers and typefounders, and also that of proprietors and trainees". So this association, too, initially derived its support from status-conscious printing workers and proprietors. In October 1849 the League had 3,000 members

5 Reprinted in: Willi Krahl, Der Verband der deutschen Buchdrucker, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1916), p. 219 f.

6 Gutenberg No. 51 of 22 December 1849, p. 202 f.

in 148 places. Headed by Karl Fröhlich, it demanded not only a curb on apprenticeships but also the setting of standards rates of pay and working hours to reduce competition between workers. The League also succeeded, at least initially, in building up a system of benefits that included travelling, sickness, disability and life insurance. It was never a militant organization; like the working men's associations, it was more concerned with solving problems within the trade by putting its demands to the employers and government bodies in negotiations. But this in itself, together with the offer of further vocational training measures, the democratization of society and the setting up of benefit schemes, pointed the way ahead to trade unionism.

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1848 also saw the setting up of the Association of German Cigar Workers (Assoziation der Zigarren-Arbeiter Deutschlands) at the first congress of cigar workers, held in Berlin from 25 to 29 September. Unlike the printers, who wished to defend their status, the cigar workers were principally concerned with improving their position and the respect in which they were held. Although the work was unhealthy, it was considered light, and cheap labour – women, children and prison inmates – was employed, which did little to boost the cigar workers' reputation in a highly status-minded society. The fact that cigar production was concentrated in certain regions – Westphalia, Saxony and Baden – obviously helped the idea of organization to gain acceptance; the silence of the work process was conducive to conversation; and the workers' distress was such that relief was urgently required.

The formation of this association again shows quite clearly the importance of the guild as a model, even when there was no such tradition within the trade. Thus one of the association's main aims was regulation of the labour market; it sought a ban on all child, female and prison labour. Furthermore, in the rules of 13 September 1849 the founders believed that they could oblige all cigar workers to join their association[7].

On the other hand, looking at the democratic structure of the organization, the system of self-financing through contributions and the demand for collective wage agreements, with courts of arbitration in cases of conflict with the employers, the beginnings of trade unionism were also in evidence. Industrial action was also one of the means whereby members' interests were to be defended, although the trade union formations of

7 Printed copy in the Hauptstaatsarchiv, Düsseldorf (Reg. Düsseldorf Präs. 861)

the revolutionary period can hardly be considered militant organizations. The Cigar Workers' Association also attempted to build up a benefits system and widows and orphans fund. Another of the aims set out in the constitution was further vocational training for members. The need for organization among the cigar workers may be gauged from the fact that under the leadership of Wenzel Kohlweck the association rapidly acquired 1000 members and by September 1849 it had 12,800 members in 77 places.

3. *Organizational setbacks in the reactionary 1850s*

Scarcely had the first working class organizations come into existence when they were banned in the period of reaction that set in. The nobility, the army and a compliant bourgeoisie prevented the implementation of political rights and liberties. True, the Prussian Association Law (Vereinsgesetz) of 11 March 1850 and the federal decision of 13 July 1854 guaranteed freedom of association and assembly; but on the other hand a blanket ban was introduced on all workers' associations with "political, socialist or communist aims". Also, all associations classified as political were forbidden to recruit women, schoolchildren and apprentices, and they were also prevented from setting up organizational links with one another. The Fraternity of Working Men, which in February 1850 had pressed for cooperation between political and trade union organizations with some success, at least amongst the cigar workers, the Gutenberg League and the Cigar Workers' Association all suffered political persecution in Prussia as early as 1850, and by 1854 in other parts of Germany, too. But the idea of organization was kept alive in the funds and benefit schemes until these, too, were dissolved or turned into state-controlled insurance schemes in 1853–54. Only individual schemes continued to run at company or local level, and these provided a jumping-off point in the 1860s.

The continuity of the trade union idea was thus not entirely broken in the 1850s. It was simply not possible to "prohibit" clandestine organizations, the experiences of union founders and members and, least of all, the everyday clash of interests with the employers, which led to "strike waves" in the 1850s, particularly in 1855 and 1857. But while the independent labour movement was smashed, there developed organizations which either appealed expressly to workers and journeymen or pressed for associations that bridged class and social strata. The co-operative idea, which also played a part in the Fraternity of Working Men, should be mentioned here. As Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, mayor of a village in Westerwald,

did for agriculture, Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch had been advocating co-operative mergers between traders and artisans since the 1850s; as a convinced liberal, he hoped to protect the lower middle class against the advance of (large-scale) industry in this way. Although Schulze-Delitzsch also appealed to factory workers, they had little to gain from the formation of credit co-operatives, for they lacked not only money but also experience and training.

The 1850s showed the two-faced attitude of the authorities towards the working class: the independent organizations of the labour movement were crushed – at the same time as (very modest) efforts were made to alleviate the worst manifestations of the "social question". May 1853 saw the introduction in Prussia of government factory inspectors, whose prime duty it was to protect young people. Further, the minimum age for factory work was reduced to 12; minors between 12 and 14 years were no longer permitted to work more than seven hours a day. In 1854 the first steps towards sickness and disability insurance were taken. But measures of this nature achieved precisely nothing; the state was still overwhelmingly inclined to see the "social question" primarily as a policing problem.

It was not merely social discrimination against working people but also the legal obstacles, and in particular the ban on all their efforts to organize, that forced the labour movement to become politicized. For any demand for social improvements presupposed political rights which first had to be won. So long as there was no guaranteed freedom of assembly or association and no freedom of the press, any workers' organization had to give political demands a central place in its programme.

The period of reaction and its authoritarian legacy thus helped the labour movement to develop with all the more vigour and political motivation later on. It was possible to put the brakes on the labour movement for a while – but not on the process of economic and social change that produced it and to which it was a response. In a single decade, 1851–60, industrial production doubled, the railway network increased from 5,870 to 11,150 km, and the output of Germany's steam engines rose from 260,000 to 850,000 horsepower. Industrialization was proceeding apace – and with it the emergence of the working class.