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'Engines of Mischief': The Luddite Disturbances of 1811–12

In the three weeks between late March and mid-April 1812, three different manufacturers, in no way connected to each other and living and working in different parts of the country, received threatening letters. George Rowbottom was a hosier from Eastwood, a small town west of Nottingham, putting out work in the framework knitting industry of the East Midlands. Mr Smith was a master dresser from near Holmfirth, who, using shearing frames, finished cloth in the West Riding woollen industry. And Thomas Garside was a manufacturer from Stockport engaged in spinning yarn and dressing warps for weaving cotton cloth by steam. Threatening letters, of course, were far from unusual. They formed, as we have noted, a stage in many industrial negotiations, since they were a means of stating demands without the need for anyone to be identified as the negotiator. However, these three letters were linked in that they appeared to bear a common authorship: each carried the imprimatur of Ned Ludd.

From head Quarters Genaral Lud

George Rowbottom this is to inform you that their is not a man in the town of Arnold bulwell Hucknall nor basford that takes work out unless it is full price full fashion and proper price and size and this is to give you Notice that if you bring or give any more work out without it is full fashion full price and proper size you shall work this frame [drawing of a gallows] with a rope around your neck.[1]

To Mr Smith Shearing Frame Holder at Hill End Yorkshire
Sir

Information has just been given to me that you are the holder of those detestable Shearing Frames, and I was desired by my Men to write to you and give you fair Warning to pull them down . . . you will take Notice that if they are not taken down by the end of next Week, I will detach one of my Lieutenants with at least 300 Men to destroy them and

[1] HO 42/122, 'From head Quarters Genaral Lud' to Rowbottom, March 1812. Kevin Binfield's painstaking assembly of Luddite writings provides the definitive version of such letters and an outstanding analysis of the language and rhetoric that lay behind them. K. Binfield, *The Writings of the Luddites* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

furthermore take Notice that if you give us the Trouble of coming so far we will increase your misfortune by burning your Buildings down to Ashes

Signed by the General of the Army of
Redressers
Ned Ludd Clerk
Redressers for ever Amen[2]

Sir

We think it our Duty to inform you that We was Intent upon Setting fire to your factory on Account of those Dressing Machines that was and still are Within it. But We Consider that it would Be very Injurious to those Industrious Masters that Occupy the Different parts of it therefore in justice to humanity We think it our Bounin Duty to give you this Notice that is if you do not Cause those Dressing Machines to be Removed within the Bounds of Seven Days from the above Date your factory and all it Contains Will and Shall Surely Be Set on fire . . . it is Not our Desire to Do you the Least Injury, But we are fully Determin'd to Destroy both Dressing Machines and Steam looms, Let Who Will be the Owners We Neither Regard those that keeps them Nor the Army for We Will Conquer Both or Die in the Conflict Remember, We have given you Both time and Warning and if you pay no attention you Must abide by the Consiquence

Signd General Justice[3]

The phenomenon of Luddism continues to fascinate historians and a wider public alike, with good reason.[4] Popular protests in the eighteenth century frequently threw up leaders, real or imaginary, who, as we have seen, were variously given nominal titles such as 'captain' or 'general'. But none had come up with a proper name to identify their champion. And none had seen the same name not only employed within the specific locality but exported to other very different industrial and geographical contexts. While 'Captain Swing' was to enjoy an even wider territorial sway in 1830, Ned Ludd achieved a public recognition which was remarkable. Through newspaper reports, his name was on the lips of all classes around the country and his doings the subject of parliamentary debate. His fame tempted others in distant regions to invoke the power of his signature. Thus in May 1812 a Gloucestershire clothier received the following:

Mr Lewis May 10

if you do not see as those that Work at your Mischonry if not Paid better, particuler the shearing frames for Wee be Resolved to set on fire all the Places that Have Got any of

[2] HO 40/1/1, Ned Ludd Clerk to Mr Smith. Identifying Smith is not straightforward. See Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 208–11.

[3] HO 40/1, 'General Justice' to Garside, 19 April 1812. The dressing machines in question spun and strengthened the warp, which could then be used for coarse cotton cloth production on power looms. The device was invented and patented by William Radcliffe.

[4] Significant studies of Luddism include E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Gollancz, 1963; Penguin, 1968), ch. 14; M. I. Thomis, *The Luddites: Machine-Breaking in Regency England* (David and Charles, 1970); R. Reid, *Land of Lost Content* (Heinemann, 1986); K. Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and their War on the Industrial Revolution* (Addison-Wesley, 1995); B. Bailey, *The Luddite Rebellion* (Sutton, 1998); and Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*.

it in: and thee mind Jack as if Thee Do not Harken to the above thee shalt Rue for it the same as Pearcevel; We have Done over Lodgmoor and Browns mills; and if you will not alter yourern soon as se as all the shearing searvants . . . be paid more wages or they will Join we if we Gives them a few Pounds; and you tell the Farmers all round you that if Grain is not sold at a Reasonable Price, we will shoot them as they come from Market, for we will have more bread or Blod

I am E. LUD[5]

'Ned Lud' (for at first his surname seems to have had only the one 'd') allegedly hailed from Nottinghamshire. A framework knitter's apprentice, he had, the story ran, been criticized for making up his hose too loosely and was told to 'square his needles', the term used for adjusting the mechanism of the stocking frame. Ned took the injunction literally and flattened the workings of the machine with a hammer. Even allowing for the fact that the resistance of framework knitters in 1811–12 towards wide frames often involved them in smashing their workings with hammers, the choice of Ned's name to self-identify the Nottinghamshire machine breakers was surprising, for he was hardly a heroic figure. It indicates at the very least a sense of self-irony which is remarkable. Yet in a very short time, even as his henchmen went about his business, Ned had become famous and was the subject of ballads and doggerel.

> Chant no more your old rhymes about bold Robin Hood
> His feats I but little admire
> I will sing the Achievements of General Ludd
> Now the Hero of Nottinghamshire.

Where Robin, a displaced gentleman, signified paternal protection, taking from the unscrupulous rich barons to give to the poor, Ned stood for the sturdy self-sufficiency of the independent labourer prepared to take on the role of resistance for himself. Furthermore, from the first, Ned Ludd assumed a clearly ideological and moral position of the righter of wrongs and the punisher of those who threatened community values:

> The guilty may fear, but no vengeance he aims
> At honest man's life or Estate
> His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames
> And to those that old prices abate
> These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
> By unanimous vote of the Trade
> And Ludd who can all opposition defy
> Was the grand Executioner made.[6]

[5] *Gloucester Journal*, 20 July 1812. The writer proved to be 15-year-old employee Thomas Gardner. At his trial the judge blamed the press rather than his innate depravity. The two mills referred to had been burned down but do not appear to have been deliberately fired. Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister, was murdered by John Bellingham on 11 May 1812.

[6] HO 42/119, 'General Ludd's Triumph'. The song, sung to the tune of 'Poor Jack', dates from late 1811 or early 1812 since it was most probably bundled with a letter from Coldham to Ryder in January 1812. See Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 95–100 for a discussion of the song and its provenance.

The fame of 'Ned Ludd's men' spread.[7] And when disorders broke out in neighbouring regions among entirely different trades, the name of Ludd spread with them.[8] This no doubt reflected the positive response among workers in many regions to the image, established through press reports, of Ludd as the upholder of customary rights. However, the authorities feared a more sinister reason, seeing Luddites not merely as machine-breakers but as a secret conspiracy to overthrow the state. They were not without circumstantial evidence to sustain such a view. Credible, if sketchy, reports showed that delegates from the disturbed East Midlands visited groups of workers in both Yorkshire and Lancashire in early 1812 and maintained some correspondence across the regions. Others, unconnected with these industrial conflicts, and who had political change, including violent political change, as their object, were also conducting clandestine correspondence. How far 'Luddite' linkages tied up with these, how far the 'industrial' elided into coherent revolutionary plotting, or whether these meetings were simply the ordinary pattern of workers in dispute seeking support from other working groups beyond their region remain subjects of considerable historical debate.[9]

The single defining feature of Luddism was a common resistance to labour-saving technology. Indeed, the Luddite disorders have, uniquely among popular protests, bequeathed to posterity an adjective that has entered the lexicon as synonymous with a blind and unthinking hostility to technology and to change. As I have argued elsewhere, such a view, essentially a construct of Victorian industrial triumphalism, does less than justice to those involved in the protests and in many ways seriously misstates the Luddites' attitude to machinery.[10] Moreover, Luddism, though characterized as a movement against new labour-saving technology, was in fact a complex amalgam of protests shaped by their local industrial, political, and historical contexts. The common title disguises differing patterns of labour protest and differing contemporary understandings of the changing character of both industrial production and industrial relations. Each region demonstrated the ways in which popular protest had developed across the previous century.

The Luddite disturbances did, however, share a common economic and political context which shaped both their development and the response that greeted them.

[7] *Nottingham Journal*, 28 December 1812.

[8] We might note that the Yorkshire rioters did not always describe themselves as 'Luddites'. They also referred to themselves as 'redressers', which, given the fact that the trade concerned were cloth dressers, might again have been self-ironic, and as ' "snappers" as they call themselves', according to a report in the *Nottingham Journal* of 24 March 1812. One is left to wonder whether the 'Snappers' would have made quite such an impact at the time or on posterity. What, indeed, is in a name?

[9] For the best discussion of the linkages between the affected regions and the links with ultra-radicals, see J. R. Dinwiddy, 'Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties', *Social History*, iv(1) (1979), 33–64.

[10] A. J. Randall, *Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woollen Industry, 1776–1809* (Cambridge, 1991), 2–3.

Following a period of rapid wartime growth, the economy was plunged into ever-deepening depression by the mounting consequences of the Orders in Council, initiated in 1807. These Orders attempted to wage economic warfare against Napoleon by establishing a blockade of the growing number of Continental ports controlled by France. At first the Orders had only limited impact: new trade with the Iberian Peninsula and South America grew apace, while the blockade was not well enforced. However, their impact offended the United States of America, which passed a Non-Intercourse Act in 1809, closing American ports to British vessels. This move was to have disastrous effects for both Lancashire cotton and Yorkshire woollens since both had developed significant markets in America. Protests against the Orders and against the war alarmed a government already seriously frightened of the possibility of internal revolt. And, with trade declining, the internal economy was hit as demand slackened. A speculative boom collapsed and unemployment rose everywhere. Compounding these distresses, the price of food rose inexorably when the 1810 and 1811 harvests both proved seriously deficient.[11] None of this made Luddism inevitable, but these circumstances heightened a sense of social and political crisis and brought the question of machinery to the fore. And they created the context in which industrial tensions might rapidly spill into riot. The Oldham diarist, William Rowbottom, presciently recorded in early January 1812:

> in Consequence of the Badness of trade and the Dearness of all sorts of provisions there is but Little apearance of Cristmas . . . the Lower Class of people . . . are absolutely Short of the Common necessaries of Life . . . if there be an alteration of times it must be for the Better Except there be Comotions or Civil wars wich God Grant may never happen in this Country or Kingdom.[12]

Let us examine the three disturbed regions in turn.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LUDDISM

As noted, Luddism first emerged in Nottinghamshire. Yet in many respects the original Luddites fit the later paradigm least well, since the focus of the disorders in the East Midlands were not machines per se but threats to customary practices and to piece rates. The hosiery and lace industries, as noted earlier, were essentially putting-out trades controlled by urban hosiers who acted as merchant capitalists. In the cities and towns of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire production remained centred upon small master producers who employed journeymen in their shops. However, most hosiery and lace production by 1810 took place in the

[11] Across the manufacturing districts, concerns mounted for the labouring poor. For example, Bolton clergymen, manufacturers, and inhabitants petitioned against wage reductions and rising grain prices. HO 42/117, Pilkington to Earl of Derby, 12 November 1811, enclosing Petition.

[12] Oldham Local Studies Library, MF/G19, Rowbottom Diaries, January 1812.

surrounding villages where 'independent' framework knitters were employed on piece rate. Few stockingers owned the frame on which they worked. Frames were complex and represented a significant capital investment. Most framework knitters therefore rented them, paying a weekly sum for which they were liable whether they produced hose or not. While the knitters liked to see themselves as artisans, they struggled to maintain any real autonomy.[13] However, it was not entirely one-sided. The hosiers, like all merchant capitalists in putting-out industries, had little control over the rate of production. Additionally, their investment in rented frames was highly vulnerable to attack. Frame-breaking was therefore a means of putting pressure on recalcitrant hosiers, a tactic used in various disputes before the events in 1811.

Three interlinked issues lay behind the disturbances that broke out in 1811. The first was a downward pressure upon piece rates, which reflected a declining market for hosiery and lace goods. The second was the fact that, in the boom years following the Peace of Amiens, a large number of people, not all previously connected with the industry, had purchased frames for rental income and thereby inflated the army of labour. These men were accused of being among the first to lower wages. Moreover, as with other weaving trades in this period, expansion had weakened the old customary controls upon labour. This was seen most clearly in the increasing numbers of female stocking weavers and apprentices, both of which undermined the trade's capacity to maintain rates. Finally, custom was also increasingly undermined by the use of so-called wide frames. 'Full-wrought' stockings were made in the form of a tube. However, early in the new century a new form of stocking-making was developed using a wider frame, which enabled the knitter to produce cloth in one flat piece. Such frames had long been used, without dispute, to make, among other products, pantaloons and other forms of lace. They required a deal less skill and could be used by women and apprentices with little training. However, when these wide frames were used to produce stockings, they seriously threatened the framework knitters' trade. Cut out from the cloth and then sewn up with a selvedge at the back, such 'cut-ups' were immediately denounced as a cheap inferior product. Moreover, framework knitters believed that such products were contrary to the Charter granted to the Framework Knitters' Company by Charles II, which decreed that only 'full-wrought hose' might legally be produced. Indeed, the Charter provided a sanction, ordaining that frames making 'spurious articles' might be destroyed in order to ensure that hose was not deceitfully made. The *Nottingham Review*, in words which echoed the case that the shearmen had brought against the gig mill, noted in December 1811 that frames were being broken 'not for being upon any new construction . . . but in consequence of goods being wrought upon them

[13] Thomas Large, a delegate sent by the framework knitters to lobby for the regulation of their trade in 1812, was firmly put in his place on this point at a meeting of London artisans. Large to Committee, 24 April 1812, reprinted in D. Gray and V. W. Walker (eds.), *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, viii. *1800–1835* (Thos. Forman, 1952), 143.

being of little worth, are deceptive to the eye, are disreputable to the trade, and therefore pregnant with the seeds of destruction'.[14]

The earliest sign of discontent came in early 1811 in the village of Arnold. Framework knitters broke into workshops and removed the jack-wires from frames making cut-ups. It was an effective means of preventing them working without causing lasting damage to the looms.[15] However, those hosiers manufacturing cut-ups were not prepared to compromise and on 11 March a large demonstration took place in Nottingham. 'A number of individuals from the adjacent villages' marched into the city 'with a view of representing to their employers the hardships they were subject to and of intimidating others into compliance with their demands by which alone they can be enabled to obtain a subsistence.' The magistrates called out troops but the demonstrators left quietly. However, later that day a large crowd assembled at Arnold 'with a premeditated determination to destroy some stocking frames employed there by hosiers of this town'. Fifty frames were broken.[16] In the weeks that followed more frames were smashed in the villages and towns around Nottingham. From the first, the attacks were well-ordered. 'The persons engaged in these depradations proceed in small companies, disguised so that their persons may not be known.'[17] These attacks persuaded hosiers in the town to call a public meeting on 26 March, which, while condemning 'the illegal measures which have been resorted to by *some* of the framework knitters', resolved to 'recommend to the Trade in general to give for all full-fashioned work the OLD PRICES'.[18]

The agreement appears to have held for the summer but broke down as autumn moved into winter. Trade worsened, but again it was the increasing use of the 'wide frames' that occasioned disorder. The Duke of Newcastle noted that

> a new machine had been invented which enabled the manufacturers to employ women in many instances in which men had hitherto been employed; also the malcontents were looking to exacting greater wages than the manufacturers were able or inclined to pay them.[19]

In November frames were smashed at Arnold, Bulwell, and Baswell, as were a considerable number at Sutton-in-Ashfield owned by a hosier 'who made for the most part cheap Grade at reduced prices, and paid for a considerable proportion of the labour in Goods'.[20] Trouble was expected since threatening letters had been

[14] *Nottingham Review*, 6 December 1811.
[15] W. Felkin, *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace* (1867, 1967 edn.), 236.
[16] *Nottingham Journal*, 16 March 1811. [17] Ibid., 23 March 1811.
[18] Ibid., 30 March 1811. The hosiers also reiterated their determination to support the civil power who on the same day issued a handbill offering 50 guineas reward for evidence that resulted in the conviction of those smashing frames.
[19] HO 42/117, Newcastle to Ryder, 16 November 1811. The *Nottingham Journal* echoed this interpretation: 'The depredations have been almost exclusively confined to the destruction of a certain description of stocking frame which being of a new construction are supposed by the workmen likely to prove greatly injurious to the body at large.' *Nottingham Journal*, 16 November 1811.
[20] *Nottingham Journal*, 10 November 1811; HO 42/131, Hayne to Ryder, 12 February 1812.

sent to various obnoxious hosiers. Increasingly they bore a common signature. One of the earliest was to 'Mr H . . . at Bulwell', probably Edward Hollingworth. It warned:

> Sir, if you do not pull don the Frames or stop pay Goods only for work or m.. in full fashon my Companey will [vi]sit yr machines for execution . . .
>
> Ned Lu[d][21]

On the night of 10 November, Hollingworth's house was attacked. The marauders were initially driven off with gunfire and one attacker was killed. However, they regrouped and forced their way into the building where they smashed all the wide frames, though not standard frames, and all the household furniture in revenge.[22]

Attacks on wide frames now increased in both scale and extent. Some were quite open. A massed crowd marched from Arnold to Sutton-in-Ashfield to initiate frame-breaking there. Some city hosiers were so alarmed that they sought to retrieve their frames from the country knitters, an action which immediately increased anger since it deprived their previous hirers of all work. One such attempt was thwarted when the cart was intercepted and all the frames smashed on the roadside.[23] Within a fortnight, disorder had spread out to the framework knitting industry in Derbyshire and Leicestershire, while the villages around Nottingham were entirely convulsed.[24]

Troops were rushed to the city of Nottingham and started night patrolling.[25] Newcastle was confident that their presence had put an end to disorders 'in the neighbourhood of Nottingham' but he remained concerned about outlying parishes.[26] There the military presence forced the Luddites to conduct their attacks in smaller parties: 'The operations were conducted with so much secrecy and dispatch that the business was accomplished long before any force could be collected to resist them.'[27] But if the numbers in each action were small, the reach of 'Ned Lud's men' was long.[28] At Beeston and Blidworth, the Luddites 'placed men in the avenues to the Villages and declared they would shoot any man who attempted to go out to call the civil or military power' before breaking 'a great many frames' and levying contributions for their support on householders.[29] Furthermore, the hosiers' stratagem of bringing frames back into the city backfired: 'they have had the temerity to extend their depredations even to the town itself', noted the *Nottingham Journal*, recording the destruction of attacks on frames in various locations in the city. Moreover, although the wide frames

[21] HO 42/118, letter from Ned Lud. For details of this letter, see Binfield, *The Writings of the Luddites*, 73–4.
[22] *Nottingham Journal*, 16 November 1811.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 21 November 1811.
[25] Ibid., 23 November 1811.
[26] HO 42/117, Newcastle to Ryder, 26 November 1812.
[27] *Nottingham Journal*, 30 November 1811.
[28] Ibid., 28 November 1811.
[29] HO 42/117, Sherbrooke to Newcastle, 30 November 1811.

remained their principal targets, Luddites now were smashing frames 'as are employed at reduced prices, and in some instances, those worked by women'.[30]

While direct action characterized resistance to wide frames and wage cuts, the knitters also maintained a more 'public' dialogue, aimed at publicizing their case and persuading their employers to negotiate. Some 'Luddite' statements made clear the anger felt against those hosiers who sought individual profit at the expense of the reputation of the trade and its workers. A poster, 'Declaration: Extraordinary', laid out charges against Charles Lacy, a Nottingham hosier, who stood accused of having 'reduced to poverty and misery seven hundred of our beloved brethren . . . by making fraudulent Cotton Point Nett, of One Thread Stuff'. Lacy, it was claimed, had profited by some £15,000 but in so doing had ruined the trade. 'It appeareth to us that the said Charles Lacy was actuated by the most diabolical motives, namely to gain riches by the misery of his Fellow Creatures.'[31] Other statements were more conciliatory in style. An 'address from the framework knitters to the Gentlemen Hosiers of the town of Nottingham' emphasized 'we have nothing in view but a reciprocal Advantage in the Trade, both for ourselves and you.' It sought their 'best Advice, respecting an Address to Parliament, for the better Regulation of our Trade, and means of Defence against future Impositions'. The old pattern of combining the stick of direct action with the carrot of negotiative compromise was again in evidence.

Such appeals to the employers were not without success. A meeting of hosiers in Nottingham in November resolved to amend the prices approved at the March meeting 'more nearly to the wishes of the workmen and which, it was agreed, should be abided by and published'.[32] Some hosiers in the plain silk trade agreed 'to make a seasonable advance of 6d per pair their workmen in the manufacture of black silk hose.'[33] These actions prompted a public 'Address' from the workmen thanking their employers for their 'ready condescension in attending to the solicitations of those Persons that waited upon you, on our behalf, to obtain the advance above specified'. The address listed those firms that had signed the agreement. The implication was clear: their property would now be exempt from attack.[34] However, the agreement could not be enforced across the trade. A further meeting of hosiers was called on 4 December. It resolved that, provided disorder ended, they would 'receive and consider proposals from the workmen for the purpose of removing any grievances which may appear to exist'.[35] A copy of the prices agreed in 1805 was published in the *Nottingham Review* on 6 December.[36] Newcastle was hopeful that such agreements would put an end to the disorders.[37] Certainly violence abated in the immediate aftermath of these

[30] *Nottingham Journal*, 30 November 1811.
[31] HO 42/119, 'Declaration: Extraordinary', November 1811. The poster ordered 'our well-beloved Brother, and Captain in Chief, Edward Ludd', to execute Lacy.
[32] *Nottingham Journal*, 21 November 1811. [33] Ibid., 30 November 1811.
[34] Ibid., 29 November 1811. [35] Ibid., 7 December 1811.
[36] Ibid., 6 December 1811. [37] HO 42/118, Newcastle to Ryder, 29 December 1811.

negotiations, but, when it became clear that many hosiers would ignore any agreement, it soon resumed.

> They go about in small parties, disguised, with their faces besmeared, and stationing centinels at the doors accomplish their purposes with the least noise. They communicate with each other by means of a watchword and the firing of a pistol or gun is generally the signal of danger or of retreat.[38]

The problem of securing meaningful negotiation was exacerbated by the Nottingham corporation, which, no doubt under pressure from the hosiers, established a secret committee, consisting of leading civic officials and the city hosiers, to tackle Luddism. Armed with some £2,000 to offer as rewards, the committee pressed for more troops to coerce the disaffected. They also began a process of arresting suspects in the middle of the night, encouraging rumours that these men had been impeached by their comrades. This brought an immediate response from Ned Lud, who warned that that any person 'giveing any information, of breaking frames to the Town Clerk, or to the Corporation Silly Committee' would be 'Punish'd with death, or any Constable found out making any enquiries so has to hurt the Cause of Ned Lud or any of his army, D E A T H (by order of King Lud)'.[39]

While attacks continued, attempts to reach a negotiated peace continued. In late December the framework knitters of Melbourne published an address to the hosiers, reminding them of the agreement reached in May 1805 with 139 'honourable Hosiers'. And in early January 'Ned Lud's Office, Sherwood Forest', issued a 'declaration' reminding all of the continuing validity of the charter granted by Charles II that empowered the destruction of 'all Frames and Engines that fabricate Articles in a fraudulent and deceitful manner'. Ned promised to uphold this provision, though, interestingly, he disowned 'Gangs of banditti' who had allegedly 'infested various parts of the Country under the pretence of being employed in breaking Frames and hath committed divers Robberies'. 'I have Gave two thousand Pounds as secret money any person that will give any Information of the villainous and false rumours of the Frame Breakers.'[40] The fact that this sum matched the 'Silly' Committee's fund was doubtless no coincidence.

However, while Luddites sought to uphold an image of reasonableness, their inability to secure a lasting agreement always drove them back to industrial violence. By early January attacks had again become general. Even the sympathetic *Nottingham Journal* described the situation as 'little short of a rebellion' as attacks proliferated, frequently simultaneously, stretching the capacity of the numerous troops stationed in the county. Nearly one hundred frames, it declared, had been destroyed 'within the last seven days'.[41]

[38] *Nottingham Journal*, 7 December 1811.
[39] HO 42/118, Newcastle to Ryder, 21 December 1811; Ned Lud's proclamation (n.d., 23 December 1811).
[40] HO 42/119, 'Declaration', 1 January 1812.
[41] *Nottingham Journal*, 1 February 1812.

Public opinion, subjected to a constant information diet of 'outrages', nevertheless remained far from hostile to the Luddites. Several correspondents openly condemned the hosiers. For example, John Wright declared that

> as a body, their conduct appears to be most reprehensible, tame and dastardly, through the whole of this dispute. They know and are aware of the extortion and tyranny of some of the hosiers combined with . . . a falling trade, was the original cause of the dissension and depredations.[42]

Thomas Becher blamed hosiers who had failed to pay the rates agreed in the spring and argued for regulation of frame rent:

> I am aware of the delicacy attaching to any interference with regulations of trade, yet I beg leave most respectfully to submit for your consideration the expediency of passing an act to prescribe by a regulated table . . . the rent to be paid for every species of frame.

This would, he believed, cut out speculative production and closely connect the knitter with the hosier.[43] And even established hosiers, such as Thomas Hayne, were prepared to accept that that among their number were those who, by paying truck and seeking to reduce wages, were provoking the workers to anger. He was, though, more inclined to blame the number of frames hired 'from Persons not connected with the Trade' who rented frames simply as a speculative investment.[44] *The Times* was particularly critical of the local authorities' failure to check the disorders: 'There must be singular negligence somewhere or these disgraceful and dangerous proceedings would be put down at once.' However, it also pressed for a meeting of master manufacturers 'to consider the real demands made upon them by the workmen; and they should point their resolutions to meet as far as possible the actual distress of the quiet and industrious'.[45]

Such was the public support for the machine breakers that, their £2,000 notwithstanding, the corporation was forced to admit failure. The Luddites were not only supported by those in work, Coldham, the town clerk, lamented: they had also won the hearts and minds of the community:

> They seem to have succeeded in such an astonishing degree that it is difficult to find out a person engaged in this employment who is not heart and soul embarked in it. They have lately exercised great Judgement and Discretion in the Selection of their Victims in the Town by fixing upon the property of Individuals on some Account Obnoxious to popular resentment.[46]

In the main, Luddism was seen, as by Becher, as a trade dispute, albeit one that had got out of hand.[47] However, some magistrates and corporation members were disposed towards seeing more general dangers, while Newcastle, having initially

[42] Ibid., 8 February 1812. However, he also blamed the editor for encouraging the Luddites by his criticism of the civic authorities.
[43] HO 42/120, Becher to Ryder, 11 February 1812.
[44] HO 42/131, Hayne to Ryder, 12 February 1812.
[45] *The Times*, 27 January 1812.
[46] HO 42/118, Coldham to Ryder, 14 January 1812. Coldham also acted as secretary to the joint committee.
[47] HO 42/120, Becher to Ryder, 11 February 1812.

argued that the disorders were 'entirely of a local and partial nature', had by 5 February come to wonder whether there was a need for martial law.[48] The ministry was certainly thoroughly alarmed by what it saw as insurrection and was only too willing to respond favourably to the suggestion from the Leicester magistrates and Nottinghamshire MPs that draconian legislation was needed to bring the disorders to an immediate end. The result was the Frame Breakers' bill 'for the more exemplary punishment of persons destroying or injuring any stocking- or lace-frames or other machines or engines used in the frame-work knitted manufactory'. That exemplary punishment was, of course, death. Frame-breaking was already punishable by up to fourteen years' transportation under an Act of 1788, the result of an earlier bout of frame-breaking, a measure that, it was admitted on all sides, had proved completely ineffective.[49] Nonetheless, the Home Secretary, introducing the measure on 14 February, insisted that forcible action was needed since 'every means had been resorted to' to end the outrages, without effect. Ryder argued that Luddism was 'a system bordering almost on insurrection'. 'If the offences are allowed to continue, it would suffer great danger to the state.' Bathurst made no bones about it: 'The peace of the country would be cheaply purchased by the forfeiture of a few lives, in order to deter future outrages on the property of individuals, and the tranquillity of the state.' While members of the Lords offered some resistance—Byron famously demanded, 'Is there not blood enough in your penal code?' while Grosvenor denounced it as an 'obnoxious measure' that would 'inflict death on to anyone who should enter a house without force and merely damage a few threads of lace. Such a bill he could not contemplate without horror'—the bill became law by early March.[50]

The Frame Breakers' Act proved as ineffectual a tool of prosecution as its predecessor, an eventuality pointed out by Coldham before the bill was introduced:

> I have had a long conference with those who have given me most important information, and kept a watch upon the motions of the Framebreakers, and they will do so not a moment longer than the law is as it now remains. They cannot they say consent to act where the death of a fellow creature must be the consequence of their giving such information as may lead to his conviction.[51]

But while frame-breaking continued through February and even briefly into March, the Act, supplemented with additional troops, transformed the atmosphere in the East Midlands. The spectre of the gallows suddenly loomed large. The Nottinghamshire assizes heard five cases of riotous assembly and seven of frame-breaking though, since these offences had been committed before the new

[48] HO 42/117, Newcastle to Ryder, 16 November 1811; HO 42/120, Newcastle to Ryder, 5 February 1812. It was not a view shared by the two Bow Street officers sent to the city to assist the magistrates: HO 42/117, Conant to Ryder, 4 December 1811.

[49] *28 Geo. III, c.55*. The Act in fact had never been successfully used.

[50] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 21, 14 February 1812, *passim*; *Nottingham Journal*, 7 March 1812.

[51] HO 42/119, Coldham to Ryder, 24 February 1812.

Act, they had to be tried under the 1788 Act. Five men were found guilty: two were transported for fourteen years and three for seven years. The rest were acquitted.[52] An uneasy quiet descended over the region.

With direct action having failed, the framework knitters formally established a 'United Committee' to petition Parliament to legislate to regulate the trade. Signatures flooded in from around the county and a deal of lobbying took place at Westminster.[53] Persuading politicians was not helped by an attempt in April to murder a hosier, William Trentham. He was said to have cut the wages of two women workers and, when they complained, had sneered that they should 'tell Ned Ludd'. Two men shot at him, hitting him but not fatally. No one was ever arrested for the crime.[54] Eventually a parliamentary committee examined the case and for a while the stockingers had some hope of success. 'We have only Dr Smith's Disciples to contend with whose principles are execrated all over the kingdom', Henson, their leader noted.[55] But continued sporadic disorder in the county played into the hands of the hosiers. Coldham reminded Ryder: the Luddites 'are not put down by the Terror of the Law, on the contrary they know that they have brought the terror of assassination in lively exercise upon the head of their employers'.[56] The bill was emasculated and then thrown out in the Lords. Sidmouth delivered the *coup de grâce*, noting that he hoped 'that no such principle would be again attempted to be introduced in any Bill brought up to that House'.[57]

YORKSHIRE LUDDISM

Just as the disorders in Nottinghamshire were dying down, machine breaking broke out in Yorkshire. Here the conflict was much more directly that of man versus machine. The battle over the introduction of the gig mill having finally been lost with the repeal of the old regulatory legislation in 1809, the Yorkshire croppers faced their worst nightmare: the introduction of shearing frames, which would entirely destroy their trade. Frames had been creeping into the woollen districts around Huddersfield even as the parliamentary enquiries had been taking evidence in 1803 and 1806, but their take-up on a large scale was protracted, in part at least from fears of the retaliation that they must engender. William Horsfall had erected them in his factory at Otiwells in 1807,[58] but it was only from 1809 that others, such as William Cartwright, followed suit, installing them alongside every other new piece of technology in his mill at Rawfolds. Their competitive advantage might have mattered less had trade prospered. But with the onset of

[52] *Nottingham Journal*, 21 March 1812.
[53] *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, viii. 153.
[54] *Nottingham Journal*, 2 May 1812.
[55] *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, viii. 157.
[56] HO 42/123, Coldham to Ryder, 2 June 1812.
[57] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 24 July 1812.
[58] *Nottingham Journal*, 9 May 1812.

depression,[59] smaller master dressers found themselves being squeezed from the market since their hand-finished costs were much higher. Reluctantly they too were forced to invest in the machines.

It was clear from January that trouble was brewing. In Leeds, the cloth-dressing centre of the West Riding, magistrates heard of a meeting of croppers, faces blackened and armed with hammers, which had resolved to take direct action and smash the proliferating shearing frames.[60] And when fire broke out at Oatlands mill, which housed gig mills, arson was immediately suspected. The *Leeds Mercury* noted, 'The depredators have attacked Oatland's mill near Leeds. . . . It appears that the recent riots and outrages in Nottingham have arrived in this county.'[61]

However, it was not until February that machine-breaking actually commenced. From the first, violence focused upon the villages south-west of Huddersfield, the centre of innovation in the West Riding woollen industry. On 22 February a crowd, one hundred strong and with blackened faces, forced their way into the dressing shops owned by Mr Hirst at Marsh and smashed shearing frames. They then did the same at Balderson's shops at Crosland Moor.

> The party was armed with pistols, etc, and appears to have acted on a regular systematic plan, and with the most minute attention to the commands of the leader. Their first operation was to surround the premises in order to prevent any communication with the neighbourhood, and proceeded to destroy the obnoxious utensils. As soon as the work of destruction was completed, the leader drew up his men, called over the roll, each man answering to a particular number, instead of his name; they then fired off their pistols, gave a shout and marched off in military order.

Four days later the cropping shops owned by William Hinchcliffe at Leymoor were attacked and all his machinery smashed. Now thoroughly alarmed, the merchants and manufacturers in Huddersfield formed a committee to resist the 'Luddites—the cant term used to describe the depredators', as the *Mercury* recorded.[62] Troops already in the district were immediately placed at the ready: 'so much alarm prevails among the proprietors of gig mills, that a military guard is nightly stationed for their protection.' A reward of 500 guineas was immediately offered for evidence leading to the conviction of the perpetrators.[63]

A brief lull followed and then new attacks began, again centred upon Huddersfield. Frames and shears were smashed at Slaithwaite, Honley, and Crosland. The Luddites were determined but not impolite. Samuel Swallow deposed: 'Between one and two this morning a number of people came to this house and began to demolish tools. They broke four pairs of shears, two shearing

[59] A meeting of merchants and manufacturers in the county in April 1812 heard that over £1,000,000 worth of cloths were lying unsold in warehouses. *Wentworth Woodhouse Mss.*, F47/49, A statement in support of the petitions from the merchants and manufacturers, 13 April 1812.

[60] *Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 January 1812.

[61] *Leeds Mercury*, 12 February 1812.

[62] *Nottingham Journal*, 1 March 1812. See also *Leeds Mercury*, 29 February 1812.

[63] *Nottingham Journal*, 14, 21 March 1812.

frames and one brushing frame, after their work of destruction was complete they asked for arms, after wishing goodnight, they left.'[64] Extensive workshops owned by Francis Vickermann in Huddersfield were attacked and thirty pairs of shears destroyed, along with cloths and other property. Vickermann had received a threatening letter a few nights earlier.[65] On the night of 23–4 March destruction spread to the Leeds district. Some forty men, again well-armed, forced their way into the shearing mill of William Thompson at Rawden, seized the watchman, and then smashed all the shearing frames. For good measure they also smashed the windows. From first to last the attack lasted only twenty minutes. In Leeds itself the workshop of Dickinson, Carr and Shand was entered and 'eighteen pieces of fine cloth, dressed by machinery, torn and cut into shreds'.[66] Men with blackened faces broke into Mr Smith's workshop near Holmfirth and smashed frames.[67] They then marched a mile to Horn Coat to Joseph Brook's workshop where they destroyed his frames. Finally they marched to Honley where James Brook's workshop contained a recently purchased shearing frame. He had already dismantled the machine, fearing retribution. The Luddites smashed it, but left all his other shears undamaged.[68]

By early April most of those master dressers, who, like Brook, had felt the need to buy and set up shearing frames in order to compete with those with far greater capitals, had either taken down the machines or seen them smashed. Protecting these small and scattered workshops had proved impossible and the Luddites had been able to assemble, break in, and destroy the machines long before the authorities could react. However, the croppers were now left with far more difficult targets, namely the large mills that the new merchant-manufacturers had established, most of which housed significant numbers of shearing frames and gig mills. Their owners were the men who had led the successful campaign to repeal the old regulatory statutes in 1803–6. They had no intention of being intimidated by a group who, they believed, would soon become entirely redundant.

The first of these strategic targets to be attacked was the large mill at Horbury, near Wakefield, owned by Joseph Foster. No Luddite attacks had taken place in this district and it is possible that Foster was too complacent. On the night of 9 April a large crowd, said to number three hundred, surrounded the mill, forced their way inside and

> destroyed frames, shears and cloth and broke his windows and their metal frames. The watchman was forced to lay on the ground with a gun at his head. Then they broke into the bookkeeper's house and his family were treated most violently, they then set the house on fire.

[64] HO 42/121, examination of Samuel Swallow, 6 March 1812.
[65] HO 42/121, Radcliffe to Ryder, 17 March 1812, enc.
[66] *Nottingham Journal*, 4 April 1812.
[67] This was most probably the same 'Mr Smith Shearing Frame Holder at Hill End' who received the threatening letter noted earlier. See Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 208–9.
[68] *Nottingham Journal*, 28 April 1812.

The damage was estimated at £700.[69] The attack 'has spread alarm throughout this manufacturing district.'[70]

Success encouraged the Luddites next to attack the large mill at Rawfolds, near Heckmondwike. Its owner, William Cartwright, was one of the most prominent manufacturers in the West Riding and someone who had made clear his intention to press mechanization to the utmost. He was well aware that his mill was a prize target and he had prepared thoroughly. He had turned the mill into a formidable fortress, erecting a breastwork of flagstones at the windows to allow a protected field of fire for the defenders. Every night soldiers were stationed there. Late on 12 April a large contingent of Luddites assailed the mill, trying to force the main doors with sledge hammers. Cartwright and the soldiers opened a withering fire upon them, with Cartwright being the most active. 'The soldiers say they never saw a man fire and load so fast.' Small arms fire from outside could not penetrate the mills' defences and, with, casualties mounting, the Luddites resorted to axes to try to get the doors down. Briefly it looked as if they would succeed but, just as the defenders were fixing bayonets for a last stand, the attackers drew off. They left two seriously wounded men in their wake, John Booth and Samuel Hartley, but others too had been hit. Bloodstains were trailed for up to three miles from the mill.[71]

The failure of the assault did nothing to diminish popular support for the croppers. Indeed, the deaths the following day of both Booth and Hartley further embittered social relations since rumours suggested both had died under torture. 'Vengeance for the blood of the innocent' was chalked up on many doors and walls.[72] A large crowd gathered at Halifax for the funeral of Hartley. To pre-empt similar popular expressions of grief at Huddersfield, Booth's body was buried there very early the following morning. The incoming crowds found the town swarming with troops. 'Huddersfield wears the aspect of a town under military power night and day.'[73] Attempts to secure information met with a wall of sullen silence. Rumours emphasized that the Rawfolds attackers had been drawn from across the woollen districts and many had clearly suffered gunshot wounds, yet no information on any of the perpetrators could be obtained. The *Leeds Mercury* noted, 'We believe there is a very general disposition amongst the lower classes to view the actions of the persons engaged in this association with complacency not to say with approbation, this is the strength and life's blood of the organisation.'[74] The frustration of the authorities increased: 'all these outrages, and much worse, are perpetrated without the detection of even a single individual: and thus escaping, the offenders seem, as must naturally be expected, to increase in strength and daring.'[75]

[69] *Leeds Mercury*, 11 April 1812; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 April 1812.
[70] *The Times*, 14 April 1812.
[71] *Leeds Mercury*, 18 April 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 28 April 1812.
[72] HO 42/122, Campbell to Grey, 16 April 1812. [73] *York Courant*, 20 April 1812.
[74] *Leeds Mercury*, 9 May 1812. [75] *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 April 1812.

Nevertheless, the defeat at Rawfolds made plain the croppers' dilemma: they might successfully intimidate the smaller firms into abandoning the use of frames but, as long as the large factories like Rawfolds continued to use them, they would continue to exert pressure on master dressers either to reintroduce machinery and risk more violence or to face a complete loss of their trade. In desperation or anger, the decision was made to murder those who were behind the large mills. On 18 April an attempt was made to shoot Cartwright as he rode home from Huddersfield. The shots missed. Nine days later a second manufacturer was targeted. William Horsfall, owner of Otiwells mill at Marsden, west of Huddersfield, was fatally shot while riding from Huddersfield market to his home. Horsfall, a prominent figure in the special committee to combat the Luddites, had, like Cartwright, invested heavily in cloth-dressing machinery and had also strongly fortified his mill, even going so far as to set up cannon. The *Leeds Mercury* noted, 'He had rendered himself obnoxious to a high degree to the machine destroyers, who knowing his premises were too well defended to justify an attack on his property, committed a crime on his person that will embitter every future day of their existence.'[76] He was also a leading figure in the local volunteer militia. He had made no secret of his contempt for the croppers and had allegedly claimed that he would ride up to his saddle girths in Luddite blood.[77]

The failure at Rawfolds and the murder of Horsfall changed the character of Yorkshire Luddism. Attacks on mills gave way to raids for arms. The day after the murder, a master dresser who had already had his shearing frame smashed, Clement Dyson, was roused from sleep by men with blackened faces who told him, 'General Ludd has sent us for your gun and pistol and we must have them immediately. . . . If you shoot any of us, your wife and children will be corpses in Ten minutes.'[78] Thereafter such raids proliferated, many highly orchestrated. A correspondent to Fitzwilliam noted the

> precision, intrepidity and dispatch with which the armed banditti regularly searched a populous village, a mile in length, for arms and took away six or seven without attempting to touch other property, firing repeatedly into houses and individuals who offer the least resistance with a promptitude and apparent discipline that no regular troops could exceed.[79]

Those who acted for the authorities or who were presumed to be providing information to them also came under attack. Shots were fired at Allun Edwards of Huddersfield, who 'rendered himself obnoxious to the incendiarists by the vigilant discharge of his duty' as constable of the watch. The Colonel in charge of troops in Leeds was also targeted.[80]

[76] *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 9 May 1812.
[77] F. Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites, Chartists and Plug-drawers* (1880; Cass, 1968 edn.), 129.
[78] HO 40/1/1, Dyson to Radcliffe, 30 April 1812.
[79] *Wentworth Woodhouse Mss.*, F45/117, Walker to Fitzwilliam, 13 July 1812.
[80] *Leeds Mercury*, 9 May 1812; *The Times*, 12 July 1812.

The deepening bitterness of the working population against the manufacturers was matched by the growing alarm of the authorities that a civil war was at hand. The *Leeds Mercury* could not comprehend the attempts to murder employers, describing the crime as 'foreign to the feeling of Englishmen, and so much at variance with the courage and humanity of our national character'.[81] The proliferating rumours of drilling and secret oaths alarmed General Maitland, commander of the army in the region: 'The terrible oaths bind the misled. . . . Such an evil combination of destruction can now only be met with an equal force for its preservation.'[82] This was a view shared by the *Leeds Intelligencer*:

> There is certainly some hidden mystery in this business, not yet ready for development. Their partial insurrections form but a curtain to cover the horrible scenery preparing behind it. . . . It is a mere drilling of the people for a field day upon a larger scale. There is a dark, subtle and inevitable agency at work, seducing the ignorant and the inexperienced and encouraging the profligate and the abandoned.[83]

Master dressers made no attempt to reinstate shearing frames. But the frames still working in the fortified mills pointed up the frustrated impotence of the croppers and may indeed have drawn increasing numbers into the ultra-radical fold.

LUDDISM IN LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE

Edward Thompson noted:

> when Luddism came to Lancashire it did not move into any vacuum. There were already, in Manchester and the larger centres, artisan unions, secret committees of the weavers, and some old and new groups of Painite Radicals, with an ebullient Irish fringe.[84]

Luddism in Lancashire and Cheshire was by far the most complex and confused of the protests in the three regions. Here attacks on machinery took place side by side with insurrectionary conspiracies, radical proselytizing, and protests over the price of food. Cotton workers were in the van of all of these, but they were not alone. However, at the heart of the protests were the cotton weavers.

In Lancashire and Cheshire, machine-breaking was directed against the power loom. Applying power to the one remaining major production process proved technically difficult. A powered loom had been invented by Edmund Cartwright around 1787 but it was not successful, and the attempt to introduce a revised version in Manchester in 1791 ended when the factory housing the looms burned down in suspicious circumstances.[85] However, further improvements meant that by 1811 a power loom to weave coarse calico at last became economically viable.

[81] *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812.
[82] *Wentworth Woodhouse Mss.*, F45/112, Maitland to Fitzwilliam, 26 April 1812.
[83] *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 April 1812.
[84] Thompson, *The Making*, 651.
[85] *London Gazette*, 20–4 March 1791.

Larger manufacturers began to set them up in new weaving factories. The cotton weavers were seriously alarmed since the looms clearly foreshadowed the demise of domestic weaving. In a context of faltering trade and falling piece rates, they were in no mood to sit by and watch their conditions worsen further. Although the authorities were frightened that local weavers' committees were being infiltrated by radicals who were orchestrating insurrectionary plots, a concern heightened by the increasing evidence of illegal oaths, weaver informants suggested that such links were limited. But there was one thing they were agreed upon: 'they are determined to do away with those steam looms.'[86] Attempts to negotiate agreements with manufacturers to restrain their use failed.[87] Violence inevitably followed.

In February Stockport manufacturers began to receive threatening letters and at least one attempt was made to set fire to Peter Marsland's weaving factory, while on 20 March, in the middle of the night, men attacked the power loom factory owned by William Radcliffe. Windows were smashed and lighted torches thrown inside but they were extinguished before fire could take hold.[88] The Bolton magistrate, Colonel Fletcher, who ran an extensive spy network, informed the Home Office of a rumoured plan for simultaneous attacks on factories in Bolton, Stockport, and Manchester.[89] However, when disorders broke out in Manchester, they were occasioned not by machinery but by politics. Manchester Tories called a meeting at the Exchange to congratulate the Prince Regent on retaining the existing government on his assumption of the Regency. Reformers and radicals, disappointed at the Prince's failure to dismiss the old Tory elite, determined to stage a counter-demonstration, urging, 'Now or never! All those who do not wish for an increase in taxes and poor rates, for a greater scarcity of provisions and no work are called upon to speak for themselves.' Fearing violence, the Tories called off their meeting, but a large radical crowd, assembled from as far as fifteen miles around the town, nonetheless gathered in the marketplace before marching to the Exchange. Rowbottom recorded that

> about one o clock the populace Begun to be turbulent and Begun to Demolish the valuable furniture and the windows Lamps and Chanliers fared the same fate . . . the Riot Act was Read and the Cumberland Militia and a party of the Scotch Greys put the mob to the Rout happily no Lives where Lost.

Some of the rioters, however, went on to attack Mr Schofield's mill in Newton Street, which was said to contain obnoxious machinery.[90]

[86] HO 42/121, Warr to Fletcher, 21 March 1812. For an excellent account of the background to Luddism in Stockport, see R. Glenn, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution* (Croom Helm, 1984), 167–75.

[87] HO 42/120, Lloyd to Bulkeley, 11 February 1812.

[88] HO 40/1, Lloyd to Ryder, 21 March 1812; reports of Stone and Yarwood to Fletcher, March 1812; Glenn, *Urban Workers*, 170–5.

[89] His spies told Fletcher that 823 weavers had been sworn as Luddites and that some 250 of them were already armed. HO 40/1/1, Fletcher to Beckett, 6 April 1812.

[90] *The Times*, 11 April 1812; Rowbottom Diaries, 15 April 1812.

The Exchange riot precipitated extensive disorder across the region. Much focused on the rocketing price of food. For example, on 13 April, Stockport spinners, together with colliers and carters from Bollington and Rainow, marched to Macclesfield, where, with local workers, they seized food in extensive disorders.[91] However, the next day they turned their attention to the local weaving factories. The first to be targeted was the steam-powered weaving factory owned by Goodair and Co. 'We had been for some days under great apprehension of the mob,' Goodair's wife recounted. At 9 a.m. a large crowd assembled before the factory at Edgley, throwing stones and breaking the windows. They then marched into the town and smashed the factory windows of other mills containing power looms, including those of Hindley and Bradshaw, Radcliffe, and Bentley and Co. They also smashed the manufacturers' house windows and, in the case of Marsland, destroyed all his furniture. Then, over 3,000 strong, they returned to Edgley where they forced their way into Goodair's mill and 'destroyed the looms and cut all the work which was in progress'. Only the intervention of troops prevented the mills owned by Messrs Sykes from becoming their next victim.[92] In the days that followed, workers toured the district, led by two men dressed as women and calling themselves 'General Ludd's wives', attacking factory owners' property and demanding food and money from houses they passed.[93] In Manchester cavalry patrolled the streets at night and constituted a strong presence in the day. Nevertheless, on 15 April food riots broke out in the town. They were to last for five days, while parties of the 'disaffected and disorderly' marched out into the country districts, searching out food stocks. Soon food rioting became extensive, many of the riots being led by 'General Ludd'.[94]

Attacks on power-loom weaving factories increased. On 20 April the factory owned by Daniel Burton and Sons at Middleton, 'where machinery is used in great perfection', was attacked by 'an infatuated mob' who fired guns into the factory. A withering counter-fire drove them off, fatally wounding five rioters. They then attacked the houses of Burton's employees, destroying their furniture until cavalry drove them off.[95] The following day the attackers returned, supported by miners armed with picks and muskets with fixed bayonets. They carried before them an effigy of 'the renowned General Ludd whose standard bearer waved a sort of red flag'. Again the mill's defences held, but this time Burton's house was destroyed before the military could intervene. Some days later, the firm issued a notice that they had 'determined not to work their looms any more'. It was said that the insurers would not cover their losses.[96] At Stockport, as we have

[91] HO 40/1, Lloyd to Ryder, 13 April 1812; *The Times*, 21 April 1812.
[92] *The Times*, 17 April 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 25 April 1812.
[93] HO 40/1/1, Lloyd to Ryder, 13 April 1812.
[94] HO 42/128, Clay to Home Office, 21 April; Fletcher to Beckett, 22 April 1812; *The Times*, 21 April 1812; *Manchester Mercury*, 21 April 1812.
[95] *The Times*, 23 April 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 2 May 1812.
[96] Rowbottom Diaries, 20 April 1812; *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812; *The Times*, 23, 24 April 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 2 May 1812.

noted, Thomas Garside received a letter from 'General Justice' warning him to take down his machinery.[97] He was already a shaken man. Just days before, as he had stood watching the attack on a neighbour's mill, he had been noticed, denounced as a spy, stoned, and chased into a neighbouring cottage. When he tried to escape, he found himself surrounded and feared for his life until the 'leader' of the mob stopped them and allowed him safe passage. He found the power of the leader more frightening than that of the mob: 'this attempt at murder was not the effect of passion—but in obedience to the command of their leaders.' Manufacturers were facing, he wrote, 'the most desperate and best organised conspiracy that the world has ever witnessed'.[98]

With mobs everywhere and mills, both corn and cotton, coming under attack, his sense of beleaguerment was widely shared. Chippindale, the Oldham magistrate, warned Fletcher, 'If more military is not sent into the country, they will not be called upon to protect it, but will be required to re-conquer it.'[99] However, industrial violence was coming to an end. On 24 April, rioters eventually succeeded in destroying the large mill at Westhoughton, near Bolton, owned by the firm of Wray and Duncuft, which housed some 170 steam looms. Fletcher's spy 'B' had previously warned of imminent attacks but none had materialized. On the morning of the 24th, news of an attack brought the military hotfoot from Bolton but, finding no rioters, they left. Their withdrawal provided the chance for which the rioters had been waiting. They broke all the windows and then threw heaps of straw inside before lighting them. The mill was completely destroyed at a loss estimated at over £6,000.[100]

The destruction of the mill effectually ended the 'industrial' phase of Lancashire Luddism. Thereafter the authorities, as in Yorkshire, coordinated their forces better to ensure that the largest mills had a strong military protection, while Colonel Fletcher orchestrated a mass roundup of suspects:

> by a well-conceived project, most judiciously enacted, their secret meetings were dashed into, their private signals obtained and by a patient and persevering duty of detachments of the Bolton Militia, their diabolical nocturnal assemblies were put into confusion, their papers seized and a very large number of their ringleaders . . . have been secured and sent to Lancaster gaol.[101]

Overt attacks on factories gave way to arms thefts, insurrectionary plotting, and clandestine drilling. Although one steam weaving factory had been destroyed and another taken out of commission, no concessions on the use of power looms had been won.

[97] HO 40/1, letter from General Justice, 19 April 1812.
[98] HO 42/122, Garside to Ryder, 21 April 1812.
[99] HO 40/1, Chippindale to Fletcher, 23 April 1812.
[100] J. L. Hammond and B. Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer* (1911; Longman 1978), 228–32, detail the machinations of 'B'; *The Times*, 30 April 1812; *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 2 May 1812.
[101] *Nottingham Journal*, 9 May 1812.

By the end of April 1812 machine breaking in all three regions had largely come to an end. In the East Midlands, where stocking frames were easier targets, some frame-breaking continued and the occasional attack was made upon shearing shops in the West Riding, but in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Cheshire the principal objects of Luddite hostility, the large factories, were by now too heavily defended to make further outright assaults practicable. In all three regions Luddism turned in on itself. Arms thefts, sturdy begging, and raids that combined physical assault, searches for food and sometimes common theft, proliferated, as did reports of drilling and revolutionary plots. To many observers, 'industrial' protests had turned into a rebellion aimed at the very state itself.

The changing character of Luddite activity reflected the changing context in all three regions. A key element in each was the presence of unprecedented numbers of soldiers. From April onwards troops flooded into the disturbed districts to reinforce the already large garrisons. Historians, taking their lead from Darvall, have recorded that, by early May, an army larger than that which Wellington had taken to fight the French in the Iberian Peninsula now faced the Luddites.[102] General Maitland commanded some 7,000 men in and around Manchester, of whom 1,400 were mounted troops, while Generals Dyott and Grey commanded armies of 4,000 and nearly 2,000 in the Midlands and Yorkshire, respectively. However, these were but part of the force available, since local militia regiments considerably augmented military strength. In Yorkshire, the militia totalled perhaps a further 12,000 men: in Lancashire and Cheshire they numbered roughly the same. That made, Reid estimates, perhaps 35,000 soldiers in all available to tackle disorders, a significant percentage of them mounted men.[103] And over and above these regular and irregular troops, the mobilized Watch and Ward and increasing numbers of special constables also maintained close observation of the streets.[104] In effect, large parts of the East Midlands and the industrial north were, by the end of April, effectively under martial law.

Moreover, Maitland was not content to pursue a passive policy of defence. From the first he set out to overawe and overwhelm those creating disorder. His tactics were shrewd. He insisted from the first that troops were to be kept together, both for security and to reduce the risk of their being suborned or, worse, isolated and successfully attacked. He also made great show of the build-up of military might. When he took up command, he marched all his troops, some 7,000, through Manchester in full regimental order in a show of strength, an action

[102] Sale, *Rebels Against the Future*, 148. [103] Reid, *Land of Lost Content*, 151–2.

[104] For example, Rowbottom recorded, 'two majestrates met at the Spread Eagle Oldham and swore in a Large number of Constables for the parish of Oldham & Ashton under Line And two Hundred of the Oldham Local Militia where Emdodyed for fourteen Days and the Rest of the Regement to be Cald on Duty in Rotation.' In May the Watch and Ward was established: 'they watched from nine at night till four in the morning the watchmen were provided with watch Bills Rattles Trunceons Swords pistols and Blunderbusses.' Rowbottom Diaries, 27 April, 11 May 1812.

which extended over three days. He used regular and irregular night and daytime patrolling to disconcert the disaffected and to reassure the loyal. These tactics were supplemented by ruthless anti-terrorist measures. One such was the establishment of what Reid calls 'the first explicitly devised commando unit of the British army'. A large detachment of the Stirlingshire militia, led by a youthful dragoon, Captain Raynes, was tasked with harrying clandestine Luddite activity. Moving constantly around the hill country, lying up in the day and patrolling without regard to territorial boundaries when darkness fell, Raynes and his men sought out, attacked, and arrested any gangs of men out and about. He proved remarkably effective.[105] This aggressive policy of military pacification was supplemented by the detention and highly aggressive interrogation (and probable torture) of suspects, a practice followed by zealous magistrates such as Joseph Radcliffe of Huddersfield, John Lloyd of Stockport, and Joseph Nadin, the Manchester deputy constable. Soon men were being taken up in large numbers.[106] The spy network already in place run by local magistrates such as Fletcher and Nadin was supplemented with spies recruited by Maitland to infiltrate Luddite groups. Although their testimonies, often contradictory, merely added to the confusion in understanding the nature of the threat posed, there is no doubt that fear of spies increased the pressure on Luddite councils. All this meant that there was little chance that Luddism would simply fade away. Whereas earlier extended protests had been allowed to die down, Luddism was to be extirpated.[107] Such pressure, however, drove it further underground and into ever-more desperate resistance, evidenced by increasing attacks on their tormentors.[108]

LUDDISM AND POPULAR PROTEST

Historians continue to disagree over the character and significance of Luddism. While all agree that its origins lay in distress and in hostility towards new, or modified, technology that threatened custom and employment, the development of Luddism after its earliest phases has been interpreted in very different ways. Thompson argued that Luddism marked a pivotal point in the emergence of class

[105] Reid, *Land of Lost Content*, 184. Reid provides a detailed account of Raynes' methods: 182–6. Raynes left his own record: F. Raynes, *An Appeal to the Public—containing an account of the services rendered during the disturbances in the north of England in the year 1812* (London, 1817).

[106] For example, Rowbottom noted, 'last night Joseph Nadin Deputy Constable of Manchester arived at Midleton attended by a Large party of Scotch Greys and about one o clock this morning Broke into several Houses Secured people in there Beds he was provided with several post Chaises in wich he Emediately put his prisoners and drove off for the New Bayley.' Rowbottom Diaries, 5 May 1812.

[107] Maitland warned Sidmouth that 'we are shutting our eyes to an evil . . . from dread of trying totally to extirpate it.' Counter-terror alone could break the Luddites. 'I am convinced we can by this means terrify them into a sense of their own weakness.' HO 42/126, Maitland to Sidmouth, 22, 24 August 1812.

[108] Among many attacks on magistrates and soldiers, we might note deliberate attempts to murder Colonel Campbell in Leeds in May and Radcliffe in October. HO 42/132, Campbell to Grey, 9 May 1812; HO 40/2/7, Acland to Maitland, 1 October 1812.

attitudes. He saw Luddism as emerging from the 'opaque society' of illegal combinations and into outright opposition to the state: 'Luddism was a quasi-insurrectionary movement which continually trembled on the edge of ulterior revolutionary objectives.'[109] Thomis, on the other hand, saw little in Luddism to suggest that there was any substantive link to radical politics or to insurrectionary aspirations. Luddites, he argued, were not 'would-be revolutionaries or the parliamentary reformers, the food rioters or the trade unionists. . . . They were rather the people who broke machinery as a deliberate, calculated policy.'[110] Dinwiddy's careful reassessment of the radical and insurrectionary dimensions of Luddism suggested that the two worlds of trade and politics did indeed become intertwined in the later stages of Luddism in Lancashire, Cheshire, and Yorkshire, though he found no evidence to suggest that Luddism in the East Midlands shared this pattern.[111] Calhoun too argued that industrial conflicts increasingly became enmeshed with hostility to the state, but saw this as evidence of 'reactionary radicalism', a backward-looking resistance to change that had little in common with the progressive radicalism of the artisan supporters of Paine or Burdett.[112]

There is certainly not space here to assess the wider significance of Luddism for nineteenth-century political and social relations. Nonetheless, the Luddite disturbances do pose questions concerning the changing nature of popular protest. For, while Luddism may be seen as emerging directly from that long line of Hanoverian popular protests which we have already examined, it clearly took on dimensions not seen previously. Not least of these were the sheer scale and longevity of the disorders and the way in which they grew ever more bitter. As we have seen, earlier industrial and subsistence protests had often proved difficult to bring under control. Food riots in 1766, 1795, and 1800–1 often continued to convulse a district for many weeks, while the Wiltshire Outrages in 1802 took several months to bring to heel. Yet none witnessed the same level of sustained disorder or proved so difficult to subdue as Luddism: historians agree that it was not until the Special Assizes and the mass hangings in January 1813 that the threat from General Ludd could finally be pronounced dead. Contemporaries clearly felt that Luddism constituted a real divergence from any former popular protest, which was one of the reasons that many believed that it must have ulterior intentions.

Were the authorities, both local and national, correct in seeing Luddism as a new sort of protest? The Hammonds, Thomis, and Bailey suggest that they were not, regarding the authorities' response as an overreaction to what was little more than a widespread but essentially old-style process of 'collective bargaining by riot'. Certainly there were magistrates who were, as always, quick to be alarmed.

[109] Thompson, *The Making*, 604.

[110] Thomis, *The Luddites*, 27. See the critique of this compartmentalist approach by F. K. Donnelly, 'Ideology and Early English Working-Class History: Edward Thompson and his Critics', *Social History*, ii (1976), 219–38.

[111] Dinwiddy, 'Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties', 33–64.

[112] C. Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1982), 60–72.

The Frame Breakers' Act, likewise, conformed to a knee-jerk reaction to disorder. Yet even those who were not inclined to cry wolf were from an early stage alarmed by the development of Luddite disorder. Moreover, we should acknowledge that many had good reason to be frightened. The hosiers who persistently refused to abandon cut-up production and the wide frame knew that they risked the loss of their frames. But attempts at murdering obnoxious employers indicated a new level of industrial violence in the East Midlands. More obviously, the new large factory owners of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Cheshire recognized that they were going to incur considerable public enmity when they introduced shearing frames and power looms. But they may not have expected the sheer fury of the response. The assault on Rawfolds, for example, was extraordinarily persistent in the face of overwhelming firepower and conducted with the military discipline of a force seeking to breach an enemy fortress—which is of course exactly how the factory was seen, with good reason. The scale and anger of the crowds who attacked the mills in Stockport took spectators by surprise. These attacks were in no way clandestine but took place in broad daylight. Moreover, the participants were not overawed by the army. The crowd that besieged Burton's mill at Middleton in April was said number some 3,000 strong and they did not flee when, having set Burton's house on fire, a troop of cavalry, reinforced by a large detachment of militia, belatedly arrived. The rioters simply withdrew to higher ground, awaiting battle.[113] There was a palpable sense of violence in the air. Reverend Hammond Roberson, vicar of Liversedge, had looked forward to confronting the Luddites: he wrote in March to Radcliffe that he had had 'good reason to think that we should have a visit from these croppers if we had not been prepared—as we are. I almost wish they would make an attempt, I think we should give a good account of them.'[114] John Lloyd clearly revelled in the opportunity to engage the Luddites in (unequal) conflict.[115] Luddism lacked, in all three regions, that sense of reciprocity which in the previous century had helped to alleviate conflicts, if only temporarily and symbolically.

The violence of Luddism cannot be attributed to the participants' lack of industrial organization. Contrary to Thomis' view that Luddism reflected the weakness, or absence, of trade unionism, it is clear that those involved in all three regions were in fact surprisingly well organized.[116] As we have seen, the croppers ranked among the most powerful provincial craft unions of the period, their position unassailable until the rapid expansion in the use of the gig mill some ten years earlier. Cotton weavers had demonstrated their ability to organize effectively across the region, as their petitioning campaign and strike of 1808 had shown.[117]

[113] HO 42/122, Clay to Ryder, 21 April 1812. [114] Bailey, *The Luddite Rebellion*, 47.

[115] See, for example, HO 40/1/2, Lloyd to Ryder, 16, 18 April 1812.

[116] Thomis, *The Luddites*, notes that, in Yorkshire, frame-breaking 'occurred not through established trade union machinery but in its absence'. He also sees Nottinghamshire Luddism dividing cleanly between the machine-breakers and the trade unionists of the Framework Knitters' Company: 133–7. [117] See Glen, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution*, 154–63.

The framework knitters were perhaps in the weakest bargaining position of the three trades involved in Luddism, but, like the cotton weavers, they demonstrated how quickly they might be coordinated to bring orderly pressure to bear on their employers. Nor is it credible, in the light of earlier disputes, to divorce frame-breakers from 'trade unionists'. When in April the Framework Knitters' Company produced a petition in favour of legislation for 'preventing frauds and abuses in the frame-work knitting manufacture', they were able to obtain over 10,000 signatures in a matter of days, which might suggest that the entire body of workers saw this form of approach as most likely to succeed.[118] Yet, those same communities had remained rock-solid in support of the Luddites in the previous months, showing no willingness to impeach any of Ned Ludd's men. Henson certainly made great play of his public criticism of machine-breaking. But he was hardly likely to praise Luddites, not least since he was well aware that many in authority believed that he *was* Ned Ludd. After the Frame Breakers Act, discretion was at a premium.

One aspect of Luddism that gave the authorities particular cause for alarm was the proliferation of oath-taking, which occurred in all three Luddite regions, since they associated this with revolutionary intentions. Swearing oaths of loyalty to anyone other than the monarch was, of course, treasonable, a fact underlined by two Acts that followed the naval mutinies in 1797. However, loyalty oaths of some sort featured in many trade union initiation ceremonies throughout the eighteenth century. The cloth dressers' Brief Institution certainly had an oath of loyalty that new members were required to swear. Thomas Bailey of Trowbridge deposed in 1802 that he had been required to swear 'to be true to the shearmen and see none of them are hurt and not to divulge any of their secrets'. This same oath featured in the West Riding. The form of this particular oath was new, but Bailey had previously sworn another when he had completed his apprenticeship and joined the local society.[119] The 'Luddite' oath that turned up across the disturbed districts was little different: 'I will never reveal to aney . . . Person or Persons aney thing that may lead to . . . any Discovery under the Penalty of being sent out of this world by the first Brother that may meet me.'[120] Indeed, it was said to be similar to freemason oaths.[121] Certainly, swearing oaths became a key part of the wider politicization of Luddism: when the spy McDonald sought to infitrate Luddite ranks in July 1812, his initiation was completed by being 'twisted in' in the Crispin Inn, Halifax, swearing the oath on the Bible, which had been specially brought. But, significantly, the man who conducted the process, John Baines, was

[118] *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, 144–5, 29 April, Henson to Committee. Henson noted in early May that 'I can scarcely walk the Streets without being stopt to enquire how we are going on and when I go to Town again.' Ibid. 146, Henson to Latham, 7 May 1812.

[119] Randall, *Before the Luddites*, 133–4. See also K. J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland 1780–1815* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), 162.

[120] *Howell's State Trials*, 30, Rex v Eadon, 1070.

[121] When an amnesty was offered in the autumn to those who had sworn illegal oaths in Lancashire, some thirty-two colliers came forward to abjure themselves. They do not seem to have been in any way connected with Luddism. Hammond and Hammond, *Skilled Labourer*, 271.

a hatter, not a cropper, and an old 'Jacobin'. As in 1802, attempts to infiltrate purely cropper ranks foundered since only another clothdresser could demonstrate the necessary credentials: an ability to finish cloth.[122] This was why as 'Luddism' moved out from the trade to wider engagement, it became increasingly vulnerable to penetration.

Rather than try to isolate Luddism within one of three different models of protest—industrial, radical, or revolutionary—we would do better to regard it as a changing mélange of protest in which all three elements were present in different degrees and combinations at different times and places. Yet, if Luddism in each of the three regions included such elements, it was in each also more than these. Luddism must be read as a purposive statement about the way in which those involved viewed and understood the changing world in which they found themselves. Kevin Binfield has properly directed scholars to the very rich text of Luddite writings as a means of gaining understanding of their mentalités. This approach emphasizes that the disorders were not just the desperate struggle for incomes in the face of displacement by new technology and economic hardship, though these were at the core. It also emphasizes the value systems and beliefs that lay behind the protests.

It is noticeable that the rhetoric of Luddism in the East Midlands remained firmly embedded in the older patterns of moral economy. Here the industry was beginning to come under the sort of pressure that other outworking trades had experienced a decade earlier. Their discourse, Binfield notes, therefore continued to emphasize 'a set of principles, previously sanctioned by the government but under threat at the time'.[123] That discourse was stated no more powerfully than in the song, 'General Ludd's Triumph':

> Let the wise and the great lend their aid and advice
> Nor e'er their assistance withdraw
> Till full fashioned work at the old fashion'd price
> Is established by Custom and Law[124]

The East Midland Luddite disorders therefore may be seen as fitting into that earlier pattern of eighteenth-century protest that maintained what we might term dialogue through disorder. Their actions replicated methods that they had utilized in earlier disputes and that we have seen employed by other industrial workers: industrial violence of graduated character, combined with attempts to negotiate, or to use third parties to negotiate, with those employers deemed to be breaking custom. However, in 1811–12 this model did not prove productive for two reasons: the economic circumstances of depressed trade made finding a lasting agreement very difficult; and the local authorities were not prepared to press hosiers to agree to a more regulated model. Voluntary agreement foundered not

[122] Maitland did attempt to find shearmen from the West Country for this purpose. It was not a success. HO 42/124, Maitland to Home Office, 17 June 1812.

[123] Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 32.

[124] HO 42/119, 'General Ludd's Triumph'.

only upon the rock of underpaying 'country' hosiers, but also upon powerful city hosiers' resistance to any compromise. The Nottingham committee in fact resembled those committees of merchants and gentlemen clothiers which ten years earlier had sought to free the woollen industry from the restraints of the old paternalist legislation. The framework knitters nevertheless oscillated between direct action and attempts to secure agreements with the hosiers, a model that had worked in the past. At heart they remained convinced that their moral economic model would be one that all could share. Paternalists and respectable sympathizers agreed that stockingers were being oppressed by the hosiers, but, significantly, even paternalists like Becher had abandoned hopes of regulation by the state. Henson was correct to see his enemy as 'Dr Smith's Disciples'. Moreover, the Midland disturbances showed from the first that the ministry had no intention of tolerating these disorders. While local magistrates, in particular the county magistracy, remained often surprisingly restrained in their dealings with Luddites, Nottingham and Leicester corporations pressed for more draconian measures,[125] a stance strongly supported by a central government that chose to see frame-breaking as a threat to the very fabric of the state. It was indeed the ministry that pressed forward the Frame Breakers' Act, even when advised by a hawk like Coldham that it would prove counterproductive.[126]

Framework knitters, like woollen weavers, master clothiers, and cloth dressers in 1802–3, believed that they possessed constitutional protections, as evinced by the Charter, which must be upheld. As long as they retained that faith, it was less likely that Midland Luddism would develop a strong radical or revolutionary dimension. In April–May 1812 the Framework Knitters' Company made great efforts to lobby their county and borough members at Westminster, seeing this direct link into the legislature as the most effective means to further their case once it became obvious that direct action was counterproductive.[127] That engagement within the parliamentary process, the hope that local members could provide relief, may well have dissuaded many from listening to the radicals' arguments. That was not to last. But a residual confidence in moral economic arguments shaped the character of East Midland Luddism.

In Yorkshire, as Binfield has shown, Luddite discourse was of a different character entirely. While Ned Ludd in Nottinghamshire sought to find common ground with the 'gentlemen' hosiers, General Ludd's pronouncements in Yorkshire carried a far more coercive and menacing tone. Again, this reflected the local history. The failure of the croppers and master clothiers to persuade Parliament to sustain the old regulatory legislation had changed the context of their discourse. Here the champions of unrestricted mechanization had triumphed. Entrepreneurs like Cartwright and Horsfall made no secret of their determination to press ahead with machinery, seeing the repeal of the old legislation as symbolizing a new

[125] The link between municipality and trade was strong. George Coldham, town clerk of Nottingham, also acted as the secretary of the hosiers' association.

[126] HO 42/119, Coldham to Ryder, 24 February 1812.

[127] *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, viii. 146–7.

relationship. For them the old reciprocity between master and journeymen, between merchant and master clothier, was dead. The power of capital now knew no constraints. So the Yorkshire croppers were under no illusion about what they faced. Direct action was now the sole weapon in their armoury, for there was no point in persisting in a dialogue with no listeners. At first the old model of direct action and threatening letter, previously seen in the disorders in 1802, proved effective enough. However, defeated by the fortified mills, some frustrated croppers turned towards murder. Others fell into the arms of the radicals like Baines, still others turned towards the insurrectionary schemes that had rumbled around the Riding since the United Englishmen's plots of 1801.[128] As this happened, Binfield notes, the language of Yorkshire Luddism 'shifted from threats against employers . . . to threats against the local authorities for counteracting the machine-breaking campaign . . . Rather quickly the focus on Yorkshire Luddite rhetoric began to concentrate upon a politico-economic system that was manifested locally in a highly visible and active form.'[129]

The tone of discourse in Lancashire and Cheshire, Binfield, notes, was different again, being grounded within three discursive fields: the petition; the language of political economy; and the language of Jacobinism. He also noted that threats, direct and oblique, were even more characteristic of 'north-western' Luddism than of either of the other two regions. He interprets this combination as arising from the lack of a distinct collective identity. This analysis, drawing heavily upon Bohstedt, is not entirely convincing. Binfield argues that the 'relatively new industrial population' of the region precluded any incorporation of the 'structured rhetoric of custom and law into an array of protest' since, in contrast to the Luddites elsewhere, cotton workers 'lacked the long-standing traditions of collective activity, organic identity, and social practice that would have been imparted by an ancient and communitarian trade . . . and would have enabled them to claim their customary rights through traditional procedures'.[130] This is not sustainable. Manchester, Bohstedt's 'city of strangers', housed very well-organized and articulate cotton workers unions, as Charlesworth has noted.[131] The growing towns around, such as Oldham and Stockport, did the same, while, county-wide, the cotton weavers had recent 'union experience' unrivalled by any other weaving group in the country. The surprising thing in many ways was not how difficult it was to develop a sense of custom among the weavers, given the rapid expansion of the industry, but the speed at which newcomers acquired notions of customary rights and 'traditions'. However, the dialogue of disorder needed a reciprocal response to work. There is little evidence that, after 1804, anyone in authority was listening, except to spies and agents provocateurs. Here the bench had nearly shed its residual links to a rural and commercial past and was becoming dominated by

[128] On the United Englishmen in the county, see J. L Baxter and F. K. Donnelly, 'The "Black Lamp" in Yorkshire, 1801–2', *Past and Present*, lxiv (1974), 112–23.

[129] Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 49. [130] Ibid. 36, 34, 33.

[131] A. Charlesworth, 'From the Moral Economy of Devon to the Political Economy of Manchester, 1790–1812', *Social History*, xviii (2) (1993), 205–17.

manufacturers. Their language was the language of political economy, a language to which their workers had to listen daily. So, if Luddite discourse here contained more echoes of this language than elsewhere, it reflected the lived reality of life in the industrial revolution's fast lane.

The form of Luddism in the cotton districts was also far more 'mixed' than elsewhere and far more overtly confrontational. In terms of the attacks on the mills, the character of the mass assemblies smacked more of open rebellion against an occupying power than of attempts at collective bargaining by riot. Rioters here showed little sign of fear of recognition or of early military presence. In this respect, the disorders showed a clearer parallel with the food riots that had engulfed the region twelve years earlier than with industrial disputes elsewhere. That said, the mass presence and firm determination to smash technological threats to their trade in 1812 clearly echoed the earlier attacks upon the large jennies. This region had also been in the van of a developing radical and revolutionary presence since the mid-1790s and the methods of secrecy and organization that characterized their councils were adapted by the secret committees of weavers after 1808. It is therefore little wonder that the utterances of the manufacturers and justices in 1812 sound more like those of later colonial planters and magistrates faced with a native uprising than those of their peers elsewhere. They were experiencing, as traumatically as their workforce, the consequences of a very rapid industrial transformation that treated the unwary capitalist every bit as ruthlessly as their workers.

Yet, if Luddism in the North-west differed in some respects from that elsewhere, like the other two regions it was characterized by a community rather than just a 'trade' response. In all three regions a wall of silence greeted the authorities and was not broken until they began to use ferocious counter-terrorist measures. Although machinery threatened specific trades, entire communities sided with those whose incomes were at risk. This solidarity even extended to participation in Luddite attacks. For example, neither of the two men fatally wounded in the attack on Rawfolds were croppers or even engaged in the woollen trade, while, only two of those killed in the battle with troops that followed the attack on Burton's mill were cotton workers: two were miners, the rest being a baker, a joiner, and a glazier.[132]

What, therefore, can we conclude about the significance of Luddism for the development of popular protest?

I would argue that the Luddite disturbances marked a decisive sea change in the relationship between the crowd and the authorities. If the pattern and pace of change varied from region to region, in each we can see the demise of the old dialogue through disorder model that had characterized so many popular protests previously. Luddism exposed a new ferocity on the part of the state and local authorities when faced with disorder, a ferocity that in turn engendered fiercer resistance on the part of the protestors. Historians have seen in that changed stance the fear of insurrection that had gnawed at the self-confidence of the English ruling

[132] HO 42/122, Clay to Ryder, 20 April 1812; Rowbottom Diaries, 20 April 1812.

class since the earliest days of the French Revolution. Certainly, the old model for crowd control and riot management required the local authorities to demonstrate a sangfroid in the face of disorder that was harder to sustain when images of the sans-cullotes danced before their eyes. The perceived 'threat from within' from 'the swinish multitude' clearly fuelled reaction to industrial protestors in 1811–12.

That said, the sea change was not just, or even primarily, I would suggest, one fuelled by concerns about civil order or the maintenance of the English *ancien régime*. As in the case of the food market and in earlier conflicts over industrial regulation, the change was also ideologically driven. Luddism, its causes and its treatment, owed as much to the 'Dr Smith's Disciples' and their faith in free markets as to the lurid concerns of Mr Burke's successors for the preservation of the 'mighty oaks'. This was, of course, the view taken by Edward Thompson. He argued that Luddism arose 'at the crisis-point in the abrogation of paternalist legislation, and in the imposition of the political economy of *laissez-faire* upon, and against the will and conscience of, the working people'.[133] If that process occurred earlier in the cotton districts than in the East Midlands, the same factors drove the pattern of events both there and in Yorkshire. In all three regions those who became involved in the disturbances—and they included, as we have seen, large numbers not directly or immediately threatened by mechanical innovation—had been, or continued to be, engaged upon a defence of customary production modes and models that not only provided them some autonomy and security in their lives but that were, they believed, protected by constitutional rights. The rejection of these industrial moral economies, and the permitted and assisted imposition of 'engines of mischief', undermined a social contract that had underpinned social relations for a century. Ned Ludd, like Robin Hood, epitomized a rejection of the law of the jungle where the rich and powerful might ride roughshod over the rights of lesser mortals. But where Robin might have looked forward to the return of a kingly monarch to right the balance, Ned could have no such hopes from the Hanoverians. George III's ministers were the authors of their misery. Any lingering hopes in the greenwood trees and moors were shattered in February 1812 when the Prince Regent, at last assuming the power of the Crown as his father was officially pronounced mad, chose to retain the present ministry. Nedd Ludd Clerk informed Mr Smith that

> The immediate Cause of us beginning when we did was that Rascally letter of the Prince Regents to Lords Grey & Grenville, which left us no hopes of any Change for the better, by his falling in with that Damn'd set of Rogues, Perceval and Co to whom we attribute all the Miseries of our Country.[134]

The assassination by a madman, John Bellingham, of that damn'd rogue Perceval on 11 May was greeted with rejoicing across the country. In Nottingham, for example, when news arrived, 'a crowd assembled with a band of music' and paraded the streets for fully two hours, leading public rejoicing.[135]

[133] Thompson, *The Making*, 594.
[134] HO 40/1/1, Ned Ludd Clerk to Mr Smith.
[135] *Nottingham Journal*, 16 May 1812.

Luddites, and workers elsewhere in the country, were not alone in lamenting the brutal death of that sense of reciprocity which had been deemed to sustain the paternalist social model. Byron, having ventured for the first time into the Lords to deliver a rebuke against the Frame Breakers' Bill, penned the following verse in a poem published in the *Morning Chronicle*:

> Some folk for certain have thought it was shocking
> When famine appeals, and when poverty groans;
> That life should be valued at less than a stocking
> And breaking of frames, lead to breaking of bones.[136]

Yet, if paternalists looked askance at the harsh response to 'starving' men, those at whom the bill was framed were considering a different lesson:

> Well dn, Ned Lud, your cause is good,
> Mk Perceval your aim,
> By the late Bill 'tis understood,
> 'Tis death to break a fram.
>
> With dextrs skll the Hosiers kill,
> For they are quite as bad,
> To die you must by the late bill,
> Go on my bonny lad.
>
> You may as well be hangd, for death
> As brkng a machine,
> So now my lad, your sword unsheath,
> And make it sharp and keen.
>
> We're ready nw your cause to join,
> Whenever you may call,
> To make foul blood run fair and fine,
> Of tyrants grt and small.

Beneath the poem, there was this postscript:

> PS Deface this who dare,
> Shall have tyrants fare,
> For Ned's Every where,
> To both see and hear.[137]

Even after Luddism had been brutally suppressed, the fear that 'Ned's Every where' was to suffuse the next thirty years.

[136] *Morning Chronicle*, 2 March 1812.

[137] The poem has two versions, that in HO 42/123, which Binfield notes 'appears to be in the handwriting of a Home Office clerk', and another in Nottingham Archives M297. Binfield argues persuasively that this is the earlier version. Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites*, 129–32. I have used the earlier version here.