The Other Proletarians: Seasonal Labourers, Mercenaries and Miners

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of wage labour in Europe has traditionally been seen as a transition from peasant agriculture to employment in urban industries involving permanent migration from rural areas to the cities. In this context migration was often depicted as a flight from the land forced by enclosure or by famine. This particular form of proletarianization-cum-urbanization was indeed of major historical significance. Recently, however, many historians have tried to shift the emphasis in another direction. According to one such scholar, Charles Tilly, European demographic growth from the Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century was caused predominantly by the proletarianization *outside the cities* which was induced by the modernization of agriculture and, above all, by proto-industry. Migration also plays an important role in this model. Firstly, early modern European proletarianization led to net migration losses of European proletarians who left for white settlement colonies, as in the cases of Spain, England and southern Germany. Secondly, proletarianization had major mobilizing effects on the rural population by way of short-distance and temporary or seasonal migration, followed by long-distance migration during the nineteenth century.[1] As a rule, proto-industry caused indirect proletarianization through self-employment which brought the work to the labourers rather than causing migration.[2]

In this article, instead of concentrating on the routes of urbanization and proto-industrialization that have already been extensively studied, I will concentrate on alternative non-urban proletarianization processes. These in fact encompass a wide variety of labour processes such as mining, infrastructure construction, work in the transport sector – mainly at sea – and even work in the armed forces. Table 1, very schematically, provides an outline of the main proletarianization

[1] C. Tilly, "Demographic Origins of the European Proletariat", in D. Levine (ed.), *Proletarianization and Family History* (Orlando, 1984), pp. 1–61. An important possibility, not mentioned by Tilly, is proletarianization through the liquidation of the slave status; see A. A. Svanidze, "Town Handicraft and Hired Labour in Mediaeval Sweden, the 13th to Early 15th Centuries", in A. Guarducci (ed.), *Forme ed evoluzione del lavoro in Europa: XIII–XVIII secc.* (Prato, 1991), pp. 559–590, esp. pp. 584–585.
[2] See the contributions to this volume by Christian Simon on "manufactures" (a form of proto-industry which involves wage labour rather than self-employment) and Anders Florén on rural industries of both types, and the literature quoted by them.

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Table 1. *Proletarianization of peasants: possible trajectories*

	Settlement in city	Return migration to cities	Migration outside cities	No migration
Servants	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Manufacturing workers	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)
Workers in proto-industry	(0)	(0)	(2)	(2)
Seamen	(0)	(0)	(3)	(3)
Miners	(0)	(0)	X	X
Soldiers	X	X	X	(0)
Seasonal workers	(0)	X	X	(0)

Key: (0) does not occur commonly; (1) no collective employment; (2) treated in the articles by Anders Florén and Christian Simon; (3) treated in the article by Karel Davids; (X) discussed in this article.

trajectories for peasants. This shows the seven main occupational groups and the places where the tasks were normally performed. The three last columns show the main possibilities for early modern country dwellers to earn wages without settling permanently in an urban environment.

When examining the collective actions of wage labourers, not all combinations of the characteristics mentioned above are particularly interesting to look at. In many cases, only one employer and a single labourer, or a very small group of labourers are involved, usually in cases such as embezzlement, personal revenge, job quitting and so on. Hints at such conflicts can be found in annual contracts for agricultural work which involved the hiring of individual labourers. The collective behaviour of the workers cannot be easily assessed from these documents except in Alpine regions where, from the eighteenth century onwards, sometimes as many as thirty or forty unmarried live-in servants could be found on each farm.[3] These destitute people, who were rarely in a position to marry, who were often bastards and who often parented bastards themselves, formed a group that could sometimes manifest itself clearly both on the farm and outside in the village. Within the farm community this took the form of the rejection of inadequate and bad meals.[4] These groups sometimes accounted for as much as one third of the village population, and because of their age, united to form the parish youth which often involved victimizing bad employers with charivaris.[5] Apart from these exceptions, labour relations concerning servants

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[3] N. Ortmayr (ed.), *Knechte. Autobiographische Dokumente und sozialhistorische Skizzen* (Vienna [etc.], 1992), pp. 297ff. This might also be applicable to Portugal: *ibid.*, p. 77.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 331.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 318–319 (in Switzerland these groups were called *Knabenschaften*, in Austria *Zechen*, *Ruden* or *Passen*), and p. 326.

fall largely outside the scope of this article which is concentrating on organized wage labour in rural areas.[6]

I will focus on the remaining forms of collective wage labour relations, involving miners, soldiers and various types of seasonally migrating labourers. These labour relations – with the possible exception of mining – involved temporary migration, either seasonally (often repeated ·over many years) or for a number of consecutive years.

Long-distance seasonal migration of countrymen can be dated back to the late Middle Ages and was already widespread in pre-industrial western Europe. The data available show that people were prepared to travel as much as three hundred kilometres in search of seasonal work. At the end of the *ancien régime*, it involved more than 300,000 people in a handful of important pull areas.[7] However, only minimal figures are shown since they are based on movements across district borders and, consequently, movement within districts has not been measured. If it were possible to account for these short-distance movements, one could reasonably expect a figure of about half a million workers to be involved. During the nineteenth century these numbers grew enormously. Long-distance seasonal migration in western Europe as a whole around 1900 can be estimated as being about ten times more than it had been a hundred years earlier.[8]

Another form of temporary migration involved remaining in one place for a number of consecutive years, the main objective being to accumulate a sum of money which, on returning home, would enable the worker to start an independent life, usually by setting up a household of his or her own. It was therefore mainly young unmarried men and women, between about fifteen and twenty-five to thirty years of age who migrated temporarily in order to find work. The most important occupations among temporary migrants were apprenticeships and jobs as journeymen, soldiers and sailors for men, and work as household servants for women.

In the following notes only a very rough picture of labour relations in the sectors mentioned earlier (of migrant labourers, miners and soldiers) can be given by way of rather randomly selected examples.

[6] Another reason is the bound character of many of these relations, as in England up to the beginning of the eighteenth century; see R. J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991). This does not apply to all countries in western Europe, e.g. for the Netherlands see J. Lucassen, "Labour and Early Modern Economic Development", in K. Davids and J. Lucassen (eds), *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic from a European Perspective* (Cambridge, forthcoming, 1995).
[7] J. Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600–1900: The Drift to the North Sea* (Beckenham, 1987), p. 110.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 194ff. In eastern Europe this growth was even more spectacular during the second half of the nineteenth century, see p. 127.

My objective is to show how important these paths of proletarianization have been, rather than to give a complete overview of this feature in Europe over a period of more than half a millennium.

SEASONAL LABOURERS[9]

Many types of seasonal labour only involved one or two workers per employer. Such small-scale labour relations, which were common in grass mowing and certain other agricultural tasks along the Dutch shores of the North Sea coast, may be compared with those of servants, but for one essential distinction. Those who represented themselves – personally bargaining over the conditions of temporary employment, combined with the fact that piece-work was common – maintained a strong relationship between output and pay. From the letters of some of these workers which have survived, we may conclude that they considered themselves equal to their employers. Equal because at home they were peasants and were used to bargaining over agricultural prices. The fact that their cottages were much smaller than their temporary employer's farms, and that they were forced to hire themselves out, does not seem to have been essential to their sense of self-esteem.[10]

A typical example of medium-sized groups of seasonal workers were the gangs of brickworkers which originated from the German principality of Lippe-Detmold, who used to work in the Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia and other countries from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. These gangs were made up of on average ten men, often with six or seven on the brick-making team and the other three or four turning out tiles; they used to work from spring to autumn. For this period of eight months, they used to contract a particular works where clay and peat were ready for use and where a room with dining and sleeping facilities was at their disposal (see Figure 1). The employer did not have to oversee their activities except in a superficial way. During the season, not only the raw materials, but also the drying yards, the mills, the horses to churn the clay and the ovens were their responsibility. At their height these specialists accounted for more than 10,000 people who knew everything about firing bricks and tiles. They agreed to do this work against a remuneration per thousand well-fired bricks or tiles. The price was agreed upon before the start of the season.[11]

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[9] For reasons given before, this article restricts itself mainly to work in rural areas. However, seasonal work also occurred in the cities, e.g. calico printing, see the contribution by Christian Simon.

[10] J. Lucassen, "Hannekemaaiersbrieven 1860–1889. Een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de arbeidsverhoudingen in de Friese hooibouw", *It Beaken*, 49 (1987), pp. 200–229.

[11] Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 78–83; see P. Lourens and J. Lucassen, *Lipsker op de Groninger tichelwerken. Een geschiedenis van de Groningse steenindustrie met bijzondere nadruk op de Lipper trekarbeiders 1700–1900* (Groningen, 1987) for more details; together with P. Lourens I am preparing a detailed collection of essays on the way these brick-
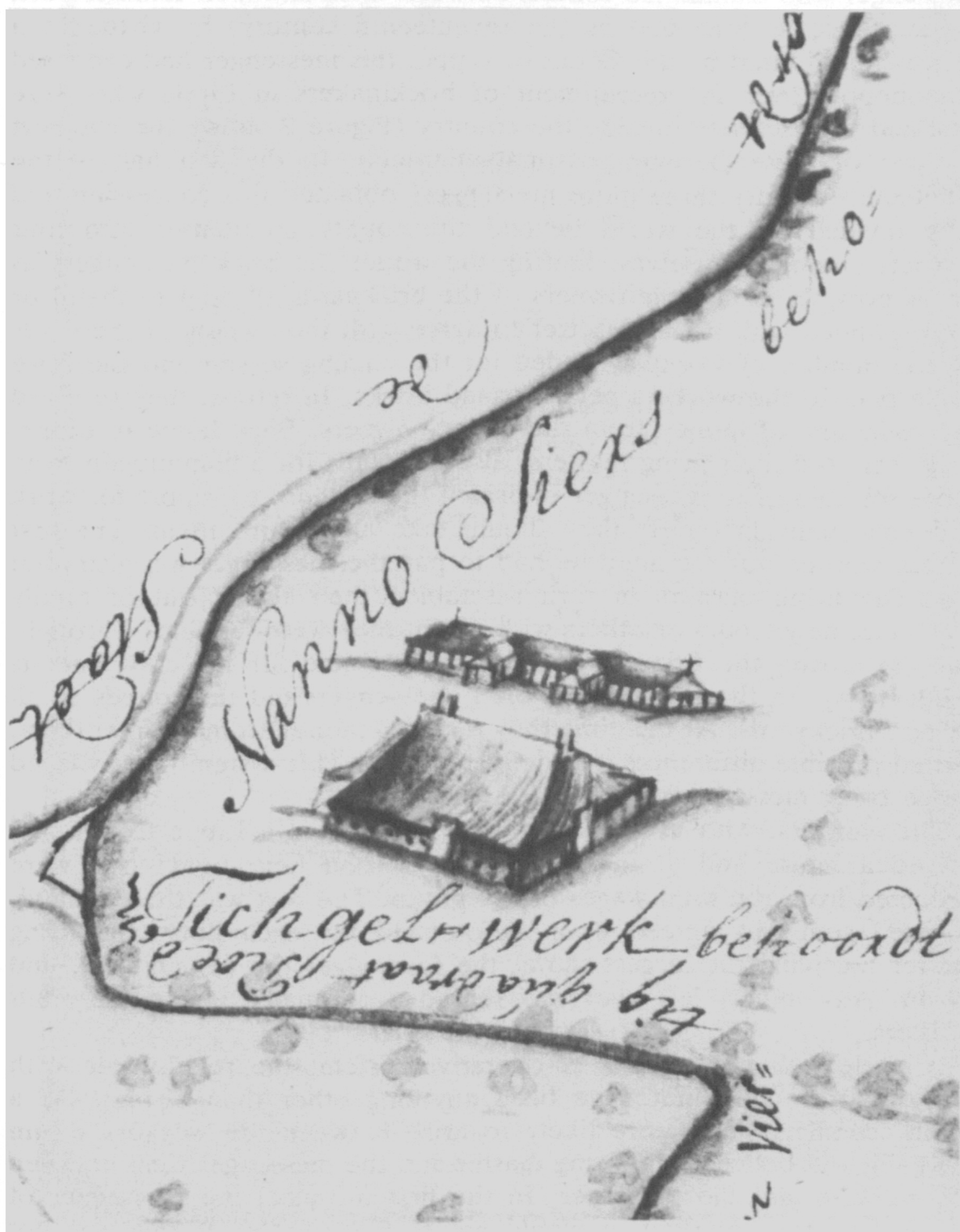
Figure 1. Tile works in Heiligerlee (The Netherlands), *c.* 1740

workers managed to conquer such a substantial part of the European brickmaking market. For labour relations in English brickmaking, see R. Samuel, "Mineral Workers", in R. Samuel (ed.), *Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers* (London [etc.], 1977), pp. 3–97, esp. pp. 61–62.

Peculiar to the Lippe brickworkers was the existence of an official messenger who maintained contact between them and their families back home. Since as long ago as the seventeenth century, by virtue of a concession granted by the Count of Lippe, this messenger had exercised a monopoly over the recruitment of brickmakers in Lippe who were destined for factories outside the country (Figure 2 shows the passport for one of these German seasonal migrants). In the first half of the nineteenth century three more messengers obtained this concession and they divided up the world beyond the county boundaries into four districts among themselves. During the winter the brick messengers as far as possible visited the owners of the brickyards allotted to them, or corresponded with them by letter to agree with the owners of the yards on the number of workers needed for the coming season and the price to be paid to the workers per thousand bricks. In return, they received a certain sum of money from the factory owners. Back home in Lippe, they recruited their firing masters, also in return for a commission from those selected. The messenger informed them where to report for work and how many labourers they should take along with them. The first time a worker was recruited he had to pay the messenger a registration fee. The firing masters in turn assembled their teams out of family members, neighbours or others with whom they were familiar. Throughout the season the firing master was responsible for his crew and its productivity. In the summer the brick messengers did the rounds of all "their" brickyards. At this time they received money from their workers, settled possible differences and delivered post. This system of privileged Lippe brick messengers lasted until 1869.

The workers, who lived in a co-operative called a Lippe Commune, shared a house and at the end of the season household costs were deducted from the total wages of the group. The rest was then divided. A fixed sum was agreed upon beforehand for each duty, the firing master receiving the largest share, the form-giver the next largest, and so on. Any money left over was shared out equally among the adult workers.

It is clear that in such a co-operative system, the relationship with the employer could not have been anything other than distant. As a result, conflicts were more likely to arise between the workers within the gang and between the firing master and the messenger than between the workers and the employer. In the first instance, the messenger of the district they worked in would act as a mediator. If this was not possible, after 1851 they could appeal to a special court consisting of all the firing masters of their district back in Lippe during the winter months. Appeal was also possible in the second instance concerning disputes between the firing master and the messenger. In the third case, which for obvious reasons very rarely came about, the situation was

Figure 2. Passport for the German seasonal migrant Johann Henrich Rubart from Pivitsheide (1778) (Copyright: Aufnahme Staatsarchiv Detmold)

more complicated.[12] The messenger initially tried to settle·the dispute, as he was the first in line of responsibility. We know of such disputes from the German-Dutch border region of Groningen and East-Frisia from the years 1794, 1816 and 1846. If attempts by the messenger failed, the workers and the messenger had to complain about the employer to the courts who had jurisdiction over the area where the brickworks concerned were situated. A first case is known from 1798, but a second one, half a century later, is more interesting to look at since it shows very clearly what these seasonal brickworkers thought of themselves and their conditions.

In a brickworks in the Dutch village of Stadskanaal in Groningen there had regularly been trouble between the seasonal labourers and their employer since the early 1840s. The Lippe workers were always backed by their messenger who was afraid that if he gave in, agreements at other works would be threatened. An appeal by the employer to the government of Lippe was unsuccessful. In the spring of 1849 another conflict arose. The employer accused the workers of not taking proper care of a horse which had fallen ill, the workers refused to mend the broken clay churning mill and in the end the employer sacked the small Lippe gang of four workers. However, they considered this to be impossible because they were under contract. With an iron logic they maintained that not they, but the employer had gone on strike and they took their case before the local court of Zuidbroek. This was a big step, considering they had to pay caution money of no less than the equivalent of 150 Dutch guilders in order to begin the prosecution and, as was usual, they had not yet been paid except for an allowance for food. In comparison, the net wages they could expect to receive were about 60 guilders per person per season.

Two weeks after their dismissal, or as they said, the strike by the employer, the court sessions began which were to continue for more than a year and a total of twenty-eight sessions. The firing master attended the first few sessions but later walked home, leaving the case to the legal experts. The definition of labour relations was central to the case. The employer and his lawyer stressed that the Lippe brickworkers were just ordinary servants and that they therefore had to obey his orders. The workers, of course, said that they were subcontractors, that the prevailing Dutch servants act was not applicable and that a breach of contract was being challenged. Unfortunately for the workers, after more than a year the judge ruled that the servants act had to be applied. The workers' lawyer could then only question whether the dismissal was justified under the servants act and whether foreigners were protected by this law. The judge ruled that foreigners did fall under the protection of this law and that the workers had been dismissed without good

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[12] For the following see Lourens and Lucassen, *Lipsker*, pp. 37–41.

reason. He condemned the employer to pay the arrears of more than 120 guilders, the legal fine of an extra six weeks wages, plus the costs of the trial. The workers' failure in terms of their principles, but their victory in practical terms, was not the end of the case. The employer appealed at the court of the town of Winschoten and there, in 1851, nine new court sessions took place which the employer again lost. In the meantime the workers had been working for two seasons elsewhere, but were still waiting to have their caution money returned and to be paid the arrears on their wages plus the fine of six weeks wages. When the employer still hesitated to pay after the second verdict, the court of Winschoten ruled that his works should be put up for public auction. Only then, at the beginning of 1852, three years after the beginning of the discord, did the employer finally give in. He eventually sold his works and the new owner did not employ any Lippe brickworkers until 1859.

The first elaborate Dutch source of information on labour relations in large-scale seasonal works is the treatise on dike building by Andries Vierlingh, written around 1577–1578. This is based on his experience over half a century in the estuary of the rivers Schelde and Maas in the provinces of Flanders, Brabant, Zeeland and Holland.[13] He shows that dikes were divided into sections roughly 80 metres long. These were let to subcontractors who built their part of the dike with the help of yeomen (Vierlingh speaks of a total of between 600 and 1,000 yeomen per project), whom they personally selected. Later sources show that the workers themselves often selected the foreman who was sent to subcontract a piece of the dike.[14] These groups of workers lived together during the spring season in sheds which they built alongside the dike. What Vierlingh feared most was that these groups of workers would go on strike ("make monopoly") for higher pay, and that the directors of the dike would offer them higher wages in order to prevent it. It seems to have been quite normal for armed men to be present on the work sites, but this did not go far enough for Vierlingh, who recommended immediate hanging for the instigators of strikes, arguing that the only solution would be to install formal military discipline.[15] This appeal for discipline seems to have been repeatedly made up to the time of the canal builders and the railway navvies.[16]

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[13] J. de Hullu and A. G. Verhoeven, *Andries Vierlingh: Tractaet van Dyckagie* (The Hague, 1920), esp. pp. xii–xv, xxxiii, xxxvii and the references on these pages to the text itself.

[14] Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 64–71.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 101–105, 115, 122–123, 278–281; for Germany, see F.-W. Schaer, "Zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage der Deicharbeiter an der oldenburgisch-ostfriesischen Küste in der vorindustriellen Gesellschaft", *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 45 (1973), pp. 115–144.

[16] A. Burton, *The Canal Builders* (London, 1972) and compare P. Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals 1780–1860* (Cambridge, 1993); for

There has been a lot of debate about the extent to which different subcontracting systems were used and the state of labour relations between contractors and navvies, and it is hard to decide which systems prevailed at particular moments. However, the age-old system of co-operative work which we have already seen at work in Holland, seems also to have been common during the great navvying era in the British Isles and other parts of Europe where major public projects were undertaken up until the end of the nineteenth century. It was not only common practice, but was also favoured by the men and certain influential employers. Thomas Brassey, son of the most famous railway builder, said in 1872: "My father always preferred putting a price upon the work, rather than paying by the day. This system was modified to suit the usual habits of the people with whom he had to deal [. . .] Piece work could not in all cases be adopted without some complications and difficulties; but my father always looked upon day work as a losing game; and all his work was done as far as possible by subcontract, which is piece work on a somewhat larger scale. [. . .] Payment by piece is beneficial alike to the master and the men. The men earn higher wages, while the master has the satisfaction of obtaining an equivalent for the wages he has paid, and completing the contract which he has undertaken with far greater rapidity";[17] this is an echo of Vierlingh three centuries before: "the estimation and the assessment of the soil, carried to the dike, and the visitation of the excavated pits, and the payment accordingly as agreed upon, is the most expedient way to promote a diking scheme and to build a complete dike with a profit".[18] Nevertheless, three sources of tension were always present: tension between the members of a butty-gang, between the different gangs on a single construction site and between one or more gangs and the subcontractors, overseers, and so on.

We should be wary of romanticizing the internal relations of a butty, since the same inequalities occurred here as in the gangs which were discussed earlier in connection with the brickmakers. Here again, the weakest chain determined the earnings of the whole gang, as is clear from the description by a foreign visitor of the Dutch *polderjongens*

the extensive literature on railway navvies, I will only mention the classics: T. Coleman, *The Railway Navvies: A History of The Men Who Made The Railways* (Harmondsworth, 1965) and J. Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland* (Cork, 1970); for the Netherlands: A. Geelhoed, "Spades are Trumps. Strikes of Navvies at the Construction of the Utrecht-Arnhem Railway, 1840–1843", in L. Heerma van Voss and H. Diederiks (eds), *Industrial Conflict. Papers presented to the Fourth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History* (Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 147–164.

[17] T. Brassey, *On Work and Wages* (London, 1872), pp. 264–265.

[18] De Hullu and Verhoeven, *Vierlingh*, p. 103 ("de schattinge ende waerderinghe van de aerde ende spijse aen den dijck gebrocht, ende de visitatie van de uuijtgelaeden putten gedaen, ende daernaer te betaelen als voorseijt is, is het expediëntste om een dijckagie te avancerene ende tot proffijt in volle dijckagie te brengen").

(polder boys), a class which is "to be found throughout the country wherever drainage is carried on, operating in gangs, as subcontractors, under the chief undertaker of the work. They are men habituated from their childhood to the work, and to the life of the swamps and morasses, and hardened against sickness and fatigue; they are uniformly strong, robust and active men, because the weak cannot stand the severe toil, and the indolent are driven from the gangs. They work in bands from eight to twelve men, each band under its own chief".[19]

The continuous discord between the gangs was peculiar to the navvies, and the reason for this is simple. A common strategy used by employers who were involved in major public works was to increase the competition between the different gangs by giving prizes to the gang that completed the work first. In Holland, bonuses were offered to the team which reached the top of the dike and planted its flag first, or completed some other task before the others.[20] The best groups were better paid for their accomplishments to provide an incentive for the other workers to try harder. Most contractors hired a number of teams and tried to spur them on through competition. On the other hand, contractors did not hesitate to hire teams at rates under the going wage. Both these practices help to explain why friction was common on the work site. In the period of emerging nationalism, antagonism which already existed between for example, the Irish and the English; the Scots and the Irish; the Scots and the English; the Belgians and Dutch; the English and Dutch; the French and foreigners, especially Belgians and Italians,[21] was an ever-recurring theme of clashes between navvies, both in the British Isles and on the Continent. It is not always very easy to make a distinction between antagonism caused by the built-in competition between gangs, and the antagonism between employers and workers over rates of pay, the method of payment, truck systems, the quality of the temporary housing, etc. Elements of both are present in examples which will be given later. The competition between the butty gangs was one of the employer's main weapons, and furthered labour productivity.

Although Vierlingh does not actually mention strikes himself, they are implicit to his text as we have seen. In fact, there are records of strikes by navvies in the Low Countries from 1410–1413 onwards.[22]

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[19] George E. Waring, Jr, *A Farmer's Vacation* (Boston, 1876), p. 90.

[20] De Hullu and Verhoeven, *Vierlingh*, p. xxxiii; Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 64–71.

[21] Coleman, *The Railway Navvy*; Handley, *The Navvy*, esp. p. 185; Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*; for Dutchmen versus Englishmen, see Handley, *The Navvy*, p. 169, n. 8, and R. Burgler, *Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, 6 (1979), pp. 51–78, esp. p. 62; for France: A. Chatelain, *Les migrants temporaires en France de 1800 à 1914* (Lille, 1976), pp. 863–865; for Irishmen from Cork against Irishmen from Connaught, see Way, *Common Labour*, pp. 193ff.

[22] M. P. de Bruin, "Over dijkgraven en polderjongens", *Archief van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen*, 1970, pp. 100–114; S. J. Fockema Andreae,

However, they may have occurred even earlier since large numbers of navvies are documented as early as the twelfth century: in 1167, a thousand navvies were recorded near the Flemish town of Damme. In the early 1530s strikes are known to have taken place in Zeeland.[23] After Vierlingh died we know of examples of (the fear of) labour unrest among the navvies again in Zeeland in 1597–1598, in Leiden in 1611, where navvies went on strike for better wages, and again in Zeeland in 1612 and 1618.[24] Historical research until now has produced no other examples of striking Dutch navvies before 1737, and possibly not until 1772. However, along the German North Sea coast Dutch labour relations also seem to have been introduced. As a result, labour unrest and strikes among the navvies in this region have been recorded for 1640, 1650, 1698, 1717 and 1765, which fills in the gap in the Dutch data, increasing the likelihood that these traditions were handed down from one generation to the next.[25] From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, frequent labour unrest among the navvies has been continuously recorded in the Netherlands and in adjacent parts of Germany.[26]

In Britain, a great many examples of unrest can be traced, starting with two labour disputes by canal builders in 1768. In the first case, navvies on the Ware-Thames Canal asked for a wage increase, and the second involved embankment constructors in Boston. A third example from the eighteenth century is the strike in 1793 by embankment constructors engaged in building a canal in Stamford, which was provoked by workmen who had been fighting being arrested.[27] In the era of the building of the railways which followed, labour disputes were so numerous it is almost impossible to count them all.[28] Central to these disputes was the solidarity among the men, since it was apparent to everyone involved that supply and demand determined the chances of success for those who wanted to alter the terms of employment. Firstly of course came the unity of all men working on the same construction site. In the description of these strikes we always find the almost ritualistic

Studiën over waterschapsgeschiedenis. Vol. 3: *De Grote of Zuidhollandse Waard* (Leiden, 1950), p. 38.

[23] De Bruin, "Over dijkgraven", pp. 101, 104–105.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 104–107; Dekker, "Labour", p. 408. See also C. Baars, *De geschiedenis van de landbouw in de Beijerlanden* (Wageningen, 1973), pp. 36–38, 46 and 58 and P. van Dam, "Gravers, ofzetters en bierdragers. Werkgelegenheid aan de Spaarndammerdijk omstreeks 1510", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 18 (1992), pp. 447–478.

[25] Schaer, "Zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage".

[26] Apart from the references, given already, see also H.-G. Husung, *Protest und Repression im Vormärz: Norddeutschland zwischen Restauration und Revolution* (Göttingen, 1983).

[27] C. R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1717–1800* (London and Totowa, 1980), pp. 24, 160, 168.

[28] Way, *Common Labour*; Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*; Handley, *The Navvy*; Geelhoed, "Spades are Trumps"; Husung, *Protest*.

round-up of all the men using drums, music, banners and often followed by a military-like parade by the workers armed with spades and other tools, eventually ending in a solemn presentation of the demands. The 1611 Leiden example started with a navvy, who borrowed a drum from his neighbour and called a meeting of all his colleagues, whereupon the navvies marched with the drum and their spades back to the city. In Scotland the same thing occurred though with other musical instruments. Here the parades were sometimes accompanied by pipers and even a brass band is mentioned.

' Apart from the necessity of solidarity among all navvies on a single site, adjacent sections of the labour market had to be controlled by the strikers in order to prevent blacklegs from breaking the strike. These other sections were not always the same. In the case of the masons involved in building sluices, bridges and so on, the local mason's labour market had to be controlled. For example, in mid nineteenth-century Scotland, masons at a railway branch line near Airdrie had to protect their strike by offering a *solatium* of 15 shillings each to masons from Dundee who had been enlisted by the master, whereupon the blacklegs returned to their own town.[29] Where ordinary navvies were concerned, the labour market for farm hands had to be controlled. Another Scottish example may help to clarify this. When navvies went on strike in 1845 near Berwick, a total of 1,400 men went to the hiring market for reapers in Berwick to protest that the rates offered to the shearers should be doubled. This policy was apparently decided upon to prevent these farmhands from working as blacklegs on the railway construction sites, and to open up opportunities to leave the railway for themselves.[30] It is apparent from these examples that the idea that the navvies stood completely apart from the rest of the labour force is difficult to support,[31] particularly when we consider the seasonal character of most navvying activities which forced them into other occupations during the worst seasons of the year, and most of all because of the large numbers involved for relatively short periods. Millions of them laboured on the dikes, harbours, fortresses, canals, roads and railroads and the accompanying tunnels and bridges. This mainly took place in the Low Countries and northern Italy to begin with, but all over Europe from the eighteenth century onwards.

We may conclude that the success of organizing seasonal migrant labour depended to a great extent on the simple mechanism of supply and demand. Only in situations where labour was scarce could the workers push their demands, as we have seen they did. The widely

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[29] Handley, *The Navvy*, p. 192.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 189.
[31] R. M. Dekker, "Labour Conflicts and Working Class Culture in Early Modern Holland", *International Review of Social History*, XXXV (1990), pp. 377–420, esp. p. 409.

used system of subcontracting gangs sometimes involved highly effective bargaining, in particular at the start of the season. Strikes were one of the weapons workers used since they knew that the employer too, because of the limited length of the season, was eager to see the work started as soon as possible.[32]

MERCENARIES

From late medieval to mid nineteenth-century Europe and later in the colonies, becoming a soldier or a sailor in the navy or merchant navy was just one of the jobs a poor boy could aspire to.[33] Migrant soldiers, even more than migrant sailors, were often unmarried, young adults who did not want to spend their entire lives in the service of foreign armies, but hoped to collect enough money to return home and to set up a household of their own.[34]

Certain regions of Europe were specialized in sending large numbers of professional soldiers to other countries in Europe and overseas.[35] These regions were primarily Switzerland and adjacent parts of southern Germany and secondly, Scotland. According to Wilhelm Bickel's estimates, one million Swissmen left their country as mercenaries between 1500 and 1850.[36] Although modern historians consider this figure too high, nobody doubts that Switzerland was exceptional at producing mercenaries.[37] In the seventeenth century between 10 and 30 per cent of the men over sixteen years of age, married as well as unmarried, became mercenaries. In the eighteenth century this figure dropped to between 5 and 20 per cent of the men over sixteen, who were now mostly very young and unmarried. A slight connection can be established at this time between job opportunities in proto-industry and foreign

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[32] This conclusion also applies to the seasonal work of peat digging and peat dredging in the Low Countries, see Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 71ff.

[33] This is discussed in the contribution by Karel Davids.

[34] See also M. Mitterauer, *A History of Youth* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 123–124.

[35] The classical work on this is F. Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and his Work Force*, 2 vols (Wiesbaden, 1964–1965); P. Contamine gives a good overview of medieval mercenary recruitment in "Le Problème des migrations des gens de guerre en occident durant les derniers siècles du Moyen Age", in Guarducci, *Forme ed evoluzione del lavoro*, pp. 459–476; for Ireland see R. Stradling, "Military Recruitment and Movement as a Form of Migration: Spain and its Irish Mercenaries, 1598–1665", in *idem*, pp. 477–490.

[36] Discussed in L. Schelbert, *Einführung in die schweizerische Auswanderungsgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Zurich, 1976), p. 155.

[37] A.-L. Head, "Intégration ou exclusion: le dilemme des soldats suisses au service de France", in P. Bairoch and M. Körner (eds), *La Suisse dans l'économie mondiale* (Geneva, 1990), pp. 37–55; A.-L. Head-König, "Hommes et femmes dans la migration: la mobilité des Suisses dans leur pays et en Europe (1600–1900)", in *First European Conference of the International Commission on Historical Demography* (Santiago de Compostela, 1993), pp. 205–225.

armies. If opportunities in industry diminished, more men left to join the army, and vice versa. In Switzerland, we know that roughly two fifths managed to return in the seventeenth century compared to one third in the eighteenth century. It is assumed that only some of them managed to marry, either in the country or the cities.[38] Those who did not return home had not necessarily died on the battlefield or while in service. Documentation shows that they also settled in the countries where they had served.

Emigration of Scottish soldiers goes back to the fifteenth century, when probably up to 15,000 Scottish soldiers fought in the service of France during the penultimate phase of the Hundred Years War.[39] These generations were followed by others who offered their services in Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Prussia. T. C. Smout estimates that in the first half of the seventeenth century, some 100,000 young men left Scotland, which was between 15 and 25 per cent of its male population, a figure equal to the total number of Scots who emigrated in the nineteenth century.[40] The destinations were roughly one in three to Poland, one in four to Ireland, the same number to Scandinavia and the rest to other countries like the Dutch Republic. Most of these were soldiers. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the figures did not change in absolute or relative terms but the ratio of men to women did, with many more women leaving than before. This is tied to the fact that the proportion of mercenaries became smaller. The destinations also changed a great deal. Poland and Scandinavia vanished from the list, the Dutch Republic maintained its share, but now Ulster was by far the main destination, followed by England and to some extent America. In the case of Scotland, it is not easy to determine whether the soldiers who survived the campaigns and their stay abroad were able to return to Scotland or whether they in fact did so. In the seventeenth century, many of those who fought in Ireland seem to have settled there afterwards as farmers.[41]

What was the proletarian experience, beyond the hiring oneself for the best possible conditions? Once in the army, discipline ruled and surprisingly few mutinies have been recorded, particularly in the eighteenth century, although desertion provided a solution to many problems.[42] Nevertheless, the success and longevity of this highly peculiar

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[38] R. Braun, *Das Ausgehende Ancien Régime in der Schweiz: Aufriss einer Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen and Zurich, 1984), pp. 43–44; Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser*, I, pp. 115–140; M. Bundi, *Bündner Kriegsdienste in Holland um 1700: Eine Studie zu den Beziehungen zwischen Holland und Graubünden von 1693 bis 1730* (Chur, 1972), pp. 129 and 135ff.

[39] T. C. Smout, "Scots as Emigrants in Europe 1400–1700", in S. Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Le migrazioni in Europa secc. XIII–XVIII* (Prato, 1994), pp. 659–669.

[40] Smout, "Scots", pp. 665–666.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 661.

[42] Redlich, *German Military Enterpriser*, II, pp. 213–214.

type of labour relations seems to be more striking than the excesses which were mainly due to bad pay. Surprisingly, mercenary life could lead to direct employment in industry in some countries since large-scale furloughing of drafted soldiers by their captains into the crafts and the textile manufactures became normal practice in the eighteenth century. In the words of Fritz Redlich: "military barracks became veritable spinning mills, at least in Prussia and Austria".[43] Despite the fact that in almost no other circumstances, apart perhaps from aboard ship, did proletarians share their lives with each other as completely as the mercenaries, very little is known of their habits and activities although remarkable is the military nature of many public demonstrations. There are innumerable examples of striking workers on parade, led by beating the drums or flying banners.[44]

MINERS

In many parts of Europe, mining was the main occupation of inhabitants of rural areas after agriculture.[45] However, labour relations varied greatly. In some cases, miners worked independently, although in most cases they were purely wage labourers and in the most extreme cases they could be considered bonded labourers.

At first sight, very favourable conditions appeared to reign in those mines where the miners worked independently. A famous example is the iron mine of Rancié in the French Pyrenees, not far from Andorra.[46] There, since at least the thirteenth century, the local miners worked for themselves having acquired the sole right to extract the iron ore. However, they were obliged to sell it at a fixed price to the ironmasters – the local elite, who could dictate the prices as they also had control of farmland and foodstuffs. In fact this obligation reduced the miners to a kind of subcontractors. So, although in a technical sense they were not wage labourers, in reality they could be seen, and they saw themselves, as members of one big family, who, mutual competition notwithstanding,

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 80–86, 254ff.
[44] Only one of many examples: R. Dekker, *Holland in beroering. Oproeren in de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Baarn, 1982), pp. 76–78.
[45] For a discussion of the degree to which mining and related activities are part of the urban or the non-urban world, see Michael Mitterauer, "Produktionsweise, Siedlungsstruktur und Sozialformen im österreichischen Montanwesen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit", in M. Mitterauer (ed.), *Österreichisches Montanwesen: Produktion, Verteilung, Sozialformen* (Munich, 1974), pp. 234–315, esp. pp. 234–260 (also in M. Mitterauer, *Grundtypen alteuropäischer Sozialformen. Haus und Gemeinde in vorindustriellen Gesellschaftsformen* (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 1979), pp. 148–193; K. Tenfelde, "Bergarbeiterkultur in Deutschland. Ein Überblick", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 5 (1979), pp. 12–53, esp. p. 19.
[46] R. Garmy, *La "mine aux mineurs" de Rancié (1789–1848)* (Paris, 1970), pp. 27–30, 36–38.

displayed great solidarity to outsiders like the ironmasters. It is no wonder that with the advent of the French Revolution, the three to four hundred miners of Rancié asked to be free to sell "the product of their labour"[47] to the highest bidder instead of to a monopoly of the local elite. Unfortunately for them, their concept of collective worker-owners was not shared by the authorities. On the contrary, mining legislation over the years which followed confirmed ownership and regulation by the state and tried to discipline the miners into ordinary wage labourers. In reality, this was very hard to achieve and it took more than half a century during which the state-appointed engineers had constantly to agree to compromises with the miners.

Rancié is maybe less unique than it might seem.[48] In Britain we have the fine example of the free miners of the Forest of Dean.[49] In many ways, they were like the miners of Rancié, except for the fact that in the Forest of Dean many small mines were operated individually by the miners. There existed a uniform price here too, but this time it was determined by the miners themselves and this configuration was turned into a ·system of private enterprise in the nineteenth century. The way in which groups of miners rented pits in many parts of England might also fall into this category, although here communities could not pretend to have age-old rights as in the examples just given. Raphael Samuel shows how this system of bargaining – which can be compared to the Lippe brickworkers' system – was very common in ironstone, tin, copper and lead mining.[50] Merfyn Jones has worked this out very eloquently for the Welsh slate quarries.[51] In this last instance, the mine was private property with a slight management presence. This provoked Her Majesty's Inspector of Mines in 1875 to conclude that "it is manifest that an idea prevails that a mine is able to manage itself".[52]

Far more common is the system whereby the King or other temporal lords, mostly from the High Middle Ages onwards, gave concessions to others to exploit a mine, or, especially from the sixteenth century onwards, organized state exploitation with the help of civil servants. These people were privately or collectively operating entrepreneurs or

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 39: "fruit de leur travail [. . .] qui ne prend source que dans leurs forces"; see also p. 73.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 184–186.

[49] C. Fisher, "The Free Miners of the Forest of Dean 1800–1841", in R. Harrison (ed.), *Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered* (Hassocks, 1978), pp. 17–53. See also A. Wood, "Social Conflict and Change in the Mining Communities of North-West Derbyshire, c. 1600–1700", *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), pp. 31–58.

[50] Samuel, "Mineral Workers", p. 49.

[51] M. Jones, "Y chwarelwyr: The Slate Quarrymen of North Wales", in Samuel, *Miners*, pp. 99–135.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

state-appointed engineers and had to deal with the miners or other wage labourers who were remunerated with piece or time wages.[53] The separation of labour and capital had already taken place in the Middle Ages in the Central European mountain regions, where a monetary economy was fully deployed.[54]

Consequently, as early as the thirteenth century, labourers in Bohemia and Austria started to unite, and from the fourteenth century onwards, workers also formally joined together in the Saxonian Erzgebirge, where they formed associations called *Knappschaften*. These organizations started as religious brotherhoods[55] of hewers which soon also began mutual benefit schemes or funds;[56] from the fifteenth century onwards they mutually controlled the production, which meant that they prevented the emergence of inequality among the piece-working labourers. They used strikes, go-slows and collective absence without leave to push forward their demands forward on their employers. Sources on these coalitions prior to 1500 are available for Saxonia and Austria and, from the sixteenth century on, these coalitions were universal in German speaking countries.[57] Miners' strikes in Central Europe have been documented since the middle of the fifteenth century, although from the Bohemian Constitutiones Juris Metallici (the *Iglauer Bergrecht*) of 1300 it is clear that strikes must have also taken place much earlier.[58] For instance, around the middle of the fourteenth century, coalitions of miners were forbidden in the Austrian gold mines in the Gasteinertal and the Rauristal, and at the end of that century, in the salt mines of Hall.[59] In 1466 in Schneeberg, not far from Freiberg, some of the miners walked out because of a wage cut, while others occupied the mine. We know of many other similar examples from Saxonia and from Bohemia since 1496. Already in the second half of the fifteenth century in the German Empire, relations between the miners and their overseers had become so tense that a certificate of discharge (*Abkehrschein*) was introduced. The famous strike of the silver mine workers of Joachimsthal (the place after which the thaler and dollar are named) in 1525, was characterized by a large-scale and well co-ordinated armed upheaval

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[53] For Germany: C. Sieg'l, *Arbeitskämpfe seit dem Spätmittelalter* (Cologne [etc.], 1993), pp. 46–53 and Tenfelde, "Bergarbeiterkultur", pp. 20–28.

[54] Mitterauer, "Produktionsweise", p. 272.

[55] Sieg'l, *Arbeitskämpfe*, p. 80; Mitterauer, "Produktionsweise", pp. 264–267.

[56] Sieg'l, *Arbeitskämpfe*, p. 80; Mitterauer, "Produktionsweise", pp. 280–281 (including the hospital founded in 1510 in Schwaz by the miners' brotherhood!) and 314.

[57] Sieg'l, *Arbeitskämpfe*, pp. 78–83. However, this author emphasizes the relative weakness of the miners, as compared to the yeomen organizations in the towns. Most recently, cf. the articles by S. C. Karant-Nunn and by C. Vanja, in T. M. Safley and L. N. Rosenband (eds), *The Workplace before the Factory: Artisans and Proletarians 1500–1800* (Ithaca and London, 1993).

[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 140 and 122–126 for a summary.

[59] Mitterauer, "Produktionsweise", pp. 281–282.

which resulted in the recognition of the rights of the miners to have their own banner, to seal documents and to practise self-management. From the early seventeenth century, and continuing for some hundred years, the ironwork miners of Carinthia also showed great tenacity in defending their ever-threatened position.

Crucial to the position of these continental miners was the generally accepted idea that the territorial lord owned all underground minerals. This meant that, in the end, the miners always had to deal with the secular powers. This could mean that they either had to resist the power monopoly of the state, or that the state could take care of their well-being in a paternalistic way. It was therefore not at all usual, as we saw from examples from Bohemia and Saxonia, for the fund to be administered by the miners themselves. In many cases, the state, fearing the desertion of the miners, and consequently the loss of the lucrative incomes for the state coffers as well as the export of secret specialist knowledge, tried to bind the miners by welfare schemes such as state- or mine-administered funds, poor schemes, pensions and so on. The negative aspect was that it was then used to frustrate the miners' endeavours to unite under certain circumstances.[60]

The history of organized labour in the British mining industry seems to start much later, but has many things in common with the continental examples, except for the prevalence of private enterprise in the cases of England and Scotland. David Levine and Keith Wrightson have shown how, at least from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, coal miners in northern England were able to organize themselves very effectively. It is likely that they took their example from the keelmen whose actions have been documented from the middle of the seventeenth century.[61] Here collective bargaining took place on an annual basis, leading to solidarity in the coalfield as a whole. It is curious to see how the successful great strike of 1765 developed as a result of rumours that the employers wanted to introduce compulsory discharge notes. These notes already existed in Scotland, but the colliers were already using similar methods by maintaining clearance lines enforced with the help of substantial entry fees.[62] Among the methods available to the English and Scottish colliers on piece-work contracts, it is most remarkable that

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[60] For example, the *Kurkölnische Bergordnung* of 1669 (Sieg'l, *Arbeitskämpfe*, pp. 141–142); also see H. Baumgärtel, *Bergbau und Absolutismus. Der sächsische Bergbau in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts und Massnahmen zu seiner Verbesserung nach dem siebenjährigen Kriege* (Leipzig, 1963), pp. 43–51; Tenfelde, "Bergarbeiterkultur", pp. 25–26.

[61] D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 390ff.; see also Smout, "Scots", pp. 665 and 668 who stresses that many of the keelmen on Tyneside were Scottish.

[62] A. B. Campbell, *The Lanarkshire Miners: A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775–1874* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 52.

a maximum level of output was set. This system of collective control enabled the men to prevent the prices from dropping and prevented the detrimental competition which might have led to less favourable piece-rates, as seen with the navvies.[63]

Another possibility for organizing labour relations in mining was servitude, which was common in Scottish coal mines and saltworks until its abolishment by the acts of 1775 and 1799. Under this system, families of miners were generation after generation bound for life to their coalmasters.[64] This, however, did not prevent them from working on piece-rates nor from organizing themselves or taking collective action. Strikes have been documented since the 1690s for virtually every part of Scotland where coal was mined, as Christopher Whatley has shown. He lists some sixteen strikes prior to 1750 and adds that this is probably only the tip of the iceberg and that "other forms of collier non-co-operation were endemic. So, a century or more before the abolition of serfdom, Scottish colliers had learned how to exploit short-term buoyancy in the market for coal to their advantage". A good example is a strike in 1701, which was deliberately timed for the moment when the ships were waiting to load the coal. Collective bargaining was thus essential for these serfs in the determining of piece-rates and, consequently, their income. Hence coalmasters could not easily act arbitrarily on wages and conditions, without risking triggering protest actions.

The question is, whether such actions were possible without the help of formal continuous associations. Whatley suggests that from at least 1724 onwards, quasi-masonic brotherhoods must have existed among Scottish miners. The early brotherhoods he found had a mutual benefit fund and made decisions about the admitting of strange hewers into the pit. He even goes so far as to point out the employers' interest in the repeal of the serfdom of Scottish colliers in 1775. They wanted to abolish the artificially high wages and colliers' combinations caused by the limited supply of labour in Scotland in a period of high demand for coal and fierce English competition. It is therefore not surprising that one colliery overseer from Irvine, on hearing of the "Plan of Coalliers being free" declared that he "by no means approved of it & swore by God that if that was the case a Coallier would soon be as bad as a day labourer!"

COLLECTIVE WAGE-LABOUR RELATIONS

In the cases described so far, what has become very clear is the predominance of task wages over time wages[65] and in many cases connected

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[63] *Ibid.*, p. 51; Jones, "Y chwarelwyr", p. 119.

[64] Campbell, *The Lanarkshire Miners*, pp. 2–5; the following mainly after C. A. Whatley, "'The Fettering Bonds of Brotherhood': Combination and Labour Relations in the Scottish Coal Mining Industry c. 1630–1775", *Social History*, 12 (1987), pp. 139–154.

[65] See already for Germany in the late Middle Ages: Ulf Dirlmeier, "Zu den Bedingungen der Lohnarbeit im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschland", in Guarducci, *Forme ed evoluzione*

with it, the hiring of workers as a group and not as individuals. Labourers were even prepared to strike in protest against time wages, demanding piece-wages instead.[66] It is therefore important to discuss some aspects of the wage systems, as they seem to be so crucial to early modern labour relations.[67] The prevailing type of hiring among seasonal workers seems to have been what a hundred years ago was called co-operative work by David F. Schloss. He gave the following characterization of co-operative work:

- The members of the co-operative group are associated by their own free choice, determining for themselves of how many persons and of what persons that group shall consist.
- The associated workers select from among themselves their own leader.
- Arrange the division between all the members of the group (including the leader) of the collective wages in such a manner as may be mutually agreed upon as being equitable between all the associated workers.[68]

In his typology of labour relations, co-operative work is only one of the three types of collective remuneration of the combined labour of a group of workmen.[69] One of the other options was that wages were paid by the employer to each member as a specific share of the aggregate amount. The other is the contract, according to which wages were apportioned by the employer between the group by first deducting the time wages of the subordinate members and then paying the principal member(s) a piece-work remuneration out of the balance which was left, the amount of which varied according to the working speed maintained by the group. Schloss also makes the distinction within contract work between the subcontract, according to the definition given here and a variant called piece-wage foremanship in which all workers, except the foreman, are paid time wages.[70]

The distinction between the piece-wage foremanship, the subcontract proper and the co-operative work is most important. It means making the distinction between a system of sweated labour[71] in which the foreman

del lavoro, pp. 521–558, esp. pp. 539 and 544 ("daily wages were not typical for late medieval wage labourers").

[66] Husung, *Protest*, p. 166 gives an example in north-western Germany in 1846–1847.

[67] At least in Europe. For the predominance of time wages in early modern America see Way, *Common Labour*.

[68] D. F. Schloss, *Methods of Industrial Remuneration* (London and Edinburgh, 1892), p. 87 and the third revised and enlarged edition of 1898, pp. 155–165 with many examples from different countries in Europe; another classic is L. Bernhard, *Die Akkordarbeit in Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1903); also see R. Samuel, "Mineral workers", pp. 33ff. and 48ff.

[69] Schloss, *Methods*.

[70] *Ibid.*, 1892, pp. 82–86 and 1898, pp. 147–153.

[71] *Ibid.*, 1892, pp. 101–103 defines as "sweated-labour" those cases of subcontracting, in which all workers are employed by the same employer and not by their own "contractor" (who, he seems to imply, can also work for more than one employer). C. R. Littler, *The*

is the only profiteer and thus motivated to squeeze the workers to the utmost, and a system in which there is a direct relation for the workers between the work done and their remuneration. In these circumstances, the nature of the relation between the workers and the foreman is crucial, much more so than the relation between the workers and the employer, because this is only of an indirect, and usually remote character. According to Schloss, labour relations in subcontracting proper, and especially in co-operative work, are ideal as they reflect the most direct relation possible between the output and remuneration of the workers.

Historically, time wages have long been less important than task and piece wages.[72] However, Schloss seems to imply that at the end of the nineteenth century piece-wage foremanship was most important and consequently the most perverse of all the systems discerned.[73] How long piece and task wages have prevailed in the British Isles is uncertain, and it is possible that piece and task wages existed in the Low Countries long before they reached the other side of the North Sea.[74] Following Schloss, some authors, in particular Sidney Pollard,[75] Eric Hobsbawm and Craig Littler, have asked the question whether subcontracting and co-operative work may be seen as a world-wide transitory phase between domestic production and the direct management of full-blown capitalism of the turn of the century.[76] In their vision, such labour relations had the function of adapting pre-capitalist forms of management to the capitalist mode of production. According to these authors this adaptation

Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies. A Comparatve Study of the Transformation of Work Organization in Britain, Japan and the USA (London, 1982), pp. 64ff. makes a distinction between "internal subcontract" where the workers are united on one spot and "external subcontract" or "outwork", the last of which is the real "sweated-labour".

[72] A. J. Taylor, "The Sub-contract System in the British Coal Industry", in L. S. Presnell (ed.), *Studies in the Industrial Revolution presented to T. S. Ashton* (London, 1960), p. 234; Littler, *The Development*, pp. 70–72; Schloss, *Methods*, 1898, p. 202.

[73] I conclude this from Schloss, *Methods*, 1898, p. 202 where he states that the majority of the wage earners in the British Isles receives one or the other form of piece or task wage and *ibid.*, p. 43 where he affirmatively quotes a report of 1894 that says: "Taken as a whole, the system of time-work appears to be the most extensive method of wage-payment in the United Kingdom".

[74] In England in the building trades, piece wages seem to have been introduced only from the 1870s on; see R. Price, *Masters, Unions and Men. Work Control in Building and the Rise of Labour 1830–1914* (Cambridge, 1980), e.g. p. 83. For the Netherlands, see A. Knotter, "De Amsterdamse bouwnijverheid in de 19e eeuw tot ca. 1870. Loonstarheid en trekarbeid op een dubbele arbeidsmarkt", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 10 (1984), pp. 123–154.

[75] S. Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management. A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 51–63.

[76] For example, Taylor, "The Sub-contract System", p. 234 and T. Wright, " 'A Method of Evading Management' – Contract Labor in Chinese Coal Mines before 1937", *Comparative Studies in Societies and History*, 23 (1981), pp. 656–678, esp. p. 678, are in favour of this theory; Pollard, *The Genesis* is not clear; Littler, *The Development* is rather sceptical.

was necessary because of the weaknesses of direct management which was not yet able to bear the responsibilities of recruitment of personnel or the control of the quality of production. They still had to leave this to subcontractors when production was carried out in remote areas, or sometimes overseas, where labour recruitment had to take place elsewhere, or where the employer forwarded capital but knew little about the actual production process. It also had the advantage of not having to engage workers for too long at a time in situations with a rapidly changing economy.[77] Michael Sonenscher agrees with the assertion that subcontractors had the necessary knowledge of the labour market which employers often lacked, but goes one step further when he emphasizes that this system was promoted by certain groups of workers themselves. These workers saw an advantage in this system whereby they were able to use seasonal and conjunctural fluctuations in order to achieve optimal wages in the short term. In eighteenth-century France the trade guilds were the great opposers to these schemes. Sonenscher speaks of the economy of the *bazar*, characterized by adequate information and access to labour. This could entail a complementary relationship between modern companies and small subcontracting firms.[78] Richard Price remarks that those workers in particular who saw an opportunity to contract work themselves, helped to advance the system.[79]

CONCLUSION

This all leads us to the question of how to define the labour consciousness of these countrymen, who were working collectively for part of the year or who spent part of their life as wage labourers. If we add to this the millions of servants, not discussed here, it is clear that large parts of early modern western Europe had built up forms of labour consciousness, either directly through their own experience, or indirectly by close contacts with family members or kinsmen.

Experiences in one occupation could very well be combined with those in other occupations, whether as a wage labourer or as a small independ-

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[77] See note 76, but especially Wright, "'A Method'", pp. 657, 665 and 669–670.
[78] M. Sonenscher, *Work and Wages. Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge [etc.], 1989).
[79] Price, *Masters, Unions and Men*, p. 30. He does not see the complementarity as Sonenscher does, but rather – at least in the building trade – "subcontracting" as putting into practice the general contract; see also D. Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America. Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge [etc.], 1979), p. 16. Some authors have gone so far as to define a certain size of firm as the most ideal for subcontracting proper or co-operative work. They emphasize the fact that these were not the smallest, nor the largest enterprises, but particularly the medium-sized ones. Taylor for instance points to mines of between sixty and seventy workers as an example. A. J. Taylor, "The Sub-contract System"; see also Wright, "'A Method'", pp. 665–666.