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EMIGRATION AND CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCTION BY THE VICTORIAN FLINT GLASS MAKERS, 1850–80

Takao MATSUMURA

Abstract. The flint glass makers' Union in the third quarter of the nineteenth century in Britain planned and attempted emigration and co-operative production, together with the restriction of apprenticeship and promotion control, all aimed at creating a permanent scarcity of skilled labour in order to keep wages high. Hence the Webbs used of the Union as an example of a 'New Model' union. Certainly the co-operative production was thought of as 'a means of absorbing the unemployed' among flint glass makers in the early 1850s and was revived in the mid-1860s, but the glass makers thought it too risky and it was not accomplished. An emigration scheme guided by doctorines of orthodox political economy was also discussed in the early 1850s but in the period between 1852 and 1881 only fifty-nine glass makers emigrated. It is therefore misleading to regard the Union as enthusiastic emigrators by citing the policies often described in the *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, as the Webbs have done. What the Webbs did not do was to count the actual number of emigrants.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Webbs characterised the trade union movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century as possessed by 'the New Spirit and the New Model,' under which 'Trade Unionism obtained a financial strength, a trained staff of salaried officers, and a permanence of membership hitherto unknown.'¹ They thought that this period clearly differed from the 'Revolutionary Period' between 1829 and 1842. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (A.S.E.), organised in 1851, provided them with the leading example of the 'New Model' union. The Webbs' view that the years around mid-century saw a turning point in the structure of the unions strongly influenced later historians of opposite political persuasions like Rothstein and Perlman.² G.D.H. Cole was the first to revise the Webbs' view. He denied that the Amalgamated Societies could be regarded as representative of the entire trade union movement, or even most of it, during this period, and that even the Amalgamated Societies were nearly so 'capitalist-minded' as historians of the

¹ S. & B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, 1920 edition, p. 181.

² T. Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism*, 1920, pp. 194–5. S. Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, 1928, p. 129.

trade union movement commonly suggest.³

The Webbs' treatment was not entirely satisfactory, particularly where the flint glass makers' union was concerned. Flint glass makers organised the 'powerful' United Flint Glass Makers' Society in 1844 and reorganised it in 1849. The newly organised society, Flint Glass Makers Friendly Society (F.G.M.F.S.) has 1,017 members in twenty Districts, covering England (sixteen Districts), Scotland (two Districts) and Ireland (two Districts) in 1852. It was literally a national union. Membership continued to increase each year until 1877, except for a slight fall in 1855, 1861 and 1868. There were 912 members in 1855, 1,300 in 1860, 1,612 in 1865, 1,762 in 1870 and 1,994 in 1875. In 1877 it reached 2,088, but after that it began to fall, reaching 1,937 by 1881. The decline was largely the result of the trade depression. We can say that compared with other unions, such as the Engineers, Carpenters and Joiners, Stonemasons, Ironfounders and Boilermakers, the increase of membership of the F.G.M.F.S. in the third quarter of the century was relatively small, and in 1880 the scale of the society remained small.

In many important respects the F.G.M.F.S. was a 'New Model' union, except in one highly significant respect. It resembled the A.S.E. or the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners organisationally in that it was a national union with a Central Committee and Central Secretary, and actuarially in that it stood for high contributions and high benefits, unemployment allowance, superannuated allowance, sick and death benefits, all of which were secured by the growing funds of the society. In the 1860s these funds *per capita* sometimes amounted to twice those of the A.S.E. It was these firmly established benefits which completed the transformation from old tramp society to 'New Model' union. Strategically the society insisted upon 'Defence, not Defiance' and stressed its policies respecting the restriction of apprenticeship, promotion control, regulation of labour mobility between areas of slack and full employment, limitation of production, encouragement of emigration and co-operative production, all aimed at creating a permanent scarcity of skilled labour in order to keep wages high.⁴ This paper aims to analyse emigration and co-operative production planned and attempted by the F.G.M.F.S., both of them being thought of as means of absorbing the unemployed.

II. EMIGRATION

Trade union emigration provides a controversial area in the labour history of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Charlotte Erickson insists that trade unions continued to encourage and to aid the emigration of their members over

³ G. D. H. Cole, 'Some notes on British trade unionism in the third quarter of the nineteenth century,' *International Review of Social History*, II, 1937, reprinted in E. M. Carus-Wilson ed., *Essays in Economic History*, vol. III, 1962, p. 202.

⁴ For the structure and policies of the Flint Glass Makers Friendly Society, see T. Matsumura, *The Labour Aristocracy Revisited, The Victorian flint glass makers 1850-80*, Manchester University Press, 1983, particularly chapter 4.

the period. 'The old-established unions, such as the Engineers, the Iron Founders, the Carpenters, and the *Flint Glass Makers*, continued to encourage the emigration of their members and to aid them to emigrate by making grants of money and by supplying useful information and advice.'⁵ In contrast, R. V. Clements stresses that 'much of the information in union periodicals was unfavourable to emigration.' 'Not only did unions like the Operative Bricklayers, which showed no great interest in the problem, print unfavourable communications from overseas, but others, like the *Flint Glass Makers*, did so quite frequently, urging members to stay at home when conditions abroad warranted it.'⁶

In the third quarter of the nineteenth century there were a number of ardent supporters of emigration among trade union leaders, notably Alexander Campbell, Alexander MacDonald, George Potter and Joseph Arch. Some trade unions promoted emigration in the late 1840s and the 1850s. In the early 1850s an emigration scheme was a significant part of the policy of the F.G.M.F.S. This was partly due to William Gillinder, the first Central Secretary of the Society, who was enthusiastic about it. The Society resolved to establish an Emigrational Committee in 1849. Its object was 'to send the surplus hands to the United States, at the rate of six men per month for six months, or for a longer period, if necessary.'⁷ By that time many flint glass makers had emigrated to Brooklyn, Pittsburg, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, where there was 'a pretty regular demand for skilled workmen from England,'⁸ They were sent with a donation from the Emigration fund of £12 10s each. It seems likely that at least in the early 1850s the emigration scheme of the F.G.M.F.S. was guided by doctrines of orthodox political economy.⁹ The *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* published a leading article entitled 'Emigration as a means to an End' in 1854. After explaining that 'the scarcity of labour' was 'the great point which decides the price of our labour' the article ran:

We consider that it ought to be the aim of the Society to ward off the evils of a surplus of labour, and to direct the members how to make the most use of brisk times. With this introduction we come to emigration, as the

⁵ C. Erickson, 'The encouragement of emigration by British trade unions, 1850-1900,' *Population Studies*, III, 1949-50, p. 250. My emphasis.

⁶ R. V. Clements, 'Trade unions and emigration 1840-80,' *Population Studies*, IX, 1955, p. 170. My emphasis.

⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 23 December 1850.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 201. Webb's view was followed by Stanley Johnson (*A History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America, 1763-1912*, 1913, pp. 296-7), and C. Erickson. 'In their emigration theories trade union leaders accepted the wage-fund doctrine of Adam Smith and the ideas of Malthus and Mill on the need to check population growth' (Erickson, 'The encouragement of emigration,' p. 250). On the other hand, Clements says that 'trade union attitudes and policies regarding emigration were moulded by their interpretation of the strategic and tactical needs of their particular organizations as well as by their conception of the nature of trade unionism. They were not thereby persuaded to give to emigration the place in their policies suggested by commonly received contemporary economic theory' (R. V. Clements, 'British trade unions and popular political economy' *Economic History Review*, sec. ser., XVI, 1961, p. 53).

means of restoring the balance of bad and good times; it will accomplish what we have said, it is much better to spend £1000 on Emigration and get rid of the surplus labour altogether than to spend £1000 on the unemployed, to keep them at home to be used as a whip in bad times to make us submit to whatever an unprincipled manufacturer in his desire to monopolize the trade, may put on us.¹⁰

Gillinder planned that £1,000 'would send fifty men out of our surplus labour every year'¹¹ to Australia with £20 a head. He himself resigned the Central Secretary of the Society in 1854 in order to emigrate to America. When the farewell party was held in the Oddfellows' Hall, Birmingham, on 8 September of that year, about 200 flint glass makers and their wives were gathered and they praised his decision. Benjamin Smart from Glasgow, noted *inter alia* that:

Their friend, Mr. Gillinder, had always strongly advocated emigration, and now he was going to set the example. For himself, he looked on emigration as one of the best means of reducing surplus labour.¹²

Scholefield, a radical M.P. from Birmingham, also admired his decision:

With regard to the question of emigration I must say, that if all the Societies in Birmingham could send missionaries as the glass-makers have done to distant Countries, such as Mr. Gillinder to America, and Mr. Nixon to Australia—(cheers)—they would do an infinitude of good to those countries and the trade to which they belong.¹³

After leaving England with his family, Gillinder started the Franklin Glass Company in Philadelphia in 1861 and began making pressed glass in 1863.¹⁴ Gillinder's patented a new kind of blow pipe in 1865 which required less skill to use and made a drastic change in the production process in America.¹⁵ Thus the skilled artisan in blown flint glass making in England, who had opposed pressed glass making and had accused its promoter, Neville of Gateshead, of being an 'unprincipled' employer, turned into the successful pressed glass manufacturer in

¹⁰ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, II, p. 1. The article was probably written by Gillinder. See Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 201, fn. 1.

¹¹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, II, p. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, p. 101.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 104.

¹⁴ A. C. Revi, *American Pressed Glass and Figure Bottles*, 1964, p. 163, and G. S. & H. MacKearin, *American Glass*, 1941, p. 610. In 1961 'Gillinder Brothers, Incorporated' celebrated their centennial year (Revi, *ibid.*, p. 163), and it is now producing 'blown and pressed illuminating glass ware' (*American Glass Review*, XCIII, no. 8A, 28 February 1973—Glass Factory Directory Issue).

¹⁵ Revi, *American Pressed Glass*, pp. 10–1. The *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* of 1866 introduced the new blow-pipe used by Gillinder and Sons: 'Workmen receive the molton substance in long pipes, from which they blow cylindrical forms, looking like bottles, that are subsequently pressed into various shapes. The rapidity with which this is done is marvellous. The Messrs. Gillinder are not only large capitalists, but eminently practical men and most courteous gentlemen' (*Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VIII, p. 281).

America.¹⁶ This was an example of the social elevation of a Labour aristocrat from a 'Staunch trade's Unionist' to an 'honourable and good employer.'¹⁷

It should be admitted, however, that, in opposition to Gillinder, there was another view in the Society even in the early 1850s. This group questioned the validity of gigantic emigration schemes in reducing 'surplus labour' and recommended accumulating Society funds rather than expenditure on emigration. Certainly, the emigration scheme based on supply and demand theory was practical only when the barriers to prevent unskilled workers from coming into the trade were strong. In 1852 even the Central Committee of the Society remarked in the address:

At first our ideas fixed on a gigantic emigration scheme as best investment; but on referring to the unemployed list we came to the conclusion that emigration at present would only make room to bring new boys up to the trade. We therefore agree with the Edinburgh proposition that the present funds shall be invested in the names of three men.¹⁸

A member of the Society, calling himself 'Truth and Justice,' proposed in 1852 that:

It (the rule on emigration) ought immediately to be taken into consideration by the trade, with a view to save our funds for more urgent purposes; for at present emigration of our members may benefit the individual who emigrates, but cannot benefit the trade, which is our principal object; for when men are not to be had in this country, emigration will only give an impetus to the rearing of apprentices, as we cannot expect men to work any length of time three-handed, and they will have to do that, or take an apprentice.¹⁹

Moreover, as Gillinder stated, 'some of the emigrants soon afterwards got 'home sickness' for, after stopping abroad about two months, they came back, and like the spies in Scripture, brought back a bad report.'²⁰ These different views come from a different understanding of the term 'surplus labour.' As R. V. Clements points out, 'when emigration was discussed, it was nearly always with reference to 'the surplus members of our trade,' with little or no examination of the meaning of 'surplus.'²¹ Therefore, it is wrong to pick up one view out of these two opposite views on emigration existing in the Society and to emphasize one side more than

¹⁶ Gillinder died on 22 February 1871 at the age of forty-nine. His obituary said: 'A little over sixteen years since Mr. Gillinder left the Birmingham District, comparatively poor in pocket, and after numerous cares and toils and struggles, he had just secured a first-class position in his adopted home, as a large manufacturer' (*Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, p. 1085).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 340.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 342.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 109.

²¹ R. V. Clements, *English Trade Unions and the Problems of Emigration*, B. Litt, thesis, Oxford University, 1953, p. 134.

TABLE 1. EMIGRATION OF FLINT GLASS MAKERS BETWEEN
1852 AND 1881

Year	No. of emigrants	Destination		
		America	Australia	Unknown
1852	3	3	0	0
53	5	3	0	2
54	5	3	0	2
55	1	1	0	0
56	10	0	0	10
57	0	0	0	0
58	0	0	0	0
59	0	0	0	0
60	1	0	0	1
61	0	0	0	0
62	1	0	0	1
63	3	0	0	3
64	1	0	0	1
65	0	0	0	0
66	0	0	0	0
67	1	1	0	0
68	0	0	0	0
69	5	1	4	0
70	6	1	5	0
71	0	0	0	0
72	0	0	0	0
73	0	0	0	0
74	0	0	0	0
75	0	0	0	0
76	0	0	0	0
77	1	1	0	0
78	1	1	0	0
79	11	9	2	0
80	4	4	0	0
81	0	0	0	0
Total	59	28	11	20

Source: Compiled from the *Quarterly Report (Districts) of the F.G.M.F.S.*, in *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, I-IX.

the other.²²

As Table 1 shows there were twenty-four emigrants between 1852 and 1856. However the high period of emigration ended in the final year. Society funds came to be accumulated, not for emigration, but mainly for Friendly benefits.

²² The Webbs disregarded the opposition to emigration among glass makers. Sidney Webb quoted from the *Magazine* in his note that 'a scheme of emigration . . . is a failure' (Webb, *Flint Glass Makers*, Ms, Webb Trade Union Collection at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, Section A, vol. XLIV, p. 232), but this quotation was not taken into consideration in either the *History of Trade Unionism* nor *Industrial Democracy*.

Consequently, support for emigration disappeared from the columns of the *Magazine*. At the time of the strike and lock-out in the flint glass trade in 1858–59 no emigrants appeared, partly because of the Society's lack of funds caused by the strike, and partly because of the solidarity of flint glass makers in time of struggle.

The movement for emigration revived in the second half of the 1860s, although the destination changed from America to Australia. In 1868–69 the Central Committee of the Society restricted emigration to America, because of depression there.²³ In March 1868 the Central Committee of the Society told the membership that:

The society is broken up in New York, and the men are undermining one another to a great extent; casto-place workmen's wages are reduced from 45 dollars to 38 and 30, and they have to work from Monday morning to Saturday dinner, and when they receive the money it does not go far. My advice to those in England who have anything to do is, stay where you are.²⁴

Instead, the Central Committee of the Society encouraged members to emigrate to Australia by offering higher grants for workers prepared to go to that country. Emigrants to America got £6 10s and those to Australia got £10 10s.²⁵ The Central Committee of the Society explained the background of the discrimination when the Central Committee proposed it in June 1869:

Even America, with all her greatness, has become in a measure well stocked with our class of artisans; and we have heard of many complaints of slack trade from our friends there during the last twelve months; and as there appears to be far brighter prospects offering themselves in Australia, the trade now having obtained a footing there, we propose to lower the grant for America and offer extra inducement to go out to Australia.²⁶

In March 1868 the Central Committee of the Society refused to give grants to ten applicants wishing to emigrate to America.²⁷ One year later, in March 1869 the Central Committee again 'refused the grant to several who desired it, believing that by their going they would do not good for themselves, and in all probability would end in their returning home again, and thus becoming no permanent relief

²³ The *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* had already published two letters from America, which aimed to persuade members of the Society to remain in England. One came from the Glassmakers Union of Brooklyn, New York and New Jersey (June 1865), and another from the Flint Glassmakers of the United States (March 1866).

²⁴ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, p. 258.

²⁵ In 1852 the emigration grants had been reduced from £12 10s to £8 10s which had been paid irrespective of destination. So the 1869 amendment decreased the grant for emigrants to America from £8 10s to £6 10s and increased that for those to Australia from £8 10s to £10 10s provided they had been members of the Society over five years (£6 10s in the case of three years).

²⁶ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, p. 646.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 258.

to the surplus labour in our trade.'²⁸ As a result, in 1869 and 1870 only two members emigrated to America, while the revival of emigration for Australia took place (Table 1).²⁹ It should be added that an emigrant could retain honorary membership by paying 10*s* per annum, if he wanted to do so. But in no case was superannuation or death money paid to this special class. Unlike engineers, pattern makers and stone masons, honorary membership for emigrants in the F.G.M.F.S. was entirely nominal.³⁰

In the first half of the 1870s the revival ended. The rule regarding emigration remained unchanged during the decade. But the more directly glass makers felt the menace of foreign competition, the more strongly they reacted to the Emigration scheme, because they thought that the skilled glass makers who emigrated only produced articles of high quality abroad which were encroaching upon the British market. Between 1870 and 1877 articles relating to emigration appeared surprisingly rarely in the *Magazine*. The leading article in the *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* in November 1874 concluded that:

This is a grave mistake, to drive men to seek a living in a foreign land,— to take their labour, skill, and experience of years, and all at once give the new country the benefit of the better part of a life-time spent in anxious care, experiments, and perhaps a fortune; the great balance of advantage in such cases falling to the latter, with no corresponding return.³¹

In spite of the criticism voiced in the *Magazine*, emigration began to increase again when depression returned to the glass trade in 1877 (Table 1), particularly in 1879, when there were eleven emigrants, most of them going to America. Out of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 586. Erickson regards the F.G.M.F.S. as a typical union with discriminatory emigration grants. She says that 'in view of the higher fare to Australia this kind of rule did not work to the detriment of emigration to the United States' (Erickson, 'The encouragement of emigration,' p. 264). Since she was able to use only the third edition of the *Rules and Regulations of the F.G.M.F.S. of 1879* but not the *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, she failed to realise the motive and the results of this discrimination in grants. On the other hand, R. V. Clements rightly points out that in 1869 'the Flint Glass Makers revised their rules to increase the attractiveness of Australia as compared with America, since there would be less likelihood of return thence' (Clements, *English Trade Unions and the Problems of Emigration*, B. Litt thesis, *op. cit.*, p. 135). The differential grants scheme was proposed by the Central Committee of the Society in June 1869 and soon after it was carried by the voting of all members of the Society—1219 for and 368 against (*Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, pp. 760–1).

²⁹ The evidence does not entirely support the Webbs' assertion that the abandonment of the emigration policy among the trade unions continued until 1872 when it was revived (Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 102). The support for an emigration scheme by the Junta and its allies was almost entirely concentrated in 1869 and 1870. Bate, the secretary to the National Emigration Aid Society spoke before the Trades Union Congress in 1869, and on the consulting committee of the reformed *Bee-Hive* in 1870, along with Allan, Applegarth, Potter and Edward Jenkins, the secretary of the National Emigration League (Clements, *English Trade Unions and the Problems of Emigration*, B. Litt thesis, *op. cit.*, p. 92), but Joseph Leicester was critical of the emigration scheme.

³⁰ For instance, the A.S.E. members going abroad could keep their funeral and accident allowance by paying a contribution after 1850 and could retain membership and benefits by joining a branch of the Society abroad after 1857. See Erickson, 'The encouragement of emigration,' p. 267, fn. 2.

³¹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VIII, p. 4.

TABLE 2. DISTRICTS FROM WHICH EMIGRANTS CAME BETWEEN
1852 AND 1881

District	No. of emigrants	District	No. of emigrants
Manchester	13	York	1
Birmingham	11	Newcastle	1
Glasgow	8	Dublin	1
Belfast	5	Shelton	1
St. Helens	4	Kilnhurst	1
Stourbridge	3	Bolton	1
London	2	Edinburgh	1
Hunslet	2	Newton-Le-Willows	1
Dudley	2	Warrington	1
		Totals	59

Source: Compiled from the *Quarterly Report (Districts) of the F.G.M.F.S.*, in *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, I-IX.

seventeen men who emigrated between 1877 and 1880 eight men had been suffering long-term unemployment.³² Even before this it is notable that each peak in the number of emigrants (in 1856, 1863 and 1869-70) took place soon after the worst unemployment (in 1855-56, 1861-62 and 1869-70).³³ Although the emigration scheme of the F.G.M.F.S. was theoretically guided by doctrines of orthodox political economy particularly in the early 1850s, the practical motive for some (not all) emigrants seems to have been to escape unemployment. The Districts from which emigrants came are interesting (Table 2). In the period between 1852 and 1881 thirteen men came from Manchester, eleven from Birmingham, eight from Glasgow, but only three came from Stourbridge. Between 1877 and 1880 seven men came from Manchester, but nobody came from Stourbridge, probably because the Manchester flint glass trade was damaged more severely by the depression than the Stourbridge industry. What is clear is that, in comparison to other trade unions which encouraged emigration in the third quarter of the century, the number of emigrants from the F.G.M.F.S. was very

³² Out of these seventeen emigrants, eight men were unemployed, six were employed and three were unknown. The period of unemployment of the eight men was respectively, 63 weeks (Servitor), 58 weeks (Workman), 58 weeks (Melter), 38 weeks (Servitor), 26 weeks (Workman), 17 weeks (Servitor), 52 weeks (unknown), and 9 weeks (unknown). These figures are obtained by tracing names of emigrants in the *Quarterly Report from Districts* and the list of receivers of unemployment allowance each quarter in the same period.

³³ R. V. Clements suggests that 'in 1854 the Glass Makers' executive supported emigration assistance "as the means of restoring the balance of good and bad times," but later encouragement of emigration was by no means closely related to fluctuations in the economy. Discussion was stimulated, but action seldom followed (Clements, *English Trade Unions and the Problems of Emigration*, B. Litt thesis, *op. cit.*, p. 137). But he contended so without investigating the relations between the actual numbers of emigrants of flint glass makers and the trade cycle of the flint glass industry. His view must be revised, although it is right to say that 'discussion was stimulated, but action seldom followed.'

small.³⁴ It is therefore misleading to regard the F.G.M.F.S. as enthusiastic emigrators by quoting the emigration policies often described in the *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, as the Webbs have done. What the Webbs did not do was to count the actual number of emigrants.

III. CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCTION

Flint glass makers were involved in the discussion of co-operative production in the early 1850s. This coincided with the rise of the national movement for the association of producers. Although the scheme devised by the flint glass makers was not eventually put into practice, it is still valuable to examine the formulation of the plan because it illustrates the ideology of flint glass makers as Labour aristocrats.

The first proposal for co-operative production in the flint glass trade was made by the Central Committee of the F.G.M.F.S. at the end of 1851. The proposal was to set up a glass manufactory with a capital of £500 first and then to 'set as many of our unemployed to work as were needed, under the management and control of a Director and Committee, to be employed at the works.'³⁵ Co-operative production was thought as 'a means of absorbing the unemployed.' Undoubtedly, flint glass makers were strongly influenced by the numerous attempts at setting up selfgoverning workshops for tailors, shoemakers, builders, piano-makers, printers, smiths and bakers in the early 1850s.³⁶ The Christian Socialists J. M. Ludlow, Maurice, Kingsley, Neale, Hughes and others had formed themselves into the 'Society for Promoting Working Men's Association' in the autumn of 1849 and they 'were advocating with an almost apostolic fervour the formation of associations of producers, in which groups of working men were to become their own employers.'³⁷ The *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* briefly introduced the Association to its readers in 1851. 'The elimination of the entrepreneur was Buchez's idea, from which the Christian Socialists' model sprang.'³⁸ Buchez limited the application of his scheme to artisans 'whose capital was skill, and who used tools and not machines.'³⁹ The English followers of Buchez experimented in industries already mentioned, which had not been transformed by the use of machinery. In this sense, flint glass making which was dependant on relatively simple tools presented an encouraging field for experiments in co-operative production. One of the observers from the newly organised A.S.E. participated in the flint glass

³⁴ Whereas the Ironfounders' Society, one of the most ardent unions in favour of emigration, spent £4.700 on it between 1854 and 1874, the F.G.M.F.S. spent only £306 between 1852 and 1874 (For the figures of glass makers, calculated from the *Quarterly Report (Districts) of the F.G.M.F.S.*).

³⁵ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, I, p. 133.

³⁶ B. Potter, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 1904 edition, p. 122. See also 'Strikes and industrial co-operation,' *Westminster Review*, XXV, 1864, pp. 258-9.

³⁷ Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 225.

³⁸ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, I, p. 172.

³⁹ Quoted in Potter, *The Co-operative Movement*, pp. 120-1.

makers' conference held in Stourbridge in May 1852 and indicated the advantages of setting up co-operative flint glass manufactories:

The glass trade is beset by much fewer difficulties than fall to the lot of other business. To start a small experiment would require but little capital, and the market is already created. Everybody wants glass, every Co-operative store could and would act as agents for the sale of goods manufactured by a Co-operative glass works. We shall look forward with some anxiety to the promised scheme.⁴⁰

The prospect of 'the nobility of the land, including Her Majesty the Queen' visiting the local 'Co-op' to purchase items of 'taste, richness and beauty' gives a fresh colour to this old utopia.

Opinions expressed by the members of the Society after the first proposal of the Central Committee can be classified into two main groups. One group supported the scheme. They believed that, in the short run, it would work as a means of absorbing the unemployed and that, in the long run, a new economic order would emerge based on co-operative production as an alternative to existing society. A member of the Society, who called himself 'Mentor,' proposed that it should collect £5,000 with 1,000 shares from the members of the Society and borrow £5,000 from outside. With £10,000, five twelve-pot furnaces would be started and gradually expanded 'till we have the whole of the trade centred in the workmen.'⁴¹ His idea was 'the elimination of the entrepreneur.' When the scheme was accomplished, in Mentor's words, 'the lever would then be in our own hands—the miserable uncertainty which a working glass-maker feels of his situation being permanent would then vanish—the feeling of servility and dependence which now pervades our mass as a body would then change into self-respect; in fact, there is not trade in the world that has the chance we have to free ourselves from the thralldom of capital as it is used at present.'⁴²

A second group rejected the scheme. The earlier Owenite failures cast a dark shadow. The attitude of this group is represented by a Stourbridge member of the Society:

This great question, Co-operation, has occupied the attention of some of the philosophers and philanthropists in nearly all ages and countries, but still seems to have made little or no progress.... Some political economists did, after repeated challenges, discuss the subject with him (Robert Owen). Not one of them could show any impracticability in his

⁴⁰ *The Operative*, 1852, p. 447. It is interesting that the flint glass makers' conference should attract the attention of the engineers. Early in 1851 both Newton and Allan approached the Christian Socialists for advice on how best to use their surplus funds and they had drawn up the scheme for purchasing the Winsor Iron Works in Liverpool which would run on co-operative principles. See C. E. Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854*, 1920, p. 234, P. N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Cooperation in Victorian England*, 1974, pp. 41-3, and J. B. Jefferys, *The Story of Engineers, 1880-1940*, 1946, pp. 33-4, 42-4.

⁴¹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, I, p. 235.

⁴² *Ibid.*

plan, because his conclusions were drawn with nearly mathematical accuracy. He put his theory into practice, with his own funds. After that, he found others with capital to join him in his great scheme. . . . (As a result) a great many lost large sums of money.⁴³

This group also questioned the validity of co-operative production as a means of absorbing the unemployed. Another member of the Society, called 'Benjamin Franklin,' of Manchester, contended that 'there is too much glass manufactured at present, and that on our part it would only be aggravating the evil.'⁴⁴ He emphasised the reality of the competitive society:

We should only be another competitor entering the lists of competition; and it would not answer any purpose whatever as regards the unemployed, because the amount of capital proposed would not employ above ten or twelve men.⁴⁵

However, the annual conference of the Society held in Stourbridge in May 1852 was in general well disposed towards the co-operative production scheme. The conference decided to leave William Gillinder to draft plans for undertaking it.⁴⁶ But no practical results followed. Three years later, in 1855, the Glasgow conference of the Society resolved that 'the conference agree with the principle of co-operation, but owing to the present unsatisfactory state of the law of partnership, think it would be dangerous to adopt this principle at present.'⁴⁷ The enthusiasm of some glass makers in the early decade had disappeared. Four factors were mainly responsible for this disappearance. First, the Christian Socialists gave up their task in despair after three or four years of devoted effort, so that flint glass makers were influenced by the waning national movement for co-operative production. Second, the legal position of trade societies which prevented them from holding property was obviously an obstacle. Third, the rapidly expanding financial resources of the Society made it possible to take care of the unemployed, who were earlier expected to be absorbed in co-operative production. Finally, the old opposition or scepticism towards co-operative production persisted among some glass makers.

However when a large number of glass makers were thrown out of employment as a result of the great strike and lock-out in 1858–59, it was not surprising that the scheme was revived. A project for forming a 'Joint Stock Company' for the manufacture of flint glass in Stourbridge was approved at the conference held on 31 December 1858 and 1 January 1859. Efforts were made to raise a capital of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 385.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ The *Operative*, 1852, p. 447. The *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* made reference to the fact that William Gillinder 'promised shortly to lay before the trade a prospectus for the formation of a joint stock company' (The *Operative*, vol. I, p. 185), probably because Gillinder, the Central Secretary of the Society and the editor of the *Magazine*, did not or could not draft the plan.

⁴⁷ 'Minutes of a Conference held at Glasgow in 1855' in *Trades' Societies and Strikes*, 1860, p. 122.

£5,000 by 500 shares of £10 each⁴⁸ and 'suitable premises could readily have been obtained, and 50 shares were immediately taken up in the Stourbridge District.'⁴⁹ But the funds collected were small and they were soon exhausted, because they were used to support the members on strike. The scheme was ephemeral and faded away.⁵⁰

It revived again in the mid-1860s. The Edinburgh conference of the F.G.M.F.S. held on 4 June 1867 was of special significance with reference to co-operation. In March of that year the leading article of the *Flint Glass Makers Magazine* declared that 'the investment of our funds—banking and industrial co-operation—will form a most important subject for the Conference, and if the Conference can see their way clear to the adoption of the latter, it will be the beginning of a revolution in our trade, which will, if successful, alter our position as a Trades' Union, and make us in reality what we are sometimes called in derision—"Gentleman Glassmakers".'⁵¹

This revival of interest in co-operative production is not too difficult to explain. In the first place, during 1865–66 'a stir and activity in the individualist camp of Co-operators'⁵² occurred after the suspension of the activities of the Christian Socialists. An impetus was also given to the co-operative movement by the Briggs' profit-sharing scheme introduced into their collieries in 1866. All this had an impact on the thinking of flint glass makers. W. H. Packwood, a leading advocate of the co-operative movement in the F.G.M.F.S., had communicated with Thomas Hughes on this matter before attending the Edinburgh conference. Second, the legal obstacle preventing trade societies from holding property had been removed by the Industrial and Provident Society's Act in 1862. Alexander Campbell, called this Act 'the charter of British workmen, as it allowed any number of persons above seven to become an incorporation to carry on any business except mining and banking with limited liability.'⁵³ Thus the legal way to co-operative production had been opened up. Third, and more directly, the scheme was motivated by the 'low rate of interest obtained from banks on our fund.' W. H. Packwood stated at the Edinburgh conference that:

The proposition had originated from a correspondence with the C. C. on the low rate of interest from bankers, for which some proposed to invest a portion of their funds in mortgage and building houses, but he now wished them to consider calmly the propriety of investing some of their

⁴⁸ Godfrey Lushington, 'An Account of the Strike of the Flint Glass Makers in 1858–59' in *Trades' Societies and Strikes*, p. 110.

⁴⁹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, IX, p. 8.

⁵⁰ About eighteen years later, in 1877, this project was recalled as follows: 'However good and just the cause may be, in working out such enterprises, they must be placed upon surer foundations than the sudden resolve brought into existence by the bitter antagonism of capital and labour' (*ibid.*).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, V, pp. 910–1.

⁵² Potter, *The Co-operative Movement*, p. 133.

⁵³ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, IV, p. 990.

capital in an industrial co-operative glassmanufactory. (Hear hear)⁵⁴ The rapidly accumulated funds of the Society in the 1860s led glass makers to consider the establishment of co-operative production once again. It is notable that this time the motive of absorbing the unemployed, a feature of the early 1850s, was lacking and it was the problem of the low rate of interest which triggered the project. W. H. Packwood and Joseph Leicester in particular, took the initiative. Packwood said that 'he was in favour of uniting capital and labour under co-operative arrangements, which, if conducted with skill and energy, he had no doubt in.'⁵⁵ Alexander Campbell was solicited, as an 'old-Co-operator,' to give the meeting the benefit of his experience on Co-operative Industry.⁵⁶ The conference eventually resolved that 'in order to commence a capital for individual industrial co-operative glass manufacture, the members of this conference agree to express their earnestness and sincerity by taking shares.'⁵⁷ The shares were £1 each.

Soon after, in September of that year, W. H. Packwood addressed the Society on co-operation proposing that 'no member take less than three shares. The shares can be paid for as low as three-pence per week.'⁵⁸ Immediately the London District approved of this decision and Joseph Leicester, 'took names for 63 shares and ready money to the amount of 27 sterling.'⁵⁹ The other Districts did not follow the London District's enthusiasm however. About a year later, in November 1868, Alexander Campbell wrote in his letter to J. C. Traill, secretary of the Trade Union Commission that 'the Flint-glassmakers' Society of Great Britain and Ireland are now also raising funds to be applied in carrying on their craft on the co-operative principle,'⁶⁰ but still the scheme failed to take off.

Despite almost full preparation for the establishment of co-operative production, it was not accomplished. Neither the practical side of this scheme nor its ideological content could muster sufficient support. W. H. Packwood had stated in his address that 'the external principles embodied in co-operation are destined, by sober thought and wise management, to raise the artisans of this country to a condition of prosperity, and elevate them to a nobly intelligent and well-to-do position in society.'⁶¹

We regard it (co-operative production) as a means of leading to our social and intellectual advancement, and as the means of realizing that economic and commercial knowledge that we cannot otherwise possess,

⁵⁴ *Glasgow Sentinel*, 15 June 1867.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 July 1867.

⁵⁷ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, V, p. 1044.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Letter from Alexander Campbell, dated 25 November 1865, regarding the revised Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1867; in *Royal Commission on Trade Unions*, 11th and Final Report, 1868-69, vol. II (P. P. XXXI), p. 343, no. XII.

⁶¹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, p. 19.

and which will prove the means of preventing many mistaken strikes, and the only true means of ascertaining a proper estimate for the remuneration of our labour arising out of the profits resulting from the combined efforts of capital and labour.⁶²

This appeal corresponded well enough with the aspirations of the Stourbridge glass makers and those of some leading members in the Society. But for other glass makers it might sound like a merely Utopian idea. They feared that the scheme was a risky way of investing the funds. They chose a more cautious road. They hoped that their social position might be elevated within the existing system.

In contrast, the glass cutters adopted a different stance. There was a long dispute between the Executive of the Cutters' Society and the Wordsley branch. 'During the great strike of 1865 the branch proposed to start a Co-operative shop to employ some of the men on strike. They appealed for permission and were authorised to borrow £100 and start, but not to use Union funds. Being unable to borrow the £100 they used £45 of the Society's money.'⁶³ The executive regarded the co-operative production as 'separate and distinct from the Trade Society and not at all entitled to use its funds.'⁶⁴ The Executive demanded repayment, so that the Wordsley branch collected shares and started their scheme in 1868 in the name of the 'Stourbridge Provident Flint Glass Manufactory Society.'⁶⁵

G. Laughton, Wordsley secretary of the Cutters' Society, wrote with hope in April 1868:

We have at the present time upwards of 800 shares taken up, a great many of which are paid up. We have bought and paid for nearly £200 worth of material. We have men employed cutting patterns, and hope in a short time to be able to supply the public with a class of work equal in every respect to the first houses in the trade, and on better terms than any house in the trade... We have the advantage of procuring the best skilled labour of the trade, and can get it at any time.⁶⁶

The shares were £1 each and were paid up by instalments as low as 3d per week per share. Although no information about the number employed in the factory is obtainable, £800, if all shares were collected, meant that the factory was relatively small. This factory exhibited its products, together with those from other glass factories in the area at the annual festival held by the Glass Makers and Cutters Societies on 6 July 1868.⁶⁷ But it was short-lived. By the end of that year it had

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ S. Webb, *Flint Glass Cutters*, Ms, Webb Trade Union Collection at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, Section A, vol. XLIV, p. 355.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Brierley Hill Advertiser*, 25 April 1868. The Cutters' Society succeeded in securing the Park Field Glass Works, near Stourbridge, lately carried on by G. Robinson of Wolverhampton (*ibid.*).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1868.

been closed as a failure.⁶⁸ Flint glass makers in Stourbridge and its neighbourhood strongly supported the factory and proposed 'that £200 be loaned from our Trade's Fund to the Flint Glass Cutters' Industrial Co-operation Association, Stourbridge, for twelve months, at five per cent interest.'⁶⁹ The result of voting for this proposal by the whole membership of the F.G.M.F.S. was 579 for and 946 against and consequently the proposal was withdrawn.⁷⁰ The glass makers evidently thought that the glass cutters' scheme was too risky.

As with other policies, it would be a mistake to think that the glass makers had united or settled opinions about co-operative production. Opinion changed over time and in accordance with specific circumstances even as it differed from one region to another. But the great obstacle was not that co-operative production was seen as too utopian, but that it was not seen as utopian enough. If co-operation promised nothing more than "Gentleman Glassmakers," then that end might be attained by less risky and more well tried methods such as the securing of accumulated reserves and improving friendly society benefits. It was the very practicality of co-operative production as conceived and presented by its advocates, which deprived it of the chance of being weighed upon a more favourable set of scales and not being found wanting. Great adventures are not to be expected from men with pedestrian ambitions.

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⁶⁸ Webb, *Flint Glass Cutters*, Ms, *op. cit.*, p. 356. 'The Society has £25 invested as a loan which is to be repaid in full, also £25 in shares which will have to bear their share of loss (*ibid.*). The name of the factory immediately disappeared from the local directory, *Kelly's Post Office Directory, 1868*, as suggested in H. J. Haden, *The Stourbridge Glass Industry in the 19th Century*, 1971, p. 33.

⁶⁹ *Flint Glass Makers Magazine*, VI, p. 253.

⁷⁰ Stourbridge (294) and London (50) supported the proposition, but Birmingham (294), Edinburgh (60), Glasgow (78) and Rotherham (65), opposed it. The Manchester District was divided, 76 for and 78 against (*ibid.*).