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# ARTISANS RESPOND TO INDUSTRIALISM: SHOEMAKERS, SHOE FACTORIES AND THE KNIGHTS OF ST. CRISPIN IN TORONTO\*

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Cobbler, cordwainer, shoemaker — by whatever name they were of first rank in the pre-industrial world of the artisan. These “most persistent of working class intellectuals”<sup>1</sup> were ever present figures in the struggle for a freer and more egalitarian world. In rural England, these village radicals, acted as spokesmen, organizers and ideologues in the struggles of the agricultural labourers.<sup>2</sup> In urban Paris they joined their brother *sans culottes* in the streets at the Bastille.<sup>3</sup> In London they were the main carriers of the Jacobin tradition.<sup>4</sup> In the United States they helped create a radical tradition of Republicanism which figured again and again in nineteenth century labour struggles.<sup>5</sup> In the Mackenzie Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada no artisan group played a more prominent role.<sup>6</sup> What elements in the shoemaker’s craft prepared them for such prominence?

One old, Lynn, Massachusetts shoemaker reflecting on the recently lost traditions of his trade suggested one answer:

The peculiar nature of his business requiring of the workingman little mental concentration, allowed him to take part in discussions, or fix his attention upon any question that might engage his thoughts. His work went on mechanically, as it seemed, without needing any of that nice care which is indispensable in many of the mechanic arts. This circumstance made every workshop a school and an incipient debating club; and from this doubtless has arisen the general intelligence which is said to characterize the sons of Crispin.<sup>7</sup>

Shoemakers were “given to deep thinking” in New England and their shops were often visited by ministers desirous of testing their sermons before delivery. These centres of popular theological debate were considered unequipped if they did not contain a bible, a dictionary, a grammar, and a weekly newspaper. Also part of every shop’s standard

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equipment were "one or more extra seats or boxes for the accomodation of visitors" who would drop by either to read to the working journeymen or to join in listening and debating as "the best reader in the crew . . . read the news."<sup>8</sup> Only the pub challenged the shoe shop as a centre of popular culture and it was often shoemakers or other artisans who ran these. Frank Foster, a printer and leader of the Knights of Labor in the United States, referred to every shoemaker's shop as a lyceum and credited the craft with "the old time front rank of comparative intelligence."<sup>9</sup>

Shoemakers had in addition a particularly vibrant craft tradition. Stories of St. Hugh and of Saints Crispin and Crispianus and other types of lore provided a set of familiar and well defined customs that instilled the craftsmen with pride and solidarity.<sup>10</sup> On October 25, the feast of St. Crispin, cordwainers the world over marched beneath banners depicting their patron saints and engaged in drunken frolics. Shoemakers in Canada built on these traditions. This craft lore was undoubtedly carried to Canada by emigrating cobblers. These men took a prominent role in early Canadian labour organizing. Toronto shoemakers struck for higher wages and better conditions as early as 1830 and again in the 1850's. Other early shoemakers' societies are reported in Montreal, Halifax and St. John.<sup>11</sup> Generally in British North America wherever shoemakers were in sufficient numbers to organize, they did.

Any understanding of the life of shoemakers in this period must start at their workplace. There can be little doubt that the artisan's relation to work was central to his identity in the pre-industrial city. Let us turn to one such city, York, Upper Canada. Shoes, as all else, were initially imported to York but as early as 1830 shoemakers struck for an increase in their bill of prices. By 1833 a total of 68 shoemakers lived and worked in York.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly some were storekeepers but the strike and the large number of shoemakers demonstrates that production for the local market had commenced. Thirteen years later Toronto contained 49 shoe shops, no doubt, still a mixture of retailers and custom shoemakers.<sup>13</sup> The 1851 census reports two shoe factories in the city. While production grew slowly in Toronto, Montreal was setting the pace in Canadian shoe production. Only in the early fifties with the advent of the sewing machine did the artisan structure of the shoe industry come under attack.<sup>14</sup> The structure of the wholesale trade in Montreal until that point had involved a central shop where the cutting was done. The cut leather was first given to women working at home for binding and then to shoemakers working in small shops for bottoming. The sewing machine and ever growing markets began to change all that in the early fifties.<sup>15</sup>

A Montreal firm, Brown and Childs introduced sewing machines first in that city and then in Toronto. Their Toronto branch, established in the late forties as a retail shop for Montreal goods, began to manufacture in the fifties for the western market. By 1856 two other companies had joined Brown and Childs in wholesale manufacturing in Toronto: Gilyat, Robinson and Hall and E.K. Paul and Company.<sup>16</sup> The new method of production involved the relocation of the female binders. The widespread use of the sewing machine in binding uppers necessitated the shift from home to factory for these women.

A rapid increase in shoe production occurred in the late fifties and early sixties. The major impetus came from the increased size of the Canadian market. Agricultural specialization and the improved transportation network allowed the new urban industries to triumph over the old village production.<sup>17</sup> The tariff also played an important role in the development of the shoe industry. In the 1850's, when the tariff stood at 12½%, New England goods apparently competed successfully, but the new 15% tariff combined with the dislocations of the Civil War to close off the Canadian market to American shoes. The tariff was subsequently raised to 17½% in 1874 and to 25% in 1879 to meet manufacturers self-interested demands.<sup>18</sup>

By 1860 Brown and Childs, which had become Childs and Hamilton in Toronto, employed 40 men and 15 girls in its four story establishment on Wellington Street East. These employees "were kept constantly employed in cutting, fitting and stitching, besides a number — generally over a hundred — who work in their own homes at what is termed bottoming — so that upwards of 150 hands are engaged." The company owned ten sewing machines and utilized all the other "latest appliances in labour-saving machinery." The manufactory occupied only the top two flats; the other two were given over to sales and storage.<sup>19</sup> The 1861 census reports seven Toronto shoe factories but directories identify only four competitors of Childs and Hamilton in the wholesale trade. The rapid growth of Toronto shoe manufacturing was frequently described in the Toronto Board of Trade reports. In 1860 Erastus Wiman wrote of the "decrease of the manufactures of small towns over the country" and speculated that these shops would slowly become little more than cobblers' shops for the repair of city manufactures. The next year he stated that "the large shoe shops in each village where from five to ten men were wont to be employed" were a thing of the past.<sup>20</sup> In 1863 he reached a new eloquence in describing the industry's transformation:

Eight years ago there was only one regular traveller from Montreal and one from Toronto who solicited orders from the country trade, and these seldom

left the line of the railroad. Now it is no uncommon thing to meet from fifteen to eighteen in a single season — all keenly alive to business, and pushing into all sections of the country, remote or otherwise.

He added that: “business formerly distributed over a thousand workshops in the country districts” had become “the eighteen or twenty establishments of the five cities of the provinces . . .”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the sixties the rapid growth of the Canadian market provided a further thrust toward industrialization. The perfection of the McKay machine enabled the manufacturers to bring the last remnant of outside work, bottoming, under the control of the factory. Montreal firms quickly embraced the new sole sewing device:

*Only a year or two ago, pegged work was the kind produced; but new and improved machinery recently introduced has most materially changed the character of the articles made, a large and increasing demand now exists for sewed goods, sole-sewing machinery enabling the manufacturers to supply cheap sewed boots and shoes of all kinds thus supplanting much of the fine pegged work which had formerly been in request.*<sup>22</sup>

In 1867 Montreal manufacturers had 250 sewing machines, 50 pegging machines, 30 closing machines, 15 sole-sewing machines, 20 sole cutters and machinery for eyeletting, punching, skiving, and rolling.<sup>23</sup>

Toronto manufacturers quickly implemented these latest changes in production. J.M. Trout was enthusiastic in his description of the wonders of these new devices that reduced all to system:

*Childs and Hamilton's establishment is a perfect beehive of activity, and the admirable order and arrangement of the whole is as perfect as long experience and the best business tact can make it.*<sup>24</sup>

New manufacturers emerged in Toronto in the mid sixties. One of the quickest growing was Sessions, Carpenter and Company which, like Childs, had started as a retailer but without Montreal connections. This firm reportedly doubled its production in 1865 and intended to redouble it in 1866. Employing 250 hands in 1867 it expanded to 400 in 1868 and then to 510 in 1870 when as Sessions, Turner and Cooper, the firm opened its new Front Street factory. The description of this factory demonstrated how complete the transition to machine production was by 1870. Built at a cost of \$30,000, the new three story building “utilized machinery to an extraordinary extent.” The basement was used for storage, the ground floor for offices and shipping, and the first floor for cutting and finishing. This floor also housed the channeling machine which shaved and cut the sole, removed strips, and left the leather ready for the sewing machine. The 78 sewing machines were located on the second floor; they were operated by 119 women

who had their own separate entrance and were completely segregated from the male employees on the other floors of the factory. The men's work was done on the third floor. This involved all the heavier sewing and peg work and included the larger machines used in bottoming.<sup>25</sup>

The 1871 census of industry demonstrates the rapidity and totality of the transformation. Of 49 boot and shoe firms in Toronto, the ten largest employed ninety per cent of the total work force and accounted for an identical proportion of the total annual product. The four largest, Sessions, Turner and Cooper (510), Childs and Hamilton (192), Damer, King and Company (191), and Paterson, Murphy and Braid (154) accounted for 66% of the workers and 64% of the production. (See Tables 1 and 2)<sup>26</sup> Boots and shoes had become Toronto's largest and most industrialized industry. The artisan shop of 1850 was clearly a thing of the past.

Toronto shoe production peaked in the early seventies. After 1871 the census returns illustrate the decline of the Toronto industry. Both the 1881 and 1891 censuses depicted a fall in both numbers employed and in the annual value produced. (See Table 3) The growth of the Toronto industry had always been based on the production of finer quality goods than Montreal and Quebec produced. With the rapid improvements in mechanization that revolutionized the shoe trade this became as outmoded as the skill of the shoemakers themselves. Much was also said at the time about Quebec's cheaper labour supply and less organized workers but this remains a question to be studied. Whatever the cause the Toronto fine goods trade fell before Quebec competition in the eighties and nineties.

How did the shoemakers respond to the arrival of the factory system in their lives? The effects of these changes were all-encompassing for the artisan. Formerly he had worked in a small shop; now he found himself in a factory with hundreds of other workers. Before he alone had made the entire shoe by hand; now he worked only on parts of it with the aid of machines. In the old shops he had control over his time, his discussions, his visitors, and his work; now he was subject to factory discipline like any other worker. The separation of the journeyman and his master at one time relatively undefined had been growing for some years, but under the shop system a certain familiarity remained. The factory created massive barriers of social distance between owner and worker. Most important, industrialization stripped the shoemaker of his most valuable possession — pride in his craft, and in his product. That the memory of both old and new was a tangible part of each shoemaker's life can be seen in a press description of one Montreal factory as late as 1885:

Indeed, there were several employees of both sexes, some of whom came to the firm as children, whose experience compasses nearly all the improvements in boot and shoe machinery. . . . One old man, named Dennis Barron, who had been in their employ 43 years, remembered helping to put up the first sewing machine used on boots and shoes . . .<sup>27</sup>

Shoemakers did not wait long to register their opinions of industrialization. As early as the 1850's A.J. Bray reported that in Montreal the changes initiated by Brown and Childs were "violently opposed by the shoemakers, but progress triumphed over prejudice."<sup>28</sup> In England the shoemakers of Northampton fought a series of strikes in the years 1857-59 in an attempt to resist the introduction of the sewing maching.<sup>29</sup> In Lynn, Massachusetts artisan resistance culminated in the Great Strike of 1860.<sup>30</sup> In Quebec City in the sixties "nos bons cordonniers . . . se liguèrent contre les petits americaines, ainsi qu'ils appelaient Messieurs Coté et Bresse et voulurent les chasser de la place . . ."<sup>31</sup> These phenomena were all local in nature.

The introduction of the McKay machine in the mid-sixties changed the nature of unionism in the shoe industry. The local unions quickly perceived that the new factory system demanded broader forms of organization than they had previously evolved. Ontario shoemakers met in Toronto in 1867 to form the Boot and Shoe Makers Union of the Province of Ontario only five months after the founding of the Knights of St. Crispin in Milwaukee and before that body had expanded beyond Wisconsin. Representatives were present from eight Ontario towns and in three days of meetings they created a provincial structure for unionism in their trade. This organization probably provided the basis for the expansion of the Knights of St. Crispin into Ontario in 1869 and 1870.<sup>32</sup>

Newell Daniels, who had worked in the shoe industry of his native Massachusetts, founded the Knights of St. Crispin in Milwaukee in March of 1867. In the fall of 1867 the order began to grow slowly but in 1868 and 1869 it expanded rapidly. By April, 1870 the order included 327 locals and by April, 1872 around 400 lodges had been organized. The Knights entered Canada in 1868 organizing a lodge in Montreal (Lodge 122) and followed this in 1869 with lodges in Quebec, St. John (Lodge 171), Toronto (Lodge 159), Guelph (Lodge 202), Hamilton (Lodge 212), and Windsor. The next year two more Toronto lodges (315, 356) were organized as well as lodges in Halifax, Chatham (326), Georgetown, London (242), St. Catharines (340), Stratford (233), and Barrie (353). In 1871 lodges were added in Galt (371) and Orillia (372).<sup>33</sup>

An analysis of the Crispin experience in Toronto demonstrates the inadequacies of much of the previous literature on the subject. To view the order as either a pre-industrial anachronism or as a harbinger of industrial unionism has not proven particularly useful.<sup>34</sup> The order took consciously from the old but always with the new situation in mind. It merged the old traditions of the wisdom and independence of the shoemaker with the new realities of factory production. The Crispins in Toronto were always far more than an economic institution. They organized excursions, balls, dinners, and even a quadrille club.<sup>35</sup> These varied social functions probably played important roles in maintaining the old craft solidarity in the early years of the factory. The Order also provided a funeral benefit but perhaps more important than even the financial aid thus supplied was the solemnity and dignity the attendance of one's brother Crispins lent to such an event.<sup>36</sup> The Order had a special funeral rite and even the death of a shoemaker became in this way an action of ritual and actual solidarity.<sup>37</sup> One might add that these services also proved to others the strength of the Crispin order since they involved demonstrations of large numbers of Knights.<sup>38</sup>

Ritual ran throughout the workings of the order. Oaths, secret work, and elaborate ceremony all can be analyzed to show the adaptation of old artisan traditions to the unprecedented situation shoemakers faced. For example, the Knights of St. Crispin initiation ode used the legend of St. Crispin in similar ways to the traditional *Histories of the Gentle Craft* which had been given to each new shoemaker at the end of his apprenticeship in England:

St. Crispin is the name we take;  
 May we now be inclined  
 His virtues all to imitate,  
 In him a pattern find.<sup>39</sup>

The names and roles of the Order's officers share much in the traditions of Masonry and in discussions about changes in the constitution in 1872 this debt was made explicit by the International Grand Secretary S.G. Cummings:

In all other orders, such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, Good Templars, and others, digests are used, and many a trouble has been amiably settled that threatened to become serious. Why should we not have one? An Order like ours, composed of such diverse elements, liable at any moment to come into collision with each other, makes a digest an imperative necessity.<sup>40</sup>

Cummings' second point tells us much of the uses of ritual as a device for creating solidarity.



Other parts of the Knights of St. Crispin ritual illustrated awareness of the new reality facing shoemakers:

You well know our trade has become unreliable and fluctuating, that our wages are reduced on the slightest pretexts and that as no season of the year do we receive fair compensation for our toil; therefore we have banded ourselves together (sic) for the purpose of securing identity of interest, and unity of action among those of us employed on the various parts of boots and shoes.<sup>41</sup>

But the merging of the old and new was best described in Sir Knight's charge which immediately preceded the initiate's solemn oath of obligation:

Brother . . . you have wisely resolved to join this order of ours, and thus aid us in the work of rescuing our labor from its present depressed condition, and secure, through organization that degree of independence that justly belongs to us . . .<sup>42</sup>

The great emphasis on ritual in the Knights of St. Crispin and later in the Knights of Labor has not received sufficient attention from historians. The study of similar patterns in *England* by Eric Hobsbawm and Edward Thompson has provided copious evidence of the importance of such traditions.<sup>43</sup> Hobsbawm's discussion of ritual in *Primitive Rebels* however raises many questions about the longevity of ritual in the North American labour scene. Employing a perhaps overly schematic distinction between "form" and "content" Hobsbawm writes of the triumph of the latter by the 1830's and 1840's. The tenacity of complex ritual in North American labour and its utility in new struggles has perhaps been underrated by historians who are made uncomfortable by the presence of pre-industrial cultural traits among the emerging proletarians.

At the heart of the entire Crispin effort was the striving to regain the control that they had previously exercised over their lives. Their losses were not limited to the work place for they also involved the pride and self-respect they had enjoyed in their communities. When Newell Daniels visited Toronto in April of 1870 he struck on this theme again and again and ended his speech with a poem that reiterated the traditional understanding of the labour theory of value:

Whom shall we honour as heroes?  
 To whom our praises sing?  
 The pampered child of fortune?  
 The titled lord or king?  
 They live by others labour,  
 Take all and nothing give.  
 The noblest types of mankind  
 Are they that work to live

Who spans the earth with iron?  
Who rears the palace dome?  
Who creates for the rich man  
The comforts of his home?  
It is the patient toiler  
All honour to him then  
The true wealth of a nation  
Is in her workingmen!<sup>44</sup>

In Toronto the Crispins were successful in organizing the entire male factory labour force. When they organized they accepted as members all workers presently employed in the factory and only attempted to police hiring policies later. The timing of their organizing success is difficult to pinpoint but from the 60 members in one lodge with which they began in January of 1869 they reached an estimated peak of around 600 in 3 or 4 lodges in December of 1870.<sup>45</sup> Not satisfied with organizing only the men they also made serious efforts to help create a Daughters of St. Crispin lodge in Toronto but were stymied by the manufacturers' intransigence on that issue.<sup>46</sup> Although unsuccessful in Toronto the order had great success organizing women in the United States and the Daughters of St. Crispin took their place beside Susan B. Anthony's female printers at National Labor Union meetings.<sup>47</sup>

A search of the Toronto directories for the personal histories of the approximately 80 members of the Knights of St. Crispin identified by name in the daily and labour press and in minutes of the Toronto Trades Assembly and the Canadian Labour Union reveals much about the composition of the Order.<sup>48</sup> The order consisted solely of working shoemakers. There were no bosses or even independent shoemakers or cobblers ever mentioned as belonging to the order. The subsequent careers of these men shows how narrow were their options. The overwhelming majority of them remained shoemakers throughout. A few became proprietors of small grocery stores or saloons, a traditional sanctuary for working class leaders in the nineteenth century. One even became a labourer during the depression of the seventies but he returned to shoemaking after a few years. The only other noticeable change was that another 4 or 5 became the proprietors of small cobbler shops where they repaired factory shoes and perhaps did some custom work on the side. None became leaders in the industry. However at the same time it should be noted that many of the early industrialists in this field were not practical shoemakers but rather were entrepreneurs with available capital. The overriding impression one has of this group of Crispins is that the vast majority remained shoemakers. These workers provided considerable stability and experience

to the trade union movement of the eighties. Perhaps the outstanding example among Toronto shoemakers was Michael Derham, whose career spanned the Ontario wide body of 1867, the Knights of Saint Crispin, the Knights of Labor 2211 and finally the Boot and Shoe Workers International Union. Two other Crispins of the seventies, James Draisey and G. Duncan also served in the Knights of Labor Local Assembly 6250.

The Toronto manufacturers' counterattack against the Crispins started in the late fall of 1870. When the successful contract of 1869 came up for renewal the Crispins sought price increases on certain specific types of work.<sup>49</sup> All the manufacturers agreed to pay the increase and peace seemed assured for another year until Hamilton refused to sign the contract, insisting that they accept his word instead. The Knights of St. Crispin refused and finally forced him to sign only by means of a short turnout at his factory. The Knights struck against him again in late December or early January after he broke the agreement by reducing the wages of some of the men. This time however solidarity broke down and 27 Crispins tendered their resignations and indicated they would return to work. Their resignations were refused and when they returned and broke their oaths by revealing lodge proceedings they were expelled from the order and the strike continued. Thus in January of 1871 Childs and Hamilton and Henry Cobley and Company published a circular attacking Crispin tyranny and closing their shops to members of the Order. They accused the Crispins of limiting their lines of manufacture, of coercing other workers into the union, and in general of "arrogant and overbearing conduct." The Crispins correctly saw the assault as an attempt to destroy the union:

Their object is of course very apparent. If they could break up the organization of the men they would be enabled to dictate terms, cut down wages to the lowest niche, make whatever objectionable rules they please, and harass their employees perpetually.<sup>50</sup>

The Knights of St. Crispin vowed to fight the companies and commended the other Toronto manufacturers who continued to run union shops.

This strike continued into the spring with the companies enjoying some success in recruiting scabs but they were not sufficient to return production to its normal level. The employers actively searched for replacements from as far away as England where Canadian emigration agents sought 400 shoemakers for Toronto, Hamilton and London, all centres of active Crispin organization. There was even some mention of following the example of one New England manufacturer and importing Chinese labour. Labour's emerging anti-emigration policy

must be studied in the context of such blatant anti-working class efforts.

The situation in Toronto took an ominous turn for the worse when the Order called a strike at a second large factory. In early April the shoemakers at Damer and King turned out. The immediate issue was the firm's refusal to fire a number of young boys who had been hired without seeking the permission of the Knights of St. Crispin. There were, however, a whole series of other issues which had been exercising the shoemakers for some time. One of these had been the company's refusal to recognize a union of the female operatives that the Knights had helped to organize. Another complaint concerned the inferior nature of the shoes being produced which not only upset the lasters' pride but also cost them money since the uppers were so defective they took longer to work. But perhaps the final blow was management's "heaping indignities upon us, such as causing us to enter and retire from the shop by a back lane so full of dirt and slush that we could not help but wet our feet."<sup>51</sup> The shoemaker's pride was not something to be tampered with.

The Crispins held a demonstration April 4 when 50 of the strikers left to seek jobs in Chicago and other points west. About 400 to 500 shoemakers marched through Toronto streets, headed by the band of the Tenth Royals, a local militia company, and carrying the flags of the United States and Great Britain. On their arrival at the Great Western Depot they were addressed by H.L. Beebe, a Crispin leader, who assured them they had the support of all Toronto workers in their resistance to the bosses' unjust oppression. Tension, already high around these two strikes involving the city's largest union, was increased when *The Leader* launched an hysterical attack on the order as a seditious and Yankee controlled threat to all things Canadian. The evidence produced was that the Stars and Stripes had been carried in the procession to the station. *The Leader* even argued that "the Mayor would have acted properly had he prevented the flag of a foreign nation being flaunted in the faces of our citizens on the public thoroughfares on such an occasion."<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly the first report of violence came only one day after *The Leader's* nonsense. Shoemakers reportedly assaulted a man at work in a Yonge Street workshop. Two men were arrested but the details were not revealed. Late on Thursday night or in the early hours of Friday morning, April 6 and 7, the factory of Childs and Hamilton was the scene of what the *Globe* termed "a dastardly outrage." A person or persons, entered the factory through a door on a back lane and proceeded to selectively destroy machines, work in progress, shoemakers' kits, and finally, the foreman's outwork records.

The damaged machines included a McKay machine, battered with a sledge hammer, a channelling machine and a rounding machine. Only the areas of the factories where the scabs worked were harmed; the leather storage areas and the female operatives' workroom were untouched.

Immediately the manufacturers and the press blamed the Knights of St. Crispin. Hamilton told the press of his certainty that the Crispins were responsible. Editorially *The Telegraph* argued that "under the circumstances the Knights of St. Crispin must be held responsible."<sup>53</sup> *The Globe* more cautiously suggested that "the appearances point strongly to members of the Society as the perpetrators of this outrage."<sup>54</sup> Not surprisingly the order "repudiated any connection with it whatever" and added that the act was "not tolerated by the officers nor by the rules of the society."<sup>55</sup> Initially they offered a fifty dollar reward but withdrew it when they detected discrepancies in Hamilton's story. The owner claimed not to have discovered the outrage until late morning but the Order claimed to have a witness who swore they had seen him there earlier. The Order then argued that the act had been committed to damage the society's reputation and went as far as to suggest that Hamilton should seek the perpetrator among his independent men.

Although police investigated the case it was never solved. The allegations of the manufacturer against the Society remained unproven. Whether or not the Knights as a body were responsible will never be known, but the evidence certainly suggests that the act was done either by members or sympathizers of the order. The attack discriminated in its targets as did most traditional examples of "collective bargaining by riot."<sup>56</sup> This selectivity indicated the premises of the attack. Damage to the machines would further limit production and the destruction of shop records and workmen's kits stood as stark warnings to strikebreakers to reconsider the magnitude of their decision. Nevertheless in this case it was an act performed in weakness, not in strength and represented the failure of the Order to impose its will through the new methods and techniques of collective bargaining. This recourse to pre-industrial tactics of enforcing workers' power was destined to fail against a manufacturer as large as Childs and Hamilton who had access to far more support than did the small textile manufacturers assaulted by Ned Ludd and his followers. Again we should be cautious for perhaps too much can be made of the traditional in this assault. Workers have continued to respond to the power of industry (reinforced when necessary by armed state power) with violence throughout the twentieth century. Also these were unusual acts in Crispin history.

John Hall found no such examples of the machine breaking in Massachusetts.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, many of the assumptions of Crispin organization that we have already discussed lent themselves well to these actions. Rituals, oaths and secrecy were the constant companions of earlier uses of property damage in working class history. The very inability of the Toronto police to break the case was probably indicative of the shoemakers' collective refusal to cooperate with the investigation. One suspects that only solidarity could have protected the proponents of direct action for the community of shoemakers was small enough that absolute secrecy within the craft seems unlikely if not impossible.

There were other incidents in this strike. Only one week after the machine breaking a striking shoemaker who either indicated his intent to scab or who was too vociferous in his criticisms of the strike discovered that his kit had been destroyed by his fellow workmen who jeered his invective over the damage. Then in mid-May the picket captain at Damer and King's factory was arrested and convicted of using threatening and abusive language to strike-breakers. A twenty dollar fine or two months imprisonment was assessed for his freedom with the word "scab." Although the two strikes seem to have continued throughout the summer, they clearly failed. In the fall the newly organized Toronto Trades Assembly took up the shoemakers' cause and attempted to arbitrate between the Order and the three non-union factories. Although the minutes record some initial success the outcome was never recorded.<sup>58</sup>

Crispin activity remained quite visible in Toronto and throughout Ontario despite the setbacks of 1871.<sup>59</sup> The Ontario Grand Lodge broke away from the International Grand Lodge in 1873 perhaps reverting easily to its earlier organizational form. Active organizing went on and new lodges were chartered under a new numbering system which followed the old Crispin pattern, only making Lodge 159, Toronto number 1. The new lodges organized in 1873 and 1874 were: Peterborough (Lodge 12), Brantford (Lodge 13), Belleville (Lodge 14), Thorold (Lodge 15), Ingersoll (Lodge 16), and Preston (Lodge 17). In 1873 strikes were fought in Orillia and Guelph. The province-wide nature of the organization was reinforced by events such as the St. Catharines excursion picnic of 1873. In late August approximately 300 Crispins and friends sailed from Toronto to St. Catharines where they joined 200 of their Hamilton brothers and the St. Catharines Crispins. After marching with bands and banners through the main streets of the city they arrived at Montebello Gardens for games, speeches and refreshments.

The Canadian Grand Lodge met for the last time in 1876 in Hamilton where it was noted that

although the depressed conditions of trade had thrown many of the lodges back in point of numbers, the order on the whole was in a flourishing condition.<sup>60</sup>

However, this last convention also again sought international affiliation with the revived Knights of St. Crispin. For this purpose they named a delegate to the next meeting of the International Grand Lodge of the Crispins who was "to strike a basis of union." Probably nothing came of this initiative. The Lodge's disappearance at the provincial level was undoubtedly due to the dislocations of the depression. The Boot and Shoe industry was particularly heavily hit:

During 1875, the manufacturing of boots and shoes received a severe check by frequent failure and because of a grossly overdone state of business. Again in subsequent years, the industry was plunged into a fearful condition of doubt and uncertainty . . . It was not until the spring of 1880 that it could be said to have before it a future which promised sound conditions.<sup>61</sup>

After the demise of the Provincial Grand Lodge, locals in several shoe towns retained their organization. This was certainly true in Toronto where the Knights of St. Crispin remained on the scene until 1886 when they entered the Knights of Labor as Crispin Assembly 6250.<sup>62</sup> The tenacity of the Crispins in Toronto was not unique. A Crispin-led lasters' strike occurred in Montreal in 1882<sup>63</sup> and Crispins marched in a St. John labour parade in 1883.<sup>64</sup> Just as the Knights of Labor built off a Crispin experience in the United States, they also did so in Canada.<sup>65</sup> In Toronto and Hamilton shoemakers were among the first Knights of Labor local assemblies organized. The Knights of Labor provided the focus for Canadian shoemakers until National Trade Assembly 216 left the order in 1889 and founded the Boot and Shoe Workers' International Union which organized its first Toronto local in 1890.<sup>66</sup>

The Toronto Crispins had a continuous existence until they joined the Knights of Labor but after 1877 they ceased to be the only organization of shoemakers in Toronto. In that year a group of factory operatives, some of whom had previously belonged to the Crispins, organized the Wholesale Boot and Shoemakers' Union.<sup>67</sup> The Knights of St. Crispin from this point on only contained custom shoemakers. This group of skilled shoemakers fought strikes in 1881, 1885 and 1887. In 1881 and 1887 they won pay increases and 1885 they successfully resisted Dack and Sons' attempt to introduce team production. The proposed teams would have consisted of five shoemakers, all working

by hand, dividing the functions of custom shoemaking instead of one worker making the entire shoe.<sup>68</sup>

The factory operatives who joined the Knights of Labor in 1883 as Local Assembly 2212 were successful in negotiating contracts without recourse to strikes in 1879, 1881, 1882 and 1883.<sup>69</sup> The major strike of the eighties occurred in 1882 when the female operatives of the five major factories struck for union recognition, a uniform bill of wages and an advance. This was the first major strike of women workers in Toronto.<sup>70</sup> Toronto unionists provided plenty of support in this strike which lasted three weeks. The Wholesale Boot and Shoemakers' Union lent advice, financial aid and finally went out on a sympathy strike with their sister shoe workers. The Knights of St. Crispin also supplied financial aid and often Crispin leaders appeared at strike meetings to proffer support and solidarity. These strike meetings took place every afternoon and high spirits and militancy were displayed throughout. Many of the operatives were not happy with the final settlement and as many as a third voted to remain out on strike. The settlement won them a uniform bill in the future but no guarantee of an advance although this remained a cloudy issue and many claimed there had been such a promise. The women who had sung the following song in April struck again in December of 1882 and November of 1883;

We won't sew on a button,  
Nor make a buttonhole;  
We won't stitch up a shoetop,  
All ready for the sole,  
Until the price is raised a peg,  
On all the shop's pay-roll.<sup>71</sup>

The uniform bill the bosses had promised was delivered in February of 1884, almost two years after the strike. Although there was much discontent with the new bill no collective action was taken against its provisions.

The relative quiet in the boot and shoe industry in Toronto after 1882 was undoubtedly related to its declining economic status. Two of the largest Toronto factories failed in the mid-eighties: Damer in 1883 and Charlesworth in 1886.<sup>72</sup> The new Boot and Shoe Workers International Union fought and won its first strike in February 1890 against J.D. King and Company. Nevertheless leverage against management was disappearing as the industry declined in Toronto.<sup>73</sup>

The history of the shoemakers response to industrialization consists of much more than strikes and trade union organization. Indeed it is a history of the cultural adaptation of old forms to counter



the new pressures of factory production. Frank Foster celebrated the old role of the shoemaker in early labour organization and looked forward to the new:

The 'blazoned banner' of St. Crispin has ever been flung out at the head of the labor column. The organization may come and the organization may go; but we may have faith that the love of right and liberty underlying all social reforms will in the future, as in the past, give inspiration to the workmen in the gentle craft of leather. Crispin, Unionist, Knight of Labor, have all had for their ideal a better livelihood and larger possibilities for their members, and in this broadening sweep and loftier tread of labor organization lies in the high hope of the days to come and children yet unborn.<sup>74</sup>

The transitional role of the Crispin and Knights of Labor experience can also be seen in John Hall's encounter with an old Massachusetts shoemaker:

I even found an aged laster in Lynn who claimed to have been a Crispin, though it seems clear he was confusing the Crispins with the Knights of Labor. The way he spoke of the Crispins made it unmistakable that to have been a Crispin was a proud and glorious thing. If the craftsman had to surrender his pride in his individual skills, he was no less a man of spirit. His pride henceforth would be in his loyalty to his fellow workmen and to the standards of mutual help necessary to deal with socialized and mechanized production.<sup>75</sup>

Never anachronistic in their response to industrialism, the shoemakers only demanded their share in the manifold gains that were constantly heralded by latter day Whigs as companions of the new order. That they did not share in the gains or at least shared in them only to an insignificant degree is a story for historians of the next period of the shoemakers' history. That the new Boot and Shoe Workers International Union was a strong socialist union in the United States in the first decades of its life should thus come as no surprise to those who have traced the history of the sons and daughters of St. Crispin.

TABLE 1  
 Boot and Shoe Industry in Toronto, Number Employed, 1871

Size of work force	No. of establishments	Total No. of employees	% of employees
100+	4	1047	66
50-99	4	290	19
30-49	2	79	5
10-14	5	56	4
5-9	7	41	3
2-4	14	39	3
1	13	13	1
Totals	49	1565	101

Source: Canada, Census of 1871, Industrial Mss., Toronto, (R631A)

TABLE 2  
 Largest Toronto Shoe Manufacturers, 1871

Name of firm	No. Employees					Production		cumulative %
	Adult		Children		total	Value of		
	M	F	M	F				
Sessions, Turner	330	90	50	40	510	\$300,000	64	
Childs & Hamilton	134	42	13	3	192	160,000		
Damer, King	105	60	1	25	191	250,000		
Paterson, Murphy, & Braid	100	50	4	—	154	160,000		
Holmes	50	24	2	7	83	100,000	85	
Barclay, Evans	66	8	2	4	80	75,000		
Sanderson & Williams	50	15	3	2	70	45,000		
Dack, Forsythe & Leslie	37	20	—	—	57	60,000		
Cobley	13	30	3	3	49	35,000	90	
McEntee	25	4	1	—	30	18,000		
Total	910	343	79	84	1416			

Source: Canada, Census of 1871, Industrial Mss., Toronto, (R631A)

TABLE 3  
Shoe Industry in Toronto, 1871-1901

	No. of establishments	No. of employees	Total Wages	Total value of Production
1871	47	1564	\$378,797	\$1,334,215
1881	76	1232	345,343	1,290,392
1891	149	742	316,812	1,156,894
1901*	8	637	287,354	899,329

\*1901 Census includes only establishments employing more than five workers.

Source: Canada, *Census, 1871-1901*.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, (New York, 1962), p. 259.
- <sup>2</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing*, (London, 1969), pp. 18, 63-64.
- <sup>3</sup> Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes*, (New York, 1972).
- <sup>4</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London, 1963), p. 549.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Faler, "Workingmen, Mechanics and Social Change: Lynn, Mass. 1800-60" unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1971, ch. 3 and conclusion.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Lindsey, *The Life and Times of Wm. Lyon Mackenzie*, (Toronto, 1862), Appendix I.
- <sup>7</sup> David N. Johnson, *Sketches of Old Lynn*, (Lynn, 1880), pp. 4-8.
- <sup>8</sup> Fred Gannon, *The Ways of a Worker a Century Ago*, (Salem, 1918), p. 2 and Fred Gannon, *A Short History of American Shoemaking*, (Salem, 1912), pp. 18-19. See also Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America," *American Historical Review*, 78 (June, 1973) pp. 531-588.
- <sup>9</sup> George McNeill (ed.), *The Labor Movement*, (Boston, 1887), p. 192.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Romance of the Shoe*, (London, 1922), pp. 51-56.
- <sup>11</sup> Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada*, (Montreal, 1968), pp. 6, 21 and James Richard Rice, "A History of Organized Labour in St. John, New Brunswick", unpublished MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968, ch. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> William Catermole, *Emigration*, London, 1831, p. 92 and Edith Firth, *The Town of York, 1815-1834*, (Toronto, 1966), p. xxxiin.
- <sup>13</sup> William H. Smith, *Canadian Gazeteer*, (Toronto, 1846), p. 195.
- <sup>14</sup> For a good general description of changes in the methods of shoe production see Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry*, (New York, 1919), ch. 8 and for Canada see Canadian Reconstruction Association, *The Boot and Shoe Industry in Canada*, (Toronto, 1920).
- <sup>15</sup> A.J. Bray, *Canada Under the National Policy*, (Montreal, 1883), pp. 123-125.
- <sup>16</sup> *Toronto Directory for 1856-57*, (Toronto, 1857).

<sup>17</sup> Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire Economique du Québec*, (Montreal, 1971), especially Part 4, ch. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Canada Parliament, *House of Commons Journals*, 1874, Appendix 3, pp. 63-6 and 1876, Appendix 3, pp. 90-115.

<sup>19</sup> Toronto Board of Trade, *Annual Report for 1860*, (Toronto, 1861), p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28 and *Report for 1861*, (Toronto, 1862).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, *Report for 1863*, (Toronto, 1864), p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> William J. Patterson, *Statements Relating to Trade, Navigation, and Mining for 1867*, (Montreal, 1868), p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Toronto Board of Trade, *Annual Report for 1865*, (Toronto, 1866), pp. 39-40.

<sup>25</sup> *Globe*, Nov. 18, 1870.

<sup>26</sup> Canada, *Census of 1871*, Schedule 6, Industrial Census, Toronto Manuscripts, Public Archives of Canada (R631A).

<sup>27</sup> *Globe*, Nov. 18, 1885.

<sup>28</sup> Bray, *Canada Under the National Policy*, pp. 123-125.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Romance of the Shoe*, pp. 224-226 and Alan Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874-1957*, (Oxford, 1958), pp. 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Faler, *Workingsmen, Mechanics and Social Change*, Ch. 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Annuaire du Commerce et de l'Industrie de Québec pour 1873*, (Quebec, 1873), pp. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Globe*, Sept. 20, 1869; *Leader*, Sept. 20, 1869; *Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 20, 1869.

<sup>33</sup> Data generated from Don Lescohier, "The Knights of St. Crispin, 1867-1874" in *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, Economic and Political Science Series*, VII, (1910) pp. 1-102, from a perusal of the Toronto press from 1867-1885, and from the *Proceedings of the International Grand Lodge of the Order of the Knights of St. Crispin*, 1869, 1870 and 1872.

<sup>34</sup> The secondary literature on the KOSC was until recently woefully repetitive. John Commons used the experience of American shoemakers to develop his theses about the importance of market relations in the history of labour. His seminal article "American Shoemakers, 1648-1895" in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1909, was expanded on in Lescohier's Wisconsin thesis in 1910. These two works became the standard interpretation and subsequent volumes by Blanche Hazard, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Mass.*, (Cambridge, 1921) and Augusta Galster, *The Labor Movement in the Shoe Industry*, (New York, 1924) as well as several other works only repeated the findings of the Commons School. The work shows many of the flaws of the Commons' approach: an over-emphasis on national developments, a dependence on official publications, a narrow institutional framework, and a theoretical emphasis on the centrality of market relations which deemphasizes the conflict of capital and labour. The KOSC in this view becomes an organization almost totally preoccupied with controlling the operation of machinery and closing off the factory to non-shoemakers. Conflicts thus become shoemaker versus green hand and ultimately shoemaker versus market. Struggles between workers and employers almost disappear. Only in the last twenty years has this interpretation come under attack. The first historian to question these views was John Hall who in his thesis "The Gentle Craft: A Narrative of Yankee Shoemakers", unpublished PhD. thesis, Columbia, 1953, discovered that in Massachusetts the order had been far more interested in wages and hours than in green hands. Two recent theses by Paul Faler (op. cit.) and Allan Dawley "The Artisan Response to the Factory System: Lynn Mass.", unpublished PhD. thesis, Harvard, 1971, both demonstrate the

weaknesses of the old view. Faler in a sensitive community study of Lynn shoemakers up to 1860 shows the development of a working class with a distinct culture who by 1860 had moved into direct conflict with their employers. Dawley traces the Lynn story into the seventies and through a study of the membership rolls of the KOSC in Lynn finally puts to rest notions of the Crispins as a narrow labour elite of custom shoemakers fighting off other workers. Lynn Crispins represented a complete cross-section of the factory labour force and found themselves in direct conflict with their employers on a wide range of issues. Alan Fox's *History of the National Union* suggests the relative uniqueness of the Crispin success in creating a union which combined the old skilled artisans with the new factory work force. In England the machine shoeworkers split off from the old Cordwainers Society in 1873. The creation of this new union was necessitated by the inability of the old union to adjust successfully to the changes wrought by industrialization.

<sup>35</sup> *Globe*, Nov. 28, 1868; Nov. 27, 1869; Aug. 9, 1870; Dec. 23, 1870; Feb. 11, 1871; Sept. 3, 1871; Sept. 1, 1873; *Irish Canadian*, Dec. 2, 1868; Dec. 1, 1869; *Ontario Workman*, May 9, 1872; April 24, 1873; Aug. 28, 1873.

<sup>36</sup> For the importance of funerals see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, (London, 1971), p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> *Ritual of the Order of the Knights of St. Crispin*, (Milwaukee, 1870), pp. 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> For Toronto Crispin funerals see *Globe*, Dec. 15, 1873; July 5, 1881.

<sup>39</sup> *Ritual*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Lescohier, *KOSC*, pp. 93-94. On use of Masonic rites in general see Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, (London, 1959), ch. 9 and Noel P. Gist, "Secret Societies", *University of Missouri Studies*, XV, (October, 1940).

<sup>41</sup> *Ritual*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. For a broader discussion of working class culture see Herbert Gutman and Gregory Kealey *Many Past: Essays in US Social History*, 2 vols, (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), especially the introduction.

<sup>43</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, ch. 9 and Thompson, *Making*, especially ch. 14-15. For a discussion of these themes in Canadian history see R. Hann, L. Kealey, G. Kealey, P. Warrian, *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History, 1860-1930*, (Kitchener, 1973).

<sup>44</sup> *Globe*, April 13, 1870; *Daily Telegraph*, April 13, 1870.

<sup>45</sup> *Leader*, April 10, 1871. For evidence of a fourth lodge in Toronto (366) see *Globe*, Jan. 26, 1872 and *Ontario Workman*, Feb. 20, 1873.

<sup>46</sup> *Leader*, April 10, 1871.

<sup>47</sup> David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, (New York, 1967), pp. 395-399, 457-461.

<sup>48</sup> After compiling lists of Knights of St. Crispin mentioned in the Toronto press and in the minutes of the TTA and the CLU I checked their personal biographies by following them through the Toronto Directories of the seventies and eighties.

<sup>49</sup> For detailed summaries of events see *Leader*, April 10, 1871; *Globe*, Jan. 25, 1871; Jan. 26, 1871; April 10, 1871; *Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 24, 1871. The following narrative is reconstructed from a reading of the Toronto press day by day.

<sup>50</sup> *Globe*, Jan. 26, 1871.

<sup>51</sup> *Leader*, April 10, 1871.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, April 4, 1871.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, April 8, 1871.

<sup>54</sup> *Globe*, April 10, 1871.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "The Machine Breakers," in *Labouring Men*, (London, 1964), p. 7. On this subject see also Thompson, *Making*, ch. 14, Malcolm Thomis, *The Luddites*, New York, 1972 and Lionel Munby (ed), *The Luddites and Other Essays*, (London, 1971), pp. 33-56.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, *The Gentle Craft*, ch. 9-10.

<sup>58</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes*, June 2, 1871; Oct. 20, 1871; Nov. 3, 1871; Nov. 22, 1871.

<sup>59</sup> *Ontario Workman*, Feb. 20, 1873; March 27, 1873; June 12, 1873; Aug. 28, 1873; Nov. 27, 1873; Dec. 11, 1873; Feb. 19, 1874; March 5, 1874; *Mail*, July 26, 1873; July 21, 1875; July 22, 1875; *Leader*, Sept. 1, 1873; Feb. 12, 1874; July 22, 1875; *Globe*, Feb. 14, 1874; July 22, 1875; July 24, 1875.

<sup>60</sup> *Globe*, July 22, 1876.

<sup>61</sup> William Wycliffe Johnson, *Sketches of the Late Depression*, (Montreal, 1882), pp. 160-162.

<sup>62</sup> *Globe*, April 7, 1886.

<sup>63</sup> Jean Hamelin et al, *Répertoire des Grèves dans la Province de Québec au XIXe siècle*, (Montreal, 1970), p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Rice, *Organized Labour in St. John*, ch. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Norman Ware, *The Labor Movement in the US, 1860-1925*, (New York, 1929), pp. 200-209 and Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 199, 462-470.

<sup>66</sup> Gerald Grob, *Workers and Utopia*, (Chicago, 1961), pp. 122-124. For a local version see James Morris, "The Cincinnati Shoemakers' Lockout of 1888: A Case Study in the Demise of the Knights of Labor", *Labor History*, 13 (Fall, 1972) pp. 505-519.

<sup>67</sup> *Globe*, Feb. 15, 1877; Oct. 21, 1879.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, March 11, 1885; *Telegram*, March 11, 1885.

<sup>69</sup> *Globe*, Oct. 22, 1879; Oct. 23, 1879; Oct. 29, 1879; April 28, 1881; April 30, 1881; May 18, 1881; May 24, 1881; May 18, 1882; June 30, 1882; May 17, 1883; Nov. 17, 1883; *Mail*, Oct. 14, 1879; Oct. 21, 1879; Oct. 22, 1879; *Telegram*, April 29, 1881; May 23, 1881.

<sup>70</sup> See *Globe*, *Mail*, *Telegram*, and *News* for April and early May, 1882 for copious detail. Also see *Trades Union Advocate*, May, 1882.

<sup>71</sup> *Trades Union Advocate*, May 4, 1882.

<sup>72</sup> *Globe*, Jan. 13, 1883; *Labor Reformer*, Nov. 13, 1886; Dec. 25, 1886. See also Hector Charlesworth, *Candid Chronicles*, (Toronto, 1925), pp. 68-70, on his father's failure.

<sup>73</sup> *Globe*, Feb. 15, Feb. 19, Feb. 21, 1890. For the Boot and Shoe Workers International Union, especially its socialist politics see: Henry F. Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912*, (Amherst, 1966) and John Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, (New York, 1970), especially chapter 3.

<sup>74</sup> McNeill, *Labor Movement*, p. 213.

<sup>75</sup> Hall, *The Gentle Craft*, p. 356.