THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

CLASS AND COMMUNITY IN AN EGYPTIAN TEXTILE TOWN

Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

Sawsan El-Messiri, M.A.

September, 1980

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to so many people for providing encouragement, assistance, and constructive dialogue during the course of the research and writing of this thesis that it is impossible to thank them all individually. The International Development Research Centre gave me a Research Associate Award for the year 1976-1977 which enabled me to conduct my field research and helped me to finish my thesis. Talal Asad served as my supervisor in the research, but his guidance and encouragement went far beyond his official role. His deep commitment to Middle Eastern studies and to Egypt were reflected in the extra effort he put into helping an overseas student who had special problems of communications.

Tanya Asad graciously provided me with hospitality in England, and her meticulous reading and discussion of various drafts of the thesis were very helpful in clarifying issues. David Waines, on his continuous trips to Egypt, developed a sustained interest in al-Mehalla, visiting the town, making the photographs for the research, reading several chapters and providing useful criticism. Nawal El-Messiri read the final draft, and made a number of valuable comments and suggestions.

I would like to thank 'Asmat Khier and Muhammad Filfila for their assistance in the field. I am also grateful to Carol Bibawi, who took out time from her many responsibilities to help with Arabic translations and editing. Linda Oldham edited the final version of the thesis, and shared with me the worries of deadlines. Nadir Ezz made the reproductions of photographs which are included in this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the people of al-Mehalla who spent so much time and effort in informing me about their industrial world; despite being busy businessmen, they opened their world to an outsider, and generously worked to help her become an insider. My extended family in al-Mehalla made major contributions to my work over a period of several years, helping me to meet key informants, introducing me to factory owners, discussing the textile industry with me endlessly, and providing me with constant support and encouragement. Without their interest and assistance this work would have been impossible. Last, but by no means least, I thank my daughter Wafaa, who helped me in many ways to complete my thesis; with deep appreciation, I dedicate this thesis to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION. 1

Statement of the Problem. 1
Fieldwork 7

CHAPTER II: THE URBAN SETTING: AL MEHALLA AL-KUBRA. .16

Name, Location and Settlement History 16
Present Administrative Boundaries 18
The Physical Layout of the City and Housing Patterns 22
Population Growth in the Twentieth Century. 37
Population Movement 41
Major Social Distinctions 45
Conclusion. 50

CHAPTER III: THE HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY 52

Al-Mehalla as an Old Textile Centre 52
The Textile Industry at the Time of Muhammad 'Alī .59
The Effects of Imperialism on the Textile Industry. 61
The First Three Decades of the Twentieth Century. 66
The Egyptianisation of the Textile Industry 76
The World War II Period 79
The Post-War Situation. 85
The Rise of a Mehallāwī Industrialist Group 88

CHAPTER IV: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS IN THE MEHALLĀWĪ SECTOR. 107

The Raw Cotton and Yarn Trades. 107
Distribution of the Finished Cloth. 115
The Production of Traditional Cloth 118
Production in the Mechanised Sector 128
Conclusion. 148

CHAPTER V: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION (I) ECONOMIC POSITION. 153

The Distribution of Wealth Prior to 1930. 153
Wealth and Mobility after 1930. 183
Conclusion. 206

CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION (II) STATUS. . . .208

The Character of Ahl al-Balad 208

The Identity of Ahl al-San'a 211
Influential Groups in the Social Hierarchy Prior to 1930 226

New Social Groupings after 1930 232

The Sherkāwwīyya Identity. 232
The Identity of the Medium-Scale Owners. . . .244
The Identity of Small-Scale Owners 252

Conclusion. 255

CHAPTER VII: CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS CONFLICT. 262

Working Relations in the Large-Scale Factories Prior to Unionisation 262
The Labour Movement and the Development of Trade Unions. 268
Present-Day Labour Relations in the Medium-Scale Factories of al-Mehalla 295
Conclusion. 316

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION 321

APPENDICES

I. BASIC INFORMATION ON 100 FACTORY OWNERS . . .342
II. CASE STUDY OF AL-SIMSĀR, THE OWNER OF A SMALL-SCALE FACTORY 355
III. CASE STUDY OF AL-BADĀWĪ, THE OWNER OF A MEDIUM-SIZE FACTORY 369
IV. CASE STUDY OF A LABOURER. 382

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS. 472

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 474

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The study reported here was designed to analyse the social and economic conditions underlying the development of class relations in an Egyptian industrial town, al-Mehalla al-Kubra. The research was directed at understanding social and economic relations among groups in the textile industry in al-Mehalla in terms of the reality which exists there, without *a priori* assumptions regarding the nature of groupings in that community. In investigating the socio-economic conditions underlying the development of class relations, the question of to what extent there is class alignment, class identity and class consciousness is emphasised. Very little such work has ever been done in the Middle East, and it is hoped that the findings of this study will prove useful in illuminating some of the processes of development in the region as a whole.

Al-Mehalla provides a particularly good setting for the study and analysis of industrial development and the emerging of certain classes and class conflict. A large, modern industrial centre, it has a long history of textile production. It industrialised very rapidly, beginning in 1928 with the establishment there of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company, today one of the largest

industrial complexes in the Middle East. Despite the fact that economic theory postulates that large-scale industry naturally eliminates small-scale production, the huge, fully automated factories of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company produce side-by-side with semi-mechanical workshops and craft-based textile workshops which function in very much the same manner as they did at the turn of the century. Thus not only is the transformation of the town due to industrialisation completely within the memories of many living informants, which is of great importance given the absence of documentation on working and social conditions in earlier years, but various phases in the development of the industry can still be seen in operation.

Quite apart from its interest as a case of industrialisation in Egypt, al-Mehalla merits close study because it is inherently fascinating as a community. As will become clear in the course of this study, developments there in many ways contradict commonplace assumptions about the nature of Egyptian industry and Egyptian character. It is a vital, active, committed community of weavers whose history and patterns of social relations throughout the period of industrialisation must be documented at the micro-level now or not at all. Also, in order to meaningfully evaluate the development of al-Mehalla and its contemporary reality, it is imperative to analyse its past history. This thesis is therefore intended primarily as an anthropological study which may serve future social historians as well.

While other urban studies have been conducted in

Egypt, they have tended to be carried out mainly by demographers, sociologists and historians rather than anthropologists. Most of the urban studies have focussed on the big cities, particularly Cairo and Alexandria. Al-Mehalla has gone almost entirely unstudied.

The only comprehensive study of the city itself was done by Nawal Ismail, a geographer, who conducted research there in the sixties on the development and structure of industry.[1] As a geographer, she was primarily concerned with the ecology of al-Mehalla and its relation to industry rather than with the people of the town. Other literature on the town, modern or historical, is limited in quantity and quality. Most of it is in booklet form, and largely concerned with describing various general features of the city. The historical literature is limited to scattered paragraphs in major historiographies. The only piece of research to be published in English is an article on the social history of Misr Spinning and Weaving Company.[2]

Although there is a growing body of sociological studies on urban Egypt, only a handful of these have dealt with class and related topics such as class conflict and

---

[1] Ismail, N., The Industrial Area of al-Mehalla al-Kubra (Cairo, M.A. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1965, Arabic).

[2] Carson, W., "The Social History of an Egyptian Factory", The Middle East Journal, Vol. II, No. 4 (Autumn, 1957), p. 351. Although this study is very superficial its data inadequate and its analysis unsatisfactory, it is used by one of the basic readers on the Middle East, Lutfiyya, A. and Churchill, C., Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures (The Hague, 1970).

class consciousness. Those which do attempt to deal with these phenomena can be broadly classified into two groups: studies which take an economic determinist position (roughly, a Marxist orientation), and those which seek cultural explanations of variables associated with class. The studies in both categories leave something to be desired, though for somewhat different reasons.

The Egyptian Marxist social scientists working in Egypt have tended to define social classes in a rigidly economic determinist manner. They apply Marxist typologies and terminology to the Egyptian society at large, relying on broad historical analysis of events in the society or on gross statistics related to ownership, income or occupation at the level of the national economy.[1] Even those who attempt to investigate class at the micro-level assume a mechanical relation between a certain mode of production and a certain social formation. Their concern is to demonstrate the importance of the concept of historical materialism in explaining changes in Egyptian society.[2]

Studies using, at least implicitly, a subjective notion of class have tended not to deal with class per se, but many of them imply the concept of social class in their definitions of their problems. These tend to be at the micro-level of social analysis. Dealing, for example, with the working class, they emphasise questions such as working

---

[1] An example of this orientation is provided by the work of Magdi Hassanein, "Class Structure in Egypt Pre-1952", Al-Tali'a, Vol. 4 (April, 1971), pp. 51-70.

[2] For instance, 'Abd al-Baset 'Abd al-Mu'ti's Class Conflict in the Egyptian Village (Cairo, 1977, Arabic).

conditions,[1] level of production,[2] problems of adaptation,[3] working relations in industry,[4] and social organisation of work.[5] The difficulty with such studies is that they focus mainly on institutional issues, isolating the worker from his community and dealing with him only in the context of his place of work. Most such studies are very much influenced by the Western sociological tradition in their theoretical frameworks or their methods of data collection. While such studies may be quite useful in some respects, they contribute little to our understanding of Egyptian society in general or of workers in particular.

The present study seeks to overcome these limitations in the literature by examining present-day social relations in the textile industry of al-Mehalla from a broad perspective. Clearly the relations between workers and managers or owners cannot be dealt with properly if they are isolated from the wider socio-economic structure in which they are located, and from the historical development of the Egyptian economy as a whole. On the other hand, questions about class formation and class conflict

---

[1] al-Saaty, H., Industrialisation and Urbanisation. An Empirical Study of Alexandria and Its Workers (Cairo, 1958, Arabic).

[2] Halabi, A., Leadership and Productivity in Industrial Organisation: A Sociological Study of Work (Cairo, M.A. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1970).

[3] 'Abd al-Hadī, A., Social Adaptation of Migrant Industrial Workers to Cairo (Cairo, M.A. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1970, Arabic).

[4] 'Abu 'Alī, M., The Social Organisation of Industry: A Social Study of the Oil Industry in Egypt (Alexandria, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alexandria, 1968, Arabic).

[5] Ahmad, M., Sociological Theory of Organisation: A Field Study of a Textile Factory in Alexandria (Alexandria, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alexandria, 1971, Arabic).

cannot be understood merely on the basis of gross statistics related to the national economy. Rather, the dynamics of the process must also be investigated at the micro-level.

The question of class identity and class relations in Egypt is a very complex one, requiring an elaborate framework for analysis. No pre-established body of theory can be assumed to be suitable for such analysis, although certainly various Western schools of thought regarding social class have much to contribute to the analysis. Nevertheless, these bodies of theory remain, so far as Egypt is concerned, empirically unverified. My main concern, therefore, is to provide as broad a view as possible, in order to highlight the significant elements in the class-relation development in al-Mehalla.

Thus from the outset emphasis has been on investigating the complementarity between the macro-level and the micro-level of society. While the research was designed to account for present-day patterns of class relations, a full understanding of these relations requires an examination of the historical development of the industry and the patterns of social relations which developed along with patterns of production, with an analysis of the manner in which international and national economic and political forces have influenced developments within the community of al-Mehalla.

Such concern with the impact of external forces and events in no way implies that the community itself may be seen as passively responding to external occurrences.

Rather, examination of the dynamics of community responses and adaptations helps to bring to light the linkages which exist, with differential intensity and consequences, between macro-level structures and micro-level processes. This in turn enhances the subjectively-oriented investigation of the various groupings within the textile industry, and an evaluation of the class structure and the positions of individuals within this structure in terms of people's own definitions and perceptions.

Fieldwork

Because the research utilised a broad perspective on the social reality of the textile industry of al-Mehalla, a diversity of techniques of data-collection were required. The fact that the town has a population of about 300,000 makes an anthropological study of the entire community impossible, and the work focussed on groups within the textile industry itself, with special emphasisis on the class relations of owners/managers and labourers.

The fieldwork and writing for this thesis were performed in several separate periods of time spread out across seven years, 1973-1980, and there was considerable overlap between the two. The researcher's periodic visits to al-Mehalla varied in length from a few days to several weeks, depending on the phase of the research. In addition, many of the factory owners were interviewed when they came to Cairo on their frequent business trips, and a number of visits were paid to villages in the vicinity

of al-Mehalla which supply the town with labourers or are themselves the sites of textile factories.

Methods of data collection ranged from purely library research to pure participant observation, and also involved survey questionnaires and extensive in-depth interviewing. Background information was collected from various official organisations in the town and from ministries in the capital, hut the official registers were almost invariably incomplete and contradictory. Thus the researcher spent considerable time visiting and revisiting the many government offices in the town, checking and rechecking basic data.

The same process was employed with interview and survey data throughout the study. Each datum was checked and cross-checked with as many key informants and survey respondents in as many different social categories as possible. This was partly because there are powerful incentives for both owners and workers to conceal the full extent of their holdings or their participation in union activities, partly due to contradictions in the data which could not be cross-checked with an "objective" source, and, perhaps most importantly, because the understanding of contradictions in the views of members of different social categories was of great interest to the researcher.

During the first stage of the research, a survey was made of 100 owners of small and medium-scale factories in al-Mehalla, about one-fifth of the total owners in the town. Twenty-five of these were selected for in-depth, intensive interviewing. Two researchers who are from

al-Mehalla assisted with this survey, as well as with a few workers whom it was difficult for the researcher to contact directly as the initial meeting with them had to take place in a cafe, where it is difficult for a woman to enter.

Other groups in al-Mehalla were also intensively interviewed. Key informants were selected from each social group to serve as sources of information on that group. Information gained through these interviews was used in planning interviews of other members of that group.

In order to obtain sociological data regarding the early decades of the twentieth century, key informants who had been active in the textile industry at that time, who had good memories and who were articulate were selected, based on their reputations in the textile community as authoritative individuals. Most of these informants were still considered to be leaders of their social groups. These key informants proved to be such rich resources of data that interviews lasted for many hours.

Ten key informants were chosen from among handloom weavers, twenty-five from among labourers in the private sector, and twenty-five from the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company. Some of these were workers who had played leading roles in their groups of labourers.

The researcher's connection with al-Mehalla began much earlier than this study, as she was born in the town, the daughter of a factory owner, and lived there for many years. The fact that she was originally a resident of

the town was no doubt a mixed blessing, for it is quite possible that her objectivity was less than it might have been if she had been a total outsider to the community at the outset of the study. On the other hand, she no doubt had insights into social relations which an outsider would have taken much longer to arrive at, and in any event a total outsider would have found it impossible to establish contact with many important respondents.

While the researcher originally feared that her identitytity as the daughter of an owner might interfere with her research and lead many respondents to distort information, it proved to be impossible to conduct much of the research without identifying herself as a townswoman. During the initial survey of the factory owners, it was impossible to gain admission to plants as a researcher or even to get in touch with most of the owners without introductions from mutual friends or family members. Even where owners could be contacted without intermediaries, correct information was provided only if a personal relationship could be established between them and the interviewer. Thus many, though not all, of the owners included in the study were aware of the researcher's origins.

The gathering of economic data proved to be very difficult, since economic conditions and the system of work in the town lead to many illegal activities, such as dealings in the black market, falsifying information about the number of looms in order to obtain more than the legal ration of yarn, and providing false information in order to evade taxes. Factory owners were understandably

reluctant to provide information on the number of workers they employed, since their official records showed reduced numbers in order to sidestep labour laws concerning wages and insurance.

In addition to these specific fears, factory owners have a general dislike for providing any information to government agencies, as they lack confidence in these institutions and are unwilling in principle to cooperate with them. This attitude is characteristic among Egyptians, due to historical divisions between the series of governments and the population as a whole and traditional suspicion of the systems of taxation which have been established at various periods. Thus when rumours spread, at the outset of the research, that the work was being sponsored by the Labour Office or the Inland Revenue Office, owners were less than eager to participate in the study.

It took a long time for the researcher to convince the owners that she had no relationship with any such institution, and this fact had to be attested to continually by mutual friends. Many owners grew to understand and sympathise with the purposes of the research, but others did not. The 100 factory owners selected for case studies were therefore chosen on the basis of the relationships which had been established with them, rather than on the basis of a stratified random sample. The researcher did, however, try to ensure that the sample included a variety of factory sizes, and to utilise a sufficiently large sample to help make up for its manner of selection.

Because there is considerable suspicion and conflict in the relations between workers and owners in the town, the establishment of relations of trust with both groups simultaneously would have been very difficult. Al-Mehalla, despite its 300,000 inhabitants, remains in many ways a small town, and rumours spread rapidly from one factory to another. While the researcher did not intend to conceal from either the owners or the workers the fact that she was working with both groups, she did not wish to have that fact precede her establishing contact with individual members of either, and she thus went to some lengths to avoid working with the two simultaneously, and did not appear publicly with members of either group.

In addition, her identity as the daughter of an owner, though an asset with some of the owners, would have made work with the labourers difficult, and she thus stressed her identity as a Cairene researcher in these interviews. A delicate balance had to be maintained between ethical responsibilities in the field and the practicalities of research work. The researcher thus adopted the policy of not revealing her origins to the workers unless asked directly. She met with the factory owners in their factories and in some cases their homes, while in the factories themselves she observed the workers but did not interview them. Workers were met in their homes or in social gathering-places, such as coffee houses or group meetings held in other workers' homes.

In most cases, workers and owners from the same factories were not interviewed. In specific cases where it

was necessary to interview both owners and workers, the researcher made numerous visits to the factories concerned, carried out participant-observation, and arranged for interviews in people's homes. She never spoke to an owner in the presence of a worker, or vice versa, and attempted to spread such work out over an extended period of time.

A table of all the factory owners with some of the data gathered by means of the survey questionnaire is attached as Appendix I. Two factory owners were selected from among the 100 owners listed in this table to be included as case studies in this thesis. Appendix II represents the very small-scale owners, and Appendix III the medium-scale owners. In both cases, the occupational backgrounds of the owners are representative of their groups, as are significant aspects of the life histories of each. In both cases, intensive interviewing of the owners took place over periods of weeks, along with observation of patterns of production in their factories. All of the employees of the small-scale owner were also interviewed in depth. Six workers in the medium-scale factory were intensively interviewed, as were two brothers and various other relatives of the owner.

Appendix IV is an abstracted version of the autobiography of an eminent wage labourer who began his career at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company as a migrant worker at the age of eleven. Over the years he became one of the informal leaders of the Egyptian labour movement, although he never sought formal office in the trade unions

and rejected the offers of formal leadership roles that came his way. Imprisoned for his labour activities for several years, he wrote his autobiography in colloquial Arabic on empty packages of cigarettes. Ultimately several intellectuals tried to help him to publish his story, but to date it remains unpublished.

It took the researcher two years to locate this labourer in Cairo, where he now lives, and to obtain this autobiography from him. She interviewed him for many hours, at several different meetings. Well-informed and articulate concerning the Egyptian labour movement, he was eager to have his story printed, and to provide any information which would assist the researcher. The autobiography is thus presented here in nearly its original form. The only changes which have been made have been the re-arrangement of the presentation of some themes, and the elimination of repetitions. Otherwise, the translation from the original Arabic is almost entirely literal.

The intensive interviews made for the study were mostly tape recorded in order to obviate the need for note-taking and allow for concentration on the conversation. All interviewees were asked to consent to the recording, and most had no objection, although a few government employees refused. Despite having agreed to the recording, some respondents were made ill at ease by the machine, and if putting it to one side did not result in its being ignored, the researcher shut it off and conducted the interview without it, making her notes immediately after the interview was completed.

Numerous photographs of workshops and factories were taken in order to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the operations in the weaving process. A sample of these is included here, as is a glossary of Arabic terminology relevant to the ethnographic context.

CHAPTER TWO

THE URBAN SETTING: AL-MEHALLA AL-KUBRA

Name, Location and Settlement History

Information gleaned from the writings of historians and geographers concerned with various periods of history reveals that al-Mehalla has long been known as an urban center. It is unclear, however, when al-Mehalla became an industrial center, and the historical record remains sketchy into the eighteenth century.

The oldest pharaonic monuments found in al-Mehalla belong to the XXVIth Dynasty, but these monuments do not necessarily indicate the presence of a settlement there. The first clear evidence of a town at al-Mehalla comes from the seventh century A.D. The town was known as DiDiouseya, and later came to be called Tipaipi, or Di-Shayri in the Coptic language. The historian Amelineau[1] reports that DiDiouseya was the name of a plant whose fibres were used in pharaonic times for making textiles, and it appears that this is the Greek name for DiShayri.[2]

When the Arab armies invaded Egypt in the seventh century under the leadership of 'Amr ibn al-'As, they were forbidden to settle in inhabited areas, and therefore built their camps outside towns and cities. These camps were

---

[1] Amelineau, E., La géographie de l'Égypte a l'epoque Copte (Paris, 1890), p. 262.

[2] de Nikion, J., Chronique de Jean de Nikion (Paris, 1883), p. 436.

called "mehallat", a word derived from the root halla, meaning to settle.[1] One such camp, known as Mehallet Dakla or Sharqun, was originally opposite the town of Dakla, which later grew to become the eastern nucleus of al-Mehalla al-Kubra.

The present town consists of about eight villages. Its two basic nuclei are Sandifa, the original town of Didiouseya, and al-Mehallet Sharqun, also known as Dakla. These nuclei are located on hills opposite a branch of the Nile known as the Millah River. Tenth-century descriptions of the town describe Sandifa as an urbanized and prosperous commercial center.[2] The settlement of Dakla, which developed after the Arab invasion of Egypt, grew after the tenth century as far as the river, so that the two nuclei emerged. Dakla and Sandifa became one town, first known as Mehallet al-Kubara and later as al-Mehalla al-Kubra (the big settlement) or just al-Mehalla.

Although the two nuclei merged, the town of al-Mehalla retained its dual character. Each nucleus had its own mosque and a prosperous commercial centre. One had a special market for spinners, the Suq al-Ghazalin, and the other had a special market for weavers, the Suq al-Nawlin, until the nineteenth century. Today these nuclei constitute the oldest quarters in the town, Sandifa and Suq al-Laban.

---

[1] Ibn Duqmān, I., Al-intisār bi wāsitat 'aqd al-asmār (Bulaq, 1893), vol. v, p. 82.

[2] al-Muqaddas, S., Ahsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm (Leiden, 1906), p. 313.

Al-Mehalla is located in a plains area, five to six metres above sea level, in Gharbīyya Governorate (see Map 1). With a population of 292,853, it is the largest city in the northern Delta, and second in importance in Gharbīyya only to Tanta, the governorate's capital. Five other governorates are within easy travelling distance: the capitals of Daqahlīyya, Kafr al-Sheikh, al-Bihēra, and Menufīyya Governorates can all be reached in between an hour and an hour and a half, and Cairo is an hour and a half away. There is constant movement between al-Mehalla and the surrounding governorates by means of regular trains, buses, taxis, and private cars.

Present Administrative Boundaries

The city's boundaries take in agricultural land, so that in area the city is as large as Tanta. In many cases these boundaries correspond with the water courses. To the south is the branch of the Nile known as the Shebin River, with its extension, the Millah River, going into the city. Several canals, such as the Ma'ash and the Mehalla, branch off from these rivers.

With the exception of major urban centres such as Cairo, Alexandria and the Canal Zones, Egypt's governorates are composed of major cities, towns, and villages. Each governorate is divided into administrative subunits called marakez (s. markez). The markez is composed of a capital town or city, the bandar, which is the administrative centre for local government in the markez, handling



Map 1. The Governorates of the Delta.

governmental affairs on behalf of the surrounding towns and villages.[1] A bandar may be divided into smaller administrative units called aqsām (s. qism).

Bandar al-Meḥalla has undergone several administrative reorganizations in the process of the city's expansion. Al-Meḥalla was one qism until 1937, when it developed into four distinct quarters. The rapid growth of the city in the forties required a division into two aqsām, made up of six quarters: 'Abu al-Qāsim, al-Hanafī, al-Mutwalli, al-Manshīyya, al-Sherka, and Ṣandifa. Further expansion in the fifties resulted in the growth of three new quarters: Medinet al-'Amāl, Midan al-Meḥattah, and Wali al-Din.

The city has grown rapidly over the past few decades, chiefly due to the in-migration of rural workers. At the same time, its administrative borders have expanded to take in a sizeable amount of agricultural land. The relationship between the city proper and the bandar as a whole is a complex one, as the urban and rural components of al-Meḥalla are interrelated and interdependent in a variety of ways, both in terms of their populations and in terms of factors such as patterns of land use. In addition, there

---

[1] A local council is formed in each markez of the governorate, made up of elected members, eight of whom represent the bandar. Every markez has a chairman, who is also the chairman of the city and is appointed by the Minister for Local Government. The local council in the markez is responsible for the welfare of the inhabitants in such fields as health, education, public services, lighting, sewage and housing. It also supervises social services, public transport and other services provided by the government. The budget for local government in al-Meḥalla is provided by al-Gharbiyya province, which in turn is funded by the central government in Cairo. The present trend is toward independence of the marakez and the investing of provincial governors with the full powers of the President of the Republic for local affairs.

are within the environs of al-Mehalla several villages, such as Mehallet 'Abu-'Alī, al-Qantara, Bilīna, Bitīnā, Dīyarbhashīm, Kafr al-'Alw, and Kafr Higazī.

Bandar al-Mehalla takes in about 3,620 feddans of agricultural land, mostly in the western and southern parts of the city. The major crops grown in the more central lands are vegetables and fruits which supply the city's markets. Crops such as rice, wheat and cotton are grown on more distant lands. Rice cultivation has spread to the northern lands, covering an area of about 1,500 feddans. Wheat is grown on 700 feddans, and cotton on about 1,000 feddans.[1] This extensive cultivation of cotton and rice has led to the establishment of cotton gins and rice mills in al-Mehalla.

Cotton ginning was one of the first processes to be mechanised in al-Mehalla, and there are now six ginning establishments in the city, employing about 470 workers and owned by three companies, the Egyptian Cotton Ginning Company, the Alexandria Commercial Company, and the Egyptian Cotton Ginners' Company. Rice mills expanded after World War II, and now employ about 200 workers.

Al-Mehalla owes its fame as an industrial city, as well as most of its growth during the twentieth century, to the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company. One of the largest industrial complexes for textiles in the Middle East, the Misr Company[2] was constructed in 1928 on an area of 32

---

[1] Ismail, N., The Industrial Area of al-Mehalla al-Kubra (Cairo, M.A. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1965, Arabic), p. 201.

[2] The Misr Spinning and Weaving Company is referred to locally as "Misr Company", and this usage will be adopted here.

feddans in the eastern part of the city. In 1936 the area expanded to 100 feddans, and today the Company occupies 551 feddans toward the southeast part of the city, employing 46,000 workers.

Thus while a very high proportion of the residents of al-Mehalla are industrial workers, about two percent of the population is occupied in agricultural labour, while several villages, such as Mehallet 'Abu-'Alī, al-Qantara, Bitinā and Bilīna, are involved in the textile industry. These villages are famous for local textiles such as sheets, handkerchiefs, and ghazlīyya, a cotton cloth used for making the peasant gallabīyya (the traditional flowing gown, pl. gallalīb). It is estimated that there are about 1,000 handlooms in these villages.[1] Several estates within near-by villages have become residential areas for industrial labourers working in al-Mehalla.

Thus even in terms of settlement patterns it is difficult to delineate exact boundaries for the city of al-Mehalla. The complexity of the social networks which inter-relate the city with the surrounding rural area will become more apparent in the following sections, which examine social processes such as the continuous movement of rural labourers into the city and the types of economic relations between al-Mehalla and the surrounding area.

The Physical Layout of the City and Housing Patterns

Like most Egyptian cities, al-Mehalla is made up of old quarters with narrow streets and old houses and new

---

[1] According to the spinning cooperative in al-Mehalla.

buildings. In general, however, the tendency toward very high blocks that has become prevalent in Cairo and Alexandria has had little effect in al-Mehalla, and few buildings rise higher than five storeys. Until quite recently, transport in al-Mehalla was limited to horsedrawn carriages and private cars, but two bus routes were set up about ten years ago and taxi-cabs appeared in 1979. Bicycles are widely used, especially by workers at Misr Company.

The distinctive industrial character of al-Mehalla is immediately apparent on entering the town. The sound of machines is everywhere, and the textile industry has made its mark on every street. Pick-up trucks and horsedrawn carts pass through the streets laden with bundles of yarn and folded cloth. Men and boys go by carrying hanks of silk for the handlooms, and roofs of houses are covered by freshly dyed yarn hung out to dry. It is normal to see multicoloured yarns completely covering the roof of a house, and to find lamp posts used as supports for unravelling coloured silk yarn.

Another remarkable aspect of the town is the existence of old and new textile workshops manufacturing on a small scale side-by-side with large-scale, technologically advanced industry. In the old parts of the city activity never ceases, and the sound of the looms comes from every side. The machines are nevertheless hard to find, for they are in basements or rooms of ordinary houses, in former garages and the yards of dwellings. The streets are crowded with people taking finished cloth, folded cloth and yarn

from one place to another. Every conceivable form of transport is used, from donkey carts to adapted tricycles, from bicycles to lorries to people carrying loads on their shoulders. In some streets women spread the pavements with the varieties of cloth manufactured in al-Mehalla and sit to sell them. Thus the old city is all noise and bustle, and the visitor's first impression is that the activity in the old streets lacks organization altogether.

In contrast stands the huge modern factory of the Misr Company. Cut off from the centre of the city, it covers an area so extensive that it takes about twenty minutes just to drive around the factory walls. No noise or other sign of activity is evident from outside. Workers gather in thousands in front of the gates in the morning, then speedily disappear inside; no one sees or feels what goes on inside the vast isolated mill. The only connecting link between the great mass of workers inside the factory and the outside world is the sound of the factory whistle and the factory clock, which can be seen from a distance of several kilometres. The whistle is the sign for the start of work; when the factory first opened the whistle was the only means many people had of telling the time, apart from the call to prayer broadcast from the mosques.

The overall impression given by the town is one of activity and earnestness, for it is a working town. Facilities for amusement are limited to a few cinemas and social clubs, but there are many traditional coffee houses where tea and coffee are served and the customers amuse themselves playing dominoes or backgammon. These coffee houses

serve as meeting places for men of various occupations and crafts where they can agree together about appointments for jobs or discuss their work. There is, for example, a coffee house frequented by building labourers, and anyone who needs the services of a labourer or decorator has only to call at this coffee house and make a payment in advance to obtain the workman he needs. Some housing and real estate agents carry out their business in particular coffee houses, lorry drivers and owners arrange contracts with their customers in others, and so on.

The general aspect of the town reflects the fact that it has expanded considerably in a short period of time, haphazardly and without planning. Al-Mehalla lacks many amenities such as paved streets, a reliable electricity supply, and systematic urban planning. Its streets and buildings are developing in a chaotic manner, and new buildings are designed without regard for aesthetics, which is particularly unfortunate since the Delta towns in general lack the attractive natural surroundings which grace the towns of Upper Egypt.

With the expansion of the city, functually defined zones developed. In the old city, work and residence were in the same quarters, or even in the same buildings. The introduction of mechanised industry facilitated the development of relatively distinct sections for residence, administration, commerce and industry.

The first wholly residential areas emerged during the first decade of the twentieth century, when a new class of wealthy cotton merchants moved from the old traditional

quarters toward the river in the north where there are several gardens. Later, with the emergence of a group of wealthy industrialists, this area expanded from Muḥib Street to the Mansura Road (see Map 2). This extension of the elite buildings into the agricultural land resulted in continuous increases in land prices. In the fifties a square metre of land cost £E 5.00. Today the price is between £E 200 and £E 300. Most of the land in this area has been sold, further raising the price of the few remaining feddans.

Most of the buildings in this zone are either villas or buildings of a few storeys. These buildings are occupied by their owners as residences. Flats in the area are more expensive than anywhere else in al-Mehalla, about £E 30 to £E 40 per month for a medium-sized flats. Even with such high rents, it is far more profitable to sell the flats than to rent them. This limits the availability of rental flats, increasing the housing problem for the middle and lower classes, particularly the newly-married couples who do not have large sums of money to invest. Even when owners do let out flats, they ask for cash advances which usually equal five to ten years' rent.[1]

The second zone in al-Mehalla is the administrative area, which is in the centre of the city. It grew up along the railway line east of the old nuclei in which governmental institutions such as courts, police stations and post offices, together with some shops and a few residential

---

[1] Housing is a pressing problem all over Egypt, but in the sixties this was the case only in the capital cities, chiefly Cairo and then Alexandria.

University Library Hull

buildings, had already been established.

The commercial zone extends from the centre of the city to the old areas. The commercial centre now includes several streets, notably al-'Abāsī, al-Bahlawān, Sa'd Zaghlul, and Twenty-third July. Most of the buildings in this area date from the twenties, and most consist of two to three floors. The ground floors are used as shops of various kinds. At the edges of the commercial zone there is a declining residential area inhabited by the lower middle classes. The commercial centre serves mainly the middle and lower classes of al-Mehalla as well as the peasants who live in nearby villages. Wealthy members of the community go to Cairo and Alexandria for other than daily shopping.

Even today, however, there are few purely residential quarters in al-Mehalla, except for the northern part of the city where the rich have started to live and a few quarters inhabited by industrial workers. Thus one can divide the city into three major areas: a purely industrial area that has its nucleus in the south, a purely residential area mainly for the elite and for industrial labourers; and mixed areas that are used both for residences and workshops, and, in some cases, small factories.

One finds industrial workshops in most of the streets of the city. They are more noticeable in the old city, which falls mainly in the aqsam of 'Abu al-Qāsim, al-Hanafī Sandifa, and Wali al-Din. These quarters are characterised by their narrow lanes, numerous mosques, a few churches and a synagogue. The construction of most of these buildings dates from the nineteenth century; hence, they are in very

poor condition. These quarters are mostly inhabited by small weavers, labourers and a few peasants. Those quarters which fall within the commercial centre are inhabited mainly by members of the middle classes, such as merchants and craftsmen.

The purely residential areas for labourers emerged as a consequence of the rapid influx of peasants into al-Mehalla. In the thirties industrial labourers clustered in any vacant place in the city, and many owners took advantage of the increasing demand for cheap housing and built shabby buildings, or simple huts, and rented them to workers. A common pattern of housing in this period was to rent the same room to as many as ten persons or even more who worked on different shifts.

In the forties the Misr Company, in cooperation with the government, began to build a residential area for its own labourers. When World War II broke out, the government used this housing for war migrants and then for homeless people. It was only in 1946 that Misr Company took it back and added some social facilities such as clubs, schools, a mosque, and a few shops. The construction of that residential area in the south and of the Misr Company factory in the east resulted in a concentration of other workers' quarters in the southern and eastern parts of the city. The Misr Company and the government continued to be concerned about the housing problem, and in the fifties a housing cooperative established 101 houses for labourers and bureaucrats of the Misr Company.

In 1960 the city council established two residential areas consisting of 1,203 inexpensive residential units. These official attempts to solve the problem of housing for the workers were not sufficient. The Company housing absorbed only a small percentage of its work force, and other residential areas developed in response to the need for housing due to the large increase in the number of industrial workers.

These new residential areas were mainly on nearby rural estates, or 'ezab (s. 'ezba). The 'ezab are an interesting phenomenon in al-Mehalla. Although they were built on farmland, land prices were originally very low and the land was purchased mainly by industrial workers, small weavers, urban poor and a few peasants. They grew rapidly after 1960, when government legislation improved the working conditions of the labourers and wages increased; many workers used their bonuses to build homes in the 'ezab.

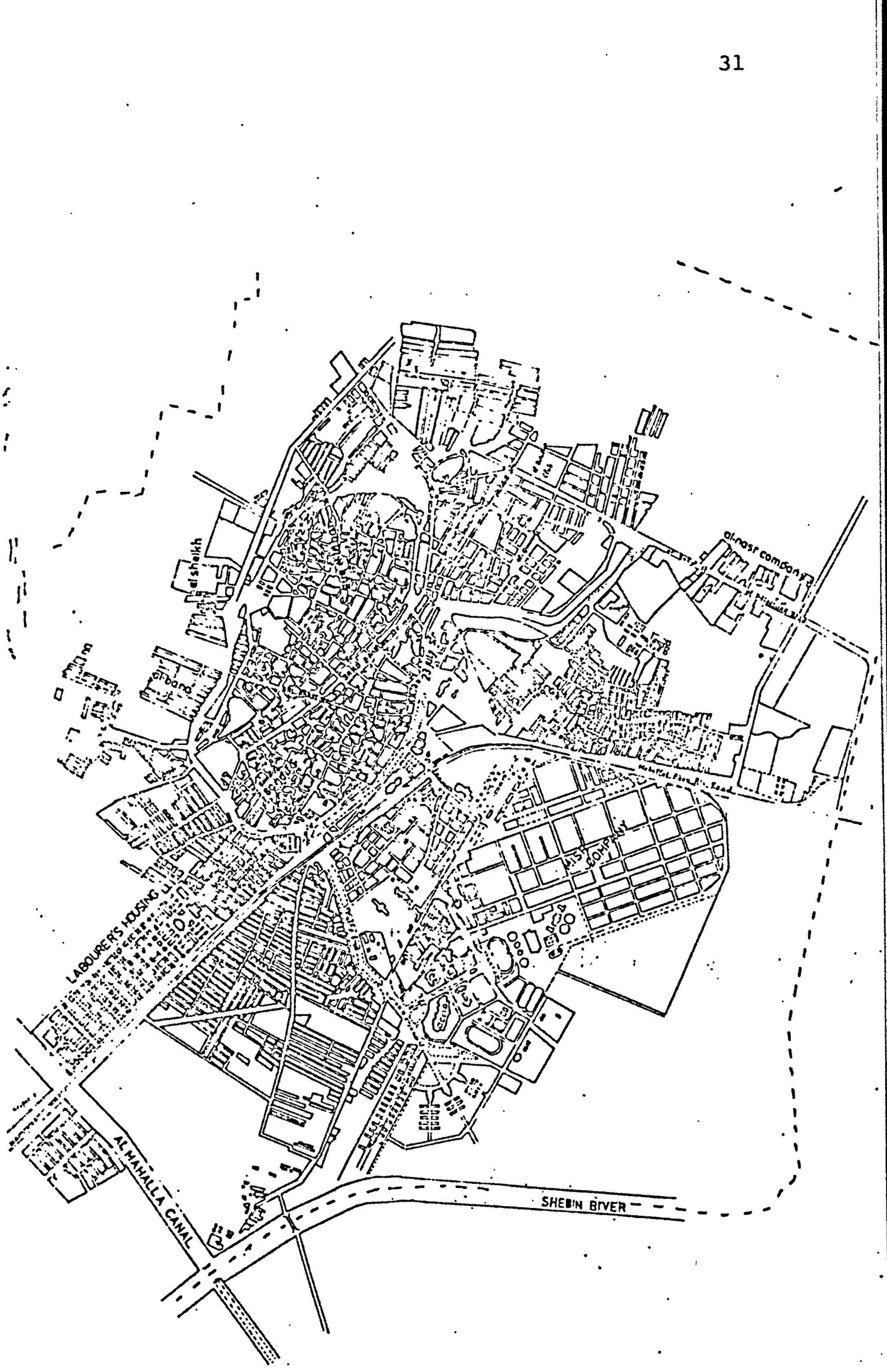
All of the 'ezab (such as 'Ezbat al-Ragabi and 'Ezbat Ragab al-Qadi in the east, and 'Ezbat al-Gomhurīyya, 'Ezbat 'Abu-Dira' and 'Ezbat Khadr in the south) were established along roughly the same pattern. Their owners began by dividing the land into pieces of about 100 square metres or 60 square metres. These pieces were then sold individually. The design of the homes built by the labourers shows little variation. Those built on the larger pieces of land have eight-metre frontages, and consist of two rooms with a hall and bathroom. The smaller houses have six-metre frontages, and consist of a small hall

and one room. An 'ezba is usually divided up in straight lines, so that houses are built in rows divided by streets about eight to ten metres wide.

The labourers and other poor who bought pieces of land on these 'ezab built their homes in stages because they could not afford to purchase all the necessary materials at one time. Having bought a piece of land, a labourer normally waits until he has received a bonus or saved some money, and then builds a ground floor consisting of one room. Some live in these rooms without doors, windows or baths, covering the room's openings with pieces of wood or tin at night, and digging a hole in the ground to use as a lavatory. As rooms are gradually added, they are rented to other families. When the house is ultimately completed, it usually consists of two to three storeys.

The physical layout of the city is characterized by a clear-cut separation between the original buildings of al-Mehalla and the Misr Company complex, which constitutes a city within a city, surrounded by high walls. Within the complex are mills, stores, offices, schools, residential quarters and social centres, all of which are surrounded by fences. This area became a nucleus for the city's major industrial area as a whole, which expanded until it reached Mehallet 'Abu-'Alī and al-Qantara to the east, Mehallet al-Burg in the north, and the Shebin River in the south (see Map 2).

Some of the small-scale factories owned by individual entrepreneurs were started outside the walls of the Misr Company complex in order to take advantage of the



Map 2. Al-Mehalla al-Kubra.

facilities which had been established for the Company, such as roads and transportation. With the expansion of small-scale industry in the fifties, other industrial areas grew up on the fringes of the town, such as 'Ezbat 'Abu-Shahin. Land in the northeastern part of the city, along the Mansura Road and in 'Ezbat 'Abu-Shahin, became very expensive, and so the factory proprietors who emerged in the sixties turned to al-Banā, in the northwestern part of the town, where they rented buildings that had not necessarily been purpose-built. Even those who bought land and built their own factories tended to erect buildings that were hardly different from residential blocks.

The next areas of expansion were in the nearby countryside, first in Meḥallet al-Burg to the northeast and then in Meḥallet 'Abu-'Alī. In the fifties Meḥallet al-Burg was the domain of a few big factory owners, but by the seventies its character had changed, and it had become an industrial complex containing about 100 small and medium-sized factories. This area, which takes in about 4,500 square metres of land and has a population of about 15,000, is now almost entirely industrial, but contains a number of dwellings, and some of the factory owners live on the upper floors of the buildings which house their workshops.

The most recent area of industrial expansion is in the village of Meḥallet 'Abu-'Alī, which is about three kilometres northeast of al-Meḥalla on the Meḥalla-Mansura Road. It has a population of not more than 7,000, most of whom work in agriculture. During the sixties the weaving industry began to move into the village as a consequence of the

prohibitive land prices and high rents in al-Mehalla. The village now contains about thirty factories, each of which has between five and fifteen looms, as well as two or three factories with about twenty looms each. The village maintains a generally rural character, with mud brick houses of not more than two storeys. Factories are concentrated in the main street, and their owners are townsmen from al-Mehalla rather than villagers.

The Economic Structure of al-Mehalla

The textile industry has occupied the major sector of the population of al-Mehalla since the beginning of the twentieth century. This predominance, which increased with the establishment of the Misr Company, is clear from the statistical data, although these data are internally inconsistent to the point that an accurate and detailed assessment of the number of workers involved over the last decades is impossible.[1] Nevertheless, despite the discrepancies in the figures which have been gathered by various researchers and statisticians, the general outlines of the development of the industry are clear.

Table 1 shows the numbers of workers employed in the major economic sectors of al-Mehalla at four points in time between 1937 and 1977. The increase in the relative scale of the industry during the forties due to the full establishment of the Misr Company is clear from this table.

---

[1]The Labour Office figures, for example, state that of 45,760 workers in al-Mehalla 32,571 work in the textile industry, while combined figures for employees in the public and private sector factories total 65,500.

Table 1

Number of Workers in Each of the Major Economic Activities in al-Mehalla for the Years 1937, 1947, 1960 and 1977

Economic Activity	1937	1947	1960	1977
Agriculture and Fishing	2,270	5,116	2,776	*
Manufacturing, including Textiles	13,177	27,802	22,429	*
Textile Industry Alone	10,480	23,370	*	65,500**
Construction	*	991	1,841	*
Transportation	907	1,324	2,102	*
Trade	3,153	4,810	5,518	*

Source: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), Census of Population, Supplement for Gharbiyya Governorate (Cairo, 1937, 1947, 1960 and 1977, Arabic).

*Figures not available.

**This figure was taken from the unpublished records of the Labour Inspection Office in al-Mehalla al-Kubra.

The continuing increase in the number of textile labourers since that time is accounted for by the expansion of the private sector, which remains labour-intensive, and by the fact that the Misr Company, as a public sector firm, is required by law to employ a fixed quota of workers.

Table 1 also shows that trade and agriculture continue to rank as important economic activities in the city. Al-Mehalla functions as a market for fruit, vegetables and fish from the surrounding area, as well as for mud and straw for brick manufacture and the finished bricks themselves. In turn, the city is the major source of supply of many basic food items (sugar, tea, and so forth) not available in the surrounding areas, along with such items as medicines and manufactured articles, and is the centre for the water and electricity supplies.

Trade is carried on through various markets, each of which is held in a regular location and at regular intervals. These markets contribute to the daily volume of commuters into the city and the network of relations between the city and the hinterland. The wholesale and retail trades are closely intermingled; many merchants work in the two simultaneously. Trade centres on agricultural produce, raw materials (notably yarn), and manufactured goods, and there is a strong emphasis on satisfying the demands of the traditional and rural communities for particular kinds of textiles and for items such as copperware.

At the same time as al-Mehallâ serves as a market-place for its area, it also serves the country as a whole. Its location in the northern part of the Delta

just between fertile land and a much more arid plain, makes it a convenient collecting centre for agricultural products such as cotton and rice. Al-Mehalla has thus become the largest cotton marketing centre in Egypt, and every year about 1,150,000 qantars[1] of cotton are brought to the market there for sale.

Textile production in al-Mehalla is devoted to two kinds of commodities, which are dealt with in two distinct marketing systems. The Misr Company produces mainly modern textiles, which are marketed across the country as a whole and, recently, exported. The small-scale workshops and factories produce mainly traditional fabrics, which are sold to villagers.

The cotton market is located in the northern part of the commercial section of the town. It was established in 1912, along with others like it elsewhere in the country, and then occupied an area of seven feddans. In the old days, before government control, the prices of cotton according to the stock exchange in Alexandria were posted at the door daily. The peasants paid a small entrance fee; inside, weighers weighed their cotton and kept it until it was sold. Later a new cotton market was established in order to keep pace with the scale of the trade, occupying ninety feddans of land. It is open for business every day, but trading is heaviest on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The cattle market is one of the oldest markets in al-Mehalla, and is held every Tuesday. It used to be located on the wasteland near the cemetery to the west of the city,

---

[1] Ismail, p. 150.

but has now been allotted a fenced area to the east. Al-Mehalla serves as a collecting centre for livestock from all parts of the northern Delta as well as for nearby villages. Cattle are brought short distances on foot, but are often transported from more distant places in small pick-up trucks. They are brought to market at night or early in the morning, especially during summer, in order to minimize the strain of the journey. Since this market attracts peasants from a wide area, merchants use it as a place to sell all kinds of goods that appeal to the villagers; farmers who have sold their livestock are ready customers for textiles, leather and wooden products and tools.

The vegetable market extends over several streets that are connected with the western rural areas. The most active trading takes place on Fridays, although the market is open daily. In general, vendors exhibit their products in baskets set on platforms or on small handcarts. The vendors are nearly all women. The townswomen who work in the market attend daily, selling all sorts of food items as well as textiles. Rural women come from nearby villages on Tuesdays to sell their fresh vegetables, cheese, butter, eggs and chickens.

Population Growth in the Twentieth Century

The rapid growth of al-Mehalla city in the twentieth century is reflected in its population statistics. These reveal not only a sharp increase within a relatively short period, but also a high density, ranking fifth among

the nation's cities, and an increasing proportion of males to females, as reflected in Table 2.

Like the population of the country as a whole, that of al-Mehalla grew rapidly after 1917, due mainly to improved health care. It was only in 1925 that running water and electricity were introduced in the town. This made possible a series of changes in the social and recreational facilities in al-Mehalla, which motivated wealthy people in nearby villages and towns to migrate there.

In 1927 the rate of increase in the city exceeded that of the nation as a whole, largely due to the city's emergence as a major cotton collection centre and to the improvements in the infrastructure. The great increase in 1937 shown in Table 2 was due to the expansion of the Misr Company and the migration of labourers from rural areas to the city. The peak of the increase came in 1947, due to a rapid expansion of the factory to meet the needs of the local market, which increased substantially due to World War II.

From 1947 to 1957 the rate of increase was smaller than in the preceding decade. This can be explained partly by the decline of the textile industry in the fifties and partly by the new policy of mechanisation, which led to a decrease in the labour force. It was during this period that the Misr Company began automating its looms, resulting in the dismissal of a large number of its labourers and very few new appointments.

The introduction of large-scale industry also affected the sex ratio in the city. In 1907, 1917, and 1927, the

Table 2

Population Figures for al-Mehalla in the Twentieth Century

Year	Total Population	Total Increase	Average Annual Increase (Percent)	Male Population	Female Population	Area in km^2	Density per km^2
1798	17,000						
1882	21,851						
1897	31,791	2,940	.9				1,406
1907	33,547	1,756	.6	16,522	17,025		1,484
1917	38,088	4,541	1.4	18,878	19,210	20.5	1,858
1927	45,642	7,554	2.0	22,492	23,150	20.5	2,226
1937	63,292	17,650	3.9	33,138	30,154	20.1	3,149
1947	115,758	52,466	8.3	60,965	54,793	22.6	5,122
1957	148,685		-	-	-	-	-
1960	178,288	62,530	4.1	90,811	87,477	22.1	8,870
1966	225,323			114,390	110,933		
1976	292,853			150,085	142,768		

Source: CAPMAS, 1907-1976 (figures for 1798 and 1882 are estimates).

sex ratio (males per 100 females) was 97.0. By 1937 males exceeded females by about 3,000, so that the ratio was 1.088, and by 1947 there were 6,000 more males than females, for a ratio of 1.112. These ratios were produced by the characteristic pattern of migration during those years. Men from rural areas in Gharbiyya and other governorates (mainly Menufiyya and Daqahliyya) came to work in al-Mehalla. Most of these workers were single. When they did marry, they tended to choose wives from their home villages. A few brought their wives to the city, but most left their families behind, paying them visits as often as possible.

This pattern was largely due to the poor housing conditions in al-Mehalla and the instability of industrial employment. By the late forties, when the Misr Company began to provide housing for its workers, it became possible for more of the men to bring their families to al-Mehalla. Then with the promulgation of new labour laws in the sixties, workers gained job security and increased wages, and many were able to build their own homes and settle in the city with their families. Thus the sex ratio levelled off in the sixties, though males continue to exceed females, probably because there remain a considerable number of workers from rural areas who are either unmarried or have left their families in their home villages.

With the introduction of large-scale mechanical industry in al-Mehalla in the thirties, the city grew more rapidly than did important cities such as Tanta, al-Minya, the capital of Minya Governorate, and Assyut, the capital

of Assyūt Governorate. As shown in Table 3, the population of al-Mehalla increased by 132,000 between 1927 and 1960, while the increase at Tanta was 94,000, Minya 47,000, and Assyūt 61,000. The extent of overcrowding is not obvious from the population density figures, since the area of the city includes land occupied by industrial establishments and agriculture as well as residential areas. Figures for the average number of residents per room give a more accurate picture of living conditions. Today in al-Mehalla the average number of residents per room is 2.4, higher than for either Cairo, at 2.3, or Alexandria at 2.0. In Cairo the most crowded quarter, al-Gamalīyya, has an average of 2.8 persons per room, and Alexandria's most crowded quarter, al-Dekhayla, has an average of 2.7 persons per room. This degree of overcrowding characterises four out of the six quarters of al-Mehalla: 'Abu al-Qāsim, al-Sherka, Sandifa and Wali al-Din.

Population Movement

There is continuous migration of the rural population into al-Mehalla in search of work in the textile industry, and a daily ebb and flow of those who work in the city but live in the surrounding villages. Because of the strong, continuing link between al-Mehalla labourers and the surrounding villages, workers are able to return to their rural bases when industrial employment declines.

When large-scale mechanical industry was established in the thirties and forties and migrants came in large

---

[1]CAPMAS, General Census for Egypt and Census for al-Mehalla, 1960.

Table 3

Population Densities of Selected Egyptian Cities

Densities	al-Mehalla al-Kubra	Tanta	Minya	Assyūt
Population in 1927*	46,000	90,000	48,000	66,000
Density per km^2 in 1927	2,226	3,983	2,824	2,690
Population in 1937*	63,000	95,000	55,000	71,000
Density per km^2 in 1937	3,149	4,215	3,244	2,865
Population in 1947*	116,000	140,000	70,000	90,000
Density per km^2 in 1947	5,122	6,191	4,160	3,648
Population in 1960*	178,000	184,000	95,000	127,000
Density per km^2 in 1960	8,870	14,627	9,451	5,567

Source: al-Sharnubi, M., Migration from Rural Areas in the United Arab Republic (Cairo, Ph.D. dissertation, Ain Shams University, 1968).

*Population figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

numbers from the countryside, special housing was often constructed for them, and the town expanded to incorporate a growing urban population within its boundaries. This process continues even today. Figures on migration into the city are not available, because the census does not count migrants within a governorate, but it is generally assumed that the original migrants to al-Mehalla in this century came mainly from within Gharbīyya Governorate and from the Governorates of Menufīyya and Daqahlīyya. This migration was due to unemployment in Menufīyya since the thirties and to the infertility of agricultural lands in the northern Delta. After the forties, migrants came largely from nearby centres in Gharbīyya, such as Samanūd, Kafr al-Sheikh and Tanta, as well as from villages near al-Mehalla.

Migration from within the governorate is in part due to Misr Company policy. The Misr Company was the original employer of most of the migrants, and its policy from the beginning has been to encourage ahl al-balad (the people of the town) to work in the textile factories. Thus first preference was given to local residents, then to others from the nearby villages in the markez, and then to others from within the governorate. After the fifties, al-Mehalla ceased to be a pull area for migrant labour from other provinces, both due to this policy of the Misr Company and due to the housing shortage in the city.

Estimates of the number of migrants into al-Mehalla over the last few decades can be reached through comparison

of the reported population growth due to natural increase and population growth as a whole. Table 4 shows such estimates for 1937, 1947 and 1960.

Table 4

Estimated Number of Migrants to al-Mehalla in the Years 1937, 1947 and 1960

Census Year	Total Population	Total Increase	Natural Increase	Number of Migrants
1927	45,642			
1937	63,292	17,650	11,714	+ 5,936
1947	115,758	52,466	14,176	+ 38,290
1960	178,288	62,530	56,672	+ 5,858

Source: Based on figures presented by al-Sharnubi.

The total population is affected by the daily commuters. This commuter traffic is one of the largest in Lower Egypt. There are three main categories of people who move into the town daily and leave it again at night: labourers, students and bureaucrats. Those who come from other towns and cities are mainly labourers and a few government officials. Commuters from the villages are mainly labourers, students and pedlars. This movement increases in volume during October, November and December, when cotton is collected and ginned.

Labourers in the textile industry constitute the largest single group of daily commuters. Labourers from Daqahlīyya and Gharbīyya Governorates prefer to reside in their own villages, due to the housing problem and high

cost of living in al-Mehalla. Thus the area from which labourers come daily constitutes a circular zone of about thirty kilometres in diameter around the city. More workers come from the closer villages than the more distant ones, and many come on foot or by bicycle. Public transport is arranged to coincide with factory shifts, which change at 7:00 a.m. 3:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

A 1960 sample survey of labourers commuting to work at the Misr Company and four medium-scale textile factories showed that the push areas for commuters to al-Mehalla were almost all in Gharbiyya Governorate, particularly its northern part (see Table 5). The fact that many of these areas are within walking distance and that the housing shortage has been increasing in al-Mehalla since the fifties makes it very likely that this daily movement of labourers into the city has continued unabated over the last twenty years, and that it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Major Social Distinctions

The population of al-Mehalla has long had a certain urban character, but new social distinctions have emerged as a result of industrialisation and the city's close relations with both rural areas and the major urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria. The ahl al-balad (people of the town) call themselves "Mehallawwiyya", (s. Mehallawi), meaning that they live in al-Mehalla, but the townspeople regard as particularly Mehallawi the families who have been there for

Table 5

Labourers of Misr Company by Place of Residence in 1960

Place of Residence	Number	Percent
Bandār al-Mehalla	11,273	70.60
Al-Mehalla Markez**	1,196	11.20
Samanūd Markez	1,600	10.50
Tanta Markez	245	1.60
Santa	219	1.40
Zifta	13	.05
Kafr al-Zayāt	11	.04
Qutur	2	.01
Total for Gharbīyya Governorate	14,559	95.40
Āgā	333	2.20
Talkha	172	1.10
Mansura	176	1.30
Total for Daqahlīyya Governorate	681	4.60
TOTAL	15,240	100.00

**Excluding the centre city.

Source: Unpublished figures of the Technical Research Centre of the Misr Company, 1960.

many generations. These ahl al-balad who trace their origins to Mehallāwī ancestors differ from the peasants who have come from nearby villages to settle and from those who come to al-Mehalla for provisions.

Before the thirties this difference was very great, and it was also very obvious because occupations played a basic role in creating the distinction. The peasants were associated with agriculture, and their links with the outside world were limited. The Mehallāwwīyya, on the other hand, were for the most part either directly engaged in the textile industry or involved in trade and merchandising of textiles. The great majority were either craftsmen or owners of looms. Some of the craftsmen had originally been peasants, but the overwhelming majority had been considered Mehallāwwīyya since before the thirties. A Mehallāwī who was a craftsman working in industry considered himself to be of higher status than the peasant who worked the land. There were less basic differences between them as well, in such things as the clothes they wore and their styles of life.

With the opening of the Misr Company and the migration of thousands of peasants from the surrounding villages to al-Mehalla, the social distinctions between the peasants living in the town and the true Mehallāwwīyya became extreme. A social group known as the sherkāwwīyya (s. sherkāwī) emerged, made up of the former peasants working in the Company. In the presence of large numbers of peasants, the differences between them and the Mehallāwīyya in all aspects of life emerged clearly, as will become clear in

later chapters.

After the migration of the peasants to al-Meḥalla and their employment in the textile industry, there was no longer an occupational distinction between them and the Meḥallāwwīyya. Instead, a social distinction emerged, based on origin rather than occupation, which continued to be significant for about twenty years. It then began to disintegrate by stages in the face of a number of other factors which contributed to the unification of the workers in general, regardless of background. The most important distinction today is that between public sector employees and workers in private industry.

While in Cairo and Alexandria there were Westernised groups who made up the aristocratic elite and who were in close contact with foreign individuals and frequently had been educated in foreign schools, no such group existed in al-Meḥalla. Situated in the heart of the Delta, the city had no direct contact with the movement of foreigners into the country, and the few individual foreigners who did come there to engage in the cotton industry never constituted a social group which interacted with the townspeople. Rather, the foreigners were isolated and had no social intercourse with the local inhabitants.

The only visible sign of a foreign presence in al-Mehalla was the "Frères" school for boys and girls, with an attached clinic where basic medical services were provided and an orphanage which was used mostly by the local Copts. Most of the pupils at this school were the children of foreigners, local Christians, or administrators

from Cairo, although the children of a few of the city notables attended.

Thus the only "Westernised" group in al-Mehallà consisted of administrative employees who were not originally from the town but came from Cairo. They were in constant contact with the capital and with Alexandria, and this, in addition to their style of dress and way of life, marked them out as aliens. This minority used to send their children to foreign schools in Cairo and Alexandria. They were regarded by ahl al-balad as being more sophisticated, in a Western way, than the local people. By comparison, the local people had access only to the facilities of al-Mehalla, which were all of a local or national character. With the exception of the "Frères", all of the schools in the city were Egyptian.[1]

Even today, al-Mehalla remains relatively traditional. The only modern amusements are cinemas which show mostly Egyptian films. Aside from an occasional foreign film, there is very little in the way of Western culture. Western music and theatre, for instance, rarely exist outside Cairo and Alexandria, and only a tiny minority of the inhabitants of al-Mehalla are interested in such pursuits.

Signs of religious life in the city are striking: the numerous mosques are much used for prayer, and religious festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm. In Ramadan the majority of the population fasts, and the whole structure of life is different than that of other months of

---

[1] After the 1952 revolution, all foreign schools fell under the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and they now teach the government syllabus with the addition of a foreign language.

the year. Most work is done in the period between the sunset prayer and the pre-dawn meal, for many people remain awake all night, although the public sector maintains normal working hours.

Many of the townspeople make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and a large number of pilgrims from al-Mehalla make the journey every year. Other religious customs--the celebration of feasts, the holding of various religious ceremonies, the slaughtering of sheep at the Greater Bairam and the distribution of alms during Ramadan--play an important part in the life of al-Mehalla, and demonstrate the continuing resistance to Westernisation and secularisation.

With the influence of the mass media and education, Westernisation is increasing, but it remains far less than in urban centres such as Cairo. The Westernised groups have increased in number, and are no longer limited to the few bureaucrats who originally came from Cairo, but even the most "modern" in their way of life observe the prevailing patterns of life in al-Mehalla, and live differently there than when they are in the capital.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the broad outlines of the development of al-Mehalla, showing that it has been an important textile centre in Egypt for centuries. The city has grown rapidly in the twentieth century, particularly since the establishment of the vast Misr Company complex beginning in the late twenties. Today the textile industry, together with its ancillary services, dominates the town

economically as well as demographically. While the city has become increasingly urbanised, it has never lost touch with its rural hinterland, which continues to supply al-Mehalla with labourers for the textile industry as well as raw materials and foodstuffs.

The demographic expansion of the city has been due to the influx of large numbers of migrants, as well as commuters who come daily from surrounding villages to work. Because of the city's rapid growth, expansion has been largely unplanned, and residential, commercial and industrial buildings are mixed together throughout. Living conditions tend to be crowded, although housing has improved greatly since the fifties and the sex ratio has levelled off.

Despite years of intensive urbanisation, however, al-Mehalla remains very traditional socially, especially by comparison with Cairo and Alexandria, and has retained and developed its original specialisation in textiles. Chapter III discusses the development of the textile industry in al-Mehalla since pre-Ottoman times, with particular emphasis on the external events affecting the textile industry and local responses and adaptations to these events.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Al-Mehalla as an Old Textile Centre

It is commonly assumed that al-Mehalla, like other industrial cities in Egypt, developed its reputation and its vitality through the introduction of modern industry. Such an assumption, erroneous as it is, is reinforced by the shortage of documentation of the city's history, as well as by the support lent to this view by the administrators of industrial plants such as the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company. Careful review of the historical sources, however, shows that the city has passed through various stages of development as a textile centre, and that the pre-industrial period was not one of mere stagnation. This chapter pieces together information on the early development of the textile industry in al-Mehalla and analyses its development in the twentieth century, using both written sources and oral history as tools for placing this industry in the context of the national and international trends and events which have affected al-Mehalla.

Although it is clear that the city has an unbroken tradition of textile production extending back over centuries, it is difficult to date the origin of the industry there exactly. The historical literature cites Alexandria, Damietta, Bura, Tennis, Demira and Dabīk as having been important textile-producing centres prior to

the Ottoman period (1517-1798), but does not include al-Mehalla.[1] Tenth-century al-Mehalla is usually referred to in the literature as an important urban centre, as it was then the capital, or kawra, of the administrative unit of Sakha, and of the Governorate of Gharbīyya. Al-Muqaddas describes the town as having had a prosperous commercial life during this period, but the only industrial activity which he mentions is the production of cottonseed oil.[2]

Prominent textile centres such as Damietta, Tennis, Dabīk, Bura and Demira were exposed to the continous attacks of crusaders and pirates in the twelfth century. Al-Mehalla, located farther inland, was protected from such attack, and was far enough from the capital to escape the constant political struggles that occurred there. Thus when textile centres such as Damietta collapsed under the pressure of external events, it may have been that large numbers of skilled textile craftsmen moved to towns farther from the coast, and al-Mehalla would have been a logical choice. This idea is supported by the fact that the first historical references to al-Mehalla as an industrial centre date from after the deterioration of the original textile-producing towns and cities.

Such an interpretation does not necessarily imply that it was the migrating weavers who introduced the

---

[1] al-Muqqadas, Shams al-Dīn 'Abu-'Abd-Allah ibn Muhammad, Ahsan al-taqasīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālim (Leiden, 1906), p. 313; al-Maqrizi, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Ali, Al-mawa'iz wal i'tiyar bi-dhikr al-khitat wal-'athar (Bulaq, 1925); p. 286; ibn Duqman, Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Misri, Al-intisar bi wasitat 'aqd al-asmar (Bulaq, 1893), vol. v, p. 82.

[2] al-Muqaddas, p. 313.

textile industry to al-Mehalla after the twelfth century. The city has been producing textiles at least since pre-Ottoman times, and although the historical record is too vague to provide evidence of weaving there prior to the twelfth century, it is plausible to suppose that craftsmen may have been drawn there because it was already a relatively secure textile centre. Either way, the city's fortunes must have benefitted from declines in other textile towns, especially Damietta, which, like al-Mehalla, was an early producer of silk textiles for local and export consumption. In any event, the tendency of historians to focus their attention on military events means that the early history of cities which witnessed no important campaigns has been neglected, and so very little is known about the first development of the textile industry in al-Mehalla.

Ibn Duqmān describes fifteenth-century al-Mehalla as a city with schools, mosques, inns, gardens and weavers.[1] It was the capital of Gharbīyya Governorate during almost the entire Ottoman period. The important point to note about al-Mehalla's fate as an industrial city during the Ottoman period is that it probably deteriorated far less than many Egyptian cities, which suffered greatly from the Ottoman policy of sending local craftsmen away to work in Turkish cities. Once again, it may have been al-Mehalla's location deep in the Delta which saved it from foreign

---

[1] Ibn Duqmān, v, p. 82.

penetration and utter decline.[1] That some sort of decline was experienced is shown by reports of French scholars who accompanied Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, who noted that despite the fact that al-Mehalla remained the largest city in the Delta there were whole quarters which had been completely deserted by their inhabitants.[2] The reasons for this decrease in the population are unknown.

There may have been a further decline in the population of the city at the end of the eighteenth century due to the French invasion. The battle that took place between French and Egyptian troops at al-Mehalla is described by al-Jabarti as follows:

> A troop of French soldiers settled in Menufiyya and ordered the inhabitants to pay them tribute as a condition for departing. When they reached al-Mehalla al-Kubra, its inhabitants were more stubborn. They met the judge of the town and refrained from paying tribute and insisted on fighting the French. The French set a trap for the people of Mehalla and fought them with guns and cannons. The French killed about one thousand and six hundred, including the judge of al-Mehalla. No one in Mehalla escaped that fate except those who left the town. The French, after subjugating the people of Mehalla by force, imposed a tax of about one hundred thousand French riyals on the town. They collected it by force and pursued the rich inhabitants who fled from the town.[3]

Such persecution may have driven many local residents

---

[1] It is clear that al-Mehalla declined less than other textile cities during this period, because the city ranked third in population in Egypt, and had over 2,000 textile workers, while Bani Sueif had 600 and Qena 250 [Owen, E. R.J., Cotton and the Egyptian Economy 1820-1914 (London, 1969), pp. 12-13], and only al-Mehalla and Cairo were then able to produce textiles for export.

[2] Girard, M.P.S., "Memoire sur l'agriculture, l'industrie, et le commerce de l'Egypte", in Déscription de l'Égypte, 2nd edn., vol. xvii (Paris, 1824), p. 205.

[3] al-Jabarti, 'Abd al-Rahman, 'Aja'ib al-Athār fi al-Tarājim wa-al-Akhbār (Cairo, 1958), p. 369.

to leave the town and search for a more secure place to live. However, the French military domination of al-Mehalla was too brief to end the relative isolation of the city.

French chroniclers describe the state of the textile industry in Egypt during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as primitive and consisting mainly of handicrafts. Several Egyptian economists, notably al-Gritly[1] and Issawi[2], also describe the industry of that time as stagnant and essentially medieval in its techniques and organisation. These writers attribute the state of the industry to its failure to keep pace with European advances in technology.

The production techniques of the weaving and spinning industries in particular are described by al-Gritly[3] as very traditional, essentially unchanged since pharaonic times. No modern tools such as those to be found in Europe at the time were in use. There was a complete lack of inanimate motive power, and the industry consisted of small production units, workshops staffed by their owners and a few boys.

The fact that the industry was mainly based on small production units was due to a strong assocation between industry and agriculture. Craftsmen worked at spinning and weaving in their spare time, depending mainly on locally

---

[1] al-Gritly, A., History of Industry in Egypt (Cairo, 1952, Arabic).

[2] Issawi, C., "Egypt since 1800: a study in lopsided development", in Issawi, C., The Economic History of the Middle East (Chicago, 1966), pp. 359-374.

[3] al-Gritly, pp. 20.

available agricultural materials. Such features of the Egyptian textile industry at the beginning of the nineteenth century have led modern scholars such as Issawi to describe it as part of an essentially subsistence economy, using local raw materials to produce for local consumption.[1] This characterisation is somewhat misleading as far as al-Mehalla is concerned, for it fails to take into account salient distinctions between industrial developments in that city and those elsewhere in the country.

Eighteenth-century al-Mehalla was described by French scholars as the largest centre for silk weaving in Egypt, important not only for its industry but also for its commercial activity. Girard reported that al-Mehalla was then producing silk textiles for various parts of the Ottoman Empire.[2] The vigorous al-Mehalla textile industry thus produced for export as well as for local consumption. It used local raw materials, such as flax, but also imported raw materials, such as silk from Syria, brought by way of Damietta.[3] The city had over 2,000 textile workers just before the arrival of the French.[4]

When the French arrived in 1798, they described the importance of al-Mehalla as an industrial city as follows:

> Mehallat el-Kebyr is the capital of Gharbiya; its name signifies literally the big city. Commerce is one of its activities, but it is mainly a manufacturing city rather than a place for exchange. Mehallat el-Kebyr is the biggest manufacturer of silk. What makes

---

[1] Issawi, pp. 360.

[2] Girard, p. 206.

[3] DuBois-Aymé, "Voyage dans l'interieur du Delta", in Description de l'Égypte, 2nd. ed., vol. ii (Paris, 1824), pp. 108-113.

[4] Owen, p. 12.

> it very important is that there is no silk industry in any other city in Egypt. All the silk cloth that is used by Egyptian women is manufactured in Mehallat el-Kebyr. They also produce headscarves, light linen for shirts, and linen towels with silk borders.[1]

The first Egyptian census was conducted in 1798 by the French expedition. This census ranked al-Mehalla third in population in Egypt, after Cairo and Damietta, making it one of the leading cities of the Delta. Its population even exceeded that of Alexandria, as shown in the figures below.

Table 6

Populations of Major Egyptian Cities According to the French Census of 1798[2]

City	Population
Cairo	260,000
Damiette	20,000
Mehallat el-Kebyr	17,500
Alexandrie	15,000
Assiut	12,000
Tanta	10,000
Mansura	7,500

Thus it is clear that throughout its history al-Mehalla has been graced by a location which is highly advantageous for fostering a flourishing textile industry. Far enough from the coast and from the route between Cairo and Alexandria to avoid being the scene of major military conflicts and national political struggles, near enough to

---

[1] DuBois-Aymé, ii, iv, p. 109.

[2] Jomard, E., "Memoires sur la population comparée de l'Égypt", in Déscription de l'Égypte, 2nd edn., vol. xviii (Paris, 1824), p. 96.

major trading centres to be able to obtain imported raw materials such as Syrian silk and to produce for the export market, it was located in the heart of an agricultural area which provided it with a steady supply of local raw materials such as flax. With a long tradition of an indigenous weaving industry, and probably also as a magnet for craftsmen from towns with less favourable locations, the city provided an ideal site for the building up of a strong specialisation in textiles.

To be sure, the relative isolation of al-Mehalla which allowed it to sustain its continuity as an urban centre and as a textile centre never made it wholly independent of external events. Once textiles were produced in sufficient quantity to be traded and exported, national and even international events grew in importance. Any interruption in trade routes, for instance, could reduce the flow of raw silk from Syria[1] or interrupt the normal distribution of textiles to other parts of Egypt. The important feature of al-Mehalla's location and resources was that it was in an extremely good position, from earliest times, vis-a-vis other textile-producing centres in Egypt, and that it made full use of the opportunities for expansion which this relative advantage provided it.

The Textile Industry at the Time of Muhammad 'Alī

The first attempt at establishing large-scale industry on the European model in Egypt was made by Muhammad

---

[1] Although there were always two routes to Egypt, one by sea and one overland through Gaza and Sinai, so that both would have had to be closed to interrupt the flow of trade.

'Alī. The impetus he gave to industry came from a desire to replace imported goods with local substitutes as part of a comprehensive scheme to develop the Egyptian economy. He made weaving and trading in cotton textiles a state monopoly, and introduced long-staple cotton, which gave further impetus to government investment in the industry. By 1833 thirty weaving factories were operating in Egypt, along with cotton spinning mills and bleaching and dyeing establishments. They were equipped with European machines and employed about 30,000 workers. Power was provided mainly by treadmills, and in a few cases steam engines were imported. Jennies and looms were largely manufactured by Egyptian carpenters.[1]

In 1826 two such factories were located in al-Mehalla, each of which contained 60 combing machines, 120 spinning machines and 200 looms. Workshops were constructed for repairing and producing machinery for spinning and weaving. The general pattern at that time was for Cairo factories to provide raw materials and equipment to the provincial mills, which would spin yarns and return them to Cairo for weaving or export. Al-Mehalla was an exception to this practice, in that the factories there were run as combined units which handled all phases of production of finished textiles.[2]

Muhammad 'Alī's attempts to provide Egypt with a

---

[1] Hansen, B., and Nashashibi, K., Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development: Egypt (New York, 1975), p. 206.

[2] Fahmy, M., La revolution de l'industrie en Égypte et ses consequences sociales au 19e siècle (Leiden, 1954, 25-26.

centralised industrial economy failed. He became unable to finance the textile factories, and imports of cotton goods increased. Only the weaving of coarse cotton adapted to domestic tastes survived at the handicraft level. By the middle of the 1830's, Muhammad 'Alī's resources were overstrained, and in 1837 he was forced to institute a policy of administrative decentralisation which rapidly led to the abandonment of his monopoly system and the revival of a free market characterised by direct contact between the Egyptian cultivator and the European merchant.[1]

The Effects of Imperialism on the Textile Industry

By 1850 Egypt was fully integrated into the imperialist-dominated world market system as an agricultural unit. This necessitated a number of structural changes, including the authorisation of private ownership of land for both Egyptians and foreigners. The irrigated area was vastly expanded, making it possible to concentrate on cash crops such as cotton. There was great improvement in transportation, and the financial links binding Egypt to the industrially-advanced European countries were strengthened. A huge public debt was accumulated, beginning in 1858. As an export crop, cotton became very important in attracting private foreign capital to Egypt; the country's surplus earnings from cotton exports were continually absorbed by the servicing of Egypt's foreign debt.[2]

Thus emerged a dependent export economy, almost

---

[1] Owen, pp. 45-46.
[2] Issawi, p. 365.

totally dependent on activities related to the financing, sale and purchase, transport and industrial processing of cotton. Investment in industry was limited to various aspects of processing the export crop (such as cotton ginning and pressing), and to a few protected industries (sugar, beer, cement, bakeries) and traditional Egyptian industries such as the production of silk, soap and cigarettes. The investors in even this limited industrial establishment were mainly foreigners who were protected by the Capitulations and had direct access to foreign markets and to major sources of finance. By the end of the century, the indirect penetration of the West had become overt and direct.

During the period between 1850 and 1900, which witnessed the British occupation of Egypt, it became difficult to diversify the economy because the colonial administration was opposed to any serious attempt to industrialise the country. It was also difficult to diversify investment under the policy of a government which favoured a strict specialisation in the production and export of cotton. The chief consequence of this state of affairs was the emergence and reinforcement of a raw material exporting economy. Together with the growth of such an economy and its inevitable dependence on the import of finished goods, there developed a new demand for goods manufactured in Europe.

During the khedival era, and in particular since Ismail, the policy had been to make Egypt a part of Europe. Hence Western styles of life, Western products and Western

ideas were increasingly glorified by the elite. Consequently, the rise in the living standards of upper and middle-class Egyptians within a raw material exporting economy was mainly reflected in the acquisition of European consumer goods. With the adoption of a European lifestyle, it became difficult for equivalent local products to survive. From that period on, Egyptians developed a taste for goods that could not be locally produced, and produced commodities that the local society was losing its taste for. This restricted the demand for local products to the traditional and lower-class consumers.

A split thus developed in the textile market between imported products to meet the demands of the elite and locally produced goods to satisfy the needs of the masses. The market for foreign goods was entirely controlled by import regulations, and even local industry suffered from government import restrictions, as long-staple Egyptian cotton was too good and therefore too expensive for local consumption. Low-grade cotton had to be imported from India, Syria, and especially England, and silk was brought from China and Italy.[1] Flax and artificial silk were also imported. Yarn imports were limited because the production capacity of the textile industry was low while it was still at the craft stage, and imports were further discouraged by the manipulation of tariffs. This was in line with British colonial policy to discourage Egyptian

---

[1]Shearer notes that in 1909 all of the yarn used in Assyūt came from Europe, particularly Lancashire. Shearer, W., "The Weaving Industry in Assyut", L'Égypte contemporaire No. 1 (Cairo, 1910), pp. 184-185.

industry. In 1916 regulations even went so far as to ban the use of imported raw cotton for local consumption.[1] These restrictions were so severe that the needs of the masses could hardly be met.

So telling were the pressures brought to bear that even large-scale industrial enterprises failed to stand the strain. In 1896 a group of Egyptians attempted to establish a modern textile factory in Alexandria, but they failed. Unable to stand the competition of imported textiles, they sold out to a group of English businessmen who formed the Anglo-Egyptian Company. Another Egyptian company, the Egyptian Cotton Mills Company, was founded in 1899 with 20,000 spindles. Both companies experienced difficulties, and in 1907 the Egyptian Cotton Mills Company had to close down. The Anglo-Egyptian Company survived longer, but it had to be reorganised by a German group in 1912 as the Filature Nationale d'Égypte.[2]

---

[1] A law was passed in 1916 prohibiting the importation of foreign raw cotton for domestic consumption, allegedly to protect domestic cotton from foreign plant diseases. Whether the motivation was only a pretext for a protectionist measure or not, it certainly dealt a severe blow to the Egyptian textile industry. See Hansen and Nashashibi, p. 209.

[2] Both mills had some prospects for success since they oriented their operations toward a large domestic demand for coarse yarns spun from ordinary domestic cotton from Upper Egypt, which was replaced by low-grade Indian and Syrian cotton whenever the former was considered to be too expensive. Moreover, the mills were protected by relatively high transportation costs and by the eight percent customs duty applied to imports. But no sooner had the first factory started operations in 1901 than a countervailing excise tax of eight percent was imposed, nullifying the external tariff. The excise tax was pushed by Lord Cromer personally in the name of free trade, but was probably also the result of pressure from Lancashire industrialists. Hansen and Nashashibi, p. 207.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, al-Mehalla had begun to decline as an industrial centre. It began to serve as a cotton collection centre to meet the needs of the export economy. Mechanical gins, presses, and repair workshops, as well as the commercial activity of cotton trading, were introduced.[1] Expansion in this period was toward the river because of the specific nature of these economic activities. Gins, presses and rice mills were constructed on the eastern side of the Shebin River to make use of the river for transportation as well as in water-powered industrial operations such as cotton-pressing.

In losing its position as a prominent industrial centre, al-Mehalla also declined as an administrative centre. Tanta became the capital of Gharbiyya Governorate, and major administrative centres were located there.[2] The main network of railroad lines in the Delta was headquartered in Tanta, with minor lines branching out to other towns and cities.

Thus the change in al-Mehalla's status as an industrial centre also affected the size of its population. While in 1798 al-Mehalla had been substantially larger

---

[1] 'Ali Mubarak describes the state of industry in al-Mehalla as follows: "There are a hatchery that produces about 500,000 chickens a year, and rice threshers and three workshops for machine repairs, of which one is owned by the mother of the Khedive Ismail and the other two by the Englishman Francis. There are seven ginning mills, all owned by foreigners except for one that is owned by Prince Husein Basha Yaken." Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya (Cairo, 1955), p. 15.

[2] Ramzy, Muhammad, The Geographic Dictionary of Egypt (Cairo, 1953, Arabic), p. 18.

than either Tanta or Mansura, it had lost its relative position by the end of the nineteenth century, as shown in the figures below.[1]

City	1798 Census	1897 Census
al-Mehalla	17,500	31,791
Tanta	10,000	57,289
Mansura	7,500	37,266

Whereas al-Mehalla was a flourishing textile centre during the Ottoman period, exporting silk textiles to all parts of the Ottoman Empire, now the market for its textiles had shrunk to local consumers, and most of these were increasingly confined to members of the lower class and the traditional groups in towns and villages. While the weaving industry survived, it was not to regain its former vitality until after World War I.

The First Three Decades of the Twentieth Century

The first three decades of the twentieth century fall within the colonial period of dependent economy during which Egypt specialised in exporting raw cotton and England in manufacturing textiles. The dependency of the economy increased during World War I, when the whole Egyptian economy was directed to serving the British army until the end of the war and the declaration of the armistice in 1918.

Part of this period is regarded by some economists as marking the beginning of import-substitution in Egypt.[2]

---

[1] Ramzy, p. 18.

[2] Mabro, R., and Radwan, S., The Industrialisation of Egypt 1939-1973 (London, 1976).

The important developments that created the necessary conditions for an industrial spurt in the late 1920's and 1930's were the crisis of the export sector, the emergence of national enterprise, and the tariff reform of 1930.

Although attempts at industrialisation during World War I failed, they did challenge the assumption that Egypt was an agricultural country that should specialise in exporting cotton and importing industrial products. This challenge was affirmed by the successive crises of 1920, 1921 and 1926, culminating in the depression of 1929-1932, which resulted in stagnation in the cotton export sector.

> Egypt, like all other primary exporters, faced a situation where a slump in international demand, caused by a crisis in the industrial centres, resulted in the export sectors of the periphery countries contracting violently and a severe deflation being transmitted to the rest of the economy.[1]

National awareness of the need for industrialisation increased. Many Egyptians considered industrialisation essential to independence and the basis for modernisation and progress. Population growth was creating employment pressures that agriculture alone could not handle. Voices began to be heard in Egypt in favour of the development of national industries to eliminate dependence on foreign imports. This patriotic feeling induced the emergence of national enterprise in the twenties and thirties.

During this period textile production in al-Mehalla was dependent on imported cotton yarn and was oriented toward the needs of the general mass of the working population. The purchasing power of the peasants and working

---

[1]Mabro and Radwan, p. 27.

classes was dependent on the price of cotton, which fluctuated considerably under the laissez-faire economic policy of that time. Consequently, the position and status of those involved in the textile industry were unstable.

The System of Marketing Cotton and Finished Products and Its Impact on the Textile Industry

After the government monopoly of cotton was cancelled in 1849, the peasants were free to sell their produce on the open market. The peasant sold his cotton either to a petty merchant in the village or to cotton merchants at the nearest cotton market, or sent it directly to banks or ginners. Cotton markets were established on a wide scale in 1912 in villages and towns to protect the peasants from the exploitation of the merchants.[1] The government provided these cotton collection centres with weighers and a daily report of cotton prices according to the Alexandria exchange.

There were two procedures available to the peasant for selling his cotton. He could sell at a pre-fixed price, which prevented him from gaining if the market price was high but gave him some security against sudden drops in price. This method of selling was adopted mainly by small landholders in urgent need. Or he could sell the crop by

---

[1] "Kitchener instituted a system of halaqas [cotton markets] in an effort to protect the smaller cultivators against the activities of unscrupulous dealers. These consisted of an enclosed space of about an acre in which there was an official weighing-machine, notice of the daily opening price of ginned cotton at Alexandria, and later, a storehouse from which cheap seed and chemical fertiliser were distributed... Ninety-two such halaqas were opened during the first year." Owen, p. 218.

contract before it was picked. The seller received a sum in advance and estimated the final price according to the contract bourse.

The villages of the Delta and Upper Egypt, in spite of difficult economic conditions, still constituted a ready market for al-Mehalla products, which was not the case with the products of other textile centres. As a result, al-Mehalla remained the town with the most handlooms and weavers. In 1909, al-Mehalla had 3,183 male weavers, compared with 2,369 in Cairo, 2,405 in Qalyub, 2,394 in Menuf, 1,431 in Damietta and 1,266 in Akhmim. Al-Mehalla also ranked first in the number of handlooms in use, 2,455 compared with 390 in Damietta and about the same number in Cairo.[1]

The outbreak of World War I affected the weavers in al-Mehalla badly. The peasant's purchasing power dropped sharply because his major crop was not exported and its price was low. In 1914 most of the looms in the city stopped working. One big producer who owned twenty-four looms stopped twenty of them. The son of this weaver explained that, "My father would have stopped all the looms, but it so happened that those still working on them were our relatives."

During this period in al-Mehalla weaving was a seasonal activity. Weavers worked mainly when there was a demand for their products. This was usually at the times of mawālid (saints' days) and at the time of selling the

---

[1] Rapport de la Commission du commerce et de l'industrie (Eg.) (Cairo, 1918), p. 15.

major crops, mainly cotton. Small weavers who had no capital would work just before the cotton season, sell their products, and stop weaving for the rest of the year. The big weavers too sold most of their cloth during the cotton season, but they had access to relatively large amounts of capital, and thus were able to store their products for up to a year before selling them.

If the price of cotton was low, the peasants would have little money with which to purchase clothes. Given the limited amounts of money involved, a drop in the purchasing power of the consumers would have a direct impact on the scale of production. Big weavers would stop some of their looms and dismiss wage-earning craftsmen. During such a crisis not only did the prosperity of the weavers decline, but in some cases they had to leave the craft. Thus in 1914 some owners became wage-earning craftsmen and many craftsmen became pedlars. This pattern was so common in slump years that when present-day informants describe a bad period they say, "That year weavers left their looms and sold vegetables in the market."

Production in the handicraft textile industry in al-Mehalla was diversified, and included handkerchiefs, towels, napkins, sheets, bedspreads, silk shawls and sashes, and cloth for gallalīb, along with cotton, silk and linen yarns. These textiles supplied the traditional demands of the peasants and working classes, and most items were sold locally, with very little being sent directly to Cairo and virtually nothing abroad. Merchants visited weavers in their homes periodically to buy the

finished goods, and generally had small shops in town where the goods were sold. Silk goods were always sold by weight, cotton by the piece.

During World War I, the supply of raw materials was much curtailed. This led to a decline in cottage industry in general,[1] but al-Mehalla seems to have fared better than other textile centres. Although al-Mehalla was famous for its silk, it adapted to war conditions, substituting cotton and other yarns for silk to meet the demands of the traditional local market. This is reflected in the statistics given for specialist weavers in the censuses of 1907 and 1917.

In 1907 there were 3,112 silk weavers in the markez of al-Mehalla, compared with 158 in 1917; those working in cotton increased from 43 in 1907 to 646 in 1917. This indicates a strong swing to cotton, but more significant is the appearance in the 1917 census of 2,528 weavers specialising in "yarns of non-animal origin, or unspecified yarns".[2] Unspecified yarns may be a category including artificial silk or rayon along with any yarn not included in earlier censuses. Such fibres did not exist in 1907, but by 1917 had absorbed virtually all of those who had traditionally worked in pure silk.

The total number of textile workers in al-Mehalla changed very little in these years, from 3,902 in 1907 to 3,896 in 1917. ... There was diversification into ..

---

[1] As of 1909, Assyūt, for example, had only seventy looms; though a few years previously it had had 300. ... Shearer, pp. 184-185.

[2] CAPMAS, 1917.

textile-related industries, for the 1917 census includes 200 workers in ginning and pressing, an activity which had not figured at all in the 1907 census. Key informants report that the al-Mehalla textile industry did suffer a decline in 1914 due to World War I, but this decline is not reflected in comparison of the census figures for 1907 and 1917 due to the recovery of 1916. In that year many of the local weavers turned to artificial silk, and quickly regained their pre-war positions.

After the war cotton prices rose gradually from 38.51 riyals the qantar in 1917 to 37.20 in 1918 to about 45 riyals in 1919, as compared with 12.0 in 1914.[1] England imported huge quantities of cotton for its factories immediately after the war to make up for the shortages of the war years. The purchasing power of Egyptian cotton growers increased, and the al-Mehalla weavers today speak of the years 1919 and 1920 as a golden age of their industry.

Weaving establishments flourished, expanding to meet the increasing demand for textiles. Expansion was rapid, since all that was needed was an empty place and some pieces of wood to be hammered together into a loom. There were then no licenses needed, nor were there taxes or health requirements. The capital required for starting up in handlooms was thus relatively insignificant (£E 2 or 3), raw materials were readily available, and weavers were able to get yarn from merchants on credit. However,

---

[1] al-Rifa'ī, H., Industry in Egypt (Cairo, 1935, Arabic), pp. 187-188. Cotton prices were always expressed in riyals; one riyal equals £E 0.20.

the demand for yarn was so great that prices increased dramatically. One informant who is a big weaver today reports that in 1918 his father bought a quantity of silk yarn for £E 1.00 a kilogram, and before he arrived home its price had increased to £E 4.00. The prices of finished textiles also shot up; the ghazlīyya (a six-metre piece of traditional cloth), for example, which had sold for £E 0.20 in 1917 sold for £E 1.25 in 1919.

This rapid increase in cotton prices, together with the decrease in imports, created a big gap between supply and demand, which in turn contributed to inflation. After the boom years, prices of cotton went down from 35.94 riyals per qantar in 1925 to 21.53 in 1926, 29.68 in 1927, and 25.88 in 1928.[1] Gradually some stability was attained in prices and costs, and so too a relative stability in the positions of weavers in general. The increasing use of artificial silk in 1927 affected only those who had specialised in silk weaving. These weavers quickly adapted their looms to the new yarn and diversified by producing cotton cloth as well.

As time went on the situation in al-Mehalla inevitably reflected the prevailing export economy of the country during this period, but al-Mehalla avoided complete industrial decline and industry continued to absorb more of the work force than any other activity. In 1917 the total population of the bandar of al-Mehalla was 38,088, of whom 10,458 were workers, distributed among various

---

[1] al-Rifa'ī, pp. 187-188.

occupations as follows:[1]

Textile industry	3,167	31 percent
Other industry	2,707	26 percent
Agriculture	2,740	26 percent
Trade	1,844	17 percent

It was this high level of industrialisation which led Tala'at Harb to characterise the city as follows in a speech on September 4, 1924:

> The occupation of 3,167 persons in the textile industry in al-Mehalla contributed to its economic balance and made it a unique Egyptian city compared to the majority of Egyptian cities that are dominated by rural features.[2]

Al-Mehalla had not in fact suddenly become unique, but had succeeded where other industrial centres such as Assyūt had failed in maintaining its high level of involvement in the textile industry.

By 1930, with a world depression and deflation, cotton prices fell to 17 riyals, reaching 12 riyals in 1931.[3] The international slump had a severe effect on al-Mehalla. Many weavers abandoned weaving entirely, and some cotton merchants went bankrupt. This crisis affected all weavers, but, not surprisingly, it was the small weaver who was worst hit and who had to leave the field for other, less profitable work.

Until 1930 the fate of the textile industry in al-Mehalla was closely linked to fluctuations in cotton prices, because they largely determined the incomes of

---

[1] CAPMAS, 1917.

[2] Harb, M., Collection of Speeches by Tala'at Harb Bey (Cairo, 1927, Arabic), p. 102.

[2] al-Rifa'ī, p. 188.

peasants, and thus in turn the scale of production for the rural market. Given the limited margin of profit within which the weaver had to operate and the uncertain conditions of the local market for which he produced, it is understandable that his position was extremely vulnerable.

The State of Technology and Industrial Development

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Egyptian textile production was predominantly non-mechanical. In al-Mehalla only two operations were carried out mechanically, pressing and ginning, both controlled mainly by foreigners. The early establishment of these two mechanical processes in Egypt was in line with the colonial interest in packing cotton for export.[1]

Handlooms were locally made. They were constructed to be foot-operated, the treadles being connected to four or sometimes six pedals. Weavers became quite expert, and some could pass the shuttle through the loom seventy times per minute. The yarns used in these looms were either cotton or silk, the cotton yarn usually being imported from England and the silk from China and Italy through importers in Cairo. The cotton was bought ready-dyed, while silk was dyed locally.

Expansion and development in the textile industry were limited by this low level of technology as well as by marketing conditions which had an adverse effect on the

---

[1] All Egyptian cotton was exported. In some years the quantity exported exceeded the year's production--e.g., in 1927 total production was 6,087,000 qantars, and 7,383,000 were exported, with the additional quantity being taken from the previous year's stock. al-Rifa'ī, p. 189.

possibilities of accumulating capital. It is estimated by two key informants who owned weaving workshops at that time that in 1914 the largest single quantity of capital invested by a weaver was between £E 300 and £E 500. By 1919 this figure had risen to about £E 3,000. The acquisition of such sums was usually possible only for those who combined trade in raw materials with their activities as weavers.

The Egyptianisation of the Textile Industry

The Egyptian textile industry remained almost entirely craft-based through the twenties, with the exception of some processes which were mechanised to serve the needs of the British industrial establishment. Because industrialisation of the economy had been blocked by colonial policy, the craft based industry had never gone through a process of mechanisation, and thus when the development of mechanisation did become possible after the twenties it was through an essentially separate industry which was built up alongside the handicraft weaving sector.

Rising demand for textiles during the twenties and thirties meant ever-increasing levels of imports. The tariff reforms of the thirties and the emergence of national capital, mainly within the Bank Misr group, made mechanisation of weaving possible for the first time. Bank Misr established factories for ginning, spinning and weaving, and after some time became the main investor in all activities concerning cotton production, industrial

processing and weaving.[1]

In al-Mehalla, as elsewhere in Egypt, mechanised industry was established from the beginning on a large scale rather than developing slowly from the handicraft stage. Traditional weavers played no part in setting up mechanised, large-scale production. While the handicraft sector of the city was struggling with a shrinking market and limited capital resources, an outside bourgeois group with access to large amounts of capital established a modern factory for spinning and weaving there.

Shareholders of Misr Company included big landlords, such as the Badrawī Ashur family, and big businessmen such as Tala'at Harb and 'Abd al-'Azīz Radwan. Out of the thirty-five shareholders, only four were from al-Mehalla--the city's major landlord and three local yarn merchants. The shareholders from al-Mehalla, moreover, had the smallest number of shares, and only one of them became an active member of the board of directors.[2]

The question of the factory's location was extensively debated. Several Egyptian towns were considered suitable in terms of climate, labour supply, transport facilities and other factors. Local informants give various

---

[1]The Bank played a vital role in the early industrialisation of the Egyptian economy as a whole, also acting as intermediary in extending government loans to industrial enterprises, and establishing or helping to establish twenty-seven companies, most of which remained under its complete control. See Fuad, A., Bank Misr, 1920-1970 (In Between National Capitalism and Socialism) (Cairo, 1970, Arabic).

[2]From the records of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company.

explanations for al-Mehalla's ultimate selection. One major reason given by officials at Bank Misr was that al-Mehalla lies almost at sea level and is therefore very humid all year round (humidity is very important to textile production). This is not, however, an adequate explanation, since Alexandria is equally humid, and at that time had many more infrastructural facilities. In addition, al-Mehalla is a two-hour train journey from Cairo and Alexandria, and then lacked sufficient power, water or sewage facilities to meet the needs of the original mill.

Tala'at Harb, the leader of the Bank Misr Group, was aware of all these limitations, but, as several local informants indicated, no other major town was prepared to sell a large trace of land to the Bank at a reasonable price. Whenever the word spread that a particular town was being considered as the site for a mill, real estate owners immediately raised their prices. Thus when al-Mehalla's prices remained reasonable, even if higher than they normally were, Tala'at Harb decided to build there. While this may be one of the reasons for the selection of the town, it is also clear that Tala'at Harb was well aware of al-Mehalla's long tradition in handloom weaving,[1] and it is reasonable to assume that the founders thought this made the town a good site for the location of their factory.

Bank Misr's intention in establishing the Misr Company was to institute large-scale mechanisation of the textile industry. The Bank's statement of its objectives was as

---

[1]Cf. Tala'at Harb's description of al-Mehalla cited on p. 74.

follows:

> ...to carry on spinning, weaving, bleaching and dyeing in addition to any industry associated with cotton and other fibres. Consequently this company will trade in yarn. In particular it will engage in the following: First, buying or selling raw materials in Egypt or abroad; second, trading in the company's products in Egypt and abroad; third, buying factories for spinning, weaving, bleaching and dyeing.[1]

Thus all the processes and operations of production, sales and purchasing were to be controlled by one company in one place.

The World War II Period

Conditions in the industry improved gradually, reaching a peak of prosperity in 1939 with World War II. The increasing demand for textiles on the parts of Egyptian civilians and foreign troops stationed in Egypt resulted in a big boom in the textile industry. The expansion of demand for textiles during World War II was so great that some traditional weavers increased the numbers of their handlooms from between twenty and fifty to between two hundred and three hundred, a rate of growth that had been impossible for them in the pre-war period.

The demand for cotton became so great that the number of workers involved in the spinning and weaving of cotton in al-Mehalla grew from 9,145 in 1937 to 21,140 in 1947. By 1937 the number of pure silk weavers had risen to 611, possibly because handwoven cotton textiles could not compete with factory-produced goods and cotton weavers had

---

[1] From the records of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in al-Mehalla.

reverted to silk, but those working in pure silk had decreased from 611 in 1937 to 46 in 1947.[1]

Though subject to foreign occupation and a policy of a free economy, the Egyptian government was moving toward intervention in cotton policy. Cotton, the chief raw material of the textile industry, was subject to international price fluctuations. The pricing of cotton was established in the cotton bourses which dealt in futures markets, spot markets, and forward dealing. But since the local futures markets were controlled by a limited number of powerful foreign dealers, they were unable to offer adequate facilities to Egyptian producers. The government intervened by closing the futures market in Alexandria several times.[2] Apart from direct interventions in the futures market, the government intervened in cotton cultivation in four main ways: area restriction, cotton export taxes, purchases for and sales from buffer stocks, and encouragement of cotton exports through straightforward subsidies.

Although Misr Company and two other big factories (Alexandria National Spinning Company and Kafr al-Dawar Company) were contributing to the establishment of a local yarn market and a modern textile industry, most Egyptian cotton continued to be exported. Local factories consumed about half a million qantars in the thirties, which constituted only about five percent of the cotton produced.

---

[1] CAPMAS, 1937, 1947.

[2] Hansen, B. and Marzouk, G., Development and Economic Policy in the U.A.R. (Amsterdam, 1965), p. 98.

This figure rose to twenty-five percent during World War II and decreased gradually after the war.

With the establishment of these big companies for spinning, the weaving industry also expanded. In Cairo and Alexandria, mechanical weaving was begun by big companies, some of them foreign-owned, but in al-Mehalla individuals and families in the weaving industry started to mechanise only after the establishment of the national Misr Company. These big companies as well as the small industry were supplied mainly by imported yarn in addition to some locally produced yarn.[1] Nine spinning factories produced about 112 tons of yarn daily in Egypt during World War II, distributed as follows:

Misr Spinning and Weaving Company	49.5 tons
National Spinning Company	35.0 tons
Kafr al-Dawar Company	13.0 tons
The six other companies	14.0 tons

These companies kept enough yarn for their own production needs, and by law sold the remainder to the government, which distributed it to other manufacturers on the basis of a quota system. The spinning mills in al-Mehalla were able to supply about half of the local demand for yarn during this period.[2]

The World War II boom had a dramatic effect on Misr Company as well as on the small handicraft workshops of al-Mehalla. In the thirties all the senior technical and

---

[1] André, E., L'industrie du cotton en Egypte (Cairo, 1953), p. 84.

[2] Ismail, N., The Industrial Area of al-Mehalla al-Kubra (Cairo, M.A. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1965, Arabic), p. 41.

managerial employees (e.g., heads of units) in the Misr Company had been foreigners. The Egyptian labour force was divided into two main categories: technical and managerial staff (i.e., clerks and technicians), and labourers. The technicians were mainly graduates of technical industrial schools (pre-university) who were sent to factories abroad for additional training and later replaced the foreign technical employees, also becoming heads of departments. Skilled labourers were few in number because traditional weavers refused to work in the Company. The majority of the labourers were unskilled and of rural origin. This group suffered most in adapting to the new working conditions in the factory and in their dealings with the town community of al-Mehalla.

During World War II the Misr Company expanded to meet the increasing demand for its products. The growth in capital and plant was accompanied by growth in the labour force. The number of workers increased from 2,000 in 1931 to 27,500 by 1946.[1] The increase in profits enabled the Company to replace the outdated looms which had been bought from British factories. This old machinery was then bought, repaired and used by smaller private factories and by independent weavers based in little workshops.[2]

The introduction of mechanical looms by the Misr Company in the thirties, and especially their ultimate

---

[1] Records of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company.

[2] Old knitting machinery sold off by the Company was also bought up by local weavers, who introduced mechanised knitting in 1947.

replacement and consequent sale to private weavers, provided a new opportunity for the traditional weavers of al-Mehalla. They began cautiously to use a few mechanical looms in addition to their old handlooms. With the change in looms, they changed their products. They started to produce new cloths as well as their traditional specialties, and also began to use a variety of other available yarns as well, including wool. Their consumers were no longer limited to the peasants, and the yarn was no longer totally imported, for several local factories were now producing it.

It is estimated by factory owners today that there were five persons who had mechanical looms in al-Mehalla in 1942, apart from the Misr Company. The first small mechanical factory was started by a director of the Workers' Department of Misr Company, who imported some old mechanical looms from France in 1934. Another Misr Company employee, the son of a weaver, bought a few old mechanical looms and supervised their operation privately while continuing to work for the Company. The other three were traditional weavers who bought two or three mechanical looms each.

When World War II started in 1939, Misr Company was already producing yarn as well as cloth. Demand for yarn exceeded the available supply, so the government arranged a rationing system for distribution of yarn. Weavers who had left the industry in 1930 returned, those who had continued in weaving were able to expand, and many persons from other occupations entered the textile business in

order to obtain a ration of yarn and sell it on the black market. A bundle of yarn weighing ten pounds cost £E 80 and could be sold for £E 500 on the black market. By 1945, a plain piece of ghazlīyya which had fetched £E 0.25 in 1940 was officially sold for about £E 0.45 and brought £E 1.20 on the black market.[1]

These increases in prices brought about increases in wages, profits, and led to the use of new materials. Wage-earning labourers were receiving higher wages. In 1933 a wage-earning labourer received £E 0.025 for weaving a sheet which was then sold for £E 0.12. By 1942 such sheets sold for £E 1.35, and the weaver was paid £E 0.25 per sheet. The change was so sudden and so great that it became possible for some weavers to change their positions substantially in one year. In 1939, for instance, one wage-earning craftsman was working for £E 0.075 per piece in his father's workshop. At the same time he owned two small handlooms for weaving handkerchiefs. In 1942 he bought about 1,000 bundles of silk on credit for £E 4 per bundle. By the end of the month the price per bundle had reached £E 40. In that year he increased the number of his handlooms to forty, and purchased two mechanical looms.[2]

The restriction of imported goods, complete government control of yarn, the fixing of prices while demand increased all led to the emergence of a black market in yarns. These conditions provided some traditional weavers

---

[1]Information provided by key informants who were owners of factories and workshops during this period.

[2]Key informants.

with the capital that was needed for mechanisation, and the Misr Company provided the necessary technical expertise. Thus while the big textile plant was expanding, handlooms were also increasing in number and the mechanisation of the traditional small-scale industry had begun. This resulted in an increase in the number of workers in the textile industry from 10,480 in 1937 to 23,370 in 1947. By 1947 al-Mehalla's industrial workers made up 27.3 percent of the total Egyptian textile industry work force; by comparison, 23.6 percent of this force worked in Cairo and 42.5 percent were in Alexandria.[1]

The Post-War Situation

The next period, from 1945 to 1951, was characterised by a decline in the textile industry as a whole. With the end of the war and a return to pre-war import and foreign trade conditions, the Egyptian cotton industry found itself unable to compete in world textile production because of its lack of technical expertise, its out-dated machinery, and the high price of Egyptian cotton. From 1945 to 1946 production in the Misr Company increased from 16.5 million to 19 million kilograms of yarn, and from 86 million to 94 million yards of cloth. These quantities exceeded local demand, and from 1947 on the Company began to concentrate on production for export. In 1948, however, the Company was unable to sell any of its surplus abroad owing to

---

[1] Ismail, p. 42.

the rise in cotton and textile prices, and stock accumulated. In 1949, following the trend toward increasing imports, about 4,000 tons of cheap cotton textiles were imported, which, together with the stock held in store (about 10,000 tons), led to a fall in prices, reductions in working hours, and the closing of some factories. To meet the crisis, Misr Company implemented a new industrial policy. It imported new automatic machinery and changed its emphasis from coarse to fine spinning, concentrating on the production of fine cotton and wool textiles. The result of this policy was a drop in the Company's labour force. By 1951 the number of labourers had fallen from 27,500 to 16,575.[1]

As a result of these crises, the government intervened to subsidise the cotton industry. The sums involved came to £E 500,000 by 1959.[2] The Korean War of 1950-1951 helped the cotton industry to recover temporarily by causing a rise in the price of cotton, and with this internal purchasing power increased. This boom ended by the end of 1951, and the textile industry soon faced a major problem in terms of accumulated surplus production which threatened the continuity of the majority of the big textile factories.

The small factories, however, were not affected in the same way. Their markets, being local, were not affected by

---

[1] From the records of Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in al-Mehalla.

[2] al-Gibali, S., The Impact of the Spinning and Weaving Industry on the Development of the Economy of the Arab Republic of Egypt (M.A. Thesis, High Institute of Home Economics, Cairo, 1972, Arabic), p. 160.

international variations in demand, and when the Misr Company began to concentrate on fine textile production it left the local market largely to the small factories and workshops. The slump that prevailed in the industry in the fifties did not, therefore, affect small-scale producers to the same extent as the major companies.

Once World War II was over and yarn could be sold freely, prices came down. Most of those who had entered the industry in order to be able to profit by selling yarn on the black market now left it. By 1948 many of the traditional weavers had accumulated enough capital to establish themselves as important entrepreneurs in the textile industry. Mechanical looms had been tried by a few traditional weavers, and their advantages were now evident to all. Yet handlooms managed to survive and even compete with the big industrial complex of Misr Company. Handloom weavers had managed to produce some kinds of cloth at lower cost and of better quality than that of the Misr Company, but by and large this had only been possible during the wartime boom, and after the war there was no way of competing with mechanical looms.

By 1948 about twenty traditional weavers had introduced mechanical looms. Two years later, around fifty weavers had mechanical looms. According to the factory owners of that time, most of the traditional weavers who purchased mechanical looms retained most of their handlooms until the fifties, but gradually most of them gave up their handlooms and concentrated exclusively on the mechanical looms.

By the end of the forties a class of factory owners had begun to emerge from among the traditional weavers. These owners had acquired enough productive property and prestige to distinguish themselves permanently from other weavers in al-Mehalla. Mechanisation was carried out by individual families, and partnerships outside kin relations were rare. Some of these families came to own quite large factories, and thus found themselves facing the threat of nationalisation during the Nasser era.

The Rise of a Mehallāwī Industrialist Group

The measures that were taken directly after the 1952 Revolution did not immediately introduce qualitative changes into the existing structure of the textile industry. Although political power was in the hands of the new regime, until 1956 leading sectors of the economy were still owned or dominated by imperialist interests. In 1956 foreign capital, principally British and French, controlled sixty percent of the combined balance sheets of commercial banks, specialised banks, insurance companies, savings offices and insurance plans. Egyptian private capital controlled twenty-five percent (of which ninety percent belonged to Bank Misr), and savings offices and public social insurance plans represented seventeen percent.[1]

---

[1] Mansour, F., Development of the Egyptian Financial System Up to 1967 (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 29-30.

In this period the only two major innovations within the field of economic policy were the First Land Reform, which resulted in breaking up the central political power of the big landlords, and administrative measures against those who had compromised themselves in the service of imperialism. Changes in the industrial structure were not very significant between 1952 and 1956. Government intervention increased in intensity and range, but Egyptian industry remained predominantly oriented toward consumer goods (seventy percent), and the production of machinery and transport equipment was low (about three percent, including repairs).[1] Government intervention in the textile industry took the form of attempts to organise that industry and protect it from foreign competition and economic crises. In 1953 a reserve fund was established to subsidise the cotton industry.

The Liberation of the National Economy (1956-1960)

The development of the Egyptian economy from 1956 to 1960 was characterised by the liberation of the national economy. The government had greater control over the financial system; a public sector appeared which planned a programme for the establishment of new industries and closer relations with socialist states, thus terminating the earlier domination by the West of Egypt's economic relations.[2]

---

[1] Radwan, S., Capital Formation in Egyptian Industry and Agriculture 1882-1967 (London, 1974), p. 210.

[2] Mansour, pp. 32-34.

In order to speed industrialisation, in 1952 the Revolution had established the Permanent Council for Development of National Production (PCDNP). In 1956 the Ministry of Industry was established, and the first industrial plan was drafted in 1957. Expansion of the cotton industry was a major objective of this plan, which sought national self-sufficiency in the production of textiles as well as an increasing cotton production for export. Investment in the cotton industry under this plan reached about £E 32 million. In order to achieve these objectives, the Ministry stopped the importing of yarn and textiles and encouraged the import of new machinery for the public sector. The Ministry attempted to improve the quality and volume of the textile industry by providing the required technicians, training unskilled personnel, and importing new machinery.[1]

Thus a small public sector emerged in the period just before 1956 as a result of state interest and investment in a few industries. This sector expanded with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, the sequestration of British and French firms after the war of 1956, and the nationalisation of Bank Misr in 1960. Significant public investment in the industry under the First Industrial Plan (1957-1960) contributed to this expansion. The period 1952-1961 saw the emergence of a mixed system in which the private sector co-existed with an ever-expanding public sector and in which the government continually extended its intervention and control.[2]

---

[1] al-Gibali, p. 188.

[2] Mabro and Radwan, p. 40.

The Structure of the Textile Industry in al-Mehalla from 1952 to 1961

The structure of the textile industry in al-Mehalla during most of this period reflects the features of a "free enterprise economy". Misr Spinning and Weaving Company was owned by private shareholders, and did not become part of the public sector until 1960, with the nationalisation of Bank Misr and its dependent companies. At the same time, government policy was aimed at self-sufficiency in textile production and less dependence on cotton exports.

The Misr Company, which had expanded vertically until 1950, started to stabilise its vertical expansion by improving its looms and spindles and replacing its old machinery with new automatic models. These changes increased the volume and variety of production, so that cotton and woolen yarns and cotton wool were being produced. The Company's capital doubled between 1951 and 1960, from £E 2 million to £E 4 million. The amount of cotton yarn produced increased from 15,267 tons in 1950 to 26,000 tons in 1960. Cotton cloth production increased fourteen-fold during the same period. The Company also produced 559 tons of cotton wool, which covered most of the needs of the local market. In addition to these quantitative changes, there were also some qualitative changes during this period. While the Company's factory had formerly produced only coarse yarns, in this period it changed over to fine and medium qualities.

This change of yarn was reflected in the quality of

the cloth which was produced. The factory started to produce fine cotton textiles for export to several countries of Europe (England, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany), Africa (Sudan, Libya, Ghana, Tunisia), as well as to Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Thus although the Company had been established with the objective of developing national industry with a view to economic independence, it became dependent on the world market not only for its exports but for its machinery, and this dependence continued after the 1952 Revolution.

The Company continued to be strongly affected by international events and market fluctuations because it was partly producing for export. This had an impact on its policy for expanding the labour force and welfare services right up until 1961. In 1961 Law No. 117 nationalised all banks and insurance companies. Subsequently, Law No. 118 specified that the government would be a partner in certain companies holding a share of not less than half of the total capital. Law No. 119 specified that no one could own shares whose value exceeded £E 10,000. In addition to these three laws limiting private shareholding and subjecting all companies to government control and intervention, other laws of July 1961 gave workers the right to share in management, and guaranteed a fair return for good work. Working hours were limited to seven per day, and this led to the employment of an extra 1,000 workers in that year.

The development of the small-scale textile industry in al-Mehalla took a different direction from that of the

Misr Company. Though this period witnessed a great slump which led Misr Company to expand horizontally by changing from mechanical to automatic looms, the local small-scale production sector continued to grow very rapidly. Within this sector there were increases in both the number of workshops and small factories and in the number of mechanical looms employed in each.

The owners of these small-scale factories started to mechanise in the forties by adding a few mechanical looms to their handlooms. By 1952 there were about 100 mechanical workshops and factories, and by 1960 the total had reached about 200. Very few weavers had enough capital to establish large factories. The majority (120) had between one and ten mechanical looms. Only five factories had more than eighty looms. Five others had more than forty, twenty had between twenty and forty, and fifty factories had between ten and twenty mechanical looms. Most of these looms were old mechanical looms which the big factories, mainly Misr Company, had sold off after World War II. The five biggest factories in al-Mehalla acquired more modern looms, and indeed three of them were established after 1952 with newly-imported automatic machinery. Nearly all of the 300 automatic looms used in the private sector were in these five factories.[1]

This rapid expansion and development of the textile industry in the private sector in al-Mehalla was distinctive in two ways: First, it was during this period that it became apparent to the government that in the country

---

[1] Ismail, p. 56.

as a whole private capital was not being invested in industry, but mainly in construction. By contrast, traditional weavers were then investing all of their savings in industry. Second, at the same time that large-scale complex industry (in al-Mehalla's case, the Misr Company) was reducing costs by becoming more capital-intensive and reducing its labour force, small-scale factories were expanding and flourishing.

Thus until 1960, eight years after the July 23 Revolution, the structure of the textile industry remained basically the same in the sense that it was governed by a free market and free enterprise. The intervention of the government was minimal; only foreign enterprise was controlled. National companies were encouraged to expand. In al-Mehalla the Misr Company and the small-scale sector continued to co-exist and expand in different directions. The Misr Company, with its global structure, enormous capital and large market, was closely tied to the world market system and dependent upon it. It continued to suffer from market fluctuations, which affected Company policy regarding the types of machinery used and the size of the labour force employed. Welfare services for employees were kept to a minimum until 1961. At the same time, the small-scale sector continued to develop largely by taking advantage of local means and facilities, and by responding to the demands of the local market, and was therefore less affected by fluctuations in the world market system.

The Structure of the Textile Industry in al-Mehalla between 1961 and 1977

After 1960 the structure of al-Mehalla's textile industry was transformed by the impact of government intervention in the industrial sector as a whole. An attempt at full planning was initiated by the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan in June 1960. This plan was to be the first stage in a ten-year plan aimed at doubling the national income in ten years. This was to be achieved principally by speeding the rate of growth of the industrial sector.[1] About ninety percent of investment was to be made by public authorities, on the assumption that the rest would be forthcoming from the private sector.

The Egyptian government came to realise the difficulty of comprehensive planning in an economy which had a relatively small public sector and in which at least two-thirds of national production took place outside its immediate control. It became apparent that private investors on whom the government depended for the financing and execution of the Five-Year Plan were not willing to cooperate, and that they preferred to invest their money in real estate. The government became convinced that the desired increase in the rate of industrial growth could be achieved only by closer state control over the savings of the organised sector which accounted for about fifty percent of total savings.[2]

> .The post-1957 years were a period of trial of strength, in which more often than not, it was

---

[1] Radwan, pp. 206-207.

[2] Ibid.

> private capital in the hands of the big bourgeoisie of the old school that managed to contain the emerging public sector and use it for its own purposes.[1]

It is here that the massive nationalisations of 1961-1963 found their justification. First came the nationalisation of the Belgian and International Bank, Bank Misr and the National Bank in 1960. In 1961 all banks that remained in private hands and all insurance companies which did not come under previous acts or laws of Egyptianisation and nationalisation were also nationalised.

Toward the end of June 1961 began what is now referred to in Egypt as "The Socialist Revolution". First the entire cotton trade passed into government hands. The Alexandria futures market was closed, and the Egyptian Cotton Commission assumed responsibility for buying and selling all raw cotton at fixed prices. Houses exporting cotton became joint stock companies with government participation. All firms engaged in external trade came under government control.[2] By 1962 the government was practically the sole owner of the "modern industrial sector", and had attained control of its savings and investment.

The government, after the massive nationalisations of 1961-1963, started to reorganise its managerial structure. It established organisations for each specialised industrial activity, to be responsible for implementing the objectives of the development plan. Thus public enterprise became part of the pyramidal structure. It was affiliated

---

[1] Mansur, p. 33.

[2] O'Brien, P., The Revolution in Egypt's Economic System (Oxford, 1966), p. 130.

to public organisations which exercised supervision and control over all firms in each branch of activity. These public organisations were in turn attached to ministries. Thus the Public Organisation for Spinning and Weaving was responsible for all spinning and weaving companies which were nationalised. This public organisation incorporated thirty major companies, made up of 100 firms which had been amalgamated to strengthen their financial positions. Together they represented about eighty percent of the production of the spinning and textile industries of Egypt. The only firms not controlled by the public organisation were small ones, scattered in Cairo, Alexandria, al-Mehalla and Qalyub, and these firms today constitute the private sector of the textile industry.

The textile industry continued to expand after nationalisation, resulting in an increase in the cotton yarn produced by local spinners. In 1952-1953 the cotton used by local spinners represented 15.4 percent of cotton production. This figure increased to about 25 percent in 1960-1961 and to about 38 percent in 1969-1970. The tremendous increase in the spinning of cotton was accompanied by an increase in the number of mechanical looms. The number of spinners increased from 556,528 in 1953 to 1,703,466 in 1970. Looms increased from 15,670 in 1953 to 26,391 in 1970.[1] As a result of this expansion, cotton textile production increased to the extent that local

---

[1]The Industrial Union, The Spinning and Weaving Industry over Fourteen Years (Cairo, 1970, Arabic).

demands could be met and a surplus became available for export. The production of cotton textiles increased from 40,000 tons in 1951-1952 to 70,810 tons in 1961 and 110,333 tons in 1970.[1]

During the first two years of the "Socialist Revolution", these changes did not affect the structure of the small-scale industry in al-Mehalla. Though all the spinning companies were nationalised and the cotton trade passed into government hands, the yarn trade was still controlled by independent merchants. Thus the same yarn merchants went on operating as before, and they remained the agents of some spinning factories even after nationalisation. The private sector in al-Mehalla also operated as before. One might assume that with the initial nationalisation of some sectors of the textile industry, factory owners would hesitate to invest, but this was not the case even among the owners of the largest factories. Two such owners said that this was not the case; they did in fact carry out expansions in their factories between 1961 and 1963, when their factories, together with three others in al-Mehalla, were nationalised.

After the nationalisation of these five big factories in 1963, completely new conditions were created which had an impact on the entire structure of the textile industry. Fear and confusion paralysed the whole private sector in al-Mehalla. Any thoughts of expansion were abandoned, and owners became reluctant to invest even in raw materials

---

[1]Figures provided by the Statistical Section of the Public Organisation for Spinning.

for fear of nationalisation.

In 1964 the yarn trade came under government control and yarn prices were fixed. Thus the government acquired full control of the raw materials of the textile industry --i.e., the trade in raw cotton and yarns. It was also in full control of part of the production system (the spinning companies), two thirds of all weaving factories and half of all knitting factories. The marketing of finished textiles remained in the hands of cloth merchants.

The five big nationalised factories were united under the name of Nasr Company. Both Misr Company and Nasr Company thenceforth made up the public sector of the weaving industry in al-Mehalla. The rest of the factories in the town remained in the private sector, and were thereafter referred to as the Mehallāwī sector.

The Ration System

In 1964 some of the public spinning companies were assigned to distribute yarn to the private weaving factories in their localities. By 1966 there was increasing demand for yarn, and the supply was not sufficient. The government began to consider ways of establishing a system of fair distribution as well as of acquiring greater control over the prices of finished cloth. It instituted a ration system by which each factory received a fixed ration of yarn and supplied the company responsible with the finished products. This system was useful to the Mehallāwī sector as long as conditions were unstable, as it helped them to stay in operation, though not to expand.

From 1963 to 1968 the private sector remained static in terms of the number of looms and the quantity of cloth produced. By 1968 the ration system had exhausted its usefulness, and owners wanted a change.

The political and economic conditions of 1967, particularly Egypt's increased foreign indebtedness, had a direct impact on the state of the textile industry. During this period there was an increasing demand for cloth due to the increase in the population, but the public sector was unable to produce enough to meet that demand. To make matters worse, a large percentage of the yarn and finished cloth was sent to the Soviet Union as payments on loans.

Revision of the Ration System after 1966

In spite of the rising demand for cloth, the private sector felt handicapped by the existing method of operation. Major complaints were voiced in textile weaving circles against the manner of operation of the ration system in the private sector. The ration system was revised, changing the government's relationship with the private sector. The small factories (those with less than ten looms) were exempted completely from working for the public sector. It was decided that they would receive their rations of yarn at fixed prices and then be free to produce directly for the market. This ration was called a "supervision allotment", because the role of the government was now limited to supervision rather than direct control of output.

The rations of factories with more than ten mechanical looms were divided into two parts. Seventy-five percent would be "production allotment", and twenty-five percent "supervision allotment". Thus the big private factories were free to produce for themselves with one quarter of their total rations, but were required to use three quarters of their yarn to produce for the public sector. Thus two systems of production emerged in the private sector. Part of the capacity of the private sector was still operating for the public sector, and part of it obtained yarn from the public sector and produced cloth either for other private enterprises or directly for the market. Under this system the public sector continued to control the prices of yarn but lost control over the marketing, distribution, and profit of part of the finished textiles.

The partial decontrol of yarn resulted in tremendous expansion in small-scale weaving factories and in the development of a black market which grew over the years to become an accepted phenomenon and part of the existing production system. The prevailing mode of production during this period was an asset to the growth of small workshops, but it checked the growth of large establishments, for although the owners of these establishments accumulated more wealth than ever before, they no longer reinvested it in the industry. Rather, they began to direct their capital to new kinds of investments.

The Black Market

The black market in the textile industry began on a small scale in 1966 after the establishment of the dual production system in the private sector, and grew over the years. By 1977 prices in the black market were almost double the prices fixed by the government. It is estimated that by 1977 there were 12,000 looms working with yarns obtained entirely from the black market and producing entirely for the private sector. According to an unpublished report,[1] between £E 4 million and £E 7 million are paid annually over and above fixed prices to obtain yarn on the black market. This sum goes neither to the public sector nor to the consumer, but to the yarn ration distributors and the black marketeers.

Surveys carried out in 1976 indicate that there has been a fifty percent increase in the number of looms since 1968; there are 6,000 new looms which are not registered with the government.[2] They work at full capacity, obtaining their yarn on the black market, and produce about 70 million metres of cloth per year. Some take orders directly from the public sector and others work for the public sector indirectly by taking orders from subcontractors.

In al-Mehalla there were several individuals, from various occupational backgrounds, who had enough capital

---

[1] al-Messiri, E., "The Yarn Ration System in the Public Sector", an unpublished report submitted to the head of the Association for the Spinning and Weaving Industry (al-Mehalla, 1976, Arabic).

[2] Surveys carried out by the Ministry of Industry.

to open workshops equipped with mechanical looms in the hope of cashing in on the large profits being made in the industry. To some this was like a golden age in textile production, because although the demand for cloth was growing and causing prices to rise, yarn was subsidised by the government. Even when the prices of cloth were fixed, as they were for certain cheap varieties intended for the mass market, weight and quality specifications were not strictly checked, and so exceptional profits could be made.

Factories and workshops established after 1967 were not allotted quotas of subsidised yarn, nor were they able to import machinery. Nevertheless, even after that year owners in al-Mehalla set up establishments by making their own machines copied from the older models which were available locally. They bought their yarns on the black market in the hope that once they became established in the industry they would be allocated yarn rations. In fact, new factories were not incorporated into the ration system until 1974, and even then the total existing allotment was not increased but merely redistributed over a greater number of factories. Nevertheless, according to key informants, these new owners made profits even before being allocated rations because they based their production costs on black market prices. When they did begin to receive subsidised yarns, they did not lower their prices, and thus their profit margins increased.

By investing £E 2,000 in machinery, an owner could buy and begin to operate eight or ten looms. If these

looms were worked three shifts a day, the owner would be entitled to a yarn quota of about four tons per annum. The difference between the black market and fixed rate yarn prices was about £E 400 per ton, so an owner on this scale could make a profit of £E 1,600 simply by selling the yarn. This was so lucrative that some owners in fact stopped production and merely sold their yarn allotments. Owners of relatively large factories used their large profits to expand and acquire several factories. Many small workshops of less than ten looms also made considerable profits because they were entirely free to choose which types of cloth to produce and were in no way restricted by orders from the public sector. For them the years 1968-1977 were indeed a "golden age".

By contrast, this was a period of decline in the industry for the long-established traditional weavers, who had no opportunity to establish their own looms or to introduce mechanisation. Under the new conditions of production it was no longer possible for a skilled weaver to establish himself without a substantial amount of initial capital. Such weavers resented the fact that anyone in al-Mehalla with enough money was able to invest in mechanical looms even if he knew nothing of the textile industry. They still regard such investors as opportunists, men who leave the industry as quickly as they joined it once the bubble has burst. Typically, they say, it is the newcomers who prefer selling their yarn on the black market to weaving it, and because of their ignorance of weaving they

usually bought their way into an established weaver's business or employed skilled workers and mechanics to run their new factories for them. Their own hearts and minds were never committed to the industry.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, al-Mehalla has a strong textile tradition dating back for centuries. This tradition first grew up in relative isolation from the buffeting of international events, but at the time of the British occupation of the country this isolation became a thing of the past. Colonial policy prevented the traditional handicraft industry from developing and mechanising, and when mechanisation did come to al-Mehalla it was introduced from outside the town by a group of national capitalists.

The World War II textile boom led the large-scale Misr Company to expand, and to modernise by replacing its old mechanical looms, selling them off to traditional weavers in al-Mehalla. Some of the weavers who bought up these looms were able to expand enormously, and became the medium-scale factory owners of the fifties.

During the Nasser years, even the largest private factories of al-Mehalla continued to expand until the wave of nationalisations of 1963 hit al-Mehalla directly, and these owners began for the first time to seek other forms of investment. Once the ration system for yarns had been established, small-scale owners were able to mechanise, but the traditional handicraft sector of the

weaving industry continued to operate side-by-side with the modern, mechanised industry.

Chapter IV examines the operations in the production of textiles in both the handicraft and mechanised sectors of the industry in order to show how it has been possible for traditional and small-scale mechanical weavers to continue in the industry since the establishment of the very large-scale mechanised and automated factories, and discusses the manner in which the complementarity of units at all levels of production has enabled all scales of production to survive.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS IN THE MEHALLĀWĪ SECTOR

The Mehallāwī sector of the al-Mehalla weaving industry is composed of private weavers working handlooms or mechanical looms in workshops ranging in scale from the traditional owner-operated atelier to the quite large-scale, highly mechanised factories which employ up to 500 workers and may rival the public sector company in their level of technological sophistication. Regardless of the scale of establishment, however, the production process can be divided analytically into units dealing with raw cotton, units marketing cloth, units producing yarn, units producing cloth, and units finishing cloth.

This chapter describes the economic relations among the various units, and details the social, economic and technical relations within the weaving workshops themselves. Focussing chiefly on the organisation of the industry during the twentieth century, it describes traditional processes of production and the changes brought by mechanisation, in order to show the complementarity of relations among production units of various sizes and lay the groundwork for Chapters V and VI, which analyse social stratification in the al-Mehalla community of weavers.

The Raw Cotton and Yarn Trades

The Buying and Selling of Raw Cotton and Yarn

The process of buying and selling raw cotton in

al-Mehalla at the beginning of the twentieth century took place in the context of a system based in Cairo and Alexandria and controlled by foreign companies and merchants. As a cotton collection centre, al-Mehalla had several ginners and pressers. Various raw cotton merchants were based there. These cotton merchants bought cotton from peasants in nearby villages on behalf of ginners, larger merchants, or banks. Very few of them had enough capital to buy the cotton themselves.

Key informants report that ten families remained in the raw cotton trade in al-Mehalla from the thirties until its abolition in 1952. Four of them were considered by ahl al-balad (the people of the town) to be "big" merchants, making enormous profits through speculation in cotton.

At the opening of the century, most of the yarn used in al-Mehalla was silk. Cotton yarn, which was traded separately, became more widely used as silk became scarcer and more expensive. In both cases, yarn was imported by foreign companies or individuals, mainly Jews. Three al-Mehalla families specialised in the silk yarn trade. Two of these also owned weaving shops, and thus were manufacturers as well as traders. Their role was mainly to supply weavers in the town with silk yarn imported via Damietta. By the end of the thirties, these silk yarn merchants were dependent on their weaving shops or on trade in other varieties of yarn, as silk yarn was much less commonly used.

While big weavers were concentrating on silk cloth at the end of the nineteenth century, other weavers were

producing a crude fabric called sirsawi, made of flax. This cloth was mainly used in making the peasant gallabīyya and was woven on a special "underground looms" which was set into the earth so that the weaver sat on the ground itself. Artificial silk also became popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. Initially it was used for small items such as belts, shawls and headcovers. Artificial silk ultimately replaced pure silk for production of traditional fabrics in al-Mehalla, but cotton remained the major yarn used by weavers. Flax was rarely used after the beginning of the twentieth century.

An elderly weaver described the introduction of artificial silk to al-Mehalla as follows:

> We weavers who were specialised in producing qutnīyya and alaga[1] were still using baladi silk [pure silk] until 1928. In that year a Syrian introduced qutnīyya made entirely from viscous rayon into the market. It was much cheaper and brighter than our qutnīyya. This Syrian cloth nearly finished us off. Someone first produced this cloth in al-Mehalla for use in kafan [shrouds]. We immediately examined the material, consulted one another about it, and tried to produce it ourselves. We succeeded in our attempts, and by 1930 only viscous rayon was used in qutnīyya, alaga and shahi.[2] The whole town changed its yarn from baladi silk to viscous rayon, since a kilogram of imported viscous rayon cost about thirty piastres while a kilogram of baladi silk cost about 130 piastres.

This decrease in the cost of producing traditional cloths occurred just in time to ease the worsening economic situations of both consumers and producers caused by the international economic crisis of the thirties.

---

[1] Qutnīyya is a traditional cloth in which the warp is silk and the weft cotton, and with a bright surface. Alaga is a similar cloth with less thread and is thus lighter.

[2] Shahi is also a traditional cloth made of silk and cotton, but less light than qutnīyya.

When cotton yarns became popular in the twenties, three local families began to trade in them. Two of these families became specialised in the cotton yarn trade, controlling it from that period on. Their role was restricted during the twenties and thirties to buying cotton yarn from dealers in Cairo and reselling it in al-Mehalla. The businesses of these merchant families expanded enormously as the demand for cotton grew, particularly at the time of World War II. After the nationalisation of yarn production in 1964, they became purchasing agents for the public sector spinning companies.

Credit Transactions in the Yarn Trade

Throughout the twenties and thirties, yarn was distributed to handloom owners through an informal system. There were no banks in al-Mehalla, and credit transactions were based on trust. As members of the al-Mehalla community, the merchants knew who the reputable owners were, along with their scales of production and their financial positions. An owner eligible for credit would open an account with a merchant which allowed him credit up to a stated limit--perhaps several hundred pounds. The merchant would keep a small notebook for recording the amounts of yarn bought on credit by each owner.

Once an owner sold his cloth, he paid all, or sometimes part, of his debt to the merchant, thus becoming eligible for further credit. An account could be maintained for years, as long as the owner and merchant trusted each other. The notebook which demonstrated that

an owner was in debt to the merchant was a source of prestige to the owner, as it showed that he was regarded as trustworthy.

Although reputable owners could get yarn from merchants without collateral, a merchant would not hesitate to attach the property of an owner who did not repay a loan within a reasonable period of time. Alternately, he might purchase the owner's cloth at a reduced price, himself selling it on the market.

Yarn merchants provided credit to small owners only if they mortgaged their property as collateral. If an owner had nothing to mortgage, he had to pay cash. If he lacked both cash and collateral (such as real estate or gold), he was forced to turn to moneylenders to obtain enough money to buy yarn. Moneylenders in al-Mehalla were mainly Jews, but also included a few of the big landowning families. They lent money at twenty-five percent interest.

Changes in the Yarn Trade after the Thirties

Two cotton yarn merchant families monopolized the yarn trade in al-Mehalla until World War II, when the government intervened to control the distribution of yarn through a system of rationing. This system lasted from 1941 to 1944. The yarn trade was decontrolled at the end of the war, and again came under the domination of one of the big merchant families, the Khalils.

Between 1952 and 1961, yarns were distributed through a hierarchy of merchants, including agents of the spinning companies, wholesalers and retailers. Retail merchants

were merely agents who distributed products for the big merchants on a commission basis.

There was no yarn market in Tanta or Mansura. With the increasing demand for cotton yarn, al-Mehalla became the centre for the yarn trade in the northern Delta. In addition to the Khalil family, which had been in the trade since the thirties, four factory owners who had been handloom owners and silk merchants since the thirties branched out into the yarn trade in the fifties.

These big yarn merchants monopolized the yarn trade in the northern Delta. The simultaneous roles of yarn merchant, factory owner and cloth merchant made them leaders in the textile industry. As factory owners, they knew which factories were producing which kinds of cloth, and were able to anticipate demand for specific types of yarn. They knew in advance which yarns would be in demand in given seasons, and could thus stock up on what was needed. If the appropriate yarns were not available, they might ask the spinning factories to produce them. They knew which yarns were used in making each variety of cloth, and their practiced eyes could detect low quality yarns even when their defects were apparent to others only after weaving.

As purveyors of finished cloth, these families were aware of which textiles were most in demand in the market and which kinds were the most profitable. Types and designs of cloth changed constantly in response to demand, and an orientation toward "novelty" cloths rather than traditional fabrics developed. Their wholesaling

activities kept them in touch with the tastes of the consumers and the demand for the various types of cloth. This knowledge was, in turn, utilised in their factories.

As industry leaders, these big merchants were widely imitated and asked for advice by the people of al-Mehalla. When their roles as merchants were taken over by the public sector in 1964, two of the big yarn families remained active in the trade as agents for the spinning companies.

All of the al-Mehalla owners united in a cooperative association for the distribution of yarns after 1964. This association received its yarn allotment from three public companies, and the whole private sector of the town thus functioned as a converter for the public sector. The fact that the public sector was now responsible for supplying yarns and marketing finished products not only helped to make small factories more viable, through reducing risks to owners, but also, according to some, allowed easy profits through shady practices.

It was commonly held in the private sector that dealing with the public sector was more profitable than dealing with the big cloth merchants had been, as it was possible to bribe officials to accept substandard products. Such dealings would not harm an owner's reputation, as the entire system was anonymous. All the same, few owners made enough profit during this period, through cheating or otherwise, to be able to expand their operations.

As described in Chapter III, nationalisation of the spinning companies was quickly followed by the establishment of a thriving black market in yarns. Although this

illegal trade was primarily parasitic in nature, it also performed a valuable function by helping to overcome defects in the rationing system used in distributing yarns. Often the yarns supplied by the public sector companies were inappropriate to the needs of the various factories. Owners commonly turned to the black market to sell unwanted yarns and to purchase the ones they needed.

Relations between the public and private sectors of the textile industry have been subject to official as well as covert manipulation, often through variations in the form of subcontracting, which involve transfers of yarn. Today subcontracting from the public sector takes various forms. Sometimes a large public sector factory decides not to produce "popular" varieties of cloth, and instead passes the yarns for these fabrics on to private sector factories. In other cases, it may increase the quota of yarn provided for the private sector in order to increase the amount of cloth produced, with the extra production being transferred to the public sector for a stipulated price.

The normal maximum production of a factory with forty looms, for example, is 800,000 metres per annum. When the public sector wishes to increase production, it may form an agreement with such a factory by which the public sector provides an extra quota of yarn and the private factory then produces an additional perhaps 200,000 metres of cloth, bringing total production up to a million metres. This being beyond its maximum possible production, the private factory then passes the extra yarn on to other

factories for processing. Thus a new contracting hierarchy has developed in which the public sector contracts work out to large private sector factories, with these in turn subcontracting to smaller firms.

Some authorities in the textile field have asserted that there is a national shortage of yarn since nationalisation of yarn production. At the same time, there are indications that the number of spindles has increased over the past ten years, and this in turn implies that there has been an increase in the total yarn available.[1] Some observers therefore claim that the apparent shortages are not real, but merely due to poor systems of distribution.

Distribution of the Finished Cloth

Some of the finished textiles produced in al-Mehalla are also distributed there, but most of them are distributed across Egypt and some are exported. There is a hierarchy of specialised cloth merchants in the town, ranging from wholesale merchants to small-scale sellers. The process of distributing the finished textiles is closely associated with their production, and in some cases with the process of marketing the raw materials themselves.

The wholesale market for folk textiles, which are the main output of the Mehallāwī industry, is centred in al-Azhar Street in Cairo. Prior to nationalisation several families had their factories in al-Mehalla and their trade centres in al-Azhar Street. The 'Alī family,

---

[1] al-Messiri, E., "The Yarn Ration System in the Public Sector", an unpublished report submitted to the head of the Association for the Spinning and Weaving Industry (al-Mehalla, 1876, Arabic).

for instance, was involved in both textile manufacture and the yarn and cloth trades from the beginning of the twentieth century, producing and distributing traditional cloth in al-Mehalla, Cairo and Upper Egypt. After their factory was nationalised in 1963, this family began to work as the agents of the United Arab Company, handling yarn distribution and cloth marketing for seventy percent of the al-Mehalla factory's production.

The extent to which this family continued to be influential even after nationalisation of their factory is revealed in statistics for 1964-1965.[1] Total production of folk cloth for Egypt as a whole was about 200 million metres, and al-Mehalla's production made up eighteen percent of the total. The 'Alī family sold cloth that year amounting to about £E 2.5 million. This continued influence was, of course, based on the family's long experience in the textile industry and intimate knowledge of the market.[2]

---

[1] These figures are taken from an interview conducted at al-Mehalla with the head of the 'Alī family.

[2] When the United Arab Spinning and Weaving Company was faced with difficulties in distributing cotton yarn in al-Mehalla, the head of the 'Alī family was able to solve the Company's problem. He understood that the private sector owners were afraid to invest in their factories because they feared nationalisation. He offered to distribute yarn and market cloth for a tiny commission (a few milliemes on each bundle). He then provided yarn to factory owners, paid their labour costs, collected the finished cloth, and sold it on the market. This plan had often been used prior to nationalisation by big companies using smaller firms as converters in return for a percentage of profits, but was never a method of choice as the profits on such work were less than those obtained by producing one's own textiles. Under the new circumstances it was enormously successful. The Company was able to distribute more yarn than any other company, and its profits increased enormously. The 'Alī's also made a great deal of money from the arrangement, even though the per-unit commission was very small.

In the twenties and thirties, prior to mechanisation, handloom owners, or mu'allimīn (s. mu'allim) marketed their own cloth. Big mu'allimīn who were famous for certain types of cloth, such as qutnīyya or ghazlīyya, were contacted by merchants who would come from other towns to purchase cloth. When demand for his cloth exceeded his production, a big mu'allim sometimes prepared raw materials, parcelling them out to smaller shops for weaving, rather than expanding his own establishment. Alternately, he could purchase good quality textiles from smaller shops, finish them, put his own trademark on the cloth and sell it along with his own finished goods, which were usually more expensive.

The majority of the mu'allimīn were small-scale weavers who lacked access to the wider markets and thus sold their cloth at the local cloth market. These products were usually sold at lower prices, in order to compete with the better-known trademarks of the big mu'allimīn. In some cases these lower prices were achieved through lower costs, but generally they were due to smaller profit margins.

The local suq al-tālāt (Tuesday market) was held weekly in one of the main streets of al-Mehalla. The mu-allimīn went to the market early in the morning and sat in rows on the ground, with their wares displayed on low tables or simply on pieces of cloth spread out in front of them, selling cloth to individual clients or local merchants. Bargaining was limited, since expenses were carefully calculated and profit was minimal. Prices varied by milliemes (tenths of a piastre) according to seasonal variations in demand.

The Production of Traditional Cloth

Handlooms are now used mainly for the production of traditional types of cloth, although some modern textiles for which there is now great demand, such as tapestry cloth, are made on handlooms. The best-known traditional cloths produced in al-Mehalla are made either with pure or artificial silk or cotton. Silk cloths are chiefly qutnīyya, alagā, shahi, and items such as belts, shawls and handkerchiefs. Today the weft of qutnīyya, which composes twenty percent of the thread, is cotton and the warp is artificial silk. The major consumers of this kind of cloth are the religious 'ulama (Islamic scholars) and the village notables, who still dress in the jubba (a long traditional outer garment) and kaftan (a long traditional inner garment). The second type of cloth is ghazliyya, which is made of cotton and used mainly for the folk gallabīyya. Thus the consumers of this kind of cloth are mainly peasants and, occasionally, workers. The ghazlīyya can also be made on mechanical looms, but qutnīyya cannot.

The production units for traditional cloth are mostly located in the old nuclei of the city, Sandifa and Suq al-Laban. Since early times, work in traditional textiles has been divided among various specialist groups in the city. The process of producing textiles was, and still is, made up of a series of connected operations, each of which was carried out by a separate production unit and sometimes by a particular family. Production units varied in size, sex of employees, and skill of workers. Most of

the technical operations were controlled by particular families, who handed their skills from one generation to the next.

Operations in the Production Process

The basic production unit, of course, is weaving. Weavers buy the raw material and process it from one operation to another and then sell it on the market.

Winding

The first stage of production is preparation of the weft, which starts with the winding of yarn hanks onto wooden pirns. This operation is carried out in homes by women or in workshops by boys. Wives and daughters usually do the winding for small-scale weavers. This occupation was so common before mechanisation that observers commented that every household in al-Mehalla had women winding yarn. These women were paid by the bundle.

Dyeing

Dyeing is another independent operation carried out in a separate workshop, usually on the ground floor of the owner's house. In the two central quarters of Sandifa and Suq al-Laban there were formerly six to eight dyeing workshops serving all of the weavers of al-Mehalla. The master of the dyeing workshop is the only skilled worker and he is assisted by a few labourers. Dyeing has been kept in several families who have passed the skill from one generation to the next. The process is carried out in an elementary way with simple equipment. Hanks of yarn are carried on wooden sticks and put into copper pots set on

canūn, traditional heaters consisting of two separate stones to support the pot and pieces of wood to burn underneath. Hanks are taken from the boiling coloured water and placed in wooden jars for rinsing before being spread on top of the house to dry.

Prices for dyeing vary according to colour and type of yarn (cotton or silk). Cotton is mainly used for ghazlīyya and is dyed in three basic colours: white, black and blue, which are the locally produced permanent dyes. Silk is processed in a different manner. Silk hanks are washed in big copper pots to get rid of the glueing stuff, and then bleached in hot soapy water, washed, and dried in the sun. After cleaning, the hanks are dyed. Then they are washed again, rinsed, dried and given to the mezayikati, or sizer, who separates the sticking ends. A bundle of silk weighs 4.5 kilograms, and each bundle produces about five pieces of ghazlīyya, or thirty metres in all.

Warping

The warping workshop is usually a big room located on either the ground floor of a building or on its roof. It has one mu'allim and a maximum of four assistants, two for each warper. Informants estimate that in 1920 there were about thirty warpers serving approximately 2,400 looms in al-Mehalla. Big weavers usually have their own warping workshops. One warper can supply twenty looms daily.

Hierarchy within a small warping workshop is limited to the mu'allim and his assistant, who is usually his son.

The tools are crude and limited to a dawwāra, or warper (literally, "something which turns or winds"). It is made of four solid pieces of wood with small "pens" sticking out from the major ones, and is driven by the foot. Pirns are hung on the small pens to get the length needed for the specific warp. The warper is paid per bundle, but the thread's number determines the price. Common thread numbers are six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen and sixteen, indicating various finenesses of thread. The larger the number, the thinner the thread and the finer the quality of the finished cloth. The thin thread is longer; hence a bundle of thin thread has more warp than a bundle of thick thread, and its cost is higher.

The average cost of warping a bundle of thread in the thirties was £E 0.04. It reached £E 0.10 in the sixties, and today is £E 0.30. One worker can produce ten bundles a day, which means that the warper who owns his own tools is paid about £E 3.00 a day. In a very few cases such a worker might buy yarn and sell it warped.

Sizing and Glueing

Two other independent operations which are carried out at home or in the streets are sizing of the yarn (mainly cotton) and glueing of silk yarn, and then separating the sticking ends by spreading the thread on two poles on the street, usually light poles.

Leasing, Helding and Denting

A more technical operation, called laqy, consists of leasing, helding and denting. It is carried out by specialised craftsmen, either in their homes or in small

shops. A team for this operation consists of a craftsman and two boys. The weaving mu'allim pays the craftsman by the mezdīyya, which is ten pounds of yarn in hank form, compressed into a cubic shape. Sometimes the leasing and helding is performed in the craftsman's home, with the denting performed in the weaving shop.

All of these operations are preparatory to the main work, which is weaving. After the weaving, the cloth is prepared for sale by being washed and ironed. Traditionally men washed the cloth on the river bank; today they wash the cloth in their homes. Midaq, or hammering, is performed in small shops. Two men sit opposite each other, hammering each part of the cloth with wooden hammers and then ironing it with a foot-operated ironer. In the same workshop there is also an ironing machine for folding the cloth.

The Organization of the Weaving Workshop

The traditional weaving workshop is usually termed the qa'ā (literally, hall). The qa'ā usually occupies the ground floor of the owner's house, but any vacant lot can be fenced off, roofed, and used as a workshop. In the twenties mu'allimīn were identified by the number of hand-looms they possessed, which were sometimes enough to require several qa'āt (pl. of qa'ā). There were then approximately thirty big mu'allimīn who owned between ten and forty looms each. Informants report that the largest qa'ā in al-Mehalla in the twenties measured 25 feet wide by

60 feet long and contained 24 handlooms.

Today there are thirty-five mu'allimīn who own a total of 662 looms, along with 260 independent craftsmen who own a single loom each.[1] The largest qa'ā in 1977 had ten handlooms, and rather than being on the ground floor of the mu'allim's house is located on property rented from a former mu'allim who had left the city.

The mu'allim provides the artisans with space, handlooms and wound pirns. The artisans are free agents who set their own working hours and are paid at the completion of each piece. Today most of these artisans are elderly; craftsmen are no longer training their sons in handloom weaving, believing it better to train them on mechanical looms. The mu'allimīn complain that they are now unable to replace weavers who die.

In the twenties the traditional qa'āt were organised in terms of a hierarchy of artisans:

'amil fadāl

The 'amil fadāl, or apprentice, was usually the son of or other relative of the mu'allim. No specific tasks were assigned to him. He ran errands and performed small jobs for other workers in the qa'ā. As he understood more and more of the work, he was asked to perform increasingly complicated tasks. The first job he handled was sitting in front of the worker who was winding, collecting the empty pirns. After some time he would do the job himself, usually beginning this work to fill in for an absent winder.

---

[1] From the records of the Cooperative Society for the Textile Industry in al-Mehalla.

This training was on a voluntary basis, and did not begin at a particular age. The 'amil fadāl received no salary, as he was not defined as a productive worker. He was under the strict supervision of the craftsmen, and subject to their discipline. One elderly craftsman remarked that, "If I had not been terrified of the artisans' beating I wouldn't have learned anything, and I might have quit the craft."

'amil 'agīr

The 'amil 'agīr, or wage-labourer, was the second rank in the qa'ā. These workers were paid weekly wages (about £E 0.10 per week in the twenties) and were assigned specific tasks. The 'amil 'agīr began by winding the thread on pirns, and then would help the weavers to prepare the handlooms. Most qa'āt had a small handloom which was used for weaving leftover threads into handkerchiefs. These 'amil 'agīr learned weaving by working at these small looms whenever they were free. Like the 'amil fadāl, the 'amil 'agīr was promoted whenever he was able to weave sufficiently well, generally around the age of twelve.

sanay'ī

The sanay'ī (pl. sanay'īyya) was the fully skilled worker in the traditional workshop. He was subject to minimal supervision from the mu'allim, and was free to set his own working hours, though he usually worked from early morning until sunset. He normally finished one or two six-metre pieces of cloth per day, depending on his skill and the type of yarn used.

The sanay'ī saw himself as a skilled worker possessing both taste and intelligence. In comparing himself with workers in other fields, the sanay'ī emphasized the meaning of his title, "creator". A sanay'ī had to be patient and meticulous, since he had to deal with very fine threads which frequently became entangled; great patience was required to disentangle them. To emphasize the difficulty of the craft, a common saying among weavers was that "a jinn [spirit being] tried to weave, and when other jinn searched for him they found him dead on the handloom." Thus weaving is such a difficult task that even supernatural beings are unable to manage it.

mu'allim

The mu'allim, or owner, was at the top of the hierarchy of workers in the weaving workshop. He integrated the various operations, coordinating work in the workshop with the demands of the market. He worked as a sanay'ī, purchased raw materials, managed the processing of the yarns through to the finished product, and marketed the cloth. The sanay'īyya required minimum supervision, since they worked by the piece. Sometimes the mu'allim just stayed in his shop and the worker went to him to receive raw materials and submit finished textiles. The mu'allim provided instructions regarding design, the number of threads to be used, and the quality required.

This hierarchy of handloom weavers no longer prevails. Now only elderly craftsmen work per piece for a mu'allim.

Many sanay'iyya are self-employed, renting one handloom in a qa'a, or working their own handlooms in their homes.

Production Costs in the Traditional Workshop

An elderly mu'allim made the following calculations for production costs for the two major types of cloth produced between 1920 and 1925:

Production Costs for a Six-Metre Piece of Ghazliyya

Raw materials (cotton)	£E 0.14
Wage of weaver	0.04
Auxilliary operations (warping, dyeing, laqy, washing, ironing)	0.04
Total costs	£E 0.22

As such a piece of ghazlīyya was sold for £E 0.24, the mu'allim's profit per piece was £E 0.02.

Production Costs for a Six-Metre Piece of Qutniyya

Raw materials (silk and cotton)	£E 0.37
Wage of weaver	0.15
Preparatory operations	
dyeing and warping	0.05
denting (laqy)	0.01
glueing (mezayikati)	0.01
hammering (midaq)	0.025
Total costs	£E 0.615

Such a piece of qutnīyya sold for £E 0.65; the mu'allim's profit was thus £E 0.035.

A mu'allim who owned twenty looms could produce forty pieces of ghazlīyya per day, or 1200 per month. If every craftsman in his employ produced two pieces each day in the month, his monthly income would be £E 24.00. A wage

labourers who worked for thirty days received a maximum wage of £E 2.40. A more skillful worker could produce qutnīyya, thus receiving a maximum wage of £E 3.00 per month.

By comparison, a contemporary mu'allim who has two handlooms producing qutnīyya estimates his costs as follows:

Raw materials:	
1/2 kilogram of cotton	£E 0.65
1/2 kilogram of artificial silk	1.25
Wage of weaver	1.00
Preparatory operations:	
dyeing	.025
warping	.20
denting (laqy)	.06
glueing (mezayikati)	.07
Total	£E 3.415

A six-metre piece of qutnīyya sells for £E 4.00, and the mu'allim receives a profit of £E 0.745 per piece. Assuming that each sanay'ī produces sixteen pieces of qutnīyya per month, the mu'allim's profit would be £E 23.84, less £E 4.05 insurance costs per worker per month, or £E 8.10. These figures probably underestimate the profits of such a mu'allim. For instance, most of the mu'allimīn avoid employing weavers for whom insurance payments must be made, and usually get rid of those labourers who insist on having insurance. However, even if a mu'allim cuts his costs to the very minimum and has workers who produce twenty-five pieces per month each, his total profits will not exceed about £E 30 per month, or up to about £E 40

if he works one of the looms himself.

By comparison, an owner of two mechanical looms need employ only one labourer and a boy to operate his looms. (Handloom weavers can no longer reduce costs by employing boys, as they are no longer being trained in this tradition.) Thus while an owner of two handlooms would obtain a maximum profit of about £E 50 by working his own looms, the owner of two mechanical looms would get about £E 90.

The owner of two mechanical looms who has an income of about £E 90 per month has the following expenses:

Rent of one mechanical loom	£E 4.00
Rent of workshop	6.00
Wage of boy labourer	6.00
Wage of owner's son	4.80
Electricity	10.00
Insurance	1.35
Total costs	£E32.15

Thus his net profit is about £E 60, although his labour input is much less than the that of the handloom owner who is self-employed.

Production in the Mechanised Sector

The Scale of Production

Private factories vary greatly in productive capacity. Al-Mehalla has about 600 factories in the private sector, with anything from one to 100 mechanical looms each. In 1973 there were 3,600 mechanical looms, distributed among about 500 factories.[1] According to key informants

[1] These figures are drawn from the latest (1973) complete reports of the Weavers' Cooperative Society, which keeps records of the names of factory owners and the quantity of yarn allotted to each.

contacted in 1976, 700 mechanical looms had been added to the total by that year, bringing the number of owners to about 600.

The majority of mechanical loom owners have thirty looms or less, as shown in Table 6. Only two owners out of the 484 on whom this table is based had more than fifty looms. These figures are in part a reflection of the

Table 6

Distribution of Mechanical Looms among Owners[1]

Scale of Ownership (number of looms)	Number of Owners
1 - 4	218
5 - 9	159
10 - 19	76
20 - 29	23
30 - 39	3
40 - 49	3
49+	2

division of factory ownership after the nationalisations of 1963. Some large owners responded to the first nationalisations of private sector factories by dividing up the ownerships of their factories among several individuals, nearly always members of the same family, so that each held title to specific looms, or by dividing a factory into separate production units.

[1]This table is based on data from the Weavers' Cooperative Society for Yarn. The total number of owners is 484, which is the figure for 1968, the last year for which complete records of the number of owners by loom are available. These statistics were gathered in order to assign yarn rations to factory owners on the basis of the number of looms they owned.

When the ration system for yarns was introduced, all loom ownerships had to be registered with the government so that yarn quotas could be established for each owner. In 1968 the ration system was revised, and owners with less than eleven looms were exempted from producing for the public sector. Thus the ideal scale of mechanical ownership was ten looms. Owners of existing factories were barred from further breakdowns of ownership within their establishments, but those who established factories after 1968 were able to take advantage of the new regulations by building units consisting of ten looms or less. This pattern has continued into the seventies, as shown in Table 7, and today a factory with sixty looms, for example, is likely to have six owners.

In order to calculate the volume of production of a particular factory, one must take into consideration not only the total number of mechanical looms but also their types. The total shifts worked, the number of weavers, and the number of owners also need to be considered.

For purposes of this study, the size of a factory is important in that it affects the social and work relations of the owners and workers. We shall here categorise these factories roughly as small (one to four looms), medium (five to ninety-nine looms) and large (more than 100 looms). The large-scale factories are no longer part of the private sector. Thus when we speak of the big factories in the private sector, we mean the factories that are medium-scale in relation to the industry as a whole, although these factories are quite large by comparison with other

establishments in the private sector.

Table 7

Size of Factory in Number of Looms by Year of Establishment[1]

Size	Total	Year of Establishment					
		50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80
1- 4	25	-	-	-	-	20	5
5- 9	21	-	2	1	10	7	1
10-19	23	4	5	4	5	5	-
20-29	6*	2	1	3	-	-	-
30-39	7	2	2	2	1	-	-
40-49	6	-	-	3	3	-	-
49+	12	4	3	1	4	-	-

*Including one factory which was established before 1948.

Today in al-Mehalla there are two mechanised sectors for textile production. One is the public sector, consisting of Misr Company and Nasr Company, and the other is the private, or Mehallāwī sector. The public sector is very modern, capital-intensive, and technologically complex. The private sector is less modern, has much smaller quantities of capital invested, and consists mostly of a large number of little factories and workshops.

The large factories are oriented toward mass production. Misr Company went into production in 1931 with 484 mechanical looms. In 1945 when the number of looms had

---

[1]This table is based on a questionnaire administered to 100 factory owners. The fact that only two owners shown in Table 6 had fifty looms or more, while twelve had this many in Table 7 is due to the fact that the data in the earlier table was based on ownership of looms and the second on whole factories; several of the factories included in Table 7 have more than one owner.

reached 4,010, the mechanical looms were replaced by automatic ones. Major technical operations such as ginning, pressing, weaving and printing take place within a single production unit. These mills use a variety of yarns, mainly cotton, wool and linen, and rely on their own sources of electrical power and water. They have their own fleets of lorries for transporting goods.

Misr Company produces yarns, cotton and woolen textiles, and medical cotton. In earlier years it produced mainly cheap folk textiles, such as grey cloth. Formerly it specialised in thick cotton yarn, whereas today it produces and uses medium and fine-grade cotton and wool yarns.

The mechanised production of textiles consists of a number of operations. These are carried out in one or more production units, depending on how capital-intensive a unit is and the extent of integration of the work process. Misr Company may be regarded as a totally integrated mechanised unit; it comprises all the operations required for producing cloth from raw cotton, and even manufactures some garments, employing complex machinery at every stage of the production process. By contrast, production operations in the Mehallāwī sector are divided among several units under separate ownership, most of which employ human energy and the simplest of tools.

The Mehallāwī sector has always been associated with a particular technique of production. This technique is used to produce cloth such as striped and jacquard material and terrycloth which can be marketed almost straight

from the loom after minor operations such as calendering. This technique is different from that used in mass production in Misr Company, where grey cloth is woven and then printed on.

The kind of cloth produced is related to the kind of mechanical looms used. The two most common types are the wide looms (about 100 inches across) and the narrow looms (about 30 inches across). The wide mechanical loom produces sheets, both plain and checkered. With the addition of a jacquard system, it can produce upholstery fabrics and terry towels. Narrow looms produce striped cotton flannel, poplin and calico. With the addition of a Dobby system these looms can produce checkered cloth, cotton flannel with a textured stripe, gabardine, gauze and napkins.

Since small-scale owners cannot afford to add either the jacquard or Dobby systems to their looms, they usually produce sheets on the wide looms and poplin and cotton flannel on the narrow looms. Most of the small-scale owners choose to produce sheets, because these require less cash outlay; sheets are in constant demand, while cotton flannel is a seasonal fabric and requires storage during the off season. Further, production of cotton flannel means going into competition with the public sector factories, which do not produce sheets of the kind produced in the small workshops. The small-scale owners produce cotton flannel and poplin if they are operating as subcontractors and being paid only for their labour.

The Production of Weaving Machinery for the Private Sector

Looms

Most of the looms used by the private sector in al-Mehalla are locally produced. There are fifty specialised workshops for manufacturing semi-mechanical looms, including foundries, turneries, electrical workshops, and carpentry shops. Like the weaving factories themselves, these establishments are only semi-mechanised, and the production process is broken down into a series of steps which are independently performed by various specialists. These specialists work in separate production units that have less than ten workers and are sometimes as small as a weaving workshop with two mechanical looms.

The first step in the production of looms is the casting of iron and steel parts. There are seven foundries in al-Mehalla, three of which are quite large. They produce loom parts using old British looms as models. The wide mechanical loom contains five kilograms of cast iron and eighty kilograms of steel.

The owner of the largest foundry in al-Mehalla learned foundry work as an employee of the Misr Company. He owns a weaving factory with twenty mechanical looms, all of which were designed locally and produced in his own foundry. A percentage of the cast iron used is brought in from outside, but most is obtained by melting down and recasting old machinery.

The furnace is the basic part of the foundry, and it is locally manufactured. It melts down raw cast iron mixed with scrap iron. Molten iron flows through a pipe

into a square container holding moulds for the loom parts. Wooden planks are fitted around the moulds, which are packed in sand. The molten iron is left to harden and then removed from the moulds. All of these operations are carried out by hand by trained workmen.

After casting, the parts are taken to a turnery where they are worked to the exact form required for the particular kind of loom being made. There are about twenty small turneries in al-Mehalla. Both the foundries and the turneries could potentially produce a wide variety of machinery, but most of their capacities are devoted to producing new mechanical looms and spare parts for old looms.

The third phase in the production of mechanical looms is carpentering. A few carpenters in al-Mehalla have become specialised in making the wooden parts of mechanical looms in their own shops.

Most of the owners who were originally mechanics act as contractors for their own looms. The owner first goes to a foundry, where he pays half the purchase price in cash, with the other half to be paid in installments after the loom starts producing. The casting costs £E 135 for cast iron and £E 20 for steel. Turning costs about £E 90. The owner purchases other parts, such as warping beams, cloth beams, and special nails for about £E 64. Carpentry for the loom costs about £E 25. A motor is bought separately. In addition, the owner pays labour charges of the foundry and the mechanic.

As of 1977, a mechanical wide loom cost between £E

600 and £E 700. The narrow loom cost about half that amount. By purchasing the small parts himself, separately contracting the three phases of production, and assembling the pieces himself, an owner could save about £E 100.

Other Machinery

Another machine needed by each weaving workshop is the wefting machine. This machine winds the required amount of yarn into cones on bobbins to be used for the shuttle. This machine is also produced in al-Mehalla and is usually operated by a young boy. Various sizes of wefting machines are available.

There are various supplementary machines for warping, such as "cheese winders", hank winders, and cone winders. Very small-scale owners do not buy such machines, because they usually work as subcontractors and thus do no winding. Even if a small owner works for himself, it is more economical to have his warping done in specialised warp shops. Those who own more than 10 mechanical looms find it more economical to purchase their own winding machines.

The hank winding machine is found only in private sector workshops, as it is associated with traditional dyeing. The spinning companies produce yarn in cone form, but traditional dyeing methods require that the yarn be in hank form. Thus the hank-winding machine, which costs about £E 5, is used to convert the cones into hanks.

By developing such simple machinery, it has become possible to cater to a variety of needs, and hence to serve the small owners. Another advantage of this local development of machinery is that small workshops need not be

dependent on imported goods, whether yarns, machinery or spare parts, as all are produced locally for low prices.

Operations in the Production Process

The first operation in the production of striped cloth in warping, which is partly manual and partly mechanised. Viscous rayon is manufactured in cone form. Only the Misr Company has facilities for dyeing cones, and smaller companies must convert the cones to hanks in order to dye them. The yarn is made into a rope on a foot-driven warper. Single threads are then sized and wound onto a cylindrical spool for sectional warping. Factories which have more than ten looms usually find it more economical to have their own warping machines, but there are independent warping workshops which serve smaller factories.

The weft is also purchased in cones and then machine-wound onto pirns. All workshops, even those with only one loom, have pirn-winding machines, which are usually operated by young boys or girls.

After the cones have been wound onto a warper beam, the next operation in the production of unbleached calico is sizing. One mechanical sizer can supply 200 mechanical looms. Until the nationalisation of the five factories in 1963, there were seven factories in al-Mehalla which wove calico. They used techniques of mass production which were introduced in al-Mehalla outside the Misr Company only in 1955. Before that time, calico was produced by techniques which are possible even in small factories. This involved sizing of the thread in hanks and then winding it onto

cylindrical spools before sectional warping. This technique has been used in small-scale factories in Shubra al-Kheima since the forties, but is very rare in al-Mehalla, perhaps because the handweaving tradition is both older and stronger there.[1]

Dyeing is an essential process for the production of striped cloth, but prior to nationalisation only seven factories had semi-mechanised dyeing units of their own. The other factories sent their hanks to be dyed at independent shops.

The operation known as leasing, drawing and denting is completely manual, except in Misr Company. It is carried out in small independent workshops, except in factories with more than fifty mechanical looms. One labourer and a boy can dent between five and eight beams per day; a mechanical loom requires a beam every ten days. Thus two denting labourers can keep a factory of fifty looms supplied with beams, but would be underemployed in a smaller factory. This operation is often carried out in the streets of industrial areas by workers who make rounds of the factories, picking their beams, leasing and denting them at the factory door. In al-Banā, for example, one worker carries out these operations for all the factories of the area.

Production in the Small-Scale Factories

More than a third of all factory owners fall into the

---

[1] This traditional skill tends more to the production of striped cloths such as qutniyya, ghazliyya and alaga.

category "small-scale". Most of these owners were originally wage labourers in private factories or at Misr Company. They were born in al-Mehalla, and are from families traditionally involved in the industry. The education of this group is limited, and most are illiterate. Table 8 shows the occupational backgrounds of small-scale owners compared with those of owners of larger factories.

Internal organisation of the small workshops depends mainly on the labour input of the owner. He stays in the workshop, weaving or repairing his looms, training and supervising the workers. If a worker is absent or leaves his job, the owner takes his place. Small owners employ mostly children and unskilled labourers, and most of the labourers are still being trained in weaving. Some of these are able to learn weaving in a few months, especially when trained on simple mechanical looms, and then do the same work as an adult labourer but for a smaller salary. Often the workers are the children or other relatives of the owner. Except for the sons of the owner, once these workers are trained they seek work in larger factories as skilled labourers.

By law children under the age of twelve cannot be employed, but there are a large number of such children working in the private sector. At the age of twelve, boys generally earn £E 0.20 per day. Once they have learned to weave, they are paid by the metre of cloth produced. A skilled weaver who is over eighteen years of age earns at least £E 1.00 per day, depending upon the number of metres he can produce. These older workers must be registered

with the Labour Organisation, and must participate in the governmental social insurance and health insurance plans. Social insurance payments are the equivalent of one third of a worker's salary, of which the owner pays two thirds and the worker one third. Health insurance payments equal five percent of the salary, of which four-fifths is paid by the owner and one-fifth by the employee. Owners who do not register their labourers are subject to severe penalties, but workers under the age of eighteen are considered to be trainees and need not be registered.

Boys work on narrow and wide mechanical looms which are simpler than the jacquard and dobby looms. After a period of training that usually begins by winding, depending on the age of the boy, a boy can begin weaving. On the average, a boy working on a wide loom can produce ten sheets during a twelve-hour shift. For this he receives about £E 0.40 per day. An adult labourer using the same loom produces fifteen sheets in the same period of time, and thus receives a daily wage of £E 1.20. Thus owners prefer to employ boys. There is no minimum wage for this group, and the social and health insurance systems do not apply to them. Thus the owners can employ boys and girls at any wage and dismiss them at will. However, since there is a shortage in the labour force in al-Mehalla, a de facto minimum wage policy has come into effect and spread widely over the last two years.

A recent (1978) threat to the small owners has been the rise in the prices of yarns and the government policy ultimately to abolish the ration system. Prices of yarns

Table 8

Occupational Backgrounds of Owners of Mechanical Looms

Occupational Background	Number of Owners			
	Total	1-4 Looms	5-49 Looms	49+ Looms
Weaver-mechanic				
public sector	11	6	5	-
private sector	23	9	13	-
Mu'allim (handloom owner)	27	2	17	6
Sana'ī (handloom craftsman)	1	1	-	-
Related occupations:				
dyeing	2	-	2	-
loom-making	4	1	3	-
warper, drawer	4	-	4	-
cloth merchant	6	-	3	2
Unrelated occupations	4	2	2	-
Bureaucrats in textile sector	5	3	2	2
Bureaucrats in other sectors	4	-	4	-
Students	9	1	8*	2
Total	100	25	63	12**

*All of these students were the children of mu'allimīn, and all of them were educated specifically to take over the establishments of their fathers.

**The number of those with fifty looms or more is higher in this table than in Table 6 because the trend in 1967 was to split ownership of looms within factories. In this survey, the unit is the factory itself, regardless of divisions of ownership.

have increased gradually since 1973. At that time, the price of a bale of cotton weighing 4.5 kilograms was £E 2.75; by 1974 it had increased to £E 3.25, and in 1978 it was £E 3.50. Thus a sheet weighing 1,000 grams cost £E 1.15 in 1973 and now costs £E 1.93. To cut down on production costs, small-scale workshops increased the white area of the checkered cloth, and began mixing the fixed dyeing stuff with cheaper colours which are less permanent. The cost of dyeing a bale of cotton with fixed colours is about £E 1.50, whereas the less permanent dyes cost only about £E 0.40. They also decreased the weight of the sheet to about 800 grams by controlling the number of threads used. Thus a bale which would formerly have produced four and a half sheets now makes five and a half sheets. A third measure for decreasing costs consists of buying cheaper yarns which have not yet been sorted by thread size, and sorting them in the workshop.

The workshops of this group are clustered in the new industrial areas such as al-Banā and Mehallet al-Burg in the northwestern part of town. These areas have many buildings consisting of small rooms rented out individually as workshops, usually to owners of mechanical looms. Workshops having two or three owners are quite common, but in such cases each owner often has his own separate mechanical looms. The renting of workshops already equipped with looms is also a common practice.

Many of these buildings were not originally designed as workshops. The increasing demand of the weavers for work space led owners to convert their buildings to this

use. One striking example is the case of a landlord who set up buildings for use in a cattle-fattening project. These buildings consisted of cattle sheds whose roofs were supported by concrete pillars at five-metre intervals. When the owner realised that he would make more money by renting out his property as small factories, he converted his building into small rooms, each of which could hold three or four looms. Demand was so great that he was able to add two more floors. The entire space of this building is only about 2,000 square metres, but it housed more than fifty separate factories by 1968, one year after rentals began. The property now consists of two rows of buildings separated by an alley six metres wide, blocked by a wall at one end and a gateway at the other. The gateway is manned by a guard, in order to prevent tenants from moving out without paying their rents.

Rents on such rooms are relatively high by comparison to those in the older weaving districts. The landlord described above charges £E 0.30 per square metre per month for his unfurnished rooms, and more for rooms which are equipped with looms. Such an arrangement is only attractive to weavers during boom times, and even then is not common. Renting a room pre-equipped with a loom does have the advantage of permitting the weaver to conserve his capital for use in building his own loom, but would never be more than a temporary expedient. By and large, the tenants of such rooms are people from outside the weaving industry who have come into the industry as an investment, and not weaving labourers trying to become independent owners.

Production in Medium-Scale Factories

Although the range in scope of operations is enormous even within the category of medium-scale factories as defined here, particularly by comparison with the small-scale factories discussed in the preceding section, the production processes of the medium-scale factories are distinctive primarily in terms of the number of looms in use, and the category is essentially uniform in terms of technological and organisational characteristics affecting labour relations. The majority of the looms in these factories are locally made and semi-mechanical, but one factory is likely to include a variety of different types of looms.

The internal organisation of these factories is quite different than that of the large public-sector factories. Owners of the medium-scale private sector factories are mostly former mu'allimīn or sanay'īyya from the textile industry, and even those with other occupational backgrounds come from families which include weavers (see Table 8, p. 140).

When the large factories originally emerged in the fifties, labourers were drawn mainly from among the skilled handloom craftsmen, who were nearly all of Mehallāwī origin. Initially these workers preferred employment in the private sector, but with changes in the labour laws and nationalisation of the largest factories in the sixties, wages and working conditions were so much improved in the public sector that the private sector lost its competitive advantage in hiring skilled workers, and was more and more

forced to employ unskilled labourers from rural backgrounds, including boys, girls and women.[1]

The hierarchy within the medium-scale factories is quite limited by comparison with that in the factories of the public sector. Managerial staffs are very small, and most of the supervision and management of the work is performed by the owner. Most of the clerks have diplomas in commerce, but hiring is based on experience and the needs of a particular factory, and some of the clerks have no degrees. In the large factory described in Appendix II are about 300 productive workers, and the administrative staff equals about five percent of this total.

The productive labour force consists of unskilled daily wage labourers, skilled production workers (many of whom are specialised in the weaving of particular fabrics), and mechanics. The mechanics, who are at the top of the production hierarchy, receive monthly salaries which vary from one factory to another as well as from one kind of loom to another, but generally range from £E 50 to £E 100.

Skilled workers are paid by the metre of cloth produced, at rates which vary according to the type of cloth and the kind of loom. These rates are more or less standardised across the private sector, though boys may be paid at a lower rate than adult workers. The rate per metre of flannel cloth, which is produced on the narrow

---

[1] It is impossible to make a meaningful comparison of wages between the public and private sectors during the fifties because the organisation of the work force in the public sector was on a completely different basis than in the private sector.

loom, is £E 0.012. An average worker can produce forty metres per day, receiving a wage of £E 0.48. The rates for jacquard looms, by contrast, are £E 0.037 per towel and £E 0.10 per bed cover. The average worker can produce thirty-five towels or eleven bed covers per day, thus receiving wages between £E 1.10 and 1.30.

Unskilled labourers normally receive daily wages. Most of these workers are boys and regarded as trainees; they are therefore not covered by social insurance. The wages of such boys vary from £E 0.20 to 0.40, depending on their skills. Boys begin working at the age of eight to twelve, depending on how long their parents are able to keep them in school. They are first trained on the winding machines and then begin to weave on locally-made narrow or wide looms at about the age of fourteen or fifteen. If a boy wants to become a production worker and be paid by the metre, he usually moves to another factory to begin as a skilled labourer. Once having mastered weaving on the narrow and wide looms, he can begin work on the jacquard and dobby looms. These looms, however, require considerable skill, and are usually operated by older workers.

By the time a boy is skilled, he is around the age of twenty-one, when he enters the army. If he does not learn a more profitable occupation in the army (such as that of driver or mechanic), he is likely to seek work as a skilled weaver in a public sector factory once he returns to civilian life.

Girls work mainly in preparatory operations such as winding, usually beginning at around the age of ten. By age eighteen they earn £E 0.40 per day, but rarely exceed that rate unless they assume other chores, such as serving. In larger factories they tend to receive higher wages, and to perform extra work such as inspection of cloth, folding and packing, and sewing.

In one factory which is a combination knitting and weaving unit there are about eighty girl employees. Seven girls work in winding and receive wages ranging from £E 0.25 to £E 0.70. Those earning more than £E 0.30 per day work per hank. In this factory are fifty sewing machines. Fifty girls operate these machines, aided by ten girl assistants. They all receive between £E 0.20 and £E 0.45 per day. Their supervisor is twenty-five years old. Beginning as a winding girl, she has worked in this factory for eleven years. She married one of the weavers, and now receives a salary of about £E 35 per month, but she is an unusual case as very few girls work in these factories after marriage.

These factories must constantly recruit new labourers, as they suffer a high rate of turnover. This problem increases with the size of the factories, as the larger factories are most dependent on unskilled labour. Recruitment is chiefly through personal connections with old labourers in a factory, particularly the mechanics, who bring their relatives and friends to fill vacancies. The only time an owner is known to have made a public announcement of openings in his factory and to have drawn up a formal

application form was when he instituted a completely new knitting section and needed to hire thirty girls at one time. Even so, all of the new workers were hired through contact with old employees.

Conclusion

The local, national and international events outlined in Chapter III had a profound impact on the structure of the textile industry in al-Mehalla, requiring great adaptability on the part of weavers at all levels of production. While the public sector had the protection afforded by government commitment to create and maintain an independent national textile establishment, private sector weavers had to develop their own strategies for dealing with the vicissitudes which confronted them. The nature of such strategies varied depending on the size of the production unit and the events of a particular period, but the central factor in the survival of production units at different levels was the high degree of complementarity of the system as a whole.

The enormous public sector company of al-Mehalla is capital-intensive and highly integrated, containing all units needed for the production of finished cloth under one roof. While the advantages of such integration are great, the Mehallāwī sector of the industry turned its very inability to operate in this manner into a formula for survival and even, in many cases, for expansion. Initially the industry had functioned through artisans whose skill and experience were the primary capital involved in weaving.

As weaving became increasingly mechanised, profits became more and more contingent on capital investment in mechanical looms. The city of al-Mehalla then grew to function as if it were one enormous factory. Like Misr Company, this huge plant contained all of the units involved in the production of fabrics, but their ownership was fragmented.

Thus the Mehallāwī sector factories varied in scale from a few very large units carrying out most or all of the relevant production processes to very small units in which only one or two such processes were undertaken. The strategies of the smallest-scale producers, more than those of any other group, provide insights into how the system as a whole functioned to permit the survival of units of all sizes.

Although outsiders to the textile industry did frequently invest in a few looms during boom years, they were involved in weaving only in a transitory way, and throughout the last forty years the small-scale owners of mechanical looms have always been predominantly Mehallāwwīyya from families in the textile industry. They have perhaps an extraordinarily strong drive toward independence, and are equipped with the experience and skills acquired over generations in the industry. What they do not have is capital.

Mechanics and weavers were able to establish themselves as independent owners because to do so did not require that an owner control all the processes involved in production. If times were good, he might be able to afford to rent a workshop containing a loom and work that loom

while saving his earnings toward constructing his own machinery. More commonly, he would act as his own contractor, splitting up the production of his own loom among the specialised workshops of the town, thus saving substantial sums. Once having acquired a loom, he could work it himself to save on labour costs. If he could not afford to purchase yarns, he could work on a subcontracting basis for a larger producer, weaving for a fee.

A small-scale weaver wishing to expand was free to decide to add to his looms without increasing the number of production processes in his shop, as al-Mehalla contained many specialised shops with skilled workers who could provide him with warp and weft, wind his bobbins and dye his threads. If his finished products were of sufficient quality, he could sometimes avoid marketing them by selling them directly to a larger producer for sale along with that producer's cloth.

Calculations of the relative advantages of various routes to expansion were meticulous. For example, an owner with two mechanical looms did much better to purchase two new looms than one, as the labour costs are essentially the same in either case. By contrast, the inclusion of, for instance, a warping unit is economical only if it serves more than ten looms, so an owner would be unlikely to choose to expand in this direction.

Al-Mehalla also provided a ready source of labourers for the factories. A small mu'allim could thus vary his own role to suit the conditions of the times. During boom times he could hire the labour he needed and act as a

manager and supervisor. During slumps, he could do his own mechanical work and fill the role of weaver in his own shop. In recent years the small-scale shops have had more difficulty in recruiting labourers, but because their owners are local people with wide kin and acquaintance networks in the industry, they have been able to surmount such difficulties.

While al-Mehalla thus provided a context in which it was possible for many weavers and mechanics to become independent owners, after the forties it was very difficult for them to expand enough to become really prosperous. The really advantageous situation during this period was that of the medium-scale factories, which were able to expand enormously, initially through taking advantage of the facilities, technological expertise, and cast-off machinery of the Misr Company and later through manipulating the ration and subcontracting systems to their own benefit.

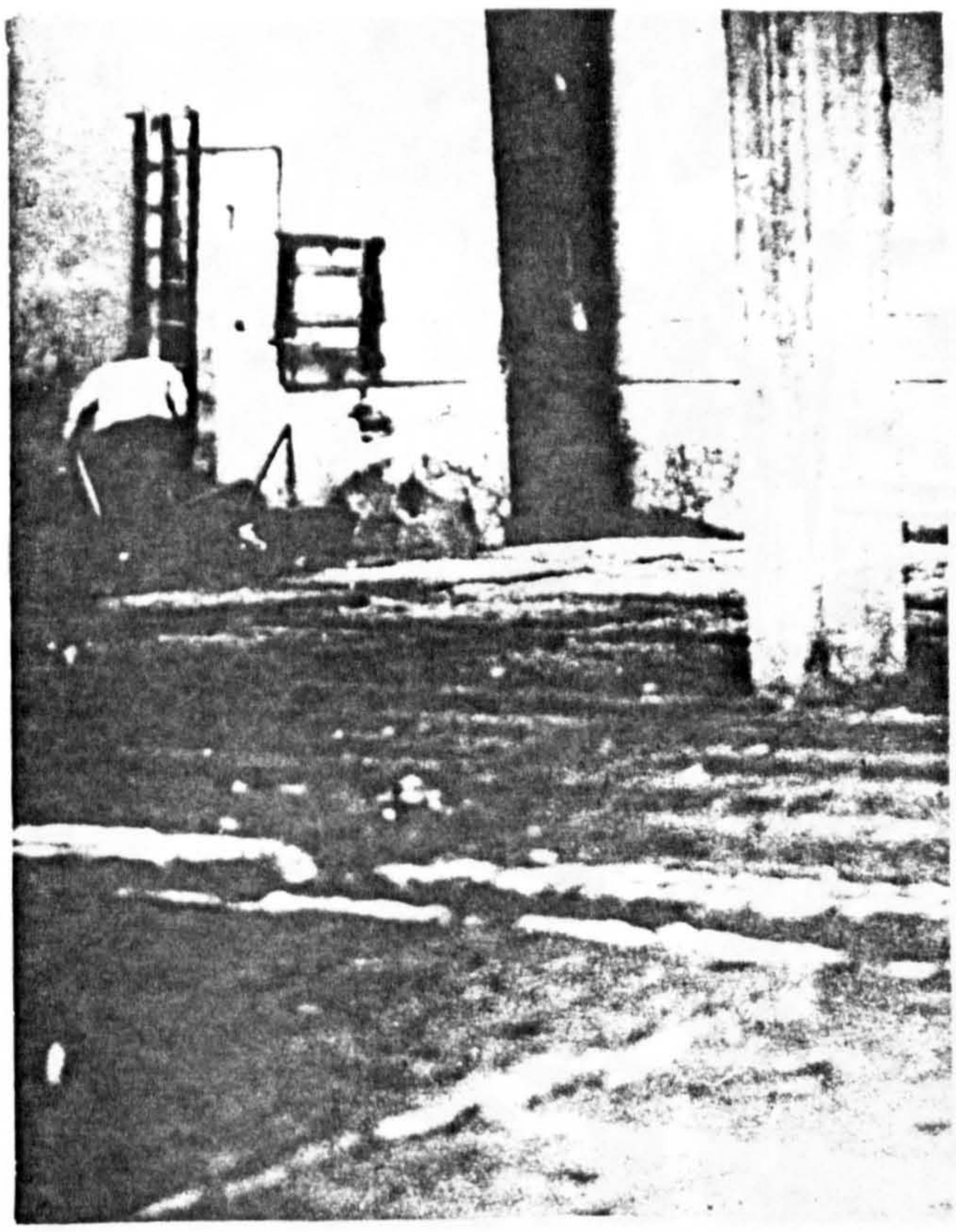
To the great advantage of the mu'allimīn who grew to become medium and large-scale producers, the boom years of World War II coincided with decisions in Misr Company, then still in private hands, to replace many of its mechanical looms. Thus these smaller owners were able to buy up mechanical equipment at a time when market conditions were such that they were certain to be able to sell their products at a profit. Demand was so high that Misr Company could not keep pace with production requirements even in its own specialties, and this gave added impetus to the smaller firms. Government control of yarn prices combined with high prices of finished cloth during these years

made further mechanisation possible.

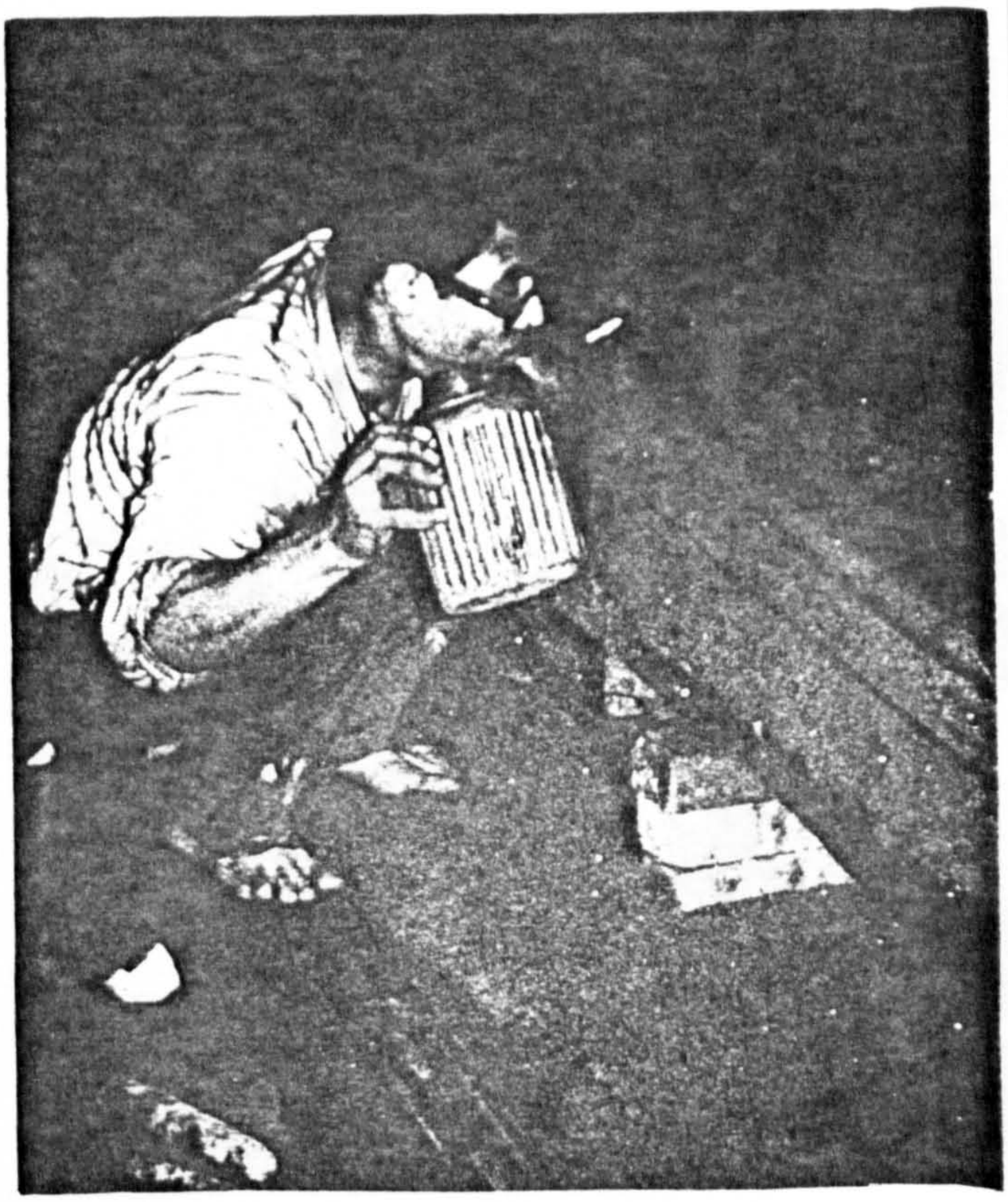
Once the war boom ended in the late forties, such expansion into mechanical looms became virtually impossible for small-scale producers. Those who had been able to capitalise on the favourable economic conditions, however, were left in a good position, and their relative advantage was further increased during the fifties and sixties. Although the threat of nationalisation discouraged expansion of the largest private-sector units, particularly after the government takeover of five al-Mehalla plants, the restrictions on cloth imports and the shipment of huge quantities of finished cloth to the USSR for repayment of public debt meant that the public sector was unable to meet local demands for cloth, and was forced to subcontract out much of its work to the private sector. Thus private producers could escape the risk of further investment while increasing their production and their profits. Some of the advantages of this complementarity between the public and private sectors were passed on to the smaller producers through further subcontracting.

Increases in the complexity and complementarity of economic relations within the textile industry in al-Mehalla have helped to guarantee the survival of units at all levels of production. At the same time, the system of social stratification characterising the community of weavers in the city has also become more complex. Chapters V and VI discuss the impact of changes in the context and organisation of the weaving industry on lifestyles, social relations and social class distinctions in this community since the craft phase of the industry.

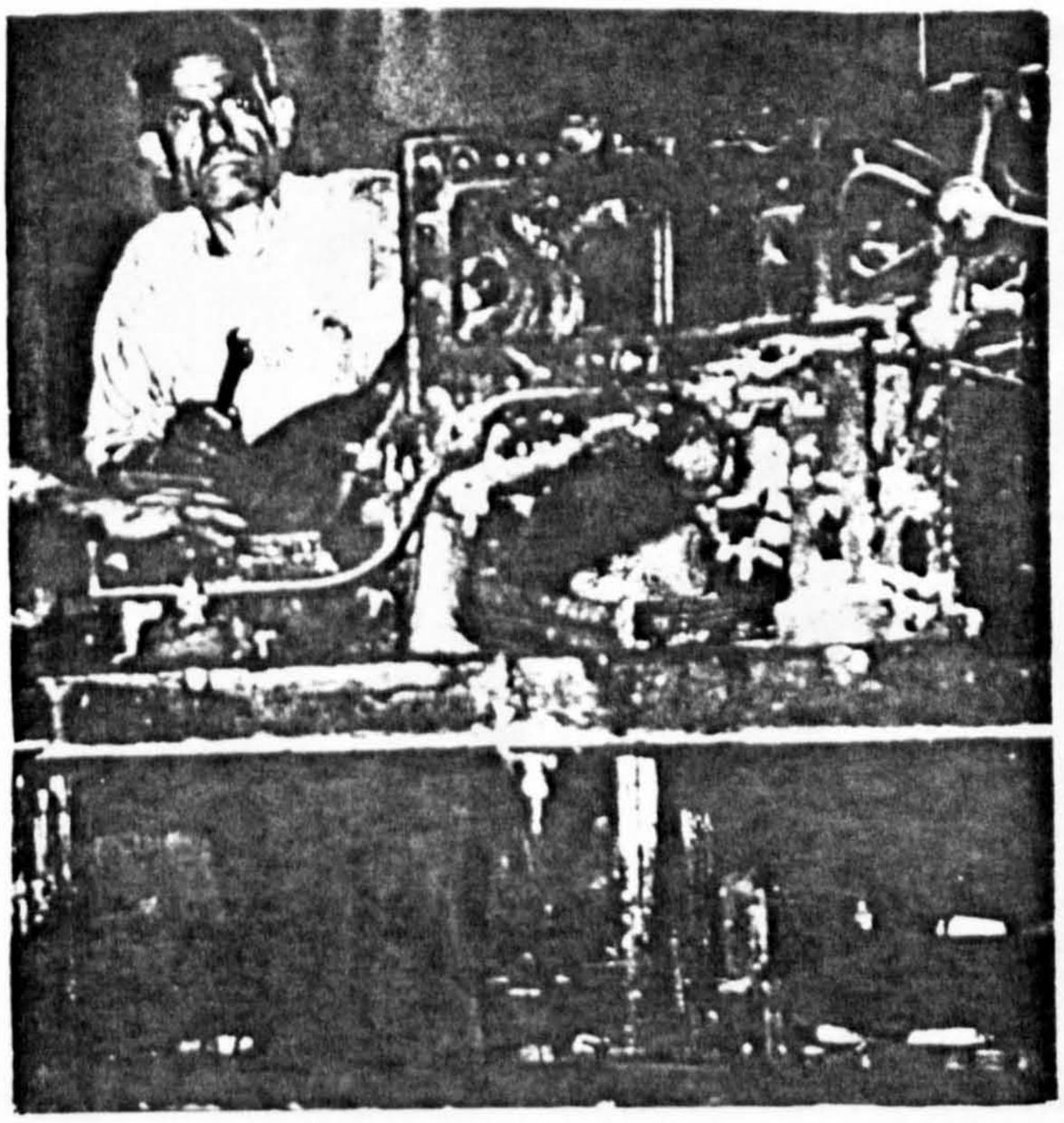
The Process of Producing Mechanical Looms



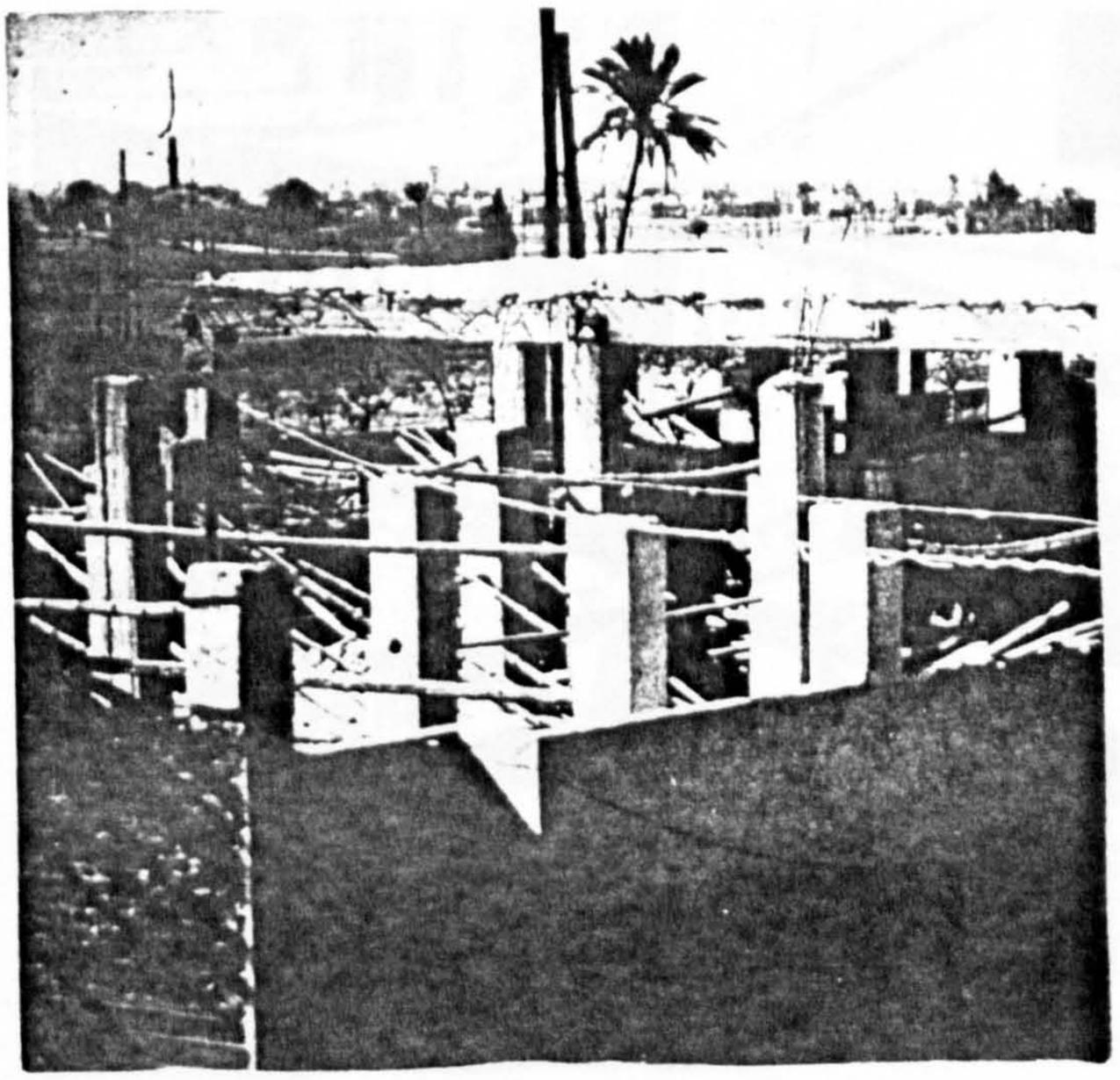
A foundry.



Models for machines.



A turnery.



Expansion of new buildings to be rented as small factories.

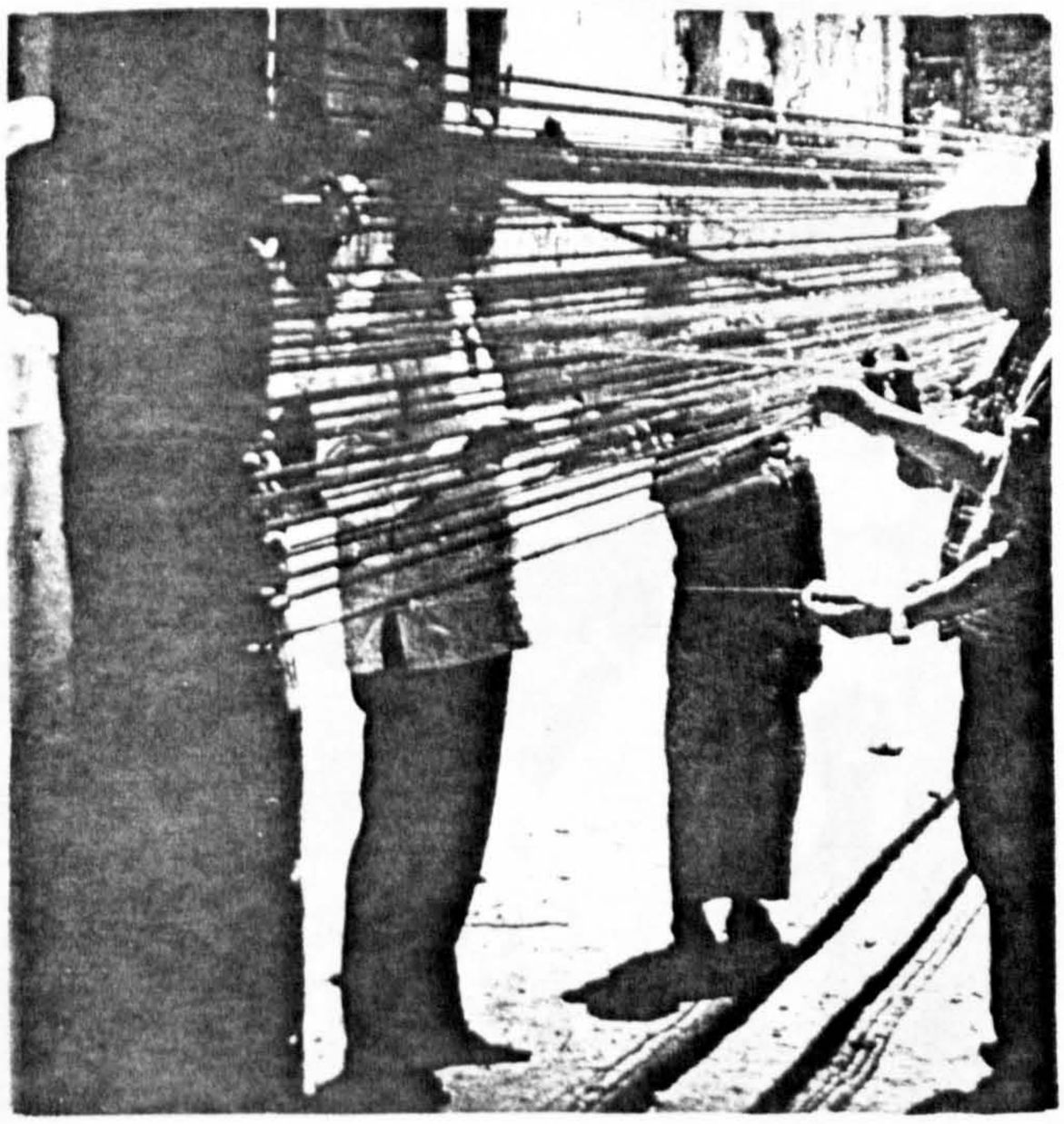
Craft Phase



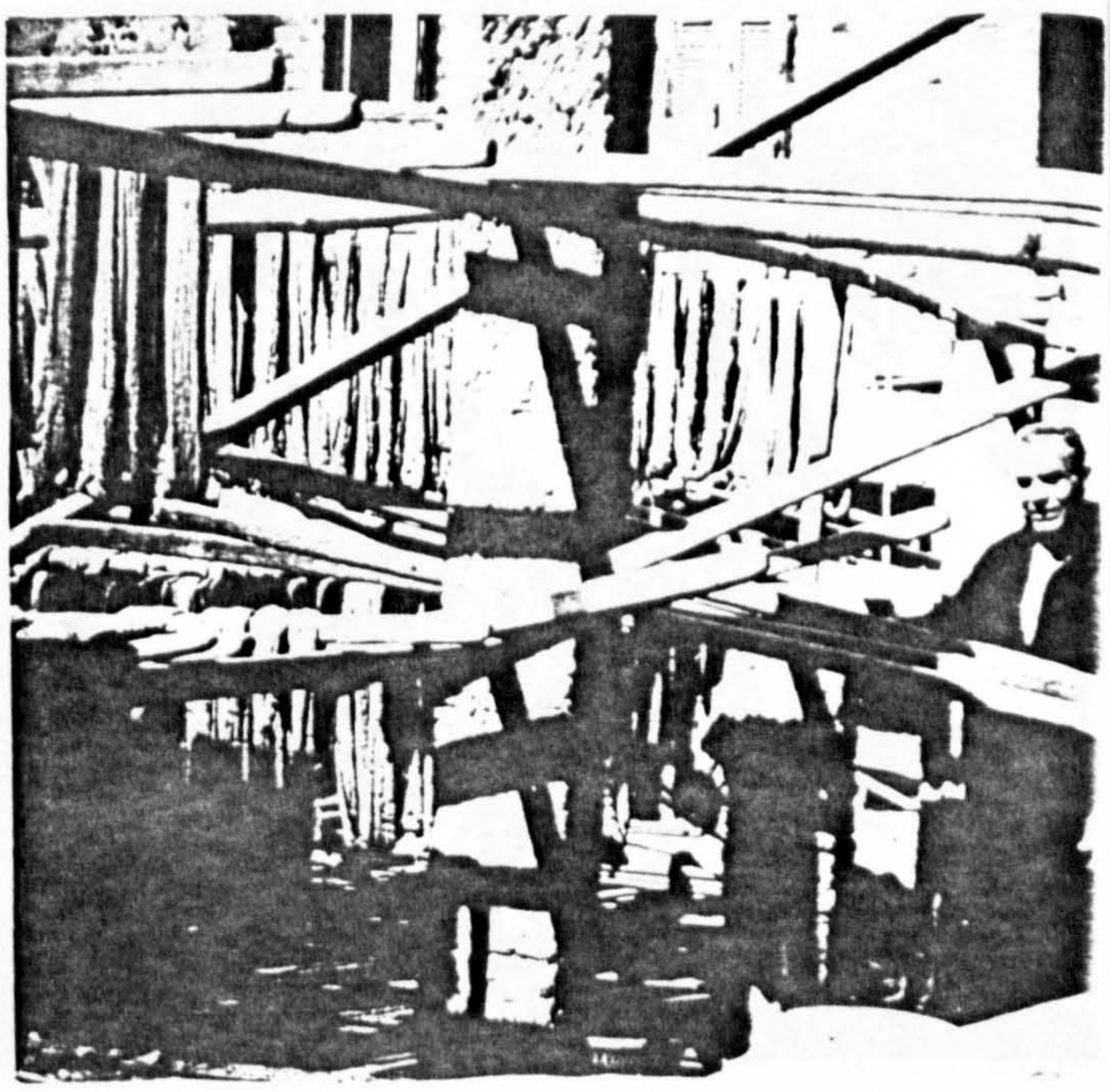
Winding handlooms.



Traditional dyeing workshop.



Sizing of silk thread over poles.



Drying hanks of cotton over roofs of houses.



Workshop for warping.



A traditional warper.



The laqy operation.



Thread ready to be carried to a qa'a for weaving.



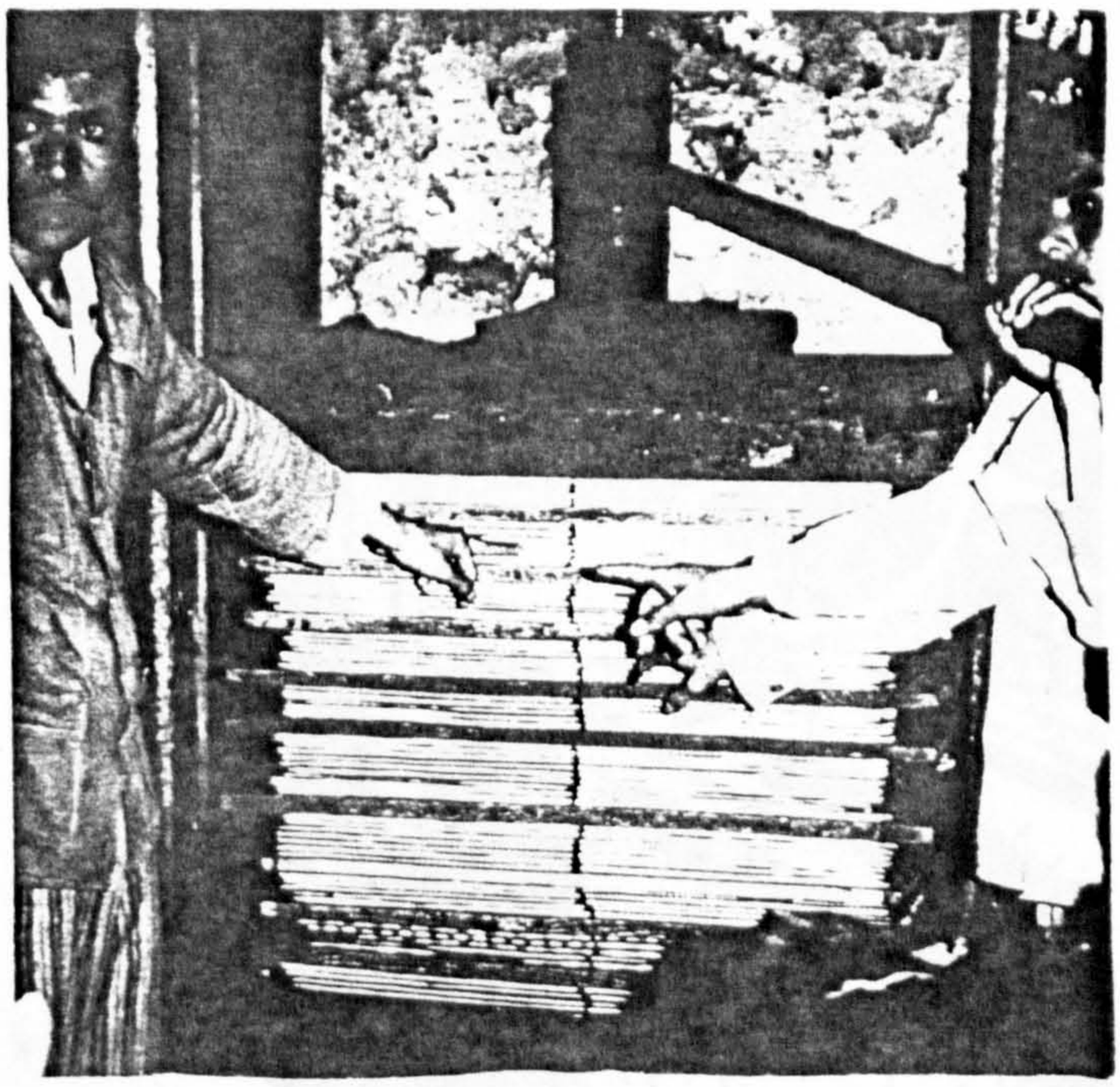
A qa'ā of several handlooms.



Ironing.



Hammering.



Pressing.

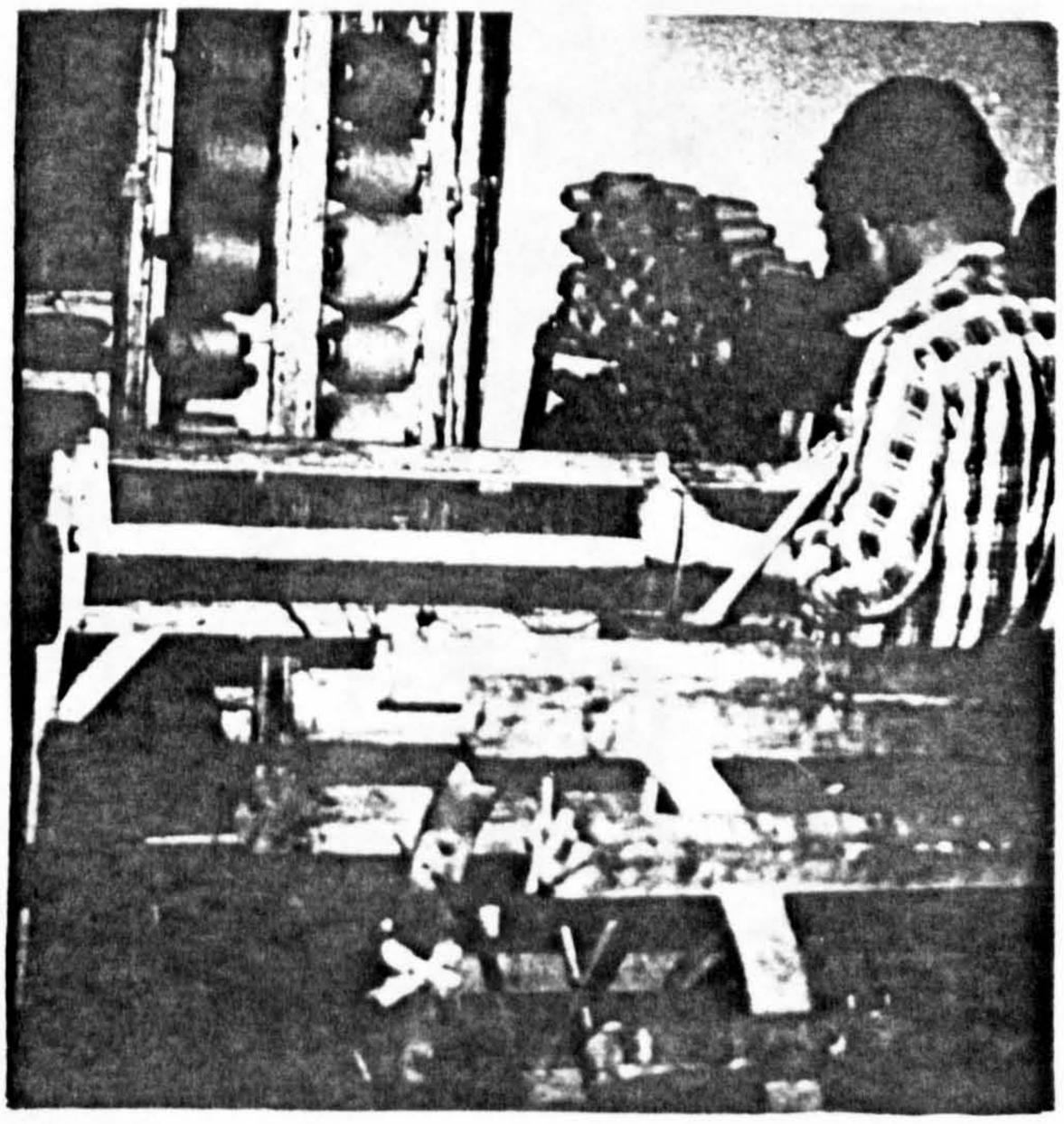
Mechanical Phase



Dyeing.



Winding.



Warping



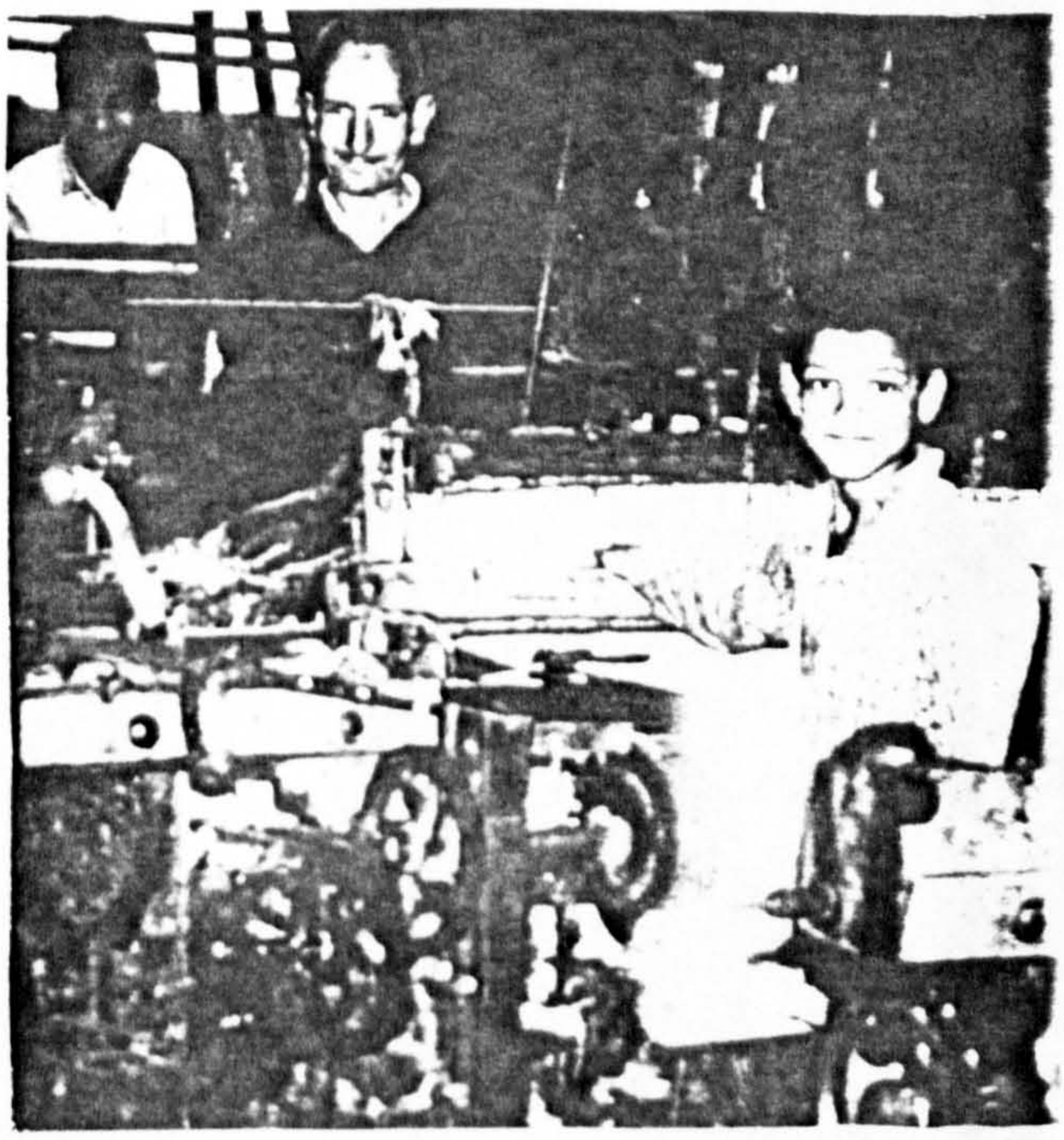
Beams of thread in streets.



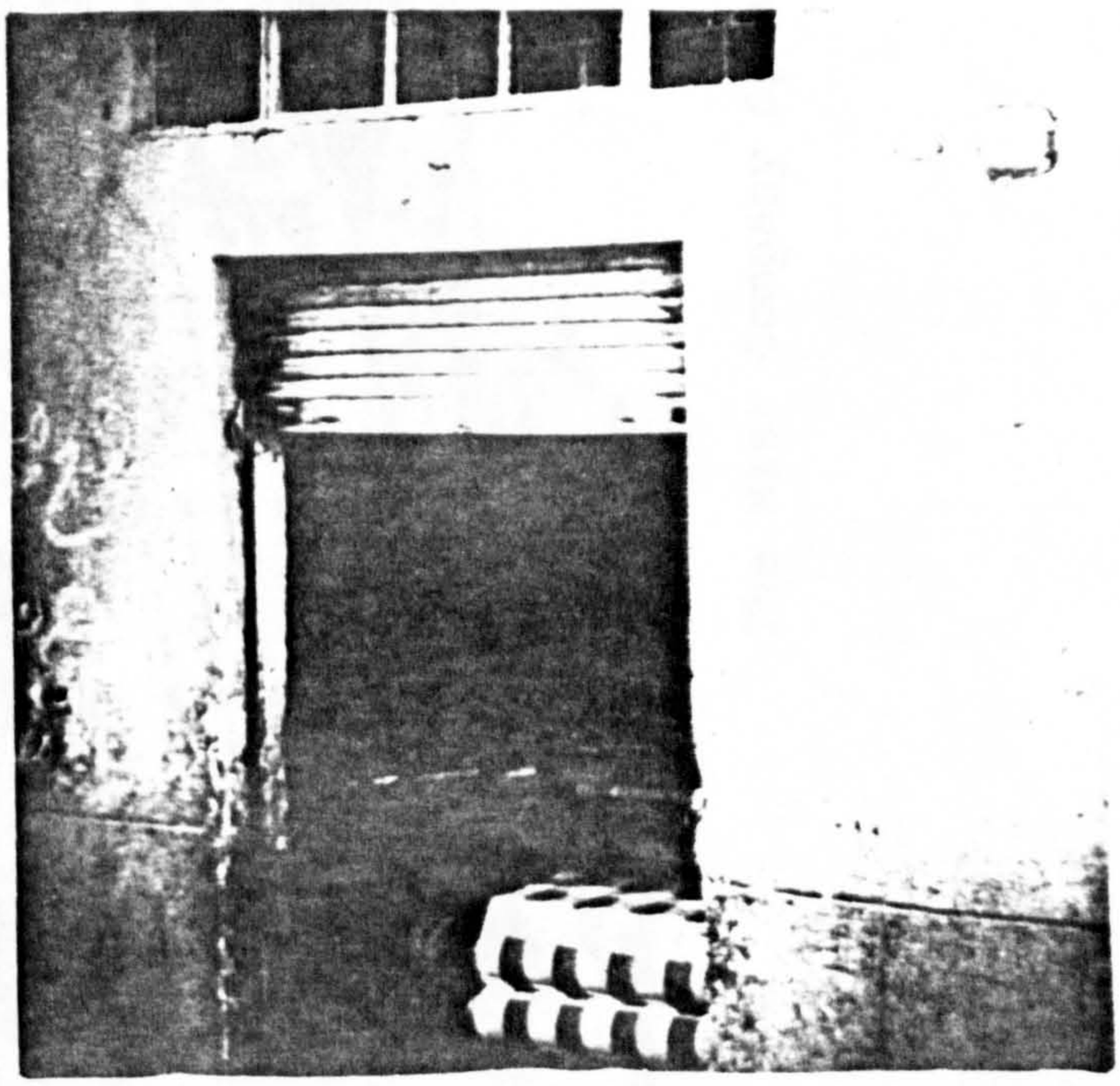
Laqy.



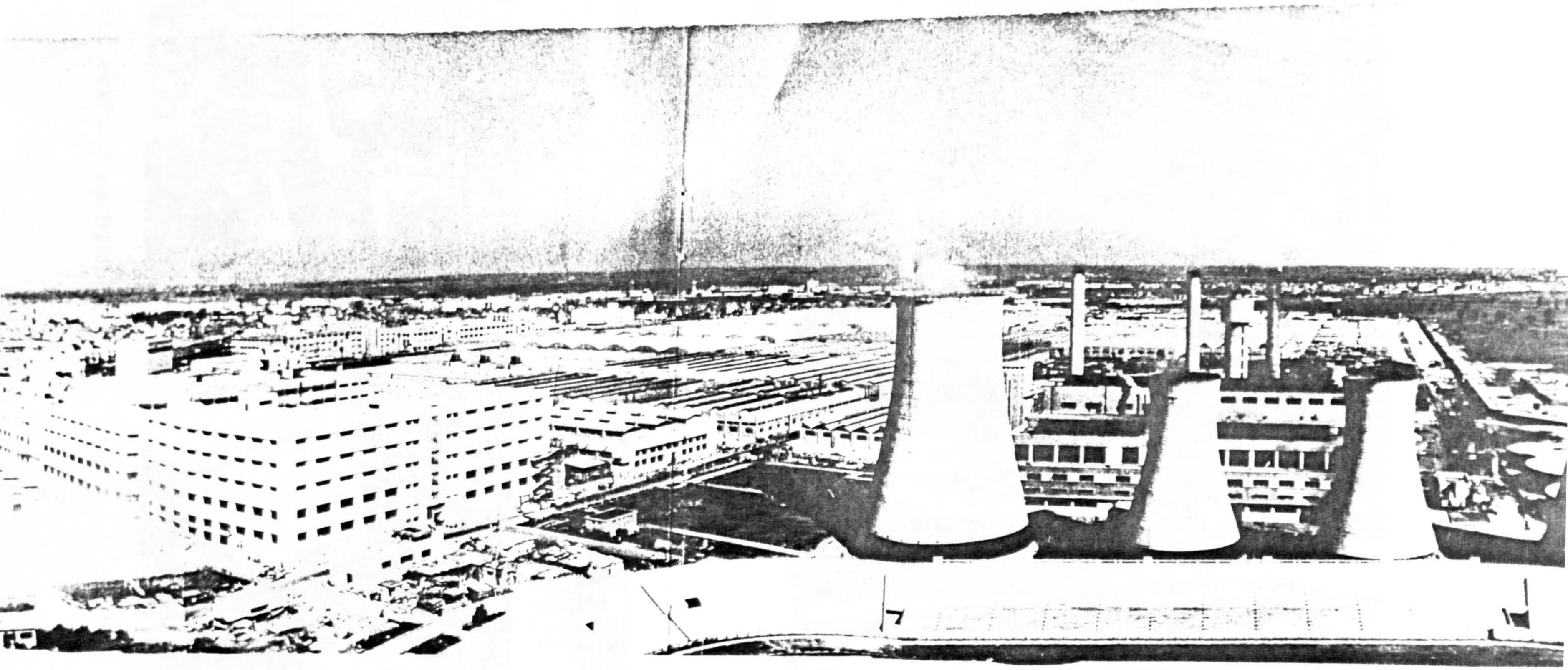
Mechanical loom in a small workshop



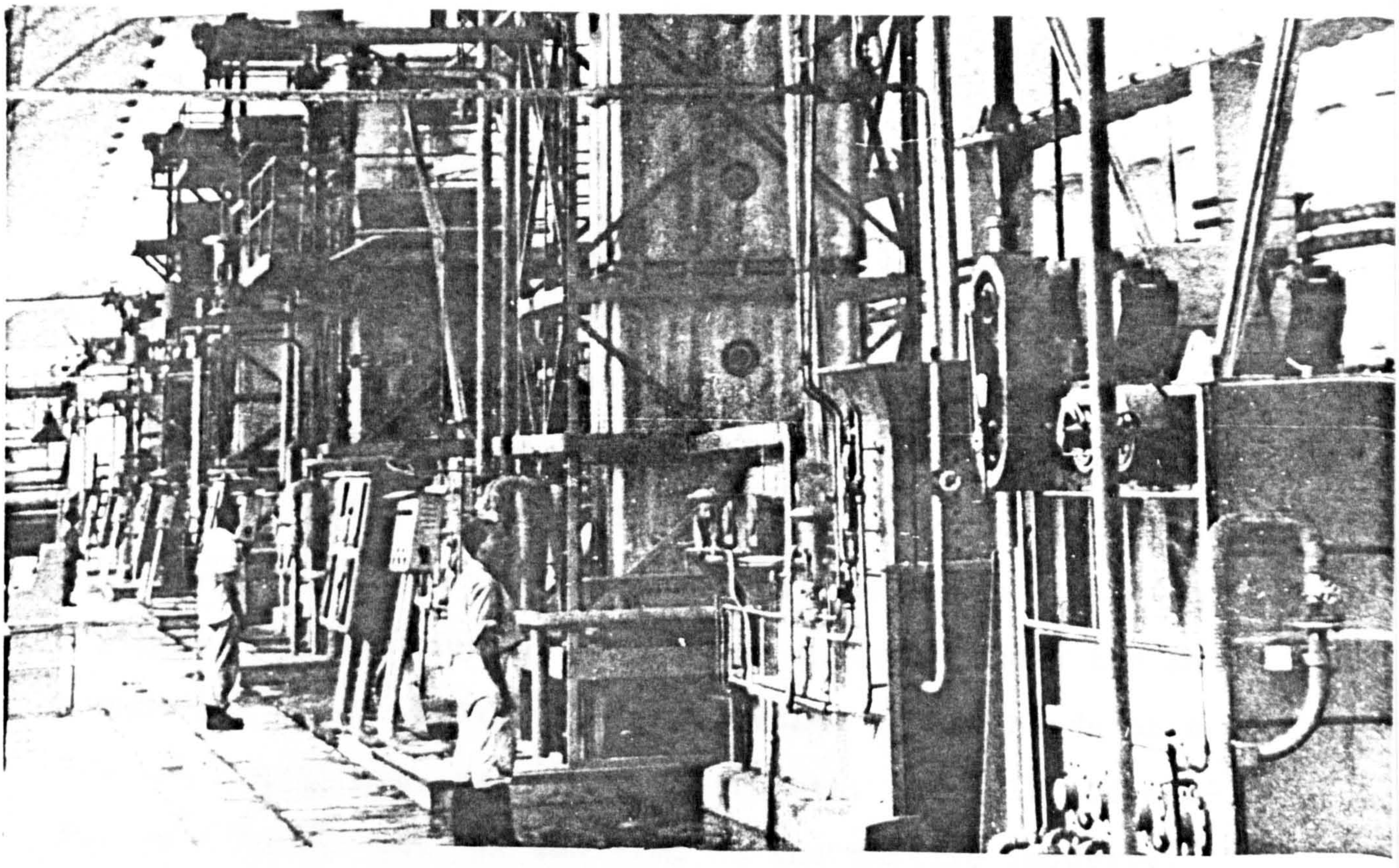
Mechanical looms in a medium-scale factory.



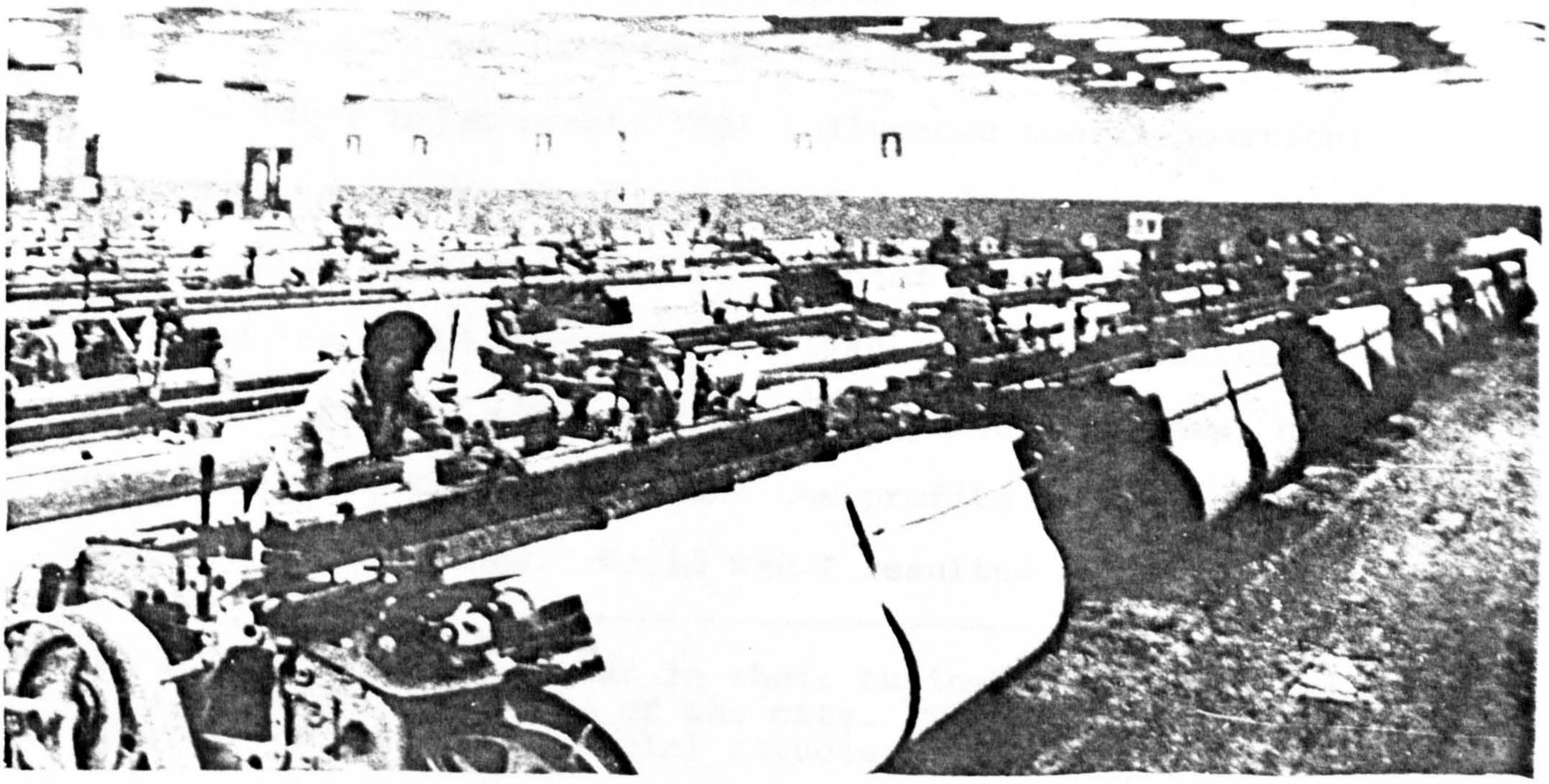
Al-Simsār's workshop with two mechanical looms.



The Misr Company Spinning and Weaving Factory.



Automatic dyeing machinery.



Automatic weaving machinery.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION (I) ECONOMIC POSITION

The Distribution of Wealth Prior to 1930

As discussed in Chapter IV, al-Mehalla's economy was largely dependent on the textile period prior to 1930. Out of 34,000 inhabitants, 6,000 worked in the industry, and the majority of these were craftsmen, either wage-earners or self-employed. The wealthiest group in the industry was composed of foreigners, mostly British, who specialised in buying and processing raw cotton for export.[1] Among the indigenous groups, wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few big mu'allimin, raw cotton merchants, and silk and cotton yarn merchants. In addition to the textile industry, the chief sources of wealth in al-Mehalla at that time were land ownership and certain leading government positions such as those of mayor, sheikh al-hara (chief of the location), chief of police, and director of irrigation.

The three major events that influenced social positions in al-Mehalla during the first three decades of the twentieth century were World War I, the boom years of 1918 and 1919, and the world depression of 1930. The war brought down cotton prices, which affected the purchasing power of the peasants on the one hand and the profits of the cotton merchants on the other. World War I resulted in a severe

---

[1] The British lived together in their business compounds and took no part in the life of the city. They are thus irrelevant to a study of social structure in al-Mehalla.

cut in production. In reducing their outputs, weavers took a cut in profits, and were forced to dismiss some of their workers. Hence in these years there were changes in the positions of many weavers and craftsmen.[1]

After the war, cotton prices rose gradually, and the years 1918 and 1919 are considered the golden age of the textile industry in al-Mehalla. Rising cotton prices increased the purchasing power of the peasants, and as the prices of yarn rose the profits of the merchants and producers increased. The general impact of this boom was that newcomers were attracted to the industry and incomes rose, although some groups profited more than others, particularly the cotton merchants and cotton yarn merchants.

The cotton and yarn merchants became very wealthy, and were identified as notables. They used some of their profits to buy land and to build luxurious homes. The silk merchants, who were also weavers, profited much less than the cotton merchants because of the decline in the demand for silk cloth, but they too benefited from the boom. Most of their surplus was reinvested in the weaving industry, although some of it was also invested in land and homes. Other weavers also invested their profits in the industry. Medium-scale producers bought more looms, and some wage-earning craftsmen were able to buy their first looms. Many craftsmen who had been forced to leave the industry during the slump returned to it during this boom.

---

[1] The exception to this was the foreign group in the city. The British bought, pressed, ginned and exported cotton on such a huge scale and were so closely in touch with the international market situation that they did not run the risks that threatened the fortunes of local families.

Wealth and Social Position among the Well-to-Do

Then as now, townspeople in al-Mehalla formed their judgements of the wealthy not merely on the basis of the extent of their wealth but also on the basis of its manner of acquisition and use. Families who became rich through hard work and the wise use of money, and those who inherited some wealth from previous generations but managed this wealth carefully and diligently, received widespread respect in the community.

Some of the wealthy families had become rich very quickly during the boom years, and had used their capital for investments in fields such as weaving and land ownership in which they were not deeply concerned with productivity, but simply with returns on their capital. The raw cotton merchants families were the most unstable of such groups during the twenties. They were identified as opportunists whose quickly acquired fortunes could be lost as fast as they had been gained. Similarly, landlords who had acquired their holdings with money saved from salaries earned at various government posts or from moneylending were not highly esteemed.

The wealthy families who engaged in moneylending tended to invest in land, and were somewhat despised. There was a general feeling that such ill-gotten gains could not bring lasting prosperity. In fact they did not, as during the world depression of 1930 peasants were unable to pay their debts, which adversely affected the moneylenders, and the establishment of a rural credit bank in al-Mehalla in 1936 was a further blow to their fortunes.

By the end of the thirties the power that had lain in the hands of the traditional leading figures in the community, including the sheikh al-hara, the mayor, and the director of irrigation, was declining, lying instead with the top administrators of the modern institutions then being established. These new posts became a source of prestige and influence, and constituted a means of acquiring privilege and so wealth for their holders.

Most of the wealthy families early in the twentieth century had combined economic resources, with investments in, for example, land and industry, or trade and industry. Land was never a major source of investment in al-Mehalla because opportunities for and inclination toward investment in this form of property were limited. Trade and industry were more prestigious occupations than farming, and few merchants and mu'allimīn aspired to become landlords, despite the fact that land was then cheap enough that some mu'allimīn had the means to invest. Land within the boundaries of the city was divided into small ownerships, making acquisition of estates impossible after the turn of the century, and land farther away was arid and required great care if it was to be brought to fertility. Lacking experience in agriculture, the townsmen believed that they would be cheated by the peasants, and frequently repeated that "what begins in the mud ends in the mud."

As a result of these factors, prior to 1930 only ten wealthy families derived the greatest parts of their incomes from investments in agriculture, and six of these also had substantial investments in industry or trade. As shown in

Table 9, these ten families had originally come to agriculture from diverse backgrounds, and had acquired their land by various means. Although they were all known as major landlords, none of them owned more than 300 feddans, and as each estate was actually the property of several members of a family, these families were not very wealthy by comparison with estate-holders elsewhere in Egypt at that time.

Examination of the family histories of these landowners reveals that the stability of the families whose main incomes were derived from the land was related to the way in which they acquired their land and wealth. By the thirties only the four families who had real roots in agriculture were continuing to prosper.

The al-Shishiny family, for instance, was very well established in agriculture. The father, Mustāfa al-Sheshiny, owned seventy feddans of good agricultural land which he cultivated himself and then bequeathed to his sons, 'Alī, Mustāfa, Mahmud and 'Abbās. 'Abbās and Mustāfa were both given educations and left the land, but 'Alī and Mahmud were not. 'Alī was able to accumulate about fifty feddans for himself in addition to the land which he inherited, and his branch of the family stayed on the land in al-Mehalla. Even the relatives who had become educated and gone to live in Cairo as bureaucrats, however, continued to reinvest some of their capital in land.

By contrast, the A'sar family, although they owned more land than the al-Shishiny family, originally lacked roots in agriculture. They began in industry and then

Table 9

Land as a Source of Income

Family	Source of Land	Textile Production Interests	Cotton Interests	Trade Interests	Original Occupation
'Abu-Siyam	Some inherited (also 5 houses)	Mu'allim in 'asba	-	-	Sheikh al-hara; moneylender
al-A'sar	None inherited	Mu'allim in 'asba	-	-	Mayor; moneylender
al-Sheshiny	Inherited	-	-	-	Agriculture
al-'Asily	None inherited	Mu'allim in 'asba	-	-	Mayor
'Arabi	Some inherited	-	-	-	Government employee; Director of Irrigation
Bashma'win	Inherited	-	-	-	Turkish bureaucrat
Gebran Salim (Syrian)	Inherited	-	-	-	Moneylender
Shanuda (Copts)	Inherited	-	-	-	Moneylender
al-Zayat (Copts)	Inherited	-	-	Timber	Agriculture
Selim (Copts)	Inherited	-	-	-	Agriculture

entered the moneylending trade, investing some of their profits in land. The head of the family, Nu'man Basha al-A'sar, is said to have known King Fūad before he assumed the throne, and to have had other friends in high places in Cairo. Through the influence of these friends he was able to rent out about 900 feddans of land in al-Barari, arid land which was not his own but had been put into religious trust. He began renting this land in 1917 and continued to do so until his death in the thirties. His income was enormous, but due to his reckless extravagance and ostentatious life-style he fell into debt during the world economic depression, and after his death all his land had to be sold to pay off his creditors. The family then lost its position and was never again numbered among the notables of al-Mehalla.

The 'Alī family was unusual in that it was primarily engaged in the textile industry but its members saved the profits which they had earned through the 'asba and silk trade and invested in land. It appears that the father had managed to save about £E 5,000 after thirty years in the textile industry. In 1920 he purchased forty feddans of land for about £E 4,000. The older of his sons, who eventually became wealthier than his father, also bought forty feddans, borrowing about a third of the purchase price from his father. Both of the sons continued to work as mu'allimīn and landowners. The 'Alī family was characterized by its hard work and unostentatious lifestyle, and has been able to maintain its position as a notable family through the seventies.

Three of the ten biggest landowning families--al-'Asili, al-A'ṣar, and 'Abu-Siyam, invested their money in the textile industry, particularly in the production of al-'aṣba, at the end of the nineteenth century, as this was a highly profitable investment at that time.. Only two or three big mu'allimīn worked in this trade, as it required a relatively large amount of capital. Once the less expensive cotton yarns became popular, the demand for 'asba decreased, and the landlords left the industry, thereafter confining themselves to agriculture.

Trade of all kinds was a major activity and source of wealth in al-Mehalla during this period. Table 10 lists the big merchant families during the first three decades of the twentieth century, along with their occupational backgrounds. As reflected in this table, the wealthiest traders in al-Mehalla were very specialised in terms of their investments by comparison with the big land-owning families.

Cotton merchants made high profits during this period, but of the ten Mehallāwī families engaged in the trade only one, al-Samra, was considered to be truly wealthy. The local Mehallāwī merchants always remained distinct from the British and Jewish cotton dealers. These latter merchants dealt on a larger scale, had more control over the market, and were generally able to maintain greater stability and continuity. The economic condition of the Mehallāwī families, on the other hand, rose and fell according to the state of the market, and a family could pass from wealth to bankruptcy within a year or two. Only the al-Samra family

Table 10

Trade as a Source of Income

Family	Trade Interests	Cotton Trade	Textile Production	Property Owned	Original Occupation
Khalil	Large-scale cotton yarn trade; groceries	-	-	Land, some inherited; grocery shops	Tobacco pedlar in Damietta
'Abu al-'Ala	Medium-scale cotton yarn trade	-	-		
al-Samra	Medium-scale cotton yarn trade	Big cotton trader	-	Land, some inherited	
Sa'id Musa	-	Big cotton trader	-		Assistant cotton grader
al-Mansi	Silk Yarn Trade	Big cotton trader	-	-	Assistant cotton grader
Hagar	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Assistant cotton grader
Bibars	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Cotton grader and agent for main cotton dealers
Basyuni	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Agent for cotton dealers
al-Shaf'aī	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Agent for cotton dealers
al-Aswad	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Cotton weigher
al-Gharib	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Cotton weigher
al-Namrawi	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Cotton weigher
Nur al-Din	-	Big cotton trader	-	-	Cotton weigher

maintained a fairly consistent level of prosperity for any length of time, but in the twenties they too lost heavily on both yarn and raw cotton, and from then on they relied on the income from their land and from government employment.

Because the trade in raw cotton was such a risky business and built fortunes on very shaky foundations, it was regarded sceptically by conservative merchants, who saw it as a form of gambling. "Cotton is white but has a black heart," they would say to explain their refusal to deal in this treacherous trade.

The yarn trade was more stable than the raw cotton trade. Three Mehallāwī families were the sole distributors of yarn in al-Mehalla; no foreigners were involved in the trade. The wealthiest yarn merchants were the Khalil family. By the thirties this family was widely respected because its members had earned their fortune by the hard work of a generation. It is still remembered in al-Mehalla that the family migrated from Damietta to al-Mehalla as simple tobacco pedlars and then began to deal in groceries. The father had five sons, 'Abd al-Hayy, Mahmūd, Muhammad, al-Sheikh, and Ahmad. Of these, Mahmūd and Muhammad were working with their father at the time of his death. Al-Sheikh and Ahmad had taken other jobs, and 'Abd al-Hayy, the youngest, had not yet begun to work.

When the father died, he left about sixty feddans and some grocery shops. The oldest brother, Mahmūd, had accumulated about 100 feddans with the profits he made in trade and had gone to live in Cairo while his brothers

Muḥammad and 'Abd al-Hayy worked the family business. In 1920 Muḥammad died, leaving two sons, Muḥammad and 'Abd al-Mu'nim. Muḥammad had received the primary school certificate and then gone to work with his father, while 'Abd al-Mu'nim studied in the faculty of law. When their father died, 'Abd al-Mu'nim joined his brother and his uncle, 'Abd al-Hayy, in the business rather than completing his studies.

This family had begun to trade in yarn at the beginning of the twentieth century. After 1919 they concentrated on this trade rather than on their grocery business. After the twenties 'Abd al-Hayy became the head of the Khalil family, and with his brother bought up about 200 feddans. This made them one of the wealthiest families in al-Meḥalla in the thirties. Their fortune in land, shares and trade continued to grow, until by the fifties they had become one of the major yarn trading families in Egypt.

Some textile families were also considered to be wealthy during this period, but none of them were as prosperous as the merchants and landlords. Textile production was not a stable source of wealth at this time, and only mu'allimīn with sizeable production units (say from ten to thirty handlooms) and reputations for good products, or who had investments in other activities such as trading in yarn or cloth, were able to accumulate some wealth. Some of the wealthiest weavers were those who, like several of the large landowning families, had invested in 'asba at the end of the nineteenth century. Only two or three weavers had sufficient capital to make the relatively large investment required for this specialisation.

Other big mu'allimīn were also specialised in particular types of cloth. The 'Alī family, for instance, specialised in Ghazlīyya No. 1 and qutnīyya, and were the sole distribubtors of these fabrics in Upper Egypt. Ibrahīm Mansur specialised in qutnīyya, distributing it in Lower Egypt. Other families engaged in the industry, some of whom had begun as craftsmen, were simply wealthy enough to maintain ownership of their small production units.

The list of the mu'allimīn working in al-Mehalla in the first three decades of the twentieth century presented in Table 11 includes only six who were considered to be "big" mu'allimīn. Of these, two were big silk merchants (the 'Alī and al-Far families). The 'Alī family weavers were the richest mu'allimīn in al-Mehalla at this time. They started in the textile industry in about 1890, when 'Alī became a craftsman in a weaving workshop owned by one of his relatives. By the beginning of the century he had not only become a big mu'allim in his own right, but had also branched out into the silk trade. By 1920, as discussed in the section on land ownership, this family had also become landowners.

'Alī's initial purchase of land may have been because he wanted a means of maintaining his independence at the time he retired from the textile industry. Investment in land, however, was uncommon among the mu'allimīn, and the elder son's purchase of land at the same time is less easy to find an explanation for. He became known as an exceptional character in the city, the only mu'allim to live like the landed gentry. Even his pattern of consumption

Table 11

Textile Production as a Source of Income

Family	Occupation Prior to 1910	Trade Interests	Occupation Prior to 1930	Occupation in 1977
'Alī	Craftsman with one of his relatives	Big silk merchant	Big mu'allim	Owner of large factory nationalized in 1963
al-Far	Small mu'allim	Big silk merchant	Big mu'allim in 'asba	Owner of medium-scale factory
Kabbash	Big mu'allim	-	Big mu'allim in Ghazliyya No. 1	Left textile industry
Biheri	Small mu'allim	-	Big mu'allim in black handkerchiefs	Left textile industry
'Eid	Small mu'allim	Silk merchant	Big mu'allim in 'asba	Owner of large factory nationalized in 1963
'Abd al-Nabī	Scholar at al-'Azhar	-	Big mu'allim in silk jacquard curtains	Left textile industry; his nephews have small mechanical factories and handlooms
Moki			Mu'allim in dyeing	Small dyer
al-Shami			Mu'allim in dyeing	Small dyer
Taman			Mu'allim in dyeing	Small dyer
Nur al-Din			Mu'allim in dyeing	Dyer and owner of medium-scale factory
Mahmud Barakat		Cloth merchant		Left textile industry
Ibrahīm Mansur			Mu'allim in qutnīyya	Owner of medium-scale factory

Family	Occupation Prior to 1910	Trade Interests	Occupation Prior to 1930	Occupation in 1977
'Adus		Cloth merchant		The biggest cloth merchant
al-Qadi	Craftsman		Mu'allim in ghazlivva	Owner of big factory
al-Mahmudi	Small mu'allim		Mu'allim in 'asba	Owner of medium-scale factory
al-Ghanam	Craftsman		Mu'allim in sailcloth	Owner of big factory, nationalised in 1963
Shahin	Drink vendor	Cloth merchant		Medium-scale merchant
al-Samuli	Craftsman		Mu'allim in ghazlivva	Owner of medium-scale factory
al-Husary	Butcher		Medium mu'allim	Left Textile industry
al-A'ma	Small mu'allim		Mu'allim in ghazlivva	Owner of medium-size factory
'Ewaina			Mu'allim in ghazlivva	Owner of medium-size factory
al-Mutayyim	Craftsman		Mu'allim in ghazliyva	Owner of medium-size factory
'Abu-Dishish			Medium mu'allim	Owner of big factory, nationalised in 1963
'Enab	Caterer (farash)		Medium mu'allim	Owner of medium-size factory
al-Qizla			Medium mu'allim	Owner of medium-size factory
al-Sigini			Medium dyeing mu'allim	Big dyer - big factory, nationalised in 1963

Family	Occupation Prior to 1910	Trade Interests	Occupation Prior to 1930	Occupation in 1977
al-Gendi			Medium mu'allim	Merchant and big factory, nationalised 1963
al-Zaghal		Cloth merchant	Medium mu'allim	Big merchant.

was unlike that of the other mu'allimīn.

In any case, despite its other investments, the 'Alī family sustained its commitment to the weaving industry, and continued as owners until their large factory was nationalised in 1963. In the early period the elder son specialised in Ghazlīyya No. 1, later switching to cotton cloth. He became known for having such excellent products that he was able to become the sole distributor of ghazlīyya in Upper Egypt in the twenties. The younger son also went into business with his father, specialising in qutnīyya.

Patterns of expenditure in al-Mehalla before 1930 were determined by group values rather than simply by the amount of wealth a family possessed. In turn, a family's style of life and the way in which they spent their money had a great deal to do with the respect and status they were accorded by the community as a whole. Held in particularly low esteem by the people of al-Mehalla, despite their great wealth, was a clique of cotton merchants, civil servants of Turkish origin and a few landowners. This group was known for extravagant and ostentatious expenditures on luxuries, and for indulging in behaviour which was looked down on by the local people. They gathered daily in a cafe whose Greek owner ran his establishment as a bar, and met in the homes of their members to gamble.

This pattern of expenditure, however, characterised only a small minority of the big families. Most were known as solid citizens, hardworking and oriented toward saving and investment in their work. Their time was divided between

work and sleep, and they would generally retire to bed immediately after the evening prayer. Very few families had contact with Cairo, and so money and time were spent in a quiet, provincial manner. An illustration of how few were the outward signs of affluence in al-Mehalla at that time is the fact that there were then only about six horse-drawn carriages, owned by some of the wealthy families. Other people walked, rode donkeys, or hired carriages.

None of the houses in al-Mehalla had more than two storeys, apart from a three-storey palace owned by 'Abu-Siyam, and most of the houses were similar to one another in design. The entrance opened onto a yard at the end of which was a reception room for male visitors. This room would be furnished with simple divans all around the walls and a marble-topped table in the middle. Trays of food for the visitors would be placed on this table. Two steps up, on a slightly raised level, would be two bedrooms for men and boys. Off the yard would be a lavatory, a small place for making coffee, and an area for the women which included a kitchen and a storeroom.

The upper floors of these houses had two bedrooms, one for the head of the household and his wife and the other for the women and girls of the family. A sitting room on this floor, for women or the members of the family as a whole, would be furnished with divans, and food would be served from a tray placed on a table in the centre. On the ground floor there would be an oven for baking bread and a chicken coop. In the case of medium or small mu'allimīn, the house would be adapted to make room for a weaving shop

downstairs, or for dye vats or other equipment, but the big mu'allimīn ran their businesses on separate premises.

Until the twenties, household furniture consisted of divans and tables such as those described above. All were of simple design and local manufacture. In the twenties, however, it became the fashion for wealthy families to furnish the homes of their sons and daughters with Western-style furniture. In the late twenties the youngest son of and daughter of the 'Alī family, two sons of the Khalil family, the daughters of the al-A'sar and al-Samra families, and the daughter of a family of local civil servants all married in al-Mehalla, and they were all provided by their families with similar furniture.

The furnishings given to the newlyweds included a gilt sitting-roomsuite upholstered in silk, a dining-roomsuite, a drawing-room suite complete with piano (though none of the brides or grooms could play), and a bedroom suite complete with wardrobe, bed, dressing table and chiffonier. These items came to be defined as essential to the establishment of a home of class, as were silk curtains for all the windows, carpeting for all the floors, copper kitchenware, a sewing machine, and quantities of clothes and jewelry for the bride. All this would cost up to £E 1,000, divided approximately as follows:

Suites of furniture for the sitting-room, dining-room, drawing-room and bedroom	£E 160
Silk jacquard curtains	120
Carpets	50
Clothing	100
Copper kitchen utensils	50

Piano	100
Sewing machine	20
Jewelry (diamond bracelets, earrings, and necklace)	200

The provision of all these items was the responsibility of the bride's family, while the bridegroom's family paid about £E 200 in bride money.

These are, of course, average figures, but they give a fair picture of what wealthy families felt obliged to provide for their children. Only the wealthiest could buy all these items immediately preceding the wedding. Others accumulated them over a period of several years before a marriage. This pattern was an innovation in the spending habits of the people of al-Mehalla, and only became possible because of the cotton boom of 1918 and 1919. When these families were marrying their sons and daughters in the thirties, the same items cost only about £E 200, but money was so hard to come by that in some families property had to be mortgaged in order to meet what had come to be regarded as social obligations.

The story of the 'Alī family illustrates the difficulties faced by even wealthy families in al-Mehalla in the thirties. The father had retired and was living on the income from his forty feddans of land (the yearly rent per feddan was about £E 5). Six years after purchasing this land, in 1926, he had to pay £E 200 bride money for his younger son and to buy his daughter's trousseau, in the style described above, which cost about £E 1,000. At this time the elder son was facing financial difficulties due to the slump of the late twenties. As a new generation

mu'allim, his patterns of consumption were different from those of his father, and his life-style was much like that of the town notables and landlords. He had a horse-drawn carriage, a cook and several servants, and sent his daughter to a foreign school. At the same time he continued in the hard-working tradition of his father, and was not among the group who drank and gambled. When he died in 1930, he had used up almost all his savings, and his land was mortgaged to the bank. About half his land had to be sold to pay his debts. His retired father began to support his grandchildren on the income from his land, and the younger son was the only member of the family left in the textile industry. He was by this time married, with a family of his own, and as well as contending with the slump he was helping his father to bring up his brother's children. Times were hard for all.

When recalling the thirties, present-day Mehallāwwīyya say "The pound was in the lion's mouth." That is, one had to fight for every pound. Deflation had the effect of bringing prices down drastically, but still no one had the cash to buy. Even wealthy families were sometimes unable to meet the unavoidable expenses of weddings and funerals without going into debt, and in those days moneylenders were charging thirty percent interest. If a debt was not repaid within a year, interest was calculated at a compound rate.

We have thus seen that the majority of the big families in al-Mehalla drew their incomes from the textile

industry and/or the land during the first decades of the twentieth century. It is difficult to estimate the wealth of particular families, because wealth depended not only on income but also on patterns of expenditure and investment. Moreover, given the instability of the textile industry at that time, even income is difficult to estimate. Generally speaking, the wealthiest families were the landowners, but since much of their land had been acquired recently and did not consist of huge estates, the gap between them and other groups was not wide.

The next wealthiest group was the raw cotton merchants. Their wealth, however, was transient, and most of it was frittered away on lavish expenditures. Yarn merchants who were able to combine the trade either with production or with trade in other types of commodities fared better. Those who invested their savings in the cotton trade were exposed to such reversals of fortune that only one family, the Khalils, were able to maintain their position as yarn merchants in the thirties. Others, such as the al-Samra and 'Abu-Siyam families, were crushed by the crisis.

The third most wealthy group in al-Mehalla was the mu'allimīn. Their situation was complex. Only four families in this group were also involved in trade, and of these only one accumulated enough wealth to be outstanding. The other big mu'allim families were landowners, but only two were able to maintain their status for two or three generations. Most mu'allimīn invested their profits in production, and so their fortunes depended on the economic

conditions in the industry at any given time. Apart from investment in the industry itself, the mu'allimīn generally practiced thrift in an attempt to forestall the bad times which were a regular feature of the industry.

Wealth and Social Position among the Mu'allimīn

The majority of those who ran businesses in the textile industry were small-scale mu'allimīn who were socially very close to the craftsmen, or sanay'īyya. The various production units in the textile industry, though independent establishments, were nevertheless closely linked and complementary to one another. Theoretically, mobility from one level to another was open. For example, a warper or a dyer could be the mu'allim of a qa'ā, and the mu'allim of a qa'ā could specialise in any combination of operations within the industry. Of all the occupations in these production units, the highest and most difficult to enter was that of mu'allim of a weaving unit. It required a variety of skills and a fair understanding of all the other production processes, as well as experience which usually began at the sanay'ī level.

The common educational pattern for a mu'allim's sons in the early twenties was attendance at a kuttāb (a religious primary school which taught mostly the Qur?an) or an elementary school to learn reading, writing and basic arithmetic. After reaching this level of formal education, they were expected to go to work for their father, as and when they were needed and depending on the mu'allim's financial situation. One mu'allim recalled the years of

his formal education as follows:

> I went first to the kuttāb in 1916 for two years, then to a government primary school for a couple of years, then to a preparatory school. At that level there was no government school, and if I wanted to complete my education I had to go to a private school which required something like thirty to forty pounds [tuition]. At that time no one in al-Mehalla could afford to spend that amount on education except the few notables. I had to terminate my schooling at the age of seventeen. During my school years, unlike other sons, I was not interested in my father's work. I had other social interests. I had an open mind and interacted with a large group of friends outside my family. I used to stay with this group in the cafe until late at night. Because of that I was considered a no-good boy who should be forced to work with his father immediately. When I went to the workshop of my father and asked him for money his answer was, "I don't have money. If you need money, you have to earn it--sit at a loom and weave." Hence I started in the qa'ā as an 'amil 'agīr. My father used to treat me exactly like one of his labourers. He would deduct from my wages if my work was not as good as that of the skilled sanay'ī.

Thus while the sanay'ī would usually bring his son with him to the qa'ā at the age of five to start his career as a craftsman, the mu'allim spared his child that early start in the trade in order to give him some formal education. This was only possible as long as the mu'allim did not need his son's help. Once he needed him, or began to believe that education might affect his son's interest in the industry, he would terminate his son's education, as recounted in the following narration:

> I went to school until the age of fourteen. One week before my final examinations, my father came and asked me, "What are you doing?" I said, "Studying for my final exam." He said, "What are you going to do after your exam?" I answered that I would go to a teacher training college and become a teacher and earn three pounds a month. This to me seemed quite a huge sum. My father replied, "Is it worth being a teacher for that? Come, work with me. You are 'azāz ibn azāz'" [a weaver and the son of a weaver].

For the mu'allim formal education was useful only to a certain elementary level, for reading and writing were needed for keeping a simple record of amounts of raw materials and accounts of labourers and expenses for various operations. From the age of twelve the son of a mu'allim was able to help his father by keeping various types of records, such as the number of pieces of cloth produced weekly by each worker and how much each was to be paid. The workers were paid weekly, usually on Thursdays, but often took advances on their wages, which somewhat complicated the record-keeping.

Such accounts were kept in an elementary way. A literate mu'allim would keep a small note pad in his pocket in which he recorded what he owed others and what others owed him. Illiterate mu'allimīn kept the figures in their heads. One son comments that "Although my father was illiterate and depended on me for all his accounts, his mind was like a computer, and in no time he could pick out any errors in my accountbook."

Small-scale weavers needed to use the labour of every member of the family in order to sustain their positions as mu'allimīn. In such cases the time spent in formal education was cut to a minimum. The large-scale mu'allim who could afford to spare the labour of his children would send them to school for a longer period, and they would be expected to help their father with some of his managerial tasks.

Most of the mu'allimīn began their careers as ṣanay'īyya, not only because they had to earn their ways but

also because this training was necessary if they were to become good managers. One mu'allim said:

> Unless the mu'allim knows how to weave he is not a mu'allim, because he will be deceived by his workers. As a mu'allim I started my training on the handloom, at the age of twelve. By the age of fourteen, in addition to weaving I had to supervise the sanay'iyya in the qa'a by preparing the work for them. In three years I became the top sanay'i in my trade, as the following incident shows. One day my father got the warp in an alaga of natural silk that had been burned in the process of dyeing due to an excess of a certain chemical. All the sanay'iyya refused to weave it because the yarn was burned. I had to weave it myself or we would have had to throw all that silk away. I wove a metre a day in eight hours, so each of the ten pieces took fifteen days to finish. I finished the ten pieces and took one for myself and had it made into a gallabiyya which I wore for forty years!

The son of the mu'allim was taught the various kinds of yarn and the suitability of specific yarns for specific cloth. This knowledge is essential in marketing yarn. Marketing yarn and selling finished textiles require, in addition to knowledge of the yarns, prices and qualities, certain skills in interacting with people. As an elderly mu'allim commented,

> You need to study the psychology of the merchant in front of you. With some merchants you need not say more than a few sentences. With others you have to shout and have a long discussion. This skill in interaction is acquired by practice, and our sons are impatient. I had learnt the salesman's art at the age of twenty-five, whereas my son, who is now over twenty-five, is incapable of handling marketing and has to depend on me.

As with other skills, the son of a mu'allim learned to handle marketing by accompanying his father on visits to the merchants to make deals.

After being trained in the various operations, the son was expected to work for his father as long as the

father lived. The status of the son depended on the scale of his father's business. In small weaving establishments the son would be a sanay'ī; in larger ones he would generally be responsible for managerial work within the qa'ā and for processing the raw materials. In some cases the sons took over the marketing process when their fathers grew old. This usually required contact with merchants outside al-Mehalla. As long as the father was alive and able to work, however, he remained the sole operator and decision-maker.

Though some sons might choose to remain in business with their fathers or other members of their families, in general they developed independent businesses after a while, as illustrated by the following account of the 'Alī son:

> My father, who was both a well-known mu'allim and a silk merchant, left me in school after the kuttāb until the age of twelve. My older brother was already working with my father, but at that time he had his own independent workshop too, with a different kind of specialty. While my father was famous for 'asba, my brother specialized in Ghazlīyya No. 1. While still working with my father, I started at the age of seventeen to do some business on my own. I rented two small handlooms for handkerchiefs, and operated them on my own account. After a while I added a few looms for qutnīyya and alagā. Thus while working with my father I had already established my own career in another kind of textile and established a name for myself in my own line.

Success as a mu'allim or skilled weaver requires a background of years of training and experience. No formal structures existed to teach these skills; specialisations were transmitted from father to son. This explains why whole families in the textile industry specialised in dyeing, others in warping, others in trade in silk or

cloth. Although specialisation in any of these areas demanded a knowledge of all the other branches of the industry, mobility between occupations was in fact difficult during this period. With the limited resources available, competition was fierce, and narrow specialisation was a major factor in the survival of individual producers. Everyone depended heavily on his training and skills, which were the most valuable assets of the operator, and the narrower the specialisation the higher the level to which it could be developed. Even within the same operation, i.e. weaving, each mu'allim had to create his own specialty.

Each mu'allim concentrated on a specific kind of cloth. He would try to develop it, creating new techniques and designs, training his workers to a certain level of skill, until this specific cloth became associated with his name. This was only possible for relatively big weavers. Small-scale weavers had to imitate existing fabrics in their designs. The quality of their production was much lower, because they could not afford the highly skilled labourers or the expensive techniques used by the big weavers. They produced cloth which only an experienced merchant could differentiate from that woven by the big mu'allimīn, but it was sold more cheaply because its production costs were lower and it was not distributed in the main markets. An alternative method of business for the small-scale operators was to meet orders placed by the cloth merchants. The merchants would provide them with appropriate yarns and they would weave cloth which was bought up

immediately. This was even more profitable for the weavers than simply selling their labour.

The mu'allim of a qa'ā could gain nothing by changing his operation and becoming, for example, a dyer or a merchant. What did commonly happen was that a mu'allim added certain minor operations to his shop, such as warping and denting if he owned sufficient looms to make this economical. To expand in quite new directions, such as dyeing or merchandising, required substantial capital investment, and if a mu'allim had capital available it was always more profitable for him to acquire more handlooms and develop his own specialty than to launch out into a new field.

Thus occupational mobility during this period tended to be up or down in the same narrow line of business, and in the case of the larger-scale weavers, in the increasing specialisation in a particular kind of cloth. It was the very specialised families who survived the times of crisis. When the market was slack, it was high quality goods that would be sought out by the customers, and such goods could be produced only by operators who had been trained in a specific line through generations. When demand for cloth was high, quality was less important, as anything would sell.

Thus skill and specialisation are the chief factors which kept particular families in the textile industry even in periods of slump and declining demand. In boom times, when quality was less important, profits were high even for the small producers. It was during such booms that a sanay'ī might find an opportunity to become an owner. He

would obtain yarn, the most expensive item in production, either from a merchant who contracted in advance for the finished cloth, or by mortgaging some of his belongings. Since demand was heavy, marketing was relatively simple and profits were assured. Even if the weaver himself did not know how to market his merchandise, big mu'allimīn and cloth merchants were willing to buy up his wares as long as the boom lasted. The real test for such weavers came during slump times, however, as the backbone of the industry consisted of those skilled specialists who could maintain their positions when times were bad.

Another significant feature of the textile industry in al-Mehalla during this period was the importance of kinship ties. Certain families specialised in certain lines, training not only their children but also other relations in the same field. Heads of families had obligations to their relatives, and it was expected that a mu'allim in need of workers would offer employment to his kin before recruiting workers from outside the family. Newcomers to the industry thus began their careers under the protection of their relatives. They would be socialised into the business and trained, and might at a later stage be taken on as partners or given support and protection while establishing themselves as independent operators.

There was thus a constant tension in the industry between the individualistic nature of weaving enterprises and the fierce competition between establishments on the one hand and the social obligations to immediate relatives

of the extended family on the other. This was true of al-Mehalla as a whole during this period, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Kinship ties linked the various levels of the social structure of the city, and business relationships were thus very personal in nature.

Although the industry had become more profitable than it had been, expansion was limited during these years by the low level of technology (production was all on hand-looms), the low purchasing power of the consumers (mostly peasants), the limited varieties of cloth produced (mainly traditional fabrics), and the difficulty of accumulating capital. In 1914, according to estimates of present-day informants, the largest amount of capital invested by a single weaver was between £E 300 and £E 500. By 1919 this figure had risen to about £E 3,000. Those who were able to invest such sums usually combined trading in raw materials with weaving.

The estimated profit of a weaver on a piece of ghazlīyya was up to £E 0.03. A weaver who owned ten looms could produce an average of ten pieces of ghazlīyya per day, or 300 pieces per month. His monthly profit could range from £E 6 to £E 9 if he sold all of his output. In the years between 1900 and 1930, the fluctuation in the prices of raw materials was greater than that in wages and profits.

By 1930, with the world depression and deflation, cotton prices fell to 17 riyals, and then to 12 riyals in 1931. This crisis hit all weavers, but it was the small weaver who was hurt most, and many were forced to leave the industry. Throughout the period the state of the industry

and the limited profits it brought made real development of the industry as a whole virtually impossible. External factors such as World War I and booms in cotton prices made it possible for operators to expand, but only in terms of the size of existing production units. The booms were in any case counterbalanced by slumps; these fluctuations limited both the growth of individual units and the development of large income gaps among owners and between owners and workers. Except for a very few big mu'allimīn who owned other kinds of property, such as land, shops or houses, or who were involved in trade, most of the owners were in a similar position, and the very small-scale producers who constituted the majority of owners, were very close to the level of the sanay'īyya.

Wealth and Mobility after 1930

After the crisis of the thirties, new factors made themselves felt in the development of the industry in al-Mehalla. The majority of the weavers had had to work very hard just to maintain their positions through the continual crises. A few mu'allimīn managed to retain the higher economic status they had attained in 1919. The introduction of mechanical looms by Misr Company provided enormous openings for the weavers. Cautiously, they began to use a few mechanical looms in addition to their handlooms, and began producing new types of cloth in addition to their traditional specialties, using various other yarns, such as wool. Their consumers were no longer limited to the peasantry, and the yarn was no longer entirely imported, for

several local factories had begun to produce it. Thus the weavers of al-Mehalla had ceased to be completely dependent on cotton.

The modest openings that appeared in the thirties for weavers in al-Mehalla increased during World War II. When the war began in 1939, Misr Company was already producing yarn as well as cloth. The rise in cotton prices, coupled with the lack of imported goods, led to a rapid increase in the market value of local cloth. Al-Mehalla's weavers began to expand their handloom establishments and to produce new materials in addition to their traditional cloths. Demand for yarn exceeded supply, so the government imposed a rationing system. Weavers who had been forced to leave the industry during the thirties now returned, and those who had remained were able to expand. Many people came into the field for the first time in order to take advantage of the ration system for yarns.

The merchants profited enormously from the conditions created by the war, particularly the cotton merchants. Their position had been fluctuating; they were regarded as wealthy before the forties, but had never been able to accumulate enough wealth to create a stable position for themselves in the local community. Yarn merchants, by contrast, had been moving up since World War I. Although the few yarn merchants were of similar standing until World War I, after 1914 the Khalil family began to control this trade. With the establishment of spinning mills in al-Mehalla, this family automatically became the sole distributors for the yarns produced by the Misr Company.

War conditions of increasing yarn prices brought a tremendous increase in the Khalil family's profits, although they had nothing to do with the black market. In fact, they ceased to deal in yarns during the war years, apparently to preserve their reputations as honourable merchants. Even with this interruption of their trading, the family was able to accumulate enough money from their yarn trade to purchase 1,000 feddans of land. They became the first merchant family in al-Mehalla to re-invest their money in agriculture, and by the fifties they had become the most important family in the town.

The position of the big weavers was also affected by World War II. They started to mechanise in large numbers after the war. After the introduction of mechanical looms by the Misr Company in the thirties, traditional weavers had been able to observe the operations of these looms and to estimate their impact on the market. Once they had a chance to assess the potential of these looms, they became very enthusiastic about mechanisation. With the experience of operating handlooms, of management and trade, they now had investment capital which made it possible for them to change their style of operations.

As cautious businessmen, their first ventures into mechanisation were gradual. A mu'allim would start by buying one old mechanical loom, adding another the second year, and so on. None of the mu'allimīn had enough money to mechanise in 1940, but by 1945, when Misr Company was selling off its old machinery, many mu'allimīn were able to buy up old looms. The first mu'allim to begin mechanising,

in 1941, recounts his experience as follows:

> I went one day to Misr Company to have a look at the mechanical looms. That night I could not sleep from thinking about what I had seen. To observe a loom that makes 200 turns in one minute, and being someone in the business [ibn kar], I immediately recognized the potential of these looms. The next day I went to Cairo and contacted people in the business of importing machinery. At that time many Syrians and Jews specialized in importing machinery. They brought old machinery from Europe, selling it to local weavers. I bought a loom from Cairo, but I had to bring an experienced mechanic from the Misr Company to show me how to operate it. You see, this was modern machinery, and my experience was confined to hand-looms. When that loom began to produce in 1940, I made a profit of about £E 1 every day. I was so happy that I didn't want that machine to stop day or night. Being so happy with the profit and the efficiency of the machine, I bought another three. I rented a workshop in a building and the neighbours complained about the continuous noise, but I was so happy with the machine that I couldn't stop it, so I rented three different workshops, and every time I was obliged to stop in one place I went to another.
>
> Even when the company destroyed its old machinery rather than selling it, the weavers in al-Mehalla used to get mechanics to repair it. The workers who were able to adapt their skills to the operations of the mechanical looms were kept on, and those who could not do so were dismissed.
>
> Once the war was over and yarn could be sold freely again, prices came down. Most of those who had entered the business in order to make profits by selling their yarn rations on the black market now left it. Some long-time weavers had accumulated enough by 1948 to establish themselves as leading families in the textile industry.
>
> With mechanisation a new managerial group grew up in Misr Company which was mainly Cairene in origin but also contained a substantial number of Mehallāwī employees. A

second significant group that appeared in al-Mehalla for the first time in substantial numbers was the industrial labourers. They were mainly rural migrants who either commuted daily from nearby villages or settled in the city. A third group that emerged during this period was the stratum of factory owners. These owners included about forty mu'allimīn as well as a few former bureaucrats in the Misr Company. These were joined by owners who had been employed in the private and public sectors of the textile industry, as well as industrial labourers and others. This group now totals about 600 owners, and is varied in terms of social and occupational backgrounds as well as in the scale of ownership (see Table

The Economic Position of Medium-Scale Owners

The owners of medium-scale factories are all from local families and have long traditions in the textile industry. Most of them were big mu'allimīn in the thirties and forties who initiated mechanisation in the Mehallāwī sector, and their establishments date back to the forties and fifties (see Table 11). Thus they had established themselves long before as wealthy owners, although their growth was checked by nationalisation.

While the mu'allimīn of the thirties were initially cautious in their approach to mechanisation, by the fifties they had begun to establish modern-style factories. One exception is the 'Alī family. After the death of the elder son in the thirties, the younger son had specialised in qutnīyya and in the cloth trade. After World War II he was

faced with a choice between investing his savings in mechanisation or expanding his cloth trade. Because there was no other member of the family to work with him, he went into partnership with a prominent Cairo cloth merchant. As partners they also started a small knitting factory in Cairo. Meanwhile, a promising young Mehallāwī boy was working with him in cloth merchandising as a clerk. The 'Alī son trained this boy, and when he had proved himself he was made a partner in the 'Alī family business. At the same time, the 'Alī grandsons were completing their university studies in Cairo.

By the fifties 'Alī and his partner had invested all their savings from trade in a comprehensive, modern-style factory which combined all of the textile production units and specialised mainly in jacquard cloth and terry toweling. They also added yarn to their trading activities. After establishing the factory, 'Alī severed his partnership with the Cairo cloth merchant and started a company with his sons and his former clerk. They divided their interests between trade and production, as well as between Cairo and al-Mehalla. One son was responsible for the operation of the factory. The other joined the partner in the merchandise centre in al-Mehalla, and the father was responsible for merchandise in Cairo. Thus while the 'Alī family began mechanisation as late as the fifties, they were able to establish one of the biggest modern-style factories in the Mehallāwī sector.

Al-Ghanam, who was an average-size mu'allim in the thirties, was able to establish a similar factory, but his savings were invested mainly in mechanisation and he never engaged in trade. The al-Ghanam family began mechanising in

1934, beginning with two old mechanical looms. They continued to purchase mechanical looms, and by the fifties were able to build a new modern factory equipped with new mechanical looms. They remained in production, never engaging in trade. This left them in a relatively poor position when their factory was nationalised in 1963. Unlike the 'Alī family, for instance, they were unable to sustain themselves in the years immediately following nationalisation by falling back on their trading interests, and it took them two years to begin a new factory.

In addition to establishing modern-style factories, medium-size owners used their surplus to change their styles of expenditure. By the fifties they were identified as being as wealthy as landlords and merchants. Some of the landowning families had also improved their positions by the fifties. The Shishiny family by then owned 1,000 feddans, and the Khalils, though big yarn merchants, had also accumulated about 1,000 feddans. All the same, the factory owners were considered to be as wealthy as these two groups. The landlords were hit earlier by the new socialist laws, and al-Shishiny had to disperse his ownership among his family and sell part of his land.

Although the majority of the medium-scale factory owners were the mu'allimīn of the thirties, their position in the social system of al-Mehalla had changed, and they took on a separate identity. They gravitated to the northern part of the town to build their villas, and this area became the residential neighbourhood of the elite. The main street in the area is identified by the people

of al-Mehalla as the street of the factory owners.

After the fifties the operations of the medium-scale owners grew in number and expanded in scale. The instability of the early decades of the twentieth century was a thing of the past. In the new sociopolitical economy of the Nasser era, their situation as small-scale local industrialists had changed. External factors had ceased to be a threat. Their main problem lay in the need to compete with large-scale, complex industry. A second threat came from the new regime and its tendency toward increasing state control. All the same, this group was moving upward, investing every penny in its factories.

How was it possible for these owners to expand as a group and change their position in the community of al-Mehalla? Why did they invest in industry when other investment was safer and less likely to be lost through nationalisation? How was it possible for them to compete with the Misr Company? The answers to these questions are related to the organisation of the textile industry at this time, as well as to the characteristics of the group of factory owners.

The factory owners during this period were mainly the old handloom weavers and their families. They had already ceased to be a vulnerable group with a limited surplus--they had capital, and were investing it in modern industry. The gap between them and the cotton and spinning merchants had narrowed. A few of the factory owners took over spinning merchandise, and exceeded the old merchants in their profits.

This group came to equal the big landlords of al-Mehalla in terms of wealth. They differed from the landowners and merchants in that they had deeper roots in the town, and their main interest lay in local industrial activity. Their investments were all concentrated in developing their own factories. The big landlords and some of the merchants, on the other hand, were part of the wider stratum of the national bourgeoisie. They were shareholders in large companies, and had shared political affiliations.

The national bourgeoisie, although it was the group that started national industry and fought foreign economic penetration, became dependent on foreign policy after expansion and were part of the world market economy. The big national companies in Cairo, as well as foreign companies, controlled merchants and owners of textile factories in Cairo and Alexandria, but none in al-Mehalla. These big companies in Cairo were prepared to cooperate with the new regime only as long as it served their interests. Once they felt that the regime might hit their investments in industry, as was the case with foreign investment, they ceased to invest. They felt that the government take-over of foreign enterprises indicated that they were next on the list.

Owners of textile factories in al-Mehalla, on the other hand, were traditional mu'allimīn who were completely isolated from formal political circles, and they had no preference for one regime over another. They were not associated with foreign groups or businesses, and their factories were less dependent on foreign markets and foreign

expertise. Except for a few of the largest of these factories, most of the medium-scale owners had established their factories with old looms sold off by big companies, mainly Misr Company, or with locally produced looms. Their yarns were locally produced, and their markets were among the local rural and urban lower classes. The technology which they used was within the realm of their own expertise or that available at Misr Company. Their main concern was the development of their enterprises, and during this period they took advantage of the favourable conditions for such development.

One major favourable condition consisted of the measures taken by the government to protect local industry through restricting imports. With the nationalisation of foreign businesses in the textile industry, local goods were in more demand, and local industrialists were able to replace foreigners in the marketplace. As long as there was a demand in the market for their products, they worked to expand.

The main solution of the Mehallāwī sector to the problem of competition with the Misr Company has been a reversion to their traditional specialty of cheap popular cloth, especially ghazlīyya. Producing such cloth on mechanical looms made it cheaper and stronger. Most of the very small-scale workshops containing one to ten mechanical looms had originally produced such cloths for the peasant markets. With the new regime's greater efforts at stabilising crop prices and improving the wages of peasants and workers, one would assume that there was less fluctuation in peasant

incomes. Purchasing power would thus increase, and there would be less risk of slumps in the popular textile market.

Owners of the larger of the medium-scale factories in al-Mehalla, who had advanced mechanical looms, tended to specialise in various new products. Two factory owners specialised in jacquard cloth and terry toweling, a third a coarse fabrics for use in tents, awnings and sun umbrellas, a fourth in silks, and a fifth in wools. These owners were regarded as innovators by the rest of the owners. They produced such excellent quality fabrics that no one could compete with them within their specialties.

To avoid competition with Misr Company, the private sector of the textile industry in al-Mehalla concentrated on mechanical techniques not used by the large factory, producing, for instance, striped rather than grey cloth. After World War II the policy of the Misr Company was to concentrate on production of fine thread and luxury cloth for export, which left the market for some of the cheap popular textiles to the small-scale industry.

In addition to all these factors, there was another important characteristic of the relationship between the Misr Company and the smaller producers. Whereas Misr Company had originally been located in al-Mehalla in order to take advantage of the experience and skilled labour already present there, the local weavers in turn exploited the Company's presence, making use of it to mechanise their workshops and to expand. They bought up the Company's old machinery, and used its skilled workers on a part-time basis. Some of the factory owners sent their sons to work

in the Company and be trained there, in order that they be able to operate their own factories afterward. Though most of the factory owners were from the traditional mu'allim families, there were several Mehallāwwiyya who had been office staff, technicians, or even workers in Misr Company. They carried their expertise gained in the Company over into their factories. The Mehallāwī mechanical industry also benefitted from the services provided in the town for the large company, such as roads and electricity.

Another factor which contributed toward the growth of this group was its managerial techniques. Misr Company began with a global organisation. It required types of experience not then available in Egypt, and depended at the outset on foreign expertise. For example, during the Company's early years, all senior technical and managerial employees (e.g., heads of units) were foreigners. This foreign group decreased gradually over the years as Egyptians were trained to take over. The huge salaries required by foreigners were an extra cost as well as a source of frustration for Egyptian employees, who were performing similar tasks at much lower salaries. It took Misr Company some time to succeed in training a sufficient quantity of skilled labour. With the huge labour force of 30,000 workers, it was to be expected that there would be major problems of management during this period.

The scale of production and therefore of management problems was much smaller in the Mehallāwī sector. The largest factory during the period between 1952 and 1960 had less than 500 workers. Management techniques were based

on past experience in the industry, and part of the labour force was drawn from townsmen who had originally been craftsmen. The traditional weavers had demonstrated that their managerial practices were more efficient than those of the Misr Company, and they were able to produce at less cost and to sell at lower prices. Some of these owners say that they introduced very advanced machinery, such as the expensive printing machinery in the dyeing factory of al-Sigini, before the Misr Company did so. Others indicate that they succeeded in producing some of the same lines at less cost.

Some of the factory owners are convinced that because of their greater efficiency they were a threat to Misr Company rather than vice versa. This might explain why for some years the policy of Misr Company was to destroy its old machinery rather than selling it to smaller factories in the city.

The labourers in the smaller-scale factories were also different than those in Misr Company. In the forties and fifties the small-scale factories were in an advantageous position, because the skilled craftsmen preferred to work in these smaller factories. At the same time, when they needed advanced mechanical skills, they were able to draw on the trained mechanics of the Misr Company, using them on a part-time basis.

The Impact of Nationalisation

By the sixties, the big Mehallāwī factory owners were developing modern-style factories. They produced cloth

of the same quality as that of the big industrial complex, and were able to sell some of their products at lower prices. Thus the highly mechanical textile complex was no longer threatening to the small, semi-mechanical Mehallāwī sector. The major threat to the growth of this group took place in 1963, with the nationalisation of five medium-scale factories in al-Mehalla. This event came as a great shock to the Mehallāwī sector. They had always identified themselves with the small national capitalist groups, and had believed that even the biggest of their factories were of the very small scale supported by the new regime. Interestingly, some members of this group believe that they were nationalised because they had become a threat to the Misr Company. They say that Misr Company was afraid that if the smaller mechanised factories were permitted to develop further they would be able to sell most equivalent products at lower prices, thus embarrassing the public sector.

The initial reaction of the Mehallāwī sector to the nationalisation of five of its factories was confused. Owners clung anxiously to their current positions, thus creating a static situation. After 1967 the tight system of operation had loosened, and the private sector was permitted to use part of the yarn ration to produce on its own account. The immediate result of this opening was an increased demand for yarn, which led to the expansion of the black market. There were possibilities for expansion, and the government made no clear policy statement specifying to what extent it was desirable or permissible for private companies to expand.

The most interesting development involved the five medium-scale owners who were nationalised without compensation from the government.[1] The only one of these owners who was not from a traditional mu'allim family retired and left the town. Most of these owners were completely bankrupted by nationalisation. Some had more assets than others (such as buildings, cars, or a few feddans of land), but none had enough capital to open a new factory. The compensation which they received was insignificant--by law no one family could be paid more than £E 10,000, although some of the factories had estimated worths of as much as £E 500,000, and this compensation was not paid until fifteen years after the nationalisation in any event.

All the same, these owners remained in the textile industry in one way or another. The 'Alī family fell back on its skill in trade, acting as agents for the public sector. At the same time, two members of the family each opened a small factory, one in Cairo and one in al-Mehalla. The al-Ghanam family, which consisted of four brothers who were partners in the nationalised factory, dissolved their partnership and established small individual factories.

The eldest al-Ghanam brother first went into trade. Before nationalisation he had purchased a new modern mechanical machine for producing flannel cloth, but the factory was nationalised before he had had an opportunity for examining this machine. After nationalisation there was a great demand for flannel cloth, but importation of the machinery

---

[1] The government estimated the value of a factory and paid an equivalent amount in government bonds, but it was well known that these bonds were of no value.

was difficult. Al-Ghanam decided to produce the machine himself. He sent one of his former employees to bring him the design, and he bought a turning lathe and began working with his old mechanics to produce the machine, piece by piece. He succeeded in producing two machines which are very similar to the European one which he had originally bought for about £E 12,000, and these new machines cost about £E 1,000 each. He proceeded to make six more machines, selling them to other factory owners. Then he opened a small factory with one of his brothers, registering it in his wife's name. They also started a separate factory on behalf of the sons of their dead brother.

The 'Eīd family, also original mu'allimīn who lost their factory through nationalisation, consisted of three brothers. After nationalisation they dissolved their partnership, and each of them opened a small new factory with his sons. One of the brothers established his new factory in Cairo. The fourth owner, al-Sigini, who was originally a dyeing mu'allim, opened a small factory with his only brother and their children.

The threat of nationalisation in the sixties unified this group of factory owners. By 1969 they had set up an association whose objective was to look after the interests of the group, initiated by a young member of one of the families who had lost their factories through nationalisation. The medium-scale owners also initiated a cooperative for yarn distribution, and actively supervised the system to make sure that each owner received his fair share.

By 1979 the ration system had disappeared. Yarn

prices had risen until they equaled those of the black market, which is now fading away. Government yarn subsidies have been eliminated. Since the establishment of the Open Door Policy, the medium-scale owners have risen quickly. Since 1975, these owners have begun to establish modern-style factories equipped with new machinery. Mechanical looms in some factories have been replaced with automatic looms, and types of cloth never before produced in al-Mehalla are being introduced. Three of the five families which were nationalised in 1963 have established new modern factories, and the Mehallāwī group as a whole is now investing heavily in the textile industry. They see the past ten years as a period of stagnation, and fear that they have fallen behind the rest of the world in textile production. They are eager to change and develop their styles, techniques and machinery.

Patterns of Expenditure of the Medium-Scale Factory Owners

Until the sixties, the medium-scale factory owners, like their fathers before them, invested every spare penny in their factories. Very few bought land or considered other forms of investment. Their lives centered around their work to the extent that their working hours cannot be calculated accurately. Owners tended to stay in their establishments, or those of their friends, until late in the evening, and workshops and factories were used not only for production but also for socialising and exchanging views and experiences. Even formal social gatherings tended to be used for conducting business and making

transactions concerning purchase of raw materials and sales of products.

This group is known for its practicality and lack of pretensions. They established their factories in the most economical and practical manner possible, according to their approaches to management. Factory buildings are constructed of crude local materials suited to the needs of production, but lacking any claim to luxury. Furnishings are very simple, even crude. Administrative offices are not spatially separated from working areas, and owners rarely remain in their offices. Rather, they are usually to be found in the working areas, and are thus easily accessible to the workers. Every available space is used for production, and very little space is allocated to administrative purposes.

It was only between 1963 and 1970 that these owners ceased to invest all of their savings in their factories and began to direct surplus capital to buying buildings in Cairo and Alexandria or purchasing land. As soon as the fear of nationalisation passed, by 1970, and demand increased, they again began to develop their factories. Contrary to the practices of other Egyptian entrepreneurs, they never attempted to diversify their holdings or invest in more profitable industrial enterprises.

By comparison, textile factory owners in Cairo and Alexandria who have comparable factories vary their investments, engaging in a variety of activities. One might establish a textile factory and then switch to producing glass when there is an opportunity for greater profit.

Some have even established shops selling imported goods in Port Said, a customs-free zone, in order to make quick profits. The Mehallāwī group has had equal access to such investment opportunities, but have been interested only in the textile industry. When there is a boom and they have spare capital, they develop their factories, either renewing machinery or adding new production units. In slack times they decrease production but continue in the industry.

As a leading industrial group in al-Mehalla, these owners have begun to socialise their children in new ways. All of them are sending their children away to obtain university educations. Some of the owners send their sons abroad to learn how new machinery operates or to get some practical training. Some have sent members of their families to work in Misr Company for a period in order to obtain skills for use in their own factories. Some members of the new generation have degrees unrelated to weaving, in fields such as literature and agriculture. Others specialise in areas relevant to their fathers' factories, such as chemistry or mechanical engineering. Most of the sons, regardless of the type of formal education they receive, are expected to work with their fathers when they finish school.

The patterns of consumption of the older generation of medium-scale factory owners were oriented toward saving, and their style of life is closely associated with the town. The younger generation, by contrast, is much more cosmopolitan in orientation, and they have become the most conspicuous consumers in the city.

The Economic Position of Small Owners

The fortunes of the small factory owners who emerged from the working class have risen and fallen during the twentieth-century development of the textile industry in al-Mehalla. During the craft phase they were the most vulnerable group of owners in times of slumps, but their craft background prevented them from disappearing altogether. Early in the century they fluctuated between the roles of owners, self-employed craftsmen, and wage-earning craftsmen, and the same fluctuations continued after mechanisation.

Industrial workers in the Misr Company, as well as those in the private sector, began by establishing their own small workshops, many of which had only one mechanical loom. While this phenomenon has been continuous through the history of the al-Mehalla textile industry, its frequency increased greatly after nationalisation, and particularly after 1967. The system of production after nationalisation was favourable to small-scale owners, in the sense that they faced no threat of government control. Government policies of fixed prices for raw materials without equal standardisation in prices of finished goods made possible enormous profits in the textile industry. There was at the same time an increasing demand for cloth, due mainly to increase in the population and in individual purchasing power, and this demand was beyond the capabilities of the public sector, despite all its efforts at expansion. All of these factors paved the way for the increased expansion of the private sector.

The structure of the productive units in the private sector of the mechanical textile industry made the expansion of small-scale concerns possible. The characteristic feature of the small mechanised industry is that it follows the divisions characteristic of the craft phase. The system makes it possible for small owners to carry on complementary operations in separate workshops at less expense than would be entailed by performing them in their own shops.

The widespread system of subcontracting which grew up after nationalisation has also been a great advantage to the small producers. By subcontracting work from the larger factories, the small owner loses part of his profit, but the system nevertheless provides him with a stable income and continuous demand, while relieving him of the marketing function. The owner of a small workshop does not need capital for raw materials under this system, nor does he need marketing skills, as both are provided by the contractor.

In addition to these favourable external conditions, small owners need a certain amount of capital if they are to purchase their own machines and successfully launch their own businesses. The cost of a mechanical loom can be reduced by buying an old machine and repairing it, or by acting as the contractor for one's own loom and having it built step-by-step by local craftsmen. Even so, to obtain enough money to purchase a loom, the labourer must work very hard for a long time, cutting his consumption expenses and those of his family to the bone. Some

labourers delay their marriages in order to save money, others sell the jewelry of their wives, and still others go into debt.

Once the labourer has succeeded in setting up his own workshop, he must continue to pare costs by every possible means. Labour costs are reduced by using child labour and unskilled labour, and the owner himself is able to produce in his own shop, further reducing costs. If capital is lacking for raw materials, he can function as a converter of raw materials obtained through contract with larger concerns.

One wage-earning labourer began his career as an owner in 1960 with a total capital of £E 5. He rented two handlooms, obtained yarn on credit, worked on one loom and employed a labourer to work on the other. He paid £E 2 per month rent on the looms, and borrowed money to pay for the warping and the wages of the weaver. In order to increase his profit margin, he marketed his cloth in distant villages. During this period he lived in one room with his wife and three children. Their only furniture was a bed and a mattress on the ground for the children. He paid £E 1.50 per month rent for this room, and gave his wife £E 0.10 to 0.15 daily for food. He went on living at this subsistence level until he had saved £E 1,000. He was so obsessed with working and saving that he did not realise that he was living at bare survival level. This owner described the situation in the following words:

> All I was concerned about was working harder and thinking of ways of saving. I hardly saw my children or looked after them. My wife was fully responsible for our family life. She

> tried very hard to make ends meet, and she never complained.
>
> I woke up early one morning in winter to find that my children were wet. For the first time I realized that for three years we had been living in a dark basement room that is swimming in water in winter. I immediately rented two rooms in another building.

Soon he was able to buy that building. After a while, he built two rooms on the second floor for his family. These rooms cost him £E 300; to build a complete floor would have cost £E 500, but he preferred to live in two rooms, use the first floor as a workshop, and save the £E 200 to invest in his work.

By comparison, the group of owners who were not originally in the textile industry, either as labourers or owners, are considered by the others to be intruders. They are "profit-hunters" who know nothing about the industry, and are concerned neither about the development of the industry nor about production. They are the ones who sold their yarn rations on the black market. Once having received a ration, they were ready to stop their mechanical looms in order to escape from problems of management, labour relations, and marketing, by selling their yarn on the black market.

At times, particularly between 1967 and 1977, the difference between the fixed price and the black market price has been enormous. Thus a boom in the industry attracts outsiders who try to extract the maximum profit and have no concern for real development. These outsiders must depend on the existing skill of mechanics and skilled labourers. In a crisis, such as fluctuations in price or

cancellation of rations, they are the first group to close down, particularly if they are involved in small-scale enterprises. They are the most vulnerable owners, because they lack both work skills and business experience. Their reserves are obviously limited.

Conclusion

The pattern of wealth distribution in the community of al-Mehalla prior to the thirties was unstable. There was continuous mobility within economic groups, and it was not easy to rank people simply according to wealth. There were people who were wealthy but ranked low because of the nature of their occupations, such as the cotton merchants. On the other hand, there were others who were not wealthy but ranked high. The complex system of stratification in this period was not closed, and there was no simple, straightforward ordering of roles. Roles were diffuse, and even people's economic positions were not strictly rated on the basis of the amount of wealth they possessed.

Mobility in such an open system took place within various strata, as well as in a few cases between strata. Upward and downward mobility within a stratum, however, were most common among the industrial group. With the changes which took place after 1930, there was more stability in this group in terms of economic position. All the same, those who were in a relatively high economic position, i.e. the big mu'allimīn (see Table 11, p.140) in the thirties improved their economic positions in the forties. Thus the

existing pattern of wealth distribution among the production group was reinforced.

The big mu'allimīn of the late thirties were in the strongest position for mechanisation. These owners had better knowledge of the industry and could therefore earn more. They had the longest experience in textiles, and access to substantial capital. Thus the higher status and wealthier groups were in the best position to manipulate the new economic developments to increase or at least sustain their wealth. Of the twenty-eight mu'allimīn who were regarded as "big" during the thirties, eighteen were able to expand their enterprises and become factory owners.

Although in principle upward economic mobility was possible for all members of the textile industry, in practice this was more difficult at the lower levels of the socio-economic pyramid. Only a few wage-labourers were able to acquire the capital needed to establish themselves as independent entrepreneurs, and fewer still to expand their activities and join the ranks of the medium-scale factory owners.

As has been discussed in this chapter, despite the great range of economic status within the al-Mehalla weaving community today, it is difficult to classify social groups simply in terms of their economic positions. Other factors are of great importance in defining the identities of Mehallāwwīyya. Chapter VI analyses factors which help to determine status within the al-Mehalla textile industry and discusses their relationship with economic position.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION (II) STATUS

As indicated in Chapter V, the range of incomes within the textile community in al-Mehalla was relatively large even during the early years of the century, but there were many factors which drew the group as a whole together and prevented wealth from being the sole determinant of social class, helping to keep the system of stratification from rigidifying. The community of textile workers was drawn together by religion, and particularly their memberships in localized religious brotherhoods, by their kinship networks, by common residence in the town and even within particular neighbourhoods, by their style of life, and, perhaps most significantly of all, by the structure of the industry itself and the relationships which it engendered among craftsmen at all levels.

This chapter analyzes the social system which characterized the textile industry of al-Mehalla at the beginning of the twentieth century in terms of social status and networks of human relationships, and then goes on to analyze the manner in which external events and developments within the industry itself have affected the system of social stratification in the intervening years.

THE CHARACTER OF AHL AL-BALAD

At the turn of the century, al-Mehalla was a small

town and the overwhelming majority of its population was composed of ahl al-balad, that is, true Mehallāwwīyya, born and bred in the town. Whereas today the inhabitants of al-Mehalla complain that they do not even know their neighbours, at that time everyone knew everyone else, and a stranger or newcomer was immediately recognized as such. The social fabric of the community was built upon kinship ties and patron-client relations throughout the various occupational groups, and with the exception of several "foreign" communities and some government officials, life-styles, values, and patterns of behaviour were fairly homogeneous compared with those of al-Mehalla today.

Of the foreigners the most alien group was the British. They were engaged in the processing and trading of cotton, and some of them lived in al-Mehalla during busy seasons. However, they lived in their own factory compounds, completely isolated from ahl al-balad. The Greek community was more integrated into the life of the town, and was made up of grocers, doctors, and various small-scale traders and entrepreneurs. The third significant group was the Jews, who were not strictly speaking foreigners, but always maintained their separateness, living in a particular area of the town known as "Khukhit al-Yahud", or Jews' Alley. The Jewish community was sizeable, as al-Mehalla was a place of Jewish pilgrimage owing to the belief that the Prophet Jeremiah had lived there. While the Jewish community included various social levels and had closer contact with ahl al-balad than did either the British or the Greeks, it was regarded with animosity by the Mehallāwwīyya because

the majority of its members were wealthy and had become so through moneylending.

Ahl al-balad constituted an in-group not only vis-a-vis the "foreigners" in their midst, but also vis-a-vis the nation as a whole. For instance, although there was an official network of police stations and courts, the Mehallāwwīyya did not care to have their problems dealt with by outsiders, and resolved their disputes through an unofficial district court, mahkamat al-khutt, which met regularly in a hall near the official court. This unofficial court was presided over by six of the town notables, working in pairs, each pair on a different day of the week. During the twenties most of the people appointed to this council were mu'allimīn, among them Muḥammad al-Biḥēri, Mustāfa 'Eid, and Mustāfa 'Abd al-Nabī. Hagg Mustāfa al-Shishini, however, who was a landowner, was also a member.

This court dealt with a variety of cases, including marital quarrels, disputes over ownership, and settlement of debts. It passed judgement only in cases concerning ahl al-balad, who all knew each other and were aware of the difficulties that particular families might be facing. The parties to the dispute would meet before the members of the court and the dispute would be settled according to their judgement after one or two sessions, depending on the complexity of the case. A judge from the official lawcourt would sometimes attend to make a judgement legally binding. In the majority of cases, however, although the decisions of the district court were not binding in law, they were complied with because tradition and the ties of personal

relationships demanded respect for the judgement of those accepted as the heads of the community. Moreover, disputes were settled according to traditional norms universally understood and accepted in the community. This informal court was active until 1925. Present-day Mehallāwwīya cannot recall any appointments to judgeships or cases which were dealt with after that year. The popular court had settled disputes speedily and satisfactorily; after its passing people had to turn to the official legal system, with its lengthy procedures, and the delays involved were themselves the source of further complications and animosity in many cases.

The Identity of Ahl al-San'a

Ahl al-balad included several significant sub-groupings. Workers in the textile industry, whether mu'allimīn or ṣanay'īyya, regarded themselves as ahl al-ṣan'a (people of the craft), as opposed to ahl al-filaha (those who worked the land) and ahl al-tigāra (merchants). Merchants were not included among ahl al-ṣan'a even if they traded in yarn or cloth unless they were also producers. Ahl al-ṣan'a rather despised ahl al-filaha because their work required no intelligence or skill but only physical strength, and held the same view of street vendors and pedlars, cart drivers, porters, and many other workers in the town.[1]

---

[1]They regarded those who did such unskilled work as being little better than the unemployed, and it was a great blow to a craftsman's pride if, during a slump in the industry, he was forced to do such work himself. Although his income might not fall significantly, he would feel degraded.

Religious Ties

At that time ahl al-san'a were entirely Muslim, although there was a sizeable Coptic community in the town. Ahl al-san'a were bound together by their common membership in certain turuq (religious brotherhoods, s. tariqa). Al-Mehalla is known for its many mosques, said to number 365 like the days of the year, and for the saints associated with them. Religious brotherhoods made up of the devotees of local saints abound there. However, the brotherhoods with the largest memberships in the town are the Ahmadīyya, made up of the followers of al-Sayyid al-Badāwī, which is centred in Tanta, and the Burhanīyya, which is made up of the followers of al-Sayyid Ibrahim al-Dusuqi, based in Dusuq. Nearly all the members of these two turuq were ahl al-san'a, and the families of certain of the big mu'allimīn were associated with these groups. The 'Eid and Kabbash families, for example, belonged to al-Tariqa al-Burhanīyya, while the Biheri and 'Abd al-Nabī families belonged to al-Tariqa al-Ahmadīyya.

These big mu'allimīn had a special role to play in the celebrations that took place for the birthdays (mawālid, s. mulid) of their patron saints. They would normally rent a house, either in Tanta for the Ahmadīyya, or in Dusuq for the Burhanīyya, and go to stay there with some of their craftsmen and members of the brotherhood in order to participate in the festivities, which included performance of the dhikr (ritual prayers associated with mawālid). The mu'allim would normally provide food and lodging for all of the Mehallāwwīyya who came for the occasion throughout the

celebrations, which lasted for days and sometimes weeks. The mu'allim would bring samples of his cloth with him to sell to the people of the city during the mulid.

Thus part of the prestige of a big mu'allim was associated with his being a leading member of the Ahmadiyya or Burhaniyya and the extent to which he was generous with his hospitality during these celebrations. Similar festivities took place in al-Mehalla to mark the birthdays of local saints, though they were not associated with particular brotherhoods. Most involved in such ceremonies would be those living near the saint's shrine; thus the people of Sandifa, for example, would celebrate the mulid of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rabu. The practice was to perform the dhikr and then pass in procession through various parts of the town with flags and carts decorated with lamps. The mulid was also an occasion for distributing food to the poor.

The celebration of mawalid was a main source of entertainment as well as a religious observance, and reflected the level of the town's prosperity in any given year. It is well-remembered, for example, that in 1923 celebrations were held in honour of every sheikh who had a mosque dedicated to him in al-Mehalla, and so there was a celebration nearly every day, as well as the main festivals of the Ahmadiyya and Burhaniyya brotherhoods. No one can remember any celebrations at all during 1914 or 1915.

Kinship Ties

Another unifying factor that cut across economic differences was the network of kinship ties. Most of the

people of al-Mehalla were related to each other in one way or another, no matter how distantly. Mu'allimīn would have both landlords and craftsmen as relatives, and kinship ties were particularly close among ahl al-san'a. Thus in the early part of the century most of the mu'allimīn were related to one another. The 'Alī family was related by marriage to the Mahmudi family and the Kabbash family, while the al-Gizla and al-'Enaba families were also related.

During this period ahl al-san'a lived mostly in Sandifa and Suq al-Laban, which were the two main areas of the town. When it came to choosing marriage partners, preference was given to Mehallāwwīyya, and of them to members of ahl al-san'a, and of them to inhabitants of the same neighbourhood. These criteria are reflected in the relationship patterns which existed during this period, and will be discussed later.

Kinship ties played an important role in the working relations that existed among ahl al-san'a, and although an individual craftsman or mu'allim would often make decisions or work independently of his family, his family ties were still of great practical significance. For example, the son of the 'Alī family had the opportunity at the age of seventeen to set up in business independently of his father. Because of his father's good name and reputation, he was able to obtain yarn from the merchants in spite of having no capital reserves of his own. Because 'Alī was a well-to-do and respected merchant, his son was given the same facilities in business as would have been accorded to

the father, since it was expected that even though family members might be engaged in separate enterprises, ultimately each member shared in the achievements and took responsibility for the losses of every other.

Different degrees of relationship and obligation existed within each family. In the case of the family of a prosperous mu'allim, his sons would work with him and learn the business insofar as the size of the enterprise and the number of sons would allow. If it was a large establishment capable of employing all the sons, they would continue to work with their father according to their own individual willingness and ability. Generally the father would single out the son with the most aptitude, and either allot him greater responsibilities in the business or encourage him to set up on his own. If one of his sons showed little managerial aptitude, he would train him in the craft aspects of the business. It was in fact rare that a mu'allim would be able to employ all of his sons, unless he was a small-scale operator and relied on his sons as labourers. In the case of mu'allimin working on a medium scale, only one or two sons would normally be taken into the business in positions of responsibility. The business would require no more than that, and it was not acceptable that a son should become a financial burden on his father.

In the event that a mu'allim had no sons, he would normally call upon his other relatives, especially his brothers and nephews, to come into business with him and take a share of the profits. In such cases the chosen relative would be trained from an early age. By involving

his sons and relations in his work, rather than taking outsiders as partners, the mu'allim was trying to keep his production specialty within the family, so that the fame and reputation of the family could be maintained and grow.

In every extended family there were rich and poor members, and it was the wealthy mu'allim's obligation to give preference to his poor relations, training them to fill any vacancies which occurred. These relations, once employed, had priority over other labourers in the business, and could not, for example, be dismissed during a slump. When times were hard, the mu'allim who had relatives on his payroll had to continue to provide them with a livelihood, by paying them wages for lower production or even for no work at all. This would, of course, increase his losses in a slump, but it was part of the obligation inherent in his being a wealthy member of the family. The prosperous mu'allim also had to support these relatives in other ways. In Islamic law, poor relations have priority over non-relations in the distribution of alms which is obligatory for the Muslim, and they would also receive gifts on feast days.

These obligations to one's kin, whether to the immediate or extended family, made the work situation highly complex. Although all of these obligations were accepted and observed, there were also strong incentives to break away from the family business and establish independent enterprises. In making decisions where both family and business considerations were involved, the factors to be weighed against each other were the family obligations

that existed, the abilities and needs of the individuals concerned, and commercial and business considerations, in that order. Thus although a small industrial enterprise would by nature tend to be more successful when in the hands of one mu'allim making independent decisions, and even though an independent venture might suit the abilities of a certain family member and be economically advantageous to him personally, it could easily happen that the demands of family obligations would overrule these considerations.

A typical case is that of 'Abd al-Hamīd al-Ghanam. He was the youngest of four brothers who all worked with their father, although 'Abd al-Hamīd had acquired some looms of his own which he ran independently. He had more aptitude for the business than any of his brothers, and was full of new ideas. It was he who encouraged his father to begin producing a new kind of cloth, a sailcloth used for donkey saddlebags, sails and sun umbrellas, which raised their profits to eighteen percent at a time when other handloom operators were making only two percent profit. When his father died, 'Abd al-Hamīd thought of starting his own enterprise and leaving his brothers to run the family business. He realized, however, that his three older brothers, who were by then married and had families to support, would never make a success of the business without him. He therefore decided to amalgamate his looms and theirs, feeling that it was his responsibility to build their fortunes as well as his own. They all lived together in one house in order to economise, and shared the profits. In the first year they made a profit of £E 50, and in the

second £E 200. Under 'Abd al-Hamīd's direction, expansion continued until by the fifties the al-Ghanam family owned one of the medium-scale modern factories of al-Mehalla.

Another case is that of the al-Qadi family. Muhammad, the youngest of the three sons of Hagg Mustāfa, took over responsibility for the family when his father died. Muhammad had had to work as a labourer with his father when he went bankrupt. While working as a labourer he saved some money and started a small separate business with two handlooms. Within a year he had become the owner of ten handlooms. He went on working with his father and brothers in addition to expanding his own business. When his father died, he took full responsibility for the family enterprise, but he kept his own work separate. His business expanded rapidly, especially after he began mechanizing in 1940. When the family handloom enterprise declined, he added the handlooms to his new modern factory. He employed all of his brothers in the new factory, but he and his children were the owners.

The ties among ahl al-balad in general and ahl al-san'a in particular were reinforced by the prevailing patterns of marriage. The one factor that affected virtually all marriages in al-Mehalla was the strong preference of Mehallāwīyya from all social groups for marriage within ahl al-balad. Whatever the merits of a non-Mehallāwī suitor, he would be refused, as an outsider who would take his bride to live elsewhere, in what ahl al-balad regarded as foreign parts. Marriages between Mehallāwwīyya whose families knew each other very well were greatly preferred.

There was no preference for patrilateral parallel cousin marriage, as was the case among other sectors of Egyptian society, especially in the agricultural areas. Among peasants the wealth of a family lay in its land, and girls would be married to their cousins so that their share of the land would stay in the family. Among ahl al-ṣan'a in al-Mehalla, however, the case was different. Wealth lay in the skill of a craftsman's hands, which could not be inherited like land, but could only be taught and trained, and was moreover taught only to one's sons. The sons "inherited" their fathers' experience, and so there was no fear of losing the craft by marrying daughters outside the family. Women had no major role in the industry other than as general helpers to their husbands; the wife of a mu'allim would help him in some aspects of his work but would never work a loom; a craftsman's wife would wind the spools; a dyer's wife would help wind the yarn. But women did not have independent employment in the industry and did not inherit, so a family lost nothing if its daughters married non-relatives.

Although ahl al-ṣan'a formed a cohesive group, they held a variety of social and economic positions. There were big mu'allimīn, small mu'allimīn, craftsmen and simple labourers, but these categories were neither static nor sharply defined. Upward and downward mobility were very common in the unstable economic conditions before the thirties. For example, four of five of those who were big mu'allimīn in the thirties had been craftsmen in the twenties, while some big mu'allimīn had had to leave the industry

altogether, such as the Kabbash and al-Biheri families, while Mansur became a mu'allim with only a small-scale business. The awareness of the possibility of such mobility narrowed the gaps among the sub-groups within ahl al-san'a.

Within ahl al-san'a the normal preference was for marriages between people of similar economic backgrounds, but since economic status was unstable and kinship ties cut across all economic levels, this could not be maintained as an absolute rule. Membership in a particular social group was thus less important than certain valued personal characteristics, such as skill at one's craft and a readiness for hard work. It was these factors that endured when wealth might dwindle. With skill and hard work, a man could always support his family. Provided a suitor had these qualities and was from ahl al-balad, that is, he "had roots", he would be accepted almost without regard for his financial standing. Ahl al-san'a were well aware that their real wealth lay in themselves and their skills, not in ready cash.

Thus the son of a small mu'allim might marry the daughter of a big mu'allim, or a craftsman might marry a mu'allim's daughter, provided he was a good and hard worker. He would hope that he too might become a mu'allim one day, and that his father-in-law would help him establish his own business.

Style of Life

Apart from being bound together by kinship ties, in the early decades of the twentieth century ahl al-san'a

were united by a particular style of life in which physical and behavioural symbols of rank differentiating employees from employers were minimal.

Clothing is one of the most obvious signs of social rank, but ahl al-san'a all dressed alike. The only people in al-Mehalla who wore Western dress were the government officials, apart, of course, from the foreigners, and none of these were ahl al-balad. Other groups, whether merchants, landlords or mu'allimīn, all wore the traditional local dress, consisting either of a kaftan worn under a full-length coat-like garment (the gibba), and a turban, or a loose robe (gallabīyya) of wool in winter and silk in summer, worn with a fez. The workers and craftsmen could not afford several sets of clothes, as could the more well-to-do, but the cost of living was low and even a labourer could afford to dress quite well. He could buy cloth for a woolen gallabīyya, for example, for £E 0.30, pay in installments, and have it tailored for £E 0.30. A labourer would also have a silk gallabīyya, though he would wear a cotton one at work, and he would always wear shoes.

In many social contexts, formal education serves to differentiate social levels. This was not, however, the case in al-Mehalla. At that time no one in the town had attended university, and education was limited in general to the kuttāb, primary schools, and elementary technical schools. Preparatory and secondary schools were to be found only in Tanta and Cairo, and the Mehallāwwīyya in general, whether they were landlords or merchants or in

the textile industry, did not bother to send their children there. Thus the educational difference between the worker and the mu'allim lay simply in how well they could read and write, and even this difference was not universal, for many mu'allimīn were illiterate and relied on their sons for keeping accounts and handling any business that was done in writing.

Places of residence and types of housing can also differentiate social groups, but although there were several residential areas in al-Meḥalla they were not then divided or structured according to occupational groups, as in earlier times, or according to economic level and social groups, as they are now. Neither were areas divided according to function; all quarters of the city were areas of mixed work activity and residence.

There were at this time in al-Meḥalla three main quarters: Ṣandifa, Suq al-Laban and al-Waraqa, where all ahl al-balad lived. Each quarter contained a mixture of all sectors of the community--merchants, craftsmen, landowners, rich and poor. Craftsmen and mu'allimīn specialising in different types of cloth lived and worked side by side. Even so, particular areas did with time come to be associated with particular specialities. Ṣandifa, for instance, became famous for its silk weavers and mu'allimin producing 'asba.

Apart from these areas were Sewiqat al-Aqbāt, the Coptic residential area, and Khukhit al-Yahud, the Jewish residential area. The foreigners lived in their own factory compounds. Thus ahl al-balad were in no way divided

according to their places of residence, and only the religious and foreign minorities lived separately.

The rich, naturally enough, had bigger houses than the poor, and in the case of the mu'allimīn the uses to which the houses were put varied. A big mu'allim would use his house as his residence only, and have his workshop on separate premises, whereas a small mu'allim would use part of his house to accommodate his looms. But although the houses differed, almost everyone, rich and poor, owned his own house, and rented accommodations were almost unheard of. The rare exceptions were workmen who had left their parental homes and rented dwellings until they could build or buy their own homes.

All these details indicate that the social gap between the mu'allimīn and their craftsmen was very narrow indeed. The mu'allim and the craftsmen he employed regarded themselves in many ways as a team. Their relations with one another were governed by certain implicit obligations on the part of the mu'allim and certain duties on the part of the craftsman. There were no labour laws or formal legislation to define these obligations or duties, but they were mutually understood and accepted.

The mu'allim was obliged to train the sanay'ī until he became a skilled worker. During training it was expected that wages would be low because production was minimal, but even when the craftsman became proficient enough to begin producing efficiently, he continued to be paid a daily wage rather than a piecework rate. This was more profitable for the mu'allim and was reckoned as a kind of

compensation for the training he had provided. When the sanay'ī became a skilled worker he would, in theory, be given a great deal of freedom to produce as much cloth as he liked at a piecework rate. His production would be limited, however, by his own peak work speed and by market conditions. A worker expected that in times of slump or in seasons of low demand his mu'allim would ask him to cut production or even dismiss him if conditions became very bad.

When a mu'allim had to dismiss labourers he made his choice of who should go and who should stay according to certain criteria, taking into consideration responsibilities to kinsmen among the employees and then the skill and personal qualities of the workers. The first to go would be the workers who had no aptitude for the craft, or who were objectionable in their behaviour. The mu'allim would keep on the skillful workers and those of good character.

A labourer's livelihood therefore depended not only on his own skill but also on the prosperity of his mu'allim. The workers therefore uttered prayers before the mu'allim went to market that he would make a good sale. A mu'allim's prosperity was reflected in various advantages for the labourer. Most important was job security. Also, the more prosperous the mu'allim, the more the craftsman could depend on him in any time of crisis. It was expected that a mu'allim visit a labourer who was ill and leave him money, and he was also expected to provide material help on other occasions associated with financial difficulty, such as the marriage of the worker or his children, the

birth of a child to the worker, a death in the worker's immediate family, or in the case of disablement. At the time of marriage, the mu'allim would contribute toward the wedding expenses, the furnishing of the home of the newly-weds, or both.

The more generous the mu'allim was with his sanay'īyya, and the more involved in their personal lives, the more his reputation would grow in the community for being an honourable man. To the mu'allim his sanay'īyya were his men in a special sense. He had the right to ask anything of them, and expected to be obeyed, but there was a degree of give and take. A labourer would ask for a meal at his mu'allim's home, or for a length of cloth, more freely than he would ask anything of his workmates. It was understood that his mu'allim was his only provider, while his workmates stood in need just as he did.

A reputable mu'allim would be surrounded by a group of sanay'īyya whom he had trained, and they would be looked upon by all as his own men. They were expected to work for him throughout their careers, though if an opportunity arose for one of them to establish an independent business, the mu'allim would be expected to help and encourage him. However, if one of them left him to work for someone else, he would be considered a traitor, and another mu'allim would try to bring about a reconciliation or at least ask the permission of the original mu'allim before employing him. As a rule the sanay'īyya were completely loyal, and identified with their mu'allimīn rather than with other craftsmen, forming a unit in the community vis-a-vis

other mu'allimīn and their men. Disputes between a mu'allim and his craftsmen were handled internally through a middleman who was either an elderly relative or an elderly and senior sanay'ī. There was no structured legislation or formal association to protect the rights of either group; work relations were controlled by the intense patron-client relationship that existed between a mu'allim and his men.

So strong was this relationship that a mu'allim identified more closely with his own men than with other mu'allimīn, and competition among the mu'allimīn and their production teams was stiff, especially during times when the market was depressed. These teams worked to produce types of cloth that would find a ready market, changing and adapting their specialities for greater profitability. They would even replace their looms if the changes they wanted to make required a new type of loom, and gained a reputation for "outdoing the Japanese".

Influential Groups in the Social Hierarchy Prior to 1930

The social hierarchy of al-Mehalla before 1930 was blurred in the sense that social groupings were neither sharply differentiated nor systematically ranked. The four major occupational groups were landlords, merchants, ahl al-san'a and bureaucrats, but status groups cut across occupational lines. The most influential groups included two major categories, the town notables and the government bureaucrats.

The Notables

The town notables were from the wealthiest groups in the town, but not all wealthy families were considered to be notables. Continuity of wealth over a period of time as well as the source of wealth were important factors in differentiating the notables from the rest of the wealthy inhabitants. Some groups were wealthier than others. Landlords, for example, were wealthier than ahl al-san'a, but some ahl al-san'a families, such as the 'Alī, Kabbash, 'Abd al-Nabī and 'Eid families, were nevertheless considered to be notables.

The notables maintained their power and status not only by their wealth and their use of it, but by their participation and influence in community affairs. They were active in both the formal and informal decision-making bodies in the town. Informally they were members of the area courts and representatives of religious brotherhoods. Formally they held local government offices such as those of mayor or sheikh al-balad. The notables in al-Mehalla were few in number. They were the parliamentary representatives of the town, and some had close working relations with other notables in Cairo and Alexandria. Most of them were associated with the Wafd party, and the whole city stood together in solidarity with the Wafd against the British in 1919.

After the 1919 revolution, differences began to appear among the Wafd representatives, and some of them joined other parties which stood against the Wafd in al-Mehalla, such as the Constitutional Liberals, the Sa'd!s and the

Independents. In 1921 the Wafd representative in al-Mehalla was Ahmad Kamal, who was a medium-size landowner. The Shishiny family were among the strongest supporters of the Wafd. Doctor Haider al-Shishiny, who was from the educated branch of the family that was in contact with Cairo, was married to the daughter of Muhammad Farid, and so had links with the nationalist movement in Cairo. He played a leading role in rallying support for the Wafd. The A'sar family under Nu'man Basha al-A'sar supported the Wafd during the 1919 revolution, but then left the party and joined the Constitutional Liberals who were then in power. Nu'man Basha thus became the government's representative in al-Mehalla, while Haider al-Shishiny represented the Wafd. Parliamentary representation from then on came to be associated exclusively with the Shishiny family, being members of the Wafd who could represent al-Mehalla. Two other ahl al-san'a families belonged to the Wafd party, but their role was to support the Shishiny family in election battles.

All the other parties opposed the representatives of the Wafd. Indeed, one of the Wafd slogans of that time was "He who is not with us is against us." 'Abd al-Hayy Khalil put himself up as an independent parliamentary candidate in 1930, and the Wafd members viewed him as standing against them, although he was in fact well known for not favouring any political party and for having good relations with all groups. Parliamentary candidacy remained for so long the province of these two families that the Shishiny family came to be associated in people's minds with the Wafd party, while the Khalils were believed to stand for the state

against the Wafd.

Thus parliamentary activity was confined to a few families of notables, and eventually became restricted to the Khalil and Shishiny families--a family of merchants and a family of landowners. When this happened, the whole city was divided between supporters of the two families, not on the basis of the policies each put forward, but rather on that of personal relationships. For example, several mu-'allimīn from among ahl al-san'a supported the Khalil family because they had dealings with them in the yarn trade, and their support automatically brought with it the support of their workers. All relatives were expected to support the family without question. Support was also related to residential areas, since the Shishiny family mostly lived in Suq al-Laban while the Khalils were mainly in Sandifa. This meant that whole neighbourhoods were in virtual opposition to one another.

The power of the notables as a special interest group was thus limited and controlled by their ties with and dependence on the rest of ahl al-balad. The fact that they were not all from the same economic group, being landowners, merchants and industrialists, also lessened their solidarity as an interest group and brought them closer to other sectors of the population.

The Government Bureaucrats

The government bureaucrats in al-Mehalla were not necessarily drawn from ahl al-balad and were less wealthy than the notables, but they nevertheless had great prestige in the town. Major government officials such as the

chief of police, the head of the local council, and the engineer in charge of irrigation, controlled public utilities which greatly affected private interests. Every citizen had at some time to deal with government departments in the town, and would need the good offices of government officials. It was therefore good policy to treat them with respect at all times, and they thus acquired power and prestige through their handling of community affairs. Their wealth, moreover, although less than that of the notables, was stable, in contrast with the insecure financial position of ahl al-balad. Thus a bureaucrat earning £E 5 or 6 per month could ask for the hand of the daughter of any of the wealthiest families in al-Mehalla and be accepted because of his stable income, which, though limited, would guarantee a more secure future than the £E 10 a merchant would make when times were good. In fact the social intercourse of these government officials was with the notables of al-Mehalla, and those who chose to stay in the town married into these families.

Thus there were various social groupings in al-Mehalla which cut across occupational and economic groupings. At the top of the hierarchy was a group of notables who were wealthier and more powerful than ahl al-san'a, although they had less control over their sources of wealth than did the foreign groups who lived in the town. The bureaucrats had less wealth than the notables, but more prestige and power in community affairs. Ahl al-san'a and the merchants ranked below the notables and the bureaucrats.

It is important to keep in mind that these groups were

interrelated by marriage. For example, the sister of al-A'sar, the mayor and landowner, was married to 'Abd al-Hayy Khalil, the yarn merchant. The Khalil family was also related by marriage to families of government employees (such as Bashmu'an) and ahl al-san'a families such as al-Shimi and Kabbash, while the Kabbash family intermarried with the landowning al-'Asīly family and families from ahl al-san'a such as the al-Mahmudi and 'Alī families. The Shishiny family, who were landowners, intermarried with government officials of Turkish origin (the Rustum family), as well as with families of ahl al-san'a, such as the al-Far family, and so on. Indeed, ahl al-balad, whether notables, merchants, landowners, or ahl al-san'a, were all interrelated by marriage.

These indigenous groups, by intermarrying and maintaining similar modes of living, and by living together in the same residential areas, established the identity of ahl al-balad--i.e., the Mehallāwī identity. The character of this identity became more obvious and acquired greater cohesion with the influx of rural migrants to work in the Misr Company. From then on, two polar groups became clearly distinguishable: the Mehallāwwīyya, or ahl al-balad, and the sherkāwwīyya (people of the company), or al-gharbāwwīyya (the outsiders).

NEW SOCIAL GROUPINGS AFTER 1930

The establishment of the Misr Company in the thirties marked the introduction of new groups quite distinct from the indigenous population. The owners of the Company were foreign to al-Mehalla, Cairenes who had no connection with the local townspeople or the Company employees. Their representatives, the managerial group, were also outsiders, Cairenes, or, in many cases, foreigners. As for the Company workers, a large proportion were of rural origin. The distinctions between the various groups in al-Mehalla was clear, and the Company employees quickly earned the nickname "sherkāwwīyya" (from sherka, meaning company), marking their separateness from ahl al-balad, the Mehallāwwīyya.

The Sherkāwwīyya Identity

The sherkāwwīyya were divided into two groups, the bureaucrats and other high-level employees and the labourers. The labourers were divided between those who came from outside al-Mehalla and the Mehallāwwiyya. The latter soon came to be regarded by the rest of ahl al-balad as being more sherkāwī than Mehallāwī, and became estranged from the community to some extent. They themselves resisted this estrangement, for to lose their identity as townsmen and be assimilated into a group of migrant peasant workers was to accept a serious loss of dignity. They therefore insisted that they were Mehallāwwīyya, quite distinct from and superior to the rural newcomers, whom they insisted on calling gharbāwwīyya (outsiders, aliens, strangers). The migrant labourers in turn looked on their

Mehallāwī workmates as quite distinct from themselves. The Mehallāwī workers were therefore in the difficult position of being regarded as sherkāwwīyya by ahl al-balad but as Mehallāwwīyya by themselves and the newcomers to the town.

The labourers of rural origin who worked for the Company found themselves alien not only to the local labourers but also to the bureaucrats who were strangers to the town like themselves. The bureaucrats, or any workers holding supervisory posts, no matter how petty, were always regarded as a class apart. They had been to school, and the majority had secondary certificates or technical diplomas. This alone made them respectable gentlemen, even though they only earned about £E 0.05 to 0.10 a day, very close to the wages of the skilled production workers, and were living away from home just like the rural migrants. In the factory they wore clean white coats and spotless shirts, trousers and shoes, as they moved around repairing the machines or checking on production. They lived in apartments shared with their colleagues.

How different the labourers, who wore old clothes, a gallabīyya or dirty overalls, and went barefoot or wore wooden-soled sandals, for their status demanded no special way of dress. All the similarities that might have drawn the two groups together--their common situation as strangers to the town and the fact that they had similar wages --were reduced to insignificance by the contrast between the ways of life and patterns of expenditure of the two groups.

These groups were further alienated from one another by their functions within the Company. The educated employees worked in supervisory capacities and as foremen on the shop floor, implementing Company policy of maintaining strict discipline, enforced by severe and often violent punishment for any disobedience or infraction of regulations. The assumption was that fear was the best incentive to work and that the only way to make the workers fear the management and to make them submit to discipline was to beat them. This was a deliberate policy carried out at all levels of administration. One labourer describes his perception of the situation thusly:

> If anyone had ever beaten them [the foremen] or bawled them out just once, they would not treat the workmen this way. But why should anyone have beaten them? They lived in a world apart from us--always have and always will. They were brought up in palaces, the sons of mayors and the like. They saw their fathers beating the peasants to make them work the land for nothing, while they went to school and got an education. Now they have to prove they are better than we are, and so they drive us the way a shepherd drives a flock of sheep.[1]

Thus the employees of the Company were very much aware of the gulf which separated them. Nevertheless, ahl al-balad, viewing them from the outside, perceived the sherkāwwīyya as one group whose identity was most of all associated with the rural migrant labourers who came to al-Mehalla in huge numbers and made up the bulk of the Company workers.

These sherkāwwīyya labourers resided in areas separate from the traditional residential areas of ahl al-balad.

---

[1] From the autobiography of Fikri al-Khūli, a rural labourer in Misr Company in the forties (see Appendix IV).

They lived under very bad conditions in the slums that grew up on the fringes of the city. On the nearby 'ezab, buildings of unbaked mud brick were put up, with iron doors which soon rusted. Each room in these buildings was rented separately to as many as twenty labourers who worked different shifts and thus would not all need the room at the same time. Unlike the homes of local residents of both town and village, this housing was small, dirty and insect-infested, and the lodging rooms had neither windows nor bathrooms. These unsanitary conditions, coupled with the unhealthy atmosphere of the factory, led to the rapid spread of tuberculosis among the labourers. Soon the small local hospital could no longer serve all those stricken with the disease, and special tents were erected to house them.

The fall in the standard of living, combined with the lack of adequate medical facilities, led to the spread of other diseases too, among the workers and in al-Mehalla in general. In addition to treating patients suffering from various epidemics, the one general hospital had to treat workers who suffered industrial injuries. These were frequent, owing to the poor condition of much of the machinery used, the lack of training of the workers, and the general absence of safety precautions.

At first the migrant labourers retained many of the features of their previous life-style. They continued to wear the coarse cotton gallabīyya of the peasants, which made them immediately distinguishable from the Mehallāwī workers, who wore silk gallalīb in the ifrinjī (Western) style--that is, with collars, cuffs and back yoke much

like the Western shirt. The peasant gallabīyya was much fuller, with wide sleeves. This constituted a danger on the shop floor, where flowing gowns could be caught in machinery, and so a regulation was issued banning the wearing of gallalīb and wooden-soled sandals in the factory. Infringement of this regulation was punishable by fines. Although designed for safety, this regulation worked as a hardship on the labourers, who could not afford to buy other clothes. The situation did not improve even when the Company issued trousers to the workers, because the cost of the trousers (£E 0.25) was deducted from wages, and in any case the trousers were issued only every six months, while they wore out in three. Once the trousers wore out, the workers had no alternative but to revert to the gallabīyya and be subject to disciplinary fines.[1]

The rural workers lived in groups based on their villages of origin, each group living in the same 'ezba and sometimes in the same lodging house or even the same room. They had a very low standard of living because their wages were so low. As unskilled labourers they earned £E 0.02 to 0.04 per day in the thirties, while their Mehallāwī counterparts who were considered skilled workers earned £E 0.04 to 0.06 per day, and handloom weavers outside the factory earned £E 0.06 to 0.08 per day. Unlike the Mehallāwī labourers, the rural migrants did not even enjoy the fruits of their own labour, for they always saved as much as possible from their wages and sent or took cash

---

[1] 'Uthman, T., Nidāl 'ummāl al-nasīq al-mīkānīkī bil-qāhira (Cairo, 1948).

back to their families in the villages.

In the thirties the peasants of the Delta had severe economic difficulties. Gharbīyya Governorate in particular was densely populated and dependent on agriculture. The deep alluvial soil had suffered after the introduction of perennial irrigation, because excessive irrigation of the low-lying land led to a rise in the level of the water table and hence to the salination of much agricultural land. The cost of the desalinisation process was prohibitive as far as the average small-holder was concerned, and much land had to be mortgaged to pay debts during the Great Depression. All this, combined with the lowering of the land-man ratio in the Delta due to the increase in the population, increased the number of landless families and the numbers of those unable to support their families solely through agriculture, whether as tenant farmers or agricultural labourers.

It was these circumstances that made factory labour such an attractive prospect for many of the rural poor, for although they were the poorest of the poor in the town, they were, and perceived themselves to be, in a better situation than their counterparts in the villages. They would sum up their situation by saying "Ish rāmak 'ala l-murr? Al-amarr minnu" (literally, "What pushes you to accept the bitter [life]? That which is more bitter."). The bitter life was to work in a strange town as a factory labourer, for leaving home was for a peasant a real psychological hardship, quite apart from the physical hardships of life in al-Mehalla. "That which was more bitter" was life in

the village as a landless labourer.

The labourers would encourage themselves with memories of the village, where a delay in paying the rent for the land could lead to the family's only buffalo being registered as a guarantee of payment and to the requisition of the grain they had managed to store for the year ahead. When the mayor needed labour they would be rounded up to work without pay. In al-Mehalla they saw more cash than they had ever seen before, and wages were assured, so that they could save money for their families at home to ensure that the rent was paid and some supplies were brought in to feed the children.

The labourers maintained very close ties with their home villages, to which they returned every week or two. They would take their wages to their families and bring back provisions, such things as bread and salty white cheese, enough to last the next fortnight. These provisions would supply almost all their needs, so that their expenditures in al-Mehalla were kept to a minimum.

When they married at the age of sixteen or eighteen, according to the rural tradition, they would normally choose wives from their home villages; no one in al-Mehalla would have married his daughter to a sherkāwī. For the sake of economy, wives would normally be left in the village, although later on when the Company began to provide some housing, those lucky enough to get accommodations would bring their families to the town.

The rural labourers' weekly or fortnightly visits to their home villages were the high points in their lives,

helping them to relieve the sense of alienation and home-sickness that beset them in town. When forced to spend a free weekend in al-Mehalla, they spent their time together in amusements very different than those of ahl al-balad.

On Sundays the streets of the town were crowded with workmen who had not gone to their villages. In Muhib Street there was a public garden where the orphanage band used to play. The sherkāwwīyya would gather around this band, and then go walking in the street along the river, sucking sugar cane. They went through the streets of the town in their simple dirty clothes and wooden-soled sandals, their heads shaved bare, nibbling termis (lupine) seeds or peanuts. Those who had received their full pay could purchase a buza (a sort of local beer) for five milliemes in one of the many local bars, or a cooked meal. This type of expenditure was quite different than that of ahl al-balad.

The city was thus divided into two separate worlds, that of the sherkāwwīyya and that of the Mehallāwwīyya. A major canal branching off from the Shebin River constituted a physical barrier between the two. Each bank of the canal had its own police station, shops and coffee houses, barber shops and bakeries. These facilities were more expensive and of better quality on the Mehallāwwīyya side, and the sherkāwwīyya, limited by their tiny incomes, stayed on the factory side. Their daily leisure time was minimal, because they worked twelve-hour shifts and scarcely had the time to do more than go back to their rooms to eat and sleep.

The sherkāwwīyya formed among themselves little

groups of workers from the same home villages, who might easily be relatives as well, which functioned as circles for mutual help and support within the larger group of workers. Within these cliques, members would lend each other money, share provisions of food, and spend their free Sundays together. They also kept one another informed of developments within the factory and in the city at large.

The Company's managerial staff endeavoured to eliminate hostility toward the sherkāwwīyya by providing services for the city such as roads, hospitals, schools, and other facilities. The Company's general manager attempted to extend his control to the Meḥallāwī sector of the city, and put himself up as a parliamentary candidate for Greater Meḥalla against the Shishiny family in 1944. In an effort to gain support from ahl al-balad, he had a mosque built during the election year, and the campaign developed into a struggle between the Meḥallāwwīyya and the sherkāwwīyya. In fact, a large number of the factory workers voted for al-Shishiny, and the Company lost its bid for political leadership in the town. The struggle which took place, however, was not simply between the Meḥallāwī and sherkāwī groups, but was also a battle between the Wafd and the government, and the success of the local candidate was a result of his membership in the Wafd as well as of the divided allegiances of the sherkāwwīyya.

The differences between the Meḥallāwwīyya and the sherkāwwīyya were also apparent in terms of their memberships in religious societies, of which the two most important in the forties were the Sunniyin and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Sunniyin is a ritualistic Muslim association which was introduced in al-Mehalla around 1940 by Sheikh al-Subki. Later, Dr. Sa'id, a dentist and the nephew of 'Abd al-Hayy Khalil, became the official leader of the association. Its main activities were the conducting of religious ceremonies and the undertaking of various joint commercial enterprises, including opening places of trade, shares in which were sold to members at reduced prices. The Members also helped one another in times of personal financial crisis. These activities made it natural that the Sunniyin recruit members mostly from among the small traders of ahl al-balad, who were extensively intermarried.

The Muslim Brotherhood is a national political organization which began in al-Mehalla among ahl al-balad and spread mostly among students and government employees. The General Manager of the Company encouraged membership in the Brotherhood in an attempt to counteract the influence of radical movements, especially Communism, among the workers. Communism had at that time begun to gain a few adherents in al-Mehalla. However, the Muslim Brotherhood continued to be most successful among ahl al-balad. When it did spread among the sherkāwwīyya, its members were mostly middle management employees. Some present-day informants who were labour leaders in the forties believe that the Muslim Brotherhood had no following at all among the labourers in al-Mehalla, and say that its reputed 2,000 members in the al-Mehalla branch were all from educated groups. Membership in the association required a lengthy initiation period spent in becoming literate and gaining a thorough knowledge

of the Brotherhood's interpretation of Islam.

Thus it is clear that the labourers of al-Mehalla were not active participants in any organized political or religious groups in the forties, and formed no part of any organization which might have fought for their rights. Their main preoccupation was with their daily subsistence problems. One sherkāwī labourer described their situation as follows:

> How can the labourers join in [political activities]? They don't have time or opportunity even to think. They work twelve hours a day. It's as if they were buried underneath what goes on in the town. From sunrise to sunset not a soul's about. Imagine a town like this, full of working men--26,000 in the factory alone, not counting the ginners and handloom weavers, who amount to five or six thousand. Imagine how it would be if they all went out to demonstrate! That's when we would be able to say Egypt and all her workers were liberated.[1]

The Mehallāwī attitude toward the sherkāwwīyya was on the whole intensely negative. They were blamed, as a group, for any criminal activity in the city, and were held responsible for decreasing the level of morality. The prices of food, rent and land were all rising, and this too was blamed on the sherkāwwīyya. Their way of life, forced upon them by their poverty, made them despised by most of the Mehallāwwīyya. Having no homes of their own, living crowded into single rooms, existing on bread and cheese for days at a time when a Mehallāwī worker could eat well and even buy meat occasionally, having no shoes and no silk gallabīyya--all this conferred on them such a low status in the town that they were almost completely ostracized by the rest of the community. The most disastrous social error a Mehallāwī

---

[1]From the autobiography of Fikri al-Khūli, here attached as Appendix IV.

father could make was to marry his daughter to a sherkāwī, whether he was a manager, an engineer or a labourer. The stigma on such a marriage was so great that even a Mehallāwī worker in the factory would leave his job before daring to propose marriage with the daughter of a family of ahl al-balad.

The sherkāwwīyya retained this negative identity for a period of twenty years, but in the fifties and sixties it eroded and the sharp distinctions between Mehallāwwīyya and sherkāwwīyya began to fade. Rural labourers had become skilled workers, and working and economic conditions had improved. The main improvement, apart from rises in wages, was the complete housing area which the Company built for its workers. Apart from residential blocks of apartments, each containing several rooms including a kitchen and a bathroom, the development included a hospital, a social club, a mosque, a school, gardens and cooperative stores for the sale of vegetables, fruit and groceries. Although the new area housed only a small proportion of the workers, it was one of the best and most attractive residential areas in the town, and became a recreation centre where ahl al-balad and the other workers would come to spend their leisure time instead of going to the town centre on the other side of the river. And so ahl al-balad began to mix with the sherkāwwīyya.

The sherkāwwīyya labourers also began to use the savings which they managed to accumulate from bonuses to buy plots of land on the estates around al-Mehalla and to build small houses. On these estates no distinctions were made between Mehallāwwīyya and sherkāwwīyya labourers and other

groups from among ahl al-balad who bought land. The majority of those living in these areas were Company workers, for they had become more prosperous than other groups in the city.

A clear improvement in the standard of living of the workers in the Company took place as a result of the benefits they gained under the socialist laws passed after 1952. It became difficult to distinguish between Mehallāwwiyya and rural workers in the Company. Conditions for appointment to Company posts now include certain minimum skills and education to at least the primary certificate level, and the Company has established a number of schools for the workers and their children. After nationalisation, the workers, as public sector employees, became beneficiaries under the labour laws, and in general they now enjoy better working conditions and higher wages than private sector workers in the town. The relative positions of the two groups of workers have now reversed. Today private-sector textile workers aspire to become sherkāwwīyya, and ahl al-balad are delighted if the opportunity arises to acquire a company labourer as a son-in-law.

The Identity of the Medium-Scale Factory Owners

Factory owners have become clearly differentiated from labourers; the two groups now live in different residential areas, and no longer share the same educational background and life-style. The owners began to form a cohesive group in 1955 when industrial production expanded. As problems of production increased, cooperative societies

began to be formed, such as the Yarn Association, founded in 1958 after the public sector took over supervision of the yarn supply.

In 1968 the Factory Owners' Association was formed to protect the interests of the owners after nationalisation. The factory owners united in this association, and took control of the Yarn Association, appointing a board of directors made up of owners who performed this function on a voluntary basis. The Factory Owners' Association made a count of looms, fixed allotments of yarns for each factory owner, and undertook the distribution of yarn on this basis. It also used to grant loans to small factories, for even though most of the members were medium-scale owners, they had agreed to help the small-scale operators in order to guarantee the yarn supply. This grouping bound together private sector industrialists at all levels against the public sector, and represented an attempt by the owners to gain supremacy over the public sector, obtain a just quantity of yarn, and solve the many problems they had been faced with as a result of the expansion of the public sector.

By forming these associations, the factory owners managed to safeguard their interests, manipulating the public sector and overcoming the numerous problems they faced in the distribution of yarn. The Yarn Association and the Factory Owners' Association were both still in operation in 1978, but their importance had diminished, particularly after the abolition of the ration system and the rise in the price of yarn to the level of black market prices. The social activities, meetings and celebrations which the

associations used to organize no longer take place, and it has become clear that the solidarity of the group of factory owners is based chiefly on their common economic interests and on the need to overcome the threats that have faced them with the increasing intervention of the state in the industry.

While such issues serve to unify the owners as a group, there are today sub-groups among the owners which are distinguished by their various life-styles, and the gaps between these groups are often as wide as that between the owners and the labourers. The Mehallāwī factory owners have lost the homogeneity that characterized them as a group during the craft phase of the industry. As was to be expected, with the abolition of the ration system and the end of the threat of state control, the varying economic interests of different owners came to the fore.

The Life-Style of the Medium-Scale Factory Owners

In al-Mehalla today the medium-scale factory owners do not all live in the same way. There are those who follow the traditional way of life. They prefer to live in extended families in the old parts of the city. Their houses are furnished with heavy local furniture, and their patterns of expenditure are related to their narrow fields of interest. This group is little interested in Western fashions in clothes and in owning modern cars (though some of them have small old cars), and they furnish their homes simply. Their main expenditures are the traditional ones--food, bride money, betrothal presents to seal engagements, gold jewelry for their daughters. They tend not to believe

in educating their daughters, and do not even show great concern for the educations of their sons, expecting that whether or not the boys are able to gain academic qualifications they will come to work in the family business. Intermarriage between the families within this group is common. Their contact with Cairo is restricted to business trips, and outside their work, which is their main interest, they find their recreation in the entertainments available in al-Mehalla, such as cinemas and coffee houses. They tend not to frequent the social clubs that exist in the town, which draw their memberships mostly from the white collar groups.

Another group of factory owners, which has broken away from the traditional way of life, associates mainly with wealthy merchants, landlords, and other occupational groups such as doctors. These owners make up the elite of al-Mehalla society. They live in separate areas in the northern part of the city where they have had new, modern villas and houses constructed. They have largely retained the investment patterns of former generations, but their patterns of consumption are vastly different. They regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as the modern group in local society.

This elite group is full of enthusiasm for advancing the textile industry in al-Mehalla by introducing the latest technology, buying the most modern machinery, and introducing new types of cloth. They keep themselves informed of the latest developments in the industry abroad, but when it comes to choosing equipment for their own factories they are careful to select machines that can be handled easily by

Egyptian labourers, that can be serviced locally, and that are economical to run.

They furnish their homes in the European style, wear the latest fashions, and drive the newest cars, particularly favouring the Mercedes. When they buy major luxury items they tend to choose those which will have long useful lives or which can be sold later at only a small loss, such as carpets. They install the latest domestic equipment in their homes, and always have the biggest and best of such items as refrigerators, cookers and washing machines. In general, however, their lives have changed only on the level of material possessions, and they retain the same moral values and follow some of the same social customs as other groups in the al-Mehalla community.

The social horizons of this group extend beyond al-Mehalla, and they maintain close contact with families in Cairo and Alexandria, where several are members of well-known social clubs and the Rotary Club. Their family celebrations on occasions such as weddings no longer take place in their homes in al-Mehalla, but are arranged in the big hotels of Cairo and Alexandria. All of the members of the present generation have attended universities in Cairo or Alexandria, and some have degrees or diplomas from abroad. Most are constantly visiting Europe, either for business or for pleasure. The thrift which characterised the previous generation no longer prevails, and the patterns of consumption of this group are among the most conspicuous in the town. Members of the group no longer identify with the rest of the factory owners, and since their social life is

centred outside al-Mehalla they often marry into non-Mehallawi families. The selection of marriage partners is on the basis of individual choice rather than family arrangements.

Relations with Employees

Though the medium-scale factory owners have widely differing life-styles, their relations with their employees tend to be similar. The patron-client relations that existed up to the thirties are no longer in force, but the simple personnel administration techniques that are used still keep the owners in close contact with their workers, albeit on a quite different basis than before.

In the majority of these factories there is a high proportion of transient, unskilled workers under the age of eighteen. The labour laws do not apply to these workers, because they are considered to be trainees, and they thus have no part in the social security system. Such labourers begin working at an early age, and move from one factory to another whenever an employer has no further need of them or when they are attracted by a higher rate of pay, until they reach the age when they are called up for military service. These workers usually come from villages near al-Mehalla.

It is unusual for workers to stay in one factory for a long time. Often they change jobs after two months, and a year is a long time to stay in the same job. The factory owners therefore have no opportunity to get to know their labourers personally, so they relate to them through the few workers who have been with the factory for a long time.

Today most factory owners feel little sense of responsibility toward their workers, beyond paying their wages,

and they tend to feel that their workers are overpaid, in spite of the fact that they earn less than textile workers in the public sector and less than labourers in other industries. (At present, construction workers can earn between £E 5 and £E 6 per day, while textile workers in the private sector earn no more than £E 1.50.)

The owners view the mechanical loom operators as less committed to their work, less regular, and less tied to the factory than the workers during the days of handloom production. They blame this change on the wave of socialism that swept the country in the sixties, and on the labour laws, and they avoid complying with these laws whenever possible, by employing as many very young labourers as they can and by cutting down on the number of skilled workers in their factories.

In each factory there is a group of skilled labourers who are permanent employees, and they maintain the old, traditional client-patron relationship with the medium-scale factory owners. This group varies in size from factory to factory, depending on the size of the establishment. Such workers perform several functions, including recruiting, training and supervising the transient labourers, and they are the only labourers who receive special benefits such as help toward paying the costs of school fees, clothes, or medical care for the worker and his family. Each of these groups is completely loyal to its employer, defending his interests in his absence, and imposing discipline on the other workers. They also act as go-betweens for the owner and the labourers, so that if a labourer wants something

from the factory owner he normally approaches him through this group. They also advise the owner on questions such as which workers should be kept on and which dismissed, and this advice is always given on the basis of what would best serve the factory's interests, for this group has a strong sense of commitment to its factory.

In addition to the strong personal relations between the factory owners and these core groups, traditional ties and responsibilities still exist to some extent between the owners and all of their workers. On feast days such as the Prophet's birthday or the Greater Bairam, the factory owners usually slaughter sheep or calves and distribute the meat to their employees, and during Ramadan it is customary for the owners to present their workers with gifts of cloth and money. Such customs began in the days of the traditional mu'allimīn, and have been perpetuated by their descendants. They also form part of Islamic teachings, and many factory owners still give the alms required during Ramadan to their workers, though these acts of charity are not based on a clearly defined responsibility toward the employees.

The Identity of Small-Scale Factory Owners

Most of the small-scale factory owners have a common social background as wage-earning labourers. Their solidarity expresses itself in various forms of mutual assistance, such as providing yarn or loans to an owner whose supply of yarn runs out, exchanging expertise and repairing machines that break down in their owners' absences. They also work together to increase efficiency, as shown by their reaction

to the constant problem of power failures. This problem affected the whole of al-Mehalla because the electricity supply could not keep pace with the rapid expansion of workshops. Big factories overcame the problem by installing heavy-duty electric cables and points at their own expense. The landlords could and should have taken this measure on behalf of the smaller factories, but they did not, and so the owners banded together to install these fittings for themselves. Now instead of working exclusively in the morning, when pressure on the electricity grid is light, they are able to work continuously without problems with electricity. Thus work in these shops now follows a very irregular pattern, and one may find a particular workshop open or closed at any hour of the day or night.

The major asset of the small-scale owners is their skill as labourers. Most of those who worked themselves up from being labourers had been mechanics prior to buying their own looms. The mechanic is the most skilled workman in the labour hierarchy in the private factories, combining several functions. He supervises work in the factory, repairs the looms, trains unskilled labourers, recruits workers, and in some cases stands in for absentee weavers. He gets the highest wage of all the weavers, and in some factories is paid a monthly salary. The mechanic is always looked upon with great respect. His skills and experience equip him for many of the tasks he will face as an owner, although as an owner he needs extra skills in which he has not been trained, such as marketing of finished products.

The owners of small-scale factories are dependent on the owners of medium-scale factories for support and protection. They join with them in cooperatives for yarn distribution, as well as in the Association of Factory owners. All the same, the labourer-owners feel that they are exploited by the bigger owners, feeling that if they only had enough capital they would be able to produce and market on their own like the medium-scale owners. In that case they would not work for a contractor, and would thus save the fifteen percent profit the contractor makes out of his work by marketing their finished products.

These owners regard themselves as being as poor as the wage labourers. In fact, the income of a chief mechanic is very close to that of a small owner. They also work by themselves as wage labourers. Originally labourers, they are more closely associated with workers in terms of their life styles than they are with the medium-scale owners. Their friends are workers, and their social circles are mainly composed of workers. They have greater access to child labour and female labour among their families and friends. Hence their relations with their workers are completely different than the type of relations that exist in larger factories. The owner-worker relationship is more nearly on the model of the patron-client pattern of earlier times, involving family, neighbours and friends in the same occupation. Nevertheless, as owners they try to minimize the wages which they pay their labourers.

Thus these owners have an ambivalent feeling about their identity. They are proud of their backgrounds as

labourers who achieved their new status by their own effort. They see themselves as exploited by big owners, and feel that they suffer like workers and live like workers. They are well aware of how vulnerable they are compared with the medium-scale owners. They complain of unjust treatment in the sense that they have obligations which are similar to those of the medium-scale owners--insurance payments, the same yarn ration, electricity costs, etc. On the other hand, they tend to downplay their identity as workers, and extract as much as they can from labourers, just like the bigger owners. They complain as much as the big owners of the problem of high wages and how labourers are demanding their rights without accepting their responsibilities, and they also believe that today the workers are less honest and conscientious than the craftsmen of earlier times.

This ambiguous identity reflects the reality of this group. In fact they are owners and workers at the same time. The capital of small-scale owners enables them to own only part of their means of production. They may own one or two looms, but they do not have enough capital to buy raw materials or own a workshop. They rent their workshops and work for others. They can control the timing and procedure of their work, but they cannot control prices or profits. Even as owners, they must sell their labour in order to survive. Although in material terms they are little better off than wage-earning labourers, however, they have aspirations toward changing their status and increasing their incomes through future expansion, and they are aware that their chances of financial and social advancement are more than

those of the labourers.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis shows that the class of owners in the textile industry in al-Mehalla now constitutes a separate social grouping. Up to the thirties, ahl al-san'a incorporated both owners and workers in a united body, but from the thirties on, with the spread of industrialisation and the increase in mechanisation in the textile industry, the craftsmen and mu'allimīn grew further and further apart socially. Two distinct groups emerged, the owners and the workers, with further divisions appearing within each group.

Prior to nationalisation there was a group of capitalist investors who were shareholders in Misr Company but were unknown to the Company's workers. They existed invisibly, somewhere in Cairo, and had no relations with any social group in al-Mehalla. The day-to-day running of the Company was in the hands of a group of managers who were at first partly foreigners and partly Egyptians, mostly Cairenes. By degrees, Mehallāwī employees began to be promoted to managerial posts and became heads of departments, until finally in recent years two Mehallāwwīyya have been appointed general managers of the Company.

After nationalisation and the expansion of the public sector, most of the administrative and managerial employees retained their posts except for personnel appointed to the Company board. State control of sales, profits and credit reduced the Company's economic independence, and its freedom was further limited by the enforcement of new labour

laws. The new administrative cadres of the public sector factories in al-Mehalla were largely composed of members of the middle class who had been either employees of the Ministry of Industry or army officers. The former were appointed on the basis of their technical qualifications, but the ex-officers were appointed for political or administrative reasons.

The second group of owners that has a distinct social identity is the owners of the biggest private sector factories. These owners can be called "national capitalists". They are, nonetheless, limited in terms of financial resources, technical know-how and business relationships. Their industrial enterprises are limited to al-Mehalla, although they are in touch with the business world in Cairo and Alexandria, and they sell their goods not only in Cairo but also, in some cases, on the international market, exporting to both Western and Eastern bloc nations. They are the sons of traditional mu'allimīn now rising fast in the business world and up the social scale as a result of the loosening of state control. The "Open Door" policy has provided opportunities for this group, which is benefitting from and therefore supporting the new economic policy of the country. In spite of this, however, members of this group have no political commitment, owe allegiance to no national party, and do not stand as candidates in elections.

After the abolition of political parties in 1955 and the formation of the National Union and then the Socialist Union, new factions of labourers and other workers began to participate in politics. With the re-introduction of

the party system in 1975 and the formation of the Left, Right and Centre parties, some of the old established parties in the town began to participate in elections once again, but none of the owners of the bigger factories ever stood as a candidate. The head of the Shishiny family stood for election in 1975 as the representative of the Centre Party, the party of the government, on behalf of "occupational groups", and a number of Mehallāwwīyya stood against him. The most important of these was Dr. Sa'id, who represented the Sunni religious movement in al-Mehalla, and was one of the founders of the Islamic Law Association. Dr. Sa'id beat the Shishiny family in these elections, even though the owners of the biggest factories and many of the merchants and notables supported Shishiny. The support of the factory owners, however, did not take the form of active campaigning for any political line; their influence was rather dependent on the fact that they had become respected leading figures in the community with high social standings, for they had close relations with high-level civil servants and representatives of all branches of government agencies in al-Mehalla.

The social group of owners of medium-scale factories can be subdivided into two groups, the traditional and the modern. The traditional group identifies with other groups in the city who share its traditional life-style but not necessarily its economic status. The mu'allimīn who have retained handloom production and resisted mechanisation fall into this group of traditional owners. The status of the traditional wing of the group of medium-scale factory

owners is far less prestigious than that of the modern group. Their limited social contacts and lack of understanding of new social and political structures reduce their mobility, growth potential and power. Under state control the differences between them and the modern faction were muted, but after 1973 the gap began to widen as the modern group began to exploit the opportunities afforded by Egypt's new political economy. The modern group is technically qualified and socially at ease in dealing with both the state bureaucracy in Cairo and international markets for buying machinery and selling textiles. They are developing their techniques and technology very rapidly to keep abreast of changes in the international textile industry.

The third group of factory owners are those with small enterprises. Most of the small-scale owners began as labourers and stand as examples of what can be achieved by workers in the way of ownership, but they live in a world which is neither that of the owners nor that of the labourers, deprived of the security of both guaranteed permanent employment in the public sector and the stable ownership which characterizes medium-scale owners. Their aspiration is to enter fully into the world of owners, and to that end they struggle to educate their children to ensure their social advancement. At the same time, they are still in need of their children's labour. Wage-earning labourers have similar aspirations for their children and a greater chance of fulfilling them than the small owners, who can only with difficulty give their children freedom to study. Their main concern in becoming owners was to free themselves from the

tyranny of employers and become free to work when they chose and never to work a night shift. As owners, however, they work even harder than before in order to be able to remain owners. But whether or not small owners are in fact better off than labourers, both groups have a positive attitude toward ownership, no matter how small-scale. An owner's identity is far more respectable and prestigious than a wage-earning labourer's, and the labourer's ambition is to escape from his negative identity and educate his children so that they will rise above the status of their father. Education and ownership remain the only ways in which the labouring families can throw off the burden of their identity.

As with the group of owners, the working class in al-Mehalla is divided into various distinct social groups. There is still a sizeable group of craftsmen weaving on handlooms, though their position is declining with the advance of mechanisation, as are their wages in relation to their input of physical effort. They have lost the prestige they once held as artists, being regarded now as backward and primitive to be using the methods of a past age. It has become more prestigious to work as a factory labourer, handling advanced and complex machinery--the labourer is at least "modern". Thus the first division of the working class is into handloom weavers and factory workers.

Industrial labourers are further sub-divided. Originally the chief distinction was between Mehallāwī and sherkāwī labourers. With structural changes the division is now between employees of the public sector,

originally the sherkāwwīyya, and employees of the private sector, originally the Mehallāwwīyya. The ethnic origins of the workers are no longer a significant factor in establishing their social identity, for those who began as migrant labourers from rural areas are now completely integrated into the community of al-Mehalla. They live in the same neighbourhoods as Mehallawī industrial labourers and the families of these formerly separate groups now intermarry.

Those who come now as migrants from rural areas find employment mainly in the private sector. They come unskilled, uneducated and desperate for work, and find opportunities only in the private sector, since minimum educational and technical qualifications are now stipulated for all public sector appointments, and recruitment in the public sector is in any case kept at a fixed low level each year. The rural migrants therefore act as a labour reserve for the private sector, and function as cheap labour, with a rapid turnover. They constitute the real urban poor of al-Mehalla today. Labourers in the private sector are less secure in employment, less well-paid, and receive fewer benefits than public sector workers. They are also less well organized, and have less sense of solidarity, and they almost universally aspire to find employment in the public sector.

Although there are sectional identities among both owners and labourers, there is a sense of solidarity within each of these two groups, though to different extents. The owners, despite their differences, appear to have been

developing an occupational consciousness since the sixties. The threat of state control united them to protect their interests, and made them aware of themselves as a social entity. They reacted to the threat by spontaneously organising themselves into associations to safeguard their interests and promote growth. The structural changes taking place at present favour the expansion of the medium-scale factories and tend to promote their group solidarity, while working at the same time to the disadvantage of small-scale owners. The latter are faced with the choice of either reverting to their former status as labourers or remaining small owners. Even if they choose the second option, they cannot realistically hope to join the ranks of the medium-scale owners, for the gaps between the two groups are widening, as they are between the traditional and modern groups among the medium-scale owners.

Sectional identities among labourers are more alive than among owners, and they are less conscious of themselves as a class or as a social organism with a unified identity. They still retain a deeply negative attitude toward their own status as workers, and are united only in their aspirations to move up. Chapter VII explores significant aspects of the history and present-day structure of the labour force in the textile industry of al-Mehalla in order to highlight the processes of generation and management of conflict in the industry since the founding of the public sector weaving company.

CHAPTER VII

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS CONFLICT

This chapter explores the important question of to what extent there is class consciousness and class conflict in the textile industry of al-Mehalla today. It begins by describing the manner in which the founding of the Misr Company factory created major social divisions in the town, examining the relations that grew up between labourers and management, the conflicts that emerged, the type of organisation that existed within the labour force, and the way in which that organisation was mobilised to deal with the problems faced by the workers. The nature of conflict in the medium-scale factories of the private sector will also be analyzed to show why discontent is now greater there than in either larger or smaller establishments.

WORKING RELATIONS IN THE LARGE-SCALE FACTORIES PRIOR TO UNIONISATION

Relations with Ahl al-Balad

During the initial period of operation of the Misr Company factory (i.e., the thirties and forties), the major conflict in al-Mehalla was between the townspeople, the Mehallāwwīyya, and the workers in the factory, the sherkāwwīyya. Various cliques existed within each of these groups, and minor controversies frequently arose among them.

The sherkāwwīyya were blamed by the local community for all changes for the worse that took place in al-Mehalla, from a decrease in morality to rises in the cost of living. Egyptian society accords peasants a very low position in the social structure, inferior to that of urban labourers, and this in combination with the attitudes of townspeople toward the rural migrants made it deeply humiliating for Mehallāwwīyya workers in Misr Company to be associated with the sherkāwwīyya. They thus tried very hard to maintain a clear distinction between themselves and the rural labourers in order to maintain their own identities as Mehallāwwīyya.

Thus relations between Mehallāwī and sherkāwī workers within the Misr Company were marked from the beginning by a sense of alienation which escalated to the point of outright confrontation between the two groups. The Mehallāwī workers became increasingly threatened by the ambiguity in their own positions, and more and more hostile to the newcomers. They became convinced that if these "outsiders" left the factory, they themselves would be able to enjoy all the benefits which the factory had brought to the town and would cease to bear the stigma of association with the sherkāwwīyya. They refused to have any dealings at all with the rural workers, and longed for the "good old days" when they had been full participants in local community affairs.

The Mehallāwī workers thus insisted on calling the rural workers "gharib" (aliens, outsiders), and constantly taunted them with reminders of their inferior origins.

They were only fellaḥīn (peasants), and should not forget that fact. They were continually reminded of their status as outsiders, and barred from participation in the local community. They were humiliated and reviled at every opportunity, were frequently the objects of false accusations, were physically attacked in the factory, and were set upon in the streets and beaten with various crude weapons.

The passive submission of the sherkāwwīyya to the initial verbal attacks which were made upon them gave the Meḥallāwī workers confidence to step up their attacks, which became more and more violent, developing from assaults on individuals to mass attacks on groups of rural labourers. The submissive attitude of the migrants, who were divided into groups based on their villages of origin, slowly began to change, however, and finally they banded together to reply to violence with violence, realising that as they outnumbered the Meḥallāwī workers in the factory there was no need to fear them. Seeing the strength of the rural labourers when they banded together, the Meḥallāwī workers became less free in their attacks, and the antagonism between the two groups also decreased due to growing awareness of their common suffering caused by the appalling working conditions in the factory.

Conditions in the factory were indeed harsh. The Company was in a state of constant development and change, and the workers had no security. There were no labour laws at that time. The labourers worked twelve-hour shifts, and long periods would pass during which they would go to and from work in the dark and virtually never

see the sun. Tuberculosis spread rapidly due to unhealthy and overcrowded living conditions, so that even the government became alarmed at the situation. The medical care which was available was totally inadequate; the only hospital in the town was already over-burdened with the victims of industrial accidents. The sherkāwī labourers had special difficulty in reconciling their old conception of work as agricultural labourers with the definition of labour imposed by the factory.

Strict regulations regarding working hours, the use of the lavatories, clothes to be worn in the factory, and other aspects of the workers' behaviour, were resented, and particularly the imposition of penalties for infringements of the regulations. An even greater source of discontent was the relationship of the workers to the looms themselves. Maintenance of factory machinery was on the whole neglected, and the dangerous condition of the looms intensified the fear with which the unskilled labourers regarded the machines. They saw mechanical looms kill their workmates, and so the looms themselves were their first object of resentment and anger. Ultimately the awareness grew that it was not the machines that were responsible, but rather their owners. This understanding was slow to develop because to the workers the factory was simply their place of work, identified by a sign at the gate--they did not even know who the owners were, nor did they have any idea of where to direct complaints or demands for improvements in working conditions.

The rural workers made conscious comparisons between

life in the villages and life in the factory. In the village if someone was killed the police would come and supervise the burial after an autopsy had been performed by the area doctor. An investigation was carried out, the culprit was tried, sentenced and punished. Compensation had to be paid by the murderer to the family of the dead man. In the factory, many workers were killed by the machines, but no investigation was ever carried out by the police or the management, no responsibility was assigned, no compensation was paid, no attempt was made to ensure that no one else would die in the same way. No one registered complaints against the Company, and the bereaved families filed no reports with the police or claims for compensation or justice. Indeed, they knew of no way of doing so.

In the village the situation was very different. If, for example, a buffalo trampled down someone's crops or butted someone along the way, its owner was held responsible, for if the animal had been well-fed it would not have eaten the crops, and if it were firmly tied it would not wander or harm anyone. In the same way, the owners of the looms should be held responsible for the damage done by them, for if they were properly serviced and if safety rails were erected in appropriate places, they would no longer be dangerous. This understanding of the situation grew clearer, but the fact remained that whereas a buffalo's owner was known to the whole village, no one knew who owned the factory.

Relations Between Labourers and Management

In the thirties, the early years of the Company's operation, the distinction between labourers and managers was very great. The managerial employees of Misr Company were divided into several categories, ranging from the foreman of a workshop, who would normally be a mechanic with a diploma from the technical college in al-Mehalla, to the manager of the entire Company. To the labourers, this group as a whole represented the Company's interests, and was hence alien to the workers.

The worker-manager relationship was characterised at all levels by severity and emphasis on discipline. It was impersonal and unjust. The labourers were completely isolated from the managers, who did not understand their problems or the difficult conditions under which they were living. Regulations were to be followed blindly; no explanations were given and no excuses accepted. No training was provided for the workers, and their lack of skill coupled with the state of repair of the looms was the cause of errors for which the workers paid, often in loss of production and consequent drops in pay, and sometimes with their lives.

Situations of conflict arose daily between the two groups, one of the chief bones of contention being wages. At first the labourers' dissatisfaction was not so much with their gross wages as it was with the amount of pay they actually received. For example, a labourer on a rate of £E 0.32 per fifteen-day period might, due to the Company's severe system of deductions, be paid £E 0.16 or

even less.

As tensions accumulated, managers tended to become more aggressive and severe, and in reaction the workers began to organise themselves for action. The extent to which this action was organised by leaders from within the Misr Company work force as opposed to the trade unions can only be discovered by exploring the nature of the trade union movement at the national level and its operation among the al-Mehalla labourers during the thirties and forties.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNIONS

Developments in the National Labour Movement

The Egyptian trade union movement began in 1899 with a strike by the tobacco industry workers, but effective mass labour action--that is, organised mass movements--remained restricted to Cairo and Alexandria for many years. It was most evident in those sectors of the working population which had had the longest experience of labour activity, such as the railway and tram workers, the dockers, and workers in the tobacco industry.

The Egyptian working class took shape between 1882 and 1914 among groups of destitute peasants who had migrated to urban centres and among industrial tradesmen. The tradesmen had been adversely affected by competition from imported goods and foreign investment, and the guilds which united them disintegrated. The emerging working class was based

mainly in service industries and large factories and industrial units owned by the foreigners, who had obtained privileges and monopolies through the occupation powers. The development of an industrial working class did not end the differences between industrial labourers and craftsmen, and the two groups continued to function side-by-side as their positions deteriorated.

The foreign establishments were characterised by low wages, long working hours, and a great difference between the wages of Egyptian and foreign labourers. These foreign labourers were nevertheless the first to engage in organised labour action in the form of strikes and union activities aimed at improving their working conditions in Egypt. The first years of the twentieth century were marked by a chain of strikes organised and led by the foreign workers with the participation of Egyptian labourers.

The strike constituted a new and important factor at that time in the life of Egyptian workers, and came as a shock to public opinion, the press and the authorities, who considered it a European innovation that had invaded the country. The newspaper al-Liwa, for example, described the lock-in carried out by the cigarette rollers in 1900 as "alien to the East". The newspaper al-Garida depicted it as a "new malady" brought to the East from the West. al-Ahram accused the Egyptian workers of aping the West, and warned them that their corrupt imitation would only do

them harm.[1]

Despite such antagonisms toward the imported form of social action, however, workers in the East learned from their experience of poverty, just as workers in the West did, and the labour movement developed and grew. During the years from 1907 to 1914 the unions, of which there were eleven by 1911, were known as associations rather than as unions. The most outstanding union during this period was the Handicraft Workers' Association, which was founded in 1909 through the efforts of the National Party. It was one of the largest nationalist labour organisations, and its members included both labourers and craftsmen. The largest proportion of the active membership were handicraft workers, because they were the immediate victims of the appearance of foreign goods, which flooded the markets and had a profound effect on the life and work of this group.

Although the years of World War I were a time of growth for national capitalism, they were hard times for the working class. The work of the unions came to a stop because of the laws, decrees and emergency regulations imposed by the British during the war, and the labour movement and the press were stifled.

Side by side with the laws that paralysed the unions and forbad public gatherings, a movement arose among

---

[1] 'Izz al-Dīn, A., The History of the Egyptian Working Class from its Emergence until 1919 (Cairo, 1966), p. 67.

employers which aimed at lowering wages and reducing the number of workers employed. Along with other factors (such as the limitation of foreign trade, the departure of some foreign businessmen and the closing down of their establishments, the stopping of building and development projects and the cutting of government expenditures), this led to a marked problem of unemployment. The working class was also exploited by the occupation authorities, which mobilised thousands of labourers for compulsory service in the Egyptian Labour Corps, which was used to provide back-up services behind the battle lines. It is estimated that about a million peasants and labourers were dragooned into this corps during the war.[1]

In reaction to the hardships suffered by the workers during the war, the union movement grew after the armistice, and the number of unions soon more than quadrupled. The huge majority of these unions, however, were concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria, and union activity was only slight in the provinces. Of forty-three unions, nineteen were in Cairo, eighteen in Alexandria, and only six in the provinces.[2]

The majority of the unions (twenty-eight) were made up of workers in single trades, while the other fifteen were formed to gather together the workers in one particular industrial enterprise or establishment. Among the six unions in the provinces was the union of workers in al-Mehalla al-Kubra. It was founded through the efforts of

---

[1] Izz al-Din, A., The History of the Egyptian Working Class 1919-1929, p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

Sheikh Mustāfa 'Abd al-Nabī in 1919 as a branch of the Handicraft Workers' Association. No records exist of the activities or membership of the union, but Mustāfa 'Abd al-Nabī was known as one of the largest mu'allimīn in hand-loom weaving and was held in great esteem by ahl al-san'a in al-Mehalla. He may have been prompted by his awareness of the dangers which the handicraft industry was beginning to face, and by his many contacts with Cairo and his knowledge of the union movement there. Today, however, no trace remains of the activity of this union among the workers of al-Mehalla, who are not even aware that it ever existed.

With the revival of the union movement after World War I, the original campaign for higher wages and reduced working hours was resumed, while at the same time the leaders directed their efforts toward better union organisation and attempts to gain legal recognition for the unions. Two conflicting lines of thought concerning organisation existed among the leaders. The first, which was supported by the foreigners and by workers in the cigarette and printing industries and other industries that employed large numbers of foreign workers, called for the formation of separate unions for each occupation. The second preferred the revival of the Handicraft Workers' Union as a united union to organise workers in all trades and industries.

The demands of the working class during this period were simple ones, not going beyond improvements in wages, and mass action was also limited. This contrasted with

the pre-war situation, when the labour programme showed a wider consciousness, with demands for compensation for industrial injury, retirement bonuses, joint committees to handle complaints, and even profit-sharing. The labour movement, moreover, came to be dominated by racial or national interests, so that there were demands made separately by Armenian workers, others by Italians, still others by Greeks, and so on.

The working class played a part in working for the 1919 revolution. Thousands of workers and craftsmen participated in demonstrations organised by the students and intellectuals. In addition to such spontaneous participation, the labour leaders organised mass movements, such as strikes, protest marches and sabotage operations aimed at supporting the movement for independence and also at putting pressure on employers for higher wages, shorter working hours and the satisfaction of other grievances accumulated during the war years. Mass labour action toward the bringing about of the 1919 revolution was still only clear and effective in Cairo and Alexandria, which remained the centres of organised union and labour activity.

The growth of the union movement during this period led to the creation of a general workers' union at the national level. The Socialist Party, founded in 1920, played a leading role in the formation of this union; other parties which sympathised with the working class included the National Party. The Nationalists had already played an influential role before World War I in founding,

as mentioned earlier, the Handicraft Workers' Union, one of the first nationalist unions in Egypt. The Party enlisted its young educated members to help the labourers and craftsmen through "People's Schools" and working men's clubs, whose aim was to teach the workers their rights and needs. The influence of the Nationalist Party increased, and the liberal and indeed socialistic ideas of its leaders spread. But the party was not allowed to strengthen its links with the working class, for the British authorities struck the party in several ways, including the persecution of party leaders and the exile of Muhammad Farid. With the coming of the war, the activity of the party came to a stop, and with it its influence on the workers, especially after the Wafd Party came to the fore.

In the twenties the Communist Party began to emerge and took up a special position in relation to the working class, regarding itself as the true spokesman for the aspirations of the Egyptian workers, both labourers and peasants. This position differed from that of the National and Democratic Parties, who merely expressed their sympathy with and concern for the workers and peasants, and aimed at providing educational and health facilities for them, without claiming to represent their interests.

By 1923 the Egyptian Communist Party was well-established, especially in the General Union of Trade Unions. Here its influence was greater than that of the National Party, whose activity had been paralysed since World War I. When the Wafd Party came to power in 1923 it clashed with the Communist Party and the General Union, and as a result

the General Union of Trade Unions was dissolved. To fill the vacuum this created, the Wafd government formed the General Union for Unions of Workers in the Nile Valley, but this union was formed of followers of the Wafd Party rather than followers of the labour movement. It was also isolated from the existing unions, and relied mostly on new unions which were set up superficially, especially in the provinces, far from contact with the labour movement in Cairo and Alexandria. The leadership of the Union, moreover, was made up of elements chosen from the Wafd Party and not elected from among union leaders. The unions therefore set out to demonstrate their independence by severing relations with the Wafd government.

The basic aim in establishing the General Union was to gain control of the labour movement in order to maintain law and order and keep the peace for the safety of the government. This was also the underlying reason for the struggle it undertook for an improvement in working conditions and for the promulgation of labour laws, but at the same time it was the reason for the lack of influence of the union on the daily actions of the working class. There was no political bond between them like that which existed between the National Party and the Handicraft Workers' Union or between the Egyptian Communist Party and the General Union of Trade Unions. In both these cases the political parties followed a policy of attempting to create labour leadership to support the parties while they were in opposition. In the case of the Nile Valley Union experiment, however, an attempt was being made by a party in

power to control the labour movement. Thus the union collapsed as soon as the Wafd fell from power and the party's men were removed from union leadership. This shows unquestionably that the union's links with the government were stronger than its links with the labour movement.

The twenties were characterised by a number of different trends, notably towards effective group activity and the growth of union formations. The unions finally joined together in the General Union of Trade Unions. An attempt was made by some political parties, such as the Egyptian Socialist Party, which became a communist party, to create a political system that would provide for the participation of the unions in government. Nevertheless, by the end of the twenties the working class had lost many of its earlier gains, notably two general unions, the General Union of Trade Unions, and the General Union for Unions of Workers in the Nile Valley.

The economic crisis of the thirties had a direct influence on the situation of the workers. Companies and employers were trying to keep wages down while the prices of essential goods were rising. The work force was confronted by these pressures with no general union or central organisation to lead them in facing the problem.

There were splits in union leadership during this period, and a number of different lines of action aimed at organising the union movement and controlling its leadership. A wing of the Wafd Party, which came to be known as the Constitutional, worked for the formation of an Office for the Organisation of the Union Movement, and founded a

General Union for the Trade Unions. Then Prince 'Abbas Halīm appeared on the scene. With the resignation of the Wafd government, the king and the British nominated Sidqī Basha to form a government. Sidqī came to be known for his autocratic methods. He suspended the constitution and obstructed the processes of law. The union leadership, made up of a group of Wafdites, the Constitutional Liberals and 'Abbas Halīm, joined together to challenge the government of Sidqī, and 'Abbas Halīm was chosen chairman of the General Union for the Trade Unions.

In the opinions of historians of the labour movement, however, the unions existed in two separate realms, connected only by fragile ties. There was the world of the nationalist party leaders, made up of 'Abbas Halīm, the Wafdites and a group of the Constitutional Liberals, quite distinct from the world of the unions themselves, which were scattered among Cairo, Alexandria and the provinces, and the groups of labourers formed in the places of work. The latter had little influence on what happened in the world of the party and union leaders in the heart of Cairo. That is, there was a split between the union leadership and the separate trade unions at the grass roots level.

It is thus clear that trade unions began long before the thirties and passed through several stages of development, including various degrees of solidarity, fragmentation and division between the leadership and the base. Organised mass action took place many times in various factories during the first three decades of the century, but

in al-Mehalla there was no labour organisation for the textile workers except the al-Mehalla Workers' Union. From the scanty evidence available we know that this union was for craftsmen and that its leader was a mu'allim, but there was no similar organisation for the industrial workers, even though mechanisation had begun in the ginneries as early as the beginning of the century.

The Labour Movement in al-Mehalla

Apart from the contradictions which existed within the union system in Egypt as a whole, the labour movement suffered from its lack of influence outside Cairo and Alexandria, and had no meaningful existence either on the organisational level or on the level of the broad base of industrial labourers. Industrial workers in al-Mehalla were not even aware of the developments in the union movement in Cairo, and so their reaction to employment problems and the difficulties that confronted them was largely spontaneous, based partly on their own experience as peasants and partly on imitation of the reactions of the educated employees.

Labourers in the Misr Company factory had from the beginning been discontented and oppressed by a sense of injustice, but they did not know how to express what they felt except by writing letters and petitions of complaint to Cairo. This brought about no change in their working conditions. The only person whom they associated with the ownership of the factory was Tala'at Harb, whose statue stood in the factory yard, but on the rare occasions when

he visited al-Mehalla it was as if the whole government had arrived. He would be surrounded by his entourage, and the workers would have no access to him at all.

The rural migrant labourers were the most disadvantaged group in the factory; their working and living conditions were the worst, and their wages were the lowest. Nevertheless, the first group to take mass action was the educated workers, graduates of industrial training centres. Their jobs were to repair looms and carry out other skilled tasks, and for this they were paid £E 0.05 or 0.06 per day. As educated men they had a status as effendīyya (gentlemen), marked by their wearing of Western suits, as opposed to the labourers' gallalīb, which they could not afford on their wages. The social pressure which was exerted on them to live according to the standards which their status demanded made them even more than the labourers of what they lacked, and in 1936 a wave of rebellion swept through their ranks and they came out on strike.

When the educated workers were paid £E 0.06 a day, a sum which some piece-work labourers could earn, they were filled with resentment and a sense of injustice which alienated them still further from the labourers and eventually brought on the 1936 strike, which came to be known as "the foremen's strike". The migrant labourers, however, were unaware of the basis on which this strike was organised because of the great rift that existed between the different classes of workers.

In al-Mehalla there was no understanding of how an organised trade union could be formed and function. To

peasant labourers the very concept of a trade union was new, and so they had no sense even of the need for one. The notion of a trade union was introduced to al-Mehalla by Prince 'Abbas Halīm; the first announcement of the formation of a union was made during his visit to al-Mehalla of 1936. Before his arrival rumours flew around of how he had been able to force employers and factory owners to bow to the demands of their workers, and the feeling began to grow that this was the man the workers could rely on for help. If 'Abbas Halīm was with them, the feeling went, the king himself was with them, and they would be saved from their misery.

Although the news of 'Abbas Halīm's impending visit was greeted with great enthusiasm, and the idea of a union introduced to the workers at this time gained tremendous support among them, the visit itself was not as successful as it might have been. The workers were unable to understand the Prince's speech, and were left with only the haziest idea of what action he was proposing. All the same, the widespread popularisation of the idea of organising themselves to claim their rights continued unabated among the workers, despite their difficulty in finding a direction for their efforts. 'Abbas Halīm's role in the labour movement in al-Mehalla never went beyond urging the workers to register as union members and encouraging them to believe that unionisation was the solution to their problems.[1]

---

[1]This visit is described in detail in Appendix IV.

Unknown to the workers at the time, political pressures were being brought to prevent 'Abbas Halīm from working in al-Mehalla. The king had exploited the prince's influence with the labour force to draw the support of the workers away from the Wafd Party, which at the time opposed the king. At the same time, 'Abbas Halīm was at odds with the king, and so chose to side with the people against the government of Sidqī in 1936. The members of the General Union of Trade Unions of the Workers of All Egypt put up 'Abbas Halīm as the leader of the General Union, and he worked for an increase in the number of trade unions and a growth in the effective influence of the workers in order to strike a blow against Sidqī's government and the king at the same time.

When 'Abbas Halīm's influence began to show results, King Farūq revoked a decree which had deprived 'Abbas Halīm of the privileges accorded to the descendents of Muhammad 'Alī, and restored to him the title of prince. Thus the split that had existed between 'Abbas Halīm and the king came to an end, and with it 'Abbas Halīm's concern for the affairs of the working class. The main aim of his concern had been to use the workers to strike at Sidqī and the king, but when the Wafd returned to power and his differences with the king were settled, his passion for the cause of the workers died.

While 'Abbas Halīm never returned to al-Mehalla, the idea of the union which he had introduced there did not die. There was, on the one hand, a feeling that if 'Abbas Halīm had been unable to achieve anything the workers

stood no chance at all on their own. On the other hand, the workers dreamed of forming a union without outside help, especially when they remembered how the mechanics and other skilled workers had been able to band together and take action.

After a time the workers decided to begin writing complaints to the government. Their experience in the countryside was that if the irrigation water was insufficient, a letter to the Ministry of Irrigation explaining that the crops were endangered produced action and the water supply improved. They therefore hoped that their simple complaints to the government, telling of the men who died of tuberculosis, of the hours they worked that deprived them of the sight of sunshine, of their pitiful wages, if repeated often enough, would produce results.

The First Strike of Labourers in al-Mehalla

After a time, rumours began to spread that the government was indeed preparing to intervene and institute an eight-hour working day. Hopes began to rise, and dreams filled the men's heads of how they would be able sometimes to eat in cafes instead of in the darkness of their lodgings, of how they would walk in the afternoon through the streets of the town and spend their leisure hours sucking sugar cane with their friends in the park, and of how on the days when they went home to their villages they would arrive fresh and clean in the early evening instead of haggard and exhausted at midnight.

Eventually a notice appeared at the factory announcing

a cut in working hours, but, inexplicably, only for the spinners and not for the weavers. The official justification for this was that working conditions were harder for the spinners because of the cotton dust that lay heavy in the air, but the discrimination was unbearable for the weavers. The spinning and weaving shops were side-by-side, so the weavers could see the spinners leaving work in the bright sunshine at three o'clock, while they still had to work another four hours. Waves of indignation spread through the ranks of the workers, and one Friday during the break for lunch, when all the workers were gathered together, the word began to spread that they should go on strike.

Their ideas were built on the precedent of the mechanics' strike of the year before, and they agreed that when they went back to the machines no one would work. At first they sat at their own machines, but then they gathered in groups, singing traditional songs and encouraging one another in their determination to work an eight-hour day like the others. For the first time they could hear one another speak in the workshop, for the looms were silent.

After about forty minutes, a messenger boy came from the office to find out what was going on. The managers were still at lunch, and always took their time. Eventually one of the technical managers appeared, a Frenchman, with his translator. He stood on a chair to address the workers and demanded to know why they had stopped work. Since they had not organised themselves properly, they had no spokesman to voice their demands, and their reaction

when they saw the Frenchman standing before them, clean and wellfed, was to pelt him with spools from their machines.

After the retreat of the manager the workers were ordered home. This they interpreted as a victory, and spread the word to the nightshift workers, who resolved to follow the same plan of action. The nightshift, however, was met with an ultimatum--work as before or leave. They all left. The workers did not know what to expect the next day, a Saturday and payday. Despite the efforts of the factory guards and the police who were brought in from neighbouring towns, they barricaded themselves into the weaving shop and refused to leave without being paid and receiving assurances of cuts in working hours. After efforts to eject them by force failed, their anger and bitterness grew to such a pitch that they began to smash the looms.

Eventually the management capitulated and paid wages to both day and nightshift workers, but the factory was closed for repairs and alterations for forty-five days and about 100 workers were arrested as an example to the rest. They were, however, undeterred after their victory. When the factory reopened they were told that working hours had been cut from twelve to ten, wages were increased, and each worker would henceforth be responsible for two looms instead of four. The alterations to the factory entailed splitting up the weaving shop into smaller units in order to limit the possibility of joint action in the future, but the workers were pleased with what they had achieved, and took courage for the future.

The Company, however, viewed the strike as a mere "disturbance":

> Some disturbances took place among the weaving and workshop labourers and they came out on strike, hoping to speed up the implementation of the eight-hour shift system. Some of the labourers wanted to expedite the introduction of the new system, and the devil set to work among them so that they responded to the incitements of certain agitators and used the weapons of strike and deliberate damage and destruction against the Company. This regrettable incident was the first of its kind to take place in the history of the Company.[1]

Developments in the Labour Movement During the 1940's

During World War II, Egypt became an arsenal and base for the Allied armies. Factories were established to provide goods needed by the armies, and groups of workers began to be formed in the workshops on the military bases. New groups of textile workers also formed in Shubra al-Kheima in Cairo and in Karmuz in Alexandria. But the workers were divided among separate unions, each one confined to the workers in one factory, so that they functioned much like cooperative societies.

The struggle of the labour movement came to a stop during the war because of the exceptional conditions, martial law, and the issuing in 1940 of a military order forbidding strikes. Nevertheless, some scattered strikes did take place, particularly in the textile industry. The war had an adverse effect on the life of the workers, in contrast to the class of owners, whose profits increased greatly. Prices rose wildly as masses of peasants descended

---

[1] From the records of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in al-Mehalla.

on the cities to work in the industries that flourished during the war, and to join the work force in the factories established by the Allied Forces. Because of the increase in available labour, wages remained fixed at pre-war levels and the workers began to demand increases to help them combat the rises in the cost of living.

After the war, many factories closed down, while others reduced wages or decreased their work forces. Textile factories in Shubra al-Kheima and Alexandria (the Nuzha Company factories) as well as the Misr Spinning and Weaving factories in al-Mehalla dismissed many workers. The economic circumstances of the workers degenerated, and rising unemployment drove them together and unified their unions. The post-war period was thus characterised by independent union activity. The unions freed themselves from party and political control of their leadership and policies and worked seriously toward the formation of a general union of trade unions. This period also saw the return of communist elements who attempted to take over the unions.

According to Raouf 'Abbas,[1] the communist organisations that were formed during and immediately after the war had limited influence. Communist elements in the labour force had recruited 7,000 members by 1942, but the movement never expanded numerically after this point. The Egyptian communists' failure to form a broad national base among the workers was due to their dependence on foreign leadership,

---

[1] 'Abbas, R., The Labour Movement in Egypt (Cairo, 1969, Arabic).

which isolated them from the Egyptian people. Nevertheless, secret communist groups were active among the ranks of the workers in al-Mehalla.

With the end of the war, the Egyptian working class suffered severe hardship. Among the chief problems that faced them were unemployment and a fall in wages, and so from 1946 onward strikes began to spread among the textile workers. One of the best-known textile industry strikes during this period was in Shubra al-Kheima, which became so famous for having received funds from communist organisations that it came to be known as "the Red Area". In 1946 the workers in the National Spinning Company in Karmuz in Alexandria also took strike action, which was repeated in 1948. Workers in the Sabahi Spinning and Weaving Factory, also in Alexandria, struck in 1948.

Among the most important textile workers' strikes during this period were those at the Misr Company in al-Mehalla in June 1946 and September 1947. A link had begun to be formed between industrial workers in Cairo and Alexandria and those in al-Mehalla, and the labour movement in al-Mehalla became part of the Cairo labour movement. Educated elements sympathetic with the labourers had come to control the union initially created by 'Abbas Halīm. In Misr Company there was an engineer who played a leading role in the union, as well as several graduates of technical colleges. The 1946 and 1948 strikes were led by secret and semi-secret workers' committees led by organised elements from the communist groups that existed at the time as well as independent unionist elements. The Company

managed to deprive the workers of a true union that would speak and fight for them, by forming a union led by the Company's men and run by the engineers.

Handloom workers also embarked on collective action against employers, because they were feeling the effects of the introduction of mechanisation during this period. There was no widespread discontent among handloom weavers in al-Mehalla before industrialisation and the formation of the unions, but in the 1948 strike they joined with the industrial workers. During these two strikes, al-Mehalla was beseiged by police and troops, and a situation close to martial law prevailed, with the dention of hundreds of workers.

According to Taha 'Uthman, the basic reason for the strike was the treatment which the administration gave the workers.[1] The pay system was unacceptable to the workers; most were on a system of production-related wages, and each worker had been made responsible for four looms instead of two as formerly. In spite of this, the level of wages had fallen. The Company took one quarter of a worker's production without pay; fines imposed for faults discovered on inspection accounted for another quarter of his rightful wages. There were also fines for lateness, for the wearing of wooden-soled sandals or gallalīb, for the carrying of newspapers, etc. In addition, the Company did not provide medical treatment or first aid, and the new equipment brought in to cool the factory and keep it free of dust

---

[1] 'Uthman, T., Nidāl 'ummāl al-nasīg al-mīkānīkī bil-qāhira (Cairo, 1948), p. 45.

was always out of order, thus eliminating much of the protection that was supposedly provided against the dangers of the job and the diseases it often caused.

All this led to discontent among the workers, which was increased by the Company policy of decreasing the work force, implemented with a view to replacing the looms then in use with automatic models. The workers believed that what mattered to the Company more than anything else, even more than the quality of production, was keeping their wages as low as possible so that they would not even cover the basic cost of living.

The Company attributed the 1948 strike to outside agitators (see p.284). In the view of the managers, the Company had been unable to finance any major projects or developments until the boom of the war years, but once the opportunity had come they had begun the staged implementation of projects to improve the situation of the workers. In their view, the situation of the workers had improved, and could be expected to continue to do so, so that there was no real cause for complaint. The Company took steps to remove the agitators in order to keep the peace and maintain order. By "agitators" was meant communist elements, for it is well known that the communist movement's activities grew among workers in al-Mehalla in the forties and played a part in leading the strikes.

While it is clear that the Company did indeed begin to take measures to improve the lot of the workers after the war, these were limited. It is not surprising that discontent was rife at a time when changes were being made,

for when conditions are extreme labourers are too concerned about their daily struggle for existence to make a coherent protest; when hardship begins to be alleviated and a certain minimum level of economic security is attained, they become conscious of their conditions and are prepared to act.

The development of the union movement in al-Mehalla and the appearance of organised collective action in the form of violent strikes came to an end after the strikes of 1948 as a result of state intervention, the terrorist tactics employed by the police, and the arrest of leading elements. Those who remained in the union tended to support the Company, and so the Company gained control of the union, with the help of the Labour Office and the state police. After this the union worked in one direction and the labour movement in another.[1]

The terrorist tactics supported by the government to overcome labour discontent had succeeded in stopping the conference of unions of Egyptian workers in 1946, and so prevented the formation of a united front in the late forties, stopping the unification of the unions. Labour activity in the late forties thus failed to form a meaningful union, and individual unions were reduced to battling with the companies for which their members worked, only rarely managing to achieve worthwhile advances.

---

[1] Among the elements that influenced the workers during this period was the Muslim Brotherhood, though their exact impact is uncertain because of the lack of sufficient studies on which to base an evaluation of the Brotherhood's role in various sectors of Egyptian society.

The Development of the Labour Movement after 1952

New attempts were made at the beginning of 1950 to form a single comprehensive union including all the Egyptian trade unions. A preparatory committee began work in this direction, but the Great Cairo fire, followed by the 23 July Revolution, put a stop to its activities and caused the postponement of the conference of trade unions.

After 1952 three important labour laws were promulgated. One of these granted freedom to workers to form unions. Another granted freedom to form trade associations, and the third abolished arbitrary dismissal. As a result, the number of unions increased from 488 in 1951 to 1377 in 1958, and the total union membership jumped from 145,000 to 1,433,000.[1] During this period the unions were established on a new basis. A pyramidal structure was developed with the factory as its base; at its peak was the General Union of Trade Unions for Egyptian Workers. The aim of this new system was to form a bond between workers and factory administrators in the interests of the national development plan.

After the wave of socialist legislation of July, 1952, workers in the public sector Misr Company of al-Mehalla had the right to participate in Company administration, share in profits, and receive bonuses for good work. A law was passed reducing working hours to seven per day, resulting in the hiring of over 1,000 workers by the Company. The Company also extended the services it provided for its . . . .

---

[1] Abbas, p. 113.

workers, and built new housing for them, increased the medical facilities available to cover all workers and their families, built schools to provide education for workers' children, and provided increased facilities for amusement and sporting activities.

The new laws related to the union system and workers' privileges and minimum pay levels resulted in a sense of security among the public sector workers in al-Mehalla. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the labour movement, workers' participation in administration did not achieve the desired result of improving production, for the union was controlled by a minority who exploited it to serve their own personal ambitions. According to a textile worker who had been long active in the union movement,

> The union used to help the workers financially, and there was a sense of solidarity, but now, and especially since 1973, union committees are controlled by those who work on them. The union used to be active in the struggle against illiteracy, but this is no longer the case. At present there is a workers' representative who in fact does nothing and makes no effort either to direct the workers or to lead them, even though he is supposed to represent them. What is more, the workers' representative for al-Mehalla in the People's Assembly, who has been a union member in the central committee for ten years, does nothing at all.[1]

From conversations with this representative it appears that the official role of the union is to provide services for the workers, the most important of these having been achieving of literacy for eighty percent of the former peasant workers. All of those who work in the Company are members of the union, from the managing director down to

---

[1] From interview with an ex-member of the trade union in al-Mehalla.

the newest employee. All who pay union dues are entitled to the services of the union, such as support in cases of bereavement.

The fact that labourers in the public sector work for the state, which has all the trappings of a socialist regime, has resulted in more security for them, but that is not to say that labour-management relations are without tension or group militancy. It is true that there have been no violent major strikes since 1948, but discontent has never entirely died, and three minor strikes took place in 1973, 1975 and 1979.

One of the informants who is a manager reported that there are indeed daily commotions among the workmen, and complaints and demands are made. "But we try to absorb discontent as it arises, so that it does not escalate and develop into a strike." Nevertheless, since public sector workers in al-Mehalla constitute part of the labour movement of Cairo and Alexandria, and since means of communication are now advanced and rapid, any change that takes place in one sector has a direct influence throughout the system. Any demand which is met for a group of workers in one sector is presented on the same day by workers in other sectors, and this is a major cause of friction, for in some cases these demands are not based on legally recognised rights.

Information concerning reasons for recent strike action is contradictory and no official statements are issued concerning the subject, so all estimates are based on conversations, which follow conflicting opinions from group

to group. It seems that strikes are called for one reason and then incorporate others as they progress. In general, the strikes of 1973, 1975 and 1979 were for improvements in the situations of particular groups, such as the group of employees in the Misr Company holding medium-level technical qualifications, and escalated as other demands of the workers were added to the basic issue.

In many cases, laws are variously interpreted by different companies, and this leads to discontent among workers who are not treated according to the most favourable interpretation, and they then demand equal treatment. For example, the Nasr Company in al-Mehalla and the Misr Company both pay incentives to their workers, a production incentive when production targets are met, and an export incentive when export targets are met. In 1979 export incentives were paid only to Misr Company workers, because Nasr Company had not attained planned export levels. As a result, the Misr Company workers received larger sums than the Nasr Company workers. The latter demanded that they receive the same amount of money as the Misr Company workers, and when the head of the management council refused they called a strike.

The head of the management council was thus forced to issue an order for the workers to be paid, but the Ministry of Labour intervened from Cairo. Misr Company workers and other labourers in the textile industry were anxiously awaiting the result of the strike, for if the Nasr Company workers were paid the export incentive without meeting the target, the workers in every company would be entitled to

the same payment, whether or not production goals had been met. After the Ministry's intervention, no incentives were paid, some workers were arrested, and the head of the management council was dismissed for issuing the order to pay the workers. The workers were placated by being given ten days pay in advance, and the dispute and the strike ended.

PRESENT-DAY LABOUR RELATIONS IN THE MEDIUM-SCALE FACTORIES OF AL-MEHALLA

As shown in Chapter VI, the status of private-sector owners of medium-scale factories has changed, and this group is now at the top of the social structure of al-Mehalla. The workers too are better off than before, but their position has not improved as much as that of the owners, and the widened social gap between the two groups has increased the alienation between them. There is also a significant gap between the positions of public sector workers and their counterparts in private industry.

Although there is still discontent among public sector workers over the provisions of the labour laws and frequent demands for amendments to these laws to establish industry-wide equality, public sector employees have obtained improvements in their economic status and working conditions thus far not provided to private sector workers. The fact that strikes have taken place only in the public sector is due to the nature of work in the very large-scale factories rather than to relative conditions in the two sectors. The ease with which public sector workers can be mobilised results from several factors, among them their higher degree

of consciousness of the laws and regulations applying to labour, more contact with textile workers in the labour movement in Cairo and Alexandria, and a higher level of education.

Nevertheless, since the 1960's, private sector workers have become increasingly aware of their rights and of their relative deprivation, vis-a-vis the public sector. They live side-by-side with public sector workers, and see the gains which these workers have achieved through collective action and the application of the labour laws, and they aspire to the same gains. As their ambitions have increased, however, so have their problems and conflicts with the owners, and thus far they have been unable to organise effectively to demand their rights.

This group has no guarantee whatsoever of secure employment, and thus any conflict in the private sector is more acute and involves greater risk. The majority of the private sector workers are unskilled and uneducated, and thus face difficulties in organising themselves and in dealing with the institutions which have been established to deal with their problems. In fact, these new institutions are neither efficiently organised nor free of corruption. Frequent changes in and amendments to the law, coupled with lengthy procedures for the settlement of disputes, frequently work against the interests of the labourers. During the sixties the tendency was for the labour organisation to side with the workers, right or wrong, and owners generally submitted to regulations without protest out of fear of nationalisation. After 1973 these attitudes

changed, however, and the cumbersome bureaucracy involved in the official settlement of disputes now often drives labourers to arrange private compromises with the owners.

Sources of Discontent among Private Sector Workers

The new laws themselves are problematical. In some cases they are ambiguous in specifying to whom they apply, public sector workers or workers in general, and in many others they are difficult to enforce in the private sector. Evasions of labour laws which were clearly intended to apply to all types of workers, including regulations dealing with minimum wages, working hours, and participation in the state insurance system, take many forms. Minimum wages are enforced for neither the labourers who are drawn from among rural migrants nor for those who come from among the urban poor. Because of the high level of unemployment among these groups, they can still be employed in the private sector for very low wages, with a new worker being paid between £E 0.20 and 0.30 per day. These rates are lower than the daily wages received by peasants.

While employers are exempted from registering employees who are under the age of eighteen for the national insurance system, all employees over eighteen must by law be included in this program. However, private sector factory owners explain to their workers that their contributions for health, old age and unemployment insurance would entail a ten percent reduction in their wages, and thereby secure their agreement not to participate. The result is that workers in the private sector lack the employment security

offered by the public sector.[1]

Even where minimum wage laws are adhered to, employees in the private sector have much lower incomes than workers in the public sector factories. In part this is because the public sector workers must have higher qualifications for employment, but it is also partly due to unequal application of other provisions of the wage laws.

Production workers in the public sector currently earn a minimum of about £E 20 per month, and may eventually rise to earn as much as £E 70 per month.[2] Production workers in the private sector earn between £E 15 and £E 30. While public sector workers receive regular increments, based on the length of time they have been working, the law did not stipulate any increments whatever for private sector workers prior to 1976. Thus once an employee was earning £E 12 per month, the legal requirements had been met and he had no legal right to a rise, even after years of employment in the same factory. As a result, the minimum monthly income of an old weaver in the public sector is about £E 50, whereas it is only £E 20 for his counterpart in the private sector.

---

[1]The head of the insurance office in al-Mehalla stated that one reason that the owners refuse to participate in this system is that its cost to the employer is unrealistically high, twenty percent of the employee's salary.

[2]Public sector workers must be literate and have completed or been exempted from military service. The workers are divided into five categories, each of which is further subdivided into ten grades. Normally a worker can expect to be promoted from grade ten to grade four over a period of about seventeen years. Service workers are paid at a daily or monthly rate, depending on grade, while production workers receive a basic wage, also determined by grade, plus a piecework rate which varies according to the type of cloth they weave.

Another area in which there are continuous disputes is that of official holidays. When workers demand to be paid for a new official holiday, owners refuse, claiming that this holiday is intended for workers in the public sector only, which frequently leads to the workers consulting the Labour Office or even the Ministry of Labour to obtain written statements of the scope of the relevant law.

Although the private sector weavers have numerous grievances, they have great difficulty in obtaining redress for their complaints. Owners take pains to avoid employing workers who are members of unions, and take action against those who either join a union or consult the Labour Office with a complaint. While it is not easy for an owner to fire such an employee outright, owners have many ways of making life difficult for employees whom they see as troublemakers, and the workers therefore hesitate before seeking outside help with their problems.

The Perspective of the Owners

The owners of medium-scale textile factories in al-Mehalla still view the ideal factory as one in which human relations are of primary importance and management is based on direct personal relations with the employees. They are very conscious that such values are not being materialised in their factories today, but justify the change in their patterns of labour relations by saying that the labourers have changed due to the promulgation of labour laws and a deterioration in the workers' orientation toward their work. It is only with his core group of permanent employees that

an owner is able to sustain the personal relationships which characterised labour relations in the past.

As the owners see it, the worker today is concerned with his rights and not his duties, and the law serves his interests rather than those of the factory owner. These laws have "spoiled" the workers, making them less obedient and conscientious about their work, and making it impossible for anyone to compel them to do their jobs properly.

While the owners acknowledge that conflict has increased greatly between themselves and their workers, they still maintain that most of the labour unrest in the textile industry lies in the public sector, and that private sector employees would not participate in labour activities if the public sector workers did not incite them to do so.[1] They believe that the source of labour unrest is the huge scale of the Misr and Nasr Company factories, which make work relations impersonal and anonymous, so that the workers have no one within the factory to whom to take their grievances, and turn instead to the Labour Office or go on strike.

The medium-scale owners see their own factories as much more intimate in scale, and view themselves as constantly available to their workers. If workers should

---

[1] When major strikes take place among the public sector workers in al-Mehalla, the owners of private-sector factories located near the public sector works generally close down to avoid interference with their workers by the public sector employees. Factories located outside the town in areas distant from public sector factories open for work as usual. Whatever the effectiveness of this measure, private sector workers do not take strike action on their own initiative.

find themselves unable to speak directly with the owner, they always have access to the core of permanent employees, who can communicate to him any complaints that arise. Thus they deny that the workers have any real on-going grounds for resorting to unions or the the Labour Office. They believe their workers to be unified, because they sometimes present specific demands as a group, but do not expect them to take any united action which might damage their work places.

According to these owners, such conflict as does exist in their factories is chiefly the result of the new labour laws, the incitement of workers by the public-sector labourers, and the poor attitudes of the workers themselves. They feel that relations were smooth during the craft phase of the industry and on into the period of mechanisation. While they admit that there is continuous conflict, they say that this is because the new laws have changed the workers' attitudes toward work. One of their many complaints about worker attitudes is the extensive absenteeism and illness among the labourers. From the point of view of the owners, the workers want to be absent from work but are unwilling to accept any penalty for not coming. They claim that on days of major football matches thirty percent of their workers are unwell.[1]

---

[1]Under the labour laws, an employer is entitled to dismiss an employee for extensive absenteeism, but in practice this is difficult because such a dismissal would be deeply resented by the other workers. Originally a physician selected by the employer had to verify the worker's illness, but the workers believed that he was in league with the owner and therefore reluctant to grant adequate leave. This problem no longer arises because the doctors who certify illness are associated with the social insurance system.

Older workers, the owners say, are more cooperative and make many fewer complaints. Younger workers, by contrast, complain constantly about overtime, wages and increments. The owners say that they are in conformity with labour laws and that these complaints are therefore unjustified. So far as wages are concerned, they believe that their workers are paid more than they earn, and few seem to take note of the fact that the wages are very low relative to the cost of living.

In general, the owners try to resolve complaints from the workers without allowing them to reach the labour office, but the rate at which such grievances have been reported to this office has escalated. An average of fifty complaints per month were reported in 1960; by 1970 the rate had increased to sixty.[1] Clearly more such complaints would be registered if the penalties imposed by the owners for consulting this office were not so stringent. All the same, the owners maintain that the workers who do report to the Labour Office are a deviant minority.

Although they attribute much of the conflict between themselves and their workers to the very existence of new labour legislation and institutions, many owners also take the attitude that these changes relieve them of the responsibility of looking after their workers. Some owners decline to deal with worker grievances, expecting labourers

---

[1] This assessment is based on the calculations of an officer reviewing the records of the al-Mehalla Labour Office. The researcher herself was not given access to these records. These complaints can be divided into two broad categories: those of workers who have been dismissed or employers who wish to dismiss workers, and those of workers making some kind of a demand, with regard to wages, holidays, or other rights and privileges. The latter far exceed the former.

to seek redress through official channels. Others try to prevent their workers from contacting the Labour Office at all costs, and if a worker does seek aid there, the employer will thenceforth refuse to help him, challenging him to let his organisation handle his problems for him.

There is a clear contradiction in the owners' view of worker discontent, as they maintain that grievances are minor problems occurring mainly among new workers. As shown in the examination of the labour force made in Chapter IV, however, the great majority of the workers in these factories are exactly these new, young labourers. Thus the implications of the state of discontent in these factories are clear, if the least satisfied constitute the majority of all workers.

The Labourers' View of Owners

The labourers' perceptions of work relations in the medium-scale factories are quite different than those of the owners. In the view of the labourers, labour relations are not now smooth, nor were they in the past. Discontent exists among both handloom weavers and labourers in private factories; some of its sources are shared by the two groups.

Workers in the private, or Mehallāwī sector of the textile industry feel strongly that they suffer serious disadvantages when compared with workers in the public sector. They are exploited by the owners and their pay is low. The labourers who were previously craftsmen see that their working conditions have changed but their standards of living have fallen. They lament the passing of the old

days, when they used to dress in silk gallalīb, had leather shoes, and ate meat daily, although they say that even then not all owners had good relations with their workers. The fact that the handloom industry faced continual crises created many problems for the labourers. They were often dismissed without compensation, and owners used to exploit workers and pay them poorly.

One craftsman spoke highly of the way his mu'allim had treated his workers in a time of crisis in 1950. Most of the mu'allimīn of handlooms were dismissing their workers between 1950 and 1952, even though there was already a trade union for handloom workers, because there was a slump in the industry. This mu'allim, however, tried to decrease his volume of production, but did not dismiss any workers. He eventually became bankrupt, and sold about ten feddans of land in order to keep his business going. He asked his labourers to produce less, and they agreed to squeeze their wages rather than earn nothing at all.

Craftsmen who are still operating handlooms today see themselves as the most exploited group in al-Mehalla's weaving industry. Under the law, workers must be registered with the Labour Organisation in order to secure insurance and pension rights, but most of the handloom craftsmen are not registered. The major complaint of this group is that most of them are elderly, but if they die their families receive no pension, and if they become ill there is no one to look after them. Handloom operation requires more energy than mechanical loom operation, and this group is in particular need of good nutrition. Weaving is considered to be

an artistic profession but a tiring one. The healthier the labourer, the more he can produce, but due to the lack of medical care most craftsmen in this group have health problems. Labourers blame the owners for their poor working conditions, yet they tend not to register with the Labour Organisation because registration is an obstacle to finding work, and craftsmen who are registered receive unfavourable treatment from the mu'allimīn.

A craftsman in a relatively big factory described conflict between owners and piecework labourers, whether handloom workers or weavers on mechanical looms, as frequently resulting from problems of bad yarn. With state control of the spinning factories, the quality of some kinds of yarn deteriorated. The good quality yarns were either exported or distributed to the public sector, and those of poor quality were left to the private factories and workshops. Bad yarn slows the process of weaving, and this has an impact on wages for pieceworkers. When labourers who are registered with the Labour Organisation complain of the quality of the yarn, the owner's common reaction is "It is the yarn of your organisation!" If a labourer is not identified with the Labour Office, the owner tries to compensate him for the time lost because of the quality of the yarn.

Labourers in the private mechanized factories believe that they have more grievances than the craftsmen. They view working on mechanical looms as in itself creating problems. One labourer who was originally a craftsman and became a mechanical weaver in the same factory with the

same owner, remembers hardly any conflict with the owner during the handloom period, but with the mechanical looms there are constant problems. A major cause of these problems is the tendency of mechanical looms to break down. With the handlooms, there is no part that is liable to break or go wrong: "Nothing stops a handloom except myself." He feels he has complete control over the handloom, whereas a machine often needs repairs which may take hours. The factory mechanic may try to insist that the worker, being technically responsible for the machine's function, should not be compensated for this loss of production. The labourer insists that he should not be made to suffer for a breakdown beyond his control, and an argument ensues. Some owners take a passive attitude and neglect workers' problems, so the workers go and complain at the Labour Office.

Another source of conflict which arose with mechanisation is that of flaws in the woven cloth. Any fault in the weaving on a handloom can be spotted and corrected immediately, whereas with mechanical looms it is impossible to correct errors in the fabric. They have to be left, but at inspection the faulty part is deducted from total production, thus affecting the pieceworker's wage. A labourer with limited wages does not readily accept any decrease. He may start to argue and complain, and friction may grow between him and the owner. Thus the labourer feels that he is working on a machine that he cannot fully control, and yet he is being held fully responsible for its production.

This situation produces considerable conflict between him and the owner.

The wage system also creates discord. The majority of the workers in the medium-scale factories are piecework labourers. New rates of pay per metre of cloth produced vary for different kinds of textiles; there are constant claims that rates of pay are too low and demands for increases in the rates for particular fabrics. When one factory raises a particular rate of pay, workers in other factories demand the same increase, or sometimes leave their factories for better pay elsewhere. In general factory owners try to avoid this problem by agreeing on equal rates of pay.

Some factory owners pay higher rates to older workers than they do to younger ones for the same type of cloth. This causes a three-sided conflict between the older and younger workers and the factory owner. An example of this situation occurred in a factory whose workers were mostly under eighteen years of age. The young workers stood together against the owner because he was paying them at a lower rate than the older workers, even though they might have been employed in the factory for a shorter period. Since the employer was dependent on the young workers, he faced the possibility of a major problem with production.

One of the workers described the incident as follows:

> We registered complaints at the Labour Office and the union that our rates were low, but no one took any notice. The government does not care about our problems. The employees in these organizations are naturally in league with the factory owners and all they do is try to calm us down and bring about a reconciliation with

> the owner. After several days the Labour Office informed us that they would not take any action on any of our demands, so there was nothing for it but to go to the owner. We were very persuasive with him and said he should be generous to us and that we were dependent on his goodness and generosity, and that he should regard our coming to him as a reconciliation. He told us that we should just get down to work and he would see us right in the end, because of course his business was being held up and during the dispute we were all working halfheartedly and so production was down. And so the problem ended and he gave us a rise of eight to nine milliemes per metre, which amounts to about an extra pound over a fifteen-day period.

Many disputes also arise from the workers' demands that the factory owners allow them to join the Labour Organisation. Many workers in these factories claim that the owners refuse to enroll them, and when an official from the Labour Organisation comes to register the number of workers employed in a factory he normally goes to the owner's office. While he is there, the workers not enrolled are told to leave the factory and sit in a nearby cafe. The workers are accustomed to hearing the owner tell one of his lackeys to "get rid of the pigeons", meaning to get the unregistered workers out quickly before the official makes his check.

Apart from this, most workers in the private sector do not belong to the union, for a variety of reasons. Some have never heard of the union, and some feel that the union is ineffective and offers no assistance to the workers, so they are unenthusiastic about joining. Some of those who would like to join hesitate because it is well-known that employers resent the workers who are union members, and any worker who actually asks the union to solve a problem

is branded an agitator. The following description of a relevant incident was given by a worker who had had a dispute with his employer:

> I worked as a warper in a factory and was paid a weekly wage, but I asked the owner to put me on piecework because he used to make me do all sorts of jobs and give me only a low wage. Then one day he asked me to sign a paper saying I had received a cost of living bonus. I told him I'd neither asked for nor received any such thing, but he said that it was the law. I refused to sign and went to the union. They told me they would take me to a lawyer, so I paid a pound and asked the lawyer to see the owner. When the owner was notified, he sent me some people who asked me to give up the case, but I refused and said if he wanted me to give it up we had to make a fresh start; he should put me on piecework and not fixed wages, and I should get my bonus. I stayed on at the factory for some time and then left and tried to set up in business on my own. This was unsuccessful, so I tried after that to get a job in a factory. This proved difficult because al-Mehalla is a small town and news travels fast, so when I reported the factory owner to the union all the factory owners heard about it and were afraid to give me a job lest I do the same to them.

Problems with the owner can lead to the dismissal of a worker, since workers in these factories have no tenure. In one case, a warper worked in a factory for ten years, and by degrees became responsible for production and equipment there, as well as supervising a number of boy and girl workers. The worker relates the story of his leaving the factory as follows:

> The factory owner hit one of the girl workers very hard in front of me. As a father with children of my own, I told him he should never hit a girl, and that if she was careless in her work he could make a deduction in her pay or report the matter to her family. But the owner, in spite of all the years I had worked for him, simply shouted at me and abused me in front of the boys and girls--and I was a foreman. I felt very hard done by to be treated that way after so many years--that he should swear at me in front of my

workmates, and then he said I didn't work for him any more, and so I left. None of my workmates stood up for me at the time, because anyone who did would have been out with me. I never reported the owner because I've always been honest and straightforward in my work, and I don't like complaining and things like that, even though I used to see the head of the Labour Office and the Labour Organisation coming to take sheets and towels and cloth and presents.

In many cases contention arises between workers and owners because labour laws are simply not applied. Disputes centre around such issues as cost of living increments, compensation for industrial injuries, sick leave and medical costs. One worker interviewed, for instance, explained that when his hand was broken in an accident at work, the employer did not send him to a doctor but rather to a traditional medical practitioner, a bonesetter. The employer paid half the fee and the worker the other half, and he was given no sick leave but continued to work and even had deductions made from his pay when he was unable to work a full day. The workman also paid for his own subsequent treatment. The complaint is frequently made that owners do not cover medical expenses, as they are legally required to do. When workers apply to them for doctors' fees, they tell them to go to a hospital where they can be treated free.

The end result of these continuous disputes is the insecurity of the labourers. They do not settle in one factory, as was the pattern in former times and is now the case in the public sector, but are constantly on the move, looking for a "better" factory where either the pay is better or they are allowed to join the Labour Organisation and so obtain some of their rights, or where the owner has

a reputation for implementing the labour laws and giving the workers the required benefits.

From the employment history of one of the workers in a medium-scale factory a picture emerges of the extent of the upheavals in these factories and the reasons for conflict between workers and employers.

Ahmad has been a textile worker for many years. He began his career at an early age, operating a handloom in his father's workshop until 1950, when he was twenty-five years old. At that time the market for handwoven textiles was slack, so he turned to mechanical looms and worked in a medium-scale factory for five years, becoming a skilled operator of jacquard looms. In 1956 he left the factory. He recalls his reasons for doing so:

> In 1956 the state insurance plan was established and so the factory owners began to give the older workers like me a hard time, getting rid of them and bringing in new workers, because, as they thought, the older workers would start demanding cost of living increments.

So Ahmad left this factory for another medium-scale factory where he stayed for only three months. He then left this factory because the rate of pay there was lower than he had received in his previous job and also lower than that paid to other workers in the same factory. Ahmad says:

> I used to earn £E 0.005 per towel while other workers in the same factory would earn £E 0.03, and when I asked to be paid at the same rate as the others I was told I was just a new worker and couldn't possibly be paid on the same scale as those who had been working there longer. So when they would not raise my rate of pay, I left.

After this he worked in a third factory between 1957 and 1959. The rate of pay per towel was low in this factory

and when the workers asked for a rise the owners said that whoever was not happy could leave. Many did, including Ahmad.

He next went to work in the fourth factory, where he stayed from the end of 1959 until the end of 1963. He left when the son of the owner took over the factory's management and changed the rates of pay that had been agreed on between his father and the workers. The workers would not accept the new rates, and many of them left. After this Ahmad worked in a fifth factory, from the end of 1963 to 1973, but during this period many disputes arose between him and the factory owner.

Ahmad complains that the owner used to move the workers around every day from machine to machine, and the better the worker the more likely he was to be given a troublesome machine which less skillful workers could not operate at all.

> The owner had introduced some new machines and when they were assembled the experienced workers were set to operate them. Because they were new, they were not yet running smoothly and constantly broke down and needed adjustment. This delayed production, and we asked the owner to pay us the average wage we would earn on ordinary looms. He refused, and we went to complain to the union. But although the union should take the workers' part, they came out in favour of the owner because he had come to an arrangement with the union representative.

Ahmad was involved in another dispute with the owner because of a medical problem. One day when he was mending a loom with a mechanic his hands were injured. The insurance office sent him to a hospital and he received treatment for nine months, which was covered by his insurance. As a result he lost twenty percent use of his fingers and was

compensated accordingly. The doctors recommended that he should do only light work, but the owner simply said, "How can I give you light work--you're a textile worker and a service worker?" "I took him to court," Ahmad relates, "but got no satisfaction."

> The union was not for me but against me in the case, because the leader of the union, or the committee members, rely on a report from the union representative. The representative goes to the owner and says so-and-so has lodged a complaint against you. But instead of writing a report in support of the worker, he is paid by the owner to write a report in support of him. None of my workmates stood up for me either, because if anyone did he would be persecuted at work. All the owner has to do to punish him is to put him on a troublesome machine that will make him sick of work. In the end I lost the case, because whenever I put a pound into it, he put ten. He sent some of his men to beat me up in an attempt to stop me pressing charges, and at that I took the matter to the police, but even so I finally left my job at the factory without being given my rights.

Eventually Ahmad chose to go back to weaving on a handloom after all the difficulties he had faced in his factory jobs, and he has been operating a handloom since 1973. As a handloom weaver he does not have the right to belong to the Labour Organisation, and so he has to pay his own medical expenses and gets no holidays with pay, but he sees this as the only drawback, and in any event the same situation exists to a certain extent in the mechanised factories. Several factors compensate for lack of membership in the Organisation, the most important being the fact that the owners of the handlooms run modest enterprises and are close to their workers. The rate of pay is quite high; handloom weavers earn between £E 1 and £E 2 per day, according to the type of cloth they weave. Handloom weavers

also have a greater freedom in their work, and in choosing their hours, than do factory workers. Ahmad sums up the most important advantages as follows:

> The work is run in the traditional way. There is no danger like that attached to working mechanical looms. The owners don't lord it over the workers, and there are no incidents.

Ahmad feels that these advantages, coupled with the character of his workmates in handloom weaving, give him peace of mind, which he never found in the factories. The craftsmen who are his workmates are better than industrial labourers in that they care for each other, help each other, cooperate together and are concerned for one another's welfare.

The industrial labourers, he says, are quite different. They harbour malicious intentions, and when they find that one of their number is doing well they try to damage his loom. He explains that this is because of the inequality that exists among them. One might earn £E 0.07 per metre, another £E 0.05 and another £E 0.03, because they are producing different types of cloth. This makes them draw comparisons among themselves and envy one another. The different speeds of the looms also create inequality; one worker may produce forty metres a day, while another can produce only thirty because his loom runs less efficiently. With handloom weavers the situation is different. They all receive equal pay for equal work, and so there is no malice or jealousy.

A further source of conflict in the medium-scale factories, according to Ahmad, is that the workers set the labourers against one another. The foreman of every shift wants his workers to be the ones who attain the highest

production rate. This puts them into bitter competition with each other, and the end result is that no worker helps another and each thinks of nothing but his own interest, to the extent that a worker may take sides with the factory owner against another worker. Some of the workers interviewed indicated that private sector labourers have no sense of solidarity, and only a low degree of awareness of their problems, while public sector workers, because they have higher wages and more security, are able to take time to think and so have a better understanding of the situation.

Thus labourers who have been working in the Mehallāwī sector for a long time and who originally did not want to work in Misr Company now aspire to work in the public sector. Owners argue that there is no difference between workers in the public sector and the private sector and that relations between owners and workers are governed by labour laws in either case. The labourers, however, always point to discrepancies between the application of these laws in the two sectors.

In addition to concrete advantages to working in the public sector, there are less obvious ones, such as less demand for manual work and more openings for the elderly and the handicapped. Some labourers feel that the public sector has spoiled the labourer by imposing narrow specialisation. The weaver is no longer able to perform the tasks of a mechanic, and now waits for someone to put a few drops of oil into his mechanical loom. Thus he has become ignorant of the machine.

The common procedure for settling disputes in the

private sector is to first approach the owner. Labourers find that owners almost never give them their rights, and that Labour Office officials usually take the sides of the owners because they get all sorts of presents and favours from them. Thus most of the elderly labourers, who cannot afford to be in constant trouble with the owners, simply accept the owners' terms. Young labourers more readily take their disputes to the Labour Office, and even embarrass official representatives by speaking of their collaboration with the owners. Taking their complaints to the Labour Office may give them some rights, but it ruins their reputations as good workers and lessens their chances of finding employment. When owners find that a labourer has had a problem with another owner and taken him to court or to the labour office they refuse to employ him.

Thus the labourers tend to feel that neither the Labour Office nor their trade union is useful for solving their problems. Leaders and labour representatives in these institutions are alienated from the broad base of labourers. Thus despite the conflicting interests between labourers and owners, we find that labourers in many cases resort to the owners to solve their problems rather than to the trade unions or Labour Offices.

CONCLUSION

With the developments which have occurred in the larger society have come changes in owner-worker and manager-worker relations in the textile industry of al-Mehalla.

When mechanisation first began, the major area of conflict was in the Misr Company, whence it extended to the community of al-Mehalla as a whole. It was then no longer restricted to manager-worker conflict, but involved labour-labour and rural-urban conflict as well.

Conflict between labourers of different social backgrounds gradually died out, but labour-management relations deteriorated until mass action was taken by workers in the Misr Company against the Company. This action took the form of strikes and the organisation of trade unions. Prior to 1961 the labour movement was characterised by the spontaneity of its reactions. At first, random militant protests were aimed at obtaining improvements in working conditions. The most militant groups were the educated, skilled workers, who led the organisation of mass action and propagated the idea of forming a trade union. The protests of this group served as an inspiration to the masses of discontented, semi-skilled, uneducated, rural migrant labourers, whose protest action, when it came, was violent and disorganised, directed against the machines themselves as well as the managerial staff. Their demands were directed exclusively at achieving an improved economic position and gaining some degree of employment security.

There were undercurrents of discontent in the Mehallawi sector in the period before 1961, but no collective action or demonstrations took place except among handloom weavers, who were dismissed in large numbers in 1948 because of the fall in demand for their products. Due to the limited size of most private sector factories, patron-client relations

prevailed, and working conditions were much better in Misr Company. In the forties and fifties, most of the owners of these factories were mu'allimīn operating handlooms and a few mechanical looms. The development toward mechanisation took place gradually without much change in the composition of the labour force.

The system of work was largely dependent on the types of looms in use. Working hours were flexible, and the work was not oppressive. The mechanical looms used at that time were easy for trainees to handle, and the owners had a direct relationship with their workers. All of this contrasted with the situation in the Misr Company, where working conditions were hard and the rural workers did not receive economic returns which were commensurate with their effort, as there was a degree of incompatibility between a rural background and employment in the Company. At that time employment in the private sector was more desirable than working at the Misr Company, although eventually the relation between the two switched.

For all these reasons, the labour movement in the textile industry of al-Mehalla was concentrated among the workers in the Misr Company prior to the promulgation of the socialist laws of the fifties and sixties, because discontent and a sense of grievance were more widespread there than in the private sector. With the change in the Egyptian political system to a sociálist regime, labour relations in the factories changed. The workers' demands had been entirely material and not related to any ideology, but the introduction of the labour laws brought political demands

for participation in decision-making and profit-sharing, in addition to purely material issues such as rises in wages, insurance, pension rights and security of employment.

Following these developments, the type and area of conflict changed. In a socialist system, public sector workers are employed by the state, and socialist legislation had to be enforced in the public sector. It was not easy to extend these benefits to cover private sector workers because of the sizes of the establishments that existed in the private sector and the way the work was organised within them. The gap between the positions of workers in the public and private sectors therefore began to widen. At the same time, the composition of the labour force changed. Whereas Misr Company had formerly relied mainly on rural migrant labourers and the Mehallāwī sector on handloom weavers, the Company now employed mostly trained, educated workers, while the private sector took on unskilled, uneducated rural workers.

The basic causes of disputes between owners and managers and their workers also changed. Disputes were still many and constant, but individual complaints now arise more in the private sector. In general, discontent and grievances are now more widespread in the medium-scale factories of the private sector than in either the big factories of the public sector or the small workshops.

In the small textile workshops labour relations are entirely different than those of medium-scale industrial enterprises. Even where mechanical looms are used, the organisation of work follows the traditional pattern that has

existed since the craft phase of the industry. It is true that labourers in the workshops, as in medium-scale factories, earn low wages and do not enjoy the advantages of insurance, pensions or continuous employment, but the small establishments are characterised by good, personal labour relations, and the workers continue to enjoy a degree of freedom in choosing their working hours. This results in a sense of security, for the factory owner has a meaningful relationship with his employees, knowing their problems and trying to help with them.

In these small factories, most of the workers are in any case relatives of the owner, or at least his friends, and this, as well as the small scale of the operation, facilitates the establishment of good relations. Disputes between workers and owners are therefore limited and personal, and are usually resolved within the family. In general, if a dispute does arise between an owner and a worker, the owner calls in the worker's father or mother and reports their son's behaviour. In the same way, if a workman needs a loan or some other favour from the owner, he brings in his family to approach him with the request.

Thus the workers in the medium-scale private sector factories of al-Mehalla are shut out of two worlds. They have lost the protection of the mu'allim which they enjoyed in the craft stage of the industry, but they are prevented by their lack of training, skill and education from obtaining the benefits and security accorded by employment in the public sector.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The present study has had two major aims: first, to furnish a basic analytical description of the social and economic conditions underlying the development of class relations in an industrial town, al-Mehalla al-Kubra, and second, to discover to what extent there is class identity, class consciousness and class conflict among the industrial group of the town.

This study utilised the anthropological approach, investigating the problem of changing class relations in a holistic manner at the micro-level, but also incorporated into the analysis processes at the macro-level. Traditionally, anthropological studies are concerned with small-scale social units, which makes their focus the micro-level, and leave the macro-level to other disciplines. In dealing with an urban problem, however, one cannot ignore the macro-level of analysis without creating a barrier to full understanding of the problem as a whole. This study therefore investigated changing class relations within the context of national and international relations.

Organisationally the thesis falls into two main sections. In the first part, made up of Chapters II through IV, the context in which the textile industry of al-Mehalla

developed is presented. International, national and local processes and developments which have influenced groups in the textile industry are discussed, with emphasis on assessing both external and internal factors which have helped to make al-Mehalla the community it is today.

Chapter II describes the urban setting of al-Mehalla, showing that the town has been an important urban centre for centuries, throughout which time the textile industry has dominated the town economically and demographically. Chapter III takes issue with the commonplace assumption that real industrial development began in Egypt only with the introduction of European techniques and "modernisation", and that prior to that time industry in general was stagnant and in a state of underdevelopment. In fact, a vigorous textile industry existed in al-Mehalla long before any European influence was felt in the town, and for a long period of time that industry's existence was very likely due to the town's isolation from international events, along with its close association with the peasantry.

The collapse of Muḥammad 'Alī's industrialisation schemes has been similarly attributed to the backwardness of the country and the unwillingness or inability of the citizenry to adapt to the demands of industrialisation, and partially to his attempts to gain independence for Egypt. It is impossible to test the first component of this argument empirically, as there is no data available on the attitudes of Egyptians toward work and economic

development during that period, but the evidence from al-Mehalla indicates that this is not necessarily a convincing explanation. As has been shown in the early chapters of the thesis, the textile groups in al-Mehalla, although they could still fairly be described as "traditional" and conservative during the opening decades of the twentieth century, nevertheless seized every opportunity for expansion and industrialisation. They failed to develop and change only when strong factors beyond their control prevented them from doing so. Such strong external forces, in the form of interference from foreign powers, were also brought to bear on Egypt during Muhammad 'Alī's reign, and in themselves constitute a sufficient explanation for the failure of his ambitious plans for industrialising the country.

The nascent dependency which grew up during the time of Muhammad 'Alī became the dominant characteristic of the Egyptian economy during the time of the British occupation. Egypt became integrated into the world system, and its economy became wholly centred around a single cash crop, cotton. The export economy which developed led to a vast influx of capital, large-scale immigration of foreigners, and an increase in awareness on the part of Egyptians. This development has led some analysts to raise the question of why no native Egyptian industrial group developed before the twenties and thirties, and why Egyptians invested in land rather than in industry. Implied in such queries is the notion that there is

something about Egyptian culture or history which has produced a character unsuited for industrial work. Issawi has made this question explicit, saying that

> ...a partial explanation is in the advantages foreigners have had over Egyptians. But other causes must be sought, probably in historical and cultural fields.[1]

In al-Mehalla, however, there was an industrial group which tried very hard to adapt and develop industry throughout the occupation period, despite the fact that investment in industry was very risky due to the vulnerability of the economy to fluctuations in the world market for cotton. At the same time, British colonial policy aimed to prevent the development of a textile industry in Egypt, and a climate was thus created in which the industry was crippled in its attempts to develop and modernise.

It is thus very clear that industrialisation in the textile industry was blocked by Western penetration of the economy, and it was the foreign occupation itself which prevented the natural development of the craft-based industry into a modern industrial establishment, at least as far as the al-Mehalla weaving industry is concerned. Once the boom years of World Wars I and II made real development possible, local weavers took advantage of every opportunity to expand and modernise.

Even the attempts of the Misr Group, which did have sufficient capital to minimise risk in investing in modern industry in al-Mehalla met with incomplete

---

[1] Issawi, C., "Egypt Since 1800: A Study in Lopsided Development" in Issawi, C., The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914 (Chicago, 1966), p. 366.

success, but this too must be understood in the context of international events of that time. The attempt of the Misr Group to eliminate external constraints on the development of an Egyptian industrial establishment came when Egypt had been profoundly integrated into the world market system as an agricultural unit, and the retardation of the country's economic development made it impossible to develop an industrial establishment without importing both capital and expertise from the West, perpetuating the state of dependency and making conditions very difficult for Egyptian workers.

Comparison of the Misr Company factory and the Mehallāwī factories between the late twenties and the 1952 Revolution makes particularly clear the extent of Western domination of the modern mechanised sector. The Misr Company was attempting true independence, but could not function in sufficient isolation to achieve its goals fully, as it was producing for a world market and was thus vulnerable to fluctuations in prices and to the vicissitudes of a system in which it had no influence. The Mehallāwī group, by contrast, was able to industrialise readily, despite its limited capital, because it directed its production to the local market and was thus less tied to the Western-dominated world economic system.

After the July Revolution of 1952, the Egyptian government was able for the first time to control some of the determinants of national industrialisation. Massive amounts of state capital became available for investment in the public sector, and the government adopted a deliberate

policy of protectionism and commitment to the establishment of truly independent, wholly Egyptian industry. Because this policy involved extensive nationalisation of large firms during the early sixties, some potential investors in the economy were deterred from putting their money into industry for fear of losing their capital. The Mehallāwī sector of the al-Mehalla textile industry, however, was so committed to industrialising that neither the threat of possible nationalisation nor the competition of large-scale industry prevented them from investing in their factories. During the first years when true independence was possible, raw materials were freely available for the first time, yarns were spun locally, and looms and their spare parts were produced in the town. Mehallāwī owners responded quickly to these new opportunities by expanding as rapidly as possible.

It is thus clear that the lessening of Western control made it possible for the native industrialists to develop and expand. Their attitudes toward their industry were basically unchanged. They had always been committed to development and expansion, but had at many points lacked opportunities for real growth. The strategies for survival and patterns of adaptation which had grown up during the occupation years were heavily relied on to make expansion possible during the Nasser era, but on a much grander scale. While state control ultimately checked the development of the biggest private-sector factories, it created new opportunities for smaller owners, of which they were quick to take advantage. As is characteristic of the

Mehallāwī group, their responses to the changed circumstances were creative, and they readily perceived ways of manipulating the situation to the benefit of their businesses.[1]

These internal adaptations on the part of the textile industry of al-Mehalla are discussed in Chapter IV.. This chapter details the production processes of the industry of the town, and shows how the operations in producing finished textiles were susceptible to re-patterning and adaptation to external trends. The responses of workshop and factory owners to events which they could not effect were made in terms of phenomena which they could control; depending on the degree of control of particular owners, they were able to maintain or alter their positions despite external influences.

The second part of the thesis, Chapters V, VI and VII, deals with the question of to what extent there is class identity and class conflict as a result of these historical developments and the transformation of the industry from a craft phase to a mechanical phase. In the analysis of Mehallāwī class relations, an attempt was made to identify various groups in the city, with particular emphasis on the class of owners and the class of workers. The discussion of social stratification is

---

[1]Since the seventies a new type of dependency relationship has begun to grow up as a result of the Open Door Policy, which is reintegrating the Egyptian economy into the world system. Although this policy is beginning to have an impact on the textile industry in al-Mehalla, it is still too early to assess its full consequences.

divided for analytical purposes into a consideration of economic or class position, discussed in Chapter V, and an analysis of status, presented in Chapter VI. In Chapter V the objective criteria that identify people's positions in the economic order--i.e., the manner in which people relate to the system of production--are investigated. In Chapter VI, status groups for which assignment of individuals is based on subjective criteria rooted in the culture of their community are discussed. The thesis then seeks to account for people's perceptions of their class positions, and to discover to what extent they perceive themselves as members of economic groups with shared interests and concerns.

It was essential to differentiate between economic position and status position in order to depict the social reality of al-Mehalla, because people in this community sometimes have prestige and power which is not commensurate with their wealth. Thus economic and status factors had to be separated analytically in order to discover the extent and manner in which they are connected in the town.

Status groups may be differentiated from classes on the basis of style of life, sense of honour, power, and ability to influence others, and ethnicity. Thus the concept of social status is applied to

> ...a typically effective claim to positive or negative privilege with respect to social prestige so far as it rests on one or more of the following bases: (a) mode of living, (b) a formal process of education which may consist in empirical or rational training and the

> acquisition of the corresponding modes of life, or (c) on the prestige of birth, or of an occupation.[1]

As shown in these chapters, economic position does have a powerful influence on social position, but it has never been the sole determinant of status in the al-Mehalla textile community. In part this is because throughout the twentieth century there has been great fluctuation in the economic positions of groups in the textile industry in the town, so that current economic position was not a stable indicator of the long-run prospects of an individual. Perhaps an even more important factor has been the homogeneity of the town in terms of one industry pursued by essentially one approach to production over most of the period in question, along with the fact that al-Mehalla's long history as a textile centre has involved not merely a tradition of weaving but a strong commitment to the field, so that shared standards existed for evaluating individuals not only in terms of their financial success but also in terms of their commitment and their standards of excellence with regard to their craft.

Until the introduction of mechanisation on a wide scale, the capital necessary for a craftsman to purchase his own loom and thus become an owner was relatively limited, and during good times there were frequent shifts in status. Intermarriage within the group was common,

---

[1] Weber, M., The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation (New York, 1964), p. 428.

and awareness high that current economic status was less valuable as an indicator of long-range prospects than skill and industry. Thus the network of kin relations extended throughout the industry, largely unrestricted by concern for economic status per se, and the emergence of distinct classes of owners and workers was impossible. An additional factor in the lack of true class identity was the small scale of the workshops in the Mehallāwī sector and the close relationships between mu'allimīn and their men, which made relationships up and down the hierarchy of production more intimate and enduring than horizontal relationships based on class and class-related factors.

The very homogeneity of ahl al-san'a also meant that shared values had grown up over a very long period of time among craftsmen in general, and these values over-rode economic considerations in many situations. Thus cotton merchants, who at some periods were among the wealthiest of the local citizens, were viewed as gamblers, and were not accorded the status and respect given to even much less wealthy mu'allimīn. A more extreme example, the moneylenders, were universally despised.

This system began to break down as industrialisation increased, but never entirely disappeared. Prior to the sixties it was impossible to speak of distinct classes of owners and workers within the Mehallāwī textile industry. Now the growth of relatively large private-sector factories, coupled with the threat of nationalisation in the sixties,

which led some of the largest owners to begin investing their capital elsewhere, brought owners a new understanding of their shared interests, and had an impact on the identities of the largest owners in particular. The development of the Yarn Association and the Owners' Association in response to the ration system and the expansion of the public sector thus marked a shift in group consciousness.

These organisations included owners at all levels, but their primary organisers and those on which they had the most influence were the biggest private owners, some of whom had already begun to differentiate themselves for the first time from the remainder of the owners in terms of life-styles and patterns of residence and consumption. The holdings of such owners are vastly greater than those of the small-scale owners, so that diversity within the group is too great for them to operate as one interest group. Thus the situation remains complex; no simple distinction between owners and workers can be made even today.

At the same time that very modern, capital-intensive factories operate in the private sector, there are small-scale, semi-mechanical shops in which the owners are in the ambiguous positions of being both owners and labourers, and, predictably, their relations with their employees are very different than those in the big factories. It is not merely differences in scale of operation which have created distinctions among groups of owners, however.

The Mehallāwī community is very much aware that the opportunities for economic mobility have decreased in the last two decades, and that a small owner is unlikely to be able to join the ranks of medium-scale factory owners, in spite of the fact that they all hope to be able to do so.

Economic position has thus become a more reliable indicator of social position than it once was, but even today the two are not identical. Even among the medium-scale owners, strong social differences continue to militate against the development of a stronger group identity. These social differences are recognised by the local community, who identify owners as "traditional" versus "modern", as well as in terms of their scales of operation. The "modern" owners have ceased to be identified primarily with the al-Mehalla textile community, but have established strong social links with equivalent classes in Cairo and Alexandria, while the traditional group more nearly maintains the social patterns of the past and is rooted in the local community.

There is thus an emerging class consciousness among the owners of the medium-scale factories of al-Mehalla in that they have come to see themselves as having common interests vis-a-vis the state, the public sector and the workers, and have begun to take joint action to defend these interests. The question then remains to what extent is the conflict between these owners and their workers and the militancy of the labourers a product of class consciousness among the workers, and can such

conflict be viewed as true class conflict.

Chapter VII discusses the new factors which were brought into play after the establishment of the large-scale private sector Misr Company by a group of national capitalists who were not part of al-Mehalla. The rapid expansion of the Misr Company factory even after nationalisation brought new factors into play in the local community. The importation of large numbers of unskilled rural workers disrupted the homogeneity of the town, and created a type of conflict which had not previously existed there. The new "sherkawi" group did not share the values of the Mehallawwiyya, nor did they have the advantages of the patron-client relations which characterised the local industry.

Due to the abysmal working conditions in the factory and their alienation from the townspeople, the sherkāwī labourers were eventually driven to mass action. The militancy of these workers was manifested in numerous clashes with the management of the factory prior to 1960 and after 1963; the question here is to what extent did this antagonism constitute an expression of class consciousness.

In a study made of the labour movement in three British towns, Northampton, South Shields and Oldham, in the nineteenth century, the central theme is the development and decline of a revolutionary class consciousness. John Foster, in assessing to what extent a radical class consciousness existed in these three towns, states three essential conditions for its emergence. These are:

"an organised labour movement, the use of extra-legal tactics, and a degree of radical leadership."[1] We shall attempt to discover to what extent such conditions were in existence with regard to the labour movement in al-Mehalla.

Before 1963 the labour movement was disorganised. Its militancy was simply the expression of a spontaneous reaction to impossible working conditions. Rather than being a true labour movement, what existed in al-Mehalla during the thirties and forties were small organised groups of workers in the midst of a great mass of unorganised labour whose main cultural ties were still with the countryside. Their survival depended on their continued employment in Misr Company, but they had no job security, and this, along with wages, was their main concern. They derived no enjoyment from their jobs, being constantly oppressed by low wages and harsh working conditions, but the important thing to them was that they be able to keep working; they did not expect job satisfaction.

By the end of the forties attempts were being made to organise labourers into trade unions. Some radical elements existed both at the level of formal structures and at the grass roots level, but in the absence of a broadly based labour movement these elements found themselves isolated and ineffective. The alienation of the formal leadership from the working masses was an additional

---

[1] Foster, J., Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (London, 1974)., p. 102.

factor in the disorganisation and disunity of labourers in al-Mehalla.

Information concerning informal leadership during this period, as in the present, is framentary and difficult to evaluate. It is therefore impossible to adequately assess the role played by informal leaders, who are part and parcel of the general mass of labourers, or to know to what extent they could be called radical. What can be examined, however, is their general impact on the labour movement.

Throughout the history of the movement, until 1960, conflict and labour-owner or labour-management struggles were over immediate issues that offered no direct chalelnge to existing sectional identities. They were disputes characterised by a lack of ideological basis. At the same time, union activity, whether legal or illegal, rarely took on any clearly political character. Union leaders and informal leaders among the workers failed to unit the labourers, and were also unable to use their positions to instigate a wider struggle against the system itself. We cannot, therefore, say that militancy in al-Mehalla before 1960 was the product of class consciousness among the workers.

The labour force in al-Mehalla in this period may be defined as "sub-proletarian". The workers were irregularly employed, semi-skilled and largely illiterate. They came from various social environments, but were mostly from rural backgrounds, with some urban groups. As a group, their origins lay in the inability of a traditional

agricultural society to cope with a vastly increased population, and in the social and economic destruction of the traditional crafts. The category "sub-proletariat" is not sharply differentiated from the rest of the working classes, for in Egypt at that time most labourers were unskilled and illiterate, and those in unskilled employment one day might be unemployed the next.

Ian Clegg describes the world view of the sub-proletariat as

> ...a rejection of facticity and rationality, by an encapsulation within a system that is felt to operate as a result of a maleficient will of its own. Because poverty and misery must be endured as an immediate part of things, rather than as a possibly alterable result of the economic or social system, the individual trapped in this belief system is denied the opportunity of becoming conscious of his own alienation.[1]

Thus the sub-proletariat cannot become conscious of itself as a class. It can participate in revolutionary action, but only in a spontaneous and apocalyptic manner; it is incapable of sustained revolutionary effort. For Clegg these characteristics differentiate it from the true proletariat, who have a sense of class consciousness and are capable of that effort.

Given the nature of the labour movement, trade union leadership and the work force in the textile industry in al-Mehalla, we can assert that there is no clear evidence for the existence of class consciousness prior to 1960. To assess class consciousness for the period following

---

[1] Clegg, I., Workers' Self-Management in Algeria (New York, 1971), p. 105.

1963 using Foster's criteria is difficult, because the radical changes that took place in the labour movement during this period and the promulgation of labour laws was not the result of a development of the labour movement into a progressive political movement, nor of the emergence of radical leaders among the workers so that the labour movement challenged the political and ideological status quo. Rather, the change was imposed by a group outside the working masses, the petty bourgeoisie. The government was changed willy-nilly into one of state capitalism, and inspired by socialist thinking, politically based changes were made in the economic system.

Thus political and ideological change took place in the formal structure of the labour movement, but at the grass roots the masses of industrial labourers were still mainly concerned with material self-interest, and so judged the economic and social system by their material results, and not so much by their ideology. The working masses cared not whether they lived under a socialist or capitalist regime provided that regime resulted in material improvements in their lives. This narrow material self interest is more prevalent among medium-scale factory labourers, who are almost by definition semi-skilled, uneducated and lacking in material security. By contrast, public sector workers today are efficient, educated, skilled and securely employed; these are the characteristics of modern industrial organisation. Thus the full-time labourer in a modern industrial system (i.e.

the public sector) has a social identity defined by his role as a labourer, but the unemployed or irregularly employed labourer has, as Clegg has put it, "a negative social identity, frozen in a half-world between the traditional and the modern."[1]

It therefore appears that the labourer's objective situation as a member of a class does not ensure his consciousness of that situation. We see in the Mehallāwī sector a labour force that is still disorganised. The workers do not see themselves as part of a larger group with similar interests, nor do they perceive their role in the economy. Their interest is served by relating to employers rather than to other workers. Their plans for the future centre around economic improvement, and that not for the group as a whole, but each for himself as an individual. They aspire, too, to rid themselves of this negative identity by becoming owners or accumulating enough capital to start up in some independent business. Accumulation of capital is possible not only through hard work and saving, but for the lucky ones by working temporarily in an Arab state where high salaries are paid. Workers are eager to work abroad, but the opportunity is not available to all. Another common aspiration among this group is to become bureaucrats, "sitting at a desk doing nothing". They realise that their lack of education makes this impossible for them, and so it becomes their aspiration for their children.

---

[1]Clegg, p. 108.

None of the labourers interviewed hoped his children would follow him into jobs as labourers. They all cherished the hope that they will gain an education and work in government offices, but this remains a dream, almost a fantasy, capable of fulfillment only in the far-distant future.

An inability to express their hopes of changing their material and social status in a reasonable and rational way is characteristic of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Bourdieu, in a survey carried out among Algerian labourers,[1] sees a relationship between the different kinds of workers and their attitudes toward their positions in the economic system. He found that a high degree of "irrationality" existed among the less-skilled, less-educated and less well-paid workers. This can be partially attributed to the rural background of most of this group. The change from the value system of a traditional society to that of an industrial economy inevitably creates disorientation.

Bourdieu's notion of the identity of the uneducated semi-skilled has some truth in it, but in Egypt the new socialist legislation has made formerly irrational hopes realistically attainable. Free education has made mobility possible for many workers, and labourers are eager to educate their children. Once their children attain any recognised educational standard the door is open for them to change their status from labourers to some other occupation. Thus the aspirations of the Mehallāwi sector

[1] Clegg, p. 199.

labourers are irrational insofar as they are only materialised for the few, but rational insofar as there are indeed some who have themselves, or through their children, fulfilled the dream.

It is true that up to the present concern for the material aspects of improvement dominates the attitudes of industrial labourers in both the public and Mehallāwī sectors, but at the same time it cannot be denied that socialist change, even at the purely formal level, has had an impact on the labourers' awareness of their conditions and their identity. The fact that it was socialist legislation that brought about material improvements for the labourers has motivated them to support and safeguard the ideology that motivated this change. Thus the structural change at the state level has brought the public sector labourers to the threshhold of class-consciousness, but it is nevertheless too early to speak of a homogeneous class of labourers in the textile industry in al-Mehalla.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

BASIC INFORMATION ON 100 FACTORY OWNERS

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Faruq (al-Banā)	1 jacquard loom	1972	private-sector mechanic	al-Mehalla	1 girl, 1 boy	brother-in-law owner	literate
'Abi (al-Banā)	1 local narrow loom	1972	private-sector mechanic	al-Mehalla	1 girl, 1 boy		literate
al-Sayad (al-Banā)	1 local narrow loom	1972	private-sector mechanic	al-Mehalla	1 girl, 1 boy		literate
al-Siwia (al-Banā)	2 local wide looms	1972	weaver/mechanic small factory	al-Mehalla	2 boys, 1 his son	2 relatives are owners	literate
al-Yamani (al-Banā)	2 local wide looms	1970 - 1 loom 1972 - 1 loom	Misr Company weaver, then mechanic in small factory	came from Samamed in 1963	1 boy, 2 girls; 1 boy and 1 girl are his relatives	none	literate
Kabīl (Saba' Binat)	2 local looms	1972	Misr Company weaver	Tanta	2 boys, 1 girl	none	literate
Muhammad Nasif (Mehallet al-Burg)	2 local narrow looms, 1 shift	1977	weaver/mechanic small factory	al-Mehalla	3 boys, 2 girls	brother is Misr Company weaver/mechanic.	illiterate
'Abd al-Razik al-Mansi (Mehallet al-Burg)	2 local narrow looms	1974 - closed 1977, now works as private-sector mechanic	weaver/mechanic public sector	al-Mehalla	2 boys		literate
Muhammad (al-Shēikh)	2 local narrow looms	1976	weaver/mechanic	al-Mehalla	3 boys, 1 girl	father handweaver	primary certificate
Hussein Higazy (Mehall t al-Burg)	3 local narrow looms	1974	electrician	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 2 girls, 1 boy	father is handweaver and loom owner	literate
Ibrahīm Muhammad (al-Banā)	3 local wide looms, 1 shift	1974	Misr Company weaver	al-Mehalla	3 boys, 1 girl	brother is Misr Company weaver	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
'Abd al-Hayy al-Khawaya (al-Bana)	3 local narrow looms, 1 shift	1972	handweaver and owner of bicycle rental and repair shop	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 2 boys	father owns 1 handloom	literate
Rafa't al-Badawī (al-Sheikh)	3 local wide looms, 1 shift	1972 - 1 loom 1974 - 2 looms	assistant in father's workshop and merchant	al-Mehalla	1 part-time mechanic, 2 labourers, 2 boys	father and two brothers own handloom shops and two other relatives	preparatory certificate
'Abd al-Mu'nim 'Abu-Wahba	3 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1975	unsuccessful building contractor	al-Mehalla	5 boys	brother was his partner but sold out to become teacher	preparatory certificate
Samir al-Badawī	3 local wide looms, 1 shift	1973	Misr Company employee	al-Mehalla	part-time mechanic, 2 labourers, 2 boys	father mu'allim, 2 brothers and 2 other relatives own mechanical looms	industrial diploma
al-Sayed Hamid al-Sihli	3 local narrow looms, 3 handlooms, 1 shift	1976	handloom craftsman, then mu'allim	al-Mehalla	1 labourer, 1 girl, 3 boys	father mu'allim, brother handweaver	illiterate
Ramadan Mustafa	4 local wide looms, 1 shift	1973	owner of workshop for winding motors of mechanical looms	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 1 girl, 3 boys	brother is Misr Company weaver	primary certificate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Rashid al-Shukri al-Rahim	4 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1974	secondary school student	al-Mehalla	7 boys	uncle and 3 nephews owners of textile factory	secondary certificate
Hassan Higazi (Mehallet al-Burg)	4 local looms, 1 shift	1971	mechanic in small factory	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 1 boy	Male relatives are textile labourers; father is hand-weaver	literate
Rif'at Bedawi and brother (in town)	4 local looms, 1 shift	1975	Misr Company employees, then merchants	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 1 boy	grandfather, father, uncles in industry	industrial diploma
al-Tanbari	4 local looms, 2 shifts	1976	mechanic in small factory	al-Mehalla	3 labourers, 1 boy	father hand-loom craftsman; brothers joint owners of weaving workshop; nephews weavers in private factory	illiterate
al-Muhandis	4 local looms	1972 - started with 2 looms	mechanic in small factory				
Rabi al-Suni (Mehallat al-Burg)	4 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1972	weaver in small factory	al-Mehalla	4 labourers, 4 boys	grandfather and father were handloom weavers; brothers are labourers in industry	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Muhammad al-Talimi al-Garib	4 local narrow looms	1974	Mechanical weaver at Nasr Co. Started as handloom weaver	al-Mehalla	6 boys	Father and 4 uncles mu'allimin	Illiterate
Mahmūd Nur al-Diād (Mehallet al-Burg)	4 local looms, 2 shifts	1974	Employee at Nasr Co.	al-Mehalla	4 labourers, 2 girls, 2 boys	Brother-in-law	BA, commerce
al-Rabi'yi (Mehallet al-Burg)	5 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1972	Mechanic in a small factory, then travelled to Lebanon and made money to buy looms	al-Mehalla	8 labourers	Father owned 1 handloom	Educated in religious institute
al-Ahwal (Mehallet al-Burg)	5 local looms	1971	Mechanical warper (began as hand warper)	al-Mehalla	Sells his yarn temporarily in the black market when he gets an order		
al-Kalini	5 local looms, 10 handlooms	1971 (started with two handlooms in 1960)	Wage labourer in his father's factory	al-Mehalla		Father mu'allim	Literate
'Abu-Lila (al-Banā)	6 local looms (2 jacquard, 4 narrow)	1956, began with one loom bought with a year's wages	Mechanic in private sector	al-Mehalla	1 mechanic, 6 boys	Father handloom weaver	Literate
'Abd al-Hamīd Arwas (Mehallet 'Abu-'Alī)	6 local narrow looms, 1 shift	1968 started with 1 loom in brother's factory	Mechanical weaver in small factory, then with brother	al-Mehalla	2 labourers, 6 boys	Father owns 1 handloom, brother owns workshop	Literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Muhammad al-Dintawi (Mehallet 'Abu 'Ali)	6 narrow looms, 1 shift	1974	Student, then bus conductor	al-Mehalla	9 boys	Brother owns workshop; father mu'allim owner of mechanical workshop; three brothers textile labourers	Preparatory Certificate
Muḥammad Badāwī (al-Banā)	6 local wide looms	1974	Assisted his mu'allim father one year, then went to Kuwait	al-Mehalla	5 labourers, 4 girls, 3 boys	Two brothers own mechanical workshops; father mu'allim, brother-in-law owns mechanical workshop	Industrial Diploma
'Abd al-Khaliq 'Uda (Mehallet al-Burg)	6 local looms (2 wide, 4 narrow), 1 shift	1965	Weaver/mechanic then maker and seller of mechanical looms	al-Mehalla	6 labourers, 2 girls, 3 boys	father mu'allim	Illiterate
Lutfi (Mehallet al-Burg)	6 local looms	1970	Dyer in private sector factory				

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Mustāfa Salah Meki (Mehallet al-Burg)	6 narrow looms, 1 shift	1958	Dyer in father's factory	al-Mehalla	10 labourers	brother is dyer	literate
Imām Toman (Sūq al-Laban)	7 local looms (2 wide, 5 narrow), 1 shift	1970 (1 loom in operation in 1977)	Secondary student, then in partnership with father until purchase of two looms	al-Mehalla	1 boy, 1 girl	Father owns dyeshop; father-in-law and 3 brothers-in-law own mechanical workshops	secondary certificate
Muhammad Rashad Badaya (Mehallet al-Burg)	8 narrow looms	1968	student	al-Mehalla	14 male labourers, 4 girls	father and grandfather	diploma in commerce
Muhammad al-Azaz (Mehallet al-Burg)	7 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1969	weaver in Nasr Company, inherited father's factory	Kafr al-Sheikh	6 labourers, 2 boys	father-in-law in industry	primary certificate
'Atef Muhammad Musa (al-Banā)	8 local looms, 1 shift	1976	clerk in textile factory, then weaver	al-Mehalla	3 labourers, 5 girls, 12 children	all 10 brothers are textile labourers in private sector	secondary certificate
'Abd al-Kader (al-Banā)	8 local looms (4 wide, 4 narrow) and 12 handlooms	1968	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	4 girls, 6 boys, 1 mechanic (son of owner)	father is a mu'allim, brother owns workshop and handlooms	literate
'Anwar Baraka (Mehallet al-Burg)	8 local narrow looms, 2 shifts	1970	private-sector mechanic	al-Mehalla	15 labourers	2 generations of handloom weavers	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Khedr al-Abyari (Mehallet al-Burg)	8 local narrow looms, 1 shift	1966	private-sector weaver	al-Mehalla	8 labourers (3 males, 3 girls, 2 boys)		literate
'Abd al-Mu'nim 'Ayad	8 local looms (6 narrow, 2 wide), 1 shift	1971	carpenter specialised in mechanical looms	al-Mehalla	5 labourers, 4 boys 4 girls	father hand-loom weaver; brother-in-law labourer and assistant of 'Ayad	literate
Faruq 'Abu al-'Enin	8 local looms, 2 shifts	1969	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	15 labourers, girls, 5 boys	whole family in weaving; father mu'allim	preparatory certificate
Muhammad Rashad Bidaya (Mchallet al-Burg)	8 local looms	1968	student	al-Mehalla	14 labourers, 4 girls, 4 boys	father and grandfather	commerce diploma
Hassan Muhammad Balaha and partners (Saba' Binat)	9 looms (4 British, 5 local), 1 shift	1963	partner in father's textile factory	al-Mehalla	3 labourers, 2 girls	6 relatives	industrial diploma
Muhammed Mahmūd Nalia (Mehallet al-Burg)	10 local looms (7 narrow, 3 wide)	1969, 3 looms; brother was partner 1971-73	supervisor in uncle's factory	al-Mehalla	4 labourers, 4 girls 8 boys	uncle owns factory	secondary certificate
al-Maghrabi	10 local looms	1970, started with 1 inherited loom	denter	al-Mehalla			

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Rizk and al-Sarafi	10 local looms	In 1958 began as partners with 4 looms, then 10 then split up; one remained, the other expanded to 30	Rizk - labourer in private factory; al-Sarafi - Misr Company labourer	al-Mehalla			not recorded
Sayad al-Badāwī (Suq al-Laban)	10 local looms	1961	Cloth merchant	al-Mehalla	not recorded	father and brother	literate
Yusif al-A'ma	10 narrow looms, 2 shifts	1962	partner in father's factory	al-Mehalla	10 labourers	uncle	primary certificate
Muhammad al-Simsaf	11 looms (5 jacquard, 4 wide, 2 narrow)	1965	labourer on mechanical warper	al-Mehalla	not known	brother and in-laws	literate
al-Sayed 'Abu-'Amr	11 looms, 2 shifts	1954	handloom weaver	al-Mehalla	20 labourers, 5 girls, 5 boys	4 brothers-in-law and other relatives	literate
Fawzi Zaki 'Abu-Shawali (Suq al-Laban)	12 local wide looms	1960 (began as brother's partner)	assistant in brother's factory	al-Mehalla	6 labourers	father mu'allim and owner of mechanical shop	literate
al-Said Suliman Fargal	12 local looms (4 narrow, 8 wide), 2 shifts	1970	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	9 labourers, 4 girls, 4 boys	whole family in weaving; father handloom weaver	literate
Ismail Muhammad Sami ('Ezbet 'Abu Shehin)	12 local looms	1958	Misr Company weaver	al-Mehalla	20 labourers, 10 boys	none	illiterate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Musad Muhammad al-Azazi ('Ezbet 'Abu Shehin)	12 local looms	1966	owner of electrical fittings shop	al-Mehalla	25 labourers, 5 girls	none	primary certificate
Ibrahīm Mansūr	12 local looms	1963	owner of handloom shop	al-Mehalla	25 labourers, 5 girls	father mu'allim	primary certificate
Ahmad Hamdi Hassān (Mehallet al-Burg)	13 local looms	1970	civil servant, Ministry for Land Reclamation	al-Mehalla	3 labourers, 2 girls	none	secondary certificate
Muhammad 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Kuni	14 local looms	1953	mu'allim (mudaq)	al-Mehalla	12 labourers, 2 girls	father, grandfather, many other relatives	literate
Mustāfa 'Abu 'Ushish (Mehallet al-Burg)	14 local looms	1965	assistant in father's spare part shop for looms	al-Mehalla	16 labourers, 6 boys	father owns factory	preparatory certificate
'Abd al-Hamīd Nur al-Din	14 local looms	1960	student	al-Mehalla	35 labourers, 5 girls	father owns factory	B.A., science
al-'Abd	15 local looms	1965 started with two looms	private sector weaver	al-Mehalla		uncle owns mechanical shop	
Muhsin al-Sufugi (Mehallet al-Burg	15 local looms	1958	private sector	al-Mehalla	18 labourers, 12 girls, 8 boys	brother is weaver	literate
'Abd al-Glil 'Abu State (Dayer al-Nihya)	15 local looms	1956	weaver	al-Mehalla	20 labourers	one brother weaver, one cloth merchant	primary certificate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Faruq al-Termi-sani	15 local looms, 2 shifts	1970	Misr Company weaver	al-Mehalla	40 labourers	none	literate
Yassin al-Abyad (Mehallet al-Burg)	16 local looms	1972	student	al-Mehalla	9 labourers, 2 girls, 3 boys	none	preparatory certificate
Rageb 'Adib (Suq al-Laban)	16 local looms, 2 shifts	1955	warper	al-Mehalla	15 labourers, 5 girls	father was handloom mu'-allim	illiterate
Muhammad Yehya al-Faŕ	18 local looms	1954	son of mu'allim	al-Mehalla	15 labourers, 5 girls	whole family in industry	industrial diploma
Mustāfa Ghase (Shukri al-Qawatfi)	20 local looms	1965	traditional tailor	al-Mehalla	50 labourers	whole family in industry	illiterate
Hamdi 'Abd-Allah Ismail (Mehallet al-Burg)	20 local looms	1965	employee of High Dam Corporation	al-Mehalla	20 labourers, 4 boys, 6 girls	cousin	B.A., Arts
Ibrahīm Farīd (al-Banā)	20 local looms	1955	foundry owner	al-Mehalla	3 labourers, 5 girls	none	illiterate
Ahmad Muhammad 'Abd al-Nabī	22 local looms	1948	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	20 labourers, 6 girls, 4 boys	father and uncles	primary certificate
Ibrahīm al-Bindari (Dayer al Nahya)	22 local looms	1965	weaver	al-Mehalla	35 labourers, 5 girls	father and brothers	illiterate
'Abd al-Hamid (Shukri al-Dewa-tīli)	25 local looms	1955	weaver	al-Mehalla	30 labourers, 5 girls, 5 boys	none	literate
'Abd al-Hamīd (al-Ghanam)	30 local looms	1965	weaver	al-Mehalla	60 labourers	brothers	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
'Abd al-Hayy ('Emara)	22 local looms, 8 jacquard looms	1945	Misr Company employee	al-Mehalla	22 labourers, 8 girls	father	B.A., commerce
Mahmūd Rizk (Mehallet al-Burg)	30 local looms, 2 shifts	1958	Football player, Misr Company team	al-Mehalla	50 labourers	father	commerce diploma
Muhammad al-Essali	30 local looms	1965	white collar worker	al-Mehalla		grandfather	B.A.
Ibrahīm al-Zahar (al-Banā)	30 local looms, 2 shifts	1950	owner of hand-loom shop	al-Mehalla	40 labourers, 10 girls	father	illiterate
Mustāfa Shafiq 'Eid	30 local looms, 2 shifts	1965	student, then assistant in father's factory	al-Mehalla	40 labourers	grandfather mu'allim; uncles, brothers, many other relatives	secondary certificate
'Abd al-Hamīd al-Qalubi (Saba' Banāt)	32 local looms	1957	employee in private factory	al-Mehalla	30 labourers, 15 girls	brothers	B.A., education
Muhammad al-Imbabu (Muhib St.)	40 local looms, 2 shifts	1965	weaver in private factory	al-Mehalla	60 labourers, 10 boys	brother	literate
Muhammad Ahmad al-Sharawi (Muhib St.)	40 local looms	1960	cafe owner	al-Mehalla	60 labourers, 20 girls	father hand-weaver; cousins	B.A.
Mustāfa al-Ghanam (Shehin)	40 local looms, 2 shifts	1960	student	al-Mehalla	60 labourers	whole family	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
Nabil Muhammad (al-Banā)	40 local looms	1965	student	al-Mehalla	30 labourers, 25 boys	father	B.A., Engineering
'Abd al-Hadi 'Abd al-'Azīz Taha ('Abu-Shehiñ)	41 local looms, 2 shifts	1965	factory worker	al-Mehalla	60 labourers, 20 boys, 20 girls	uncle owns factory	primary certificate
Samir Kandūs	47 local looms,	1960	merchant	al-Mehalla	55 labourers	father	B.A.
Tawfiq al-'Abass (Kafr Higazi)	50 local looms, 2 shifts	1948	handweaver	al-Mehalla	100 labourers	father	illiterate
'Alī Muhammad al-Gindi	50 local looms, 3 shifts	1965	student	al-Mehalla	60 labourers, 40 girls	father	primary certificate
Muhib Kadus	60 local looms	1956	son of mu'allim	al-Mehalla		relatives in cloth trade	B.A.
Khalil	60 local looms	1966	cloth merchant	al-Mehalla		relatives in cloth and yarn trade	literate
Mussad Muhammad al-Gindi	60 local looms 2 shifts	1966	merchant	al-Mehalla	65 labourers, 15 girls	father	literate
Muhammad Muhammad al-Gindi (Dāyer al-Nihya)	60 local looms, 2 shifts	1960	worked in father's factory	al-Mehalla	60 labourers, 30 girls	father and brother	primary certificate
Kamel al-Samuli (at Metwalli)	62 local looms, 3 shifts	1958	worked in father's factory while student	al-Mehalla	150 labourers, 30 girls, 20 boys	father and brothers	diploma in textiles
Muhammad al-Helwy (Mehallet al-Burg)	80 local looms, 2 shifts	1968	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	100 labourers,	whole family in industry	illiterate
'Ali Shukel (Shukri al-Quwatly)	80 local looms, 2 shifts	1952	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	200 labourers	whole family in industry	literate

Name	Mechanical Looms Number and Type	Date of Establishment	Occupational Background	Original Residence	Number and Kind of Workers	Relatives in Industry	Education
'Ali al-Gindi (Shukri al-Quwatly)	100 local looms, 2 shifts	1948	mu'allim	al-Mehalla	300 labourers	brothers	literate
al-Qadi	100 local looms	1957	mu'allim	al-Mehalla		father, grandfather and uncles	B.A.
Ismail Hussein	110 local looms, 3 shifts	1950	Misr Company employee	al-Mehalla	250 labourers, 20 girls, 35 boys	in-laws	literate

APPENDIX II

CASE STUDY OF AL-SIMSĀR, THE OWNER OF A SMALL-SCALE FACTORY

Al-Simsār is one of the several wage-earning labourers who managed to establish his own textile workshop in 1972 with one mechanical loom. In 1977 he had two mechanical looms, and had been acting for six months as mechanic and supervisor of another small workshop belonging to one of his relatives. How was it possible for al-Simsār as a wage-earner to become an owner? Having become an owner in the most vulnerable sector, what is his strategy for survival? To what extent do al-Simsār and other small-scale owners think of themselves as owners, and with whom do their sympathies lie--with workers or with owners? What kind of production relations exist at this level of ownership and with whom do these owners ally in conflict situations?

The Workshop of al-Simsār

Al-Simsār's textile workshop is in the industrial area of al-Banā. In this area I was able to survey about fifteen workshops of the same size as al-Simsār's. There are a number of medium-size factories in the area which occupy a whole building each, but there are also buildings with small rooms, each of which is used as a separate workshop. These workshops are usually rented to owners of mechanical looms. Workshops having two or three owners are quite common, but in such cases each owner often has separate mechanical looms.

Al-Simsār rents a workshop with one mechanical loom and has bought another loom and placed it in the workshop. It is a small workshop, about four metres square, with a wooden partition that divides it horizontally and no openings other than a large door. The upper part is used for spool winding. A movable wooden ladder is used to reach that section, and a basket on a rope is used to get the spools from one floor to the other.

Work in al-Simsār's workshop follows a very irregular routine. One might find the workshop closed or open at any time of the day or night. Al-Simsār has selected the al-Banā area because it is an industrial area and work is permitted at night, whereas in residential areas work has to stop at night to avoid the risk of prosecution. (However, although it is illegal to open a workshop in a residential area, there are numerous violations of this law.) With the rapid expansion of the industrial areas, a major problem for these factories is the irregular electricity supply. A common scene in the streets of this area is that of young labourers playing football until the power returns.

Al-Simsār is rarely to be seen in his workshop. He depends on his son Rif'at, who is seventeen years old, and another boy who is fourteen. His daughter, who is thirteen, is seen occasionally in the workshop during lunch hours, bringing food for her brother. Al-Simsār has seven children: four girls and three boys. He sent them all to school with the hope that they would get good qualifications and find prestigious occupations. When the eldest son, Raf'at, failed his primary certificate examination, al-Simsār was ready to send him to a private school and "spend every penny, even sell the workshops" to provide him with a qualification. Raf'at refused to continue in school and insisted that he work with his father. Al-Simsār, though disappointed in his son, was happy to get some help and be relieved of the monotonous work of weaving. He also feels that he fulfilled his duty to provide his son with other options, and it is the son's desire to be a weaver.

Al-Simsār seems to have more luck with the girls in education. The two younger daughters have done well in their studies. The eldest is now in the Institute of Commerce and the next is in preparatory school. The third daughter was in primary school when a primus stove exploded in her face while she was buying a sandwich for her teacher. She remained in hospital for three

days and then died. She was the only daughter who was interested in the workshop, and she had helped a lot in winding during her summer vacation. Young girls as well as young boys are expected to help in all operations in their father's workshop if they are needed, but since most of them go to school they are free only during the summer and for a few hours after school. Al-Simsār has two children in primary school and two who are still too young for school.

The fact that al-Simsār is usually absent from his workshop does not interfere with the work. Raf'at and the young boy cooperate to do the weaving; if something goes wrong with a machine any mechanic in the area can fix it. Usually help is sought from a neighbouring workshop in which there are three owners who were originally mechanics. Even if there is nothing wrong with the mechanical looms, these neighbours keep coming to find out if Raf'at needs any help.

Raf'at and the boy are expected to come daily at seven in the morning and leave at seven at night. In the winter they usually open around nine. Sometimes Raf'at decides to eat lunch at home, particularly since his sister died, so he closes the workshop and leaves. If he needs something and the other boy is not around, he simply closes the shop and goes to get it. Sometimes he stays late. If he is tired, he goes home and his father stays.

Al-Simsār's Work History

Al-Simsār looks on his workshop with pride since he established it through his own efforts, and he has high hopes of expanding it in order to be able to bring up his big family. He began work at the age of twelve as an industrial wage-earning labourer in a textile factory. Before the age of twelve he was able to go to school, as his father was a baladi tailor (i.e., he made gallalīb) who could afford to spare his labour. Although his father was a tailor, other members of his family were craftsmen and mu'allimīn, engaged in weaving.

Al-Simsār's brother-in-law had started his career as a craftsman, becoming a mu'allim owning two handlooms. He then worked in Misr Company, acquiring the skills that enabled him to establish his own mechanical workshop. When he established this workshop, he hired al-Simsār's older brother, who was a weaver. When al-Simsār was twelve years old, he also went to work for this brother-in-law. beginning as a labourer. He stayed with this factory until 1954, when he was conscripted, at the age of twenty. By then the workshop had expanded to become a small factory with about ten mechanical looms.

During these eight years he learned weaving. He progressed from being an unskilled weaver to being a skilled worker, and eventually became the factory's mechanic. This factory would be considered one of the small-scale factories of that period, since there were then several factories, apart from Misr Company, which had more than 100 mechanical looms.

While al-Simsār was working in his relative's very small factory, he received an offer to work in Misr Company. He refused this offer, and gives his reasons for refusal as follows:

> ....
>
> For an ibn al-balad there was a stigma attached to working in that factory. We are originally skilled craftsmen, and so we have the ability to learn mechanical weaving quickly. We used to get a higher wage in small factories than the labourers did in Misr Company. Most of those who worked in the big factory were peasants from the villages. They were the only ones who would accept such wages--i.e., two to five piastres a day in the forties. They did not mind living in miserable conditions. For ourselves, we are accustomed to eating well and living "cleanly" [that is, comfortably]. For example, from the time I was fourteen years old, my father used to make my mother prepare rich meals for me and my brother daily because we were sanay'iyya, i.e. labourers who used up a lot of energy. On the other hand, the sherkawwiyya were foreigners in the town. They would eat anything and sleep anywhere. We used to call them "al-gharbawwiyya" [the aliens].

Thus al-Simsār, as an industrial worker in the forties, preferred to work in a small factory rather than

in the big Misr Company factory. In this small factory his position improved automatically with his skill. Within a few years he had become the factory mechanic, which is the most skilled position in the hierarchy of a small weaving factory. In this role, which he still performs, he combined several tasks. He supervised work in the factory, repaired the looms, trained unskilled labourers, recruited labourers, and in some cases stood in for absentee weavers. The mechanic receives the highest wages of all weavers, and in some factories the mechanics, as supervisors, get a monthly salary. The mechanic is always regarded with great respect. In describing his role as a mechanic, al-Simsār said:

> The mechanic is a skilled labourer. He is everything in a factory. He is a doctor because he diagnoses the errors in a machine. The foreign experts usually consult the mechanic first, because he is the one who knows most about machinery. The engineer's theoretical knowledge when he graduates is less than the practical knowledge of the mechanic. A mechanic can humiliate any engineer by asking him to repair a machine. I know of an illiterate mechanic who managed to design and produce his own mechanical loom.

When al-Simsār was drafted, his older brother Muḥammad, who was a warper, started his career as the owner of a small factory which eventually contained thirteen mechanical jacquard looms. (A jacquard loom is a more complex and expensive loom whose production equals that of three ordinary looms.) That is, although al-Simsār's brother increased the number of his looms to only thirteen, their production was equal to that of a factory of forty ordinary looms. He was able to construct two apartment buildings from the profits of this factory, and his ownership of mechanical looms and buildings came to exceed that of his original employer. Al-Simsār thinks that his brother was able to make more progress in the industry than his brother-in-law because the latter had eight children who all went to the university and received higher qualifications, while his brother has only four children, born later in his career, and two of them assist him in the factory. This explanation implies that al-Simsār believes that certain patterns of consumption decrease the amount of capital available for investment.

When al-Simsār left the army he worked for his brother as a mechanic on the understanding that the brother would help him to establish his own workshop. After working with his brother for minimum wages, trying to save enough capital for a workshop, he discovered that "my brother was only interested in keeping me as a hired labourer to help supervise the work in his own factory." After a long dispute with his brother, he broke away and started his own workshop. The dispute between the two brothers continued for some time, until some family members and other factory owners intervened to settle it.

The older brother submitted to the group's will and rented to al-Simsār a room and a mechanical loom in his building in al-Bana district. Al-Simsār thought that what he obtained from his brother was less than his right, because after all whatever his brother gave him he paid for in rent. His brother also divided the room he rented to him in such a way as to block the possibility of expansion, in order, according to al-Simsār, to force him to work for the brother. Al-Simsār, however, remained independent.

As the owner of one loom who was married and had six children, all at school, al-Simsār was unable to buy another mechanical loom, although he had the energy and skill to operate two looms. He needed additional income in order to provide a decent living for his family. He had a very small sum of money obtained through selling his share in his father's house, but this was not sufficient to purchase a mechanical loom. He discussed this problem with his wife, and she suggested that she sell her jewelry and copper pots to help him buy the loom. Her family objected strongly to this decision, but she refused to listen to them, explaining her position as follows:

> Though my father is rather well off, since I was married he has done nothing except look in on us occasionally. My husband is a very decent man. He does not like to ask anything from anyone. He never permitted me to beg the help of

> my family. Thus when my family was angry with me because I wanted to help my husband, I told them, "We never asked anything of you, and it is my husband who has been fully responsible for my livelihood, so I feel free to do what I want with my jewelry."

Thus al-Simsār, with the aid of his wife, was able to buy another mechanical loom and so increase his income. His circumstances improved, and he believes that his wife deserves the credit for this. He speaks of her as the "base" of his life, saying that,

> She is bint-nas, i.e. asila [of good family, authentic]. She lived all the time without complaining of our poor living conditions. She tried to make ends meet with the little I gave her. She managed to save enough to send all our children to school, and they are always dressed decently. She is the one who helped me to become the owner of a weaving shop.

When al-Simsār was in the midst of his crisis, he never considered letting his wife work outside the home. He keeps saying that

> ...as a respectable weaver I cannot let my wife work amongst labourers or outside the home. If she develops any skill that could be practised at home, such as sewing, she can work. Anyhow, my wife does not have skill in any type of work, and I believe she has helped me more by her excellent management of household affairs and bringing up our children.

To al-Simsār and many other weavers, girls who work in the textile industry are the poor girls and peasants. Even these poor girls would usually work in private sector factories, in specific operations such as winding, sewing and preparation. They work as long as they remain unmarried, and then leave their jobs. No girl would work as a weaver. One day I saw a young girl of fourteen working on a mechanical loom. When I asked her whether she would like to be a weaver, she answered emphatically, "I only help my uncle in winding, and since he is away most of the time I learned weaving."

When al-Simsār started as an owner he was faced with several obstacles. He had no knowledge of the market and no idea of how to begin. He mentions that two neighbouring big factory owners acted as his patrons,

and says that if it had not been for their help he would have become a wage-earning labourer once again. Al-Simsār was aware that his skills and capital were not sufficient for success in the role of an owner, and had counted on his brother for help. When his brother let him down, he was most grateful to the neighbouring owners who came to his aid.

The System of Work in al-Simsār's Workshop

The system of work in most of the small workshops is based on subcontracting, i.e. production for larger factories. The larger factories buy the yarn, warp it, and then give the warp beams to small factories for weaving. The larger owner does the marketing of the cloth. In many cases, these larger owners are themselves operating for an even larger industrial unit, usually in the public sector.

Mustāfa al-Simsār used to work for the two big factories whose owners acted as his patrons in the early days. They provided him with technical advice as well as with a continuous supply of warp beams. He now gets his warp beams elsewhere. He is paid per metre of cloth woven. When he works two shifts, he produces about 100 metres per day. He receives £E 0.03 per metre, or £E 3.00 per day. For the last three years he has been working for a subcontractor who produces bedsheets. He provides al-Simsār with warp beams on a regular basis. Al-Simsār's average production is about 100 sheets a day. The contractor pays him £E 0.16 per sheet, so he receives £E 25.60 per week, or £E 102.40 per month.

Although al-Simsār's aspiration for his son was that he finish school and get a degree, his son was interested in manual work. Every day from the age of five he would go to the workshop after school and help in the winding. By age ten he was able to weave on the small mechanical loom during his summer vacation. At the age of twelve he knew how to handle the two mechanical looms. His father, though he would have preferred a different career

for his son, nevertheless was happy to have his help, as he was getting tired of his work.

Normally small weavers do a lot of the weaving themselves, but al-Simsār, though still in his forties, is rather lazy and hates routine work. He is constantly looking for errands to run outside the workshop. Some of the people who know him say that his bad experience in the 1956 war, when he was lost in the desert for weeks, affected his personality. Raf'at, now about seventeen years old, is considered by his father to be a mu'allim who is fully responsible for the workshop. He is treated as an owner. When it was suggested to Raf'at that he might work in Misr Company for wages, he replied that "My factory must have my attention."

Although al-Simsār refused work at Misr Company in the forties, he thinks that conditions have changed and that a worker of his skill would be the chief of a whole section, and would be provided with housing, insurance, and security in his old age. In short, he would be much better off financially than al-Simsār now is. He even aspires to have his son recruited into the Misr Company, but he knows that without an elementary school certificate his son has no chance. Raf'at earns only about £E 0.20 per day, that is, about £E 6.00 a month, as pocket money, and his mother takes about two-thirds of this amount.

Ahmad, the other boy who works in al-Simsār's workshop, began by winding and occasionally helping Raf'at in weaving. Later he learned to weave and began to receive a daily wage. Once he was a skilled weaver he was paid on a piecework basis. He now earns about £E 1.20 per week. He gives his father £E 1.00 and keeps £E 0.20 as pocket money. In return his father provides him with food and housing. Ahmad expects good food from his family since he works and gives them money. One day they did not provide him with food. In response he spent his entire income for that week on a single meal, a dish of kabab. Ahmad believes that this was the only way to force his family to provide him with good food.

Ahmad's family background is quite different from that of Raf'at. His mother is dead, and his stepmother is less concerned with her husband's children. The family is very poor; the father works as a wage-earning craftsman on a handloom, and earns too little money to provide his children with educations. Each member of the family must work to survive.

Ahmad, though the same age as Raf'at, has longer work experience and is more independent. He worked from the age of seven as an assistant to a cart driver, and then as a cart driver himself. He claims that he earned not less than £E 0.40 per day at the age of twelve. He left that job because it was unsteady and he wanted to learn a trade.

Ahmad did not like holding an irregular job because it affected his consumption patterns and led to an undesirable life style. When he had money he smoked four packets of cigarettes a day and ate a lot. When he had no money the next day, he would get very little to eat and would nearly starve. Ahmad felt that if he became accustomed to hunger he would never think of work, even if he found a job for £E 10 per month, and so he would become accustomed to idleness and become saya', or good-for-nothing. Al-Simsār, who lives on the same street as Ahmad, shared his concern, and felt that by training the boy in his workshop he would save his career and be doing him thawāb, a favor that God would reward him for. Recently, however, Ahmad went back to irregular work and left al-Simsār. Raf'at and his father feel that Ahmad has been lost forever as a sanay'ī, and that this is due to his disturbed family background.

In the workshop Ahmad and Raf'at cooperated to get the work done. Mustāfa al-Simsār supervised them to some extent, but most of the time he was absent. He did the buying for the workshop, and raised lambs. He kept a goat and a sheep in front of the workshop. When he was in the shop, he played the role of mu'allim by correcting any errors the boys made. He looked upon himself as a teacher who was doing a favour to the boys by teaching

them a trade. Obviously the weaving process is monotonous, and al-Simsār depended greatly on the boys, rarely weaving for himself. Even when he was in the workshop, he usually just sat around.

Every now and then al-Simsār would discover an error in the weaving and would scold the boys or even hit them. After a while though he would jokingly remark that "they are still boys who cannot work without a mu'allim." Ahmad would reply sarcastically by saying "al-ʔalam beyighlat," which literally means that the pencil, or master, can be wrong.

As for the two boys, they chat with each other to break the monotony of the work, and when there are power cuts, which happens daily, they play football in front of the workshop. Raf'at observed several times that when he is alone he cannot work. A weaver usually needs company.

The average income of Mustāfa al-Simsār from this workshop is about £E 90 per month. His expenses are as follows:

£E 4.00	rent of one mechanical loom
6.00	rent of the workshop
4.80	wages of Ahmād
6.00	wages of Raf'at
10.00	electricity
1.35	insurance
£E 32.15	total

Thus al-Simsār's net income from the shop is a maximum of £E 60, but in practice he gets less, since there are continuous breaks due to power cuts. The quality of the yarn is also usually a hindrance to maximum production. An average monthly income of £E 50 is more realistic. He also receives a yarn ration for one loom, which raises his income to around £E 70, to which must be added the money he makes from other activities, such as raising and selling sheep. Even so, however, al-Simsār is no better off as an owner than a chief mechanic, who can expect to earn between £E 70 and £E 100 per month.

Like many other small owners, al-Simsār had to work and save very hard for a long time in order to accumulate enough capital to buy a loom. These wage-earning craftsmen practice the strictest economy over periods of years, denying themselves all but barest necessities. Some even delay their marriages in order to be able to save for looms. Often they only manage to become owners by renting their looms and depending heavily on unskilled and child labour, and they must nearly always carry a large portion of the workload themselves. This as a rule leaves them without sufficient capital to be truly independent; they are forced to subcontract, as they are unable to buy yarns for themselves, and they lose a substantial portion of their potential profits through this system. Why, then, do they make such sacrifices to become owners?

Al-Simsār himself thinks that he would make more money if he worked for someone else. He is aware of the salaries paid to mechanics, and knows that there is little if any difference between their earnings and his own. He believes that without some additional source of capital, such as a second yarn ration, he will find it nearly impossible to accumulate the £E 1,000 needed to begin buying yarns for himself. All the same, he, like most of the small owners, says "I prefer to work freely for myself and to be my own master" (hurr nafsī). I go to work when I want and end work when I want, and I never work a single night shift."

The other factor that makes being a small owner more attractive than working as a chief mechanic for someone else is the aspiration to expansion. There is always some hope of expansion and more profit, however faint that hope may be. Al-Simsār and others believe that a mechanic or skilled weaver has no chance to change his status as an employee or to increase his income, but that they, on the other hand, work harder and think of ways of saving. Having succeeded in raising their status to that of owner, they may, somehow, eventually find a way to expand.

At the same time as these small owners are very proud of their status as owners, their ties with the labourers are very close. They tend to work as labourers in their own workshops, and are thus able to produce more at less expense than can owners who were not originally textile workers. As a labourer, the small-scale owner is closely associated with workers in terms of lifestyle. His friends are workers and his social circle is mainly composed of workers. He has greater access to child labour among his relatives and friends. His relationship with his workers is thus completely different than the type of relations that exist in larger factories. Working relations in the small factories are more nearly of the patron-client type, involving family, neighbours and friends in the same occupation.

Thus we find that Mustāfa al-Simsār was able to accumulate the capital to establish his factory by selling his wife's jewelry and by practicing strict economy in daily expenditures, relying in this on his wife's good management. His experience as a mechanic employed by his relative, the cooperation of other factory owners, and the existence of suitable business openings all helped al-Simsār to stay in business as a small owner with two mechanical looms. He has not, however, been able to expand or to increase the number of looms he operates.

APPENDIX III

CASE STUDY OF AL-BADĀWĪ, THE OWNER OF A MEDIUM-SIZE FACTORY

The al-Badāwī family comes from a line of mu'allimīn working in the textile industry who developed from being the owners of hand-weaving workshops to being the owners of a modern factory. Their factory is large compared with that of al-Simsār (Appendix II), but very small compared with Misr Company or with the factories that were nationalized.

Present Organization of the Factory

The new al-Badāwī factory was established in 1957 by Muḥammad al-Badāwī and began production in 1960. It is located on the western fringes of the town on a two-feddan site, of which one and a half feddans are occupied by the buildings. With the expansion of al-Meḥalla, the factory is no longer outside the town boundaries. It is surrounded by a poor residential area where most of the factory employees live. This is one of the few factories which have an independent electricity supply, provided by two diesel-powered generators. In an industrial town which has severe power supply problems, this independence is a great advantage.

Another indication of the factory's size is that it combines all the production units within one complex. There is a dyeshop employing eleven workers with a semi-mechanical dryer. An oil-fired water heater in a separate room heats water in the pipes. Zinc vats are filled with hot water and dyes to dye the yarn. The dyeing and sizing processes depend mainly on the skill of the workers in changing the water temperature at the right moments. The warping unit employs six workers on mechanical warping and one on handwarping. The winding unit employs thirty workers. Other preparatory stages carried out in the factory are inspection, with four workers, and napping, with three workers.

Ninety-six weavers and one denting and leasing worker are employed in the three workshops for mechanical weaving. The mechanical looms in operation include: twelve jacquard looms, producing terry towelling, mattress ticking and bedspreads; seventeen dobby looms; ninety-six narrow looms, producing cotton flannel and poplin; three wide looms, producing bedsheets. Of these, all but the jacquard looms are old (1940) models, mostly manufactured in the factory itself.

Because a variety of skills are required for the maintenance of the different kinds of looms, six mechanics and four assistant mechanics are employed, each specializing in a particular type of loom. There are four mechanics and two assistants for the narrow and wide looms, one mechanic and one assistant for the jacquard looms, and one mechanic and one assistant for the dobby looms.

Evidence of the factory's links with the craft phase of the industry is to be found in the handloom workshop. When the factory began production in 1960 it operated about 100 handlooms, but this number has decreased as the mechanical looms have progressively taken over. There are now twelve handlooms in operation, run by elderly craftsman. When a worker retires or dies, his loom is removed.

The factory has its own semi-mechanized workshop employing four electricians, one turner, four mechanics and three labourers. This shop produces spare parts for the looms, as well as complete looms copied from British models of the forties, which are sometimes adapted to meet specific needs. Although mechanical looms are widely produced in al-Mehalla, it is unusual to find a factory that actually produces its own.

Management of the factory was originally handled by the owner Hagg Muhammad and his two sons, Mustāfa and Muhsin. When the father died in 1973, the sons continued in management without him, assisted by their uncles, Ahmad and Said. One uncle is responsible for the stores

and one for the handloom section. Three clerks work in administration. Service workers at the factory include two storemen, a male nurse, a switchboard operator, three watchmen, a porter, a cleaner/office boy, and three car-washers. The total payroll of the factory, including youths not tallied above, is about 300 employees.

The buildings of the factory are constructed of crude local materials. They are designed to meet the needs of production, and have no pretensions to luxury. Even the furniture is very crude and traditional. Every available space is used for production. Although there is a separate administration building, only one room is furnished as an office for the owners and the rest of the building is used for production-related activities. Though no one in the al-Badāwī family had ever engaged in agriculture, one of the two brothers became interested in agricultural projects, and when chicken farms became popular and profitable projects around 1970, he set up a chicken farm on the roof of one of the factory buildings.

Work History of the Owners of the Factory

The present owners of the factory are the two sons of Muhammad al-Bedāwī. Mustāfa, the elder son, began working with his father after receiving his secondary certificate. Muhsin, the younger, received his university degree. After the death of their father in 1973, Muhsin joined his brother in the factory in 1974.

Although it was Muhammad al-Bedāwī who constructed the modern factory, the family's history in the textile industry began with Muhammad's father, Hagg Mustāfa. Hagg Mustāfa was a skilled craftsman who worked as a wage-earning labourer with mu'allim 'Abd al-Nabī in the years after 1910. Mu'allim 'Abd al-Nabī was a fine craftsman and the most famous mu'allim in the town. He trained his own workers, who developed a high reputation for their skill in weaving fine materials such as alāgā and Mu'allim 'Abd al-Nabī was educated at al-Azhar and became

a scholar, but his father was a mu'allim and he became interested in weaving. According to several mu'allimīn in al-Mehalla, 'Abd al-Nabī had one of the largest qa'āt in al-Mehalla, in which he produced numerous kinds of silk textiles. He was seen as an innovator, and was so intelligent that he could analyse any kind of cloth and reproduce it. His nephew, Hagg Ahmad 'Abd al-Nabī, narrates an incident that exemplifies his skill and intelligence:

> One day a basha who was responsible for one of the palaces discovered that a curtain was torn. The curtain was silk, and imported from France. They came to Hagg 'Abd al-Nabī, and he analysed the curtain and made the additional part in such a way that no one was able to distinguish the original from the added piece. The craftsman who executed the design on the handloom was Hagg Mustāfa al-Bedāwī.

At that period Hagg Mustāfa al-Bedāwī was one of the skilled craftsmen of Hagg 'Abd al-Nabī. Hagg Mustāfa managed to become the owner of twenty handlooms in the twenties. He ran the business with the help of his eldest son, Ahmad. He was responsible for designing and explaining the design in terms of the number of threads of the alāgā, buying the yarn and marketing the cloth. He did not know how to read and write, and so had no records of his business.

Hagg Mustāfa had two kinds of workers, those who earned daily wages and labourers who did piecework. Each Tuesday, selling day, he would pay his workers. His workers were well off. To earn £E 0.80 per week meant a labourer was able to dress in a silk gallabīyya and eat like a mu'allim. It is often mentioned by the elderly mu'allimīn that prices were low in those days. For example, two chickens cost £E 0.05, a pound of butter £E 0.02.

Hagg Ahmad, the son of Hagg Mustāfa, was responsible for supervising daily work in the qa'ā. He describes their workers in the twenties as honest and decent. They were responsible, and he never really had to supervise any of them. He used to give them the yarn and then take the finished cloth.

Most of al-Bedāwī's labourers stayed with them. Hagg Mustāfa beat any worker who misbehaved. This was not considered an offense, since a labourer would expect his father to beat him if he misbehaved, and a mu'allim was regarded as a teacher with the same authority as a father. In return, the labourers were entitled to ask certain favours from mu'allim Mustāfa. They felt free to ask for lunch from the mu'allim's house, to ask for money when they were in need, and to seek advice, even in personal matters. If the mu'allim was prosperous, they expected more favours; if he was facing a crisis, they were directly affected in terms of their wages, and indirectly affected in terms of the favours he could perform for them. A common prayer of the workers was that their mu'allim would prosper.

Hagg Mustāfa was known as an amibitious owner who was anxious to expand his business. Like most owners of that time, however, he had limited capital and did not trust the existing credit system. In those days of fluctuating prices, a number of mu'allimīn had gone bankrupt by acquiring large quantities of yarn on credit while in the process of expanding. Mu'allim Mustāfa, though cautious, one day took the advice of a yarn merchant and bought an enormous amount of yarn, assuming that prices would increase. The following day the price of a bundle of yarn decreased from £E 5 to £E 3. In consequence, Hagg Mustāfa had to reduce his scale of work and employ his three sons as labourers. He continued to run his business on this limited scale until the youngest son, Muhammad, was old enough to take over the business and expand it.

The fact that the youngest son was the one who took over the family business was due to his character. His elder brother, Ahmad, who is now working in the factory, saw himself as being basically different than Muhammad:

> Since childhood I was a wayward boy, very irresponsible. Once my father assigned to me a specific task in the business. I failed, and we lost about £E 800 as a result of my irresponsibility. As for Muhammad, everything he turned his hand to was a success. He never missed praying at the

> appointed time, and was very charitable to the poor and needy. Having such a responsible character, he was favoured by our father, and was given more responsibility in work.

An elderly craftsman refers to the way in which Hagg Muhammad built his career by saying,

> Although Hagg Muhammad was the son of our mu'allim, he worked as a labourer just like myself. I was cleverer than he. I used to finish two pieces when he would finish only one. But whereas I got married at the age of eighteen and could not save a penny, Hagg Muhammad was gada' [clever] and stayed unmarried until he was twenty-eight. He saved some money and joined a small mu'allim, starting a separate business operating two handlooms. He used to increase the number of handlooms every month. In a year, Hagg Muhammad was able to change his position from wage-earning labourer to owner of ten handlooms.

In addition to being clever, Hagg Muhammad was fortunate, because in his second year in business, in the forties, he bought 1,000 bundles of silk on credit. That year the price of a bundle of silk was £E 4. The same month that he bought this silk, the price rose to £E 40 per bundle. He was thus able to expand his work; from owning ten small handlooms for handkerchiefs, he became the owner of fifty handlooms for alāgā.

When Hagg Muhammad started working, he tried to organise work and keep records of the workers' accounts as well as other business accounts. He began to expand his work and operate the handlooms that his father had stopped. He asked his father to rest, and assumed all the responsibility for the business. By the forties, the al-Bedāwī family had about eighty handlooms for alāgā and operated about thirty handlooms in nearby villages. The family name for alagā and qutnīyya was so highly reputed that the demand for their products grew. Instead of expanding their own ga'ā by buying looms and hiring craftsmen, the family provided small owners with yarn, gave them the design for the cloth, and paid them labour costs. Then they would take the finished cloth, wash and iron it, stamp the mark of al-Bedāwī on it, and sell it with their own products.

Al-Bedāwī also bought some of the good products of small owners, preparing the cloth and selling it under his own brand name.

Muḥammad al-Bedāwī used all of these methods to meet the demand for his products in the forties, but as Ḥagg Aḥmad said,

> Handlooms are slow; one loom produces an average of one piece [six metres] per day, whereas the mechanical loom produces twelve pieces per day. Ḥagg Muḥammad was eager to increase his production, so he introduced mechanical looms. He started mechanisation by buying four new mechanical looms in 1940. Those who had mechanical looms in al-Maḥalla, apart from Miṣr Company, were very few--Sewīlām, a white-collar worker who established a small factory, and al-Ghanam, a mu'allim who bought two old mechanical looms from Miṣr Company.

In that same year, about four other mu'allimīn bought mechanical looms. All of them kept their handlooms at first, but very soon many of them dropped the handlooms and expanded quickly in mechanical looms. For example, Ḥagg Manṣur, an elderly mu'allim who now owns a small factory of twenty mechanical looms, began with two old mechanical looms that he bought for £E 80 from Miṣr Company. Every time he bought a mechanical loom, he would reduce the number of his handlooms, until he had sold them all. His rationale for stopping the use of handlooms was as follows:

> As an old mu'allim, I had to stop handlooms even though their produce yields a higher price. I have to consider the market situation. In business if I have a product which produces high profit but is slow in marketing, and another product which produces low profits but is quick in marketing, which one should I choose? I personally prefer a product which is less profitable but quicker in marketing, which is the case with the products of mechanical looms. I made the decision to stop the handlooms, although they are profitable, when one day I discovered that I had stored cloth worth £E 2,000 from the seven handlooms. The marketing of the handloom products is slow, which meant that I "froze" my capital in the cloth. Should I really tie up my capital in traditional cloth just because I am an azzaz ibn azzaz [a weaver and the son of a weaver] and simply follow tradition? Certainly not! I have to develop and change the handlooms to mechanical looms so as not to freeze my money.

Mu'allim Mansur believes that the majority of the mu'allimīn of the twenties have mechani.ed their workshops, and that the ones who kept their handlooms are the very small-scale owners who do not have enough capital to mechanise. Also, he says, there are some narrowminded mu'allimīn who are quite satisfied with their work on handlooms.

Ḥagg Muḥammad al-Bedāwī, though a big mu'allim who owned about 120 handlooms, did not decrease the number of his handlooms. He continued to increase the number of mechanical looms and operating other small mechanical factories on his own account. In 1952 there was a recession in the textile industry, and some factories were selling off their mechanical looms. Ḥagg Muḥammad bought up the mechanical looms of two of these factories. He continued to expand, increasing the number of his mechanical looms until he had forty in all, in addition to the 120 handlooms in the old factory.

By 1960, when he began work in the new factory, he had about eighty mechanical looms and had reduced the number of his handlooms to about sixty. He had reduced the handlooms because the number of labourers who had been trained on handlooms was decreasing. The children of craftsmen were no longer being trained to become weavers. Well-off craftsmen educated their children, and the poor ones realized that while weaving on handlooms requires several years of training, mechanical looms need only a few months, after which a child begins to earn an income.

Until the sixties, Ḥagg Muḥammad invested every penny of his profits in the industry, either in horizontal expansion, by increasing the number of looms, or by developing mechanical looms and acquiring more modern ones. He bought two feddans as a site for the new factory, and invested in looms. He never considered investing in agricultural land, because he always felt that developing his factory required all of his capital, and described himself as being, after all, "a weaver and the son of a weaver", meaning that the textile industry, not agriculture, was his field.

After the sixties, and particularly after the nationalisation of five factories in al-Mehalla, Hagg Muhammad stopped expanding. Although he was not nationalised, his factory was approaching the size of those that had been. To al-Bedāwī, as to all of the factory owners, the period between 1961 and 1967 was a critical one. The big owners found their freedom of action restricted. They could not buy yarn directly from spinning companies, nor could they market their own products. Al-Bedāwī, along with other factory owners, was required to operate for the public sector, which provided him with yarn and took his finished products. Thus the owners had no control over production, distribution, or profit margin.

In addition to these restrictions, there was also the threat of nationalisation. Al-Bedāwī's factory was one of the largest factories in al-Mehalla remaining in private hands once the five largest factories had been nationalised, so his position appeared to be particularly vulnerable. He stopped expanding, and cut down on the looms he already had wherever possible. Due to the labour laws it was difficult to lower output, since this would have required dismissing part of his labour force.

After 1967, the threat of nationalisation decreased, and restrictions on the owners loosened. The private sector was allowed to use part of its yarn ration to produce on its own account. Thus the black market in yarn, which had become very slack, expanded again as the demand for yarn grew.

Labour Relations in al-Bedāwī's Factory

Al-Bedāwī's factory is a medium-scale modern factory, but the majority of its looms are only semi-mechanical, and it thus employs a large number of workers. In a factory with so many employees, one would expect a different pattern of relations from that found in a workshop such as that of al-Simsār. Al-Bedāwī needs a constant source of workers, particularly because of the high

turnover of girls and boys. Recruitment in al-Bēdāwi's factory depends mostly on personal contact with old labourers there, particularly the mechanics. When a vacancy occurs, labourers bring their relatives and neighbours.

Thus the workers in al-Bedāwī's factory are also friends, neighbours and relatives. Most of al-Bedāwī's workers are from al-Mehalla and from the neighbourhood in which the factory is located. There is also a high percentage of workers who have been employed by the factory for many years. Some of them began with Hagg Muhammad al-Bedāwī when he was working with handlooms. Most of these weavers progressed to mechanised looms, but there are still twelve handloom operators, all over forty years of age.

Hagg Muhammad says that the workers have changed. In earlier days they were more obedient and conscientious about their work, and there were fewer problems. Today there are constant labour problems. Muhsin and Mustāfa say that their factory has the best reputation in al-Mehalla for its treatment of workers: "We abide by the labour laws, and are the first to bring in any new bonuses. We have never resorted to the Labour Office to settle the workers' complaints.

From the point of view of al-Bedāwī, there are no major sources of conflict between him and his workers. He admits, however, that although wages increase constantly and raises are given more often than they used to be, there is still rising dissatisfaction due to the steadily increasing cost of living.

Mustāfa and Muhsin, like their father, feel obliged to distribute "bonuses in kind" on certain occasions, such as cloth in Ramadan and meat on the feast. In addition to these general distributions, they feel obligated to old labourers who have been with them for a long time. For example, the main reason for keeping the handlooms is that they provide the livelihood of craftsmen who have been working with them since the very beginning.

How Does a Worker in the al-Bedawi Company See Himself Vis-a-vis the Owner?

Mahmud al-Rukh has been working for the al-Bēdāwi family since the forties. He is one of the several workers in this factory who have spent more than twenty years employed in one factory in the private sector. Like al-Bedāwī himself, he thus combines in his work history craftsmanship and the career of an industrial worker in the same factory.

He began his career at the age of fifteen, when he failed in his examinations and left school. Neither his father nor any of his family were craftsmen in the textile industry. He had a friend who became a weaver and attracted him to the field. He worked as a handloom weaver from 1946 to 1952. At first he was happy with his work because he was earning good wages (£E 0.15 a day), had no family, and his father was well off. In his work on handlooms he felt free in his actions and was his own master. He went to work when he chose and left at his own convenience. He could take a day off work whenever he liked as long as he didn't need the money.

With the recession of the fifties Mahmud used to work for six months and then be laid off for the rest of the year. Since there were no labour laws he received no wages when work stopped; all he could do was try to find another job. In 1952 he asked Hagg Muhammad to let him work on the mechanical looms. Hagg Muhammad put Mahmud in the mechanical loom workshop and had the supervisor train him.

As a weaver, Mahmud found it rather easy to learn mechanical weaving. It needed less strength than work on the handlooms, and training took a short period. The one thing that bothered him was the night shifts, although al-Bēdāwi had only one night shift, between three and eleven o!clock. In handloom work he had been accustomed to finishing work not later than six o'clock.

It took him some time to adapt himself to the new timetable, but after a year he was a skilled weaver,

earning about £E 0.25 per day. He was paid per six-metre length of cloth. His average production was ten lengths per day, at £E 0.025 each. This was less than he had earned as a handloom operator, and the cost of living was rising. He therefore decided to leave al-Bedāwī's factory and signed on as a skilled worker with another firm, where he also trained as a mechanic. After three years he returned to al-Bedāwī, expecting that his new skills would lead to his employment as a mechanic. However, this attempt to raise his status proved to be unsuccessful, because the number of workers with mechanical skills was such in the al-Bedāwī factory that Mahmud's new ability was in little demand, and he returned once more to operating a mechanical loom.

Although Mahmud was working in the same factory with the same owner, his relations with al-Bedāwī began to change. He remembers almost no conflict with al-Bedāwī when he was working as a handloom weaver, but with the mechanical looms there are constant technical problems.

Mahmud feels that although al-Bedāwī abides by all the labour laws, there are still inequities between workers in the private sector and those in the public sector. For example, official holidays are stated very vaguely in the law, without specifying whether they are for all workers or only for workers in the public sector. In 1957 al-Bedāwī's workers reported Hagg Muhammad to the Labour Office because at shem al-nesim, the spring holiday, he gave a vacation without pay. This led them to demand recognition of their right to the same paid holidays as the workers in the public sector. It took them a full year to establish this right. They went to the trade union, the Labour Office, and to the Ministry of Labour. Since 1958 they have been paid for all official holidays.

In the private sector a system of regular increments was not adopted until 1976. Mahmud had been considered a piecework weaver for ten years by then. He earned an average of £E 20 per month, which is above the legal minimum

wage for his classification of £E 12 per month. The fact that he had been earning the same wage for ten years was not against the law. The only way for Mahmud to increase his wages was by increasing his production or changing the kind of loom he operated, and consequently the kind of cloth he produced, and this is not always possible.

Thus Mahmud complains that after working in the private sector for twenty-two years he has an average income of only £E 20 per month. Similar workers in the public sector with equivalent experience are earning £E 40 to £E 50 per month, because of regular wage increments and the implementation of a profit-sharing scheme. Mahmud obviously regrets that he does not work in the public sector, but at the age of forty-eight it would be very difficult to begin there.

In the forties Mahmud had a chance to go to work at Misr Company, after the recession in handlooms, but his father objected because of the night shifts. He was also unwilling to be identified with the Misr Company labourers:

> We Mehallāwwīyya didn't like the sherkāwwīyya. Their wages were less than ours. As a child I used to earn more than their adult labourers. They were strangers who came to our town, overcrowded it, and spoiled its calmness and prosperity.

The option of working in the public sector is closed to Mahmud now. The other option, that of self-employment, also appears to be closed. Mahmud cannot afford to buy a mechanical loom because he cannot save £E 300. He has a family of six children. One boy is working as a carpenter and the other three boys are in school. Of the two girls, one is married and the other is at home. He can hardly feed his family on his income, in spite of the fact that he lives rent-free in accommodations inherited from his father.

Mahmud says that in 1952 it would have been possible for him to get a mechanical loom for £E 50. In fact, a friend of his for whom he failed to find a job in the factory did buy a mechanical loom and is now one of the factory owners. But Mahmud never thought of buying a loom,

and being a labourer in a big factory with other, more skilled, labourers limited his chances of becoming one of the mechanics of the factory. Thus the only option left open to Mahmud is to continue working as a piecework labourer.

APPENDIX IV

CASE STUDY OF A LABOURER

Fikri al-Khūli worked in his childhood and youth, from 1928 until 1942, as a labourer in the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in al-Mehalla. He witnessed the dynamics of working conditions during this period, and later in the fifties and sixties became part of the labour movement in Cairo and an informal leader in the various textile factories where he worked. In 1958 he was imprisoned for his activities in the labour movement. While in prison, he decided to write his memoirs as a labourer in the Misr Company. He gave the reasons for writing these memoirs as follows:

> In 1958 I was in prison with a group of fellow-activists, both workmen and intellectuals. If you let yourself go in prison, you find yourself thinking of your children and your family, and you turn in on yourself and suffer and lose all hope. So we tried to get ourselves out of that isolation and not allow any of our colleagues to be left to himself. You had to think of something outside yourself, to think about the struggle and the others who were in it. Then you would be filled with hope and enthusiasm.
>
> In prison there is plenty of spare time, so we used to meet together and tell stories. What else was there for us to do? So one would begin a story and we would listen, just like the "Thousand and One Nights". Every night it was someone's turn to tell a tale. One day one of us was telling of an outing he had gone on with his school or his factory long ago, an outing to al-Mehalla al-Kubra. He described the textile factory, how fine it was, and how there was housing for the workers and a hospital. He described the huge buildings and the beautiful modern machines, and so the story of the outing went on. He came to al-Mehalla as an outsider and marvelled at the town and the factory and enjoyed it all, but as I listened to what he said I was shattered. Here was a worker like myself, yet he saw the factory in a completely different way from mine.
>
> I began to speak and tell them that it was not as simple as it seemed, and that the factory was really quite different from the way my colleague had described it. Then everyone said it should

be my turn the following day to tell my side of the story in al-Meḥalla. Straight away I sat down to think about how to begin. I had lived a normal life like anyone else, going to work and going back home, mixing with other people, having different experiences, passing through different trials, and all the time my mind had been recording my life story, storing the images of countless situations. At first I didn't know how to begin telling them about al-Meḥalla, but I finally decided to start from the first time someone came to our village of Kafr al-Ḥama saying a factory was going to open in al-Meḥalla where they would make cotton into cloth.

He wrote his memoirs in prison on cigarette packets, and when he was released some of his educated friends volunteered to collect them and copy the whole text into a notebook. They then made several attempts to find a publisher for the book. It was begun as a serial in the magazine The Worker, but was stopped after three episodes. Numerous subsequent attempts to find a publisher have failed, and so I took the original notebook just as it stood. I have re-ordered some of the text, but apart from that it is supplied here in almost literal translation from the original text by Fikri the labourer.

Child Labour

Fikri was born in the village of Kafr al-Hama in 1917. His father was working as a building labourer in his village and nearby villages. He died shortly after Fikri's birth. His mother was concerned about his upbringing, because he was the youngest and because his father had wanted so much to educate him like the people from Cairo whom he met in his work. The mother was hoping for a better future for Fikri than his brother and sisters. She used to tell him "I want you to become better than your brothers and any of awlad al-balad. Those who are educated work as clerks and get steady jobs, whereas those who do not get any education work as servants and unskilled labourers, fawa'li'" (those who carry mud on donkeys all day). She said, "I want you to be your own master." So with these aspirations for the future, Fikri went to the kuttāb (religious primary school)

at the age of six. He used to help his mother in the fields, taking his brother's place during the season of the Nile flood, when the mayor of the village would send the youth out to work on the dykes without pay.

One day in 1929, Fikri went to school as usual, and was asked to go to the mayor's residence for a meeting with the whole village, which he describes as follows:

> There I found my mother and brother and sisters and the men, women, young people and children of the village. A city gent came out with the mayor and addressed the people in a loud voice, and said "Good people of Kafr al-Hama, we have come to talk to you. Bank Misr has established a factory that spins the cotton you grow and makes it into cloth for you to wear....Before, we used to grow the cotton for the British to take, but now the cotton will be grown and we shall spin it and weave it so that the whole operation will be Egyptian--a national industry--send your sons to learn a trade, and when they learn they earn a good wage.

After a week of such talk, lorries arrived at the village to take those who wished to work in the new factory. That day all the village was out to say good-bye to those who were leaving. Each villager who was travelling took with him a basket of bread and pickles. They were surrounded by men and women crying, and everyone was praying for their safety. With this group there were two of Fikri's friends. Fikri was thinking all the time about what he had heard about the new factory and his friends who would work on machines. Finally he decided to follow his friends. Knowing that his mother would disapprove, he ran away in order to join his friends in al-Meḥalla.

Then eleven years old, Fikri made his way to al-Mehalla on foot. By chance, he encountered his two friends, who immediately took him with them to the factory where they were working on the night shift, from eight o'clock at night until seven o'clock in the morning. They explained to him that they worked the night shift for one week and then one week from seven o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock at night. They worked on winders and received £E 0.01 per day.

Fikri was bewildered by his first sight of the spinning shop:

> I went into the spinning shop and found it full of young kids about my age, not older than ten or eleven years old. I stood amazed, looking first at the machines and then at the kids standing in groups, each with a cylinder full of spools in his hand. There were others fixing the spools on the machines. I stood next to a wooden crate, staring at all of this, motionless with fright. I had never seen anything like it in my life--the tall machines set one beside the other in a regular arrangement, the children standing beside them wearing striped gallalib stained with oil, coming and going and rushing to fix the spools every time one fell off a machine.
>
> Every machine had a leather belt more than sixteen metres long running around a wheel, and if you looked up at the ceiling you couldn't see it because there were so many belts. The noise of the machines forced everyone to put cotton in his ears, and a system of hand signals had taken the place of calling the workers by name. If one of the workers wanted one of his workmates, he would give an enormous bellow and they would all look up and he would signal to the one he wanted.
>
> While all this was going on I stood there stupified. Then along came the foreman and asked me to write my name in a register he had in his hand and to go to work with the children who were taking the spools off the spinning machines. As I went forward, I was in a state of complete bewilderment, and whenever I looked at the machine working I could not bring myself to go near it. I stood watching from a distance the boys fixing the spools, and the overseer called me and stood teaching me and encouraging me to get closer, little by little, to the machines, until I began to feel reassured and I went up to the machines, encouraged by the other kids who had done it before me. I set to work with great enthusiasm, anxious to do as well as they. I kept working until I learnt how to fix on a spool while the machine was running, and this increased my self-confidence and dispelled some of my fear and the terror that had possessed me, and I was quick to pick up and fix any spool on any machine.
>
> By the second half of the night shift I was exhausted and fighting against sleep. I tried putting my head under a tap to waken myself, out of fear of the foremen, but it was useless. My eyelids started to close, and drowsiness got the better of me. I went over to the big crate of spools, and to my utter amazement found it full not of spools, but of sleeping children packed in rows! I joined

them and slept, only to start up from sleep when a bucket of water was poured over us, drenching our clothes. We woke terrified. We found ourselves confronted by the foremen, and we all ran back to our machines. I took off all my clothes beside one of the machines, and the kids gathered round and helped me wring them out and hang them on the sides of the machine. I stood shuddering from cold, next to the machine, with the children going to and fro behind me. Tiredness had taken complete hold of me: I watched them, each with his box full of spools in his hands, moving slowly, exhausted, propping themselves up against the wall and the sides of the machines, eyelids drooping. And I saw the overseers walking around with buckets full of wet cotton waste in their hands, sloshing the faces of the kids who fell asleep or were nodding off, and the kids nipping into the lavatory by the dozen to wash the cotton off their faces. I tried to overcome my drowsiness and put on my clothes when they were more or less dry.

I went walking around between the machines, and wherever I went I saw faces upturned, looking expectantly for the first rays of dawn. They lit up with happiness at the first gleam of sunlight, happiness at the end of the night and the long hours of toil. The workers welcomed the day with a cry that went around the factory, shaking the very walls and drowning the whirr of the belts and the clatter of the machines. From then on their shouts of joy and exultation went back and forth. Slowly the growing light of the morning became brighter than the light of the electric lamps, and all attention turned to the hands of the clock on the wall, waiting for them to reach seven. As the time drew near, a hush descended on the waiting workers.

Conditions of Work

Fikri lived with his friends from the village and was introduced to other rural labourers, who tended to lodge together. Housing conditions were very poor. To Fikri's astonishment, most of his rural friends lived in the rural areas around al-Mehalla, in houses built of unbaked mud brick with rusty iron doors. Unlike the houses in his village, his friends' house was small, dirty, and infested with insects. The room was rented to twenty labourers on various shifts. Conditions were most unsanitary. Most of the rooms had neither windows nor bathrooms.

Fikri and his friends became alarmed after visiting

some of their roommates who had been sent to the hospital. They were shocked at the number who were coughing blood or had lost parts of their bodies in accidents with the machines. What worried them most was that their labourer friends were undergoing this suffering far away from their families. They cursed the situation that made them feel all the loneliness and helplessness of strangers in a strange land.

Whenever Fikri and his friends were stricken by a great longing for home, they would remind each other that as men they had to work, no matter where, and that after all, in their villages they used to work on the royal farmlands and the estates of the aristocracy, and were often away from home for weeks at a time. They felt that in spite of all the bad conditions, they were still much better off in al-Meḥalla. They compared their situation then and before as follows:

> It is better here in spite of the hard conditions, better because one is sure of constant work and sure of earning a bit to give his mother and brothers to pay for the rent of the land and get in some grain for the kids to eat. Why, whenever we were a bit behind with the rent, the royal <u>khasa</u> [prerogative] wouldn't be content with registering [as a guarantee] the one buffalo that was all we owned. They would even lay hands on the bit of grain that we had sweated blood all the year to set aside. So now the situation is more hopeful than it was in the village. If it weren't for the damned machines, everything would be fine. When we were in the village we'd never have ten piastres in our hands all at once, or even five! When the mayor had his hand under water in the flood he'd round us up and set us to work without pay. That's how life in the village drained us dry and we never laid eyes on any money. It's true that we miss home, but that is the way to make a living. Let's just pray that God keeps us all healthy and that everyone will get back safely to his family.

Fikri and his friends were struggling very hard to accommodate to the trying circumstances of work in al-Meḥalla. The factory regulations were hard and strictly applied, and to abide by them was very difficult. Fikri describes the scene as the workers tried to be on time at the factory:

As we were preparing the bread to take with us for lunch, we heard the factory whistle announcing fifteen minutes to seven. This was the time for opening the four doors of the factory to let the workers in. We rushed into the streets. Each of us lifted the hem of his gallabiyya, gripping it between his teeth, and flew like the wind. We snatched off our shoes in order to run faster. We weren't the only ones late--the streets were swarming with hundreds like us, each one with his shoes under his arm and the hem of his gallabiyya between his teeth, all charging like horses, all trying to get there before the doors closed, depriving them of a day's wage, each one thinking only of himself.

I was running like the wind, afraid of being late. I looked behind and saw crowds of others running, their faces haggard, their tongues lolling out like animals, and I remembered the proverb I had heard from my mother: "If you're caught in a flood, even stand on your son!" I saw and remembered. I saw those who fell in their haste, and found no one to help them up, and I saw those who elbowed their workmates out of the way to get in front. I went along with the tide.

I was panting. Some of my friends grabbed my hands. "You late like us?" they said. "We almost overslept. Run or the doors will shut and you'll lose a day's pay. Run, boy! We're nearly there! Run! The guards are holding the gates. They're going to shut!" I could hear a tumult and voices all down the street, all shouting, "Run!", all urging the others. They were barefoot. I was wondering if the gates could possibly stay open long enough to let in all this crowd.

I kept hoping, but I was disappointed. When I reached the gate the guards in their yellow suits were closing the gate, slowly, slowly, until the hands on the clock showed seven. The whole street was still crammed with people. I wriggled in between the legs of the guards just as they shut the gates. The workers were shouting outside, trying to force open the gates, crying out "We've run ourselves to death! What's up? Are you going to lock the gates in our faces for the sake of a few minutes? Shame on you! We'll miss a day's pay!"

A battle almost broke out between the workers and the guards, the workers trying to get in and the guards with their hard hearts and big sticks trying to shut the gates. The workers crowded together and their numbers swelled, and they began to shout "Push the gate, lads. We're going to lose a day!" Their determination grew stronger,

the determination of workers set on getting in and doing a day's work. They managed to force open one of the gates and workers surged in, cheering in victorious exultation. But the guards, whose hearts knew no mercy, did not accept defeat. They took up their canes, the sort the peasants use to drive their donkeys, and short whips bound with brass wires, and on the order they set about beating the workers indiscriminately.

The sticks and whips rained down blows mercilessly on faces and heads until the blood flowed from all over the workers' bodies, and in this savage way they managed to divide up the workers and get them into the street. They shut the doors and the smiles and laughter that had lit up their faces at the moment of victory turned to tears outside the locked gates. The guards stood in an orderly line, their sleeves rolled up, each with a twisted smile on his face. In front of them stood their commanding officer, wearing the official uniform. He was a retired army officer hired by the company especially for such occasions as these. The officer stood before the guards, encouraging them to even greater works, and said, "You have done your duty well. These people are nothing but animals gathered from every town and village. They have to be made to submit until they get used to discipline. These scum have to get used to order, and these efforts of yours are the only way to achieve that."

The officer saw us from a distance, standing there, and sent one of the guards up behind us, so we hurried inside and disappeared behind the machines in the factory. When we felt safe, we wiped away our sweat, taking our time.

I went over to the machine I used to stand beside and found 'Abd al-'Azīm there, the workman who had taken it upon himself to train me, watching me from behind the machine. I understood why, because he was worried about my being late. He tried to speak to me by raising his voice standing behind the loom, but I neither heard nor understood, and I stayed where I was. 'Abd al-'Azīm rushed over to me because he was not used to seeing me like that. My face was wan from tiredness, and I couldn't answer his questions because I was still breathless. He did not wait for an answer. He went running off to the cloakroom and came back with some water in his cap and splashed it on my face.

I gulped and swallowed and no longer felt faint, and 'Abd al-'Azīm said, "Get up quickly and lean on the machine. Make out you're working

> in case the boss comes around. The weaving section head, Mr. Sadiq, is a man who doesn't like to see a machine idle, and if he hits you it's always with his boot. He doesn't care what's wrong with the machine, all he cares about is that it's running. He doesn't care if the threads are tangled or not, or if it needs repairing or not. All he cares about is that it's running. As soon as he comes in everyone starts stuttering, even the foremen. As soon as they see him they run like crazy. They knock the workmen about left and right, and take off all the brakes, even if the machine is out of order, just so the boss won't see a machine idle. They go in fear and trembling of him. A real bastard of a boss. He doesn't differentiate between a workman and an assistant. If he finds a machine idle, he clouts the operator and the mechanic. Watch out for him, kid. Get up quick!"

Regulations Inside the Firm

Discipline was as strict inside the factory as out. Anyone who broke a regulation was severely punished on the spot by the overseer. After being in the factory for a few weeks, one day Fikri found a big crowd in the hall around a report hanging on the wall. He started to read it to himself. Those who were standing behind him asked him to read it aloud. He read the following:

> By order of the general manager: First, all lavatories will be closed on all factory floors from 8:00 a.m. till 11:30 a.m. and from 2:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m. Second, anyone who is one minute late for work in the morning or evening will be prevented from entering the factory for one or two days to compensate losses to the factory. Third, the wearing of wooden clogs on the shop floor is forbidden, on pain of punishment. Fourth, no worker is allowed to raise his hand to the foreman or signal with it. Anyone not abiding by this regulation will be dismissed from work.

At the end of the notice there were the names of those who were being forthwith dismissed, including a worker who had answered back the supervisor that morning.

> After finding out about the new regulations and the names of those who were dismissed from work, I found the workmen having a heated discussion. Someone said, "As if the workman did anything! The man who got the sack was pushing a cart. The foreman called him but he went on without hearing him. Just look what the foreman did to him then! He stormed up to him like a wild beast, knocked

him flat on his back, grabbed him by the neck, and only let go when all the workmen gathered round and saved him by brute force. And after all that, you see what's happened? He got the sack. It's as if he had been beaten to death without lifting a finger. It's all a conspiracy to break us down. They want us to lose all our spunk." Someone else said. "Never mind. Anyway, wasn't he going round the machines all day with a spanner in his hand? Did he have to do that? It's only the wrong kind who behave that way."

Someone else went on, "Okay, but what are we going to do about the toilet? Are we supposed to stay all day without going? Good grief, lads! It's hard enough to hold it for five minutes! Where are we supposed to do it if we can't go to the toilet when we need to?" A loud voice replied, "We're going to kill ourselves, are we? We'll just have to piss next to the machine. What can they do to us? Hit us? They hit us already. Sack us? They already give us the sack. What else is there?"

Another man went on, "If anyone hits you, let him have what's coming to him! No one's better than anyone else. You can't be a man at home with your wife and family, and then at work be a snivelling kid. You've got to be a man at home and at work!"

But someone else said, "No mates, that's no solution! Anyone who can't put up with things as they are had better go back to his village before he comes to a sticky end. We've only come here to support our mothers and families, and we've got to be prepared to be walked over for their sakes. You have to put up with a lot to make a living. When the foreman swears at you or bawls you out, let it in one ear and out the other. Just saying, "Yes sir" makes things easy. Anyway, God made everyone in his own station, so obey God and the Prophet and those who rule you. That's what God says in the Qur?an."

But the reply came, "Do you mean God's satisfied with what happens to us? Didn't God say, 'Whoever attacks you, attack him as he attacked you'? Don't they hit us on what God created? When someone punches you in the face, is it right or wrong?" The man answered, "That's just my opinion. I am advising you so none of you loses his head and hits the foreman and then lives to regret it."

Someone sighed and said, "When a cup gets full, it overflows. They even want us to go barefoot at work. They don't even want us to wear our clogs. Do they think we've got money for shoes? We keep

> our shoes for going home every fortnight. If we wear them out, we can't get another pair. It's no use, mates. We've got to hit back at those who hit us. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And remember, the one who starts it is most in the wrong."

Conception of a Machine (the Mechanical Loom)

The regulations antagonised the workers because they could not understand the penalties specified. To them it was unfair to dismiss workers, or even penalise them, for such actions. But these regulations were less offensive than those related to the mechanical work itself. Repairs and maintenance were neglected. The condition of the mechanical looms intensified the original fear of the machines felt by unskilled labourers. Fikri, a villager coming to the factory as a child, was terrified of the mechanical looms, which he knew had killed workers. But after a while he noticed that it was not the machine which killed the labourers, but the administration of the factory which should be held responsible for the continuous misery and accidents related to the mechanical looms. He recalls one of these accidents and how it happened:

> One of the workers was worried about a fault in his mechanical loom, and so he went to the mechanic, who was talking to one of the foremen, and tried to explain to him what was wrong with the machine. The foreman didn't listen to him, and pushed him away, saying, "Get out of here! Go over there and wait for me by the machine." The workman went back deflated, and stood beside the machine. "You see I've done as you said. I went to him and he took no notice. I can't leave the machine standing idle all day. What will they say when the cloth goes for inspection and they measure it and find that the man on the night shift turned out more than me? What will they say? They'll say I'm a poor worker. And then what? They'll give me the sack. Will anyone dare to say the mechanic stopped the machine and left it idle? Who would say it, and who would listen? Would anyone accept my statement that I went to him three times and he had nothing to do? He does nothing but chat with the foremen, and he doesn't care about fixing the machine or even knowing what's wrong with them. What on earth shall I do? The mechanic will only say that no one told him, no one called his attention to it. It will all turn out to be my fault.

Who will prevent penalties? I must run the machine. I'll run it no matter what happens. No one here listens to what a workman says. It's the foreman who gets listened to, no matter how much he neglects his work. I did what I was supposed to do, and now I've got to run the machine no matter what."

He started up the machine, although he knew how dangerous it could be, so afraid was he of being sacked for carelessness. The machine ran and carried normally, and the operator imagined that it had mysteriously set itself to rights. He reassured the workmen who were standing around that there was nothing dangerous in the machine, and they started going back to their own work. Nobody was expecting what happened next. The shuttle hurtled out of the machine like an arrow and hit the operator on the head, a fatal blow to his skull. The operator fell to the ground, blood streaming from his head. In a moment his face and clothes were covered with it. He lay silent and motionless.

The nearby workers gathered round, shouting, "The shuttle's killed someone," and workmen came from all over the shop floor, everyone trying to see him lying there, but it was impossible because the workers numbered in the thousands. Shouts went up on every side, "Make room, mate. It's hot in here! What a waste!"

The workman lay there for more than a quarter of an hour, a quarter of an hour that seemed more like a whole day, before the foremen arrived. I was standing beside him. The rapid beats of my heart almost stopped. My body trembled, and I froze to the spot. I didn't notice that the blood had drenched my clothes till after the foremen arrived. They stood beside him, their faces showing not the slightest concern, as if nothing had happened. They had grown accustomed years ago to seeing dead faces covered in blood like this. All the workmen crowded around, their eyes moist with tears, all of them trying to fulfill the foremen's orders to carry him away. But the foremen only let five of them do it.

They stood in rows on both sides, with others behind the machines, waiting to catch a last glimpse of him. Their eyes, glistening with tears, looked maliciously at the foremen, who seemed completely unconcerned and unmoved, and at the machine that had killed a workmate who had been beside them only a few minutes before.

The workmen went back to their places, but now each stood terrified at his machine, and they looked hysterically around them, afraid that what had happened to their workmate would happen to them. I went over to my machine that was operated by

'Abd al-'Azīm and stood behind it, scared stiff. Every part of me was shaking. I looked around me. There was the machine that had killed the workman, the machine that had killed its master. My fear grew that the foreman would order me to go and run it when he knew that I was trained and could operate it.

Every time I saw the machine standing beside me, I wished I could flee far away until someone else came, especially after I caught sight of the blood that had dried next to the machine. No one came to clean it up, and I said to myself, "Why doesn't anyone clean up the blood? Why don't the bosses have it done? Are they leaving it till one of the directors comes to see it? Or will someone from the police come to inspect the scene of the accident and order the body to be buried after he makes an investigation and locks away the murderer, as they used to do in my village when anyone was attacked and killed. Could that happen? Could they arrest a machine and lock it up?"

Many questions--and my mind went back to the days when I used to work in spinning and a lot of people were killed by the machines. Nobody carried out an investigation, and none of the bosses came to find out the cause. The police never came to establish what had happened. And then I was sure that no one would come and the worker would be buried like the rest. No one would know about it, the reason why he died or how it happened.

Everything around me started spinning, and my body shook. I only left the spinning shop to get away from the dying and escape with my skin, and there I was seeing a worker die in a moment from a blow of the shuttle. I remember all those I had seen or heard of, workers on skeining or spinning or cleaning who had lost arms and legs, and whom I had seen in hospital. Their names had never been recorded, and their wages for the days they had worked before their accidents were not even paid to their families. It was as if they had died just like stray cats.

And I remembered the days when I lived in the village, when Muhammad the Upper Egyptian had been accused of killing al-Sayyid al-Sawwaf. The police had come, and it was they who ordered the burial of the body after the area doctor had come and ordered an autopsy. Afterwards the court sentenced the murderer to twenty-five years imprisonment--that is, a life sentence--as well as making him pay compensation to the dead man's children. Why was nothing done here as it was in the village to establish the responsibility? Why no investigation

or compensation? Why no punishment of those responsible, so that these deaths were not repeated? These were the questions that went round in my head, driving me crazy, and still I found no solution that would set my mind at rest.

And again, why are complaints not written against the company? Do the men who died not have families who would register complaints, write reports to the police, and demand a trial for the murderers of the sons and the payment of compensation? Whoever owns a buffalo which causes the ruin of other people's crops, or butts someone, is punished, since the owner is considered responsible for the beast. Here in the factory it might be said that the machines are the murderers, and the machines are nothing but iron. And I said to myself, shouldn't the owner of the factory be punished like the owner of the buffalo, being considered responsible for negligence? If the owner of the buffalo fed it properly, it would never trample down other people's crops. If he tied it up with strong rope, or led it along with due precaution, it would not be able to butt people along the way, and so the owner is guilty of negligence. Here in the factory, if they maintained the machines and put barriers around the dangerous areas, the workers would not be killed. What applies to the owner of the buffalo should apply to the owner of the factory, because he is responsible. So why are complaints not made? Why do the families not present complaints in court, and lawyers stand up in defence of the workers? Doesn't the proverb say, "Even the shot that misses its mark is alarming"?

Ideas flooded my mind in just the few seconds while I stood in front of the machine. I looked at the faces around me; they were grave and despondent. The workers' voices had fallen silent. No talking, no smiles, no laughter as there usually was. Everything on the shop floor was silent except for the clatter of the machines and the whirr of the belts that could feel no grief.

Then what I least expected and wanted happened. I saw the foreman coming along the gangway, looking to the left and right, searching the faces of the workers standing at the machines. I felt he was looking for the day workers so he could hand over to one of them the machine that had been operated by the worker who had died. I wished I could excape, or that the earth would swallow me up so that he would not see me. I moved away from him, but he came closer, and I went over to 'Abd al-'Azim, trying to hide myself behind him. He said to me, "What's the matter? You're as white as a sheet!"

"The foreman's coming."

"So what? Let him come. Nothing can happen."

"I'm afraid he'll put me on the machine the man who died had."

We were silent for a moment, and then he went on, "That's nothing to be afraid of, is it? Whatever would we do if everyone took fright? Who's going to work the machine then?"

"I don't want to throw my life away. If you die here no one even knows where you're buried."

"Don't worry! Don't give yourself ideas like that. Nobody dies before his time. Our lives are in the hands of God."

I felt encouraged at this, and said, "But doesn't God say, 'Don't put your lives in danger'?"

And he answered scornfully, "Danger? Is there anything here that's not called danger? Everyone here is in danger as long as his mother's not praying for him. These are machines, machines made of iron that don't know anything about danger. As long as we've agreed to work we've no business being afraid of danger. That's what earning a living is all about. 'What drives a man to struggle? The need to escape a harder struggle.' That's what the proverb says. Nothing brought us here but our need, so forget about danger and work, and be careful. You're a good lad and you've a deft hand for work. You've learnt the job and now you're good at it. So if the foreman comes and puts you on the machine, you've got to go.

"Don't be scared. You have to show him you're a man. 'Whatever you're scared of will happen to you', the saying goes. Don't stand and stutter. Get a hold on yourself. Do you really know what that machine is like? You think it's a huge thing, a terrifying thing, but it's not at all. Do you know when you go up to it with determination and show it you're the boss, it gets afraid of you? That's how to get the better of it and make it work for you. Do you get it? Don't you get scared. I don't want fear to get a hold over you. Don't let me down. I want you to stand up bravely at the machine, otherwise they'll say I don't know how to train a worker."

'Abd al-'Azīm did not finish what he wanted to say. The foreman arrived and stood beside the machine, looking around, and spotted me standing next to 'Abd al-'Azīm. He stood for a moment, watching me, making sure I could cope with the

machine, and I was saying to myself, "If only the earth could open up and swallow me!" in spite of the encouragement I had had from 'Abd al-'Azīm. Finally the foreman decided to take me, after asking 'Abd al-'Azīm in his rough voice, "What do you think of the boy next to you? Can he manage the machine?" 'Abd al-'Azīm had replied confidently, "Yes, sir."

So I resigned myself to the fact that there was nothing to be gained from fear; I must reject it. I must summon up some courage, as 'Abd al-'Azīm had said. I must go up to the machine unafraid. I must get the better of it before it got the better of me. I must make 'Abd al-'Azīm proud of me in front of the foreman, so he would know that his was the credit for my skill. I must not let him down.

The foreman took me by the hand, and I followed him. 'Abd al-'Azīm whispered in my ear, "Don't get scared! I'll help you out." As he spoke, his lips were smiling, because I was the first of his trainees to be put on a machine. He smiled despite the grief that hung over the shop floor.

When I got to the machine, before I set it going the foreman said, "Listen, wait--get something and wipe up that blood first. I don't want a single drop beside the machine. And get off the blood that's splashed on the sides!" He said it roughly. I had to obey.

I resigned myself to the fact that the subject was closed. The worker had died and was on his way to be buried, without his name even being recorded in the company's register, without the cause of death being established. He had gone just as others had gone before him. I said to myself, "Where are the police? Won't anyone even write a complaint, even anonymously, the way they used to in the village when the criminal was a powerful man from an established family?"

I felt there was no point in delaying, so I took off my gallabiyya and started the machine, remembering all 'Abd al-'Azīm's advice. There was no use being afraid as long as I had decided to be a worker.

I stood at the machine, gripping the brakes, watching the faces of the workers around me, and for the first time I felt full of joy. I had become a workman. I had been put in charge of a machine. I had learnt how to work it. I had become like 'Abd al-'Azīm and all the machine operators, and soon I would train others as I had been trained.

In a minute my two friends, al-Gharīb and al-Safti, would come and see me standing at the machine alone. And when my mother knew, she would be pleased.

'Abd al-'Azīm's face was glad when he saw the machine running. He pulled my hand and said, "Congratulations. That's the way! You work, and nobody will be able to say a word against you. Nobody can tell you off, or call you to run his machine 'cause he's tired or wants to go to the lav or go for a walk over to the dyeing shop or the inspection room or anything. Now you're stuck with your own work, and that lets you off doing favours for everyone else. The machine operators are always trying to exploit the day workers, the workers who aren't trained yet, and they boss them around. And now you're at a machine, and you'll be as good as the best of them. Life's like that--everything changes. Whoever's untrained today will be trained tomorrow. Now you're trained and damned good at it. Put your best foot forward then, and make us proud of you. I'm glad I have trained someone like you and seen him get up and handle a machine. I'm really pleased with you, and if you need anything I'm right beside you, and I'll put in a good word for you with the men around you."

As usual, I stood at the machine and took off my gallabīyya and put it to one side with the bread I had for lunch wrapped in a piece of cloth. I had torn the cloth from an old black gallabīyya of my mother's instead of the handkerchief which I had lost under the machine. The machine started up, and I stood beside it with a sense of pride and self-confidence. The workers around me watched me, amazed and exchanging whispers: "See how the boy's standing at the machine! He's running it like a dream. It's really flying around. Look at it--the youngest kid here, and he's working the machine like any man." They watched me with their sharp eyes, and I heard them say, "It's not how big you are or how old you are that counts! He's just a kid, but he's got the machine running better than a man."

The foreman came too, and stood watching me with satisfaction. Every time I heard remarks like this, my self-confidence increased, though I often felt embarrassed when I saw the older workers watching me. I would ask myself, "Why do they watch me like that? Is it because I'm only young and yet I've become just like them, old as they are, or what is it?" But their gaze nevertheless spurred me on to work.

Although Fikri was encouraged by working on a machine like any man, he was making a tremendous effort to overcome his fear and suspicion of the machine, especially after seeing what had happened to his friend. He used to have nightmares about being killed by a shuttle and buried in al-Mehalla, away from his village, but he would overcome such fears by saying to himself,

> Let me trust in God and perhaps I won't die. And even if I die, everything is in the hands of God, and it's all Muslim graves. The important thing is to trust in God. My mother always says, "Keep to the straight and narrow, and your enemy will never get you." I'd better not walk in front of the machine. It's the machine that's the enemy, that's what kills. I'd better start it up, then go and stand behind it, out of the way of the shuttle going backward and foward since the machine's out of order. I'd better start up the machine and run behind it, and keep out of danger, the danger of the machine.
>
> What else can one do? I've been trained, and I have to be careful. What could I do in the village if I went back home? I'd go back to the mosque school and the fiqi [teacher of the Qur?an] would bastinado me. Or I could be a peasant farmer, but we don't have any land. Could I work for the mayor? Could I be a servant? Could I gather the boll weevils on the royal estates? Work for one day and haveno work for ten? No! Here it's better, out of the sun and with constant work. It's true they hit us, but the beating won't go on long here, and that happens to all the others. Lots of people have died, and none of the other workmen has packed up and gone home. New people are coming every day. They arrive by the truckload.

Relations between Migrant Labourers and Townsmen

Migrant labourers in Misr Company were faced with difficult conditions, not only inside the factory but in the town as well. Antagonism toward rural labourers in Misr Company was present among all strata in al-Mehalla. The Mehallāwī workers isolated themselves from these migrant labourers, whom they identified as the "sherkawwiyya," meaning "the people of the Company." They also called them al-gharbawīyya (strangers). The relationship between the workers from the town and the rural labourers

started with alienation and then went on to confrontation between the two groups. Fikri tells of numerous conflicts between these groups in his memoirs, including the following:

> A flurry of movement began on the shop floor, unaccustomed movement. Workers were running this way and that in every direction, looking all about them. 'Abd al-'Azīm came up to me and said, "Listen, whatever you do, don't leave the machines, 'cause the Mehalla people are out for a fight. They're chasing the workmen with sticks."
>
> "Why?" I said.
>
> "Don't you know why? Just be careful, and don't leave the machines at the moment lest you get yourself killed."
>
> I stood watching the faces going past in front of me, and I felt a great desire to know what was going on. Then I saw Gharīb coming quickly toward me, and behind him Sayyid Safti, and they said with one voice, "Have you been standing here and not seen what happened? They're beating them with sticks and knocking them about. They don't let anyone get away without a beating, and they're getting the best of all the workers."
>
> "Why?"
>
> "Who knows? We just came to tell you. When we saw them we just ran and hid by the machines."
>
> "Didn't you hear anything?"
>
> "What did we hear? We heard them when they were crowding in on one of them and beating hell out of him, saying, 'Say you'll go home, you swine. You've got to get out of this town. You've made the price of food go up, you bastards. You're biting the hand that feeds you. Now tell, will you get out of town or not?' and they didn't let him go till he said, 'All right, all right, I swear I'll go home. I'm not a local man; I'll go home." When we heard that, we lay down beside the machines, afraid they'd come over to us. They grabbed a second man, and a third, and they didn't let anyone go till he gave in like the rest. That's what we saw."
>
> "Okay, but what are we going to do, lads?"
>
> Safti said, "What are we going to do? We'll go back home. We have to go back home. We're no match for them. We're not ready to throw our lives away."

But I shouted back at Safti, "No, no, we'll stay here! We'll stay here!"

I said it after all these images had flashed through my mind, and then I looked around and saw Gharib was whispering with Safti about going back to the village. They were both terror-stricken.

"We'll have to stay here," I said. "We're not the sort to run away. What happens to others will happen to us. Don't listen to what Safti says, Gharib. He's obviously a real coward!"

The workers were swarming in the factory like bees in a hive, whispering here and there, each one considering what to do. They were rushing past me when 'Abd al-'Azim came up and whispered in my ear, "Listen. It looks as if it's got serious. Everything is in chaos. The Mehalla people are beating up the workers, and they don't let anyone escape."

"Why? Don't you know?"

"Do you remember when we were walking along watching the wedding celebration? You heard them say, "Mehalla people only! No sherkawwiyya! None of those who've put up the price of food! No strangers!" Do you remember when they trod on your foot? They were trying to pick a fight, but we decided to stay out of trouble. Well, now they've started. They're beating up the workers. They want to get rid of us."

"So what shall we do?"

"What shall we do? We'll stay! Look at the way things are here in the shop. All the men are wondering what to do. Every group from the same village is meeting together behind the machines, and they are asking each other."

"Have you heard what they're saying?"

"Some of them are shaking with fright as they're talking. Some of them say we've got to go home. Some of them say everyone should talk to the men from his own village and we should stick together and hold out. 'They can't finish us off,' they're saying. 'Doesn't anyone care about his workmates? We're all in trouble together. We have to fight for our living.'"

"Can the Mehalla men get the better of all us workers?"

"No, they can't, not if we stick together and hold out."

"But how can we hold out?"

"If all the men from one village, or from the same shift, could get together, then they could fight off any attackers and defend each other. That's the only way. Just the way we used to do things in the village. When there was a feud between two families, the strong family would win, and everybody would take notice of them."

"That was in the village, but how would it work out here?"

"Mutual benefit brings people together. Each of us came here just to make a living. Each of us wants to stay and work to support his family. We could hardly believe it when we found steady work. What could we work at if we went home? Shall we go back and do casual labour for the mayor, and be at his mercy and let him give us one piastre and take ten? Or shall we go home and hire ourselves out on the land and work one day and be laid off ten? We thanked our lucky stars we found these jobs, and now these swine want to get rid of us. Not likely! We've got to stay. I'm going to talk to everyone I know from my village and the villages nearby. I'll talk to them so no one will think of going off home. We'll stay here united!"

I said, "How are you going to be united? What does it mean as long as everyone lives in a separate area and the houses are far away from each other? Even at work we're split up, everyone at his own machine and in different workshops. So how can we face the Meḥalla people who've got together to force us to go and leave the way clear for them?"

"If the Meḥalla people are united by the desire to get rid of us, we're also united--by our work, by making our living. I don't think anyone from our village would reject that idea. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I'm not going home! I won't leave work, even though Gharīb and Sayyid Ṣafti said we ought to go. I said to them 'No,' and they changed their minds."

'Abd al-'Azīm wrung my hand and said, "That's my boy. You're from our village and you've refused to go home, and that's the way all the men from our village should be. We won't pick fights with anyone. We'll just defend ourselves whenever we're attacked. I'm going to talk to everyone I meet about it."

Only a moment after he left me, a weaver came rushing along the gangway, his gallabiyya torn, his thin pale face swollen from the punches he had received, bleeding from the mouth. He stopped and stood anxiously beside one of the men, his eyes darting this way and that, and he attracted a lot of attention. A lot of the workmen stood watching him with pale faces and piercing angry eyes. They did not stand still for long. One by one they drifted toward him, looking back for fear of the foremen, and they gathered around him asking questions. I moved toward him too, unable to resist, and I heard him saying, "They hit me. Some people from Mehalla ganged up on me, a crowd of people, and surrounded me, and every time one of them hit me and I turned to face him, another one would give it to me in the face. I didn't know where I was from the beating. And they weren't satisfied with that. They dragged me along by my gallabiyya and ripped it, and one of them punched me in the teeth and broke them."

One of the men asked him, "And what did you do? Just leave them to it? They took you for a weakling. Why didn't you let one of them have it? Then they wouldn't have dared knock you about like this."

"They tricked me," he answered. "How was I supposed to know they'd close in on me and beat me up? I was walking along, minding my own business and going to change a set of spools, empty weft spools, and get a full set from the weft shop. Walking along minding my own business, and they surrounded me like gypsies, and one of them said, 'Why here's a little country yokel! Walking along with his nose in the air! We'll soon put that right!' After that I don't know what happened. Anyway lads, what can one do among so many? There were lots of them, and only one of me. I didn't know where the next punch was coming from."

"Damn it all!" I said. "If my brother Muhammad were here he'd have beaten hell out of them with his sticks."

All the men standing around said with one voice, "Where is that brother of yours?"

"In the village," I said. "Kafr al-Hama."

They shook their heads, and one of them said, "In the village? We thought you meant he was here in the factory. He could have stood by us in this mess we're in."

"Why," I said, "haven't you got a stick? Let every man have his stick with him."

Someone else said, "Are we supposed to be working or carrying sticks around? How on earth are we supposed to cope? Isn't it enough that we already creep around like scared rabbits? Don't we have enough with being beaten by the foremen? We've decided to put up with it so that we don't get the sack, but what's all this business about the Meḥalla people? What do they beat us up for? What have we done to them? They say we've put up the price of food and put up the price of housing, but we're just workmen. How could we put up the price of housing? We're no landlords, are we? Why should they take it out on us? Why don't they go to the people who are really putting the rents up?"

Another man replied, "They just can't stand strangers here. That's why they want to get rid of us and have everything for themselves."

"What do you mean, 'everything'? Look at the state affairs are in and tell what 'everything' they want to keep for themselves. There's nothing to be had at all."

"You'd think we go and eat off their tables! But we all eat from our own lunch baskets, and we all pay good money for our lodging. It looks as if they're just a bad lot."

"Why should we go home to be called unemployed and useless? We're going to stay and live off the sweat of our brows. It's all a question of work and defending our livelihood. Has everything come to nothing? Are they all it takes to send us packing? This is it--we'll make gangs just like them, and everyone's to bring his stick under his arm."

We left the workshop, and as we were going along I heard the workmen talking, and they talked of nothing but what had happened between the Meḥalla people and the workmen. We reached the outside gate of the factory. I stood trying to prevent 'Abd al-'Azīm from coming with us. "You're tired," I said, "and you should go home and rest. It's enough that we've been on our legs for twelve hours. Twelve hours are enough to wear out a mountain."

But 'Abd al-'Azīm insisted that he wouldn't go until he was satisfied we were safe. Eventually he did leave us, and we went on our way. All along the road we found workmen running toward us, each with the hem of his gallabīyya held between his teeth. They were running around in no particular direction. Some were saying, "Come on now, just try to trap us now!" Others were saying, "Stop,

mate! Don't be scared! What the hell will people say of us? They'll say they are cowards. They say the Mehalla people sent the workmen packing, all of them. What a disgrace! Aren't we men anymore?" Shouts and cries. Workmen running everywhere, saying, "Anyone got my sticks? They're all prepared. They've set a trap for us."

'Abd al-'Azīm took me aside next to one of the houses, and we stood pressed against the wall. "Listen," he said, "Stay here. Don't move from this spot. Give me your scissors. Give them to me. It is no good--I've got to kill one of them."

"What do you mean, kill one of them?"

"I've had enough. Every day they heap abuse on us and beat people up. Don't we have enough humiliation to put up with? How long are we supposed to stand it? Give them to me. I'll stick one of them just once with the scissors and it'll finish him. They're the kind of people you have to frighten or they never stop. You see all those men running? If they saw someone have a go at the Meḥalla crowd, they'd stop running. Give them to me. I'm going to do it."

"What about when they catch you?"

"What's to let them catch me? It's dark. I can do it and hide. You can see what a crowd there is. The people are going crazy. The streets are full and everybody's running."

Sayyid Ṣafti said, "But why should it be up to us to do something? We're no different from all the people who are running about. Let's just run like them. What do we want to get ourselves in trouble for?"

But 'Abd al-'Azīm answered, "What trouble, mate? Are we just going to sit and talk while they're beating up the workmen? If everyone talked that way all the men would go back to the village. Someone has to do something."

In the end he snatched the scissors from me and ran off, saying, "Don't move from here till I get back. I'll come back to you." But I didn't pay any attention to him, and ran after him with Gharīb and Safti to see what he would do. He was running along shouting, "Don't be scared, lad! Stop running, kid! Have some courage, boy!"

The townspeople were standing under the low bridge blocking the way and setting about the workmen in a mad frenzy. 'Abd al-'Azīm was encouraging

people and calling on them not to run or be afraid. Some of them would say, "What do we have to attack them with? Do you think we're ready to die?" 'Abd al-'Azīm would grit his teeth and say, "Die, you bastards? Do you think there's any death worse than the one we're living? Your running away like that will only set them after us more. It'll make them really drive the workers out of the town!"

But some of them stopped to listen, and one of them said, "Go on, then! Show us how clever you are! You go ahead and we're behind you. It's easy to talk, but you just move up to the front if you're a man!" And he answered, "Come on, then, follow me!" And others took courage, and one of them cried from the back of the crowd, "Show us your courage so we can hold our heads high again! Now's the time to find out who the real men are!"

The workmen lined up one behind the other, pressing against the wall of the ginning mill, and we stood nearby watching. A man called 'Alī came up to 'Abd al-'Azīm and said to him, "What have you got?"

"I've got a pair of scissors," he replied.

"Okay, let's have them."

"Why? What's between us?"

" "Listen, give me the scissors and I'll attack them first, and you come up behind me."

But 'Abd'al-'Azīm answered, "No. I'm going in first, and you come up behind me and try to grab one of their sticks."

And 'Abd al-'Azīm made his assault, and they came up fighting from behind while he yelled at the top of his voice, "Dig in, lads! Dig in anywhere you can!" The Mehalla men were not prepared for the surprise attack, especially after they had first begun to attack the workmen and had taken the position and felt the first thrill of victory as the workers fled before them, leaving them off guard. Suddenly came this attack from the rear. One of them fell bleeding. Sometimes 'Alī's name would ring out: "That's the way, 'Alī! That's the way!" And sometimes, "That's it, 'Abd al-'Azīm, that's the way. You've given us something to be proud of. Let's get at them, lads."

The men standing by went in to the attack, and the rest stopped running. Those who had hidden around corners came back. The Mehalla men took flight,

with thousands of workmen after them, whooping with joy. 'Abd al-'Azīm and some of the other first attackers managed to grab some whips and sticks from their hands and went on chasing them.

After the fight, 'Abd al-'Azīm became unusually silent. As for 'Alī, whose name had suddenly been heard on the lips of some of the workmen, and who had supported 'Abd al-'Azīm in his attack, he was a young man, not more than twenty-five years old, with a slight stoop, a quiet man, not given to talking much. Some of the workers who knew him had gathered around him. He never took his eyes off 'Abd al-'Azīm, and eventually went over toward him slowly and shook his hand. "Where are you from?" he said.

"From al-Ga'farīyya."

"Where are you living?"

"In 'Ezbat 'Abu-Jasha."

'Alī said, "You're a brave man. If it hadn't been for you, we'd never have moved a step forward. I haven't had the honour of meeting you before. Yours truly is from al-Munifīyya, and you're from al-Ga'farīyya, you say?"

"Where are you living?"

"I live in the same 'ezba as you, and I work in the same factory as you. We come from different governorates, but that didn't stop us meeting. We're strangers to al-Mehalla. That's what made them attack us and beat us, as you've seen. I want you to come with me tonight so we can share a bite together. That will make a bond only the lowest of the low would break."

I woke the next morning early to the same sound as I had heard the day before, the call of the owl. It gave me the expectation that what had happened the day before would happen again. On the way to the factory, the workmen were walking cautiously, sticking close to each other whenever they saw people standing on the pavement in harir ifringi clothes.[1] They moved along in groups, some watching ahead, some watching behind, sharp-eyed. Each one was expecting a club or a dagger or a knife to come flying at his head from behind.

---

[1] This term refers to the Western-style silk gallabīyya worn by the Mehallawwīyya, in contrast to the more traditional style gallalīb worn by the rural workers.

On the way, the workmen gathered together, waving their arms about and whispering and talking about what had happened the day before. One of them would say, "We've done it. We've got in touch with the men from our village." And another, "What have you done about the sticks?" And the reply would come, "We'll get them from the village. We get paid today, and we'll bring them with us when we come back." And so the talk went on about the assembling of the village groups.

"See what happened yesterday. The real men made their move. We've got to move too. We're no less men than they are. Have you put the men from your village in the picture?"

We went into the factory without any scuffles on the way to the machines. I took over the loom from my workmate as usual, but before he left he whispered in my ear, "Watch out! The Mehalla men are fighting with the workers. There are fights going on all over the factory. There have been scuffles here and there all night."

"What did you do?"

"Whatever should I do? I'm staying out of it, mate. As long as no one comes near me, I keep to myself."

He left me and walked off, and I stood at the machine thinking about what he had said to me and what I had heard in 'Ali's house the day before.

Then 'Abd al-'Azīm came up from behind the machine and interrupted my thoughts. "Payday today," he said. "Everyone will go home to his village and come back with a stick. We're already agreed to that. And we've also agreed that all the workmen from one village will find lodging together."

"Would one room be enough?"

"No, they'll live in different rooms, but in the same street or the same area, so they can be near each other. But we're waiting till we collect our pay. We'll arrange everything then so everyone can settle his debts."

I went back to the machine to think about what 'Abd al-'Azīm had said, and I said to myself, "If everyone thought like the man on the night shift, we'd really lose the fight. When those like him get a beating and find no one to protect them,

they'll know what's right." Then suddenly Gharīb came running up to me shouting, "Give me the scissors. They've put me on a machine, a rotten, broken down machine full of broken threads. The operator hasn't turned up. They've brought me one of the Mehalla men to fix the threads, and he's asked me for the scissors to cut the threads."

"So why are you shaking like that?" I asked.

"I'm scared he's going to give me a beating."

"Don't be scared, lad. Take the scissors, and don't show him you're afraid."

He took the scissors and left. I stood at the machine watching and wondering what would happen to Gharīb. Would the thread man give him a beating? And if he did, would we keep quiet? We couldn't leave him to it. It's true we're only young, but "attack is the best means of defense," they say. They're older than us, and if they got hold of us they'd beat the living daylights out of us. But could we just keep quiet? No! We ought to hit them with anything we could lay our hands on. An iron weight, a weight from the machines. One blow on the head would make the blood flow, and then everyone would talk about how the kids made a Mehalla man bleed! That would please my brother!

I stood waiting for Gharīb to come back, but he did not appear. So I left the machine and went over to his place. There he was, standing alone at the machine, so I asked him for the scissors. He looked around for the thread man and then he said, "He's gone off with them!"

I stood looking this way and that and caught sight of him standing beside one of the machines. I took Gharīb and we went towards him and stood next to him. Gharīb went up to him and asked for the scissors, shaking from head to foot. The thread man stood staring us in the face, and then he smiled a crooked smile and said, "Go and get them from the man standing at that machine over there." He pointed him out, and we went toward the man. But he stood grinning at us, and pointed to another man and said, "Go and get them from him."

We went toward the second man and he stood looking around at the rest and I noticed their mocking smiles. "They're just playing a game with us," I said, realizing that the scissors were gone and they had no intention of giving them back.

I went to 'Abd al-'Azīm and told him what had happened, and he said, "Whatever made you give them the scissors? Don't you know they're spoiling

for a fight?"

I hurried over to Gharīb and said, "Keep your eyes open, and if you see him with the scissors come and let me know." So I kept watch from one side and Gharīb from the other. I remembered my mother's favourite saying, "Only the bakers enjoy the bread," and my brother's, "It takes a man to do a job."

Suddenly I saw the thread man, standing by one of the machines, taking the scissors out of his pocket and putting them down in front of him. He stood rolling up his sleeves and brushing his long soft curls back away from his eyes. He was looking around him, first at the workmen, with their threadbare gallalīb, then at his own silken clothes, and he would toss his head proudly, stand for a moment, and then once more look around at the workmen. I watched him and my whole body shook.

I said to myself, "He's bigger than me! He's so damn proud of himself! Trying to scare the men. If he hit me, he'd knock me flat! And he's not on his own--he's got others with him. They'll gang up on me and slaughter me. But I've got to get the scissors, and whatever will be will be. Never mind the consequences--at least I'll have defended my rights. Never mind if they give me a beating. They're bigger than me. The important thing is to stick up for my rights, otherwise my brother will hit me when he knows about it. I'll strike the first blow. Doesn't my brother say that attack is the best form of defence?"

I was trying to give myself courage while I watched till he began work. "Now he's started work--this is it!" I looked around and found that no one had realized what was on my mind. Everyone was working silently, moving slowly behind the machines. The belts were whirring, the wheels of the machines turning faster, the machines speeding up as the whirr of the belts grew louder. I shuddered and said, "To the attack."

Then I asked myself, "Attack? Shall I attack him? On my own? There are the scissors gleaming in front of me. Shall I go and tell 'Abd al-'Azīm? Maybe he won't agree, and will just tell me to set the matter before God. Shall I go and tell Gharīb? Maybe he'd be afraid for me and stand by me." Then suddenly I found myself rushing over to him. I stood beside him and said, "Gharīb, he's working with the scissors. Come with me and we'll grab them. Come and get a lump of wood or a machine arm, and if anything happens, hit out. Attack is the best means of defense. Hit out at anything."

I left him and went toward the machines. On my way I saw the scissors gleaming in front of my eyes, and felt I could not stand it. So I went toward the thread man, taking my chance while he was busy. I summoned up all my courage, set my mind to it, and took the scissors. My hand closed on them. Up came the thread man, rushing toward me, raising his hand, about to bring it down in my face. I did not give him the opportunity, remembering the words of my brother. The scissors struck him in the forehead; the blood spurted forth and spattered his pale face!

When I saw the blood my knees turned to jelly and I could not move. I found Gharīb and Sayyid Ṣafti and 'Abd al-'Azīm and lots of workmen coming over from every direction. Shock filled the shop. No one took any notice of me, or even felt my presence, so much were they concentrating on the worker drenched in his own blood and on trying to dress his wound.

The Meḥalla workers came up and stood beside him, trying to find out what had happened. I said to myself, "This is it. I'm finished. They're going to kill me now." 'Abd al-'Azīm whispered in my ear, "You did it? Okay--don't take flight. Don't you worry. You've broken his spirit, got him down. Whatever happens, you've really hurt him."

Few of the bystanders noticed or understood what was said. Many faces were turned towards me, unable to conceal their smiles in spite of their fear. The foremen came and set about beating the workmen indiscriminately, and each one went to his machine. 'Abd al-'Azīm pulled me by the hand and said, "Come here. Are you going to stand there till they take you away? Come this way."

I went with him, weak-kneed, and stood at the machine. Every time I looked at the wounded man I grew more afraid. The foremen were questioning him and he was standing, not answering. One of the foremen took him off toward the sick bay.

The news spread like lightning through the shop, and questions began to be asked about who could have done it. Fingers pointed in my direction. Some came and stood by the machine whispering, some smiling, some gritting their teeth, some shaking their heads regretfully, some grinning unabashed. People coming and going, everyone asking, while I stood calmly running the machine after getting a hold on my nerves.

Some of them came close and said, terrified, "Now you're in for it. How could you hit him? He's one of the Mehalla futuwa [thugs]. You've got no chance--he'll cut you to bits!"

I put up with a lot of comments as I stood there, saying to myself, "Okay, so what? It's all the same to me. It's better than just letting the scissors go. Why should I? He wants to play tough with me? Well, now I've hit him, and I'll take what's coming."

The gangway was packed with onlookers, and one of the workmen came and whispered elatedly in my ear, "Keep your spirits up. You'll find we're behind you. Plenty of the people here are very pleased, but they can't express how happy they feel."

Before he had time to finish, the thread man appeared at the door with his head bandaged and the supervisor beside him. I expected that they would take me outside and give me a thrashing. I tried to appear unafraid, sometimes moving about between the machines, sometimes putting my hand on the brake. All the workmen were peering between the machines, waiting to see what would happen. The thread man began to gather around him a large number of men from the workshop and outside, all of them in silken clothes. They crowded around him as they would a story teller, each one trying to get in a question, and he answering the questions without pointing towards me at all.

As the crowd of workmen grew, so did my fear, and I said to myself, "This is it. All these will be onto me, and I'm on my own with no one to help. Even Gharīb and Sayyid Safti are both at their machines. And 'Abd al-'Azīm isn't coming my way. Whatever are they crowding around talking for? Why is 'Abd al-'Azīm standing at his machine? Why doesn't Gharīb come? Maybe they're afraid of the foreman. So what! I'm going to die. Never mind, at least I hit him first and stuck up for myself in front of everyone. What will people say after I'm dead? Won't they say that the Mehalla men ganged up on me and killed me? That won't make heroes of them!"

While I was deep in thought, the thread man started coming slowly towards me with a group of workers in their smart clothes. I said to myself, "Shall I run and leave the machine? Shall I make a run for it? I can't--it's too late. The die is cast. They're coming my way. They're closing in. Good grief. I'll get the scissors. If I get them out of my pocket they'll get them away from me. That's just too bad. I'll give him one before he

gets me. Before I die, I'll make him suffer--that's what my brother used to say."

I took the scissors in my hand and stood like a sentry in front of the machine, looking left and right, scanning the faces around me like a drowning man waiting for someone to stretch out his hand and pull him from the sea. I felt reassured when I saw 'Abd al-'Azīm and Gharīb and others hiding behind machines, each with a pole in his hand. Slowly they approached, and as I found them coming nearer, I began threading my way more quickly around the machines. I stood to look around, my heart pounding. It seemed to me that the whole shop had grown quiet, that even the whirr of the machines had faded, although they were running at full speed.

All the workmen were watching me, but none of them made a move to gather together, and I asked myself, "Why don't the men come to protect me? Didn't 'Abd al-'Azīm say that there was an agreement that all the men from the same village should stick together? But so far no one has gathered together or come my way at all. Perhaps they're waiting until the others start something. That was 'Abd al-'Azīm's idea last night when we had that meeting at 'Ali's house.

Now the thread man and some of the workmen in their silk clothes were standing at the machine, holding the brakes. I stood glued to the spot, thinking, "This is it. It's up to God now. There's nothing I can do. They'll kill me. Shall I run? No, I won't run. Where could I run to? To die isn't such a terrible thing."

I took the scissors out of my pocket and went toward them, the scissors raised in my hand. The thread man stopped in his tracks and looked at me long and hard, without making a move. I stopped just a step away from him, and we gazed at each other, each watching and waiting for the other to start something. I found 'Abd al-'Azīm standing beside me, leaning on a stick. And suddenly there was Gharīb standing beside me, and he came up close and said, "I've come."

The Mehalla workmen were smiling, and their smiles broadened when they saw Gharīb standing beside me. I felt reassured by their smiles. The thread man started toward me. I raised the scissors and Gharīb raised his stick, but the Mehalla men just looked up smiling, and none of them lifted a finger. The thread man came even closer, and shouted in a voice even louder than the noise of the machines, "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! When they asked me in the office I told them I took a fall. They asked who hit me, and I said I just took a

fall--no one hit me."

They crowded around me and I stood in the midst of them, my heart pounding. I reached for the brake and stopped the machine, afraid one of them would pick me up and throw me into the cage. But I found the thread man reassuring me. "Don't be scared," he said. "Why are you afraid? You're fine, lad! You're the only one who's ever done what you did to me. From now on, I count you as my younger brother. Did anyone put you up to it? Anyone tell you to do it?"

"No," I said.

He said, "A lot of the lads from our town wanted to finish you off, but I wouldn't have it. You're a brave lad. It's true you're only young, but you've got guts and tried to take care of your things. I liked the way you snatched back the scissors, and the way you took me by surprise. Did anyone show you how? Where are you from?"

"From Tanta," I said.

He said, "Just for the sake of al-Sayyid al-Bedāwī no one will interfere with you! You're from Ṭanta and we're from al-Meḥalla, and from now on we'll be friends. You're a fine lad at your work and at defending your property, and if you ever need anything we're right with you. You're from Ṭanta and all the Ṭantawwiyya are real men." And he shook my hand and left.

I stood astounded, unable to believe that it had happened. I looked about me and there were workmen standing around me, staring, shaking their heads in wonder. 'Abd al-'Azīm came up and asked, "How did you get on with them? What did they say to you? We were expecting that one of them would try to set about you. Each of us had a stick, but we found them just talking to you."

After I had told him what happened, another man came along and said, "They're just testing you. They wanted you to say someone was with you, that someone had urged you on. They only talked to you that way when they saw the workmen armed with sticks."

Someone else said, "Do you know who that is? He is one of the Meḥalla tough guys from Suq al-Laban, and he was too embarrassed to tell his cronies that a slip of a kid had let him have it. He didn't tell any of the men with him about what you did. Who could he tell them about? Everyone saw what happened, and now he can't look anyone in the face. He used to go around boasting that there was no one to touch him in the whole world. No one in the workshop could

satisfy him. The way he used to beat the men! It's true what the proverb says, that a pigeon's dropping can trip up a camel! This is a fine beginning. It will work up the men's enthusiasm."

The next day on my way to the factory I was surrounded by voices ringing in my ears, the voices of street vendors, a multitude of intermingled cries, most of them the cries of women, each trying to drown out the other, and the closer I drew the clearer the cries became. From time to time I could hear the voices of small children, no more than six or seven years old, and as I came close I would see them standing beside their mothers, holding bunches of radishes and watercress in their hands and waving them in the faces of the workmen who were standing there, offering them for sale. I watched them. It was clear that they were not from out of town but were local Mehalla people, and I said to myself, "They shouldn't set upon us as long as they benefit from our being here. The vendors make a profit out of us, and the other merchants and other Mehalla people too. So why do they join in when it comes to beating us up?"

Relations between Labourers and Administrators

Administrators in the Misr Company were divided into several occupational categories that varied in hierarchy. The categories ranged from the mechanic of a shop, who was usually a mechanic with a diploma from the industrial school in al-Mehalla, to a manager of the whole company. These administrators, with their varied occupational and educational backgrounds and their different roles and statuses, were conceived of as one group by the workers. To the labourers this group represented the Company's policy and interest, and was hence alienated from them. During the thirties, when the Company was being established, the dichotomy between labourers and administrators was sharp and great.

Inside the shops as well as the firm the administrator-worker relationship was characterised by severity and concern for discipline. It was impersonal and unjust. The labourers were completely separated and isolated from the administrators. The managers and heads did not understand their problems and the difficult lives they were leading. Situations of conflict arose daily between the

two groups. Wages were one of the chief causes of the conflict. In the beginning, the dissatisfaction of the workers was not so much with the amount of the gross wage as with the amount of wages they actually received. For example, a labourer on a rate of £E 0.32 per fifteen-day period might, due to the Company's severe deduction regulations, be paid half, or even less than half, of this amount.

Fikri describes payday in detail, telling what it meant to the worker to have deductions made from his wages, and discusses how he personally dealt with the problem during his first few months of work in the Company.

> Each of us went into his workshop, and I said to myself, "Today I'll get paid thirty-two piastres. That's better than before. I'll buy a half-fare ticket for eighteen milliemes and tell the conductor I'm only young. But why should I? He might catch me out. I'll buy a full ticket for three and a half piastres, and sit on a seat like any other man and look out of the window, and when the ticket inspector gets on I'll show my ticket and have nothing to worry about. I'll have twenty-eight and a half piastres change from which I can get a present for my sister on the way home. As soon as I see her, I'll give it to her without anyone seeing. She used to bring me everything from the fields, so why shouldn't I take her something in return."
>
> My ideas possessed me while I was standing at the machine, sunk in thought. Then one of the workmen passed behind the machine and shouted in my ear and took my shoulder and gave me a shake. He yelled in my ear, "The boss is coming around. Watch out. They're sprinkling the gangways."
>
> My thoughts were interrupted. I looked around and saw a lot of workmen moving with distracted hesitation between the machines. I was sure that their preoccupation was evidence that they were thinking thoughts like mine. Today is payday. Each one is thinking of the things he will buy on his way back home and of the friends and loved ones he will see whom he left behind in the village. That is definitely what they are thinking about.
>
> Or, perhaps they are thinking about the moves to different lodgings that will take place, and paying their debts. Or perhaps they are wondering what they should do if they find the Mehalla men waiting at the door to attack them as they did yesterday,

and whether they will join battle with them. Would the battle delay their leaving town and seeing their families and the farmlands and the provisions that were to keep them going for the next fifteen days? Many questions occupied me as I watched their faces, and I said to myself, "In any case, by the look of them they've got a lot on their minds, just like me."

I watched the faces, all turned towards the door, their smiles spreading. Everyone was happy that the working day was drawing to a close and it was nearly pay time.

I stood watching to see where the foreman would sit so I could manage to get a place near the front of the queue. He sat down, and with amazing speed the workmen gathered from all sides, each standing behind the other in orderly lines, and I too rushed to take my place in the queue. But the foreman stood up and gave orders that the machine operators should leave the line and each one go back to his machine immediately, on pain of punishment, until they were called after the workmen in charge of machines were paid.

I stood motionless, glued to the spot, and said to myself, "I'm not going to stand by the machine at a time like this! So I'll stay where I am. The order's not meant for me. It's for those who became machine operators before I did. The foreman doesn't know anything anyway. He'll be busy with what he's doing, and he won't notice. I want to collect my pay early and get home early and spend tonight in the village. My sister will be waiting for me already, and my mother will be cooking. I haven't smelt food cooking for ages, or eaten meat and vegetables. By now she'll be cooking for me.

The whispering grew, and straight away I had a feeling that the moneybag wasn't full. "The bosses have filled the registers with deductions ever since the day they put up the notice." I shuddered and said to myself, "It's a disaster! What about the men who've been done out of their money by the Company? How will they get home? None of them have got any money. How will they eat? Everyone's planning on today being payday so he can go and buy his provisions."

I stood there anxiously and stretched out my hand to take what he would give me, my eyes on the money-bag. The foreman gave me back the stamp and with it half a piastre! I stood waiting with outstretched hand, but the foreman said, "That's it. You've got your pay!"

"I've only got half a piastre," I said. "I have to have the rest. There should be thirty-two piastres. I've worked it out."

But he said, "That's all that's owing to you. Get out of here."

My head swam and I stood there staring and looking incredulously at the half piastre in my hand. "I haven't got my pay yet. He must have forgotten." I looked left and right, and my eyes filled with tears when I saw the happy faces of the lucky ones who had been paid in full. I looked again at the half piastre in my hand, and said, "It can't be! I've worked full time. I haven't missed a day! So why should I only get half a piastre? The foreman must have slipped up. I'll go and tell him. How am I going to get back to the village?"

I went back to the queue, and when Gharīb saw me he said, "What's the matter? Didn't you get paid?"

"No. They gave me a miserable half piastre."

"How can that be? Go up to him again. He must have made a mistake. I got paid in full."

I completely lost my head and rushed toward the foreman, shouting madly, "You've forgotten to give me my money." He paid no attention, but the men standing in the queue said, "Don't hold us up! Let us get our pay. Take your turn in the queue. Let us see whether we'll get any money or not."

The foreman, sitting in his place, appeared unconcerned by my yelling. I took my place in the line, and the men stepped forward one after the other, and once again I found myself standing in front of the foreman. He looked me in the face and said, "Name? Have you got a stamp?"

"Yes."

"Let's have it."

I gave it to him, my heart pounding. He looked at it and at me and said, "You've already been paid. Here's your stamp in the book. What have you come back for?"

I cried shrilly, "I haven't been paid. The boys who are with me got full wages. Give me my money. My mother's waiting for me. What shall I tell her? Give me my money. God will reward you. I don't have even a bite to eat. How can I go home? My mother will thrash me."

But he bawled at me, "Get out of here, you bastard. I've no money for you."

I kept at it, "You've just forgotten me, sir!"

He pushed me with his hand and said, "All I need is for you to start getting insolent with me. Get out of here! Next!"

"I'll stand in the queue again," I thought. "Maybe it's the crush of people that makes him get it wrong. Maybe he'll soften. I'll tell him my father's dead, that he died when I was little, and my mother is bringing me up alone and she needs money to spend on my brothers and sisters. Maybe it'll touch his heart. I'll tell him everything. Perhaps he'll give me the rest of the money."

I found myself in front of him again, and he looked at me and said, "Name?" I told him and he was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Weren't you here just now? I've heard that name before."

"Yes."

He went pale and his face turned yellowish and he raised his fist and stood up. He was about to hit me in the face, so I leant sideways. "What do you want, you wretch?" he yelled.

"Money. The money, sir. The money I didn't get." And I burst into tears and poured everything out. "My father's dead and my mother needs money. My mother won't get married again, and she needs the money to keep my brothers and sisters. Please give me some money, I beg you."

The foreman bent his head and his hand relaxed and he was silent for a moment. Then he said, "What am I supposed to do?"

"You can do everything! Give me some money!"

The man sat down and started going through the papers after taking my stamp. I stood wiping my tears on my sleeve. He became engrossed in the papers, but then the manager came into the workshop and the workmen started running in every direction to get the machines turning. The foreman sat, completely preoccupied, and I stood in front of him. A worker said, "You've held up our pay!" And another, "Let him try to get his wages."

The whispering among the workmen increased. A voice came from the rear, "Fire only burns the one who touches it."

The foreman said, "Come closer, come here. See for yourself." He stuttered as he spoke, because the manager was doing his rounds. "Come and see. What's your name? Have a good look." What's written by your name?"

I found my name, and written beside it, "Deduction for a faulty bolt of cloth, to be paid half a piastre." The foreman said, "You see?"

I said, "There's nothing against me. I swear I haven't taken anything."

He shouted in my face, "You spoilt a bolt and it's been deducted from your wages."

The tears streamed from my eyes as I answered, "I haven't spoilt anything. This is the first time I've been at a machine. Before this I was just a day worker. I wasn't in charge of machines or anything, so why should the bolt be set against my wages?"

The manager went over to the office that was kept for him in the weaving shop. I stood looking around at the men's faces, but my tear-filled eyes could see nothing. Some of the workmen came toward me, saying, "What are you crying like that for?"

"I'm crying for myself. The company's pinched my money."

""Are you the only one who's been done? There are plenty of people like you whose money's gone to the company."

"Why don't they come and we'll go and complain together in the office?"

"It's a humiliation to complain to anyone but God, the proverb says. And anyway, no one would take sides with poor people like us."

"So what shall we do?" I said. "We have to go and tell him. Perhaps he'd be sympathetic."

One of them answered, "The one who recites feels differently than the one who listens."

"Let's do what we can," I said. "He who claims his rights doesn't lose them. The foreman said they'd give us the faulty bolt of cloth."

But one of them replied, "A day with the government turns into a year. Does fire burn any except those who touch it? As long as they've got enough to eat, there's nothing more to be done. And the manager goes around with his suit drenched in eau de cologne and his belly nice and full."

I went to the foreman to get the bolt of cloth that had been deducted from my wages. He said, "What are you getting so excited about? Calm down and you'll understand everything straight away. The bolt is your property since its value has been deducted from your earnings."

"So give it to me," I said.

"After a week or two."

"I want it now."

He pushed me with his hand. "You're holding me up now. It's enough that I know the bolt is yours."

I moved away from him and stood watching him count the money and pay the men, and my heart was heavy and I wept. I watched the workmen being paid, and the workmen who were told, "A bolt has been deducted." I saw them beat their faces in dismay, and I felt that I was not the only one who had lost his money to the company. There were even other workers, older than I, beating their faces. Weeping, I went over to them. "What are you going to do?" They did not answer. One of them said, "What can we do? We're ruined." And another, "Ever since the foreman took over the registers we've never had a fair deal!"

"What shall we do about the bolts of cloth?" I said.

One of them said, drying his tears, "What shall we do? Do you think anyone can as much as open his mouth?"

"How shall we go home?" I said.

We did not finish our conversation, for the overseer came around pushing us in all directions. "The manager's coming around, you bastards."

I leant against the side of one of the machines, and my heart beat faster. The manager's coming around? Why shouldn't I go to him? What can he do to me? I'll tell him as well that my father's dead. Perhaps he'll feel sorry for me. Would he give me the sack? Why should he? Do they give the sack to anyone who makes a complaint? I'll stand in front of him politely.

I said, "I'll go and stand in front of him and complain. I'll go and tell him everything before he goes home. There's an hour to go. Come with me."

But they all refused. "One disaster's enough, without causing another."

I was confused. "Shall I go? No, I won't go. My mother and sister must be waiting, waiting for their presents and the headscarf with the fringe." I felt more homesick than ever, and left the workmen and rushed heedlessly toward the office, toward the manager, saying between my teeth, "I'll complain to him. I'll cry in front of him so he'll give orders for me to take the cloth, and I'll sell at any price. The important thing is that I get home to see my mother and sister and eat some meat and bring back some pastries with me."

I rushed in, caring nothing for what might happen, and found a huge tall man with a black face and sharp eyes and enormous moustaches, wearing a white calico gallabīyya, a skullcap in his hand, and heavy shoes.

When I went toward him he yelled at me, "Stay where you are! Don't move! What do you want here?"

"The money," I said, "I've come to complain."

"That's not allowed," he said.

"Why isn't it allowed?"

"Go to your foremen in the shop."

"I went, but they didn't help. Let me complain to him." I let out a shrill cry for help. "There's no one but him for me to go to. There's no one for me to complain to. There he is, sitting inside, sitting in front of me. I can see him through the window. Mr. Manager. Sir!"

The great hulk of a man nearly gagged me, and said, "Shut up, you wretch! You'll get me the sack."

"What do I care! Mr. Manager! Sir!"

I was shouting like a madman, yelling constantly. It was the first time a worker had been in the manager's office, and that was what astounded the doorman so. Then the door flew open and he stood at the door shouting, "What's all this commotion about?"

The doorman rushed toward him, stammering, "It's just a kid, sir. I tried to make him go, but he wouldn't. He caught me unawares and got in. I tried to gag him, but he slipped away and I couldn't stop him."

The manager bellowed, "Come here, you! What gave you the nerve to come in here?"

I moved slowly toward him. "If you please, I've come to complain."

And the words poured out. I was afraid he would go back inside without hearing me out, but when he heard that my father was dead and that I was earning the keep of my brothers and sisters, he gave me a long silent look and took me by the hand and led me into the office. I stood sobbing, explaining what had happened. "Call the foreman," he said to the doorkeeper.

After a while, the foreman came. I could see him through the window that overlooked the shop floor, and I could see workmen and how they hid when they saw him coming. The foreman came in with a lot of papers under his arm, and came and stood and saluted in front of the manager. He stood with his hands at his sides and his face flushed, especially when he saw me.

"What's this boy's complaint all about?" the manager began. "He says a bolt of cloth's been deducted from his wages."

The foreman stuttered, looking at me. "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I show you the books?"

"I want some money," I said, "I don't care how. It's the first time I've been in charge of the machine."

The manager noticed the foreman's hesitation, and yelled, "Get the papers."

The foreman moved quickly toward him, head downcast, and stood with stooping shoulders beside him. My heart beat faster. I was afraid the manager would be convinced by the foreman, so I cried out in fear, "I don't care how you arrange it! I need the money to take back home."

The manager looked at me shrewdly and said, "Wipe your eyes and come over here in front of me." I moved a step forward, feeling that all the joints in my body had turned to jelly. "We're going to give you the cloth," he said. "We'll give it to you today. You can go and collect it now. But this is the first and last time you set foot in my office."

I did not register his last words, so loudly did the first ring in my ears. My fear left me, and confidence took its place. I almost jumped for joy, and tears streamed from my eyes. The manager threw a note onto the desk and I picked it up automatically and rushed for the door, words falling from my lips without my knowing what I said. "God give you a long life with us. God make you always a helper for people in trouble."

I could not see the door, and I went toward one of the windows thinking it was the way out. If there had not been a warning shout from behind me I would have thrown myself through it. It was the manager who shouted. The foreman took me by the hand, and I went with him like a blind man, clutching the note in my hand without even knowing what was written on it.

In less than a moment a crowd of workmen who had had cloth deducted from their wages gathered around me. When I showed them the note, Gharīb and Sayyid Safti were overjoyed, and 'Abd al-'Azīm cheered and almost threw me in the air. But the faces of all the men who had had the price of cloth deducted looked crestfallen. Whispered remarks flew around: "A kid went in to the manager without being scared, and we just stood, afraid to go in." I did not hear the rest. I went quickly over to the storeroom before it closed for the day, and Gharīb followed behind me. In the store I gave the foreman the note and said, "This is from the manager."

The foreman lit a lamp on his desk and scrutinised the people in the bright light. He leapt to his feet and opened up a big room full of piles of bolts of cloth. On the floor there was the lot, stacked up, each one with its name on and the amount that had been deducted from his pay. He spent some time going through the papers stuck on the stacked cloth, and I went behind him, looking eagerly for my name. Then he stopped at one of the bolts and said, "This is your one."

I lifted it onto my shoulder and went toward the shop. The cloth was heavy, so I took it in turns with Gharīb to carry it. In the workshop the men gathered around me. I was overcome with joy. A lot of them stood inspecting the cloth, and others stood with tears rolling down their cheeks, cursing themselves. "Just a kid, and he got the better of everyone. There! He's got the cloth, and now he can go home while we just stand here squirming. We just stand crying in front of him, and there's nothing we can do."

"If you'd come with me," I said, "you'd have got your cloth. I told you, but you were scared."

Then the motors came to a halt and the belts slowed right down and the spinning wheels of the machines stopped, announcing the end of the day. More and more workers gathered around me, all asking questions, and I would answer with the sweat dripping from my brow.

I was moving among them like a magician who has everyone looking at him. Workmen I did not know from all the other shops were asking questions and whispering, "Who's that kid carrying cloth on his shoulder in the middle of the factory? Isn't he afraid?" Some of them said, "The guards at the gate will stop him." But others replied, "But he's got his name on it." And others were saying, "He's not the only one. There are plenty of others who haven't got their cloth yet, but he went in to the manager and complained, so he gave orders that he should collect it straight away."

The whispers increased. "That boy went and stood in front of the manager? Why, when the manager comes in the whole workshop shakes and you feel as if even the machines tremble. He must be a plucky type."

At the gate the guards crowded around me. "What's this? Come here, kid. Where do you think you are, in a takeaway store? Do you think you're going to swagger out like that, toting a bit of cloth? Don't you think there are any guards here?"

"Don't talk that way," I said. "If someone steals something, does he go around carrying it on his shoulder? Don't talk like that to me."

But they replied, "Come on, you thief. Up to the officers' room!"

One of them grabbed me by my gallabīyya, pulling it tight around my neck, almost choking me. Another pulled me by the arm, and the rest pushed me from behind. "We haven't caught anyone for a long time," they were saying. "This is a good chance."

I tried to slip through their hands, but they were strong. I was shouting, "Let me go and I'll come along with you!"

But they paid no attention to what I said, and just kept dragging me along. In the office, the officer was sitting in the chair, leaning his head back against the wall. The guards came in, making a tremendous uproar, their heavy shoes stamping on the ground. They lined up in front of him and saluted, and one of them said, "A thief, sir. We caught him at the gate."

I shouted, with tears falling from my eyes, "Don't call me that. I'm not a thief. The company deducted it from my pay. I swear the cloth belongs to me. Shame on you! I'm an orphan and working to keep my brothers and sisters. Let me go so I can catch the

train to go home and get some supplies."

The officer was astounded by what he saw, and gave me a long look. "That won't wash with us, son," he said. "Tell me who you got it from and I'll let you go. Who gave it to you?"

"The manager signed for it," I said, "the weaving manager. Ask him--he'll soon tell you."

I spoke with confidence, and that was what so amazed him. He picked up the telephone and asked, and the order came, "Let him go. Let him go. The cloth is his property now. That's what the foreman said."

I left the office with my head held high. At the outer gate all the workmen were waiting eagerly, and when they saw me joy filled all their hearts, and they cheered, "He's come out with the cloth! He's come out with the cloth!"

I saw smiles of sympathy and understanding spreading over the faces of the waiting men when they saw me coming toward them. I noticed Gharīb leaning over from behind 'Abd al-'Azīm whispering loudly, "There he is, there he is. We'll be going home, and we'll all see our mothers."

"What are you going to do?" asked 'Abd al-'Azīm.

"Let's go and sell it," I said.

I went into one of the shops carrying the cloth on my shoulder, and when the owner saw me he drew near, looking at the workmen standing by, and said, "What's this?"

"A bolt of cloth from the company," I said.

"What have you brought it for?"

"To sell it."

"Did you steal it?"

"What do you mean, steal it? Don't dare say that!"

"How much do you want to sell it for?"

"The company charged me all my wages for it. They didn't leave me a penny, so do you think I'll make a profit on it?"

The owner of the shop said, "Would you sell it for fifteen piastres?"

"A whole bolt of cloth for fifteen piastres? That's too little."

"Eighteen."

"That's robbery. That's nothing at all. It cost me all my wages."

"Twenty-eight?"

"Still too little," I said.

"Thirty."

Then I realized it was an expensive bolt of cloth, and tried to push him higher. The salesman offered thirty-five, but I snatched it from his hands and went over to another shop. When we were at the door, 'Abd al-'Azīm whispered in my ear, "Don't rush it! The higher the price you get the better."

When the owner of the shop saw it, he said, "Are you selling?"

"Yes."

"How much were you offered?"

"Fifty-two piastres, but I refused. That's less than it cost."

"I'll give you forty," he said.

I smiled, and my face flushed. "Make it a bit more."

With quiet deliberation he said, "This is my last offer: forty-eight piastres."

Gharīb and Sayyid Safti whispered in disbelief, "Take it! Take it before he changes his mind!"

I went toward him and said, loudly and eagerly, "Done!"

He opened the drawer and began to count--ten, twenty, thirty, forty-eight piastres. I stretched out my hand, my heart beating hard, and as I left the shop everything in front of me seemed shining and brilliant. I looked in all the stores, wanting to buy everything in stock with my forty-eight piastres!"

Conflict between Labourers and Administrators

Due to the kind of relations existing between labourers and administrators, tensions began to accumulate and conflicting situations emerged, involving various ranks of administrators. In reaction to spontaneous conflicting situations, workers came to organise themselves and take action. Administrators were becoming more aggressive and more severe. In narrating the daily events of the shops, Fikri gives us detailed descriptions of how specific conflict situations emerged, how one situation led to another, and how administrators united in their policy in the beginning and then certain groups started to identify with the workers.

When Fikri came back from the village, one of the labourers warned him of the tension in the shops:

> "Mind you're careful," he said. "Mind you're careful, because they deduct a lot of fines. Every foreman has a register and spends the whole day doing the rounds of the machines and writing down names. What they give us with one hand they take away with the other. They don't want us to collect any pay at the end of the session."
>
> "What have you done about it?" I asked.
>
> "What can I do? I just make sure I'm careful. My mother says, 'If anyone hits you on your right cheek, offer him your left.' That's what it takes to make a living."

I was going to suggest that he write a complaint, but he gave me no chance. "The Mehalla people," he went on, "who know the work would all be gathered together in the shop, and when a loom broke down and we went to tell them to come fix it, they would refuse. They refused to work and just stood there, till in the end Engineer Shahata came along. None of us was standing with them. After they talked to him, some of them went out, but some of them stayed talking to him about an increase in wages. They wanted seven piastres a day, even though we only get two and a half. But the engineer refused and told them that they were already earning a good wage. 'The money you get is quite enough. You earn four piastres. There are other men who only get two and a half. You ought to be grateful! You're better off than other people.'"

I went over to take a look at the machine, afraid there might be something wrong with it that would be the cause of my destruction, remembering the death of the workman before me, and suddenly Gharīb came running up and stood beside me and said, "The workers are saying that the Mehalla men asked for a rise for themselves and the company refused, and a lot of them have gone off home, including the thread man who took a fancy to you." And he ran off. Everything was running; the workmen were running, and the mechanics were running, and the machines were going full speed, their wheels spinning and the belts flying around. The warp workers were running in the gangways, and everyone was working hard. They had come back from their villages longing for work. They had seen their families and come back reassured, each one bringing with him provisions for the whole of the next fifteen-day stretch. And then each would go back to get more food, and he would take his pay and give it to his family so that they could pay the rent of the land they worked.

I stood contemplating the faces as I stood at the machine, and suddenly I found him standing there, looking as if he had just come from the village in his black gallabiyya with the smart white stripes. I stretched out my hand and he shook it warmly and carried on talking to the men standing with him. He was talking loudly amid the din. I heard him say, "Everyone's brought a stick to keep by him."

Someone else said, "Why did you tell us..."

Then one of the foremen appeared in the distance and the men noticed him and disappeared behind the machines, bending over out of sight. They stood back at their own machines, keeping their eyes on the foreman. After a while, not long after work had begun, the men gathered once more, one beside the other, and started discussing what had happened in the morning.

One of them said, "There you are! The good Lord has got rid of them for us! Asking more money for themselves! Imagine--they earn four piastres a day and want to ask for more! Whatever are we supposed to do? Every man jack of us works like a horse and only gets two and a half."

Another man replied, "But we're not like them. They know the trade, mate. They've been in weaving all their lives."

"What's the difference between them and us?" someone else asked.

"The difference is that they're the men who trained

us. When we first came, didn't we find them at the machines? And they used to take us in hand and show us how the machines work. What's more, they're the ones who taught us how to thread a needle, so they ought to be asking for a rise."

"But why shouldn't we ask for a rise too, since we've learnt the trade?"

"What are you wasting all this time talking for, as if they gave them anything? They asked right enough, but all the company did was refuse to let them work. They're one against another. Thank the Lord you've at least got jobs!"

"You mean we ought to keep quiet and not make a wage demand? Just sit here, saying nothing? As long as they're asking for more we ought to too. What can it cost us? The sack? Not very likely. What have they got the machines for? To let them sit idle? If all the workmen go home, how can they carry on working?"

"It would be fantastic," I thought to myself, "to get some extra money, even if it's only four piastres a day like the Meḥalla men. That would mean that every month we'd earn a pound all but four piastres. My mum would be thrilled to bits."

"Why shouldn't we ask for more too?" I said aloud. "We ought to ask." And so I began to take part in the discussion about the need to put in a wage demand. The talk and discussion spread and went on behind the machines about the need to ask for a rise in wages because what we earned was not enough. The foremen noticed what was going on and began making the rounds of the workshop. They went around, their eagle eyes staring at us, brandishing the registers they held in their hands whenever they paused beside one of the workmen.

While I was deep in thought I heard voices being raised in the distance and shouts came from all sides. I stood watching the workmen rushing past, and suddenly found myself going along with them, making my way in the same direction, but not forgetting first to stop the machine out of fear that something might go wrong and ruin the cloth. As I went toward the shouts I found a large number of workmen, assembled in the middle of the workshop around one of the foremen, all eyes on him, kneeling on top of one of the workmen on the floor, beating him with his fists while the workmen's cries rose from round about.

One of the men said, "Isn't there anybody here ready to act like a man?"

"But what can we do?" someone else asked.

"Finish him off!"

"Finish him off? But what about all the others?"

"The others? What others? Who are they to humiliate us like this? Isn't there anyone tough enough to stand up to them with me?"

"One of the men quoted the proverb, "Give a bad neighbour time--he'll either move away or be hit by some disaster."

"But how much time are we going to give? We had our fill of it. If anything like this happened in the village, it would cost the lives of a dozen men! There isn't an hour goes by without someone taking a beating."

Others just stood their ground, milling around with blazing eyes. Suddenly I noticed one of the workers, a short, dark-skinned man with a big head and wide eyes, standing shaking from head to foot. He leaned toward one of the other workmen and whispered in his ear, and I heard him say, "Tonight, tonight...and then we'll see what the company will do for him." The words rang in my ears, and I kept my eyes on him for a long time, until he disappeared from sight behind the machines.

One of the nearby workmen said to me, "You see, you see what the swine have done to the man, how they've bloodied him up?"

"The only thing that will do any good is to start writing complaints," I said.

"Complaints? Complaints to whom?"

"Complaints to the government, complaints to the law."

"What government? They don't understand anything about what's going on here. We don't know them and they don't know us. Do you think he'd done anything to deserve being beaten to death?"

"So what can we do? Just sit here doing nothing? How long are we supposed to carry on like this?"

"Till judgement day," he said. "Till the good Lord does something about it."

"There's still a long time to go before the judgement day! And we can't keep on forever like this,

saying nothing and doing nothing. Let's send in some complaints. Even if we don't get what we want, it might get something moving. That's what Hagg Mahmud back in the village is going to do."

I was worried because 'Abd al-'Azīm did not come to find out what was happening. I went to him in case he would write a complaint. He was standing in front of the machine absent-mindedly. I pulled his arm, but he said to me, "I've come back from the village exhausted, completely worn out. If I wasn't afraid of the blasted foreman I wouldn't have come back till later. I spent the couple of days I had in the village at the plough and on the land, and now I'm back, sick of the sight of the factory, afraid of falling asleep on the job, afraid one of the wretches will come and beat me."

"And what would you do if one of the foremen did come and beat you?" I asked jokingly.

"What would I do? I'd poke his eyes out and blind him! I'd send him off blind! But what's it all coming to in the end? Another eleven years in prison, and I'll be packing up work. Not all bird's meat is eaten." He spoke apologetically.

I said, "Suppose we were to send complaints to the government. We wouldn't lose anything. We'll just do what we can and then whatever comes of it will be the will of God." He laughed loudly in his old accustomed way and shook off the drowsiness that had been hanging over him. Then one of the workmen yelled from behind the machines, "It's him, it's him!" and as we pricked up our ears we heard him say, "Tomorrow, tomorrow. Don't go home. Wait at the factory gates." And off he went.

'Abd al-'Azīm started laughing again. He was laughing at my suggestion that we send in complaints in writing. "Wherever did you pick up an idea like that?" he said. "Whoever put such a thing in your head?"

"I heard of it in the village. Everyone there is going to do it."

"But who's going to do it here? If we get the paper we won't find anyone to do the writing. And if we find someone, we won't have the money to send it."

"We can have a whip round and collect the money."

He fell silent and remained silent, and I thought that his silence meant the same as the silence of the

others, especially the man on the machine next to mine. But after thinking for a while, 'Abd al-'Azīm spoke again and said, "It's not a bad idea to send in complaints! Why shouldn't we write tomorrow morning? We're due to have a meeting. Why don't you put the idea forward?"

Only a moment after I left, loud and ever louder cries were heard. "It's him, it's him, it's him." Workmen came running from all sides, hands gesticulating, lips smiling. I thought it must be morning, but I looked at the sky and saw that dawn had not yet broken. The cries grew louder and more and more running men filled the gangways. 'Abd al-'Azīm came running by in front of me, his face more haggard now than ever. Suddenly he stopped and said, "Run! There's a man dead. The workman's killed the foreman." And he was gone. I stood rooted to the spot. "Good grief," I said, "the foreman's dead! The workman's killed the foreman! Which foreman can it be? I wonder..."

I shuddered. I was thinking and the workmen were running. I started running in the same direction. The place was packed. An enormous crowd surrounded him and others were pushing and shoving. I forced a way through, and this is what I saw: I saw a man stretched out on the ground, bleeding profusely, his clothes blotched with blood. He lay on his back, barefoot.

We were expecting it to happen. We had often warned him and advised him, but he refused to listen to us, and he would make the excuse that violence is the only method to be used. He often said that it was his nature, even when he was at school, before he got the diploma, the technical school diploma. Even his fellow students hated him to high heaven. This is the way he expected he would die! Others were sobbing violently, repeating his name as if he were a martyr, with tears streaming from their eyes.

The workmen gathered together around the machines, saying, "The good Lord's rid us of one of them." They said it with bitter joy and stood at the machines watching from a distance. One of them said, "Look at that. The foreman's dead and the machines haven't stopped. It makes no difference! There's no difference between when a working man dies and when a foreman dies. I always thought there was a difference!"

Someone else replied, "You mean there's no difference?"

"That's right! There's none. When the machine killed the workman, the factory didn't stop. And now the foreman's dead and gone and the machines still

keep running. So where's the difference? Did anyone come and say he used to give the workers magnificent beatings, so let's stop the machines in his honour, even just for a minute? And when he fell down dead, nobody bothered about him. They ate his meat and left his bones, as the saying goes." They spoke with their eyes toward the dead man.

I wondered to myself. "They say a man will only work if he's frightened into it. I heard that from the officer the day he ordered the guards to beat us. I heard him say 'They're just a lot of riffraff. We have to make them go in fear of us and bow their heads. We have to get these workmen constantly looking back over their shoulders in fear. They must submit, and they only submit with a beating.' I've heard the same thing from the foremen. That means they're carrying out a deliberate policy, all of them, even the manager. So who can we complain to?" These were the questions in my mind.

And again I asked myself, "Is it true that only a beating will make a man work? Does he have to be afraid? It can't be. When my mother just used to yell at me I'd be furious all day and not be able to get anything done. They must be different from us." I thought to myself, "They can't be ordinary human beings that can't be forced to work or beaten into working. They don't understand that beating makes a man angry. Didn't they ever get angry with their families? Weren't they ever told that if you hit a cat it will scratch you?"

I said to myself again, "Maybe they've never been beaten or yelled at and that's why they do it to us. If anyone had hit them or bawled at them just once, they wouldn't treat the workmen this way. But why should anybody ever beat them? They're worlds away from us--always have been, and always will be. Living in palaces, the sons of mayors. No one's ever sworn at them or hit them. They've spent their whole lives taking it out on other people. They saw their fathers taking the peasants on the farms and beating them and making them work the land for nothing. And they're the ones who've been to school and got educated, so they have to show us they're better than we are. They think the workmen are just so many sheep to drive along the way as a shepherd drives his flock."

As I was pondering these questions, a crowd of people came through the door, a big crowd. All of them were gentlemen, with fezzes on their heads. They went toward the body, the dead foreman drenched in his own blood. Everyone watched them, and those

who were too short to seestood on tiptoe. Gharīb came running up to me and said in my ear, "The police, the police have come, come to investigate. That's what the people at the front are saying."

"Of course," I said to myself. "The police should come, and straight away, when a man kills someone. But when a machine kills someone the police don't come. Why? Who knows."

A large number of the workmen held a meeting in one of the houses about what had happened that day in the factory. I proposed to talk about a different subject, which was the need to discuss a rise in wages. I began to speak and addressed them all. "One of my fellow workers on the day shift has told me that the Mehalla men working in the factory asked for an increase in their wages today. We ought to ask for one too."

One of the other men replied, "There's a world of difference between them and us. First of all, we've got to work out how we're going to survive in this town. Didn't we agree that everyone should bring a good stick with him from his village? Isn't that what we agreed?"

'Abd al-'Azīm said quietly, "What good are sticks, lads? We can hardly stay on our feet, let alone cart sticks around with us. In my reckoning the Mehalla men will calm down on their own after a while, but right now we've got to start thinking what will happen to us now that someone's killed the foreman."

Someone said, "Why should we be afraid of them? We know very well how it will turn out in the end."

Sheikh 'Alī Diwidār said, "Whoever gave it to the foreman was a good man. The only thing that will have any effect is for us to turn on anyone who gives us any lip, even the foremen. As for the Mehalla men, we've got to give them a beating anyway. We must get some stout sticks and keep them with us and have the day workers lie in wait for the night shift and the night workers have their sticks ready for the day shift, and from now on every man should know what he's supposed to do."

Another of the men interrupted, "That's enough of this kind of talk. Didn't someone just now raise his hand and talk about how we have to ask for a rise? Why have we dropped the subject? What do you think, Sheikh 'Alī? What's your opinion about asking for a rise? Haven't the Mehalla men asked for one? Why shouldn't we?"

'Abd al-'Azīm said, "I agree."

And Sheikh 'Alī replied, "First of all we've got to get hold of the people who never leave their rooms and get them moving. That's what I want to say at the moment."

All the men there spoke up together, "What have we got to lose? Nothing at all."

We went to work. Some of the men thought that injustice had died, but nothing of the kind. Terrorising of the workmen increased after what had happened, but nevertheless the workers continued to hold meetings in various places. Days and months passed, and whenever they heard that the investigation was being continued, they would go to see the workman. And so things carried on as usual, till in one of the meetings we heard that the case had been presented and was to be tried the next day.

"What are they in such a hurry about?" was the question some men asked.

"They're in a hurry to see him dead! Didn't you see what used to happen when we went to the police station? Didn't the police even push his mother outside, and she'd keep standing there, waiting for hours like a beggar? The thing is there are different grades of people, just like the fingers on your hand, that are all different. A poor man's a poor man for life."

One of the men said, "We've never seen a case presented as fast as this."

And someone else, "Our fears are surely well-founded. We must go and see him tomorrow.

'Abd al-'Azīm said, "As long as they pass judgement according to the Qur?an. Isn't it written, "If you pass judgement between people, do it with justice?"

But another man interrupted, "As if there is any justice! There's no one who lives according to the written word of God. What's written is one thing, but what really goes on is something else. If there were any justice we wouldn't be living like this."

They all stood muttering and shaking their heads sadly. Then they began to look at each other and fell silent for a moment, as if stunned, and one of them said, "You mean there's no justice! What's the Qur?an written for then? Isn't it meant for us?"

But the men replied, "Why should we upset ourselves about it now? We'll go to court tomorrow and see for ourselves."

In court, the prosecutor said that "Because of the importance of the case it has been prepared with all haste. The first factory in independent Egypt..."

Someone whispered, "What does he mean, independent! What's the country crawling with Britishers for, then?"

The prosecutor continued, "A factory within whose walls thousands of men work, among them a small but valuable group of the finest of our educated men, whose mothers have given of the sweat of their brows to offer them for the cause of science and the revival of industry. And one of the ignorant masses, whose hearts have been blinded by malice, has killed his foreman."

Again he indicated the workman with his hand. "Here is where the importance of the case stands out," he went on, "and the reason for the haste with which it has been put forward. It has been speedily presented so that he may pay the price for his deed and be an example and warning to anyone who entertains the idea of such brutal crime and for the protection of the cream of our educated men."

'Abd al-'Azīm whispered, "Just the cream... So there's no one to stand up for the workers who are dying every day. That's why they're in such a hurry. The worker has only God on his side."

One of the women cried, "It's a crime! He's supporting a family of orphans!"

The prosecutor finished his presentation of the case by saying, "I demand the death sentence for this workman as an example of the strength of the system which we serve, so that the hearts of our people may once again feel secure from danger."

The courtroom was quiet. Everyone was muttering and casting enquiring glances around. What was to be said? Someone whispered, "What kind of justice is that?"

Suddenly a voice rang out. It was the voice of the lawyer who had stood up in front of the judges' bench. "My client is not the murderer," he said. "The murderers are those who are skulking behind their desks, issuing orders. Let them not be called the chosen few, the cream of our educated men, brought up by the sweat of their families' brow. The outrages that take place show a complete disdain for all moral values. It is these outrages, suffered by

the workers in the Company, which drove one of the men, not my client, to commit this action. If you want to maintain a stable situation, look for the reasons for the unrest, the reason for the suffering borne by thousands of peasants who come to work in the town to make a meagre living. It is on their shoulders that industry rests. Create for them a better life than the miserable existence they are leading now.

"This workman is a victim of those who hide themselves from view, and if you want to know the truth, come with me to the hospital and see for yourself what the Company does to its workmen. As for what has been said about this so-called murderer, it is all untrue. The case has not been proved against him. None of the workers has identified him, and he has not confessed, in spite of the torture to which he has been subjected during interrogation."

'Abd al-'Azīm whispered, "Go on--tell them about the lavatories." The prosecutor didn't say anything. "Tell them about the machines that kill a worker every day. Tell them, God save you!"

The lawyer went on to complete his defence. "This workman must be allowed to leave the dock, and in his place should stand those who are hiding behind the scenes, out of sight behind the machines. My client is innocent. There is nothing in evidence against him, and I demand a verdict of not guilty."

The courtroom shook from the applause, and would certainly have collapsed had not the judges tapped with their pens on the bench.

The judges entered. The judge in the middle announced a sentence of eight years and the payment of compensation to be set by the court. The courtroom rang with applause, and the women said "What would the wind take from the plate?"[1] Tears streamed from their eyes. The workman in the dock cheered after he had been handcuffed, and shouted, "Injustice is over forever!" He left the dock and got into a black van which made its way slowly through the streets thronged with workmen. The women stood watching, and the men waved, and the workman got out handcuffed, but he managed to wave for a long time before he finally disappeared from sight.

As we were going along, my heart was pounding, and I asked the man walking beside me, "Why did you clap when you heard the verdict?" And one of them said, "We were expecting the death sentence. Everyone was expecting it. That's why the man himself was the first to cheer."

---

[1] Roughly, "You can't take nothing from nothing."

The First Strike

One day I was sitting in our room, the wind blowing in through the windows, when Gharīb let out a loud shout. "How long are we going to carry on like this? Our bodies are stiff with cold. We don't get any sleep all night, trying to warm our bodies in a bit of miserable sackcloth, and the cold goes right through us and pierces us to the bone."

"You're only getting what you're asking for," someone else replied. "We talk ourselves hoarse every day. We say 'Let's ask for a rise so we can buy blankets to wrap ourselves in,' but it goes in one ear and out the other."

"The trouble is there are no real men left," one of the men remarked.

But another man yelled, "What are the real men supposed to do, anyway?"

"We want to ask for a rise to buy blankets."

"Okay, just tell us what to do and we'll do it."

"Don't you know what to do? We've got to do what the Mehalla men did. We go to work in the morning, and when the engineer comes around we stop the machines and gang up on him and tell him two and a half piastres isn't enough."

Someone said, "Maybe he wouldn't accept the idea."

"Never mind."

I looked at the faces of the men around me. They were working energetically but looking at each other, each wanting to say something to the others, to ask the others who would be the first to stop his machine and go up to the engineer when he came around. But nobody answered the unspoken question, and not a word was said. Each man was thinking to himself but not daring to speak to the others.

"Who's going to be the one to start," I asked myself. "Everyone is ready to join in. Everyone's wondering what will happen if the machines don't stop. Everyone's wondering what the day has in store, if he'll still be in a job at the end of the day or if he'll be fired, especially since the company has fired men who had been working ever since the factory opened, men who taught the other workers and taught us. Will they give us a rise, or will they give us

the sack? And what shall we do if the company refuses to pay more?"

I went over to 'Abd al-'Azīm to ask him about it, but he rapped out, "Stand at your machine! Don't talk to anybody. If the workmen make a move, do whatever they do. If they don't, we're all in the same boat together."

"All the men are talking, waiting for someone to make the first move," I said. I stood watching the expressions on all the faces, and became certain that everyone had realized that it was vital that we stop the machines, but the problem was who would speak first, who would step out to explain our request.

"The only thing is for us all to go," I said to myself. "We should all go up to him and speak as one man. In that way he wouldn't be able to pick on anyone." I leant over toward one of the men working beside me and told him my idea, and he in turn leant over toward the man beside him, but still they all stood waiting with anxious eyes, watching to see who would start, who would give them a signal to stop work. While they waited, watching each other, there were some who hid their heads behind the machines, as if the whole affair had nothing to do with them, compelled by their fear of what the consequences might be, afraid that one of them might attract attention and be the first to be dismissed. It was this fear of dismissal that prevented them from taking action, and so they hid their heads.

I said to myself, "The way things are going, nothing will happen. Why shouldn't I stop my machine? If I stopped it, I wonder what would happen. Maybe when the machine stopped no one else would follow, because I'm only young and it's not very likely that the older workmen would stop their machines just because I stopped mine. So what! Why don't I try it? If they don't stop, what could happen? What could the company do to me? They'd give me the sack? Doesn't matter much. I'll stop the machine and let come what may."

I decided it was no use waiting. The engineer would be leaving, and we had to stop the machines first. I said to myself, "This is it!" and stopped the machine. I stood in the gangway, shaking all over. All the nearby workmen looked at me, astounded that I should stop the machine without its being in need of repair. They watched me in astonishment, and some of them said, "Surely he can't be the first to dare to stop his machine!"

Someone replied, "Why not! Stop your own machine too!" and he applied the brakes to his machine and it stopped. All the workmen nearby began stopping their machines, and every time a different worker looked and saw the machines stopping he would stop his own, and in moments the whole workshop was at a standstill.

I looked at the foremen in the shop. Each of them stood looking at his watch, thinking it was time for the lunch break, but to their surprise they found it was only ten o'clock. Immediately they made their way toward the machines, and without asking any of the workers they eased off the brakes. But the workmen applied them again, and the foremen then started to ask what was happening and the workmen to reply.

Suddenly the workmen were assembling in groups behind the machines, and a distant voice boomed encouragement and all the workers re-echoed the cry. The engineer stood stock still in astonishment. He had not expected that such a thing would happen, and he made for the office of the weaving manager with the foremen bringing up the rear.

They stood talking and gesticulating angrily while the workers sang at their machines. The engineer was shouting, "They've turned off the machines." The workers stood watching from a distance. Then one of them found the courage to say, "What are we waiting for? Let's go! There's the engineer, standing shouting. Let's go up to him. He can't take our lives, can he? Only the One who made us can do that."

Some replied, "Who's going to walk in front?" and as they began to move forward the ones at the front moved to the back, and so it went on as they made their way up to the engineer. They began to look at each other and some of them were calling out, "Move forward, lad, move forward! What sort of men are you? That's not the way real men behave. If you want to play the man at home, you've got to be a man at work too. You'd think we were going to commit robbery! We're just going to ask for a rise! We don't get a wink of sleep all night. We crawl right into our sacks from the cold, but it still freezes us right through!"

Some of them took courage and walked in front, and the advance went on. Shehata 'Abu-Dashish, the engineer, stood in his place, hands behind his back. The workmen gathered around him, and he spoke in a calm steady voice. "What do you want?"

They all replied loudly, "We want a rise, a rise in wages. Two and a half piastres won't do. We're

fully trained, and we run the machines on our own."

Then he bellowed like a wild beast, "Every one of you get back to his machine immediately or you'll be fired!" He shouted and waited, but the men did not move from their places. He repeated the order again, but the workers stayed where they were, saying over and over again, "We want a rise!"

Again he ordered the men back to the machines, but they stood their ground, so he said, "Every one of you who won't go to work can take himself out of here altogether. The door's wide enough to let an army out."

At that they went back to their machines, and each one picked up the handkerchief that contained his lunch and made his way toward the door. They walked along through the gangways, and whenever anyone tried to go back to work the rest pushed him along with the crowd.

Suddenly the engineer came rushing forward and stood in front of the crowd. The workmen stopped and he addressed them. "Go back to the machines, and I'll go and talk to the general manager and ask him for a rise for you."

When the men heard him say, "I'll talk to the general manager," they raised the cry, "Long live justice."

The engineer spoke again and said, "I'll be back in the afternoon and let you know what's happened."

The workmen went back to their machines overjoyed and cheering, each looking at the other with beaming faces. The machines started up. The din grew louder and the belts spun around. The foremen scattered throughout the workshop, scanning the faces, searching for what they called the ringleaders, but the men paid no heed to the malice that glinted in their eyes and simply moved challengingly about between the machines. The foremen withdrew.

I looked around and then saw the engineer, standing gesticulating with the foremen, and the foremen pointing toward the workmen. They were talking together in low voices. We could not hear anything, but we tried to watch the movement of their lips. One of the workmen came and stood beside me. "Why didn't they come over to us? What are they waiting for? Didn't he say he'd call us together?" Another man said, "They've tricked us." But I answered, "Why are you so impatient? You can't rush what God gives you! Give it some time!" "They're exchanging information," one of the others said, "about who was

responsible. As long as they don't involve me! I was the last one to stop my machine and the first to get it going again when we came back."

"How long are you going to be afraid?" And someone answered, "Forever!"

While I was deep in thought about what had happened and what I had heard, the engineer ordered all the machines to be stopped and all the workmen in the shop to gather together. Thousands assembled and he stood on a wooden chair with the foremen around him. The men stood expectantly.

The engineer opened his mouth to speak and everyone fell silent. He spoke in ringing tones, and from his face it was clear that he was angry. "Listen, you men..." The engineer shifted his position and raised his voice, "We've brought you here from the village. Every one of you is from a different village. We brought you here to train you. The general manager was going to fire you, to fire you all, but certain goodhearted men intervened on your behalf.

"From now on, the wages system will be different. You used to be paid by the day, but now we've changed that system for you, and you'll be paid according to production. Every machine operator will have his name written on his machine immediately. The man who works well will be paid better. It'll be up to everyone to do his best. Everyone will be paid according to production. It'll be pieceowrk. We'll fix a metre to every machine to measure the operator's work. As for the men who are paid by the day, who are still being trained, they'll stay as they are with no change in their wages, and when the new workshops open they'll be transferred to work there."

As he drew to a close, he said, "On payday you'll see. All of you just stick to your machines and keep at it."

The men all went back to their looms whispering together. "What's all this about production? What does it mean? It's a new idea. We ask for a rise, so they put us on piecework."

With these thoughts and words, each man went to his machine, and they began to race each other in their work. The machines were not fast enough for them, so they began to set their hands to the arm to which the comb was attached and push it with their hands, thinking thus to increase the speed of the machine. Some of the others cut the belts with the same end in view. They all moved with new energy, speaking to each other only rarely, and then in haste,

thinking, "Let's work with all our might to turn the tables on them."

Suddenly one of the workers standing near me came over and began to say, "They've tricked us, and now they're going to make us sweat blood. And at the end of the session they won't give us any breaks. They say we'll be paid according to production. What production? The best way is to be paid by the day. At least we'd know how much we were going to collect, and make our plans accordingly. Now they've thrown everything into confusion. They haven't given us a rise or even left us in peace, and we're still stuck with the same miserable life we had before."

The day came to an end and the second shift came on. All the men were talking to each other, and the men of the night shift did not take well to the news about the piecework system. Their faces looked depressed, and some of them were saying, "It's the weavers who've let us in for this rotten business. Now we'll all come to work and slave away, trusting to luck. We'll be here from sunrise till evening and go home without knowing how much we've made. What is it to do with us anyway? We're the ones who stopped the machines? What did we do wrong? What are they punishing us for? They ought to punish the men who stopped their machines. We're in the spinning shops, working and minding our own business. We haven't done anything. What have things come to! The innocent get treated like the guilty."

The days passed by. The foremen went around between the machines. The treatment of the workers had become harsher after the foreman had been killed, and it became even more so when they saw the men having the audacity to stop their machines and demand a rise. Suffering under this brutality, the workers were counting the days--how slowly they passed--waiting to see what pay they would get after the engineer's announcement of the adoption of the piecework system.

How many days went by, and how many sleepless nights! Then on payday the men went to work, their hands on their hearts. Their fear of the unknown was growing, and it showed on their faces. They talked, in spite of the cold weather and the falling rain, about how much each would earn. "We've given it all we've got--let's see if it's been worth it." But some were cynical, "What they give us with one hand they'll take away with the other." And they fell silent for a moment.

I was deep in thought about my wages and the things I would be taking home with me, the piece of silk and the new shoes, when suddenly I found the

foreman standing nearby. I had not noticed him come up, and I turned around feigning ignorance of his presence, to try to get a look at him from behind the machine. There he was, standing with a piece of paper in his hand, looking from it to me and back again.

Then he came toward me and suddenly stopped beside me, looking at the paper and looking at me again. He stood next to me and I tried very hard not to let the machine stop while he was there. I went quickly around to the other side of the machine, and managed to get a glimpse of what was on the paper. When I saw that, I said to myself, "Good grief! They're the numbers of my machines. What's he got the numbers for? Is he going to transfer me?"

Thoughts and ideas passed through my mind in quick succession as I stood, completely engrossed in my wondering, trying to pluck up courage and fight off the shadowy fear of dismissal and losing my livelihood that bore down on me. Then the foreman advanced toward me. When I saw him, the fear rose up in me again. I found him looking at the cloth and handling it, and other foremen standing beside the machine, shaking their heads, and workmen looking anxiously, casting furtive glances from behind the machines and saying, "What's happened? What's the boy done? What's all the to-ing and fro-ing about? What are they going to do to him?"

They were afraid. As for me, my knees had turned to jelly. The machine was running at full speed, and the belts were hurtling around as if even they were afraid. The other foreman whispered in my ear, "Your name's down in the office, and the engineer will be coming to see you."

Thoughts rushed through my head, ideas out of control. Then 'Abd al-'Azīm came quickly over, hiding behind the machines, afraid that one of the foremen would see him. He whispered in my ear, "What did they stop by you for? What did they say?"

I did not answer. He asked again, and finally I said, "I don't know. They told me the engineer's coming and my name's down in the office."

While we were talking, the foreman called the men who worked on the day rate, and they began to form a queue, one behind the other, making orderly lines. Everyone's eyes turned in their direction. I stood in my place, deep in thought, saying to myself, "If only the engineer would come and set my mind at rest. Why ever did they say my name's down

in the office?"

While I was deep in thought and the workmen were cheering joyfully on getting their pay, the engineer came through the door, behind him Ḥassan al-Samra, one of the weaving foremen. They came in their suits, reeking of scent, so much so that it overpowered all the hated smells of the workshop--the smell of grease and oil, and the smell of old urine that always rose from beside the machines since the decision to close the lavatory. They wandered along the gangways between the machines as if they had made an agreement to give the men a whiff to show them who the bosses were.

"This is it," I said. "They've come. They're coming for me. They're coming to tell me to stop the machine. I waited for a long time. This is it! The time has come. I'm going to be fired now." I stood looking at everything around me and at the workmen standing nearby I stared at 'Abd al-'Azīm and I stared at the belts whirring around and the machine running at full speed. I laid my hand on the arm while the machine was running and stared at it as it made the arms shudder.

"My last day!" I said to myself, "The last hour I shall spend in the factory. I'll go back to the village and trudge behind the buffalo as it ambles along. I'll take my time walking behind her, instead of running, the way I do here. Who knows? Maybe I'll work as a servant for the village elders and their talk will get me down and make me hate being alive."

While I was deep in thought, I heard one of the men shout out, but I paid no attention. But then I saw one of the supervisors rushing toward me and looking straight at me, and my heart began to pound. I tried to look away and not watch them, which the engineer noticed when I drew nearer. When he saw me, he looked astonished and gave me a long look, wondering to himself, "What's all this about?" At first he thought I was not one of the weavers, but one of the spinning workers escaping from his workshop. He whispered to Hassan al-Samra, and Hassan al-Samra whispered to the supervisor, and they whispered together with their eyes on me.

Then the engineer said, "Do you run the machine? You're very young. Who gave you the job?"

I tried to stand tall, and said, "The foreman did."

He smiled as he looked at me, and bent toward me, closing one eye and winking with the other at the

foreman standing beside him. He leant toward my ear and said, "So you're a weaver?"

"Yes. It was the foreman who gave me the job. He put me on weaving." He smiled at my words, and said, "It's incredible that a scrap of a lad like this could turn out all that work. Have you been on the machine the whole period?"

"Yes, yes, I swear."

And the supervisor put in, "Yes, yes, sir, he's the one who's been on the machine." He asked the same question of Hassan al-Samra, saying to himself, "Amazing, incredible!"

'Abd al-'Azīm went forward, all eyes turned upon him, all heads raised to see. Everyone knew that he had not left the machine at all. He gave the foreman his seal and the men crept forward and he held out his hand. The foreman was counting, and the workmen counted with him. "How much?" said one. "Wait," said another. "Ten piastres, another ten, another ten, another ten, another ten--that's it, that's it! They've given us a rise! Fifty piastres and a half. We've got a rise, lads! We've got a rise!"

'Abd al-'Azīm was out of his wits. He did not test the money as he usually did, but ran off without even counting it. "God save him!" one of the men said. "That's the best man of us who's just been paid!"

"He's been working himself to death," someone else said.

"That's enough of that talk--you'll bring him bad luck!"

"Why should we wish him any harm. If I didn't have a rotten machine that keeps breaking threads, I'd have carried even more than him."

"It's the foremen who don't do any repairs. You can't expect the machines to run on their own. They want us to work our guts out while they sit on their backsides. Whenever we tell them to come and fix the machines, they say, "Ah, but you're on piecework."

The men looked toward 'Abd al-'Azīm who was sitting behind his machine counting his ten piastre pieces. When he saw me he cheered and said, "Look at that! We were all scared, but there they are, fifty piastres and a half. I can buy a new pair of shoes! How did you do?

"You'll get even more. Your machine's running like clockwork. Didn't the foreman tell you you were the first? And they've got your name down in the office." He was interrupted by one of the workmen yelling, "Move forward, move forward a bit. The foreman's calling you. He's calling your name." I rushed toward him.

"Your seal?"

"Here."

He stared at the paper and stared at my face before counting the money. Then he drew me by the hand. The men were watching from all sides to see how much I would collect. "Did the engineer come to see you?" asked the foreman.

"Yes, yes, he came and saw me, but he didn't say anything. He just said I was the first, and then he left without saying anything."

The foreman said to himself, "No, it's not brawn that counts. The youngest one has earned more than the oldest! Here you are--ten..." and he began to count, and the men counted with him while I stood there unbelieving.

"Fifty-five piastres, the best wage of all. Keep it up!"

I did not hear what he said. I took my money in my hand and waited for nothing. I did just as 'Abd al-'Azīm had done. The men came to ask me about it, and I stood in the midst of them in a daze, holding the money tight in my hand. "Leave him alone," said 'Abd al-'Azīm, "let him get his machine running."

One of the men shook my hand and said, "Your mother must be praying for you!"

And another one said, "He's only just arrived and he knows the trade already. We taught him, and now he's earning more than us. He's earning the wages of two men!"

Prince 'Abbas Halīm Visits the Workers to Form the First Weavers' Union

The days passed, one after another. Numerous pictures were hung on the walls, and crowds of workmen would stand looking at them attentively, moving their lips and gesticulating. It was not only the company workers; local handweavers would get in touch with

each other in anticipation of the happy day, and the ginners and even the bakery workers. I realized it every time I passed through any street or alley. Everyone was waiting expectantly, waiting for Sunday. Even the women came out of their houses to stand in the street, looking at the pictures, encouraged by all the talk they had heard.

In the morning the weaving workers went out into the streets, joined by the ginning workers and the hand weavers. The taxi drivers showed more enthusiasm than anyone else in sticking up posters on the walls. The workers made their way toward the huge marquee. Thousands assembled.

The men thronged into the station just as the train was screeching slowly to a halt. A man appeared at a window, a fair-skinned, clean-shaven man with blue eyes. He was tall and heavily built. The train stopped and the workmen rushed through all the doors of the station and thronged the platform, making their way toward his carriage. A deafening chorus of slogans rang out, "Long live the leader! Long live the rescuer! Long live the breaker of oppression! Up with the workers!

They carried 'Abbas Halīm to the marquee on their shoulders. Inside the marquee we found most of the new mechanics, which was a surprise to many, and questions were asked: "What are they doing here? Whatever brought them along? Why have they come now? Aren't they the ones who beat the workers? Aren't they the ones who tore down the posters?" Some men replied, "Never mind! They're not all like that. Some of them are good lads!" But the answer came back, "What do you mean good? They're all swine! We'll tell him all about them."

'Abbas Halīm went in borne aloft on the shoulders of the workmen to the sound of loud cheers and slogans shouted one after another so that the marquee shook. The men crowded in after him, each carrying his shoes under his arm, afraid of losing them in the crush, and shouting slogans with the rest.

I fixed my gaze on 'Abbas Halīm, waiting to see what he would say to relieve the bitterness I felt, but I found him stuttering and stammering meaningless words which none of us could understand. The workmen looked at each other asking, "What's he saying? He's talking double Dutch." Someone said, "He's not talking to us at all, he's talking to the mechanics." And someone else said, "He's talking a foreign language." And the answer came, "Of course, mate. Why should he talk to us? Why should he lower himself? He's talking to the types who can

understand him."

'Abbas Ḥalīm finished his address with more incomprehensible stammerings, and a voice rang out at the back, "We didn't understand a word! Give us an explanation of what he said!" And many voices repeated the demand. One of the men beside him stood up and said, "'Abbas Halīm has come to visit you today. He gives you his greetings and says he's going to start a union here for all the workers in Mehalla to join. The membership fee will be one piastre for boys, three piastres for adults, and five piastres for senior workmen. And everyone must get two photographs, one for his membership card, which he'll keep for himself, and when he comes on his next visit you'll see the fine things he's going to do."

When the workers heard this, hope lit up their faces. He spoke again, "Workers of Mehalla! The time for action has come. Don't waste the opportunity. Each of you must know that the way is hard and long, but we all have to seize the chance. No one must hesitate to pay his union dues, because it's through the union that we shall write complaints and present them to all the people concerned. We've sent in complaints before till the post boxes were full of them, but nobody moved and up till now the government has done nothing. Even then the police turn a blind eye. But the time for action has come. The time has come for us to stand up in public and say, 'Who are the men you have buried in the earth? Where are the men you have buried in oppression? Where is the compensation they deserve?'"

He fell silent and the workmen waved and shouts came from the back, "Down with oppression and all who support it!" The cheers grew louder till they shook the pavilion, and they went on and on till another voice added a warning, "Don't let him down! No one's to say that he came and did nothing!" Another voice cried, "The day will come soon when we crush the men who've oppressed you. But you have to be united, holding hands in an unbreakable bond."

The speech finished with three cheers for 'Abbas Halim and three cheers for the workers, and the cheers rang out, "Up with the workers! Down with the unjust bosses!" Some people said, "He's really achieved nothing. We were expecting him to fight for us, but he came quite unprepared for a battle." Others remarked on his stuttering speech, some scornfully, but some saying, "He spoke in riddles so that anyone from the company who heard wouldn't

understand when he was planning to come back."

When the workmen were discussing together the implications of 'Abbas Halīm's visit, 'Abd al-'Azīm said, "I wasn't going to say anything, but when I heard Mustafa say that he didn't understand what someone away in Cairo could do for us, it seemed to me that that's not the line of thought we should be following. The question we should be asking is whether the workers need someone like that to support them or not. Are the big bosses afraid of him? Should we join the union? These are the things we have to ask ourselves. I think myself that even if he doesn't achieve anything, God forbid, the bosses are still going to be living in fear of him for a while, and all the cheering they heard today will keep them afraid and make them think twice.

"Nothing like this has happened before, and it has encouraged the workmen, and will keep encouraging them to know that there are people like 'Abbas Halīm ready to stand with them. All that's possible, and that's why I say we've lost nothing and we've got nothing to lose. It will put some spirit into the men at their work. Things have changed, Mustafa, don't you think?"

Mustafa Muhammad replied, "I think the same way. I'm not objecting, I'm just asking. I wonder if one man can accomplish all the things we've talked about, and I'm afraid the men will rely on him instead of standing on their own feet. All we've heard is that he will come and do everything, and that's what I object to."

"Tell us about the union," I said. "What is this union, Mustafa Muhammad? Is it a man?"

He smiled and said, "We're the union."

I said, "Okay, if the union is the workmen and the workmen are in the factory, and we've sent in complaints before, what will the difference be? Can you tell me, Mustafa Muhammad?"

"I really don't know the difference," he answered.

"So who shall we ask?"

"We'd better ask those who talked to us about it."

I went and asked 'Abd al-'Azīm, and his answer was, "I don't know either, but why should we bother ourselves? It won't be long before we can ask the people that raised the subject. What we can say is

> that none of us knew 'Abbas Halīm was going to come. He just appeared from nowhere, and it's the workmen who are the basis of everything. Nevertheless, if someone appears and says he's going to help us, we'd better not refuse the offer. Let him work and we'll stand behind him. So let's go and pay our subscriptions. Let's go and have our photos taken."

The workmen assembled for a union meeting in one of the lodging houses, hoping that some of the mechanics who had closer contact with 'Abbas Halīm would come to tell them when he would be visiting al-Mehalla a second time. To their disappointment, none of them came, and so the meeting broke up without their gaining any new information about action to be taken by the union.

On the way home from the meeting, they heard the news that the company was planning to introduce female labour. The first angry reaction was that this was the company's reply to 'Abbas Halīm and the newly formed union, and that all the men who had joined the union would be sacked and replaced by girls. Some thought that no father would allow his daughter to work in a factory with men. They were somewhat encouraged by the opinion of some that this was only a rumour spread by the company to frighten them out of adhering to the movement being started by 'Abbas Halīm.

The rumours increased, and the anger of the workers grew at the prospect of the employment of girls in the factory. Some proposed to beat any girls who began to work. Others saw the plan as an attempt by the company to employ workers who would be too weak to fight for their rights. They completely rejected the prospect of leaving the machines and going back to work on the land after adapting to their way of life in the factory.

One day the men found queues of girls standing outside the factory, ready to work, girls aged between ten and twenty and wearing clothes that revealed the varying backgrounds from which they came. Most of the men were angry and resentful, but some flirted with the girls.

The workers formed groups, some of them angry and wanting to beat the girls to frighten them off, others simply voicing their disapproval and their disgust at girls coming along to work among men, some of them with painted faces, leaving their brothers at home jobless. In spite of the men's anger, they could not bring themselves to strike the girls. The girls reacted by covering their faces, embarrassed and annoyed. Inside the factory, the men began to demand who would inform 'Abbas Halīm of this, their latest grievance.

The girls entered the factory, herded by the foremen, and the men began to wonder what they should do. They entertained the possibility of smashing the machines rather than handing them over to girls. In the event, the girls were led straight through the workshops and put to work in a new department making cotton underwear, but the men, still feeling their jobs threatened, still contemplated beating up the girls to deter the company from appointing more.

Some of the men were in favour of leaving the girls to earn a living, and not descending to the methods the Mehalla men had tried to use against the immigrant workers, but the majority were in favour of teaching the girls a violent lesson. They decided to observe for a while, to work out the girls' work schedule and the route they took to their lodgings. The company, however, arranged the working hours of the men and girls in such a way that the men never had a chance to catch the girls and beat them. They had to be content with spitting at them whenever they passed the workshop, and ill-feeling grew between the two groups till the animosity reached the pitch of feeling that had formerly existed between the Mehalla men and the immigrant workers.

Finally, in desperation, some of the men planned a joint attack on the girls as they passed the workshop on their way out of the factory. Armed with planks from the machines spiked with nails, they rushed to the attack. Fikri was caught by a group of girls, and in order to escape wounded one of them in the stomach.

After avoiding the girls for several days, fearing their revenge, one day Fikri was trapped by them. They stood pouring abuse on him, while he stood attracted by the beauty of the girl he had wounded, deeply regretting what he had done. Fikri's friends volunteered to fight the girls with him again, but he held them back till they saw what the girls would do. The girl who had been wounded, Muḥasin, rallied a group of workmen to avenge her, and they attacked Fikri and his friends. A fight ensued, with planks of wood from the machines and scissors. The girls' supporters, a gang of Meḥalla men, were eventually driven off, but many of Fikri's fellow workers warned him that they would be sure to lie in wait for him. The Meḥalla men, however, thinking it impossible that a few boys should fight alone and that they must be part of a large and powerful gang, decided to mend the quarrel and came offering to show them around the workshop where the girls were by way of reconciliation.

Fikri, Gharīb and Sayyid Ṣafti went one day to watch the girls leaving work, and for a joke pretended to attack them. The girls took fright at first, but their apprehension abated when they realized it was only a fake attack, and feelings of good humour began to grow between the two groups.

After Fikri used his influence with the mechanic to have Muḥasin excused from paying a fine, he went to visit her at her mother's sugarcane shop, and discovered from her how the foremen were constantly trying to take advantage of the girls in the factory. Her mother welcomed him, bewailing the fact that circumstances forced Muḥasin to work in the factory, and expressing the hope that God would send her a good husband to make her happy. Fikri started to feel ashamed of his previous attitude toward Muḥasin and the other girls who worked in the factory.

When Fikri talked to 'Abd al-'Azīm in the factory to ask if he had any news of when 'Abbas Halīm would be coming again, 'Abd al-'Azīm warned him against leaving his machine to talk. He realized that this would only cause trouble

with the foremen, who were particularly alert and vindictive since union activities had begun. Moreover, since they were on piecework, leaving their machines idle would do nothing but lose them money. They should leave the discussion of their problems for the union meetings, outside working hours and out of earshot of the company officials.

A group of workers met together with one of the company mechanics who had chosen to help them by keeping them informed of what the company bosses were doing. He told them that because of the influential positions held by the company bosses, 'Abbas Halīm's relatives, they assumed that the king had put pressure on him not to return to al-Mehalla to take up the workers' cause. All this confirmed what some had feared all along, that the workmen could not expect help from a man away in Cairo. The mechanics said they should not despair, but make up their minds to run the union themselves and fight their own battles. He believed that as long as they were united and aware of the facts of the situation victory could not be far.

When the news spread among the workmen that 'Abbas Halīm was not to return, they began in their anger to speak openly of writing complaints of all their grievances to the government. Tension rose so high that some of the foremen turned a blind eye rather than tangle with the men. Later the same day, one of the mechanics came and warned Fikri not to meddle in matters that did not concern him. As he walked away, Fikri thought to himself,

> "What business is it of yours? What have you to do with me? What's made you stick your nose in? Acting as if you're the foreman! You're just a two-bit mechanic! What do you earn? Just six piastres a day--what's six piastres? I get almost as much as you and I've got no education. The difference between us is a big sham, and even so you treat me the way the big bosses do, as if there were no difference between them and you. But their wages are ten times yours, so what gives you the right to behave the way they do? Whatever you do, you're no better than dirt. We thought you'd turn

out better, that you'd treat us better than they do, but all you learnt at school was to despise labourers like us, and that's why you treat us the way you do. You think you're the cat's whiskers, like the public prosecutor once said.

"But don't think things will stay that way. 'Abbas Halim is coming from Cairo, and he'll have you walk to heel like performing monkeys!"

At a meeting of the workers, Farag, the mechanic who had decided to side with them, described how he felt about the labourers in the factory:

"Only a short while ago I hated you, hated even the sight of you. I considered myself educated, and that it was not fitting for me and those like me to be near you or walk along with you, because you have no learning. That was what they taught me at school, and when we presented our papers at the factory we were told the same before starting on the job.

"We were told to give you no courtesy, to treat you roughly and never to smile. They said that if we didn't behave that way we would never manage to stay in control. But now I have to confess, after living a while among you, that you're good men who know love but no hatred. I've seen many of you grow skilled in your work, and work enthusiastically. Your eyes never leave the machines. You notice every fault, and repair anything that goes wrong...

"Even if there are still a lot of men who behave with the old mentality, those who think their education makes them superior, they'll know one day that they are only making problems for themselves. But it will be too late for them. We have a life in common. The phantom of death is slowly creeping up on us, and we're in such a position now that we have to fight it off. But death will never withdraw unless all of us act together."

A certain mechanic tried to persuade Fikri to join the "Young Egypt" Party, to fight for independence from the British, but he refused, saying that all of his family and his village supported the Wafd, and that he would not follow any other line. When asked how then he could have joined the union, he explained that this was quite different than a political party, and was fighting for the rights of the workers, not for a political aim.

Confrontation between Workers and Managers

The workers heard about upheavals in Cairo:

"All the schools are in confusion. There are demonstrations everywhere. Sidqī went, damn him, and 'Abd al-Fattah Yehyā came in. Then 'Abd al-Fattah Yehyā was dismissed, and Nesim formed his cabinet and now he's carrying on where Sidqi left off--killing and slaughtering the people, and blood is flooding in the streets in the battle for Egypt to be free, free to buy machines from any country she likes, from Russia, Germany and France, and to sell cotton at the price we choose."

"We only got hold of these broken down old machines after a struggle, after the 1919 revolt, and even then they weren't installed in the factory till 1928, after the countries accepted the so-called independence! If it weren't for the traitors, we would have got our real independence, traitors like 'Adlī, who put down the revolt, and Sidqī and others after them. What is happening today in Cairo is a clear rebellion against what Sidqī and Nesim have done to abrogate the 1923 constitution. These demonstrations have as their aim the overthrow of imperialism"

"You were shouting slogans the day before yesterday," I said, "but why weren't you shouting against the British? All I heard was 'God is most great!' and 'Glory to Egypt!'"

"Our slogans are full of meaning," he replied. "'God is most great!' means great to overcome the oppressors. 'Glory to Egypt' is for independence."

"Do you really belive what you're saying, Salim?" one of the mechanics asked. "What's this young Egypt Party all about? The country needs unity, not division. You're splitting the unity of the people and going against what Sa'd [Zaghlul] said about the people being the source of power. You're betraying what Sa'd has always insisted on, which is that the constitution grants that it is the people who are the source of power. The king objected, and he and Sa'd battled over it, and Sa'd won and never gave up his slogan, 'The king reigns but does not rule' and 'The people are power."

"Now what are you doing? You've betrayed the trust. The first thing you did was to put the king first. Your first slogan was 'God, the king...' so you put the people last. Isn't that a departure

from what Sa'd has said? You've abandoned the people. Who are you standing with? With 'Adlī and Sidqī and 'Abd al-Fattāh and Nesim and the king. And against whom? Against the constitution. Didn't you just say that you don't regard them as enemies of the people?

"Consider what you say, Salim, and consider what Sa'd says and do it. Whoever stands against the constitution is an enemy of the people. So who do you stand with? Join the people's march. Give up the Young Egypt Party and go along with what Sa'd wants for the people. Tell the king he can reign but not rule! There are demonstrations against Nesim everywhere, and what the people are demanding is a restoration of the constitution. That means the expulsion of the British and a chance for the people to move. Think, Salim! Any departure from the Wafd is a betrayal of the 1919 revolution."

After the mechanic left, Fikri remarked to Salīm that there were no labourers in the Young Egypt demonstration. He answered,

"How can the workers join in? They don't have time or opportunity even to think. They work twelve hours a day. It's as if they were buried. We're all buried under what's going on in this town. From sunrise to sunset not a soul's about. Imagine a town like this full of working men. In the factory alone there are more than 26,000, and that's not counting the bakers and the ginners and the hand weavers, who amount to five or six thousand. One town with so many men in it--imagine if they all went out to demonstrate! That's when we'll really be able to say that Egypt and all her workers will be liberated."

When Fikri later explained all he had heard to the workers, an older man said that they had forgotten to tell him that the workers of Alexandria, including the railway workers, who had a general union, had played an important part in the 1919 revolution, but Sa'd had dissolved the union and imprisoned its leaders. When the first government was formed under Sa'd the workers rejoiced and thought it was a victory, and so they presented their demands, including a cut in working hours and a rise in wages. The government refused and the workers went on strike and occupied the factories and raised the flag.

They occupied the factories for three days and ran

the machines like true experts, but Sa'd had them shot and put them in prison. He forced them out of the factories, and not only did he dissolve the socialist party, he put its other members in prison. A famous lawyer, Antol Marun, died in prison for defending the workers. And Sidqī killed workers too.

"Everyone who was alive then knows all about it. That's what it's like to be a worker. Everyone's against the workers. You were angry when 'Abbas Halīm didn't come. Why didn't he come? The reasons are the same. They prevented him, because they know that if the workers in a huge factory like this took some action everything would be turned upside down. The government understands very well. They've learnt a lesson from history, and that's why they were afraid of his coming. Why should they cause themselves trouble?

When King Fūad died, the workers regarded it as a judgement of God upon him for his treatment of the people, but some saved their satisfaction till they could see how the new king would behave. The news of his death had been concealed till his son arrived from abroad, lest the British seize power again, but some said he had killed more than the British. There was a feeling that his son would be better.

In the evening not a single street was empty of demonstrators, all of them chanting slogans in support of Nahas. Workers thronged the streets, unaware of what the shouting was all about at that late hour, burdened as they were with fatigue after their long hours of work. Enthusiasm rose and grew stronger, and little by little the workers became involved. The noise attracted them like a magnet. Some lifted others up astride on their shoulders, and I found myself, like the rest, running, and dragging Gharib along with me.

"Come on, sit out of it," he protested.

But I replied, "Let's go and watch."

I got into the thick of it and was carried along by their enthusiasm. I shouted with them at the top of my voice, forgetting myself, caught up by what I had heard. At that moment, Mustafa Muhammad and al-Kafuri and Farag in his blue trousers appeared at a nearby street corner, watching the demonstration. Suddenly one of the marchers hoisted me up

on his shoulders, saying, "Lead the cheers!"

I was caught unprepared, and said, "What shall I say?"

"You just shout and we'll repeat after you."

All the people I knew gathered around me, and Farag stretched up his hand and gave me a piece of paper, written in haste from the look of the writing.

"Shout!" he said. "Shout what's on the paper! Shout quickly! Shout!"

As soon as I raised my voice more and more gathered around me. "Our demands are just! Our cause is right! We sent a just demand, governor! Compensation! Compensation! Compensation for those who die! Do what we ask for those who die! TB's spreading among the workers. Cut the working day!"

Voices rose high and people thronged around till no one was leading their cries, as if they had all agreed together. As I shouted and the responding voices rang out, three policemen in their white gallalib and coats and woollen caps attacked ferociously and snatched the paper from my hand. Others dragged me down off the men's shoulders, shouting, "What's going on here! What's got you into the demonstration? What do you think you're shouting about, you swine? Come along with us, you lot!"

But the workmen thronged together and escaped from their clutches, and a voice rang out like thunder, "Tell him about the injustice, men. Complain to the governor."

Another voice screamed out madly, "Grab them! Grab those men!" He was pushed into the throng and disappeared, and saw the people rushing toward him, and on all sides voices rose in a fury, urging that the three policemen should be given a beating.

All conversation centered around what had happened. Everyone was talking. "Have you heard? Have you heard what happened at the demonstrations for the king's death? It turned into a demonstration for workers' rights! Some of those lads are real devils!"

"Stout lads! What does it matter to us who dies and who lives? To hell with whoever dies. People die every day at the machines. It was a good thing that our voices were heard by everyone in the street."

"Jolly good that the people stopped cheering for the king and started shouting with us!"

"All those people were workers, after all. As soon as they hear someone shouting for their rights, they're bound to join in. But what made the police intervene? They kept quiet at first. They only made a move when the workers started to make their voices heard."

One morning the workers read in the press that the government had issued a law concerning compensation for industrial injuries, including a thousand days' pay in compensation for death, and up to £E 180 for complete disability. Cheers went up in support of the Wafd, but the jubilant workers were aware that there was no compensation for death from tuberculosis, and no reference to a cut in working hours. This was simply the first victory; many battles remained to be fought.

One day when Fikri's machine broke down, he went for help to Salim, the mechanic, who in turn brought some men from the machine shop to repair the loom. They complained as they worked that the machine was 137 years old, and could not be expected to run smoothly any longer. Fikri asked why the company did not buy new machines, and Salim put it all down to the British occupation. Occupation, he said, meant tight control over trade. The British bought Egyptian raw cotton dirt cheap and made huge profits by selling the manufactured cloth. It was therefore not in their interest to allow the Egyptian textile industry to develop, and that was why Egyptian factories could lay their hands on nothing but worn out and outdated British machinery no longer needed by the British factory owners.

In May, 1937, Farag, the mechanic, was told by a clerk who worked in the company offices that the company was to limit working hours to an eight-hour day. He passed the word on to Mustāfa Muhammad and his friends. The clerk had seen a government memorandum which said that because of the numerous complaints received within and outside the factory, and because of a hospital report about the spread of tuberculosis, action was to be taken.

Fikri confirmed that he had heard of complaints being sent by the hospital. The men were overjoyed that shorter working hours would mean they could sometimes see the sun, and their fears that the foremen would prevent the change were overcome by the knowledge that this was an order from government level which could not be refused. The first to receive orders about the new work schedule were the spinning, drawing, carding and cleaning workers. The weavers, since they were on piecework, made an extra effort to finish in eight hours the work they would normally do in a twelve-hour shift. But no one came to tell the weavers to leave early, and they waited, angry and confused, not understanding why they should be neglected.

The next day the same thing happened. They were unable to find Farag to ask for information, and 'Abd al-'Azīm, their former leader, had become negative and unwilling to take a stand. Fikri and his friends ganged up on Mustāfa Muhammad, demanding action to support his everlasting talk of the union and workers' meetings. Mustāfa counselled patience, but Gharīb shouted angrily that they should stop the machines as they had done in their first protest. The word spread, with shouts of "Up with the workers!"

'Abd al-'Azīm and Mustāfa repeated their pleas for patience and caution, but the workers said that they would beat up any man who refused to stop his machine. The threats of the majority overcame the advice of the few moderates, and all the men stopped their machines. Mustāfa pointed out that they had not agreed upon a plan of action. No one had prepared himself to put forward the claims of the men, and so this unplanned strike would probably have little effect. They had worked out no strategy concerning where or how they would gather, for how long they would stop work, or anything else. The more mature men were very frustrated.

One of the French managers came in with an interpreter, and a shout went up that no man should be intimidated into starting his machine. Other voices were raised, shouting, "Our claims are just!" More cries shook the walls, "Open the toilets, you tyrants!

An eight-hour working day for all!" The shouting crowd moved toward the office, shouldering their way toward the French manager, who was standing on a chair in the hall. Hands were raised everywhere, and the voices rang out, "Open the toilets to the workers, you tyrants! Give us a rise, you tyrants! Nine years of injustice is enough!"

The interpreter noted down everything that was said, and then whispered it into the French director's ear. His face grew pale and flushed by turns, and he stuttered out hysterically some halting phrases which no one understood. Quickly the interpreter growled out the translation. "The door's wide open! Whoever doesn't like things here can show us a clean pair of heels!" Before he finished what he had to say, one of the workmen aimed a weft beam and hurled it at him, and that was followed by a hail of weft reels. "You haven't offered us anything!" they cried. The men grew furious, and some of them chanted, "Down with the tyrant! Down with the French manager!"

He began to shake, and then suddenly a bundle of reels hit him on the head and drew blood, and he rushed headlong out of the workshop like one crazed. After a few minutes the engines stopped, although it was not yet three o'clock. The men's faces shone, and 'Abd al-'Azīm was the first to laugh as he said, "A good beginning! All that's left is for them to put up an official announcement."

The men rushed toward the door, but Mustāfa hurried to stop them. "Where are you going?"

"The engines have stopped."

"But it's only two o'clock. Wait! Wait!"

"We want to leave. We want to get home before the spinners."

Suddenly the door of the workshop opened, or rather, was thrown open, and haggard faces looked toward it. The order came, "Get out!" and sticks were concealed threateningly behind backs. The men moved forward in a steadfast block, shouting, "It's not time yet. We're going to leave on time at three o'clock."

But the men were carried away by a wave of joy at the prospect of going home early. "Why should we wait? Let's go home." Other voices cried, "Let's get together and talk, lads!" The voices rose and overpowered each other. "We want to know

where we're going. We have to know the path we're going to take. The night shift still don't know what's happened, and they won't know, since no notice has been put up."

"We can tell them. We can tell all the men who live with us."

"That's too haphazard. The others have to be informed properly."

People were getting excited. "Everyone should tell the people living with him." Mustafa Muhammad's voice rose above the rest. "That won't do. We must appoint people to go around systematically. We have to get particular people."

"Where shall we get them from?"

"We'll choose them from among us. We need twenty or thirty. Everyone who thinks he's got it in him can put himself forward."

They all shouted out, "Me! Me!" They vied with each other, each wanting to be chosen, till eventually we settled on thirty. I was one of the most eager to be chosen. Voices cried out that we should appoint Mustafa and al-Kafuri and 'Abd al-'Azim.

The workmen hurried to leave, each one thinking about how to let the night shift workers know what had happened. But 'Abd al-'Azim leant for a moment on one of the walls. His lips were tightly pursed, and his usually dark face was pale. I hurried over to his side and said, "Let's go. All the men have left. Come on, or we won't have time to go around to all the workers."

As we walked along, he muttered from between his pursed lips, "What is this? We take it on ourselves to do something and then lay the burden of it on the others. Last time we did it none of them knew, and now we've done the same again, only worse. Do you think the company will leave us be? Impossible, after the manager's been knocked about. It's all a mess!"

"What do you mean, a mess?" replied Gharib. "You're dragging behind and holding us up with you. Give me your hand. It wasn't for nothing that they did what they did. They've put up with a lot, and on top of it all the wretched manager stands up and says whoever doesn't like it can go! It needed the men to make a move."

We went around to the people in several areas, and at a point in Suq al-Laban Street we found a gathering

of men, among them Farag, the mechanic, and he was the first to speak. "Things are better now. Instead of being under attack, we are now on the offensive, but to continue in the struggle we have to be organised. What you did today is proof that you've begun to know the way. You chose men from among yourselves, not outsiders. That's a good beginning toward discovering the true way, but it's only a beginning. They still haven't put up an official notice. The last man out of the factory saw no sign of it. Meetings are still going on in the factory and behind closed doors of the offices, and no one attends except the bosses. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, so be on your guard.

"The company started with two workshops, and now there are more than twenty big buildings. The workshops are growing, and the workers helped to build them up. It's nine years since work began. It started with two workshops, and now more than twenty have been put up, and buildings are built to increase the affluence of the foreigners and their minions. But you, the workers, the source of all this development, can't even find a place to relax in comfort. A candle has been lit. You have lit it today, and it will never burn out."

The time drew near. The alarm clock rang, and on that same evening the workers prepared to leave for the factory, their faces anxious in anticipation of the unknown consequences of what had happened. Work had stopped, but we were not the men who had started it, and we had never stopped work before. It was because of them that we stopped working on a day-to-day basis and became piece-workers. The wages went up, and it was due to them. Today they stopped work again, but it wasn't for a rise in wages. It was for something more far-reaching than that--a change in working conditions.

They did it for an eight-hour day, so that we might see the sun shining on the houses and the water, a sight we have not seen since we set foot in the factory. After being just two workshops, the company now comprises more than twenty, hiding within their walls thousands upon thousands of workers. Where did it all come from?

Time will tell. The important question for the moment is what to do? The future depends on what we do. Should we give in? What would happen if we did? The day shift stopped work, and now they are waiting to see what we do. What would people say? What would happen if we didn't stop work? They would dismiss all the men who did strike, and we would still be in darkness, darkness forever.

Everything is surrounded by risks. There is nothing whose outcome is guaranteed. So we just have to give it all we've got so that no one can say we don't deserve to see the sun shining through the trees. That's what people will say if we break the strike, and we would be depriving all the men who did stop of their very livelihoods. Why? Because we're cowards. It's not only they who stand to gain. All of us do who have been worn out by long hours of work. And the outcome depends on us.

The whistle shrilled, calling the men to work. Fearfully I went inside. We all had our hands on our hearts. Along the way there had been long rows of guards in their yellow uniforms, carrying sticks in their hands and waving their arms. "Into the yard to hear the head of the accounts office!"

Everyone moved along silently, the whole crowd surrounded by guards. Suddenly the cry went up, "The manager! The manager!" They opened the way for a tall, long-faced man with close-cropped hair whose blue eyes were flaming. "If you please!" he said, waving the men aside, scrutinising their faces with narrowed eyes, with the look of a man who knew what he was about. The men made way for him, but no one lifted his hand in greeting. Stifled cries expressed their apprehension as they saw the cruel look in his eyes.

Silence fell, and the movement of the heads was like corn in the wind. The manager cried angrily, "Do you know what's happened? Of course you know. The rabble told you. We will not allow it to be repeated! Everything is back to normal, and the criminals will be punished for their diabolical action. You will work a twelve-hour shift, and anyone who does not like it is free to go. I tell you this now, before you start work."

His eyes grew bloodshot, and he shouted again, "Any man who decides to stop work will be punished decisively. All who do stop will be dismissed." When the workers were silent, the manager thought he had won. The men looked at each other, and then a voice rang out, "We will not work!"

The manager's voice returned, "You will be punished. We shall be merciless. Whoever doesn't bow down to whatever any of the foremen decides will be shown the door."

A wave of violent indignation swept through the crowd. The manager stood his ground, but a voice came from the back, "Do the work yourself and find

out what we're complaining about. Hasn't the government issued orders?"

The manager replied harshly and imperiously, "If you're not back at work in fifteen minutes, you will be considered just like those who stopped work this morning. Those are our orders."

A storm of voices rose up, "We'll only work according to government regulations. No differentiation in labour!"

And someone bellowed, "Everybody outside! The door's wide open. Do the work yourself, Mister Manager. You run the machines!"

The men rushed out, crying, "Work for all," and voices rose to heaven as they met the men waiting at the gates. Throats grew hoarse from shouting, "No differentiation in labour!"

The chanting went on without a break, and gazes of admiration came from people who had nothing to do with the factory. Women gave trills of joy, and the street vendors cried, "Up with the weavers!"

The turners and the smiths and the carpenters gathered around, saying to each other, "We can't just sit silent. We're workers too. Are they better men than us to stop their machines? They even hit the manager in broad daylight, and they answered back to the accounts manager and told him what they thought of him. They're better than more educated men like us. All they want is equal conditions for all. We have to follow their lead and put down our tools in the workshops."

The street was in a ferment, and meetings took place all night. No one got a wink of sleep, and we heard things we had never heard before. One of the demonstrators whom we had never seen before came forward and said, "We are all in the same job. The factory binds us all together, and we are bound by the bonds of the struggle for our rights. Now is the time for us to fight against this bestiality and the power of greed that lives on our sweat and labour. The hour has struck for us to defend ourselves. No one will save us but we ourselves. All for one and one for all. That must be our rallying cry if we want to beat the enemy."

"He's right!" shouted someone in the crowd. "Let him tell us what to do tomorrow!"

And so he went on with his powerful speech. "Let us continue and complete what has been accomplished.

You will not be alone, for other workers will stand with you. Tomorrow you'll see. We're the workers from the [private] workshops."

In the morning the workers hastened their steps through the streets, breathless with excitement. They felt that something tremendous was about to happen. A crowd of workmen was clamouring at the factory gates, eyes upturned toward the black smoke belching from the chimneys. Voices rose from here and there, "Quiet, quiet till we get inside."

The gates opened. No one blocked the way. The guards stood in a rage by the gates, looking hungrily for something. There was no difficulty in getting in, and voices mingled with the roar of the machines and the hum of the belts.

Men gathered together from all sides, gesticulating and urging each other on. The deep discontent in their tired hearts was demanding an outlet. They looked around victoriously and gripped each other's hands. Their faces shone with excitement. Dark eyes stood out and teeth flashed as they chanted continuously. Someone cried out, "Let's calm down. Everyone to his machine!"

All ears were pricked, hearts aflutter, and all eyes were on the doors. Minutes passed, and none of the foremen appeared. Hearts were filled with foreboding. A voice cried out, "Today's payday. If anyone asks us to leave, we must refuse. We demand our wages. We won't leave till we get what we've earned."

They blocked the doors of the weaving shop with iron weights from the looms, so that neither police nor factory guards could get in to them, and sat secure, confident that in the end they would have their way. The sight from the windows of ranks of steel-helmeted police strengthened their resolution not to leave the factory till their demands were officially met, and they sat in groups encouraging each other with songs and slogans.

Then, suddenly, a small door that they had not bothered to block burst open, and in came the factory guards, brandishing whips. They drove the workers to the doors on the opposite side of the weaving shop, hoping that they would open them and flee, but the workmen, herded together now and no longer in small groups, stood firm under the hail of blows which fell indiscriminately on heads, faces and bodies.

The sudden appearance of the guards had shocked them, and having no plan of action, for a while they

did not know what to do, except that they must not leave, no matter what. Then, as they recovered from the surprise of the attack, they became aware that the workshop was full of weapons they could use to defend themselves--wooden beams, sticks, iron bars, and, best of all, the fire extinguishers hanging on the walls. They began a counterattack, and soon it was the guards who were being chased by the workmen, who found great delight in running after them with hoses, bricks, stones, anything. The guards were driven out, the workmen shut and blocked the doors behind them, and still not a single worker had left the factory.

After this victory, bitterness and angry resentment welled up again. Indignation that the company should condemn them to poverty, hunger, disease, even death, and on top of all that to send in the guards to drive them out without being paid. And the company was still an anonymous being to them. They hated it, but didn't know to whom they could express their hatred. On that day, however, their feelings grew so strong that they had to be expressed and they began to smash the looms, the looms that had killed and maimed their workmates.

Meanwhile, the defeated guards, who emerged soaked and bruised from the workshop, were telling their tale, and orders were eventually given that any workman who left the factory should be paid his wages. Vouchers were distributed inside the workshop, and one by one the men went out to be paid, returning to assure their workmates that they really did have their money in their hands, till they were all paid and went home.

Morale rose high as a result of these events. The night-shift workers took courage and went to collect their wages too, and then the weaving shop was closed and remained closed for forty-five days. About a hundred workers were arrested and paraded through the town as an example to the populace of what happened to troublemakers, but the workers were undeterred. Something had been achieved by their action.

During the factory close-down the machines were repaired and the weaving shop divided into smaller workshops, each taking not more than 200 workmen, so that the danger of joint action would be diminished in the future. The workers, meanwhile, enjoyed their enforced holiday, in spite of the fact that it increased their poverty, for they were

not paid during the close-down. They were aware that the factory, when it reopened, could not function without them, and that they would get back the jobs on which they depended.

When the factory was ready to be reopened, the men were called to a meeting with the managers in a public garden and were told that they would be granted certain concessions. Working hours were to be cut from twelve to ten, wages were to be increased, and the workload was to be reduced by having each worker run two looms instead of four. So they returned to work, satisfied to a certain extent, but realizing that by splitting up the work force and leaving breaks between one shift and the next the company was attempting to limit their ability to take industrial action in the future.

Glossary of Arabic Terms

ahl al-balad - people of the town
ahl al-filaha - people who work the land
ahl al-san'a - people of the craft
ahl al-tigara - people who work in trade
alagā - a silk and cotton cloth similar to qutnīyya
'amil 'agīr - wage labourer
'amil fadāl - apprentice
asila - authentic
awlad al-balad - sons of the area
azaz ibn-azaz - weaver and son of a weaver
baladi - local
bandar - the capital city of a markez
bint-nas - a girl of good family
buza - a local alcoholic drink similar to beer
canūn - a traditional heater used in dyeing yarns
dawwāra - warper
dhikr - ritual prayers associated with mawālid
'ezba, 'ezab - small farms
fawa'li - those who earn their livings by transporting mud by donkeyback
futūwa - thugs
gada' - clever
gallabīyya, gallalīb - the traditional flowing gown(s) of the peasants
gharbāwiyya - outsiders, aliens
ghazlīyya - a six-metre piece of cloth used for making gallalīb
hurr nafsī - my own master
ibn kar - son of the business
ifrinji - foreign
jibba - a long, coat-like outer garment
jinn - spirit beings
kafan - shrouds
kaftan - a long inner garment
kawra - capital

khasa - private

kuttāb - a religious primary school teaching mostly the Qur?an

laqy - the process of leasing, denting and helding yarn

markez, marākez - administrative subdivision(s) of the governorate, made up of a city and its hinterland

Mehallāwī, Mehallāwwīyya - native to al-Mehalla

mezayikati - yarn sizer

mezdiyya - ten pounds of yarn in hank form

midaq - the hammering of woven cloth

mu'allim, mu'allimīn - head(s) of traditional weaving workshops

qa'ā, qa'āt - literally hall(s), refers to the traditional weaving workshop

qantar - a standard measure of weight, equal to 1,000 pounds

qism, aqsam - administrative subdivision(s) of a city

qutnīyya - a cloth with a bright surface, woven of a silk warp and cotton weft

sana'ī, sana'īyya - literally creator(s), refers to full-fledged weavers

shahi - a silk and cotton cloth similar to qutnīyya

sheikh - a Muslim title of respect

sheikh al-hara - head of locality

sherkawi, sherkāwwīyya - literally people of the company, used to differentiate indigenous residents, lifestyles, production processes from those brought from outside

sirsawi - a crude fabric made of flax

tariqa, turuq - religious brotherhood(s)

thawab - a favour which will be rewarded by God

termis - lupine

BIBLIOGRAPHY

English and French Sources

Abu-Lughod, J. and Hay, R., Third World Urbanization (Chicago, 1977).

Amelineau, E., La geographie de l'Egypte a l'epoque Copte (Paris, 1890).

Andre, E., L'industrie du cotton en Egypte (Cairo, 1953).

Au Roi, D., "L'industrie en Egypte", in Description d'Egypte, vol. xvii (Paris, 1826).

Ball, J., Contributions to the Geography of Egypt (Cairo, 1939).

Bujra, A., The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town (Oxford, 1971).

Carson, "The Social History of an Egyptian Factory", The Middle East Journal, vol. ii, no. 4 (Autumn 1957).

Chabrol, D., "Essai sur les moeurs des habitants modernes de l'Egypte", in Description d'Egypte, vol. xviii (Paris, 1828).

Clegg, I., Workers' Self-Management in Algeria (New York, 1971).

Dahrendorf, R., Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, Cal., 1959).

Davies, J., Social Mobility and Political Change (New York, 1970).

Deeb, M., "Bank Misr and the Emergence of the Local Bourgeoisie in Egypt", Middle Eastern Studies, vol. xii (Oct. 1976).

Dubetsky, A., "Class and Community in Urban Turkey", Paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association, Boston, Nov. 1974.

DuBois-Ayme, "Voyage dans l'interieur du Delta", in Description d'Egypte, vol. ii (Paris, 1824).

Eman, A., L'industrie du coton en Egypte (Cairo, 1953).

Engels, F., The Working Class Conditions in England (first published 1845).

Epstein, A., Politics in an Urban African Community (Manchester, 1973).

Etman, S., "An Experience in the Rural Situation in its Tenth Year and Comparison between Misr Company's Workers at Mchalla and some Rural Areas in Gharbiyya Province", Paper of the Family Planning Research Center, Misr Spinning and Weaving Company Hospital (Mehalla al-Kubra, Egypt, n.d.).

_____. "Results of Family Planning Undertaken for Four Years in a Workers' Community", Paper submitted to The Family Planning Council, Misr Spinning and Weaving Company. (Mehalla al-Kubra, n.d.).

Feder, E., Strawberry Imperialism (An Enquiry into the Mechanisms of Dependency in Mexican Agriculture), (Madison, Wisc., 1977).

Fahmy, M., La revolution de l'industrie en Egypte et ses consequences sociales au 19e siecle (Leiden, 1954).

Falabella, E., Development of Capitalism and Class Formation: The Torrante in the Track. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1976.

Fallers, L., Inequality: Social Stratification Reconsidered (Chicago, 1973).

Farid, I., The Population of Egypt (Cairo, 1948).

Foster, J., Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns (London, 1974).

Girard, M., "Memoire sur l'agriculture, l'industrie, et le commerce de l'Egypte", in Description d'Egypte, vol. xvii (Paris, 1824).

Gonchley, A., The Development of Modern Egypt (London, 1938.

Gordon, M., "Notes on the Weaving Industry at Mehalla Kabir", Egypte Contemporaire (Cairo, 1909).

Hamdan, G., Studies in Egyptian Urbanism (Cairo, 1959).

Hansen, B. and Marzouk, G., Development and Economic Policy in the U.A.R. (Amsterdam, 1965).

Hansen, B. and Nashashibi, K., Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development: Egypt (New York, 1975).

Heller, C., ed., Structured Social Inequality - A Reader in Comparative Social Stratification (London, 1969).

Hobsbawm, E., Primitive Rebels - Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Manchester, 1959).

Hopkins, N., "The Emergence of Class in a Tunisian Town", Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Mexico City, Nov. 1974.

Hussein, Mahmud, Class Conflict in Egypt: 1945-1970, trans M. Chirman, S. Chirman, A. Ehrenfeld, K. Brown (New York, 1977).

Issawi, C., Egypt at Mid-Century (London, 1954).

_____, "Egypt since 1800: A Study in Lopsided Development", in Issawi, C., The Economic History of the Middle East 1800-1914 (Chicago, 1966).

Jomard, E., "Memoires sur la population comparee de l'Egypte", in Description de l'Egypte, vol. xviii (Paris, 1824).

Kuczynski, J., The Rise of the Working Class (New York, 1967).

Lozach, J. and Hug, G., L'habitat rural en Egypte (Cairo, 1930).

Lynch, O., The Politics of Untouchability - Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India (New York, 1969).

Mabro, R., The Egyptian Economy 1952-1972 (Oxford, 1974).

Mabro, R., and Radwan, S., The Industrialisation of Egypt 1939-1973 (Oxford, 1976).

Mansour, F., Development of the Egyptian Financial System Up to 1967 (London, 1976).

de Nikion, J., Chronique de Jean de Nikion (Paris, 1883).

O'Brien, P., The Revolution in Egypt's Economic System (London, 1966).

Ossowski, S., Class Structure in the Social Consciousness trans. S. Patterson (New York, 1963).

Owen, E., Cotton and the Egyptian Economy 1820-1914 (London, 1969).

Radwan, S., Capital Formation in Egyptian Industry and Agriculture 1882-1967 (London, 1974).

Rapport de la Commission du Commerce et de l'Industrie (Eg.) (Cairo, 1918).

El-Saaty, H., "Some Aspects of the Social Implications of Technological Change in Egypt", in Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, vol. vi (Cairo, 1961).

El-Saaty, H. and Hirabayash, K., Industrialization in Alexandria, Some Ecological and Social Aspects (Cairo, 1959).

Schmid, L., The Role of Migratory Labor in the Economic Development of Guatemala, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1967.

Shearer, W., "The Weaving Industry in Assyut", in L'Egypte Contemporaire no. 1 (Cairo, 1910).

Szentes, T., The Political Economy of Underdevelopment (Budapest, 1971).

Thompson, E., The Making of the English Working Class (New York, 1966).

Tienda, M., "Demographic Transition and Dependency: The Disaggregation Issue and Population Policy in Peru", revised version of a paper presented at the Seventh National Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Houston, Nov., 1977.

Weber, M., The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, ed. T. Parsons, trans. A. Henderson and T. Parsons (New York, 1964).

_____, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, trans. and ed., H. Gerth and C. Mills (New York, 1958).

Wells, H., "Note preliminaire sur l'industrie du tissage en Egypte", Egypte Contemporaire (Cairo, 1910).

Arabic Sources

'Abbas, R., The Labour Movement in Egypt (Cairo, 1969).

'Abd al-Hadī, A., Social Adaptation of Migrant Industrial Workers from Rural Areas to Cairo (Cairo, M.A. Dissertation, Ain Shams University, 1966).

'Abd al-Mu'ti, A., Class Conflict in the Egyptian Village (Cairo, 1977).

'Abu 'Alam, A., "The Labour Movement", Al-talī'a (June, 1966).

'Abu 'Alī, M., The Social Organisation of Industry: A Social Study of the Oil Industry in Egypt (Alexandria, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alexandria, 1968).

'Abu Ismā'īl, A., The Structure of Intermediate Industries (Cairo, 1959).

Ahmad, A., The Town (Cairo, 1960).

al-Barāwi, R., Economic Conditions in Egypt during the Fatimid Period (Cairo, 1948).

Bishāra, Ā., The Industrial Areas of Egypt (Cairo, 1962).

Central Statistics Office, Government of Egypt, Spinning and Weaving Industry (Cairo, 1967).

Fahmi, M., "The Role of the Working Class in the National Labour Movement", Al-talī'a (May 1968).

Fahmi, M., The Trade Unions in the Socialist Countries (Cairo University, Ph.D. Thesis, Cairo, 1962).

Fūad, A., Bank Misr 1920-1970 (Between National Capitalism and Socialism) (Cairo, 1970).

Galab, F. and Hussein, A., "Why the Public Sector?", Al-ahram (April 23, 1974).

al-Ghazālī, A., The History of Egyptian Trade Unions 1899-1950 (Cairo, 1968).

_____, "The Movement of the Egyptian Labourers and Trade Unions after World War II", Al-talī'a (February, 1968).

Ghrib, A., The Sociological Approach to Social Stratification (Alexandria: Ph.D. Thesis, Alexandria University, 1967).

al-Gibali, S., The Impact of the Spinning and Weaving Industry on the Development of the Economy of the Arab Republic of Egypt (Cairo, M.A. Dissertation, High Institute of Home Economics, 1972).

al-Gritly, A. The Structure of Modern Industry in Egypt (Cairo, 1948).

_____, History of Industry in Egypt (Cairo, 1952).

_____, The People and Economic Resources of Egypt (Cairo, 1962).

Guide to the Exhibition of Industrial Production in Mehalla (1969).

Halabi, A., Leadership and Productivity in Industrial Organisation: A Sociological Study of Work (Cairo, M.A. Dissertation, Cairo University, 1970).

Halīm, A., The Egyptian Labourer: Conditions of Egyptian Labourers Before and After World War I (Cairo, 1934).

Hamdan, G., The Geography of Cities (Cairo, 1955).

Harb, M., The Cure for the Egyptian Economy: A Bank for the Egyptian Nation (Cairo, 1913).

_____, Collection of Speeches of Tala't Harb (Cairo, 1927.

_____, Muhammad Tala'at Harb in Some of his Speeches and Notes (Cairo, 1957).

Hasan, M., The Impact of the Labour Movement on Individual Policies (Cairo, Ph.D. Thesis, Cairo University, 1960).

Hasan, S., Old Cairo (Cairo, 1942).

Hussein, A. and Galāb, F., "The Problems of the Public Sector", Al-ahram (April 24, 1974).

Hussein, A., Industry in Egypt (Cairo, 1935).

al-Husseini, M., Occupational Mobility in a Textile Factory (Cairo, M.A. Dissertation, Cairo University, 1968).

Ibn Duqmān, I., Al-intisār bi-wāsitat 'aqd al-asmār (Cairo, 1893).

Ibn al-Ji'ān, S., Al-tuhfa bi-asmā' al-bilād al-misrīya (Cairo, 1898).

Ibrāhīm, M., "The Role of Industrial Planning for Economic Development", Al-ahram al-iqtisādī, vol. xv (November/December, 1957).

Ibrāhīm, M., "The Policy of Industrialisation in Egypt", Hawliyāt kulliyat al-adab, vol. ii (1968).

al-Idrīsi, M., Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-afāq, (Cairo, 1894).

Isma'il, N., The Industrial Area of al-Mehalla al-Kubra (Cairo, M.A. Dissertation, Ain Shams University, 1965).

The Industrial Union, The Spinning and Weaving Industry over Fourteen Years (Cairo, 1970).

'Iways, M., "Our Industry and Markets", Al-ahram al-iqtisādī (September 1963).

'Izz al-Dīn, A., "The Emergence of the Egyptian Working Class", Al-talī'a (May, 1965).

_____, "The July Revolution and the Labourers", Al-tali'a (July, 1965).

_____, The History of the Egyptian Working Class in the Thirties, 1929-1939 (Cairo, 1972).

_____, The History of the Egyptian Working Class 1919-1929 (Cairo, 1970).

_____, The History of the Egyptian Working Class from Its Emergence until 1919 (Cairo, 1966).

al-Jabarti, A., 'Aja'ib al-āthār fī al-tarājim wa-al-akhbār (Cairo, 1958).

al-Khulī, L., "The Working Class between the Trade Union Movement and the Political Movement", Al-talī'ā, vol. i, no. 5 (May, 1965).

al-Maghribi, F., I, the Labourer (Cairo, 1950).

al-Maqrizi, T., Al-mawā'iz wal-i'tiyār bi-dhikr al-khitat wal-'athar (Cairo, 1925).

al-Messiri, E., The Yarn Ration System in the Private Sector, an unpublished report submitted to the head of the Association for the Spinning and Weaving Industry (al-Mehalla, 1976).

Mubārak, 'Ali, Al-khitat al-tawfīqīya (Cairo, 1955).

al-Mudrik, M., The Problems of al-Mehalla Labourers (Cairo, 1947).

al-Muqaddas, S., Ahsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm (Leiden, 1906).

al-Nukhīlī, S., The Labour Movement in Egypt and the Position of the State and Journalism toward It From 1882 to 1952 (Cairo, 1968).

Public Relations Department, Governorate of Gharbīyya, The Governorate of Gharbiyya (Tanta, 1971).

Ramzy, M., The Geographic Dictionary of Egypt (Cairo, 1953).

Rifā'ī, A., "The Worries of 'Abd Allah Rifā'ī, A Weaver", Al-Tali'a (June, 1976).

Rif'at, Y., My Town, al-Mehalla al-Kubra (al-Mehalla, 1972).

Sa'īd, G., The Economy of Egypt (Cairo, 1950).

al-Sharnubi, M., Migration from Rural Areas in the United Arab Republic (Cairo, Ph.D. Thesis, Ain Shams University, 1968).

Shayyāl, G., The Economic and Political History of Damietta (Alexandria, 1949).

al-Tali'a, "The Mass Movement of Trade Unions in Egypt" (May, 1965).

_____, "The Public Sector" (August, 1965).

_____, "The View of the Working Class on Present Conditions" (January 1968).

_____, "The View of Labourers on the Present Problems of the Trade Union Movement in Egypt" (November, 1968).

_____, "Work and Labourers in Egypt" (June, 1965).

_____, "The Public Sector: Egyptianisation and Industrialisation" (September, 1965).

The Tourist Guide to al-Mehalla al-Kubra (Tanta, 1974).

'Uthmān, T., The Labourers' Struggle in the Mechanical Weaving Industry (Cairo, 1948).

_____, "Notes and Documents on the History of the Working Class" Al-katib (July and August, 1971 and January, March and May, 1972).

Ziadah, M., "Some New Observations on the Mamluk Empire in Egypt", Magallat kulliyat al-adab, Cairo University, vol. iv., Pt. 1 (May, 1936).