

## Support for Machinery by Yorkshire Cloth Merchants, 1791

(Leeds Cloth Merchant Proclamation in Support of Machinery, broadsheet, 1791; in J. F. C. Harrison, ed., *Society and Politics in England, 1780-1960*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, pp. 72-74.)

### THE CLOTH MERCHANTS OF LEEDS

BEING informed that various Kinds of MACHINERY, for the better and more expeditious DRESSING OF WOOLLEN-CLOTH, have been lately invented, that many such Machines are already made and set to work in different Parts of this County, and that great Numbers more are contracted for, to be used in the Dressing of Cloth in other Parts of Yorkshire, and in the Counties of Lancaster, Derby, Chester, Wilts and Gloucester, thought it necessary to meet together on the Eighteenth of October, to take into their most serious Consideration what Steps were needful to be taken, to prevent the Merchants and Cloth-Dressers in other Parts, from diminishing the Staple Trade of this Town, by the Enjoyment of superior Implements in their Business.

At the said Meeting, attended by almost every Merchant in the Town, the above Facts did clearly appear, and after a Discussion of the Merits of various Inventions, and the Improvement in Dressing likely to be derived from them, it appeared to them all, absolutely necessary that this Town should partake of the Benefit of all Sorts of Improvements that are, or can be made in the Dressing of their Cloths, to prevent the Decline of that Business, of which the Town of Leeds has for Ages had the greatest Share, and which from its local Advantages, we presume may be maintained and increased, provided the Merchants, and Dressers of Cloth, in Leeds, do not neglect to use the best Means in their Power, of performing their Work to the utmost Perfection.

In order that the Matter should be undertaken on a Plan to afford every possible Information, a Committee was then appointed for the Purpose of obtaining one of each of the different Machines now in Use, on the most approved Construction, and a Subscription was entered into for defraying the Expence thereof, and to enable them to obtain an eligible Situation for erecting and working them, for the Inspection of the Trade, previous to their being brought into general Use.

At a time when the People, engaged in every other Manufacture in the Kingdom, are exerting themselves to bring their Work to Market at reduced Prices, which can alone be effected by the Aid of Machinery, it certainly is not necessary that the Cloth Merchants of Leeds, who depend chiefly on a Foreign Demand, where they have for Competitors the Manufacturers of other Nations, whose Taxes are few, and whose manual Labour is only Half the Price it bears here, should have Occasion to defend a Conduct, which has for its Aim the Advantage of the Kingdom in general, and of the Cloth Trade in particular; yet anxious to prevent Misrepresentations, which have usually attended the Introduction of the most useful Machines, they wish to remind the Inhabitants of this Town, of the Advantages derived to every flourishing Manufacture from the Application of Machinery; they instance that of Cotton in particular, which in its internal and foreign Demand is nearly alike to our own, and has in a few Years by the Means of Machinery advanced to its present Importance, and is still increasing.

If then by the Use of Machines, the Manufacture of Cotton, an Article which we import, and are supplied with from other Countries, and which can everywhere be procured on equal Terms, has met with such amazing Success, may not greater Advantages be reasonably expected from

cultivating to the utmost the Manufacture of Wool, the Produce of our own Island, an Article in Demand in all Countries, and almost the universal Cloathing of Mankind?

In the Manufacture of Woollens, the Scribbling Mill, the Spinning Frame, and the Fly Shuttle, have reduced manual Labour nearly One third, and each of them at its first Introduction carried an Alarm to the Work People, yet each has contributed to advance the Wages and to increase the Trade, so that if an Attempt was now made to deprive us of the Use of them, there is no Doubt, but every Person engaged in the Business, would exert himself to defend them.

From these Premises, we the undersigned Merchants, think it a Duty we owe to ourselves, to the Town of Leeds, to the Nation at large, to declare that we will protect and support the free Use of the proposed Improvements in Cloth Dressing, by every legal Means in our Power; and if after all, contrary to our Expectations, the Introduction of Machinery should for a Time occasion a Scarcity of Work in the Cloth Dressing Trade, we have unanimously agreed to give a Preference to such Workmen as are now settled Inhabitants of this Parish, and who give no Opposition to the present Scheme.

Appleby & Sawyer  
Bernard Bischoff & Sons  
[and 59 other names]