

the most important change was the addition of certain arbitration clauses which provided that in a dispute over wages or hours both parties could name an arbitrator; and if the two arbitrators could not agree, either party could require them to submit the points in dispute to a Justice of the Peace, whose decision would be final. On the third reading of the amending Bill<sup>1</sup> these clauses were attacked by the Attorney-General, who declared that this arrangement would have the tendency to fix wages, and that the men might "name an improper person that a master would be obliged to meet—this would be a sort of Solicitor-General in that trade, who would no doubt be paid and indemnified for his labour and genius."<sup>2</sup> Pitt upheld this criticism, to which Gascoyne and Sheridan replied by pointing out that the clause was taken almost verbatim from the Act passed in the same session for establishing arbitration in the cotton trade.<sup>3</sup> Pitt carried his motion for adjournment at the time,<sup>4</sup> but the clauses were ultimately adopted.<sup>5</sup> The final stages are unfortunately unreported. The Bill as drawn up by Sheridan and his colleagues on the committee contained a valuable clause to protect friendly and benevolent societies, but this clause disappeared.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> July 22, 1800.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, July 22, 1800.

<sup>3</sup> 39 and 40 George III. c. 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, July 22, 1800.

<sup>5</sup> For failure of these clauses see p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> That nothing in this Act extends "in any Manner to affect or render illegal any Clubs or Societies of Workmen now formed or hereafter to be formed, or the Funds of any Clubs or Societies subscribed or collected *bona fide* for the several beneficial Purposes of promoting the Knowledge of their respective Trades and Manufactures, and of providing Masters with Workmen, which latter Clubs or Societies are commonly called or known by the Name of 'Houses of Call,' and of purchasing Tools for Workmen, who may be incapable of purchasing the same themselves, or who shall have lost the same by Fire, or other inevitable Accident, and of granting the like Relief as is given by Friendly Societies established and enrolled under and by virtue of an Act passed in the 33rd year of His present Majesty, intituled 'An Act for the Encouragement and Relief of Friendly Societies,' to Workmen and their Wives and Families, who cannot receive such Relief from such last-mentioned Societies, by Reason of their not admitting any



The greatest living master of controversial prose analysed the Combination Laws in a characteristic article in the *Political Register* that appeared the year before they were repealed.<sup>1</sup> In 1823 a spinner named Ryding was tried for an assault on a Preston manufacturer named Horrocks, who was also a member of Parliament. In the course of his trial it came out that Ryding had decided deliberately to wound Horrocks or his partner in order that he might be tried before a judge and jury, and thus bring before the world the injustice of the Combination Laws under which he and other spinners had suffered great privations, in consequence of their attempt to resist a reduction of wages. Cobbett wrote on the trial, putting his views in the favourite form of a public letter to Wilberforce, who had let drop the unfortunate phrase "free British labourers" in a speech on the West Indian slaves, and in the article he discussed the Combination Laws. After reciting their main purpose Cobbett goes on, "Well, Wilberforce; the combiners are to go to gaol or to the House of Correction, to the former for not more than three months, to the latter for not more than two months, for the first going off. *Two Justices of the Peace*, who are appointed and displaced at the pleasure of the Ministers, two of these men are to hear, determine and sentence without any *Trial by the Peers of the party*. It being very difficult to get proof of this combining for the raising of wages, there is a clause in the Act compelling the persons accused to give evidence against themselves or against their associates. If they refuse, these two Justices have the power to commit them to prison, there to remain, without bail or mainprize, until they submit to be examined or to give evidence before such justices.

"Now, you will observe, Wilberforce, that this punishment is inflicted in order to prevent workmen from uniting together, and by such union, to obtain an addition to their

Persons to be Members thereof after a certain Age: anything in this or any other Act contained to the contrary thereof in anywise notwithstanding."

<sup>1</sup> *Political Register*, August 30, 1823.