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THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM IN LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY  
BRITAIN:

A Study of Social Structure and Working Class Belief

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by

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VOLUME I

Ph.D.

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## SUMMARY

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1. The central theoretical focus of this study - which seeks to offer a sociological account of the nature of the labour movement and socialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century - is strictly speaking the genesis and evolution of working class political beliefs. It is intended that this should be considered in relation to the broader structural and ideological environment of the period, as well as within the experiential milieu of the working class community on the local level.
2. In Chapter 1, a number of prefatory remarks are advanced and the main theoretical issues under consideration are discussed. Chapter 2 comprises a chronology of socialism and working class movements during the period 1850-1906. It is hoped that this chronological outline will provide a basis for the subsequent analysis.
3. The two chapters which comprise Part I of this study attempt to elaborate a theoretical perspective, by reference to which the trajectory and nature of British socialism and working class social belief in the latter half of the nineteenth century may be better understood. Chapter 3 considers the major Marxist and sociological approaches to this question, stressing in particular the themes of social structure, ideology and class consciousness. A variety of problems inherent in these theories will be identified in Chapter 4 which, building upon a critical analysis of the approaches to the socialist movement, concludes by proposing a theoretical framework adequate to the complex historical and sociological issues apparent in this area.
4. The three chapters which comprise Part II aim to provide a general account of the broader structural and ideological context of the period. In Chapter 5, the development of the economy and social structure is discussed, stressing, in particular, changes in this sphere during the closing decades of the last century. Chapter 6 complements this with an account of the major ideological forms and their developments during these years. Finally, the themes of these two chapters are drawn together by Chapter 7, in which the broad trajectory of socialism and the labour movement at the societal level is documented in relation to the foregoing analysis.
5. The macro-structural and ideological formation of later nineteenth century Britain - as documented in Part II - provides the overall context for the third part of this study: an examination of the workings of certain micro-sociological processes. Here, the focus will be upon socialism and working class life, work and religion in Lancashire between about 1890-1906. In accordance with the theoretical perspective outlined above, this part of the study will highlight the innovative role of working people themselves in the development of social consciousness. Chapter 8 sets the background to political change in the north west between 1868-1906 and documents the course of labour organisation and politics during this period. Chapter 9 comprises a detailed examination of the activities, agitations and conceptions of socialism prevalent at the branch level in Lancashire - in short, an account of socialist branch culture. Chapters 10-12 aim to situate these socialist beliefs and organisational forms within the working class community of later nineteenth century Lancashire. Attention is here devoted to, firstly, industrial structure, wages and work processes; secondly, home and community patterns; and finally, Nonconformity and popular religious belief.
6. Finally, Part IV comprises one chapter in which a number of concluding remarks are advanced.

To my parents

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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N.B. Listed below are those abbreviations employed most frequently in the text. In general, the term is given in full at the first instance followed by the abbreviation in brackets.

Abbreviation

A.A.M.	Amalgamated Association of Miners
A.A.O.C.S.	Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners
A.S.C.J.	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
A.S.E.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
F.A.R.A.	Factory Acts Reform Association
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
I.W.M.A.	International Working Men's Association
L.E.A.	Labour Electoral Association
L.E.C.	Labour Electoral Committee
L.R.C.	Labour Representation Committee
L.R.L.	Labour Representation League
L.W.M.A.	London Working Men's Association
M.F.G.B.	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
M.N.U.	Miners' National Union
N.C.F.A.R.A.	Northern Counties Factory Acts Reform Association
N.L.P.L.W.A.	North Lancashire Power Loom Weavers Association
N.M.A.	National Miners' Association
S.D.F.	Social Democratic Federation
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
U.T.F.W.A.	United Textile Factory Workers' Association

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I owe a great amount to my wife, Hilary, for her perseverance generally and her assistance in checking the manuscript. It is, however, with an enormous sense of gratitude that I have chosen to dedicate this study to my parents. It is with them that my greatest debt will always lie.

#### Declaration

The following parts of this study have been used previously. Chapter 9 represents a revised version of my article "Socialism at Branch Level 1890-1900: Some Notes Towards Analysis", in the Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 4 (1976-77) 6-35. Chapter 12 represents a revised version of my article "Religion in the Working Class Community and the Evolution of Socialism in later Nineteenth Century Lancashire", to appear in a forthcoming edition of Histoire sociale-Social History.

===== CHAPTER ONE =====

PREFATORY REMARKS: SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL HISTORY  
AND SOCIALISM

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Some brief prefatory remarks are necessary to explain the scope and intention of the research presented in this thesis. The central theoretical focus of this study - which seeks to offer a sociological account of the nature of the labour movement and socialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century - is strictly speaking the genesis and evolution of working class political beliefs. It is intended that this should be considered in relation to the broader structural and ideological environment of the period, as well as within the experiential milieu of the working class community on the local level; in short, this study comprises a sociological inquiry into the nature of and manifold relationships between social structure and social belief. It is hoped that the present chapter will clarify four issues. Firstly, the relevance of a study of the socialist movement in this period to contemporary social theory, and social stratification research in particular, will be indicated. Secondly, the theoretical question of social structure and belief will be raised and its place within both Marxism and sociology discussed. Thirdly, the analysis of socialism and "working class consciousness" by British labour and social historians will be briefly examined, and the lessons contained therein for any properly grounded sociological approach noted. Finally, the plan and line of argument explicated in this study will be outlined.

## I.

It is conventional to preface a study of this nature by justifying the chosen field of research. This might be considered especially germane in the case of research concerned with the history of British socialism, the literature surrounding which is already extensive and has grown rapidly in recent decades. In actual fact little justification would seem to be necessary. This study is offered as a contribution to the wide ranging debate in history and sociology on the working class, the enduring relevance of which for modern social research need hardly be emphasised. There are two reasons as to why this should be the case. Firstly, although recent work has challenged the paradigmatic status of the "English model" of modernisation and industrialisation which has prevailed since Karl Marx first derived his theories of capitalism and social class formation from the study of English society,<sup>1</sup> theoretical inquiry into social stratification and the development of political citizenship has repeatedly turned to the "classic soil" of the first industrial nation. The stress placed upon stratification studies in contemporary social research in this country and elsewhere perhaps serves to underline this fact.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, in spite of all this work it cannot

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1. See, for instance, Reinhard Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered", Comparative Studies in Society and History, IX (1966-67) 292-346

2. Perhaps the most notable of which is the large scale study of social mobility and stratification at present being conducted at Nuffield College, Oxford. For a survey of stratification research in this country since 1945, see John H. Goldthorpe and Phillippa Bevan, "The Study of Social Stratification in Great Britain, 1945-1975", unpublished research paper, (Oxford 1975.)



yet be argued that diminishing returns have set in. Quite the reverse, in fact, for as research has advanced and new lines of inquiry have been opened up, so, too, have old assumptions been challenged; the debate surrounding the nature of the working class remains as lively as ever, indeed if not more so.<sup>3</sup> In the light of recent work, however, there would seem great need to highlight the historical development of the working class. The "ideal-typical" orientation of much stratification research has, perhaps, tended to obscure the historical diversity of working class life and work,<sup>4</sup> but in general a more complete understanding of the contemporary social structure must surely be premised upon a sound analysis of its antecedent historical evolution. The study of British socialism is absolutely integral to a fuller comprehension of the development of the working class, its beliefs and ideologies.

That "the debate on the working class" should continue to arouse considerable scholarly interest is, of course, tribute to Marx's theoretical achievement. Drawing his evidence from the conditions of nineteenth century English society, Marx's formulation of the central economic dynamic of capitalist society, with its attendant theories of social class and class consciousness, seemed to suggest that this most

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3. One need only mention the interest and criticism provoked by the publication of John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour (Cambridge 1970); The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour (Cambridge 1971); and The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure (Cambridge 1969).
  4. The point is made by a number of contributors to a recent symposium on working class social imagery: see, for instance, R. L. Davies and Jim Cousins, "The 'New Working Class' and the Old", in Martin Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society (London 1975) 195.

completely developed of all industrial societies would call forth the highest expression of working class revolutionary potential. Yet by the 1870s and 1880s when Engels, in particular, concerned himself with the question as to why the working class in Britain had failed to exploit the opportunities opened up by the second franchise reform of 1867 - let alone manifest anything approaching a "revolutionary class consciousness" - a work of revision had begun which has continued to the present day. And one has seen in the process concepts such as the "labour aristocracy", "respectability", "integration", "subordination", the "decomposition" of the working class, "embourgeoisement" and, latterly, the emergence of an "affluent" working class variously hypothesized.<sup>5</sup> The British working class and its politics remains still an area of research pregnant with possibilities.

In short, the aim of this study and its ultimate rationale is to explore in some depth one aspect of the whole debate - namely, the working class, the labour movement and socialism in the latter part of the last century. It is perhaps surprising - but of no small significance - to observe that, with the exception of Professor Bauman's study,<sup>6</sup> there exists not one explicitly sociological investigation into the working class and socialism in this period. Although recently a number of sociologists have begun to turn with interest to the nineteenth century

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5. The course of the debate on the working class over the last century is usefully summarised by Goldthorpe et.al., Affluent Worker in the Class Structure, 1-29.

6. See further, Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement (Manchester 1972).

working class,<sup>7</sup> research has tended to focus upon the contemporary social structure, allowing historians (usually writing from within a Marxist perspective) to lead the field in analysing the earlier period.<sup>8</sup> There would seem little need, therefore, to justify a study which sets out to examine, within a broadly sociological framework, the nineteenth century working class and socialist thought. This is the substantive area in which the complex sociological and historical relationships between social structure and belief will be explored.

## II.

There are, it has been recently suggested, "two sociologies", one macroscopic in orientation, systemic and ultimately constraining, whilst the other is microscopic, interactive and concerned to highlight human agency and control.<sup>9</sup> It may be, however, that Dawe has identified

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7. Among recent contributions, see for instance, Nigel Young, "The English Working Class and the Dialectics of Incorporation", Berkely Journal of Sociology, XII, (1967) 1-43; H. F. Moorhouse, "The Political Incorporation of the British Working Class: an Interpretation", Sociology, VII, (1973) 342-59; Robert Q. Gray, "Styles of Life, the 'Labour Aristocracy' and Class Relations in Later Nineteenth Century Edinburgh", International Review of Social History, XVIII, (1973) 428-52 and the same author's recent book, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976); Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics (Cambridge 1974); J. M. Cousins and R. L. Davies, "Working Class Incorporation - A Historical Approach...", in Frank Parkin, ed., The Social Analysis of Class Structure (London 1974) 275-97.
  8. Although Piva has recently argued that historians of the nineteenth century working class and sociologists concentrating upon present day class structure have in fact arrived at remarkably similar conclusions. This, I think, is open to question: cf. Michael J. Piva, "The Aristocracy of the English Working Class: Help for a Historical Debate in Difficulty", Histoire sociale-Social History, VII, (1974) 270-92.
  9. Alan Dawe, "The Two Sociologies," British Journal of Sociology, XXI, (1970); see further, Dick Atkinson, Orthodox Consensus and Radical Alternative (London 1971).

but one dichotomy in an area of study characterised by a number of dichotomies. For the distinguishing feature of the sociological enterprise is its unavoidable concern with "...the study of a particular class of objects which themselves have the curious characteristics that they may be thought of as having concepts about each other and about other objects".<sup>10</sup> This fundamental ontology immediately suggests a dualism between the study of society in its objective and subjective aspects; on the one hand, the structural and institutional arrangements of any human society and, on the other, the ideas, beliefs, values, hopes and aspirations of people about that society, may be identified and investigated. Flowing directly from this essential dualism are the twin emphases of sociological inquiry which form the core concern of the present study: the nature of and relationships between what we shall term social structure and social belief.<sup>11</sup>

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10. John Rex, Discovering Sociology: Studies in Sociological Theory and Methodology (London 1975) 212.

11. See further Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Harmondsworth 1967). Throughout this study, the terms "social belief", "social consciousness" and "social imagery" - taken to mean the rounded subjective capacity and orientation, if often diffuse and unorganised representations, of human beings - will be assumed synonymous. These terms are, therefore, to be distinguished from the notion of "class consciousness", which presupposes a universal, unitary and coherent ideological articulation, as well as from that of "social consciousness" as used in Marxist theory. I wish to avoid the imputation that social structure and belief or consciousness, as employed in this study, are of equivalent theoretical status to that of "base" and "superstructure" (for which latter term "Consciousness" is often substituted) in Marxism, a metaphor I take to be fundamentally ambiguous (see below on this point). My intention here is simply to explore the relationships between two (among a range of) key sociological concepts. I do not wish to claim, as would Marxists for the base/superstructure idea, that total social formations may be encapsulated and explained by reference to these two terms.

There can be little doubt as to the place of these two terms within modern sociology. Social structure, whilst by no means employed consistently or unambiguously, has been a central sociological concept since the time of Herbert Spencer, one of the first writers to use the term. The notion of a social structure implies the fundamental sociological premise to the effect that human societies manifest regular and identifiable patterns of social institutions and relationships, to which individuals orient their action, the latter, in turn, reacting back upon that structure. Similarly, social belief or consciousness - that is, the subjective component of human cognition - underscores the normative orientation of much American sociology as well as the "sociological conception of thought" which Karl Mannheim initiated as the sociology of knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

The precise nature of the relationship between these two terms has, however, proved elusive. It is quite fundamental to this study that the interplay between men and society, and hence between social structure and belief, be conceived of as genuinely dialectical but, as John Urry has recently noted, this is a fact little recognised by sociology.<sup>13</sup> It is unfortunately all too rare to find satisfactorily spelled out, either theoretically or empirically, the form of the relationship and social mediations which exist between social structure and belief; at worst the two have become discrete categories, and human subjectivity reduced

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12. T. B. Bottomore, Sociology: A Guide to Literature and Problems (London 1970) 108; Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (London 1960), 1-5 on the "sociological conception of thought", et. passim.

13. John Urry, Reference Groups and the Theory of Revolution (London 1973) 1.

to but an epiphenomenal and passive reflex of the former. Recent trends in social thought may indeed have served to exacerbate this divide. On the one hand, there has been a movement towards a "structural super-determinism" in the guise of a revived structuralist Marxism, and, on the other hand, the phenomenological aspects of social interaction which emphasise the bestowal of human meaning - albeit divorced from wider structural imperatives - have come to be viewed with increased favour.<sup>14</sup> If these "two sociologies" are at the moment further apart than ever, the aim of the present study is to systematically explore the relationship between social structure and belief and to suggest that, in reality, the two terms ultimately suggest a single argument.

The issue is a pertinent one for both Marxist and academic sociology. Marxists have felt obliged to work within the confines of Marx's cryptic formulation of the base and superstructure idea in his Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* as follows,<sup>15</sup>

...the sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to

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14. The vogue of structuralist Marxism is inspired by the work of Louis Althusser and his followers: see, for instance, For Marx (London 1969), and Nicos Poulanzas, Political Power and Social Classes (London 1973); the charge of "structural super-determinism" is levelled against this work by Ralph Miliband, "The Problem of the Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulanzas", in Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Science (London 1972) 253-62. The second tendency in social theory, most noticeable in the field of the sociology of deviance, combines the phenomenological perspective of Alfred Schutz with the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead. It reaches its apotheosis in ethnomethodology: see, for instance, Paul Filmer, Michael Phillipson, David Silverman and David Walsh, New Directions in Sociological Theory (London 1972)

15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (London 1969) 182.



which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

The inherent reductionism implicit here has prompted not a few Marxists to abandon the whole apparatus of base and superstructure as inappropriate and inadequate for the analysis of social consciousness;<sup>16</sup> but many more indeed would readily claim to accord to human agency and thought a place in the historical process, by stressing the dialectical autonomy of consciousness from material factors.<sup>17</sup> Whilst this may be so, it nevertheless remains the case that Marxist sociologists and historians have resorted all too readily to notions such as "hegemony", "bourgeois ideology" and the like, which assume the passive and almost total imbibition of ideas, most usually on the part of the working class. There are, in fact, two problems here. Firstly, the actual mechanisms of indoctrination have been little studied. As John Goldthorpe has recently observed, "...the problem is no more than posed: whether from the side of Marxism or academic sociology, the work of producing an answer - that is, of showing exactly how socialisation 'from above' takes place - remains

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16. See for instance, E. P. Thompson, "Socialist Humanism", New Reasoner, I (1957) 111-13 and 129-31; "The Peculiarities of the English", in John Saville and Ralph Miliband, eds., The Socialist Register 1965 (London 1965) 351ff.

17. In asserting the relative autonomy of superstructural elements, the testimony of Engels is often invoked: cf. his letter to Bloch of 1890, in Marx and idem., Selected Works, 692. For more recent expositions, see for instance Eric Hobsbawm, "Labour Traditions" in his Labouring Men Studies in the History of Labour (London 1972) 371-86; Richard Hyman, Strikes (London 1972) 73; Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", New Left Review, 82, (1973) 3-16.

almost all to be done".<sup>18</sup> Second, and more importantly, the "indoctrination" theory of ideology, virtually ubiquitous within Marxist thought, actually devalues social consciousness, which becomes again a mere reflex conditioned by extrinsic forces.<sup>19</sup>

The problem is no less central to sociological theory. The classical argument in the sociology of knowledge links belief and social structure intimately,<sup>20</sup> but we are, as yet, little wiser as to the precise institutional and processual mechanisms which mediate the two. It is a central psephological and sociological premise, for instance, that political attitudes and social class location are more or less closely tied; yet Sartori has posed the question,<sup>21</sup>

...how do we pass from class conditions to class consciousness and action?...In the final analysis, how do we know that class conditions are the cause of class consciousness and action... The reply is very simply that we do not know. This is to say that between class conditions on the one hand, and class action on the other hand there is a wide gap, a major missing link.

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18. John H. Goldthorpe, "Class, Status and Party in Modern Britain: Some Recent Interpretations, Marxist and marxisant", European Journal of Sociology, XIII (1972) 360.
19. A Marxist historian like Eric Hobsbawm who, as noted above (note 17) seeks to emphasise the explanatory role of superstructural elements, may nevertheless for the purposes of his essay on "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain", assume that the economic location of the aristocracy of labour automatically predisposes this stratum to the influence of bourgeois ideology: cf. Labouring Men, 272-315. The whole question of the labour aristocracy will be taken up late in this study.
20. Peter Hamilton, Knowledge and Social Structure: An Introduction to the Classical Argument in the Sociology of Knowledge (London 1974).
21. G. Sartori, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology", in Seymour Martin Lipsett, ed., Politics and the Social Sciences (New York 1969) 82-3.



The ready recourse to an all-embracing process of socialisation favoured by many political sociologists in linking social class and political belief is, once more, to deprecate the integrity of social belief. Again, human consciousness is assumed to be merely receptive rather than active, constrained rather than creative.

It may be concluded that the absence of a serious examination of the almost inviolable relationship between social structure and belief in both Marxist and academic sociology has resulted, at best, in fundamental confusion and, at worst, in the complexities of human consciousness being totally glossed over. It is intended that this central concern should fully inform the sociological analysis of British socialism and the labour movement outlined below.

### III.

The study of socialist and working class history in this country has been dominated until quite recently by the classic labour history tradition whose course was charted by Sidney and Beatrice Webb and G. D. H. Cole, powerfully undergirded by an indigenous Marxist tradition. Two features have characterised this tradition, of which any sociological approach needs to take full cognizance.

Firstly, the prime emphasis of British labour historiography has been, to put the issue bluntly, rather less upon working class history than with the history of working class movements, institutions and leaders. Trade union history, for instance, set in the mould in which the Webbs had first cast the subject, is very much "Head Office" history - the history of General Secretaries, organisational politics and institutional developments - whilst the real experience of working class life and the hopes and ideals of the anonymous "rank and file" has remained obscure. In short, labour historians have been happy to

extrapolate the countours of popular consciousness from the writings and utterances of working class leaders and from the policies of working class organisations.<sup>22</sup> It is hoped that the limitations of this approach will be made abundantly clear in this study.

Secondly, there has been apparent in this historical work an implicit teleology. We should not be surprised by the fact that the overwhelming majority of studies of early socialism are themselves written from a socialist perspective. Quite naturally, activists and intellectuals of the left have been concerned, for both personal and political reasons, to document the history of their movement, the course of popular struggles, and its victories and defeats. Socialism, however, is not simply a political creed; far more explicitly than other political ideologies, Marxist and non-Marxist socialism alike embody a theory of history by which it becomes imperative to locate itself. As Goran Therborn has recently noted of the evolution of Marxism: "The theory of historical materialism makes it possible to situate Marxism itself - just as much as market economics or normative sociology - in relation to capitalist development and the bourgeois revolution."<sup>23</sup> In this way the problem of teleology has become almost a political imperative and, too frequently, one finds accounts of the socialist tradition couched in the language and slanted in the direction of the final goal state determined legitimate or desirable by the particular commentator. Three instances of this tendency may be noticed.

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22. See, for instance, James Hinton's criticisms of Royden Harrison's book Before the Socialists - a work in the classic labour history tradition - for concentrating too much upon the political dimension of working class history, and not enough upon the nature of working life and experience: cf. "The Labour Aristocracy", New Left Review, 32 (1965) 72-7.

23. Goran Therborn, "The Working Class and the Birth of Marxism", New Left Review, 79 (1973) 3.

Firstly, of considerable importance to labour history have been the numerous autobiographies and recollections left by labour or socialist activists. Here the tendency to retrospective interpretation of the socialist movement - particularly in terms of personal careers - may be registered by simply noting the titles of some of the more well known works: Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle (John Hodge); From Crow-Scaring to Westminster (George Edwards); From a Stonemason's Bench to the Treasury Bench (Henry Broadhurst); and so on. Secondly may be cited the influential Fabian tradition in British labour historiography which stems from the Webbs' extensive researches into trade union and working class history, through the work of J. L. and Barbara Hammond, to the massive and invaluable scholarship of G. D. H. Cole. Underpinning an ostensibly narrative and chronological history may be clearly discerned here implicit assumptions about the nature of the working class and socialism. V. A. C. Gatrell has observed of the Fabians' treatment of Robert Owen that,<sup>24</sup>

Around 1900 the Fabian socialists and their circle discovered in him [Owen] their forebear, germane to British soil, the proper father, in short, of English socialism. A careful chain of succession was implicit, sometimes explicit, in their writings, which traced from him a burgeoning socialist but non-Marxist tradition of which they appeared as the most recent trustees.

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24. V. A. C. Gatrell, "Introduction" to Robert Owen, Report to the County of Lanark (Harmondsworth 1969) 8.

In Fabian history one finds emphasised the Protestant values of working people, their irenic bearing and essential constitutionalism, and their actions are interpreted in a teleological schema leading to full parliamentary citizenship.<sup>25</sup> Altogether different, finally, has been the Marxist tradition of British labour history. Here we find exalted the revolutionary potential of a depressed proletariat in line with its "true" historical vocation. According to this schema Chartism, for instance, has been interpreted as a proto-Marxist stirring; the 1842 hunger riots in Lancashire assume the status of a conscious and concerted "general strike"; whilst the minor incident in Hyde Park on May 6 1867 is infused with popular revolutionary sentiment.<sup>26</sup>

There are important lessons here for any sociological analysis of early labour and socialist forms. It ought to be possible to avoid the teleological trap - that is, the assumption that there is a final and fixed state to which the movement is inexorably heading - and agree with Zygmunt Bauman to the effect that "...no goal, final form or measuring standard is set for the labour movement, once and for all, in any form, whether quasi-empirical or openly transcendental, and that all

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25. The Hammonds in particular were prone to emphasise the pacific and religious predilections of working people. The Fabian scheme naturally culminates in the Welfare State of today: cf. Asa Briggs, "The Welfare State in Perspective", European Journal of Sociology, II (1961) 221-58.

26. For the Marxist interpretation of Chartism, see A. L. Morton and George Tate, The British Labour Movement (London 1973) 57-8: the authors actually argue that in Chartism may be discerned not simply a precursor of Marxism generally, but more specifically of the policy document of the British Communist Party, The British Road to Socialism! On 1842, see Mick Jenkins, "The Chartist General Strike", unpublished paper presented to the Manchester History Workshop, 1975; on 1867, see Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) 78-136.

the tasks that the movement itself sets for its activities are dependant variables of the complex system to no less an extent than its other attributes".<sup>27</sup> It is hoped that this study might proceed along these lines.

As if parallel to the movement in social theory which has witnessed a phenomenological and interactionist revolt against the constraints of over-arching systemic theory, there has gone a similar tendency within the practice of social history. In this latter case, the reaction has been against the dominant emphases of British labour history which, as noted above, often tend to subsume popular experience beneath its political and organisational forms. Recently a number of historians have striven to appreciate working class history more fully by elevating in status the popular point of view.

The seminal text here is undoubtedly Edward Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class, first published in 1963. Squarely facing up to the problem of social consciousness within Marxist theory, this work sought to recover "...the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of history..." from burial beneath economic or wider social determinism.<sup>28</sup> Brilliantly evoking the very texture and phenomenology of the early years of the last century, Thompson aimed to present the working class and its consciousness during these formative years as it appeared from below,<sup>29</sup>

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27. Bauman, Between Class and Elite, xi.

28. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth 1968) 13.

29. Thompson, *ibid.*, 13.

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity...they lived through these times of acute social disturbance and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience...

This tendency within social history has fanned out in a number of directions. "Oral" history sprung into life as an autonomous sub-discipline, whose practitioners proclaim the veridical qualities of personal recollection;<sup>30</sup> and devotees of "people's history" have recently begun the publication of a series of monographs concerned to explore popular nineteenth century history from below with a study of Village Life and Labour.<sup>31</sup>

There is doubtless merit in much of this recent historical work, its main contribution having been to spotlight the subtleties and density of social belief and working class consciousness, as well as its complexity of formation. The point ought to be well taken in a sociological analysis of British socialism, but equally significant are the weaknesses inherent in this approach. "History from below" represents a revolt not merely against the tyranny of certain Marxist concepts but against those of sociologism as well. In his understandable enthusiasm to rebutt Professor Smelser, Thompson dismissed too lightly the claims of social theory in general,<sup>32</sup> and "people's history" as a whole tends to

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30. For details, see the journal Oral History, published from the University of Essex.

31. Raphael Samuel, ed., Village Life and Labour (London 1975), particularly the editor's "Introduction: People's History", xiii-xxi. The most notable example of "people's history" is to be found in the work of the History Workshops, Ruskin College, Oxford. See their journal, History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians, I and II (1976).

32. Thompson, The Making, 11 et. passim.

lack adequate structural, institutional and organisational analysis. Similarly, there is a lack of that "totalizing" perspective which has been claimed as the distinguishing feature of the Marxist method<sup>33</sup> and without which, to be sure, a macro-societal frame of reference or sense of process is of necessity lacking.

All this is perhaps to reaffirm what has gone before: namely, that a sociological approach to the evolution of the British working class and socialism must above all take cognizance of the complex interplay between social structure and belief, both to be conceived of as active social processes. The orientation of labour history demands imaginative qualification but, by emphasising the subtle gradations of social consciousness, recent social history has merely demonstrated how genuinely reciprocal must be the relationship between these two aspects of sociological inquiry.

#### IV.

The plan of this study and its line of argument are as follows. In order that historical narrative should not impose unnecessarily upon the analysis offered below, Chapter 2 will outline descriptively the course of the labour movement and socialism in Britain - a chronology of the period 1850-1906. Reference may then be easily made in the later chapters to the sequence of events. Part I comprises two chapters in which a theoretical perspective will be developed. Chapter 3 outlines both Marxist and sociological accounts of the development of socialism in this country and the following chapter, which begins by critically

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33. Perry Anderson, "Socialism and Psuedo-Empiricism", New Left Review, 35 (1966) 32-3, 37 and 39. The absence of just such a totalizing and integrative perspective is the basis of Anderson's criticisms of Edward Thompson.



examining these approaches, concludes by elaborating a theoretical framework adequate to the historical analysis of social structure and working class beliefs. It is suggested here that the macro-structural and ideological context in which socialism emerged needs to be complemented by an appreciation of the creative and innovative role of working people themselves in the social milieu of the working class community. Parts II and III take up and develop these emphases. Part II comprises three chapters wherein a macro-societal perspective will be presented. In Chapter 5, the evolution of the capitalist economy and social structure in the later nineteenth century will be examined; in close relation to this Chapter 6 will chart the changing fortunes of mid- and late-Victorian ideologies; Chapter 7 will draw together these macro-societal features by analysing their impact upon the broad trajectory of British socialism.

Part III - a micro-perspective - is intended to illustrate the mediation and transformation of these factors on the local level, and the five chapters which comprise this section focus upon the specific case of socialism in later nineteenth century Lancashire. Chapter 8 sets the background to political change in the north west by examining politics generally, and labour politics and socialism in particular, during the period 1868-1906. Chapter 9 aims to explore the activities and agitations, and conceptions of socialism, prevalent at the branch level in Lancashire. Having thus identified the political beliefs current among working people in later nineteenth century Lancashire, the subsequent two chapters attempt to explain the generation and evolution of those beliefs within the working class community. Chapter 10 focuses upon industrial structure, wages and work processes and Chapter 11 upon the home, family and community structures of working class life. These will be related to the forms of socialist belief described in Chapter 9. Chapter 12 comprises a



detailed analysis of one particular aspect of working class communities in the north west - religion and chapel life - tracing the adaptation and "stretching" of religious beliefs by working people within the community milieu, and their impact upon the emerging socialist consciousness.

Finally, Part IV comprises one chapter in which a number of concluding remarks are advanced.

===== CHAPTER TWO =====

THE COURSE OF EVENTS: A CHRONOLOGY OF THE  
LABOUR MOVEMENT AND BRITISH SOCIALISM,  
1850-1906

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This study is to be read as a sociological investigation into certain aspects of the socialist movement and working class politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and not as a piece of historical research in the strict sense. Historical writing is directly dependant upon the primary source material of the past; this study cannot, in the main, lay claim to such standing. It is concerned to offer an interpretation in broadly sociological fashion of, rather than add to, the well-known facts established by labour and socialist historiography. However, in order that the analysis presented in the later chapters should not be unduly encumbered by the need to refer to the course of events during these years, in what follows a chronology of the working class movement and development of socialism between 1850-1906 is outlined. It should be emphasised at the outset that this chronology makes no claim to completeness; stressing the institutional and political progress of the organised working class as against spontaneous or unorganised forms of militancy, its scope is strictly delimited by the focus of the subsequent analysis itself. The reader will find, for instance, the First International of the 1860s only briefly mentioned, whilst the development of working class co-operation is entirely omitted. It is simply intended that the present chapter should provide a skeleton framework upon which the later analysis may be hung.

## 2.1: The Period 1850-1880: Trade Unionism and Working Class Politics

The first half of the nineteenth century had witnessed the emergence of a plethora of working class organisations and popular movements which, if often spontaneous and ephemeral, were of astonishing vitality, and had culminated in the upheaval of Chartism. In failing to meet the ruling class challenge in 1848, however, the Chartist leaders had condemned the movement to a fairly rapid demise. Never again would revolutionary politics have the same appeal to the British working class; "In a generation's time", have noted two students of this period, "the word Chartist was already beginning to be forgotten".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the very midst of the heady atmosphere of the 1840s, there were already signs of developments which, after mid-century, would bring about a re-orientation of the labour movement upon a stable, if more moderate and limited, basis. It is of some significance that a body founded in 1845 called the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour was not, in spite of its name, a revival of the lofty ideals of the earlier "general unionism", but a much less class consciously aggressive organisation with the practical aim of bringing together separate unions for the purpose of lobbying at Westminster for particular industrial reforms. In this sense, it may be seen as a precursor of the Trade Union Congress, which it closely resembled in both structure and policy.<sup>2</sup>

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1. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British Common People 1746-1946 (London 1961) 327.

2. Although I. Prothero has sought to portray the National Association as a revival of "general unionism" (cf. "London Chartism and the Trades", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXIV (1971) 103) its character seems clear enough: see further, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, History of Trade Unionism (London 1920) 186-7, 195-6; Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth 1973) 37ff; A. E. Musson, British Trade Unions 1800-1875 (London 1972) 49.

Before the spectre of Chartism had been exorcised, therefore, a more moderate spirit was discernable amongst the organised working class, a spirit manifested most obviously in "new model" unionism.

In 1851 the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had been formed primarily through the efforts of William Allen and William Newton.<sup>3</sup> The A.S.E. consolidated a number of local engineers' societies, the largest of which had been the Journeyman Steam Engine Makers, founded in Manchester in 1826, into an organisationally stable and financially secure union with a central London office. The Amalgamation comprised mainly the skilled and well-paid workers of the engineering industry, from whom a high rate of contribution was expected and in return for which a generous scale of sickness, superannuation and funeral benefits was provided. The central finances of the A.S.E. were placed under the control of a full-time general secretary who was responsible to the Executive Committee at the London headquarters. Eschewing political militancy in favour of trade and benefit society goals and a policy of restricting the supply of labour, the A.S.E. has been taken by Marxist-inclined historians as the archetypical example of moderate trade unionism, labour aristocratic in composition and imbued with middle class values and the spirit of liberalism.<sup>4</sup> As such, it is often seen as standing

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3. The best concise general history of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers is James B. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers (London 1945).

4. See, for instance, the treatment of the A.S.E. in the following works by Marxist historians: Theodore Rothstein, From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement (London 1929); Allen Hutt, British Trade Unionism: A Short History (London 1962) 24-33; A. L. Morton, A People's History of England (London 1971) 440-46; J. T. Murphey, Preparing for Power (London 1972) 59ff; Tony Lane, The Union Makes us Strong: The British Working Class - Its Politics and Trade Unionism (London 1974).

in marked contrast to the revolutionary aspirations of working class politics in the previous period and as providing the model for trade union development in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in their monumental history of British trade unionism, greeted the A.S.E. as a "new model", it was G. D. H. Cole who, in 1937, first questioned the essential novelty of the Amalgamation.<sup>5</sup> This revision has found some support among contemporary historians, who have also challenged the view that it was the paradigm of reformist trade unionism in the two decades after 1850.<sup>6</sup>

The resilience of the newly formed A.S.E. was soon put to test during the lock-out of engineering workers which occurred, mainly in London and Lancashire, in 1852.<sup>7</sup> This struggle, which hinged around the union's opposition to overtime, piecework and the introduction of unskilled machine workers into the industry, saw the men receiving help in their resistance from the middle class group of Christian Socialists and from workers in other trades. The engineers were driven back to

5. Cf. the Webbs' comment to the effect that, "Scarcely a trade exists which did not, between 1852 and 1875, either attempt to imitate the whole constitution of the Amalgamated Engineers, or incorporate one or other of its characteristic features", History of Trade Unionism, 224; see further, Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) 9-22. G. D. H. Cole, "Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century", in E. M. Carus-Wilson, ed., Essays in Economic History iii (London 1962) 202-21.
6. A. E. Musson, "The Webbs and their Phasing of Trade Union Development between the 1830s and 1860s", Labour History Society Bulletin, 4, (1962) 6-8; idem., British Trade Unions, 50-56.
7. Jeffreys, Story of the Engineers, 32-48; for documents, see G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, British Working Class Movements: Select Documents 1789-1875 (London 1965) 479-83.

work and were forced, in many cases, by their employers to sign "the document" renouncing trade union membership; slowly, however, the A.S.E. began to gain recognition and it emerged from the dispute stronger than ever. The influence of the Amalgamation was to be seen most obviously among those unions of mainly metropolitan artisans - plasterers, builders, tailors, compositors, bookbinders and the like - which aped the engineers. In June 1860, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was formed by Robert Applegarth which, as may be implied from its name, was cast in the cautious and prudent image of the A.S.E.<sup>8</sup> The passivity of new model unionism may, however, be overstated; although often reluctant to use it, men like Allen and Applegarth never abandoned the strike weapon, as is evidenced by the constant occurrence of industrial disputes during this period. Beginning with the engineering lock-out, the decade ended with the bitter struggles in the London building trades over the question of the Nine Hour Day between 1859 and 1862. The builders' strikes had been preceded by considerable unemployed agitation in London from about 1857 onwards, in which year there had been formed the National Association of Unemployed Operatives.<sup>9</sup> During the course of the disputes which followed, the strength of the "London Order" of Bricklayers (O.B.S. - secretary Edwin Coulson) was tested to the full; other unions responded to the challenge, and the growing strength of the A.S.E. may be registered

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8. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 224; for a contrasting assessment of Applegarth, see Asa Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth 1971) 176-204.

9. Raymond Postgate, The Builders' History (London 1923) 167-80; Cole and Filson, British Working Class Movements, 486-88; Frances Emma Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England 1850-67 (London 1966) 132.

by the fact that it donated £1000 a week for three weeks to the bricklayers. The struggle also precipitated the formation of the London Trades Council. Evidence suggests that Trades Councils had been formed in a number of provincial towns, such as Liverpool, Glasgow, Sheffield and Manchester as early as the 1840s, but now, for the first time, there was a permanent body to co-ordinate trade union activities in London.<sup>10</sup> The first executive of the Council was elected in July, and Tom Jones of the Tinsplate Workers' Society was appointed secretary.

Disputes of a more or less serious nature occurred in a number of other industries during the 1850s. A successful strike of 7,000 spinners in Stockport precipitated the great Preston lock-out of 1853, a dispute which severely tested the resilience of the newly formed Amalgamation Association of Operative Cotton Spinners. Although the men were defeated, the tenacity of the Amalgamation was established beyond doubt. The cotton weavers followed the lead of the spinners when, in 1858, the East Lancashire Power Loom Weavers Association was set in train; this organisation, too, was soon put to the test when there took place in the following year a twenty-seven week dispute with the weaving employers of Padiham, a strike from which the Association emerged vindicated.<sup>11</sup> Organisation was advancing among the coal miners, too. In 1856 Alexandre MacDonald had sought to revive a Federation comprising all the miners in the country and, by 1858, the National Miners'

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10. G. D. H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, ii, (London 1937) 77-80; George Tate, The London Trades Council (London 1950).

11. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 48-49; Cole and Filson, British Working Class Movements, 483-85.



Association had been founded. The following year, Lancashire miners took the lead in forming the Amalgamated Association of Miners, a militant rival to the N.M.A.<sup>12</sup> These provincial associations were rather less like the A.S.E. The textile unions were federal in organisation, financially localised and, along with the miners unions, far less exclusive. They were concerned, moreover, with securing legislative regulation of their industries, particularly in respect of the length of the working day; they looked to the law for protection, and were thus led directly into a succession of mainly political activities. The 1850s saw, therefore, the emergence of two outstanding forms of trade unionism. On the one hand, the "Amalgamated Societies" of the type represented by the A.S.E., with its close combination of industrial and friendly activities, centralised control and non-political policy of restrictive regulation of the supply and conditions of labour. On the other, there grew up the "Amalgamations" of the type represented by the spinners' and weavers' associations, with their localised finance, federal structure, collective bargaining based upon standard price lists and steady pressure for legislative regulation.<sup>13</sup>

By the early 1860s, the prominent London trade unionists had come to coalesce around the Trades Council, and to this group the Webbs applied the pejorative term of "the Junta"; Allen and Applegarth, George Odger (shoemakers), George Howell (bricklayers), Daniel Guile (ironfounders) and Coulson and T. J. Dunning of the bookbinders were its foremost members;

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12. Robin Page Arnot, The Miners: A History of the M.F.G.B. 1889-1910 (London 1949) 44ff; Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 46; Raymond Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle 1972) 82ff.

13. Cole, Short History of the Working Class Movement, 63-4.

in the provinces they were supported by John Kane, whose Amalgamated Ironworkers' Association was clearly an "amalgamated" union, and Alexandre MacDonald. According to the Webbs, the similar outlook of these men as regards trade union policy came to dominate the London Trade Council.

"The distinctive policy of the Junta", they noted, "was a combination of extreme caution in trade matters and energetic agitation for political reforms!".<sup>14</sup> These trade union leaders were not mass orators, but administrators; meticulous and skilled in the minutiae of committee work, they were not agitators, but were coming to recognise the value of Parliamentary pressure tactics by which they sought to promote specific measures of social and political reform.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, the Junta were staunchly Liberal in politics, and they seemed ready, if not anxious, to co-operate with middle class radicals like John Bright; but, once again, the Webbs' contention that all trade unionists in this period passively imbibed bourgeois values - and particularly the economic doctrines - has been seriously questioned.<sup>16</sup> Nor were the new model unionists or the

14. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 240.

15. For a sociological analysis of the changing composition and character of the trade union leadership in this period, see Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement (Manchester 1972) 110-31; the growing sense of political awareness among the trade unionists has been dealt with by Carl Brand, "The Conversion of the British Trade Unions to Political Action", American Historical Review, XXX (1925).

16. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 292-94; R. V. Clements has challenged this view in his article "British Trade Unions and Popular Political Economy", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIV (1961) 93-104.

Junta as dominant as was once thought. They were seriously challenged by the smaller, more militant metropolitan societies, whose aspirations were voiced by The Beehive newspaper founded in 1860, the proprietor of which, George Potter, and editor, George Troup, held out for a more aggressive trade policy.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a number of the provincial trade unions evinced manifest enthusiasm for this policy.

These differences amongst the trade unionists came through in a number of issues during the 1860s. In the industrial unrest of the years 1864-65, Potter opposed the London Trades Council with a much more militant policy, occasioning a bitter feud between the two groups of trade unionists which was to last for several years. That Potter was supported by men like Dunning, Kane, MacDonald and Broadhurst "...signifies that the temper of large sections of trade unionism was not the cautious middle class temper of Allen and Applegarth."<sup>18</sup> Capitalising upon his support, Potter established the London Working Men's Association in 1866, which gave enthusiastic support to the efforts of the Wolverhampton and Sheffield Trades Councils in arranging a national trades conference in Sheffield in July 1866 - the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades - for mutual support during lock-outs and for the purposes of countering the claims of the Employers' Associations.

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17. Stephen Coltham, "The Beehive Newspaper: Its Origins and Early History", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (London 1967) 174-204; B. C. Roberts, The Trade Union Congress 1868-1921 (London 1958) 22-26, has questioned the dominant role of the Junta.

18. Gillespie, Labour and Politics, 231.

The L.W.M.A. was also actively involved in the struggle for Parliamentary reform which came to a head during these years and in which the trade unions played a leading role. By the early 1860s, Reform Associations had begun to appear in various parts of the country; in Manchester, for instance, Ernest Jones, now reconciled to collaboration with the middle class radicals, had built up a strong movement there to agitate for franchise reform. The London trade unionists, with the single exception of William Allen, had shown their enthusiasm for reform by organising the Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association in 1862 for the purpose of agitating the trades. In 1864, Bright's party and his working class allies had established the Reform Union in Manchester and, in the following year, the trade unionists formed the Reform League under George Howell around the more inclusive programme of manhood suffrage. Although the League was an overwhelmingly working class organisation pledged to one man one vote, its leadership showed themselves willing to co-operate with the middle class radicals and the Liberal Party.<sup>19</sup> After the events following the demonstration in Hyde Park in 1866, the governing class had become convinced that the enfranchisement of at least a part of the working class was inevitable and, in 1867, Disraeli passed a measure which in effect brought the urban working man within the pale of the constitution. The leaders of the Reform League, undiminished in their enthusiasm for Mr. Gladstone, settled for this measure of household suffrage and worked vigorously for the return of the Liberal Party in the election of the following year.

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19. G. D. H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (London 1950) 27-8; Harrison, Before the Socialists, chs. 3-4; Gillespie, ibid., passim.

The other major issue confronting all trade unionists in the 1860s concerned the state of labour and trade union law. In the early years of the decade Alexandre MacDonald, and Alexandre Campbell and George Newton of the Glasgow Trades Council, had initiated a campaign to have modified the iniquitous Master and Servant Law. The famous Leeds Miners' Conference of 1863 had resolved to take up the challenge, and the London Trade Union Conference of 1864 threw its weight behind this resolution. In 1867, the grievances of the workers relating to labour contracts were partly met by the Master and Servant Act of that year.<sup>20</sup> In the final stages of this campaign, however, occurred two very significant events. The "Sheffield Outrages" of 1866 brought to light the violent side of working class organisation, and led to a full-blooded outcry against the whole principle of trade unionism on the part of employers and the press.<sup>21</sup> In the following year occurred the judicial decision in the famous case of Hornby v. Close, which cast into doubt the trade unions' legal standing owing to their tendency to act "in restraint of trade" during industrial disputes. The government decided to refer the whole issue to a Royal Commission. In order to concert their evidence to the Commission, the Amalgamated Societies set up the Conference of Amalgamated Trades in London, whilst the unionists in the north and the smaller London societies were represented by Potter's L.W.M.A.

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20. For details of the 1863 miners' conference and its legislative programme, see Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 302-306; the Master and Servant law is analysed by Daphne Stephen, "Master and Servant", in John Saville, ed., Democracy and the Labour Movement (London 1954) 160-200.

21. Sidney Pollard, The Sheffield Outrages (London 1971); Cole and Filson, British Working Class Movements, 558.

The odds, however, were heavily weighted against Potter and his friends. Assisted by Thomas Hughes, the Christian Socialist, and the Positivist lawyer Frederick Harrison, the Junta presented a masterly case to the Royal Commission which placed much emphasis upon the moderate and responsible nature of trade unionism. Applegarth, in particular, was outstanding in the manner in which he presented his evidence.<sup>22</sup> In 1868, the Junta made their peace with the Trades Union Congress, which had grown out of the U.K.A.O.T., and this now became a regular affair. The report of the Royal Commission had been favourable to the trade unions, and, in consequence, the Liberal Government in 1871 had passed the Trade Union and Criminal Law Amendment Acts. Whilst they were ready to accept the former, the latter was in all respects abhorrent to the trade unionists and it fell to the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., established by the 1871 Congress, to lobby for its repeal. Under Howell's skilful guidance, the Parliamentary Committee maintained steady pressure and assiduously cultivated personal contacts in the government.<sup>23</sup> Between

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22. See further, H. W. McCready, "British Labour and the Royal Commission on Trade Unions 1867-69", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXIV (1955) Briggs, Victorian People, 191-95.

23. The emergence of the T.U.C. has been traced by A. E. Musson, "The Origins and Establishment of the Trades Union Congress", in idem., Trade Union and Social History (London 1974) 23-63. Howell's part in the trade union lobby is well documented by F. M. Leventhal, Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics (London 1971) 165-89; see further, H. W. McCready, "British Labour's Lobby 1867-75", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, XXII (1956).

1871 and 1875, the Committee pressed for a number of reforms (e.g. legislation against truck), but concentrated above all upon securing further alterations to the Criminal Law and the Master and Servant Act. Their hopes for reform still rested with the Liberals and, in 1874, MacDonald and Burt were elected to Parliament as working men's representatives with Liberal support. The first working class M.P.s in British history had thus initiated the "Lib-Lab" tradition. The Conservatives won the election, however, and responded to trade union pressure by passing in 1875 the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, and with this the Parliamentary Committee was satisfied. The campaign had been a triumph for trade union respectability and moderation exercised through lobbying techniques; "The work of emancipation", the Parliamentary committee announced was now "full and complete", and Howell retired from his post.<sup>24</sup>

In the provinces, where the Junta had comparatively little influence, trade unionism was going its own way. The textile workers and the miners were cultivating their own political methods aimed to secure legislative regulation, and we have seen that it was among the provincial unions that the T.U.C. originated. Since the Leeds Miners' Conference, the union had shown itself anxious to press for industrial reforms and MacDonald, following up his success with the Master and Servant Law, succeeded in getting a Mines Regulation Act written into the statute book in 1872. As the price of coal rose throughout the 'sixties, both the N.M.A. and the A.A.M. prospered and, by 1873, each could claim about 100,000 members. In these years, many of the country unions concluded sliding scale agreements with the coalowners, which linked wages to the

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<sup>24</sup>. Cited by Pelling, History of British Trade Unions, 76.



selling price of coal.<sup>25</sup> In 1872, the cotton operatives had demonstrated the strength of their organisation by founding a body called the Factory Acts Reform Association to press for a maximum legal week of fifty-four hours.

Elsewhere, too, trade unionism was on the move. In 1871 there occurred a movement to agitate for the Nine Hour Day amongst the engineers in the north east quite independent of the A.S.E. London leadership, who gave only their half-hearted support. The campaign, led by John Burnett, was a great success, and the effects of victory were speedily seen. Throughout the country, engineers and builders, as well as many workers in other trades, put forward demands for shorter hours. The Durham Miners' Association gained recognition, and the miners in south Wales stuck and won. The agitation continued throughout 1872 and 1873 and in London building workers revived their agitation for the Nine Hour Day.<sup>26</sup> In the boom of the early 'seventies, unionism began to gain a foothold amongst a number of semi-skilled workers and labourers, and it is possible to detect the stirrings of "new unionism" in this period.<sup>27</sup> Railwaymen, building workers, seamen, carmen, gas workers and port workers were all involved, and the Labour Protection League, established by the London

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25. For details of sliding scales, see Page Arnot, The Miners, 59-62; Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 338-42, 734-37; Pelling, ibid., 78.

26. Cole, Short History of the Working Class Movement, 121; Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 313-17.

27. Eric Hobsbawm has seen in the period of union expansion of the early 1870s anticipations of the "new unionism" of the late 1880s, cf., "General Labour Unions in Britain 1889-1914", in Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London 1972) 182.



dockers in 1871-72 was, according to John Lovell, "in almost every respect as significant an organisation as the Dockers' Union founded seventeen years later".<sup>28</sup> In 1872 the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was set in train by Joseph Arch and was greeted with unqualified enthusiasm by Frederick Engels.<sup>29</sup> By this time, the provincial unionists were beginning to make themselves felt in the T.U.C.<sup>30</sup> All told, the T.U.C. could number 1.2 million members by 1875.

A turn for the worse occurred around 1875 when, as a result of the worsening economic climate, a spirit of sectionalism began to assert itself. Many of the advances made during the previous few years were wiped out and replaced by a veritable catalogue of defeats and dissensions within the trade union ranks between 1875-80. Coal prices fell heavily, and with them miners' wages linked by sliding scales; before the end of the decade, the Amalgamated Association had been swept out of existence and the N.M.U. survived only in Northumberland and Durham in any strength. Many of the newly-formed labourers' unions floundered. Although the N.A.L.U. survived, the organisation was considerably weakened by the depression that rocked British agriculture after 1875 and Arch felt obliged to launch a programme of emigration for his members.<sup>31</sup> But the structure

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28. J. Lovell, Stevodores and Dockers: A Study of Trade Unionism in the Port of London, 1870-1914 (London 1969) 73.
29. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain (Moscow 1971) 360-62; Cole and Filson, British Working Class Movements, 602-7.
30. David Kynaston, King Labour: The British Working Class 1850-1914 (London 1976) 48.
31. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 342-57; Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 83-86.

of trade unionism was, by now, too firmly rooted to be easily destroyed even if, after the Parliamentary triumphs of 1875, trade union political activity dwindled. In 1875 Henry Broadhurst, a stonemason and fervent Liberal, had assumed the secretaryship of the Parliamentary Committee and he continued the moderate pressure tactics established by the Junta, although interest was now limited to such matters as factory legislation, employers' liability and so on. In the disheartening conditions which prevailed in the late 'seventies he could not, even if he had so wished, have taken a more aggressive line. Henry Pelling has concluded that, "His role was primarily to maintain, in a less favourable period, what had been won in the years more suitable for political progress."<sup>32</sup> To this end he was admirably suited.

It would be instructive at this point to turn to an examination of working class politics during this period - both the socialism of the International Working Men's Association, and the campaign to secure working class representation in Parliament. It will be noticed, however, that as yet the trade unions continue to dominate the working class movement.

The only serious socialist presence in the years between 1850 and 1880 was that provided by the International Working Men's Association - the "First International", as it has become known. The International seems to have grown out of the stirring events in the sphere of international politics in the early 1860s. At home, radical workingmen in London were, with but a few notable exceptions, fiercely partisan in their sympathies for the northern States during the American Civil War; in the time of the Polish insurrection of 1863 they were heart and soul with the nationalists; and their support for Garibaldi and the struggle for Italian emancipation was equally loyal. The I.W.M.A. was founded in London in 1864 to promote

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32. ibid., 86.

international contact between trade unions with George Odger, secretary of the London Trades Council, as its President and William Randall Cremer as secretary. Among the initial supporters of the new organisation were Karl Marx and Guiseppe Mazzini.<sup>33</sup> The crowded first meeting was chaired by Professor E. S. Beesley and a provisional committee comprising London trade unionists, old Chartists, Owenites and others, was elected to draw up a declaration of rules and principles, but in the end this was provided by Marx himself in the form of an "Inaugural Address" which placed the International upon an unequivocally socialist footing. "The International was founded", Marx wrote to Bolte in 1871, "in order to replace the socialist or semi-socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle. The original Rules and Inaugural Address show this at a glance."<sup>34</sup> In June 1865, Marx delivered a series of addresses to the General Council of the First International which set forth, for the first time in public, the basis of his theory of surplus value.<sup>35</sup> The I.W.M.A. held annual congresses in London in 1865, Geneva (1866), Lausanne (1867), Brussels (1868), Basle (1869) and The Hague (1872), when the organisation was to all intents dissolved. The

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33. The history of the First International has been analysed by G. D. H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought 1850-90, ii (London 1954) ch. 6, 88-133; H. J. Collins and C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International (London 1965); Julius Braunthal, History of the International 1864-1914, i (London 1966) 85-194.

34. Marx to F. Bolte, 23 November 1871, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (London 1968) 681-2. The Inaugural Address is reprinted in Marx and Engels, On Britain, 340-49.

35. Selected Works, 186-229; the paper was first published in 1898 under the title Value, Price and Profit.

affiliation of the foreign delegates had turned the International into a warring ground of competing doctrines and sects. Marx found himself leading the British section against the Proudhonists in France, the Lassallean tendency in Germany and against Bakunin and his followers and, as he saw it, "...the history of the International was a continuous struggle of the General Council against the sects and amateur experiments, which sought to assert themselves within the International against the real movement of the working class". <sup>36</sup>

Until 1871, in which year a number of English branches of the International were formed, and apart from the O'Brienite National Reform League and a handful of individual members, the International comprised solely trade unions in its English section. In spite of his hostility to the moderate British trade unionists, Marx was anxious to recruit them into the I.W.M.A. in the hope that they might imbibe the theory of socialism and the spirit of revolution. <sup>37</sup> At its height, the aggregate membership of affiliated British trade unions never exceeded more than about 50,000 but many of the prominent leaders, such as Odger, Applegarth, Broadhurst, Cremer and Howell, were members. The unions which joined, such as the bricklayers, tailors, shoemakers, cabinetmakers etc., were mostly declining or vulnerable handicrafts, little affected by the process of mechanisation. <sup>38</sup> The heavy industries were almost totally

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36. Selected Works, 682.

37. Henry J. Collins, "The English Branches of the First International", in Briggs and Saville, Essays in Labour History, 248; A. Lozovsky, Marx and the Trade Unions (London 1935) 59-62; Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (London 1971) 8-11.

38. Henry J. Collins, "The International and the British Labour Movement", Labour History Society Bulletin, 9 (1964) 24-39.

unrepresented and, amongst the major unions, only the A.S.C.J. could be induced to join.<sup>39</sup> The British trade unions in the I.W.M.A. showed little interest in Marx's revolutionary socialism; their main motive for joining the International was the limited one of combatting foreign black-legging, though doubtless there was much interest in and sympathy with international democratic movements at the time. The trade unionists could not be persuaded to take political instructions from the General Council and, after the passage of the 1867 Reform Act, interest in international affairs on the part of the trade unions waned. There was in any case little rooted support for militant political action amongst the working class, let alone the variety envisaged by Marx. The political reaction against the Chartist period was virtually complete and men as far apart in politics as Richard Cobden and the old Chartist Thomas Cooper bemoaned, with equal reproof, the political passivity of the working class during this period.<sup>40</sup> Without doubt, the unexampled upturn in the nation's economic fortunes after mid-century had much to do with this.

On the whole, the question of labour representation baulked larger in the minds of the working class leadership than did the question of

39. And doubtless this was in large measure due to Applegarth's personal interest in international affairs; cf. Briggs, Victorian People, 179, 182.

40. In March 1861 Cobden wrote, "I wonder that the working people are so quiet under the taunts and insults offered them. Have they no Spartacus among them to lead a revolt of the slave class against their political tormentors? I suppose it is the reaction from the follies of Chartism which keeps the present generation so quiet", cited by Leventhal, Respectable Radical, 43. In his autobiography, The Life of Thomas Cooper (London 1872) 393, Cooper bemoans the intellectual and political decline of the workers which he sensed on a visit to Lancashire in 1863. Whereas once socialism was earnestly discussed "Now, you will see no such groups in Lancashire. But you will hear well-dressed working men, talking, as they walk, with the hands in their pockets, of "Co-ops" (Co-operative Stores), and their shares in them, or in Building Societies..."

socialism. Soon after the election of 1868 the Reform League had been wound up in a state of confusion and recrimination occasioned by the discovery of Howell's complicity with the Liberals. The poor showing of the L.W.M.A. before 1868, and the opposition from Liberal candidates which Odger and Potter faced when contesting by-elections at Stafford and Nottingham in 1869, led to the formation of the Labour Representation League, an amalgam of metropolitan labour groups brought together in August of that year by Robert Latham, a Radical lawyer practising in London. The manifesto of the League declared that its principal duty would be "...to secure the return to Parliament of qualified working men - persons who, by character and ability, command the confidence of their class..."<sup>41</sup> but, while the election of workingmen was defined as the main object of the League, it was also authorised, where it thought fit, to support other candidates favourable to working class claims. The L.R.L. at the time of its formation was, to all intents and purposes, a London body. Moreover, it tended to be associated with the Liberal Party and, in consequence, the bulk of provincial trade unionists virtually boycotted the League and preferred instead to apply themselves to safeguarding the position of their own movement. Potter led an opposition tendency within the L.R.L. and, in addition, a rival left wing organisation, the Land and Labour League - notable for its links with the International and its efforts at organising the unskilled - was also founded in 1869. Moreover, the Positivist Edward Beesley had launched a campaign in that same year to secure support for the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Trade Unions, and which included many bitter attacks upon the Liberals.<sup>42</sup> But in spite of this opposition, the L.R.L. held the field.

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41. Cole, British Working Class Politics, 50; see further on the L.R.L., A. W. Humphrey, A History of Labour Representation (London 1912) 31ff.

42. See further, Royden Harrison, "Professor Beesley and the Working Class Movement", in Briggs and Saville, Essays in Labour History, 232.

Odger fought a by-election at Southwark in 1870 for the League and Howell took the field in Norwich in 1872. The establishment of local School Boards in 1870 had provided an opportunity for the L.R.L. to test the strength of the working class vote in local elections. The L.R.L. ran thirteen candidates in the General Election of 1874 of whom, as we have seen, Burt and MacDonald were successful. Although the League was closely identified with the Liberals, it would be a mistake to underestimate the genuine desire for working class independence which existed at the time. A sense of disillusion had set in among the working class leadership when the Liberals had opposed labour men in the by-elections of 1869 and 1870, and this was exacerbated in 1871 when the government had introduced its trade union legislation. The appeal and membership of the League grew as dissatisfaction with the government mounted and, though few were, as yet, ready to advocate an independent labour party, "...there were many ready to use every means to secure labour representation on the list of Liberal candidates for the next election."<sup>43</sup> By the time the election came, "There was a more militant and independent spirit in the whole campaign, and many influential men who worked for the Liberal Party in 1868 rendered no help in that direction in 1874..."<sup>44</sup>

The L.R.L. folded up soon after the General Election but, even before 1874, it had become virtually a trade union body. Latham had been succeeded as President by William Allen and Lloyd Jones as secretary by Henry Broadhurst; Daniel Guile was now treasurer. With cordial relations between the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and the Liberals to some extent restored after 1874, these changes meant a decisive move

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43. J. H. Stewart Reid, The Origins of the British Labour Party (Minnesota 1955) 25.

44. Humphrey, History of Labour Representation, 50.



away from the notion of a "Labour Party" - such as there had been - towards the narrower object of securing the return of a few trade unionists to Parliament. This may be registered by tracing the fate of resolutions regarding labour representation introduced at Trade Union Congresses during the 1870s.<sup>45</sup> For whatever use Allen, Applegarth and their friends may have meant to make of the L.R.L., from 1869 onwards these functions were to an increasing extent, taken over by the T.U.C. through its own Parliamentary Committee. Until the late 'seventies, then, the trade unions were mainly concerned to secure their own representation in the Commons and, in the General Election of 1880, Broadhurst joined Burt and MacDonald on the backbenches as "working men's M.P.s".

## 2.2: The Period of the 1880s: The Socialist Revival

It was noted above that, in the period 1850-80, trade union developments dominated the labour movement and its politics. With the decade that opened in 1880, working class political organisation begins to assume greater significance, and it is here that we may most usefully commence.

The background to the revival of socialism in Britain lay with a variety of economic and political factors.<sup>46</sup> Britain managed to stave off serious economic crisis in the mid-'seventies but the situation began to deteriorate after 1877-78, and the ensuing slump occasioned a severe fall in working class living standards and a concomitant rise in unemployment.

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45. Humphrey, ibid., 66-74.

46. For the background to the socialist revival, see John Saville, "The Background to the Revival of Socialism in England", Labour History Society Bulletin, 11 (1965) 13-19; Reid, Origins of the Labour Party, 3-16; Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (Oxford 1965) 1-12.



Politically, we may notice the fusion of Liberal radicalism and the land reform movement in the same decade. A new and more militant radical tradition had emerged in the 1870s under the leadership of Sir Charles Dilke, Charles Bradlaugh and Joseph Chamberlain. As Mayor of Birmingham between 1873-75, Chamberlain had embarked the corporation upon a programme of what would later be termed "municipal socialism", whereby essential services and utilities were taken over and locally administered by the municipality. In 1877 the National Liberal Federation was formed, thus consolidating the radical wing of the Liberal Party, whilst Bradlaugh's influence brought in the increasingly numerous London Radical Clubs. After the electoral reforms of 1884 and 1885, Chamberlain had published his "unauthorised programme" which "...went to the extreme limits to which Radicalism could go without becoming socialism".<sup>47</sup> Henceforth, radicalism was to be an integral part of the Liberal Party within Parliament which, under Chamberlain, went well beyond the aims of the trade unionists in the House like Howell, Burt and Ben Pickard, whose views had been set out in The New Liberal Programme in 1885.

Liberal radicalism had much affinity with the campaign of the land reformers from the 1860s onwards. J. S. Mill was the driving force in this sphere and, in 1870, he had formed the Land Tenure Reform Association which brought together prominent Liberals with members of the International. During the next few years, a number of similar bodies were formed which received added impetus from the publication of Henry George's Progress and Poverty in 1879 and his lecture tours in Britain and Ireland in 1882 and 1884, in which he propagated the themes of land reform and the single tax.<sup>48</sup> Simultaneously with George's agitation was published Alfred

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47. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 409.

48. Details of the land reform agitation and its contribution to the revival of socialism may be found in Max Beer, A History of British Socialism, ii (London 1953) 237-45.

Russell Wallace's Land Nationalisation (1882) which immediately went through two editions. By the early 1880s, however, there was mounting disillusionment with the record of official Liberalism - not only Gladstone's tenderness to the Whigs and his reluctance to embark upon a policy of advanced social and political reform - but also his apparent continuation of Beaconsfieldian imperialism in Egypt and South Africa and, above all, his support for coercion in Ireland.<sup>49</sup> In 1884 a public debate as regards the questions of single tax and socialism was conducted between George and Henry Mayers Hyndman at St. James's Hall. By that time there were two socialist organisations in London, whose supporters attended the meeting and evinced marked sympathy with the socialist critic of Henry George.

Hyndman, a wealthy Tory democrat who had read Marx's Capital in French in 1880, was the moving force behind the Democratic Federation founded in London in 1881.<sup>50</sup> At the outset, the Federation was a Liberal radical organisation which devoted much of its attention to the issues of coercion in Ireland and agricultural distress. Hyndman, however, was gradually formulating his own socialist philosophy and, as early as 1881, he had published England for All and distributed it amongst members of the Federation. This book was little more than a straight plagiarism of Marx's theories - although without acknowledging the source - and, partly as a result of this omission, the Federation was never able

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49. Paul Adelman, The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945 (London 1972) 3.

50. Full details concerning Hyndman and the S.D.F. may be found in C. Tsuzuki, H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism (Oxford 1961)

to secure the support of the Marx-Engels family group in London.<sup>51</sup> The Federation began to recruit a number of extremely able men, such as J. L. Joynes, a master at Eton College who had accompanied George on his lecture tours, R. P. B. Frost, H. H. Champion, Ernest Belfort Bax and William Morris, and these convinced socialists increasingly replaced the radicals who were rapidly deserting the organisation, fearful of its militant socialism. In 1883, Hyndman brought out his book on The Historical Basis of Socialism in England, and the Federation issued a manifesto entitled Socialism Made Plain; in consequence, the Democratic Federation lost the support of the Radical Clubs and Hyndman was able to convert it into an openly socialist organisation later that year. In 1884 the name Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) was adopted.

The programme of the S.D.F. emphasised above all its ultimate objective: "The Socialisation of the means of Production, Distribution and Exchange, to be controlled by a Democratic State in the interests of the entire Community, and the complete Emancipation of Labour from the Domination of Capitalism and Landlordism".<sup>52</sup> The Marxism of the S.D.F. was, however, of a particularly rigid and unbending variety. Hyndman would allow of a series of "palliatives" - that is, immediate social, economic and political reforms - as "stepping stones to a happier period", but

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51. Engels' references to Hyndman and the S.D.F. were almost always derogatory; see, for instance, Engels to Bebel, 1883: "...Hyndman is an arch-conservative and an arrantly chauvinistic but not stupid careerist, who behaved pretty shabbily to Marx...", and Engels to F. A. Sorge, 1894: "The Social Democratic Federation here shares with your German-American socialists the distinction of being the only parties who have contrived to reduce the Marxist theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy.": cf. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Britain (Moscow 1953) 516, 536.

52. For the programme of the S.D.F., see R. C. K. Ensor, ed., Modern Socialism (London 1904) 350-55.

the Lassallean "iron law of wages", which they accepted as gospel, led the S.D.F. activists to undervalue the role which might be played by the trade unions.<sup>53</sup> The Socialist Catechism, written by Joynes in 1885, made no mention of trade unions, whilst Hyndman argued that they "...cannot be said to be other than a hinderance" to working class organisation; he spoke, in addition, of the "utter futility" of strikes to increase wages and bemoaned, "The waste of trade union funds on strikes or petty benefits to the individuals to the individuals who compose them..."<sup>54</sup> The attitude which the S.D.F. adopted with respect to the trade unions naturally alienated many working men, as well as driving out in despair activists like Tom Mann and John Burns.

Hyndman was also an autocratic and high handed leader, whose obstinate character and ingrained snobbery was bound to sow dissention. On 27 December 1884, a split in the Executive Council of the S.D.F. took place; ten of its members resigned denouncing, in the process, Hyndman's "attempt to substitute arbitrary rule therein for fraternal co-operation", but the schism hinged in large measure around Hyndman's attitude to contesting Parliamentary elections. "As Hyndman considers the S.D.F. his own property", wrote William Morris, "let him take it and make what he can of it..."<sup>55</sup> and he led away the dissident group opposed to political compromise, which included Edward Aveling and Elenor Marx, Belfort Bax, and Lane and Mainwaring of the Labour Electoral League, to form the Socialist League. Morris's

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53. Henry J. Collins, "The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History, ii, (London 1971) 47-69.

54. The Historical Basis of Socialism in England, cited by Eric J. Hobsbawn, ed., Labour's Turning Point (London 1948) 74.

55. Cited by Philip Henderson, ed., Letters of William Morris (London 1950) 222-23; Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 29.

generous vision of socialism, which fused his love of art and beauty with the social criticism of John Ruskin, found expression in the League's newspaper Commonweal set up to rival the S.D.F.'s Justice; whilst the latter was dry and turgid, encumbered by Hyndman's laboured Marxist rhetoric, Commonweal became, in Morris's hands, a paper of some literary merit. Both organisations were continually bedevilled by shortage of funds, and they relied upon the personal financial resources of Hyndman and Morris. Numerically, too, both socialist bodies were weak; in 1889 the S.D.F. laid claim to 1,926 members, but John Burns put the figure at "really less than half of this"; according to E. P. Thompson, the membership of the League was about 700 in 1887.<sup>56</sup>

But, in spite of their shortcomings, both the S.D.F. and the Socialist League successfully brought to public notice the cause of revolutionary socialism by exploiting the distress of the unemployed during the depths of the economic depression in the mid-'eighties. The victims of the slump had been left to the uncertain mercies of Victorian philanthropy until, in January 1886, a procession led by Hyndman and John Burns speedily turned into a riot. Middle class opinion was drawn to the plight of the unemployed and charitable contributions began to flood in. Further publicity was gained when Burns, Hyndman, Champion and J. E. Williams were unsuccessfully prosecuted on a charge of seditious conspiracy arising out of the demonstration. For the next two years, the Federation continued to organise and even drill the unemployed, and in this way Burns was able to display his magnetism as a London labour leader. In November, 1887, Cunninghame Graham and Burns vainly tried to storm Trafalgar Square against

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56. Pelling ibid., 44, n.1; E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (London 1955) 546.

the police; a socialist, Alfred Linnell, died of injuries at the hands of the police, and the incident passed into socialist martyrology as "Bloody Sunday". But there was no rooted popular support for revolutionary politics and, when trade revived in 1888 and 1889, the influence of the socialists rapidly waned.

Nor had the S.D.F.'s electoral policy yielded any long term fruits. In 1885 Hyndman and Champion had accepted backing from Conservative sources to field a number of candidates in the General Election of that year, and the working class movement was not impressed with the explanation offered by Hyndman, to the effect that even Tory Gold "does not smell". Few working men were attracted to the Federation's convoluted Marxism and practical, hard-headed trade unionists were outraged by Hyndman's attitude towards their movement. But, if numerically weak, the Federation had built up important centres of power amongst skilled workers, particularly in Lancashire and London, and its members had also managed to gain a foothold in the London Trades Council. The Socialist League was also riven by dissention. In 1887 it had been largely responsible for establishing a North of England Socialist Federation among the miners, and its members had played an active role in the strike of that year. Morris, however, was fast coming to fear that "...as an organisation we shall come to nothing...", and in the following year the Bloomsbury Branch, which included the Avelings and several German Marxists, was expelled; with the withdrawal of the "Parliamentary" element, the League rapidly passed into the hands of the anarchists. Morris himself withdrew in 1890 to the comparative shelter of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, and eventually returned to the S.D.F. shortly before his death in 1896. Most historians would agree that the impact of the S.D.F. and the Socialist League was strictly limited, but it should not be forgotten that many

labour leaders and activists had been early members of these organisations where they were schooled in socialist theory and politics. <sup>57</sup>

The second socialist organisation to emerge in this period was the mainly middle class Fabian Society. The Fabian Society emerged as an off-shoot of an ethical sect called the Fellowship of the New Life in London. <sup>58</sup> Its main movers in the early stages were Hubert Bland and Frank Podmore, but in 1884 it gained its two most influential recruits. These were George Bernard Shaw, at that time an obscure journalist and aspiring novelist, and Sidney Webb, who held a clerkship in the Colonial Office. They were more than ably supported by Sidney Olivier, Graham Wallas, Mrs. Annie Besant and William Clark. This talented group brought fresh, open and critical minds to bear upon contemporary social and economic questions; most of the group had at some stage been Liberal radicals, and they were conscious of the growing socialist atmosphere afforded by the agitations of the S.D.F. But, between 1884 and 1887, the Fabians worked out a distinctive brand of evolutionary and gradualist socialism that was to separate them, upon both doctrinal and tactical grounds, not only from the revolutionaries of the Federation but also from the broader working class movement.

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57. See, for instance, the verdict of Reid, Origins of the Labour Party, 49-52; P. P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party (London 1958) 23-28; by contrast, the contribution of Hyndman and the S.D.F. has been emphasised by Hobsbawm in his article "Hyndman and the S.D.F.", Labouring Men, 234-37, and Saville, "The Revival of Socialism", 19.

58. For the history of the Fabian Society, see Edward Pease, The History of the Fabian Society (London 1916); Margaret Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism (London 1961); Anne Freemantle, This Little Band of Prophets: The Story of the Gentle Fabians (London 1960). By far the most scholarly treatment is to be found in Alan M. McBriar's book Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918 (Cambridge 1962).



Fabian socialism found its most cogent expression in a collection of essays, which the Society published in 1889, called Fabian Essays. These essays placed great emphasis upon what the contributors saw as the evolving socialist zeitgeist of their time, a tendency they found evidenced by the growth of state and municipal intervention in society. Socialism for the Fabians was, in essence, a doctrine of collectivism, in the direction of which they believed society to be inexorably, if gradually, travelling, and their aim was to harness these trends in a more frankly socialist fashion. Annie Besant expressed this conception as follows, <sup>59</sup>

There will never be a point at which a society crosses from Individualism to Socialism. The change is ever going forward; and our society is well on the way to Socialism. All we can do is consciously co-operate with the forces at work, and thus render the transition more rapid than it would otherwise be.

The Fabians did not believe that this end was to be achieved by building a mass socialist party. The group of Fabians were centred upon London and, although a number of provincial societies grew up in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties - there were some 42 such bodies in 1892, with a membership of around 1,500 - they were not concerned to build up the movement outside the Metropolis. As a self-consciously middle class body, the Fabians held in the 1880s to a policy of "permeation", whereby they sought to infect, as it were, the traditional channels of political expression with socialist opinion. Most frequently this entailed working with the radicals, as they did on the new London County Council. In 1888 the Society secured the election of two of their members, Annie Besant and Stuart Headlam, onto the L.C.C. and, by 1892, they had six members

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59. Annie Besant, "Industry under Socialism", in Asa Briggs, ed., Fabian Essays (London 1962) 185.



including Webb, who was elected chairman of the Technical Education Board. Here they worked in concert with the "Progressive Party" of radical opinion in the name of municipal reform, and were successful in effecting several notable advances in this sphere. The Webbs were the foremost advocates of this policy of permeation, and their famous dinner parties became, as H. G. Wells satirized them, "political factories" to this end. Webb gave every indication of having regarded permeation of the traditional parties, and the Liberals in particular, as a substitute for a new party: "This permeation is apparently destined to continue", he wrote, "and the avowed socialist party in England will probably remain a comparatively small disintegrating and educational force, never itself exercising political power, but applying ideas and principles of social reconstruction to each of the great political parties in turn..."<sup>60</sup> In the 1880s, and well into the 'nineties, many of the Fabians held out much hope of the Liberal Party. Fabian Tract 6 The True Radical Programme, drafted by Webb, was a critique of official Liberal policy as announced at Nottingham in 1887 and, in the following year, Webb circulated his pamphlet Wanted: A Programme amongst delegates to the N.L.F. in Birmingham. From 1889, Webb had a seat upon the Executive Committee of the London Liberal and Radical Union and it has even been contended that the famous Newcastle Programme upon which the Liberals gained office in 1892 was, in actual fact, drafted by Webb and Shaw.<sup>61</sup>

Although the policy of permeation was formally dropped by the Fabians in the early 1890s, they never sought to encourage independent working class political action. But they rendered the socialist movement incalculable service by their researches into a multiplicity of economic

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60. Sidney Webb, Socialism in England (London 1889) 25.

61. George Bernard Shaw, "Sixty Years of Fabianism", postscript to Fabian Essays, 296-97; on the whole question of the Fabians' relation to Liberalism, see McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 234-79.

and social problems, and through the publication of their tracts and pamphlets. Fabian Essays sold 27,000 copies within two years of publication and has been in continuous reprint ever since. In 1889 Facts for Londoners appeared, providing a wealth of information for socialist activists, and was followed up by pamphlets dealing with conditions in other provincial towns. The peak of Fabian leaflet distribution came in the early 'nineties when as many as 325,000 propaganda sheets were printed and distributed. The publication of the famous Fabian Tracts, which ventured socialist opinion on a whole range of subjects, was set in train in the 1880s: between 1890-91, 10 new Tracts were published and 335,000 copies printed; 1891-92 saw 20 Tracts published, with their distribution nearing 378,000.<sup>62</sup> The Fabian Society provided popular outlines of complex pieces of legislation which affected working class interests and their "book-boxes" were circulated among all working class organisations as a service to the movement. They were also indefatigable speakers, always willing to provide a lecturer for Independent Labour Party branch meetings, Co-operative Societies, Liberal Associations, trade unions, local Fabian Societies, and for S.D.F. branches. In 1890 they launched their "Lancashire campaign", which saw London Fabians touring the industrial north and delivering lectures to all interested bodies. This was considered to have been such a success that arrangements were made to put Fabian provincial lecturing on a more or less permanent footing.

In all, however, neither the S.D.F. nor the Fabian Society succeeded to any significant extent in attracting rooted working class support. This goes equally for a number of smaller socialist bodies formed during these years. The Guild of St. Matthew, set in train by Stuart Headlam

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62. For details of Fabian propaganda, see Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 106; McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 162-86.

in 1877, was an Anglican radical body in the tradition of Henry George and the land reformers; though Headlam was a prominent Fabian, the Guild could never number more than about 400 members. There were also one or two groups of independent socialists in the provinces, such as the Sheffield Socialists formed by Edward Carpenter in 1886. But the total membership of the socialist organisations in 1889 could not have exceeded 2,500, whilst the number of trade unionists in that year was around 750,000. Though political organisation had advanced by leaps and bounds during the 'eighties, it was changes within the trade union movement that would bring about the next stage of development in working class history.

Under Broadhurst's tutelage, the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. had continued the pressure group tactics inherited from the 1860s and 1870s. The majority of those who would soon come to be known as the "old unionists" remained firmly wedded to the Lib-Lab tradition and not without some cause for, in 1885, eleven working men, including Joseph Arch, Burt, Broadhurst, William Abraham, Cremer, Howell, Pickard and Charles Fenwick, had secured election as trade union M.P.s. The following year, Broadhurst was invited to serve as under-secretary at the Home Office in Gladstone's third ministry - the first working man ever to achieve ministerial status. "Working men by birth and upbringing", these new M.P.s "...were eminently practical men...the leaders of the working class were purely Liberal in politics, and hailed Mr. Gladstone as their chief".<sup>63</sup> In its enthusiasm for the representation of the trades in the House of Commons in the wake of the Third Reform Act, the T.U.C. had founded the Labour Electoral Committee in 1886. Hopes had been raised that the new organisation might provide the nucleus of an independent party but, in

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63. Humphrey, History of Labour Representation, 85-6.

spite of it showing "...a rather disturbing tendency to bolt from the official line of co-operation with the Liberal Party...",<sup>64</sup> T. R. Threlfall, the President of the 1885 T.U.C., who had taken the initiative in forming the Committee, made it perfectly clear that in his view the allegiance of one or other of the traditional parties was necessary if working men were to secure election.<sup>65</sup> Otherwise, the successors to the Junta - Broadhurst, John Burnett of the A.S.E., J. D. Prior (Carpenters), and George Shipton (London Trades Council) - carried on with the cautious Parliamentary policy. They sought further electoral reform, although not to the extent of advocating manhood suffrage; they looked for measures of social reform which would allow the respectable and thrifty workman to rise in the social scale; and they pressed for industrial reform where the particular case warranted it.<sup>66</sup> On the whole, the Parliamentary Committee only had any impact where its demands harmonised with official Liberal Party policy as had been the case in 1880, when the Liberal administration had enacted a modest Employers' Liability Bill. Within the trade union world, the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. was beginning to loose standing.

Elsewhere, trade unionism began to revive in the 1880s. Amongst the miners there had been a significant shift in policy. For a number of years the wages of the miners had been linked by sliding scales to the level of profits prevailing in the industry. But, in the late 'seventies,

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64. Reid, Origin of the Labour Party, 74.

65. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 57-8.

66. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 366-70.

this had proved disastrous when the price of coal had begun to fall rapidly. This fact led to a campaign amongst the younger miners against the system, which rapidly spread from Yorkshire and Lancashire to other parts of the country. In 1888, Ben Pickard of Yorkshire rallied as many of the autonomous country unions as possible for a general 10% wage increase; so successful was the move that in 1889 the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was set in train. The M.F.G.B. brought together all the miners, except those in Northumberland, Durham and South Wales, behind a policy which pledged itself to agitate for the Eight Hour Day.<sup>67</sup> In other industries, too, new unions were being formed. In 1881, the General Union of Textile Workers was established in the hitherto unorganised woollen sector. In 1884 the remaining local Weavers' Associations joined the Lancashire Power Loom Weavers' Association, and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association was formed. The Card and Blowing Room Operatives' Amalgamation followed in 1886, and in 1887 all the unions in the cotton trade drew together to form the United Textile Factory Workers' Association, a body whose main aim was to promote factory reform by political means. A Steel Smelters' Union was formed in Scotland by John Hodge, and Ben Tillett initiated the Tea Operatives' and General Labourers' Union amongst the London dockers, both in that same year. Finally, in the north Havelock Wilson began building up the National Sailors' and Firemens' Union.<sup>68</sup> These unions formed a strong block of potential support in the T.U.C. for at least some of the legislative programme which was beginning to be put forward by the "new unionists".

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67. Page Arnot, The Miners, 91ff; Webb, ibid., 393ff; Pelling, History of British Trade Unions, 105.

68. For details of union advances, see Cole, Short History of the Working Class Movement, 153-54.

In its early stages, the main movers of new unionism were two young artisans, Tom Mann and John Burns. Mann, born in Coventry and an engineer by trade, was an early member of the S.D.F. who had published a pamphlet called What a Compulsory Eight Hour Working Day Means to the Workers in 1886, advancing an argument for a more aggressive and militant conception of trade unionism. Mann charged the "old gang" of trade unionists as being men of "fossilized intellect", and of "supporting a policy that plays directly into the hands of the capitalist exploiter".<sup>69</sup> Burns, a fellow member of the A.S.E., ably supported Mann in his campaign. Simultaneously, the same militancy of spirit and weariness of the T.U.C. was being expressed by the Scottish miners' leader James Keir Hardie. Hardie, who had laboured to build up the Ayrshire Miners' Union and the Scottish Miners' Federation, had been a lifelong Liberal, but his views were rapidly changing under the influence of the socialist literature he was assiduously imbibing. At the 1887 Trade Union Congress, Hardie launched a vitriolic attack against the class collaborationism of Broadhurst and his ilk which, although it hardly endeared him with the trade union leadership, did much to crystallise the more militant opposition within the T.U.C.

The advanced delegates revived the idea of "general unionism" by arguing for less exclusivity in trade union membership and, in particular, the inclusion of the unskilled among the ranks of organised labour. Against those old unionists like Howell, who emphasised the benefits to be derived by labour from collaboration with the Liberals,<sup>70</sup> Mann and

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69. Tom Mann, What a Compulsory Eight Hour Working Day Means to the Workers (London 1972) 23.

70. In his Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders (London 1902), Howell proudly lists 82 pieces of legislation in the labour interest resulting from co-operation with the Liberals.

his friends favoured a more aggressive trade policy - particularly in respect of wage demands and the Eight Hour Day - and they called for independent working class political action and further measures of legislative intervention. Such sentiments had already gained much ground in the north and elsewhere before the explosion of unskilled unionism in London which came with the strike of match-girls at the Bryant and May factory led by Mrs. Besant in 1887, the Gasworkers' strike led by Will Thorne and the great Dock strike of 1889. The unskilled ferment was doubtless precipitated by the brief period of prosperity then prevailing, but the success of these groups of workers proved infectious. In all, it led to a great advance in trade unionism. "The masses are on the move", enthused Engels,<sup>71</sup> and indeed they were. The dockworkers' union was put on a permanent footing with Ben Tillett as full-time secretary, and the gasworkers began to expand their union throughout the country; unions of General Railway Workers and Printers' Labourers were formed and Arch's N.A.L.U. revived; Havelock Wilson's Seamen's and Firemen's Union shot up to 65,000 members, and all told, about 200,000 labourers had been newly organised by 1890.<sup>72</sup> In the provinces a number of general labour unions were set up, such as the National Amalgamated Union of Labour on Tyneside. Hardly a section of the workforce was unaffected by these developments, which in turn revived the old unions, whose membership figures too began to rise steeply for a few years after 1889.<sup>73</sup> On 4 May 1890, 200,000 workers demonstrated in London's first May Day procession: "...the English proletariat, rousing itself from forty years

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71. On Britain, 523.

72. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 405-6; Hutt, British Trade Unionism, 43-4.

73. Webb, ibid., 407.



slumber", declared Engels, had "re-joined the movement of its class". <sup>74</sup>

New unionism presented a striking challenge to the old conception of trade unionism, distinct in both tactics and organisation. The militant unions appealed largely to the unskilled and lower paid workers; they tended to have lower entrance fees and subscriptions and embraced not benefits of the friendly kind, but rather aggressive strike tactics geared to win concessions from the employers. They were more akin to general unions, willing to recruit workers without distinction of type of employment. The two breeds of delegate to Congress even looked different. Among the old unionists, according to Burns,

A great number of them looked like respectable city gentlemen; wore very good coats, large watchchains and high hats... Among the new delegates, not a single one wore a tall hat. They looked workmen. They were workmen. They were not such sticklers for formality or Court procedure, but were guided more by common sense.

Will Thorne recalls being "stung by the boorishness of the old school." <sup>75</sup>

The new unionists were young, militant and proudly socialist. They began to extend their sphere of influence to the growing provincial Trade Councils, of which some sixty or so were formed in the years between 1889-91.

In the heady atmosphere which followed upon their initial successes, the new unionists threw down the gauntlet to the Trade Union Congress. As yet dominated by unionists of the old type, the militants had been slowly entering the T.U.C. until, at the 1890 Congress in Liverpool, Burns and Mann managed to push through, as a result of support from the Miners' Federation and the textile unions, a resolution demanding the

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74. Articles on Britain, 402-403 (emphasis in original).

75. Burns and Thorne both cited by Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 87-8.



Eight Hour Day. Broadhurst's own union voted in favour of the motion and he was forced to resign his secretaryship. Sixty resolutions were passed at the Congress of that year, of which forty-five were sponsored by the socialists, being, according to John Burns, "nothing more nor less than direct appeals to the State and municipalities of the country to do for the workman what trade unionism 'old' and 'new' had proved itself incapable of doing".<sup>76</sup> Broadhurst spoke for the old gang in opposing the creeping socialism with its appeals to enhanced state intervention; he made clear his belief in 1887 that,<sup>77</sup>

...men were capable of protecting themselves by their own manhood and independence; and therefore they had gone on, not seeking from Parliament what they could do for themselves... could they go to Parliament every time they wanted the town clock regulated?...

By 1890, the militants had done much to shake the complacency of the T.U.C. although socialism was still, as yet, the minority opinion. Broadhurst was replaced as secretary of the Parliamentary Committee by Charles Fenwick, a Northumberland miner who had been a Liberal M.P. since 1885 and, with Broadhurst, a staunch opponent of the statutory Eight Hour Day. Mann and Tillett, by contrast, reaffirmed their belief in independent political action on the part of the working class and the trade unions; "Our ideal is the CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH. This we believe will be reached by honest effort in various directions, chief among which will be the efforts of the trade unionists...", but in the

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76. Cited by Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 432.

77. Speech to the T.U.C. of 1887, cited by Hobsbawn, Labour's Turning Point, 96; see further, H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A. F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 (Oxford 1964) 53-4.

meantime "...we can be continually gaining some advantage for one or other section of the workers".<sup>78</sup> As socialists, therefore, the militants sought to introduce into the thinking of the T.U.C. a more far reaching conception of state involvement and regulation.

One expression of this was the growing awareness that, if legislation favourable to the labour interest was to be enacted, an independent force representing the working class in Parliament was highly desirable. The cry for independent representation had never been completely stilled. In 1881 George Shipton, editor of the Labour Standard, ran a campaign in his columns for a "distinct and national Labour Party".<sup>79</sup> In 1887, H. H. Champion had left the S.D.F. and had begun to agitate for an independent working class party through the offices of the I.E.C., which was placed on surer footing in that year as the Labour Electoral Association. His paper The Labour Elector helped begin the revolt against the domination of the Liberal Associations, and thus marked an important stage in the growth of a British working class political party.<sup>80</sup> Working class candidates in these years often faced refractory opposition from local Liberals, who frequently refused to run working men as their candidates. Keir Hardie, for one, had quarrelled with the Liberal caucus; in 1887,

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78. Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, The "New" Trades Unionism (1890), cited by Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point, 98-99.

79. Reid, Origin of the Labour Party, 73; Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 53.

80. Henry Pelling, "H. H. Champion: Pioneer of Labour Representation", The Cambridge Journal, VI (1953) 222-38; Origins of the Labour Party, 56-61; Cole, British Working Class Politics, 98ff.

he accepted an offer from the North Ayrshire miners to be their Parliamentary candidate and, in March 1888, when a vacancy occurred at Mid-Lanark, he was selected as miners' candidate there. The Liberal opposition he encountered prompted Hardie and his supporters to form an independent working class party in Scotland.

With Cunninghame Graham in the chair, the Scottish Labour Party met for the first time in May 1888. The new body absorbed the Scottish Land and Labour League and, whilst not definitely committed to socialism as its ultimate object, the party was clear as to its policy of electoral independence. Many like Hardie had not yet abandoned all hope of reforming the Liberal Party, but even so it was becoming clear that a party quite distinct from the Liberals should sooner or later have to be formed. The militants in the T.U.C., including Hardie himself, took up the call for independent labour representation in the late 'eighties; in 1889, for instance, he had unsuccessfully moved that a Parliamentary fund be set up to assist in the election of independent labour men. In 1888 the Labour Union had been formed, a typical short-lived effort and one of many between 1888-93. The Union, which was supported by Hardie, new unionists and some former Socialist Leaguers, issued a staunchly independent manifesto which appealed to the workers to "...enroll themselves under the banner of LABOUR to make the government and legislature of Great Britain instruments of social regeneration..."<sup>81</sup> Outwardly, the Liberal inclined T.U.C. leadership seemed well placed to ward off the socialist challenge yet, as A. E. P. Duffy has shown, even before 1889 the "old gang" were not entirely unaffected by the new winds of change, which were already corroding the trade unionists' steadfast opposition to state intervention.<sup>82</sup>

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81. Cited by Hobsbawn, Labour's Turning Point, 120.

82. A. E. P. Duffy, "New Unionism in Britain 1889-90: a reappraisal", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIV (1961) 306-19.

2.3: The Period 1890-1906: The Emergence of the Labour Party

Whilst new unionism had proved, as Ben Tillett saw it, "...the regeneration of the trade union movement...",<sup>83</sup> many of these organisations had before long run into more difficult times. One important reason for this was the on-set of depression after 1891, but another was the beginning of a counter-attack by the employers, particularly marked in the docks and in the shipbuilding industry, where they stiffly resisted the union demand for a closed shop. As early as the end of 1889, the Gasworkers had found themselves in conflict with the South Metropolitan Gas Company and, by 1890, there were hardly any union members working for the company. An attempt to organise postmen had failed in the same year, and at Hull the dockworkers were soundly defeated by their employers after some initial successes. Unskilled unionism survived, but became in the 1890s "...uncomfortably like the 'old unionism' it had once fought; and the policies of its leaders changed accordingly."<sup>84</sup> Hobsbawn's judgement is severe, but it remains true that many of the "general union" ideals were quietly dropped. Tillett's London dockers had become more exclusive in outlook almost immediately, and the same tendency spread to other unions. The Gasworkers in the West Riding concentrated more and more upon organising the skilled grades in the industry;<sup>85</sup> the N.A.U.L. in the north east retained its shipyard workers, but lost most of the general branches. The militant socialists, who had imparted to new unionism its early enthusiasm, were themselves coming to be replaced

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83. Ben Tillett, Memoirs and Reflections (London 1931) 117.

84. Hobsbawn, Labouring Men, 191; see further on the domestication of new unionism, Bauman, Between Class and Elite, 163-4.

85. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 102-3.

by more moderate men. Will Thorne of the Gasworkers' for instance, himself a protege of Engels, had recruited J. R. Clynes to the union in 1892, a man of distinctly cautious persuasion. The fact remains, however, that new unionism had injected a more adventurous spirit into the whole labour movement, the most important aspect of which was the demand for the legal Eight Hour Day. This was the vital link between the growing forward movements in the political and trade union fields, and the pioneers of working class politics had taken up the Eight Hour Day as a central slogan.<sup>86</sup> New unionism marked, therefore, "...the beginning of that close alliance in thought and purpose between the trade union movement and the socialist movement which produced in due course the Labour Party."<sup>87</sup>

At the 1890 Trade Union Congress some of the old unions, notably the miners and the cotton operatives, had lent their support to the Eight Hour Day demand, although the Northumberland and Durham miners, whose members had already won a seven hour day, naturally opposed the resolution. Congresses in the following years witnessed constant friction between the supporters and opponents of the statutory Eight Hour Day and over the whole question of a more vigorous and independent policy of political action. At the 1891 T.U.C., the advocates of the Eight Hour Day won an important debate and, in the following year, Fenwick was severely criticised for failing to press the demand in Parliament even though it was now official T.U.C. policy. By 1894 he had been replaced as Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee by Sam Woods, the Lancashire miners' leader, who was a fervent supporter of the legal Eight Hour Day. The "advanced"

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86. For the importance of the Eight Hour Day demand, see Morton and Tate, The British Labour Movement, 187-88.

87. Tillett, Memoirs and Reflections, 116.

delegates also sought to urge the T.U.C. to secure more effective labour representation in Parliament. Though the trades had been represented by the group of Lib-Labs since 1885, it was by no means obvious to the new delegates that the Liberal Party would be more favourable to the cause of labour than were the Conservatives; indeed, to their credit in 1891 the Salisbury administration had accepted the need for a "fair wages" agreement in respect of government contracts.

In the early 1890s, however, the old unionists retained an overwhelming numerical superiority in the T.U.C. Alongside the large societies - the engineers with 287,000 members, the Builders' Society with 148,000 members, and the mining unions with 347,000 and textile unions with 200,000 members - were many small and localised craft unions represented at Congress, comprising artisan workers in sometimes still pre-industrial crafts.<sup>88</sup> These trade unionists were practical men, who distrusted the abstruse theories of socialism and on many issues committed their unions to highly conservative policies. The moderate trade unionists disavowed militant strike tactics and among them the idea of arbitration and conciliation had gained much ground. Conciliation schemes had been broached by several enlightened employers such as A. J. Mundella and Sir Rupert Kettle as early as the 1850s and '60s, and these had begun to spread nationally.<sup>89</sup> The Brooklands Agreement of 1893 for instance, which terminated the large cotton strike of that year, had established conciliations procedures for the textile industry. The national lock-outs in the boot and shoe industry in 1895 and in engineering in 1897-98 were

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88. See Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 428, 744-50, for membership statistics.

89. For details of arbitration and conciliation, see J. R. Hicks, "The Early History of Industrial Conciliation in England", Economica, X (1930) 25-39; I. G. Sharp, Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain (London 1950); V. L. Allen, "The origins of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration", International Review of Social History, IX (1964) 237-54.

both concluded by the establishment of machinery to deal with future disputes. In iron manufacture, building, mining and shipbuilding, too, employers were coming to recognise that trade unionism was an established fact and sought to make the best of the situation by devising conciliation boards. In 1893 a sixteen week strike by the Miners' Federation was ended after Lord Rosebery had mediated to establish conciliation machinery and, by 1896, a Conciliation Act had conferred upon the Board of Trade the powers necessary to intervene in industrial disputes.

But, in spite of the predominance of the conservative inclined old unions, victories on the trade union front had lent fresh impetus to the movement for working class political independence. The centre of gravity was shifting away from London to the industrial north of England, and here socialism and independent politics were being taken up by working people in large numbers. The provincial branches of the S.D.F., the Socialist League and the Fabian Society - far removed from the trammels of Hyndmanite sectarianism and the Webbs' intrigue - had done much to propagate and popularise socialist ideas. In Newcastle, three labour candidates had been elected to the School Board there as early as 1888; in Leicester the local Trades Council had representatives on both the School Board and the Town Council by 1891, while in Cumberland the local branch of the L.E.A. (now elsewhere defunct) issued in January 1892 a radical, but strongly independent, manifesto.<sup>90</sup> But the heart of the independence movement was in the West Riding of Yorkshire where, between 1889 and 1892, new and predominantly socialist Trades Councils were formed in Halifax, Huddersfield, Keighley, Spen Valley, Dewsbury, Batley and Brighouse.

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90. Kynaston, King Labour, 55.



The most forceful body in the north was the Bradford Labour Union. Partly due to the harsh time suffered by the woollen workers after the American McKinley Tariff of 1890 and due, in part, to the Leeds Gasworkers strike led by Will Thorne and Pete Curran, and the bitter struggles at the Manningham Mills between 1889-91, small socialist and labour clubs had developed and, under the leadership of W. H. Drew, had joined together in the spring of 1891 to form the Bradford Labour Union.<sup>91</sup> Much of the success of the Union may be attributed to the awakening of political interest which Joseph Burgess's Yorkshire Factory Times, founded in 1889, had endeavoured to encourage. The Union adopted candidates for two of Bradford's three constituencies, one of whom was Robert Blatchford. Blatchford was a brilliant and popular journalist who had begun to write for The Workman's Times to which Burgess had transferred and, in late 1891, founded The Clarion in Manchester, the most famous and influential of the labour pioneering papers. Hardie's Labour Leader, too, was an effective voice in the campaign to end the old Lib-Lab alliance, and in fact by 1891 was labelling itself "the organ of the independent labour party" even though no such party as yet existed.<sup>92</sup> This was rectified in May 1892, however, when Blatchford and John Trevor of the Labour Church founded the Manchester and District Independent Labour Party.

After the General Election of 1892, the movement for electoral independence in the north gained fresh momentum. Keir Hardie, Havelock

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91. Extracts of the constitution of the Labour Union are to be found in Hobsbawn, Labour's Turning Point, 121. For the background to the emergence of independent labour politics in the West Riding, see E. P. Thompson, "Homage to Tom Maguire", in Briggs and Saville, Essays in Labour History, particularly 279-92, and Reg Groves, The Strange Case of Victor Grayson (London 1975).

92. On the labour pioneer press in general, see Stanley Harrison, 'Poor Men's Guardians: A Survey of the Struggles for a Democratic Newspaper Press 1763-1973', (London 1974) 158-81.

Wilson and John Burns gained election to the Commons as independents and ten other workingmen, including five miners, were elected as Lib-Labs; and Ben Tillett came within 600 votes of the Liberal victor at Bradford West. Of the three "independent" M.P.s, only Hardie showed himself to be truly free of Liberal connections, and at the 1892 Trade Union Congress he carried a resolution instructing the Parliamentary Committee to draw up a scheme for labour representation fund. In 1893 the Congress reaffirmed its interest in the idea, though the Parliamentary Committee remained lukewarm. The Committee was wary of the socialists in the T.U.C. who, in the same year, had successfully moved a resolution urging the unions to support only candidates pledged to "the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange." <sup>93</sup> This victory for the advanced delegates was repeated in 1894, but the Parliamentary Committee remained obstinate.

The strength of the socialists in these years was due in large part to the formation and rapid growth of a national Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) At the instigation of Burgess's Workman's Times, a conference to consolidate all the various organisations working for independent labour representation was convened in Bradford in January 1893. The Bradford conference, at which Hardie not surprisingly emerged as the dominant personality, was a novel departure in British party political history. For perhaps the first time, authentic working class aspirations found expression, voiced either by the working class leadership or by the delegates to the conference - "...the intelligent, respectable, working trade unionist of the new labour clubs...young and friendly, their

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93. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 107; for details of Congresses in the 1890s, see Cole, British Working Class Politics, 153-58.

countenances gleaming with good humour above their loose red ties...They were not politicians for politics sake; they were the working class in earnest..."<sup>94</sup> One hundred and twenty delegates attended the conference, and of these the majority were from the industrial north of England or Scotland and, all told, about one third came from the Yorkshire Labour Clubs and parties. There were, in addition, eleven representatives of northern Fabian Societies and six representing S.D.F. branches in Lancashire. The preponderance of northerners reflected the recent rapid growth of the movement there and, in consequence, the London socialist leadership was very much under-represented. Out of this conference was born the Independent Labour Party with its own brand of specifically English "practical socialism".

Some indication of this is afforded by the decision of the delegates to retain the name "Independent Labour Party" as against incorporating the term "Socialist" in their title. For one thing, many of the labour unions and clubs were by no means as yet explicitly committed to socialism. But of greater significance, as Ben Tillett argued at Bradford, was the fact that the new party stood but little chance of capturing the trade unions, a tactic upon which most of the delegates were in fundamental agreement, if they wore their socialism too conspicuously. Conversion of the unions to socialism was recognised as the long-term goal, but what was immediately necessary was a recognition of the identity of interests between socialist and non-socialist trade unionists, and an alliance between them. "In the best interests of socialism", wrote Hardie in 1893, "we should seek every opportunity of fraternizing with the trade unionists and breaking down the barriers between them and us."<sup>95</sup>

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94. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 116.

95. Cited by Reid, Origin of the Labour Party, 63. Ninety-one out of 101 delegates voting supported Tillett's plea for a "labour alliance".

Nevertheless, a motion advocating the collective ownership of the means of production was substantially carried, and the party declared as its object "an Industrial Commonwealth founded upon the Socialisation of Land and Capital", and its methods to this end, "the education of the community in the principles of socialism..."; "the industrial and political organisation of the workers..."; and "the independent representation of socialist principles on all elective bodies..."<sup>96</sup> The conference adopted in its programme a range of economic demands, the main one of which was the legal Eight Hour Day, and this was complemented by a number of social and economic palliatives such as provision of work for the unemployed, the abolition of overtime, piecework and employment of children under fourteen years, state pensions for everyone over fifty and adequate welfare provision for all widows, orphans, sick and disabled workers. The delegates also embraced wholeheartedly motions advocating free, unsectarian, primary, secondary and university education, and the municipalisation and public control of the drink traffic. Finally, there was demanded the abolition of indirect taxation and the gradual transference of all public burdens onto unearned income, with a view to its ultimate extinction.

The I.L.P. programme, as adopted in 1893, was thus concise, clear-cut and fundamentally socialist in intention. The new party was firmly committed to independent working class politics, although the delegates had decided against accepting the Manchester I.L.P. Fourth Clause, as advocated by Blatchford, insisting that all members of the new party pledge themselves to abstain from voting for any candidate of the other major political parties.<sup>97</sup> Engels was extremely enthusiastic about

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96. Details from I.L.P. Inaugural Conference Report (1893); see further, Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 51-2.

97. Cole, British Working Class Politics, 143-44.

the new party; he wrote to F. A. Sorge that "...the mass of the membership is certainly very good, as the centre of gravity lies in the provinces and not in London, the home of cliques, and as the main point of the programme is the same as ours...the I.L.P. may succeed in detaching the masses from the Social Democratic Federation and in the provinces from the Fabians, too, thus forcing unity".<sup>98</sup>

The founding conference had raised high hopes of the new party. The period between the formation of the I.L.P. and the General Election of 1895 was one of feverish activity and, by that year, membership was up past the 10,000 mark, although its support remained overwhelmingly localised. Tom Mann, as General Secretary to the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P., reported in 1894 that their strength was rooted firmly in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and recent research has confirmed that there was little or no manifest shift in the distribution of I.L.P. support between 1893-1910.<sup>99</sup> By 1895 there had been formed 102 local I.L.P. branches in Yorkshire alone, 73 affiliated to the Lancashire and Cheshire Independent Labour Federation, and 41 Scottish branches; by way of contrast, there were only 29 branches in the London district, 23 in the whole of the Midlands and a handful in the eastern counties and the south and south west.<sup>100</sup> This rush of enthusiasm, however, was

98. On Britain, 531.

99. I.L.P. General Secretary's Monthly Report, National Administrative Council Minutes, March 1894; Deian Hopkin, "The Membership of the Independent Labour Party 1904-10: a Spatial and Occupational Analysis", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 175-97. On this question see further, R. E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (London 1966) 8-9; Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 48-50; Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 158-60.

100. I.L.P. Directory and Branch Returns (1895).

tempered by the failure of the party to gain any seats in the election of 1895, when 28 I.L.P. candidates took the field. Not one was returned, and even Keir Hardie, the only sitting member, lost his seat; but they polled a total of 44,594 votes, and the party leadership professed themselves well pleased with this showing.

After 1895, a feeling of disillusion descended upon the socialists. There were, it is true, some notable successes. The party put up creditable showings in a number of by-elections, such as in 1896 when Frank Smith polled 1,249 votes, or 14% of the total vote, at Attercliffe, and at Bristol (East) in 1897, where the I.L.P. candidate came within 180 votes of being elected. Again, I.L.P. activists were inexhaustible in their efforts to spread the gospel of socialism during these years, and their efforts did not go totally without reward. The I.L.P. made much headway in municipal politics and local elections, securing representatives upon School Boards, Town and Parish Councils and Poor Law Boards throughout the industrial north and other parts of the country. But by 1897, as Henry Pelling has pointed out, "it was clear that the 'socialist boom' was over", <sup>101</sup> and in that year the total I.L.P. membership was down to 8,500; by 1900 it stood at only 6,000. The years after 1895 were years of political apathy and dissention within the socialist movement. "To us public affairs seem gloomy; the middle-classes are materialistic, and the working class stupid, and in large sections sottish, with no interest except in racing odds", noted Beatrice Webb despondently in 1900: "The social enthusiasm that inspired the intellectual proletariat of ten years ago has died down and given place to a wave of scepticism about the desirability, or possibility, of any substantial change in society,

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101. Origins of the Labour Party, 179.

as we know it." 102

In 1895 the I.L.P. also received a setback to its policy of working to influence trade union branches and Trades Councils with socialist opinion, and in sending delegates to Congress to plead the socialist case. It was at this point in time that the Parliamentary Committee decided to change the basis of representation at Congress, which hitherto had allowed socialists right of attendance as delegates from the Trades Councils. A sub-committee of the Parliamentary Committee under John Burns put a stop to this by recommending that the Councils be excluded. This proposed change, strongly supported by the Miners' Federation and the textile operatives, erected a formidable barrier to the progress of independent labour representation and socialism within the T.U.C. Within only a short space of time, however, the fortunes of the socialists had been quite turned about as a result of developments in the trade union world.

The upsurge of new unionism had led to a hardening of attitudes amongst a number of employers, who began to concert plans to recover their lost control over employment. In 1890 the shipowners had combined in a Shipping Federation which worked with considerable success to combat unionism in the docks in the early 'nineties. The "aristocrats" of the trade union world were not spared this onslaught: the Federation of Engineering Employers, founded in 1894, sought to counter the increasingly militant tendencies within the A.S.E., whilst the miners and the cotton workers, too, found themselves facing increasingly stiff resistance on the part of their employers. The "employers' counter-offensive", as

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102. Barbara Drake and Margaret Cole, eds., Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership (London 1948) 195.



Elie Halevy has termed it, prompted one William Collinson to form the National Free Labour Association in 1893 which, supported by the ship-owners and the railway companies, aimed to supply "free" or blackleg labour in order to break strikes.<sup>103</sup> This was the tense situation in which the most important industrial struggle of the decade took place. The Employers' Federation seized the opportunity provided by the national lock-out in the engineering trades in 1897-98 to force a confrontation with the A.S.E. The dispute, which had begun over the question of the Eight Hour Day, soon became linked with the whole issue of technological change and managerial control, and ended in defeat for the men.<sup>104</sup>

The trade unions for their part had assumed that their legal position was secured by the Acts of 1871 and 1875. But with regard to picketing and the protection of union funds from liability for damages in cases of tort, that security had been slowly eroded by decisions in the Temperton v. Russell (1893), Allen v. Flood, and particularly in the case of Lyons v. Wilkins which, in 1898, drastically limited the right of picketing by a trade union, thus seriously undermining the unions' conception of "peaceful picketing" as secured, or so they imagined, by the legislation of 1875.<sup>105</sup> By the late 1890s the state of trade union law was one of

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103. Elie Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour (London 1951); for the background to the employers offensive and the "free labour" question, see John Saville, "Unions and Free Labour: the Background to the Taff Vale Decision", in Briggs and Saville, Essays in Labour History, 317-50.

104. For details of the engineering lock-out, see Jeffreys, Story of the Engineers, 143-49; Hobsbawn, Labour's Turning Point, 155-57; Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 484ff.

105. Webb, ibid., 597-99; Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 110-12. Henry Pelling has argued that the decision in the case of Lyons v. Wilkins was due less to judicial bias than to technical changes in the interpretation of the law: cf. Popular Politics and Society in late Victorian Britain (London 1968) ch.4.

considerable confusion, although the balance had been manifestly tipped against the unions. Picketing was being seriously questioned, heavy damages were being awarded against union officials and members arising out of disputes, and there had been raised the question of the trade unions being sued in their corporate capacity.

In other respects, too, the general political climate was less than propitious. Little by way of social reform had been secured from the Conservative government since 1895; though this was hardly unexpected, the benefits to be gained from the alliance with the Liberals seemed - even for many traditionally-minded old unionists - to be equally slight. The Liberal Party was in the throes of a severe dose of factionalism and, moreover, leading Nonconformist manufacturers, many of whom held key positions in the provincial party organisations, were often conspicuous for their anti-union attitudes. It was this whole atmosphere that allowed the socialists to make fresh headway among the trade unionists. The various socialist bodies had by this time gained much experience of collaboration with trade unions and the Trades Councils for the purposes of contesting municipal elections, and once more some kind of working alliance with the trade unionists no longer seemed too remote a goal. Moreover, in the years after 1895 a number of socialists had secured election to prominent positions in some of the old unions; George Barnes of the I.L.P. had become General Secretary of the engineers in 1896, and in that same year James McDonald of the S.D.F. was elected secretary of the London Trades Council. The I.L.P.'s overriding priority remained that of forging the "labour alliance" with the trade unions, and in 1896 Hardie advocated "...that periodically, say once a year, a Socialist conference should be called, and that all socialist organisations, together with all Trade Unions and Co-operative organisations, should be invited

to send delegates." <sup>106</sup> In the later 1890s, the call for an electoral alliance with the trade unionists was repeatedly heard at I.L.P. conferences but, as Poirier had pointed out, "The I.L.P. leaders knew that the socialist mouse had to come to the trade union mountain, not the reverse." <sup>107</sup>

In 1898 the T.U.C. had been persuaded, largely by Robert Knight of the Boilermakers' Society, to establish a General Federation of Trade Unions as a central organisation for mutual trade union defence. But those who looked to the G.F.T.U. as the precursor of "one big union" were soon to be disappointed, and it rapidly developed as a society for mutual insurance against strikes and lock-outs. <sup>108</sup> Under attack from all quarters, the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. was coming to be much more independent of the Liberals. Reckoning four out of its thirteen members to be socialists in 1898, Hardie judged the time ripe for securing T.U.C. support for a policy of independent labour representation. The T.U.C. of that year seemed to respond by passing overwhelmingly a resolution commending the trade unions to support "the working class socialist parties". <sup>109</sup> In 1899 Hardie addressed delegates to the Scottish T.U.C., who evinced marked enthusiasm for the I.L.P.'s policy of electoral independence. With this support behind them, at the 1899 T.U.C. in Portsmouth the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants put forward a resolution, with the backing of the I.L.P., which called upon the Parliamentary Committee, <sup>110</sup>

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106. Cited by Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 201.

107. Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 78.

108. Cole, Short History of Working Class Politics, 177.

109. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 203.

110. Cole, British Working Class Politics, 153.

...to invite the co-operation of the Co-operative Socialistic, Trade Union and other working organisations to jointly co-operate on lines mutually agreed upon, in convening a special congress...for securing the return of an increased number of labour members in the next Parliament.

The motion was passed by Congress - in spite of the opposition of the Miners' Federation and the Cotton Spinners, whose leader James Mawsdley was himself a Conservative candidate - by 546,000 votes to 434,000. It was a momentous occasion and "...a decision which revealed a real change in the attitude of the unions to political action." <sup>111</sup>

As a result of this decision, a preliminary committee consisting of representatives of the trade unions and the three main socialist parties drew up arrangements for a conference which met, almost unnoticed amid the imperialist fervour occasioned by the South African War, on 27 February 1900. With this conference came into being the Labour Representation Committee, (L.R.C.), attended by delegates representing besides the socialist parties, less than one half of the unions affiliated to the T.U.C. and by no Co-operative delegates at all. The immediate question to be tackled was that of the relation of the new body to socialism and the socialist movement, and, once more, it fell to Hardie to mediate between the moderate trade unionists and the purists of the S.D.F., whose representative James MacDonald favoured the formation of a party "based upon recognition of the class war." <sup>112</sup> It was Hardie's motion - the "line of least resistance" as Theodore Rothstein characterised

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111. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 206.

112. Reid, Origin of the Labour Party, 90-92; for details of the various strands of opinion at the founding conference of the L.R.C., see Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics: A History of the L.R.C. (London 1958) 25-31.

it, <sup>113</sup> - which found most favour at the Memorial Hall Conference, to establish, <sup>114</sup>

...a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which, for the time being, may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of Labour...

The tenor of the L.R.C. was thus set. In a famous outburst, John Burns - whose socialism by this time had suffered considerable dilution - inveighed against the "class prejudice" of the new party; but in actual fact the conference had managed to avoid a declared policy of socialism, although this brought about the inevitable breach with the S.D.F.

Once Hardie's resolution had been accepted, the conference then established the L.R.C., comprising two I.L.P. members, two S.D.F.'ers, one Fabian, and seven trade unionists, to run independent labour candidates backed by the various organisations affiliated to the Committee. Ramsay MacDonald was appointed unpaid secretary and, all told, this represented an enormous triumph for the I.L.P. and for the socialists generally. As yet, however, the future of the new body was less than certain. Representing about 353,070 working men - that is, less than one third the aggregate number of trade unionists in the country - the A.A.O.C.S. was the only 'old union' of any significance to have affiliated immediately. In the first year of its existence less than a dozen trade unions joined the L.R.C., which was a particular hardship since it depended for its income upon the subscriptions of affiliated organisations. The consequences were seen in the General Election of 1900 which was announced soon after the formation of the Committee. Fifteen candidates took the

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113. From Chartism to Labourism, 284.

114. Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, 28.

field, almost entirely sponsored by affiliated trade unions and socialist societies, and of whom only two, Keir Hardie and Richard Bell of the A.S.R.S., were successful.

Within the space of only a year the fortunes of the L.R.C. had changed dramatically. The decision in the House of Lords in respect of the case brought against the A.S.R.S. by the Taff Vale Railway Company in July, 1901, confirmed the liability of union funds for damages incurred during the course of industrial disputes. The whole trade union world immediately recognised the far-reaching implications of this legal decision and their natural reaction was condemnatory. Hardie and MacDonald seized the opportunity that this presented for the L.R.C. In August, 1901, Hardie questioned the Government in the House of Commons and it became clear that the Salisbury administration had no plans to rectify the situation by legislation. MacDonald therefore wrote to the trade unions stressing that "The recent decision in the House of Lords... should convince the unions that a Labour Party in Parliament is an immediate necessity", <sup>115</sup> and the T.U.C. of 1901 fully supported this view. As their worsening legal position became clear, the trade unions turned to the L.R.C., and affiliations slowly began to increase.

By 1902, MacDonald had managed to increase the aggregate membership of the Committee to around 455,450, a figure which was still disappointing to many. But in that year the L.R.C. secured its first victory at the polls, when David Shackleton at Clitheroe and Will Crooks at Woolwich were both returned in by-elections. In July 1903 there came fresh success when Arthur Henderson captured Barnard Castle for the L.R.C. By late 1903, 127 new unions had joined the Committee, including the

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115. Bealey and Pelling, ibid., 77.



A.S.E. and the United Textile Factory Workers Association, thus raising membership to 847,315; later that year, the rest of the building workers came in, as did the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation. <sup>116</sup>

Meeting in conference in Newcastle, the party had agreed to raise a fund for the payment of Labour M.P.s by means of a compulsory levy upon the unions, and the basis of a distinct political party was established by the conference declaration that its candidates must "strictly abstain from identifying themselves with, or promoting the interests of, any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties". <sup>117</sup> The year 1903 marks, therefore, a real turning point in the history of the L.R.C. By this point in time, the Parliamentary Committee had come round to accept the need for a detailed formulation of a Bill to restore the status quo ante Taff Vale and, in default of Liberal or Conservative gestures in this direction, <sup>118</sup> the L.R.C. was beginning to appear as the most likely candidate.

In reality, the independence of the L.R.C. at this time was in considerable doubt. Hardie still hoped to convert the Labour and Lib-Lab M.P.s (of whom there were fifteen by 1905) into an independent group, but their growing antipathy to the policies of the Conservative government inclined them to the Liberals, a tendency which was reinforced by the electoral agreement concluded between MacDonald and the Liberal Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, in 1903. <sup>119</sup> But it was in the name of strictly

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116. For trade union affiliation to the L.R.C., 1900-1906, see Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 375.

117. Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, 141ff.

118. Reid, Origin of the Labour Party, 96-104.

119. Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, 143-6, 156-9, 298-99.



independent labour representation that the socialists outside Parliament laboured to convert the unions. After about 1901 the I.L.P. had experienced something of an upturn in its fortunes. Disillusion bred by the South African War had brought in a flood of new recruits, and organisationally the party was now more stable; the National Administrative Council fell firmly under the control of Hardie, MacDonald, Snowden and Glasier, and the acquisition by the party in 1904 of Hardie's Labour Leader, coupled with the decline in The Clarion, had all given the I.L.P. an immense propagandist advantage. By contrast, the S.D.F. held firmly to its "impossibilist" line first propounded in 1900, and took little interest in the L.R.C. As for the Fabians, only Edward Pease involved himself in the work of the Committee, the general attitude of the Society to the Committee being, according to Pease, one of "benevolent passivity".<sup>120</sup> So it fell to the I.L.P., through Hardie as leader of the Labour group in Parliament, and through the efforts of local branch activists, to convince the trade unionists of the value of the new organisation.

By 1905 the L.R.C. and the trade unions, were working closely together, mainly due to the failure of either major party to pledge itself to a clear solution to the problem of trade union legislation. By the terms of the "Caxton Hall Concordat" concluded in that year, the L.R.C. and the T.U.C. agreed to support each other's candidatures at the forthcoming General Election. The T.U.C. could count a number of Liberals amongst its candidates, but this presented little problem to MacDonald, for they might be fairly easily accommodated within the term of the alliance agreed upon with the Liberals in 1903. When the election came in 1906, the L.R.C. fielded 50 candidates, of whom 40 were put forward by the T.U.C.

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120. Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 151.

and ten by the I.L.P; there were, in addition, 15 mainly miners' candidates who held the formal approval of the Parliamentary Committee and a handful of Lib-Lab's. Of the L.R.C. candidatures, 32 were without Liberal opposition as a result of the MacDonald-Gladstone agreement. The result was, by any standards, a triumph. Fifty-four Labour candidates were returned, of whom 29 were members of the L.R.C. The Committee had secured one third of a million votes in the 50 constituencies which it had contested, representing 37% of the popular vote in those areas. <sup>121</sup>

The L.R.C. now formally changed its name to that of the Labour Party, and its M.P.s constituted themselves as a Parliamentary party with officers and Whips, and sat upon the opposition benches. Nine members of the Parliamentary Committee were M.P.s, six of whom were members of the Labour Party. The appearance of the new party signified the conversion of a substantial section of the labour movement the idea of independent labour representation but, in spite of this, there was still a long way to go. To many union leaders the Labour Party was primarily a body representing the interests of organised labour on the floor of the House; I.L.P. activists, in turn, were concerned that socialism had been vitiated for the sake of the "labour alliance". To trace the course of the Labour Party after 1906 is, however, beyond the scope of this study. We may only notice that, in the first session of the new Parliament, the overriding priority of the Labour Party in Parliament was to press the Liberal government to amend the legal position of the trade unions, and this was secured by the Trades Disputes Act of 1906. As a political party, the duty of the socialists remained primarily to the trade unions, whose interests they represented.

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121. For details, see Cole, British Working Class Politics, 281-86.

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## PART I: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The two chapters which comprise Part I of this study attempt to elaborate a theoretical perspective, by reference to which the trajectory and nature of British socialism and working class social belief in the latter half of the nineteenth century may be better understood. Chapter 3 will consider the major Marxist and sociological approaches to this question, stressing in particular the themes of social structure, ideology and class consciousness. A variety of problems inherent in these theories will be identified in chapter 4 which, building upon a critical analysis of the approaches to British socialism, concludes by proposing a theoretical framework adequate to the study of the complex historical and sociological issues apparent in this area.

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===== CHAPTER THREE =====

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF BRITISH SOCIALISM

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It is well known that the specific character of socialism in this country has for long proved a difficult - not to say inviolable - historical and political problem, testing to the full the theoretical and conceptual acumen of many scholars since the time of Marx and Engels. Essentially, the problem lies in this: how is it possible to account for, in the world's most advanced capitalist and, in consequence, most socially proletarian nation, the emergence of a socialist tradition conditioned by the corporate claims of the trade unions and espousing a gradualist and evolutionary philosophy from which has flowed an unequivocal commitment to the parliamentary method? It need hardly be said that many of the ideas and concepts used to characterise and analyse the British socialist movement are derived from Marx and Engels' own writings in this area, drawing in particular upon their treatment of ideology, class consciousness, and the notion of an "aristocracy of labour". The first half of this chapter, then, will trace the use of these and related concepts within both the classical and contemporary Marxist traditions in accounting for the nature of socialism in this country. The discussion will then turn to considering a variety of sociological and political theories which, to a greater or lesser extent, bear upon the central question under consideration here. Whilst a number of these theories represent a marked advance upon the Marxist analysis, it will be suggested that, to some degree, their conception of social ideology and consciousness is similar to that employed by Marx. Ultimately, therefore, they are vitiated by a similar range of problems.

### 3.1: The Classical Marxist Tradition

It is not possible to over-emphasise the debt which Marx's thought owed to his direct experience of the conditions and tensions of capitalist society in mid-nineteenth century England. As a young man, Marx had been profoundly impressed by Engels's "brilliant sketch" of political economy which his friend had based upon a study of the English economists, and by his researches into The Condition of the Working Class in England, to both of which works Marx repeatedly turned throughout his life.<sup>1</sup> The political economy of Smith and Ricardo was, of course, in Lenin's celebrated formulation one source and component part of the Marxist doctrine,<sup>2</sup> but the debt runs deeper than this. For England was, in Marx's words, no less than "the classic ground of the capitalist mode of production", and for this reason "...is used as the chief illustration in the development of my theoretical ideas".<sup>3</sup> And thus it was from the "classic ground" of the capitalist system that Marx drew the substance not only of his economic studies, but also for his theories of ideology, social class and class consciousness, and gained much of his experience of working class political organisation.

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1. The "brilliant sketch" was Engels' essay in the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher of 1844 entitled "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy". See also, Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (London 1972 ed.) On this see further David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought (London 1973) 106; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Britain (Moscow 1953) 493.
  2. V. I. Lenin, "The Three Sources and Component Parts of Marxism", reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (London 1968) 23-7.
  3. Karl Marx, Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, i, (London 1970) 8; see further, Anthony Giddens, The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies (London 1973) 144.

The general theoretical model of capitalism explicated in Capital most clearly approximated the English case, and here it was that Marx believed the essential class structure of capitalism to be "...indisputably most highly and classically developed"; if "even here the class structure does not appear in a pure form", the logic of history was tending inexorably in that direction.<sup>4</sup> Thus it may be reasonably surmised that Marx believed the working class would early on develop the socialist class consciousness he held as basic to the transformation of society. We shall need to examine Marx's theory of class consciousness in some detail; at present, it may simply be noted that for Marx the emergence of class consciousness amongst the workers was an essential component of his theory of social class, indicative of the transition from "class" as a mere economic category to "class" as a self-activating and conscious subjectivity - the famous Hegelian klasse für sich. It was, moreover, the conditio sine qua non of successful socialist theory and practice, the transcendence of ideological or false consciousness and the establishment of a socialist, and hence fully rational social order.<sup>5</sup>

In explaining the genesis and development of class consciousness, Marx also drew heavily upon his experience of English capitalist society. Here, all the necessary pre-conditions for socialist consciousness seemed

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4. Karl Marx, Capital, iii, cited by T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, eds., Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (Harmondsworth 1970) 186.

5. For the place of class consciousness in Marx's thought, see for instance, S. Ossowski, Class Structure in the Social Consciousness (London 1963); George Lichtheim, "The Concept of Ideology", History and Theory, V (1965) 174-77; Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Use of 'Class'", American Journal of Sociology, LXIII (1965) 573-80; C. Wright Mills, The Marxists (Harmondsworth 1969) 87-8; Ralph Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (London 1969) 25.

present: a proletarianised labour force, pauperised and immiserised; the triumph of the large scale productive unit; the economic vicissitudes of the classical trade cycle; and strong trade unionism that marked the initial forms of class struggle. In short, Marx's theory of class and class consciousness led him to hope that Britain would be one of the first industrial societies to experience socialist revolution, even if the form of that revolution was in doubt. In the wake of industrial crises Marx was apt to speak as if a total and abrupt social revolution was imminent; but on other occasions both he and Engels were more sanguine in professing to believe that socialism might be attained by peaceful and gradual means - a possibility which the extension of the franchise to the urban workers in 1867 had opened up. <sup>6</sup>

However, the theory stood in want of considerable revision when confronted with the reality of working class political development in England. For, in the decades following 1850, the highest expression of working class consciousness was an exclusive form of craft trade unionism coupled with the demand for Parliamentary representation, which only after Marx's death was to assume more pointedly political form, and then of an extremely limited character. Thus, in their writings and observations on the course of British labour, both Marx and Engels sought to account for what they saw as the historically specific - and hence temporary - obstacles to the development of working class revolutionary potential in this period. Much weight was placed in this connection upon the role of bourgeois ideology in constraining and integrating working class thought. There is then, an important distinction to be drawn between the status of English capitalism in their theoretical writings, and its place in

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6. McLellan, Karl Marx, 444; Henri Lefebvre, The Sociology of Marx (London 1971) 169.



their empirical observations regarding socialism and the working class. An account of Marx and Engels' analysis of British socialism will permit us in what follows to clearly pinpoint the limitations of that theory.

It is integral to much of Marx's social theory that Britain, as the oldest and most fully developed capitalist society, should manifest those tensions and contradictions which would call forth social revolution.<sup>7</sup> Marx and Engels were aware, however, that many obstacles to the progress of socialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century existed, and were themselves a result of Britain's unparalleled economic hegemony and secure capitalist system, although their full significance would not be apparent until after their lifetimes. In particular, they paid due respect to the power of the ruling class and its ideology in "this most bourgeois of all nations".

Marx had paid tribute to the revolutionary part played by the English bourgeoisie in The Communist Manifesto, but both he and Engels recognised that bourgeois economic supremacy was now world wide and founded upon the exploitation of colonies abroad; this power would not be lightly conceded. Ruling class hegemony in England was the stronger for having been premised to some extent upon a fusion of old and new social groupings - the established landed aristocracy and the emergent industrial bourgeoisie - a symbiotic compromise the genesis of which Engels located in the late seventeenth century. Historically, a large section of the landed class "...far from counteracting the development of industrial production, had, on the contrary, sought to indirectly profit thereby", and this tendency had found its expression "...in the continuity of judicial precedents

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7. Giddens, Class Structure of the Advanced Societies, 144-45.

and in the religious preservation of the feudal forms of the law".<sup>8</sup>  
 In like fashion, Marx described the British Constitution as an "...out-of-date, superannuated, obsolete compromise between the bourgeoisie who are not officially but actually ruling in all decisive spheres of bourgeois society, and the landed aristocracy who are governing officially..."<sup>9</sup>

This relative autonomy of state forms in Britain reflected the hegemony of a composite, yet powerful, ruling class. It was in consequence of this fact that Marx and Engels believed bourgeois ideology and forms of mystification to be especially efficacious in diverting the course of the working class movement and divesting it of revolutionary aspirations. Marx, of course, had classically described the stultifying process whereby, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" in his Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,<sup>10</sup> and Engels voiced the same concern in 1890: "In a country with such an old political and labour movement there is always a tremendous heap of traditionally inherited rubbish which has to be got rid of by degrees."<sup>11</sup> Both frequently inveighed against the "apparent bourgeois infection", and the flaccid "bourgeois 'respectability' bred into the bones of the workers...(the working class's) inborn respect for its 'betters' and 'superiors' is so old and firmly established that the bourgeoisie still

8. "Preface" (1892) to Socialism: Utopian and Scientific in Marx and Engels, Selected Works, 389, 391.
9. "The British Constitution" (1855) in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain (Moscow 1971) 221-22.
10. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in Marx and Engels, Selected Works, 97.
11. Engels to H. Schlütter (1890), On Britain (Moscow 1953) 526.

find it pretty easy to get their bait accepted." <sup>12</sup> In 1878, Marx bemoaned the absence of independent class politics among the proletariat since 1848: "The English working class had been generally more and more deeply demoralised...and had at last got to the point when it was nothing more than the tail of the great Liberal Party, i.e. of its oppressors, the capitalists..."; <sup>13</sup> whilst Engels was unequivocal as to the contributive role of evangelical religion in this process: it is, he wrote in 1844, "...made the principal subject of instruction, and the memory of the children overburdened with incomprehensible dogmas and theological distinctions; that sectarian bigotry and hatred are awakened as early as possible, and all rational mental and moral training shamefully neglected." <sup>14</sup> Towards the end of his life, Engels scathingly denounced the strength of bourgeois ideology among the workers to the following effect, <sup>15</sup>

One is indeed driven to despair by these English workers with their sense of imaginary national superiority, with their essentially bourgeois ideas and viewpoints, with their 'practical' narrow-mindedness, and the parliamentary corruption which has seriously infected the leaders.

It is, therefore, to the pernicious and seeping effects of bourgeois ideology in all its aspects - "respectability", religiosity, deference,

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12. Marx to Engels (1863) and Engels to Edward Bernstein (1889), ibid., 493, 522-23.

13. Marx to W. Liebknecht (1878), ibid., 509.

14. The Condition of the Working Class, 141.

15. Engels to G. V. Plekhanov (1894), ibid., 537.

Liberalism, parliamentarianism, and the like - that both Marx and Engels attributed the low level of political consciousness among the workers. The ruling ideas of the bourgeois class were rooted in its specific historical evolution and position of immense economic and political superiority, but a number of factors pre-disposed the working class to accept its ideology. For instance, Marx and Engels were continually distressed to note the antipathy of the English working man, and especially the trade union leadership, to socialist theory. These "thick-headed John Bulls", as Marx contemptuously termed them, were practical men, suspicious of abstruse "continental" socialist doctrine and concerned above all else with the bread and butter issues of trade unionism. One reason for this, as Engels was to labour in the 1880s and 1890s, was the absence of a political party specifically committed to developing and propagating Marxist theory in Britain. Only the Social Democratic Federation made any pretence of being a Marxist body, and even it "...has ossified Marxism into a dogma and...by pursuing the exact opposite of the policy recommended in the Manifesto, it renders itself incapable of ever becoming anything else but a sect." <sup>16</sup> The absence of a critical and coherent socialist theoretical perspective naturally retarded the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness amongst the working class, rendering it subservient to the very categories of bourgeois ideology itself.

Of greater significance were the internal divisions within the working class which fissured any sense of common identity. Marx, for instance, located "the secret of the impotence of the English working class" in the latent antagonism between Irish and the indigenous proletarians. <sup>17</sup>

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16. Engels to Karl Kautsky (1892), ibid., 528.

17. Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt (1870), ibid., 507.

But it is Engels' theory of the "labour aristocracy" which has been held up as the most potent explanation of working class moderation and trade union reformism in the later nineteenth century. Since mid-century, Marx and Engels had observed the comparatively prosperous economic climate sapping socialist vision and leaving the workers content to develop but trade unionism and co-operative ventures along a line of narrow respectability. As early as 1858, Engels had written to Marx to the effect that "...the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois..."<sup>18</sup> By the 1880s it appeared clear to Engels that Marx's notion of a universally immiserised proletariat was untenable, but he hoped to salvage Marx's theoretical analysis of the worsening social position of the working class under capitalism by arguing that there had arisen a working class elite who, feeding upon the crumbs of capitalist prosperity and colonial exploitation, had risen above the impoverished undermass, and had lent a tone of reformism and respectability to the working class movement. In an article which contrasted the position of the workers in 1845 and 1885, Engels observed,<sup>19</sup>

That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of the fact is that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final.

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18. Engels to Marx (1858), ibid., 491-92.

19. "England in 1845 and in 1885", Articles on Britain, 392; part of the article is reprinted as the 1892 "Preface" to The Condition of the Working Class, 27-34.

Although the condition of the factory hands had improved in this period as a result of legislative enactment, Engels argued that it was in those trades "in which the labour of grown-up men predominates" - such as engineering, carpentry and joinery, and the building industry - that there had arisen an aristocracy more prosperous than the rest of the workforce. He added that for "the great mass" of working people below this elite stratum, "...the state of insecurity in which they live is now as low as ever, if not lower." <sup>20</sup>

Engels believed that the emergence of the labour aristocracy was but a temporary consequence of Britain's economic supremacy of the world markets, and he felt its imminent demise was heralded by the resurgence of new unionism and the Independent Labour movement of the industrial north in the 1890s. However, by positing the existence of a small aristocratic stratum able to secure an advantageous position in the labour market by means of apprenticeship regulations and controls over entry into trade, Engels was able to account for the permeation of bourgeois ideas and, in consequence, the existence of non-revolutionary sentiments in the working class movement without abandoning the fundamental Marxist belief in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat.

If Engels initiated the concept of the labour aristocracy in Marxist theory to explain the existence of bourgeois traits and lack of revolutionary ardour among the workers, it was Lenin who wove the idea into a general theory of capitalist development. Writing in 1916, Lenin argued that capitalism had attained monopoly form out of which had

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20. ibid., 392.

developed modern imperialism.<sup>21</sup> Within the home capitalist market, a few firms had become big enough to dominate the market and control prices. They were able to secure "super-profits" at the expense of non-monopoly sectors, and thus looked for outlets abroad where these might be invested at high rates without diluting the home monopoly situation. There is thus a need for overseas investment and the export of capital. Lenin believed that this process generally involves the industrial monopolies in close relationships with the big banks, producing what is called finance capital, and this, in turn, seeks closer association with the state in order to sustain the political conditions propitious to monopoly. Capitalism thus becomes state monopoly capitalism, securing maximal profit returns by means of capital export.

In his Imperialism, Lenin drew heavily upon statistics of British capital exports, although in other respects his theory fits the British case less perfectly. Finance capital, for instance, was essentially a feature of German and, to some extent, American capitalism, and not primarily a British phenomenon where the banks lacked large industrial interests and intervention until the 1930s. Nevertheless, Lenin was unambiguous as to the effects of imperialism in Britain,<sup>22</sup>

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21. V. I. Lenin, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, in Henry M. Christman, ed., The Essential Works of Lenin (New York 1966) 178-270. Discussions of the Leninist theory of imperialism and monopoly capitalism will be found in George Lukacs, Lenin (London 1972) 39-59; Robert Conquest, Lenin (London 1972) 74-8; and Michael Barratt Brown, The Economics of Imperialism (Harmondsworth 1976) 63ff., et. passim.

22. Imperialism, 250-52.



Imperialism...which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, creates the economic possibility of corrupting the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives form to, and strengthens opportunism...Imperialism has the tendency of creating privileged sections even among the workers, and of detaching them from the main proletarian masses.

Lenin thus linked intimately the existence of the labour aristocracy and imperialist "super-profits", by means of which the elite stratum might be weaned away from revolutionary socialism. And thus, "The upper stratum furnishes the main body of co-operators, of trade unionists, of members of sporting clubs and of numerous religious sects"; the "...petty bourgeois craft spirit that prevails among this aristocracy of labour" led in Britain to a rejection of socialism in favour of bourgeois liberalism. The labour aristocracy "...has followed the Liberals, and contemptuously sneers at socialism as a 'utopia'. The Independent Labour Party is precisely the party of Liberal-Labour politics." <sup>23</sup>

The existence of a labour aristocracy founded upon and nurtured by conditions of capitalist imperialism cannot but be according to Lenin a fertile breeding ground for bourgeois ideas amongst the workers. Lacking that critical socialist awareness which he believed could only be brought by intellectuals from without, and implanted within the working class, the labour movement in Britain was thus easy prey for "economistic" beliefs, the inevitable concomitant of "spontaneism". For Lenin, "...any worship of the spontaneity of the labour movement, any belittling of the role of the 'conscious element'...means ipso facto...the strengthening of the influence of the bourgeois ideology upon the workers." <sup>24</sup> Rooted in a century of world economic supremacy and the creation of an aristocracy

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23. ibid., 251; V. I. Lenin, British Labour and British Imperialism (London 1969) 99.

24. V. I. Lenin, What is to be Done? in Christman, ed., Essential Works of Lenin, 88-9 (emphasis in original)

of labour, bourgeois ideas - including the ideology of imperialism and chauvinistic fervour itself - became "spontaneously" a part of the make-up of working class psychology and, in consequence, a reformist and economistic orientation the "natural", if only because the obvious and practical, policy. Unless "the conscious element" be present, the spontaneous slope of the political and economic landscape will tend to make the labour movement slip towards reformism, for "...the spontaneous development of the labour movement leads precisely to its subordination to the bourgeois ideology".<sup>25</sup> For Lenin, the British labour movement was of this precise nature, reinforcing his belief that "...the working class, solely by its own forces, is able to work out merely trade union consciousness..."<sup>26</sup>

In accounting for the absence of a mass revolutionary movement in Britain by reference to the economism of the labour aristocratic stratum, Lenin had implicitly abandoned Engels' view that it was but a temporary phenomenon, for the labour aristocracy would remain so long as it might profit from colonial exploitation. With Lenin, the concept becomes a major tool in the Marxist analysis of British socialism.

Antonio Gramsci and Leon Trotsky were among the more astute and prescient students of the British labour movement within the classical Marxist tradition, and their contributions should not go unnoticed here. Both were concerned to explore and develop further the analysis of bourgeois ideology initiated by Marx and Engels, often in a radically novel and penetrative fashion.

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25. ibid., 90; for a treatment of this question which closely follows Lenin, see Eric Hobsbawm, "Trends in the British Labour Movement since 1850", in idem., Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London 1972) 316-43.

26. ibid., 80.

Antonio Gramsci's concern with the place of culture and consciousness in the historical process, with the nature of ideological hegemony and the role of intellectuals in transmitting the dominant culture, is well known.<sup>27</sup> His use of the term "hegemony" is clearly brought out in a celebrated letter written from prison in 1931 where he contrasts "'political' society (in other words, dictatorship, or an apparatus of coercion to control the masses of the people in accordance with the mode of production and the economic system prevailing at a given period)", and "'civil' society (i.e. the hegemony of a social group over the entire society of a nation, a hegemony exercised by means of and through the organisations commonly called private, such as the Church, the Trade Unions, the Schools, etc.)"<sup>28</sup> According to Gramsci, "the sphere in which the intellectuals mostly operate is that of 'civil' society",<sup>29</sup> and the ideological hegemony they propagate is not so much "repressive" but has a "positive" function

27. Gramsci's writings available in English are most conveniently to be found in Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, eds., The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (London 1971) and Lynn Lawner, ed., Letters from Prison (London 1975). Useful commentaries germane to the present discussion include Gwyn A. Williams, "Gramsci's Concept of Egemonia", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXI (1960) 586-99; Alberto Martinelli, "In Defence of Dialectic: Gramsci's Theory of Revolution", Berkely Journal of Sociology, XIII (1968); John Merrington, "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism", in R. Miliband and J. Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1968 (London 1968) 145-76; Carl Boggs, "Gramsci's Prison Notebooks", Socialist Revolution, (Sept-Oct. 1972) and (Nov. Dec. 1972); J. Fermia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", Political Studies, XXIII (1975) 29-48. A recent critical essay by Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", New Left Review, 100 (1976-77) 5-78, is addressed to a number of the issues discussed here.

28. Letter of 7 September 1931, reprinted in the "Gramsci Edition" of the New Edinburgh Review, 1975, 47.

29. ibid., 47.

insofar as it actually represents common interests and establishes a matrix of societal values and a normative order. He distinguished between "organic" intellectuals, who are fairly directly related to the economic and political structure and are closely tied to the class they represent, giving it "...homogeneity and awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields";<sup>30</sup> and "traditional" intellectuals, the remnants of a previous social formation, such as scholars, artists and the clergy. Whilst the traditional intellectuals do not necessarily share the outlook of the ruling class, they will usually effect a compromise with it.

Consciously or otherwise, the intellectuals will propagate ideas and ways of thinking that are essentially conservative in their implications. To the extent that the bourgeoisie is able to effect a widespread cultural hegemony, Gramsci argued that popular struggles will be confined to the "economic-corporate", rather than the oppositionally hegemonic plane. For, unless critically challenged, the only ideas capable of becoming generally accepted and institutionalised in social life are those which serve the interests of the dominant or "rising" (bourgeois) social classes. The precise nature of ideological hegemony in a society thus becomes critical for an appreciation of the forms of working class organisation; as Gramsci observed of trade unionism, it is "a type of proletarian organisation specific to the period when capital dominates history...an integral part of capitalist society..."<sup>31</sup> and, as such, permeated by the prevailing hegemonic values.

30. "The Formation of the Intellectuals", in Prison Notebooks, 5.

31. Gramsci writing in L'Ordine Nuovo (Turin 1919-20). A selection of these articles have been reprinted in New Left Review, 51, (1968) 28-58 (from which the above quotation is taken). For a discussion of Gramsci's analysis of trade unionism, see Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (London 1971) 43-6; see further Perry Anderson, "The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action", in R. Blackburn and A. Cockburn, eds., The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus (Harmondsworth 1967) 263-80.

In this respect, the trajectory assumed by the bourgeois revolution in Britain, the structure of its ruling groups and ideologico-hegemonic control, is of supreme significance. Following Engels, Gramsci argued that in the British situation "...we have a similar phenomenon to the German, one of fusion between the old and the new...The old aristocracy remained as a governing stratum, with certain privileges, and it too became the intellectual stratum of the English bourgeoisie..."<sup>32</sup> Although there existed an extensive category of organic intellectuals tied to the capitalist class, this social group "...shows a remarkable economic-corporate development but advances only gropingly in the intellectual-political field."<sup>33</sup> In "the higher sphere", the "feudal" landowning nobility retained much of its supremacy:<sup>34</sup>

It loses its economic supremacy but maintains for a long time a politico-intellectual supremacy and is assimilated as 'traditional intellectuals' and as directive group by the new group in power. The old landowning aristocracy is joined to the industrialists by a kind of suture which is precisely that which in other countries unites the traditional intellectuals with the new dominant classes

By reference to Britain's specific social and cultural-intellectual formation, Gramsci is able to account for the "directive" social role of bourgeois hegemony. The bourgeois class, intimately intertwined with the landowners did not, to any significant extent, lead popular struggles against the remnants of feudal privilege; instead, "...the nobility (or a fraction of it) formed the national-popular bloc first against the Crown and later against the industrial bourgeoisie. English tradition of a popular "Toryism" (Disraeli, etc.)".<sup>35</sup> But the larger part of this

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32. Prison Notebooks, 83.

33. ibid., 18.

34. ibid., 18.

35. ibid., 216.

fused social grouping stood overwhelmingly dominant against the subordinate class, in both economic and politico-intellectual terms, <sup>36</sup>

...the landowners and the industrialists have permanent interests which bind them together...; and it is undeniable that the landowners are 'politically' far better organised than the industrialists, attract more intellectuals than they do, are more 'permanent' in the directives they give, etc.

It should not be assumed, however, that working class thought within a hegemonic bourgeois culture is for Gramsci inevitably relegated to "corporate" standing. Rather the contrary, for the very basis of his socialist theory and strategy lay in the belief that working class consciousness might advance and develop at several levels within bourgeois society. Few Marxists have been as ready as Gramsci to accord a creative role to social consciousness and ideas and to recognise the varied forms - the "...more or less bizarre combinations..." - which working class thought might display. Anxious to avoid reducing consciousness to the material basis of society, Gramsci argued that before the working class could become directive in society, or, what amounts to the same thing, develop a socialist perspective, "the war of position" - a protracted "organic" struggle - would be necessary. By this, Gramsci seems to have had in mind a sustained cultural-ideological and educative process whereby an alternative proletarian counter-hegemony would be created. <sup>37</sup> Without prior success in the "war of position" on the cultural front, a seizure of state power would prove only transitory, if not disastrous. In short, it was both possible and necessary for the workers to advance their comprehension and consciousness within bourgeois society. In his prison

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36. ibid., 156.

37. For a discussion of the concept of "war of position", see Anderson, "Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", 55ff.



notebooks, he puts forward the thesis that the proletariat "...can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' (i.e. hegemony) before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power)." <sup>38</sup> For Gramsci, a mass Communist Party working through its own organic intellectuals and building upon popular ideas and conceptions was central to this struggle for an oppositional and totalistic mentality.

Britain lacked just such a mass - or "totalitarian" - oppositional party. Here Gramsci detected an all-pervasive cultural hegemony which saturated the social formation, founded upon the remarkable economic development of the bourgeoisie and the "directive" role of a "'bourgeois aristocracy' tied to certain functions of civil society and of political society (the State) - concerning tradition, the education of the ruling stratum, the preservation of a particular mentality which protects the system from sudden upheavals..." <sup>39</sup> Against this, and in the absence of a popular Communist Party with its own organic intellectuals, working class organisation and thought in Britain could advance but hesitatingly beyond the economic-corporate plane.

As with Gramsci, Leon Trotsky was at pains to account for those aspects of British development which had inhibited the emergence of a mass revolutionary movement, and he too placed much stress upon "the political development of England [ which ] presents remarkable peculiarities, the result of all its past history, which now lie directly in the way of its future growth." <sup>40</sup>

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38. Prison Notebooks, 57, 108-10, 229-39, 243; Anderson, "Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", 45ff.

39. Prison Notebooks, 216.

40. Leon Trotsky, "Where is Britain Going?", in George Novack, ed., Leon Trotsky on Britain (New York 1973) 26.



In Marx and Engels' lifetimes, it had seemed likely that Britain's economic headstart would the sooner yield to socialist transformation. By 1925 however, Trotsky was able to perceive that, "The historical dialectical process in this connection has played a sorry trick on England, in transferring the advantages of her early development into the causes for her present backwardness."<sup>41</sup> He noted that the oldest and most secure capitalist nation, in which the peasantry had early on been expelled from history, had achieved world-wide economic supremacy in the second half of the nineteenth century. In consequence of this fact, "...the British bourgeoisie became...the richest, strongest, and most enlightened of the bourgeoisies."<sup>42</sup> Bourgeois rationalization had been "organic" and gradual, cloaked beneath a profoundly mystifying veil: "The British bourgeoisie developed under the protection of ancient institutions", wrote Trotsky in 1924, "on the one hand adapting itself to them and on the other subjugating them to itself, gradually, organically, 'in an evolutionary way'".<sup>43</sup>

A history of economic pre-eminence had given rise in Britain to a supremely secure and confident ruling class; in addition, "a temporary combination of historical forces" attendant upon this development helps explain "the incongruity between Britain's capitalist development and her socialist movement."<sup>44</sup> Trotsky took over Engels' and Lenin's concept of the labour aristocracy to announce that "...Britain's early

41. ibid., 61.

42. "Through What Stage are We Passing?", (1924) in R. Chappell and Alan Clinton, eds., Trotsky's Writings on Britain, i (London 1974) 20.

43. ibid., 20.

44. "War and the International" (1914), in Writings on Britain, 14.

entry onto the path of capitalist development and world robbery...created a privileged position not only for her bourgeoisie but also for a section of her working class." <sup>45</sup> Due to her insular location, large-scale military expenditure had been unnecessary in Britain. The "...bourgeoisie skilfully utilized these conditions in order to separate the top layer from the bottom strata, creating an aristocracy of 'skilled' labour and instilling into it a trade union cast of spirit." <sup>46</sup> In a word, "...thanks to Britain's early capitalist development her bourgeoisie disposed of resources that enabled them systematically to counteract the proletarian revolution." <sup>47</sup>

It was this position of unparalleled might that had permitted the British ruling class to elaborate an ideology of "gradualness". They had been uniquely able, according to Trotsky, to export much of the violence of their imperialist plunder and thus create the illusion of pacificism in domestic social relations. The result was nothing less than a profoundly conservative and stultifying bourgeois culture with which the trade union leadership and labour aristocracy were equally imbued: <sup>48</sup>

[Britain] exploited the whole world. This softened the inner contradictions, accumulated conservatism, promoted an abundance and stability of fatty deposits in the form of a

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45. ibid., 14.

46. ibid., 14.

47. "Thoughts on the Progress of the Proletarian Revolution" (1919) in Writings on Britain, 15.

48. The History of the Russian Revolution (1931), ch. 6, in Writings on Britain, 6.

parastic caste, in the form of a squirearchy, monarchy, House of Lords, and the State Church. Thanks to this exclusive historic privilege of development possessed by bourgeois England, conservatism combined with elasticity passed over from her institutions into her moral fibre.

Trotsky dwelt at length upon the forms of bourgeois ideology in Britain. The "inevitability of gradualness" and the ideology of pacificism and optimism were taken over uncritically by the working class and even the "socialists" of the Labour Party and the Fabian Society.<sup>49</sup> The inherent religiosity of bourgeois culture - "...the old dense web of hypocrisy and clerical prejudices..." - permeated the psychology of the working class and its representatives:<sup>50</sup>

The mentality of a present day British trade union leader is a mixture of the religious and social prejudices of the period of the restoration of St. Paul's Cathedral, the practical skill of a trade union official at the height of capitalist development, the snobbishness of a petty bourgeois fighting to be respectable, and the uneasy conscience of a labour politician who has repeatedly betrayed the workers.

Traditions and prejudices, "...old rags, rubbish, the refuse of centuries...",<sup>51</sup> were thus used by the ruling class to dampen the critical faculties of the workers, whilst "the close psychological web" of capitalist morality and philosophy served to mystify exploitative social relations. Insularity and empiricism informed social thought, dulling socialist inquiry:<sup>52</sup>

[Britain] advanced by groping empirically, looking ahead and generalizing as to her part only when absolutely

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49. "Where is Britain Going?", 37-53, et. passim.

50. Between Red and White (1921), in Writings on Britain, 16.

51. Writings on Britain, 24.

52. "Where is Britain Going?", 61.

necessary. The traditional cast of mind of the Englishman, particularly of the English bourgeois, is impressed with the seal of empiricism, and this same tradition was passed on to the upper layers of the working class. Empiricism became a tradition and a banner; it was combined with a contemptuous attitude for the 'abstract' thought of the Continent.

Although Trotsky believed these factors to be but temporary historical phenomena, contingent upon Britain's imperialist monopoly, there can be little doubt as to the deeply pessimistic analysis of British socialism at which the classical Marxist tradition had arrived. The thrust of that analysis had shifted since the death of Marx towards emphasising the enormous obstacles which Britain's historical evolution, forms of bourgeois thought and the structure of her working class had placed in the path of revolutionary class consciousness. These Marxists continued to believe, however, that the seeds of socialist revolt lay germinating amongst the mass of the workers, even if "the ossified consciousness of a collective Henderson and a hydra-headed Mrs. Snowden" <sup>53</sup> remained at this point in time the highest expression of working class reformism.

### 3.2: Contemporary Marxist Analyses

In seeking to account for the course of the labour movement and British socialism, latter day Marxists have elaborated upon several aspects of the classical analysis. First, the concept of the labour aristocracy has been subjected to critical review by a number of scholars in recent years, most notably Eric Hobsbawn and John Foster. Secondly, the determinate form of the bourgeois revolution in this country and its

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53. Writings on Britain, 16.

impact upon the working class movement has been emphasised, within the context of a general study of Marxist class theory, by Nicos Poulanzas. Finally, Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn have endeavoured to map out a "totalistic" Marxist theory of British society and culture, as one aspect of which the socialist tradition might be considered.

As an explanation for the liberal and reformist tenor of the British working class movement, the concept of a labour aristocracy has, of late, become common currency in Marxist analysis, although it was not until 1954 that a more rigorous definition than that provided by either Engels or Lenin was offered. In that year, Eric Hobsbawn's celebrated article "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain"<sup>54</sup> proposed six different criteria which, at least theoretically, demarcated the aristocratic stratum: these were, "the level and regularity of a worker's earnings"; "his prospects of social security"; "his conditions of work"; "his relations with the social classes above and below him"; "his general conditions of living"; and "his prospects of further advancement".<sup>55</sup> Of these, "...the first is incomparably the most important...", and Hobsbawn thereafter relies mainly upon wage data to identify the labour aristocrats. On this basis the aristocracy of labour may be said to merge imperceptibly with the lower middle class: "Indeed the term 'lower middle class' was sometimes used to include the aristocracy of labour"; but, "If the boundaries of the labour aristocracy were fluid on one side of its territory, they were precise on another. An 'artisan' or 'craftsman' was not under any circumstances to be confused with a labourer."<sup>56</sup>

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54. Eric Hobsbawn, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain", in Labouring Men, 272-315.

55. ibid., 273.

56. ibid., 273, 275.

According to Hobsbawn's calculations, the "classical period" of the labour aristocracy fell between the 1840s and the 1890s, in which years it comprised approximately the upper 10% of the labour community. It was thus more or less coincidental with the membership of the 'old' and new model trade unions, and had been reinforced by the growth of the metal industries during this half-century. The shading-over of the aristocratic stratum into the higher social groups is important for Hobsbawn's argument, for this helps to account for its political beliefs: "Thus its persistent liberal-radicalism in the nineteenth century is easily understood, as also is its failure to form an independent working class party." <sup>57</sup> Hobsbawn identifies those industries which contained a high proportion of well paid workers - such as engineering, shipbuilding and iron and steel trades, cotton, building, cabinet-making and the printing and hosiery industries - and asserts that, with only one or two partial exceptions, the trade unions in these sectors were the most "respectable" and had unbrokenly conservative records: "Indeed, the political and economic positions of the labour aristocrats reflect one another with uncanny accuracy." <sup>58</sup> Few "aristocratic" unions joined the Labour Representation Committee in its early years, although sections of this stratum "...began to feel the competition of machinery and the threat of down-grading" <sup>59</sup> and were progressively radicalised as the gap between them and the lower middle class widened in the years prior to 1914.

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57. ibid., 274.

58. ibid., 287.

59. ibid., 289.

Hobsbawn's contribution undoubtedly provided an important clarification, and much substantiating material in support of the labour aristocracy thesis, although the weight of his argument is ultimately made to rest almost entirely upon the evidence of wage differentials. In this respect, recent work by a number of Marxist-inclined scholars is highly pertinent. Royden Harrison's study of the history of the artisanal and craft dominated Reform League during the political agitations of the mid-1860s has highlighted that aspect of the labour aristocracy argument concerned with the relationships between strictly political organisation and initiative and the development of capitalist employment structures;<sup>60</sup> and V.L. Allen has pointed to the importance of the "arbitration craze" of the 1860s and '70s as a crucial mechanism of "respectability" and "accommodation."<sup>61</sup> It is, however, in the work of John Foster that the most imaginative and sustained treatment of the theory is to be located. In a scholarly study of mid-nineteenth century Oldham,<sup>62</sup> Foster has sought to demonstrate the emergence of a labour aristocracy in the cotton spinning, coal mining and engineering industries upon the basis of changes in authority relationships at the point of production - an important variable which Hobsbawn recognised but singularly failed to elaborate upon.

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60. Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) 1-39, 78-136.

61. V. L. Allen, "The Origins of Industrial conciliation and Arbitration", International Review of Social History, IX (1964) 237-54.

62. John Foster, Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English Towns (London 1974).



Foster's analysis of the labour aristocracy forms part of a wider account of the process of re-stabilisation and "liberalisation" in mid-Victorian England. He presents a wealth of documentation which suggests that, prior to 1850, a "revolutionary class consciousness" was present amongst radicals in Oldham, the result particularly of the great crisis in the cotton industry between 1830-47. Two factors are held to account for the transmutation of this militant outlook into the restricted reformism of mid-Victorian society. The immediate factor precipitating working class defeat was a liberalizing response on the part of the local bourgeoisie which successfully fractured the proletarian dominated radical alliance of the later 1840s.<sup>63</sup> Secondaly, a re-establishment and re-orientation of the capitalist economy occurred; and the major feature of this solidified social structure was the emergence of the labour aristocracy and the panoply of cultural institutions which supported it.

Foster identifies the aristocracy of labour with the growing use of sub-contracting and pace-making which followed the elimination of craft controls, and this is seen as a fundamentally new form of capitalist social discipline, now operative within the working class and at the place of production itself, rather than externally imposed upon the labour community as a whole. For the engineering, cotton and coal mining industries, Foster describes the process whereby craft control was replaced by the emergence of a stratum of workers who acted as pace-makers on behalf of their employers; in cotton spinning, for example, the mule spinners and adult male carders gained enhanced authority over the unskilled grades in the industry, radically polarising the two sections of the workforce. Foster's usage of the concept of an aristocracy of labour thus implicitly

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63. ibid., chs. 6-7.

rejects Engels' identification of the privileged stratum with that part of the trade union movement which retained its craft status and autonomy. For Foster, the process was most clearly evidenced in the cotton and engineering trades, both of which "...show the development of a stratum of production workers exercising authority on behalf of the management." <sup>64</sup> By the 1860s, about one third of all workers in engineering and about one third of all male workers in cotton were acting as task-masters over the rest of the workforce.

The labour aristocratic stratum was buttressed by a distinct web of cultural associations which fissured the old monolithic labour sub-culture. A matrix of social institutions - adult education, temperance, co-operative societies, Methodist chapels, and the like - cocooned the aristocrat, closing off social intercourse with the rest of the working population beneath him. As Foster observes, "...what one seems to have are two mutually exclusive groupings with all the authority systems concentrated round the smaller one and no apparent connection between the two." <sup>65</sup> The creation of a privileged grade and its cultural isolation was thus the key element in social stabilization and control, and the deflection of the working class movement from its revolutionary path.

There can be little doubt that this subtle and complex argument represents a qualitative advance in the analysis of the aristocracy of labour around mid-century. More recently, however, Foster has attempted to trace "the active historical development which the labour aristocracy underwent" in the subsequent half century and in this period has detected

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64. ibid., 237; for a similar treatment of the labour aristocracy argued around the theme of authority structures, see Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976) 3, 42.

65. ibid., 223.

a shift in its essential nature.<sup>66</sup> If capitalist ideological control had been re-established by mid-century, the working class nevertheless continued to make advances organisationally. The possibility of militant class action and politics remained ever-present, and even "...the institutions of the labour aristocracy did incorporate some aspects of class power."<sup>67</sup> When market conditions changed in the 1870s and 1880s, with the growing threat of foreign competition and the unionization of sections of the unskilled, there arose "...the possibility of trade unions acting as general instruments of class unity."<sup>68</sup> Locally, employers turned their attention away from the wider issue of social control to the more pressing need to maintain levels of profitability; in addition, the growth of employers' associations, semi-skilled work and cyclical unemployment, "...did much to break down the commitment of individual skilled workers to the culture and authority of their employers."<sup>69</sup>

As a militant working class movement began to arise in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a new ruling class intervention became necessary, "a second line of defence now that the device of bribing a whole stratum 'through the market' was becoming both economically difficult and politically unreliable;"<sup>70</sup>

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66. John Foster, "British Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy", in Jeffrey Skelley, ed., The General Strike 1926 (London 1976) 17.

67. ibid., 19.

68. ibid., 19.

69. ibid., 19.

70. ibid., 20.

Put briefly, the answer was to add a set of bribes that bypassed the market and went direct from the state or employers to (or through) trade union leaders and politicians. These were thus able to reach all organised workers, including those in unskilled unions...

Bourgeois control was thus reinforced in the closing decades of the century but now, according to Foster, effected organisationally through the trade union and labour leadership to embrace the whole of the organised working class. "The bribe" handed out to the aristocracy of labour was now to be distributed through a new breed of reformist politicians, through the institutions of the "Welfare State" and through Fabian-type municipalization and social imperialism -- "the direct expression of the labour aristocracy at this stage in its development." <sup>71</sup> Foster summarises the shift in the labour aristocracy as follows: <sup>72</sup>

The labour aristocracy, as a means of control, was quite different from what it had been fifty years before. Always associated with trade union organisation, and to this extent incorporating the gains of previous struggle, it had been compelled to move forward from simply manipulating the sectional bargaining power of the unionized elite to manipulating trade union organisation itself: from selective bribing 'through the market' to blanket control through bureaucracy

Bourgeois social control remained in working order through the organisations of the aristocracy of labour, and only after the First World War did the fabric of control begin to give way.

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71. ibid., 21.

72. ibid., 24.

Nicos Poulanzas has sought to enhance Marx's theory of bourgeois development by introducing the notions of "dislocation" and "uneven development" in historical analysis and, by reference to the specific trajectory of the British social structure, he suggests that the nature of the working class movement may be better comprehended.<sup>73</sup> Poulanzas argues that the genesis of the capitalist mode of production, and hence bourgeois rationalization, may be traced back to the capitalization of ground rents by a fraction of the landed nobility in the seventeenth century. Economically, this permitted the open and almost completely successful domination of the capitalist mode of production in the social formation, particularly in the countryside, if on the political plane leadership of the process had been assumed by "a fraction of the land-owning bourgeoisie which was already on the way to establishing its independence from the feudal nobility."<sup>74</sup>

There may be detected here an instance of "dislocation". The economic domination of the bourgeoisie as a whole proceeded under the aegis of the political rule of a fraction of the landed nobility, itself the nucleus of the industrial bourgeoisie. In 1832 the "commercial and ground-rent owning bourgeoisie obtained the hegemony of the power bloc;" however,<sup>75</sup>

...the ensemble of the process meant that the bourgeoisie first gained an appearance on the political scene by obtaining power through the intermediary of the nobility, who represented the owners of ground-rent and the commercial bourgeoisie. Later on...it was represented by the Whigs, the owners of ground-rent who acted as the bourgeoisie's intermediary

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73. Nicos Poulanzas, Political Power and Social Classes (London 1976), particularly 168-73, 183-4.

74. ibid., 169.

75. ibid., 171.

A dislocation is thus apparent between the "feudal" forms of the state and the economic and juridical systems which enshrined capitalist property relations. The bourgeois revolution is expressed in "...the domination of economic power over political power...The result of all this is that the success of the revolution in Britain is characteristically masked and appears to have miscarried on the political plane." 76

The particular features of the bourgeois revolution in Britain, argues Poulanzas, had serious ideological repercussions on the working class movement, for: "The working class can so rarely escape having to live according to the mode imposed by the dominant ideology..." 77 The danger lies in its effects upon working class politics, the "...dangers of specific deformations lying in wait for revolutionary theory; as a number of temptations, as it were, to the working class to imitate the revolutions of its national bourgeois class." 78 Accordingly, the defining features of the British working class movement are corporatist, the clearest expression of which is trade unionism; priority is thus accorded to the economic level at the expense of the political struggle aimed at seizing state power.

Perry Anderson's seminal article "Origins of the Present Crisis" initiated an ambitious attempt from within certain neo-Marxist quarters to map out a "totalizing" and structural analysis of British society and culture, which would itself provide the launching point for contemporary socialist theory and tactics. 79 In a number of follow up studies, both

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76. ibid., 173.

77. ibid., 183.

78. ibid., 183.

79. Perry Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", New Left Review, 23 (1964) 26-53.

Anderson and Tom Nairn have elaborated upon the basic model presented in that article, on aspect of which has been to situate the socialist tradition within this over-all Marxist schema.<sup>80</sup>

British capitalist hegemony has proved, according to Anderson, "...the most powerful, the most durable and the most continuous anywhere in the world",<sup>81</sup> and three overwhelming features of British history are held to explain this fact. First, the bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century was "impure", having been fought essentially within, rather than between, classes. Typically bourgeois rationalization was but "a bourgeois revolution only by proxy", led by the landed aristocracy underpinned by mercantile capital. This dynamic agrarian capitalism revolutionised society but "left almost the entire social structure in tact"; capitalism was thus initiated and carried through by the "feudal" classes without need of a militant bourgeois ideology.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, the nascent industrial bourgeoisie was early on predisposed to accept the rule of a fundamentally capitalist aristocracy, and, "The most important single key to modern English history lies in this fact."<sup>83</sup> Reconciled to a "feudal" state and threatened from within by working class organisation

80. Tom Nairn, "The British Political Elite", New Left Review, 23 (1964) 19-25; "The English Working Class", New Left Review, 24 (1964) 43-57 and reprinted in Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science (London 1972) 187-206; "The Nature of the Labour Party", New Left Review, 27 (1964) 38-65, and 28 (1964) 33-62; Perry Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties", New Left Review, 29 (1965) 3-18; Tom Nairn, "Labour Imperialism", New Left Review, 32 (1965) 3-15; Perry Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo-Empricism", New Left Review, 35 (1966) 2-42; "Components of the National Culture", New Left Review, 50 (1968) 3-57; Tom Nairn, "The Fateful Meridian", New Left Review, 60 (1970) 3-35.

81. "Origins of the Present Crisis", 28. .

82. ibid., 29-30.

83. ibid., 31.



and the subversive ideals of the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie gained partial victories in 1832 and 1846 before there occurred "a deliberate, systematised symbiosis of the two classes"; "...mesmerised by the prestige and authority of the landed class", the bourgeoisie succumbed to its hegemonic vision. Finally, the imperialist era of late century provided the crucial astringent, welding the bourgeoisie and aristocracy together into a single social bloc. Imperialism "...gave its characteristic style to a whole society...its typical mode of leadership...Its explicit ideological expressions...in this period merely serve to suggest how deeply acclimatised English culture became to the ambiance of Empire." <sup>84</sup>

The roots of English culture and ideology - an "immensely elastic and all-embracing" bourgeois hegemony - whose very parameters delimit and define the nature of class consciousness in that society, lie in this specific historical context. The social relations of British society are characterised by a seemingly feudal hierarchy of orders and ranks, deference and tradition, and a profound and seductive mythology of "natural subordination" of which Burke was the clearest exponent. The ideology of bourgeois hegemony is both deeply mystifying and antithetical to socialist theory. Nairn speaks of, <sup>85</sup>

English separateness and provincialism; English backwardness and traditionalism; English religiosity and moralistic vapouring: paltry English "empiricism", or instinctive distrust of reason - all these features which...may appear as 'defects' or 'distortions' of bourgeois development in England, were in reality hammered together into a specific form of bourgeois hegemony during the infancy of the working class.

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84. ibid., 34-5.

85. "The English Working Class", in Ideology in Social Science, 193.

And Anderson has similarly written of bourgeois culture,<sup>86</sup>

The two great chemical elements of the blanketing English fog are 'traditionalism' and 'empiricism'; in it, visibility - of any social or historical reality - is always zero.

Bourgeois hegemony thus subjugates working class consciousness and limits it to corporate expression. Moreover, the bourgeoisie itself, acquiescing in the tutelage of a rationalizing landed aristocracy, did not, and indeed could not, produce its own articulated ideology. There was absent in Britain a militant bourgeois "Jacobin" ideology, and in consequence the bourgeoisie's "practical struggles were necessarily conducted in terms of a pre-Enlightenment philosophy, a religious world-view unequal to what was at stake...its own limited, parochial Enlightenment in the shape of political economy and Utilitarianism...English feudalism and would-be absolutism were swept away without the fire of Jacobinism."<sup>87</sup> The impact of this ideological deformation on the working class was profound, for: "Given the time and circumstances of its birth, this class was fated to repeat, in certain respects, the historical development of the English bourgeoisie itself."<sup>88</sup> In short, the bourgeoisie bequeathed no coherent, revolutionary world-view to the working class, but a parochial and pre-Enlightenment tradition. "In England, a supine bourgeoisie produced a subordinate proletariat", observes Anderson: "It handed on no impulse of liberation, no revolutionary values, no universal language. Instead, it transmitted the deadly germs of Utilitarianism..."<sup>89</sup>

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86. "Origins of the Present Crisis", 40.

87. Nairn, "The English Working Class", 189-90.

88. ibid., 188.

89. "Origins of the Present Crisis", 43.

The specific development of the working class meant that it was bypassed by socialist theory. In one sense it was premature, its early struggles pre-dating socialist theory proper. Savagely repressed, the workers had no option but to turn inwards upon themselves, producing a dense working class sub-culture of but limited corporate vision. The defeat of Chartism occasioned thirty years of working class passivity, a "...profound caesura in English working class history supervened," during which time this social and cultural apartheid was reinforced.<sup>90</sup> In another sense the working class was too late to be touched by socialism: "It was not until the 1880s that the working class really began to recover from the traumatic defeat of the 1840s. By then the world had moved on. In consciousness and combativity, the English working class had been overtaken...Marxism had missed it."<sup>91</sup> A further peculiarity of English history compounded this failure: the absence of an autonomous intelligensia, both willing and able to forge ties with the working class, and impart to it a sense of theoretical perspective.<sup>92</sup>

In this determinate historical pattern may be located the narrow reformism and non-revolutionary aspirations of British socialism - the "labourist" tradition. "Something of the mindless complacency of British bourgeois society was in this way transmitted to British socialism... Its empirical, undoctrinaire origins, the thoroughly indigenous nature of all its roots, signify a particularly intimate bond with the society that gave birth to it."<sup>93</sup> For Nairn, British labourism reflects its

90. ibid., 33.

91. ibid., 36.

92. See for instance Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", reprinted in Alexandre Cockburn and R. Blackburn, eds., Student Power (Harmondsworth 1969) 255-29.

93. Nairn, "Nature of the Labour Party", 39.

its trade union origins, corporate in vision and labour aristocratic in composition. Fabian socialism, the intellectual core of the working class movement, was but "...derived Utilitarianism and the timid and dreary species of bourgeois rationalism embraced by the British industrial middle class during the industrial revolution.<sup>94</sup> The essentially evolutionary and Parliamentary beliefs of the working class movement mirror, therefore, the dominant strains of bourgeois ideology,<sup>95</sup>

The overpowering conservatism of British society, deeply embedded in the working class itself and now aggravated by imperialism; the failure of the intellectuals to attack this conservatism and provide the basis of a genuine 'British socialism'; the slow evolution of all socialist ideas and the corresponding movement, in isolation from the movements in other European countries, leading to the dominance of the unions and their prudent economic philosophy - all these things brought about the 'second best' solution of labourism.

### 3.3: Sociological Theory and Working Class Belief

The notion that society may be held to comprise a range of class differentiated normative systems is fundamental to much sociological inquiry.<sup>96</sup> A variety of recent sociological theories which bear - albeit tangentially in certain instances - upon the question of British socialism here under consideration share this assumption. To this extent it is possible to detect the influence of the Marxist approach, but on the whole they arrive at a more sophisticated conceptualisation of "working class consciousness". The theories are premised around the notions of an "integrated", "incorporated" or "subordinated" working class in British society.

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94. ibid., 44.

95. ibid., 48.

96. See for instance, Herbert H. Hyman, "The Value Systems of the Different Classes", in R. Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipsett, eds., Class, Status and Power (Glencoe 1953) 488-99.

David Martin and Colin Crouch have recently situated a brief account of socialism and working class incorporation within a wider analysis of the British class structure.<sup>97</sup> Four factors are held to account for "the relatively unperturbed co-existence of a stable social hierarchy and a capacity for flexibility and reform" within the class structure: "the British tradition of institutionalised compromise"; an early and less ideologically total revolution; the gradual process of industrialisation; and the social assimilation of the industrial to the landed classes.<sup>98</sup> In consequence of these factors, "changes were forthcoming from the Establishment itself: the rivals of socialism put forward attractive alternatives or eventually acquiesced in many of its achievements."<sup>99</sup> Martin and Crouch's analysis of the class structure thus points to "the combined conservatism and flexibility of British society."<sup>100</sup> The working class movement in Britain has operated within this profoundly conservative context, much of which has rubbed off upon it. The twin pillars of British working class conservatism, they suggest, are to be located in the existence of a flexible elite in society, "usually ready in the long run to concede whatever is necessary to its continued existence..."; and an integrated working class, acquiescing in the overall operation of the political system, inherently deferential and with but little awareness of its own relative deprivation. The nature of British socialism is thus intimately affined to the social structure and its central value system,<sup>101</sup>

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97. David Martin and Colin Crouch, "England", in Margaret S. Archer and Salvador Giner, eds., Contemporary Europe: Class, Status and Power (London 1971) 241-78.

98. ibid., 242-44.

99. ibid., 243.

100. ibid., 268.

101. ibid., 271-72.

It is quite wrong to suggest that English socialism derives from a betrayal of proletarian revolution by its leadership: that leadership is the direct expression of a cultural tradition compounded of liberalism, religious dissent, and a pragmatic temper that rejects all total ideologies and utopian changes for whatever localized gains are to be had.

Anthony Giddens' work upon The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies has also sought to relate the nature of the British labour movement to the specific character of class development.<sup>102</sup> For Giddens, the fundamental question in the development of advanced capitalism is why class struggle has remained at the economic level of trade union activity, rather than aspiring to the political dimension of control over the economy. His answer is that the struggles of the nineteenth century labour movement to secure full incorporation within the national polity had the effect of stabilising and completing the institution mediation of power in the capitalist order. As a direct consequence,<sup>103</sup>

Social Democracy...is the normal form taken by the systematic political inclusion of the working class within capitalist society. What has to be specifically accounted for is not the 'reformist' tendency of the political arm of the labour movement once it has been accepted within the liberal democratic order...but those cases...where a revolutionary orientation has in fact become strongly marked.

Class conflict of a sharper kind is argued by Giddens to characterise the early, rather than the mature, levels of capitalist development; in the later stages, the continuation of economism as the active expression of class struggle is the result of rises in real wages, coupled with attitudes to work and society which restrict the possibility of demands for working class control over the process of production.<sup>104</sup>

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102. Giddens, Class Structure of the Advanced Societies, ch. 11, et. passim.

103. ibid., 285 (emphases omitted).

104. ibid., 291-92.



The "integration" or "incorporation" argument has, however, been taken one step further in recent contributions by Nigel Young and Michael Mann. Both writers have suggested that the process of incorporation may be less than complete, and there exists the possibility that elements of viable working class opposition and antagonistic values may survive, even within the confines of the liberal capitalist order. Young argues that the "incorporation of the English working class into the polity and institutional framework of the nation state" was achieved through "specific institutional nexi, in which ideological enlistment, material inducement, social co-optation and political accommodation could be maximised." <sup>105</sup>

During the early part of the last century, however, a strong sense of separate identity and working class consciousness developed as a "nascent counter-culture." In working class culture may be detected a continuous strand of popular egalitarian-collectivism, in part a traditional pre-industrial communalism and, "in part articulated in opposition to the other major normative deviation from paternalist-traditionalism - bourgeois individualism, utilitarianism, and political economy." <sup>106</sup> Working class collectivism found expression in a largely defensive institutional sub-culture, which insulated and protected a scale of oppositional values. As the century progressed, this working class consciousness became more powerful and increasingly well organised and there existed at least the potential of militant class politics. To some extent, "hegemonic" consciousness and aspirations arose amongst the workers but, lacking intellectual articulation, "...it is concluded that the hermetic culture,

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105. Nigel Young, "Prometheans or Troglodytes?: The English Working Class and the Dialectics of Incorporation", Berkeley Journal of Sociology, XII (1967) 2.

106. ibid., 3.



whilst preserving class identity, has by way of introverting consciousness, kept the class and its ideals subordinate." <sup>107</sup>

Young suggests that trade unionism was one expression of these working class oppositional values, but: "Having been defined as deviant these institutions were at first repressed, then accommodated and finally incorporated into the structure of the nation state." <sup>108</sup> In this process, the important factors were not the secondary sources of social subordination, such as religion or imperialism, but "the crucial nexus of civic and national incorporation" is identified as "the Labour Party in Parliament." The Labour Party, <sup>109</sup>

...drew union leadership into the Parliamentary arena and was influential in furthering the bureaucratisation of the unions...Parliament, in other words, imposed its own conditions. It ritualised political deference and civility in a traditional institution; it realised a formal corporate assimilation of labour; it then proceeded to co-opt the leadership and began to accelerate the individuation of the rank and file.

In brief, the Labour Party "did not in any sense reflect the collective culture which it purported to represent" and thus fissured the collectivist expression of working class culture; "...it directly undermined the hegemonic logic of unionisms' corporate institutional development. When national industrial crises came, as they did, the emollient and obfuscating qualities of the labour movement's nexi with Parliament proved decisive." <sup>110</sup>

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107. ibid., 3.

108. ibid., 3.

109. ibid., 25.

110. ibid., 26.

Like Young, Michael Mann has pointed to a duality of allegiance amongst the working class in the liberal democratic state.<sup>111</sup> Their consciousness, he suggests, is historically incorporated but not repressed; rather, the workers pragmatically acquiesce in the dominant values of society. "Most working class people do not 'accept' (in whatever sense) their lot", but nor do they have consistent deviant ideologies, for: "The most common form of manipulative socialisation by the liberal democratic state does not seek to change values, but rather to perpetuate values that do not aid the working class to interpret the reality it actually experiences..."<sup>112</sup> Mann credits the fact of "pragmatic acceptance" on the part of the working class to the "historical incorporation" of that class, although he does not deal in any detail with this process.

More recently, Mann has conceptualised the pragmatic subordination of the working class in terms of four escalating levels of class consciousness: identity - opposition - totality - conception of alternative society.<sup>113</sup> Here Mann is conceptually better able to provide a description of the failure of the workers to break out of the vicious circle of subordination, and he places greater emphasis upon economistic trade unionism in the process:<sup>114</sup>

...a realistic appraisal of alternative structures is lacking even among the most class conscious workers in the most explosive situations. Whatever the objective possibility that they might be the bearers of a new principle of social

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111. Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy", American Sociological Review, XXXV (1970) 423-39.

112. Mann, ibid., 437.

113. Michael Mann, Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class (London 1973) 13, et. passim; for a similar argument, see Giddens, Class Structure of the Advanced Societies, 112-13.

114. ibid., 69.

structure - collectivism - they themselves either do not perceive this or do not know how to translate it into action. The explosion of consciousness is trapped in a vicious circle (from identity to opponent to totality and then back again to identity) and so does not make a revolution.

In all this, however, the ambivalence of working class consciousness remains acute and its importance has been elsewhere reinforced by Mann in a recent study of ideology in the non-skilled working class.<sup>115</sup>

Suffice it to say here that the thesis to the effect that the political stability of liberal democracy is not underpinned by normative consensus, as was once thought, but rather that it rests upon the pragmatic acceptance of by the workers of existing social arrangements, is one that has also been supported by a number of scholars concerned with the character of post-war British class structure.<sup>116</sup> It may be concluded that the characterisation of working class consciousness in these accounts is similar to that of Marxist theory, although they build in a greater appreciation of the complexities of working class belief by pointing to it ambiguous, or "pragmatic", content.

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115. R. M. Blackburn and Michael Mann, "Ideology in the Non-Skilled Working Class", in Martin Bulmer, ed., Working-Class Images of Society (London 1975) 131-60.

116. J. H. Westergaard, "The Rediscovery of the Cash Nexus", in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1970 (London 1970) 111-38 points to the fact that indications of working class pragmatic acquiescence are to be found in studies by W. G. Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice (London 1967); Robert McKenzie and A. Silver, Angels in Marble (London 1968); and John Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, J. Platt and F. Bechhofer, The Affluent Worker, i, ii, and iii (Cambridge 1968 and 1969). See further on this question, C. W. Chamberlain and H. F. Moorhouse, "Lower Class Attitudes to Property: Aspects of the Counter Culture", Sociology, VIII (1974) 387-405; "Lower Class Attitudes Towards the British Political System", Sociology, VIII (1974) 503-25.

A second line of sociological inquiry has been opened up by Frank Parkin around the theme of "subordination". In 1967 Parkin advanced a theory of "two cultures" of political loyalty to account for the phenomenon of working class conservatism.<sup>117</sup> Reasoning that socialist beliefs were antithetical to the dominant value system of capitalist society which would, under normal circumstances, suggest Conservative allegiance, Labour voting becomes a form of political deviance. Socialist values will thus only be found, according to Parkin, "predominantly where individuals are involved in normative sub-systems which serve as 'barriers' to the dominant values of the society."<sup>118</sup> The structural bases of these sub-cultures are the traditional working class community and the industrial workplace, in particular the large factory.

Recently, Parkin has elaborated upon this argument by outlining three modal types of consciousness or value-systems in society.<sup>119</sup> There exists, firstly, the dominant value-system, the social source of which is the major institutional order: "This is a moral framework which promotes the endorsement of existing inequality; among the subordinate class this leads to a definition of the reward structure in either deferential or aspirational terms."<sup>120</sup> Secondly, there is the subordinate value-system, generated in the local working class community and which

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117. Frank Parkin, "Working Class Conservatism: A Theory of Political Deviance", British Journal of Sociology, XVIII (1967) 278-90.

118. "Working Class Conservatism", 282; for a critique of Parkin's thesis of political deviance of some relevance here, see Chris Chamberlain, "The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain", British Journal of Sociology, XXIII (1973) 474-89.

119. Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (London 1972) 79-102, et. passim.

120. ibid., 81.

fosters a parochial communal solidarity, a sub-class consciousness:

"This is a moral framework which promotes accommodative responses to the facts of inequality and low status." <sup>121</sup> But here there is no whole sale absorbtion of the dominant order, but rather, <sup>122</sup>

...the subordinate value-system represents what could be called a 'negotiated version' of the dominant value system. That is to say, dominant values are not so much rejected or opposed as modified by the subordinate class as a result of their social circumstances and restricted opportunities.

The resulting value-system is characterised by a high degree of "normative ambivalence". Finally, there may be identified the radical or oppositional value-system based essentially upon the mass working class party, and here Parkin is insistent; without the mass political party, "there can be no major sources of political information or knowledge which would enable the subordinate class to make sense of their situation in real terms." <sup>123</sup>

Empirical variations in working class consciousness are seen by Parkin as dependant upon access to these meaning systems, or the extent to which each normative system "feeds into" the working class. The major expression of the subordinate value-system is "instrumental collectivism", or trade unionism; but it is potentially, at least, open to influence by the radical values carried by the mass working class party. Parkin accounts for the failure of militant oppositional values to gain ground among the British working class by reference to the progressive de-radicalisation of the working class party in this country. <sup>124</sup> But he

121. ibid., 81.

122. ibid., 92.

123. ibid., 98.

124. ibid., 103-36." Substantiating evidence for the role of political values and political parties in shaping working class perceptions is presented by Richard Scase, "Conceptions of Class Structure and Political Ideology", in Frank Parkin, ed., The Social Analysis of Class Structure (London 1974) 149-77.

stresses as well the traditional methods of incorporation, and the specific set of constraints which keep the working class subordinate and restrict the growth of a radical value-system.

It might be useful here to assess the contribution of sociological theories to the understanding of British socialism and working class belief. As in the Marxist approach, the failure of the working class to attain a revolutionary or hegemonic vision forms the central problematic, and this is accounted for by reference to the ideological and institutional "incorporation" or "subordination" of the workers. However, these arguments are expansive enough to embrace the existence of working class oppositional values, be they "pragmatic" or "negotiated" versions of the dominant moral order. This is an advance upon the Marxist position, according to which working class belief is subsumed beneath the dictates of bourgeois categories, and it points to the complex interaction and genesis of belief in society.

### 3.4: Citizenship, Civility and Deference: The Argument from Political Culture

Rather in contrast, we may notice finally a group of theories which seek to explain political behaviour in this country and, by extension, working class and socialist beliefs, upon the assumption that the central values underlying the major institutional order are held in common by all social classes. The citizenship theory points to the role of social rights in society and their gradual universal extension; and the theories of civic culture and deference are premised upon an analysis of a consensual and harmonious political culture, from which flows specific forms of political thought and action.



The two main proponents of the citizenship perspective, T. H. Marshall and Reinhard Bendix, differ somewhat in their emphases, although both aim to account for the gradual absorption of the working class into a societal normative unity or citizenship, over against the conflicting tendencies inherent in sub-cultural formations. Marshall begins from what he takes to be the fact of the increasing equalisation in the social status of incumbents of different social class positions, arguing that the one will tend to off-set the inequalities of the other; and thus, "...the inequality of the social class system may be accepted provided the equality of citizenship is recognised."<sup>125</sup> Three types of citizenship rights are identified - civil, political and social rights - respectively safeguarded by the courts and juridical authority, local and national representative bodies, and the social services and educational apparatus. According to Marshall, civil rights developed in the eighteenth century and had been mostly secured by 1832. Political rights emerged haltingly throughout the nineteenth century, until full manhood suffrage was granted in 1918. Though their foundations were laid during the course of the last century, the period of social rights correctly belongs to the present century.

Bendix adopts Marshall's typology of citizenship rights, and endorses the emphasis upon the emergence of comprehensive equality and universality of status, although he links it rather more closely to the emergence of the modern nation state, particularly the development of the franchise in Britain.<sup>126</sup> Bendix interprets working class unrest in the nineteenth

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125. T. H. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class, and other Essays (Cambridge 1950) 8.

126. Reinhard Bendix, "Transformations of Western European Societies since the Eighteenth Century" in idem., Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies in Our Changing Social Order (New York 1964) 55-104.



century as being mainly concerned with furthering entry into the framework of the polity, "at establishing the citizenship of the workers... their rightful place in the political community of the leading nation of the world." <sup>127</sup> Reacting partly to the spread of popular egalitarian ideals, <sup>128</sup>

...English society proved itself capable of accommodating the lower class as an equal participant in the national political community, though even in England this development involved a prolonged struggle and the full implications of equality as we understand them today evolved only gradually.

Both Bendix and Marshall are thus clear as to the integration of the working class, by means of the progressive extension of citizenship rights, into a suffusing national community. The realities of social class inequality are thus relegated to second place: "Status differences can receive the stamp of legitimacy provided that they do not cut too deep, but occur within a population united in a single civilization... The unified civilization which makes social inequalities acceptable, threatens to make them economically functionless." <sup>129</sup> This perspective therefore questions the existence of class politics and class consciousness in a society in which citizenship is the norm; to this extent, the class basis of militant socialist beliefs and politics must give way to the embrace of the unitary political community. The evolutionary and gradualist

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127. ibid., 67.

128. ibid., 71 (emphasis added)

129. Marshall, Citizenship and Social Class, 76-7.

Parliamentary overtones of the British working class movement may be held to flow from this fact. <sup>130</sup>

Recently, political scientists have come forward with the theories of "civic culture" and "deference" to account for political behaviour in this country. Both are closely related to the concept of "political culture", and it will be useful to begin here. According to one definition, "...the principle components of the political culture are values, beliefs and emotional attitudes." <sup>131</sup> Clearly, therefore, the notion of a political culture is a normative device by reference to which political orientations and behaviour may be rendered explicable. Thus, Beer and Ulam content that each component of the political culture comprises conceptions of authority, and conceptions of purpose or ends, both of which are widely diffused and shared throughout society.

It is often suggested that British society is a particularly clear case of a consensual and harmonious political culture. Richard Rose has observed that "...except for the Irish controversy, England has escaped political conflict concerning basic values, beliefs and emotions...this enduring consensus is one of the most distinctive features of politics in England." <sup>132</sup> In like fashion, Eckstein has noted: "Only in Britain

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130. Cf. David Lockwood's comments on the effects of citizenship on the nature of class conflict: "...the limitations which it imposes upon 'the naked economic power' of the marketplace; the civic incorporation of the worker; and the institutional separation of industrial from political conflict." "The Radical Worker: A Postscript", in Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society, 260.

131. S. H. Beer and Adam B. Ulam, eds., Patterns of Government: The Major Political Systems of Europe (New York 1965) 32. See further, Y. C. Kim, "The Concept of Political Culture in Comparative Politics", Journal of Politics, XXVI (1964) 313-35; Richard Rose, Politics in England (London 1965) 28-57; L. W. Pye, "Political Culture", International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1968) xii, 218-25; D. Kavanagh, Political Culture (London 1972).

132. Richard Rose, "The Political Culture", in idem., ed., Studies in British Politics (London 1969) 3.

has there existed an enduring and genuine political consensus, that is, broad agreement on what is authoritative in government..."; the political system has an "...inherent capacity for effective action." <sup>133</sup> There are, he suggests, two bases to this effectiveness. The conception of authority in British political culture "...attributes to leadership a far larger scope of legitimate independent action than that of any other democratic country", <sup>134</sup> and this in turn is premised upon a strong belief in order, hierarchy and deference, of which one expression is the stable two-party system. These factors are mutually reinforcing and are rooted in the gradual and decisive evolution of central government; in the social hierarchy and class structure which ensures that "difference in politics is paralleled, indeed perhaps even maintained, by deference in general social behaviour"; <sup>135</sup> and in the fact that many basic political issues are settled by custom and broad agreement. It follows that the British "...are highly immune to ideologies - pragmatic in outlook - not only because their passions are channelled out of ordinary politics, but also because the political system confronts them, comparatively speaking, with a narrow range of unresolved issues." <sup>136</sup>

Proponents of the political culture thesis have felt able to account for the development of British socialism in terms of this remarkably continuous, authoritative and consensual political system. The gradual modification and adaptation of political institutions in line with social change and the enfranchisement of the working class meant, that by the

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133. Harry Eckstein, "The British Political System", in Beer and Ulam, eds., Patterns of Government, 73-4.

134. ibid., 75.

135. ibid., 92.

136. ibid., 98.

Marxism was being propagated in England in the 1880s, "...the working class leadership had already begun to make some political headway, and, most important, to believe that they could make headway. They positively supported the Parliamentary regime and sought to make gains within it." <sup>137</sup>

The civility studies flow naturally from these ideas. <sup>138</sup> These seek to explain the conditions of democratic stability by positing the prevalence of certain societal values, i.e. internalized normative constraints, which form part of the political culture and are acquired through a process of political socialisation, rather than at the level of class culture and consciousness. Almond and Verba, for instance, attempt to answer the question: "Is there a democratic political culture - a pattern of political attitudes that foster democratic stability, that in some say 'fits' the democratic political system?" <sup>139</sup> Assuming a "democratic political system" to involve the open competition of political elites based upon popular electoral support, they stress the need for a balance between political deference and popular participation, "...a judicious mixture of respect for authority and sturdy independence", as basic to an effective political system. <sup>140</sup>

Thus, Nordlinger has emphasised the elements of hierarchy, social status and deference present in British political culture, and the

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137. Rose, Politics in England, 33.

138. See for example, G. Almond and S. Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton 1963); Harry Eckstein, "A Theory of Stable Democracy", in idem., Division and Cohesion in Democracy (Princeton 1966); Eric A. Nordlinger, The Working Class Tories (London 1967).

139. The Civic Culture, 473.

140. Brian Barry, Sociologists, Economists and Democracy (London 1970) 48.

dualistic orientation of the electorate - they must be both allegiant and acquiescent on the one hand, vocal and active on the other. <sup>141</sup>

What is required is the requisite mix of acquiescent and directive attitudes on all sides of the main political cleavages. Similarly, Almond and Verba instance Britain as an exemplar of the "civic culture"; <sup>142</sup>

The political culture of Great Britain also approximates the civic culture. The participant role is highly developed. Exposure to politics, interest, involvement, and a sense of competence are relatively high. There are norms supporting political activity, as well as emotional involvement in elections and systems affect. And the attachment to the system is a balanced one: there is general system pride as well as satisfaction with specific government performance.

In Britain is to be found the essential balance of "subject competence", that is to say a widely shared belief in the legitimacy of government, and "citizenship competence", a belief in the right and even duty of the individual to try to exert influence. Almond and Verba argue in addition that there must be a balance in the civic culture between emotional and instrumental attitudes towards political activity and between consensual and conflictual orientations; and there must be widely diffuse "social trustfulness". <sup>143</sup> Nordlinger argues that these balances must be struck in the "dualistic political orientation" of the electorate. <sup>144</sup>

As to the genesis of the civic culture, these studies rest almost entirely upon an assumed process of "political socialisation", by which those values and beliefs of the political culture conducive to the maintenance of a democratic system are widely diffused and inculcated. Almond and Verba make reference to the transmission of the civic culture

141. Working Class Tories, 13-45, 210-52.

142. The Civic Culture, 455.

143. ibid., 487-92.

144. Working Class Tories, 218-24.

"...by a complex process that includes training in many social institutions - family, peer group, school, work place, as well as the political system itself." <sup>145</sup> Following Parsons and Shils, Nordlinger speaks of the distribution of political orientations "...as internalized aspects of political objects and relationships which predispose an individual to act in a specified manner over a period of time." <sup>146</sup> Political thought and action in a stable democracy is thus held to follow from the imbibition of specific normative values, themselves a part of the wider political culture.

The closely related theory of "deference" also challenges class interpretations of political behaviour in that it sets out to investigate the phenomenon of working class conservatism, which is held to run contrary to the grain of class interests. The electoral success of the Conservative Party since the advent of mass democracy - of fifteen general elections since 1886, in which a single party has won a safe majority, the Conservatives have triumphed twelve times - has been premised upon the continuing support of a large section of the manual working class. It is increasingly coming to be recognised that the simple identification of capitalist forms of production with the universalised hegemony of an instrumental and calculative morality, <sup>147</sup> must be complemented by recognition of the power of continuing modes of traditional authority and, in particular, paternalism, recently identified as "the processes of

145. The Civic Culture, 498.

146. Working Class Tories, 46; the model followed here is that elaborated by Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, eds., Towards a General Theory of Action (New York 1962), especially 53ff., and 159ff.

147. See for instance Reinhard Bendix, Work and Authority in Industry (New York 1963) ch. 2.



legitimisation by tradition of the hierarchical nature of English society." <sup>148</sup>

The idea that conservative political allegiance might be motivated by wider social attitudes of deference to a traditional ruling class must be seen as part and parcel of these processes. As a sociological concept, deference has been defined as simply any act of appreciation of another: "The granting of deference entails an attribution of superiority...an attribution of merit...an assessment which attributes worthiness...which is quite distinct from an attribution of moral qualities." <sup>149</sup> But a number of studies have in recent years specified the concept further to focus upon the social and ideological bases of voting behaviour, and locate the stable core of Conservative support among the working class in the context of the British class structure and its characteristic social attitudes. <sup>150</sup>

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148. Howard Newby, "Paternalism and Capitalism", in Richard Scase, ed., Industrial Society: Class, Cleavage and Control (London 1977) 63-4. On this question, see further, A. H. Birch, Small Town Politics (Oxford 1960); T. Lane and K. Roberts, Strike at Pilkington's (London 1971); R. Martin and R. H. Fryer, Redundancy and Paternalist Capitalism (London 1973); R. S. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics (Cambridge 1974); Colin Bell and Howard Newby, "The Sources of Variation in Agricultural Workers' Images of Society", Sociological Review, XXI (1973) 229-53.
149. Edward Shils, "Deference", in J. A. Jackson, Social Stratification (Cambridge 1968) 105.
150. Parkin, "Working Class Conservatism", op. cit.; Raphael Samuel, "The Deference Voter", New Left Review, 1 (1960) 9-13; Seymour Martin Lipsett, "Must Tories Always Triumph", Socialist Commentary, (Nov. 1960) 10-14; Perry Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy", in idem., and Robin Blackburn, eds., Towards Socialism (London 1965) 263-64; Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice, op. cit.; David Butler and Donald Stokes, Political Change in Britain (Harmondsworth 1971) 136-48, 413-14 - for the concept of deference. For a critique of the deference thesis, see Ian Gilmour, The Body Politic (London 1971) 89-92.



Perhaps the most eloquent of the deference studies are those of McKenzie and Silver and Eric Nordlinger. Both these contributions to the debate distinguish two types of working class Conservative: the deferential and the secular or pragmatic Conservative.<sup>151</sup> Deferentials are mostly characterised by their preference for ascribed, socially superior political leadership, whereas seculars are motivated more by the practical economic and welfare policies of the competing political parties. The bases of working class deference to the Conservative elite are complex, but clearly rooted in the socially superior background of the Party's leadership and in its attempt to identify itself with the traditional values, institutions and symbols of the nation as a whole. Deference implies, therefore, both preference for a socially ascribed elite as uniquely qualified to govern the nation and, especially for McKenzie and Silver, an affirmation of the established social and political order. They demonstrate how the Conservative Party's propaganda has been assiduously directed at the working class over the past century and has easily emphasised such an identification due to the basic similarity of conservative values and those of the dominant social groups.<sup>152</sup> The prominence of elites in the Party and the relatively successful institutionalization of dominant values among the population at large has encouraged the Conservatives to foster this image, and the workers in turn to accept it.

A second basis of working class Conservative support has always existed. This lies in the Party's paternalistic claim to care for the wellbeing of "the people" (the tradition of Disraelian Toryism), and its

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151. McKenzie and Silver, Angels in Marble, passim; Nordlinger, Working Class Tories, passim.

152. Angels in Marble, 18-73.

more general claim to a monopoly of governmental expertise. Both McKenzie and Silver and Nordlinger detect a pragmatic working class attachment to the Conservative Party, which to some extent is independent of deferential attitudes.<sup>153</sup> Deferentials appear to be relatively unconcerned with material advantages and view politics as a way of displaying and receiving esteem in a hierarchial social order. Secular voters are more interested in the actual social or economic advantages to be had, but fail to see this as linked unconditionally to the Labour Party. Hindness suggests that the distinguishing feature of secular or pragmatic voting is the absence of a solidaristic class consciousness rather than commitment to deferential norms.<sup>154</sup> It is thus possible for seculars to support either major political party, whilst deference would seem to tie the voter inextricably to the Conservatives. McKenzie and Silver claim to detect less evidence of deferential attitudes amongst younger voters, and an increase in the proportion of younger seculars voting Tory compared with older secular voters.<sup>155</sup>

As is the case with the civility studies, the proponents of this thesis explain the existence of deferential attitudes by referring to the hierarchical and authoritative nature of the political culture, its traditionalistic social relations and the process of political socialisation. Nordlinger argues that: "In order to analyse this problem, we can turn to the political socialisation process, specifically the respondents' experiences with "paternal authority" during early adolescence..."<sup>156</sup>

153. ibid., 16; Working Class Tories, 64.

154. Barry Hindness, The Decline of Working Class Politics (London 1970) 21-2.

155. Angels in Marble, 183-90.

156. Working Class Tories, 98.

McKenzie and Silver located deferential attitudes in "...that long process in English history whereby many partisan symbols continually enter the body of consensus beliefs, helping to reconcile factions with the national community", and they too stress the importance of early familial socialisation, <sup>157</sup>

It seems probable that the British political and social culture has acted directly upon both the Conservative elite and large parts of the working class, predisposing the one to promulgate and the other to accept doctrines and policies which have continued to nourish working class Conservatism.

### 3.5: Conclusion: Approaches to Socialism and Working Class Consciousness

It would be useful to conclude by recapitulating upon the main lines of the approaches to British socialism and working class consciousness explicated in this chapter.

The theoretical foundation of the Marxist account of British socialism is to be located in Marx's own theory of ideology and class consciousness. It is suggested here that the specific evolution of British capitalism and social structure by the later nineteenth century had produced a powerful "hegemonic" ruling class, whose beliefs and ideology encapsulated and constrained that society, and whose mores saturated the whole social formation. Marxists have emphasised in particular those elements of the bourgeois ideology - traditionalism, deference, Liberalism and evangelism, empiricism, national chauvinism, and the like - which appear as mystificatory and antithetical to the development and reception of socialist theory proper. Working class consciousness was thus itself subordinated to the categories of bourgeois thought. Unable to transcend

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157. Angels in Marble, 251-52.

these, it was relegated to the level of "trade union", "corporate" or reformist class consciousness; as such, it fell far short of socialist consciousness. The structure of the working class, in particular the emergence of an aristocracy of labour, facilitated this process of ideological containment. Marxists have argued that the social and economic location of the labour aristocracy predisposed it to imbibe bourgeois ideology, which in turn became the defining feature of the working class movement.

The sociological theories we have examined take over the Marxist assumption of a class differentiated normative order in society, and attempt to account in various ways for the "integration" or "subordination" of working class thought to the dominant societal value system. However, it is suggested that the working class might not succumb to the dominant order in its entirety, but rather their value system will be a "pragmatic" or "negotiated" version of the central moral order. Greater emphasis is thus accorded to the autonomy of native forms of working class expression.

The citizenship theory, and the arguments from civic culture and deference, assume the existence of a common normative political culture within which the British working class were progressively integrated during the course of the last century. It is held that the commitment of the labour movement to reformism, gradualism and its essentially parliamentary stance, as well as the absence of class combativity and the presence of deferential traits among large sections of the manual workforce, were contingent upon this. For it is suggested here that political thought and action flow naturally from this normative culture; in consequence, stress is placed upon the complex process of political socialisation by which the consciousness and hence the political behaviour of the working class is shaped.

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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There is certainly a great deal in the theories outlined in the previous chapter upon which a sociological approach to British socialism and the analysis of working class consciousness might build. Equally, however, it is imperative to identify clearly the problems which each contains. The first part of the present chapter will critically examine these ideas and doubts will be cast upon the adequacy of their treatment of social structure and belief. In particular, it will be necessary to offer a detailed critique of Marx's theory of ideology and class consciousness. Following upon these comments, the latter part of the chapter will attempt to formulate a theoretical framework, the heuristic precepts contained within which are concerned to cast into sharper relief the complexities of social consciousness and the processes of belief formation.

4.1: Problems in Marxist Theory: Ideology and Class Consciousness

The theory of ideology and class consciousness is fundamental to the whole Marxist analysis of British socialism. We may begin, therefore, by examining Marx's theory in some detail, although the discussion will fan out to trace the handling of these themes within the Marxist tradition in general. In Marx's thought, ideology and class consciousness ultimately suggest a single argument, since ideology cannot but be a particular form of consciousness - "false" consciousness, "alienated" consciousness, or whatever; ambiguities and problems pertinent to either or both must, therefore, be closely related.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Richard Lichtman, "Marx's Theory of Ideology", Socialist Revolution, V (1975) 45.

In his analyses of concrete historical events, such as The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852) or The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850 (1895), Marx employed a very interesting theory of class and ideology which highlighted both the complexity of ideological formations and the partial independence of ideas from material forces. However, for theoretical or polemical purposes Marx was most of the time content to lump together as "bourgeois ideology" more or less disparate ideas, and when he spoke of ideology it was usually in the context of an assault upon a political or theoretical position which he considered itself ideological. Thus it was that at various times Marx derided as "bourgeois" the thought of Young Hegelian philosophers, orthodox political economy, Jeremy Bentham, Proudhon, as well as the social reforming zeal of "...humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics...[and]...hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind." <sup>2</sup> These all represent, we are to assume, instances of "bourgeois ideology".

The tendency to reduce the balance of competing ideological forces in capitalist society at any one moment in a dichotomistic fashion can be detected most clearly in Lenin's writings, where we find the following: "...the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a 'third' ideology, and,

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2. Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (London 1968) 58. R. N. Berki has shown that in the class combatitive interpretation which prevails in Marx's work, bourgeois ideology is both "positivist", "...in so far as it presupposes a sharp and unbridgeable dividing line between ideas and beliefs pertaining to a false and those containing the true one", and "metaphysical", "...inasmuch as it operates with abstract, unchanging entities, that is, in this case, 'bourgeois ideology' as such on the one hand and Marxian thought on the other": cf. "The Marxian Concept of Bourgeois Ideology: Some Aspects and Perspectives", in Robert Benewick, et. al., eds., Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problems of Ideology (London 1973) 89.



moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology)." <sup>3</sup> It is this assumption - that what is not revolutionary proletarian thought must, of necessity, be bourgeois ideology - that has led all mature socialist theory since Marx to an unequivocal rejection of spontaneity and economism as inevitably leading to the domination of bourgeois ideas in the working class movement. Lenin's What is to be Done? remains the classic statement of this concern, and is similarly apparent in the work of Trotsky and Georg Lukacs, whose History and Class Consciousness employs a theoretical model which counterposes bourgeois and proletarian thought themselves as discrete as the reified "antinomies of bourgeois thought". <sup>4</sup>

In like fashion, categories of class consciousness within Marxist thought have assumed a similar dichotomised form. Class consciousness is absolutely central to Marx's theory of social classes and his conception of socialist theory and politics, yet no single theory of the development and dynamics of consciousness is to be found in his work. Instead Marx presents at different times at least five sets of conditions which may serve to develop working class consciousness, although it is not stated how many of these need to be present in any one situation, or in what combinations.

There is, firstly, a form of explanation explicit in Marx's youthful writings, but which it may be plausibly argued critically underscores

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3. V. I. Lenin, What is to be Done? (1902) in Henry M. Christman, ed., The Essential Works of Lenin (New York 1966) 82.

4. See for instance the essay "Class Consciousness" in Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (London 1971) 46-82; on this see Tom Bottomore, "Class Structure and Social Consciousness", in Istvan Meszaros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness (London 1971) 54. For a critique of Lenin's dichotomisation of ideologies, see Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism (London 1971) 39-43.



his subsequent work, to the effect that working class consciousness lies in the realisation and reappropriation of man's true essence, "the total redemption of humanity by a dehumanised proletariat".<sup>5</sup> It need hardly be said that this is a theory premised upon a distinctive philosophical anthropology, human nature as it is under conditions of commodity production, and as it might be; and thus Marx spoke of communism in 1844 as,<sup>6</sup>

...the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social i.e. human being...

Secondly, Marx on occasions links a series of conditions surrounding the worsening social position of the proletariat to the development of socialist consciousness. The themes of immiseration and pauperisation under capitalism are to be found throughout Capital; for instance,<sup>7</sup>

The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is the official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.

As its social standing worsens, Marx believed that the working class would become progressively conscious of this fact. It is important to notice his emphasis upon the spiritual side of the misery of the subordinate

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5. Karl Marx, "Introduction" to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right in Lucio Colletti, ed., Karl Marx: Early Writings (Harmondsworth 1975) 256.
  6. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, in Early Writings, 348.
  7. Karl Marx, Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, i (London 1970) 644; on this aspect of Marx's work see further Anthony Giddens, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory (Cambridge 1971) 55-8.

class, for pauperism is not simply a material consideration, but "poverty conscious of its moral and physical poverty";<sup>8</sup> and equally important to recall that class consciousness may develop given a relatively rather than absolutely worsening social position.<sup>9</sup> In a number of important respects, however, Marx qualified this account. It seems clear that he rejected any deterministic notion of an "iron law of wages",<sup>10</sup> whilst in The German Ideology Marx pointed out that "...pauperism is the position only of the impoverished proletariat..."<sup>11</sup>

On other occasions Marx presents an argument which suggests that class consciousness will advance as working class material interests are increasingly recognised and acted upon. In a celebrated passage Marx outlined how, contingent upon the growth of large-scale industrial production,<sup>12</sup>

...the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level...the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes.

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8. Karl Marx, The Holy Family (1845), in T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, eds., Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (Harmondsworth 1970) 237.
  9. The classic statement of the social character of human needs is to be found in Wage Labour and Capital (1847) in Selected Works, 84.
  10. Marx qualifies the statement cited in fn.7 above with the comment, "Like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances...", Capital, 644. See further on this question, T. Sowell, "Marx's 'Increasing Misery' Doctrine", American Economic Review, I (1960) 111-20.
  11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (Moscow 1968) 220.
  12. The Communist Manifesto, in Selected Works, 43.

If trade unionism is the initial manifestation of this process, localised struggles are soon welded "into one national struggle between classes" and begin to assume more sharply political forms. Fourthly, Marx sometimes offers an account of class consciousness which is founded upon the structural antagonism of capital and labour in-built into the process of capitalist production. The relationship between capitalists and wage labourers is structurally exploitative - characterised, in fact, by the extraction of surplus value - and this cannot remain hidden from the workers for long. Marx placed great stress upon the importance of economic crises in fostering revolutionary consciousness, as they starkly highlight the common class situation of the proletariat, particularly because they tend to occur as a sharp recession following a period of relative prosperity during which time unemployment is low and wages high.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, nothing "...will do away with the misery of the industrial masses... every fresh development of the productive powers of labour must sharpen social contrasts and accentuate social antagonisms."<sup>14</sup>

Conterminous with these processes, Marx finally points to the development of working class political organisation as at once conducive to the furthering, and expressive of, class consciousness. Initially the proletariat is called upon by the bourgeoisie to assist in its own struggles against the feudal system,<sup>15</sup>

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13. Giddens, Capitalism and Social Theory, 56.

14. Karl Marx, Address to the Working Classes (1864), cited by David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought (London 1973) 365-66.

15. The Communist Manifesto in Selected Works, 43-4.

In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

In this process the political awareness of the working class is honed and given more pointed articulation by "...a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" and who go over to the side of the workers. <sup>16</sup>

There is thus no single, clear-cut theory of the development of class consciousness in Marx's thought. It is obvious, though, that his conception of class consciousness, as with that of social class, was in large measure a theoretical construct and as such embodied a dual perspective - a theory of both synchrony and diachrony. <sup>17</sup> If Marx opposed class in the given immediacy of the empirical world ("'Vulgar' common sense turns class differences into differences in the size of one's purse..." <sup>18</sup>) to that dynamic and multi-dimensional form which the logic of history demanded it would assume, so too was working class consciousness at any one moment in time set against that of a theoretically postulated socialist consciousness. And thus Marx observes that: "It is not a question of knowing what this or that proletarian, or even the proletariat as a whole, conceives as its aim at any particular moment. It is a question of knowing what the proletariat is, and what it must historically

16. ibid., 44.

17. The point is made by Frank Parkin in an excellent unpublished paper, "Class Consciousness in Marxist Theory", presented to the Department of Sociology in the University of Lancaster, May 1973.

18. Karl Marx, "Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral...", (1847) in Bottomore and Rubel, eds., Selected Writings in Sociology, 208.

accomplish in accordance with its nature." <sup>19</sup> Lenin, of course, was insistent that "...the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness...", <sup>20</sup> which he strongly contrasted with socialist consciousness injected, as it were, into the working class by intellectuals of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois origin. The dichotomy is classically expounded by Lukacs, who followed Marx in positing as opposites the contingency of "psychological" consciousness and the theoretically attainable "imputed" or "ascribed" class consciousness. <sup>21</sup>

It should be clear that there exists in Marxist theory a direct correlation between social classes and modes of thought for, just as bourgeoisie and proletariat in capitalist society must stand fundamentally opposed, so too must respective ideologies and forms of consciousness. In this schema, ideology and social consciousness are thus dichotomised. In addition, a process of unification may be detected, by which is meant that bourgeois ideology, for instance, is pictured as a self-sufficient, hermetically sealed unit, seemingly an indissoluble and internally coherent totality. "Trade union" consciousness and "socialist" consciousness, likewise, stand as discrete and unified modes of thought, both to be distinguished from "bourgeois ideology" except to the extent that this contaminates and absorbs wholesale the former. <sup>22</sup> If this

19. The Holy Family (1845) in ibid., 237-38.

20. What is to be Done?, in Christman, ed., Essential Works of Lenin, 74.

21. History and Class Consciousness, op. cit.; see further Istvan Meszaros, "Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness", in idem., ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, 85-127.

22. The dichotomisation and unification of ideology and forms of class consciousness is particularly marked in the writings of Marxists after the death of Marx: see below on this.

reading of the Marxist theory is correct, it suggests a number of points which ought to be taken into account in the historical analysis of social consciousness.

The dichotomisation and unification of ideology and forms of human thought has bred a remarkable reluctance among Marxist writers to recognise that these may, in reality, be decomposed into their constitutive elements; for social consciousness may be multi-facted and complex, perhaps even in tension at several points. In a word, the flexibility and historical adaptability of human thought is rarely accorded due weight. For instance, bourgeois ideology in nineteenth century Britain may conservatively be said to have comprised a disparate cluster of ideas about work, property, government, human nature and religion, or the diverse social theories of, say, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Samuel Smiles and political economy.<sup>23</sup> We should hardly expect all these to constitute a single harmonious value-system, or to interlock smoothly at all points. Reluctance to decompose ideology and social consciousness must surely tend to obfuscate the varied forms and subtle gradations of human thought.

Again, the gulf which exists in Marxist thought between two discrete and self-contained modes of working class consciousness itself raises additional problems. Conceived in this way, there has never been offered an adequate theory to account for the transition from one state of consciousness to another. Stemming from Marx's own analysis is the absence of any appreciation that the growth of social belief might be an evolutionary and gradual process (significantly, the very terms are anathema to Marxist discourse), receptive to a variety of influences and capable of generating from within itself a variety of forms. In Marxist

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23. Bottomore, "Class Structure and Social Consciousness", 57.

theory the transition could not but be abrupt and final and, theoretically, the decisive element rests in a revolutionary catalyst. Contemporary Marxists appear to have perpetuated this confusion. In 1968, the editorial board of New Left Review called for "a theory of dual consciousness" as an apparently adequate explanation for the French "revolution" of that year,<sup>24</sup> whilst Robin Blackburn has outlined an "explosion of consciousness" thesis.<sup>25</sup> In this fashion much of the subtlety of human consciousness has been lost.

It follows by extension that the unification and dichotomisation of ideology and class consciousness has blinkered Marxism to the actual historical processes and mechanisms whereby aspects of social belief interpenetrate and, over time, reciprocally shape, modify and adapt to one another. This much ought to be clear from the outline of the Marxist analysis of British socialism presented above. It is argued by Marx and Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci, and no less by neo-Marxists, that bourgeois ideology in Britain absorbed and deflected in various ways the revolutionary aspirations of the working class. But the reality is surely far more intricate. To be sure, many "bourgeois" values and ideas fed into the working class, but in the process were transmuted into vital, active elements of working class consciousness itself. It is disturbing to observe the way that Marxism has fallen foul of a profoundly ahistorical and static approach to ideology and class consciousness, which allows of no interpenetrations, modifications and dialectical transformations over time. It is intended that the present study should spotlight some of these processes.

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24. "Editorial", New Left Review, 52 (1968) 1-7.

25. Robin Blackburn, "The Unequal Society", in idem., and A. Cockburn, eds., The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus, (Harmondsworth 1967) 48-51.



It will be argued in what follows that these problems stem from a singular reluctance within Marxist thought to accord due weight to the actual mechanisms and social institutions by and within which ideologies are propagated and social belief generated. There are two clearly related emphases in the Marxist treatment of ideology and it would be instructive at the outset to examine both of these.

The first approach, which is concerned, strictly speaking, with the production and reproduction of human belief, stresses that ideological forms of thought are in some sense rooted in the existing structure of social and economic relations, but that this reality presents itself as mystification in the illusory nature of phenomenal forms.<sup>26</sup> The source of this thesis is the received "base/superstructure" metaphor, to the effect that, "It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness", and passages by Marx such as the following,<sup>27</sup>

The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, training, habits, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of nature...In the ordinary run of things the labourer can be left to the 'natural laws of production' i.e. to his dependance upon capital, a dependance springing from and guaranteed in perpetuity by, the conditions of production themselves.

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26. On this interpretation, see John Mepham, "The Theory of Ideology in Capital", Radical Philosophy, 2 (1972) 12-19; Norman Geras "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy", in Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory (London 1972) 284-305.

27. Karl Marx, "Preface" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, in Selected Works, 182; Capital, iii (London 1970) 809 (emphasis added).

Now, Louis Althusser's recent analysis of ideology is of this order, for he wished to relate ideology to the conditions of the reproduction of the relations of a determinate mode of production and as being itself rooted in this process.<sup>28</sup> Althusser locates the mechanisms of ideological control in what he terms "ideological state apparatuses", but his discussion of these is so superficial as to add little to our understanding of the actual processes at work within these institutions. He suggests, for instance, that "...the ideological State apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations...is the educational ideological apparatus." According to Althusser, education "...drums into [children]...a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped up in the ruling ideology." At several stages in the educational process, a "mass" of young people "...ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited..."<sup>29</sup>

According to this schema, then, social structure and institutions are only analysed insofar as they embody and propagate wholesale the dominant ideology commensurate with the mode of production. The process is assumed complete and all-embracing, social consciousness "inevitably" moulded, a passive recipient of those values and social practices deemed necessary by the social formation. It should be noted, however, that Marxists have been at pains to rebutt charges of determinism by arguing for a "structural dialectic of social structure and social consciousness", which is held to embody a greater emphasis upon the reciprocal relationship

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28. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in idem., Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays (London 1971) 123-73.

29. ibid., 144-45, 147.

between social structure and imagery.<sup>30</sup> Yet this formulation remains at best equivocal and, as Martin Bulmer has recently observed: "What a dialectical approach would look like when applied to the study of social imagery remains, however, unclear for the time being."<sup>31</sup>

The second emphasis in the Marxist treatment of ideology focuses upon the diffusion as well as the creation of ideas, and may be located in the tendency to explain ideology as being rooted in the hegemony of the bourgeoisie as a class. The source here is the thesis advanced by Marx in The German Ideology to the effect that: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas"; within that social group "...one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood)..."<sup>32</sup> It is in this sense that Lenin most usually spoke of ideology: the power of the ruling ideas, he suggests, stems from,<sup>33</sup>

...the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than Social Democratic ideology; because it is more fully developed and because it possesses immeasurably more opportunities for being distributed.

Neo-Marxists have similarly assumed that the dominant class ideas in society cannot but result in untrammelled containment. Marcuse's One Dimensional

30. See Richard Hyman, Strikes (London 1972) 73; for a similar argument, see Margaret S. Coulson and David S. Riddell, Approaching Sociology (London 1970).

31. Martin Bulmer, "Some Problems of Research into Class Imagery", in idem., ed., Working Class Images of Society (London 1975) 176.

32. The German Ideology, 64-5.

33. What is to be Done?, 84

Man would seem to approach ideology in this way and, elsewhere, Marcuse has identified the conditions under which people live and think, and thereby determine what they think, with "the prevailing indoctrination": <sup>34</sup>

The people exposed to this impartiality are no tabulae rasae, they are indoctrinated by the conditions under which they live and think and which they do not transcend... To enable them to become autonomous...they would have to be freed from the prevailing indoctrination...

If this approach has stimulated a concern among Marxists with the forms and technological means of the production and dissemination of ideas, it is once more only to the extent that they propagate wholesale the ideas of the ruling bourgeoisie: these the ruled "do not transcend".

Both emphases in the analysis of ideology to be found within Marxist thought ultimately subsume the consciousness of the subordinate class to the dominant ideology, although to some extent they diverge in emphasis. The first explanation has tended to stress determinism; that ideology pervades the social and productive relations of capitalist society and thus and the conditions appropriate to de-mystification must similarly lie therein. There follows a tendency to wait upon "economic laws", "historical development", and so on. The second explanation, to the effect that ideology is to be located in the domination of the bourgeoisie as a class, suggests a more voluntaristic set of tactics. For whilst all-embracing, this class domination may nevertheless be challenged by active human agency, revolutionary politics, and so forth. The two terms in the couplet "determinism/voluntarism" have been variously emphasised by Marxists but, on the whole, stand in uneasy tension.

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34. Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance", in idem., Robert P. Wolff and Barrington Moore, A Critique of Pure Tolerance (London 1969) 112.

The ambiguity stretches in addition to the Marxist analysis of class consciousness. An obvious determinism springs from Marx's ascription of a historical role to the proletariat ("Its aims and historical activity are ordained for it..."<sup>35</sup>) yet, on the other hand, the theme of "self-emancipation" is equally evident in Marx's thought. In this pattern the proletariat carries out its own liberation, encapsulated in Marx's famous remark that "...the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves...",<sup>36</sup> and Engels' contention that "...Marx relied solely and exclusively upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, there exists little room in these discussions for any appreciatory sense of the complexities of ideology or social consciousness. We are given to understand that the bourgeois ideology is omnipotent and omnipresent and, in the normal course of events, working class thought cannot transcend its parameters. There is offered no analysis of the mechanisms by which, or institutions within which, social beliefs develop: inevitably subordinate, Marxists have alternated between determinism and voluntarism in accounting for the "explosion" of working class consciousness. Neither explanation would seem to be adequate.

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35. The Holy Family, 238.

36. Provisional Rules of the First International (1864), cited by Hal Draper, "The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels", in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1971 (London 1971) 84; on this question, see further Norman Geras, "Marxism and Proletarian Self-Emancipation", Radical Philosophy, 6 (1973) 20-22.

37. "Preface to the German Edition of 1890" of The Communist Manifesto, 33.

From the analysis thus far, it may be suggested that the Marxist analysis of British socialism falls down on a number of counts.

Firstly, conceptions of ideology and social consciousness are unnecessarily rigid and categorical. "Bourgeois ideology" in nineteenth century Britain loses much of its colour and flexibility, seemingly a unified body of ideas, and working class consciousness is similarly stripped of variety to become merely "trade union" or "reformist" consciousness. Moreover, working class thought is assumed the passive recipient of bourgeois ideas, totally constrained ideologically and divested of any native vitality. Finally, the Marxist analysis leaves us with no adequate theory as to the transition from the extant trade union to the potential socialist consciousness. This absence precludes any sense of the evolution and growth of social belief in various directions, or the means by which this might be studied.

As was hinted in the previous chapter, Gramsci alone represents the partial exception within the Marxist tradition. Few have been as ready as Gramsci to accord autonomy to human thought and, in consequence, he believed that a range of possibilities were theoretically open to working class thought in bourgeois society. Gramsci was aware that the diffusion of a critical outlook and the growth of socialist conceptions among the workers might be a tenuous business, liable to display a number of forms, <sup>38</sup>

...the enquiry has a particular interest in relation to the popular masses, who are slower to change their conceptions, or who never change them in the sense of accepting them in the "pure" form, but always and only as more or less heterogeneous and bizarre combinations...These considerations lead, however, to the conclusion that new conceptions have an extremely unstable position among the popular masses...

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38. Q. Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (London 1971) 338-40.



Gramsci suggests that working class consciousness is not simply "incorporated", but that contradictory elements may be discerned within it, elements of intellectual and moral approbation which co-exist in unsteady equilibrium with elements of resignation and even hostility. In working class thought he contrasts, <sup>39</sup>

...thought and action, i.e. the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words the other displayed in effective action...It signifies that the social group in question [i.e. the working class] may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic...

For Gramsci, then, there may exist a gap between the dominant ideology and the proletariat's own conception and interpretation of reality. He believed, moreover, that extant forms of popular consciousness were not to be lightly dismissed as reformist aberrations, but formed the bedrock for, and were indeed the very raw material of, socialist ideas, <sup>40</sup>

...can modern theory [i.e. Marxism] be in opposition to the 'spontaneous' feelings of the masses?...It cannot be in opposition to them. Between the two there is a 'quantitative' difference of degree, not one of 'quality'.

The working class are not the hapless victims of bourgeois ideology but may, within certain limits, challenge by their own resources the dominant normative order. It is upon this latent groundswell that Gramsci believed the "organic" evolution of an alternative moral hegemony might be founded. <sup>41</sup>

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39. ibid., 326-7.

40. ibid., 198-9.

41. For work inspired by this aspect of Gramsci's thought, see Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", New Left Review, 82 (1973) 3-16; R. Q. Gray, "Religion, Culture and Social Class in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Edinburgh", in Geoffrey Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914 (London 1977) 143-51.



In Gramsci's Marxism we find the contention that, even within the hegemonic order of a ruling bourgeoisie, the potential for revolt and social disintegration is ever-present. Though his cryptic notes do not take us far beyond the idea of "contradictory consciousness", one finds here at least the elements of a more responsive approach to the analysis of working class consciousness.

#### 4.2: Ideology, Class Consciousness and the Labour Aristocracy: Further Comments

The comments offered above may now be further elaborated in the context of a more general discussion of the Marxist approach to British socialism. First, the theses articulated by Poulanzas, Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn will be subjected to scrutiny; thereafter, the analysis will turn to the concept of the labour aristocracy.

The following discussion of the Anderson/Nairn studies will be concerned solely with their analysis of social consciousness and ideology. One ought to note, however, that this work has been subjected to much wide-ranging and generally searching criticism.<sup>42</sup> In a trenchant article by Edward Thompson, for instance, Anderson and Nairn have been taken severely to task upon a number of counts.<sup>43</sup> Thompson rejects the conceptualisation to be found in these studies of the aristocracy as a class distinct from the bourgeoisie and their analysis of its role in the evolution of British capitalism, arguing that it was in fact from the beginning "...a superbly successful and self-confident capitalist class."<sup>44</sup>

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42. See for instance, Richard Johnson, "Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson and English Social Development", Cultural Studies, 9 (1976).

43. Edward Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, The Socialist Register 1965 (London 1965) 311-35.

44. ibid., 317-18.

Furthermore, he is critical of Anderson's account of the fusion of landed and industrial wealth into a single social bloc suggesting, rather, that the bourgeoisie as a whole constituted the politically dominant class. Finally, it may be noted that Poulanzas himself has chided Anderson and Nairn for their use of an essentially idealistic Marxist problematic.<sup>45</sup> These and similar problems must be left to one side, as the focus of attention in what follows will be upon the theory of ideology and class consciousness which underscores these Marxist texts.

The theoretical device of base and superstructure is clearly evident in the work of these writers and, so far as social belief and thought are concerned, it is ultimately reductionist. Thus, Poulanzas is anxious to accord "intrinsic autonomy" to "the superstructures as specific levels" and to safeguard their freedom from material constraint.<sup>46</sup> Yet it should be obvious from his explanation of the British labour movement that forms of bourgeois ideology - and working class consciousness in turn - are themselves referred to as contingent upon the specific form of bourgeois revolution and social class structure. Little autonomy thus remains for working class thought, which "...can so rarely escape having to live according to the mode imposed by the dominant ideology..." - merely the temptation "...to imitate the revolutions of its national bourgeois class."<sup>47</sup> This tendency is equally clear in the work of Anderson and Nairn. Anderson has noted of the English Civil War that "...the ideological terms in which the struggle was conducted were largely

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45. Nicos Poulanzas, "Marxist Political Theory in Great Britain", New Left Review, 43 (1967) 57-74.

46. ibid., 64.

47. Nicos Poulanzas, Political Power and Social Classes (London 1976) 183.

religious, and hence still more dissociated from economic aspirations than political idioms normally are."<sup>48</sup> Nairn, too, speaks of middle class consciousness in the nineteenth century as "...simply the accompaniment to a world economic hegemony, a natural form of consciousness and conduct..."<sup>49</sup> For all their sophistication and deployment of elaborate conceptual apparatus, human consciousness and thought in the work of these authors are reduced to predominantly conditioned epiphonema. As Thompson has pointed out: "Reductionism is a lapse of historical logic by which political or cultural events are explained in terms of the class affiliations of the actors...that ideas, religious beliefs, or works of art, may be reduced (as one reduces a complex equation) to the 'real' class interests which they express."<sup>50</sup>

A particularly vivid concomitant of this methodology has been the tendency among these Marxists to scale down the complexities of ideology in British society to but one or two elements, themselves intelligible as conditioned by class structures - Utilitarianism, "empiricism", "traditionalism", etc. As Thompson has been at pains to make clear, the bourgeois class in Britain certainly constituted an "authentic" and "articulate" rounded ideology, composed of Protestant values, the theory of political economy of Smith and Ricardo, the theory of political liberalism, and the theories of natural science - Darwin in particular. If modes of thought are unified in this way, much of the impact of this dense and flexible ideology is surely obscured.

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48. Perry Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", New Left Review, 23 (1964) 28 (emphasis added).

49. Tom Nairn, "The English Working Class", in Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, 190.

50. "Peculiarities of the English", 352.

The dominant ideology in Britain was, according to Anderson, of "hegemonic" compass. He re-defines the Gramscian concept as follows: "The hegemonic class is the primary determinant of consciousness, character and customs throughout society", one which "...imposes its own ends and its own vision on society as a whole..."<sup>51</sup> By the terms of this definition, it is quite clear that only a ruling class can be hegemonic; it follows that the working class must be a "corporate" class - "...one which pursues its own ends within a social totality whose global determination lies outside it."<sup>52</sup> Now this is to do incalculable violence to the subtlety of Gramsci's formulation for, as has already been indicated, he believed that even a subordinate class might begin to elaborate an oppositional hegemonic mentality of its own and, indeed, this was a vital pre-requisite to the seizure of power by the working class. With Anderson, "corporate" class consciousness becomes synonymous with "reformism", and thus the working class is inevitably subordinated to bourgeois ideology.

Several factors are indicative of this dismissive stance. Anderson and Nairn blame the absence of an indigenous Marxist tradition upon the insularity and ingrained conservatism of the trade unions; the "...distinct, hermetic culture...[which]...has blocked the emergence of a universal ideology in the English working class";<sup>53</sup> and upon the default of the British intelligensia. Working class consciousness is conceptualised as blind, instinctive praxis at the purely political level and the

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51. "Origins of the Present Crisis", 39, 41.

52. ibid., 41.

53. ibid., 42 (all emphasised in original).

intellectuals become the embodiment of articulate political consciousness. There is singularly lacking here any "grass roots" dimension - the local level of working class communities, trade union and socialist branches, working class institutions, the workplace, and so on - for at this level there may be detected complex value-systems often antagonistic to the over-arching hegemony. This is not to deny that these beliefs fell short of the full-blown revolutionary class consciousness which Marxists applaud; it is rather to argue that working class thought and conceptions were not simply "corporate" and acquiescent. These categories violate the complex reality of working class consciousness, whose texture was often dense and always subject to change and development.

Perhaps the single most important ambiguity in this respect is to be found in the relationship which these authors posit as between bourgeois and proletarian forms of class consciousness. Poulanzas, it will be recalled, argues that there exists a "temptation" for working class thought to recreate the specific forms of bourgeois development.<sup>54</sup> In like fashion, Anderson and Nairn have suggested that, because the aristocracy was able to impose its cultural and ideological hegemony upon British society as a whole, the bourgeois class did not succeed in structuring a "coherent" ideology of its own. Following Marx's dictum to the effect that "the bourgeoisie supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education", they argue that the subordinate class did not find a fully constituted bourgeois ideology (such as was Jacobinism in France), which it in turn might transform into proletarian ideology.<sup>55</sup> Now it may be objected that such a

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54. Political Power and Social Classes, 183.

55. "Origins of the Present Crisis", 41ff; Nairn, "The English Working Class", 188ff. See further the other works in this genre cited in the previous chapter.

schematic auto-succession of social classes and modes of thought is, to say the least, highly improbable. But to the extent that it is a valid contention, at least two serious problems are immediately apparent.

It is by no means self-evident that the constitution of an "articulate" and coherent ideology on the part of the British bourgeoisie would necessarily have resulted in its being re-casted as a militant and oppositional working class consciousness. The implicit paradigm underlying this contention is clearly drawn from the French model of development in which Jacobinism, we are to assume, was precisely the exemplar of bourgeois thought. The model cannot be uncritically transposed to the British case, in which conditions such an ideology would surely have been no less hegemonic and integrative than those forms which Anderson and Nairn suggest actually existed. Secondly, given a schema which postulates a close relationship between successive modes of thought in this fashion, it is surely more likely that there would occur a fusion, or at least partial inter-penetration, of aspects drawn from the different value-systems, elements of bourgeois ideology, for instance, being taken up and reworked within proletarian thought. One is being asked to accept that, whilst the development of working class consciousness is itself contingent upon the nature and categories of bourgeois thought, the two remain ultimately discrete.

Many of the difficulties of the Marxist analysis of ideology and class consciousness thus reoccur in the accounts offered by contemporary authors with respect to the evolution of socialism in this country; these too are at once both reductionist and rigidly categorical. In consequence, we are little wiser as to the actual processes by which social consciousness is generated and evolves, or as to its complexity of formation.



Much weight has been made to rest upon the concept of the labour aristocracy in Marxist analyses of British socialism, and it in turn is intimately linked to the theory of ideology and class consciousness, for the existence of a privileged labour elite is held to facilitate the implanatation of a debilitating bourgeois vision in the working class movement. Two sets of problems in fact surround this theory. First, there is considerable confusion even among Marxists as to the precise social composition of the labour aristocratic stratum, the bases of its privilege and its temporal genesis and location. Secondly, the labour aristocracy argument is vitiated by its unquestioning identification of economic and social position within the labour community with the existence of bourgeois attitudes and traits.

"The difficulty about the Marxist labour aristocracy", Henry Pelling has recently observed, "is that it means something slightly different in almost every context."<sup>56</sup> For Engels, it comprised skilled trade unionists, those men who, like the engineers and building workers, had been able to secure an advantageous bargaining position. Beyond linking the labour aristocracy to the existence of imperialist super-profits, Lenin was equivocal as to its actual composition, at different times labelling as aristocratic "labour leaders" and politicians, the trade union leadership, "the upper stratum of the proletariat", and even the whole of the working class in the imperialist countries during the First World War.<sup>57</sup> Again, Hobsbawn's criterion is primarily those workers in receipt of high wages.<sup>58</sup> Foster identifies as labour aristocrats

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56. Henry Pelling, "The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy", in *idem.*, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 41.

57. Roger Penn, "Skilled Workers in the Class Structure", unpublished research paper (Cambridge 1975) 3.

58. Eric Hobsbawn, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain", in *idem.*, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London 1972) 272-315.



those in authority over their fellows at the workplace but, in the latter part of the century, shifts its composition onto the trade union leadership and even the whole of the organised working class. <sup>59</sup>

Nor is the period of labour aristocratic pre-eminence any less ambiguous. The emergence of the labour aristocracy may be dated in the 1840s according to Foster, although both Hobsbawm and Royden Harrison locate its "classic period" in the decades immediately after 1860. Engels had in mind primarily the 1880s and 1890s, whilst for Lenin the aristocracy of labour was a feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recently, Foster has traced its influence through to the 1920s. Finally, the methods by which the labour aristocratic strata are said to have been bought off are almost as varied as its composition. These have ranged from a crude theory of "bribery" of the labour and trade union leadership, sub-contracting at the place of work, high wages derived from bargaining strength, control of entry and imperialist super-profits, through to tariffs and state welfare measures. In recent years the concept has even been used by Marxists to account for ethnic differentiation within the working class. <sup>60</sup>

However, the real issue at stake here is the theoretical status and inner logic of the labour aristocracy theory. It may be conceded at the outset that the working class has at no time been constituted as a simple, homogeneous social group, but the Marxist labour aristocracy clearly asserts more than the simple fact of differentiation among the

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59. John Foster, Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution (London 1974); "British Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy", in Jeffrey Skelley, ed., The General Strike 1926 (London 1976) 3-57.

60. See, for instance, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, "The Function of Labour Immigration in Western European Capitalism", New Left Review, 82 (1973) 40-59.

workers. For it is argued that this differentiation must lead to the absorption of bourgeois values and ideas antithetical to the socialist perspective. For Engels, the fact that "...the English working class have to a certain extent shared in the benefits of monopoly...very unequally parcelled out amongst them...is the reason why since the dying out of Owenism there has been no socialism in England".<sup>61</sup> Likewise, for Hobsbawm, Harrison and Foster there is held to exist a close relationship between the political moderation and the economic location of the labour aristocracy.

To put the matter in a nutshell, we are being asked here to accept a rather simple correlation between degree of "privilege" (whatever its basis) and political or industrial behaviour. Labour aristocratic consciousness is assumed to follow from the fact of economic situation, and that of the mass of the working class from the tenor of respectability and policy of reformism which the aristocratic stratum bequeathes to the working class movement. In Engels, Lenin and Hobsbawm's versions of the theory, the determination of social consciousness in this fashion is particularly apparent, and we may notice only Lenin's belief in "...the tendency of imperialism to divide the workers in this way, to encourage opportunism among them, and cause temporary decay in the working class movement..."<sup>62</sup> Foster's formulation of the theory represents a great advance in this respect. In identifying the importance of authority relations within the labour community, and specifying the web of institutions which form the primary redoubt of labour aristocratic culture, he is able to present a more life-like picture, although it

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61. Frederick Engels, "England in 1845 and in 1885", in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain (Moscow 1971) 394.

62. "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism", in Christman, ed., Essential Works of Lenin, 252.

should be noted that even here sub-contracting is held to account almost entirely for the fact that workers come to imbibe the values of the employer class. At the other extreme, Foster strips away the most original and suggestive aspects of his theory in accounting for the labour aristocracy towards the end of the century: here he reverts to a naive theory of "betrayal" of the working class by a small group of labour leaders at the head of working class organisations, through which "the bribe" is distributed.

The inadequacies of the Marxist labour aristocracy may be more clearly registered by reference to several rather more sophisticated re-formulations of the theory. It is coming to be appreciated that the mere existence of an elite stratum is hardly evidence enough for the total injection of bourgeois values into the working class outlook. There is certainly no lack of evidence which suggests that the views of the aristocracy of labour reflected the diffusion of such dominant values in Victorian society as "respectability", "independence" and "thrift". But this must be qualified, for these values may have changed their meaning when absorbed into the artisanal lifestyle. Royden Harrison, for instance, has complemented his version of the labour aristocracy thesis by observing that bourgeois "self-help" values took on collectivist overtones among the working class, in many cases quite alien to the intentions of the dominant social groups.<sup>63</sup> The ideology must therefore be analysed in the context of the workman's own economic, social and cultural experience.

It has fallen to a number of historians in recent years to draw out the full implications of this critical insight. In an analysis of

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63. Royden Harrison, "Afterword" to Samuel Smiles, Self-Help (London 1968 ed.) 268-69.

the labour aristocracy in nineteenth century Edinburgh, Robert Gray has argued that the values and behaviour of the artisan elite "...should be interpreted in relation to the situation of the actor:"<sup>64</sup>

The outlook of the Victorian labour aristocracy was thus an ambivalent one. Dominant values changed their meaning as they became adapted to the conditions of the artisan world and mediated through autonomous artisan institutions. The typical stress upon the 'respectability' of the upper working class stratum can often be seen as a claim to corporate social recognition.

It is important that the subtle shifts in the meanings attributed to certain values upon their reception into the artisanal lifestyle should be fully appreciated. "The claim to 'respectability' must be set in the context of a strong sense of class pride", although: "The co-existence of solidaristic values and practices with aspirations expressed in the language of hegemonic individualism made for a certain ambivalence in the ideology of the artisan."<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey Crossick's work on the metropolitan aristocracy of labour leads him to dispute "the traditional orthodoxy"; "If these labour aristocrats were a vital force in bringing stability to mid-Victorian Kentish London - and they certainly were - it is essential that we do not overestimate their capitulation to the values of the local middle classes."<sup>66</sup>

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64. Robert Q. Gray, "The Labour Aristocracy in the Victorian Class Structure", in Frank Parkin, ed., The Social Analysis of Class Structure (London 1974) 26; see further, "Styles of Life, the 'Labour Aristocracy' and Class Relations in Later Nineteenth Century Edinburgh", International Review of Social History, XVIII (1973) 428-52.

65. Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976) 139, 138.

66. Geoffrey Crossick, "An Artisan Elite in Victorian England", New Society, 23-30 December (1976) 613; "The Labour Aristocracy and Its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London", Victorian Studies, XIX (1976) 303.

...the process of ideological hegemony by which the mid-Victorian ruling elite successfully contained a section of the working class was a far more subtle and ambiguous process than would be allowed by the orthodoxy of the labour aristocracy being indoctrinated with, or persuaded to accept, middle class values and ideals. The values proclaimed by the labour aristocracy take on a very different significance when understood within a specific working class socio-economic situation. It is only in this context the political militancy, the trade union solidarity, the continuing class tension, and the subsequent labour consciousness can be interpreted.

It may be concluded that the theory of ideology and class consciousness which underscores the Marxist labour aristocracy has again led to working class consciousness being denuded of vitality and colour, and absorbed into the dominant value system per medium of an elite stratum. In this way there has remained intact the a priori assumption that the mass of the working class will aspire at length to revolutionary consciousness, although one is little wiser as to how this will come about. The processes whereby social belief develops are in reality intricate; the "downward flow" of language and ruling class values must be matched by recognition of the "upward flow" of working class experience and aspirations, and the process of "mixing" - in the context of the working class community and social institutions - in fact the genesis of working class consciousness.

#### 4.3: Problems in Sociological and Political Approaches

The re-stated labour aristocracy thesis leads naturally to a consideration of the sociological theories outlined in the previous chapter. For here again it is recognised that working class consciousness need not be simply a passive capitulation to the normative societal order, but a "negotiated" or "pragmatic" version of those values. For a variety of reasons, however, these theories fail to establish convincingly their



case of incorporation and, in consequence, the adequacy of their analysis of working class consciousness must be in doubt.

It will be recalled that Young stressed the incorporation of a "popular-egalitarian collectivist" working class tradition through the critical institutional nexus of the Labour Party.<sup>67</sup> Now Young's argument does greater justice to the oppositional values embodied in British working class culture and its institutional bulwarks. Yet his case for its incorporation rests solely upon the political role of the Labour Party. It is not clear whether he regards the aim of getting into Parliament, or the consequences of participating in it once arrived, as being the main cause of working class incorporation. Either is surely inadequate, particularly as Young wishes to stress the strong, hermetic working class culture as continuing unaffected. We are not told what mechanisms of transmission ensured the dominance of incorporation, nor why the Labour Party should have such calamitous effect. Ultimately, a structural analysis of working class belief and culture is sacrificed for an explanation predicated upon the betrayal and collusion of a small group of Parliamentary leaders.<sup>68</sup>

Like Young, Parkin too works from the pre-given fact of subordination.<sup>69</sup> This he locates in the subordinate value-system rooted in the working class community, although this is no passive recipient of the dominant order, but spawns a "negotiated" version of it. The subordinate value-system may also be receptive to oppositional beliefs channelled in from

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67. Nigel Young, "Prometheans or Troglodytes? The English Working Class and the Dialectics of Incorporation", Berkeley Journal of Sociology, XII (1967) 1-43.

68. See further J. M. Cousins and R. L. Davies, "'Working Class Incorporation' - A Historical Approach...", in Parkin, ed., Social Analysis of Class Structure, 281-84.

69. Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (London 1972) ch. 3, et. passim.

the radical value-system, whose social source is the mass working class party. Parkin emphasises the role of the traditional means of incorporation - the routinization of working class organisation, acculturation of the working class leadership, the entry of bourgeois recruits and the like - but places marked accent upon the normative effect of political de-radicalization in capitalist society.<sup>70</sup> However, much of his argument rests upon the assumption of subordination. This he explains by reference to the role of socialisation and the education system, religion and social mobility, but accepts that these are only partial explanations. Ultimately, he offers a tautological argument which hinges around subordination as a presumed fact, and may be detected in "...the tendency for the under-class to throw up symbolic systems which explain their life situation in secular, non-political terms..."<sup>71</sup> As John Westergaard has recently shown, Parkin's account of the subordinate value-system is such as to automatically exclude universalistic radical beliefs, which must be imported into working class culture from outside by intellectuals and professional politicians. Westergaard correctly points out that much genuine oppositional revolt has sprung from within the working class itself: "...labour history seems clear enough that a great deal of opposition of a universalistic kind, involving a vision of an alternative society, has its own roots within the working class, and that in this country goes back at least to Chartism."<sup>72</sup>

By taking subordination for granted, Parkin's theory cannot advance in any depth beyond the "normative ambivalence" of the working class

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70. ibid., ch. 4.

71. ibid., 77.

72. John Westergaard, "Radical Class Consciousness: A Comment", in Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society, 254.



value system and attention is therefore directed away from the generation and varied forms of working class belief. Likewise, Mann's theory has emphasised the "pragmatic" subordination of the workers in capitalist societies, and his four levels of class consciousness represent a marked improvement upon the dichotomistic Marxist conception. But again he is unclear as to the actual processes of incorporation. Mann endeavoured to show that among the working class there is a discrepancy between their apperceptions of the remote and more abstract aspects of society and of those more proximate and concrete issues which bear upon their day to day lives, and thus the workers neither possess nor need to have coherent and well formulated images of society because ideologies are only articulated by those who are concerned with preserving or changing society - by social elites or working class militants. And thus he argues that, "...only those actually sharing in societal power need develop consistent societal values", and so the failure of the workers to develop "societal values" is part and parcel of their failure to control society; and vice versa.<sup>73</sup> Mann makes reference to socialisation through the education process, "voluntary deference", nationalism and imperialism, and "class consciousness", but like Parkin is unconvinced as to their adequacy as full explanations. Working class pragmatic acquiescence in the dominant order is thus put down to the "historical incorporation" of that class, although the actual workings of this process and the development of reformism in this country is left undeveloped by Mann.<sup>74</sup>

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73. Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy", American Sociological Review, XXXV (1970) 435.

74. For a critique along these lines of Mann's work, see John Downing, "Grave-Diggers' Difficulties: Ideology and Class Struggle in 'Advanced Capitalism'", in Richard Scase, ed., Industrial Society: Class, Cleavage and Control (London 1977) 124.

It will have been noticed, therefore, that each of these theories rests upon a weakly argued case for incorporation, which in the final analysis is held to account for forms of working class belief.<sup>75</sup> They advance the argument beyond the Marxist position by challenging the assumed subordination of working class thought to the normative societal order, but are prevented from following the argument through by the pre-given fact of "subordination". Ultimately this must define the outer limits of working class thought.

It ought to be clear from the whole discussion thus far that, to the extent that they might assist in our understanding of the British socialist movement, the theories of citizenship, civility and deference stand in want of considerable revision. A brief analysis of these approaches will indicate why this should be so.

With the concerns of this study in mind, two major defects will be seen to vitiate the citizenship perspective. First, one may legitimately question the extent to which citizenship rights actually overrode the divisive inequalities of social class structure.<sup>76</sup> Of the very period in which the theory has sought to demonstrate and account for the emergent sense of national and civic unity and the widening embrace of the political community, the Liberal social philosopher T. H. Green observed of the working class that they were being "left to sink or swim in the stream of unrelenting competition....So far as negative rights go - rights to be let alone - they are admitted to membership of civil society, but the good to which the pursuits of society are in fact directed turn out to be

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75. Cousins and Davies, "'Working Class Incorporation'...", 281-84.

76. See further, Ralph Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (London 1969) 105-7.

no good things for them." 77 Indeed, it is the overwhelming sense of social polarisation and antagonism that defines most of the nineteenth century, rather than that of societal consensus. Moreover, far from there having existed a consistent body of reciprocally recognised rights and claims within society, Victorian Britain was dominated by conflict between rival claims and antithetical rights. Conceptions of citizenship rights are in any case to be sociologically situated; and thus the middle class right of enterprise and laissez-faire undoubtedly militated against the social and human rights of the vast majority of the population. Social rights were from the start associated with the collectivist claims of the workers and a far cry from those conceived of by the higher social strata.

Marshall's citizenship theory drastically understates the continued, and continuing, reality of social class inequality. Citizenship rights did not smooth over these divisions but rather they were themselves fractured by the rival claims of social groups. It would seem to follow, secondly, that working class social belief in the last century cannot be held to result from absorption into the framework of the civic and political community. The argument hinges about the normative integration of the workers into a common culture at the societal level. The fissiparous tendencies inherent in sub-cultural formation are not recognised in this schema, nor, equally, are the mechanisms by which this assumed process of normative absorption took place specified. The contribution of the citizenship perspective to the study of British socialism must be in doubt.

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77. T. H. Green, Prolegomana to Ethics (1883), cited by Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and his Age (London 1964) 320.

Similar comments are pertinent in respect of the civility and deference theses. It will be recalled that the common framework here is that of political culture, for each refers more or less explicitly to the central cultural values of society in explaining individual and group beliefs and political orientations. As both theories assign a central place to cultural factors, we might usefully inquire as to the applicability of the political culture concept to the present study.

It is once more argued here that working class political behaviour may be explained by reference to a process of normative integration into a widely diffuse and consensual political culture. There is a difficult problem of causation here. Social relationships between men, and the ideas which they embody, are, it has been argued, in reality but two sides of the same coin.<sup>78</sup> The relationships between values and action is an internal and logical relationship, and therefore one cannot be held to be causative of the other, which would call for the relationship to be external and contingent. To account for a specific form of political behaviour by invoking the values of the actor is simply to redescribe that action, rather than to explain it. Political culture as the beginning of a chain of causative sequence must be rejected, although the way is still open as to how individuals come to possess the values in question. For this reason, political socialisation plays a large part in these approaches. A second ambiguity in the political culture argument stems from its tendency to talk in terms of the political culture. It has already been suggested that to speak of British society during the nineteenth century in consensual and harmonious terms is to do violence to the historical reality of a society fragmented and fissured

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78. On this point see Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science (London 1958).

by competing social groups. These studies do not differentiate between the dominant political culture, and more or less antagonistic sub-cultures; nor do they allow for the fact that acquiescence in the values of the dominant culture on the part of the subordinate class may be less than total.<sup>79</sup>

Turning our attention to the theory of deference, an immediate confusion is apparent for, as both Jessop and Kavanagh have observed, the concept of "deference" is itself not wholly unambiguous.<sup>80</sup> Jessop has distinguished four analytically distinct forms of deference, and suggests that not all will give rise to unequivocal Conservative support among the working class. To the extent that "ascriptive social deferents" - i.e. those who defer simply to the high born or wealthy - "...are motivated by a politically oriented 'trade union consciousness' and see their interests as linked to the electoral success of another party whose policies and actions are not incompatible with the established order - to that extent they are likely to vote other than Conservative."<sup>81</sup> Nor is it immediately obvious why deference in itself should be a cause of working class political behaviour, because not all deferentials vote Conservative. Nordlinger hints at the suggestion that deference may be a result of Conservative partisanship;<sup>82</sup> and Parkin has argued that both deference and Conservatism are themselves contingent upon a third factor -

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79. On this point see Bob Jessop, Traditionalism, Conservatism and British Political Culture (London 1974) 21-6.

80. Jessop, Traditionalism and Conservatism, 32-7, and "Civility and Traditionalism in English Political Culture", British Journal of Political Science, I (1971) 1-24; David Kavanagh, "The Deferential English: A Comparative Critique", Government and Opposition, VI (1971) 333-60.

81. Traditionalism and Conservatism, 36-7.

82. Eric Nordlinger, The Working Class Tories (London 1967) fn. 64-5.



exposure to the dominant value-system. <sup>83</sup>

These are problems inherent in a theory which moves from the realm of normative culture and thence to working class political behaviour in an attempt to explain action seemingly contrary to the run of class interests. Similar comments are germane in respect of the civility studies, which stress the role of emergent cultural properties and display an overriding concern with the political system as a whole. Here again there is precious little recognition that in the "civic culture" there may be important divergences between dominant and peripheral values, and neither Nordlinger nor Almond and Verba pay much attention to the implications of inequalities in the distribution of power on political stability. Nor do they satisfactorily resolve the problem of causality for, as Brian Barry has observed, it is quite possible that an effective democratic political system results in a civic culture, rather than that the civic culture produces stability of political behaviour in such systems. <sup>84</sup>

More central to the concerns of the present study, however, is the fact that both the deference and civility theories rely upon a blanket process of political socialisation to account for the transition from normative orientations to internalised behaviour. The process is assumed singularly efficacious and is held to militate against the emergence of political radicalism, or indeed any sense of disillusion with the legitimacy of the political system. McKenzie and Silver's comment to the effect that, "Where the ordinary person is seen as politically efficacious, it is almost always through the polling booth and not through working class political or industrial organisations", <sup>85</sup> is typical of the

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83. Frank Parkin, "Working Class Conservatism: A Theory of Political Deviance", *British Journal of Sociology*, XVII (1967) 278-90.

84. Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* (London 1970) 51.

85. R. McKenzie and A. Silver, *Angels in Marble* (London 1968) 125.

conclusions arrived at by these studies. A ubiquitous process of socialisation allows for no human agency and, in consequence, social consciousness is reduced to but a pliable receptor. According to this view, then, there is no possibility that the reception and interpretation of dominant values, or the place of sub- or contra-societal cultures in the articulation of working class political belief, might be analysed. <sup>86</sup>

To sum up the argument, then. Focusing upon the analysis of social consciousness as fundamental to a study of British socialism, a variety of problems have been identified in previous theoretical formulations. The classical and neo-Marxist traditions have sought to account for the non-revolutionary and labourist movement in this country by invoking the theory of ideology and class consciousness, and related conceptual devices such as the labour aristocracy. It has been suggested, firstly, that the Marxist analysis unnecessarily schematised the issues involved. Modes of human consciousness are both unified and dichotomised, with the result that much of the complexity and texture of social consciousness is obscured. There is no adequate theory to account for the transition from one form of consciousness to another, nor any analysis of the mechanisms and processes by which beliefs develop. Secondly, working class thought is actually devalued in the Marxist schema, either reduced to underlying "real" motive forces, or assumed totally integrated, unable to "fight back". In Gramsci's Marxism the elements of a more sophisticated and appreciative theory were identified, but this too falls short in the face of the real complexities involved.

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86. Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh, 143, suggests that the simple model of deference is unacceptable, as it usually co-existed with notions of corporate class pride and identity.



As to the theories of political behaviour which argue from political culture, deference and civility, it was suggested that the normative integration and consensual absorption of social belief into an enveloping socialisation process is unacceptable. Certain sociological theories were seen to advance beyond this position by recognising that working class consciousness may be a "pragmatic" or "negotiated" version of the dominant moral order. But by assuming a priori the fact of "incorporation" or "subordination", they too fail to fully account for the formation and development of social consciousness. In short, the complex and dynamic relationships between social structure and belief remain largely mysterious. The theoretical framework outlined below is addressed to precisely these questions.

#### 4.4: Towards a Theoretical Framework

Too frequently, the nature and forms of socialism in the latter part of the nineteenth century in this country are adduced from the thought and actions of the "great men" of the movement. Sociologists have easily followed labour historians in this respect, by extrapolating from the politics and attitudes of trade union General Secretaries and labour leaders and politicians the "social consciousness" of the working class rank and file. Basic to this study is the premise that, if we are to appreciate the nature and appeal of socialism in this period, then this consciousness ought itself to become a primary focus of consideration. Put another way, one ought to be concerned with the actual conceptions of socialism prevalent at the "grass-roots" level - that is, the level of the working class community. Indeed, the work of the labour leadership would surely have come to nothing if the socialism they propounded did not strike a responsive chord among a wider working class audience, and

was not seen to face up to everyday problems "at the level of meaning." But nor, equally, can it be assumed that conceptions of socialism remained unchanged in the transposition and diffusion from one level to the other.

If Marxist and sociological theories fall down in this respect, then an approach to these questions ought perhaps be receptive to recent significant developments in historical research in this country. This historiography has been distinguished by its fresh approach to the nature of English society in the nineteenth century, emphasising in particular the cultural and political role of the working class.<sup>87</sup> Inspired in part by Marxian revisionism, this historical line of inquiry may be characterised as "democratic"; its dominant tone has been humane and anti-deterministic, stressing the role of men as active, creative and conscious human agents. It has sought to retrieve such neglected popular movements as peasant struggles, social banditry and anarchism, religious sects, crowds and mobs, and has distinguished itself from traditional labour history with ideas like "primitive rebellion", "moral economy", and general attempts to reconstruct "history from below". This venture in reconstituting the texture and social meaning of popular struggle was initiated and exemplified by E. P. Thompson in his seminal work The Making of the English Working Class. Yet, if the emphasis has been relocated upon the autonomy of working class action, there is often lacking (as was noted in chapter 1) a wider macro-societal frame of reference and sense of social structure to which these beliefs might be referred.

It will be suggested that a sociological approach to British socialism must assume this "democratic" concern, integrated within a broader macro-ideological and structural perspective. To this end, the theoretical

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87. See above chapter 1 on recent trends in British historical research.

framework which informs this study may now be schematically outlined. It should be noted that at this stage the theory is purely formal and abstract. At the moment, no allusion will be made to the historical and sociological flesh and blood which would bring this skeletal outline to life.

- (1) It should be clear from the preceding analysis that a sociological explanation of the trajectory and nature of British socialism must take full cognizance of both the macro-structural and ideological environment within whose ambit working class beliefs emerge, and the innovative and cultural role of working class people at the micro- or communal level. Consequently, this theoretical framework will be structured around two emphases:-
  - (i) the evolution of social structure and ideological forms, including the global conception of socialism itself;
  - (ii) the working class community, its social institutions and relationships - the existential basis of popular social imagery.
- (2) Any properly grounded sociological approach to socialism and working class belief must begin by specifying the wider structural and ideological context.
  - (2.1) In Part II of this study, the main parameters of this macro-sociological context will be defined. This will be seen to involve: first, an account of the evolution of the Victorian economy and social structure and their commanding features by the latter part of the last century; second, and closely related to this structural analysis, the nature of the dominant ideological

forms will be discussed; and finally, an analysis of the character and broad trajectory of the labour movement and socialist thought at the "national" level.

- (2.2) These macro-societal factors will play an important part in shaping working class social consciousness, but they are in no sense determinant. Rather must they be seen in the sense of establishing the context, preconditions and potentialities for the occurrence of non-structural and micro-level processes - the development and organisation of social groups, the formation of new interests and values and the general creation and transformation of culture and consciousness. Social structure, for instance, must be conceived not as ultimately constraining, but as itself an on-going sociological process; there would seem little reason to dissent from Bottomore's account of social structure, which allows "for the influence of a variety of factors in the processes of destructure and restructure."<sup>88</sup>

- (2.3) In similar fashion, the normative structure of society - its ideas, values and ideologies - will bear upon working class imagery. But, once more, the domain of ideological forms - and even those of hegemonic compass - is surely to be seen as the general framework within which occurs cultural interpretation and innovation. It is fundamental to this study that human consciousness be conceived as an autonomous human activity, and in Part III the activistic processes whereby working class belief is forged are brought into focus.

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88. T. E. Bottomore, "Structure and History", in Peter Blau, ed.; Approaches to the Study of Social Structure (London 1976) 161.

- (3) As Barry Hindness has recently argued in a study of working class political behaviour, "...any explanation must be in terms of both the meanings this behaviour has for the people concerned and of the social and political structure within which they act..."; these "...meanings and experiences...exist and are important within an already structured situation."<sup>89</sup> The macro-societal perspective must, therefore, be complemented by an analysis of the social processes operative at the micro-societal level - that of the working class community.

- (3.1) As Converse has noted of the diffusion of ideologies,<sup>90</sup>

As the meaning system is transmitted from its original carriers, it becomes fragmented and its scope becomes narrower... At the same time the character of the key elements undergoes systematic change. They shift from the remote, generic and abstract to the increasingly simple, concrete and close to home.

Students of social imagery have often pointed to a distinction between working class views concerning abstract situations, and those appertaining more directly to their own concrete daily life.<sup>91</sup> To be sure, "higher-order" language, values and political orientations will flow downwards from the societal level to that of the working class community. But in acting upon and influencing social beliefs, they are emolliated to the extent that they interact with "lower-order" systems founded of sentiments, beliefs and aspirations

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89. Barry Hindness, The Decline of Working Class Politics (London 1971) 11, 33.
90. P. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics", in David E. Apter, ed., Ideology and Discontent (Glencoe 1964) 206-61.
91. See, for instance, Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order, 94-5; Jim Cousins and Richard Brown, "Patterns of Paradox: Shipbuilding Workers' Images of Society", in Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society, 79; Roderick Martin and Robert H. Fryer, "The Deferential Workers", ibid., 103, 109.



rooted in the concrete, everyday experience of working class life.<sup>92</sup> A sociological approach cannot afford to ignore the existential bases of this indigencous working class outlook.

(3.2) It will be suggested here that working class perceptions of social factors will be mediated by those aspects of the social structure which form the primary social nexi of the working class community. Certainly, this theme is a common one in sociological inquiry. And thus, David Lockwood has observed that, "For the most part men visualise the class structure of their society from the vantage points of their own particular milieux..."; in this connection, he stresses the importance of "the industrial and community milieux of the manual workers."<sup>93</sup> Frank Parkin is in broad agreement with this emphasis,<sup>94</sup> whilst Inkeles has argued that "...people have experiences, develop attitudes and form values in response to the forces or pressures which networks of interpersonal relations" tend to exert.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Bott has pointed to the role of "the primary social world" - the "network of friends, neighbours, relatives and particular social institutions" - in shaping individual and group perceptions of the social world.<sup>96</sup>

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92. For a discussion of "higher-" and "lower-order" belief systems, see Nigel Harris, Beliefs in Society: The Problem of Ideology (Harmondsworth 1971) 32-5.
93. David Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society", Sociological Review, XIV (1966) 250; this article is reprinted in Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society, 16-31.
94. Parkin, "Working Class Conservatism", 282-85.
95. A. Inkeles, "Industrial Man: The Relation of Status to Experience, Perception and Values", American Journal of Sociology, LXVI (1960-61) 2.
96. Elizabeth Bott, "Conceptions of Class", in Richard Rose, ed., Studies in British Politics (London 1969) 134.

(3.3) Within this basic orientation, there exists much room for further exploration. Recent research has highlighted the fallacy of assuming a priori that a given social milieu will automatically call forth predictable social perceptions amongst working class groups; clearly there exists much indeterminacy in the relationship between objective social structures and human consciousness.<sup>97</sup>

In what follows, ideal-typical constructions of working class milieux and imagery will be eschewed, and it is proposed that the emergent properties of actual social situations should become the primary focus of attention. If the generation and distinctive forms of working class consciousness are to be appreciated, then such beliefs must be located within the all-round primary social and occupational experience of specific working class groups. In short, these beliefs must be set within the context of the working class community and its culture. These terms will be defined in due course.

- (4) It is this immediate and localised social world that forms the existential basis of working class imagery and the context in which ideas conflict and interact, and social consciousness is forged.
- (4.1) It will be argued in the following chapters that subordinate groups do not simply capitulate to and acquiesce in the dominant moral order of society. Rather, language, values and ideas which "feed into" the working class will only be perceived, taken up

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97. Evidence on this score may be gained from many of the contributions to the recent symposium on working class imagery edited by Bulmer, Working Class Images of Society, passim. See further, Morris Rosenberg, "Perceptual Obstacles to Class Consciousness", Social Forces, XLIV (1965) 22-27.



and acted upon to the extent that they are seen to harmonise with and interpret adequately the day to day experience and problems of those groups. There will be manifest, therefore, a process of interaction between higher-order value-systems which are specifically aimed at or filter through to, and the more or less concrete experiential lower-order beliefs of, particular working class groups.

- (4.2) This interaction is an historical and active human process. It may be termed cultural struggle or adaptation, for there will be in evidence a process whereby ideas and values are "stretched", transformed and twisted more into line and harmony with the existential location and outlook of that working class group.<sup>98</sup> Within given structural constraints, the perceptions of and meanings attached to specific value-systems to which the working class are exposed will show subtle but yet perceptible changes. The dominant ideas and ideologies of a society are rarely passively imbibed; rather social consciousness ought to be seen to emerge out of this active process of cultural struggle and adaptation.
- (4.3) In any study of socialist belief, it would be manifestly inadequate to concentrate exclusively upon the generation of those beliefs within a given parochial working class environment. Universalistic values and beliefs, injected, as it were, from "outside" this immediate context will play a vital part in the process. But their meaning cannot be appreciated divorced from the primary social environment of which they are a part. Only in this situation

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98. Hyman Rodman's article, "The Lower-Class Value Stretch", Social Forces, LXII (1963) 205-15, must be mentioned here as an early determinant in the elaboration of the above theoretical schema.

do socialist ideas begin to "make sense" for working people and hence for the investigator concerned to understand those beliefs.

- (5) The context in which cultural struggle and adaptation takes place - and hence the genesis and sustaining of social consciousness - is the working class community and its culture. These terms must now be examined.

- (5.1) The basis of the social institutions which comprise any working class community is the division of labour in society.<sup>99</sup> It is this single economic division - which means that the working man must live by his labour and skill for which he is in receipt of a wage - that pulls the working class together as a group and, on occasions, a highly self-conscious group. From this, and the workings of the poverty cycle classically analysed by Rowntree, springs the repeated experience of hardship through which most working families passed in the nineteenth century at one time or another. Lacking financial resources to fall back upon, the working class found it necessary to turn inwards upon its own communality and collectivism for help and assistance in times of need. It is upon this economically founded mutuality that the "settled structure" of the community rests.

- (5.2) In accounting for the development of working class imagery, Part III of this study will emphasise various facets of this settled structure in later nineteenth century Lancashire. First, the industrial structure of the working class community and its

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99. The following discussion draws upon Brian Jackson, Working Class Community (Harmondsworth 1968), particularly 164-69.

productive relations appear at all times to have been a central consideration. Second, home and family structure, and neighbourhood propriinquity patterns in Lancashire, will be related to working class social outlook. Finally, the case of popular religious beliefs and Nonconformist chapels in the working class community will be singled out as a detailed instance of the processes of belief formation.

- (5.3) The "settled structure" of the working class community is the context within which its culture is forged and arises. Structure and culture are mediated by social interaction and relationships. <sup>100</sup> By working class culture, then, is meant that ensemble of beliefs, values and goals actively evolved in the course of social relationships carried on within the institutions of that community. The process of conflict and adaptation of ideas alluded to above - and the resultant forms of social belief - are of course part and parcel of this culture and can only be appreciated by reference to the social institutions of the community by which the dominant patterns of social relationships are embraced.
- (5.4) All of this should not lead us to believe that the working class community is a homogeneous entity, or working class consciousness a coherent weltanschauung. On the contrary, much evidence points to the importance of social and economic differentiation within the working class, to a "lack of fit" between occupational and community milieux in certain instances, and to "contradictory" elements in the working class value system. These and similar problems complicate the issue and make facile categorisation

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100. Lewis Coser, "Structure and Conflict", in Blau, ed., Approaches to Social Structure, 210-11.

impossible; they are, notwithstanding, actual features of working class life and thought, and ought to be accepted and explained as such.

(5.5) Two further aspects of the community milieu should be noted.

First, the community can be seen in part at least as a defensive network, within which working class autonomy may be exerted and by which more or less deviant belief systems are buttressed from the dominant values of society. This interpretation has proved an essential part of much social research concerned with sub-cultural formation.<sup>101</sup> In this connection, one may notice John Burnett's contention that, "Within what seemed a closed and rigid social structure, the working classes constructed their own exclusive world, remote from the acquisitive, accumulative impulses of the late Victorian economy. In part, it was an escape from the harshness of the real world, in part an attempt to create community in the anonymity of the industrial town."<sup>102</sup>

(5.6) Secondly, it is often the case that each social institution of the working class community serves not so much a single function or specialised interest, but acts rather as "fields in which to develop and extend personal relationships."<sup>103</sup> A contrast may perhaps be drawn at this point between middle and lower middle class life, and that of the working class. The former social

101. Particularly in the field of the sociology of deviant behaviour; see Jock Young, The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use (London 1971), 41-2.

102. John Burnett, "Autobiographies as History", in idem., ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s-1920s (London 1974) 18.

103. Jackson, Working Class Community, 168.

groups, economically fissured centrifugally into discrete households, were "neither gregarious nor collective by nature", and when they participated in voluntary associations and institutions, "they did so in a one-dimensional and almost instrumental way." <sup>104</sup>

By comparison, the various institutions of the working class community almost "overlap", each expressing different aspects of the same dominant pattern of social relationships. It will be suggested, for instance, that the Nonconformist chapel in Lancashire working class communities was not simply a "religious", but more an all round social institution, firmly rooted in those communities. Religious sentiment harmonised intimately with other aspects of the working class value-system including, it will be argued, socialist beliefs.

- (5.7) Whilst the working class community and its culture in nineteenth century Britain were distinct and recognisable social forms, the idea to be found in certain Marxist writings to the effect that working class society was a discrete and hermetic sub-set of society as a whole, must be rejected. <sup>105</sup> Rather, it is the nature of the relationships between the community and wider social forces which will be of interest here.

- (6) Socialism and socialist beliefs may now be easily inserted within the above theoretical schema.

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104. Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", in idem., ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 28.

105. See for instance Charles Keith Maisels, "Editorial", New Edinburgh Review (n.d., "Working Class Culture and Consciousness Edition") 1-3.



- (6.1) To the extent that socialist beliefs were taken up and integrated into the value-system of working people, then they too must be interpreted as one aspect integral to the working class community and its culture. It will be suggested in the following chapters that to secure some measure of widespread acceptance, socialist ideas must mesh into the all-round outlook of working people, given effective expression in social relationships and through the institutions of community life. In this way one is able to account for the specific nature of socialist beliefs, why they assumed importance and the mechanisms of their gradual evolution.
- (6.2) The above comments suggest that in our analysis of socialism among the Lancashire working class, we would do well to focus upon on local socialist branches, the pattern of social relationships to be found in them and the conceptions of socialism prevalent at the parochial or communal level. Naturally, one would be concerned in addition with their place in the working class community and relation to its other social institutions. According to this perspective, both the forms of socialist belief and organisation might be more clearly appreciated.
- (6.3) If the main lines of the above argument are accepted, and socialism is to be rooted and therefore appreciated in the setting of the working class community and its culture, then it should not be surprising to find that popular consciousness may fall short of a theoretically postulated universalistic socialist consciousness. As many scholars have argued, "communal" consciousness is often a form of sub-class consciousness, and may even be antithetical to a full-blown socialist consciousness.<sup>106</sup> It should by this

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106. See for instance John H. Westergaard, "The Withering Away of Class: A Contemporary Myth", in Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn, eds., Towards Socialism (London 1965) 104-8; "The Rediscovery of the Cash Nexus", in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1970 (London 1970) 128-9.

time be clear, however, that no hard and fast distinctions of this nature can be sustained, for the difference between communal and class consciousness is surely one of degree, rather than one of quality. By approaching the issue in the fashion recommended here, it is hoped that the teleological fallacy - that is, by which extant forms of social belief are evaluated against the yardstick of an assumed fully fledged class outlook - might be avoided. Rather, one is concerned in what follows to appreciate the forms of social belief which were forged by working people in later nineteenth century Lancashire, to treat them as actual modes of thought and behaviour, adequate in themselves and thus worthy of investigation in their own right.

In accordance with this theoretical framework, the following chapters will seek to account for the emergence and the nature of socialist beliefs among working people in Lancashire during the period 1890-1906. Part II of this study (chapter 5-7) will investigate the macro-structural and ideological context in which the labour movement arose in the second half of the nineteenth century. Part III (chapters 8-12) will focus upon trade unionism and socialism in the north west, with particular reference to the generation of distinctive beliefs in the social milieu of the working class community. In short, it is hoped that this investigation will clarify somewhat the complex historical and sociological processes mediating social structure and social belief.



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## PART II: A MACRO-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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An account of the broader structural and ideological context of the period must be the starting point for this analysis of British socialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In Chapter 5, the development of the economy and social structure is discussed, registering, in particular, changes in this sphere during the closing decades of the last century. Chapter 6 complements this with an account of the major ideological forms and their developments during these years. Finally, the themes of these two chapters are drawn together by Chapter 7, in which the broad trajectory of socialism and the labour movement at the societal level is documented in relation to the foregoing analysis.

Taken together, the three chapters which comprise Part II of this study aim to provide a general account of the sociological context within which the micro-level processes documented in Part III occurred.

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NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN:  
EVOLUTION OF ECONOMY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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It will be helpful to begin our analysis of the macro-structural and ideological context within which socialism and socialist beliefs emerged in the later years of the nineteenth century by tracing the course of the capitalist economy and the changing nature of the British social structure up to, and during, this period. The subsequent discussion of ideological forms and socialist thought will, in large measure, hinge about this account of the mid- and late Victorian social structure. It should be made clear that the intention here is not to elevate the concept social structure, as Harold Perkin would seem to favour, to "that central, integrating cause" of British economic and ideological development;<sup>1</sup> however, with the aims of this study firmly in mind - namely, an exploration of the complex relationships between objective social situations and forms of social consciousness - it would seem reasonable for this purpose to treat the nature and trajectory of social structure as a pivotal organising variable.

The themes dealt with in this chapter are as follows. First, the nature of the mid-Victorian social structure, as it emerged over the course of several centuries, will be examined. The discussion will then turn to the Victorian "Golden Years", roughly between 1850 and the 1870s, and the character of British capitalism and class structure during this period. Economic and social changes in the face of the "Great Depression" of the last quarter of the nineteenth century provide the focus of the

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1. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880, (London 1969), 16.

third section of this chapter, which concludes with a brief discussion of certain strategic social groupings and their place in the class structure - aristocratic and middle class "radicals", and the nature of the professions and Victorian intelligensia. This structural analysis forms an essential prelude to a fuller understanding of the course of socialism in this country.

### 5.1: The Path to Mid-Victorian Equipoise

The emergence of the socialist movement in the later nineteenth century inevitably bore the imprint of a social structure which, by mid-century, may be said to have achieved a condition of "equipoise".<sup>2</sup> This social formation was the result of a long process of development spanning several centuries of which, however summarily, the major features must be indicated.

The key to the subsequent evolution of British society would seem to reside in what Barrington Moore has termed the "aristocratic impulses towards the transition to capitalism in the countryside."<sup>3</sup> Whilst the passage from feudalism to capitalism cannot be dated with any precision,<sup>4</sup> it nevertheless seems clear that, as early as the fourteenth century, "a modern and secular society was slowly pushing its way up through the vigorous and much tangled undergrowth of the feudal and ecclesiastical order."<sup>5</sup> Taken together, the wool trade of the later Middle Ages and

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2. The term used by W. L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation (London 1964).

3. Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, (Harmondsworth 1969), 3.

4. M. Dobb, Studies in the Development of Capitalism (London 1972), 33-82; R. Hilton, ed., The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism, (London 1976).

5. Moore, Dictatorship and Democracy, 4.

the Tudor peace, which had brought about national unification, law and order, and established a standard system of weights and measures, were instrumental in generating a powerful stimulus to the growth of a commercial, not to say capitalist, outlook in the countryside. Rational investment in land underpinned the enclosure movement, a wave of agrarian capitalism propelled by the landed upper classes and the Yeomanry.<sup>6</sup>

In the emerging townships, the accumulation of burgher wealth and merchant capital may also be detected in this period. Once secure, this incipient bourgeois class was almost immediately ready to effect a compromise with the old order - socially and economically merging with sections of the aristocracy and welcoming local gentry and their sons into membership of its foremost gilds.<sup>7</sup> The growth of commerce in the towns during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries created an expanding market for agricultural produce, which in turn further intensified the movement towards commercial farming.

By the early seventeenth century, an embryonic capitalist enclave in society is readily discernable. Enclosures continued apace - in 1621 the first general enclosure bill had been enacted - whilst capital was increasingly being invested in land reclamation and clearance, deforestation and drainage. Merchant finance for capitalist production may be detected in the textile, leather and smaller metal trades, alongside the development of "putting-out" merchant employers in domestic cloth production. Fired by the rapid growth of coal production before

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6. Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714 (London 1974), 24-28; Reformation to Industrial Revolution (Harmondsworth 1969), 65-66.

7. Dobb, Studies in Development of Capitalism, 120.

1640, the effect of which was to stimulate cannon-founding, sugar refining, and paper making, and to revive old industries such as iron smelting, steel and copper, industry was ceasing to be the affair of small master craftsmen and the free miner, and the London capitalist and enterprising landowner were coming to play an increasingly significant role. The economic domination of the Metropolis was unique in Europe; London merchants slowly penetrated into spheres hitherto monopolised by local trading oligarchies, in turn radiating the morality of the market outwards towards the provinces. <sup>8</sup>

Two aspects in particular of this economic development prior to the Civil War are worthy of note. First, it is of some significance that notions associated quintessentially with bourgeois capitalism, such as economic freedom and individualism, laissez-faire and free trade, and so forth had arisen to the surface of English society early on, breeding above all amongst enclosing landowners in the years before 1640. Second, commercial life in both town and countryside grew up mainly, although not entirely, in opposition to the Crown. In these lie the specific features of the English Civil War, which pitted commercially minded elements within the landed upper stratum against the would-be-feudal Stuart Monarchy of James I and Charles I, with its paraphernalia of Royal monopolies, forced loans and taxes, and the burdens of wardship, purveyance and feudal tenures. The instruments of Royal despotism such as Star Chamber and High Commission were quite naturally a fetter upon capitalist rationalization; yet, if this was Britain's "bourgeois revolution", there was one crucial difference from that pattern experienced in France

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8. Hill, Reformation to Industrial Revolution, 27-28, 66, 76; M: Dobb, ibid., 123ff.



over a century later. The complex interpenetration of economic, religious and constitutional issues split the ruling class itself, for many gentlemen and peers engaged in economic activity which would have been unthinkable to a French noble. Underpinned by merchant capital - "the only true bourgeois kernel of the revolution"<sup>9</sup> - this was a struggle within the landowning class itself. As R. H. Tawney has pointed out: "The landowner living on the profits and rents of commercial farming, and the merchant or banker who was a landowner, represented not two classes but one....Judged by the source of their incomes, both were equally bourgeois."<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War ensured that absolute monarchy would never again be possible, although it has been argued that this was an "incomplete revolution".<sup>11</sup> In spite of the course of radicalization which the revolution assumed (the emergence of a militant Yeoman and artisan left in the Army), there was no substantial legal or political reform, nor any legacy of redistributed property; tithes and the State Church remained intact, whilst a brief period of religious toleration was rapidly curtailed. In no sense can the seventeenth century struggles have been said to usher in the rule of a bourgeoisie; yet if landed dominance remained unassuaged, capitalist influences had penetrated the countryside long before the Civil War. To be sure, the dividing line between the enclosing landowner and the bourgeois proper was a thin one.

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9. Perry Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis", New Left Review, 24 (1964), 29.

10. Cited by Hill, Century of Revolution, 96.

11. Hill, ibid., 165 et. seq; Anderson "Origins of the Present Crisis", passim.



In other respects, however, the legacy of the English revolution appears to be less ambiguous. Firstly, the explosion of juridicial and constitutional devices removed the obstacles to the march of capitalist development in both town and countryside. The abolition of feudal tenures established for landowners an absolute right to their property vis-a-vis the King and left copyholders at the mercy of the landlords.<sup>12</sup> By shaking off the claims of Crown, Church and peasantry, English landowners transformed lordship into commercial ownership, a process systematised by Locke in the eighteenth century into the concept of absolute property in the interests of possessive individualism.<sup>13</sup> Market nostums flourished in the healthy rural environment as the abolition of feudal tenures increased the profitability of investment in agriculture, stimulated enclosures, and in turn brought about far reaching changes in milling, marketing and transport.<sup>14</sup> Now under the aegis of Parliament, the route towards full scale enclosure and the destruction of the peasantry was cleared. The legal device of strict settlement, evolved in the 1650s in order to prevent heirs breaking up estates, enabled landed families to consolidate their holdings into larger and more viable units.<sup>15</sup> This continued unabated throughout the eighteenth century and culminated the process of "primitive accumulation" which Marx argued was the real genesis of the capitalist mode of production, and created

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12. Christopher Hill, The English Revolution 1640 (London 1972), 53-54.
  13. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 51-56; E. P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English" in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1965, (London 1965), 316-19; see further on this C. B. Mcpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, (London 1962).
  14. See further on these developments, Harold Perkin, "The Social Causes of the British Industrial Revolution" in Transaction of the Royal Historical Society, 5th ser., XVIII (1968) 123-43.
  15. H. J. Habukkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740", Economic History Review, X (1940) 2-17; Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1780-1914 (London 1969) 54; Eric Hobsbawn, Industry and Empire (Harmondsworth 1969), 29.

the unique triadic rural social structure of large landowners, capitalist farmers and landless labourers. <sup>16</sup>

Secondly, monied and landed interests were, as a result of these developments, more clearly on a par. Peers and gentlemen with money to spare invested in trade, just as merchants who prospered had to buy land if they wished to count in society and politics. Strict settlement served to link more closely landed and bourgeois fortunes, as the scions of the aristocracy now received their patrimony in the form of a capital sum and were impelled to seek a career outside landlordism. The territorial interest was in any case adapting early to the world of commerce and commercial agriculture and, although the interlocking between aristocracy and bourgeoisie was less in the eighteenth century than it had been under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts, the connections remained remarkably intimate. <sup>17</sup> Socially, too, these strata forged common bonds, as there occurred "the elevation of the front rank of the middle classes to the status of landowning nobility, and their intermarriage with the older houses." <sup>18</sup>

Finally, a propitious political climate favoured the march of capitalist rationalization. The sovereignty of Parliament - the representative body of "The Free" (i.e. propertied) - and the absence of a large standing army and continental style bureaucracy, created a milieu in which government fiscal, domestic and foreign policy might be subjugated to commercial ends. Under the patronage of an aristocratic

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16. Karl Marx, Capital, i (London 1970), part VIII.

17. Hill, Century of Revolution, 236; Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 21-23.

18. Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, The English Middle Classes (London 1949) 34.

assembly, the route to the eventual triumph of bourgeois capitalism was secure; the repercussions of this fact would be felt two centuries hence.

Against this background, certain aspects of the development of social structure must be pointed out. A key theme in the nineteenth century is the unique relationship between the landed interest and the industrial bourgeoisie.

The foreign visitor to eighteenth century England would surely have noticed of the aristocracy, as Eric Hobsbawn has reminded us, that "the grandees of Britain were not a nobility comparable to the feudal and absolute hierarchies of the Continent";<sup>19</sup> this was no rigid, caste like social grouping but, as Harold Perkin has portrayed it, "an open aristocracy based upon property and patronage."<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the flexible structure of the landed classes, as they emerged over two centuries prior to 1800, provided an ideal environment for the generation of an industrial society. The upper strata appear to have been open to some extent, allowing a wide measure of mobility both into, and out of, their ranks. In this respect the structure of landed society itself, founded upon the division between gentry and nobility, appears to have played a crucial role. The gentry acted as a "feeder" into which parvenu wealth might be absorbed, and from which passage to the nobility was always a possibility; in any event, gentry status was the first stage in what was usually a long process of social assimilation. After the Restoration, social ascent into the nobility in this fashion became

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19. Hobsbawn, Industry and Empire, 32.

20. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 17.

a well worn path for merchants, industrialists and minor peers, as well as for men of substance from a wide variety of backgrounds. The upward flow of new men into the honorific elite was matched by a downward flow of younger sons who, encouraged by the legal arrangements of primogeniture and strict settlement, had been parcelled out by their families into lucrative middling occupations. It is this in-built fluidity of structure of the landed interest which seems to have precluded any serious conflict between industrial and landed wealth and, as F. M. L. Thompson has shown, was to be a crucial factor in the gradual and peaceful evolution of the aristocracy during the nineteenth century. <sup>21</sup>

Integral to this arrangement was the artistocratic conception of social leadership, infused at many points with laissez-faire values. The essence of the Revolution settlement had been that the Crown should govern in a manner conducive to the progress of agrarian rationalization. Chary of state intervention, the King had been denied a permanent standing army or effective bureaucracy which might conceivably rival the territorial power of the aristocracy. Out of pure self-interest, therefore, there had been imparted to the State those free market values germinating in the countryside for at least a century before the Civil War and which would become the guiding precepts of the industrial order. The make-up of landed society ensured that these ideals were disseminated throughout its various levels, for the precious relationship between the nobility, and those aspirants whose route to landed status lay through the gentry, made a prime consideration deference to the social leadership of the nobility.

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21. F. M. L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London 1963), 21-4, et. passim; Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 52-62; E. G. Bulwer Lytton, England and the English (1833), cited by W. Guttman, ed., The English Ruling Class (London 1969) 27-29.



This conception of leadership, inherent in and constantly reinforced by the institutions, symbols and rituals of country society,<sup>22</sup> fanned out in a number of directions. Politically, the social conservatism of the lesser gentry and arriviste wealth was deflected from the path of reactionary intransigence by their dependance upon aristocratic political leadership, which was often more flexible and less conservative. Economically, too, the landowners gave the lead in agricultural investment and improvement, exercising their stewardship of the national patrimony in the fertility of the soil, which they claimed as private property. Under these conditions, rent was seen as no more than a return upon investment in a concern in which the landlord took a share of the risks as well as the profits along with the tenant.<sup>23</sup> Finally, social emulation of the landed nobility became an imperative; this, in turn, proved a powerful spur to enterprise and consumer demand for social emulation generated spending, often in the form of long term capital investment, by middling entrepreneurs in the hope of raising themselves in the standing of society.<sup>24</sup>

It would seem beyond reasonable doubt, therefore, that the specific structure of British society at its upper reaches permitted the gradual modification and adaptation of the landed nobility to the industrial society of the nineteenth century and the imperative of capital accumulation.

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22. For a discussion of the role of aristocratic social leadership, see David Spring, The Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century, (Baltimore 1963) 181ff. F. M. L. Thompson shows clearly how the intercourse of country society, and particularly hunting and rural sports, solidified the leading role of the nobility: cf. Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 109-50.

23. J. D. Chambers, The Workshop of the World (London 1968) 55.

24. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 85-97.

A variety of factors had contributed to the emergence of industrial capital in the two centuries before 1800; we may notice, for example, the breakdown of urban localism and undermining of the monopolies of craft guilds, whether in manufacture or domestic form, and the need for nascent industrial capital to be emancipated from monopolies in the sphere of trade within which merchant capital was entrenched.<sup>25</sup> Here lies the importance of the seventeenth century Revolution which, along with those sources of pre-industrial wealth upon which Marx laid great stress,<sup>26</sup> freed capital for industrial venture. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, T. S. Ashton has suggested that pioneer industrialists "came from every social class and from all parts of the country", but recruits from the "lower levels of the middle ranks" would appear to have predominated.<sup>27</sup> Of Samuel Smiles' twenty-eight "men of invention and industry", fourteen came from the ranks of small property owners or yeoman farmers, master weavers, shoemakers, schoolmasters, and the like; six came from quite prosperous middle class circumstances; and of the eight who became capitalists of any importance, only one was of working class origins.<sup>28</sup> David Hey's study of leading ironmasters in the north of England shows that many often emerged from a peasant-craftsman background.<sup>29</sup>

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25. Dobb, Studies in Development of Capitalism, 161.

26. Marx, Capital, 751.

27. T. S. Ashton, The Industrial Revolution (London 1973) 13; Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 82; on the question of the social origins of early capitalists, see further Paul Mantoux, The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century (London 1923) 376-82; Lewis and Maude, The English Middle Classes, 44, 48; P. L. Payne, British Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century (London 1974) 24-29.

28. Samuel Smiles, Men of Invention and Industry and Industrial Biography cited by Dobb, Studies in Development of Capitalism, 279-80.

29. David Hey, The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region: A Study of Rural Industry before the Industrial Revolution (Leicester 1972) 49.



Yet, the middling origins of many pioneer men of industry should not blind us to the way that finance for new forms of industrial enterprise "helped to link closely together the interests of the new class of industrial employers and those of the older wealthy classes of landowners and merchants..."<sup>30</sup> In the early stages of the industrial revolution the bulk of new capital needed for creating and working factory production came from merchants. Provincial banks, initially merchant businesses, were channelled into the financing of industry and, by way of acting as financiers to industrial capitalists, some were drawn on to drop their merchant business and concentrate wholly on banking; still others turned into industrialists pure and simple.<sup>31</sup> Of the early capital for cotton production, quite the major part seems to have emanated from already established merchant sources.<sup>32</sup>

Wealthy landowners, enriched by the proceeds from enclosure, the growth of estates during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and increased rents during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, were often instrumental in funding industrial ventures. Integral to the legal arrangement of strict settlement were better mortgage terms; estates could now permanently carry a very high load of debt on mortgage quite safely from one generation to another. A mortgage on a secure estate became a sound security for creditors, and landed families were now better placed to raise and provide capital sums for younger sons who could not

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30. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British Common People 1746-1946 (London 1961) 203.

31. Cole and Postgate, ibid., 201-2; Dobb, Studies in Development of Capitalism, 281.

32. G. Unwin, "Introduction" to G. W. Daniels, Early History of the Cotton Industry, (Manchester 1920) xxx.

get their portions in land, freeing this money for investment elsewhere. In the early nineteenth century, much landlord capital was funnelled into rural investment and various kinds of improvement in agricultural technique. One should not be biased by the charges of inefficiency levelled by men like J. S. Mill and James Caird against landlordship,<sup>33</sup> for, as David Spring has shown, an increasingly business like attitude to estate management - which often involved ploughing in capital for returns of quite ludicrously small proportions - came to typify more and more landed aristocrats during this period.<sup>34</sup>

Of equal significance was the flow of landlord capital, either directly through managers or indirectly through contractors to whom they extended credit or even lent capital, into strictly industrial venture. The major outlets for this form of investment would appear to have been coal and slate mining, quarrying and mineral extraction; participation in and, occasionally, the funding of railway construction; urban development, house building and laying out streets and squares; and a miscellany of activities ranging from port and harbour developments to the construction of mineral lines and canals.<sup>35</sup> It is true that some of this economic

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33. J. S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy (6th edition, 1865) Vol. 1, and James Caird, English Agriculture in 1850-51 (1852), both cited by Guttsman, The English Ruling Class, particularly 83-128.

34. Spring, The Landed Estate in Nineteenth Century, *passim*; see the same authors "Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion in the Early Victorian Period", Victorian Studies, VI (1963) 263-80; Thompson, Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 151-83.

35. For instances of landowner's industrial ventures, see Thompson, Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 238-68; David Spring, "English Landownership and Nineteenth Century Industrialism", and J. T. Ward, "Landowners and Mining", both in *idem.*, and R. G. Wilson, eds., Land and Industry: The Landed Estate and the Industrial Revolution (London 1971) 16-62, and 63-116; David Spring, "The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron", Journal of Economic History, XI (1951) 3-24; for two case studies of aristocratic industrial venture, see E. M. Howe, "Coal, Art and the Beaumonts", History Today, XXIV (1974) 243-49 and F. M. Mather, After the Canal Duke: A Study of the Industrial Estates of the Third Duke of Bridgewater (Oxford 1970).

activity was "debt-driven", forced upon recalcitrant members of the landed elite who had been reduced in circumstances by ostentatious consumption or by the legacies of improvident relatives. But the overall effect seems clear enough: <sup>36</sup>

In brief, what shows itself here with uncommon sharpness is the spectacle of large scale entrepreneurial activity, full of risks and uncertainty, bringing in its train extensive development of natural economic resources.

This unique combination of business acumen and lordly habits has led two recent scholars to independently suggest that the role of landowners in the industrial revolution was probably as significant as the part they placed in the course of agricultural change between 1700 and 1870. <sup>37</sup> J. T. Ward and R. G. Wilson have commented upon this process that, "...it was this fusion of interests, the fact that landowners encouraged what happened in industry, that created the ideal environment for economic change. The social attitudes and economic responsibilities of the landowners were obviously closely linked..." <sup>38</sup> It seems clear, finally, from W. O. Aydelotte's careful analysis of the House of Commons in the 1840s that business interests were fairly evenly divided between the Tories on the one hand, and the Whigs, Liberals and Radicals on the other side, and that "a very considerable" portion of

36. Spring, "Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron", 21.

37. G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London 1963), 189; M. W. Flinn, The Origins of the Industrial Revolution (London 1966), 44-5.

38. Ward and Wilson, Land and Industry, 13.

the landed interest were at least involved incidentally in business activity.<sup>39</sup>

In all this, however, one ought to keep firmly in mind F. M. L. Thompson's stricture to the effect that, "It would seem to be a mistake to conclude that the simple fact of a spread of economic interests necessarily made an aristocrat feel any identification with the industrialists or sympathy with middle class objectives."<sup>40</sup> And equally, as middle class spokesmen were at pains to point out in the early and mid-Victorian periods, a profound gulf separated their values and culture from that of the "privileged" world of the landed elite. Founded upon its growing economic predominance, this period had seen the emergence of a distinct "middle class consciousness", with its own scale of values and interpretation of economic and social life, which had been aroused and had come to fruition sometime between the Napoleonic Wars and the Reform struggles.<sup>41</sup> If, as is now generally recognised, the Reform Act of 1832 had done little to undermine the sociological premises of aristocratic rule,<sup>42</sup> the reform of the municipalities - achieved for Scotland in 1833 and, in England and Wales, by 1835 - had done much to provide an entree for the middle classes into local government and

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39. W. O. Aydelotte, "The House of Commons in the 1840s", History, XXIX (1954) 329-62; "The Business Interests of the Gentry in the Parliament of 1841-47", Appendix to G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London 1962) 290-305.

40. Thompson, Landed Society in Nineteenth Century, 268.

41. Asa Briggs, "Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics 1780-1846", Past and Present, 9 (1956) 65-74; "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth Century England", in idem., and J. Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History, (London 1960) 52-60.

42. D. C. Moore, "The Other Face of Reform", Victorian Studies, V (1961) 7-34.



administration.<sup>43</sup> The relaxation of religious barriers, which had begun with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, had helped to weld the consciousness of religious Dissent onto the middle class outlook, whilst spokesmen for the middling strata like James Mill and the Philosophic Radicals traded upon their growing sense of discontent: "He seconded their natural demands for better government and better legislation", noted Mill's biographer, "...to suit the extension of manufactures and commerce...and insisted on [the middle classes] having a share of political power for their own defence."<sup>44</sup>

We may notice the expression of this growing sense of middle class awareness in only two spheres of early Victorian society although, in reality, its ramifications were manifold. It was, firstly, a self-awareness which found articulation in the middle class clamour for an educational system more atune to their needs. If the upper middle class were willing to acquiesce in the classical aristocratic curriculum, the burgeoning middle strata, especially in the industrial regions wherein their strength lay, were the force behind moves towards more utilitarian curricula in such local grammar schools as existed; the establishment (by those who could afford it) of fee-paying proprietary schools; the setting in train of day and boarding schools to rival the aristocratic public schools; and the move to open up the preserve of higher education to Dissenters and others of middle class origins.<sup>45</sup> But it was, perhaps, in the growth of a provincial middle class press that this sense of separate

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<sup>43</sup>. Lewis and Maude, The English Middle Classes, 55.

<sup>44</sup>. Alexandre Bain, James Mill: A Biography (London 1882) 446.

<sup>45</sup>. Brian Simon, The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870 (London 1974) 74-83; P. W. Musgrave, Society and Education in England since 1800 (London 1968) 6-42; M. D. Shipman, Education and Modernisation (London 1971) 112-39.

identity, which gained added momentum in the 1840s with Peel's economic and fiscal reforms and the Corn Law struggle, may be most clearly discerned.<sup>46</sup> To be found, again, in the industrial and commercial centres of the country, it fell to newspapers like The Leeds Mercury (edited by Edward Baines), The Manchester Guardian (J. E. Taylor and Jeremiah Garnett), The Sheffield Independent (Robert Leader) and The Manchester Times (Archibald Prentice) to systematise and relentlessly press home the themes of efficiency in local and central government; Parliamentary, banking and fiscal reform; opposition to Trade Unionism; and the abolition of Corn Laws and all restrictive duties. Underscoring it all was the ubiquitous political economy - at this level often crude and over-simplified - of Malthus, Smith and Ricardo, which lent an aura of legitimacy to industrial middle class opinion. John Vincent has convincingly demonstrated the part played by the middle class press in fusing provincial opinion into the Liberal Party in the 1860s.<sup>47</sup>

Yet we would err too much in the opposite direction if we were to follow uncritically those like Mill, Cobden and Bright whose bete noire was residual aristocratic privilege, fettering, or so they saw it, middle class initiative at every turn. Politically, it is true, the entry of the "new men" into Parliament remained as yet largely for the future,<sup>48</sup> but it cannot be assumed that the aristocracy ruled by fiat alone.

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46. On the growth of the middle class provincial press, see D. R. Read, Press and People 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities (London 1961). Further detail may be found in R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension (London, 1955).

47. John Vincent, The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-68 (Harmondsworth 1966) 94-101.

48. W. L. Guttsman, The British Political Elite (London 1963) 34-59.



The landed interest, mindful of its junior industrial partners in the country at large, could never have steered a course of narrow class interests. Skilled in the art of judicious political concession, there was amongst this class no die-hard reaction against the march of progress, "no huge reservoir of conservative and reactionary forces that existed at certain points in Germany and Japan."<sup>49</sup> As will be suggested in the next chapter, the Tory leadership from the late 1820s onward was prepared to countenance a "liberal" policy, geared above all to competing for the middle ground of the new urban and industrial Britain. Similarly, the position of the Whig aristocrats was that common to the whole of the landed classes and, in reality, very close to that of the Liberal Tories. There was a case, as Macaulay argued, for hitching the middle class to the Constitution; if mischief was not to come of the struggle between "the young energy of one class and the ancient privileges of another", then reform and concessions was inevitable. In practical politics, this position brought him close to that of Mill and the Philosophic Radicals.<sup>50</sup>

By mid-century, therefore, we may fairly say that the conditions making for equipoise were present. It was a settlement premised upon the balance of potentially conflictual forces, a balance of old and new. Whilst by no means overlooking the very real and often persistent, divergencies of interests between the new industrial classes and the old territorial elite, we may correctly locate that equipoise in the compromise effected by the industrial order with aristocratic rule. "A precise

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49. Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 30.

50. Joseph Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution (Yale 1963) 33-43; and Intellectuals in Politics: J. S. Mill and the Philosophic Radicals (New Haven and London 1965); on the position of the Whigs in relation to the Tories, see Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London 1970) 15-16.

balance of rural and urban forces", <sup>51</sup> tipped by representatives of the former to the advantage of the latter in 1846. It is instructive to note how, during the Commons debate on the Corn Law issue, Peel could reaffirm his belief in the landed aristocracy and yet proclaim its interests to be inextricably linked with those of the bourgeoisie: <sup>52</sup>

I believe it to be of the utmost importance that a territorial aristocracy should be maintained...The question only is - what in a certain state of public opinion, and in a certain position of society, is the most effectual way of maintaining the legitimate influence and authority of a territorial aristocracy ...I said long ago that I thought agricultural prosperity was interwoven with manufacturing prosperity; and dependant more upon it than on the Corn Laws...I believe the interests direct and indirect of manufacturing and agricultural classes to be the same.

It was, in brief, a social, economic and political balance of opposites, characterised by Barrington Moore as "aristocratic rule for triumphant capitalism." <sup>53</sup> The landed and industrial interests had been thrown together in the upper reaches of the nation's social structure over two centuries and had evolved a working alliance, which in turn had been sealed by two decades of militant working class challenge culminating in the Chartist fiasco of 1848. That the economic crisis of 1847 had been unable to topple the legacy Peel had bequeathed to the Conservative Party indicated for Halevy the real foundation of the equilibrium of mid-century: the "true national policy of England" was not middle class radicalism, still less working class Chartism, but "the Liberalism of the political economists." <sup>54</sup>

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51. Janet Roebuck, The Making of Modern English Society from 1850 (Newton Abbot 1974) 1; G. M. Young, "Mid-Victorianism", History Today (1951) 11-17; Portrait of An Age: Victorian England (London 1960) 83.

52. Cited by Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 26.

53. Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 29.

54. Elie Halevy, Victorian Years, 1841-95 (London 1962) 290-91.

It would be useful at this point to focus upon the lower reaches of the social structure and examine the character of the working class in early Victorian society. It has been found necessary to devote some attention to the evolution of the landed aristocracy and industrial middle classes; we may deal with the working class much more briefly.

Before mid-century it is impossible to detect a homogeneous working class in Britain. Far from being proletarians, the largest portion of the lower orders during the early nineteenth century were landless agricultural labourers. In 1801, four out of every five people lived on farms, in hamlets or in villages. They were, of course, the raw workforce for the emerging factory sector, but in the first half of the century many trades remained intimately connected with the land - pre-industrial crafts such as blacksmithing, millers, builders, shopkeepers, and so on.<sup>55</sup> This picture must be complemented by noting the survival of domestic production (e.g. handloom weaving), artisanal crafts (compositors, breeches-makers, jewellers, watchmakers and leather workers) and, below them, "a bewildering range of jobs and conditions that cannot be entirely defined by stratification."<sup>56</sup>

The overriding impression cannot but be that, until mid-century at least, the early stages of industrialisation had little impact upon the vast majority of the population. The development of capitalism was classically "uneven", allowing for the survival of many pre-industrial

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55. John Burnett, "Introduction", to idem., ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (London 1974) 27-8.

56. J. F. C. Harrison, The Early Victorians 1832-51 (London 1973) 48; L. G. Johnson, The Social Evolution of Industrial Britain (Liverpool 1959) 10-23 and 71 has pointed to the continual references to the working class as the "lower orders", the "poor", the "industrious poor", and so on, as unfortunate in hindering recognition of the diversity of this class in the early nineteenth century.

forms.<sup>57</sup> In the small workshops of the metal finishing trades or in gunmaking, the brass foundry, saddlery and harness trades, there remained, even as late as the 1860s, a remarkable co-existence of a highly subdivided process of production with the small productive unit putting out work to domestic craftsmen;<sup>58</sup> many forms of domestic outwork and family production survived well into the century;<sup>59</sup> the petty master and subcontractor, rather than the large capitalist, was the predominant form of employer in this period;<sup>60</sup> whilst most industrial production (and this is certainly true in the case of the early cotton factories) remained small scale and rurally based.<sup>61</sup> For many working people, the impact of mechanisation was as yet in the future. J. F. C. Harrison has reminded us of just how much work was done, as it always had been, by sheer muscular effort in great areas of Victorian life.<sup>62</sup>

One may perhaps break down the structure of the working class in these years by distinguishing between those sectors initially unaffected by the march of industrialisation and those whose lives were radically transformed by it. In the former category we should include, firstly, those unskilled urban and rural labourers who, as noted above, continued to work in the manner to which they had always been accustomed. Secondly,

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57. Raphael Samuel, "Wage Labour and Capital in the Nineteenth Century", paper presented to the Centre for the Study of Social History, University of Warwick, 14 March 1974.

58. Dobb, Studies in Development of Capitalism, 258-81.

59. For the tenacity of family employment in cotton production, see N. J. Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution (London 1959) 188-93.

60. R. W. Wainwright, "Introduction" to idem. and P. E. Razzell, The Victorian Working Class: Selection from the Morning Chronicle 1849-51 (London 1973) xix-xxvi.

61. G. D. H. Cole, Studies in Class Structure (London 1955) 27-31.

62. Harrison, Early Victorians, 59.



there remained the numerous older skilled trades which, with the increase in population and rise in national income, may well have found their skills in greater demand (e.g. building workers, clothing, boot and shoe making, cutlery, printing, bookbinders, and so on). The size of this category is frequently underestimated: in 1831 there were, for instance, about 203,000 adult male artisans in the building trades and 133,000 adult boot and shoe makers and menders.<sup>63</sup> Such men were conscious of and well known for their superior status, which they maintained by means of elaborate apprenticeship regulations and a network of trade societies. Wage bargaining was for these groups very much a question of custom and tradition, set from time immemorial at twice, three times or even more the wage of relational unskilled occupations.<sup>64</sup>

Among those groups most affected by industrialisation, a number of new skills had been pushed to the fore - mule spinning in the cotton industry, for instance, or the "new artisans" and mechanics of the engineering trades. Such skills were grafted, as it were, onto the older occupational grades and there occurred at least a partial fusion of interests between them. Finally, one must account for those workers most radically affected by the industrial revolution - the cotton factory population, for instance, who numbered between 375,000 and 400,000 men, women and children in 1831; and those sectors thoroughly degraded by technological advance - outworkers, domestic producers and handloom weavers - pushed towards the margins of

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63. W. H. Challinor, The Skilled Artisans During the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850 (London 1969) 4-5.

64. Eric Hobsbawn, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London 1964) 344-70.

existence by the relentless onslaught of factory production, and whose plight has been extensively documented.<sup>65</sup>

It is as well to recall this variety of experience and conditions which formed the basis of the early Victorian working class. If we speak, as Zygmunt Baumann has done, of a workforce divided in this period between a skilled, occupationally secure stratum of usually small producers and an "amorphous, fragmented and alienated" section, the "raw material" of the working class,<sup>66</sup> we have a working schema which, whilst not doing gross violence to history, needs to be continually qualified. Certainly, the complexity of the working class should preclude any facile generalisations about the class basis of politics in these early years, as a number of historians have been at pains to point out.<sup>67</sup>

## 5.2: The Fruits of Prosperity, 1850-1870s

Such in very general terms was the character of the social class structure at mid-century. We may now add more detail to this broad outline, beginning with an account of the capitalist economy during what has come to be known as the Victorian "Golden Age".

In the twenty-odd years after from 1850, the economy began to assume more characteristically modern forms. Population was increasing rapidly - it had more than doubled in England and Wales between 1811 and

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65. J. L. and B. Hammond, The Town Labourer (London 1917); D. Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (London 1969); E. P. Thompson, The Making of The English Working Class (Harmondsworth 1972); M. Thomis, The Town Labourer and the Industrial Revolution (London 1974).

66. Z. Baumann, Between Class and Elite (Manchester 1972), ch. 1.

67. See for instance, John Vincent, Poll Books: How the Victorians Voted (Cambridge 1967), "Introduction".



and 1871 (from 10 millions to 22.7 millions) and was, by 1881, to reach almost 26 millions - and in consequence urbanisation was proceeding apace. In 1851, the urban population just about exceeded the rural; thirty years later it was more than double it.<sup>68</sup> In the third quarter of the century national product grew rapidly and it is in this period that the standard of living was advancing most definitely. Mechanization and the size of productive units increased quite markedly and, on the whole, one sees the economy moving into a more mature and stable phase during these years.

The Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851 was striking testimony to Britain's world industrial hegemony. Yet among the real engineering feats on display (bridge building, locomotive construction, ship-building, and deep mining, for instance) the overriding impression of the economy at mid-century remains one of petty craftsmanship rather than mass production. With the exception of transport and mining, most of the exhibits firmly suggested a system of production on quite a small scale; the workshop or small factory run by a group of partners or a single employer, rather than the impersonal joint stock concern, was still the rule in most branches of production. Nevertheless, as William Ashworth has observed, "It is its astonishingly dynamic quality that is the outstanding economic characteristic of the mid-Victorian period."<sup>69</sup> The level of investment was high - averaging perhaps £124m annually between 1855-65 - and certainly a glance forward in time strengthens the impression that this was a remarkable period of capital formation. What stands

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68. S. G. Checkland, The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815-85 (London 1964) 27-33.

69. William Ashworth, An Economic History of England 1870-1939 (London 1960) 7.

out most clearly was the ability of the economy to concentrate on meeting efficiently a fairly narrow range of basic needs. Agriculture, employing over 1.5m men and around 230,000 women, was by far the largest single employer in 1851, followed by domestic service, which employed about 1m males and females all told. Then came the building construction industry (442,000 craftsmen and 367,000 labourers), cotton production (about half a million male and female workers in all), coal mining (219,000 men), and around 79,000 iron workers, 63,000 boilermakers, 53,000 copper, tin and lead miners and 27,000 iron miners. <sup>70</sup>

If the economy was still far removed from modern capitalist forms, it was nevertheless changing rapidly. The transition to machine production was intensifying, particularly in engineering, textiles, heavy industry, railways and shipbuilding. <sup>71</sup> Innovation in productive technique, more reliable equipment, new modes of production and better organisation were all improving quality and cutting production costs. Technological developments, such as the Bessemer (1856) and Siemens (1866) techniques in bulk steel production, were becoming more widely diffused throughout industry. By the 1870s the country was still concentrating upon the same basic range of activities, although not quite to the same extent. During the third quarter of the century there was a clear shift away from primary production (agriculture, fishing and forestry) to manufactures; but even more striking was the expansion of the tertiary sector (trade and services), due particularly to the enormous investment in the railway system - the pace maker of the second stage of industrialisation, just

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70. J. H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain: Free Trade and Steel 1850-1886 (Cambridge 1932) 24.

71. J. D. Chambers, The Workshop of the World: British Economic History from 1820 to 1880 (Oxford 1968) 1-45.

as cotton had been the leading sector in the first stage. In all, the trend seems clear enough: by 1871, only 43% of the occupied population were engaged in agriculture, textiles, clothing, building and mining - those basic economic activities which twenty years before had employed 52%. <sup>72</sup>

Britain in this period was truly the "workshop of the world." No other industrial power had embraced free trade so completely or with such enthusiasm, or had foreign markets at quite such strategic points in its development. It was Britain's location in an interlocking pattern of world trade which proved so propitious to economic advance in these years. <sup>73</sup> Increasingly dependant after mid-century upon imports of foodstuffs and raw materials (such as cotton, wool, cellulose and non-phosphoric iron ore for steel production), Britain responded by supplying the world with manufactures, capital, goods and services. In 1850, fully two thirds of exports comprised textiles, 18% were metal and engineering products and, in all, 93% of exports comprised manufactured goods for the same proportion of imported primary unprocessed produce. By 1870 textile exports had fallen to 56% of the total, a downward trend which was to intensify during the last quarter of the century. It was Britain's trading position in the world economy which, when disrupted by foreign competition after the mid-'70s, proved disastrous to her "distorted" industrial structure and export pattern. Even in the years after 1850, there seems little doubt that a mounting deficit on the balance of trade was being increasingly hidden by invisible earnings. <sup>74</sup> Yet the immense

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72. Ashworth, Economic History of England, 11.

73. Clapham, Economic History of Modern Britain, 217ff.

74. Mathias, First Industrial Nation, 249-52 and 290-336.

leap in foreign trade values under the stimulus of free trade is not in doubt. The major stagnation in exports would appear after 1875. <sup>75</sup>

For the time being, however, the mid-Victorian economy was paying dividends. Vast investment during the railway booms of the 1830s and 1840s - if in the short term rather unsettling - had at least the long term effect of placing the economy upon a somewhat broader and more secure basis than had been provided by textiles as the leading sector. The development of joint stock banking, the consolidation of the central banking and credit system, the provision of limited liability (1856-62), improvements in communications and transport facilities and the growth in new and more efficient forms of company organisation were all working in a similar direction. These were also the years of high returns to landowners and farmers - the period of "high farming" - characterised by expansion, high prices and resilient profits. <sup>76</sup>

From the boom which began in 1844, crowning the second phase of railway construction and bringing the virtual completion of the main line system, Britain experienced almost thirty years of uninterrupted prosperity. <sup>77</sup> If the depression of 1847 brought the classic culmination of a domestic investment boom, another shock was registered by the notable climax of an export boom in 1857. But the speed of recovery was astonishing, hastened by the Anglo-French free trade agreement in 1860. The mid-'60s brought a more severe set-back in the form of the American Civil War and the Cotton Famine in Lancashire, and the Overend and Gurney

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75. See below on this point.

76. E. L. Jones, "The Changing Basis of English Agricultural Prosperity 1853-1873", Agricultural History Review, X (1960) 102-19; D. C. Moore, "The Corn Laws and High Farming", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XVIII (1965) 544-61; F. M. L. Thompson, "The Second Agricultural Revolution 1815-1880", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXI (1968) 62-77.

77. For a summary of Britain's economic performance, see Checkland, Rise of Industrial Society in England, 21-51.

crash of 1866. But recovery was again rapid, stimulated by a further bout of railway investment, with iron production and shipbuilding in particular feeling the mounting pulse. The boom of thirty years culminated in 1873, when the point of fullest employment and greatest excitement in a long trend of rising prices and general expansion had been achieved.

It would seem useful to pause here and examine changes in social structure during this period; for such changes as occurred imprinted themselves firmly upon the course of British socialism in the last quarter of the century.

The economic success of the third quarter of the nineteenth century provided a sound material bedrock upon which rested the mid-Victorian settlement, that unique balance of landed and industrial social groupings. These were not undifferentiated categories, and some attention must now be devoted to elucidating more precisely the composition of the social class formation.

During the two decades after 1850 the size and variety of the middle classes increased enormously. Eric Hobsbawn has suggested that, in 1851, "the genuine middle class was not large", broadly coinciding with the 200,000 or so, English and Welsh assessments of over £300 a year for income tax.<sup>78</sup> But between 1851 and 1871, there was apparent the beginnings of a large expansion in lower middle class, the "new" white collar grades, largely contingent upon the growth of the tertiary sector and the expansion of company organisation and public administration, as may be gauged from Table 5.1. Besides these newer occupations, the

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78. Hobsbawn, Industry and Empire, 156.



"classic petty bourgeoisie" was also expanding: in 1881, shopkeepers alone, for instance, numbered almost one million.<sup>79</sup> As will be noticed, these data also point to a corresponding, although less imposing, increase in the size of the old established professions, particularly in the field of education.

TABLE 5.1: Growth of Middle Class Occupations, 1851-71:  
England and Wales.

(in '000s, and as % of occupied population)

	1851		1861		1871	
	'000s	%	'000s	%	'000s	%
<b>Professions:</b>						
Law	32	0.4	34	0.4	39	0.4
Medicine	60	0.7	63	0.7	73	0.8
Education	95	1.0	116	1.2	135	1.3
Religion	31	0.4	39	0.4	44	0.4
Literature and Science	2	-	3	-	7	-
<b>Commerce: clerks,</b>						
accountants, bankers	45	0.5	68	0.7	119	1.1
Public Administration	52	0.6	64	0.7	73	0.7
Trade, wholesale and retail	547	6.5	674	7.1	838	7.8

SOURCE: Geoffrey Best, Mid-Victorian Britain (London 1971) 105.

Beyond merely quantitative expansion however, the middle classes were coming into their own in all spheres of society. In local government the opportunities for the middle ranks to make their mark had been continuously expanding since the 1830s. Their control over the provincial

79. Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain", in *idem.*, The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914 (London 1977), 12; G. Kitson Clark, Making of Victorian England, 122.



press, which really rose to new heights after the repeal of the stamp duty in 1855, reflected middle class influence in many areas of local opinion, policy and borough politics. In the national aristocratic press, too, one can detect quite clearly the infiltration of bourgeois values by mid-century.<sup>80</sup> The complete triumph of the middle class ideal throughout education was registered by the three great school Commissions of the 1850s and '60s, which in effect set out to create a tripartite system for the three classes of the new society.<sup>81</sup> The reform of the public schools by men like Dr. Wooll and Thomas Arnold of Rugby School, and Samuel Butler of Shrewsbury School, sought to meet the challenge of middle class education by outdoing the proprietary schools on their own ground; if they hardly threw open their door to the scions of the manufacturing and trading classes, the public schools did much to instill in their aristocratic pupils middle class ideals and morality.<sup>82</sup> Following the Royal Commission on the ancient Universities in the 1850s, and the resulting Oxford University Act (1854) and the Cambridge University Act (1856), even these venerable institutions began to question their curricula and social composition and, however unsuccessfully at first, to recognise the need to attract more students of middling origin.<sup>83</sup>

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80. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 303.

81. These were the Newcastle Commission (1858), the Clarendon Commission (1861) and the Taunton Commission (1864); see further, Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 299ff; Simon, The Two Nations and Educational Structure, 299-336; Shipman, Society and Education in England, ch. 1.

82. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (Harmondsworth 1971) 158; see further, Asa Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth 1971) ch. 6.

83. J. P. C. Roach, "Universities and the National Intelligensia", Victorian Studies, III (1959-60) 131-50.

Above all, perhaps, it was the increasing professionalisation of government and the opening of the Civil Service to competitive examination in 1870 which marked the impact of middle class standards in what was an hitherto aristocratic preserve.

The fact remains however that, if in these and other spheres as Harold Perkin has cogently demonstrated, the "entrepreneurial ideal" triumphed, it did so in a society whose polity and social mores remained overwhelmingly aristocratic. One would be misled in following too easily those Whig aristocrats who expressed their dismay at the "infusion of new blood" into the House of Commons in 1846;<sup>84</sup> or those who, like Bagehot writing in 1867, argued that "the religion of gold" had already done much in dissolving the aristocratic premises of the Constitution upon which its dignity rested. However much Bagehot might rail against "The great capitalists, Mr. Bright and his friends... [who] very naturally and very properly want more power for themselves",<sup>85</sup> the overwhelming body of evidence suggests that, until well after 1867 at least, the "new men" made few significant inroads into the Commons.<sup>86</sup>

Even more importantly, aristocratic social leadership and political influence, radiating outwards from the great country estates - those effective symbols of territorial power,<sup>87</sup> - remained virtually impregnable.

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84. Halevy, Victorian Years, 180.

85. Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution (London 1963), ed., R. H. S. Crossman, 175; see further, Briggs, Victorian People, 103.

86. W. Guttsman, The British Political Elite, 75-108; "The British Political Elite and the Class Structure" in P. Stanworth and A. Gidens, eds., Elites and Power in British Society (Cambridge 1974), 22-44.

87. Mark Girouard, "A Place in the Country", Times Literary Supplement, 27 February 1976, 223-26.

Here politics was dominated by the honorific leaders of local status communities, a feature which, if anything, the 1832 Reform Act had underscored.<sup>88</sup> Long after reform, there existed a political world of Parliamentary seats dominated by high status individuals, and in which rank and property counted for much. At least 23 such country seats were effectively patronised by 20 peers and 3 commoners, and a further 200 seats existed where the overwhelming influence lay with some 250 peers and 150 commoners; even after 1867, it appears that 16 country seats were dominated by a single patron, whilst 23 still survived as borough patrons with 25 seats at their command.<sup>89</sup> In these years, over one ninth of the families of squires and large landowners were still represented in the Commons, and of 111 landowners with more than 50,000 acres, 59 sat in the 1868 Parliament.<sup>90</sup> A Select Committee, set up to inquire into Municipal Elections in 1868, discovered that aristocratic influence embraced a gamut of techniques, from moral and financial suasion through to overt coercion (eviction of tenants, shopkeepers and tradesmen ruined, and so on.)<sup>91</sup>

There emerged in Victorian England no specifically bourgeois political party, which might reflect and articulate the economic position and

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88. D. C. Moore has convincingly demonstrated the importance of hierarchic status groupings in nineteenth century British politics, and how the 1832 Reform Act was designed to preserve these communities: see further, D. C. Moore "The Other Face of Reform", Victorian Studies, V (1961) 7-34; "Concession or Cure? The Sociological Premises of the First Reform Act", Historical Journal, IX (1966) 39-59; "Political Morality in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: Concepts, Norms, Violations", Victorian Studies, XIII (1969) 5-36, and Moore's recent work The Politics of Deference (London 1976).

89. Thompson, Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 48-9.

90. Guttsman, "British Political Elite and the Class Structure", 25.

91. Select Committee on Municipal Election, (1868-69) extract in Guttsman, The English Ruling Class, 131-33.

interests of the middling social strata; it seems that for the most part middle class electors positively preferred to be represented by their betters. But one cannot afford to ignore the political skill and pragmatic realism which aristocratic statesmen like Peel and Gladstone demonstrated, perversely making them appear, on many issues, even more representative of middle class opinion than the spokesmen of that class themselves were. As Norman Gash has convincingly demonstrated, neither the Conservative nor the Liberal Party became exclusively and stereotypically class institutions, one representing the landed interest and protection, the other the party of industrialists and free trade.<sup>92</sup> Rather, both stood for a complex of economic, constitutional and religious interests. The Conservative Party was the representative of order and stability, authority and the Established Church, whilst the Liberals stood for progress and reform, Low Church and Dissent. In both cases, the rival, but equally aristocratic, leadership had to come to terms with industrial middle class opinion. It seems clear that Disraeli inherited the mantle of Peelite "liberal" Toryism and this, rather than his vaunted social reform programme, was his real political contribution; ironically, it led him to countenance policies which incensed the Tory magnates upon whom it is often assumed that Disraeli based his appeal.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, the context in which a variety of sectional interests crystalised to form the Liberal Party was not the replacement of aristocratic by bourgeois rule: "It was not to replace the old ascendancy by a new one, but to

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92. Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics 1832-52, (London 1965) 128-30.

93. Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 60-130; E. J. Feuchtwanger, "The Conservative Party under the Impact of the Second Reform Act", Victorian Studies, II (1959) 289-304.

combine rule by consent over individuals with rule by consensus between clearly marked groups, by keeping matters in the hands of those most skilled in adjusting minute particulars to make provisional agreement possible - those trained under the old dispensation." <sup>94</sup>

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, many sections of the landed elite had long recognised the need to compromise with the new society. The scale of business enterprise and industrial investment emanating from landed sources continued apace, as did the influx of younger sons into the world of the professions, business and commerce. The final provision of limited liability in 1862 was a milestone in this respect, for it permitted liquified assets formerly held in land to be converted into industrial investment without industrial duty. <sup>95</sup> So it was not simply a question of propitious political concession, although this counted for much, but the fact that in a wide range of spheres the territorial classes were willing to jettison their paternalist system and meet the new industrial society more than half way, and share in its spoils. The apparent stability and longevity of aristocratic rule in Britain masks this process of subtle accommodation to the bourgeois mores penetrating landed society. "There was no body of thought, no ideology which (as distinct from social habit) cut off the aristocracy from those below them", has noted W. L. Burn, <sup>96</sup>

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94. Vincent, Formation of the Liberal Party, 13.

95. N. Harris, Beliefs in Society (Harmondsworth 1968) 105; for changes within the artistocracy in this period, see David Spring, "The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron", op. cit.; "The Role of the Aristocracy", Victorian Studies, IV (1960) 55-64; "Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion in the Early Victorian Period", op. cit.

96. Burn, The Age of Equipoise, 316-19.



...the fact was that there were very few spheres of politics in which there was a discernable "aristocratic" policy in contrast to a "non-aristocratic" or "anti-aristocratic" policy.

If superficially fragmented as a result of the Corn Law schism and Disraeli's High Tory posturings, the underlying reality of party politics during the years of mid-Victorian equipoise reflects its sociological context - a fundamental social agreement around the tenets of economic liberalism and progress, around the values of the new society as against the old. In its upper reaches, the Victorian social structure united landed and industrial interests beneath a benign aristocratic tutelage. We need now to turn to examine the nature of the social structure at its lower extremes in this period.

Much contemporary opinion subscribed to the belief that the working class had shared equally in the fruits of mid-Victorian prosperity.

"All classes have participated in the blessings", noted a leader in The Economist in 1851: 97.

...the national advance in wealth and all the material appliances of civilisation...has not been turned solely to the benefit of the more favoured children of our time, but that all classes of the community, the humbler as well as the richer, have participated in the blessings of change.

Assisted by the fact that retail prices in 1870 showed about only half as great an increase over 1850 as wholesale prices, G. H. Wood was able to estimate that by 1870 money wages had risen by one third; in terms of real wages for workers in full employment this represents a rise of

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97. The Economist, Jan-Feb. (1951) cited by E. Toyston Pike, ed., Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age (London 1967) 40.



18% and, by 1874-75, of fully one third.<sup>98</sup> What appears to have taken place for wheat and other commodities in this period is a narrowing of the gap between wholesale and retail prices, due partly to improved transport and distributive facilities and partly to keen competition between traders for custom in an expanding market.<sup>99</sup>

To be more specific about the course of working class wages, however, we need to examine the structure of the labour community itself. It has been held, with some justification, that the dominant feature of this period was the ability of a small group of skilled workers to pull away from the mass of their fellows in both social and pecuniary terms. It seems clear that between 1850 and 1870 the surviving small crafts - of which there were literally scores, ranging from silversmithing and jewellery making to printing, wheelwrighting, tailoring and shoemaking - were supplemented by new, large scale and mechanised skills, thrown up by the process of industrialisation and based essentially upon the application of metals and machines.<sup>100</sup> As the century progressed, some of the old skills were overtaken and transformed by new one. In all, though, there can be little doubt that the numbers of skilled workers grew rather than diminished. It would appear that the lion's share of the increase in working class wages was absorbed by this skilled stratum. G. D. H. Cole has estimated the wages of the skilled working class - which he numbered at around 14% of the workforce in the late 1860s - to have been about

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98. G. H. Wood, "Real Wages and the Standard of Comfort since 1850", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXII (1909) 91-103; B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge 1962) 343.

99. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 350-51.

100. Cole, Studies in Class Structure, 31-3; Burnett, Useful Toil, 251.

twice those of the unskilled.<sup>101</sup> In a study of wage differentials in the later nineteenth century, K. Knowles and D. J. Robertson have backed up this assertion by arguing that "...it seems probable that the strong craft Unions of the mid-nineteenth century were able to establish a new wage differentiation in favour of their members, although in the absence of national wage negotiations marked regional diversities persisted."<sup>102</sup> Finally, Hobsbawm's detailed evidence would seem to corroborate the above; in the worsted industry, cotton, engineering, mining and shipbuilding, his figures show clearly that skilled wages rose more often and sooner than those of the unskilled. Above all, it was in the unprecedented expansion of the metal trades that "an immense reinforcement of the labour aristocracy occurred in this period."<sup>103</sup>

Such is the economic foundation of the labour aristocracy thesis. Its corollary would seem to be that by far the larger part of the working class ranked beneath this elite stratum - unskilled manual labourers, factory employees, and semi-skilled machine minders, routine workers, and the like - were by-passed when the fruits of the Victorian harvest were distributed. As a whole, the standard of living of the workers was probably not rising as fast as national income in these years; but, in addition, within the working class itself the absolute improvement of the standard of life of the masses took place at the same time as a relative worsening of their position vis-a-vis the elite stratum. In

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101. G. D. H. Cole, "The Working Classes", History Today, I (1951) 65.

102. K. G. J. C. Knowles and D. J. Robertson, "Differences between the Wages of Skilled and Unskilled Workers 1880-1950", Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Statistics, XIII (1951) 115.

103. Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy in the Nineteenth Century", in idem., Labouring Men, 272-315 (quotation p.283.)

Marx's sense of the term, exploitation would seem to have intensified in this period. <sup>104</sup>

It is in the third quarter of the nineteenth century that the labour aristocracy may be most clearly discerned - its phase of maximum florescence, so to speak. It seems possible to accept Royden Harrison's contention that there was a tendency for the wage differential to "hump" over this period, <sup>105</sup> whilst we have ample testimony to the existence of a distinctive artisanal culture and life-style, premised around the themes of religion, respectability, self-help and political Liberalism. <sup>106</sup> Contemporary observers, like Henry Mayhew and the Christian Socialists J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, were equally insistent upon the social gulf which appeared to have opened up between the two sections of the labour community; <sup>107</sup> we may notice, in this connection, Thomas Wright's observation that the working class, <sup>108</sup>

...are practically and plurally classes, distinct classes... between all these sections there is difference, and in most cases antagonism of feeling. Between the artisan and the unskilled labourer, a gulf is fixed...The artisan creed with regard to labourers is that the latter are an inferior class, and that they should be made to know, and kept in their places.

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104. Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) 23.

105. ibid., 30.

106. For the nature of the artisanal sub-culture, and its ingrained sense of occupational identity, see Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976), especially chs. 5-7.

107. E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, eds., The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle 1849-50 (Harmondsworth 1971), passim; J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, The Progress of the Working Classes 1832-67 (London 1867).

108. Thomas Wright [The Journeyman Engineer] Our New Masters (London 1873) 3, 5-6.

This internal division within the labour force as a whole, characterised most vividly by the existence of an aristocracy of labour whose social aspirations were geared towards petty bourgeois status and who felt a greater sense of affinity with the new lower middling strata rather than with the main body of the workers,<sup>109</sup> defines the lower reaches of mid-Victorian society. We shall have cause to examine the labour aristocracy thesis and its political connotations at length. For the moment we may simply notice the place of the labour elite within the working class and social structure as a whole; for by the end of the mid-Victorian period, social and economic changes were affecting all sectors of society, including the aristocracy of labour. It is to these developments that we should now turn.

### 5.3: The Watershed of Late Century: The Changing Economy and Social Structure, 1873-1906

The final quarter of the nineteenth century set in train two fundamental sorts of change in the economic structure of the country. Firstly, the "workshop of the world" ran out of steam. If the period between 1873 and 1896 can no longer be described with any certainty as a monolithic "Great Depression",<sup>110</sup> it is nevertheless clear that the progress of capitalism was seriously checked in a whole variety of spheres. Secondly, these years saw certain basic shifts in the structure of the economy, competition and the market, and in the nature and size of productive units. These developments were registered in turn by changes

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109. Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh, 100-115 cites evidence of voluntary associations and marriage patterns to show how the artisan was brought into contact with petty bourgeois groups, towards whom his lifestyle was shaped.

110. See, for instance, S. B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression 1873-1896 (London 1969) 54.

in social structure. As this period is also that of the "socialist revival", we shall be concerned to chart the effects of these developments upon the course of the working class movement.

There are superficially indicators enough to suggest that expansion and progress in the economy were still in evidence. National income, which stood at £560m per annum in 1851, had by 1900 been stretched to £2,081m p.a., or £49 per head of the population.<sup>111</sup> Industries based upon recent technological developments - such as motor vehicles, organic chemistry (plastics, soaps, drugs, etc.) electricity, communications, lighting, and artificial fibres and silks - automation and precision machinery were advancing apace.<sup>112</sup> Urbanisation was by now far advanced, but signs of change were to be found in the birthrate which, after the population boom of the 'seventies, began a long process of decline from its peak in 1876. Nonetheless, the population of around 30 million in 1871 had reached almost 40 millions by 1901.

There were, however, more ominous signs of change. Prices slumped continuously from an overall index of 128 in 1872 to 73 in 1896,<sup>113</sup> and, whilst not all commodity prices fluctuated evenly - coal and metal prices, for instance, picked up after about 1881-85, but the price of cotton fell from 8.7d. per lb. in 1871-75, to 4.2d. per lb. in 1891-95 - the general tendency seems clear enough.<sup>114</sup> More serious still was the

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111. Mathias, The First Industrial Nation, 243.

112. R. S. Sayers, A History of Economic Change in England 1880-1939 (Oxford 1973) 60-77; A. L. Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain 1880-1914 (London 1967) 6-10.

113. Mitchell and Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics, 472-73.

114. Saul, Myth of Great Depression, 11-15.



apparently relentless relative decline in industrial output and productivity, as may be adduced from Tables 5.2 and 5.3:

TABLE 5.2: Growth in Manufacturing Output, U.K. and U.S.A. 1870-1907

YEAR	Output Index (1870 = 100)		% Increase in output since preceding date		Compound % increase in output per annum	
	U.K.	U.S.A.	U.K.	U.S.A.	U.K.	U.S.A.
			%	%	%	%
1870	100.0	100.0	-	-	-	-
1880	123.3	168.6	23.3	68.6	2.2	5.5
1889	151.7	263.2	23.0	56.1	2.4	5.1
1899	175.7	398.7	15.9	51.5	1.5	4.3
1907	193.3	642.4	10.0	61.1	1.2	6.2

SOURCE: A. L. Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain, 130

Total net investment, as a percentage of national product, fell from a peak of 16.3% in 1873 to 8.5% in 1879 and, although rising again in the 'eighties, it fell to a low of 7.4% in 1893.<sup>115</sup> Capital formation followed a similarly depressing pattern and, in consequence, the mid-1880s onwards could not but usher in a period of questioning and misgiving in the face of two seemingly ubiquitous factors: low prices and low profits.<sup>116</sup> Although capital was available for borrowing at low real rates, industrial recovery seemed reluctant to follow.<sup>117</sup>

115. Ashworth, Economic History of England, 88.

116. See further, H. L. Beales, "The Great Depression in Industry and Trade", in E. M. Carus-Wilson, ed., Essays in Economic History, i (London 1954) 406-15.

117. For the whole debate on the "Great Depression", see A. E. Musson, "The Great Depression in Britain 1873-1896: a Reappraisal", Journal of Economic History, XIX (1959) 199-228; *idem.*, "British Industrial Growth during the 'Great Depression' (1873-96): Some Comments", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XV (1962-63) 529-33.



TABLE 5.3: Average Rate of Productivity Increase, 1870-1913,  
United Kingdom  
(% per annum)

	%
1870-1880	1.2
1880-1890	0.5
1890-1900	0.2
1900-1913	0.2

SOURCE: Derek H. Aldcroft and Harry W. Richardson, The British Economy 1870-1939 (London 1969) 129.

For other reasons, too, contemporaries were beginning to suspect that the economy had lost much of its resilience and there was no longer the same assurance that each new wave of prosperity would reach a higher point than the last. Since the export peak of 1872, manufacturers had been confronted by rising tariff walls in, and intensive competition from, rapidly expanding foreign economies. "We are beginning to feel the effects of foreign competition in quarters where our own trade formerly enjoyed a practical monopoly", noted a Royal Commission in 1886, and even in the home market, dumping of foreign goods had turned "Made in Germany" into a catchword of alarm.<sup>118</sup> Table 5.4 clearly indicates Britain's worsening relative trading position and Table 5.5 the stagnation of export values after 1875 and mounting deficit on balance of trade:

118. Keith Hutchinson, The Decline and Fall of British Capitalism (London 1951) 19.

TABLE 5.4: Production and Exports of Manufactured Goods,  
1911-13 compared with 1881-85

COUNTRY	Volume in 1911-13 as % of volume in 1881-85	
	Production (%)	Exports (%)
United Kingdom	162	175
Germany	363	290
United States	377	537
World	310	239

SOURCE: Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain, 132.

Britain's share of world trade fell from 19.65% in 1876-80 to 14.15% in 1911-13, the effect of which was most pronounced in the nation's basic industries - cotton, coal, iron and steel and shipbuilding; in cotton, for instance, domestic exports slumped from a value of £256.3m, in 1872 to £216m in 1894, although the industry began to revive in the years immediately following.<sup>119</sup> Finally, as traditional overseas markets were closed off to British exports, the pattern of trade tended to shift towards reliance upon Empire and colonial outlets.<sup>120</sup>

The data presented in Table 5.5 also illustrate the extent to which the deteriorating balance of trade was being increasingly cushioned by a variety of "invisible" earnings: "incomes from services" (by far the largest of which was shipping) was in itself almost sufficient to cover the deficit in these years. More significant were earnings which

119. Mitchell and Deane, Abstract of Historical Statistics, 283-84; Sayers, History of Economic Change, 78-105.

120. A. K. Cairncross, Home and Foreign Investment 1870-1913: Studies in Capital Accumulation (Cambridge 1953), Table 43, 189.

TABLE 5.5: Balance of Payments and Export of Capital 1871-1906

Year (annual average for 5 yr. period)	Net Imports	Exports of U.K. Products	Balance of commodity trade	Income from services	Income from interest and dividends	Balance on current account	Accumulating balance of credit abroad
	(a)	(b)	(c)=(b)-(a)	(d)	(e)	(f)=(c)+ (d)+(e)	(g)
1871-1875	302.0	239.5	- 62.5	86.8	50.0	74.6	1,065
1876-1880	325.9	201.4	-124.5	93.0	56.3	24.9	1,189
1881-1885	336.6	232.3	-104.3	101.0	64.8	61.6	1,497
1886-1890	327.4	236.3	- 91.1	94.6	84.2	87.6	1,935
1891-1895	357.1	226.8	-130.3	88.4	94.0	52.0	2,195
1896-1900	413.3	252.7	-160.6	100.7	100.2	40.3	2,397
1901-1905	471.5	296.9	-174.6	110.6	112.9	49.0	2,642

SOURCE: Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation, 305

accrued from the export of capital. "This was the golden age of British capital export", W. Adams has noted, <sup>121</sup>

The foreign competition which vexed the exporter of British goods, caused no sleepless nights in the City of London, from which the vast accumulations poured overseas to lands where the rate of interest was higher and Labour movements embryonic or illegal.

From as early as mid-century, the value of capital exports had been steadily growing to stand at around £75m per annum in 1876, by which time the total accumulated had leapt to over £1,000m. From 1875 until about 1910, the yield of already invested capital more than covered new lending and, by the turn of the century, the accumulated total invested abroad was a staggering

£4,000m. <sup>122</sup> J. A. Hobson cites statistics which suggest that, between 1882 and 1893, the value of foreign and colonial investments had grown by 74.8%. <sup>123</sup> The export of capital was clearly linked to the rising proportion of metal goods and engineering products exported, of which railways formed by far the larger part. In 1893, British capital invested abroad represented 15% of the country's total wealth; nearly one half was in the form of loans to foreign and colonial governments, and of the rest a large proportion was invested in railways, banks, telegraphs, land and mines. Such earnings masked Britain's deteriorating economic position, but there is much indication that they helped breed rentier attitudes among businessmen and manufacturers at home.

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121. W. S. Adams, Edwardian Heritage: A Study in British History 1901-1906 (London 1971) 65.

122. For details of capital export in this period, see Brinley Thomas, "The Historical Record of International Capital Movements to 1913", and Matthew Simon, "The Pattern of New British Portfolio Foreign Investment 1865-1914", both in J. H. Adler, ed., Capital Movements and Economic Development (London 1967) 3-32, and 33-70.

123. J. A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study (London 1954 ed.) 61-3.

The overall picture in the last quarter of the century, therefore, was one of patchy economic achievement in which increments in the national income were sandwiched between years of increasingly severe depression (e.g. the late 1870s, 1886, 1893 and 1903-4). The mounting clamour for "Fair Trade", i.e. a return to protection, was widely heard in these years, no less in agriculture where the competition of prairie wheat, cheaper transport and a series of bad harvests in the 'seventies had brought to an end the age of High Farming.<sup>124</sup> Although it was possible to make adjustments in the direction of market gardening, animal husbandry, dairying and the like, and those farmers on richer lands were better placed to weather the storm, cereal growing - and wheat production in particular - were never to recover from the impact of the Great Depression. The value of agricultural land fell drastically and the area under cultivation shrank steadily. In all, the depression in agriculture was an enormous symbolic blow to the prestige of the landowning class.

The factors underlying the watershed of late century are in reality complex, but certain key features may be pinpointed. The effect of foreign competition was undeniably a major cause of Britain's lost monopoly. The distorted industrial structure, in which a few great export industries prospered in the very special circumstances of the world market in the first half of the century, was bound to reverberate seriously in this situation.<sup>125</sup> Other explanations for the depression fall readily to hand. There may have been implications in the failure of the money supply to keep pace with the

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124. For agriculture in this period, see Mathias, First Industrial Nation, 337-49; T. W. Fletcher, "The Great Depression in English Agriculture 1873-96", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIII (1960-61) 417-32.

125. For an examination of the effects of foreign competition, see Hutchinson, Decline and Fall of British Capitalism, 17-30.



growth of activity in the 1880s and 1890s, accounting for the fall in prices.<sup>126</sup> More significant still was the failure of businessmen and industrialists to press ahead sufficiently rapidly with innovation in newly created and expanding industries and with reinvestment in and restocking the established industries, where tradition rather than innovation was the order of the day.<sup>127</sup> Finally, explanations for the depression have been premised upon the detrimental effects of Britain's early industrialisation and a possible decline in the quality and vigour of entrepreneurship;<sup>128</sup> and upon shifts in investment patterns after 1873, bringing lower costs and falling prices in the wake of faster gestation periods.<sup>129</sup>

If the root causes of the "Great Depression" remain elusive, one can be rather more certain as to its effects upon the structure of the economy. Foremost amongst these would appear to have been an increase in size, relocating the basis of production upon a corporate, rather than an individual entrepreneurial, foundation. To be sure, in Capital Marx had demonstrated that a process of industrial concentration was at work well before 1850.<sup>130</sup> This tendency had been further encouraged, however, by the growth of domestic and colonial markets, improved transport and communication facilities and

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126. See, for instance, P. Cagan, Determinants and Effects of Changes in the Stock of Money 1875-1960 (New York 1965) 250.

127. Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain, 10-25, 125-33.

128. Saul, Myth of the Great Depression, 44-48; D. H. Aldcroft, "The Entrepreneur and the British Economy 1870-1914", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XVII (1964) 113-34; Payne, Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth Century, 45-56.

129. W. W. Rostow, British Economy of the Nineteenth Century (Oxford 1948) ch.3, et. passim.

130. Capital, i, 434-45.



the development of a centralised banking and credit system in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the intensification of mechanisation and power-driven machinery was working to increase plant size in these years. This fact was registered in the rapid growth of the joint stock company. The 1862 Joint Stock Companies Act had provided an enormous fillip to this form of industrial organisation and, between 1884 and 1890, the number of joint stock companies carrying on business and the amount of their paid up capital increased by two thirds, from 8,692 to 13,323 companies and from £475,551m to £777,140,000 of paid up capital. <sup>131</sup>

The emergence of "big business" was further propelled by the threat of foreign competition, which had stimulated among employers a move towards combination in the form of trade associations, cartelization and amalgamation. Starting with the Salt Union in 1888 - which eventually controlled over 90% of salt production in the United Kingdom - large-scale amalgamation began to replace free competition. Following the lead of America, cartels emerged amongst bleachers, Bradford dyers, calico printers and fine cotton spinners, whilst conditions approaching monopoly were reached by wall-paper manufacturers and Associated Portland Cement. With the emergence of the high street chain store and amalgamations in shipping and tobacco, the large business unit had indisputably arrived. <sup>132</sup>

The tendencies towards industrial consolidation and corporate organisation at home and the export of capital abroad were paralleled and stimulated by the increasing power and centralization of finance during the 1880s and '90s. In the changing circumstances which displaced Britain from the position of

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<sup>131</sup>. Helen Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties: Towards a Social Basis of Freedom (New York 1945) 43; P. L. Payne, "The Emergence of the Large-Scale Company in Great Britain", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XX (1967) 519-42.

<sup>132</sup>. Mathias, First Industrial Nation, 386-95.

world economic leader, financial magnates began to assume a more central role in the economy. Supported by the vast deposits of the British banking system, it was men like Cassels, Revelstokes and Rothschild who were able to sustain and promote exports by capital investment. As has frequently been observed, the bonds between finance capital, the traditional ruling class and the world of politics were particularly strong. <sup>133</sup>

In consequence of these changes, it is possible to detect a profound shift in the assumptions underlying business endeavour and economic life. The major effect of the depression and profit squeeze seems to have been to dissolve the belief in progress, laissez-faire and economic liberalism and in the beneficial distributive market mechanism, upon all of which the mid-Victorian settlement had been premised. Above all, the failure of traditional liberal tenets to effectively counter foreign competition led the business and governing classes to reassess and look with increased favour upon the economic role which might be played by the State.

It is indeed in the extent and scope of governmental intervention in the economic sphere which most clearly distinguishes this period. Much of the hostility to state intervention was beginning to subside, and even those who clung to earlier views of the proper limits of governmental action had to interpret some of them in a wider sense. <sup>134</sup> Since Gladstone's first administration, social and economic legislation of one kind or another had been steadily accumulating. In the sphere of social welfare, the inadequacy of traditional market nostrums had been vividly exposed by the findings of Booth and Rowntree and pressure from trade unions and the working class movement. Equally, however, industrial and business interests were coming

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133. Adams, Edwardian Heritage, 65-73.

134. Sayers, Economic Change in England, 121ff. On this see further, Harold Laski, "Leaders of Collectivist Thought", in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians (London 1949) 417-22.

to view the State rather more leniently. It is significant that the demand for efficiently operated municipal services to be provided at public expense - the growth of which was such a marked feature of this period - was most vociferously expressed by the business community.<sup>135</sup> No one did more than Joseph Chamberlain, the Midlands industrialist, to popularise and promote the spread of "municipal socialism".

Within the middling and upper strata of late Victorian society, these years saw a variety of changes: the size and complexity of the lower middle class was greatly increased; the gradual decline of the landed interest became both more apparent and rapid; and there emerged a new composite ruling class based upon the fusion of landed and big business interests.

It was among the petty bourgeoisie, the rank and file who staffed the new great units of distributive commerce and services such as banking, insurance, transport, communications and administration, that the most significant expansion occurred. The final twenty-five years of the century saw a vast increase in the blackcoated population: estimated at around 20% of families in the 1860s, they were over 40% by the 1930s.<sup>136</sup> Numerically, the largest increases were in those occupations which straddled the working and middle classes - clerks, typists, shop assistants, railway officials and commercial travellers. "Commercial occupations" leapt from employing 212,000 people in 1871 to 597,000 in 1901, and those employed in public administration rose from 106,000 to 191,000 in the same period; but of all the lower middle class groups which expanded with the structural shift of the late-Victorian economy from manufacturing to services, clerks were by

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135. Henry Pelling, Modern Britain 1885-1955 (London 1974) 39-40.

136. Richard Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915 (St. Albans 1976) 207; David Lockwood, The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness (London 1969) 19-35.

far the most numerous and important. In 1861 only 91,733 men and virtually no women were employed as clerks; by 1891 there were 370,433 men and 18,947 women but, by 1911 with 561,000 men and 124,843 women, clerks were one of the largest and fastest growing occupational groups in society. <sup>137</sup>

However, conditions of life varied widely within these social groupings. Increasingly, the lower middle class were moving to live in new suburban housing estates, where they formed, in C. F. C. Masterman's words, "a homogeneous civilisation - detached, self-centred, unostentatious", and where the values of respectability, home and family life were at a premium. <sup>138</sup> Yet Taine saw well what the trumpery of respectability and social advance might mean to the poorer middle class family, <sup>139</sup>

The well mowed lawns, the little iron gates and painted facades and symmetrical plots are reminiscent of nice clean toys. The ornamentation of the houses is in bad taste...all of it fresh and neat and incongruous, an equivocal and trumpery luxury like that of a newly rich self-made man who, trying to look smart, looks bedizened.

This for many was the reality of life: only in banking and insurance were wages rising rapidly enough for social advancement to take place and the ordinary clerk, for all his middle class pretensions, was often no better off than the well paid working man.

Indeed, much evidence points to the fact that in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the economic and social position of the petty bourgeois was becoming every more precarious. Urbanisation, the growth in

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<sup>137</sup>. Geoffrey Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914 (London 1977); L. Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work (Newton Abbot 1973) 215; Cole, Studies in Class Structure, 60-61.

<sup>138</sup>. C. F. G. Masterman, The Condition of England (London 1960) 57; Hugh McLeod, "White Collar Values and the Role of Religion", in Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 61-88.

<sup>139</sup>. H. Taine, (Translated and introduced by E. Hyams), Taine's Notes on England (London and New York 1957) 220.



size of firms and retail outlets, cartels and monopoly, had all begun to squeeze the small shopkeeper or businessman; increasingly sophisticated production and management techniques restricted, and in some cases even closed off, the channels of upward mobility for many white collar workers; and the very specialised and weak labour market position of the clerk bred high unemployment and distress in late century, a problem which was compounded by the threat of foreign and female clerical labour.<sup>140</sup> Fear and even hatred, of the working class spread rapidly amongst this stratum, yet there is no evidence of any generalised petty bourgeois right wing reaction - fed by the frustrations, insecurities and status-anxieties of these years - such as occurred elsewhere. The lower middle class held firmly to those liberal free market values espoused by their betters, but by this time increasingly coming into question. We should remember, in addition, that the falling birth rate - most marked among these groups - helped to cushion the impact of economic change, and precluded any conflict between an "intellectual proletariat" and the ruling class: "By such limitation of family", observed Masterman, "the standard of living is reduced to the level of the income, and the clerk and professional class can be identified with the prevailing order, instead of becoming centres of social upheaval."<sup>141</sup>

In the upper reaches of the social structure, there continued to be evidenced that growing sense of identity between social groups, slowly bringing about a fusion of landed and industrial wealth. The newly rich grew as the joint stock era diffused industrial and commercial capital amongst ever larger bodies of inactive shareholders. But the landed upper

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<sup>140</sup>. For the worsening social and economic position of the clerk in these years, see G. L. Anderson, "The Social Economy of Late-Victorian Clerks", in Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 113-33.

<sup>141</sup>. Masterman, The Condition of England, 70.

classes had long since come to terms with this process; predisposed to profit from the new industrial society and driven by the depression in agriculture into yet more frankly commercial ventures, the aristocracy continued to imbibe bourgeois values and habits and one can detect greater thrift and more businesslike conduct in their affairs. Moreover, the expansion of commercial, industrial and professional occupations provided lucrative openings for the sons of landed families in the world of business. <sup>142</sup>

It was not, therefore, a situation of conflict, but rather through a gradual process of adaptation, that the old landed and big industrial interests merged into a composite ruling stratum. <sup>143</sup> This symbiotic fusion occurred on a number of levels: in the intercourse of society where wealth and lineage met; by the pressures of economic change, which made even the greatest landowners eager for the favours of railway companies, coal managers and mineral magnates; and through the steady transfusion of newly acquired wealth into landed position. But, above all, it was per medium of the public schools, both new and old, that the cultural gulf separating the bourgeois from the aristocratic, the Dissenter from the High Churchman, came to be bridged. Men of business and commerce, and even those of Nonconformist persuasion, slowly began sending their sons to the public schools and the schools took to welcoming them. <sup>144</sup> The Public Schools Act of 1868 nicely balanced upper and middle class wishes by maintaining the traditional primacy of Classics, while at the same time replacing the already increasingly expensive "free" places for the local poor with a system of "open" competitive examination, necessarily involving costly pre-examination preparation. Indicative of these developments was the emergence, from the mid-1880s onward,

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<sup>142</sup>. See the work of David Spring cited above (fn. 35 and 95).

<sup>143</sup>. Thompson, Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 285.

<sup>144</sup>. Cole, Studies in Class Structure, 64.



of the "Beer Baron" - those elevated to the peerage from industrial and commercial backgrounds; by the late 1890s, those raised from the nobility constituted only 13% of new creations, whilst the gentry and commoners coined 44% and 43% of new titles respectively. <sup>145</sup>

One should not underestimate the complexities involved here, for a different code of ethics and social behaviour often inhibited the formation of close relationships between new and old wealth. Yet, as F. M. L. Thompson has shown, what overt hostility there was only served to enhance this reciprocal absorption of social classes. <sup>146</sup> During the Edwardian era, high society life was "democratised" as industrialists were admitted into exclusive saloons and the permissible limits upon intermarriage were relaxed. Politically, too, the new men had begun to enter Parliament in large numbers, although it would as yet be some time before they found high Cabinet office; Gladstone's Cabinets were dominated still by the established Whig families, whilst the aristocratic composition of government had been enhanced by Balfour's emphasis upon "the classes". <sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, 10 Cabinet ministers in the Conservative Government of 1900 held between them 15 directorships and 16 ministers not in the Cabinet held 26, all, it would appear, with Balfour's explicit sanction. <sup>148</sup>

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145. R. E. Pumphrey, "The Introduction of Industrialists into the British Peerage", American Historical Review, LXV (1959) 6-9.

146. Thompson, Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 283-85.

147. On the question of the new men in Parliament, see Guttman, British Political Elite, chs. 4 and 5; idem., "Political Elite and the Class Structure", op. cit.; see further, idem., "The Changing Social Structure of the British Political Elite 1886-1935", British Journal of Sociology, II (1951) 122-34.

148. Adams, Edwardian Heritage, 88.

The watershed of late century further encouraged, therefore, that process which saw the great railway financier, shipowner, ironmaster and colliery proprietor join the new professions, such as accountancy, directors, engineering and architecture, alongside the established social classes at the apex of the social pyramid. The whole social arrangement was sealed in the Conservative Party of the period. Coming increasingly to rely for its support upon the urban industrial areas and trading upon middle class and petty bourgeois fear of both liberal and radicalism and working class socialism, the Conservative Party welded together landed and urban political support for an alliance in defence of property. Once again, however, the right wing reaction was attenuated. This theme will be taken up in the following chapter; for the moment, we may turn to the nature of the working class in Britain during the period of the "socialist revival".

The Great Depression years brought no less important changes within the working classes. As always, there were those who believed that the workers had never had things so good: "...the 'money' wages of all classes of labour in Great Britain have advanced about one hundred percent", wrote D. A. Wells in 1898, <sup>149</sup>

while the purchasing power of the wages in respect to most commodities, especially in recent years, has also been very great. The impression probably prevails very generally in all countries that the capitalist classes are continually getting richer and richer, while the masses remain poor, or become poorer. But in Great Britain...this is not the case.

It is true that during the final quarter of the century the absolute living standards of the workers improved markedly, although the advance was admittedly very uneven. Generally, however, every index of money wages

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<sup>149</sup>. Cited by R. W. Breach and R. W. Hartwell, eds., British Economy and Society 1870-1970 (London 1972) 59-60. See further, Robert Giffen, The Progress of the Working Class in the last Half Century (London 1884).

bears witness to the improvement in cash bargains struck by labour after mid-century. In all, money wage rates doubled between 1850 and 1910, and according to G. H. Wood, were 15-16% higher in 1900 than they had been in 1873 and their purchasing power was 42% greater. <sup>150</sup>

Moreover, the range and quality of foodstuffs and commodities available to the working class had improved considerably. Imported foods had enhanced and made more varied the diet of working class families, whilst the entire consumer goods market of the poor began to be transformed by the rise of multiple retail outlets. Footwear and clothing, and cheap consumer durables such as bicycles and sewing machines, were all becoming more readily available, whilst sugar and tea consumption per head had doubled between 1860 and 1910. Finally, the leisure pursuits of the masses were changing too. The mass entertainment sports - football, dogs and racing - now provided a convivial Saturday outlet for working people and the growth of seaside resorts like Blackpool had begun to cater for annual holiday of the textile operative.

As Frederick Harrison recognised, however, the standard of living of the workers could not be accurately gauged from indices of wage rates alone. <sup>151</sup> Whilst money wages rose during these years, Bowley calculated that between 1880 and 1900 the distribution of the national product as between wages and other forms of income in actual fact changed very little. <sup>152</sup> And even this may have been too optimistic a view. Rising wages resulted in no small measure from technological changes increasing output per man by means of mechanisation and a steady occupational shift from lower paid to better

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150. Wood, "Real Wages and Standard of Comfort", op. cit.; Mitchell and Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics, 343-44; A. L. Bowley, Wages in the United Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century (1900: New Jersey 1972 ed.) 126.

151. Frederick Harrison, National and Social Problems (London 1885) 380.

152. Cited by Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 443-44.

remunerated occupations. Above all, of course, it was due to falling prices that any increment in wages occurred. Well might Harrison conclude in 1885 that,<sup>153</sup>

...ninety percent of the actual producers of wealth have no home that they can call their own beyond the end of the week; have no bit of soil or so much as a room which belongs to them; have nothing of value of any kind...; have the precarious chance of weekly wages which barely suffice to keep them in health; are housed for the most part in places that no man would think fit for his horse...This is the normal state of the average workman in town or country.

When one takes into account unemployment (and the relatively new phenomenon of "technological unemployment"), which rarely fell below 5% during these years and was indeed frequently much higher and more tenacious amongst unskilled workers, and the extent of primary, hard-core urban poverty unearthed by Booth in London and Rowntree in York - submerging possibly 25-30% of the country's population - it seems possible to agree with Helen Lynd that,<sup>154</sup>

Despite these wage rises after the middle of the century and an accompanying advance in the standard of comfort involving increased consumption of such things as flour, tea, cocoa, sugar, rice, currants and tobacco, the total flow of wealth to the different segments of the population continued to be very disadvantageous to the working classes.

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153. Speech to the Industrial Remuneration Conference (1885), cited by J. H. Stewart Reid, The Origins of the British Labour Party (Minnesota 1955) 8.

154. Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties, 49; D. J. Oddy's analysis of working class diets during this period adds weight "to the supposition that many people in the last years of Victoria's reign were inadequately nourished...": Cf. "Working Class Diets in Late Nineteenth Century Britain", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXIII (1970) 314-23. See further, A. E. Dingle, "Drink and Working Class Living Standards in Britain 1870-1914", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXV (1972) 608-22.

The gradual recognition of the real extent of working class plight was to do much to undermine the belief in progress and benign market forces so characteristic of mid-Victorian Britain.

The actual structure of the work force was itself changing in this period. The later stages of industrialisation were characterised by the growing application of scientific technique and resultant economies of large-scale production. There began to emerge a labour force with relatively fewer unskilled grades, many more semi-skilled, self-acting machine minders, calling for dexterity rather than real craftsmanship, and a high requirement of skill from a decreasing proportion of the workforce.<sup>155</sup> With the ever increasing application of machinery - which reduced not only the number of heavy unskilled manual tasks but also many of the craft skills - a more homogeneous labour force began to emerge, based largely upon semi-skilled machine operations involving a low level of formal technique.

Among the unskilled lower strata, work was becoming less secure and more prone to the vagrancies of the trade cycle. At this level, unemployment was consistently high during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and here its effects were most debilitating. It was, moreover, the unskilled who felt the full impact of the employers' attempts to shore up profit margins by creating an easy market of surplus labour.<sup>156</sup> Again, mechanisation and automation had brought in their wake fresh problems for the lower working class. Whilst mechanisation had done away with many hazardous occupations, it was at the same time creating new ones. The more extensive use of machinery meant that for many people work became noisier, faster and

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155. Cole, Studies in Class Structure, 39.

156. Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties, 237-98.



more monotonous, with fewer periods of rest.<sup>157</sup> Much evidence points to a speed-up of production in these years, demanding of workers greater effort and output. In 1902, Herbert Samuel emphasised that,<sup>158</sup>

...if the hours of labour are shorter, the labour itself is more intense. If there is more leisure, work is more monotonous...the worker has to keep pace with the machine; he is often subject to more tiring strain; at an earlier age his powers become unequal to the demand made on them, and a man is dismissed as superannuated at a time of life when the easier conditions of the past would have regarded him as still in his prime.

In a few trades, the mechanisation of most processes left a few still to be done by hand in conditions that were more arduous than ever, because of the mechanisation of the remainder.

In some industries, particularly in the engineering trades, an ominous development came in the form of piecework and other arrangements - such as the "feed and speed" and premium bonus systems - introduced alongside the greater attention being paid by employers to workshop organisation.<sup>159</sup> Geared mainly towards increasing productivity and output, this new managerialism was bitterly resented by trade unionists and workers alike; often these systems involved a kind of overseership that was apt to be viewed as a driving device by all workers, and always as an affront to craft pride and workshop communality. In all, they contributed much to making work generally more arduous and less endurable.

157. Ashworth, Economic History of England, 203.

158. Herbert Samuel, Liberalism (London 1902), quoted by Adams, Edwardian Heritage, 34; Allen Clarke, The Effects of the Factory System (London 1899) 63, and B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry (London 1915) 184-88 for further details on industrial speed-up in this period. See below, Chapter 10.

159. For details, see Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain, 97.



Such managerial developments were certainly important in breaking down the craft authority and exclusivity of the labour aristocracy. In purely monetary terms, it seems clear that the skilled working class maintained a considerable differential advantage over the rest of the workforce until at least 1914.<sup>160</sup> But the authority of the labour aristocrats, and their control both over the process of production and over other workers, was gradually being eroded. Its skills were being replaced by semi-skilled machinists, whilst increased social mobility had made it more difficult to bolster craft status by means of formal apprenticeship regulations. Much of this process was, of course, vehemently resented by skilled workers, but in other respects they were being pushed towards closer identification with the main body of the working class. The relations between the labour aristocracy and the vastly expanded blackcoated strata immediately above it almost certainly worsened in these years. The intense white collar status consciousness, and aggressive rejection of manual work on the part of the lower middle class, was itself manifest in, as well as being reinforced by, increasing residential and social segregation. If these tensions were not new, they became far more significant in a period when the white collar workers were no longer a thinklayer above the labour aristocracy, but a substantial stratum whose very anxieties exacerbated their rejection of those below them.

Both from above and below itself, therefore, the economic securities and community reassurances of the mid-Victorian labour aristocracy were being challenged. It was in the changing circumstances of the late nineteenth century that a social separation emerged between the core of the lower middle class and the aristocracy of labour; this, to be sure, was

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160. Knowles and Robertson, "Differences between the Wages of Skilled and Unskilled Workers", e.g. Table I, p.111.

one factor amongst a number that turned the elite of skilled men back towards a broader political identification with the working class as a whole. 161

#### 5.4: Aspects of Class Structure - I: Aristocratic and Middle Class Radicalism

It may be instructive in the concluding sections of this chapter to focus briefly upon certain "strategic" social groups in late-Victorian society. We may begin by examining the place of Tory and middle class radicals in the class structure as a whole; their importance as regards socialism and the working class movement will be spelt out in the following chapters.

It has been argued that the sociological foundation of mid-Victorian equipoise, and later developments in British society, was the social and economic compromise effected by the representatives of territorial and industrial wealth. It has not, however, been suggested that this social fusion was anything like complete. Inevitably, there were sections of the landed elite who, anxious to turn back the clock and revert to honorific aristocratic rule, would reject the social "compromise"; and, inevitably, sections of the middle class existed who were impatient of the privileged and closeted world of the landed gentleman, essentially parasitic upon the real movement of industry and commerce. Neither group was large, but their actions held immense importance in Victorian society; the reasons for this, and the course of Tory and middle class radicalism, may now be briefly examined.

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161. Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class", in idem.; The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 48-52; Gray, Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh adduces evidence suggestive of the breakdown of aristocratic prerogatives and the emergence of a more homogeneous working class in late century, and the manner in which these changes turned the labour elite towards socialism: 115-20, 165-83.

Those spokesmen for the traditional ruling class hostile to the new industrial state were of two kinds. There were those men who, like Giffard, the ultra-Tory editor of The Standard, Lockhart of The Quarterly, Sewell, Alison and Galt, and the crude Toryism of Fraser's magazine, attacked Peelite Conservatism in the name of reactionary feudal privilege. <sup>162</sup> But of greater concern here is that strand of Tory thought which runs through the nineteenth century and which was concerned to urgently defend - albeit in paternalistic fashion - the working class and its standard of life against the tide of middle class laissez-faire. In the 1830s and '40s, one finds this type of Toryism in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, where Oastler, Sadler, Stephens, Bull, Wood and Ferrand led the factory movement and opposition to the new Poor Law, drawing Tories and proletariat together against the claims of the industrial bourgeoisie. <sup>163</sup> Eloquent expression of a similar concern is often held to be apparent in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey's Colloquies on the Progress of Society and in the work of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. <sup>164</sup> This same theme inspired the "revivified and spiritualised feudalism" of Disraeli's Young England movement, which reached its apotheosis in his call for "the elevation of the condition of the people" in 1872 and the social reforms of his 1874-80 administration.

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162. R. B. McDowell, British Conservatism 1832-1914 (London 1959) 30-34.

163. For details of the Tory led anti-poor law movement in the north, see G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, British Working Class Movements: Select Documents 1789-1875 (London 1965) ch. 8; P. Hollis, ed., Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815-50 (London 1973) 194, 198, 203, 208-9, 211-12. Early Conservative working men's clubs appeared in the north at this time, inspired principally by Oastler: Cf. R. L. Hill, Toryism and the People 1832-1846 (London 1929) 47-57.

164. David Roberts, "Tory Paternalism and Social Reform in Early Victorian England", American Historical Review, LXIII (1958) 323.

A brief resurgence of the radical Tory ideal may be discerned in the "Tory Democracy" of Lord Randolph Churchill and his "Fourth Party" in the 1880s. <sup>165</sup>

If the linchpin of this, essentially aristocratic, radicalism lay in a rejection of the flaccid compromise which the bulk of landed families had made with the new industrial order, so too was there an equally vociferous coterie of middle class spokesmen agitating against residual aristocratic privilege. These men demanded curbs upon what they believed to be an outmoded conception of territorial power by means of Parliamentary, legal, fiscal and commercial reforms in the cause of greater "middle-classness". Inevitably, many members of the bourgeoisie saw only the disjuncture between their own productive role in society, and the monopolisation by the landed elite of privileges in the spheres of politics, education, the professions and armed forces, and of honorific social esteem in general.

Like its aristocratic counterpart, middle class radicalism was a continuous theme throughout the nineteenth century. <sup>166</sup> In the early years of the century, the main radical force was the classic artisanal and shopkeeping petty bourgeoisie; as yet undifferentiated from the working class proper, these intractable radicals were the backbone of all progressive political movements. <sup>167</sup> If their Bible was Paine's

165. Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 131-66.

166. For an overview of radical movements in the nineteenth century, see Simon MacCoby, ed., The English Radical Tradition 1763-1914 (London 1952).

167. For early petit bourgeois radicalism, see Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, op. cit.; T. J. Nossiter, "Shopkeeper Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century", in idem., A. H. Hanson and S. Rokkan, eds., Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences (London 1972); Frank Bechhofer and Brian Elliot, "Persistence and Change: The Petty Bourgeoisie in Industrial Societies", (unpublished paper 1975) 4-5. Another perspective on middle class radicalism is that offered by R. S. Neale with his idea of the "...dynamic achievement-motivated middling class:" cf. "Class and Class Consciousness in early Nineteenth Century England; three class or five?", in idem., Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century (London 1972).



Rights of Man, petty bourgeois radicalism was short-lived and, by the 1830s and 1840s, had become more concerned with the rights of property. But by this time a more stable and enduring form of radicalism was emerging among manufacturers, industrialists and aldermanic radicals, who were wearying of the naked class bias of Parliament - symbolised above all else by the duties upon Corn. Between the First Reform Act and the Corn Law struggles, this middle class radicalism was articulated by the new provincial press and by men like Bright, Villiers, Gibson, Fox, Gilpin and, above all, by Richard Cobden. 168

By the 1860s middle class radicalism had changed again. It entered into a connection with organised labour that had been lacking before and it gained enormously in prestige and intellectual ascendancy. Bright's reform agitation of the 1850s and 1860s links this new radicalism with that of the Manchester School, but its most outstanding representative was John Stuart Mill. By now bound securely to the Liberal Party, it fell to men like Dilke, Trevelyan, Fawcett, John Morley, Godwin Smith and Thorold Rogers to bridge the gap between radicalism and the educated public. Middle class radicalism had by this time detached itself from crude bourgeois interests and the way was open for the development of Liberal radicalism after the Home Rule split of 1886. In all, however, the concerns of the radicals had remained remarkably consistent - namely, how best to secure for the individual maximal liberty of thought and action; it was a goal which uncannily reflected middle class interests within a society heavily overlaid by an aristocratic patina.

Both Tory and middle class radicalism emerged against, but yet were intimately related to, the evolution of the Victorian social structure. Whilst aristocratic radicals decried the heartless tide of entrepreneurial

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168. Vincent, Formation of Liberal Party, 67-8.

progress, middle class radicals felt that the process had not gone far enough; frustrated by the sight of a landed elite sharing in the spoils of industry, their goal was nothing less than the bourgeoisification of society. Neither of these social groups was large but, precisely because of their peripheral location in relation to the mid-Victorian settlement, their appeals were infused with enormous symbolic significance. Both were able to appeal to the "true" vocation of either aristocracy or bourgeoisie, a vocation obscured by the course of societal development. And both felt the need to appeal to the working class in the construction of the society for which they stood. The importance of this latter fact will be indicated when we turn to examine the evolution of working class and socialist thought.

#### 5.5: Aspects of Class Structure - II: The Intelligensia and Professional Strata

It is often observed that, in a number of foreign countries, intellectuals have played an important part in socialist and progressive movements. Whilst often oversimply attributed to their "alienation" from society, it is nevertheless true that their socially marginal location has often impelled them to make common cause with the working class.<sup>169</sup> The older continental intelligensia were bourgeois, but often hostile to other members of their class and prominent only where the class was weak.<sup>170</sup>

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169. Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (London 1971) 310ff; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Lickmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Harmondsworth 1971) 143-44: the classic statement of the role of the intellectuals in the socialist movement is that provided by Karl Kautsky, cited by Lenin in his What is to be Done?, in Henry M. Christman, Ed., Essential Works of Lenin (New York 1966) 82.

170. Geoffrey Hawthorne, "The New Intelligensia in Britain", New Society 28 October 1976, 183.



In Victorian Britain, by contrast, the intellectuals were firmly wedded to the higher social strata and correspondingly weaker as an autonomous force, unable to transfer their allegiances with the same degree of impunity; significantly, the very word "intelligensia" is alien to the English language. This concluding section will examine the place of intellectuals in the Victorian class structure, within which they merged imperceptibly with the liberal professional stratum and its ethos.

Perry Anderson has convincingly argued recently that the absence of an autonomous intellectual stratum in Britain must be traced back to the sixteenth century. Aristocratic control of the established public schools and the ancient Universities allowed this class to produce its own intellectuals, mainly from its lesser, professional reaches. The absence of Roman Law in England, moreover, precluded the growth of an intelligensia based upon the legal faculties of the Universities.<sup>171</sup> To these conditions ought to be added the deep strain of empiricism which profoundly impregnated nineteenth century British culture; Victorian anti-intellectualism would seem to rest, as Walter Houghton has pointed out, in the process of industrial revolution initiated, not by the insights of theoretical scientific inquiry, but by the empirical gropings of essentially practical men.<sup>172</sup> The empirical cast of the English mind was reinforced in a variety of ways, particularly by Evangelicals like Shaftsbury who took pains to impress upon devotees the need to subordinate "the mischief of speculation" to practical good works.

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171. Perry Anderson, "Components of the National Culture", in A. Cockburn and Robin Blackburn, eds., Student Power (Harmondsworth 1969) 227-9, 279 fn. 15.

172. Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (London 1973) 110-136.

It seems fairly clear that Victorian intellectuals were a particularly stable and well integrated stratum within society as a whole. Far from "alienated", the intellectual assumed his title and estate almost by the right of birth, his legitimacy being established by the claims of family, class, education, profession and remuneration. He could move in high society, aspire to political office, or make money without impugning his calling. He had not the stigmatism of intellectuals elsewhere - academicism, bohemianism, or the precosity of the feuilletonist or esthete. Noel Annan's eloquent account of the Intellectual Aristocracy portrays a secure and established class, "like the rest of English society accustomed to responsible and judicious utterance, and sceptical of iconoclastic speculation."<sup>173</sup> United by ties of kinship over those of social class, it is staggering to survey the interlocking geneologies that bind by birth and marriage the great names of nineteenth century English culture. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has noted of the Victorian intellectual: "His intellectuality came as naturally to him as his language, which in turn was as natural as breathing. It was his birthright, and he was as secure in that as he was in his Englishness."<sup>174</sup>

There existed no lumpen-intelligensia in Victorian society whose grievances might be turned towards political radicalism<sup>175</sup> nor, indeed, any evidence of that process prophesied by Marx whereby a portion of the bourgeois intellectuals go over to the side of the workers.<sup>176</sup> In all,

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173. Noel Annan, "The Intellectual Aristocracy", in J. H. Plumb, ed., Studies in Social History, A Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan (London 1955) 285.

174. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds (London 1968) 201-2.

175. V. G. Kiernan, "Notes on the Intelligensia", in R. Miliband and John Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1969 (London 1969) 60-61.

176. K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto in idem., Selected Works (London 1968) 44.

there would appear to be great merit in Gramsci's analysis of British intellectuals which suggests that the intellectual stratum is, by and large, "traditional", intimately related to the landed governing class, although "...it should be added that the English aristocracy has an open structure, and continually renews itself with elements coming from the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie." 177

A further aspect of the profound affinities between Victorian intellectuals and the class structure ought to be mentioned. Whilst the middle classes collaborated in preserving the traditional social and political forms of the ruling class, they developed the morality of professional service into their equivalent of noblesse oblige and equipped themselves with the necessary training institutions in the reformed public schools which deliberately clung to classical curricula. 178 The intellectuals in Victorian society became in turn closely identified with the ethos of liberal professionalism, indicative of their sociological moorings within society at large. The intercourse between the intelligensia and professions was close, bringing to the term "intellectual" wider connotations than might be the case elsewhere. It is interesting, in this connection, to note that Guttman's analysis of the professional middle class and intellectuals in British politics between 1886 and 1916, found among these groups no trace of that deep felt resentment of injustices and deprivation discernable amongst the Nonconformist middle class. Indeed, these men entered politics when professional success

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177. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, eds., Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci (London 1971) 83; on Gramsci's analysis of the British intelligensia, see L. Salamini, "Towards a Sociology of Intellectuals: A Structural Analysis of Gramsci's Marxist Theory", Sociological Analysis and Theory VI (1976) 13-14.

178. Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism, 216.

seemed well assured, attracted as much by the social standing and inter-  
course of Parliament, as by any burning desire to initiate legislative  
reform. 179

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, just as the established  
intelligensia were in general shifting their allegiances to the Conservative  
Party, there began to emerge a new "democratic" intelligensia. The  
product of educational, Civil Service and social reforms, this group  
comprised the newly educated - social workers, teachers in the schools  
and the new Universities, technologists, scientists, administrators and  
Civil Servants. 180 This was, of course, a period of questioning and  
doubt, and the "new" intelligensia had not that faith in progress and  
material prosperity of the mid-Victorian generation. The Fabians were  
the representatives par excellence of this group: "Our parents, who read  
neither Spencer nor Huxley, lived in an intellectual world which bore  
no relation to our own", wrote Edward Pease of their intellectual milieu,  
"and cut adrift as we were from the intellectual moorings of our  
upbringings... We also felt instinctively that we could accept nothing  
on trust." 181

The fact remains, however, that even this "new" intelligensia was  
unable to radically distance itself from society and, conditioned by its  
premises, their intellectual revolt remained grotesquely attenuated; to  
Pease, for instance, salvation came in the form of Henry George's  
Progress and Poverty. In similar fashion, the highbrow Bloomsbury circle

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179. Guttsman, "Aristocracy and Middle Class in British Political Elite",  
particularly 27-31.

180. For an analysis of the "new democratic" intelligensia, see Dmitri  
Mirsky, The Intelligensia of Great Britain (London 1935) 45ff.

181. Edward Pease, History of the Fabian Society (London 1916) 18.

and the flowering of Bohemianism in late century represent no more than a rarefied critique of society. In the former, an escape through an aesthetic of personal relationships presented no challenge to late Victorian and Edwardian society; British Bohemia was but a pale imitation of its Parisian mentor, and was brought to an abrupt end by the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895.

Above all, the intelligensia had not at any time established links with the working class movement. It is surely ironic that the intellectual creed of the only significant group of thinkers to align itself with the workers - the Positivists Beesley and Harrison and their colleagues - was imported from France. The home grown Romanticist tradition which, as Raymond Williams has demonstrated, was in many respects a coherent and far reaching critique of Victorian capitalism,<sup>182</sup> remained for good sociological reasons generally divorced from the working class movement. Only by the efforts of such maverick figures as William Morris and Walter Crane were these insights grafted directly onto the socialist movement.

The direct impact of the intelligensia on the course of British socialism, therefore, would appear to have been slight by Continental standards. Yet their contribution cannot be ignored. The part played by the professional and intellectual strata in shaping later nineteenth century society, administration and ideology, formed the milieu in which socialist beliefs crystalised. These themes will form the subject of the next chapter.

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182. Most notably, of course, in his Culture and Society (Harmondsworth 1971).



===== CHAPTER SIX =====

IDEAS IN CONTEXT:

IDEOLOGY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

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In the previous chapter, the nature of economy and social structure in mid-Victorian Britain, and developments in this sphere during the latter part of the century, were examined. This outline must now be complemented by focusing upon ideological forms throughout the period. In what follows, we shall be concerned to analyse the nature of conservative and liberal ideology, and the role played by Evangelicalism, at mid-century. It will be suggested that during the Victorian "Golden Age", the ideology of economic liberalism - embodying a belief in laissez-faire, individualism and the free market principle - formed the central value system of society. Yet the structure of mid-Victorian society itself was such that, coupled with the economic changes of late century, the collectivist elements inherent in both conservative and liberal thought were slowly pushed to the fore. This chapter will, therefore, point to ideological systems within a definite structural context; and the impact of both macro-structural and ideological factors upon the course of the working class movement and socialist thought will be indicated in the following chapter.

6.1: Ideas and the Mid-Victorian Equipoise - I: The Liberal Axis

In mid-Victorian society, conservative and liberal thought dominated the stage of political ideas. It will be argued here that these two bodies of thought converged around a central value system - the "Liberal axis". This may be considered surprising as, in abstracto, their fundamental assumptions as regards human nature, society, government and



and economic life, could not have been more starkly antithetical. We may begin, then, by glancing briefly at the "basic intention" of both conservatism and liberalism.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the essential themes of conservative ideology are to be found in the writings of Edmund Burke, and it may be useful, therefore, to quote in full Cecil's summary of his thought:<sup>2</sup>

In the first place Burke insisted on the importance of religion and the value of its recognition by the State. Secondly, he hated and denounced with his whole heart injustice to individuals committed in the course of political or social reform. Thirdly, he attacked the revolutionary conception of equality and maintained the reality and necessity of the distinctions of rank and station. Fourthly, he upheld private property as an institution sacred in itself and vital to the well-being of society. Fifthly, he regarded human society rather as an organism than a mechanism, and an organism about which there is much that is mysterious. Sixthly, in close connection with this sense of the organic character of society, he urged the necessity of keeping continuity with the past and making changes as gradual and with as slight a dislocation as possible.

Fundamental to conservative thought would appear to be a philosophy of imperfection, a secular conception of original sin which, standing in opposition to notions of human perfectability, has at all times sprung to the defence of a limited style of politics and political change.<sup>3</sup>

These themes in conservative ideology fan out in a number of directions. The organic and mysterious sense of society implies as much the need for an established Church - in Burke's words, "the very

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1. For the concept of the "basic intention" of ideological thought, see Karl Mannheim, "Conservative Thought", in Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology (London 1953) 102-16.
  2. Lord Hugh Cecil, Conservatism (London 1938) 48.
  3. Noel O'Sullivan, Conservatism (London 1976) 9-31.

foundation of the whole Constitution" <sup>4</sup> - as its immutable order, hierarchy and "a true natural aristocracy". Conceived thus by the conservative, society is a stable entity, ideally premised upon the harmonious balance of the natural estates of the realm. <sup>5</sup> Private property is integral to this world-view; there is a tendency for conservatives to hark back to a conception of "genuine" and inalienable property, of which the land is the prototype. <sup>6</sup> The belief in personal rights has always complemented the belief in property rights, although liberty for the conservative remains essentially unequal. <sup>7</sup> Finally, we find in conservative thought a veneration for history and tradition as the sole legitimate guides to future action; it is not reason, but experience, which governs the thought and action of the Tory.

Conservatism is thus a passive and heavily integrationalist ideology. <sup>8</sup> The conservative's belief in society as an organic union, its immutable gradations of status and natural leadership; in the need for strong government but yet paternalistic concern for social welfare; <sup>9</sup> in a profound sense of religion and the mysterious aspects of society

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4. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (London 1967) 96; R. J. White has elaborated upon the "shared understandings" of conservatism, particularly its strong religiosity: Cf. idem., ed., The Conservative Tradition (London 1950) 4-5.
  5. The classic statement is Disraeli's Vindication of the English Constitution (1835), part of which may be found reprinted in Philip W. Buck, ed., How Conservatives Think (Harmondsworth 1975) 68-70. For a recent statement of the "balanced society", see R. A. Butler, Our Way Ahead (London 1956) 10-13.
  6. Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind (London 1954) 382; Mannheim, "Conservative Thought", 104-5.
  7. Sir Geoffrey Butler, The Tory Tradition (London 1957) 67-71.
  8. Nigel Harris, "Introduction" to Conservatism: The State and Society (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, London 1963).
  9. R. MacKenzie and A. Silver, Angels in Marble (London 1968) 24-5, 30, 42-7.

and human existence - all explain the Conservative Party's insistence on its unique historical role as custodian of the national interest. Conservatism is the nation; the guiding precepts of the conservative mind are those of society at large. <sup>10</sup>

At the centre of liberal thought lies a metaphysic of individualism, a particular picture of the human being as separate in two distinct ways from the world which surrounds him; he is autonomous, within the mechanical and law-governed world of fact, in his ability to make and carry through moral choice, and essentially separate from all other individuals in the sense that he is self-directing, self-propelling and complete in himself. <sup>11</sup> For the liberal, too, society is a balanced compact, but one founded upon there being clearly defined and enforced legal relationships between all of its members. <sup>12</sup> Two themes in the doctrine of individualism have nourished nineteenth century English liberalism: the doctrine, with equalitarian implications, of the rights of man, or political liberalism, and the anti-statist, largely utilitarian doctrine of laissez-faire, or economic liberalism. <sup>13</sup> Forming the basic tenets of mid-Victorian Liberalism, these doctrines developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the form of utilitarianism and political economy.

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10. Andrew Gamble, The Conservative Nation (London 1974) has emphasised the "national" role of conservatism.

11. Anthony Arblaster, "Liberal Values and Socialist Values", in R. Miliband and J. Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1972 (London 1972) 89-90.

12. D. J. Manning, Liberalism (London 1976) 14.

13. Koenraad W. Swart, "'Individualism' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", Journal of the History of Ideas XXIII (1962) 77.

The "rigorously atomistic metaphysic" of Benthamite utilitarianism - "the state as the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it, each viewed as a receptacle to be filled with satisfaction"<sup>14</sup> - underpins Bentham's famous happiness principle. Dedicated to the elimination of all fictions in government and society in accordance with the dictum of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number", Bentham believed, however, that legislation should impose minimally upon the individual. Sharing with Hobbes an almost complete indifference to the notion of self-improvement as a thing desirable in itself, Benthamite utilitarianism sought to create a favourable atmosphere for self-interested individuals to pursue their own ends, admittedly tempered by the caveat - reinforced in the classical economics of Malthus, Smith and Ricardo - that this could not but result in the natural and spontaneous harmony of general interests.

As to its political content, the utilitarian doctrine may be said to have incorporated three aspects: laissez-faire, democracy and education. Yet the equalitarian implications of the rights of man were subordinated by Bentham, James Mill and the Philosophic Radicals to an emphasis upon an essentially restricted representative franchise, coupled with copious doses of "education" to improve the moral lot of the lower orders. The importance of property baulked large in their minds and, in essence, the foundation of utilitarian democracy was shallow: "...if property were overthrown with the direct intention of establishing equality of fortune",

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14. Crane Brinton, English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century (London 1962) 16-17; see further, John Plamenatz, The English Utilitarians (London 1958), and idem., Man and Society, ii (London 1971) 1-36.

declared Bentham, "...society would relapse into the savage state from which it has arisen." <sup>15</sup>

Various causes crystalised around these basic emphases to form mid-nineteenth century liberalism. We may number amongst these the cause of militant Dissent of which Edward Miall was the foremost exponent; the causes of peace and internationalism which flowed from the belief in free trade; and a number of sectional interests pitted against the weight of establishment, notably the Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalist fringes. It fell to Gladstone to combine these multifarious themes into something like a coherent political programme. It is in Gladstonian liberalism, a vague and polycentric, but yet powerful, ethicalism, that liberalism may be said to have found its true expression in mid-Victorian society.

If, however, we care to situate conservative and liberal thought within the broad sociological context of the period, the ideological divide between these bodies of thought appears less marked than the above account would appear to suggest. As Elie Halevy observed, "...the true national policy" of the mid-Victorian settlement lay in "the Liberalism of the political economists". <sup>16</sup> In a society in which the world of social intercourse, manners and privilege remained firmly entrenched in aristocratic hands, economic power was increasingly passing to the industrial bourgeoisie. If the usurpers had not yet dislodged the landed elite from its traditional preserves, they had effected an ideological coup of quite remarkable proportions by successfully imposing

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15. Jeremy Bentham, Principles of the Civil Code, i, cited by Lionel Robbins, The Theory of Economic Policy in English Political Economy (London 1952) 118.

16. Elie Halevy, Victorian Years 1841-1895 (London 1962) 290-91.



a broadly liberal free-market ideology upon society in general. And there is, in turn, much indication of the willingness of the landed interest to be seduced by its temptations. Both social classes came to subscribe to a central value system which in large part overrode the nuances of ideology. The axial role of economic liberalism was brought about by a combination of pressure from below and permissiveness from above, as may be detected in the course of conservative politics in the mid-Victorian period.

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie, increasingly self-conscious and aware of its growing economic power and role in municipal affairs, education and the provincial press - in short, as "public opinion" - were striving to impose their own social vision upon the "natural aristocracy". In this endeavour, they found reliable allies in the Philosophic Radicals. Whilst by no means sporting a coherent and unambiguous programme, these middle class radicals were inexhaustible in the cause of Parliamentary reform, "efficiency" in government and administration, religious toleration and freedom of the press, Church disestablishment and education.<sup>17</sup> With their characteristic emphasis upon justification by service, the Philosophic Radicals voiced middle class criticisms of aristocratic profligacy by calling for the greater professionalisation of the State.<sup>18</sup> Nor were they simply working from the outside, as it were; in men like Henry Brougham, a fifth column had been introduced into the ruling class itself:<sup>19</sup>

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17. William Thomas, "The Philosophic Radicals", in P. Hollis, ed., Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England (London 1974) 53-6.

18. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London 1969) 286-90.

19. Brougham cited by A. V. Dicey, Law and Public Opinion in England (1905; London 1962 ed.) 185-86.



If there is the mob.../ declared Brougham in the House of Lords in 1831/...there is the people also. I speak now of the middle classes - of those hundreds of thousands of respectable persons - the most numerous and by far the most wealthy order in the community...By the people, I repeat, I mean the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name.

Brougham, and many men like him less consciously imbued with the utilitarian ethos, indicate stirrings within the Burkean "natural aristocracy" itself: "Revolutions only occur when the political aristocracy is not the natural aristocracy", Brougham believed, for "The successful manufacturer is now part of the natural aristocracy of England." <sup>20</sup>

But it was not all a case of pressure from below. The British aristocracy, predisposed by over two centuries of social and economic development, were more than receptive to the guiding themes of a free enterprise society. Naturally there were misgivings, voiced by a number of reactionary right wing polemicists. <sup>21</sup> Yet there were signs enough, as G. M. Young has reminded us, that the aristocracy was being "moralised" and shedding, as the nineteenth century progressed, their gentlemanly vices of gambling, drunkenness and sexual indulgence. <sup>22</sup> By the 1830s, the decadence of the eighteenth century aristocracy was passing: private theatres and balls declined in popularity, whilst sobriety and piety - outwardly at least - seem to have increased; the age of ostentatious consumption - lavish patronage of the arts, grand building, and bibliomania - gave way to greater intellectual pursuits and concern with efficient estate management and agricultural improvement. <sup>23</sup> There is in addition,

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20. Brinton, English Political Thought, 41.

21. See further, R. B. McDowell, British Conservatism 1832-1914 (London 1959) 30-34.

22. G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age, Victorian England (London 1973) 4; see further Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 284-5.

23. David Spring, The Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration (Baltimore 1963); "Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion in the Early Victorian Period", Victorian Studies, VI (1963) 263-80.

as we have had cause to note, ample evidence of their industrial and enterprising spirit in the early and mid-Victorian period. For all their misgivings, the "natural aristocracy" were soiling their hands on the industrial machine.

By the mid-nineteenth century, "...the strong and steady currents of Whig and Tory opinion were splitting into eddies", making "...Conservatism a little less Tory, and Liberalism a little less Whig."<sup>24</sup> The ideology of the liberal free market economy had assumed a pivotal role in society and the easy adaptation of the landed interest to the industrial order had the effect of tempering the extremes of conservative thought, bringing it more into line with the social compromise that formed the basis of mid-Victorian equipoise. Karl Mannheim has suggested that it was in Germany, characterised above all by the absence of a strong middling stratum, that conservative ideology found its purest expression during the last century. In Britain, by contrast, Conservatives were less ready to hark back to a basically sound and undisturbed social order sometime before the onset of industrialisation and, instead, placed a greater trust in the self-adjusting forces of a free and competitive economy.<sup>25</sup> In short, the conditions of its development have given to British conservatism a decidedly "liberal" flavour. Conservative thinkers from Burke onward have elevated the liberty of the subject - an emphasis upon "freedom" from which "freedom of enterprise" was but a small step - to a central place in their political philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Young, Portrait of an Age, 82.

25. Mannheim, "Conservative Thought", 79-84; see further, Wolfram Fischer, "Social Tensions at Early Stages of Industrialisation", in James J. Sheehan, ed., Industrialisation and Industrial Labour in Nineteenth Century Europe (New York and London 1973) 106-7.

26. Buck, "Introduction" to How Conservatives Think, 9-28.

Similarly, the organic conception fundamental to conservative ideology has never precluded change and adaptation in society. For Burke, "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation".<sup>27</sup> This idea was echoed by Peel in 1834 when he urged the Conservative Party to accept as complete and final the franchise reform; and of Salisbury, too, Paul Smith has observed that: "He was not, however, a reactionary in the ordinary political sense of the term. He had a strong enough sense of history to know that it could not be put in reverse."<sup>28</sup> British conservatism has shown a remarkable ability to lean towards and incorporate the representatives of the new industrial order. Burke's "natural aristocracy" required a background of wealth and family, but he was prepared to countenance the claims of talent as well. Coleridge broadened Burke's defence of liberty within a purely political ideal of balance to encapsulate wider social forces making for change and progress. Even with Thomas Carlyle, who amongst English Conservatives most resembles Continental writers, the natural leadership he favoured was a creative one, intended to shift conservative thought away from its traditional concentration upon the landed aristocracy and to assign that position, in part at least, to the new commercial aristocracy.<sup>29</sup> Carlyle was at pains in this connection to criticise Disraeli, but it is significant that, just as he ceased to be an outsider seeking power, so too the "natural aristocracy" for Disraeli came to break its links with the landed interest pure and simple,

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27. Burke, Reflection on the Revolution in France, 19-20.

28. Paul Smith, ed., Lord Salisbury on Politics (Cambridge 1972) 106.

29. O'Sullivan, Conservatism, 84-7, 93; Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Arnold (Harmondsworth 1973) 137, 139.

"...and become those who in fact held social power, a union of some of the landed interest and the new group of businessmen." <sup>30</sup>

If, ideologically, British conservatism has not on the whole been marked by reactionary intransigence and obscurantism so, too, were Conservative Party politics in this period concerned above all to compete for the middle ground of liberal free market opinion. The tradition of "liberal" Toryism had been initiated by men like Canning, Huskisson, Robinson and Peel under Lord Liverpool in the late 1820s. <sup>31</sup> But, stumbling upon the block of Roman Catholic Emancipation and the Reform issue, the Tory Party fell from office and, in 1832, sustained the greatest defeat of its history bar that of 1906. Attaining the leadership of the Party, Peel determined to continue the work of the liberal Tories; in so doing, he rejected two alternatives - a party based simply upon vested and obdurate landed aristocratic interests, and the popular approach of the Tory radicals and that coterie of youthful aristocrats around Disraeli. This, broadly, implied acceptance of the industrial revolution; it meant that the Reform Bill be accepted by the Tories "as a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question"; <sup>32</sup> and, above all, it implied a libertarian fiscal policy. The programme favoured by Peel amounted to one of compromise with the middle classes, by which means the traditional constitution of Church and State might

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30. Nigel Harris, Beliefs in Society: The Problem of Ideology (Harmondsworth 1968) 105.

31. Details of the Conservative Party in this period are drawn from: R. B. McDowell, British Conservatism, Chs. 1-2; George Kitson Clark, Peel and the Conservative Party: A Study in Party Politics 1832-41, (1929; London 1964 ed.); Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London 1970); Paul Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform (London 1967) 1-36 et. passim.

32. Robert Peel, "Address to the Electors of the Borough of Tamworth", in Buck, ed., How Conservatives Think, 57.



be preserved and the dangers of its destruction at the hands of non-aristocratic classes much diminished.

The essence of Peel's new Conservatism was to bring about a party of moderate opinion and to win back those moderate men and the "great interests" in the nation alienated by the Party's stance on the Reform question. The 1841 election proved to be striking vindication of this policy and, whilst in office, Peel sought to consolidate the support of the industrial middle class by means of the great free trade budgets of 1842 and 1845, the Bank Act of 1844 and, of course, the repeal of Corn Duties in 1846. In that year, Cobden felt able to secretly entreat Peel to found a new middle party out of the ruins of the old aristocratic factions: "You represent", wrote the spokesman of industrial opinion to Peel, "the idea of the age, and it has no other representative amongst statesmen." <sup>33</sup>

Although a Mines Act (1842) and a Factory Act (1844) had been placed upon the statute book, it was primarily towards the industrial bourgeoisie that the Conservative Party directed its attentions in the 1830s and 1840s. Opposition to this policy naturally came from the group of Tory radicals in the northern manufacturing districts and Disraeli's "Young England" clique, with its programme centred upon Church and Crown allied, by means of social reform, with the workers against the industrial middle class. Yet there was more than a hint of opportunism about Disraeli's policy, which was calculated to attack Peel by capitalising upon the protectionist sentiments of the Tory country gentlemen. Although Disraeli continued to head the "Ultra" faction in the Party between 1846 and 1865, the Conservative reaction to the Victorian settlement was attenuated, lacking, above all, any

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33. Cited by Halevy, Victorian Years, 148.

viaable chance of success. His own attachment to social reform in these years was shallow <sup>34</sup> and, upon being elevated to leader of the Party, Disraeli dropped the protection issue and in essence continued to steer the liberal course charted by Peel.

It is true that in 1872 Disraeli made integral to Conservative policy "the elevation of the condition of the people...no important step can be gained unless you effect some reduction of their hours of labour and humanize their toil..." <sup>35</sup> But, as Paul Smith has convincingly demonstrated the social reforming zeal of Disraeli's 1874-80 administration - often adduced as indication of his policy of "Peers and People" - counted for less than the attempt to resurrect Peelite conservatism. In this way, Disraeli hoped to render the Conservatives more palatable to middle class tastes by "fusing the defensive elements of the bourgeoisie with the landed interest in the great alliance of property which the radical menace had enabled Peel to initiate a quarter of a century earlier." <sup>36</sup> Conservative thought by the third quarter of the nineteenth century was, in reality, little different from liberalism, at least to the extent that both were broadly premised upon the liberal free market nostrums that underscored mid-Victorian prosperity. By this time the belief in protection was almost defunct among Conservatives and the accommodation to the liberal tenets of society was virtually complete. Of course, the Conservative Party could not afford to ignore altogether the claims of the workers, as is attested to by the social record of Disraeli's administration; but for Smith this advertised, "...less Conservative

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34. D. C. Somervell, Disraeli and Gladstone (London 1926) 76; David Roberts, "Tory Paternalism and Social Reform in Early Victorian England", American Historical Review, LXIII (1958) 330-32.

35. B. Disraeli, "Speech at the Banquet of the National Union..." (1872), in Buck, ed., How Conservatives Think, 71.

36. Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform, 27.



zeal for social reform than Conservative empiricism in the face of concrete problems." <sup>37</sup>

It need hardly be emphasised that the convergence of political ideology around an axial liberal value system was contingent upon the evolution and structure of mid-Victorian society itself. It would be instructive at this point to examine the place of the working class in the social structure and its relation to the liberal ideological axis.

The simple thesis to the effect that a brief heyday of middle class rule in mid-Victorian Britain was progressively submerged, as the century wore on, by the sheer weight of working class numbers must be rejected; as John Vincent has observed, "Demos and the middle class really arrived on the political scene at about the same time, both were penned in and tied down by the social realities of an aristocratic constitution..." <sup>38</sup> The fact that the capitalist economic system had of necessity to develop within an overwhelmingly aristocratic society meant that the middle classes could not afford to overlook the education of the masses in the principles of the new order. On the one hand, therefore, a sustained process of more or less unashamed ideological containment was launched by which, it was hoped, working class minds might be tutored in bourgeois values. On the other hand, the various brands of middle class radicalism - whose leitmotiv was, above all, impatience with the constrictive compromise effected with the old order - appealed to the workers in the name of their own social ideal.

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37. ibid., 323.

38. John Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68 (Harmondsworth 1972) 30.

The received notion that Britain became a mass democracy by a succession of legislative reforms has now been complemented by a number of accounts which stress the importance of social class and ideological relationships underlying this process; these accounts provide a useful corrective to the narrowly political interpretations of reform. And thus, John Foster has shown that an anaesthetising process of ideological "liberalisation" antedated reform, in effect making that reform a safe concession.<sup>39</sup> Trygve Tholfsen has suggested that the Reform Bill of 1867 did little to restructure the fundamental economic and social realities of Victorian society. The bourgeoisie were ideologically prepared,<sup>40</sup>

...to impart a distinctive form to the emergence of democracy in England - the combination of a fairly large dose of electoral equality with political patterns congenial to an inegalitarian society.

Finally, Royden Harrison's scholarly account of the relations between the artisanal Reform League and Liberalism is once more illustrative of this concern; by 1867, the predominantly labour aristocratic working class movement "...had attained precisely that level of development at which it was safe to concede its enfranchisement and dangerous to withhold it."<sup>41</sup>

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39. John O. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution - Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns (London 1974) 203-50.

40. Trygve R. Tholfsen, "The Transition to Democracy in Victorian England", International Review of Social History, VI (1961) 228; see further, idem., "The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability", Political Science Quarterly, LXXXVI (1971) 57-91.

41. Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-81 (London 1965) 133.

In short, attention is here being directed to the ideological acquiescence of the working class - or at least its elite aristocratic stratum - in the dominant liberal values of mid-Victorian society. To be sure, there existed in this period an enormous range of institutions and techniques whose very raison d'être was to disseminate and impart to the lower orders those values which both reflected and underscored social equipoise. Fundamental to this concern was the attempt to popularise the various themes of political economy - the natural harmony of capital and labour, the "immutable laws" of the wages fund and the futility of strikes, laissez-faire and free trade, etc. - and the ethos of self-help, respectability and personal improvement. The most forceful single advocate of political economy was, of course, Harriet Martineau (1802-76).<sup>42</sup> Building upon the "useful knowledge" approach of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (1826), Martineau raised economic orthodoxy to new heights of popularity after 1830 with a steady flow of didactic pamphlets and tracts, the best known of which was Illustrations of Political Economy. This series of novellettes, published between 1832-34, rammed home the wisdoms of economic thought in the form of homely stories and anecdotes. Rather more subtle, although no less influential a propagandist, was Samuel Smiles (1812-1905), whose books extolled the virtues of thrift, duty, character and, above all, self-help.<sup>43</sup> His books, the sales of which were truly enormous, sought to present "...a middle class social outlook as the wisdom of the ages.

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42. See further, R. K. Webb, Harriet Martineau (London 1960); M. Blaug, Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study (New Haven 1958), ch. 7.

43. These are, in fact, all titles of Smiles' books: see further Asa Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth 1971) 124-47; Kenneth Fielden, "Samuel Smiles and Self-Help", Victorian Studies, XII (1968) 155-76.

It put the weight of tradition and common sense behind social values and interpretations which were in reality peculiar to Victorianism." <sup>44</sup>

What may be seen here, and in the writings of many less inspired writers, is the whole doctrine of laissez-faire bag and baggage - the perfection of the competitive system; the illegitimate and perverse consequences of government interference; the uselessness of strikes and combinations of workers; and so on - all designed for working class consumption. <sup>45</sup> The ideologies of popular political economy, self-help and respectability merged in mid-Victorian Britain and were enshrined in numerous bodies devoted to their propagation: the Mechanics Institutes, the Rev. Solly's Workingmen's Club movement, the Savings Banks, Friendly and Burial Societies, William Ellis' Birkbeck Schools, as well as a whole phalanx of institutions and techniques ranging from schools and reading rooms, temperance halls and libraries, through to public lectures, competitions and the "prize essay". <sup>46</sup>

All this cannot be seen as anything but a direct effort of ideological indoctrination, although there is some doubt as to the depth with which it penetrated the working class. <sup>47</sup> Perhaps of greater significance in the long run was the effect of middle class radicalism

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44. J. F. C. Harrison, "The Victorian Gospel of Success", Victorian Studies, I (1957) 160.
45. H. Scott Gordon, "The Ideology of Laissez-Faire", in A. W. Coates, ed., The Classical Economists and Economic Policy (London 1971) 180-205.
46. For details of these various institutions, see further Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 70, 293, 305-6; Richard N. Price, "The Working Men's Club Movement and Victorian Reform Ideology", Victorian Studies, XV (1971) 117-47; P. H. J. H. Gosden, The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875 (Manchester 1961) and Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in Nineteenth Century Britain (London 1973); Robin Gilmour, "The Gradgrind School: Political Economy in the Classroom", Victorian Studies, XI (1967) 207-24; Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians (London 1971).
47. Gordon, "Ideology of Laissez-Faire", 192; R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848 (London 1955) chs. 3 and 4.

upon the working class movement. It was axiomatic that those sections of the bourgeoisie angered by the seeming languor and inertia which were concomitants of the mid-Victorian settlement, should appeal to the workers in their campaign against aristocratic prerogative. The structure of British society itself, therefore, pushed middle class leaders to the fore of radical agitations and, in turn, they sought to give their various campaigns a popular flavour. Ultimately, this took the sting out of working class struggles.

Throughout the nineteenth century, it is possible to detect a continuous love-hate relationship between middle and working class radicalism.<sup>48</sup> During the Reform struggles of 1830-32, and the campaign to repeal the newspaper Stamp Duty in the early 1830s, middle class radicals called for and drew upon working class support, only at the end of the day to settle for something less than the workers had demanded.<sup>49</sup> During the Corn Law agitations, the middle class leaders of the campaign made great efforts to secure working class support with the promise of cheap food, against what militants portrayed as a campaign for the emancipation of the capitalist.<sup>50</sup> It may, however, be instructive to examine the way in which the radical campaign for a further instalment

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48. Early and mid-Victorian "politics of popular radicalism" have been described by G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London 1962) 123-25; the relations between middle and working class radicalism in the period 1850-67 is treated by Frances Emma Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England 1850-67 (1927; London 1966 ed.)

49. On the relations between middle and working class radicals during the Reform crisis, see Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 365-68; J. Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution, (Yale 1963) *passim*. For the Stamp Duty struggle, P. Hollis, The Pauper Press (London 1970); Stanley Harrison, Poor Men's Guardians (London 1974) 75-102.

50. See Lucy Brown, "Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League" in Asa Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies (London 1959) 342-71.



of reform in the late 1850s and early '60s stole the more far reaching colours of the working class Reform League.<sup>51</sup> This campaign may be dated from 1848, when the middle class radicals brought forward the "Little Charter" - an appeasing programme of household suffrage, Triennial Parliaments and the Ballot - and erected a National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association (1849-52) to agitate for it. The working class campaign continued under veterans of the Chartist period but, by the 1850s, even staunch class warriors like Ernest Jones had come round to the need for an alliance with the middle class. In this situation, Bright's famous oratorical campaign of 1858-59, organised though it was by a middle class radical committee, was especially fitted to capture the attention and enthusiasm of the working class. Co-operating with both the National Reform Union, which was enlisting middle class support, and the more popular Reform League, Bright and J. S. Mill sought to pressurise the government into granting a further extension of the franchise. Predictably, the provisions of the 1867 Reform Bill suited middle class tastes more than it met working class expectations and, again, the sobering effects of middle class co-operation had impressed themselves upon the working class movement. Working class radicals had to settle for household suffrage and, as Trygve Tholfsen has observed, "The Parliamentary reform movement helped to impress a liberal form on the political consciousness of the working class, particularly the aristocracy of labour."<sup>52</sup>

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51. For details, see S. MacCoby, ed., The English Radical Tradition 1763-1914 (London 1952) 145-71.

52. Tholfsen, "The Transition to Democracy", 245.



In terms of political ideology, therefore, the commanding feature of mid-Victorian society was the convergence of ideas around a central liberal free-market value system. Both reaction from above and revolt from below were forestalled and extremes of political thought tempered, as the landed upper classes and at least the elite stratum of the working class came to subscribe to the axial liberal tenets of social equipoise. This whole process was underscored and reinforced by a moral imperative. It is to the Evangelical ethic that we should now turn.

#### 6.2: Ideas and the Mid-Victorian Equipoise - II: The Evangelical Ethic

As with involvement in business venture, adherence to the central values of the new society transcended social class and formal party lines. It might be objected, however, that so long as the Conservative Party remained wedded to the High Church, and the Liberals to Low Church and Dissent, there could be no meaningful rapprochement. In this, precisely, lies the importance of the Evangelical ethic. "Evangelical morality was the single most widespread influence in Victorian England", Noel Annan has remarked: "It powerfully influenced the Church of England, was the faith of the Methodists, and revived the older Nonconformist sects; it spread through every class and taught a clear set of values."<sup>53</sup> Ranging across social, economic and party political divides, Evangelicalism diffused bourgeois morality throughout the various levels of society. In this way, what began as a moral revolution generated, and in turn sustained, an economic and political revolution.

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53. Noel Annan, Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to his Time (London 1951) 110.

It was Elie Halevy in his England in 1815 who focused attention upon the decisive role of Evangelicalism - particularly in the form of Wesleyan Methodism - in the history of modern England. The origins of Evangelicalism lay in the eighteenth century religious revival. Between 1735 and 1760, a number of Anglican clergymen, the most famous of whom were John Wesley, George Whitfield and Howell Harris, went through parallel, but apparently spontaneous, conversion experiences which involved an intense feeling of their sins being forgiven and a personal assurance of salvation.<sup>54</sup> All attracted large followings and were responsible for converting a substantial number of people. In the early years of the Evangelical revival, those who felt the call to embrace the new "vital religion" generally remained within the Church of England but well before the end of the eighteenth century a significant minority had broken away, and to whom the term "Methodists" was initially derisively applied.

Evangelicalism was a reaction against the worldliness and complacency of eighteenth century England, specifically a protest against the prevailing attitudes to religion and morality. Against a vague and undemanding concept of Christianity, which relegated God and his commandments far into the background of men's consciousness, the Evangelicals preached an intense, urgent and all-consuming faith. Theologically, it was a vague doctrine, comprising little more than the belief in the innate depravity of man, the conversion of the sinner and the sanctification of the regenerate soul through the experience of God's

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54. For the Evangelical movement in general, see K. Heasman, Evangelicals in Action (London 1962); Standish Meacham, "The Evangelical Inheritance", Journal of British Studies, III (1963) 88-104; Geoffrey Best, "Evangelicalism and the Victorians", in A. Symondson, ed., The Victorian Crisis of Faith (London 1970) 37-56; Ian Bradley, The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians (London 1976).

grace. But, as a result of its intense soul-searching and emphasis upon practical good works, the Englishman "...found himself at every turn controlled, and animated, by the imponderable pressure of the Evangelical discipline."<sup>55</sup> Though it lacked binding doctrine, Evangelicalism was a serious call with firm religious and moral intentions; puritanical and life-denying, rather than life-affirming, it stressed the negative values of abstinence and self-control against the positive values of generosity and altruism. The emphasis upon personal salvation and rejection of the concept of elect meant that all men, whatever their present state, held the potential for inner reform. The doctrine of justification by faith led Evangelicals to approximate a doctrine of good works as the true route to salvation.

Originating among the middle and lower middle class, the unstinting efforts of Evangelicals in both the Established and Dissenting Churches diffused the ethic widely throughout early and mid-Victorian society. Evangelicalism was quintessentially a middle class creed, and found its staunchest adherents among the ranks of civil servants, army officers, bankers, merchants and members of the professions.<sup>56</sup> But the high and mighty soon found that they, too, had souls to tend. The Evangelical stress upon devotion, abstinence, application and good works, upon moral and spiritual sanctity, fully permeated the upper layers of Victorian society, contributing in no small measure to the moralisation of the aristocracy. Church-going became fashionable once more in high society, whilst an observer in the 1840s noted with some surprise the prevalence

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55. Young, Portrait of an Age, 1.

56. Bradley, Call to Seriousness, 51; Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 283.

of theological talk in the great country houses.<sup>57</sup> The social standing and connections of such noted upper class Evangelicals as Wilberforce and his Clapham "Saints", the Duke of Grafton, Lord Darlington and Lady Huntingdon naturally assisted this process. By mid-century, there could not have been more than a hundred or so aristocratic families in which one member at least had not heard the call of Evangelical Christianity.<sup>58</sup>

The "two nations" - not rich and poor, but rather land and industry - were bound ever more tightly, therefore, by an ethical imperative. The moral revolution had made it easier to seize the opportunities of social mobility linking the two worlds, and not only to take advantage of them, but also to institute those political and social reforms that opened new doors and avenues of entry. The Evangelical reformers themselves, like their ethic, cut across class and party lines; artisans and masters, clergymen and men of letters, businessmen, barristers and aristocrats, Whigs, Tories and Radicals - all found themselves toiling in common endeavour to abolish slavery and promote temperance, sexual morality, hard work and thrift. In Evangelical effort, theological - and hence social - differences came to nothing: William Wilberforce once told his son Samuel that,<sup>59</sup>

the differences between Churchmen and Dissenters were in his eyes of very small consequence. They were but the scaffolding...when the building was complete no one would ask what sort of scaffolding it had been...He nowhere found in Scripture that it would be asked at the last day 'Were you Churchman or Dissenter?', but 'What were your works?'

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57. Spring, "Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion", 265-77; Bradley, Call to Seriousness, 36-41.

58. Bradley, The Call to Seriousness, 37.

59. ibid., 58.



No one class or party had a monopoly of Evangelical conscience or reforming zeal and, behind the scenes, if not in public, there was much collusion between ostensibly opposing groups. This gave to measures of reform greater fluidity than might have appeared upon the surface of things.

Evangelicalism played a revolutionary role, but it was far from a revolutionary creed. When the fear of Jacobinism was at its height, Jabez Bunting was quick to declare on behalf of the Methodist connection that "Wesleyanism is as much opposed to democracy as it is to sin", whilst the social conservatism of Wilberforce or Hannah More is legendary.<sup>60</sup> Above all else, it was a moral revolution in defence of property and economic application, rather than a subversive morality. Evangelicalism radiated the puritan morality of the middling strata outwards to embrace the landed elite, reinforcing the claims of superiority made by Mill and the Philosophic Radicals on behalf of the middle ranks. For the convert, the raw stuff of emotional experience was the proof of God's existence, and the Evangelical who developed a philosophical turn of mind was likely to be attracted by the Utilitarian system, which professed to base its conclusions upon an empirical examination of human experience. Both Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism regarded their own versions of verifiable experience as final and both were resolutely opposed to the abstract speculation of metaphysics.<sup>61</sup>

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60. For the political attitudes of the Wesleyans, see David Thompson, ed., Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century (London 1972) 10, 28-30, 37-8; E. R. Taylor, Methodism and Politics 1791-1851 (London 1935), passim; on Wilberforce and More, see Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 282; Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (London 1974) 66-74.

61. Annan, Leslie Stephen, 112-13.

Evangelicalism underscored and faithfully complemented the Utilitarian vision of the industrial middle classes but, by mid-century, they had both shed many of the rigidities of the early nineteenth century and had settled into that comfortable marriage that characterised the period of equipoise. Both doctrines retained their presence, if now less forcefully; a vague liberal approach to government, economy and society which stressed laissez-faire, free trade, self-help and economic initiative was mirrored by an unsectarian, latitudinarian Evangelicalism. Gertrude Himmelfarb has termed this the "... 'central ganglion' of the moral life", which may well have been the nerve centre of mid-Victorian society: "It was here that irreconcilables were reconciled, passions were cooled, interests and ideologies were muted."<sup>62</sup> We may now trace the effect upon the working class of the moral imperative that underlay the Victorian settlement.

In a celebrated passage, Elie Halevy described Methodism as the key to "the extraordinary stability which English society was destined to enjoy throughout a period of revolutions and crises."<sup>63</sup> His best known treatment of this theme depicts Methodism as "the antidote to Jacobinism", and argues that the Nonconformist sects "offered an outlet by which the despair of the proletariat in times of hunger and misery could find relief", in that they "opposed a peaceful barrier to the spread of revolutionary ideas."<sup>64</sup> Whilst not without its critics,<sup>65</sup>

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62. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Victorian Ethos: Before and After Victoria", in *idem.*, Victorian Minds (London 1968) 291.
63. Elie Halevy, England in 1815 (London 1961) 387.
64. *ibid.*, 590; *idem.*, The Liberal Awakening 1815-30 (London 1961) iv.
65. See, for instance, Eric Hobsbawm, "Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain", in his Labouring Men (London 1972) 23-33; E. P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth 1972) 41-6, 385-440.



the "Halevy Thesis" - to the effect that Evangelicalism in general, and Methodism in particular - was a formative disciplining agency in reconciling the working class to the new industrial order - has won general assent among historians of the nineteenth century working class and labour movement.<sup>66</sup> It would seem eminently reasonable, therefore, to agree with Bernard Semmell that, imaginatively qualified, the thesis remains strongly suggestive and worthy of further investigation.<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, there appears to exist ample evidence substantiating Halevy's contention that Methodism gave "British Liberalism at the opening of the nineteenth century its distinctive character", and that it helped to generalise the values and social practices of industrial capitalism. W. J. Warner has broadly followed Max Weber in locating Wesleyan Methodism among those Protestant forces conducive to fostering the ethos of capitalism, for in it he detects the "new social values" of individualism, thrift and economic enterprise which formed the guiding themes of the industrial order.<sup>68</sup> Bernard Semmell's scholarly reading of Methodist theology arrives at similar conclusions. Semmell suggests that Methodism was the British counterpart to the eighteenth century democratic revolutions, ushering in the free market economy:<sup>69</sup>

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66. See Thompson, The Making of the Working Class, and idem., "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", Past and Present, 38 (1967) 88-9; Biran Harrison, "Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England", Past and Present, ibid., 98-125; Sidney Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management (London 1965) 193ff; Tholfsen, "The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability", op. cit.

67. Bernard Semmell, "Introduction" to Elie Halevy, The Birth of Methodism in England (1906: London 1971 ed.) 1-29.

68. W. J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution (1930: London 1967 ed.)

69. Bernard Semmell, The Methodist Revolution (London 1974) 3-9, 170-98.

The Methodist synthesis, with its combination of the modern and the traditional and its peculiar resolution of the forces making for liberty and order, for revolution and counter-revolution, may be said to be at the heart of the success of Wesley and his connection as the mediator of the traditional England of the ancient regime and that of the modern, industrial nation-state.

More broadly, the Evangelical movement in general played an important part in establishing those characteristically "Victorian" aspects of the social system. It was, of course, the chief source of that moral intensity that pervaded Victorian culture, no less amongst the working class where Evangelicalism strengthened the ethic of personal improvement and imparted to it a distinctive emphasis upon individual virtue. The profound internalization of the puritan spirit of militant activism and development of virtuous character and conduct within the individual induced by Evangelicalism served to remind the working man, in the spirit of mid-Victorian liberalism, of the great prospects for improvement that lay within easy reach. Evangelicalism fostered and sustained among the workers, particularly its artisanal stratum, a spirit of genuine independence, self-reliance and sobriety which, whilst these virtues might indeed find collectivist expression, more often than not served to bind the working class ever more securely to the liberal beliefs of mid-Victorian society. <sup>70</sup>

To the extent that the working class subscribed to Christianity in its Evangelical form, it powerfully underscored their social subordination within the terms of Victorian equipoise. Evangelicalism was no less an important source of the ideal of "elevating the masses" which defined the official social role of the bourgeoisie and enabled them

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70. See further, Tholfsen, "The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability", 79ff.

to wield full authority and prestige in their dealings with the labouring population. With its demand for good works as the outer expression of a soul renewed and sanctified, Evangelicalism legitimised philanthropic and charitable activities with all the assumptions of social superiority which they embodied.<sup>71</sup> The end result was a class endowed with an unshakeable faith in the moral superiority of its ideals and economic order.

It is worth again emphasising that the "revolutionary" role of Evangelicalism was effected within a profoundly conservative political context, and this is particularly so in its dealings with the working class. The most cursory examination of the religious press or pamphlets of Hannah Moore, Mrs. Sarah Trimmer or Wilberforce, or of the policy of the Wesleyan connection as regards Sunday schools, education, or its more democratic off-shoots,<sup>72</sup> will readily confirm this impression. In all, the role of Evangelicalism seems clear enough: as the moral binding force and cement of the central societal value system, the working classes, too, were "...imbued by the Evangelical movement with a spirit from which the established order had little to fear."<sup>73</sup> Nonconformity, in particular, provided in England a form of institutionalised revolt, channelling political discontent which in other countries may well have travelled the route to atheism and thence to repulicanism or militant socialism.<sup>74</sup>

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71. Gareth Stedman Jones has analysed the social assumptions of superiority embodied in "the gift" in his Outcast London (London 1971) 251-52.

72. R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension (London 1955) ch. 2; Thomas W. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850 (New Haven and London 1976) 203-4; W. R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (London 1972) 40-44, et. passim.

73. Halevy, "The Birth of Methodism in England", 51, 70-77.

74. See Taylor, Methodism and Politics, passim; R. G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent 1815-48 (London 1956); Rupert E. Davies Methodism (Harmondsworth 1964).

The analysis of ideological forms in the third quarter of the nineteenth century may now be usefully summarised. Contingent upon the social structure of mid-Victorian Britain - a unique sociological balance of traditional landed and industrial capitalist interests - the material foundation of which was the astonishing economic success of the capitalist economy, social and political thought had been attracted towards a dominant free market value system - the Liberal axis of mid-Victorian society. Traditional Tory politics and thought, the social "carriers" of which was an aristocracy more than predisposed to acquiesce in the new order of things, were tempered in their reaction to economic rationalisation and relocated broadly within the ambit of liberal assumptions. Similarly, at least the upper stratum of workers were drawn into the value consensus, due in part to direct ideological inducement and in part to the accommodative role played by middle class radicalism. Evangelicalism cemented this ideological formation, penetrating the individual's psychology with a moral revolution whose implications were far from revolutionary.

But the story is not altogether one sided. The particular social structure and economic environment which fostered and sustained middle class hegemony in the mid-Victorian period would ultimately prove destructive of those values in the changed conditions of late century. To understand this process, we must examine the tension between individualism and collectivism in British ideologies already present during the years of equipoise.

### 6.3: Ideas and the Mid-Victorian Equipoise - III: The Dialectic of Individualism and Collectivism.

The paradox of mid-Victorian society and ideology lies in this: that whilst the ideological axis of that society appears as the fullest



expression of individualistic liberalism, the seeds of its antithesis - state collectivism - were already present. The tension between individualism and collectivism in Victorian thought, initially muted but which would become manifest with the on-set of the Great Depression, was again premised upon the specific social structure of British society. It is often suggested that British socialism bears the imprint of an antecedent liberal tradition, but the reality is more complex. The ideological environment in which socialist thought crystallised and which it could not to some extent reflect, itself contained a dialectic between individualistic and collectivist elements which made the imprint all the more ambiguous. These ideas will be taken up in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

The tendency to characterise mid-Victorian society as one of unbridled individualism stems from A. V. Dicey's classic periodisation of the nineteenth century. In 1905, Dicey advanced a thesis to the effect that the years between 1825-70 were those of "Benthamism or Individualism", whilst from 1870 to about 1900 occurred "The period of collectivism"; "By collectivism is here meant the school of opinion often termed...socialism, which favours the intervention of the State..."<sup>75</sup> Although he spoke of "the debt of collectivism to Benthamism", Dicey felt but little compunction in treating the former period as par excellence that of individualistic thought and laissez-faire and in this he has been followed by a large number of contemporary historians.<sup>76</sup>

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75. Dicey, Law and Public Opinion in England, 64.

76. See, for instance, Eric Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (Harmondsworth 1972) 231-2; Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, *passim*.

In point of fact, it is only in the case of those popularisers of political economy, self-help and laissez-faire that these ideas were branded around in their pure, although almost certainly over-simplified, form. It must be made clear at the outset that, although overwhelmingly the dominant ethos of the period, at no stage did laissez-faire or crudely individualistic notions rule unassuaged. There is good precedent for a "refined" view of the dominant liberal ideology. In The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, Elie Halevy classically demonstrated the existence of a tension between the economic and juridicial aspects of Bentham's thought. The former, he argued, were premised upon the conception of a natural harmony of interests in society and the latter upon an artificial harmony of interests which seemed to open the door to a measure of legislative interference, albeit in accordance with the canons of utility.<sup>77</sup> In 1948, J. B. Brebner went to the opposite extreme by standing Dicey's thesis on its head. Brebner professed to detect in Bentham's thought a form of crypto-collectivism and suggested that British laissez-faire "...embraced a vigorous concept of state economic responsibility."<sup>78</sup> Several years later, Lionel Robbins further questioned the hitherto received identification of a belief in uncontained laissez-faire with the classical political economists.<sup>79</sup>

Since that time a number of scholars have shown that, although laissez-faire was a strongly held belief amongst the classical economists, it was no dogma and, in consequence, they seem to have been prepared to

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77. Elie Halevy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London 1972) 15ff., 89ff., 489-90.

78. J. Bartlet Brebner, "Laissez-Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth Century Britain", Journal of Economic History VIII, supplement (1948) 59-73 (quotation p.59).

79. L. C. Robbins, The Theory of Economic Policy in English Political Economy (London 1952).



allow certain exceptions to the general rule of non-interference. In one or two spheres - such as trade and defence, public works, monopolies and monetary policy - Smith, Ricardo and Malthus appear to have favoured some measure of governmental activity, whilst McCulloch and Senior clearly stated on a number of occasions the positive role which the state might play in economic life.<sup>80</sup> Blaugh's reappraisal of the classical economists' attitudes to factory legislation serves as a reminder that on most issues their views were more complex and divided than was once thought;<sup>81</sup> and E. G. West has pointed to the existence of "...a remarkable division of opinion among the classical economists concerning the applicability of the free market principle to education."<sup>82</sup>

It is indisputably the case that state intervention in great areas of society may be detected in early- and mid-Victorian Britain and certainly during the period Dicey believed to be one of untrammelled individualism.<sup>83</sup> Factory legislation, for instance, had been carried

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80. See, for instance, David Roberts, "Jeremy Bentham and the Victorian Administrative State", Victorian Studies, II (1959) 194; Mark Blaugh, Ricardian Economics, 193-212; R. L. Couch, "Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth Century Britain: Myth or Reality", The Manchester School, XXV (1967) 199-215; A. W. Coates, "Editor's Introduction" to idem., ed., The Classical Economists and Economic Policy, 6; A. J. Taylor, Laissez-Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth Century Britain (London 1972) 32-8, et. passim.
81. Mark Blaugh, "The Classical Economists and the Factory Acts - A Re-examination", in Classical Economists and Economic Policy, 104-22.
82. E. G. West, "Private versus Public Education: A Classical Economic Dispute", in Classical Economists and Economic Policy, 123-43; see further, idem., "The Role of Education in Nineteenth Century Doctrines of Political Economy", British Journal of Educational Studies, XII (1964) 161-72.
83. See Brebner, "Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth Century Britain", 70-73; George Kitson Clark, An Expanding Society: Britain 1830-1900 (Cambridge 1967) 147ff.

into law in 1802 and 1833, and similar statutes followed regulating specific industries (e.g. chimney sweeps, 1840; mines, 1845); the ten hour Acts of 1848-50 regulated hours of labour and culminated the period of the Factory Movement. The Poor Law of 1834 "was not based upon laissez-faire, but on its opposite. It was pure Benthamism, a combination of the elective with the bureaucratic principle."<sup>84</sup> Trade union legislation was enacted in 1824-25, 1867, 1871 and 1875; economic enterprise was frequently prompted and regulated by the State (e.g. Railway Company's Acts from 1823 onwards; Post Office, 1840; telegraphs and telephones, 1856-69 and 1875-1911); criminal law, and legal and judicial procedure were reformed (1816-73); sanitary reforms were implemented (1820-47), the Central Board of Health (1848-54) and the Sanitary Code (1875) erected; and so on.

Now, it can hardly be maintained that State intervention in mid-Victorian Britain stemmed from the conscious application of collectivist principles. Many of these measures were simply empirical responses to practical problems, thrown up by the new social order, on the part of men who held genuinely to a belief in laissez-faire. Some were the results of the work of particularly able and forceful individuals, dedicated to mitigating specific evils. Moreover, the role of the state certainly increased in broadly organic fashion, responding to and expanding in the light of new problems or information.<sup>85</sup> These and similar questions

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84. G. M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, iv, (Harmondsworth 1972) 148.

85. On these points, see further, Oliver MacDonagh, "The Nineteenth Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal", Historical Journal, I (1958) 52-67; Henry Parris, "The Nineteenth Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal Reappraised", The Historical Journal, III (1960) 17-37; G. Kitson Clark, An Expanding Society, ch. 8; Derek Fraser, The Evolution of the British Welfare State (London 1975) 91-114.

have mainly been debated by administrative historians, whose focus of attention has usually been confined to the role of Benthamism in the evolution of governmental administration. It will be suggested here, by contrast, that the treatment of individualism and collectivism in Victorian society and social thought ought to be widened, and itself located within the structure of British society as a whole. From this perspective, it will be argued that an ambiguity is apparent in both conservative and liberal ideology, the full implications of which would become apparent in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.

Harvey Glickman has recently spoken of "...the inherent collectivism of British conservatism - its 'Toryness' - which permitted its adaptation to modern welfare policy..."<sup>86</sup> It is perhaps confusing - but certainly of supreme significance - to observe how the fundamental themes of conservative ideology might bend in a collectivist direction, just as they had their libertarian aspects. In a propitious sociological environment, conservative ideology might easily turn to sanction state intervention.

There is no inherent contradiction between the belief in an organic society, authority and a stratified, ordered community, and a positive role for the state. It flows naturally from a belief in order and authority that the state might intervene and direct the workings of society; as a philosophy of imperfection, to be sure, conservatism holds that the government alone might restrain man's evil propensities. In addition, the state may easily become a natural arm of the organic community: if,

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86. Harvey Glickman, "The Toryness of English Conservatism", The Journal of British Studies, I (1961) 111.

as Arthur Balfour believed, "Authority rather than reason lays the deep foundations of social life", <sup>87</sup> then there is no ingrained objection as to why this authority should not be vested in the state. <sup>88</sup> Finally, as regards conservative attitudes to "The People", i.e. questions of social reform, Toryism has not shrunk from the charge of collectivism, <sup>89</sup>

Ancient Toryism died hard. It lived long enough to leave time for the rise of a new Toryism in which democratic sentiment deeply tinged with socialism, blends with that faith in the paternal despotism of the state which formed part of the old Tory creed.

Conservative social reform need not, therefore, proceed on purely individualistic lines. There is no antithesis between conservatism and socialism...Conservatives have had no difficulty in welcoming the social activity of the State.

W. H. Greenleaf has concurred with the opinion that a tension between liberal individualist and collectivist sentiments may be discerned in nineteenth century conservative ideology. <sup>90</sup>

The presence of both individualistic and collectivist themes within conservatism was no random figuration, but intimately affined to and expressive of the sociological premises of mid-Victorian society. The structure of British society in this period - an industrial middle class society in which aristocratic influence remained predominant and in which there had occurred at least a partial fusion of interests between these two groups - gave rise to three distinct, although frequently overlapping, strands of Tory opinion. To a greater or lesser extent, each rejected

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87. "Authority and Reason", in W. W. Short, ed., James Arthur Balfour as Philosopher and Thinker (London 1912) 17.

88. Glickman, "Toryness of English Conservatism", 131.

89. Dicey, Law and Public Opinion, 39; Lord Hugh Cecil, Conservatism, 195.

90. W. H. Greenleaf, "The Character of Modern British Conservatism", in R. Benewick, et. al., eds., Knowledge and Belief in Politics (London 1973) 177-212.



the compromise effected by the representatives of the old order with those of the new. Firstly, there was a humanitarian tradition of Toryism - rooted in sympathy for the poor and care for their moral and material welfare, the desire for a Christian social order and an intense hatred of the new industrial society and its philosophy - embraced by men like Shaftesbury and Oastler, the fiery Reverend J. R. Stephens, Michael Sadler, Bull and Wood.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, there is the strong nineteenth century tradition of social conservative thought and criticism. In the later writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey and John Ruskin, one finds the reassertion of traditional paternalist values; a hatred of the manufacturing order and its laissez-faire ideals; a trenchant critique of the dismal science of political economy; and an overriding concern with the lot of the working masses.<sup>92</sup> Finally, one must consider, in addition, that essentially aristocratic ideal of noblesse oblige. In the press, Southey, Alison, Lockhart and Giffard attempted to push social concerns to the forefront of Tory thought, and in Parliament Lord Ashley (later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury) and Disraeli and his aristocratic Young England acolytes, found expression for their animus against the bourgeoisie in a reconstructed feudal system.

These various strands of Tory radicalism united around a common concern for social reform - sanitary and housing legislation, the restriction of the hours of labour, or protection for factory women and children, sweeps and miners, and the like. In all, it was a powerful

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91. White, ed., The Conservative Tradition, 208-9, 215; Cole and Filson, British Working Class Movements, 315-17 on Oastler. See further, Michael Rose, "The Anti-Poor Law Movement in the North of England", Northern History, X (1974) 70-91.

92. Lord Lindsay of Birker, "The Social Conscience and Ideas of Ruskin", in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians (London 1949) 277-82; Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1915 (Harmondsworth 1971) 38-47, 65-84.

spur to positive state intervention, although admittedly no overriding commitment to collectivism was at work.<sup>93</sup> The importance of Tory paternalism can, however, be overstated and David Roberts has provided a useful corrective to this view. Roberts suggests that Tory radicalism or paternalism was but a minority strand of opinion within the Conservative Party and by no means held a monopoly of reforming conscience, whilst his examination of various reform measures seems to suggest that support was drawn broadly from across the party political spectrum.<sup>94</sup>

It is true that Tory radicalism was a force on the fringes of conservatism, the mainstream of which had accommodated itself to the dominant liberal ethos; in ideological terms, it stood outside the social class "settlement" of mid-Victorian England. Precisely because of this, however, Tory radicalism was infused with enormous symbolic significance. Rather in the fashion of the Sorelean myth it was able to present itself as "true" conservative policy - its historical vocation, as it were, lost sight of by Conservative politicians. It is not to the effective but rather to the symbolic role of Tory radicalism that we should turn in seeking to understand this question. This symbolic appeal perhaps explains why a Toryism of popular sympathies and social reforming qualities was, if marginal, continually present in the conservative outlook throughout the nineteenth century; and it helps to account for the success of Disraeli's "One Nation" rhetoric and his ability to capitalise upon the myth of "true" Toryism which he had adduced from a spurious reading of English history. Above all, it was an important contributory factor pushing the Conservative Party to embrace collectivist opinion and policy in the changing conditions of late century.

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93. White, The Conservative Tradition, 219-23.

94. David Roberts, "Tory Paternalism and Social Reform in Early Victorian England", American Historical Review, LXIII (1958) 323-37.



But popular Toryism, with the possibilities it held out of collective state responsibility in the cause of social amelioration, was not entirely devoid of practical impact. The residual strain of Tory radicalism in the nineteenth century explains the peculiarly ambiguous nature of "Tory Democracy". On the one hand, Tory Democracy implied the assertion of middle class opinion within the Conservative Party; rooted in the provinces among the industrial bourgeoisie, it found expression in a broad conservative ideology in defence of property against the encroaching radicalism.<sup>95</sup> But, on the other hand, Tory democracy also demanded that cognizance be taken of the claims of the workers. Gertrude Himmelfarb's analysis of the 1867 Reform Act is instructive here. In spite of the fact that Disraeli's overriding policy was a liberal conservatism of the Peelite variety, a latitudinarian Tory democracy was assertive enough in the mind of Disraeli and Conservative members for them to enact a household suffrage measure which went far beyond that contemplated by Gladstone and the Liberals and even radicals such as Bright and Mill.<sup>96</sup>

The presence of Tory paternalism throughout the nineteenth century represented not so much a body of thought positively in favour of state responsibility but rather a strand of incipient collectivism, able to assert itself when the situation demanded. At all times represented by one group or other within a conservative tradition broadly oriented to the philosophy of the industrial state, it allowed the Conservative administrations of 1866-7 and 1874-80 to grapple flexibly and undogmatically with social and economic problems and to countenance state activity

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95. Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 147-8.

96. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Politics and Ideology: The Reform Act of 1867", in Victorian Minds, 333-92; see further, F. B. Smith; The Making of the Second Reform Bill (Cambridge 1966).

when the need dictated.<sup>97</sup> The impressive body of social legislation enacted by Conservative governments in this period - the Sanitary Act of 1866, Factory Act (1874), Public Health and Artisan Dwellings Acts (1875), Sandon's Education Act (1876) and the Trade Union Amendment Act (1876), the Merchant Shipping Act (1875) and the Factory and Workshops Bill of 1878 - are all indicative of the fact that paternalistic social concern remained a live issue for Conservatives.<sup>98</sup> In the hallowed sphere of agriculture, too, Tory humanitarians like Philip Pusey saw the need for governmental direction through the Board of Enclosure Commission: "I begin to think decidedly that some supervision on the part of government is necessary for giving energy to the present taste for improvement", Pusey wrote to Gladstone in 1843, "and I think you will agree with me that in this country we carry to excess the practice of individual enterprise."<sup>99</sup>

To sum up, then. Conservative ideology in mid-Victorian Britain had broadly embraced the individualistic liberal tenets underpinning social equipoise. But the structure of Victorian society itself had ensured the generation of, and indeed sustained, a strand of paternalistic Tory thought which kept open the option of vigorous state responsibility. During this period, individualist sentiments clearly predominated over collectivist opinion: in the final quarter of the last century, those tendencies working towards enhanced governmental initiative would begin to assert themselves.

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97. As is made abundantly clear by Paul Smith's scholarly analysis of Conservative social reform: cf. Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform, op. cit.

98. cf. R. C. K. Ensor: "It has been said that Disraeli's franchise extension of 1867 was 'the death warrant of laissez-faire'. 'Certainly the first full session...drove a remarkable number of nails into the laissez-faire coffin'; England 1870-1914 (Oxford 1936) 36.

99. Cited by David Spring, The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration (Baltimore 1963) 141.

In mid-Victorian Britain, liberal ideology appeared as the apotheosis of the laissez-faire ideal and the individualistic cast of mind. Yet here, too, it is possible to detect the seeds of that collectivist opinion which would be taken up and made integral to the "New Liberalism" of the early 1900s.

So far, the discussion has emphasised the axial role of liberal thought in the mid-Victorian period, relocating, as it were, aristocratic and working class thought within its broad compass. But it was not all plain sailing for those industrial classes whose aspirations were most faithfully articulated by liberal ideology, for the very social structure which had brought this ideology to prominence dictated also that the bourgeoisie take account of an increasingly organised and self-conscious working class movement. Middle class radical opinion was fully aware that if aristocratic privilege was to be curtailed and working class revolt forestalled, then appeal would have to be made to this latter group. Ultimately this was to undermine the stability of the middle class ideal itself.

As noted above, the legacy of Utilitarianism and political economy was by no means one of unrepentant, dogmatic laissez-faire for, in certain instances, the spokesmen of these creeds were prepared to countenance a measure of state intervention. A number of developments in the third quarter of the century served to intensify the tension between the individualistic and collectivist aspects of liberal ideology. A contradiction came to sharply pose itself between the belief in individual freedom, which predisposed industrial and commercial opinion in favour of non-intervention, and the equally ingrained principle of material progress. It was coming to be recognised, by the 1850s and 1860s, that the inequalities of capitalist society represented an enormous obstacle to

both the moral and material advancement of the workers. This consideration carried no small weight with middle class spokesmen: it is now recognised that the political economists were by no means as oblivious as was once considered to the claims of the working class and even Cobden - the architypical middle class apologist - held firmly to the belief that free trade would benefit both capitalist and labourer alike. <sup>100</sup>

To the conflict between the canons of utility and progress must be added a second development within liberal ideology. As the complexities of managing and administering a large scale industrial society increased, even those most firmly wedded to the doctrine of laissez-faire were prepared to assert that state initiative - albeit in clearly defined cases - had become unavoidable. The unconscious implications of this were legion. Whilst much legislation - for example, the Factory Acts - were intended to "re-vamp the legal framework in an attempt to create a liberal society", <sup>101</sup> it carried in its wake an unavoidable paternalism and extension of administrative machinery and professional staff. This, in turn, embodied its own impetus towards a more far reaching collectivism. In short, the artificial distinction between the state and society was beginning to break down.

Those middle class radicals like John Bright who, by mid-century had come to appreciate the importance of linking up with labour in a common struggle against the debilitating atmosphere of landed ascendancy, realised that social reform prescriptions were vital to the success of their appeal. By this time, the rather crude ruling class response to

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100. See further, A. W. Coates, "The Classical Economists and the Labourer", in *idem.*, Classical Economists and Economic Policy, 144-79; Brinton, English Political Thought, 110, 113.

101. Couch, "Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth Century Britain", 211; see further, W. H. Coates, "Benthamism, Laissez-Faire and Collectivism", Journal of the History of Ideas, XI (1950) 357-63; H. J. Schulz, "Introduction" to *idem.*, ed., English Liberalism and the State: Individualism or Collectivism? (London 1972) xiii-xxiii.



working class radicalism, which comprised, in the main, moralistic attempts to counter subversive ideas, had given way to a more sophisticated form of social control which stressed the social elevation of the masses. <sup>102</sup> The futile "useful knowledge" and otiose scientific education of the Mechanics Institutes was coming to be replaced by the more abstract ideal of "civilising", "refining" and "elevating" the lower orders, that they might play a useful and responsible role within society. And it certainly seemed realistic to the middle classes that, granted a judicious measure of social and electoral reform, the "respectable" working man might be trusted to deport himself with credit. The staunch, upstanding artisans of the northern industrial regions, with their Co-operative and Friendly Societies, Temperance Halls, and their terraced houses and furnished parlours, and with whose restrained and moderate behaviour during the Cotton Famine the country had been so profoundly impressed, seemed ready for co-optation into the body politic. <sup>103</sup>

By the 1860s, therefore, educated middle class opinion seemed ready to accept the claims of "Rochdale Man" and the need for a degree of moderate legislative reform. In spite of Gladstone's own distaste for what he termed "constructivism", liberal ideology was swinging around towards acceptance of social reform. In part this was felt to be long overdue, but also it was seen as a timely tactic of co-optation in order to dish the landowners. Gladstone's 1868-74 administration wrote into the statute book the first Education Act to specify the role of government in 1870, the Trade Union and Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1871) and the

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102. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, 60-82; Price, "Working Men's Clubs and Social Reform Ideology", 118-20.

103. A line of thought Royden Harrison has dubbed the "Rochdale" argument: Cf. Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) 108-19. The importance of the behaviour of the Lancashire operatives during the Cotton Famine in the reorientation of liberalism has been emphasised by Stedman Jones, Outcast London, 5, 8ff. See further, F. B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill (Cambridge 1966) 8-14.

Public Health and Coal Mines Acts (1872), all of which increased measurably the role of the state in the affairs of the nation.

In a wider respect, too, reform was one of the issues over which intellectual liberalism was renewed and recharged in the 1860s. Under John Stuart Mill, the radical wing of the Party moved into closer allegiance with the labour movement. Mill himself, elected as Member of Parliament for Westminster in 1865, was demonstrably moving to the left, stressing the distributionist aspects of his Principles of Political Economy in a socialist direction. In many respects, he is a transitional figure in the history of intellectual liberalism. With Mill, the tension between freedom and progress, authority and "the cultivation of individuality" strain to breaking point. John Stuart Mill was deeply entrenched in the whole ethos of traditional liberalism.- freedom, reason, individuality - yet was aware of the obstacles to these ideals inherent in liberal society itself and he was pushed to stressing a measure of state intervention formerly quite unheard of.<sup>104</sup> With Mill was John Bright, Thomas Hughes, Thorold Rogers, the young T. H. Green, John Morely of The Fortnightly Review, the newly founded organ of the "advanced" party, the Nonconformist conscience, and - against his better judgement - Gladstone himself.<sup>105</sup>

In other spheres, too, liberal ideology was widening to embrace the positive state. Again, much hinged on the fact that sections of the industrial bourgeoisie felt themselves constrained and hemmed in by the realities of landed society. The agriculturalist James Caird was

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104. See further, M. Beer, A History of British Socialism, ii (London 1953) 232-3, 237-45.

105. R. Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915 (St. Albans 1974) 36-7.



of this type. Quite in sympathy with the aims of the manufacturers' party led by Cobden and Bright and no friend of the landowning classes, Caird's pamphlet High Farming under Liberal Covenants, The Best Substitute for Protection (1849) put forward the case for agricultural improvement enacted by the state, should the landowners prove laggardly in their duty.<sup>106</sup> Clearly, the representatives of industrial opinion were not above infusing a little life into the aristocracy by means of the state, should their protectionist sentiments get the better of them.

It is these issues within the ideology that point to and anticipate the split in the Liberal Party in the 1880s. For the moment, however, we may recall only how the conterminous evolution of the industrial middle and working classes within an overwhelmingly aristocratic society had served to introduce the language of social reform and governmental initiative into the vocabulary of liberalism.

One final aspect of the British social structure must be considered. The nature of the intellectuals and professional groups in mid-Victorian society played a large part in bringing to fruition those collectivist seeds present but, in this period, as yet latent in conservative and liberal ideology. As the extent and scope of government and administration grew, a further breach in the ethic of laissez-faire was introduced.

Essentially, the liberal professional ethos was meritocratic, premised upon the rule of talent and expertise; it bred a belief in efficiency and economy in tackling social problems, the abolition of waste in government and the extension of the administrative apparatus as and when social pressure required it. The professional ethic fed

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106. Examined by Spring, The Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century, 167-70.

upon and was recharged by the extension of legislation and administration during the nineteenth century. Social problems were increasingly being recognised and tackled, but often the inquiry only served to uncover the hidden dimensions involved; this in turn necessitated increased powers and administrative machinery, an enlarged inspectorate, further policing or regulatory laws, and so on. Moreover, inquiries and commissions yielded ever larger batches of statistics and information about all manner of social questions and, in the process, the professionalisation of government was further enhanced. Sanitary reforms demanded increased powers of enforcement; the Factory Acts were applied to more and more industries; and in numerous other fields, such as railways, mines, and steamship inspection, the professional ethic was reinforced and the collective powers of the state expanded.<sup>107</sup>

Now this is more than a simple model of organic administrative growth, as Professor MacDonagh would have us believe.<sup>108</sup> Of course, there was an inner dynamic at work here, but the whole process was fueled by the specific nature of the professional/intellectual strata. The liberal-professional ethic which had emerged in Victorian society was admirably suited to carrying out these administrative tasks, and it drew in intellectuals and experts in various fields, unencumbered by any ingrained opposition to the state or its activities. Above all, the similar social composition and outlook of these men precluded any intellectual intransigence and brought these groups together in common endeavour in a capacity of high social standing.

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107. Perkin, Origins of Modern English Society, 319-39; Clark, An Expanding Society, ch. 6. See further, Eric C. Midwinter, Victorian Social Reform (London 1976) for the growth of social legislation and collectivism.

108. MacDonagh, "The Nineteenth Century Revolution in Government", op. cit.; Parris, "The Nineteenth Century Revolution: Reappraisal", op. cit.

The Victorian intelligensia and professional stratum were, by all accounts, resolutely opposed to the encroachment of socialism. Yet between them they played a vital role in bringing about the collectivist atmosphere in which later nineteenth century British socialism would flourish.

#### 6.4: Ideological Responses to the "Great Depression"

During the Victorian heyday, individualistic liberalism had assumed supreme ascendancy throughout society and, in consequence, the collectivist impulse in British ideology lay dormant. In any event, a series of weak governments and divided parties in the aftermath of the Corn Law schism precluded legislation of a strongly interventionist flavour. 109 This situation began to change in the 1860s with the re-emergence of firmly constituted parties and stable governments and, in particular, with the on-set of the "Great Depression" around 1873. The slide in the nation's economic fortunes and worsening world industrial and trading position brought into question those beliefs which had underpinned the mid-Victorian settlement: material progress no longer seemed assured; foreign competition and the mounting imperialist clamour made internationalist, free trade sentiments seem otiose; individualism was coming to be seen as outmoded in an age of corporate business enterprise; whilst the "natural laws" of the market seemed inadequate to the problems of late century. In all, the moral complacency of the Victorian Golden Age gave way to a sense of urgency and questioning.

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109. On this point, see Valerie Cronwell, "Interpretations of Nineteenth Century Administration: An Analysis", Victorian Studies, IX (1966) 245-58.

The foundations of party politics were undergoing change in this period, too. The Conservative Party had begun to attract into its ranks the satisfied classes in both town and country and was becoming, in effect, an alliance in defence of property against radicalism or working class socialism. Feeding upon the vested interests of the landed and middle classes, the Conservatives also traded successfully upon the natural social conservatism and insecurities of the petty bourgeoisie during these years.<sup>110</sup> The Liberal Party had taken a distinct turn towards radicalism, but it still remained in large measure the Party of sectional interests - Nonconformity, Welsh nationalism and Irish Home Rule - and championed such causes as land reform, temperance and Church disestablishment. The Party had, in addition, the overwhelming support of the working class and organised labour. Right across the spectrum, therefore, political ideas were responding to the changing economic and social environment. We must trace the way that these changes served to enhance collectivist sentiments in liberal and conservative ideology at the expense of individualistic notions. This, to be sure, defines the ideological climate in which the "socialist revival" occurred.

The ideological foundation of mid-Victorian society was, of course, economic liberalism. In the latter part of the century this "traditional radicalism" found committed exponents in men like Gladstone, Morley and Campbell-Bannerman, even if its concerns were increasingly being submerged by Gladstone's pre-occupation with the Irish Home Rule question. But within liberal ideology as a whole, there were emerging streams of

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110. For developments in the Conservative Party in this period, see James Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the later Nineteenth Century", Victorian Studies, VII (1963) 35-66.

thought which seriously challenged the inherited individualistic posture. In a number of spheres, it is possible to detect the growth of a more urgent and intense "social radicalism". 111

A variety of factors contributed to the growth of social radicalism within liberal thought and its increasingly lenient attitude as regards the direct or municipal intervention of the state in the affairs of the nation. One may cite, for instance, the developing critique of political economy in these years. Here again, J. S. Mill is the seminal mind, bridging the middle class radicalism of the 1850s and that of Sir Charles Dilke and Joseph Chamberlain in the 1870s and after. In his Principles of Political Economy - particularly its subsequent editions - Mill developed an argument against orthodox economics which came increasingly to stress the socialist and distributionist aspects of economic life: here, for instance, he formulates an early plea for worker participation: 112

The form of association, however, which if mankind is to continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is...the association of labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their occupation, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.

By the 1870s, the Ricardian economic system was being subjected to unremitting assault by a new school of economists, led by thinkers such as Cliffe Leslie, David Syme, J. K. Ingram, Toynbee and Cunningham and owing its theoretical origins to Christian Socialism, Comte and

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111. The distinction between "traditional" and "Social radicalism" has been drawn by H. V. Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914 (Cambridge 1973).

112. Cited by Beer, History of British Socialism, 188-89.



English positivism and the German historical school of Knies, Roscher, Kant and Schmoller.<sup>113</sup> From John Ruskin, too, authors like Patrick Geddes and J. A. Hobson took over a moral and ethical critique of political economy, which even the orthodox economist Alfred Marshall felt obliged to recognise.<sup>114</sup>

By the 1880s, as Helen Lynd has shown, "exceptions" to the general rule of laissez-faire non-intervention were becoming increasingly widespread.<sup>115</sup> If the reassessment of political economy lay behind this, two further factors in particular marked a catalyst in liberal thought: the land question and the "re-emergence" of urban poverty. Demands for land reform, which grew out of the residual anti-landlord strain within the Liberal Party, vividly illustrate the weakness of laissez-faire at one of its strategic points. J. S. Mill had classically formulated the doctrine of "unearned increment" accruing from rents and, in 1870, he had founded the Land Tariff Reform Association, a campaigning body which attracted support from such prominent Liberals as Thorold Rogers, John Morley, Sir Henry Fawcett, P. A. Taylor, Professor Cairns, Cliffe Leslie, Sir Charles Dilke and Alfred Russell Wallace. The L.T.R.A. claimed the "unearned increase of the land and the produce thereof" for society as a whole and urged upon the nation to take control of the land, for "the state has exactly the same right to control it that it has to control, for instance, the railways."<sup>116</sup> The L.T.R.A., and

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113. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, 1-16; Beer, History of British Socialism, 231-37.

114. Alfred Marshall, Principles of Economics, (preface to First Edition), cited by Beer, History of British Socialism, 236-7.

115. Helen Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties: Towards a Social Basis of Freedom (New York 1945) 104.

116. Cited by Beer, History of British Socialism, 241.



numerous similar bodies concerned with land reform, were greatly encouraged by the publication in 1879 of Henry George's Progress and Poverty and Alfred Russell Wallace's book Land Nationalisation (1882), which immediately went through two editions. The idea was widely abroad in liberal circles that traditional economic nostrums held but little applicability to the land; Gladstone's Irish Land Act (1881) and Agricultural Holdings Act (1883) added fuel to this belief. <sup>117</sup>

In another sphere, too, the distributive mechanism of the free market was coming increasingly to be questioned. In the 1880s and 1890s, a highly publicised series of events had drawn the attention of educated opinion to the existence of vast pockets of urban poverty in the midst of plenty. Hard on the heels of the controversy surrounding The Bitter Cry of Outcast London in 1883-84 came the appointment of a Royal Commission on working class housing; the unemployed demonstrations of 1885-86 and the strikes of London matchgirls and dockers in 1889 brought widespread debate about the wages and conditions of life and work of the lower orders; and General Booth's In Darkest England (1890) presented a veritable catalogue of urban poverty and deprivation. Coupled with revelations about sweating in the East End of London and the investigations of W. T. Stead's Pall Mall Gazette, the repercussions of these events were felt well beyond the Metropolis. There can be little dispute as to the impact upon liberal social theory from the 1880s onward, of the "discovery" of generalised urban poverty. <sup>118</sup> Perceptions of "the poor" began to change, particularly

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117. On the importance of the Irish question as a whole in contributing to the dissolution of individualistic liberalism, see R. C. K. Ensor, "The Recession of Liberalism", in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, 398-400.

118. See further, E. P. Hennock, "Poverty and Social Theory in England: the Experience of the 1880s", Social History, I (1976) 67-91; Lynd, England in the Eighteen Eighties, 23-60.

as regards the need for enhanced state initiative in ameliorating social distress.

The re-orientation of intellectual liberalism upon a collectivist footing was given cogent expression by a group of Balliol men, whose mentor was Thomas Hill Green. As the guiding light of Oxford idealism until his premature death in 1882, Green helped to introduce into liberal thought the conception of "positive freedom" based essentially upon the belief that the state is no mechanical contrivance or utilitarian device, but rather a projection of man's moral self and a necessary means and implementation of his full development.<sup>119</sup> For Green, the mutual interdependence of individuality and its social milieu was an ethical and not simply a juristic conception; society was a moral entity and the state the most conscious and purposeful expression of that morality. These themes found eloquent expression in his posthumous Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation, where we find a far reaching inquiry into the relationship between the individual and the state in a variety of spheres. The most positive statement of Green's liberalism, however, is to be found in a lecture entitled "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract" (1880), in which he defended Gladstone's social reforms - and particularly his proposal to regulate contracts between Irish tenants and their landlords - in the name of "positive freedom".

Green's restatement of liberalism did away with the unnatural divide between the spheres of economics and politics by which an older generation

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119. On Green and English Idealism, see further, A. D. Lindsay, "T. H. Green and the Idealists", in F. J. C. Hearnshaw, The Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Victorian Age (London 1933: 1967 ed.) 150-64; George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory (London 1951) 607-15; Adam B. Ulam, The Philosophical Foundations of English Socialism, (New York 1964) 26-41; Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and his Age (London 1964).

of Liberals had excluded the state from interfering with the free market. Green himself was no lover of state regulation and exhibited many of the individualistic traits of the mid-Victorian liberal.<sup>120</sup> A more frankly collectivist spirit, however, was introduced by his followers F. H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet, although they lacked much of the ingrained rationalism of Green's work which had avoided subjection to the hypo-statised state universal into which neo-Hegelianism might easily degenerate.<sup>121</sup>

By the 1890s, therefore, the intellectual foundations of social radicalism had been laid. It remains only to notice how men like C. F. G. Masterman, John Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse built upon this foundation and together provided for the Liberals a distinctive treatment of the economic problem in politics, viewing the interrelated issues as less a matter for separate and independent disciplines than as an essay in distributive judgement.<sup>122</sup> In the name of "Liberal socialism", Hobhouse was ready to sanction wide ranging collectivist measures; his "ethical basis of collectivism" depended upon a more far reaching conception of state and society, whilst Arnold Toynbee declared its maxims to be,<sup>123</sup>

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120. Richter, Politics of Conscience, 235, 295, et. passim.

121. Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory (London 1969) 391-94; see in particular, Bernard Bosanquet, The Philosophical Theory of the State (London 1958) e.g. 171.

122. On Masterman, see J. T. Boulton, "Editor's Introduction", to C. F. G. Masterman, The Condition of England (London 1960) xxii; on Hobhouse, see P. P. Poirier, "Introduction" to L. T. Hobhouse, The Labour Movement (1893: London 1974 ed.) vii-xxiv, and Morris Ginsberg, "L. T. Hobhouse", in Timothy Raison, ed., The Founding Fathers of Social Science (Harmondsworth 1970) 154-61; see further, Emy, Liberals and Social Politics, 106-18; Schultz, ed., English Liberalism and the State, Pt. III.

123. Arnold Toynbee, "Are Radicals Socialists", cited by Richter, The Politics of Conscience, 288.

First, that where individual rights conflict with the interests of the community, there the state ought to interfere; and, second, that where the people are unable to provide a thing for themselves, and that thing is of primary social importance, then again, the State should interfere and provide it for them.

It is against this background that the challenge to traditional liberal ideology in the final quarter of the nineteenth century should be set. This challenge came from two quarters - social radicalism and Liberal Imperialism - and both, it will be argued, were fundamentally corrosive of liberalism's individualist foundation.

Fin-de-siècle radicalism made its assertive appearance with the Birmingham municipal radical Joseph Chamberlain and the militant atheist Sir Charles Dilke. The Radical wing of the Liberal Party had been consolidated as the National Liberal Federation in 1877 and had played a large part in the Party's electoral victory in 1880. Following the extension of the franchise in 1884, Chamberlain advanced a "Radical Programme" which he proclaimed as Liberal policy: it was based firmly upon an appeal to the working class and declared that socialism was "not a stigma, but a modern tendency pressing for recognition", and that "the path of legislative progress in England has been for years, and must continue to be, distinctly socialistic."<sup>124</sup> Recent research has stressed the tenacity with which radicalism within the Liberal Party survived the fall of Dilke and defection of Chamberlain and found expression in the Newcastle Programme of 1891.<sup>125</sup> Official Liberal Party policy now included Welsh disestablishment, further registration and electoral

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124. Quoted by Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 410-11.

125. H. V. Emy, Liberals and Social Politics, *passim*; Michael Barker, Gladstone and Radicalism: The Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain 1885-1894 (London 1975).



reforms, the establishment of district and parish councils, municipal, land and taxation reforms and "the direct popular veto on the liquor traffic." 126

Both Michael Barker and H. V. Emy have amply demonstrated the vitality of "social radicalism" in the Liberal Party in the 1890s, regenerating the structure and organisation of the Party and indicating the massive advance of democratic radicalism in the aftermath of the Home Rule schism. In social composition, the radical wing of the party was based not upon the business classes, but upon a wide variety of professional men. It gained in strength and resolve after the Liberal administration of 1892-95 has disappointed the radicals by its absence of social measures and began to forge links with the labour movement, the Fabians, and I. L. P. leaders like Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald. For the first time, perhaps, Liberals had begun to confront the "economic factor" in politics, and social radicalism was clearly an anticipation of the New Liberalism of 1906. 127

If, on the one side, social radicalism vied with the traditional Gladstonian heritage, on the other stood the challenge of Liberal Imperialism. Unofficially led by Lord Rosebery and more than ably supported by Gray, Fowler, Haldane and H. H. Asquith, this coterie of Liberal Imperialists vehemently opposed the flaccid cosmopolitanism of Cobden, Bright and Gladstone and sought to reinvigorate the party around an imperialist appeal. 128 Yet, according to Rosebery, much remained

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126. S. MacCoby, ed., The English Radical Tradition 1763-1914 (London 1952) 207-8.

127. Emy, Liberals and Social Politics, 12-18; P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge 1971).

128. On Liberal Imperialism, see further Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform (London 1960) ch. 3; Elie Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour 1895-1905 (London 1951) 93ff; W. Adams, Edwardian Heritage: A Study in British History 1901-1906 (London 1971).

to be done if England was to aspire to a true imperial role. Education must be reformed, a healthy imperial race must be bred and cared for, welfare and social reform must be attended to - in short, a minimum of "national efficiency" must be achieved. The policy which Rosebery set before a rejuvenated Liberal Party was precisely that of national efficiency, based upon methodical and scientific progress and social reform and welfare prescriptions adequate to an "imperial race" - "a condition of national fitness equal to the demands of our Empire" - a question of "public health" which could only be solved by state action.

On the whole, it seems reasonable to conclude that imperialist sentiments held but little sway among the working class or within the socialist movement as a whole.<sup>129</sup> But one organisation - the Fabian Society - found in Liberal Imperialism a programme worthy of support. For there was little, to be sure, to distinguish the policy of "national efficiency" from the state enforced "national minimum" which Sidney and Beatrice Webb had long advocated.<sup>130</sup> It is surely of more than passing significance that the leading Fabians - those passionate advocates of state and municipal collectivism - should find a congenial ally for a time in Liberal Imperialism. Rosebery's programme fitted in well with their intercessions on behalf of social reform and gave eloquent voice to their animus against the individualistic liberal tradition of Cobden and Bright, Morely Gladstone and Harcourt. For a while, the Webbs courted the Liberal Imperialists, hoping to convert them to their own brand of collectivism.

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129. Richard Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class (London 1972); Henry Pelling, "British Labour and British Imperialism", in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 82-100.

130. Semmell, Imperialism and Social Reform, ch. 3.



Their "co-efficients" dining society included many prominent Liberals, although it never became anything more than an esoteric enclave of politicians, intellectuals and professional men and women.

Like social radicalism, but from an entirely different direction, Liberal Imperialism was working to corrode the traditionally entrenched fear of the state in liberal thought. There was indeed little hint of radicalism in Rosebery's advocacy of "national efficiency", for Liberal Imperialism gave voice, in the main, to powerful financial interests in late Victorian society.<sup>131</sup> Yet its collectivist overtones were unavoidable. The influence of Green and neo-Idealism cannot be discounted, but it was above all the "Prussian model" - the clearest contemporary example of national order, efficiency and progress imposed from above - which baulked large in their minds. "Take the example of Prussia", eulogised Rosebery in the House of Lords in 1900, "for I know of no other so striking, of the necessity of constant vigilance in the strict maintenance of a state."<sup>132</sup>

Although in many respects profoundly subservise of its earlier stance, the re-orientation of liberal thought cannot be seen as anything but a continuation and development of mid-Victorian ideology. The evolution of economy and social structure, according to which mid-nineteenth century Liberalism appeared as the exemplar of individualistic free market values, had by late century shifted liberal assumption decisively in a collectivist direction. The drift towards enhanced governmental activity may be gauged by the defection of the established intelligensia from the ranks of the party. The fear of encroaching socialism was expressed by Sir James Fitzjames Stephens in his

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131. Adams, Edwardian Heritage, 53-6, 65-6.

132. Cited by Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 102.

Liberty, Equality and Fraternity (1873) and in Sir Henry Maine's Popular Government (1885) and the same sense of dread and disillusion was voiced by Liberal intellectuals such as A. V. Dicey, Henry Sidgwick and J. R. Seeley.<sup>133</sup> It was, however, Herbert Spencer who proved to be the most trenchant critic of late Victorian liberalism. Spencer argued that liberalism, whereas it formerly stood for the individual and voluntary co-operation, had now,<sup>134</sup>

...lost sight of the truth that in past times [it] habitually stood for individual freedom versus state coercion...Liberalism ...has grown more and more coercive in its legislation...to an increasing extent adopted the policy of dictating the actions of citizens, and, by consequence, diminishing the range through-out which their actions remain free.

But to appreciate why it was that Spencer characterised this tendency as the "New Toryism", we must examine changes in conservative ideology during this period.

It might be considered surprising that the late nineteenth century did not bring about that right-wing reaction so conspicuously absent in mid-Victorian England. By this time, the Conservative Party forcefully represented the social cohesion of landed and industrial wealth, underpinned by the natural conservatism of the suburban petty bourgeoisie and reinforced by the defection of the Whigs under Hartington in 1886.<sup>135</sup> Yet, no obscurantist or backward looking policy was evidenced.

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133. See further, John Roach, "Liberalism and the Victorian Intelligensia", Cambridge Historical Journal, XIII (1957) 58-81.

134. Donald MacRae, ed., Herbert Spencer, The Man Versus the State (1884: Harmondsworth 1969 ed.) 67.

135. Gordon L. Goodman, "Liberal Unionism: The Revolt of the Whigs", Victorian Studies, III (1959-60) 173-89; for details of the changing social bases of Conservatism, see R. C. K. Ensor, "Some Political and Economic Interactions in later Victorian England", in R. L. Schuyler and H. Ausubel, eds., The Making of English History (New York 1952) 534-42.

Conservatism had inherited much of the vitality of the business community and support of those managerial strata which the Liberal Party had frightened off and which was to make it the true ideological representative of the corporate economy. But it inherited also the traditional Tory "One Nation" rhetoric which impelled Conservatives to seek, in addition, popular support. In the changing social and economic conditions of late century, both factors came together to shift the Conservative Party in the direction of a more far reaching and fundamental collectivism.

The tradition of Tory Democracy was by no means defunct within the Conservative Party, but as always it remained effectively vestigial. It had reappeared again in the 1880s with the antics of Lord Randolph Churchill and his "Fourth Party" (Churchill, Arthur Balfour, Sir Henry Drummond and J. E. Gorst) but, once more, the cause suffered at the hands of its exponents. These frondeurs launched a clever and by no means unopportunistic attack upon Peelite consensus politics, by now under the aegis of Northcote and Salisbury. The legacy of One Nation - Peers and People - was revived but, overall, Tory Democracy seemed a short-lived and irrelevant distraction from the true course of Conservative politics, which lay in consolidating the support of the industrial and lesser bourgeoisie. But, if only because of the electoral considerations which the franchise reform of 1884-85 had pushed to the fore, the Conservative Party could not ignore the claims of the new working class voters. "Tory Democracy" in its dual guise - that is, in respect of both middle and working class opinion - remained a live issue whose importance was by no means extinct.

Both aspects of the Conservative "national" approach may be discerned in the growth of imperialist sentiment within the party and in Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. In the 1880s, Salisbury and Balfour had seen in imperialism a policy around which conservative support might unite

and by which the party might revive its national appeal.<sup>136</sup> It attracted Chamberlain too, who, upon entering the Conservative cabinet in 1895, began to systematically expound the themes of imperialism and jingoistic fervour in a fashion calculated to seize the imagination of the country. Chamberlain's propagation of the virtues of the "Saxon", "Germanic" or "Teutonic" race, as representing Christian civilisation in its most consummate form, was supported by almost the entire British press.<sup>137</sup> For Chamberlain himself, imperialism rapidly began to replace his erstwhile radicalism as a bid for a truly national policy.

For Chamberlain, however, imperialism had a distinct social content. His Tariff Reform campaign was, as Bernard Semmell has noted, "a finely wrapped social imperialist 'package' to be sold to the British electorate";<sup>138</sup> in return for a protectionist fiscal policy which, he readily conceded would mean higher food prices, Chamberlain promised the working class greater security of employment, high wages and, above all, the implementation of an old age pension scheme upon which he had been sitting for several years. The whole campaign was backed up by an enormous propaganda effort and vast outpouring of imperialist tracts orchestrated by the Tariff Reform League. There was, as Halevy has observed, more than a hint of the "Prussian model" in his advocacy of social imperialism,<sup>139</sup>

He announced his intention to repeat the experiment Bismarck had made so successfully at Berlin twenty-five years before. Like Bismarck, he believed that the way to revive Conservatism was to adopt a policy of social reform, and like him, to combine it with a new fiscal policy of protection.

If Tariff Reform had replaced radicalism as Chamberlain's popular cause, the effects upon conservative ideology were to be no less far reaching.

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136. Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism, 228.

137. Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 53ff.

138. Semmell, Imperialism and Social Reform, 90.

139. Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 287.

There was, however, another side to Chamberlain's imperialism and protectionist campaign, for it was by no means entirely dictated by considerations of popular support. Whereas the Liberal Imperialism of Rosebery and his followers reflected the interests of the great financiers and finance capital, Chamberlain's imperialist policy was based squarely upon manufacturing opinion and industrial capital. The Liberals had clung to their traditional belief in free trade, and they favoured a fiscal policy which emphasised direct over indirect taxation; Chamberlain's Tariff Reform programme, by contrast, grew out of the fears of the manufacturing and business classes about foreign competition and gave fresh voice to those "Fair Trade" protectionist sentiments first expressed in the 1880s. Support for his policy came mainly from those sections of manufacturing industry which, like his own native Birmingham engineering trades, had been hardest hit by "The Foreigner". Chamberlain's Tariff Reform proposals naturally favoured a "self-sustaining Empire", whose national wealth would be founded firmly upon indigenous productive resources rather than upon reliance on foreign markets and indirect taxation as the source of revenue for social reforms. The "two imperialisms" reflect, then, a division between finance capital (backed by the cotton and shipping interests) which stood to benefit from the traditional free trade policy, and industrial capital - weakened by foreign competition and Britain's declining world role - whose sentiments inclined towards protection. In this respect, it was the manufacturing and business groups who saw their interests as being best served by Chamberlain's programme. <sup>140</sup>

Chamberlain's imperialism attempted to weld manufacturing and working class interests into a single campaign for protection under the Conservative banner. That it failed to do so is not of significance

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140. Semmell, Imperialism and Social Reform, ch. 7.



here. What is important is the fact that it represented the rejection of laissez-faire and free trade in the economic sphere and favoured the intervention of the state in protecting and fostering native productive resources, and in effecting a policy of social reform. Reflecting the economic situation of late century, Tariff Reform was an important collectivist tendency within conservative ideology, advertising, as Beatrice Webb noted in 1903, "the need for investigation and the desirability of deliberate collective legislation."<sup>141</sup> The Fabians looked favourably upon Chamberlain's programme, whilst Robert Blatchford, a socialist whose army experience had taught him the value of self-sufficiency, Empire and social reform, was an unqualified advocate of tariff reform.

Imperialism was a popular cause amongst Conservatives, but tariff reform was rather less so. The campaign split the party and eventually floundered with the upturn in the nation's economic fortunes after 1903. Some Conservatives, like Winston Churchill, saw it as a betrayal of the "One Nation" policy of Disraeli in its renunciation of free trade and, hence, of cheap food for the masses. A "national" Conservative policy, which included overtures to the working class, may, however, be detected in other sections of the party. Arthur Balfour, for instance, had responded favourably in 1894 to Chamberlain's proposals for "social reform in a Conservative spirit", and thoughtful Unionists generally were inquiring as to whether or not judiciously conceived social measures might not halt the advancing socialist tide and indeed turn it to their own advantage.<sup>142</sup> The "Prussian model" not only influenced the tariff

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141. Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership (London 1948) 267.

142. Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 226-31, 336ff; Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism, 298.



reformers: speaking in Manchester in 1895, Balfour declared that, <sup>143</sup>

Social legislation, as I conceive it, is not merely to be distinguished from socialist legislation, but is its most direct opposite and its most effective antidote. Socialism will never get possession of the...working class or any other class, if those who wield the collective forces of the community show themselves desirous...to ameliorate every legitimate grievance and to put society upon a proper and more solid basis.

True enough, the social record of successive Conservative administrations was hardly impressive: A Coals Mines Act had been passed in 1887, a Housing Act (1890), Free Elementary Education and a Factory Act (1890), the Conciliation Act (1896), the Workman's Compensation Act (1897) and an Education Act of 1902 virtually completes the picture. But notwithstanding this paucity of reforming legislation, Halevy has detected in two measures enacted in 1905 - the Unemployed Workmen's Act and the Aliens Act - "the first outline of a code of legislation at once conservative, national and social - legislation conceived in the spirit of Bismarck, the spirit which in England had inspired Disraeli's policy." <sup>144</sup>

Amongst Conservatives of most shades of opinion, therefore, there no longer existed the ingrained opposition to governmental activity that acceptance of laissez-faire had once dictated, and it is in this sense that Spencer spoke of the "New Toryism". The social structure within which conservative ideology had evolved and was articulated meant that "Tory Democracy" remained essentially Janus-faced, placing popular considerations and legislation only slightly below in priority a policy calculated to consolidate the support of the industrial and lesser

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<sup>143</sup>. Cited by Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 231, fn. 1.

<sup>144</sup>. Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 375. For the growth of collectivism in conservative ideology, see Cecil, Conservatism, ch. 4, for the idea of the "instrumental state". See further, White, The Conservative Tradition, 217-23.

bourgeoisie. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, these changes - in particular Britain's worsening economic position and the challenge of a widened electorate and growing socialist movement - implied that the state must play a more active role in the life of a conservative nation.

6.5: Conclusions: "The Collectivist Coral Island"

The "age of equipoise" in the mid-nineteenth century had found cogent ideological expression in the values of self-help, individualism and the free market economy - the "Liberal axis" of society - around which social and political thought in general had tended to coalesce. This was an age of moral certitude, characterised by an unshakeable belief in material progress sustained by the success of the capitalist economy and resilient profits. Yet, as Harold Laski has pointed out,<sup>145</sup>

At the height of the period we call the age of laissez-faire, we can see a change taking place in the minds of men. The philosophers began to be critical of a state power which is merely a referee holding the ring. A good many people begin to realise that freedom of contract is a hollow mockery when the power to bargain on equal terms is absent.

It has been argued in this chapter that, if economic liberalism reflected the particular structural and economic conjuncture at mid-century, it contained, in addition, the seeds of collectivist beliefs which slowly assumed greater prominence during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Liberal ideology had of necessity to adapt to and incorporate the positive state, particularly as middle class radicals appealed to the working population to join a common struggle against the residues

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<sup>145</sup>. Harold Laski, "The Leaders of Collectivist Thought", in Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, 417.

of aristocratic privilege. The Conservative Party, too, whose politics had been primarily geared to accommodating industrial free market opinion, was nevertheless mindful enough of a tradition of popular Toryism to countenance social reforms and state initiated amelioration. Under-scoring these developments was the ubiquitous factor of economic malaise - the Great Depression and demise in Britain's world industrial pre-eminence.

It was not only political ideology in the narrow sense that was responding to the changing social environment of the late nineteenth century. The 1851 religious census of Church attendance had vividly highlighted the absence of millions of English men and women - and particularly the working classes of the large industrial centres - from the pews of the nation's Churches and it had sent a shock wave throughout the whole of the Christian establishment.<sup>146</sup> In the following decades, Churchmen and Dissenters alike began to address themselves to this question and to reappraise their attitudes to the working class and social reform.<sup>147</sup> George Kitson Clark has shown how the Church of England - at times reluctantly and with no great show of resolve, it is true - slowly began to face the problems of an urban and industrial society.<sup>148</sup> Social questions began to dominate religious discourse, and in men like Stuart Headlam, Rev. Richard Jones and Archdeacon Cunningham, and Toynbee Hall and the "Settlement" movement, social concerns and the well-being of the labouring population begin to assume prominence. Nonconformity,

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146. See further, K. S. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, IX (1960) 74-86.

147. The question of the Churches and Social Reform has been treated in K. S. Inglis' scholarly survey, Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England (London 1964).

148. See further, G. Kitson Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England (London 1973).

too, was responding to the challenge and here, again, there began to emerge a body of opinion sympathetic to the plight of the lowly and anxious to carry social reforms into law.<sup>149</sup> Some Dissenters, like Hugh Price Hughes, the leader of the "Forward Movement" in the Methodist Church, J. Scott Lidgett, Samuel Keeble, the liberal Congregationalist, R. J. Campbell and General Booth of the Salvation Army actually propounded explicit schemes of social amelioration or founded organisations to agitate for them.

The overall effect of these trends was to create the ideological environment in which British socialism re-emerged in the 1880s and which to some extent it came not unnaturally to reflect. Two long quotations amply evoke the spirit of collectivism in the latter part of the century. The first is taken from John Morley's *Life of Cobden*.<sup>150</sup>

It cannot be seriously denied that Cobden was fully justified in describing the tendencies of this legislation [*i.e.* the factory laws] as socialistic. It was an exertion of the power of the state, in its strongest form, definitely limiting in the interests of the labourer the administration of capital...In the thirty years that followed, the principle has been extended with astonishing perseverance. We have today a complete, minute, and voluminous code for the protection of labour; buildings must be kept pure of effluvia; dangerous machinery must be fenced; children and young people must not clean it while in motion; their hours are not only limited, but fixed; continuous employment must not exceed a given number of hours, varying with the trade, but prescribed by law in given cases; a statutable number of holidays is imposed; the children must go to school, and the employer must every week have a certificate to that effect; if an accident happens, notice must be sent to the proper authorities; special provisions are made for bakehouses, for lace-making, for collieries, and for a whole schedule of other special callings; for the due enforcement and vigilant supervision of this immense host of minute preseciptions

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149. K. S. Inglis, "English Nonconformity and Social Reform 1880-1900", *Past and Present*, 13 (1958) 73-89.

150. John Morley, *The Life of Cobden*, i (London 1881) 302-3.



there is an immense host of inspectors, certifying surgeons and other authorities...and if we add to this vast fabric of labour legislation our system of Poor Law, we find the rather amazing result that in the country where socialism has been less talked about than in any other country in Europe, its principles have been most extensively applied.

The second is a passage from Sidney Webb's The Progress of Socialism (1888), 151

...opinion turned against the laissez-faire system fifty years ago. Mainly by the heroic efforts of a young nobleman, who lately passed away from us as Lord Shaftesbury, a really effective Factory Act was won; and the insatiate greed of the manufacturers was restrained by political power, in the teeth of their most determined opposition. Since then the progress has been rapid. Slice after slice has, in the public interest, been cut off the profits of land and capital, and therefore off their value, by Mines Regulations Acts, Truck Acts, Factory Acts, Adulteration Acts, Land Acts...Parallel with this progressive nationalisation or municipalisation of industry a steady elimination of the purely personal element in business management has gone on...Besides its direct supersession of private enterprise, the State now registers, inspects, and controls nearly all the industrial functions which it has not yet absorbed...This is the rapid progress of "Collectivism" which is so noticeable in our generation. England is already the most socialist of all European communities...

As early as 1887, Professor William Graham might address the Manchester Statistical Society on the subject of the "possible, safe and reasonable socialism upon which we have already entered in England, and on the lines of which he believes it necessary to go further and at a faster rate." 152 The socialist tradition in this country shows a profound affinity with the society within which it developed, with its values and ideologies. It is to this question that we should now turn.

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151. Sidney Webb, The Progress of Socialism (1888) cited by Henry Pelling, ed., The Challenge of Socialism (London 1954) 164-66.

152. Report of the meeting of the Manchester Statistical Society, The Guardian, November 10, 1887 (emphases added).

===== CHAPTER SEVEN =====

THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE:  
THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND SOCIALISM IN THE  
LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY

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"...Marx was all very well for foreigners, but  
this was Britain, the Unique Land."

Emanuel Shinwell, The Labour Story (London 1963)  
p.34.

The great irony of socialist history is this: that whereas socialist movements are brought into existence with the declared aim of restructuring society upon the lines of their own theory and cosmological vision, they are at the same time inescapably a part of society and often come to reflect and embody its own structure, assumptions and values. The analysis of social structure and ideological thought in the later nineteenth century presented in the two previous chapters delimits the context in which British socialism evolved and was articulated. It will be argued in this chapter that the labour movement and socialism in this country assumed the "line of least resistance": socialism did not strike out in any radically novel direction or, indeed, seek to challenge in toto the premises of Victorian society, but rather took over its ancestral assumptions in carrying forward the inner logic of British society itself in the cause of labour and the working class. From this perspective, it will be seen that the British Labour Party and its philosophy - a labourist tradition powerfully underscored by a home-grown democratic collectivism - showed deep affinities with and is indeed incomprehensible apart from the native soil of late Victorian society in which it took root.



7.1: Labour, Trade Unionism and Liberalism, 1850-70s.

It may be useful to begin by restating the main features of the working class during the Victorian "Golden Age". The commanding feature of this period, it is often argued, was the existence of an aristocracy of labour, an elite of mainly skilled artisans who had to some extent drawn away from the main body of the working class. Economically, the labour aristocracy had profited greatly from the success of capitalism and its differential wage advantage was maintained and bolstered by craft oriented trade unionism and elaborate apprenticeship regulations. Culturally, too, there is some evidence pointing to the existence of a specific artisanal lifestyle, distinct from and at points even hostile to the feckless and pub-centred culture of the proletarian. The elite of the labour community knew that they occupied a secure and generally recognised position just below that of their employers, but certainly very far above the rest.<sup>1</sup> The petty bourgeois stratum - which might conceivably pose a threat to their status - was as yet small, but, as we have had cause to notice, was growing rapidly. In ideological terms, finally, the aristocracy of labour seemed pre-disposed to acquiesce in the values of economic liberalism which reflected the equipoise of mid-century. Certainly, the ruling classes had taken great pains to inculcate the virtues of self-help, respectability and the "natural laws" of political economy in the minds of the workers, whilst middle class radicals in putting themselves at the head of popular movements had done much to temper working class demands and imbue the labour movement with bourgeois habits. Evangelicalism, and particularly Nonconformity,

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1. Eric J. Hobsbawn, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain", Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London 1972) 296. As noted above, Hobsbawn's is the classic treatment of the labour aristocracy thesis.

reinforced this process of accommodation and there was no small measure of religious sentiment to be found among the elite of working men.

On the face of things, therefore, there would seem to be good evidence for what has surely come to be the received interpretation of the labour movement in the decades after 1850, to the effect that British trade unionism reflected the social and economic domination of a labour aristocracy infused with bourgeois values and broadly subscribing to the tenets of economic liberalism. And thus, Theodore Rothstein's account of the labour movement in these years points out that,<sup>2</sup>

...the English worker fell easy prey to the organised force of bourgeois party ideology and became a Conservative or a Liberal, unconsciously introducing their ideology into his own non-political trade union.

A. L. Morton and George Tate have argued that the 1867 Reform Act signalled amongst the workers,<sup>3</sup>

...the acceptance of capitalist ideas [which] had already destroyed the class independence of the leaders, and the extent to which the rot had spread downwards through considerable sections of the organised workers themselves...beginning about 1860, a decline set in, and what came to be known as the "Lib-Lab" outlook increased.

Finally, a contemporary Marxist historian has observed how "...the trade unions became organisations of the 'labour aristocracy'":<sup>4</sup>

Politically, the new trade union leaders were committed to Liberalism - that is, to the classic British party of the industrial bourgeoisie, reposing upon the twin pillars of Protestantism and free trade...

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2. T. Rothstein, From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement (London 1929) 202.
  3. A. L. Morton and George Tate, The British Labour Movement (London 1973) 121.
  4. Tom Nairn, "The Nature of the Labour Party - I", New Left Review, 27 (1964) 40.

If this view is particularly that of Marxist scholarship, it has nevertheless secured broad assent among historians of the working class and the labour movement in general.<sup>5</sup> The importance of this interpretation need hardly be emphasised here: it is suggested that the liberal heritage taken over by the socialist tradition - by proscribing any radical or far reaching socialist vision - critically coloured its entire development and reached its apotheosis in the British Labour Party.

Certainly, the new generation of trade unionists who laboured to build up the great "Amalgamations" of the 1850s and '60s seem to fit this picture perfectly: these were "stable and firm rooted bodies, confined to skilled craftsmen of sober and prudent habits...the new generation held firmly to all the tenets of Victorian liberalism."<sup>6</sup> In men like Allen and Applegarth, George Odger of the Shoemakers, George Howell of the Bricklayers and T. J. Dunning of the Bookbinders' Society, one can detect the essence of the mid-Victorian labour aristocratic outlook - prudent, respectable and, above all, moderate in all things political. F. M. Leventhal's biography of Howell, Secretary of the Reform League in the 1860s, portrays a labour politician imbued with the typical social and political attitudes of the mid-Victorian artisan. A cautious and meticulous administrator, and convinced Gladstonian Liberal, his perspectives were shaped by "the dominant cultural values of his day...a vindication of the Smiles philosophy; that such aspirations existed suggest the extent to which the ideals of a bourgeois society infected

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5. See, for instance, Geoffrey Best, Mid-Victorian Britain (St. Albans 1971) 111-12. The importance of the labour aristocracy in the formation of the working class movement, and in mediating accommodative responses on the part of the working class to capitalism, is emphasised by Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976) 144-64, 188-89.
  6. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British Common People 1746-1946 (London 1961) 369.

young Victorian artisans...Howell's generation of labour leaders reached maturity in the atmosphere of lessened tension generated by mid-Victorian prosperity." <sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the artisans themselves who comprised the membership of the "new model" trade unions seem to have been of like character. Robert Applegarth, for instance, was clear as to the kind of men his Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (A.S.C.J.) hoped to attract: "He must be in good health, and have worked five years at the trade, be a good workman, of steady habits, and good moral character, and not more than forty-five years of age...He pays 2s. 6d. which is called 'proposition money', and stands over for inquiries to be made respecting his character and abilities." <sup>8</sup> The new model unions catered for the needs of the skilled and generally the better paid working man. They almost always had high subscriptions - of round about 1s. a week - and provided a series of "friendly benefits", such as unemployment, superannuation, sickness, accident and funeral allowances. Eschewing costly strike funds or similar "wasteful" expenditure, the new model unions expressed the priorities of the labour aristocrat, notably respectability and economic security. "It was, and was meant to be, a society of skilled men, bound together by close ties of common craftsmanship, and looking to it not only for trade protection, but equally for mutual insurance", G. D. H. Cole has noted of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers: "In short, it was a trade union and a Friendly Society almost in equal measure." <sup>9</sup>

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7. F. M. Leventhal, Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics (London 1971) xiv, 15.

8. Evidence of Applegarth before the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, 1867, cited in James B. Jeffreys, ed., Labour's Formative Years (London 1948) 31-2.

9. G. D. H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, ii, (London 1937) 59.

If the social composition of the new model unions in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was in essence labour aristocratic, there is a strong body of opinion, beginning with Sidney and Beatrice Webb's classic history of trade unionism, to the effect that in philosophy and spirit, too, the labour movement was tainted with the assumptions of liberal ideology. The Webbs strongly insisted upon the moderate "new spirit" of trade unionism after 1850, "...a reaction against the policy of reckless aggression which marked the Owenite inflation", <sup>10</sup> and which drove unionists to adopt the laissez-faire, free market arguments of their opponents, the orthodox political economists, <sup>11</sup>

They insisted only on the right of every Englishman to bargain for the sale of his labour...Freedom of association in matters of contract became, therefore, their rejoinder to the employers cry of freedom of competition.

The generous Utopian aspirations of "general" unionism were increasingly sacrificed to the "...crude 'self-help' of an 'aristocracy of labour'", <sup>12</sup> and to the economic laws of supply and demand, the freedom of contract bargaining, the concept of the "wage fund", and so on.

Certainly, many of the Amalgamations believed that by controlling entry into their trades by means of apprenticeship statutes and restrictions upon employment and hiring, wages may be shored up: "It is our duty then to exercise the same control over that in which we have a vested interest", ran the preamble to the rules of the A.S.E., "...as the physician who holds his diploma, or the author who is protected by

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10. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London 1920) 198.

11. ibid., 294. See further, Selig Perlman, A Theory of the Labour Movement (1928: New York 1968 ed.) 125-29.

12. ibid., 297.



his copyright." <sup>13</sup> With this belief came an unavoidable exclusivity. The Boilermakers declared in no uncertain terms their opposition to the dilution which admittance of the unskilled caulkers into their Society would entail, <sup>14</sup> whilst J. Doody, of the United Flint Glass Cutters Society, declared to the Birmingham Trades Union Congress of 1869 that, <sup>15</sup>

...the introduction of an unlimited number of apprentices into any trade would overstock the labour market, and thereby cause men who are ready and willing to work to be thrown idle, and moreover cause a reduction of wages to take those who may be retained.

Similar considerations lay behind the elaborate emigration schemes advanced by a number of the craft unions. <sup>16</sup> Finally, as George Potter of the Builders' Society recognised in 1861, hours of labour were equally subject to economic truths: "When the workmen in the building trades discontinued work for the "Nine Hours", they acted in accordance with the fundamental principles of "free Trade" and "Political Economy", they only exercised their legal and moral right of appraising, and offering to dispose of their labour, at what they had good reason to believe, was its fair, and just value..." <sup>17</sup>

Many of the craft Amalgamations which arose in the 1850s and 1860s placed as much emphasis upon friendly provisions as upon their strictly

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13. Jeffreys, Labour's Formative Years, 30.

14. ibid., 33.

15. Jeffreys, ibid., 35.

16. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 201-2; Raymond Postgate, The Builders' History (London 1923) 191; C. Erikson, "The Encouragement of Emigration by British Trade Unions 1850-1900", Population Studies, III (1949) 248-73; W. S. Shepperson, "Industrial Emigration in Early Victorian Britain", Journal of Economic History, XIII (1953) 179-92.

17. Jeffreys, Labour's Formative Years, 39.



industrial role. The new generation of trade unionists - and particularly those grouped around the Junta - strongly emphasised the need to build up and consolidate a benefit fund in the hands of full-time officials, rather than to accumulate a strike fund. Indeed, they often went out of their way to disavow strike intentions, as William Allen made clear to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1867,<sup>18</sup>

The Executive Council does all it possibly can to prevent any strike, and where they have the time or opportunity, generally, they cause a deputation of the workmen to wait upon their employer and represent their grievances, and then the Council give advice afterwards. We endeavour at all times to prevent strikes. It is the very last thing that we would think of encouraging.

The new model unionists believed, with T. J. Dunning of the Bookbinders, that "...there should be a good understanding between [capital and labour]...; that neither should vex or offend the other...Both are so essential to each other and so intimately connected, that one cannot be injured without the other feeling it."<sup>19</sup> As schemes of conciliation and arbitration became the vogue in the 1860s and 1870s, trade union officials began willingly to co-operate with those employers who, anxious to stabilise labour costs and avoid costly disputes, had erected "peace-keeping" machinery;<sup>20</sup> as V. C. Allen has argued, the "arbitration craze" represented a powerful mechanism of responsibility and the accommodation of the labour elite and its caste of trade union officials.<sup>21</sup>

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18. Jeffreys, ibid., 41.

19. Jeffreys, ibid., 47.

20. See further, J. R. Hicks, "The Early History of Industrial Conciliation in England", Economica, X (1930) 25-39; I. G. Sharp, Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration in Great Britain (London 1950);

G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, British Working Class Movements: Select Documents 1789-1875 (London 1965), 502-11.

21. V. Allen, "The Origins of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration", International Review of Social History, IX (1964) 237-54.

Running parallel with the new model unionists' extremely conciliatory and deferential attitudes towards their employers went an emphasis upon individual improvement and the self-cultivation of the working man. The Webbs have shown that as militant strike tactics came to be depreciated from the 1840s onward, "knowledge" and "moral uplift" of the members began to figure prominently in the outlook of the trade unionists. Branches began to build up their own trade libraries and to cater for the artisan in his pursuit of self-advancement by providing savings banks, "scientific education" and evening classes. The trade union movement both reflected and, in turn, helped to sustain the essentially mid-Victorian values of respectability and personal improvement among working men. Teetotalism, for instance, epitomised for the new model unionists working class self-respect and self-realisation.<sup>22</sup> Temperance became an integral part of the labour aristocratic outlook, one aspect of his staunch individualism and upright bearing in matters of both trade and politics. Often the products of Nonconformist milieux, labour leaders of this period could be pious and even puritanical in their union dealings and personal relationships.<sup>23</sup>

In short, there would seem to be great merit in the generally accepted interpretation of the labour movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Although this period was punctuated by a number of bitter industrial disputes - the lock-out of engineering workers in 1851-52, the London builders' strike (1859), the unrest of the early 1860s, the nine hour ferment amongst the engineers and other groups of workers in 1871-72, and so on - the main body of Metropolitan trade unionists had

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22. Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England (London 1971) 25-6.

23. See, for instance, Leventhal's description of Howell in Respectable Radical, passim.

shown themselves to be moderate and conciliatory, anxious to avoid conflict by prescribing the limits of branch autonomy and centralizing decision in the hands of full-time paid officials. Politically, too, these men were of a staunchly Liberal cast of mind. The history and political agitation of the Reform League between 1865-67 demonstrates clearly that many labour politicians were uninhibited in their support for the Liberal Party. What sympathy there was for an independent labour party had dried up in the early 1870s, by which time the trade unionists were agitating through the offices of the Labour Representation League for little more far reaching than labour representation in Parliament. The campaign to reform the labour laws between 1867-75 shows again the labour leadership willing and indeed anxious to operate through the accepted political channels, hoping to persuade by lobbying tactics such Liberal M.P.s who may have been sympathetic to their cause. Finally, as we have already observed, very little support was forthcoming from the trade unions or from the majority of English workingmen for Karl Marx's International Working Men's Association. Although many prominent figures from the labour world were members, their conception of the International was strictly limited to trade union purposes. Above all, Marx's vision of a revolutionary party and a socialist future evoked little response from a trade union movement elitist both in spirit and composition.

There are, however, a number of problems with the interpretation according to which the labour movement in the period between 1850-75 was fundamentally artisanal in social make-up and liberal in tenor. Firstly, this theory shows a tendency to generalise unwarrantedly from a small number of Metropolitan trades. Secondly, it tends to overstate the essential novelty, significance and extent of new model unionism

and, as a result, overlooks the character and contribution of provincial and other trade union forms in this period. Finally, the tension in which the labour movement stood with liberal ideology has not been accorded adequate recognition. An examination of these points will suggest that trade unionism during the Victorian heyday was no mere reflection of the dominant liberal values, but rather a refraction of those values: in all, the trade union movement was a crucial stimulant to the appearance of collectivist elements in British nineteenth century ideology.

If there is strong evidence for the existence of a well paid labour aristocratic stratum in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it cannot be assumed that all such men were necessarily akin to that secure body of artisans - protected by apprenticeship regulations enforced by their Society - to be found in a handful of London trades. To be sure, workers in the printing, shipbuilding and engineering industries and in a few small and static trades, such as cabinet making, brushmaking, silk hat manufactures, and in branches of the glass trade, were of this kind.<sup>24</sup> Beyond this, the existence of a labour aristocracy pure and simple, must be in doubt. Whilst these trades would seem themselves to have been the exceptions in London, the work of Stedman Jones has pointed to the atypicality of the Metropolitan labour market within the national economy as a whole.<sup>25</sup> In the provinces, trade unionism was far less exclusive. There was no apprenticeship in the cotton spinning industry, weaving trade unionism was classically "open"

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24. See Mayhew's descriptions of the "society" men in these and similar trades: cf. E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, eds., The Unknown Mayhew (Harmondsworth 1973).

25. Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (Oxford 1971) 19-32; Gray's analysis of Victorian Edinburgh shows the economy and labour market to have been similar to that of London, thus accounting for the strength of its labour aristocracy: cf. Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh, 26, 28-42.

and precursor of the general unionism of the last decade of the century, nor can any evidence of a labour aristocracy in the mining industry be sustained.<sup>26</sup> In the manufacture of iron and steel apprenticeship was crumbling, whilst even the engineering industry in the provinces - notably the textile machinery sector in Lancashire - was far less of the aristocratic type.<sup>27</sup> Builders only verged on the edge of the aristocracy and even here the members of the O.B.S. were frequently unemployed and suffered seriously from the competition of the semi-skilled.<sup>28</sup> There were, of course, highly paid men in these industries but, all in all, it seems dangerous to generalise as to the existence of a labour aristocracy upon the basis of the Metropolitan economy and labour market.

Hand in hand with this tendency, has gone a confusion in respect of the nature and importance of new model unionism. It seems clear that the Webbs overstated the essential novelty of the Amalgamations, which in large measure embodied many of the traditional characteristics of the old skilled craft unions; nor was their elite composition anything new. As V. L. Allen has pointed out: "The greatest distortion by the Webbs was in their phase called 'The New Spirit and the New Model', covering the years 1843-1860. New model unionism ranks as a piece of historical fiction. There was nothing new about the constitution of

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26. See further, Henry Pelling, "The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy", in idem., Popular Politics and Society in late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 46-52, and idem., History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth 1973) 76-7; H. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy (London 1962) and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy (London 1902) 474-75 on the cotton unions. See further, Gareth Stedman Jones, "Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution", New Left Review, 90 (1975) 63.

27. Pelling, "Concept of the Labour Aristocracy", 48; see further James B. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945 (London 1970) 154.

28. Pelling, "Concept of the Labour Aristocracy", 50; Postgate, The Builders' History, 371.



the Amalgamated Society of Engineers." <sup>29</sup> The contrast strongly insisted upon by the Webbs between the earlier class conscious and revolutionary trade unionism, and the pacific, bourgeois-minded "new model" type - and which has recently received unequivocal support from Royden Harrison <sup>30</sup> - is almost certainly an oversimplification. But it is not simply, as G. D. H. Cole has demonstrated, that the so-called "new model" unions were less novel organisations than the Webbs and others have made out and that they were not so deferential to the employer class, but also that they by no means dominated the whole of the trade union movement. <sup>31</sup> In mining, cotton, metals, tailoring, boot and shoemaking, and a whole range of other trades, little or no attempt was made to ape the "new model". Cole also suggested that the Amalgamations did not exercise such firm or widespread control over the trade union movement as had been assumed by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Indeed, much evidence points to the fact that the initial movers of the idea of a T.U.C. were the provincial trade unionists, whose efforts were co-ordinated by Potter and his followers. They played a by no means inconsequential part in the struggle to reform the labour laws of the late 1860s and early 1870s proving, as both B. C. Roberts and A. E. Musson have demonstrated, a severe challenge to the Junta's own Conference of Amalgamated Trades. <sup>32</sup>

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29. V. L. Allen, "A Methodological Critique of the Webbs as Trade Union Historians", Labour History Society Bulletin, IV (1962) 5. See further, A. E. Musson, British Trade Unions 1800-1875 (London 1972) 49-55.
30. Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London 1965) ch. 1.
31. G. D. H. Cole, "Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century", in E. M. Carus-Wilson, ed., Essays in Economic History, iii (London 1962) 202-21.
32. B. C. Roberts, The Trade Union Congress 1868-1921 (London 1958) 22-6; A. E. Musson, "The Origins and Establishment of the T.U.C.", in idem., Trade Union and Social History (London 1974) 23-63.



It follows that, if the accepted interpretation has rather overplayed both the extent of the "classic" labour aristocracy and the significance of new model unionism, it has also assumed too easily the almost complete injection of liberal-bourgeois values into the trade union outlook. Too little attention has been devoted to ambiguities in the relationship between the middle class and the working class movement which, as F. E. Gillespie has observed, were continually present in the years between 1850-67.<sup>33</sup> Significantly, Harrison himself has written that: "The history of working class politics in Britain during the last one hundred years might be written in terms of the changing attitudes towards Liberalism":<sup>34</sup>

From the 1860s onwards, the conflict between the desire to be assimilated and the urge to independence was continuously present within individuals as well as within movements.

Certainly, the labour movement evolved in an environment dominated by liberal-bourgeois values but, equally, the "urge to independence" was ever present. It is this latter element which pushed labour leaders and the working class - not into accepting liberal ideology wholesale - but rather towards collectivism.

It may be instructive, therefore, to reappraise the depth and intensity with which the central tenets of economic orthodoxy actually penetrated trade unionism and working class thought in general. In the article cited above, G. D. H. Cole also seriously challenged the view "...that with the decline of Chartism in the later 1840s the British

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33. Frances Emma Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England 1850-1867 (London 1966).

34. Royden Harrison, "The British Working Class and the General Election of 1868", International Review of Social History, V (1960) 424.

Labour movement relapsed suddenly into an acquiescence in capitalist conditions of employment, and even into a belief in the inexorable laws of capitalist Political Economy." <sup>35</sup> Certainly, the new model unionists were neither socialist nor revolutionary in aspiration, but this should not be taken to mean that they embraced "the philosophy of capitalism." Indeed, much contemporary opinion held firmly to the belief that the labour leaders were hardly votaries of the principles of political economy. Far from there being even a measure of agreement about the fact of economic life, G. D. Pownall in 1879 remarked on the impossibility of failing to see that "...capital and labour have pitched in hostile camps." <sup>36</sup>

As R. V. Clements has convincingly demonstrated for the period 1850-75, trade union policy seldom complied with the orthodox teachings of the liberal economists. <sup>37</sup> True enough, many trade unionists would borrow from the dogma of "supply and demand" when and where it could be useful to them in improving wages or conditions of employment by strengthening their bargaining power: as the Christian Socialist Lloyd Jones explained, "...the working man accepts such of these views as his experience in the world and workshop justify to him. Where this experience does not do so, he rejects them." <sup>38</sup> And when it came to the

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35. Cole, "British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of Nineteenth Century", 219.

36. G. D. Pownall, "Some Considerations affecting the Relations of Capital and Labour", Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society (1878-79) 108.

37. R. V. Clements, "British Trade Unions and Popular Political Economy 1850-1875", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIV (1961) 93-104. In an earlier paper, "Trade Unions and Emigration 1840-1880", Population Studies, IX (1955) 167-80, Clements questioned the argument that the trade unions' schemes of emigration grew out of their general acceptance of orthodox political economy.

38. Lloyd Jones, Trade Unions (London 1877) 6.

question of strikes, limitation of entry, wage minima, and so on, many trade unionists roundly condemned orthodox teachings. In evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1867, William Allen and Daniel Guile, both members of the so-called Junta, proclaimed aloud their disbelief in orthodox theory and that "unnatural" interferences with supply and demand were both necessary and desirable. Allen went so far as to decry the much vaunted harmony of interests between capital and labour: "Every day of the week I hear that the interests are identical. I scarcely see how that can be, while we are in a state of society which recognised the principle of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market." <sup>39</sup> Even George Howell, in his book Conflicts of Labour and Capital (1878), firmly declared that "...the working class have to fight every day for every advantage which they have gained, and for every privilege which they have won." <sup>40</sup>

In other respects, too, the new tactics of the working class leadership in this period - the reliance upon lobbying, close organisation, co-operation, teetotalism and the savings banks - which superficially argue satisfaction with their environment, in reality reflect adaptation to changed conditions. Self-help, savings banks and the pursuit of intellectual and cultural refinement advertise not so much capitulation to crudely bourgeois values and individualism, but spelt out for trade

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39. Cited by Clements, "British Trade Unions and Political Economy", 102-3.

40. George Howell, Conflicts of Capital and Labour (London 1878) 395. See further, A. E. Musson, "Trends in Trade Union Development 1825-75", in idem., Trade Union and Social History, 20: "...there is little truth in the Webbs' assertion that trade union leaders in the third quarter of the nineteenth century were dominated by middle class economic philosophy. Whatever lip-service they may have paid to it, when it suited their purposes, they did not, in fact, accept the wage fund theory, or the immutability of the "laws" of supply and demand, nor did they regard strikes as harmful and useless interferences with freedom of contract".

unionists the dignity and worth of the working man. These policies were often proudly assertive, founded as much upon a distinct sense of class, communality and claim to corporate social recognition, as upon "the desire to be assimilated". It is, in short, a mistake to assume that bourgeois values were gullibly swallowed in their entirety by working men, even those of the new model temper.

However, by no means the whole of the trade union movement was of the new model cast. In London, the chief resistance to the Junta appeared in the building trades: Thomas Connolly, President of the Stonemasons, and George Potter, a member of an old-fashion carpenters club. Potter had made something of a name for himself during the builders strike of 1859-60 and, along with George Troup, had founded The Beehive newspaper in 1862.<sup>41</sup> Always in favour of a more aggressive trade policy, Potter clashed with the Junta during the unrest of 1864-65; he was the inspiration behind the formation of the London Working Men's Association in 1866, the precursor of the Trade Union Congress of 1867; and he led a more militant opposition tendency within the L.R.L.<sup>42</sup> During the 1860s, Potter wielded a great amount of influence in both the political and industrial struggles of labour. In the provinces, his following amongst trade unionists was extensive and, in many respects, "...Potter embodied the spirit of the "new unionism" of the last decade of the century, which was to rise up against the policy of the Junta, which by that time had become traditional, and call it a betrayal."<sup>43</sup>

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41. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 374; Stephen Coltham, "The Bee-Hive Newspaper: Its Origin and Early Struggles", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (London 1967) 174-204.

42. G. D. H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (London 1950) 51.

43. Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England, 211.

In matters of economic theory, Potter proudly announced his opposition to orthodox teachings. In 1859, for instance, he argued - very much in the tradition of the anti-capitalist economics of Thomas Hodgskin and William Thompson - that the working day was divided into two parts, the larger of which being appropriated in the form of profit.<sup>44</sup> In like fashion, the opposition of The Beehive to the northern States in the American Civil War demonstrated the reluctance of Potter and Troup to compromise with the position of Bright and the radicals of the Manchester School.<sup>45</sup> It would, however, be a serious mistake to regard Potter and The Beehive as in any sense a force for socialism or class war within the labour movement. On many trade union questions Potter was in full accord with the Junta, as his evidence to the Royal Commission in 1867 made clear.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it may be fairly held that the differences between Potter and the Junta were not differences in fundamental outlook, but in tactics, exacerbated not by rival doctrines, but by a clash of personalities, particularly between Potter and Applegarth.<sup>47</sup> Despite his useful work in working class politics and trade union journalism, Potter contributed no new social philosophy to trade unionism and his militancy was a rough and ready sort, based more upon expediency than upon an alternative economic theory to that of the Junta.

It is, then, a mistake to assume that all trade unionists were of the middle class temper of Allen and Applegarth; Potter's following on

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44. Potter in Reynolds' News (1859), cited by Harrison, Before the Socialists, 17.

45. Coltham, "The Bee-Hive Newspaper", 199-201; Harrison, Before the Socialists, Ch. 2.

46. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 374.

47. On this point, see further Clements, "British Trade Unions and Political Economy", 99.



many issues represented a militant and more radical body of opinion, and in reality not all that far removed from large sections of the Junta and new model unionism itself.<sup>48</sup> In the provinces, too, trade unionism was by no means a carbon copy of the centralised Amalgamations of skilled craftsmen. In textiles and the mining industry, there was not the same sharp competition between the artisans and other sections of the labour force. The Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners (A.A.O.C.S.), although limited to the adult male mule spinners, started as a loose federation and remained so until the late 1870s, and the weavers' amalgamations were both general in their recruitment and loosely federated in structure. In the 1860s and '70s, the cotton unions continued to be highly localised in character and representative of all textile workers who came together for the purposes of political lobbying.<sup>49</sup> Among the miners, there could be no question of separate unions for the different grades of men working in the pits. Like the textile workers' associations, the Miners' National Union (M.N.U.) established in 1858 aimed to secure regulation of their industry and conditions of work by Parliament.<sup>50</sup> In this, these unions far overstepped the bounds of economic dogma. The Factory Acts Reform Association (F.A.R.A.), formed by the textile operatives in 1872 to work for a reduction of the maximum legal weekly hours from sixty to fifty-four, and the agitation of Alexandre McDonald and the miners which saw

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48. Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England, 231.

49. See further Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, *passim.*, and E. Hopwood, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association (Manchester 1969).

50. Pelling, History of Trade Unionism, 77.



the Mines Regulation Act carried into law in the same year all contemplated a measure of state interference which could not but breach the canons of supply and demand.

Where centralised activity was to be found among the textile and mining unions in the period 1850-75, it was mostly confined to efforts at obtaining mines and factory legislation - that is, it was political and not industrial. Where a centralised working class organisation had been built up, as in the case of the Amalgamated Association of Miners led by Halliday in Lancashire, it was combined with an aggressively militant policy quite unlike that usually attributed to the new model societies.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the constant occurrence of industrial strife throughout the provinces belies the veracity of any interpretation premised upon the wholesale passivity and accommodation of trade unionism during these years. The struggles of the 1850s and 1860s were as much against "oppression" and "exploitation" as were the messianic and visionary movements of the 1840s. The colliers' struggles of the 1860s were as fierce as any during the "revolutionary" phase of trade unionism, whilst in the 1850s there had occurred the bitter strikes of cotton operatives, the shoemakers, engineers, glass makers and builders. The hard fought disputes of the 1860s were followed by the successful strike wave in the north east, initiated by the engineers in 1871.

In view of this record, it would be difficult to pronounce the class character of trade unionism as being any less acute in this period than formerly; indeed, the conflictual aspects of industrial antagonism were underlined by the emergence, from the 1850s onwards, of organisation on the employers' side. It is in fact surprising that historians have

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51. For the A.A.M., see further, R. Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle 1972), esp. Chs. 5-7.

accepted so easily the assumed capitulation of the trade union movement to bourgeois capitalist values. Whilst it is true that the seeds of "Lib-Lab'ism" were sown during these years, Gillespie has pointed to the existence of tensions and ambiguities - and indeed the diametrically opposed opinions as to industrial and social interests - in the relationship between the middle class and the labour movement.<sup>52</sup> Trade union tactics and structure certainly changed after mid-century, but the class content of working class organisation remained intact, as expressive of corporate labourist interests as ever.

In a number of important respects, therefore, the hold of liberalism on the working class movement as a whole was less than complete. It seems clear that reliance by the trade unions upon the Liberal Party was dictated more by expediency than ideals, and even the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. had been quick to instruct their members to vote for Conservative candidates in the election of 1874 if they appeared favourably inclined to a reform of the labour laws.<sup>53</sup> The T.U.C., certainly, continued under Henry Broadhurst in the 1870s a policy of lobbying for limited reforms through its Liberal connections but yet, if most trade unionists rested their hopes for the social advancement of the working class upon the Liberal Party, it was surely because concession seemed most likely from this quarter during a period of optimism and rising economic fortunes. In short, it was not doctrinaire individualism or economic orthodoxy which gained currency among the organised working

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52. Gillespie, Labour and Politics in England, 58, 291.

53. Philip P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party (London 1958) 15; Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 286. The trade unionists own Labour Representation League was by no means wholly unequivocal in its allegiance to the Liberals: cf. A. W. Humphrey, A History of Labour Representation (London 1912) 50.

class, but liberal ideology in so far as it held out the promise of further social amelioration and industrial reform. <sup>54</sup>

The laggardly showing of the Parliamentary Committee during the 1860s and 1870s, should not blind one to the fact that not only amongst the provincial unions of textile operatives, miners or builders but equally within the ranks of the skilled artisans of the new model Societies, the main body of working class opinion favoured governmental intervention and regulation of their trade, particularly in respect of hours and conditions of labour. <sup>55</sup> If, during the Victorian Golden Age, the Liberal Party appeared to many working men as being most sympathetic to their demands, it was to the extent that liberalism offered hope of collective initiative. The organised working class movement was not, therefore, a simple reflection and imbibition of bourgeois capitalist values, but stood rather at the collectivist pole of liberal ideology. The full significance of this would become manifest in the changed environment brought about by the Great Depression.

## 7.2: "The Unique Land": The Revival of Socialism in the 1880s

As has been described in Chapter 2, the decade of the 1880s brought a flowering of socialist activity, and has come to be known as the period of "socialist revival". For the moment, however, the socialist message was to be taken up and spread - not by working men or active trade unionists - but by a coterie of ex-High Tory radicals, foreign emigres, disaffected artists and intellectuals and socially conscious middle class

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54. Indeed, Perlman has pointed out that old unionism began to lose favour among working men by its failure to advance protective legislation: cf. Theory of the Labour Movement, 133-34.

55. Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 14-15.

men and women; and only towards the end of the decade did the aspirations of the workers themselves find expression in New Unionism and the movement to secure independent labour representation. These groups variously coalesced in the early 1880s to form the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) and the Fabian Society. It would be instructive at this point to situate the socialism of these organisations in relation to the structure of late Victorian society and its characteristic ideological forms.

The history of the S.D.F. - a veritable catalogue of sectarian feuds and schisms, revolutionary ideals and dogmatic intransigence, and wild fluctuations in membership and activity - need not be repeated here.<sup>56</sup> Yet, in spite of what appears an indifferent record, its importance should not be underestimated. The activists of the Federation carried out invaluable work in preparing the ground for the upsurge of unskilled unionism and the cause of independent labour representation in the late 1880s and 1890s, and in pioneering the socialist doctrine generally when the weight of established opinion was at best indifferent and, most usually, overtly hostile to its reception. The S.D.F. provided an entree into the world of labour politics and a training school for a succession of the most gifted leaders of the movement: Tom Mann, John Burns, Will Thorn, J. Bruce Glasier, George Lansbury and even Ramsay MacDonald and Ernest Bevin. If it helped to introduce Marxist political thought to this country, it is perhaps because of this that many historians of the labour movement have declared the S.D.F. to have been

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56. See further, H. E. Lee and E. Archbold, Social Democracy in Britain (S.D.F. London 1935); C. Tsuzuki's biography of Hyndman, H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism (Oxford 1961) has much detail concerning the S.D.F. Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914 (London 1967) chs. 6, 9.

an organisation on the fringes of mainstream British thought and politics.<sup>57</sup> This claim warrants some attention, for the Federation was perhaps more of a product of specifically British conditions than is often thought.

At first sight, there would appear to be sound evidence for this particular interpretation. On the whole, the S.D.F. failed to establish any rooted working class support, and its version of Marxian socialism held but scant appeal for most working men and women. The Federation's pretensions to doctrinal purity, its vituperative attacks upon Parliamentary collusion and resolute insistence upon the primacy of the class war, its materialism and atheism and, above all, its intemperate rejection of trade union struggles, amused a few and certainly incensed most workers.

"The average British worker", P. P. Poirier has remarked, "anti-revolutionary and conservative in temper, found much of the dour, dogmatic teaching of the S.D.F. incomprehensible, or was repelled by its anti-religious bias."<sup>58</sup> Again, the particular version of Marxism espoused

by the S.D.F. leaders was rigidly doctrinaire and mechanistic, lacking any sense of "critique" which might have made its Marxism into a living doctrine rather than a seemingly closed and finished system.<sup>59</sup> Engels

was not alone in charging the S.D.F. with having ossified Marxist theory into a stale and sterile dogma.<sup>60</sup> This was due in part, as Henry Collins

has shown, to the paucity of Marx's own writings at that time available to English speaking socialists.<sup>61</sup> But one cannot discount the importance

57. See in particular Godfrey Elton, England Arise: A Study of the Pioneering Days of the Labour Movement (London 1931) 73-101; Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party, 24; Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (Oxford 1965) e.g. 41.

58. Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 24-5.

59. Henry Collins, "The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History, ii (London 1971) 47-50.

60. Engels to Sorge (1894) in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Britain (Moscow 1953) 536.

61. Collins, "The Marxism of the S.D.F.", 52.



of H. M. Hyndman's own personality and style of political leadership, for his obstinate character and vacillating policies were further factors weakening the organisation and rendering it unacceptable to politically minded men and women in the country at large.<sup>62</sup>

Generally speaking, then, historians have found good cause to agree with Godfrey Elton to the effect that S.D.F. Marxism was a foreign imposition - in all essentials alien to native British thought and political tactics. More sympathetically inclined scholars have emphasised the obstacles to revolutionary socialism which the prior existence of a moderate and liberal flavoured trade union movement presented.<sup>63</sup> In a number of very important respects, however, these interpretations demand qualification: if its revolutionary aspirations were blunted by the corporate claims of trade unionism, the socialism of the S.D.F. was nevertheless profoundly intertwined with the conditions of British society and affined at all points to its major structural and ideological interstices.

Particularly germane in this respect was the failure of the S.D.F. to attract native middle class intellectuals in any quantity, who might have brought committed, but critical minds to the task of elaborating Marxist theory.<sup>64</sup> In many Continental countries, it fell to intellectuals of bourgeois origin to join the ranks of the working class and develop Marxist theory and politics. In Britain, where the intelligensia was

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62. See, for instance, Eric Hobsbawn, "Hyndman and the S.D.F." in Labouring Men, 233ff.

63. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 421; Collins, "Marxism of the S.D.F.", 69.

64. Collins, "Marxism of the S.D.F.", 69; Hobsbawn, "Hyndman and the S.D.F.", 234.



socially wedded to and often quite indistinguishable from the higher social strata, there was no evidence of that impressive, albeit temporary, flow of disaffected young intellectuals to the call of Social Democracy - Croce and his contemporaries in Italy, the young Sombart, Lucien Herr, Jean Jaures, the Austro-Marxist school of Viennese intellectuals and, at a later date, Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany. By 1890 in Germany, Marxism was unparalleled in intellectual ascendancy, whereas at home it languished, obfuscated rather than clarified by pedestrian minds. The importance of this fact for British Marxism cannot be overemphasised. The S.D.F. lacked above all that social perspective peculiarly the property of an autonomous and socially unattached intelligensia and which has proved elsewhere so propitious to the development of indigenous revolutionary tactics.

Those intellectuals attracted to Social Democracy in this country, like William Morris and the talented artist Walter Crane, carried with them the heritage of Victorian Romanticism often underpinned by their early flirtation with liberal-radical politics. This latter contention goes equally for the bulk of the Federation's membership. H. W. Lee, for nearly fifty years an activist in the S.D.F., recalled that he had been "...content, in my own small way, with the Liberal Party, until the coercion Act of 1881 turned me bitterly against Gladstone and I drifted into republicanism..." Before joining the S.D.F., James Macdonald had been "a very great admirer of Mr. Gladstone", whilst Tom Mann has recounted how his imbibing of the usual round of radical concerns - Malthusianism, co-operation, land reform and birth control - led him on to embrace the socialist cause. <sup>65</sup> For a good many socialists of the 1880s and '90s,

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65. H. W. Lee, James Macdonald and Tom Mann in How I Became a Socialist (1896), cited by Eric J. Hobsbawn, ed., Labour's Turning Point (London 1948) 32-3, 35-6.

the bourgeois radicalism of Henry George's Progress and Poverty was a formative influence.

It would be a grave error indeed to assume that the socialism of the S.D.F. was nothing more than liberal-radicalism writ large, for both Morris and Crane - and indeed all the socialists cited above - moved well beyond the bounds sanctioned by traditional radical politics. It is, however, the heritage of liberal radicalism - which, as has been emphasised, was the traditional "left" expression of the mid- and late-Victorian social structure - that gave the S.D.F. its peculiarly ambiguous character. Uncommitted to total revolution yet unconvinced by reformist demands, the S.D.F. wavered between heady socialist milenial aspirations and a more sober and limited set of demands.<sup>66</sup> Beneath a veneer of Marxist phraseology, S.D.F. activists worked dedicatedly and sincerely for a variety of immediate "palliatives": the programme of the Federation included the demand for better housing, free, secular education and the abolition of child labour; a mandatory eight hour day, direct taxation and the extension of state and municipal ownership; various welfare and pension provisions, Church disestablishment, and so on.<sup>67</sup> All these were very similar to the policies advocated by the "practical" socialists of the Fabian Society or the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) in the 1890s. In addition, the S.D.F. took seriously both Parliamentary democracy and the possibility of using it to advance social reform. Hyndman, for instance, was insistent that even non-socialist governments were liable to be compelled, by the sheer "pressure of current events", to enact increasingly collectivist-type measures.<sup>68</sup>

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66. Max Beer, History of British Socialism, ii (London 1953) 268-69.

67. Beer, History of British Socialism, 267-8; the revised (1903) programme of the S.D.F. is to be found in R. C. K. Ensor, Modern Socialism (London 1904) 350-55.

68. H. M. Hyndman, Commercial Crises of the Nineteenth Century (1892: London 1932 ed.) 9.

Throughout its existence, the S.D.F. vacillated in its relations with the I.L.P. and, later, the Labour Representation Committee (L.R.C.) At times anxious to effect a policy of "socialist unity", at others it was downright condemnatory, scathing about the class collaborationist character of British Parliamentary socialism.<sup>69</sup> Yet, when the feverish revolutionary atmosphere of the 1880s had subsided, Hyndman and the "right" of the S.D.F. began to move towards a more practical and moderate policy, uneasily reconciling their belief in "the final clash" with the need for "stepping stones" to socialism. If the Hyndmanite faction drew closer towards "practical socialism" - although never able to fully identify with it - significantly enough the "left" of the Federation did not stand for a more far reaching Marxian socialism, but was rather an anarchist/"impossibilist" fringe, often represented by foreign emigres.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the interesting thing about the S.D.F. - particularly its provincial membership<sup>71</sup> - was the extent to which activists identified themselves and were prepared to co-operate with the more moderate socialist organisations.

Stripped of its more dogmatic assertions, therefore, the main body of S.D.F. socialism subscribed to an immediate programme very similar to that of the other socialist organisations. In all essentials, their "palliatives" grew out of that collectivist form of liberal radicalism common to the whole socialist movement. Certainly, some of the leaders of the S.D.F., notably Harry Quelch and Hyndman himself (whose natural

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69. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 85-6, 100-103, 135, 166ff; Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 27.

70. Tsuzuki, ibid., 136-7; see further, idem., "The Impossibilist Revolt in Britain", International Review of Social History, I (1956) 377-97.

71. The provincial branches of the Federation had a wide degree of autonomy from the central London leadership: cf. Hobsbawn, "Hyndman and the SDF", 235: The S.D.F. branches in Lancashire will be examined below. (Chapter 9)

sympathies had always been more with the Tories <sup>72</sup>), virulently condemned the Liberal Party and favoured that, faux de mieux, S.D.F. members vote for Conservative candidates in general and municipal elections. <sup>73</sup> But this attitude was the exception to the rule and, in practice, S.D.F.'ers showed a penchant for supporting Liberal radicals whenever socialists were not in the running; certainly, when S.D.F. members contested such elections, as they frequently did, their manifestos often read like those of the advanced radicals. <sup>74</sup>

Unable, therefore, to achieve that sense of intellectual detachment which the elaboration of a truly original Marxist politics suited to the conditions of British society demanded, the socialism of the S.D.F. instead fitted neatly into the major currents of late nineteenth century political thought. If superficially obscured by its adherence to a rigid and labourered version of Marxism, it is in this respect that the S.D.F. is rather closer to late-Victorian politics and society than is often assumed.

In 1884, the year in which the S.D.F. first declared itself an explicitly socialist organisation, a party was formed whose influence in the long term far outran that of the Federation or the Socialist League, its anarchist inclined off-shoot: this was the Fabian Society. There is some confusion surrounding the role of the Fabians and their importance in the British socialist tradition. In his account of the Society published in 1916, Edward Pease suggested that, "Its first achievement...was to break the spell of Marxism in England", <sup>75</sup> and many

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72. H. M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences (London 1912) 26.

73. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 109-10; Beer, History of British Socialism, 269-71.

74. Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 27.

75. Edward Pease, History of the Fabian Society (London 1916) 237.

historians have indeed attributed to the Fabians a central role in the emergence of a reformist and gradualist Labour Party in Parliament. And thus, J. H. Stewart Reid has argued that "...to a very large extent it was the Fabians who supplied the doctrine and philosophy of the new Independent Labour Party after its founding at Bradford in 1893." <sup>76</sup>

A. L. Morton and George Tate suggest that Fabian socialism "...eventually became the foundation of the doctrine of the right wing leadership of the Labour Party", <sup>77</sup> whilst Tom Nairn has discerned "...the permanent hegemony of Fabianism, ideologically" within socialist thought in this country. <sup>78</sup> This is almost certainly to overestimate the direct influence of Fabian socialism. If Fabianism and the socialism of the I.L.P. and, later, the Labour Party bear more than a passing resemblance, it is because both reflected and articulated similar aspects of late-Victorian society and ideology. With the Fabians, however, these factors appear in particularly sharp form.

By the mid-1880s, a distinctive Fabian brand of socialism had begun to emerge. Little indication of this, however, was present in the Society's early programme, which called merely for "the reorganisation of society by the emancipation of land and industrial capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit." <sup>79</sup> But soon the Fabians were to be found debating a constitutional and gradualist version of socialism. Discarding such phrases as "the abolition of the wage system" or appeals to absolute

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76. J. H. Stewart Reid, The Origin of the British Labour Party (Minnesota 1955) 56-9.

77. Morton and Tate, The British Labour Movement, 173.

78. Nairn, "Nature of the Labour Party", 47.

79. See Beer, History of British Socialism, 286-7 for early Fabian policy.



equality of remuneration, hours of labour or status in society, they argued for a reconstruction of society through its own democratic polity and social institutions.<sup>80</sup>

Alongside their gradualist interpretation of socialism, an economic doctrine was evolving in the 'eighties.

Both Shaw and Webb had read Marx's Capital in French translation, but they had been more convinced by the Jevonian theory of marginal utility espoused by Philip Wicksteed than by Marx's labour theory of value, whilst Webb had remained a disciple of John Stuart Mill.<sup>81</sup> Their eclectic attitude towards the Marxian doctrine is evident in Shaw's review (1887) of the first English translation of Capital:<sup>82</sup>

...the average Marxite never understands rent, and confuses employers with capitalists and profits with interest...For Marx...treats of labour without reference to variations of skill between its parts; of raw material with reference to variations of fertility; and of the difference between the product of labour and the price (wage) of labour power, as "surplus value", without reference to its subdivision into rent, interest and profits.

These two concerns - evolutionary socialism and the theory of rent - form the core of Fabian doctrine as it was presented in Fabian Essays in 1889. There can be no doubt that Webb, Shaw and Wallas considered the theory of rent to have been a great contribution to socialist thought and, in later years, Sidney and Beatrice Webb were to refer to it as the essential cornerstone of any collectivist economy.<sup>83</sup> The theory

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80. For the evolution of Fabian doctrine in the 1880s, see Pelling, Origin of the Labour Party, 35ff; Margaret Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism (London 1961) 17-25.

81. Bernard Shaw, "Memoranda by Bernard Shaw", appendix to Pease, History of Fabian Society, 258-62; A. M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918 (Cambridge 1966) 29-36.

82. Cited by Henry Pelling, ed., The Challenge of Socialism (London 1954) 163.

83. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 162; for the importance of their economic doctrine, see further Sidney Webb, "Introduction to the 1920 Reprint", in Asa Briggs, ed., Fabian Essays (London 1962) 271.



of rent concerns the additional product over and above "economic wages", i.e. the minimum subsistence wage on "the margin of cultivation", without any element of skill or capital: this surplus comprises four elements: <sup>84</sup>

- i. "Economic rent" - the extra product due to advantage of site.
- ii. "Rent of ability" - the extra product accruing from superior skill or ability.
- iii. "Economic interest" - the extra product due to the use of more or superior quality capital.
- iv. "Rent of opportunity" - or "profits" - due to "adventitious advantage".

Though skilled workers may lay claim to a portion of these "rents", the feature of capitalist society, according to Shaw, is that the main part is appropriated by the owners of the means of production. Clearly, Shaw and Webb had extended the Ricardian theory of rent in such a way as to embrace the return of factors of production other than land, and in this manner to improve upon the "single category" Marx called surplus-value. <sup>85</sup> "Rent" became for the Fabians the outstanding form of unearned increment, but it remained on the whole a vague and ill-formulated doctrine. Merely by substituting public for private ownership of property, Shaw believed that the surplus "...can be added directly to the income of the workers by simply discontinuing its exaction from them... The economic problem of socialism is thus solved." <sup>86</sup>

If the theory of rent was a rebuff to Marxism, so too was the Fabian's repudiation of the class war and their unabashed appeals to the

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84. MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 37-8; Bernard Shaw, "Economic", in Fabian Essays, 35-61.

85. Shaw, "Economic", 59, fn. 1.

86. ibid., 56-9.

middle class to initiate socialist change.<sup>87</sup> But it was primarily in their conception of evolutionary socialism that Marxian socialism was most strikingly confronted. Several of the contributors to Fabian Essays gave an account of the evolution of capitalism into socialism which came to be spoken of in later years as "the inevitability of gradualness". The following passage from Webb's essay is instructive: socialists, he argued,<sup>88</sup>

...are only advocating the conscious adoption of a principle of social organisation which the world has already found to be the inevitable outcome of Democracy and the Industrial Revolution.

This theory "...is but the conscious and explicit assertion of principles of social organisation which have been already in great part unconsciously adopted."<sup>89</sup> For Webb, William Clarke and Annie Besant, the nineteenth century presented "...and almost continuous record of the progress of socialism", an inexorable zeitgeist to which even the opponents of socialism could not but succumb. These social tendencies, "...proceeding silently every day", were, according to Clarke, "...practically independent of our individual desires or prejudices."<sup>90</sup>

For Webb, "the extent to which our unconscious socialism has already proceeded" was advertised by the vast increase in the scope of central government and municipal intervention in economic and social life. He noted with undisguised enthusiasm 'the progress of "municipal socialism": "Any number of Local Improvement Acts, Drainage Acts, Truck Acts, Mines

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87. See further, "Fabians and the Middle Class", from The Report on Fabian Policy (1896), cited by Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point, 58; Bernard Shaw, "Sixty Years of Fabianism", Fabian Essays, 295; MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 66-7; Elton England Arise, 94.

88. Sidney Webb, "Historic", in Fabian Essays, 64.

89. ibid., 62.

90. Clarke, "Industrial", in ibid., 94-134.

Regulations Acts, Factory Acts, Public Health Acts, Adulteration Acts, were passing into law." <sup>91</sup> Insofar, then, as the progress of socialism was held to be contingent upon the growth of state activity, it became for the Fabians primarily a doctrine of collectivism. In Webb's hands, socialism might become an unassuaged eulogy to the "collective social organism": <sup>92</sup>

...we must take even more care to improve the social organism of which we form part, than to perfect our own individual developments. Or rather, the perfect and fitting development of each individual is not necessarily the utmost and highest cultivation of his own personality, but the filling, in the best possible way, of his humble function in the great social machine.

But the doctrine of collectivism fanned out for the Fabians to embrace not only municipal socialism but, in addition, the broader concept of a "national minimum" standard of life for all members of the community. <sup>93</sup>

Though the Fabians held to the inevitability of these tendencies in society they had high hopes of political democracy and, initially at least, believed that Parliament held out the possibility for further advance in a socialist direction. <sup>94</sup> Socialism, then, was identified with collective control and planning under the auspices of a democratic Parliament. Fabian thought brought together in a single doctrine, as G. D. H. Cole has observed, <sup>95</sup>

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91. ibid., 78.

92. ibid., 90; see further on this point, Alexandre Gray, The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin (London 1963) 395.

93. For the concept of the "national minimum", see Webb, Industrial Democracy, and H. W. Macrosty, State Arbitration and the Living Wage, Fabian Tract 83 (1897): MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 107-8 for its relation to Fabian collectivism.

94. MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 75-7.

95. G. D. H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought - iii (pt. 1) (London 1967) 115.

...the political tendency towards the control of society by a government responsible to a democratic electorate, and the economic tendency towards the centralised planning of production, distribution and exchange.

It is often suggested that in later years Shaw and the Webbs came to emphasise primarily the rule of experts: <sup>96</sup> it is true that Sidney and Beatrice Webb were wont to stress more than their colleagues the "planning, neatness, efficiency, economy and hygiene" of the social organism but not, it should be noted, to the extent of overlooking the claims of liberty. <sup>97</sup>

In their political activities, the middle class Fabians were decidedly ambiguous. On the question of an independent working class party, they changed course on a number of occasions. Throughout the 1880s and, until about 1893, the Fabian Society seemed hostile to the idea and placed greater emphasis upon their own policy of "permeation", a tactic which flowed naturally from their belief that socialism was the rising force in society. Intent upon shifting the established channels of political opinion further in a socialist direction, the Fabians were prepared to work in concert with Radical organisations and individuals, a form of alliance for which the Progressive Party in the new London County Council was the prototype. Leading Fabians, such as Webb, Shaw and Wallas, were closely connected with Liberal radical opinion in the Metropolis, whilst a small section of the Society, headed by Hubert Bland, favoured permeating the Conservative Party. While some

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96. Cole has argued that "Shaw, fundamentally, did not care a button about democracy", History of Socialist Thought, 211; Bertrand Russell has also charged the Webbs with a contempt for democracy, The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell (London 1975) 74-6.

97. MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 159-62.

of the Fabian leaders regarded permeation as merely a temporary expedient, the majority appear to have shared Webb's attitude expressed in 1889 to the effect that, "This permeation is apparently destined to continue." <sup>98</sup> Steeped in the progressivism of the Metropolis, they showed little appreciation of the problems of socialists in the northern industrial centres, where Liberal radicals of the London type were a rarity and permeation an inappropriate tactic. <sup>99</sup>

In retrospect, Sidney Webb was to claim that from 1887 onward the Fabians were looking to a Labour Party to take over from the Liberals. <sup>100</sup> In reality, no such change was discernable until at least 1893 with the publication of Shaw and Webb's tract To Yours Tents, Oh Israel, which advocated an independent socialist party founded upon the trade unions. But the Fabians were unwilling to take the initiative in forming such a party. Shaw and de Mattos attended the founding conference of the I.L.P. in 1893 and were, by all accounts, anxious enough to see a Labour Party formed, but were pessimistic about this particular attempt which they believed to be premature. <sup>101</sup> Though the Fabians were by no means hostile to the programme and tenor of the I.L.P., their relations with the new party remained cool. Around 1895, Shaw and Webb flirted with the idea that John Burns might lead a new socialist party and, after this date, their support for the I.L.P. cooled noticeably. <sup>102</sup> Rather than

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98. Sidney Webb, Socialism in England (London 1889) 25.

99. Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 31.

100. Poirier, ibid., 30.

101. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 114; Cole, Story of Fabian Socialism, 43-4.

102. See further, A. E. P. Duffy, "Differing Policies and Personal Rivalries in the Origins of the Independent Labour Party", Victorian Studies, VI (1962) 43-65; Paul Adelman, The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945 (London 1972) 23.



looking to a Labour Party, Webb and Pease, George Bernard Shaw and Wallas, and indeed the majority of the Fabian hierarchy, continued to hold out hopes for the Liberal Party. With the formation of the L.R.C. in 1900, only Edward Pease deigned to represent the Fabians on the Executive Committee of the new organisation: for a number of years after 1900 the Society,<sup>103</sup>

...did not greatly concern itself with the Labour Party  
 ...mycolleagues of the Fabian Society as a whole showed  
 little interest in the new body. In a sense it was not  
 in our line...Therefore for a good while, we remained in  
 a position of benevolent passivity.

Among individual Fabians, opposition to an independent working class party was strong. Beatrice Webb, for instance, was never able to reconcile herself to this eventuality and rarely sought to disguise her strong dislike for both Keir Hardie and the I.L.P.<sup>104</sup> Clearly, the direct impact of the Fabian Society upon the Labour Party is less than was once common thought. According to Alan MacBriar, "...it seems certain that the I.L.P. and the Labour Party would have come into existence without their assistance, which was for the most part equivocal and not very helpful."<sup>105</sup> In all, the Fabian Society does not appear to have taken the Labour Party seriously until Webb joined the Executive of the Party in 1914, and then only because there seemed to be no alternative.

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103. Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 150-51.

104. Barbara Drake and Margaret Cole, eds., Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership (London 1948) 110, 117.

105. For relations between the Fabians and the I.L.P., and later the Labour Party, see MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 280-306, 307-345.

If, then, one must discount the thesis which argues for the centrality of the Fabians to British socialism, it nevertheless seems clear that I.L.P. and Labour Party socialism was, in all essentials, closely akin to Fabian thought. And this is hardly surprising, as both streams of socialist opinion emerged within, and to some extent mirrored, a similar social and ideological environment. It would be instructive to locate Fabianism within this social context for, in many respects, their socialism throws into sharp relief themes which appeared in the 1890s with the growth of the independent labour representation movement.

It is often suggested that Fabian socialism stands in a direct line of descent running from Bentham, Mill and the Philosophic Radicals, through John Stuart Mill, to the Fabians themselves. There is indeed some indication of a kind of spiritual and intellectual kinship between the Utilitarians and the Fabians. Both groups saw the path to progress as lying through a reasoned and empirical critique of social institutions, educational provision and representative government. Both favoured rational scientific endeavour over political action and, abhorring a priori judgements, they relied upon a critical empiricism; both, moreover, advocated "infiltrating" established social and political institutions the better to guide them in a direction already discernable in their evolution.<sup>106</sup> Doctrinally, too, we may notice Beer's<sup>107</sup> contention that,

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106. Mary Peter Mack, "The Fabians and the Utilitarians", Journal of the History of Ideas, XVI (1955) 76-88.

107. Beer, History of British Socialism, 281; Shaw has noted that "...it is probably due to Webb more than to any other disciple that it is now generally known that Mill died a socialist.": "On the History of Fabian Economics", appendix to Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 259.

Webb stands on the shoulders of J. S. Mill. He is the direct mental descendant of the last great Utilitarian. He has taken on the work of socialism where Mill left it - namely, half-way between individualism and social reform, and carried it a good distance further.

The theory of rent represents a continuation of the work of Mill and the land reformers of the 1870s and '80s, extended by Shaw and Webb to the sphere of moveable capital and who, in widening the scope of rent exactions, merged this essentially liberal theory with the collectivist demand of vesting both landed and industrial property in public hands. Finally, William Irvine has detected in the Webbs' Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain (1920), "...Mill's last version of the future brought into the sharp focus of a carefully elaborated practical detail...the integration of the socialistic within the Benthamite state." 108

Most of the prominent Fabians had been firmly within the Liberal radical camp before joining the Society, and the notion that the Fabians were the heirs to the radical tradition has also found support in two recent histories of the Society. Alan MacBriar has argued that English liberalism - as transmuted through J. S. Mill - was the major strand of thought feeding into Fabian doctrine, crucially shaping its reaction to Marxist socialism. 109 Similarly, Willard Wolfe has professed to detect in the 1880s the continuity of radical themes in Fabian political thought, which they helped to transmit to the twentieth century Labour Party. That J. S. Mill blazed a trail which Webb and others would self-consciously

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108. William Irvine, "Shaw, the Fabians, and the Utilitarians", Journal of the History of Ideas, VIII (1947) 225-26.

109. MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 7-8; the liberal inheritance of Fabianism has been particularly stressed by those of a later generation in the Society: see, for instance, C. Atlee, The Labour Party in Perspective (London 1937) 21, 26, 34.

follow is the linch-pin of Wolfe's argument. Although he admits of other influences, notably Comte and his English disciples, Webb is held to have entered the 1880s as an orthodox political radical in the mould of John Morley and J. S. Mill - individualistic, earnest and socially highminded. Graham Wallas, Sydney Olivier and Annie Besant and William Clarke serve briefly as further illustrations of "the transition from advanced Radicalism of the Millite variety to Socialism in the Fabian sense." 110

Can one accept, therefore, that Fabian socialism was but old radicalism writ large? Substantial qualification would surely be required, for it seems difficult to square Fabian collectivism and their stringent etatisme with the traditional individualistic radical legacy. Shaw and Webb, and indeed most of the prominent Fabians, were virulently hostile to the "traditional radicalism" of the Cobden, Bright, Gladstone and Morely variety, with its resolutely anti-collectivist stress upon laissez-faire and "do-nothingism". Again, they countered the free trade and internationalist predilections of the Liberals with their own version of Empire: Shaw's compromise tract, Fabianism and the Empire (1900), embraced "a lofty and public-spirited imperialism", and pleaded for "the effective social organisation of the whole Empire and its rescue from the strife of classes and private interests." 111 It was in this spirit that the Fabians were able to make common cause with the Liberal Imperialists, particularly as Rosebery's programme of "national efficiency" seemed to all intents and purposes akin to their own "national minimum".

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110. Willard Wolfe, From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrine 1881-1889 (New Haven and London 1975).

111. Semmell, Imperialism and Social Reform, 71.

Insofar, therefore, as the Fabians took over liberal radical concerns, it was to the extent that they could draw out the collectivist implications. Hobsbawm clearly overstates his case in arguing that their advocacy of collectivism and concomitant rejection of laissez-faire pushed them well outside the Liberal tradition: "...their lack of contact with, and indeed hostility to, the liberal-radical tradition", he suggests, "isolated them from the bulk of British left-wing intellectuals." 112

But Fabian doctrine was not so much a rejection of liberal ideology but more a revamping of it in a collectivist direction - aligned, in fact, with the broader movement they professed to detect in society at large. To this must be added the influence of Comte and the "Prussian model". Like the Bismarckian collectivist R. B. Haldane, one of Rosebery's strongest supporters in the Liberal Imperialist camp, Webb was moved to wax eloquent about the "superior efficiency" of the "German social organism". 113 If the influence of liberal ideology is discernable in Fabian thought, it is surely not liberalism pure and simple but rather its collectivist elements which were expressed and propagated by most of the prominent Fabians.

Godfrey Elton has usefully characterised Fabianism as "the move towards native tactics" in the evolution of the British labour movement. The Fabians recognised that collectivist sentiments were "ubiquitously in the air" and, as Webb pointed out in the Report on Fabian Policy in 1896, 114

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112. Eric Hobsbawm, "The Fabians Reconsidered" in Labouring Men, 253.

113. Fabian Essays, 90; Haldane, of course, who has studied at Göttingen, had a penchant for obscuring practical politics with German metaphysical erudition.

114. Cited by Elton, England Arise, 111.



Almost all organisations and movements contain elements making for socialism, no matter how remote the sympathies and intentions of their founders may be from those of the socialists.

Some comments on the social composition of the Fabian Society might help explain this adherence to a native radical collectivist doctrine which, whilst clearly liberal in origin, took them beyond the simply non-laissez-faire aspects of liberal ideology. The Society was overwhelmingly and self-consciously non-proletarian. It aimed, in George Bernard Shaw's words, to make socialism "...a constitutional movement in which the most respectable citizens and families may enlist, without forfeiting the least scrap of their social or spiritual standing."<sup>115</sup> It seems likely that the number of actual workingmen among the ranks of Fabians never exceeded 10%.<sup>116</sup> If in the provinces Fabian branches were more obviously working class,<sup>117</sup> both the leadership and membership of the London Society were mostly of middle class origin and social background, and few conscious efforts were made to rectify this imbalance.

The middle class membership of the Society falls into two broad categories.<sup>118</sup> Among the first group were members of the traditional middle classes - professional people and men in business or commerce, doctors, clergymen, and those from the world of the arts - who for one reason or another had, like Beatrice Webb, developed a sense of social

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115. Bernard Shaw, "Sixty Years of Fabianism", Fabian Essays, 295.

116. Hobsbawn, "Fabians Reconsidered", 257; Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 35.

117. Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 102.

118. For further detail, see Hobsbawn, "Fabians Reconsidered", 257.

conscience which impelled them to rebel against their upbringings. 119

But the second group was larger and altogether more interesting. They may be loosely termed "self-made professionals", comprising writers and journalists (Shaw and Bland), civil servants (Webb), university teachers (Wallas) and artists, school teachers and new professionals, as well as the professional organisers and politicians who may be regarded as white collar workers risen from the ranks. They included also a good number of the "new women" of the late nineteenth century, making their own way in the world as writers, teachers or typists. 120

This latter group was, as Dymitri Myrski termed it, the new "democratic intelligensia", more progressive than the established intelligensia and brought into prominence by the social and educational reforms of the late nineteenth century. 121 They were not of the established middle class but, as Shaw and Webb often referred to themselves, an "intellectual proletariat", the "literary proletariat", a black-coated or "professional proletariat" 122 - men and women in new or recently created occupations making their appearance in Victorian society, but standing to some extent outside the traditional matrices of the social structure. This group lacked the social integration of the old professional classes and was not, by and large, functionally related in any way to the process of capitalist production. It could, therefore, project the belief that it was "above" social classes - in some sense tangential to society at large - and

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119. For Beatrice Webb's upbringing and arrival at social investigation, see My Apprenticeship (Harmondsworth 1971).

120. Hobsbawn "Fabians Reconsidered", 257; on the "new women" in late Victorian society, see R. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (London 1973) 58-9.

121. D. Mirsky, The Intelligensia of Great Britain (London 1935) 45ff.

122. G. Bernard Shaw, The Fabian Society, Fabian Tract 41 (1892) 26-8; Webb, Socialism in England, 37.

Fabian socialism was usually spoken of by its propagandists as being in the interests of "the community as a whole". We have noticed that the doctrine of class conflict plays no part in the Fabian conception of socialism; rather, the emphasis is "national" - "national minimum", "national efficiency", social planning, and so on.

In sum, the Fabians saw themselves as rational social investigators and engineers, unencumbered by the baggage of class prejudice. They were trained, impartial scientific administrators and experts, who had created an alternative morality to that of the profit motive. Instead, the Fabians advocated an ethic of public service and duty. This was surely the cornerstone of the Webbs' entire conception of socialism, with its stress upon expertise; it is integral to the emphasis placed by Shaw upon merit and "superior brains"; and it underlies, of course, the whole notion of a rent of ability.<sup>123</sup> A doctrine of collectivism suited the requirements of this social group, above all else in the role it ascribed to those of middling origin in bringing about socialism through its own impartial expertise. In short, the particular social composition of Fabianism was admirably suited to developing further those collectivist currents in British society. They were a new social group, an elite of intelligence and ability recruited from below whose "socialism" was especially compatible with, and indeed expressive of, the conditions of post-laissez-faire capitalism. Fabian doctrine reflects the inability - and perhaps unwillingness - of the people for whom it spoke to find a place in the middle or upper reaches of late-Victorian society.

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123. Bernard Shaw, Socialism and Superior Brains, Fabian Tract 146 (1909). The Fabians were, in fact, the exemplars of Selig Perlman's "efficiency intelligensia": cf. Theory of the Labour Movement, 284-5, 291-99.

Ultimately, however, the "revolt" of the middle class Fabians was cut short to the extent that they turned inwards upon their own rational and impartial expertise, rather than outwards to embrace the broader working class movement. There existed in Britain no traditional bonds forged between the intellectuals and the working class upon which they might have drawn. But the Fabians might claim to speak for the workers, per medium of a far reaching collectivist conception of socialism. In sum, Fabian doctrine threw into striking relief the collectivist currents within British ideologies, manifesting in particularly acute form the background to the movement for independent labour representation of the late 1880s and 1890s which would graft this native collectivism directly onto the working class movement.

### 7.3: The Background to the Labour Party: the Socialism of the I.L.P.

With the growing movement among the "advanced" trade unionists of the late 1880s to secure independent labour representation, the appearance of the Labour Unions and Clubs in the northern provinces and the formation of the I.L.P. in Bradford in 1893, there emerged that distinctive strand of socialism which would feed into and provide the inspiration for the British Labour Party. The campaign for independent labour representation signals for the first time a link developing between the growing power of the working class and the spreading collectivist ideas of late-Victorian society.<sup>124</sup> Onto these tendencies were fused the interests of the trade unionists, the values of Protestant Nonconformity and the social conservative tradition of John Ruskin and Carlyle, to form a uniquely British blend of socialism. The socialism of the I.L.P. was at once practical and idealistic; visionary, but yet firmly rooted in its native

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124. Elton, England Arise, 199-200.

soil. We may now turn to examine the I.L.P. and its philosophy and once more attempt to situate it in relation to the social structure of late-Victorian Britain and its characteristic ideological forms.

The upsurge of unskilled unionism in the late 1890s had its most lasting effects in the political sphere, where it had helped to push socialism and the demand for independent labour representation to the forefront of the working class movement.<sup>125</sup> The cause of labour representation was gaining an increasingly sympathetic hearing in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties in the industrial areas of northern England rather than in the Metropolis, where the success of progressivism had obstructed the emergence of an independent working class movement. In London, the divisions within the working class were sharper than in the provinces. The old-fashioned craft unions which dominated the London Trades Council - printers and compositors, tailors, bookbinders and cabinet-makers, and the like - had not been drastically affected by industrialisation, whilst large scale factory production was much more common in the north. It was, then, in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and the north east of England and western Scotland that the socialist gospel began to spread among textile operatives, dockers, shipbuilders, coal miners, engineers and similar groups of workers. Here, the propaganda of the S.D.F. and local Fabian Societies had no small impact upon the working class - and particularly upon the younger and more aggressive trade unionists - and had done much to prepare the ground for socialism in the late 1880s. It was, however, primarily through the new local Labour Unions, Workingmen's Clubs and trade unions -

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125. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 90-98.



supported by campaigning newspapers like Burgess' Workman's Times and Blatchford's Clarion - that the new widespread socialist agitation was channelled. 126

The I.L.P. thus came into existence owing but little affinity to the London socialists of the S.D.F. or the Fabian Society. The organisational structure of the new party, agreed upon at the inaugural conference in the Bradford Labour Institute, reflected its provincial rootings. It was decided that the local Labour Unions and I.L.P. Branches - which the national I.L.P. had, in fact, consolidated - would enjoy a considerable measure of autonomy whilst the central executive body, the National Administrative Council, was left with little power of initiative in policy matters. This basic structure - a central executive with few powers and divisional councils and local branches with wide freedom of movement - mirrored, of course, the pre-existence of I.L.P. branches and the strength of northern provincialism. 127

Moreover, it gave to the I.L.P. a distinctly local flavour. In Chapter 9 we shall attempt to examine the nature of socialism and political life at the local branch level in Lancashire; for the moment, however, we may concentrate upon the "national" programme and philosophy of the party.

The stated object of the I.L.P. as adopted at Bradford was frankly socialist - "the collective ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange" - although the Conference had

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126. The local background to the emergence of the I.L.P. in the north has been eloquently evoked by Edward Thompson in his "Homage to Tom Maguire", in Briggs and Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History, 276-316; for two local studies, see J. Reynolds and K. Laybourn, "The Emergence of the I.L.P. in Bradford", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 324-46 and A. W. Purdue, "Arthur Henderson and Liberal, Liberal-Labour and Labour Politics in the North-East of England", Northern History, XI (1975) 195-217.

127. Robert Dowse, Left in the Centre: The I.L.P. 1893-1940 (London 1966) 6.

prudently decided against calling itself a Socialist Party. A series of social and economic palliatives completed the programme, which in most respects differed little from that of the S.D.F. But one marked difference lay in the practical tenor of the I.L.P. Unlike the marxisant Federation, the socialism of the I.L.P. had been arrived at empirically and lacked any real theoretical basis. Indeed, its very flexibility of doctrine was a valuable asset to the new party. Willing to back the whole range of trade union ameliorative demands, the I.L.P. never ran the risk of vitiating doctrinal purity and might happily concentrate upon forging an alliance with the trade unions: as Robert Dowse has remarked, "...the socialism of the I.L.P. could accommodate, with only a little strain, temperance reform, Scottish nationalism, Methodism, Marxism, Fabian gradualism, and even a variety of Burkean conservatism." <sup>128</sup> Pragmatic, anti-theoretical and, above all, severely practical, I.L.P. socialism was admirably suited to appeal to, and rectify, the immediate concerns of working men and women. From this perspective, it is the exemplar of "practical socialism".

The inaugural programme of the I.L.P. clearly placed social and economic demands over and above strictly political aims. The leaders of the party were ever wary of purely political issues and, impressed rather with emphasising social and economic questions, the programme included merely a general statement to the effect that the I.L.P. was "in favour of every proposal for extending electoral rights and democratising the system of government." <sup>129</sup> For many years, I.L.P. leaders stressed that the democratic political means to effecting the socialist

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128. ibid., 6.

129. I.L.P. Inaugural Conference Report (London 1893) 12.

ideal were in fact already available: 130

Political freedom is obtained, the democratisation of our institutions is, if not complete, so nearly so... The franchise is but the key with which to unlock the gate that bars us from the wealth we have created. The vote is but the scythe with which to reap the Golden Harvest, the produce of our labour...

Fundamental to the socialism of the I.L.P., therefore, was the belief that political reforms ought now to be extended into the economic sphere: "It seems likely that industry will have to undergo changes similar to those through which our political system has passed...Socialism will bring into the industrial world that same sense of freedom which we already experience in the political world." 131

There were two ways in which this might be brought about. One was to "bring the question of socialism before the House of Commons" 132 by contesting general elections and securing representation in the labour interest in Parliament. In 1895, however, the rush of enthusiasm which the formation of the I.L.P. had engendered was severely checked by the failure of the party to gain any seats in the election of that year, when 28 of its candidates had taken the field. But the second possibility open to the I.L.P. was to exploit the opportunities presented by the newly created machinery of local government and in the years between 1895 and 1900 the I.L.P., faced with bleak electoral prospects, shored up the spirits of its adherents by focusing their energies and talents upon local politics. Local politics provided for these men and women the best opportunity for practical work and experience and, for the first

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130. Russell Smart, The I.L.P., Its Programme and Policy (London 1893), 4.

131. I.L.P. "Platform Pamphlets", No. 26, What is Socialism? (1901).

132. I.L.P. "Platform Pamphlets", No. 2, Socialism in Parliament (1901).

time, attempts to secure municipal representation in the interests of the workers were put upon a systematic foundation in many towns, often linked to a comprehensive policy to extend municipal powers and services and to improve the pay and conditions of municipal employees.

For small parties like the I.L.P., local government provided an area where its members might gain experience of administration and responsibility. Often the various socialist bodies would co-operate closely with the town's Trades Council in contesting local elections so that Labour groups slowly became a permanent feature of many local councils. By 1897, the I.L.P. had managed to secure the election of 34 representatives upon local Boards of Guardians and 51 upon the School Boards; they had 45 town councillors, 48 parish councillors and 24 seats upon Urban District Councils. In addition to these activities, I.L.P.'ers acted as Borough Auditors in a number of areas and sat upon Burial Boards and Workhouse Visiting Committees. <sup>133</sup> Here the socialists were able to do much valuable work in improving municipal services - housing, education, health and sanitation, local employment relief and the like - for those people for whom the services were intended. They brought socialism to local attention and were able to call upon the support and services of many working men and women who might otherwise have been passed over.

I.L.P. socialism was practical socialism, therefore, in the sense that it stressed tangible and immediate reforms over doctrinaire pronouncements, but also in that it emphasised the viability and, indeed, the very obviousness of socialism. When challenged, I.L.P. propagandists would usually retort that the socialism they advocated could already be seen "working". Pointing to the large and ever expanding range of

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133. Report of the Fifth Annual I.L.P. Conference (London 1897).



municipal services and enterprises as examples of "working socialist institutions", I.L.P.'ers believed that the existence of municipal abattoirs, transport, bands, allotments, museums and art galleries, canals, markets, warehouses, and a whole plethora of locally managed and maintained institutions, advertised that socialism was a "rising force", already firmly entrenched in society.<sup>134</sup> Doctrinaires might dismiss this as "gas and water" socialism or as mere social reformism, but many members of the I.L.P. were impressed. Even "public hop-growing" - "the latest municipal experiment at Tunbridge Wells" - signalled for an I.L.P. pamphlet "...the inevitability of municipal agriculture and socialism generally."<sup>135</sup> Eschewing the revolutionary rhetoric of Hyndman and the S.D.F., the I.L.P. subscribed to an evolutionary and moderate conception of socialism in many respects akin to Fabian gradualism.

At one extreme, this belief in the "rising force" of socialism merged imperceptibly with Fabian doctrine. I.L.P. leaders like Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald were by no means far removed from the spirit of Fabianism, as MacDonald himself made clear,<sup>136</sup>

The discovery which belongs to the British school of socialists is that the changing organism of society produces the forces which make for its own re-adjustment...Thus, the duty of the socialist now is to select from the complexity of social movements those tending towards collective organisation and to marshall them for political purposes...

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134. See, for instance, I.L.P. "Platform Pamphlet", No. 7, The Advance of Socialism (1901).

135. I.L.P. "Platform Pamphlet", No. 29, Municipal Agriculture (1901).

136. J. Ramsay MacDonald, "Socialism and the Labour Party", The Socialist Review: A Monthly Review of Modern Thought, I (1908) 17.



For those socialists less closely tied to Fabianism, however, the collectivist tendencies in society were important but less consciously articulated. Certainly, most working class members of the I.L.P. were of the opinion that a socialist policy must embrace enhanced legislative enactment in favour of the working population and the trade unions; but they were less concerned to harness the "changing organism of society", than to realise socialism by independent political action. The I.L.P. roundly declared in 1895 its opposition to an "Alliance of any kind with Liberal Plutocrats and Tory Aristocrats", <sup>137</sup> and its activists saw that the support of the trade unions for a broadly based "labour alliance" would be necessary for any policy of resolute political independence.

A consistent theme in the work of the I.L.P. throughout the 1890s was, indeed, the attempt to forge a labour alliance with the trade unions. This consideration had figured prominently in the minds of the delegates at the foundation conference when formulating the programme of the new party <sup>138</sup> and, by 1898, Hardie was able to express as follows his belief in the direction in which the I.L.P. ought to be heading, <sup>139</sup>

What we should aim at is the same kind of working agreement nationally as already exists for municipal purposes in Glasgow. Trade unionists, socialists and co-operators each select their own candidates, a joint programme having been first agreed upon, and then the expense of the campaign is also borne jointly.

It was with potential trade union support in mind that the I.L.P. concentrated upon practical economic and social demands of obvious relevance to organised labour - the eight hour day, the 6d. minimum, unemployed relief, etc. "Practical socialism", then, was integral to the I.L.P.'s conception of socialism and tactically allied to their policy of courting the unions.

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<sup>137</sup>. I.L.P. Directory and Branch Returns (London 1895) 9.

<sup>138</sup>. Pelling, Origin of the Labour Party, 118; Poirier, Advent of the Labour Party, 51-2.

<sup>139</sup>. Labour Leader, 1 October, 1898.

There was, however, another side to I.L.P. socialism. Along with its stress upon "practical socialism" was to be found an ingrained utopianism, an often vague and sentimental appeal which embraced the far-off ideals of "brotherhood", "comradeship" and the like. The roots of this philosophy, which were diverse, usually culminated in an intense and heartfelt hatred of social injustice and inequality among I.L.P.'ers. Many activists had been profoundly influenced by the social conservative critics of the industrial order, notably John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, and with this merged the aesthetic poetry of Walt Whitman and the naturalistic philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Socialists like William Morris and Edward Carpenter had infused this backward looking vision with life and vitality in their own writings and had helped to graft its insights onto the working class movement.<sup>140</sup> This tradition was not learnt second hand by socialists, but was rather an urgent and all-consuming faith: the most cursory examination of I.L.P. newspapers demonstrates that books by these social critics were widely read and discussed by branch activists.

To some extent these ideas fused with the more rational and secular versions of a harmonious community which the Owenites and secularists had put about.<sup>141</sup> But more often they were informed by a profound and deeply felt religiosity. Many I.L.P.'ers had been brought up as members of Methodist and other Nonconformist chapels in the northern industrial regions and, whilst a number had renounced their erstwhile faith for the socialist gospel, they nevertheless clung tenaciously onto

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140. For an eloquent defence of the contribution of Romanticism, and in particular that of William Morris, to the socialist movement, see E. P. Thompson, "Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism: the Case of William Morris", New Left Review, 99 (1976) 83-109.

141. Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism (London 1973) 39-55.

those beliefs they held to be genuinely religious - love, brotherhood, charity, justice. It was in these areas that the chapels counted for much in the formation of political and social opinion, as G. D. H. Cole has noted: <sup>142</sup>

The chapels were centres of community living, as well as of religious worship and politico-social loyalties. The individual or household that broke away from chapel connection was very apt to feel lost and lonesome in a hostile world. Such outcasts - even if they were outcasts by their own act - wanted a sense of 'belonging' and of comradeship in some small group enough for intimate personal relations.

I.L.P. socialism provided just this sense of 'belonging, conferring upon the life of its adherents new meaning and overarching purpose and illustrating, in particular, the failure of organised religion to satisfy humanitarian expression for some working people. <sup>143</sup>

There was much about I.L.P. socialism that had the appearance of a religious cause. For Keir Hardie, socialism was "much more an affair of the heart than of the intellect": his socialism was above all else a cause in favour of the underdog, of love and altruism, <sup>144</sup>

Altruism, the sacrifice of self for others, is the highest development of the religious idea. It is the basis of Christ's teachings and was exemplified in his life and death. And it should apply to the work of the State as well as to that of the individual citizen...Socialism means the moralisation of industry.

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142. Cole, History of Socialist Thought, 140.

143. On this point, see further Stanley Pierson, Socialism and Religion: Their Interaction in Great Britain 1889-1911 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1957) especially ch. 5.

144. The Labour Leader, 30 March 1906; J. Keir Hardie, Ethics and Politics, I.L.P. "Platform Pamphlets", No. 24 (1901). For an analysis of Hardie's political theory, see Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist (Oxford 1975) ch. 10.

The clearest statement of Hardie's political philosophy is to be found in his book From Serfdom to Socialism (1907) in which, heavily overlaid with what he chose to term the "New Theology", socialism was presented as more than a mere economic theory but as embracing also a generous ethical vision.<sup>145</sup> It was the spirit of selflessness and altruism that Hardie found most laudable in the activities of the I.L.P.'ers: "Never did the pioneers of a movement show more of the true spirit of self-sacrifice than did the I.L.P. supporters...It was an inspiration to come into contact with them, so pure, so disinterested were the motives impelling them."<sup>146</sup>

A profoundly moral or religious rhetoric was basic to the perorations of most of the socialist leaders during this period. Philip Snowden was well known for his "Come to Jesus" appeal, and "the Christ that is to Be" - "a vision of what the world will be when the spirit of love and sacrifice which has actuated noble spirits in all ages, and which attained full glory and full perfection in the life and example of Jesus of Nazareth"<sup>147</sup> - was his favourite theme. The "New Women" of the socialist movement, Rachel and Margaret MacMillan, and Kate Conway, were equally insistent that theirs was a religious crusade.<sup>148</sup> In 1919,

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145. J. Keir Hardie, From Serfdom to Socialism (London 1907)

146. J. Keir Hardie, Young Men in a Hurry, (n.d.) 3.

147. Philip Snowden, "The Christ that is to Be", in the I.L.P. Annual Conference Handbook (London 1903) 22.

148. See further, Margaret MacMillan, The Life of Rachel MacMillan (London 1927) and D. A. Cresswell, Margaret MacMillan: A Memoir (London 1948). A recent biography of J. Bruce and Katherine Glasier is useful here: cf. Lawrence Thompson, The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katherine Bruce Glasier (London 1971) 88-91.



J. Bruce Glasier, too, described the socialist movement in the following terms, <sup>149</sup>

It is in the justice or equality of the relationship which it seeks to constitute, rather than in the degree of quantity of wealth itself, that the essential principle of socialism is to be found. Thus the great wrong of the existing social conditions does not lie in the mere circumstance that many are poor while few are rich; but in the injustice and degradation, in the assertion of superiority and inferiority, in the denial of brotherhood, which these conditions imply...Thus, once again, we see that fundamentally socialism is a question of right human relationships and is essentially a spiritual principle.

As one reads the autobiographies of this generation of I.L.P. leaders - Joseph Burgess, Ben Jowett, Ben Turner, J. R. Clynes, Percy Redfern and many others, <sup>150</sup> - the same all pervading sense of religiosity and moral righteousness is readily apparent.

For many working class members and branch activists, I.L.P. socialism became not unlike a religious quest for communality, and they found in shared socialist endeavour precisely that sense of meaning and comradeship absent from their everyday lives. Only in this way is it possible to explain the wholehearted enthusiasm with which they threw themselves into political activity. In the mid-1890s, the I.L.P. was financially and numerically weak but the party was carried along by a groundswell of popular enthusiasm. Philip Snowden has evoked "the spiritual exaltation and religious faith" of socialism in his native Yorkshire: <sup>151</sup>

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149. J. Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism (London 1919), cited by Pelling, The Challenge of Socialism, 364-66.

150. Joseph Burgess, A Potential Poet: His Autobiography and Verse (Ilford 1927); Fenner Brockway, Socialism over Sixty Years: Jowett of Bradford 1864-1944 (London 1946); Ben Turner, About Myself (London 1929); J. R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924 (London 1937); Percy Redfern, Journey to Understanding (London 1946). For the religious influences on I.L.P. leaders, see further, S. Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement (London 1967) 308-14. These socialists provide a clear example of Perlman's "ethical intelligensia": cf. Theory of the Labour Movement, 289-91.

151. Philip Snowden, An Autobiography (London 1934) 67.



It was like a revival gathering. Socialism to these men and women was a new vision, a new hope of relief from the grinding toil and hard struggle with poverty which had been their lot.

Inspired in this way, I.L.P. activists laboured unstintingly to spread the socialist message. Sam Hobson, for instance, has recalled "...the sublime faith these men and women had in the I.L.P. creed - for it was more than a political doctrine - there can be no doubt." <sup>152</sup> J. R. Clynes attributed the devotion of the I.L.P.'ers to the fact that the party, <sup>153</sup>

...offered something quite different from the promises of the existing two parties. We were out with a spiritual appeal, as well as to win material concessions. We urged that man did not live by bread alone. We wanted more than wages. We demanded a share for all in freedom and beauty, and a system of life that should be organised, not left to the accidents of birth and environment.

This, without doubt, was the "ethical" component of I.L.P. socialism. <sup>154</sup>

The formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 had symbolised the achievement of that "labour alliance" for which Hardie and the I.L.P. had laboured unceasingly throughout the 1890s. The Committee, which within only a few years would constitute itself as the British Labour Party, was less a socialist body than one brought into existence to represent the interests of the trade unions. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the elite of skilled working men had slowly begun to turn towards identification with the broader working class movement as the effects of the Great Depression and social change

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152. Sam Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist (London 1938) 39.

153. Clynes, Memoirs, 103.

154. See further, Pierson, Marxism and British Socialism, 140-73.

generally had stripped away their former privilege and authority, whilst the assault on the legal position of the trade unionists had proved the decisive factor in influencing them in favour of independent labour representation.

It is this fact - that the I.L.P. and later the Labour Party were anxious to accommodate their socialism to the ameliorative programme of the trade unions - that has predisposed most historians to accept the view that Labour Party socialism represented the final capitulation to bourgeois liberal ideology. With its "gas and water" socialism and moralistic ethics, Marxists in particular have readily followed Lenin's stricture to the effect that: "The Independent Labour Party is precisely the party of Liberal-Labour politics. It is quite justly said that this party is 'independent' only of socialism, and very dependant indeed upon liberalism."<sup>155</sup> Many, like Joseph Clayton writing in 1926, have taken the view that the "decline" of socialism may be dated with the decision of the I.L.P. in 1893 to court the trade unions.<sup>156</sup> Ralph Miliband, for instance, takes as his starting point in a critique of Parliamentary socialism the retreat from socialism which the I.L.P.'s accommodation to the trade unions in 1900 represented. Thereafter,<sup>157</sup>

...the history of the L.R.C. is largely the history of political manoeuvre to reach electoral accommodations with the Liberals... Given the history of the L.R.C., there was never any likelihood that the new Labour Party in Parliament, however incisive the individual contributions of some of its members might on occasions be, would assume the character of a militant and independent opposition, with distinctive, let alone socialist, policies.

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155. V. I. Lenin, British Labour and British Imperialism (London 1969) 99.  
 156. Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 (London 1926) 113-17, 126ff.  
 157. Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour (London 1972) 19, 21; see further, David Coates, The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism (Cambridge 1975) ch. 2.

It ought to be clear by now that this simple explanation, premised around the themes of ideological capitulation and containment, understates the real processes at issue. There were, to be sure, a number in the I.L.P. hierarchy who had progressed to socialism via liberal radicalism, but who remained closely allied to their erstwhile political faith; for his own part, Ramsay MacDonald believed there to be no "profound gulf" between Liberalism and socialism, which marked for him "the growth of society not the uprising of a class" and was naturally to be furthered by close collaboration with all progressive forces.<sup>158</sup> Socialism, he argued elsewhere, "must begin with the fact of social unity, not with those of class conflict, because the former is the predominant fact in society."<sup>159</sup> To put the matter in this way, however, is to overlook the state of tension with which I.L.P. socialism stood in relation to liberal ideology. The socialism of the I.L.P. represented a further elaboration of the collectivist sentiments already apparent in late-Victorian society and ideology and, by appealing to the working class on a large scale, had moved one step beyond liberal ideology pure and simple.

There seems to be good evidence that for those working men for whom socialism in the 1890s held most attraction - young, skilled men, usually trade unionists of the "advanced" school - liberalism had for some time been declining in popularity.<sup>160</sup> Evoking the atmosphere of the 1880s, Frederick Rogers has recalled that,<sup>161</sup>

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158. Cited by Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, 18.

159. J. R. MacDonald, Syndicalism: A Critical Examination (London 1912) 50; for MacDonald's socialism, see further J. R. MacDonald, The Socialist Movement (London n.d.)

160. Cole, History of Socialist Thought, 136.

161. Frederick Rogers, Life, Labour and Literature (London 1913) 138-39.

The intellectual awakening of the workshop came with the spread of socialism. Liberalism was a salt that had lost its savour, though the working class of the 'eighties and 'nineties hardly knew that; they only knew it was different to the taste. The younger generation of workmen saw no outlook along its lines, and to them the platform orator of the Liberal Party was a vendor of commonplaces, and Liberalism itself little more than a note of interrogation. But the new gospel of the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange flashed like a bright bewildering vision into the minds of Labour, and it seemed as though the seeds of revolution were being sown.

Indeed, the philosophy of the I.L.P. was admirably suited to attract towards socialism those once liberally inclined working class men and women: the very vagueness of Hardie's appeal, for instance, added to his effectiveness as he worked to detach from the Liberal fold its strongly Nonconformist labour section.

In Chapter 9 of this study, we shall examine in some detail the conception of socialism widespread among working class activists at the branch level in Lancashire and it will be suggested there that the urge to independence from the two major parties was strongly felt throughout the rank and file of the movement. We know, of course, that among the leaders of the I.L.P. there was much vacillation as regards their relations with the Liberals, symbolised most vividly by the secret electoral agreement between MacDonald and the Liberal Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone.<sup>162</sup> But even at the leadership level, it cannot be simply assumed that I.L.P. socialism was but liberal radicalism reincarnate. Kenneth Morgan's recent biography of Keir Hardie is instructive in this respect, for he seeks to demonstrate precisely the ambiguity of Hardie's socialism vis-a-vis liberal ideology.<sup>163</sup> Hardie had no love for the Liberal

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162. For details, see Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906: The History of the L.R.C. (London 1958) 125-59.

163. Morgan, Keir Hardie, passim.



Party, but at times he showed clear affinities with a radical version of liberalism;<sup>164</sup> yet at other times he would attack the Liberals fiercely, declaring on one occasion that "...there can be no national socialist party in Parliament so long as there is a Liberal Party to confuse the issue."<sup>165</sup>

In this respect, Hardie was typical of many I.L.P. socialists of the period. He had, of course, begun his career as an advanced Radical and for many years had seen little or no conflict between his desire for social reform and support for the Liberals.<sup>166</sup> By around 1887, however, Hardie had arrived at the conclusion that the working class could only benefit from the implementation of a specific Parliamentary programme, uninhibited in its demands for State intervention on behalf of his own native Lanarkshire miners by liberal assumptions of personal responsibility and self-help and backed by a political party comprising the trade unions. And thus, having evolved through liberal radicalism and owing for his own political outlook no small debt to it, Hardie had come to embrace collectivist solutions to working class problems which took him beyond the bounds of unfettered liberal ideology.

British socialism in the 1890s, then, represented the continuation of ideological themes deeply embedded in the labour movement during the past half century. It was a socialist creed with deep affinities to the structure and ideological forms which had given it birth, particularly in that it brought together the working class movement and those collectivist ideas gaining currency in late-Victorian Britain. It is, of course, undeniable that the attempt to forge an electorally independent

164. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, 20.

165. Hardie, Young Men in a Hurry, 4 (all italics in original).

166. See further for Hardie's route to socialism, Fred Reid, "Keir Hardie's Conversion to Socialism", in Briggs and Saville, Essays in Labour History, ii, 17-46.



force based upon the trade unions had meant that strictly socialist aims were tempered by the need to accommodate trade unionism itself. But this is not to say that it was a captive of liberal ideology. Rather, it was a labourist philosophy underscored by a native collectivism and as such had moved beyond purely liberal assumptions.

#### 7.4: Conclusions: The Trajectory of British Socialism

The three chapters which comprise Part III of this study have sought to demonstrate the manner in which the global trajectory of British socialism in the latter half of the last century was profoundly affined to the evolution of social structure in this period and developments within the dominant ideological forms. If the broad thesis advanced in these chapters is accepted, it would seem necessary to dissent from Henry Pelling's judgement expressed in his Origins of the Labour Party. Referring to "the 'socialistic' and humanitarian sentiment which was common in political circles and which accounted for the spasmodic and haphazard action of the legislature in extending the sphere of State activity", Pelling has suggested that, <sup>167</sup>

This tentatively collectivist outlook was so widespread and so vague that it cannot be said to have had any special significance in the development of the Labour Party. It is interesting to observe that the political theory of T. H. Green, who modified the doctrine of Liberalism as if to fit in with the contemporary change of attitude to the function of the State, had an influence upon the intellectuals of the older political parties, such as Balfour and Haldane, but his work was not read either by members of the working class socialists, who rarely proceeded further into philosophical speculation than was required to appreciate the ethics of Comte or Spencer.

Admittedly, "It would, indeed, be difficult to maintain that any of the British labour leaders at the end of the nineteenth century, except for a very few Marxists, were able to build their political views

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167. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 11.

upon a reasoned philosophical basis", <sup>168</sup> but this is hardly the point. It has not been argued here that British socialism was founded upon a coherent and articulate State collectivist philosophy - Idealist, neo-Hegelian, Bismarckian, or whatever; rather, it has been suggested that socialism was shaped - perhaps unconsciously for many working class activists of the labour movement, it may be conceded - by the structural and ideological environment of late century, and in which "socialism" was ubiquitously in the air."

Pelling has clearly underestimated the deep sociological rooting of collectivist sentiment in the actual make-up of British society itself. In Chapters 5 and 6, we have sought to demonstrate how collectivism gradually came to the fore in both conservative and liberal ideology in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a tendency which can only be understood by reference to the structure of society at mid-century, and its subsequent evolution. "Tentative" and "vague", possibly, but the increasingly lenient way in which the "instrumental state" was coming to be regarded had firm sociological moorings. The broad trajectory of the labour movement - which we have sought to illustrate in the nature of trade unionism in the quarter century after 1850, in the S.D.F. and the Fabian Society and in the socialism of the I.L.P. in the 1890s - reflects this structural and ideological environment. But it was not a mere imbibition of liberal ideology - a capitulation, as many historians would have us believe, to the philosophy of bourgeois capitalism - but rather a further elaboration of the characteristic ideological forms of late century in a collectivist direction.

These remarks conclude the discussion of the macro-sociological context in which socialist thought crystallised during the second half of

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168. ibid., 11-12.

the nineteenth century, although our understanding of British socialism is still incomplete. It remains for us to trace the way in which socialist ideas at the "national" level were transmitted to, and transmuted within, the micro-sociological level of the working class community. The remainder of this study will focus upon working class social life in later nineteenth century Lancashire and, in particular, the reception and interpretation of these ideas in the working class community milieu.

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THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM IN LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY

BRITAIN:

A Study of Social Structure and Working Class Belief

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VOLUME II

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### PART III: A MICRO-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The macro-structural and ideological formation of later nineteenth century Britain, as documented above, provides the overall context for the third part of this study - an examination of the workings of certain micro-sociological processes. Here, the focus of attention will be upon socialism and working class life, work and religion in Lancashire between about 1890-1906.

Chapter 8 sets the background to political change in the north west between 1868-1906 and documents the course of labour organisation and politics in the period. Chapter 9 comprises a detailed examination of the activities, agitations and conceptions of socialism prevalent at the branch level in Lancashire - in short, an account of socialist branch culture. Chapters 10-12 aim to situate these socialist forms within the working class communities of later nineteenth century Lancashire. Attention is here devoted to, firstly, industrial structure, wages and work processes; secondly, home, family and community patterns; and thirdly, Nonconformity and popular religious belief.

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===== CHAPTER EIGHT =====

POLITICS IN THE NORTH WEST AND THE GROWTH OF SOCIALISM:

THE BACKGROUND TO POLITICAL CHANGE IN LATER

NINETEENTH CENTURY LANCASHIRE

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As a prelude to the detailed analysis of the emergence and spread of socialist ideas in later nineteenth century Lancashire, and the relationship between those ideas and the working class communities in which they were rooted - all of which form the substance of the final part of this study - it is intended that the present chapter should provide an overall picture of the more important factors shaping the course of politics in general, and labour politics in particular, in the north west. It has not been considered necessary here to provide a general historical account of industrial Lancashire in the nineteenth century, which would in any case be to repeat material amply documented elsewhere and to which sources the interested reader may turn.<sup>1</sup> Rather, we shall be concerned in what follows with those factors bearing specifically upon the course of political change in the north west in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The first section of this chapter will, therefore, examine the electoral sociology of Lancashire in this period, concentrating upon the social and economic background to politics in general, as well as those elements in the situation influencing the development of socialism. The discussion will then

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1. See, for example, Talbot Baines, The Industrial North in the Last Decade of the Nineteenth Century (Leeds 1928); Leo H. Grindon, Lancashire: Brief Descriptive and Historical Notes (London 1892); Henry Fishwick, A History of Lancashire (London 1894); A. P. Wadsworth and Julia de L. Mann, The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780 (Manchester 1931); T. W. Freeman, H. B. Rogers and R. H. Kinvig, Lancashire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man (London 1966); Christopher Aspin, Lancashire: The First Industrial Society (Helmshore 1969); David M. Smith, The North West (Newton Abbott 1969); John Marshall, Lancashire (Newton Abbott 1974).



turn to offer an account of the politics of organised labour - with particular reference to textile, mining and engineering trade unionism - the growth of the socialist bodies during the 1880s and 1890s and, finally, the gradual conversion of the trade unions to the idea of independent labour representation.

8.1: The Sociological and Economic Background to Lancashire Politics, 1868-1906.

Upon the minds of the mid-Victorian generation, Lancashire was firmly imprinted as the home of cotton, free trade and laissez-faire, and Liberalism: the names of Peel, Gladstone, Cobden and Bright were indissolubly linked with Lancashire, and they knew that when Manchester spoke she "...spoke with the voice of the Anti-Corn Law League."<sup>2</sup> The identification of economic liberalism with Lancashire had, of course, been classically stated by John Bright in the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1851: "Now we are called the 'Manchester Party' and our policy is the 'Manchester Policy', and this building I suppose is the schoolroom of the Manchester School."<sup>3</sup> For a century or more, her politics had been tied to the vicissitudes and fortunes of the cotton interest, an economic feature of such ubiquity in the make-up of Lancashire as to unite both labourers and masters around the principles of the day - free trade, self-help and individualism.<sup>4</sup> In short, the mid-Victorian generation knew that Lancashire was Liberalism.

To later generations, however, this characterisation will suffice only as a gloss. There were, as H. J. Hanham has reminded us, three

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2. Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (Harmondsworth 1975) 118.

3. G. B. Smith, The Life and Speeches of John Bright, 1 (London 1881) 345.

4. G. B. Hertz, The Manchester Politician 1750-1912 (London 1912) 51.

Lancashires whose capitals were Liverpool, Manchester and Preston.<sup>5</sup>

The Manchester district, comprising in addition the cotton spinning towns of south Lancashire, was solidly Liberal and between 1832-67 Bolton had been the only town to consistently return a Conservative member to Parliament. Liverpool, by contrast, whose economy revolved around the great merchants and shipowners, was a Tory stronghold where Liberalism was fatally tinged with the cause of the Irish Catholics. The rest of Lancashire was more diverse, but it was in the north of the country that territorial influence bore heavily upon its political complexion. Country families nearly always provided Conservative candidates for Preston, Wigan and Burnley, while in Blackburn and Warrington Liberal manufacturers vied with Conservative manufacturer-landowners like the Hornbys, Fieldens and Sir Gilbert Greenall. Many of the large landowners in the north were themselves of indigenous Roman Catholic extraction.<sup>6</sup> In all, at the dissolution of the Parliament elected in 1865, the Lancashire M.P.s were evenly divided between the Conservatives and the Liberals, although there were of course variations from district to district.

If Liberalism had not, therefore, entirely consumed Lancashire before 1867 - as a superficial reading of some of its more energetic proponents might suggest - it was, nevertheless, decisively relegated into second place in 1868 when, standing out against the national trend, the Conservatives captured Lancashire. Allowing for the effects of the redistribution of 1867, the Conservative Party came out of the election

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5. H. J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone (London 1959) 284-87.

6. Lancashire was much less affected by the Reformation than elsewhere, and in the eighteenth century was a primary redoubt of High Toryism and Jacobitism. See further, Marshall, Lancashire, 37-41.

with 24 of Lancashire's 38 seats.<sup>7</sup> The Manchester School of politics had given way to that of Tory Democracy, for that essentially it was: there can be little doubt about the fact that, in the years after 1868, conservatism came to be strongly rooted amongst the urban working class in Lancashire. "What do you say to the elections in the factory districts", wrote Engels to Marx in the aftermath of the election:<sup>8</sup>

Once again the proletariat has discredited itself terribly. Manchester and Salford returned three Tories and two Liberals ...Bolton, Preston, Blackburn, etc., practically nothing but Tories...Everywhere the proletariat is the tag, rag and bob-tail of the official parties, and if any party has gained strength from the new voters, it is the Tories.

It seems clear that the strongest Conservative support was located in the older, poorer and most densely industrialised parts of the boroughs.<sup>9</sup> The Conservatives again scored notable successes in Lancashire in 1874 and, in the north west as a whole (i.e. Lancashire and Cheshire, and the High Peak division of Derbyshire), their ascendancy remained remarkably secure up until 1900, as the following data make clear:

TABLE 8.1 Distribution of M.P.s in the North West, 1885-1900

	Conservative	Liberal	Irish Nationalist
1885	46	24	1
1886	59	11	1
1892	45	25	1
1895	60	10	1
1900	56	14	1

SOURCE: P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge 1971) 10.

7. Richard Shannon, The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915 (St. Albans 1974) 73.

8. Engels to Marx, November 18, 1868, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Britain (Moscow 1953) 499-500.

9. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, 319-20; R. L. Greenall, "Popular Conservatism in Salford 1868-1886", Northern History, IX (1974) 123-38.

It will be noticed that this strong Conservative tradition was more or less maintained in the face of the Liberal victories of 1885 and 1892, whilst in the traditionally Liberal cotton spinning districts the actual "swing" to the Tories in 1892 was about 1.0% as against 1885.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst, as J. R. Vincent has argued, the Tory triumph in Lancashire may be attributed, in part at least, to boundry alterations and the creation of new seats in 1867,<sup>11</sup> one cannot afford to ignore the sociological premises of this vigorous Tory tradition. Conservatism in Lancashire during this period was genuinely popular, seemingly able to appeal to and tap the support of the working class and embrace the institutions characteristic of popular life - the pub, workingmen's clubs, Friendly Society, etc. As P. F. Clarke has demonstrated in his scholarly Lancashire and the New Liberalism, "In mid-Victorian Lancashire the more successful party would be that which could unbend most easily towards the working class sub-cultures which were the world of the new electorate."<sup>12</sup> It was of some significance for the development of socialism that politics in later nineteenth century Lancashire showed many of the "communal" features of interest based politics, drawing the working class upon the basis of sectional concerns or deferential attitudes into an alliance with the Conservatives and overriding the strictly social class basis of politics upon which socialism is premised.

"Communal politics" - or what D. C. Moore has recently termed "the politics of deference"<sup>13</sup> - were the foundations of mid-Victorian political

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10. Henry Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (London 1967) 253.
  11. J. R. Vincent, "The Effects of the Second Reform Act in Lancashire", The Historical Journal, XI (1968) 84-94.
  12. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 34.
  13. D. C. Moore, The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Political System (London 1976).



behaviour. Moore has demonstrated how the provisions of the Reform Act of 1832 were geared to restoring the cohesion of local hierarchical communities within which honorific elites might wield power and influence, "...the social foundation prerequisite to 'that state of habitual social discipline' which Burke had idealised..."<sup>14</sup> Between 1832 and 1867, the role and influence of the landed interest in the country divisions, often meshing closely with the social and political role of Church dignitaries, continued to lead public opinion united within a social structure comprising a mosaic of interest or deference communities.<sup>15</sup> The influence of local status elites was clearly part and parcel of those "social disciplines" - the "disciplines of dependance" - which W. L. Burn has discerned as fundamental to mid-Victorian equipoise,<sup>16</sup> and such political influence was shared, although by no means in equal measure, by the manufacturing interests in the boroughs. John Vincent's analysis of electoral politics in mid-Victorian Rochdale demonstrates in particularly sharp form the deference accorded to permanent elites and local interests in the town, notably family tradition, the drink interest and the Church, and to the owners of industrial property.<sup>17</sup> Other studies show clearly how local landowners or manufacturers in Lancashire might carry inordinate weight in a constituency through their economic and financial, religious or organisational influence.<sup>18</sup>

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14. D. C. Moore, "Concession or Cure: The Sociological Premises of the First Reform Act", The Historical Journal, IX (1966) 46; see further idem., "The Other Face of Reform", Victorian Studies, V (1961) 7-34.
  15. D. C. Moore, "Social Structure, Political Structure and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian England", in R. Robson, ed., Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain (London 1967) 20-57.
  16. W. L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation (London 1964) 232-94.
  17. J. R. Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68 (Harmondsworth 1972) 131-53.
  18. H. A. Taylor, "Politics in Famine-Stricken Preston: An Examination of Liberal Party Management", Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, CVII (1955) 121-39.



Received historical interpretation has tended to the view that an individualistic political democracy, reoriented along the lines of social class over those of status and voiced most eloquently by the advocates of middle class opinion such as James Mill, was brought into being in 1867 and given more or less explicit recognition in the principles underlying the 1885 redistribution settlement.<sup>19</sup> Yet much evidence attests to the tenacity of status and interest groupings in British politics after 1867,<sup>20</sup> and certainly the survey of constituencies carried out by George Howell and the Reform League in 1868 at the covert behest of the Liberals revealed that in many divisions the influence of "castle and cathedral, the great landowners and large employers" remained as yet little affected by the Reform Act.<sup>21</sup> As late as the final two decades of the nineteenth century, social class in politics might still be overlaid and obscured by the workings of a variety of sectional interests: "In a period which was dominated by the Irish question more than by any other single issue, we have to accept that British political behaviour was far more sectional than it is today, and that social class was not as much a political watershed as it has been in recent years."<sup>22</sup> We may now turn to trace the workings of these political processes in the north west during the period under consideration here.

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19. See, for instance, J. Hamburger, "James Mill on Universal Suffrage and the Middle Classes", Journal of Politics, XXIV (1962) 167-90.
  20. D. C. Moore, "Political Morality in Mid-nineteenth Century England: Concepts, Norms, Violations", Victorian Studies, XIII (1969) 5-36.
  21. Royden Harrison, "The British Working Class and the General Election of 1868", i, International Review of Social History, V (1960) 424-55.
  22. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 418.

There would seem little cause to dispute Clarke's contention to the effect that, "In the north west, religion was probably associated with politics more closely than in other parts of Britain."<sup>23</sup> Lancashire boasts a strong and vital tradition of Nonconformity which may be dated back to the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> So enduring was this tradition that, in 1843, Edward Baines Jnr. was able to summarise his survey of religion in the manufacturing districts by commenting upon the prevalence of Nonconformist chapels and Sunday schools in Lancashire, a conclusion largely borne out by the census of religious worship in 1851 which pointed to the leading role of Dissent, and especially the Wesleyan Methodists, in the "chief manufacturing districts."<sup>25</sup> Wesleyanism, closely tied to the established Church, was notoriously strong among the petty bourgeoisie and the lower middling shopkeeper ranks and not unnaturally had a conservative tradition in the mid-nineteenth century. The off-shoots from the Wesleyan connection - the Primitive and Independent Methodists, for instance - were by contrast based far more solidly upon the working class, and both were particularly well represented in the north west. The Baptists had something of a working class following,<sup>26</sup> whilst Old Dissent - the Unitarians, Quakers and Congregationalists were, by and large, the sects of the wealthy, the so-called aristocracy of Dissent and inclined towards Anglicanism and Conservatism.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 53.

24. See, for instance, Robert Halley, Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Non-conformity (Manchester 1872). For further detail, see Chapter 12 below.

25. Edward Paines, The Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts (1844: London 1969 ed.) 18; K. S. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XI (1960) 85-6.

26. John Lea, "Baptists and the Working Classes in Mid-Victorian Lancashire", in S. P. Bell, ed., Victorian Lancashire (Newton Abbott 1974) 59-82.

27. For the social composition of Dissent in the later nineteenth century, see David M. Thompson, "Introduction", in idem., ed., Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century (London 1972) 13-15.

Lancashire had become thought of as the centre of Nonconformity in the days of the Manchester School and, by late century, the politics of Dissent were unashamedly Liberal, ready to spring to the defence of all traditional Liberal shibboleths, notably internationalism, temperance and Church disestablishment. By this point in time, however, the situation had begun to change somewhat, as the Church of England seems to have experienced a revival in parts of Lancashire, where a large number of Church schools were built. Some credit for this may be fairly attributed to James Fraser, Bishop of Manchester from 1870-85, who was responsible for putting Church educational provision in his diocese upon an especially vigorous footing and whose sympathies with the working class were well known.<sup>28</sup> By late century, Lancashire Anglicanism had come to rely upon the working class more than in any other part of the country: "Democratic Churchmanship", as Clarke has termed it, "built upon the Church schools, had a rabidly evangelical tone which made for a solid Conservatism."<sup>29</sup>

In the religious geography of nineteenth century Lancashire perhaps lies the explanation for the Anglican - and hence Conservative - bias of large sections of the working class. In the north, north-east and eastern parts of the county, where population growth owed much to the influx of workers from Yorkshire and elsewhere, Nonconformity and the various Methodist sects were most prominent; Anglicanism led the field in the south and west, and around Preston where the immigration of Irish born Catholics had been the greatest. The vast exodus of Irish into Lancashire had been a feature of almost the whole of the century - peaking, perhaps,

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28. See further T. Hughes, James Fraser: The Second Bishop of Manchester (London 1887).

29. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 63.

in the decade 1840-50 - but which by 1881 had brought more than a third of all the Irish born in England to Lancashire alone, making it the most Catholic county in the nation.<sup>30</sup> There was a long tradition of antagonism between the Irish and the Lancashire working classes, reflected in the fact that the two groups had on many occasions to be separated at the place of work and exacerbated by the frequent use of the Irish as strike breakers.<sup>31</sup> It was a hostility which Marx regarded as no less than "the secret of the impotence of the English working class", and which certainly accounts for the rabid Anglicanism of many workers, as a local observer noted just after the 1868 election,<sup>32</sup>

...nowhere is the illiberal notice 'No Irish need apply' more fully carried out in the social and political relations of life...Lancashire has contracted towards the Irish much of the feeling which actuates the Orange Protestants in Ireland.

In those constituencies where the Roman Catholic population was predominantly Irish, religion intervened decisively in politics. The main issues for the Irish - who were often active in the United Irish League in Lancashire - were at all times Home Rule and education in that order, and which predisposed them to support the Liberals. "The Irish leaders are not only dead against socialism", bemoaned H. M. Hyndman of Burnley in 1895, "but they are absolutely bound to the Liberals and will never break away."<sup>33</sup> Above all, however, the indigenous working class reacted against the Irish by voting Conservative. In Blackburn in 1868

30. For details of the Irish influx into Lancashire, see A. Redford, Labour Migration in England 1800-1850 (Manchester 1964) chs. 8-9; Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 241.

31. Redford, Labour Migration in England, 161-3.

32. Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, April 9, 1870, in Marx and Engels, On Britain, 507; "One Who Knows Lancashire", The Times, November 23, 1868.

33. H. M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences (London 1912) 67.



the Irish, comprising about 10% of the town's population, had proved the catalyst in sparking off a Protestant backlash,<sup>34</sup> whilst in Salford "a gale of hysterical Protestantism" was aroused by Gladstone's proposal to disestablish the Irish Church;<sup>35</sup> elsewhere, Fenian agitation had done much to prejudice the working class against the Liberals.<sup>36</sup> Religious xenophobia was fueled by Church organisations of various types in Lancashire, such as the Low Anglicanism of the Church Lads' Brigade which had its greatest strength in the Duchy.

Closely related to religious divisions was the question of education, which figured prominently in Lancashire politics. All the denominations built their own schools in large numbers and, of the nine county boroughs in England and Wales which never had Board Schools, seven were in this region.<sup>37</sup> Even in the towns which had established Board Schools the voluntary institutions were ascendant and there appears to have been keen competition between the denominations. Churchmen and Dissenters alike were determined to fight for their own schools, but the rivalry was sharpest where the Catholic minority was largest, or where anti-Catholic feeling was rife. It was not in the interests of even the Nonconformists to support Liberal education policy and, in such areas, Toryism and the schools were identified in terms of Protestantism. The general prevalence of voluntary schooling in Lancashire proved an area of intense xenophobic rivalry, the strength of the Church schools in those areas of high Irish population being a sure foundation for the Conservative Party to build upon.<sup>38</sup> In addition, many middle aged operatives recalled that under

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34. See J. C. Lowe, "The Tory Triumph in 1868 in Blackburn and in Lancashire", The Historical Journal, XVI (1973) 733-48.

35. Greenall, "Popular Conservatism in Salford", 131.

36. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, 304-10.

37. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 242.

38. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 64-9.



the half-time system only the Church schools would admit the factory children, and here it was that "they were cordially welcomed." <sup>39</sup>

Deference to traditional family influence was another factor which played no small part in shaping Lancashire politics and here too opinion was often divided upon religious lines. The old landowning families were most important - and seem to have been remarkably successful in influencing voting - in the belt of county divisions running from North Lonsdale through Blackpool and Chorley to Ormskirk, shading off into the mining areas of Westhoughton, Newton and Ince. Though landlord influence was much tempered by the urban character of large parts of Lancashire, magnates such as the Duke of Devonshire in North Lonsdale, the Earl of Derby in Blackpool, Westhoughton and Ormskirk, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (near Ince and Chorley) and the Earl of Ellesmere in Ince itself, and the Earl of Selbourne and Lord Newton, both in the Newton division, were effective in the Conservative and Anglican interest. In these divisions the Liberals encountered much difficulty in securing support. <sup>40</sup>

In many of the agricultural constituencies, notably North Lonsdale, Chorley and Ormskirk, Nonconformity was weak and large sections of the population were of indigenous Catholic origin, not unnaturally reinforcing the tendency of the agricultural districts to vote Conservative.

In a large number of constituencies, traditional family political leadership was based not simply upon territorial grandees, but emanated also from a wide variety of local men with a stake in the town, or land-owners turned industrialists. The Conservative cotton manufacturer Sir Harry Hornby at Blackburn, whose family had represented the borough at Westminster for most of the nineteenth century, carried with him an

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39. The Times, December 25, 1891.

40. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 249-52.

enormous local following until his retirement in 1906; in Darwin, John Rutherford, a wealthy Blackburn brewer, had managed to secure much support by means of his philanthropic activities. St. Helens and Newton, where the borough and county divisions formed a single political unit, were effectively patronised by the Conservative Pilkington family and the Liberal Unionist Gambles, whilst in Warrington two rival families vied with each other for control - the Conservative Greenalls, landowners with a substantial connection with the local brewery, and the Crosfields, a Liberal family whose wealth was founded upon soap making. In the more industrialised county divisions, similar possibilities for political leadership were present. In Birkenhead, where the Irish vote made the constituency firmly Conservative, W. H. Lever (later Lord Leverhulme) carried such local weight that he almost captured the seat for the Liberals in 1895. In Lancaster, the opposition of town and country interests was reflected in the rivalries of Colonel W. H. Foster of Hornby Castle and the local linoleum manufacturer, Norval Helme.

Though such conflicts were not uncommon, in many areas the alignments of political loyalties were more straightforward. In the agricultural divisions, the Liberals were unlikely to be able to challenge the landed interest at all effectively. There existed, moreover, one or two pockets in Lancashire where the Tory Radicalism led by Oastler in the 1840s had survived; Oastler's follower, J. R. Stephens, lived on in Stalybridge until 1879 and where the operatives retained a deep sense of gratitude to the Conservatives for enacting factory legislation.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the strongly Nonconformist constituencies of the weaving belt - Accrington and Clitheroe, Rossendale and Darwin - sustained a marked Liberal complexion, due in part to their similarity to the Dissenting

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41. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, 314; Hertz, The Manchester Politician, ch. 5; The Times, December 25, 1891.

communities to be found in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in part to the absence of Irish born Catholics, whose strength was on the western side and in the large towns and in which areas the Conservatives tended to fare best.

Whilst the political influence of urban industrial families could hardly rival in extensity that of the traditional landed magnates, in its own domain it could be quite as effective. The Conservative leanings of many working people is often attributed to an ingrained hatred of their Liberal-Nonconformist employers, and which led to the Conservatives coming to be regarded as the party of the working class.<sup>42</sup> In actual fact, the situation would appear to have been rather more complex. By no means all cotton manufacturers were of Nonconformist persuasion; indeed, after mid-century there had occurred something of a drift to the Church of England as manufacturers prospered and hankered after social standing.<sup>43</sup> Nor were they as uniformly Liberal as is often supposed; a large number of employers displayed Conservative sympathies and certainly the cotton bosses in Lancashire were by no means as unfailing in their devotion to the traditional free trade policies of the Liberals, particularly in the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup>

The hatred of the operatives for their masters may have been real enough, yet there remains good evidence, as Patrick Joyce has shown, for the ability of local employers to command political allegiance upon a

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42. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, 308ff.

43. Tony Howe, "Cotton Factory Masters 1830s-1875", unpublished paper (Oxford 1976).

44. P. F. Clarke, "The End of Laissez-Faire and the Politics of Cotton", The Historical Journal, XV (1972) 493-512.

factory basis.<sup>45</sup> Exercising the whole gamut of dependency obligations - which might range from coercion and economic power, through patronage, the control of clubs, chapels and Friendly Societies, to education, influence and moral suasion - employers were able to call forth widespread political commitment throughout all grades of workers in their factories, once more indicative of the fact that "The Second Reform Act in Lancashire enfranchised communities as much as, and rather more profoundly than, it enfranchised individuals."<sup>46</sup> Tory employers, whose paternal touch was frequently more deftly popular, seemed most able to command the political sympathies and loyalties of their workers. Evidence of employer paternalism is fairly widespread in Lancashire, where cotton families like the Ashworths seem, by their humane and "new model" attitudes, to have evoked a fair degree of working class deference.<sup>47</sup>

Among the cotton operatives themselves, political allegiances varied. The spinners were, of course, redoubtable Conservatives. The ordinary working man in south Lancashire was both conservative and resolutely independent in everyday life, often owning his own house or buying it through a building society, a member of a co-operative or friendly society, and perhaps owning shares in one of the freehold land and housing associations so strong in the north west.<sup>48</sup> The cotton

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45. Patrick Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the later Nineteenth Century", The Historical Journal, XVIII (1975) 525-53.

46. Joyce, ibid., 553.

47. Rhodes Boyson, The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise: The Rise and Fall of the Family Firm 1818-1880 (Oxford 1970) 91-3, and chs. 6-7. Christopher Aspin, ed., Angus Bethune Reach: Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1848 (Helmshore 1972) 65-9; P. E. Razzell, "Introduction", to idem., and R. W. Wainwright, eds., The Victorian Working Class (London 1973) xxix-xxxix.

48. F. B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill (Cambridge 1966) 11; Frank Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character (n.d.) 45-7; W. A. Abram, "Social Condition and Political Prospects of the Lancashire Workman", The Fortnightly Review (1868), cited by E. Royston Pike, ed., Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age (London 1967) 73.



weaving districts were more staunchly Liberal. Here Nonconformity was stronger and radical politics more deeply entrenched in the smaller communities and firms of the weaving sector. If, however, the weavers' amalgamations were keener than the spinners in pursuing Liberal, and later Liberal-Labour politics, it is nevertheless the case that labour relations in cotton were normally calmer and less embittered than in other heavily unionised industries. Not surprisingly, the Conservatives were able to find among the trade unionists themselves a number of able lieutenants.<sup>49</sup> In the engineering districts of Lancashire, conservatism was less deeply rooted and here the Liberals tended to find much support. The miners, too, inclined towards the Liberals, but there was no small measure of Conservative sympathy to be found in the pit towns; though the mining vote predominated in Wigan, the town returned a Conservative member in every election between 1885 and 1910, whilst Newton, St. Helens, Ince and Chorley could also boast strong Conservative records.<sup>50</sup>

The 1867 Reform Act had initiated within the two major parties that process which saw their gradual adaptation to the world of a mass electorate and we may notice finally the manner in which politics was conducted at the popular level in Lancashire, sealing, as it were, the political alignments outlined above. Both parties, working through their influential families or employers, sought to effectively patronise the political allegiances of all the major working class institutions, notably the Temperance, Friendly and Burial Societies, the Co-operative shops and Societies, and the Volunteers - this latter of particular importance on the Tory-Anglican side. Large employers showed but little compunction

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49. Hanham, Elections and Party Management, 316.

50. Roy Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914 (Oxford 1968) Appendix B, 198-201.



about engaging in religious or educational philanthropy for political motives, but it was above all around the workingmen's clubs that political organisation revolved. Immediately after 1868, steps were taken to bring the new working class voters into the party ranks, either by creating Conservative or Liberal workingmen's clubs or hoisting the party colours in already extant clubs. <sup>51</sup>

The workingmen's clubs were usually patronized by leading employers in the localities who also headed the pyramidal election ward organisation. <sup>52</sup> Although the Liberals began to extent their club movement in the wards in the 1860s, it appears to have been the Conservatives in Lancashire who responded most acutely and effectively to the exigencies of mass party organisation. <sup>53</sup> Indicative of this was the fact that, backed by the highly organised drink interest, most Conservative workingmen's clubs sold alcohol, one of the major features determining their attractiveness to the working class. Ostrogorski's comment to the effect that "...it is the Tories who are the past masters in the organisation of the 'social meeting' and in the art of making them attractive..." would seem particularly apposite in the case of Lancashire, where a Toryism of popular complexion had effectively embraced large areas of working class life.

## 8.2: Trade Unionism in the North West in the 1880s

In the previous section, the political attitudes of workers in the textile, mining and engineering industries in Lancashire were briefly

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- 51. M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties - 1 (London 1902) 425-6.
  - 52. Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire", 547; Lowe, "The Tory Triumph of 1868 in Blackburn"; for a discussion of politics and the Workingmen's clubs, see further, John Taylor, From Self-Help to Glamour: the Workingmen's Club 1860-1972 (History Workshop Pamphlet 7, n.d.) 44ff.
  - 53. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organisation of Parties, 427, 432; Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire", 549-53.

noted. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned to examine the growth of socialism in the north west and the politics of the organised working class in the later nineteenth century. It may be helpful to begin, therefore, by analysing the character and politics of the main working class organisations active in Lancashire up to the period of the 1880s.

(a) Textile Workers

We may usefully document the course of labour politics amongst the textile operatives by examining in turn the organisation of the cotton spinners, the weavers' amalgamations and the unions of cardroom workers and piecers.

Dating from at least the later eighteenth century - for which period we have evidence of combinations of spinners agitating for standard piece-prices - the continuous existence of a variety of spinners' organisations may be discerned. Exhibiting a high degree of what H. A. Turner has termed "natural" vitality - that is, almost informal associations founded upon "occupational stability and an inherited or adaptable organising tradition"<sup>54</sup> - these unions were sporadic, often exclusive and sectional in character, but well to the fore of trade union militancy in the early nineteenth century. In 1818 the spinners took the lead in forming, even before the repeal of the Combination Laws, the general "Philanthropic Society", the formation of which to agitate for wage improvements and reduced hours precipitated a two month long strike of 20,000 spinners in the Manchester area.<sup>55</sup> During the 1820s, the spinners were to be

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54. H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions (London 1962) 107.

55. Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth 1973) 36; A. Aspinall, ed., The Early English Trade Unions (London 1949) 246ff.

seen pioneering renewed attempts at national organisation under the leadership of John Doherty,<sup>56</sup> whilst in 1829, the year in which Doherty's Grand General Union of all the Operative Spinners in the United Kingdom was set in train, a six month general strike of Manchester and Stockport spinners against wage reduction, and, in 1830, large scale "turn-outs" in the Manchester and Bolton areas and the formation of the National Association for the Protection of Labour, occurred.<sup>57</sup> Strikes of Oldham spinners took place in 1833, in which year we find Doherty prosecuting with his usual vigour the agitation for an Eight Hour Day initiated by his Society for National Regeneration, and in 1837, whilst 1842 saw the formation of a Lancashire spinners' Federation in Bolton.<sup>58</sup>

In common with the whole of the trade union movement in this period, there was precious little organisational stability amongst the Lancashire spinners whose policies were frequently wildly revolutionary and apocalyptic. Yet, even during the early years of the century the cotton workers cherished notion of reducing their hours of labour by means of Act of Parliament was at all times apparent. The National Regeneration campaign for a shorter working day in 1833 was followed by the formation of numerous local short time committees to agitate for the Ten Hour Day and, in the early 1840s, to lend support to Oastler's campaign for a legal reduction in the working day.<sup>59</sup> It was in their belief that the

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56. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, History of Trade Unionism (London 1920) 116; see further, R. G. Kirkby and A. E. Musson, The Voice of the People: John Doherty 1789-1854 (Manchester 1976).
57. G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, eds., British Working Class Movements: Select Documents 1789-1875 (London 1965) 247-51, 251-53; Turner, Trade Union Growth, 387.
58. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 132.
59. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy (London 1902) 338, 348, 364.

remedy for unemployment and glutted markets lay in the reduction of the working week that the cotton spinners distinguished themselves from the weavers, whose first concern, as we shall observe, was always with the issue of wages.

By the 1850s, more stable forms of organisation had begun to develop among the cotton workers. The short time committees had to some extent co-ordinated the activities of the local associations and seemed to suggest that further progress in that direction might be advisable. But it was the lock-out in Preston, a bitter dispute which saw the men defeated after a seven month struggle spanning 1853-54, which had first brought the district associations to act in concert and paved the way for future organisational advance.<sup>60</sup> In 1853, the district societies were loosely knit together by the formation of the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners (A.A.O.C.S.), a federal organisation for which the term "Amalgamation" was something of a misnomer for a body with few central powers, and in which branch autonomy and locally controlled finances and strike funds were paramount. The characteristically federal structure of the cotton unions, reflecting the many local and district variations in skills and work process in the industry, had thus been given explicit recognition in organisational form.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike the weavers' amalgamations, which relied almost exclusively upon collective bargaining, the first priority for the spinners was to secure their own controls over the working team of one mule spinner and his two male assistants - the "big" and "little" piecers.<sup>62</sup> The battle

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60. R. P. Bradshaw, The Preston Lock-Out: A Case Study of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Cotton Strike, and its Role in the Development of Trade Union Organisation among Textile Workers (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1972).

61. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 38, 124-5, 146.

62. H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A. F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 (Oxford 1964) 27; S. J. Chapman, "Some Policies of the Cotton Spinners' Trade Unions", The Economic Journal, X (1900) 467-73.



for the control of the workgroup, which gave to the spinner the right of hiring and firing his piecers and determining their wages, had been fought out before the Amalgamation was given its final shape in 1870, and the spinners' victory accounts for the formidable strength which it rapidly attained. The provision of a generous range of benefits appears to have taken precedence over the negotiation of wage rates until the 1870s at the earliest. The spinners were paid on a piece rate basis, and in Lancashire there emerged the elaborate wage lists regulating payment for varying counts of yarn on a single list.<sup>63</sup> These lists were extremely complex, necessitating the emergence of a specialist trade union official able to interpret the list in question in the event of dispute, although by 1887 there had emerged two dominant lists: the Oldham list, a "speed list" which made allowance for the increased effort demanded of the spinner, and the Bolton list, adjusting piece prices according to the character and quality ("count") of the yarn.<sup>64</sup>

Established by the 1870s and 1880s upon a sound organisational footing, the spinners' unions and the A.A.O.C.S. began to extend their lobbying tactics, relying upon political pressure to complement the purely industrial struggle. The textile unions had actively supported the Junta in the campaign to reform the labour laws in the late 1860s and early '70s and, increasingly led by officials selected upon the basis of competitive examination, the cotton operatives had recommenced their short time agitation during these years. In 1872, for instance, delegates

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63. For the background to, and emergence of, the wage lists, see S. J. Chapman, "The Regulation of Wages by Lists in the Spinning Industry", The Economic Journal, IX (1899) 592-99.

64. For a discussion of the various wage lists and their operation, see John Jewkes and E. M. Gray, Wages and Labour in the Lancashire Cotton Spinning Industry (Manchester 1935) chs. 4-7; Webb, Industrial Democracy, 195.



from the local societies had established the Factory Acts Reform Association (F.A.R.A.) for the purpose of reducing the working week from 60 to 54 hours,<sup>65</sup> a measure ostensibly for the benefit of women and children in the factories although it was clear that the men would also benefit from its implementation. The scope of the spinners' political demands may be gauged by the intentions behind the Northern Counties' Factory Acts Reform Association, a body established by the district unions in 1886 to lobby for further factory inspection and more stringent regulations governing the conditions of their trade.<sup>66</sup> In a number of spheres, then, the textile operatives were seeking legislative enactment by seizing the political initiative.

By 1889, the spinners' amalgamation comprised some 17,000 operatives, the largest single district being the Oldham province (5,649 members) followed by Bolton (4,062), in all representing around 90% of all cotton spinners in the region.<sup>67</sup> The spinners' amalgamation was a clear instance of that form of union organisation the Webbs characterised as "the purely trade society":<sup>68</sup> a "closed" and relatively exclusive association, the amalgamation and its various local societies imposed heavy membership contributions but provided in return the most comprehensive and generous system of benefits in the country. Whilst these were mainly unemployment, accident and sickness payments - and often breakdown pay and emigration grants - "dispute and out of work pay" was nevertheless considerable.<sup>69</sup> If labour relations in the cotton spinning industry

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65. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 77; Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 309-12.

66. Webb, ibid., 371.

67. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 29; Roland Smith, A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry 1873-1896, (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1954) 366.

68. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 415.

69. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 27; Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in the Cotton Industry, 157-58; Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, ch. 6.

were relatively harmonious, it is still the case that a large number of minor and localised disputes occurred, reflecting, of course, the wide measure of autonomy in trade and industrial matters which rested in the hands of the district associations.

Above all, however, the spinners' amalgamation were a distinctly moderate, not to say conservative, hue. Though they were consistent supporters of factory legislation and threw their weight behind the Eight Hour Day movement of the late 1880s, they were on the whole impervious to the militant ideas which the "advanced" delegates to the T.U.C. were putting about during the course of the 'eighties. The Amalgamation had refused to have any part in the strike-oriented Federation of Organised Trade Societies set in train mainly by the iron and building trades after the Sheffield Congress of 1874, whilst the cotton operatives consistently rallied to the defence of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. when it faced attack from the New Unionists.<sup>70</sup> Reflecting the conservative proclivities of many of their members, a large number of the permanent officials of the spinners' amalgamation were themselves Tories. J. T. Fielden, a Liberal of distinctly moderate complexion, spoke for many officials in the Amalgamation in the terms of economic orthodoxy in pronouncing that: "The laws that govern ultimately the rate of wages as well as the profits of capital are inexorable in their operation;"<sup>71</sup> whilst James Mawdsley, a Conservative candidate on a number of occasions, was quite explicit about his political preferences: "I am with the Conservative Party", he declared, "because I believe, on the whole, that they are the least hypocritical of the two parties."<sup>72</sup>

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70. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 356, 401.

71. J. T. Fielden, Speech on Foreign Competition in the Cotton Trade (Blackburn 1879) 5.

72. Speech by Mawdsley, Oldham Daily Standard, 28 June 1899.

In a number of important respects, the development of labour organisation among the weavers provides an instructive contrast with that of the operative cotton spinners. Although the early forms of weavers' combinations were like the spinners in their volatile structure and often desperately militant tactics, stability and growth of organisational forms occurred earlier, the weavers leading the spinners in developing their trade unionism roughly between the years 1840-70.<sup>73</sup> Like the spinners, the weavers organisations displayed a large measure of "natural" occupationally-based vitality, often emerging around Friendly Societies or "box clubs" affording protection for the trades against the repressive Combination Acts. It was, of course, the unfortunate handloom weavers who were in the van of trade union developments; organising against the disastrous effects of the powerloom - which, after about 1806, had relentlessly depressed wages in the weaving sector - combinations of weavers had arisen to combat their worsening position. A manifesto of the "Association of Weavers" had been issued in 1799 and, thereafter, there followed a long series of appeals and petitions demanding a minimum price for their goods.<sup>74</sup>

The handloom weavers took the lead in the "Blanketeers" march for reform in 1817 and, again, they were to be found in 1819 petitioning for the enforcement of a minimum wage. But the complete degradation of the handloom weavers was signalled by the improved looms increasingly being marketed during the 1820s. Throughout the 'twenties, a number of violent demonstrations occurred in which weavers smashed powerlooms and attacked factories, and such desperate measures continued to be employed through

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73. Turner, Trade Union Growth; E. Hopwood, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association (Manchester 1969) for the general background to the weavers' amalgamations.

74. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 56-9.

to 1842 when the "Plug Plot" and Chartist-inspired "general strike" occurred in Lancashire, for which the weavers evinced marked enthusiasm. But, alongside these doomed organisations, the new powerloom weavers were slowly forging their own trade unions. Between 1834-37, there occurred repeated attempts in Preston and elsewhere to get weavers' associations off the ground, whilst the first attempt to form a federation of powerloom weavers occurred in 1840, in the hope of supporting the Stockport strike of that year.

It was the emergence of piece-work lists in the weaving sector as early as the 1840s which precipitated the formation of more stable District Associations among the weavers. Skilled permanent officials were needed to enforce these lists by which the rate for each job was calculated. In this the weavers led the way, boasting by 1878 some twenty to thirty paid officials as against perhaps half a dozen in the spinners' unions.<sup>75</sup> By the 1850s and '60s, stable District Associations had been formed in most of the towns in north and north east Lancashire and, in 1858, the "First Amalgamation" - the North Lancashire Power Loom Weavers' Association (N.L.P.L.W.A.) - was set in train. The Amalgamation was a federation of local weavers' societies mainly around the Blackburn area, the objects of which contained little else beyond wage matters. Membership at first grew only slowly - by 1863 it represented just seven societies - but the Amalgamation was clearly here to stay. In 1878, in which year there occurred the "Great Strike" of almost 100,000 north Lancashire operatives against wage reductions, the Amalgamation, which by this time had over 15,000 members, was re-organised and placed upon a more secure organisational footing. But the weakness of the body was apparent to all and soon steps were taken to create a much more comprehensive organisation. The "Second Amalgamation" came into being in.

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75. Turner, Trade Union Growth, 50ff., 76, 120, 137; Webb, Industrial Democracy, 16, 106, 196.



1884, when 57 delegates representing 28 districts meeting in Bury agreed upon an organisation whose first priority would be at all times to maintain a "fair rate of wages." <sup>76</sup>

The main concern of the weavers' organisations was always to improve wages. The background to the formation of the second amalgamation, for instance, was the strike of some 30,000 Blackburn operatives in 1880 for a return of the wage cuts effected two years previously. In contrast to the spinners, whose craft-oriented unionism sought to entrench their position by controlling labour supply in the industry, the weavers' associations were "open" and, in many respects, precursors of the new unionism of the late 1880s. The weavers' amalgamation emphasised far less than the spinners the friendly side of trade unionism and, always seeking to control wages by direct collective bargaining and strike tactics, they paid no benefits other than strike and lock-out pay. <sup>77</sup> Like the A.A.O.C.S., however, it was a federal body which gave pride of place to branch autonomy; there was no standard rate of contribution for the membership, which was levied by the local unions and which was, in any event, quite low.

In policy matters, therefore, the weavers' amalgamation was less exclusive and, in politics, far more militant than the spinners. By 1884 the weavers' union could number some 200,000 operatives in its ranks, by far the majority of whom were women. <sup>78</sup> In this, there is no stronger contrast with the spinners, whose organisation was almost exclusively male dominated. Reflecting the aspirations of a workforce living in small weaving villages, working in smaller factories than the spinning

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76. Hopwood, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, chs. 6-8.

77. For details of the weavers' amalgamation's income and expenditure, see Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, ch. 6.

78. For female composition of the weavers' amalgamation, see B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry (London 1915); Webb, Industrial Democracy, 500.



operatives and overwhelmingly Nonconformist in religion, the weavers' amalgamation pursued a consistently Liberal policy. But as with the spinning operatives, the weavers were often concerned to mobilise their political strength in favour of Parliamentary regulation of the trade.

We may conclude this brief survey of labour organisation and policy among the cotton operatives by focusing upon the Card and Blowing Room workers - the preparatory grades of the spinning industry - and upon the development of trade unionism among the spinners' piecers.

The exclusivity of the spinners is vividly illustrated in their dealings with the cardroom amalgamations. The decisive event in the history of cardroom organisations was the great Oldham lock-out of 1885 and the formation of the Amalgamation in 1886, which grew gradually until it could claim 15,000 members by 1889.<sup>79</sup> In that year the Amalgamation felt itself secure enough to call out its members, mainly in the Oldham area where its greatest strength lay, in an unsuccessful attempt to increase the level of earnings in the preparatory cotton process. In its formation and early struggles, however, the cardroom amalgamation found little support forthcoming from the spinners and it is hardly surprising that their attempt to federate with the spinners in 1890 proved abortive.<sup>80</sup>

The cardroom operatives comprised semi- and unskilled male, but predominantly female and often juvenile, labour and, like the weavers, their Amalgamation was inevitably concerned with wages above all else. In this respect, the amalgamation had been reasonably happy when, in 1890,

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79. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 112; for details of the carding room process and organisation, see A. P. Wadsworth, "The Cotton Trade Unions", in G. D. H. Cole ed., British Trade Unionism Today (London 1945) 386ff.

80. Clegg, ibid., 112; Turner, Trade Union Growth, 144-47; Chapman, "Some Policies of the Cotton Spinners' Unions", op. cit.

a new general list was drawn up for Oldham which appears to have given increases to most cardroom operatives. Less conservative in temperament than the spinners, the cardroom amalgamation concentrated upon building up a strike fund for use against the employers' associations, although per capita contributions were low and once more set at the district level. <sup>81</sup>

The history and fate of the Piecers' Union is much more dilatory. The piecers were traditionally members of the spinners' amalgamation but, with the exception of the Bolton district, were never more than 50-60% organised. There were, however, several attempts made under socialist inspiration to form an independent union for these male workers. In Oldham, J. R. Clynes initiated a movement in the late 1880s, for instance, whilst in 1890 the Bolton piecers attempted organisation. <sup>82</sup> Both attempts proved futile, although they paved the way for the Lancashire Piecers' Association which came into being in 1891-92. Again, the piecers faced much opposition from the spinners who were, in effect, their immediate employers. They had not the slightest desire to see the piecers in a separate union - whose policy might be to improve the wage levels set by the spinners and possibly act as strike breakers in the spinners' own disputes. Again, the contrast with the weavers, who were more ready to encourage general unionism throughout their sector of the industry in the interests of wide solidarity, is instructive. <sup>83</sup>

(b) The Miners

In several respects, the development of labour organisation among the coal miners was similar to that of the textile operatives. In the

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81. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 105-6.

82. See further, J. R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924 (London 1937) 47-9; Chapman, "Some Policies of the Cotton Spinners' Unions", op. cit.

83. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 475, 494, 497, for relations between the spinners and piecers.

first place, there was no apprenticeship system in either cotton or coal, in both of which the industrial revolution had swept away protective customs; the "little" piecer could be promoted to "big" piecer and thence to spinner as vacancies occurred, just as in the mines the haulage worker might work his way to the coal face.<sup>84</sup> Again like the cotton unions, the miners' organisations in Lancashire were distinctly local, with much inter-branch rivalry tending to weaken the overall solidarity of the union.<sup>85</sup> In most colliery districts, the miners tended to live in villages and small towns occupied mainly by other miners and often cemented by the ties of Nonconformity.<sup>86</sup> In Lancashire the pits and seams were smaller and the miners themselves less isolated and much more intermingled with workers employed in other industries, particularly textiles. Only in Wigan and St. Helens were the miners the single largest occupational group. The absence of the self-contained pit village in Lancashire tended to fragment the various district unions and, in shaping their policies, the miners were open to influence by a variety of factors which elsewhere might not have played the same role.<sup>87</sup>

Up to the 1860s, at least, the development of trade unionism in the mines was marked by violent swings and upheavals in both organisation and membership, a persistent rudimentary organisation among the miners which might have provided the basis for rapid growth was often undermined by wide and recurrent fluctuations in the selling price of coal.<sup>88</sup>

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84. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 15; Webb, ibid., 474-5.

85. The point is emphasised by Raymond Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle 1972).

86. G. D. H. Cole, Labour in the Coal-Mining Industry 1914-1921 (London 1923) 7.

87. For further detail, see below Chapter 10.

88. The best concise history of the miners' union is Robin Page Arnot, The Miners: A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain 1889-1910 (London 1949).

Evidence suggests that the first miners' union in Lancashire was founded in 1794 at Pemberton and, by the end of the eighteenth century, at least ten similar organisations had been established in central Lancashire.<sup>89</sup> In 1818 a dispute involving thousands of miners in the Lancashire coal-field broke out, but until 1830 - in which year the south Lancashire colliers formed the Friendly Society of Coal Miners in Bolton - strikes had been far too disorganised and unco-ordinated to be at all effective. The F.S.C.M. proved, however, to be shortlived and it collapsed during a strike in 1831.<sup>90</sup>

By the time of the formation of Martin Jude's Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland in 1841, strong county unions already existed throughout the Lancashire field,<sup>91</sup> and these provided a sure foundation for the success of the new organisation in Lancashire. By 1844, under the leadership of David Swallow the miners had built up a large membership and were able to play a leading role in determining the union's national policy. A successful strike in St. Helens in 1844, which was repeated in other parts of the county, occasioned the transfer of the union's headquarters to Lancashire. The strength of the Lancashire Union in this period contrasted vividly with the position of the unions in most other coalfields.

Though the National Miners' Association had collapsed in 1848, in 1851 the Lancashire and Cheshire District of the Association had been set in train with an extensive range of friendly provisions. Although there remained much local disarray in the north west, with the locus of union activity firmly rooted at the district level, many of the

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89. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle 1972) ch. 1.

90. Challinor, ibid; Aspinall, Early English Trade Unions, 303ff.

91. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 181-82.

leaders of Alexandre MacDonald's National Miners' Association (1858) were recruited from the Lancashire coalfield. The N.M.A. was a federal organisation, pacific in character and attaching great importance to bringing pressure upon Parliament.<sup>92</sup> In this it offended the more militant Lancashire miners, who took the lead in forming the Amalgamated Association of Miners in 1869. Under the authoritative leadership of Thomas Halliday, it was decided that the A.A.M. should have centralised funds and an aggressive industrial policy. By 1873, the N.M.A. had some 123,000 members whilst the A.A.M., centred upon the north west, had around 99,000 members.<sup>93</sup>

For a while, the militant tactics of the A.A.M. proved highly successful. But during the early 1870s, when prices began to fall rapidly, miners throughout the country were forced to respond defensively to wage cuts and in Lancashire the A.A.M. collapsed amid a resurgence of local separatism.<sup>94</sup> The adoption of sliding scales in the 1870s, agreed between the miners and the coal owners, favoured the N.M.A. which began to expand, although overall this was a bad period for the miners' unions. It was, however, in this period that the miners secured their first representatives in Parliament. But in contrast to Burt and MacDonald, who had been elected as miners' M.P.s with Liberal backing, Halliday and the A.A.M. favoured a policy of electoral independence, although the failure of William Pickard at Wigan in 1874 demonstrated that there was as yet no large body of miners who wanted working class M.P.s.<sup>95</sup>

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92. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British Common People 1746-1946 (London 1961) 374.

93. For details of the A.A.M., see Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, chs. 5-7.

94. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 18ff.

95. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 142-46; R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics, (Oxford 1968) ch. 1.



The years between 1874-80 were lean ones for the Lancashire miners, but things began to pick up when the strike of several Lancashire districts in 1881 had the effect of bringing together about a dozen of the district unions in a closer federation. Though a number of areas, including Wigan, were as yet not ready to join, the Lancashire Miners' Federation came into being and soon after its formation an increase in wages was secured in most parts of the area. The secretary of the new organisation, as yet little more than a collection of autonomous districts often with their branches far away from the pits, was one Thomas Ashton, a collier from Openshaw in Manchester.<sup>96</sup> In 1883, the delegates of the Lancashire miners resolved: "That the time has come when the working miners shall regulate the production of coal", although finding it impossible to secure their object by strikes, the Lancashire men turned to the policy of legislative regulation which had long been advocated by MacDonald and the N.M.A. Although the Lancashire Federation remained weak, dogged by "...the north west miners' intense love for localism",<sup>97</sup> the Lancashire miners played a laudable role in initiating the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1889.

As was the case with the cotton workers, then, there was much sympathy among the Lancashire miners for the Parliamentary policy which the N.M.A. had exemplified and, after 1889, would become a major string in the bow of the M.F.G.B.<sup>98</sup> By 1886 the miners had 5 M.P.s in Parliament, all of them of the Lib-Lab stable. In Lancashire, however, the miners were by no means as committed to the Liberals as was the case

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96. Arnot, The Miners, 63, 297; Webb, History of British Trade Unionism, 433.

97. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 180.

98. Both the cotton operatives and the miners aimed to secure a mandatory minimum wage: cf. J. W. F. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory (1928: London 1969 ed.) 162-63.

elsewhere. Though admittedly less than the cotton spinners, there was no small amount of Conservative sentiment amongst them; indeed, until the coming of the Labour Party the Conservatives were consistently successful in Wigan and Newton, two of the constituencies where the miners were most heavily concentrated. Like the cotton workers, the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation (as it soon became) was divided in its political loyalties between the two major parties and this was naturally a hinderance to its effective political functioning. For the Lancashire miners, anxious to secure Parliamentary representation but hamstrung by divisions among the membership, the new Labour Party - independent of both Conservatives and Liberals alike - would offer obvious attractions.

(c) The Engineers

As was noted above, the A.S.E. founded in 1851 is often cited as the exemplar of a labour aristocratic craft union, pacific in temper and exclusive in its composition. To the extent that this picture is at all accurate, however, the development of the engineers' organisation in this way was dependant upon a specific economy and labour market, of which London and old-fashioned trade centres such as Birmingham and Edinburgh were the prototypes. Here, engineering shops were smaller, the proportion of millwrights (the old-established all-round craft workers in the industry) was larger and firms generally less capitalised and showing a high degree of traditional craft practices. In Lancashire the situation was somewhat different. The development of the textile machine and steam engine sector - particularly in the south Lancashire spinning region around Bolton and Oldham - powerloom engineering and the manufacture of locomotives and the production of machine tools had all served to shift the centre of

the trade away from London to the more intensely mechanised and large-scale workshops of Lancashire.<sup>99</sup>

By mid-century, therefore, Lancashire was in the van of technological change in the engineering industry. Here the growth in size of individual firms and specialisation within the process of production, both of which were concomitant upon the replacement of handicrafts by machinery, were most in evidence.<sup>100</sup> Large firms like Hibbert and Platt of Oldham, Dobson and Barlow and Hetherington of Manchester, and particularly machine tool manufacturers like James Nasmyth and Whitworth of Manchester, displayed a high level of capital intensity which created conditions of production more akin to that of unified factory enterprise and whose mechanised techniques destroyed the all-round skills and workplace authority of the millwrights. Keith Burgess has recently shown the proportion of millwrights in engineering to have been indicative of local differences in the nature of the industry. According to the 1841 census, millwrights comprised only 7% of all engineering workers in Oldham, but as many as 18% in Edinburgh.<sup>101</sup> Significantly, James Nasmyth's new methods had been pioneered in a small engineering workshop in Edinburgh before he moved to Lancashire.

It is not, therefore, surprising to find that in Lancashire engineering employers had been well placed to introduce new techniques of workshop production, notably piece-working, which had done much to dissolve the

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99. For the development of textile machine engineering alongside the cotton industry, see D. A. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry 1850-96 (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1953) Pt. 1.

100. James B. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945 (London 1970) 51-67.

101. Keith Burgess, The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience (London 1975) 5ff; Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976) 38.

traditional craft authority and pride of the engineers. A survey conducted by the A.S.E. in 1861 had revealed that piece-work was ascendant in the large scale textile machinery and stationary steam engine manufacturing districts of Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale and Bolton: in these areas, some 25% of all workers in the industry were subject to payment by the piece, whilst 75% of all piecemasters were to be found in Lancashire.<sup>102</sup> Unlike the small scale, highly skilled and versatile craft workshops of London, piece-work occasioned many bitter disputes between masters and the men essentially revolving around wages and dilution struggles.

Certainly, the 1852 lock-out in the engineering industry had been most fiercely contested in Lancashire, where labour militancy varied directly with the size of firm and level of capitalisation.<sup>103</sup> Here the militancy of the engineers was based not only upon their opposition to piece-work, but also upon their hostility to the introduction of semi-skilled, "illegal" machine workers and to the systematic overtime which employers had been strong enough to enforce. Engineering bosses like Nasmyth had occurred the disapprobation of the men by a policy of introducing less skilled workers to operate machines, thus replacing the more expensive skilled engineers.<sup>104</sup>

It is this background which helps explain the consistent militancy of engineering workers in Lancashire. The Lancashire men had followed up the successful nine hour movement in the north west of England in the

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102. M. and J. B. Jeffreys, "The Wages, Hours and Trade Customs of the Skilled Engineer in 1861", Economic History Review, XVII (1947) 27-44.

103. K. Burgess, "Technological Change and the 1852 Lock-Out in the British Engineering Industry", International Review of Social History, XIV (1969) 215-36.

104. K. Burgess, "Trade Union Policy and the 1852 Lock-Out in the British Engineering Industry", International Review of Social History, XVII (1972) 645-60.



early 1870s with a series of wage demands, by means of which large gains had been made. At Hetherton's in Manchester, for instance, a dispute was terminated in 1873 by the first important arbitration in engineering on a demand for a 2s. increase as an alternative to a threatened lock-out by the employers.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the whole of this period, the question of piece-work and issues attendant to it proved a constant thorn in the side of industrial relations in the industry. For example, in May 1887 a bitter dispute occurred in the engineering industry in Bolton in which the town was sharply divided over the question of "knobsticking", and which was accompanied by some of the most violent scenes since the days of Chartism.<sup>106</sup>

Like the miners, the engineers in Lancashire tended to support the Liberal Party in line with the national policy of their Society but, again, there was a sizeable minority for whom popular Toryism held a great deal of attraction; in Stalybridge, for instance, where there was a large textile machine engineering industry, the political allegiances of the town were distinctly Conservative and a Liberal was returned there only in the landslide election of 1906.<sup>107</sup> Once more, we cannot discount the influence of the cotton industry and the operatives working in it - with whom the engineers were often closely associated - upon the political attitudes of this group of industrial workers in the north west.

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105. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers, 90-1.

106. P. A. Harris, Class Conflict, the Trade Unions and Working Class Politics in Bolton 1875-1896 (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1971) ch. 2.

107. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 256-7, 259.



(d) The Trades Councils

A brief analysis of the Trades Councils in Lancashire may help to round off this account of the politics of the organised working class up to the 1880s, and afford some indication of the nature of labour organisation in those trades not mentioned above. Although Sidney and Beatrice Webb were wont to emphasise the political role of the Trades Councils in the struggles of labour, there is every indication that outside London - and particularly in Lancashire up to the 1880s - the political role of the Trades Councils was strictly subordinated to an industrial function of providing mutual support for local societies in dispute by their inability to present a united political face.

Prior to the upsurge of new unionism in the late 1880s, the Trades Councils in the north west were, on the whole, moderate bodies which spoke on behalf of the skilled workers comprising the major part of their membership. The Manchester and Salford Trades Council, which had been formed in 1866 at the instigation of W. H. Wood and S. C. Nicholson of the Manchester Typographical Society, both of whom had been delegates to the conference of trades in Sheffield in that year, represented only the skilled male trades in the two towns - bookbinders, tailors, plasterers, joiners, ironfounders, painters, lithographers, bakers, sadlers and spinners comprising the first council members.<sup>108</sup> In Liverpool, too, the history of the Trades Council between the 1860s and the '80s was, according to E. L. Taplin, scarcely distinguished: "Dominated by a handful of men representing the skilled trades, they represented the

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108. A recent history makes this skilled composition abundantly clear: cf. Edmund and Ruth Frow, To Make That Future Now!: A History of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council (Manchester 1976) 12-13. The First report of the Oldham trades council, too, claimed 3,500 members, all of whom were skilled workmen: cf. Oldham Trades and Labour Council Centenary 1867-1967: Handbook (Oldham 1967) 8.

prevailing attitudes of the labour aristocracy." <sup>109</sup> In Bolton, the Trades Council was controlled by a group of men around the moderate spinners' leader J. T. Fielden, whilst in Barrow the council remained in Lib-Lab hands well into the 'nineties. <sup>110</sup>

But it was not simply - as was the case at Eccles, where the A.S.E. imbued the Trades Council with a policy of quietude - that the skilled unions represented were disinclined to take a strongly political role, but that also these men were frequently divided among themselves. At Manchester, where the Trades Council was split between Conservatives and radicals, the organisation took a decision to avoid identification with any political movement in 1867, at which point the radicals seceded to form a "Trade Union Political Association" to agitate for reform of the franchise. <sup>111</sup> In Liverpool, the Trades Council could only stand aside and "deplore the present misunderstanding" which saw the great strike of seamen and dockers paralyse the port in 1879. <sup>112</sup> At least until the challenge of unskilled unionism, therefore, many of these provincial Trades Councils, representing workers whose sympathies were often divided between the two major parties, eschewed political initiative. In this situation, the attraction of a Labour Party independent of other political ties is once more apparent and in many Lancashire towns the Trades Councils and divisional Labour Party came eventually to merge, combining both industrial and political functions. <sup>113</sup> This, however, is to anticipate

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109. E. L. Taplin, "The Liverpool Trades Council 1880-1914", Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 3 (1976-77) 12.

110. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics in Bolton, op. cit; Nigel Todd, "The Labour Movement in North Lancashire c.1890-1911", Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 2 (1975-76) 9.

111. Frow, To Make That Future, 15.

112. Taplin, "Liverpool Trades Council", 12.

113. Cole, Trade Unionism Today, 184.

the impact of new unionism and socialism upon the trade unions in Lancashire in the 'eighties and after, and it is to this question that we should now turn.

### 8.3: Socialist Currents in the 1880s and 1890s

The previous section has sought to describe the nature of labour organisation and politics in the north west up to around the decade of the 1880s. By this point in time, however, a new factor had been introduced into the political make-up of Lancashire in the form of socialism and trade unionism among unskilled workers. It would be useful here to trace the progress of socialism in Lancashire in the 1880s and 1890s and, in the final section of this chapter, to document its impact upon trade unionism and labour politics up to 1906.

Nationally, the 'eighties had witnessed a revivification of socialist activity, revolving in the main around the Social Democratic Federation and the predominantly middle class Fabian Society. In the metropolis the S.D.F. had to wait until the unemployed demonstrations of the mid-'eighties provided a chance for its members to propagate their case, but in Lancashire the opportunity presented itself earlier. The formation of the Federation had almost coincided with the massive and bitter strike of Lancashire miners in 1881 against the coal-owners decision compelling them to contract out of the Employers' Liability Act. Writing in the Pall Mall Gazette in January of that year, H. M. Hyndman strongly supported the miners, whilst several days earlier he had written to Marx,<sup>114</sup>

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114. Hyndman to Marx, 15 January 1881, cited by Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 185.

Matters are ripening in the North of England. This weather will push them yet faster. Poor creatures with the pits closed and their children crying for food and warmth!...We shall be into revolution before we know it. That indeed is coming, but I want to see it come peacefully. I am going to see some of the leaders of the working classes...The movement has begun for which you have so long waited: now it has to be guided to grow.

As in London, the S.D.F. was able to expand by exploiting the distress of the workers in Lancashire and turning it to political advantage. In 1884 the Salford branch of the S.D.F. had been founded at the instigation of Henry Musgrave Reade,<sup>115</sup> whilst in March, 1885, Justice reported that S.D.F. literature was being read with interest by St. Helens miners, at that time reduced to four day working; later accounts describe the formation of S.D.F. branches in Eccles, Oldham and Pendleton, where "...many more would join, but they are afraid of the local magnates, the colliery proprietors."<sup>116</sup> According to Dona Torr, "South Lancashire early became and always remained the strongest provincial centre of the S.D.F." and, if so, this can be attributed to the activities of Tom Mann, who spent most of the year 1888 in Bolton agitating the trades and speaking from the steps of Bolton Town Hall and in nearby towns on behalf of the Federation.<sup>117</sup> In actual fact, however, it was in north Lancashire, where in 1884 the Federation had launched a campaign during the cotton strike in the Blackburn area and, by 1886, some dozen or so S.D.F. branches had sprung into being, that the Federation was able to establish its most rooted support. Hyndman himself began a long standing

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115. Henry Musgrave Reade, Christ or Socialism?: A Human Autobiography (n.d.) for the formation of the Salford S.D.F.

116. Justice, 28 March, 1885; 19 September 1885.

117. Dona Torr, Tom Mann and his Times 1856-1890, i (London 1956) 239; Tom Mann, Memoirs (London 1923) 68-70.

association with the town of Burnley with a propaganda mission in 1883,<sup>118</sup> and by the late 'eighties Lancashire had undoubtedly become the strongest provincial redoubt of the S.D.F.

Although pre-eminently a London body, the Fabian Society too had begun to take root in the industrial north west, particularly between the years 1890-92. In September 1890, the Fabians had launched their "Lancashire Campaign", a series of carefully orchestrated lectures and talks throughout the industrial north of England delivered for the most part to Liberal or radical clubs, Co-operative Societies and other interested bodies, and focusing upon a whole range of political, social and economic questions.<sup>119</sup> The campaign did much to stimulate the growth of provincial societies, which in the early 'nineties was rapid. The lecture tour was considered to have been such a success that Fabian lecturing in the north was made more or less permanent and, in 1896, a second Lancashire campaign was considered and duly executed.<sup>120</sup> There continued to be great demand from the provincial Societies for Fabian lecturing, many of which closely overlapped with the other socialist bodies, notably the I.L.P.<sup>121</sup>

In all, Fabian lecturing and the propagandizing activities of the local Societies in Lancashire had proved a great spur to socialist advance in the early 1890s. The S.D.F. was able to strengthen its foothold before the I.L.P. was founded and, through the efforts of its

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118. See Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, 60ff. for details of the Burnley campaign.

119. Edward Pease, History of the Fabian Society (London 1916) 95-8; Alan M. MacBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918 (Cambridge 1966) 179-80.

120. Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (Oxford 1965) 184.

121. Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 97, 102.



two organisers J. J. Terrett and Dan Irving, its position in the Duchy was consolidated. In 1893 Irving had accepted an offer from the Burnley S.D.F. to become the branch's full time organising secretary whilst in the same year Terrett is reported as having campaigned extensively throughout Lancashire, delivering 363 lectures and establishing some 24 new branches in the north west.<sup>122</sup> All this organising effort did not go unrewarded: in 1892 Justice spoke of "...the remarkable spread of Social-Democracy among the weavers and spinners - men who have hitherto acquiesced in the reactionary ideas of their Conservative leaders,"<sup>123</sup> and in August 1893 there was established a Lancashire District Committee of the S.D.F. comprising about 20 branches. By the end of the year, the Burnley Socialist was founded as the organ of six local Federation branches, whose aggregate membership had now reached nearly 2,000.<sup>124</sup> After ten years of continuous socialist activity in Lancashire, it was decided by the S.D.F. Executive in 1892 that the moment was propitious for a candidature in the general election of that year. Hyndman was selected to contest Burnley for the Federation and, although he did not win, he secured a creditable 1,500 votes.<sup>125</sup>

The growth of socialist agitation on the part of the S.D.F. and the Fabians in the 1880s and early '90s in the north west had, in its turn, done much to encourage the formation of trade unions among many groups of unskilled workers. In Manchester, it was mainly the socialists who began the task of organising the unskilled. Alf Barton and William Bailie of the Socialist League had assisted the carters there to form the

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122. C. Tsuzuki, H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism (Oxford 1961) 96.

123. Justice, 30 April 1892.

124. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 97.

125. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, 64-70.

Manchester and Salford General Union of Carters in 1889 and a branch of the Platelayers' and General Railway Labourers' Union was also formed. Gas workers in Salford, dissatisfied with the 12 hour shifts which they were then working, send a deputation to the Salford S.D.F. asking for assistance in forming a union. In September 1889, the new union was set in train with William Horrocks, a member of the Federation, as its first secretary.<sup>126</sup> The socialists also assisted in the formation of a Shop Assistants' Union and Navvies' and General Labourers' Union in Manchester in 1890, and a Cabmen's Union (1889) and General Labourers' Union (1890) in Bolton.<sup>127</sup> The General Union of Railway Workers and the National Union of Dock Labourers had opened branches in Barrow in 1890, and the Gas workers followed suit in 1893. In Lancaster, there were labourers' strikes at Storey Bros. linoleum factory and the wagon works in 1890.<sup>128</sup> Finally, the upsurge of new unionism in Liverpool had the effect of reinvigorating the Trades Council, which benefitted from the affiliation in 1888 of the Mersey branches of the National Amalgamated Union of Seamen and Firemen and in 1890 of the five Liverpool branches of the National Union of Dock Labourers; and in Oldham, socialists were the driving force behind the formation of the Oldham Gas Workers and General Labourers' Union, and unions of Railway workers, Shop assistants and spinners' piecers.<sup>129</sup>

Throughout Lancashire in this period, S.D.F.'ers were well to the fore in unskilled agitation, and it was this ferment which provided the

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126. For details of new unionism in Manchester, see Frow, To Make That Future, 28-30.

127. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics in Bolton, ch. 3.

128. Todd, "The Labour Movement in North Lancashire", 3-4 for details of new unionism in Barrow and Lancaster.

129. Taplin, "The Liverpool Trades Council", 13; Oldham Trades and Labour Council Handbook, 15-24.

background to the formation of the Manchester I.L.P. Towards the end of 1891, John Trevor had taken the initiative in forming his Manchester Labour Church. Dedicated to the principle of "God in the Labour Movement", the Labour congregation liaised closely with the other socialist organisations in the city emphasising the spiritual component of socialism. In that same year, Robert Blatchford had begun publication of his pioneering labour paper The Clarion. In 1892, a move was made to organise a united May Day demonstration in Manchester, following the lead which London had shown the previous year. A number of unions decided to join forces with the socialist societies and, on Sunday 1 May, the march from Stevenson's Square to Alexandre Park took place. Laurence Thompson has memorably evoked the atmosphere in Manchester on that first May Day: 130

Into Alexandre Park they went, where the buds were bursting on the trees, and the sun shone, and the Police stood stolidly about the six platforms. There were Comrade Sidney Webb of the London County Council, and Don Roberto, Conninghame Graham, with his pointed beard and his silver wit, looking as if he had just stepped from a Valasquez painting. William Johnson, the dashing Prince Rupert who commanded the Shop Assistants' Union, the little fighting cock Alfred Settle, Horsfall of the Workmens Times staff, and half a dozen more. They spoke and the crowds cheered. No matter what they said, the crowds cheered, for it was May Day, and the banners curled bravely in the wind.

Blatchford was Chairman at the first platform, a covered cart like a camels cage, through the bars of which he smiled his heart out upon the happy crowd. He had a headache and a bad cold, and no-one heard his speech except the police. But when he cried, "Hands up for Socialism", every hand was raised. Before nightfall, between sixty thousand and a hundred thousand working men and women had committed themselves to demanding nationalisation of the land, an eight hour day, payment of M.P.s, shorter Parliaments, adult suffrage and an Independent Labour Party.

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130. Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman (London 1951) 87.

At John Trevor's insistence, a Manchester and Salford I.L.P. was founded by Blatchford a few days later: "It was able to enrol at once almost seven hundred members", Thompson observed, "May Day had been a triumph indeed."

Following the lead of the Manchester I.L.P., local branches began to emerge throughout Lancashire; by 1895 there were 18 local I.L.P.s in the Manchester and Salford district alone, 10 around Liverpool and, in all, some 73 branches throughout the whole of Lancashire and Cheshire. 131 During the 1890s, the S.D.F. proved a serious competitor to the I.L.P. in Lancashire, particularly as in some areas it was an older and more firmly established body whereas the I.L.P. had grown up quickly and had not yet developed a solid organisation. But from the start there was, by all accounts, close co-operation between the S.D.F. and I.L.P. in matters of organisation and propaganda and, after 1900, between the S.D.F. and local L.R.C.s. The Lancashire branches of the S.D.F. always stood to the right of the national executive of the Federation. Many of its members were trade unionists in the spinning and particularly the weaving towns and were anxious to maintain the S.D.F. link with the unions through the L.R.C. When the S.D.F. met in conference in Birmingham in 1901 and agreed to withdraw from the L.R.C., the motion was apparently opposed by the Lancashire branches and an Accrington delegate declared the proposal to be "foolish", suggesting that Federation policy ought to aim to "permeate and capture the trade unions." 132

Certainly, by this period the socialists of the I.L.P. and the S.D.F. had made much headway in the trade unions. In Bolton, the socialists were able to build successfully upon new unionism, but remained resolutely

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131. I.L.P. Directory and Branch Returns (1895) 6.

132. Cited by Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 136.

opposed by the Trades Council which was dominated by Liberals and Conservatives.<sup>133</sup> In Barrow, by contrast, the upsurge of new unionism had led to the growth of socialist ideas within the Trades Council, and this may have been behind its decision to contest the municipal elections of 1892 in the labour interest.<sup>134</sup> In Eccles, the Trades Council really got off the ground only after the socialists, and particularly Leonard Hall, an early organiser of the navvies working on the new Manchester Ship Canal, had begun to agitate the unskilled trades and from the start it took a resolutely socialist line.<sup>135</sup> By 1895, five out of the nine members of the Executive Committee of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council were socialists and the body began to play a more active and forceful role in industrial disputes.<sup>136</sup> As always, the S.D.F. remained strongest in the north of the county, where a Federation member had been elected Vice-President of the Burnley Weavers' Association in 1895.

The socialist effort in Lancashire during the 1890s found additional expression in the Clarion Clubs and Associations and through Labour Church congregations. Blatchford's socialism appears to have caught on in a big way in Lancashire, where The Clarion was widely read by the factory folk in the cotton industry.<sup>137</sup> The various aspects of the

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133. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics in Bolton, chs. 3-4.

134. Todd, "The Labour Movement in North Lancashire", 6; see further, idem., "Trade Unions and the Engineering Industry Dispute at Barrow-in-Furness", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 35.

135. John Smethurst, "The Eccles Trades Council", paper delivered to the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 18 October 1975.

136. Frow, To Make that Future, 36.

137. See below, chs. 9 and 13 for further detail on both the Clarion and Labour Church movements.



Clarion Fellowship - the Cinderella Clubs launched in 1890, the Clarion Clubs, choirs and bands, Glee Clubs, Clarion Scouts and Field Clubs - were virtually confined to Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, where they overlapped closely with the I.L.P. and other socialist bodies.<sup>138</sup>

Such was Blatchford's influence that during the South African war his patriotic views encouraged the emergence of "jingo socialism" in S.D.F. and I.L.P. branches in Lancashire in opposition to the national leadership.<sup>139</sup> Soon after the formation of his Manchester Labour Church, John Trevor saw his idea being taken up by working men and women throughout the whole of the industrial north. Labour Churches sprang up in about 30 towns in Lancashire during the course of the 'nineties and, often associated with or off-shoots of Labour Church congregations, socialist Sunday schools were established in most centres.<sup>140</sup>

In all, therefore, Lancashire was well to the forefront of socialist agitation and the movement for independent labour representation in the 1890s, second only indeed to the West Riding of Yorkshire. Tom Mann, now secretary of the I.L.P., described Lancashire and Yorkshire in 1894 as "the stronghold of the movement", and recent research has confirmed that there was no manifest change in this geographical distribution of strength between the 1890s and 1910.<sup>141</sup> Lancashire was also the main

138. David Prynne, "The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain", Journal of Contemporary History, XI (1976) 66-9.

139. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 111.

140. D. F. Summers, The Labour Church and Allied Movements (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1958) 312-13; Fred Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain 1892-1939", International Review of Social History, XI (1966) 18-47.

141. I.L.P. General Secretary's Monthly Report, National Administrative Council Minutes, March 1894; see further D. Hopkin, "The Membership of the I.L.P. 1904-10: A Spatial and Occupational Analysis", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 175-97.

source of the Social Democratic Federations's strength outside London. Of the Federation's 82 branches in 1894, some 27 were in Lancashire and thirty in London.<sup>142</sup> In the general election of 1895, the I.L.P. had put into the field 28 candidates, of whom 8 contested constituencies in Lancashire; the candidates included George Barnes (Rochdale), Fred Brocklehurst (Bolton), Pete Curran (Barrow), J. E. Johnson (N.E. Manchester), Dr. Pankhurst (Gorton) and James Sexton at Ashton-under-Lyne and, in all, they secured some 14,810 votes, a creditable proportion of the 44,000 or so votes cast for socialist candidates in the whole election.<sup>143</sup> For the first time in British history, the socialist message was being put across to a wider audience; we should now turn to trace the effects of this socialist current upon the trade unions in Lancashire and the course of labour politics up to 1906.

#### 8.4: Labour Politics and Trade Unionism in later Nineteenth Century Lancashire

The period 1890-1906 saw a number of important developments taking place within the trade union movement in Lancashire, due in part at least, to the impact of the growing socialist awareness. But overall, a wide range of factors were at work, shifting the policies of the cotton operatives, the miners and the engineers towards labourism and the notion of independent labour representation.

In most respects, the cotton spinning unions continued very much upon the moderate course which elevated the close regulation of the

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142. Justice, 3 February 1894.

143. For details of I.L.P. electoral showings in Lancashire, see G. D. H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (London 1950) 272.

supply of labour to pride of place.<sup>144</sup> This moderation is perhaps reflected in the pattern of industrial relations which prevailed in the industry. There was a long tradition of associations of employers as well as of workers in cotton, and the revival of trade unionism among the spinners had precipitated the formation of several employers' organisations which by the late 1880s and 1890s had emerged as comprehensive bodies: the United Cotton Spinners Association (1888) and the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Association (1891) in spinning, and the United Cotton Manufacturers Association in the weaving sector.<sup>145</sup> It was in concert with the F.M.C.S.A. that the spinning operatives concluded the Brooklands Agreement in 1893, the compact "...which regulated the spinning section of the industry without dispute for about twenty years."<sup>146</sup>

In 1890-91 there had occurred a rash of "bad spinning" disagreements which came to a head in 1891 with a dispute at Stalybridge. After a lock-out imposed by the employers, an agreement was reached providing that work should begin again and stipulating that, where bad spinning was proved, the men were entitled to compensation.<sup>147</sup> The employers, however, were not satisfied; in September, 1892, the Federation imposed a 5% wage cut and in November a lock-out began. In March, 1893, an agreement was concluded between the employers headed by Charles Macara, a well known Manchester manufacturer, and the operatives, whose leader was James Mawsdley, at the Brooklands Hotel on the outskirts of Manchester. Though a reduction in wages was agreed upon, the most important aspect of

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<sup>144</sup>. S. J. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry: A Study in Economic Development (Manchester 1904) ch. 9.

<sup>145</sup>. For details, see Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, ch. 5.

<sup>146</sup>. Cole and Postgate, The British Common People, 438.

<sup>147</sup>. For details, see Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, ch. 9; Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 114-15.

the deal was that which for the first time provided the spinning industry with central and systematic machinery for negotiation and conciliation. General adjustments in wages were to take place annually within prescribed limits, whilst a procedure was laid down for referring unsettled mill disputes to arbitration.<sup>148</sup> Without doubt, the Brooklands agreement initiated a new phase in industrial relations in the cotton industry. It was, Macara recalled sometime after the event, "the dawn of a new era breaking upon us",<sup>149</sup> whilst on the side of the operatives, too, there was widespread agreement that Brooklands was "The Magna Carta of the Cotton Trade", and Charles Macara a man in whom they could "...place implicit confidence, who is absolutely fair in all his dealings, takes a broad and liberal view of the trade, and is always anxious to consult the welfare of both employers and employed."<sup>150</sup>

The Brooklands conference governed the spinning industry from 1893 to 1905, in which year it was formally terminated by the unions on the grounds that the arbitration machinery was too cumbersome, and tended to work against them. But in the interim, the total number of recorded disputes fell from 135 in 1890 and 156 in 1891, to 52 in 1898 and 44 in 1899; although there was a tendency for the number of unofficial disputes to increase, there was no dispute of any size in the industry between 1894-1900.<sup>151</sup> In 1892, the weaving sector had instituted a new Uniform List and this, too, tended to abate conflict within the industry, at least for the time being. Although strikes did occur in

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148. Smith, ibid., ch. 9; Clegg, ibid., 116-17; Webb, Industrial Democracy, 200-204.

149. Charles W. Macara, Recollections (London 1921) 26.

150. Cotton Factory Times, 23, 30 January 1903.

151. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 119; Burgess, Origins of British Industrial Relations, 274ff.

picketing was not normally required as they remained, in a sense, domestic matters rarely exciting wider public interest.

In all, then, the general mood of the operatives during the 1890s seems to have been quiescent. The weavers' associations continued to thrive and in 1900 they claimed a membership of 109,000, 81,500 of whom were in the Amalgamation. The spinners had fallen from their peak of 19,662 in 1891 to around 18,000 in 1900 but, with an overall density of over 95%, they were certainly one of the best organised trades in the country. The membership of the cardroom associations fluctuated at around 25,000. The cotton operatives continued to place their faith in the efficacy of Parliamentary activity and, to this end, these three unions had come together in 1889 to form the United Textile Factory Workers' Association (U.T.F.W.A.), a body formed exclusively for Parliamentary purposes and, focusing the very considerable political influence of the workers, it was next to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain perhaps the most powerful labour organisation in the country. <sup>152</sup>

The tradition of Parliamentary activity on the part of the cotton operatives was, of course, well established. We have already noted that, in 1872, the cotton unions had revamped their Factory Committees as the Factory Acts Reform Association to lobby for the 54 hour week; in 1883, the Association was resuscitated and in 1886 there had been set in train the Northern Counties' Factory Acts Reform Association to press for better legal enforcement of factory legislation. Growing out of this latest experiment, the U.T.F.W.A. was a federation of the major cotton unions whose sole object was, according to the Webbs, "...the removal of any grievance...for which Parliamentary or Governmental Interference is required", <sup>153</sup> and beyond which the constituent unions were in charge

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152. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 435; idem., Industrial Democracy, 123-24, 258-60.

153. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 258.



of their own affairs. However, split as it was between the Conservative spinners and the Liberal weavers, the U.T.F.W.A. could press no settled or united political line and rarely came into conflict with the cotton bosses.

The U.T.F.W.A. was, in actual fact, remarkably successful in lobbying for industrial reforms. In 1889 the Cotton Cloth Factories Act, which controlled "steaming" in the weaving sheds by stipulating maximum humidities, had been secured, whilst the weavers had successfully agitated for the inclusion of the "particulars clause", appertaining specifically to textile production, in the Factory Act of 1891. As a Tory stronghold, Lancashire was of some importance to the 1895 Conservative administration, who sought to propitiate the operatives when steaming again became a problem with a second Cotton Cloth Factories Act in 1897. If by the end of the century, as Hugh Clegg and his colleagues have observed, "...the cotton unions, unlike the Miners' Federation, could look back over the past decade with some satisfaction", <sup>154</sup> it was not simply due to the skilful lobbying of the U.T.F.W.A. leaders but also because the body was divided between support for the two major parties, and there were many seats in Lancashire which either party might hope to win. Unlike the miners, therefore, the cotton operatives were able to curry favour with governments of all shades and particularly the Conservatives, by whom most of the major victories of the workers had been conceded.

As regards its relations with the employers, the U.T.F.W.A. was usually on good terms. On the one occasion that the Association took united and effective political action - namely, in the agitation which began in 1894 against the Indian cotton duties - it was in concert with,

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154. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 245.

and not in opposition to, the employers. Nor were the operatives in fundamental disagreement with their masters over the Half-Timers Bill of 1899, for both parties were opposed to this mildly progressive measure, the workers on the grounds that raising the age limit at which children could go to the mills from 11 to 12 would result in loss of earnings. The instinct of the cotton unions had always been to suspect the intrusion of party politics into their affairs and they remained on the sidelines, as it were, applying pressure as and when necessary to both of the major parties. Besides being divided between the Conservatives and the Liberals, the cotton workers - unlike the miners - were not concentrated enough to dominate the vote in any one constituency, rarely in fact exceeding 30% in those areas in which the U.T.F.W.A. was strongest. <sup>155</sup>

There was, initially at least therefore, little sympathy to be discerned among the cotton unions for independent labour representation, let alone socialism. The weavers were perhaps the keenest section of the operatives in this respect yet, even as late as 1900, the General Council of their Amalgamation insisted that "the question of Labour Representation in Parliament so far as this Amalgamation is concerned, be not entertained." <sup>156</sup> Divided in their political loyalties, the cotton unions did not seem receptive to the idea of the L.R.C. when that body was first established in 1900; they would have preferred, perhaps, labour representation along the lines of their own abortive bi-partisan scheme mooted in 1895 - Mawsdely, the secretary of the spinners' union to stand as a Conservative and David Holmes of the weavers to be put up as a Liberal. The cotton workers had no grudge against labour representation as such but they feared, as Thomas Ashton noted during

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155. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 258-64.

156. Cited by Hopwood, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 59.

the debate at the 1899 T.U.C. to establish independent labour representation, that because the Lancashire workers were deeply divided, "if their society were to intervene in politics, it would go down immediately."<sup>157</sup>

Moreover, the cotton unions had been instrumental in warding off the socialist challenge to the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee during the 'eighties and 'nineties. Seemingly impervious to the new ideas being put about by the "advanced" delegates, the cotton unions had rallied around Henry Broadhurst and the Committee when they came under fire in 1889.<sup>158</sup> In 1895, they were one of the big battalions firmly supporting the exclusion of the Trades Councils and the revised card system of voting which could only have worked to their own advantage. Yet, although the textile unions were by no means converted to co-operating with the I.L.P. - the major socialist body comprising the L.R.C. - a number of factors occurring after about 1900 were instrumental in pushing them to embrace the idea of independent labour representation in Parliament. Dissatisfaction with the lobbying methods had begun to arise in 1899 when the Half-Timers Bill was passed; as noted above, the operatives were virulently opposed to this measure and the failure of lobbying to avert its passage undoubtedly strengthened the case for the Parliamentary representation of labour.<sup>159</sup>

In 1900, Ramsay MacDonald, as secretary of the L.R.C., had begun what would surely have been the arduous task of convincing the district unions in the textile industry to affiliate to the new body, had there not occurred the so-called Blackburn Picketing Case. The indignation

157. Cited by Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 117.

158. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 401.

159. F. Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics: A History of the L.R.C. (London 1958) 100.

of the cotton unions to the affront of Taff Vale had been muted until an incident at Blackburn, which showed that even when no question of intimidation arose picketing could make trade unions liable for civil damages, brought the legal assault nearer to home.<sup>160</sup> Gradually, concern over the union's liability for damages grew and, as a result of this episode, the Northern Weavers requested the U.T.F.W.A. in January 1902, "to take the necessary steps to secure direct representation in Parliament." The following month, another obstacle to the political conversion of the cotton unions was removed with the death of Mawsdley, whose Conservative predilections inclined this influential figure in the cotton world to distrust the I.L.P. and indeed the whole idea of politics intruding into the affairs of the unions.

In June, 1902, there occurred a vacancy in the Clitheroe constituency and the weavers seized the opportunity to put forward their own man, David Shackleton, who was returned unopposed as Labour M.P. for that division. Shackleton's candidature, which had been supported by the U.T.F.W.A., proved to be a catalyst in shaping relations between that body and the L.R.C. From this point onwards, all doubts as to the wisdom of mixing politics and trade unionism vanished. At the instigation of the weavers, the U.T.F.W.A. held a ballot of all its members which showed an overwhelming majority to be in favour of Parliamentary representation. The supposedly Conservative spinners voted by more than three to one in favour of the motion<sup>161</sup> and, as a direct consequence,

160. For details, see Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, 78ff.

161. Cotton Factory Times, 6 February 1903: the voting figures were,

	For	Against
Cardroom workers	14,173	4,573
Spinners	9,978	3,057
Beamers, Twisters and Drawers	2,509	377
Weavers	54,637	11,352
Overlookers	1,210	170
Bleachers and Dyers	647	327
TOTAL	84,154	19,856

the U.T.F.W.A. affiliated to the L.R.C. in January 1903.

The conversion of one of the most powerful and best organised "old" unions to a political role and support of the L.R.C. was underlined by the selection of two further candidates to contest Parliamentary seats - A. H. Gill at Bolton and Thomas Ashton at Oldham, both of them spinners' officials. In no sense, however, can the shift in the policies of the cotton unions be seen as a victory for socialism. "Labour representation" remained for them to be interpreted in a sectional light, but above all it was the expediency of representation by a political party independent of both the Conservatives and the Liberals which had been the overriding consideration in the minds of the union officials. It was, nevertheless, an important shift in political strategy and one which reflected the increased favour with which the ideas being propagated by the socialists in Lancashire were coming to be held by the factory population.

The 1881 miners' strike in Lancashire had left the men impoverished and union funds depleted yet, in spite of the fierce localism which often characterised union policy, the Lancashire men were in the van of the movement to secure some effective form of unity amongst the miners in the country at large. <sup>162</sup> By the mid-'eighties, the L.C.M.F. had seemed to be ailing; membership had fallen from 16,526 in 1884 to 7,968 in 1886 and the financial position became equally precarious. By 1888, however, the coal trade generally was experiencing some improvement and the fortunes of the Federation revived without recourse to sliding scale agreements, which were in any case being terminated by this time in most other areas. As noted above, the initial impetus behind the formation of the M.F.G.B. in 1889 had come from Lancashire and Yorkshire, whose secretaries,

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162. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 184-8.



Thomas Ashton and Ben Pickard, had worked together closely in informal collaboration since the early '80s. When the price of coal had begun to rise in 1888, the Lancashire miners called a national conference on wages and it was out of the subsequent agitation that the Federation emerged.<sup>163</sup> By 1892, trade union membership in the mining industry stood at around 300,000, more than half of whom were in the Federation; of this figure, Lancashire and Cheshire provided about 30,000, although there remained a significant minority of miners in the region as yet unaffiliated.<sup>164</sup>

No county benefited more than Lancashire from the formation of the M.F.G.B., where the union gained visibly in strength and the coal owners came to treat it with greater circumspection. The Federation continued to advance in Lancashire during the 1890s, but the experience of the great lock-out of 1893 had shown that the pronounced localism of the district associations remained a threat to solidarity in the north west and, as a consequence, the Lancashire Federation was revamped in 1897 with a new centralised structure. As a sop to localist sentiment the district unions were still permitted to exist, although they lost most of their real powers.<sup>165</sup>

If the miners' organisation in Lancashire perhaps resembled that of the textile operatives in its distinctly local, not to say parochial, foundations, a second similarity lay in "...the constancy with which both the miners and the cotton operatives have adhered to the legislative protection of the Standard of Life as a leading principle of their trade unionism."<sup>166</sup> The M.F.G.B. was pledged from the outset to secure

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163. For the background to the M.F.G.B., see Page Arnot, The Miners, ch. 3.

164. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 99.

165. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 202.

166. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 313; see also 415.

the Eight Hour Day for the miners, and it is their Lib-Lab politics, geared to lobbying for this and similar legislative advances, that most obviously characterises the policy of the miners in this period. The miners, of course, had their own M.P.s elected with Liberal backing and support and on the whole they were hostile to the movement for independent labour representation.<sup>167</sup> But the Federation was not as subservient to the dictates of the Parliamentary Committee as perhaps the textile unions might on occasions be, as was shown by the way in which they roundly turned upon Broadhurst and the "Old" Front Bench over the question of the Eight Hour Day at the Liverpool Congress of 1890.

During the 1890s, however, the Miners' Federation was coming increasingly to question its Lib-Lab orientation. For one thing, its lobbying tactics had proved nowhere near as successful as those of the textile operatives. Persistent lobbying by the miners had achieved improvements to the Mines Regulation Act (1887) by amendments in 1894 and 1896, but these gains were entirely over-shadowed for most of the membership by the failure to carry an Eight Hour Bill.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the miners' Lib-Lab'ism seemed to be paying fewer and fewer dividends. In 1886, five miners' M.P.s had joined Thomas Burt on the backbenches and, with the miners' vote growing all the time, there seemed every reason to expect more successful candidates in the very near future. But, by 1900, the number of miners' M.P.s had actually been reduced to five, and the whole of the period 1885-1900 had seen only nine new candidatures. Considering the miners' fervent commitment to achieving the Eight Hour Day this is perhaps surprising, although one reason was

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167. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 109.

168. Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 240.

undoubtedly that the co-operation and goodwill of the Liberals, upon which miners' candidates were dependant, had simply begun to evaporate. <sup>169</sup>

Towards the end of the 1890s, the miners, in line with the whole of the trade union movement, had begun to recognise the need for more aggressive political action. The Liberal administration of 1892-95 had proved itself to be supine in the field of social legislation and the knowledge that strike action might very well entail legal risks in the wake of Taff Vale served only to strengthen the miners' officials in the belief that the way to Eight Hour legislation lay through political action. There was little sympathy for the newly formed L.R.C. on the part of the miners' union, confident of their ability to elect their own M.P.s. <sup>170</sup> But, between 1900 and 1902, there occurred a major shift in policy and the M.F.G.B. embarked upon an ambitious scheme designed to secure Parliamentary representation on a much increased scale. This scheme remained in operation until 1909, at which point the Federation belatedly decided to affiliate to the Labour Party. <sup>171</sup>

The Lancashire miners were the exception within the Federation, however, and they had opted to affiliate to the L.R.C. as early as 1903. Here, the demand for independent labour representation as advocated by the socialists had gained a more sympathetic hearing than at pit-heads elsewhere in the country. Certainly, the attraction of an independent third party to the Lancashire miners' leaders who, like the bulk of their membership, were divided as between the Liberals and Conservatives was considerable. Sam Woods, Thomas Aspinwall and Robert Isherwood were all

169. Gregory, Miners and British Politics, 14-27.

170. Pelling, History of British Trade Unionism, 117.

171. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics, 19-27.

of Lib-Lab sympathies, Jesse Butler and Tom Grenall were socialists, whilst Thomas Ashton was favourably placed as Federation secretary to espouse his Conservatism. But, more than this, the socialist organisations in Lancashire had been able to make much headway among the miners. The I.L.P. and the S.D.F. remained strongly placed in Lancashire throughout the 'nineties and, as has been noted, both were active in the coalfields. The unity of the socialists and the miners was displayed during the 1893 lock-out in the north west. Both socialist organisations comprised a number of miners who figured prominently in the union and those not connected with the industry still endeavoured to identify themselves with the miners' struggle by holding meetings, raising funds or helping with relief work. The dedication of the socialists during the dispute helped endear them to large numbers of miners, and they soon began to reap electoral rewards. In 1893, Jesse Butler successfully stood as the I.L.P. candidate at Openshaw for the Manchester City Council, whilst a local correspondent to The Workman's Times credited the victory of the S.D.F. in securing a seat on Burnley council to the miners: "Comrade A. G. Wolfe permeated socialism among the miners. They not only voted for us, but worked with an enthusiasm and determination never excelled." 172

By the mid-1890s the Lancashire miners remained divided in their political loyalties - in 1893 a short-lived Conservative Labour Union had actually arisen in Lancashire - but the attraction of Liberalism was visibly waning; after 1895 no miner stood for Parliament under Liberal colours in the county. The miners had been coming up against the "...stupid and grudging attitude of local Liberal Associations" 173 and, in 1900, the Lancashire Federation resolved to run its own candidates.

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172. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 218-19; Workman's Times, 11 November 1893.

173. R. C. K. Ensor, England 1870-1914 (Oxford 1936) 222.



"I am afraid that we are moving too fast", complained the cautious Thomas Ashton, but even so the Lancashire miners had made provisional arrangements to put forward three candidatures by 1902, and of course they had little or no compunction about contesting seats already held by the Liberals. This obviously raised the question of their relations with the L.R.C. and, in consequence, the Federation agreed to affiliate to the full extent of its 37,000 membership in 1903. The Lancashire miners were not only, therefore, far ahead of the other constituent unions of the M.F.G.B. in the extent to which they had embraced the need for the independent representation of the working class at Westminster and degree to which they had been permeated by socialist ideas; but they were also to some extent ahead of the L.R.C., in that there was little sympathy among the miners for any electoral arrangement between Labour and Liberal candidates.

The policies of the A.S.E., which led that Society to affiliate to the L.R.C. in 1903, may be dealt with here much more briefly. Once more, there is some indication that engineers in the north west, where piece-working, machine tool production and the dilution of skills were primary concerns, were well to the fore of the agitation calling for labour representation in Parliament.

The erstwhile solid Liberalism of the A.S.E. had begun to be shaken in the 1880s by the agitation of the "advanced" unionists like Tom Mann and John Burns, with their calls for a more aggressive trade policy and vitriolic attacks upon Broadhurst and the Old Front Bench of the T.U.C. For the 1890 Congress, the Society chose both socialists as two of their five delegates, impressing upon them all a recommendation to vote for the legal limitation of the hours of work, whilst in 1891 Mann was only narrowly beaten for the secretaryship of the Amalgamation by John



Anderson. <sup>174</sup> Mann's campaign, which was fought around a policy of opening up the Society to the less qualified workers in the industry, had its effects in the changes to the union's structure effected by the Leeds Delegate Meeting of 1892. Here, according to the historian of the A.S.E: "Sweeping changes were made in the rule book in an attempt to bring the structure and policy of the Society into line with the tremendous growth which had taken place in the industry and in the Society since the framework of the organisation had been laid down in 1850." <sup>175</sup> The number of full time officials was increased and entrance barriers were lowered with the express purpose of opening the ranks of this hitherto aristocratic union to practically all the workers in the industry. The effects of new unionism can be seen here clearly at work, advertising "the development of a spirit of militancy greater than had been seen in the Society for twenty years." <sup>176</sup>

This was the background to the great lock-out in the engineering industry of 1897, which pitted the union's "new spirit" - symbolised by the election of George Barnes, an I.L.P. member, to the general secretaryship of the A.S.E. in that year - against the intransigent Employers' Federation of Engineering Associations, founded in 1896 with the obvious intention of countering the Amalgamation. In 1897, the Federation had intervened in a dispute in London where the engineers and a number of other unions were striking for the institution of an Eight Hour Day. The Federation ordered a national lock-out, thus precipitating a struggle which was to last six months and brought into issue the whole question

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174. Webb, History of Trade Unionism, 408.

175. Jeffreys, Story of the Engineers, 136; Eric Hobsbawn, ed., Labour's Turning Point (London 1948) 106.

176. ibid., 136; see further, Clegg, History of British Trade Unions, 138ff.

of trade unionism itself. Assisted by the systematic use of blackleg "free" labour, the employers proved too strong for the men, who decided to sue for terms in January of 1898. Not only had the demand for the Eight Hour Day to be withdrawn, but the employers insisted in addition upon their right to determine what class of workmen should be employed on new machinery. 177

The terms of settlement of the 1897-98 lock-out, which were harsh and were to colour industrial relations in the industry up until 1914, had the effect of intensifying the more important issues confronting the Lancashire section of the industry. Every Federated employer was to be allowed to introduce piece-work, whilst the regulations surrounding overtime working were so lax as to give the employers almost complete control in this field. The "machine question" still loomed large and dilution of skills remained a hotly contested issue. Not surprisingly, it was the workers in the textile machine districts of Oldham and Bolton, where piecework was most extensively practised and mechanisation most fully advanced, who took the lead on these issues around the turn of the century. 178

In common with the whole trade union movement, the engineers' freedom of action had been severely circumscribed by the Taff Vale decision, one of the more important factors leading an active section of the Society to look to Parliamentary action. The rules permitting political action by the A.S.E. had also been widened in 1892 and, in 1900, the

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177. Pelling, History of Trade Unionism, 112-13. The growth of the engineering employers' association, and the "free labour" question, is treated by John Saville, "Trade Unions and Free Labour: The Background to the Taff Vale Decision", in Asa Briggs and idem., Essays in Labour History (London 1960) 317-50. See further, R. O. Clark, "The Dispute in the British Engineering Industry 1897-98", Economica, XXIV (1957) 120-37.

178. Jeffreys, Story of the Engineers, 154; for the full terms of settlement, see A. Marsh, Industrial Relations in Engineering (London 1965) 73-4, 250-55.

Society was represented at the foundation conference of the L.R.C. In 1903, the membership of the Society endorsed the Committee and in the following year the first levies were taken in its support. In all, this represented an enormous shift in policy on the part of what was once the most exclusive and consistently Liberal union in the country, a shift which can only be understood by reference to wider economic changes in the later half of the nineteenth century and, in particular, the conditions in engineering facing the workers.

#### 8.5: Conclusions: The Election of 1906 in Lancashire

As noted above, the victories of the Labour Representation Committee in the general election of 1906, which brought into being the Labour Party in Parliament, were a milestone in the history of labour representation. Moreover, the success of the Committee in Lancashire, where no less than 13 of the 29 L.R.C. members were returned, securing there some 103,263 votes - or about 41% of the popular vote cast in those constituencies <sup>179</sup> - is indicative of the extent of political change in the north west over the past half century. We began this chapter by noticing the emergence of popular Toryism among the urban working class after 1868 and some of the more important factors contributing to this phenomenon. By 1906, however, the swing against the Conservatives in Lancashire was enormous. In 1900, the Conservatives held 47 out of the 58 seats in the Duchy, with around 56.6% of the vote in the north west as a whole; after the 1906 election, they held only 15 seats, and their share of the vote had fallen to 43.5%.

Part of the explanation for this remarkable shift in political allegiances must lie in the conjunction of socialist influence and trade

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179. Calculated from Cole, British Working Class Politics, 283.

union strength in Lancashire during these years. Unlike the West Riding of Yorkshire, where unionism was on the whole much weaker, the strength of the socialist organisations in Lancashire was complemented by the support of the powerful textile and mining unions, both of which by 1906 had thrown their weight behind the demand for the independent representation of working men. But another reason may be, as P. F. Clarke has cogently argued, that the Labour victory in Lancashire must be seen as part and parcel of the revitalisation of the Liberal Party in 1906 and 1910, and the reawakening of both intellectual and organisational forces within the Party which resulted from the replacement of communal politics by the alignments of social class. 180

It is true that, in 1906, traditionally Tory Lancashire spurned many of its ancient allegiances to both the landed and manufacturing interests. At Newton, J. A. Seddon of the Shop Assistants defeated a member of the famous St. Helens glass manufacturing family, the Pilkingtons, whilst at Westhoughton W. Tyson Wilson of the Carpenters resolutely saw off Lord Stanley, the heir of the great estates of the Earl of Derby. At Barrow in Furness, the socially and religiously fissured workforce of the shipyards and steelworks voted more or less as a unit for the first time in 1906 in electing Charles Duncan in preference to C. W. Cayzer, the wealthy shipowner who had held the division for the Conservatives since 1892; whilst the predominantly working class North East Manchester division, which had never elected a Liberal before 1906, in that year

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180. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, ch. 13, et. passim. However, Alan Fowler has disputed Clarke's claim that the Liberal Party not only accommodated, but was also revitalised by, the resurgence of class politics before 1914. Pointing to the "advance of labour" in Lancashire between 1900 and 1910, Fowler argues that the "clear shift" in working class support from both the Liberals and the Conservatives to Labour could only "herald the end of the two party system and the creation of a three party system": cf. "Lancashire and the New Liberalism", Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 4 (1976-77) 36-62.



sent J. R. Clynes to Westminster to serve on behalf of the Labour Party. In Preston, a town with a high proportion of Roman Catholics of both indigenous and Irish extraction, the Conservatives had been consistently successful until J. T. Macpherson captured one of the borough's two seats in 1906. <sup>181</sup>

To a great extent, therefore, the specific concatenation of social, ethnic, religious and economic factors which had helped to shape the complexion of Lancashire politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century were weakening. And yet if "communal" politics were, by this time, giving way to the more modern exigencies of social class, it nevertheless remains true that the success of the Labour Party in Lancashire was founded upon the weakness of Liberalism in the county, a legacy of the popular Tory tradition. The electoral arrangement concluded between Ramsay MacDonald and the Liberals in 1903 which determined that, as far as possible, L.R.C. and Liberal candidates should not split the vote by opposing one another, worked particularly well in Lancashire where the Liberals were weak in most places and in no position to resist the claims of labour. <sup>182</sup> At the same time, both the textile operatives and the miners, the two strongest groups of industrial workers, were ready to put up L.R.C. candidates. It was in Lancashire, therefore, that the electoral arrangements worked most effectively. The Liberals proved most accommodating in the matter of candidatures and, in consequence, not one of the Lancashire seats was won by the L.R.C. without at least the tacit support of official Liberalism.

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181. Details from Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, 244, 261, 268-9, 275.

182. For details of the electoral arrangement, see Bealey and Pelling, Labour and Politics, ch. 6.





SOCIALISM AT BRANCH LEVEL, 1890-1906

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...one of the effects of the I.L.P. movement is to create a capacity for enjoyment in the men and women connected with it.

The Labour Echo, 1 January 1898

An attempt was made in the preceding chapter to outline some of the general, but more important, social and economic factors influencing the course of political change in later nineteenth century Lancashire and the broad character of labour politics in the same period. This background analysis must be kept in mind when, in this and the remaining chapters of this study, we turn to a detailed examination of socialist politics and beliefs at the local level during the years 1890-1906. The present chapter aims to explore the nature of political life and beliefs, activities and agitations - in short, the all-round socialist culture - to be found at the branch level in Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> Having clearly specified the conceptions of socialism held by working people in the north west, subsequent chapters will trace the genesis and rooting of these beliefs in the social milieu of the working class community.

A theoretical framework for the analysis of working class social belief was advanced early on in this study and by reference to which, it was argued, the evolution of socialism might be more fully comprehended. It was suggested there that the structural and ideological environment in which British socialism emerged - the substance, in fact, of Part II

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1. This chapter represents a revised version of my article, "Aspects of Socialism at Branch Level, 1890-1906: Some Notes Towards Analysis", in Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 4 (1976-77) 6-35.

above - ought to be complemented by an appreciation of the active and innovative role played by working men and women themselves, an on-going micro-sociological process to be located within the social relationships of the working class community and its culture. To this end, we now turn to examine in some depth the nature of socialist belief and activities in later nineteenth century Lancashire, before accounting for the crystallisation of those beliefs at the community level. Although the broad trajectory of the socialist movement during this period was examined in Chapter 7, it remains necessary to account for the character of the movement in the localities: in keeping with the theoretical precepts proposed above, working class social and political ideas cannot be simply extrapolated from the "national" level - the level of the labour and trade union leadership, Parliamentary politics and pronouncements, or whatever - but must be specified in their own right, and situated within a distinctive social milieu.

Our main focus in this chapter will be, therefore, the socialist branch in Lancashire and, by way of an examination of branch newspapers,<sup>2</sup> minutes and similar sources, it is hoped that the distinctive flavour of the movement in Lancashire might be clearly evoked. Most of the material presented here appertains to I.L.P. branches and clubs, Labour Church congregations and the Clarion movement founded by Robert Blatchford, although allusion will be made at a number of points to local S.D.F. and Fabian Society branches.

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2. Deian Hopkin has compiled a useful checklist of local I.L.P. newspapers and their location: cf. "Local Newspapers of the Independent Labour Party 1893-1906", Labour History Society Bulletin, 28 (1975) 28-37.

### 9.1: The Socialist Movement 1890-1906: National and Local Bearings

As has already been observed at a number of points above, the socialist inflation of the 1890s and the movement to secure independent representation for working men at Westminster drew most of its support from the northern industrial regions of the country, notably Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire: in Edward Thompson's pithy phrase, "The I.L.P. grew from the bottom up: its birthplaces were in those shadowy places known as 'the provinces'." <sup>3</sup>

In spite of the fact that, within only a few years of its formation, moves were made by the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. to give the new party greater cohesion by centralizing its organisation and administration, the characteristic pattern of a weak centre but yet burgeoning periphery remained with the party throughout this period. <sup>4</sup> Similarly, what little central organisation there was to be found in the Labour Church movement, or the Clarion associations, was rarely in evidence and, once again, both socialist bodies were largely carried along by the groundswell of local sentiment and enthusiasm. <sup>5</sup>

The effect of this particular pattern of development was to give the socialist movement of the 1890s and first decade of the present century a distinctly local flavour. Socialists in these areas, unencumbered by the imposing hand of central office, were free to respond by shaping their creed to suit local conditions and grass roots opinion.

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3. E. P. Thompson, "Homage to Tom Maguire", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (London 1967) 277.

4. Robert Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (London 1966) 6-9; Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (Oxford 1965) 148, 155; *idem.*, "The Story of the I.L.P." in Popular Politics and Society in late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 121-29.

5. Both John Trevor and Robert Blatchford were content to wait upon local initiative in developing their movements. Although a central Labour Church Union was formed, it resolved at the outset that the local congregation should be left quite autonomous. See below Chapter 12.

The character and appeal of socialism in the regions cannot, therefore, be adequately appreciated if it is treated as merely incidental to, or an unaccountable spontaneous upheaval somehow on the periphery of, the national scene. In Lancashire as elsewhere, socialists were broadly guided by their leaders and national party policy, but their politics emerged in equal measure, however, as a result of local pressures and they felt little compunction in adapting their creed to embrace the immediate concerns of working people in the locality. As with the policy and orientation of the I.L.P. nationally, socialism in Lancashire was, as we shall see, at once "practical" and "ethical", but the meaning of that socialism for activists in the north west cannot be understood apart from the economic and social realities of working class life in the region.

In a number of important respects, therefore, socialism at the branch level in Lancashire was a distinct variant upon that espoused by the national leadership. This fact may be registered at the outset by means of a brief comparison of the social composition of the movement nationally and locally, for clear differences stand out in the social make-up of both centre and periphery. The I.L.P. drew almost all its recruits from the working class. Many of its most effective propagandists were hard-headed, practical trade union officials and included such men as J. R. Clynes, Ben Turner, James Sexton, Robert Smillie, Pete Curran, Tom Mann, G. N. Barnes and Ben Tillet. There was also to be found "...the idealistic, somewhat romantic, grass-roots leaders of the new union movement and working class socialism...associated with the era when the movement spread to the masses, when the mass of workers awoke and when a political movement with a class base was born",<sup>6</sup> and of whom James Keir Hardie was the foremost example.

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6. Zygmunt Bauman, Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement (Manchester 1972) 216.



For leadership and intellectual outlook, however, the I.L.P. owed as much, if not more, to professional men and women of the middle classes as to its working class adherents. Although the party was ever anxious to effect an alliance with the trade unions during the 1890s, it: <sup>7</sup>

...stubbornly resisted the suggestion that Labour candidatures be limited to men actually engaged in a trade. The I.L.P. frowned on this 'hoary-handed son of toil' idea of a Labour Party. Thus, paradoxically, the I.L.P. socialist despite his more vociferous insistence upon a strict independence was often far less class conscious in his attitude toward Parliamentary representation than his non-socialist trade union ally.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the labour and socialist activist Frederick Rogers should profess to have distrusted the I.L.P. because of its "large middle class element", <sup>8</sup> for the inner circles of the party included men such as R. M. Pankhurst, the Manchester lawyer and John Lister, a member of one of Yorkshire's oldest landed families; Fred Brocklehurst, a university graduate who had originally hoped to enter the ministry; Russell Smart and Edward Marsden, both men of business; A. E. Fletcher and Ramsay MacDonald, both of whom were journalists; and Philip Snowden who, until his full-time involvement in the movement, had been a civil servant. Moreover, many of the "new women" of the movement, such as Carolyn Martyn, Rachel and Margaret MacMillan and Katherine St. John Conway were of impeccably middle class background.

Although the bulk of Labour Church members in the north west were working class, it was often the case that the support of well-off middle class people was crucial in launching and providing leadership for the various congregations. <sup>9</sup> It is well known, too, that the London leadership

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7. P. P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party (London 1958) 50.

8. Frederick Rogers, Life, Labour and Literature (London 1913) 210.

9. Stanley Pierson, "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement in England 1891-1900", Church History, XXIX (1960) 468.

of the S.D.F. and the Fabian Society was predominantly bourgeois. After the bulk of Metropolitan radical working men's clubs had disaffiliated from the Federation in 1883, the executive of the organisation remained thereafter thoroughly middle class, with the workers represented by only one or two adherents of great energy and loyalty, such as J. E. Williams and James MacDonald,<sup>10</sup> From their earliest days, the Fabians had been largely drawn from the middling social strata, although the drawing room environment in which the Fabians conducted their business - whilst it effectively ostracised the proletariat - in fact attracted a very miscellaneous audience.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the whole of our period, both socialist organisations remained overwhelmingly middle class in their leadership, although the S.D.F. made strenuous efforts to enlist working class supporters and was indeed more successful in this respect than were the Fabians.

Locally, however, all these socialist bodies were based far more squarely upon working class support and membership. Certainly, there is some indication that professional middle class men - including lawyers, accountants, architects, surveyors and doctors - were over-represented relative to their national size in I.L.P. branch activities.<sup>12</sup> Henry Musgrave Reade, for instance, brought up in a staunch middle class and strictly Anglican family but who had rejected religion and progressed through republicanism, positivism and secularism to socialism, became a prominent figure in the Salford S.D.F. and, later on, the Manchester

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10. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 25; C. Tsuzuki, H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism (Oxford 1961) 68-9.

11. Pelling, ibid., 35; see further George Bernard Shaw in Margaret Cole, ed., The Webbs and their Work (London 1949) 7.

12. Deian Hopkin, "The Membership of the I.L.P. 1904-10: A Spatial and Occupational Analysis", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 190.

I.L.P. during the 'nineties.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Dr. Pankhurst and his redoubtable wife, Sylvia, were leading lights in the I.L.P., their comfortable Manchester home becoming something of a centre of socialist activity and discussion in the city.<sup>14</sup> Slightly lower down the social scale, the contribution of the lower middle classes to the early history of socialist branches has often been underestimated. The new culture of socialism - cycling and rambles, general free thinking and the flouting of respectable norms - seems to have been particularly strong among some of the clerks, teachers, shop assistants, telegraphists and the newly emancipated population of young white collar workers generally in and around Manchester during these years.<sup>15</sup> The mild rebellion of the Clarion clubs, too, appears to have provided a less than conventional outlet for the undoubted earnestness of some of these men and women.<sup>16</sup> Norman Swindon, for instance, a draughtsman who had moved to live and work in Manchester in 1901, has vividly described the attraction to men and women like himself of Blatchford's socialism and the appeal of political activity in the Jackson Street S.D.F. Club.<sup>17</sup>

However, although men and women of middle or lower middle class origin certainly seem to have been active in I.L.P. or other socialist branches in Lancashire, most accounts powerfully attest to the overwhelming predominance of well paid, skilled workers in the ranks of the movement.<sup>18</sup> In his autobiography, Sam Hobson wrote that he could not "...recall the

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13. Henry Musgrave Reade, Christ or Socialism: A Human Autobiography (n.d.)
  14. For the Pankhurst's activities in the movement, see E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement (London 1931) 116-70.
  15. See, for instance, C. S. Davies, North Country Bred: A Working Class Family Chronicle (London 1963) 82-5.
  16. Hugh McLeod, "White Collar Values and the Role of Religion", in Geoffrey Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain (London 1977) 78.
  17. Norman Swindon, Engineering Without Wheels (London 1962) 24-67.
  18. Hopkin, "Membership of the I.L.P.", 192; Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism (London 1973) 209-10.

name of a single socialist or Labour leader who had graduated from either the slum dwellers or the lower middle class. Both of these social groups got the worst of both worlds. Socialist propaganda was gladly received by the better paid workers." <sup>19</sup> After nearly a decade of I.L.P. activity, a Labour candidate in Manchester found the poor working class areas especially unsympathetic: "One of the peculiarities...which struck me as passing strange, was the poorer the district, the greater the amount of blue bunting (Tory colours) was displayed and my appearance was greeted by howls and jeers - by the women in particular." <sup>20</sup>

Local studies, too, would appear to bear out the general impression that I.L.P.'ers were drawn, on the whole, from the ranks of the skilled manual working class, often of Nonconformist bent. They were the "...intelligent respectable working trade unionists of the new labour clubs", <sup>21</sup> men like Willie Pickerill of Stockport, a talented and ambitious engineer whose family had always been deeply involved in religious affairs, and who himself was active for many years in the I.L.P., Clarion and Labour Church movements. <sup>22</sup> Peter Firth's important study of the I.L.P. in Nelson has revealed that this small, but active, branch comprised in the main young aritsans and skilled weavers, usually educated in the local Nonconformist voluntary school and frequently regular chapel attenders. <sup>23</sup> No I.L.P. candidate for municipal post in Bolton during these years can be classed as having been socially less

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19. Sam Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist (London 1938) 36.

20. John Hodges, Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle (London n.d.) 148.

21. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 116.

22. Norah W. Johnson, Willie Pick (Welwyn 1973).

23. Peter Firth, Socialism and the Origins of the Labour Party in Nelson and District 1890-1906 (unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Manchester 1975) ch. 1.



than a "superior" working man<sup>24</sup> and, overall, the social composition of the typical I.L.P. branch in Lancashire during the first two decades of the party's history would seem to have been remarkably similar to the branch in Scotland described below:<sup>25</sup>

Except for an odd teacher and a few shop assistants, the members were all working men and their wives. For the most part the men belonged to the skilled trades as in England and were nearly always known as good and steady workmen. They were active trade unionists to a man. The I.L.P. was not attracting as yet what are called the 'unskilled workers'... the great majority were total abstainers. There was a strong element of Puritanism in their make-up. It was to these qualities that the I.L.P. owed its extraordinary influence.

A number of accounts clearly suggest that Labour Church congregations, too, drew mainly people from the working classes: "A Labour Church is thus seen to be a church of workers", pointed out Seth Ackroyd: "It is emphatically the poor man's church..."<sup>26</sup> Again, however, men and women from the upper reaches of the labour community would seem to have predominated. James Simms commented upon the presence of "...the self-respecting working men, the shopkeeper and the lower middle class man" in his Bolton congregation,<sup>27</sup> whilst an observer of an early Labour Church service in Manchester noted that the hall was,<sup>28</sup>

Packed with a respectable, responsible looking audience, not to be confounded with one of the Salvation Army type...the bulk of the audience was composed of men, decently dressed artisans and mechanics, some of a higher grade, all, unless their looks belied them, full of earnest expectancy...

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24. P. A. Harris, Class Conflict, the Trade Unions and Working Class Politics in Bolton 1875-1896 (unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Lancaster 1971) 62-3.
25. John Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage: An Autobiography (London 1935) 199.
26. The Labour Prophet, January 1897. For further details of the class composition of the Labour congregations, see *ibid.*, February 1892, 10; November 1892, 84; November 1893, 88; January 1893, 8; March 1895, 47.
27. The Labour Prophet, June 1898.
28. Evelyn March-Phillipps, The Spectator, 21 April 1894, 533.



On a number of occasions, John Trevor was moved to bemoan the absence of and difficulty in attracting members of the unskilled working class to Labour Church congregations. <sup>29</sup>

From all this, however, it cannot be simply concluded that the appeal of socialism was confined to the labour aristocracy pure and simple. The question of the applicability of the labour aristocracy thesis to conditions in the north west during these years will be taken up in subsequent chapters. For the moment we may notice only J. R. Clynes' recollection of the character of the early socialists in Lancashire which, whilst perhaps suffering all the defects of retrospective evocation, is notwithstanding a useful corrective to the monochromatic "labour aristocracy" interpretations of the movement: <sup>30</sup>

...the fact is that most Labour supporters were illiterate youngsters who had left school at ten or twelve years old; whose parents could not read or write...Collarless, moneyless, almost wordless, we earnestly believed that it was wrong for the ill-educated to be exploited.

Not surprisingly, Clynes suggests, these working men profoundly distrusted the "...white-faced intellectual lad of the better class to which Karl Marx has always appealed."

There is strong evidence that working class support for the other socialist organisations, too, was stronger in the localities. As a consequence of the Fabian "Lancashire Campaign", there had suddenly arisen a cluster of local Fabian Societies throughout the Duchy. The social composition of these local Societies was often in striking contrast to that of the parent body for, as Edward Pease observed, their membership

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29. See, for instance, Trevor cited by Laurence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman (London 1951) 80.

30. J. R. Clyens, Memoirs 1869-1924 (London 1937) 59-60.

was almost entirely drawn from the working class.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the aloof and self-consciously middle class London Fabians, the Lancashire Societies were closely related to the Trades Councils or to the other socialist bodies in the region. Both the S.D.F. and the Socialist League had been instrumental in bringing many of these Societies into existence, whilst within a few years a number of them had been succeeded by, or merged into, I.L.P. branches.<sup>32</sup>

The S.D.F. in Lancashire, as noted in the previous chapter, drew heavily for its support upon working trade unionists in the textile and mining industries but, interestingly enough, there is some indication that the Federation was also able to recruit many ex-Conservatives of Anglican predilection. Throughout the country as a whole, the S.D.F. tended to be strongest in those areas of Anglican influence,<sup>33</sup> and a fair proportion of its membership would appear to have comprised socially mobile working men risen from the ranks, or those of essentially petit bourgeois station - self-employed men such as shopkeepers, small tradesmen, newsagents, tobacconists, ironmongers and shoemakers. In municipal elections in Bolton between 1889 and 1895, the Federation's candidates included a Fish and Potato Dealer, a fruiterer and a greengrocer, two boot and shoe makers, a manager of a shoe shop and a hosiery manufacturer; by contrast, only one candidate - Charles Booth, a carter who contested the town council in 1887 - was of, obviously working class status.<sup>34</sup>

31. Edward Pease, History of the Fabian Society (London 1916) 95.

32. Pease, ibid., 95, 102; Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 94. In St. Helens, for instance, the local S.D.F. branch turned itself into a Fabian Society in 1892: cf. The Clarion, 27 August 1892.

33. Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics: The Story of the L.R.C. (London 1958) 9.

34. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics, 60-63; see further, Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 2.

Overall, therefore, socialist branch membership in the north west was predominantly upper working class and, although representatives of the higher social strata were to be found among the ranks, there was nowhere near the same bourgeois element as was discernable in the national leadership. This did not mean, however, that socialism was greeted with any degree of tolerance - let alone being accepted - by large sections of the labour community. Robert Roberts has recalled of pre-war Salford that socialism continued to make little impression on the lower working class, whose adherents were dubbed by them as "agitators" and "red rags." <sup>35</sup> Similarly, Joe Toole, also writing about the Salford of his youth, has noted the gulf which separated the socialists from many of the workers: "About this time anybody who became a socialist was regarded pretty much as a Bolshevik was regarded ten years ago", he commented, "...or as your extreme Communist is today." <sup>36</sup> Upon his own conversion to socialism, Toole was forced to endure charges of atheism, free-love and "treason".

Certainly, it was often the case that, by embracing and espousing the socialist creed during these years, the working man would be marked out from his fellows. "The I.L.P.'er, with his circular red-enamel button in his lapel - a gold S, for Socialism, twined round the party initials - was an easily recognisable figure before the 1914 war", Raymond Postgate has observed: <sup>37</sup>

If a man, he was often rather white faced, voluntary asceticism adding to the effect of the under-feeding and overwork common among the British working class; if a woman, straggly-haired and given to 'sensible' clothes...But a profound earnestness and independence of thought was the I.L.P.'ers most distinguishing

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35. Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Harmondsworth 1974) 28-9, 177-78.

36. Joe Toole, Fighting Through Life (London 1935) 79.

37. Raymond Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury (London 1951) 95.

characteristic...the I.L.P. was indulgent to oddities and to indiscipline, thinking that the truth would come out through the least experienced mouth-pieces.

Although themselves of the working class, the pioneer socialists were sometimes a breed all on their own. Their penchant for book-learning and asceticism, their high-minded earnestness and espousal of unpopular, not to say freakish, causes and their flouting of respectable social, political and religious mores, occasionally divorced them from the mass of the working population.

"One sometimes gets the impression", wrote George Orwell in 1937, "...that the mere words 'socialism' and 'communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, snadal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England."<sup>38</sup> One unfortunate effect of the early socialist movement, with its esoteric causes and self-imposed puritanism, was that on occasions it tended to remove the socialist from the everyday world of his or her peers. Alice Foley of Bolton has recalled with some misgiving her sister's conversion to the movement, one consequence of which was a preference for early morning cold baths!:<sup>39</sup>

We all shared somewhat in the embarrassment of our sister's new found assumption of independence and aloofness...She had drifted away from her factory companions...and the present circle was a group of sedate young ladies from shops and offices, all seduously imbibing socialist ethics and culture.

But, overall, there seems little doubt that by far the larger part of the intense enthusiasm and loyalty which sustained and nourished branch socialism in Lancashire emanated from the working class, albeit the more "respectable" and better paid section of that class.

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38. George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (Harmondsworth 1967) 152.

39. Alice Foley, A Bolton Childhood (Manchester 1973) 46.

## 9.2: Activities and Agitation at Branch Level

The distinctly local rooting of the socialist movement was underscored by a number of factors at work during the 1890s. For one thing, none of the socialist organisations seemed particularly concerned to centralise and orchestrate the activities of their various branches to any great extent and, in consequence, there grew up a tradition of branch autonomy in the movement. We have already observed that the I.L.P., in Joseph Clayton's phrase, "...was created by the fusing of local elements into one national whole. From the circumference its members came to establish the centre."<sup>40</sup> Certainly the pre-existence of local Labour Clubs and Unions ensured that localist sentiment flourished unallayed. The Labour Church and Clarion movements embodied little or no central organisation, for both John Trevor and Robert Blatchford were anxious to encourage local initiative in developing the parent ideal. In the Fabian Society, a "...somewhat detached attitude, combined with the recognition of the differences between the parent society and its offspring, led to the adoption of a system of local autonomy."<sup>41</sup> Though the London Society supplied local branches with literature, fact sheets and "Fabian News", in all other respects - and particularly that of political policy - complete autonomy was accorded. Finally, much independent S.D.F. political and trade union activity took place at the local level. Here, Federation branches and their members had a great deal of latitude in collaborating with local I.L.P.'s or engaging in joint campaigns for representation on the municipalities.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 (London 1926) 82.

41. Pease, History of the Fabian Society, 102.

42. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism, 274.



During the 1890s, the socialist movement was kept alive by the activities and agitations of the membership at the grass roots level. This came to assume particular importance after about 1895, when the movement as a whole entered upon something of a period of quietude. No socialist candidate was returned to Parliament after Keir Hardie's victory in 1892 until 1900, and socialist politics languished for a while as squabbling between the various leaders and the hardening of sectionalism replaced the earlier enthusiasm.<sup>43</sup> It was, therefore, by harnessing the enthusiasm of the local membership in the branches around matters of local concern that the movement was carried through the doldrums. In Lancashire, as in most regions, branch activities and agitations were of three main kinds: educational and propaganda activities; industrial agitation and the support for local groups of workers in dispute; and municipal or national electioneering and campaigning.

For the pioneers of the socialist movement, there could be no more important activity than educating the public in the principles of their creed and propagating widely its fundamental tenets. Educational provision, both for the activists who were already branch members and for those "Conservative and Liberal Working Men" in the local community who were potential converts, was thus a central activity to branch socialism. The minute books of the Central Branch of the Manchester I.L.P. reveal that much attention was devoted to the question of wider educational provision,<sup>44</sup> whilst D. F. Summers has ranked the propaganda service

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43. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, ch. 9; see further A. E. P. Duffy, "Differing Policies and Personal Rivalries in the Origin of the I.L.P.", Victorian Studies, VI (1962) 43-65.

44. Minutes of the Central Branch of the Manchester I.L.P. 1902-1905, passim, (Manchester Central Reference Library M42/1/1).

performed by the Labour Churches as being foremost among its contributions to the movement.<sup>45</sup> The Clarion activists, in particular, placed great store by educating working men and women. Their revolution was to be, in Blatchford's words, "...a revolution of thought": "Let us at once get the people, or a big majority of the people, to understand socialism", he had written, "...to believe in socialism, and to work for socialism, and the real revolution is accomplished."<sup>46</sup> Representing, as they did, a minority strand of opinion within society, it was imperative that all the socialist organisations fully attended to their educational provision.

Much emphasis was placed by activists upon educational and study facilities within the branch, partly in order that the rank and file of the movement might acquire a broader grasp of social and political questions generally, but also because the socialist valued intellectual and cultural refinement as not only worthy in itself but, in addition, as presaging the new society. Branch newspapers in the north west attest to the value attributed to personal study by the amount of space given over to the discussion of literary themes.<sup>47</sup> Members of the Manchester I.L.P. branch, for instance, were encouraged to read and study authors as diverse as Sir Thomas More, John Ruskin, William Blackstone, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Blatchford, William Morris, J. A. Hobson, H. G. Wells, Edward Carpenter, Shaw and even Nietzsche.<sup>48</sup> Without doubt, however, the most single influential book among socialists was Merrie England by Robert Blatchford and its arguments became a standard feature of

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45. D. F. Summers, The Labour Church and Allied Movements (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh 1958) ch. 7.

46. The Clarion, 12 February 1898.

47. See, for instance, "Books to Read" in Manchester: The Monthly Journal of the Manchester and Salford I.L.P., 15 July 1900, 2.

48. Manchester, 2 June 1899, and 5 October 1899.

branch publications in this period. Lectures and study groups would also be arranged by the socialist branches, and these embraced a wide range of social, political and economic questions. From its inception, the Manchester Labour Church held a variety of study classes, the most popular of which was by all accounts the Political Economy Class which met each Thursday at the Labour Church Institute in the city;<sup>49</sup> whilst in January, 1894, the Bolton congregation announced its intention of establishing classes in English grammar and composition and political economy.<sup>50</sup> Study sessions such as these were especially popular with the socialists during the winter months, when the dark nights rendered open-air speaking and outdoor meetings and activities impossible.

Fostering study and education was a means of involving members more deeply in the activities of the branch and meant that the committed socialist might be giving over several evenings of the week to the party. A number of I.L.P. and Labour Church branches endeavoured to build up their own libraries, whilst in 1896 the Bolton Church reported that its bookstall "does pretty fair in business."<sup>51</sup> In addition, most branches relied heavily upon the "book-boxes" which the Fabians circulated as a service to the movement on receipt of only a small fee. Comprising chosen books on political or economic themes, or tracts and pamphlets on subjects of importance in local government, such as health, housing, public education, the provision of allotments and so on, most book-boxes went to I.L.P. branches and clubs and to Labour Church congregations.<sup>52</sup> Almost the only intrusion on branch autonomy in these years would be a

49. The Labour Prophet, December 1892, 96.

50. ibid., January 1894.

51. ibid., April 1896.

52. Out of a total 100 subscriptions for Fabian book-boxes during 1896-97, 46 were from I.L.P. branches: cf. Fabian Annual Report (London 1897).

visit from one of the socialist lecturers, although the arrival of a well-known speaker was a highlight in the life of a provincial socialist branch. The I.L.P. had an itinerant group of famous lecturers - including a number of women, whose sentimental appeal was well-loved by branch members - and when they visited branches in the north they drew large crowds, in turn boosting the membership of the branch which was able to recruit many of those who had been attracted to the meeting. <sup>53</sup> Not all these lectures were of a serious nature, and socialists always looked forward to a visit from one of the Clarion team with their humorous anecdotes and lantern slide-shows. <sup>54</sup>

Of perhaps greater importance, however, were those activities which took the socialists outside their branch hall into the streets of the local community in propagandizing their case among the unconverted. Most branches published their own newspapers or broadsheets which carried articles of both national and local interest, and these they would usually try to sell on the streets. Occasionally such newspapers were joint ventures, like the Nelson Socialist Journal, founded in 1893 as the organ of the I.L.P. and the S.D.F. in that town. <sup>55</sup> The best opportunity for activists to sell their papers, or the special cheap 1d. editions of Merrie England and similar socialist literature, was when they held open-air discussions and meetings, which they did nearly every evening during the summer months. Open-air speaking and meetings were the very life blood of branch socialism, its most intimate and effective link with the body of workers on whose behalf it claimed to

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53. Keir Hardie, for instance, drew a crowd of 3,000 at a Manchester I.L.P. and Labour Church meeting in 1894: cf. The Labour Prophet, February 1894.

54. See any edition of The Clarion, or the "Reports" in The Labour Prophet from the various congregations, for further details.

55. Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 1.

speak. During the 1890s, the socialist street corner orator was a common sight in the towns of the industrial north west. Twice a week, the Salford S.D.F. held meetings on a piece of waste ground in the city, whilst on Sundays the Manchester I.L.P. held regular meetings on the corner of Tibb Street.<sup>56</sup> The Clarion activists played their part, too, by taking to their bicycles and "invading" en masse the towns and villages surrounding Lancashire, distributing their books and literature on the way.

Early in January, 1892, John Trevor and the Manchester Labour Church congregation began holding open-air services at Trafford Bridge: "There is no pulpit in the land more sacred than Trafford Bridge", he commented, "...where for years past a growing band of Salford socialists have proclaimed their message, in season and out of season..."<sup>57</sup> Later on, the open-air work was continued at the Ordsal Fair Grounds, where the lecturers would address large crowds, whilst activists engaged those on the outskirts of the gathering in conversation; still others would move through the people assembled, selling copies of the Labour Prophet to all who had a penny to spare.<sup>58</sup> The I.L.P., too, appear to have been particularly adept in the art of open-air propaganda. Brass bands would be used to attract a crowd for the lecturer to harangue and socialist choirs would enliven the meetings by singing songs by Edward Carpenter, or from the Labour Songbook. As J. H. Stewart Reid has pointed out, the lecturers seem to have been fully in tune with working class aspirations and often evoked an enthusiastic response:<sup>59</sup>

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56. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 76ff; Minutes, Manchester I.L.P. central branch, 21 July 1903.

57. The Labour Prophet, February 1892.

58. Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 435.

59. J. H. Stewart Reid, The Origins of the British Labour Party (Minnesota 1955) 67.



When the I.L.P. lecturer began his appeal to the crowd assembled before him, he very seldom made the mistake that members of the S.D.F. were so prone to - that of talking above the heads of the audience. Instead, he fixed upon some simple object of grievance and based his case upon it, couched in terms of homely colloquialism.

Finally, the socialist organisations attempted to capitalise upon local issues by holding meetings, demonstrations and marches and using the opportunity to press their case. In 1896, Fred Brocklehurst of the Bolton I.L.P. led a crowd of no less than 20,000 people in a march over Winter Hill protesting against the closure of local beauty spots to the public.<sup>60</sup> In that same year occurred the famous free speech agitation at Boggart Hole Clough, near Manchester, which found all the socialist bodies united against the imprisonment of three of their comrades for public speaking at this well-known local venue.<sup>61</sup> In 1897, the socialists instigated a right to hold public meetings agitation in Nelson, which culminated in a series of free speech rallies addressed by Tom Mann and which excited considerable local interest.<sup>62</sup> All these issues brought welcome publicity for the socialists, which they were not slow to exploit.

A second set of branch activities and agitation stemmed from the fact that the socialists were ever anxious to encourage and develop the industrial side of the movement. The close links which grew up between the trade unions and many of the socialist branches in the provinces

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60. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics, ch. 4.

61. For details of this issue, see Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, 136-39; Clayton, Rise and Decline of Socialism, 84.

62. Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 1.

was, once again, an invaluable source of strength locally for the movement during the 1890s and first decade of the present century. With the departure of Pete Curran from the Council of the I.L.P. in July 1898, the old direct link with new unionism was severed at the leadership level. Hereafter, the party leadership would be dominated by men like MacDonald, Snowden and Glasier - full-time journalist-politicians without trade union affiliations.<sup>63</sup> Only Hardie seems to have regretted the change and, as always, he favoured a greater proportion of trade unionists on the Council. Locally, however, the bonds between the trade union movement and the socialists remained intact, more so in Lancashire than in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where unionism was on the whole only weakly developed.

It was, therefore, at the local level that the rapport and goodwill between socialists and trade unionists - the essential foundation for any "labour alliance" - was brought about. It was also the provincial socialists who seemed to be most free of many of the prejudices as regards trade unionism which characterised the London socialists. The Fabians, for their part, had rarely shown any interest in the trade union movement, whilst Hyndman regarded new unionism rather patronisingly as "unconscious strugglings towards socialism", which he thought should be made conscious by socialist propaganda among the workers.<sup>64</sup> Such prejudices were, on the whole, absent in Lancashire where I.L.P. and S.D.F. branches, Labour Church congregations and local Fabian Societies comprised mainly working trade unionists. In consequence, the socialists made great efforts to report industrial developments in their branch newspapers and most carried reports of local Trades Council proceedings,

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63. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 176.

64. Justice, 11 January 1890.

presented social and industrial articles in the form of "labour notes" and sought to give full and sympathetic coverage of local disputes.

It was, in fact, the involvement of local socialist branches in strikes and disputes that helped to keep the movement alive during the 'nineties and certainly did a great deal to endear the socialists to working trade unionists. Industrial conditions and local wage rates and grievances - particularly those of municipal employees - were given full publicity and, wherever practicable, activists rendered all assistance in struggles directed towards improving these conditions. During the strike of Manchester Mat Makers in 1892, for instance, the Labour Church in the city played an important role in co-ordinating and supporting the union in its struggle. John Trevor addressed several meetings of the mat-makers, a number of whom were members of the Manchester congregation, and acted as mediator between the men and the employers; as the dispute dragged on, the Church launched an appeal through the Labour Prophet to assist the workers and to establish a co-operative shop for the dismissed men.<sup>65</sup> In Ashton-under-Lyne, an I.L.P. branch came into being after a series of disputes in the cotton industry had resulted in the workers there being locked-out in November, 1892. During the last month of the lock-out, the newly formed I.L.P. actively sought to permeate the workers with their views, particularly the need for an independent party of labour. Acting in concert with the S.D.F., several public meetings in support of the locked-out workers were arranged by the I.L.P.<sup>66</sup> These two socialist bodies were also to be found closely co-operating in Nelson in an agitation against unemployment following a mill

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65. Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 430-31.

66. Shelia Carter, "The I.L.P. in Ashton-under-Lyne, 1893-1900", Bulletin of the N.W. Labour History Society Group, 4 (1976-77) 66-9.

strike in that same year. Both organisations were vociferous in demanding action on the part of the municipality to ameliorate distress.<sup>67</sup>

The socialists were also well to the fore during the great lock-out of 1893 in the Lancashire coalfield. When the S.D.F. called for a minimum wage, the Eight Hour Day and the nationalization of the mines, their stirring language echoed many colliers' feelings of frustration and hostility and there emerged a close relationship between the miners and the S.D.F. branches in the pit towns. Although the I.L.P., too, was fully engaged in agitating the miners, the existence of two socialist organisations did not create discord, diminishing the power of the socialist appeal; instead, they tended to complement each other, the I.L.P. gaining members where the S.D.F. could not. Although their leaders rarely saw eye to eye, there are few instances of these disagreements being transferred to the local level and, as the Labour Leader reported, "The S.D.F. and I.L.P. in Lancashire are working together splendidly."<sup>68</sup> In Ashton, the prosecution of a group of tailors for picketing a manufacturer who had been supplying sweat-shops in Manchester in 1895, precipitated a campaign by the I.L.P.'ers in favour of the right of peaceful picketing and which ended in the men being vindicated.<sup>69</sup> Again, the Labour Church in Bolton was fully involved in the strike of iron workers during 1897 and the need for relief collections among the members called heavily upon the congregation's financial resources.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the whole of this period, then, the socialist bodies in the north west were at all times ready to assist in trade union struggles

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67. Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 1.

68. The Labour Leader, 8 June 1895; see further, Raymond Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle 1972) 218.

69. Carter, "I.L.P. in Ashton-under-Lyne", 74-5.

70. Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 353.

of any kind. The close links between trade unionism and the socialists may be gauged from developments in Lancaster, where a branch of the Fabian Society had actually been set in train by members of the Gas Workers' Union and left wing Trade Councillors in 1892. The Society united socialists who were active in the Trades Council with unaffiliated unions and the product of this new relationship was the creation of the Lancaster branch of the I.L.P. in 1894.<sup>71</sup> Thereafter, the Fabian Society played an important role in marshalling support for the I.L.P. The socialist bodies found some support for labour representation among the engineers in Lancashire and, during the lock-out of 1897 in the industry, they did much to tap the pent-up militancy of the workers.<sup>72</sup> On occasions, industrial agitations might prove to be violent. During the strike of the Oldham Electric Traction Company workers in 1900 in protest against the unfair dismissal of nine men, a demonstration march led by the Oldham and Ashton branches of the I.L.P. had been baton charged by the police. Seventy-three marchers were injured and seven arrests were made.<sup>73</sup>

It would be fair to say that the "labour alliance", which was realised in the formation of the L.R.C. in 1900 and its subsequent progress, was forged as much at the grass roots level as by the leadership of the working class movement. It was here that an essential understanding emerged between organised workers and the socialists, due in no small measure to the importance attached by the latter to their agitations

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71. Nigel Todd, "The Labour Movement in North Lancashire 1890-1910", Bulletin of N.W. Labour History Society Group, 2 (1974-75) 4-5.

72. Although there was apparently some disagreement among the men themselves as to the role which ought to be played by socialists in the dispute: cf. Nigel Todd, "Trade Unions and the Engineering Industry Dispute at Barrow-in-Furness 1897-98", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 37-8.

73. Carter, "I.L.P. in Ashton-under-Lyne", 80.



against unemployment and demands for unemployed relief. If one issue dominated branch socialism during this period, it cannot have been other than that of unemployment. Branch newspapers consistently fulminated against the human waste that unemployment represented, taking up on the local level the crusade against unemployment and distress which Hardie had so successfully prosecuted as Member of Parliament during the period 1892-95. At any or all of the Labour Church services throughout Lancashire, whenever there was a need, a collection would be taken to aid striking or unemployed workers. Many of these appeals, such as that to assist unemployed Card and Blowing Room hands, were adopted as special Labour Church concerns.<sup>74</sup> In their broadsheets and handbills the socialists advocated, like activists in Rochdale and Manchester, a vigorous municipal programme of unemployed relief by the institution of local labour bureaux.<sup>75</sup> In those areas in which the socialists had secured municipal representation, activists worked insistently through the offices of the Poor Law Guardians to alleviate suffering occasioned by unemployment. No issue was dearer to the hearts of trade unionists than unemployed relief and, through their agitations, the socialists won over many converts to the cause as well as fostering close ties between the various bodies of the movement.

Electioneering and campaigning was the third area into which branch activists channelled their talents and energies. Although much of the work that the branches were doing in local government held little or no immediate relevance to the grand object of the socialist commonwealth

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74. The Labour Prophet, April 1895; Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 435.

75. Rochdale Labour News, 7, January 1900; Minutes, Manchester I.L.P. central branch, 23 December 1902.

espoused by the movement, the task of sustaining constant pressure on the authorities to exercise the limited municipal powers afforded them by non-socialist governments was a vital one in the life of the provincial branches. Once more, municipal electioneering and politics created a reservoir of goodwill between the various socialist organisations locally for, while relations between the leaders were strained during the 1890s, the branches in Lancashire made common cause in agitating for improved local amenities.

Local elections were taken very seriously by branch activists in the north west as affording an opportunity by which practical expression might be given to many of their ideas. They were also concerned to note that the established parties had previously monopolised these positions, with the effect that important services were being executed less efficiently than the socialists might have wished. In Blackburn, for instance, the I.L.P. had decided to contest the post of Borough Auditor after the town's Labour Journal had revealed that much money was being squandered by council officials, whose conduct - particularly in the matter of sobriety - left much to be desired.<sup>76</sup> With the entry of the socialists into the fray of local politics, many posts which had hitherto remained uncontested became the focus of keen political rivalry: in 1894, the Ashton Reporter noted with no small indignation that the I.L.P. had "forced" an election for the Board of Guardians by nominating four candidates.<sup>77</sup> For the first time in many towns, the proceedings of the local council were fully reported by branch newspapers.

"Education", announced the Manchester and Salford I.L.P. paper, "...enunciates truly the great moral as well as Christian principle of respecting our neighbours as ourselves",<sup>78</sup> and it was to the School

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76. Blackburn Labour Journal, 14 July 1898.

77. The Ashton Reporter, 8 December 1898.

78. Manchester, 20, December 1894.

Boards established under the Education Act of 1870 that branch activists devoted much of their attention. In Nelson, the I.L.P. and S.D.F. contested the School Board election jointly in 1892 and successfully secured three seats. The S.D.F.'ers - unlike the I.L.P., which tended to favour the voluntary schools of the Nonconformist denominations - were strongly opposed to sectarian education, but both organisations worked unstintingly for free, compulsory education and sought to increase the number of school buildings, improve the quality of education for working class children and increase the wages of School Board teachers.<sup>79</sup> The S.D.F. were also keen to contest the School Board election in Bolton, where they recorded something of a triumph when, in 1892, J. Shufflebottom secured over 12,000 votes on behalf of the Federation.<sup>80</sup>

One area in which the socialists could gain much local sympathy was in their attempts to humanize the workings of the Poor Law system. The S.D.F. and the I.L.P. in Burnley successfully engineered the election of a socialist sympathiser, Mrs. Selina Cooper, onto the Board of Guardians in 1902, who thereafter resolutely pressed for a number of socialist policies. With the backing of the socialists, Mrs. Cooper sought to abolish pauper clothing and the Guardians' policy of separating married couples in the workhouse; she claimed exemption from work on behalf of the aged poor, ended the stigma of pauper burials and made great strides in improving the sanitary standards of the Burnley workhouse.<sup>81</sup> In these sorts of activities, Labour Church members were often anxious to render every assistance. In spite of Trevor's reservations about the congregations involving themselves too deeply in purely

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79. Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 3.

80. Harris, Class Conflict and Working Class Politics, 62.

81. Details from Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, ch. 3.

political affairs - a movement which, he felt, might vitiate their emphasis upon the spiritual component of labour - activists took a keen interest in and usually campaigned for the socialist candidate during local School Board or Poor Law elections.

The fervent belief in "municipal collectivism" was a defining feature of branch socialism during these years and activists in Lancashire were instrumental in pressing for the adoption of a whole range of locally managed services and institutions. We find socialists in Bolton in 1895 advocating public control of wash houses and coal supplies, as well as the "...municipalisation of all those things that can be done better collectively than by private management."<sup>82</sup> In Pendlebury, the I.L.P. Pioneer argued that houses built with privy middens were unpleasant and unsanitary and so they pressed with real vigour for the installation of water closet systems in all new council houses.<sup>83</sup> Manchester socialists were active in advocating the municipal control of the "drink traffic", telephones, hospitals, insurance and canals,<sup>84</sup> whilst in 1900 we find labour men in Rochdale standing out for municipal milk and food supplies.<sup>85</sup>

These agitations helped to focus local attention upon issues of real popular concern, as well as providing activists with practical experience of campaigning and responsible administration. Not all the socialist branches, however, enjoyed successes in this field; in Ashton, I.L.P. candidates came bottom of the poll in all municipal elections during these years, but they continued to put up candidatures largely

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82. Bolton and District I.L.P. Pioneer, 10, July 1895.

83. Pendlebury I.L.P. Pioneer, March 1899.

84. Manchester, 4, August 1899; The Social Reformer: The Monthly Journal of the Manchester and Salford I.L.P., 28, August 1901.

85. Rochdale Labour News, 9, March 1900.



for propaganda and educative purposes.<sup>86</sup> All this work came in useful at general election times, when branch activists would rally around the campaign of the local candidate. During elections, many of the branches came out with their own election newspapers in which they sought to present the issues clearly for the local population, as well as outlining the programme of their own candidate.

Inevitably, perhaps, national election candidates put up by the socialists included the more prominent names in the movement. In 1900, for instance, Hardie had contested Preston for the I.L.P. and Philip Snowden had entered the field in Blackburn. Where a local candidate was put up it is noticeable that the campaign was fought around issues of obviously local relevance, as was the case in Bolton in 1895 where Fred Brocklehurst stood for the I.L.P. Brocklehurst's legislative programme included local unemployed relief, a legal reduction in the working day, the implementation of a scheme of old age pensions and reform of the Poor Law, increased employer liability, free, unsectarian education, the taxation of ground rents and the abolition of government contractors and middlemen as "...a preliminary step towards nationalization", as well as promising support for "...every progressive measure of Social, Industrial and Political Reform."<sup>87</sup>

The programme was typical of many socialist candidatures in the industrial north during this period. Brocklehurst secured 2,694 votes and the local party declared itself well satisfied with that result, announcing that "...the future is with the I.L.P. if its members will but rise to the height of the glorious cause..." It is noticeable that during general elections the whole movement - I.L.P. branches, Clarionettes, Labour Church congregations, Trades Councils and even the

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86. Carter, "I.L.P. in Ashton-under-Lyne", 71.

87. Bolton I.L.P. Pioneer, 10, July 1895.



purists of the S.D.F. - pulled together in common cause, that of the independent representation of the working class in Parliament. It is, therefore, with the notion of independent labour representation that we may begin our analysis of socialist ideas in the north west - for this demand was integral to the conception of socialism current at branch level.

### 9.3: Conceptions of Socialism

In Chapter 7 of this study, the importance of both "practical" and "ethical" strands in the overall make-up of I.L.P. socialism in the 1890s and early twentieth century was highlighted. This will provide a convenient framework for an analysis of socialism at branch level in Lancashire in which both emphases were well to the fore. Socialism at the local level, however, was no mere rehearsal of the arguments propounded by the leadership of the movement but, within the broad guidelines of official party policy, took on a distinctly local flavour, responding to and articulating the social and economic conditions of working class life in the north west. By identifying the specific conceptions of socialism prevalent at the grass roots level, we shall be well placed in subsequent chapters to account for the generation of those beliefs within the social milieu of the working class community.

Central to the argument of the present study is the contention that the broad trajectory of British socialism was not shaped, in any simple or monochromatic fashion, by the injection of liberal-bourgeois values into the working class movement, but may best be appreciated as a further elaboration of collectivist themes deeply embedded in the evolution of social structure and ideological forms, an articulation

essentially effected by the harnessing of these tendencies to the growing power of the labour movement. This is not to deny, of course, that prominent socialists like MacDonald or Snowden did not feel a close spiritual and ideological kinship with liberalism itself, nor can the fact be avoided that, especially in Lancashire, the electoral victory of the L.R.C. in 1906 was secured in particularly close liaison with the Liberals, under the terms of the covert agreement concluded in 1903. In view of the fact that many historians have uncritically assumed that the liberal "contamination" was equally in evidence at the local branch level - where activists were, it is held, drawn mainly from the aristocracy of the working class and most frequently of Nonconformist upbringing - it would seem imperative to begin by emphasising the very real commitment to labour independence which working class socialists in the north west undoubtedly felt.

Among rank and file activists, the starting point of their socialism could not but be independent labour representation, vigorously advocated by men and women who had, in their everyday lives, first hand experience of those they contemptuously termed "Tory aristocrats" and "Liberal plutocrats". In the opinion of Joseph Clayton, the cotton operatives in Lancashire were unencumbered in their reception of the socialist doctrine by any enthusiasm for the Liberal Party, due in large measure to the Liberal's scant regard for factory legislation in the past.<sup>88</sup> The theme of working class independence was sternly insisted upon by the clause in the rule book of the Manchester and Salford I.L.P., which held that all members of the party should "...pledge themselves to abstain from voting for any candidate for election to any representative body who is in any way a nominee of the Liberal, Liberal-Unionist, Irish Nationalist,

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88. Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism.

or Conservative Parties." <sup>89</sup> There could be no escaping the full implications of the so-called Manchester "Fourth Clause"; <sup>90</sup>

We have had enough of wirepulling and negotiation, of plot and counter-plot, in the past; and the last thing desirable for the Labour Party to do is to shape itself on the old party lines and mimic the old despicable type of time-serving politician the political parties have bred for us.

At the foundation conference of the national I.L.P., a severe tussle had been occasioned by Blatchford's motion to the effect that the Manchester Fourth Clause be adopted as official party policy and, in the end, an amendment moved by a Bradford delegate placing the decision as to electoral policy with the local branches was carried.

It is frequently asserted that this rumpus sealed the fate of the "dogmatic" Manchester I.L.P.'ers <sup>91</sup> but, in actual fact, the spirit of independence which the Fourth Clause embodied was a feeling which fully permeated branch socialism in Lancashire. Even the most cursory survey of branch newspapers reveals how frequently and insistently the theme of independence was advocated in both national and local politics. At Ashton-under-Lyne, where Blatchford and several members of the Manchester party had helped to found the I.L.P. branch in February 1893, socialists there adhered to the Fourth Clause until as late as 1906 when, entirely in consequence, they decided to abstain from the general election of that year. <sup>92</sup> The Barrow I.L.P. Journal summed up the aims of the socialists in the north west by its insistence that it spoke for "...the

89. Rule Book of the Manchester and Salford I.L.P. (1891) 4.

90. "Elihu" (Samuel Washington), The Case for the Fourth Clause (Manchester 1893) 2.

91. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 121.

92. Carter, "I.L.P. in Ashton-under-Lyne", 65.

large and ever-growing party of workers in this town who are opposed to both political parties, Tory and Liberal..."<sup>93</sup> The hopes and aspirations of activists are brought out in the letter cited below from a local socialist:<sup>94</sup>

I'll tell you why I hope so much of the I.L.P. It is the only party yet which has proved that it cannot be bought by the intriguing Liberals and Tories. Officials may be bought. But the rank and file are honest, and are not to be tempted by compromise - not yet awhile.

There were a number of aspects to this insistence upon independence by branch activists. First, the belief was about that Labour stood in some sense above "mere" party politics, that is to say above the inconsequential squabbles of the Tories and Liberals which skirted over the issues of genuine concern: according to the Rochdale Labour News in 1900, "...any man who claims to represent Labour must do so free from party political prejudice."<sup>95</sup> The underlying assumption discernable here is that the cause of labour entailed the pursuit of "higher" ideals, an emphasis we shall note recurrent elsewhere. Activists would, therefore, have fully agreed with Shaw Maxwell when he declared in 1892 that, "...the days of mere political questions are over. The machine is at last in [the working classes'] power, and it is now their business to use it. Party government on the old lines is practically over."<sup>96</sup>

Second, the urge to independence seems to have followed naturally from an - at least implicit - theory of Liberal demise, which comes through strongly in branch publications. According to this view, it was argued that social, economic and political progress had overtaken

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93. Barrow I.L.P. Journal (N.D.) 3.

94. The Clarion, 5 January 1895.

95. Rochdale Labour News, 1, 26 May 1892.

96. The Labour Union Journal, 1, 26 May 1892.



the erstwhile party of reform, whose real vocation must now devolve upon the forces of labour. Activists believed with Russell Smart that "...the old party of progress has accomplished its mission, it refuses to advance further on the path of social reform," and that "true" Liberal principles, encapsulated in the demand for enhanced social and political reforms, were now firmly on the agenda of the labour movement.<sup>97</sup> Again, in the opinion of one labour columnist writing in 1898, "...the Liberal Party has exhausted its mission, and is not prepared to step forward in accordance with the true spirit of Democratic progress."<sup>98</sup> This whole question is highly pertinent. Whilst branch activists forcefully rejected the machinations of Liberal politicians - more staunchly, certainly, than some quarters within the Labour leadership itself - their conception of socialism embodied in no small measure the development and further elaboration of an indigenous Liberal inheritance.

Why was this? The received orthodoxy which attributes the vitiation of socialist purity to the "betrayals" of the Labour leadership is, whilst no doubt of considerable importance, in itself an inadequate explanation. Rather, branch activists believed that socialism was the rising force in society, that tendencies and trends working towards inevitable emancipation were already visible and these they must harness in their own chosen direction. This evolutionary conception of socialism owed as much to broad social and economic changes in late nineteenth century Britain than to the influence of Fabian doctrine or right wing labourism. In the first place, a long tradition of civil and political liberties in Britain and a history of working class and democratic struggles had culminated in the widening of the franchise nationally and the opening up of local government by measures enacted in 1888 and 1894. "In that

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97. Russell Smart, The I.L.P., Its Programme and Policy (London 1893) 5.

98. I.L.P. Gazette (Manchester) July 1894.



political liberty is the germ of a far greater liberty...", observed one I.L.P. correspondent,<sup>99</sup> arguing that democracy was proceeding apace and offering hitherto unforeseen opportunities for socialists.

Again, socialists recognised that legislation of a more or less progressive nature, dating from at least the great Education Act of 1870, was being cumulatively enacted by non-socialist governments and these they must surely work to extend to embrace industrial reform and yet more comprehensive social provision. But, above all else, the growth of municipal enterprise was a potent influence on socialist thinking. Activists could see in their own localities the community taking control of a whole range of activities. From allotments, abattoirs, baths and cemeteries; gasworks, tramways, electricity generation and markets; to brass bands, art galleries, canals, warehouses and golf links, socialists sincerely believed and propagated widely to the effect that these represented socialism in action and striking practical testimony to the emerging efficacy of municipal ownership. Bearing in mind what Elihu had termed "Milk and Postage Stamp Socialism",<sup>100</sup> activists believed with Enid Stacey, writing for the Bolton I.L.P. Pioneer, that "The growth of modern socialism may be likened to the flowing onwards of a mighty river," and is now "...a strong and inevitable current carrying us irresistibly on towards the sea of a fuller and happier humanity."<sup>101</sup>

The embryo of socialism was thus perceived within the womb of capitalist society and socialists saw themselves, by extension, as the midwife present to ensure a safe birth and vigorous development. Not

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99. Labour Union Journal, 3, 9 June 1892.

100. Elihu (Samuel Washington), "Milk and Postage Stamps" (1893) cited by Henry Pelling, ed., The Challenge of Socialism (London 1954) 189-92.

101. Bolton I.L.P. Pioneer, 7, April 1895.

surprisingly, therefore, we find current in branch discussions and publications a fairly simple conception of capitalism as a social formation. Socialists located the root evils of the incumbent social system either in "competition" or "private ownership" (significantly, the term "commercialism" was most frequently employed to characterise the existing social order <sup>102</sup>) and in which case the solutions readily - and, we can see in retrospect, too simply - presented themselves: these lay in substituting "public" for private ownership and "co-operation" in place of the competitive system. Precisely because it was assumed that socialism was the evolving force in society, we find but little detailed discussion of what the future society might look like, or indeed how municipal control - upon which that society was held by the socialists to essentially rest - might be practically managed and administered; and there existed small inkling among activists in the 1890s that the achievement of socialism might be more complex than suggested here. In one or two cases, certainly a more realistic conceptualisation of capitalism may be discerned as, for instance, in 1899 when Manchester declared that "...the system of private ownership depends ultimately upon the armed force of the State." <sup>103</sup> In general, however, the nature of capitalism as a totality - its full institutional and ideological ramifications and concomitant obstacles to socialist development that these must imply - was not as yet perceived, nor allowed to dampen socialist ardour. <sup>104</sup>

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102. See, for instance, The Labour Prophet, January 1892, 6.

103. Manchester, 1, May 1899.

104. It is, of course, a truism that in times of quietude and retreat socialist theory has tended to emphasise the obstacles to revolutionary potential, whilst during periods of rising fortunes these are relegated to second place. If, during the period under consideration here, socialism was conceived as the rising force in society, it is understandable perhaps that activists should fail to perceive the material obstacles to the achievement of socialism: cf. Lucien Goldman, The Human Sciences and Philosophy (London 1969) 82.

It was entirely in consequence, however, that socialists did not construe their creed as class based - at least in any rigorous Marxist sense. Admittedly, one finds frequently stated the fundamental opposition of interests which existed between the capitalist and the working man. But proponents of the movement were not prepared to push this belief, either practically or theoretically, to its logical conclusion: namely, socialism as the new hegemony of an erstwhile subordinate class. On the contrary, their conception of the "working class" - or, more frequently, "labour" - was flexible enough to allow socialism a broad based appeal. Here, two points deserve mention. First, it was widely assumed that, as Manchester I.L.P.'ers put the matter in 1901, "...the socialist idea is gradually sinking, perhaps to some extent unconsciously, into the life of the nation, and is permeating all classes of society."<sup>105</sup> Implicit once more is the notion of an evolving and overwhelming socialist force in society, a higher truth, as it were, eclipsing mere party opinion. Second, although socialism would benefit primarily the working population, sentiments of class warfare were anathema to the activists of the I.L.P., Clarion or Labour Churches. They advocated, rather, a vision of fellowship, a "brotherhood of common humanity:" "For the work we have in hand," announced Trevor, "...the distinctive qualities of all classes are needed."<sup>106</sup> Or again: "In working for this vast social change," declared the manifesto of the Manchester and Salford I.L.P.,<sup>107</sup>

...the I.L.P. welcomes the help of any person, in any class, who sees the injustice, or feels the misery of the present day social arrangements. It does not seek the triumph of one class over another: but the merging of all class distinctions in a practical brotherhood.

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105. The Social Reformer, 26, June 1901.

106. The Labour Prophet, August 1895.

107. Manchester, 1, May 1899.

It is by no means unusual, moreover, to find echoed the sentiments of a resolution passed by the central branch of the Manchester I.L.P. in 1905, suggesting "...meetings to be held in well-to-do suburbs, with a view to propagating socialism among the rich." <sup>108</sup>

For branch activists, then, socialism was premised upon the needs and interests - not so much of the "working classes" - but of "labour" and which will include, as the Labour Chronicle put it, "...all honest members of society." <sup>109</sup> Socialists believed that their creed was calculated to exalt all those engaged in "useful social service," <sup>110</sup> the industrious majority of society whose well-being was frustrated and toil expropriated by a small minority parasitical upon the main social body. The dispute at the founding conference of the I.L.P. over nomenclature, when the term "Socialist" was rejected, assumes in this connection far more than symbolic significance. It should be clear that the conception of socialism embodied in branch socialism was logically implied by the wider analysis of capitalism and the "evolving socialist force."

Current at I.L.P., Clarion or Labour Church branch level and, in all its essentials, fully accepted by the purists of the S.D.F., was a distinctive conception of socialism, above all distinguished by its local, not to say parochial or even neighbourly, rooting and orientation. Exemplified by the emergence and growth of municipal collectivism, activists ascribed to a brand of "practical socialism," intimately related to and expressive of local conditions and experiences. The flavour of practical socialism at branch level may be clearly evoked by citing several of the precepts contained in an article ventured by Rochdale socialists in 1900: <sup>111</sup>

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108. Minutes, Manchester I.L.P. central branch, 21 March 1905.

109. The Labour Chronicle, 1, May 1893.

110. Manchester, 1, May 1899.

111. Rochdale Labour News, 9, March 1900.



"Socialism in a Nutshell"

Socialism does not declare for equality of man, but demands equality of opportunity...

Socialism does not advocate "sharing out", but that work should be provided for all, and wealth produced for the benefit of all...

Socialists do not advocate revolution. They believe in peaceful and gradual evolution, and they point out that this evolution has been going on for centuries, until today we have socialist institutions in almost every town, village and parish in the country.

Socialist institutions include waterworks, gasworks, tramways, electric lighting, markets, baths, cemeteries and burial grounds, working class dwellings, piers, quays, etc...

A second component integral to socialism at branch level is less tangible than its practical strand, but no less powerful: the essentially moral critique of capitalism powerfully voiced, as we have seen, by many of the more prominent leaders of the movement gave birth to a widespread belief in the "religion of socialism" and its ethical potential among local activists. This conception of socialism - almost, in fact, as a new and higher religiosity - was able to call forth devotion and unflinching service from the adherents to "The Cause."

The main focus around which this conception of socialism emerged and revolved was the belief on the part of activists, whose development reflected the ingrained religious traditions of many Lancashire communities, that their creed embodied in full the generous teachings of the Christian faith. "Ethical" socialism undoubtedly crystallised a variety of impulses. First, it is common to find socialists criticising the established churches for failing to live up to their own glorious teachings, for manifest cant and hypocrisy - the difference between what activists liked to term "Christianity" and "Creedianity". In 1892, the Labour Union Journal decried the "...utter lack of Christ like attribute of sympathy among



the religionists," <sup>112</sup> whilst Fred Benson of the Bolton I.L.P. spoke for many working men and women when he denounced, <sup>113</sup>

The travesty of Christ's teaching which today passes for Christianity...the result of 1800 years of psuedo-Christianity ...the religious denominations are among the wealthiest corporations in the world, and an unholy alliance is thus established between Christianity and Mammon.

It had been, of course, the seeming insensitivity of the churches towards social questions that had prompted John Trevor to found the Labour Church movement in Manchester in 1891 and many erstwhile chapel-goers to fervently support this venture. Advancing the idea that "...the Labour Movement is a Religious Movement", and that "...the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion...", the Labour congregations, too, drew a sharp distinction between orthodox theology and genuine religious impulse. <sup>114</sup> Secondly, activists insisted that socialism, far from being anti-religious, was in fact perfectly compatible with full freedom of worship. In spite of what detractors of the movement were given to protesting, professing Christians need have no fear on this count: "Socialism has nothing to do with a man's religion", declared the Rochdale I.L.P.'ers reassuringly, "...socialism does not attack religion." <sup>11</sup>

Many, however, were ready to go further than this in arguing that socialism was, in reality, the practical application of "true" Christian principles, with the promise of fellowship and brotherhood, love, charity and justice that the latter held out. The Bury Light of Labour - in many respects an uncharacteristically militant and class conscious paper -

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112. Labour Union Journal, 4, 16 June 1892.

113. Bolton I.L.P. Pioneer, 4, 1 January 1895.

114. See, for instance, The Labour Prophet, January 1897.

115. Rochdale Labour News, 9, March 1900.

was nevertheless at pains in 1896 to make crystal clear its social idealism: 116

Socialism is in harmony with Christ's teachings. Therefore, a man to be a Christian must be a socialist...The men who are serving God most - whether they know it or not - are the socialists; who, by peaceful and honest means, are trying to bring about a system of society founded upon justice and love.

The point was re-emphasised later on in that same edition: "When socialism is realised, then will practical Christianity be possible - then can we begin to build up our higher man on a satisfactory basis." Commonly, socialists drew upon the "Sermon on the Mount" for their inspiration, the generous message of which cast into sharp relief the dismal science of capitalist economic doctrine: "Christ says, 'Love your enemies'; political economy says, 'Undersell your friends'," was the way in which one I.L.P. writer saw the issue in 1895. 117 Similarly, George Froggatt alluded to Christ's concern for the "blessed poor" in condemning private ownership in land: 118

It is undoubtedly God's intention that the meek should inherit the earth, but modern land laws are such, that the class Christ called blessed have to pay the landed proprietor for the privilege of living on it.

Conceived thus, socialism was given new meaning and many activists found, in a very real sense, a new faith. Only in this manner can be explained the atmosphere of enthusiasm and fervidity that suffused branch life, the very real and heart-felt emotion that signified commitment

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116. The Light of Labour (Bury), 12, May 1896.

117. The I.L.P. Election Herald (Huddersfield), 10 July 1895.

118. George H. Froggatt, Christ and the Labour Movement (Bradford n.d.) 2; see also, Henry Lees, A Christian's Duty Towards Socialism (Manchester Labour Press n.d.); R. Wood, Socialism, Christ and Christianity (Glasgow, Labour Literature Society 1894).

to the cause and the pure comradeship of socialist endeavour that ran through all these men and women did. For a brief period in the 'nineties and early years of the present century, socialism for some working people in the north came close to being a religion and many, indeed, spoke unashamedly of their "conversion" to the movement. Whilst we cannot simply assume that the rank and file members of the I.L.P., or Labour Church congregations, were inevitably as devoted to the ethic of individual spiritual uplift as perhaps were some of the leaders of the movement,<sup>119</sup> activists nevertheless endorsed the ethical perorations of the Labour leaders, prepared in fact to carry into the 'everyday dealings its full implications: "The keynote of Snowden's utterances is an ethical one", enthused the Liverpool I.L.P. branch newspaper:<sup>120</sup>

He is no mere 'bread and butter' socialist. He aims at nothing less than the fullest possible development of all man's potentialities, physical, mental and moral.

This conception of socialism broadened out into a rounded moral outlook whose antecedents lay only partly in the Bible and partly in the writings of Ruskin, Carlyle, Morris, Carpenter and Robert Blatchford. Ethical socialism ran parallel to and infused with genuine motive force the more practical side of the movement and we can detect its influence at branch level in a number of ways. Firstly, there was a strong strain running through socialist propaganda to the effect that social and political reforms were ineffectual - indeed, nothing more than mere material palliatives - unless complemented by individual and personal regeneration. The Labour Churches were insistent, of course, that social and political emancipation were inseparable: "...the development of Personal Character

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119. See below, Chapter 12, for further discussion of this point.

120. The I.L.P.'er: The Monthly Record of the Liverpool Branch of the I.L.P., February 1904.

and the improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage." <sup>121</sup> The belief was current throughout the movement as a whole. "Manners makyth man", declared Manchester: this is "...the personal spirit of socialism", <sup>122</sup> and one may perceive this emphasis as being in many respects basic to branch life where individual cultivation and refinement - educational, moral and spiritual - was well to the fore.

Secondly, and even more forcefully, this strand emerges with the frequent assertion that socialism holds out the promise of a "higher" way of life, a cleaner, healthier, happier and more wholesome existence. It is not without significance that the Blackburn Labour Journal of 1898 decrying, in the passage alluded to above, the wastage and inefficiency of local government under the old parties, declared that "...the members of the socialist party are resolved to purify our municipal administration."<sup>123</sup> In their day to day agitation, this concern with man's spiritual and moral well-being was often apparent. I.L.P. activists throughout Lancashire consistently championed the cause of temperance and the municipalisation of the drink business was always well to the fore of their demands; they campaigned for wider educational provision, for "...true education consists of the acquisition of good habits, good customs, purer views;" <sup>124</sup> health, housing and sanitary reforms were, of course, positively beneficial in themselves but, in addition, as The Labour Prophet saw it, <sup>125</sup>

The first essential of life is health and wholeness...The ideal of the Labour Movement is the growth of men and women into what God meant them to be...when a man's body, mind and spirit are all at one - then and only then will the Labour Movement have done its work.

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121. Labour Church Principle V: cf. any edition of The Labour Prophet.

122. Manchester, 15, July 1900.

123. Blackburn Labour Journal, 14 July 1898 (emphasis added).

124. Manchester, 15, July 1900.

125. The Labour Prophet, May 1893..

Finally, it is possible to detect further expression of this conception of socialism in the wholesale rejection of ugliness and the unmitigated changes wrought by laissez-faire capitalism commonly voiced by socialists. A standard feature of branch newspapers in this period was a nature or country column, wherein which the beauty of the countryside was exalted. This same impulse drove the youthful Clarion Cyclists each weekend during the summer months into the country areas surrounding the industrial towns, and sent the regular I.L.P. or Labour Church branch rambles and picnics to breath the clean atmosphere of the Lancashire moors. Again, Clarion, I.L.P. and Labour Church activists founded Field Clubs as an important adjunct to their other activities, the aim of which was to enhance the love and study of nature. "The keynote of Merrie England", wrote The Scout (a Clarion magazine), "...is the revolt of a beauty loving man from the sordid ugliness of modern competitive commercial life."<sup>126</sup> It is noticeable, also, that when many I.L.P. branches held their annual "Merrie England" fund raising bazaars, the centre of attraction would often be a simulated medieval English village, complete with Maypole dancing and all the trappings of this supposed ideal existence. In 1895, for instance, the Bolton I.L.P.'ers called their village "Nowhere", after William Morris' account of his socialist utopia in News from Nowhere. This seemingly trivial detail of branch life speaks volumes about what socialism meant to the men and women of the Cause.

In all, therefore, the "religion of socialism" characterises a distinctive phase in the social history of socialism, "...a phase of revolutionary evangelicalism", as Stephen Yeo has termed it, "...a temper which was not just the abberation of a few eccentrics who had not yet 'matured' enough to divest themselves of religious language, but which

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126. The Scout: A Journal for Socialist Workers, 1, 30 March 1895, 3.



is central to the understanding of those who called themselves socialists c.1885-1895." <sup>127</sup> The ethical component of socialism was clearly evinced by all the socialist organisations of industrial Lancashire, no less by local activists of the S.D.F. or Fabian Society, whose national leadership was particularly hostile to the "problem of sentiment". The "religion of socialism" was, for many socialists, the deeply-felt motive force behind the more practical branch activities and agitations: both aspects of the movement, however, were taken up by activists and woven into the all-round culture of socialist branch life.

#### 9.4: The Movement at Branch Level: The Socialist Culture

For the men and women who took up the socialist cause during the final decade of the last century, day to day branch life embraced a wide range of social and cultural, as well as purely political, activities. Of course, the business of politics - meetings, committees, discussions, propaganda, electioneering, and the like - was ever present, but far more than this was entailed. For here, indeed, was a rich cultural association into which many were drawn and felt understandably attracted - in some cases as much as to the formal political programme itself. Within the socialist clubs and branches, activists created a whole and distinctly new way of life, pre-figuring in their everyday activities the higher forms of social relationships which their creed espoused.

The striking feature about the socialist movement in this period, and the key to its early growth and strength, was the amount of local initiative and vigour it was able to evoke. As has been observed, the national organisation of the I.L.P. was weak, but this local vitality

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127. Stephen Yeo, "A Phase in the Social History of Socialism, c. 1885-1895", Bulletin of the Labour History Society, 22 (1971) 6.

was in turn the result of characteristics which made the party unique in British history until this time. Paradoxically, the secret of the I.L.P. success was in part its non-political character, its ability to enrol all members of a working class family into new and deeply textured social relationships. In the Clarion associations and Labour Church congregations, too, we may notice the existence of an all-round appeal which attracted the women and children of the male members. The Labour Prophet carried many articles written especially for children in which religious and socialist ethics were presented in a simple and straightforward manner, whilst most branch newspapers contained articles of obvious relevance to the womenfolk.<sup>128</sup> There were clear affinities between the socialist cause and the rising expectations of women in late-Victorian society. The "new women" of the movement found their counterparts at the local level in Lancashire, where confident and ambitious young women like Stella Davies, Hannah Mitchell, Annie Kenney and Alice Foley<sup>129</sup> threw themselves wholeheartedly into the movement, as at one time they might have found in church or chapel a similar outlet.

In a whole variety of spheres, the socialist movement - and particularly the I.L.P. and Labour Churches - provided a constant form of expression for working men and women. Social gatherings, dances and games were regularly held at branch level, sustaining that common fellowship that was in truth the very cement of the movement. Branch

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128. For a while, The Labour Prophet carried a "Cinderella Supplement" usually written by Blatchford especially for the children: cf., for instance, ibid., May 1893. For articles for women, see for instance, ibid., February 1892; March 1892; February 1893; etc., etc.

129. Davies, North Country Bred, op. cit.; G. Mitchell, ed., The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell (London 1968); Annie Kenney, Memoirs of a Militant (London 1924); Foley, Bolton Childhood, op. cit.

newspapers regularly carried a diary of forthcoming social events, to which the families of members were cordially invited to attend.<sup>130</sup> During the summer months, the branches organised outings and rambles, or perhaps a large picnic involving several neighbouring clubs or congregations, in which activists had an enjoyable day exploring the local countryside whilst at the same time distributing their propaganda and literature. Activities like these and, in particular, the new vogue of cycling on the 1890s, were especially popular with the Clarionettes. By 1895, there were some 32 Clarion Cycling Clubs throughout the industrial north and the large and active membership of the Clubs, as well as enjoying themselves on their cycling trips or Clarion "meets", also distributed leaflets and spread their message in the towns and villages throughout the region.<sup>131</sup>

With the more active socialist groups in Lancashire during this period, the club hall in which the branch was based would rarely be free from activity of one sort or another. In the evenings, I.L.P. brass bands, choirs or Clarion Vocal Unions would rehearse their repertoire and the musically gifted would provide concerts for the other members, or to promote the Cause. The I.L.P. used music to good propaganda effect: brass bands and fervent hymn singing would usually advertise their public meetings and, when the Manchester I.L.P. band became moribund, a correspondent was quick to advocate the reformation of a socialist brass ensemble, "...as I consider music and labour should go hand in hand."<sup>132</sup> "It is time labouring folk had their own songbook",

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130. For an overview of branch social activities, see The Labour Leader, 7, 14, 21 April 1894, or the congregation reports in The Labour Prophet.

131. David Prynne, "The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and the Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890s", Journal of Contemporary History, XI (1976) 66-9.

132. Manchester, 22, February 1901.

wrote William Hines in his Labour Songs for the Use of Working Men and Women, one of the favourite songbooks with the activists of the I.L.P. and Labour congregations: "There is no other way of keeping up fellowship and good spirit between labouring folk than by song and music." <sup>133</sup> Song and music revived an old custom of the Chartists and it encouraged the Nonconformists of the Free Churches to identify more easily with the labour movement. The Labour Churches were anxious that their Sunday services should be spontaneous and joyous events and to this end music was of central importance: in the opinion of John Trevor, "Probably no feature in our meetings is more marked and more important than the regular use of music." <sup>134</sup> Early in 1894, the Manchester congregation attempted to broaden its appeal by instituting Sunday afternoon recreation: "The Labour Church service is to be improved and social intercourse facilitated by the provision of tea. The whole family is encouraged to come along to the recreation service." <sup>135</sup>

Much of this was spontaneous and light hearted activity - seemingly far removed from the serious world of politics - but in reality an eager anticipation of the grand future these men and women advocated; for the Bolton I.L.P.'ers, branch life was one round of "...eating, drinking (aerated), speechifying, reciting, singing and general hilarity..." <sup>136</sup> "I cannot say that we youngsters of the Socialist Fellowship were unduly depressed," remembers one of these early activists, "...for in essence we were 'as full of spirits as the month of May'." <sup>137</sup> But, by the same token, much branch activity was more serious and of earnest

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133. William Hines, Labour Songs for the Use of Working Men and Women (1895) cited by Clayton, Rise and Decline of Socialism, 94.

134. The Labour Prophet, September 1894.

135. ibid., January 1894.

136. Bolton I.L.P. Pioneer, 12, September 1895.

137. Foley, Bolton Childhood, 69.

character. We have already observed the rounded literary culture which flourished at branch level and the sense of collective self-education which prevailed as members of the socialist organisations debated literary and political themes in their discussion groups. For Alice Foley, as for many young men and women of her generation, conversion to the Cause opened up a whole new cultural world and brought, for perhaps the first time in their lives, the experience of theatre and classical music.<sup>138</sup> Throughout Lancashire, men and women like Annie Kenney found intellectual stimulation through the Labour press and particularly the writings of Blatchford: "His writings on Nature, Poetry, Philosophy, Life, were my great weekly treat. Thousands of men and women in the Lancashire factories owe their education to Robert Blatchford."<sup>139</sup>

On the local level, socialist branches provided not only a large menu of recreational, educational and religious activities, but also a blueprint for the ideal community. In opposition to an economic system founded upon the principles of greed and wasteful competition, activists set up their own co-operative trading concerns and encouraged other members to deal only with tradesmen known for their sympathetic views or high quality goods. In a number of branch newspapers one finds a regular "Fair Traders" column, comprising a list of local retailers and manufacturers complying with trade union rules and standards and themselves favourably disposed to the movement. Some of the socialist branches set up their own trading departments with the intention of supplying good quality food or products at reasonable prices in order to beat commercial profiteering. The prospectus of the Liverpool I.L.P. trading department, for instance, announces its aim to have been

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138. Foley, ibid., 68-73.

139. Annie Kenney, Memoirs of a Militant, 23.



"...the supply of coal on the undermentioned favourable terms" to all the members. <sup>140</sup> In Salford, socialists responded by establishing a "People's Bank", in which the workers might save whilst at the same time supporting the movement. <sup>141</sup>

As Eileen Yeo has remarked: <sup>142</sup>

The idea that the working class, through its own collective efforts, could build a culture which allowed for active participation and control in social as well as economic life persisted through the mid-century in the Co-operative movement. With the later nineteenth century socialist revival, it flowered vigorously again in the Blatchford Clarion movement and in the local branches of the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. It is a proud and peculiarly indigenous tradition that British socialism and radicalism have been concerned not only with structural shifts of economic and political power, but with the very quality and excellence of all dimensions of human existence.

I.L.P., Clarion and Labour Church branch life, in its concern for "...the very quality and excellence of all dimensions of human existence" as against emphasising a purely economic or political creed, came in this way to embody a distinctive life style, an alternative and more wholesome existence whose dimensions may be gauged from a careful scrutiny of branch publications. A cursory glance at advertisements carried by the labour press, for instance, immediately suggests that these were clearly directed at a self-conscious socialist market. A wide range of commodities aimed at the socialist life style were advertised by local tradesmen and which, in turn, sustained the self-conception of this distinctive sub-culture: hats, coats, bicycles and even food and drinks - like "Christopher Bros.

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140. Prospectus, I.L.P. Trading Department, Liverpool (West Derby) Branch.

141. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 90-91.

142. Eileen Yeo, "Robert Owen and Radical Culture", in Sidney Pollard and John Salt, eds., Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor (London 1971) 107-8.

"Equality Tea", or "Cox's Anti-Burton Non-alcoholic Ales - to combat the speed of Commercialism"<sup>143</sup> - all marked out the socialist and created a fraternal and identifiable bond with his fellow members.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the socialist culture at branch level during these years was the total identification of the whole person with the movement and its culture, an involvement which in turn was able to call forth enormous enthusiasm and devotion on the part of the membership. It was, of course, nothing less than the sheer hard work of branch activists which kept the movement alive during the 1890s, but from which socialists gained much satisfaction and a deep sense of comradeship. As J. R. Clynes has recalled of his period of socialist agitation, high spirits on more than one occasion compensated for low finances: "...the camaraderie of Labour was such that workmen in the towns we visited clubbed together and gave their tobacco money to help with railway and fares; others, going short of food themselves, offered meals; others, again, would sleep in cellars, garrets and outhouses so as to free a bed for the Union delegate."<sup>144</sup> This same sense of comradeship and dedication occurs time and time again in recollections of the movement by activists in Lancashire. Hannah Mitchell, for instance, wrote that "...our hearts were glad. We were young and full of hope, thinking that we had only to broadcast the socialist message and the workers would flock to our banners."<sup>145</sup> Again, Willie Pickerill's biographer has noted with some regret the difficulty in conveying to later generations some sense of the often simple, but nevertheless wholly fraternal, social and cultural activities of this early breed of labour activists:<sup>146</sup>

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143. The Clarion, 21 November 1896; The Labour Leader, 31 March 1894.

144. Clynes, Memoirs, 66.

145. Mitchell, The Hard Way Up, 108.

146. Johnson, Willie Pick, 51-2.

...there were lighter moments in plenty. Popular Saturday evening concerts...concert parties and light opera...everyone was swept up by the excitement of the Merrie England Bazaar ...How to convey to the present sophisticated generation the excitement of such an event as that Merrie England Bazaar? A revolution has taken place since then, in nothing so much as the pleasures of the people. When the Mediterranean sun is available to almost all, when the working man can travel in his own car to find scampi and chips, when his wife attends 'coffee mornings' that have not only money raising objectives, but snob value as well, how are we to understand the lure of the homespun, even pathetically trivial entertainments of those days?

Socialist branch life was in reality, then, an all-round culture collectively forged by working people themselves and which allowed for and fostered a meaningful sense of control and autonomy - not simply in the field of economics and politics - but over social life in general. Branch socialism represented a flourishing sub-culture within society as a whole, an alternative life style in anticipation of the glorious future which the socialists envisaged. "Club-life", according to one I.L.P. writer, <sup>147</sup>

...has awakened and developed the self-governing powers of the members, thereby assisting, however unconsciously, in the evolution which shall yet present us with the higher power of social and political government.

This vigorous local culture was, of course, the product of a specific phase in the history of socialism - a phase in which the initiative in politics had passed temporarily from the national to the local level - and there is much indication that this was shortlived. By 1899, the Manchester I.L.P.'ers were faced with the problem of apathy among the members and they anxiously sought to rekindle the "old spirit" once more. <sup>148</sup> By 1906, the initiative had returned once more to the level of the Parliamentary leadership.

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147. The Labour Echo, 1 January 1898.

148. Manchester, 4, September 1899.

"Practical socialism" or "practical Christianity" - as socialists variously termed their movement - was embodied in the wider series of activities that constituted branch socialism during this period. This culture is one pointer to the nature of working class social consciousness, for it was firmly rooted in the social patterns of Lancashire communities. An investigation in this direction will form the substance of the following chapters.

===== CHAPTER TEN =====

SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY - I:  
INDUSTRIAL STRUCTURE, WAGES AND WORK PROCESSES

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It will be recalled that the heuristic framework outlined in Chapter 4 above, the theoretical precepts contained within which underscore the approach to socialism and working class belief adopted in this study, was insistent that the analysis of macro-structural and ideological factors shaping the broad trajectory of the socialist movement must be complemented by taking into account the cultural and essentially innovative role of working people themselves at the local level. It was suggested there that the social relationships and institutions of the working class community may be said to form the milieu within which occurs an on-going process of cultural struggle and adaptation - a "stretching", as it were, of ideas, values and beliefs in accordance with the existential location and perceptions of that working class group. To the degree that socialist beliefs were taken up and woven into the value system of working people then they, too, must surely be analysed as one aspect no less integral to the community than any other.

In consequence, we turn in this and the subsequent two chapters to an analysis of working class community and culture in later nineteenth century Lancashire. It is of some importance that the distinctive structure and flavour of community life in the north west be clearly specified, for it was in this context that broad structural and ideological processes operative at the macro-level were interpreted and infused with meaning in the light of everyday working class experience, and within which the distinctive socialist beliefs analysed in Chapter 9 were generated and sustained. We may proceed analogically, perhaps, by viewing the working class community as a form of social filter, a mediatory level sifting



and reworking normative systems feeding into that milieu to fit in with the rounded outlook of working class life.

The ultimate intention of Chapters 10-12, therefore, is to consider socialist beliefs in Lancashire in relation to working class life in the round. The present chapter will consider the economic foundations of the community by referring to industrial structures, wages and work processes, paying particular attention to the cotton textile industry. Closely related to economic life will be seen to have been the home, family and community patterns of the Lancashire working class: these themes will be treated in Chapter 11. Chapter 12 will continue the line of inquiry initiated here in a much more detailed fashion by focusing upon one particular aspect of the working class community in the north west - namely, religion and chapel life - concentrating once more upon the interactions with the emerging socialist consciousness of the 1890s. In a word, the whole discussion will seek to demonstrate the importance for any mapping of working class belief of the contours and general topography of the local social milieu within which such beliefs are situated and from which they are indeed inseparable.

#### 10.1: Industrial Structure, Wages and Work Processes

##### (a) The Lancashire Economy in the 1890s

A brief overview of the industrial make-up of Lancashire as a whole in the later nineteenth century will serve as a prelude to the detailed analysis of the structure of, and wages and work processes in, coal mining, engineering and, particularly, the cotton textile industry.

Indeed, it is hardly possible to begin other than by noting the predominance of cotton spinning and manufacture, by far the largest single occupational category in the region and most forcefully shaping the

character and structure of industrial Lancashire in general. Often closely related to and, indeed, at points juxtaposed upon the main lines of cotton production were coal mining and engineering - in short, the three great basic industries of the Duchy, around and between which had emerged a thick web of subsidiary occupations. The 1891 census reveals that almost 200,000 men and over 300,000 women were engaged in the various preparatory, spinning and manufacturing processes of the cotton industry, representing approximately 15% of the male population of the county at that point in time, and as many as 38% of all occupied females.<sup>1</sup> This is almost certainly, however, to understate the secular experience of cotton in working class life. Being heavily reliant upon both male and female juvenile labour, it is true to say that employment in cotton had at some time, usually during adolescence, been the lot of a much larger section of the population, not to mention the fact that its subsidiary and supportive processes (chemicals, bleaching and dyeing, finishing, transport and warehousing, communications, etc.) intimately affected the lives of vast numbers not themselves directly engaged in either spinning or weaving. Even within Lancashire, cotton production was, moreover, extremely localised, to such an extent in fact that it wholly dominated certain towns: in Bolton in 1891, 23,054 found employment in the staple industry, or 24% of the town's occupied male and 31% of its occupied female population; in Oldham, the proportions were 27% and 35%, rising to 40% of occupied males and 43% of all occupied women in Burnley.<sup>2</sup>

Much employment in other spheres revolved naturally around the twin foci of cotton spinning and manufacture. Engineering works were to be

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1. Parliamentary Papers (PP), 1891 Census of England and Wales, c.7058, v. CVI, 1893-94: Division VIII, North Western Counties. All figures calculated from Tables VII.

2. PP 1893-94, Table VII.

found in most towns in Lancashire servicing the adjoining cotton mills, but the industry was most obviously concentrated to the north east of Manchester, centring upon Oldham, and in a broad belt running west and north of Manchester through Bolton, where the production of textile machinery predominated and engaged almost half of the total 44,000 men who found employment in the industry in Lancashire.<sup>3</sup> The main locus of the industry was, therefore, virtually conterminous with the major workings of the Lancashire coalfield, and from which some 88,000 colliers made their livings in 1891. Comprising around 225 square miles between the river Ribble and the Mersey, the predominantly mining region centred upon Wigan, Westhoughton, St. Helens and Ince, the bulk of whose output was, of course, consumed by the contiguous cotton industry.<sup>4</sup>

As to the remainder of industrial Lancashire, we may briefly notice only the following.<sup>5</sup> Manchester was the centre of the cotton finishing, printing and lothing industries, although small firms were to be found carrying on these trades in such towns as Liverpool, Wigan, Blackburn and Preston. Bolton had justly earned something of a reputation for the quality of her bleaching, whilst textile dyeing and calico-printing were important minor industries widely scattered throughout the county. These sectors of the Lancashire economy, along with the chemical industry based in St. Helens, were stimulated by and had grown up next to the

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3. PP 1893-94, Table VII; John Jewkes, "Industries", in Henry Clay and K. Russell Brady, Manchester at Work (Manchester 1929).
  4. PP 1893-94, Table VII; Annon, A Survey of the History, Commerce and Manufactures of Lancashire (London 1897).
  5. See further, Leo H. Grindon, Lancashire: Brief Historical and Descriptive Notes (London 1892); T. W. Freeman, H. B. Rogers, and R. H. King, Lancashire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man (London 1966); David M. Smith, The North West (Newton Abbott 1969).

cotton trade, although St. Helens was, in addition, an important centre of glass production. The extraction of iron ores was mostly confined to Ulverston and Furness, supplying the smelting and shipbuilding trades of Barrow on the north west peninsula. Finally, one or two towns had emerged as specialist centres, such as Horwich, which had mainly grown up around its engineering sheds, paper-making in Bury and linoleum manufacture in Lancaster.

By the closing decade of the nineteenth century, the industrial structure of Lancashire was wholly reliant upon its staple industry - "a closed economic area", as John Jewkes retrospectively characterised it - in which there was a particularly intimate inter-dependence between cotton and the finishing trades, textile engineering, coal and chemicals, and the clothing industries.<sup>6</sup> For the moment, it was an economic symbiosis which paid dividends, but within which the diseconomies of over-reliance upon cotton and specialisation were already apparent - disintegrative forces which appeared during the years of depression in the final quarter of the century and were to assert themselves with a vengeance after the Great War. We should turn now to a closer investigation of each of the three major industries of Lancashire in this period.

(b) The Cotton Industry

It has been justly observed of cotton production in Lancashire that the "...unique socio-economic situation of the cotton operative emphasised the importance of work in both its economic and social contexts, creating a total life-style that mediated the worker's relationship with the wider society."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it seems clear that, in spite of the many and variegated local specialism embraced by the industry, cotton worked

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6. John Jewkes, Re-adjustment in Lancashire (London 1935).

7. Keith Burgess, The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience (London 1975) 246.



to impose a certain uniformity upon the towns of Lancashire and foster a homogeneity of vision among the working class, one intimately tied to the conditions of production themselves. By 1850, the basic technological foundations of the industry, which had advanced cotton from domestic to water-powered and thence to steam-powered production, had been laid; the latter half of the nineteenth century saw a consolidating of firms in the industry, but a process in which specialisation and localisation of production were the guiding themes.

Contemporaries and historians alike have readily accepted Engels' contention that there was evidenced in the cotton industry of the 1840s an "...ever-increasing concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands."<sup>8</sup> It does indeed seem likely that the mechanisation of weaving and the automation of spinning during the previous twenty years had tended towards increasing fixed capital inputs, a classic case of labour saving technological change, in fact, which went on until the 1860s<sup>9</sup> and served to concentrate capital in the hands of large producers able to reap economies of scale. S. D. Chapman has observed that, by mid-century, "...the small, uneconomic mills were gradually declining, and the industry increasingly concentrated upon the Lancashire coalfield",<sup>10</sup> and corroborative

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8. Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1892: London 1972 ed.) 56; the tendency towards concentration in cotton is noted, albeit with some degree of scepticism, by G. R. Porter, "On the Accumulation of Capital by the Different Classes of Society", Quarterly Journal of the Statistical Society, XIV (1951) 193, 199; J. H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, i (Cambridge 1926) 185.
  9. M. Blaug, "The Productivity of Capital in the Lancashire Cotton Industry during the Nineteenth Century", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIII (1960-61) 359-60, 364, Appendix C, 379.
  10. S. D. Chapman, The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution (London 1972) 33.



evidence suggestive of the trend to scale in this period has been marshalled by a number of historians of the cotton industry.<sup>11</sup> The tendentious pattern of consolidation and concentration by mid-century was real enough, but one should not overestimate the size of firms in the industry. In a major revisionist essay, V. A. C. Gattrell has recently pointed to "...the survival into the 1840s of a familiar pyramidal hierarchy of firms in which large firms were still few, and small to middling (and single process) firms were preponderant."<sup>12</sup> Small capital remained ascendant in the industry in spite of the obvious structural drift towards size: the average primary process firm in Manchester employed 260 hands in 1841 and a quarter of all firms employed fewer than 100 operatives; the typical weaving shed in 1850 might employ 100 hands on around 160 power looms.<sup>13</sup>

The decades after 1850 saw nothing like the same scale of technological innovation as that which had revolutionized the industry in the previous half-century. A number of advances rendered the preparatory processes more automatic, particularly in carding and combing where the introduction of new machinery occasioned something of a revival in fine spinning.<sup>14</sup> The self-acting mule remained almost ubiquitously dominant in the spinning sector, although by late century the ring spinning process pioneered in America was beginning to make some small headway. In weaving, warping was greatly facilitated by the invention of the warping frame in the 1840s, but the major development here was the advent of the Northrop loom in the final decade of the century. The growth in the size of firms

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11. John Jewkes, "The Localisation of the Cotton Industry", Economic History II (1930), 95; A. J. Taylor, "Concentration and Specialisation in the Lancashire Cotton Industry", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., I (1949) 119-22.

12. V. A. C. Gattrell, "Labour, Power and the Size of Firms in Lancashire Cotton in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXX (1977) 97.

13. Gattrell, *ibid.*, 125; D. A. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry 1850-96 (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1953) pt. 3.

14. For technological developments post-1850, see Farnie, *ibid.*, pt. 1.

during the second half of the century was not matched by any similar trend in capitalisation; after the 1860s, the impetus towards capital inputs and labour saving technique declined and labour costs per unit of output began to rise steadily.<sup>15</sup> Any increments in labour productivity discernable during this period are to be largely explained, therefore, as accruing from work intensification and speed-up, rather than from technological innovation.

Other trends during this period are less equivocal. There was a decided movement in the cotton industry after mid-century towards urbanisation as country mills, usually reliant upon water power and producing poor quality low count yarns, were forced to the economic margin and increasingly replaced by the steam powered urban factory.<sup>16</sup> The period after 1850 had also witnessed the steady demise, after a brief period in ascendance, of the combined spinning and weaving concern.<sup>17</sup> Hereafter, the industry began to polarise much more sharply as between the weaving sector of north Lancashire and spinning in the south. Intense localism and specialisation, always associated with the industry, became now more than ever its hallmarks. Improved transport facilities - the county's railway system was virtually completed by 1850 - easier access to capital and a rapidly expanding market, all underscored the impetus to differentiation within the industry and the reassertion of old-established centrifugal forces which had been deflected, if never wholly obscured, by the brief regime of the combined concern.

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15. Blau, "Productivity of Capital in the Cotton Industry", 360, 364-67.

16. Taylor, "Concentration and Specialisation in the Cotton Industry", 114-19; Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, pt. 2.

17. Taylor, ibid., 119-22.

By late century, the broad partition of the industry between the spinning and weaving sectors was all but complete: in 1884, some 62% of looms were concentrated in north Lancashire and over three-quarters of the spindles were to be found in the area to the south of Rochdale.<sup>18</sup> The tendency towards grouping by process is starkly registered in the fact that, by 1900, the building of combined spinning and weaving mills had virtually ceased.<sup>19</sup> By late century, then, spinning was concentrated in a belt of towns immediately north and east of Manchester, especially in Bolton and Oldham, and weaving in a second belt further to the north, and embracing Blackburn, Burnley and a number of smaller centres. Well defined though these divisions were, by 1911 they had been further reinforced, at which point in time 73% of looms were in the north and fully 88% of spindles in the south.<sup>20</sup>

A number of broad differences are immediately apparent between the two sectors of the industry. The towns of the north were generally smaller, where many weavers lived and worked in centres such as Rawtenstall, Nelson, Colne and Padiham; the spinning towns of the south were, by contrast, larger communities, sprawling into one another to form the vast agglomeration that was "Metropolitan Lancashire". Again, although a handful of mills in the north employed over 500 operatives, in 1890 a typical weaving shed comprised 390 looms worked by around some 200 hands. Many of these concerns were owned by small capitalists, or remained in the hands of family employers, and in which quasi-patriarchal labour

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18. Jewkes, "Industries", 96; H. W. Odgen, "The Geographical Basis of the Lancashire Cotton Industry", Journal of the Textile Institute, XVIII, (1927).

19. S. J. Chapman and T. S. Ashton, "The Sizes of Businesses, mainly in the Textile Industries", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXVII (1913-14) 491-92.

20. Jewkes, "Industries", 96.

relations were reinforced by the personal ties of deference and obligation; it cost much less to float a specialist weaving firm, both in terms of fixed and circulating capital, and this clearly worked to encourage small scale enterprise.<sup>21</sup> In the spinning sector, the comparatively standardised character of the product, with long production runs, tended to increase capital and overhead costs and firms were on the whole much larger. Whereas only 144 joint-stock weaving ventures had been promoted between 1869-96, around 324 large spinning mills had been set in train upon joint-stock lines, including a small number in the Oldham area which, by 1900, had a capacity of 100,000 spindles or more and employed more than 10,000 operatives.<sup>22</sup>

Even within these broad divisions, however, the nature of the cotton industry was such as to differentiate production and industrial process still further, as a plethora of local skills, specialisms and products branched outwards, superimposing one line of demarcation upon another. Paradoxically, perhaps, the process of centralisation in cotton was countered as the century wore on by the consolidation of already deeply entrenched localisms, tending to variegate the industry within an over-arching uniformity. No doubt due in part to variations in geographical conditions, the localisation of cotton production was as much tradition bound, combining the custom of habit with the economies which result from the grouping of similar processes.<sup>23</sup> There inevitably followed from the broad division of the industry between the spinning and weaving sectors a further devolution towards specialisation by

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21. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, pt. 4; Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 236.

22. Farnie, ibid., pt. 4; Burgess, ibid., 236.

23. S. J. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry: A Study in Economic Development (Manchester 1904) 156-58.



product, firm and market.<sup>24</sup> In the north, Preston emerged as the centre of light fancy and plain goods, Chorley of muslins and calicos and the famous Burnley "pick" made that town the home of printing cloths of low and medium quality; coarse and staple products were to be found in Blackburn, finer goods were woven in the Nelson and Colne areas, whilst Darwin and Accrington were famed for their shirting and dhooties bound for export. In the spinning sector, the finest yarns were spun in Bolton and Oldham, the former in particular being renowned for its fine quiltings and fancy cotton dress goods. Coarse and medium yarns were centred upon Oldham, calicos and fustians were to be found in Rochdale, whilst Bury and Leigh were once again the home of fine count products. Such variations in industrial organisation, process and market were, not unnaturally, reflected in the character of labour relations prevailing in cotton.

As with coal-mining elsewhere in the country, cotton was concentrated in certain areas which it dominated. The localisation of the industry proved to be remarkably static and pervasive and the high degree of specialisation meant that the cotton towns were homogeneous to an extent unrivalled except perhaps by the pit villages.<sup>25</sup> "These demarcations are not absolutely observed", Sidney Chapman pointed out, "but they are sufficiently clear to give each town in the area covered by the cotton industry a distinctive place in its general organisation."<sup>26</sup> This markedly local diversification at the base of the cotton industry is central to our concern: we shall trace in due course its social and cultural concomitants among the working class in the north west.

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24. See further, Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, pt. 3; Jewkes, "Industries", 97-8.

25. P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge 1971) 76.

26. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry, 157.



It would be instructive at this point to turn to an analysis of the work processes and relationships in which the cotton operatives were engaged. Here, one is immediately confronted by the vast range of tasks, grades and statuses which the industry comprised. Like coal mining, there was little intrinsic skill in cotton production in the sense that other trades required a recognised period of training and distinctions between jobs were largely determined by experience. As the following brief account of the major processes will show, the work was mostly machine-minding, demanding varying degrees of watchfulness and dexterity.<sup>27</sup>

The cotton spinning industry may be conveniently divided into the preparatory stages and the spinning operation itself.<sup>28</sup> According to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, a typical cotton mill at the turn of the century with 40 pairs of mules, would employ about 90 preparatory cardroom operatives, mostly juvenile and female labour, 40 adult male mule spinners, each with two male assistants, and several overlookers whose task was to supervise the whole mill.<sup>29</sup> Raw cotton arrived at the mill in tightly packed bales of fibre and, before ready for spinning, had to undergo a variety of preparatory processes executed mainly by women and girls. After willowing - a rough process intended to open out and clean the cotton - the raw material was further purified on the lap frames, from which it went to the card and blowing rooms. Here the cotton was separated by means of rollers fitted with teeth, blown, and finally drawn out as a "sliver" onto bobbins by the drawing frames. Blowing room and drawing frame tenters were the highest female grades in these processes, below

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27. H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions (London 1962) 110-11.
28. For general accounts of the work process in cotton spinning and weaving, see J. R. Barfoot, The Progress of Cotton (1843: Helmshore 1973 ed.); C. Miles, Lancashire Textiles (Cambridge 1968); L. H. C. Tippet, The Lancashire Textile Industry (London 1969); and H. Catling, The Spinning Mule (Newton Abbott 1970).
29. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy (London 1902) 105.

them being ranged a hierarchy of assistant tenters, who would usually be young girls. It was likely that the head carder and under carder would be adult male workers, whilst stripping and grinding - by late century a highly mechanised preparatory operation - would again be carried on by the men.

As to the spinning operation, in Lancashire mule spinning wheels were always arranged in pairs, both supervised by three operatives - the mule spinner or "minder" and his two assistants, the "big" and "little" piecer - the latter being in all likelihood a young boy.<sup>30</sup> All three operatives were concerned to ensure the smooth running of the automatic mule, whose spindles twisted and wound the yarn in alternation, by joining broken threads, removing completed cops from the spindle ("doffing"), replenishing the supply of roving ("creeling") and generally oiling and cleaning their machine. Ring spinning, a comparatively simple method of imparting the twist and winding the yarn onto the bobbin at one and the same time, was only just being adopted by manufacturers in the 1890s and was almost always carried on by unskilled female labour. In the spinning sector, the minder was the only operative to be paid by the piece and it was therefore much to his advantage that the whole operation should be executed as quickly and efficiently as possible; he was responsible for paying the other two members of the spinning team and he held the right of hiring and firing his piecers.

On the manufacturing side, the operations involved were equally complex. When the cotton left the spinning machines it was wound onto bobbins, and had first to be prepared to form the weft and warp of the loom. This involved a whole series of operations, some relatively simple, employing girls and young women, and others the skilled crafts of men.

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30. For a description of the mule operations, see John Jewkes and E. M. Gray, Wages and Labour in the Lancashire Cotton Spinning Industry (Manchester 1935) 3-11.

Some part of the preparation of the yarn might have been done in the spinning mill or, alternatively, by the manufacturer in his weaving shed.<sup>31</sup> Winders would first rewind the yarn onto larger bobbins, and beamers and tapesizers, the latter category being almost universally adult male workers, were engaged in strengthening the thread to be used for the warp. Some part of the yarn would be twisted by the doublers to form a single thread comprised of two or more strands. Most of these operatives were paid by the piece with the exception of the sizers, who received a fixed weekly wage.

In a weaving shed proper comprising, say, 800 looms which alternatively raised and lowered the warp so that the weft may be passed between them by means of the shuttle, there would be about 200 male and female weavers whose main task lay in renewing the supply of weft and re-joining broken threads, as well as number of children ranging from a dozen to 50, employed by the weavers as tenters and paid small sums.<sup>32</sup> There would be, in addition, a number of ancillary workers employed by the manufacturer at various times,<sup>33</sup> textile warehousemen, and a small number of overlookers. These operatives were paid by the piece, whilst the overlooker would receive a fixed proportion of the weaver's wage. The whole process was completed by the finishing trades, usually bleaching, dyeing and printing.

All considered, therefore, there might be as many as 25-30 grades of operatives employed in cotton spinning, and some 15-20 in manufacture, ordering whom was a distinct and diurnal hierarchy as to authority, status and remuneration. Differentiation based upon occupational function

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31. A. P. Wadsworth, "The Cotton Trade Unions", in G. D. H. Cole, ed., British Trade Unionism Today (London 1945) 390.

32. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 105.

33. For the character of ancillary workers in weaving, see E. M. Gray, The Weaver's Wage (Manchester 1937) 39-40.

was further amplified by the heavy reliance of the industry upon female and juvenile labour. The Lancashire mill lass had long been, of course, a stock literary figure whose work conditions provided much ammunition for those critics whose animus was directed against the factory system.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Hewitt has estimated that around 58% of all women over 20 years of age in Lancashire were engaged in cotton in 1851 and there is some indication that the numbers involved rose steeply in the subsequent two decades.<sup>35</sup> By 1901, no less than three-quarters of unmarried women in the mill towns worked outside the home and, for those under the age of 25, the figure was around 90% - indicative, in fact, of a virtually ubiquitous working class practice.<sup>36</sup> The data in Table 10.1 illustrate the distribution of female labour as between the various processes of the industry:

TABLE 10.1 Female Operatives in the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1901-1911

	1901	1911	%
Cardroom operatives	46,135	55,488	+20.3
Spinning	34,553	55,448	+60.5
Winding, warping	64,742	59,171	- 8.6
Weaving	175,158	190,922	+ 9.0

Source: B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry (London 1915) 87.

34. Wanda F. Neff, Victorian Working Women: A Historical and Literary Study 1832-50 (1929: London 1966 ed.) 20-87.

35. Margaret Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry (London 1958) 16.

36. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, 76.

One obvious effect of this high level of female employment was to intensify the dependance upon and experience of cotton production among working class families in the mill towns, as well as reinforcing the pre-existing degree of specialisation among the men.

If women ranked below men in the occupational hierarchy, even lower down were to be found the children. The future was prescribed for the sons and daughters of the factory folk: "Children leaving school who intended entering the factory almost invariably entered the spinning first", recalled one woman operative; "There are, of course exceptions, but very, very few." <sup>37</sup> A young girl might begin as a "sweeper out" in the mill, a little tenter in the card and blowing room, a weaver's piecer, or as a general "scavenger". The boys would almost always seek to secure a position as little piecer, for some of whom - but obviously not all - advancement to big piecer and thence to minder was always a possibility. Even less than the women, juveniles in cotton had few rights and were generally dependant upon adult operatives for both their employment and wage. <sup>38</sup>

This employment pattern was universal in the cotton industry although, again, there were many local variations. The ratio of males to females, and of persons of different ages, varied considerably with the locality and the branch of the industry. Family employment in the strict sense was most prevalent in weaving although, as a general rule, the work group was larger where the process was coarsest and heaviest and the wages least. The numbers of children employed and their specific tasks also showed much diversity, although the spinning team of three operatives

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37. "Textile Worker", in Margaret Pollock, ed., Working Days (London 1926) 231.

38. For the position of the juvenile piecers, see Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in Cotton Spinning, 172-92.



was inviolable in its composition.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the parochial variations, the fact remains that the industry as a whole was hierarchically structured, each process or sector embodying its own distinct gradations of status and chain of authority.

The effects of these occupational relationships may, however, be overstated. Seizing upon the importance of the industry's inner authority structure and, in particular, the fact of sub-contracting as between the minder and his piecers, John Foster has argued for the emergence of an aristocracy of labour comprising mainly spinners and adult male carders, whose role in the unmaking of the labour movement has been alluded to at several points above.<sup>40</sup> It is true, certainly, that sub-contracting was prevalent as an early industrial form of managerial control which survived the factory age in the cotton industry.<sup>41</sup> Whilst there is some indication that large employers would on occasions contract work out to small capitalists,<sup>42</sup> the most prevalent form of sub-contract in cotton involved placing skilled spinners in charge of extensive machinery on the understanding that they recruited and paid their piecers. The practice soon became widespread and, as noted above, remained a key feature of the work process in the later nineteenth century.

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39. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry, 158-60.

40. John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns (London 1974) 229-34. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 244-46, has also stressed the differentiation of the cotton workforce and the embourgeoisement of the minders.

41. Sidney Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain (London 1965) 43.

42. Angus Bethune Reach's report from Oldham for The Morning Chronicle, in 1849, spoke of "...a great number of small capitalists renting floors or small portions of factories."; C. Aspin, ed., Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849 (Helmshore 1972) 79.

Now, whilst it may be conceded that the vigour of the cotton operatives' political attitudes was indeed sapped by the existence of important status distinctions within the workforce, there is nevertheless much that is questionable about the main lines of Foster's thesis. To the extent that they were at all important, for instance, these workshop characteristics would be mostly confined to the spinning sector. Cotton weaving was far less of a differentiated process, at least to the extent that authority holding within production was strictly delimited. Although occupational gradings were certainly complex, authority was largely vested in the overlookers - strictly speaking, an arm of management rather than a sector of the labour community proper - and based upon their power of hiring and firing.<sup>43</sup> Weaving was, moreover, no labour aristocratic prerogative buttressed by the full force of apprenticeship; a boy acting as a weaver's tenter would, after only two or three years experience, be ready to assume control of a power-loom and many 15 and 16 year olds were indeed to be found in such a position.<sup>44</sup> In spite of its highly complex structure, it seems likely that there existed in the weaving process a strong sense of communal identity. Margaret McCarthy has evoked the ambiance of the weaving shed around the turn of the century in the following terms: "...there was a strong sense of communality in those early factories, inherited from more bucolic days, and the weaving shed was, as often as not, a real commune of neighbours, friends and even close relations."<sup>45</sup>

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43. Patrick Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the later Nineteenth Century", The Historical Journal, XVIII (1975) 531.

44. W. A. Abram, "The Social Condition and Political Prospects of the Lancashire Workman", The Fortnightly Review, October 1868, cited by E. Royston Pike, ed., Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age (London 1967) 74.

45. Margaret McCarthy, Generation in Revolt (London 1935) 18.

In spinning, too, it is at the same time open to question as to whether divisions in the workforce were as important as credited by Foster and, indeed, whether work authority played a significant role at all in occupational differentiation. For one thing, the compass of the minder's authority was severely circumscribed, holding sway only over their juvenile piecers.<sup>46</sup> This latter category cannot be held to constitute an exploited sub-group within the working class as a whole, for some piecers soon became spinners themselves, whilst many more left the industry altogether as they grew older.<sup>47</sup> Subjection to operative authority remained the lot, then, of only a small adult minority. Most other grades, including the adult male carders, experienced authority through the orthodox chain of overlooker supervision flowing directly from management. The mule spinners were the "natural" leaders of the occupational community, but in no sense constituted a labour aristocracy. There was no apprenticeship in the industry and little skill component other than manual dexterity; the general social standing of the minders was, moreover, tainted by the presence of a sizeable Irish minority.<sup>48</sup>

All this is not to deny, of course, that real divisions based upon occupational function and reinforced by the age and sex composition of the workforce were not operative; rather is it to suggest that Foster's wholesale construction of a rounded labour aristocratic subculture - a phalanx of distinct social and cultural associations which sealed off the spinner from his fellow workers - constitutes an unwarranted generalisation from what was in fact a fairly attenuated authority relationship.

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46. Joyce, "Factory Politics of Lancashire", 532.

47. Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 46-7; Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge 1971) 26-8.

48. Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Harmondsworth 1974) 20.

Nevertheless, it is true that the distinctive occupational structure of the cotton industry was of singular importance in shaping the outlook and attitudes of the working class, as may be gauged from the pattern of labour relations and wages prevailing in the industry. Although broad generalisations are possible, recognition must once more be immediately accorded to the vast range of local traditions and practices in these spheres. Wage payment was universally conducted according to standardised lists which codified piece-rates against such well-defined criteria as the size and speed of mules, the "count" or degree of fineness of the yarn to be spun and the particular nature of the product, and which dated from the early stages of industrialisation when the price agreed for each commodity was largely customary.<sup>49</sup> By the later nineteenth century, wage payments were dominated by the Bolton and Oldham lists in spinning and the "Universal List" adopted by the weaving sector in 1892,<sup>50</sup> but there remained many local nuances and specialisations to be taken into account, in effect rendering payment for each process or product unique in itself. In like fashion, the pattern of industrial relations varied enormously, ranging from the depersonalised conflicts of capital and labour which plagued the Oldham coarse sector, to the intimate relations between masters and men which might prevail in some of the smaller weaving sheds, where small capitalists operating upon the "room and power" system may well have only recently been operatives themselves.<sup>51</sup>

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49. S. J. Chapman, "The Regulation of Wages by Lists in the Spinning Industry", The Economic Journal, IX (1899) 592-99.

50. Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in Cotton Spinning, chs. 5-6; E. Hopwood, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association (Manchester 1969).

51. Janet Weinroth, "The Nelson Weavers 1870-1900", paper presented to N.W. Group of the Labour History Society, April 1976; Reach noted that in Oldham, too, relations between the men and small capitalists might be extremely cordial: Manchester and the Textile Districts, 80.



The course and policies of labour organisation in cotton have been detailed in Chapter 8 above and need not be reiterated here. It may be instructive, however, to explore a number of relationships between trade union forms and attitudes and industrial structure, particularly with regard to the intense localism and inner differentiation of cotton production. All the cotton unions elevated local autonomy in political and trade matters to pride of place; both the spinners' and the weavers' amalgamations were premised upon parochial foundations which accorded considerable autonomy in recognition of regional specialisation. This was strikingly advertised in the federal character of the United Textile Factory Workers' Association which united the several amalgamations, a purely political pressure group covering all cotton operatives and which lacked any power of initiative without the prior consent of the constitutive unions. The two most important unions in the spinners' amalgamation - those formed at Oldham in 1870 and Bolton in 1871 - were fundamentally distinct in structure and intention and, as the Webbs observed: "The partial autonomy of the "provinces" of Oldham and Bolton is not a case of geographical, but of industrial specialisation. Each "province" has its own peculiar trade, spinning different "counts" for widely different markets. Each is governed by its own peculiar list of piecework prices, based on different considerations." <sup>52</sup>

The Webbs were also concerned to note that the occupational division of labour which prevailed in cotton precluded the formation of a single amalgamation which might embrace all the diverse grades of the industry, <sup>53</sup> and it is true that, in their rate of growth and policies, the textile organisations diverged markedly, depending largely upon the different

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52. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 125.

53. ibid., 105.



concerns and bargaining positions of the several grades within spinning and weaving.<sup>54</sup> As was observed in Chapter 8, unionism took root first among the spinners and only later on spread to the predominantly female and juvenile card and blowing room operatives. The minders' primary concern with regulating the supply of labour and, in particular, controlling promotion from piecer to mule spinner according to seniority within the mill, their high subscriptions and friendly benefits, all made for characteristically "closed" unions reflecting the minority status of the spinners as the "natural leaders" of the family employment situation.<sup>55</sup> Lacking these prerogatives, the piecers and preparatory operatives sought to directly advance wages, and their amalgamations were correspondingly more militant in temper. The character of trade unionism in the weaving sector, by contrast, advertised the fact that here the labour force was more homogeneous. Although the tapesizers were highly paid workers, they constituted only a fraction of all operatives, the overwhelming majority of whom, both male and female, were themselves weavers. In weaving the family economy was not based upon job differentiation according to sex and, beyond the sizers, few grades were the preserve of adult male workers. In consequence, trade unionism appeared initially among the less skilled and lower paid, spreading only to the privileged sizers at a later date. Their policies were above all concerned with wage rates and unionism among the weavers was classically "open", if only because they lacked the strength to restrict the supply of labour to the job.<sup>56</sup>

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54. See Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 253-60.

55. Burgess, *ibid.*, 253-57; Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, 114, 209-12; Sidney J. Chapman, "Some Policies of the Cotton Spinners' Trade Unions", The Economic Journal, X (1900) 467-73.

56. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 257; Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, 206, 112-23, 150-51; the whole question of trade union policy and labour relations during this period is treated by Roland Smith, A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry 1873-96 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1954).

Further indication of the importance of industrial structure is afforded by a consideration of wage rates and differentials. Between 1860-1906, the average weekly earnings of all cotton operatives rose by almost 70%, standing by that late date at 19s. 7d.<sup>57</sup> There were, however, many local variations in wages, as the following data drawn from the spinning sector make clear:

TABLE 10.2 Full Time Earnings of Minders and Piecers in Various Spinning Districts, 1906

	Minders		Big Piecer		% of minder's wage	Little Piecer		% of minder's wage
	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.	
Oldham	41	10	19	4	46.3	14	0	33.5
Rochdale	41	1	19	6	47.4	13	0	31.6
Bolton	45	9	15	5	33.7	10	7	23.1
Leigh	47	6	15	0	31.6	9	9	20.5
Manchester	47	0	15	9	33.5	7	10	16.7
Ashton	41	10	17	11	42.8	11	5	27.3
Preston	39	3	16	9	42.7	9	2	23.4

Source: Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in Cotton Spinning, compiled from Table IV, 30, and Table VI, 32.

In cotton manufacture, too, there existed wide diversity in wages as between the localities. As a general rule, however, earnings tended to be higher with fine count yarns throughout the industry, although under the Oldham list, before its revision in 1907, the coarse counts brought the greatest rewards.

57. G. H. Wood, The History of Wages in the Cotton Trade during the Past One Hundred Years (London 1910) 133; A. L. Bowley, Wages in the United Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century (1900: New Jersey 1972 ed.) 115-19; Robert Giffen, The Progress of the Working Classes in the Last Half Century (London 1884).

There is some indication, however, that the general advance in wages was by no means equally apportioned between the various grades of worker in the industry. In the spinning sector, adherence to the list system maintained the relative differentials between each category of labour and, for precisely this reason, the well-paid spinners consistently opposed any form of flat-rate increase.<sup>58</sup> In spite of this, however, it seems likely that the semi-skilled workers, particularly the strippers and grinders, made some headway in the hierarchy of relative earnings, whilst unskilled female labour, as well as the piecers, fell back somewhat. The following figures appertaining to the Manchester district have been calculated to illustrate these wage movements:

TABLE 10.3 Cotton Spinning: Average Weekly Earnings of Various Grades Expressed as % of that of the Self-Actor Spinners: Manchester and District 1871-1906.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1871	100	40	70	42	49	51	40	40	23
1874	100	36	69	43	46	48	39	42	25
1877	100	41	64	47	50	50	39	41	25
1880	100	41	69	46	48	48	38	45	29
1886	100	38	65	47	49	49	40	44	31
1891	100	36	73	51	50	50	38	42	29
1900	100	35	73	50	48	48	38	42	28
1906	100	34	71	48	47	46	37	43	28

Source: Wood, History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, calculated from Table 42, 131.

Key: 1. Self-actor spinners.

58. Wood, *ibid.*, 9; J. W. F. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory (1928: London 1969 ed.) 166; H. A. Turner, "Trade Unions, Differentials and the Levelling of Wages", The Manchester School, XX (1952) 245.

2. Card and Blowing Room Females.
3. Strippers and Grinders
4. Draw Frame Tenters
5. Slubber Frame Tenters
6. Rover Frame Tenters
7. Throstle and Ring Spinners
8. Big Piecers
9. Little Piecers

In cotton manufacture the range of differentials was less acute although, once more, the following data would seem to suggest that the unskilled winders, reelers and weaver's helpers lost ground in their relative earning power:

TABLE 10.4 Cotton Weaving: Average Weekly Earnings of Various Grades Expressed as a % of that of Weavers: Lancashire 1871-1906.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1871	92	92	100	100	214	35
1874	91	86	100	100	246	35
1877	82	76	100	100	235	32
1880	81	84	100	100	218	32
1886	76	76	106	100	206	30
1891	78	72	104	100	201	32
1900	76	71	105	100	194	31
1906	74	67	102	100	195	30

Source: Wood, History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, calculated from Table 42, 131.

Key:

1. Winders
2. Reelers
3. Warpers
4. Weavers
5. Dressers and Sizers
6. Weavers' Helpers

Although earnings were subject to considerable local diversity, they would nevertheless seem to have broadly reflected the complex division of labour which characterised the industry. The exception

appears to lie with the semi-skilled operatives, whose earning power relative to the other grades of labour advanced noticeably. <sup>59</sup>

For those concerned to relate working class social imagery to occupational patterns, the cotton industry would seem to present a difficult - not to say inviolable - case: an industry which, on the one hand, imposed an overall homogeneity upon the mill towns and yet which, on the other, dissolved into a plethora of local specialisms, products and practices; and a working community which, if hardly fractured as between labour aristocratic and proletarian sub-cultures, was nevertheless hierarchically graded by a complex occupational division of labour. However, changes in occupational structure and work processes in late century are highly pertinent to this concern and help us to make sense of an apparently confusing situation.

It would have required a prescient observer indeed to predict in the 1890s the fate which lay in store for the cotton industry in the years immediately after 1918; in retrospect, however, the seeds of demise appear all too clearly. It is true that the industry continued to expand right up until the Great War, whilst the first decade of the new century in particular had proved to be a period of unrivalled prosperity. <sup>60</sup> But there had been few major technological innovations during the past half century, and the reluctance shown by employers to capitalise upon new developments suggested to many the fact that a regime of tradition rather than innovation would continue to govern the industry.

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59. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 45.

60. For generally optimistic account of the cotton industry in this period, see B. Bowker, Lancashire under the Hammer (London 1928) 12-16; R. E. Tyson, "The Cotton Industry", in D. H. Aldcroft, ed., The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition 1875-1914 100-127.



There were, however, yet more ominous portents. No sector of the economy was as dependant upon exports as cotton, absorbing a record 85% of total output during the period 1876-80.<sup>61</sup> The industry was thus highly vulnerable to the foreign competition which had concussed Britain's monopoly in the decades after 1870, particularly as the relatively simple technologies involved in cotton production had been exported in vast quantities by Lancashire manufacturers themselves. By 1880, tariffs and competition abroad were proving serious fetters to the industry's growth potential. The rate of increase in the export of cotton piece-goods fell from 66.5% between 1865-69 and 1880-84, to 13.8% between 1880-84 and 1896-1900; during the same period, yarn exports fell from an increase of 65% to well below zero.<sup>62</sup> More and more, cotton manufacturers were coming to rely upon the sales of traditional lines in the markets of the Near and Far East and, from this point in time, the contraction of export markets continued unabated.<sup>63</sup>

Home demand, too, had reached a peak in 1860 that was not exceeded until 1925 and the effects of which were to prove equally calamitous.<sup>64</sup> Whilst the home market was expansive, the industry had been able to contain the "piecer problem", by which only a small proportion of boys were able to graduate to operating their own mule spinning wheels. As growth in the spinning sector decelerated, there built up an ever larger reservoir of piecers who had either to accept their position as permanent,

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61. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, 420-21.

62. Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 53.

63. Smith, ibid., 16-17; Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, 400-404; Tyson, "The Cotton Industry", Table I, 105, Table IV, 110; H. A. Turner and Roland Smith, "The Slump in the Cotton Industry 1952", Bulletin of Oxford University Institute of Statistics, XV (1953) 106-7, 113-16.

64. Farnie, ibid., 390.

or leave the industry altogether - by late century, the fate of at least half the juveniles entering the cotton industry.<sup>65</sup> For the industry as a whole, the depression of 1877-79 proved climeratical; in the face of falling mill margins, employers came to concentrate upon the production of fine and medium goods at the expense of the coarse end of the market, whilst the trend of investment towards labour rather than capital utilisation was further intensified. Both readjustments were to have profound effects on labour relations and conditions of work in cotton.

By late century, the industry was reeling under the combined assault of three seemingly ubiquitous factors: low profits, falling prices and technological stagnation. The rapid decline in the price of raw cotton and yarns compressed mill margins - particularly in the years 1873-78 and 1889-95 in spinning and 1878-80 and 1882-92 in manufacture - and during which periods labour relations were especially strained.<sup>66</sup> The trend towards labour utilisation increased the proportion absorbed by labour costs in the total price of the final product and, with their bargaining power in consequence enhanced, it was during this period that the centralized amalgamations came to be recognised for collective bargaining purposes by employers under pressure to contain, if not resolve, industrial conflict. There is much evidence, however, that the demands of the operatives were hardly assuaged, let alone satisfied, by the highly bureaucratic and pacific cotton unions so eulogistically described by the Webbs.<sup>67</sup> Working class frustration thus boiled over in a series of unofficial disputes during these years:

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65. Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in Cotton Spinning, 172-92; Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 240.

66. For declining mill margins, see Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 115; Smith, History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry, passim., treats labour relations as a whole in the context of falling profits; see further, Burgess, ibid., 233-34, 264ff.

67. Cf. Industrial Democracy, 203; "The machinery for collective bargaining developed by the cotton operatives, in our opinion, approaches the ideal." Burgess, ibid., 264-90.

in spinning, the piecers struck against their worsening position vis-a-vis the minders, whilst stoppages involving both groups occurred because of bad spinning and increasingly onerous work loads; in cotton manufacture, disputes centred upon "driving" by the overlookers, bad work and steaming. 68

At the very root of working class discontent in late century were wage rates and the condition of factory employment, themselves reflecting the straightened circumstances of the industry. Formerly, the nature of overhead costs in the industry had been such as to make possible recourse to short-time working during lean economic times, rather than cutting wage rates. But with the trend away from capital utilisation after the 1860s, employment began to rise faster than net output and was matched, in proportion, by an increase in the industry's wage bill. 69

It now became possible for the cotton masters to counter falling mill margins by chipping away at the list piece-rates and, if wages in general rose during these years, such increments were secured only at the cost of extra effort on the part of the workforce. Some indication of this is afforded by the following list of standard piece-rates in both sectors of the industry between 1870 and 1905:

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68. Burgess, ibid., 288-89.

69. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 11; Blaug, "Productivity of Capital in the Cotton Industry", 366-69.

TABLE 10.5 Changes in the Levels of Standard Piece Rates, 1870-1905

	Blackburn and Uniform Weaving list	Oldham Spinning list	Bolton Spinning list	Ashton Spinning list
1870	100	100	100	100
1875	100	100	100	105
1880	85	85	95	90
1885	90	85	90	90
1890	90	90	100	100
1895	90½	92	100	97
1900	92½	100	105	105
1905	97	100	105	105

Source: G. H. Wood, History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, Table I, 3-4.

As piece-rates fell, the operatives were goaded to increase their output and advances in their earnings came to depend upon their subjection to an intensifying pace of work using existing production methods, rather than by way of new technologies. G. H. Wood's figures would seem to confirm the impression that improvements in wages in the latter half of the last century were due preponderantly to increased efficiency and application on the part of the cotton operatives. 70

Few workers in the industry were able to escape the debilitating effects of work intensification and speed-up. The absence of basic technological innovation logically implied that, in the competitive international market at that time prevailing, established methods had to

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70. Wood estimated that the advance in wages between 1860-1906 - a period, it should be recalled, characterised by labour rather than capital utilisation - was due only about 7% to increases in rates of pay, 13% to the employment of more adults over children, and fully 49% "to increased efficiency of operative and machine": History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, 139.

be pushed to the limits of their productive capacity. Individual workloads rose in both sectors of the industry; the operative was encouraged to spend less and less time waiting between operations and free time and dinner breaks were progressively curtailed in flagrant violation of the factory acts; whilst increased speeds brought more yarn breakages to further irk the worker. In 1885, the Cotton Factory Times recalled that twenty years previously: "The operative at that time often used to be able to leave the mill in the morning and the afternoon - much was the ease of working methods"; but now, <sup>71</sup>

...there is no break in working either in the morning or in the afternoon. The number of spindles attended to by a minder and two Piecers have been increased by 30 per cent on weft mules, and 12 per cent on twist. The speed of the mules has increased 15-20 per cent. The tendency is to reduce price list prices as the length and speed of the mule is increased.

In 1896, the complaint was forcefully reiterated by a correspondent to the operatives' journal: <sup>72</sup>

The race during the last ten years has been increasing pace by pace from a workman's point of view...Increased speed, stricter attention to work, causing more anxiety and a greater strain upon nerve and strength...meal hours work gives an opportunity for the unscrupulous and the avaricious to strive against their fellows, compelling them to do the same...

There was no disguising the fact that the rate of exploitation had increased measurably. The number of spindles per operative on self-acting mules rose from 109 in 1850 to 234 in 1890, whilst mule speeds more than doubled in the same period. <sup>73</sup> It is remarkable to note how,

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71. Cotton Factory Times, December 4, 1885.

72. Cotton Factory Times, February 14, 1896; Allen Clarke, The Effects of the Factory System (London 1899) 62-3.

73. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry, 41.



despite greater inputs of labour, the amount of yarn produced per hour by each worker rose from 0.883 lb. in 1845, to 2.267 lbs. in 1892, whilst at the same time labour costs per lb. fell from 2.3d. to 1.6d.<sup>74</sup> In cotton manufacture, too, the advent of the power loom had meant that an operative tended 4-6 looms in 1893 whereas in 1850 the average per operative was 1 or 2.<sup>75</sup> Loom speeds increased from 110-120 picks per minute in 1833 to 222-240 picks per minute in 1893. The weight of piece-goods manufactured per hour rose in relation from 0.539 lb. in 1845 to 1.352 lb. in 1892 and, once again, labour costs fell from 3.5d. per lb. to 2.59d.<sup>76</sup> The operative's life was now dominated - not to say tyrannised - by the machine and the overlooker to a quite unexampled extent, as a female textile operative recalled:<sup>77</sup>

Work inside the factory is now much harder than it used to be owing to the great speeding up of machinery. The toil is now almost ceaseless; the machinery demands constant attention... Production has increased without the corresponding increase in hands, showing that machinery has largely superseded human labour. Whether spinner or weaver, the textile operatives are on their feet from the first turn of the wheel in the morning till the last turn in the evening. Their feet are never still, their hands are always full of tasks, and their eyes always on the watch. For forty-eight hours a week, year in and year out, one is expected to keep up to the great machine monsters.

In the later nineteenth century, the worsening conditions of factory employment were beginning to break down the ties of paternalism by which some factory masters had been able to command allegiance on the part of

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74. Blaug, "Productivity of Capital in the Cotton Industry", 366; F. Merttens, "The Hours and Costs of Labour in the Cotton Industry", Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society (1893-94) 128.

75. ibid., 131.

76. Blaug, "Productivity of Capital in the Cotton Industry", 366; Merttens, "Hours and Costs of Labour in Cotton", 128.

77. "Textile Worker", in Pollock, ed., Working Days, 234.

their workforce, and to fatally taint the pattern of industrial relations. Although there is some evidence that the burdens of work intensification fell disproportionately upon the piecers and preparatory grades,<sup>78</sup> no worker was exempt from the horrendous demands of the new regime. For, in spite of legislative enactment of one kind or another, the cotton mills and weaving sheds remained monstrously unhealthy and brutalizing places.<sup>79</sup> Of all the accounts which exist, Roland Kenney's indictment of the spinning mills during this period is perhaps the most eloquent:<sup>80</sup>

The clatter of the eight pairs of spinning jennies in the room where I worked merged into one devil's roar that haunted all my waking and sleeping moments. Each jenny had one thousand spindles, and...In my not infrequent nightmares I found myself under this covering of threads, like a lark in a cage, unable to get out, waiting for the return run of the jenny to crush me to bits. There were other horrors. The sanitary arrangements were such that our bare feet sometimes brought back from the conveniences - which were open to the spinning room - traces of the filth into the jenny-gate where we worked. The stench was horrible. The cotton dust was so thick that the occasional sunbeams that visited us through the windows in the summer-time looked as if they were white with tiny, dancing particles of snow. The factory distilled some fearful poison into my blood. I hated to work there. I hated the great barrack-like building. I loathed the dust and the grease and the stink of the place. Two of the minders were brutes to us Learners and Little Piecers...I developed a morose and dissatisfied nature...Within a few weeks of starting work I saw with horror that the fresh pink of my flesh was turning to an unhealthy pallor and that the pleasing curves of my limbs were fading. I looked on the other factory folk and noted that they also were pale and wan...

Occupational differentiation remained a real feature of the work process in cotton and a not uncommon reaction on the part of the minder to the new conditions was to bully their piecers towards ever greater effort.<sup>81</sup> But the overall effect of the depression through which the

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78. Jewkes and Gray, Wages and Labour in Cotton Spinning, 34; Wood, History of Wages in the Cotton Trade, 139-41.

79. Clarke, Effects of the Factory System, *passim*.

80. Roland Kenney, Westering: An Autobiography (London 1939) 22-3.

81. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 241.

industry passed in the final quarter of the nineteenth century was to diffuse widely throughout all grades of operative the common experience of frustration and exploitation. For, by this time, the opportunity of social mobility for even the most privileged workers had been effectively sealed off. The Oldham Limiteds provided more openings for promotion,<sup>82</sup> it is true, but the conclusions drawn recently from a study of Bolton, which appear to indicate that in the period 1898-1911 no spinners became employers and very few rose to manager, although less important supervisory grades were usually drawn from the shop floor, would seem to hold good in general.<sup>83</sup> Far from the mule spinners constituting a privileged labour aristocracy, able to effect social closure against those below them, they were subjected to the same indignities as any other workers, whilst in terms of earnings they were clearly losing ground to the semi-skilled adult male grades of labour. Indeed, their plight may well have been worse than that of other workers for, by the 1890s, mule spinners were beginning to be thrown out of work by unskilled female labour operating the ring spinning process - an incursion which this supposed aristocracy of labour seemed powerless to resist.<sup>84</sup>

"The signs are that the Lancashire cotton trade has seen its best days", wrote Allen Clarke in 1895, and for whom the repercussions were crystal clear: during the halcyon days of the industry, "...no spinner

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82. Roland Smith, "An Oldham Limited Liability Company 1875-96", Business History, IV (1960-61) 39-40; S. J. Chapman, and F. J. Marquis, "The Recruitment of Employers from the Ranks of the Wages Earners in the Cotton Industry", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXV (1911-12) 296-7.
83. Ellis Thorpe, Industrial Relations and the Social Structure: A Case Study of Bolton Cotton Mule Spinners 1884-1910 (unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, University of Salford, 1969) 160.
84. Webb, Industrial Democracy, 242; A. L. Levine, Industrial Retardation in Britain 1880-1914 (London 1967) 95.

with any respect in his stomach would drink beer in the taproom with a common labourer"; but times had changed, for: "Later on, when trade declined, all sorts of workers, high and low, began to join together to do something remedial."<sup>85</sup> The last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century had witnessed, therefore, the start of that process which by the 1920s and '30s, as Allen Hutt has shown, had reduced the cotton workers to an exploited working mass whose class combativity was second to none.<sup>86</sup> One effect of this process had been to unify the workforce to some extent, forging between at least skilled and semi-skilled operatives a greater sense of identity - the desire "to join together to do something remedial" which Clarke noted - based upon their shared perceptions of the conditions of cotton factory production. This, in turn, was to have important implications for the development of the labour movement; and we shall also need to trace the impact of industrial structure and work process on the family and community milieu of the Lancashire working class in the subsequent chapter.

(c) Coal Mining

It was, perhaps, inevitable that the fortunes of the Lancashire coalfield should be closely linked to those of the cotton industry, as an adjunct to which its major growth had been stimulated during the course of the industrial revolution. Most of the output from the Lancashire field was consumed locally by the textile industry, to which it served as the main supplier, and the small amounts exported were mainly for bunkers.<sup>87</sup> Although a number of large concerns like the Wigan Coal

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85. The Clarion, February 16, 1895.

86. Allen Hutt, The Condition of the Working Class in Britain (London 1933) 91-6.

87. D. A. Thomas, "The Growth and Direction of our Foreign Trade in Coal during the last Half Century", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXVI (1903) 511.



and Iron Company had arisen by the 1860s, most colliery firms in the north west operated on a fairly small scale, lingering on producing for local needs; 58% of collieries in the west Lancashire coalfield around Wigan in 1851 yielded less than 100 tons daily and the major part of the district's output was accounted for by a handful of relatively large firms.<sup>88</sup> Partly due to the nature of coal outcroppings in the region, and in part contingent upon its intimate relationship with the staple industry, the mining communities in Lancashire were in a number of respects distinct from those to be found elsewhere in the country. The solid, homogeneous pit village was absent from Lancashire, where the miners lived and worked in towns and villages also occupied by workers employed in other industries, particularly textiles. In 1891, over one third of Lancashire miners lived in the seven large towns of Manchester, Burnley, Oldham, Bolton, Blackburn, Wigan and St. Helens, but only in the last two were they the largest single occupational group.<sup>89</sup> And even here the men were closely related to cotton by way of their wives and daughters, who almost invariably worked in the mills.<sup>90</sup>

Coal mining was quite unlike cotton production, however, in that it displayed only a low degree of automation and capital intensity. Because of early industrialisation, most colliery firms in this country during the nineteenth century were small-scale and, as a result, were particularly prone to diminishing returns which set in as the more accessible and easily worked seams were exhausted and which, in turn, limited the extent

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88. A. J. Taylor, "The Wigan Coalfield in 1851", Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society, CVI (1955) 117-19.

89. PP, 1893-94, Table VII.

90. Comment by John Smethurst in discussion of his paper "Thomas Halliday and the Lancashire Miners", presented to the Manchester History Workshop, April 12, 1976.



to which the ratio of capital to labour might be increased. Only a small number of companies were large enough to realise economies of scale, with the effect that there were few major technological innovations in mining. Employers were reluctant to adopt mechanised means of coal cutting to counteract the onset of diminishing returns and, in 1900, less than one-fiftieth of the total British output of 225 million tons was undercut mechanically and the productivity of the British miner was about half that of his American counterpart.<sup>91</sup> Mining remained in large measure, then, a labour intensive industry, in which the wage bill comprised by far the major part of total production costs. Much, therefore, depended upon the efficiency and application of the miners in increasing output, and so the industry was particularly shaken by the steep fall in labour productivity which occurred after about 1883.<sup>92</sup>

In the old-established Lancashire coalfield these problems were particularly acute. By the second half of the nineteenth century the more easily worked seams had been long since exhausted. There was widespread flooding and subsidence and the seams were difficult to mine, varying greatly in quality, thickness and density. It was a district seemingly ripe for the extensive employment of the coal cutter, but the prevalence of faulting and the difficulties presented by steeply pitched seams, presented formidable obstacles to enterprise; and long haulage distances from the coal-face to the pit-bottom, and the great depth of many of the shafts, all tended to increase production costs and depress

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91. A. J. Taylor, "The Coal Industry", in Aldcroft, ed., British Industry and Foreign Competition, 56.

92. A. J. Taylor, "Labour Productivity and Technological Innovation in the British Coal Industry 1850-1914", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIV (1961-62) 48-71.

output.<sup>93</sup> In consequence, earnings were low in the Lancashire coal-field and hours of work long for the colliers.<sup>94</sup>

There is some indication that declining productivity had been a problem in the north west from as early as the 1870s. With surface coal exhausted, colliers were compelled to go deeper and the ratio of "dead" work to actual digging increased in proportion.<sup>95</sup> Like the long worked Durham field, the downward momentum of labour productivity was well established by the 1880s: the average amount of coal raised annually in Lancashire between 1884-88 and 1909-13 declined by almost 30%.<sup>96</sup> In a desperate bid to shore up production, the coal-owners had responded by hiring more workers and the industry was claiming an increasing share of the nation's labour force. Employment in coal mining increased by 220% between 1881 and 1911, in which same period the total occupied male population was expanding by less than 50%;<sup>97</sup> by that latter date, the industry accounted for around 6% of national income, but almost one in ten of adult male workers was a miner.<sup>98</sup> The recruitment of more and more colliers did little to improve productivity in Lancashire as many were older men, or those inexperienced in mining.

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93. N. Simpkin, "The Lancashire Coalfield", Institute of Fuel, War-time Bulletin, December 1945; Taylor, "The Coal Industry", 57.
94. For the colliers' hours of labour in Lancashire, see B. McCormick and J. E. Williams, "Miners and the Eight Hour Day", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XII (1959) 233.
95. Raymond Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle upon Tyne) 116.
96. B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge 1962) calculated from Table "Coal 3", 115.
97. Taylor, "The Coal Industry", 49.
98. Christopher Storm-Clark, "The Two Faces of Coal", New Society, June 30 (1977) 649.

Although it is true that labour relations in the smaller Lancashire collieries may well have been less depersonalised than elsewhere, company paternalism of the sort and scale practised in the east Midlands was out of the question, even had the employers been so disposed.<sup>99</sup> The employers' only hope of survival lay in depressing production costs, the most important element of which were wages. On the eve of the First World War, the Lancashire miners - who were not even granted the traditional perquisites of free house coal and an explosives allowance - were bitter and frustrated at the conditions which had prevailed in the industry for many years. The Wigan Observer reported a contrast between the Lancashire and Derbyshire coalfields in the following terms: 100

Wigan, the Lancashire coal centre, and Chesterfield, the Derbyshire coal centre, are only fifty miles apart as the crow flies. They might be five hundred if a difference in spirit depended upon geography. In Derbyshire the demand for a minimum wage is based on economic theory supported by a sense of comradeship with the less favoured districts. In Lancashire, the men will tell you that it is a matter of life and death. For years the history of the Lancashire coal industry has been a history of miserable strikes and actions at law. The cumulative effect is an estrangement between masters and men such as exists nowhere else except in South Wales. For this, the nature of the coalfield even more than human being is to blame.

Such conditions were the backdrop to labour relations and wage rates prevailing in the industry and which, inevitably, coloured the workers' own social and political attitudes. Before turning to this question, however, it would be useful to examine the major work processes and relationships in coal mining.

Although embodying a highly differentiated work process, it was argued above that the labour aristocracy thesis holds but little applicability to the cotton industry in the later nineteenth century; this

99. Roy Gregory, The Miners and British Politics (Oxford 1968) 57.

100. Wigan Observer, March 2, 1913, cited by Gregory, ibid., 57.

is equally so in the case of coal mining. John Foster appears to recognise the ambiguous standing of mining in this respect, but it is not allowed to deter him from pointing to the emergence of an aristocracy of labour in the Oldham coal industry.<sup>101</sup> The crucial points in its development, according to Foster, appear to have been the statutory appointment of checkweightmen in 1860 - creating with the full approval of the coal-owners a new authoritative grade of production workers able to act as an arm of management - and the introduction of sliding scales in the 1870s, which automatically pegged wages to prices in obedience to the "laws" of supply and demand. Others, like Eric Hobsbawn, have seen in the sub-contracting arrangements of the "butty" system a form of labour aristocratic co-exploitation, by which skilled workers had a financial interest in keeping the wages of other workers low.<sup>102</sup> This claim warrants critical scrutiny for, to the extent that an aristocratic stratum was evidenced in mining, it would seem once more necessary to exempt Lancashire colliers from this broad generalisation.

It is of course true to say that mining exhibited a gradation of occupational tasks and statuses. In line with most coalfields in the country the Lancashire miners worked on the longwall system, whereby a causeway was driven a short distance from the pit-bottom, exposing the coalface on either side; this was then hewed, the gaps left behind being packed with debris and pit-props.<sup>103</sup> It would appear that under this system, the hewers - always an elite minority of those employed about

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101. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, 234-37.

102. Eric Hobsbawn, ed., Labour's Turning Point (London 1948) 6-7; Storm-Clark, "Two Faces of Mining", 651. For an explanation of the butty system, see A. J. Taylor, "The Sub-Contract System in the British Coal Industry", in L. S. Pressnell, ed., Studies in the Industrial Revolution (London 1960) 215-35.

103. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 159, 161.



the mine and the key men of the whole system - had a section of the face to themselves. The hewers were responsible for tearing away the coal with their picks and shovels and, where conditions permitted, gunpowder charges helped to free the coal from the surrounding rock. In cramped conditions and oppressive heat, the strength and agility of the hewers became legendary: 104

The best hewers have to learn to do their work in quick time, and it is curious to watch them shifting their postures and strangely adapting to the exact form or figure required to bring down the coal with the advantage of speed. I have never seen any labour like it; but its duration and voluntary extent must be measured against its intensity.

The nature of their work thus assured the hewers a large measure of work control and job autonomy. It was impossible for the employers to supervise the work process and, in consequence, both they and the men insisted upon payment by the piece; for the miner, piece-working was an added safeguard against exploitation by the owners. 105

Another class of underground workers were the putters, hauliers, fillers and trammers. As their names imply, these workers had to collect the hewed coal, stack it in the coal tubs and move them along to the pit-bottom. Many of these tasks were executed by boys, the youngest of whom would be trappers, whose job was to open and close the ventilation doors to ensure a steady current of air through the shaft. 106 Some were piece-workers and others were paid by the time. Also to be found underground would be inspectors and firemen as prescribed by the Mines Acts,

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104. "A Traveller Underground", Our Coal and Our Coal-Pits: The People in them and Scenes about Them (London 1853) 166.

105. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 159.

106. Our Coal and Coal-Pits, 152-58, 186.



although they were more properly officials of the colliery and were paid a standard weekly rate. Above ground there were the surface workers, mostly labourers engaged in spading, hauling and sorting the coal. In Lancashire, a fair proportion of these workers were women - the so-called "pit brow lasses" - almost invariably themselves the wives or daughters of colliers. The work and conditions of these women was vividly portrayed by John Monk Foster, a Wigan collier, in his novel The Pit Brow Lassie: 107

No work that a woman or girl could do would be found in the hands of a boy or a man. There was a woman helping the banksman at the cages; women and girls were running full and empty tubs in all directions across the pit-brow...women and girls were busy in the shots and screens, freeing the coal from dirt and slack. At the end of the great coal stack, where coals were stored when trade was bad, a group of women, with only here and there a man among them, were busy with spades and riddles filling railway wagons, and each woman handling her implement as easily and deftly as a man. On the other side of the pit brow, where the Leeds and Liverpool canal ran, another group of women were filling a boat with coal in the colliery basin under the guidance of a man.

By an Act of Parliament of 1887, all females over 12 years of age were allowed to continue to work at the collieries and, although comprising only around 5% of the total surface colliery force, their continued presence was a source of much concern to the trade unions. 108

The various grades of the mining industry were clearly reflected in wage rates, although much caution is advised in analysing the earnings of coal miners. Piece-rates varied from region to region in accordance with the availability of labour locally, whilst much "on the spot" bargaining, which took in account such factors as the accessibility of

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107. The Wigan Comet, 12 February 1889, cited by Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 70-71.
108. Angela V. John, "The Lancashire Pit-Brow Lasses and the Campaign to Remove Women from Surface Labour", Bulletin of N.W. Labour History Society Group, 3 (1975-76) 1-5.

the seam, its thickness and the quality of the coal, was conducted; again, the large proportion of labour costs in the total cost of production led to wide fluctuations in wage rates in line with general economic movements.<sup>109</sup> On balance, however, it is probably fair to say that, in common with most other fully employed workers, the miners shared in the general prosperity of the years between 1850-80, in which period their wages advanced by something like 20%<sup>110</sup> After the bad decade of the 1880s, the fortunes of the industry revived and, by 1906, the average yearly earnings of coalface workers stood at £112.<sup>111</sup> The less skilled time workers, like the hauliers, putters and fillers, would earn perhaps 30-40% less per shift than the hewers on piece-rates.<sup>112</sup> The movement of wages for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the mines is suggested by the data contained in Table 10.6. For the industry as a whole, differentials certainly showed no tendency towards narrowing in this period and there is indeed some evidence of the fact that they may have widened as between skilled and less skilled workers.<sup>113</sup>

The evidence for Lancashire is scanty, but certain clear trends may nevertheless be picked out. Until the 1880s, wages here were more or less on a par with those prevailing in other coalfields, if not slightly better, and the hewer's position relative to other fields was at least as favourable as it had been in 1850. Between the mid-'eighties and 1914, however, Lancashire seems to have lost ground, by which point in time the hewer's average earnings per shift stood almost 2s. below those of the well-paid Yorkshire field.<sup>114</sup> By 1891, colliers in Lancashire

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109. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 161; Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 10-11.

110. Bowley, Wages in the United Kingdom, 96-109.

111. Guy Routh, Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-60 (Cambridge 1965) Table 38, 88.

112. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 163.

113. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 45.

114. Gregory, The Miners and Politics, Table 9, 57.

TABLE 10.6 True Weekly Wages Rates in Coal Mining, 1886-1913.

	1886	1913
<u>Skilled Workers</u>		
Hewers (piece-work)	24s. 6d.	50s. 4d.
<u>Semi-Skilled Workers</u>		
Putters, fillers, etc. (time-work)	20s. 8d.	36s. 10d.
<u>Unskilled Workers</u>		
Surface labourers (time-work)	18s. 0d.	33s. 0d.

Source: Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 31.

might count upon a daily wage of around 7s. 0d., whilst the semi-skilled putters were able to command 5s. 6d., a differential advantage much less than that operative elsewhere. <sup>115</sup> In addition, it must be recalled that much of the work in the north west was done by daywagonmen, colliers less well paid than those on piece-work. Lancashire colliers were also expected to find from their own pockets the money for various other necessities - powder, ripping, timbering, etc. - which in other areas would be provided by the employers. <sup>116</sup> J. W. F. Rowe has concluded that the Lancashire collier's net pay was less than that of most other coal-fields and was won only at the cost of extra effort. <sup>117</sup>

There is little here to support the thesis to the effect that a privileged and well-paid labour aristocracy dominated the Lancashire coal mining industry. Certainly differentials were greatest in the industry

<sup>115</sup>. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 212; Bowley, Wages in the United Kingdom, 108.

<sup>116</sup>. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 191.

<sup>117</sup>. J. W. F. Rowe, Wages in the Coal Industry (London 1923) 62.

where the butty sub-contracting system was in operation, giving a small elite of butty masters an income of between £3-4 and £15 a week. Yet the system was virtually unknown in the north west where only one firm, that of Andrew Knowles and Son of Pendlebury, appear to have adopted the system of sub-contract labour, and even here it was eventually abandoned following trade union and socialist pressure.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, sliding scale agreements, held by many to advertise the acquiescence of the miners to free market principles as well as tending naturally to increase wage differentials, never really caught on in Lancashire, where the Federation held out against the implementation of sliding scales until their general duesitude in the early 1880s.<sup>119</sup> Finally, we must recall that the recruitment of large numbers of men into the industry, by which means Lancashire coal-owners had sought to counter the decline in labour productivity by drawing upon a pool of cheap unskilled labour, could not but work to dilute skills and further corrode the prerogatives of the "privileged" grades.<sup>120</sup>

It should be noted, too, that checkweightmen were wholly unrecognised by the coal-owners in large areas of Lancashire, particularly in the north east. This had the effect not only of removing an authoritative grade of worker from the occupational hierarchy but, in addition, subjecting the colliers to possible coercion from the employers.<sup>121</sup> As to the skilled hewers, their authority within the labour community was severely delimited by the absence of "cavilling" in Lancashire - the

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118. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 205-6; Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 161.

119. Challinor, ibid., 189-92.

120. Taylor, "Labour Productivity and Technological Innovation", 54; Taylor, "The Coal Industry", 54-5.

121. Burgess, The Origins of Industrial Relations, 209-10; Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 81.



method employed elsewhere by which the hewers decided between themselves as to the allocation of sites and work mates - a fact which gave to the employers a large measure of control, as well as enabling them to discriminate against particular men in the distribution of workplaces and allocate "fancy men" to the best sites. <sup>122</sup>

The development and policies of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation in the later nineteenth century reflects not so much the fact of a workforce fissured between proletarian and aristocratic cultures, but embodied rather a collective response to the harsh conditions, low wages and coercion of the coal owners on the part of the workers as a body. The Federation was concerned first and foremost with wage bargaining and securing regulation of conditions of employment in the industry, rather than with controlling the supply of labour or maintaining apprenticeship - for no such system was operative in the mines. The Lancashire miners were, therefore, a particularly advanced sector within the industry as a whole, for whom socialist ideas and the goal of state intervention came to hold much appeal during the course of the 1880s and 1890s. <sup>123</sup>

An intensive and assertive localism characterised the development of labour organisation among the miners in the north west, due in no small measure to the nature of the pits in the region and to the mining family's close ties with the particular branch of the textile industry in the locality. This localism had not prevented the formation of the Amalgamated Association of Miners in 1869 - although it was certainly a factor contributing to its ultimate demise - with its aggressive and centralised wage bargaining policy. <sup>124</sup> The militant legacy of the A.A.M.

122. Burgess, *ibid.*, 165-66, 209-10; Challinor, *ibid.*, 214.

123. See above, Chapter 8.

124. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, chs. 5-7 on the A.A.M., 180 on localism.



stood the Lancashire men in good stead during the depression years of the 1870s.<sup>125</sup> By 1880, however, the scattered local unions in the north west were patently struggling, with a membership hardly in excess of 1,000 and little, if any, co-ordinated activity to boast of. But the dispute of 1881, precipitated by the coal-owners' decision to force the colliers to join the employer dominated Lancashire and Cheshire Miner's Permanent Relief Society, led directly to the formation of the Lancashire Federation and the strike of that year, in which general wage advances were secured.<sup>126</sup>

Broadly in line with the political predilections of the majority of the rank and file, the leadership of the Miners' Federation in Lancashire was divided in its loyalties as between the Conservatives and the Liberals.<sup>127</sup> As has been observed, however, a more militant temper had begun to permeate the miners during the 1880s and '90s and, rooted in their work situation, were a number of factors swaying the colliers towards recognition of the need for greater state intervention and regulation. First among these was the question of safety conditions in the mines. Faced with declining productivity and profits, the coal employers had sought to save money over the years by scrimping on safety precautions. The accident rate in the Lancashire mines was in consequence horrifying, fully 40% above that of Northumberland in 1898.<sup>128</sup> A second major demand on the part of the miners was that of the statutory Eight-Hour Day. With the chronic problem of diminishing returns

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125. Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 199.

126. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 164-71; Robin Page Arnot, The Miners: A History of the M.F.G.B. 1889-1910 (London 1949) 62-4.

127. Gregory, The Miners and Politics, 63-4.

128. Wigan Observer, January 29, 1898, cited by Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 213.

confronting the coal-owners and their inability or unwillingness to introduce new capital intensive technologies, little option remained other than recourse to longer working hours. Hours of labour were higher in Lancashire than in almost any other coalfield and, against the rectitude of the bosses, legislation appeared to the miners to be the only method of securing the statutory working day. <sup>129</sup>

A problem peculiar to the Lancashire coalfield was the ability of the employers to escape the provision of the Employers' Liability Act of 1880. After the passing of the Act, many coal-owners compelled the colliers to contract out and join the Lancashire Permanent Relief Fund as a condition of employment. This flagrant violation of the law was a further factor pushing the miners towards an increasingly militant stance. <sup>130</sup> Finally, the absence of checkweightmen at many Lancashire mines during the 1890s presented the employers with opportunities to cheat and exploit the workforce by using loopholes in the law to prevent their appointment. Even where checkweightmen were permitted, much evidence suggests that the employers frequently controlled their election by means of bribery and dismissal. <sup>131</sup>

As was the case with the cotton industry, it would seem reasonable to conclude by noticing the way in which the development of coal mining during the final quarter of the nineteenth century had served to weld together to some extent the workforce in the north west. There would seem to be little substantiating evidence - at least appertaining to Lancashire - for the existence of a privileged and authoritative grade

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129. McCormick and Williams, "Miners and the Eight-Hour Day"; Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 214.

130. Challinor, ibid., 214.

131. Challinor, ibid., 214.

of production workers in mining which might be held to constitute an aristocracy of labour. Rather, the severe problems of the industry in the region confronted all grades of labour in the form of low wages, long hours and harsh conditions. The militancy of the Lancashire colliers - the mood which drove them to affiliate to the L.R.C. well before their counterparts elsewhere in the country - grew directly out of these conditions and from the effects of which few workers in the industry were able to escape.

(d) The Engineering Industry

The engineering industry and, in particular, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers founded in 1851 is broadly agreed upon by Marxist and non-Marxist historians alike to have been the locus classicus of the labour aristocracy during the last century. Much of the evidence adduced in support of this claim, which shows clearly the emergence of a skilled and privileged grade of engineering workers after about 1850, is indeed incontrovertible. Engineering also provides the main prop for Foster's analysis of working class politics in Oldham, according to which the development of a collaborationist aristocracy of labour is located in the erosion of craft skills and their replacement by a small group of skilled piecemasters, acting as pacemakers over the rest of the workforce, in an era in which capital exports were coming to characterise the industry.<sup>132</sup> There is much of value in this analysis and yet, as was noted in Chapter 8 above, by late century the engineers in the north west had become a particularly militant and refractory group. An examination of industrial structures, wages and work processes in the

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132. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, 224-29; see further, Hobsbawn, "The Labour Aristocracy in the Nineteenth Century", 278-84 for the aristocracy, including the engineers, during this period.

industry may help to account for this transition from aristocratic quiescence to labour militancy.

There seems good reason to believe that the development of the engineering industry in Lancashire was once more largely contingent upon servicing the needs of the cotton trade, the subsequent exolution and fortunes of the two industries being closely interlocked. As a distinct industrial form, engineering would appear to have emerged in the north west in the latter half of the eighteenth century, drawing upon indigenous mechanical skills and pioneering the techniques of textile machine engineering, steam engines and boilers.<sup>133</sup> Fired by a rapidly expanding market, there are signs that the industry early on developed a high degree of specialisation as well as an advanced machine tool technology.<sup>134</sup> The trade prospered alongside the cotton industry and, by mid-century, engineering, metals and textile machinery constituted a small, but important, adjunct to the staple industry, employing around 3% of the country's adult male population.<sup>135</sup>

As Keith Burgess has recently demonstrated, the development of British engineering in the nineteenth century falls into three principle phases.<sup>136</sup> Before 1830, the industry was largely labour intensive, revolving around the skills and expertise of the millwrights. Between 1830-50, the trend of investment turned towards the injection of capital; this period saw the development and diffusion of machine tools and engineering machine technologies and fitters and turners emerged as

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133. G. Tupling, "The Early Metal Trades and the Beginnings of Engineering in Lancashire", Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, LXI (1949) 1-34.

134. A. E. Musson and E. Robinson, "The Origins of Engineering in Lancashire", Journal of Economic History, XX (1960) 209-33.

135. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 23.

136. Origins of Industrial Relations, 1-5, et. seq.



specialised job categories in the place of millwrighting. The trend of capital investment slowed down after 1850 and, until 1880 or so, complete specialisation was still rare, but makers of locomotives, textile machinery and heavy machine tools came closest to it.<sup>137</sup> The 1890s saw a further advance in labour-saving machinery and the ratio of capital to labour began to rise once more. Burgess clearly documents how these years during which capital inputs rose also saw acute conflicts in the industry, centring upon such issues as piece-working, "systematic" overtime, workshop practices and managerial control, apprenticeship/journeymen ratios, the "machine question", and so on.

As noted above, in Lancashire the large-scale and capital-intensive machine technologies were well advanced and, in consequence, such issues assumed critical importance and were to colour labour relations in the north west virtually throughout the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century. It was in the textile machinery, stationary locomotive and machine tool sectors that skills and craft autonomy had been most radically confronted. The Oldham textile machine firm of Hibbert and Platt, for instance, upon which the 1852 lock-out had centred exemplified the "abuses" which aroused the hostility of skilled men. In 1850, the firm consisted of two plants that together employed more than 1,500 workers; its capital assets exceeded £150,000 and, in all, the firm was the paradigm of capital intensive engineering organisation. By 1914, Platts employed some 12,000 men and its output was equal to that of the whole American textile machine industry.<sup>138</sup> In the later

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137. S. B. Saul, "The Engineering Industry", in Aldcroft, ed., British Industry and Foreign Competition, 186.

138. Keith Burgess, "Trade Union Policy and the 1852 Lock-Out in the British Engineering Industry", International Review of Social History XVII (1972) 645-60; Origins of Industrial Relations, 22; Saul, "The Engineering Industry", 191-92.



nineteenth century, engineering in Lancashire was dominated by the large textile machine and specialist machine tool engineers itemised in

Table 10.7:

TABLE 10.7 Principal Textile Machinery and Specialist Machine Tool Engineering Firms in Lancashire

NAME	DATE FOUNDED	NUMBERS EMPLOYED
<u>Textile Machinery</u>		
Hibbert and Platt, Oldham	1821	12,000 (1913)
Howard and Bullogh, Accrington	1853	6,000 (1914)
Dobson and Barlow, Bolton	1790	4,000 (1908)
Brooks and Doxey, Manchester	1859	4,000 (1913)
Hetherington, Manchester	1837	4,000 (1913)
Asa Lees, Oldham	1790s	3,000 (1913)
<u>Machine Tool Makers</u>		
Muir, Manchester	1842	400 (1894)
Hulse, Manchester	1852	300 (1880)
Craven, Manchester	1853	1,000
Kendall and Gent, Manchester	1857	400
Smith and Coventry, Manchester	1859	500 (1894)
Cunliffe and Groom, Manchester	1864	200 (1892)
Richards, Manchester	1880	500
Holroyd, Rochdale	1887	250

Source: S. B. Saul, "The Market and the Development of the Mechanical Engineering Industries in Britain 1860-1914", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XX (1967) 112, 121.

These large engineering factories stood in marked contrast to the small, versatile and all-round craft workshops which characterised the engineering trades in such old-fashioned centres as London, Edinburgh and Birmingham. In spite of the size of engineering works in the north west, however, in no town was the industry the single largest employer and, like the coal miners, the engineers would live and work among other workers, principally those in cotton. Oldham was the largest engineering centre in Lancashire, but even here its 4,500 employees in 1891 fell far short of the 13,000 men and 17,500 women engaged in cotton. A similar pattern prevailed in the other engineering towns like Bolton, Manchester and Rochdale. Only in Barrow, with no cotton industry to speak of and dominated by the shipyards, were the metal trades ascendant. <sup>139</sup>

In no other part of the country were engineers to feel so fully the effects of the "abuses" which accompanied the progressive mechanisation of the industry as in Lancashire. The development of the slide lathe and the marketing of an accurate planer before 1840 had, early on, begun to revolutionise textile machine manufacture, the effects of which along with the wider diffusion of machine tools had been to strip away skill and craft controls. Foster's analysis of the census data would appear to indicate a marked decline in the proportion of skilled workers in the Oldham industry, from 71% in 1841 to 41% in 1861, and a corresponding growth in the semi- and unskilled sectors from 3% and 2% respectively in 1841, to 23% and 20% thirty years later. During the same period, the number of juvenile jobs rose from about one-seventh to one-quarter. <sup>140</sup> As the trend towards capital investment levelled off after about 1850, however, the skilled grades were able to consolidate and, in the case of

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139. PP 1893-94, Table VII.

140. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, 226-7, 327.

the pattern makers to actually increase their wage differentials. <sup>141</sup>

By 1891, fitters and turners had more or less completely replaced millwrights as the skilled and specialist grades in the industry and who, along with spinning and weaving machine makers, constituted the largest category of engineering workers in Lancashire:

TABLE 10.8 Categories of Engineering Workers in Three Lancashire Towns, 1891

	Bolton (%)	Manchester (%)	Oldham (%)
Engine and Machine makers	13	20.5	11
Millwrights	6	3	2
Fitters and Turners	30	33.5	39
Boiler makers	7	15	2.5
Spinning and weaving machine makers	38	27	44
Others	6	-	-
TOTALS	2,368	7,143	4,451

Source: PP 1893-94, Table VII.

Beginning around 1890, however, the trend towards capital injection in engineering gained momentum once more, precipitating in turn what can only be described as a revolution in machine shop tools. The impact of these changes were to be particularly felt among the skilled fitters and turners. <sup>142</sup> In the machine shop, the appearance of the capstan and turret lathes, the vertical, horizontal and later universal milling

<sup>141</sup>. J. B. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers 1880-1945 (London 1970) 62.

<sup>142</sup>. Jeffreys, ibid., 119-24, 150-57; Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 87-103, Appendix III, 263-70.

machine, the external and surface grinder, the vertical borer and the radial drill, may all be dated to this period. In the fitting and erecting shops, too, changes were abroad at least equally as great as those which had taken place in the machine shop and perhaps far more reaching in their effects upon skills. Accurate machines to a great extent eliminated the need for fine adjustments by the fitter with his scrapers, files and chisels, and the job became less like "fitting" and more akin to "erecting" pre-made parts with the aid of a spanner and hammer.

The effects of these changes may be registered by an analysis of the major work processes in the industry. The tendency towards mechanisation could not as yet obscure the highly differentiated occupational hierarchy which characterised engineering, but it certainly altered considerably this division of labour by challenging the prerogatives of the skilled grades, whilst at the same time interposing an enlarged semi-skilled layer in the process of production. With the demise of millwrighting, the fitters and turners - who set up and supervised the machinery - had risen to prominence as specialist skills. Turning came into being as a job category with the introduction of metal turning lathes and, until the 1890s at least, the lathe worker had to master the all-round skills of metal machining operations: alongside all forms of plain turning, a proficiency in boring, reamering, broaching, screw-cutting, tapping and drilling were expected of the turner. The fitter, too, was a skilled workman, principally occupied in assemblies leading to the finished product.<sup>143</sup> Although these remained real, tangible skills in the later nineteenth century, it was undoubtedly the men in the machine or the fitting and erecting shops whose skills had been most severely confronted by the introduction of the new machinery documented above.

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143. M. L. Yates, Wages and Labour Conditions in British Engineering (London 1937) 17-18, 22-23.

Pattern-makers and moulders were two further categories of skilled workmen in engineering.<sup>144</sup> The wooden patterns required for castings were made by the pattern-makers and the general run of metal castings were the work of the moulders. During the 1890s, the revolution in machine techniques had little or no adverse effect on the skill of the pattern-maker, as indeed was the case with the skilled platers and riveters, to be found principally engaged in boiler-making or shipbuilding. The changes had, however, brought into existence a range of semi-skilled "machine men", who at one time were engaged mainly on planing, shaping, slotting and drilling machinery, but by late century had assumed supervision of semi-automatic capstan and turret lathes, drilling on radial machines, boring, grinding and milling machines, as well as shaping machinery, all to be found in the machine shop.<sup>145</sup> Below them, finally, were to be found the unskilled labourers whose number would vary according to the operation, but were generally in evidence in all sections of engineering work.<sup>146</sup>

Wage rates and earnings in engineering naturally followed this occupational division of labour, but there is some indication that the technological developments of late century compressed differentials slightly and certainly served to generalise more arduous and intensive work conditions throughout all grades of labour in the industry. It seems clear that, between 1850-80, the differential wage advantage of the skilled man was materially advanced by the strong craft practices of the A.S.E.<sup>147</sup> After this date, however, the intensification of

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144. Yates, *ibid.*, 23; Rowe, *Wages in Practice and Theory*, 93.

145. Yates, *ibid.*, 19-22; Rowe, *ibid.*, 98, 103.

146. Yates, *ibid.*, 26.

147. K. G. J. C. Knowles and D. J. Robertson, "Differences between the Wages of Skilled and Unskilled Workers 1880-1950", *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics*, XIII (1951) 115; John Burnett, "Skilled Workers", in *idem.* ed., *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London 1974) 269-71.



capital substitution began to erode the position of the skilled fitters and turners by introducing a growing body of machine men who, in some firms, became the largest single occupational category. At the same time, mass production methods and the trend towards inter-changeability of parts increased the speed and intensity of work and enabled employers to devote more attention to workshop planning and supervision. One important effect of this was a noticeable speed-up in work. The time taken to make part of an engine bearing in an efficient engineering workshop was cut from 98.2 minutes in 1890 to 28 minutes in 1900, a reduction greater than in any other decade between 1880 and 1930.<sup>148</sup> Overtime working increased but, most catastrophic of all, was the capitulation of the skilled men to piece-rate working, imposed by the employers who sought to maximise the productive output of their new machines. In 1886, 6% of turners and 11% of machinists were paid by the piece; by 1906, the respective figures stood at 32% and 42%.<sup>149</sup>

Between 1886 and 1906, the average weekly wage rates of turners, fitters, moulders and pattern-makers advanced by something like 10%. But the wage differential distinguishing all but the most skilled workers from the semi-skilled machine minders had begun to narrow, as may be gauged from the data presented in Table 10.9 below. If, prior to 1894, the trend towards narrowing wage differentials was only marginal,<sup>150</sup> it was already clear that the growth in numbers and organisation of the semi-skilled workers had begun to disturb the old conception of the proper wage differential between skilled and unskilled, reducing in turn the

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148. A.E.U. Monthly Journal, February 1932, 55, cited by Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 27.

149. Yates, Wages and Labour Conditions, 97.

150. Knowles and Robertson's figures would appear to suggest that the main narrowing of differentials in engineering occurred only after 1914: cf. "Difference in Wages of Skilled and Unskilled", Table I, 111; for the position by the 1920s, see R. Spicer, British Engineering Wages (London 1928).

efficacy of wage bargaining upon the basis of custom.<sup>151</sup> Although this was ominous enough, it was the question of skilled labour substitution and machinery that most radically affected skilled men and which heralded the demise of an erstwhile labour aristocracy.

TABLE 10.9 Relative Positions of Different Grades in Engineering, 1886-1906

	According to Time Rates		According to Full-Time Earnings	
	1886	1906	1886	1906
Smiths	100	100	100	100
Pattern makers	107	110	102	99
Moulders	107	109	104	101
Turners	103	100	99	97
Fitters	101	102	98	96
Machine men	76	80	74	78
Labourers	62	60	60	56

Source: Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 105.

The defeat of the A.S.E. in the 1852 lock-out in the engineering industry in Lancashire and elsewhere was an enormous setback to the union's campaign against dilution, piece-working and systematic overtime.<sup>152</sup>

During the next thirty years, however, the issues which had plagued labour relations in the 1830s and '40s fell into abeyance; piece-work and over-

151. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 157.

152. Keith Burgess, "Technological Change and the 1852 Lock-Out in the British Engineering Industry", International Review of Social History, XIV (1969) 215-36; "Trade Union Policy and the 1852 Lock-Out", op. cit.

time practices came to be normalised with the capital/labour ratio in relative equilibrium and the A.S.E. turned to consolidating the prerogatives of its skilled membership. Although piece-work was most prevalent in Lancashire, even here by 1867 it was nowhere near as common as had once been the case.<sup>153</sup> But this period witnessed, in addition, a shift in policy-making within the Amalgamation, for the 1850s and '60s were marked by the rise of the A.S.E. district committees and a reassertion of local autonomy.<sup>154</sup> And thus, when the "machine question" once more became an issue of contention in the 1890s the struggle was to be found most resolutely waged in those localities in which abuses were most widely in evidence.

Lancashire was, of course, one such region, and here the abuses bit deeply and were vociferously countered by the district committees. The defeat of the men in the 1897-98 lock-out was, in this respect, nothing less than an unmitigated disaster for engineers in the north west. The terms of settlement upon which the dispute was concluded granted to Federated employers almost all the prerogatives against which the A.S.E. had been campaigning; employers secured the right to introduce whatever class of labour they wished into Federated workshops, they gained full freedom of selection, recruitment and training, provision for overtime and piece-working was accorded and all limitations on apprenticeship ratios were lifted.<sup>155</sup> In a word, full managerial authority and freedom

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153. Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 26; M. and J. B. Jeffreys, "The Wages, Hours and Trade Customs of the Skilled Engineer in 1861", Economic History Review, XVII (1947) 27-44.
154. Burgess, ibid., 36-7; the Webbs' Industrial Democracy, 48-9 noted that the trend towards decentralisation in the A.S.E. was still important in late century.
155. R. O. Clark, "The Dispute in the British Engineering Industry 1897-98", Economica, XXIV (1957) 120-37; A. Marsh, Industrial Relations in Engineering (London 1965) 73-4, 250-55.

of action was assured. For the men the settlement signalled a further round of skill dilution, machine substitution and, above all, an intensification of work from which not even the most privileged grades were immune.

Taken together, the effect of all these changes in occupational relations and work processes was to give rise to two contrary trends. On the one hand, they stiffened the resolve of the skilled men to withstand the onslaught of the semi-skilled machine minders. The compromise policy of the A.S.E. of enrolling after 1893 the semi-skilled men, and throwing the combined strength of labour in an attempt to establish one or two definite semi-skilled rates, was not as yet attractive to the skilled engineer with his pride of craft and trade union customs.<sup>156</sup> But it was surely, if only slowly, coming to be recognised that sectionalism of this nature weakened the collective response of the workers to the abuses which confronted all engineers. As Nigel Todd has shown, in Barrow-in-Furness the hostility and divisions between artisans and labourers fatally weakened the union's struggle during the dispute of 1897-98.<sup>157</sup> As apprenticeship regulations became more and more difficult to enforce the A.S.E. was forced to compromise, however, and in 1901 a new class of membership was instituted, which allowed any man who had been working for not less than two years on one type of machine, and who was receiving not less than 70% of the standard rate for turners, to join the union.<sup>158</sup>

The second tendency at work, therefore, but of which only the initial signs were apparent before 1914, was towards the emergence of a common

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156. Jeffreys, Story of the Engineers, 136-39.

157. Nigel Todd, "Trade Unions and the Engineering Industry Dispute at Barrow-in-Furness", International Review of Social History, XX (1975) 32-47.

158. Rowe, Wages in Practice and Theory, 110.



identity as between skilled and semi-skilled workers. The gradual compression of differentials and the dilution of skills slowly eroded the sectional outlook of the aristocratic grades, whilst the subjection of all engineers to the shared experience of piece-working, overseership and work speed-up helped forge a united response. By the 1920s and '30s, the period in which Walter Greenwood's classic novel of working class life in Lancashire Love on the Dole is set, the subjugation of the erstwhile aristocrats of labour was complete. The years under consideration here marked the start of that process which, as Harry Hardcastle, Greenwood's young engineering apprentice slowly came to recognise, had denuded engineering of craft skills and rendered apprentices to skill as vulnerable to the capricious policies of the bosses as any unskilled labourer: 159

Would Marlowe's re-engage Billy Higgs and the rest of the displaced time-served men? Or would more machinery be installed, everybody find themselves promoted and the gap at the bottom filled by hordes of raw boys just left school?

His spirits withered. Remember the installation of that new automatic machinery previous to the wholesale dismissal of Billy Higg's generation? At that time it held no significance for him, except that it had meant promotion; it was merely newer and more up to date machinery whose functions were marvellous, whose capacity was manifold and infinite. The screw-cutting lathe that needed only the assistance of a hand to switch on the current; that could work, ceaselessly, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week without pause for meals: a Thing that fed itself, functioned with mathematical precision, 'could do anything except talk', as someone had put it.

The novelty of such machinery was gone now; they were commonplace, established; their predecessors were antediluvian. They made of inexperienced boys highly skilled men. And the latest boys knew of nothing else; were as to the manner born.

Every year new generations of school boys were appearing, each generation pushing him and his a little nearer to that incredible abyss of manhood and the dole.

Why, the supply of boys was inexhaustible; there were millions of them at school; Marlowe's could keep going for ever. What was to become of him and his when their time was served? Where would openings occur if every firm was playing Marlowe's game? If! A horrible suspicion clutched him...



10.2: Conclusions

The analysis of industrial structure, wages and work processes in the three staple industries in later nineteenth century Lancashire is but the first stage in our exploration of the relationship between socialist ideas and working class community life. The following chapters will continue this line of research by examining working class family and community patterns which, not unnaturally, were closely related to the economic foundations of the community described in this chapter. At this intermediary stage of the analysis, therefore, it may be permissible to summarise the broad argument advanced above in a series of points.

1. The structure of the Lancashire economy was such that by late century almost its entire operation revolved around cotton, a perhaps unexampled case of industrial over-dependance. Not only was cotton the largest single employer in the region, but the experience of cotton was diffused widely throughout a much larger number than those directly engaged by the industry. Both mining and engineering were closely linked to the fortunes and vicissitudes of the staple industry; the men in these trades did not live in closed communities, but would live alongside textile workers in the mill towns and might even have had experience of cotton through their wives and daughters.
2. The conditions of cotton production in Lancashire imposed an overall similarity upon the mill towns but, at the same time, fostered a distinct parochialism, based upon local specialisms of process or product. It was a parochialism of outlook which to some extent spread to other industries; in any event, it found expression in labour organisation among the miners and engineers, no less than the cotton operatives.

3. The development of each of the three industries under consideration here in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, was such as to confront all grades of labour with the common experience of work speed-up and productivity intensification, worsening conditions at work, long hours and a reassertion of managerial control. In cotton, these changes were rooted in the depression which began in the late 1870s and brought falling profits and mill margins; in coal mining, they stemmed from a crisis of productivity in the particular context of the Lancashire coalfield; and in engineering from a growth in capital intensity and mechanised production. Overall, industrial conditions in late century coloured labour relations, engendered hostility and resentment within the workforce and reinforced trade union demands for legislative intervention in their industries.
  
4. The common experience of industrial crisis to some extent began to corrode the sectional attitudes rooted in the highly complex division of labour characterising each industry. Working in a similar direction was the movement of wage relativities. In cotton and engineering, and against the national trend in the Lancashire coalfield, one might generalise by saying that semi-skilled rates were advancing more rapidly than skilled rates, and unskilled rates tending to lag behind the rise in skilled rates. The industrial structure of the north west would not appear to provide evidence for the labour aristocracy thesis. Differences between skilled and unskilled remained endemic in all three industries, yet there is evidence of at least the beginnings of that process which saw skilled and semi-skilled workers drawing closer together. Only in this much broadened sense - a "flattening" out of the aristocracy of labour, as it were - may the theory be accepted.

5. Finally, changes for the worse in wages and work processes did much to strip away the veneer of paternalism which had made for those "communal" forms of politics in Lancashire, exposing more clearly the class alignments upon which the socialist movement might build.

===== CHAPTER ELEVEN =====

SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY - II:  
HOME, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PATTERNS

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In the preceding chapter, an attempt was made to describe the nature of industrial structure, occupational processes and wage rates confronting the working class in later nineteenth century Lancashire. Work cannot be other than of central importance in lower class life, its structure and relationships being the economic imperatives of everyday living; those features of the work situation documented in Chapter 10 form, in short, the real foundation of the working class community. When we turn in the present chapter to examine home and family relationships, as well as a number of aspects of the general community milieu, it should be no surprise to find that these social patterns are to a large extent shaped by the industrial structures undergirding community forms. The working class community is, however, no mere reflection of economic forces. As has been continually stressed throughout this study, the social relationships and institutions of the community embody the innovative and creative impulses of working people. It is here that ideas, values and beliefs, and the rounded culture of the community, are consciously created and adapted.

Our knowledge of working class community life during the last century, despite having been considerably augmented in recent years,<sup>1</sup> remains as yet in large measure speculative and there is great need for further exploration in this area. Yet, what evidence we have almost invariably attests to the importance of the communal, as well as the personal and concrete, qualities of working class life. And thus, Richard Hoggart has observed that:<sup>2</sup>

The more we look at working class life, the more we try to reach the core of working class attitudes, the more surely does it appear that the core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local: it is embodied in the ideas of, first, the family, and second, the neighbourhood.

Young and Wilmott, too, noted the importance of kindred and community associations in their study of East London:<sup>3</sup>

Either length of residence or localised kinship does something to create a network of local attachment, but when they are combined, as they are in Bethnal Green, they constitute a much more powerful force than when one exists without the other.

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1. The work of the History Workshop group of Ruskin College, Oxford, has done, and ought to do, much to illuminate many aspects of nineteenth century working class life: see, for instance, R. Samuel, ed., Village Life and Labour (London 1975), and forthcoming studies in the same series. Working class diaries and autobiographies are now coming to be recognised as valuable source material - see, John Burnett, ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (London 1974) - as is oral history: forthcoming work by Paul Thompson and Thea Vigne will utilise this latter method. Also useful, if impressionistic, is Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth 1973), and Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Nineteenth Century (Harmondsworth 1974). The work of novelists such as Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, George Gissing, Arthur Morrison and Robert Tressell can also be useful in affording insights of working class life. For more recent studies, see for instance J. B. Priestly, English Journey (London 1934); George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937: Harmondsworth 1967 ed.); N. Dennis, F. Henriques and C. Slaughter, Coal is Our Life: A Study of a Yorkshire Mining Community (London 1956); F. Zweig, The Worker in an Affluent Society (London 1961); M. Young and P. Wilmott, Family and Kinship in East London (Harmondsworth 1969) and Brian Jackson, Working Class Community (Harmondsworth 1968).
  2. Hoggart, ibid., 33.
  3. Young and Wilmott, ibid., 116.



Finally, Brian Jackson has described working class institutions (societies, clubs, etc.) in the following terms: they are, <sup>4</sup>

...not so much the centre of a particular skill or interest as fields in which to develop and extend personal relationships... This certainty about who you are and what the world around is, this practise of acting out personal relationships, and the concrete, documentary habit of thought produce that 'directness' of speaking and that incipient metaphorical life which could be so rich a ground for any developed culture.

There would appear to be little question, therefore, as to the centrality of kinship and neighbourhood patterns to working class life. In the context of the present study, the importance of communal association is further enhanced by the manner in which these patterns mediate the given economic structure of the community and its broader culture - of which socialist beliefs may be considered an integral feature.

#### 11.1: Home and Family Structure in Lancashire Working Class Life

As one factor contributive to working class social imagery, there can be little doubt that the importance of the home and family situation has been largely overlooked, for both Marxists and sociologists alike have concentrated almost exclusively upon the rooting of working class perceptions of society in the mode of productive relations. A recent symposium entitled Working-Class Images of Society makes no mention of the home or family variables, <sup>5</sup> whilst Jean-Paul Satre has bemoaned the scant attention that Marxism has accorded to this dimension: "Today's Marxists are concerned only with adults: reading them one would believe that we are born at the age when we earn our first wages"; and he emphasises "...the point of insertion for man and his class, that is, the particular family as a

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4. Jackson, ibid., 168-69.

5. Martin Bulmer, ed., Working-Class Images of Society (London 1975).

mediation between the universal class and the individual." <sup>6</sup> This omission would appear all the more surprising when it is recalled that sociological inquiry has long recognised the place of the extended kin network in traditional working class life, <sup>7</sup> whilst for many years a fundamental psephological dictum has insisted upon the strong relationship between family background and electoral and more broadly political orientations. <sup>8</sup>

Community studies of nineteenth century or more recent working class life - notably those by Hoggart, Young and Wilmott and Jackson cited above, and others - have invariably pointed to the overarching sense of kinship structure and sentiment which characterises these social groups, a dense network of family feeling which, if on occasions romanticised, was nevertheless of pervasive economic and wider social relevance to working people. There has been an unfortunate tendency in social and historical research towards over-stressing the political dimensions of working class life, concentrating upon labour movements and organisation, trade unionism and labour politicians, and the like, at the expense of the indigenous communal bulwarks of the working class. It is rarely appreciated that during the last century the working class family was one such bulwark, a front line of defence against the incursions of a hostile world. A sociological study of socialist belief would be manifestly inadequate without consideration of this dimension, for these beliefs were to a significant extent generated and harboured within the family and broader community milieu.

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6. Critique de la Raison Dialectique (1960), cited by J. M. Maravall, "Subjective Conditions and Revolutionary Conflict: Some Remarks", British Journal of Sociology, XXVII (1976) 31.
  7. Young and Wilmott, Family and Kinship, 48, 60-75, 82-3, 87-8, et. passim; C. C. Harris, The Family (London 1970) 82-7; S. Cotgrove, The Science of Society (London 1967) 43-7.
  8. H. H. Hyman, Political Socialisation (Toronto 1959) 52-64; F. Greenstein Children and Politics (New Haven 1965); M. Rush and J. Althoff, An Introduction to Political Sociology (London 1971) 38-42, 51-4, 58-60; David Bulter and Donald Stokes, Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice (Harmondsworth 1971) 65-89; R. E. Dowse and J. A. Hughes, Political Sociology (London 1972) 182-89; idem., "The Family, the School and Political Socialisation", Sociology, V (1971) 21-4 idem., "Girls, Boys and Politics", British Journal of Sociology, XXII (1971) 53-67.

Such an emphasis should not, however, be allowed to distract attention from those links conjoining economic life and the working class family and community. This point would seem to be particularly germane to the case of later nineteenth century Lancashire under close consideration here, for the extent of female and child employment in the region - particularly, of course, in the production of cotton textiles - advertises a peculiarly intimate relationship between the home and work situations. In a study of Metropolitan working class culture between 1870-1900, Gareth Stedman Jones has plausibly argued that the waning of class combativity may to a great extent be located in the progressive divorce of home and work. Whereas the old radical artisan culture in London had been squarely founded upon occupational groups, this work-centred life-style had begun to yield during the second half of the century to social patterns premised upon the home and family which, Stedman Jones argues, "...tended to become a depoliticized haven."<sup>9</sup> Although persuasive, this analysis cannot be uncritically generalised; in the industrial north west, much evidence attests to the continued tenacity of those bonds which linked the work and family situations.

By way of a sophisticated application of the functionalist theory of structural differentiation to the cotton industry and the working class family, Neil Smelser has effectively demolished the widespread contemporary belief that technological change between 1770 and 1840 had dissolved the cohesion of the cotton family.<sup>10</sup> Whilst he cogently demonstrated that the working class family responded and adapted to change by itself moving

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9. Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working Class Culture and Working Class Politics in London 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class", Journal of Social History, VII (1974) 484-89.
  10. Neil Smelser, Social Change and the Industrial Revolution (London 1959) 180-312. A summary of Smelser's argument is to be found in his article "Sociological History: The Industrial Revolution and the British Working Class Family", in idem., Essays in Sociological Explanation (New Jersey 1968) 76-91.

onto a new level of differentiation, there is some indication that Smelser overstated the survival of the family economy and, particularly, patterns of family employment in the cotton industry. Although surveys conducted by the Factory Commissioners in 1816 and 1833-34 indicated that well over 50% of children employed in the cotton mills of Lancashire were directly engaged by other operatives - and, in the spinning sector alone, the numbers involved were far in excess of this figure - perhaps not more than 10% were to be accounted for by parents directly employing their own children, although the practice would certainly be more common in the rural areas.<sup>11</sup> The remaining children were frequently those of other operatives, or poor law orphans recruited from the neighbouring counties or even further afield.<sup>12</sup> Michael Anderson has concluded from a study of mid-nineteenth century Preston that the practice of allowing operatives to employ assistants in the cotton industry can at no period have resulted in a predominantly parent-child pattern of employment. Indeed, non-relatives were probably always in the majority, although where possible the recruiting of kin was to be preferred as being more reliable, with the child's wage contributing directly to the family purse.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst direct parental employment in cotton should not, therefore, be overestimated, the extent to which the family economy persisted is not always appreciated. During the later nineteenth and early twentieth

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11. M. M. Edwards and R. Lloyd-Jones, "N. J. Smelser and the Cotton Factory Family: a re-assessment", in N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting, eds., Textile History and Economic History (London 1973) 315; S. Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management (London 1965) 43.
  12. Frances Collier, The Family Economy of the Working Classes in the Cotton Industry 1784-1833 (Manchester 1964); C. Stella Davies, Living Through the Industrial Revolution (London 1966) 65-9.
  13. Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire (Cambridge 1971) 113-17.



centuries, the incidence of children following their father's occupation has been put at 61.7% of occupied male children in cotton textiles and at more than 80% among the girls.<sup>14</sup> The localisation and distinct specialisms of the industry naturally brought many variations in the pattern of family employment.<sup>15</sup> A weaver's family generally provided a labour group of greater numerical strength and with a larger number of children engaged than in a spinner's family, although patrimony among males was most prevalent in the spinning districts of Oldham and Bolton, where the mule team frequently comprised fathers and sons.<sup>16</sup> The family economy was of greater importance in cotton manufacture owing to the lower average earnings of the adult male workers and the need to consolidate the family income, but in spinning, too, it was by no means uncommon for the wives and daughters of the minders or the big piecers to be employed in the preparatory grades.<sup>17</sup> Although there would appear to have been a steady fall in the numbers of children employed in cotton in the second half of the century, the striking constancy of the female labour force, and the small range of variation in the proportions of adult male labour, suggests that the distribution of skills was largely governed by the technical character of machinery.<sup>18</sup> The data in Table 11.1 illustrate the distribution by age and sex of the cotton operatives between 1850 and 1895.

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14. S. J. Chapman and W. Abbott, "The Tendency for Children to Enter their Father's Trades", Journal of Royal Statistical Society, LXXIV (1912-13) Table I, 599-600, 603-4.
  15. S. J. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry: A Study in Economic Development (Manchester 1904) 158-60.
  16. Chapman and Abbott, "The Tendency to Enter Father's Trades", Table II, 601.
  17. Keith Burgess, The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience (London 1975) 244.
  18. M. Blaug, "The Productivity of Capital in the Lancashire Cotton Industry during the Nineteenth Century", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XIII (1960-61) 368.



TABLE 11.1 Sex and Age Composition of the Cotton Operatives (U.K.)  
1850-1895 (%)

	1850	1867	1885	1895
Male and female 13 or under	4.6	10.4	9.9	5.8
Male: 13-18	11.2	8.6	7.9	7.9
Male: 18+	28.7	26.0	26.4	27.6
Female: 13+	55.5	55.0	55.8	58.7

Source: S. J. Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry (Manchester 1904) 112.

Female and juvenile labour was in every respect crucial to the well-being and standard of comfort enjoyed by most working class families in Lancashire during the later nineteenth century. Anderson's study shows clearly how mothers and children in Preston were forced to work outside the home by the pressure of sheer economic want,<sup>19</sup> and the fact that in the 1890s many Lancashire women were ready to break the law by resuming employment within only four weeks of confinement would surely suggest that their husband's income alone was inadequate to stave off hard times.<sup>20</sup> Evidence as regards the incidence of family poverty in Lancashire, however, is at best sketchy. John Foster's analysis of household income data in Oldham would appear to suggest that, in the relatively prosperous year of 1849, 41% of the town's population had a weekly income below, or less than 10s. above, the subsistence level; in a slump year such as 1847, the

19. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 72-6.

20. Margaret Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry (London 1965) 127-29.

figure might be well in excess of 60%. An outright majority of working class families in Oldham were too poor to buy basic foodstuffs, or were able to survive only "...by choosing alternative forms of impoverishment: economising on living standards, sending mothers and children out to work, and forming combined households with relatives." <sup>21</sup>

The occurrence of family hardship was inextricably related to the secular cycle of working class life. As Foster points out, only about one in seven of all working class families in Oldham were permanently free from the clutch of primary poverty: "...poverty was not so much the special experiences of a particular group within the labour force as a regular feature of the life of almost all working families at certain stages in their development, especially in old age or before young children could start earning." <sup>22</sup> The working of the poverty cycle was, of course, classically analysed by Rowntree in his study of York around the turn of the century <sup>23</sup> and, taking over Rowntree's scale, Anderson marshalls corroborating evidence from his 1851 Preston sample. If poverty characterises the early stages of the life-cycle, the skilled factory worker might live fairly comfortably during the middle and later stages, although old age invariably brought penury. <sup>24</sup> In any event, the earnings of wives and children were at all times crucial to the family's standard of living.

As indicated in the previous chapter, wages in the staple industries in the north west had risen considerably by late century, yet there is little evidence that the relative poverty of large sections of the working class was to any great extent alleviated. Booth's report on the conditions in London during the 1880s, and Rowntree's study of York alluded to above,

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21. John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns (London 1974) 96.

22. ibid., 96.

23. B. S. Rowntree, Poverty: A Study of Town Life (London 1901) 136-38.

24. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 31-2.

seemed to concur in finding about 28-30% of the population (representing some 40-43% of the working class) in poverty,<sup>25</sup> and studies carried out in Manchester and Salford during these years provide substantiating evidence. And thus, a survey of the old working class districts of Manchester and Salford conducted by Fred Scott in 1882 found 50% of those in the Manchester sample and fully 66% in Salford to have been "very poor", and a further 23% and 18.6% respectively to have been "poor".<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, T. R. Marr found little reason to doubt the veracity of Booth's and Rowntree's figures for Manchester and, upon this basis, calculated that over 200,000 in that city alone in 1904 stood in the grip of poverty.<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Robert's survey of working class life in Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness between 1880-1930 confirms this impression; the experience of childhood poverty would seem to have been widespread among her respondents and, once more, the incomes of mothers and children were of first importance in helping the family to eke out a living.<sup>28</sup>

The effects of widespread poverty among the working class are all too obviously recorded in appalling housing conditions and the level of sickness and mortality rates prevailing. In 1882, the Medical Officer of Health in Manchester commented to the following effect upon working class housing in the Ancoates district of the city:<sup>29</sup>

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25. Charles Booth, ed., Life and Labour of the People in London, iii, (London 1892); Rowntree, Poverty, op. cit.
  26. Fred Scott, "The Condition and Occupation of the People of Manchester and Salford", paper presented to the Manchester Statistical Society, May 8, 1882; see further, Manchester City News, May 11, 1889.
  27. T. R. Marr, Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford (London 1904) 19-25.
  28. Elizabeth Roberts, "Living and Learning - Socialisation Outside School" Oral History, III (1975) 14-28.
  29. Cited by Scott, "The Condition of the People of Manchester", 15; for further detail on working class housing, see Enid Gauldie, Cruel Habitations: A History of Working Class Housing 1780-1918 (London 1974); David Rubinstein, ed., Victorian Homes (Newton Abbott 1974).

Nearly the whole of the houses were built before 1830...The houses...have no ventilation spaces under the floor. They rise directly from the ground...They smell fusty. The ceilings are only six feet from the floor. The timber in many cases is in a state of decay. Houses in such a condition, and so erected, cannot be otherwise than damp. The absence of any provision to prevent the moisture of the ground rising into the walls, and the thinness of the latter affording so little defence against rain, the interior can seldom be or never be as dry as a home should be.

Such abominable conditions were by no means confined to the old working class districts of the large towns. In 1874, the Lancet reported the conclusions of the Local Government Board inquiry into Skelmersdale, "a colliery village having a population of four thousand":<sup>30</sup>

The statement made in evidence as to the condition of the village shows that, even among colliery villages, Skelmersdale must have a pre-eminence in filth. The houses, many of the most miserable construction, are almost buried in the filth of the inhabitants; the privies so foul as to repel even those most familiarised with them; the drainage accumulated in horrible puddles, fed also by the liquid abominations of the pig-sties and middensteads.

It is hardly surprising that under these conditions sickness and mortality rates were high. Stomach disorders were literally part of everyday life and could only be accepted stoically when even the better placed working family "...lived almost entirely on porridge, hot-pot, sheep's head broth, boiled cod, herrings, rice pudding and suet dumplings."<sup>31</sup> For many more, however, the staple fare would be bread and margarine or dripping, treacle, jam and tea, whilst dinner was rarely a two course meal.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally, epidemics of a more serious order - cholera, typhus and typhoid - occurred, and scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough,

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30. Cited by Challinor, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners (Newcastle upon Tyne 1972) 244.

31. C. Stella Davies, North Country Bred: A Working Class Family Chronicle (London 1963) 71; Roberts, The Classic Slum, 124-28.

32. Eunice M. Schofield, "Food and Cooking of the Working Class about 1900", Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, CXXIII (1971) 151-68.

smallpox and tuberculosis were common lethal diseases.<sup>33</sup> Conditions in the cotton mills played a large part in spreading disease and disability: high temperatures and abnormal humidity (induced artificially through the process of steaming in the weaving sheds) precipitated such respiratory diseases as bronchitis, pneumonia and pleurisy - these three alone contributing to almost 7,000 deaths in Lancashire in 1894.<sup>34</sup>

Between 1881-90, life expectancy in England and Wales stood at 43.66 years for men and 47.18 years for women, whilst in rural areas it might be as high as 51.48 and 54.04 years; in Manchester, by contrast, the figures were 28.78 years and 32.67 years respectively.<sup>35</sup> Again, the death rate of 20.27 per 1,000 in Oldham and 23.49 per 1,000 in Bolton in the 1890s, was manifestly in excess of that prevailing in the rural areas around Blackpool (13.8/1,000) and Turton (10.6/1,000).<sup>36</sup> Poverty was most savagely reflected, however, in the extent of infant mortality, which clearly varied in direct relation with the incidence of female employment outside the home:

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33. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 34.

34. Allen Clarke, The Effects of the Factory System (London 1899) 61.

35. Marr, Housing in Manchester and Salford, 18.

36. Clarke, Effects of the Factory System, 42.



TABLE 11.2 Infant Mortality in Areas of High and Low Female Employment  
1895-1905

	Total % of women occupied	Total per 1,000 Infant mortality
<u>High</u>		
Burnley	75.4	208
Preston	73.8	208
Blackburn	76.5	183
Oldham	70.4	170
Bolton	71.7	166
Bury	73.7	164
<u>Low</u>		
Swansea	42.1	160
Lincoln	47.2	157
South Shields	34.9	155
Cardiff	43.6	147
Barrow-in-Furness	40.7	144

Source: Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, Appendix II, 222.

Although hours of work had been progressively shortened during the nineteenth century, in 1900 most cotton factory operatives still worked around ten hours each day, their usual hours being 6 a.m. to 8 a.m.; 8.30 to 12.30 p.m.; and 1.30 to 5.30 p.m. Moreover, the strain of work had been heightened measurably by the increasing speeds of machinery documented above. As B. L. Hutchins pointed out, the strain was nowhere as painfully felt as among the female operatives, whose income was vital for the family economy. Overstrain and sickness was common among the women, for: "The whole system is like an elaborate mechanism to extract the last unit of effort from each worker..."<sup>37</sup> Accidents and ill-usage

37. B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry (London 1915) 184-88.

of children seem to have increased in the later decades of the century, and what Allen Clarke termed "the system and its slave-driving tendencies" made many overseers - dependant for their own wages upon the output of the operatives in their charge - outright bullies.<sup>38</sup> It is indicative of the straightened economic circumstances that the factory population had but little choice other than to acquiesce to the new regime and strive to increase their output.

The evidence of poverty among the Lancashire working class must, in all fairness, be set against testimonies - of which there were not a few - to the comparative affluence and material well-being of the operative class. As noted above, it was indeed possible for a family with all its members in full-time employment to be temporarily relieved from the demoralizing poverty which characterised the early and later stages of the life-cycle. E. H. Hunt has recently argued that, relative to other groups of female and juvenile workers, the Lancashire cotton operatives were reasonably well placed and, in consequence, family earnings as a whole must be counted as having been high.<sup>39</sup> By late century, family incomes of £3-4 a week were normal and wages in excess of £10 were occasionally encountered, although individual earnings were indisputably low.<sup>40</sup> High family earnings were bolstered by the relative absence of short-time working or unemployment in cotton and, as Sidney and Beatrice Webb observed, the willingness of the low paid grades to unhesitatingly support the wage claims of the spinners, the two groups in the industry being frequently joined by bonds of kinship.<sup>41</sup>

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38. Clarke, Effects of the Factory System, 71.

39. E. H. Hunt, Regional Wage Variations in Britain 1850-1914 (Oxford 1973) 114-15, 117.

40. Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 244.

41. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy (London 1902) 323.

In 1849, Angus Bethune Reach reported approvingly the comfortable and affluent bearing of the Lancashire work people: <sup>42</sup>

The Manchester operative in prosperous times need never want and seldom does want, a dinner of what he calls 'flesh meat' ...The outdoor dress of the men is comfortable and respectable ...The people are uniformly well shod and their general appearance is that of unostentatious comfort.

As to the housing of the better class of operative, Reach was loquacious in praise of the mahogany furniture and well appointed parlours and the "pleasure and pride in their dwellings" shown by the operatives in Hulme. <sup>43</sup> Later in the century, too, we find no shortage of commentators willing to enter evidence on behalf of the Lancashire work people's privileged station. Frank Ormerod, for instance, pointed out that: <sup>44</sup>

It is a notable fact that it is not the factory people who dwell in slumland, or bring slums into existence; one must go to a stratum of workers much below the cotton operative for the dire evidences of poverty. The mill-hand is generally very fairly, if plainly, housed.

Charles Rowley, for many years a voluntary worker among the poor of Manchester, similarly recalled in his autobiography that "...the mass of the people are well housed on the whole, and their wages are, as a rule, good and steady. One supposes there is no other industrial community that is so uniformly so well-off on the bread-and-butter side of existence."

The high level of earnings which characterised some of the cotton families during certain stages of the life-cycle has suggested to at least one recent historian that there was evidenced among this group an incipient

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42. C. Aspin, ed., Angus Bethune Reach: Manchester and the Textile District in 1849 (Helmshore 1972) 17-18.

43. ibid., 4.

44. Frank Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character (London n.d. (1910?)), 6.

45. Charles Rowley, Fifty Years of Work Without Wages (London 1912) 4.

process of embourgeoisement.<sup>46</sup> To be sure, there are a number of features of Lancashire working class life which superficially argue for the veracity of this interpretation. The popularity of friendly and building societies with the Lancashire work people - among whom the extent of home ownership was perhaps without parallel - is frequently adduced as indicative of the prevalence of middle class values of thrift and self-advancement among them.<sup>47</sup> They were also keen supporters of and regular investors in the savings banks,<sup>48</sup> whilst a feature of the northern manufacturing districts was the great number of profitable co-operative stores dealing in drapery goods as well as food, and with their trade confined almost entirely to the operative class.<sup>49</sup> According to Ormerod, the co-operative "divi" (share dividend, distributed in proportion to purchases at the end of each financial quarter) was exalted to a fetish by Lancashire working men and women, displacing the original ideals of mutuality and collective solidarity.<sup>50</sup> Again, the coming of limited liability diffused share ownership widely in a textile centre like Oldham, where many operatives - not simply, it should be noted, those engaged in cotton - held shares in their employers firms, if not directly, then indirectly as members of savings banks, friendly, building and co-operative

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46. Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 244-46.

47. For the prevalence of these institutions in the north west, see P. H. J. H. Gosden, Self-Help: Voluntary Associations in Nineteenth Century Britain (London 1973) 13, 40, 43, 116, 144, 159.

48. Albert Fishlow, "The Trustee Savings Banks 1817-61", Journal of Economic History, XXI (1961) 26-40, shows that cotton spinners and weavers comprised 6.1% of all depositors in the Manchester and Salford Trustee Savings Bank in 1842; Smelser, Social Change and Industrial Revolution, 358-77; Gosden, ibid., 228. For an interesting discussion of friendly societies and radicalism, see Trygve Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian Britain (London 1976) 281-304.

49. Gosden, ibid., 186-89.

50. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 46-7.

societies and even trade unions. 51

Such evidence as this must be tempered by recalling once more the essentially precarious and transitory "prosperity" of family earnings, but it provides a useful corrective to any monochromatic interpretation of the Lancashire working people as a depressed and homogeneous proletariat. As to whether or not there is sufficient evidence here in support of the embourgeoisement thesis is an issue which will be confronted in due course; for the moment, however, we may only notice that in 1903 the secretary of the Co-operative Union reported that many members of the societies earned less than £1 a week - hardly, it must be conceded, an adequate income to support middle class pretensions. 52

The material background to working class life documented above is crucial to a fuller understanding of the structure and functions of the working class family in later nineteenth century Lancashire. It will be seen that a combination of family employment and material want in certain stages of the life-cycle served to heighten the importance of kin relationships in working life.

The preponderance of mill employment in Lancashire, and the need in cotton for many young male and female workers, is often considered to have provided considerable motivation to early marriage with the operatives.

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51. D. A. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry 1850-96 (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1953) 261-62, 301-2; Roland Smith, A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry 1873-96 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1954) 191; S. J. Chapman and F. J. Marquis, "The Recruitment of the Employers from the Ranks of the Wage Earners in the Cotton Industry", Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, LXXV (1911-12) 302. Theodore Rothstein argued that, by investing their accumulated strike funds, the craft unions rendered them less accessible to the rank and file for militant strike purposes: From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement (London 1929) 212; this seems an extreme judgement.

52. Cited by Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 55.



It is of course true that factory work gave many young men and women a measure of financial independence quite unknown in other areas, and which many contemporaries found deeply distressing.<sup>53</sup> Coupled with the fact that wages were likely to rise only marginally with the onset of adulthood, this seems to have persuaded a number that early marriage was the most advised course of action.<sup>54</sup> The evidence on this count is, however, ambiguous. Dr. Hewitt's data would seem to suggest that female textile operatives married at much the same age as women in other occupational groups - that is, at around the age of 23 - with the exception of the collier's wives, who married on average slightly earlier.<sup>55</sup>

We can be rather more certain about the size and cohesion of the Lancashire working class family in this period, which was invariably large and tightly knit. It seems to have been the case that the employment of women outside the home in the latter half of the century resulted in a discernable diminution in their fertility, particularly among weavers where the demand for female labour was most marked.<sup>56</sup> There can be little doubt, though, that if the working class nuclear family in Lancashire was not noticeably larger than that prevailing elsewhere, the extent of kin contacts, co-residence patterns and propinquity argue for a predominantly familistic society. Foster has demonstrated that the formation of combined households with relatives was a common defence against poverty employed by working people in Oldham. Basing his case upon household composition data, Foster suggests that the sharing of homes and economic resources by parents and other kin families and young children -

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53. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, 35-38.

54. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 132.

55. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, 45.

56. ibid., 87-96.

"huddling" together as he aptly terms it - could emollify the periods of hardship which most families might expect to experience by obtaining support from younger siblings and parents.<sup>57</sup> Co-residence and joint household formation was indeed a common practice with working people in the face of material need<sup>58</sup> and Anderson's study of Preston, which found the number of persons living with relatives of one kind or another at some stage in their lives to have been around 95% of the town's population, provides further evidence of this social pattern.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, Anderson's detailed research points conclusively to the importance of co-residence and kindred propinquity for the Lancashire working population. As many as 23% of families in his sample of Preston households contained related persons other than members of the nuclear family, the mean size of households in the town being around 5.5 persons.<sup>60</sup> Co-residence was found to have been closely related to the economic life-cycle for, while the overwhelming majority of married couples eventually established their own homes, in the early days of marriage or in old age when the material constraints were greatest at least half of the couples opted to lodge with their kinsmen.<sup>61</sup> Those offspring who deliberately left home, either as individuals or as newly married couples, seem to have been in a decided minority. The predominance of mill employment as against domestic service in Lancashire meant that for most boys and

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57. Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution, 96-7.

58. See, for instance, M. Loane, From Their Point of View (London 1908) for evidence from London, e.g., 52: "The joint household sometimes represents family life at its highest, and often it gives a stability to the working class home which it could not otherwise possess, enabling periods of sickness or unemployment to be safely tided over..."

59. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 43.

60. Michael Anderson, "Household Structure and the Industrial Revolution; Mid-Nineteenth Century Preston in Comparative Perspective", in Peter Laslett and R. Wall, eds., Household and Family in Past Times (Cambridge 1972) Table 7.1, 219.

61. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 48, 53; idem., "Household Structure and Industrial Revolution", 223.

particularly, of course, girls, work was available locally, and they tended to stay in the parental home at least until marriage.<sup>62</sup> A by no means insubstantial minority of families also took in lodgers, usually comprising both adult and juvenile migrant workers.<sup>63</sup> In Preston, three generation families were not uncommon, and Anderson has concluded that:<sup>64</sup>

The urban-industrial revolution, then, seems, contrary to all expectations ten years ago, to have been associated with a considerable increase in co-residence of parents and married children.

The magnetic attraction of familial propinquity and, in particular, the classic matrilineal pattern of working class life noted by observers like Young and Wilmott in East London, would seem to hold good for nineteenth century Lancashire. Working class autobiographies and recollections from this period invariably attest to the importance attached by newly married couples of living nearby to their relatives.<sup>65</sup> Subsequent moves of house rarely removed them from the family sphere of influence, and especially that of the mother. "Northern society, for all its lip-service to 'him', was largely matriarchal", Norah Johnson has recalled of her Lancashire background: "It was always to 'mi' Mother' that everyone went for comfort".<sup>66</sup> Anderson's data, which argue for a noticeable tendency for related persons to congregate in closely defined areas, is once again apposite; he concludes of these "clusters of co-villagers" that "...many, perhaps even a majority, of people did deliberately live near one or more of their kinsmen, and many others probably tried to."<sup>67</sup>

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62. T. W. Pateman, Dunshaw: A Lancashire Background (London 1948) 49-51.

63. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 45-55, 101-2, 124-32.

64. Anderson, "Household Structure and Industrial Revolution", 223.

65. Davies, North Country Bred, 35.

66. Norah W. Johnson, Willie Pick (Welwyn 1973) 17.

67. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 61.

If the stability and cohesion of familistic ties in Lancashire belie the argument which attributes their disruption to the process of industrialisation, it is precisely in the economic life of the region that we may locate the strength and functions of the working family. The high level of female and juvenile employment in cotton turned every member of most families into a breadwinner in his or her own right, even if the head of the family was not himself engaged in textiles. This fact gave to the family a remarkable economic cohesion, for its well-being depended upon the wages of even the humblest member. Elizabeth Robert's respondents tell of the way in which both boys and girls were initiated at a very early age into the world of adult employment and soon acquired a sense of their own economic importance to the family. For working class children, the move from school to work was seen as more of a natural and obvious transition than a disruptive period in their lives. <sup>68</sup>

The family in turn was able to provide crucial employment services. In spinning, the minder was in a position to secure work for juveniles as piecers and, when they did not employ their own children, the spinners would try to engage the younger relatives of other kin, or the children of neighbours and friends. <sup>69</sup> It was certainly a common practice for the minders to ensure that the older female members of his family worked in the same mill in the preparatory card and blowing room processes. <sup>70</sup> In cotton manufacture, particularly, employment opportunities were closely guarded by the family, where lower individual earnings made it imperative that as many kin as possible should contribute to the family purse. <sup>71</sup>

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68. Roberts, "Living and Learning", 17-19.

69. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 116-18.

70. Burgess, Origins of Industrial Relations, 244.

71. Burgess, *ibid.*, 257; Chapman, The Lancashire Cotton Industry, 158; H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy (London 1962) 160.



In a wider sense, too, kinship ties might frequently be helpful in securing work. Many employers consciously set out to recruit whole families, or took on as a matter of course the younger members of a family as they attained employable age.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the bulk of recruitment would be effected by informal soliciting of kin, or by kin of friends on behalf of their own relatives.<sup>73</sup>

The pattern of family employment was not without its problems, however, and it fell to the wider kinship network to offer help and solutions. The high level of female employment meant that many wives and mothers - perhaps as many as two out of every three occupied married women in the region - were absent from home during the mill hours of 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., or thereabouts.<sup>74</sup> The womenfolk had, therefore, but little time or energy to devote to household or family chores and it was common for relatives or neighbours to help out about the house. Even before they began work, young children were integral to the domestic economy and would be encouraged to assist in household duties of one kind or another, or support the family's working members by taking drinks or meals into the mill during the breakfast and dinner breaks.<sup>75</sup> Washerwomen, needlewomen and dress makers were crucial for working mothers and, if a relative could be persuaded to take on these tasks, the female operative's lot might be greatly eased and her expenditure on these vital services much reduced.<sup>76</sup>

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72. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 118-20.

73. For an instance of informal contacts at work in securing employment in the spinning mills, see Joseph Burgess, A Potential Poet? His Autobiography and Verse (Ilford 1927) 30, 39.

74. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, 29-30.

75. Roberts, "Living and Learning", 18.

76. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry; 63ff.



The most serious problems for the working mother were those surrounding childbirth and childminding and, once again, friends and kin could be of incalculable service. In most working class districts there was to be found a handful of middle-aged women who would assist during childbirth.<sup>77</sup> After the mother's return to work, infants might be tended by elder sisters or widowed relatives living-in, or by a nurse-girl employed by the family and who might also assist about the house. Working mothers often had to rely upon the services of a day-nurse to look after young children but, as these women were charging around 5/- a week for their services in the 1890s, many women looked to relatives for assistance.<sup>78</sup> Anderson noted that the co-residence of elderly or widowed parents typically found in the cotton towns was a vital part of the domestic economy for, by minding children or generally assisting in the running of the home, they added to rather than detracted from the family purse.<sup>79</sup>

In fact, in a whole variety of spheres the kinship network was of central importance in the day to day family economy of the Lancashire work-people. In an age when bureaucratic forms of relief were either minimal or non-existent and in all likelihood tainted with the stigma of charity, the working class family became a front line of defence in times of crisis. Young couples or aged relatives were welcomed into the home and in return they carried out a range of services, such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, childminding, and the like. Later on, when their families became too large to allow actual co-residence, this mutual pattern of assistance seems to have been a strong motivation for married couples themselves to live near the parental home.<sup>80</sup> Kin mutuality was of particular importance

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77. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 46-7.

78. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, 132; Roberts, "Living and Learning", 15-16.

79. Anderson, "Household Structure and Industrial Revolution", 227-28.

80. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 141.

during times of crisis, such as sickness in the family or when unemployment or short-time working temporarily reduced the family's earning power. There is much evidence, as Peter Townsend has shown, that kin support for elderly relatives is still a common working class practice, but again this may be held to have assumed especial importance for the Lancashire family economy in which the aged in their turn might play a vital role.<sup>81</sup>

The overriding impression would seem to be, then, that of a high level of reciprocal interaction with kin which grew out of the peculiar demands and exigencies of life and work in the north west, and was in large measure contingent upon the typical life-cycle of the working class family. "The obligation to 'weigh in and help'", as Stella Davies recalled, was greatest in periods of family crisis and want, during which time relatives would dutifully rally round.<sup>82</sup> But a vast range of day to day services - often simple services like passing down children's clothing, offering advice, assistance and comfort, and so on - were regularly carried on. One should be chary, however, of retrospective romanticisation. Robert Roberts has provided an important corrective to any cosy evocation of working class family life by pointing out that close propinquity, together with the brutal hardships of material poverty, could lead as often to enmity as it did to fellow feeling, and in the lower reaches of the working class relations between parents and their children might be harshly authoritarian.<sup>83</sup> Again, it will be noted that kin relations might be characterised by a strong disapprobation of deviants or those families which had slipped down the status hierarchy of working class society.

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81. Peter Townsend, The Family Life of Old People (Harmondsworth 1970) 186-87.

82. Davies, North Country Bred, 35.

83. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 50-51.

Nevertheless, two factors stand out as regards the family structure of later nineteenth century Lancashire. First, the imperatives of work and material need bound the working class family together as a single economic unit; if this, in turn, posed serious problems for the working family, many responded by turning inwards upon kindred associations for relief, a movement which served only to strengthen family cohesion. Second, the domestic economy of the Lancashire workpeople embraced a "natural" hierarchy - from the male breadwinner at the top down through the women and children in the family - which once again rested upon work processes with all their local variations and specialisms. But the hierarchy could not obliterate the importance of women and children, whose contribution to the very well-being of the working class family was in all respects critical.

#### 11.2: The Working Class Neighbourhood and Aspects of Community Life

As we turn our attention from the working class family in later nineteenth century Lancashire to the community milieu, it will be important to keep in mind the interrelations between these two dimensions of working class life. The wider community setting of friends and neighbours, streets and institutions, was a logical and natural extension of the family. Whilst this broader setting will form the focus of attention in what follows, reference must perforce be made at a number of points to the place of the family in the community.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, cotton spinning and manufacture were typically carried out in small communities, such as the villages and small weaving towns of the Rossendale Valley and north Lancashire, in country mills outside the larger centres of the south or in the largely independent outworker colonies like Brookhouse, Nova

Scotia and Audley in Blackburn, the West End and Hurst in Ashton, or Elton in Bury, and around which the towns had eventually expanded.<sup>84</sup> As the century wore on, many of these communities were swallowed up by the rapidly expanding towns of industrial Lancashire, swelled by the influx of immigrants to the cotton trade which, by 1850 or so, had meant that in almost all the large centres migrants from elsewhere outnumbered the indigenous population.<sup>85</sup> Between 1801 and 1851, the population of Manchester rose from 75,000 to 303,000, and stood in 1891 at 505,000; in Bolton, the respective figures were 18,000, 61,000 and 156,000, and in Blackburn 12,000, 47,000 and 120,000; Oldham's population of 12,000 in 1801 had reached 131,000 by the end of the century.<sup>86</sup>

In spite of the disruptive effects which such enormous populations movements cannot but have wrought, the evidence for a continuity of neighbourhood feeling is striking. By the second half of the century, there seems to have occurred a slackening off in local population turnover and a consolidation of communities. Anderson's work on Preston points to a high degree of population movement, but mostly confined to the small "charmed circle" of the local neighbourhood and he concludes by noting that even "...the continual residential mobility of these towns seems to have only rippled the surface of the neighbourhood feeling".<sup>87</sup>

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84. For the development of weaving communities in north Lancashire, see G. H. Tupling, The Economic History of Rossendale (London 1927) ch. 7; descriptions of small spinning communities in the south are to be found in Collier, Family Economy of the Working Classes, ch. 4; see further, J. D. Marshall, "Colonisation as a Factor in the Planting of Industrial Towns in north west England", in H. J. Dyos, ed., The Study of Urban History (London 1968) 215-30.

85. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 34-41; A. Redford, Labour Migration in England 1800-1850 (Manchester 1964).

86. B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane, eds., Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge 1962), Table "Population and Vital Statistics", 8, 24-7.

87. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 104.



Patrick Joyce's comparison between the pollbooks for 1868 and 1871 census enumerators' schedules suggests what may have been a steadying of local population movements in the Lancashire towns.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the local specialisms and reputations of the old occupational communities survived even in the large centres of Metropolitan Lancashire where, after mid-century, there occurred a settling of the population around the colonies in the form of "townlets" or "urban villages" - sub-sets of the larger conurbation within which community life might flourish.<sup>89</sup> The adult male cotton workforce and, particularly, the pattern of family employment was a further important factor making for continuity and stability.<sup>90</sup>

Urban village or townlet life broke down the anonymity of the conurbation and formed a local social milieu in which personal interaction was genuinely possible. As Reach observed, cotton in Lancashire imposed an overall uniformity upon the mill towns: "...these towns wear a monotonous sameness of aspect, physical and moral...in all essentials a description of one is a description of all."<sup>91</sup> Yet this uniformity embraced a diversity of local patterns and communal forms. "Every industrial city, of course, folds within itself a clutter of loosely defined overlapping 'villages'", Roberts has recalled of Edwardian Salford:<sup>92</sup>

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88. Patrick Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the later Nineteen Century", The Historical Journal XVIII (1975) 530.

89. Joyce, ibid., 528-30; Marshall, "Colonisation in north west England", op. cit.

90. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, Table 2 (b), 29, shows the increased likelihood of cotton workers staying in the industry as they aged.

91. C. Aspin, ed., Angus Bethune Reach: Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849 (Helmshore 1972) 71.

92. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 16.



Those in the Great Britain of seventy years ago were almost self-contained communities. Our own consisted of some thirty streets and alleys locked along the north and south by two railway systems a furlong apart. About twice that distance to the east lay another slum which turned on its farther side into a land of bonded warehouses and the city proper. West of us, well beyond the tramlines, lay the middle classes, bay-windowed and begardened. We knew them not.

Many such communities were incompletely absorbed into the urban sprawl and retained a strong sense of their own colonial identities as the true work and social centres of community life and within which even rural traditions might have survived. <sup>93</sup>

Whilst this pattern of urban development ensured that community feeling survived in the mill towns, there is some indication that it may have helped to undermine paternalist and other forms of communal politics. Joyce has sought to demonstrate that employer influence and authority, based upon economic power and operative within the factory workforce as a whole, remained effective during the latter part of the century. <sup>94</sup>

But it must be recalled that from as early as the 1830s, the industrial and commercial classes had begun moving out of the towns into the burgeoning suburban areas, districts like Rusholme, Broughton and Pendleton adjoining Manchester. As these areas were in their turn overwhelmed by the city's growth, the richer businessmen began to move ever further away from the urban sphere of influence - to rural Cheshire, or the Fylde coast. <sup>95</sup> As P. F. Clarke has pointed out, this was not purely a

93. See, in particular, Marshall, "Colonisation in north west England", for an important analysis of the surviving autonomy of the old out-worker colonies. Anderson, "Household Structure and Industrial Revolution", 215, in fact describes the mill towns as standing midway between a predominantly rural, and an urban-industrial community.

94. Joyce, *Factory Politics of Lancashire*, op. cit.

95. Engels noted the social segregation of classes in Manchester as early as the 1840s: cf. Condition of the Working Class, 78-80; for the position in late century, see Rowley, Fifty Years, 9; Davies, North Country Bred, 88.

Manchester phenomenon: "All over Lancashire, proud burghers were succeeded by generations less committed to the smokey towns." <sup>96</sup> By late century, the pattern of urban social apartheid had begun to prove corrosive of the old ties of deference which contiguous residence had once successfully underscored.

The distinctive feature of working class community life in the mill towns of the north west was, then, a bounded parochiality rooted in the local traditions of the old industrial colonies, and around which the towns had expanded - a mosaic of urban villages which went to make up the larger conurbation. People born locally deliberately clustered together in the same streets or parts of the town, and these "co-villagers" provided a range of reciprocated services which were a natural extension of those characterising kinship networks. It was not only relatives who would try to live in close proximity to each other. Migrants to the towns - particularly, of course, the Irish - huddled together in groups or joint households where supportive interaction facilitated the adaptation to urban living. <sup>97</sup> Workmates and lodgers, too, resided in the same localities, perhaps because the established residents had taken them in to their own homes or had been instrumental in finding accommodation. <sup>98</sup> As Anderson has concluded from his study of Preston: <sup>99</sup>

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96. P. F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge 1971) 30.

97. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 101; J. Haslett and W. J. Lowe, "Household Structure and Overcrowding among the Lancashire Irish 1851-1871", Histoire sociale-Social History, X (1977) 58.

98. Anderson, ibid., 101-106.

99. Anderson, ibid., 103.

The sense of community that seems sometimes at least to have built up in these communities was probably reinforced by the fact that neighbours, workmates, co-villagers, friends, and even fellow church members, would usually have been the same people, so that the attractions and solidarity which developed in one relationship would reinforce the others and make it that much more difficult to break community norms...

Such "community norms" were operative precisely because community life in Lancashire shaped the attitudes and perceptions of many residents who, in all likelihood, would rarely venture outside the familiar territory of their own locality. Until the coming of electric tramcars in the first decade of the present century when, for the first time the majority of working people were able to take advantage of cheap urban transport, the population remained generally immobile.<sup>100</sup> As J. R. Clynes has recalled of his native Oldham, most men and women "...died in their own towns and villages without ever having travelled five miles from the spot where they were born. To them the rest of the world was a shadowy place, merging into the boundaries of unreality."<sup>101</sup> Most working men and women were tied by their place of work, but they might have established in addition their own place in the community - a certain position in the local pub, a credit account with the corner shop, and so on - and such relationships were not lightly relinquished.<sup>102</sup> A survey of the working class autobiographies recently compiled by John Burnett reveals that much house movement was extremely localised, rarely, in fact, taking the migrant outside the boundaries of his own community; whilst Anderson found that

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100. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 146.

101. J. R. Clynes, Memoirs 1869-1924 (London 1937) 33; in his autobiography Fighting Through Life (London 1935) 6, Joe Toole describes the streets of Salford as a "prison", from which few rarely escaped.

102. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 29.

over 40% of his Preston sample were to be located in 1861 in the same house, or within 200 yards of that house, they had occupied ten years earlier. <sup>103</sup>

Much first hand evidence attests to the fact that neighbourhood contact in the mill towns was both frequent and familiar. And thus, the streets of Ancoats of an evening, according to Reach, <sup>104</sup>

...present a scene of very considerable quiet enjoyment. The people all appear to be on the best of terms with each other, and laugh and gossip from window to window, and door to door. The women in particular, are fond of sitting in groups upon their thresholds sewing and knitting; the children sprawl about beside them, and there is the amount of sweethearting going forward which is naturally to be looked for under such circumstances.

Alice Foley of Bolton recalls that the corner shop in her community was a recognised neighbourhood meeting place, where the women would spend much of their time simply sitting and chatting. <sup>105</sup> The prevalence of sobriquets in Lancashire life is further illustration of this sense of community; one frequently finds that working men and women used nick-names in addressing or referring to their friends and neighbours to such an extent that their real names might on occasions allude them. <sup>106</sup>

Other pieces of evidence seem to support the proposition that neighbourhood solidarity was often strong. Anderson, for instance, reports cases of neighbour endogamy in mid-nineteenth century Preston. <sup>107</sup> Another witness tells of how the residents of Trafford Street, Salford, came to the aid of a family whose main breadwinner had contracted tuberculosis,

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103. John Burnett, Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (London 1974) 292; Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 42.

104. Reach, Manchester and the Textile Districts, 8.

105. Alice Foley, A Bolton Childhood (Manchester 1973) 20.

106. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 18.

107. Anderson, Family Structure in Lancashire, 104.

by arranging a collection to finance his recuperation.<sup>108</sup> During difficult times in the working class community, "...old street quarrels were at once forgotten, and the poor did indeed help the poor."<sup>109</sup> Roberts' work on childhood in later nineteenth century Lancashire has revealed that: "Virtually all the children witnessed their mothers and neighbours helping each other in times of need; neighbours' washing was taken in if it rained and they were out, newly confined women and their families were given bowls of soup, dying neighbours were sat with through the night."<sup>110</sup> One of the respondents in this study is cited by Roberts to the following effect:<sup>111</sup>

My grandma was a wonderful woman, she was always looking after people. There was a man had TB and eight or nine children and they wouldn't have a thing. She used to tear cloth up and there was always napkins. She was making scouse one day and she said to me, 'Now put another basinful of water, there's some kids to feed.' It was thinner. But the neighbours all helped each other. A christening gown would go right round a street.

As noted above, the community of neighbours and friends would usually provide a supply of midwives and childminders, washerwomen, teawomen and dress makers for the working family. In the Hankey Park of Greenwood's classic novel, credit and pawn was arranged informally by neighbours for the purpose of buying new clothes.<sup>112</sup>

In all this, a pervading sense of local identification was ever present. Outsiders like F. B. Smith, for many years a clergyman in the

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108. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 30-31.

109. Toole, ibid., 3.

110. Roberts, "Living and Learning", 20.

111. Roberts, ibid., 20.

112. Walter Greenwood, Love on the Dole (Harmondsworth 1974) 102-9.



mill towns of Lancashire, were immediately impressed by the pronounced affinities of the work people with their own locale.<sup>113</sup> Much of this identification was closely related to the particular product or specialism of the textile industry prevailing locally; although only five miles separated Nelson and Burnley, their industrial traditions were quite distinct, and no more pejorative epithet could be applied to a Nelson working man than that of his being a "Burnley waver".<sup>114</sup> Parochial affiliations and identities are to be found evinced in Lancashire folk humour, much of which involved ridiculing the dialect, temperament or intelligence of people in neighbouring towns, or even the weather in those areas!<sup>115</sup>

It is crucial to set against the picture of solidaristic community life in Lancashire, however, the many accounts which testify to the acuity of status differentiation within the working class. The theme is recurrent in working class autobiographies:<sup>116</sup>

It is a mistake to look upon the working class as a sort of block, as a solid mass, when in fact it is composed of an infinitude of levels and grades and ranks, clearly recognised and quite as sharply differentiated as those which exist in more exalted spheres of society...There were, too, the separation between the skilled craftsman and the labourer and the vast gulf which cut off from one another the people living in separate streets, attending the different schools and worshipping at the various chapels and churches.

"We were all poor in Trafford Street", Joe Toole remembered, "...Yet we had our class distinctions as in other walks of life."<sup>117</sup> Status symbols

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113. F. B. Smith, Parsons and Weavers: A Study in Lancashire Clerical Work (London 1897) 3.

114. I am grateful to Janet Weinroth for this point.

115. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 32; Pateman, Dunshaw, 45.

116. Margaret McCarthy, Generation in Revolt (London 1953) 21.

117. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 4; see further, Roberts, The Classic Slum, 13-31.

pervaded all aspects of working class life: clothes and family possessions marked out the aspiring from the indolent in the community;<sup>118</sup> the presence of a drunkard or an illegitimate birth in the family would occasion much adverse local comment;<sup>119</sup> and those who shopped at the co-operative stores - in which credit on purchases was strictly disavowed - were in everybody's eyes a cut above those who lived from hand to mouth on the tick of the corner shop.<sup>120</sup> Even the annual wakes week holiday signalled the activation of social differences, as Stella Davies recalled: "I badly wanted to go to Blackpool...but Blackpool was 'common', so I was not taken."<sup>121</sup>

In all working class communities there were certain areas or streets which, by general assent, were deemed "rough", and where the sense of release of Saturday evening - helped along by heavy drinking - invariably brought street fights. Violence was commonly found among the colliers, whose rowdy pastimes in this sense merely mirrored their harsh work situation.<sup>122</sup> But the hierarchy of the community which separated the rough from the respectable took in a range of occupational and ethnic factors. At the apex of the pyramid were to be found shopkeepers, publicans and skilled tradesmen, and slightly below them the semi-skilled labouring population. Cotton workers were themselves socially graded. Weavers were counted as "top" of their class, followed by winders and drawers-in, and then came the spinners, who lost standing because of the presence of a strong Irish element. Female operatives in the finishing trades or

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118. Roberts, ibid., 20, 32-33, 37-41.

119. Some indication of the shame felt by respectable families with a drunken relative is afforded by Margaret Penn, Manchester 14 Miles (Cambridge 1947) 28; for working class attitudes to illegitimacy, see Davies, North Country Bred, 46; Roberts, ibid., 47.

120. J. Lawson, A Man's Life (London 1944) 31.

121. Davies, North Country Bred, 48.

122. Raymond Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 245-50.

dye-works filled the lowest bracket. At the base were to be found the unskilled labourers, themselves apportioned into plainly defined groups according to occupation, possessions and family connections. By common assent, the lowest groups included the rough Irish, idlers, beggars, fallen women and recidivist petty thieves. <sup>123</sup>

Most families were well aware of their position and standing in the community and which they jealously guarded, mindful of the fact that an untoward act, a drunken row or an improvident husband or mother, might all too easily reduce them in the social estimation. No profound analysis was needed for the social hierarchy of everyday life was subtly reinforced and sustained in all day to day dealings. The public house, for instance, faithfully mirrored these community patterns: the status of the mule spinners was registered in the designation of "Mule Spinners Only" bars, whilst the epithet "he's only a tap-room man" was a common slur. <sup>124</sup> In the north Lancashire town of "Dunshaw", the least respectable public house was called "The Ragpickers" - as its name suggests, frequented only by the scavengers and the lowest grades in the cotton industry. <sup>125</sup> The social inferiority of the tacklers - by general agreement an unskilled and menial occupation in cotton manufacture - was constantly reinforced in jibes about their "gawmlessness" or stupidity, and is harshly evoked in a popular dialect poem by William Barton: <sup>126</sup>

His heyd's not o'erstocked wi' much knowledge, or brains,  
But a tackler requires nooan, yo know,  
An' if he's as numb as a greyt lump o' wood,  
He'll nobbut be t'smac as 'em o;  
Wod he's lacking i' knowledge, he has t' conceit,  
He's a mighty big mon, in his way,  
An' if suppin' flat pints meks a qualified mon,  
He's fit for a tackler today.

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123. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 17-21.

124. S. D. Chapman, The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution (London 1972) 58; Roberts, ibid., 19.

125. Pateman, Dunshaw, 18.

126. Pateman, ibid., 45.

Two features of working class community life in later nineteenth century Lancashire thus stand out. First, the existence of parochial and strictly circumscribed patterns of behaviour and thought, closely related to the particular features of occupational and work situations locally, may be held to characterise these communities. Second, there was in evidence at all times a tension between working class mutuality and differentiation and which must, in the interests of accuracy, be accorded due weight. It is no contradiction to assert that working class life was at once solidaristic and stratified; the two poles of social behaviour were ever-present, their relative strength ebbing and flowing as the situation warranted and in response to changing circumstances, as may be gauged from the analysis of selected aspects of working class community life in the north west to which we shall now turn.

If, as was noted at the outset of this chapter, the defining features of working class life lie in its concrete, immediate and, above all, distinctly personal qualities, then it is surely to everyday social patterns and institutions that we should turn in seeking to appreciate the full flavour of the working class community in Lancashire. In what follows, certain aspects of community life in the region will be discussed and which, whilst by no means aspiring to a rounded picture of this rich and varied culture, may nevertheless highlight some of those features of popular life which were recreated in political form by the socialist movement which gained currency in the north west.

We may begin by examining one everyday - but often neglected - facet of Lancashire popular life, namely, the community of the street. Against the privatised and home-centred ethos of the middle classes, working class street life is frequently deprecated as unruly and anarchic. Nothing



could be further from the truth. For working people, the community of the street was but a natural dimension of familial and friendship networks, displaying its own deeply textured social patterns and inviolable norms of conduct. The front door of the typical working class terraced cottage of the northern manufacturing centres opened out of the living room directly onto the street and, in consequence of this fact and that of overcrowding, family life spilled naturally out onto the street.<sup>127</sup> The links between the two dimensions of working class life were noted by Reach: "In most cases the doors of the houses stand hospitably open, and young children cluster over the thresholds and swarm out upon the pavement."<sup>128</sup> "Neighbouring" from house to house was thus a natural activity, although it should be recalled that a subtle code of conduct dictated when the moment was propitious for a person to enter a neighbour's house.<sup>129</sup>

Working class street life flourished in the evenings after work, when the operatives would mingle in the streets or alleys, gossiping with each other, smoking, or perhaps placing a friendly wager on a game of "pitch and toss".<sup>130</sup> At weekends, the streets would be crowded, for on Saturdays it was customary for the womenfolk in Lancashire to utilise the half-day holiday by cleaning about the house - their penchant for scrubbing and whitening the doorsteps, with much coming and going by the children in and out of the house, made this work much more than a privatised activity.<sup>131</sup> The men of the family might lend a hand with repairs and

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127. See further, Haslett and Lowe, "Household Structure and Overcrowding", *op. cit.*; Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 58. Working class housing in south Lancashire is analysed by W. J. Smith, "The Architecture of the Domestic System in S.E. Lancashire and the Adjoining Pennines", in S. D. Chapman, ed., *A History of Working Class Housing* (Newton Abbott 1971) 249-75.

128. Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts*, 6.

129. Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 58-71.

130. Roberts, "Living and Learning", 20; Toole, *Fighting Through Life*, 56.

131. Reach, *Manchester and the Textile Districts*, 8; Pateman, *Dunshaw*, 49.



suchlike but, if we follow Thomas Wright's account, then these domestic chores would appear to have involved neighbours and friends alike. His description of the working man's Sunday, too, shows clearly the importance of the social life of the street. <sup>132</sup>

For working class children, street life was a logical extension of the home. Alice Foley has recalled that: "The street in which I was nurtured as a small girl had little to boast of, except that in an odd way we regarded it as Our Street, and rich in its own quality of communal life." <sup>133</sup> The typical games and sports of the children were adapted to the confines of the cobbled streets and the composition of gangs and rivalries would usually go by streets. For working class youth, there was always something of interest abroad in the street: "...the man with the Polar Bear, a German Band, a tipster, Morris Dancers, the Salvation Army, Nigger minstrels, weddings, funerals...A Birth, a brawl, a christening, a visit to the Band of Hope for prayer, all made life interesting." <sup>134</sup> As they grew older, so the courtship rituals of working class adolescents had to be adapted to street life. Hannah Mitchell tells of the way in which young men and women would parade along the streets, passing each other at regular intervals at which points introductions might be effected; it was, she laconically observes, "The working girl's equivalent to the London season." <sup>135</sup>

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132. Thomas Wright [The Journeyman Engineer], Some Habits and Customs of Working Classes (London 1867) 184-248, for accounts of the working class Saturday and Sunday.

133. Foley, Bolton Childhood, 15.

134. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 33-4; Roberts, "Living and Learning", 23.

135. G. Mitchell, ed., The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell (London 1968) 83.

Life for working people in Lancashire centred upon the communal group life of a small number of known streets; here it was that the individual secured a place in the community, where idiosyncracies were recognised and tolerated or special talents valued and shared. The richly social character of street life brought a rarely accorded dimension to working class behaviour which those viewing from outside the community have been apt to miss. The alleged embourgeoisement inherent in the factory operatives' attachment to the friendly and building societies noted above, for instance, carries less weight when it is recalled that these institutions grew out of working class life, rather than imposing upon it paradigmatic patterns of bourgeois thrift or individual advancement. For these institutions were more akin to communal activities; the subscriptions to the friendly society or the clothing clubs were paid weekly and were collected by the "club man" who called from door to door, becoming himself a recognised part of the community and even an intimate confidante or adviser on domestic matters.<sup>136</sup> Lodge meetings were usually arranged informally, in neighbour's houses or in the local public house, and were as much a social occasion as dictated by consideration of self-improvement.

Shops and marketing provide another instance of the manner in which the community of the street brought a vital social colouration to what outsiders might otherwise regard as a unidimensional economic transaction. Most of the time, working women relied on the local corner shop which became in many communities a gregarious social centre. Robert Robert's account of Edwardian Salford life - itself written from the vantage point of a corner shop - amply corroborates this impression.<sup>137</sup> Again, in many

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136. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 66.

137. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 42-3, et. passim.

mill towns it was the local cloggers shop - clogs being an important item of clothing for the cotton operatives - which took on a similar role as a meeting place, where workers congregated and gossiped, smoked or read the newspapers.<sup>138</sup> For the menfolk the barbers shop would, in like fashion, be a local institution where Sundays might be passed in the company of one's workmates.<sup>139</sup>

This sense of communal activity may also be discerned in Walter Tomlinson's memorable evocation of "Marketing with the Poor on Saturday Night."<sup>140</sup> Saturday evening was the favoured time with Lancashire families for visiting nearby markets to purchase the food for the weekend, old clothes or tools. Markets like the famous "Flat Iron" market in Salford were crowded on Saturday nights and, whilst much bargain hunting undoubtedly went on, a carnival atmosphere flourished. Husbands would accompany their wives to the market and then congregate in "another place" to await their spouses. Even those without money would nevertheless go regularly to the market to imbibe the colourful scene, while "...the mill girls trouble less than usual about their headgear...and seem to be thoroughly enjoying their fashionable parade."<sup>141</sup> This was clearly more than an account of shopping pure and simple: as Tomlinson wryly observed, as the evening wears on, "the beer is now getting abroad."

The above discussion of working class street life, shops and marketing, though necessarily brief has sought to highlight the deeper, distinctly social qualities of these seemingly mundane activities, patterns of behaviour which mirrored the community setting. Once more, however, the

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138. Pateman, Dunshaw, 48.

139. Wright, Some Habits and Customs, 219-24.

140. Walter Tomlinson, Eye-ways of Manchester Life (London 1887) ch. 10; see also Thomas Wright, The Great Unwashed (London 1868) 201-16.

141. Tomlinson, ibid., 107.

communal aspects of working class life must be tempered by recalling the status divisions and hostilities which permeated community life. In the street or the corner shop it might be manifested in malicious gossip, moral disapprobation or even ostracism of disfavoured individuals or families. Different shops had their own status rankings, material possessions clearly marked off the respectable from the rough working class family, and so on.

The typical leisure pursuits of the Lancashire working class are again useful in affording some indication of the qualities of popular life for they, too, grew out of community patterns and reflect its structure and assumptions. For many working men and women, the public house was the centre of their lives. Lancashire was, of course, the home of the teetotal movement and due to its influence, together with that of the Band of Hope and the Nonconformist denominations, not a few Lancashire men shunned all contact with intoxicating liquor.<sup>142</sup> For very many more, however, drink was truly the quickest way out of Manchester. It has been calculated that in the latter part of the last century, the average working class family spent one fifth of its total income on alcoholic drink - an outgoing which sorely depressed living standards - although the proportion would obviously vary in particular cases.<sup>143</sup> There is

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142. For the temperance and Band of Hope movements in Lancashire, see Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872 (London 1971) 109, 148, 192-94, 219; Lilian Lewis Shiman, "The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable Recreation for Working Class Children", Victorian Studies XVII (1973) 49-74; Roberts, The Classic Slum, 152-53.

143. J. Rowntree and A. Sherwell, Temperance Problem and Social Reform (London 1900) 10ff; A. E. Dingle, "Drink and Working Class Living Standards in Britain 1870-1914", Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXV (1972) 608-22.



little cause to assume that the north west was any less well served by public houses than elsewhere in the country. In fact, in 1902 there were 486 public houses and 2,394 beer and wine houses in Manchester alone - or one licensed premises for every 189 persons in the city.<sup>144</sup> When James Fraser assumed the Bishopric of Manchester and moved to Lancashire in 1870, he was shocked at the prevalence of drunkenness: "I had no idea of the extent of the ravages caused by intemperance till I came to Lancashire", he wrote to Gladstone in that year: "Here I see the demon in the fulness of his power - demoralising, corrupting, criminalising a noble people."<sup>145</sup>

Working class drinking was pre-eminently a social activity, for it was an escape from the harsh reality into the bright and brash conviviality of the public house. But it is again an accurate guide to status differentiation within the working class community. Those inhabitants of the districts surrounding Northenden, near Manchester, who made the trip to the weekly "Sunday Saturnalia" went primarily to spend the whole day drinking, but also to enjoy the outing and sense of occasion.<sup>146</sup> Tomlinson's description of this event is distinctly one of rough working class life, but a much broader spectrum of the working class community would go regularly to the "free and easys", "Harmonic Meetings" or "singing saloons" held in the public houses on Saturday nights.<sup>147</sup> Here the audience were encouraged to join in the singing and general merry-making

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144. Marr, Housing in Manchester and Salford, 28.

145. Cited by Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, 363.

146. Tomlinson, Bye-ways of Manchester Life, ch. 17.

147. M. B. Smith, "Victorian Entertainment in the Lancashire Cotton Towns", in S. P. Bell, ed., Victorian Lancashire (Newton Abbott 1974) 174-77; Toole, Fighting Through Life, 50-51.



and, not surprisingly, some of these establishments gained bad reputations and would only be patronised by the wilder sections of the labouring population. Nevertheless, the free and easy was a generally popular social diversion, although it is noticeable that many artisans and future labour leaders who left autobiographies and memoirs rarely mention the role of drink and the public house in their lives.<sup>148</sup> Certainly, for the most aspiring working families the pub was a taboo pastime.<sup>149</sup>

The most important social institution in Lancashire working class life, after the public house, was undoubtedly theatre and music hall and here, by contrast, the appeal was genuinely wide. Repertory theatre was extremely popular in the north west and there were well established theatres in all the major towns in the region by the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>150</sup> Performances at the working class theatre might range from the unpretentious "penny reading" through to more ambitious productions, and which usually attracted a fair spread of people from the neighbouring communities. It seems clear from accounts presented by Thomas Wright and others that the audience ranged from the unruly "roughs" to the more serious minded "orderlies".<sup>151</sup> Joe Toole from Salford, certainly of the latter category and himself an intelligent and studious

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148. The attitude is nicely expressed by Philip Snowden, An Autobiography (London 1934), 22; "The Sunday school and the Chapel, and, I regret to add, the public house, were the centres of what social life there was in the parish."

149. Margaret Penn's aspiring family were anxious to avoid any contact with drink: Manchester 14 Miles, 28; from another point of view, articulate working men like Roland Kenney, condemned drink for its stupefying effects: cf. Westering: An Autobiography (London 1939) 23.

150. Smith, "Victorian Entertainment in Lancashire", 170-72; Eric Midwinter, Old Liverpool (Newton Abbott 1971) 23-39, for the history of the Liverpool Royal Court Theatre.

151. Wright, Some Habits and Customs, 152-80.

man, devotes much space in his autobiography to discussing the place of theatre in popular life and, for many like him, it was by all accounts a formative cultural experience.<sup>152</sup>

Another form of entertainment was the music hall, which had almost universally replaced broadside street ballad singing by the 1850s and attained its apogee in the 'nineties. The music halls of the Metropolis were rigidly stratified by clientelle but, in the industrial provinces, they were genuinely popular and expansive: their public was the "deserving poor" - "labourers, artisans, porters, navvies, street-sellers of all kinds...with their wives, their sisters or their sweethearts."<sup>153</sup> The association between music hall song and jingoistic fervour is, of course, well known but, although many songs embodied "a true-blue ultra-conservative declaration of loyalty or a knowing bit of sarcasm", there is little indication that such sentiments had much impact upon the working class:<sup>154</sup> rather, the attraction of music hall for the Lancashire work people lay in the fact that it "...indicated, with a bitter humour or sentimentality, the everyday life and romantic hopes of the working class and their relationships with other social groups of Victorian society."<sup>155</sup>

The popularity of the music hall with all sections of the Lancashire working class is advertised in the life of Willie Pickerill, a skilled and intelligent engineer who in early life had hoped to make stage and song his

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152. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 69-73, et. passim; Johnson, Willie Pick, passim.

153. C. E. B. Russell and E. T. Campagnac, "Poor Peoples' Music Halls in Lancashire", The Economic Review, X (1900) 290-91.

154. Laurence Senelick, "Politics and Entertainment: Victorian Music Hall Songs", Victorian Studies, XIX (1975) 151; Stedman Jones, "Notes on the Remaking...", 490-97; the impact of jingoistic music hall song on the workers is questioned by Henry Pelling in his "British Labour and British Imperialism", in Popular Politics and Society, 87-8; R. Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class (London 1972).

155. Smith, "Victorian Entertainment in Lancashire", 179.

career. His biographer points out how, <sup>156</sup>

Lancashire folk were mad about music hall....Add to the dead pan Lancashire humour the physical surroundings of the Halls - red plush gilt, engraved glass, the Bar, and above all the great curtain finished with gold light rising slowly to reveal a world vastly different from that of everyday. Outside there were rows of dingy streets, pavements blowing with dark dust, the rain-sodden winds of the north west, the certainty that 6 a.m. would see you, dinner tin in hand, already clocking on at the 'shop' ...As by a miracle, troubles became transmuted into delight.

Music making was ingrained into the life of the Lancashire work people, growing out of and sweetening the drab and dreary surroundings of everyday life. In his autobiography describing Lancashire life in the earlier years of the nineteenth century, the cotton spinner Moses Heap tells of the intense love of the Rossendale people for music, and of people who tramped over the hills in all weathers to join friends in cottage concerts lasting well into the night. <sup>157</sup>

Much opportunity for music making and song lay in connection with the church or chapel which, as we shall see in the next chapter, provided a unique outlet for working class cultural expression. But music was also, of course, secular in inspiration and sprang directly from the lives of the Lancashire working class. We learn, for instance, that singing was a popular street activity during the summer evenings in the working class districts of Salford. <sup>158</sup> Choirs and "glee clubs" were extremely popular, often being arranged informally, and with practice sessions being held outside mill hours; <sup>159</sup> whilst "bands of music" paraded the streets

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156. Johnson, Willie Pick, 29.

157. Moses Heap, Moses Heap of Rossendale (1824-1913): My Life and Times (n.d.), typescript in the Manchester Central Libraries.

158. Toole, Fighting Through Life, 52-3.

159. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 61-7, for the place of music and singing in Lancashire popular life.

upon the least excuse and their numbers were legion. In 1853, the first organised brass band contest had been staged at the Belle Vue Zoological Gardens in Manchester and, by the 1860s, "banding" had become tremendously popular with Lancastrians.<sup>160</sup> Brass bands sprung up everywhere - in neighbourhoods, mills, trade unions, and so on - and were vociferously supported at contests with the kind of zeal that was later to be accorded to football teams. Each summer, the industrial towns of Lancashire staged brass band contests which became popular events unrivalled in their excitement and carnival gaiety, and even the employers were known on occasions to shut down their mills for the duration.

When Bacup Old Band competed at Belle Vue in 1864, the whole town was by all accounts fiercely partisan in its loyalties as Isaac Leach, the band's historian, has recalled:<sup>161</sup>

The excitement in the neighbourhood was intense, and for days before the contest the fate of the band at Belle Vue was the sole topic of conversations. The rehearsals in the yard of Broadclough Mill on the Sunday before the contest were attended by thousands. On the morning of the contest special excursion trains were run from Bacup and the mills had to stop.

Words are too weak to describe the scene inside the large hall inside Belle Vue when the Bacup board was hoisted as the winner of the first prize. The excursionists from Bacup were frantic with joy and could not tell how to express their feelings. It was after midnight when the band reached Bacup where the whole of the inhabitants were out awaiting their arrival. Along Newchurch Road the band played John Brown's Body and the crowds, thousands in number, joined in the strains.

Mills were known to rival each other for the quality of their bands and reputations were jealously guarded. There can be little doubt as to the spontaneous enthusiasm which local brass bands generated. They were, above

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160. For the background to the brass band movement, see John F. Russell and J. H. Elliot, The Brass Band Movement (London 1936).

161. Cited by Christopher Aspin, Lancashire, The First Industrial Society (Helmshore 1969) 172-73.



all else, rooted in working class life and they allowed working people to control their music making in a democratic fashion: the minutes of the Dobcross band "...may well have been articles of association, laying down democratic processes and purposes (how many committee men, how elected, how long for, etc.) but they are evidence of a feeling of belonging to a general movement, and of wishing to conform to accepted standards and practices." 162

A similar sense of distinctly local rooting and expression may be detected in many of the pastimes and sports popular with Lancashire workingmen. Brass bands, bowling clubs, pigeon racing, greyhound and whippet racing, ratting, football and cricket teams, often growing out of the informal association of factory, pub or neighbourhood had, by late century, come to replace the more brutal working class sports like bull baiting, dog fighting and cockfighting common during the Lancastrian wakes. 163 "Purring", or clog fighting, remained popular in the mining districts but it reflected the rough edges of working class life that were gradually being smoothed over. 164 The rise of the mass spectator sports during the later nineteenth century must, of course, figure in any account of working class life. The popularity which organised football soon attained with the working population is often noted and, as R. Q. Gray has recently shown, its wide appeal was indicative of the emergence of a more homogeneous working class culture. 165

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162. Henry Livings, That the Medals and the Batons be put on View: The Story of a Village Band 1875-1975 (Newton Abbott 1975) 16.

163. For the decline of the brutal working class sports, see Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, 32-49; Pateman, Dunshaw, 184ff.

164. Challinor, Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, 246-49.

165. R. Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford 1976) 116-18; Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 84-91.



It seems clear, however, that the early development of football embodied a large measure of participatory democracy. "The great majority of the league clubs of today", one commentator has recently noted, "grew out of the concern of groups of working men to develop their primary group relationships in what leisure time they had." <sup>166</sup> With the coming of the Saturday half-day holiday, working men now had more time to enjoy and play sports, and particularly football, attracted by its relative cheapness and simplicity. Many of the early football clubs grew directly out of occupational groups (such as Manchester United, formed by workers on the Lancashire and Yorkshire railway; or Darwin F.C., a team of mill-workers who reached the fourth round of the challenge cup in 1878), chapels and Sunday schools (Everton), and schools and factories. <sup>167</sup> In like fashion, it is rarely appreciated that bowling and cricket, too, were genuinely working class games in the mill towns; here they had few, if any, of the genteel middle class overtones which accompanied these games in the southern counties of England. <sup>168</sup>

By late century, the annual wakes week holiday in Lancashire was well established and was a jealously guarded and eagerly anticipated period of relaxation for the factory population. It is well known, of course, that the coming of cheap transport had opened up the north west seaside resorts of Blackpool, Fleetwood, Morecambe and New Brighton to the mass annual exodus of the operative class. <sup>169</sup> The Lancashire workers

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166. Ian R. Taylor, "Soccer Consciousness and Soccer Hooliganism", in S. Cohen, ed., Images of Deviance (Harmondsworth 1971) 139-40, 140-43.
167. James Walvin, The People's Game (London 1975) 50-68; Midwinter, Old Liverpool, 131-48.
168. For a comparison of crown and flat green bowling, see Jackson, Working Class Community, 106; Mervyn Jones, "Crown Territory", New Statesman, 19 August (1977) 241.
169. Harold Perkin, "The Social Tone of the Victorian Seaside Resorts in the North West", Northern History, XI (1975) 180-94.

regularly formed clothing clubs, saving schemes and co-operatively arranged "going off" clubs to save for the coming holiday.<sup>170</sup> Wakes week was the major annual break for the work people in Lancashire, but one should not overlook the importance of traditional holidays and festivities in working class life. Easter and Mid-summer were two such popular dates, when pleasure fairs and circuses were regularly held in the north west.<sup>171</sup> As Frank Ormerod shows in his account of popular Lancashire life, fairs were one of the more important features of working class society during this period.<sup>172</sup>

We may observe only one final feature of urban working class culture in later nineteenth century Lancashire. Paradoxically, perhaps, rural influences and traditions had by no means been obliterated without trace from working class life. The pattern of urban development in the north west around the traditional outworker colonies possibly aided the survival of old-established practices, but even the large towns there is some indication that Naturalist Clubs were popular with working men and women.<sup>173</sup> The prevalence of animals in working class life, suggested by a survey of Sunday leisure pursuits conducted in 1905,<sup>174</sup> is further indication of the survival of these traditions, whilst many working men went fishing regularly, or grew vegetables on small allotments to supplement the family diet.<sup>175</sup> In the towns of north Lancashire in particular, there was a

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170. The Textile Mercury, 31 August 1889, 343; 7 September 1895, 197.

171. Pateman, Dunshaw, 195ff; Smith, "Victorian Entertainment in Lancashire 179-80.

172. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 22-4.

173. Pateman, Dunshaw, 141.

174. Daily Telegraph survey of 1905; cited by H. McLeod, "Class, Community and Religion: The Religious Geography of Nineteenth Century England", in M. Hill, ed., A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 6 (London 1973).

175. Roberts, "Living and Learning", 16-17, found that half of her sample from Lancaster and Barrow had allotments, or reared poultry.

strong attachment to the surrounding moorland areas where the work people could easily take walks to "get out on to t'tops for an airin'".<sup>176</sup> This facet of working class life provides an interesting corrective to the idea that the Lancashire environment was uniformly grey and urban and the working class inextricably divorced from the land.

### 11.3: Industrial and Community Structures - Conclusions: Socialism and Working Class Culture

Finally, we may conclude the discussion presented in this and the preceding chapter by relating socialist belief and organisational forms in the north west to working class industrial and community milieux. It has been argued that industrial structures and work processes cannot but form the material foundation of working class life, from the demands of which no working man or women was free. But the wider culture of any working class group - its ethos, values and ideas and social practices, and as part of which we must count socialist beliefs - is no mere reflection of economic life but is mediated by everyday social interaction and community forms. It is in the context of community life that working class social imagery is generated and sustained responding, not unnaturally, to economic imperatives or wider ideological forces yet embodying ultimately the creative and innovative impulses of working people. In what follows, then, it will be necessary to recall the specific forms of socialist belief and organisation in later nineteenth century Lancashire outlined in Chapter 9 and relate these to the industrial and community structures documented in the two subsequent chapters.

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<sup>176</sup>. Pateman, Dunshaw, ch. 2.

We may begin with a number of comments as regards the social composition of the socialist movement in Lancashire during the 1890s and first decade of the present century. It was demonstrated above that the branch level activist would, in all likelihood, have been a skilled or at least reputable working man, perhaps a chapel goer and certainly an active trade unionist, but by no means the "aristocrat of labour" that a number of commentators have given us to understand. The movement was, then, one which held out much appeal to a broad band of working people tending towards the upper reaches of their class. This social composition is, in part at least, rendered explicable when the occupational experience of skilled and semi-skilled grades in the Lancashire cotton, engineering and coal mining industries is recalled. The erstwhile status and authority of skilled labour was, by late century, being undermined by technological change and the growth and organisation of semi-skilled tasks, while both categories of labour were being subjected to the common experience of economic and productivity crisis in the form of work intensification, the reassertion of managerial authority, pieceworking and the systematic use of overtime. Evidence has been presented which suggests that, by this point in time, the labour community was beginning to unite around its upper levels, the lines of demarcation between once privileged grades and semi-skilled - but yet by all accounts "respectable" - working men slowly dissolving and a common outlook gradually emerging as a result of shared industrial experience.

There can be little doubt about the fact that, during the depression years of the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the structure of the working class was changing and a more homogeneous upper portion was in the making. These changes are reflected in the recrudescence of labour militancy and the fact that once aloof working men were slowly turning toward the broader working class movement; and they were premised around such



typical leisure pursuits as the brass band movement, choirs, pigeon-fancying and dog racing, and the mass spectator sports. This is not to suggest that the consciousness of craft practices or the traditional hostility between artisans and labourers had altogether vanished, for much emphasis has been placed upon the continued relevance of occupational differentiation. Again, varying attitudes on the part of different sections of the workforce to drink and the public house, theatre and music halls, register the fact that "rough" and "respectable" remained perennial divides. But the general impression that a more unified working class outlook was slowly coming into being is undeniable, and it was precisely from these strata that the pioneer cadres of the socialist movement were drawn - "respectable" men and women, to be sure, but during a period of industrial and structural transition in which the term can no longer be confined to a small aristocracy of working men.

The importance of industrial structures in Lancashire may also be discerned in the intense localism of outlook which pervaded working class life. It was argued above that the defining features of cotton production lay in the existence of a plethora of local skills and specialisations of process and product - a distinct parochialism, in short, which found expression in the pattern of urban development on the north west. A localised outlook is also to be found, as Raymond Challinor has demonstrated, in the development of labour organisation among the coal miners in Lancashire. This parochiality of vision and social patterns could not but recur in the development of socialism particularly during the 1890s when, for various reasons, the political initiative had passed temporarily to the local level. It has been argued that the socialist movement flourished in a distinctly local environment, its activities and agitations being directed towards the rectification of immediate concerns by municipal means. If, in part, this emphasis may be attributed to the strictly bounded



outlook fostered by occupational and community experiences in the north west, it was also from this perspective that activists discerned in the growth of municipally administered services and institutions locally the vindication of their new political creed.

Contrary to the tendency discernable in certain quarters of the labour leadership to seek accommodation with official Liberalism, it was observed that a premise basic to grass roots socialism in Lancashire was that of resolute independence in electoral and wider political action. In seeking to explain this fact we may turn once more to working class community patterns. By the end of the century, occupational experiences and the pattern of urban development in the region had begun to corrode the paternal political bonds and hierarchic groupings which had for long characterised Lancashire politics and which may be held to have underpinned the indigenous Conservatism and, to a lesser extent, Liberalism of the working population. As more obviously class based politics began to assume predominance, these old allegiances were spurned and the attraction of a "third" party, as it were, independent of traditional alignments and resolved to further measures of collective industrial regulation was immediately recognised.

Lying behind these political developments during the period 1880s-1906 was the fact that industrial workers - facing the threat of ever-increasing job intensification, longer hours and worsening conditions of labour - were becoming progressively conscious of the need for regulatory intervention in their own particular industry. The progress of the great trade unions of cotton operatives, miners and engineers in this period towards the call of independent labour representation was documented in Chapter 8, and their traditional concern to secure industrial intervention eventually found expression in support for the Labour Representation Committee. Interestingly enough, then, "communal" forms of politics themselves helped to give

rise to an independent socialist force, and this situation may be instructively contrasted to that prevailing in the West Riding of Yorkshire where the absence of a strong trade unionism, and the strength of Liberalism among the working class, made the socialist movement there much more equivocal in its independent resolve.

Turning from ideas and beliefs to the organisational forms displayed by the socialist movement in Lancashire it will be noted that here, too, many of the characteristic cultural and community patterns of working people were recast or, more correctly, recreated by them in political form. Socialism cannot be imposed upon but, to take root, it must rather grow directly out of working class life; it would, therefore, be surprising if the "practical democracy" of the Lancashire work people was not to inform their political beliefs: 177

To political methods they look for the adjustments of their grievances and the bettering of their kind, and though bred to be extremely conservative in habit, they are yet among the most practically democratic people on the earth. They are staunch friends and helpful neighbours, hospitable to the last degree among their own.

We may recall, for instance, the way in which socialist branch culture attracted not only working men but, also, their wives and families into a broader and richer association. One clearly finds here a political expression of the "natural" family economy of the region - by which all members of the working family were considered to play an important role in its general well being - as well as of the importance attached to kindred ties in working class life, and it was logical for Lancastrians that their socialism should be similarly premised. Children were welcomed into the movement and considered to have been equally valid participants, just as some of the weavers' district unions had special juvenile sections.

Similarly the women in Lancashire who were demanding that their political role ought to be commensurate with their economic role.

In a very real sense, the rounded socialist branch culture described in Chapter 9 above was a recreation by working people of the social patterns familiar to their day to day lives. It is not without some significance that a number of activists have recalled their initially apolitical attraction to the movement, for there was indeed much of a cultural nature to excite their enthusiasm. Socialist branch life was not simply "political" but, as has been explained, provided in addition a forum for all-round working class expression. Their dances, social occasions and musical gatherings, socialist brass bands, choirs and glee clubs, and even their penchant for rambles and picnics on the Lancashire moors, faithfully mirrored working class community patterns. The popularity of Blatchford's Clarion newspaper with Lancashire working men and women was surely due in no small measure to its extensive coverage of theatre and music hall, and even sporting fixtures, as a cursory glance at that paper will confirm. A fuller understanding of the appeal of socialism in this period must take into account the communal dimension - the "practical democracy" of group life - as well as the formal political programme. This dimension was well to the fore in the socialist movement and it perhaps begins to explain the intense devotion and enthusiasm which it was able to evoke from its working class adherents.

It would be possible to continue in their vein but the point ought, by now, to be well taken; the attraction of socialism in Lancashire during these years can surely only be completely appreciated once situated within the community milieu of which it was an expression. Of course, that many - indeed by far the majority - of working people were as yet unconvinced by the need for socialism perhaps deserves repetition. We may notice only Sidney and Beatrice Webb's unflattering reference to the cotton

operatives in their Industrial Democracy: 178

Absorbed in their chapels and co-operative stores, eager by individual thrift to rise out of the wage-earning class, and accustomed to adopt the views of the local millowners and landlords, the Cotton Operatives, as a class, are not remarkable for their political capacity.

The point is a valid one, if somewhat exaggerated; yet changes were abroad in late century which impelled a number of working men and women - that they were as yet a minority may be readily conceded - to kick over the traces of their former political allegiances and seek a new outlet of expression.

For those with whom the new political creed did take root, it was to the extent that it harmonised with other aspects of their life style and was seen by working people to express their own deeply felt emotions and aspirations. Within given economic constraints, working men and women in the north west created a socialist movement deeply impregnated by the structure and assumptions of their community life. It will have been noticed that no reference has as yet been made to the "ethical" strand of socialist beliefs during these years. To understand fully the process by which political beliefs are generated within and adapted to the rounded outlook of working class community life, the final chapter of this study will comprise a detailed analysis of just one aspect of these communities - namely, religion and the chapels - and trace the way in which deeply held beliefs shaped the socialist movement. It is to this discussion that we should now turn.



===== CHAPTER TWELVE =====

SOCIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY - III:  
THE NONCONFORMIST CHAPEL AND POPULAR BELIEF IN  
LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY LANCASHIRE

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With all its faults and hypocrisies, England has a religious conscience and a religious consciousness which gave her a distinct place and mission among the nations...If Karl Marx could say that England was the only country in which the social revolution could be realised without violence, it was largely because of our religious life and history that he could say it.

John Trevor, Address to the International Socialist Congress, July 1896, in The Labour Prophet, August 1896.

The Lancashire mind is indeed essentially a believing, perhaps an over-believing one. Fanaticism rather than scepticism is the extreme into which it is most likely to hurry.

Angus Bethune Reach, in The Morning Chronicle, 1849.

The final chapter of this study will conclude the discussion initiated above by narrowing down the focus to one particular aspect of the working class community in Lancashire - religion and chapel life - and by tracing its impact upon the emerging socialist consciousness of the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> If the argument elaborated above, to the effect that socialist beliefs must be located within the broader community milieu, is to be pursued, then to the extent that chapel and religious sentiment were at all important in working class life they too would be closely affined to the new socialist awareness. In short, the chapel provides one institution in which we may trace in detail the process of cultural adaptation - the

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1. This chapter represents a revised version of my article "Religion in the Working Class Community and the Evolution of Socialism in later Nineteenth Century Lancashire: A Case of 'Working Class Consciousness'", to appear in a forthcoming edition of Histoire sociale-Social History.



"stretching" of certain values and notions by working class groups to harmonise with everyday social life and its native forms of expression.

To this end, the analysis of religion in the working class community is highly pertinent. It was argued in Chapter 6 that religious ideas, and particularly Evangelicalism, provided a form of moral or psychological astringent within the wider Liberal axis of mid-Victorian society. If by late century the rabid evangelical ethic had slowly decomposed, it can hardly be maintained that organised Christianity as a whole was any more favourably inclined to the emerging socialist movement. As is often noted, most of the Nonconformist denominations were by this point in time solidly middle class in composition and politically identified with Gladstonian Liberalism. Where it informed the socialist outlook, therefore, religion provides a good illustration of the adaptation and stretching of beliefs by working people to their own ends, and particularly so in Lancashire where denominational allegiances had been a major factor in determining political orientations.

This chapter will argue, then, for the deep rooting of religious belief and institutions among the working class of the north west and, in consequence, their importance in the crystallisation of "ethical socialism". In arguing thus, however, two questions must be immediately confronted. First, since the appearance of Professor K. S. Inglis' Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England, and drawing upon sources of religious attendance such as the 1851 census of worship, it has become commonplace to suggest that the churches had but little impact upon the masses of the provincial manufacturing centres.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary historical orthodoxy

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2. K. S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England (London 1964); for the 1851 census, see Religious Worship (England and Wales), Report, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3, LXXXIX, i. (There was a separate report for Scotland.)

subscribes broadly to the opinion that religion among the working class of late-Victorian society was confined solely to its artisanate or labour aristocratic stratum, co-existent, in fact, with the urge to "respectability" which marked off these workers from the main proletarian body. Marxist historians in particular have been inclined to follow Lenin and Trotsky's observations on British labour in explaining the emergence of ethical socialism, most obviously exemplified by the I.L.P., Labour Church or Clarion movements, by reference to the domination of the working class by an aristocracy of labour.<sup>3</sup> Religious predilection is generally held, therefore, to have advertised the embourgeoisement of those sections of the working population by whom it was most clearly evinced.

Secondly, if in this schema working class religiosity is confined to a small elite stratum of the labour community, ideologically predisposed by its economic and social location, non-Marxist historians equally have tended to minimise the depth and intensity of religious sentiment within the main body of the working class. Arguing from the assumed secularisation of society in the closing decades of the last century and the concomitant rechannelling of moral fervour, a number of commentators have followed Sam Hobson who, in recalling his involvement in the socialist movement during these years, suggested that the I.L.P. appeared just at the moment that Nonconformity was losing its hold on the working class of northern England. To this fact he attributes "...the sublime faith these men and women had in the I.L.P. creed."<sup>4</sup> More recently, Henry Pelling has elaborated upon this argument. Pelling outlines the processes whereby

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3. V. I. Lenin, British Labour and British Imperialism (London 1969) 98-9; George Novack, ed., Leon Trotsky on Britain (New York 1973), 54ff. The argument may be traced back to Frederick Engels' The Condition of the Working Class in England (London 1972), 155, where Engels considers religion among the workers to have been confined to "...the half-bourgeois, the overlookers, foremen and the like."

4. Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist (London 1938) 38-9.

"...religion seemed to be departing from the life of the lower classes", and alongside which occurred "...as a symptom of religious decline...the transference of religious enthusiasm to the political sphere." <sup>5</sup>

The present argument will question, in revisionist fashion, the adequacy of these explanations by exploring the place and role of Nonconformity among the Lancashire working class <sup>6</sup> and by focusing upon the Labour Church movement of late century. It will be suggested below that religious sentiment and institutions were perhaps more deeply founded in working class life than is often assumed. Statements based upon statistics of attendance or non-attendance are little real indication of the true depth of feeling; <sup>7</sup> rather, we shall be concerned to situate religious belief and the chapel within the rounded social life of the working class. Only in this way is it possible to fully appreciate the relationship between religious and socialist ideals in the overall make-up of working class consciousness.

#### 12.1: Religion, Respectability and the Workers

Most historians have been content to follow the broad conclusions of Inglis' study in identifying a profound alienation in mid- and later Victorian society between the churches and the urban working class. The general absence of the labouring population, particularly in the "chief manufacturing centres" of industrial England, had been strikingly confirmed by the census of church attendance of 1851 whose enumerator, Horace Mann,

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5. Henry Felling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (Oxford 1965) 130, 142.

6. It will not be the concern of this chapter to evaluate the contribution of any particular Nonconformist denomination in working class life or socialist politics. Methodism, and in particular the more democratic off-shoots from the parent body, such as the Primitives, and to some extent the Baptists, were the more influential among the working population in the region.

7. For the limitations of attendance statistics, see Hugh McLeod, Class and Religion in the late Victorian City (London 1974) 24-5.

had concluded that the neglectors belonged largely to "the labouring myriads of our country...the masses of our working population...These are never or but seldom seen in our religious congregations." <sup>8</sup> The years after mid-century had initiated a wide ranging debate within orthodox Christianity regarding its relations with the urban proletariat and, in some instances, vigorous efforts to rectify the imbalance, although by the turn of the century the churches could claim but little success in increasing their lower class attendance. <sup>9</sup> The worst fears of clergymen were reinforced by the protestations of infidelity often voiced by working men and their representatives. Engels had professed to detect in 1844 "...almost universally a total indifference to religion..." among the masses and, in 1855, Marx portrayed English anti-clericalism as having "...the character of a class struggle waged by the poor against the rich." <sup>10</sup>

There was indeed no shortage of criticism from within the ranks of organised labour and the working class. "Marxian" in The Workman's Times, for instance, had made public the feelings of many workingmen about the sincerity of religion and church-goers in 1891: "If Jesus were to revisit this world, at say, St. Paul's or Trafalgar, those middle class Christians would be the first to yell for his blood"; whilst A. M. Thompson considered that, until the emergence of the Labour Churches, religion "...had become so identified within my observation with black clothes, kid gloves, tall silk hats and long faces, that it and I appeared to have parted for ever." <sup>11</sup>

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8. Cited by K. S. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, IX (1960) 77.

9. See further for details, Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes.

10. Engels, Condition of the Working Class, 155; Karl Marx, "Anti-Church Movement", in idem., and Frederick Engels, Articles on Britain (Moscow 1971) 240-41.

11. The Workman's Times, 7 November 1891; The Labour Prophet, November 1893, 105.



Even Keir Hardie had been moved on one occasion to declare that, "...I cannot accept current theology as being other than a travesty of what Christ taught", and many of these themes were echoed in various socialist tracts and pamphlets of the time which addressed themselves to the question of labour's relationship with orthodox religion.<sup>12</sup> In 1906 George Haw, in a book entitled Christianity and the Working Classes which portrayed a wide measure of indifference and hostility to church institutions, cited a "workman from Newcastle" to the following effect;<sup>13</sup>

Is it not because true, genuine Christianity is very little practised by the clergy of today, and consequently not understood or practised by the great majority of the people...Again, is it not a fact that in most churches today the great majority of the so-called "better class" people look down upon the working man, who spends his life in toiling for their necessities and luxuries and do not associate with him as a brother?

There would seem, prima facie, little evidence exempting later nineteenth century Lancashire from this general picture of popular irreligion or at least mere indifference. The religious census had clearly shown the provincial manufacturing centres to have been areas of lowest church attendance, and this included every large town in Lancashire with the sole exceptions of Wigan and Rochdale.<sup>14</sup> A survey conducted by the Bolton Weekly Journal in 1896 found, that of 80,000 who might have attended church

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12. Keir Hardie, Can a Man be a Christian in a Pound a Week? (Labour Leader pamphlet, n.d.) 1. See further, Tom Mann, A Socialist's View of Religion and the Churches (Clarion pamphlet 1896); M. Gass, The Socialism of Jesus (Glasgow 1893); James Leatham, Was Jesus a Socialist? (London 1896); T. Russell Williams, Should Christians be Socialists? (Bingley 1904); J. Bruce Wallace, Christ and Social Problems (Belfast n.d.); George H. Froggatt, Christ and the Labour Movement (Bradford n.d.); R. Wood, Socialism. Christ and Christianity (Glasgow 1894); Henry Lees, A Christian Duty Towards Socialism (Manchester n.d.); Katherine and J. Bruce Glasier, The Religion of Socialism (London n.d.)
13. George Haw, ed., Christianity and the Working Classes (London 1906) 3-4
14. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship", 84-5.



or chapel on Sunday, 22 December of that year, only 14,000 chose in actual fact to do so.<sup>15</sup> Robert Roberts, too, has recalled of Salford around the turn of the century that the processes separating religion from the working population were clearly in evidence:<sup>16</sup>

...it seemed that by the early years of the twentieth century churches and chapels had little to offer that would attract much longer those from the lower multitudes...the moral authority of religious establishment, though still not openly questioned, was at least being quietly ignored by more and more members of the manual working class.

Finally, a woman from Burnley is reported by Haw in 1906 to have suggested that unbelief and distrust of the church was coming to be increasingly marked among the population of the Lancashire mill towns.<sup>17</sup>

Lancashire was traditionally, of course, a stronghold of the middle class Nonconformist "Alliance" of the second half of the nineteenth century but, insofar as religion had attracted the workers, it had suffered a number of setbacks by late century. The revival of popular Anglicanism in the Duchy, fueled by xenophobic and ethnic rivalry precipitated by the Irish influx, had predisposed many working men to favour the Church and Conservative Party.<sup>18</sup> It is certainly true that Lancashire working men and women were coming to be increasingly suspect of Nonconformity as being all too clearly associated with the employer class: "The Nonconformist manufacturers of Lancashire and Yorkshire", remembered one socialist activist of the time, "prayed for and generally with us on Sundays, and preyed on us for the rest of the week."<sup>19</sup> Nonconformists seemed in any case out of touch with working class life. They appeared rigid and

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15. Cited by Allen Clarke, The Effects of the Factory System (London 1899) 142.

16. Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (Harmondsworth 1974) 175.

17. Haw, Christianity and Working Classes, 6.

18. See Above, part 8.1, Chapter 8.

19. Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left, 24.

and puritanical, bent on frustrating the working man's legitimate pleasures with their agitation to restrict the licensing hours, against the music halls and theatres so popular in the mill towns, Sunday railway excursions and opening of art galleries, public libraries and museums on the Sabbath.<sup>20</sup> As socialist ideas began to gain currency in the 1880s and '90s, Nonconformity further distanced itself from the working class by insistence upon its traditional individualistic ethic.<sup>21</sup> It might be plausibly argued, then, that commitment to the various Dissenting denominations was singularly lacking in Lancashire by the end of the century, displaced by a popular Anglicanism whose appeal was xenophobic rather than strictly religious.

Such conclusions would be hasty. Whilst possibly the case that hostility to religious establishment was greater than it once had been,<sup>22</sup> it cannot be glibly assumed that ideas and sentiments of fundamentally religious significance had been expelled without trace from working class life and it becomes imperative at this point to explore a number of confusions surrounding popular religiosity. In the first instance, that aspect of the "secularisation" thesis propounded by sociologists of religion, which has declared the increasingly marginal social role of the churches to be an inevitable concomitant of the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, warrants careful attention.<sup>23</sup> Lancashire, home of the

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20. D. M. Thompson, ed., Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century (London 1972) 13; Tom Mann, Tom Mann's Memoirs (London 1923) 69, for an account of opposition from Nonconformists in Bolton to the opening of libraries on Sundays.

21. John F. Glaser, "English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism", American Historical Review, LXIII (1958) 358.

22. Although care is advised in pronouncing the Victorian age one of increasing unbelief: cf. Susan Budd, Sociologists and Religion (London 1973) 124.

23. For the secularisation thesis, see B. R. Wilson, Religion in a Secular Society (London 1966); Alasdair MacIntyre, "Secularisation", The Listener 15 February 1968, and Secularisation and Moral Change (Newcastle 1967); Budd, Sociologists and Religion, ch. VII.

industrial revolution, cotton, and Engels' "classic soil" of the capitalist mode of production, has frequently been pictured as the locus classicus of large scale industry with all its attendant features - the mill towns, a proletarianised work force, poverty and squalid housing and, in consequence, popular religious indifference. It needs to be recalled that a surprising variety of productive situations existed well into the nineteenth century and the large industrial town - Manchester and Salford, Liverpool, Bolton, Preston or Oldham, for instance - was by no means typical nor as uniformly grey as is often suggested.

By far the majority of early cotton concerns were country mills, situated in the industrial villages and small towns in the north and east of the county, on the Pennine foothills, or in the industrial colonies which surrounded the larger towns.<sup>24</sup> Angus Bethune Reach reported of Lancashire for the Morning Chronicle in 1849 that,<sup>25</sup>

...thickly sprinkled amid the oak-coppiced vales of Lancashire, with the whitewashed cottages of the workpeople gleaming through the branches and beside the rapid stream, or perched high on the breezy forehead of a hill, are to be seen hundreds on hundreds of busily working cotton mills. In the vicinity are no foetid alleys, no grimy courts, no dark areas or underground cellars. Even the smoke from the tall chimneys passes tolerably innocuously away - sometimes, perhaps, when the air is calm and heavy, dotting the grass and the leaves with copious showers of 'blacks', but never seriously smirching nor blighting the dewy freshness of the fields and hedgerows, through which the spinner and the weaver pass their daily toil.

Even in late century, mill workers like Annie Fernhead, who worked at the Rheddish mill in Gorton, near Manchester, and Rowland Kenney's father, a factory hand at Spring Head, might live and work among rural surroundings,<sup>26</sup>

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24. See H. Clay and K. R. Brady, Manchester at Work: A Survey (Manchester 1929) 94.

25. C. Aspin, ed., Angus Bethune Reach: Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849 (Helmshore 1972) 65.

26. Norah W. Johnson, Willie Pick (Welwyn 1973) 7-9; Rowland Kenney, Westering (London 1939) 3-5.

and in many similar areas throughout Lancashire a traditional way of life co-existed with the partial domination of the new mode of production. It is true, of course, that the size of towns grew rapidly after mid-century fired by the progressive centralisation of the cotton industry, but the pattern of urban development was intensive rather than extensive and, as noted in Chapter 11, the old productive colonies retained much of their identity and where, in any case, a recent semi-rural past ensured that traditions deeply rooted in popular life might survive. Religion was integral to these communities and retained much of its vitality even as late as the turn of the century. <sup>27</sup>

Nor can it be assumed, as it so often is, that infidelity inevitably follows from the fact of large scale urbanisation, although formal worship was undoubtedly least popular in these areas. Misunderstanding has in addition surrounded the restricted and pejorative imputation of "respectability". There exists a clear tendency among historians of the working class and nineteenth century labour movement to confine respectability, or the hankering after it, to a small upper section of the lower strata whose life style was geared more towards that of the lower middle classes. It is suggested that religion and church-going were more correctly features of this, as against that of broader proletarian, culture. Certainly, religiosity was one strategy for the aspiring working man, who found in church association forms of primary social relationships which elevated him above the common lot. <sup>28</sup> But there is a sense in which respectability

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27. For the strength of Methodism in one such area, the Rossendale Valley, see William Jessop, An Account of Methodism in Rossendale and Its Neighbourhood (London 1881).

28. See, for instance, the life of James Hopkinson: J. B. Goodman, ed., Victorian Cabinet Maker: Memoirs of James Hopkinson 1819-1894 (London 1968).



was wider than is implied here and may indeed be seen as one response to the very conditions of working class life. For the term ought also to embrace "self-respect", and comprehend the struggles of many ordinary people to remain afloat with some measure of dignity in a hostile world. Richard Hoggart has detected in working class life, <sup>29</sup>

...a clear dignity in that reaction to the pressures of the outside world which takes the form of insisting on 'keeping y' self-respect'. And the moment this idea of 'self-respect' and 'self-reliance' comes to mind, it begins to flower into related ideas: into that of 'respectability' first, which itself spreads outwards and upwards from some thin-lipped forms, through the pride of a skilled workman, to the integrity of those who have practically nothing except a determination not to allow themselves to be dragged down by circumstances... There is, I think, a tendency among some writers on the working classes to think of all those who aim at thrift and cleanliness as imitators of the lower middle classes... But cleanliness, thrift and self-respect arise more from a concern not to drop down, not to succumb to the environment, than from an anxiety to go up...

In the anonymity of the urban environment, a number of the working population sought to actively confront the forces bearing upon their lives by establishing for themselves an aim in life and sense of purpose, by maintaining a stable home and family life in the face of disintegrative forces, by escaping the drunkenness and fecklessness of the "rough" family and, above all, by ascribing to some vague standards of "decency" and self-respect. Such working men and women sought to bring a feeling of order into their lives and a small measure of autonomous control in the midst of seemingly imponderable pressures. They would certainly not be the poorest sections - whose passivity in the face of grinding poverty is generally recognised - or the rough working class; but they were not simply confined to the better paid, upper sections of the labour community. For it was precisely for those who had just enough to escape the hand to

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29. The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth 1973) 77-8.



mouth existence of the bread line - but precious little else - that self-respect became imperative. Too frequently the working class is pictured as passive and inert, the victim of and unable to transcend social forces and ideological pressures. On the contrary, a large number - perhaps even a majority - of workers sought "respectability" as in some small way surmounting factors seemingly beyond their control and establishing social distance between themselves and those who had capitulated to such forces. <sup>30</sup>

There existed a number of strategems by which one's integrity might be maintained. Religious ideals were just one such form of higher focus and coherence, something "above" the squalid daily struggle and, by ascribing to which, working people were able to establish a goal and sense of overarching purpose in their lives. We should not be surprised to find that socialism held out a similar attraction to these working men and women, and often the two went hand in hand. <sup>31</sup> It would be instructive at this point to turn to examine the place of religious sentiment and institutions within the broader social life of the working class for, although a feeling of hostility to the insincerities and nepotism of the churches and their representatives was doubtless widespread, we would be wrong in assuming this to be indicative of irreligion or that the churches had but little or no impact upon working class life. Ideas, beliefs and practices of a basically religious nature appear to have been more prevalent than is often thought, and intimately bound to working class conditions of life.

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30. Evidence substantiating the contentions contained in this paragraph comes from two sources, although remains in large measure qualitative. First, a number of the working class autobiographies cited elsewhere in this study seem to support the interpretation of working class respectability offered above. More importantly and more informative, however, were a series of interviews carried out with veterans of the labour movement in Lancashire. My thanks are due to Mr. Arnold Tweedale of the Oldham Trades and Labour Council for arranging these interviews.

31. Two novels provide evidence of the way in which socialism brought a sense of meaning and coherence to the lives of its advocates, standing in marked contrast to everyday working class life: see the portrait of Owen in Robert Tressell's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (London 1955) and Larry Meath in Arthur Greenwood's Love on the Dole (Harmondsworth 1974).

## 12.2: Nonconformity and Popular Belief in Lancashire Life

The tradition of popular Anglicanism in later nineteenth century Lancashire has perhaps distracted attention from the deep rooting of Nonconformity in many working class communities, the strength of which cannot be divorced from the specific religious history of the county. Contemporary historians were fully cognisant of the vigorous Dissenting traditions to be found in the north west: <sup>32</sup>

More distinctly than any other English county, Lancashire has a religious history of its own. Its Puritanism has been remarkable for many peculiarities, its Nonconformism has been, in many respects unlike the Nonconformism of other parts of England.

The growth of Nonconformity in Lancashire owes much to the development in the seventeenth century of unendowed chapels to meet the religious needs of a population sparsely served by Anglican Churches. <sup>33</sup> The occupation of chapels and meeting houses during the Commonwealth by ejected ministers ensured that, by the Act of Toleration and the years following 1689, Nonconformity was able to establish a degree of permanence. <sup>34</sup> Nonconformis came to be associated with dissent in politics as in religion, staunch defenders of civic and religious liberties and implacably opposed to the High Church Tories and Jacobites. <sup>35</sup> The new Dissent of Methodism and

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32. R. Halley, Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity (Manchester 1872) v.

33. W. Shaw, "The Religious Life of Lancashire During the Commonwealth", in E. Axon, ed., Bygone Lancashire (London 1892) 10-12; E. Axon, "Nonconformity in Lancashire in the Seventeenth Century", Transactions of Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, XXXV (1918).

34. For an account of Nonconformity in Lancashire during the period, see W. Brockbank and F. Kenworthy, eds., The Diary of Richard Kay 1716-51: A Lancashire Doctor (Manchester 1968).

35. Richard Wade, The Rise of Nonconformity in Manchester (Manchester 1880); Lt. Col. Henry Fishwick, A History of Lancashire (London 1894) 226-240.

Congregationalism of the Evangelical revival preserved and fostered the principles of religious self-government and, by the later eighteenth century, centres such as Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton ("the Geneva of Lancashire"), Blackburn and Lancaster "...were the sources from which evangelical Nonconformity were diffused throughout all parts of the county", and many of these chapels made important contributions to Lancashire civic and cultural life.<sup>36</sup> In 1843, Edward Baines Jnr. reported that in Lancashire there existed church and chapel accommodation for 42% of her population as against only about 30% in London.<sup>37</sup> By mid-century, Manchester had emerged as the home of bourgeois Nonconformity, but it is well to recall that the religious census had shown the Dissenting denominations, and especially the Wesleyan Methodists, to have been most influential in the popular religious life of the manufacturing districts.<sup>38</sup>

It is further beyond question that the Sunday school movement in Lancashire was significant in touching at a number of points the lives of working people. "The system originated by Mr. Raikes some seventy years ago", noted Reach in his reports,<sup>39</sup>

...took deep root in Lancashire, and grew with the growth of manufacturing industry. The serious cast of the Lancashire mind, and its earnestness and zeal, acting upon the facilities afforded by the order and discipline which it is the very nature of the factory system to install, formed a soil in which the Sunday school system took very deep root and bore rich harvests.

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36. Halley, Lancashire Nonconformity, 526; Rev. Benjamin Nightingale, Lancashire Nonconformity, or, Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, iii, (London 1892) 1; H. McLachlan, "Cross Street Chapel in the Life of Manchester", Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, LXXXIV (1939-41).
37. E. Baines, The Social, Educational and Religious State on the Manufacturing Districts (1844: London 1969 ed.) 18.
38. Inglis, "Patterns of Religious Worship", 85-6.
39. Manchester and the Textile Districts, 43-4.



In his classic History of Lancashire, Edward Baines observed that no less than 7,200 scholars attended the various denominational Sunday schools in Bolton in 1824. In the 1830s, there existed in Manchester and Salford some 34 Anglican, 72 Dissenting and 11 Catholic schools and, by 1849, there were to be found in attendance from 40,000 to 50,000 scholars and between 4,000 to 5,000 teachers, inspectors and visitants.<sup>40</sup> In the report cited above, Baines Jnr. found one Sunday school pupil for every five inhabitants in Lancashire, as against one in ten in the Metropolis. Much of the initiative behind the movement was due to the Methodists, whose Sunday schools - often managed by ordinary mill workers - made extensive efforts to reach a section of the population for whom educational provision had hitherto been negligible.<sup>41</sup>

In a recent scholarly study, Thomas W. Laqueur has demonstrated that the Sunday schools represented in all respects autonomous working class institutions, their membership being overwhelmingly drawn from the labouring population who themselves controlled the schools and attuned them to their own needs.<sup>42</sup> By mid-century, they were particularly strong in the north west where "...the sheer numbers that attended Sunday schools...imply that almost all children of the working class or the 'lower orders' must at one time or another have attended Sunday school."<sup>43</sup> In 1857, it was estimated that, of nearly 3,000 people in Haslingden, almost one in three attended Sunday school,<sup>44</sup> and there is much evidence that the habit persisted

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40. A. P. Wadsworth, "The First Manchester Sunday Schools", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXXIII (1951) 326; Reach, Manchester and the Textile Districts, 44.
41. H. F. Mathews, Methodism and the Education of the People (London 1949) 47-51.
42. Thomas W. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850 (New Haven and London 1976).
43. Laqueur, ibid., 89.
44. C. Aspin, Lancashire: The First Industrial Society (Helmshore 1969) 109.

among the working class until late century. Around 1900, the Bennett Street Sunday school in Manchester was attracting over 2,000 scholars weekly,<sup>45</sup> whilst Elizabeth Roberts has concluded from her study of Lancashire life between 1880-1914 that the experience of Sunday schooling was virtually universal with working class children.<sup>46</sup> That the Sunday schools remained largely working class institutions controlled by their members is attested to by a clergyman familiar with the region:<sup>47</sup>

The Sunday school is a great institution in Lancashire, but it is not necessarily regarded as the handmaiden of the church. In many places the Sunday school is in silent but stubborn opposition to the church. The clergyman's teaching is systematically countered.

There was a wide measure of agreement among working class parents that attendance by their children was to be encouraged and it is in their attitude towards the Sunday schools that the working population, as Henry Pelling has suggested, most clearly displayed their religious tolerance.<sup>48</sup>

To progress beyond merely quantitative statements of accommodation and attendance, however, we need to situate religion within the wider framework of working class life. It is true that traditional, ritualistic or even frankly superstitious practices survived in some working class communities, particularly in the more remote areas of Lancashire: Rushbearing customs, ghosts or "boggarts", soteriological "love-feasts" and the emotional revivalist meetings periodically held in Lancashire towns and villages all

45. C. Rowley, Fifty Years of Work Without Wages (London 1912) 31.

46. Elizabeth Roberts, "Living and Learning - Socialisation Outside School", Oral History, III (1975) 14; Laqueur, Religion and Respectability, 247.

47. F. B. Smith, Parsons and Weavers: A Study in Lancashire Clerical Work (London 1897) 34.

48. Henry Pelling, "Popular Attitudes to Religion", in idem., Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London 1968) 30-31.



evinced the tenacity of vestigial traditions or superstitious customs.<sup>49</sup> But religion could not be in the main other than severely practical, and it took on forms among working people rooted in their conditions of life and expressing the dominant patterns of community life. Questions of abstract theology or doctrinal disputation were irrelevant for, as Alice Foley of Bolton recalled,<sup>50</sup>

...everyday life in the home, school and in the streets healthily conspired against such a conception of religiosity. The force of environment and nurture gradually decreed that contentment and fulfilment would be found, if at all, in kinship with the lowly and simple of this world...

It is, then, in relation to patterns of social life that religious practices and forms among the working class are to be rendered explicable.

Religious beliefs had to earn their stay by confronting the most pressing problems of working class life, and there was offered in the final analysis hope of something better than the present round. Stemming from a life's toil but sparsely rewarded on this earth, working men commonly expressed a belief in heaven, in a life after death and future salvation.<sup>51</sup> Many believed in a supreme Being whose judgement, whilst it might appear perverse at present, would nevertheless prevail in the end - a final arbiter of "eternal justice".<sup>52</sup> Above all, in an age when the working class had of necessity to turn upon itself for relief, to the network of familial

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49. For instances of traditional or superstitious religious practices in Lancashire, see F. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character (London nd. (1910?)) 14-18, 140-47; T. W. Pateman, Dunshaw: A Lancashire Background (London 1948) 195; G. Mitchell, ed., The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell (London 1968) for an account of the "love-feast". See further, A. Smith, "Popular Religion", Past and Present, XL (1969) 181-86, and for the earlier period, Stuart Mews, "Reason and Emotion in Working Class Religion", in D. Baker, ed., Studies in Church History 9 (London 1972).

50. Alice Foley, A Bolton Childhood (Manchester 1973) 36.

51. Hoggart, Uses of Literacy, 114; for salvation in lower class religious beliefs, see Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (1922: London 1965 ed.) ch. 7.

52. On this aspect of popular religion, see further Thomas Wright, Our New Masters (London 1873) 88.

and neighbourhood relationships which were basic to community life, religious beliefs sprang directly out of these social patterns. And thus, the "Christian" thing to do was to offer help and assistance in times of crisis to one's friends, workmates, neighbours and especially to one's kin. In so far as Christianity was important to the working class it was as a system of ethics, a concern with morals as against metaphysics. Such behaviour was no more nor less than "decent" behaviour, a vague but yet not undemanding conception intimately related to everyday life. Equally, the patterns of reciprocation which underscored working class morality might be circumscribed by denomination and ethnicity and, in a number of communities, Irish Catholics rarely found themselves the recipients of such charitable concern.<sup>53</sup>

Although doubtless ill-defined and lacking in coherence, working class religiosity revolved around certain core themes, simple but intensely held values comprising a loose system of morality and ethics. Religion was not something for Sundays alone, to be forgotten during the rest of the week, but was primarily for working men and women a guide to "right" and "wrong" in life. A basic commitment to love, brotherhood, charity, justice and attendant notions were founded firmly in everyday life and their application equally bounded by community patterns. The social equivalents of these ideas - which lay in living a "decent" life, in being a "good" neighbour and friend to others when in trouble, in "sticking together" and lending a hand to one's family in the face of life's many crises - were inescapable. That a whole philosophy of life might be reduced to a working maxim made such sentiments no less significant. Hannah Mitchell's father was a religious man and she recalled that: "He considered that the whole duty of man was contained in the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you', and he certainly lived up to his belief."<sup>54</sup> The

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53. Roberts, The Classic Slum, 14, 22-3; Margaret McCarthy, Generation in Revolt (London 1953) 21-6, on the treatment of Catholics in working class communities.

54. The Hard Way Up, 55.

focus of working class religion might in this sense be narrow and inward looking, located within and reflecting the parochial social outlook and practices of the community.

What working men and women took to be genuinely religious was in all essentials practical, its primary focus of concern the immediate and concrete. An expansive conception of higher purpose helped people to bear the tragedies and setbacks endemic in their lives and, whilst perhaps infrequently resorted to, prayer was a comforter in the face of death and disaster.<sup>55</sup> Such sentiments were practical in that they faced up to real problems but also in that they tended to be pragmatic and antithetical to theological nuance, and often non- or supra-denominational. It was by no means unusual for members of the same family to belong or at least express attachment to chapels of differing persuasions, or to attend a Nonconformist school.<sup>56</sup> It mattered more that they found a congenial atmosphere there rather than this or that interpretation of the scriptures and, with this in mind, they might express a deep attachment to the local chapel whilst rarely in fact attending formal religious worship. Well might one working class woman recall her mother's religious predilections as "creedless and pewless".<sup>57</sup> Expressed religious opinion was not simply undogmatic but also fluid, and might vary depending upon the social context in which it was profered.<sup>58</sup>

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55. This aspect of religious life may lend support to the functionalist approach: cf. Kingsley Davies, Human Society (New York 1949) ch. XIX

56. Working class autobiographies tell frequently how working people would change their place of worship for other than strictly religious reasons: see, for instance, Moses Heap, My Life and Times 1824-1913 (n.d. typescript in the Manchester Central Libraries). See further, M. Loane, The Queen's Poor (London 1905) 35, for evidence from London, and Pelling, "Popular Attitudes to Religion", 22-3.

57. Foley, A Bolton Childhood, 23.

58. This aspect of working class religion has been noted by McLeod, Class and Religion, 55.

Religion for the working class in addition sanctified the special occasions in life. It was almost unthinkable that christenings, weddings and burials should not be done properly - that is to say, given a religious seal - and this would be the case for even the hitherto laxest attender.<sup>59</sup> Joe Toole tells of an almost exaggerated morality to be found in the poorer quarters of Salford during this period which demanded nothing less than legitimacy in marriage.<sup>60</sup> At these important dates in life, working people turned to their religion as providing an appropriate marker and imbuing such occasions with a higher significance far removed from the ordinary workaday world.

Most working people were convinced that life ought to conform to certain basic ethical maxims. These rarely found coherent or systematic articulation, or comprised a rounded philosophy of life and after-life, but were flexible precepts which, by their very nature, could not be confined to the "religious" sphere alone. If, as noted above, the working class conceived the spirit of religion as implying in part at least certain social obligations and relationships, these might easily inform and merge with wider economic or political beliefs. In those parts of the country where Nonconformity had gained a foothold among the labouring population we can see clearly how religion has frequently impinged upon political ideals. George Edwards of the Norfolk farm labourers, for instance, described in his autobiography the way in which Primitive Methodism opened his eyes to social injustices and, in consequence, the need for socialism: "With my study of theology, I soon began to realise that the social conditions of

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59. Hoggart, Uses of Literacy, 115-16; see further, "The Diary of John Ward of Clitheroe, Weaver", Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, cv (1954) 161, which mentions his attending church only on the occasion of his daughter's wedding.

60. Joe Toole, Fighting Through Life (London 1935) 55.



the people were not as God intended they should be." <sup>61</sup> Again, Margaret McCarthy from Lancashire, an activist in the early years of the labour movement, has recalled how the growth of her father's socialist beliefs and sense of class solidarity could not be divorced from his equally heart-felt Methodism. <sup>62</sup> That political consciousness might emerge in this way, embodying and fortified by religious sentiment, is to be located precisely in the flexibility of popular religiosity. In 1911, Conrad Noel pointed to the intimate relationship between the socialist appeal and what he termed the "lukewarm theism" of the British working class: <sup>63</sup>

English democrats do not think out what they mean by authority, and, therefore the idea of Heavenly Authority cannot clash with the loose and unfinished earthly schemes: their political vagueness fits in well enough with a lukewarm theism...

It should be no surprise to find, then, that the precise nature of socialist ideas in Lancashire owed much to antecedent religious forms and beliefs.

At one extreme, working class religion might lapse into utopianism and certainly had its sentimental side. We can trace a vision of fellowship or a longing for a better and more harmonious order in their beliefs which has frequently inspired working class politicians and socialist rhetoric. But if the New Jerusalem was a vision, the ultimate test remained prosocially concrete. For everyday activity, "practising" and not simply "preaching" were the hallmarks of a good Christian. Inherent in working-class religion, therefore, was an in-built suspicion of the established denominations and mistrust of clergymen and ministers who preached Christian virtues but yet

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61. George Edwards, From Crow-Scaring to Westminster (London 1922), cited by Thompson, Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century, 198.

62. Generation in Revolt, 13.

63. Rev. Conrad Noel, "The Working Class", in W. K. Lowther Clark, ed., Facing the Facts, or, an Englishman's Religion (London 1911) 94.



seemed more often than not concerned only with ministering to the needs of the rich, or ingratiating themselves with the bosses.<sup>64</sup> It became a common socialist complaint that the churches were failing by the very standards of their own creed and yet, as Thomas Wright noted, workingmen nevertheless clung tenaciously onto and counterposed what they believed to be genuinely religious:<sup>65</sup>

Uneducated though they may be, ignorant of theology as they mostly are, their common sense still tells them that to make church-going the be-all and end-all, as a test of religion, with the observance of one of its mere mechanical rites; to put a premium upon hypocrisy and cheap self-righteousness...In the essentials of Christianity - the feelings of brotherly love and kindness, the virtue of patience - the working classes are not lacking. Their non-attendance at places of worship has not the grave meaning that even many of the more charitably inclined in the other classes may attach to it...

How widespread were such religious conceptions? It seems clear that active, principled secularism among the working class was rare,<sup>66</sup> although the poorest sections and the rough working class would have little to do with religion. At the other extreme, we can certainly find patterns of lower class religiosity which may be more correctly located within a labour aristocratic world view.<sup>67</sup> Again, a small number conceived religion primarily as an intense and deeply personal relationship with their God. Such faith would usually inform the whole life style of the "devout" working man, which was apt to be puritanical and censorious.<sup>68</sup> Standing between

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64. Walter Greenwood, Lancashire (London 1951) 33.

65. Our New Masters, 87-9.

66. Haw, Christianity and the Working Classes, 1: "The aggressive agnostic belongs more to the middle class than to the working class."; Pateman, Dunshaw, 175.

67. See, for instance, the life of J. R. Lancashire: cf. F. Hall, A Northern Pioneer: The Life of J. R. Lancashire (London 1927).

68. See, for instance, the life of James Hopkinson: Goodman, Victorian Cabinet Maker, passim.

these extremes was a large section of the working class for whom religion brought a measure of hope, order and self-respect. It was, quite simply, part of their way of life, not devout or theological religion but a working ethical code by which life might be lived and ultimately judged. If at its worst religion might foster intolerance and bigotry, "...at its best it yielded to the faithful a simple certainty about the ends of life and helped them to live in honest, kindly and sober ways." <sup>69</sup> If such religion caused some to distance themselves from the established churches, this cannot be taken to indicate that they lacked entirely any sense of identity. The chapel was often approached as an all round social institution, and in this sense its influence might be pronounced. Again, we need to widen our conception of the role of religious institutions in working class life.

### 12.3: The Chapel as a Working Class Social Institution

In many working class communities in later nineteenth century Lancashire - no less in the larger towns where we should not deprecate their contribution to working class life - Nonconformist chapels were frequently vital parts of the community, offering a variety of attractions on a number of levels. As is often noted, Nonconformity was more democratic and flexible in its structure than the Church, offering greater participation through lay involvement of various kinds for ordinary people in the day to day running of their chapels and an increased sense of control over their own religious lives. <sup>70</sup>

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69. Pateman, Dunshaw, 168.

70. See, for instance, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer (London 1919) 270-71; Thomas Wright, The Great Unwashed (London 1868) 93; Noel, "The Working Classes", 107-10; Thompson, Nonconformity in the Nineteenth century, 161; Pateman, Dunshaw, 170.

In the most general sense, the place of chapels in the social life of working class communities may be grasped from the manner in which activities tended to revolve around the various seasons of the ecclesiastical calendar. Margaret Penn's engaging account of life in Moss Ferry, near Manchester, shows clearly how the pattern of events in this industrial village focused upon the occasions of the religious year.<sup>71</sup> Christmas, for instance, was the sparkling climax of the northern year and was marked by parties and festivities in the chapel and hearty carol singing through the night.<sup>72</sup> In other communities, the local gathering of families for the traditional New Year Party held in the chapel hall was similarly popular.<sup>73</sup> In the north west, Easter was a popular date of some local significance. The festival was marked in Moss Ferry with chapel "daffodil services" which symbolised the passage of winter and, elsewhere, with pace-egging games, plays and mummers, whilst a number of areas held traditional Easter fairs throughout this period.<sup>74</sup> Other popular dates in Lancashire included Shrovetide and mid-Lent Sunday, when the tradition was for the people to bake simnel cakes.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps the most eagerly anticipated annual event, however, was Whitsuntide, which in Lancashire was marked by processions and celebrations. In most areas, the Catholics held their walks on Whit Friday and the Anglicans and Nonconformists the following Monday, an expediency arrived at so as to preclude possible religious antagonism.<sup>76</sup> Moses Heap, a weaver from Rawtenstall, remembers of the earlier part of the century that,<sup>77</sup>

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71. Margaret Penn, Manchester 14 Miles (Cambridge 1947) 64-80, 95.

72. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 147.

73. Annie Kenney, Memoirs of a Militant (London 1924) 9-13.

74. Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 142-47; Pateman, Dunshaw, 196.

75. Ormerod, ibid., 147.

76. Greenwood, Lancashire, 21-2.

77. My Life and Times, 6.

Whit Friday was our 'Red Letter Day'. The day was spent by the scholars in procession through the village streets, accompanied by two bands of music, and banners of various shapes, sizes and designs, visiting the gentry on our way, and receiving presents in the shape of oranges, sweets and cakes.

The occasion retained much of its obvious appeal and accounts of Lancashire life in late century suggest that the Whitsun walks were as popular as ever. Whitsun was traditionally the time when new clothes were purchased, and Joe Toole tells of how poor families in Salford formed saving clubs to buy new clothes in order "to walk with pride in the Whit-week religious processions." <sup>78</sup> The labour pioneer Joseph Burgess evoked in verse the meaning of Whitsuntide in Lancashire popular life: <sup>79</sup>

Who are these in dainty dresses?,  
Tell me why this rich array?  
Stranger, you would never guess;  
Daughters of the poor are they.  
These are they whose mothers spin,  
All the winter and the spring,  
Raiment to adorn them in,  
At the Whitsun walk and sing.

Those commentators who have stressed the general absence of popular religious sentiment cannot account for the rich fascination which religious ceremonies, processions and anniversaries held in working class life.

Alongside these celebrations of fundamentally religious intent were to be found weddings, christenings and burials which, as noted above, were rarely allowed to escape sanctification by working people. A recent theory proposed by W. S. F. Pickering to explain the persistence of rites of passage in secular society, and stressing the social setting and content of such ceremonies, is of wider applicability to those aspects of working class religiosity under consideration here. <sup>80</sup> For while these occasions

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78. Fighting Through Life, 8.

79. Joseph Burgess, A Potential Poet: His Autobiography and Verse (Ilford 1927) 175.

80. W. S. F. Pickering, "The Persistence of Rites of Passage: towards an explanation", British Journal of Sociology, XXV, (1974).



clearly retained a vestigial religious importance they were often turned into real neighbourhood events, affording the opportunity not only of religious expression but also for demonstrations of collective sentiment and social relationships basic to community life. These events were, therefore, at once religious and social, usually embracing family and wider kin groupings as well as friendship networks in a solidifying social occasion. The attraction of these traditional dates and events in the religious calendar and the persistence of rites of passage in working class life cannot be separated from the parochial community patterns to which they were intimately related, and in turn afforded an additional means of expression.

In a wider sense, too, religious institutions harmonised with other facets of working class community life in the north west. Throughout Lancashire during these years - and this is especially true of the smaller towns and industrial colonies in the Duchy - the leisure and social patterns of the community would often focus upon the chapel, for here was one institution within which members might make and control their own activities. Sometimes associated with the chapel anniversary, sometimes an event in its own right, the Sunday school outing was an eagerly anticipated occasion in the year.<sup>81</sup> Sunday school outings grew enormously in popularity after mid-century when teas, parties and field days were provided for the children and social functions for the adults. Feasts were one of the earliest Sunday school innovations and, in later life, a number of working men have fondly recalled the trips and outings organised by the chapel or Sunday school as providing a welcome break from the monotony of daily routine.<sup>82</sup> For working class children, the Sunday

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81. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability, 177-79.

82. An example from Yorkshire, where in many respects popular Nonconformity was similar to Lancashire, may be found in the autobiography of the trade unionist Ben Turner, About Myself (London 1930) 40.



school also provided almost the only means of convivial diversion, and it was in the school sports teams or children's parties that many remember the happiest times of their youth.<sup>83</sup> The Band of Hope movement flourished in Lancashire and enrolled countless working class children. Though its aims were peculiarly censorious - the movement aimed to instill in working class youth the twin virtues of teetotalism and bourgeois respectability - they provided recreation and distraction, the memory of which far outlasted their moral sermonisings.<sup>84</sup>

Adults, too, found in their chapels a community of like-minded people with whom problems might be aired and points of concern discussed. Working class chapels became centres of support and assistance and men and women felt that they could turn with confidence to their fellow members for help, both material and moral, in times of need. There is much evidence, too, that Sunday schools developed a wide range of social services, autonomous and self-directed forms of relief as against the organised poor law or philanthropic assistance. Many Sunday schools had highly organised and well-financed sickness, burial or clothing clubs attached to them, whilst a number of Nonconformist chapels also acted as a savings bank, where working people might save for the annual wakes week holiday and other special occasions, or to safeguard against emergencies.<sup>85</sup> The informally constituted services of the Sunday school or chapel were wider still and might often embrace assistance by fellow members in securing employment or housing.

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83. Johnson, Willie Pick, 27-8.

84. On the Band of Hope in Lancashire, see further Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872 (London 1971) 192-4; Lillian Lewis Shiman, "The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable Recreation for Working Class Children", Victorian Studies, XVII (1973) 49-74; Roberts, The Classic Slum, 161.

85. Laqueur, Religion and Respectability, 172-76; Rowley, Fifty Years of Work, 31.

The chapel would also be an outlet for cultural and sporting activities, providing opportunities for working people starkly absent from their day to day routine. Much opportunity for making music or song lay in connection with the chapel and, as Edwin Waugh noted of the Lancashire working people during the cotton famine of the 1860s: <sup>86</sup>

I believe there is no part of England in which the practice of sacred music is so widely and so lovingly pursued amongst the working class as in the counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire. There is no part of England, where, until recently, there have been so many poor men's pianos, which have been purchased by a long course of careful saving...It is not uncommon to meet working men wandering over the hills with their musical instruments to take part in some village oratorio many miles away.

The chapel choir gave to many working men and women a unique chance of cultural expression; though herself quite untutored in music, Joseph Burgess tells of how his mother sung leading soprano in the Hollinsworth Primitive Methodist chapel and how, in consequence, music making and song came to play an important role in the life of his family. <sup>87</sup>

In the years following the concession of the free Saturday afternoon to the factory operatives, churches and chapels began to spawn sports teams, and inter-chapel sporting rivalries became intense. As late as 1885, 25 out of the 112 football clubs in Liverpool had religious connections. <sup>88</sup> The many sided attraction of the chapel reminds one of Jack Lawson's description of working class religious life in another part of the country: <sup>89</sup>

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86. Edwin Waugh, Home Life of the Lancashire Factory Folk during the Cotton Famine (London 1881) 76.

87. Burgess, A Potential Poet, 9.

88. Eric Midwinter, Old Liverpool (Newton Abbott 1971) 131-48; James Walvin, The People's Game (London 1975) 50-68.

89. Jack Lawson, A Man's Life (London 1944) 69: the description is, in fact, of the north east of England.

The chapel was their first social centre. Here it was that they drew together, found strength in their weakness and expressed to each other their hidden thoughts and needs. The chapel gave them their first music, their first literature and philosophy to meet the harsh life and cruel impact of the materialistic age. Here these men first formed the language and art to express their antagonism to grim conditions and injustice.

Religion frequently set the seal upon family socials and gatherings, and a visit to the chapel would be an accepted part of the occasion.<sup>90</sup> As a social institution in this rounded sense, however, the chapels faced in the larger towns the competing pull of the public house, theatre and music hall. For many, though, the chapel retained its appeal as a centre of wholesome conviviality, and it is noticeable that when working people like Hannah Mitchell moved into the towns from the surrounding districts they turned before all else to the chapel for friendship and assistance in their new environment.<sup>91</sup>

For many working men and women, and especially those who were in the closing decades of the century the first converts to and cadres of new unionism and the evolving socialist movement, the chapel and Sunday school might have been a formative cultural and educational experience, and it is often forgotten that this remained an important source of instruction for many years even after the provision of full time formal schooling in 1870. Laqueur has demonstrated in the earlier years of the nineteenth century the existence of a highly developed culture of self-instruction and secular education to be found in working class Sunday schools, a tradition which

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90. C.. Stella Davies, North Country Bred: A Working Class Family Chronicle (London 1963) 68.

91. Mitchell, The Hard Way Up, 75-80.

nurtured many labour and trade union leaders of late century.<sup>92</sup> Working class autobiographies of the period, too, frequently tell of how a little learning was acquired at the chapel or the Sunday school, where lessons, stories and anecdotes were imprinted upon impressionable young minds, ethics and recitations imbibed which might be recalled in later life.<sup>93</sup> The Lancashire working man J. R. Lancashire acquired his training in the local chapel and, as his biographer notes,<sup>94</sup>

There, as at many Sunday schools of that day, there was secular as well as religious instruction, and it was at this school that J. R. Lancashire as a boy and a youth learned reading, writing and arithmetic by means of Sunday morning lessons...The Sunday afternoon instruction largely took the form of addresses on natural history, geography, the beginnings of science...

Some adults learned to read and write spurred on, perhaps, by lay involvement in their chapel; a number, certainly, had been taught to read from the Bible, their first groping enquiries directed by the reading material most conveniently to hand in an age when books were beyond the limited means of most men and women.<sup>95</sup>

In many homes before the availability and use of public libraries became widespread among the working class, only religious books and tracts - usually awarded as Sunday school good work or attendance prizes - would be possessed by the family.<sup>96</sup> Most households would have a copy of the

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92. Religion and Respectability, 148ff; among labour politicians who mention the role of Sunday Schools in their education, see John Wilson, Memoirs of a Labour Leader (London 1910) 204-8; William A. Dalley, The Life Story of W. J. Davies (Birmingham 1914) 14; Mann, Memoirs, 4; Ben Tillett, Memoirs and Reflections (London 1931) 26-8; Thomas Burt, An Autobiography (London 1924) 44.
93. See examples in John Burnett, ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (London 1974) 101, 291, 297.
94. Hall, Lancashire Pioneer, 69.
95. See, for instance, the autobiography of Thomas Wood (1822-80), part of which is in Burnett, Useful Toil, 305.
96. Before 1870, only 35 local authorities provided public libraries, although during the next twenty years around 118 did so: cf. W. A. Munford, Penny Rate: Aspects of British Public Library History 1850-1950 (London 1951) 33-4; see further, Penn, Manchester Fourteen Miles, 188-89; Roberts, The Classic Slum, 170.



Bible - it was often known simply as "The Book" - which had been handed down through the family and usually found pride of place in the home. <sup>97</sup>

Education was variously encouraged in other ways, too. According to F. B. Smith, Sunday schools in Lancashire were unique in the large number of adults who came to ardently discuss and debate various issues. Here, education would be pursued in a vigorous dialectical rather than strictly didactic manner: "No political candidate on the hustings has to endure a worse heckling than a fresh teacher in an old-established Lancashire Sunday school men's class." <sup>98</sup> Some chapels, like the Wesleyan Methodists in Moss Ferry, founded or made space available for mutual improvement classes in which a sense of collective self-education might flourish. <sup>99</sup>

Evidence exists to suggest that others occasionally organised speaking and elocution lessons and, as the century progressed, we learn of working men and women pressing to have social and political issues treated in their chapels and discussion groups set up to thrash out issues of topical concern. <sup>100</sup> It should be little surprise to note, then, that a number of socialist groups in Lancashire during this period were based, or held their meetings and discussions before acquiring premises of their own, in the local chapel hall. <sup>101</sup>

It may now perhaps be more clearly appreciated how much wider might be the influence of the Nonconformist chapel in working class life than can be simply adduced from statistics of Sunday worship. Above all, the

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97. Pateman, Dunshaw, 53-4.

98. Smith, Parsons and Weavers, 37.

99. See Penn, Manchester Fourteen Miles, 74-80.

100. Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship (Harmondsworth 1971) 174.

101. See Peter Firth, Socialism and the Origins of the Labour Party in Nelson and District 1890-1906 (unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Manchester, 1975) ch. 2.



enormous impact of hymns, prayers and sermons on working people cannot be overstated; before the advent of mass channels of communication, religious pronouncements of this nature were the most significant means by which a specific and coherent philosophy of the world reached them. If the working population of the northern manufacturing centres did not seem outwardly religious by attending regular worship, it must be recalled that the all round role of the chapel in Lancashire communities might evoke allegiance and identification as strong as with those who were church-goers in the accepted sense.

It was in this fashion that many Nonconformist chapels became social institutions in the life of the working class, offering involvement and participation in a variety of spheres. In this lay the attraction of the Dissenting denominations to ordinary people, for they allowed much scope in the running and control of their religious affairs. The local lay preacher was a vital part of the structure of Nonconformity; many of these preachers were, like their congregation, untutored working men whose extempore prayers would frequently be delivered in a broad Lancashire brogue. <sup>102</sup> On a personal level, it was an institution through which might be realised working class self-control and expression, imbuing the life of the participant with a sense of meaning. But the chapels in these communities had in addition a wider social role. In her fascinating account of northern working class life, C. Stella Davies has recalled how the strong sense of familial responsibility and cohesion, solidarity and mutual self-help basic to working class life, extended to embrace members of the local chapel. <sup>103</sup> An atmosphere of genuine camaraderie grew up in some chapels, to which working men and women felt understandably attracted.

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102. Pateman, Dunshaw, 170; Ormerod, Lancashire Life and Character, 68ff.

103. North Country Bred, 69.

As a focal point of community life, chapels reflected its dominant social patterns and served to define the boundaries of the community. The various levels of chapel involvement ultimately suggest a single "way of life". Noting its prevalence in Lancashire, Robert Halley observed in 1872 how Nonconformity, <sup>104</sup>

...having little of the stiffness or formality of the Independency prevalent in the southern and eastern counties, has accommodated its working with remarkable facility to the feelings and habits of the manufacturing population...and with as little interference as possible allow them to do, what cotton spinners male and female love to do - to manage their religious concerns in their own way.

This sense of self-determination which chapel life afforded combined, as the young Beatrice Webb noted of Nonconformity in Bacup in 1883, personal and social autonomy, self-respect and communal spirit: <sup>105</sup>

Each chapel, even of the same denomination, manages its own affairs; and there are monthly meetings of all the members (male and female) to discuss questions of expenditure, etc. In fact, each chapel is a self-governing community, regulating not only chapel matters but overlooking the private life of its members.

We should hardly expect the forms of socialism that emerged among these people to be divorced from this way of life.

#### 12.4: Socialism, Religion and Community Life: The Case of the Labour Churches

Finally, we may turn our attention to tracing the way in which religious beliefs and institutions related to and bore upon the evolution of socialism in later nineteenth century Lancashire. Robert Moore has correctly noted in a recent paper that the importance of religious ideas

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104. Halley, Lancashire Nonconformity, 533.

105. My Apprenticeship, 174-75.

is frequently underestimated in the analysis of working class social imagery,<sup>106</sup> and his own study of the Durham coalfield locates Methodism as an element contributing to the class harmony and generally pacific attitudes to industrial relations of the trade union leadership.<sup>107</sup> The focus here, by contrast, will be upon the adaptation and "stretching" of religious beliefs in the context of the working class community, and their relationship to the "ethical" strands in the overall composition of branch socialism discussed above (Chapter 9).

In many respects, the case of religion is particularly pertinent to any study concerned with the innovative ideological role of working class groups. Considered on the level of macro-societal formation and process, there can be little argument as to the contributive role of religion - in its Evangelical and Nonconformist guise particularly - to the consolidation of the dominant ideological patterns of late century. The value of Nonconformity - especially, of course, Methodism - as a potentially efficacious means of social control and community discipline was fully recognised early on during the industrial revolution. Local manufacturers in Lancashire were particularly anxious to patronise chapels and Sunday schools, quick to sense the disciplining role that these institutions might perform; this, to be sure, was the fullest embodiment of Andrew Ure's "moral machinery".<sup>108</sup> There is little reason to assume that the

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106. Robert S. Moore, "Religion as a Source of Variation in Working Class Images of Society", in M. Bulmer, ed., Working-Class Images of Society (London 1975) 54.

107. Robert S. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics (Cambridge 1974).

108. See Andrew Ure apology for the factory system The Philosophy of Manufactures (1835), cited by Patricia Hollis, ed., Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815-1850 (London 1973) 344-45; for the role of Methodism and religion generally in industrialisation see Sidney Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution" Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XVI (1963-64) 254-71; E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", Past and Present, 38 (1967) 88-9. For Lancashire, see Davies, North Country Bred, 21, 27-28.

channelling of patronage and social control through religious institutions by powerful social groups eased up as the century wore on and, indeed, considering the importance of denomination in determining the political alignments of Lancashire in the second half of the century, it may well have increased.<sup>109</sup> Politically aware working men like Rowland Kenney placed the anaesthetising power of religion on a par with that of drink and the public house in imbuing the labour community with quietude.<sup>110</sup> Yet, this monochromatic picture must be complemented by recognition of the at least partial autonomy of working class social imagery. To the extent that ordinary men and women had a measure of control over their religious lives, as Nonconformity seems to have offered; and to the degree that the chapels merged into working class life, as they seemed to do in a number of communities, then the reception and interpretation of their message manifested a subtle transformation, exhortations to quietism and deference twisted to fall more clearly into line with working class perceptions.

Expressed another way, we can perhaps say that the working class is not the hapless victim of bourgeois ideology sometimes portrayed but will, through the institutions characteristic of popular life - such as chapels and Sunday schools often were - formulate beliefs which are in concordance with their conceptions of social life. The process is doubtless complex and perhaps imperceptible, but in consequence no ideology is absorbed wholesale but will decompose into manifold streams to merge with those beliefs and practices indigenous to the working class situation: "In this way", E. P. Thompson has noted of the earlier part of the century, "even the 'fortress' of the Sunday school might breed rebellion."<sup>111</sup> This is a

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109. Patrick Joyce, "The Factory Politics of Lancashire in the Later Nineteenth Century", The Historical Journal, XVIII (1975) 543, 547-49.

110. Kenney, Westerling, 23.

111. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth 1968) 432.



judgement which finds support in Wadsworth's analysis of the early Manchester Sunday schools: "They were begun as a form of police precaution imposed from above, and imbued with authoritarianism. They were transformed by the genius of ordinary people into a vital part of a democratic society." <sup>112</sup>

The nineteenth century affords numerous examples of changes wrought from below in the meanings attributed to religious belief systems. The Owenites held "socialist" Sunday services and adopted hymns, readings and even the pattern of the Christian year to their own ends. <sup>113</sup> The Chartists founded their own churches in a number of places and they, too, turned orthodox hymns and prayers to their own advantage whilst at the same time borrowing from the Methodists their organisational forms. <sup>114</sup> Within the orthodox denominations, too, the struggle has been no less apparent, for it was surely conflict over the control and organisation of their religion - exacerbated by a social class divide - that lay behind a number of the schisms in the Methodist church up to mid-century. <sup>115</sup> We can interpret ethical socialism in like manner. Throughout Lancashire towards the end of the nineteenth century, the working class - and young men and women in particular - were responding to the changing economic and social conditions and the weakening paternal bonds of which religion had provided a crucial astringent by challenging anew religious authority and relevance. Sceptically, the demanded that their chapels and preachers face up to the changing realities

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112. Wadsworth, "The Manchester Sunday Schools," 325.

113. Eileen Yeo, "Robert Owen and Radical Culture", in Sidney Pollard and J. Salt, eds., Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor (London 1971) 97-103.

114. See further, H. U. Faulkner, Chartism and the Churches (New York 1916); R. F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850 (London 1937).

115. W. R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (London 1972) 135-76; Thompson, Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century, 134-43.



of working class life and respond to the challenge posed by the advancing socialist and democratic ideas. And some did indeed take up the challenge, like the Rev. W. Barnes of Nelson, who expounded from his Methodist pulpit upon the theme of "What Socialism can do for the People" in 1894, and was by no means the only one to do so. <sup>116</sup>

This is not to suggest, however, that the working population in the north west was becoming irreligious, or that religion no longer held any meaning for them. Certainly, a number of working men came to reject entirely the religious beliefs that they had once adhered to, turning instead, perhaps, to the ethical or secularist bodies for spiritual fulfilment. <sup>117</sup> But as yet it was only the most advanced working men to whom Bradlaugh's secularism appealed and, for very many, chapel and religion remained firmly part of their lives and they sought to recharge their own religious idealism with a new vitality and greater relevance, adapted to their own needs and attitudes. In this precisely lay the attraction of ethical socialism, for by this means the personal integrity and self-respect which religion afforded might be extended to the political plane and those vague, yet deeply felt, religious impulses rooted in working class life might find renewed expression. The question is frequently posed as if the emerging socialist consciousness could not but be antithetical to its religious antecedents. This, however, is almost certainly to misconceive the nature of popular religion, for most working people who turned to socialism in these years did not see the question in this light but believed, rather, that the new creed might more forcefully express those beliefs they held as basic to true Christianity. Of course, this impulse behind the socialist consciousness itself gave rise

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116. Firth, Socialism in Nelson and District, 26.

117. Rowland Kenney rejected religion, but his sister's spiritualism held a deep fascination for him: Cf. Westering, 86.

to a number of forms. Only a few working men remained chapel-goers and coupled this with their political activities. Many more, indeed, distanced themselves from the established religions to which they might once have belonged, only to counter that "true" religion might best be practised outside the churches. Yet others attempted to forge religious structures more within their grasp and control, and they founded and worked through the Labour Churches and socialist Sunday schools in seeking out their social salvation. From one perspective, however, the unifying themes underscoring the various organisations and tendencies embraced by "The Cause" lay precisely in those sentiments fundamental to working class religiosity.

The close affinity with religious ideals which ethical socialism embodied becomes perhaps more comprehensible when it is recalled that it had been initially in the chapels that many Lancashire working men had learnt their politics. "One cannot help feeling", wrote Beatrice Webb in the 1880s, "what an excellent thing these dissenting organisations have been for educating this class for self-government"<sup>118</sup> and, as has often been noted of the Nonconformist denominations and in particular of the more democratic Methodist sects, they were indeed veritable breeding grounds for the political activists and trade unionists of the future.<sup>119</sup> Here, men and women were schooled in the principles of self-government and co-operation, learned the skills of organisation and developed techniques of public oratory. The labour movement has traditionally borrowed a variety of organisational forms from the religious bodies and, in this period, we may notice only how the socialists in Lancashire adopted the fervent hymn

118. My Apprenticeship, 175.

119. On the contribution of Methodism to the working class movement, see Robert Wearmouth, Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900 (Nottingham 1955). Eric Hobsbawm has written of the Primitive Methodists that "...it is not too much to think of them as primarily a sect of trade union cadres": Cf. "The Labour Sects", in idem., Primitive Rebels (Manchester 1959) 138.

singing of the Dissenters; nothing seemed more natural to the labour activist and pioneer suffragette Annie Kenney than to raise funds for the movement by carol-singing, "...as we used to do when I attended Sunday school." <sup>120</sup> Some working men, like Willie Pickerill of Stockport, arrived at socialism under the influence of radical and reforming ministers like Hugh Price Hughes, J. Scott Lidgett, Samuel Keeble, the Rev. F. L. Donaldson ('the friend of the unemployed'), and local men like John Trevor, James Sims and the Rev. B. J. Harker of Bolton. <sup>121</sup>

The popularity of Robert Blatchford's Clarion movement in the north west provides an indication of how the ideals and social patterns that the Lancashire working population found in chapel life were recreated in a new and higher form. The simultaneously social and religious appeal of the movement is advertised in the fact that the various bodies which comprised the Clarion association should come to be spoken of in later years as a "social fellowship". Rowland Kenney spoke for many ordinary men and women when he recalled the responsive chord which Blatchford's writings had struck with him: <sup>122</sup>

After morning Sunday School I had to read my old Grannie a two-column two page article in the Sunday Chronicle, signed 'Nunquam'. Those articles were a revelation to me. Mere child as I was, I was uplifted by those Sunday morning readings, and my old Grannie was moved and uplifted also. They brought to both of us a sense of beauty and betterment.

Men and women of differing backgrounds and disparate views joined, worked for and lived the Clarion Fellowship, united by the vision of socialism

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120. Memoirs of a Militant, 35.

121. Johnson, Willie Pick, 39.

122. Westering, 20; see also, Kenney, Memoirs of a Militant, 23.

which Blatchford had offered them.<sup>123</sup> The "sentiment of altruism", or, as he sometimes described it, the "religious sentiment", was the basis of this vision:<sup>124</sup>

Sever the socialist movement from altruistic sentiment and it is a lost cause. Never without the impetus of human love can socialism be established! Losing the sentiment of human love it could never last. Reduced to a mechanical system of cold justice and economic organisation, it would become more hateful and less endurable, than the anarchy which now prevails.

For Blatchford, the term altruism meant simply the command to "Love thy neighbour as thyself", an epithet which "...probably owed its origins to Christ..."<sup>125</sup> All this led Blatchford to a specific conception of socialism: "If socialism is to live and conquer it must be a religion. If socialists are to prove themselves equal to the task assigned to them they must have a faith, a real faith, a new faith."<sup>126</sup>

It is ironic that Blatchford who, after 1900, launched a series of stinging attacks upon orthodox Christianity and was regarded by clergymen and other luminaries as the greatest infidel at large, should lend inspiration to a "religious" movement.<sup>127</sup> To be sure, his "religion" had little enough in common with the "cant" and "formality" so manifestly displayed by the churches. "I do not attack religion", he wrote, "but only the pretence of religion...";<sup>128</sup> or again: "Our new religion turns its back upon the churches, with the symbolisms and ceremonies and display, and

123. For the Clarion Fellowship, see A. Neil Lyons, Robert Blatchford: The Sketch of a Personality (London 1910) 111-13; Lawrence Thompson, Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman (London 1951) 157-60.

124. Altruism: Christ's Glorious Gospel of Love against Man's Dismal Science of Greed (Clarion Pamphlet 22 1898) 6.

125. The Labour Prophet, May 1897.

126. The Clarion, 25 April 1896.

127. See The Clarion after 1900 for details of the religious controversy.

128. Socialism: A Reply to the Encyclical of the Pope (London 1892) 18.



teaches us that love and mercy and art are the highest forms of worship." <sup>129</sup>  
 As was the case with the I.L.P. during these years, described in 1924 by William Stewart as "...a great social fellowship, joining together in bonds of friendship all of its adherents in every part of the land and forming a communion comparable to that of some religious fraternity whose members have taken vows of devotion to a common cause", <sup>130</sup> ethical socialism gave practical expression to and made strikingly relevant themes basic to working class life, chapels and religion, embracing a distinctive political consciousness that cannot be understood apart from the "religion of socialism": <sup>131</sup>

...the Religion of Socialism is a phrase first used, I think, in 1885 in the manifesto of the Socialist League...We have the right to refuse the name of socialist to those who have not grasped the economic truth. But an economic theory alone, or any number of economic theories will not make a religion. If you want socialism to be a religion, you must widen your definition of socialism. You must draw out all the ethical and spiritual implications of these desires and efforts for a juster social order...A new conception of life is taking shape, to which it is affectation, if not folly, to refuse the name of Religion...

The appeal of Blatchford's Clarion or I.L.P. socialism to working people in the north west lay not simply, however, in the fact that these movements took up and reworked traditional religious themes, but more that they recreated patterns of broader social and cultural association to be found in working class chapel life and which themselves grew out of the working class community milieu. It was in the Labour Church movement that this may be most clearly discerned and our concluding remarks will, therefore, explore the relationship between the Labour Churches and the general

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129. The New Religion (Clarion Pamphlet 9, 1894/5) 4.

130. William J. Stewart, J. Keir Hardie (London 1924) 74.

131. Robert Blatchford quoted by Steven Yeo, "A Phase in the Social History of Socialism, c. 1885-1895", Labour History Society Bulletin, 22 (1971) 6.



working class community of which they were a political and religious outgrowth.

In what follows it has not been considered necessary to provide a general historical account of the Labour Church movement; the formation and growth of the movement was outlined in Chapter 8, whilst some indication of their activities and agitations, and the ethical conception of socialism which the various congregations in Lancashire espoused, was presented in Chapter 9. The Labour Church movement has, in addition, been explored by a number of historians in recent years and to which sources the interested reader may turn for background material of a fairly detailed nature.<sup>132</sup> The intention here will be rather to "situate" and interpret this singular religio-political experiment in two respects: first, the "theology" and religious practices of the Labour Church congregations will be considered in relation to the nature of popular belief as documented above; and, second, the broader social and cultural features of the movement will be set against some of the features of working class community life explored in the previous two chapters.

John Trevor's autobiography - a garrolous book, but nevertheless one of the most remarkable personal statements of ethical and religious uncertainty to emerge in this period - tells of a devout and sincere man whose disillusion with religious orthodoxy and his concern for the religious

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132. Stanley Pierson, Socialism and Religion: Their Interaction in Great Britain 1889-1911 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1957); idem., "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement in England 1891-1900", Church History, XXIX (1960) 463-80; K. S. Inglis, "The Labour Church Movement", International Review of Social History, III (1958) 445-60; idem., Churches and the Working Classes, 215-49; D. F. Summers, The Labour Church and Allied Movements (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1958); Hobsbawn, Primitive Rebels, 142-45; S. Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement (London 1967) 66-9; Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 132-36.

needs of the lower classes impelled him to "find God with a closed Bible."<sup>133</sup> As his own spiritual vicissitudes intensified, his views on the need for social reforms became clearer during his time as assistant to the London Unitarian leader Philip H. Wicksteed in the late 1880s.<sup>134</sup> Wicksteed's advanced views had influenced Trevor profoundly by the time he accepted the pulpit of Brook Street Unitarian Church, situated in an old working class district of Manchester, in 1890. Trevor's doubts about the adequacy of Unitarianism grew as he quickly became aware of the "...frightening gulf between the Churches and the world, and of the helplessness of the Churches in facing the world's problems."<sup>135</sup> In 1891 he resolved to make a clean break with all religious establishment. "What labour needs", he wrote to his congregation in that year, is to be "inspired with a strong religious life of its own, which shall save it from finding the hour of its success the hour of its ruin."<sup>136</sup> Dedicated to the principle of "God in the Labour Movement - working through it as he once worked through Christianity for the further salvation of the world...",<sup>137</sup> Trevor addressed the first meeting of his Manchester Labour Church in October, 1891.

Lacking formal dogma or overarching philosophy, the Labour Churches were from the start theologically imprecise and resolutely opposed to definitive doctrinal pronouncement. In 1891 Trevor drew up a set of precepts upon which he believed the new church ought to be founded and, as eventually adopted by the Labour Church Union, these formed the sole guiding principles of the movement:

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133. John Trevor, My Quest for God (London 1897) 64.

134. On Wicksteed, see further C. H. Herford, Philip Henry Wicksteed (London 1931).

135. My Quest for God, 220.

136. Letter from Trevor, cited by Summers, The Labour Church, 499.

137. My Quest for God, 241.

The Labour Church is based on the following Principles:

1. That the Labour Movement is a Religious Movement.
2. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not a Class Religion, but unites all members of all classes in working for the Abolition of Commercial Slavery.
3. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being.
4. That the Emancipation of Labour can only be realised so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God, and heartily endeavour to obey them.
5. That the development of Personal Character and the Improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage.

It will be seen then that Labour Church theology, such as it was, rested upon an affirmation of divine evolution and a denial of any doctrine of original sin. The notion of a universal brotherhood replaced that of class supremacy, and the need for personal regeneration was elevated to complement the demand for social reconstruction. Finally, the Labour Churches were testimony to Trevor's conception of a doctrinally shifting "free religion": "Free religion means man's own natural and free development", he wrote in 1896: "It is not based upon teachings, books or Churches, but on individual conclusions drawn from all phases of human experience...The Labour Movement is the field for free and natural religious development..." 138

Although lacking a coherent and rounded theology, of one thing the Labour Churches were certain: that "true" Christianity was no longer to be found practised by the established churches, whose abstruse "creedianity" and manifest class bias had rendered them treasonable to the original glorious cause. "The churches of today are based not only on traditional

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138. "The Relation of the Labour Movement to Free Religion", Seed-Time, January 1896, 7.

religion", inveighed Trevor, "but also upon capitalist purses: and those who pay the piper will naturally desire to call the tune." <sup>139</sup> The divisive social assumptions of religious orthodoxy naturally went hand in hand with the subsumption of real Christian sentiment beneath a veneer of sterile dogma: according to Seth Ackroyd, "The Labour Church tells men that theology is one thing, and religion quite another. Theology divides, religion unites." <sup>140</sup> It was not therefore, as detractors of the movement were given to stress, with malicious intent that a new working man's church had been brought into being, but as a necessary response to the already heavily class conditioned attitudes of religious orthodoxy. Replying to one critic, B. J. Harker of Bolton wrote, <sup>141</sup>

...as if the capitalist church did not already exist, and has existed till labour has been shut out from the churches...A capitalist church always follows the capitalist...I could point out many a Wesleyan Church, and many a Congregational Church, that is nothing but a capitalist church. It is the Capitalist Church that necessitates the Labour Church.

Undergirding what little "official" theology there was to the movement lay an unashamed reassertion of fundamental Christian virtues, a plea for love and brotherhood, charity, justice and mutuality, as against the claims of the competitive system and its clerical apologists. Of contemporary society, Ben Tillett observed disparagingly in The Labour Prophet of 1892 that, "Individualism is the God, selfishness its religion, beggary-neighbour is its gospel." <sup>142</sup> Trevor recognised the embodiment of true religion in "those who have working men's hearts in them" and were ready to put into application the grand spirit of fellowship and brotherly love. <sup>143</sup> Still others saw the role of the Labour Church to be that of

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139. The Labour Prophet, September 1892.

140. The Labour Prophet, January 1897.

141. Bailey J. Harker, Christianity and the New Social Demands (London 1892) 7.

142. The Labour Prophet, April 1892.

143. ibid., March 1893.



"restoring the true teachings of Jesus." <sup>144</sup> As Margaret MacMillan correctly observed, it was precisely because of the fact that the Labour Churches "departed from all the customs of the other Churches", that "The comradeship and co-operation of all concerned in the movement were like those of the early Christians." <sup>145</sup> In the religion of the Labour Church movement was to be found, therefore, a higher recreation and expression of all those vague yet fundamentally idealistic beliefs which working men and women held to be the essence of true Christianity.

Yet Trevor and the leaders of the movement - the prominent figures in the localities whose views are to be found regularly in the columns of The Labour Prophet - were insistent in addition that the "Religion of the Labour Movement" should not lose sight of the importance of individual uplift, the ethical and spiritual component of socialism being in their opinion of equal, if not greater, importance than mere social reconstruction. This theme reoccurs time and time again in Labour Church discussion. When Fred Brocklehurst entered a plea in 1893 for greater political involvement on the part of the Labour congregations, Trevor was quick to retort that they must also develop "faculties for seeing far more deeply into the facts of life...and the significance of our moral struggles and defeats." Trevor criticised those labour speakers who ignored man's inner needs, and maintained that unless they could blend social religion with personal faith, the movement "could not justify its existence." <sup>146</sup> It was with this in mind that he sought to maintain the sense of separate identity of the congregations within the broader working class movement: <sup>147</sup>

144. ibid., November, 1896.

145. Margaret MacMillan, The Life of Rachel MacMillan (London 1927) 77, 82.

146. The Labour Prophet, October 1893.

147. ibid., March-April 1894.



The close alliance I have always worked for, but it must not result in want of consciousness of a distinct mission. The Labour Party exists for the attainment of THINGS. The Labour Church exists for the attainment of LIFE, without which the attainment of things will never avail for our well-being.

This belief in man's essential spirituality and a strong conviction that this spirituality could find more adequate expression than that provided by traditional religious life found continued outlet in Labour Church services. During the 'nineties, the movement became the catch-all for most of the diverse ethical reforming tendencies of the period. Lectures on behalf of "anti-vivisection", "theosophy", "ethical culture", "Tolstoyism", "vegetarianism", "socialism and the moral life", and so on, were common enough, although they branched out to embrace more secular themes as well. <sup>148</sup>

It was entirely in consequence of this emphasis upon individual regeneration that Labour Church leaders were anxious to rebutt criticisms to the effect that their movement was inspired by class motives. Once more, this is a question which continually recurred in The Labour Prophet. Philip Wicksteed, for instance, argued in 1892 that the Labour Churches envisaged the individual, <sup>149</sup>

...as living a full life, in fellowship with his fellow-workers and fellow-livers. To strive for this is NOT TO FIGHT FOR A CLASS, but to fight against classes on behalf of society itself... The Labour Movement and the Labour Church, then, are not a class movement and a class church...

A similar concern was shown by the Rev. W. E. Atack, writing in The Labour Prophet in 1893: <sup>150</sup>

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148. For details of Labour Church lectures, see any edition of The Labour Prophet for the reports from the various congregations.

149. The Labour Prophet, January 1892.

150. ibid., November 1893.

I may as well confess at once that my first thoughts on the subject were full of distrust and dislike...I could not rid myself of the thought that it was a class movement...My eyes were blind to the fact that, as we all ought to be labourers, it was impossible for this movement to be in any real sense a "class movement", i.e. if it be only true to the full meaning involved in the word 'Labour'.

Trevor, too, was equally insistent in this respect: "One class cannot save another class", he wrote in 1893: "They must work out their own salvation until there are no longer any classes"; and again, "For the work we have in hand, the distinctive qualities of all classes are needed." 151

This emphasis upon individual spiritual uplift becomes comprehensible when we recall that Trevor and the regional leaders of the movement had often been devout, and occasionally fiercely transcendental, Christians in the past, but whose erstwhile certainty had been shaken and who found in the Labour Churches a more positive outlet for their ethicalism. Men like Trevor himself, A. J. Waldegrave of London, James Sims at Bolton, R. A. Beckett, sometime editor of The Labour Prophet and who had once been a Unitarian lay preacher, A. W. Hildreth of Darlington and James Stott of Bradford, both of whom had been brought up in the Anglican faith and Fred Brocklehurst, a Cambridge theology graduate, were among the prominent figures whose disillusion with the orthodox denominations - usually, although by no means invariably, the Nonconformists - had impelled them to seek their own and the salvation of others through the Labour congregations. When one also takes into account such popular Labour Church speakers as Rachel and Margaret MacMillan, Enid Stacey or Carolyn Martyn, it becomes readily apparent that most of the leaders of the movement were moved above all else by religious zeal and an ethic of personal uplift.

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151. ibid., March 1893; August 1895.

It is of no little interest to inquire how far the "theology" of the Labour Churches harmonised with the religious views of their working class adherents in the north west. It may be conceded at the outset that for some working people the appeal of an ethically charged and spiritually aware socialism was profound. A working man - "with perhaps an indifferent education" - wrote to The Labour Prophet in 1894 in the following terms: 152

The Labour Church is to me the means of developing the true life, spiritual and moral, of indicating to man his relationship with his fellow men and to God, of showing the world that the Labour Movement of today is not devoid of religion of the right sort.

Yet there were signs that not all members were convinced by the ethical tone of The Labour Prophet, as is suggested by another letter from a working class correspondent: "You hit the right moment for the Church wonderfully, but I don't think you were so apropos with the paper." 153 Indeed, all the indications are that by far the majority of working men and women who attended the Labour Churches did not subscribe primarily to the spiritual component emphasised by those like Trevor but, rather, were motivated by a vague idealism which tinged their socialism but lacked the transcendental overtones of some Labour Church leaders.

An invaluable letter for the student of the Labour Church movement by A. J. Waldegrave deserves to be noted in this connection. In discussing the social composition of the congregations, Waldegrave observed that: 154

The largest section of the membership consisted of working men (and often their wives) who were class conscious members of trade unions and, as such, were concerned with improving the

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152. ibid., December 1894.

153. ibid., February 1894.

154. Cited by Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 688.

conditions of the workers under the existing industrial system;...They had little interest in religion insofar as it was concerned with things spiritual and transcendental - with 'other-worldliness' - but it would have been unjust and untrue to describe them as simply materialists, bent on getting for themselves and their children a larger share of the wealth produced in the country. They had an idealism tinged with the religious conception of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

The primary concern of these working men and women was "...that the means to be employed must be political...and that it was necessary to create a Labour Party with a majority in the House of Commons."

By the very nature of the enquiry, any account of rank and file attitudes to the Labour Churches must perforce be largely impressionistic. Yet some indication in this direction is afforded by a careful reading of working class autobiographies and letters written by working people to the Labour Prophet. From sources such as these, it seems likely that the broad appeal of the Labour congregations lay not so much in the primacy of spiritual regeneration - though doubtless this was of considerable importance - but precisely in the absence of a guiding theology. Working men and women were not so much attracted to religion in any other-worldly sense, which might often seem to them remote from everyday life, but rather it was that they found in the "free religion" of the movement a loose idealism which was capable of bending to their own aspirations and which they took to be a necessary complement to secular socialism. An article written by "A Weaver" in The Labour Prophet of 1892, and entitled "Why the Labour Movement is a Religious Movement", is indicative of those religious beliefs truly rooted in working class life. The working man in question speaks as one of the "...down-trodden wage slaves of today... They Cry: Give us work, food, clothing, shelter (no workhouses), and leisure to live the life that God has given us...To whom must they look for guidance." His answer, which must be cited at length below, is

that such guidance is surely to be found in working class organisation and struggle rather than in the historic churches, "...the capitalist Pharaohs of this day": 155

They must get outside the existing institutions...We want something more than political promises and spiritual consolation... The emancipation of the workers is slowly but surely working itself out. When we look around and see the many skilled and unskilled workers banding together in trade unions for their mutual protection...one begins to understand some little of the Labour Movement...surely the Labour Movement is a religious movement in the highest sense, as it is working for the benefit of the poorest of us. It is 'God in us working out our salvation'. Any movement having for its object the emancipation of the labouring classes must in itself be a religious movement ...It is a religion in itself.

Like another working man who inveighed in 1893 against the spiritual platitudes to be found in the evangelical Mission which he used to visit, 156 working people found that they were able to practice in the Labour Churches those beliefs they held as fundamental to genuine Christianity - notions such as love and brotherhood, justice, mutuality, charity, and the like - which grew out of everyday life and which they found evinced in the struggles of their oppressed fellows. Their "religion" was not abstruse or overtly transcendental, but a religion of expediency, grounded in their conditions of life. In a word then the attraction of the Labour congregations seems to have been "religious" in a severely practical sense for most working class people and, in consequence, more closely tied to political and industrial organisation and struggles than some of the leaders of the movement would have conceded.

It should not be forgotten, however, that many working class people genuinely looked to the Labour Churches for certain religious services and, to the extent that they did so, we can detect once more the recreation

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155. The Labour Prophet, August 1892.

156. ibid., January 1893.



of traditional working class religious practices in a new and higher form. It was observed above that working people in the north west were anxious that the significant periods in life ought to be sanctified by religion, and the Labour Churches were adapted by their members to satisfy these felt needs. And thus, when the Labour Church Hymn Book was revised in 1902 it incorporated a Labour Baptism ceremony to cater for what had long been a demand from the various congregations.<sup>157</sup> One account of a Labour Church baptism ceremony describes how the infant was lowered into a basket of roses, "...and the Powers that controlled a Workers' Union were implored to make her life similarly roseate."<sup>158</sup> Once more in line with working class practices, the Labour Churches soon felt obliged to formulate their own marriage and burial services,<sup>159</sup> whilst the debate over the place of prayer within the movement advertises the fact that many workers were anxious to continue what had long been an earthly comforter in their new religious institution.<sup>160</sup> As to the actual Sunday service, there was much variation between the different congregations, although most had prayers and fervent hymn singing, interspersed by readings from the Bible or democratic or humanistic texts, and centring around a lecture from a guest speaker. It seems clear, however, that the services were not drab or dour occasions, characterised by the mindless recitation and incantation of religious orthodoxy but, above all, joyous and spontaneous affairs with lively singing and music and often extempore prayer: "Joy needs wedding to religion", enthused Trevor: "Think of all the Churches...all droning and mourning away on a given Sunday. In how many is a hearty laugh heard. Let us make our services

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157. See Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 197ff. on Labour baptism services.

158. Johnson, Willie Pick, 62-3.

159. Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 201-6.

160. On the question of prayer in the Labour Churches, see the issues of The Labour Prophet following May 1893.

more and more joyous, and get the best music possible to help us in that direction." <sup>161</sup>

If working men and women found in the Labour Churches a new forum of expression for their ingrained religious beliefs and practices, it led almost inevitably to a divergence of emphasis as between the leadership and rank and file of the movement. As early as 1895, there were indications that a more secular spirit was beginning to assert itself in the movement <sup>162</sup> and, in which year, A. W. Hildreth complained that many now saw the Labour Churches as simply "...a Sunday meeting place of the I.L.P., for the purpose of teaching elementary economic socialism to the unconverted masses." <sup>163</sup> In the following year, Trevor spoke of the urgent need for "a clearer statement of our principles", particularly as regards "our position in the socialist movement." <sup>164</sup> Though a number of leaders shared Trevor's hope that the Labour Churches might inspire a new religious enthusiasm and idealism, many saw all too clearly that the espousal of a real creed would alienate a large section of their following. <sup>165</sup> By this point in time, even some of the Labour Church leaders now saw their function as simply that of providing "...the common meeting ground of men and women representing all sectors of the socialist movement - where the S.D.F. lion may lie down with the I.L.P. lamb, and receive the benediction of the Fabian." <sup>166</sup> Early in 1898, a large section of the Bolton congregation seceded because the Labour Church was "getting too religious", <sup>167</sup>

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161. ibid., June 1893.

162. ibid., November 1894; W. Walsh, "The New Secularism", Contemporary Review, January 1895, 117ff.

163. ibid., December 1896.

164. ibid., December 1896.

165. Pierson, "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement", 474.

166. Birmingham Labour Church, Minutes, 14 November 1907.

167. The Labour Prophet, February 1898.

whilst later that same year Edwin Halford noted "with a considerable amount of dismay and sorrow...the rapid growth of a very materialist spirit in our Churches."<sup>168</sup> By 1900, Fred Mather discerned the imminent demise of the Labour Church ideal in the waning of religious enthusiasm among the members and the predominance of socialist speakers who were not even ostensibly religionists.<sup>169</sup>

By 1906, the suppression of the theistic and ethical element in Labour Church theology was confirmed by a new set of precepts drawn up by the Labour Church Union which emphasised primarily the importance of socialism. By this time the movement was well past its peak and was soon to collapse entirely, although one source tells of "upwards of thirty Labour Churches" in 1907.<sup>170</sup> Above all, though, this shift in the Labour congregations in the course of their short lifetime illustrates how they gradually came to reflect the aspirations of the membership and from which there followed a decline in the emphasis placed upon purely spiritual elevation, although their socialism remained coloured by a vague idealism which grew out of popular belief in the industrial north.

To appreciate fully the appeal and shift of emphasis in the Labour Churches in Lancashire, a second line of inquiry must now be initiated. Broadening the focus of attention somewhat, it is clear that the congregations harmonised with and extended many of the characteristic social and religious patterns of the working class community and chapel in the region, becoming themselves social institutions in a general sense, controlled by

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168. ibid., August 1898.

169. The Clarion, 22 September 1900.

170. Joseph Edwards, ed., Reformers Yearbook (London 1907), see entry under "Labour Churches".

and responsive to their working class membership. As many of the activities of the Labour Churches were detailed in Chapter 9 above, the intention here will once more be to situate the movement within the community milieu.

One is immediately impressed by the spontaneity and enthusiasm with which the Labour Church movement was greeted by working men and women in the north west. In 1893, Trevor pointed to the fact that, "...in no case, save that of Manchester, has the formation of a Labour Church been the work of one man"; on the contrary, "...the people who wanted to have a Labour Church have met together of their own initiative and decided to form one"; they are "initiated and carried on solely by the energy of local members." <sup>171</sup> Some years later he again noted that: "What characterises the Labour Church, and makes it unique in the religious life of our country, is its spontaneous development among the people, without priests or pastors or even leaders...The people have made the movement their own..." <sup>172</sup> The enthusiasm which the Labour congregations generated may be discerned in a letter written by a working man to Trevor soon after the formation of the Manchester Church: <sup>173</sup>

I know the uphill fight that's before you. I think I know the task you have set yourself. It is noble, sir; it is good. I cannot help but admire, ah!, and help you, if you command. You have gone to a rough school. But there are some true hearts there, and some willing hands. Many of us have been on the look-out for years for a church such as you told us about a few Sundays ago. And now, sir, it is within our reach...men will walk five miles to hear the Religion they have longed for, waited for, and never understood until now.

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171. The Labour Prophet, April 1893.

172. ibid., August 1896.

173. Cited by Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 506.

Still another working man enthused, "It is not straw, Sir, it is powder, and you have just applied the match. This thing has been in the hearts of workingmen for years past, and you have given voice to it." <sup>174</sup>

Contemporary reports fully attest to the spontaneous enthusiasm evoked by the Labour Churches among working people in Lancashire. "Sunday Lecture by Nunquam: A Remarkable Scene", was how The Workman's Times described the first Labour Church service in Manchester: <sup>175</sup>

The reception given to the lecturer was most enthusiastic. The hall was crowded to excess and thousands had to be refused admission. All the passages and stairs were filled with people, and before anything like order could be obtained, Mr. Blatchford had to leave the hall and address a meeting outside. After the lecture, a vast crowd of people, many of whom had come from distant parts of Lancashire...assembled outside the Town Hall and cheered the lecturer as he drove away.

Of the service itself, the reporter observed that a hymn "...was sung to a good swinging tune in a very hearty manner by the mass of the people present, and it had such an effect that I saw several who had to call into requisition their pocket handkerchiefs." Reports carried by The Labour Prophet suggest that in 1893 the average weekly attendance at the Oldham Church was around 300, and at Manchester as many as 800; the congregation in Bolton by all accounts flourished during the 'nineties and, in 1896, the Church there could count on a weekly gathering of about 300 people. <sup>176</sup> When a popular speaker was arranged, the attendance was greatly boosted; some 3,000 gathered at the Oldham Labour Church to hear Kate Conway in March 1893 and about the same number heard Hardie address the Manchester congregation early in 1894. <sup>177</sup>

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174. The Workman's Times, 23 October 1891.

175. The Workman's Times, 16 October 1891.

176. The Labour Prophet, January 1893; November 1893; August 1896.

177. ibid., April 1893; January 1894.



The genuinely deep rooting of Labour congregations in working class communities in Lancashire is registered by the spontaneity with which they were greeted, for their attraction would not have been so marked had they not fulfilled widely felt needs of popular concern. For one thing, the Labour Churches went far beyond the Nonconformist denominations in the extent of their lay involvement and democratic structure, providing further opportunities for working class control and expression. "The Labour Church is frankly, even passionately democratic", noted Wicksteed in the first glow of its inception and, as congregations were increasingly established, most of them initiated some scheme of democratic self-management which brought all decisions to a meeting of the whole membership.<sup>178</sup> Of course, enthusiasm for the original congregation democracy with its wide diffusion of authority was not sustained, but there was always evident in the Labour Churches a marked distrust of anything that resembled government by clique or an incipient clergy. This wide measure of lay participation in all the activities of Labour Church government and finance was underscored by the absence of central control in the movement; from 1892 a Labour Church Union met annually but had resolved at its first meeting that "the Labour Church Union shall leave each church free to manage its own affairs", and it never in fact comprised all the congregations.

With their wide measure of membership involvement the Labour Churches, rather like many working class chapels, branched out to become more than simply religious bodies but social institutions closely related to Lancashire community life. Often it was the case that all members of a working class family would be active in the local Labour Church.

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178. Wicksteed cited in Herford, Philip Henry Wicksteed, 223; Summers, The Labour Church Movement, ch. 4.

The Labour Prophet regularly carried articles of obvious interest to women and argued for the importance of their role in the labour movement: "They do care, they do want to know all about these unions and Eight Hour Bills and competition and such like, and they want to have the chance of hearing your Tom Mann's and Ben Tillett's..."<sup>179</sup> The needs of working class children were equally tended to by the formation of Cinderella Clubs, although after about 1894 these tended to merge with the Sunday schools organised for the children of Labour Church members. A competition run by the Manchester Labour Church in 1893 revealed much interest among the membership in the best ways of instructing children in co-operative and broadly humanistic ethics.<sup>180</sup> For Labour Church activists, "The Cause" was inseparable from working class family life:<sup>181</sup>

We socialists see that the principles which underlie the labour movement are the only ones which are eventually compatible with a true home family life - the principles of equality, justice, love, unselfishness.

A sense of wholesome family participation may also be discerned in the many social activities arranged by Labour Church congregations. Even the most superficial survey of the reports from the various Churches carried by The Labour Prophet will confirm how central were dances and socials, fairs, bazaars, tea parties, outings, rambles and picnics to the life of the congregations. Like many working class chapels, the Labour Churches became social and leisure centres whose convivial atmosphere attracted many as yet unconverted to the socialist case. In offering advice for the formation of Labour Churches, Trevor suggested that the "...first thing to be done in developing any organisation is to get the members together for social intercourse, and to inspire them with a common purpose and a

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179. The Labour Prophet, February 1892.

180. ibid., July 1893.

181. ibid., March 1893.

common life" <sup>182</sup> and, in 1897, a survey of Labour congregations revealed that the fraternity and solidarity engendered by social functions was valued above all else by the membership. <sup>183</sup> Tom Mann particularly liked "the fraternal atmosphere of the services", <sup>184</sup> and many members recall in particular the community spirit which involvement entailed; it was, according to Alice Foley, "...a community of young and old, lively and provocative, imbued with visions of a new society...It was all good fun and a healthy feature of community life before the advent of television." <sup>185</sup> In the Labour Churches members discovered a real sense of belonging to some extent opposed to the stuffy respectability of the established denominations. <sup>186</sup>

Again, the Labour congregations embraced a wide range of educational and cultural activities as was noted in Chapter 9 above. The congregations ran their own study and discussion groups and The Labour Prophet even arranged reading and elocution classes. <sup>187</sup> Several Labour Churches had built up their own libraries, and most had bookstalls which sold labour papers or tracts such as Merrie England and Edward Bellamy's Looking Backwards. Poetry and reading groups were by all accounts popular with Labour Church activists, an experience which gave to working men a training in public speaking and a hitherto undiscovered sense of confidence. These activities, along with Labour Church brass bands, socialist choirs, vocal unions and Glee Clubs, concerts and recitations, involved activists deeply in the life of the Church, broadening their commitment to and identification with the cause. During the summer months outdoor

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182. ibid., May 1893.

183. ibid., May 1893.

184. ibid., June 1897.

185. A Bolton Childhood, 69, 71.

186. Summers, The Labour Church Movement, 114-16.

187. The Labour Prophet, September 1894.

activities assumed pride of place and each weekend would see members out on the Lancashire moors for rambles and picnics, often linking up with neighbouring congregations in an open-air festival.

A large part of the appeal of the Labour Churches in the north west rested, therefore, in the fact that members found in them not only an opportunity for religious expression in a fashion suited to their needs but also that rounded sense of community which was a feature of many working class chapels in the region. It cannot but be concluded that the Labour Churches "caught on" for a short while precisely because of the fact that they recreated the social, leisure and religious patterns of community life, whilst at the same time imbuing them with higher relevance in their espousal of the new socialist creed. They were an extension of indigenous working class practices, offering through the democratic structure of the congregations further opportunities for enhanced working class self-expression and self-respect.

#### 12.5: Conclusions

The analysis presented in this chapter of popular belief and Nonconformist chapels in the working class communities of Lancashire, and their relationship to the "ethical" aspects of the socialist movement - particularly in the form of the Labour Churches - has sought to demonstrate the active adaptation and "stretching" of ideas by working people into line with the demands of and outlooks fostered by their experiential milieu. Whilst religious sentiment and institutions took on forms closely related to native community patterns - the coercive and blatantly ideological elements emollified with their reception into working class life - so the Labour Churches were adapted by working class men and women to their own needs and they, too, became an expression of working class community life.

That the Labour Churches might be integrated into working class life in this fashion was facilitated in no small measure by the absence of centralising tendencies in the movement; content to rest upon local initiative and spontaneity, the Labour congregations were taken over and shaped by their members in a fashion quite unlike that envisaged by Trevor and the other leaders. If the positive role of the Labour Churches in working class life as presented here is to be accepted, it would seem necessary to dissent from several previous interpretations of the movement. Pelling's thesis, for instance, to the effect that the Labour Churches "...gained support merely as a short-lived protest against the links which the Nonconformist churches had established with the middle class, and in particular against the alliance with the Liberal Party",<sup>188</sup> a transference, as it were, of religious enthusiasm to the political sphere - is obviously too depreciatory in that it clearly understates the continuing attraction of deeply held popular religious sentiments, albeit reworked in a higher and more urgent form. This line of explanation is not without other proponents. Inglis broadly supports Pelling's argument that the Labour congregations were a reaction against religious orthodoxy, although he takes exception to the portrayal of the movement as a rejection of Nonconformity alone,<sup>189</sup> whilst Pierson has argued that: "The story of Trevor and the Labour Church movement was largely the story of an unsuccessful attempt to solve problems raised by the decay of nineteenth century Evangelicalism."<sup>190</sup> These accounts strip away much of the vitality of the movement by locating its genesis in a negative reaction to religious establishment, rather than by concentrating upon

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188. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 142-43.

189. Inglis, "The Labour Church Movement", 445-48.

190. Pierson, "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement", 476.



the way in which the Labour Churches played a positive role in working class life by articulating deeply ingrained religious and broader social patterns.

Evidence adduced in previous chapters must also cast doubt on the Marxist argument that ethical socialism was but the delusions of an aristocracy of labour, although Hobsbawn's treatment of the Labour Churches perhaps deserves consideration. At the outset, Hobsbawn seems to appreciate the rooting of the Labour congregations in working class community life when he notes that: <sup>191</sup>

To those brought up in a Dissenting atmosphere, nothing seemed more natural than to form another sect on the traditional model, and the Labour Churches, with their familial Dissenting forms of worship - the sermons, hymns, brass bands, children's outings - expressed the new socialist ideology in the familiar terms of their experience."

Yet, for Hobsbawn the Labour Churches suffered the usual "penalty of the social pioneer" in that they preserved the traditional religious expressions of political dissent and "...the labour sect had to fill the gap for the want of anything better" in the absence of a militantly secular socialist language. Again, the emphasis is ultimately depreciatory, the Labour congregations merely "filling the gap" between popular religious forms and the presumably laudable secular politics.

It is hoped that the present discussion might have added a further dimension to the appreciation of the Labour Churches in particular and ethical socialism in general. This aspect of the socialist movement of the closing decade of the last century must be seen not as a mere reaction to denominational failure, nor simply as a stop-gap along the route to socialism, but as worthy of consideration in its own right and expressing

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191. Hobsbawn, Primitive Rebels, 144.

the continuity, but yet reworking, of working class religious and social patterns intimately related to the community way of life. And the initiative in this process of cultural innovation must be seen to rest with working class people themselves.

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PART IV:

CONCLUSIONS

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===== CHAPTER THIRTEEN =====

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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A.

ONE: Sociology is not concerned with a 'pre-given' universe of objects, but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doings of subjects...

TWO: The Production and reproduction of society has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members...

B.

ONE: The realm of human agency is bounded. Men produce society, but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosing...

TWO: Structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing constraints upon human agency, but as enabling...

Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method  
(London 1976) 160-61

Recent research into the question of working class social belief, whilst often theoretically advanced and empirically substantial, has served only to further underline the importance of a number of ambiguities and lacunae which continue to plague this particular aspect of sociological inquiry.

First among these, and underscoring the whole problematic of working class consciousness and belief, remains the issue of the precise nature of the relationships, mediations and reciprocities which may be held to bridge objective social situations and human meaning. The various articles in a recent symposium addressed to precisely these problems illustrate the extreme complexity of the inter-relationships between objective class situations and perceptions of those situations.<sup>1</sup> In spite of all this work, however, it has been concluded that "...arguably

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1. Martin Bulmer, ed., Working Class Images of Society (London 1975).

the synthesis of complementary elements, and to some extent the demonstration of a necessary connection of a reciprocal kind between structure and meaning, remains problematic." <sup>2</sup> Second, it is clear that as yet no serious attempt has been made to integrate fully the workings of micro-sociological processes within a macro-societal frame of reference. Again, we may notice Martin Bulmer's insistence upon "...the need to balance the emphasis here upon micro-structural factors in the genesis and sustenance of class imagery with more detailed attention to macro-structural factors such as the economy and polity." <sup>3</sup> Finally, the absence of a historical dimension to much sociological work in this field - a result, in part, of the ingrained division of labour whereby sociologists, concerned with universals, evolve useful concepts, while historians, focusing upon concrete events, apply them; and, in part, resulting from the ahistorical ideal-type methodology towards which David Lockwood sought to incline his paradigmatic article on working class images of society - has perhaps obscured the dynamic and shifting qualities of social consciousness.

It is intended that the foregoing study should have pointed to several ways in which these difficulties might be approached. To clarify the issues involved, therefore, these concluding remarks will offer a brief summary of each of the three major sections presented above, suggesting at each instance the theoretical premises and implications of the research presented there.

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2. Martin Bulmer, "Introduction", ibid., 4.

3. Martin Bulmer, "Some Problems of Research into Class Imagery", ibid., 177.



## I.

The tension between objective facticity and subjective meaning in sociological inquiry may be dated at least to Durkheim's insistence upon the thing-like attributes of social facts and Weber's elucidation of the "subjectively meaningful" nature of social action. But dominated by the work of Karl Marx - in which, as noted in Chapter 4 above, the absence of a coherent and adequate theory of the development and dynamics of class consciousness could not but force into prominence the determinant nature of objective forms - social stratification studies have for long stressed the primacy of social structure over human meaning. In recent years, however, a variety of theoretical tendencies rooted in the modern critique of positivism in sociology - we may notice, for instance, only Talcott Parson's voluntaristic theory of action advanced in his The Structure of Social Action (1937), the rediscovery of Marx's early writings, the emphases of Max Weber's methodological studies and the trend towards existential and phenomenological philosophy on the European continent - have converged and to some extent found common ground in their central emphasis upon the interpretation of social action as it appears from the actor's perspective. The point has been reached when, today, few scholars would discount the claim to consideration of the objective role of the actor's subjective perceptions by couching their explanation purely in terms of social structure.

If these theoretical considerations provided one starting for the foregoing analysis, a second may be discerned in recent British historical work. As was noted in the Prefactory Remarks above, the revolt of a number of historians against the rigid constraints of certain Marxist concepts is made clear by their "democratic" and humanistic orientation, once more turning upon the importance of the popular viewpoint and subjective meanings in historical interpretation. Taken together, these

diverse tendencies have informed this study of British socialism, particularly in respect of the need for a historical perspective in the study of working class social belief which, at the same time, accords to human meaning an intrinsic importance and autonomy and, whilst situating belief systems within a societal frame of reference, frees them from crude material constraint.

One final theoretical antecedent may be cited before a summary of Part I - A Theoretical Perspective - is attempted. David Lockwood's seminal article on working class social imagery drew heavily upon Elizabeth Bott's contention, advanced in her Family and Social Network (1957), to the effect that the images of class structure held by individuals cannot be separated from their personal social environments of kin networks, friends, neighbours, relatives and particular social institutions.<sup>4</sup> This illuminating insight in linking individual world-views with primary social group membership and relations has since been extended by many scholars to embrace not only the community milieu but also work and industrial situations, as well as emphasising the relations between these two dimensions of social life themselves. This study of socialist belief has attempted to capitalise upon this theoretical perspective and take the argument one step further by highlighting a variety of features in the industrial and community milieux of the Lancashire working class towards the end of the last century which have hitherto received little attention.

It was with these concerns in mind that the first part of the study identified a variety of problems in previous theoretical formulations in the study of socialism. It was argued, for instance, that the Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions have hinged their explanations of the labourist

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4. David Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society", Sociological Review, XIV (1966); E. Bott, Family and Social Network (London 1957), Ch. 6.

and essentially non-revolutionary labour movement in this country around the classical analysis of ideology and class consciousness to be found in Marx's own writings, whilst at the same time elaborating related conceptual devices such as the notion of an aristocracy of labour. An analysis of Marx's theory suggested that here modes of thought were unnecessarily rigid and schematised, forms of consciousness unified and dichotomised to the extent that much of the complexity and texture, as well as the dynamic and adaptive qualities, of social belief were obscured and the possibility of serious analytical consideration precluded.

Much the same may be said of the theories of political behaviour which argue from political culture for, by premising themselves upon the workings of a blanket process of socialisation, the proponents of the deference and civility theses once more neglect to analyse the workings and processes of human thought itself. Only in the writings of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, and in certain sociological formulations were the basic elements of a more sophisticated and appreciative theory identified. Built into these approaches was seen to be a recognition that working class social consciousness might be a "pragmatic" or "negotiated" version of the incumbent moral order, and there is admitted here some measure of flexibility and autonomy in the generation of popular belief systems.

The first point to be made about the theoretical framework advanced in Chapter 4, and upon which the whole of the subsequent analysis rests, is that it aimed to place much emphasis upon the occurrence of non-structural and micro-sociological processes in the generation of working class belief. Arguing that popular belief must be conceived of as a conscious adaptive process, it cannot, therefore, be divorced from the total primary social and industrial milieu in which working men and women live out their daily lives. At the outset, then, the commitment to an

approach founded upon recognition of the autonomy of social belief was clearly specified; and the links conjoining and mediating this dimension with that of broader structural and ideological forms was held to rest in the social relationships and institutions of the working class community.

## II.

The second point to be made about the theoretical framework lies in its insistence upon integrating these micro-level processes within a macro-societal framework and, for this reason, Part II sought to offer a general account of the economy, polity and ideological forms in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In point of fact, two basic intentions underscore this particular section of the study.

Taken in themselves, firstly, the three chapters comprising Part II aimed to account for the broad trajectory of socialism and the labour movement during this period. A central consideration underlying the discussion here was the idea, advanced by many non-Marxist as well as Marxist commentators, that British socialism represents a capitulation to the values of bourgeois liberalism; and, having taken as its point of departure what Ralph Miliband has termed "the Liberal connection", socialism was tainted by its assumptions to such a degree that the labourist tradition was but an obvious recreation of liberal-radical politics.<sup>5</sup> The main thrust of the argument in Part II challenges this interpretation - premised, as it is, around the wholesale absorption of working class thought - by suggesting that socialism in this country must be seen as a further elaboration of collectivist themes deeply embedded in the social structure and dominant ideological forms, removing it, so to speak, from the sphere of influence of liberal ideology pure and simple.

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5. Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour (London 1972) 17ff.

In Chapters 5 and 6, therefore, it was argued that, if by mid-century the determinate historical evolution of the British social structure had brought about a society premised around the axial values of economic liberalism, in that historical pattern, too, lay the seeds of collectivist opinion which began to assert themselves during the Great Depression of the period 1873-1896. Set against this background, Chapter 7 argued that the major orientation of socialism and the labour movement was that of "a line of least resistance." British socialism displayed deep affinities with late Victorian society, it is true, but in harnessing the collectivist drift of society to the growing power of the workers' organisation, there emerged a democratic collectivist tradition one step removed from absorption into the dominant ideology of the period.

Secondly, the analysis of society, ideology and economy - including, of course, the global trajectory of social itself - must be seen for theoretical purposes as the context within which socialism was developed by activists locally. To understand the actual meaning of economic changes in late century, the development and impact of ideology or, indeed, the meaning of socialism "nationally" for working men and women in the localities, it was found necessary to shift the focus of attention to the working class community in Lancashire. Part III - A Micro-Sociological Perspective - aimed to provide such a perspective, from which the reception and interpretation of these broader tendencies might be appreciated.

### III.

In accordance with the theoretical framework informing this study, the social beliefs of working men and women must be seen as actively created within the context of definite social institutions and relationships. In Part III, therefore, the focus of the study was made to rest upon socialism



in the north west between 1890-1906. This was a period during which, for a variety of reasons, the political initiative had for the moment passed from the Parliamentary to the grass roots level, and when the movement was carried through a period of quiescence and sectionalism by the agitations and enthusiasm of activists locally. It provides, therefore, an appropriate period in the history of socialism to study the movement on the local level.

Following upon an analysis of political change and the course of labour organisation in the north west between 1868-1906, Chapter 9 attempted to delve in some detail into the activities, agitations and conceptions of socialism prevalent at the branch level in Lancashire. Here socialism was seen to revolve around two principal emphases for working people: on the one hand, a "practical" strand of thought - intimately related to local condition and grievances, stressing the theme of electoral independence and placing much faith in the efficacy and practicability of municipal collectivism - was immediately apparent; and, on the other hand, one saw the existence of an "ethical" strand in the movement, fervently idealistic and bearing no small resemblance to the humanistic ethics of the Christian faith. In addition, the social branch culture in all its aspects - ranging from educational and social activities through to the existence of a distinctive lifestyle - was identified.

The two subsequent chapters sought to relate these socialist beliefs and organisational forms to developments within the community and occupational milieux. The impact of economic changes in late century was examined at the local level, and much emphasis was placed upon the experience of industrial structure, wages and work processes in cotton, engineering and coal mining in the north west. The discussion then turned to account for the nature of kindred and community relations in Lancashire, paying particular attention to a number of features of popular life which

influenced the development of socialist beliefs. It was seen, therefore, that these community and occupational situations formed the social environment in which the movement locally crystallised, and an attempt was made to demonstrate how socialist beliefs and organisation recreated many of the community patterns familiar to Lancashire working people.

As an example of the creation of belief systems by working people - that process previously termed one of cultural "struggle" and adaptation, or, again, the "stretching" of belief systems - the final chapter chose to concentrate upon the nature of popular religion and Nonconformity in the region. Finding it necessary to dissent from the conventional attribution of irreligiosity to the working classes, the discussion sought to establish how religious sentiment was perhaps more deeply rooted in popular life than is often assumed and how the Nonconformist chapel might on occasions play the role of a rounded social institution in working class communities. Once more, these communal forms found political expression. An account of the ethical socialism of the Labour Church movement in Lancashire sought to illustrate how working men and women adapted these Labour congregations to fit in with their own communal conceptions of religious life, and attuned their socialism in like fashion.

It is hoped, therefore, that the third part of this study might have suggested a number of ways in which the problems previously identified in the sociological analysis of working class imagery could be tackled. By emphasising the importance of the conscious creation and adaptation of beliefs by working people within their work and community milieux, we have one perspective from which the always complex relationships between objective social situations and human meaning, and macro-structural forms and micro-level processes, might be viewed, provided that the historical and shifting qualities of these relationships are constantly recalled.

## IV.

A number of brief remarks concerning the implications of this study for the theoretical analysis of socialism and class consciousness will suffice to conclude the discussion.

The theoretical approaches identified and examined in Part I above share a common tendency to assume the workings of an enveloping process of incorporation and accommodation which is somehow held to have descended upon the working class during the course of its evolution. The proponents of the political culture, civility and deference theories all argue for the absorption of the working class and its beliefs within an overarching value consensus, whilst Marxist commentators and sociologists alike - concur in emphasising the diversion of the working class from its revolutionary goal by the infectious and pernicious workings of the dominant value system. An underlying model of societal development is at work here and, whilst more obviously apparent in some approaches rather than others, is nevertheless clear enough to warrant consideration: viz. that reformist socialism of the British variety cannot be other than a deviation from true vocation, expressing a malformation, or even a denial, of assumed class consciousness.

The emphasis is, of course, ultimately depreciatory and may be most clearly seen in the anxiety shown by many commentators to denounce the existence of ethical or even frankly Christian elements in socialist thought as a vestigial delusion or contamination by bourgeois values. It should be clear from the account presented of the movement during the period 1890-1906 that, where socialism does gain a measure of acceptance among working people - and considerable evidence suggests that it was received with great enthusiasm and certainly called forth much devotion from at least sections of the Lancashire labour community - it did so where it harmonised with and was seen to articulate and explain the familiar

and everyday aspects of community life. In short, socialist beliefs became a material force insofar as they were taken up and adapted by working people in line with experiential community perceptions.

That such communal perceptions may fall short of a full-blown universalistic class consciousness can hardly be denied. This is not to advocate, however, that the socialist movement in the final decade of the century - including its ethical component - should be decried as less than adequate, or judged lacking against the assumed yardstick of revolutionary socialism. The socialist movement was in large measure created by the efforts and genius of working people who, in their own localities, adapted and imbued their beliefs with the assumptions which grew directly out of their day to day lives. To judge the movement lacking is to devalue this contribution.

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