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**FROM CHARTISM  
TO LABOURISM**

# FROM CHARTISM TO LABOURISM

Historical Sketches of  
the English Working  
Class Movement

*by*

*Th. Rothstein*



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THEODORE ROTHSTEIN was born in 1871, at Kovno, Russia, and educated at the Poltava Gymnasium. He came to England in 1891, and thereafter until his return to Russia (1920) worked as a journalist. He acted as correspondent for several Russian Radical papers, and in England worked on the staff of *The Tribune*, *The Daily News*, and *The Manchester Guardian*, specialising on questions of foreign policy. He was for many years a member of the National Union of Journalists. Soon after his arrival in England he joined the Social-Democratic Federation, in which he was active until its merging in the Social-Democratic Party. He entered this Party, and again the British Socialist Party, in which it was merged in its turn. He remained in the B.S.P. until 1914, when he resigned owing to the jingo attitude of the Party majority. Throughout the pre-war years he played a prominent part in the theoretical life of the Party, occupying a Left Wing and revolutionary position in the first against opportunist and Social-Imperialist tendencies, represented by Hyndman. As such, he acted as correspondent for the *Neue Zeit*, the leading theoretical organ of the old International, and attended the International Congress at Stuttgart in 1907 as a British delegate. He was a member of the Executive of the S.D.F. for several years. He took an active part in several revolutionary Nationalist movements, particularly the Egyptian, and contributed frequently to its press, as well as writing an exposure of the rule of British Imperialism in Egypt, *Egypt's Ruin* (1911). Although taking no active part in the Russian movement, he supported the Bolsheviks from 1905 onwards. From 1914 onwards he assisted in the crystallisation of the Left revolutionary and international wing in the B.S.P., which launched *The Call* in 1915 and won a majority, forcing Hyndman and the social-patriots out of the Party, in 1916. He supported the Bolshevik Left in the international conferences at Zimmerwald and Kienthal, and after the February Revolution in Russia in 1917 fought the pro-Kerensky elements in the British Labour Movement. In 1920 he was appointed a member of the first Soviet Delegation, and went to Moscow in August in this capacity to report. Following the defeat of Lloyd George's plan for a war on Soviet Russia, Rothstein was not allowed to return to this country. He has since been engaged in Soviet work—as Chairman of the Universities Reform Commission (1920-21), Soviet Minister to Persia (1921-22),

and since 1922 a member of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. Since 1920 he has been a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik), as from 1900. Amongst his works may be mentioned *The Decline of British Industry, Egypt's Ruin, Essays in the History of the British Labour Movement* (in Russian, translated into several languages), as well as several earlier historical works in Russian; together with many writings in the British, German, Russian, American etc., Marxist press from 1895 up to the present.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE ... ..	I
<b>PART ONE: THE PERIOD OF CHARTISM</b>	
<i>The Chartist Movement</i>	
Chapter 1—"Social Wrongs" ... ..	7
Chapter 2—The Parliamentary Reform of 1832 ... ..	16
Chapter 3—The Bourgeoisie in Power ... ..	25
Chapter 4—The Charter ... ..	35
Chapter 5—Parties and Sections ... ..	44
Chapter 6—The Convention ... ..	57
Chapter 7—Decline and Revival of the Movement ... ..	66
Chapter 8—The Break-up of Chartism ... ..	75
Chapter 9—The End of the Movement ... ..	85
<i>The Origins of the Theory of the Class Struggle</i>	
Chapter 1—The Birth of Class Consciousness ... ..	93
Chapter 2—Society and Classes ... ..	100
Chapter 3—The State and the Antagonisms of Classes ... ..	107
Chapter 4—Reform and the Conquest of Political Power ... ..	116
<i>The Forerunners of the International</i>	
Chapter 1—The Beginnings (1832-45) ... ..	124
Chapter 2—The Fraternal Democrats (1846-47) ... ..	133
Chapter 3—The Collapse (1848-49) ... ..	141
Chapter 4—Recovery at a Lower Level (1849-50) ... ..	150
Chapter 5—End of the Fraternal Democrats (1851-53) ... ..	158
Chapter 6—Formation of the International Committee (1854-55) ... ..	166
Chapter 7—The International Association (1855-59) ... ..	174
<b>PART TWO: THE PERIOD OF TRADE UNIONISM</b>	
Chapter 1—The Ideology of Opportunism ... ..	183
Chapter 2—The Practice of Opportunism ... ..	202
Chapter 3—The Fruits of Opportunism ... ..	218
Chapter 4—The Fruits of Opportunism ( <i>concluded</i> ) ... ..	237
Chapter 5—The Roots of Opportunism ... ..	255
Chapter 6—Stemming the Tide of Socialism ... ..	266
Chapter 7—The Labour Party ... ..	281
Chapter 8—The Rise of the Tide ... ..	298
Appendix ... ..	321
Index ... ..	361
Tables (Index) ... ..	365

## PREFACE

THE present volume, like so many other volumes, has a history. It is made up of essays written on various occasions at various times in the course of twenty years which were originally intended for a foreign Socialist (or Communist) public—partly Russian, partly German. The opening essay, which in the present collection may serve as an introduction to Part One of the volume, was written as far back as 1905 at the height of the first Russian revolution, and had for its object to acquaint the militant Russian working class, then preparing under the leadership of the Bolsheviks for an armed insurrection, with its great precursor, the English proletariat engaged in a revolutionary struggle under the Chartist banner, and at the same time to demonstrate, by the example of the contest between the "moral" and "physical force" schools of the Chartist Movement, the futility of the Menshevik policy of compromise and opportunism. The "essay," which in its original form was a series of magazine articles, afterwards republished as a book, had naturally to be popular in style and not over-learned in substance. The English reader, versed in the subject, may, indeed, find it now too popular. In those days, however, it must be remembered, even English political and historical literature had, with the exception of Gammage's well known volume, not a single book or even pamphlet on the Chartist Movement, and my modest contribution to its history might well have been, if translated, the first of its kind even in England. As a matter of fact, the only more or less serious attempt to deal with the history of the Chartist Movement was in those days embodied in the none too satisfactory work of Mr. John Tildsley, who had written and published it in German, not to speak of a small propaganda pamphlet on the subject which had appeared also in German under the auspices of the German Social Democratic Party some years earlier, anonymously, from the pen of Hermann Schleutter, the author of a much later work on Chartism. This state of things was characteristic of the trend of historical studies in England at that time—studies which were then greatly exercised, as I well remember, over the Battle of Hastings, but had no interest for the great and passionate struggle of the English proletariat, the first of its kind in the history of



modern times. Since then English historical literature has been doubtfully enriched by a few monographs such as Mark Hovell's or Julius West's, as well as by the contribution of Mr. M. Beer to the subject in his *History of British Socialism*. But I advisedly refer to these books as of doubtful value, because they have all been written from an anti-revolutionary, opportunist, "Lovettian" point of view, and to that extent are so many misrepresentations of the great movement. More particularly, West's is a piece of supercilious and ignorant humbug worthy of the school of which he was such a promising disciple. It is for this reason that I have allowed this essay, based though it is on no extensive original research, to be translated for the English reader. After all, it is still original in the sense of presenting the subject in a light hitherto carefully screened from the eyes of the British worker, besides containing a new analysis of the factors which contributed to the decay of Chartism. I can claim that I was the first to discover the historical part played by George Julian Harney as the first (one may almost call him) Bolshevik, as well as the sinister rôle of the so-called Christian Socialists. I also was first, after Mr. Tildsley, to make use of the files of the *Northern Star*, which had been shortly before proclaimed by certain English writers to be no longer available. The special merit which I claim for myself in connection with this essay is to have placed in the right light the controversy between the two lines of tactics—a theme which has remained as vital to-day as it was nearly a hundred years ago.

To this essay I have caused an appendix to be added on the famous Tenth of April—an event which, though usually dismissed by the historians in a few lines, has still a controversial interest. This particular essay was written in 1923 in Russian as a contribution to a collective volume commemorative of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the European revolutions of 1848. It is the first work of historical research on the subject, attempted by anyone anywhere.

The next two essays were originally written in German for the readers of the at that time well known weekly Marxist review *Neue Zeit*, edited by Karl Kautsky—one in 1908, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, and the other in 1913 in connection with the then forthcoming, but—on account of the outbreak of the great Imperialist slaughter called the World War—never realised celebration of the fiftieth anniver-

sary of the First International. The object of the first of these two essays was to show that in the enunciation of their great doctrine of class struggle, the founders of modern scientific Socialism, Marx and Engels, had had a group of most remarkable precursors in England in the persons of certain writers (more particularly in that of Bronterre O'Brien, an Irishman of genius) who were the theoretical leaders of the Chartist movement. In studying their utterances as set out in this essay the reader will be astonished to see how deeply these early Socialists have penetrated into the mysterious nature of modern classes and modern society and with what acuteness of perception and analysis they have dissected the vast "ideological" superstructure which rests on the brutal relation of classes. The Fabians and, generally, the champions of compromise and opportunism who have more than once repudiated the theory and tactics of class struggle on the plea that they are so thoroughly "un-English" and have been invented on the Continent, will now see that they are quite native to British soil and were enunciated long before Marx and Engels wrote a single line on the subject. Indeed, these great authorities on the history of English thought will, it may be feared, now fly to the other extreme and proclaim, as was the case with the labour theory of value, the beginnings of which had been found in the writings of some early English economists, that Marx and Engels were unscrupulous plagiarists and paraded "crude" English theories of bygone ages as their own discoveries. We leave them to dispose of the confusion of their ignorance as best they can, but we are certain that the working class reader will derive considerable profit from the study of these early writers, and know how to apply them even in the circumstances of to-day. I may add that an attempt to publish this particular essay in English was made some time before the war by the British Socialist Party. The translation was actually made and set in type, but the publishers found at the eleventh hour that the pamphlet would not "pay," and the publication was dropped.

The next essay dealing with the English origins of the International will also come as a mild revelation to the English reader. In this field also the English proletariat was the precursor, and none of the English historians of the Labour movement knew it. As Bronterre O'Brien was the main exponent of the pre-Marxist doctrines in the previous essay, so does George Julian Harney (and in association with him, Ernest Jones) appear

in this essay the principal exponent of proletarian Internationalism long before Marx.

The above essays form the first part of the present volume, dealing with the revolutionary period of Chartism. The second part is a historical and social analysis of the British Labour movement during the period presided over by the genius of non-revolutionary or, rather, anti-revolutionary trade unionism down to the time of the imperialist war. This was conceived by me shortly before the war as a sort of antidote to M. Beer's book. The latter, in its German original, had then recently been published, and I intended to publish mine also in German, with a view to which I had made arrangements with the German Social-Democratic publishing house of Messrs. Dietz and actually had the first few chapters written when the war broke out and stopped my enterprise. I had before me at the time a vast amount of material in the shape of extracts from official Government and trade union publications as well as newspaper cuttings dealing with various parts of my subject. Had this part of the present volume been completed at the time, it would have been much larger, much more complete, and, above all, would have been richly documented and annotated. Unfortunately, during my post-war travels the greater part of my raw material became lost, and when in 1924-5 I sat down to write it, I no longer had these numerous references at my disposal, and had to make use of my own German manuscript and my old German articles in the *Neue Zeit*, filling in the gaps as best I could from the scanty English material which could be obtained in the Moscow libraries. I mention these details in order to ask the indulgence of the reader in case my references and authorities should be regarded by him as not sufficiently ample. For the rest, the facts quoted by me are well known to anyone acquainted with the subject—so much so, indeed, that I may with equal justice be reproached for submitting to the English reader matter which has almost become trite. But then, the value if any, of this part of my work lies not so much in the facts quoted, as in their analysis and interpretation; and in this respect I may also claim to have been the first to show them in the particular light which I directed on them, and to elucidate the factors which have governed them. The conclusion which I have arrived at in this part is that the policy of compromise and class-conciliation pursued by the British working class since the collapse of Chartism has not been justified by its results, but has,

on the contrary, landed British labour in a veritable *cul-de-sac*.

The English people are notoriously ignorant of their own history—more especially (for reasons brilliantly set out by O'Brien) the British working class. May my modest effort help them to see themselves and their past in a true light, so that they may find their way to the future with as little and as painless error as is humanly possible!

TH. ROTHSTEIN.

*Moscow, 1929.*

PART ONE  
THE PERIOD OF CHARTISM

I

THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

CHAPTER ONE  
"SOCIAL WRONGS"

"It may be doubted whether there ever was a great political movement of the people without a social origin. The chief material object of mankind is to possess the means of social enjoyment. Secure them in possession of these and small is the care they have for political abstractions. It is the existence of great social wrongs which principally teaches the masses the value of political rights."—GAMMAGE, *A History of the Chartist Movement*.

THE political class movement of the modern proletariat begins with Chartism. It was in England, the cradle of industrial capitalism, that the working class made the first attempt to establish a party of its own for the conquest of political power, and launched the political slogans which have since been inscribed upon the banners of Labour parties throughout the world. True, the attempt failed, and the slogans were not realised, or they were realised in a totally different form; nevertheless, the "spirit" of Chartism did not die, and for many, many years to come—down to the very recent times when all values have undergone revolution—it continued to draw and to move the labouring masses again and again, inspiring them with the same hopes, directing them on to the same course, and prompting them to adopt the same methods of struggle. Therein lay its enormous historical importance which rendered it of actual moment at every stage passed by the working class. It anticipated, as it were, all the subsequent developments of the political labour movement, and outlined in advance the paths and aims which the latter was to pursue. Each time the proletariat was aroused to class consciousness, it was led to embrace the political formula first discovered by the Chartists; each time it moved, it followed the trail which they had blazed. Hence the fact that no bourgeois

historian has ever been able to understand this movement, and that to this very day it has not found one worthy of itself. Engels and Marx were the only men who appreciated it at its real value and worked out its principles in their doctrines on the aims and tactics of the working class.

The beginning of the Chartist movement is usually put down to the year 1837 when the Charter containing the famous six points of the democratic programme was drawn up by the London Workingmen's Association. This is not correct. The historians who are responsible for this procedure are accustomed to look in history for *outward* marks, and have in this case overlooked the essential fact that insofar as the *class* struggle of the workers for the Charter was concerned, the movement was started, at least, one year later, while as regards the *demands* set out in the Charter, the movement can be traced to a far earlier period. As a matter of fact, the historians themselves mention numerous attempts at democratic parliamentary reform which had been made during the whole of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, notably the attempt of Major Cartwright who, fifty-eight years previously, had introduced a Bill in the House of Commons containing the same six points as the Charter. However, it is argued by the historians that whereas all previous attempts had come from the ruling classes, the Charter of 1837 was for the first time drawn up, in part at least, by the workers. This again is not true. The workers had previously taken active part in the agitation for universal suffrage etc., but, just as in 1837, these political slogans were still devoid of a clear-cut class character. The true position was that during the whole of the first third of the nineteenth century the ruling classes in England had been busily engaged in administering object lessons in political science to the working class, and that under the effect of these lessons the political thinking of the workers was steadily maturing until it eventually took the shape of Chartism.

It will be useful to see what the tenor of those lessons was. England was at that time in the throes of the gigantic economic and social readjustment known in history as the Industrial Revolution. It began in 1765 with the invention by Hargreaves of the spinning-jenny, it went on at a rapid pace, when in 1774 Arkwright came forward with his fine-spinning machine, and gained further impetus ten years later when Cartwright patented the power loom, reaching its full course in 1785 when steam was

for the first time employed as motive power. The era of production by machinery, or as it is called in England, the factory system, was ushered in. The changes which it introduced into the economic and social life of the people are commonly known. The small producer was gradually driven off the market, the independent or semi-independent artisan began to be transformed into a proletarian, while the rural population, which was also engaged in domestic production, flocked more and more into the industrial towns; women began to replace men at industrial labour, while children of 5, 6 and 7 years of age were sent to the factories; in a word, the whole order of life was turned upside down. As late as 1770 the rural population still constituted 40 per cent. of the total population of England, but in 1811 it dropped to 35 per cent., and in 1841 to 26 per cent. The number of families between 1801 and 1841 increased by 34 per cent., but the rural districts had only  $7\frac{1}{4}$  per cent. of this increase. The cities grew by leaps and bounds: between 1801 and 1841 the population of Manchester grew from 35,000 to 353,000; Leeds from 53,000 to 152,000; Birmingham from 23,000 to 181,000; Sheffield from 46,000 to 111,000; Bradford from 30,000 to 105,000; Halifax from 63,000 to 131,000, and so on. The population of the whole of the "cotton county" of Lancashire increased between 1801 and 1831, from 692,931 to 1,336,854, and the increase of the population in the "woollen" West Riding of Yorkshire during the same period exceeded 100 per cent. All this increase of the population was greedily swallowed up by capital, which in 1840 drew 380,000 people into the woollen industry alone (as compared with 40,000 in 1760), and 420,000 people into the cotton industry, of which number there were 242,000 women and over 80,000 children and juveniles.\* The condition of all these hundreds of thousands of workers was truly terrible. The Parliamentary reports of 1833 and 1842 draw a picture which has scarcely any parallel in the history of the race; it almost eclipses the horrors of slavery in America, of English landlordism in Ireland, and of British rule in India. Wages were as low as nine shillings per week; the working day extended to 16 or even 18 hours; children, from four years upwards, were ruthlessly exploited (there are cases on record of three-year-old children working for 12 hours a day); the most insanitary conditions of labour prevailed, causing a high rate of mortality and sickness; there was a complete break-up of family

\* Porter, *Progress of the Nation*, 1851, *passim*.

life; ignorance, wild habits, drunkenness and immorality—such was the picture of the first third, and even of the first half, of the nineteenth century, as portrayed over and over again in scientific works as well as contemporary novels\*. Capital was indeed “oozing blood through all its pores” (Marx), and Fielden did not exaggerate in declaring that nine generations had been devoured in the course of ninety years.

How did the working class react to these calamities? First of all, it resorted to rioting, to the destruction of machinery and the wrecking of factories, and to personal violence against manufacturers. But this was only one form of protest, a spontaneous elemental protest such as arises invariably at similar stages in the development of capitalism. It was accompanied by another form of protest—one much more deliberate and from a political point of view of incomparably greater importance, to which the historians have hitherto failed to pay due attention. It took the form of numerous petitions to Parliament, calling upon the State to protect the workers against the effects of the new order. It is difficult nowadays to grasp the undoubted fact that nowhere in the past did the State play such an active part, nowhere was it considered as the living embodiment of the collective will of “society,” called upon to regulate social relations and to guide the destinies of the nation, as in those days in England. It was customary, both in historical textbooks and in the discussions on the “future of capitalism” which occurred whenever capitalism emerged in any country, to draw a parallel between the “natural” economic and social development of England and the “artificial” development of the country in question, the word *natural* being used in the sense of freedom from State interference, as opposed to the artificial growth of capitalism under the care of the State. There can be nothing more unfounded than this fiction. The interference of the State in the economic destinies and social relations of the countries on the Continent was mere child’s play in comparison with the detailed and never-ending regulation of public and social life, the active policy of fostering, encouraging, planting, regulating, and prohibiting industrial and commercial

\* The best description so far drawn of that period is contained in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, by Engels, and in the chapter on Primitive Accumulation in the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*. One need scarcely mention, among books of fiction, such well-known novels as Kingsley’s *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, Disraeli’s *Sibyl* and Mrs. Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.



activity, which had been practised by the "mercantilist" Governments in England in the course of 150 years, beginning with the "glorious Revolution" of 1688. We refer here, as indicated by the date given, not to the feudal regulation of production and consumption which also existed in other countries, but to the measures taken by the *national* State for the furtherance of the commercial and industrial development of the country and the regulation of the social relations of the people. On the one hand, we witness an endless series of colonial wars and a vast and intricate system of duties—prohibitive and otherwise—on imports, and of bounties on exports, and, on the other hand, a system of public relief for the poor and the unemployed, regulation of wages in accordance with the prices of the means of subsistence, and so on. A perusal of the economic literature of that period, or of any of the volumes of Hansard, will suffice to show at once how "artificial" was the commercial, industrial and social development in England, how deliberately the State had been guiding the destinies of the British nation, and how the debates in Parliament were essentially concerned with economic policies. In the absence of a press and the means of organising public opinion, the wishes and demands of the "nation" frequently found their expression in petitions to Parliament, which petitions then served as the starting point for three-fourths of the parliamentary debates and of the Government's decisions. Now the wool manufacturers would ask for the abolition of import duties on wool; then the West Indian planters would demand an embargo on the import of sugar and rum in foreign bottoms or in foreign casks; now the glass-button manufacturers of Birmingham complained of the competition of French silk-button manufacturers; and then the London shopkeepers would seek protection from the competition of the street hawkers. On the other hand, the workers and the small farmers would demand protection against middlemen and profiteers, complain of cases of infringement of the apprenticeship laws by the employers, demand relief in times of bad harvest, and ask for a revision of existing wage scales. And Parliament would listen attentively to all these clamours, would appoint commissions, issue regulations, embargoes, establish new wage scales, grant premiums on grain imports, banish French buttons from the market, close colonial ports to foreign ships, prohibit imports to Ireland otherwise than via England, and so on. The State, so far from shirking its

economic duties and from heralding its own destruction as the supreme goal of its existence, was actively intervening in all the affairs of the nation like a veritable omnipresent and omnipotent Leviathan.

In such circumstances it is scarcely surprising that the working people, thrown out of their age-long ways of life by the machine and crushed to the ground by factory capitalism, should turn to Parliament and claim from it protection against the new order of things. The people in their innocence were not yet acquainted with the new political economy; they did not yet know that the things which were taking place, the robbery and spoliation, were part of an all-wise and benign dispensation which no mortal dared challenge. Neither were they philosophers who contemplate the world from the lofty standpoint of history and are able to reconcile the irreconcilable in a single idealistic synthesis. They knew that they were suffering; they saw the emergence of a new kind of people, of greedy money-mongers introducing an unheard-of inanimate labour-power that took the bread out of their mouths and upset the traditional order of things. They promptly protested to Parliament, asking for intercession. In glancing over the files of Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates* we find, for instance, that in 1805 "Lord King presented a petition (in the House of Lords) from the journeymen Calico Printers of Lancashire, Derbyshire, Cheshire, Lanark, Renfrew etc., complaining of distress they suffer in consequence of their inability to procure employment owing to the excessive multiplication of apprentices and stating other grievances to which they are subject. . . . He said that the number of apprentices introduced of late years into their trade, which exceeded very far indeed the proportion ever known before in any mechanical profession in this country, excluded the journeymen from almost even the chance of being able to earn their subsistence. Indeed, in many instances these journeymen were refused employment, unless they consented to sign a second contract or indenture for five or seven years, on such terms as the masters thought proper to prescribe."\* In 1808 the hand-loom weavers petitioned Parliament for a minimum wage. The power loom, they declared, was destroying their chances of earning a livelihood. They were not able to compete with it, and if Parliament did not come to their assistance they would all have to come on to the parish. Similar complaints were made in the

\* Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. V, col. 117.

following year by the cotton spinners, then by the stocking makers, then again by the weavers and spinners, by one category of workers after another, who were crushed by the machine and by the employment of women and children, or were mercilessly exploited by the manufacturers. Such petitions were addressed to Parliament again and again, showing a child-like faith in the goodwill and omnipotence of the State.

Thereupon Parliament would enter upon a discussion of the petitions. On behalf of the manufacturers, Sir Robert Peel (who every morning would stand at the gates of his factory, whipping in his belated workpeople—mainly children of five to seven years of age) would openly declare that he was sick and tired of all these petitions and that "there were many masters who seriously thought of removing themselves and their capital to some other country where their property would be better protected, and their trade be more free from restriction."\* This was an anticipation of the subsequent doctrine of vulgar political economy as to the "volatile" and "nervous" nature of capital. Erskine, the distinguished lawyer, raised a different argument. He claimed that the workers' demands for the limitation of the number of apprentices was "in violation of the elementary principles of civic liberty, and that never (!) had such demands been made upon Parliament." This argument anticipated that of the capitalist's right of exploitation, which was subsequently to be invoked against factory legislation, against the trade unions fighting black-legging, against free and compulsory elementary education, and many other reforms. In their turn, responsible Cabinet Ministers would appeal to the teachings of modern political economy concerning "the freedom of industrial enterprise from governmental interference as the condition of industrial prosperity" as the reason for their disagreement with the views of the petitioners, but would declare that, "undesirous of being accused of lending a deaf ear to parliamentary petitions which constituted the right of all classes of society," they were willing to appoint a select committee to examine the petitions. Such a committee would then be appointed, and after examining these and similar petitions, would give its verdict: "The Committee finds that the legislature cannot pass a single act restricting either the freedom of industry, or the absolute right of the individual to dispose of his time and labour upon terms and conditions which he may find most

\* *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, col. 533a.

advantageous to his interests, without violating the general interests that are of first rate importance to the prosperity and happiness of the community, without creating a dangerous precedent, and without, after a short lapse of time, aggravating the existing unemployment and distress by raising obstacles to the elimination of this very unemployment."

This was quite a new kind of talk, the meaning of which could not at once be grasped by the workers. It was so much at variance with the practice of centuries, so glaringly contradicted by actual facts, that the workers might easily have taken them as a joke. But even a joke may give offence if accompanied by such comments as those made by the Committee. Among other things the workers had asked in their petitions for a money grant to enable them to tide over the "crisis" (the deadly competition of machinery was considered by them as a temporary crisis), and so to maintain their labour power for the coming industrial season. The grant, however, was refused by the Committee on the ground that "it would serve no good purpose, and would even be extremely harmful from all points of view, particularly since it would be likely to raise unfounded hopes that might easily upset the equilibrium of labour and occupation in the various branches of industry, trade and agriculture." This plea was particularly offensive in view of the fact that only a few days previously a grant of six million pounds had been given to the manufacturers in the shape of a long-term loan to be repaid in instalments. On that occasion it had been stated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that "although the crisis in which the manufacturers were finding themselves had been largely caused by their own fault; nevertheless they had already been sufficiently punished for their conduct, and Parliament should not punish them further for their mistake out of sheer revenge." Now, however, when it was a question of making a grant to the workers, Parliament could find nothing better than to approve of the findings of the Committee, adding to it the gratuitous advice that the workers "might with good sense and patience wait for better times, and in the meantime look for work elsewhere."

Such declarations by Parliament and the Government in answer to the workers' petitions constituted the political lesson to which we have referred above. We have mentioned only one incident out of the long chain of petitions and refusals which characterised the whole of the first third of the nineteenth century.

but it is enough to indicate the new attitude of the State towards the working class. Henceforth the State, openly constituted as a class organisation, considered it the supreme purpose of its existence to clear the road of capitalism from all obstacles hitherto raised by patriarchal legislation. For a long time the people could not realise the change, could not understand how Parliament could make up its mind to break suddenly with all past traditions, with all the rules and regulations which had become part and parcel of their economic life; how it could place itself on the side of capital, that all-devastating, impersonal and heartless entity, whose very appearance was bringing ruin, breaking up family ties, spreading immorality, and upsetting all former relations between master and man. But whether the people understood the full import of the change or not, the fact itself of this change in the attitude of the ruling classes was too obvious to be ignored. The only way out of the situation seemed to be to turn these classes, or rather these persons, out of power and to put in their place others who had not sold themselves to capital and would, therefore, be more attentive to the needs and petitions of the people. In this way, the consciousness of "social wrongs," as Gammage puts it, gave rise to the idea of parliamentary reform. Parliament, the most essential part of the State machinery, was in the hands of the hereditary aristocracy; it must be wrested from their grasp and handed over to the people.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE PARLIAMENTARY REFORM OF 1832

"This is the most wicked, tyrannous, dishonest, diabolical measure that could be imagined. . . I therefore conjure you to prepare your coffins if you have the means. You will be starved to death by thousands, if this Bill pass, and thrown on to the dung-hill, or on to the ground, naked, like dogs. . ."—*Poor Man's Guardian*, April 11, 1832.  
(Letter by a Workingman.)

HOW was Parliament to be wrested from the hands of the aristocrats? Experience had shown that they would not yield of their own accord, and that to all entreaties and clamour they would answer with physical force. In 1816, the year following the battle of Waterloo, when the people who were supposed to have saved England and the rest of the world from the tyranny of the "Corsican usurper" had been thrown into the depths of an unparalleled crisis, William Cobbett, the untiring champion of democracy, started an agitation in favour of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. The agitation met with tremendous success, and political clubs were opened everywhere, dedicated to the memory of Hampden, the hero of the Civil War. What was the attitude of the Government towards the movement? It suspended the Habeas Corpus Act and issued emergency laws forbidding the carrying of arms, curtailing the rights of the Press, of public meetings, speeches etc. Two years later the emergency laws were withdrawn, and the agitation was renewed, but the Government adopted even more barbarous methods in order to suppress it. A great open-air mass-meeting was to be held at Manchester in August, 1819. The meeting had been arranged to take place at St. Peter's Fields, a vast common in the vicinity of the city. Enormous crowds of workers in holiday attire, with their wives and children, with bands and banners, gathered to listen to their beloved "Orator" Hunt. Hunt had just managed to mount the platform when the meeting was assaulted by troops and police called in for the occasion, and a great massacre ensued. The casualties upon that battlefield—since nicknamed the "Battle of Peterloo"—numbered 14 killed and 618 injured. It became clear that a revolution could not be avoided: the obstinacy of the

aristocracy was to be met by a regular rebellion, and physical force was to be put down by physical force.

Such things, however, are usually slow in coming, and this was particularly true during the fairly prosperous years that followed, but the crisis of 1829 caused a revival of the movement and lent it redoubled vigour. An agitation was set on foot through all the towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire where secret clubs were organised for the purpose of securing arms, while in rural districts popular riots broke out, accompanied by rick burning and the usual manifestations of "red" terror. Things were rapidly assuming a grave aspect, so much so that the bourgeois radical elements, who had taken a large part in the movement, began to feel somewhat scared. "What if the masses of the people should indeed start a revolution? What if the ruling class should prove so stubborn that it would have to be stormed out of office? Would not the revolutionary impetus put into power a radical "mob," which would then have its own way not only with the established laws, but also with property? And far-sighted men like Francis Place—an ex-tailor who had grown rich and was now the leader of the bourgeois-radical elements of his time—felt that revolution was perhaps a fine thing as a bugbear, but rather too dangerous as reality. When asked by his Whig friends to address a message to the country labourers calling upon them to keep the peace and to cease terrorist acts as useless, Place refused and confidentially stated his view to a friend that "Captain Swing (the legendary leader of the gangs of labourers who went about rick-burning) was helping to bring reform within the range of practical politics."\* On the other hand, when the reactionary Duke of Wellington, a furious opponent of Parliamentary reform, scared by the rioting in London, cancelled the arrangements for the King's visit to the Lord Mayor's banquet, Place accused him of encouraging the people to rioting by his cowardice, and at the same time urged his Whig friends not to drive the Tories out of office, since "a present change of Ministers would do more towards producing or rather accelerating a revolution than all the other circumstances taken together." "The time," he argued, "is not yet come when a radical change can be made either so effectually as to prevent other similar changes, or so beneficially as to answer the purposes of any class of reformers." This meant, according to Place, that the people were in a state of great excite-

\* Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place*, p. 253-4.

ment, and if the Whigs, who had long pledged themselves to parliamentary reform, were to come into office, they would have to carry drastic measures which would take them much further than they desired, or if the Whigs failed to do so, it would provoke a revolutionary outbreak.

The situation became still more acute after the fall of the Wellington Cabinet at the end of 1830, and the formation of a Whig Government which on March 1st, 1831, introduced a Reform Bill. The Bill exceeded all the hopes of the bourgeois radicals. True, it did not provide for universal suffrage, but it did away with the old land property qualification, abolished the notorious rotten boroughs, gave rights of representation to the new industrial centres, and in addition extended the suffrage to all tenants paying a rent of not less than ten pounds per annum. These provisions were quite satisfactory to the bourgeois radicals, since they bestowed political power upon the middle classes whom they championed. But the working class, which was given no share in the reform, was naturally indignant. "Meetings had been held in the manufacturing districts (we read in a confidential report by a factory inspector of the time) at which petitions for universal suffrage had been agreed to, and delegates had arrived in London from various parts of the country to enforce the separate claims of the working people. The language used by these delegates and their associates, and that used in their unstamped publications, was directed to the object of inducing the working people to believe that the constituencies which the Reform Bill would create would belong exclusively to the class of tradesmen and shopkeepers, or, as they were termed, the middlemen, a class which at all times, it was said, had been the worst enemies of the working people."\*

It was at this time that Lovett and other disciples of Owen and Hodgskin organised the "National Association of the Working Class and Others,"† whose basic principles were that "labour is the source of wealth," that "the best country is the one which has neither rich nor poor," and that "all men are born free, and possess certain inborn and inalienable rights." Among its demands was the abolition of all aristocratic and property privileges, and the introduction of universal suffrage for adults of either sex upon reaching the age of 21 with secret ballots, annual Parliaments

\* Quoted by Wallas, *ibid.*, p. 275.

† The "others" referred chiefly to parliamentary radicals of that time, like O'Connell, Hunt and Hume.



etc. In a very short time the Association was joined by numerous workers, and affiliated with similar clubs at Leeds, Manchester, Bristol and elsewhere. The "Rotundists" (so named after the Rotunda Hall where their meetings were held), soon acquired great importance. At their weekly open-air meetings they urged their huge audiences to accept no half-measures which would only benefit the middle classes but to insist upon the complete carrying out of the democratic programme laid down by Major Cartwright.

This Association comprised only the cream of the working class, mixed up, as implied by its name, with other elements from the extreme Left of the radical bourgeoisie. As such, it could not exercise any wide influence upon the masses of the people, and could indeed be safely ignored in the negotiations with the Government concerning the Reform Bill. There was, however, another trouble: the Government was meeting with furious opposition to the Bill on the part of a House of Commons vitally interested in the old order of things, and of a House of Lords made up almost entirely of Tories. This meant that the spectre of revolution, hitherto used as a scarecrow for the reactionaries, could not yet be safely discarded, although to encourage it and let it loose would mean playing into the hands of the Rotundists with their dangerous ideas about property and other things. What was to be done? Francis Place evolved an ingenious plan. In every society, he says, there is a fairly large section which ordinarily shuns politics, but at critical moments may be brought out onto the streets. By getting hold of these people—and with a certain amount of diplomacy it should not prove impossible—one could stage a show of revolutionary activity in support of the Bill without running any further risks.\* Accordingly, at the end of 1831, he founded a "National Political Association" with branches in the provinces, and with the aid of his astute agents and the judicious distribution of money, obtained by private subscription as well as from secret Governmental funds,† he marshalled the requisite number of individuals from among the lower middle class and some corrupt representatives of the working class. An agitation on its behalf was started both openly and secretly, manifestoes were issued, and very soon it became a sort of rallying ground for a number of unenlightened workers, petty shopkeepers, shop assistants, and the like. The real object of the Association

\* Wallas, *ibid.*, p. 279-80.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 276 and 277.

was not made public. Indeed, Place well understood that if the real aim of the Association, that is, support of the Government Bill, were to become known, "the working people would see in the proceeding the old desire to use them for a purpose and then to abandon them. . . . The gap between the working and middle classes would be widened, and the rancour that exists would be increased, and all chance of reconciliation put off for years. . . ."\*

Instead, the aim of the Association was formulated as that of getting "real and proportionately strong representation of the middle class and of the working classes in the House of Commons" a formula deliberately made vague in order that everybody could interpret it according to his political taste. It was, then, upon these hired elements that Place and his colleagues relied both for revolutionary ammunition against the opponents of the Bill, and for a buffer against the Rotundists.

The Reform Bill, as is well known, was twice rejected. After the first defeat of the Bill, Parliament was dissolved, and in the new elections Place made the first use of his new organisation. He attained a measure of success beyond all expectation. In spite of the efforts of the Rotundists to launch a campaign in favour of universal suffrage and other reforms such as the abolition of the stamp duty, the disestablishment of the church, the repeal of the corn laws, the mob shouted: "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill!" and resorted to such violence against its opponents (going to the extent of breaking the windows of Wellington's house) that the elections resulted in a brilliant victory for the Whigs. From then on the crowd of shouters wirepulled by the "National Political Association" played a prominent part in the struggle for and against parliamentary reform. Now it was used for the purpose of staging street demonstrations, now it was incited to rioting, now it was used as "the people" on whose behalf petitions were sent to Parliament, and again it was sent to break the windows as well as the ribs of aristocratic peers. In the provinces huge mass-meetings were held at which resolutions were carried to the effect that in the event of further obstinacy from the House of Lords, the people would refuse to pay taxes, while reports were circulated that a crowd of a hundred thousand men armed with pikes was going to march on the House of Commons from the counties surrounding London. In London itself, after each defeat of the Bill, the crowd would march through

\* *Ibid.*, p. 281.

the streets compelling the closing of shops and the ringing of church bells, while Place himself would artfully spread the rumour that arms and weapons were being manufactured for the "people" at Sheffield, that a "meeting of delegates" had decided to begin shortly to erect barricades, that the people were about to pillage the castles of the aristocrats and carry off the wives and children of the lords as hostages, and so on.\* On their part the Cabinet Ministers, while secretly subsidising the movement from private and Governmental funds, threatened the Lords with the people's revenge, telling them that "they were asked for a small contribution towards the renovation of the old edifice of representative government, that the longer they hesitated the more they would eventually have to yield, that the people would increase their demands to annual Parliaments, universal suffrage, secret balloting etc."†

Indeed, as is well known, the Lords had to yield, and the Bill was passed, but at no time, not even at the most critical moments, was the situation at all revolutionary. Place and his colleagues manipulated their stage-hands with rare dexterity, never allowing the popular excitement to pass from stage effects to reality. When public indignation reached its highest point after the third defeat of the Bill (when the Government announced its intention to resign, and the King summoned Wellington with the obvious intention of crushing the movement by force) and the Whigs themselves were prepared to run the risk of a rebellion, Place and his friends hotly protested and prevented the holding of a great mass meeting near London which was to be attended by half a million people. No doubt if the struggle had been carried on further, that is, if Wellington had indeed taken office and resorted to the use of arms, the situation might have taken a very serious turn; but Place was aware of this, and did not allow the situation to grow so acute. When the Iron Duke began forming a Cabinet, Place organised the famous run on the Banks, causing such a panic in commercial circles that the King was compelled to throw the Duke overboard and summon the Whigs once more.

What were the Rotundists doing in the meantime? They

\* As to this "kidnapping plan," we are told by the simple-minded Lovett (*Life and Struggles*, p. 217): "My informant, Mr. Francis Place, told me that a thousand pounds were placed in his hands in furtherance of the plan." Poor Lovett could not see that Place was merely using him as press reporters are used nowadays.

† Lord Brougham in the House of Lords.

saw clearly through the game played by Place, and did their utmost to counteract it. As soon as the "National Political Association" was formed they organised a great mass meeting to expose the manœuvres of its founders. But the meeting was proscribed by the Government on the ostensible pretext that seditious preparations were being made by the Rotundists, but in reality at Place's request. In compliance with the old-established custom of submitting the programmes of political organisations to public meetings for approval, a meeting of this kind was held by Place's "Association," which the Rotundists attended in force in order to submit a resolution in favour of universal suffrage. The Rotundists' plan was to capture the meeting, but Place was too astute to be caught unawares: he organised obstruction, and the Rotundist speakers were prevented from addressing the meeting. They succeeded nevertheless in one thing: they managed to carry a resolution to the effect that one half of the Administrative Council of the Association should consist of workers. Place was confounded for a while, but he soon recovered his bearings; by a liberal disbursement of money from the secret Governmental funds he secured the co-operation of numerous members of the Association, and the Council as elected was made up almost entirely of his henchmen.\* Finding themselves in a hopeless minority, the Rotundists left the "Association" and proceeded to agitate among the people at large.

From the first, the Rotundists in their organ, the *Poor Man's Guardian*, endeavoured to explain to their public that the promises held out by the sponsors of the Bill were thoroughly deceitful, that it would be the height of folly to trust them, and that the only way for the working class to secure the necessary reforms was to take political power into their own hands. At a public banquet, Lord John Russell, Cabinet Minister and author of the Bill, declared that "this Bill was not a temporary measure calculated to bring temporary benefits, but one that would once and for all secure liberty to the people; that it was not a measure which gave victory to any particular party, but one which secured the prosperity and happiness of the nation upon a just and indestructible foundation." The *Poor Man's Guardian* sharply denounced this humbug. "We believe," Bronterre O'Brien wrote, "you

\* For details of this struggle between the Rotundists and Place and his Association, see Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, pp. 74-75, and Wallas, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

are by this time aware of how little the Bill benefits yourselves; but you are taught to imagine that the transfer of the nomination of members from wealthy individuals to the general body of £10 householders or middlemen will be of great service to you, inasmuch as the latter will be more inclined to do you justice than the former; and you are, naturally enough, led into this delusion by the liberal opinions which they have hitherto professed and the principles they have advocated; yes, when they themselves had common cause with you for complaint—when your wrongs were theirs—when they had no suffrage, they, then, could say that all persons should have equal rights, and accordingly could unite with you in obtaining what they themselves required as much as you; could they do otherwise? Could they then object to your having rights equal to their own? How would a suitor look, asking of his judges that charity which, even while he asks for it, he is himself denying to others? Thus, then, they were obliged to allow your rights: but now the situation of affairs is wonderfully altered. Their battle, thanks to your assistance, is safely won, they think; their position is changed from that of fellow sufferers and fellow plaintiffs into that of masters and judges; and the question is, whether, to all our experience of nature, it is not more than probable that they will feel anxious to maintain their own superiority over you—whether, having gained, as an exclusive advantage, that which they before only claimed in common with you, they will, without obligation, surrender up your just proportion of it.”\*

The question was stated with splendid clarity, and the proletariat was hoodwinked again and again by the honey-tongued promises of the Liberal bourgeoisie, in England in 1832 (as we shall presently see), and in France, Germany and Austria in 1848, before it could finally grasp the profound meaning of the statement made by O'Brien.

Equally sharp were O'Brien's comments on the “revolutionary” manœuvres to which Place and his lieutenants resorted each time it was necessary either to intimidate the opponents, or to force the hand of the advocates of the Bill. In a manifesto to the House of Lords, demanding universal suffrage, O'Brien, its author, wrote: “Threats of a ‘revolution’ are employed by the middle class and ‘petty masters’ as arguments to induce your allowance of their measure; but be not intimidated by them: a

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Nov. 5, 1831.

violent revolution is not only beyond the means of those who threaten it, but is to them their greatest object of alarm; for they know that such a revolution can only be effected by the poor and despised millions who, if excited to the step, might use it for their own advantage, as well as for that of themselves, who would thus not only be placed in a less exclusive situation than at present, but would also have their rights of property endangered: be assured that a violent revolution is their greatest dread, and, should ever the poor millions be compelled to resort to such an alternative, they will be as firmly opposed to it as yourselves could possibly be: yes, alas! their assistance, in such event, is secured to you by the irresistible *sympathy of property*, without the necessity of any sacrifice on your part . . .”\*

History has since confirmed these words by many striking instances. In England, as was correctly pointed out by O'Brien, the middle classes did not want any revolution; but in other countries they courted it (or at least, they could not prevent it), and the “poor millions” had subsequently to pay a heavy toll of blood for the assistance they had rendered to the bourgeoisie.

In this way did the Rotundists agitate, but the course of history proved stronger than their efforts. The non-class-conscious mass of the workers and the exceedingly class-conscious mass of the petty-bourgeoisie followed “the Bill and nothing but the Bill,” and the Reform Bill was enacted in 1832 to the exclusive interest of the capitalist class. The Rotundists continued to agitate as much as possible until 1834, when the Workingmen’s Association was disbanded, and its members scattered to various parts of England.

\* *Poor Man’s Guardian*, Oct. 1, 1831.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE BOURGEOISIE IN POWER

"Base, brutal, bloody Whigs."—O'CONNELL.

SO the bourgeoisie came to power. What did it do? First of all, it declared that the world had now reached the highest point of perfection, that there was no room for further political development in England. "Having now extended the suffrage," Mr. Stanley declared on behalf of the Government, "the Government would only be deceiving the people and contradicting all the professions that they had made, and with which they had come forward, if they should not be strenuous in their resistance to any attempt to carry the extension farther. The Government had come forward with a complete measure of Reform, which the people had adopted as the new charter of their liberties; it had been so extensive as to alarm many, who, however, consented to go to the length of it upon the distinct pledge that it was to be a final measure."<sup>\*</sup>

To whom the Minister referred when speaking about "the people," it is difficult to tell; at any rate they were not those whom he and his associates had used as revolutionary pawns. They had been repeatedly promised their reward, and when the Government went back on its solemn pledges, it merely fulfilled the prediction made by O'Brien. Five years later a repetition of this statement by Lord John Russell became the signal for the beginning of the Chartist movement; but in 1832 it caused indignation only among the Rotundists, since the public at large were tired after the recent struggle and hoped that the victorious bourgeoisie would at least assist them in their economic distress. These hopes, after all, had been the main motive force of the masses during the whole of the Reform campaign, although the wily Whigs had succeeded in emasculating the battle-cry to "The Bill and nothing but the Bill"; this was possible only because the people had a profound belief in their bourgeois allies and expected from them greater sympathy than from the old aristocrats. They were soon to be undeceived by events; for if the aristocracy had scourged them with whips, the bourgeoisie was now to chastise them with scorpions.

<sup>\*</sup> *Poor Man's Guardian*, Dec. 29, 1832.

The outstanding feature of the new Parliament was that it had retained all the previous fiscal regulations, including the corn laws and the indirect taxes. The corn laws had been introduced in 1815, and prohibited any import of wheat until the price reached 80 shillings a quarter. These laws were perhaps the most eloquent evidence of the class nature of the aristocratic regime, and had been the subject of constant complaints on the part of the lower middle class and the workers. However, the years 1833-36 were marked by good harvests, and the price of wheat fluctuated between 48 and 53 shillings; this fact was exploited by the Whigs as an excuse to retain the corn laws, thereby conciliating the defeated landlords. The same circumstance—relative prosperity—enabled them to withhold the revision of the system of taxation. Out of a revenue of £47,000,000 in 1831, £35,500,000 were derived from indirect taxes, of which 93.33 per cent. was raised on such articles as tea, sugar, tobacco, coffee, butter and timber. This heavy and unjust burden of taxation was also left unchanged by the Whigs, out of consideration for the manufacturers and the landlords.

Nevertheless, both the corn laws and the unjust distribution of taxes were mere trifles as compared with the cardinal "Condition-of-England-Question"—as Carlyle called it—arising from the introduction of machinery. By that time all the old regulations concerning wages and apprenticeship had been abolished, and only very few people dreamt of their restoration. The question, chiefly, was how to regulate the conditions of labour in the factories on the one hand, and on the other, how to assist those sections of the population which had not yet been drawn into the new system, such as the urban and rural artisans and small home producers. With regard to the factory proletariat, the first remedy that suggested itself was the shortening of the working day and the suppression or at least the limitation of female and child labour. With a view to this, Owen and Fielden formed in 1833 the "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union" and set out to preach a general strike for an eight-hour day. Thanks to the prosperity of the years 1833-1834 the movement met with unusual success, and very soon it rallied to its banner about half a million workers. Then the new regime of the "middle classes" revealed its class nature. Notwithstanding all the pleadings of Francis Place to avoid discrediting itself at the very outset by hostility to the workers,\* the Government determined to crush the movement "by

\* Wallas, *ibid.*, p. 353 *et seq.*



energetic measures," arrested six poor labourers in Dorsetshire who had tried to form a local branch of the "Trades Union" and sentenced them to seven years' transportation. This barbarous verdict proved a mortal blow to the young movement, and it soon died out. Fielden and his companions, Oastler and Sadler, then began an agitation for the legislative regulation of factory labour, and especially for a legal ten-hour day for women and juveniles. Another, even more numerous, section of the working class, the semi-independent producers in town and village, was in no better position than the factory workers. They did not cease to address their complaints to the House of Commons, each more pitiful than the last. In Lancashire alone there were 80,000 hand loom weavers dying of starvation together with their families. Between 1813 and 1833 the number of power looms in the country had increased from 2,400 to 100,000, with a corresponding drop in the weavers' earnings from 13s. 6d. to 4s. 6d. per week, on a working day of from 12 to 16 hours.\* They lived on potatoes and never tasted meat.

In a similar plight were the Nottingham stocking makers, the Coventry and Spitalfields silk-spinners, the Clerkenwell mechanics, the wool-spinners in the western counties and numerous other categories of workers. Matters were no better in the rural districts. At the close of the eighteenth century all the cottages, except one, in a certain parish in Sussex were owned by the hand loom weavers who were working with their families on orders from the manufacturers. They had brewed their own beer, and had meat at their table at least three times a week. Now, in 1834, only two cottages were owned by the workers, 182 people were getting parish relief, while the remainder had nothing to brew and to drink, and were feeding only on potatoes. The same was true of other places. The town of Corford in Suffolk had once been a flourishing wool manufacturing centre, "but," we are told by a contemporary,† "the power of the machine had destroyed the weaver's needle and shuttle, the spinning wheel and the loom," and 4,304 people out of a population of 7,892 were getting parish relief. Altogether, parish relief was now playing a tremendous part in the economic life of these sections of the working class. In compensation for the abolition of the

\* Oastler in *Poor Man's Guardian*, July 5, 1834.

† Speech by Sir Henry Willoughby in the House of Commons, July 1, 1834.

monasteries, which had spent one-third of their revenue on public relief, the parishes were obliged, under the old Elizabethan law, to maintain their poor at public expense, the aged, infirm and those incapable of work, in poorhouses and similar institutions and to find work or working material for the able-bodied unemployed. In course of time, towards the close of the eighteenth century, when the industrial revolution had begun and the price of bread, owing to wars, had soared to an unprecedented height, the parishes were charged with yet another form of public relief in the shape of money grants to supplement low wages or in aid of rent. In many counties where the old wage regulations had been abolished, the parishes, through the justices of the peace, established sliding scales of regular money grants-in-aid in accordance with fluctuations in the price of corn, and entire parishes, as we have seen, came down on the rates. In 1832 the expenditure on such relief exceeded £7,000,000, a sum equalling 10s. per head of the population.

It was then that the ruling bourgeoisie suddenly discovered a remedy for all the ills which beset the people. It was the cleverest idea ever conceived by the creative mind of the bourgeoisie. It discovered, as though inspired by some divine intuition, that the whole evil was due to parish relief, which encouraged people in idleness. While industrial capital, swelling year by year, was keenly hankering after human flesh, the hand loom workers, thanks to public support, were unwilling to part with their looms, and labourers stubbornly remained in their villages and spent their time in idleness. This of course was true, mainly if not solely, of the work-shy able-bodied and did not apply to the old and the children maintained by the parish. But then, were not these latter a burden on the parish because they were receiving no support from their relatives or because, anticipating eventual relief from the parish, they had been unthrifty when at work? The moral of which was: abolish the Poor Law, do away with parish relief, and everything would change: the loafers would go to the factories, the rural labourers would quit their villages, everyone would make provision for the future, and the homes and asylums for the sick, aged and the young would disappear. At the same time the general economic situation of the country would improve, since millions of pounds would be expended on productive purposes instead of being wasted on the maintenance of paupers.

A clever idea, was it not? Take away from the people

ruined by capitalism their last miserable refuge, and all their misery will pass away.\* There was but one drawback: the people had become so demoralised that in no circumstances would they willingly submit to such a severe operation. They might rebel and overthrow Parliament, together with the hateful factories. Fortunately, there was a remedy for this, too. In the eighteenth century some poor law authorities had introduced the so-called workhouse, a sort of semi-penal institution where the inmates were given compulsory work of such a character and under such conditions that many hastily left the workhouses, preferring to undergo any privation rather than accept such parish relief. This was done not so much to encourage the people to be industrious, as to save the rates; the fewer people applying for relief, the less would be the expenditure and the lower would be the rates on the landlords. The workhouse idea was now revived, both in order to "render the people industrious" and to avoid the menace of a revolt. In every parish there was to be established a workhouse and no relief was to be granted except inside its walls. In order that the workhouse might not be too attractive, the conditions for the inmates were to be such as "to render them, on the whole, less desirable than those of the independent workers," and "the inmate was to be subjected to such a system of toil, discipline and restrictions, as would outweigh all the bodily comforts obtained." Under such conditions, to use an expression by the most authoritative historian of this "social reform,"† "the offer of relief at the workhouse would be tantamount to its absolute withholding," and the worker would be prepared to stand any amount of suffering rather than apply to the parish.

This plan was carried out to the letter. In 1833 a commission was appointed to draw up the scheme and in 1834 its work was crowned by the passing of the famous Poor Law Reform Act. It was a truly revolutionary measure which, with one flourish of the pen, swept away some of the most ancient social traditions.‡

\* The authors of this idea were the "Philosophic Radicals," the disciples of Bentham—Chadwick, Nassau, Senior, Grote, Mill, etc. The names of these people are still cherished to-day by British capitalists.

† Webb, *A History of the English Poor Law*, Vol. 3, p. 49.

‡ Both the authors and the historians of this reform considered it as England's salvation: it "freed" the people from everything which hindered their development into the proletariat. Mr. McKay indeed uses as an epigraph to his book the following quotation from Hegel: "*Denn die Weltgeschichte ist nichts als die Entwicklung des Begriffes der*

The already impoverished people—as predicted by the *Poor Man's Guardian* as far back as 1832—were “thrown on to the dunghill, or on to the ground, like dogs,” deprived of the support which they had previously enjoyed. Everywhere the gloomy “Bastilles”—as the workhouses were nicknamed—were erected, and anyone refusing to enter them was denied relief. The visit to the Bastille was accompanied by truly diabolical cruelty. The work was of the most senseless kind—oakum picking, stone breaking or bone crushing; the inmates were so starved that frequently they greedily sucked the marrow out of the bones given them for crushing or stole the food intended for the domestic animals; husbands were separated from their wives, and parents from their children, this separation of parent from child being so rigorous that women went mad and children died of loneliness; the brutal and degrading treatment, the prison-like discipline, and the lack of discrimination between the healthy and the sick—all these and others atrocities turned public relief into an institution of unparalleled savagery. As a reward, the “reformers” could boast a few years later of an appreciable decrease in “pauperism” which reduced the poor law expenditure from 6½ million pounds sterling in 1831 to half a million in 1841. In the county of Kent—to cite only one instance—the number of persons receiving parish relief in twelve parishes was reduced from 3,512 in 1833 to 5 (sic!) in 1836.\* The rest of the people, we are laconically told by the same authority, had “found employment elsewhere.” The report fails to mention the conditions under which that “employment” was secured, but we learn from another report that twenty-five families, chased by the workhouse system from certain Bedfordshire villages, secured employment in the Lancashire factories, earning a total of £28 per week, i.e., somewhat over £1 per family.† To earn this sum, not only the adults, but also the children had to work ten to twelve hours a day and more. It was now that the system of “putting the people through the mill,” described so vividly by Marx and Engels, started in England on a mass scale. Entire villages, adults and children, were transported by the Guardians of the Poor to the factory towns, in carts or barges, like bales of merchandise, and delivered to the tender mercies of the capitalists. In *Freiheit*” (World history is nothing but the unfolding of the idea of liberty.)

\* *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

† *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Lancashire, we read in the report of a Poor Law inspector (quoted by McKay\*), machinery using 7,507 horse-power was being erected, and it was calculated that six mill-hands would be required per each horse-power. The necessary complement of mechanics, labourers etc., would amount to as many more, that is, in all, a population of 90,064. From what source were these 90,064 units of labour to be supplied? First, the inspector hoped that many of the local hand loom weavers would embrace this opportunity of relinquishing a decaying industry; but he feared that the hand loom weavers might continue "unwilling to surrender their imaginary independence, and prefer being enslaved by poverty to the confinement and unvarying routine of factory employment." He recommended, accordingly, that the Commissioners should appoint a suitable agent to act as a means of communication between the millowners and the Assistant Commissioners in the south. The Commissioners, accordingly, circularised the Poor Law officers and manufacturers, offering their services to the latter as purveyors of human flesh from "counties with surplus population," and hundreds and thousands of families, including children "of legal age and strength," were sent to work in the factories of "highly respectable firms."

This was the reward given by the bourgeoisie to the working class for its co-operation in the acquisition of political power. Anticipating the storm which would be caused among the people by this perfidy, the bourgeoisie, as always happens in similar circumstances, went so far as to throw overboard the glorious Constitution and handed over the administration of the Act to a Commission of three bureaucrats holding office for a period of five years and responsible neither to the House of Commons nor to the Cabinet. The Commission was invested with full dictatorial powers, and a special police, formed for the purpose, was placed at its disposal to enable it to carry out, from the safe distance of its chambers, the provisions of the Act in whatever manner it deemed fit. Its agents in the parishes consisted of locally elected commissions controlled by central inspectors and instructed by means of bureaucratic circulars.

That these precautionary measures were not superfluous was demonstrated by the attitude of the masses during the Parliamentary discussion of the Bill. Hundreds of petitions were showered upon the legislators from all parts of the country; mass

\* *Ibid.*, p. 217.

meetings attended by hundreds of thousands protested against this glaring attack upon the rights of the people, while in the House of Commons speeches were delivered such as had seldom been heard in the representative assemblies of the world. "I tell you," shouted Fielden to Lord John Russell, the sponsor of the 'reform,' "that the introduction of the new law in my constituency will meet with resistance, and I do not mind telling you frankly that if such resistance takes place, I would lead it. If matters have come to such a pass that neither the sheriff's baton nor the constable's bludgeon can maintain public order against the aggressors, it is our duty to resist, and I am prepared to take upon myself a share of the responsibility."\* Fielden was supported by a group of M.P.'s, small in number but strong in their eloquence and indignation, who fought against the Bill with might and main. After the eventual passing of the Bill, the fight was carried into the country. In applying the Act (*i.e.*, at the election of the Guardians, the building of "Bastilles," the collection of the rates etc.), nearly every industrial district had to be taken practically by storm. The most fantastic rumours went about among the masses. It was said that the bread in the workhouses was poisoned, that the children in any family in excess of three were to be killed, that anyone touching the bread given at the workhouse would be imprisoned and his children slain, and so on. The resistance of the people was tremendous. The workers rebelled and razed the workhouses to the ground, yielding only, after many bloody encounters, to military force.† In many places the law could not be operated for a number of years, and in 1836 it was in force only in 64 localities. In the Kentish villages a social and religious movement arose among the peasants, led by a madman who declared himself the world's saviour come to abolish the new Act. Troops were sent against them, and it was only after the prophet had been killed and several volleys fired into the crowd, that the movement was suppressed. In order to gain an idea of the excitement which reigned among the people, suffice it to quote from a speech delivered before a crowd of 100,000 people by the Rev. J. R. Stephens, later an associate of the Chartists, and at that time the most impassioned opponent of the new law. "If Lord John Russell wanted to know what he (Rev. J. R. Stephens) thought of the new Poor Law, he would tell him plainly: he thought it was

\* Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Feb. 24, 1836.

† Oastler was one of the most influential leaders of this movement.

the law of devils, and that it ought to be resisted to the death, even if the first man that might be slaughtered in opposing it should be Lord John Russell himself. They had at Ashton come to the determination that when next March came, they would vote no more for Guardians. Let the man who would dare to accept the office of Guardian take the consequence upon his own head. He told them this, because he thought they ought to know. If it was to come, let it come; it should be an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, limb for limb, wife for wife, child for child, man for man and blood for blood, so help their God and their country."\* Equally vehement was his eloquence at Newcastle: "The people were not going to stand this, and he would say that sooner than wife and husband and father and son should be sundered and dungeoned and fed on 'skillie'—sooner than wife or daughter should wear the prison dress—sooner than that—Newcastle ought to be, and should be—one blaze of fire, with only one way to put it out, and that with the blood of all those who supported this measure. . . ." He (Mr. Stephens) "was a revolutionist by fire, he was a revolutionist by blood, to the knife, to the death. If an unjust, unconstitutional, and illegal parchment was carried in the pockets of the Poor Law Commissioners, and handed over to be slung on a musket, or a bayonet, and carried through their bodies by an armed force, or by any force whatever, that was a tidy sentence; and if this meeting decided that it was contrary to law and allegiance to the Sovereign—that it was altogether a violation of the Constitution and common sense, it ought to be resisted in every legal way. It was law to think about it and to talk about it; and to put their names on paper against it, and after that to go to the Guildhall and to speak against it. And when that would not do, it was law to ask what was to be done next, and then it would be law for every man to have his firelock, his cutlass, his sword, his pair of pistols or his pike, and for every woman to have her pair of scissors, and for ever child to have its paper of pins and its box of needles, and let the men with a torch in one hand and a dagger in the other put to death any and all who attempted to sever man and wife."†

Such was the bitterness and intensity of the struggle; but the treacherous bourgeoisie, backed by armed force, eventually

\* Reported in *Northern Star*, 10.2.1838

† Quoted in Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, pp. 56-57.

triumphed. Here again, no doubt, the years of prosperity which followed the "reform" facilitated the work of pacification. Nevertheless the anger of the people was unallayed, and at the first opportunity it assumed a new political form. At last the people realised how profoundly they had been deceived in 1832, and how right were those who had warned them against an alliance with the Whigs. They grasped the necessity of getting at the helm, and once again the question of universal suffrage and democratic Parliaments became the order of the day. Chartism came upon the stage.



## CHAPTER FOUR THE CHARTER

"There, Lovett, is your Charter, agitate for it, and never be content with anything less."—  
O'CONNELL.

"Six or seven years ago they had met on that ground for the attainment of what they thought would be freedom. They joined the middle class that were then struggling for their rights—they obtained for them political freedom, and they trusted to their gratitude for assisting to secure the rights of the great masses of the community—they had been deceived, basely deserted, but they now stood forward again in their own might and majesty and again they would triumph. . . ."  
—JAMES WILLIAMS, Chartist orator, at Sunderland meeting, in 1838 (quoted by Gammage).

**I**N June, 1836, there was founded in London a little society called "The London Workingmen's Association." Its soul was one Lovett, a follower of the doctrines of Robert Owen; a man of quiet manner, but not over-shrewd; capable yet unfit for practical political struggle, since he did not possess even a spark of revolutionary temperament. He was friendly with all the bourgeois radicals of his time and entertained a particular regard for Place, upon whose suggestion the Association was founded.\* The Association was "to draw into one bond of unity the intelligent and influential portion of the working classes in town and country, to seek by every legal means to place all classes of society in possession of their equal political and social rights," and further, "to use every exertion to remove those cruel laws that prevent the free circulation of thought through the medium of a cheap and honest press."† This last plank in the programme of the Association was inserted because it was thought by the founders that only by educating the working class would it be possible to achieve the aims of the Association, since by such means alone could the working class be made to realise its political and social position. "Ignorance," said the manifesto of the newly founded Association, "has caused us to believe that we were born to toil and others to

\* Wallas, *op. cit.* p. 359.

† Lovett, *op. cit.* pp. 92-93.

enjoy—that we were naturally inferior, and should silently bow to the government of those who were pleased to call themselves superior; and consequently those who have governed us have done so for their own advantage, and not ours. The existence of their power depending on the ignorance, the instilled prejudice, and cupidity of the multitude, they have formed their institutions for hoodwinking and keeping them in subjection. . . . Happily, however, for mankind, the floodgates of knowledge, which the tyrants of the world have raised to stem its torrent, are being broken down. We have tasted its refreshing stream; the mist of ignorance and delusion is past; we perceive the injustice practised on us, and feel the slavery from which we have not yet power to free ourselves. Our emancipation, however, will depend on the extent of this knowledge among the working classes of all countries, on its salutary effects in causing us to perceive our real position in society—in causing us to feel that we, being the producers of wealth, have the first claim to its enjoyment—that as education develops the intellect and better prepares men to fulfil their respective duties in society, those who produce the means of education have an equal and a natural right to its benefits—that as government is for the benefit of all, all have equal rights, according to their abilities, to fill any of its offices; and, as the laws are said to be for the benefit of all, all should have a voice in their enactment. When these principles are well understood by the working classes, the power which knowledge generates will soon lead to their general adoption; and then, fellow workmen, the tyrants of the world will lose their power, hypocrisy her mask, and the deceivers of mankind their credulous disciples.”

These statements are in the abstract true, of course; but by confining its activities beforehand, on the basis of these principles, to peaceful propaganda (chiefly by means of literature), to self-education, to the establishment of libraries etc., and by stipulating such conditions of membership as possession of the virtues of temperance, good character, and so forth, the Association doomed itself in advance to the position of a sect without any political influence upon the masses. After all, it was a mere truism to say that without the proper consciousness of social and political wrongs no social and political emancipation was possible; the question at issue was precisely *how* this consciousness could be aroused, and the methods chosen by the Association to this end were neither the only nor even the most effective ones. Theoretical propaganda

without action on the widest possible scale may influence some individuals, but cannot lay hold of the masses, while action awakens the consciousness of the masses with elemental irresistible force and brings it at the moment of crisis to a blaze.\* It is a great misfortune if the conditions are not ripe for such action, or if the ground has not been properly prepared or has been occupied by others; it is a still greater misfortune if the conditions exist while those engaged in the struggle fail to see them.

This was precisely the case with Lovett and his Association who failed to appreciate the existing situation and therefore considered it possible to engage only in slow, quiet, and, as it appeared to them, sure propagandist activity. The reason for their failure was that they were Londoners, and London, not being an industrial centre, did not feel the oppressive effects of the factory system or of the new Poor Law to the same extent as it was felt in the industrial North, where the masses were struggling violently in their meshes and engaged in bloody fights. Even to-day London does not reflect the true moods of the people, as Paris reflected it in France until recently. All the most important social movements in England have come from the industrial North, and this, by the way, is why foreigners coming to England, but staying only in London, usually carry away with them most distorted impressions.

It was no doubt on this account, too, that the Association so readily "hobnobbed" with the bourgeois radical elements and to some extent succumbed to their influence. All cats are grey at night, and in the dark hours preceding the awakening of class consciousness radical bourgeois politicians easily passed for "leaders of the people." As mentioned before, the very idea of the Association originated with Place, who five years previously had paralysed the movement in favour of universal suffrage. If now, in seeming contradiction to his own past, he helped to found an Association that was fighting for "equal political and social rights for all classes of society," it was because he knew that such a movement was bound to emerge sooner or later, and thought quite justly that it was best in the circumstances to forestall it and render it from the very outset as innocuous as possible. This shows what a shrewd and astute politician he was. He did not at all fear the Owenist background of the new movement. Owenism was an exceedingly peaceful doctrine, not only rejecting active political fighting, but

\* Marx said: "With the thoroughness of an historical action grows the mass of the body whose action it is."

actually (as subsequently proved by facts) opposing Chartism, offering in its place trade unionism and co-operation. Nevertheless, among the followers of Owenism were the most intelligent elements of the working class, and by directing them into bourgeois radical channels Place could hope for so much greater success. As a matter of fact, everything went smoothly at first: the Association, although issuing now and then excellent manifestoes on different topics, was devoting its main attention to theoretical discussions on social and political subjects, sharing with Place the profound conviction that the only way to attain the desired goal was by the slow education of the masses and by moral pressure upon the House of Commons.

However the year 1837 compelled the Association to come out of its shell and to contemplate the wide world of realities. The financial collapse in America brought about a severe crisis in England, and all the discontent of the people, repressed during the last five years, threatened to break out in a terrific storm. The Association decided to come forward with a demand for the complete democratic reform of Parliament, and instructed Lovett, its Secretary, and some other members to draw up a petition in this sense to Parliament. By February it was ready and adopted at a general meeting of the Association. Its introductory part, setting forth the purpose of the petition, is highly interesting. "We want to convince you and the country at large," it said, "that you do not represent the people of these realms; and to appeal to your sense of right and justice as well as to every principle of honour, for directly making such legislative enactments as shall cause the masses of the people to be represented."\* The petition proves its contention by official figures,† concluding: "Your petitioners therefore respectfully submit to your Honourable House that these facts afford abundant proof that you do not represent the numbers

\* Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

† "Out of a total number of males of over 21 years of age (over 6 millions) only 839,519 were electors, and the majority of the House—331 members—had been elected by only 151,492 voters, *i.e.*, by one fortieth of the adult male population; 15 members of the House were returned by under 200 electors; 55 under 300; 99 under 400; 121 under 500; 150 under 600; 196 under 700; 214 under 800; 240 under 900; and 256 under 1,000; and the Honourable House contained 1 marquess, 7 earls, 19 viscounts, 32 lords, 25 right honourables, 52 honourables, 63 baronets, 13 knights, 3 admirals and so on, including even 33 East India and 13 West India proprietors, and 114 patrons of church livings having the patronage of 274 livings between them."

or the interests of the millions; but that the persons composing it have interests for the most part foreign or directly opposed to the true interests of the great body of the people." To remedy such an abnormal state of affairs the petitioners asked for a reform of the Parliamentary suffrage to include the six points of the old Cartwright programme: universal suffrage, abolition of all property qualification, annual parliaments, equal constituencies, salaries for M.P.'s and the secret ballot. The petition was to be introduced in Parliament by one of the radical M.P.'s of that time (Roebuck); but the plan did not come off owing to the death of the King in July, and the new elections in the autumn.

The reason why this still-born petition deserves mention is that it gave rise to the term of "People's Charter." It happened that, in order to secure the backing of the petition by at least the radical M.P.'s, nine of them were invited to a special conference with the Committee of the Association in order to state their views. Nearly all expressed their sympathy with the programme, but each discovered one reason or another to call it "premature."\* By the efforts of Place, who was anxious to effect an understanding between the Association and the Radicals, their scruples were eventually overcome, and each one of them gave a written pledge to support the petition, and later on, the Bill itself. It was then that the Irish agitator, O'Connell, one of the participants in the conference (at that time he had a grudge against the Whigs for the coercion laws promulgated by them against Ireland, but subsequently he went back to the Whigs and became a bitter opponent of the Chartists), said to Lovett, handing him the petition after signing it: "There, Lovett, is your Charter, agitate for it, and never be content with anything less." The word "Charter" caught on, and soon it was universally adopted.

This first petition was not the historical Charter: the latter was drawn up a few months later and represented the draft of a Bill containing the aforesaid "six points." It was to serve as the programme of a new political Labour Party. By a strange whim of fate, the first manifesto of this party was also drawn up by the London Workingmen's Association, which thus seemed to be instinctively turning more and more towards the Left. In the elections of 1837 it issued a proclamation to the electors, appealing to them to take up a strictly independent attitude towards both the

\* This scene, so characteristic of Liberals in all countries and all times, is described by Lovett, *op. cit.* p. 111 *et. seq.*

Whigs and the Tories, and to support only those candidates who subscribed to the six points of the democratic programme. "Six years will soon have elapsed," ran the proclamation, "since the Reform Bill has become the law of the land. In order to carry out this measure, the help of the millions was required, and it was given by them cheerfully and honestly. They threw themselves heart and soul into the fight, and would have sacrificed their lives in order to attain that which, they were told, would bestow upon them all the blessings of liberty. Alas! the pledges, whereby their hopes had been raised, were not fulfilled, and the anticipated liberty did not come. . . . But now the people have already been taught by experience and will no longer fight for a measure which will deny them a share in the privileges accorded by it. . . . Within a few weeks from now will be drawn up and distributed the Bill under the name of 'The People's Charter,' which will contain the following points: [Here follows an enumeration and elucidation of the points]. It will serve as the rallying ground for radical reformers, and as the touchstone for those who describe themselves as the friends of the people. Let these principles become the pledge of every candidate appearing upon the platform. Do not let yourselves be hoodwinked by any promises to abolish the hateful Poor Law, or any of the other laws jointly enacted by Tories and Whigs; compel them to promise universal suffrage and the other essential measures of self-government."

These words reveal the first spark of proletarian political consciousness: no promises of reform are of any value without the guarantee of universal suffrage, which for many generations since has been considered the key to the political power of the working class. Only the people themselves, being in power, can pass reforms and carry them into effect. A sound understanding of the conditions of social progress is also revealed in the concluding words of the manifesto: "We are now on the threshold of a new reign, and the young and unprejudiced feelings of the Queen, and the education which she has received, have raised high hopes among many people. But . . . 'Put not your trust in princes,' says the old adage, and when we find among her Counsellors such people whose long list of evil doings has almost no equal in the very worst periods of tyranny, we, without in the least doubting her good intentions, prefer rather to rely on the force of justice of our demands, and on our united efforts in seeing them through, than upon the promises that a crowned head can give us."

This Bill-Programme\* was actually drawn up and distributed to all parts of England in the spring of 1838; but in the meantime a little incident occurred in the House of Commons, which at once secured wide popularity for the Bill. The new Parliament was convened in November 1837, and in the course of the usual debate upon the Queen's speech one of the radical M.P.'s moved a resolution in favour of the secret ballot and shorter terms of Parliament. Lord John Russell, who opposed the resolution on behalf of the Government, repeated the declaration made a few years previously by his colleagues, to the effect that the evolution of political institutions in England had been completed and that there would be no further Parliamentary reforms. Delivered at a moment when the people were groaning in the grip of a great crisis, this speech (which gained for its author the nickname "Finality Jack") at once brought to their feet both the working people and the radical elements, indicating at the same time the channel along which the long pent-up discontent was to rush. It was at this psychological moment that the "People's Charter" made its appearance and became the magnetic centre of the popular ferment. It formed the rallying ground for a new and distinct political movement. As Leeds, Feargus O'Connor founded a new journal, the *Northern Star*, which started a vigorous agitation for the Charter; at Birmingham, Thomas Attwood, famous since the agitation of 1831-32 (it was he who had threatened, if the Lords should be obdurate, to march on London at the head of 100,000 men), revived his old Political Union and huge mass meetings were held at the principal industrial centres. The first meeting of this kind

\* Here is the preamble to the famous historic document (Lovett, *op. cit.* p. 449):—

"Whereas, to insure, in as far as it is possible by human forethought and wisdom, the just government of the people, it is necessary to subject those who have the power of making laws to a wholesome and strict responsibility to those whose duty it is to obey them when made;

"And, whereas, this responsibility is best enforced through the instrumentality of a body which emanates directly from, and is itself immediately subject to, the whole people, and which completely represents their feelings and their interests;

"And, whereas, the Commons House of Parliament now exercises, in the name and on the supposed behalf of the people, the power of making laws, it ought, in order to fulfil with wisdom and with honesty the great duties imposed on it, to be made the faithful and accurate representation of the people's wishes, feelings, and interests;

"Be it therefore enacted . . ."

took place at Glasgow in May. It was attended by about 200,000 people, who had marched with 200 banners and 40 bands to a vacant field on the outskirts of the city. They were addressed by Attwood who had arrived for this purpose from Birmingham. At that meeting he outlined the programme of action that was subsequently adopted by the Chartists: a general convention, a petition to Parliament carrying millions of signatures, and then, if the petition be thrown out, "a solemn and holy strike." One month later at a demonstration of 80,000 people at Newcastle, addressed by O'Connor, and followed by a mass meeting of 200,000 people at Birmingham, Attwood again proposed the general strike and threatened the Government, in case of imprisonment, with the vengeance of 100,000 devoted followers, while O'Connor advocated a violent revolution; at a huge mass meeting of 250,000 people on Peer Green, half way between Leeds and Huddersfield, O'Connor appealed again for revolution, and so on. It was a veritable epidemic of huge mass meetings which, by their size and excitement, eclipsed the similar demonstrations of 1831-32.

The Bill in itself was only a battle-cry and not a method of action, and Attwood's idea of a monster-petition to Parliament and of calling a special Chartist Convention, was rapidly gaining popularity. Attwood himself drew up such a petition and jointly with Fielden, the M.P. for Oldham, undertook to introduce it into Parliament. The petition was drawn up in the same strain as the one at London in 1837. Describing the sad plight of industry in general, and of the working people in particular, it continues: "It was the fond expectation of the people that a remedy for the greater part, if not for the whole, of their grievances, would be found in the Reform Act of 1832. They have been bitterly and basely deceived. The fruit which looked so fair to the eye has turned to dust and ashes when gathered. The Reform Act has effected a transfer of power from one domineering faction to another, and left the people as helpless as before. Our slavery has been exchanged for an apprenticeship to liberty, which has aggravated the painful feeling of our social degradation, by adding to it the sickening of still deferred hope. We come before your Honourable House to tell you, with all humility, that this state of things must not be permitted to continue; that it cannot long continue without very seriously endangering the stability of the throne and the peace of the kingdom; and that if by God's help and all lawful and constitutional appliances, an end can be



put to it, we are fully resolved that it shall speedily come to an end." The petition then proceeds to enumerate the demands of the petitioners.\*

At a meeting of 300,000 people on Kersal Moor near Manchester, this National Petition was first adopted and signed, and amid scenes of universal enthusiasm the first delegates to the Chartists' Convention were elected. The crowd entered into a solemn covenant to support the delegates in the fulfilment of their perilous duties and to protect them, and that "if the rascally Whigs dare lay their hands on them and the people allow it, it shall be worthy of continuing in its present existence, in perpetual bondage."† Similar meetings were held in many other cities, and everywhere signatures were collected to the National Petition, and delegates elected to the Convention. Such was the course of events during the end of 1838 and the beginning of 1839.

\* Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

† Gammage, p. 62.

## CHAPTER FIVE PARTIES AND SECTIONS

"There might be no clear idea in their minds at the commencement of the movement for the Charter of the way in which political power was worked to their disadvantage. Still less might they be aware of the nature of those social measures which the possession of that power would enable them to apply for the improvement of their condition."—GAMMAGE.

WE are now on the eve of the open emergence of Chartism as an organised force, and it will be proper for us to pause awhile in our survey in order to examine its nature. This is all the more necessary since that nature was extremely heterogeneous, and this fact, to some extent, predetermined the fate of the whole movement. At any rate, at the outset the movement had to exert considerable effort to attain homogeneity, and this required a good deal of time, diverted energy from the immediate tactical aims, and gave the opponents time to gather their forces. The failure of the first Convention must be attributed mainly to this circumstance.

As we have seen, the idea of the struggle for the political rights of the workers originated with a group of Londoners associated with Lovett. We have also seen that, notwithstanding the social doctrines professed by them, they were strongly influenced by Place and his colleagues from among the radical bourgeoisie. According to Place's idea,\* the agitation for the Charter was to be purely political, to the entire exclusion of all social questions—even that of the abolition of the Poor Law—so that men of different political parties might take part in it. The adoption of such a broad platform would, according to Place, assure the success of the movement; to transform it into a class movement would be tantamount to foredooming it to failure. Place urged that the methods of agitation must be peaceful, educational and "moral," so as not to scare away people belonging to other classes. All this wisdom was duly assimilated by Lovett and his followers. When the Government, alarmed by the stormy agitation conducted by Feargus O'Connor, took vigorous measures for its suppression, the

\* Wallas, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

London Association made haste to issue a manifesto\* in which it condemned incendiary speeches of any kind, emphasising that the Charter was the most innocent thing in the world: "Land, labour and capital," they declared, "are the great sources of wealth, and are dependent each upon the other, and justice demands that in all the arrangements necessary for production and distribution, equality in legislation should prevail." When O'Connor came to London to make his "incendiary" speeches there, Lovett openly assailed him, accusing him of frightening away thousands of people by his speeches, and threatening to leave the movement if the agitation was carried on according to O'Connor's precepts. "There is nothing to be gained for the cause," he declared,† "by rude attacks upon the Poor Law or any other unfair measure of this kind." Naturally the Association did not exercise any influence over the working masses and, as against the huge mass meetings held in the North, could only muster comparatively small meetings with an attendance rarely exceeding a few thousands. Attwood quote properly described it as "a little clique of people who had as much influence over the workers of London as over the workers of Constantinople," while O'Connor threatened them with the "unshorn chins, blistered hands, and fustian jackets" of his supporters among the factory workers.‡

Before this a vigorous opposition had arisen within the Association itself against the opportunist policy of its leaders which after prolonged quarrels, led to a formal split in March, 1838. A part of the members, led by 24-year old Julian Harney, broke away and formed a new group under the name of "The Democratic Association," which was one of the most remarkable of all the organisations then existing. It may be said to have been the only organisation at the time which succeeded, to a certain extent, in properly connecting the ultimate aims of the economic emancipation of the proletariat with its political class action, thus creating the supreme synthesis which was subsequently to be embodied in the modern Labour movement. The group had a common programme with the followers of Owen and Lovett. In line with them it declared its supreme object and aim to be the abolition of inequality and the establishment of "universal happiness," putting forward as palliatives an eight-hour working day for adults and the

\* Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 178

† *Northern Star*, December 29, 1838.

‡ Wallas, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.

abolition of all child labour, the repeal of the Poor Law Act of 1834, the legalisation of trade unions, complete liberty of the press, general school education, and so forth.\* Its journal said: "There is only one remedy for the evils with which society is afflicted: equality of rights, equality of conditions. Universal Suffrage is a means to establish equality. But unless the 'People's Charter' is followed by measures to equalise the condition of all, the producing classes will still be oppressed and the country will probably be involved in the most disastrous calamities."† How was universal suffrage to be achieved? On this question Harney and his friends parted company with the opportunist Lovettists and joined the revolutionary wing of the Chartists. In a manifesto‡ issued by them concerning their separation from the Lovett section they declared that although they did not in the least dispute the value of peaceful educational propaganda, they considered it quite utopian to rely upon that activity alone: "What our enemies will not give us out of respect for justice, they are not going to yield to us as the result of moral suasion." "The Working Men's Associations are as an engine in the hands of some designing enemies . . . of the working millions, whose endeavour is to concentrate, by the establishment of this and other such light delusions, the abilities and energies of the people, and then to nullify their effects."§ The Democratic Association warned the working class against forming an alliance with the bourgeoisie: "Base, hypocritical and assassin-like they will join the movement only to divide it. . . . Whatever the middle classes have ever taken into hand has turned out to the people's cost to be delusive and fraudulent; therefore, as the producing classes intend to regenerate their country, they must rely on themselves and on themselves alone."|| These words seem to anticipate the voice of Marx in formulating the principles of the First International.¶ Harney went on to advocate resolute action:

"In the event of Parliament being dissolved before the presentation of the National Petition, or before the *Honourable* (Scoundrel) House have given their decision upon the People's

\* *Northern Star*, July 21, 1838.

† *The London Democrat*, April 13, 1839.

‡ *Northern Star*, March 24, 1838.

§ *Ibid.*, March 24, 1838.

|| *London Democrat*, April 1, 1839.

¶ "The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself."

Charter, what should the people do? . . . My answer is, let them really and truly 'take their affairs into their own hands.' . . . My recommendation is, the Queen's Writ for a new election of members being proclaimed, let the people of each county, city and borough, where democracy hath reared its head, assemble at the place of nomination on the day appointed and then and there nominate the men of their choice. . . . The Universal Suffrage Man will be elected in nineteen cases out of twenty. . . . To elect representatives without enabling them to take their seats in the legislature would be the veriest farce imaginable. To complete the good work, it will be necessary that each representative should be furnished with a body-guard of sturdy *sans-culottes* some thousands strong, the number, of course, varying according to the strength of the democracy of the district. . . . 'The million of men,' with their representatives would encamp for one night on Hampstead Heath, and the following morning march upon London. . . . 'If the House of Commons should not be dissolved and reject the Charter, what then should the people do?' Your duty, working men, will then be to meet in countless thousands. Every district should send its deputation on a given day to a certain place and march from thence right on to London. . . . At what more fitting opportunity could the Men of the North commence this journey; the weather is fine and good, their hearts are anxiously beating in expectation of the word of command; they pant to be free and they know that London must be the battle-field."\*

We shall see later how from this standpoint he criticised all other measures suggested at that time. For the present it is sufficient to mention that when the Convention was in session, the Democratic Association played in regard to it the role of a Jacobin Club, and in the Convention itself Harney and his friends took their seats on the "Mountain."

We know now that Harney was perfectly right, and we can only wonder how it came about that ten years prior to the appearance of the *Communist Manifesto*, and thirty years before the founding of the International, a self-taught young man managed to anticipate some of the things subsequently taught by Marx and Engels to their contemporaries. But in this very fact, in this anticipation of things which matured only a generation later, lay the tragic historical aspect of the situation. The English proletariat, as we shall presently see, was not yet ready for the reception

\* *London Democrat*, April 27 and May 4, 1839.

of such doctrines, and the Democratic Association was doomed to play the part of a wandering comet. Least of all could it count on success in London, where, as we have seen, there was no homogeneous and concentrated proletariat.

The idea of a political struggle for the Charter was taken up in the North, and there launched among the masses of the people. This was particularly the case at Birmingham, where political agitation on a mass scale had become a sort of fine art in 1831-32. To Birmingham belongs the credit of having brought the movement down from the heights of bourgeois radicalism into the lower ranks of the people. It had also worked out such methods of action as huge mass meetings and mass petitions, summoning a Convention—the Chartist Parliament—and a general strike. Thanks to this and to its former reputation Birmingham from 1839 became the prime moving force of the movement, leaving the Londoners entirely in the background. O'Connor even formally acknowledged Birmingham's supremacy, and on behalf of his organisation declared his implicit faith in Attwood and his club, and his readiness to follow their lead. Nevertheless there were already at that time some far-seeing people, like O'Brien and Oastler, who doubted the political reliability of these people. The fact was that Birmingham was by no means a proletarian city, such as were, for instance, the Lancashire and Yorkshire towns. Its working class population consisted chiefly of independent artisans or skilled workers receiving high wages in the arms factories and similar establishments. They did not feel the effects of the Poor Law, neither had they as yet experienced the full weight of the capitalist yoke. They were more interested in the abolition of the corn laws and in the reform of taxation. The discontent was wholly of a petty middle class character, which furnished good ground for all kinds of political red-herrings hawked about by Attwood and his colleagues in the Birmingham Political Union. Attwood was a wealthy banker, and he saw the root of all the evil in Peel's Currency Act of 1819, which had provided for the payment of interest on the national debt in gold. As the loans contracted during the Napoleonic wars had been made at the nominal price of the paper money in circulation at the time, the creditors, by the passing of Peel's Act, received a present of some hundred million pounds from the treasury. Attwood came to the conclusion that this was the source of all the calamities, and insisted on the abolition of the gold standard and

its replacement by paper money. It was for the sake of this reform that he had fought for the Reform Bill in 1832, and on seeing that the new Parliament would be just as unwilling to listen to his projects as had been its predecessor, he, after some hesitation, threw in his lot with the Chartists. He was followed, after still greater hesitation and under pressure from the members of the Union, by the whole Administrative Council, and petty middle class Birmingham thus ranged itself on the side of the Charter.\* In this way a totally alien element was introduced into the movement. To be sure, it wore a proletarian cloak—brave revolutionary phraseology, mass demonstrations, plans for a general strike; but all this lacked the essential substance of proletarian action, viz., the resolve not to shrink from the most extreme measures. Here, for instance, is Attwood's picture of the most revolutionary of the measures suggested by himself, the general strike, or the "sacred week," as he called it. "On the first day of the week," he said,† "we will offer up on our bended knees, a solemn prayer to Almighty God for his blessing on our righteous cause. On the second day, we will enter into a solemn league and covenant with each other, swearing that we will never cease from legal exertions, until the national petition shall have been carried into law. The third day of the week we will devote to a general canvass of all the electors of the House of Commons; and so we will go on from day to day, to the end of the week, which will be the most memorable in the history of the world. I may perish; but if I live to conduct this great operation, and the people support me, I promise you that our country shall exhibit such a sublime spectacle as the wide earth and the wide range of history never exhibited before." It can easily be seen that the general strike—a terrible double-edged weapon to which the proletariat resorts only in extreme cases—was made by Attwood into a sort of theatrical demonstration for which even he himself could not find the proper content. And what if it failed? What if the "legal exertions" should fail to scare the ruling class and the "sublime spectacle" not impress them? To such a question Attwood would have probably found no reply since extreme measures, as shown by subsequent events, were taboo to him. As a matter of fact his closest colleagues were not even prepared to go the full length of the few measures proposed by

\* A brilliant exposure of the underlying motives of the Birmingham school was given by O'Brien in the *Northern Star* of June 16, 1838.

† *Birmingham Journal*, June 19, 1841.

him, and refused to go beyond presenting a petition. We shall presently see how they took advantage of the first plausible pretext to leave the movement as soon as it began to incline towards revolutionary measures; some of them—notably Mr. Muntz, also a banker and a J.P., who was one of Attwood's closest associates—openly betrayed the movement, presiding or assisting at the courts which tried their former comrades, and sentencing them to heavy terms of imprisonment and exile.

Neither the Lovettists nor the Birmingham Union represented the true character of the Chartist movement, which could be proletarian or nothing at all. The former lost all importance before the opening of the Convention which was to mark the first public appearance of the Chartists as a political party and the latter shortly after. The centre of gravity of the movement shifted to the factory proletariat of Lancashire, Yorkshire and South Wales, to whom the Charter was, to use an expression of the Rev. J. R. Stephens, "a knife and fork question," a question of the most material needs. Here we have not revolutionary phrases, but genuine revolutionary energy which had repeatedly proved itself in the fight against the Poor Law; here we have no mere paper plans of reform, but real schemes of social changes leading to the abolition of the political and economic denomination of capital itself. This genuinely proletarian current in Chartism—one which prevailed over all others and gave the movement its historic character—found its supreme embodiment in its leaders: Feargus O'Connor, James Bronterre O'Brien, Henry Taylor, John Frost, and later Ernest Jones. The majority of them possessed first-hand knowledge of the industrial north, and had been eye witnesses of the Whig treachery and of the working of the new Poor Law. Julian Harney was their closest associate. Together they saw in the success of the Charter merely a way to a people's government and to the transformation of the social and economic system. Like him they insisted on a strictly class-basis for their political action and revolutionary tactics. They differed from him in that they considered an armed rising, *i.e.*, the revolution, as the "last measure" to which recourse should be had only when there was a fair chance of success. It should therefore be prepared in the meantime by organisation, propaganda and action such as simultaneous mass-meetings, demonstrations and a general strike, but in no circumstances should it be decreed from above or precipitated by sporadic outbursts. On the whole, their views upon this



question were very close to those subsequently entertained by most of the Marxist Socialist parties.

In their social views, however, they differed radically from the latter. Being as yet unable to grasp the dialectical character of the capitalist process and remembering, instead, the violent and "artificial" character of the stage known as "primitive accumulation," they looked for the economic emancipation of the people not to the further development of capitalism, but to its abolition and to a return to the pre-capitalist order—to the time when the land had not yet been enclosed and had belonged to "the people." "The system I combat and which I wish you to combat is that by which your profit-mongering oppressors have turned you from agriculturalists into manufacturers for all the world," declared O'Brien.\* "Now, I am not against manufacturers nor against the fine arts, nor against even the largest possible extension and application of both to the purposes of human economy, but I am against the system which would first make these paramount to agriculture and then bestow all the advantages of both on an upstart moneyed aristocracy who, in drawing you from off the land, have made you more abject slaves to their cupidity than your forefathers ever were to the feudal barons of the middle ages."

"For," he said in another place,† "all the slavery in our towns, as well as all the slavery upon our farms, is the work of land monopoly. 'Tis not so much what the landlord takes himself, 'tis not even what he enables his vassal-tenants to exact, that makes landlordism so horrible. The deep damnation of his offence lies in his driving the mass of mankind to become the hired slaves of middle class demons, to live under whom is to a man of mind and feeling a thousand times worse than death. No man grudges work when he works for himself or for those who will work for him in return. But to be forced to be the hired slave, all one's life, of some hard grinding middle class devil, who has no earthly sympathies in common with you, who looks upon and treats you as a slave, and looks upon himself as your benefactor for letting you live at all, to drudge and vegetate under such a being as that is, indeed, the perfection of misery. Yet, that is the fate imposed by landlords and money lords upon nine-tenths of mankind."

It is interesting to enquire how these people pictured to them-

\* *National Reformer*, January 7, 1847.

† *Ibid.*, Oct. 16, 1846.

selves the return to the pre-capitalist period—whether by the establishment of small private property holdings or by the introduction of social (collectivist) production? It appears that at least, the *Northern Star*, the leading organ of the party, did not see beyond “one’s own plot of land,” and O’Connor, the publisher of the paper, declared in a public speech\* that he was neither a Socialist nor a Communist, as that principle was opposed to the “instincts of mankind” and would destroy all incentives to industry. All he wanted was a “proper distribution of wealth,” by taxing the “aristocracy” and establishing peasant proprietorship. “Then,” he says, “we shall have the three states of the Empire working harmoniously together, the people and the aristocracy reciprocally depending upon each other for comfort and advice, always recognising the right of property in its fullest sense to be in the labour of the working classes.”†

As against this O’Brien (“The Schoolmaster,” as he was nicknamed by his comrades for his erudition and philosophical views) had a much wider outlook upon the question. To him private property was “legalised plunder”; and hence “that deadly war of those who *want* against those who *have*, and all the sanguinary laws resorted to by the latter for their protection.”‡ In the direct gifts of nature there could be no private property. God had intended them for all; whereas the products of labour were being appropriated by the capitalists owing to the unjust laws which enabled them to monopolise credit and money.§ For this reason he did not simply advocate a return to the pre-capitalist stage of social development. Since the stage of machinery had made its appearance, it enabled the people to lead a happier life, if only they would become the owners of land and machinery, instead of being machines at the service of “scoundrels” who had gradually captured the possession of both.|| He outlined both his minimum and maximum programme in one of his numerous articles, *What is Universal Suffrage?* “With universal suffrage,” he says, “you obtain a power over the tenures by which land is held unoccupied—a power over monetary affairs of the country—a power to establish a national bank of issue, and as many credit

\* *Northern Star*, October 23, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1836.

‡ See his remarkable article in the *Poor Man’s Guardian*, Oct. 4, 1838.

§ *Northern Star*, March 27, 1841 and July 13, 1839.

|| *Ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1838.

or loan banks as you think proper, for the accommodation of industrious artisans and labourers of good character—a power over 30,000,000 acres of land, which are now waste or next to waste and 15,000,000 of which are capable of cultivation—a power over the Crown lands in this country and over the public land in our colonies—a power over corporation funds, charitable endowments, and every other description of public property, including all the tithes, and all the Church lands, now appropriated exclusively by the upper and middle classes—a power over national taxation as well as over local assessments of every sort, and what is greater than all the rest, a power to establish industrial communities of your own, in which you may command instead of, as now, begging employment, and in which there need be no other limit to your production than the gratification of your own wants.”\*

O'Connor and O'Brien represented the two main schools in the general proletarian section of Chartism. Neither of them understood the economic and historic role of capital, whose power, in their view, was merely due to knavery and plunder, which could be stopped by legislation. But while the former's outlook did not rise above a mere redistribution of land, the latter saw the need of socialisation of the land and of the means of production—at least in agriculture, as a guarantee against “wage slavery for the middle class demons.” This, of course, is far removed from the aspirations of modern working class parties; in its essence it is a restatement of the doctrines of Robert Owen; nevertheless if the Chartist masses had followed O'Brien, the history of England would have been shaped differently. But in history it is preposterous to use the conditional mood. The English proletariat in the 30's and 40's of the last century could not have followed O'Brien because it was then just emerging as a class, and its eyes were turned to the past rather than to the future. The component elements of the future were not yet visible, while the past was still in evidence as fragments and survivals of all sorts. Obviously, the views of O'Connor were bound to meet with wider recognition.

However, we are anticipating. At this juncture we are only concerned with the first appearance of Chartism on the stage of history, and it would be well to take note of a highly characteristic fact which was not without its effect upon the subsequent fate of the movement. We have in mind the co-operation established, on the grounds of common hatred for the new factory system, between

\* *Ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1838.

the left wing of Chartism—the “physical force party” as it was called—and some of the Tory elements, like Oastler, Stephens and Fielden. These were real, live Tories, devotees of the Church, the monarchy, and land rents. But they were old-fashioned Tories, romantic Tories, whose whole soul rebelled against capitalism which, with cynical callousness, was turning the “good old” England upside down and bringing material and moral disintegration into the historic life-forms of the people and of society. To them capital was both the symbol of the destruction of the old customs—*mores majorum*—and the expression of various harmful innovations—*res nova*—and as good Conservatives they were horror-stricken to see the State, the Church, the Law, and even the Crown, ranging themselves on the side of capital and immolating on its altar everything which England had hitherto cherished. This appeared to them the destruction of the old-established order, and as good British citizens who had gone through the school of Hampden and the American revolutionaries, they considered it their right not only to protest against such lawlessness, not only to refuse to submit to it, but even to fight weapon in hand. “I have no wish,” Oastler declared in one of his famous open letters to Lord John Russell, the “basest among the base Whigs,” “to see society disorganised—to see the Government and People pitched in bloody array against each other. It would be no solace to my mind to see the downfall of the British Throne, and to see the people of England laughing when the landlords claim their rents. I am a loyal subject of the Queen, I am the friend of the aristocracy and have sacrificed much on their account. I revere the national Church and have always told the people so; but if the Church, the Throne, and the aristocracy are determined to rob the poor man of his liberty, of his wife and of his children, then is the Church no longer that of Christ;—then is the Throne no longer that of England—then are the nobles no longer safeguards of the people—then are they worse than useless; then with their bitterest foes, would I cry, *Down with them, Down with them all to the ground.*”\*

Similar views were held both by Fielden and by Stephens. The former declared: “Now, I am so far a Conservative that I do not wish to see the old English institutions destroyed; I am so far a Conservative that I will exert myself to the utmost of my power, and I will call upon the people to back me, to prevent the

\* *Ibid.*, January 20, 1838.

destruction of those institutions which the radicals never asked to be destroyed but which is now proved the Whigs do wish to destroy . . . ." He (Mr. Fielden) believed it would be found, after all, that the real radicals, those who sought for universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and vote by ballot, would be the best Conservatives of the country.\* Stephens said that "he came forward as a man, as a British subject, and as a Christian minister, to declare that the labourer and the husbandman shall first of all in the community be partakers of the fruits of the soil."†

Of course, it would be a big mistake to count them among the Chartists, to whom they themselves had never claimed to belong. It is true that Fielden, as we have seen, was a supporter of the Charter: together with Attwood he fought in Parliament for universal suffrage, hoping by that means to abolish the hateful Poor Law, to prohibit child labour, and to limit the working day to 10 hours. Further than that, however, his intentions never went.‡ A diametrically opposite standpoint was taken by Oastler. He bluntly and honestly declared§ that he did not believe in universal suffrage, as it would not mean "universal justice": it would create, instead of the tyranny of the minority, that of the majority, and he was the enemy of tyranny in any shape or form. An intermediate position between them was occupied by Stephens. He was in favour of universal suffrage. "The principle of universal suffrage," he declared, "was one which tens of thousands knew had ever been dear to his heart, and one which he would continue to advocate and disseminate to the utmost of his power."|| It was for this reason that he was elected a delegate to the Convention. Nevertheless he never put in an appearance there, because he was resolutely opposed to political methods of action. "I am not a political agitator," he said, "there is not a man who ever heard me propound any theory of politics or any system of political economy."¶ He considered the National Petition a worthless scrap of paper, the idea of the general strike a harmful chimera, and instead of the six points of the Charter he recognised only one: "a good prayer and a long

\* *Ibid.*, June 9, 1838.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1838.

§ *Ibid.*, April 27, 1839.

|| *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1839.

¶ *Ibid.*, June 29, 1838.

spear.”\* Many considered those words as opposition, even as treachery to the cause; but such accusations were groundless; Stephens was a Conservative-Libertarian, a purely English product of the type one still meets nowadays, and while he had an understanding of *popular* revolution, he did not understand a political *class* struggle.

We have dwelt on this Tory-revolutionary tendency because, firstly, it has frequently been confounded with that of Chartism; and secondly, it helped to imbue the minds of the workers with such ideals as were subsequently to furnish the ground for befogging the class-consciousness of the proletariat and its revolutionary tactics. If the indignation of the working class is to be justified by the fact that the aristocracy, the Church and the monarchy forget their “historical” duties towards the people, it will lose its *raison d’être* the moment these patrons of the people remember them again. As we shall see, this was the very thing which happened, and Chartism lost a number of its adherents. It should be admitted, however, that this was not the principal misfortune of the movement. Its first task was to settle some elementary questions pertaining to the tactics and forms of the struggle, and this was accomplished by the Convention.

\* *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1839.

## CHAPTER SIX THE CONVENTION

“If all the workers throughout the country were as convinced of the need for universal suffrage as are the workers in the North, then we might be able to unite upon some common plan. So far, however, you cannot suggest a single plan without subjecting yourselves and the very cause to immediate peril.”—  
O'BRIEN.

THE Convention was opened in London on February 4th, 1839, its object being, as stated in the resolution of the Birmingham meeting where Attwood had first suggested the idea of calling it, to take all the legal steps necessary to compel Parliament to give legal force to the demands contained in the National Petition. It is hard to tell what Attwood understood by legal steps, and why the calling of a Convention was necessary. Nevertheless, the representatives of the revolutionary section entertained, no doubt, some remote idea of turning the Convention into a national representative assembly which having been elected by the people at public meetings, might be in a position to challenge the authority and power of Parliament, or at least to exercise pressure upon it by means of resolutions, remonstrances etc. At any rate, both sides put great hopes in the Convention, so much so that in hailing its opening the *Northern Star* of February 7th, 1839, apologised for having previously put down the date of carrying the Charter into law as late as September 29th. Now it declared itself in perfect agreement with one of the London speakers who had allowed the Queen one month and three days in which to enact universal suffrage! Events were soon to show how greatly both sides had misjudged the situation.

The very composition of the Convention warranted no bright hopes. There were 53 delegates of whom eight were from Birmingham alone. Of this number three were magistrates, six newspaper editors, one a clergyman of the Church of England, one a Dissenting Minister, and two doctors of medicine, the remainder being shopkeepers, tradesmen, and journeymen.\* Such a motley composition might not in itself have been significant, had it not been accompanied by a correspondingly varied mixture of

\* Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

outlooks represented by the delegates. Unfortunately, this heterogeneity was considered an augury for successful work. In the eyes of the majority of those assembled on February 4th, the Charter was still the embodiment of abstract and universal justice, and the fact that the Convention was made up of various elements, who had for the time being sunk their class and party differences for the sake of the Charter, seemed a factor containing strong promise of victory. Francis Place alone, who had originated the idea of such "concentration of efforts" and "co-operation of classes," saw the true significance of this factor, and was secretly elated over it; similar, if not so conscious, were the feelings of the Birmingham delegates who, according to Oastler,\* had deliberately come to the Convention to weaken its revolutionary policy. In fact, only the proletarian representatives, as frequently happens, were led astray by the illusion and believed in the force of super-class justice.

Another circumstance which did not promise rapid success was that, in spite of all the stormy agitation in the preceding six months, the number of signatures to the petition brought to the Convention by the delegates did not exceed half a million. Considering that the petition was to be a "national" one and presented on February 28th, this insignificant number of signatures indicated that the public was unprepared and that the calling of the Convention was premature. This was soon realised by the delegates themselves. Having vainly waited for three weeks, and seeing the futility of their appeals through the press, the Convention decided on the 26th to defer the presentation of the petition until May 6th, and to send out emissaries to the provinces, in groups of 15 chosen by lot, for a period of three weeks, to renew the agitation and collect more signatures. This was a half measure which could not but damage the cause: on the one hand it was a disappointment to that section of the public which had expected to see the petition in Parliament on the 28th, and on the other it appreciably reduced the attendance at the Convention and doomed it to perilous inactivity. It would have been wiser to follow the advice of the leading organ of the Birminghamites† to adjourn the Convention altogether, and to take up the work of agitation and organisation among the people. The reluctance to adjourn

\* *Northern Star*, April 27, 1839.

† *Birmingham Journal*, quoted by the *Northern Star*, of February 23, 1839.



the Convention was no doubt due, to some extent, to the intention of the revolutionary element, now that the idea of the petition had apparently fizzled out, to compel the Convention to resort to more decisive measures.

The third factor which influenced the course of events was the choice of London as the meeting place. A worse choice could scarcely have been made. London was neither in a revolutionary mood nor organised, nor did it have behind it a working class public. In assembling there, the Convention did not feel the presence of the masses, nor were the masses aware of its existence. This was fatal. In vain did the Democratic Association try to make good this deficiency by addressing resolutions to the Convention on behalf of "the people," demanding vigorous action. The moderate parties saw that the Association had no following, and replied to such interference in the business of the Convention by protests and demands for the expulsion of its leaders from the Convention. Even after the Convention, upon the withdrawal of the Birmingham delegates, had adopted the resolution urged by the Association to the effect that every English citizen had the right to carry arms in order to meet acts of "injustice and oppression," it had no idea of the means for carrying such resolutions into effect, or generally, of the expediency of such a course. Finally, early in May, the Convention decided to leave London, but instead of moving to Manchester, Leeds or Glasgow, where a revolutionary proletariat was alive and acting, it chose middle-class Birmingham in the hope, as explained by O'Connor, of "imbuing its sleepy inhabitants with new revolutionary ardour." But the Government had sized up the situation much better than the Convention: it provoked disorder and then suppressed it with great savagery, it arrested the Chartist leaders, and the shattered Convention had, after a while, to return to London.

These three factors foredoomed the Convention to failure: its time was spent in factional strife, in the carrying and rescinding of resolutions, and above all, in hesitation and indecision.

Factional strife started almost from the very beginning. After the appointment of a commission, as urged by the "moderates," to interview various members of Parliament in order to secure their support to the petition—a commission on which Harney refused to serve, declaring that he believed neither in petitions nor in lobbying—the "Mountain" moved the appointment of a concurrent commission to discuss "ulterior measures"

in the event of the petition failing. This at once revealed the divided counsels which existed in the Convention: while O'Brien, for instance, opposed the motion merely because it was premature, the Birmingham party objected on principle to raising such a question, declaring that the business of the Convention was to hand in the petition and to disband, whereas the discussion of "ulterior measures" smacked of revolution and went beyond their competency. The debates on this question lasted very long, and the moderates won the day. But the "Mountain" did not give in and carried the agitation into the street, accusing the Convention of cowardice and inactivity, and insisting on revolutionary measures. It was then that one of the Birmingham leaders, William Cobbett, the son of the famous Radical, ostentatiously threw up his credentials and left London. His colleagues remained, and on the question of the instructions to be given to the delegates sent to the provinces, they even scored a victory by getting the Convention to instruct the emissaries to refrain from advocating revolutionary measures or delivering incendiary speeches. This was their last victory. After long bickerings, having lost all patience with the incendiary speeches of Harney, they also threw in their credentials and went back to Birmingham.

Such was the prologue to the Convention: it took six weeks to get rid of the bourgeois-radical elements. True, the Birmingham delegates were rebuked by their constituents, who sent others to take their place; but the new delegates took hardly any part in the debates, and the representatives of the working class remained the masters of the situation. Then the strife began between the "physical force" and "moral force" parties. By that time it had become clear that the petition would not be ready for presentation even in May, and therefore on the return of the agitators from the country it was decided to organise simultaneous mass meetings everywhere, in support of the petition, on Whit Sunday, May 20th. Here another difficulty arose: the Government, apprehending disorder, issued a proclamation warning the people against seditious speeches and acts. This caused Lovett and his associates to demand the formal repudiation of "physical measures," while the "Mountain" insisted on ignoring the Government's warning. A lengthy discussion ensued which ended in a compromise: the Convention issued a manifesto to the people urging calm behaviour at the meetings, and advising them to avoid provoking the authorities, to keep arms in readiness, but

to employ them only in self-defence. At the same time a commission was appointed to discuss "ulterior measures."

These debates and decisions took up the whole of April and the beginning of May, and on the 11th the Convention decided to move to Birmingham. The last decision was adopted not without strong opposition from the "moral force" party. According to O'Connor and O'Brien, the sponsors of this plan, the Convention should be located during the discussion of the petition in Parliament in some central place of the movement, in order to be prepared for all eventualities. By the latter was meant, of course, the possibility of the petition's failure, and an outburst of indignation on the part of the disappointed public. But such dangerous possibilities were the very things that Lovett was anxious to avoid, and he therefore insisted that the Convention should stay in London until the fate of the petition had been decided. He also insisted on the "ulterior measures" being discussed there, so that the removal to Birmingham constituted a decisive victory for the "physical force party," which from that time on led the whole movement. Immediately on arriving at Birmingham (May 14th) the "ulterior measures" commission submitted its report. Its recommendations in the event of a defeat of the petition in Parliament, provided for a series of "peaceful" revolutionary measures, such as a run on the banks, abstention from excise liquors, trade boycott of the opponents of the Charter, the arming of the people, and finally a one-month general strike. These recommendations led to violent debates. On the one hand, the Lovettists would not hear of such "peaceful" measures. On the other they were scathingly criticised by Harney. He pointed out\* that the proletariat had no current accounts at the banks, that the abstention from excise liquor would deprive it of the only luxury it could afford to relieve its miserable existence, and that a general strike was only useful if it served as a prelude to revolution, since the ruling classes could not be subdued by famine, and the strike would end either in the surrender of the workers or in a collision with the armed forces of the Government. Eventually it was decided to accept the recommendations of the commission on the condition of their being approved at the public meetings which were to be held on May 20th. Nevertheless some of the "moral force" people thought they could no longer stay in the Convention, and withdrew from it.

\* *London Democrat*, May 4, 1839.

The time appointed for the organisation of simultaneous demonstrations in support of the Charter was drawing near, and the delegates had to betake themselves into the country to take charge of them. At the same time Attwood, who together with Fielden had undertaken to present the petition to Parliament, reported that it could not be presented before the middle of June and that it would be discussed only on July 14th. The Convention found itself in a deplorable situation. The mass meetings which were to be held on the eve of the decision of the fate of the petition, as a sort of popular demonstration, lost their meaning, and the Convention itself became useless, since all its preparations had been planned in the event of the petition's defeat. It suddenly dawned on the Convention that all the three months spent in debate had been a waste of time, and that it had done absolutely nothing to prepare the people for the struggle ahead. And, as though to aggravate the situation, the Government began a vigorous persecution of the Chartists, arresting their speakers, flooding the working class quarters with police and troops, calling out middle class special constables, and issuing new proclamations forbidding the formation of secret clubs for training in the use of arms. The Convention, realising its impotence, decided to adjourn its sessions altogether until July 1st, and to make use of the interval to prepare the public for extreme measures. This of course, was the most sensible thing for it to do; it would have been even more sensible had it done so sooner. For the rest, the Convention, before dispersing, adopted a resolution that in the event of the Government interfering with the public meetings, its members were to meet again and declare themselves in permanent session, and immediately appeal to the people to carry out the aforesaid "peaceful" revolutionary measures.

Happily or unhappily, it didn't come to that. The announced mass meetings were duly held on Whit Sunday in all the centres of the movement, attended by hundreds of thousands of people, and despite all the roughness and provocation of the authorities, they proved to be perfectly orderly. Members of the Convention addressed all these meetings, and its resolutions were carried unanimously. The Convention could therefore reassemble on July 1st with greater courage: it felt that it had received a mandate from the people to resort, if needs be, to extreme measures. But the Government had a little surprise in store. Having failed to deal with the whole people gathered at public meetings, the

Government made up its mind at all costs to destroy the Convention, and for this purpose it decided to provoke disorders in Birmingham. A state of emergency was proclaimed, and the city flooded with troops, while the local authorities issued an injunction against all meetings, particularly at the Bull Ring, the "Forum," which had served as a meeting ground in the agitations of 1831-32. The Convention decided to avoid provocation, and issued a manifesto to the people, calling upon them to carry into effect all the "ulterior measures" except the general strike (which it was decided to postpone until the fate of the petition had become known), after which the Convention was to dissolve and to meet again in London on the 10th of the same month. This of course looked very much like a flight, and it would probably have been much better to move to some revolutionary centre and there to prepare for action. But the Government forestalled either of these possibilities. On the very eve of the departure of the Convention a squad of police summoned by the local authorities arrived from London and marched straight from the railway station to the Bull Ring where a crowd was peacefully listening to the reading of newspapers, and carried out a savage assault. About 80 people were arrested, including Dr. Taylor, one of the members of the Convention, who was trying to calm the crowd, and Lovett, who, acting as secretary of the Convention, signed a manifesto the day after the assault, protesting against the conduct of the Government and of the local authorities. Martial law was proclaimed in the city,\* and all gatherings were dispersed by the police force. Finally the people lost their temper: fires were started and shops on the main streets smashed. For two or three days Birmingham was in the hands of the people, but the party of "law and order," backed by the armed force of special constables, eventually got the upper hand.

News of the event travelled rapidly, and huge demonstrations of protest against the actions of the Government were held at Newcastle, Glasgow, Sunderland and many other towns in Lancashire and Scotland, ending almost invariably in sanguinary encounters with the troops and the police. At the same time further arrests were made, and among the victims were both O'Connor and O'Brien. Although most of those arrested were let out on bail after a preliminary examination, it seemed certain that the Government was preparing for a monster trial which was

\* Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 146

to place all the Chartist leaders behind bolts and bars. The only hope lay in decisive action, and had the Convention called there and then for an insurrection, the industrial proletariat would probably have answered the call. Advice in this sense was given by the *Northern Star* (July 13th, 1839), which urged the Convention to appoint a committee of thirteen to be in permanent session as the National Council in London, while the remaining thirty members were to travel over the country and organise an insurrection. But the Convention, split by the Lovettists, did not follow such a course, contenting itself with protesting against the illegal action of the Government and proclaiming the constitutional right of every British citizen to resist armed aggression by force.

This meant the open bankruptcy of the Convention. By its hesitation it showed the ruling classes that it need not be taken seriously, while at the same time it allowed the revolutionary sentiment of the workers to cool down, or what was still worse, to spend itself in isolated outbursts. The consequences were not slow in coming. On July 12th the petition, bearing a million and a quarter signatures, was at last debated in the House of Commons, and promptly rejected by a huge majority. The Convention could think of no better course than to discuss the question of declaring a general strike, finally arriving at the conclusion that the time was not opportune for such action. Either revolution or nothing—thus was the situation summed up by the committee appointed by the Convention to examine the situation—there could be no middle course. The Convention refused to take any middle course, and rejected revolutionary action. "In ordinary times," O'Brien declared,\* "the Convention could not with safety to itself, or with advantage to the cause, assume a bolder position, or recommend more decisive measures than it had already done, but in the present extraordinary times, to recommend stronger measures would bring the people into peril, and to advise weaker ones would insure defeat." In these words, falling as they did from the lips of one of the revolutionary leaders, the Convention pronounced its own death sentence. It was evident that the Convention itself was conscious of its detachment from the masses, and being uncertain as to the future course to be taken, thought it best to dissolve. This decision was taken on September 14th by a majority of only one vote (the casting vote of the Chairman) against 11 votes of the Lovettists.

\* *Northern Star*, Sept. 14, 1839.

Thus the first Chartist "Parliament" ended its career, furnishing the lesson that the leaders of the proletariat cannot with impunity ally themselves with the bourgeoisie, and that the only guarantee of success lies in keeping live contact with the masses. While deploring its failure, we cannot deny its great achievement in having purged the movement of alien elements and given it a homogeneous proletarian character. Henceforth it was clear that in the fight for universal suffrage the workers could rely only upon themselves, since to them alone as a class was it a question of vital interest.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF THE MOVEMENT

"The 'chimera' of Chartism, not the reality, has been put down. The matter of Chartism is weighty, deep-rooted, far-extending; did not begin yesterday; will by no means end this day or to-morrow.—CARLYLE, *Chartism* (1839).

THE dissolution of the Convention and the temporary weakening of the movement served as a signal for the Government to institute a series of trials and to carry out wholesale arrests. Apparently, the Whigs expected in this way to deal the knock-out blow to Chartism, whose intrinsic weakness was exposed by the history of the Convention. Stephens was arrested in November, 1838, for taking part in illegal torchlight meetings and for inciting to armed rebellion. His trial, which caused indescribable excitement among the factory workers, took place shortly before the dissolution of the Convention, and in spite of his brilliant five-hour speech, he was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. The trial of the other leaders, including Vincent, Lovett and Collins, and afterwards O'Connor and O'Brien, was postponed until the following year, while the Government decided which charges were to be preferred against them, so as to draw up an impressive indictment. Had nothing else happened, the trial would probably not have taken place at all, or would have ended in the acquittal of the accused. Unfortunately, an incident occurred in South Wales which furnished the Government with a decent pretext for carrying out its longstanding plan of mass repression. This incident for which, by the way, Lovett and his friends were responsible, has been christened an "insurrection" in textbooks on English history; in reality, it was a rather venturesome attempt on the part of Frost and some of his comrades to release Vincent from Newport jail. Frost himself was a native of Monmouthshire, in which country he served as a J.P. After he had joined the Chartist movement and taken part in the Convention, Lord John Russell threatened to remove him if he did not sever his association with the sedition mongers. Frost refused to comply, referring to the constitutional law that judges cannot be removed unless by a verdict of the courts. Nevertheless he was



removed, and after the arrest of Vincent was appointed by the Convention to watch the case. In spite of all his efforts no release on bail was granted, and Vincent was imprisoned in Newport jail, where he was treated with extreme cruelty. It was then that Frost conceived the plan of releasing him by force. He mentioned this plan to some of his comrades in the Convention, but meeting with no sympathy, decided to carry out the plan at his own risk. As soon as the Convention was dissolved—Frost, as Chairman, gave the casting vote in favour of dissolution—he proceeded to South Wales, where the workers (mostly coal miners) were Chartists to a man, and one night in November, at the head of several thousand people, he marched on Newport. At a pre-arranged place he was to be met by two contingents from other towns, but they were prevented from coming by inclement weather. Frost, after waiting for them until morning, went on to Newport by himself. He arrived there at 9 a.m. (instead of 2 a.m., as had been arranged) and was met by a volley fired by constables and troops in ambush. Fighting followed, and the "insurrectionists" were forced to retreat after sustaining a loss of 10 killed and 50 wounded. Frost, two of his lieutenants and 19 others were arrested, and there, apparently, the matter ended. The Whigs would not have been Whigs had they failed to take advantage of this incident to deal a blow at the Chartist movement at a whole. Frost's abortive attempt was magnified into a great rebellion alleged to have been organised to take place simultaneously in Yorkshire and Birmingham, and a strong political bias was given to the trial. To-day, reading the records of the trial and the speeches of the prosecuting counsel, one cannot help wondering how the "historians" can still talk seriously of the "insurrection" in South Wales. The evidence of the witnesses was full of contradictions, many of them were proved by the defence to have been guilty of perjury and corruption, the police were forced to admit that their agents had taken part in the case, while the arguments of the prosecution were wholly threadbare. Nevertheless a verdict of high treason was returned by a packed jury, and Frost and two of his lieutenants were sentenced to death. Fortunately, thanks to pressure upon the Government, the verdict was not carried into effect, and the sentence was commuted to one of penal servitude and deportation to Australia.

To the majority of the Chartist leaders who saw plainly that the Government was looking for any chance to employ the whole

force of its judicial and police machinery against them, Frost's attempt was a highly undesirable incident, and indeed, the first half of 1840 was marked by Governmental terror unparalleled in recent English history. Arrests and imprisonments followed one after the other, many were compelled to flee to the continent and to America, many were deported to penal settlements, and some were executed. The police and the troops used most brutal methods, indulging freely in espionage and provocation. Public meetings were dispersed, the labour press suppressed, and the clubs closed. Within a few months about 450 people were languishing in prisons and dungeons, where they were treated like criminals, starved and tortured. The victims included nearly all the leaders of Chartism, O'Connor, O'Brien, Taylor, Collins and others, sentenced to from eighteen months' to two years' imprisonment. Taylor died in prison from ill-health, while the minds of Lovett, Collins and Vincent become slightly unhinged, one concentrating on education, the other on religion, the third on temperance. Prison life left deep physical and moral traces upon them all.

Reaction triumphed all along the line, and there was no end to the rejoicing of the Whigs. But popular movements are not so easily stamped out, and at the very moment when Chartism seemed to have been utterly crushed, there began to appear fresh, young growths upon the devastated field. The Chartists who remained at large (including Harney and Lowrie) had been carrying on underground agitation all the while, and in the latter part of 1840, when the first victims came out of prison, the movement began to rise to the surface again. A meeting was held at Manchester, attended by 23 delegates from different parts of the country who decided to unite all the local organisations into one "National Chartist Association," a fully-fledged political Labour Party with an elected executive committee, periodical conventions, membership dues and membership cards. It was a great step forward as compared with the formless movement of the preceding period, and bore evidence of the growing political maturity of the workers—the more so as the law did not permit national organisations but only isolated local ones. On this ground Lovett refused to join the Association after his release, or to take part in the political struggle in general; but that the new organisation was fully in accord with the needs of the movement was demonstrated by the fact that within a couple of years the Party had already upwards of 400 local branches and about 40,000 members.

For some time the new Party gave evidence of its existence only by public meetings and demonstrations arranged in connection with the release of Chartist leaders. When Lovett was released, followed by M'Douall and then by Collins, banquets and processions were organised in their honour, and public meetings held, attended at times by more than 100,000 people. Thus stimulated, the movement gradually revived, and Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle etc., became again important centres of Chartism. In the summer of 1841 general elections took place and the Party decided to demonstrate its power to the Whigs. Upon the advice given by O'Connor from jail (and against the advice given from jail by O'Brien, who recommended abstention), the Party resolved to agitate and vote for the Tories, and the Whigs actually suffered a heavy defeat. For this the Chartists were reproached by their contemporaries, who accused O'Connor of secret sympathy with the Tories. It was even rumoured that he and his nearest friends had taken money from the Tories, with which they had carried on their election campaign. O'Brien himself made such insinuations, and they have been repeated by historians ever since. Of course it was the usual calumny, which then, as repeatedly afterwards, was spread by the Liberals because the workers dared put up their own candidates against them. It was based upon the naive belief that the Liberals were, after all, more "progressive" and nearer to the workers than the Conservatives—a belief proved by facts as well as by logic to be entirely unfounded. Indeed, if any choice was to be made at that time between the two parties of the ruling classes, preference should be given to the Tories, who, as representatives of the landed interests, frequently took the part of the workers in the struggle against the tyranny of capitalism. This was the case throughout the whole history of factory and social legislation. At all events, to support the Tories was no greater crime than to support the Whigs, and if the English workers of a subsequent period had been politically as independent as the Chartists, we should not have had so frequent occasion to deplore their political backwardness and their captivity to the Liberals. The reproach was the more unmerited as the Chartists had put up their own candidates against both parties wherever possible, and although none were elected, since the majority of their supporters had no vote, they were victorious on the hustings when the vote was taken by show of hands. This was clear evidence of the fact that the people were on their side, and that only the class

suffrage was responsible for the success of the ruling parties.

At the close of the summer of 1841 both O'Connor and O'Brien were released, and the movement rose at once to an unprecedented height, although O'Brien, dissatisfied with the Chartist election policy, refused to join the Association, and preferred to agitate on his own account. This widened the breach between the two leaders, which became a bitter personal enmity, followed by mutual accusations, recriminations and calumny. But the movement was already too strong for the quarrel between these two personalities, prominent though they were, to injure it. Virtually, O'Brien had no following whatever, and O'Connor—a genius as an agitator, although with little theoretical training, and a good deal of Irish vanity and brag—became the dictator of the movement. While still in jail, he had contributed to the *Northern Star* a series of withering articles against Lovett, Vincent and Collins who wanted the Chartists to hold aloof from politics; and now he started a systematic campaign against the Cobdenites, arousing an agony of despair among the Liberal free-traders. The question of the repeal of the corn laws, and the attitude towards the agitation of Cobden and his supporters, the factory slave-drivers, were correctly understood by the Chartists from the very outset. In regard to the corn laws, the London Workingmen's Association had declared in 1838 that "they were admittedly very harmful, but were nevertheless only one of the numerous effects of one common cause which they were out to eliminate; that the question of their repeal should be decided by representatives of the people and not of a class. Had the corn laws existed so long that the people could forget what had preceded them, then they would probably believe the promises that were now showered; but the year 1815 (when they had been introduced) was not so far back."<sup>\*</sup> It was in the same spirit that O'Brien now started a campaign in the *Northern Star* against the Cobden League, arguing that without universal suffrage which would enable the workers to make use of the reform in their own interest, the repeal of the corn laws and the cheapening of bread would only lead to cheaper labour power and serve the interests of the capitalists. "Do not let yourselves be hoodwinked by the middle class again," was the warning voice of a Chartist speaker at a public meeting,† "you have helped them to gain the suffrage for themselves, but where

<sup>\*</sup> *Northern Star*, September 17, 1838.

† Quoted by Gammage, p. 82.

are the beautiful promises which they gave you? All the reforms which they have carried out were only to their own advantage. And now they want the repeal of the corn laws, not for your benefit, but for their own. 'Give us cheap bread,' they shout, but in reality they think: give us low wages. Do not listen to their hypocrisy, stick to the Charter: without the suffrage we are slaves." In this sense the Chartists carried on an unrelenting fight against the Cobdenites, heckling them at their meetings, sometimes breaking them up and exposing the hypocrisy and humbug of their speakers.

That the Chartists were perfectly justified in acting thus no one doubts to-day. The agitation for the repeal of the corn laws was a fight for the predominance of industrial capital over agriculture, the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, the struggle to crown the work of the Reform Act of 1832. After the repeal of the corn laws Cobden wrote to Peel: "Do you shrink from the post of governing through the *bona fide* representatives of the middle class? Look at the facts, and can the country be otherwise ruled at all? There must be an end to the juggle of parties, the mere representatives of traditions, and some man must of necessity rule the State through its governing class. The Reform Bill decreed it; the passing of the Corn Bill has realised it."\* Cobden and his associates did not always speak with such candour. On the contrary, with hypocrisy unsurpassed in history (of which, for the rest, the later English Liberals have inherited a fair dose), they spoke of "national" interests, of the interests of the oppressed masses, and in order to win the support of the Quakers, the clergy and the old maids, they prated of the universal peace that was to be ushered in by free trade, of the precepts of Christianity which it was to carry into effect, and so on.† By these methods, and by others less savoury still,‡ they succeeded in hoodwinking the public; but the Chartists remained their implacable opponents to the end. They saw the inner meaning of the free trade movement. "Their only aim in life," O'Connor declared,§ "is to buy labour in the cheapest market, and to sell in the dearest." The Chartists knew quite well what to expect

\* Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 1903, p. 395.

† Morley, *ibid.*, p. 230.

‡ The Cobden League resorted to bribery and corruption of the press and politicians on a large scale. See Morley *op. cit.*, pp. 221 and 251.

§ O'Connor, *The Trial*, 1843, preface, p. v.

from the middle class becoming the ruling class of the country; they had had a foretaste in the Poor Law Reform of 1834. Cobden himself did not disguise his hatred of the trade unions, which he described as "founded upon the principles of brutal tyranny and monopoly,"\* while Bright was a bitter opponent of labour legislation, particularly of the Ten Hour Bill.† They had a prompt and decisive way of dealing with the Chartists and other working class opponents to their policies. "With democracy and freedom on their lips," O'Connor said of them, "do we not find them foremost, as masters, as magistrates and as jurors, in persecuting all who dared to express opinions at variance with those by which they hope to accomplish this object? Do we not find them expending little short of £100,000 in twelve months for the purpose of buying opinion, and yet afraid to meet their very slaves in public discussion? Have they not, as masters and as magistrates, followed up, persecuted, tortured and in many instances banished from their homes every individual who has taken an active part in exposing their dishonesty and their ignorance? Have they not established the system of excommunication, by conspiring together, to banish from their employment every man who has taken an active part against them? Have they not compelled men, women and children to subscribe to that fund by which they hope to trammel labour, and to place it under the control of capital? Do they not work your wives and daughters to death, while they compel you to walk the streets in idleness?"‡

The campaign against the Free Traders steadily gained in intensity, reaching its highest pitch in 1842. That year was a very bad one for the manufacturers, and the Chartists realised the peril contained in the agitation of the Cobdenites, who ascribed the crisis to the corn laws. But in vain did the Cobden League spend £10,000 on agitation in the factory districts; in vain did Lovett issue thundering manifestoes against the Chartists, denouncing the "incitement of class against class"; the Chartists proved victorious in their arguments everywhere. In their exasperation, the Free Traders decided to resort to extreme measures.

The Lancashire manufacturers, in order to demonstrate their inability to continue production under the existing fiscal conditions,

\* Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

† Hodder, *Life of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, Vol. II., p. 82.

‡ O'Connor, *The Trial*, 1843, preface p. v.

decided to shut down their factories and discharge their work-people. Incidentally, they also hoped by this to punish the Tory landlords for their resistance, as they expected some of the discharged workers to apply for parish relief, and it was chiefly the owners of land and houses who contributed to the Poor Rate. Accordingly, they set to work to provoke a strike by reducing wages, and strikes indeed broke out in three places on August 5th. The plan was working satisfactorily, and the manufacturers pointed to these "unfortunate" results of the corn laws which were ruining both the manufacturers and the workers. Suddenly the situation changed. At a meeting of strikers on August 12th the question of the Charter was raised, and those present decided to add the slogan of universal suffrage to their immediate economic demands, and to refuse to go back to work until both were fulfilled. Furthermore, they decided to extend the movement throughout Lancashire, and for this purpose appointed picketing squads to go from factory to factory and from town to town urging the workers to quit, and removing the plugs from the boilers. Very soon all work within a radius of 50 miles around Manchester ceased, and a meeting was held attended by 358 delegates who, by a majority of 320 votes, formally sanctioned a general strike for the Charter—the "holy month." This surprised both the manufacturers and the Chartists: the latter had not expected the movement to take such a turn. In the meantime the movement spread to the neighbouring county of Yorkshire and on to Staffordshire. Strike committees were set up, which permitted the production of food and other perishable articles of prime necessity only, and collections taken for the strike funds. The behaviour of the strikers was everywhere exemplary, and perfect order reigned in the towns which had fallen into their hands. At Preston and two or three other places the local authorities provoked disorders, and bloody encounters with the troops followed. It looked as though "holy month" was indeed to become a fact, and the Executive Committee of the Chartists had already issued a proclamation appealing to the whole working class of England to join the movement. Here again, the cardinal and fatal difference between the industrial North and the trading and agricultural South, which had been at the bottom of all the failures of Chartism, became apparent. London and the Southern counties failed to support the strike, and the movement came to an untimely end. By August 25th, all the factories had resumed work, and their

owners, although they had failed to achieve their original aim, rejoiced over the crushing defeat of the Chartists.

Like Frost's attempt in 1839, the unsuccessful strike of 1842 furnished the Government with a pretext for instituting a series of trials. The largest was that of O'Connor and 58 of his comrades, indicted at Lancaster for publishing the aforesaid manifesto in favour of the strike. They were arrested, but promptly released on bail, and their trial took place a year later. It lasted for eight days and resulted in terms of imprisonment for 38 of them. Fortunately, the prosecution, either with or without intent, had failed to name the place in which the alleged offence had been committed, and thanks to this technical omission the sentence could not be carried out. The Government thought it inexpedient to institute another trial, and the whole case lapsed. As against this, in one of the other trials, Cooper, one of the most prominent young leaders, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and M'Douall had to save himself by escaping to France.



CHAPTER EIGHT  
THE BREAK UP OF CHARTISM

"For a successful revolution it is not enough that there is discontent: what is required is a profound and thorough conviction of the justice, necessity and importance of political and social rights."

—GAMMAGE.

THE strike of 1842 clearly demonstrated the weakness of Chartism. The weapon of which the Chartists had dreamed for so long had at last been put to the test, and one week's experience proved its worthlessness. Moreover, the Chartists could not but be aware that the movement had been started without them: this showed that they were detached from the masses and unable to guide the course of events. It was clear that only a section of the English proletariat was ready to take up the political struggle for emancipation, while the rest either lacked the necessary vigour, or did not see the need for it. Apparently, there was nothing left for Chartism to do but give up for the time being all thought of decisive action, and proceed with the patient and plodding task of agitation and organisation.

This was easier said than done. At that time those tendencies to which we referred in a previous chapter, of little importance in their earlier stages, began to assume more definite forms. There was firstly the new trade union movement. It was no longer the trade unionism of Robert Owen, which had reached its zenith in 1834, and broke down entirely in 1840. The new trade unionism, which arose partly as an effect of the more favourable industrial conditions of 1840, and partly as a result of the disappointment following the failure of the Chartist Convention, was even more hostile to the political struggle than had been its predecessor. Having discarded the Owenist Utopia of a general strike as the weapon which with one blow would usher in the "new moral world," trade unionism now assumed the character of craft organisations, talked of the harmony between the interests of masters and workers, and threw politics overboard.\* The crisis of 1842, as we have seen, led many workers into the political fight for the Charter, but the conditions in the labour market having improved

\* S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 180 et seq.

again, they, smarting under the recent disappointments, went back to trade unionism. The workers were becoming more and more reconciled to the existing order, and were only seeking for means of improving their position under it. The social revolution was receding into the background as a hopeless dream, while social reform was coming to the fore.

The same may be said of the other movement founded by Robert Owen, the co-operative movement. Its utopian forms were seeing their last days, being replaced by consumers' societies which had no other aim but to get cheaper products for the consumer. In 1844 the Rochdale Pioneers founded their business and from that time onwards the co-operative movement, based entirely upon the existing capitalist relations, grew and expanded. It was, of course, opposed to Chartism, and gained many adherents among the Chartist elements disappointed in the course of events; later on, as we shall see, it became an object of exploitation by the Christian Socialists.

Finally there was the movement in favour of the ten-hour day for women and juveniles in the cotton industry. For the present, this is the most important. The attitude of Marx and Engels to this reform (which became law in 1847) is well known: to them it was the triumph of *principle* over capitalist society. But it is not so well-known that they had not always been of the same opinion, and that for a long time they had taken a hostile attitude towards this reform.\* The explanation is that in the course of the 17 years which elapsed between the enactment of the ten-hour day and the First Congress of the International, the circumstances which attended the agitation in favour of the reform had become things of the past, and were forgotten, whereas the practical importance of the principle involved in the reform remained. These circumstances had indeed been such as to lead the contemporary observer to believe that the reform was being bought at an excessively high price—at the price of surrendering considerable and important sections of the English proletariat to the ideological domination of Tory philanthropists with Lord Ashley (subsequently Lord Shaftesbury) at their head and of reconciling them to the existing order. In taking upon himself the leadership of the movement for the Ten-Hour's Bill in 1833, Ashley proceeded upon a definite understanding with the

\* Engels, *The English Ten-Hour Bill*, originally appeared in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 1848.

workers, "that all should be carried on in a most conciliatory manner, that there should be a careful abstinence from all approach to questions of wages and capital; that the labours of children and young persons should alone be touched; that there should be no strikes, no intimidation and no strong language against their employers either within or without the walls of Parliament."\* "From the first hour of my movement to the last," Ashley confessed later, "I had ever before me and never lost sight of it, the issue of a restoration of a good understanding between employer and employed."† And in this he certainly succeeded. "The factory movement," states one of its historians,‡ "had been the means of training considerable numbers of working men to a high sense of responsibility and moral duty; they felt that from them much was hoped, and they were anxious to guard against disappointment."

Gladstone, likewise, in 1864 admitted publicly in the House of Commons that the law had been beneficial "both in mitigating human suffering and in attaching important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government."§ Again, at a meeting of the British Association in Manchester in 1861, it was stated that this law "had consolidated society in this part of the island, swept away a great mass of festering and growing discontent, placed the prosperity of this district on a broad, solid and safe basis—as the orderly, educated, contented labour of Lancashire. . . . These results had followed from the sagacious, persevering and moral exertions of the advocates of the Ten-Hours Bill."|| Finally, the workers themselves adopted the following resolution after the passing of the Bill: "That we are deeply grateful to Almighty God for the success which has attended our efforts, and now that the object of our labours for the last thirty years is about to be brought to a happy consummation we pledge ourselves to promote by every means in our power those religious and social blessings which it has been the object of the Bill to extend to the factory workers."¶

We have dwelt on this movement at some length because

\* Edwin Hodder, *Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*. K.G., 1886, Vol. 1, pp. 155-156.

† *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, Chapter 15, p. 208.

‡ Kydd, *The History of the Factory Movement*, Vol. 2, p. 284.

§ Hodder, Vol. 2, p. 206.

|| *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 207.

¶ Hutchins and Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, p. 97.

its bearing on Chartism (and on the social education of the British worker in general) has been so little understood that Tildsley, for instance, represents the factory movement as one of the component parts of Chartism.\* Not only was it a distinctly different movement, but it actually was one of the causes of the downfall of Chartism. In 1848 it may be said to have saved the country from a revolution which seemed likely to break out at any moment. "I shall declare without hesitation," Sir G. Grey, then Secretary of State, wrote to Lord Ashley in that year, "in Parliament or elsewhere, that the passing of the Ten-Hours Bill has kept these vast counties at peace during this eventful period."† Ashley himself (then the Earl of Shaftesbury) wrote in his diary: "I may rejoice and heartily thank God that the operatives of Lancashire and Yorkshire, suffering as they are, remain perfectly tranquil. Such, under God, is the fruit of many years of sympathy and generous legislation."‡ And he goes on to mention the fact that several thousand people at Manchester had been enrolled as special constables to maintain order.

These were the currents which obstructed the path of Chartism, drawing away from it the masses of the workers, and hindering its further growth. The leaders themselves were aware of the fact that dangerous rivals were growing up everywhere, and devised means to galvanise the movement and give it a new force of attraction. As far back as the beginning of 1842 O'Connor made an attempt to combine the demand for the Charter with that for the dissolution of the union between England and Ireland, so as to gain the support, at least, of the Irish masses. But it was a wrong step from the standpoint both of principle and of tactics. On the one hand, it adulterated the Chartist movement by the introduction of an entirely alien element, and on the other it deceived nobody. Although the second petition drawn up on these lines had secured over 3 million signatures, Parliament refused to be impressed by this subterfuge, and the petition was thrown out by a huge majority. The Convention itself, having met again in London on April 12th, attended by 25 people, spent its time in complete inactivity, and on May 3rd, immediately after the defeat of the petition, dispersed without having made any

\* Tildsley, *The Origin and Economic Foundations of the Chartist Movement*.

† Hodder, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 358.

‡ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 241.

decisions. It was obvious that by such means it was impossible to revive the movement, and that, on the contrary, its end could only be hastened. O'Connor then hit upon another plan—his famous agricultural colonies.

This plan embodied all the vagueness of the Chartist social outlook, of which we have spoken before. If it were really the aim of the movement to check the progress of capitalist development and to get the expropriated masses back to the land, why not achieve by direct economic action what it was impossible, or exceedingly difficult to attain by indirect political methods? Accordingly, in April, 1845, O'Connor came out publicly with a plan for forming agricultural colonies, and for buying the land in small lots by means of intricate banking operations. He proposed to get together a fund of £5,000 by floating an issue of small shares, and to invest £4,000 in the purchase of enough land for 50 people. After a certain lapse of time the value of the estate, thanks to the labour invested, would so increase that it could be mortgaged for £4,000, and by adding this money to the balance of the original amount a second estate could be purchased whose value would in time increase, allowing the purchase of a third estate and so on. It was calculated by O'Connor that eight estates for 400 people would cost £33,000, and would increase in value to £60,000 in the course of four years. These again could be mortgaged for £27,000 and the money used for the purchase of further estates, until the whole of the factory proletariat would be settled on the land and the reign of capitalism would come to an end.

Nowadays it amazes us that O'Connor and his audience could indulge in such ridiculous projects and attach to them any serious hopes. As a matter of fact, many of his contemporaries and the majority of historians saw nothing but roguery in these fantastic projects, and went so far as to accuse their author of dishonesty and swindling. Needless to say that such charges were wholly unjust. O'Connor, with his Irish imagination and enthusiasm, did believe in his own plan, and not only did he not get a single farthing for himself out of the scheme, but, as proved by a parliamentary committee in 1848, he lost his own private fortune in it. O'Connor did not display any profound knowledge of political economy, and O'Brien was quite right in denouncing his project as "utopian and reactionary." It should, however, be said in his defence that he had not been alone in misunder-

standing the economic mechanism of modern society and in believing in the possibility of creating values out of nothing. It was to be the scientific mission of Karl Marx—whose *Poverty of Philosophy* appeared two years later—to do away once and for all with chimeras in the domain of theories of value.

In the meantime O'Connor's project met with great success, and the cry of "The National Chartist Land Co-operative Society," notwithstanding all the criticisms levelled at it by O'Brien, attracted fresh masses of people. In December, 1845, a Chartist conference at Birmingham officially accepted O'Connor's agricultural plan as part of the programme, and thenceforth agitation was conducted on these two lines. O'Brien, who advocated the nationalisation of the land, the establishment of a bank to furnish cheap credits to small producers, and a "symbolic currency"—a programme that was also of doubtful merit, but had this advantage, that it presupposed the conquest of political power—himself with several others continued to wage a violent campaign against O'Connor, charging him with treachery and challenging him to a public debate. In spite of all this, hosts of new adherents flocked to O'Connor's banner, contributing about £200 weekly towards his plan. In May, 1847, an estate was purchased and parcelled out into plots; this further increased the popularity of the movement, and in August the funds of the "Land League" reached £50,000. In November of the same year the number of shareholders reached 42,000 and the capital had increased to £80,000. A second and larger estate was purchased, and O'Connor reached the pinnacle of his glory.

All this, no doubt, saved the Chartist movement from immediate collapse, but henceforth its fortunes were bound up with the success of the land scheme: the moment the latter proved unworkable, the movement itself would come to an end. The years 1844 and 1845 were the best since the crisis of 1837, and the growth of the trade union, co-operative movements etc., diminished the recruiting power of Chartist meetings and Chartist agitation. Down to 1848 the movement was comparatively stagnant, broken now and then by various incidents. In August 1844, a public debate on the question of free trade was held at Northampton between Cobden and O'Connor, and whether the latter was not in good form or whether too much had been expected of him, he failed in his argument, and Cobden carried off the laurels. This did not in any way impair O'Connor's reputation, and when

Cooper, his former lieutenant, on being released from jail in 1845, having become an advocate of "moral force," started a campaign against him, he was punished by formal expulsion from the Party. O'Connor's greatest triumph was won in the general election of 1847. The Chartists put up several candidates, including O'Connor at Nottingham in opposition to Hobhouse, a member of the Government, Harney in opposition to Palmerston, and, in another constituency, Robert Owen, who agreed to stand on the Chartist programme. Owen obtained but one vote; Harney obtained the satisfaction of defeating his opponent at least in the hustings; but O'Connor defeated his opponent in the actual ballot, securing 1,257 votes as against 893 votes for Hobhouse. In his person Chartism for the first time entered Parliament; but it was also the last time. Until the general election of 1900, not a single representative of the revolutionary proletariat succeeded in entering the holy of holies of the English bourgeoisie.

The slight value of these victories was to be demonstrated in the following year, in the revolutionary year of 1848. It began with a great crisis in the labour market, and the rumours of an impending revolution in France seemed to breathe new life into the Chartist movement. When it did break out, there was great rejoicing among the Chartists. Mass meetings were held everywhere and greetings sent to the French people; Ernest Jones, Harney and McGrath went to Paris as the bearers of an address to the Provisional Government on behalf of the Chartists, and an intimation was given to the English Government that any attempt to intervene in France would be followed by immediate revolution. On March 6th a great gathering of the unemployed took place in Trafalgar Square, and amid shouts of "Bread and Revolution" it was resolved to march to Buckingham Palace. In Glasgow the unemployed demanded bread, and were treated to a shower of bullets. The flame of insurrection spread to Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Bristol, Sheffield, Bradford etc.; everywhere there were huge mass meetings, riots and fights with the troops and the police. Such a sudden and gigantic explosion had not been witnessed in England even in 1838-39, but the organised workers had already been pacified, and without them there could be no revolution. Events soon proved this to be true.

Seeing the revolutionary temper of the people, so strongly reminiscent of the early days of the movement, the Chartists decided to try once again their original methods of action. It was

decided to present a petition, and to call a Convention on April 4th. The campaign was very successful, and when the delegates assembled in London on the appointed day, O'Connor could boast that the petition bore not less than 5½ million signatures. Those were certainly good tidings; nevertheless the delegates did not seem to be greatly impressed by this success, for a debate immediately ensued in the Convention concerning "ulterior measures." Reynolds, one of the young leaders, proposed that in the event of the failure of the petition the session of the Convention should be made permanent, and the Charter proclaimed the law of the land. To this the majority did not agree, and it was resolved, instead, to convene a special National Assembly which was to declare itself permanently in session.

Did the Chartists believe in the possibility of these measures? Were they prepared to raise the standard of revolt in order to defend the National Assembly? As to the younger members of the Convention, like Reynolds or Ernest Jones, there is no ground for doubt. "I believe," the latter declared,\* "the people are prepared to pronounce the mighty fiat—to ring the inevitable knell of slavery. I should be a guilty man did I say so without a well-grounded conviction. For the evil that might come I should in part be responsible. The widow and the orphan would have a right to curse me. But, before heaven, I believe we stand upon the threshold of our rights. I conscientiously believe the people are prepared to claim the Charter." Different was the attitude of the older leaders, whom experience had taught to be more circumspect. O'Brien, with his characteristic candour, declared that he did not believe the population of London was with them, or that it was generally prepared to resort to extreme measures.† O'Connor, on the contrary, tried to conceal this truth from others as well as from himself. He declared himself ready for everything, he was prepared to stand and fight in the front ranks, and would sooner die than give up the Charter.‡ At the same time, he continued, he would not imperil the movement by undue haste and so long as the people were unprepared not a single window-pane would be smashed, not a straw taken away from the possessing classes. Evidently, in his heart of hearts O'Connor did not believe in the possibility of a revolution, but he was afraid to avow

\* Gammage, p. 299.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 300



it, as such an admission would have meant the knell of the movement.

Such moral cowardice was unworthy of him; moreover, it was futile. The petition was to be presented on April 10th, and for this purpose it was decided to arrange an open-air mass meeting on Kennington Green, whence a procession carrying the petition was to march to Westminster. According to the plans of the Convention, whose members were to lead it, the procession was to be perfectly peaceful. It pleased the Government, however, to take a different view of the matter and to exaggerate the plan into an attempt at revolution. In vain did the Convention send a deputation to the Home Office to assure the Government that it had no seditious intentions of any kind, in vain did O'Connor give similar assurances from the floor of the House of Commons; the Government, whether actually scared or merely pretending, forbade the procession and passed an emergency act in Parliament "for the protection of the Crown and the Government" providing severe penalties for seditious speeches, and instructed the Duke of Wellington to take the necessary measures of protection. The Iron Duke concentrated in London an army of 100,000, occupied Westminster Bridge and Parliament Square with artillery, posted cordons and ambushes everywhere, and armed a force of 170,000 special constables (among whom was the future Napoleon III.)—in a word, he made preparations as though for Waterloo. In its turn, the Press indulged in fanciful stories about the proposed meeting, describing it as the prelude to revolution, and so thoroughly scared the *bon bourgeois* that on April 10th London was half deserted, and all business at a standstill. Later historians refer to that day with considerable awe, indulging in melancholy reflections on what might have happened had not the Government and the Duke acted with such energy. In reality, the fear was groundless, being aroused artificially in order to discredit the Chartist movement. Had any disorder occurred on that day, had any blood been shed in the streets, it would not have been the fault of the Chartists, but of the Government. Fortunately, both the Convention and O'Connor had the courage at the eleventh hour to recognise the true position and not only to cancel the procession, but also to issue a strong appeal to the people to keep calm and to offer no provocation. At the meeting itself O'Connor and Jones delivered speeches in which they implored the people not to be provoked by the sight of armed soldiers and police, and

the whole affair ended in O'Connor and his comrades peacefully taking three cabs and carrying the petition to the House of Commons. It weighed 5 cwt. 84 lbs., and, according to O'Connor, bore 5,700,000 signatures. It was incorrectly reported that the meeting had been attended by 150,000 to 170,000 people; actually the number did not exceed thirty to forty thousand.

April 10th was not the decisive day the imagination of chroniclers has painted it, but, as admitted by the Chartists themselves, it showed how weak their movement was. O'Brien had been right in saying that the population of London was not with them, and O'Connor himself was now forced to admit it. Yet greater disappointment was in store for the Chartists: the number of the signatures was counted by the clerks of the House, and instead of 5,700,000, the petition was found to bear less than 2,000,000 signatures, and a considerable portion of these were fictitious into the bargain. O'Connor tried to dispute the figures, but was shown, as an instance, that out of 10,000 signatures on one sheet 8,200 were those of women; and when, after a few rude remarks, he demonstratively left the House, he was forced to return and to apologise. It was more than a defeat, it was a humiliation, and henceforth Chartism began to lose its moral prestige.

## CHAPTER NINE THE END OF THE MOVEMENT

"People call him a dreamer. But dreams are only the light of a clearer sky, too brilliant for our naked eye, and when we behold its radiance we turn aside and call it dreams. Ah, believe me, all thoughts which were ever born in majesty and expired in grief, which time has raised to maturity and glory, all of them were at first described as 'empty dreams'."—ERNEST JONES (re-translated).

THE year 1848 marked a turning point in the social history of England. After the repeal of the corn laws two years previously, she started upon her gloried industrial career which made her in a short space of time the "workshop of the world." The 50's were characterised by unusual progress in all branches of industry and trade. In 1850 exports had amounted only to £70,000,000 and imports to £99,000,000. Ten years later the former reached the huge figure of £164,500,000 and the latter £210,500,000. The output of coal in 1850 had aggregated 49,000,000 tons; in 1860 it rose to 82,000,000 tons. The iron output for the ten years 1831-41 amounted to 16,000,000 tons, for 1841-50 to 18,000,000 tons, whereas the output for 1851-60 was 32,500,000 tons. During the ten years 1841-50, 2,300,000 bales of cotton had been consumed, and 965,000,000 lbs. of yarn turned out. In the years 1851-1860 the consumption of cotton reached 3,800,000 bales and the production of yarn amounted to nearly 2,000 million lbs. In 1841-50 the consumption of wool amounted to 820,000 tons, and woollens to the value of £244,000,000 were produced; in 1851-60 the consumption of wool exceeded one million tons, and the value of the output amounted to £311,000,000. Finally, the length of the railway system between 1850 and 1860 was increased from 6,890 miles to 10,400 miles, and the tonnage of the mercantile fleet rose from 4,200,000 to 5,700,000.\*

Amidst such prosperity some crumbs were bound to fall to

\* For these and the following figures see Mulhall's *Dictionary of Statistics*, Haydn's *Dictionary of Dates*, Bowley's article in the *Journal of the Statistical Society* for March, 1901, Ward's article in the Supplement to Hutchins' and Harrison's *A History of Factory Legislation*.

the working class. The trade union struggle began to meet with success, and wages were gradually rising. A spinner had earned 18s. per week in 1850, and 20s. in 1860; a weaver had earned 13s. in 1850, and 15s. in 1860; a cabinet-maker 20s. in 1840 and 25s. in 1860; a stone-mason 23s. per week in 1840, and 30s. in 1860; general builders' labourers 15s. 6d. per week in 1841-50, and 17s. in 1851-60; foundrymen 22s. 6d. per week in 1845-54, and 29s. in 1855-64, and so on. These, of course, were mere crumbs which bore no relation to the growth of the national income; but, firstly, they followed upon a period of steadily declining wages, and secondly there had been a more or less considerable decline in the prices of nearly all articles of consumption, so that the real increase in wages was more than the nominal increase. As a result, on comparing the period of 1831-50 with that of 1851-70 we find that the consumption of wheat per head increased from 255 to 320 lbs., of meat from 89 to 90 lbs., of sugar from 20 to 55 lbs., of tea from 23 to 44 lbs., and of salt from 25 to 45 lbs.

Such progress had a pacifying effect upon the workers, and henceforth trade unionism acquired great power and at the same time abjured all revolutionary ideas. Trade unionists talked of the "beneficent results of good relations between employers and workers," urged the "separation of industrial questions from politics," and asserted that "the labour organisations had not the least intention to cause injury to the employers, but on the contrary, to assist them by ennobling the character of the workers, with a corresponding decrease in their (the employers') responsibility."\* On the other hand, the bourgeoisie itself, living as it did in affluence, considered it more advantageous to make concessions and even to anticipate possible demands, rather than to be stubborn and thereby lay bare the existing class antagonisms. We read in Lord Shaftesbury's diary† that before ten days had elapsed after the famous April 10th, he was sent for by the Queen, "who was anxious to know, in view of the disturbed condition of the country, which were the best ways to show royal interest towards the working class." Lord Shaftesbury advised Prince Albert "to place himself at the head of the solid movements," and when the latter, acting on his advice, visited a meeting of the Society of Workingmen's Friends and delivered a "social" speech, Shaftesbury put down in his diary: "Such, indeed, is the

\* S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 208.

† Hodder, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 246-249.

way to suppress Chartism." About the same time the movement of Christian Socialism was founded by Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow. Under the fresh impression of the events of April 10th, these three had gathered at Maurice's house (the latter had even offered his services on that day as a constable, but had been disqualified as a clergyman), and there and then—in the words of Kingsley's biographer\*—"the lines were laid of that peaceful agitation for the organisation of labour on the principles of association rather than of competition, which came to be known by the name of the Christian Socialist movement; and which undoubtedly in the latter half of the century has done so much to promote a more brotherly spirit between rich and poor." This movement, emerging at the moment of profound disappointment in Chartism, did indeed play a great (but hitherto unappreciated) part in the final detachment of the workers from political action. The ideas which it inculcated into the minds of the workers may best be judged from the words put by Kingsley into the mouth of the hero of his novel *Alton Locke*, an ex-Chartist: "Fool that I was! It was within rather than without that I needed reform. . . . For my part, I seem to have learned that the only thing to regenerate the world is not more of any system, good or bad, but simply more of the spirit of God." "I am a radical reformer," Kingsley wrote in one of his *Political letters to working men*, "I am not one of those who laugh at your Petition of the 10th April; I have no patience with those who do. . . . But my quarrel with the Charter is that it does not go far enough in reform. I want to see you free; but I do not see how what you ask for will give you what you want. I think you have fallen into just the same mistake as the rich of whom you complain—the very mistake which has been our curse and our nightmare—I mean the mistake of fancying that *legislative* reform is *social* reform, or that men's hearts can be changed by Acts of Parliament. If anyone will tell me of a country where a Charter made the rogues honest or the idle industrious, I shall alter my opinion of the Charter, but not till then. . . . Be fit to be free, and God himself will set you free."† Of course, in his sermons he upbraided also the rich, so much so that at times Maurice had to remind him that the rich were also human beings whom it was a sin to insult.‡ But there was a

\* C. W. Stubbs, *Charles Kingsley*, p. 103.

† Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 116, 118.

‡ G. F. Maurice, *The Life of F. D. Maurice*, Vol. 1, p. 478.

set purpose in his diatribes against the rich. "I feel sure," Ludlow wrote,\* "that many Chartists and working men will feel more confidence in him than they had ever felt in the clergy, when they see that he has the courage to remove the beam from his own eye before tackling the splinter in their eyes." Indeed, these sermons met with great success, and thousands of workers joined the consumers' societies founded by the Christian Socialists. It was they who finally banished the principles of Owenism from the co-operative movement, and attracted to it the sympathies of the bourgeoisie. They also carried on educational activities, establishing mechanics' institutes—the fore-runners of the university settlements—organising evening classes and founding workers' libraries. The aim they pursued in these activities can be seen from Maurice's words:† "The question is, how to eliminate Owenism and Chartism? Repression has proved powerless; but the Queen, in a conversation with Lord Melbourne, has indicated the proper way, to wit, education. But what sort of education will be capable of doing away with Chartism? The one that will point out to him (to the worker) his unjust claims and will satisfy his just demands." These were the educational methods used by Christian Socialists, and they yielded rich results.

Another important factor at that period, due partly to disappointment in Chartism, and partly to the industrial revival, was emigration. Emigration had, of course taken place before, but now it assumed a mass character. It has been pointed out by a historian of the movement for a 10-hour day‡ that "one of the causes of the great growth of emigration in recent years was the disappointment which followed the unsuccessful mutiny at Newport." In 1838 the number of emigrants was 33,000; in 1839 it rose to 62,000, and in the following three years to 90,000, 118,000 and 128,000 respectively. All these emigrants—we are told by the same historian—were young people of great energy and determination, for whom it was difficult to live in England; they migrated to the United States, and were followed in later years by their friends and relatives. Further disappointment increased the stream of emigration, and in 1847, after the discovery of gold in California, the number of emigrants rose to over a quarter of a million. Thus, in 1848 it reached 250,000, and in 1849 it went

\* *Ibid.*, p. 477.

† *Ibid.*, 2, 269.

‡ Alfred, *History of the Factory Movement*, Vol. 2, p. 670.

up to 300,000. The Christian Socialists soon realised the benefits of this method of social phlebotomy. "Colonisation," Maurice declared,\* "is not exile; it is good, spiritual, Anglo-Saxon, Christian work." The bourgeoisie encouraged this godly business for all it was worth, and since in 1851 gold was also discovered in Australia, about a million and a quarter persons were shipped out of England in the course of four years (1851-54), mostly "young people of great energy and determination." This outward human stream rid the bourgeoisie of the most dangerous elements, and finally undermined Chartism and all the independent revolutionary activity of the English proletariat.

All these factors combined to make any further success of Chartism impossible. No doubt they would all have proved powerless, or at any rate, of a temporary character, if the chief factor—the industrial development of the country—had itself been a temporary one. But it so happened that the English bourgeoisie had just approached the zenith of its material power, and at that zenith it stayed up to the middle of the 70's. In such circumstances these factors not only continued to act but steadily increased in force. In our own days we have seen how a succession of prosperous years has had a stultifying effect upon the political consciousness of the workers, as in the case of German revisionism. Much greater must have been the demoralising effects upon the workers of a quarter of a century of uninterrupted industrial progress, which enabled a bourgeoisie, still without a rival, to discard the whip and gild the ginger-bread. It so succeeded in captivating the mind of the workers that in 1867 it could afford to extend to them, without any misgivings, the suffrage for which Chartism had fought, and even to appoint some of their representatives to ministerial and judicial positions. This Babylonian captivity of the leaders of the working class has gone on to this day, although the masses themselves are, by degrees, shaking it off.

From what has been said it will be clear that the history of Chartism after April 10th, 1848, represents nothing more than its epilogue. It is true that in the factory districts this particular mishap did not leave any deep traces. On the contrary, the brutal behaviour of the Government greatly added to the discontent, and a wave of loud protest swept from one end of industrial England to the other. Huge mass meetings were held everywhere, secret clubs were formed whose members practised military drill,

\* G. F. Maurice, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 332.

and in some places fights occurred with the troops. Nevertheless, the impression of the events of April 10th upon the Convention was very disheartening. At first it proposed issuing a manifesto to the people exposing the action of the Government, and instructed O'Connor to introduce a motion in the House of Commons for the impeachment of the Cabinet; but after the discovery of the fraud in connection with the petition signatures—a fraud for which, of course, neither O'Connor nor the Convention were to blame—it lost heart and gave up its original intentions. Many of the members, including O'Connor himself, even suggested giving up the idea of a National Assembly, and probably not much would have been lost if it had done so. But there were still several hot-headed young men in the Convention who had faith in the future, and a resolution in favour of convening a National Assembly was carried. On Good Friday, a series of successful mass meetings were held by the Chartists at Manchester, Glasgow, Halifax, Nottingham, Bradford and elsewhere, attended by tens and hundreds of thousands of people, who elected deputies to the National Assembly. Particularly active at that time was Ernest Jones, who travelled from place to place, rousing the proletariat. The National Assembly opened in London on May 1st. About 60 delegates arrived and another 40 were expected. Its uselessness was obvious from the very first meeting. After receiving reports from the deputies on the situation in the various localities, the Assembly began to discuss the question of the further organisation of the movement, when the old dispute about “physical” versus “moral” force, seemingly long since dead and buried, broke out again. The last failures had had a strongly “sobering” effect upon many enthusiasts, and since neither O'Connor nor O'Brien were in attendance, the “moral” people felt themselves masters of the situation. And so, instead of discussing the questions upon the agenda, the National Assembly indulged in debates as to the respective merits of one or the other method of action, the debate terminating in quarrels and scenes which eclipsed those of the first Convention. For ten days these fratricidal quarrels went on until at last the assembly decided that the most sensible thing to do was to disperse. It appointed a new Executive Committee of the party and carried a couple of worthless resolutions, and on May 13th dispersed for ever.

This miserable episode,—perhaps the most sorry spectacle in the whole history of Chartism—dealt the death blow to the move-



ment. After this it did not live, but dragged on a wretched existence until it reached its end. In June and July, 1848, large mass meetings were still held in many cities; the people continued to arm and to give battle to the police and the troops, but these were the last flickers of life. The Government threw the whole weight of its forces upon the remnants of the movement, and crushed it; Jones, M'Douall and many others were arrested and sentenced to 2 or 3 years' imprisonment; less prominent people were punished even more severely; O'Brien devoted himself exclusively to propaganda for land nationalisation, while O'Connor showed the first signs of insanity. In July 1849 he introduced in the House of Commons a Bill based upon the Charter, which received the support of 15 members, and in the following year, worn out and tired, he attempted to reach an agreement with the party of the old Radical, Hume, who had started an agitation for the lodgers' vote. From time to time meetings were held at various places, and the Executive Committee convened conferences in order to revive the movement. All these were futile attempts: the masses of the people were growing more and more indifferent to the Charter, while endless squabbles went on among the Chartists themselves. On March 31st, 1851, a congress of the party was held, at which a new programme was drawn up containing a series of social measures, e.g., the nationalisation of the land, the disestablishment of the Church, the abolition of indirect taxation, free and compulsory elementary education, and so on. But even this programme, resembling so closely the programmes subsequently drawn up by the different Labour Parties, proved incapable of attracting the people, and the movement continued its downward course. Cases of desertion from the Chartist camp to that of the bourgeois radicals became more and more frequent; the *Northern Star* was bought up by a group of "social reformers," the Executive Committee was forced to sub-let its premises in order to cut down expenses, and O'Connor's land plan fizzled out. O'Connor himself, broken down and mentally deranged, was put in a lunatic asylum, and so few were left of his friends and followers that a public subscription on his behalf realised only £52. The only member to continue his public activity was the noble and ever-young Ernest Jones, but even he was powerless against unbending Fate. In May, 1852, yet another Chartist conference was held at Manchester; the delegates sadly observed the smallness of their numbers and after spending five days in reorganising the

party (or rather, its remnants), separated, to meet no more. At the elections to the Executive Committee in the following year, one section of the Chartists accused the other of dishonesty, refused to recognise the validity of the voting, and withdrew from the party. The Executive Committee was left alone with a small group, and very soon dissolved for ever.

Thus ended the great Chartist movement—the first political movement of the proletariat in its struggle for emancipation. What was the cause of its decay? Not the quarrels of its leaders, as asserted by some, and not the wiles of its enemies, as urged by others. When all has been said, the cause lay in the immaturity of the economic development, which was responsible for the lack of class-consciousness among the proletariat, disunited as it still was by differences in living conditions and interests.

This does not mean that it passed away without leaving any trace. He who has had the privilege of roaming through the literature of Chartism, can easily trace the profound effect which the practice and theory of Chartism exercised upon the political education of the founders of the modern working class movement—Marx and Engels. It was from the Chartists that they learned how the proletariat becomes organised as a class party, it was from them that they first obtained a lucid theory of the class struggle worked out with astounding minuteness. No doubt the very doctrine of the conquest of political power as the indispensable preliminary to social reconstruction was, to a considerable extent, suggested to Marx and Engels by the Chartist movement, which had been wholly and deliberately based upon that doctrine. Finally, the revolutionary importance of universal suffrage was first appreciated by the Chartists, and subsequently by Marx and Engels; it became the slogan of the proletariat throughout the world for many years to come. Chartism did not disappear without leaving a trace. On the contrary, its mighty spirit remained alive, and in the ever-changing process of history continued to act as a creative force as long as the conditions which had brought it into being remained substantially the same. When those conditions disappeared, it died: but this death was its greatest triumph! Chartism has become militant and victorious Communism.

## II.

### THE ORIGINS OF THE THEORY OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE BIRTH OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

AS far back as the 'thirties of the last century James Bronterre O'Brien, of whom we shall have many occasions to speak in this essay, wrote: "Have no faith in history, look upon it as a mass of fabrications, concocted, like modern newspapers, not with any regard to truth, or the interests of humanity, but to deceive the multitude, and thus to bolster up all the frauds and villainous institutions of the rich."<sup>\*</sup> What was true in regard to historical research in the beginning of the nineteenth century is even more true of the present day. There is scarcely another field of study so falsified as modern historical research. Partly owing to a lack of understanding of the true motive forces in history, partly out of deference to the interests of the ruling classes, our "independent" and "impartial" scholars have reduced history to a "mass of fabrications" which has for its purpose anything but the discovery of truth. It may indeed be said that the more class-conscious a ruling class is, the more unscrupulous is the adulteration of history, which becomes an apologia for that class, and "bolsters up all frauds and villainous institutions." Upon the appearance of a new class, which takes up the struggle for power against the ruling class, history is purged of this apologetic rubbish, only to become once again a mass of fabrications after the new class has consolidated its power. The proletariat alone abides by historic truth after gaining the victory, for the victorious proletariat has no "frauds and villainous institutions" to bolster up against anybody. This applies not less to historical facts than to the historical method, since the proletariat has no interest in departing from its materialist basis.

It is no doubt this highly developed class-consciousness of the English bourgeoisie which explains the fact that modern English history has been so incredibly adulterated and falsified. Of course, innumerable fabrications and distortions will be found in the history of earlier centuries, which bourgeois scholars in

<sup>\*</sup> *Poor Man's Guardian*, Dec. 5, 1835.

England, as elsewhere, are particularly fond of studying, since in that field they feel somewhat less hampered by considerations of modern class interests; but it is chiefly the history of the last century and a half that is handled with such scandalous unscrupulousness. Whole periods in the history of the English people, as for instance the great Chartist movement, are skipped over with a few naive and disdainful remarks, whilst other, less important periods are elaborately treated in the style of modern "descriptive" journalism and parliamentary gossip.

Modern English history has been so little investigated that the researches of our great masters, Marx and Engels, still constitute the main source from which we derive our knowledge of the early stages of the Labour movement in England, and the subjects left untouched by Marx and Engels are still, as it were, outside our field of knowledge. For instance, Plekhanov, in his splendid preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, outlining the early history of the theory of the class struggle, demonstrates by examples from French sources, that as far back as the first third of the nineteenth century several bourgeois and Utopian Socialist writers in France had a very clear conception of the class struggle. It is remarkable, however—or rather natural, after what has been said before—that he does not make a single reference to English sources, which shows that even to him, whose erudition was so great, their literature was unknown. Yet it was from England that he could have obtained abundant material for his historical sketch, far superior in clearness, wealth and completeness, than anything to be found in French literature. For the conception of the class struggle in all its implications and applications can be exhaustively developed only from the proletarian standpoint, and in this respect the soil was much more favourable in England. Here the proletariat was socially differentiated from the bourgeoisie at an earlier date and more completely than in petty-bourgeois France, where this great cleavage occurred only in the 'forties, and where till then no specific proletarian philosophy could possibly have emerged.

In England the facts, indeed, are so clear and definite that one may even fix the precise year in which the conception of the class struggle as a component part of proletarian thought first made its appearance. It was in the year 1831, when the first Reform Bill was introduced in the House of Commons. As is well known, the Bill was the result of a long agitation, extending over more

than half a century, against the monopoly of power in the hands of the landed aristocracy, and aiming at the abolition of its political privileges by a democratisation of the suffrage and a redistribution of seats. But whereas the agitation had been carried along on radical and democratic lines, demanding universal suffrage, secret ballot, short parliaments etc., the Bill introduced by the Government was limited to a redistribution of seats and to an extension of the vote to householders paying a rent of not less than £10 per annum. In this way a distinct line of demarcation was drawn among the population hitherto deprived of political rights, which closely coincided with the distinction between the possessing and non-possessing classes, *i.e.*, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. That this reform was a trick usually employed by governments to split the democratic movement and to arrest its further growth with the aid of the newly enfranchised possessing classes, was quite obvious from the statements made by various members of the Government at the time. Grey, the Prime Minister, frankly declared in the House of Commons: "If any persons suppose that this Reform will lead to ulterior measures, they are mistaken; for there is no one more decided against annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and the ballot, than I am. My object is not to favour, but to put an end to such hopes and projects."<sup>\*</sup> A similar statement was made by his colleague, Lord Brougham, in the House of Lords: "You are now asked to pay a moderate price for restoring the old fabric of the representative system, and if you refuse it, the longer you delay, the more you will have to yield, till annual parliaments, elected by the millions, and vote by ballot must be conceded. . . . There are those who, even in this House, talk much of the Bills so adding to the strength of the democracy as to endanger all the other institutions of the country, and who therefore charge us as originators, as the promoters of spoliation and anarchy. Why, my Lords, have we ourselves nothing to fear from democratic spoliation? The fact is, that some of the members of the present Cabinet possess more property than any two administrations together within my recollection. I need not say I do not include myself, for I have little or no property, but what little I have depends upon the stability of existing institutions and is as dear to me as the much larger possessions of your lordships."<sup>†</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> *Poor Man's Guardian*, Nov. 19, 1831.

<sup>†</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1831.

The intentions of the Government were stated quite clearly, and events soon proved that they did not miss their object. When the Bill was thrown out by the Lords, the whole of the middle classes ranged themselves on the side of the Government, and the entire country resounded with the clamour of "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill!" Some democrats endeavoured to oppose this cry, drawing attention to the class nature of the Bill, but their warnings were as a voice crying in the wilderness; the whole proletariat followed the middle class. The intentions of the bourgeoisie were again stated quite clearly by Thomas Attwood, the leader of the Political Union of Birmingham, which was at the head of the reform movement. In a speech delivered before his colleagues in the latter part of 1831 he drew a parallel between the political situation in England and that of America, where the negroes and the foreigners had no vote: "In America there were at least nine men interested in property to one man interested in labour alone. In England the case was exactly the reverse. Here there were nine persons interested in the sale of their labour to one who was interested in the preservation of his property. Therefore, if it had not been deemed safe for the national interests in America to confer political power indiscriminately upon every individual in the community, they ought not to be surprised if it was deemed still more unsafe in a state of society like that of England, where property was gathered up into immense masses and where extreme poverty might so act upon the passions and necessities of the people as to have them unfair judges over the property of their neighbours, and probably to urge them on to measures alike destructive of the interests and happiness of all."\*

How could such naive candour on the part of the middle classes fail to arouse the class consciousness of their natural opponents? In the same year, in connection with the hue and cry raised by Attwood and his colleagues in Birmingham against the arrogant Lords, the democratic *Poor Man's Guardian* wrote in an appeal addressed to the House of Lords: "Threats of a 'revolution' are employed by the middle classes and petty masters, as arguments to induce your allowance of their measure; but be not intimidated by them: a violent revolution is not only beyond the means of those who threaten it, but it is to them their greatest object of alarm; for they know that such a revolution can

\* *The Morning Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1831.

only be effected by the poor and despised millions who, if excited to the step, might use it for their own advantage, as well as for that of themselves, who would thus not only be placed in a less exclusive situation than at present, but would also have their dear rights of property endangered: be assured that a violent revolution is their greatest dread, and, should ever the poor millions be compelled to resort to such an alternative, they will be as firmly opposed to it as yourselves could possibly be; yes, alas! their assistance, in such an event, is secured to you by the irresistible *sympathy of property*, without the necessity of any sacrifice on your part, of any fraction of your dear exclusiveness.”\*

No clearer grasp of the situation from the standpoint of the class struggle could have been exhibited even by a Marxist, and numerous similar passages to be found in the columns of the same newspaper show that these were not isolated and casual observations but part and parcel of a definite system of ideas. We shall return to this subject later; at this juncture it may be noted that precisely one year later the theory was turned into practice. When the fight against the Lords became intense, and there were riots in London and 100,000 pikes were alleged to be kept in readiness in Sheffield, the centre of bourgeois agitation, a Midland Union of the Working Classes sprang up, because, as was stated in the announcement, “the leaders of the other unions, being men of property, had separate and distinct interests from those of the working class.” Dr. Arthur S. Wade, one of the founders of the Union, wrote in a letter to Attwood: “As the majority of those who have taken an active part in these unions are men of property, they have an interest in securing the representation of property rather than of human beings. As a proof of this, men of property, from time immemorial, have always secured the power to make laws, and always protected their own interests, reckless of the consequences, the effects of which you may this day behold, in the extreme wealth on the one hand and the destitution and starvation of the artisans of your own town on the other.”†

The Reform Bill was passed. True, there was no revolution; nevertheless when the Lords threatened a military dictatorship under that old martinet, the Duke of Wellington, a run was organised on the Bank of England, and the Crown and the Lords had to surrender. This opened the way to the further develop-

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Oct. 1, 1831.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1832.

ment of proletarian class consciousness, and to a clearer understanding of the antagonism between the classes. As long as the bourgeoisie was still in the opposition and was fighting for its rights, it could keep up the pretence of fighting for the rights of the common people. Indeed, when the menace of a military dictatorship was imminent and the supporters of the Bill were urged to unite, even the *Poor Man's Guardian* succumbed to the lures of the Attwood syrens and wrote: "When the Bill is safe, which we are not yet quite confident it is, we cannot think so ill of human nature as to think that those who will then have gained their own freedom will not aid us to gain ours."\*

O'Brien, whilst criticising the Reform Bill as a measure intended, "not for the relief of the people, but to furnish the means of keeping them down," even then declared that the passing of the Bill would not be without some advantage to the people, since "it would transfer the Government (through the House of Commons) from the aristocracy to the middle class—and by this means furnish you, the workmen of England, with the means of ascertaining who are your real enemies. . . . If the Reform Bill," he continued, "did not certainly better your condition, then you would be able to see that it made no difference to you who were your masters, if you were still to remain slaves, and that the only way for you to get out of the mess was to get a slice of the government into your own hands."\* The remark that to the workers it made no difference who were their masters was not perhaps entirely correct, and as we shall see later on, O'Brien could see things in a different light. At any rate, his expectations came true much sooner than he considered possible.

The popular movement aroused in Ireland was met by the brutal Coercion Acts, and the "reform" Government answered the founding of Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union with the sentence of the six Dorsetshire labourers to deportation at the very moment when the workers of London were collecting money to present a piece of silver plate to the parliamentary sponsors of the Reform Bill!

In 1834 the new and atrocious Poor Law deprived the working class of its traditional right to public relief, and, on the plea of reducing the "intolerable" burden of taxation and arousing their "manhood," delivered the poor to the tender mercies of the

\* *Ibid*, May 26, 1832.

† *The Midland Representative*, May 12, 1832.



capitalist class hankering after human flesh. "The object of the new Poor Law Act," O'Brien wrote, "is to bring down the whole of the labouring population, agricultural and manufacturing, to the lowest rate of remuneration at which existence can be sustained. The saving they look forward to is nearer £40,000,000 than £2,000,000, and it is a saving not out of rates but out of wages."\* It was, indeed, an act of class violence without parallel in England, and it fully justified the warning sounded in an article in the *Poor Man's Guardian*, entitled "A Last Warning on the Accursed Reform Bill" and signed by "One of the Oppressed," in which it was said: "The Bill is the most illiberal, the most tyrannical, the most abominable, the most infamous, the most hellish measure that ever could or can be proposed. . . . I therefore conjure you to prepare your coffins if you have the means. You will be starved to death by thousands, if this Bill pass, and thrown on to the dunghill, or on to the ground, naked, like dogs."† After the enactment of the new Poor Law this prophecy, in spite of the most strenuous opposition offered by the workers, became literally true, as may be seen from the literature of that period.

These measures soon exercised their effect. "In one respect," O'Brien wrote, "the New Poor Law has done good. It has helped to open the people's eyes as to who are the real enemies of the working classes. Previously to the passing of the Reform Bill, the middle orders were supposed to have some community of feeling with the labourers. That delusion has passed away. It barely survived the Irish Coercion Bill, it vanished completely with the enactment of the Starvation Law. No working man will ever again expect justice, morals or mercy at the hands of a profit-mongering legislature."‡ These words were fully justified. It is enough to turn the pages of the popular journals of the time, in which thousands of political demonstrations and mass meetings are recorded, to see that by that time the English proletariat had practically given up all dreams of the "union of all classes," had indeed started the movement which was soon to become known as Chartism, which in its turn, affected the theoretical outlook of the period and led to a remarkable conception of the class struggle.

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Jan. 28, 1837.

† *Ibid.*, April 14, 1832.

‡ *Hetherington's Twopenny Despatch*, Sept. 10, 1836.

## CHAPTER TWO SOCIETY AND CLASSES

**F**OREMOST among those who most clearly and consistently brought an understanding of class antagonisms and of the resulting class struggles to bear upon the treatment of the questions of the day was one who, as frequently happens with original thinkers, had the misfortune to outlive himself, James Bronterre O'Brien. Marx happened once or twice to make some disparaging remarks about him, and since then we have had an idea of O'Brien as one of the numerous "cranks" living in England at that time, busy inventing all manner of social schemes and panaceas. This does him great injustice. His was one of those limited, yet very gifted minds which are incapable of giving further development to their original ideas because those ideas have been conceived through their own mental efforts. "We have," O'Brien once said with justifiable pride, "treated all the subjects in a manner such as they were never treated before, our views on them were perfectly novel and peculiar to ourselves."\* This originality was both his merit and his misfortune. His discoveries had clouded his vision and rendered him for ever blind to further advances. Marx made his acquaintance at a time when his principal work had been accomplished, but as he still continued to appear in public as writer and lecturer—he died in 1864—Marx assailed his confused economic doctrines, which may be detected in the first period of his activity, although they then played a subordinate part and were not carried to such extremes as they were later on.

Even his pet scheme of a national currency bank, which made him particularly famous, was evolved in the 'forties, and no one was more uncompromising in the denunciation of similar schemes put forward by Attwood, during the movement for the Reform Bill, than he.† In fact, his historical significance lies not in the domain of economic theory but in that of political philosophy, and those who would get a proper appreciation of his merit must turn to the numerous weekly newspapers on which he worked, chiefly

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, May 24, 1834.

† Cf. his articles in the *London Mercury*, June 11th, 1837, and in the *Northern Star*, June 16, 1838, concerning the plans advanced by Attwood and his friends.

as editor, during the period 1831 to 1839. Such were the *Midland Representative*, *Carpenter's Political Pamphlets*, the *Political Herald*, the *Poor Man's Guardian*, the *Destructive*, the *Twopenny Despatch*, the *London Mercury*, the *National Reformer*, the *Operative*, the *Southern Star*, and the *Northern Star* of 1837 and 1838. From the articles which appeared in these newspapers, and not from his subsequent writings, a proper idea can be gained of that breadth and originality which earned for him the nickname of "The Schoolmaster."

O'Brien was not alone in the views which he advocated. In almost every issue of these newspapers we find proof of the fact that the idea of the class struggle and the understanding of class antagonisms were widely diffused in those days. The names of two men particularly deserve to be rescued from the unjust oblivion of history, those of Henry Hetherington and John Bell. The former was the publisher of the *Poor Man's Guardian* and of numerous other democratic newspapers in which he co-operated with O'Brien in championing the rights of the workers, whilst Bell was the editor—at first alone, and then jointly with O'Brien—of the *London Mercury* in 1836-7, in which he published a series of articles on social and political problems of the day which reveal a really masterly grasp of the conception of the class struggle. Besides this, Hetherington was an untiring champion of the freedom of the Press, fighting the infamous stamp duty by word and deed, and serving several terms of imprisonment for ignoring it. His *Poor Man's Guardian* was published without paying the stamp duty in order, as appeared in large letters on the front page, "to measure the power of right against the power of might," and no penalties could force him to cease this practice. Hetherington was the real founder of the freedom of the Press in England, a fact which will not be found in bourgeois histories.

So much for the men themselves. When we come to study their views, we must bear in mind that these thinkers lived at a time when the development of modern capitalism was far from being completed, when its first phases of downright robbery and violence were not yet at an end. While it was possible to gain an insight into the antagonism of classes, it was as yet impossible to separate the objective effect of economic laws from the subjective psychology of the individuals operating them, in other words, to distinguish between the mechanism of the exploitation of labour-power, inherent in capitalist production, and the excesses of

individual employers of labour. O'Brien frequently uses the word "conspiracy" (of the capitalists against the workers), and together with his associates often refers to the process of exploitation as an "abuse" on the part of the "middle classes" (*i.e.*, the employers of labour) which they are able to practise owing to their privileged position in a society in which the majority of the people are denied access to the land.

He wrote: "The history of mankind shows that from the beginning of the world, the rich of all countries have been in a permanent state of conspiracy to keep down the poor of all countries, and for this plain reason—because the poverty of the poor man is essential to the riches of the rich man. No matter by what means they may disguise their operations, the rich are everlastingly plundering, debasing, and brutalising the poor. All the crimes and superstitions of human nature have their origin in this cannibal warfare of riches against poverty. The desire of one man to live on the fruits of another's labour is the original sin of the world. It is this which fills the world with faction and hypocrisy and has made all past history to be what Gibbon so justly described it—'a record of the crimes, absurdities, and calamities of mankind.' It is the parent injustice from which all injustice springs."\* However highly one may value the understanding of the material foundations of history exhibited in these words, the subjective mode of viewing the class struggle, from which O'Brien starts in his argument, constitutes a basic defect which impairs the value of his main idea.

The same is true of the social and economic views entertained in those days. It is difficult to reconstruct a more or less complete system of economics out of the numerous fragmentary and contradictory theories on land, capital, capitalist exploitation etc., which were current in those days; nevertheless they were invariably based upon one and the same leading idea of a "usurpation" on the part of "crafty villains," and upon the denunciation of the employing class as "usurers." "The truth is," says O'Brien, "rent and profits are as much attacks on industry as tithes, or the malt tax, or any other impost. They are all so many subtractions from the wages of labour—all part and parcel of the same cannibal system which sacrifices the many to the avarice and ambition of the few."† Another time he speaks of our good fortune "if

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, April 27, 1833.

† *Ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1834.

we were proprietors of the land and of the machines, instead of being mere machines ourselves for crafty villains who have gradually usurped both to our exclusion." Then, again, still less scientifically, he says: "Let the aristocracy be born again into the world, that is to say—utterly, thoroughly and radically reformed—let them even show a disposition to do us justice, and then we may have kindly feelings towards them. . . . Let them renounce their usurpations and admit the people to their undoubted rights. . . . Let the aristocracy be humane and the people will be grateful."\*

Many such expressions and views could be quoted, but these suffice to show that the thinkers of those days on the whole lacked a true perception of the objective nature of social and economic laws. This was far from being the invariable rule. It is, indeed, amazing to trace the progress of their philosophic thought from crude empirical perception to a viewpoint on social-economic phenomena which leaves nothing to be desired in point of objectivity. When, for instance, O'Brien himself declares in one place that "human character has been hitherto essentially the same in all ages and countries because society has been always constituted on the same principles"† his words not only contradict his own oft-repeated denunciations of the wickedness and brutality of capitalists etc., but put him in line with the modern interpretation of history which considers social environment the decisive factor in the formation of individual character. On another occasion he speaks even more clearly: "We do not accuse the moneyed capitalists of intentional robbery. To do this would be as unjust as it would be malignant. . . . These spoliations they commit, not from sinister design, but from accidental position in society; or, rather the spoliations are committed *for* them by the silent operation of causes over which they have no control under the existing arrangements of society."‡ And elsewhere he says: "Those of the middle class are like all other men, the creatures of circumstances. Their characters are formed by institutions and their *relative positions* in society to other classes."§ Such statements clearly go far beyond empirical thinking and sound almost like extracts from Marxist literature. Yet it is a remarkable fact that having taken up the standpoint of materialist

\* *The Destructive*, June 22, 1833.

† *Poor Man's Guardian*, Nov. 30, 1833.

‡ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1835.

§ *The Midland Representative*, April 14, 1832.

determinism, O'Brien in no way succumbed to that superficial fatalism which we find, for instance, in Robert Owen who also considered human character to be the product of environment. In opposition to Owen's fatalism he says: "If a man is to be excused for oppressing me because, forsooth, he is the 'creature of circumstance,' am not I for the like reason to be excused for resisting him? . . . or is it the aggressor only that ought to profit by the theory of unaccountability?"\*

O'Brien goes even further in his conception of individual character, viewing from the same objective standpoint all that is individual ("heroic") in history. With a sure hand he grasped one of the profoundest problems of historical philosophy which remains even to-day a closed book to all who are outside the Marxist world of thought. "The error," he says in an article on the ever-occurring political assassinations in France and Italy; "which appears to us to be one of the most formidable barriers to human improvement, is that of imputing to *individuals* the glory and the guilt of those political acts and systems of government, which are, in reality, the work of whole classes, and in the execution of which the individuals are but the chosen tools or instruments of these classes." Tyrannicide and similar actions are useless, for "our slavery is the work, not of individual rulers, but of whole classes of people, whose interests are naturally placed in opposition to our own."† On another occasion, speaking on the same subject, he calls this practice of "referring to individuals the acts of whole classes" one of the most "pernicious and extensive errors that ever Machiavellism pressed into the service of despotism."‡ "Who," he asks, speaking of the class struggle in America, "are the real enemies of the American operatives and of the American democracy? Why, to be sure, the Middle Classes. These are the real tyrants of America, and of England, and of France, Spain, and Portugal, and of every country on the face of the earth, to which their dominion extends. It is the selfish and savage division of society which fills the world with misery. People talk of priests and standing armies. They look to kings and aristocrats, and would make us believe that we owe all our evils to those personages. This is humbug that ought to be discarded with our nursery tales. There is nothing delights a

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, March 21, 1835.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1835.

‡ *Ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1835.

usurious middle class more than to hear the people railing at kings and priests, or at lords and standing armies. And why? Because it proves the people's ignorance of the real state of things. It shows that they know not their real enemies."\*

Considering that even to-day there are not only individuals, but entire political parties which make the "most pernicious error" of ascribing to individuals "the glory and guilt of the political acts and systems of government,"† we cannot help admiring O'Brien's keen historical insight. Even more remarkable is the fact that not only did he understand the conditioned nature of the rôle of the "hero" in history, but that he also emphasised everywhere the conditioning factor itself—the class—which stamps him as one of the direct and most important forerunners of Marx and Engels. For the centre of gravity of the materialist conception of history lies in the fact that it sees in the *classes* of society the instruments of the historical process, and to O'Brien belongs the honour of having been one of the very few thinkers who realised this before Marx.

We shall presently see how O'Brien used this conception of class; at present we merely wish to point out that the same standpoint from which he considered the actions of individuals was also applied by him to social institutions. In opposition to the utopian and romantic idealists of those days, and to the workers who attacked the use of machinery, he, in a series of brilliant articles, agreed that the evils of machinery lay not in the machine but in the system. "If," he said, "instead of working to displace manual labour altogether and enrich a few avaricious task-masters at the expense of their slaves, machinery were made to work for the general good by being employed as an auxiliary to, instead of as the antagonist of, human labour, there is no fixing a limit to the blessings that might be derived from it."‡ "For," he declared, "the misfortune consists in that all the institutions of the country are made to operate in favour of the unproductive classes of the community, without any more reference to the productive classes than is necessary to preserve a sufficient number of them for the purpose of maintaining others in idleness."§ This emphasises

\* *Ibid.*, July 5, 1834.

† The author, writing this in 1908, was alluding to the Russian Social-Revolutionaries who were advising and practising individual terrorism.

‡ *The Destructive*, Oct. 12, 1833.

§ *The Political Herald*, No. 1, 1835.

the social factor which determines the rôle of machinery in the given circumstances. The machine itself, like the individual, may be good or bad; the decisive question is whether it is used as the tool of a particular class or for the general good.

The same criterion was applied by O'Brien on another occasion. "Of Mr. Owen's theories respecting marriage and religion," he writes, "we say nothing decided. We deem them altogether beside the question. Our present institutions relating to marriage and religion may be very good, or they may be very bad; but whether good or bad, they have manifestly grown out of our system of property and can never be wholly separated from it. You cannot dispense with marriages, or 'single family arrangements' so long as individuals are made answerable by law for the maintenance of their own offspring. You cannot dispense with marriage if you will preserve the inheritance or transmission of property to your heirs or descendants. . . . The compelling of one man to unite himself through life to one woman, and to the children of that woman by himself, is as necessary a consequence of our present property laws as the mystic union of the sexes is a necessary consequence of the laws of our nature."\*

It will be seen how little the subjective mode of viewing things imposed upon O'Brien by the immaturity of the capitalist processes and relations, prevented him from gaining a true conception of the action of social laws. One is, indeed, almost tempted to assume that the subjective mode was not really his way of thinking, but rather his method of expression, such as we not infrequently find even in modern Marxist and Party literature. But this would be too daring a deduction from the facts. In the conditions prevailing at the time O'Brien could not be a Marxist, and though we may admire the high level attained by his genius, we are bound to recognise a certain crudity in his ideas. On the other hand we must guard against considering O'Brien's insight into the mysteries of historical and social processes as the accidental inspiration of a lucid mind. Rather was it a system "in the making," the roots of which were partly intertwined with the remains of an earlier phase of thought, while the summit rose to a higher and purer plane.

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, March 28, 1835.



CHAPTER THREE  
THE STATE AND THE ANTAGONISMS OF CLASSES

FROM an understanding of the class aspect of social actions and of the social institutions of men to a true idea of the nature of the modern State is really but one short step. "Fools," O'Brien declares in his incisive way when speaking of the coalition war against revolutionary France, "fools, indeed, imagine that Pitt or Bonaparte caused it, or that it was the work of Cabinets or a few individuals in power. With such imbeciles we have nothing to do. Men capable of believing such stuff are not worth our notice. *Rulers and Cabinets have no power whatever beyond what society gives them.* The 'statesmen' who made war on France in 1793 did so because war was agreeable to the capitalists and profit-hunters. . . . It was for the double purpose of crushing that revolution and of opening a new field for the 'enterprise of commerce' that our moneyed interests urged that war against France."\* The relation between the Government and those who command it, *i.e.*, the ruling classes, could scarcely have been described more succinctly, and the words which we have italicised sound even to-day like a revelation.† The case was put even more clearly by an anonymous writer who, we believe, was O'Brien himself. "Everybody seems to think," he says, "that the Government makes itself what it is, when the real fact is, that the Government is made by the profit-men to protect them in their exorbitant profits, rents, and impositions on the people who labour. Is it the Government who makes the laws, or is it not, on the contrary, the great profit-men who make them to enrich themselves and then have the Government to execute them? It is the profit-men who are the *oppressors* everywhere. The Government is their *watchman* and the people who labour are the *oppressed*."‡ Here we have—probably for the first time in literature—the conception of Government as the executive committee and watchman of the interests of the ruling classes. The State itself is shown to be the organisation of the

\* *Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1834.

† This was written long before the publication of Lenin's *State and Revolution*.—(Translator.)

‡ *Poor Man's Guardian*, Jan. 14, 1832.

possessing classes for the oppression of the labouring masses. "Society," says John Bell, "has hitherto been a scheme for the protection of the rich in the perpetration of wrongs upon the poor. Society, as commentators upon the established codes of law tell us, was devised for the protection of person and property."\* "Up to this moment," says O'Brien, "all the Governments of the world have been nothing but conspiracies (*read*: organisations) of rich against poor, *alias* of the strong and cunning to rob and to keep in subjection the weak and ignorant. The present Government of England is of this sort. It is a great conspiracy of the rich against the poor, a conspiracy of idlers and robbers against the industrious and simple. No man is allowed a share of it, unless he has what is called 'property,' that is, unless he lives by force or fraud on the industry of others."†

In a brilliant article on law-making he spoke of the nature of the class State in the following terms: "Our legislators always assume that the laws of each country are right, and those who violate them are wrong. This is a rank falsehood. The laws are oftener *wrong* than *right*, and consequently, those who disobey them, more 'sinned against than sinning.' Where a small knot of villains usurp to themselves the privilege of law-making with a view to plundering the rest of the community, they have no right to make *their* laws the standard of right and wrong, or the measure of innocence and criminality. To hear Lord Brougham one would think that there was no crime in England but that of violating the laws—whereas, nine-tenths of the crimes amongst us are committed under the sanction of the laws by the law-makers themselves and their supporters. Robbery, for instance, is a crime, but who is the greatest robber in England? Why, the Statute Law of England, to be sure. He is an overgrown thief, with ten thousand hands, all of which he has in our pockets at the same moment; and he is, moreover, armed with a hundred thousand muskets, having bayonets screwed at the end of them, all of which he has, at a moment's warning, ready to force down our throats if we resist his robberies; not to speak of his innumerable bastilles, treadmills, transports, and hemp ropes, all of which are equally available for the enforcement of his plunder."‡

In similar strain he says upon another occasion: "Men have

\* *London Mercury*, Sept. 24, 1836.

† *Poor Man's Guardian*, March 7, 1835.

‡ *The Destructive*, March 23, 1833.

always been ready enough to cry out for the security of property, and to pass the most sanguinary laws for its protection. . . . It is doubtful to us, however, whether there would be any laws at all wanted to protect property, provided there were just laws in the first instance to render the acquisition of it possible only by fair and honest means. But, as matters go now, nine-tenths or perhaps ninety-nine parts in a hundred of what is called property is acquired by legalised plunder; and hence that eternal war of those who *want* against those who *have* and all the sanguinary laws resorted to by the latter for their protection.”\*

There is an unmistakable ring of the subjective and utopian mode of thinking in this as in the foregoing passage; nevertheless the nature of the State and of State legislation is shown up quite correctly. “Legalised plunder”—what more appropriate description could one give of the economic and political conditions which assisted at the birth of capitalism? O’Brien states the same truth more scientifically when he says: “The upper and middle classes have no wealth but what consists of subtractions wrung from industry, through institutions of their own making. Those of them who have sprung from the ‘lower ranks’ may boast as much as they like of their habits of industry as *workmen* and ascribe their wealth to that industry, but all who know anything know well enough that it is not as *workmen* they acquired it, but as *hirers of workmen*.”†

Here we are approaching the vital question—that of the relation between the possessing and non-possessing classes, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Whatever may have been the conception of the process of exploitation which O’Brien and his friends entertained, it is clear from the foregoing that that relation itself could only be conceived by them as one of fundamental antagonism. When the advocates of the Reform Bill sought to mask their treachery by preaching the identity of interests between the middle and the working classes and by assuring the public that the former could not well promote their own interests without at the same time promoting those of the latter, the *Poor Man's Guardian* declared editorially:—“Don't believe those who tell you that the middle and working classes have one and the same interest. It is a damnable delusion. Hell is not more remote from heaven, nor fire more averse to water, than are the interests

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Oct. 4, 1834.

† *Ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1834.

of the middle to those of the productive classes.”\* “What nonsense,” says the paper on another occasion, “to talk of their (masters and workmen) identity of interests. There neither is nor can be community of interest between master and slave. The utmost advantage the labourer derives from his master’s prosperity is employment for the time being, while the wealth he produces subsequently recoils upon himself in the shape of a new claim upon his labour, which it bestows upon his employer or his employer’s heir.”† On a third occasion the paper states: “We have over and over again shown (and by arguments unanswerable) that the ‘rights of capital and labour’ are irreconcilable. In truth, ‘rights of capital’ is an abuse of words. Capital has no rights, and can have no rights, unless to inflict wrong be a right. . . . The rights of capital will be found to resolve themselves into the right of defrauding and enslaving one portion of them and of transporting and housing the rest, according as they submit to or resist the tyranny that consumes them.”‡

It required a complete revolution in the conduct of the bourgeoisie towards the working class, assisted by certain restrictions on the unscrupulous power of capitalism, to obliterate from the mind of the English proletariat the early understanding of the fundamental antagonism of modern society. At the same time it would be erroneous to assume that because this understanding was the product of the cruder forms of capitalist exploitation, it remained in its elementary stage and never included the realisation that exploitation was something more than an accidental relationship, limited by the boundaries of the workshop. It was characteristic of the men of the ‘thirties’ that they extended this relationship to one between the possessing and non-possessing classes in general, and transplanted it from the workshop into public life as a whole.

“The history of mankind shows,” says O’Brien, “that the middle classes have ever combined with ‘property’ to keep down ‘poverty,’ but never with poverty against the aggression of property, except in cases where their own profits or liberties were threatened with the despotism of property. In these cases they have sometimes called in the multitude to their aid, but it was from purely selfish motives; for no sooner had they accomplished

\* *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1833.

† *Ibid.*, Sept. 15, 1832.

‡ *Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1834.

their own objects, *i.e.*, repelled the aggressions of property, than they shook off their no longer needed allies, and even united with the common oppressor to keep them down."\* The term *property* refers of course to landed property, and it is clear that the article refers to the Reform Bill agitation. On another occasion, touching upon the wiles of bourgeois reformers, he puts the question more broadly. "We know," he says, "there are many honest men led astray by the plausibility of a union of all classes of reformers. The workpeople are so weak in themselves, and the word *union* has such a charm in it, especially when it falls from the lips of influential persons, that it is no wonder they are deluded; but such people . . . forget that there can be no real union between parties whose interests, feelings and habits are in every respect opposed to each other. . . . Every sincere man who repudiates the fraud is maligned by these impostors as one who would sow division amongst the reformers. Division, indeed! Yes, a division it may be, but it is a division between wolves and lambs."† O'Brien generalises upon the subject of class antagonism in a still broader manner when he writes: "Do you not find that while for the purpose of throwing dust in our eyes they (the oppressors) affect to divide themselves into sectarian divisions, as Catholic and Protestant etc.—into titled divisions, as dukes, lords, commoners etc., into factious divisions, as whig, tory, 'moderate reformer' etc.—into politico-economist divisions as 'Landed Interest,' 'Moneyed Interest,' 'Manufacturing Interest' etc., do you not find, fellow countrymen, that with all these fraudulent divisions—which are so many distinctions without a difference—they agree perfectly, one and all of them, in keeping you in ignorance by excluding you from all participation in the laws of your country, and from all control over the distribution of the wealth you produce? . . . What signifies it to us whether we are robbed by Whig or Tory, if in the end we are robbed? Of what consequence to us to have the men who rob us call themselves 'Moderate Reformers,' if when we break out into the premature resistance of despair, they prove their 'moderation' only by bayonets, hulks and halters? What difference does it make to us whether our legislators are Catholic aristocrats or Protestant aristocrats or Muggletonian aristocrats, so long as they

\* *Ibid.*, April 5, 1834.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1835.

agree to monopolise all land and capital in the country, and thereby appropriate to themselves fully five-sixths of our productive industry?" (*Poor Man's Guardian*, Sept. 22, 1832).

This is an insight into the fundamental identity of all bourgeois political parties, religious sects and similar divisions, which was to be fully revealed later by Marx and Engels. O'Brien and his friends also anticipated our masters by distinguishing, in an examination of the nature of the various bourgeois classes and parties, between the dynamic and the static aspects of the case by formulating their attitude to the two political parties of the English bourgeoisie accordingly. The Whigs, on account of their hypocrisy, were naturally more repulsive to them than the Tories. "Who told the Liberals," O'Brien asks, "that the Tories are our only enemies, or even our worst enemies? . . . Heaven knows how cordially we abhor the Tories: but if we are to speak the truth, we solemnly declare that the Whigs are the worst faction of the two. Point us out any one villainous act of the Tories, and we will show you two of the same stamp from the Whigs."\* It was an abhorrence (entertained for a long time afterwards by Marxist Socialists in England) which will never be understood by people who are not familiar with the history of the Liberal Party in England, with its constant deceptions and hypocrisy. "The question has often been asked me," O'Brien says, "which do you prefer, the old representation or the new—the borough-mongers or the profit-mongers? My answer was never direct, but always to this effect: I prefer neither, but I hate the profit-monger most. If destiny left us no other choice than between the two, I should certainly prefer the perpetuity of the borough-monger to that of the profit-monger, but looking through hope to a time when we shall be cursed with neither, I prefer the new representation to the old, as being the more likely of the two to produce the state I look for."† Reading these words one recalls the concluding passage in Marx's speech on Free Trade.‡ They contain too an essential principle of Marxist tactics.

\* *Ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1835.

† *Bronterre's National Reformer*, Feb. 11, 1837.

‡ "Generally speaking, the Protectionist system in these days is conservative, while the Free Trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the Free Trade system hastens the Social Revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone I am in favour of Free Trade."

What was true of politics was, with O'Brien, also true of religion. He was by no means a "Freethinker" in the modern sense of the term; he was neither an atheist like Bradlaugh, nor an agnostic like Huxley. He never wrote a single word on religion as a question of faith. But as against this he possessed what is, of course, far more important—a profound historical understanding of religion as an institution, and he was never tired of fighting the Church as an instrument of oppression. At the time of the Catholic Emancipation he was practically the only one to denounce the fraud of celebrating the abolition of the Protestant oath as a victory for the freedom of conscience, when the only purpose of the act was to enable the Irish Catholic peers to enter the House of Lords.\*

Upon another occasion, commenting upon the rejection of a wealthy Jew as sheriff in the City of London owing to his refusal to take the Christian oath, O'Brien writes in one of his masterly articles; "Most people will laud the conduct of Mr. Sheriff Salomons in this affair. They will ascribe his rejection to his conscientious scruples; and thousands will sympathise with him who would see a legion of poor people die of hunger, without a tear for their fate or an effort to save them. The scruples of a sectarian (real or pretended) find hosts of admirers, while the real wants and hardships of a Christian are totally disregarded. What a world of sympathy has been bestowed on a few Catholic peers and lawyers, whom the old anti-Popery oaths excluded from seats in Parliament and from the Cabinet! The non-gratification of the ambition of these parties was called 'the wrongs of Ireland'; while no more notice was taken of the substantial wrongs and hardships of the rest of the population than if they were so many sheep or cows. The hunger, the desolation, the disfranchisement and spoliation, the wholesale murder of the poor were considered as dust in the balance, compared with the hardships of excluding a few plundering, heartless lawyers from Parliament. When will the people see through the cheat? When will they be wise enough to know that all rich men are the same in religious matters, that is, that they have in reality no religion at all—that they only use it as a cloak for their robberies, and as an instrument for the degrading and enslaving of the poor? . . . Salomons will buy cheap and sell dear; he will lie and cheat, and speculate all the day; he will take advantage of the necessities of his fellow

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Oct. 3, 1835.

creatures and get their goods out of them at half their value; he will lend money at exorbitant interest, and exact his pound of flesh like Shylock. All this Mr. Sheriff Salomons will do in the teeth of justice and humanity, which abhor them as destructive of the liberties and happiness of the poor. But then, Mr. Sheriff Salomons will not swear 'on the faith of a Christian.' He will not insult his holy religion. He will not apostatise from his 'faith' . . . What the millions should generally know is this: that no rich man believes in religion of any sort except as a political engine to keep the useful classes in subjection to the rich."\*

We have given this lengthy extract because it is exceedingly characteristic of O'Brien's point of view. O'Brien was the first, at least in England, to discuss religion—not as such, that is, from the point of view of its tenets—but from its social and political aspects, and with his understanding of class antagonisms, he came to the only correct attitude on the question of religion, which was as far removed from all shallow attacks on religion as such, as from the bias in favour of Nonconformity, which is so popular in England. O'Brien realised that religion and religious faith are two different things which it was wrong to confuse, whether for the purpose of defending or attacking them. Religion is a social institution, and like all other social institutions it is built upon class domination. "The Catholic aristocrat," says O'Brien, "will differ from the Protestant one on Transubstantiation or Purgatory or rubbish of that kind, but they will perfectly agree in robbing the poor of their rights."†

As vigorous and forceful as in denouncing political and religious humbug, O'Brien assailed other frauds employed by the capitalists to cloak their exploits. He was among the few who saw through the great swindle associated with the so-called abolition of slavery in the West Indies, when a dole of thirty millions was voted by Parliament as compensation to the bankrupt slave-owners. The hypocrisy of Wilberforce and other leaders of the Abolitionists was indeed disgusting, and O'Brien attacked them with all the force his pen could command, "To hear the abolitionists talk," he writes, "you would fancy that black men were the only slaves under British rule. . . . Did those rascals feel a sincere hatred of slavery, they would begin by abolishing it

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Dec. 12, 1835.

† *Ibid.*



at home. . . . The man who will start out on a cruise of benevolence to Jamaica, while he need only go to Spitalfields to find more misery than he can believe, that man is either a thickheaded fool or a coldhearted impostor. . . . How is it that we never hear the Buxtons or the Wilberforces complain of slavery at home? Whisper, Buxton, and we will tell you! Because you know, you smooth rogue, that English slavery is essential to our 'highly civilised state.' That is the reason, Buxton. The slavery of the millions is the basis of your cannibal civilisation. All your anthropophagous institutions rest on this basis: it is because the millions are slaves that you, and the like of you thrive so well. By emancipating the negro you lose nothing; you would lose a great deal by emancipating Englishmen. . . ." O'Brien thus explains the meaning of the last sentence: "In the one case, he employs and feeds the slave *only when he wants him*; in the other, he has to support him whether he has employment for him or not. . . . Emancipation enables the master to get more work done, and to give him less for it. Emancipation emancipates the slave from the whip, but it also emancipates him from his dinner; and as a hungry man is no respecter of the law, he soon discovers that if he has escaped the whip, it is only to stumble upon the tread-mill or the gallows."<sup>\*</sup>

We can see with what a profound understanding of the class interests which determine the actions and policy of the dominant bourgeoisie, O'Brien discussed various questions of the moment; and, as we pointed out in the preceding chapter, this understanding was not an isolated and accidental anticipation of the Marxist doctrine, but a complete and consistent system of ideas which came remarkably close to modern Marxism. We shall now see to what practical use these ideas were put by O'Brien.

<sup>\*</sup> *The Destructive*, June 8, 1833.

## CHAPTER FOUR REFORM AND THE CONQUEST OF POLITICAL POWER

REVOLUTIONARY Socialists are frequently reproached with being unwilling to take part in the actual daily work of reform. This reproach, with all its absurdity, contains a modicum of truth in the sense that we refuse to be a party to any and every fraud which may be hailed by the bourgeois parties as reform; that we generally entertain no hope, or very little, of obtaining from these parties any serious and important reform, and that even a serious reform is to us only a means of gaining further reform which would, by strengthening the working class, bring us nearer to the ultimate revolutionary goal. Nor could it be otherwise. What makes us a revolutionary party is this conviction that only a complete transformation of society can finally solve all social problems. Not for a single instant are we led astray as to the real value of reforms, and amid the clamour invariably raised by the bourgeois parties when carrying out this or that reform, we never hesitate to emphasise the viewpoint which is, to our mind, the determining one.

This was also the case with men in the 30's of the last century. Having discovered the interest factor which underlies all the actions and watchwords of the ruling classes, they considered the overthrow of these classes as the only object worth fighting for. "All reforms in Church and State," says O'Brien, "which did not go to emancipate the labourer from the tyranny of Capital would be useless, or worse than useless to the working classes."\* "What have they (the working classes)," he asks, "to do (just now, at least) with tithes, or taxes, or repeal of the Union, or even the corn laws? Nothing whatever. These are questions which, in the present state of society, can concern only the middle and upper classes. And why? Because, if tithes and taxes were abolished to-day, these classes would monopolise the entire benefit. Nor can they be prevented under the present system. As long as the labourer's existence depends upon the capital of others, so long must he continue a pauper and a slave. . . . There is but one remedy. It is to upset the whole system. There is no reforming it by parts. It is easier to

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, Oct. 4, 1834.

remodel the whole than to reform a part. And why? For the same reason that it is easier to plant a new tree, than to raise fruit from a decayed one. . . . Abolish tithes, for instance, and any particular tax, and the difference is immediately swallowed up by the capitalist. But to the labourers what matters it whether the fruits of his toil are usurped by the parson, under the name of *tithe*, or by the landlord and farmer, under those of *rent* and *profit*? Not one straw.\*

In point of principle, O'Brien may not have been altogether right in ascribing such rigidity to economic laws. But it should not be forgotten that the English proletariat in those days possessed no strong organisations to counter the effect of those laws, and that, generally, the reforms mentioned above were red herrings which the bourgeois parties trailed across the path of the workers. The uncompromising opposition offered by O'Brien to these and similar reforms was not dictated so much by principle, as by profound distrust of the sincerity and honesty of the ruling classes. "All oppressed of every kind" he warned, "should look with distrust upon the measures of change which originate with their oppressors, and if the work of reform is to be done well for them, they must do it for themselves."† This is only a paraphrase of the well-known dictum that the working class itself must work out its own salvation, which has since been inculcated in our minds by theory as well as by cruel experience.

This attitude placed O'Brien and his friends in sharp opposition to Robert Owen and other Utopians, who, filled with a child-like faith in the efficacy of the slogans of justice and humanity, would appeal to the ruling classes and dream of a peaceful reformation of society by means of industrial co-operative societies and the like. "It is often painful to us," says O'Brien, "to witness the proceedings of working men. To hear their protestations of innocent intentions, to hear their simple appeals to justice and probity, to watch their tenderness of scruple in all doubtful matters are to us, we confess, painful scenes; and why? Because they betray a profound ignorance of our present social state. Working men fancy that being honest themselves, the other orders of society are honest also. They fancy that because their own arguments are based on justice and humanity, their oppressors should also rest theirs on the same grounds.

\* *Ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1834.

† *Ibid.*, Oct. 18, 1834.

Miserable delusion! The rich have never cared one straw for justice or humanity, since the beginning of the world. "We defy the historian to point out a single instance of the rich of any age or country having ever renounced their power from love of justice, or from mere appeals to their hearts and consciences—there is no such instance! Force and force alone has ever conquered them into humanity."\*

Of course, the case is not quite so simple as it seemed to O'Brien. Justice and humanity—whether affection or dislike for them—play no determining part in the class struggle. The historical actions of classes depend on their general position in the process of production, and what appears as justice and humanity to the bourgeoisie is frequently absurd from the point of view of the proletariat. Nevertheless what O'Brien said about the only really efficacious method of converting the ruling classes to the principles of humanity constituted a great advance on the Utopian ideas of Robert Owen. What he meant by "force" was not mere physical violence, but rather moral pressure, or, as he describes it, "a combination, a determined union of the whole of the useful classes."†

On another occasion he wrote of the Owenite dreams: "The wealth once acquired, will the possessors voluntarily give up the system which gained it for them? . . . Little do they know of human nature who think it. So steeled are the hearts of these parties by the nature of their pursuits, it is certain that they would sacrifice half the working population of the world rather than renounce it. . . . Nor would there be any use talking to them of the superior happiness of another system. They know nothing of such happiness. The only happiness they can understand is money—and the power of getting others to work and think for them—the consciousness, in fact, of their own superiority. . . . There is but one way of reaching them—it is through fear. Make the mammonists afraid, and you may do anything with them."‡ Here the personal, subjective element in the conduct of the ruling classes is strongly underlined; but the fundamental idea that the relation between the classes is essentially a question of power was absolutely correct and far

\* *Ibid.*, June 21, 1834.

• † *Ibid.*, Oct. 25, 1834.

‡ *Ibid.*

superior to the views prevailing among the Utopians of those days.

This gave rise to the most essential idea which distinguished the views of O'Brien and his friends from those entertained by Owen and the other Utopians. It was the recognition of the political struggle, *i.e.*, of the capture of political power as the only means towards carrying out the necessary reforms, and even of the transformation of society according to the views of Owen and other "Socialists." "Everyone knows," says O'Brien, "that government is intended only for the protection of those that make it. Where the few make the Government, the Government will govern only for the few. Where the many make it, it will govern for the many, unless (as often happens) the few are cunning and strong enough to cheat the many out of their due share of it. In England the Government is made *by* and *for* the middle and upper classes, *alias* for those who live by fraud and force on the plundered industry of the poor. So long as the Government continues in such hands, neither Mr. Owen nor anybody else will effect the slightest practical change."\* "We would," he wrote on the occasion of the arrival of some St. Simonians to England, "advise the St. Simonian missionaries to give up their religious reveries, and stick to political economy. . . . Let them expound the due rights of industry, and stand up for the political emancipation of the working classes, and they may do much good. Let them inculcate the necessity of combination among the oppressed of all religions against the oppressors of all religions. . . . What the people want is a government of the whole people to protect the whole people, and this once acquired, they will be in a position to establish Owenism, or St. Simonianism, or any other ism that a majority may think best calculated to ensure the well-being of the whole. With a power over the laws, the people may do anything that is not naturally impossible; without it they will never be able to do anything."†

Hetherington, speaking of the criticisms levelled at Owen by some of his bourgeois opponents, wrote: "The *Chronicle* thinks that the views of the Society (an association under Owen's superintendence) are too utopian to be realised. Quite the reverse; they are essentially practical and beneficial, if the people had a free stage and no favour. When the people have equal

\* *Ibid.*, March 21, 1835.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 30, 1833.

rights and their consequent equal laws, the superiority of Mr. Owen's principles will admit of demonstration, but not till then. To attempt to establish, even partially, upon independent grounds, any of Mr. Owen's philanthropic views in the present state of the country and before the working classes are politically emancipated is only putting the cart before the horse and will end in an abortion."\*

This shows how well the leaders of the working class in those days appreciated the importance of political rights in the proletarian struggle for emancipation. It seemed incomprehensible to them how such otherwise keen-sighted men as Robert Owen could fail to see the obvious need of political emancipation for the working class, and more than once, on observing the political indifference of the Owenites and the trade unions led by them, they gave vent to their anger. "In reviewing the struggle," O'Brien wrote, "which is now in progress between capital and labour, or between the trade unions on the one hand and the master manufacturers on the other, there is one circumstance which fills us with astonishment and regret, we mean the disposition of the chief leaders of the workmen to disconnect their cause altogether from politics. This is the most futile and ill-judged proceeding that can be conceived."† "What," was the equally passionate protest of Hetherington, "have the 'genuine' Owenites in London done against all these enormities, but paralyse the noble efforts of others by deprecating politics? Have they raised their voice against imprisoning poor men for vending cheap knowledge? Have they, in any way, assisted to establish a free Press, or contributed a trifle at any of their social dancing parties to mitigate the sufferings of the poor victims of Whig tyranny? Nero fiddled while Rome was burning! And the benevolent Owenites are dancing jigs at two-shilling hops while thousands and ten thousands of their poor fellow countrymen are pining in want and destitution. . . . I, therefore, tell them that the greatest, the first to be removed barrier is the want of political power in the millions; and till that is removed co-operation upon Mr. Owen's comprehensive plan can never be successfully established."‡

The necessity of political rights for the working class was so

\* *Ibid.*, Dec. 28, 1831.

† *Ibid.*, Dec. 7, 1833.

‡ *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1832.

frequently and so pointedly emphasised by them that, like the Chartists afterwards, they were often reproached with making a fetish of political power and raising the demand for universal suffrage into a sort of panacea for all ills. No doubt the reproach was merited at times, but only in isolated cases, when in the heat of debate with the Owenites, would the advocates of political struggle go so far as to deny all value to any reform but that of suffrage, believing that all other reforms would almost automatically follow suit. A perusal of the numerous articles on America written by O'Brien in the *Poor Man's Guardian* and elsewhere will suffice to show that he did not consider political institutions important merely as such. He points out that under a democratic suffrage and a democratic government there can also be exploitation of the masses. "The Americans," he says, have rich and poor as we have; fluctuations and bankruptcies as we have; broken hearts and broken heads as we have."\* "For," he declares, "it is one thing to possess the right, and another to make a wise use of it; universal suffrage can be of little use, if applied only to political purposes. In fact, it is only as auxiliary to social reform or as a means of protecting the multitude in the establishment of new institutions for the production and distribution of wealth that universal suffrage would develop its virtues."†

It will be seen that to these men the attainment of political power was, indeed, only a means to a higher end. True, this goal, as pointed out at the beginning of this essay, was conceived by them in very vague outline. From other statements made by the same writers it can be seen that the social future was visualised in rather confused and contradictory terms far from the logic and lucidity of the picture drawn by Owen. But their great historical contribution consisted not in the logic and clarity of their utopian schemes (for in the circumstances of the time nothing but utopian schemes could be drawn) but rather in the establishment, so to speak, of the preliminary conditions to any plan of a future social order. Born of the actual class struggle of the time, their ideas pierced the veil of the numerous and complex political, religious, and ethical pretences which concealed the real substance of modern society, and attained a surprisingly clear understanding of the fundamental class antagonisms which determine and on which depend all the other ideas and actions,

\* *Ibid.*, Dec. 27, 1834.

† *Ibid.*, July 5, 1834.

as well as the institutions of society. O'Brien and his friends were the first to adopt the standpoint of historical materialism in the appreciation and interpretation of social processes and social facts. Their doctrine soon became the theoretical foundation of the powerful Chartist movement, about which one frequently asks oneself in amazement, could it really have been a pre-Marx movement.

The reader will naturally wish to know how much Marx and Engels owed to these thinkers of the first half of the 30's in working out their theoretical views. It seems incredible that Marx and Engels, who appeared upon the stage but a few years after them, should have learned nothing from those who had anticipated one of the essential parts of the doctrine they subsequently proclaimed. There are no direct indications that they did. On the contrary, we have Engels' declaration that it was Hegelian philosophy and French Socialism which had mainly influenced Marx, which, by implication, excludes the idea of the ideological influence of O'Brien or any other English thinker. It seems to us too rash to accept this conclusion without further research. In the first place, the possibility of an indirect influence exercised through the Chartist movement is by no means excluded. Engels himself refers to the industrial conditions of England as a third factor which influenced himself and Marx, and these conditions were correctly described only in Chartist literature. Then, as Franz Mehring\* pointed out, Engels was probably the first of the two to arrive at the basic principles of materialist philosophy; and Engels had received his political education in England, where he carefully studied both the living conditions and the literature of the time. One may venture a guess that it was from this literature that Engels gained his first insight into the theory of the class struggle, as indeed it was from this source that he learnt to describe it in his first book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. It is possible that he set out and developed these newly acquired views in his letters to Marx during the latter's stay in Paris and in Brussels, and in personal association with Marx during his stay in England in 1845, thus aiding his friend in his philosophical studies. Engels also mentions that he supplied his friend with English literature—probably such as supported his point of view. Perhaps it was because of the part he played in the development of Marxist

\* *The Literary Legacy*, German Edition, Vol. 1, p. 359.



theories, that Engels made no mention of the influence of English ideas, since it would have revealed him as the original author of the materialist conception of history, an act which would have been contrary to his modesty and his loyalty to Marx.

Of course, all this is mere surmise, and should not be taken as anything else. It is based chiefly upon the fact that, fifteen years before the drawing up of the *Communist Manifesto*, the theory of class antagonisms and class struggle in capitalist society had been presented in all its bearings, not in a fragmentary form, but in such a systematic and complete manner as to arouse even to-day our wonder and admiration. Moreover, those views were not advocated by unknown men in obscure newspapers, but by the most prominent proletarian publicists of the time, whose names were in everybody's mouth, and whose writings were read by the proletarian multitudes. O'Brien was particularly sought after by newspaper publishers and was paid high fees for his articles. It seems improbable that the ideas of this famous and most popular writer should have left no trace on Marx and Engels. Perhaps some day a historian will be able to offer something more on this subject than mere surmises.

### III

#### THE FORERUNNERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL

##### CHAPTER ONE

##### THE BEGINNINGS (1832-1845)\*

**T**HE International Workingmen's Association was formed in London on September 28th, 1864, at a public meeting in St. Martin's Hall. The meeting was devoted to the Polish question, but one of the French delegates, in his speech, touched upon the idea of an international association of workers to fight the capitalist menace, and the idea was enthusiastically taken up by the assembly and embodied in a resolution. A committee was then elected to carry out the resolution and it was this committee which laid the foundation of the historic International.

Such is the account we read in the documents of the period, and so we usually picture to ourselves the beginning of that great movement of the International proletariat. It is, however, clear that this picture is most inadequate. How did the idea of an international association of the proletariat arise at all, and why was it enthusiastically adopted by a large assembly composed of

\* NOTE (1913). This essay, although ready for publication, was held back by the author in order that he might have an opportunity of studying the correspondence of Marx and Engels. Now, having read that correspondence, the author finds no grounds for revising any of the facts or opinions expressed by him. He had hoped that the correspondence would help him to fill the gaps in his data concerning the very important period at the end of the 'fifties and the beginning of the 'sixties; but his hopes were not realised. True, his views of some personalities, notably of Harney and Jones, do not coincide with those to be found in the letters of Marx and Engels; nevertheless he believes that Socialists of to-day may and should be more just in regard to these first protagonists than was possible for the two founders of Scientific Socialism, who had to defend and advocate their new doctrines against the whole world. Especially as regards the international organisation of the proletariat, Harney and Jones had laid the foundation of the splendid edifice subsequently erected by Marx and Engels, and though it is certain that the former, in spite of the much more favourable conditions, would never have been able to build up the historical International—not, at least, in all its magnitude and influence—it is equally certain that even Marx and Engels would not, without their work, have met with such success. Possibly Marx and Engels could not be aware of this, but we know it, and should openly admit it—TH. R.

Englishmen and foreigners; rapidly growing into a mass movement even among the reactionary trade unions of England? The documents furnish no information on this point, and as long as this gap in the evidence exists, our ideas about the origin of the International are also bound to be incomplete and in some respects even erroneous.

It requires but a brief reflection to see that such a grand idea as the unity of the international proletariat could not have arisen, could not have found acceptance and application, unless it had long occupied the minds of the people, unless it had responded to actual sentiments and aspirations and had to some extent undergone trial. It should be observed that we do not speak here of the content subsequently infused into this idea by the mind of Marx, although historically this, too, can be explained by social causes. We have in mind the general idea of the organisation of the international proletariat for the common struggle for emancipation, and this idea, we say, must have been fairly widespread long before September 1864, when it was accepted and so swiftly carried into effect. For a historical movement cannot be created out of nothing, nor launched at will even if its founders and sponsors be titanic personalities: it must rise from the soil of history, from the seeds of preceding movements, and move along in direct succession to them.

The International was born in England, and it is on English soil that we have to look for its preceding history. It was no mere accident that the movement originated in England and drew its nourishment chiefly from the English soil. Until late in the 70's England was the country in which modern class antagonisms, first arising there, developed most powerfully, and therefore the essential forms of the proletarian class struggle first unfolded themselves in that country. England witnessed the first political movement of the proletariat as a class. It was in England that the working class first organised itself into trade unions. It was the consciousness of the English proletariat which arrived at the first clear understanding of the class struggle both as a historical factor and as a tactical principle. And, last but not least, it was in England that the proletariat first acquired a deep sense not only of its solidarity with the workers of other countries, but also of the imperative need for concerted action in the fight against capitalist society, based upon this solidarity.

As a matter of fact, the rise of international sentiments and

of the ideas of international solidarity among the English proletariat coincided with the general awakening of its class consciousness in the course of the struggle for the democratic franchise in the 30's of the last century. At that time, too, the rest of Europe from France to Poland, was swept by revolutionary movements and revolutions; and the common struggle for freedom, as well as the great influx of political refugees from all countries to England, rendered the English workers particularly susceptible to internationalist ideas. If we take, for instance, such a popular newspaper, read by the workers in those days, as the *Penny Papers*, published by Henry Hetherington, one of the most gifted proletarian publicists in England, and soon re-christened the *Poor Man's Guardian*, by which name it is historically known, we frequently find from a quarter to a half of its eight small pages taken up with foreign affairs, reports and comments. "It celebrated the "glorious victories" of Poland, it vigorously protested against the "outrages" of the counter-revolution in Portugal, it published numerous manifestoes and proclamations by the various national committees in London, and on the first anniversary of the July (1830) Revolution of Paris, "that glorious and immortal cause," the workers were invited to attend a special banquet arranged for the occasion. "It must be kept in mind," it wrote, "that it is the victory of the working classes in the streets of Paris we wish to perpetuate; which led to the freedom of Belgium, Switzerland and glorious, betrayed, and as yet triumphant Poland!"\* The celebration of the July days took place on August 1st, at the very hour when bourgeois London, in the presence of the King, was celebrating the opening of the new London Bridge. The banquet was held in the Copenhagen Tea Gardens, Copenhagen Fields (near the present King's Cross Station), and was attended by 1,500 people of both sexes. Fiery orations were delivered by Hibbert, Lovett, Cleeve, Watson and other leaders of the working class. An address was adopted "to the brave people of France," in which it was said among other things: "We grievously lament that you should have suffered your hopes to be deceived and your efforts paralysed by the worst of men—viz., stockbrokers, law-mongers, and others of like character. . . . We regret . . . that you did not take the wise and necessary steps in the great social progress of universal liberty—the declaration of a republic. . . . You, the working people, who effected the revolution and carried

\* *Penny Papers* May 21, 1831.

it to a successful issue, what have you got? More poverty and less sympathy. . . ." During supper more speeches were delivered and stress was laid on the "heroic efforts of the men of Paris," which should "be ever spoken of with gratitude, and held worthy of imitation throughout the world."\*

It will be seen that the sympathies of the English proletariat for the revolutionary struggles in other countries bore a distinctly proletarian character even in the early stages of its own political movement. As is well known, the bourgeoisie, too, entertained in those days great sympathies for the Polish insurrection and for the Belgian revolution, and later on it welcomed similar movements in Italy and Hungary. The House of Commons even voted an annual grant of £10,000 for the support of the Polish refugees. But these sympathies were radically different from those entertained for these revolutions by the workers. "It is the victory of the working classes in the streets of Paris we wish to perpetuate" —these words were characteristic of the attitude of the London workers to the July Revolution. They marked the dawning of a consciousness of purely *proletarian* international solidarity.

The subsequent years were taken up with the English people's own fights for freedom, with the revolutionary struggles against the new Poor Law and with the great Chartist Movement. This did not prevent the English working class from devoting serious attention to the movements in other countries. The Democratic Association, founded by George Julian Harney in 1838, established close relations with the foreign political refugees living in London, and the columns of the front page of the *Northern Star*, the leading organ of the Chartists in those days, were invariably devoted to foreign affairs under the title "Foreign Intelligence." There can be no doubt that the numerous foreign refugees contributed greatly to the development of international sentiments, and all of them took part in the demonstrations and activities of the Chartists. In this way there arose a kind of reciprocal influence which helped to foster the sense of international solidarity. By the beginning of the 40's all the refugees were organised into committees and unions, and we read for example, that in the latter part of 1845 all the refugees' organisations in London under the chairmanship of Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist leader, jointly celebrated the birthday of "Orator" Henry Hunt, the hero of the Peterloo Massacre, the toast of the "Democracy of all countries"

\* *Poor Man's Guardian*, August 6, 1831.

being responded to by the well known German revolutionaries Karl Schapper and Wilhelm Weitling. In January the association of Polish refugees, presided over by Colonel Oborski, one of the leaders of the insurrection of 1830, issued a pronouncement in memory of the Russian Decembrists executed twenty years earlier, and the Chartists, the French refugees and even the central committee of Young Italy under Mazzini, which, as a rule, held itself aloof, joined in the action.\* On September 22nd, the anniversary of the first French Republic was celebrated by a banquet, at which Thomas Cooper, the Chartist leader, presided, and Harney, Joseph Moll, Weitling, Fontaine and others spoke on behalf of their respective nationalities.† At the end of the year a great "democratic and fraternal" meeting was held to express sympathy with the Poles, Harney being the chief speaker and Schapper following suit.‡ On all these and numerous other occasions the democratic and proletarian standpoint was invariably emphasised. Weitling and Schapper were never tired of bringing home to their English brothers that the proletariat of the world is one and has only one enemy, the international bourgeoisie, and when Harney spoke of the necessity of restoring the independence of Poland he took care to point out, with reference to the intrigues of Polish magnates, the Czartoryskis and the Wielopolskis, that he meant the restoration of the independence of the Polish people, not that of the Polish aristocracy. Altogether, 1845 was in a sense a historical year. It witnessed the formation of the Society of Fraternal Democrats, the first international organisation of the working class, and to that extent the forerunner of the International. Early in 1845, Oborski and Schapper had founded a society of Friends of Humanity and Justice Among All Nations, which drew up an appeal to "all the oppressed" to direct their united forces against "citadels, armies and dungeons."§ The fate of this society cannot be ascertained from the existing sources, but a banquet held on September 22nd in commemoration of the French Republic gave occasion to Harney to establish the Society of Fraternal Democrats. As Harney explained a year later on the first anniversary of the organisation ¶ he had been prompted in

\* *Northern Star*, Feb. 21, 1845.

† *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1845.

‡ *Ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1845.

§ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1845.

¶ *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1846.

his initiative by the thought that the Democrats of various countries living in London knew so little of one another and of the conditions and events in their respective lands and were dependent for information on the mendacious bourgeois press. Guided by the principle that all men are brothers, the Democrats were to write and act in common. They were not to form any special party: "Once for all we explicitly state that we repudiate all idea of forming any 'party' in addition to the parties already existing in England. We desire not to rival, but to aid all men who are honestly combined to work out the emancipation of the people."\* There were to be no rules and no formal organisation. Members were to be admitted on mutual recommendation, and that was to be the sole rule. "Any rules or regulations excepting the above," we read in the report of the first meeting of the Society, March 15th, 1846, "were deemed to be unnecessary, as were also any fixed payments, it being thought that money was unnecessary except for special purposes when voluntary contributions would be sufficient, each democrat contributing according to his means." On the question of officers, too, "it was considered that neither council nor committee was necessary, the fraternal democrats not being a society or party, but merely an assemblage of men belonging to different countries for the purpose of mutual information."† Nevertheless it was found necessary to have permanent secretaries appointed to sign all documents intended for publication, and six secretaries were elected for England, Germany, France, the Slavonic countries, the Scandinavian countries, and Switzerland respectively.

This loose form of organisation adopted by the Fraternal Democrats deserves our attention. It was their announced principle that they did not wish to form any political party in addition to the parties already existing in England, and for this reason they did not care to frame any specific rules or regulations. Why this avoidance of the forms of permanent organisations? The reason we learn from a speech delivered by Ernest Jones, at one of the subsequent meetings of the Society. "There was at its formation," he said, "a slight mistrust on the part of my Chartist brethren against the Fraternal Democrats—they feared it was an attempt to supersede the movement—to create a party within a party; they have now learned that every member of this

\* *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1846.

† *Ibid.*, March 21, 1846.

society is a thorough Chartist, and that Chartism is a test of admission for its members."\* As a matter of fact, the mistrust which was inspired by the formation of the society was so profound that at the end of 1847, after the Society had been at work for two years and should have been above suspicion, the Fraternal Democrats still found it necessary to pass a special resolution expressing their allegiance to the Chartist cause and stating that "the Fraternal Democrats, convinced that the best means of advancing the cause of Democracy in all countries is to obtain the People's Charter . . . do hereby resolve to give all the assistance in their power towards making the People's Charter a law of the land."†

The reasons which at first prompted the Fraternal Democrats to reject all forms of party organisation are worthy of note, for precisely at that moment Marx and Engels were penning the opening lines of the second chapter of the *Communist Manifesto*, which also declared that Communists did not form any separate party. Unfortunately, these words were for a long time erroneously considered to contain a guiding principle intended for all countries and all times, whereas in reality they were intended only for the English conditions of that particular historical moment. The Chartist Party was greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by Harney and Jones as well as by Marx and Engels, as is evidenced by the well known letter of the Democratic Alliance of Brussels to Feargus O'Connor on July 17th, 1846; and it was, therefore, quite natural for the Fraternal Democrats to avoid anything that might look like rivalry with it.

Nevertheless the Fraternal Democrats were eventually forced to adopt a more rigid form of organisation. On July 19th, 1847, it was decided to institute a regular membership fee of one shilling per annum,‡ and on December 13th the principles and rules of the organisation were adopted.§ Each affiliated nationality was to appoint a general secretary, and the general secretaries were to appoint from their midst one or more corresponding secretaries.¶ The general secretaries, together with one or other representative from each nationality, formed the committee which managed the

\* *Ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1847.

‡ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1847.

§ *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1847.

¶ *The Fraternal Democrats*, British Museum Catalogue, 1857—



business of the Society (henceforth called the "Association"). There were to be also a treasurer and financial secretary, and a general meeting of the members was to be held every first Monday in the month or at the summons of the committee. As secretaries we find at that time, G. Julian Harney, Great Britain; Karl Schapper, Germany; J. A. Michelot, France; Peter Holm, Scandinavia; N. Nemet, Hungary; J. Schabelitz, Switzerland; Louis Oborski, Poland; and on the committee Ernest Jones, Thomas Clark, Philip McGrath, C. Doyle, and W. Dixon. It seems pretty certain that this form of organisation, which was reproduced in all subsequent organisations, constituted the model of the first International. There was only a span of twenty years between the two organisations, during which period the traditions of the Fraternal Democrats were still alive.

Although the Fraternal Democrats were properly organised only after a lapse of two years, they had always worked on a sort of platform to which was now added, together with the rules, an "Object" of the organisation, formulated as follows: "The mutual enlightenment of its members; and the propaganda of the great principle embodied in the society's motto: 'All men are Brethren'."\* The programme itself was outlined by Harney in his speech delivered at the first anniversary of the organisation on September 21st, 1846, and was subsequently adopted in full:

"We renounce, repudiate, and condemn all political hereditary inequalities and distinctions of caste; we declare that the earth with all its natural productions is the common property of all; we declare that the present state of society which permits idlers and schemers to monopolise the fruits of the earth, and the productions of industry, and compels the working class to labour for inadequate rewards, and even condemns them to social slavery, destitution and degradation, is essentially unjust." Such was the social and political programme of the Fraternal Democrats. Finally, in regard to internationalism, the members of the organisation were to denounce any of the national prejudices which served as a cause of contention among peoples: "Convinced too, that national prejudices have been, in all ages, taken advantage of by the people's oppressors to set them tearing the throats of each other when they should have been working together for their common good, this society repudiates the term 'foreigner,' no matter to whom applied. Our moral creed is to receive our

\* *The Fraternal Democrats, op. cit.*

fellow men without regard to 'country,' as members of one family, the human race; and the citizens of one commonwealth, the world."\*

The Fraternal Democrats, it will be seen, was a democratic and communist body. Their motto, "All men are brethren," which was apparently borrowed from the German Workers' Educational Society (founded 1840), probably under the influence of Schapper, was retained even after the Communist Manifesto had launched a new militant slogan into the world. After the June events of 1848 it was frequently replaced by the words: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of the "Red" Republic. Nevertheless, as we shall presently see, the term "men" was always understood by the Fraternal Democrats as meaning "proletarians."

\* *The Fraternal Democrats, op. cit.*

CHAPTER TWO  
THE FRATERNAL DEMOCRATS  
(1846-47)

THE most successful period in the activity of the Fraternal Democrats occurred in the years 1846-47 and in the first three months of 1848. Since it was not a party of action, as was to be afterwards the International led by Marx, but only a propagandist body, its members carried on, so long as the political circumstances were favourable, a vigorous agitation for the ideas of international proletarian solidarity and international mass action for freedom both in England and abroad. Every revolutionary event—the capture of the Bastille, the proclamation of the first French Republic, the July Days in Paris, the insurrection in Poland etc.—was made by them the occasion for organising propaganda meetings and banquets, and all important occurrences in other countries, such as the Cracow rising, the revolution in Geneva, the revolt of the Junta in Portugal, the February Revolution in Paris, and so forth, brought forth public pronouncements on their part in the shape of manifestoes and demonstrations. By 1847 the Fraternal Democrats enjoyed a popularity which extended far beyond the borders of England, and their appeals and manifestoes, very frequently addressed directly to the peoples in revolt, were reprinted in all the democratic newspapers abroad. Soon they established relations with the Democrats of Brussels. When the latter congratulated O'Connor on his parliamentary victory in a splendid letter signed by Marx, Engels and Gigot, the Fraternal Democrats responded with an address in which they expressed their gratitude for the recognition of the Chartists and of the *Northern Star*, and welcomed the attitude of the Brussels Democrats as "further proof of the progress of brotherhood and the close unity of the democrats of all countries in the great struggle for political and social equality."\* On the second anniversary of their existence, on September 20th, 1847, the Fraternal Democrats launched an appeal to the united democracy of Europe, in which, after a survey of the international events of the past year, they advanced the idea of an international congress of Democracy as a counter-stroke to the bourgeois international Free Trade

\* *Northern Star*, July 25, 1846.

Congress in Brussels.\* The idea was hailed with enthusiasm by the Brussels people, and Marx himself went over to London to take part in the commemoration of the Polish insurrection of 1830 which was to be held by the Fraternal Democrats on November 29th, 1847, in the White Hart, Drury Lane—the headquarters of the German Workers' Club in London, to present an address and to carry on propaganda for the organisation of an international democratic congress of workers.† It was also proposed by Marx that the two organisations should establish close relations by correspondence. Both proposals were adopted by the meeting with great enthusiasm, and in their conference on December 13th, the Fraternal Democrats decided to request the Brussels Society to convene the international congress in Brussels to be held on October 25th, 1848, the anniversary of the Belgian revolution.‡ The events of the "Mad Year" (1848), as it was called in Germany, frustrated these plans, and it was only 18 years afterwards that the first democratic congress of the workers of all countries—the International—was held. But it is clear that this historical idea really originated with the Fraternal Democrats, probably with Julian Harney. What, then, were the ideas and views advocated by the Fraternal Democrats? They were once summarised by Harney in a speech delivered before the German Workers' Club in London:§

"Nationality has in other times been necessary; it saved mankind from universal and irredeemable slavery. In our day, too, the invoking of the spirit of nationality in some countries is indispensable to rekindle life in those countries. . . . But we must have no king Czartoryski. We must have no kingdom of Italy such as the Italian deputies solicited of the Holy Alliance in 1815. We must have the sovereignty of the people in both countries; the education of the people in both countries; the education of the people, and at least, the progressive social advance of the people, ever progressing, until the people own no masters but themselves, and enjoy the fruits of their labour, uninfluenced by oppressors in any shape or name. In other countries, such as England and France, there is no need to rekindle national feelings; on the contrary, the efforts of the good men in both countries should be directed to

\* *Ibid.*, October 2, 1847.

† *Ibid.*, December 4, 1847.

‡ *Ibid.*, December 18, 1847.

§ *Ibid.*, February 14, 1846.

the abolition of the remaining prejudices which a barbarous cultivation of the the spirit of nationality in days gone by called into existence. . . I appeal to the oppressed classes of every land to unite for the triumph of the common cause. . . 'Divide and conquer' has been the motto of the oppressors; 'Unite and triumph!' should be our counter-motto. Whatever national differences divide Poles, Russians, Prussians, Hungarians and Italians, these national differences have not prevented the Russian, Austrian and Prussian despots uniting together to maintain their tyranny. Why, then, cannot the people of those countries unite for the obtainment of their liberty? . . . The cause of the people in all countries is the same—the cause of labour, enslaved and plundered labour. . . In each country the tyranny of the few and the slavery of the many are variously developed, but the principle in all is the same. . . In all countries the men who grow wheat live on potatoes. The men who rear the cattle do not taste flesh food. The men who cultivate the vine have only the dregs of its noble juice. The men who make the clothing are in rags. The men who build the houses live in hovels. The men who create every necessity, comfort and luxury, are steeped in misery. Working men of all nations, are not your grievances, your wrongs, the same? Is not your good cause, then, one and the same also? We may differ as to the means, or different circumstances may render different means necessary, but the great end—the veritable emancipation of the human race—must be the one aim and end of all."

These words were uttered a year and a half before the *Communist Manifesto* was drawn up, and already the idea of bourgeois nationalism was given up, and the slogan of "Workers of all countries, unite!" was proclaimed. Nationalism was considered a necessary stage in the social and political development of an oppressed people (such as Poland, Italy etc.); but *only* as a stage of development, which should in no way over-shadow the interests of the proletarians as against the oppressing classes. Even amidst the fight for national emancipation the proletarian class struggle must retain its aims and endeavour to attain them. This point of view was formulated with particular clearness in connection with the Cracow insurrection. The insurrection produced a tremendous impression upon the labour democracy in England, and numerous public meetings were organised by the Fraternal Democrats to express sympathy and collect funds for the

benefit of the insurgents. A leaflet was also circulated in which, after recapitulating all the old sins of the English governments towards Poland, English diplomacy was called upon to prevent any intervention of the part of Austria. The Society of Polish Emigrants, led by Czartoryski, felt rather nettled by this democratic support, and it issued a manifesto to the people, warning against "sundry fantastic State theories" advocated by the Fraternal Democrats. A reply to this manifesto was made in the *Northern Star*, which was then edited by Harney:—

"Now, once and for all," the newspaper declared, "let us tell the Polish Committee that if Poland is in arms merely for the sake of nationality—such a cause will not meet with the sympathy of the great mass of the British people. We desire the restoration of Poland's nationality, because we believe that restoration to be one of the necessary means to the great end of Poland's regeneration, but the mere nationality of Poland—that is, the substitution of the tyranny of Polish aristocrats for the tyranny of Nicholas, Ferdinand, and Frederick William, has none of our sympathy. . . . Tyranny is tyranny all the world over, and if the mass of the Polish people are to be trampled on, it matters little whether their tyrants are Poles or Russians."\*

Thus, the views of the leaders of the Fraternal Democrats on the subject of nationalism and internationalism were entirely free from bourgeois ideology. They emphasised that nationalism is necessary only for the more active prosecution of the proletarian class struggle, and that internationalism is the corollary of the identity of the proletarian cause in all countries. Moreover, international solidarity is urged as the pre-requisite to the proletarian victory in general, for the international bourgeoisie can only be overcome by a united conduct of the struggle. At a great meeting of the Fraternal Democrats in the summer of 1847, in connection with the revolt of the Junta in Portugal against Donna Maria, Harney declared that "the people are beginning to understand that foreign as well as domestic questions do affect them; that a blow struck at Liberty on the Tagus is an injury to friends of Freedom on the Thames; that the success of the Republicanism in France would be the doom of tyranny in every other land; and the triumph of England's democratic Charter would be the salvation of millions throughout Europe." And in the conclusion of a speech delivered a couple of months afterwards in connection

\* *Ibid.*, March 21, 1846.

with the second anniversary of the Cracow insurrection, Harney said:

"Let the working men of Europe advance together and strike for their rights at one and the same time, and it will be seen that every tyrannical government and usurping class will have enough to do at home without attempting to assist other oppressors. The age of Democratic ascendancy has commenced. . . . But more than that, the rule of the bourgeoisie is doomed."\*

The idea of a prearranged plan of joint action may appear somewhat naïve, but we must not forget that this was the period when the "tyrannical governments" resorted to joint action upon an extensive scale. When the Cracow insurrection was crushed by the Austrian troops, and the city itself, regardless of the Treaty of Vienna, was annexed to the Monarchy, not one of the Powers raised a voice of protest; but no sooner did the revolution flare up in Portugal than the English Government hastened to crush the Junta, in which action it was promptly joined by France and Spain. In face of such manifestations of solidarity among the rulers, the idea of the futility of isolated revolts and the need for simultaneous revolutions as a pledge of success was bound to arise also among the oppressed. This idea was vindicated by the events in February and March of 1848, but what was here particularly important was the emphasis laid upon the international solidarity of the proletariat as an opposing force to the international solidarity of the rulers. At one of the banquets given by the Fraternal Democrats in honour of the French revolutionaries on July 14th, 1848, in memory of the taking of the Bastille, Karl Schapper spoke of the "international solidarity of peoples against the international solidarity of kings and priests," whilst Harney and Jones gave a toast for the "holy alliance of nations."†

It was from the same proletarian point of view that the Fraternal Democrats considered the question of war. At this period the English Liberals were hawking the idea of universal peace and non-interference in other people's business—a hypocritical slogan launched by Cobden for the express purpose of winning over the Quakers, which possessed the advantage of furnishing a good excuse for the rejection of any demands, such as that of aiding Italy in her struggle for emancipation, or for counteracting the infamous interventions by the Russian world-

\* *Ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, July 18, 1848.

tyrant Nicholas I. A bitter controversy ensued between the Cobdenites and the Fraternal Democrats, in which the latter vigorously denounced "the absurd doctrine, under the present circumstances, preached by advocates of everlasting and universal peace."<sup>\*</sup>

Whilst free from all reactionary utopianism, they clearly realised the nature of modern so-called "national" antagonisms and wars, and exerted all their efforts to expose the warmongers. In the beginning of 1847 there was a danger of war between England and the United States for the possession of Oregon, on the Pacific coast, and the Fraternal Democrats organised demonstrations, issued leaflets, and finally published a manifesto to the workers of both countries, in which they pointed out that hitherto all wars had been waged at the expense of the toiling masses without bestowing any benefits on them, and that the Oregon war "would distract public attention from your grievances, would add to your burdens, might probably afford a pretext for your government curtailing your scanty liberties . . . and would indefinitely postpone your political emancipation." Furthermore, "a war between the two nations would revive the barbarous national prejudices and hatreds," whilst the workers had no interest whatever in the possession of Oregon. "There is no foot of land, either in Britain or the Colonies, that you, the working class, can call your own. . . . They, your masters, will take the land—they will fill all the higher situations, civil and military, of the new colonies—your share will be the slaughter of the combat and the cost of winning and retaining the conquest. . . . The actual settlers on and cultivators of the soil, these are the rightful sovereigns of the soil, and should be at perfect liberty to choose their own form of government and their own institutions. . . . Here is one argument (the appeal continued) which the advocates of war address to the cupidity of the two nations—viz., 'which ever nation shall command the ports of the Pacific, will ultimately command the trade with China.' Suppose so, let the men who profit by 'trade,' and make fortunes by 'trade,' let them struggle for commercial supremacy if they will, but the victims of trade have no good reason for fighting for the ports of the Pacific or any other ports. . . . The progress of commerce has served but to extend and consolidate the tyranny and the slavery of the poor."<sup>†</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 13, 1847. (Speech by Harney.)

<sup>†</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1946.



We find the same attitude one year later, during the great war panic which arose in connection with complications with France. In those days France was the hereditary enemy, and the English were haunted by the nightmare of the French destroying the British fleet, starving the population of the British Isles and bombarding London from Hampstead Heath! This nightmare was much ridiculed by the Fraternal Democrats, and at a great meeting addressed by Harney and Jones the following resolution was carried: "That in the opinion of this meeting the outcry respecting the 'National Defence' is got up by those who have an interest in perpetuating the present unjust, plundering, and murdering system; and that the object of the parties who have created the said outcry is: first to prolong the slavery of the British people, and second to prolong the reign of tyranny generally."<sup>\*</sup>

These quotations should suffice to characterise the views held by the Fraternal Democrats. Although they were not formulated with the same precision possible nowadays, after eighty years and more of schooling, they were nevertheless impregnated with the purely proletarian spirit and it would be good for some of our Labour men to assimilate them. Harney and Jones were, no doubt, revolutionary internationalists in the modern sense of the term, and they were joined by Schapper, McGrath, and a great number of political emigrants and Chartists.

Let us briefly describe the activities of the Fraternal Democrats from 1846 to 1848. We have already referred to their attitude in connection with the Cracow insurrection. With the object of carrying on a more successful agitation in favour of the Polish people, they founded in March 1846, jointly with the Polish exiles, the Democratic Committee for the Regeneration of Poland, which held open meetings and issued monthly reports on the events in Poland. Harney was the secretary of the committee, O'Connor the treasurer, and among its members, besides Oborski, Ernest Jones and Schapper, were also Hetherington and Holyoake. At one of the meetings held by the Committee, in the National Hall, Holborn, on May 20th, 1846, in memory of the Polish martyrs, Ernest Jones came forward for the first time as a public speaker and agitator. In the same year the oligarchy was overthrown in Geneva, and the Fraternal Democrats presented an address to the people of Geneva, in which they gave advice on various

<sup>\*</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb 5, 1848.

measures to be adopted. "That the popular sovereignty may not be illusory," it was said in the address, "two safeguards, it appears to us, are essential. First, the sovereign power of law making, and the appointment of all the officers of the State, political, civil and military, must be retained in the hands of the people. . . . Second, experience will have taught you that for the maintenance of your liberty, without bloodshed, it is essential not only that all citizens should be armed, but also that the armed force of the Republic should be under the direct control of the entire body of the citizens: retaining the above named safeguards of your liberties, there is no measure of social reform demanded by justice which you may not accomplish."\*

In the same year an agitation was carried on in connection with the menace of war with America over the Oregon question, which culminated in a manifesto issued to both peoples, reviewing the course of the dispute and making use of the opportunity to protest against the war of the United States on Mexico over the question of negro slavery.† At the end of the year a further manifesto was issued to the "Democracy of Europe," calling upon in to fight the Holy Alliance between Austria, Russia and Prussia.‡ In 1847 the Fraternal Democrats continued their agitation about Poland, and partly also about Switzerland. A big agrarian movement had broken out in America, and the demands of the tenants for 160 acre farms were heatedly discussed by the Fraternal Democrats. Both Schapper and Harney advocated collective ownership of the whole land, and denounced the programme of the American reformers as reactionary and petty bourgeois.§

\* *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1846.

† *Ibid.*, July 11, 1846.

‡ *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1846.

§ *Ibid.*, March 6, 1847.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE COLLAPSE (1848-1849)

THE beginning of the great revolutionary year of 1848 found the Fraternal Democrats at the height of their activity. Everywhere in Europe the moral atmosphere was full of great expectations, and the general spirit of quest and unrest also gripped the English Chartists and the foreign colonies in London. The Fraternal Democrats maintained close relations with the Brussels Democrats, and in their organ, the *Northern Star*, frequent contributions appeared from the pen of Engels, who was then living in Paris. By the end of 1847 their committee included two members of the Central Committee of the Chartists, and in the first two days of the New Year it issued an ardent appeal to the workers of Great Britain and Ireland, signed by all its general secretaries. The object of the appeal was the struggle for the Charter, but it also spoke of the international solidarity of the proletariat, of the efforts of the bourgeoisie to blunt the class consciousness of the workers by nationalist incitements and war panics, and so forth.\* On the very day when the storm broke out in Paris the Fraternal Democrats held a great meeting in memory of the Cracow insurrection, at which Harney spoke of the social aims of the coming revolution. "The emancipation of labour," he said, "was the only worthy cause of the political struggle": the masses should capture political power in order "that those who till the soil shall be its masters; that those who raise the food shall be its first partakers; that those who build mansions shall live in them . . . that Capital, the offspring of Labour, shall be its servant and not its master . . . that none but the idle shall die of hunger, and none but the vicious suffer reproach."† Hitherto, in all revolutions, the workers had poured out their blood, whilst the fruits of victory were reaped by the bourgeoisie; the time was now come for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

The events of the revolutionary days in Paris brought the workers in England to a state of great excitement. Revolution was preached at all the Chartist meetings, and a great mass meet-

\* *Northern Star*, Jan. 8, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1848.

ing was announced to be held on April 10th on Kennington Green. Early in March a mixed labour deputation was sent to Paris to present an address to the new Republican Government. McGrath represented the National Committee of the Chartists, Jones the London Section of the Party, and Harney the Fraternal Democrats. They were joined by Schapper and Moll on behalf of the German Workingmen's Club, and by Edgar Bauer on behalf of a "German Committee." The deputation was cordially received by Garnier-Pagès and Ledru-Rollin and it took part with Marx and Weerth in the great meeting organised on March 6th by the German colony in Paris in the Salle de Valentines under the chairmanship of the poet Georg Herwegh. Unfortunately, Harney was indisposed and could not attend the meeting. When the English delegates returned to London (the Germans stayed on in Paris) they reported to their respective organisations, and the Fraternal Democrats issued a new manifesto to the French people in which they hailed the action of March 17th for the defence of the Republican Government and warned them against the trickery of the monarchists. In that address the slogan of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was for the first time inscribed in place of the old one. Three days afterwards they issued a manifesto to the English proletariat\* in which they pointed to the social legislative measures of the French Government particularly in regard to the organisation of labour and appealed for vigorous demonstrations in favour of the Charter. On March 28th they distributed a new leaflet in connection with the critical situation in Ireland,† where the people were deeply stirred by the events in Paris and cruel coercive measures were employed by the Government. In the columns of the *Northern Star* we find no data as to the attitude of the Fraternal Democrats towards the revolutions which broke out in Vienna and in Berlin. But on March 25th Harney began to write his Letters on Foreign Affairs, *i.e.*, on revolutions and revolutionary movements in other countries, and those letters, signed by the old pen-name of Marat—"L'Ami du Peuple"—have lost but little of their value even to-day. They were addressed to the "Working Class" and were headed with the motto of the French Revolution. In the course of two years more than 80 of these letters were published, the last of them being dated May 4th, 1850, and after leaving the editorial board

\* *Ibid.*, March 25, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, April 1, 1848.

of the newspaper, in July of the same year, Harney resumed them in the *Red Republican*. The *Red Republican* soon ceased publication, and Harney founded a new paper, the *Friend of the People*, in which he continued to publish his Letters. In the middle of March, 1852, the last number of the *Northern Star* appeared. The newspaper continued to appear under the name of the *Star* with a trade unionist and co-operative programme, but a month later it was purchased by Harney and amalgamated with the *Friend of the People*, and published under the name of the *Star of Freedom*. Beginning with April 25th, *L'Ami du Peuple* continued to write his Letters until the final discontinuance of the paper on November 27th, 1852. At the beginning of 1853 an effort was made by Harney, jointly with James Bell, to establish a new paper, *The Vanguard*, but the Letters of the People's Friend did not appear any more. In the course of four years from 1848 till 1852, particularly in the *Northern Star*, Harney wrote current reviews of the different movements abroad, from which it can be seen how closely the revolutionary upheavals in Central Europe, in which so many personal friends took part, were followed in London.

In England the crisis was approaching. On April 10th, 1848, a great mass demonstration was to be held in favour of the Charter, and a National Petition presented to the House of Commons. It is still a matter of controversy among historians whether that demonstration was planned by the Chartists as a prelude to revolution. There can be no doubt that some Chartist leaders did hope that the whole population of London might turn out on Kennington Green and thence proceed to the House of Commons to support the petition with their "blistered hands." This hope was apparently shared by the Fraternal Democrats, who held a public meeting on April 4th, at which they unanimously carried a resolution in support of the National Petition and drew up an appeal to the people urging "the adoption of other, more effective measures to compel the granting of their just demands."\* But things turned out differently. Martial law had been proclaimed by the Government; the London area was flooded with troops; the Duke of Wellington was given powers to drown in blood any revolutionary attempt, whilst the Government rushed through Parliament a Gagging Act imposing a penalty of seven years' deportation for uttering seditious speeches. The contem-

\* *Ibid.*, April 8, 1848.

plated plan of action on Kennington Green fell through, and a deadly blow was dealt to the Chartist Movement, already weakened by the desertion of the petty bourgeoisie after the repeal of the Corn Laws. The Fraternal Democrats were also severely hit. Not only did the menace of the Gagging Act affect them; not only were their ranks decimated by the arrest of those of their members who were prominent Chartists (e.g., Ernest Jones), but against them as against all political emigrants (at the request of the Prussian Government), a new Aliens Act was carried, giving power to the Home Secretary to deport without trial any "undesirable alien." Mass meetings of protest against both laws were organised by the Fraternal Democrats; but this, of course, did not help them. At a single blow the once flourishing organisation was smashed, and the lively activity of its members violently suppressed. On May 4th an attempt was made by Harney to revive the organisation. As the members had not met for two weeks, Harney appealed to them through the *Northern Star*, saying that their enemies had deprived them of their meeting place at a moment when the organisation was acquiring ever greater power and usefulness, and that they should therefore meet again to revive their activity. On the appointed day a few of the members who were still at large turned up at Cartwright's Coffee Rooms, in Red Cross Street, Barbican, and drew up the new rules. The foreign members were solemnly absolved from all duties towards the organisation, and the number of members on the Committee was reduced to seven: Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and four executive officers elected at the annual general meeting. The date of the latter was postponed from September 22nd, the day on which the first French Republic was proclaimed, to May 4th, the day on which the second Republic was proclaimed, and the motto of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" was officially adopted. The programme remained practically the same. The object of the organisation was to be "the mutual education of members, and propaganda for its principles." The abolition of hereditary inequality, including the monarchy, was to be its political motto. Finally, the principles of "common ownership of the land" and of "the whole product of labour shall be its reward" were declared the social tenets of their faith.\* An appeal was also launched to the people for resistance to the Aliens Act. It pointed out that the Aliens Act was not directed

\* *Ibid.*, May 27, 1848.

against the aristocratic foreigners whose sole mission is to live in luxury and idleness at the expense of the English people (a gentle hint anent Prince Albert and the Coburg brood) nor against the crowned tyrants forced to flee from the just anger of their peoples; but rather "against those fighters for freedom whom it was the supreme duty of the English people to honour."\*

We know not to what extent the Aliens Act was put into effect. Most probably it remained a dead letter. Still the Government terror raged in full force, and it was impossible to carry on any political propaganda. The workers themselves were profoundly disappointed by the failure on April 10th, and the Chartist organisations collapsed everywhere. No wonder that the Fraternal Democrats, too, notwithstanding their reorganisation, disappeared from the stage till the close of the year. Although *L'Ami du Peuple* continued his Letters in the *Northern Star* with astonishing regularity, the existence of the organisation itself, with one single exception, cannot be traced through the whole of that year. Whether the disappearance of the reports and of the very name of the Fraternal Democrats from the columns of their paper was a mere measure of precaution, or whether, indeed, they did not meet any more, is a question which cannot be answered. But on July 6th they met at a farewell banquet given to Schapper and his wife who were leaving for Germany. Numerous toasts were given—to Schapper and his wife, to the Revolution in France and in Germany, to the *Northern Star* and, last but not least, to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and a manifesto to the German Workingmen's Societies was drawn up and signed, among others, by Schapper and Moll, in which the sanguinary June days in Paris were reviewed. "The Flag of the Red Republic" it was said in the manifesto, had become the banner of the proletariat throughout Europe. The time was gone when the masses could be pacified by political phrases and by nominal political rights. It was now realised by millions of toilers in France, England and Germany that "even the best of paper constitutions could not embrace all the human rights, nor even the most important of them." This was the only public function of the Fraternal Democrats during the whole year since the reorganisation of May 4th.†

The month of June, 1848, brought about a crisis in the whole

\* *Ibid.*, May 6, 1848.

† *Ibid.*, July 8, 1848.

of the labour movement in Europe, including the Fraternal Democrats. The French proletariat was defeated, and in England the masses turned their backs upon political action and took up the co-operative and trade union movement. A period of political apathy ensued which lasted almost fifteen years and was interrupted only by the national struggles in Hungary and Italy. London again swarmed with political refugees; but the place of revolutionary passion was taken by rhetoric, and the atmosphere was filled with quarrels and betrayals. True, the Fraternal Democrats came to life once more, and the indefatigable Harney continued with all his old vigour the propaganda of the political and social solidarity of the proletariat of all countries; but this activity did not meet with the former response, and the organisation was doomed to gradual extinction.

Nevertheless it continued to exist for four years more, and since during that period it was the principal spokesman for the international proletarian idea, which it handed on to later kindred organisations, its further history merits our attention.

In the very first days of 1849 the Fraternal Democrats appeared once again before the proletarian public with a manifesto in which they explained the reasons for their prolonged silence. It was signed by Harney, Samuel Kydd, Edwin Gill, Henry Ross, and Charles Keen, who declared that "silence had been imposed upon them by unfavourable circumstances. . . . The blows of tyranny had weakened their ranks, and bitter disappointment had taken the place of the radiant hopes." The manifesto went on to review the growth of the counter revolution, ascribing its success chiefly to the lack of consciousness on the part of the working class, and to reassert the basic principles for which the Fraternal Democrats were struggling. They would not, the manifesto declared, assume any function which was beyond their powers. They recognised their weakness; but even with small means a good deal could be achieved for the furtherance of the objects of the organisation, which was the furtherance of the advent of a new social order which would be the most beneficial order ever known in history. In conclusion, the manifesto invited the working people to take part in a grand celebration of the February Revolution—within the limits of the law. The celebration was held on February 26th, and took the form of a banquet, under the chairmanship of Harney, and attended by Bronterre O'Brien. Two days before the banquet the Fraternal Democrats



addressed a manifesto to the "Republicans of Paris," wishing them the speedy establishment of a "true" republic, a "red republic, democratic and social."\*

Mention should be made here of an interesting incident.† The proprietor of the *Northern Star*, in which Harney, as editor-in-chief, wrote his weekly reviews of the international situation and his articles signed "The People's Friend" and "A Red Republican," was Feargus O'Connor. Probably the latter had long been displeased with the prominence given to foreign questions in his paper, and in the issue of March 3rd, 1849, in connection with the celebrations on February 26th, he unexpectedly published a brief but very rude protest against the excessive propaganda of republicanism, and against meddling in foreign affairs generally. The next issue brought a brilliant reply over the signature of "The People's Friend," which pointed out the close affinity of interests of the proletariat throughout the world. A blow to the liberty of one people, he declared, reiterating his favourite idea, greatly affected the liberty of other peoples. At the same time he published a large number of letters from readers in opposition to O'Connor's view. The latter was shown the reply only after the paper had been printed, and in a short note in the same issue he complained of such action "by editors of the paper appointed by him who considered themselves its proprietors." He was not going to reply just now; but he merely wished to mention that for some time the *Northern Star* had been devoting itself too much to foreign affairs, neglecting home affairs of tremendous importance, and that this policy must be discontinued in future. In the issue of March 17th a seven-column article appeared by O'Connor in which he attacked his editor-in-chief. The propaganda for a republic, he declared (and here was the cat let out of the bag) would scare away from the Chartist ranks such people as would otherwise lend the movement strong support. He had been repeatedly reproached, both in and out of Parliament, on account of the republican propaganda. The paper should devote itself only to Chartism, and the question of the Charter should be connected neither with republicanism nor with foreign revolutions. As to those readers who had declared that they would not read the paper without its foreign section, he would tell them to please themselves, as he would rather have the *Star* publish his own

\* *Ibid.*, March 3 and Feb. 24, 1849.

† *Ibid.*, March 3 to March 31, 1849.

views and have only one reader, than to have a million readers, if that be purchased by subservience on his part and servility on theirs. This reply, containing as it did a number of personal and indecent attacks upon the editor, was not only silly but, politically, entirely absurd: to frighten the English workers by the bogey of the desertion of bourgeois "friends" after the experience of April 10th in London, and of the June days in France, was altogether comical. Harney, in the following issue, gave a short but telling reply to his employer, reminding him that none other than O'Connor himself had attempted to connect Chartism with other questions, e.g., with that of the Union and of home colonisation, and at the same time repudiating the charge of excessive propaganda of republicanism. It must be assumed that O'Connor had also been taken to task by some outside individuals and organisations, for in the following issue the plucky Irishman practically withdrew his charges, and explained that it had not at all been his intention either to eliminate the foreign review from his paper or to shut Harney's mouth. The honours of the tussle thus remained with Harney, who continued to occupy from six to eight columns each week in lengthy reports and comments on foreign affairs. This incident was highly characteristic of O'Connor, who was a broken man morally since the failure of April 10th, and at the same time it demonstrated the popularity of Harney and of his ideas among the labour democracy of the day.

It was a democracy whose ranks were becoming thinner every day and the intervals between the Fraternal Democrats' periods of activity were becoming longer. The banquet on February 26th, was followed by an address to the French democracy in April, protesting in the name of that "humanity which unites all people" against the condemnation of Barbès, Albert, Louis Blanc and their comrades by the Bourges court.\* Another interval of two months elapsed, and in June a second appeal "To the French People" was issued in connection with the treacherous policy of the French Government in Italy.† In the same month a great meeting under the chairmanship of Hetherington was held to condemn the activities of the counter revolution in Hungary and in Baden, and on the suppression of the Roman Republic. The British Government was called upon to lend armed assistance

\* *Ibid.*, April 14, 1849.

† *Ibid.*, June 16, 1849.

to all insurgent peoples, the pacifists of the Cobden school were denounced, and the importance of gaining political power through the Charter was proclaimed as the necessary condition for a pacific foreign policy. It was agreed to present a mass petition to Parliament in favour of armed intervention against Austria in Italy, and against Russia in Hungary. The idea had been put forward by Harney and vigorously advocated by him in the columns of the *Northern Star*. On July 24th a second meeting was called to popularise this idea\* (it is significant that this meeting was presided over by O'Connor), and a week later Harney attended a meeting called by radicals to discuss the question of diplomatic intervention in favour of Hungary, and received the votes of all those present in favour of an amendment demanding from the Government a naval demonstration at Trieste.† For this he was severely taken to task by the *Times*. But even this new, and apparently popular slogan could not lend any new strength to the Fraternal Democrats, and after a period of three months of inactivity we find them making a fresh attempt at reorganisation during the latter half of October.

† *Ibid.*, August 4, 1849.

\* *Ibid.*, July 28, 1849.

CHAPTER FOUR  
RECOVERY AT A LOWER LEVEL (1849-1850)

THE reorganisation of the Fraternal Democrats undertaken on October 19, 1849, was directed towards obtaining a fresh lease of life for the organisation; but Harney, in making this attempt, was actuated not only by a lively sense of the need of propaganda for international proletarian solidarity, but also, apparently, by a very practical motive, namely by the desire to secure material aid for the many comrades who had been left without means of subsistence or who had been forced to escape to England after the defeat of the Continental revolutions. There was at the time terrible distress—more particularly among the Continental "Red Republicans," who, of course, met with no sympathy among the English bourgeoisie, and if the Chartist leaders had to suffer persecution, boycott and imprisonment, even more calamitous was the position of their foreign comrades. The very first article of the *Democratic Review*, founded by Harney, was devoted to this question, while provision was made in the new rules that over and above the sum paid by each member to the general fund (one shilling annually) a Fraternal Fund should be formed out of voluntary contributions from the members, to be applied solely to help brothers (British and Continental) suffering from persecution.\* It is characteristic of the circumstances of that period that in spite of the profound interest aroused among the democracy in England by the foreign liberation movement (*c.f.* Harney's *Democratic Review* or Linton's *English Review*, which were almost exclusively devoted to foreign events), the Fraternal Democrats managed to collect for the Fraternal Fund in the course of three months, from November 1849 till January 1850, the miserable sum of 34 shillings.† Harney was untiring in his appeals to the workers not to let the victims of the *coup d'état* and the counter-revolution die of starvation, but the trade unions themselves, which had started collections in September 1850, managed to collect until the middle of 1852 not more than £23. On May 9th, 1852, a fresh attempt was made by Harney to establish a Fraternal Fund; he called a meeting of leading

\* *Democratic Review*, Nov. 4, 1849, pp. 20, 21 and 24.

† *Northern Star*, Jan. 25, 1851.

emigrés, and a Committee of Political Refugees was formed, which issued an appeal to the public and organised various functions for the purpose of raising funds. After nearly a year's activity, the net result amounted to £69 11s., and on March 30th, 1853, the Committee was dissolved in view, as stated in their resolution, of "the absolute indifference of the great mass of the British people to the claims of the political exiles."\*

This indifference, of course, affected not only foreigners. Bronterre O'Brien, whose name had been almost a programme as recently as 1848, was himself suffering hunger and was sinking lower and lower into misery and poverty until his death in 1864. McDoual, one of the most interesting and popular figures in the Chartist movement, soon after his release from prison, was compelled to emigrate to Australia, where he soon died in great distress. His wife and four children came back to England, and after numerous hardships were compelled to go to the workhouse. Feargus O'Connor himself, the most prominent leader of the English proletariat, ended his days in 1855 in a lunatic asylum, destitute and forgotten, and the efforts of his friends to get up a fund for a memorial on his grave proved unsuccessful. As to the destitution and sufferings of Ernest Jones, one of the most brilliant personalities of that time, a man of aristocratic descent, we have his own narrative, couched in simple language, which even to-day echoes to the sound of weeping. In short, it was a period of decline in proletarian class-consciousness rendered more glaring by the contrast of the support generously given in hard cash by the English bourgeoisie to the Mazzinis and the Kossuths.

Nevertheless, the Fraternal Democrats still kept up their spirits. After the reorganisation in October, 1849, they adopted a revised programme comprising the following points: "The Fraternity of Nations, and especially the brotherly union of the proletarians of all countries. The abolition of the penny stamp, and all other fiscal and oppressive restrictions on the freedom of the Press. The political emancipation of the working classes of this country by the legislative establishment of the principles of the People's Charter. The diffusion of sound knowledge on political and social questions by means of the distribution of tracts, addresses in the public journals, lectures, public meetings, etc.,

\* *Star of Freedom*, May 15, 1852; *Reynold's Newspaper*, May 18, 1853 (No. 144).

with the view of preparing the proletarian classes for the achievement of their deliverance from the oppression of irresponsible (*sic!*) capital and usurping feudalism.”\*

Soon afterwards a leaflet issued “To all Democrats and Social Reformers” set out the double aim of the reorganised associations as follows: “We have resolved to reorganise the Society of Fraternal Democrats with the intent thereby of establishing an efficient democratic propaganda, having for its two-fold mission the fraternisation of Democracies of Europe and the advancement of the principles of Democratic and Social Reform in this country.” Owing to the Aliens Act it was impossible to get foreigners enrolled as members, but “means would nevertheless be taken to render our society a veritable link of union between the democratic and social reformers of this country and those of continental Europe and America.” As to reforms, the leaflet went on to say: “Holding that political reform must be valueless unless productive of social reform, we shall advocate the political as preliminary to the social rights of the people. . . . By so acting we hope to be able to inspire the working classes to seek with zeal and energy their political franchises and to make wise and all-serving use of these franchises when won.” In conclusion, the document reiterated the old assurance that the leaders of the movement did not wish to usurp the place of any other association of the working class, and that they would be happy to take their part in the Chartist party, if the latter were revived.†

These assurances were entirely superfluous, not only because the Chartist movement, notwithstanding all efforts at reorganisation, was doomed to sad extinction; but also because the same causes which rendered the further existence of Chartism impossible also restricted the activity of the little Society of Fraternal Democrats, in spite of its new social and political programme, to the bare proclamation of proletarian solidarity. At the same time it was not without symptomatic significance that if hitherto the Society and its leaders had quite unmistakably submitted to the influence of the new Communist teaching of Marx and Engels, they now began to fall more and more under the influence of the French refugees, as may be noticed from their public statements and their personal relations. The reason for this lay, probably, partly in the fact that Marx and Engels were then gradually giving

\* *Northern Star*, Nov. 3, 1849.

† *Democratic Review*, Nov., 1849; *Northern Star*, Nov. 3, 1849.

up practical political work, but partly also in the particular conditions of the time, which left room only for the *rhetoric* of Socialism.

We must, however, remember that even this rhetoric was taken by many who engaged in it with great earnestness. Some of these men later sealed their convictions with their blood upon the barricades of the Paris Commune, and all of them were suffering cruel destitution in exile, although by betraying their convictions they might have purchased freedom and possibly, wealth. Such was Harney's attitude when, at a great meeting on November 21st, he presented, in the name of "Fraternity and the Democratic and Social Republic" the French exiles Ledru-Rollin, Arago, Considérant and Pyat, with a public address,\* and in reply to their response, also in the shape of an address, wrote in the *Northern Star*:† "The words of brotherhood which have passed between the Fraternal Democrats and the French exiles, must not be regarded as a mere interchange of civilities. Those words carry with them a deeper and far more important meaning. . . . It must be admitted that dissensions and jealousies—individual and national—which yet occasionally disfigure our good cause, do afford to those enemies (of democracy) the means of wounding us. Nevertheless, the holy principle of Fraternity is no fiction, no mere fool's vision or coinage of a schemer's brain, but is, on the contrary, a great fact—one of the greatest facts of this time."

The same firm conviction of the reality of internationalism resounded in his words spoken at a New Year's "Fraternal Festival" held on December 31st, in which some 300 English and other "Red Republicans" took part. "We must," he said as chairman, "exalt the principles of Fraternity to the place heretofore occupied by creeds now worn out and cunningly devised systems now exploded. Fraternity we must not merely inscribe on our banners, but imprint on our hearts and make the rule of our actions. If we do so, no power can prevent our triumph. The people will march shoulder to shoulder and trample down all their enemies; the red flag will make the tour of the world, and rally all nations round Liberty's Tree."‡ How near he, in company with his French comrades, thought this great day to be,

\* *Democratic Review*, Dec., 1849.

† *Northern Star*, Dec. 22, 1849; *Democratic Review*, Jan. 1850.

‡ *Northern Star*, Jan. 5, 1850.

can be seen from the address drawn up by him on behalf of the Fraternal Democrats "to the Brethren of the Human Race" on the occasion of the second anniversary of the February revolution. "On that day," he wrote, "commenced the great European revolution destined to terminate in the annihilation of caste rule and class slavery; destined to extinguish oppression and misery, to emancipate labour, establish the right of justice and inaugurate the Fraternity of Nations—the brotherhood of all mankind, without distinction of clime, colour, speech or creed. . . . Knaves may affect to believe and fools cheat themselves into the belief that the revolution is finished. . . . The revolution is not finished because the people have been defrauded of the legitimate proofs of their struggles and sacrifices in 1848 and 1849."\*

From the psychological standpoint this faith in the speedy rebirth of the Revolution was a wonderful source of inspiration in the struggle for the proletarian cause; but for the practical preparation of the revolution which was to come, if only in the distant future, it was worse than useless. Happily for the Fraternal Democrats, the year 1850 was enlivened by some events which afforded at least an occasion for outward activity. A splendid victory was won by the French Socialists with Eugène Sue at their head in the general election on March 10th, and the Fraternal Democrats held a mass meeting to celebrate the event. The meeting was addressed by Harney and O'Brien, and emphasis was laid on the fact that "the Fraternity of Nations was no vain phrase, but a vital and eternal fact," and that "a conquest gained by the people of one country is a victory for the people of every land."† When the French Government promptly retaliated by launching a plan for the abolition of universal suffrage, the Fraternal Democrats took the occasion to organise another meeting—this time of protest.‡ Early in July, Ernest Jones was released from jail, and a supper was given in his honour by the Fraternal Democrats.§ Then, in the beginning of September, came the famous mobbing of the Austrian general Haynau in the streets of London. This merry story deserves to be rescued from oblivion. Haynau, by his heroic deeds—particularly by mass flogging, in which even women were not spared—in Italy, and

\* *Ibid.*, March 2, 1850.

† *Ibid.*, May 11, 1850.

‡ *Ibid.*, June 8, 1850.

§ *Ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1850.



then during the crushing of the Hungarian revolution, had become famous throughout Europe and gained for himself the title of "Hyena," phonetically resembling his surname. In the autumn of 1849 there was a rumour of his appointment as Ambassador to Berlin, and our old friend "L'Ami du Peuple" commented on it in the *Northern Star* as follows:—

"Why not to the British Court? I can assure him that the gates of St. James' Palace would not be closed against him. I can assure him that even the *Liberal* Lord Palmerston would not hesitate to invite him to the usual diplomatic spreads and aristocratic revels. Sure; I can promise Haynau, if he will come here, he may win the smiles of the ladies of 'rank and fashion.' . . . I can promise him, too, the protection of the police, and the undisguised disgust of Smithfield drivers and Whitechapel butchers, and no, I will not anticipate what the people would do for him. Indeed, it is not easy to imagine what the people might do if they found an untamed *Hyena*, without chain or keeper, in the streets of the metropolis."<sup>\*</sup>

These words were written in the autumn of 1849, and a year later the prophecy came literally true. Haynau arrived as a guest in London in September, 1850, and was given a most cordial reception by the aristocracy. Among other places, he paid a visit to the brewery of Barclay, Perkins & Company, in Southwark, carrying a letter of recommendation from one of the Rothschilds and accompanied by an adjutant and an interpreter. He made his customary entry in the Visitors' Book, signing himself: "Fieldmarshal von Haynau," and was taken to the inner premises of the brewery. The entry in the book was examined by some curious people, and soon the news spread among the numerous workers as to the identity of the high guest. As he entered the public room, a big bundle of straw was shot at his head, then another, and amid general derision his hat was kicked off his head, and he was immediately surrounded by a big crowd of people who were shouting: "Women's hangman of Austria!" "Wild hyena!" and so forth. They tore off his coat, pulled his whiskers, threw mud at him, and finally he was dragged out into the street. Outside the brewery there happened to be a crowd of draymen. They promptly sized up the situation, as they shouted: "Here comes the fellow who tortured women!" and soon they plied their whips over the back of the unfortunate

<sup>\*</sup> *Ibid.*, October 27, 1849.

fieldmarshal, who, with great difficulty, and half dead, managed to make his escape into the adjacent St. George's public house. There he hid himself behind a dustbin, but was pulled out again by the hair into the street, and was given a thorough beating, until the publican saved him from the crowd and brought him back to the house, where he barricaded himself in a bedroom and waited for the police to deliver him in a boat to Waterloo Bridge, and thence to Morley's Hotel in Charing Cross. On the following day the Fieldmarshal fled from the inhospitable city. Thus the prophecy of Harney turned out literally true.

The incident, naturally, created a great stir. The bourgeois newspapers raised a big hue and cry, and a vicious campaign was started against the agitators and the foreign rebels. But nothing happened either to the agitators or to the men of Barclay's brewery. Great crowds of people flocked to the place to inspect the scene of battle, and the lessee of the St. George did a roaring trade. The directors of Barclay, Perkins & Co., found themselves compelled, in compliance with the general sentiments, to erase Haynau's name in the Visitors' Book, whilst the Chartists and the Fraternal Democrats held numerous mass meetings to proclaim their solidarity with the draymen. One of those meetings was addressed, in defiance of the Alien Act, by Engels (in Farringdon Hall), who told the indignant audience that Haynau, shortly before his arrival in London, had taken part in an international peace conference at Frankfort, where he had been sitting next to Cobden. A resolution was adopted by the meeting, couched in the familiar terms: "That all the peoples of the earth are brothers, that the infliction of tyranny and cruelty in any country is an outrage to all nations, that the brewery workmen and the high spirited men who assisted them in chastising the Austrian assassin deserve well of their country and are entitled to the thanks of the friends of freedom and justice throughout the world."\*

The incident had some effect politically; public interest was again aroused for the cause of freedom of the oppressed peoples, and numerous refugees' societies were again able to come out openly and unmolested. On November 29th, the Fraternal Democrats held a meeting and banquet to commemorate the Polish insurrection of 1830, which was addressed by Schapper, who had then returned from Germany.† On New Year's eve the

\* *Ibid.*, September 14, 1850.

† *Ibid.*, Dec. 7, 1850.

Fraternal Democrats held a New Year's party under Harney's chairmanship,\* and all the emigrant societies were represented by delegations. Engels, on behalf of the Germans, delivered a lengthy address on the causes of the failure of the revolutions in 1848-49, and Harney caused a sensation by reciting how an Englishman, by the name of Baker, who edited in Vienna a newspaper entitled *The Radical*, had been shot 24 hours after Blum's execution without evoking any protest on the part of Lord Palmerston. Among the toasts at the banquet was one given to the Fraternal Democrats who were hailed as the "pioneers of the great movement of social reform."

Alas, the "pioneers" were by no means in a flourishing condition. In spite of lively activity, and the tumult of events in 1850, the Society counted no more than 261 members, and its funds amounted to the imposing sum of 35s.† Probably this was the weighty reason which, in August, urged the Fraternal Democrats, before the Haynau incident, to get in touch with the National Chartist Association (the remnant of the once powerful Chartist Party), with the National Reform League founded by Bronterre O'Brien, and the Social Reformers—a society led by Jacob Holyoake—apparently not only for common action, but for eventual fusion. A general committee was formed which drew up a programme; the programme was discussed at numerous meetings of the four organisations and subsequently submitted to the approval of the members, whilst a unity congress was to be held in the following year in connection with the great Exhibition.‡ Thus far our information goes, and nothing further can be found in printed sources. It would seem that the plan was not carried out; whether on account of external reasons or owing to personal dissensions, we do not know. All we know is that both the Fraternal Democrats and the other organisations carried on, respectively, their independent existence, holding separate meetings on various occasions. One may doubt whether this was greatly to the detriment of the proletarian cause, since all the four organisations put together had barely a hundred members. This concluded the year 1850, a year not lacking in eventfulness, but marked by the decline of the international revolutionary movement.

\* *Ibid.*, January 7, 1851.

† *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1851.

‡ *Ibid.*, Aug. 24 and Oct. 19, 1850.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE END OF THE FRATERNAL DEMOCRATS (1851-53)

EIGHTEEN Hundred and fifty-one was the year of the first world exhibition in London, the year of the arrival of Kossuth in England, and the year of the *coup d'état* in France. All these events were calculated to stimulate general interest in foreign affairs and international sentiment among the English people. It is possible that the very idea of the World Exhibition had been suggested by the sentiments advocated and popularised by Harney and other advanced proletarian spokesmen. At any rate, it seems tolerably certain that the internationalist movement which arose among the Liberal bourgeoisie about that time was greatly influenced by this proletarian propaganda and must be considered as a semi-conscious attempt at competition with it. The bourgeoisie of that period also began to court trade unions and the co-operatives, endeavouring, by fostering Mechanics' Institutes and popular libraries, as well as by the publication of cheap literature, to wrest the working people from the intellectual influence of the still active "agitators." In the diaries of the Christian Socialists of the type of Kingsley and Maurice we find numerous references to this movement which sprang up after the critical year of 1848 among the "enlightened" bourgeoisie and even at the royal court.

This may account for the fact that in spite of the important events of 1851 and the following years, neither the Fraternal Democrats nor their successors managed to regain their former position. They were simply snowed under by the bourgeois internationalists, who, later on, when victory had been gained, discarded their internationalism like worn-out clothes, together with their interest in trade unionism, co-operation, and popular education. To be sure, the victory of the bourgeois rivals was due to the objective march of events; but here, as everywhere else, objective development acted through the will and the conduct of the men.

The very first months of the year afforded the Fraternal Democrats numerous opportunities of manifesting their activity. In Constantinople the Polish hero of the Hungarian revolution, General Bem, died and, in February, the Fraternal Democrats, jointly with the Polish and Hungarian societies, held a big meet-

ing addressed by Schapper and Louis Blanc.\* This was followed by another meeting in commemoration of the February Revolution, addressed by the same speakers.† In April a banquet was held in memory of Robespierre, and again in May the Fraternal Democrats, at a public meeting, called upon the British Government to prevent the extradition of Kossuth and other refugees from Turkey.‡ Then O'Connor was again the cause of another ridiculous incident. The great Exhibition was to be opened in May, but the bourgeois Press had started in advance a "stunt" against foreign "agitators" alleged to be planning a revolution for that occasion. O'Connor thought it necessary to join in this outcry and in the *Northern Star* warned the Chartists to beware of the foreign revolutionary crowd and spies.§ The whole of the foreign colony in London was indignant, and the conduct of the former leader was denounced at numerous meetings. The Fraternal Democrats, too, resented the impertinent insinuations of O'Connor, and held a protest meeting on April 12th under Harney's chairmanship, Schapper being present on behalf of the Communist League.¶ Possibly this event had something to do with the failure of the plan for fusion of the four organisations referred to above. At any rate, the affairs of the Fraternal Democrats must have been in a very poor state, as towards the end of May their committee was driven to the necessity of holding "social tea parties" in order to attract the public. Even this means seems to have proved none too effective, for soon afterwards Harney decided to transfer his agitation to the provinces. This meant that there was nothing more to be done in London. Henceforth the London organisation was to serve only as the headquarters, whilst the movement itself was to be carried on chiefly by provincial societies.|| As a matter of fact, Harney did succeed in establishing societies in many towns of the North of England and Scotland, but it may be noted (anticipating somewhat the course of events) that they were immediately captured by the bourgeoisie and turned, mainly, into republican organisations. For just at that period, English Radicalism, particularly outside London, was associated with Republicanism, and even the sympathies of bourgeois radicals for the national movements

\* *Northern Star*, Feb. 8, 1851.

† *Ibid.*, March 1, 1851.

‡ *Ibid.*, May 17, 1851.

§ *Ibid.*, April 5, 1851.

¶ *Ibid.*, April 19, 1851.

|| *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1851.

on the Continent assumed more and more a republican hue. Thereby a common ground was formed between the Continental democratic leaders and the radical bourgeoisie in England, and the former could work on that ground without having to look for the support of the proletarian masses.

This was clearly demonstrated at the time of the arrival of Kossuth in England. Kossuth had escaped from his Turkish asylum, and from the moment of his landing at Southampton, his journey to London was a veritable triumphal procession. The train had to halt everywhere to allow the local authorities and mayors to present addresses of welcome, whilst Kossuth delivered speeches. Upon arrival in London he was received by various societies and official organisations, and, accompanied by a huge crowd, he was taken straight to the City, where a banquet was given in his honour. The whole Press, with the sole exception of the *Times*, published eulogistic articles about this champion of liberty, the English aristocrats crowded to shake hands with him. Among others, the Fraternal Democrats, too, had made preparations for a rousing reception to be accorded to the great man. They had arranged a big banquet with the assistance of other societies, under the auspices of a "United Workers' Committee."\* But the situation was soon cleared up. Kossuth refused to attend the banquet, and the ceremony had to be conducted in his absence. Kossuth pleaded that he did not wish to carry on any "party politics" in England, and for this reason he was accepting invitations only from official bodies. The excuse was as lame as it was characteristic, and, as a matter of fact, it was subsequently retracted by Kossuth himself. He consented to the holding of a meeting and to the presentation of an address to him; but he stipulated that the address should be delivered in a little room in private, that his reply should be given in writing, and that afterwards he should address the public from a window or balcony. So it was done. The meeting took place in December in the Copenhagen Fields, King's Cross, and turned into a grand demonstration, among the speakers being O'Connor and O'Brien. (Harney was then in the country.)† Kossuth, however, refused to make the acquaintance of these men! Later on he had many an occasion to regret his excessive courting of the English bourgeoisie, and did not hesitate to confess it publicly.

\* *Ibid.*, Nov 1, 1851.

† *Ibid.*, Dec. 13, and 20, 1851.

The meeting in Copenhagen Fields also dealt with the *coup d'état* in France, which took place on the 2nd of December in the same year. The event had aroused the greatest indignation in England as everywhere else, and the Fraternal Democrats particularly—Harney in the country, and the others in London—raised a passionate protest. Everywhere they demanded the recall of the British ambassador from Paris, and in January, 1852, upon Harney's return to London, they issued a manifesto to the people in which they advocated the solidarity of the people as a means of counteracting the intrigues of international diplomacy, declaring that "whatever the aid given by English rulers or English gold to the usurpers, the traitors and the tyrants, the workers of England would feel every blow directed against their brethren in Europe, and the hour was not far distant when the workers of all nations would unite for a crusade against the tyranny of the crowned violators of the oath, and against the tyranny of money over people."<sup>\*</sup>

How little the Fraternal Democrats were prepared to share in the outburst of chauvinism which was evoked by the *coup d'état* in France, is shown by their attitude towards the great war scare which was engineered by the bourgeois Press on the ground of the alleged menace of a recrudescence of Bonapartist ideas across the Channel, and in reality in order to win public opinion for an increase of armaments. Harney, differing from some of our contemporaries, promptly declared at a public meeting that:—

"He advised them to act with all men who would oppose the increase of the army or the turning of the police into a more armed force than it was now. Let them arm the people, let them have popular bodies armed among the people, independent of Government influence. If an invasion should become more threatening he would say with O'Connell, that the time of England's difficulty was the time for them to achieve their rights. . . The brigands of France or Russia would not come to wage war in Spitalfields or bivouac there. They would not come to plunder those who had nothing; if they were to defend the country, they must give themselves something to defend. . . . Let them look to the factory districts, and say whether these men could be said to have homes or families. They have nothing but misery whilst their rulers monopolise every benefit."<sup>\*\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 24, 1852.

<sup>\*\*</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1852.

Naturally, the "panic" soon passed, and in the following year the Democrats of England, Fraternal and otherwise, had to fight against the idea of an alliance between England and France. In the meantime, however, Harney and his friends had many opportunities of proclaiming their internationalist ideas, together with Louis Blanc, Cabet, and Schapper, when celebrating the birthday of Robespierre, in April, on the funeral of Albert Darasz, an old Polish revolutionary, who had taken part in the insurrection of 1830, and edited the then famous *Demokrata Polski*, in August, and so on. In November the Committee of the Fraternal Democrats passed a series of resolutions in which they expressed their horror at the execution of twenty-four Italian revolutionaries in the Savigaglia prison, pledged their support to the "Shilling Subscription for European Freedom" founded by Linton, established closer contact with the Democrats of America, Australia and other English-speaking countries, and finally appointed a sub-committee to draw up an address to the British people, on the situation in Italy.\* The address was published a couple of weeks afterwards, and in it the British public were invited to contribute to the aforesaid Fund, and to "flood Parliament with petitions for ensuring the evacuation of the Roman States by French and Austrian troops at present therein."†

As far as can be gathered from the Press of that period, this was the last public action of the Fraternal Democrats. From now on their name disappears from the columns of the newspapers. We know not whether this was the result of the discontinuance of the last newspaper conducted by Harney, which was naturally interested in reporting the doings of the Society, or whether the Society itself was disbanded towards the close of that year; at any rate, it is tolerably certain that the year 1852 was the last year of the movement founded by Harney seven years previously. As the first organised standard-bearer of the idea of international proletarian solidarity, this Society merits our grateful memory, and the methods which it adopted on the eve of the fateful year 1848 show how closely in type it approached the future International. The collapse of the revolutionary movement in England as well as on the Continent prevented it from becoming the connecting link of an international proletarian organisation, and even its more modest rôle in England proper, owing to that

\* *Star of Freedom*, Nov. 13, 1852.

† *Ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1852.



growing passivity of the working class which was the distinguishing feature of the subsequent decades, was bound to diminish more and more. Of course, the International which was founded twelve years after the extinction of the Fraternal Democrats was something more than a mere international proletarian *organisation*; but it may be safely asserted that had not the life of the Fraternal Democrats been cut short after 1848, it would have been that Society and no other organisation which would have fulfilled the historic mission of the International. This is sufficiently vouched for by the part taken by Marx and Engels in the Society during the early days of its existence. Indeed, even the historic International was not, at its formation, the same as it afterwards became. We shall presently see that even after the disappearance of the Fraternal Democrats, the idea of international proletarian solidarity continued to exist, leading to repeated attempts at the formation of an organised movement which was approaching more and more, both in form and content, to the future International.

For the rest, it should be noted that the collapse of the Fraternal Democrats towards the close of 1852 or at the beginning of 1853, was due chiefly to external circumstances—above all to dissensions among the leaders. Harney no longer believed in the possibility of a purely political movement of the working class, whereas Ernest Jones was still dreaming of a revival of Chartism. The difference of opinions led to a violent break between the two early in 1852, when Harney purchased the *Star*, and Jones founded the *People's Paper*. They charged one another with having established their newspapers on bourgeois money and became implacable enemies. A few months afterwards a quarrel occurred between Bronterre O'Brien and Harney in connection with an entertainment arranged by the Fraternal Democrats in honour of foreign refugees. After speeches by Harney, Cabet and Louis Blanc, O'Brien took the floor and severely criticised his comrades for their belief that it was possible to help the national movements abroad merely by sentimental speeches without making a revolution in England itself. It created a great scandal, and the friendship between Harney and O'Brien came to an end. All these quarrels, of course, reflected the confusion then prevailing, which made it impossible to frame a common policy. It also prevented the possibility of fresh experiments, and undermined the existence of all organisations, including the Fraternal Democrats. Before taking leave of Harney, it should

be mentioned that for a couple of years he was still active in London: he tried to publish a new paper, the *Vanguard*; then wrote several articles and letters for the once Chartist, and now more and more bourgeois radical *Reynolds' Newspaper*; then he went to the North of England, where he co-operated for a time with the bourgeois radical and republican Joseph Cowen; then moved to Jersey on a business with which we shall deal presently; and finally emigrated to America, whence, however, he returned to England a few years later, withdrawing from politics altogether. Harney was a man of whom the English Labour movement may be justly proud, although Marx and Engels, after 1850, treated him somewhat scornfully because of his enthusiasm for the French and for men of the Willich and Schapper stamp.

Of course, the collapse of the Fraternal Democrats redounded greatly to the advantage of the bourgeois internationalists, and it must be admitted that the latter did their work at first quite well. Whilst the *People's Paper*, the only surviving Labour paper, paid almost no attention to foreign affairs (we speak of the year 1853), the columns of *Reynolds' Newspaper* were filled with reports and articles on the national movements of the Continent and on the actions of British diplomacy, the writers generally taking a correct view of events. The great and successful opposition movement, which arose out of Orsini's plot against Napoleon III, was also conducted under the leadership of the bourgeois radicals. Palmerston intended to use this opportunity to strengthen the Conspiracy Acts and to hand over the foreign refugees to the hangmen and spies of the Continental governments. The attempt failed, and Palmerston was forced to resign. The authorities then got up a bogus trial of Dr. Simon Bernard on a charge of complicity in the said conspiracy; but the charge could not be proved, and the defendants were acquitted by the jury. Shortly afterwards a publisher named Truelove was indicted for the publication of a seditious pamphlet under the title of *Is the Killing of Tyrants Admissible?*, but he too was acquitted. When we remember the totally different outcome of the trials of Johann Most and Burtsev at a later period,\* we can realise the long road of retreat covered since that time by bourgeois radicalism and republicanism.

The few surviving Labour and Socialist organisations were not entirely inactive. We read, for instance, that in the same

\* Both were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for publishing in foreign languages literature justifying political assassination.

year the birthday of Robespierre was celebrated by O'Brien's National Reform League, and that a great meeting was held to commemorate the Polish insurrection of 1830.† Harney and O'Brien also took part in a demonstration in Finsbury under the chairmanship of Duncombe, at which the Government was called upon to declare war on Russia in order to protect Turkey against Russian aggression.‡ In the same year the various refugees' societies amalgamated into a European Central Democratic Committee which was joined by Linton, Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin, Herten and Ruge. On the whole, however, those were merely isolated organisations and manifestations, which could lay no claim to any historic importance.§

† *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Dec. 4, 1853.

‡ *Ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1853.

§ *Ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1853.

CHAPTER SIX  
FORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
(1854-55)

THE years of the Crimean War (1853-55) doubtlessly witnessed the best period of bourgeois internationalism, although they also marked the beginning of its moral decay. The hostility against Russia, as a citadel of reaction in Europe, gradually degenerated into Jingoism; and the common struggle with France eventually led to a reconciliation with the Bonapartist régime and to the renunciation of all ideals of Liberty. This change of attitude became particularly pronounced in connection with the Polish problem. Everywhere in Europe the principle of Poland's restoration had been an axiom of the democratic faith, and that not so much on the ground of justice or humanity, as, above all, because an independent Poland would shatter the alliance of the three most reactionary powers in Europe and would create a barrier against Russian Cossackdom. Hence the incessant demonstrations of European democracy on Poland's behalf and the universal popularity of Polish refugees. During the Crimean War the pro-Poland idea gained popularity even in official circles in England: it was intended to use the Polish people against Russia so as to secure victory in the protracted fighting at Sebastopol. For the furtherance of this idea numerous mass meetings were held throughout England, and even a Polish Legion (half of them Germans!) was formed under the ægis of Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Cambridge, and, it was rumoured, Palmerston himself.\* Particularly untiring in the agitation for the Polish idea was Kossuth, who addressed most of the meetings and recommended support for the independence movements in Poland and Hungary as the best means of overcoming Russia. In this attempt of linking up Poland and Hungary he signally failed: even in those days the liberty-loving Britishers would not hear of a fight for the independence of Hungary, because not only was the menace of Austria's doubtful neutrality to Russia a trump card in the hands of the Allies, but hopes were also entertained that some day Austria might even join them. Even on the Polish question considerable differences soon began to break out. At the

\* *People's Paper*, Dec. 2, 1854.

close of 1854 the Liberals, under the chairmanship of Sir Joshua Walmesley, organised a big meeting in St. Martin's Hall, at which a resolution was passed in favour of the recognition of Polish nationality by both Western Powers (France and England). Ernest Jones, who was at the meeting, tried to speak, but was refused permission. He then moved an amendment, for the addition of the words: "as a free and democratic republic." A terrific din broke out, and Jones was almost thrown off the platform.\* Kossuth, who figured as an official speaker, also took this opportunity to denounce the alliance with the "hero of the Second of September" (Napoleon III), and the flirting with Austria. He was almost shouted down, and on the following day was soundly belaboured in the bourgeois press.† At another meeting in the same hall, presided over by the Earl of Harrington, who spoke in favour of forming a Polish Legion, the few democrats present declared that they could not seriously entertain this idea so long as Palmerston, one of those responsible for crushing the Polish nation in 1830 and 1846, remained Foreign Secretary. The promoters of the meeting felt their noblest sentiments so deeply outraged that they closed the meeting and left the hall.‡ To complete this picture of the renunciation of the principles of democracy by the bourgeoisie, mention should be made of the fact that when, in April 1855, Napoleon III arrived in London, even *Reynolds' Newspaper* urged tolerance and respect to England's ally!§

It was this rapid bankruptcy of bourgeois internationalism which again gave rise, at the close of 1854, to the idea of independent proletarian and Socialist action. The circumstances appeared rather propitious, since shortly before, Ernest Jones had succeeded in reviving the Chartist organisation. On May 15th, 1853, about 3,000 people had met at a Chartist demonstration near Manchester, and a committee was elected.|| In March, 1854, a Chartists' "Labour Parliament" met in session at Manchester, and a new programme was drawn up. Jones and his friends were full of enthusiasm, and even Marx, elected together with Louis Blanc as Honorary Delegate, declared that "the very fact of such a Parliament coming together marked a new epoch in the world's

\* *Ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1854.

† *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Dec. 3, 1854.

‡ *Ibid.*, Aug. 12, 1855.

§ *People's Paper*, April 12, 1855.

|| *Ibid.*, June 25, 1853.

history."\* This, naturally, led to the idea that the time had come to oppose the proletarian conception of internationalism to that of the bourgeoisie. The opportunity presented itself in the autumn of 1854, when the news was received that Barbès, a victim of Napoleon's *coup d'état*, had been pardoned and intended to proceed to England. Jones immediately gathered his friends and suggested that the occasion might be used for a counter-demonstration against the projected visit of Napoleon III, thus opposing one symbol, as it were, to another. The idea commended itself, and a "Welcome and Protest Committee" (the name itself is characteristic) was formed of representatives of the different foreign organisations.† Kossuth was invited to join, but declined on the plea that "as a foreigner, he could not abuse English hospitality."‡ The Committee decided, on December 4th, the day of the massacre in the streets of Paris, to organise a meeting of "welcome and protest," and placarded London with posters bearing the headline: "Who is Napoleon?" The police were kept busy tearing down the posters, and the entire bourgeois press was literally mad with fury. Unfortunately, Barbès was unable to arrive in London for the meeting, and the demonstration was carried out in his absence in the Hall of Science, City Road. In spite of opposition by some radicals who spoke in favour of an alliance with France, the meeting went off so magnificently that eight days afterwards the Committee, upon a motion made by Jones, constituted itself as a permanent organisation, "to demonstrate their welcome to the exiles of France, and their fraternisation with the Democracy of the Continent, in opposition to the League of Kings."§ On December 17th a second successful demonstration was held, and in his paper Jones hailed the new "Federation of Democracies" as the force which would "shake the foundations of the royal thrones and the arches upon their bloodstained crowns."||

Here we are confronted with a very interesting phenomenon. The "Welcome and Protest Committee" became a sort of International, which although failing to acquire even remotely the influence and to exhibit the activity of the Fraternal Democrats, nevertheless preserved the idea of international proletarian solidarity

\* *Ibid.*, March 8, 1854.

† *Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1854.

‡ *Ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1854.

§ *Ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1855.

|| *Ibid.*, Dec. 16, 1855.

until the time of the inception of the historic International; and, what is still more interesting, it anticipated its organisational forms almost exactly. From the first days of the year 1855, there was among the members of the Committee a widespread desire to go beyond the purely demonstrative objects of the organisation, and to transform it into a social and political body of a general character. It was to assume the name of a "Social and Democratic Association," on the following basis: "the full and complete enfranchisement of the people, as founded in the People's Charter; the social rights of labour as embodied in the programme of the Labour Parliament; the brotherhood of nations under the banner of the European Republican Democracy."† This was a departure from the original idea of the Committee, and a sort of encroachment upon the functions of the newly founded Chartist Party, which, of course, could not be calmly accepted by Ernest Jones. Accordingly, he at once declared that if such a basis were accepted he would leave the organisation and co-operate with it only in international matters. Thereupon the plan was withdrawn and after a lengthy discussion another was substituted in its place. The Committee was turned into a "London Organisation Committee" of the Chartist Party, but foreign affairs were put in charge of a special sub-committee of seven members which established contact with the Society of French Refugees, and jointly with them and with five representatives of other refugees' societies, formed an "International Committee" which was to report from time to time to the London Organisation Committee. The London Organisation Committee soon disappeared, and the International Committee became an independent body. Ernest Jones was its chairman, James Finlen (who soon withdrew) its treasurer, and each "nationality" elected its own secretary, Chapman representing the English, Talandier the French, a certain Bley the Germans, Dembinski the Poles, Dezzi the Italians, and Salvatello the Spanish. The extent of the enthusiasm for the International Committee may be gauged from the words in which Jones hailed the new organisation in his paper: "This organisation is the most important that has ever taken place in London. It is far more solid and practical than that attempted in the fever of 1848."\* But the great expectations proved as short-lived as those which had been entertained in connection with the Labour

† *Ibid.*, Jan. 6, 1855.

\* *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1855.

Parliament. Nowhere in England, nor on the Continent, had the working class yet recovered from the deep wounds inflicted by the counter-revolution, and many years were still to elapse before it could be stirred to activity again.

The first step of the new Committee was to make its bow to the public. For this purpose it organised a great meeting in St. Martin's Hall on February 27th in commemoration of the French Revolution of 1848. In connection with that demonstration, Ernest Jones wrote in his paper:—

“Is there a poor and oppressed man in England? Is there a robbed and ruined artisan of France? Well, then, they appertain to one race, one country, one creed, one past, one present, and one future. The same with every nation, every colour, every section of the toiling world. Let them unite. The oppressors of humanity are united, even when they make war. They are united on one point: that of keeping the peoples in misery and subjection. . . . Each democracy singly may not be strong enough to break its own yoke; but together they give a moral weight, an added strength that nothing can resist. . . . The Alliance of peoples is the more vital now, because their disunion, the rekindling of national antipathies, can alone save tottering royalty from its doom. Kings and oligarchs are playing their last card: we can prevent their game. No movement of modern times has therefore been of such importance, as that international alliance about to be proclaimed at a great gathering in St. Martin's Hall.”\*

Thus the new International was conceived chiefly as a democratic alliance of the peoples against reactionary governments. This sounds somewhat different from the appeals subsequently made by the great International and even from the slogans of the *Communist Manifesto*, and of the Fraternal Democrats on the eve of the revolutions of 1848. This difference shows how unripe the situation still was, how even the advanced elements among the Labour leaders were still under the influence of the foreign, and particularly of the French, refugees, whose views did not go beyond the national emancipation of peoples and the establishment of democratic republics.

Nevertheless it would be unjust to confuse the leaders of the new movement with the republican dreamers. The great meeting was held on the day appointed; and Ernest Jones, who presided, expressed himself in a lengthy speech as follows:—

\* *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1855.



"All men are brethren; all now begin to understand the meaning of these words. Yet, all men are brethren—but some are Abels and some are Cains, and this is a gathering of the Abels of the world against the crowned and mighty Cains who murder them. . . . Kings and oligarchs have separated the peoples; Democracy unites them. . . . The Republic is peace, and the Empire is war . . . we are here as soldiers of that Democracy—the advance guard of the army of liberation of the world. We are here for three great and solemn purposes: to protest against alliances with tyrants, and the use of our name in those alliances; to help the oppressed nationalities win their freedom; to proclaim and promote the sovereign rights of Labour, that uncrowned, but only legitimate monarch of the world. . . . Our further duty is to restore the oppressed nations to independence. But what independence? I say *internal as well as external*. Independence from the aristocrat and usurer within, as well as the Czar or Emperor without. Better no Poland than a royalist or oligarchic one. . . . The oppressed and crushed nations have not bled and suffered for this—to be made a catspaw of middle class Liberals. . . . Let none misunderstand the tenor of this meeting: We begin to-night no mere crusade against an aristocracy. We are not here to pull one tyranny down, only that another may live the stronger. We are against the tyranny of capital as well. . . . The human race is divided between slaves and masters . . . and until labour commands capital, instead of capital commanding labour, I care not what political laws you make, what republic or monarchy you own—*man is a slave*.\*

It was necessary to quote at this length in order to prevent too hasty conclusions. Nevertheless\* the Jones's were few in number, Marx and Engels held aloof, and the overwhelming majority consisted of muddleheads still dreaming of a renewal of the past in the future.

The meeting was well attended, but it ended in a fiasco. Among the speakers was Alexander Herzen, who was called upon to speak to the principal resolution. The resolution protested against any alliance with the "despots" and the "usurers," demanded an "alliance of the peoples based on mutual interest and tending to universal brotherhood," and asked for "a conference of the representatives of all democracies" and the establishment of a "permanent international committee consisting of repre-

\* *Ibid.*, March 3, 1855.

sentatives of all the democracies," for the purpose of "promoting the advent of the Democratic and Social Republic."\* The resolution was moved by Finlen, and Hertzén was called upon to second it for much the same reason that led to the famous scene of fraternisation between Plekhanov and Katayama half a century later at the International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam (1904). It was announced by the chairman that "in order to show their repudiation of national hatred" (this happened during the Crimean War), and that their fight against the despots should not be confused with one against the peoples oppressed by them, the resolution would be seconded "by a Russian." It was certainly a good idea, but unfortunately, it was badly carried out. The Russian proved quite equal to the task, and calmly drawing out of his pocket a lengthy document, written in the French language and containing a review of Russian conditions, read it to the assembly. No doubt the document was written in the best Hertzén style—it was subsequently published *in extenso* in the *People's Paper*—but there was no time left for any other speaker, and the big audience gradually left the hall; and the great meeting upon which the utmost efforts had been spent by its promoters, and to which congratulatory messages had been sent by Barbés, Victor Hugo, Saffi, and many other, fizzled out. We wonder whether the great Russian ever realised his imprudence.

With regard to the International Committee itself, the effect of the demonstration proved beneficial, and in the months following, it held regular weekly business meetings. There were no public meetings, probably owing to the lack of funds, but possibly also for other reasons. We find, for instance, that Ernest Jones had to give up the agitation concerning Napoleon III's visit because one of his bourgeois patrons who stood security for the payment of the Stamp Duty on his newspaper deserted him, and "an order was sent down to the Stamping Department by the Government's solicitor to stop the issue of stamps to the *People's Paper*." During that period we find only one brief notice, of a few lines, concerning a public meeting that was to be held by the International Committee in the new Political and Scientific Institution, founded by the Chartists in Friar Street.† One month later the Committee issued a manifesto to the people which deserves to be quoted, for it shows clear evidence of French influence, and

\* *Ibid.*, March 3, 1855.

† *Ibid.*, June 30, 1855.

particularly of the ideas and phraseology of the Proudhonist refugees. The manifesto declared:—

“We ask an alliance—an alliance of the people for the purpose of promoting progress, of purifying the ideas from error, of removing injustice from the laws, of cleansing the manners from falsehood; an alliance in order to crush despotism which, in the shape of monarchy, aristocracy and moneyocracy, oppresses the peoples and keeps the greater part of mankind in an ignoble and debasing state of slavery. The hour of that alliance has struck. . . . From all religions, from all philosophies, from all past institutions, thrown together and melted in the fire of the revolution, will arise a new synthesis, a social order of which the life of humanity has been up to the present time a prophecy and a preparation. . . . Peoples, labour is everything in the world—it is Virtue, it is Nobility, it is Richness, it is Love, it is Creation pursuing its course, it is Truth and Beauty. . . . Before labour, all your governments are, socially speaking, but cheating stewards, unfaithful book-keepers. . . . Yes, in an economical point of view, the revolution is a rectification of accounts and nothing else. . . . Men! Peoples! Do you feel so little life within yourselves that you fear to die, if you set aside the leading strings of your paternal Government? . . . Arise, go forth!—Your strength will be revealed to you. Such is the word we have to sow—such are the principles which we have to propagate and by which we will lay the foundations of the Alliance of the peoples on the ground of the universal and social Republic.”\*

Such a farrago had never been uttered by the Fraternal Democrats, and it affords a glaring indication of the confusion which then reigned in the minds of those who remained faithful to the cause. Later Proudhonist philosophers again tried to smuggle their “synthetic” phraseology into the International, but were defeated, because Marx and Engels were there. Obviously, in the middle of the 50’s, the lone efforts of Jones, who was familiar with the Marxian doctrine, were not enough to overcome them.

\* *People’s Paper*, Sept. 8, 1855.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION (1855-59)

THE activities of the International Committee during the second half of 1855 are of no particular interest. The ills from which it suffered were common to that period, namely, the political and social indifference of the masses, which had a depressing effect upon the most stalwart spirits. In the beginning of September we hear loud complaints of Committee members not attending the meetings, and one resolution can be found in which such lazy members are advised to "tender their resignations to the respective nationalities."\* On September 22nd the Committee, jointly with the "French Revolutionary Commune," organised a mass meeting in memory of the Polish insurrection (addressed, among others, by Dombrowski), which had rather unexpected consequences.† It happened that Felix Pyat had written an open letter to Queen Victoria against the alliance with Napoleon and read it at the meeting. The letter was written in fairly trenchant style, and although it was promptly published in *L'Homme*, the newspaper published by Victor Hugo at Jersey, it passed quite unnoticed until denounced by the *Times*. Suddenly there arose a thrill of "public indignation." Particularly incensed were the bourgeois politicians in Jersey. Protest meetings were held, the offices of *L'Homme* were mobbed and almost wrecked, and finally, the Governor of the island ordered the deportation of three Frenchmen identified with the paper.‡ In London, too, a Pole was arrested for publishing the letter in leaflet form. Yet it was remarkable that the writer of the letter and his two co-signatories, as well as Victor Hugo, the proprietor and editor of *L'Homme*, were not molested. Apparently, there were two souls struggling in the Government's breast, and the action of the authorities ended in a splendid fiasco. After Hugo himself had demonstratively left the inhospitable island and moved to Guernsey, the whole of radical London rose indignantly against the Government's shameful act, and protest resolutions were carried at numerous mass meetings. In St. Martin's Hall, a meeting was held under the

\* *People's Paper*, Sept. 8, 1855.

† *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1855.

‡ *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Oct. 28, 1855.

presidency of Edward Miall, M.P., at which Ernest Jones delivered an impassioned speech, and in support of which a letter expressing sympathy was sent by Cobden himself.\* Similar demonstrations were held in the provinces, particularly at Newcastle. The local Foreign Affairs Committee, led by Joseph Cowen, drew up a letter of congratulation to Victor Hugo, and Harney at the head of a deputation delivered it to him at Guernsey.† With the assistance of the International Committee, a special Guernsey Exile Committee was formed for the benefit of the deported French exiles. This Committee organised the collection of funds, and on New Years' Eve held a great international soirée in honour of the political refugees. The meeting was addressed, among other speakers, by Ernest Jones and Ruge. A manifesto on the national question was drawn up, in which the right of every nation to self-determination was emphasised, and the principle of nationalisation of the land, money (sic) and transport was proclaimed, ending with the motto: "Vive la République Démocratique et Sociale!"‡ As a result of all these demonstrations further repressions ceased, the Government's plan of renewing the Aliens Act (on Napoleon's request) was given up, and even the arrested Pole was set at liberty. It was a great victory for the democracy, which was, however, marred by a comic, yet characteristic incident. The International Committee, in defiance of the Government, published the above-mentioned letter to the Queen in the *People's Paper*, as well as in leaflet form, which greatly enraged Kossuth. He was convinced that the letter in question had been penned by "foreign socialists" in the Committee, among whom "there were probably many police spies." He got in touch with Ledru-Rollin and Mazzini, and the three of them published a joint statement in which they protested against the Committee's action and refused to have any dealings with the "Socialists." For this they were severely dealt with by the *People's Paper*—particularly Ledru-Rollin, who barely two years previously had shouted himself hoarse at a Polish meeting in favour of a "democratic and social republic."§

The following year, 1856, may be described to a certain extent as a historic one. The International Committee displayed

\* *People's Paper*, Nov. 17, 1855.

† *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Nov. 18, 1855.

‡ *People's Paper*, Jan. 5, 1856.

§ *Ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1855.

particular activity, and in February, jointly with the French Revolutionary Commune, it held a mass meeting in honour of the February Revolution and the League of Peoples in St. John's Street Institute, Tottenham Court Road. In April a delegation of workers from Paris arrived in London for the purpose of founding an Universal League of Workmen.\* The announced object of the League was the social emancipation of the working class, which was possible only through the unity of the workers of all countries as against international capital. Of course, there were to be no politics: the goal of emancipation was to be attained by means of forming producers' and consumers' societies. In the five principal countries of Europe there were close on 20,000,000 workers; if each one of them would make a small contribution, a great amount of capital could be accumulated, which might be used for the establishment of bakeries, slaughterhouses, and other undertakings, gradually and painlessly ousting the sway of capital. The good news was hailed with particular joy by O'Brien, and immediately, with the assistance of Pyat and Tallandier, a big mass meeting was called which approved the draft, elected an executive committee, and decided to issue a manifesto to the trade unions. It was the old Owen story, only upon an international basis, and of course it soon collapsed, not, however, without having a stimulating effect upon the International Committee. In May it issued an interesting manifesto, addressed "To all nations," in which it was declared:

"The device of all, in democracy, is not only Universal Republic, it is Universal democratic and social republic. . . . In effect, the universal republic, the alliance of the peoples in peace, liberty and justice, depends as much on the internal constitution of the people, as on the mode of their external activity. It is even right to say that the internal constitution determines the external policy. . . . Monarchy, empire and aristocracy, are war. Republic, liberty, equality, are alone able to say: we are peace. But monarchy is not only in the Government, it is in the workshop, in property, in the family, in religion, in the economy, the manners, the blood of the people. It is from everywhere that we must turn it away, and everywhere, for all the people, the social problem is the same: to substitute labour for birth and wealth as origin and warrant of rights in society. The International Committee has recognised from the first day of its formation that there is no

\* *Reynolds' Newspaper*, May 4, 1856.

solution whatever—in conformity with the equality of conditions between peoples—to the problem of international relations, so long as the solution of the social problem of the equality of conditions between men is not found.”\*

These were the old empty phrases with which the exiles of 1848 liked to intoxicate themselves; but in the concluding part of the manifesto a new note is struck, for the promoters of the new organisation go on to say that they thought it necessary to outline a definite plan for the further extension of the influence of their work. This plan was to consist in the extension of the existing International Committee, which, owing to its small membership and lack of funds, was almost doomed to impotence, into an *international association* open to the people of all countries, and made up not of an International Committee in one European city only, but of international committees in the largest possible number of cities. It was further explained that no details could yet be outlined as to the means of establishing such committees or as to the concentration of the funds and activities of such an International Association; but it was intended, should the plan find favour, to issue membership cards for the payment of dues to the amount of sixpence per quarter, entitling the bearer to membership in the International Association and to a vote at both national and international meetings (congresses). In this manner it was expected to create a powerful organisation, rich in membership and funds.

The manifesto was signed by the Secretary of the International Committee, John Nash, at No. 10, Charlotte Street. The organisational scheme of the International Association, outlined in the manifesto, down to the name of the organisation and the idea of the universal membership card, was in substance the scheme later adopted by the first International. The plan, no doubt, would have been realized in 1848, had the project of an international workingmen's congress been carried out then; but since this was not the case, the date of the formulation of the organisational scheme of the International should be put down as 1856.

As mentioned above, the plan had been suggested by O'Brien's attempt to form a Universal League of Workmen in connection with the arrival of a delegation of French workmen. Steps towards carrying out the plan were taken in the month of

\* *People's Paper*, May 3, 1856.

August of the same year.\* The International Committee, jointly with the French Commune, held a mass meeting in memory of the French Revolution of 1792 at the Literary Institute in St. John's Street. A resolution was carried, proposing to the International Committee, the Revolutionary Commune, the German Communist Club, the Society of English Chartists, the Society of Polish Socialists (?), and "to all others who, while belonging to no organisation, were entitled to membership in the International Committee," to organise an Alliance for the purpose of mutual support in the fight for a democratic and social republic. The resolution went on to say:—

"The said societies engage themselves, in fine, to use all their power to induce the citizens of all countries to organise socialist and revolutionary national societies, to bind them together by means of the general association in order to make the international propaganda profit by the strength of the association of all the individuals, and the various national propaganda profit by the strength of the association of all the peoples, and so prepare the success of the future revolution—success which the past revolutions could not achieve for not having known and practised the law of solidarity, outside of which there is no salvation either for the individuals or for the peoples."

It is not worth while to waste any words about the fine phraseology of the resolution: it bears the stamp of the current revolutionary slang imported from France. It is more important to note that with this all our sources of information suddenly come to an end, and we are unable to find any direct data as to the fate of the Alliance, and even of the International Committee. In fact, at this point, we lose the thread of the history of the organised international movement in England. An explanation for this is to be sought not only in the decline of the Labour movement generally, under which all stimulus towards intellectual activity disappeared, but more especially in the total collapse of the Labour press. True, the *People's Paper* continued to exist for some time, but it was already moribund, and the few newspapers which followed contain little of interest, and soon vanished. Nevertheless, from a brief report in the *People's Paper* concerning the "political soirées" organised by Jones in those days—they consisted of political discussions spiced with recitations and music—we learn that the International Committee was still in existence

\* *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Aug. 17, 1856.



in the beginning of 1857, and jointly with the French Commune, celebrated the February Revolution in St. Martin's Hall.\* Speeches were made on that occasion by Schapper, Pyat, Tallandier, Nadaud and some others of our old friends. Two years later, in November 1858, in the same hall, the anniversary of the Polish insurrection of 1830 was celebrated under the chairmanship of Oborski, with the assistance of Schapper,† at which a particularly long speech was made by Edgar Bauer; we do not know, however, whether the International Committee took part in it. Presumably it was still in existence; nay, it had apparently grown into an International Association, of whose existence we learn something from the publications (mostly edited by Wilhelm Liebnecht) of the German Communist Club. Thus, we read that in the beginning of 1859 the International Association proposed to issue some sort of remonstrance against Mazzini, whereat for unknown reasons the Poles felt offended and withdrew from the organisation.‡ They soon came back and, as it seems, took part in a memorial meeting to the February Revolution which was held on February 24th.§ We learn further about other meetings held by the International Association in the same year, on June 24th, in commemoration of the sanguinary June days, 1848, on September 29th, in commemoration of the Polish insurrection, and so forth.|| On September 9th, the memory of Robert Blum was honoured; but, apparently, the affair was organised not by the International Association, but by the German Communist Club. Nevertheless, an appeal was made at that meeting to all those present to join the International Association.¶ In those days, apparently, the Germans were already playing first fiddle, since in the reports of nearly all the meetings we find the names of Schapper, Liebnecht, and Lessner mentioned, but very rarely those of the French. Two facts should be mentioned here: first, that some organisations, as for instance, O'Brien's National Reform League, were still not affiliated to the International Association;\*\* and second, we accidentally learn that the latter had its branches in other countries, and even in America, known as

\* *People's Paper*, Feb. 28, 1857.

† *Cabinet Newspaper*, Dec. 4, 1858.

‡ *Neue Zeit* (London), Feb. 5, 1859.

§ *Ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1859.

|| *Das Volk* (London), July 25, 1859.

¶ *Hermann* (London), Nov. 12, 1859.

\*\* *Reynolds' Newspaper*, April 11, 1859.

*Decuria*, which carried on a correspondence with the Central Committee in London.\* Nothing further can be learned of those organisations, but judging by the fact that special bodies were subsequently formed on various occasions—for the reception to Garibaldi in 1862, and for the celebration of the Polish anniversary in 1863—and that at the time of the formation of the International there existed an Universal League—one may surmise that in the beginning of the 60's neither the International Committee nor the International Association were any longer in existence.

This concludes our very inadequate sketch of the history which preceded the International. On September 26th, 1864, a great meeting was again held in St. Martin's Hall in connection with the Polish anniversary. Again there arrived French working men with "a plan for the promotion of a better understanding among peoples," and again an enthusiastic resolution was carried in favour of establishing an International Association. When reading of these events in the histories of the International hitherto written, it always sounds a wonderful and new idea. But now, in the light of the foregoing, we know that all these things were old and quite natural. There had been numerous mass meetings held in St. Martin's Hall before; the English working class and democracy had already formulated their attitude on the Polish question upon numerous previous occasions, and formed, in connection with it, international alliances; even the visits of French workmen and their appeals for fraternisation were not quite so new. Furthermore, having regard to the fact that barely two years elapsed between the end of the last and the formation of the new International, and that the traditions of the former, partly through personal associations, and partly in other ways, were still very much alive—even the organisational form of the new International appears to be a simple reproduction of that of the old one. Indeed, in the eyes of its original founders the new International might even have appeared a simple continuation of the old one. And since the latter, through the medium of the International Committee, was a simple continuation of the Fraternal Democrats who from the beginning had thought of an international party embracing all countries, it appears that from 1845 down to 1864 there had been a continuous chain of ideas and efforts working all the time in one direction and finally resulting in the foundation of the historic International. If one were to indulge in specula-

\* *Das Volk*, June 11, 1859.

tion (for the rest, inadmissible in historic research) as to "what might have been if" etc., one would have to admit that even the new International would not have fared any better than its predecessors, had not the movement been joined by Marx who, fully alive to the new circumstances—the proletariat was everywhere recovering from its defeats and beginning to move forward—gave a new content to the old ideas, whilst retaining the previous forms of organisation. As a result, the International not only remained alive, but displayed an activity by which it alone acquired historical importance. This was the work of our great master, and this constitutes his immortal service to the international proletarian cause. But historical science, if it wishes to remain scientific, must in this case, as in all other cases, point out the fact that even great men do not work in a vacuum, that their activity as the Demiurge of history owes its effect precisely to the fact that they continue the work already begun, and erect their edifice upon the foundations already laid by preceding history. As in the whole of their theoretical and practical activity, Marx, and partly also Engels, in forming and leading the International, were the successors upon a higher plane to the work of others who, though not in possession of such creative powers, must be remembered by us as the forerunners of our great masters in this domain, and honoured as such: George Julian Harney and his Society of Fraternal Democrats, and Ernest Jones and his International Committee.

PART TWO  
THE PERIOD OF TRADE UNIONISM

CHAPTER ONE  
THE IDEOLOGY OF OPPORTUNISM

IN the summer of 1924 there died not far from London one of the oldest leaders of the British working class, forgotten by his contemporaries, but once famous in England and abroad. We speak of Robert Applegarth, at one time a member of the General Council of the First International, for many years the leader of one of the foremost trade unions in England, and for a quarter of a century one of the most prominent men in the post-Chartist trade union movement in general. He is described by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, in their *History of Trade Unionism*, as "an ideal representative of the English Labour movement in the political world," while Mr. Humphrey, the author of a *History of Labour Representation*, wrote enthusiastically in praise of him as a model Labour leader deserving study and admiration even to-day. By using this typical English Labour leader of the second half of the nineteenth century as an example, we may conveniently and profitably study the mental outlook of the Labour movement in England in the period which followed the breakdown of Chartism.

Applegarth was born in 1833, and at the time of his first appearance on the Labour stage—he was then only about twenty years of age—Chartism had already ceased to exist. He lived and acted when disappointment and passivity were prevalent among the working class: not only militant and revolutionary methods, but politics in general, had been abjured, and co-operation, emigration and trade unionism were in great vogue. In his autobiography, Thomas Cooper, once a prominent Chartist leader, then a deserter to the camp of the bourgeois reformers, recalling the days of his youth, ruefully wrote: "In our old Chartist time, it is true, Lancashire workmen were in rags by thousands; and many of them often lacked food. But their intelligence was demonstrated wherever you went. You would see them in groups, discussing the great doctrine of political justice—that every grown up, sane man ought to have a vote in the election of the men who were to

make the laws by which he was to be governed; or they were in earnest dispute respecting the teachings of Socialism. Now, you will see no groups in Lancashire. But you will hear well-dressed working men talk, with their hands in their pockets, of co-ops, and their shares in them, or in building societies."\* This was written by Cooper in 1872, but his words can also be applied to the 50's, although the workers were not as yet well dressed. Similar testimony to the change in the average type of English working man is borne by the *Edinburgh Review* which, recalling at the end of the 50's the stormy Chartist days, wrote: "Since then, time has solved all these problems—the discovery of the gold-fields in California and Australia, the absorption caused by the Crimean war, and, latterly, the enormous increase of our commerce and manufactures, resulting from our successful commercial policy, have changed the whole complexion of our labouring classes. Penury has given way to plenty; idleness to employment; disaffection to content. . . . The good which they (the workmen) expected to result from the six points of the Charter has descended upon them from an unexpected quarter. Although the feeling among them in regard to their admission to the franchise is genuine and strong, it is altogether different, not in degree only but in kind, from that which animated the Chartists in 1848."† No doubt the worthy journal, in speaking of the material benefits which "descended" upon the working class in the 50's, indulged in some exaggeration. It is true that the capitalist class was amassing wealth as never before,‡ and some crumbs did fall to the working class. The workers, however, were far from living in a state of plenty, and the crumbs were not thrown to them without severe fighting, as is evidenced by the numerous protracted strikes and lock-outs which took place in those days. Still, the condition of the working class *had* undergone a change and its psychology was, indeed, different. Lord John Russell himself could not help admiring the changed mentality of the working class and even considered it worthy of the vote which he had so long and persistently withheld. "To my mind," he declared in

\* *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, p. 393.

† *Edinburgh Review*, vol. cxxxiii., p. 283 (quoted by Joseph H. Park, in *The English Reform Bill of 1867*, 1920).

‡ *The Times* in its annual review on Dec. 31, 1859, wrote: "It may be doubted whether greater accumulations of wealth have ever taken place in a period of ten years in any age or country." (Quoted by Park, *op. cit.*)

the House of Commons in 1854,\* "the sentiments, moderation and common sense, manifested by our people in 1848, have shown that considerable elements of the population, still deprived of the suffrage, have grown quite ripe for it, and by being given parliamentary representation, would benefit our State and social system." In a word, it was a time when even the capitalist class greatly admired the workers who had at last become "practical" and had turned their backs upon revolutionary gods and shibboleths. Such was the time of Robert Applegarth's activity and leadership among the working masses.

It should be observed that he by no means belonged to the worst type of leaders of that period. Compared with the generation of leaders which sprang up some twenty or thirty years later—real flunkys of capitalism—Applegarth was almost an idealist. Among his associates and contemporaries he was distinguished by a broader outlook, as may be seen from the fact of his having joined the International and served upon its General Council. Among other things he was not an advocate of "pure trade unionism"; on the contrary, he persistently advised the workers to give their attention to politics. For instance, in 1862, when the Manhood Suffrage Association was formed, Applegarth joined it and wrote its first manifesto, in which he said to the workers: "Hitherto our efforts have been directed to the removal of one evil only, forgetting, or only partially remembering, that all the evils under which we suffer have a common origin—namely, an excess of political power in the hands of those holding a higher social position. . . . We must not forget that we are citizens, and, as such, should have citizens' rights. Recollect also that by obtaining these rights we shall be able more effectually to secure our legitimate demands as unionists. Our object is to create an organisation for the purpose of obtaining our rights as citizens; or, in other words, our just share of political power."

Four years later, in one of his circulars to the members of his own union, he wrote: "We have wondered in the past, when hearing of Trade Societies cry out 'No politics,' if they really understood what they said, and often grieved to see the gross injustice to which they have been frequently subjected while they themselves have been parties to their own suffering by neglecting to use the means at their command towards removing the cause of it. . . . What is more natural than that trade unions should

\* Quoted by Park, *Ibid.*, p. 307.

protect their members from bad laws as well as protect their wages?"

Applegarth was by no means opposed to politics, and denounced those who wanted to keep politics out of the trade unions. But this is the interesting point. When the Chartists were fighting for the suffrage, their leaders always declared: "By means of the suffrage we shall win political power, and by means of political power we shall rebuild society." As to how they would rebuild society, the Chartists, as we know, held very vague and conflicting views. But Applegarth was not concerned with the reconstruction of society. Nor did he aim at winning *all* political power. He only noticed that other classes had an "excess" of power; and as to the practical benefits to be derived from the suffrage, they amounted, in his opinion, to the satisfaction of the "legitimate demands" of the trade unions, which in those times were legal recognition of the unions, the right to picket, and a few other reforms. Such were the political claims of even those Labour leaders who were urging the workers to take part in the political struggle! This is not all. In the same circular, he, a member of the General Council of the International, went on to say: "Let us then unite with dignified firmness and rest not until our unions have that protection to which they are entitled, and I trust that with such protection and a few more years' experience, we shall have established a new era in the history of labour, have gained the full confidence of our employers, adopted arbitration as the first resort in our differences, and freed our unions from the expense and anxiety of strikes as far as it is possible to do so, and we might then—'material' as we are—turn our attention to the establishment of a system that would embrace education for the young, employment for our surplus labour, the erection of meeting houses apart from public houses, as well as homes for our aged members."

This is a totally new objective: gaining the confidence of employers instead of fighting them, abolishing strikes and resorting to arbitration, as the logical outcome of the policy of gaining the confidence of the masters instead of fighting them, and ultimately, the transformation of the trade unions into peaceful organisations of the Friendly Society type which foster the spirit of "self-reliance" among the working class and at the same time save bourgeois society and the State a good deal of anxiety and expense. This was the social programme of the Labour leaders

who dreamed of opening a "new era in the history of labour." It was, indeed, a new era, not in the revolutionary sense, but rather in the sense of an active adaptation to capitalist society.

What were to be the means towards the consummation of this sublime ideal? Of course, the most "moral" ones! The rules of the Manhood Suffrage Association contained a special clause that "moral agitation alone be employed, such as meetings, petitions, circulars, addresses, deputations, and requesting to be heard at the bar of the House of Commons"; while in the manifesto drawn up by Applegarth we read: "Let us work, work, work—unitedly, consistently, and persistently; and our voice will be heard within the walls of Parliament. The friends of progress there will support our demands, and Sovereign and people will, at no distant date, celebrate our victory." Five years later, in 1867, the "Sovereign and people" did celebrate the victory of bestowing the franchise upon the working class in the towns, a victory in which the "friends of progress" both within and without the walls of Parliament played a prominent part. This triumph of "moral force" had been preceded by the affiliation of the trade unions to the International and by riots in London, whereupon the "Sovereign and the friends of progress" decided that it was best to hearken to the voice of the workers before it turned into a revolutionary roar.

In the same year (1867) the first practical illustration was given of that gospel of social peace to which Applegarth devoted himself. The Tory Government, having passed the Reform Bill, hastened (as is usually done in England in such circumstances) to call for new elections, hoping to continue its stay in office by the aid of the grateful new constituents. The workers of Sheffield also decided to take part in the elections and put up a candidate of their own. It must be borne in mind that the workers of Sheffield were at that moment the object of furious attacks on the part of "public opinion," *i.e.*, the capitalists and their press. The workers at one workshop had killed one of their mates for refusing to join the union, and this was construed as proof of the criminality and social harmfulness of labour associations and of trade unions in particular. As the English workers were at that time agitating against a legal decision which denied legal protection to trade union funds, the terrorist act at Sheffield furnished capitalist public opinion with a convenient pretext not only to uphold the decisions of the courts but also to insist upon the *criminal*



responsibility of trade unions for offences committed by their officials. The agitation—which ended in the appointment of a Royal Commission and in the satisfaction of the workers' demands—was at that time in full swing, and in the midst of it the Sheffield workers decided to put up a parliamentary candidate. Whom did they choose? Acting upon Applegarth's advice they chose a Mr. Mundella. Mr. Mundella was a wealthy Nottingham manufacturer, hailing from the centre of the lace and hosiery industry where the workers had once destroyed machinery during the Luddite movement. Since then the relations between the local manufacturers and the workers had become more "normal"; the workers had gradually forgotten the time when they were independent hand loom weavers working in their homes, while the manufacturers had become more enlightened exploiters. Mundella himself was one of the first manufacturers in England to introduce arbitration for the settlement of disputes with his workpeople. It was a big step forward, in that it implied the recognition of the workers' unions and of collective bargaining. The employers had also graciously admitted the workers to be worthy of sitting with them at round table conferences. Mundella was therefore considered a man of progress and a friend to the workers not only in England, but also abroad. He had been described in the foreign press as a pioneer in the domain of social peace, and the Count of Paris—the Orléans pretender—accorded him a place of honour in his book on English trade unionism, the first serious work on this subject.

This manufacturer was adopted as candidate by the workers of Sheffield\* who had just obtained the suffrage and were for the first time making use of this political weapon—the same for which the workers of the preceding generation had fought with such heroism and self-sacrifice under the banner of Chartism. Applegarth wrote in the local press: "We have had some dismal forebodings as to the method in which the working classes would use their newly-acquired power; especially has it been imputed to trade unionists that they would launch their votes in one compact mass against the institutions and the property of the country. Well, here we have the first example of the working class using that

\* Mundella, when a member of the Liberal Cabinet in the 90's, established at the Board of Trade a Department of Labour, which at once became an important centre for research work and for the settlement of industrial disputes. This department was later reorganised as the Ministry of Labour.

increased power, in Sheffield above all other places. The Sheffield workers have selected as a candidate for Parliament one in whom they have full confidence, and one in whom they believe they have a faithful representative of their interests. And who is the candidate they have selected? Is he a 'firebrand' from among their own ranks; a blind advocate of their interests regardless of the interests of others? No; he is an employer of labour who, by extraordinary energy, ability and an honourable life, has won the position he now occupies and is equally respected by his fellow manufacturers as he is by his workpeople. . . . And why? Because while employers and men have elsewhere been engaged in conflict he has, for the last eight years, battled successfully with the prejudices of both employers and employed in his own district, and has substituted for an almost chronic state of social warfare a system of even-handed justice, a business-like for a barbarous method of adjusting questions affecting the vital interests of the nation."

Reading this pæan to the glory of social peace and in praise of the rejection of a revolutionary struggle for a new society, it is hard to believe that scarcely two decades had passed since the English proletariat had fought for the overthrow of the "cannibal system" (a favourite expression of Bronterre O'Brien), marching in solid masses behind their leaders who, in fiery speeches, agitated for a relentless struggle against the capitalists. And this was the first time the workers were making use of the vote, in a city where they had suffered from the victimisation and terrorism of the master class as nowhere else! Clearly, the working class already stood firmly on the platform of bourgeois society, its only dream being to merit the confidence of that society, to refrain from all irritating action and to convince it that the workers should not be pushed on to the path of militancy. These words of Applegarth represent a programme which really opened a new era in history. The English worker was at that time still at the head of the international Labour movement, and as his revolutionary struggle in the past had mapped out the course to be followed by the Labour movement of other countries, so did his present policy of compromise with bourgeois society open up a new road. The workers in other countries in their turn followed the same course.

Class harmony now became a fetish, and Applegarth was one of its most fervent worshippers, although as we have pointed out he was by no means one of the most reactionary leaders of the time. In 1868,

under the chairmanship of Gladstone, a meeting was held of the Social Science Association (a well-known body of Liberal reformers engaged in studying problems likely to bring the working class into the net of bourgeois ideas) which was to be addressed by Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, a pillar of Liberalism, on the question of the relations between masters and workmen. A resolution was moved by the speaker to the effect: "That strikes and lock-outs, now of frequent occurrence, the interference with private judgment by harassing regulations regarding piecework, overwork, and so forth, and the intimidation so often employed in enforcing such regulations and maintaining strikes, although they may result in temporary victory on either side, and in the long run to lower both wages and profit, show a great and lamentable ignorance of the natural laws which regulate wages and demonstrate the importance of at once taking measures to remove the ignorance." By "natural" laws of wages, of course, was meant the notorious doctrine of supply and demand and the theory of the Wage Fund, which was already being rejected by some of the more serious representatives of bourgeois political economy, like John Stuart Mill, but which was still served up to the workers by the apologists of the manufacturing class. Applegarth, himself a member of the Association, attended that meeting in the company of Ludlow, another luminary of that dark period, and introduced an amendment to the effect that strikes and lock-outs betrayed "a great and lamentable ignorance of the interests which employers and employed have in common, and the duty which should bring together all classes of society." By taking the sting out of the resolution, this amendment emphasised the most important problem which confronted the new Labour leaders, a problem aggravated by such "stinging" resolutions as the one submitted by Shuttleworth. It was fully realised by the Association that Applegarth and Ludlow were right, that their amendment would be more beneficial to the capitalist class than the provocative resolution, and the author of the latter therefore withdrew it on the ground that "it was not worth while debating verbal differences." Indeed, it was not worth while debating the point as the amendment was a much better bait for catching the simple-minded worker.

Many illustrations could be given to indicate the mentality of this member of the General Council of the International who, together with his friends like Odgers and Howell, caused so much annoyance to Marx. But enough has been said to show the great

gulf which separated the new leader of the English workers from the old Chartists and to appraise his political thinking at its true worth. We shall only refer to the reasons which prompted him to resign the general secretaryship of his union in 1871. The Webbs, in their *History of Trade Unionism*, modestly explain his resignation as having been due to "various personal disputes in the Society."\* Humphrey is more explicit about these "disputes." In 1871 a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into the problem of venereal diseases, and the working class was "honoured" by the inclusion of Applegarth among its members. The Executive Committee of his union—the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners—was indignant. In 1867, when a Royal Commission on Trade Unionism had been appointed in connection with the events at Sheffield, the Government could not be prevailed upon to include a representative of the workers upon it for fear of arousing the resentment of the capitalists. In 1871, however, a Labour leader with no special competence on the subject was invited to serve on a commission dealing with a question with which the workers had no direct concern. The Executive of Applegarth's union adopted a strongly worded resolution: "We shall not allow our society to be tickled by the mere sentiment which has been imported into this question, such as 'the honour reflected on our society by the General Secretary having been selected as a member of a Royal Commission.' We have yet to learn that any honour can be reflected on our body by an enquiry into such a loathsome subject, or that members of our society are specially affected on the question, or possess any special knowledge of the matter." The Executive Committee demanded that Applegarth should decline such an insulting appointment. Applegarth, however, preferred to resign his position in the union, stating in justification of his conduct, that before accepting the appointment he "had consulted some workers whose opinions he valued, and had also taken the advice of many persons, non-workers, known throughout the land as sincere well-wishers for the working class, whose personal friendship was one of his most valuable acquisitions." The advice of "friends" was apparently more important to Applegarth than the wishes of his colleagues on the Committee, with whom he had worked for a great number of years. This

\* Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *A History of Trade Unionism*, p. 237.

fact alone is sufficiently characteristic of him as a Labour leader. Equally characteristic is his great friendship with bourgeois well-wishers, which he prized above the interests of his own organisation and class. It was a friendship with such people as Mundella, and social reformers, radicals and Christian Socialists, like Professor Beesly, Frederick Harrison, Lloyd Jones and Thorold Rogers, who acted as links between the labour world and bourgeois society, and permeated the minds of the trade union leaders with their ideology. It was this connection which proved the undoing of these weak-kneed and vanity-stricken successors of the great Chartists: it ended with the political demoralisation of the leaders of the English working class, a state of affairs which acted as a powerful solvent in the English working class. When—to quote a few instances from recent history—the death of the miners' leader, Benjamin Pickard, revealed the fact that for a number of years he had been receiving a salary from Liberal Party funds; when, on the retirement of an even greater Paladin of English trade unionism, Robert Knight, the leader of the model Boilermakers' Union, which had known no strikes for decades, renowned for his incessant denunciation of "politics," it was revealed that he had been a shareholder in the shipbuilding and dock companies against which his union had to fight; when, forced to resign after numerous unsuccessful strikes, Richard Bell, general secretary of the Railwaymen's Union and predecessor to the Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, who is still at his job, was immediately given a berth at the Board of Trade; when Mr. David Shackleton, after many years as a Lib-Lab. leader, during which time he occupied the same position in the counsels of the Parliamentary Labour Party and of the Party Executive itself as that now filled by Mr. Arthur Henderson, suddenly resigned and accepted a knighthood and a Government post at the Board of Trade at a good salary—when we read and recall all these and numerous similar cases,\* we know that they were not accidental, but were the logical and natural outcome of that policy of opportunism, of conciliation with capitalist society through the medium of the middle class "friends" which Applegarth had helped to found.

Applegarth himself, having begun by supporting a Liberal

\* The list might be supplemented by the case of Mr. MacDonald, who, while Labour Prime Minister of England, accepted a gift of £30,000 from a wealthy manufacturer, who afterwards received a baronetcy.

reformer in the elections of 1867, gradually slipped down the steep incline to the verge of rank treachery. His biographer tells us the following story. In the 70's there was a big agitation over the criminal negligence with which shipping companies were overloading their freightships. Frequently the ships were so old as to be practically foredoomed to shipwreck in the first storm; just as frequently the ships were loaded above the watermark; no lifebuoys were carried, and there was hardly any inspection. Indignation ran high over the frequency of "accidents" at sea, particularly among seamen. Plimsoll, who persistently brought up this question on the floor of the House of Commons, in one of his famous Parliamentary speeches in 1875, called attention to the rotten ships used by a firm with which a Mr. Norwood, M.P. for Hull, was connected. Norwood felt offended, and decided to sue Plimsoll for criminal libel. But Mr. Norwood was a member of the Liberal Party, and since the Liberals were at that time in opposition and posed as paragons of virtue, it did not suit the Liberal leaders—notably our old friend Mundella—to allow such a scandal in the noble Liberal family. The worst of it was that Mr. Norwood intended to subpoena Mundella as a witness, while Mr. Mundella who, apparently, knew a thing or two about Norwood's firm, was anxious to avoid giving evidence, as Norwood was a generous subscriber to the Liberal Party funds. Without more ado, Mundella sent his friend Applegarth to talk matters over with Norwood. The reason for this choice of the former secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners as mediator was that Applegarth had supported Norwood in his election campaign. At first Norwood would not be persuaded. Applegarth then informed him that he had in his possession convincing proof of the fact that Norwood's firm was, indeed, carrying on shipping in "floating coffins," as they were then called, on a large scale, that only recently one of those ships, the wooden sides of which had been painted to resemble steel, but were in reality rotten, had gone down with all her crew, and that, therefore, if the case came to court, Applegarth would be compelled to give evidence against him. This threat proved effective, the case was stopped, the reputation of the Liberal Party saved, and Applegarth's biographer was put in a position to record the remarkable diplomatic talent of his hero.

Needless to say, this intimate incident in the political life of Applegarth does not appeal to us in the way intended by the

enthusiastic biographer. A Labour leader, although no longer on active service, gives his support to a capitalist to get him elected to Parliament, knowing full well that the latter sends many of his fellow workers to sure death for the sake of gain, and when this fact becomes known, does not confirm the fact, but conceals it from the public and from the working class, taking advantage of his knowledge only to save the prestige of . . . the Liberal Party! It is quite obvious that if there had been no danger to the Liberal Party, Applegarth would have continued to suppress the facts known to him, and Plimssoll, the noble defender of the life and health of the seamen, might have gone to prison for all he was concerned. To a Labour leader the interests of the Liberal Party and the friendship of members of the middle class were more important than the life of the seamen and the interests of the working class as a whole. Such was the eventual outcome of the passion for compromise which originated in the innocent wish to substitute "business" methods for the "barbarous method" of settling disputes with the employers! No wonder the bourgeoisie loved him, as it subsequently loved the Pickards, the Knights, the Bells, and the Shackletons. In 1871, when he stood as candidate in the first elections to the newly-constituted London School Board, he was not only supported by John Stuart Mill, Huxley, Thorold Rogers and Jevons, but his Conservative opponent actually withdrew in his favour and subscribed £20 to his election fund as a token of his esteem. This generous opponent was none other than the secretary of the London Master Builders' Association—that is, of the very capitalist group which Applegarth, while secretary of his union, and his union itself, had had to fight for many years! It stands to reason that such tokens of esteem are shown by capitalists only to *select* leaders of the working class, with whom it is a pleasant and profitable business to deal.

It remains to be added that Applegarth, on resigning his post, started a business for himself, established the first electricity company in London, put up the first electric light standard in London, and eventually retired with a small competence supplemented by an annuity subscribed by his friends.

In giving this character sketch of Robert Applegarth, we have, as the reader may have noticed, described the new school of English Labour leaders who appeared upon the stage in the second half of the nineteenth century, and diverted the Labour movement from revolutionary to opportunist, from proletarian to

middle class, from political to trade union lines. The operation was carried out with such ease and completeness that the later history of the English Labour movement reads, not as a continuation of the old, but rather as an entirely new history having nothing in common with the preceding one. There were new leaders, new methods, new interests, and new aims, and the traces of the old vanished so quickly that its very memory was all but obliterated in the next generation, and the few survivors, like O'Brien, Harney and Ernest Jones seemed living anachronisms, almost curiosities. Men of great talent, great temperament, of great and profound erudition, who but a few years previously had shaken the very foundations of capitalist society and had been followed by hundreds of thousands of factory workers, were now lonely figures moving in obscurity, misunderstood by the majority, understood only by small groups of the selected few, while their place was taken by new men who did not possess a fraction of their intellect, talent and character, and who attracted similar hundreds of thousands of workers by the shallow gospel of "look after the pennies" and the need of coming to an agreement with the employers on this subject, even at the price of class independence. The break between the two periods seemed to be complete; nevertheless the thoughtful historian will discover the connection between them. After all, the tendencies which prevailed in the second half of the nineteenth century were not quite so new as they appeared to be: they had existed before, struggling hopelessly against other\* tendencies favoured by circumstances of the time. We are told by the Webbs,† who had access to the archives of the trade unions, that as far back as 1845, the Stonemasons' Central Committee repeatedly cautioned their members "against the dangerous practice of striking," advising them to avoid it as they would "ferocious animals." Four years later the Liverpool Lodge of the same union made the bland proposition "that our society no longer recognise strikes, either as a means to be adopted for improving our conditions, or as a scheme to be resorted to in resisting infringements." Even in 1835, we read that the London compositors denounced all "violent" methods of fighting the employers, recommending to use only the "irresistible weapon of truth and common sense," just as Applegarth did a generation later, when he declared before the Royal

\* See Chap. VIII., *Part One*, "The Break-up of Chartism."

† *History of Trade Unionism*, 1920 Ed., pp. 198-9.



Commission on Trade Unions: "I set out from the first day that I took office with the determination that I would not have anything to do with the violation of the law, and that if there were any violation of the law in connection with our society I would down it."\* Obviously the servile mentality of the Labour leaders of the second half of the nineteenth century had its roots in the preceding period, but it could not get hold of the minds of the workers until such time as the collapse of Chartism had created a vacant place for it.

We have seen in the preceding chapters how this came to pass. The breakdown of political revolutionary movements invariably leaves behind it a sense of profound disappointment with the previous methods of action and previous forms of organisation, and throws the masses back to petty humdrum work. This is what happened in England after the defeat of Chartism which had embodied the highest revolutionary ideals of that time. Not only did the workers turn to "practical" problems, but the very rejection of the higher aims was extolled as the sublimest wisdom. All the Lovetts, Holyoakes, Coopers and others, who even before had not felt themselves quite at home in the revolutionary movement, now became the advocates of small deeds and humble virtues, and their voices met with a lively response among the wide masses of the proletariat, tired and weary, bleeding from a thousand wounds. This, we say, is the usual corollary of post-revolutionary periods: between the defeat and the rallying of new forces for the resumption of the struggle there lies a period of moral and even physical depression. But in England this period was protracted for a whole half-century, and the reason for this must be sought in the circumstances described in our previous chapters. As against the position of the working class of other countries in similar circumstances, the English proletariat did not find itself isolated, but became the centre of the attention of bourgeois reformers who quite correctly realised their mission: when the workers grew disappointed with the revolutionary struggle, these reformers showered their "love" on them, built a moral bridge between them and the capitalist class, enabled them to reorganise upon a new platform, compelled the capitalist class to yield a little to the workers' demands in regard to wages, working hours and working conditions in general, and since that period happened to coincide with a spell of great industrial prosperity, from which some crumbs

\* Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

would in any case have accrued to the workers, the ideas preached by the reformers struck deep roots among the masses and became an integral part of the mental outlook of the English proletariat.

The distinguishing feature of this mental outlook was acceptance of capitalist society, which acceptance found its expression in the rejection of political action, and in the recognition of the teachings of vulgar political economy of the harmony of interests as between the employing and the working class. Out of this ideology arose the classical trade unionism, that specifically British form of "economism" with which we have been familiar for the last three generations. It is non-political, not because it considers political action an ineffective means towards the social revolution, as was the case with Owen, but because it repudiates the very idea of social revolution, concentrating its whole attention on partial ameliorations of the condition of the workers, or rather, of its own members. It is significant that as recently as 1894 the historians of trade unionism, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, defined "Trade Union" as "a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment."\* In other words, even as late as the 90's of the last century the aims of the trade unions were understood by historians intimately acquainted with them, as not proceeding beyond the limits of capitalist society, as being confined to partial improvements within the framework of the capitalist system.† No other ideals were held by the

\* Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *op. cit.* (1920.)

† It is characteristic, that in the 1920 edition of their book the Webbs thought it necessary substantially to alter their definition of a trade union. Instead of "the conditions of their employment" they introduce the rather awkward term, "the conditions of their working life," explaining that the old term had been "objected to as implying that Trade Unions have always contemplated a perpetual continuance of the capitalist or wage system. No such implication was intended," they declare. Trade unions have, at various dates during the past century, at any rate, frequently had aspirations towards "a revolutionary change in social and economic relations." As though the authors themselves had not considered in 1894 those aspirations as travesties, deviations from the normal and, so to speak, immanent aims of the trade union movement! The new term "conditions of their working life" devised by them was intended to rectify this "mistaken" idea of the nature of Trade Unionism, without imparting to it any revolutionary tendencies, without breaking at the very outset the continuity between the definitions propounded by them in 1894 and 1920. At the close of the book, in the supplementary chapter written for the 1920 edition, our authors become more outspoken when

English workers in the post-Chartist period, and this made it possible for such men as Applegarth, Odgers, Allan, and others to become leaders, men who entirely assimilated the mental outlook of the bourgeois reformers, and eventually degenerated into simple hirelings of capital, like the heroes enumerated above.

However, one must not suppose that this process of adaptation to bourgeois society ran altogether smoothly. An essential condition for successful adaptation was a certain minimum of concessions and decent treatment of the workers on the part of the capitalist class, but, in reality, one group of employers or another would at times take up such a reactionary attitude that a conflict became inevitable, and at acute moments all the fine theories about harmony of interests would vanish overboard. This happened in the 60's, which were marked by a vast number of provocative lock-outs and by victimisation of every kind. It was during those years, too, that the more reactionary of the capitalist class, encouraged by the situation brought about by the terrorist act at Sheffield, suddenly made the discovery of an ambiguity in the law on trade unions and with the help of the law courts attacked the right of combination itself. The answer to this was an unexpected revival of the political movement among the workers, which, while confining itself to putting up "independent" Labour candidates in parliamentary elections on a trade unionist and bourgeois-reformist platform, nevertheless augured ill if the case which aroused the excitement were allowed to drag on and become they declare (p. 717): "The object and purpose of the workers, organised vocationally in trade unions and professional associations, and politically in the Labour Party, is no mere increase in wages or reduction of hours. It comprises nothing less than a reconstruction of society, by the elimination of the capitalist profit-maker from the Nation's industries." And in their work *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain* (1920) they go even farther, defining Trade Unionism as "the organ of revolt against the capitalist system" (p. 274). How far the Webbs had moved in their learned terminology from the views of 1894! This progress, no doubt, reflected the revolutionary tendency in favour of "direct action" which was manifested by the trade unions in 1919-20, and by the generally revolutionary atmosphere of the period which followed the October revolution in Russia and the wide sympathies for it on the part of the masses of the English workers who, in the summer of 1920, stopped by their intervention the preparations of the British Government for a new military attack on Soviet Russia. What must be thought of "scientific" historians who change their definitions under the stress of the moment?

acute. The more intelligent among English public men and politicians, remembering the past and realising the importance of trade unions as safety valves, intervened in time and succeeded with the help of the enlightened section of the capitalist class in removing the danger by legislation. The working class returned to its "economist" position and continued to identify itself with capitalist society. The literature of that period abounds in instances of this opportunist mentality, in which the workers themselves proclaim their devotion to bourgeois ideology and even defend it against the bourgeoisie themselves. By way of example, we may refer to a pamphlet written by a Bolton stonemason in defence of trade unionism against the furious attacks showered upon it in connection with the Sheffield outrages.\* The author sets out to prove that "the principles and practices of trade unions, in the main, are not antagonistic to the principles of political economy," that is, of the vulgar political economy of the apologists of capitalism. "We contravene," he continues, "no law of political economy; but trade unions are essential and indispensable to the working man in order to give effect to those laws, that is, in order to effectively remove the intermeddling of avarice, which would suspend or otherwise injuriously interfere with the ordinary and beneficent operation of those laws. . . . Let me ask, did the law of supply and demand give cheap bread to the toiling millions of this country when the iniquitous and abominable corn laws pressed like a huge incubus upon the energies of the people? Of course it did not; and the whole lifetime of the indefatigable, unconquerable, and immortal Richard Cobden and his coadjutors has been spent in a continued warfare to overthrow monopolies, and give effect to the laws of political economy, which Adam Smith and other great thinkers have revealed the existence of." The "laws" of vulgar political economy—notably, the alleged law of supply and demand—are acclaimed as "beneficent"; Cobden, one of the most vulgar heroes of this vulgar period of English capitalism, is extolled as the "immortal" fighter against "monopolies," and the attitude taken up by trade unions is defended not from the standpoint of the class struggle, but from that of the Manchester school of *laissez faire*. The reader might perhaps think that in speaking of monopolies the author aimed at these who monopolised the means of production, the capitalist class. Nothing of the kind!

\* William Graham, *A Discussion on the Principles and Objects of Trade Unions*, 1868.

"Let it go forth to the world," he writes, "that the trade unions are not organised to contravene, but to give full, practical, and beneficent effect to the laws of political economy . . . . We seek to give those laws their practical effect, not by extorting that which is compatible with the manufacturing and commercial prosperity of the country, but by seeking to establish the rights of labour on a solid foundation, by securing for the working man a fair and legitimate share of the profits of his toil. . . ." Beyond a "fair and legitimate share" in the product of labour the ambition of our author did not go, for as he says in another place, the real interests of masters and men are not opposed to one another but identical. Hence his wish that "the trade unions and the employers associations might, at last, one day be combined in reasonable and harmonious actions."

Such was the ideology of a leading trade unionist in the 60's, and such it remained until our time. Exactly forty years later, in 1907, Richard Bell, in a book on trade unionism (it is noteworthy that the trade unions, in spite of all their efforts to win the "confidence" of the capitalists, have continually been on the defensive, have had to prove their usefulness to bourgeois society!), wrote:

"Our trade unions have benefited industry, *i.e.*, the capitalists as well as the workmen. The very essence of character and morality is the restraint of immediate impulses for the sake of eventual advantage. It demands a money sacrifice and a certain amount of discipline. Without these trade unionism could not exist. The more developed it becomes, the more highly ordered it becomes. . . . Our trade unions have rendered great service in establishing good and stable relationships between employers and workmen. This has been, and is, an enormous advantage in the keen competition with other countries. . . . The growth and consolidation of trade combinations among workmen forced employers to organise also, and from these two powerful organised forces a new order of things has been brought about. Instead of fighting and quarrelling over every subject of difference between them, they developed consultations and deliberations, mutual understanding and respect instead of ill-feeling and antagonism, and with these arrangements were made for providing machinery for regulating differences according to changing circumstances and conditions. . . . Without trade unions the grievances of workmen would be greater and their passions quite unrestrained and the

result would be that there would never be complete freedom from strife and strikes. Happily, strikes are becoming less frequent each year.”\*

In the course of half a century we hear the same speeches repeated by successive generations of Labour leaders: such constancy of ideology is not to be met with in any other country or at any other age. Obviously this period was one continuous whole, and may be analysed in one general survey.†

\* Richard Bell, *Trade Unionism* (1907), pp. 66-68, 71.

† In the preface to a new edition (1924) of his book, *Socialism: Critical and Constructive*, Mr. J. R. MacDonald writes: “It cannot be over-emphasised that public doles, Poplarism, strikes for increased wages, limitation of output, not only are not Socialism, but may mislead the spirit and the policy of the Socialist movement.” By “public doles” are meant the grants given to the unemployed; “Poplarism” stands for the tolerably generous policy of unemployed relief practised by the Poplar Board of Guardians; while “limitation of output” is the stock objection of the capitalist class against the trade unions! And a most prominent Labour Leader repeats all these charges against the working class just as any employer of labour might do.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE PRACTICE OF OPPORTUNISM

**R**EPUDIATION, not only of revolution, but of politics in general, and concentration on purely economic trade union action—this was the main background to the British Labour movement of the post-Chartist period. This does not mean that the workers, as individuals, did not interest themselves in politics. On the contrary, many of them would attend political meetings, vote at elections for one candidate or another, and frequently join one or the other of the political parties. All this did not in the least contradict the slogan of "No Politics" which was now followed by the working class: the watchword applied only to the organised forms of politics based upon the *class struggle*. In other words, every individual worker could privately engage in politics as much as he desired, but when organised with his fellow workers he was to quit politics the moment he entered his organisation. Naturally, by thus atomising himself politically, by refusing to use in the interests of his class, that which constitutes his main strength, *i.e.*, organisation, the English worker fell an 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. Even when forced by circumstances, as for instance, by the attacks of the capitalists against the workers' right of combination, which meant an attack upon the very existence of the trade unions, to take up political action again (as was the case in the 60's and 70's) by sending their own representatives to Parliament, the workers never went beyond the idea that they were simply exercising their right of protecting their professional interests in the same way as lawyers, doctors, bankers, railway companies, and other professional and industrial groups do, when sending their own people to Parliament to look after their particular interests. No sooner did the need for such protection pass, than the workers would stop electing their own men to Parliament, and those who were already there would, according to their personal tastes, join one or other of the bourgeois parties—chiefly the Liberal Party which was astute enough by Radical watchwords to lure the majority of the Labour politicians into its political net. At all events, the struggle of the British

working class up to the formation of the Labour Party, in the first years of the present century, was carried on exclusively on the lines of non-political trade unionism, under the banner of pure "economism."

What was this struggle? While carrying on with a persistence worthy of a better cause the policy of compromise with the employers, the workers could not avoid periodical conflicts with them, first, because necessity in general knows no law, and secondly, because, as usually happens, their conciliatory tactics were in themselves a considerable temptation to the employers. Not all employers were as clever and as enlightened as Mundella, and it took them a long time to appreciate the extent to which the new policy of the working class was to their own advantage. If we had complete statistical data for the whole of the period under review, we could no doubt trace by the records of industrial disputes how the workers gradually overcame the obduracy of the employers and in proportion as the latter became more and more prosperous and realised the advantages of their point of view, won their "confidence." Unfortunately, precise and complete statistics of such disputes, *i.e.*, of strikes and lock-outs, begin only in the 90's, after the creation of the Department of Labour by Mundella. Even so, at the *end* of the period under review, the situation seems remarkable. For the space of 17 years from 1893, when statistics were first collected, until 1910, which year, as we shall see, marked a radical change in the situation, we get the following picture of the movement of trade disputes.\*

[SEE TABLE AT TOP OF NEXT PAGE]

In studying this table it is necessary to bear in mind that among the number of workers involved in disputes (strikes and lock-outs) are included those who did not directly participate in them, but were reduced to idleness on account of the conflicts in other branches of industry. If work is stopped in a weaving mill on account of a strike or lock-out in the spinning branch, the weavers are included among the workers involved in the dispute, and entered in the third column. This strange statistical method leads to an artificial swelling of the figures quoted in that column. On the other hand, English statistics entirely ignore

\* These and other statistical tables relating to the Labour movement which are quoted in these pages are taken from the Board of Trade publications, *e.g.*, *Abstract of Labour Statistics for the United Kingdom, Trade Unions, Strikes and Lock-outs, etc.*



Years	Number of disputes	Work-people involved	Number of working days lost
1893	613	634,301	30,467,765
1894	929	325,248	9,529,010
1895	745	263,123	5,724,670
1896	926	198,190	3,746,368
1897	864	230,267	10,345,523
1898	711	253,907	15,289,478
1899	719	180,217	2,516,416
1900	648	188,538	3,152,694
1901	642	179,546	4,142,287
1902	442	256,667	3,479,255
1903	387	116,901	2,338,668
1904	355	87,206	1,484,220
1905	358	93,503	2,470,189
1906	486	217,775	5,028,816
1907	601	147,498	2,162,151
1908	399	295,507	10,834,189
1909	436	300,819	2,773,986

conflicts which last less than one day, or involve no more than ten workers. This tends to reduce the figures in the second column, as compared with the actual state of affairs. Of course, petty conflicts are of no great importance as indices of the prevailing conditions in a country of large-scale industry such as England. Nevertheless, as a means of calculating the extent of conflicts which peaceful proceedings could not avert, exhaustive statistical data would have been exceedingly useful; it would have been even more useful to confine the statistical survey to the workers directly involved in the disputes. Such is the method used in contemporary German statistics, which does not leave out a single conflict however insignificant, and takes into account only those workers directly involved in the strike or lock-out. Even with these defects, the above table is highly instructive. With all the fluctuations in the figures in the second column, their downward tendency is quite obvious; at the end of a long period the number of open conflicts between the employers and the workers continued to decline, and in the first ten years after the beginning of precise statistics fell by nearly one-third. The lowest level was reached in 1904, and although an upward tendency is later noticeable, it is very slight. In a country of such colossal capitalist

development, with 14 million people employed in trade and industry, there were no more than 355 strikes and lock-outs in a whole year. The tendency towards "social peace" is even more patent in the third column, where the figures of workers involved in disputes gradually drop from 600,000 to 87,000; indeed, with the exception of the first year, the whole period under consideration does not involve more than some two or three hundred thousand out of a total number of 14,000,000 workers! This gives some idea of the nature of the struggle going on in those years. Bearing in mind what has been said of the make-up of these figures, we may conclude that as a matter of fact there was no struggle whatever between labour and capital in England in the "direct meaning of the term, and if disputes did occur in the course of the year the number of workers involved was frequently so insignificant as to be almost negligible. The last column, in the light of the two preceding ones, acquires a particular meaning; since the number of disputes is small and gradually dwindling, and since the number of workpeople involved grew less, the number of working days lost indicates the length of the conflicts, *i.e.*, the stubbornness on both sides. Here again the general tendency may be violently upset by the fact of a few hundred workers refusing to resume work, or being kept out of work by the employers, for a considerable length of time. This occurred during the famous strike at the Penrhyn quarries in South Wales at the beginning of the 90's, which involved only a few hundred people, but lasted for several years, contributing to the high figure in the fourth column for the year 1893, although the downward tendency is quite unmistakable and bears out the general picture presented by the table.

No revolutionary Marxist would make a fetish of strikes, as was done in the good old days by the Revolutionary Syndicalists. The strike was never considered by revolutionary Marxists as a "revolutionary exercise," but was regarded as a very serious measure dictated by the arrogance of the capitalists, after all peaceful efforts had proved unavailing. The amazing decrease in the number of trade disputes, as we have seen in England, would not itself arouse any ill forebodings but would, on the contrary, suggest a state of "sweet reasonableness" and enlightened liberalism on the part of the employers were it not accompanied by certain phenomena suggesting that the reason for this decline lay not in any particular virtue on the part of the employers

ready to meet their workers half-way, but in the substitution of compromise procedures in the place of struggle, which impaired in advance the will power and the freedom of action of the workers. For instance, the 70's saw the introduction of the system of *automatic* regulation of wages by the notorious sliding scale arrangement: if the sale prices of the articles produced went up, wages increased, and *vice versa*. This meant that no account was taken of changes in the price of articles of mass consumption, or in the cost of living generally; nor of the fact that a decline in the sale price of the product might have been caused by improved technical methods and machinery (which, by the way, often compelled the workers to take up a hostile attitude to technical and economic progress). The only criterion for the adjustment of wages was whether or not the employer was making sufficient profit. Here was a most cynical way of making the needs and the well-being of the workers dependent upon the interests of the capitalists' pockets, and a form of conciliation of interests which left no room for any action for the improvement of the conditions of the wage-earners. Nevertheless, the sliding scale system flourished in the coal mining industry for many years, and was only gradually dropped. (It is still prevalent in the iron and steel industries.) Even more efficient and durable substitutes for trade union action were devised. In 1893, the famous Brooklands Agreement was signed in the cotton industry, which made it incumbent on either side to submit all disputes to a local (and in the case of a failure to come to an agreement, to a central) conciliation board consisting of an equal number of representatives on either side, and pending their decision to abstain from all hostile acts. It was further provided that changes in the rates of wages could take place only once a year, and that to the extent of not more than 5 per cent. either way. Here again the cost of the necessary commodities entering into working class consumption was considered to but a limited extent, since in fixing the new rates of wages on the basis of a 5 per cent. increase or reduction, the state of industry, *i.e.*, the profits of the masters were necessarily considered also: if the profits were high, a 5 per cent. increase in wages would be granted, if not, it would be refused or a reduction imposed. Just as under the system of the sliding scale, so under the Brooklands Agreement the profits of the employers were the deciding factor. Thus the interests of both sides were brought into harmony, *i.e.*, the

rate of wages was made dependent upon the rate or amount of the employers' profits. Of course, the cotton spinners were at liberty to strike if dissatisfied with the findings of the conciliation board; but it is remarkable that in the course of two decades, with one or two exceptions—with which we shall deal later on—"peace" in the cotton industry was never disturbed. No wonder that this diplomatic instrument became a model for other industries. Conciliation agreements after the model of the Brooklands Agreement were introduced in many of the important industries, which prevented open conflicts and pledged both sides to submit their grievances to a hierarchical series of conciliation bodies before resorting to the sharp weapon of a strike or lock-out. In some industries, *e.g.*, in the bootmaking trade, the reciprocal obligations were strengthened by a money deposit as security, to be forfeited by the party which infringed the statutory rules of the agreement. In the bootmaking trade the deposit amounted to a considerable sum, and for every infringement of the agreement as much as £100 was to be forfeited. This method proved so efficacious that between the year 1895, when the agreement was signed, and the year 1912, *i.e.*, in the course of 17 years, the workers forfeited only £688, and the employers only £10. In other industries the mutual obligations were guaranteed not by money deposits, but by a peculiar system of collective responsibility. Thus, in 1909, an agreement on the Brooklands model was signed between the employers' association and 26 trade unions whose members worked in the ship-yards of the north-eastern district. Here the final court for the settlement of all disputes after exhausting all the intervening links in the form of local and special joint committees (pertaining to the particular trade), was a general meeting of representatives of *all* the shipbuilding firms and of *all* the 26 trade unions concerned. This meant that the final decision as to war or peace was to be given by the 26 executive committees of trade unions, not at all anxious for the sake of a minority—perhaps a small group—to allow a complete stoppage of work which would make their own members unemployed. Naturally, the decision of such a super tribunal was invariably in favour of compromise and "peace."

The development of machinery for the prevention of open disputes is a distinct feature in the relations between employers and workers in England towards the close of the period under consideration. It was not, one may say, so much the handiwork:

of the employers themselves as that of the workers, or at least of their leaders, who were exceedingly proud of their victory over the stubbornness and obscurantism of the employers, and gained for themselves a world-reputation as good fellows.\* Eventually the State itself, which had hitherto allowed full liberty and initiative to the "unfettered forces" of both classes, found it possible as well as expedient to take this important business under its wing, and in 1896 took the first step in this direction by drawing up model schemes of conciliation and arbitration boards as well as model rules of procedure for the settlement of industrial conflicts. These boards were not made compulsory, but the prestige of the Government supplied a sort of guarantee for the impartiality and equity of their decisions. Eleven years later, in 1907, the Government, in the person of Mr. Lloyd George, then President of the Board of Trade, went one step further by intervening in the railway dispute then raging and establishing, with the consent of both parties, a highly complicated conciliation apparatus for the prevention and settlement of disputes. In the following year the Government set up panels of representative Labour leaders and employers from which the parties in dispute, in particularly difficult cases, could select members for an arbitration court or an "impartial" chairman of a conciliation board. In 1911—that is, the beginning of the new period, with which we shall deal later on—the Government itself formed a so-called "Industrial Council" made up of an equal number of well-known trade union leaders and capitalists or lawyers, under the chairmanship of Sir George Askwith, a high official at the Department of Labour experienced in such matters, to serve as a supreme Conciliation Board for the settlement of such conflicts as could not be settled directly between the employers and their workers. Thus gradually the State itself officially recognised the importance of the principle for which the

\* A characteristic speech by one of the pillars of Trade Unionism of the post-Chartist period, Alexander MacDonald, delivered in 1875, is quoted by the Webbs in their *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edition, p. 338): "Twenty-five years ago, when we proposed the principle of arbitration, we were then laughed to scorn by the employing interests. But no movement has ever spread so rapidly or taken a deeper root than that which we set on foot. Look at the glorious state of things in England and Wales. In Northumberland the men now meet their employers around the common board. . . In Durhamshire a Board of Arbitration and Conciliation has also been formed, and 75,000 men repose with perfect confidence on the decisions of the Board. There are 40,000 men in Yorkshire in the same position."

Labour leaders and the more enlightened section of the employers had been fighting so long, and gave it practical assistance. In 1910, apart from local wage agreements, of which there were 563, there were in operation in England 1,103 collective agreements as described above, 30 sliding scales, and 282 conciliation boards or committees, including 265 which covered definite branches of industry, and 153 which also provided for arbitration.

After this, it is not surprising that the number of strikes and lock-outs steadily decreased. In fact, most of the disputes in English industries were settled by conciliation before any open conflict occurred as will be seen from the following table:—

Year	Number of Conciliation Boards settling Disputes	Number of Disputes before Boards	Number of Disputes settled by Boards	Number of Disputes settled by action
1898	53	1,324	762	40
1899	56	1,232	678	40
1900	67	1,190	611	30
1901	57	1,406	708	37
1902	60	1,402	704	27
1903	65	1,633	799	28
1904	57	1,418	650	28
1905	60	1,726	839	25
1906	78	1,561	797	46
1907	73	1,545	668	45
1908	83	1,842	807	56
1909	101	1,997	1,025	65

It will be seen that the conciliation boards (including arbitration) displayed a lively activity from the time of their official recognition. The number of disputes referred to and settled by them increased year by year and until 1906 there was a steady growth in the number of disputes settled before action was taken, as may be seen from the last column. On comparing this table with the preceding one giving the number of strikes and lock-outs (see p. 204), we can see how far every year the number of disputes settled by peaceful procedure exceeded that of open conflicts; in 1909, 1,025 disputes were settled by arbitration and conciliation as against 436 which developed into strikes and lock-outs.

It is well known that conflicts do not invariably arise whenever demands are made by one side or the other. Changes in the conditions of employment are taking place every day without leading to particular disputes, and indeed, industrial statistics in England show that in a great majority of cases—affecting from 80 to

90 per cent. of all employed workers—wages rise and fall without any conflicts whatever. How does this come about? If the reader thinks that it is achieved by simple and direct exchange of opinion, by negotiation between the two parties, he would be mistaken; conciliation procedure occupies so large a place in the regulation of the relations between the employer and the worker that it plays an important part even here, although there are no actual disputes to be settled. In order not to weary the reader with extensive tables, we shall merely mention that between 1898 and 1909 the number of workers whose wages were settled as the result of direct negotiations decreased from 764,622 to 175,338; there was also a decrease in the number of workers whose wages were changed by means of sliding scales (from 165,953 to 37,833); on the other hand, the number of workers whose wages were settled by conciliation procedure increased from 29,509 to 787,758. This clearly demonstrates the great part played by the machinery of conciliation. More and more effectively it abolishes the free play of forces which, in a latent form, is represented even by simple direct negotiations between employers and employed, and replaces it by a compromise, accepted in principle by the workers in advance. The fond dream of the pacifists of all countries was thus realised in British industry: no more wars, no more armed and mutually menacing powers—only a tribunal settling all disputes in a peaceful, impartial and equitable manner.

In such conditions, what was to become of the trade unions, those great organisations on which the attention of the English workers was so exclusively concentrated during the second half of the nineteenth century? It is argued by international pacifists that if all disputes arising between Powers were regulated by peace tribunals, there would be no further need for armaments, and swords could be beaten into ploughshares. Such a conception of complete disarmament was, it is true, never reached by the English workers; they were prevented from attaining such a high level of idealism by the capitalists themselves, who from time to time reminded them—and none too gently—that with all the blessings of conciliation and arbitration, they would be well advised to keep in reserve their trade organisations. But, while not dissolving their organisations, the trade unions necessarily assumed a peculiar form. In the first place, the methods by which they endeavoured to define and to regulate their relations with the employers left little room for the activity of the masses.

Negotiations are not carried on, nor are agreements reached by great numbers; these jobs are entrusted to select representatives, the "leaders," *i.e.*, the higher officials of the unions. The masses, that is the members of the union, the union itself, were pushed into the background. In this way the leaders acquired an authority and power which went far beyond the functions of an executive. It is true that theoretically they were controlled by the union, and in the majority of cases their actions—notably the agreements made by them with the employers—had to be sanctioned by the executive committee, by a delegate conference, or, in particularly important cases, by a referendum of all the members of the union. This control and sanction (usually exercised *post factum*) were of a purely formal character in view of the authority wielded by the leaders. For the "leader"—the secretary or president of the union, or an influential member of the executive committee—arrives at his position as the result of gradual and careful selection in virtue of such qualities as organising capacity, an intimate knowledge of his particular trade, and, most of all, ability for treating with the employers, *i.e.*, for carrying on diplomatic negotiations with them. "Nearly all the leaders of the larger unions in particular," we are told by Richard Bell, "are men of ability, and possess more knowledge, insight and judgment than the rank and file can have; they also understand better the need and value of moderation and compromise."\* Elsewhere we shall deal with the social and political aspects of these accomplishments; at this juncture it is enough to point out that under the prevailing policy of compromise pursued by the working class in the second half of the nineteenth century, the leaders were bound to possess them, and to that extent to occupy an exceptional position to the detriment of the part played by the union itself.

In the second place the policy of opportunism, carried to the extent of avoiding direct negotiations with the employers and seeking the settlement of disputes in arbitration or conciliation, greatly reduced the importance of the organisation generally. What need was there for a strong organisation, or for propaganda among the unorganised workers, if questions of wages and working conditions were to be settled on the basis of the market prices of commodities, or of the profits made by the employers ("the state

\* *Trade Unionism*, p. 69.



of industry"), and generally on terms of mutual goodwill (in conciliation committees) or by fair and impartial judges (in arbitration boards)? Such efforts seemed superfluous. The trade union becomes a sort of privileged organisation for a higher type of worker, an exclusive corporation seeking to promote the interests of its members only, and jealously protecting its privileges from the grasp of uninvited outsiders.

In the third place, if fighting be a "barbarous" method, and the strike a "ferocious animal" to be avoided at all costs, then the strike fund itself was a bad thing, since it might at a critical moment facilitate a decision in favour of fighting. To be entirely without it was impossible: it would mean giving up the unions altogether; but its existence constituted a danger which had to be constantly watched. A way out of the difficulty was found by transferring the disposal of the strike funds from the local branches to the central committee, by separating it rigidly from the general funds to be used for the most part for the payment of benefits in case of unemployment, sickness, old age, death etc. Furthermore, in order to discourage the rank and file from clamouring for strikes, the sums accumulated in the strike fund were to be invested in various securities and even in landed property. This rendered access to them difficult, increased the inconvenience of declaring a strike, and thereby fostered and encouraged a readiness to compromise and to settle disputes peacefully. This idea of investing the strike funds to render them inaccessible was introduced for the first time, as approvingly described by the Webbs, by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1851, and gained wide popularity on account of its usefulness.

The net result of all this was to reduce the British trade unions to a state of stagnation:—

Year	Number of Unions	Number of Members	Year	Number of Unions	Number of Members
1892	1,188	1,509,532	1901	1,265	1,966,761
1893	1,221	1,488,457	1902	1,232	1,953,307
1894	1,259	1,477,571	1903	1,218	1,931,043
1895	1,281	1,414,800	1904	1,188	1,895,109
1896	1,294	1,502,714	1905	1,181	1,920,373
1897	1,286	1,623,016	1906	1,200	2,113,806
1898	1,287	1,688,531	1907	1,173	2,406,746
1899	1,282	1,848,570	1908	1,165	2,378,248
1900	1,271	1,955,704	1909	1,153	2,347,461

The British working class began organising into trade unions as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century, and fought numerous battles for the right to combine. The continent of Europe was still entirely unorganised when the English trade unions had behind them a great history of stress and struggle, and were held up by Marx and Engels, and later by William Liebknecht as models for the proletariat of other countries. What were the facts? Out of a total of 14,000,000 wage-earners engaged in industry and trade in 1892—the first year for which we have precise data—only 1,500,000, that is, hardly 11 per cent. were organised in the trade unions. When in 1874 they met in Manchester to discuss the danger threatening their rights to combine, it was reported that the delegates attending the congress represented a total of 1,191,992 organised workers. Perhaps the figure was exaggerated, perhaps a number of those organised workers existed only on paper. Nevertheless, the trade unions must even then have represented an imposing force, otherwise the Government would not have been scared into making concessions. Two decades later the total membership was still no more than 1,500,000, and it was only after 15 more years that it reached the second million. Subsequently they gained 300,000 new members in a single year, but soon began to lose them. Altogether during the eighteen years under review the trade unions gained 800,000 new members, which meant less than 45,000 per annum. During the same period in Germany the number of workers organised in the trade unions—counting only the so-called free or Social-Democratic unions—increased from 237,094 to 1,832,667, making an annual increase of 90,000, or about double the number of the corresponding increase in England. True, this increase took place in exceptional circumstances. Capitalist development in Germany had begun long before 1892, the German proletariat had long desired to organise, and the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws opened the flood gates hitherto barring the tide, which now streamed on with irresistible force. In England, too, capitalist development was by no means arrested and there was still a huge mass of unorganised workers who, as was shown by subsequent experience, were capable of being organised. Clearly then, the cause for the period of stagnation in the English trade union movement should be looked for, not outside, but rather within it, in the fact that the English workers, thoroughly imbued

as they were with the spirit of compromise with the capitalist class, attached but small importance to organisation.

It is necessary to note the peculiar state of trade unionism in England. While the German trade union movement of that period was concentrated in slightly over 50 industrial and other unions, the English movement was broken up into more than 1,000 different craft organisations, this number even increasing towards the middle of the 90's, thanks to an improvement in general industrial conditions. Taking as an instance the year 1907, when the number of organised workers increased considerably, we find that the miners had no less than 75 unions, the textile workers 263, the builders 77, metal workers 222, transport workers 62, wood workers 100, clothing and shoe workers 40, and so on. All these were independent organisations, some of a purely local character, others national; some embracing only one craft, others covering a group of crafts; but all competing with each other, sometimes even to the extent of blacklegging, and all busily engaged in mutual quarrels about overlapping etc. In the building trades for instance, the bricklayers, the stonemasons, the carpenters, the tilers, the plumbers, the plasterers, the painters, the glaziers and the unskilled labourers were not only separately organised but were themselves divided into several unions; the painters for instance were divided into two national competing unions and 21 independent local unions competing with the national unions, many of them covering but one town or even a part of a town (*e.g.*, the painters and paperhangers in the East End of London). To be sure, not all unions were equal in point of importance. At the close of 1907 there were not less than 376 unions with a membership of about 100. On the other hand there were 21 unions with a membership of over 50,000. On the whole, over 60 per cent. of the total number of organised workers, or 1,457,856 workpeople were enrolled in 100 unions. But this very fact of the existence of such a number of small unions shows how unorganised the English workers really were. This is not affected by the existence of the so-called federations. At the close of 1907 there were 19 federations in the building trades, 11 of miners, 17 of metal workers, 35 of textile workers, altogether 106 federations including one general federation of trade unions; but with the exception of the Miners' Federation, not one of these organisations could compare with the big German Verbände; the former were loosely connected bodies which met rarely or never, had no

central executive organs and served only for purposes of re-insurance. Even the General Federation, intended to correspond to the Central Commission of the German Trade Unions or to the French Confederation of Labour, did not in reality embrace even one-half the number of the existing trade unions, and had almost no other function but that of granting supplementary financial assistance to affiliated bodies in cases of emergency. At the end of 1907 it counted altogether 116 organisations. The federations were constructed on the same principles as the trade unions, there being local and national federations, craft and industrial, everywhere competing with each other and fighting each other.

It was in fact sheer chaos, arising from the fact that the militant function of trade unionism had been relegated to the background. Its main function can best be seen from an analysis of expenditure on different objects. Below we give a table showing the expenditure of the above mentioned 100 leading trade unions in the course of 18 years; the amounts are shown both in absolute figures and as percentages of the total expenditure:—

Year	Strike and Lock-out Benefit		Unemployment Benefit		Friendly Society Benefits		Total Expenditure
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%	
1892	398,035	27.8	324,869	22.7	458,845	32.2	1,426,613
1893	588,373	31.6	460,484	24.8	553,214	29.8	1,858,949
1894	167,050	11.7	451,578	31.5	536,671	37.4	1,432,841
1895	196,686	14.2	422,427	30.4	518,167	37.3	1,389,207
1896	171,817	13.9	165,955	21.6	522,833	42.4	1,231,977
1897	646,434	34.2	330,164	17.5	544,583	31.5	1,888,352
1898	326,428	21.1	233,613	15.9	607,840	41.1	1,476,337
1899	119,979	9.6	184,564	14.8	120,508	44.5	1,252,011
1900	153,516	10.6	261,295	17.9	679,556	46.6	1,456,716
1901	209,709	12.8	324,821	19.8	613,779	37.8	1,637,572
1902	219,844	12.2	429,418	23.9	653,251	36.4	1,798,879
1903	176,350	9.2	512,575	26.8	694,726	36.3	1,915,709
1904	117,222	5.7	654,181	32.0	748,823	36.7	2,043,161
1905	211,898	10.3	523,766	25.4	785,932	38.0	2,065,009
1906	153,179	7.5	424,398	21.6	819,721	41.8	1,960,169
1907	136,122	6.6	462,739	22.5	875,230	42.1	2,055,999
1908	615,350	19.2	1,000,685	31.3	927,614	28.9	3,210,530
1909	154,991	5.8	944,802	35.2	921,686	34.3	3,687,104

The table reveals the very essence of English trade unionism as it evolved in the course of half a century. The expenditure connected with strikes and lock-outs, *i.e.*, directly with the economic struggle, decreases steadily, and although from time to

time there is a sudden upward leap indicating some big strike or lock-out, the tendency of this item of expenditure is towards the vanishing point. On the other hand, the trade unions were spending a good deal on the relief of the unemployed, whose number naturally grows during years of industrial depression and during great strikes which frequently lead to a complete stoppage in allied trades. Of course, it is the duty of the trade unions to take care of their unemployed members. It is characteristic to note that down to 1911 there was no State Insurance for unemployment in England, and the English workers, who had won the suffrage as far back as the 60's and had been represented in Parliament since the middle of the following decade, did not even raise the question of State Insurance, but were patiently, and even willingly, maintaining their unemployed members out of trade union funds. We say willingly, because to the trade unions the payment of unemployment benefits was but one part of the friendly society functions which had become most important, as can be seen from the figures in the fourth column. The expenditure on sick, death, superannuation and other benefits, was steadily growing, usually amounting to not less than one-third of the total expenditure, and frequently more; if we add to these unemployment benefits, it will be seen that fully two-thirds of the budget was expended by the trade unions on objects which had nothing to do with their militant functions. Although the funds intended for fighting the employers were held separately from those for friendly benefits, the existence of the latter exercised a strong, though indirect, effect upon the general policy of the trade unions, drawing into them those elements which are least inclined to militancy and therefore most likely to play at decisive moments a restraining part. We are told by the Webbs, in their *History of Trade Unionism*, that these friendly society functions were originally introduced into their trade union by the engineers with the object of attracting members and at the same time preventing "reckless" strikes. This succeeded so well that about 60 per cent. of the trade unions turned from militant to mutual benefit organisations of the friendly society type, so dear to the heart of the English bourgeoisie, since for a long time they prevented the introduction of State Insurance, and even now play an important part in saving State expenditure on public relief.\*

\* This is what Gladstone said about the Friendly Societies in the House of Commons, 1864 (quoted by Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 53):—

It was with perfect justice that John Burns, in the days when he was still a revolutionary social-democrat, wrote about this combination of functions in the trade unions: "Constituted as it is, Unionism carries within itself the source of its own dissolution. . . . Their reckless assumption of the duties and responsibilities that only the State or the whole community can discharge, in the nature of sick and superannuation benefits, at the instance of the middle class is crushing out the larger unions by taxing their members to an unbearable extent. This so cripples them that the fear of being unable to discharge their friendly society liabilities often makes them submit to encroachments by the masters without protest. The result of this is that all of them have ceased to be unions for maintaining the rights of labour, and have degenerated into mere middle and upper class rate-reducing institutions."\* In other words, the opportunist policy, which became the basis of the Labour movement of the post-Chartist period, changed the very structure of the English trade unions, converting them, to a large extent, into simple friendly societies; in its turn the new structure intensified the tendency towards opportunism and encouraged the further development of the policy of compromise.†

"Nothing is more satisfactory and congenial, nothing more harmonious with the best English ideas than to see men of the labouring classes associating together, in the true and real spirit of self-government, for the purpose of providing against the contingencies of old age, sickness and death; and on societies of such a sacred character I would not lay a finger."

\* Quoted by the Webbs, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

† In his book *Trade Unionism Old and New*, 1891, p. 126, George Howell states that in the course of 39 years (1851-1889) the Amalgamated Society of Engineers expended on funeral benefits £209,917, accidents £52,630, sickness £680,314, unemployment £1,922,264, superannuation £682,270, and on disputes £86,664, all told!

### CHAPTER THREE THE FRUITS OF OPPORTUNISM

WE have made a discovery, so to speak; the post-Chartist period of the Labour movement in England was not at all a period of economic *struggle* on trade union lines, as is usually supposed, but a period of the gradual *repudiation* of this form of action; it was a period of reaction from the trade union point of view, a period of adaptation and approximation to bourgeois society, a period of deliberate compromise with it, and accordingly, a period of striving for the establishment of a peaceful collaboration of classes. In consequence of this striving, the new form of organisation of the Labour movement in the post-Chartist period, trade unionism, degenerated into an amorphous mass of semi-guild, semi-charitable organisations which were compelled only by direct necessity to discharge the militant functions ordinarily belonging to trade unions. This disposes of the legend that the British working class in the second half of the nineteenth century had given up political struggle in order to concentrate upon the economic struggle.

What were the results of this transformation of the British working class movement from revolutionary Chartism to pacifist trade unionism? In the Labour movement, as in any other movement, and in any sphere of human activity, the question of method amounts, in the last resort, to the question of its effectiveness. No method is good or bad in the abstract: any method is good if it leads towards the goal, and bad if it does not. The same may be said in regard to the question whether the policy adopted by the English workers in the post-Chartist period was right or wrong. After all, we can only judge of it by results. Did the results justify the policy? Did the repudiation of the political class struggle and the adoption of the policy of conciliation and compromise in the realm of trade unionism lead to valuable achievements? This is the question we must put concretely, whatever the beliefs we hold; and in the following chapters we shall endeavour to answer it.

In an earlier chapter of this book\* we have pointed out that the 50's marked a turning point in the history of wages in

\* See Part I, pp. 85-86.

England. Beginning with that period the wages of the workers increased steadily until the 70's. A few figures will show the importance of this change. We shall first of all take the cotton industry, that classical and characteristic industry of England. One of the foremost English statisticians, Mr. Bowley,\* has drawn up the following weekly rates of wages for cotton spinners in Lancashire at different years in the nineteenth century :

Year.	s.	d.	Year.	s.	d.	Year.	s.	d.
1806	...	24 2	1839	...	22 11	1854	...	20 0
1810	...	30 0	1841	...	22 0	1859	...	24 1
1815	...	28 11	1848	...	19 11	1865	...	30 0
1833	...	27 1	1850	...	20 5	1874	...	33 0

We see that beginning with 1810 the wages of the Lancashire spinners declined continuously until 1848, when they began to go up again, reaching the former level fifteen years later and surpassing it in the following decade. Another statistician, Mr. Wood, in his excellent work, *A History of Wages in the Cotton Industry*, has independently worked out the figures of the weekly wages of the Lancashire workers in that industry and drawn up the following index numbers, wages in 1886 being taken as 100 :

1810-16	...	79.66	1855	...	70.50
1823-24	...	73.00	1860	...	71.66
1832-33	...	71.00	1870	...	88.66
1840-41	...	65.66	1874	...	100.00
1849-50	...	65.66			

Here again we see a steady decline of wages after 1810, stopping in 1840, and remaining at a stationary level for about ten years. After 1855 wages rise, and by the middle of the 70's reach the level of 1886. The difference in the figures of the two statisticians is due not only to the natural discrepancy likely to occur in the calculations of two independent investigators using different methods, but also to the fact that Mr. Wood's figures relate not merely to cotton spinners, but to all classes of workers employed in the cotton industry, not of the whole of Lancashire, but only of Manchester and its neighbourhood. For the whole of Lancashire, together with Scotland, Wood has drawn up a different table, showing the movement of wages of *all* classes of workers in the cotton industry, taking the wages of 1886 as 100 :

\* A. L. Bowley, *Wages in the United Kingdom*, 1900, p. 118.



1833	...	52	1860	...	63
1839-41	...	51	1871	...	79
1849-50	...	50	1874	...	84
1855	...	54			

Unfortunately, the figures for the first third of the nineteenth century are missing, but it seems certain that they would only bear out the general tendency, that is of a steady drop in wages down to the middle of the century and then a gradual rise until the middle of the 70's.

The same tendency, though not so clearly defined as in the cotton industry, can be seen on the whole in other branches of industry. Mr. Bowley gives the following figures of the daily earnings of miners in Lancashire:\*

Year.	s.	d.	Year.	s.	d.
1811-20	...	4 3	1851-60	...	3 8
1821-30	...	4 2	1861-70	...	3 9
1831-40	...	4 0	1871-75	...	6 10
1841-50	...	3 0	1876-80	...	4 4

The same curve in the wage level is apparent, descending until 1850, and then rising, and even making sudden leaps during the second half of the century. Similar movements can be observed in other industries, such as the woollen or the building trades. For these industries the following table of index figures was calculated by Mr. Bowley, 1900 being taken as 100:\*

Worsted.		Woollens.		Building Trades.	
1823-24	... 105	1815	... 115	1810-25	... 57
1827-31	... 105	1825	... 110	1827-30	... 53
1833	... 90	1835	... 75	1831-40	... 57
1838	... 90	1845	... 80	1850	... 58
1855	... 75	1857	... 85	1860	... 68
1860-61	... 81	1860	... 95	1870	... 76
1866-68	... 94	1870	... 100	1880	... 87
1874	... 115				

In some industries the rise began somewhat before 1850, in others it started later; but the general tendency was for wages to drop in the first half of the century, and to rise in the second half. It may therefore be said that there was an appreciable improvement in the position of the working class in England

\* *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

† Article in the *Journal of the Statistical Society*, March, 1901.

during the first 30 years after the breakdown of Chartism. True, in the majority of cases the improvement amounted only to a slow return to the conditions which had prevailed in the first years of the century; but after a number of years of declining wages the very cessation of the decline was a relief, while the slow, but steady rise which followed was bound to have a great psychological effect.

What followed after the middle of the 70's? We shall quote general figures first of all. The Department of Labour have published annual index figures of wages showing the relative rise and fall in wages before and after 1900 (taken as 100), divided into the following industrial groups: (1) textiles, (2) building trades, (3) coal mining, and (4) metal trades. In each of the groups the average is deduced from the wage rates of the most important branches. But as we are not at present interested in the actual amounts of wages, but in their movement, it is immaterial to us whether the figures refer to *all* workers in the given industry or only to certain sections of them. On the other hand it is necessary to note that the workers in all these industries were the best paid and best organised, and therefore, the progress in the movement of wages shown in the table represents what may be termed the maximum.

The table below is taken from the *Annual Abstract of Labour Statistics* for 1906-1907, supplemented by data for 1909 from the 1911 issue:

[SEE TABLE AT TOP OF NEXT PAGE]

In each of these groups singly, and in all of them together, the year 1901 marks the peak of the upward curve of the figures since 1879, after which they descended again with or without intermission until about 1905, when the upward trend was resumed. Only the figures of the second group (the building trades) on reaching 100.00 in 1901, remained at that level until the end of the period under consideration. But the wages both of this group and of the group of the textile and metal trades were at the close of the 70's at a pretty high level, whereas the wages of the coal-miners then stood very low. The greatest advance, therefore, was made in the wages of the coal miners, who by 1901 increased their wages by nearly 32 points above 1879. As against this, the wages of the textile workers during the same period increased only by 12, of the builders by slightly over 13, and of the

Years.	Textile.	Building.	Mining.	Metal.	All Groups.
1875 ...	104.89	84.45	79.38	88.99	89.93
1879 ...	88.01	86.67	62.11	87.86	81.16
1880 ...	89.78	85.55	61.45	88.05	81.21
1885 ...	90.22	84.45	63.10	89.96	81.93
1890 ...	95.12	86.67	85.85	91.72	90.08
1895 ...	94.97	92.22	72.54	93.18	88.23
1896 ...	94.97	93.33	71.90	96.75	89.24
1897 ...	94.97	94.45	72.60	98.18	90.05
1898 ...	94.97	97.78	78.60	99.19	92.64
1899 ...	98.22	98.89	83.53	99.61	95.06
1900 ...	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
1901 ...	100.00	100.00	93.95	100.29	98.56
1902 ...	100.00	100.00	87.53	100.29	96.96
1903 ...	100.00	100.00	84.92	99.93	96.21
1904 ...	100.00	100.00	82.31	99.93	95.56
1905 ...	102.67	100.00	81.02	100.05	95.94
1906 ...	106.22	100.00	83.36	100.83	97.60
1909 ...	107.11	100.00	89.20	101.32	99.41

metal workers by rather less than 13 points. All the groups together succeeded in raising their average wages between the end of the 70's and the beginning of the new century by a little more than 17 points. What was the increase for the whole period of thirty years, from 1879 until 1909? During that period the textile workers succeeded in advancing their wages slightly over 19, the builders by slightly less than 14, the coal-miners by 27, the metal workers by slightly more than 13, and all the groups together by 18 points. This was slightly more than 0.5 per annum! During approximately the same period (1881-1908) the foreign trade of England increased from £568,000,000 to £911,000,000, an increase of about 60 per cent.; the tonnage of the mercantile marine increased from 6.8 million to 11.5 million, *i.e.*, by nearly 70 per cent., and the aggregate taxable income of the propertied classes increased from £601,000,000 to £1,011,000,000, *i.e.*, by 68 per cent. It is quite evident that the workers in these selected groups, which, as we have pointed out, belonged to the best paid and best organised sections of the workers, were receiving nothing like a proportionate share in the general economic improvement, or one corresponding to the share appropriated by the capitalist class. As a matter of fact, their share of the social product in 1909 was pro-

portionately less than it had been in 1879. This is tantamount to bankruptcy on the part of trade unionism.

In drawing our comparisons we started with the last year of the 70's, which marked the beginning of the rising curve. We have, however, given in italics the figures relating to the *middle* year of the same decade, up to which we brought our figures of the previous period (p. 220). Had our comparison been made with these earlier figures, the progress would appear even more insignificant. We would find that in the textile group wages at the end of the 70's and the beginning of the 80's were lower than in 1875 and although they rose afterwards, this rise was so slow that as late as 1905 wages were still lower than in 1875. And this in a first class industry! It was only in 1906 that wages began to rise above the level which had been attained in the middle of the 70's, so that the entire advance for the years 1875-1909 amounted only to 2.5 points. The situation in the coal-mining industry was slightly better. There too, the figure for 1875 was higher than those of the following years and was only reached again fifteen years later, in 1890, but only for a moment, as wages immediately fell again, surpassing the level of 1875 in 1899 and the following years. In this way the miners' wages rose by four points in the course of 23 years, and the entire advance over the period under review, that is during 34 years, amounted to some ten points. Among the metal workers things were little better, but even so, wages in 1885 stood below the level of ten years previously. After 1885 they began to rise and finally reached the level of 20 per cent. above that of 1875. Even this figure, the result of the struggle of various unions in the metal trades over a whole generation, is extremely low. The building trades showed the greatest advance. Their wages began to rise not at the end, but in the middle of the 70's and surpassed the level of 1875 by 14 per cent. towards the close of the century. At that figure they remained stationary for the next ten years, so that these fourteen points cover the entire advance for the period 1875-1909—as though the wages suddenly grew tired of advancing rapidly, and for very weariness could move no longer. The aggregate result for all the four groups amounts to this: the figures for 1875 were surpassed by about 0.5 points at the end of the 15 years following and were definitely left behind in 1897, that is, after 22 years; while over the period of 34 years, the net result was an advance of about 9 points. This looks more like stagnation than progress, and reflects the achieve-

ments of the policy which inspired the actions of the working class during the second half of the nineteenth century. Let us not forget that the above four groups constituted, so to speak, the aristocracy of labour, the proud organised upper sections of the working class which set the pace for the whole of its economic and political life. We now know that all its proud achievement amounted to was that during the period of the greatest prosperity of capitalism in England, it succeeded in increasing wages by rather less than 10 per cent. in the course of more than 30 years, and by even less for the cream of that aristocracy, the textile workers. To realise concretely how the wages of these groups of English workers moved, we shall quote a few examples from the official reports of the Department of Labour.\* At the Bolton mills a piece rate agreement was drawn up in 1858 which formed the basis for the subsequent annual changes in the rates of wages. During the next 50 years, down to 1909 wages moved 5 per cent. upwards ten times, 10 per cent. upwards twice, 5 per cent. downwards nine times, and 10 per cent. downwards four times. As a result the Bolton operatives were in 1909 receiving lower wages than in 1858. Or take the Blackburn weavers: among them piece-work rates were established in 1853. In the course of the first fourteen years, down to 1866, the weavers obtained one advance of 10 per cent. and another of 5 per cent. over the original level; during the remaining years of the same period, the rates moved neither one way nor the other. In 1876 the basic rate was changed and continued till 1892. During this period it was modified fourteen times, and each time downwards: once by 5, twice by 10, and eleven times by 15 per cent. In 1892 the basic rate was again changed and up to 1905 underwent the same process: twice it was lowered by 10, twice by  $7\frac{1}{2}$ , and once by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. In 1906 wages were restored to the basic rate and remained there until 1909. It will be seen that with the exception of the first period, marked by episodic increases, the workers throughout the subsequent long period were paid either below or at best according to the basic rate. These general figures indicate the movement of wages in the post-Chartist period, down to the end of the first decade of the present century, although they might be supplemented with advantage by other figures published by the English Government on a different occasion. A Liberal Government was

\* *Seventeenth Abstract of Labour Statistics for the United Kingdom, 1906-7.*

in power in 1908 and set out to prove to the workers the baselessness of the arguments of the Tory protectionists that wages suffered on account of Free Trade. A special investigation of working conditions in the industrial districts was undertaken, and a series of reports were published in the course of a number of years, down to the outbreak of the war, under the general title of *Earnings and Hours of Labour of Workpeople in the United Kingdom in 1906*. The reports give the rates of wages for a selected week in September or October, 1906, with supplementary estimates of earnings on the assumption of employment during a whole year. This assumption is exceedingly bold, and the average figure of earnings shown in the reports and given below suffers from considerable exaggeration. Taking the textile industry, we find the following weekly earnings:—

Industry	Adult		Juvenile		Average Earnings
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Cotton ...	29/6	18/8	11/6	10/1	19/7
Wool ...	26/10	18/10	8/10	8/4	15/9
Linen ...	22/4	10/4	7/8	6/7	12/-
Jute ...	21/7	13/5	10/11	9/8	14/3
All industries...	28/1	15/5	10/5	8/11	17/6

After a century of development of an industry in which English capitalism occupies the world's leading place, and in which the workers are very well organised, an adult full-time worker was earning 28s. and all workers on the average less than 20s. a week. Of course, these are but average figures. In the textile, as in other industries, there are different categories of workers, including for example fine cotton spinners who earned sometimes more than £2 a week. But the low average shows how very small was the number of such lucky fellows. Weekly earnings, in 1906, were distributed as follows:—

Industry	Male		Female	
	%	Weekly Shillings	%	Weekly Shillings
Cotton	59.7	Under 30	59.3	Under 20
	40.4	" 25	23.9	" 15
	67.4	" 30	24.7	From 15 to 20
Woollen	15.2	" 20	55.6	" 10 " 15
			10.7	Under 15
	36.7	From 20 to 30	49.1	From 10 to 15
Linen	44.4	Under 20	41.7	Under 10
	36.0	From 20 to 30	66.4	From 10 to 15
	49.1	Under 20	46.2	Under 10
Jute	54.0	From 20 to 30	47.8	From 10 to 15
	19.4	Under 20	38.9	Under 10

It will be seen from this table how high was the percentage, even among adult workers, of those who earned less than 20s. a week, while the number of those who earned less than 30s. a week was never below one-third, often exceeded one-half and sometimes even reached two-thirds of the total number of workers. This in all conscience is very little for the premier industry of the premier capitalist country of the world. The textile industry in all its branches employs women and juveniles driven into the factory by the low earnings of the men, thus reducing men's wages still further. Out of the total number of workpeople employed in the textile industry in the period under review there were no fewer than 680,000 women, or more than half the total, and about 32,600 half-timers under 14 years of age—half-time, which in the course of half a century was abolished over and over again and still survived. In 1886 an enquiry was held into the textile industry which to some extent may be compared with that of 1906. We say to some extent because 1886 was a year of crisis and was, therefore, marked by lower rates and lower earnings, while 1906 was a prosperous year accompanied by good earnings. The more remarkable is the insignificance of the progress reflected in the following table:—

Industry	Weekly Male Earnings		Weekly Female Earnings					
	1886		1906					
	s.	d.	s.	d.				
Cotton ... ..	23	7	28	10	15	0	18	0
Woollen ... ..	23	3	26	10	12	7	13	10
Linen ... ..	19	9	22	4	8	8	11	10
Jute ... ..	23	0	25	5	8	9	7	13
All together ...	22	11	27	7	12	9	13	7

The figures of 1886. were below while those of 1906 were above the normal level. We can therefore imagine how insignificant was the progress made in the course of these 20 years when, in the most favourable conditions, the difference amounted to about 5s. per week for men, and 4s. for women.

We shall not deal in detail with the other industries investigated in 1906, but shall simply give a few characteristic samples of wages prevailing at that date in different industries:

[SEE TABLE AT TOP OF NEXT PAGE]

From these examples, taken from official, that is, from optimistic sources, it may be seen how miserably the workers were paid as late as the beginning of the present century in the

## THE FRUITS OF OPPORTUNISM

227

Industry	Adult Male	Adult Female	Juvenile Male	Juvenile Female	Average Earnings
Pig Iron ...	34/4	—	12/11	—	33/4
Engineers ...	32/5	13/1	9/7	8/2	25/11
Shipbuilders ...	35/11	14/8	11/10	7/4	30/7
Tin Plate ...	42/-	14/9	12/4	8/10	32/1
Iron and Steel ...	39/1	—	13/-	—	36/10
METAL INDUSTRY ...	33/11	12/8	10/4	7/4	27/4
Wholesale Clothing...	31/8	15/5	9/11	6/4	14/10
Tailoring ...	31/11	12/11	9/9	6/4	14/8
Boot, Shoe ...	28/8	13/1	10/6	5/10	19/10
CLOTHING INDUSTRY...	30/2	13/6	9/8	5/9	15/1
Paper ...	28/11	11/7	10/10	7/4	20/10
Printing ...	36/10	12/3	8/7	6/4	23/10
Bookbinding ...	34/1	12/10	8/8	6/-	16/4
CARDBOARD INDUSTRY	28/10	12/3	10/3	6/1	12/5
PAPER AND PRINTING					
TRADES ...	34/4	12/2	8/11	6/4	20/-
Pottery and China...	32/4	11/11	11/2	6/2	19/8
Glass ...	38/4	8/9	12/4	7/1	26/6
Chemicals ...	29/1	10/8	10/3	7/4	27/5
CHINA AND GLASS					
INDUSTRY ...	29/2	11/10	11/6	7/-	23/6
Baking, etc. ...	38/11	12/8	9/6	6/5	22/8
Brewing ...	26/3	9/4	10/5	7/5	24/3
Tobacco ...	30/6	12/-	9/9	6/2	13/10
FOOD, DRINK AND					
Tobacco ...	26/4	11/5	10/-	6/6	19/-
Saw Milling ...	27/4	12/5	9/8	8/4	22/4
Furnishing ...	33/-	13/1	8/7	6/2	24/10
WOODWORKING					
INDUSTRY ...	32/-	12/11	9/6	6/10	26/7
Gas Workers ...	32/6	12/6	—	—	31/7
Tramways ...	30/6	11/3	—	—	29/3
Water Supply ...	28/8	12/9	—	—	28/3
MUNICIPAL SERVICES	28/1	11/10	—	—	26/3

wealthiest capitalist country and in the best organised large-scale industries. The earnings of adult workers may in some cases appear more or less adequate if we overlook the fact that the figures relate to full-time employment, which is generally most unusual for any length of time in modern industry. England particularly, working for exports and importing her raw material, is highly sensitive to fluctuations on the world market, and the course of her production constantly experiences changes. Nowhere in the capitalist world is there, even in good years, so much unem-



ployment and such sudden and frequent changes in the state of employment as in England. While the real earnings of adult male workers were below the figures given in the official report, the earnings of female and juvenile workers were wretched even according to the official data. Weekly earnings in the above industries were distributed as follows:—

Industry	Male workers (% of total)	Average weekly earnings (in shillings)	Female workers (% of total)	Average weekly earnings (in shillings)
Metal Trades ...	41.0	Less than 30	—	—
	24.0	" " 25	—	—
Clothing ...	54.2	" " 30	45.1	From 10 to 15
	7.2	" " 20	21.6	Under 10
Paper and Printing	36.5	" " 30	52.2	From 10 to 15
	6.8	" " 20	26.5	Under 10
Pottery, Glass, Chemicals, etc.	58.4	" " 30	49.7	From 10 to 15
	9.1	" " 20	31.0	Under 10
Food, Drink, Tobacco, etc....	71.8	" " 30	44.2	From 10 to 15
	16.4	" " 20	37.8	Under 10
Woodworking ...	65.0	" " 30	54.1	From 10 to 15
	14.3	" " 20	25.0	Under 10

Even among adult workers there was a considerable proportion earning less than 20s. a week on full time, while from 30 to 70 per cent. earned less than 30s. per week. It was estimated by Mr. Bowley on the basis of these data, that in the United Kingdom there were about 8,000,000 people permanently employed, whose weekly earnings were as follows:—

Weekly Earnings (in Shillings).	No. of Persons Employed.	Per cent.
Less than 15 ...	320,000	4
From 15 to 20 ...	640,000	8
" 20 " 25 ...	1,600,000	20
" 25 " 30 ...	1,680,000	21
" 30 " 35 ...	1,680,000	21
" 35 " 40 ...	1,040,000	13
" 40 " 45 ...	560,000	7
Over 45 ...	480,000	6

These figures, of course, cannot claim to be scientifically exact and are probably optimistic. Nor is it quite clear what is meant by "permanent employment" under the capitalist system

of production, and what becomes of the remaining six millions employed in trade and industry, mentioned by the census reports. Even with these limitations, the table shows that about one million workers, or  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the total number, earned less than 20s. per week, while one-half the total number—or to be more precise, 53 per cent.—earned less than 30s. Nobody will contend that the condition of the working class in England at the close of the fifty years period after the collapse of Chartism, as illustrated by these figures, was anything like satisfactory. Would other methods of fighting have yielded better results? Or were the English industries really unable to stand a larger expenditure on wages? On the occasion of the enactment of the Minimum Wage for the coal mining industry, a confidential memorandum was sent out to its members by the Mine Workers' Association of Northumberland and Durham, giving the movement of wages in these districts for a number of years. It showed that the rates for a two shift day were: in February 1872, 6s. 6d.; in July 1872, 8s.  $0\frac{1}{2}$ d.; in March 1873, 9s.  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.; in April 1874, 8s.  $6\frac{1}{2}$ d.; and in October 1874, 7s. 8d. But in the year of grace 1912, a minimum wage of 5s. 6d. was established by law for the miners, and a minimum wage of not more than 6s. 9d. for the highest paid category of miners, the hewers, a rate that is, very much below that of 40 years before. Had the coal mining industry been ruined in the course of these long years? Nothing of the kind. Since the 70's there had been a tremendous development in technique and productivity in the mining industry, and the coal magnates had amassed great wealth. But the miners in these two districts were, until very recently, among the most determined representatives of the ideology of the post-Chartist period; they had adopted the sliding scale, and for a long time even refused to join the Miners' Federation, as they were wholly opposed to governmental interference in such "private" business as the regulation of working hours, which formed one of the main planks in the platform of the Federation. The only explanation for the decline in their wages as compared with the 70's is to be found in the effectiveness of their methods of dealing with the employers.

From the figures quoted at the beginning of the present chapter, we may conclude that practically the same conditions as in the coal mining industry obtained in other trades: the low wages prevailing at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century were the closing figures in a *downward* series

which began in the middle of the 70's. We must also bear in mind that the official figures with which we are operating are based on a fiction that the weekly, monthly or annual earnings of the workers can be calculated arithmetically on the basis of wage rates (piece-time or other rates) by the simple use of multiplication. In reality, owing to the constant changes in employment, the earnings of the workers are continually fluctuating, as may be seen from the official reports on changes in wages in the most important industries, such as the building trades, mining, iron and steel, shipbuilding and engineering—in fact, in all except railways, agriculture and one or two others. A record of these changes was taken from 1893, and although the period covered is short, the figures are highly instructive.

Years	No. of workers with wages affected by		Amount of		Incr. + Decr.—
	Increase	Decrease	Incr. £	Decr. £	
1893 ...	142,364	256,473	23,240	10,813	+ 12,426
1894 ...	175,615	488,357	7,425	52,517	- 45,091
1895 ...	79,867	351,895	6,147	34,358	- 28,210
1896 ...	382,225	167,357	33,721	7,128	+ 26,592
1897 ...	560,707	13,855	32,861	1,354	+ 31,507
1898 ...	1,003,290	11,865	81,601	786	+ 80,815
1899 ...	1,174,444	1,132	91,009	104	+ 90,905
1900 ...	1,209,284	23,010	211,412	2,822	+ 208,590
1901 ...	429,715	489,318	40,790	117,377	- 76,587
1902 ...	91,812	789,891	5,526	77,921	- 72,595
1903 ...	21,327	874,721	1,542	39,869	- 38,327
1904 ...	16,054	784,604	1,202	40,432	- 39,230
1905 ...	319,304	249,586	16,333	18,502	- 2,169
1906 ...	1,097,984	5,140	58,409	512	+ 57,897
1907 ...	1,242,534	2,930	201,152	240	+ 200,912
1908 ...	119,327	464,216	7,260	66,431	- 59,171
1909 ...	18,371	131,505	986	69,908	- 68,922

Year by year the wages of thousands of workers went up and down in accordance with the changing conditions of trade. In the last column are given the results of these changes: in the course of 17 years the workers (in the industries for which the figures are given) suffered a reduction in the wages nine times, and obtained an increase eight times. The total amount of the reduction in wages was £430,302 per week, while the increases aggregated to £709,644 per week, giving a net increase in wages

of £279,342 per week, or £14,515,684 per annum. If we forget that this figure represents the cumulative result of a development of 17 years, that it was distributed among millions of workers employed in those industries, and that in the following years it might be reduced to zero\* it may appear fairly impressive. By comparing it with the figures of the income of the propertied classes, we see how insignificant it is. These figures of the income of the bourgeoisie are to be found in the Reports of the Inland Revenue Department:—

Years.	From Owner- ship of Land, Houses, etc. (£1,000,000)	Business concerns, etc. (£1,000,000)	Total amount of income from property (£1,000,000)
1893-4	207	357	674
1894-5	208	340	657
1895-6	211	357	678
1896-7	214	377	705
1897-8	216	401	734
1898-9	224	416	763
1899-1900	228	436	792
1900-1	233	466	833
1901-2	238	488	867
1902-3	242	492	880
1903-4	252	502	903
1904-5	255	504	912
1905-6	259	509	925
1906-7	264	519	944
1907-8	267	544	980
1908-9	270	566	1,010

\* In point of fact, this did not happen. From 1910 the workers, as we shall see, took up a different policy and in the years that followed wages show an upward movement. In 1910 wages increased by 14 millions, in 1911 by 34 millions, in 1912 by 139 millions, and in 1913 by 175 millions. During the war the upward movement of wages continued, and, thanks to war bonuses, reached a very high level. In 1917, for instance, over 150 millions were added to total wages. But since the war wages have been on the down grade, and the gains of the prosperous years are being rapidly reduced. In 1921 the total of wages was reduced by more than 6 millions a week, in 1922 by more than 4 millions a week, and in the first eight months of 1923 the total reduction amounted to 209,000 a week. In the aggregate for three years wages were reduced by 10,430,000. *The Labour Year Book, 1924*, p. 173.

This presents an entirely different picture: no fluctuations, no ups and downs, but continuous and steady increase. In the course of 17 years the total income of the landlords and property-owners increased from £207,000,000 to £270,000,000, and the total income of the industrial, commercial and professional bourgeoisie increased from £357,000,000 to £566,000,000, while the aggregate income of the possessing classes increased from £674,000,000 to £1,010,000,000. The bourgeoisie is not exactly in love with the tax collector, and partly to evade the payment of taxes, and partly for commercial reasons, it does not very readily disclose its income even to an official organ of its Government. Consequently, there is every reason to assume that these figures are considerably below the actual figure: but even an advance from £674,000,000 to £1,010,000,000 constitutes a net increase of £336,000,000—rather different from the paltry £14,500,000 which represented the increase in the workers' wages during the same period. It is true that this £14,500,000 does not represent the total increase in the wages of the working class as a whole; they refer only to certain trades making returns to the Department of Labour. But they are the leading industries, and employ the major portion of the working class, so that the sum of £14,500,000 probably represents more than half the total increase in the wages of the entire working class. Assuming that the increase in the wages of the rest of the working class amounted to about the same sum, so that the total increase of wages during this period amounted roughly to £30,000,000, it is still but a small fraction as compared with the growth in the income of the bourgeoisie. Who, in the face of these figures, will be so bold as to assert that economic development in England did not permit of a greater share of the annually growing wealth of the country to accrue to the working class? It is clear that the workers took but little advantage of the economic possibilities which offered themselves. And the chief responsibility for this failure must be laid at the door of the policy of compromise with the capitalist class conducted by the leaders of organised labour.

A telling illustration of the foregoing is furnished by the railwaymen, a typical group of the English proletariat which went through all the phases of the evolution of the English Labour movement of the last half century. Although railways were first built in England as far back as the 30's, and had become towards the middle of the century a great industry, the workers employed

on the railways remained for a long time unorganised, owing to their being scattered over about a hundred different lines and detached from their fellow workers by the very nature of their occupation. It was only in the middle of the 60's that they began to form organisations, but these were chiefly of a friendly society character under the patronage of philanthropic directors and wealthy shareholders of the railway companies. In 1872 there was formed the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the first railway trade union of the regular type with extensive charitable functions, but still under the patronage of wealthy benefactors, which explains the fact that, having started with a membership of more than 12,000, the union was left with 6,320 members a decade later. Subsequently, the union recovered, and in 1890 reached a membership of 26,360. But as late as 1903 it still had no more than 52,000 members, and in 1906, on the eve of a great fight and after a vigorous agitation, it reached a membership of 70,000.\* In 1880 the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, and the United Signalmen and Pointmen were formed. In 1889 the General Railway Workers' Union was formed and later on the Railway Clerks' Association—almost *ad infinitum*. All these unions represented one or another of the privileged groups of railway employees, now competing with each other for members among the lower grades, now limiting their activities to one district only, now trying to embrace a larger territory and so on. As a result of such confusion and competition we find that as late as 1910 only 100,000 workers on the railways were organised out of a total of 565,000 employees.

What was the lot of the railwaymen in such a state of organisation, and with a policy which allowed a leading influence in the unions first to bourgeois friends, and then to such labour leaders as Richard Bell and afterwards James Thomas? In 1895 the average wage of railwaymen of all grades amounted to 23s. 0½d. per week, and ten years later to 24s. 3½ per week, having risen by the princely sum of 1s. 3d. per week! An inquiry carried out by the A.S.R.S. in 1907 among railwaymen disclosed the fact that over 100,000 or nearly 20 per cent. of the total were receiving from 20s. to 30s. per week. These figures were challenged by the Board of Trade, which undertook an investiga-

\* cf. Cole and Arnot: *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, London, 1917; Leibuscher, *The Struggle of the English Railway Workers*, Munich, 1913.

tion of its own and published its report in 1912. We can understand the reason for this delay when we learn that according to these official data, there were 96,000 men on the railways receiving 19s. a week and less. Of course, these are all average figures. Among the half-a-million workers there were guards on passenger trains receiving 29s. 3d., guards on goods trains receiving even 31s. 2d.; there were also signalmen, firemen, enginemen etc., earning as much as 46s. per week. These fortunate workers were only an insignificant minority, while at the other extreme there was an equally small minority whose wages were as low as 16s. per week. This in a rich and thriving industry which yielded huge incomes to directors and shareholders!

In justification of such low rates of wages it was usually argued that there was no unemployment on the railways, while, on the other hand, there were superannuation benefits, promotions etc. But there was an obverse side to these advantages—one need only pass from the static to the dynamic aspect of this form of exploitation. We have seen how slowly wages rose; we must now note certain attendant circumstances. Since the end of the last century the methods of working the railways in England have changed completely through the introduction of so-called American methods. They are stated in the annual report of the A.S.R.S. for 1905 as follows: "In spite of the added responsibilities involved in working these mammoth locomotives, and the great difficulties in working longer and heavier trains the men's conditions of service remain unaltered upon practically all railways. Their remuneration is not increased and their hours of labour are not reduced. . . . As less men are required . . . short time . . . and dismissals have been the recognised order of the day. Promotion is also at a standstill. Formerly, firemen could reasonably expect to secure promotion in some 7 or 8 years, but owing to less drivers being required, no such promotions have taken place for the last four or five years."

Exact figures illustrating these facts were given by Mr. Thomas at the A.S.R.S. conference in that year. In 1904, he said, the railways carried 34,000,000 tons more than in 1901, and the revenue increased by £2,435,000. At the same time, owing to the new methods of working, a saving of 17,900,000 train miles had been effected, yielding an economy in wages to the amount of £71,000. If the old methods had continued, Mr. Thomas went on to explain, 1,777 new enginemen would have been taken

on; but since they had been changed, thousands of enginemen had been put on short time, and hundreds compelled to do the stoking, while the firemen were obliged to work as cleaners. Similar facts were quoted in the report of the union for 1906. In that year the number of train miles decreased by about 400,000, while the freight carried increased by 11,000,000 tons. In the conditions prevailing in 1900, it would have been necessary to introduce 2,500 new engines which would have meant employment for 10,000 men; instead of that the number of engines was reduced by 1,200 and the number of men by 6,000.

It is clear that even with the small increase in wages shown by the figures for 1896 and 1905 the material conditions for the railway workers became worse. A larger volume of the work had to be performed by fewer men, and that meant a greater strain, longer working hours, and more frequent accidents. An inquiry carried out in 1907 revealed the fact that more than one-half of the workers employed on the railways (51.1 per cent.) were working 60 hours a week and more, nearly 4 per cent. (3.9) were working 72 hours and more, and only about 7 per cent. were working less than 54 hours per week. On the basis of a six-day week (assumed in the inquiry) this meant that one-half of all the railwaymen were working not less than 10 hours a day, and some as much as 12 hours a day and longer. The average week of enginemen and firemen amounted to 62 hours; of signalmen 57.5; of guards, 61.4; of cleaners, 55; and so on. All these figures were in a way theoretical, since in reality the railwaymen—particularly the enginemen and firemen—were often called upon to work overtime, sometimes for twenty-four hours at a stretch; as was brought out by the numerous inquiries held in connection with railway accidents. The results of excessive work were reflected in the statistics of accidents on the railways, as can be seen from the following table:—

Year	Fatal	Non-Fatal	Year	Fatal	Non-Fatal
1897 ...	566	14,402	1905 ...	437	14,335
1898 ...	542	12,979	1906 ...	483	16,256
1899 ...	584	15,582	1907 ...	508	21,514
1900 ...	631	15,698	1908 ...	432	24,181
1901 ...	565	14,740	1909 ...	372	24,095
1902 ...	485	13,858	1910 ...	435	26,464
1903 ...	497	14,356	1911 ...	446	27,818
1904 ...	448	14,561	1912 ...	403	28,200



These figures deserve close attention. In 1899 and 1900 "American" methods were introduced, and the number of accidents in both categories at once leapt upwards. Later on, however, the workers adapted themselves to the new methods, and since the Government took alarm and in 1900 introduced a number of measures for the prevention of accidents on railways—the "Prevention of Railway Accidents Acts"—the number of fatal accidents gradually decreased. True the decrease did not go very far, for their number continued to fluctuate between 400 and 500 annually; nevertheless, some improvement in respect of fatal accidents could not be gainsaid. It was different with the non-fatal accidents. Their number rose rapidly in 1899 and 1900, but instead of falling later, they increased and were nearly doubled in the course of 16 years—and that in spite of, or rather because of the decrease of the number of men working on the railways. According to a statement made by Mr. Thomas in the House of Commons in February, 1914, in the course of the debate on the King's Speech, between 1901 and 1910 the freight traffic on the railways had increased by many million tons, and the passenger traffic by many millions of passengers, but the number of workers employed had been reduced by 13,000. We cannot wonder that the number of accidents was doubled. Rather should we be surprised that the railwaymen patiently suffered this state of affairs for so long. It was only towards the middle of the first decade of the new century that a movement began among them for better organisation and for a change of policy—a movement which changed the entire situation on the railways and brought the railwaymen to the front ranks of the organised and militant proletariat of England. We shall presently see in what circumstances this change took place.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE FRUITS OF OPPORTUNISM (*Concluded*)

WAGES are such a decisive factor in the condition of the working class that failure of the trade unions to solve problems relating thereto is sufficient evidence of the futility of their methods of action. There are other factors in the condition of the working class which, although not so directly susceptible to the influence of the organised power of the proletariat, are good criteria of measurement. We shall dwell on them briefly, since we are not engaged in studying the condition of the working class in England, but are only searching for an answer to the question, whether or not the opportunist methods of the trade unions were justified in practice.

We shall deal in the first place with the length of the working day. Next to wages, hours of labour are the matter of greatest concern to the trade union organisations, and it is therefore interesting to learn what has been done by the English working class towards shortening them. Government inquiries in 1886 and 1906 recorded the fact that in the course of those twenty years the normal working week in the cotton industry was reduced from  $56\frac{1}{2}$  to  $55\frac{1}{2}$  hours, that is, by one hour. This, of course, was not very great progress, considering the exceptionally favourable circumstances in which the cotton manufacturers were working.  $55\frac{1}{2}$  hours a week means more than 9 hours a day, whereas the 10-hour day had been introduced in cotton spinning mills as far back as 1847! Even this slight advance loses its importance from the fact that the  $56\frac{1}{2}$  hour week had been introduced in Lancashire in 1871. This means that the reduction of the working week by one hour represented the progress made not in 20 but in 35 years! Approximately during the same period, according to a statement made in Parliament in 1913, by one of the Lancashire Labour representatives, Mr. Gill, the speed of machinery, and consequently the intensity of labour of the Lancashire spinners, had increased by 20 per cent. Lancashire spinners were among the most peaceful workers in England, and enjoyed the leadership of such men as Mawdsley, who officially belonged to the Conservative Party, and adopted such a beneficent diplomatic instrument as the Brooklands Agreement!

No better was the position of the engineers, those pioneers of the post-Chartist trade union movement. As far back as 1871 they had won the 9-hour day, while in Scotland the normal working week was fixed at 51 hours. In 1874 the Scottish engineers too were forced to accept the 54-hour week—9 hours a day, and at that figure it stayed—until the World War. In 1897 this model trade union inadvertently became involved in a dispute which was both a strike and a lock-out, and put forward a demand for an 8-hour day. After five months of fighting, having exhausted all their funds, the workers were defeated because there were only about 70,000 men in the union, out of a total of 300,000 in the industry.

In the preceding chapter we dealt with the hours of labour on the railways. Here we propose to quote some official data on the hours of labour worked in various industries,\* in order that the reader may judge for himself the state of affairs in a country where the working class for half a century carried on a policy of compromise:—

Industry.	Average weekly hours of labour.	Industry.	Average weekly hours of labour.
Metals ... ..	53.2	Food, tobacco etc. ...	54.1
Iron & steel ... ..	55.2	Textile ... ..	55.5
Shipbuilding ... ..	52.9	Building trades ...	52.8
Paper, printing etc. ...	52.5	Clothing, boot & shoe	52.7
Pottery, glass etc. ...	53.7		

How these figures compare with those of the 50's or of the 70's it is difficult to tell, since no precise and complete data are available. All we know is that even in those cases where the hours of labour were ostensibly regulated, they were so only on paper, since the workers had to work overtime, for which they were paid time-and-a-half, and sometimes even less. Even from a formal point of view, the advance could not have been considerable, judging by such model industries as the cotton and engineering trades first quoted. Even in the coal mining industry, where progress had been achieved in some districts and for some of the workers (for instance the Durham hewers had been working less than 7 hours a day even before the enactment of the Eight Hour Day in 1909) the average working day for all categories of workers in all the districts was 9 hours and 3 minutes,

\* *Earnings and Hours of Labour, 1906.*

so that the Eight Hour Act was hailed as a blessing, although it permitted 60 hours overtime per year, and was calculated for the time spent at the coal face only. Of course, there were quite a number of firms which themselves introduced the 8-hour day as a means of increasing the productivity of labour. In Durham and Northumberland the shorter day had been introduced at the instance of the mine owners, who preferred to work their mines on two or three shifts although men above ground worked not six or seven, but nine and ten hours a day. Such exceptions, however, do not count, whereas the fact that as late as 1912 the Trades Union Congress put forward a demand for a 60-hour week for shop assistants shows how small was the improvement in the hours of labour in this branch of employment. The policy followed in the post-Chartist period also failed in regard to hours of labour.

The regulation of wages and hours of labour is the main field of the trade unions' direct activity. Indirectly their influence extends to numerous spheres which help to determine the material conditions of the working class. The trade unions seem able to exercise least effect upon unemployment, the main evil which besets the industrial proletariat of to-day. Unemployment, *i.e.*, the existence of a reserve army of labour, is an essential condition for the existence of capitalist production, and one would think the organised working class was helpless in the face of it. Nevertheless, both the First International, and the International Congress at Paris in 1889 proclaimed the 8-hour day as one of the palliative measures against unemployment, and the trade unions themselves at their congresses repeatedly demanded an all-round reduction in the hours of labour during slack periods, instead of the dismissal of men. Such a system of "short time" is practiced in some industries, particularly in the Lancashire cotton trade. At any rate, there is an obvious connection between hours of labour and the problem of unemployment, and to an extent the trade unions might have exercised some influence on its dimensions and intensity. What are the actual facts? Note, first of all, that before the war the English labour market was relieved of large numbers of workers every year by emigration. This peculiar method of bloodletting, as we have seen,\* began in the middle of the nineteenth century and went on steadily until the war, with slight abatements in the 70's and 90's. The volume of

\* See Part I., pp. 88-89.

this human stream is shown in the following figures (the net balance of emigration over immigration):—

1876-80	...	...	435,201	1901-05	...	...	586,818
1881-85	...	...	934,263	1906	...	...	194,671
1886-90	...	...	794,060	1907	...	...	235,092
1891-95	...	...	447,911	1908	...	...	91,156
1896-1900	...	...	278,122	1909	...	...	139,693
1876-1909			...	...	4,147,007*		

These figures refer exclusively to British subjects, and are of considerable significance as indices of the economic condition of the working class which furnished the main impulse to emigration. Emigration on such a large scale took place from Germany only during the period of the anti-Socialist laws, and in the years immediately preceding the war from such backward and poverty stricken countries as Galicia and Italy. Clearly, English capitalism was unable to feed its own wage slaves. Still the workers who remained behind did not find sufficient employment. The following percentages of members unemployed were compiled from the returns made by certain trade unions to the Department of Labour:—

Year		Percentage of Membership Unemployed		Year		Year		
	%	Year	%	Year		%		
1876	...	3.7	1887	...	7.6	1898	...	2.8
1877	...	4.7	1888	...	4.9	1899	...	2.0
1878	...	6.8	1889	...	2.1	1900	...	2.5
1879	...	11.4	1890	...	2.1	1901	...	3.3
1880	...	5.5	1891	...	3.5	1902	...	4.4
1881	...	3.5	1892	...	6.3	1903	...	4.7
1882	...	2.3	1893	...	7.5	1904	...	6.0
1883	...	2.6	1894	...	6.9	1905	...	5.0
1884	...	8.1	1895	...	5.8	1906	...	3.6
1885	...	9.3	1896	...	3.3	1907	...	3.7
1886	...	10.2	1897	...	3.4	1908	...	7.8
						1909	...	7.7

The trade unions making these returns belong to the best organised and most important branches of industry, comprising textiles, metals, furnishing, coal mining, printing etc. But in

† *British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions*, Cd. 1761, 1913, with additions from *Annual Abstract of Labour Statistics*.

spite of the great advance in the production of these industries as compared with the 70's, and of the emigration of over 4,000,000 people from England during that period, there was no decrease in unemployment. Unemployment in bad years did not, perhaps, reach the dimensions of thirty or forty years previously, but as against this, the amount of unemployment in good years was not less than in the past, and on the average was even in excess of previous levels. Unemployment unquestionably increased from the middle of the 70's and assumed a more permanent character in England than, for instance, in pre-war Germany. The figures show no trace of the trade unions ever taking steps to combat unemployment by fighting for a reduction in the hours of labour, and when in 1910, with a Liberal administration, an Unemployment Insurance Bill was introduced by Lloyd George, no one was more surprised than the trade unions themselves. To them unemployment was a visitation from God to which they could only submit, while paying regular benefits to its victims.

Closely connected with the question of duration of the working day, which the trade unions have done so little to shorten, is the occupational right, that is, the liability to injuries and death in consequence of accidents. In face of the progress in technical equipment of factories and works, and the usually attendant intensification of labour, it should have been the business of the trade unions to concentrate their attention not only upon the enactment and the development of special legislation, not only on the proper discharge of their functions by the inspectors, but also on the question of fatigue which depends in the first place on the length of the working day. It has been established both by scientific research and by practical observation that beyond a certain maximum of working hours, a stage in the process of labour sets in when physical and nervous exhaustion, unobserved by the worker himself, make conditions favourable to accidents, the latter growing in frequency with every additional hour of labour. Most of the accidents in works and factories occur during the second half of the day, and the most dangerous time appears to be the last hour or two. There is scarcely any need to argue about the imperative need of shorter hours for work in closed premises, even if well ventilated, or on material which is in itself injurious to health. What do we find in England? Below we give the statistics of accidents in English industries since 1895:—

Year	Total No. of accidents		No. of accidents in factories and workshops		No. of accidents in the mines		No. of accidents on the railways*	
	<i>Non-Fatal</i>	<i>Fatal</i>	<i>Non-Fatal</i>	<i>Fatal</i>	<i>Non-Fatal</i>	<i>Fatal</i>	<i>Non-Fatal</i>	<i>Fatal</i>
1895	...	No data	455	No data	1,042	No data	489	7,480
1896	...	No data	490	32,958	1,025	No data	490	14,110
1897	...4,262	63,856	518	39,816	930	No data	566	14,402
1898	...3,810	79,633	577	49,642	908	4,079	542	12,979
1899	...4,619	96,369	682	61,083	916	4,115	584	15,582
1900	...4,753	104,303	816	68,456	1,012	4,434	631	15,698
1901	...4,622	107,286	782	72,709	1,101	4,004	565	14,740
1902	...4,516	112,128	851	77,692	1,024	3,745	485	13,858
1903	...4,154	115,564	752	79,107	1,072	3,822	497	14,356
1904	...3,985	115,515	728	79,289	1,055	3,754	448	14,561
1905	...4,268	122,386	780	99,546	1,159	3,646	437	14,335
1906	...4,369	135,693	804	110,788	1,142	3,839	483	16,256
1907	...4,453	156,278	852	123,146	1,245	5,892	509	21,514
1908	...4,154	158,356	767	121,112	1,308	5,860	432	24,181
1909	...4,133	154,357	700	116,554	1,453	5,859	372	24,095

The table shows that in the course of fifteen years between 1895 and 1909, the life and health of the workers became more and not less exposed to accident. Particularly great was the number of both fatal and non-fatal accidents in workshops and factories, while the number of non-fatal accidents on the railways was more than trebled. Even in the mines, to which particular attention was paid by protective legislation and inspection, the number of fatal accidents increased, although the curve of the non-fatal accidents fluctuated: rising and dropping and rising again rapidly. This was due to the fact that prior to 1906 mining inspection registered only severe accidents which disabled the worker for a period of not less than seven days, while since it registered all accidents without exception. Outside factors, such as legislation, improved methods of registration, and more frequent inspection, naturally influence the figures, and this circumstance is often brought forward by official English statisticians in order to reassure the workers and the public at large. Moreover, whenever possible they point to the expansion of production as a factor causing an increase in the absolute figures, but reducing their relative importance. This is not quite the truth. Granted that the figures for the previous years are incomplete

\* (A repetition, for the sake of completeness, of the figures on p 235.)

for one reason or another and minimise the actual number of accidents, how is the fact to be accounted for that in the last years, when no changes occurred in the outside conditions, the number of accidents still continued to grow? How is one to explain that the number of accidents caused by new machinery in the factories, driven by mechanical power and entirely unaffected by protective legislation, increased three times as much as accidents from other causes?\*

As to the expansion of production and the corresponding increase in the number of workers employed, we have seen that on the railways the very opposite was the case, it was a reduction and not an increase in the number of workpeople employed, that was responsible both for the absolute and the relative multiplication of accidents. The same was the case in the coal mining industry. There the number of workers did increase during the last years of the period under consideration, but the only result was that whereas prior to 1902 the number of fatal accidents in the mines was 1.34 per 1,000, it increased in 1906-10, according to official data, to 1.41 per 1,000. And small wonder, as the upper seams in the coal mines are exhausted, the mine owners are prompted by greed to dig deeper and deeper, reaching at times a depth of from 200 to 300 yards where the temperature is so high that the least misadventure may cause an explosion.

Thus considering the connection which exists between the number of accidents and the length of the working day the growth in the number of accidents is further evidence of the bankruptcy of the trade union policy in England. As a matter of fact, this connection between the number of accidents and the length of the working day had been repeatedly stressed by the trade unions themselves, but they never went further than passing resolutions and sending deputations to wait on Cabinet ministers. The question of the safety of the industrial processes was for them a matter of secondary importance. It sufficed to show that the accidents had been brought about by the "carelessness" of the workers themselves or were due to something outside "human" control, and excitement would come to an end. Never, in the whole history of trade unionism, had the workers declared a strike for the principle of labour protection.

Many times on the railways the question was raised of introducing automatic coupling as a guarantee of safety; but never was a strike declared on that issue. In the coal mines the workers

\* *Journal of Royal Statistical Society*, 1911, Mr. Verney's paper.



on more than one occasions downed tools on the question of check weighing, but never was a battle fought over such questions as ventilation or pit props. We referred in another chapter to the efforts of Plimsoll, who in 1876 finally succeeded in wresting legislation on the load line. Exactly thirty years later the line was raised again by Mr. Lloyd George, who was then at the Board of Trade, reducing the safety of vessels, but increasing the profits of the shipowners. Neither the Seamen's Union nor the organised workers in general replied to this act by a strike.

We should never finish if we were to enumerate all the questions which the trade unions could have influenced in some way or another, but failed to. No less important is the fact that the trade unions had proved incapable or unwilling to organise the working class as a whole. Their aristocratic exclusiveness, to which we have referred above, and which was the result of their repudiation of a militant policy in favour of a pacifist diplomacy, caused the overwhelming mass of the working class to remain unorganised, because they did not possess the qualifications which formed the monopoly of the skilled workmen who had passed a course of apprenticeship, while the skilled workers themselves, jealous of this monopoly, insisted on running the unions on a craft and not an industrial basis, which would have included the unskilled. The majority of unskilled workers remained unorganised until the close of the 80's, when the London dock labourers, after their famous strike, founded a union and were afterwards followed at greater or lesser intervals by other classes of general labourers, such as cart and bus drivers, tramway employees, gas workers, and so on.

These unions were fairly small, their districts frequently out of touch with each other, and, what is more, they copied the opportunist tactics of the old trade unions. As a result, the strength of the working class continued to be dissipated. At least six-sevenths of the proletariat remained unorganised, a circumstance which is as characteristic of British trade unionism as the condition of its organised section. For trade unionism, after all, was and is a form of the working class movement. Having taken the place of the political revolutionary form of the proletarian struggle, it was not the intention of trade unionism to confine itself to the skilled upper layer of the workers; it aimed at opening new paths for the whole mass of the workers oppressed by capitalism. Even when this claim had been proved unjustified

by the course of events, trade unionism did not cease to pose as the leader and spokesman of the working class as a whole, claiming that in looking after the interests of the organised sections it was fighting for the working class as a whole. We are therefore entitled to put the question in its broadest aspect: what had been achieved by the trade unions, even indirectly, for the unorganised section of the working class, for the mass of the workers as a whole? The answer to this question was given as far back as 1897 by none other than Mr. Sidney Webb, the panegyrist of trade unionism, whom no one will suspect of undue hostility to the bourgeoisie. In his well known pamphlet written on the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, *Labour in the Longest Reign*, he wrote:—

“Under every heading it may be shown that, while the position of a large section of the wage-earners has greatly advanced since 1837, the other sections have obtained little, if any, share in the general growth in wealth and civilisation. If we took each department of life in turn, and fixed a datum line below which we considered that the workman could not decently live, we should find, alike in wages, hours of work, dwelling and general civilisation, that the percentage of those who fell below the line is less now than it was in 1837. But we should discover also that the lowest level reached was quite as low as at that time, and that the total number falling below our assumed datum line is, in actual magnitude, probably greater than in 1837. The depth of poverty is as great as it can ever have been; its actual breadth even is as great or greater.”

As to that “great advance” in the conditions of the fortunate aristocracy of labour, of which Mr. Webb speaks, we shall say a word or two later; in the meantime, suffice it to note that even according to the testimony of such a mild critic of bourgeois society as Sidney Webb, poverty at the end of the 90's was even wider and deeper, *i.e.*, embraced larger sections of the working class and was more intense than at the end of the 30's. Since then, in spite of further accumulation of wealth by the capitalist class and in spite of incessant emigration and the continual development of social legislation, the condition of the working class has not improved.\* Whole sections of the working

\* Here again we may quote the evidence of Mr. Sidney Webb. In his *Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, while declaring that the aim of Socialism is to secure the individual ownership of “private property” (1), which at present constitutes the right

class continue to live and to work in conditions which have scarcely changed since the days when Marx pilloried them in his *Capital* or even still earlier, when Engels described the condition of the working class in England in 1877. Both Marx and Engels wrote of the sweating system, of the "white slaves of England" left untouched by the progress of "civilisation." The sweating system continued to exist, serving as the object of keen debates and even of investigations by Royal Commissions in the 80's and 90's, down to the very eve of the World War, when at last, after 75 years of talking, the Government was forced to pass specific legislation regulating wages and working conditions in the sweated industries. The first of these Trade Boards was established for the most classical of all the sweated industries, that of chain-making in Sheffield and district, where the conditions then prevailing can be indicated by the fact that the minimum

of a handful of people, he draws the following picture of the present condition of the working class: "At present in Great Britain, as well as in other countries of advanced industrialism, more than two-thirds of all the citizens find themselves in fact excluded all their lives long from anything that can reasonably be called private property—from anything beyond their current wages, their exiguous hoards against a rainy day, and as much old furniture as would go in a cart. Of all the amenity and charm and the development of family life that may be given by the secure possession of a permanent home the bulk of the wage earners are, under modern capitalism, deprived. . . . Hardly the smallest fraction of working class families find their savings and their earnings sufficient to provide for their children, either the constant personal care during the first few years, or the educational surroundings during childhood, or the skilled medical attention, or the technical training, or even the outfit on leaving home, that fathers and mothers in all classes yearn to give their children, and that the average parent of the professional class considers absolutely necessary for the health and well-being of his own progeny. When the manual working parent dies—on an average, prematurely, at a much earlier age than among the class provided with property—there is left, in nine cases out of ten, hardly sufficient estate to pay the funeral expenses; very seldom even the most modest provision for a surviving spouse or young children; and practically never the sort of pecuniary guarantee against suffering through misfortune which fond fathers and mothers in other classes aspire to leave for their own children. The awful insecurity and continuous apprehension of privation involved in the lack of private property are the common lot to-day of at least three-fourths of all the families in the Kingdom." Such, after all the eulogies, was the actual condition of the working class in England after a century and a half of colossal development of the forces of production under capitalism, and after seventy years of trade union activity!

wage as fixed by a Commission, amounted to  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per hour. Indeed, prior to this the workers in that "industry" had been on a piecework rate (there were no time rates) of 3s. 3d. for a hundredweight of chains. The work was mostly done by women at small forges, one woman turning out about two hundredweights of chains per week and earning the princely sum of 6s. 6d., from which she had to pay 2s. for fuel and 3d. for the use of the forge. Her net earnings for a week of intense labour amounted, therefore, to 4s. No wonder that the establishment of a minimum rate of  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per hour was hailed as a great boon by these women, who could now reckon on the magnificent earnings of 10s. 6d. per week. This example suffices to show what the conditions in the sweated industries generally were. For buttonhole makers and button-sewers in the tailoring trade the minimum rate was fixed at 3d. per hour for women and 6d. for men, whereas previously 24 per cent. of the women engaged in this occupation earned less than 10s., and 70 per cent. of the men earned less than 15s. per week. In the cardboard box making industry about 10,000 women were earning less than 10s. per week, and the minimum rates fixed by the Trade Board were 6d. per hour for men and 3d. for women. In the Nottingham lace industry the home workers were earning from 1d. to  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. per hour, with deductions for "bad thread," so that the earnings of an adult woman amounted sometimes to only one shilling for a full day's work. The minimum wage was fixed by the Trade Board at  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 3d. In these four industries alone about 200,000 home workers were employed, 70 per cent. of whom were women. This figure does not nearly exhaust the dimensions of the sweating system, in which, according to approximate estimates, the total number of workers amounted on the eve of the war to 600,000. The existence of such a vast category of workers of both sexes alongside of and inside the gigantic expansion of English industry is characteristic both of the social and economic development of the country and of the Labour movement itself, which failed to reach these sections of the proletariat and to raise their social status, and particularly their wages, to an extent that would have compelled the employers to adopt modern forms of production and to transfer these white slaves from their "homes" into the factory.\*

\* The literature on this question is very extensive. A useful summary can be found in the *Labour Year Book* of 1916, pp. 213-221.

Partly connected with the sweating system and partly independent of it is the exploitation of children and juveniles; the history of child labour forms one of the most disgraceful pages in the disgraceful history of English capitalism; in spite of numerous inquiries and various legislative enactments beginning with 1802, child labour in most inhuman forms continued to flourish. The law before the war prohibited the employment of children under 12, while for children between 12 and 14 years of age the so-called half-time system was in practice. The half-time system was repeatedly the subject of protracted discussions by enlightened social reformers and educationists, and many were the solemn pledges given to eliminate it by legislative measures. Nevertheless the practice continued. Half-timers were permitted to work in textile factories up to  $27\frac{3}{4}$  hours per week (what precision!), and in other factories as much as 30 hours per week, which, together with school attendance amounted to from 40 to 44 hours of labour per week. There was this legislative regulation of child labour in industrial establishments, but what was there to prevent the exploitation of children even under twelve outside the factories at home or in the streets? Nothing at all! In 1907 a select committee found that children between the ages of 4 and 12 were employed without let or hindrance in the sweated industries: in the Nottingham lace industry, in match-box making, in the making of paper bags and artificial flowers in London, in the carding of hooks and buttons in Birmingham, and so on. The mothers would fetch the work home, and the children on returning home for dinner would immediately sit down to work, without even removing their out-of-doors clothes. Having worked through the dinner hour the children, munching their "dinner," would go back to school, and on returning home at four o'clock would again sit down to work till late at night. The remuneration for the making of match-boxes, an operation involving the pasting together of seven parts—was from  $1\frac{3}{4}$ d. to  $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per gross, and a woman assisted by four children earned from 1s. 1d. to 1s. 4d. per day by working 12-14 hours a day and compelling her children—frequently tiny mites of four and five—to help her in the morning hours before school, during the dinner hours, and after school until late at night. In one particular case a woman, working 15 hours a day on the stringing of coral beads, earned from 1s. to 1s. 6d. per day, but she was assisted by her three children. The oldest, eight years of age,

on being questioned by the visitor said: "I like work only I feel so tired." In another case a mother and three children of nine, six and five years, respectively, were engaged in the making of paper flowers earning  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. for a gross of "violets" and 2s. 6d. for a gross of "roses." They worked from 6 in the morning till school time and till midnight after school.

The reader might think these stories were taken from Section III, Chapter VIII of Marx's *Capital*. No, these facts have been taken from the reports of the select committees of 1897 and 1907, the successors to the Children's Employment Committees instanced by Marx. Truly, as the French say, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. We have only touched upon the fringe of the vast and dark domain where child labour hides from the eye of legislative inspection. Side by side with the factories and workshops there were shops which employed children and juveniles, both as half-timers and full-timers to do "odd jobs" and run errands, streets where children trade etc. In 1897 there were not less than 144,000 children attending school half time, and before and after school hours and during the dinner hour working in assisting barbers, selling newspapers, carrying parcels to customers' houses etc. About 99,000 of them, *i.e.*, 70 per cent., were working 20 hours a week and less, about 27,000 from 20 to 30 hours a week, about 10,000 over 30 and less than 40 hours a week, and the remainder 50, 60 and even 70 hours a week. It should be noted that by Parliamentary Act, passed in the 90's, the maximum time of child labour between 12 and 14 was fixed at 74 hours per week! Among the cases investigated in 1897 was a 12-year-old boy who got up in the morning between three and four to rouse 25 adult workers, afterwards selling papers from 6 till 9, and then going to school, where he would usually fall asleep. Another boy was running errands for a grocer, getting 1s. 6d. per week for working on school days from 8 till 9 in the morning, from 12 till 1.30 in the afternoon and from 4.30 till 7.30 in the evening, and on Saturdays the whole day from 8 a.m. till 10 p.m., altogether  $41\frac{1}{2}$  hours a week, in addition to  $27\frac{1}{2}$  hours spent at school. Another boy was working as a lather boy in a barber's shop, working daily from 4.30 till 10 p.m., except Saturdays, when he worked from 8 a.m. till midnight, and Sundays when he worked from 8 a.m. till 2 p.m. Altogether he worked  $49\frac{1}{2}$  hours a week besides the school hours. These were not isolated, but typical cases recur-

ring again and again in subsequent investigations. The inquiry of 1907 registered about 570,000 children under fourteen years of age who were in work of various kinds. 60,000 of them were already working the whole day in shops and factories, having secured the necessary exemption from school; 34,535 between 12 and 14 years of age, were working as half-timers in industrial establishments, and so on.

This harrowing state of affairs is in itself an excellent commentary on the level of the earnings of those groups of workers whom the trade unions were either unable or unwilling to admit into their organisations. But it is also characteristic of the organised workers themselves, for they themselves had been the stoutest opponents of legal restriction on child labour! Particularly striking in this respect were the Lancashire textile workers who had consistently opposed this reform, whose representatives in Parliament had repeatedly voted against the abolition of the half-time system, and whose prominent leaders, and the most influential leader in the Labour Party at the time—Mr. (now Sir D.) Shackleton—had the sorry courage to plead even at the Trades Union Congresses for the right of parents to supplement their insufficient earnings by those of their children! As a matter of fact, since the famous Ten Hour Act of 1847, not a single legislative measure for the limitation of child labour was passed upon the demand of the workers: such reforms were invariably sponsored by bourgeois reformers, philanthropists and educationists. It is interesting to note that even the Acts of 1833 and 1850 forbidding night-work for juveniles between 14 and 16 years of age were virtually repealed by the Act of 1867 for the iron, paper and glass industries, and when shortly before the war a committee was appointed by the Government to examine the question, Mr. Arthur Henderson himself, as a member of the Committee, declared that legislative abolition of night-labour of juveniles in these industries would be "inexpedient." Mr. Henderson was not only the secretary of the Labour Party, having succeeded Mr. Shackleton in that post, but also the leader of the Iron Founders' Union! The responsibility for the continuance of the exploitation of children and juveniles may be laid entirely at the door of the trade unions, which seek to increase the earnings of the organised workers, not by militant methods, but by the easier method of enslaving the children.

From this brief survey of the sweating system and of child

labour it may be seen how perfectly right was Sidney Webb in stating some 25 years ago that the poverty of the working class had grown both wider and deeper. At the end of the 80's a statistical inquiry into the working conditions of the working people of London was carried out by Mr. Charles Booth aided by a large staff of investigators, and approximately ten years later a similar investigation was conducted at York by Mr. Seebohm Rowntree. A voluminous report was published by Mr. Booth, in which he proved that more than a million people in London—32 per cent. of its entire population—were living under conditions which failed to satisfy the minimum requirements, not of cultured, but of bare physical existence; while Mr. Rowntree in a less voluminous, but scientifically constructed work, demonstrated the existence of fairly similar conditions in the provincial town of York. On the basis of these data, the late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, then Liberal Prime Minister, expressed in the House of Commons in 1906 his opinion that not less than 12 million people in England were living on or under the poverty line. In London alone from 50 to 60 people annually are found dead or in a dying condition, found by subsequent inquests to have been due to starvation. There are numerous lodging houses in London where a night's lodging can be secured for a few pence, even less. They are always crowded, and the 20,000 persons of either sex, including married couples, who inhabit these houses, are sufficient evidence of the destitution which exists in that city, the wealthiest in the world. There are always hundreds who cannot produce the copper required for a night's lodging. At one time a census of the homeless was taken by the police on a winter night in February, and in 1901, it was found that no fewer than 2,747 people were without shelter. On the night of February 28th, 1927, five persons were found sleeping under arches and 96 people sleeping in the streets. 19 persons were discovered in the crypt of St. Martin's. There were 14,724 persons in the lodging houses, 802 in Shelter and Labour Homes, 5,072 in Rowton House and 777 in casual wards and in hostels of the Y.M.C.A.—(*Times*, March 3rd, 1927).

Nowhere are there so many charitable institutions and such a wide system of public relief as in England. In London alone in 1913 there were no fewer than 731 private charities with a combined budget of £7,000,000 to £8,000,000. These institutions, in spite of the humiliation accompanying the receipt of assistance



from them, were working at full pressure, so that for every individual dying from starvation or lack of shelter, there were thousands who escaped such fate by applying to them. This is particularly true of public relief by the Boards of Guardians, who by law are forbidden to grant relief except in cases of extreme distress. In 1907, in which year the last three months were marked by bad trade, no fewer than 1,709,436 people applied for relief to the Boards of Guardians, including 526,449 men, 618,673 women, and 536,314 children. Out of that number, 1,434,829 persons obtained relief only once during the year, 171,641 persons twice, and 26,179 persons five times or more. This meant that in that year there were in England over 1,500,000 people who were compelled to apply at least-once to the detested "Guardians" to save themselves. It is interesting to observe, furthermore, that out of this number only 203,909 persons, *i.e.*, less than 12 per cent., were relieved for one week or less; while 326,527 persons, *i.e.*, over 19 per cent., were relieved for a period of from 1 to 4 weeks, 277,764 persons (16.3 per cent.) from 4 to 13 weeks, 158,105 people (9.2 per cent.) from 13 to 26 weeks, 204,451 (12 per cent.) from 26 to 52 weeks, and finally, not less than 538,680 persons (31.5 per cent.) received relief for a period of a whole year. These summary figures speak volumes: over 1,500,000 people could not exist through the year without the assistance of the Guardians, whilst nearly one-third of them were compelled to apply to them for public relief during the whole year!

Do these figures represent an improvement in comparison with the preceding years? Unfortunately, it was only in 1907 that such a detailed census was carried out among "paupers." The earlier official returns of pauperism refer only to two days in the year, January 1st and July 1st, and on that basis they calculate the approximate average figures for the year. This, of course, does not furnish exhaustive data, but it is quite sufficient for purposes of comparison. The following table shows the extent of pauperism in the course of 50 years (excluding the insane and vagrants):—

Year.	No. of paupers.	Per 1,000 of population.
1859 ... ..	813,965	41.8
1869 ... ..	955,302	43.6
1879 ... ..	701,812	28.0
1889 ... ..	716,144	25.5

Year.	No. of paupers.	Per 1,000 of population.
1899 ... ..	728,113	23.2
1904 ... ..	722,070	21.7
1905 ... ..	764,589	22.7
1906 ... ..	774,209	22.8
1907 ... ..	769,160	22.4
1908 ... ..	772,346	22.3
1909 ... ..	793,851	22.6

The 50's and 60's were marked by a great increase in pauperism, which declined in the 70's and then remained more or less stationary, although the absolute figures rose by nearly 70,000 in the first decade of this century. These figures relate only to England and Wales; if Scotland were added, the figures would be higher. Their import is quite clear: in the wealthiest capitalist country in the world the working class had so little succeeded in placing its existence on a firm foundation that as many as 800,000 workers yearly, in Great Britain alone, were forced to apply for parish relief. This fact stands out still more clearly if the "paupers" be examined according to age groups. It will be found, according to the results of an inquiry held in 1891, that the number of persons applying for parish relief between the ages of 16 and 60 constituted only 3.2 per cent., those between 60 and 65, 13.2 per cent.; between 65 and 70, 20.6 per cent.; between 70 and 75, 31.3 per cent.; between 75 and 80, 39.4 per cent.; and above 80, 41.3 per cent. of the entire population in these age groups. Since, however, the whole population includes both rich and poor, the percentage of old people of the working class applying for parish relief is considerably higher. Mr. Charles Booth, in giving evidence before the Commission on Old Age Pauperism in 1893, declared that: "It might be stated that about 80 per cent. of our paupers came from those industrial classes whose labour was not sufficiently remunerated, constituting by their numbers about 40 per cent. of the entire population. If that be so, then no less than two out of three people of those classes were forced to apply in their old age for parish relief in one way or another." This means that the industrial worker in the years when he was fully able to work, did not earn enough to secure himself in his old age, or to take care of his aged relatives, with the result that they were compelled to apply for parish relief (since 1908 they have been getting old age pensions

from the State). Such is the security gained for the English working class by trade unionism!

Earlier in the foregoing chapter we asked: did the opportunist methods of trade unionism justify themselves, and we can now answer with an emphatic "No." It is usually assumed, and has been frequently argued in learned books, that the English working class, having turned its back on revolutionary methods and action, having repudiated the very idea of revolution, and having concentrated its efforts on pacifist trade union action, has succeeded in achieving material security and a high standard of life. Now we see that this is a myth, that by his pacifist trade unionism the worker was not able to maintain his wages even at the level reached in the middle 70's, that his achievements both in regard to wages and other working conditions were of the smallest, and that the position of the mass of the working class in general—which the specific methods of trade unionism has even prevented from becoming organised—remained just as precarious as it had been in the past.

CHAPTER FIVE  
THE ROOTS OF OPPORTUNISM

**W**E are now confronted by an enigma which, in a sense, we may describe as the essential problem in the whole history of the English Labour movement, beginning with the middle of the 70's and ending with our own times: he who solves it will have understood that history.

We have seen how, beginning approximately in the middle of the last century, the wages and the general working conditions in England began appreciably to improve. English capitalism, having secured by the repeal of the Corn Laws and other protectionist legislation and practices, a steady flow of cheap raw material and foodstuffs, began to make gigantic strides; the export trade grew by leaps and bounds,\* and wealth from all over the world flowed abundantly into England. Thus a fund of wealth was formed, out of which the workers, through their trade unions, could secure something for themselves. This accounts for the rise in the level of wages which we have observed. But, beginning with the middle of the 70's, the upward movement of wages ceased, and sometimes changed into a downward one. Nevertheless, faith in the trade unions, in purely economic methods of fighting, remained unshaken and even seemed to grow in strength, accompanied by a marked ascendancy of an opportunist mentality. The 80's and 90's of the last century represent the lowest point in the class-consciousness of the English workers: action, even in the shape of innocent Labour candidatures as in the middle 70's, was definitely abandoned; individual workers voted either for Liberal or Tory, the very word "revolution" elicited a scornful shrug of the shoulders, if not direct abuse, while drunkenness and betting became particularly prevalent. The last quarter of the last century stands out in the history of the Labour movement, not only of England but of the whole world, as a period of unparalleled stagnation, decay, and complete absence of any vitality. It was a huge stagnant pool covered with a thick crust of motionless slime.

How can this extraordinary fact be explained? How could

\* Its aggregate value in 1854 was £118 million, in 1859 £159 million, in 1864 £218 million, in 1869 £241 million, and in 1873 £317 million; *i.e.*, it nearly trebled in the course of 20 years.

the English working class, faced with no improvement in its wages and with the manifest bankruptcy of trade unionism, continue to support and stand by it even when its very foundation had been radically changed, and nothing but miserable remnants were left of its original functions? In a word, how to account for the continued power of opportunism at a time when the historical conditions which gave it birth seemed to have disappeared?\*

The explanation is to be found in the remarkable movement in the prices of commodities of prime necessity during the period

\* The answer to this question, among others, is sought by Sombart in his *Socialism and Social Movements* (German 8th edition, 1919, pp. 215-221.) Sombart discards the current "idealistic" explanation which ascribes the "peculiar course of the social movement in England" to the wisdom of the ruling classes, and notably to the propaganda of the Christian Socialists. Sombart wishes to give a "realistic" explanation of this phenomenon and finds it, first, in the practicalness of English character, which avoids systematisation and theorising; second, in the economic development of England, which has reduced the economic fluctuations (e.g., crises, unemployment etc.) and enabled the capitalists to pay the workers relatively high wages; and third, in the shrewd appreciation of their own interests by the English employers who gave timely recognition to the trade unions, who passed important legislative measures for the protection of labour, who yielded on the question of the suffrage, and so on. To such a "realistic" explanation one would like to rejoin in the words of Cicero *Si tacuisses philosophus fuisses* (Had you been silent, you would have been a philosopher)! It is obvious that the reference to the practicalness and other features of the English character is not "realism," but one of the stock phrases of philosophers and historians which they are fond of employing whenever they lack any other serviceable explanation. "When thought is wanting, a word is interposed," said Goethe. Instead of solving anything, Sombart himself raises a problem. In this particular instance his explanation is the more irrelevant, as the English worker in the Chartist period showed that he, too, could be carried away by enthusiasm (which, for the rest, is acknowledged by Sombart himself), and it was the trade unionist policy which had proved the essence of unpracticalness. As for the lesser trade fluctuations, we have seen this to be a mere myth. English industry, more than any other is most closely dependent upon world markets, and reacts painfully to the least disturbances in them, so that unemployment, fluctuations in wages etc., do not cease for a moment. More correct is his observation concerning the ability of the English employer to pay higher wages; but the trouble, as we have seen, is that he failed to do so after the second half of the 'seventies. Finally, the reference to the wisdom of the ruling classes in general, although it savours a good deal of the "idealistic" explanation rejected by Sombart, contains a considerable amount of truth, not in the aspect in which it is given by Sombart, but in quite a different one, with which we shall deal later.

under consideration. We shall take as one instance the prices of wheat, a most important article of consumption. The price movements are shown in the following table:—<sup>b</sup>

Year.	s.	d.	Year.	s.	d.
1840	...	66 4	1875	...	45 2
1845	...	50 10	1880	...	44 4
1850	...	40 3	1885	...	32 10
1855	...	74 8	1890	...	31 11
1860	...	53 3	1895	...	23 1
1865	...	41 10	1900	...	25 8
1870	...	46 11	1902	...	28 1

In spite of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the price of wheat continued at a fairly high level until the beginning of the 70's, subject to sharp fluctuation. Since the close of the 70's the United States of America, and later on Canada, exported enormous quantities of wheat, and the prices began to fall steadily, decreasing by about one-half in the course of 20 years. Taking the wheat price of 1871 as 100, the course of wheat prices may be expressed as follows:—

1871	...	...	...	100
1872-81	...	...	...	88.1
1882-91	...	...	...	61.6
1892-1901	...	...	...	48.0

Disregarding casual and light fluctuations in individual years, and considering the movement by decades, we find the price of wheat to have been about halved in the course of thirty years. The same is true of the price of many other articles of food. The following table gives the percentage of such prices on the basis of the year 1900 as 100:—

Year	Wheat	Beef	Milk	Tea	Sugar	45 products combined	
1871	...	210.5	111.2	120.7	192.5	282.0	136.0
1875	...	167.8	127.6	152.0	195.9	236.0	141.4
1880	...	164.7	122.4	131.1	157.7	228.0	129.6
1885	...	122.0	108.6	121.6	141.2	141.2	107.7
1890	...	118.6	100.0	110.3	124.7	127.3	104.0
1895	...	85.8	93.1	106.1	112.3	103.7	91.0
1900	...	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1905	...	110.5	94.8	97.0	84.8	115.8	97.6

<sup>b</sup> The figures given here and below are taken from *British and Foreign Trade and Industrial Conditions, 1903, Annual Abstract of Labour Statistics, Vol. XVII.*, and various issues of the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society.*

In explanation of the last column it should be mentioned that the 45 combined products were not only food and prime necessities in general, but also many things of industrial consumption, e.g., cotton, wool, coal, iron etc., entering as raw material into the production of articles of immediate consumption. Even so we see since 1875 a steady decline in prices, which begin to manifest an upward tendency only in 1905. The prices of meat, milk and tea maintain their downward movement to the end of the period, and only sugar rises in price after the base year, 1900.

All these figures relate to wholesale prices. For the sake of greater precision we shall quote from the official reports the index figures for articles of consumption; though they refer only to London and begin only in 1877 they are very instructive. Taking the prices of 1907 as 100, we get the following:—

Year	Flour	Potatoes	Bread	Meat	Tea	Sugar	Butter	All com- bined
1877 ...	200.7	181.1	158.2	141.1	120.0	160.0	97.6	143.0
1880 ...	160.0	178.3	152.5	142.1	120.0	130.0	90.1	136.0
1885 ...	102.9	134.0	118.2	122.8	120.0	180.0	85.8	111.0
1890 ...	100.0	114.7	130.6	96.3	110.0	80.0	92.7	102.0
1895 ...	77.1	133.8	91.8	96.3	90.0	60.0	88.1	91.0
1900 ...	97.1	91.5	107.5	100.0	100.0	60.0	101.0	96.0

A close examination of this table will show the great advantages gained by the workers from the decline of prices in the last quarter of the last century, in the sense of an increase in their real wages. In the period between 1877 and 1895—the period of the triumph of Free Trade, which enabled England to derive full benefit from the huge decline in prices on the world markets—the retail price of flour in London dropped over 120 points, that of potatoes 47 points, of bread over 66 points, of tea 30 points, of sugar 100 points, nearly one-third,\* of butter—for which prices had been stable until the appearance of large quantities of Canadian and Siberian butter on the English market—by slightly over 9 points. Taking it all in all, the budget of a working class family in London so far as prime necessities were concerned, dropped over 50 per cent. during that period. This was the precise extent to which the real wages of the workers increased, although nominal wages remained stationary. One of England's foremost statisticians brought out

\* That was the time when Germany and Russia began to pay export bounties on sugar, and Russian sugar was used for feeding pigs in Yorkshire.

this important fact with clearness in the following table, in which the index figures of nominal wages were taken from official reports, using those of 1900 as 100:—\*

Year.	Nominal Wages.		Year.	Real Wages.	
	Nominal	Real		Nominal	Real
1879 ...	83.3	121	1897 ...	90.8	170
1880-84 ...	84.9	131	1898 ...	93.2	169
1885-89 ...	84.3	141	1899 ...	95.3	176
1890-94 ...	90.2	157	1900 ...	100.0	179 (max.)
1895 ...	89.1	163	1905 ...	97.0	163
1896 ...	89.9	170	1907 ...	101.7 (max.)	170

It was computed by the author of the table that in 1907 nominal wages had reached their maximum, standing at 22 per cent. over the figure for 1879, but that real wages had increased during the same period by 44 per cent., or by 48 per cent. when taking the maximum figure reached in 1900. The rise in real wages, as distinguished from that in nominal wages, was subject to very little fluctuation, going on steadily from year to year.

Here we find the key to the history of the English Labour movement during the whole post-Chartist period till 1910, in all its aspects. The middle of the 70's had marked a turning point in the fortunes of English capitalism. It had sustained a severe blow from the crisis of 1873, unprecedented in its intensity and duration, and the crisis was followed by the growing competition of the new industrial countries—United Germany and an America emancipated from slavery. English exports, which stood at £317,000,000 in the year of the crisis (in the preceding year it had amounted to more than £321,000,000), went down to £249,000,000 in 1878. Then exports began to rise again, reaching £313,000,000 in 1882, and after that fluctuated within fairly narrow limits, around the figure of £280,000,000 to £290,000,000, down to the end of the century. In the middle of the 90's exports were about £285,000,000, after which they began to rise again, in line with the rising prices on the world markets. English capitalism lost its industrial monopoly, and henceforth its fortunes progressed more slowly and more hesitatingly. The English capitalist, realising the change in the circumstances, began to tighten the strings of his purse. Accordingly, the British worker was finding it more and more difficult to push his demands

\* G. H. Wood in the *Journal of Royal Statistical Society*, June, 1916.



through the machinery of conciliation and arbitration, there was a halt in the rise in wages, and finally they came to a standstill. Not content with this, English capitalism assumed the offensive, attacking the organisations of the working class, and cutting wages wherever possible. One would have expected the working class, in such circumstances, to have suffered disappointment in its methods of action, for the sliding scales were used against the workers as profit and prices were falling, and the whole machinery of conciliation and arbitration ceased to give satisfaction. Nevertheless we find the working class unusually calm, and even its fight for the right of combination does not lead to any revolutionary action. Why was it so? Because from that time onwards the prices of prime necessities began to fall, and what the workers, in different circumstances, would have had to fight for, now came to them quite painlessly, without any effort, almost automatically, as though falling from the skies. Wages did not increase, or they did so only very slowly. Sometimes they dropped, but the worker, instead of experiencing distress, was, on the contrary, feeling appreciable relief, as though being paid dividends. For the same shilling or pound, which he had been getting for several years without variation, he was now receiving, month by month and year by year, more bread, more meat, more sugar and more tea—he, who had hitherto been accustomed to wear the cast-off clothing of his "betters," was now able to buy cheap but new clothing and footwear,\* and could even afford the luxury of buying an evening paper, an occasional theatre ticket, and, in the course of time, a week's trip to the seaside. What did it matter to him if wages did not increase, so long as his money was buying 20, 30 and even 50 per cent. more than before? Why

\* Down to the middle of the 'seventies there were very few workers who could afford to purchase new clothes. Usually they wore second-hand clothes procured from the great army of dealers which had grown up in that line. Cheap clothing appeared in England as a result of the influx of poor Jewish emigrants from Russia, Rumania and other countries where they were persecuted. Those emigrants were the pioneers in the manufacture of wholesale clothing, reducing the cost of production to such an extent that bespoke tailoring was retained by a few shops with a wealthy clientele. The part played by alien immigration may seem to introduce a new factor which has nothing in common with the one put forward, but the aliens who had concentrated in the tailoring trade were only able to live and to work so cheaply because of the steady decline in the prices of commodities in general.

should he fight and go on strike for an increase of five or ten shillings on wages when he was getting it without any fighting, without any unpleasantness and without privations? It is worthy of note that simultaneously with the progressive decline in prices, substitutes came generally into use; instead of China tea there appeared on the market the cheaper herb from India and Ceylon, also described as tea, but a good deal worse than the genuine article; similarly there appeared cheap Virginia tobacco instead of the Turkish brand; margarine instead of butter (margarine was imported and then manufactured at home and obtains a large sale thanks to its cheapness and ample advertisement); frozen meat imported from Australia was boomed by the eulogistic testimonials of the best doctors and is sold at half the price of English meat; then came imitation leather, imitation wool, and even imitation jewellery, and a hundred and one other cheap substitutes for the consumption of the working class. The worker may have realised that he was not getting the real stuff, but his shilling was now buying not only a pound of tea, but also getting a premium in the shape of a teapot or a cup and saucer; not only a pound of margarine, but also an extra pound of overweight; he could even afford to make his wife or daughter a holiday gift of some cheap jewellery (glass), or of a pair of dainty slippers (with paper soles), and get himself a suit of clothes purchased for 20s. Even pianos were now to be obtained at £12 to £15 apiece by monthly instalments of a few shillings. A new light dawned upon the little world of the working class family, and when old people told their reminiscences of the by-gone years, the young people could only thank their lucky star for their newly found happiness.\*

\* At one time Liberals of all shades were shedding tears of happiness over the lucky lot of the British worker and tried to prove that he was happier than his brethren on the Continent. In 1908 the Liberal Government itself supported this thesis in the course of the controversy with the tariff reformers and published a voluminous statistical Blue Book on the question of the comparative cost of living in England and Germany, showing the advantages enjoyed in all these aspects by the British worker. In this connection I published an article in the *Neue Zeit* (November 27, 1908) from which I may perhaps be allowed to make the following quotation, apologising in advance for its length:

"What has the Blue Book shown? It has shown that the German worker inhabits smaller and dearer tenements, that he also pays more for his food and that he works longer hours and earns less per hour or per picce than the British worker. The conclusion is that

No wonder that, receiving all these blessings without struggle and without politics the worker finally and utterly dismissed all thought of them and spoke with profound contempt of his Continental brethren who apparently did not possess such mysterious and generous benefactors, and had to fight strenuously for every little gain they made. Since the capitalists too were extremely delighted with a dispensation of a divine providence under which the worker was having a good time, whilst he, the capitalist, was not called upon to make any sacrifices out of his own pocket, peace and goodwill were established between the two classes as never before. Why quarrel indeed, when both sides were enjoying life, without having to make any sacrifice? Had not experience shown that the capitalist had not the slightest wish to gobble up the worker, nor the worker to gobble up the capitalist? Both could exist side by side, helping one another, because—mark you—the whole secret consisted in the increase of industrial output enabling the country to exchange its produce the British worker is better situated than the German. But this must not be applied to the British proletariat as a whole, because it is valid for only one section of it. Let us take housing conditions. It is true that rent forms the most important part of the costs of a dwelling, but it is not the only one. To inhabit a house or a tenement involves lighting, heating, and cleaning it, and each of these items is very high in consequence of certain peculiar conditions of English life. Gas or oil may be cheaper in England than in Germany, but is used in England much more than on the Continent because of the misty, foggy, smoky and sooty air in English towns, which makes it darker at an earlier hour, especially in the winter, and oftens turns day into night. It is the same with heating. Coal is certainly cheaper in England, but because of the open fire-places it must be used in enormous quantities if the house is to be kept warm. The dirty air of English industrial towns fills the house with dust and soot and the English housewife has to devote immense labour and time to cleaning. Thus, what the British worker gains in lower rent is lost by him in other directions, and the cost of living so far as housing conditions are concerned is approximately the same as on the Continent. As regards the number of rooms in English houses, English rooms are on an average considerably smaller than the German, and are used in England much more than on the Continent, where social life out of doors, in restaurants, cafes and public parks is much more widespread. Hence the importance of a more roomy house in England cannot by any means be measured by Continental standards. In England a small house is quite unbearable, and a four-roomed tenement contributes to the amenities of life in England no more than a three-roomed house on the Continent. As for clothing, linen, shoes etc., they may be cheaper in England, but involve greater expense than on

with the whole world, while Free Trade brought in the maximum profit on foreign trade. Hence the moral: Work, work, work; stick to Free Trade, and . . . no class struggle! Not Marx, but Cobden is the benefactor of the working class.

Hitherto it has been customary to explain the opportunist mentality and sentiments of the English proletariat as chiefly due to one fact—British predominance in the industrial world, which has enabled the English capitalist to dole out more or less considerable crumbs to the working class. This explanation is obviously inadequate, since the opportunist psychology of the English worker became particularly noticeable at the very period when England's industrial world-monopoly had come to an end, and English capitalism grew rather niggardly. Our explanation furnishes the only effective key to the solution of this extremely interesting and important historical enigma, which, be it noted in passing, was not confined to England alone, but existed in milder and more disguised form, in other countries of capitalist development, particularly in Germany. The progressive decline the Continent because the atmosphere in English industrial towns destroys everything in a short time and necessitates constant renewal and washing. It is probable that an average working class family in England does not expend on clothing or personal linen more than a similar family in Germany, but this economy is achieved in the same way as in heating—clothes are threadbare and the standard of life is lowered. This, by the way, explains the phenomenon which strikes every Continental visitor, namely, that the British worker does not look nearly so clean and neat as the foreigner. Lastly, it is to be observed that the figures in the Blue Book refer to but a few groups of the working class, and those the best situated. The three industries investigated are among the best organised in England and Germany; the three budget groups which are the subject of comparison in respect of food and prices are also the best paid, and only rents are quoted for nearly all sections of the working class population. Undoubtedly the highest earnings, etc., are higher in England than in Germany, but the lowest are lower than in Germany, while the middle earnings are roughly the same. The highest paid section in England is smaller than anywhere else, while a far greater part of the proletariat enjoys a much lower standard of life. Nowhere is the gulf between the best and the worst paid sections of the working class so broad, so deep, and so impassable as in England. The progress of the British working class, of which so much has been written both in England and abroad, must be placed almost entirely to the account of the labour aristocracy which numbers about one sixth, and certainly not more than one fourth of the entire working class. The condition of the rest of the masses is certainly not better, and probably even worse, than that of the corresponding sections in all other civilised countries of Europe."

in the prices of commodities was the factor which assuaged the distress among the working class, blunted its militancy against the employers, and promoted and consolidated the policy of opportunism with all its logical consequences.

The same key will help us to solve some other mysteries which directly or indirectly concern the fortunes of the English working class. In the first place, the progressive decline in prices has preserved the existence of the lower middle class (petty bourgeoisie)—the small shop-keeper and even the small producer—in the very teeth of the growth and concentration of capital and large scale production. The lower middle class in England was saved in time by the repeal of the Corn Laws and the introduction of Free Trade (rather, of free imports), which, by cheapening consumption, enabled it to hold its own against the big capitalists. The lower middle class then deserted the Chartist cause and made its peace with the new order, and the workers were isolated and defeated. A similar service was rendered to the lower middle class by the progressive decline in prices which began in the middle of the 70's, when its existence was again imperilled by the development of co-operative trading and by the invasion of capitalist joint stock enterprise into the retail trade in general. The low cost of living saved it once again from disaster, and even enabled it to recruit from the working class: the unemployed engineer or tailor occasionally succeeded in establishing himself as an independent artisan, or the worker in regular employment, earning fair wages, opened a little shop for his wife. Such proximity between the working and lower middle class was bound to affect the mentality of the former, strengthening its opportunist tendency.

Secondly, the progressive decline in prices, while blunting the interest of the English worker in higher wages and, consequently, the desire to fight for them, created in him an increased interest in the cheapening of commodities, in other words, it created the psychology of the consumer. From a militant proletarian the English worker turned into a petty bourgeois interested not so much in the income as in the expenditure side of his budget. This explains his admiration for Free Trade which enabled him to obtain commodities from all parts of the world at the lowest market prices. Free Trade became to him a sort of fetish whose sanctity admitted of no debate. This, in its turn, caused him to give his allegiance to the Liberal Party which had

made the maintenance and development of Free Trade the main plank in its programme and built upon it its scheme of national budgets with low taxes and excise duties and the gradual reduction of the National Debt by means of a sinking fund which ensured the stability of English currency on the world market. Gladstone as far back as the 50's, based his budget upon Free Trade principles, having reduced the sugar and tea duties and introduced the income tax for the purpose of balancing the budget. Since that time the reduction of indirect and the development of direct taxation became the main fiscal cry of the Liberal Party, which gained it great popularity among the English working class. For a long time it constituted one of the strongest links in the chain by which English Liberalism had fastened to itself the English proletariat, and it was only the formation of a Labour Party, equally pledged to Free Trade and a consumers' platform, that gradually loosened the bond. He who studies the historical problem of the influence of Liberalism in England should not lose sight of this fact. Many were the instances in the social history of England when the Liberal Party, merely by raising the cry: "Free Trade is in danger," could make the workers forget all its transgressions, as well as their own misery, and give it a further lease in office by supporting it at the polls.

Favourable price conditions in various ways strengthened the opportunist policy which was originally used after the breakdown of Chartism, in the favourable industrial conditions of the 50's and 60's of the nineteenth century. It must be admitted that the second period was more dangerous and monstrous than the first, since the very course of economic development rendered militancy superfluous, as it were, by automatically eliminating action between the workers and the employers, blunting it when it arose, and thus imbuing the workers with a belief in the uselessness, and even harmfulness of the class struggle. True, they saw how the employers were growing rich, and how cleverly and unscrupulously they were making use of the machinery of conciliation and arbitration to obstruct the workers' demands, and how shamelessly they themselves were betrayed by their own leaders who at times thwarted their efforts to apply coercion where the usual method of persuasion proved unavailing. Nevertheless they did not break with the opportunist tactics, as their material condition was improving in spite of everything; thus improvement created a mentality to which militancy seemed needless effort.

CHAPTER SIX  
STEMMING THE TIDE OF SOCIALISM

**C**LASS-CONSCIOUSNESS, as all consciousness, is determined by existence; existence, however, is not limited to the existence of one class, but also embraces the interaction of classes. The lack of class-consciousness among the English proletariat of the post-Chartist period, which assumed the specific forms of opportunism, cannot be thoroughly understood from the conditions of existence of the proletariat alone, detached from the rest of society: we must include in our field of vision the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which, as the dominant class, could render the circumstances propitious or otherwise for the development of an opportunist mentality among the workers. In this connection it may be quite definitely stated that the political skill and sagacity of the English bourgeoisie played a prominent part in fostering and shaping the opportunist ideology of the English proletariat. To be sure, this political sagacity in the long run was no mystical product of the "race"; it was itself the result of historical practice born of the objective conditions of the development and existence of this bourgeoisie. However that may be, the circumstances had so shaped themselves that there happened to be in existence an astute and experienced bourgeoisie to take advantage of the sentiments which arose among the working class as the result of increased wages, followed by a decline in prices, in order to foster and direct them by a suitable policy. Examples of this political sagacity we have seen already on the day after the break-up of Chartism. In the person of Mr. Mundella we have met a representative of the same subtle art. If the reader will delve into the earlier documents of the Labour movement he will find such astute bourgeois minds as far back as the 20's of the nineteenth century, during the campaign for the repeal of the Combination laws, when the noted economist J. R. McCulloch, a friend and associate of Francis Place, wrote his famous plea on behalf of trade unionism in an article in the *Edinburgh Review* (January, 1824).

"All the works which the intelligence, the cunning, and the privations of workmen can suggest, for defeating and thwarting their (the combination laws') operation, are resorted to from a

through conviction of their gross partiality and unfairness. Unfortunately, however, the mischief does not stop here. The mere breaking through an unjust and absurd regulation, if it be a fault at all, is certainly one of a very venial description. The real evil consists not so much in what is actually done, as in what it stimulates to do—in the contempt which it is but too apt to generate for all the institutions which have received the sanction of society and which are necessary to its existence. Men of reflective habits distinguish between those laws which are either oppressive and unjust or unnecessary and inexpedient, and those which conspire to secure the property, the liberties and the rights of the different classes. But the generality of men are not actuated by such motives. . . . The generality of men invariably lay the abuse of a principle to the charge of the principle itself, and because the legislature have unjustly prevented workmen from combining together to raise wages, they may not be disinclined, should a convenient opportunity present itself, to revenge themselves by combining together to overthrow the legislature.”

Here we have the first, and almost classical, formulation of the idea that the trade unions constitute a sort of safety valve, the regular working of which insures bourgeois society against revolution. No doubt, in another sense, trade unions are an evil. More than once did reactionary-minded capitalists and feudal aristocratic cliques savagely attack not only the working class, but even the liberal minded section of the bourgeoisie, on the question whether to accept this evil confronting society in order to ward off the greater but still problematic one of revolution. As in the 20's, when the question at issue was the right of combination in general, so throughout the subsequent stages of the struggle for the rights of the trade unions, the victory in the end remained with the enlightened elements of the ruling class, who continued the traditions of Place, McCulloch and their friends. This was the great historical advantage of the English over the Continental bourgeoisie, which possessed neither the courage nor the strength to seek in peaceful trade unionism insurance against revolutionary tendencies among the proletariat.

We cannot deal here in detail with this remarkable development of relations between the English bourgeoisie and the English working class, but some of its most important aspects are worthy of mention. We have already seen the profound impression produced on some sections of the English proletariat, at a moment of



extreme tension in the campaign against the trade unions, by the conciliatory policy of one great capitalist, Mr. Mundella, who was put up by the workers of Sheffield as their Parliamentary candidate at the first elections which followed their enfranchisement. The same capitalist, whose activity has not been adequately appreciated even in England, set an example of intelligent treatment of the trade unions in another direction. In 1872 an emergency congress of the trade unions was held at Nottingham. It was a year of fierce reaction in Europe, scarcely recovered from its fright at the red spectre of the Paris Commune. The congress itself had been called for the special purpose of discussing the savage attacks on English trade unionism, which threatened it with destruction thanks to the clever lawyers and unscrupulous courts who were continually discovering new cracks in the legislation regulating the existence and activities of the trade unions. Was the congress suppressed, and its members arrested? Nothing of the kind. Acting upon Mr. Mundella's advice, the town authorities with the Mayor at their head attended its opening and solemnly extended a hearty welcome. Later an official banquet to the delegates was given at the Town Hall, where they were entertained by the leading citizens, including Mr. Mundella himself. There were also excursions, "at homes," and other "honours" showered upon them. It was a rare sensation, and the Labour delegates themselves were quite taken aback at first. At one of these banquets, given at the Town Hall—so we are told by one of the historians of trade unionism\*—one of the delegates, in reply to the toast of "The Queen," shouted "Flunkeyism," and remained seated, together with some half-dozen of his comrades. The example set by the bourgeoisie of Nottingham found imitators, and from that time trade union congresses invariably met with receptions and ceremonies given by city authorities and Liberal manufacturers and landlords, symbolising a sort of inter-class solidarity. The workers, on their part, soon acquired a taste for this kind of treatment, considering it a tribute to their power, and a proof of their class equality. Liberal publicists on the Continent have always expressed their admiration for this touching display of cordiality between the classes, which was smothering the last spark of class dignity and class-consciousness in the proletariat. In England the master class knew what it was about. It wanted to demonstrate to the workers that there was no opposition

\* Howell, *Conflicts of Capital and Labour*, p. 436.

between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie, and for this purpose it was prepared to go to any length. When the workers in 1874, in answer to the campaign waged against the trade unions by reactionary employers, proceeded to put their own parliamentary candidates in the field, and backed by prominent radicals like Frederic Harrison, Prof. Beesly and John Stuart Mill, and even won seats, the bourgeoisie was at first scared to death, but it soon rallied and bravely met the demands of the workers. The Conservative Government, then in power, made haste to redress by legislation the decision of the courts which had encroached upon the right of combination that occasioned the revolt of the workers, while the Liberals suddenly discovered that the cause of the workers was their very own, that it was the duty of the Liberal Party to help the workers in furthering their trade union rights, and that therefore the Labour candidates should be included in the Liberal lists and supported by the party. Indeed, in the by-elections in 1878 there were two trade union leaders among the Liberal candidates, and two years later in the general election quite a number of constituencies were set aside for Labour by the Liberal Party. Led by Gladstone, the Liberals went even further. On taking office, they not only passed an Employers' Liability Act long since demanded by the workers (although in a rather mutilated form), but even provided for the appointment of workers as factory inspectors, an office which had hitherto been a monopoly of bourgeois professionals. A trade union leader was forthwith appointed at a handsome salary. Not content with this, the Liberal Government passed an Act for the remuneration of justices of the peace, and immediately appointed four Labour justices. Those familiar with the social history of England, and particularly with the historical chapters in the first volume of *Capital*, know what a bulwark of the landed aristocracy this institution had been in the course of centuries, and will realise what an unheard of "honour" was bestowed by this reform upon the working class. We use the term "honour" advisedly, because since the 30's the real importance of the justices of the peace in England had been reduced almost to nil, and this very fact accounts for the generous Liberalism of Gladstone's government, the greatest bluffer—if one might say so—in the modern social and political history of England. Even this fairly platonic honour proved of great moral effect, which was further amplified in 1886, when two prominent Labour leaders, Messrs. Burt and Broadhurst, were given under-

secretaryships in the Liberal Cabinet. This was quite the "limit"; members of trade unions, pariahs but a short while since, had been made members of the Government. How was this achieved? Not by revolutionary proclamations and risings, as practised by the Chartists, but by a sane policy of compromise and conciliation, by the recognition of the rights of the employers and of bourgeois society as a whole—in a word, by the policy pursued by the trade unions of the post-Chartist period. Of course, this participation in the government of the country was a mere illusion, which brought a mocking smile to the lips of many a Gladstonian Liberal. But in certain conditions even an illusion may play a historical part, and in this case the part was a decisive one. About this time, the middle of the 80's, a Socialist movement of modern type arose in England, but thanks to the clever tactics of the Liberal bourgeoisie it met nowhere with such strong opposition as in the ranks of Labour itself, captured as it had been by Liberalism. At the Trades Union Congress in 1890 a resolution was moved by the Socialists calling upon the Government to establish the legal eight-hour day. A proposal of this kind did not then sound such wild heresy as it would have done in the earlier years when Liberal individualism had been in its prime. Among the radical reformers of those days were to be found such exalted personages and politicians as Lord Rosebery, and the Fabians themselves were already enjoying popularity in high Liberal quarters. But to the Labour leaders the idea of the legislative regulation of the working day seemed an unwarranted interference in the practice of voluntary agreements with the employers, and the Social Democratic proposal was subjected to scathing criticism. One of the speakers declared that "he did not belong to those who would ask others to do that which they might do for themselves"; another one opined that "to invoke the aid of Parliament was a very risky experiment whose danger outweighed the advantages that might be obtained"; a third simply ridiculed "the meekness of those who would appeal to Parliament for assistance." These arguments expressed the political stupidity of smug and well-fed men who had sold themselves body and soul to the masters. At the same Congress another heretical resolution was moved by the Socialists, in favour of the organisation of municipal workshops and State agricultural farms for the unemployed. This proposal was of doubtful scientific and practical value; but the Congress attacked it from the standpoint

of "principle": perhaps the Socialists would like to municipalise the moon? was the sarcastic observation of an opponent. As the Socialists persevered in moving their impractical proposals at every trade union congress, the leaders resolved to make a little *coup d'état*, and in 1895 the method of representation at the congress was changed by excluding from them the local trades councils, in which, thanks to their broader outlook, the Socialists had succeeded in gaining considerable influence. This drastic change put an end to the Socialist agitation at the congresses, as Socialists no longer had the same opportunities of appearing as delegates. This measure, by the way, had for its author none other than John Burns, who a few years before had been a revolutionary leader of Social-Democracy, but in 1893 supported in the House of Commons the action of the Home Secretary, Mr. Asquith, in ordering the shooting of miners on strike at Featherstone. Burns afterwards obtained his reward in the shape of a seat in the Cabinets of Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman and Mr. Asquith.

Faced with such behaviour on the part of the Labour leaders, the Liberal bourgeoisie was naturally elated with the success of its educational work, and cherished trade unionism as the apple of its eye. This was strikingly demonstrated during the engineers' strike of 1897, one of the severest battles between capital and labour in those days. At the head of the Employers' Association was an American plutocrat by the name of Colonel Dyer. This fact largely accounts for the spirit of aggressive energy and domineering, so alien to the British practice of the previous two decades of fostering friendly relations between employers and workmen, and which caused a dispute about hours of labour to develop into a strike, and the strike to develop into a general lock-out in the entire industry. In addition, the employers declined to negotiate with the union, on the ground that it had only 70,000 members whereas there were about half a million people employed in the engineering trade, and insisted on direct bargaining with the strikers. In this way the dispute was converted into a bitter fight on the principle of recognition or non-recognition of the union. In a way the employers were not altogether wrong: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers—one of the founders, as the reader will remember, of post-Chartist trade unionism and an apostle of opportunism, was one of the most exclusive aristocratic trade unions and really had no right to speak on behalf of the large masses employed in the industry.

Nevertheless, the position taken up by the employers was a menace to the heritage, if not to the existence of trade unionism, and this greatly excited public opinion in England. So long as the dispute was proceeding on the usual lines of bargaining between the employers and the workers, it aroused but little interest in bourgeois circles, whose sympathies, if any, were rather on the side of the employers. But the situation instantly changed when Dyer's organisation took up the "un-English" position of being "masters in their own shops." The Liberal and Radical press began to assail the provocative policy of the employers, to collect subscriptions for the Strike Fund, and to appeal to the Government to intervene, and to prevent further disaster. The disasters of which the Liberals were apprehensive were clearly stated by the late Canon Barnett, Warden of Toynbee Hall, who, in sending his contribution for the benefit of the strikers' families, wrote in a letter to the *Daily Chronicle* that he supported the appeal launched by that paper on behalf of the strikers "in the firm conviction that if the trade unions were destroyed, their places would be taken by forces dangerous to the life of our country." And in its leading article the *Daily Chronicle* wrote:—

"If Colonel Dyer and the fighting masters had their way, the A.S.E. would have been by now reduced to a 'goose club,' as someone aptly said at Exeter Hall; this result would have been hailed, for the moment, with Tory acclamations. But it would obviously have meant the beginning of a period of violent labour struggle by the methods of political action, and the elections to every governing body in the country would have been the battleground of the industrial class. . . . Now, trades unionism is a force which on the whole makes for rational conservatism. It gives responsibility to those men who are marked out as the natural leaders of democracy. It is a school of government. It is certainly a barrier against the more formless and ill-considered kinds of socialist theory. . . . England is being pushed into perilous courses by men who do not understand the traditions and temper of her people. It is in the interest of those who desire in the main to keep her as she is, sustained by the same general balance of forces as to-day hold her free and stable, to intervene before the basis of workmen's politics and the character of the relations between class and class undergo a vital and alarming change."

One cannot refrain from a tribute of admiration for the class wisdom shown by these words. Even the Conservative

Government, then in power, took them to heart, and after some hesitation requested Lord Rosebery to take upon himself the part of a mediator. Both sides accepted, and the strike was settled "before the basis of workmen's politics" had undergone a change. It is interesting to note that a prominent part in the agitation for the speedy restoration of social peace was taken by one of the foremost bourgeois economists of the time, Dr. L. Brentano, who enjoyed a great reputation in England. In a letter to Mr. George Barnes, the secretary of the A.S.E., he wrote as follows:—

"Your society gave the proof that it was possible in the existing order of things for the working classes to rise to a greater share in the culture and improvement of mankind. Its working and its successes were by far the strongest argument against all revolutionary endeavours on the part of the working classes. . . . Its downfall would, I am afraid, be considered all over the world as the definite failure of trade unionism. But the failure would by no means mean the triumph of the employers. It would mean the strengthening of the revolutionary tendencies all over the world. England, which hitherto boasted of the absence of a revolutionary Labour Party of any serious importance, would henceforth rival in this with the Continent."

This is how the capitalist class of the whole world appreciated English trade unionism at the time of its great devotion to the policy of compromise with the bourgeois world. This appreciation was perfectly justified. The capitalist world had in trade unionism a barrier to Socialism much more effective than any legislative measures or military force. In face of this is it to be wondered at that the Socialist movement in England remained for a long time so weak?

There used to be in the past a good deal of discussion and perplexity as to the reason for the absence of a Socialist movement of any strength in England. After what has been said in the preceding chapters, there is no cause for perplexity on that score. On the contrary, there would have been much justification for perplexity if a strong Socialist movement had sprung up in those circumstances. The fact of the matter is that Socialism in England did not arise from the revolutionary sentiments of the working class. It did not emerge from the ranks of the workers at all, and it did not reflect in any way the ideas and aspirations of any considerable sections of the masses. It was started by a small

group of intellectuals disappointed in Liberalism, and only in the course of time did it attract a small number of the more responsive elements from among the ranks of the working and lower middle class. An attempt by a group of workers to form a Labour Socialist Party proved an abject failure. Socialism came to England from without, not from within, and for this reason it remained a movement of ideas, and not one of the working class. It was the time—the beginning of the 80's—when under the stress of new and growing foreign competition, aggravated by the continuous industrial depression, the force of Liberal ideas began to wane, to lose their external attractiveness, and to yield to the pressure of the new demands of industrial capital. Capitalists in England, watching the example of the German Empire, and experiencing the tremendous pressure of its well organised political and economic life, involuntarily asked themselves whether the old slogans of *laissez-faire* and free trade, of self-help and the sufficiency of the individual *entrepreneur* and pioneer, slogans with which in the past they had conquered the world, and whose political reflection was Liberalism, with its "administrative nihilism"—as Huxley called it—its negative doctrines of the State and the Empire, its idealisation of small nationalities and the "autonomous individual," were really imprescriptible and eternal. In accordance with this new tendency of thought, the first new movement was started in favour of protectionism—in the timorous disguise of the "Fair Trade Movement"—of closer co-operation with the Colonies and Dominions in one compact Empire, of a more active State economic policy, of a more active and imperialist ("forward") foreign policy, and so on. Liberalism, as represented by its greatest leader, Mr. Gladstone, could not resist the clamour of these new ideas which, in their totality, amounted to a repudiation of all its former principles and, as demonstrated by the imperialist adventure in Egypt and the barbarous coercion laws in Ireland, was gradually gliding into neo-conservative channels.

The Democratic (three years afterwards changed into Social-Democratic) Federation founded by Hyndman in 1881 was the expression of the disappointment which had overtaken a portion of the English intelligentsia as a result of the new tendencies in Liberalism. Hyndman himself, coming of a wealthy middle class family, had hitherto been a radical, and having lost faith in Liberalism and the Liberal watchwords, was for a long time politically at sea until he came across Marx's *Capital*. Assisted

by a band of intellectuals in the same position as himself, and a small group of workers, he founded the organisation which he expected to become a mass party. All his efforts, however, as well as those of his friends, proving unavailing: the mass of the workers—particularly those organised—turned a deaf ear to all appeals. To the contempt for Liberalism which had betrayed its own principles, although it still held in moral captivity the upper ranks of organised labour and through them, the masses—Hyndman and his friends now added a profound scorn for trade unionism as a form of organised labour barring the way to the revolutionary development of class consciousness. Leaving the trade unions severely alone, the Federation made its appeal to the unorganised masses of the workers, such as the unemployed, who seemed to promise larger revolutionary possibilities. The work performed by the Federation among these elements was truly colossal: it extended over a number of years, and was renewed at every industrial crisis throughout the course of the Federation's career. It formed a tradition, which has now passed on to the Communist Party as the direct successor in direct line to the organisation founded by Hyndman some forty years ago. It frequently looked as though this agitation would at last arouse the mass of the workers—the genuine lower ranks of labour—from their state of political apathy, and lead them on to revolutionary self-assertion and revolutionary action. But such hopes invariably ended in disillusionment, since even the unorganised section of the working class shared in the ideology fostered by those organised in trade unions, and the latter held aloof from this agitation and were even opposed to it. One thing was achieved by the agitation: it taught the unorganised "general labourers" the value of action, and at the close of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's some sections of them—*e.g.*, dockers, gas workers, van, cart and cab drivers, girl workers in match factories—came out in open fight against the capitalists, and founded their own trade unions. This so-called "new" trade unionism, however, also turned out non-revolutionary, and brought no mass adherents to the Federation. So it continued throughout the period under review. By dint of enormous efforts and self-sacrifice the Federation succeeded in enrolling a few thousand members of the working class, but these small bands could only engage in propaganda, and had no political influence on the mass of the workers demoralised by opportunism. The parliamentary candidates put up by the



Federation were invariably defeated, finding themselves every time at the bottom of the poll; and although its members, as we have seen, managed to get into trade union congresses, and even to get Socialist resolutions adopted, the practical importance of the latter was quite insignificant. It may be said that the Federation (which afterwards changed its name into the Social Democratic Party, and finally into the British Socialist Party) remained a small propagandist organisation all the way through, failing to exercise any direct influence upon the working class.

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that it could not have been otherwise. What room was there for revolutionary Marx in a working class whose peculiar economic conditions prevented the development of class-consciousness and which therefore remained non-political, opportunist and counter-revolutionary? This can be seen to-day; but it was not quite so clear to the men of that time, some of whom ascribed the failure of the movement founded and led by Hyndman to the incompatibility of Marxist Socialism with English conditions, while others ascribed it to the incorrect application of Marxist methods to the solution of the tactical problems of the English Labour movement. Among the latter were Marx and Engels themselves—soon afterwards, Engels alone, who first welcomed the withdrawal from the Federation of some prominent members led by William Morris and the Avelings. They formed the Socialist League, and supported the independent agitation for an eight-hour day carried on by the Avelings and Mr. Will Thorne in the East End of London, as the means towards the creation of a new Labour movement based on a Socialist platform which bridged the gulf between economics and politics. These efforts were even more fruitless than those of the Federation. The League came out with a programme of Socialist education, then denied the value of parliamentary action and of politics in general, adopted an Anarchist platform, and finally broke up towards the close of the 80's. William Morris and the Avelings rejoined the Federation. As for the eight-hour day agitation, it fizzled out without having promoted any new movement or organisation.

More serious were the attempts of those who denied the Marxist doctrine altogether, and its application to English conditions in particular. First in point of time were the Fabians, with Mr. Sidney Webb and Mr. George Bernard Shaw at their head, who had formed their organisation as far back as 1884. It was

not intended by its founders to be a political party at all, but merely a propagandist society engaged in spreading the doctrine of Fabian socialism, the only genuine English brand of Socialism. The class theory of society and the theory of class antagonisms were discarded, and so were, of course, the tactics of the class struggle. The very idea of revolution was denied and, of course, the Labour theory of value. Society develops by small functional and structural changes, evolving step by step, passing at the given moment into the socialist commonwealth by means of reform. The reforms consist in substituting public and State ownership for individual and private ownership, so that the abolition of the toll-gates, the construction of public gardens, slaughter-houses and baths, municipal tramways and municipal water supply, a nationalised post office and nationalised railways etc., all are Socialism or so many instalments towards the Socialist Commonwealth, legislative reform on these being the road to Socialism. In other words, State Socialism (including the municipal variety) is real Socialism and the ultimate goal of mankind. But such Socialism is identical with capitalism, since it retains the institution of hired labour! Quite so—said Fabians—for hired labour would not be abolished under Socialism. A well-ordered national and municipal economy in which all those able to work are giving their services for a fair remuneration—this is Socialism, and to this is the modern development of society leaning. For a long time the Fabians could not well explain who or what was driving society to such a course of development and, referring to the bankruptcy of individualist ideals even among the Liberals, were inclined to consider them as likely promoters of "collectivist" reforms. To this end they tried to influence them, proclaiming a policy of "permeation," the only correct policy for Socialists. The results were fairly barren. True, Lord Rosebery consented to become the chairman of the newly formed London County Council, which was to play the rôle of a model municipality in the Fabian sense, and even Mr. Sidney Webb became a member of that body. Another aristocrat, and Gladstone's most influential successor in the Liberal Party, Sir William Harcourt, declared publicly: "We are all Socialists nowadays!" Still, nothing came of those auspicious experiments, and the Fabians, in despair, turned to the working class, and are at present co-operating with the Labour Party. But while they were engaged in "permeating" Liberalism, they became themselves so thoroughly permeated by

Liberalism that it was difficult to distinguish a Fabian Socialist from the newer sort of Liberal: both advocated the extension of the functions of the State, both were inclined to reformism and protectionism, and when the Boer War broke out, both found themselves in the imperialist camp. In short, Fabian Socialism was the English edition of the German Staats-Sozialismus of the time of Bismarck, or of the subsequent National-Sozialismus of Naumann and Maurenbrecher—a mixture of reformism from above and strong bureaucratic State authority (Sozial-Monarchie, according to German terminology)—and as such, of course, it had nothing in common with the movement of the working class.

As against this, the movement founded by Keir Hardie at the end of the 80's in Scotland, and a little later in England, from the very first aimed at becoming a mass movement of the working class upon a political and Socialist basis; in other words, it pursued the same aim as the Social Democratic Federation. But Keir Hardie and his associates, so far from being Marxists, on seeing the failure of the Marxist propaganda, proclaimed Marxist doctrine and practice to be both wrong and mischievous. Himself a member of the working class, a working miner since early boyhood, Keir Hardie thought it useless and tactless to preach class war and revolution, and only aimed at organising the working class into an independent political party upon a minimum socialist platform for the everyday struggle in Parliament and the municipal bodies. The organisation founded by him in Scotland in 1889 avoided even the title of Socialist, and discreetly called itself the Independent Labour Party—a name adopted by the larger organisation founded by him for the whole of Great Britain in 1893 in Bradford. If such a policy had been dictated by considerations of a revolutionary, that is, Marxist character, as a means of getting at the masses of the workers in England in those days, it might have been commended; in fact it did get the approval of Engels, who quite rightly placed the practical solution of the problem of the political mobilisation of the English working class above all revolutionary programmes and watchwords. But as a matter of fact, there was not even a shadow of revolutionary strategy in the policy of Keir Hardie and his friends. Keir Hardie himself, muddle-headed as he was, may have entertained some hazy revolutionary plans and hopes, but his associates were opportunists of the most ordinary type, whose outlook did not go beyond the immediate problems of the day, who to the solution

of these problems imparted common Liberal reformism, and to whom parliamentary activity seemed the highest form of political action. In fact, to get returned to Parliament, by hook or by crook, became the object of the Party, and since the easiest way to attain it was by adapting its programme and slogans to the ideology prevalent at the time among the workers, there was soon very little left of the original Socialism of Keir Hardie and his associates of the I.L.P. Keir Hardie himself, having been returned to Parliament in 1892 with the aid of the Liberals who had withdrawn their own candidate and given him their votes, delivered from time to time Socialist speeches of the sentimental and academic type from the floor of the House of Commons, but did not create a militant atmosphere either within or without its walls. It is characteristic to note that shortly after his election, remembering no doubt the services rendered by the Liberals, Keir Hardie declared that "he was not opposed to the main planks of the Liberal platform," but that he would be irreconcilable "on Labour questions."\* This, however, did not save him in the next General Election of 1895. Although the Liberals again refrained from putting up their candidate against him, and although one of the chief items of his election campaign was a promise, if elected, "to get the Government to build two cruisers and an ironclad at West Ham (his constituency) to provide work for the unemployed,"† he failed to secure his seat, and the Conservative was returned. It was not until five years later that Keir Hardie was returned to Parliament by a mining constituency in South Wales. Here again he was not deprived of the assistance of the Liberals: as it was a two-member constituency, the Liberals ran only one candidate, leaving the other seat to Keir Hardie, the two parties pledging themselves to support one another against the respective Conservative opponents. It is worthy of note that Keir Hardie's Liberal colleague was Mr. Thomas, subsequently Lord Rhondda, one of the wealthiest mine owners in the district and in Great Britain generally. It was he who, in accordance with the pact, was supported by the votes of the "independent" Labour Party. Besides Keir Hardie, not a single member of his

\* A. W. Humphrey, *A History of Labour Representation*, page 127 *et seq.*

† *Ibid.*, p. 137. The reader will recollect that a promise to build warships to relieve unemployment was also made by the MacDonald Government. In this respect the traditions of the party have been well preserved.

party got into Parliament until 1906, when they were carried there upon the crest of the wave of "Labour Representation," with which we shall deal below.

We have recalled these parliamentary adventures of Keir Hardie in order to help the reader to gain a clear idea, first of the lengths to which the opportunism of the Socialists of the Independent Labour Party were prepared to go; and second, of the tremendous difficulty of getting into close contact with the working class of that period even at the cost of narrowing down the party programme and slogans to a minimum, and abjuring most Socialist principles. As a matter of fact, the Independent Labour Party, with all its opportunism, failed in its main object of winning the masses of the workers as much as its Marxist rival. Although stronger in numbers than the latter, it still remained hanging in the air, counting in its organisation a score of thousands of individual workers and semi-intellectuals who represented nobody but themselves, and exercising no influence whatever upon the large masses of the workers. Its main achievement consisted in gaining a fairly large number of municipal seats, thanks to its "Consumer's Socialism" which enlisted for it the sympathies of small shopkeepers and co-operators, and in enrolling among its members a certain number of trade union leaders, like Barnes, Clynes, Wardle and others who, with few exceptions, eventually turned out to be traitors to the working class.

Even in this greatly diluted form, Socialism proved unpalatable to the Liberal and opportunist stomach of the English workers in the 80's and 90's. This need not arouse astonishment: even diluted Socialism, if not theoretically, at least in practice, demanded the organisation of the working class into a separate party for independent political action, a demand which ran counter to the ideology prevailing among the masses of the workers at that time.

## CHAPTER SEVEN THE LABOUR PARTY

**A**BOUT twenty years after the beginning of Socialist agitation there arose in England a political mass party of the working class, the Labour Party as we know it to-day. It looked like the fulfilment of the aims long since pursued by the two Socialist organisations, and of the goal for which Engels had striven, when he stated that however primitive the original platform of an organised political movement of the English working class might be, it was eventually bound to assume a more and more pronounced class and revolutionary character.\* At first sight it might appear a contradiction of the material and moral conditions described by us in the foregoing pages. In reality, its fortunes have most strikingly confirmed the fact that opportunist ideology presented an insurmountable obstacle to the development of a genuine, potentially revolutionary, political class struggle of the proletariat. As a matter of fact, the party arose as though by accident, on, so to speak, an external matter, and was saved from an early extinction by a similarly external accidental matter. The occasion for its formation was the constant friction and conflicts in election contests between two sets of Labour candidates—those put up by the Socialist parties and those sailing under the flag of Liberalism. All through the 90's it frequently happened that a Socialist local committee, or even some big local union would put up a Labour candidate who was a Socialist, whilst the Liberals put up a Liberal-Labour man against him. The quarrels which were apt to arise from such competitions scandalised even the backward sections of Labour and caused at the same time a good deal of heartburning even to the Liberals, as the usual result in such cases was the return of the Conservative candidate. Still more

\* "The first great step in a country which enters the movement for the first time is to constitute the workers as an independent Labour party, no matter in what way, so long as it is a distinct Labour party. . . The masses need both time and opportunity to develop, and this opportunity they will obtain only on having a movement of their own—no matter in what form as long as it is their own movement—in which they will be driven forward by their own mistakes, and acquire wisdom by their failures." (Engels in a letter to Sorge dated November 29, 1886. Cf. also his letter to Madame Vishnevetski dated December 29 of the same year.)

scandalous was it when a Socialist worker-candidate was opposed by a Liberal who was not a worker, but a wealthy local man or manufacturer backed in his election campaign by prominent trade union leaders. Gradually a situation developed which was advantageous to nobody, and the question was raised at the Trades Union Congress of 1899, by a Social Democratic delegate from the reactionary Railwaymen's Union, Mr. Holmes, backed by a reactionary representative of the socialistically inclined Dockers' Union, Mr. Sexton. The resolution adopted on that occasion ran as follows: "That this Congress, having regard to the decisions of former years and with a view to securing better representation of the interests of Labour in the House of Commons, hereby instructs the Parliamentary Committee to invite the co-operation of all co-operative, Socialistic, trade union and other working-class organisations to co-operate jointly on lines mutually agreed upon in convening a special Congress of representatives from such of the above named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means for the securing of an increased number of Labour members in the next Parliament."

As the dissolution of Parliament was close at hand, the purpose of the resolution was to co-ordinate the plans of the different organisations in the forthcoming General Election, so that they should not interfere with but rather help one another. Not a word was said about independence as regards the other political parties. The sense of the resolution, apparently, was that the old system was to be continued: Labour candidates might be either Liberals or Socialists of the various shades, but they should not hinder one another. Thus, the birth of the Labour Party (that was to be) was an event of small significance at the moment, the future of which could be by no means foreseen.

The resolution was cordially welcomed by both Socialist parties, who had long since given up the hope of rallying the masses of Labour around themselves. It is true that attempts had already been made in the past to organise parliamentary candidatures of Labour on a national scale, and in 1874, for instance, the so-called Labour Representation League put up at the election candidates of whom two were actually returned. In the middle of the 80's another organisation, the Labour Electoral Association was formed, which co-ordinated the electoral activities of various Labour organisations and could soon boast a Labour group in Parliament of eleven members. The League was

founded without the co-operation of the trade unions, by the efforts of a few influential Labour leaders and bourgeois radicals who sympathised with the idea of the parliamentary representation of Labour, whilst the Association was directly formed by the Trades Union Congress, like the subsequent committee appointed by the Plymouth Congress of 1899. Neither of the organisations existed very long, as the Liberal Party undertook to include the Labour candidates in its lists and to support them. On the other hand, the workers themselves desired nothing else than to be represented in Parliament by "their own" men, *i.e.*, by the secretaries and presidents of the trade unions, regardless of their political convictions, hoping that they would defend their interests on questions directly affecting them. Thus originated the Liberal-Labour representation of which we have already spoken, and which benefited only the Liberal Party, giving it the reputation of a party representing the national interests of the people, as against the Conservative Party which, of course, championed only class interests. This was the clever handiwork of Gladstone, who, on this account, became famous as the most remarkable statesman of England.

Although past experience warranted no exaggerated expectations, the two Socialist Parties met the new attempt half way, each after its own manner. The I.L.P. was anxious only for the formation of a Labour group in Parliament independent of the Liberals; the question of its programme did not interest them in the least. Moreover, since most of the Labour leaders who were to form the parliamentary group belonged to the ordinary type of Liberal, while they themselves were "Socialists," the I.L.P. considered the framing of a programme for the parliamentary group, let alone for the whole movement, both futile and harmful, as it would inevitably lead to a split. Let the workers, so they thought, at least learn to stand politically on their own legs—and eventually they will learn to walk in the proper direction. The Social Democrats viewed the question from a different angle: there could be no truly independent Labour Party or independent Labour group in Parliament so long as they had no independent and clear-cut political line. The English working class, they argued, was not the inexperienced working class of a new country which was only entering the political arena and beginning to organise on political lines. It had behind it a long history and great traditions, and to think that it still needed to be put on its



feet was the greatest delusion. Even if the Labour group be organised independently of the Liberals, it would continue to go hand in hand with them, left untrammelled by any definite political instructions. One might ask, what if the parliamentary group and the trade unions refused to accept such instructions? In that case, of course, there was no hope in the new movement; then the Social Democrats had no place in it, and it would be better for them to hold aloof so as not to discredit themselves and their principles and to continue their direct agitation among the masses.

At the initial conference of the trade unions and the Socialist organisations in February, 1900, the two sections met in battle. The Social Democrats moved that the working class should form a "distinct party . . . separate from the capitalist parties, based upon the recognition of the class war, and having for its ultimate object the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange"; whereas the I.L.P. moved that the working class representatives in Parliament should establish "a distinct Labour group 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, or in opposing measures having an opposite tendency." The I.L.P. proposal manifestly followed the line of least resistance, and expressly sanctioned that which should have been avoided: co-operation with the Liberals. For this reason the Social Democratic proposal was overwhelmingly defeated, and that of their opponents adopted. It is further characteristic to note that in selecting the name for the new movement, or rather for the permanent joint committee of trade unionists and Socialists to be appointed by the conference, it was decided to adopt the modest name of Labour Representation Committee, without emphasising the independent character of the Representation, and only five years later the name of Labour Party was adopted, again without further adjectives. All this was quite in keeping with the policy of following the line of least resistance.

For the rest we should remember that the I.L.P., in initiating this line of tactics, was only adapting itself to the ideology of the rank and file of the workers. It also adapted itself to the parliamentary "careerism" of the trade union leaders as well as to its own opportunism which considered the gaining of parlia-

mentary seats the fundamental aim of the Party. A General Election was to take place in 1900, and neither Keir Hardie and his friends, nor the leaders of the trade unions, desired to do anything which would deprive them of Liberal support. Hence their loud protestation of their readiness to co-operate with any party friendly to Labour, and their reluctance in selecting a name for the Party, to suggest any independence by it. This policy was not justified by the results. Keir Hardie, as we have mentioned before, managed to get returned in the company of a Liberal, in a double constituency; Mr. Richard Bell, too, the secretary of the Railwaymen's Union, met with equal success in a like constituency. But the thirteen candidates of the committee were defeated. As against this, ten Labour candidates were elected who sailed under the Liberal flag and refused to associate themselves with the committee. It was clear that "independence" even of a formal character, even if existing only in the shape of resolutions, was an uncomfortable thing, and interest in the new movement cooled off to a considerable extent. When, in February, 1901, delegates from the trade unions and the Socialist parties again assembled at a conference, it appeared that in the course of the past twelve months, not more than 25 small unions (out of a total of over 1,000) had affiliated, and that the total membership had only increased from 375,000 to 469,000, and as, at that time, great and more interesting events connected with the funeral of Queen Victoria were taking place in town, the delegates, having hastily defeated for the second time the resolution introduced by the Social Democrats in favour of a class platform, rushed off to London. It might have been predicted that the new venture would prove as barren as the League and the Association of twenty and thirty years before; the Social Democrats, indeed, left the Conference, having given it up as a bad job.

At this juncture there occurred the celebrated Taff Vale and Denaby Main cases, which gave rise to the well known legal decisions, destructive of the elementary rights of the trade unions. It is unnecessary to recapitulate the details of the two cases here. Suffice it to mention that the virulent Press campaign against the trade unions as the cause of the failure of British industry to hold its own against German and American competition, which both preceded and followed the decisions, showed that the judicial attack on the unions was a deliberate move against the working class. Indeed, even such mainstays of the Liberal Party and

eminent lawyers as Asquith and Haldane loudly voiced their approval of the decisions of the Supreme Court (the House of Lords), arguing that the trade unions had hitherto enjoyed privileges inadmissible from the point of view of civil law.

It was this unexpected occurrence that saved the life of the new party. In 1902 the number of unions affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee jumped up to 127, and the total membership increased to 861,000, in 1903 the numbers were 165 and 969,000. At the same time the Committee began to score electoral victories. In a bye election in 1902 Mr. Shackleton was returned under its auspices, and one year later, also in a bye election, similar successes attended the candidatures of Messrs. Crooks and Henderson. When the General Election took place in January, 1906, 29 candidates of the Committee were elected, and only 14 of the Liberal-Labour group. Henceforth it became advantageous to run for Parliament under the auspices of the Labour Party.

Of decisive moment in this second birth of the Labour Party was, of course, not its opportunist policy, but the revolt of the masses of the workers against the arrogant attack of the capitalist class on their right of combination. It was a repetition of what had taken place at the end of the 60's and the beginning of the 70's, when the attack on the trade unions in connection with the Sheffield outrage was met by the workers joining the International, running a campaign for the reform of Parliament, and successfully carrying their first candidates to the poll.

It looked as though the problem of the political mobilisation of the working class had at last been solved, and that henceforth it would be plain sailing towards the open and wide sea of class-consciousness. So, at least, it appeared to the Social Democrats, who were probably regretting their rash withdrawal from the Labour Party. Unfortunately, their regret turned out to be premature: the old problem had not yet been finally solved, and the smooth sailing ended in the boat being stranded. The cause of this failure was that economic conditions, although gradually changing, as we shall see below, did not yet exercise sufficient influence on the mentality of the workers. Regardless of the shock which they had received from the Taff Vale decision, the rank and file of the workers were still swayed considerably by the old opportunist ideology, and their leaders wholly so. This was shown by a number of striking incidents.

Amongst the three successful parliamentary candidates of

1902-3 was Mr. Shackleton, the champion of child labour in the mills, now holding high office in the Department of Labour. Trying to profit by the excitement caused among the workers by the House of Lords decision, the L.R.C., in search of a suitable candidate for their parliamentary vacancy, could find no better champion of the rights of the working class than this gentleman, because he was so dear to the hearts of the capitalists and therefore had the best chances of success in the election. As a matter of fact, *both the Liberals and the Conservatives withdrew their candidates in his favour*, and he was returned with flying colours. The whole of the Liberal press welcomed this precious acquisition to Parliament, and the newly founded Liberal Three Dozen gave a banquet in his honour. In the Woolwich bye election in March, 1903, the choice of the Committee fell upon Mr. Will Crooks, known throughout England as a Liberal and a capitalist flunkey, who as such, had already made his mark on the London County Council. As it was a traditional Tory seat, the Conservative did not withdraw in his favour, but the Liberals not only withdrew their own candidate, but placed the whole of their machinery at his disposal. Mr. Will Crooks gained a brilliant victory which brought tears of joy to the eyes of all Liberal editors. The third Labour candidate elected in 1903 was Mr. Arthur Henderson, for many years a Liberal agent and at the same time a local Methodist preacher. These two jobs he held concurrently with his position as secretary of the Iron Founders' Association. On the eve of his decision to stand as an "independent" Labour candidate he resigned his position as Liberal agent, and for this the local Liberals could not forgive him. Accordingly they put up a candidate of their own in opposition to him, so that Mr. Henderson had to fight a three-cornered contest. But the headquarters of the Liberal Party disapproved of the position taken up by the local organisation, and the London Press supported Mr. Henderson wholeheartedly. One of the London Liberal newspapers recommended him to the electors as a "splendid Liberal, an advanced democrat, and no Socialist at all!" Henderson, thanks to such recommendation and support, defeated both his opponents, to the great joy of the Liberals, particularly of the "Three Dozen," which gave a banquet to him, too.

Such was the kind of man selected and sent to Parliament by the Labour Representation Committee, and such was the manner in which they were elected. These were to be "inde-

pendent" Labour M.P.'s!\*

Of course, this "independence" was but a fiction, possible only because the working class, and particularly its leaders, were still under the spell of opportunist ideas and entirely devoid of class-consciousness. Matters did not change one whit when, in 1906, the number of such Labour M.P.'s increased to 29. True, there were among them no fewer than 14 Socialists, *i.e.*, members of the Independent Labour Party, followers of Keir Hardie. But apart from the fact that they were opportunists to a man, and not averse to flirting with the Liberals,† they owed their success largely to Liberal support: in 25 out of 29 constituencies in which the L.R.C. candidates were successful, the Liberals did not run candidates and voted for them. Here again, as in the old days, the Liberals sized up the political and moral qualities of the Labour representatives and boldly went out and met them half-way, as hunters do who know and "play" their game. In 1901, shortly after the Taff Vale decision, a young Liberal politician—a nephew of Mr. Gladstone and the executor of his will—Mr. Alexander Murray (subsequently Lord Elibank) published a remarkable letter in the *Times*, which revealed the whole substance of Liberal policy in regard to Labour candidatures. The letter was written in connection with an incident in a

\* Early in 1905 a radical change was made in the formula of 1900. Instead of the willingness to co-operate with other parties, a point was adopted restraining the Parliamentary group from "identifying themselves in any shape or form" with the other parties and from "supporting their interests." This change was made necessary by the scandalous conduct of Messrs. Shackleton and Crooks, who had addressed Liberal meetings on behalf of Free Trade, and chiefly Mr. Richard Bell, who once had the temerity to congratulate a Liberal candidate on his victory over the Labour Party's nominee!

† Mr. Humphrey in his *History of Labour Representation* (p. 155) cites a curious "Open letter" addressed by Keir Hardie to Lloyd George and published in the official organ of the Independent Labour Party (the *Labour Leader* of March 7th, 1903) in which he invited the Radical leader to quit the Liberal Party and to join the Labour Party: "Here," he said in that letter, "is a leadership to gratify the highest ambition and satisfy the loftiest aspirations." In the same book (p. 140) Mr. Humphrey quotes a glowing tribute to Mr. Gladstone, written by Keir Hardie on the occasion of the Liberal leader's death: "To him, freedom was the one condition of value in human life. . . . Wherever men proved their desire for freedom, by struggling to obtain, his support was never long withheld." In the same article Hardie enthusiastically recalls an incident in the lobby of the House of Commons when Gladstone refused to be introduced to him!

Scottish bye-election in which the Conservative candidate was opposed by the miners' candidate, Mr. Robert Smillie, but where local Liberals decided to put up a candidate of their own, in spite of the danger of "splitting" the democratic vote and letting the Conservatives in. The Conservative candidate, by the way, was a Mr. Harmsworth, a brother of the future Lord Northcliffe. Mr. Murray, in his letter, protested against this action of the Liberal Party. He wrote:

"If the struggle between capital and labour, which seems looming in the distance, is to be averted, the Liberal Party might do worse than drop their red tape officialdom, and in constituencies where the workers are preponderatingly overwhelming, such as in North East Lanark, encourage the candidature of men like Mr. Smillie. Otherwise, radical electors will be more than ever driven into the most extreme camp, and what was once the life-blood of Liberalism will be dried up and the Party system such as we know it, cease to exist. Mr. Gladstone, with his wonderful intuition, particularly when democracy began to raise its head and realise its power, led the politically emancipated masses by the hand. . . . He did not attempt to drive them. The candidature of Mr. Harmsworth renders clear and distinct the cleavage and demarcation between capital and labour; and if the policy be generally persisted in without due consideration to local circumstances, the old restraining forces of moderate Liberalism will disappear. We shall be grouped into two great camps—capital and labour—a prospect to which no true Liberal can look forward with equanimity."

In these words the young inexperienced politician naively disclosed the great secret of English Liberalism, at the same time indicating the right policy for the Liberal Party to pursue in regard to the newly formed Labour Party. This was the line followed by the Liberals in 1902 and 1903, as well as in the General Election of 1906, although they were greatly surprised with the gift of a group of 29 M.P.'s, among whom were several "Socialists"; a rather unwelcome gift, some thought, but they did not care to show it. The newly founded Liberal monthly, the *Independent Review*, wrote:—

"We heartily welcome the new Labour Party which is now to make its first bow to the House of Commons. . . . It will be a gain to the cause of social reform, since no pressure from within the Liberal Party could prove so strong as the appearance of the

Labour Party. . . . We cannot suppress a smile when noting the alarm caused in a section of our press by the victory of the workers. The latter are asserting that the rich are now confronted with grave peril, and should exert all their efforts to overcome the enemy. We hold a different opinion. Probably no less than 23 out of the 29 new M.P.'s will call themselves Socialists. But their socialism is rather an ideal, a point of view, than a practical programme of action. We are well aware that, in practice, these people will meet with opposition on the part of some Liberals, and we shall never hesitate to criticise ourselves the new Party when we think it deserves it; but as far as we can foresee at present, we are convinced that we shall never have occasion to differ from it."

It appeared from this utterance that the appearance of a Labour group in Parliament was a veritable blessing to the Liberals, who had been so anxious to engage in "social reforms" that they couldn't move until the application of this new stimulus! And of course, it was true that one would have to search high and low to discover such a choice brand of "Socialists" as those who were now in the majority in the Labour group of M.P.'s. Their chief spokesman, the theoretician and strategist of the Party as well as its secretary, Mr. J. R. MacDonald, contributed an article to the same *Review* in which he stated the Socialist creed of the new Party:—

"The future of the Labour Party is to be determined by its success in making its principles clear to itself and the country. If it narrows itself to a class movement or a trade movement, or a manual workers' movement . . . it will weaken and finally disappear. . . . Those conclusions are reached, not by a process of economic reasoning or of working class experience. They rest upon conceptions of right and wrong common to all classes."

The Liberals could surely be content with such Socialists who looked for support "in the ideas of right and wrong common to all classes." But the Liberals themselves were, for reasons explained in a previous chapter, no longer the ideologically homogeneous party which confronted the working class in the middle of the 80's and "led it" by the hand, and strikingly revealed during the Boer war in the formation of a Liberal Imperialist League. Among them were avowed reactionaries embodying the new psychology of English industrial and financial capital, and the Liberal Government formed by Sir H. Campbell-Banner-

man, a Liberal of the Gladstonian type, found it no easy task to carry out the old and tried tactics. We saw that the most eminent lawyers of the Liberal Party who entered the new Cabinet, Messrs. Asquith and Haldane, had approved of the legal decisions of the House of Lords; small wonder that when the young Labour group in the House of Commons, born of these very decisions, put forward a claim for legislation to restore the rights of trade unions it met with very definite unwillingness on the part of the Government to accede to it in a manner satisfactory to the workers. It needed a good many vigorous attacks both within and without the walls of Parliament to compel the Imperialist section of the Cabinet to give in and to allow a free hand to the Premier and his Gladstonian colleagues who appreciated the importance of a speedy restoration of the historical barrier against Socialism. After a stubborn and protracted fight the workers succeeded in wresting the legislation which nullified the House of Lords decision and secured to the trade unions their old rights. Even then the vanquished group of Liberals was for a long time unable to regain its composure. Not only their convictions, but their *amour propre* smarted under the defeat inflicted upon them by the Labour group. This was taken full advantage of by the Conservative press, which endeavoured to magnify this defeat into a complete surrender of the Liberal Party to the "Socialists." In lurid colours it painted the "revolutionary peril" which threatened "Society" from the dictatorship of the rebellious working class, and lashed the Liberal Party for flirting with it. The more pusillanimous among the Liberals could not stand this flagellation, one of them being Mr. Murray, who had since become the Chief Whip. By an irony of fate a bye-election occurred in the same Scottish constituency as before, and again the local workers selected Mr. Smillie as their candidate. Again the Liberals put up a candidate of their own, and again the Conservative was returned. But this time Mr. Murray spoke in quite different language. At a public meeting of Scottish Liberals, he declared:—

"There were new forces awakening in the country, and as a Whip, he could see how they were shaping themselves. In the House of Commons they had the Independent Labour Party which he would prefer to call by its real name, which its members would not disclaim, the Socialist Party. . . . The Socialist Party was very powerful. They had opened war on the Liberal Party and he was not very certain that it would not be necessary in the



future for the Liberal Party to embark upon another crusade. They had just completed one crusade against protection, and he was not sure that circumstances would not force them to embark upon a crusade against Socialism. . . . Some years ago, when a gentleman, for whom personally he had a high regard (Mr. Smillie)—he did not know at the time he was a Socialist—contested North West Lanark, he supported him because at that date he did not appreciate or realise what had since been forced upon him about the real cleavage between Socialism and Liberalism, viz., collectivism and individualism. He thought there was room for union between the Liberal and the Labour forces, but observation of circumstances had convinced him that Liberals had now to stand upon their own legs. Liberalism had never thrived upon Socialism.”

This new utterance by Mr. Murray was as foolish as the previous was wise. It clearly echoed the campaign of the Conservative press which had christened the Labour Party “Socialist” in order to frighten the Liberals; at the same time it betrayed the angry feeling of the Liberals who had been defeated in Parliament by the Labour Party. Mr. Murray’s words met with ready response in the entire Liberal press, and Mr. Haldane himself could not refrain from openly threatening the “Socialists,” whom he denounced as corruptors of the trade unionist elements.

“If in the name of Labour,” he declared, “Mr. Keir Hardie or anybody else brought forward abstract propositions which conflicted with Liberal principles, the Liberal Party would cross swords with him. . . . When he brought them into the political field in the House of Commons, or in the selection of candidates, they would see what was the strength of those who asserted that Liberalism was played out. . . .”\*

The quarrel between the Liberals and the Labourites was obviously assuming dangerous forms, so that in the end the more responsible elements in the Liberal Party—including Mr. Asquith himself—found it necessary to disown their too talkative colleagues, and to assure the Labour Party that they were not a

\* It is interesting that the same Haldane was a member of the Labour Cabinet of J. R. MacDonald. Apparently he had discovered that the “abstract principles of the Labour Party were not incompatible with the Liberal principles.”—A fact particularly remarkable since Haldane, as we have seen, belonged to the imperialist wing of the Liberals.

bit afraid of it, and that they did not believe in the possibility of Socialism in England.

This equivocal compliment ended the quarrel between the Liberals and Labour in the House of Commons. As a matter of fact, the whole quarrel had been started by the Liberals, whilst to the Labour men even to fight for the rehabilitation of the trade unions was but a painful necessity. When, a few years later the same indefatigably reactionary House of Lords made a second breach in the trade union law by deciding in another suit (the Osborne case) the levying of members for political purposes was illegal, we find such "leaders" as Mr. Shackleton declaring the decision to be just, and urging the workers to submit to it. For this he was subsequently knighted and given a Government job, when the indignant workers forced him to clear out of the movement.

At present, however, the Labour Party, having carried the fight for the rights of the trade unions to a victorious conclusion, was eager to have a rest, and joyfully grasped the olive branch. It rapidly caught the "tone" of the House, with its "terrace teas" and parties given by Cabinet Ministers and even by the King,\* and when the Licensing Bill was introduced by the Government, the Labour Party threw itself with great zest into the fight against the liquor interests, declaring the measure to be the greatest social reform! It goes without saying that the Labour Party unreservedly voted for the budget, including expenditure on the army and navy, and supported the Government every time it was threatened by the opposition. Virtually it became the Left Wing of the Liberal Party, thus emulating the example of its predecessors in the 70's and 80's.

However, the honourable task proved not quite so easy this time. Under the effect of changes in economic conditions a new tendency began to make itself felt among the working class (of this later on), and this, combined with the intolerance of the new Liberalism, appreciably interfered with the pleasant and even progress of the Labour Party in Parliament. In 1907, a bye-

\* The first to accept an invitation to the King's garden party was Mr. Will Crooks, who, for a long time afterwards, could not forget the honour bestowed on him, a former workhouse waif. Messrs. Keir Hardie and MacDonald thought themselves slighted by not being invited, considering it an insult to the Labour Party. After the war the "Socialists" obtained satisfaction: they regularly attended the King's parties, at which they appeared in "democratic" morning coats.

election occurred at Yarrow, which was considered a Liberal stronghold. The local Labour people, however, decided to run a candidate, and the L.R.C. had to agree to it, as the candidate chosen was Mr. Peter Curran, a popular Labour leader and a Socialist of the Keir Hardie school who nevertheless declared right away that Socialism was his "private business." To the surprise of everybody, and to the great disgust of the Liberals, Curran was elected. The Liberals bitterly reproached the Labour Party for stealing from them in broad daylight a traditional Liberal seat without any compensation, and when at a subsequent bye-election in the Colne Valley the workers again nominated their own candidate against the Liberals, the L.R.C. stepped in with its veto. To the great consternation of the L.R.C. and of its Liberal friends, however, the Colne Valley workers not only disobeyed their leaders, but even selected as their candidate an unknown young Socialist and syndicalist, Mr. Victor Grayson, who refused to stand as a Labour candidate simply, but loudly proclaimed himself a Socialist in his election address and in his platform speeches, and carried the constituency! There was a great hue and cry in the bourgeois press, and the Labour Party made haste to disavow the unbidden guest and to boycott him in the House. Nevertheless, its favour with the Liberal Party was greatly impaired, and it felt very depressed. On the other hand, the Conservative press took up the jubilant "I told you so" tone: had it not always declared that the Labour Party, ostensibly so harmless, was merely the advance guard of revolutionary Socialism? What would the Liberal Party do? Would it continue to patronise the Labour Party as before, or would it form a united front with the other law-and-order elements against the Socialists? These questions were raised, no doubt, within the inner councils of the Liberals, but the advocates of the Gladstonian method were victorious once more. It was realised by them that a hostile campaign against the Labour Party would only strengthen the extreme tendencies among the working class, whereas a conciliatory attitude, supported by reforms, would restore its prestige, strengthen the opportunist tendencies of the trade unions, and restore the moral barrier against Socialism that existed before the unfortunate attacks on the rights of trade unions had been made. "The Liberal Party," said the *Daily Chronicle*, "has to show its ability to carry out social reforms, within the limits of our fiscal system on the one hand, and without recourse to the expedients of revolutionary

Socialism on the other hand. By its success in this respect Liberalism will ultimately stand or fall." The same newspaper was even the mouthpiece of Mr. Lloyd George, whose weight in the Cabinet and in the Liberal Party had—particularly on account of his successful settlement of the Railway Strike—become by this time sufficiently great to make them accept his plan of the introduction of a land tax and a graduated income tax in order to finance the State scheme of old age pension and social insurance. Those were to be the social reforms based on Free Trade (*i.e.*, without the aid of tariff customs as advocated by the protectionists) spoken of by the Liberal newspaper. The same idea was repeatedly urged by Liberal Cabinet Ministers, including Mr. Winston Churchill—at that time a Radical—who declared in a speech given at a banquet, that: "he hoped that, after the victory of the Liberal Party in 1906, Liberalism would have a long, steady run; but they would not succeed in reaping the legitimate harvest of democracy unless they were able to keep their hold on the people's hearts." How was the hold to be kept? "Civilisation, which had brought, and science which gave, many fine things to a large portion of the population, had given nothing to the poorest and weakest among us. . . . The Liberal Party must devote itself to the task of solving that problem. . . . He was not one of those who said everybody should be equal, but what he did say was that no one should have anything unless everybody had something. The general trend of Liberal policy must be increasingly to build up the *minimum* standard of life and labour in this country, and they must say that below a certain limit men should not be allowed to labour."<sup>\*</sup>

With such a commendable programme the Liberal Government, led by Mr. Asquith, after the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, set to work, and in the next few years carried out with remarkable energy and great effort a series of social reforms which in this respect placed England again in the forefront of bourgeois countries. Old age pensions,† State insurance against sickness and unemployment, labour exchanges, an eight-hour day

<sup>\*</sup> *The Times*, February 8, 1908.

†Old Age Pensions were wretched—on the average, five shillings a week—and were intended for persons reaching the age of 70, an age seldom attained by members of the working class. (Since 1927 Old Age Pensions have been increased to ten shillings per week, for persons reaching the age of 65.) National insurance against sickness etc. was based on the principle of contributions of fourpence a week by the

for miners, Trade Boards for the sweated industries, and even a minimum wage for miners (after a general miners' strike, it is true), followed in rapid succession. At the same time a great fight was carried on against the House of Lords, which had thrown out the budget providing for a tax on land—a fight accompanied by a severe constitutional crisis and the dissolution of Parliament (in 1910), and leading to a great victory for the Liberal Government. Liberalism suddenly emerged like a phoenix from its ashes, radiating a great light which blinded, first of all—the Labour Party. Although the reforms were paid for by the workers and were classic examples of the skill with which the bourgeoisie hoodwinks the working class, the representatives of the latter in Parliament showed the greatest enthusiasm for, and exhibited the greatest energy in supporting them and the Government. As during the World War, the Labour M.P.'s stumped the country advocating the great social reforms initiated by the Liberals, and at the two General Elections in 1910 came out openly as their allies and satellites. Of that independence which was demanded by the rules of the Party there was not a vestige, and coming back after the second General Election, in greatly reduced numbers, they became the slaves of the Liberal Party, on which they were henceforth dependent for any chances of re-election. The trade

worker and threepence a week each by the employers and the State. The workers therefore paid nearly one half of the premium. The Labour Exchanges became bureaucratic institutions, which soon developed into agencies for the supply of strike-breakers and cheap labour generally. The miners' eight hour day was a belated concession to demands made for many years, and did not include the time spent in getting to the actual working places, although the distances are, in English mines, considerable, owing to the exhaustion of the upper seams and the deep location of the coal. (not infrequently under the sea), while overtime was allowed to the amount of sixty hours per annum. Lastly, the Trade Boards fixed minimum rates for the sweated industries, not in order to abolish, but to "humanise" them. On the other hand, the budget which had to create the funds for these reforms shifted the main burden of taxation on the working class by the indirect taxation of the prime articles of consumption, sugaring the pill by a reorganisation of the income tax on a progressive scale and by a tax on land to the amount of one halfpenny per £ assessed value, which did not even cover the costs of collection. This tax was called a campaign against the landlords. In substance the precious reforms were paid for by the workers themselves, since the increased revenue from the new income tax was swallowed by the growing naval expenditure in face of the so-called German menace.

union M.P.'s felt quite comfortable, but their Socialist partners were rather ill at ease. The rank and file of the Party repeatedly voiced their discontent with the conduct of the leaders, and an opposition arose in its midst which nearly led to a split. Matters reached such a pass that not only the rank and file, but even prominent leaders like Mr. Snowden\* began to utter aloud their disappointment with the policy of alliance with the trade union leaders within the Labour Party, and demanded a revision of its constitution. But the warnings came too late. Down to the very outbreak of the World War, both sections of the Labour Party—the Socialists as well as the trade unionists—continued to play the humble rôle of the wagging tail of the Liberal Party. Trade unionism continued to play its part in barring the way of revolution.

\* "Labour representation in Parliament is now chiefly at the mercy of the Liberals, and when that support will be withdrawn, it will disappear." Thus Snowden, in the *Labour Leader*, of June 22, 1913. Mr. Snowden has since then left his own I.L.P. as being too Socialist.

## CHAPTER EIGHT THE RISE OF THE TIDE

**T**HE half century examined in the preceding chapters falls, as we have seen, into two equal parts; the first half—1850-1875—was characterised by high prices and an upward movement in wages, while the second half—1875-1900 and a little further—was marked by stationary wages, but also a great drop in prices. In the first half the opportunist ideology arose among the working class; in the second half it strengthened and reached its highest development. We now reach the new stage, which may be described as one of "revolt." It begins approximately with the end of the first decade of the current century and is violently interrupted by the outbreak of the World War. It covers only a few years; nevertheless it is of profound interest not only in point of its immediate content, but also by what it indicates for the future.

The basic material feature of this period is the upward movement of prices. There used to be at one time extensive arguments and discussions as to the cause of this rise in prices. Reference was made to increased output and the lowering of the cost of the production of gold, to the increased absorption of agricultural produce and raw materials by the enormously extended industries of the United States and the consequent reduction of their exports, to the high and increasing protective tariffs in all countries except England, and so on. We do not propose to enter into an analysis of these and similar theories: suffice it for us to observe the fact itself of the radical change in the movement of prices. Since absolute figures (in shillings and pence) do not interest us in this case, we may use index figures, continuing the tables in the preceding chapters (see p. 257).

Turning first of all to the wholesale prices of the combined 45 articles of consumption (the prices of 1900=100), we find:—

Year.	45 Articles.	Year.	45 Articles.
1905	... 97.6	1910	... 108.8
1906	... 100.8	1911	... 109.4
1907	... 106.0	1912	... 114.9
1908	... 103.0	1913	... 116.5
1909	... 104.1	1914	... 117.2

We have repeated the figure for 1905 in order to show the rapid rise of the price curve. We may get somewhat greater precision if we single out the prices of foodstuffs from among the other articles consumed by working class families. Taking the prices of 1900 as 100 we get the following series:—

Year.	Foodstuffs.	Year.	Foodstuffs.	Year.	Foodstuffs.
1871	... 144.1	1901	... 101.1	1908	... 107.0
1875	... 148.9	1902	... 101.4	1909	... 108.7
1880	... 140.9	1903	... 100.6	1910	... 109.2
1885	... 115.4	1904	... 101.2	1911	... 116.6
1890	... 108.5	1905	... 101.2	1912	... 119.9
1895	... 98.9	1906	... 101.0	1913	... 117.7
1900	... 100.0	1907	... 105.5	1914	... 121.0

We have started from 1871, as the earlier figures were not given in the preceding tables. In conformity with what we know from previous tables the level of prices stood uniformly high until the middle of the 70's, after which it began to fall rapidly. Towards the middle of the 90's, *i.e.*, about 20 years later, prices stood at 50 points lower than 1875. Then prices began to rise again, but so slowly that after the lapse of 10 years the increase amounted to but a little over 2 per cent. Between 1906 and 1907 there was a sudden jump of 4.5 per cent., and from that prices continued steadily to increase.

The movement in the retail prices of foodstuffs was slightly different. Below we give the index figures for 23 products entering into the consumption of working class families (1900=100):—

Year	Index Figure	Year	Index Figure	Year	Index Figure	Year	Index Figure
1895	... 92.1	1903	... 102.8	1907	... 105.0	1911	... 109.4
1900	... 100.0	1904	... 102.4	1908	... 107.5	1912	... 114.5
1901	... 100.4	1905	... 102.8	1909	... 107.6	1913	... 114.8
1902	... 101.0	1906	... 102.0	1910	... 109.4	1914	... 116.8

Whereas the upward movement in wholesale prices began very slowly in the middle of the 90's, retail prices made a rapid jump of over 8 points between 1895 and 1901. This is to be expected in retail trading. Thereafter, however, until 1906, the growth was slow, both wholesale and retail prices increasing only by one point in the course of five years. Between 1906 and 1907 the prices rose by 3 per cent., and after that the increase continued at an accelerating pace until in 1914, on the outbreak of the World War, it reached the figure of 15 points above that of 1906,



and 24 points above that of 1895. It has been calculated\* that the expenditure on food of an average working class family, amounting to 20s. 4d. in 1895, went up to 22s. in 1900, to 22s. 7d. in 1905, to 24s. in 1910, and to 25s. 8d. in 1914, *i.e.*, it increased by over 5s., or 25 per cent. Or, to put it in other words, the purchasing power of 20s. in the hands of a working class housewife in 1895 went down to 18s. 5d. in 1900, to 17s. 11d. in 1905, to 16s. 11d. in 1910, and to 14s. 7d. in 1914.†

This great change, which manifested itself in the new century, is of cardinal importance. If in the preceding period stationary wages were masked and compensated for by the progressive decline in prices, the rise in prices fully revealed to the workers the real state of affairs, and the Labour movement in a short space of time became almost unrecognisable.

The change came about gradually.‡ In 1905-6 a strange movement came to be observed among the miners in South Wales—a movement for getting the unorganised coal miners to join the union. Until that time, as we have stated, the British trade unions zealously guarded their exclusiveness and put every obstacle in the way of those wishing to join. Now, on the contrary, the coal miners in South Wales began to force the unorganised into the union by violence, tracking them down as traitors and cowards, holding demonstrations against them etc. Eventually the whole district broke out into sporadic strikes to force the mineowners to employ none but union men. This was so unprecedented as to attract universal attention. The explanation lay in the fact that the South Wales mining district was distinguished by peculiar conditions which made the workers extremely sensitive to changes in economic circumstances. On the one hand, the rapid development thanks to extensive concentration of the coal mining industry in that district had attracted new

\* Cf. *Labour Year Book*, 1916, p. 212. The calculations were based on data published by the Board of Trade.

† Cf. J. A. Hobson's article *The Cost of Living*, *ibid.* p. 206.

‡ The analysis which follows is based largely upon my own writings published in the *Neue Zeit* for 1910-1913, particularly on my articles *Trade Union Changes in England* (November 18, 1910), *The English Miners' Strike* (March 22, 1912), *The Great Strike and Its Lessons* (April 26 and May 3, 1912), and *Breaking the Dawn* (November 28, 1913). See also Ben Tillet's *History of the London Transport Workers' Strike*, London, 1911, and Cole and Arnot, *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, London, 1917.

workers from various parts of the country, who, as yet unorganised and unaccustomed to local conditions, were easily tempted to undercut one another as well as the organised workers in order to secure employment. On the other hand, there was the emotional Celtic temperament of the local population, which had already revealed itself during the Chartist movement.\* Every new revival of the Labour movement finds a ready and early response among the mining population of South Wales, which constitutes in this respect an excellent barometer; and it was for this reason that the South Wales coal miners were the first to react to the pressure of high prices during the new period by taking up a militant position. Seeing before them the united body of capitalists and the unorganised workers competing with themselves, they tackled organisation as the preliminary condition to success in a direct fight with the mine owners. This was a step towards a truly "new" trade unionism, the direct antitheses of the trade unionism established by the engineers 55 years previously. It is characteristic that in the same year 1906 they were the first to raise the question of a minimum wage for coal miners, a question which pointed to the source and the background of the "unrest" which had seized upon the working class.

The meaning of this strange movement of the South Wales miners had scarcely been realised by the public when the "unrest" also invaded another class of workers, the railwaymen, who, as we have seen, had been hitherto among the least organised and most passive sections of the working class. In 1906 the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants suddenly came out with the demand for an all grades increase in wages as well as for the recognition of the union by the railway companies. This was also a somewhat unusual phenomenon, causing all the more surprise as it at once assumed a threatening character and took, the following year, an aggressive form. The railwaymen talked of a general strike, and when the companies bluntly refused to have any dealings with the union, began to prepare for it. Towards the autumn the movement reached a high state of tension, and by a majority of 80,000 against 1,850, the union decided in November to declare a strike. As we saw, the railwaymen's action was defeated, thanks to the dexterous diplomacy of Mr. Lloyd George allied to the treachery of the union's leader, Mr. Richard Bell; but the significance of the movement remained as a

\* See above, p. 66.

revelation of the new tendencies in the English Labour movement.

If the railwaymen were distinguished by their backwardness in organisation and by their passivity, the workers in the cotton industry belonged to the highest aristocracy of the English working class: they were among the best organised, at the same time were famous as the most law-abiding and the least revolutionary elements in the labour world. We have seen how they originated the so-called Brooklands Agreement for the prevention of industrial conflicts, and how they even furnished an example of exceptional political "broad-mindedness" by allowing one of their most popular leaders, James Mawdsley, to belong to the Conservative Party. Now, in 1908, a strange thing happened in consequence of the prevailing trade depression causing substantial losses to the manufacturers; the latter invoked the Agreement of 1893 and asked for a 5 per cent. reduction in wage rates of the spinners, and the workers, instead of agreeing, went on strike. This was an unheard of violation of all the rules of class harmony, and in particular the written constitution of the cotton industry. The employers retaliated by declaring a general lock-out. The fight went on for seven weeks—the first in the course of 15 years—and ended in a compromise: wage reductions were postponed for three months. Here again the workers lost, but the conflict as such sounded the death knell of the policy of opportunism, while pointing at the same time to the causes of the unrest.

Equally remarkable, but in another aspect, was the unrest among the engineers and other workers in the shipyards of Newcastle and the North Eastern district. The unrest began in the spring of 1909 and took the shape of a series of sporadic strikes remarkable by the fact that not only were they accompanied by a disregard of all procedures of conciliation and arbitration prescribed by the agreements, but in many cases involved acts of defiance of their own leaders and committees, as they often broke out spontaneously with the latter's consent, and continued in spite of the leaders' advocacy of settlement by compromise. Things went so far that Mr. George Barnes, M.P., the influential secretary of the Society of Engineers and the leader of the strike and lockout of 1897, saw himself constrained to resign. Eventually the conflict was settled by a "treaty" signed by the shipbuilding yards and the 26 unions, to which we have already referred elsewhere.\* Nevertheless, the discontent amongst the

\* See above, pp. 207, 271.

workers went on, and from the time of the solemn conclusion of the treaty in November, 1909, up to the following July the workers broke it no fewer than 27 times by sporadic strikes, so the employers were forced to issue a warning to the workers threatening a general lockout if the unions signatories to the treaty did not discipline their members and did not deposit security for their good behaviour. In fact, in August, 1910, on the occasion of the twenty-eighth strike, it nearly came to a general lockout over a local dispute, but the incident was settled by the timely intervention of the leaders of the union.

All this caused surprise and consternation not only among the "public," but also among the leaders, who were not at all used to such rebellious outbreaks and disregard for solemn agreements and their own leaders on the part of their practical and level-headed members. All the engineers, cotton spinners, boiler makers, coal miners etc., who were now trampling underfoot the time honoured traditions of trade unionism, were not the common sort of labourers, as were the nondescript mob of the dockers or carters, but the very aristocrats of trade unionism, its founders and priests, the pride of the whole English working class and of the benign and friendly middle class! What strange tricks were being performed by these aristocrats! There was, for instance, the particularly favoured group of railwaymen employed by the North Eastern Railway, which, being more enlightened than the other companies, had been treating its employees with comparative decency, was paying them above the average rates and had even half recognised the union. They had joined the strike of 1907 with great reluctance, and were particularly vociferous in their joy over the settlement effected through the mediation of Mr. Lloyd George. In 1910, these same railwaymen suddenly, and without consulting their union or warning the company, went on strike and held up the whole traffic on the railway for three days on account of some insignificant local incident, and then calmly returned to work without offering so much as an apology! Equally interesting was the case of the Northumberland and Durham miners. These miners formed, so to speak, the right wing of the workers employed in the coal mining industry: for a long time they had opposed the idea of legislative regulation of working hours, and were the last to join the Miners' Federation and the Labour Party. In fact, they were an aristocracy even among the coal miners, working less and getting more pay than their com-

rades in other districts, and their chief leader, Mr. Thomas Burt, was one of the two Labour representatives who had entered Parliament in the 70's, and was at one time an under-secretary in Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet. Now these sturdy stalwarts became infected with the new spirit of anarchy: on January 1st, 1910, the new Miners' Eight Hours Act was to come into force, and more than one-third of the miners in these districts refused to accept the new rates and new rules which had been agreed upon by their leaders after prolonged deliberations with the employers. For a period of more than three months the rebellious miners refused to go back to work, disregarding all the efforts of the leaders and openly attacking them as traitors and deceivers. Their old leader had vainly appealed to them to save the good name of the trade union movement that had been sullied by the unlawful strikes and the disregard of solemn agreements, and warned them against the fatal consequences of such actions.

Alas, the disappointed veteran miners' leader, when penning this circular in August, did not foresee that before two months had passed the phenomena so deplored by him would assume such a volume as to make the year 1910 a red year in the annals of the English Labour movement. As though acting by accord, all these groups of workers, and many others, were again suddenly seized by a great excitement and, throwing all discipline to the winds, indulged in a regular orgy of strikes. It will be sufficient for our purpose to dwell on two particularly striking instances. One relates to the cotton spinners. We saw how the masters, in the autumn of 1908, had enforced a 5 per cent. reduction in wages on the plea of hard times. Since then two years had elapsed, but though there was a great improvement in the trade, there was no increase in wages. On the contrary, in April, 1910, when the trade again became "slack," the masters asked for a further 5 per cent. decrease in wages, threatening a lockout in the event of a refusal. The conciliatory machinery under the Brooklands Agreement was set to work, but with no effect. The situation became critical, when the death of King Edward afforded both sides a decent excuse for adjourning the final decision. Upon the resumption of negotiations the masters, out of respect for the memory of the great peacemaker, withdrew their demand, but the workers on their part had to agree that no change of wages should take place during the next five years! On this basis of five years' bondage for the workers social peace was restored; but alas, not

for very long. The agreement was signed on August 8th, and on September 12th the Cotton Masters' Association had to call a full meeting of its members to discuss the question of a general lock-out in the cotton industry to take effect on October 1st. What had happened? One of the unions—the cardroom operatives—had declared a strike in a mill where one of their members had been put on a job which, in the opinion of the union, had nothing to do with cardroom work. All arguments of the firm to the contrary and all appeals to submit the case to arbitration by the Board of Trade failed, and the cardroom operatives, in spite of the Brooklands Agreement, went on strike. In answer, the masters threatened a general lockout if the cardroom operatives did not put a stop to such anarchical practices. But the men did not give in, and a lockout was declared on October 1st. After a few days the dispute was settled through the mediation of the Board of Trade: the operative who had caused all the trouble was transferred to another factory, and the question whether the firm had acted rightly in giving him that job was to be decided by Board of Trade experts. Formally the workers had lost, but it was not the result that mattered but the circumstances in which the conflict had arisen. For the first time since the signing of the famous agreement of 1893, a powerful and exemplary trade union of textile workers had revolted against the methods of peaceful settlement and had wantonly violated its agreement with the employers.

The redeeming feature in this case was the fact that the executive of the union had acted hand in hand with the members engaged in the fight. It was different in the shipyard conflict. Hardly a month had passed since the settlement of the general lockout, when the boilermakers in two of the shipyards, dissatisfied with the rates fixed by the local conciliation committee, went on strike, thus disregarding both the findings of the committee and the general agreement of 1909 between all the employing firms and all the unions. As the executive of the union had set its face against the conduct of the rebellious workers and refused to recognise the legality of the strike, there arose an additional conflict with the leaders themselves. The employers, exasperated by this—the twenty-ninth—violation of discipline, announced a general lockout of boilermakers, and declared that they would not reinstate them until they had given material guarantees of good behaviour in the future. They had in their minds the deposit by the Boilermakers' Union of a substantial sum of money to be

forfeited in the event of any further violation of the agreements. The executive asked for authority to negotiate with the employers upon this question, but the men refused, preferring to appoint special delegates to negotiate, and that on condition that any future agreement, when and if arrived at, be submitted to a vote of the men. This was tantamount to a vote of want of confidence in the leaders, but the latter thought it prudent to hold their tongues. The negotiations were of a protracted nature, eventually ending in a compromise: the members of the union guilty of violating the agreements and of declaring an unauthorised strike were to be fined by the union; the fine was to be paid by the union into a special fund for the widows and orphans of the workers, under the auditing control of the employers, and then collected from the offending members; in the event of their refusing to pay, they were to be discharged by the employers and not reinstated until they had repaid their debt to the union. As compared with the past practice of money deposits to guarantee the faithful execution of agreements, this compromise looked quite decent; nevertheless it was voted down by the workers. In vain did the executive and the delegates urge that no amount of bargaining would yield any better conditions, and that the union was short of means to continue the struggle since its funds were immobilised in non-liquid securities. The workers declared that they would not allow the masters to interfere in the internal affairs of the organisation, and that if the leaders were unable to obtain better results, they, the workers, would choose others in their place.

This unusual fight of the workers on two fronts—against the employers and against their own leaders—lasted for several months and terminated in a complete victory for the men: they persisted in voting down all the agreements reached by their leaders with the employers until the employers agreed to settle the matter without any guarantees or penalties. Not content with this, the boilermakers repudiated the basic agreement of 1909 and disclaimed all responsibility for its further existence.

This episode was all the more remarkable since the boilermakers had hitherto been the stoutest advocates of peaceful methods, and the most exemplary trade unionists in the sense of internal discipline and respect for the leaders and funds of the union. If they now rebelled not only against the masters, but also against the leaders; if they now violated not only the agree-

ment with the employers, but also all the traditions of opportunism; they must have had very weighty reasons. Indeed, the drop in the real value of wages, owing to the rise in prices, had revealed to them and to the workers a number of other realities besides, which had hitherto perhaps been noticed by them, but had not affected them to such an extent as they did now. First of all, they met with the stubborn refusal of the employers to meet them half way. Being under the spell of the theory and practice of opportunism, the workers had failed to note the changes which had taken place in world economic conditions, and consequently also in the psychology of English capitalists, and were now astounded to see the absence of any desire on the part of the employers to sacrifice any of their profits to satisfy the needs of the workers. The greed of the employers was, on the contrary, manifestly assuming an aggressive character, and, contrary to all past assertions as to the identity of interests between capital and labour which were profuse in the days when the workers were obtaining benefits without any corresponding sacrifices on the part of the employers, was pushing them to hostile acts against the workers. Moreover, the employers in the meantime had formed excellent organisations for the fight both against their foreign competitors and their workpeople at home, and were now in a much better position than before to dictate the terms of "peaceful co-existence" to the working class, which had overlooked the need of organisation in its enthusiasm for peaceful diplomacy. Whilst the trade unions persisted in their old methods of loose organisation and continued to narrow down their organisations to a minimum, the employers united into powerful trusts and syndicates and created a machinery for mutual support in the event of conflicts with the men. Now it dawned upon the workers that it was not harmony of interests, but force which determined the outcome of negotiations in every individual case, and that force was on the side of the employers. Finally, it was realised by the workers that the very machinery for the peaceful settlement of conflicts was primarily, if not exclusively, serving the interests of the employers, who had no scruples in using it for the purpose of protracting and obstructing all negotiations and all conflicts. In citing the instances of sudden strikes declared by the workers, we have advisedly omitted to mention the fact that the action of the workers was in every case a reply to provocation by the employers, who for months had failed to return an answer to the workers'



complaints and had been deliberately dragging out the negotiations in the various committees. "In many cases," complained the secretary of the Boilermakers' Union, "the ships had not only been built, but had even gone to sea, and sometimes the very builders of the ships had died, before the conciliation committees had managed to give their decision on any dispute that had arisen in the course of their construction." A similar situation prevailed in the mining industry and on the railways, particularly on the latter: thanks to the machinery created on the railways by Mr. Lloyd George in 1907, the greatest grievance presented by the workers had to travel through an endless series of committees before reaching the final court which was a court of arbitration; even then the railway companies invariably found grounds for so interpreting the decision, or so carrying it out, as to compel the workers to complain again and to repeat their pilgrimages through the circles of the conciliation inferno. Matters were no different in the cotton industry: between 1908 and 1910 the workers incessantly asked for a return to the rates of wages which had existed prior to the last reduction, but the masters had skilfully protracted the proceedings until the industrial situation grew worse again, when they asked for a further reduction in rates instead of giving an increase. In fact, the whole machinery of conciliation and arbitration was converted by the much more dexterous and stronger employers into an effective instrument of obstruction.

This was the source whence flowed the new tendencies among the workers and caused so much heartburning to old Burt and other leaders. Some of them took a fairly "materialistic" view of things: for instance, Mr. Appleton, the General Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions, after the lockout of the cardroom operatives in 1909, declared in a special circular to the members that the recent strikes had drained the funds of the Federation and added that "happily there were no further disputes of such magnitude, and it was the duty of the Federation, as far as possible, to prevent them in the future." Other leaders viewed the situation from a still narrower standpoint, from that of their own comfort and ambitions to which the good will of the capitalist class was essential. If Mr. Robert Knight, for many years secretary of the Boilermakers', who boasted of never having admitted strikes, was secretly a holder of shares in shipbuilding firms, he naturally could entertain no sympathy for the spirit of revolt manifested by the workers in his union; neither could there

be any revolutionary sympathies held by Mr. Cummings, his successor, who was promised a soft job in the Department of Labour, and eventually got it on being forced by the workers to resign after causing their defeat in a strike. Of such leaders there was a goodly number, far more than those of the type of Burt, a man nurtured in the old traditions of Liberalism, who was sincerely sorry to see the break-up of the old order of things. No wonder the revolt of the workers against the masters and against the former methods of opportunism was accompanied by their revolt against the old discipline which had delivered the Labour movement into the hands of the leaders and converted it into a pedestal for their exaltation. The masses became more independent and articulate, were developing great activity, and were compelling the leaders to submit to their will.

From this moment onward something like an epidemic of strikes began, which grew more and more fierce and extensive. As though aroused from prolonged lethargy, one set of workers after another began to stir, to come out in smaller and larger detachments, to declare strikes here and there, disregarding all agreements, all discipline, and all conditions of the market; frequently losing, but just as frequently catching the employers unawares, and winning; and finally beginning to move in large masses, on a scale unprecedented in England since the time of the Chartists, and shaking the very foundations of the bourgeois order. In the summer of 1910 a movement was started by the labourers in the London Docks, who belonged to several unions. The dockers asked for an increase in wages and presented a complete programme of demands for improvements in their working conditions; their example was emulated by the Seamen's Union in all the ports. At the same time the dockers took the initiative characteristic of the times, in proposing the formation of a Federation of all the unions of transport workers for the purpose of joint action upon a united programme. The plan was enthusiastically taken up by all the numerous unions of the workers employed on the docks; the carters joined in; and a Federation was formed in the autumn. After a few months of agitation and organisation, the Transport Workers' Federation, in the summer of 1911, presented an ultimatum to the employers' association in the port of London, and receiving no satisfaction, declared a strike. This was the first mass movement in London in the whole of its history, far exceeding in size the dockers' strike of

1889, which had started for the organisation of the unskilled. The strike was so complete and thorough that everything was brought to a standstill not only in the port, but in the whole city. Delivery of foodsuffs and goods from the port and the railway stations was stopped; factories and works were forced to curtail production; the newspapers were forced either to cut down their circulation or to cease publication altogether, and only such institutions as hospitals, or public services like drainage and waterworks etc., obtained the necessary permits from the strike committee. As usual, the employers and the union leaders quickly came to terms and drew up an agreement; but the workers rejected it and disowned the negotiators. The Government, scared out of its wits, called out troops and police reserves, and threatened to send 25,000 soldiers into the port to serve as strike-breakers; but eventually it came to its senses, and began to negotiate with the workers. Having started with a membership of 14,290 in all the affiliated unions, the Transport Workers' Federation in 1911, after the victory, had more than 200,000 on its books.

Scarcely were the thunder-claps of the Transport Workers' strike over, when a strike broke out on the railways. Exasperated by the procrastinating tactics of the local railway company, which had been systematically ignoring the men's demand for the summoning of the conciliation committee to examine certain grievances, the Liverpool railwaymen downed tools in August, 1911, and were joined by the railwaymen of Manchester and other places. None of them asked the sanction of or informed the union, but from everywhere arose such a clamour for a general strike that the executives of the unions—of which there were no fewer than four—were compelled to give in. A demand was presented to the railway companies for a joint conference to discuss the men's complaints about the work of the conciliation committees, and on meeting with refusal, the unions gave notice of a general strike. The strike, warded off in 1907, broke out now, and although it proved far from general—only about 200,000 men joined in—the disorganisation of the railway traffic was felt keenly. The Government again tried the former manœuvre of Mr. Lloyd George, offering the appointment of a Royal Commission, but the offer was firmly rejected by the workers. The Government then called out the troops and threatened to militarise the railways. Particularly provocative was the attitude of Mr. Churchill, then Home Secretary. The workers, however, refused

to be intimidated, and the Government had to beat a retreat. It compelled the railway companies to agree to a conference, and as a result the companies agreed immediately to consider all the grievances, and a Royal Commission was appointed to revise the whole of the conciliation machinery. The workers went back to work, but when the Commission completed its labours, and the workers again invited the companies to a conference for the joint examination of its findings, the companies again proved obstinate, refusing to recognise the right of the unions to speak for the mass of the railwaymen. The country was again confronted with the menace of a general strike, on which a vote was already being taken; but Parliament intervened and passed a special resolution calling upon the companies to comply with the demands of the workers. In this case again the direct result of the militant policy was the growth in the membership of the organisations involved. In 1910 the total membership of the A.S.R.S. amounted to but 7,000, and together with the other unions represented a force of about 116,000 men; in 1911 it increased to 180,000, in 1912 to 200,000, and in 1913 to the big total of 326,000. In the same year three of the unions amalgamated to form the National Union of Railwaymen.

Capitalist England was to experience a yet greater shock in 1912, when it was flooded by the tremendous wave of a general miners' strike. It was preceded by a fierce battle in the South Wales district, where a group of 70 hewers in one of the mines, after vainly asking for the satisfaction or at least for an examination of their grievances, at last lost patience and downed tools. For this violation of the agreement all the 950 workers in the mine were discharged. After some fruitless negotiations, all of the 12,000 people employed by the firm involved declared a strike. The employers brought in blacklegs to work under police protection, riots accompanied by bloodshed ensued, and the miners called upon the leaders to declare a general strike in the whole of the South Wales mining district. The leaders refused, and the workers continued the heroic struggle alone. Vainly did the leaders try to find a way of compromise out of the conflict: the workers stubbornly rejected all the agreements worked out by the leaders jointly with the employers. Having started in the autumn of 1910, the strike went on until August 1911, when the workers, utterly exhausted and having rejected the last compromise, surrendered unconditionally.

This unusual fight caused the greatest excitement in all the mining areas, and severely strained the relations both with the employers, and with the leaders. In the elections to the South Wales Miners' Union in October, three of the old leaders, Mr. Brace, M.P., Mr. Richards, M.P., and Mr. Onions, were defeated, and three young Socialist-Syndicalists were elected in their place. Even Mr. Abrahams, one of the oldest and most honoured leaders of the South Wales miners, an old member of Parliament and a Privy Councillor, after whom a monthly day of rest was named, was forced to resign. The temper of the men was everywhere such that when, two weeks after the settlement of the conflict in South Wales, the general strike on the railways broke out and a movement in favour of an immediate general strike throughout the coalfields arose, the miners would no doubt have joined the railwaymen if the latter's strike had not been settled in the meantime. This explains the unusual step taken by Parliament in directly intervening in the conflict on the railways. On their part, the miners' leaders did everything in their power to prevent a clash, but the miners were obdurate and insisted on presenting an ultimatum to the mineowners in all the coalfields, containing a number of demands, of which the principal one referred to the establishment of a fixed minimum district wage. For a period of four months the leaders were engaged in negotiations with the employers, but with no result: the latter refused on principle to accept such an unheard of proposal, although the leaders were willing to make every concession, arbitrarily reducing the figures and abandoning other claims. At the eleventh hour the Government intervened, suggesting the recognition of the *principle* of the minimum wage while leaving it to the local conciliation committees to establish the precise figures. Neither side agreed to this compromise, and on February 29th the general strike began. It lasted five weeks and ended in failure, thanks on the one hand to the fact that during the four months of negotiation the mine owners and the principal industries had had ample time to take in sufficient stocks of coal to prevent disorganisation in production; and, on the other hand, to the fact that the Labour Party supported the Government in carrying through a bill making its previous offer binding on the workers. This result was a bitter disappointment to the masses and created a feeling which led in the following year to the formation of the "Triple Alliance" of the miners, railwaymen and transport workers for

the purpose of a united general strike in the near future. The outbreak of the war, however, postponed this gigantic encounter between capital and labour.

The war prevented a great many things. Throughout the year 1913 and the first half of 1914, strikes never ceased; but although none of them were of such magnitude as the railwaymen's or the miners' strike, they served morally to consolidate the ranks of the working class and to imbue them with a high degree of class consciousness. In 1913 there was a general strike of transport workers in Dublin, which destroyed the myth of Irish national unity and ended in a mass shooting of the workers. Irish affairs, in spite of their drama, had hitherto failed greatly to excite the working class in England; this time the Irish strike called forth a wave of universal sympathy which was shown in the refusal of the railwaymen to handle freights intended for Irish ports and in the shipment of large supplies of foodstuffs to the Irish strikers and their families by the English trade unions. The transport workers even discussed the question of a sympathetic strike, and had not the leaders been successful in delaying a decision upon the matter, England would have witnessed for the first time the outbreak of a strike dictated by class solidarity. The bare discussion of this plan was a sign of the times, and it is not surprising that the capitalist press began to talk about an imminent revolution.

We thus see how, in the course of a few years, English trade unionism became utterly transformed. The spirit of opportunism vanished as if by magic; the simple faith in the goodwill of the capitalist class made room for bitter hatred, and even the position of the leaders was severely shaken. The masses began to act independently; the craft spirit of exclusiveness was yielding more and more to the sense of solidarity not only with kindred organisations, but with the working class as a whole, and the mass actions recurring more and more frequently were hammering out a revolutionary consciousness which was bound sooner or later to extend to the political field. After all, class-consciousness is one and indivisible, and the achievements in the economic field are bound to have their eventual repercussion in the field of political action. In the meantime, trade unionism began perceptibly to show syndicalist tendencies, and the syndicalist agitation of Tom Mann and others, fed by the scandalous behaviour of the Labour Party in Parliament, was meeting with some success. It was during

this period that the idea of "direct action" originated which found such a striking practical application in the post-war period. In the period under consideration it was still in the stage of inception, finding its practical expression in the frequency of strikes and in the growth of the Labour organisations. We have seen\* that by the year 1908 the number of disputes dropped to 399, and the number of workers involved was less than 300,000. The following year, with its 436 strikes and lockouts, belonged to the new phase, but the decisive turn of the curve was not revealed until 1910. The character of these years can be seen from the following figures:—

Year.	No. of Disputes.	No. of Work-people Involved.	No. of Work- ing hours Lost.
1910 ...	531	515,165	9,894,831
1911 ...	903	961,980	10,319,591
1912 ...	857	1,463,281	40,914,675
1913 ...	1,497	688,925	11,630,732
1914 ...	973	446,305	10,104,700

(incomplete)

These figures paint a totally different picture from the one observed by us during the whole of the preceding half century. The growth of disputes was naturally accompanied by a corresponding growth in the number of workers organised in the trade unions. The following table shows the growth of the membership in the trade unions in the various industries:—

Year	Textile workers	Building workers	Coal miners	Metal workers	Transport workers	Railway workers	All categories
1909 ...	366,445	162,278	722,639	359,838	224,037	112,130	2,369,067
1910 ...	379,644	156,958	731,305	370,055	245,223	116,214	2,446,342
1911 ...	436,927	173,182	752,419	415,176	513,538	185,513	3,018,903
1912 ...	478,097	203,773	757,147	479,471	514,774	202,329	3,287,884
1913 ...	515,684	248,647	915,734	538,541	698,852	326,192	3,987,115

In the course of some five years the trade unions increased their membership by more than a million and a half, and in each particular case there was a very rapid growth in the activity displayed by the respective sections of the workers. This was particularly noticeable among the miners, whose Federation had always been fairly strong in numbers, but gained over 150,000 new members after the strike of 1912. Similarly the Transport Workers' Federation made about 200,000 new members after the strike of 1911. The same was true of the railwaymen. This

\* See above, p. 204.

bears out the dictum of Karl Marx that "the greater the extent of historic action, the greater becomes the mass taking that action." In this case both the depth of the action and the growth of the mass presented the two sides of one and the same phenomenon: the growing perception by the working class of its situation under the stress of rising prices. The change in the economic situation had torn aside the veil which had hitherto disguised the fact of stationary wages, and the working class realised this, as it did the selfish greed of the capitalists, its own weakness, the incapacity of the leaders, and the fallacy of the traditional policy of opportunism.

Did the working class gain by this change of policy? The answer to this must be a decided affirmative. In spite of the bitter opposition of the employers, and in spite of the short time the workers had at their disposal for a thorough re-organisation, the level of wages began appreciably to rise, as can be seen from the official statistics which are, of course, far from being exhaustive. Continuing our table of wages from page 222, we get the following figures:—

Year.	Textile.	Building.	Mining.	Metal.	All Groups.
1909 ...	107.1	100.0	89.2	101.3	99.4
1910 ...	108.9	100.0	89.7	102.0	99.7
1911 ...	107.1	100.0	88.8	103.2	99.8
1912 ...	102.5	102.5	—	104.0	102.5
1913 ...	—	—	—	—	105.3

The great strikes, as we saw, did not always arise directly on questions of wages, and were not always settled in favour of the workers; nevertheless there was decided progress for all groups, and the general curve of wages shows an increase of 6 points in five years. Of course, during the same period, as we have seen, wholesale prices of necessities rose by 13 points, and retail prices (in London) by 9 points, so that the workers were in reality still the losers, which circumstance was bound to lead to a further intensification of the class struggle. It is quite obvious that if the workers had adhered to their former opportunist tactics, their position would have grown even worse; while, on the other hand, had they started sooner on the road of active militancy, their position would have been much better.

Thus, in the last years before the war, there was growing up in England the new Labour movement which promised to revolutionise the whole internal situation in the classic cradle of capitalism, as well as the whole international position of the pro-



letariat. True, this process, as we have seen, was still based upon trade unionism, *i.e.*, upon the purely economic struggle: but trade unionism itself was being transformed by abandoning its aristocratic exclusiveness, by developing a remarkable growth in the self-dependent activity of the masses, and by reducing the rôle of the leaders to that of simple functionaries carrying out the instructions of the members under their strict control. It was not without justification that the railwaymen, on the eve of the war, having amalgamated into one big union and acquired new premises, placed in the main hall the statue of "Labour Emancipated"; it was the symbol of the new consciousness which had at last penetrated the bulk of the working class after half a century of lethargy.

The war re-shuffled all the cards, creating a vast number of tremendous new problems, putting the working class under the united pressure of patriotic propaganda and military laws, and increasing the influence of the opportunist leaders, who from the very first took up the attitude of a national truce. All the organising activity and agitation of the masses of the workers was stopped. The railwaymen, who had been drawing up an all-grades programme of demands and actions, were now confronted with the new problems imposed on them by the necessities of war transport; a number of contemplated amalgamations of kindred unions in the transport and engineering trades and among the general labourers remained in suspense, while the famous "Triple Alliance" for joint action by the miners, railwaymen and transport workers, now that another war had broken out, adjourned the negotiations. The strike movement almost entirely ceased. In July 1914 the number of industrial conflicts reached 99, but in August there were only 14. Altogether during the last five months of 1914 there were 137 disputes involving 23,000 work-people, whereas in the first seven months of the same year there had been 836 disputes involving 423,000 men. Subsequently, it is true, there was a revival of the economic struggle, because the employers were not slow in taking advantage of the national truce to fill their pockets, while "freezing" the level of wages at the pre-war rates. It may be said that until the beginning of 1915, the level of wages, with few exceptions, remained stationary while the cost of living had already risen by 16 points in August, and by 17 points in December, above the July prices. The further rise in prices, however, caused considerable unrest among

the workers, the Government intervened, and wages began to rise again. This is not to say that the period of the war was entirely free from labour revolts, but they were caused by problems of a different kind, which, in spite of their acuteness, were of a temporary character. Such was the question of the employment on a large scale of women and "unskilled" workers in the war industries which involved the abandonment by the unions of certain rules relating to the admission of outsiders to skilled work, the rates and modes of remuneration, the transfer from one branch of industry to another etc. Such also was the question of the right to strike in the war industries and of the freedom of passing from one firm to another. All these questions caused friction and endless quarrels, led to open revolts and to reprisals by the Government and the courts, and generally disturbed in a very unpleasant manner the patriotic harmony of classes. The workers were, of course, cheated and exploited all the time in a most unceremonious fashion, and had the war gone on much longer, the internal front would no doubt have collapsed, as it did in Germany. Since this did not happen, all these incidents had only a passing effect. They no doubt left some moral traces behind them, but they did not enter as an organic phase the general development of the Labour movement. In Scotland, for instance, where the engineers refused from the very first to accept the national truce, the constant friction between them and the employers and the leaders on the above-mentioned question, led to the rise and the growth of a strong Shop Stewards' movement, which rapidly gained the upper hand as against the official committees of the trade unions. It played a large and pretty dramatic rôle, and seemed to offer the promise of an interesting new development in the revolutionary trade union movement of England. But towards the close of the war it began to lose its influence, and after the war disappeared entirely. Equally remarkable was the movement for the formation of Workers' Councils which arose after the February revolution in Russia, when a National Council was formed at a large representative congress in Leeds, with local Councils in various parts of England. This movement, too, proved ephemeral. The only thing which survived was the strengthened position of the leaders who had succeeded during the war in establishing most intimate relations with the capitalist class and the ruling cliques, a fact which has played a big rôle in the post-war period.

The war thus put an abrupt end to the process of the growth of revolutionary consciousness which had been maturing in the years preceding it. Class antagonisms were pushed to the background in the minds of the workers, not so much perhaps because of their patriotic intoxication, as under the stress of the numerous new problems which now confronted them and urgently demanded attention. In this way the direct line of progress, which had been more and more clearly coming to be adopted by the workers, became entangled and mixed up with other problems and finally lost itself in the general chaos. The war had to end and the specific problems connected with it had to be settled before the Labour movement could once more find its normal course and get on to the basic line of attack against the capitalist class.

Here we must stop. Our aim in this part of our work has been to discover and to define the fundamental tendencies which guided the English Labour movement after the breakdown of Chartism, and lay bare the basic factors which governed those tendencies. In so doing, we endeavoured to furnish a key to the understanding of the intricate picture of the movement in the past, as well as to indicate the line which, in all probability, it will follow in the future. So long as English capitalism was in the ascendant and was practically holding a world monopoly, it could afford in one way or another to allow a tolerable existence to the working class and from time to time to grant political and social reforms which fostered the intellectual and moral growth of the workers. The working class therefore made peace with bourgeois society, although struggling from time to time against its most flagrant abuses. When the flourishing period of capitalism in England had passed, when the bourgeoisie became more reactionary and more niggardly, the period of declining prices began, which strengthened the harmony between the working class and bourgeois society. This was the period of stagnation in the English Labour movement and of the complete captivity of the minds of the workers by vulgar bourgeois ideology, which evoked the admiration of the bourgeoisie all over the world, and aroused the despair of International Socialism. With the change in the direction of the movement of prices the factor which had disguised the real relations between labour and capital disappeared, and the working class began to move, with an ever-increasing impact and power, until the war intervened and placed a heavy and opaque screen across its path. It was only after the ter-

mination of the war that the Labour movement revived, but in new conditions, though still on the same basis of a continuously rising cost of living, complicated by the new conditions of international and English economy. Accordingly the Labour movement assumes new forms and passes through new phases, but on the whole is manifesting the same tendency towards a relentless class struggle as it did on the eve of the war. The process of revolutionisation of the proletarian masses in England is, perhaps, proceeding slowly, but is gaining a hold irresistibly over the majority of them. To the future historian belongs the task of analysing this process, which will lead to the decisive battle.

## APPENDIX

1848 IN ENGLAND

### § I

#### *General Conditions and Political Currents*

In the panorama of the revolutionary events of 1848 a very modest, an almost microscopic place is usually accorded to England by the historians. In that year—they tell us—there was some unrest among the English working classes who were suffering from a severe industrial crisis; an attempt was made by the Chartists to take advantage of the situation in order to organise on the 10th of April a mass demonstration and a procession to the Houses of Parliament; but the Government took energetic measures and the whole affair ended in a miserable failure. That ends the story. Thus, in a score or so of lines are the events of 1848 in England dismissed even in voluminous works having for their subject the political history of England.\*

In reality, that year in England marked a most important turning point in her history, and its events played a momentous part, not only in her own life, but also in the fortunes of those very revolutions which lent such fullness to the year 1848. For if in France the revolution of 1848 marked the birth of the proletariat as a distinct class, conscious of itself and of its opposition to the bourgeoisie, if in Germany it called into being a similarly class-conscious bourgeoisie opposed to the landlord class and to the autocratic regime of government, in England the revolutionary events of that year marked, after many years of stubborn struggle, the final victory of the bourgeoisie *over* the proletariat. The consequences of that victory are still in evidence to-day, after the lapse of three-quarters of a century, whilst in its own day it reinforced the rear of the retreating Continental reaction, enabling it to rally its forces and to start an offensive. In other words, bourgeois England in 1848 succeeded not only in crushing the revolutionary proletariat at home, but also in checking the course of the entire Continental revolution. Herein lies the meaning of that year's events in England, and for this reason they deserve our attention.

Towards the beginning of '48, England presented the following picture: The country was in the throes of a severe financial and industrial crisis, originating in railway speculation, then extending to the banks, which in many cases suspended payment, and even to the Bank of England, which was permitted by Parliament to suspend the free exchange of banknotes, and eventually paralysing the whole of industry.

\* An instance of this kind is furnished by the 12-volume *Political History of England*, edited by William Hunt and Reginald Poole (1914 Edition), in which exactly 28½ lines are allotted to the events of 1848.

The workers were thrown out of employment by tens and hundreds of thousands, and the people in Ireland were dying of starvation—those who could, saved themselves by emigration to America or England. To characterise the situation it will be sufficient to mention that between August, 1847 and August, 1848 no fewer than 4,258,609 persons of both sexes, comprising one-seventh of the total population, received public relief at the hands of the Boards of Guardians in spite of all the degrading conditions which then, even more than now, were imposed by law upon the recipient, and the expenditure under this head reached the record figure of over £8,000,000. Such pauperism had not been witnessed in England since the time of the Industrial Revolution, when entire villages "threw themselves" upon the parish. On the other hand, however, the revolutionary Chartist movement, which only a few years previously had been drawing the masses into a general strike, monster mass demonstrations and even an attempt at armed insurrection, was now in a state of decline, due both to the natural reaction after the failure of the first revolutionary surge and to the relative prosperity of the intervening years which followed upon the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, and the Ten Hours Act in the textile industry. The first of these measures, which opened the era of so-called Free Trade in England was passed against the stubborn opposition, not only of the Tory landlords, but also of the Chartists, who justly considered it as a means for the capitalist manufacturers to lower the price of labour and at the same time to draw the weaker elements away from the political movement by promises of the untold blessings which were to be showered upon the working classes by the cheapening of commodities. And, indeed, Chartism was deserted, not only by its middle class supporters, but also by the proletarian elements who had not yet shaken off the mentality of the independent artisans and craftsmen from whose ranks they had sprung. Although the high hopes set before the public by the Cobdenites failed to materialise in the next few years the disappointment of the working classes did not reach any serious dimensions, owing to the financial and industrial crisis which was reasonably assumed to be a hindrance to the realisation of the effects of the reform.

As to the Ten Hour Day in the textile industry, that reform was to come into force only in May, 1848, and in the meantime the workers in that industry who had fought for this reform for many years by Parliamentary methods under the leadership of Tory philanthropists were not inclined, in spite of great unemployment, to resort to other, that is to revolutionary, methods, since the manufacturers were still agitating for the repeal of the Act and the parliamentary fight was flaring up again. This section of the working class was now one of the most docile and tractable—so much so that many years afterwards (in 1864) Gladstone could publicly declare in the House of Commons that the Ten Hour Act had been highly beneficial, "both in mitigating human suffering and in attracting important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government."<sup>\*</sup>

\* Hodder, *Life of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, Vol. II. p. 208.

portionately less than it had been in 1879. This is tantamount to bankruptcy on the part of trade unionism.

In drawing our comparisons we started with the last year of the 70's, which marked the beginning of the rising curve. We have, however, given in italics the figures relating to the *middle* year of the same decade, up to which we brought our figures of the previous period (p. 220). Had our comparison been made with these earlier figures, the progress would appear even more insignificant. We would find that in the textile group wages at the end of the 70's and the beginning of the 80's were lower than in 1875 and although they rose afterwards, this rise was so slow that as late as 1905 wages were still lower than in 1875. And this in a first class industry! It was only in 1906 that wages began to rise above the level which had been attained in the middle of the 70's, so that the entire advance for the years 1875-1909 amounted only to 2.5 points. The situation in the coal-mining industry was slightly better. There too, the figure for 1875 was higher than those of the following years and was only reached again fifteen years later, in 1890, but only for a moment, as wages immediately fell again, surpassing the level of 1875 in 1899 and the following years. In this way the miners' wages rose by four points in the course of 23 years, and the entire advance over the period under review, that is during 34 years, amounted to some ten points. Among the metal workers things were little better, but even so, wages in 1885 stood below the level of ten years previously. After 1885 they began to rise and finally reached the level of 20 per cent. above that of 1875. Even this figure, the result of the struggle of various unions in the metal trades over a whole generation, is extremely low. The building trades showed the greatest advance. Their wages began to rise not at the end, but in the middle of the 70's and surpassed the level of 1875 by 14 per cent. towards the close of the century. At that figure they remained stationary for the next ten years, so that these fourteen points cover the entire advance for the period 1875-1909—as though the wages suddenly grew tired of advancing rapidly, and for very weariness could move no longer. The aggregate result for all the four groups amounts to this: the figures for 1875 were surpassed by about 0.5 points at the end of the 15 years following and were definitely left behind in 1897, that is, after 22 years; while over the period of 34 years, the net result was an advance of about 9 points. This looks more like stagnation than progress, and reflects the achieve-

ments of the banquet campaign. One month later the Chartists were categorically asserting that the revolution in France was only a question of a few days. The Society of Fraternal Democrats, an organisation led by Julian Harney, and afterwards Ernest Jones, declared in an "Address to the Proletarians of France," drawn up early in February: "The signs of the times proclaim coming changes of vast magnitude and importance to your order. . . It requires not the power of prophecy to foretell your speedy liberation from the degrading and disastrous yoke under which France has groaned for the last 17 years."<sup>\*</sup> It is worthy of note that the Address was directed to the French *proletariat*, and not to the bourgeois politicians who were holding "opposition banquets"; and that the coming revolution was considered by the authors of the Address as fraught with important issues to the working class. On the very day when the revolution finally broke out, a public meeting was being held by the Fraternal Democrats (still uninformed of the event) to commemorate the anniversary of the Cracow rising of 1846, where a great speech was delivered by Harney, which may serve as an explanation of the above words in the Address. "Emancipation of labour," he said † "is the only worthy object of political warfare. . . That those who till the soil shall be its masters, that those who raise the food shall be its first partakers, that those who build mansions shall live in them. . . In all the revolutions the working men have been the principal workers and sufferers, but the rewards were reaped by their masters. But now at last the hour has come of the doom of the rule of the bourgeoisie." Such being the meaning of revolution, the lessons to be drawn from it for England followed by themselves. In a leading article headed "The Tocsin," in the *Northern Star*, dealing with the reports of the first battles in the streets of Paris, Julian Harney wrote: "Whatever may be the results of the conflict in France, the immediate effect upon Europe generally will be immense. Germany will be roused to action, and Italy will at once burst her Austrian fetters. Furthermore, the English people are bound, by all their hopes of liberty, to sympathise with those who are struggling to achieve freedom. . . If Englishmen are not the most despicable of slaves they will at once set about the work—peaceably and legally—of struggling for their Charter." Of course, the words "peaceably and legally" were merely used as a protection against police persecution, for, in making the announcement of two public meetings to be held, Harney goes on to say: "Let every true democrat and Chartist attend both meetings and testify adhesion to the principle that: 'Whenever a Government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people the most sacred of rights, and the most indispensable of duties.'"

In this way the events in Paris had a direct effect in England in reviving the energy and the hopes of the Chartists. Indeed, no sooner had the slogans been launched by Harney and Jones than mass meetings were organised both in London and in the provinces, at which the

<sup>\*</sup> *Northern Star*, Feb. 5.

† *Ibid.*, Feb. 26.



in power in 1908 and set out to prove to the workers the baselessness of the arguments of the Tory protectionists that wages suffered on account of Free Trade. A special investigation of working conditions in the industrial districts was undertaken, and a series of reports were published in the course of a number of years, down to the outbreak of the war, under the general title of *Earnings and Hours of Labour of Workpeople in the United Kingdom in 1906*. The reports give the rates of wages for a selected week in September or October, 1906, with supplementary estimates of earnings on the assumption of employment during a whole year. This assumption is exceedingly bold, and the average figure of earnings shown in the reports and given below suffers from considerable exaggeration. Taking the textile industry, we find the following weekly earnings:—

Industry	Adult		Juvenile		Average Earnings
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Cotton ...	29/6	18/8	11/6	10/1	19/7
Wool ...	26/10	18/10	8/10	8/4	15/9
Linen ...	22/4	10/4	7/8	6/7	12/-
Jute ...	21/7	13/5	10/11	9/8	14/3
All industries...	28/1	15/5	10/5	8/11	17/6

After a century of development of an industry in which English capitalism occupies the world's leading place, and in which the workers are very well organised, an adult full-time worker was earning 28s. and all workers on the average less than 20s. a week. Of course, these are but average figures. In the textile, as in other industries, there are different categories of workers, including for example fine cotton spinners who earned sometimes more than £2 a week. But the low average shows how very small was the number of such lucky fellows. Weekly earnings, in 1906, were distributed as follows:—

Industry	Male %	Weekly		Female %	Weekly	
		Shillings			Shillings	
Cotton	59.7	Under 30		59.3	Under 20	
	40.4	" 25		23.9	" 15	
	67.4	" 30		24.7	From 15 to 20	
Woollen	15.2	" 20		55.6	" 10 " 15	
				10.7	Under 15	
		From 20 to 30		49.1	From 10 to 15	
Linen	36.7	Under 20		41.7	Under 10	
	44.4	From 20 to 30		66.4	From 10 to 15	
	36.0	Under 20		46.2	Under 10	
Jute ...	49.1	From 20 to 30		47.8	From 10 to 15	
	54.0	Under 20		38.9	Under 10	
	19.4					

the events which were taking place in Paris. Whilst Harney, his own editor, was explaining in a thousand and one ways that the events in France were the harbingers of something very important to the proletariat, he himself wrote on the very eve of the victory of the people of Paris, in his "Letter," the first which touched upon this subject, that the contention between the French people and the monarchy was not even about parliamentary reform, but about the right of the people "publicly to discuss their grievances," and since that right had long existed in England, there was no reason for the English people to be unduly excited over the stormy events in France. On the contrary, every excitement on the subject was apt to divert attention from their own important problems. "Let me beg of you," he writes,\* "let me implore of you and beseech you, not to allow any foreign question—however its results may enlist your sympathy—to operate on your great domestic movements. . . I tell you, that as long as I live the Charter and the Land shall never be lost sight of, nor placed in abeyance by any foreign excitement or movement, however we may use events for the furtherance of those great objects." And in his effort to minimise the events in France he extols the liberties enjoyed by the English people with an exaggeration which at other times he would have been the first to denounce. "You must critically understand the position of France," he goes on to tell his readers, "and the cause of disturbance in that country, to be able to estimate the value of those privileges which you have secured in spite of oppression. . . By the dread of increasing moral power more may be done than by any physical outbreak; and the reason of my present address is to preserve you within the bounds of moral discipline, in spite of any agency that may be used to force you from your fastness and stronghold into looseness and weakness."

O'Connor wrote this article at the very beginning of the outbreak, and it was not until some weeks later, after the publication of the decrees of the Provisional Government relating to the organisation of labour, that he began to realise the meaning of the change which had taken place in France. Those decrees made a tremendous impression in England, and in his next *Letter to the Old Guards*, O'Connor wrote something like a public retraction of his previous attitude. "I was slow," he confesses, "to comment upon the good results to be obtained from the French Revolution. Past history made me sceptical. . . But now, from the change I derive hope, consolation and ample reward for all my services, because I see in the exposition of the French mind the resolution that Labour, that achieved victory, shall be the first partaker of its fruits."†

This lack of understanding of the February events in France was one of the reasons why O'Connor took no part in the agitation started by his comrades in connection with the French Revolution; there was another, and an even more important reason—that he did not believe in the possibility of a revolution in England, at least in the near future.

\* *Ibid.*, Feb. 26.

† *Ibid.*, March 18.

## THE FRUITS OF OPPORTUNISM

227

Industry	Adult Male	Adult Female	Juvenile Male	Juvenile Female	Average Earnings
Pig Iron ...	34/4	—	12/11	—	33/4
Engineers ...	32/5	13/1	9/7	8/2	25/11
Shipbuilders ...	35/11	14/8	11/10	7/4	30/7
Tin Plate ...	42/-	14/9	12/4	8/10	32/1
Iron and Steel ...	39/1	—	13/-	—	36/10
METAL INDUSTRY ...	33/11	12/8	10/4	7/4	27/4
Wholesale Clothing...	31/8	15/5	9/11	6/4	14/10
Tailoring ...	31/11	12/11	9/9	6/4	14/8
Boot, Shoe ...	28/8	13/1	10/6	5/10	19/10
CLOTHING INDUSTRY...	30/2	13/6	9/8	5/9	15/1
Paper ...	28/11	11/7	10/10	7/4	20/10
Printing ...	36/10	12/3	8/7	6/4	23/10
Bookbinding ...	34/1	12/10	8/8	6/-	16/4
CARDBOARD INDUSTRY	28/10	12/3	10/3	6/1	12/5
PAPER AND PRINTING					
TRADES ...	34/4	12/2	8/11	6/4	20/-
Pottery and China...	32/4	11/11	11/2	6/2	19/8
Glass ...	38/4	8/9	12/4	7/1	26/6
Chemicals ...	29/1	10/8	10/3	7/4	27/5
CHINA AND GLASS					
INDUSTRY ...	29/2	11/10	11/6	7/-	23/6
Baking, etc. ...	38/11	12/8	9/6	6/5	22/8
Brewing ...	26/3	9/4	10/5	7/5	24/3
Tobacco ...	30/6	12/-	9/9	6/2	13/10
FOOD, DRINK AND					
Tobacco ...	26/4	11/5	10/-	6/6	19/-
Saw Milling ...	27/4	12/5	9/8	8/4	22/4
Furnishing ...	33/-	13/1	8/7	6/2	24/10
WOODWORKING					
INDUSTRY ...	32/-	12/11	9/6	6/10	26/7
Gas Workers ...	32/6	12/6	—	—	31/7
Tramways ...	30/6	11/3	—	—	29/3
Water Supply ...	28/8	12/9	—	—	28/3
MUNICIPAL SERVICES	28/1	11/10	—	—	26/3

wealthiest capitalist country and in the best organised large-scale industries. The earnings of adult workers may in some cases appear more or less adequate if we overlook the fact that the figures relate to full-time employment, which is generally most unusual for any length of time in modern industry. England particularly, working for exports and importing her raw material, is highly sensitive to fluctuations on the world market, and the course of her production constantly experiences changes. Nowhere in the capitalist world is there, even in good years, so much unem-

We have dwelt at some length on O'Connor's attitude towards the French Revolution because it explains the weakness of the Chartist revival of 1848 and, it may be said, doomed it in advance. O'Connor's influence over the masses was unbounded. His powerful eloquence, his great energy and working capacity, his—hitherto—revolutionary tactics which looked for support to the rank and file of the workers, and, finally, his unquestionable loyalty to the movement—all this had won him unusual popularity among the proletariat, particularly in the North, despite his Irish descent and extreme Irish nationalism, against which strong prejudice prevailed at the time among the masses of the working class. As to his exceptional conceit and boastfulness, his resentment to the least opposition to his views, coupled with woeful political ignorance, this was a matter on which, of course, the masses were quite uninformed, and which did not concern them. Those who suffered from these defects were his closest associates, who had either to submit or to quit the movement. But the fact that his influence over the masses was so great could not fail to tell on the movement after it had become known that he was opposed to revolutionary methods and was in favour of "moral" force. After his advocacy of revolutionary methods in the past, when the situation seemed far less favourable—an advocacy which was based on a correct appreciation of their educational and organisational effects, if not for the immediate present, at least for the future when the situation would be more favourable—his present opposition to the revolutionary agitation carried on by his associates was bound to impress the masses with the view that the latter were wrong and that it was necessary to confine oneself to demonstrations and parliamentary petitions.

Of course, it was not easy for his friends and opponents to attack his position, partly because of his great popularity among the masses, and partly because open advocacy of revolutionary tactics—or "physical force," as it was then called—was very dangerous. Even so, they were not always able to withhold their criticism of O'Connor's position or to refrain from stating their own views on the questions of policy. Particularly daring in this respect was Ernest Jones, perhaps the most brilliant man in the Chartist movement, a talented poet and orator, later a close friend of Marx and Engels, who approached nearest to their views. At one of the numerous meetings addressed by him, he, without mentioning names, ingeniously observed: "We are told the power of the mind is to subvert despotism—so it will, if rightly used; it is as to the use we differ. The people are marching on the high road to progression, but across the way class rule has built a cold stony wall of monopolies. Now then, let the people stand before it and think, let them look at it and say in their minds: "You naughty wall, you ought to be lying low, you oughtn't to be there—why don't you tumble down?" Do you think that will clear their road? No! But if their 'power of mind' tells them to take a pick-axe and a mallet and a crowbar, and break the rotten barrier to atoms, then the highway to liberty will soon be clear."\*

\* *Ibid.*, April 1.

of production, and what becomes of the remaining six millions employed in trade and industry, mentioned by the census reports. Even with these limitations, the table shows that about one million workers, or  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the total number, earned less than 20s. per week, while one-half the total number—or to be more precise, 53 per cent.—earned less than 30s. Nobody will contend that the condition of the working class in England at the close of the fifty years period after the collapse of Chartism, as illustrated by these figures, was anything like satisfactory. Would other methods of fighting have yielded better results? Or were the English industries really unable to stand a larger expenditure on wages? On the occasion of the enactment of the Minimum Wage for the coal mining industry, a confidential memorandum was sent out to its members by the Mine Workers' Association of Northumberland and Durham, giving the movement of wages in these districts for a number of years. It showed that the rates for a two shift day were: in February 1872, 6s. 6d.; in July 1872, 8s.  $0\frac{1}{2}$ d.; in March 1873, 9s.  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.; in April 1874, 8s.  $6\frac{1}{2}$ d.; and in October 1874, 7s. 8d. But in the year of grace 1912, a minimum wage of 5s. 6d. was established by law for the miners, and a minimum wage of not more than 6s. 9d. for the highest paid category of miners, the hewers, a rate that is, very much below that of 40 years before. Had the coal mining industry been ruined in the course of these long years? Nothing of the kind. Since the 70's there had been a tremendous development in technique and productivity in the mining industry, and the coal magnates had amassed great wealth. But the miners in these two districts were, until very recently, among the most determined representatives of the ideology of the post-Chartist period; they had adopted the sliding scale, and for a long time even refused to join the Miners' Federation, as they were wholly opposed to governmental interference in such "private" business as the regulation of working hours, which formed one of the main planks in the platform of the Federation. The only explanation for the decline in their wages as compared with the 70's is to be found in the effectiveness of their methods of dealing with the employers.

From the figures quoted at the beginning of the present chapter, we may conclude that practically the same conditions as in the coal mining industry obtained in other trades: the low wages prevailing at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century were the closing figures in a *downward* series

mental effect upon their capacity for action and, generally, upon the progress of the movement and its popularity among the masses.

At the same time the masses themselves were undecided and were more than ever in need of firm leadership. On March 9, a conference of delegates from different trades was held in London on the question of unemployment.\* The prevailing tone at the conference was one of complete disappointment in Free Trade and of bitter resentment against the Government. One of the delegates, a cabinet maker, said: "They had seen a change across the water in the last few days; and mark, almost the first act of the provisional government was to look to the interest of labour." The French people were promised a Minister of Industry; and why? Because universal suffrage now prevailed in that country." Another delegate, a bootmaker, said: "From his knowledge of trade societies, he was convinced that nothing could be done for them without they first possessed a direct control on the affairs of government. The position they at present occupied appeared to him exactly the position the Government wished them to hold, but the events that had transpired in Paris, within the last fortnight, had taught them much. . . ." The conclusion to be drawn from these premises seemed obvious, but the resolution moved from the platform merely "draws the Government's attention" to the existing state of distress and prays for measures of relief! Nay, when one of the delegates, a tailor, moved an amendment, demanding universal suffrage, an interminable discussion ensued, the amendment was put as a substantive motion and was eventually talked out without a vote being taken on it. Such being the state of mind among the masses, the waverings in the ranks of the Chartists were bound to have a most detrimental effect on the movement.

On the other hand, the bourgeoisie and the Government circles revealed remarkable unity and determination. The Whigs and the Tories, the industrial bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy, at once composed their political and social differences in face of the common menace, and what seemed to O'Connor as well as to his opponents a corrupt and decomposing oligarchy suddenly became a mailed fist which quickly rallied all the possessing classes. As far back as the beginning of February, a "Queen's Own Volunteer Rifle Corps"—or White Guard, as we would call it to-day—was formed in London which boasted in its press advertisements that the Government had promised them equipment and munitions, and invited all "gentlemen" to join them. The *Northern Star*, in a leading article,† pointed out that the Volunteer Corps was intended not against any external, but against the internal enemy, and queried whether the Government would be as ready to supply arms and munitions to the Fustian Jackets if they were to form a volunteer corps?

As a matter of fact, the ruling clique quickly grasped the danger threatening from across the Channel. "I grieve at the prospect of a Republic in France," Lord Palmerston, the then Secretary for Foreign

\* *Ibid.*, March 18.

† *Ibid.*, Feb. 19.

Affairs, confessed in a message to the British Ambassador in Paris,\* "for I fear that it must lead to war in Europe and fresh agitation in England. . . The example of universal suffrage in France will set our non-voting population agog, and will create a demand for an inconvenient extension of the suffrage, ballot, and other mischievous things." The Government soon demonstrated the real value of the boasted constitutional liberties enjoyed by the British people. A Radical M.P. had arranged for a meeting to be held in Trafalgar Square to protest against the proposed increase of the income tax. The Government, in nervous fear of any big assembly of the people, invoked an obsolete and reactionary law of George III. to forbid the meeting. The valiant Radical M.P. cancelled the meeting, but it was taken over by the Chartists, who came in great force led by Reynolds, a brilliant young journalist, who had just joined their ranks, and turned it into a magnificent demonstration for the Charter. The meeting was already over and the resolution had been carried, when two unknown individuals created a disturbance, and the police, suddenly appearing on the scene, charged the crowd with their truncheons, sparing neither women nor children. It was an undoubted provocation, and the *Northern Star*, with justice, observed: "We beg our readers to mark these circumstances well. A system of terrorism is evidently aimed at. Our Government mean to adopt an opposite course from that of France. Guizot permitted 47 banquets, and stopped them when too late. Russell, the Guizot of England, thinks he will nip English demonstrations in the bud."† Not content with this, the Government, or perhaps the police acting on its own, began during the next three days to let loose crowds of hooligans on the streets of London after dark, who would get drunk and then go about smashing shops and windows and street lamps till morning, when they would be dispersed by the police or would themselves scatter to their homes. The newspapers would come out with scaring stories about alleged Chartist robberies and riots, urging the Government to take vigorous measures against the rebels and anarchists. It was a sort of rehearsal of the coming drama, or, as the *Northern Star* put it, "the discordant tuning up of the orchestra before the grand overture of liberty begins."‡

The Government, of course, "yielded" to the clamour of "public opinion," and issued an order forbidding street demonstrations at "unsuitable" hours and public meetings of any kind after six o'clock in the evening. When a few days later the Chartists arranged another public meeting to be held on Kennington Common, an order was issued to dealers in firearms to unscrew the rifle barrels and sell no cartridges and gunpowder, and all good citizens were urged to enrol as special constables, and to get arms from the Government stores. The meeting itself was attended by a force of 4,000 policemen, 100 plain-clothes detectives and 80 mounted police armed with sabres and pistols, who all

\* Evelyn Ashley, *Life of Palmerston*, Vol. II., p. 73.

† *Northern Star*, March 11. See also the description of the meeting in the same issue.

‡ *Ibid.*, March 18.

the time rode round the crowd. In addition, a section of the garrison troops was held in readiness in the barracks.\* All these elaborate measures aimed at scaring the general public as well as the Chartists. The position of the Cabinet had hitherto been shaky, and it shrewdly took advantage of the situation to consolidate and mobilise the support of the entire bourgeoisie. On March 13th, Sir George Grey, Home Secretary, could boast in the House of Commons of the tremendous response of the bourgeoisie to the Government's appeal for special constables, Manchester having offered 10,000, Glasgow 20,000, and so on.

Indeed, riots occurred throughout March and April in many cities in the North of England, mostly among the unemployed, and everywhere the bourgeois "specials" lent active aid to the police forces. Only in Glasgow the troops had to be called in, when at the beginning of April a crowd of 5,000 unemployed, after a meeting, suddenly began to loot the foodshops and various business premises, and the police, together with the special constables, proved unable to cope with them. On the following day, a military force of 2,000 was brought into the city, a collision with the crowd ensued, and several volleys were fired. A number of people were killed, many wounded, and the unemployed were subdued. The Government was rapidly acquiring skill and experience in dealing with unruly elements.

Finally, it is interesting to note the conduct of the bourgeois press. Then, as nowadays, it showed great skill in the rôle of the guardian of law and order, and in fighting the revolutionary movement. On the one hand, it carried on a furious campaign against the French Revolution, and particularly against the Parisian workers and their demand for the Right to Work. The state of France was painted in the gloomiest colours, and the entire responsibility for the prevailing conditions was placed upon the lazy workers and the Socialist demagogues within and without the Government who took advantage of the economic ignorance and animal appetites of the proletarian mob. This, of course, was done, as by the bourgeois press of to-day in regard to Soviet Russia, for propaganda purposes. "The writers in the public press," says O'Connor,† are endeavouring to scare us from our pursuit of liberty by the unhappy state of the working classes of France at the present moment. . . . But you, who are philosophers, must understand that a great revolution, produced without previous concert, must, in the first instance, be productive of hazard, vicissitudes, and, perhaps, calamity. But the question is for you, whether or no it is not worth while to pass through the ordeal of temporary suffering to establish permanent liberty?" Golden words, which it would do well for the working class in Western Europe to take to heart to-day!

The Chartists had to wage continuous struggle against the vilifying campaign of the capitalist press against the workers and Socialists of France. For example, in one of their manifestoes the Fraternal Democrats directly appealed to British workers to protect their brethren

\* *Ibid.*

† *Ibid.*, April 1.



across the Channel from unmerited attacks: "In your meetings—your workshops—your homes—everywhere, defend the brave French working classes against the vile aspersions and foul calumnies heaped upon them by the prostituted press of England—the salaried apologists of the rapacious capitalists and the soulless shopocracy."\* But the forces of the capitalist press were many times greater than the means of publicity at the disposal of the Chartists, and the vicious campaign of the reactionary press no doubt had its effects upon the ignorant popular masses.

On the other hand, the same capitalist press—again, like to-day—employed the method of minimisation when reporting on the force and influence of the revolutionaries at home. While sparing no colour in depicting the harm likely to follow their unchecked agitation, the bourgeois press represented them as a contemptible handful of adventurers or criminals of no influence or importance. "The Press of this country," O'Connor wrote,† "has always been the most deadly enemy to liberty. . . . If a paltry meeting is got up by the middle classes to oppose the income tax, every word of every fool is reported in their press, whereas scores of enthusiastic, bold and splendid meetings have been held in the metropolis to congratulate the French upon their emancipation from despotism, and yet not a line has been reported."

The conspiracy of silence has been carried to a fine art by the British press as by no other, and as it is to-day, so it was three-quarters of a century ago. A favourite method in those cases, when it was absolutely impossible to ignore a labour demonstration, was ridiculously to minimise the number of people attending it, and this method proved so effective that even contemporary historians were deceived and were led by the paltry figures of press reports to consider the events insignificant. On this subject O'Connor advised his followers "how to arrive at something like a guess at the numbers attending a Chartist meeting: take all the numbers stated by the papers to have been present, add them together, multiply them by four, and then you may make a guess."‡

\* *Ibid.*, March 25.

† *Ibid.*, March 4.

‡ *Ibid.*, March 25.

*The Tenth of April*

In describing the conditions in which the Chartist agitation, spurred on by the revolutionary events in France, revived, we had perforce to anticipate somewhat the course of events and to detach ourselves from the various stages through which the agitation was passing. Now, with a fuller understanding of the situation, we may resume our narrative of the events.

We have seen that among the Chartist leaders there was a fundamental divergence of views on the question of tactics. Jones, Harney, and many others among the younger members advocated a straightforward and open fight, having no faith in demonstrations and "constitutional" forms of struggle. They were opposed by O'Connor, who, if not on principle, at least on grounds of policy, considered it inexpedient to go beyond constitutional methods, being convinced (or perhaps pretending) that they would prove sufficient to break down the resistance of the ruling oligarchy, as happened in 1832, when the Reform Bill was forced through without a revolution. The analogy drawn by O'Connor was, of course, erroneous: in 1832 the possessing class, the landlords, in league with the big trading capitalists, had yielded to another propertied class, the industrial capitalists, backed by the petty-bourgeoisie and the working class; it yielded precisely in order to prevent a revolution. Now it was a question of the united possessing class, the landlords, the trading, industrial and financial capitalists, in alliance with the petty-bourgeoisie, yielding to the non-possessing class, the proletariat. Such an issue could not be expected to be settled in a peaceful way. At the same time, no successful issue could be expected from revolutionary, physical force methods, as the proletariat was still weak, whilst the united possessing classes were already fairly strong. The situation was quite different from that in France, which resembled more that in England in 1832. In other words, England had already had its 1848 some 16 years ago, and now the situation was what it came to be in France a few months later, in June, when the proletariat, single-handed, and badly organised, found itself confronted by the united forces of reaction, by all the possessing classes acting in unison.

All this, of course, was realised by neither of the Chartist factions, but each was dimly conscious of the need to be up and doing, so as to take advantage of the general revolutionary situation. As might have been expected, O'Connor's arguments prevailed. It was decided to act in the manner which had already been tried by the Chartists, namely, by submitting a mass petition to Parliament and by holding a Convention to back the petition and other measures. The petition, covered by millions of signatures obtained at public meetings throughout the country and containing the demands for universal suffrage and

the other points of the Charter, was to demonstrate to Parliament that there was a great body of public opinion in support of the reforms. If, moreover, as was expected, the petition were to be adopted and signed at numerous great meetings after an energetic agitation, the "moral force" which would thus be mobilised by it would, it seemed certain, compel the oligarchy to yield. In order to back up that force, a Convention of delegates elected at those meetings was to be summoned—not a mere Congress, but a *Convention*, the very name of which contained an ominous warning as to its intent and character: it was to be an instrument of the people's will, which, drawing its strength from the masses, might contend for power even against the oligarchically elected Parliament and, if needs be, proceed by mobilising those masses to more extreme measures than mere petitioning.

It is true there had been such a Convention and such a petition in the past, and the result was nil. The petition was presented, Parliament calmly threw it out and the Convention was unable to do anything. Many of its leaders were arrested, imprisoned or deported, and its members ultimately dispersed without coming to any decision. But those were different times. Now, when the high tide of revolution was surging all around, and the masses themselves had had full opportunity of learning the necessity of attaining political rights at all costs, could a similar failure occur again? The course of action was conceived as follows: at least five million signatures would be collected for the petition, the Convention would meet on April 4th and publicly discuss its plans, and on April 10th there would be held a monster mass meeting attended by at least half a million people, and this great army, led by the delegates of the Convention and the Chartist Executive, would march in procession to Westminster to present the petition. Would Parliament fail to be impressed by such an imposing demonstration? "Old Guards," O'Connor wrote\*, "see the altered state of Europe, see the fact that by the 3rd of April, the blessings of free institutions, not only in France, but throughout the Continent of Europe, will have been developed; see what support that fact will give to your supporters, when half a million men—of living men—shall accompany the minds of five millions, demanding their freedom, to the door of the House of Commons. . . Old Guards, the tocsin sounds. The day of Chartist resurrection has arrived. . . It will be a proud day for me when I march at the head of the mind of England, followed by the sinews of England, in procession to the House of Commons, for I will allow no man to go before me; and my position will be still prouder if, instead of sixteen able-bodied men, that it required to move your petition last time, it requires thirty to do it now."

This was how O'Connor pictured to himself the affair, and a similar picture was drawn by the Chartist Executive in a manifesto urging the people to hold meetings for the election of delegates and the signing of the petition. The petition, it stated, "shall be accompanied to the House of Commons by an immense concourse of the people of this metropolis, who will form an excellent guard. The Executive

\* *Ibid.*, March 4.

Committee wish to convert the presentation of the petition into a demonstration of national sympathy, and with such a view it is their intention to spare no pains to make such a display of strength as will make the cause respected."<sup>\*</sup>

On another occasion it laid particular emphasis on the moral nature of this action. "The time for securing the liberties of Britain (it declared in a manifesto) has arrived. It remains to be seen whether you are prepared for the great moral battle the trophies of which will be freedom and independence. Now or never! Remember that to will liberty is to win it. Will it then, will it. . . you, seven millions of English slaves, and no power on earth can prevent you from riving the manacles of your thralldom."<sup>†</sup> In the final appeal prior to the demonstration of April 10th, addressed to the people of London, to the Irish population of the metropolis, to the trade unions and others, it said: "The liberty-seeking German, the emancipated Italian, the struggling Pole, and the proud French republican, will regard you with an eye of disdain if your aim be not to demolish oligarchic usurpation and to substitute for it the legitimate power of the whole people. . . Remember that the eyes of Europe are fixed upon you. . . Prove yourselves worthy of their attention, congregate on the morning of the 10th in your thousands, legally, peaceably, but enthusiastically. Leave no pretext for the minions of power to utter the old calumny that you are indifferent to your political rights and satisfied with your present condition. Now or never is the auspicious moment to press your claims with success on the legislature. Now is the day, now is the hour to strike the great blow that shall give liberty and happiness to every sect and class in the British Empire."<sup>‡</sup>

The agitation, no doubt, was conducted with great vigour and ability, but we doubt whether the Jones and Harney faction were particularly elated at the stress laid on moral force, or possessed much faith in its efficacy. *Their* moral talk had a different flavour. "Friends," Jones declared at a meeting, "we'll steer the straight course, we won't be intemperate and hot-headed, we'll respect the law, if the law-makers respect us; if they don't—France is a Republic. . ."<sup>§</sup> And on another occasion: "On the 10th of April the final notice would be given to the Whigs: they (the Chartists) would deliver their petition in the proper manner and disperse peaceably and quietly, but if they would have to go to Parliament again, they would come armed. . . The Government had better not try the game of physical force, lest it turn against itself. If they denied the Charter, the people would next time ask for a Republic."<sup>||</sup> In this way Jones and his friends managed in their campaign to smuggle in their little tactical amendments, and even the *Star*, *i.e.*, its political editor Harney—whom O'Connor was not always successful in controlling—ventured the suggestion that the

<sup>\*</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18.

<sup>†</sup> *Ibid.*, March 4.

<sup>‡</sup> *Ibid.*, April 5.

<sup>§</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1.

<sup>||</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8.

Convention would no doubt devise "a plan of action to meet all eventualities." The opposition were not content with such occasional utterances and it had its own little "plan of action" ready for the Convention.

The Convention met on April 4, after a campaign of many months throughout the country, during which delegates were elected at numerous public meetings addressed by Chartist orators. As the law only permitted congresses of less than 50 members, the Convention was made up of 49 delegates, among whom we find the names of all the prominent leaders of Chartism. The proceedings began with reports by local delegates. One after another the delegates drew a picture of the terrible distress among the working people in all parts of the country, and many of them asserted that the workers, driven to despair, were prepared to resort to the most extreme measures. Ernest Jones at once raised the question of the Convention's intentions in the event of the petition being rejected by Parliament. There was audacity in the mere raising of the question, as it loudly proclaimed a lack of faith in the efficacy of O'Connor's methods. In Jones' opinion the question was so important that it demanded an immediate reply, and he moved that the Convention, in the event of the petition's failure should call upon the Crown over the heads, as it were, of the Government and Parliament, to dismiss the Ministry and to appoint such men to office as would make the Charter a Government measure, whilst the Convention itself should remain in permanent session, so that there would ensue "a struggle for power between the two parliaments." The report of that meeting gives no indication of the impression made by this unexpected proposal, but it gave rise to a debate which lasted several days.\* The first one to speak in opposition to the proposal was Bronterre O'Brien, the best theoretical exponent of the class struggle in the Chartist movement. He was against the Convention taking a revolutionary course and declaring itself in "permanent session." He argued that at least London, which he represented in the Convention, was not with them and totally unprepared to go to "extreme measures." Personally he would not go against the law so long as he believed the law was just to them, but the moment that he found the law to be unjust, and the people stronger than the law, he would calmly turn his back on it. O'Connor, apparently, thought it too risky to oppose wholly Jones' proposal and thereby to assume before the Convention unqualified responsibility for the success of the petition. He therefore proposed a compromise: the Queen indeed should be called upon to dismiss the reactionary Ministers and appoint a new Government from among such persons as were favourable to the Charter, but not before the people had sanctioned such an unconstitutional procedure. He therefore moved a resolution to the effect that in the event of the petition being rejected simultaneous meetings should

\* *Ibid.*, April 8. For the rest the proposal was not entirely novel, as Jones had already suggested at a mass meeting early in March that instead of petitioning Parliament, a procession of 800,000 people drawn from all parts of the country should appeal directly to the Queen to dismiss the Government. (*Ibid.*, March 11.)

be held in every part of the country to obtain the people's authorisation "to address the Queen to dismiss the Ministry, and call to her Council men who would make the Charter a Cabinet question." "If that were unavailing," he added, "he would never flinch, but would sooner die than not win the Charter. He meant to wait no longer than the time when the majority of the people demanded it, and were prepared to establish their rights."\* This was a fairly vague statement, for O'Connor was evidently unwilling to pledge himself to revolutionary action even if a direct appeal to the Crown should fail to achieve any results. However, it satisfied the opposition, and on the following day a motion was introduced by the Executive providing that in the event of the rejection of the petition, a memorial should be presented to the Queen. The memorial was to be drawn up by the Convention and submitted to the people for approval at numerous public meetings to be held on April 21 (Good Friday). The memorial was to be presented, not by the Convention, but by another body to be known as the National Assembly, the members of which were to be elected in the same manner as those of the Convention, and which was to meet on May 1. It was to discuss the measures necessary to force the Crown to receive the Memorial and to act upon its recommendations.

The opposition found this proposal inadequate. Reynolds, a spokesman of the extreme Left, declared that there was no need to call a new Convention under a new name to look about for means to enforce a new-fangled memorial, and supported the proposal made by Jones the day before to the effect, that in the event of rejection the present Convention should remain in permanent session and declare the Charter the law of the land. O'Brien, also considered the memorial business superfluous, but thought that the Convention would be ill-advised to proclaim itself the organ of the people's will without having received any mandate for revolutionary action and without being sure of the support of the masses (he had himself been elected by two thousand people, whereas the population of London was two millions). He therefore proposed that upon the delivery of the petition the Convention should consider itself dissolved, and that a National Assembly should then be elected at simultaneous meetings of the people, and declare itself permanent. Jones, however, supported by Harney, was prepared to accept the compromise proposed by the Executive: let there be a National Assembly and a Memorial, but the National Assembly must proclaim its session permanent until the Charter had been actually carried, and in the meantime the Convention itself should not be dissolved. After some discussion both Reynolds and O'Brien agreed to this proposal, and it was carried by the Convention.†

O'Connor scarcely took part in the debates on the Executive's proposal, although they went on for two days and were carried at times to a high pitch of passion. He attended the Convention very irregularly, almost casually, rarely rising to speak, and then, merely to points of order, always pleading lack of time and the need to look

\* *Ibid.*, April 8.

† *Ibid.*, April 8.

after the interests of the movement in the House of Commons. This aspect of his work in the House of Commons presented a sorry spectacle: the brilliant people's champion and public orator having been returned to Parliament in 1847, had become the slave of parliamentary formalities, never daring either to make a stand against his opponents as befitted a revolutionary representative of the proletariat, or to lend sufficient aid to his party in its struggle outside Parliament. When, prior to the meeting of the Convention, he had given official notice, as required by parliamentary procedure, that on April 10 he would move a resolution in favour of the Charter, he was greeted, we are told in Hansard, with "loud general derision." The Chartists, particularly the *Northern Star*, made full use of this incident for propaganda purposes, recalling that in France, too, Guizot and his supporters in the Chamber of Deputies on one occasion had met with equal "loud derision" the proposals for reform made by the liberal opposition. O'Connor gave no suitable reply to this insult, but humbly asked permission to address the House on that day, promising, in return for this "privilege" that he would not "claim the attention of the House too long." Lord Russell, however, was "extremely sorry" to be unable to grant his request, as according to the schedule of the House, the 10th of April was to be devoted to the Irish question. He suggested the 14th instead, and O'Connor accepted, "expressing his profound gratitude to the noble lord."<sup>†</sup>

This was not all. On April 6, the very day on which the Convention adopted Jones' resolution concerning the future plan of action, Sir G. Grey announced in the House of Commons the Government's own plan of action. In answer to a question by a member as to whether a mass procession would be permitted on the 10th to approach the House of Commons to hand in the petition, Grey replied that the Government intended on that same evening to issue a proclamation to the population of London warning them of the illegality of the procession and even of the meeting as planned by the Chartists, and appealing to law-abiding citizens to refrain from taking part in them on pain of severe penalties. It appeared that in the reign of Charles II.—the King who had been deposed for violating the constitution—a law had been passed prohibiting meetings and processions of more than ten people for the purpose of petitioning or appealing either to the King or to Parliament, and this obsolete law was now invoked by the "progressive" Government of Lord Russell against the working class movement. The bourgeoisie did not scruple to employ weapons forged in times of darkest reaction whenever the class struggle grew so acute as to menace its privileged position. O'Connor protested against such a course, recalling the fact that as recently as 1831 the bourgeoisie, when engaged in the fight for parliamentary reform, had led a procession of 50,000 people to the House of Commons and that three years later the Government did not prohibit a demonstration of a hundred thousand people before the House of Commons protesting against the sentence to deportation of six rural labourers

<sup>†</sup> *Ibid.*

for membership of the "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union." The Government made no reply except to observe that precedents were not analogous to the present case, and, Grey added, amid the general cheers of the House, that a bill would shortly be introduced for supplementary emergency powers "for the defence of the Crown and the Government." This Bill (which really legalised lawlessness) was indeed, introduced and passed with lightning rapidity by both Houses a few days later. The new Act, nicknamed by the Chartists, "the Gagging Act," provided severe penalties, including hard labour and deportation for a term of not less than seven years at the discretion of the courts, for any intent to influence the Crown or the Government by force, or "for any expression of such intent either in printed or written form, or by word of mouth" . . . The Government, expressing the unanimous will of the ruling bourgeois and aristocracy, threw down the gauntlet, and the Chartists, having lost the initiative of action, found themselves at a great disadvantage. They were faced with the dilemma of either giving up their plans or raising the standard of revolt.

All these events were happening in London—a city in which, on the one hand, was concentrated the whole machinery of the bourgeois government, all its physical forces and all its moral and ideological influence, and in which, on the other hand, there was no organised and concentrated factory proletariat, as in the cities of the North, but a huge petty-bourgeoisie composed of shopkeepers and petty Government officials, and the world's wealthiest mercantile and financial bourgeoisie. London was the least auspicious place, not only for revolutions, but for any new social movement in general, and this accounts for the fact that not only Chartism in its revolutionary period, but even the bourgeois reformist movements drew their nourishment not from London, but chiefly from the provinces, from the industrial centres of the North and Scotland. The Chartist Convention, suddenly confronted (although, properly speaking, this might have been expected, since the discussion of its plans had been carried out with full publicity) with the definite alternative of reacting one way or another to the Government's challenge, could think of nothing better than to issue a manifesto to the shopkeepers and other petty-bourgeois elements of the London population, assuring them of the perfect orderliness of the proposed demonstration, and to send a deputation to wait on Sir G. Grey with similar assurances that it would be an unarmed demonstration and that no revolution was contemplated.\* True, the Convention decided at the same time, in the teeth of the Government proclamation, to hold the demonstration, though without any procession to the House of Commons, and the *Northern Star* wrote in a leading article: "Whilst engaged in this holy and godlike undertaking, should lewd power let slip the dogs of war, power must take the consequence, and great and dreadful will the consequence be, if vengeance and despair should once possess the minds of the millions of freemen who pant for liberty, and demand the restoration of their long with-

\* *Ibid.*, April 8.



held rights." Nevertheless, when Harney, supported by Jones and others, moved, in view of the changed conditions, the immediate appointment of delegates to represent the various constituencies in the event of the arrest or death of the present delegates on April 10, the majority opposed the motion on the ground of the "undemocratic" character of the procedure suggested, and decided instead that such a contingency should be met with the re-election of delegates at regular public meetings.\*

O'Connor himself no longer took part in the Convention's deliberations, partly on account of illness, but no doubt also because he foresaw the failure of his plan. On the morning of the 10th, immediately before the demonstration, he appeared at the Convention to charge his opponents with responsibility for the turn of events: "Had it not been for the folly of some people outside of the Convention, and a few in it, there would never have been any opposition to their demonstration and it would have been the grandest thing of this kind ever seen in England."† This charge was both ungracious and untrue, but no one cared to argue with him. He was evidently suffering great pain, and was only anxious to prevent a catastrophe. He declared that in spite of his illness he would march in the demonstration to prevent any disturbance of the peace, as the Government had firmly resolved to crush the demonstration by military force upon the least attempt made by its participants to resort to violence. This practically foredoomed the grand demonstration which, according to original plans, was to be, if not a revolution, at least its prelude.

The Government had, indeed, taken all possible measures to nip the movement in the bud. Taught by the experience of France and Germany—bourgeois governments are always ready to learn from the experience of others, which cannot be said of the proletariat—the Government of Lord John Russell had firmly resolved to take no chances, and, in order to make some political capital out of the situation, organised a gigantic mobilisation of its forces. At its signal the capitalist press yelled in one voice that the Chartist agitation was nothing but the work of aliens and Irishmen who were seeking to disrupt the British Empire (this caused the alien emigrants to declare publicly, through Harney at the Convention, that they would take no part in the demonstration), thus playing upon the "patriotic" sentiments of the shopkeeping class, and incidentally facilitating the passing of the Gagging Act. At the same time extraordinary powers were given to Lord Wellington to put the London area under military control. The Iron Duke concentrated 12,000 troops of all arms, including artillery, to bar all the approaches to the Houses of Parliament and to the royal palaces, while the police in full force, armed with truncheons, bore upon Kennington Common and the bridges leading over the Thames to Westminster. They were further reinforced by 170,000 special constables who were to look after law and order in the city, particularly in the aristocratic quarters and the busiest streets. All

\* *Ibid.*

† *Ibid.*, April 15.

the Government offices were turned into miniature fortresses, barricaded with all kinds of objects from sandbags to heavy bound volumes of *The Times*, and all the officials, from the highest to the lowest, were armed from head to foot. These extraordinary proceedings naturally created a panic and the city resembled a fortress awaiting the enemy's assault. The aristocracy made a hasty flight from the perilous city, and the Queen and her family were shipped away to the Isle of Wight. In all these preparations there was one remarkable feature to be noted: the Government not only did not look for, but was most anxious to avoid conflict and bloodshed. Lord Russell wrote to the Prince Consort on the eve of the 10th: "Colonel Rowan, the chief of police, advised that the procession should be formed and allowed to come as far as the bridge they may choose to pass, and should there be stopped. He thinks this is the only way to avoid a fight. If, however, the Chartists fire and draw their swords and use their daggers, the military are to be called out. I have no doubt of their easy triumph over a London mob. But any loss of life will cause a deep and rankling resentment. I trust for this and every reason, that all may pass off quietly."<sup>\*</sup> Wellington himself, on being asked by a friend about the preparations being made for the 10th, replied: "Yes, we have taken our measures; but not a soldier or a piece of artillery shall you see, unless in actual need. Should the force of the law, the mounted or unmounted police, be overpowered or in danger, then the troops shall advance—then is their time. But it is not fair on either side to call them in to do the work of police; the military must not be confounded with the police, nor merged in the police."<sup>†</sup> Each viewed the problem from his own point of view, but both the civil and the military authorities were determined to avoid a bloody collision, and certainly not to provoke it. This, no doubt, showed the political sagacity of the English ruling class, a virtue in which both contemporary and subsequent rulers on the Continent seem to have shown themselves woefully deficient. It was a sagacity not dictated by internal political considerations alone. In his reply to Lord Russell, Prince Albert wrote: "To-day the strength of the Chartists and all evil-disposed people in the country will be brought to the test against the force of the law. . . I don't feel doubtful for a moment who will be found the stronger, but should be exceedingly mortified if anything like a commotion was to take place, as it would shake that confidence which the whole of Europe reposes in our stability at this moment, and upon which will depend the prosperity of the country."<sup>‡</sup> Accordingly, the military were concealed in barracks and ambushes, and, with the exception of the police and the special constables, no armed forces were visible in the streets.

From nine o'clock in the morning the marching columns began to gather at the points of assembly, whence they proceeded to Kennington Common by routes indicated by the police. Everything passed off quietly and peaceably: the police did not interfere and did not even

<sup>\*</sup> *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II., p. 198 (1907 edition).

<sup>†</sup> Theodore Martin, *Life of the Prince Consort*, Vol. II., p. 33.

<sup>‡</sup> *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II., p. 199.

touch the banners inscribed with suitable slogans, while the marchers, on their part, created no disturbances. At noon the procession reached Kennington Common, and the Convention also arrived in full force, in special buses chartered and decorated for the occasion, carrying the huge petition. The Convention had previously held a short formal meeting, at which O'Connor delivered his speech, but the delegates were manifestly in an anxious mood: who could tell how the Government would act, and how the crowd would behave? The meeting passed off more quietly, not to say more tamely, than either side might have expected. As soon as the Convention arrived, O'Connor was told that Colonel Rowan wished to see him. O'Connor probably thought that he was going to be arrested, but the Chief Commissioner of Police merely wished to impart the final warning that the Government had decided that the procession should not be allowed to pass the bridge, and that any attempt to break through would lead to bloodshed. O'Connor returned to the meeting, and, mounting the platform, delivered a speech to the effect that the crowd, having fulfilled its duty, should now peaceably disperse, giving the police no pretext for attack. He spoke long and pathetically, with all the fire of his eloquence, but not a word about the Charter, not a word about the things which he had during so many years called upon the people to fight for. Less than two hours later the crowds began to disperse, and the famous roth of April came to an end. O'Connor and the Chartist Committee, seated in hired hackney coaches, proceeded to the House of Commons to deliver the petition.\*

There have probably seldom been other such days on which so much was expected to happen and all expectations were utterly disappointed. It is in this very futility of the results that the significance of that day lay. To the ruling classes, who had been aware of the importance attached to that day by O'Connor and his faction, of the high hopes they had entertained for an impressive procession, and of the great moral effect they had expected from the popular march to the House of Commons in support of the petition—to them the virtual renunciation of the procession and, practically, of the demonstration itself, was a great triumph. In order to heighten the effect, the capitalist press, duly inspired by the Government,† minimised the number of the crowds on Kennington Common, stating that there had assembled not more than fifteen to twenty thousand, which figures are repeated by historians to this day. In reality, in spite of the Government proclamation, there had assembled, apparently, about 150,000 people, although O'Connor—by far the most competent man in England to estimate the number of people attending public meetings, but partial in this case, put the Kennington crowd at 400,000. Be that as it may, the outcome was an undoubted victory for the ruling classes, and particularly for the Government, and Lord Russell reported elatedly to the Queen on the following day: "Lord John Russell pre-

\**Northern Star*, April 15.

†On the eve of the 10th, the Government had requested the newspapers to estimate the crowds at not more than 15,000-20,000 (*Ibid.*, April 22).

sents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has the honour to state that the Kennington Common Meeting has proved a complete failure."\* Prince Albert, too, wrote to his friend and counsellor, Baron Stockmar: "We had our revolution yesterday, and it ended in smoke. London turned out some hundreds of special constables; the troops were kept out of sight, to prevent the possibility of a calamity and the law has remained triumphant."†

Lord Palmerston also wrote to the British Ambassador in Paris: "Yesterday was a glorious day, the Waterloo of peace and order. . . The Chartists made a poor figure, and did not muster more than fifteen thousand men on the Common. Feargus was frightened out of his wits, and was made the happiest man in England at being told that the procession could not pass the bridge. The Chartists have found that the great bulk of the inhabitants of London are against them and they will probably lie by for the present and watch for some more favourable moment."‡ Palmerston felt like a patient happily recovering from a crisis, and was therefore inclined to give credence to all manner of gossip; nevertheless, he narrates an interesting detail which sounds quite credible, namely, that "the aliens did not turn up, but the police and the special constables had sworn to give exemplary treatment to any bewhiskered and bearded rebels that might fall into their hands, and he was sure they would have ground them into powder."

What particularly gladdened the hearts of the ruling cliques was the unanimous rally of the possessing classes to the defence of the sacred rights of private property. According to Lord Palmerston (in the dispatch just quoted) there had been over 100,000 special constables enrolled in London, some people putting their number as high as 250,000: so eager were the people of all classes and social stations "to rally to the defence of law and property." The Marquess of Lansdowne, in the House of Lords, in reply to universal congratulations, declared: "If there was anything which had imparted to Her Majesty's Government that degree of confidence which was necessary to enable them to act as they had done, it was the certainty which they had acquired within the last eight and forty hours that, if they had occasion to call on any part of the community for support, it would be readily afforded." Another aristocrat, the Marquess of Northampton, also "desired to express the gratitude of their lordships for the noble conduct of the people of London on the present occasion. The spirit of order and attachment to the English Constitution—of religion and morality exhibited by the middle classes—would long be remembered." § It was, indeed, a lesson which the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were in no hurry to forget: it taught them not to fear any revolution and to have faith in the strength and stability of their class position. "The strength of our institutions," so ran the Queen's speech

\* *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II., p. 199.

† *Martin*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 34.

‡ *Ashley*, *Life of Palmerston*, Vol. II., p. 80.

§ *Northern Star*, April 15.

at the close of this notable Session on September 5, "has been tried and has not been found wanting. My people feel too sensibly the advantages of order and security to allow the promoters of pillage and confusion any chance of success in their wicked designs." Henceforth, the ruling classes of England had the assurance that the spectre of revolution spelt no terror to them, that they could effectively cope with any danger of that kind, and that if there was one country in Europe which could withstand the general commotion ushered in by the February days in France, it was England. This was the second lesson derived by the English ruling class from the outcome of the events on April 10th. Not only was Palmerston convinced that "the result of yesterday would produce a good and calming effect all over this and the sister island (Ireland)"\* but it was even claimed by Grey in the House of Commons that the result would prove most beneficial, not only in England, but also throughout all Europe, as it would be manifested that the authorities had been aided in the performance of their duties by the cordial co-operation of the great body of the people themselves.† Prince Albert, who, as we have seen, attached great importance to European confidence in the stability of the bourgeois order in England, for the sake of which he wished to avoid even the appearance of a revolution, could now write to Baron Stockmar: "I hope this will read with advantage on the Continent" (referring to the rallying of the bourgeois elements), and to his secretary, Sir Charles Phipps: "How mightily this will tell over the world!"‡

England, indeed, by her example, not only raised her own international prestige, but also pointed out to the other Governments the way to deal with revolution, thereby inspiring them to counter-revolution. There is no doubt but that the June days in Paris had their spiritual origin in the lessons of April 10th in England; England on that day not only beat back the wave of revolution which had attacked her shores, she also sent out a wave of counter-revolution which was soon to sweep away all the conquests gained by the revolution. One may even go further and say that England became the political workshop of European counter-revolution, having gathered in her midst all the reactionary and monarchist emigrés, with whom the court and the ruling classes established intimate contact, giving them the benefit of their advice and aiding them by every means in the furtherance of their plans. England gave hospitality to the royal family banished from France, that family being related to Queen Victoria; the Prince of Prussia, too, who had fled from Berlin at the first rising of the people, found in England a home from which he could now send advice to his father, and it was also in England that Louis Napoleon, the future hero of the *coup d'état*, who served as a special constable on April 10th in one of the aristocratic streets of Mayfair, was gaining his political experience. These foreigners were not affected by the Gagging Act nor even by the special Aliens

\* Ashley, *op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 86.

† *Northern Star*, April 15.

‡ Martin, *op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 34.

Act issued after the 10th of April. On the contrary, they enjoyed special favours from the court and the aristocracy, and continued to hatch their counter-revolutionary plots in peace. A day will come when the court and State archives will reveal their secrets, and we shall then learn of the rôle played by the triumphant English bourgeoisie in encouraging European reaction in those years.

### § III.

#### *Decline and Repression*

The curve of the revolutionary movement, which had been rising since the end of February, began to fall after April 10, and in its decline there were many instructive features meriting our attention.

The rejoicings in the camp of the ruling class had their counterpart in the disappointment among the Chartists. The mass procession to the House of Commons, intended as an imposing demonstration of the forces which supported the Charter, did not take place, and although 150,000 people assembled on Kennington Common in the teeth of the Government proclamation, it proved a failure. The resolute action for which the Chartists had been preparing themselves and the public for weeks in advance and which, according to their—or rather O'Connor's—notation was to start the working class in its fight for freedom, if not for the direct overthrow of the “weak and corrupt oligarchy”—this action, the centre of attention of all Europe, ended in an obvious fiasco. Disappointment grew still more depressing on the following day, when the Petitions Committee of the House of Commons reported that the great Chartist petition did not contain the five or six million signatures claimed by O'Connor, but barely two million signatures, many of which were obviously fictitious, like those of the Duke of Wellington, Robert Peel, the Queen herself, and such nicknames as “Flat Nose,” “Snub Nose,” and so on. In vain did O'Connor argue on simple arithmetical grounds that the committee could not possibly have examined even two million signatures in one day, and point out, by referring to past experiences, that petitions invariably contained fictitious signatures and indecent scribbling, which Parliament had never considered as detracting from the value of such documents—Parliament, elated at its triumph, paid little attention to O'Connor's argument and subjected him to ridicule and insult, and the fact that the ruling cliques could indulge in such arrogance while the Chartists were powerless to hit back intensified the depression.

What was to be done now? According to programme, the Convention was to wait for the outcome of the petition, and in the event of its rejection, to prepare a Memorial and to call mass meetings for endorsing it and for electing delegates to the National Assembly. Was there any sense in waiting for a favourable issue of the petition? Was it not obvious that the petition would be rejected by Parliament with contempt? Even O'Connor no longer entertained any illusions, and did not attend Parliament on the day when he was scheduled to move his resolution on the Charter. If the petition was thus doomed in advance, were the chances of the Memorial any better? Could it reasonably be expected that the Crown would treat the Memorial with

more consideration than that accorded by Parliament to the petition? And if the Crown were to reject the Memorial, what forces were there at the disposal of the Chartists to overcome its resistance after the poor demonstration of April 10? No doubt the Chartists were asking themselves these questions and found no reassuring reply. The campaign was apparently lost, and the only thing to be done was to recognise the defeat and to start work afresh.

Still the Chartists could not make up their minds to such a course, and O'Connor particularly tried to prove that all had not yet been lost. In his opinion, the crisis brought about on the 10th of April, due to "the folly of some, the indiscretion of some, and the treachery of some of those professing to belong to our ranks," had this good side to it, that it had made the whole world speak of the Charter, of the grievances of the people, and of the condition of the working class, so that in this sense the Chartists had even scored a moral victory over the enemy. Now was the time to take advantage of the situation, and not to injure the cause by undue haste. He, O'Connor, would next week submit a plan of action which would lead to the speediest overthrow of the brutal Whig Government.

From his articles in subsequent issues of the paper\* we learn what he meant by "undue haste," and the nature of his new plan. He believed that to take up at this juncture the plan of the Memorial and the National Assembly, *i.e.*, to take up an unconstitutional position, would be dangerous, because it would open the door to all manner of provocation on the part of the Government and would be inexpedient so long as the people's resentment had not grown sufficiently strong under the stress of unemployment and the disappointment in Free Trade. It would also be premature in the sense that the legal possibilities embodied in the original draft of the petition had not yet been exhausted. His proposal, therefore, amounted to this: the idea of a Memorial and of a National Assembly was to be dropped, and in view of the failure of the *national* petition, the method of local petitions, strictly scrutinised on the spot, was to be adopted, the petitions being submitted singly to the House of Commons by members representing the respective constituencies, thereby causing continual discussion of the Charter in the House. This would be effective propaganda and would also place the House of Commons and the Government in an intolerable position.

This plan, published in the Press at a considerably later date, was apparently submitted to the Convention shortly after April 10th, and rejected by that body, for on the 15th it was resolved by the Convention to get up a Memorial and to organise mass meetings for the election of delegates to the National Assembly, and on the 25th, in the final session of the Convention, the resolution in favour of the National Assembly was carried "in spite of O'Connor's recommendation."† Did the Convention take its own plan seriously? Scarcely, although its own programme seemed less utopian than O'Connor's. On the whole, O'Connor's prestige had suffered greatly, and his plans no longer commanded confidence or even respect. He was now attacked

\**Northern Star*, April 22 and May 20.

†*Ibid.*, April 29.



by his closest friends, as may be seen from the apologetic article which he published at the time in the *Northern Star*,\* and also from the debates in the National Assembly, which was opened in London on May 1st.†

In the columns of the same paper we find many glowing descriptions of the mass meetings held under the auspices of the Convention, but apparently the most interesting of them were those at which Ernest Jones spoke. Vigorous, resourceful and eloquent, he did not hesitate even now to plead for revolutionary methods of fighting, declaring that "not by processions were they to achieve their end, but let every man be prepared with a musket in his hand."‡ As a matter of fact, he was the only one of the "Old Guard" to take part in the National Assembly, as O'Connor had not only refused to allow his own candidature at public meetings, but had also prevailed on Harney to do likewise, on the plea that as editor of the *Northern Star*, he was to give the whole of his time to the paper.§ Bronterre O'Brien, too, stepped aside, devoting himself to his own particular circle of followers, among whom he advocated his pet schemes of land nationalisation and currency reform. In this way the National Assembly was practically boycotted by two of the oldest and hitherto most popular leaders of the Chartist movement, who even now—O'Connor particularly—continued to enjoy great popularity among the masses in the provinces. This was naturally bound to tell both on the mood and the personnel of the Assembly, since many of the delegates, on learning of O'Connor's attitude, after being elected, also withdrew from that body. The result was that instead of the anticipated 100 delegates, there arrived in London only about 60, and among them were a good number who either rarely turned up at the meetings of the Assembly, or did not attend at all. This, in its turn, led to great resentment among the delegates against O'Connor's attitude and to consequent recriminations which greatly reduced the working capacity of the Assembly.

Its meetings began with a discussion of the question as to whether the law forbidding conventions with more than 49 delegates was to be ignored or complied with. After long debates it was decided to ignore the law. The first two days were given up to local reports on the conditions of the labouring masses and the sentiments revealed by them at the mass meetings. The overwhelming majority of the delegates drew a picture of misery and despair, analogous to the one drawn by their predecessors in the Convention, and just as then, opinions were divided as to whether or not the people were ready for revolutionary action. This meant, in point of fact, that an attempt to raise a revolt in the event of the failure of the Memorial would lead to a disaster. The Assembly therefore adopted the following programme of deliberations: "the means of enabling the Assembly to give renewed

\* *Ibid.*, April 15.

† Writing in the *New York Tribune* of May 3, 1853, in connection with O'Connor's death, Marx pointed out that as a political leader he had practically been dead since 1848.

‡ *Northern Star*, May 20.

§ *Ibid.*, May 13.

vigour to the movement; the organisation of the Chartist body; the great social grievances; the policy of the Chartist body in reference to other parties seeking a reformation short of the People's Charter; and the most approved mode of presenting the Memorial to Her Majesty." On the first of these questions it was decided, after a lengthy debate, to raise a campaign fund of £10,000. This was a pious wish rather than a serious decision, as no one could say from what sources such a sum of money could be raised. The time was long since gone when the Chartist movement enjoyed the support of the Birmingham bankers, whilst, on the other hand, the state of unemployment among the working class excluded any possibility of raising such a sum by means of small contributions. There was particularly keen discussion on the second question: a motion was even made to change the party's name and give up the name of "Chartism" altogether, because it was too closely identified in the mind of the public with the name of O'Connor. The motion caused a storm of indignation, both on the part of those who cherished the historic name of the party and its glorious traditions, and of those who, actuated either by sincere regard or commiseration for the old leader, resented any ungracious aspersions on the name of O'Connor in order to court favour with bourgeois public opinion. The debates were protracted and passionate. Eventually Jones succeeded in bringing about a truce among the contending factions by a diplomatic reference to the fact that the Assembly itself, in one of its latest manifestoes, had demanded "Measures, not Men." It was nevertheless a significant fact that there were no fewer than 14 votes recorded in support of the motion, whilst even among the opponents of the motion there was not one to defend O'Connor unreservedly or on grounds of principle. Further, in connection with the question of organisation there were lengthy debates about the personal expenses of the members of the Executive or the need of an Executive at all, and a new plan of organisation was drawn up.

On the item concerning tactics a good deal of discussion turned on the question as to the need of issuing further manifestoes to the people, on the attitude to be adopted by the Chartists towards permanent armies, on the temperance movement, and on the ways and means of starting a daily paper. There was in all these discussions much that was unreal and academic; but so much time was wasted in them that on the ninth day the Assembly was almost startled when reminded by some of the provincial delegates that during the whole of that time the Party had not addressed a single public meeting and that there was serious danger of the agitation dying out entirely.\* It also transpired that the Chartist treasury was absolutely without funds, and that the number of members paying dues had shrunk to 5,000.† A large open-air meeting was then decided upon by the Assembly to take place on May 15th. Further, a resolution was carried on a motion made by Jones, in favour of "arming the people"—an unexpected excursion into the realm of revolutionary tactics, rendered possible by the fact

\* *Ibid.*, May 13.

† *Ibid.*, May 6.

that the majority of the delegates considered it a mere declaration which did not imply any action. For the rest, it was so worded as to give no ground for legal proceedings on the part of the Government. Since the times were "turbulent" and Europe was, forsooth, very unstable, and war imminent, a war in which England would have to take part, and since England might become the object of attack on the part of her powerful neighbours, while, according to the admissions of the Government itself, the country's forces were wholly inadequate, the resolution recommended every citizen, on constitutional grounds, to supply himself with arms. . . It is hard to tell whether this was meant to be ironical or serious. However, some working people in the provinces did begin to procure arms and to train themselves in the use of them, but were cruelly punished. Far more interesting was another resolution moved by M'Douall and Jones and carried by the Assembly, dealing with the campaign which had just been started by liberal and bourgeois radicals in favour of a "moderate" reform of the franchise. While "noting with satisfaction" the interest shown by the bourgeoisie in suffrage reform, the assembly resolved "that all public meetings held for the purpose of affecting changes short of the People's Charter, be attended by the Chartist body, not for the purpose of obstruction, or of moving factious amendments, but to demonstrate calmly, rationally and pointedly, the superiority of the People's Charter over all other proposed reforms, and, in case of attack, to defend our principles by reason and argument."\* This decision was effectively carried out, and Chartist speakers addressed bourgeois reform meetings with great success.

All this was more or less interesting and important, but the most interesting and important of all questions, that of the Memorial, for which purpose it had been elected by the people, had so far been left substantially undiscussed by the Assembly. True, the newly-elected Provisional Executive was instructed to approach the proper authorities for the purpose of securing an audience of the Queen to present the Memorial. This gave rise to long debates as to whether they were to apply to the Home Secretary, as required by the Constitution, or direct to the Court; whether the deputation was to comply with all the rules of court etiquette, and so on. Some were altogether opposed to such procedure and moved that a great open-air mass meeting be organised from which the whole crowd should march in procession to the palace and demand an audience. Finally, it was decided to act through a small deputation which should comply with all the rules of etiquette, and request an audience, not through the hateful Lord Russell, but through the Lord Chamberlain. In all these debates the central question was studiously evaded, namely, what further steps were to be taken if the Memorial should meet with the same fate as the Petition. It was for this very purpose that the Assembly had been convened, and its duty was, in the event of the Memorial's failure, to declare itself in permanent session, as a sort of rival Parliament of the people! Jones himself, in speaking against mass presentation of the Memorial,

\* *Ibid.*, May 13.

drew attention to the fact that the situation "had changed in the last few weeks," and that it was "necessary thoroughly to organise the people before taking up a fight against the rebels in high quarters, who might try to raise a revolt against the principles of the British Constitution and the advocates of the People's Charter." This meant—and everybody realised it—that the Assembly was powerless to achieve the task for which it had been convened, and since it was reluctant to admit this openly, so as not to give its enemies ground for rejoicing, it deliberately evaded the discussion of this tragic question.

Meanwhile, in the provinces, where feelings were more revolutionary and the knowledge of the details of the situation less intimate, attention was riveted on this very question, and the Assembly's policy of silence caused a good deal of irritation. From all parts letters began to arrive denouncing the passive attitude of the Assembly upon this cardinal question and instructing the delegates to press for a decision. This, by the way, did a great service to O'Connor, who openly appealed to his "Fustian Jackets" against the attacks of his opponents and began to publish in his paper numerous resolutions from his supporters in all parts of the country expressing their confidence in him and their disgust with his adversaries. Upon a motion by M'Douall, the Assembly adopted a resolution in which it categorically declared that, "as a whole, it had never raised the question of the personal integrity of O'Connor or of anyone else, as it was opposed on principle to the introduction of the personal element in their debates." The purpose of this resolution, however, was not precisely of the kind that O'Connor might have wished for. Its real object was to silence the bourgeois press, which was giving prominence to reports of a split in the Chartist ranks. Nevertheless, O'Connor declared himself satisfied and expressed his elation at the restoration of the united front against the common enemy. But the settlement of the differences among the leaders could not reconcile the masses to the Assembly which had failed to justify their expectations, and the Assembly was eventually constrained to open a discussion on the fateful question.\* Here it revealed its utter helplessness. It was admitted by one speaker after another that it was their duty to carry out the Memorial campaign to the end, but when it came to the question of methods, they got into a hopeless impasse. Again was the question raised of "physical" versus "moral" force; again some recommended the organisation of mass meetings and petitions, whilst others were for vigorous action of a vague kind; some warned against scaring the bourgeoisie and provoking the Government to repressive measures, whilst others insisted on carrying out their pledges to the letter. Someone moved that the Assembly be dissolved and that the fate of the Memorial be left in the hands of the Executive. This "cowardly" motion caused quite a storm of indignation, and some of the delegates threatened to quit the Assembly in the event of its adoption. Leach, one of the members of the Executive and a stalwart Chartist, finally had the courage to express openly the thought that was in everybody's mind when he declared that "it was no use

\* *Ibid.*, May 20.

to blink it, they were not there a National Assembly—they did not represent England—they did not represent the Chartist body—they did not represent themselves.\* Then the inevitable happened: the Assembly, weary of acrimonious and fruitless wrangling, decided to dissolve and leave the business of the Memorial in the hands of the Executive. Even Jones spoke in favour of this decision, alluding in an emotional, yet optimistic speech to the "funeral orations" which had just been delivered by the delegates. He thought—and in this he was right—that the Assembly was only handicapping the movement, and that without it the Executive Committee, consisting of such seasoned fighters as himself, M'Douall, Kydd, Leach, McGrath, would carry on the work much better. In this way, the National Assembly, which was to challenge the authority of the oligarchic Parliament, came to an inglorious end exactly two weeks after its opening session. O'Connor had been right. In the situation which arose after the events of April 10th the calling of the National Assembly was a mistake. But, in pointing this out in a leading article in the *Northern Star* devoted to the dissolution of the Assembly, he failed to mention the fact that a good deal of responsibility for this state of affairs devolved upon himself.

We are now reaching the end of our narrative, but in order to furnish the necessary background, we must cast a glance at what happened during this period in the enemy's camp. The thing which strikes one most in reviewing the period after April 10, is the unusual moderation of the authorities in making use of their victory. They seemed to be bent on sparing the vanquished enemy, and not only were no arrests made, but even the illegal Assembly was allowed to go on and to adopt any resolutions it pleased. No use was made of the Security of the Queen's Crown and Government Act, and the Aliens Act remained a dead letter. The *Times* wrote: "We have put down Chartism, but we have not conciliated discontent."† And it seemed to be the reasoned policy of the Government, at any rate, not to aggravate the discontent by excessive measures of repression. In a letter to the Queen, dated April 15, Lord Russell outlined his view of the situation on the Continent, incidentally affording an insight into the reasons which prompted him at this stage to a cautious, not to say mild, policy in regard to the Chartists. In his opinion the blame for the Revolution in France and for the "great calamity which had descended upon Europe" fell entirely upon Louis Philippe because of his inability to form "a moderate constitutional Government" in France. "It was impossible," he writes,‡ "that the exclusion of free speaking and writing, which formed the essence of Prince Metternich's system, could continue. It might have been reformed quietly; it had fallen with a crash which spreads ruin and death around." As against this, he extols the milder policies of the ruling class in England, and adds: "The example of Great Britain may, however, secure an interval of reflection for Europe. The next six months will be very trying, but they may end with better prospects than we can now behold." Appar-

\* *Ibid.*

† Quoted in *Northern Star* of May 27.

‡ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II., p. 201.

ently, Lord Russell put high hopes on the effects of the policy of conciliation.

The conciliatory efforts of the Government were seconded by the Liberal bourgeoisie. O'Connor was perfectly right in saying that after April 10th the whole of England began to speak sympathetically of Chartism, but he was wrong when he interpreted this as the conversion of the bourgeoisie to the standpoint of the working class. In reality, the bourgeoisie in all its talk about Chartism was guided solely by the thought of corrupting the movement and detaching the masses from it. The corruption of Chartism was the special task entrusted to a group of people—mostly clergymen—who were the founders of Christian Socialism. The central figure in this group was the Rev. Frederick Denison Maurice, a prominent theologian who took an interest in the labour question and had founded evening classes in the poorer quarters of London. On the eve of April 10th he had shown his love for the working class by offering his services as a special constable, although excused on account of his clerical rank. Barely was the Chartist demonstration over, than he was visited by his friends Kingsley and Ludlow, who, greatly excited, came to confer with him on the ways and means to "save the country from disturbances, and the people from harmful utopias." They decided to get up a campaign for "Co-operation" (purged, of course, of the utopian ideas of Robert Owen) as opposed to Chartism, and of "internal" as against "external" freedom. This propaganda they called Christian Socialism and immediately set about popularising it. On the following day the hoardings of London were covered with posters signed by "A Working Parson" (Kingsley's *nom-de-plume*), in which Chartism was subjected to sharp, but ingenious criticism, after which a new poster appeared every day. "I am a radical reformer," said one of them.\* "I am not one of those who laugh at your petition of April 10th; I have no patience with those who do. . . . But my quarrel with the Charter is that it does not go far enough in reform. I want to see you free, but I don't see how what you ask for will give you what you want. I think you have fallen into just the same mistake as the rich of whom you complain—the very mistake which has been our curse and our nightmare—I mean the mistake of fancying that legislative reform is social reform, or that men's hearts can be changed by Acts of Parliament. If anyone will tell me of a country where a charter made rogues honest or the idle industrious, I shall alter my opinion of the Charter, but not till then. . . . Be fit to be free and God himself will set you free." Or another time: "You think the Charter will make you free? Would to God it would. But *will* the Charter make you free? Will it free you from slavery to the £10 bribes? Slavery to gin and beer? . . . There will be no true freedom without virtues, no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God and love to your fellow-citizens."

This propaganda for "inward reform" as the source of "true liberty" and "true happiness" was as clever as it was insidious. It

\* See Stubbs' *Charles Kingsley*, pp. 103-116-118.

upbraided the rich to gain the confidence of the poor. Particularly gifted and attractive among the Christian Socialists was Charles Kingsley, of whom Ludlow wrote: "I believe a great many Chartists and working men will have faith in him and in the clergy which they never had before, when they find he does care to take the beam out of his own eye before he begins to take the mote out of theirs."<sup>\*</sup>

At the same time efforts were being made to split the movement. Two days prior to the 10th of April, several Chartist renegades, including William Lovett, the prototype of the modern Labour leader, had founded jointly with a group of bourgeois radicals a so-called People's League, whose purpose was said to be the advocacy of the Charter by constitutional methods, and on the eve of the 10th another group of ex-Chartists and radicals formed a similar organisation under the name of the People's Charter Union.<sup>†</sup> After April 10th some bourgeois radicals—mostly Members of Parliament, acting without the aid of Chartist renegades—began to form various organisations for the extension of the suffrage and similar reforms, with the obvious aim of taking the wind out of the Chartists' sails.<sup>‡</sup> One of these organisations was headed by Hume, the Radical M.P., who had once assisted in drawing up the People's Charter and had sponsored the Chartist cause in the House of Commons; another organisation was led by Muenz, the M.P. for Birmingham, who had taken part in the first Chartist Convention in 1839, but was afterwards the foreman of the jury in the Chartists' trial, sentencing Chartists to long terms of imprisonment. A third organisation was backed by Cobden himself, the bitterest enemy of the Chartists, and so on. All these organisations were carrying on a concerted campaign, arguing that the Chartists were utopian dreamers, and that their own abridged programmes were more likely to rally the support of all true friends of freedom among all classes and thus to attain success. As already mentioned, their meetings were attended by Chartist speakers, who usually got the best of the argument. Later on, in June, a resolution in favour of the extension of the suffrage was moved by Hume in the House of Commons, meeting with vigorous opposition from Lord Russell, who argued that a reform of the suffrage would have a baneful effect on the situation on the Continent. "Their adhesion to the ancient forms of the Constitution," he said,<sup>§</sup> "had procured them the admiration and respect, not only of those countries that were attached to the fortunes of this, but also of those nations that were hostile to them. He hoped that the House would do nothing to lose that respect, or forfeit that admiration, which had caused them to be regarded

'Like a great sea-mark, braving every storm,  
And saving all who eye it!'

He admitted, however, that in the near future it might perhaps be expedient to grant some sort of reform of the franchise, in view of "the state of public opinion."

<sup>\*</sup> Dr. F. Maurice, *Life of F. D. Maurice*, Vol. I., p. 477.

<sup>†</sup> See Julius West, *History of Chartism*, p. 258 et. seq.

<sup>‡</sup> *Northern Star*, May 6 and 13.

<sup>§</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24.

Finally, there was a third method of peacefully fighting Chartism, namely, that of simulating sympathy with the working class—a method quite familiar nowadays, but then quite novel, even in England. In the above-quoted letter of the Prince Consort to Lord Russell on April 10th, urging the need for avoiding a collision between the Chartist procession and the police, the Prince goes on to say: \* "I have enquired a good deal into the state of employment about London, and I find, to my regret, that the number of workmen of all trades out of employment is *very* large, and that it has been increased by the reduction of all the works under Government, owing to the clamour for economy in the House of Commons. Surely this is not the moment for the taxpayers to economise upon the working classes! And though I don't wish our Government to follow Louis Blanc in his system of *Organisation du travail*, I think the Government is bound to do what it can to help the working classes over the present moment of distress." The Government, of course, did not heed this good advice, but ten days later the Queen herself summoned the famous sponsor and author of the Ten Hour Bill, Lord Shaftesbury,† in order to obtain "his opinion as to the manner in which they could show their interest in the working classes." Shaftesbury's advice was that the Prince Consort show interest "in social movements affecting the poor," and the Prince did attend a meeting of the "Society for the Improvement of the Conditions of the Working Classes," at which he unburdened himself of a speech concerning the need for the bourgeoisie to help the working masses, saying at the same time that "real improvement would be the result of the efforts of the working class themselves" along the line of self-education, self-improvement, and persistent toil. Since that time it has become part of the ordinary political duties of the Crown of England to show "royal" interest in the working classes, but at the moment the "brave" step of the Prince created an enormous sensation. "Aye, truly," Lord Shaftesbury wrote in his diary‡: "This is the way to stifle Chartism."

The example set by the Prince was emulated by the more advanced elements among the nobility, and in many towns they lent their aid and encouragement to the building of working class dwellings, the establishment of Working Men's Colleges, of medical dispensaries, the organisation of legal advice, of advice to emigrants, and so on. Educational work in the form of the dissemination of elementary scientific knowledge and the popularisation of the theories of bourgeois sociologists was regarded as particularly important, and the Rev. F. D. Maurice wrote: "The question is how to eliminate Owenism and Chartism. Repression has failed, and the Queen, in conversation with Lord Melbourne, has indicated the proper way, that of education."§ All these forms of activity and social patronage were subsequently developed on a large scale and played an important part in the social system, but at that time they were but the first attempt improvised on the spur of the moment, and were not carried very far, because the

\* *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Vol. II., p. 99.

† Hodder, *Life of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, Vol. II. pp. 246-249.

‡ Hodder, *op. cit.*

§ Dr. F. Maurice, *op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 269.



Government itself, in spite of the good intentions of its head, did not long maintain its part and eventually succumbed to the provocation of its own police, who were supported and even encouraged in this game by the more reactionary section of the Press. As mentioned above, the National Assembly, on the eve of its dissolution, had made arrangements to hold an open-air mass meeting on Clerkenwell Green on May 15th. Ernest Jones was anxious from the first to make this meeting a success: "The people," he said at the Assembly, "were to attend in their thousands in order to show that they were not going to be intimidated by obsolete laws from meeting and discussing their rights."\* The meeting was, indeed, attended by several thousand people; the members of the Chartist Executive, Jones, Kydd, M'Douall and others, delivered "incendiary" speeches, scathingly ridiculing the bourgeois reformers' attempts to outbid the Chartists, and bitterly attacking the Government which had imagined that the Chartist movement could be destroyed by police measures and repressive legislation. The meeting went off quietly in spite of the presence of the police, and it was followed by similar meetings in London and in the provinces. The despondency of the masses seemed to be passing away, and something like a spirit of militancy began to spread, when Lord John Russell declared in the House of Commons, in reply to a question by Hume, that "the middle and working classes neither wished for the People's Carter, nor for Hume's Four Points."† The Chartist Committee immediately appealed to the masses to come out on to the streets to repudiate Lord Russell's calumny, and the workers did come out, holding demonstrations and meetings. The police could no longer restrain themselves, and while abstaining from direct injunctions on the ground of the Gagging Act, resorted to provocation, starting fights and disorders in order to have a legal pretext for attacking and bludgeoning the people. The meetings and demonstrations were turned into street fights, and the scared middle class began to enrol as special constables and to appeal to the Government to protect them against "anarchy."‡ By the end of May the situation grew exceedingly tense. The Press got up a noisy campaign, the police indulged in an orgy of terrorism and provocation, and, finally, the courts intervened by imposing severe penalties on persons arrested at public meetings and charged with rioting and resistance to the police authorities "in the discharge of their duties."

We find a curious reference to the turbulent scenes of that period in a letter written by the Prince Consort to a relative in Belgium: "Belgium and England stand up to the present time unshaken, and furnish useful standards of what constitutes real freedom. Yet we have to deal here with a mass of artisans suffering hunger and privation through the complete stagnation of trade. There have been conflicts every night between Chartists and the police. The latter, thank God! have kept the upper hand without putting the military in requisition.

\* *Northern Star*, May 20.

† *Ibid.*, May 27.

‡ *Ibid.*, May 27 and June 3.

Still, one night they had to break with their truncheons the heads of between three and four hundred people."\*

On June 2nd these and similar occurrences were the subject of a debate in the House of Lords, in the course of which the Government was charged with showing undue mildness. The Duke of Wellington, and others, demanded vigorous measures against street demonstrations, whilst the Duke of Richmond asked for greater severity on the part of the courts.† It happened just then that the Chartist Committee, having been refused by the Lord Chamberlain an audience of the Queen for the presentation of the Memorial, decided to address a letter personally to the Queen, stating the reason for which the audience was sought, and assuring her of their highest respect. At the same time, they decided to hold, in support of this step, a number of open-air mass meetings in and around London on Whit Sunday (June 12th). This exhausted the patience of the bourgeoisie, and the Government, forgetting all about England's international prestige, surrendered. A special proclamation was issued by the police declaring all Chartist meetings illegal, and threatening severe penalties to anyone taking part in them. London was again flooded with troops (about 10,000 men), the streets were placed in charge of "special constables," and public buildings were turned into forts for military action.‡ The public places where the meetings were to be held were occupied by the police in advance, and when the marchers arrived, they had either to disperse or engage in a fight with them. The Chartists were, of course, forced to retreat, after duly registering their protest, but in some places riots took place provoked by police agents and hooligans.

Again, as on April 10th, the bourgeoisie was victorious. This time however, the Government was no longer content with moral laurels, and decided—for the third time in the history of Chartism—to make a "clean sweep" of the Chartist movement by eliminating its most active leaders. On June 7th three prominent London Chartists were arrested for seditious speeches delivered by them at a meeting on Clerkenwell Green on May 26th, and Ernest Jones himself was arrested at a meeting in Manchester on Whit Sunday, and brought to London. A couple of days later another popular Chartist leader was arrested. All five were indicted on warrants in which they were charged, "with having in a certain open place called Clerkenwell Green, wickedly, maliciously, and seditiously, published, uttered, and pronounced certain scandalous, wicked and seditious words, in the presence of divers persons there and then assembled, of and concerning our Sovereign Lady the Queen and her Government," and so forth.§

Only a short time before, at a meeting on Clerkenwell Green on May 15th, Jones had expressed his confidence that the agents of the Government would not catch him with any unguarded utterances under the "Gagging Act"—"although young in the movement he was too old

\* Martin, *Life of the Prince Consort*, Vol. II., p. 76.

† *Northern Star*, June 3.

‡ See article by *L'Ami du Peuple* (Harney) in the *Northern Star*, June 17.

§ *Ibid.*, June 10.

a bird."\* Alas, Jones had still faith in the existence of some law, even if a bad one, under which he would have to be "caught" before being persecuted. As a matter of fact, there had been nothing seditious in his utterances. He had pleaded for organised action, and against sporadic outbursts; he had urged his listeners first to organise on a national scale, and then to take up the fight for the cause, even if they were to die for it. He had concluded his peroration with the appeal: "Organise, organise, organise." But the Government was not looking for any legal, formal excuse to apply the gag. It was not a question of right and law, but of political expediency and force, and all the five accused were sentenced at the Old Bailey to terms of imprisonment of two years and more hard labour. They were tried by a packed jury of shopkeepers, and the judge was the notorious Sir Thomas Wilde, who had boasted shortly before the trial, at a banquet in the City: "Just give me the proper jury, and I will find the proper article of the law for them."† Regardless of such a cynical attitude to law and justice, the bourgeois press found Jones' sentence too lenient. The *Times* wrote that Jones had got off too cheaply, and other papers expressed open regret that the sentence had not been more severe.‡ It should be borne in mind that Jones himself had sprung from the aristocracy class (his father had been equerry to the Duke of Cumberland, subsequently the King of Hanover), and the ruling class could not forgive him his desertion and the devotion of his gifts to the working class.

Here we may conveniently conclude our narrative. We are not writing a history of Chartism, but the story of the revolutionary events of 1848, which may be considered at an end with the sentencing of Ernest Jones on July 7, 1848. After him another member of the Chartist Committee was arrested, M'Douall, who was also sentenced to two years' hard labour. This was followed by wholesale arrests, about five hundred people being put behind prison bars, and the movement was crushed. Just as the 10th of April had given encouragement to the counter-revolution all over the Continent, so the bloody June events in Paris no doubt encouraged the reaction in England and inspired it to deal the death blow to the Chartists. This was achieved by the total suppression of the Chartist organisations and by the elimination of their leaders by long terms of imprisonment.

It was a blow from which the revolutionary movement in England did not recover for generations, and to this day the English bourgeoisie is enjoying the fruits of its victory in 1848. True, this was not the only conquest which has sustained and is sustaining the English bourgeoisie; even more brilliant and important was the subsequent victory on the ideological front by means of timely economic and political concessions which gradually reconciled the working class to the capitalist order and fastened around its neck the yoke of bourgeois ideology. But even this second victory was rendered possible only as the result of the first, which had broken the revolutionary backbone of the proletariat, and

\* *Ibid.*, May 20.

† *Ibid.*, July 22.

‡ *Ibid.*, July 15.

made the working class soft and pliable in the hands of its artful conquerors. After 1848 a new chapter is opened in the social history of England—not a chapter perhaps, but a whole volume—and this new volume has an entirely different content, and is permeated with quite a different spirit. If on the Continent of Europe the year 1848 marked the *appearance* of the proletariat upon the stage, henceforth fighting for its emancipation, in England it marked the moment of the *retreat* of the proletariat, henceforth tied body and soul to the triumphal chariot of the bourgeoisie, which it is dragging along to this day. Herein lies the importance of this year to England, and for this reason its story should be told.

## INDEX

- ABRAHAM, WM. 312.  
 ALBERT 148.  
 ALBERT, PRINCE 86, 145, 344, 345,  
     356 *et seq.*  
 Aliens Act 152, 156, 175.  
 ALLAN 198.  
*Annual Abstract of Labour*  
     *Statistics* 221  
 Anti-Socialist Laws 213.  
 APPLGARTH, ROBERT 183 *et seq.*,  
     198.  
 APPLETON 308.  
 ARAGO 153  
 ARKWRIGHT 8  
 ASHLEY, LORD (LORD SHAPTESBURY)  
     76, 77, 78, 86, 356.  
 ASKWITH, SIR GEORGE 208  
 ASQUITH, 271, 286, 289, 292, 295  
 ATTWOOD, THOMAS 41, 42, 48, 49,  
     55, 57, 62, 96 *et seq.*  
 AVELING 276.  
  
 BAKER 157.  
 BARBES 148, 168, 172.  
 BARNES, GEORGE 273, 280, 302.  
 BARNET, CANON 272.  
 BAUER, EDGAR 142, 179, 325.  
 BEESLY, PROF. 192, 269.  
 BELL, JAMES 143.  
 BELL, JOHN 101, 108.  
 BELL, RICHARD 192, 200, 211, 233,  
     285, 301.  
 BEM, GENERAL 158.  
 BERNARD, DR. SIMON 164.  
 BLANC, LOUIS 148, 159, 162, 163,  
     167.  
 BLUM, ROBERT 157.  
 BONAPARTE 107.  
 BOOTH, CHARLES 251, 253.  
 BOWLEY 219, 220.  
 BRACE, WM. 312.  
 BRADLAUGH 113.  
 BRENTANO, LUJO 273.  
 BRIGHT 72.  
 British Association 77.  
  
 British Socialist Party 276.  
 BROADHURST 269.  
 Brooklands Agreement 206 *et*  
     *seq.*  
 BROUGHAM, LORD 95, 108.  
 BURNS, JOHN 217, 271.  
 BURT, THOMAS 269, 304.  
 BURTSEV 164.  
 BUXTON 115.  
  
 CABET 162, 163.  
 CAMBRIDGE, DUKE OF 166.  
 CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN, SIR HENRY  
     251, 271, 289, 295.  
*Capital*, 269, 274.  
*Carpenter's Political Pamphlets*  
     101.  
 CARTWRIGHT, EDWARD 8  
 CARTWRIGHT, MAJOR JOHN 8, 19,  
     39.  
 CARLYLE 26.  
 CHAPMAN 169.  
 Charter, *see* People's Charter.  
 Chartists' Convention 43, 44, 47,  
     57 *et seq.*  
 Christian Socialism 87 *et seq.*,  
     354, 355.  
 CHURCHILL, WINSTON 295, 310.  
 CLARK, THOMAS 131.  
 CLEEVE, 126.  
 CLYNES, 280.  
 COBBETT, WILLIAM 16.  
 COBBETT, WILLIAM (JUN.) 60.  
 COBDEN, RICHARD 70 *et seq.*, 80,  
     137, 156, 175, 199, 263, 355.  
 COLLINS 66 *et seq.*  
 Committee of Political Refugees  
     151.  
 Communist League 159.  
*Communist Manifesto* 47, 94,  
     123, 130, 132, 135, 170.  
*Condition of the Working Class*  
     *in England* 122.  
 CONSIDERANT 153.  
 Conspiracy Acts 164.

- COOPER, THOMAS 74, 81, 128, 183.  
 COWEN, JOSEPH 164, 175.  
 CROOKS, W. 286, 287, 293.  
 CURRAN, PETE, 294.  
 CZARTORYSKI 128, 136.
- DARASZ, ALBERT 162.  
 DEMBINSKI 169.  
 Democratic Association 45 *et seq.*, 59, 127 *et seq.*  
*Democratic Review* 150.  
*Demokrat Polski* 162.  
*Destructive* 101.  
 DEZZI 169.  
 DIXON 131.  
 DOMBROWSKI 174.  
 DOYLE, C. 131.  
 DUNCOMBE 165.  
 DYER, COL. 271, 272.
- Earnings and Hours of Labour of Workpeople in the United Kingdom in 1906* 225.  
*Edinburgh Review* 184, 266.
- ENGELS, FRIEDRICH 8, 30, 47, 76, 92, 94, 105, 112, 122 *et seq.*, 130, 133, 141, 145, 152, 156, 157, 163, 164, 171, 173, 213, 246, 276, 281, 325.  
*English Review* 150.  
 ERSKINE 13.  
 European Central Democratic Committee 165.
- FERDINAND I. 136.  
 FIELDEN 10, 26, 27, 32, 42, 54, 55, 62.  
 FINLEN, JAMES 169, 172.  
 FONTAINE 128.  
 Fraternal Delegates, *see* Society of Fraternal Democrats.  
 French: Revolutionary Commune 174, 176, 179.  
*Friend of the People* 143.  
 Friends of Humanity and Justice Among All Nations 128.  
 FROST, JOHN 50, 66 *et seq.*, 74.
- GARNIER-PAGES 142, 325.
- GEORGE, LLOYD 208, 241, 244, 295, 301, 302, 308, 310.  
 German Communist Club 179.  
 German Workers' Educational Society 132.  
 GILL, EDWIN 146.  
 GLADSTONE 77, 190, 265, 269, 274, 277, 283, 288, 304.  
 Grand National Consolidated Trades Union 26, 98.  
 GRAYSON, VICTOR 294.  
 GREY, SIR GEORGE 78, 95.
- HALDANE, 286, 289, 292.  
 HARCOURT, SIR WILLIAM 277.  
 HARDIE, KEIR 278, 279, 280, 288, 292.  
 HARGREAVES 8.  
 HARMSWORTH 289.  
 HARNEY, GEORGE JULIAN 45 *et seq.*, 50, 59 *et seq.*, 68, 81, 124, 127 *et seq.*, 146 *et seq.*, 153 *et seq.*, 175, 181, 195, 324, 325.  
 HARRINGTON, EARL OF 167.  
 HARRISON, FREDERIC 192, 269.  
 HAYNAU, GENERAL 154 *et seq.*  
 HEGEL 122.  
 HENDERSON, ARTHUR 192, 250, 286, 287.  
 HERWEGH, GEORG 142.  
 HERTZEN, ALEXANDER 165, 171, 172.  
 HETHERINGTON, HENRY 101, 119, 120, 126, 139, 148. P  
 HIBBERT 126.  
*History of Labour Representation* 183.  
*History of Trade Unionism* 183, 191, 216.  
*History of Wages in the Cotton Industry* 219.  
 HOBHOUSE 81.  
 HOLM, PETER 131.  
 HOLMES 282.  
 HOLYOAKE, JACOB 139, 157.  
 HOWELL 190.  
 HUGO, VICTOR 172, 174, 175.  
 HUME 91.

- HUMPHREY 183, 191.  
 HUNT, HENRY 16, 127.  
 HUXLEY 113, 194.  
 HYNDMAN, H. M. 274 *et seq.*
- Independent Labour Party 278, 283, 284, 288.  
*Independent Review* 289, 290.  
 International Committee 169 *et seq.*, 174 *et seq.*  
 International Workingmen's Association 76, 124, *et seq.*, 239.
- JEVONS 194.  
 JONES, ERNEST 50, 81 *et seq.*, 90, 91, 124, 129 *et seq.*, 137, *et seq.*, 151, 154, 163, 167 *et seq.*, 175, 178, 181, 195, 324, 325, 349, 351, 359.  
 JONES, LLOYD 192.  
 Junta 133, 136, 137.
- KATAYAMA, SEN 172.  
 KEEN, CHARLES 146.  
 KINGSLEY 87, 158, 354 *et seq.*  
 KNIGHT, ROBERT 192, 308.  
 KOSSUTH 158 *et seq.*, 166 *et seq.*, 175.  
 KYDD, SAMUEL 146.
- Labour Electoral Association 282, 283.  
 Labour Party 282, 286.  
 Labour Representation Committee 284, 286, 287, 288.  
 Labour Representation League 282.  
 LEDRU-ROLLIN 142, 153, 165, 175, 325.  
 LESSNER 179.  
*L'Homme* 174.  
 LIEBKNECHT, WILHELM 179, 213.  
 LINTON, 162, 165.  
*London Mercury* 101.  
 London Workingmen's Association 8, 35 *et seq.*, 45, 70.  
 LOVETT, WILLIAM 18, 35 *et seq.*, 44 *et seq.*, 60 *et seq.*, 66 *et seq.*, 126, 355.
- LOWRIE 68.  
 LUDLOW, 87, 88, 190, 354, 355.
- MACDONALD, JAMES RAMSAY 290, 292, 293.  
 Manhood Suffrage Association 185, 187.  
 MARAT 142.  
 MARIA, DONNA 136.  
 MARX, KARL 8, 10, 30, 46, 47, 76, 80, 92, 94, 100, 105, 112, 122 *et seq.*, 130, 133, 134, 142, 145, 152, 163, 164, 167, 171, 173, 181, 190, 213, 246, 249, 263, 325.  
 MAUDSLEY, JAMES 302.  
 MAURICE 87 *et seq.*, 158, 354 *et seq.*  
 MAZZINI 128, 165, 175, 179.  
 MCCULLOCH 267, 268.  
 MCGRATH 81, 131, 139, 142, 325.  
 MCKAY 31.  
 M'DOUALL 69, 74, 91, 151, 351, 359.  
 MEHRING, FRANZ 122.  
 MELBOURNE, LORD 88.  
 MIALL, EDWARD 175.  
 MICHELOT, J. A. 131.  
*Midland Representative* 101.  
 Midland Union of the Working Classes 97.  
 MILL, JOHN STUART 190, 194, 269.  
 MOLL, JOSEPH 128, 142, 325.  
 MORRIS, WILLIAM 276.  
 MOST, JOHANN 164.  
 MUNDELLA 188, 192, 193, 203, 266, 268.  
 MUNTZ 50.  
 MURRAY, ALEXANDER 288, 289, 291, 292.
- NADAUD 179.  
 NAPOLEON I. *see* BONAPARTE  
 NAPOLEON III. 83, 164, 167, 172.  
 NASH, JOHN 177.  
 National Association of the Working Class and Others 18 *et seq.*

- National Chartist Association 68, 70, 157.  
 National Petition 43, 46, 55, 57, 82, 87, 143, 334 *et seq.*  
 National Political Association 19 *et seq.*  
*National Reformer* 101.  
 National Reform League 157, 165, 179.  
 NEMET, N. 131.  
*Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 145.  
 NICHOLAS L. 136, 138.  
 NORTHCLIFFE, LORD 289.  
*Northern Star* 41, 52, 57, 64, 70, 91, 101, 127, 133, 136, 141 *et seq.*, 153, 155, 159, 323, 325.  
 NORWOOD 193.
- OASTLER 27, 48, 54, 55, 58.  
 OBORSKI, COLONEL L. 128, 131, 179.  
 O'BRIEN, JAMES BRONTERRE 22 *et seq.*, 48 *et seq.*, 60 *et seq.*, 79 *et seq.*, 90 *et seq.*, 98 *et seq.*, 146, 151, 154, 157, 160, 163, 165, 176, 177, 179, 189, 195, 349.  
 O'CONNELL 39, 161.  
 O'CONNOR, FEARGUS 41 *et seq.*, 48 *et seq.*, 59 *et seq.*, 78 *et seq.*, 90, 91, 127, 130, 133, 147 *et seq.*, 159, 325 *et seq.*, 347 *et seq.*  
 ODGERS 190, 198.  
*Operative* 101.  
 ORSINI 164.  
 OWEN, ROBERT 18, 26, 35, 45, 53, 75, 76, 81, 104, 117 *et seq.*, 197.
- PALMERSTON, LORD 81, 157, 164, 166, 167, 344.  
 Paris Commune 153, 268.  
 PEEL, SIR ROBERT 13, 48, 71, 166.  
*Penny Papers*, *see Poor Man's Guardian*.  
 People's Charter 8, 39, *et seq.*, 46, 55, 151.  
*People's Paper* 163, 164, 172, 175, 178.  
 "Pcterloo" 16.  
 PICKARD, BENJAMIN' 192.  
 PLACE, FRANCIS 17 *et seq.*, 35 *et seq.*, 44, 58, 266 *et seq.*  
 PITT 107.  
 PLEKHANOV, G. 94, 172.  
 PLIMSOLL 193, 194, 244.  
*Political Herald* 101.  
 Political Union 41, 48, 96.  
 Poor Law Reform Act 29 *et seq.*, 46, 48, 98, 127.  
*Poor Man's Guardian* 22, 30, 96 *et seq.*, 109, 112, 121, 126.  
*Poverty of Philosophy* 80.  
 PYAT, FELIX 153, 174, 176, 179.  
*Radical* 157.  
*Red Republican* 143.  
 Reform Bill 18 *et seq.*, 40, 42, 49, 71, 94, *et seq.*, 187.  
 REYNOLDS 82.  
*Reynolds' Newspaper* 164, 167.  
 ROBESPIERRE 159, 162, 165.  
 Rochdale Pioneers 76.  
 ROEBUCK 39.  
 ROGERS, THOROLD 192, 194.  
 ROSEBURY, LORD 270, 273, 277.  
 ROSS, HENRY 146.  
 Rotundists, *see National Association of the Working Class and Others*.  
 ROWNTREE, SEEBOHM 251.  
 RUGE 165, 175.  
 RUSSELL, LORD JOHN 22, 25, 32, 41, 54, 66, 184, 343.  
 SADLER 27.  
 SAFFI 172.  
 SALOMANS 113, 114.  
 SALVATELLO 169.  
 SCHABELITZ, J. 131.  
 SCHAPPER, KARL 128, 131, 132, 137 *et seq.*, 156, 158, 162, 164, 179, 325.  
 SEXTON, 282.



## INDEX

- SHACKLETON, DAVID 192, 250, 286,  
287, 293.
- SHAFTESBURY, LORD *see* ASHLEY,  
LORD.
- SHAW, GEORGE BERNARD 276.
- SHUTTLEWORTH, SIR JAMES KAY  
190.
- SMILLIE, ROBERT 136, 289, 291,  
292.
- SMITH, ADAM 199.
- SNOWDEN, PHILIP 297.
- Social Democratic Federation  
274, 275, 283, 284, 285, 286.
- Social Reformers 157.
- Social Science Association 190.
- Socialist League 276.
- Society of Fraternal Democrats  
128 *et seq.*, 150 *et seq.*, 324.
- Society of Polish Emigrants 136.
- Society of Workingmen's  
Friends 86.
- Southern Star* 101.
- STANLEY 25.
- Star* 143, 163.
- Star of Freedom* 143.
- STEPHENS, REV. J. R. 32, 50, 54  
*et seq.*, 66.
- SUE, EUGENE 154.
- Taff Vale Case 285, 286.
- TALANDIER 169, 176, 179.
- TAYLOR, HENRY 50, 63, 68.
- Ten-Hour's Bill 76 *et seq.*
- THOMAS, JAMES H. 192 233 *et seq.*
- THOMAS (LORD RHONDDA) 279.
- THORNE, WILLIAM 276.
- TILDSLEY, JOHN L. 78.
- Times* 149, 160, 174.
- TRUELOVE 164.
- Twopenny Despatch* 101.
- Vanguard* 143, 164.
- VICTORIA, QUEEN 86, 88, 174, 285,  
344, 345.
- VIELOPOLSKI 128.
- VINCENT 66 *et seq.*
- WADE, DR. ARTHUR S. 97.
- WALMSLEY, SIR JOSHUA 167.
- WARDLE 280.
- WATSON 126.
- WEBB, BEATRICE and SIDNEY 183,  
191, 194, 197, 212, 216, 245,  
251, 276, 277.
- WEBER 142.
- WEITLING, WILHELM 128.
- Welcome and Protest Committee  
168 *et seq.*
- WELLINGTON, DUKE OF 17, 21, 83,  
97, 143, 358.
- WILBERFORCE 114.
- WILLICH 164.
- WOOD 219.

## TABLES

- Accidents in Industry 242
- Accidents on Railways 235.
- Emigration and Immigration 240.
- Hours of Labour 238.
- Income of Propertied Classes 231.
- Pauperism Percentages 252-3.
- Prices of Foodstuffs 257-8,  
298-9.
- Prices of Wheat 257.
- Trade Disputes 204, 314.
- Trade Disputes Settled by Con-  
ciliation 209.
- Trade Union Expenditure 215.
- Trade Union Membership 212,  
314.
- Trade Union Unemployment 240.
- Wage Decreases and Increases  
230.
- Wages of Lancashire Cotton  
Spinners 219-20.
- Wages of Lances Miners 220.
- Wages Nominal and Real 259.
- Wages Percentages in U.K. 228.
- Wages in Textile Building and  
Metal Trades 222, 315.
- Wages in Textile Trades, 225-6.
- Wages in Various Industries  
227-8.
- Wages in Woollen and Building  
Trades 220.