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PERIODS
OF
WORKING-CLASS HISTORY.

I.
Chartism and the "Trades Union."

BY
R. W. POSTGATE.

Price Sixpence.

PREPARED FOR
THE LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT,
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CHARTISM AND THE "TRADES UNION."

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OBSERVATIONS.

THESE chapters form six lectures, divisible, if necessary, into twelve. Twenty-four lectures are more than should be expended on one period of revolutionary history.

The book upon which I have based this syllabus in the first place is my own *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (Richards, 18/-, cheap edition to Plebs members and N.C.L.C. students only, 8/6), chap. iii., and the numbers here in brackets refer to the documents given in it.

The only other book containing a connected history of both movements is M. Beer's *History of British Socialism* I. pt. 2, v. vi., xii.; II. pt. 1 (Bell).

The Trades Union. The standard account of the G.N.C.T.U. is in S. and B. Webb, *History of Trades Unionism*, chap. iii. (Longman, 21/-). A fairly lengthy study of the Operative Builders' Union will be found in my *The Builders' History*, about to be issued by the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives. There are no other printed sources excepting files of contemporary papers. Of these, the *Pioneer* is most important. There is a file in the British Museum.

For the earlier period preparatory to the G.N.C.T.U., see Owen's *Autobiography*; the Hammonds' three books on 1760-1830, *Village Labourer*, *Town Labourer*, *Skilled Labourer* (Longman's); Hodgskin's *Labour Defended* (1/6 reprint, Lab. Pub. Coy., with G. D. H. Cole's introduction) and almost any of Cobbett's own voluminous writings. The two lives of Owen (Podmore and Lloyd Jones) are bad.

Chartism. For a long time the only history of the Chartist Movement was a book (O.P.) published in 1854 by R. G. Gammage, a Chartist. Of this Henry Vincent wrote in his

copy, "it presents but an inaccurate sketch of the Chartist Movement." It is in fact a mere chronicle, often no better than a string of newspaper cuttings. Since then two unfinished histories of Chartism have appeared; the first, by M. Hovell (Longman's, 7/6), was complete, at the author's death, as far as 1842. This part is good, though bearing obvious marks of its unreviewed state, in style, matter, and outlook. A valueless continuation has been added by Mr. F. S. Tout. The second history, by Julius West (Constable, 16/-), deals exclusively with the political history, almost entirely ignoring the economic conditions. It also suffers from its unfinished condition. There is, in fact, no satisfactory history of Chartism. The French history (*Le Chartisme*, par E. Dolléans, 2 vols.) seems to me bad. Two studies issued by Columbia University, U.S.A., deserve mention—*The Decline of Chartism*, by P. Slosson, and *Chartism and the Churches*, by H. U. Faulkner.

For the whole period, see F. Engels' *Condition of the English Working Class in 1844* (Allen & Unwin).

I.—THE ORIGIN.

Economic Change.

The disaster which overtook the working-classes of England and Scotland, urban and rural, at the beginning of last century, appeared to some as a blessing. The capitalist system had previously been known—men had to work in large shops where there was little chance of their ever becoming an employer. The stable medieval progression of apprentice to journeyman and journeyman to master, had long ago disappeared, and the journeymen had begun to form associations of their own. But at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries the capitalist system was developed suddenly to enormous size by a series of inventions that substituted machinery for hand processes in all important trades—first in the textile, then in others. The use of water-power, then steam, stimulated production wildly. Great fortunes were made. Enormous new towns sprang up. England, from an agricultural became an industrial land.

This astonishing growth of wealth and power over the resources of nature, was accompanied by the greatest suffering on the part of the workers. In the countryside the small farmers' commons were seized under the Enclosure Acts and they themselves turned into labourers or paupers. In the new towns, floods of workers were attracted at first by high wages. With the first depression, these high wages disappeared and they were forced down to the lowest level, often below starvation. Woman and child labour, used without restriction of hours or regard for health or life, took the place of male. Oppression and tyranny within the factory drove many to cling to hand-working methods, where they made a hopeless attempt to rival the speed of a power-loom with their own fingers.

First Revolts. By the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, any trade union among the workers was forbidden, and the landlord government made no attempt to relieve distress. Any revolt, economic or political, was met by it with the most brutal violence—Peterloo, the Luddite trials, the careers of Castles, Oliver, Reynolds, and Edwards are reminders of that period which are slowly being brought back into history.

The revolt of the workers was largely confused, until 1832, with the middle-class "reform" agitation. The proposals and agitation of socialist and semi-socialist writers such as Hodgskin, Bray, and Gray do not seem to have reached a large circle. The feelings of the oppressed were far better expressed and much more directed

by such politicians as Henry Hunt and Wm. Cobbett. Nevertheless, there were certain very definite proletarian elements traceable in the Reform agitation, particularly in the later stage, and the London "National Union of the Working Classes" was in some ways a direct ancestor of the London Workingmen's Association. This and earlier bodies were exclusively concerned with political reform, and therefore were mingled with the middle-class agitation against the aristocratic government. The repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824-5 passed by neglected almost as a side issue in this struggle, which culminated in the Reform Act of 1832, which altered the franchise and redistributed the seats so as to hand political power from the landed oligarchy to the manufacturers and traders of the cities.

This victory had certain unforeseen effects. As soon as it became clear that the new Whig government had no intention (contrary to the promises of its radical supporters) of enfranchising the workers, the middle and working-class wings of the reform movements broke sharply asunder. At the same time the fraud of the Reform Bill disgusted the workers with political action and they were inclined to turn to the use of their trade unions for a revolutionary end which they only dimly conceived.

But from 1833 onwards they were provided with a cut-and-dried programme from outside, which they adopted, though how far they understood it is uncertain.

Robert Owen.

Robert Owen, their new mentor, was a wealthy cotton spinner, who had risen by his own exertions. In the market he was as sharp as another, but his brain put him, in philosophy, far above the ordinary run of business men. He had been deeply impressed by the misery and wretchedness of the people of England. He had been indignant at the glib assumption that the degradation of the English working-class was due to their own shiftlessness. He had realised, as he said, that "Man's character is formed *for* and not *by* him"—that environment, not sin, was responsible for the appalling scenes in every working-class district. He installed at his own works, in consequence, every necessity and comfort of which he could think, including provision for the education of the young. He became a model employer. Dukes and bishops visited his mills; his experiments were widely praised. The radical reformers, as throughout his life, treated him as a crazy man, who wanted to shut everybody up in hygienic work-houses.

In 1817, he had made the further step which gives him his great importance. He became, as we should say, a Socialist. He announced his discovery that isolated experiments were too little; nothing but the universal substitution of *co-operation for competition*

would save civilisation. The struggle between employer and employee for custom forced the workers' livelihood down and down. Voluntary efforts would remain isolated.

The spectacle of so eminent a man as Owen denouncing the successful system of competition that every one but the oppressed were praising, attracted numerous followers. His proposals for the co-operative democratic control of industry by the workers were seized on greedily and exact instructions demanded by a growing body of "Owenites." He first of all spent his time and money in the foundation of Communist colonies in America and elsewhere, which were to spread across the earth. They failed instead, and, returning to England, he took up the organisation of "Labour Exchanges"—bazaars where products were exchanged by the actual producers, not for the currency that supported competition, but the just and true currency of so much labour time—"hours" not "pounds." This work, which itself failed, brought him into direct contact with the workers, and he conceived the plan of using the growing trades unions for the "immediate achievement of the Millennium."

II.—1832 AND 1833.

Operative Builders' Union. In 1830, John Doherty founded the first National Trades Union, called the National Association for the Protection of Labour. This was before the passing of the Reform Bill and the ensuing growth of interest in trades unionism. It is said at one time to have had 100,000 members. However that may be, it had disappeared by 1832, and very little is known of its history.

The great wave of revolutionary trades unionism starts in an industry which, while not so depressed as the textile trade, had suffered severely, and was probably the third or fourth in importance in the country—building. The date of the founding of the Operative Builders' Union is uncertain; it is generally supposed to have been in the summer of 1831, but the union did not emerge from insignificance until next year. In the summer of that year its membership figures rushed upwards. What records remain, of it or of the bodies that it swallowed up, mark increases from midsummer, 1832, to midsummer, 1833, of hundreds and even thousands per cent. Whether it was formed as a Federation of existing unions or itself founded the craft unions is uncertain; in some cases, as in those of the Carpenters (General Union, 1827) or Bricklayers (1829, afterwards Manchester Order), there is evidence of the prior existence of the unions; in others, as in the case of the Stonemasons (1833) the O.B.U. appears to have been the founding body. Anyway, the union consisted of seven craft unions—painters, plasterers, slaters, plumbers, bricklayers, masons, and carpenters (not builders' labourers).

Its early constitution is uncertain: it appears to have been federal in character. Certainly each union retained its own name. The separation of the crafts was carried right up through the organisation to the Executive, on which sat a General Secretary and two Executive members from each craft. The only link, besides the biennial "parliament," between the crafts seems to have been the institution of "District Grand Masters," who had unknown directive powers over the whole body. Once founded, the Union grew rapidly, and had in 1833 40,000 members. In that summer it also embarked upon its first large strike; an attempt, in Lancashire, to drive out the general builder or contractor, who was still the exception and not the rule. In this they had the support of the master craftsmen, and were for the moment successful.

But the constitution of the British revolutionary trade union movement dates from the conference of the O.B.U., held in Manchester in the autumn, which was addressed by Robert Owen, and

adopted his views almost entirely. The two main centres of the strength of the O.B.U. were Manchester and Birmingham. The lodges in the latter area were continually visited and addressed by two ardent followers of Owen, the architects Hanson and Welsh. Owen himself undertook the propaganda in Manchester.

Reorganisation and the Guild. Previous agitation had prepared the way, and on August 26th a mass meeting of all the Manchester Lodges heard and approved his proposals (40)* which went before the "parliament" a month later as the unanimous recommendation of the most powerful lodges in the country. The proceedings of this parliament have been lost, but its decisions can be deduced with fair certainty. It reorganised the union, relegating the various sectional societies into seven "governments" or national craft departments. These were to have been eight, by the addition of architects, but no accredited delegates from these could be found. Much more important was the foundation of the Building Guild (42). The conference further rekindled the Lancashire dispute, which had been showing signs of decline, and turned it—by Owen's advice (41)—into a struggle for the eight-hour day.

Owen's intervention had thus involved the union in two expensive adventures; on the other hand, he had reorganised the union machinery and started again the flood of new members. The Lancashire Strike was supported energetically by the new Grand Committee, which poured in a total of £18,000, and paralysed the whole of Lancashire for 16 weeks. The Guild, which was not a separate body, but the Union in its productive capacities, tendered for some small jobs, and was successful, but its main energies were turned to the building of a £2000 Guildhall in Birmingham for the housing of itself and other unions, and later for the running of educational classes.

Just before the Manchester Conference, moreover, appeared the first number of the *Pioneer*, the unofficial organ of the new movement, edited by James Morrison, and at the same time Owen handed over the editorship of his journal, the *Crisis*, to J. E. Smith. Both of these journals reached circulations which were then enormous—the *Pioneer* passed 30,000—and the two editors provided the brains of the movement. Unfortunately, they were out of contact with the rank and file of the unions.

* For explanation of these numbers see bibliography.

III.—1833 AND 1834.

The G.N.C.T.U. While the attention of the press and the workers had been mainly occupied by the Opérative Builders' Union, other large unrelated unions had sprung up, and grave conflicts had broken out. Of these, the most serious was the "Derby turn out." In November, 1833, the employers locked out every member of a union in Derby—some 15,000—until they would consent to sign a "document" promising not to belong to any Union, or support any Union's funds. A great effort was made to collect funds to start the "Derby turnouts" in co-operative production, and for a time success seemed probable (43).

The new unions were all under the domination of Owen. They rejected, in common with Owen, political action. They opposed the masters directly, by strikes for higher wages and particularly shorter hours (47): indirectly by co-operative production. While their trade union activities drove up the employer's costs and embarrassed him, the competition of their direct labour would speedily make him anxious only to be admitted to the guild (44).

Nearly all these unions were brought together in conference by Owen at the end of January, 1834, for the formation of a general Union, which took the title of "GRAND NATIONAL CONSOLIDATED TRADES UNION." Its first organising delegate meeting was held in February. The Opérative Builders' Union and four smaller societies held aloof, but the O.B.U. was already in grave difficulties. It had to close its Lancashire strike in defeat; internal dissensions, led by craft unionists, distressed it; even the building of the Guildhall was suspended. But these difficulties were forgotten in the enormous success of the new organisation. The G.N.C.T.U. membership shot up like a skyrocket. It passed half-a-million in less than a month—a figure never before heard of, nor reached by another union that century. Robert Owen announced that the socialist millenium was nearly realised, and asked the workers in a last "Legacy" to be merciful to their exploiters (45). J. E. Smith outlined the form of the new industrial government—slightly like a Soviet—that would thrust aside Parliament (46).

The Decline. But the Consolidated Union was soon in very grave difficulties. The first blow came from Melbourne's Whig Government, which was watching the Union with genuine fear. On March 18th, 1834, six Dorchester labourers were convicted of "unlawful oaths" for swearing-in some agricultural labourers into the Union, and sentenced to the monstrous sentence of seven years' transportation. Great efforts were made

by the Union to get the sentence modified, but in vain.* Missionary ardour was consequently severely damped. Even worse economic difficulties followed. The Central Committee was entirely unable to control the Lodges. Its members were hopelessly inefficient and idle; its secretaries (John Browne and later E. C. Douglas) were ciphers, and not even such vague directions as were issued would have been adopted but for the secret intervention of an outsider, William Neal. It issued a general appeal to refrain from strikes and formulated its full programme of co-operative production (48), but it did nothing to carry out its phrases into action. The inrush of members, and the general enthusiasm, tempted every Lodge to run into a dispute. Where the men refrained, the employers were often more than not presented the "Document," a paper to be signed by every worker promising not to belong to or assist a Union (51). The Union was overwhelmed by small strikes and was financially in a hopeless condition. Levies were raised, which drove out members. The Derby "turnout" collapsed. One Executive member seized some of the funds and ran.

The Collapse. Smith and Morrison made an attempt to pull things together. Morrison resigned from the Executive, half from disgust, half thrust off, but they used their journals to agitate for a policy of no sectional strikes, but caution until they were prepared for a general strike (50). Unfortunately, the one man who could have aided this, Robert Owen, was thinking on entirely different lines. He was distressed at the collapse of the Union, and ascribed it to the attacks of Smith and Morrison on the employers. He publicly denounced them (49) and displaced the *Pioneer* from its position as official organ. A rival paper was instituted, and soon after he closed down the *Crisis* to stop Smith's pen. By this time internal dissension had completed what external attacks had begun. The Union was in dissolution, and the delegate meeting held in August, recognised it. The delegates decided to dissolve the Union, and form an Owenite propaganda society, which itself soon vanished.

The Operative Builders' Union survived a little longer. It even recovered its membership and restarted the Guildhall in this disastrous summer. But just at the time of the fall of the Consolidated, it became involved in a London lock-out (the "beer dispute")† which shattered it by the end of October. After the great struggle of 1834, some few scattered sectional unions were left, with hundreds of members where there had been tens of thousands.

* A Dorchester Committee remained in existence and secured the labourers' return some years later.

† This lockout is referred to the G.N.C.T.U. by the Webbs in their history, which I have copied in *Revolution*. I now think this is incorrect, for reasons given in my forthcoming book, *The Builders' History*.

IV.—1835 TO 1839.

Origins of Chartism. There was no essential difference between the Chartist **Chartism.** and Owenite revolts. Their causes and main characteristics were the same. The same extreme suffering of the workers, the same unco-ordinated, spasmodic efforts, the same lack of tenacity and inexperience in organisation, the same desperate violence alternating with extravagant hopes. The only differences were that Owenite unionism used the economic weapon, Chartism the political, and the place of Owen was, to a certain extent, taken by the far less important Feargus O'Connor.

As soon as the G.N.C.T.U. had collapsed, the way was clear in 1835 for a revival of political action of the workers. There were many radical clubs which were dotted about the country and had survived the Reform Bill of 1832. They had fallen into comparative insignificance during the Owenite agitation, and only slowly began to pick up afterwards. By 1836, however, the revival was marked, and by 1837 the Chartist movement had really begun, though it was not formally launched as such till 1838. It is not possible, in such a scattered movement, to ascribe to any one centre its origin, but the main share in the foundation is generally allowed to Birmingham and London. In the former town, the Birmingham Political Union, which had played a great part in the Reform Bill agitation, was revived by Thomas Attwood, a banker and local M.P., for the purpose of demanding universal suffrage. His object, however, was really to gain the victory for his own peculiar views on currency. Much more important work was done by the London Workingmen's Association, under the direction of William Lovett. This purely working-class body (of skilled workers) first drafted in its petition of 1837 (53) the six points of the Charter. The phrasing and manner of this document, its conservatism and aridity, offer a marked contrast to the Owenite manifestoes, and later Chartist publications. Its "six points" were:—Equal Electoral Districts, Universal Male Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, No Property Qualifications for M.P.'s, Vote by Ballot, Payment of Members. These proposals, put together in the form of a Parliamentary Bill—the "Charter"—were eagerly adopted and spread all over the country. From the meeting at Newhall Hill on August 6, 1838, and even before, a host of unorganised missionaries spread the new programme over the country.

In passing outside the limits of the London Workingmen's Association into the industrial wilderness of the North, the movement changed its character. The new layer of the working-class, which was now touched, was the

famished and suffering proletariat of the northern towns, in particular the handloom weavers and the factory hands. The miners were also affected.

Their demands were expressed partly by the "Tory" section, led by Richard Ostler, an earnest worker of Cobbett's school, against the horrors of the factories, and the Rev. J. R. Stephens, who turned his attention particularly to the harsh new Poor Law (56). This section was most violent and unconstitutional; it disappears after the failure of the Newport revolt.

The main body of the workers, however, supported Feargus O'Connor and his extreme revolutionary followers, such as Bussey (54). O'Connor was an Irish politician, once a follower of O'Connell. He was personally disliked by Lovett and his followers; his loud violence, demagoguery and inconsistency angered them. They saw no more than a vulgar orator, with short neck, bull shoulders, a huge frame, and no brains. They made no allowance for his immense energy in making recruits, his very considerable organising and rhetorical powers, or his acute instinct which supplemented his lack of intellectual ability. Vanity and love of popularity misled him, and in time so grew upon him that when his cause was lost his mind failed. Indeed, it is not certain for how long the greatest Chartist leader was sane; the man who probably thought himself and possibly might have been first President of the British Republic was a lunatic. He identified himself with the use of "physical force," supported by his unfortunate followers, although he always said (55) that the "moral force" advocates should be given their chance first. Lovett and his followers, less pressed by destitution and more able to estimate the forces of the government than the northerners, would not countenance the use of violence at all.

The First Petition.

In the mingled actions of the Chartists in 1838 and 1839—meetings, riots, speeches, publications, drilling—one common activity was to be found: the signing of the First Petition, embodying the Six Points. To present this to Parliament, a Convention was elected from up and down the country. Though election began in October, the Convention did not sit till February, 1839. The petition, when presented, had a million and a quarter signatures (61). It dealt exclusively with the formulated demands of the Chartists, and the inadequacy of representation.

The debate upon the Petition was delayed and the long time elapsing between its launching and rejection gave ample time for the full programme of the Chartists to be discussed, both in the Convention and outside. It became clear that the real aims of the Chartists were not confined to the prayer of the Petition. They desired political power, as O'Brien had instructed them (52), merely

as an end to social equality. Their avowed aim was to seize the wealth of their exploiters (57, 66). But on the means towards this they had no common opinion. Every leader differed. O'Brien was a follower of Babeuf (52, 24-27), O'Connor eventually started a smallholders' scheme (64), Stephens seemed to advocate a return to primitive Christianity by miraculous intervention (56); Lovett worked out a scheme of Chartist schools; G. J. Harney and others of O'Connor's "tail" demanded an exact imitation of the French Revolution. The Chartists had no formulated programme of "social equality"; if they had gained the Charter, the Chartist movement would immediately have fallen in pieces.

The Newport Rebellion. As it became clear that Parliament was unlikely to accept the petition, the agitation increased. A bloody riot in Birmingham (provoked by imported London police) led to the arrest of Lovett (60). Moderates began to leave the Convention. It drafted a programme of "eight questions" addressed to its constituents, upon the measure, to be taken in the event of the petition being rejected. These included a "sacred month" (month's strike) and arming of the people. On July 15th, the Petition was rejected.

The Convention attempted to give effect to its presence by calling the general strike, but realising the complete absence of organisation, withdrew its notice and adjourned in ignoble failure. "Moral force" was discredited.

What the Convention feared to do, others would do for it. There is abundant evidence, some of which fell into the hands of the authorities, that preparations had been made for a national rising (59). The exact arrangements made are unknown, nor is it certain that O'Connor was concerned in them, but the signal was to be given by a rising in Monmouth, headed by John Frost, a draper. The Welsh Chartists were to take Newport and then Cardiff, and their victory would be the signal for the general rising.

Frost's army of miners marched down upon Newport on the night of Nov. 3rd, 1839.* The three columns failed to unite in time, and the first arrived in Newport many hours late, long after the authorities had been warned. It marched straight into a trap outside the Westgate Hotel, and was defeated after a brief, but fairly bloody, conflict. The other risings, naturally, were abandoned.

* The existing accounts of the rebellion are unsatisfactory. I attempted some sort of a reconstruction of it in the *Communist*, June 24, 1922.

V.—1840 TO 1850.

O'Connorism. Immediately after the defeat, the Government struck at the Chartist movement. Frost, Jones, and Williams, the three Welsh leaders, were transported, and by the spring of 1840 every Chartist leader of importance was in jail. What little organisation there had been was put out of order, and for two years the movement remained depressed and defeated. Division became acute and in 1841 Lovett founded an Association which was to organise the "moral force" men apart from the others, and to co-operate with the middle-class Free-trade movement. In the winter, O'Brien and other enemies of O'Connor joined a "Complete Suffrage Association," founded by a Quaker manufacturer, Joseph Sturge, to unite all classes.

O'Connor himself was released in August, 1841. He perceived correctly that the disorderly defeat of 1839 had been due largely to lack of organisation. He founded therefore a "National Charter Association" (technically illegal), a centralised society with branches, and in effect obedient to his personal direction. His Association never contained more than a small percentage of Chartist sympathisers, but it was a nucleus which gave some general direction to a hitherto leaderless movement. The advantage of having any leader outweighed for the moment O'Connor's obvious faults, and in 1842 the movement touched its highest point.

In that year, the second petition (62) was presented. Its difference from the previous one lies mainly in its tone. It is indignant, almost insulting, and it makes direct reference to the luxurious spending of the rulers in comparison with the poverty of the people. It had the enormous number of 3,315,752 signatures. Nevertheless, as was to be expected, Parliament rejected it on May 2nd, 1842, in spite of the immense agitation.

The General Strike. The same question of "ulterior measures" that had wrecked the Convention of 1839 now faced the reorganised movement. Before it could make any decision the question was taken out of its hands. A strike against a reduction of wages in the north of England in August was turned by the operatives into a general strike across Lancashire and the major portion of the northern industrial belt, with the object of gaining the Charter (63, *a* and *b*). After some hesitation, the Association adopted the strike officially. Men went from town to town, knocking out the boiler plugs so that no work could be done. Thus the Chartists tried all of the recognised methods of agitation—constitutional methods, armed revolt, and the general strike.

But the time and conditions were very bad. Though soldiers were used by the Government, it was not they that broke the strike. Trade was bad and employers viewed the stoppage with indifference. The handloom weavers, and indeed the factory operatives, had no resources. The masters merely stood aside and waited till privation forced the strikers back to work, which it did in September. Numerous arrests followed, and the movement again began to decline. Quarrels burst out again, and O'Connor practically uprooted all his opponents and flung them out of the movement.

**O'Connor's
Reign.**

For six years or so the movement was almost entirely under his control, through the *Northern Star*, the Association, and devoted lieutenants throughout the country, like Thomas Cooper or G. J. Harney. He worked with extraordinary energy to counteract the decline which immediately set in. Throughout these years he put all his powers into the slow business of propaganda, and though he did not prevent the decline, he at least kept it within bounds and preserved a semblance of strength and organisation. His deficiencies, however, as a leader became more evident in his now unique position. He involved himself in hopeless contradictions, even in simple electoral policy, first advocating supporting the Tories and then speaking on behalf of a Whig. He first joined in the usual Chartist denunciation of the Free Trade movement (and to a less extent the Trade Union movement) as an attempt to sidetrack the workers, and then, after being defeated by Cobden in debate, reversed his opinion and supported it. His followers in these gyrations were further puzzled by his agitation on behalf of the Land Scheme, which he began to popularise in 1843. This was a proposal to settle Chartists on small farms through a "National Land Company," supported by Chartist subscriptions and directed by O'Connor (64a). In spite of O'Connor's utter unfitness for business, the company prospered for a while, and in 1846 opened O'Connorville (Herringsgate, Rickmansworth, Bucks.), the first Chartist settlement.

A revival seems to have occurred in the Chartist movement in 1846 and 1847, partly as a result of the Irish famine and the consequent general distress. Our knowledge of this period is not adequate,* and there is no criterion such as a Petition to test it by. But the highest point seems to have been touched in 1847, when several Chartists went to the poll at the election, and one, O'Connor himself, was successful. He was elected for Nottingham, of course by purely middle-class votes.

This victory turned O'Connor's head. He was always a man of great vanity and his new elevation completed what his followers

* All the primary sources of information such as reminiscences, lives, and contemporary histories are written by O'Connor's enemies, who depreciate this period in order to make out that Chartism declined exactly as O'Connor's power grew.

devotion had begun. He began to treat the Chartist movement as his appanage, even issuing instructions through the *Northern Star* signed FEARGUS REX. His pronouncements became more extravagant and incoherent; frequently almost nonsense. He was becoming clearly unbalanced.

The 1848 Movement. The movement was well on the downgrade again, when it was stimulated to an artificial activity by the news of the Continental Revolutions in February and March, 1848. When kings were being chased out all over Europe, the British Chartists could not be idle. Drilling began again, a Convention was called, a Petition was sent up and down the country for signature. Conflicts with the police became frequent; at one meeting the Chartists chased them out of Trafalgar Square. O'Connor and his chief lieutenant, Ernest Jones, went up and down the country whipping up their followers to enormous enthusiasm by extravagant promises.

The Convention, when it met, was as futile as its predecessor, but adopted resolutions (65) which in effect rejected the proposals for a revolution, but O'Connor, who said the petition had 6,000,000 signatures, made speeches that led his followers to believe that April 10th, the day of the presentation of the Petition, would be the day of the revolution, a belief shared by the Government. When the day arrived, however, the preparations of the military and police were so great and the strength of the Chartists so small, that O'Connor wisely abandoned the mass procession to the House of Commons. This was taken as the equivalent of the defeat of an insurrection; next, the Petition was found to contain less than two million signatures; finally, O'Connor's Land Company was wound up, bankrupt. The attempts at armed insurrection were easily nipped in the bud by the police. O'Connor, overwhelmed by the fall of everything he had fought for, became stranger than ever in his manner; in 1852 he had been certainly wandering in his mind for some time, when he was confined to an asylum, where he died. Ernest Jones made vain attempts to carry on the movement, but by about 1858 all trace of it had vanished.

VI.—THE DISAPPEARANCE.

New Unionism.

The stages of the decline of Chartism are not easy to trace, nor important after the end of 1848. O'Connor's insanity in 1852 marks one; another is in 1854 when no Chartist Executive was elected; another in 1855 when O'Connor's death removed the last hopes attached to his person. By 1858 or 1860 the movement had disappeared, save for a few "old Chartists" scattered up and down the country. The energy of the young men who came in to the movement about 1847, such as G. W. M. Reynolds, W. J. Linton, W. P. Roberts, R. G. Gammage, was wasted, and no similar movement (as in the case of Owenism) arose to take its place.

Instead, we have a revival of the trade union movement, in quite a different form. All traces of revolutionary feeling, and all revolutionary aims were excluded from the new "amalgamated" unions, which were modelled on the Amalgamated Societies of Engineers (A.S.E., founded 1850) and Carpenters and Joiners (A.S.C.J., founded 1860). We should also mention the cotton trades unions, which assumed a definite form in 1853.

The principles of the new movement were acceptance of the existing system, opposition to strikes, or any other form of class war, agitation for arbitration and industrial peace. Politically, its leaders were more and more closely identified with Gladstonian Liberalism. With the defeat and extinction of George Potter by Applegarth and the "Junta" in the sixties, the last influences of the old ideas were removed.

Similarly, the Co-operative Movement, started by Robert Owen, evolved from small Co-operative productive societies into experiments in co-operative retail and wholesale trading, turning eventually into the large and conservative Co-operative movement of to-day. This change begins with the success of the Rochdale pioneers (1844).

Economic Change.

The reason why these movements supplanted Chartism is to be found in an economic change. From about 1848 onwards the condition of the British working-class began to improve. This is clearly noticeable in the closing period of Chartism, when the price of food fell rapidly after the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846). The extension of the Factory Acts, and the appointment of more inspectors, also relieved the sufferings of the factory operatives and the miners, whose despair had filled the ranks of Frost's army. The growth of the trade union and co-operative movements assured to a number of skilled craftsmen an increasing comfort. They no longer had "nothing

to lose but their chains" and varied their politics accordingly. The fact was that Britain was becoming the centre of the world's capitalist economy, and from the rain of good things which poured into the employers' hands, the workers received a good share of crumbs. An operative in 1898 was strikingly better off than an operative in 1848; reformist tactics had justified themselves. For a considerable period of time the employers were anxious to avoid disputes, and both directly propaganda and indirectly education were used to further industrial peace; genuine concessions were granted and the chart of real wages, from the sixties to the nineties, goes slowly but surely upwards.

The handloom weavers, so far as can be ascertained, were in fact starved to death. But no more violent convulsions were induced by machinery. Henceforward it was introduced more gradually, and no more great waves of handworkers were thrown out on the streets to provide material for frantic and unorganised revolutionary outbursts. "British labour entered upon a long period of comparative material comfort and extreme intellectual stagnation."

This period came to an end about the eighties or nineties, when British capitalism was no longer without a rival. German, French, and later American capitalists intruded; exploitable territories were hastily parcelled out; foreign competition became acute. It is not without significance that these years were precisely those of the revival of the revolutionary Socialist movement, as well as of the organisation of the unskilled.

DATES.

(From *Revolution*, pp. 90-102, 113-136).

- 1830 July, National Association for the Protection of Labour founded.
- 1831 Summer, Operative Builders' Union formed.
- 1832 Spring, National Association disappears.
- 1832 June, Reform Bill carried.
- 1832 September, Labour Exchange first opened.
- 1833 May 1, Exchange moved to Charlotte Street.
- 1833 June, Liverpool Building Employers present The Document.
- 1833 Aug. 26, Owen addresses the Operative Builders, Manchester Lodges.
- 1833 Autumn, Cotton Spinners' Union revives.
- 1833 Autumn, Potters' Union numbers 8000 members.
- 1833 Sept. 24, Builders' Union Delegate Conference approves of Owen's plans.
- 1833 Nov. 16, Glasgow Stonemasons' Strike.
- 1833 Nov. 25, Derby turn-out begins.
- 1834 January, Worcester and Yeovil Glovers' Strike.
- 1834 January, Grand National Consolidated Trades Union formed.
- 1834 February, First Organising Delegate Meeting.
- 1834 March, London Gasworkers' Strike.
- 1834 March 18, Dorchester Labourers convicted.
- 1834 April 26, Derby turn-out broken.
- 1834 April 30, London Tailors' Strike.
- 1834 June, Morrison leaves the Executive.
- 1834 June, The Leeds District Union, after a week's strike, collapses.
- 1834 July 5, Last number of the *Pioneer*.
- 1834 July 19, Beer dispute at Messrs. Cubitt leads to London Building Lock-out.
- 1834 August 20, G.N.T.C.U. becomes the "British and Foreign Association."
- 1834 August 23, Last number of the *Crisis*.
- 1836 London Workingmen's Association founded.
- 1837 Quarrel between Wm. Lovett and Feargus O'Connor.
- 1838 May 8, The Charter published.

- 1838 August 6, Constitution of Chartist Movement at Newhall Hill.
- 1838 October 15, Great Meeting on Hartshead Moor.
- 1838 October, Election of Chartist Convention.
- 1839 February 4, Convention meets.
- 1839 May 13, Convention moves to Birmingham. Gradual secession of Moderates.
- 1839 July 4, Great Riot in Birmingham.
- 1839 July 5, Arrest of Lovett.
- 1839 July 12, First National Petition rejected.
- 1839 July 12, Convention decides on a National Strike.
- 1839 July 22, Convention withdraws its notice of a Strike and adjourns till the end of August.
- 1839 July, Aug., Sept., Decline of Chartism and repression throughout the country.
- 1839 Nov. 4, Rising of Colliers under John Frost at Newport defeated.
- 1839 Dec. 10, Frost and others tried.
- 1840 March 4, Frost, Jones, and Williams transported.
- 1840 Mar.-July, Imprisonment of all important Chartists:—
O'Brien, Jackson, Vincent, Holberry,
O'Connor, Carrier, Roberts, Williams,
Binns.
- 1840 Spring, Lovett's National Association founded.
- 1841 August, O'Connor released. Rapid growth of his power in the National Charter Association.
- 1841 Winter, O'Brien and anti-O'Connories join J. Sturge's complete Suffrage Association.
- 1842 May 2, Second National Petition presented and rejected.
- 1842 August, Spontaneous outbreak of strikes in the North of England.
- 1842 August 17, Charter Association recognises the Strike.
- 1842 August, Strike spreading; "Plug Riots."
- 1842 Aug.-Sept., Strike broken, partly by Soldiers. Wholesale arrests.
- 1842 Dec. 30, Split between the Chartists and the Complete Suffrage Association.
- 1843 O'Connor turns to popularising his Land Scheme.
- 1843-47 Decline of Chartism.
- 1845 Opposition to Trades Unions and Free Traders abandoned.
- 1846 O'Connerville founded by O'Connor's National Land Company.
- 1847 O'Connor elected for Nottingham.

- 1848 Feb.-Mar., Continental Revolutions.
- 1848 Mar. 6, Police driven from Trafalgar Square by Chartists.
- 1848 April 4, Convention again meets.
- 1848 April 10, Petition presented. Chartist demonstration collapses.
- 1848 May 23, Committee of the House of Commons appointed to investigate O'Connor's *National Land Company*. Declares it must be wound up.
- 1848-1858 Disappearance of Chartism.
- 1852 O'Connor becomes insane.
- 1854 Chartist Executive not elected.
- 1855 O'Connor dies.

HINTS FOR STUDENTS AND CLASS-LEADERS.

1. TO STUDENTS.

(a) Neither the syllabus nor the lectures of the tutor or class-leader are a substitute for independent reading. You cannot profit by a course unless you read steadily in addition to listening and joining in discussion.

(b) You will get a grip of your subject best by writing. Make written notes as you read as well as in class, and try to put your impressions on paper in the form of essays and written work. Never mind making mistakes or writing badly. Practice is the only way to do better. An essay or half a sheet of notepaper, or a personal letter to the leader on some point that wants clearing up, will give you a start if you feel in a difficulty. It is of vital importance to you to be able to express yourself clearly on paper. It clears up your thinking and it adds greatly to your power to influence others.

(c) When you are reading, remember that a book is a tool. Read carefully, but don't waste time in being too careful. There are many books of which it is worth your while to read a few chapters or even a single chapter, but not worth your while to read the whole. Read that part of a book which contains the information you want. Learn, by practice, how to use the index to find what you want. Too hasty reading and too slow and conscientious reading are both enemies of successful study. Use your books as you use your tools. Learn also how to use your Public Library. Find out what it contains, especially if it includes a reference library, and get a sympathetic librarian or assistant or friend to teach you how to make full use of it.

(d) Take part in discussion. Heckle the class leader well on any point on which you are unsatisfied or in doubt. But, both in questions and in discussion, stick to the point and see that your fellow-members stick to the point. Discussions that are all over the shop are of no educational value.

(e) Regard the class, not as an end in itself, but as a means and a starting point. Try to learn how to follow up for yourself the points which interest you. Don't be content with what the class-leader tells you. Find out things for yourself.

(f) Attend regularly and punctually. It is no good belonging to a class unless you give it first claim before all other engagements. If ever you miss a class, make up the loss by specially careful reading, and ask the class-leader to help you on any doubtful point.

(g) Remember that for every worker who attends a class, there are still a thousand who don't. Try to equip yourself to be a class-leader and so help in the movement for working-class education. Try to get your Trade Union and other Societies to which you belong to take up educational work as a serious part of their functions.

2. TO TUTORS AND CLASS-LEADERS.

(a) This syllabus is not intended to bind you down, but merely to help you. Modify it as you like, wherever possible with the co-operation of the class. Expand here, contract there; recommend for reading the books you think best. The syllabus is only meant as a *general* guide to method of study. But, where you modify it, let the students know in advance exactly how you propose to treat the subject.

(b) See that the class is as well as possible supplied with books. Get a book-box from one of the bodies which provide them (Club and Institute Union, Fabian Society, Tutorial Class Libraries, Central Library for Students, etc.). Select the books carefully yourself. See that the students make the fullest use of the Public Library (and its Suggestion Book). Talk to them about books and how to read and use them.

(c) Wherever possible, get the students to do written work, and make this as easy as possible for them by hints on writing, suggestions of subject and treatment, and so on. How much and how good their written work is depends largely on you.

(d) Stimulate questions and discussion, and don't do all the talking yourself. You should need to do progressively less as the class gains in knowledge and group cohesion.

(e) Don't be content with merely taking the class. Do all you can to give each student individually the help he needs.

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