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The Struggle for the English Working Classes' Rights between 1800 and 1850

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Dedication

I dedicate this research work to:

My family, especially to my beloved mother;

My dear friend Habibou;

And, very warmly, to Sayeed Samir.

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List of Abbreviations:

BPU: the Birmingham Political Union

ELDA: the East London Democratic Association

GNCTU: the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union

GNU: the Great Northern Union

LCS: the London Corresponding Society

LDA: the London Democratic Association

LWMA: the Leeds Working Men's Association

LWMA: the London Working Men's Association

MP: Member of Parliament

MPU: the Manchester Political Union

MUSA: the Manchester Universal Suffrage Association

NAPIP: the National Association for Promoting the Improvement of the People

NCA: National Charter Association

SWMA: the Sheffield Working Men's Association

Maps:

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Ministère des Etudes Supérieures et de la recherche scientifique

Université d'Oran Es-Senia

Faculté des Lettres, des Langues et des Arts

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Titre: ***La lutte pour les droits de la classe ouvrière anglaise entre 1800 et 1850***

Mots clés : La classe ouvrière anglaise, la révolution industrielle, tension économique, lutte sociale, syndicalisme, Radicalisme, réformes parlementaires, Owenisme, Chartisme.

Résumé : La période entre 1750 et 1850 en Angleterre a connu des changements significatifs notamment dans les secteurs économique et social. L'agriculture était la source essentielle de l'économie anglaise qui assurait à la fois pouvoir politique et prestige social. Cependant, l'avènement de la révolution industrielle a précipité l'émergence d'un nouveau groupe social ; la classe ouvrière. Cette classe s'est d'abords structurée dans les syndicats pour l'achèvement de leurs revendications sociales. Le combat syndical s'est avéré toutefois difficile et très peu fructueux vu les défaillances et la pauvreté qui caractérisaient les lois régissant le monde du travail à l'époque. L'oppression des autorités et l'intransigeance des employeurs capitalistes de la nouvelle ère envers la lutte syndicale des ouvriers anglais a donné lieu à un changement significatif de la stratégie adoptée par la classe ouvrière. Vers 1820, les ouvriers ont épousé la voie de la violence sociale pour l'amélioration de leurs conditions misérables. Cette stratégie a ouvert la porte du parlement britannique, pour la première fois dans l'histoire à travers la Grande Loi de Réforme (1832), aux alliés de la classe ouvrière ; les représentants des classes moyennes anglaises. Frustrés par l'insignifiance de la nouvelle loi sur le cours de leurs lutte, les travailleurs anglais abandonnaient la politique et rejoignaient la lutte sociale dans la période 1832-50 à travers les mouvements Owenisme et Chartisme. Le militantisme et les sacrifices des travailleurs anglais durant la première moitié du 19^{éme} siècle ouvraient la voie au vrai épanouissement du syndicalisme et la participation des couches sociale inférieures dans la vie politique dans le pays.

Errata

Mistake	Correction
recalls (page 39, 2nd §, 1st line)……..	recall
become (page 75, 2nd §, 1st line)……..	became
pamphlet (page 88, 1st §, 2nd line)……	pamphlets

Introduction

Social struggle constituted a key characteristic of one of the most animated stages in English modern history. The period between 1750 and 1850 brought significant changes to England. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century, England was predominantly a traditional agricultural country driving much of its riches from the soil. Landownership was the sole distinctive feature in the British social stratification. Land was the property qualification that secured political power and a leisured social life. However, during the second half of the eighteenth century, the invention and the gradual introduction of the steam machines into the traditional economic sector in England started to challenge the supremacy of the 'Lords of Universe', the English landowners. The twin phenomena known later on as the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions brought England face to face to a turning point in her modern history. These phenomena converted England progressively from a traditional rural country into an industrial modern one and provoked the rise of new social classes. The emergence of the working classes, which started to develop a class-awareness and sought to defend their interests, was in the heart of the 'English Question'.

During the active period of industrialisation 1800-50, the British Empire established itself at the summit of the world as a leading nation. England was a strong and a developed country. Economically, it was considered as the 'shop of the world'. The national wealth augmented apace during the period. Externally, the geographical expansion was steadily increasing. Militarily, after the decline of the Spanish Empire, Britain was the most powerful country with its strong Navy. However, domestically life was not rosy for everybody. Despite the quick growing wealth of England, a large part of its population lived in difficult conditions. The 'wealth of the nation' benefited only to a minority of landowning aristocrats increasingly rich and politically powerful. Actually, the making of the affluent and strong Victorian England relied on the efforts and sweats of the working classes. Labourers experienced hard living and working conditions. An important part of them suffered from poverty. This was the paradox of the early Victorian England known as the 'English Question'.

The present mémoire tries to analyse the reaction of the working classes in this paradoxical situation. It is an attempt to explore the causes of such a deplorable situation and to examine the answers of the working classes to the 'English Question'. During the second phase of the Industrial Revolution, workers tried to react in relatively united and organised movements to the issues that concerned them. For this purpose, they tried to form associations of economic character such as trade unions for the sake of ameliorating their bad working conditions. Another response was their involvement in political and social actions. The analysis of the working-class activities in the light of the changing national parameters is by no means a mere descriptive one or a simple narration of historical happenings. Contradictory opinions are discussed in this research work in quest of understanding the behaviour of the backbone of the industrialising process, the working classes. For this task, the mémoire is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter explores first the English social structure in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. It investigates the characteristics of the constituents of the social pyramid. The second step is the study of the characteristics and conditions of the English workers before the 'Age of Industry'. Then, the examination of the emergence and the impacts of the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions on the nation as a whole and the groups of workers in particular is given the most important focus in this chapter. This issue has always been in the heart of the 'English Question'. It should be emphasized that the positive impact of the Industrial Revolution is very arguable between the partisans of 'improvement' and the prophets of 'catastrophe'.

The violent social events that gave birth to the First Parliamentary Reform Act (1832) in Britain are the focus of the second chapter. Before their involvement in violent actions, the English working classes tried to organise themselves into legal organisations in an attempt to defend their interests. However, the Government had prohibited these organisations. Hence, the working classes saw their actions shifted from the will to create legal organisations of economic character into social riots creating a confused context of political insurrection. The issue in this chapter is whether social violence was a logical outcome and the only possible answer to the Government's repressive policy. Then, the alliance formed between the middle and the working classes, during the Reform-Act agitation is examined. In the years 1831 and 1832, the formidable social and political mobilisation of the workers constituted a

useful weapon in the hands of the middle-class leaders in their search for parliamentary reform. With the support of the working classes and after intense social and political agitations, middle-class parliamentary representation was made possible through the First Reform Act.

The third chapter treats first the social involvement of the working classes in the Cooperative Movement led by the philanthropist leader Robert Owen. In the second step, the workers' campaign against the controversial 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act is examined. These two movements appeared in a period when parliamentary-reform activity declined letting room to working-class social action. However, the most important working-class movement in the 1840s came as a response to the 'frustrating' 1832 Reform Act. By its modest extension of the franchise, the Act actually gave very little political hope to the working classes. During the late 1830s and the 1840s the English workers led by some middle-class as well as working-class Radical leaders engaged in a parliamentary-reform action known as the Chartist Movement. The practical achievements of this movement as well as its significance in the working-class struggle are discussed in this chapter. The discussion concerns first the debate over the economic roots or the political origins of Chartism. The second arguable issue of Chartism is concerned with its implication in the 'making' of the English working class despite its failure on the ground to achieve its parliamentary-reform claims.

Chapter One

The English Working Classes: Historical Background 1760-1830

Chapter I

The English Working Classes: Historical Background 1760-1830

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain started to enjoy an increasing wealth never reached before. She stood as the leading nation in the world as she dominated the major part of the international economic activities thanks to her rich trading system. Domestically, the country had developed commercial activities and the system of the old industries began to extend progressively. Parallel to the important factor of capital and investments leading to the remarkable riches of the kingdom, labour, being a basic economic factor, played a significant part in the making of the 'wealth of the nation'. The present chapter tries to examine the evolution of the economic conditions of Britain from about the middle of the eighteenth century till the end of the first third of the nineteenth century focusing on the structure and the role of different groups of workers either on land or in the old manufactures. The task is to analyse how the workers, or the working class, as they came to be called in the beginning of the nineteenth century, emerged, as well as the development of this group within the English society of that era. The analysis of the evolution of the making of the working class has always been an interesting topic of labour history. In order to accomplish this analysis, the general social framework of England with the different classes forming it in the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century is dealt with below.

1. The English Social Structure in the Eighteenth and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century:

The English society in the second half of the eighteenth century 'had its ranks and orders and its necessary degrees of subordination and authority'[1]. This social structure was based primarily on wealth crystallized basically into landownership, as Britain was mainly an agricultural country relying on a strong farming system and a true product of

[1] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000, p.9

the early-established European feudalism[1]. In his best-known *The Two Nations* (1885), Disraeli gave the social structure of the early industrial England. He concludes that eighteenth-century England was made up of two distinct and important social classes. According to him, the two classes were too far from each other to the extent that they lived in two different 'nations' as the title of his novel shows. Yet, the 'two nations' were forced to cohabit within the same country. By contrast, other analysts like Asa Briggs for instance, are convinced that the English society of the period under examination was not just 'a vast cluster of families, some born to property, others to poverty'[2].

At the summit of our 'bold and massive social pyramid'[3] were the 'great'. They were the biggest proprietors of the country who owned large estates especially in the Midlands and the South. They numerically increased and strengthened their position during the eighteenth century[4]. The members of this social group were firmly present in Parliament as well as in Government. They also had their say in the close circle of the British Monarch and naturally gravitated in the immediate milieus around him.

Below the biggest proprietors who constituted the 'nobility', there was another group of large and powerful landowners, the gentry. 'Gentry' is 'a term' used 'for the families of gentlemen' that is 'sometimes reckoned minor nobility'. 'The main criteria' for a member of this class 'were that he should live a leisured life style' and 'that he should own a respectable amount of land'. Furthermore, 'the gentry ranged greatly in income, from wealthy knights and esquires to minor or parish gentry'. The line of demarcation between the 'nobility' and the 'gentry' in terms of social rank was often ambiguous and a 'somewhat artificial distinction' existed 'between these two categories' called by some historians 'the gentry controversy'. Members of the gentry 'were classically landowners' and 'the years 1760 to 1815 were something of a golden age'[5] for them thanks to successive agricultural booms. For Briggs, this class constituted 'the backbone of the landed interest'[6]. Through its close and intimate contact with the 'great', this

[1] Feudalism was a social system of rights and duties based on land tenure and personal relationships closely linked and controlled by landownership."Feudalism", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.8
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid
[5] Juliet Gardner, Ed, *The Penguin Dictionary of British History*, Hardmonsworth: Penguin Books, 2000, p.297
[6] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.9

social group is truly considered to belong to the 'upper' classes of the English society at that time, or else, it represented the bridge between the upper and the middle classes. Below the gentry in wealth and position came two other social groups: the average farmers and the merchants.

The yeomen farmers with the cultivation of their relatively average farms formed another social class. The yeoman peasant either farmed his land by himself or let it to tenant farmers. The latter engaged large numbers of simple agricultural labourers who worked for cash wage. The category of tenant farmers belonged to the middle classes and enjoyed a leisured life in their splendid cottages.

Analogous in wealth and position to this class was that of the merchants and small manufacturers either in villages or cities. It should be emphasized that England had a developed 'world of trade and commerce' and that she was "the nation of shopkeepers and the commerce of the British was, by the standards of the eighteenth-century world, a very remarkable phenomenon"[1].

The group of artisans came obviously below that of the small merchants. These men, although having the key characteristic of high skills, were socially weak and had hardly any political strength. They 'laboured hard but' felt 'no want' and suffered from chronic frustration because they judged that they were not fairly recompensed for their great and painful professional efforts. In fact, they held a weak social status and were believed to belong to the group of simple labourers. For the artisan it was not the case, however, because he felt rightly a certain pride thanks to his income that distinguished him from the wage labourer.

Very closely to the artisans came the next-door group; the wage labourers who were also called simple or unskilled workers. Both the artisans and the mere labourers appeared to belong to the same social group, but in practice, significant differences distinguished these two categories of manual workers: professional skills, income and social prestige. The wage labourers were generally unskilled workers relying only on the force of their arms contrary to the skilled artisans. They composed the backbone of

[1] E.J.Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, p.95

the productive sectors both in agriculture and in the manufactures of the traditional industries such as the cotton and wool industries in the North of England. It should be noticed that it is difficult to group the skilled and the unskilled workers into two different social classes since they shared almost the same characteristics apart from a slight difference in social status between the skilled artisan and the mere labourer. Generally speaking, the workmen, as we shall see later, suffered from difficult working and living conditions. In the English social stratum as a whole, they were those who held a weak social status with meagre wages, with no descent education or no education at all for the overwhelming majority of them and their children[1]. They held barely any noticed political weight in the country. It should be noticed that almost all the members of the aristocracy and the gentry achieved a somewhat high level of education along with a great majority of the merchants and the artisans who came in the second educational rank within the English society.

The lowest and largest group in society, the poor, was in fact constituted of a big part of those people who laboured hard for the sake of their mere subsistence. The poor included also the unemployed, the sick, and an important number of those men who tried to go to the big cities such as London and Manchester for better life opportunities. However, they found themselves homeless and jobless for their great majority in the ruthless atmosphere of the second half of the eighteenth century. In that English social frame of 'subordination and authority', the poor 'were placed under the superintendence and patronage of the Rich'[2] and struggled almost hopelessly to better their living standards and their humiliating social reality.

As to the notion of 'class' in such analyses, it should be emphasized that the task of giving a genuine definition to it is not an uncomplicated one since sociologists 'define class differently'[3]. Some of them argue that 'there is a vagueness about classes' and that 'it is difficult to define what is meant by "social class"'[4]. Some sociologists do not see the social order as having merely two distinct groups; the owners of the means of production and the workers, as Karl Marx does. At the head of this group of sociologists

[1] Abercrombie, Nicolas, Ed, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2000, p.390
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.9
[3] Wallace, R, Ed, *A Student's Guide to Sociology*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985, p.57
[4] F.J.Wright , *Basic Sociology* , London: MacDonald and Evans Limited, 1970, p.81

comes Max Weber[1] who suggests that 'several distinct stratification hierarchies may exist in the same society'[2]. Following his definition, to draw the lines of distinction between the different social classes, a definite set of criteria should be taken into account. Only the combination of these criteria would determine the members of a given class. First, wealth and income are strong determinants of 'class'. Wealth is meant to be the financial amount or value of an individual's ownership, whereas income is defined as being 'the rate at which one receives money'[3]. To Weber, this parameter of economic order is not sufficient to determine social stratification; another parameter of political nature is equally important. This is what he calls 'party and power'. By this second criterion, he means the political activity and position that the individual holds within his local environment. To these economic and political criteria, Weber adds a third one of social order. This is the kind of regard that a society has for its social beings. In fact, social prestige, called 'status group and prestige' by Weber, is said to be the amount of positive regard that people usually have for a social member[4].

It is worth noticing that considering the three criteria advanced by Weber; social stratification becomes more complex and a little more sophisticated than that given by Marx. With regard to Weber, his theory has been challenged on its turn and proved to include some noticeable exceptions. His triple criteria of social classification do not constitute a general rule because a person can be an upper-class member having a handsome income with no political activity, or else, that an individual can be educated and well read but economically poor and lacking social prestige like some of the working-class members. In such cases, social stratification is not an easy task. In the present study, Weber's theory has been taken into account as a basis of social categorization regardless of the exceptions. Additionally, it should be noticed that landownership, wealth and income have also been given more weight in determining the English social 'pyramid' as they seem to dominate seriously the remaining criteria claimed by Weber in the English society of that era controlled drastically by land and trade.

[1] Weber,Max (1864-1920) was born in Germany. He is seen as the founder of modern sociology thanks to his coherent understanding of social science. His tense cultural life was fruitful of many modern writings on the sociology of religion, the sociology of music, urban sociology, economic history and lot of research on ancient civilizations. Abercrombie, Nicolas, Ed, op.cit., p.380
[2] Wallace, R, Ed, op.cit., p.147
[3] Ibid., p.146
[4] Ibid., p.160

2. The English workers before the Age of Industry:

During the eighteenth century, the English labour force was distributed between agriculture and some old domestic industries in the rural regions of the South and Midlands and the commercial urban and industrial centres in the South and the growing industrial North. Like in most of the feudal European countries, the agricultural sector had absorbed the major part of the English working hands during centuries before the coming of the technical industrial innovations to the British economic scene around the middle of the eighteenth century. The rate of the agrarian activities in the English economic sector started to take a lesser part around the close of this century. Agriculture 'was the indispensable foundation for industry'[1], especially for food industry and grain trade.

As to the old forms of energy sources like wood, wind and water, they started to lose ground to new ones well before the middle of the eighteenth century. The introduction of coal as a new source of energy began in the late seventeenth century and 'the total British annual coal output' amounted to 'three million tons in 1700'[2]. The mines of the South and Midlands were the fields of newly emerged groups of semi-skilled and simple miners digging with great misery for the sake of their survival. According to Pr.Ashton, "even in 1700 and 1750, fuel (coal) was basic to the development of most processes of production"[3].

In spite of the predominance of agriculture on economy from the early days of British history, old forms of manufactures had co-existed along with it in the kingdom; namely steel and iron industry, those industries directly linked to agriculture like cotton and woollen industries and other manufactures concerned with food and grain.

First, steel and iron constituted the chief agents of the old metal industries of the British kingdom. While the production of steel was not generalized to the whole country until the late eighteenth century, the output of pig iron reached 25,000 tons as early as 1728

[1] E.J.Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.97
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.19
[3] Ibid

and increased to reach 60,000 tons in 1788[1]. The traditional metal industries were mainly located in the vast regions of Yorkshire and Derbyshire.

Since Britain was basically an agricultural country, the cotton and textile industries stood as 'one of the earliest offshoots of (its) peasant economy'. Before the first technical economic transformations that the kingdom started to witness in the second half of the eighteenth century, both industries formed the most important domestic industries directly linked with agriculture. The family members of the agricultural labourers constituted a vast source of labour force on which the old domestic textile, woollen and cotton industries relied seriously. According to Mingay and Chambers:

> *"Under-employment in the countryside, especially during the winter months, provided a large supply of cheap labour for these tedious and poorly-paid crafts."*[2]

These industries constituted the pride of the kingdom overseas and employed numbers of skilled artisans like weavers, wool combers, tailors and other craftsmen directly linked to such industries. They were essentially in the English Midlands and North, in the regions of Lancashire and Yorkshire in particular.

The old industries of England cited above formed the basic foundations on which the country relied seriously to modernise and industrialise its economy. The English scholar Hobsbawm confirms that before the coming of technical industrial innovations about the mid-eighteenth century:

> *"The word manufactured (i.e. the idea) was clearly present as an image…in such cities as Birmingham, with its variety of small metal goods, Sheffield with its admirable cutlery, the potteries of Staffordshire and the woollen industry widely distributed throughout the countryside of East Anglia, the west country and Yorkshire but not associated with towns of any large size except the decaying Norwich…This was, after all, the basic and traditional manufacture of Britain."*[3]

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.19
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880*, London: B T Batsford Ltd, 1966, p.17
[3] E.J.Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.25

Taking England as a whole, the workers, from the mere agricultural labourer in the fields of the South and Midlands to the skilled artisan in the metropolis or the industrial North, were, of course, forming 'the lower ranks' of society with a weak social status and difficult living conditions well before the gradual establishment of the new industries. It is true that the skilled artisan enjoyed a relatively better social status compared to the simple labourer. He was actually characterized by high professional skills and was generally offered social respect within the English society that distinguished him from the mere wage labourer.

However, historians confirm that prior to the start of the nineteenth century workers did not form a homogeneous social body in England since the spirit of community evidently lacked in the midst of the groups of workers[1]. They were hardly organised, even at the local level, let alone the national one. In such circumstances, the middle and the upper classes of England exercised a logical political and social authority over workers both in the land and in the old manufactures. Undeniably, the English workers did not pretend to play an important role amid their traditional farming society, seriously dominated by the aristocracy and the gentry, only after the true beginning of the twin economic processes known later on as the Agricultural and the Industrial Revolutions.

3. The Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions:

During the eighteenth century, Britain was a predominantly agricultural country. Land dominated the economic and political life of the kingdom. Christopher Hill quotes Arthur Young who states that:

> *"In 1770…64% of England' s national income derived from the soil, and only 36% from trade and industry. Nearly half the population was still engaged in agriculture."*[2]

But starting from about the middle of that century, the country witnessed the emergence of new forms of industries and the distribution of the labour force shifted gradually to

[1] E.P.Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Hardmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, p.208
[2] Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution*, Hardmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, p.249

the new industrial sectors after the invention of the steam engine 'which was the principal factor in accelerating urban concentration and generalizing the labour force'[1].

3.1. The Industrial Revolution:

The Industrial Revolution is a phrase used by historians to apply to the period going from about 1750 to 1850. Some of them argue that the Industrial Revolution 'is to be thought as a movement, not as a period of time'[2]. The word 'revolution' indicates 'a suddenness of change'. Economically, it implies a quick transition from a traditional and agrarian country to a modern and industrial one. Before the start of the process of industrialisation in England, the country enjoyed a relative political stability with a Government controlled by Parliament. In addition, the British people had been accustomed with trade and industry. Giving the characteristics of the Industrial Revolution, the scholar T.S.Ashton concludes that:

> *"Everywhere it is associated with a growth of population, with the application of science to industry, and with a more intensive and extensive use of capital…there is a conversion of rural into urban communities and a rise of new social classes."*[3]

Broadly speaking, the main technical innovations that were held responsible for the industrial upheaval in England in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were the introduction of 'machine' into the textile industry, a better exploitation of coal and iron thanks to the new scientific methods applied to chemistry and the gradual generalization of the steam power[4].

Regarding the basis of the Industrial Revolution, a set of varied reasons help to understand the emergence of this phenomenon. First, the technological progress in Britain and the role of inventors and entrepreneurs stand as two of the major causes that lay behind the economic change witnessed in the country during the first half of the nineteenth century. Second, capital constituted the nerve of the industrial development.

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[1] Briggs, Asa, "The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth-century England", in *Essays on Labour History***,** Ed, Asa Briggs and John Saville, London: Macmillan & co Ltd, 1967, p.46
[2] T.S.Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution*, Oxford: O.U.P, 1968, p.114
[3] Ibid
[4] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.17

The technical industrial innovations coincided with a period in which Britain knew financial health thanks to her prosperous trade activities within the kingdom as well as in her wealthy colonies and dominions. Additionally, the banking system saw a rapid and steady growth. According to A. Briggs, the number of banks was of the order of 300 around 1784 'in England alone. During the next ten years their number trebled'[1]. Along with the 'flood' of capital and the development of the banking system, 'it was the growth of savings and of a readiness to put these at the disposal of industry'[2] that made the success of the new industries possible.

Third, the spirit of laissez-faire and liberalism governing the economic system in Britain also played an important role in the process of industrialisation. Laissez-faire is an approach meaning the non-intervention of Government into the economic activity of the country. In practice, the regulation of industry by municipalities and the central Government was 'broken down or had been allowed to sleep' during the Industrial Revolution, 'and the field was open to initiative and enterprise'[3].

Then, the population growth which took a sustained pace during the years of the industrial extension provided the economic sector with a pretty amount of labouring hands. The disposal of more and cheaper labour constituted a big stimulus to the industrial development. It should be noticed here that some analysts consider the population growth rather as a product of the Industrial Revolution not a cause of it[4]. Finally, the relative political stability characterizing the British institutions encouraged the progress of industry in Britain. In one of his articles, Alan D. Gilbert concludes that:

> *"…Many informed observers, contemporaries of the early industrial period as well as later historians, have considered the political stability of the society remarkable in an age when scarcely any other society in Europe avoided serious political violence."*[5]

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the major demographic and economic poles were in the South and East of England, and the South had a traditional importance for

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.27. A.Briggs gives other figures: in 1793: 400 banks, 1815: 900 banks. Ibid., p.84
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.76
[3] Ibid., p.7
[4] Ibid., p.3
[5] Alan D. Gilbert, "Religion and political stability in early industrial England", in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, Ed, Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1993, p.79

both agriculture and old industries. Nearly a century later, the English economic core moved to the growing industrial North 'as a result of water power, the growth of coal and iron industries and improvements in the transport system'[1]. The country witnessed the emergence of new industrial regions mainly in the West Midlands and the North. The new 'sprawling cities' such as Manchester, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, and Liverpool observed a concentration of the strong 'woollen textiles industries'. It should be emphasized that the first impacts of the Industrial Revolution had been noticed in this 'trade' and that 'it was in the manufacture of textiles that the transformation was most rapid'[2]. The cotton-mill constituted the cradle of the new industrial era in England. It 'is seen as the agent not only of industrial but also of social revolution'[3]as it created new and larger groups of workers.

Prior to the middle of the eighteenth century, England witnessed transport developments as basically required infrastructures. Canals, turnpikes, steamships, and later railroads constituted a big web of transport that linked the new industrial centres with both the sources of supply of raw materials and markets. Rivers in the North were connected with the Irish Seas. The developments that concerned transport infrastructures were required to respond to the need of distribution and delivery of both the raw materials and the manufactured goods inside and outside the British Isles.

Next, after the decline of agriculture, it was a period of rapid industrial expansion and the new economic interest became industrial rather than agricultural. A pretty amount of raw materials was exploited and used in the production of manufactured goods. As a result to this industrial upheaval, new markets had to be opened and the number of both traders and consumers increased. New industrial domains took more important dimensions in terms of production and interest. Numerically,

> *"Coal production doubled between 1750 and 1800, then increased twenty fold in the nineteenth century. Pig-iron production increased four times between 1740 and 1788…raw cotton imports quintupled between 1780 and 1800."*[4]

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.43
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.58
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.210
[4] Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987, p.135

The woollen industry spread throughout East Anglia, the West Country, the West Riding, and Yorkshire. The mining industries prospered sharply in that period and Britain 'produced perhaps two thirds of the world's coal, perhaps half its iron, five sevenths of its small supply of steel'[1].

The British cultural progress that had existed during centuries within the kingdom observed a conspicuous revival during the eighteenth century, especially in the domain of the exact and natural sciences. Inventiveness was one of the characteristics of British cultural and university life. The rich scientific life constituted one of the advantages of England at that period. Pr.Ashton confirms, "Inventors, contrivers, industrialists and entrepreneurs…came from every social class and from all parts of the country"[2]. England owed her industrial growth to inventors and entrepreneurs such as Arkwright (1732-1792) who invented a water-developed spinning frame to produce strong cotton thread. Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) contributed with his invention and improvement of the steam engine that constituted the most important factor of industrialisation. Iron production increased thanks to the efforts of Henry cort (1740-1800) in inventing and ameliorating 'puddling and rolling processes'. The industrial inventions affected the agricultural domain as well.

3.2. The Agricultural Revolution:

In the second half of the eighteenth century the English agricultural sector witnessed several transformations concerning the nature of the agrarian work itself and the size of the agricultural production. This agricultural change, labelled the Agricultural Revolution later on, has been seen by some analysts in a parallel way to the Industrial Revolution and thus as a distinct phenomenon from it. By contrast, other historians such as Mingay and Chambers argue, "the Agricultural Revolution reveals itself as an indispensable and integral part of the Industrial Revolution, sharing with it the social and scientific attributes that gave the latter its unique character of transition to the modern technological age of mass-production of food, as well as of manufactured goods"[3].

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.135
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.13
[3] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.5

Before the appearance of the Agrarian Revolution, Britain relied essentially on a peasant economy. This kind of economy had an uncomplicated technology and a division of labour based on family members. Family or household constituted the basic unit of production. Self-sufficiency was the most distinctive feature of this economic structure in which the family consumed the greatest part of what it produced. Another characteristic of the peasant society was the political isolation of the agricultural labourers from urban working classes. With respect to the peasants, this class was formed of different groups and their task was technologically modest.

Types of agricultural workers in Britain comprised farm servants, the ploughmen and shepherds, women and children working inside houses and the skilled specialist agricultural workers. Farm servants were hired by the year or the quarter and lived in the farmer's household. Their work was characterized by very low wages and long hours. The second category of agricultural labourers included the ploughmen and shepherds who represented 'regular labour-force-on the large farm-more or less fully employed the year round'. Like the servants, they suffered from low wages and long working hours. The third group included wives and children of the ploughmen and shepherds. They generally accomplished domestic casual work. Concerning their living conditions, they were "housed and fed as poorly as any pauper apprentices in the early mills, living in hay-lofts and subject to dismissal at any time". This group of workers laboured for low wages all the year[1]. Apart from women and children, the category of casual labourers included Irish migratory workers in times of good harvests. They were 'paid by day-rate or piece-rate'. The last category included the skilled agricultural workers who generally contracted for the job, received more or less higher wages and lived on their own[2]. At the general scale, the average wages in the southern agrarian counties were as low as '9s.a week' compelling the Government to assist the population financially. According to J.D.Chambers and G.E.Mingay:

> *"The lowness of wages and insufficiency of winter employment, together with limited mobility and the increase in the rural population, explained the continuing high poor rates and the prevalence of pauperism in the southern agricultural counties."*[3]

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.235
[2] Ibid., p.236
[3] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.139

As a result of the scientific innovations that came to be used in the economic sector in England during the second half of the eighteenth century, significant changes affected agriculture. This latter saw the growth of the cultivated land, the introduction of an industrialised type of agricultural machinery thanks to the inventions of men such as Robert Backwell (1691-1782) and Townshend (1674-1738) as well as of new crops like potato and turnip and the application of new farming practices in which 'improved methods of tilling, of rotation of crops and stock-breeding had become well known'[1]. New fertilizers started to be widely used to stimulate bigger production and harvests.

Then, during the Agricultural Revolution England saw her cultivated land extend substantially and the amount of output and productivity rose significantly[2]. There was also an increase of the export trade in grain used in cultivation. In addition, investment augmented sharply in farm machinery. As expected, both agricultural and urban working classes had been affected by the economic shift of the country in a significant way.

3.3. The English Working Classes:

During the eighteenth century, land dominated the economic and political life in Britain. But starting from about the middle of that century, as the country witnessed the emergence of new forms of industries, the distribution of the labour force shifted gradually to the new industrial sectors after the invention of the steam engine 'which was the principal factor in accelerating urban concentration and generalizing the labour force'[3]. In fact, the process of industrialisation, known as the Industrial Revolution, gave birth to new working classes. It was around the beginning of the nineteenth century that the groups of workers started to exist clearly as a new social force in England. These new groups have been given different labels; Gaskell called them the 'manufacturing population', Bronterre O'Brien 'the productive classes', Thomas Attwood 'the industrious classes', and Briggs 'the labouring people'. Speaking about workers in his book *The Manufacturing Population in England* (1833), Gaskell

[1] David Thompson, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991, p.14
[2] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.9
[3] Briggs, Asa, "The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth-century England", in *Essays on Labour History*, Ed, Asa Briggs and John Saville, London: Macmillan & co Ltd, 1967, p.46

confirms that 'only since the introduction of steam as a power that they have acquired their paramount importance'[1]. "In the years between 1780 and 1832 most English people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and against their rulers and employers"[2]. In fact, workers, especially in England, succeeded to form a new social body amongst the established order of early Victorian England and "the working-class presence was, in 1832, the most significant factor in British political life"[3].

Who were the members of the English working classes? During the first four decades of the nineteenth century, "the first industrial power of the world was also the one in which the working class was numerically dominant"[4]. For giving an accurate profile to a working-class member, economic and social historians provide a given number of criteria for his identification. The authors of *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* do not give a rosy profile to the affiliate of the working classes, however. According to them, "the manual worker…has lower incomes, less job security and more unemployment, a greater likelihood of poverty, fewer changes of the structured career…an earlier age of mortality, and less chance of success within the educational system"[5].

As stated by some Victorian historians, within the English society around the early nineteenth century agricultural labourers formed the first largest working group. Although the place of agriculture in the English national economy started to decline along the first third of the nineteenth century, the economic shift of the labour force to the newly established industries actually operated only gradually. Agriculture took perhaps a century and a half to occupy a subordinate role in the English economic balance about the end of the nineteenth century. As early as 1800 "It (agriculture) probably occupied no more than a third of the population and provided about the same fraction of the national income"[6]. It should be emphasized that the agricultural sector had still the heavy responsibility to feed a rapidly growing population.

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.208
[2] Ibid., p.11
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.11
[4] E.J.Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.17
[5] Abercrombie, Nicolas, Ed, op.cit., p.390
[6] E.J.Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.97

In addition, as a result of the agricultural technical innovations that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, land became more profitable and hundreds of parliamentary Enclosure Acts had been passed to reduce the common rights and support the consolidation of large farms in the South and Midlands in the hands of the 'great'[1]. Enclosure was a process of cultivating large surfaces of public open fields, waste and common lands by the limited circle of the rich landlords. Taking these new developments into account, the agricultural labourer maintained, not without difficulty, a vital economic role in the English society about the early 1830's. In their detailed common work *The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880* (1966), J.D.Chambers and G.E.Mingay estimated the number of farmers in England and Wales combined around 330,000 during the first third of the nineteenth century[2].

The tenant farmers who cultivated the land owned by the great proprietors and the gentry occupied almost half this number: 150,000. Below them came the 'owner-occupiers'. They farmed the land in which they lived and some of them rented other parcels of land from the great landlords. They outnumbered the 'nobility' and the 'gentry' combined and reached 180,000. Taken alone, the 'owner-occupier' did not own more than 20 acres of land and his economic strength was relatively weak in an age of a rapid Enclosure process[3]. Below this category came the small cottagers and the labourers. Numerically, the number of the wage labourers exceeded that of the farmers. According to Chambers and Mingay who quote Gregory King, there were, in 1831, only eleven labourers for four farmers. The agricultural labourers either worked as farm servants living with the farmer's family or worked as 'out-servants' and simple day labourers living out of the cottages. Like the agricultural labourers, the textile and woollen labourers were affected by the introduction of the steam machine.

The first effects of the Industrial Revolution had been noticed in the textile and woollen trade and 'it was in the manufacture of textiles that the transformation was most rapid'[4]. rapid'[4]. The cotton-mill constituted the very first economic cell of the new industrial era era in England. It "is seen as the agent not only of industrial but also of social

[1] See below, pp.26-27
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.18
[3] Ibid
[4] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.58

revolution, producing not only more goods but also 'new social groups'"[1]. The weaver of the 'woollen and worsted industries' operating notably in the regions of Lancashire and Yorkshire was seen as the 'prince of the craftsmen' in Britain. He was the artisan of high skills. After the arrival of the steam engine into his traditional 'trade', he tried to combine his high professional talent with the technical improvements to maintain his status of a 'skilled worker'. Within this category, we can find the 'self-employed weaver' with the status of a 'master' artisan. The 'journeyman weaver', who is ranked naturally in the second position, worked either in the shop of the 'master' artisan, or at home on behalf of his master. Another fraction of the simple weavers was originally farmers or small holders. They worked as weavers either at home with the help of their wives and children or in the shops of the big masters in times of bad harvests and agricultural depressions[2] especially in the Midlands and the North. The conditions of the craftsmen also changed in the metropolis.

In the early nineteenth century, London was a big demographic and business centre by the standards of the period. Its population occupied perhaps one tenth of the total inhabitants of England. London was the capital of 'fashion and pleasure'. It was also, "for the merchant classes …the centre of trade and the moneyed interest…for the artisans and shopkeepers London was a centre of economic activity, a home of all trades"[3]. The community of workers of these trades comprised the skilled artisans, the journeymen and the labourers. The building and construction trades consisted of builders, pundits, stonemasons, carpenters and mere construction workers. The Londoner skilled artisan was either a master at the head of a respectable shop employing a number of workers or a self-employed artisan; a family manager of his shop in his own home. The skilled craftsmen of London were engaged in several trades. Around 1831, apart from the building trades, the Londoner craftsman was 'a shoemaker, cabinet-maker, printer, clockmaker, jeweller, baker' or a 'weaver'[4]. Each of these trades, which were the 'chief trades' of the metropolis, included more than '2500 adult members' at the same period[5]. In addition, except the skilled artisans, significant

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.210
[2] Ibid., p.299
[3] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, op.cit., pp.41-42
[4] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.260
[5] Ibid

numbers of semi-skilled workers, journeymen, outworkers and mere wage labourers formed the extensive body of the new working classes of London.

The huge rural areas of the English South and Midlands contained some industrial businesses, which were largely spread around the start of the first decade of the nineteenth century. Compared to the urban regions, in these regions existed also the habitual gradation of skill among the rural working community; skilled, semi-skilled and simple wage labourers. Putting aside the cottagers and the agricultural labourers of the fields, the mining sector that took crucial importance for its new industrial sources of energy like coal, engaged a category of workers of either semi-skilled or simple miners. According to Pr.Ashton, 'coal mining was carried in a rural rather than an urban setting'[1]. The rural working classes included also weavers and tailors in the textile industries. It comprised builders, stonemasons, and carpenters in the building sector and several other craftsmen in different trades such as blacksmiths, harness-makers, tanners, knife-grinders, tinker, shoemakers and the like.

Most of the manufactures employed numbers of women and children labourers during a political period in Britain when there were no legislative restrictions that prevented such practices. Brian Inglis stresses that "in the early part of the nineteenth century, child labour came to be used on a scale it had never been used on before. Children formed the bulk of the factory, and were also more employed in workshops"[2]. Concerning women, they constituted an important labour force reservoir on which many economic activities seriously relied. According to Asa Briggs:

> *"In most mills women were the standard labour force, along with children making up two thirds of the whole (workers)."*[3]

Furthermore, during the first half of the nineteenth century the category of domestic servants occupied the second important largest group of workers below the agricultural labourers. Although women formed the quasi-totality of the domestic servants (along with a tiny portion of children) in the splendid urban houses and cottages of the 'aristocracy' and the 'gentry', they were used as agricultural labourers as well. In his

[1] T.S.Ashton, op.cit, p.28
[2] Brian Inglis, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*, London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1971, p.30
[3] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.52

article "Women in the Workforce", concerned with female labour force in the period of the first half of the nineteenth century, Duncan Bythell affirms that:

> *"Four activities accounted between them for almost 90 per cent of 'women's work': domestic and allied forms of personal service headed the list, employing about two out of every five working women; the textiles and clothing groups of industries together provided employment for a similar portion, and –lagging a long way behind- agriculture found work for approximately one working women out of every twelve."*[1]

Therefore, women dominated by far the 'private domestic service' and succeeded in maintaining a solid rank within some 'trades'; they mostly contributed markedly in their families' incomes. Women and children's difficult working conditions would be considered as an essential factor that contributed to the social and political agitations of the early eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. The depressed working women and children were one of the causes of the national unrest. Yet, they were scarcely effective actors involved openly in the social and political movements of the English working classes. In consequence, this study is not concerned with female and child labour though it represented a significant part of the English labour force in the first phase of industrialisation.

One of the notable features of the early eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries is the rapid increase of population. Consequently, the working community also witnessed a perceptible increase in a period of a large spread of industrial centres. The census undertaken in 1831 confirmed that the group of agricultural labourers came numerically in the first position in England. Arthur Young put their numbers at 180,000[2]. Secondly, the category of the domestic servants in Great Britain as a whole numbered 670,491 women. 350,000 to 400,000 men and children formed the third largest group of the British workers in the building trades. Within the businesses of the skilled artisans, the shoemakers dominated the category of the craftsmen with 133,000 adult workers. The next important group was that of the tailors with 74,000. If we take the example of London that was considered as 'the greatest artisan centre in the world',

[1] Bythell, Duncan, " Women in the Workforce ", in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, Ed, Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1993, p.36
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.18

Dr.Dorothy George affirms that there were '100,000 journeymen of all types in the early nineteenth century'[1].

3.4. The Consequences of the Two Revolutions in England:

Starting from about the middle of the eighteenth century, both Revolutions transformed England significantly into a modern and an industrialised country. The Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions raised the production of both agriculture and the old industrial sector in a manner 'unrivalled' in the world at that period. As a result, the twin Revolutions placed England externally in the first economic rank in Europe as well as in the world. Internally, the country happened to be the ground of profound economic and social transformations as wealth increased apace and interests grew bigger. Directly concerned, the group of workers observed obviously different changes in various aspects. The changes affected the economic activities in which they became engaged, the number and size of workers and their living and working conditions. The technical economic improvements resulting from the Industrial Revolution contributed to a rapid and radical transition of the country from an agrarian into an industrialised one and 'brought immense prosperity and misery combined'[2]. This was the paradox of the early Victorian England that generated a huge amount of political and social tension, distress and conflicts known as 'the English Question' that has not ceased to constitute a rich topic of historical political, economic and social studies.

During the eighteenth century, many factors gathered inside and outside England to help her economic progress. Britain continued her pursuit of expansion through her colonies and dominions. Culturally, the country witnessed a manifest progress and a wind of inventions that concerned nearly every aspect of life. In addition, men started to control and better use the natural resources and profited efficiently from the gigantic advantages of Nature. The field of agriculture adopted rapidly the technical industrial improvements and saw in its turn a revolution that transformed it profoundly and placed it to play a significant role within the English economic balance. The economic sophistication did not concern only agriculture and the traditional industries, but the

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit, p.260
[2] David Thompson, op.cit, p.33

developments concerned the use of capital as well and a system of credit and banking 'came into being'.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Britain was at the zenith of her colonial experience. The British colonies and dominions, territorially vast and demographically large, constituted rich resources of raw materials on one side and naturally an immeasurable market for the finished products manufactured at home on the other side. Furthermore, the activities of the colonists overseas represented a stable source of the capital invested in England. The scholar C.Hill announces, not without surprise, that:

> *"Spectacularly large sums flowed into England from overseas; from the slave trade, and, especially from the seventeen-sixties, from organized looting of India…[and also from] family and group savings of small producers who ploughed their profits back into industry or agriculture."*[1]

The scientific and technical industrial inventions like the steam engine and the 'innovations in the chemical and mining industries' allowed men to make a better use of the huge and rich gifts of Nature. The entrepreneurs involved in the extraction of the raw materials started to exploit bigger amounts of wood, pig iron, steel, coal, and charcoal. According to Asa Briggs:

> *"The central feature of early industrialization was not mechanization but the successful attempt to master natural resources which hitherto had mastered man."*[2]

Figures of output give evidence to the gradual 'mastery of Nature' especially concerning the new energy sources. These estimates put the output of coal around two and a half million tons a year in 1700. Fifty years later, the coal exploited amounted four and three quarters million tons. In the close of the eighteenth century, the production of coal exceeded ten million tons and reached sixteen million tons in 1829[3]. In fact, the technical chemical inventions linked to the 'new' fuels of the Industrial Revolution contributed effectively to give such large figures of output. Thanks to such a

[1] Christopher Hill, op.cit., p.246
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.15
[3] T.S.Ashton, op.cit, p.30

huge production, the nineteenth century was given the label of 'the age of coal' in England.

On the other side, according to some historical figures the Agricultural Revolution would seem to have raised the country's agricultural output with 'an increase of the order of forty or fifty percent'. Similar accounts are those of Chambers and Mingay quoting P.Deane and A.W.Cole who assert that the 'output of the agricultural produce increased by 43% over the eighteenth century'[1].

3.4.1. The Enclosure System:

With the new methods of cultivation and the introduction of an effective farming machinery during the second half of the eighteenth century, land became more profitable and more important for the farming investors and entrepreneurs. The process of Enclosure, which gained a significant speed in the nineteenth century, intended to turn the huge surfaces of the common open and desert wastelands into the hands of the landlords. Some economic historians argue that Enclosure was urgent and necessary in the eighteenth century to respond to the pressure of the rapidly growing population for food supply. Following the historian Christopher Hill:

> *"Enclosure facilitated draining of wet lands. Drainage schemes, cultivation of waste and moorland, new crop rotations, more intensive cultivation, regional specialization_ all this had led to an increase in output."*[2]

The agricultural historians Chambers and Mingay defend Enclosure "because not all open-field villages showed much progress and efficiency…the best use of the land was obtained only in enclosed and reasonably large farms"[3]. Historically, the enclosure of the common lands started as early as the twelfth century and advanced slowly and gradually, but the process saw a constant activity particularly in the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. One of the current estimates speaks about thousands of parliamentary Enclosure Acts that were passed to reduce common rights and maintain the consolidation of individual land properties. These estimates advance

[1] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.34
[2] Christopher Hill, op.cit., p.268
[3] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.52

that between 1750 and 1850 5.9 million acres (2.4 million hectares) changed from common and wastelands into large enclosed farms, especially in the Midlands and the South, by no less than 4,000 acts of parliament[1].

Much has been said about Enclosure, and like the Industrial Revolution, the issue has aroused a great deal of controversy amongst historians. The major achievement of Enclosure was the considerable rise in production that allowed the country to feed its growing population. Technically, Enclosure converted huge surfaces of the arable land effectively, expanded the area into cultivated land, and put the 'unproductive or lightly-cultivated areas into better and efficient use'. Additionally, in the age of a rapid Enclosure System farms became larger, more productive and simpler to cultivate thanks to the modern proficient farming practices. As to the financial returns of the agricultural investments through Enclosure, that was another positive aspect of this economic progress. According to Chambers and Mingay, the financial return exceeded twenty percent and even more in the enclosed wastelands. Compared to the economic standards of the epoch, the two historians estimate that 'this was an extremely good return' and that what made Enclosure "…by far the most profitable use of capital in connection with land, and perhaps more profitable than many riskier commercial and industrial ventures"[2]. However, it is worth noting that the benefits were reserved to the limited circle of the 'great' landlords and big agricultural investors and that they did not percolate down to the agricultural labourers who formed the backbone of the Enclosure process.

By contrast to those who see Enclosure as an economic phenomenon that suited England in a period of a quick growth of population and the threatening Napoleonic Wars between 1793 and 1815, others observe 'the Enclosure Act as an instrument of oppression'[3] in the hands of the big proprietors. And here, Enclosure would have bad repercussions on the small farmers, freeholders, and mere agricultural labourers. The scholar David Thompson is one of the historians who defend this view. He explains the situation in a simple manner and argues that after the start of the rapid Enclosure process in the eighteenth century:

[1] Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit, p.255
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit, p.84
[3] Ibid., p.78

> *"Most of the land was now owned by wealthy men, who let it to tenant farmers, many of the smallholders had become landless agricultural labourers…cottagers had in most cases lost their old common rights."*[1]

Similar to Thompson's view is that of the Hammonds who attest in their best known *The Village Labourer* (1912) that Enclosure was fatal to the small farmer and the cottager[2]. Furthermore, the small farmers and owner-occupiers supported the heavy expenses involved in fencing and preparing the large enclosed land for an extensive cultivation. Because of these expenses, some historians argue, numbers of the small proprietors did not resist and declined unfortunately to the status of a wage labourer. The decline of the small farmers can be explained by the fact that no less than one third of the whole English cultivated land belonged to the great proprietors. Each landlord was in charge of a farm exceeding 300 acres. However, the lands of the small farmers who outnumbered the 'great' considerably did not exceed twenty two percent of the entire cultivated land. For the cottager, the situation was even worse. The Hammonds, as fervent defenders of the field labourer, come to the sad conclusion that "…before enclosure the cottager was a labourer with land, after enclosure he was a labourer without land"[3]. Concerning the cottager, the loss of the old rights in the common and wastelands 'was undoubtedly a factor in increasing poverty'[4] in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Therefore, the farming labourers did not benefit actually from the Agrarian Revolution. The smallholders and the independent yeomen farmers were forced either to go to the new industrial towns or to work for a modest salary. This was mostly vital and beneficial either for the lords of the enclosed lands or for the masters of growing industrial sector, which was permanently supplied with wage labourers, but not for the field labourers regrettably.

[1] David Thompson, op.cit., p.14
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.88
[3] Ibid., pp.96-97
[4] Ibid., p.97

3.4.2. The Consequences of the Industrial Revolution: The First Phase (1760-1830):

Speaking about the Industrial Revolution and its impacts on the English society has been both an exciting and an incessant debate within British modern history. Incontestably, the Industrial Revolution constituted that powerful engine which was at the origin of the major historical political, economic and social landmarks in the eventful period of the century between 1750 and 1850. The process of industrialisation brought profound changes to the English society. The changes affected the material as well as the moral and psychological aspects of life of the English people. In quest of analysing the repercussions of the Industrial Revolution on the English society as a whole and on the working classes in particular, a difficulty exists on one side and a paradox on the other side. The difficulty of such an analysis is well explained by the historian John Stevenson, a specialist of the Industrial Revolution, when he observes that:

> *"For historians…the central difficulty lies in evaluating the effects of a process which is now seen as both complex and protracted."*[1]

The Industrial Revolution was a complex process because it concerned nearly every aspect of life. Its direct and indirect impacts included the economic, the political, the social, the cultural as well as the psychological features in the life of the English people. The difficulty also lies in the fact that the process of industrialisation was a lengthy one. It took more than a century starting from about the middle of the eighteenth century and did not reach its end until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In addition to the problem of the length of the process, historians do not set a clear and precise point of departure of the Industrial Revolution nor do they attribute a precise and conventional end to this gigantic process.

Second, the paradox found when analysing the industrial upheaval and its impacts on the English society concerns the attitude of the politicians, the sociologists and the historians towards this process. In fact, it is very curious to find a group of eminent scholars and university professors such as T.S.Ashton defending fiercely the Industrial

[1] John Stevenson, "Social aspects of the Industrial Revolution", in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, Ed, Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1993, p.231

Revolution and arguing that it was the most accountable feature for the progress and the improvement of the English society in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. On the other hand, another group of well known economic and social historians like the Hammonds for instance, qualify the same process (i.e. the Industrial Revolution) as being the first factor to blame in pauperising and demoralizing large sections of the English population; among them the working classes. The view of the second group is representative of the 'classical catastrophic orthodoxy' whereas the first group is said to adopt 'a new anti-catastrophic orthodoxy' defending vigorously the various improvements brought by the phenomenon of industrialisation. Speaking about this 'paradox', the scholar E.P.Thompson states that:

> *"The classical catastrophic orthodoxy (The Hammonds, B.Inglis, E.P.Thompson, E.J.Hobsbawm) has been replaced by a new anti-catastrophic orthodoxy (Sir John Clapham, Dr.Dorothy George, Pr.Ashton, Pr.Asa Briggs)…(and the new orthodoxy) becomes open to challenge in its turn."*[1]

Taking the divergences of the two contrasting views into consideration, the aspects of the Industrial Revolution dealt with in the following discussion include the development of transport and infrastructures, the banking system, the Factory System and its influence on the productive process, wages, wealth of the 'State', the change in the living standards of people focusing on income and food, and the increase of population.

As a necessary step for the success of the process of industrialisation, England achieved remarkable transport development by the standards of the time. She enlarged her poor road network and bettered her canals and rivers' webs. Furthermore, with the rise of population and the prosodic rural exoduses to the new industrial centres, the country started an effective and sustained programme of building the necessary infrastructures to respond to the pressing demands. Thus, England succeeded to strengthen her previously weak set of infrastructures especially in the urban centres and by the first third of the nineteenth century the country already owned a sophisticated system of infrastructures: schools, infirmaries, parks and other public buildings. This programme had good repercussions on the working classes since the building and construction

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.214

trades needed and actually absorbed a substantial number of skilled and semi-skilled labourers[1].

Second, the country witnessed the emergence of a banking system and banks became well known national institutions almost everywhere in the country. In addition, capital was no more the monopoly of the rich and started to move smoothly among the other classes of society. Therefore, the 'power of saving' rose gradually among the labouring population and 'indebtedness of workers to employers declined'[2].

Third, industrialisation brought regularity and discipline to the different economic sectors, which ameliorated at once both the productivity of the factory and the earnings of its workers. For some economic analysts, the rigid discipline of the Factory System was beneficial even for the labourers. According to this group of specialists, work in the Factory System is better than the traditional domestic one since '…in the same number of hours a man could earn more in factory than as a domestic worker'[3]. This is one of the most essential elements that explain the rise of wages associated with the Industrial Revolution. Under the new system of work, the labourer was paid more regularly, and time was not wasted the way it was under the domestic system. The worker's time was better exploited and naturally well recompensed in terms of pay. However, the rigid discipline brought by the new industrial organisation of work did not suit the workers as it suited the masters. While the industrial masters encouraged the Factory System for its efficiency in rising production, the workers saw the same system as an instrument of their enslavement and a source of hated regularity, routine and monotony. Compared with the domestic trades, the Factory System is held guilty for the loss of independence felt by the industrial labourers. Some historians go further and affirm that the Factory System totally 'disrupted an older and, implicitly, better way of life'[4]. Although Pr.Ashton is a partisan of 'improvement', he does consent that:

> *"In most occupations hours of work were from dawn to dusk, with short halts for breakfast and dinner…the clock…was at once an aid to*

[1] See above, pp.23-24
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.96
[3] Christopher Hill, op.cit., p.261
[4] John Stevenson, op.cit., p.238

rectitude and a witness to default…work continued until it was no longer possible to see."[1]

Fourth, with its rigorous and more rational applications of professional techniques, the Factory System successfully introduced work specialities. The division of labour, as it comes to be called, happens when 'men devote themselves to a single product or process'[2]. According to Pr.Ashton, 'the Industrial Revolution' was at the origin of the 'extension of the principle of specialization'[3]. To the division of labour are associated a set of positive elements. It helped in raising productivity since the worker became closely accustomed to the same speciality and 'endlessly repeated one single task'[4]. The separation of work made it simpler because the same worker was not compelled to achieve the whole complex process of production (as he was before, specially for the skilled trades) and the tasks became shared efficiently by a group of workers. In addition, the division of labour enabled the English worker to be paid more fairly because the skilled worker under the Factory System received an adequate pay that distinguished him from the unskilled one. Yet, under the division of labour the worker seemed losing his intimate relationship with his work. It is true that before the emergence of the different industrial specialities the worker, either in the domestic or the old manufactures performed his professional tasks with pleasure and a manifested admiration of his work. However, industry, it is widely believed, destroyed this sentimental and highly important relationship between the worker and his job. For Karl Marx, who called this phenomenon alienation, he confirms that it 'occurs when…man no longer recognizes himself in his product which has become alien to him'. In the so-called capitalist England of the period under study, the origin of alienation lay in the fact that a limited class (i.e. the masters) owned the product created by others; the working people. Workers in this situation had absolutely no control over the products of their own labour. This is one facet of alienation. Another facet of this destroying phenomenon appears in the fact that the worker, under the new system, became no longer internally motivated and lost his self-satisfaction towards his work. Working changed cruelly from an admired activity to undesirable forced labour. Furthermore, the Factory System is also blamed for depriving the industrial worker from his 'human

[1] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.98
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid
[4] Abercrombie, Nicolas, Ed, op.cit., p.102

qualities'. Under forced labour and a professional system centred on mass production, the worker is said to find himself devoid of his human nature and performing animal-like activities[1]. In this atmosphere of advanced psychological degradation, Mingay and Chambers conclude that:

> *"The labourer felt alienated and socially isolated by the hostile front of restriction and disapproval presented to him by the propertied classes."*[2]

Additionally, the rules of competition imposed by the Industrial Revolution were harmful to the group of skilled workers. These workers of crafts and skills enjoyed a status of social prestige and relative wealth before the generalization of the steam-power machines. For instance, during the second half of the eighteenth century after the rise of the new industrial wool and cotton mills in the North, the handloom weavers started to experience an unfair competition with the power looms. According to E.P.Thompson:

> *"From 1800 onwards…the majority of weavers, stockingers, or nail-makers (became) wage-earning outworkers with more or less precarious employment."*[3]

Hence, the skilled worker lost his personal pride, his social status and felt frustrated in the new economic context. Pr.Ashton affirms, not without regret, that:

> *"The attempt of the hand-loom weavers to compete with steam and the superior organization of factory forms the subject of one of the most depressing chapters in the economic history of the period."*[4]

Fifth, the Industrial Revolution brought a remarkable amelioration in wages. People from both the colonies and Europe especially from Ireland poured into England called by the 'attractive power of the English wages'. It is true that the increase in wages is taken for granted as a logical consequence of the fresh wealth of the nation and the good effects of the Industrial Revolution and mass production. For the historian Christopher Hill, 'after 1795…the income of the poor did not fall below the minimum

[1] Abercrombie, Nicolas, Ed, op.cit., pp.11-12
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.146
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.217
[4] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.61

of subsistence'[1]. Even the defenders of the catastrophic orthodoxy such as the Hammonds, Dr.Hobsbawm and E.P.Thompson agree that there was an increase in the wages as well as some observable material improvements in the life of the workers and the lower classes. For T.S.Ashton, that was certitude. He stresses in his *The Industrial Revolution* (1968) that:

> *"Most of the factory operatives were engaged at rates of pay which raised family incomes above those of any earlier generation…the earnings of most of the adults were increased."*[2]

Sixth, as a result of the gradual process of industrialisation and around the close of the eighteenth century, an increase of the English national wealth started to be felt. Around 1800, England started to take over the international market of the raw materials such as iron, steel, coal, cotton and the like. As to the manufactured goods, thanks to the newly established industries, England led the worldwide trade and the numerous markets offered to her in her colonies and dominions outside Europe as well as in her neighbouring European countries undoubtedly increased her profits considerably. Furthermore, the country did not rely only on agriculture and saw a substantial growth in the commercial activities internally. Nonetheless, some historians do not accredit the great national wealth of England in the century before 1850 to the newly established industries only. The rich industrial masters in London and the North did not think so because they considered themselves the ones whose industrial activities gave to Britain the status of the first industrial power in the world. It is worth noticing that before the emergence of the modern industries, Britain led in terms of the traditional manufactured goods like potteries and woollen clothing as well as in the trade of the raw materials. Internally, commerce was a very remarkable phenomenon and the English people were naturally accustomed to it perhaps two or three centuries before the Industrial Revolution. To take these elements into consideration, industry was not the sole source of prosperity in England in the nineteenth century. For John Stevenson, there were other factors liable for 'the wealth of the nation'. According to him:

> *"Economic growth, as defined by Wrigeley, was by no means exclusively or even primarily industrial growth, much of it was commercial expansion based on the capital, the burgeoning ports, and*

[1] Christopher Hill, op.cit., p.89
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.95

> *as has been highlighted in the recent literature on the eighteenth-century towns, in the prospering centres of consumption, leisure and civic life in the provincial capitals, spas and resort towns."*[1]

Next, thanks to the riches brought by the twin Revolutions and the increasing national capital, which became now within reach of the lower classes, the shift of England into an industrial country is believed to have brought a perceptible amelioration in the standards of living, especially those of the lower classes. The daily diet of the poor improved. The houses of the working classes became cleaner and more resistant with the introduction of timber and bricks. Family incomes increased as wages increased and the workingwomen gained in 'self-respect and public esteem'. Accordingly, analysts do agree that there was a rise in the living standards, which they attribute, in most cases, to the good repercussions of the Industrial Revolution. For some of them it is difficult to admit that the poor did not 'share in the gains'. Although John Stevenson is not of the same opinion with the partisans of 'improvement', he does consent that:

> *"There is now partial agreement that there was scope for some rise in material living standards even in the first phase of industrial growth before 1850*[2]*."*

For Pr.Ashton, the rise of the living standards was more significant. According to his investigations:

> *"...In 1831 the cost of living was 11 per cent higher than in 1790 but over this span of time urban wages had increased, it appears, by no less than 43 per cent."*[3]

However, the living-standards controversy has another facet. First, concerning the rise of wages some historians try to demonstrate that this phenomenon was not territorially equitable nor was it chronologically protracted. For the field labourers, it is obvious enough that after the accelerated urbanization of the late eighteenth century a great portion of the remaining population in the countryside was left unemployed, 'pauperised, demoralized', and relying only on the poor Poor Rates[4]. For the industrial

[1] John Stevenson, op.cit., p.234
[2] Ibid., p.240
[3] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.127
[4] For more details about Poor Rates see below, p.105

worker, the scholar John Stevenson advances that the rise of wages was not apparent until the late nineteenth century, and that 'evidence for the period before 1850 is more patchy'[1]. With regard to the regularity of rising real incomes, it was not firmly acquired especially in the periods of the Napoleonic Wars and poor agricultural harvests. Pr.Ashton states that:

> *"Periods of poor harvests (especially from 1756 to 1820) were usually followed by stagnation of trade, falling wages and unemployment."*[2]

Even if on a general scale there was a rise in wages during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution, historical accounts of the human experiences show a great deal of poverty, unhappiness and a sentiment of injustice particularly among the working people. To highlight this view historians rely on literary sources such as Charles Dickens's *David Cooperfield* (1851) and *Great Expectations* (1861). From these well-known novels, a net impression of misery and misfortune is depicted amongst the lower classes of the English society. Here, there are two distinct factors in evaluating the life of people under industrialisation. E.P.Thompson explains that the first factor is 'a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and sometimes an evaluation) of qualities'[3]. To measure the 'quantities', economic studies and empirical statistical data are obviously reliable, whereas to evaluate the 'quality' of life literary works stand as the first source of such an examination. The distinction between the quantity of material living standards and the quality of life leads, perhaps, to understand the 'paradox' of the 'English Question'. On economic grounds, it is true that there was a slight rise in wages as well as an amelioration in material living standards even for the simple working people. However, parallel to this rise there was also a rise in human misery and discontent particularly among the working classes. E.P.Thompson explains this strange situation by suggesting that:

> *"It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A per capita increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. Some may consume more goods and became less happy and less free at the same time…thus it is perfectly possible to maintain two propositions*

[1] John Stevenson, op.cit., p.241
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.117
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.231

> *which, on a causal view, appear to be contradictory. Over the period 1790-1840, there was a slight improvement in average material standards. Over the same period there was intensified exploitation, greater insecurity, and increasing human misery."*[1]

In fact, large sections of population recognized the Industrial Revolution as the age of the 'dark satanic mill' that increased their working time, and imposed on them an infernal and highly exploitative system of forced labour. Over this period, the English worker experienced a sad feeling of 'a loss of independence and a deep long-prevailing sense of injustice' against his industrial masters as a class[2].

Finally, towards the end of the first phase of industrialisation around the end of the first third of the nineteenth century, England witnessed a noticeable increase of her population. This demographic increase happened in a way hitherto unparalleled in the social history of the kingdom. As to the significance of this phenomenon on the course of the events, Pr.Ashton argues, "The outstanding feature of the period …is the rapid growth of population"[3]. In fact, some demographic figures estimate the number of people in England and Wales at about 6.5 million in 1750, and the first census undertaken in 1801 put the same population at about 9 million. In 1831, which some historians label the year of the height of the Industrial Revolution, England and Wales combined numbered 14 million[4]. Some social analysts believe that there was a causal relationship between the Industrial Revolution and the growth of population. According to them, the improvements linked to industrialisation and the Agricultural Revolution encouraged the English people to marry earlier and to produce more children at a quicker rate. The decrease of the mortality rates is also attributed to the new advances in food and medical services. Nonetheless, other social historians reject this explanation and truly argue that the demographic increase occurred also in most of the European countries in which there was no process of industrialisation until the late nineteenth century like Germany and Italy. Outside Europe, they give the example of China and Egypt. Whether the Industrial Revolution was at the origin of the growth of population or not is not the issue here. What concerns the present study is that this significant demographic rise generated a pretty amount of labour force and handsome supplies of

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.231
[2] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.147
[3] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.2
[4] David Thompson, op.cit., p.2

working hands both in houses for the traditional domestic trades and for the new industrial mills and factories increasing significantly the riches of the newly established labour market[1]. Furthermore, regarding the big number of population which 'was beginning to press on resources', and following some historical accounts one has to bear in mind that England succeeded to satisfy the wants of her growing population, especially in terms of the basic needs such as food, clothes, and shelter. According to John Stevenson:

> *"Britain was able to sustain a trebling of population in the century before 1861 and feed it largely from its own resources."*[2]

In addition, the population growth did not occur in a homogeneous way between the South and the North on one side and between the rural and the old urban regions on the other side. In fact, the growth of the industrial centres in London and the North accelerated the phenomenon of urbanization, which is defined as 'the movement of population from rural areas to cities'[3]. The tense demographic transition which England saw during the period of Enclosure and the rise of industry 'could never have been smooth' and brought a good deal of social disorder in the urban centres. Moreover, Mingay and Chambers fiercely affirm that the population increase led to an 'expansion of labour force at a rate faster than agriculture could absorb it'[4]. This situation led in its turn to the growth of unemployment at both country and cities. As a result, the jobless labourer started to receive the Poor Rate allocated by the Government as the last resort for the survival of the poor. The figure given by E.P.Thompson illustrates clearly the rise of the unemployed and unemployable people who systematically registered to obtain the Poor Rates. Following his survey:

> *"Poor-rates had arisen from under two million pounds per annum in the 1780s, to more than four million in 1803, and over six million after 1812."*[5]

[1] See above, pp.23-24
[2] John Stevenson, op.cit., p.240
[3] Wallace, R, Ed, op.cit., p.406
[4] J.D.Chambers, Ed, op.cit., p.102
[5] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.245

The gradual rise of the Poor Rates indicates unquestionably the increase of unemployment and the number of the poor in the English society around the first half of the nineteenth century.

The process of industrialisation did not have only positive aspects on the English society. The country increased its very wealth and Britain kept the title of the world's leading nation for a long time. However, for many people the issue is not as simple as that, because a careful analysis of the English people's living conditions reveals shocking realities. Industrialisation is thought to be the most important reason for pauperising and demoralizing the lower classes. For some scholars and social historians, the Industrial Revolution is blamed for the suffering of the working classes that the industrial masters relied on paradoxically to build their mighty riches. This group of historians does not take for granted the good effects of the Industrial Revolution on the English society and reject, not without evidence, the majority of the positive impacts attributed to this controversial process, especially on the working classes.

Hence, the general impression that one can recalls from the Industrial Revolution is one of regret and ambiguity. Though England saw a net and steady increase in her national wealth, the working classes, which constituted the backbone of the process of industrialisation, did not really reap the fruits of their great efforts. Except a trivial increase in the material living standards of the worker, there was a great deal of misery, degradation, social insecurity and human misfortune. In the first pages of his book *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution* (1971), Brian Inglis quotes Arnold Toynbee who desolately describes the Industrial Revolution as:

> *"…A period as disastrous and terrible as any through which a nation ever passed; disastrous and terrible because side by side with a great increase in wealth was seen an enormous increase in pauperism…[which] led to a rapid alienation of classes, and to the degradation of large bodies of producers."*[1]

Such alienation left the labourers 'socially isolated' by the firm restrictions and the general hostility of the 'industrial captains' in particular and the upper classes and the Government dominated by the propertied interests in general. In this new context, the

[1] Brian Inglis, op.cit., p.13

labourer had no political status, living 'half-way between the position of the serf and the position of the citizen'[1] in a period of great exploitation and political repression with no or very weak trade-union defences. In this unpleasant situation, it was obvious enough that the workers would struggle against both their masters and the machines that contributed a great deal in the degradation of their living conditions. Speaking about the working community Pr.Ashton concludes that:

> *"The hand-loom weavers, stockingers, nail-makers, and the labourers of the agricultural south…wished to control their lives … (and) refused to conform to the new order."*[2]

In fact, England appeared to be opening one of the most dramatic political and social chapters in her modern history. Around the close of the eighteenth century, she was on the eve of a period of social distress and political unrest. The conflicts upon the interests of the industrial masters on one side and that of the working classes on the other side announced a series of political and social disturbances, which are to be analysed deeply in the next chapter.

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.218
[2] T.S.Ashton, op.cit., p.99

Chapter Two

Social Violence, the Working Classes and the First Reform Act

Chapter II

Social violence, the Working Classes and the First Reform Act

The great economic upheaval that the Industrial Revolution brought to the British society had some social and political impacts on the country. Although the national wealth increased significantly, the working classes continued to suffer in their daily life. The labouring classes lived in poverty, in overcrowded and inadequate houses. In their factories, they faced bad working conditions such as long working hours (12 to 14 hours a day) and meagre wages. They also suffered from frequent unemployment as a result of the introduction of the steam-engine machines. Apparently, they had limited opportunities for real social improvement.

Facing this difficult social situation, the working classes responded through different ways to make their voice heard in society and to improve their living standards. Apart from their attempts to gain some rights through the creation of friendly societies and trade unions, the recourse to violence was one of their answers to this wretched situation during the first third of the nineteenth century notably. In fact, England saw a series of open violent public actions led by Radical middle-class politicians and involving working men mainly. These violent actions, caused by the difficult living circumstances of the labouring classes and some other factors, culminated in the events of 1831 and 1832 that gave birth to the First Reform Act. The latter was concerned with the reorganisation of the 'Unreformed Parliament' and the voting representative system within the British Isles. The Act extended the number of voters and gave political representation to some new industrial regions. The present chapter tries to study the successive social and political insurrections that England saw during the first third of the nineteenth century and their major outcome, namely the Great Parliamentary Reform Act, as well as its consequences on the nation as a whole and the working classes in particular.

1. Early British Trade Unionism:

During the Industrial Revolution, and even well before it[1], some attempts were undertaken to create legal organizations that could represent workers. These organizations sought to improve wages and to reduce the long working hours.

These attempts took different appellations. In their very beginning, they used to be called friendly societies or friendly clubs. When the economic conflicts sharpened between the workers and the Government in the nineteenth century they generally became known under the name of trade clubs or trade unions. Nevertheless, friendly societies differed from trade unions in the aim and the means used. They were "mutual-aid organizations formed voluntarily by individuals (i.e. small tradesmen, artisans, and labourers) to protect members against debts incurred through illness, death, or old age"[2] using "orderly conduct of meetings for the safe-keeping of funds". Their membership was estimated at 648,000 in 1793. In 1803, they numbered 704,350 and reached 925,429 in 1815[3]. The friendly societies existed in the South of England as well as in the growing industrial Midlands and North.

Whereas friendly societies tried only to help and ameliorate the workers' conditions through mutual actions among the workers without direct contact with their masters, trade unions represented "an association of labourers in a particular trade, industry, or plant, formed to obtain by collective action improvements in pay, benefits, and working conditions"[4]. These unions sought to form "separate organization of employed workers, to determine wages and conditions by negotiations with their employers"[5]. They used the principle of combination between the workers to determine both their claims and the nature of the action adopted to reach their aims. "In many circumstances, unions did not have" the rights they usually claimed "and workers may typically threaten strikes or other collective action to pressure employers to negotiate"[6]. As to their demands, they

[1] For E.P.Thompson 'In Manchester and Newcastle' for instance 'the traditions of trade union and the friendly society, with their emphasis upon self-discipline and community purpose, reach far back into the eighteenth century'. E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.457
[2] "Friendly Society", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.460
[4] "Trade Union", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[5] Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992, p.7
[6] "Trade Union", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

were various and ambitious and did not concern wages and working hours only. They also

> *"Included ...the control of the 'sweating' of women and juveniles; arbitration; the engagement by the masters to find work for skilled men made redundant by machinery; the prohibition of shoddy work;(and) the right to open trade union combination."*[1]

Trade unions could also play social and political roles and did not stick to strictly economic aims. Nowadays, "Unions in some countries are closely aligned with political parties. Unions often use their organizational strength to advocate for social policies and legislation favourable to their members or to workers in general"[2].

Members of trade unions consisted of workers of high skills who sought to preserve their somewhat privileged position within the English society of that period such as millwrights, calico-printers, cotton spinners, pattern makers, shipwrights, croppers, and wool combers. Apart from the men of skills, there were also mere wage labourers and outworkers of the Midlands and the North in the unions. Some unions were diffused everywhere in the country especially in the manufacturing districts and a few examples of them included the West of English Woollen Workers, the Yorkshire Clothier's 'Institute', Lancashire Cotton-Weavers, Sheffield Cutlers and Barnsley Linen-weavers[3]. Those unions were active in the period 1800-20. However, they were brutally faced with the firm repression of both the industrial 'captains' and the intolerance of the Government and the existing legislation. At the national level, the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was formed in 1834 under the leadership of the social reformer Robert Owen and grouped many unions in it. This union is often cited as an example of early British trade unionism. Estimates put it having around half a million affiliates. Yet, only a small portion of its members actually paid their subscription fees, which means that this big figure had a weak practical significance in the course of the working-class struggle[4]. Furthermore, A. Briggs confirms that "the four major trade

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.603
[2] "Trade Union", op.cit., in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.553
[4] Henry Pelling, op.cit., p.30

unions-those of the builders, the potters, the spinners, and the clothiers- did not join the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union"[1].

1.1. The Achievements of the Early Trade Unions:

Did the trade unions of the first half of the nineteenth century in England attain their objectives? Different accounts assert that early trade unionism in England met very harsh obstacles to accomplish what it intended to realize for the deprived working classes. On one side, the Government saw with a big suspicious eye the formation of either friendly societies or trade unions, and Parliament dominated by the upper classes' interests did not hesitate to enact laws for the callous repression of the unions. On the other side, the masters also feared the combination of their workers to improve their wages and better their working conditions. Consequently, they exercised very big pressure on the workers convicted of combination and actually often put a systematic end to their employment. This is well explained by the economist Adam Smith (1723-90) in his well-known *The Wealth of Nations* (1767) when he speaks about trade unionism in Britain:

> *"We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate…[When workers combine,] masters… never cease to call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen."*[2]

Apart from the hostility of the employers, the Government also adopted a repressive treatment towards trade unions.

[1] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, op.cit., p.252
[2] "Trade Union", op.cit., in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*

1.2. The Government's Policy towards Trade Unions:

During the first half of the nineteenth century, trade unions faced constant hostility on the part of the Government. While the Government used spies and *informateurs* to infiltrate the unions and proceed legally to repress them, the employers obliged their workers to choose between leaving the unions or 'immediate dismissal'. In this hostile environment, workingmen's associations remained intermittent and short-lived phenomena through much of the century; unions and unionists were repeatedly accused of troublemaking and systematically banned. The Government's repression reached far back the eighteenth century and affected even the strictly social friendly societies.

1.2.1. The Seditious Meeting Act and Seditious Societies Act:

According to the Seditious Meeting Act (1801), "societies and clubs…should be utterly suppressed and prohibited as unlawful combinations and confederacies". According to E.P. Thompson this Act, which was in force until July 1818, stated that "no meeting might be held of more than 50 persons without prior notice to the magistrates, who were given power" to repress "any such meetings as were of a seditious tendency"[1]. Under this Act, neither friendly societies nor trade unions could carry out their activities without the immediate oppression of the local magistrates and the permanent hostility of their employers.

Under the Seditious Societies Act (1817), friendly societies and trade clubs were suppressed throughout the country. People were granted only the rights "to form local, autonomous clubs or discussion groups, and the right to petition Parliament or the King, and to meet for that purpose"[2]. However, the important power of combination and bargaining with the employers was rigorously prohibited under those two Acts. Concerning specifically the world of labour, a series of acts called the Combination Acts were enacted to eliminate trade-unions activity.

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.700
[2] Ibid., p.675

1.2.2. The Combination Acts:

Although trade unions were organizations of economic character, they were seen during the war with France (1803-15) as being dangerous for the public order. Government and Parliament alike, which were dominated by the influential aristocrats, judged that these movements were of 'dangerous form that ought to be suppressed'[1]. Hence, a series of acts were passed to prevent and abolish trade unions. The Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 regarded unequivocally any attempt to form a trade association as unlawful action, and severely punishable under the existing legislation. In the very terms of the two Acts:

> *"Trade unions (were) illegal. The laws, as finally amended, sentenced to three months in jail or to two months' hard labour any workingman who combined with another to gain an increase in wages or a decrease in hours or who solicited anyone else to leave work or objected to working with any other workman. The sentence was to be imposed by two magistrates, and appeal was made extremely difficult."*[2]

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and under the two Acts, most of the trade unions were abolished. The unions received severe blows that obliged them, under the force of law and order, to put an end to their nascent beginnings. Some examples of the unions repressed in that period could include the West of the English Woollen Workers (1802), the Yorkshire Clothier's 'Institute' (1806), Lancashire Cotton-Weavers (1808 and 1818), Glasgow Weavers (1813), Sheffield Cutlers (1814), Frame-Work knitters (1814), Calico-Printers (1818), and Barnsley Linen-Weavers (1822)[3]. The mere attempt to form a trade union represented 'a criminal conspiracy' for both the Government and the industrial masters. However, from the 1820's onwards the government started to soften the labour legislation and to organise the activity of trade unions.

1.2.3. The Repeal of the Combination Laws:

The severity of the Combinations Acts of 1799 and 1800 draw some trade unions into a world of secrecy and violence. The workers tried to gain through underground

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.162
[2] "Combination Acts", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.553

combination and some secret violent actions what they could not obtain by the very restrictive existing legislation regulating the world of work. This situation also threatened the government and the masters and by 1820, some scope of flexibility began to appear. Francis Place[1], a political reformer, seized the opportunity of the new context and launched a serious campaign among the workers as well as in the Parliament circle for the repeal of the Combination Acts. In 1824, he worked closely with the Radical MP Joseph Hume (1777-1855) and Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844) who demanded the amendment of the Combination Laws in the House of Commons. They obtained the repeal of the Laws in 1824. The new Act "declared that the mere act of combining should not be grounds of prosecution under the common law"[2]. It also insisted on the irregularity of using 'violence to the person or property' or 'threats or intimidation' in order to impose the rules of a combination.

Yet, the 1824 Act came into being in a period of economic depression and soaring prices, during which there were a lot of violent actions involving mostly the lower classes. The industrial captains and the government counter-attacked as expected and Parliament passed a new act in 1825, which amended that of 1824 and "made the provisions against violence and intimidation more stringent than they had been in the 1824 Act". It also shed light on "the definition of the purposes of legal combination" which was "narrowed to questions of wages and hours of labour"[3]. The Act also stipulated that trade unionists were not allowed to 'molest', 'obstruct' or 'intimidate' others. The problem of such terms was how judges could interpret them in the highly restless early industrial context. Thus, unions and unionists fell again into severe repression under the limitations of law though the new Act allowed them to stay alive in the open. The following 'affair' illustrated the oppression and unfairness of the Government towards the trade unions.

[1] Francis Place (1771-1854) was an English radical reformer, best-known for his successful campaign for the repeal in 1824 of the anti-union Combination Acts. "Francis Place", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[2] Henry Pelling, op.cit., p.21
[3] Ibid

1.2.4. The Tolpuddle Affair:

During the 1830's trade unionism continued to be on the defensive in England. This was well exemplified by the attempt of six agricultural labourers in the village of Tolpuddle, Dorset, to form a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in quest of defending their interests. The labourers got in touch with the GNCTU. This latter sent them some delegates for the sake of instruction. With their help, the society was formed involving 'secret rituals and oath-taking'. In March 1834, the government, which was checking the size of union activity, sentenced the six labourers to be transported to Australia for seven years under the guilt of taking 'an unlawful oath'. In London, the riots and demonstrations of the GNCTU members that followed the trial did not succeed to reduce the labourers' sentences until 1838. Nonetheless, this 'affair' had depressing repercussions on the early trade unionism and discouraged scores of suffering workers to join the embryonic movement in the first half of the nineteenth century[1].

1.3. Assessment of Early British Trade Unionism:

Some labour historians do not attribute grand practical success to trade unions in the first half of the nineteenth century because of the unfavourable legislation and the adversity of the employers and the Government. Nonetheless, they consider the early trade unionism as one of the most important features in the development of class-consciousness among the workers. By the standards of the time, the unions' claims were 'very' democratic compared to the 'Old Corruption' environment in which they were born. England was ruled by the oligarchy of the upper classes and only a tiny proportion of the population could really hold political responsibility within the established order. In this hostile atmosphere, early British trade unions paved the way for real economic and political development by stressing and propagating the principles of collectivism and discipline. It was this moral progress, which started, perhaps, to distinguish and dissociate 'the nineteenth-century working class from the eighteenth-century mob'[2].

[1] Ben Hooberman, *An Introduction to British trade Unions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, pp.2-3
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.463

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Government in England considered unionists as troublemakers or even as criminals[1] that should seriously be oppressed. In consequence, Government and Parliament alike actually manoeuvred to adapt a rigorous legislation for the sake of preventing any eventual effect of trade-unions activity on the traditional economic and political life of the country. Another obstacle in the way of the early unionists was the opposition of the employers against the 'collective bargaining' of their employees to gain an increase in wages or a reduction in the long hours of labour. The workers realized that very little hope was left to them to prolong their 'legal' fight in quest of improving their harsh situation. This is what explains, possibly, their recourse to methods of struggle other than the 'legal and constitutional' one. The alternative ways included essentially violence and political agitation. In addition, some labour historians are of the same opinion about the somewhat frail significance and efficacy of the early trade unionism in England. According to Frederick Engels:

> *"The history of these unions is a long series of defeats of the working men, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labour market. Hence, the Unions remain powerless against all great forces which influence this relation."*[2]

Additionally, parallel to the Government's repression, H. Pelling gives other reasons accountable for the malfunction of unionism in that phase. According to his analysis:

> *"The general character of combinations early in the nineteenth century (was that)…a few of them (i.e. unions) were very elaborate in their structure…most combinations were of a much smaller and more localized type…(they were) in fact a network of autonomous clubs up and down the country, sharing no more than a mutual undertaking to provide hospitality…there was as yet virtually no machinery for cooperation between clubs existing in different trades. The clubs were faced with the difficult problem of safeguarding their funds against embezzlement."*[3]

[1] 'The court had come to regard all working-class combinations as criminal conspiracies in restraint of trade, punishable at Common Law'. G.D.H.Cole, Ed, *The British Common People*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1961, p.65

[2] Fredirick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, London: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1974, p.243.

[3] Henry Pelling, op.cit., pp.23-24

Terming the period (1825-1860) as 'High Hopes and Small Beginning', H. Pelling concludes that 'the horizons of unionism' did not begin 'to extend' only 'after the mid point of the century'. Indeed, the 1855 Friendly Societies Act "gave legal protection to societies with benefit functions, and therefore presumably to trade unions"[1]. Other studies do not assign the very beginning of English trade unionism with its authentic role as a real protagonist in the English economic and political life until 1871[2]. For this reason, the present study puts more emphasis on the social disorder and political agitation in England rather than the trade-unions struggle[3].

2. Social Violence and the Working Classes:

The limited influence of the early trade unionism led the working classes in the first half of the nineteenth century in England to direct and change their fight into social and political actions. When the legal doors were closed in front of the labouring men, the option of social violence and political protest remained wide open for them. Apparently, the 'misgoverning class' compelled them to use violence by a ruthless restriction of the labour legislation. Frequently, the oppressed societies and clubs tended to use and really employed force as a last recourse to avoid starvation. That was a natural reaction ordered by every human being's 'instinct of survival' in similar conditions. And this is what the working classes actually did. According to one view, the shift in trade-union activities gave way to popular social and political protest:

> *"Trade union organization and personnel in the first half of the nineteenth century did spill over into social and political protest."*[4]

Other writers share the same view towards the actions of the working classes. Giving the example of the Lancashire weavers, E.P. Thompson observes that:

> *"By 1819, whole communities of Lancashire weavers had adhered to the cause of reform; and from this time until the last Chartist years, weavers and stockingers were always among its staunchest and most*

[1] Henry Pelling, op.cit., pp.44-45
[2] I.e. the Trade-Union Act of 1871. "United Kingdom: Gladstone and Disraeli", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[3] This mémoire covers roughly the English working- class activities between 1760 and 1850.
[4] J.Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.162

extreme adherents…they could not hope to improve their position by trade union action alone."[1]

One of their actions was the claim for reform. Reform is used here to mean parliamentary reform and the extension of voters but not reform in its widest sense. Side by side with the general claim for parliamentary reform, workers in general and their organisations particularly tried to achieve their objectives (rising wages and reducing labouring hours mainly) either by direct negotiations with the employers, which was unsuccessful most of the time, or by using strikes, demonstrations and violent agitations including the destruction of the 'modern' industrial means of production.

The legal means for improving the working-classes conditions were rare to achieve any practical results. The recourse to Parliament passing through petitions proved to be very demanding in terms of organisation and mobilisation as well as in financial charges. The delegates sent to London were paid with the workers' subscription fees. That was not an uncomplicated mission knowing that one of the most serious reasons for the failure of the early trade unionism was the weak subscription fee of the unions' adherents[2]. Some of the workers proceeded then by using violence in order to force and threaten their employers on one side, and on the other side, they acted in such a way, perhaps, to attract the public and the Government's attention towards their sufferings.

2.1. Workers Using Violence:

Living in harsh social and economic conditions, the lower classes often employed different kinds of violent action in quest of ameliorating their working and living conditions. Some of these actions were directly concerned with the employers and the means of production. Such actions included machine breaking, the destruction of looms, of threshing machines, and of general materials. They also comprised 'the robbing or firing of houses or property of unpopular employers'[3]. Generally speaking, these sorts of actions were undertaken by the skilled and semi-skilled workers of the traditional woollen and textile industries of the Midlands and the North of England in the late

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.710
[2] See above, p.44
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.604

eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Very probably, the actors taking part in these actions were the workers of these 'trades'.

Other actions were not concerned with specific industrial units only, but they concerned the whole public properties. These actions consisted of food riots mainly in times of economic depressions and soaring prices. They did not engage just workers, even if they were the principal actors of such agitations, but the whole lower orders were fiercely engaged as well. Such actions included attacks on different public institutions and systematic assaults on markets to seize the products of high prices. During this period, the agitated centres were London and its regions, and 'the worst trouble-centres appeared to be Nottingham, industrial Lancashire, and the West Riding'[1].

In this second type of violent actions, the agitators involved diverse lower-classes members: workers (generally mere wage workers), paupers, vagrants and the like. The violent destructors and protesters are generally given the sticky label of the 'mob' by the upper and the 'governing' classes. While some observers see this violence as a spontaneous and an unorganised social action with no clear aims, others do attribute a certain political intention to it. E.J.Hobsbawm defines the mob as follows:

> *"The mob…is the most primitive and pre-political of the movements of the urban poor…a difficult phenomenon to analyse…its activity was always directed against the rich…Normally it may be regarded as reformist, in so far as it rarely if ever conceived of the construction of a new order of society…However, it was perfectly capable of mobilizing behind leaders who were revolutionaries…and being urban and collective."*[2]

Since the 'mob' involved a greater fringe of society than the working classes alone and did not represent necessarily a truly working-class movement, some direct violent actions including machine breaking and food riots, which involved workers for the most part like Luddism are dealt with below.

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.517
[2] E.J.Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974, p.7

2.1.1. Luddism:

After the invention of the new industrial steam machines, some manual skilled workers developed a sentiment of fear. This faction of workers included mainly framework knitters and handloom weavers in the English North and Midlands principally concentrated in 'the Nottingham-Leicester-Derby triangle'. The skilled workers suffered from wage cutting, competition of the power-machines[1], recurrent unemployment, and a general deterioration of their working and social status. They became frightened to lose their economic and social status as skilled workers. With the rigid governmental labour legislation and the frustrating collapse of the union clubs in these trades in the first fifth of the nineteenth century, workers resorted to the inevitable way of violence.

The first agitations arose in Nottingham in the spring of 1811 under the form of organised machine breaking. The assailants were 'masked or disguised' and 'had sentinels and couriers, pistols, pikes, hatchets and hammers'. They attacked only the frames of the insensitive employers, those who reduced the wages of the skilful employees. The attacks happened generally at nights and "the rioters appear suddenly, in armed parties, under regular commanders; the chief of whom, be whomsoever he may, is styled General Ludd, and his orders are as implicitly obeyed as if he had received his authority from the hands of a monarch"[2]. Then, the Luddites, as they came to be called after their commander's pseudonym, tried to organise their protest by the collection of arms and the establishment of permanent funds. Around 1812, the government utilized a highly repressive policy against the movement by multiplying the number of troops in the English North and Midlands. So far as legislation is concerned, frame breaking had been attributed the weighty punishment of 'capital offence'. Under the regular blows of the governmental troops and laws, Nottingham Luddism died away by the end of 1812[3].

[1] I.e. the skills of the workers were wholly replaced by the superior technical capacity of the new industrial machines.
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.606
[3] Ibid., p.608, Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p.430

At the same time, the contagion of Luddism had already gained the traditional textile, woollen and clothing counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire where croppers, hosiers and other skilful workers launched 'nightly attacks' destroying gig-mills and shearing-frames. In both counties the attacks were confined to the industrial towns of "Huddersfield, Leeds…the small clothing villages of Spen Valley, Manchester, Wakefield, Halifax, Bradford, Sheffield, Oldham, Rockdale, …Stockport, Bolton, Fails Worth, Saddle Worth, Ashton Under-Lynne, Preston, Lancaster, Wellington …etc…"[1]. Luddism in these counties persisted until about the end of the second decade of the century.

Despite the fact that Luddism was undeniably a protest movement of the textile and clothing skilled workers, it also comprised workers from other trades[2]. Luddism was a highly underground movement and its members were compelled by its internal guideline to take secret oath. This violent protest movement also showed a rigorous organisation and an efficient covert method. A good example could be that of the West Riding Luddism in which:

> *"For months, despite the presence of 4,000 troops…and the widespread employment of spies, not one of the attackers was clearly identified."*[3]

The effective chiefs of Luddism were not identified outside this protest movement, and the Luddites as an integral part of the working classes derived much of their political and social consciousness from of the Radical MPs Cobbett, Hunt, and Feargus O'Connor[4].

2.1.2. Causes of Luddism:

Luddism, as a working-class violent protest movement shared most of the causes that pushed the English workers during the Industrial Revolution to adopt and use physical force in quest of ameliorating their ruthless working and living conditions. As far as the

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.610-19
[2] In Manchester for instance, proof was given that a secret trade council whose members included spinners, tailors, shoemakers, bricklayers, fustians and workers of many other handicrafts managed Luddism. Ibid., pp.618-619
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.615
[4] Ibid., p.541

legislation regulating the textile and woollen trades is concerned, there were some rules that controlled the skilled workers' wages before the coming of the Industrial Revolution. The employers generally respected these rules because these trades had long professional traditions within England. The skilful workers were also esteemed and given a respectful professional and social status. However, after the competition of the steam-machines, the professional conditions of these trades started to change. The Government commenced to cease its intervention to regulate these trades, and the employers were the sole people who reaped the benefits of such a situation. The masters, as great admirers of rapid gains, increased the fabrication of the finished goods by the new machines and lowered the manufacture of the products made by hands. In doing so, the whole market reduced the price of the machine produce. Thus, the products made by hand, though of higher quality, remained expensive since it required more time and supplementary human skills. In the next step, the masters started to cut the workers' wages and the privileged status of the skilful textile and clothing employees experienced a fast deterioration. About the start of the nineteenth century, parliament, influenced by the new manufacturing interests, suspended and repealed a set of rules regulating the textile trade. Hence, the Cotton Arbitration Acts were repealed in the period between 1800 and 1803. In addition, between 1803 and 1808 the regulations concerned with the woollen trade were suspended then repealed in 1809. Furthermore, it was in the same period that the union clubs had been made illegal under the Combination Acts[1]. In this perspective, the workers of these trades were actually forced to use a physical-force scheme to preserve their status[2].

1.3. The End of Luddism:

The attacks directly associated to Luddism continued intermittently in the North and Midlands during the most part of the second decade of the nineteenth century. On 27th April 1812, a well-known industrialist called Horsfall was assassinated in the West Riding. Also, on May 11th, another grave national event occurred. The Prime Minister Perceval[3] (1762-1812) was assassinated in the House of Commons. After the two

[1] See above, p.47
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.596
[3] Perceval, Spencer (b. Nov. 1, 1762, London, Eng.-d. May 11, 1812, London), lawyer, politician, and British prime minister from 1809 until his assassination in 1812. "Spencer Perceval", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition

murders happening in the strongholds of Luddism, in the West Riding and in London, the government initiated a series of severe raids in the Luddite regions and the movement began to weaken critically as it lost members. The movement received diverse kinds of blows: 'arrests, betrayals, threats and disillusion'. In January 1813, three 'potential' Luddites were found guilty of the assassination of the employer Horsfall and were literally executed. Other fourteen workers were also executed in Yorkshire. Six others were transported for seven years for 'administering illegal oaths'. Arrests and repression continued in the years 1814 to 1817 and by the end of 1817 Luddism was seriously crushed[1].

With regard to the aims of the Luddites, contrasting views has been given by historians to explain this social phenomenon. One category of opinion[2] suggests that Luddism did not have any 'ulterior aims' and was thus a mere confused violent movement. This violence was the result of poverty and hunger in the difficult post-war years (1815-1830). It was also, according to this view, a violent phenomenon led, in its great majority, by unemployed juveniles in the English Midlands and North. For the defenders of this opinion there was no proof as to the political or organisational intentions of the actors of this movement[3].

On the other hand, some historians do not see Luddism as mere violent actions. They perceive this movement as a brave attempt of one of the working classes to defend its interest within a hostile professional and social atmosphere. To make their view sound weighty, this group of analysts provides a set of arguments and observations. As to the contact and organisation between the counties in which Luddism took place, they advance that:

> *"Anyone who knows the geography of the Midlands and north will find it difficult to believe that the Luddites of the three adjoining counties had no contact with each other."*[4]

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.625-627/8, Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p.430
[2] These historians include the Hammonds, the Webbs and Graham Wallas. E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.648
[3] Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p.430, E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.630
[4] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.630-631

Since Luddism was a highly secret movement, there had been a lack in the sources of evidence showing its organisation or its real aims. Here, these historians rely on some stories of spies, some information of magistrates and military, as well as some confessions of Luddites. What could strengthen this view, to their eyes, was that the Government judged that if some information relating to the political objectives of Luddism was to be shown, that 'would have inflamed the public opinion'. In the period when the circulation of information was slow and generally under written form (written press), the local authorities did their utmost to limit the diffusion of news about riots and disorder.

The partisans of this opinion go even further and try to make a link, not without difficulty, between Luddism and the parliamentary-reform movement. According to E.P. Thompson:

> *"In the three counties, the agitation for parliamentary reform commenced at exactly the point where Luddism was defeated…In Halifax…one of the first unions for parliamentary reform was founded around 1812."*[1]

The end of Luddism announced the very start of English Radicalism.

3. Radicalism and The Working Classes:

The working classes started to gain some social and political awareness benefiting from the two experiences of trade unionism and Luddism. Nevertheless, the firm opposition of the Government and the industrial masters to their claims left them the most suffering classes, with the paupers, in the English society during the nineteenth century. Some self-educated working-class members along with some middle-class sympathisers tried then to take the lead of the workers' cause. They sought to tackle the true origins of the problem. This latter was the non-representation of the middle and the working classes in the State's institutions. They judged that the improvement of the workers' living conditions should pass through the enfranchisement of the whole population. As a result, a political movement having parliamentary reform as its central objective started

[1] Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p.430, E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.633-658

to take shape, especially in the second decade of the nineteenth century. With regard to its aims, the followers of the movement were called 'Radicals'.

3.1. Radicalism:

A 'Radical' (latin *radix* meaning root) is defined in politics as 'one who desires extreme change of part or all of the social order'. The term gained this political significance for the first time in England around the close of the eighteenth century when it was used to mean 'a drastic expansion of the franchise to the point of universal manhood suffrage'. Then, the meaning of the term widened in the nineteenth century to include all those who supported or took part in the movement of parliamentary reform[1]. According to the labour historian Edward Royle:

> *"Radical politics in the nineteenth-century Britain can be regarded as a series of popular agitations by which an extension of the franchise was won and working-class representation in Parliament made possible."*[2]

Before the term 'Radicalism' came to be closely identified with the parliamentary-reform movement in the 1820's, the movement had included a set of other claims since its early days. "Historically, early radical aims of liberty and electoral reform in Great Britain widened with the American Revolution and French Revolution so that some radicals sought republicanism, abolition of titles, redistribution of property and freedom of the press"[3]. E.P.Thompson argues that:

> *"In the first place the term 'radicalism' suggests both a breadth and an imprecision in the movement. The Jacobins of 1790's were clearly identified by their allegiance to the Rights of Man and to certain forms of open organization…in 1807 it indicated intransigent opposition to the Government, contempt for the weakness of the Whigs, opposition to restrictions upon political liberties, open exposure of corruption…and general support to parliamentary reform."*[4]

[1] "Radical", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[2] Edward Royle, *Radical Politics 1790-1900 Religion and Unbelief*, London: Longman Group Limited, 1971, p.3
[3] "Radicalism", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>
[4] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.507-508

English Radicalism based its ideas and theoretical assessments principally on the political writings of Thomas Paine[1], especially his *Rights of Man* (1791-92). In this book, Paine exposed most of the 'modern and democratic' principles. By attacking the monarchy, the aristocracy, the Church, and all forms of privilege, he urged the British Government to start introducing political and social reforms. The demanded transformations included manhood suffrage, peace, public education, old-age pensions, maternity benefits, and full employment. Paine showed his firm opposition and struggled against the evils affecting the working classes: arbitrary government, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and war. *Rights of Man* gained much support among the working classes and a part of the middle classes. Thus, the book 'was widely sold and read'[2] and had a marked influence on workers especially in England during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Like the early trade unionism, English Radicalism was noticeably active in the second decade of the nineteenth century in London as well as in the industrial Midlands and North till the passing of the First Reform Act in 1832. In London, 'Radical' claims were adopted by some trade clubs, either 'in the open' or 'underground'. The London Corresponding Society was said to embrace the Radical objectives of the movement. In the capital city, Radicalism did not rely on the working-class members only. Middle-class reformers worked in close contact with the 'agitated mob' to press the Government and make parliamentary reform possible. The leaders of London Radicalism included the Radical MP Burdett, the famous journalist and pamphlet writer Cobbett and Major Cartwright who promoted the first Hampden Clubs in the country[3].

Radicalism in the agitated industrial Midlands and the North differed from that of the metropolis in the sense that it did not include much of the middle-class members or leaders. The workers of the newly established industrial centres were still suspicious of the middle class, which they associated with the 'corrupt' ruling class. Cobbett with his

[1] Thomas Paine (b. Jan. 29, 1737, Thetford, Norfolk, Eng.-d. June 8, 1809, New York, N.Y., U.S.) was an English-American writer and political pamphleteer. He has the reputation of being the greatest political propagandist in history thanks to his books *Rights of Man*, 'a defence of the French Revolution and of republican principles'; and *The Age of Reason*, 'an exposition of the place of religion in society'. "Thomas Paine", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition

[2] E.Royle, op.cit., p.21. At least eight editions were published in 1791. "Thomas Paine", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.508

enthusiastic political writings constituted the 'remote' leader of the Radical Movement of the North and Midlands. Henry 'Orator' Hunt with his 'pushing' speeches of parliamentary reform also played a leading role among the Movement.

As a political movement seeking to grow the awareness of the working and lower classes, English Radicalism adopted a set of political and social claims based on the principal demand for parliamentary reform. By embracing this claim, they meant specifically the enfranchisement of the whole British male subjects including the middle and the working classes for some Radicals, or the enfranchisement of just the middle class for other Radicals. According to Pr.Assa Briggs, the Radicals opposed the whole governing class including both Government and Parliament[1]. The difference between the Radicals who wanted total enfranchisement of the men and those who wanted the enfranchisement of just the middle classes leads to distinguish between what was called middle-class and working-class Radicalism.

3.2. Middle-class Vs. Working-class Radicalism:

Most of the middle-class members wanted to gain the right to vote and to be fairly represented in Parliament. To achieve this objective, they launched an alliance with the working classes to press and even threaten the Government for parliamentary reform. In this case, the working-class members, who were also in need of representation with regard to their miserable conditions, would be used only as a means of pressure in the struggle between the middle and the upper, ruling classes. However, the workers and the lower classes encouraged by the examples of the French and the American Revolutions saw in the Radical Movement a big opportunity to be enfranchised and to gain the right to choose their political representatives. For the latter case, the main claim was manhood suffrage meaning at that time the enfranchisement of the whole British adult males. For the other group of Radicals manhood suffrage was too demanding at that time and might include dangerous individuals coming from the 'criminal classes'. Consequently, they put some conditions for the people to be enfranchised so as to eliminate practically the whole working and lower classes. Comparing between the two groups of Radicals, the labour historian E.P.Thompson concludes that:

[1] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867,* op.cit., pp.156-7

> *"The line between householder and manhood suffrage was, in practical terms, the line of demarcation for many years between middle-class and working-class reform movements."*[1]

This is one difference among the Radicals themselves concerning the main aim of the Movement. This difference in its turn provoked other divergences among the Radical Movement. The divergences concerned the means adopted for achieving their claims. Highlighting the contrast between the two groups of Radicals, the scholar E.J Hobsbawm labels one faction 'reformists' and the second 'revolutionaries'. He concludes that:

> *"Reformists accept the general framework of an institution or social arrangement, but consider it capable of improvement or, where abuses have crept in, reform; revolutionaries insist that it must be fundamentally transformed, or replaced. Reformists seek to improve and alter the monarchy, or the House of Lords, revolutionaries believe that nothing useful is to be done with either institution except to abolish them…Reformist and revolutionary movements will naturally tend to behave differently, and to develop different organization, strategy, tactics, etc. This is by no means easy…every social movement undergoes the pull of both reformism and revolutionism, and with varying strength at different times."*[2]

3.3. The Radical Leaders:

During the first half of the nineteenth century William Cobbett, Major John Cartwright, Francis Place, Sir Francis Burdett and Henry 'Orator' Hunt were the most important leaders of the (Radical) reform movement in Britain. William Cobbett started his Radical newspaper the *Political Register* in 1806 in which he supported with big determination and enthusiasm parliamentary reform. Cobbett experienced an 'unsuccessful attempt to be elected as MP' because of the old unfair electoral system with its 'rotten boroughs'[3]. In his writings, Cobbett criticised directly and fiercely the Government. In 1809, he was tried, convicted of seditious writing and imprisoned for two years. Because of the expensiveness of newspapers (6d. to 7d.), Cobbett published the *Political Register* as a pamphlet and was able, by 1815; to buy 40,000 copies a week. In 1821, Cobbet achieved a long tour of Britain on horseback and published his

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.698
[2] E.J.Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, op.cit., pp.10-11
[3] For more details see below, pp.89-91

observations and records about the sufferings of the lower classes in a book entitled *Rural Raids*. Cobbett's writings were very widely read by the working classes. After the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, Cobbett won a seat in the House of Commons in which he multiplied his efforts to defend the lower classes' interests and denounced the Government's corruption. He died in 1835[1].

After a brief and successful career in the Navy, John Cartwright supported the American colonists and espoused some Radical political opinions. He left thus the Navy and published a Radical book *Take Your Choice* (1776). The book discussed the question of parliamentary reform 'including: manhood suffrage, secret ballot, annual elections and equal electoral districts'. The book produced both success and curiosity especially among the working classes. In 1805, Cartwright left his splendid estate of the province (Lincolnshire) and moved to London in quest of continuing and developing his parliamentary-reform activities. In the metropolis, he met the Radical leaders Francis Place, Francis Burdett, and William Cobbett. In 1812, he formed the first Hampden Clubs whose 'main objective was to unite middle class moderates with Radical members of the working class.' Several times arrested and convicted of troublemaking, Major J.Cartwright wrote in his last few years *The English Constitution* in which he argued that the solution of 'the English Question' could only be achieved through 'universal suffrage, secret ballot and equal electoral districts'. Cartwright died in 1825, a period of active parliamentary-reform actions[2].

A leather-breeches maker, Francis Place became the chairman of the parliamentary reform club the London Corresponding Society in 1793. In 1797, he resigned because he judged that the club used dangerous and violent tactics. In 1799, Place opened a bookshop in London which he used to support and lend Radical writings to the working classes mainly. Then, he used most of his energy to help Radical politicians in the House of Commons by collecting data for the promotion of the causes of the working classes such as the abolition of the Combination Acts and the support for parliamentary reforms. When the Combination Acts were repealed in 1824, Place turned to play a

[1] "William Cobbett", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*,
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRcobbett.htm>
[2] "John Cartwright", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*,
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRCartwright.htm>

leading role in the agitations preceding the 1832 Reform Act. Then, he joined the Chartist Movement and played a prominent role as a 'moral-force' supporter against the Radicals advocating the use of violence to achieve reforms[1].

Francis Burdett, later Sir, became a member of the House of Commons in 1797 with the help of his extremely rich banker father-in-law Thomas Coutts. Once in Parliament, Burdett decided to stay free from any party commitment and firmly rejected calls to join the Whigs or the Tories. He criticised the Government in its attempts to oppose and restrict individual freedom. Burdett was one of the few MPs who clearly supported the cause of parliamentary reforms and was often approached by the Radical reformers in London and asked to be their spokesperson within Parliament. In 1807, he was elected MP for the 'Radical' constituency of Westminster. He became then the uncontested leader of the Radicals in the House of Commons, introduced motions for parliamentary reforms, and overtly questioned Government's fairness. Shocked by Peterloo Massacre[2], he guided a campaign in the House of Commons in 1819 for an independent enquiry into this event. Sir F.Burdett was very active in the political agitations that preceded the passing of the 1832 Reform Act. In 1837, his thirty eventful years as MP for Westminster were over announcing new directions in his political life less Radical and more conservative as he started to think that the 1832 Reform Act had gone 'too far'. Curiously, Sir F.Burdett became more and more conservative, joined the Tories and happened to be their MP for North Wiltshire until his death in 1844[3].

The fourth active Radical leader was Henry Hunt. After his father's death in 1797, H. Hunt became the owner of 3,000 acres in Wiltshire and a huge estate in Somerset. In 1800 Hunt went to jail after a dispute with a colonel in the Wiltshire Yeomanry where he met a Radical lawyer called Henry Clifford who introduced him later to some of his political companions, including Francis Place. Henry Hunt started then a Radical political career and by 1815 he gained a steady reputation of being a brilliant orator. Hunt was frequently asked to speak at public meetings for parliamentary reforms. In 1816, 'Orator' Hunt spoke at big reform meetings when he addressed 80,000 people in Birmingham, 40,000 in Blackburn, 20,000 in Nottingham, 20,000 in Stockport and

[1] "Francis Place", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRplace.htm>
[2] See below, p.82
[3] "Francis Burdett", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRburdett.htm>

10,000 in Macclesfield. 'Orator' Hunt was one of the speakers of Peterloo Massacre at St.Peter's Field on 16th August 1819 advocating 'annual parliaments, universal suffrage, secret ballot and the repeal of the Corn Laws.' After the Massacre, he was arrested, convicted of 'unlawful and seditious assembling for the purpose of exciting discontent' and charged for two years and a half incarceration. Released in 1822, 'Orator' Hunt continued his struggle for general manhood suffrage. Along with his campaign for parliamentary reform, Hunt defended the working classes actively in favour of reducing the working hours and abolishing child labour. Candidate for the constituency of Preston in 1830, he won the election and became MP. In the House of Commons, Hunt peculiarly opposed the 1832 Reform Act because he thought that it would make the paupers and criminals eligible. This opposition cost him a serious failure in the 1833 General Election in Preston. He retired 'into private life' then and suddenly died of a stroke in 1835[1].

4. Political and Social Agitations Preceding the 1832 Reform Act:

In the first third of the nineteenth century, England lived a series of political and social disturbances said to be generally perpetrated by the working and the lower classes. The aims of these actions were the attainment of some social and political reforms. The social reforms concerned mostly the improvements in the working conditions such as reducing the working hours and increasing wages. Some of the events were 'spontaneous' reactions to situations of economic depressions and soaring prices everywhere in the kingdom. Other incidents were direct responses to the results of the industrialisation of the traditional 'trades' like the Luddite disturbances or the Swing Riots[2] for instance. Concerning the political agitations, they were concerned essentially, in the period under examination, with the demand for parliamentary reforms. These events included meetings, marches, group discussions and in some cases even riots. The Radical political leaders led the claims for parliamentary reforms and the masses included logically those who were not eligible to vote: workers, paupers and middle-class members. The reform movement's activities took place for the most part in the industrial North in Lancashire and Derbyshire as well as the London region.

[1] "Henry Hunt", in *Encyclopaedia of British History,* <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRhunt.htm>
[2] See below, p.88

It is worth noting that the different events, which took place in England in the first half of the nineteenth century, were overlapping, intermingled and thus complex in many respects. Some parliamentary reform meetings included social protest and it is difficult, in practice, to find 'purely parliamentary reform' actions. Among the Radical leaders taking part in the reform activities, there were divergences as to ask for general manhood suffrage or not. The divergences also concerned the plausible means to achieve parliamentary or social reforms. While a group of leaders and followers approved both 'physical' and 'moral' forces to press the Government, other reformers did not allow the use of violence under any circumstances. In some Radical activities there were both extreme and moderate leaders, claims and methods of action from 'the most to the less Radical' making the agitated period of the first half of the nineteenth century one of the most complex themes of British modern history.

The general atmosphere of social unrest during the first third of the century paved the way for political reform and played an important role as 'an indirect' factor leading to the birth of the First Reform Act. The kingdom saw different kinds of violent and non-violent protest. The violent protest included the breaking of the machines in competition with the workers in the industrial cities as it was shown in Luddism[1]. Other violent actions consisted of 'more violent forms of intimidations' like in Manchester and Sheffield that saw throughout the decade 1810-20 'actual or attempted assassinations, vitriol-throwing, or charges of gun-powder thrown into workshops'[2]. Along with the machine-breaking, which had a history reaching perhaps a century before, the destruction of materials, looms, the flooding or damage of pits, the firing or robbing of property (particularly houses) of badly reputed employers and masters constituted the other forms of violent direct actions used at that phase by the agitators[3]. Food strikes, that were originally non-violent actions in which the strikers 'abstain from making any use' of any dear food goods 'until prices should come down'[4], often changed into food riots causing both material and human losses.

These violent actions were usually motivated by the poor economic and social conditions of the working and lower classes. The latter had generally the tendency to

[1] See above, pp.54-55
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.562-563
[3] Ibid., p.604
[4] Ibid., p.516

embrace social and economic grievances, but did include overt claims for political and parliamentary reforms. This is explained by the fact that the individuals taking part in the actions were fervent supporters of parliamentary reform and did espouse most of the ideas of the Radical Movement. The majority of the social agitations were politically exploited by the Radical leaders and used as a means of pressure and intimidation against the Government either in the press or in Parliament. In practice, and most of the time, there was no line of demarcation between social and political claims nor was there any between social and political reformers.

4.1. Hampden Clubs, the Spenceans and the Spa Fields Riots:

One of the most violent riots claiming principally for parliamentary reform in the agitated decade 1810-20 was the Spa Fields Riots (1816) that took place in London. The rioters came essentially from the two political societies for parliamentary reform in the capital city, the Hampden Clubs and the Society of Spencean Philanthropists.

The Radical Movement owed the formation of the political societies of parliamentary reform called Hampden clubs, named after the English Civil War Parliamentary leader John Hampden, to the moderate Radical leader Major John Cartwright (1740-1824)[1]. In his book *Take Your Choice,* he vigorously defended the cause of parliamentary reform and argued that this latter should include 'manhood suffrage, secret ballot, annual elections and equal electoral districts'. Major John Cartwright moved to London in 1805 and met reformers more Radical than him including Sir Francis Burdett, William Cobbett, and Francis Place. *Take Your Choice* had great influence on both the middle and the working classes and by 1812 Major Cartwright succeeded to form the first Hampden Club in London. He was a moderate 'moral-force' rather than a 'physical-force' partisan whose 'main objective was to unite middle class moderates with Radical members of the working class'.

Before his arrest in 1813, Major Cartwright toured the country in order to persuade other parliamentary reformers to create Hampden Clubs. However, the first Hampden Club formed outside London did not appear only three years later, in 1816 at Royden.

[1] See above, p.63

The Radical reformer William Fitton created it. The same year Samuel Bamford followed the example at Middleton and Joseph Healey at Oldham. Then, the desire to form Hampden Clubs spread rapidly and steadily among the reform supporters and many parliamentary reform clubs were born in the Midlands and the North (Rochdale, Ashton-under-line, Stockport…etc).

Originally, Hampden Clubs adopted non-violent actions to promote and achieve parliamentary reform. Meetings took place regularly once a week and consisted of reading Radical newspapers to the members such as the *Manchester Observer*, the *Political Register*, the *Black Dwarf* and other Radical papers. Along with the focus on the Radical newspapers, common political matters were discussed in the meetings in quest of 'amplifying' the members' political awareness[1].

The Government was unmerciful with the Hampden Clubs and suppressed most of them under the guilt of seditious meetings. The local authorities employed spies to attend the meetings often provoking police armed forces to attack the locals in which the meetings took place and proceed with systematic arrests of the members. The Government made use of this 'policy of provocation' to anticipate the threatening growth of rebellious contagion especially among the desperate working classes. According to the historian E.P. Thompson "to isolate and terrorize potential revolutionaries, it was possible to adopt a policy of deliberate provocation. In this sense it was the policies of Pitt, in repressing the Corresponding Societies, which set in motion the logic" that led to the suppression of the political societies pleading for parliamentary reform in the period between 1810 and 1850[2].

Thomas Spence was a Newcastle-Upon-Tyne schoolmaster who arrived in London in 1792. He was arrested rapidly for selling Tom Paine's *Rights of Man.* He spent the major part of his last twenty years in jail for selling Radical newspapers, pamphlets, broadsheets and books. By the start of the nineteenth century, Spence stood as the 'unofficial' Radical leader who believed in revolution to improve the condition of the suffering masses. He did not encourage the establishment of 'a centralized Radical

[1] "Hampden Clubs", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Hampden Clubs.htm>
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.530

body' and supported rather the spread of small Radical societies throughout the country. In the meetings, Spence argued that 'all the land in Britain' should be 'shared equally' and claimed for the immediate ending of 'all feudality, lordship' and unfair landownership. At night, his followers, called the Spenceans after their leader's name, walked the streets and wrote on the walls slogans such as 'Spence's Plan and Full Bellies' and 'The Land is the People's Farm'. The government accused the Spenceans to be responsible of the London bread riots in the years 1800 and 1801 without being able to provide any proof.

Thomas Spence died in 1814 leaving after him his political ideas and tens of followers resolving to keep his Radical plans alive. His London disciples formed the Society of Spencean Philanthropists. They assembled in small clubs all over the metropolis and also met in public houses and places to discuss methods and means to achieve social equality and parliamentary reform. The government became annoyed of the Spenceans' activities and utilized spies and 'agents provocateurs' to offset their plans. John Castle was the authorities' spy who reported in 1816 that the Spenceans were working on to 'overthrow the British Government'. The Spencean activities coincided with the spread of the Hampden Clubs, which supported them and attended meetings with them. Although the Government oppressed the reform clubs, the men had the right to form local, autonomous clubs or discussion groups as well as the right to petition Parliament or the King. In the years 1816 and 1817, various reform clubs including the Spencean Societies and the Hampden Clubs met together in London to discuss common political aims and tactics.

4.1.1. The Spa Fields Riots (1816):

The second half of the year 1816 saw a significant increase of the provincial Hampden Clubs and a rich activity of the Spencean Philanthropic Society in London. The reform movement was composed of the moderate Radicals who wanted the enfranchisement of just middle class members and excluded the biggest part of the working classes and other lower classes. This group of Radicals were 'constitutionalists' advocating the use of legal non-violent methods of action such as petitions, peaceful demonstrations, meetings, marches, group discussions, boycott, tax resistance, occupations, protest songs and slogans, sit-ins, strike actions…etc. The moderate Radicals were also known

in nineteenth-century Britain as the supporters of the 'moral-force' tactics. On the other hand, the ultra-Radicals were the holders of the Jacobin faith that consisted of absolute belief in two things: manhood suffrage and the power of 'unlimited popular agitation'. They wanted immediate political and social change and approved the use of 'any' available means of protest including violence. The following analysis compares the methods of action of the ultra-Radicals called 'direct action' with the moderate Radicals' non-direct methods of action:

> *"Direct actions are often (but not always) a form of civil disobedience, and may be illegal. Those employing direct action aim to either obstruct another agent or organization from performing some practice they object to, or act with whatever resources and methods are within their power, either on their own or as part of a group, in order to solve problems. This method and theory is direct in that it seeks immediate remedy for perceived ills, as opposed to indirect tactics such as electing representatives who promise to provide remedy at some later date."*[1]

Around 1816, the reform movement in London suffered from the split between the middle-class moderate Radicals and the uncompromising ultra-Radicals, which was present at the level of both the leadership and the masses. The leaders of the movement in London, were the moderate Radicals Francis Place and Francis Burdett[2] who started, by 1815, to take their distance from the extreme Radicals Preston, Arthur Thistlewood and Dr.James Watson who were more involved in underground political work and undoubtedly 'knew the tavern world of London' better than the moderate reformers. Thomas Preston was a shoemaker proud of belonging to the working classes though some historical accounts assumed that he was 'a small employer in the leather trade'. Arthur Thistlewood was a former army officer and a former gentleman farmer who had been in France in the 1790s and had been influenced by the rebellious spirit of the French Revolution. Dr.James Watson was a fifty-year poor 'medical man and chemist' in 1816. He fiercely believed in secrete mobilisation and was engaged in subversive political activities[3]. The achievement of the objectives of reformers depended seriously

[1] "Direct Action", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>
[2] See above, pp.63-64
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.673

on how far the reform leaders were capable of reaching a compromise. According to the labour historian E.P.Thompson, this compromise was within reach thanks to the efforts of other Radical leaders who stood 'in between'. With his very words:

> *"…The London reform movement commenced divided, between cautious constitutionalists on the one hand, and conspirators on the other. The middle ground between these extremes was occupied by Cartwright, Hunt and Cobbet."*[1]

In the winter of 1816-17, a committee of the London ultra-Radicals, composed of Thistlewood, Dr.Watson, Preston and Hooper, launched an initiative of organising a series of three great reform demonstrations at a large place called Spa Fields, Clerknwell near London in 15th Nov, 2nd Dec and 10th Dec 1816. The major speaker at the three gatherings was Henry 'Orator' Hunt[2]. The masses taking part in the meetings were also pushed by the enthusiastic political writings of the Radical journalist William Cobbett who directed his readers to the true origins of their misfortune; the Government's abuses and the lack of a fair parliamentary representative electoral system. To eliminate the ills of the suffering classes, Cobbett strongly believed and made his readers believe that there existed one sole cure: parliamentary reform. The central idea on which the working-class reform movement based its strategy was to attain 'a reformed parliament'. According to the 'father of reform' William Cobbett:

> *"We must have that first (i.e. a reformed parliament), or we shall have nothing good. I exhort you to proceed in a peaceable lawful manner, but at the same time, to proceed with zeal and resolution in the attainment of this objective."*[3]

The period in which the demonstrations were called, the autumn and winter of 1816-17, was a period of widespread misery, post-war unemployment and soaring prices affecting large parts of the kingdom. The London region saw the collapse of the two important watch and clock trades and the silk industry. The Lancashire, Yorkshire and Birmingham trades and industries also experienced serious difficulties in the same period. The streets of Britain, especially London, were permanently occupied by

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.675
[2] For Hunt's biography see above, pp.64-65
[3] E.P.Tompson, op.cit., p.680

hundreds of hungry people in need of work and decent shelter. The committee called for the first demonstration to be held in Spa fields, Clerknwell near London on 15th Nov 1816. A huge meeting took place then exceeding the hope of the organizers. The angry masses listened to the energized voice of 'Orator' Hunt who agreed to lead the tribune. Cobbett, however, did not accept to take part in the demonstration fearing the presence of excited agitators, rioters and criminals. The meeting happened in absolute quietness and the participators agreed to 'adjourn' it to 2nd Dec 1816. In the meantime, the ultra-Radical leaders including principally Thomas Preston, Dr.Watson and his son created another committee. Stimulated by the great popular attendance and enthusiasm of the first demonstration, the Watsons, father and son, started to disseminate a plan of a real rebellion whereby the Bank of England, the Tower and the prisons in London were to be attacked and the prisoners to be freed.

The demonstration held on 2nd Dec 1816 was bigger than the first one. It included many unwaged soldiers and sailors. Thomas Preston addressed the agitated demonstrators in a brutal language asserting that 'the Army was on the edge of mutiny' pushing them to start rioting. Then, the Watsons, who drank extravagantly however, guided an excited contingent of Radical people to the Tower of London. In their route several properties were destroyed and many shops pillaged. Yet, the greater part of the crowd stayed in the Spa Fields to hear the speech of 'Orator' Hunt and dispersed quietly. The demonstrators agreed to gather again on 9th Dec. Some rioters succeeded to get to the Tower and the riot lasted several hours. The local authorities, which were prepared to the events thanks to a spy who infiltrated the committee called John castle, succeeded to disperse the rioters and to arrest four of the committee leaders Arthur Thistlewood, James Watson, Thomas Preston and John Hooper. The arrested Radicals were charged of the very heavy guilt of high treason[1].

Among the Radical leaders of the Spa Fields' meetings, there were those who wanted just to threaten the government with the 'effect of the demonstration' like Dr.Watson for instance. On the other hand, there were other leaders such as Arthur Thistlewood who believed in the power of 'spontaneous' rioting to achieve a successful popular 'coup-d'état'. During Dr.Watson's trial, the defence council succeeded to demonstrate that the principal prosecution witness, the government's spy John castle, had a criminal

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.630, E.P.Tompson, op.cit., pp.694-695

background and that his declarations were unreliable. The jury proved that John Castle was an *agent provocateur* ('a person employed to incite suspected people to some open action that will make them liable to punishment'). Consequently, Dr.Watson was not convicted of high treason and was immediately released. Arthur Thistlewood, Thomas Preston and John Hooper were also released after this trial since they were accused of the same offence[1].

4.1.2. The Consequences of the Spa Fields Riots:

The Spa Fields Riots had noticeable effects on the course of the reform-movement action, the Government's attitude towards reformers, and on the English society as a whole. During these events, the supporters of reform, constituted mainly of the distressed working classes of the larger London region, showed a great deal of resolution, courage and devotion in the promotion of their cause and the desire to achieve parliamentary reform. Yet, the divergences of the Radical leaders as to the kind of action and the ultimate aim of the demonstrations as well did bring some negative influence on the required results. While some ultra-Radicals like Thistlewood, Preston and Watson the son saw in the events a great opportunity to achieve a successful 'coup-d'état' through 'spontaneous' riots, other moderate Radical leaders like Hunt and Cobbett did not want the peaceful parliamentary-reform meetings to be transformed into 'any insurrectionary conspiracy'.

The sudden, badly planned shift of the Spa Fields meetings from a purely non-violent political action into an outburst of riots and an ominous public and social disorder had manifold effects on the reform movement. First, it gave a strong impression to the Government and the public opinion that the Radical leadership of the movement was confused, squashy and 'amateurish' in the accomplishment of its delicate political task. Second, it terrified the restrained middle-class reformers, produced a crack at both the headship and the substructure of the Radical Movement, and induced uncertainty among its supporters. Third, the riots of Spa Fields allowed the Spencean Philanthropic Society and the Hampden Clubs of the purely political and social character to be accused by the judicial authorities of the weighty offences of being the planners of

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.696, "Spa Fields Riots", in *Encyclopedia of British History,* <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ Spa Fields Riots.htm>

traitorous conspiracy and a serious attempt to oust the established Government[1]. Fourth, the most negative outcome of the Spa Fields events was, perhaps, the pretext they gave to the Government to start new repressive and more rigid measures than that of the years 1799-1801 against the timid trade unions, the friendly societies and the reform unions such as the Spencean Philanthropic Society and the Hampden Clubs. Actually, the government launched a series of oppressive decrees in the immediate period following the riots (February and March 1817) making the reform meetings heavily punishable. The Seditious Meetings Act (effective until July 1818) made the task of the reformers extremely tricky since 'no meeting might be held more than fifty persons without prior notice to the magistrates, who were given power' to estimate which meetings were of 'seditious tendency' and therefore to punish its organizers and members severely. As a useful arm in the battle of reform, the Radical press also suffered from the immediate aftermath of the Spa Fields Riots. Most of the Radical newspapers fell under the blows of the Sedition Acts and the most important Radical journalist, William Cobbett, felt threatened and went in exile into America in March 1817. This important defection brought a great deal of panic and doubt to the reform movement, which lost its London national heart for the next few years to come[2].

4.2. Social Agitations in the English North and Midlands:

During the period in which the London region saw its most violent events closely connected to the reform movement like the Spa Fields Riots, the working classes of the English North and Midlands experienced difficult circumstances. They were suffering from a thorny, multifaceted situation whereby economic depression, the competition of machines, the masters' ill treatment, and the Government's abuses combined to exacerbate their living and working conditions. Economic depression was largely generated by the controversial Corn Laws, which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) with France.

The first Corn Law was introduced in British Parliament in 1804. The landowners dominating the legislative body then wanted to protect their profits by imposing a tax on imported corn (corn meant at the time the primary crop grain of a country which was wheat for Britain). According to David Cody, the Corn Laws "...were designed to

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.697
[2] Ibid., pp.700-702

protect English landholders by encouraging the export and limiting the import of corn when prices fell below a fixed point'[1]. In Britain, the farming of wheat experienced, during the Napoleonic wars, a period of successive booms since corn could not be imported from outside the kingdom. However, this situation led to high bread prices for the working and the lower classes. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the British farmers feared that the import of foreign wheat would generate a fall in prices. In fact, corn prices started to plunge from 126s. 6d. a quarter in 1812 to decline to 65s. 7d. a quarter in 1815. This serious decline terrified the British landowners and led them to put great pressure on the House of Commons to pass a new Corn Law that could protect their business. Parliament reacted by making a law allowing the import of foreign corn free of any duty only when the home price attained 80s. a quarter. The Corn Laws symbolized the domination of the British aristocracy over both the ascending manufacturing interest and the working and lower classes. They were in the heart of the conflict that Britain saw during her painful transition from a feudal and mercantile country to a modern and industrial one.

The new Law generated a great deal of anger among the working classes who become now compelled to pay high prices for bread. The manufacturing class also shared the workers' irritation and feared that the new Corn Law would cause claims for higher wages. The situation worsened in 1816 as bread prices rose again. Accordingly, workers claimed wage increases so that they could compensate the rise in food prices. The masters did not accept. Then, there were food riots throughout the kingdom and the working classes of the northern industrial centres particularly started strikes as a last recourse to avoid starvation. The spinners of Manchester, the heart of northern Radicalism, went on strike in July 1818. They marched through Manchester streets holding placards illustrating their problems. They also picketed the factories of their employers. After brutal attacks on some cotton factories in Manchester, the government became seriously worried about the strike and the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, ordered the Manchester magistrates to take action. The magistrates reacted by arresting the leaders of the strike, John Bagguley, John Johnson, and Samuel Drummond. The Radical leader John Doherty was arrested and accused of attacking a woman when picketing one of the contested factories. Certainly, the local authorities believed him to be trying to form a General Union of Trades. He was charged of two years' hard labour.

[1] "Corn Laws", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

Weakened by the arrests of their leaders, the Manchester spinners ended the strike in September without gaining any increase in wages unfortunately. The industrial unrest did not cease and it was now the turn of the Manchester weavers to go on strike to ask for a minimum wage of 13s. a week. Along with the dearness of life, the weavers found the competition with the power looms one of the very harsh obstacles to overcome. The strike contagion spread quickly to Bolton, Bury and Burnley. Most of the employers refused to pay this minimum wage and the weavers returned to their factories keeping their grievances for other battles to come[1].

4.2.1. The Reform Movement in the English North and Midlands:

When the London reformers were receiving the blows that followed the Spa Fields Riots, the reform movement continued to organise itself in the manufacturing centres of the Midlands and the North. Although the workers participated actively in the economic concerns opposing them to their uncompromising masters like wage claims and strikes, they formed also the backbone of the Radical Movement in those restless regions whereby local reform societies were steadily present.

The impact of the Spa Fields events was rapidly felt, in the winter 1816-17, 'throughout most of the manufacturing districts' in which the hitherto unaccustomed workers to politics started to attend political meetings, to read the Radical press and to discuss national political issues. The reform movement in Manchester, 'the great reform metropolis', Leicester, Sheffield, Derby, Nottingham and Birmingham for instance was composed of artisans, a number of small tradesmen, and several extreme middle-class Radicals. The leading reformers of the North were John Knight, a cotton manufacturer, William Ogden, a letterpress printer, William Benbow, a shoemaker. They were from Manchester. From Ashton there was the weaver Charles Walker. From Oldham there was the silk weaver John Haigh. Robert Pilkington led the movement in Bury. In Middleton, the well-known silk weaver Samuel Bamford guided the Radicals. A draper called Joseph Mitchell led the Liverpool reform movement. In Leicestershire, the cause of reform was believed to constitute the last hope of the suffering labourers. The majority of the Lancashire spinners were Radicals. The Leicester Club founded in October 1816 was presided by a dyer and timber merchant and its most energetic

[1] "Industrial Unrest", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ Industrial Unrest.htm>(Sean Lang, *Parliamentary Reform 1785-1928)*

members consisted of printers, frame smiths, ladders and framework-knitters. The Hampden Clubs of all the Leicestershire towns and villages reached thirty clubs by the close of 1816. Several reform meetings were organised in the English Midlands and North. For instance, the period of September-October 1816 witnessed big reform meetings in Bolton, Nottingham and Sheffield (8,000 participants). Birmingham held its meeting in January 1817[1]. Compared to the reform movement of the larger London region during this period, that of the Midlands and the North was also implicated in some agitated incidents such as the Blanketeers' March, the Pentridge Rising and Peteloo Massacre.

4.2.2. The Blanketeers' March (1817):

Three of the working-class Radical leaders in Manchester John Bagguley, John Johnson, and Samuel Drummond attempted to organise a peaceful march to London. By this protest march, they intended to draw the attention of the Monarch, the Government, and the public opinion to the sufferings of the weavers and the spinners of Lancashire as well as to promote the cause of reform. The northern workers intended to march peacefully with their petitions that were to be presented to the Prince Regent (the future King George IV) in London. On their way there, they planned to hold meetings and obtain the support and involvement of other textile workers. They expected that by the time they arrived to London, there would be 100,000 demonstrators eager to inform the head of the country about their misery and impatience towards their appalling working and social conditions. Nonetheless, the moderate leading reformers in Manchester John Shuttleworth, Archibald Prentice and John Edward Taylor were afraid of the planned march and ordered their followers not to take part in it. The organisers planned to commence the march by a gathering at St.Peter's Field in Manchester on 10th March 1817. They also decided that each man should carry a blanket to keep him warm and to indicate to the people on the way that they were weavers. Accordingly, the marchers were called the blanketeers. The government, which was informed by its spies, suspected that the marchers would use violence to dispose the Monarch like 'the men of Marseilles in Paris in 1792'. Therefore, the Manchester Magistrates decided to prevent the marchers from arriving to London. About 10,000 men gathered at St.Peter's on 10th March 'making it the largest meeting ever organised in Manchester'. However,

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.701-704

the Magistrates sent in the King's Dragoon Guards who dispersed the meeting and arrested the leaders John Bagguley and Samuel Drummond and twenty-seven other Radicals[1].

Other demonstrators were determined to carry on the march to London, but the Manchester cavalry followed them. A group of the marchers was attacked only a mile from the downtown. Another group was arrested at Macclesfield and Ashbourne. At Stockport, many demonstrators received sabre blows wounding many men and one man was shot dead. More than 200 other Radicals were also arrested[2].

Once again, the 'physical-force' Radicals gave the repressive Government an occasion to punish the Movement. The moderate reformers did not want such losses to occur, in vain. Although the organisers wanted the march to happen peacefully, the local authorities were well prepared to oppress the initiative. According to some historical accounts, it was the spies employed by the Manchester Magistrates who played a central role in provoking the violent incidents. The scholar E.P.Tompson concludes that:

> *"…There are overwhelming reasons for supposing that some kind of 'physical force' conspiracy was under preparation in 1817, which was inextricably intertwined with the counter-conspiracy of Government provocateurs."*[3]

By the time the Blanketeers' March took place, the political context was terrible and the reform movement on the defensive. In the first week of March 1817, the government suspended Habeas Corpus and suspected the northern reform movement to be involved in underground political work. According to the authorities' investigations, the movement had 'four centres of organisation controlled by secret committees'. The Habeas Corpus Act was passed in Parliament in 1679. This Act guaranteed to the imprisoned person the right of examining his case in a court of law to check the legality of his arrest. Yet, Parliament had the authority to suspend this Act in periods of social agitation. It was temporarily suspended in 1715, and during the war with France

[1] "Blanketeers", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Blanketeers.htm>, Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.74
[2] "Blanketeers", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.712
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.713

allowing the Government to detain parliamentary reformers like Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall. After the Spa Fields Riots, the impacts they generated, and other minor agitations, Lord Liverpool's government obtained from Parliament the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the passing of a set of repressive measures known as the Gagging Acts. These measures prohibited assemblies of more than fifty people and ordered the magistrates to imprison 'everyone suspected of spreading seditious libel'[1]. The Gagging Acts seriously hindered the parliamentary-reform activities and induced the Movement to engage in some secret action. The northern Radical Movement was accused by the government, just after the Blanketeers' March, to be organised into four centres each of which under the control of a 'secret committee': 1– Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, 2–Birmingham and its districts, 3–Lancashire, 4–Yorkshire. According to some historians, these regions saw 'a considerable passage of delegates' of the Hampden Clubs and other reform societies. The propaganda for parliamentary reform through documents, small reunions and discussion groups also grew during the period[2]. This situation threatened the government and led it to multiply the use of spies and *agents provocateurs* to anticipate any probable rising.

4.2.3. The Pentridge Rising (1817):

After the oppressive treatment of the government to the working-class reform movement during and after the Blanketeers' March, several northern Radical leaders were arrested. Among the frustrated workers, 'a revolutionary feeling' was growing in most of the northern regions by the close of the spring season. The brutality of the authorities against the 'constitutionalist' reformers led the 'physical force' party of the Radical Movement to be involved in some insurrectionary plans. By May 1817, the contacts between the Radical delegates increased in most of the northern districts. The northern leaders were in contact with only one reformer called Oliver W.J.Richards since the London leading figures Watson, Thistlewood, Preston and Hooper were in jail for their part in the Spa Fields' Riots. Some reformers followed Cobbett to America and others were 'in hiding'. The conspirators chose 26th May to be the day of rising, but the London leader, Oliver W.J.Richards convinced them to postpone it to 9th June in which

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.320, "Gagging Acts", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk /Gagging Acts.htm>
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.714

the night would be totally dark and the whole country would be in a more perfect state for rising[1].

The magistrates of the Midlands and North who employed local secret agents informed the Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth that 'the insurrection would take place on 9th June, with or without the support of London'. In the last week of May, the West Riding magistrates intervened in the middle of a midnight meeting in Sheffield. They seized a local leader called Wolstenholme and three of his followers. The Sheffield section of the revolutionary movement fell 'in confusion' after this incident. Then, a meeting held on 6th June in Thornhill Lees, near Dewsbury, with the presence of Oliver Richards was surrounded by the troops. All the leaders were arrested except Oliver Richards who was 'let to escape'. A few hours later in Wakefield Hotel, a reformer saw him speaking to a servant of a General called Byng's. Then, the truth rapidly circulated among the Radicals announcing Oliver Richards was not a London delegate as he claimed but a Government's spy. The next morning Sidmouth's government, the Army, and the magistrates were waiting for the imminent revolt. Oliver Richards, called 'after the truth leaked out' Oliver the Spy, arrived to London on 7th June 1817 thinking that he had finished his duty by stimulating the revolt.

Nevertheless, the Radicals decided to carry on their revolutionary plan. The Nottingham leader Jeremiah Brandreth gathered on the night of the ninth two to three hundred men 'at the foot of the Derby Peak-Pentridge, South Wingfield, Ripley'. The conspirators were stonkingers, iron workers, quarrymen, and labourers with 'a few guns and more pikes, scythes and bludgeons'. They decided to march the fourteen miles to Nottingham and hoped to receive arms and followers from the farms and the houses of the villages on their way there. However, the revolt's leader Brandreth fired through the window of a farm and killed a servant. He was convinced that during the march from Nottingham to London:

> *" 'A provisional government' would be formed, and it would send relief into the country to the wives and children of those who had taken arms…'men from the North would …sweep all before them, and every man that refused should be shot upon the place'. "*[2]

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp.715-717
[2] Ibid., p.724

This is what he really did since he was a fervent partisan of 'physical-force' party against the moderate Radicals who wanted the same aims but with different means. In their book *The Village Labourer*, the Hammonds conclude that this rising was short of an experienced and intellectual leadership and described Brandreth as ' a half-starved, illiterate, and unemployed framework-knitter'[1]. During the night of the rebellion, the Nottingham region was disturbed by 'guns fired, hours blowing, shouts, and different noises'. When the troops stopped the march the insurrection finished 'in panic'. Some of the conspirators succeeded to escape and the majority of them were arrested.

During their trial, thirty-five of them were charged with high treason. Brandreth and two of his close companions were condemned to death and other eleven plotters were transported for life. During the execution of Brandreth, one of the companions shouted to the crowd that they were the victims of Lord Sidmouth and Oliver the Spy. One of the journalists of the Radical newspaper the *Leeds Mercury*, Edward Baines pursued their claims and succeeded to find enough proofs that the government was involved in the rising. According to his investigations, Baines described Oliver the Spy as 'prototype of Lucifer, whose distinguishing characteristic is, first to tempt and then to destroy'[2].

4.2.4. The Consequences of the Pentridge Rising:

First, the Pentridge Rising highlighted the misery and severe isolation of the northern and Midlands workers during and after the war with France. The degradation of the working classes was really so serious to the point that they risked their lives and believed that they could overthrow the Government out of their pikes and bludgeons. The occupations of the thirty-five arrested conspirators showed that the insurrection was a wholly working-class action without any arrangement with the middle-class reformers. In fact, among the detained conspirators there were thirteen framework-knitters, seven labourers, five colliers, two stonecutters, two farmers, a stone-mason, a moulder, a blacksmith, a tailor, a sawyer, and an engineer[3]. Second, the Pentridge affair demonstrated the determination of the Government to repress the Radical Movement by law and force. Some views go further and argue, not without evidence, that the

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.730
[2] "Jeremiah Brandreth", in *Encyclopaedia of British History,* <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk / Jeremiah Brandreth.htm>
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.732

government wanted bloodshed to terrorize the distressed working and lower classes. The government knew about the revolt but did not intervene before the start of the operation. The essential reason came out of the mouth of Prime Minister Lord Liverpool when he declared that 'one can never feel that the King is secure upon his throne till he has dared to spill traitors' blood'. Relying on his declaration, the labour historian E.P.Thompson concludes that 'the government wanted blood– not a holocaust, but enough to make an example'[1]. Third, the rebellion showed that the Government adopted through the use of *agents provocateurs* a 'preventive' measure to anticipate any threat of a planned disturbance. Oliver the Spy who represented the 'Radical Judas' played a 'legendary role' to influence both British political movements throughout the kingdom's modern history and the public opinion in the first half of the nineteenth century, which found the use of spies unfamiliar to the 'spirit of English law' and criticized the involvement of England in 'the continental spy system'. Fourth, as to the impact of the rising on the reform movement itself, the brutality of the judicial authorities against the conspirators did not succeed to isolate the extreme Radicals from the moderate ones; it rather quickened the union of both groups. The lesson learnt from the rising alerted the middle-class reformers to the failure of conspiracy and induced them to contain and control 'physical-force' Radicals by adopting a wholly constitutional struggle. In one of its articles, the Radical newspaper the *Leeds Mercury* recommended resolutely "…the working class must place itself under the guidance and protection of the Whigs and middle-class reformers"[2]. Subsequently, the working-class section of the northern reform movement started to trust the moderate middle-class reformers and the northern Radical Movement turned to adopt a purely peaceful political and constitutional struggle. The next worth noting action in the North was a peaceful reform meeting in Manchester, which turned into one of the blackest episodes in the development of the Movement called 'Peterloo Massacre'.

4.2.5. Peterloo Massacre:

In 1818, the reform movement was still suffering from the terror that followed the Pentridge Rising. Most of the Radical reform local leaders were imprisoned. Feeling weak and enduring a flagrant lack of organisation, the reform movement hardly engaged in any organised manifestation during that year. The government with its

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.723
[2] Ibid., p.736

'despotic' measures against the movement also placed itself in serious isolation and started to show some suppleness to reformers. The judicial authorities began to release the jailed Radical leaders 'one by one'. Among the liberated leaders, there were John Knight, Samuel Bamford, Johnson, Bagguley, Mitchell, Gravener Hanson and Thomas Evans. The freed reformers engaged in political activity again. They were invited to publicized 'dinners in their honours', spoke at reform meetings and even endeavoured to take the government to the court for their 'illegal arrest'.

In 1819, the cause of reform gained strength day after day. The British working class, which was 'the most clubbable working class in Europe', formed more and more local political societies especially in the Midlands and the North. With the circulation of Radical periodicals and newspapers, political discussion became 'inevitable' in every manufacturing district. The sternness of the working-class reform members was hampered with the control and moderate guidance of the middle-class and self educated reformers. Because they adopted purely political and constitutional means of struggle, the reformers felt now that they became more influential in the public scene. Workers who were often associated to the mob by their masters and the ruling class realized that only through organisation and discipline they could pretend to play a more significant national role.

The reform movement understood that the national context became favourable, in 1819, to initiate a new phase of constitutional fight to claim the primary civil and political rights that the overwhelming majority of the people lacked. Reformers struggled to gain the right to vote, the right of political organisation, the freedom of public meeting and the freedom of the press[1]. As to the political organisation, the expiration of the Gagging Acts in July 1818 facilitated the spread of reform local societies throughout the country. The national Radical newspapers and periodicals succeeded to spread out Radicalism from London to the different regions of the kingdom. Consequently, the local sections of the reform movement started 'to develop their own press'. Significant examples of the local Radical press are the northern newspapers the *Manchester Observer*, the Birmingham's *Weekly Register* and the *Norwich Blue* and the *White Dwarf*. The expansion of the Radical press led the working and lower classes to develop their perception of the political questions they were involved in. The remote journeymen and

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.738

labourers of the North became now familiar with the political issues such as the rights to vote and the freedom of the press. Additionally, one of the central demands of the reform movement in 1819 was the right to public meeting and open-air demonstration. The State granted this right to the people only on occasions of elections. The mere organisation of a meeting especially by the working people in the provinces was seen as an attempt of a criminal conspiracy by the Government. Nevertheless, the reform movement managed to organise some meetings characterised by order and discipline in Blackburn (October 1816), in Oldham (January 1817). During the great strike of 1818, the Manchester workers gathered publicly in the open to claim for wage increase. In Dewsbury, the miners marched in great numbers peacefully through the streets of the town in 1819. In the course of the same year, the Nottingham framework-knitters succeeded to organise 'orderly demonstrations'. These peaceful and orderly public meetings and manifestations accentuated the fear of the higher classes, which certainly did not welcome the transformation of the illiterate and starving workers into disciplined political militants.

The organisation of reform meetings multiplied throughout the kingdom by the start of the summer of the year 1819. In regions that represented central roles, there were bigger meetings like those held in Manchester and Stockport during June, and the meetings at Birmingham, Leeds and London during July. The cause of reform strengthened now and took a national dimension as the reformers embraced a wholly peaceful political fight and became distant from any conspiratorial plans. In August of the same year, which was a year of industrial unrest and high food prices, one of the reform clubs called the Manchester Patriotic Union Society under the leadership of Joseph Johnson, James Wroe and John Knight decided to organise a huge protest meeting. Major Cartwright, Henry 'Orator' Hunt and the Radical journalist Richard Carlyle were invited to be the main speakers at the tribune. The meeting was planned to go on a big public place called St.Peter's Field on 16th August. Cartwright did not attend the meeting and Hunt and Carlyle were determined to focus on parliamentary reform in their speeches and to underline the discontent and anger of the people. About 60,000 attended the meeting including principally the Lancashire working classes and a big part of women and children. The people were not armed and showed a peaceful conduct when listening to 'Orator' Hunt. The magistrates, who were alarmed by the size and determination of the crowd, estimated that 'the town was in danger' and

ordered the Manchester yeomanry to arrest the speakers the moment they started talking. Falling in panic, the yeomanry made a general assault on the people killing and wounding hundreds with their sabres. All the speakers and newspaper reporters were arrested except Richard Carlyle 'who managed to avoid being arrested'. The attack resulted in 500 wounded people including a hundred women, and eleven killed including two women[1].

Thanks to the efforts of Carlyle, the London press reported the event the following day with titles such as 'Horrid Massacres in Manchester'. For Lancashire and the larger northern regions, James Wroe described the carnage in the following edition of the *Manchester Observer*. This Radical journalist was thought to be the first to call the event Peterloo Massacre likened to the famous Waterloo Battle. Thanks to the spread of the Radical local press, within two days all England knew about the meeting and 'the bloody violence' with which the local authorities treated the peaceful manifestation. The most moderate reformers were shocked by the brutality of repression, and 'for a time, ultra-Radicals and moderates buried their differences' to unite against the 'tyranny' of the Government. Reformers did not lie down and held protest meetings all over England in the immediate period following Peterloo Massacre. Dr.Watson and Arthur Thistlewood were the speakers of a meeting held on 29th August in Smithfield, London. Seven days later 'a much larger meeting' was held at Westminster under the direction of the reform leaders Burdett, Cartwright, Hobhouse and Thelwall. When Hunt came in London on 15th September, the pro-governmental newspaper the *Times* reported that around 300,000 welcomed enthusiastically this Radical leader[2]. However, Hunt was charged with two years and a half' imprisonment. He was accused with the other speakers with the offence of 'assembling with unlawful banners at an unlawful meeting for the purpose of exciting discontent'. Joseph Johnson, Samuel Bamford and Joseph Healey were each charged with one-year imprisonment. The two journalists Carlyle and Wroe were later sent to jail for reporting the accounts about the bloodshed[3].

[1] "Peterloo Massacre", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition, "Peterloo Massacre", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk / Peterloo Massacre.htm>
[2] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.756
[3] "Peterloo Massacre", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*

4.2.6. The Consequences of Peterloo Massacre:

Concerning the Peterloo affair, the Government was not blamed to be the instigator of this event by its *agents provocateurs* like in the other working-class actions. Yet, it was heavily responsible for the atrocities happening on 16th August 1819. After that the bloodshed generated an enormous national shock, the local authorities claimed that it was the panic of the 'untrained' Manchester yeomanry which caused the violent attack. Some historians reject this explanation and argue that the bloody attack was carefully arranged since the Home Secretary Sidmouth and the Prince Regent rapidly communicated their congratulations to the magistrates and military of Lancashire 'for their prompt, decisive, and efficient measures for the preservation of the public peace'[1]. In addition, attempts of some reform MPs for a parliamentary enquiry on the massacre were vigorously and systematically rejected. Despite the self-satisfaction of the government towards the oppression of the Peterloo meeting, the constitutional struggle of the working classes accentuated the fear of the ruling classes. In fact, Lord Liverpool's Tory government introduced a set of new repressive measures to Parliament, which passed them by the end of December 1819. The government's propositions, later called the Six Acts, intended to restrain the Radical press and meetings and to diminish 'the possibility of an armed uprising'. The Six Acts announced that 'drilling and military exercises were prohibited; magistrates were empowered to search for and seize arms; the right to hold public meetings was further limited; and the freedom of the press was severely restricted'[2]. The Whigs opposed the acts that decreased popular rights and liberties and threatened to push the Radicals to be 'even more rebellious'. For the reform movement, the cruelty of both the massacre and the six Acts induced their 'Radical constitutionalism' to take a revolutionary character again but for a short time. Although the immediate attitude among reformers was that of revenge, the Movement was encouraged to carry on its peaceful political struggle by the huge national support and sympathy that Peterloo had provoked in the whole country. For 'Orator' Hunt, the psychological impact of the butchery was encouraging for the cause of reform. He estimated that '…for the Radicals Peterloo was a moral victory'[3] since it challenged the confidence of the old system. In the 1820's, some obstinate 'loyalists' started to think about some kind of concession to the working and

[1] G.D.H Cole, Ed, *The British Common People*, op.cit., p.226
[2] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867*, op.cit., p.186
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.755

lower classes. In addition, for the landed class it was time to launch an alliance with the manufacturing classes against the working classes, which threatened the stability of the nation. Furthermore, Peterloo secured, in practical terms, the right of public meeting for the people because "…never since Peterloo has authority dared to use equal force against a peaceful British crowd"[1].

5. The Agitations for the Great Reform Act:

The oppression of the government towards the Peterloo meeting and the severity of the Six Acts led some Radicals in London to undertake a conspiratorial plan in order to punish 'the butchers' of the massacre. The conspirators, under the leadership of Thomas Thistlewood, attempted to penetrate into a house in London where the cabinet had a dinner and kill all the government's ministers. Thanks to a government's spy, the dinner did not take place, the conspirators arrested in a house in Cato Street rented to be the base of the operation and the plan fell apart. During their trial the five leading Radical plotters Thistlewood, Davidson, Ings, Tidd and Brunt were sentenced to death. They all were executed on 1st May 1820.

Putting aside the failed Cato Street Conspiracy, which was a direct response of the extreme 'physical-force' Radicals to the Peterloo affair, the 1820's 'seem strangely quiet'[2]. Social tension was released thanks to an improvement in the economic conditions in the whole country. In the North for instance, in Lancashire and Birmingham, unemployment declined when iron prices got higher around the years 1824-25[3]. The discontented workers redirected their energy and attention to trade-union activities though labour combination was still prohibited. Strikes of workers who claimed wage increases to balance mounting food prices persisted everywhere in the country. The 1825 Act that made combinations between labourers officially permitted led to a constant increase in trade unions especially in the industries of textiles, dyeing, mining and shoemaking[4].

During the period of prosperity up to the year 1825, social and political agitations weakened both in the London region and the restless industrial districts of the Midlands

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.779
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.184
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid., p.185

and the North. The formidable Radical mobilisation of the years 1819-20 shrunk as the people's hunger disappeared. In one of his pamphlet, the Radical journalist Cobbett easily explained this situation by saying 'I defy you to agitate a fellow with a full stomach'[1]. However, during the second part of the 1820's, the economic conditions worsened again, and the working-class popular distress revived. Despite the threat of the Six Acts, the activities of the Radical Movement centred through much of the 1820's on the fight for the freedom of the press. Radical intellectuals like Cobbett in the *Political Register* and Carlyle in the *Black Dwarf* continued to teach their reform followers the importance of their cause in the improvement of their conditions. They also taught them the useful means to press 'Old Corruption' and to achieve parliamentary reform. 'The machinery of Reform' turned quicker thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of those working on the cultural expansion of Radicalism such as editors, booksellers, printers, newsvendors, hawkers and many voluntary agents. During this decade, as the claims for parliamentary reform sharpened, England saw the formation of both a middle-class and working-class 'class-consciousness' plainly articulated in the need of parliamentary representation especially for the former and the need for amelioration in the working and living conditions for the latter.

The decisive struggle over the Reform Bill took place in a period of economic distress, soaring prices and a good deal of unemployment throughout the country, especially in the South. The rural great misery pushed the agricultural labourers of the English South to launch a series of violent disturbances to protest against low wages and the wide introduction of the threshing machines. The Swing Riots[2], as they came to be called, commenced in the regions of Kent and Dorset and included many violent attacks such as 'rick-burning, the destruction of threshing machines and cattle-maiming' accentuating the fear of the government in a highly revolutionary context. In 1830, the kingdom saw an increase of intensified parliamentary reform enthusiasm especially in the industrial North. In Birmingham a middle-class economist called Thomas Attwood (1783-1859) spread the idea that the House of Commons required members with business experience and economic understanding. Then, he formed the Birmingham Political Union in January 1830 to ask for parliamentary representation for the large unrepresented northern cities like Birmingham and Manchester. The middle-class

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.184
[2] "Swing Riots", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

reformers and a great part of the working classes not only in the North but also in the whole country supported Attwood. In the next two years, tens of Political Unions were formed here and there with their numerous sections in the remoter districts of the industrial centres to press for parliamentary reform. As to the means used by reformers during the Reform-Bill crisis, most of them were peaceable, others included violence, however. Along with the spread of the Radical press for the propaganda war and the organisation of reform mass meetings as a steady political manifestation of the Movement, reformers used petitions to both the Monarch and Parliament to show their determination and augment pressure on the State institutions. Major Cartwright had started his campaign for mass petitioning for parliament since the economic depression of the years 1816-17 gathering tens of thousands of signatures around England, many of which were of suffering workers and unemployed people of lower order. The 'habit of petitioning' developed then in the second half of the 1820's to reach its peak during the Reform-Bill crisis in the years 1830-32. Hundreds of thousands of signatures transported by the 'Radical representatives' urging parliamentary reform travelled from every part of the country to London[1]. Concerning the 'physical force' component of the reform movement, there were riots in a number of British towns when people heard that the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill proposed by the Whig government in September 1831. Then, scenes of a series of angry and violent demonstrations spread throughout the kingdom reflecting mainly the frustration of the working people. Riots took place in Manchester, Liverpool, Derby, Worcester and Bath. In Nottingham, many houses and the Castle were burnt down. The most violent riot happened in Bristol on 31st October where a hundred of houses were burnt down including the bishop's house. In London, the discontented crowd harshly attacked houses of the peers that voted against the Bill including bishops.

5.1. The Unreformed Parliament:

In the eighteenth century, the House of Lords was a hereditary and aristocratic chamber, made of life peers, not elected but appointed by the British Monarch. Before a Bill became an Act (the law of the land), it had to receive the approval of both houses and the royal assent.

[1] Roland Quinault, "The Industrial Revolution and parliamentary reform", *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, Ed, Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1993, p.231

The structure of the House of Commons did not reflect the composition of society in Britain in the eighteenth century. Hunt constantly declared in the public meetings he presided that only three out of every one hundred British people had the right to vote. In 1750, England and Wales comprised only 282,000 electors in a population of over 6.5 million[1]. When the population more than doubled to reach 14 million in 1831, the number of voters reached only 435,000[2]. Also, parliamentary representation did not follow geographical features. Conventionally, "certain English boroughs were entitled to send MPs to parliament, while the remaining bits of each county (all except these boroughs) voted as a whole"[3]. In the industrial upheaval of the first half of the nineteenth century, many new-grown cities were left completely unrepresented. Big cities like Manchester and Leeds did not have any parliamentary representation, while other tiny 'empty or half-empty' towns with less than ten electors like New Romney or Old Sarum sent generally two members to Parliament[4]. The old electoral system, essentially based on property and soil qualifications, represented largely the landed interest whereas the industrial interest (manufacturing capital and skill) was grossly under-represented. According to R.Quinault's survey, "five of the twenty largest British towns in 1801 were unrepresented manufacturing towns: Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, and Paisley"[5]. This unfair electoral distribution severely reduced the manufacturing representation in the British legislative body in which only 'about 1/6 of all MPs from 1790 to 1830 were businessmen'[6]. In the 1820's, the big manufacturing advance increased and underlined the inequality between land and industry in the British political system. According to Sir James Mackintosh (an advanced Whig):

> *"'The great impulse given to English industry in the middle of the eighteenth century' had revealed 'the disparity between the old system of representation and the new state of society' and had left 'the manufacturing interest without adequate representation in parliament.'"*[7]

[1] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p.186
[2] "Reform Act 1832", in Encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>
[3] Ibid
[4] G.D.H Cole, Ed, op.cit., p.88
[5] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p.192
[6] Ibid, p.188
[7] Ibid., p.184

Thus, without parliamentary reform, the agricultural South maintained its over-representation, 'both in terms of population and interests at the expense of the North and London'[1]. In addition, the discrimination affected the representation of boroughs and counties. Each county was allowed to elect only two knights of the shire. Compared to the smaller counties, larger ones suffered from under-representation in connection to their population. On the other hand, boroughs were much better represented and 'over four fifths of all English MPs represented borough, rather than county, constituencies'[2]. Most of them were situated in the agricultural South-west of England, where "parliamentary members continued to be returned from numerous so-called 'rotten boroughs', which were virtually uninhabited rural districts, and from 'pocket boroughs' where a single powerful landowner or peer could almost completely control the voting"[3]. Concerning London, with a population of almost a million in the early 1800s, it was extremely under-represented in terms of population and wealth. In the language of numbers, 'before 1832, greater London had only 10 MPs'[4]. For this reason, the most agitated centres for parliamentary reform were the industrial North and the larger London region.

5.2. The Great Reform Bill (1832):

The Tories[5] were the main governing political force of England during the first phase of of industrialisation (1770-1830); they opposed any attempt to enfranchise more people. In November 1830, in a context of growing national parliamentary reform claims, the Whigs[6] formed a government and the Prime Minister Earl Grey (1764-1845) informed King William IV (1765-1837) that he wanted to make a parliamentary reorganisation to reduce some 'rotten boroughs' and give representation to the growing northern industrial cities in the House of Commons. After securing a majority in the House of Commons, the Whigs introduced the First Reform Bill By John Russell in March 1831.

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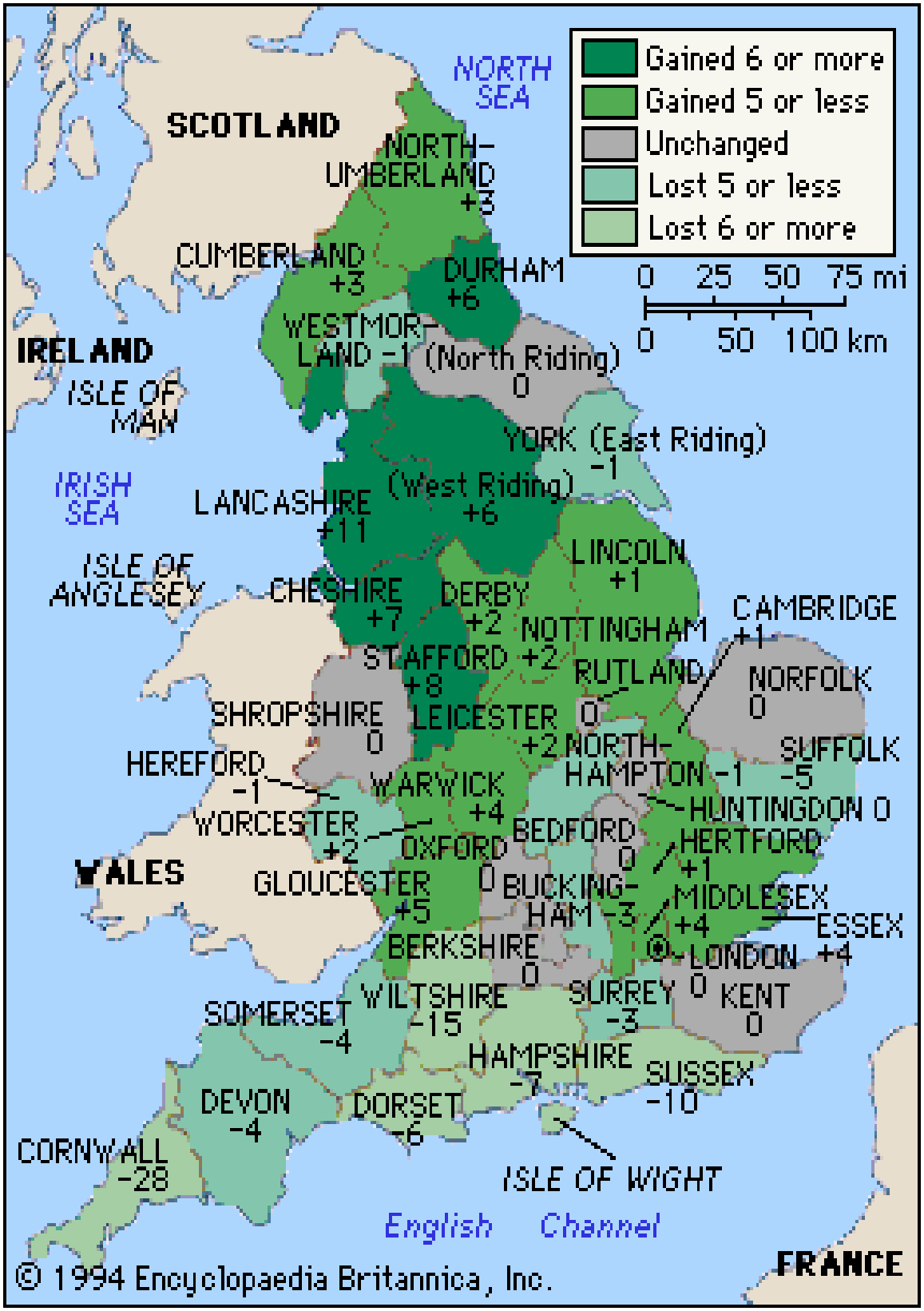
[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.226
[2] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p. 187
[3] "Reform Bill", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition
[4] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p.190
[5] Etymologically, the word 'Tory' was used to describe rural bandits in Ireland. In the 17th century, the term described monarchists in Parliament. By the 19th century, the Tories were the partisans of royal authority, established church and traditional political structure as they opposed any parliamentary reform. Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p.664
[6] In the 17th century, the term 'Whig' was used to describe politicians opposing the religious policy of Charles II. II. By the 19th century, the Whigs were the supporters of political change and favoured parliamentary reform. Juliet Gardiner, Ed, op.cit., p664, "Whigs", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

The Lower House approved it and the Higher rejected it. The next October, an amended Reform Bill passed the House of Commons and failed again to pass the House of Lords. When people heard the news, many serious riots took place all over Britain leading the first economic power of the world to a situation of a near revolution[1] for several months. In May 1832, a third Reform Bill was defeated once more in the House of Lords. Grey asked the King then to create 50 more pro-Whig peers so that the Reform Bill gained approval in the House of Lords. However, William IV refused and Grey resigned. Asked to form a new government, the Duke of Willington failed in a situation of political turmoil. Then, the King granted to Grey the authority to create the required peers. The Lords, then, felt threatened and immediately passed the Bill, which received the royal assent on 7th June 1832[2].

5.3. The Results of the First Reform Act:

The 1832 Reform Act affected the old electoral system in two important respects. First, it revised the traditional list of the enfranchised boroughs. In England, fifty-six boroughs (fifteen in the South) lost completely their representation and forty-two others were created (five metropolitan and fourteen growing industrial towns in the North and Midlands). Many new industrial cities like Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham obtained parliamentary representation for the first time. Second, the Act increased the number of voters by enfranchising thousands of people all over the kingdom. High electoral property qualifications were reduced so that the new electorate would include smaller property holders. The right to vote in the boroughs was granted 'to men who occupied homes with an annual value of £10'[3]. In the counties, the vote kept on the 40-shilling freeholder qualification and "extended to those with copyhold tenure of £10 or more and leaseholders or tenants-at-will paying £50 in rent"[4]. The total county representation was significantly increased, but boroughs' electorate continued to exceed that of counties enormously. In the 1832 General Election, the disparity persisted when

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., pp.222-3
[2] "Reform Bill", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "1832 Reform Act", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk /1832 Reform Act.htm>
[3] "1832 Reform Act", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*
[4] "Reform Act 1832", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>


Gained 6 or more
Gained 5 or less
Unchanged
Lost 5 or less
Lost 6 or more
0 25 50 75 mi
0 50 100 km
NORTH SEA
SCOTLAND
NORTH-UMBERLAND +3
CUMBERLAND +3
DURHAM +6
WESTMOR-LAND -1
(North Riding) 0
YORK (East Riding) -1
(West Riding) +6
IRELAND
ISLE OF MAN
IRISH SEA
LANCASHIRE +11
ISLE OF ANGLESEY
CHESHIRE +7
DERBY +2
LINCOLN +1
NOTTINGHAM +2
CAMBRIDGE +1
STAFFORD +8
RUTLAND 0
NORFOLK 0
SHROPSHIRE 0
LEICESTER +2
NORTH-HAMPTON -1
SUFFOLK -5
HEREFORD -1
WARWICK +4
HUNTINGDON 0
WORCESTER +2
OXFORD 0
BEDFORD 0
HERTFORD +1
WALES
GLOUCESTER +5
BUCKING-HAM -3
MIDDLESEX +4
ESSEX +4
BERKSHIRE 0
LONDON 0
WILTSHIRE -15
SURREY -3
KENT 0
SOMERSET -4
HAMPSHIRE -7
SUSSEX -10
DEVON -4
DORSET -6
CORNWALL -28
ISLE OF WIGHT
English Channel
FRANCE
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175,000 English borough voters elected 327 seats and 345,000 county voters elected 144 seats only[1]. The changes brought to the electoral system increased the number of voting people from 435,000 to 652,000 making eligible one in every seven adult males in Britain[2].

5.4. The Consequences of the First Reform Act:

The First Reform Act was welcomed in England as a significant political advance in the history of the country. At the national scene, the passing of the Bill generated scenes of satisfaction and joy. People received the news 'throughout the country by blankets, illuminations, and the ringing of the church bells'[3]. The ruling class was satisfied with the performance of the Whig government that 'was successful in relieving the danger of revolution'[4]. During the Reform-Bill crisis, the government feared the 'conjunction' between the middle class and the working and lower classes, which were referred to as the 'criminal classes'. This 'conjunction' happened politically and consciously but did not happen in practice. If it did, revolution would have been inevitable. According to E.P Thompson, revolt did not take place thanks to the 'deep constitutionalism' of Cobbett, the leader of the extreme Radicals who urged his followers to accept 'half a loaf', and 'the skill of the middle class' in offering the compromise "which might not weaken, but strengthen both the State and property- rights against the working-class threat"[5].

However, the Great Reform Act did not bring deep constitutional change to England since it maintained the traditional dominance of the landed interest over the growing industrial one. After 1832, the agricultural South remained over-represented whereas the Midlands and the North continued to suffer from political under-representation. Also, the Act did not bring the ascendancy of the 'parliamentary families' to an end. According to R. Quinault, although there was a slight decline in the number "of MPs coming from established parliamentary families in the second quarter of the nineteenth

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.227
[2] "Reform Act 1832", op.cit., in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*
[3] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.225
[4] Ibid
[5] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.899

century", the traditional privileged class "still supplied nearly 60% of all MPs when the Second Reform Act was passed in 1867"[1].

The middle-class members, who managed to exploit the largely working-class agitation of the Reform-Act crisis, constituted the social group, which benefited the most from the Act. In the boroughs, the new £10 occupier franchise promoted essentially the group of shopkeepers. In the Midlands and the industrial North, the Act enfranchised most of the manufacturing masters and big artisans. Generally speaking, the new property qualifications kept the working classes excluded from the right to vote. Although the Act enlarged the number of voters significantly, it did not change their 'social and occupational character'[2]. The scholar A.Briggs concludes that the Act was 'designed to keep out a large part of the population from the franchise'. He deplored the 'lack of mathematical logic in the Act' since eligibility depended directly on house rents. However, rents differed significantly from one region to another. When rents were relatively high in Manchester, "in Leeds the working classes were almost completely debarred from the franchise since they lived in houses of £5 to £8"[3]. The working-class exclusion was carefully arranged by the government, which did research before the passing of the Bill, concluding, "…In the parts occupied chiefly by the working classes, not one householder in fifty would have a vote"[4].

The Great Reform Act 'was limited in fact, but not in potential'[5]. Although the numerical extension of the franchise was symbolic and modest compared to the British population, the Act was considered as an important step and a central and logical change in the British political system. The Act was, perhaps, the first answer and a direct result to the transformation of Britain from an agricultural society to an industrial one. In addition, it showed that the King and the ruling class alike would submit to the pressure exercised by the masses. It was the first time in British history that the working classes played a noticeable role in decision making. The events showed undoubtedly that the working classes formed an important 'pressure group' and despite their weak social status, they could constitute, with their unity with the middle classes, an efficient political actor.

[1] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p.199
[2] Ibid
[3] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.227
[4] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.900
[5] Roland Quinault, op.cit., p.200

However, the Reform Act did not satisfy the will of the working classes for 'a say in the governing of the country'[1]. In fact, workers put their hopes and aspirations on the shoulders of their middle-class Radical leaders and their industrial masters and waited for better days. Their social and political distress turned in the following years, after the experiences of the Owenite and the Anti-Poor Law Movements, into a nation-wide movement called later on the 'Chartist Movement'. The latter Movements are studied in the third and final chapter of this mémoire.

[1] D.Frison, Ed, *Civilisation Britannique Documents Constitutionnels*, Paris: Edition Marketing, 1993, p.195

Chapter Three

Owenism, the Anti-Poor Law Movement and Chartism

Chapter III

Owenism, the Anti-Poor Law Movement and Chartism

After the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, a general feeling of disappointment and frustration prevailed amid the English working classes. Despite the sacrifices made in the events that accompanied the introduction and the approval of the First Reform Bill, the workers of the first industrial power in the world estimated that the whole measure was a 'great betrayal' to their political and social aspirations with regard to their objectives, mobilisation and the efforts during the agitation for reform. The efforts of the working classes concentrated, following the 1832 Reform Act, on social and political activities. The most important axes of the Radical Movement's action during the period 1832-50 were the social work of the philanthropist reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858) crystallised into the plans of cooperation involving the working classes, the mobilisation and the struggle against the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, and the Chartist Movement.

The social reformer Robert Owen was the father of an ambitious public project. Parallel to his active experience in the early English trade unionism, Owen believed that gathering the labourers into cooperative villages could change their destiny. During the 1830's he initiated his cooperative projects and provided his workers with decent houses, good salaries and a lot of social and medical care as he thought that a well-treated worker would certainly produce more. The first part of the present chapter tries to study this experience in the light of its impact on the working classes and the Government's reaction to it.

The amendment of the old system of Poor Relief (1601) in the form of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, and the workers' campaign to get it repealed constitute the second axe of the working-class actions examined in this chapter. The new Act intended to reduce the financial burdens that the Government granted to the poor, among which there was a great part of the suffering unemployed workers. By trying to do so, the government made relief available only to the people accepting to live in very appalling conditions inside the contested workhouses. The measure generated a great deal of social and political protest, agitation and violence especially in the North of England throughout the fourth and the fifth decades of the nineteenth century.

Apart from social claims, the English working classes came to be closely involved into an action of a purely political character. The Radical leaders, with the combined efforts of the working classes and the unions, drafted a set of political claims into a paper called 'the People's Charter' in 1838. The Charter was ambitious enough to intend 'sweeping changes to the political system of Britain' by granting the elementary right of vote to the whole adult males of the kingdom. The reticence of the Government and the determination of the Radical Movement to have the Charter pass through Parliament produced one of the most exciting stages, along with that of the 1832 Reform-Act agitation, in British modern history. The examination of the causes, events, evolution and the achievements of the Chartist Movement constitutes the biggest and final part of the present chapter.

1. Owenism:

Called after the name of its founder, Owenism was a social movement concerned with the elimination of the sufferings of the working classes. In theory, as well as in practice, almost the whole work of this humanitarian challenge owed to the intellect and efforts of Sir Robert Owen.

Robert Owen[1] was born on 14th May 1871 in Newtown in Wales. He started a quiet and comfortable life in the estate of his father who was a successful small tradesman, a saddler. Robert was sent to the local school in Newtown to receive the basic education of reading, writing and arithmetic. A distinguished and intelligent pupil, he was sent to London at the age of ten to join his elder brother who worked in saddlery there. He worked three years in London then joined Manchester in which he found work in a retail drapery business. It was in Manchester too that he discovered the success of the textile industry. In 1792 Robert became the manager of the Peter Drink water's large spinning factory in Manchester. During his years at the head of this factory, he met most of the wealthy and influential businessmen engaged in the textile industry in the country. He became then the close friend of David Dale, the owner of the 'Chorton Twist Company in New Lanark, Scotland, the largest cotton-spinning business in Britain'. In 1799, Owen married Caroline, David Dale's daughter.

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.509, "Robert Owen", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk / Robert Owen.htm>, "Robert Owen Atheist, Philanthropist, Labor Reformer", in <http://www.atheists.org>

1.1. The New Lanark Experience:

Aided by several businessmen from Manchester, Robert Owen purchased his father-in-law's four textile factories in New Lanark, Scotland for £ 60,000. The mills were not different from those of that time. The workforce in the factories included 1,300 men and women who brought also their progeny to work with them. The hours of work were long (from dawn to nightfall unsurprisingly) and the salaries were meagre. There were also over five hundred young orphans working in the New Lanark's factories. These orphans came essentially from the Scottish workhouses based in the slams of Glasgow and Edinburgh, which gathered them in very dreadful circumstances. The children of the lower classes were granted no education or school learning at that time.

Financially, the New Lanark mills were very successful under the management of Robert Owen[1]. However, making money was not the sole concern of Owen as it was for his associates. He was more enthusiastically concerned with the well-being of his workers. As to his philosophical and social theoretical principles, Robert Owen strongly believed that man was good by nature and that the environment he lived in directly influenced his character and behaviour. Convinced that the aggressive behaviour of man was the natural response to the callous milieu in which he lived, Owen argued that creating a clean environment would certainly produce 'rational, good and humane people'[2]. By doing so, Owen argued that the people, the employers as well as the Government could benefit from these changes.

To put his ideas into practice, Robert Owen initiated a reform plan to his factories in which he aimed to improve the productivity, to produce 'better quality goods' and all at once to ameliorate the awful conditions of his workers. When he arrived at New Lanark he found a large number of the workers' houses built in the form of a village near the factories. He appreciated this initiative and decided to consolidate it. He introduced measures to reorganise life in the village. He ordered the building of stores with reasonable prices (25 percent cheaper). He forbade the throwing of waste in front of the houses, insisted on cleaning the streets, and installed sewers. He inspected himself the houses and insisted on cleaning them once a week and whitewashing them once a year. He split the village into organised districts and 'put a "principal" in charge of each'.

[1] "Robert Owen", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*
[2] Ibid

Then, Owen opened a Sick Fund and installed a Savings Bank for the workers. Knowing that the wives also worked in the mills, he built communal kitchens and dinning rooms in which the village people could find 'good' and 'well-cooked food'. In 1816, Owen succeeded to reduce the long working hours 'from fourteen (with two hours for meals) to twelve hours a day with one and a quarter hours off for meals'.

Children constituted one of the most important concerns of his reforms. One of the very first decisions he took when he came to New Lanark was to build a school. He believed that learning was decisively vital for changing a child into an active member and worker of the future society. He ended the work of children under ten and diminished the working time of the others to ten hours a day. Teenagers continued to work in his factories but were compelled to go to secondary school for part of the day.

Owen's associates were exclusively concerned with making profits and showed their disappointment and rejection of his reforms. When Owen realised that he was unable to convince them of the importance of his plans he borrowed money from a local banker called Archibald Campbell and bought his partners' share of the New Lanark business. When his ideas spread later, he was able to engage new business partners who were of the same opinion about his social reforms. Gradually, Owen's reforms started to be appreciated by both the workers and the employers at New Lanark and the fame of the cooperative village attracted, in the period 1813-1830, about 2,000 visitors a year including chiefly 'businessmen, factory owners, and those who would be philanthropists'[1]. Around 1816, Owen realised that his reforms needed to be accessible to both the people and the ruling class in Britain and he started an ambitious campaign of propaganda highly important for the success of his reforms.

1.2. The British Society and Owen's Reforms:

In 1815, Owen sent an exhaustive document concerning his social and professional reforms to the Government. Then, he toured Britain discussing and making speeches about his New Lanark experience. After writing books about his philosophical and ethical assessments including *The Formation of Character* (1813) and *A New View of*

[1] "Robert Owen Atheist, Philanthropist, Labor Reformer", op.cit., in <http://www.atheists.org>

Society (1814)[1], Owen published 'his "abstract principle" of reform in a series of essays'. The writer Joseph McCabe summarised the core of his principles as follows:

> *"To establish a universal, uniform, unsectarian system of schools, with training colleges...for teachers, to establish a department of State which shall collect and publish each quarter the condition of labour, unemployment, and wages in every district, to restrict the hours of adult labour to ten, and forbid the employment of children, to institute public works (making roads, etc.) which shall absorb all who are left unemployed by private enterprise, to revise the Poor Laws drastically, to reform the jails and the administration of justice with the same thoroughness, to reduce the number of licenses and raise the duties on spirits, to suppress the State lotteries and discourage gambling, to reform the Church by abolishing tests and dogmas, to get rid of religious intolerance and war."*[2]

Those were the most important claims on which Owenites based their campaign. By 1825, Owen started to lose interest in his New Lanark Cooperative and went to America because his proposals criticising the Church dissatisfied lots of people in Britain. Once in the New World, he bought a new estate in Indiana for £30,000 and charged his son Robert Dale Owen to be the leader of the new community in America called New Harmony. By 1827, Owen returned to Britain, sold the New Lanark factories and decided to concentrate his efforts now to develop his social reforms inside the kingdom. The Owenite campaign of social reforms intensified when Owen returned to London and around 1830 the cooperative societies numbered thirty in the metropolis and not less than five hundred in the United Kingdom with over twenty thousand members[3]. Parallel to his active role on the ground to organise and guide the different cooperatives, Owen published his own newspaper the *Crisis* through which he continued to propagate his ideas.

By the early 1830's, the economic and social conditions worsened considerably in Britain. The Cooperative Movement moderated its activity as the focus of the working classes now turned to trade unionism. Consequently to a gigantic organisational work,

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[1] "Robert Owen", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*

[2] Joseph McCabe, *Robert Owen, Life-Stories of Famous Men*, London: Watts & Co., 1920, p. 38, in <http://www.atheists.org>

[3] Sidney Pollard, "Nineteen-century Co-opeartion: from Community Building to Shopkeeping", in *Essays on Labour History*, Ed, Asa Briggs and John Saville, London: Macmillan & co Ltd, 1967, p.86, "Robert Owen Atheist, Philanthropist, Labor Reformer", op.cit., in <http://www.atheists.org>

Owen succeeded to join the majority of the unions in the "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland" during the year 1834. The union claimed to comprise half a million members. However, a very restrictive labour legislation, a hostile Government and resisting powerful employers combined to put an end to the activity of the movement within six months after its birth[1].

1.3. Owen and the East Tytherly Experience:

After the crush of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and the frustration resulting from the 'great betrayal' of the Great Reform Act, along with the difficult living and working conditions, the working classes turned again to cooperative activities so as to compensate their failures on the constitutional and political levels. In 1839, Owen tried another communal experiment when he bought a large 533-acre farm called Queenswood at East Tytherly, in Hampshire. The new established community succeeded in its first five years to create a good social atmosphere, employment and education for the poor workers and their families. Yet, it faced, like that of the New Harmony in America, a serious organisational problem. In fact, a dispute between the members of the Queenswood Cooperative put an end to the final communal experiment led by Owen in 1846. Depressed by the successive failures in trade unionism and in the Queenswood Cooperative, Owen continued to spread his 'socialist' cooperative principles by encouraging movements of Factory Reform, the campaigns for adult male suffrage and the formation of flourishing trade unions within England until his death on 17th November 1859[2].

1.4. Owenism and the Working Classes:

Owenism attracted the suffering workers and the paupers since the cooperative community offered them the basic rights of shelter, food and education when the Government with its repressive legislation denied them a decent life especially after the pessimistic impact of the First Reform Act. Politically, Owenism failed to catch the attention of the ruling class and most of the industrialists and businessmen eager to make profits. In practice, the building of cooperative villages faced two important problems: the shortage of funds necessary for the construction of the basic

[1] See above, pp.44-45
[2] "Robert Owen", op.cit., in *Encyclopaedia of British History*

infrastructures, and the lack of leaders in the rank of Robert Owen to manage the complex affairs of the cooperatives.

Nonetheless, Owenism succeeded to give hope to the working and poor classes. The failure of some of the cooperative communities like that of Queenswood was a failure in organisation and leadership rather than in principle. The difficulties lay in the plans rather than in ideology[1]. According to the labour historian Sidney Pollard, many encouraging aspects can be attributed to Owenism:

> *"At the lowest, it (Owenism) offers immediate advantages in employment, saving and pure goods for sale…next, it offers the social and educational values of collaborating with others on a local basis; further, it was expected to put all the paupers to useful work, and increase national output; at a higher level still, it proposed to offer the attractions of communal, harmonious relationships in life and work; it offered justice in the distribution of wealth; it promised a rational, happy, and moral social commonwealth."*[2]

The basic principles of Owenism "the right of every man to happiness…the right to work, to knowledge, to social equality, the longing for a social system that would encourage man to help man instead of competing against them" fascinated the overwhelming majority of the workers and artisans in Britain in the sinister years of the Industrial Revolution. Also, the movement generated a huge amount of enthusiasm among the workers especially in the eventful period of 1839-42 during which the Chartist and Anti-Corn Law disturbances reached their climax[3]. Furthermore, Owenite activities strengthened the fact that the working classes were in the core of the 'English Question' during the period of 1825-50, which motivated a series of economic and social reforms over much of the nineteenth century. Another driving force of the social actions during the same period was the contested legislation called the Poor Laws.

[1] Peter N. Herndon, "Utopian Communities, 1800-1889", in Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute website: <http://www.yale.edu>
[2] Sidney Pollard, "Nineteen-century Co-operation: from Community Building to Shopkeeping", op.cit., pp.88-9
[3] Ibid., p.90

2. The Anti-Poor Law Movement:

From its introduction in the fourteenth century, up to the installation of the National Health Service in 1948, the issue of the English Poor Laws constituted one of the most important motivating forces of both social policy and social agitation in the country. The phrase 'Poor Law' is used to describe the system of Poor Relief in Britain. In an underdeveloped country with 'slow-growing economy', creating 'underemployment, unemployment and vagrancy' the British Government had developed a system of social financial assistance "caring both for those who, through age or sickness, were indigent, and for those who were overburdened with children or found work difficult to get, with relief administered on the basis of settlement". Frequently calculated on the basis of the price of bread and the size of families, the poor financial support 'was given as a supplement of wages'[1]. The history of the English Poor Laws is conventionally divided into the Old Poor Laws highlighted with the 1601 Act for the Relief of the Poor, and the New Poor Law crystallised in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act[2].

During the Middle Ages, it was taken for granted that 'poverty was inevitable' and that the poor were the victims of society. This vision originated in the biblical texts[3]. Consequently, securing relief to the poor was a Christian duty for both the Government and the upper classes. However, after the dissolution of the monasteries in the middle of the sixteenth century, which coincided with a gradual demographic growth, the problem of the poor started to cause serious problems to the British society. One of the proposed solutions was a kind of a compulsory emigration of the poor to the overseas colonies. In 1572, legislation stated that 'it was a criminal offence to be a vagabond and compulsory Poor Rates were introduced in the parishes'. The parish was 'the unit of pastoral care in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches and the Church of Scotland', whose role was to house, feed and distribute Poor Rates to the population in need[4]. In 1597, the Act for the Relief of the Poor set an annually appointed 'Overseer of the Poor' for every parish whose duty 'was to find work for the unemployed and to set up parish-houses for those incapable of supporting themselves'. The 1601 Poor Law, which closed the old phase of the history of this legislation, is often pointed out as the

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., pp.542-3
[2] Ibid., p.542, Peter Higginbotham, "Poor Laws", in <http://www.users.ox.ac.uk>
[3] "Poor Laws", op.cit., in <http://www.users.ox.ac.uk>
[4] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.517

basis of the Old Poor Laws. This Act stated that "each parish was obliged to relieve the aged and the helpless, to bring up unprotected children in habits of industry, and to provide work for those capable of it but who were lacking their usual trade"[1]. It aimed to put the parish as the sole administrative unit responsible for the Poor Relief. The Act secured the relief of the 'impotent' poor and aimed to organise the setting of work and the apprenticeship of children[2].

2.1. The New Poor Law: The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834):

In the stormy years of the 1830's, Parliament worked on a legislation that could reform the Old Poor Laws based on the 1601 Poor Law, which had not been changed for more than two centuries. The Monarch charged a team of three experts including George Nicholls, John Shaw-Lefevre and Thomas Frankland Lewis with Edwin Chadwick as their Secretary in the Royal Commission on the Poor Law to investigate on the running of the Old Poor Laws. According to their enquiries, the Old Poor Laws were badly organised and cost heavy financial burden to the National Treasury. Accordingly, to reduce public expenditure that went to the needy subjects, the task of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act was twofold. The first measure was to make the poor 'responsible' for their own welfare by introducing the principle of 'less eligibility'. This did not concern the children who were offered education and apprenticeship, but rather the able-bodied poor whose case 'shall not be made really or apparently as eligible as the independent labourer of the lowest class'. This section of the 1834 Act meant that the condition of the pauper should be less inviting than that of the most deprived worker outside the workhouse[3]. The second principle of the New Poor Law was known as the 'workhouse test' that made relief available only in the workhouse. In addition, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act included the separation of married couples inside the workhouses, and the abolition of the 'rate-in-aid', which were the grants that supplemented wages. Administratively, the Act was appreciated in the sense that it would organise the operation of granting Poor Relief. According to Asa Briggs, under the New Poor Law:

[1] Full text of the 1601Act, in <http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/poorlaws/1601intro.html>
[2] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.543
[3] "Poor Law Amendment Act 1834", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

> *"Independent parish control of relief was abolished…and the country was curved up into six hundred new and manageable ad hoc administrative units called 'Unions'. They were to be controlled by locally elected Boards of Guardians under the central supervision of a Board of Commissioners in London with powers of central inspection and audit."*[1]

On the whole, the threat of the 'workhouse test' and the abolition of the outdoor relief included in the New Act were planned to push the paupers and unemployed workers to search for jobs and to assume their social and civil responsibilities vis-à-vis their country.

After the New Poor Act became law on 14th August 1834, the Royal Commission charged the Poor Law Guardians to build new workhouses everywhere in the kingdom. The new workhouses were built in such a way that it would discourage the paupers to join them in quest of Poor Relief. The commission proceeded first by dividing the paupers into seven distinct groups. The inmates' groups comprised "men infirm through age or illness, women infirm through age or illness, able-bodied men over 15 years, able-bodied women over 15 years, boys between 7 and 15, girls between 7 and 15, children under the age of 7"[2]. All the time, the seven groups were to be put separated. Married couples were also separated, 'even the elderly, so that they could not breed'. Except for the division of the seven groups, there were no other divisions. This meant that 'the old, ill, insane, slightly unbalanced and fit' were kept constantly in the same rooms. There was no form of distraction in the workhouses (no newspapers, no books, no toys, and no games). When there was no work, the inmates only sat and did nothing in a very boring atmosphere. With regard to the buildings' architecture, it was bare, with a prison-like-structure and contained almost no furniture. The workhouses were bordered with high walls so that the paupers had no possible view on the exterior world. The workhouse rooms comprised "dormitories, washrooms, workrooms, a 'refractory ward' (solitary confinement), the mortuary, bake-house, receiving wards, dining halls and a chapel"[3]. Inside the rooms, space was so confined that, for instance, thirty-two men were kept in a small twenty-feet long dormitory. Concerning food, the workhouse

[1] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement (1783-1867)*, op.cit., p.241
[2] "Conditions in the Workhouse", in *A web of English History*, <http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/poorlaw/poorlaw.htm>
[3] Ibid

inmates were given only three 'dull, predictable and tasteless' meals of poor nutritional quality the daylong. Work in the new workhouses, was divided between able-bodied men and able-bodied women. For men, it was very hard and boring 'stone-breaking, bone-crushing, sack-making or driving the corn mill'[1]. For women, their occupation consisted of domestic work, which was hard and colossal taking into consideration the size of the miserable workhouses. The harshness of the Act stimulated a fierce campaign against it.

2.2. The Anti-Poor Law Campaign:

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act was the work of the Whig government led by Earl Grey (1764-1845). The New Act replaced completely the Old Poor Laws, though it was presented as an 'amendment' act. It was the wish of the Whigs under the pressure of the landowners in the rural South, where poverty was posing serious social hardships for scores of agricultural labourers. The Poor Law Commissioners decided to implement the New Act in the English North first, which should be unionised. According to their investigation, the regions of the Midlands and the predominantly rural South 'should be left alone' because pauperism there was more present than the 'well-off' industrial North.

During the period of the passing of the New Act (1834-36), the English North witnessed a sustained economic boom, thanks to good harvests and reasonable food prices. Yet, the amelioration in the economic conditions did not represent secure practical repercussions for the whole working-class community because of the instability of the economic system. This instability created a fragile socio-economic situation whereby almost the whole active population were employed in times of booms, but in times of slump, nearly all the working hands fell again into the miseries of unemployment. The application of the Poor Law Amendment Act in such a situation proved very complicated for material reasons. The newly built deterrent workhouses were too small to receive the large number of the unemployed workers wishing to obtain Poor Relief. In addition, the workhouse system in the English North was deficient since the Poor Law Commission was unable to build the required number of workhouses. Hence, outdoor

[1] **"**Conditions in the Workhouse", op.cit., in *A web of English History*

Poor Relief could not be stopped in the northern districts, as wished by the government, and a big part of the families continued to receive Poor Relief in their houses[1].

When the Poor Law Amendment Act was to be implemented in the North, in 1837, the region was struck by a stern economic depression, which made the whole northern industrial districts suffer from large unemployment for many years to come. This situation meant starvation and despair for numbers of the northern working classes. And what was crueller to the unemployed workers was that they had to go into the depressed workhouses so that they could receive Poor Relief. Workers felt then that they were doubly punished: first by the economic slump their region was enduring, and second by the severe requirements of the new system of Poor Relief. Consequently, a fierce campaign against the implementation of the New Poor Law started under the guidance of some working-class Radical leaders especially in the North of England.

The attempt for the implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act increased the fears of 'many local officials, overseers of the poor, members of select vestries, magistrates and ratepayers' who estimated that it would carry disorganisation to the local administrative machinery[2]. They were not convinced of the application of a strict Workhouse System in a region of large-scale economic distress and massive unemployment. They feared also the intrusion of the London Poor Law Commissioners into northern local affairs. The campaign against the execution of the new legislation started effectively in the year 1837 and was concerned with the whole English northern region especially in Lancashire and the West Riding, which already had an efficient machinery of Radical political and social agitation involved in the parliamentary-reform campaign (1830-32) and trade-union activity. The movement against the Workhouse System incorporated many 'skilful leaders and agitators, some from the upper classes' among which were the leading Tory-Radical in the West Riding, Richard Oastler (1789-1861), the Radical MP John Fielden, the Radical, later Chartist, leaders Joseph Rayner Stephens (1805-1879) and Feargus O'Connor (1794-1855)[3].

The most serious riots broke out in Bolton, Bury, Preston, Oldham, Bradford, Todmorden, and Huddersfield. In some cities like Bradford, Government troops had to

[1] "The Anti-Poor Law Movement", in *A web of English History,*
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/poorlaw/poorlaw.htm>
[2] Ibid
[3] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.243

protect Poor Law Guardians most of the time. In Todmorden, the Radical MP John Fielden led an insurrectionary campaign against tax-collection. In the textile districts of Lancashire and the West Riding, the agitators set up local anti-Poor Law committees. The committees' coordinate work was to organise meetings and to collect petitions to be sent to Parliament for the repeal of the contested legislation. In addition to these activities, the anti-Poor Law leaders spread pamphlets and wrote letters to Radical newspapers like the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Sheffield Iris* to influence both the government and the population about the necessity for the repeal of the New Poor Law. The anti-Poor Law partisans concentrated their efforts to obstruct the work of the Poor Law Commissioners. The actions used by the agitators included:

> *"Attempting to prevent the election of Guardians, electing as Guardians, men who opposed the Poor Law Amendment Act, intimidating the new Boards so that they did not elect clerks - without whom no business could be conducted, physical harassment of Poor Law officials, fighting with police and troops who were sent to assist with the implementation of the law."*[1]

The efficient anti-Poor Law campaign led the Poor Law Board in London to stop the implementation of the new legislation in the North. The old system of Poor Relief had never stopped there since it proved its efficacy[2]. Even the most resolute Commissioners realised that outdoor Poor Relief was a financially reasonable way for offering support to the paupers. Due to these reasons, the building of the new contested workhouses was very slow in the North of England and most of the parishes did not obtain the new infrastructures as planned by the Poor Law Commission.

Although the New Poor Law constituted a powerful driving force for the desperate workers and paupers with its inhumane measures, the anti-Poor Law popular struggle 'did not survive long' because of the complexity of the circumstances[3]. In addition to the revulsion of the Workhouse System, the English workers fought in many fronts at once in quest of improving their ruthless conditions. Apart from their activity in the reform movement, the Owenite experience, and the recurrent industrial struggles,

[1] Marjie Bloy, "The anti-Poor Law campaign", in <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/poorlaw/plaatex.html>
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.242
[3] "The Anti-Poor Law Movement", op.cit., in *A web of English History*

thousands of workers adhered, especially after 1839, to the national movement that would 'answer politically' the anti-Poor Law claims, known as the Chartist Movement.

3. Chartism:

Chartism was a working-class protest movement in the late 1830's and the 1840's. It sought to make an end to the socio-economic hardships endured by the large English working classes, and to secure a political representation to the lower classes after the disillusion of the 1832 Reform Act. The term 'Chartism' derived from the 'People's Charter', a six-point document supported by mass petition, which was presented to the House of Commons thrice between the years 1838 and 1850. Born of want, misery and protest, Chartism was 'an urban and industrial phenomenon' strong in the big manufacturing cities of England particularly. It claimed to bring about different groups of workers from various regions with diverse grievances into a national movement for the first time in English history. The Chartist Movement started off out of a rich set of varied reasons and took colourful manifestations on the ground in the very eventful period 1838-50.

Chartism can be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century when the English labourers started to try to pressurise the Government to obtain parliamentary reform and 'a widening of the franchise' notably. Inspired by the long-established Radical tradition among the middle and the working classes, this protest movement did not emerge until the close of the stormy 1830's. Chartism came after the passing of the Reform Act in 1832, the experience of the Cooperative Movement led by the philanthropic leader Robert Owen, and the violent protest movement against the 1834 Poor Law. Chartism was born under the circumstances of 'a bitter disappointment of the working classes with the results of reform in 1832'. In the period between 1832 and the birth of the Chartist Movement, the reform movement saw the passing of the Reform Act as a big treachery especially on the part of the middle classes. According to the historian J.T.Ward:

> *"Parliamentary reform had not brought the benefits long expected by radicals. Elections remained expensive, sometimes corrupt, often violent and still subject to considerable 'influence' by patrons; for many years guidebooks were to list the power of old landed families and some industrial dynasties, particularly over small boroughs. The*

> *Commons remained the finest club in Europe, dominated by members of the great families. Those members who chose to call themselves radicals were a mixed bunch, with little cohesion or even interest in working together…And if the Commons was disappointing to radical reformers the Lords seemed worse; warned but unreformed, it renewed its opposition to assorted reforms."*[1]

Within this atmosphere, the Radical Movement started off a new political experience based on class antagonism, in respect of the upper and even the middle classes. It wanted to express its consternation over the isolation of the working classes, 'the apparent breakdown of social order and risk of revolution, and the deficiencies of the upper classes'[2]. The next practical step of the reform movement was the formation of a political association in London.

3.1. The London Working Men's Association and the People's Charter:

Among the large English working classes emerged a group of well-aware cultivated artisans who wanted to reconstruct the reform movement and take the lead of the social and political protest within England in the mid 1830's. This group comprised notably 'the more sophisticated London workers' and the biggest part of 'the skilled artisans in the big cities'. These relatively 'well-off' and skilled workers:

> *"Believed in equal constitutional rights and looked forward rather than backward, pitching their hopes not in a golden age in the past but in the future. Enjoying higher wages than other labour groups and frequently engaging in educational activities, they prided themselves on being 'the intelligent and influential portion of the working classes'. They were prepared to take part in a whole series of working-class organizations with different names and even with different purposes."*[3]

In 1836, attempts were made to form associations in order to 'draw into one band of *unity* the *intelligent* portion of the working classes in town and country'. The chief aim of these societies was to 'seek by every legal means to place all classes of society in

[1] J.T.Ward, *Chartism*, London: B.T.Batsford Ltd, 1973, pp.64-5
[2] Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism*, in <http://www.uoguelph.ca/englit.victorian/html/laissez.html>
[3] Asa Briggs,op.cit., p.248

possession of their equal political and social rights'[1]. In June 1836, the London Working Men's Association (hereafter LWMA) was set up under the leadership of the educated Radical artisans William Lovett (1800-1877), Henry Hetherington (1792-1849) and Francis Place (1771-1854). William Lovett was a Cornish cabinet-maker and a strong believer in Owenite values. He advocated the use of moral and constitutional means of militancy and rejected the recourse to violence to solve social and political conflicts. Francis Place[2] was a master tailor, and a notable Radical MP who had struggled energetically for the repeal of the Combinations Acts[3] and the freedom of the press. Henry Hetherington was a London Radical printer and publisher who devoted much of his energy in the fight for the freedom of the press and the establishment of trade unions. In 1831, he established one of the most popular and contested Radical weekly paper (for the people) entitled the *Poor Man's Guardian*, by which he sought the education of the workers and the defence of the Owenite principles. He continued his militancy through newspaper writing and supported the spread of Chartist ideals when the movement appeared in the late 1830's.

The LWMA included noticeably, in its first years, sophisticated artisans who represented 'the top ranks of compositors, shipwrights, bookbinders and watchmakers…tailors, cabinet-makers, shoemakers and the like'. The poor workers of the region of London did not have marked contact with this political association until the national Chartist agitation in the year 1839. Within the first week of its foundation on 9th June 1836, the LWMA comprised 33 members, 100 a year later, and no less than 280 in 1839. Despite the fact that the association was 'small and select', the members started a serious and detailed work of investigation for the achievement of its aims. Their chief objective being universal suffrage, the most famous report in their research concerned 'the examination of *The Rotten House of Commons*'. The legislative body, their report concluded, "was dominated by the old and new rich, elected by 839,519 of the country's 6,023,752 male adults□indeed, 331 MPs were elected by only 151,492 voters. Working men faced no benefit from the parliamentary clash between

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.74
[2] For F.Place's biography see above, pp.63-64
[3] See above, p.47

landowners and industrialists…"[1]. This was the basic data on which the LWMA founded its reform campaign in the following years.

In the mid 1830's, the working classes were enduring a ghastly experience because of the repression of the government towards their trade-union activities. Concerning the economic conditions, England witnessed a significant amelioration in the period between 1832 and 1835 thanks to successive good harvests, but 1836 represented an end to the four-year healthy economic situation. In 1837 prices rose again and England was in the heart of one of the gloomiest recessions in her nineteenth-century history. During these 'hard times', there was 'a fairly general popular move back to political action' in England[2]. On 28th February 1837, the LWMA held a meeting in the Crown and Anchor, London, to discuss an eventual petition for the promotion of the Radical claims. This meeting was considered, later on by many Chartist leaders, like Lovett for instance, to be the cornerstone of the whole chartist struggle[3]. In March 1838, 'a committee of twelve persons, six Members of Parliament and six Members of the London Working Men's Association' were charged by the London Radicals with the draft of a paper to be the manifesto for the reform battle to come. On 8th May 1838 the 'Radical Document', or the People's Charter, was published comprising the following aims:

> *"Universal suffrage for all men over the age of 21, equal-sized electoral districts, voting by secret ballot, an end to the need for a property qualification for Parliament (so that constituencies could return the man of their choice, rich or poor), pay for MPs, and annual Parliaments."*[4]

Writing the document was a collective work, in which were involved the Radical leaders O'Connell, Lovett, Roebuck, Place, Hindley, Sharman Crawford, J.T.Leader and Colonel Perronet Thompson. According to the historian J.T.Ward, a specialist of Chartism, 'the principal authorship' of the famous document is 'controversial'. The most probable explanation, according to his study, 'is that Lovett and Place both played leading roles in the production of the proposal'. Another polemical issue concerned

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., pp.75-6
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.253
[3] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.78
[4] "Chartism", in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.com>

whether the 'outline' was a purely proletarian (i.e. working-class) product or was also the work of middle-class Radicals. J.T.Ward argues that it 'was undoubtedly the work of men of 'varied' class affiliations' since the authors included Radicals of both middle and working-class tendencies[1].

3.2. The First Wave of Chartism:

The budding start of the LWMA encouraged Thomas Atwood and his Radical companions to reorganise the Birmingham Political Union (BPU)[2]. In 1838, many BPUs revived in the English Midlands and North responding to the economic slump of 1837. By the close of 1838, the BPU was already prepared to join efforts with LWMA to launch a new reform campaign, after that of the 1832. In addition to the Six Points of the People's Charter, the BPU included currency reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws in its claims. By the spring of the year 1838, the LWMA in the greater London region and the BPUs in the English Midlands and the North were working dynamically to intensify the social and political mobilisation around the People's Charter.

During the summer and autumn of 1838, a succession of national meetings was held for the sake of 'electing representatives to a Chartist Convention'. The Chartist meetings consisted of speeches made by Radical leaders to explain the purpose of the People's Charter and to organise the campaign for the National Petition. The Chartist scheme was based on circulating the Petition all over the country and the collect of signatures. Once the job finished, the Petition was to be presented to the House of Commons in 'a giant Convention in London'. So as to prepare the Petition, colossal work of social and political mobilisation was undertaken by different sections of the Chartist Movement up and down the country. Most of the Chartist activities were guided by the LWMA in the English South and the revived BPUs in the Midlands and the North. As early as 1838, there were signs throughout England that the People's Charter was welcomed and adopted by many of the working classes especially in the London region and the industrial North. According to the scholar Asa Briggs:

> *"When the Charter was accepted in the summer of 1838 by a variety of working-men's groups in quite different parts of the country there seemed to be a united sense of purpose too, of one common struggle.*

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.84
[2] For the origins of the BPU see above, pp.88-89

From that time onwards the history of Chartism was inextricably bound up with the national crisis."[1]

Compared to the manufacturing districts of the Midlands and the North, London was an artisan city containing mainly the traditional British trades such as the building trades and the old established craft industries. The LWMA constituted the nucleus of the Chartist Movement in London as well as the whole country. Artisans formed the 'backbone' of Chartism in the Capital region. The London Chartist leaders were advocates of Owenite principles like education, self-help and class cooperation. Due to the relatively comfortable professional conditions and respectable social status of the London artisans, many of the northern Chartists saw the LWMA leaders as unconvincing 'middle-class agitators'[2]. London Chartism developed out of 'the richness of artisan club life' and the protracted experience of the friendly and political societies. During the first wave of Chartism up to the year 1840, the LWMA led Chartist activities in the larger London region with the chief aim being the achievement of the People's Charter. To attain this objective, the association organised small as well as big meetings to explain the People's Charter, to boost the collection of signatures and to promote the National Petition. Another association for reform called the East London Democratic Association (hereafter the ELDA) was formed in January 1837 in opposition to the LWMA. The ELDA was led by the working-class leaders George Julian Harney, Bronterre O'Brien (1805-64), and Feargus O'Connor (1794-1855). Harney was 'increasingly critical of the LWMA' and adopted a more radical programme including the use of physical force for the achievement of the Charter. On 10th August 1837, the ELDA reconverted into the London Democratic Association (LDA), which had branches all over the London region by the close of the 1838. The LDA attracted the poorest workers of London in contrast to the LWMA, which was formed notably by the educated and 'well-off' artisans. The emergence of the LDA brought division to London Chartism since there were divergences regarding the tactics

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.262
[2] "London Chartism", in *A web of English History*,
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/lonchr.htm>

used and differences in the membership of the two associations[1]. Not far from the London area, the region of the Midlands also witnessed an active Chartist campaign.

The early Chartist campaign in the Midlands region was notably dynamic in the county of Leicestershire and the regions of Birmingham and Nottingham. Leicestershire was a notable traditional Radical region in which Luddism had had deep roots since the second decade of the nineteenth century. The force of Chartism came from the economic suffering of the framework knitters, especially in Leicester and Loughborough, crystallised into the competition between the steam machines and the traditional handicrafts. In 1836, a society called the Leicester Radical Working Men's Association was formed to achieve 'universal suffrage, secret ballot and triennial (not annual) parliaments'[2]. When the People's Charter was launched in 1838, the Leicester Political Union was formed to lead the campaign over this 'Radical Document'. In addition to the Six Points, the Leicester Political Union's grievances included demands for the repeal of the Corn Laws and the New Poor Law. Besides Leicestershire, Birmingham constituted an energetic Chartist centre from the early beginning of the emergence of this Movement.

Birmingham is situated in the heart of the Midlands, almost half way between London and the big industrial city Manchester. Compared to the artisan South and the industrial North, Birmingham was a mixture of traditional trades like pottery and modern industries such as 'silver crafting and small arms manufactures'. Subsequently to the economic recession of 1837, Attwood's BPU was restored on 19th June 1837, in which a mass meeting was held in Newhall Hill to celebrate the event. The meeting put forward a reform programme stressing 'universal suffrage (adopted in November 1837), vote by ballot, triennial Parliaments, payments of MPs, and abolition of the property qualification for MPs'. On 5th June 1838, the council of the BPU adopted the People's Charter. On 6th August 1838, 200,000 Chartists attended a reform rally in order to choose their delegates to the Chartist Convention. It was in Birmingham that the First Chartist Convention was organised in February 1839 after the persecution of the Chartist leaders in London. Birmingham Chartism was closer to LWMA's peaceful tendency than to both Feargus O'Connor; and the northern Chartists who were ready to

[1] "London Chartism", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[2] "Chartism in Leicestershire", in *A web of English History,*
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/leicchr.htm>

use ‘physical force’ in case the Charter was defeated in the House of Commons[1]. In addition to Leicester and Birmingham, Nottingham constituted another agitated Chartist city in the Midlands.

Nottingham was one of the cities that suffered seriously from the troubles brought by the Industrial Revolution. Thousands of handloom weavers and stonkingers in Nottingham experienced bitter competition with the steam-engine machines during most of the first half of the nineteenth century. After being a noticeable Luddite centre and an active Radical region in the campaign for the 1832 Reform Act and the repeal of the contested New Poor Law, Nottingham workingmen followed the example of the LWMA and formed local societies under the leadership of Dean Taylor, Henry Vincent, James Sweet and Charles Sulton. These Chartist local organisations multiplied their mobilisation and propaganda for the promotion and achievement of the People’s Charter in the late 1830’s. Up to 1840, Nottingham Chartism organised ‘weekly lectures and reading classes’ as the leaders of the Movement believed in the spread of Owenite values through Chartism. After 1840, Nottingham Chartism was involved in some violent actions including open riots. The use of ‘physical-force’ tactics tarnished the peaceful image of Nottingham Chartism concerned with education and political struggle until the start of the 1840’s. Like the Midlands’ regions during the Radical agitations and the reform campaigns of nineteenth-century England, the industrial North played a vital role in the Chartist Movement.

Most of the reform societies, active in the 1832 Reform-Act agitation, revived in the North during the economic slump of 1837. After the birth of the People’s Charter in 1838, most of the northern local Radical organisations played a significant role in the campaign against the deterrent workhouses and unsurprisingly adhered to the Chartist Movement’s struggle. Examples of Chartism concerned with the northern Radical agitated industrial cities are Sheffield, Leeds, and Manchester.

Sheffield was one of the towns that witnessed steady industrial development during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution. This city relied notably on ‘tool and cutlery industries’, in which thousands of workers suffered in the ‘dark satanic mills’ from the harsh discipline of the Factory System. Stimulated by wage decreases and soaring

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., pp.79-80

prices, workers formed the Sheffield Working Men's Association (SWMA) on 14th October 1837. The Association's membership increased gradually through 1838. In September 1838, the SWMA organised a mass meeting attended by over 20,000 Chartists in Paradise Square, Sheffield. The Radical leaders Ebenezer Elliot, Michael Beal, Isaac Ironside and William Gill led the SWMA. Up to the close of 1839, Sheffield Chartism acted through moral- (rather than physical) force tactics. However, by 1840, the Movement adopted violent methods of militancy and its leadership fell into the hands of James Wolstenholme, a physical-force Chartist. After a meeting held on 12th August 1839, open violent clash broke out between the Chartists and the troops, in which the Town Hall was attacked and 70 men were arrested. After this incident, the Sheffield Chartist Movement went into secrecy, and continued to threaten the local authorities through the use of violence[1].

The second important Chartist centre in Yorkshire, after that of Sheffield, was the city of Leeds. Leeds was similar to Birmingham in the sense that it included both traditional domestic manufactures and modern industries, in which steam machines were used to produce woollen cloth for instance. When the Charter was darfted in 1838, Leeds' Chartism showed two facets: Middle-class Radical leaders, like Hobson and Bray, advocating the use of moral-force tactics like meetings; discussion groups and educational tools to propagate the Charter's principles dominated one facet, Rider and White represented the second facet of Chartism which did not reject the use of violence to achieve the Six Points (of the People's Charter). The Leeds Working Men's Association (LWMA) was formed in September 1837 on Woodhouse Moor, Leeds so that the city would be prepared to launch a parliamentary-reform campaign after the frustration of the 1832 Reform Act. In the late 1837, the LWMA organised 'lectures, addresses and occasional protest meetings' but the physical-force Chartists soon took the control of the Movement in the city. In June 1838, the LWMA collapsed and was replaced by the Great Northern Union (GNU) under the leadership of 'O'Connor, White, Rider, and Collins from Birmingham'. By this stage, Leeds' Chartism took definitively a physical-force tendency. On 15th October 1838, a big meeting was organised on Hartshead Moor, Leeds, in which thousands of Chartists came from Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax to elect the West Riding delegates to the National

[1] "South Yorkshire Chartism", in *A web of English History*,
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/sychr.htm>

Convention. The physical-force Radical leaders O'Connor, Rider and Pitkeithly were chosen to represent the West Riding in the National Convention. During much of the period 1838-39, Leeds' chartists were involved in underground meetings and violent schemes. Leeds was of national significance to Chartism since the mouthpiece of the Movement, a newspaper entitled the *Northern Star,* moved from Barnsley to it in 1837. The proprietor of the *Northern Star* was the Radical Irish leader Feargus O'Connor, a strong believer in physical-force tactics[1].

Chartism in Lancashire was active in Manchester notably. This latter was the centre of the cotton industry in Britain. It was a modern cotton factory town thanks to the technical developments brought by the Industrial Revolution. By the mid 1830's, about three quarters of Lancashire's population were engaged in 'production or sale of cotton textiles'. During much of the first half of the nineteenth century, Manchester was one of the most agitated working-class centres in England. As early as 1790's, Manchester already had its own Corresponding Society and a Radical paper, the *Manchester Herald,* defending the interests of the working classes. The city was also a stronghold of parliamentary-reform activity. It was there that Peterloo Massacre[2] took place in 1819; a bloody event shat shocked the whole nation. During the 1832 Reform-Act agitation, Manchester, with its vigorous Radical working classes, played a significant role for the passing of the Act. After the poor results of the Great Reform Act, the working classes launched a vigorous campaign against the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. In addition to their roles in the political and social agitations, Manchester workers were active in the trade-unions struggle. When the People's Charter appeared in 1838, Manchester developed its support out of its different active Radical groups. During the same year, two 'Chartist bodies' were born, the Manchester Political Union (MPU) and the Manchester Universal Suffrage Association (MUSA). On 24th September 1838, a giant meeting was held on Kersal Moor near Manchester. Over 50,000 Chartists from the Lancashire region attended the rally as well as delegates from all the Chartist districts 'including London Working Men's Association, Birmingham, Newcastle and Leeds'. The Radical MP John Fielden presided over the meeting and the main speakers were Joseph Rayner Stephens (1805-1879) and Feargus O'Connor[3]. The meeting,

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.116
[2] See above, p.82
[3] "Manchester Chartism", in *A web of English history,*
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/manchar.htm>

which demonstrated the strength of Manchester Chartism, elected delegates for the Chartist National Convention and secured thousands of signatures for the National Petition. Through the period 1838-9, Manchester Chartists organised meetings for the support of the Charter. Some rallies were held secretly on nights and the use of physical-force tactics prevailed within the Movement. During the summer of 1839, some Chartist leaders were arrested. Already in May, a meeting between the delegates of the North of England was held to speak about the 'Ulterior Measures' the Movement would take in case the Charter was defeated. The use of violence was predominant in the delegates' proposals[1].

3.2.1. The Chartist National Convention:

After the People's Charter became known in the country through the campaign of 1838, the Chartist leaders planned to hold the Chartist National Convention on 4th February 1839. By this time, different unions for the support and achievement of the Charter existed up and down England. When the Convention was held in London, fifty-four elected delegates took part in the meeting. The Convention's membership was representative of the geographical expansion of Chartism, not only in England but also in Britain as a whole. According to J.T.Ward:

> *"London was well represented by Cardo, seven members of the LWMA and two LDA men elected elsewhere…The BPU had five members, Scotland eight, Wales two and the industrial areas of England most of the rest. The members were a mixed bag-prosperous Midlands businessmen, medical practitioners, proletarian dissenting preachers, an Anglican priest, ranting demagogues, publicans, a lawyer, booksellers and a scattering of working folk from London and the North."*[2]

The aim of the Convention was to evaluate the dimension of the Chartist Movement, to prepare the National Petition, to see how to present it to Parliament and to discuss further plans in case 'the Document' failed in the Commons. According to Asa Briggs:

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[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., pp.99-100
[2] Ibid., p.113

> *"Neither the idea of a Petition nor a Convention was new. What was new was the emphasis on the fact that this would be the last petition. No others would be necessary. As for the Convention, it was to be a People's Parliament to be convened to coincide with the opening of the Westminister Parliament in February 1839."*[1]

During the discussions, many divergences became visible among the delegates. The divergences concerned the measures the Chartist Movement would adopt if the Document failed. The LWMA and middle-class Chartists wanted the Movement to continue its peaceful and 'moral-force' methods. The northern delegates led by Feargus O'Connor supported overtly 'physical-force' schemes.

3.2.2. The Birmingham Convention and 'Ulterior Measures':

During the London Convention some delegates remarked that there 'was little hope of progress' in the Capital. After a proposition of O'Connor, the Convention moved to Birmingham on 13th May 1839. During the meeting the thirty-five present delegates discussed 'ulterior measures' to be taken as they considered that the Charter was likely to be rejected by the Commons. Among the 'measures' proposed there were "a 'national holiday' or 'sacred month', that is to say a general strike; withdrawal of money from banks; non-payment of taxes; 'exclusive dealing' only with shopkeepers sympathetic to the cause; and, not least, the use of physical force"[2].

3.2.3. The First Petition in the House of Commons:

The government believed that the dangers of the 'ulterior measures' could threaten the security of the country. Subsequently, it put pressure on the Chartists. The moderate Birmingham Chartists and most of the middle-class Radicals withdrew from the Movement after the Birmingham Convention. It was within this atmosphere of big tension that the middle-class Radical MPs Attwood and Fielden introduced the Charter to the House of Commons on 14th June 1839. The National Petition included about

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.265
[2] Ibid

1,280,000 signatures. On 13th July 1839, the People's Charter was rejected by 235 votes to 46[1].

When the first National Petition was rejected, Lord Melbourne's government felt menaced by the violent tone of the Chartists as news of risings and 'physical-force' actions started to circulate in the country. The Home Secretary Russell, who was a strong believer in the Whigs' political vision, accepted to let room of 'liberty' to the Chartists. He did not want to adopt a repressive policy against Chartism 'until it was necessary'. However, threatening reports of the magistrates about the Chartists' activities led the government to opt for a more rigid behaviour towards Chartists. According to the scholar J.T.Ward:

> *"Excited, worried, frightened and sometimes cowardly magistrates deluged the Home Office with reports of revolutionary plots, drilling, arming, striking, arson and destruction of property. Chartists who simply hoped for a bloody revolution and the larger number who hoped that physical force threats would supplement moral force policies made little attempt to hide their preparations, in order to impress local and national authorities."*[2]

The Newport Rising[3] that occurred in Wales came to aggravate the situation in a period when the government started to consider the Chartist threats seriously. The rising took place on 4th November 1839 in Wales, where the social and economic conditions especially in the 'mining valleys' were 'the worst in Britain'. The incident happened when about five thousand men led by the Chartist leaders William Jones, John Frost, and Zephaniah Williams marched to the city of Newport, Monmouthshire to liberate some imprisoned local Chartists. Some of the Chartist miners were armed. Thanks to the use of spies, the government knew about the march and the troops waited the Chartists at the Westgate Hotel. When the marchers came close to the Hotel, the troops opened fire killing twenty-four Chartists and injuring hundreds of them. Of the 125 arrested Chartists, twenty-one were tried and convicted of high treason including the

[1] Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.132
[2] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.120
[3] Ibid., p.134

leaders Jones, Frost and Zephaniah. Condemned first to death, their sentence was converted later on to transportation for life[1].

The Newport tragedy showed the cruelty of the government towards the Chartist Movement and pushed the Chartist leaders to think about plans for 'a national rising'. Around the close of 1839, the government was alerted that "a wide plan was concocted to avenge the Newport disaster, and information flooded into the Home Office of arming and drilling in London, Bradford, Wales, Manchester, Birmingham, Loughborough, Halifax, Newcastle, Dewsbury and elsewhere"[2]. The government then reinforced its repressive campaign against the Movement 'to maintain order'. As early as 'the winter of 1840, at least five hundred Chartist leaders were in jail'[3]. After the rejection of the National Petition in the Commons, the attempt of the 'national rising' came to put an end to the first phase of Chartism. For J.T.Ward, the first Chartist wave was a failure. He concludes that by the beginning of 1840 'almost everywhere, Chartism was in ruins, with its campaigning reduced to unsuccessful petitions for its gaoled leaders'[4].

3.3. The Second Phase: O'Connorite Vs. 'The New Move' Chartism:

After the blows of the first months of 1840, there was an enthusiastic attempt to reorganise the Chartist Movement during the summer of the same year. Kept in jail for eighteenth-month imprisonment, the northern Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor made great efforts through the paper, the *Northern Star* that he edited and directed, to form a national Chartist union. On 20th July 1840, twenty-three delegates gathered in Manchester and founded the National Charter Association (hereafter the NCA) following O'Connor's directions. It was the first time in its short history that the Movement claimed to own a national body[5]. Then, local Chartist clubs and many Working Men's Associations were drawn to the NCA. In February 1841, 80 local branches joined the NCA. By December 1841, there were already 282 local branches in

[1] "The Newport Rising", in *A web of English History*,
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/newport.htm>
[2] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.136
[3] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.266
[4] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.138
[5] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.267

the association with over 13,000 members. By April 1842, the NCA comprised 401 localities with about 50,000 members[1].

Meanwhile, the moderate Chartists of London, led by Lovett, were also trying to form a national body. These Chartists, advocates of education and moral-force tactics, feared the violent 'O'Connorite' tendency that the northern Radicals gave to Chartism. Therefore, they decided to create a union that could rival the NCA. Released from prison in July 1840, Lovett started to organise the National Association for Promoting the Improvement of the People (NAPIP). O'Connor estimated that Lovett and his followers weakened the Movement when they left definitely 'the mainstream of Chartism'. Through much of the period 1840-45, Lovett and the NAPIP had to face 'the heated attacks of the *Star*, to which Lovett's scheme seemed to be a bourgeois conspiracy to divide Chartists'[2]. Despite the efforts of the NAPIP middle-class members adopting the 'New Move' Chartism, the mainstream trend of this reform movement fell into the hands of O'Connor and his physical-force followers.

3.3.1. The Second Chartist Petition:

By the spring of 1842, the Chartist Movement was able to organise a second National Petition under the leadership of O'Connor and the NCA. Despite the threatening tone of its leaders, the NCA succeeded to rebuild a Chartist organisation that could challenge Parliament again. According to the Scholar J.T.Ward:

> *"O'Connor's dynamism gave a new boost to the NCA, already controlled by his fervent apostles. Already encouraged by the nation-wide support for its spring petitions on Chartist prisoners, the Association now started a steady growth. Now began the dual tasks of organising a new Convention and petition and of weeding-out any men of doubtful loyalty to 'the great I AM' (i.e. to O'Connor). Hopes started to rise for success during 1842."*[3]

In April 1842, the Second National Convention of the Chartist delegates met in Birmingham to organise the Second National Petition. This time the Convention was

[1] J.T.Ward,op.cit., p.138, "Chartism: Framework of Events", in *A web of English History*, <http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/eventha.htm>
[2] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.149
[3] Ibid., p.149

better organised and the Petition contained far more signatures than that of 1839. On 2nd May 1842, the Second National Petition containing 3,317,752 signatures was submitted to the House of Commons. However, it was rejected by 287 votes to 59[1].

The rejection of the Second Petition enlarged the gap between the working and the governing classes. Concerning this new refusal, the opinion of the Chartists was well expressed by the *Northern Star* when it described the 1842 events as follows:

> *"Three and half millions have quietly, orderly, soberly, peaceably but firmly asked of their rulers to do justice; and their rulers have turned a deaf ear to that protest. Three and a half millions of people have asked permission to detail their wrongs, and enforce their claims for RIGHT, and the 'House' has resolved they should not be heard! Three and a half millions of the slave-class have holden out the olive branch of peace to the enfranchised and privileged classes and sought for a firm and compact union, on the principle of EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW; and the enfranchised and privileged have refused to enter into a treaty! The same class is to be a slave class still. The mark and brand of inferiority is not to be removed. The assumption of inferiority is still to be maintained. The people are not to be free."*[2]

The second rejection of the Charter coincided with a period of economic slump and provoked a cycle of strikes and violent actions known as the Plug Plots.

3.3.2. The Plug Plots:

Other than the Chartist Movement, the second 'extra-parliamentary pressure group' in England during the 1840's was the Anti-Corn Law League. The middle-class industrialists Richard Cobden (1804-1865) and John Bright (1811-1889) led the League, founded in 1839 in Manchester. The League "attempted to secure the repeal of the duties on imported grain, which were believed to raise the price of food for the workingman and benefit only the landowning classes". The repeal of the Corn Laws would benefit both the working and the middle classes by "securing the prosperity of industry and guaranteeing the livelihood of the poor"[3]. The working classes were hardly convinced of this 'logic' and during much of its existence, the Chartist Movement entertained troubled relationship with the Anti-Corn Law League. The Chartists

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.267
[2] "Chartism", op.cit., in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*
[3] "Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, UK, 1999, CD-ROM edition

believed that their struggle was different from that of their employers, who used 'every device' to manipulate the working classes and used their 'menacing' mobilisation to achieve the repeal of the Corn Laws.

One of the actions the Anti-Corn employers used was to start a series of wage cuts in the beginning of the most difficult decade, the 1840's, called the 'Hungry Forties'. Economic and social reports of the period indicate that:

> *"In 1841 the recession moved into depression again, and there was no gloomier year in the nineteenth century than 1842. Prolonged business difficulties and four years of harvest dearth made England unhappy and afraid, a country of conflict and despair. Bread was dear, and flesh and blood were cheap. Movements of protest and revolt swept the country."*[1]

Widespread unemployment and wage reductions pushed the desperate workers, Chartists for the most part, to start a wave of general strikes especially in the northern counties of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire. The strikes were called the Plug Plots[2] because Chartist workers 'drew the plugs so as to stop the work at the mills'. They organised meetings and decided 'that all labour should cease until the People's Charter became the law of the land'[3]. By this declaration, they made a direct link between their economic grievances and the Charter. By 11th August 1842, work in 100 cotton factories in Lancashire alone almost completely ceased and over 50,000 workers became unemployed[4].

The strike wave weakened by late August and by late September the Plug Plots were completely over[5]. A variety of reasons are attributed to the failure of the strikes. Workers returned to work because of hunger and misery. Furthermore, Chartist leaders like O'Connor in the *Northern Star* and the trade-union managers urged the strikers to go back to work because they estimated that the industrial conflict was beneficial to the Anti-Corn Leaguers but not to the workers. In addition, the employers withdrew the

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.255
[2] "Plug Riots", in *Encyclopaedia of British History*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk /Plug Riots.htm>
[3] "The Plug Plots of 1842", in *A web of English History*,
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/plugplot.htm>
[4] "Chartism: Framework of Events", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[5] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.164.

wage reductions since the strikes caused them colossal financial losses[1]. The end of the 1842 strike wave announced the third phase of Chartism characterised by a decrease in political mobilisation and 'new directions' concerned with social schemes.

3.4. The Third Phase of Chartism:

In addition to the failure of the second Chartist Petition, the Movement faced a number of problems during the remaining years of the 'Hungry Forties'. One of the problems that weakened the Movement was an internal one linked with leadership. The division among the Radical group continued between the intellectual moral-force southern Chartists led by Lovett and Place and the physical-force northern Chartists led by the vigorous O'Connor. The London moderate leaders, who initiated the writing of the People's Charter, considered, after the disillusionment of the 1842 rejection, that the Movement took dangerous insurrectionary directions. They thought that the violent tendency of Chartism gave the Government the opportunity to oppress the Movement and to arrest its leaders. Therefore, they decided to cease their activities and denounced the 'calamitous' leadership of O'Connor. Chartism at this stage lost credibility because of the withdrawal of its moderate leaders. Besides this internal division, other external problems weakened Chartism in the period between 1842 and 1848.

The economic situation started to improve after the depression of 1842 thanks to the introduction of railway in the English Midlands and North. The expansion of the railway network was of vital importance for the country in general and for the working classes in particular. The economic accounts of the period suggest that:

> *"The boom of the mid 1840s was based largely on the rapid expansion of railways, although an improvement in export trade in 1842 and 1843 did something to establish it… Railway building, often involving difficult feats of engineering, left its mark not only in the landscape but on the whole of the economy: in addition to providing direct employment for thousands of people, it stimulated demand for the products of other industries, particularly coal, iron, and engineering."*[2]

[1] "Chartism: Framework of Events", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.255

The economic improvement generated some noticeable amelioration in the social conditions of workers. Hence, ‘ the cry of the millions’ for the achievement of the Six Points calmed down during the Railway Age. In addition, the repeal of the Corn Laws in June 1846 reduced the price of wheat at home. This reduction decreased, in its turn, the price of bread for millions of the suffering workers. Chartist mobilisation of the ‘full-stomach’ men proved difficult for the leaders of this Movement.

In a context of economic amelioration, the government led from June 1846 by Lord John Russell, the politician who sympathised with the Chartists, introduced some social reforms directed to appease tension especially in the industrial North. The 1847 Factory Act reduced the working time to ten hours a day for all workers. This Act was the fruit of the long struggle of the working-class Factory Movement during the 1840s known as the Ten Hour Movement and led by the middle-class Radical MP John Fielden. This series of economic and social improvements provoked the decline of the Chartist activities through the mid 1840s. In addition, the failure of the Second National Petition in 1842 led the Chartist national leader Feargus O’Connor to initiate a social scheme directed to the town workers known as the Land Plan.

3.4.1. The Land Plan:

In parallel to securing the Six Points of the Charter, O’Connor had ideas for eliminating the workers’ misery. As a working-class leader, he hated the horrors and injustice of the industrial society. O’Connor was a son of a farming Irish family and ‘was inclined towards the politics of agrarian nostalgia’. Like most of the prophets of ‘catastrophe’, O’Connor believed that the Industrial Revolution had taken the folk away from their roots. Concerning the factory unemployed workers, he remarked that they could work in the large uncultivated land. The solution was simple: to put the unemployed workers ‘together’ with the unfarmed land. A ‘back to the land’ scheme was proposed as an alternative to the failure of the Charter’s Petitions in Parliament. In economic and social terms:

> *“To Feargus, a return to the land would increase agricultural productivity and extend worker’s personal independence. But, perhaps above all, it would counter the dominance of the machine. The reclamation of 15,000,000 waste acres would be both profitable and socially effective…O’Connor’s argument was that agricultural settlement would benefit both the settlers and the remaining industrial*

workers, whose conditions would inevitably improve with the removal of 'surplus' labour. As a result, machinery would become 'man's holiday instead of man's curse'."[1]

O'Connor evoked the land-reform scheme during the Chartist Conventions in Birmingham (1844) and Manchester (1845). The Land Plan was officially launched on 26th April 1845 when O'Connor, backed with the Chartist delegates, formed the Chartist Land Co-operative. In October 1846, it was changed into the Chartist Co-operative Land Company and a National Land and Labour Bank was settled. Between 1845 and 1847 'the scheme had had five names and four sets of rules' to cope with the existing legislation, but it was always considered illegal by the government[2].

The scheme suggested the collect of funds through shares bought by workers. The funds would allow the Land Company to buy the required land for settling families as permanent smallholders. For a four-acre holding, the sum was £30, about £22 for a three-acre holding, and £15 for a two-acre estate. Once the estate bought, "it was divided into holdings in proportion to the paid-up membership of each group, then names were pulled out of a hat to see who got the tenancy"[3]. The shares represented high charges for the idle workers and the allocation of the holdings was considered unfair. O'Connor contributed with big sums of his own money to buy land and cover the financial burdens of the scheme[4]. Between March 1846 and December 1847 three great estates were purchased: the Herringsgate estate (near Watford) called O'Connorville later on, the Lowbands estate in Gloucestershire and the Snig's End and Minster Lovell estates later called Charterville. However, because of the shortage of funds and the illegality of the Land Company, only 250 subscribers were settled out of 70,000 candidates in a period of nearly three years. It was a very low rate of 0.4%[5]. Unaccustomed with the rural weather and conditions, many smallholders were forced to return to towns or to go to the appalling workhouses[6]. The Land Plan 'ultimately failed' as it crashed in 1848 because of the governmental insistence towards its 'illegality' and

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.170
[2] "The Land Plan", in *A web of English History*, <http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/landplan.htm>
[3] "The Land Plan", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[4] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.193
[5] "The Land Plan", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[6] For conditions in the workhouses see above, pp.106-108

financial and practical difficulties on the ground. By 1851,'only 46 of the 250 settled families remained in their cottages'[1].

In spite of its practical failure, O'Connor's Land Plan dominated Chartism in the period between 1845 and 1847[2]. It created a great deal of enthusiasm among the distressed unemployed workers especially in the northern manufacturing towns[3]. Many reasons have been suggested to explain its collapse. It is noteworthy to state that the Land Plan had 'nothing to do' with Chartism and that it was a 'side issue' to it. The People's Charter embodied purely political claims, whereas the Land Plan was a wholly economic scheme. As an economic proposal, it was doomed to failure since it represented 'an agrarian answer' to a complex industrial problem. In addition, its implementation coincided with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Agricultural produce needed protection under the Land Plan. However, the repeal of the Corn Laws meant a 'free-trade' economic system and brought harsh competition between imported and local produce. At this stage, the declining English agricultural production could not resist against the imported food produce. Furthermore, the initiative to transform desperate unemployed townsfolk into successful permanent smallholders proved to be unrealistic. The industrial operatives were unqualified for agricultural labour. In addition, the Land Plan was put into practice in a period when conditions started to improve economically and Chartism faced a manifest lack of political mobilisation. During the same period, O'Connor was more concerned with internal divisions within the Movement and started to suffer from health problems. As a Chartist national leader, he could not really fight the battles of the Charter and the Land Plan at once[4]. With the disintegration of the land scheme in 1848, the Chartists were preparing themselves now to fight the last parliamentary battle for the accomplishment of the People's Charter.

3.4.2. The Third Chartist Petition:

About the close of the year 1847, England was experiencing again a period of economic depression and industrial slump. As the Land Plan was proving many weaknesses, there was a growing Chartist revival in the whole country, especially in the depressed

[1] "The Land Plan", op.cit., in *A web of English History*
[2] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.268
[3] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.181
[4] "The Land Plan", op.cit., in *A web of English History*

English Midlands and the agitated industrial North. The hope of the working classes was put, once more, on the People's Charter as a last resort for the elimination of their chronic social ills. During 1847, a year of a bitter economic recession, another happening outside the British Isles boosted Radical activities in England. It was the French Popular Revolution in February raised against the King Louis Philippe (1774-1850). A month later, in March 1847, this event was producing its 'natural effect' on the Chartist Movement. Riots broke in London, Manchester and most of the Midlands and Northern Chartist districts whereby "town after town held great rallies under the *tricoleur*, to hail the French and the Charter. In the last great surge of Chartist energy, heady oratory was general"[1]. In the same period, the third National Petition was progressing through the Chartist rallies to be presented to Parliament in April 1848.

On 4th April 1848, the Chartist National Convention agreed to organise 'a peaceful rally' at Kennington Common, London on 10th April. A monster march would follow the rally to present the National Petition to Parliament. If Parliament rejected the Petition again, the Convention would elect a National Assembly (of Chartist delegates) that would settle in the metropolis 'until the Charter became law'. Another measure taken by the delegates in case the Petition failed was that "the Convention would memorialise the Queen (Victoria) 'to dissolve the present Parliament and call to her council such ministers only as will make the People's Charter a cabinet measure'"[2]. Alarmed at the Chartists' plan, the government started to take precautions to preserve peace and protect properties.

On 6th April, the House of Commons declared that the Chartist procession would be banned because it represented an imminent danger for the national security. Russell's government took the menace seriously and started a series of preventive measures. The police made the Convention know that the Kennington Common was prohibited because it was illegal under law. London prepared its 'show of force' for the occasion: 150,000 special constables were to be put on the streets, and 8,000 soldiers would hang around in 'a stand-by' position. The Army would intervene only if the marchers crossed

[1] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.200
[2] Ibid., p.204

the Thames or attacked the constables[1]. Furthermore, 'the London's male population of all classes' was to join efforts with the authorities for the defence of their city[2].

On 10th April, 'special trains' brought thousands of Chartists to take part in the procession. The meeting took place at Kennington Common despite the prohibition of the government. The attendance varies significantly according to different sources. O'Connor claimed that there were 300,000 Chartists. The authorities estimated that there were only 15,000. Other 'independent' sources suggested that there were 50,000 demonstrators[3]. The 'orderly and peaceful' attendees listened to the speech of the enthusiastic Chartist orator O'Connor. The procession did not take place because it rained heavily that morning on London and O'Connor agreed 'to call off' the initiative. The Petition was carried to the House of Commons in three cabs. The government decided then to form a Select Committee to investigate the Petition. O'Connor claimed that it included 5,706,000 signatures. The Committee declared that there were only 1,957,496 signatures[4], the others being forgeries[5]. Parliament rejected the Chartist Petition without vote because it was a falsified document.

The news of the third rejection of the Charter generated a great deal of social distress in England. Serious riots broke in the summer of 1848 in London and in many towns in the Midlands and the North especially in Manchester and Bradford. The government took firm decisions to ban rallies and demonstrations in the Chartist areas. Most of the delegates retreated from the Convention as 'it became increasingly unrealistic, debating and passing resolutions which were almost meaningless'[6]. From the time of the third rejection onwards, Chartism lost most of its energy under serious organisational problems and increased governmental attacks[7]. Despite some further attempts to held National Conventions, the Chartist Movement was never able to have the same influence it had, especially in the early 1840s, on the national politics. In fact, the third rejection of the People's Charter in 1848 constituted the effective end of Chartism[8].

[1] "Chartism", op.cit.,in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*
[2] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.204
[3] "Chartism", op.cit., in *Encyclopedia Wikipedia*
[4] Ibid, Juliet Gardner, Ed, op.cit., p.132
[5] A forgery is 'for example a document, piece of paper, money…etc that has been copied in order to deceive people'. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* op.cit., p.504
[6] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.209
[7] Ibid., pp.215-221
[8] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.268

3.5. The Debate over Chartism:

Debating Chartism constitutes a rich topic of labour history. The issue over this working-class movement concerns first the reasons behind the emergence of this protest movement. Much has been said about the true causes of Chartism. Economic reasons are often evoked as the driving force of Chartism. The movement is also believed to emerge out of political grounds. Usually, the causes of the Chartist Movement are referred to as being partly economic and partly political. The second axe of the examination of Chartism is concerned with the 'consequences' of this Movement. The assessment is concerned here with the practical achievements of Chartism as well as its 'significance' and implications in the 'making' of the English working class.

3.5.1. The Nature of Chartism:

Roughly speaking, the rise of Chartism is explained with the focus put on social and economic factors. This explanation suggests that Chartism was 'a reflexive economic movement' and a direct response to the harsh working and living conditions of the 1830s and 1840s[1]. Very often, the words of the Chartist leader Joseph Rayner Stephens are quoted to sustain an economic analysis of Chartism. He declared on 24th September 1838 in the Kersal Moor meeting near Manchester that 'this question… was a knife and fork question after all; this question was a bread and cheese question'[2]. The Chartist actions sharpened in the late 1830s and early 1840s reacting to soaring food prices, subsequent economic depressions and the legislation concerned with the New Poor Law[3]. Also, what strengthens the economic interpretation of the Movement is that the three National Chartist Petitions were presented to Parliament in periods of sharp economic depressions; 1838-9, 1841-2 and 1848. The wave of general strike in the northern manufacturing districts was a direct answer to the second rejection of the People's Charter in the Commons. Thus, Chartism can be highly explained in economic terms. However, the problem with this explanation is that the Six Points of the Charter were all political and not economic[4]. Along with the economic reasons that provoked the most intense activities of the Movement, a political motivation was behind the Chartists.

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., *the Age of Improvement (1783-1867),* p.264
[2] J.T.Ward, op.cit., p.100
[3] For the Anti-Poor Law Movement see above, pp.105-111
[4] For the points of the People's Charter see above, p.114

The political reasons that pushed the working classes to adopt the People's Charter as their central concern were varied. 'Institutional' representation is the reason that has been mostly evoked to explain the political nature of Chartism. It derived much of its energy from the militant tradition of eighteenth-century Radicalism. One has to bear in mind that five out of the Six Points of the Charter (except payments of MPs) were old claims articulated in the 1832 parliamentary-reform campaign and even before. These demands aimed to secure political representation for all classes in Britain. The working classes believed that only 'a say' in how the country was managed would help them to improve their appalling conditions. The Chartist leaders understood that they had, perhaps, to stick to 'a once-for-all' solution. This solution was a constitutional one crystallised into the People's Charter. It was obvious enough, through the economic claims and struggles of the working classes, that they could not rely only on the piecemeal governmental economic measures for the elimination of their ills. This is why, perhaps, Chartism included a variety of working-class local movements into a national one. It is noteworthy, that Chartism fascinated, from its early days, the artisan workers of London, the newly established manufacturing masses of the Midlands and the North, movements of Factory Reform, the Anti-Poor Law Movement…etc. Another practical reason that encouraged the working classes to continue their political protest was the success of the middle classes to gain parliamentary representation through the 1832 Reform Act[1]. All over the parliamentary-reform agitation of the early 1830s, 'Old Corruption' showed manifest signs of weaknesses. The Government realised that its isolation from the lower classes grew bigger through their resistance to change. This isolation, along with the people's determination, put Britain under the threat of revolution during the 1830s and 1840s. The Great Reform Act constituted the concession that prevented a revolution. Hence, the Radical Movement and the working classes decided to continue the political and 'constitutional' struggle through Chartism, after the failure of the economic protests and strikes, to pressurise the Government for the obtainment of parliamentary representation. In addition, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 demonstrated that the middle classes were not only represented in Parliament, but they were able to defend their rights successfully as well. Chartism was,

[1] "Causes of Chartism", in *A web of English History,*
<http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/chartism/causcha.htm>

may be, a movement that sought economic and social improvement through political and constitutional means.

3.5.2. The Achievements of Chartism:

The discussion over the achievements of Chartist Movement can be considered in two respects. The first level of evaluation concerns the achievements of the Six Points of the People's Charter. Against this short-run objective, the Movement obviously failed as it was repeatedly rejected in its three attempts before Parliament. Many reasons have been evoked to explain this failure. One of the most obvious causes was the division among the Movement. The divergence did not concern the aim of the protest, which was clear for everybody, but concerned the potential means used in the struggle to achieve political representation for the working people. According to the scholar Asa Briggs:

> *"The Chartists were doomed to failure even before the final form of their Charter was drafted. Much of their energy was devoted throughout the Chartist story to the discussion not of ends but of means, but even had they agreed about means (which they did not), they could never have forced their conception of Parliament on the country."*[1]

Furthermore, Chartism had very weak parliamentary support of few Radical MPs throughout its existence. It failed to obtain the support of the middle class, which was concerned with its interest as the story of the Anti-Corn Law League showed. Chartism wanted Parliament to reform itself without being able to secure the necessary force to do it. In addition, the Chartist claims were too 'democratic' and too drastic compared to the little scope of flexibility offered by the Government in the 1830s and 1840s. Democracy was associated, from the birth of English Radicalism, with the French Revolution. This association frightened the upper and propertied middle classes and pushed the Government to give a repressive response to the successive attempts for the achievement of the 'Radical Document'. Moreover, the Government grew stronger in the late 1830s and 1840s in terms of security. The violent actions and the attempted risings were badly organised, and the Government joined efforts now with the middle

[1] Asa Briggs, op.cit., p.264

classes, unlike the 1832 agitation, to preserve 'peace and order' as the story of the Kennington Common procession[1] in 1848 showed[2].

The second level of analysis of Chartism is concerned with its significance in the nineteenth-century struggle of the English working classes. Chartism was an important episode in the long history of 'the making' of the English working class. It raised the awareness of the working people towards political affairs and developed the sense of 'class consciousness' among this newly established social group. The conflict of the Chartist Movement against the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League demonstrated that the working classes learned the lessons of the 'great betrayal' of the Great Reform Act. The scholar E.P.Thompson concludes that 'this collective self-consciousness' born in the 1832 parliamentary-reform agitation and consolidated during the Chartist struggle 'was indeed the great spiritual gain' of the working people[3]. Chartism, together with the Radical Movement of the early 1830s paved the way to the true emergence of the English working class about a century following the death of Chartism around 1850. Many of the political achievements of the 'Labour Movement' originated in the Six Points of the People's Charter. Evaluating Chartism, C. Thorne concludes in his book *Chartism* (1966) that:

> *"The failure of Chartism was in many ways more apparent than real. Many Chartists turned after 1848 to other endeavours. Co-operation and trade unionism attracted some, others agitated for reforms in education or in the drinking habits of the nation... Of the aims of the Charter, only that of annual elections has not been realised. Successive Reform Acts approached the equalisation of electoral districts, and universal suffrage more than most nineteenth century manhood could envisage was achieved in 1928. The property qualification for Members was abolished in 1858, the secret ballot introduced in 1872 and Members were paid from 1911 onwards."*[4]

[1] See above, pp.132-33
[2] "Basic reasons for the Failure of Chartism", in *A web of English History*, <http://www.dspace.dial.pipex.com>
[3] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.913
[4] "Basic Reasons for the Failure of Chartism", op.cit., in *A web of English History*

Conclusion

The story of the emergence of the working classes in the first half of the nineteenth century is one of the most exciting stages in English modern history. By the middle of this century, Britain reached the world's highest rank. After her military domination, England took the lead of the world's economy being the first industrialised country. The industrial upheaval granted wealth and prestige to England, as it was the principal cause of changing her from a traditional agrarian country into an industrialised modern one. To consider this change materially, its very outcome was satisfying. Yet, human historical evidence shows that the industrial experience did produce much harm than good for the majority of the English subjects. During the same period the biggest part of the English population, which was increasing rapidly, suffered from great misery inside the new big urban 'sprawling' cities and in the slums surrounding them. The group of workers, called the working classes in the third decade of the nineteenth century, witnessed profound transformations during the Industrial Revolution and responded through various ways to the 'English Question'.

Workers, going from the down agricultural labourer in the fields of the South and Midlands to the skilled artisan in the metropolis or the industrial North, formed the lowest class in the English social stratum during the years of the industrial turmoil. They held a fragile social status characterised by meagre wages, long working time, inadequate houses, no descent education or no education at all for them and their children, no social security, 'an earlier age of mortality'…etc. Within this atmosphere characterised by social distress and political instability caused by the painful move of England from a traditional country into an industrialised one, the working classes tried first to create trade unions. In doing so, the English working-class leaders believed that the Government would respond positively to their peaceful legal and constitutional claims. However, the Government replied repressively through a series of acts, like those called the Combination Acts in 1800, 1824, and 1825 and denied the people the very elementary rights to form social clubs and trade unions, to hold public meetings or to have their own free press for instance. Kept between the adversity of the employers

and the repression of the Government and the inconsequential practical success of the early trade unions, the English working classes opted for social violence and political protest to ask for their rights.

England was the ground of a series of social and political disturbances in the first third of the nineteenth century notably. These actions were generally perpetrated by the working and lower classes and led by different Radical Societies. The aim of these actions was the accomplishment of some social and political reforms. The social reforms concerned Factory Legislation like wage increase and reduction of the working hours, whereas political reforms were centred notably on extending the vote to the middle and working classes. The use of violence and conspiratorial plans by the working classes as the story of the Pentridge Rising shows, demonstrated the severe isolation of the English worker, who risked his life within the most affluent nation in the world, and thought that he could bring the government down out of his pike and bludgeon. The depressed labourer used 'physical-force' tactics as a last recourse to evade starvation. This use of violence was a natural response and a logical outcome dictated by the worker's 'instinct of survival' when the Government denied him the exploitation of every peaceful and legal means of struggle. Nevertheless, the middle-class moderate members, who waited the Government to make some concessions in a highly revolutionary context by the start of the 1830s, launched a clever alliance with the working classes to gain parliamentary representation.

The 1832 Great Reform Act was the outcome of the stormy days of the 1820s and the early 1830s. With its insignificant numerical increase of the voters, the Act did not have grand practical consequence on the working classes. It did not bring the dominance of the 'parliamentary families' to an end. It gave the right to vote to the majority of the middle-class members and let the working classes wholly ineligible. Yet, the Act was, perhaps, the first answer and a direct result to the transformation of Britain from an agricultural society to an industrial one. It illustrated that both the Monarch and the Government would succumb to the pressure of the newly emerged working classes. The passing of the Great Reform Bill proved that it was the first time in British history that the working classes participated, though indirectly, in decision-making. Additionally, the Act was a basic step in the long and profound process of reforms affecting the political representation of the British social classes in Parliament.

After the frustrating experience of the 1832 Reform Act, the working classes engaged in two movements of purely social character. The first was the Cooperative Movement led by the philanthropic reformer Robert Owen. Despite the hope and the great enthusiasm this movement provoked among the working classes, its very consequences were limited on the ground because of the lack of funds and governmental support. The second movement was the campaign against the 1834 Poor Law. The campaign drove the working classes again into the infernal cycle of violence. It demonstrated once more that the physical-force alternative was the last-resort weapon used by the English working classes to eliminate hunger and humiliation. Letting aside the inconsequential success of these two social movements, it was in a context of a general popular political revival that 'the first organized working-class movement' emerged around the close of the 1830s.

The battle around the six-point Radical Document called the People's Charter produced one of the most agitated periods in nineteenth-century English history. In a period of difficult living circumstances called the 'Hungry Forties', Chartism was a movement that emerged, perhaps, to achieve economic and social improvement through political and constitutional means of struggle. It derived much of its energy from the desperate workingmen. It also succeeded to join the southern 'well-off' artisans together with the northern industrial workers into a movement of national dimension claiming for one common cause: adult manhood suffrage. Thanks to its sustained national political mobilisation, Chartism drove the newly established English working classes into a profitable experience. It confirmed the fact that the working classes were in the core of the 'English Question'. Chartism highlighted the growing awareness of the English working classes vis-à-vis national political issues and developed the sense of 'class consciousness' among this new social group. The quarrel between the Chartist Movement and the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League showed, without a doubt, that the working classes were able to learn from the experience of the 'great betrayal' endured in the 1832 Reform Act. The Chartist Movement is considered as the foundation stone of British Socialism few decades after its collapse around 1850. Five out of the Six Points of the 'Radical Document' were already achieved as early as 1928. While Chartism failed to accomplish the Six Points in the 1840s, it was able to produce 'a state of mind' liable to confirm the newly established working class as part and parcel of English modern history.

The examination of English politics between the period 1780 and 1850 demonstrates the cruelty of the ruling class and the determination of the working classes to resist oppression. The working classes showed, from the Jacobin agitations of the 1790s to the Chartist times, that they were well aware about their 'own position and real interest' within the society it almost denied them the right to exist. Although politically oppressed and socially suffering, the English worker fought a brave battle to gain his rights. Despite a series of successive failures against the challenges of the new industrial era, the English working classes showed a high political understanding when 'workers returned', through Chartism, 'to the vote, as the more practical key to political power'[1]. The making of the affluent and powerful contemporary England as well as the rooted artisan political culture owed unquestionably to the resistance, courage, and sacrifices of the working people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

[1] E.P.Thompson, op.cit., p.913

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