
SOME POLITICAL ISSUES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN.

PART TWO:

THE RIGHTS OF COLLECTIVE ASSOCIATION

AND ASSEMBLY; PARLIAMENTARY

REFORM; INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT

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November 1977

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(GBS Briefing Papers, No. 3)

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Editor's Note

"Some Political Issues in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Part Two: The Rights of Collective Association and Assembly; Parliamentary Reform; Industrial Conflict" is the third in a series of Briefing Papers for the Great Britain Study.* The Great Britain Study is a close examination of "contentious gatherings" in England, Wales, and Scotland from 1828 through 1834. The briefing papers summarize the current historiography, available source materials and bibliography for questions which are important to the understanding of conflict in Great Britain during those pivotal years. We have designed them to inform the editors, coders and analysts of our data. We hope they will be useful to other scholars as well. In his first two briefing papers, Michael Pearlman (a graduate student in modern European history at the University of Michigan) provided a general survey of the period under study, then discussed four salient issues: the rights of workers to organize on behalf of their own interests, the agrarian conflicts of 1830, parish government, and Catholic Emancipation. In this paper, three more issues receive the same treatment: the rights of association and assembly in Great Britain, 1825-1835; parliamentary reform, 1828-1832; and industrial conflict, 1828-1834. The first of the three was an important part of the framework of contention and repression during our period. The latter two were important occasions for contentious gatherings. We will welcome corrections and additions.

Charles Tilly

*The earlier Briefing Papers are "Great Britain, 1828-1834: Historiography and Selected Bibliography" (Working Paper #159, Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, July 1977) and "Some Political Issues in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Part One: The Government and Workers' Associations, The Rural Rebellions of 1830, Parish Government, Catholic Emancipation" (CRSO Working Paper 160, July 1977). Other relevant papers concerning the Great Britain Study are Charles Tilly and R.A. Schweitzer, "Contentious Gatherings in Great Britain, 1828-1834: Provisional Plans for Enumeration and Coding" (CRSO Working Paper #150; revised version #163, September 1977) and Charles Tilly, "Repertoires of Contention in America and Britain, 1750-1830" (CRSO Working Paper 151; February 1977). The National Science Foundation is the major source of financial support for this research.

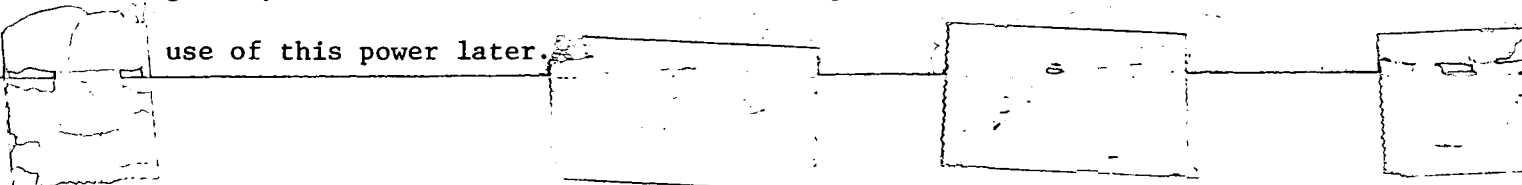
The Rights of Collective Association and Assembly in Great Britain, 1825-1835

Many historians consider that the acceptance by governmental authorities of the right to collective association and assembly was a key element in Great Britain's transition to parliamentary democracy. Eugene Black's work on British extraparliamentary political association typifies this approach, emphasizing the role such organizations played in molding public opinion and pressuring the aristocratic cliques which had previously dominated British political life. But governments and elites, even those of 18th and 19th century Britain, can never afford to be totally agnostic on the question of association among its subjects. While certain types of associations and collective gatherings by certain actors might be grudgingly allowed by the government (or in certain cases even facilitated), other large classes of actions would be clearly prohibited and repressed. This paper is an attempt to delineate what types of collective association (and by what actors) were allowed in early nineteenth-century Britain, to examine how the boundary between legal and illegal actions changed over time, and to analyze various theories about how and why such changes occurred.

Since Britain is often considered the home of political freedom, it may be strange to discover that the freedom of association has no statutory basis, and is in fact a custom of common law that has frequently been abridged by Parliamentary legislation. As Dicey points out in his Law of the Constitution (p. 271), "there is no special law allowing A, B, and C to meet together either in the open air or elsewhere for a lawful purpose"; rather it is true that A, B, and C may meet only so far as their actions, or plans for action, are not considered illegal by the government. Historically, British authorities have been concerned about and legislated

against three major classes of gatherings, which we will consider in turn: riots, seditious meetings, and combinations of workmen involved in the same trade. First the legal aspects of the question will be discussed, and then the practical application of government policy will be examined.

In British law, riot was originally a common law misdemeanor, defined as the assembly of thirty or more persons assembled to perform unlawful acts encompassing violence and performed with the intention of terrifying the populace. By the early eighteenth century, magistrates had stretched the common law to include all assemblies which seemingly threatened bystanders, even if no violence had been performed or no open threats had been made. The Riot Act of 1714 (1 Geo. 1, s.2, c.5) codified these provisions by defining riot as twelve or more persons unlawfully, riotously, or tumultuously assembled to the disturbance of the public peace. Under the act, local magistrates were to read the provisions of the law to the assembled crowd, and the failure to disperse within one hour after such a proclamation was declared a felony. Thus lethal force could be used to disperse the rioters (which had not been true when riot itself was a misdemeanor). Of course, this vague definition of riot relied greatly on the discretion of the local magistrates; we will examine their use of this power later.



Besides the law of riot, meant to manage the activities of large crowds in public places, the British government also attempted to control the more peaceful forms of association which it considered major threats to its dominance. As Frank Munger points out in his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (1977), the right to assemble, to discuss political events publicly, to petition and to be free from arbitrary arrest or search existed mainly through the failure or lack of interest of the government in exerting control over these activities. Through the eighteenth century, these rights were limited by the law of treason, which, since the time of Edward III, had been defined as the attempted assassination or levying of war against the king. An attempt by the government to extend this interpretation of treason (for example, at the trial of George Gordon in 1781) was generally resisted by juries, and the treason statute ultimately became a dead letter.

The 1770s and 1780s saw the establishment of the extraparliamentary association as a normal feature of political life in Britain. The Wilkesite and Wyvillite movements for Parliamentary reform were the first to adopt this style of political activity, which soon spread to other mainly middle class interest groups: societies for the abolition of slavery, societies for religious toleration, et al. Although the government seemed to lack

the statutory power to suppress these associations, it did have the means to control their extension. Under a 1662 law against tumultuous petitioning, all petitions of more than twenty persons required the approval of the local J.P. But these organizations came to be tacitly accepted by the government, and few attempts were made by local authorities to invoke this statute.

But the government was much more alarmed at the upsurge of political agitation among the artisanal classes during the 1790's. The activities of the radical democrats in France found echoes in the writings of Thomas Paine and the organization of the London Corresponding Society, a predominantly working class association dedicated to universal manhood suffrage. It was here that the government would draw the line. The acquittal of members of the L.C.S. at their trial for treason made it obvious that new repressive legislation was necessary, and Parliament quickly responded. In 1794, the writ of habeus corpus was suspended, and in 1795, the Two Acts were passed (36 Geo. III, c.7 and c.8), extending the definition of treason and sedition, and requiring the permission of two magistrates for all meetings of more than fifty people. The next wave of working class political agitation, in 1816-1819, was met by similar measures controlling the right of political assembly; the Six Acts of 1819 included a Seditious Meetings Act similar in content to that of 1795.

The British government, though, was never successful in its attempt to permanently control political association through statute law. Sections of the middle class were aware that such legislation could be used to suppress their own political mobilization, and therefore supported the repression in return for the proviso that such measures would be limited to a specified period of time (five years in the case of the Six Acts of

1819). Thus during the period 1825-1835, there were few specific statutes by which the government could restrict the right of peaceful political assembly: the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797, which forbade agitation among the armed forces, the Unlawful Drilling act of 1820, which outlawed armed processions, and one provision of the Seditious Meeting Act of 1795 which remained in force and made unlawful any assembly within one mile of Parliament while it was in session. The Tumultuous Petitioning Act had essentially fallen into disuse after its invocation against the Blanketeers in 1817.

The British authorities were also involved in regulating a third major variety of association, that between workers in the same trade or profession. Prior to the eighteenth century, all trade combinations which could be considered in restraint of trade were illegal under common law. With the breakdown of guild organizations and the creation of workers' associations in the skilled trades, Parliament added a series of statutory prohibitions in the eighteenth century, which culminated in the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. This legislation clearly outlawed any organizations of either workmen or employers which aimed at regulating wages, hours, or the conditions of work in any trade, but was used exclusively against the trade unions. In 1824, Parliament repealed this Act, but the next year reconstituted controls over the activities of the unions; at this point, it was legal for workers to organize such associations for the purpose of regulating wages and hours, but were prohibited from effectively confronting their employers while on strike. Meanwhile, the government had legalized the friendly societies, but forbidden them to engage in any activities other than mutual aid and insurance. (For a more comprehensive look at this question, see Michael Pearlman, "The Government and Workers' Associations, 1828-1833," GBS Briefing Paper #2.)

As we have seen, nearly all governmental power to restrict the rights of collective association and action were held on the local level by the Justice of the Peace. At times of particularly intense mobilization, Parliament might add new statutory powers for repression (e.g., 1795-1799 and 1816-1819), or the Home Office might take an increased interest in the suppression of disturbances by the local authorities (e.g. the Swing rebellion), but in main, the J.P.'s were left to their own devices. The variety of activities that could potentially be controlled by the magistrates were wide-ranging; besides the three types of associations we have discussed, the J.P.'s were also responsible for licensing alehouses and dissenters' congregations, and approving the rules of friendly societies. Moreover, the justices were in charge of the local repressive apparatus. The parish constables, the major standing arm of the policing forces in most localities, were under the direct orders of the J.P.'s, while in more extreme situations, the county militia and the regular army could be called out and placed under their control.

In such a situation, the determining input in the decision to repress certain forms of collective action was what Munger calls the "situation sense" of the J.P.'s. Various factors might influence this decision. First of all, the very ability to repress certain actions might be called into question. Of the 5,000 justices in Britain, only a small portion were at any one time seriously engaged in the maintenance of public order, and many of them were in remote rural areas, far from the scene of any major mobilizations. The forces of order at their disposal varied; in some parishes and incorporated boroughs, effective repressive apparatuses had been formed in response to urbanization and industrialization, while in others, ineffectual amateurs held the position of constable and impeded

any repressive activity. Another determinant was the strength of middle class resistance to repression. The failure of juries to convict in certain situations, the opposition to police spies, or the very existence of middle class political mobilization often made it difficult for the J.P.'s to utilize all the repressive tools in their repertoire. Munger's work points to a lowered rate of repression of all forms of political activity, including purely working class agitation, during periods when the middle classes were pressing their own claims, as in 1829-1832.

Beyond these general observations, little hard data has actually been collected on the reaction of J.P.'s to various forms of collective action. Munger's work on Lancashire seems to be the only body of quantified material; lacking comparable data for other counties, we are forced to take the probably unjustified step of considering his conclusions relevant for the rest of Britain, at least where it seems to fit in with more anecdotal material. Of course, we should also count on a certain area-by-area variability that has yet to be measured.

Starting with clearly non-political mobilizations, J.P.'s were generally not averse to the massing of large numbers of people for amusement or entertainment, providing such gatherings were clearly part of the established social order and reflected "respectable" mass behavior. Annual feast days, the celebration of the king's birthday, the local races, etc., were obviously legal gatherings. On the other hand, more purely working class forms of entertainment, such as vagrant acting troupes, bear-baiting, or particularly rowdy local fairs were often suppressed by the J.P., especially by those who were also ministers. Mass gatherings of any sort on the sabbath were similarly frowned upon.

Let us now proceed to more clearly threatening forms of mass action. The food riot, a typical form of collective action in eighteenth-century

Britain, became more marginal in the course of the 19th century, and faced a greater tendency toward repression. Magistrates had tended to treat the rioters as victims of circumstance, poor members of the community deserving lenient justice in return for political and social deference. Thus J.P.'s often intervened in 18th century food riots to ensure the selling of grain at a "just" price; this, they felt was the expedient way to maintain public order during times of economic distress. Ultimately, the battle for control of grain was won by the merchants, the towns and the national authorities, and the J.P.'s were forced to fall in line. Stiffer penalties faced the food rioters, and soon, this form of popular mobilization faded out. By our period, the food riot was essentially limited to small, rural regions such as Cornwall.

The attitude of magistrates toward trade unions and labor disturbances underwent a similar hardening, but such repression did not halt the growth of this more "modern" form of mobilization. J.P.'s had always been less tolerant toward labor agitation than the food riot, but as manufacturing interests became a more established part of the political elite, greater efforts were made to control the workers' associations. Yet, even during the period of the Combination Acts (1799-1824), magistrates tacitly accepted certain trade union activities. Purely economic collective actions rarely faced high levels of repression, except during periods of exceptional mobilization which seemed particularly threatening to elite interests. In fact, a new form of collective action, the labor demonstration, was developed in response to the borders of repression generally enforced by the J.P.'s. Picketing, threats of violence, or any attempt to shut down a manufactory were usually met by strong governmental action, while peaceful, small-scale marches with banners were considered acceptable as

long as no attempt was made to recruit new strikers or to march from town to town. Such distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate behavior continued into the period after 1825, when the trade unions themselves became legal, but a broad range of union activities remained proscribed.

The reaction of local authorities to peaceful political agitation (i.e. political associations, mass meetings, etc.) also evolved during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but in a not quite analogous direction. We have already seen a clear class prejudice in the repression of political association. As Munger points out, "the appearance of new working class collective actors, their appearance itself timed to political challenges to the ruling orders at home and abroad, triggered redefinition by authorities of the threat posed by protest." This redefinition, during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and after, led to increased repressive legislation on the national level (1795-1799, 1817-1819) and to increased repressive action by the J.P.'s, against the L.C.S., the United Englishmen, the Spenceans, and other predominantly working class agitations. The general attitude of magistrates during this period, faced with mass political activity, was "Repress first, ask questions later." Certain J.P.'s, particularly those in the new industrial towns, took their work more seriously, enlisting spies, raiding private meetings and calling the militia against political demonstrations (e.g. Peterloo). But the expiration of the Six Acts in 1824 ended the legal justification for prior suppression of political associations, while the increasing political mobilization of the middle classes served to moderate the activities of the J.P.'s in this arena. Thus during the key period of 1829-1832, when the agitation over Catholic Emancipation, parish organization and Parliamentary reform reached its peak, the right to peaceful assembly and

association had been essentially conceded by the government and local authorities. Many jealous justices continued to oversee the activities of the local radical and working class organizations, but were powerless to prevent mobilization except under unusual circumstances (such as openly riotous gatherings). Once the alliance between middle class and working class reformers ended with the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, the agitators for further reform again faced the threat of repression; the meeting of the National Union of the Working Classes in May 1833 which was dispersed by the London police and ended in riot was thus a precursor of government attitudes toward the Chartists.

Reviewing the question of government attitudes towards political association and assembly, we find that the British authorities were neither blindly repressive, as the Hammond-Webb school of labor historiography would have it, nor were they situated calmly above the fray, attempting to mediate between social forces in a difficult transitional period, as F.O. Darvall and other historians claim. The political polity was in the process of expanding to include new, independent middle class forces, and the government was not averse to their self-organization. But working class activity was to be contained within forms which displayed respect for the paternalistic authority of the state and the social elites. Outside of these boundaries, the government would rarely hesitate to suppress the "rights" of assembly and association.

Chronology

- 1662 Act for the Suppression of Tumultuous Petitioning requires approval of J.P. for all petitions signed by more than 20 persons.
- 1714 Riot Act establishes procedure for suppression of public gatherings.
- 1794 Habeus Corpus suspended in response to "Jacobin" agitation; members of London Corresponding Society acquitted of treason charge.
- 1795 Two Acts give J.P.'s power to suppress all seditious meetings for four years.
- 1799 Seditious Societies Act outlaws the L.C.S., the United Englishmen and other federated societies; Combination Act outlaws trade unions.
- 1812 Toleration Act requires registration of Dissenting congregations with J.P.
- 1816 Habeus Corpus again suspended, in response to Spencean reform movement, New Seditious Meetings Bill restricts right of assembly.
- 1819 Six Acts renews Suppression of right to association and assembly for "seditious activity"; in force until 1824.
- 1824 Combination Acts repealed trade unions legalized.
- 1825 New law passed controlling activities of trade unions.

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PARLIAMENTARY REFORM, 1828-1832

"Upon the matter of regulating the suffrage depends the destruction or salvation of states." Montesquieu

"England is gone perfectly mad." Mrs. Arbuthnot, in her journal, April, 1831.

The movement for parliamentary reform in Great Britain was, from its start, a multi-sided affair. Various interests found different, and often opposing, reasons for their objection to the outmoded method of representation in the House of Commons. Whig aristocrats and other parliamentarians historically supported some type of reform as a method of attacking Tory ministerial domination by destroying its parliamentary base in the "rotten boroughs". The middle classes in the expanding commercial and industrial towns like Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester saw reform as a tool for overturning the exclusive hold of the landowning interests over national policy. The working classes, where they were politically aroused, hoped that the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot and annual parliaments would somehow aid them in their social and economic struggles. The history of the reform movement, this "amalgam of discontents, policies, motivations, activities and personalities of fluctuating chronological and regional intensity," (as Derek Fraser has called it) is the story of alliances and misalliances among these contenders for political power, some of whom were successful, in 1832, in forcing their way into the national polity.

The system of representation in the House of Commons that so many were so eager to change can be examined in tabular form in Appendix A. to this paper (see Brock, 1973 for a more extended discussion); but perhaps a brief overview is in order. The Commons was composed of

representatives of two types of electorates. County members (188 out of 658 seats) were selected by a uniform franchise of all freeholders rated over 40 shillings. While, by the 19th century, the county electorates were rather large, they were dominated by landlord interests (except for the counties with large urban centers, such as Middlesex, Yorkshire and Lancashire). The vast majority of seats were held by representatives of boroughs, i.e. those localities which held the historic right to membership in Parliament. The boroughs varies widely in size and voting qualifications; according to Brock, only forty-three of 202 boroughs had over a thousand electors in 1830, while well over a hundred had less than five hundred (including fifty-six with less than fifty). Those with large electotates were usually "scot and lot" boroughs (where all taxpayers could vote) or potwallopers (in which all those who kept their own household were enfranchised), and therefore even more "democratic" than the county seats. But most borough members were elected by small groups privileged with the franchise because of their membership in a local "closed corporation", their ownership of a "burgage", i.e. a piece of land with attached voting rights, or their status as "freemen", a right granted according to local custom. These small, easily manipulated "rotten boroughs" were the particular target of most reformers.

But the distribution of borough seats remained the most blatant anomaly of the system in industrializing Britain. Over forty per cent of the Commons was elected in the ten counties south of the Thames; for example, Cornwall, with a population of 300,000 sent forty-two members to Parliament, while Lancashire, with 1,300,000, sent only fourteen. Of course, this was because the growing industrial and commercial towns like Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield were unrepresented. London

itself was terribly underrepresented in proportion to its population.

It was in fact in London that the modern movement for parliamentary reform began. The demagogic agitation of John Wilkes gave a rallying cry to discontented elements of the London lower middle classes - shopkeepers, artisans, petty tradesmen; "Wilkes and Liberty". Demands for a wider franchise, the abolition of the rotten boroughs, and more frequent parliamentary elections (under the Septennial Act of 1715, parliaments were to be called every seven years) were an essential part of this movement, which reached its height during the years 1763-1774. Even the Rockingham Whigs toyed with the idea of reform as an anti-ministerial tool. But the movement had no real base outside of London, and even there it was dependent on the mercurial temperament of a careerist politician. The patriotic fever brought on by the American War served to finish off the Wilkesite agitation as a viable force in British politics (see Rudé, 1962).

The defeat in America and an attendant increase in taxation called forth a new wave of "reformism", this time among the more respectable classes, during the early 1780s. For the first time, reformers organized extra-parliamentary associations to coordinate public opinion and pressure the M.P.s. Rev. Christopher Wyvill spearheaded this movement (the Yorkshire Association) of northern country gentlemen opposed to George III's economic policies, while a more radical group, the Society for Constitutional Information, was formed in London by the Old Wilksites Cartwright, Jebb and Townsend. But at the height of the agitation, Wyvill and his allies were unable to mobilize enough support in the Commons. A motion in favor of moderate reform introduced by Pitt in 1785 was defeated 248-174, and the resultant demoralization killed the Yorkshire Association (see Christie, 1962).

The outbreak of the French Revolution of 1789 both intensified the British movement for reform and killed its practical chances for success for over a generation. The tremendous popularity of radical propaganda among the popular classes, as typified by the success of Paine's Rights of Man, served to polarize the reform movement between radicals and moderates; meanwhile, the majority of the middle class swung behind government repression of the London Corresponding Society and similar working men's reform associations. During the darkest days of the anti-Jacobin hysteria, the only voices to be heard in favor of reform came from the Foxite Whigs, safely ensconced in their country homes, and far from the radical reformers who had been jailed or driven underground by the Two Acts of 1795 (see Pearlman, "The Rights of Collective Association and Assembly". in this series of briefing papers). The only organized continuation of the popular reform tradition during the Napoleonic Wars was in Westminster, where middle class and lower middle class radicals used parliamentary elections to organize mass reformist sentiment (see Thompson, 1963, Ch. 1, 5, 13).

The end of the war in 1815 was met by a tremendous upsurge in reform activity, lasting through 1819. The collapse of war-induced prosperity created economic and social discontent in the countryside, the northern industrial districts and the metropolis, which radicals attempted to channel along political lines. Hampden clubs, established by the Westminster radicals, spread through the north, while more insurrectionary elements also won a hearing among the popular classes. The provincial merchants and manufacturers were themselves coming to realize that their interests had become clearly divergent from the landed aristocracy, and needed independent representation; the Orders in Council of 1812, an

increase in taxation, new duties on raw cotton and wool, and the Corn Laws of 1815 all irritated the urban interests and pushed them toward the reform movement. But the scent of rebellion coming from the Luddite risings, the Spa field riots of 1816, the Blanketeers march and the Pentridge "Revolution" led the middle classes to ally again with the government against the popular radicals. The Peterloo massacre in 1819 cemented this alliance; in response, the government passed the Six Acts to prevent mass meetings and stifle the radical press.

By 1820, it seemed clear that the blatant divorce between social and economic realities and the system of parliamentary representation would ultimately have to be resolved. But how such a change would occur, and what form it would take, was not as obvious. Outside of Parliament, the various interests had found it difficult to form an effective alliance around a unified reform program. Inside Parliament, the Tories were waging an effective rearguard battle in defense of the aristocratic constitution and the interests of the landholding classes. The majority of the Whigs were in favor of some sort of piecemeal reform, most likely through the disenfranchisement of the worst of the rotten boroughs and the transferring of these seats to the largest cities. But the balance of power in the commons was against them. For example, the most successful mobilization of votes in favor of reform since the time of Pitt came in April, 1822; a bill introduced by John Russell, calling for the disenfranchisement of one hundred boroughs, was defeated 269-164. The only small victory for the reformers was the transfer, in 1821, of the seats of Grampound, a Cornish borough, to the county of Yorkshire.

During most of the 1820's, the Tory government led by Canning and Liverpool successfully defused the reform question by charting a moderate

course on issues of importance to the middle classes--free trade, stable currency and price supports for agriculture. But the deaths of both moderate Tory leaders in 1827 shifted the center of gravity of the ruling party to the right; the duke of Wellington, a staunch opponent of reform, became Prime Minister in 1828. During that year, reform again became a "hot" issue in Parliament. The Whigs introduced a measure to transfer the seats of two other Cornish rotten boroughs, Penryn and Retford, to the cities of Manchester and Birmingham. The ministry opposed the plan, and Wellington used the issue to force the liberal Tories, led by Huskisson, out of his cabinet. The boroughs were ultimately disenfranchised, but the seats were not transferred.

It was, strangely enough, the Catholic emancipation crisis of 1829 which set the stage for the sharpening of the reform struggle during the succeeding years (see Pearlman, "Catholic Emancipation," GBS Working Paper #2). The successful agitation of O'Connell and the Catholic Association showed that the current constitutional arrangements were not sacrosanct, and raised hopes that a similar effort could force concessions on reform. Moreover, the Catholic issue had split the Tory majority in the Commons and alienated the "Ultra" elements in the party from the ministry. These extreme anti-Catholics, led by Lord Winchilsea and Sir Richard Vyvyan, adopted the cause of reform, at least temporarily, hoping that a broadening of the franchise would bring popular anti-Catholic sentiment to bear on Parliament.

With the Tory party thus shaken, and the most unlikely elements within it announcing for reform, the extra-parliamentary reformers came to realize the possibilities of the new situation. In July, 1829, the London Radical Reform Association was founded (with the aid of O'Connell

himself), demanding universal suffrage, annual Parliaments and the secret ballot, and collecting a penny-a-month "radical rent" in direct imitation of the Irish. December 1829 saw the organization of the Birmingham Political Union (B.P.U.) by Thomas Attwood, a banker and moderate reformer; its goal was "to obtain by every just and legal means such a reform in the Commons House of Parliament as may insure a real and effectual representation of the lower and middle classes of the people in that House." This latter-named union created a tremendous stir in the cities and towns, representing, as it did, an attempt to unite all wings of the reform movement in this important provincial city. We will examine this important question, the relations between the moderate and the radical reformers, later in the paper.

During the first half of 1830, a series of reform measures was brought before Parliament by the various party factions, each with their own political axe to grind, all with little hope of success. On 18 February, the Ultra-Tory Blandford introduced a motion calling for a large-scale redistribution of seats and the adoption of a scot and lot franchise in the new boroughs; the Whigs, though, refused to support any reform plan devised by their bitter enemies, and the bill was easily defeated. A scheme for the enfranchisement of Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, brought forward by Russell on behalf of the Whigs, made a better show of it, but was voted down by 48. And on May 28, the Parliament displayed its attitude toward any truly radical reform, killing a motion by O'Connell in favor of universal suffrage by 306 votes.

As the year progressed, the reform question moved to center stage in British political debate. The bad harvest of 1829, combined with a cyclical trade recession, added an element of economic discontent to the

equation, as, once again, the middle and working classes looked to parliamentary reform as a prelude to the adoption of their own favorite panaceas. The election of July and August, 1830 (brought on by the death of George IV and the accession of the somewhat more enlightened William IV) was fought around the reform issue in dozens of constituencies, with most contemporaries assessing the results as a defeat for the ministry. Thus the situation had already intensified when the news reached Britain of the July Revolution in Paris. The people had taken to the streets against an oppressive King and his ministers, and won! Neither the government nor the reformers could have had much difficulty seeing the analogy.

The new Parliament was scheduled to convene in early November, and the flow of events seemed to be moving against Wellington. Sections of his own party were in revolt against the ministry; the Whigs were readying their reform schemes; and, coincidentally, the Swing rebellion was gaining momentum in the Southeastern rural districts. Many observers expected the Duke to announce his own moderate reform plan to head off his opponents and save the government's position. But on November 2, he declared in Parliament that the ministry considered "that the legislature and the system of representation possesses the full and entire confidence of the nation," and that he intended to oppose all reform measures introduced into the House. This tactless display of hostility sealed Wellington's fate. In London, crowds took to the street on the night of 8-9 November to express their displeasure, and forced the cancellation of a royal visit to the city for fear of serious rioting. On November 15, the government was defeated on an amendment to the Civil List (by 233-204), and the Duke was forced to resign. The next day, Lord Grey was summoned by the King to form a coalition ministry, dominated by the Whigs and

including the liberal Tories.

The Whig party, which now acceded to power for the first time in the 19th century, was not itself united around a particular reform program. A useful distinction to be drawn is that between the "advanced" Whigs around John Russell and "Radical Jack" Durham, who were ideologically committed to a comprehensive reform bill that would redress the balance of political power in favor of the middle classes, and the more moderate Whigs, such as Lord Holland and Grey himself, who saw reform as a tactically expedient measure necessary for the maintenance of constitutional stability. Between the two groups stood men such as Althorp and Brougham, the Whig leaders in the Commons. But the events of the past two years, the Catholic emancipation movement, the French Revolution, the growth of the political unions such as the B.P.U., led the moderate leadership to support a reform scheme more thoroughgoing than they themselves had anticipated. Inaction, or insufficient action, might lead, as Grey claimed, to "republicanism and the destruction of the established institutions":

Thus the new government adopted reform as its first task (along with suppressing the Swing revolt). A Committee of Four, including Russell, Durham, Sir James Graham and Viscount Duncannon, was appointed by Grey to draft a plan "of such a scope and description as to satisfy all reasonable demands, and remove, at once and forever, all rational ground for complaint from the minds of the intelligent and independent portion of the community." The committee's recommendations were ironed out during December, amended by the cabinet in January, 1831, and submitted to the King for his approval at the end of the month.

On 1 March, 1831, the government's reform plan was revealed to an

expectant Parliament. A large-scale redistribution of seats was the basis of the plan, along with the creation of uniform franchise requirements. Sixty-one of the smallest boroughs (Schedule A) were to lose both of their seats, and forty-seven more boroughs (Schedule B) were to lose one seat. The enfranchisement provisions were to give two seats to eleven cities, and one seat to eleven others; in addition, twenty-six English counties were now to elect four members instead of two; Yorkshire was to receive six members; and additional county seats were to be established in Wales, Scotland and Ireland (see Appendix B). In all, the Commons representation was to be reduced by sixty-two members. As to the franchise, all of ten householders were to vote in the boroughs, while the forty shilling freehold was to remain the basis of the franchise in the counties. The secret ballot was not included in the cabinet's bill, nor was the abolition of the Septennial act.

Even so, the Commons was struck by the boldness of the proposed reform. Few had expected the magnitude of the disenfranchisement; some Whigs even expressed their dismay. But in the cities and towns, the surprise was a popular one. Middle-class public opinion had looked favorably upon the formation of the Whig ministry, and the hope of quick action spurred the formation of pro-reform associations throughout the country. By November, 1830, the B.P.U. had enrolled 9,000 members, and the Northern Political Union had been founded by Attwood's brother Charles, in Newcastle. Public meetings of ten's of thousands were held; hundreds of petitions flooded Parliament. Most of the political unions, dominated by middle class ideologues even when most of their members might be petty tradesmen, artisans and workers, were immediately enamoured with the bill. For instance, a meeting of the B.P.U. on 7 March, attended by 15,000

people, expressed its gratitude to the King and his ministers and petitioned in favor of the measure.

In London, though, the radical working class elements were less excited about a bill which enfranchised the middle class and left the majority of the population out in the cold. Upon the unveiling of the government plan, the radicals Lovett, Hetherington, and Cleave formed the National Union of the Working Classes, to organize support for the classic Painite demands: universal suffrage, annual parliaments and the ballot. The N.U.W.C. set up twelve meeting houses throughout the London area and held regular mass gathering at the Rotunda on Blackfriars road. It is unclear how successful the radicals were in organizing working class opinion against the Whigs; most workers, even the most class-conscious ones, probably saw the bill as a step, however small, towards democracy and therefore supported it. But this split in the ranks of the reformers certainly had a major influence on the geography of agitation. In industrial towns like Manchester and Leeds, the political unions were unable to unite the manufacturers and their workers into a viable political force. Thus the vanguard role in the reform struggle was left to towns like Birmingham, where artisanal production was still predominant and the class lines were not as clearly drawn (see Briggs, 1952).

With the country clearly behind the ministry; the recalcitrant Whigs fell into line, and the Commons prepared for a vote. On 23 March, a dramatic division came on the second reading of the bill; the House passed the measure by one vote, 303-301. But on 20 April, in the committee stage; the government was defeated on a Tory amendment which moved that the number of MPs for England and Wales not be reduced. Rather than let the

bill be gutted piece by piece, Grey decided to ask the King for a dissolution of Parliament and new elections. It was precisely this sort of appeal to the nation that the Tories, and even the King, feared. But Grey persuaded him that such a move was necessary, given the state of the country, and promised that the new bill to be introduced would be no more radical than the last. The dissolution came on 23 April and the elections the next week. The sole issue, it seems, was reform; mass meetings were held to organize public opinion, and in some areas the elections were accompanied by riots: in Wigan, Boston, Banbury, Rye and Horsham, according to Rudé (1969).

The results of the election were a foregone conclusion, but the magnitude of the Whig victory was unexpected. The Tory party was routed, winning only six of the English county seats, and retaining its strength only in the rotten boroughs which were to be abolished under the act. As Molesworth wrote (1865), "Never, perhaps, had any election worked so complete a transformation." The second bill, introduced virtually unchanged on 24 June 1831, passed its second reading on 7 July, 367-231, and was adopted by the Commons on 22 September, 345-236. The only minor victory for the opposition was the adoption of the Chandos clause, which, by enfranchising fifty leaseholders, would reinforce the landlord interests in the counties.

But the major question facing the government and the political unions through the summer of 1831 was, "What will the Lords do?" The Ultra-Tories over the preceding months had dropped their advocacy of reform, and a united Tory party clearly dominated the upper house. These Tory peers considered themselves the last outpost of the revered constitution, and capitulation on this issue could only be a prelude to new and

more radical reforms. Thus, on 8 October, two weeks after its introduction, the Lords defeated the bill on its second reading, 199-158.

The reaction to the Lords' decision was swift, widespread, and in some places violent. Newspapers appeared with black borders; mass meetings were held to denounce the action. In London, Francis Place took the occasion to announce the creation of the National Political Union, while, in Birmingham, Attwood and other leaders of the B.P.U. discussed plans to organize the Union on a semimilitary footing (creation of disciplined sections, drilling, etc.). Others were not content with discussion. On 10 October, the home of the Duke of Newcastle at Nottingham was burned by a crowd wandering from a reform meeting. The next day, a silk mill and a private estate were attacked. In Derby, the city jail was attacked and prisoners released; upon marching to the county prison, the rioters were shot at and several were wounded or killed. At London, the Duke of Wellington's house was stormed. Incidents were reported over the next week at Leicester, at Tiverton and Yeovil in Somerset, and at Blandford and Sherborne in Dorset. By far the biggest outbreak came at Bristol on 29 October. The crowd held the street for three days, and did as much damage as the 1780 Gordon rioters in London, according to Rudé (1969). A dozen rioters were killed, nearly 100 were wounded, and 180 were committed to prison.

The reaction of the Whig government to the October events concretely displayed their ambivalent attitude toward the extra-parliamentary agitation. Grey and his cabinet realized that organized public opinion would be necessary to carry the reform through the Lords, but they feared the revolutionary stirrings that were felt during the month. The King himself demanded action against the political unions, but Grey, realizing the

dangers of this path, was content to issue a proclamation against the organization of the unions along para-military lines, as Attwood had been threatening. The government did take the occasion, though, to tighten its surveillance of the radical unions, and to suppress a planned demonstration of the N.U.W.C. scheduled for 7 November. The severe sentences received by the October rioters fit nicely into the government's scheme for controlling agitation; nine of the Nottingham rioters were sentenced to death, while in Bristol four were hanged, thirty-seven were jailed, and fifty-four were transported to Australia.

Grey, intent upon passing the reform, successfully persuaded the King to prorogue Parliament and thereby allow the Whigs another opportunity. Two options were open to the government: an attempt could be made to appeal to wavering moderate Tories like Lords Wharncliffe and Harrowby with a watered-down bill, or the King could be asked to create new peers and stack the Lords with reformers. Both paths were tried. A new bill was introduced on 12 December 1831, relieving some of the disenfranchised boroughs and incorporating the Chandos clause into its provisions. Slowly working its way through the Commons, the bill finally passed its third reading on 22 March 1832. Meanwhile, the King, in January, had hinted at his willingness to appoint new Lords, but Grey, against the advice of the Whig left wing, decided to hold this card in reserve.

In the country, the tremendous upsurge in membership and activity by the political unions had begun to wane, as impatience and demoralization set in. In particular, more working class supporters seemed to be disaffected by the maneuvering of the Whigs. On 21 March, for instance, the National Union of the Working Classes was able to mobilize 100,000 supporters for a march protesting the National Fast Day (which was called

by the government as a supplication against the cholera epidemic); The N.U.W.C. rechristened it National Farce Day. But the events of May, 1832, were to reexcite and reunify most of the reformers.

The third reform bill, introduced into the House of Lords on 26 March 1832, came up for its second reading on 14 April. With the support of the Tory waverers, it narrowly passed, 184-175. But its ultimate success was not assured. Even the waverers were intent upon revising the bill, if only to assert the power of the upper house. Thus, in the committee stage, the Peers defeated the government (on 7 May) on a procedural motion that threatened to allow them to gut the bill. Again, the Whig leadership decided to push for "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill", as the political unions were demanding. On 9 May, Grey asked the King to fulfill his pledge to create fifty to sixty pro-reform peers. William ultimately recoiled at the idea, and the cabinet handed in its resignation.

The "May days" of 1832 were the result of these maneuvers. While the Duke of Wellington attempted to form a ministry, the political unions mobilized an impressive display of public opinion, going so far as to threaten revolt against a Tory government. During the first week of the month, hundreds of thousands had gathered in London, Birmingham and other cities to pledge their support to the bill, come what may. The action of the Lords was the last straw: talk of barricades and pikes spread through the country; petitions flooded Parliament; taxpayers strikes were organized. The most famous agitational scheme was that of Francis Place: "to stop the Duke, go for gold", i.e. a run on the banks.

But Place's plans never left the drawing board. Wellington found it impossible to organize a cabinet under the circumstances, particularly

since most leading Tories refused to support a moderate reform that the Duke himself realized would be necessary to defuse the situation. On 18 May, Grey was recalled by the King, this time with a clear promise to create the new peers if and when necessary. With this knife at their back, the Lords capitulated. The bill was reintroduced, and passed its third reading on 4 June, by 106-22 (with over 100 abstentions). On 7 June 1832, the Great Reform Act received the royal assent and became law.

Why was there no revolution in Great Britain between 1830 and 1832? The historiography of the reform movement centers around this question, either directly or indirectly. Most writers have agreed that, at least superficially, many characteristics of a revolutionary situation were present during these years; economic distress, high levels of political mobilization, sharp divisions among the ruling elite. The classic Whig interpretation, defended by contemporaries such as Macaulay or later by interpreters like Butler and Trevelyan, claims that the peculiarly British genius for moderation, along with the political commitment of the Whig leadership combined to control the extremist elements and mobilize public opinion against the Tory reactionaries. This analysis, besides being self-serving, is somewhat obfuscating. The Whig party had never been wholeheartedly behind reform on the grand scale until the political necessities of the period forced it upon them. But there does seem to be more than a bit of truth to be found in focusing on the role of the Whigs as a key to the "peaceful" evolution of events.

Another tack is taken by historians who claim that the situation never heated up quite enough for a revolutionary solution to have been viable. Joseph Hamburger (1963, 1965) has claimed that the threat of

revolution was consciously manipulated by Place and Attwood in order to force the Whigs into concessions; all the talk of military organization, of pikes and barricades, was no more than radical subterfuge. Interestingly, the Marxist George Rudé (1969) has entered the fray, agreeing that no truly revolutionary situation existed at this time in Britain. But Rudé points to the lack of the necessary political will among the middle classes, not to their exaggeration of it. Demanding the vote for their own class, the moderate political unions were unwilling to press their own demands to the point of summoning the "lower orders" to the barricades, particularly because the British workers had already begun to form their own political and industrial organizations. Thus, if push had come to shove, the middle class would have accepted a moderate bill, rather than political instability. But Rudé fails to take into account the extent to which the popular classes had already been mobilized in 1830-31 to force even the minor concession of Grey's reform bill. And once such a mobilization has occurred, it is often difficult to contain its political consequences within the bounds intended by a middle class leadership. For instance, in 1830 or 1848 in France, it was the pressure of the masses in the streets of Paris which forced, in the first place, the abdication of Charles X, and in the second, the declaration of the republic. Such a situation possibly could have arisen in Britain in 1831 or 1832, had the government backed down in the struggle against the Lords, or had Wellington succeeded in forming an anti-bill ministry. Again we return to the political astuteness of the Whigs, drafting a reform bill comprehensive enough for the majority of the reformers and willing to carry it through to the end against the opposition of the majority of the aristocracy. Here lay the true genius of the English ruling elite.

1828

January - Duke of Wellington becomes Prime Minister.

May - Huskisson and liberal Tories resign from cabinet over disenfranchisement of Retford and Penryn.

1829

April - Catholic Emancipation Bill becomes law.

July - Radical Reform Association founded in London.

December - Attwood organizes the Birmingham Political Union.

1830

February - Ultra-Tory and Whig reform plans defeated in Commons.

26 June - Death of George IV.

29 July - 1 September - General elections.

2 November - Wellington declares against reform.

15 November - Government defeated over the Civil List, 233-204.

16 November - Wellington resigns, Grey summoned to form ministry.

1831

14 January - Committee of four finishes drafting reform plan.

30 January - Committee's plan presented to cabinet.

1 March - Russell outlines Reform Bill to Commons.

Mid-March - National Union of the Working Classes founded.

23 March - Reform Bill passes second reading in Commons, 302-301.

20 April - Government defeated on Gascoyne amendment to bill, 299-291.

23 April - Parliament dissolved.

28 April - 1 June - General elections.

24 June - Reform Bill reintroduced into Commons.

7 July - Bill passes second reading in Commons, 367-231.

- 22 September - Bill passes final division in Commons, 345-236; brought before Lords
- 8 October - Second reading division in Lords; Government defeated 199-158
- 8-10 October - Riots at Derby and Nottingham
- Mid-October - Francis Place founds National Political Union in London
- 29-31 October - Riot at Bristol
- 22 November - Proclamation against organization of Political unions along military lines
- 12 December - New Reform Bill introduced into Commons
- 18 December - Bill passes second reading division, 324-162

1832

- 15 January - William "agrees" to creation of pro-reform peers
- 22 March - Third Reading, Commons; Bill passes 355-239
- 26 March - Bill brought to Lords
- 14 April - Bill passes second reading in Lords, 184-175
- 7 May - Government defeated in Lords on procedural motion, 151-116
- 9 May - King refuses to create new peers; Cabinet resigns
- 10 May - Commons passes motion supporting outgoing ministry, 288-208
- 15 May - Wellington advises King to recall Grey and Whigs
- 18 May - Grey recalled with full authority to create peers
- 4 June - Bill passes third reading in Lords, 106-23
- 7 June - Great Reform Bill becomes law
- 17 July - Scottish Reform Bill becomes law
- 7 August - Irish Reform Bill becomes law

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Industrial Conflict, 1828-1834

The nature of trade unionism in Great Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century reflected the transitional state of British manufacturing during this first stage of the Industrial Revolution. The factory system, which most of us associate with modern industrial capitalism, had taken hold by 1830 only in the textile industry, and even here mainly in the spinning of cotton and wool thread; for instance, in 1830, handlooms still outnumbered power looms by five to two. The typical British worker was still an artisan, working in a relatively small shop and dreaming on one day becoming a master. But the tremendous expansion of production in nearly all branches of manufacturing during this period did serve to transform the relationship between capital and labor that had existed during the pre-industrial era. The creation of a national and international market and the resulting increase in competition, the expansion of the putting-out industries, the growth of the "dishonorable" workshops, the influx of unskilled workers - all these developments destabilized the position of the urban artisans and forced them to become more aggressive in defense of their traditional rights and living standards.

Thus, the industrial conflicts of these years represented two different strains of working-class activity; defensive struggles by these "superior" artisans who were finding themselves increasingly threatened by the expansion of capitalist social relations, and organizational efforts by groups such as the cotton spinners and coal miners, aimed toward creating their own associations in the mass production industries. But we should avoid making too great a point of this distinction. The cotton unions were themselves the work of the adult, male cotton spinners, who held an elite position in the factory, and their major struggles were

fought over the introduction of new techniques which threatened to reduce the wages and erode the advantages of skilled labor. The unskilled, non-elite workers in the factories, the artisanal trades and the outworking industries could scarcely hope to improve their situation in the face of the general underemployment which prevailed during most of the period. Trade union activity could be the recourse of only a minority of British workers.

The unions themselves were often the outgrowth of a friendly society or other such mutual aid associations. Based on a local grouping of workers in the same trade, such societies might attempt at some point to establish apprenticeship standards and/or lists of minimum payment for certain tasks. Still, in 1830, these were the main goals of most unions, although many had developed an organizational sophistication far beyond that of their early predecessors. The Combination Act of 1825 (see Pearlman, "The Government and Workers' Associations," CRSO Working Paper #160) had legalized the unions, but most activities necessary for their successful activity remained subject to governmental repression. Therefore, many unions retained the remnants of an underground existence - secret oaths and conspiratorial undertakings such as attacks on non-unionists and non-union shops. The strike itself was a rather dangerous weapon that often backfired, and the strongest unions, such as the building trades societies and the Glasgow cotton spinners, rarely resorted to such tactics. Those industrial showdowns which did occur were usually long and often violent, with the odds stacked overwhelmingly against the workers. The wholesale importation of blacklegs (scabs in American parlance) was common, as was government intervention against the unions and their leadership.

Probably the most important development during the period under study

was a trend toward inter- and intra-trade solidarity, culminating in the formation of general and consolidated unions. These organizations attempted to overcome the difficulties facing isolated groups of workers by:

- 1) soliciting contributions for the financial support of strikers; and
- 2) attempting to coordinate the industrial actions of various towns and trades.

As we will see, the ambitiously-named National Association for the Protection of Labour and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union turned out to be merely ephemeral forerunners of the modern national unions and Trade Union Congress, doomed to extinction because of governmental repression, a lack of clear aims and the inability to control its constituent elements. But such attempts were an integral part of the trade union upsurge which accompanied the political and social unrest of 1828-1834.

The first attempt at such organization is connected with the activities of the Lancashire cotton spinners and the name of John Doherty. In 1818, during the great textile strike of that year, the Manchester spinners created the Philanthropic society to solicit economic support from other Lancashire workers. The association collapsed soon after, but the textile workers maintained a sharp sense of solidarity. The creation of a general spinners' union again became a major issue in 1829, in the course of a series of strikes brought on by recession-induced wage cuts. Ten thousand workers in Stockport were idled from January to June by a spinners' strike, as were thousands more in April at Manchester. By July, other mill owners who were not affected by the walkout decided to make a common front with their capitalist brothers, and lock out non-strikers whose financial support had been decisive in continuing the action. By October, the workers had been defeated. In the aftermath,

calls were made for a general trade union of all spinners in Britain to avoid such catastrophies in the future. Doherty, the secretary of the Manchester spinners, organized a conference on the Isle of Man in December, 1829, and the Grand General Union of Spinners of England, Scotland and Ireland was inaugurated.

As with most other trade union movements of the period, the surviving documents are too few to attempt a real history of the Spinners Union. We do know, however, that Doherty was so enamoured of the idea of trade union unity that he attempted to unite all British trade into a general union. Within six months, he had won the support of at least twenty other Manchester trades and founded the National Association for the Protection of Labour. The N.A.P.L. was organized along the same lines as the Spinners Union, with strong central control of finances and, at least theoretically, of decision-making in regard to strike activity. Each member was to contribute a penny a week to a solidarity fund, which was only to be dispensed in support of defensive strikes, i.e. those resisting attempts to reduce wages.

Doherty and his supporters hoped that such an organization could control the often opposed local and sectional interests of the various trade unions, and create a disciplined, united movement. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. The N.A.P.L. remained a mainly Lancashire phenomenon, (although it did link up with some of the Midlands textile workers and aid in the creation of a union in the Staffordshire potteries); but even there its successes were short-lived. During 1930, the cotton spinners began a series of "rotating" strikes in Manchester, hitting two or three factories at a time and aiding the strikers with levies on the men still at work. This tactic worked brilliantly and slowly forced

the millowners to restore the wage cuts of a year earlier. But in December, 1830, the masters hit back. Fifty two firms in Ashton-under-Lyme, Stalybridge and Dunkinfield decided to enforce a general reduction in wages. The spinners' hand was forced, and in reaction the union called for a general strike of all cotton spinners in Britain earning less than what they considered to be a decent wage. The Irish and Scottish societies refused to support the movement, and even in Lancashire, the Workers of Preston, Lancaster, Stockport and Bolton failed to turn out. The strike was a violent affair, with over a thousand additional troops called to the area. But by March 1831, running short of funds and unsupported by other areas, the strikers were forced back to work.

The defeat of the strike effectively killed the Grand General Union of Spinners and thereby the N.A.P.L. Doherty took his unity campaign to London, but the trade union movement in Lancashire remained quiescent for the rest of the period. The Association, though, had served as an example for other workers, particularly in the Yorkshire woolen and worsted industries. A bitter strike at Gott's woolen mill in Leeds (from February-October 1831) led to the formation of the Leeds Trade Union, a group which soon organized over 20,000 workers. In the first months of 1832, the union led a quick and effective strike at three Leeds mills; the resulting increase in strength and prestige helped in the expansion of the Leeds movement into other parts of Yorkshire, and even into northern Lancashire, where a woolcombers' strike at Dolphinholme in November 1832 was supported by the Leeds men.

The next year, 1833, saw a general upsurge in trade union activity throughout Britain in response to an economic upturn in most trades. In the forefront of the movement was the Operative Builders' Union (O.B.U.),

an association of 40,000 construction workers in London, Manchester and Birmingham. The builders during this year, successfully turned back an attempt to create a general contracting system which would have eroded union standards and taken work from sympathetic small masters. The Nottingham hosiers, as well as the pottery workers of Worcester, won a series of economic demands merely by threatening general strikes in their respective trades. And in July 1833, the Leeds textile workers were back in action, presenting to their employers a list of wages supposedly demanded by the mysterious terrorist "John Powlett" (reminiscent, of course, of Captain Swing, the Daughters of Rebecca and other anonymous plebeian activists).

Toward the summer of 1833, it was becoming increasingly apparent to employers that a united riposte was necessary against the unions. Factory owners in various localities, including Leeds, Halifax and Huddersfield, drew up "bonds", i. e., agreements not to hire union members and to force their employees to renounce union activity. Building contractors in Manchester discharged union workers in July 1833, as did their Birmingham counterparts in August. The textile trades of Leicester and Derby became the scene of similar confrontations in November; while, by the end of the year, union glovemakers in Worcester and Yeovil, and cabinetmakers, masons and carpenters in Glasgow faced capitalist counterattacks.

As in 1829-30, a step-up in the tempo of industrial struggle brought forward plans for trade union solidarity and unity. Interestingly, this movement now became associated with the spread of Utopian socialist ideas, in particular those of Robert Owen. Owen had returned from America in 1832 after the failure of his communities in the Midwest, and soon became interested in the British trade union movement as a potential protagonist in

the creation of his "New Moral World". Many union militants, over the years, had assimilated Owenite propoganda, and now looked to the man himself for advice and leadership. The result of their cooperation was the formation of the Grand National Moral Union in October 1833 and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in February 1834.

The story of this latter organization is probably one of the most misunderstood episodes in the history of the British trade union movement. The Webbs, in particular, are responsible; they clearly overemphasized the role of Owen himself in the movement, overestimated the membership of the organization, and overstated its centrality in the agitation of 1833-34. But a more recent study by W.H. Oliver has clarified the record. The G.N.C.T.U. was certainly influenced by Owenite ideas, even to the point of aiding unemployed and striking workers to set up producers and consumers cooperatives, but its main role, like the N.A.P.L. before it, was as a coordinating body for the distribution of strike support funds. Perhaps its influence was widespread, but its main base was in London, among the artisanal workers (especially the tailors), and its paid membership never exceeded 20,000.

Perhaps, if the G.N.C.T.U. had been as powerful and as well-organized as the Webbs claimed, it would have been more successful in resisting the employers' onslaught. But by early 1834, it was obvious that the unions were outgunned. In March and April, textile workers in Leicester and Derby were returning to work and renouncing their union membership. The Leeds millowners successfully enforced the "bond" in May, and the London tailors were defeated in their attempts to enforce a minimum wage. The G.N.C.T.U. did help mobilize hundreds of thousands of workers in defense of the "Tolpuddle Martyrs", six Dorchester laborers who had been imprisoned for attempt-

ing to organize a union, but the government refused to back down. Thus, by the summer of 1834 the British trade union movement had become demoralized by defeat after defeat. Soon afterwards the G.N.C.T.U. collapsed.

Obviously, this short review of the most significant industrial struggles of the period cannot do justice to a historical record which is itself rather sketchy at most points. Hopefully, the Great Britain Study will point to some new generalizations and new areas of fruitful research. In the meantime, though, what should be borne in mind is the essentially local and sectional nature of the movement, its weakness vis-à-vis capital, but also its tremendous tenacity over the long run.

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