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The Revolutionary Tradition in England

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Dedicated to those who will complete it.

> I am sure there was no man marked of God above another, for none comes into the world with a saddle on his back, neither any booted and spurred to ride him. — Richard Rumbold, English Revolutionary and Cromwellian Ironside, to his judges in 1685.

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Prefatory Note

The following pages were written in London and Oxford in 1940–41. The war and the abnormal circumstances which accompanied it have prevented its appearance at an earlier date. The period covered, the twelfth century down to the outbreak of the Second World War, remains as written, since it has not, unfortunately, been necessary to add any fresh material accruing since 1941, when the book was completed, to the English revolutionary tradition.

Two points, however, may briefly be added in relation to the changes in the British scene which have transpired between 1941, the concluding date of this book, and 1947, the date which finally sees it appear in print.

Firstly, the decline and current disintegration of the British Empire, already foreshadowed in 1941, when the latter part of this book was written, has advanced by giant strides, in and as a result of the Second World War, when the 'Empire upon which the Sun never sets', proved impossible of effective defence. The temporary loss of the Far East to Japan has inflicted an irreparable blow upon the prestige of

'The White Sahibs' throughout the entire colonial world. And the present (1947) evacuation of India and Burma, due, ultimately, to the political and military weakness of Britain, marks 'the end o' an auld sang'; the loss of the traditional 'brightest jewel in the (British) King's diadem' marks indeed in ultimate perspective, the first, longest and decisive step in the now historically inevitable dissolution of the British Empire. How long Britain can hold her remaining, now mainly African, Empire, remains to be seen. But, sooner or later — and sooner rather than later — the historic sign 'to let' will be hung over the modern imperial successor of the Roman and Spanish Empires.

In view of what has been written in the concluding pages of the book which follows, it is really hardly necessary for me 'to point the moral and to adorn the tale',[1] and to emphasise the profound effect that the current disintegration of its empire will have upon the British metropolis itself and its revolutionary fortunes. The historical conditions themselves are fast making the successful continuation of reformism impossible, and are fast putting the British revolution upon the order of the day.

From which very fact arises the second factor of which it is necessary to take cognisance even in this brief introduction. The first rumblings, consequent upon Britain's contemporary decline, have proved sufficient to sweep away traditional Toryism in the General Election of 6–26 July 1945, and to return a majority Labour government to power. Herewith, an interesting historical situation is disclosed: the British masses are, at long last, beginning to turn over in their sleep! True enough that the mere substitution of Labour for Tory imperialism is far from being a real social revolution. Social-democracy plucks the fruits, but never cuts the roots of class society. Nonetheless, the reformist mirage will prove an unsubstantial one, and of brief duration. The masses are on the march at last! And History beckons them on to inevitable victory. We approach, beyond doubt, the final struggle: before the twentieth century has run its course, new perspectives will open out before Britain, as before humanity in general. A Free Britain, in a Free Europe, will have shaken itself free from its imperialist past. The road to the future runs clear, over the Bridge of Revolution, to the sunlit skies of a happier future!

One could, accordingly, have no more auspicious moment than this one in which to offer to the British masses, to the custodians of Britain's glorious future, this book, at one and the same time the history of her revolutionary past and the prophecy of her revolutionary future!

In preparing this manuscript for the press my best thanks are, in particular, due to Mr John McNair, General Secretary of the Independent Labour Party, for his invaluable encouragement and assistance; to Mr WM Stafford, for his personal kindness and his indispensable technical assistance; to Mr J Diamond, for his unfailing encouragement and for many valuable and useful suggestions; to Miss Hilda Habgood, for the scrupulous care and infinite trouble she took in typing the manuscript; and, last but not least, to RL Worrall, for both his warm interest, and his apt advice, expressed in many conversations, with regard to the ideas contained in this book.

14 July 1947

1 Adapted from Samuel Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* — MIA.

Introduction

A modern historian has described the nineteenth century as 'The Century of Revolution'. Already there is a growing body of evidence to support this description, and to an even greater degree as a description applicable to our current century. There is every reason to believe that the Russian Revolution of 1917 opened up a revolutionary era more stormy than that earlier one inaugurated by the French Revolution of 1789. Today, the obsolescent capitalist system, already outmoded by the evolution of the very technical forces for which its own development has been responsible, is visibly due to founder in a storm of revolution in a similar manner to the feudal system before it. Willy-nilly, therefore, our age is a revolutionary age, so much so in fact that it can be stated without exaggeration that *our epoch is only significant when and where it is revolutionary*. Whether we like it or not, our age is a revolutionary age: the science of revolution is pre-eminently *the* science of the twentieth century.

In a future publication I hope to trace the broad stream of revolution — and of counter-revolution, its inseparable concomitant — in its course throughout the ages: here, I confine myself to a more modest task and to a single aspect of the subject; viz, 'the evolution of revolution' in a single country, our own. Commencing in the middle ages and coming down to our own day, I present in historic succession the sequence of social revolution, the successive phases of which have eventuated upon English soil.

To speak today of a 'revolutionary tradition in England' may indeed cause surprise, so completely since early Victorian times has the most elementary idea of social revolution been smothered in a wet blanket of bourgeois respectability. But, despite this well-nigh universal prejudice — itself due to historical causes which the following pages will hope to make clear — it will be found upon investigation that the revolutionary tradition of the English people is inferior to that of no other people whatsoever, however much disguised by that mendacious mythology of a decadent and satiated bourgeoisie that successfully passes muster in 'respectable' circles as the authentic record of English history. The history of revolution in England is indispensable to a study of English history as it actually occurred, and not, as in current English 'history', as the ruling class think that it ought to have occurred!

To reveal its own history to the English people — a history long artfully concealed by the professional apologists of the British oligarchy, who masqueraded as scientific historians — that is the first, primarily theoretical, reason for writing the present book.

In the best historical writing, as elsewhere, we observe 'a unity of theory and practice'. To the theoretical reason indicated above, another, a practical one, can and must be added: in England, as elsewhere, we are approaching an era of social revolution. For the recent war marks, it can hardly be questioned, the beginning of the decline and fall of British imperialism and of the British Empire. And this collapse, now inevitable sooner or later — and probably sooner rather than later — means inevitably the proximate break-up of the 'Victorian compromise', that is, of the prolonged social truce, which, from the time of Disraeli onwards, has smothered class struggles in England in a common network of imperialist exploitation. With the final liquidation of its world empire, the most parasitic metropolis in all history will be awakened by the rude touch of disillusioning reality. The rival social classes,

temporarily united in common bond of imperialist exploitation, will then fall headlong into the sharpest antagonism, driven on by the most urgent economic causes. The historical dialectic will then become involved in the sharpest contradiction: for the same causes that now make Britain the least, will then make it the most revolutionary country in the world, if not in all history. *Revolution in England, coming after an age in which the very word was taboo, will assume all the force of the unexpected.*

We have not forgotten that dictum of Balzac, so entirely applicable to the coming situation in Britain, viz, that the most terrifying and destructive of all revolutions is that made by a crowd of frightened sheep! The grisly example afforded in the most recent years by Spain, that nearest of all historical analogies to the British Empire in decline, enables us to see by a kind of political necromancy what the next phase in British history is likely to resemble.

For reasons, therefore, of a character no less practical than scientific, the time is now particularly apposite to present in a broad historic perspective the sequence of revolution in England; and to present it equally as a record of the past and as a harbinger of the future; of 'the shape of things to come'.[1]

5 February 1940

1 The triple division of the ensuing work corresponds with the three great divisions into which the history of social revolution in Britain can be divided: viz, the revolutions of the feudal era; the age-long capitalist (bourgeois) revolution against the bureaucratic monarchy and the feudal system; and the early stages of the socialist (proletarian) revolution. (To a certain extent these phases are found to overlap, but this is unavoidable!) In a final chapter, we endeavour to peer through the dense murk that shrouds the immediate future; using as our lantern that method of historical analogy which is summarised in the aphorism that 'history is philosophy teaching by example'.

Part I: Revolution in Mediæval England

Chapter I: The Class Structure of Mediæval England[1]

Most histories of England begin with its conquest by the Romans (AD 44). In actual fact, however, Roman Britain was almost completely lost to sight in the storms of barbaric invasion when the night fell upon European civilisation in the era of 'The Migration of the Nations' (AD 400 to 600). After the withdrawal of the Romans (c AD 410), the island became completely separated from the European mainland and from such civilisation as survived in that age of iron. Nowhere was the Dark Age darker than in Britain. From AD 410, the date of the withdrawal of the Roman legions, to AD 597, the date of the arrival of the Christian missionaries from Rome, the former Roman province of Britain, equipped, as modern archaeological research has revealed, with all the refinements of classical civilisation, had become a *terra incognita*, a semi-fabulous land; so remote from the centres of contemporary culture that the Byzantine historian Procopius — writing in highly-civilised Constantinople in the mid-sixth century — gravely records that at dusk the curious onlooker on the coast of Gaul can observe the ghostly ferryman Charon sailing across to Britain, the abode of the dead, with his cargo of human souls bound for the spirit-land.

It was during these two misty centuries, however, that Britain became 'England' — 'Angle-land' — the land of the English; whilst, simultaneously, adding insult to injury, the original British inhabitants of the island were dubbed 'Welsh' — that is, 'foreigners' — in their own country! Of this legend-wrapped era of conquest we have only names surviving: Vortigern, Rowena, Hengist — and the inimitable Horsa! Hardly better known than these, though destined subsequently to a worldwide fame, was the British soldier of fortune who wandered around a country sinking rapidly into barbarism, fighting Saxons and Britons alternately with his band of freelance — 'free-corps' — cavalry, whom the transforming hand of time eventually metamorphosed into the world-renowned epic of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

By the year 597, when Rome again made contact with Britain — this time by the agency not of military legions, but of the ecclesiastical cohorts of the Benedictine monks of Papal Rome — the conquest of Britain was virtually completed by the Teutonic invaders, Angles, Saxons and Jutes. In place of the unified Roman province, there now existed the England of the 'Heptarchy', the land of the seven kingdoms, amongst which the barbarians had divided their island conquest.[2]

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1 The present work deals almost entirely with revolution in England: for lack of adequate knowledge I do not deal, except incidentally, with Scotch revolutionary history, whilst that of Ireland, 'England's oldest colony', falls entirely outside my scope. By the term 'revolution' we imply, here and throughout, social revolution arising from class struggles and aiming at fundamental social change. Purely political revolutions within the successive ruling classes, palace conspiracies, etc, fall entirely outside the scope of this book.

2 The title 'Heptarchy' is derived from the Greek word for seven, a name bestowed on the island by the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus — seventh century: the seven kingdoms were Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, East Anglia, Kent, Sussex and Essex, the first

It is unnecessary for me to trace in any detail the evolution of Anglo-Saxon England between the era of its adoption of Christianity in the seventh century and its final conquest by the Normans in AD 1066, with which latter date the history of Mediæval England may be said, properly speaking, to commence. Speaking of Anglo-Saxon England, I will merely remark that the original paganism of her Teutonic conquerors, in itself the invariable hallmark of a primitive patriarchal society, gave way to Christianity, which implied a closer union with the European Continent, then emerging under the direction of the papacy into the mediæval civilisation of an ecclesiastical type. Further, that after Alfred the Great (871–900, King of Wessex) had beaten off a formidable attack by the Norse Vikings, the whole island south of the Tweed was united, though somewhat loosely, under the rule of Alfred's descendants, the kings of Wessex.[3]

On 5 January 1066, there died the last king of Wessex, Edward 'the Confessor', the last 'Bretwalda' (overlord) of Anglo-Saxon England. The death of the mild 'Confessor', the last ruler of the House of Alfred, unloosed the storms of foreign invasion from both north and south. Harold, Earl of Wessex, the most powerful of Edward's feudal chiefs, seized the throne. But whilst just able to beat off an attack by the King of Norway at the battle of Stamford Bridge, he succumbed a few weeks later to the Normans, who had crossed the Channel from the south. The desperately contested battle of Hastings (14 October 1066) (or Senlac) ended the life Harold and the Anglo-Saxon regime.[4] The loosely-knit social structure crashed helplessly at the feet of the foreign invader. The Christmas of 1066 saw William, Duke of Normandy — formerly 'the Bastard', henceforth 'the Conqueror' — crowned in London as King of England by the Grace of God and the efficiency of his feudal cavalry, now first revealed in its full potency on an English battlefield. With the Norman Conquest of 1066 the history of England as a fully-fledged mediæval state may be said to begin. To observe how this was so, we must look first at Anglo-Saxon society and then at the nature of the social changes introduced by the Norman Conquest.

The main distinctions between Anglo-Saxon and Norman society may be stated in these terms: before the conquest, the Anglo-Saxon social order was neither completely primitive nor yet completely feudal; but it was rather a cross between these two forms of society. We could perhaps describe it as a tribal society in the early stages of evolving into feudalism. Its local divisions had been very imperfectly surmounted under the weak Confessor. The great Earls, with Harold at their head,

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three being of major importance.

3 This process was assisted by the conquest of the northern half of the island by the Vikings, which destroyed the power of the local rivals of Wessex, Mercia and Northumbria.

4 The Battle of Hastings was one of the most fiercely contested battles in history. But for the losses sustained by Harold's army at Stamford Bridge it seems probable, from the actual course of the battle, that the Norman attack would have been beaten off — in which case, no doubt, historians, who are the inveterate snobs of literature, would have tumbled over each other to prove how 'inevitable' was the victory of 'free' Englishmen over the feudal serfs of William! The issue of Hastings, one of the decisive battles of world history, and its momentous social consequences, forms one of the most effective demonstrations in all history of the existence and potency of the element of accident. Had William fallen, as he very nearly did — he had three horses killed under him — Normandy at that juncture would certainly have fallen back into the feudal anarchy from which he had so recently delivered her; and the conquest of England, with all that it implied, might have been postponed for centuries. The Normans, or Northmen, were originally Vikings who had seized the north of France about 900. They had, however, long ceased to be pagan barbarians and had become a leading feudal and Catholic race, who conquered Sicily and took a leading part in the Crusades, besides invading England.

were more powerful than the nominal king. Similarly, such primitive (pre-feudal) institutions as chattel-slavery (as distinct from agrarian serfdom) still existed. Bristol, for example, did a brisk trade in 'white ivory' — slaves.[5] Similarly, from the ecclesiastical standpoint, so important in the Middle Ages, the Anglo-Saxon Church, though nominally in communion with Rome, was still largely insular and deficient in ecclesiastical culture. Alfred the Great, himself no mean scholar, paints a gloomy picture of the ignorance of the clergy of his day, and up to the time of the Conquest things do not seem to have improved much in this respect. From a military standpoint, the Anglo-Saxons remained strangers to the essentially feudal institution of cavalry: at Hastings the army of Harold fought drawn up in the old Teutonic schiltroun or shield-wall, a battle-formation inherited from the aboriginal Germans, as described by Tacitus in his *Germania* (end of first century AD), and long since outmoded by the military science of feudal Europe.

From these facts and others of a similar nature, we may infer that Saxon England was in a transition stage, proceeding from a tribal society to one that was feudal in character, with all 'the inevitability of gradualness', to employ the political phraseology of a later age.

The Normans terminated this era of 'gradualness' by an evolutionary 'leap', by an operation of political surgery of the most drastic and unpleasantly efficient kind. Having conquered at Hastings, and subsequently crushed the risings of the natives, William set to work to modernise — or, rather, to mediævalise — his conquest. By a ruthless series of administrative innovations, comparable in their general effects to the modern 'Five-Year Plans' of Soviet Russia, this mediæval 'Stalin' ruthlessly converted the chaotic England of the Heptarchy into a fully-fledged mediæval society. The details of this epochal transaction belong to general English history, and as such need not detain us. I need only allude in passing to their main features: the *Doomsday Book*, which sought to end the administrative chaos of Anglo-Saxon England (1077–81); the reorganisation of the Church by William's Archbishop, the Italian Lanfranc, upon Continental models supplied by Rome under the influence of Gregory the Seventh and the ecclesiastical Reformers of Cluny; the attempts made by William to put an end to feudal disunity by asserting the rights of the Crown against his baronial vassals.

The net effect of these drastic changes was to bequeath to the Norman and Plantagenet kings who succeeded him a fully-developed mediæval society, at the class formations of which it is now necessary to glance, as it was against the background of this society that the social revolutions of the mediæval era arose, and it was towards the overthrow, or transformation, of this society that they were directed. I may add that the social order which I am about to describe took definitive shape in the twelfth century, and endured, substantially unaltered, right down to the end of the Middle Ages.

William the Conqueror (1066–87) was succeeded by his two sons, William Rufus (1087–1100) and Henry the First (1100–35). After the interregnum of the weak Stephen, marked by unchecked feudal disorder, the House of Plantagenet — originally Counts of Anjou — ascended the English throne (1154) — by right of maternal descent from Henry the First — which they occupied down to 1485, when Richard the Third was defeated and killed at Bosworth Field, at the very end of the Middle Ages. As it was against the background of the mediæval society which

5 According to *Doomsday Book* (1077–81) there were 9000 slaves in Sussex alone. A Church Council at London condemned the traffic in human flesh in 1102.

finally developed in England under her Norman and Plantagenet kings that the earliest revolutions occurred, a glance may usefully be directed at the class composition of this society.

Broadly speaking, there were six main classes or social forces in mediæval England: the monarchy, the (feudal) landlords, the Catholic Church, the peasants, the burghers of the towns, and the religious heretics (Lollards, etc). Of these six forces at work in mediæval society, the first three — viz, Crown, landlords and Church — constituted the ruling classes of the epoch in question, and, however much divided internally, always united in defence of the status quo, of the social system (feudalism) by the continuance of which they all stood to gain.

The three latter social forces — viz, burghers, peasants and (as and when they arose) religious heresies — represented the social forces that were held in subjection by the regime, and the interest of which consequently lay in its overthrow, or at least in its substantial modification.

As the revolutionary struggles of the Middle Ages were waged by and between these classes and social forces, the history of their relationships constituting the sequence of revolution and counter-revolution in mediæval England, I propose to bestow a brief glance, *seriatim*, upon their nature and importance in mediæval society.

I commence with the classes who stood to gain by the maintenance of the status quo.

I: The Monarchy: In feudal society, which lacked any high degree of centralisation, the king stood in a relationship to his vassals, the great landlords, analogous to the relationship which these latter bore to their vassals, the small landowners. In a society as was that of mediæval times, where political relationships were so largely personal as was that of overlord and vassal, the strength of the monarchy depended far more on the personal qualities of the king than in later regimes of a more advanced administrative character. Thus, a strong ruler, like William the Conqueror, the two Henrys or Edward the First, was really master in his own house. Whereas, under a weak king, such as Stephen, John and Henry the Third, baronial licence ran unchecked and complete anarchy submerged the state.

To keep feudalism, with its endemic divisions, in hand was the first task of a feudal king who took his office seriously. But, as he could not abolish the feudal *system*, the possibilities of recurring disorder were always there. Thus, William the Conqueror took measures to check the power of his feudal lords — division of lands, *Doomsday Book*, etc — and the two first Henrys developed a centralised bureaucracy, but under their weak successors English society was submerged under a tide of baronial licence.[6]

From the point of view with which we are here concerned, viz, the social revolutions of mediæval England, we can note that it was only under weak kings — John, Henry the Third, Richard the Second, Henry the Sixth — that social revolution came to a head in mediæval England. At other times, the monarchy was the efficient policeman of English feudal society.

II: The Roman Catholic Church: Taking it as a whole, the mediæval Church — less 'Roman' and more 'Catholic' than it is today — was the most powerful

6 Despite repeated assertions to the contrary, William's centralising measures proved no more successful than did those of other European kings of the feudal age: the baronial 'war of each against all' on several subsequent occasions, particularly under Stephen (1135–54), reached a pitch equal to anything to be found anywhere in European history.

institution that existed in mediæval times. Itself an institution pre-feudal in character — 'the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned on the grave thereof', as Thomas Hobbes was later to describe it in a classical phrase[7] — it gave to feudal society both a religious colouring and a 'European' consciousness — for a millennium, c500–1500, 'Europe' and 'Christendom' were synonymous terms. Throughout this entire era the Church dominated culture and education. Thus, the term 'clerk' meant equally any literate person and any person in Holy Orders. The Doctors of the Church were styled 'universal', etc, masters of all science, of secular equally with religious knowledge. On a more mundane plane, the Church owned from a third to a half of the land in Europe, and its legislation against 'usury' — which included virtually all money transactions — dominated the finance of the age. Moreover, the writ of the Church ran in the other world no less than in this. The age was a profoundly religious one; it feared Hell and desired Heaven, and the Church held the keys of both! It was this many-sided accumulation of power that made the Catholic Church *the* master-force of mediæval society.

Whilst itself an institution pre-feudal in origin yet the Church had learned how to adapt itself to the feudal system and to feudal conditions of existence. At the same time, whilst it carried on political struggles for power with the other dominant forces in feudal society, yet its interest lay in the status quo, in the defence of which it could be usually relied upon to unite with its rivals in face of a common danger.[8]

III: The Feudal Landlords: This class was, properly speaking, the ruling class of the Middle Ages. Its power rested primarily on its legal ownership of the land — and of the serfs who tilled it: we have not forgotten that, throughout the entire Middle Ages, landed property was '*real* property', that is, the kind of property that gave power and pre-eminence to those who held it.[9] Secondarily, the feudal system was in its origins a military system — it had owed its rise to the need to defend Europe against barbarian and Mohammedan invasions in the Dark Ages — and the feudal knights were the people who wielded the military power. They exercised this by means of their vast fortified castles, nearly impregnable prior to the rise of artillery in the sixteenth century, and by their heavy cavalry to which mediæval warfare could supply no effective defence prior to the rise of the longbow in the fourteenth century.

The feudal class was small in numbers, a modern military historian has calculated that the entire English knighthood in the reign of Edward the First (1272–1307) did not exceed 2750 in number. But its power was immensely strong, and its limitless arrogance — better preserved today in the still semi-feudal British aristocracy than anywhere else — regarded both burgher and peasant with unlimited disdain. The feudal chivalry was a caste rather than a class, and its far-famed 'chivalry' towards 'fair ladies' was entirely consonant with the '*jus primae noctis*' in its relationship with the women of the subject class.[10]

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7 See Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651).

8 Its relations with the monarchy were usually close, as the kings were forced to choose their ministers from the ecclesiastical ranks, in the absence of any educated lay class available for bureaucratic purposes.

9 The continuance of this classification in modern English law, down to quite recent times, shows how strong are the feudal influences still existing in modern English society.

10 See JE Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward the First* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1901), p 81.

The '*jus primae noctis*' — 'right of the first night' — gave the feudal lord the 'right' to sleep with his serf's wife on the marriage night. That this 'right' was not purely theoretical is demonstrated by the preservation in several areas in Europe, including Nottinghamshire, of

Such were the ruling classes in feudal England. Let us now direct a glance at the subject, potentially revolutionary classes in this same mediæval society.

IV: Peasants: By far the most numerous class was that of the peasants, who formed probably round about 80 per cent of the total population of mediæval England.[11] The overwhelming majority of the peasants were serfs, bound, in return for (an originally military) protection, to give their lord both agrarian and (often) personal services. Serfdom itself may be defined with essential accuracy as a form of slavery adapted to an uncentralised system. That is, the serf was at law a chattel, liable to be bought and sold with his 'manor' or agrarian estate, but the loose structure of mediæval society compelled the lord to give him at least enough personal liberty to earn his own keep.[12]

Mediæval society was, of course, based in the main on agriculture; hence the peasant-serf was the basis of mediæval economic society, just as the wage-earning proletarian is the basis of modern (capitalist) society. And, just as socialism — collective ownership of the means of production — represents the interest of the modern wage-worker, so to the bolder spirits among the serfs it appeared that agrarian communism represented the real interests of the mediæval peasant-serf.

I have alluded above to the need felt by the peasants for agrarian communism as the ideal economic system. Living as did these mainly illiterate serfs in a rude and ignorant age in which little was known of man's past and in which the scientific study of society still lay far in the future, it was a necessary feature of their age that their conception of communism should be of a religious, and not of a scientific character. It was in fact a backward-looking communism, and its main inspiration was drawn from the only literature to which the mediæval peasants had any access — viz: the Bible, and in particular those parts of the New Testament that present an idealised picture of the early Christian Church, when the disciples 'had all things in common', and when greed, the primary virtue of every society based on private property, was so far from having become the essential 'Christian' virtue — as it is today! — that the Holy Ghost was supposed to have punished it with death in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the first Christian apostles of the 'economic virtues'.

V: The Religious Heresies: The communism of the Middle Ages was therefore necessarily a religious communism: it took the form of religious heresies in both East and West, in the Christian and Mohammedan worlds. As we shall shortly have

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local codes of law, by which the eldest son could not inherit, as his paternity was assumed always to he doubtful! Truly, 'an age of chivalry'!

11 This population is usually computed at from two to two-and-a-half million, but mediæval statistics are notoriously inexact.

12 Broadly speaking, the commonwealth theorist, the 'Digger' Gerard Winstanley, the first philosopher of the class struggle in England, was right in identifying the serfs with the conquered Saxons and their feudal oppressors with the Norman conquerors — see Part II — *infra* — Chapter VI, Appendix I. It is, for instance, highly significant that in a profoundly religious age it was the masses who cherished the memory of Edward the Confessor, the idealised last Anglo-Saxon King of England, as the national saint, whilst it was the Norman Crusaders who brought back from the despotic East the cult of the Byzantine St George who, under the auspices of the court, finally displaced Edward as the patron saint of England in the fourteenth century. 'St George for Merry England' was the religious expression of the ideological victory of Norman feudalism in England. In general, there can be little doubt that the Normans were for a long time after the conquest regarded with intense hatred by their Saxon serfs. It seems probable that William Rufus was killed in the New Forest by a Saxon outlaw. Also compare the contemporary Scandinavian proverb: 'Cold heart and bloody hand now rule the English land.'

occasion to observe, the ideology of the great peasant revolutions of the Middle Ages was a religious ideology; in particular, as might be expected from its very nature, it began by demanding a return to (what is supposed to have been) the purity of the early Church, with which the heretics were never tiring of comparing the wealthy and reactionary Church of their own times, much to the latter's disadvantage.

Communism, therefore, is so far from being the modern invention of bearded foreigners in the British Museum (as both the *Daily Mail* and Mr HG Wells concur in supposing) that it was one of the major forces making for social revolution throughout the entire mediæval era. Its untiring propagandists were the underground religious heresies, from that little-known subterranean world which was always smouldering beneath the surface of mediæval society. This communism was, of course, from the nature of the times an agrarian communism of consumption, and not an industrial communism of production as in modern times. It was also a religious, and as such a backward-looking communism. What else could it have been? For that matter, all communism and every revolution that had communism for its aim prior to the industrial revolution looked to the past for its models. Throughout the long ages before social science was born, the science of communism showed only its hinder-parts to its devotees![13]

VI: The Burghers: Lastly, among the revolutionary classes of the Middle Ages we find the burgesses of the towns. The embryo of the modern bourgeoisie; the acorn whence sprouted in time the giant oak of capitalism, the luxuriant foliage of which came in time to overshadow the entire earth. But at the time of which we are speaking, this grandiose development still lay far in the future. Apart from Italy, the most advanced country in Europe, where already the carrying-trade of the Crusades had created such primarily commercial states as Venice, Genoa and Pisa, the burgess (capitalist) class was still weak in numbers and confused in its social ideology. In England, it was virtually equivalent to London, then as always by far the largest town, where the financial power of the burgesses had already made them a force by the end of the twelfth century, when the history of social revolution in England, in so far as it is possible to trace it, may be said to have begun.

It is at this point, accordingly, that I may conveniently start my account of the 'evolution of revolution' in England. I proceed, as throughout, in chronological order, and therefore begin with the burgesses, the earliest class in English history to take the revolutionary road.

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13 I feel obliged at this point to add that, whilst I hold no brief for religion — as readers of my earlier works will, I think, agree! — yet I must protest emphatically against the almost universal habit of modern revolutionaries of lumping together indiscriminately all and every kind of religion as black reaction, as 'the opium of the people'. In actual history, we must discriminate very carefully between official religion and the religious movements which had their origin amongst the masses. The former kind deserves all the abuse that can be showered upon it, and it has, of course, attracted far more attention: 'The ruling ideas in any age are the ideas of the ruling class.' — Marx. But there has often been as well a subterranean persecuted religion, which has usually been revolutionary and often communistic. I have no desire to inflict the study of theology as required reading upon the already overburdened revolutionaries of our own day! But this simple distinction would save our movement from the repetition of a lot of stark nonsense. Not all religion was counter-revolutionary 'opium', however mistaken we may regard its tenets. The different conceptions of the supernatural have also their class roots. Surely this is 'orthodox' Marxism!

Chapter II: The Revolution of the Burgesses[1]

In the year 1099, the Western Crusaders stormed Jerusalem and set up Latin states in Palestine. Throughout the entire twelfth century, armies of Crusaders were continually *en route* to the East to defend Jerusalem against the Turkish (Mohammedan) counter-attacks. As a result of this new contact of the rude West, then painfully emerging from the Dark Ages under the leadership of the Papacy into the feudal-ecclesiastical civilisation of the High Middle Ages, the level both of mental culture and of material civilisation was substantially raised by this sudden impact — of the still far more highly civilised East.[2]

As a direct result of the Crusades, a new social class, the class of burgesses, or merchants, which had been virtually extinguished after the fall of the Roman Empire and the consequent obliteration of trade, once again revived, along with the expansion of the Eastern carrying and import trade. This, as remarked above, was so particularly in Italy, the most advanced country in Europe. Venice in particular became the richest state in Europe: in 1204 she actually conquered Constantinople with an army of hired 'Crusaders'. In the twelfth century, the wealth and culture of the Norman kings of Sicily were the wonder of Europe. The Italian burgesses, even more than the Papacy, had occasion to bless the Crusades!

Beyond the Alps, the spread of trade and the concurrent growth of a commercial class, whilst less rapid than in the more favoured lands around the Mediterranean, the 'great sea' of mediæval as well as of classical times, yet also advanced considerably during the course of the twelfth century. The northern commercial federation, later known as the 'Hanseatic League', seems to have begun about this time. Whilst towards the end of his reign the sagacious Norman king Henry the First bestowed a charter upon London, which may be said to mark the official commencement of the most brilliant municipal career that modern civilisation has known. Then, as now, London already enjoyed a size disproportionate to all other English towns. Mediæval towns were small, almost Lilliputian, compared with the giant cities of modern times; and even as compared with the contemporary trade-centres, London cannot have cut much of a figure. It had perhaps a population of 40,000; a substantial population out of a total national population of around two millions or perhaps even less.

However, 'nothing is great or little except by comparison'. As compared with rural villages of mediæval England, London was a veritable giant. Apart from it, the only other trading centres were Norwich, the centre of the wool trade, and Bristol, which I have already mentioned as the centre of the contemporary slave trade. And even as late as 1660 neither city had a population exceeding 30,000.[3]

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1 In and throughout the present book I aim rather at presenting the organic sequence of revolutionary movements than at multiplying an excess of detail, which can be found in numerous monographs and general histories, and which would be, in any case, out of harmony with the scale upon which this book is planned.

2 We have not of course forgotten that throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, Europe was relatively barbaric as and when compared with the Mohammedan East. It was only subsequent to the Crusades that the leadership of civilisation passed to Europe.

3 In the twelfth century it could hardly have exceeded 10,000, making allowance for the relative increase of the population.

Thus, relatively, London was a giant. Already it had a municipal charter. It had as well an even more authentic claim to distinction in a mediæval world: from the ranks of its burghers had recently emerged England's most famous archbishop and martyr, Thomas à Becket, murdered by the myrmidons of Henry the Second in 1170, as champion of Church versus State. At the tomb of Becket, the son of a London alderman, Henry the Second, the most powerful king of his day — ruler of England plus half of France — had been scourged in expiation for his savage sacrilege: whilst the martyred Londoner had already become 'St Thomas of Canterbury', the most famous of all English mediæval saints. By the closing years of the twelfth century, London was a stronghold of the burgesses marooned amid the surrounding sea of feudal rusticity.

The Crusades had created the burgess class: the Crusades were also to create their first revolt against feudalism: the first social revolt, properly speaking, that I have been able to trace in English history.

For in 1193 Richard the First, great Crusading general and French King of England — he could not speak a word of English! — was kidnapped by an old feudal enemy, the Duke of Austria, when *en route* back from performing almost mythical exploits in the Holy Land. Under feudal law he had to be ransomed, and his ransom had to be found by his loyal subjects. As the peasants had nothing, and the feudal lords little but debts, which they had contracted to pay for their outfit to Palestine, it may be safely presumed that the already affluent London burgesses had to pay a substantial quota. They can scarcely have liked it. The ransom was a large one, particularly for a poor country like England, which had gained precisely nothing from Richard's Crusade: 100,000 gold marks. If Richard had a 'Lion Heart' ('coeur-de-lion'), his subjects found that it weighed like a heart of gold! London paid, but murmured at having to pay. The reckless feudal finance — 'Money was made to be spent', as the greatest theologian of the age expressed it (St Thomas Aquinas) — did not at all commend itself to the thrifty London burghers, still in the earliest phase of 'primary accumulation', when 'saving' was the supreme economic virtue. The sequel was trouble!

I: The Rising of Fitz-Osbert (William of the Beard): A modern political historian of mediæval England describes the sequel in the following terms:

> In England the rising of a demagogue in London to protest against the oppression of the poor is of some interest. In London there was a feeling not merely that the taxes were heavy, but that they were unfairly assessed and collected, so that they rested in undue proportion upon the poorer classes. Of this feeling William Fitz-Osbert, called 'William with the Beard', made himself the spokesman. He opposed the measures of the ruling class, stirred up opposition with fiery speeches, crossed over to the King, and, basing on the King's interest in the subject a boast of his support, threatened more serious trouble. Then the justiciar interfered by force, dragged him out of sanctuary, and had him executed.[4]

The rising of Fitz-Osbert occurred in 1196, two years after Richard's release. Concerning the 'demagogue' himself, we are told by *The Dictionary of National Biography* that Fitz-Osbert belonged 'to an eminent civic family', and in 1190 had

4 Professor GB Adams, *Political History of England*, Volume 2 (Longmans Green, London, 1905), p 381. Note the disparaging term 'demagogue', which is typical of ruling-class history!

fought with distinction on Crusade against the Moors in Portugal. It is interesting to note that he was known as 'Longbeard', from the long beard which he deliberately wore 'as a mark of hatred of the Normans'.[5] Evidently at this juncture, the London burgesses were still largely Saxon by race. It would seem that Fitz-Osbert was a man 'of commanding stature and of great strength, an effective popular speaker, and with some knowledge of law he threw himself into the social struggles of his day, with an energy and success of which the measure is preserved in that spirit of bitter partisanship in which the chroniclers narrate his career'. The part played by 'Longbeard' in the 'social struggles' of his day is described in these terms:

> Meanwhile, he appears, on the one hand, to have posed as zealous for the interest of the King, who was defrauded, he urged, by financial corruption, of the treasure that should be his; while, on the other, he accused the City magnates, who had to apportion the heavy 'aids' laid upon London for the King's ransom (1194), of saving their own pockets at the expense of their poorer neighbours. He made himself, on both these grounds, hateful to the ruling class, but succeeded in obtaining a seat upon the civic council, and pursued his advantage. He had clearly found a genuine grievance in the system of assessments, and 'fired', says the chronicler Hoveden, 'with zeal for justice and equity, he made himself the champion of the poor'. Addressing the people on every occasion, especially at their folk-moot in St Paul's Churchyard, he roused them by stinging invectives against the Mayor and oldermen.[6]

No less than 50,000 people, we are told, listened to the bearded orator who so eloquently voiced their burning grievances.

The sequel, however, proved disastrous for this early champion of social democracy. The authorities denounced him to the King. Richard was then in France, preoccupied with the erection of his great fortress of Chateau Gaillard, a mediæval 'Gibraltar'. Fitz-Osbert also had an audience with him, and Richard seems at first to have been disposed to protect him, either because he was favourably impressed by Fitz-Osbert's personality, or more probably because he wished to use him as a counter-balance to the barons and their civic counterparts, the municipal patricians. Eventually, however, either with or without the permission of the absentee King, the authorities became so alarmed at William's growing influence that they resolved to act. The sequel is narrated by our authority in these terms:

> The Primate [who was acting as regent for the absentee King — FAR] now determined to crush him, took hostages from his supporters for their good behaviour, and then ordered his arrest. Guarded by his followers, William defied him, and the panic-stricken magnates were in hourly expectation of a general rising and of the sacking of the city. Soon, however, surprised by a party of armed men, the demagogue slew one of his assailants and fled to Bow Church, together with a few friends and, his enemies said,

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5 *Dictionary of National Biography*, article on William Fitz-Osbert, Volume 19, p 189. The Normans were clean-shaven, but the Saxons, like the other Teutonic tribes, wore beards as a sign of manliness.

6 Adams, *Political History of England*, Volume 2, p 381. The 'folk-moot' was an old Anglo-Saxon custom, reminiscent of tribal society.

> with his mistress. He trusted that the sanctuary would shelter him till his followers assembled; but the Primate, dreading the delay, ordered him to be dragged out by force. On his taking refuge in the church tower, his assailants set fire to the church tower and smoked him out. Badly wounded by a citizen as he emerged, he was seized and fastened to a horse's tail, and so dragged to the Tower. Being there sentenced to death, he was dragged in like manner through the city to the Elms (at Smithfield) and there hanged in chains (16 April 1196), 'dying', says Matthew Paris, 'a shameful death for upholding the cause of truth and of the poor'.[7]

The popularity of William with the London masses is shown by the fact that 'miracles' — those sure proofs of popular esteem in mediæval times — were wrought at his grave, and 'relics' were long preserved of this first English martyr of popular rights.

Thus perished William 'of the Beard', the first social revolutionary in English history, done to death by the feudal state and the Church with all that combination of brutal ferocity and foul treachery which all ruling classes display when their interests are at stake; qualities of which we shall have but too many occasions to speak during the course of the present narrative: qualities, we may add, in which no ruling class in all history has been more prolific than have been in all ages the English 'gentlemen'.[8]

So, in the dim dawn of English revolutionary history, we leave Fitz-Osbert — 'Longbeard' — hanging on his gibbet, the first, but far from the last, revolutionary to occupy that instrument of ruling-class 'justice'. Mr HG Wells was never tired of jeering at Karl Marx's 'vast beard'. It is satisfactory for an English revolutionary to recall, so far was Marx from 'inventing' social revolution in England, as has been so often alleged, that, more than six centuries before the brilliant author of *Capital* saw the light, a revolutionary with an equally vast beard started that long and glorious sequence of the revolutionary champions of the down-trodden and oppressed, which, no less than English literature and English science, the history of the coming age will salute as amongst the most glorious achievements of the English people.

Farewell, William of the Long Beard! You were the first English revolutionary: you will not be the last!

II: ***Magna Carta***: In 1199, three years after Fitz-Osbert's tragic end, King Richard of the Lion — and expensive — Heart, great soldier, Crusader, military engineer and troubadour, was killed by an arrow when besieging a castle in France. He was succeeded by his brother John, one of the least attractive of mediæval kings, as Richard — though absolutely futile as an English king — was, in other respects, one of the most attractive. John proved as incompetent as he was cruel, treacherous and lascivious. Already nicknamed 'Lackland', he soon lived up to his name by incontinently losing the bulk of his French possessions, including the ancestral Duchy of Normandy, whence William had originally come to England. One by one, John's lands were overrun by Philip Augustus, the first of the great centralising kings of France. Chateau Gaillard, Richard's supposedly impregnable fortress, built

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7 Adams, *Political History of England*, Volume 2, p 381.

8 Dragging William from sanctuary, in defiance of all mediæval religious ideas, was absolutely typical of a menaced ruling class, which habitually disregards even its own ideology when its interests are at stake. The accusation of taking his mistress to sanctuary is also quite typical of ruling-class 'history'.

with all the latest improvements imported from the Crusading East, fell in 1204. Ten years later, in 1214, the disastrous war ended in a crushing defeat suffered by John and his allies at Bouvines (27 July 1214) at the hands of the French King. Bouvines was one of the decisive battles of the Middle Ages, and the blow to John's prestige was terrific. The sequel was a disastrous peace. By the enforced cession of the greater part of his French possessions, John was, so to speak, forced back upon England.[9]

I have already pointed out how closely related to the tranquillity of a mediæval country was the personality of the King. As in modern times, only more so, the exhibition of weakness by the ruler was the signal for social disorder and/or social revolution. This was now proved in the case of John, as previously in the case of Stephen, in the reign of whom (1135–54), England had witnessed the complete paralysis of the central government and that unchecked reign of baronial disorder and feudal licence, which the last section of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* had summarised in the terrible words that 'Christ and His Saints slept'. Similarly, in the case of John, the defeat of Bouvines and the disastrous conclusion of the French war, stirred up the hornets' nest of civil war again in England.

Already by 1214 John's shiftless and expensively futile policy, coupled with personal vices unusual even for a mediæval king — which is saying a good deal! — had alienated the two great conservative forces in mediæval society. The feudal knights despised a defeated king, the Church reprobated a debauched profligate, and both alike, as the great property-owners of mediæval society, strongly resented the heavy, irregular and arbitrarily inflicted taxes which John had been continually levying throughout the 15 years of his reign to pay both for vices which shocked the conscience of Christendom and for Continental campaigns the ignominious issue of which made him the laughing-stock of his age.[10]

It is unnecessary for me to trace the various stages by which the King drove into active antagonism the other two great conservative forces of mediæval society. As already stated, this history of the 'revolutionary tradition in England' is not interested in purely political struggles *within* the ruling classes. Suffice it to say that the disastrous issue of the French war proved to be the proverbial last straw. Within a year of the battle of Bouvines, the landlords and the Church were united against John, the coalition being led by Cardinal-Archbishop Stephen Langton of Canterbury, who had recently been appointed at Rome by the imperious Pope, Innocent the Third, to enforce that ascendancy of the Church over the state and over lay society in general, which it was the lifelong ambition of that haughtiest of mediæval Popes to achieve. More germane to our purpose is it to add that to this coalition of the conservative forces in mediæval society was added a genuine element of social revolution: viz, the burgess class, and, in particular, the City of London.

In the summer of 1215 matters came to open civil war. Under the expressive title of 'The Army of God and Holy Church', the Barons took the field against John. The campaign was short and from the King's point of view even more ignominious

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9 We must not, of course, forget that the Angevin Kings were primarily French princes, to whom England was merely an outlying appendage ruled by the right of conquest. Before Edward the First — 1272–1307 — no 'English' king either habitually spoke English, or regarded himself primarily as King of England.

10 At precisely this time Christendom was in the throes of a religious revival due to the Franciscans, and the powerful Reformer — Pope Innocent the Third — 1198–1216 — took his position seriously as the guardian of Christian morals.

than his French campaign, since he was unable even to meet the rebels in the open field. In a mediæval society the combination of Church, feudal landowners and burgesses was irresistible. There was no class left to which the King could appeal — the peasants, the only remaining class, were a political cypher until the development of the longbow in the fourteenth century gave them military potency.[11] In John's case, the French war had left him so bankrupt that he could not even hire mercenaries, the only other source of military power left to him with which to face this formidable coalition.

As a result, the King was forced to meet his rebellious subjects, and, after the merest show of resistance, to capitulate unconditionally to their demands. The result was the historic meeting on the island of Runnymede (on the Thames, near Staines), where John — after, it is said, rolling on the floor and making a meal of the carpet of rushes! — signed, unconditionally, the historic document, to be known to posterity as *The Great Charter — Magna Carta* in the original Latin. Moreover, the King was forced to agree to the formation of a kind of permanent 'Committee of Public Safety' consisting of 25 barons, to supervise the execution of its provisions (15 June 1215).

What, in essence, was *Magna Carta*? As we shall see very shortly, subsequent ages, with sharply separated points of view and outlooks, estimated its value and significance very variously. As to what it was in and by itself, we may quote the standard history already cited:

> From beginning to end the *Great Charter* is a feudal document… As a statement of feudal law the *Great Charter* is moderate, conservative and carefully regardful of the real rights of the King. In fact, as our authority goes on to point out, in essence, the *Great Charter* was a conservative document, which sought only to regulate the balance of feudal society by defining the mutual relations of the three great conservative institutions in mediæval society, viz: King, Church and feudal lords; the first of which must, in future, be compelled to respect the rights of the latter two.[12]

If this was all that *Magna Carta* consisted of, to be sure, there would be no call upon me to refer to it in connection with the (social) revolutionary tradition in England. But, over and above its feudal-ecclesiastical clauses, the *Charter* contained further clauses of a genuinely revolutionary nature. For the burgesses had taken their part in the armed rising which had brought the King to heel. They received their reward in Clauses 13, 33, 41 and 42 of the *Charter*, which clauses constitute the document as an early stage in the bourgeois revolution that ended, centuries later, with the downfall of feudalism itself. It is, we may add, these clauses alone which bring the *Great Charter* within the scope of the present book.

Of these clauses which relate to the special interests of the burgesses, the most important are the following:

> Chapter 13 gives to the citizens of London all their rights and free customs.
>
> Chapter 33 provided for the removal of kydells, or weirs from all English rivers. This was intended to give greater freedom to inland navigation, the rivers being the great highways of trade.

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11 See *infra*, Chapter IV.

12 Adams, *Political History of England*, Volume 2, p 438.

> Chapters 41 and 42 give permission to merchants, both English and foreign, to enter and leave the kingdom except in time of war. They are not to pay evil tolls. The privilege is extended to all travellers, except the prisoner and the outlaw, and natives of a country with which England is at war.[13]

For the history of social as distinct from mere political revolution, these clauses were the only immediately revolutionary ones. Otherwise, *Magna Carta* was only an incident in the feudal life of the times.

Why then, it may be asked, has the *Great Charter* enjoyed such an enormous posthumous reputation, one entirely out of proportion to its own intrinsic importance in the life of its own times? The answer to this question is to be found in the direction taken by the social revolutions of ages long subsequent to the thirteenth century. As we shall see, Shakespeare, in *King John*, wrote an elaborate play around the life of the hero — or rather, villain — of *Magna Carta*, in which that 'key to all subsequent constitutional history', that 'palladium of our liberties', as liberal historians were subsequently to style *Magna Carta*, was not so much as mentioned, even in an aside! Shakespeare, the most faithful court historian of the Tudors, represented the view held by the 'totalitarian' state of the sixteenth century with regard to earlier attempts to limit the Royal Despotism.[14]

On the other hand, the Whig and Liberal historians, politicians and constitutional lawyers, who were engaged in the seventeenth century in a life and death struggle with the absolute monarchy, fantastically exaggerated the importance of *Magna Carta*, as an early predecessor in their own struggle against absolutism; the feudal barons at Runnymede became metamorphosised in the Whig political alchemy into a band of mediæval Pyms, Hampdens, Shaftesburys, undaunted champions of popular rights and founders of the British Constitution![15]

In actual history, *Magna Carta* occupies a modest but definite point in the sequence of social revolution in England. In itself mainly a conservative document regulative of feudal society, it yet advanced the juvenile burgesses class to a modest yet definite place upon the scale of mediæval society. It therefore, if and when considered as a revolutionary document, marks the early stage of development in the revolutionary rise of the burgesses, the commercial 'middle' class.

Its immediate effects, however, were nil. John, unable to resist the overwhelming coalition, resorted to the time-honoured expedient of 'divide and rule'. By a grovelling submission to the Papal Legate, Pandulf, he appealed over the head of Archbishop Langton to the Pope himself. The Church, which disliked revolution except in its own interests, and usually played for its own hand in mediæval society, first deserted the barons, and then excommunicated its erstwhile allies! John gratified the proudest of the Popes by doing homage to his Legate in feudal style, for 'his' Kingdom of England. Henceforth, as the vassal of the Church, John was above such a merely mundane obligation as to keep an oath made to

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13 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 17, pp 317–18.

14 See *infra*, Part II, Chapter I.

15 This view has not so much coloured as completely dominated the standpoint of the classic exponents of 'orthodox' modern English history — see these citations from representative modern historians: 'The whole of the constitutional history of England is a commentary on this *Charter*.' — Dr Stubbs; 'The rights which the barons claimed for themselves they claimed for the nation at large.' — JR Green.

secular persons. Accordingly, he repudiated the *Charter*, raised a mercenary army with ecclesiastical funds, and commenced heavy civil war against the adherents of the *Charter*.

Next year John died (1216), worn out by anger and debauchery — a Gargantuan feast of peaches and cider is said to have given him the *coup de grâce*! But his heir was an infant — Henry the Third. The French sided with the barons and invaded England. The war drifted on for years in a chaotic sea of feudal disorder. *Magna Carta* sank beneath the sea of war, a relic of an early phase of revolutionary history, presently, after the lapse of centuries, to be brought to the surface by the Whig political archaeologists, and having 'suffered a sea-change' in the process, to emerge as an historical justification of classes still in the remote future when Runnymede witnessed the signature of the *Charter*, and to furnish the legal pretext for revolutionary demands which would have caused the typical feudal bishops and barons who signed it to turn in their graves with horror![16]

16 Robin Hood: it was during the period just dealt with that a picturesque legend locates the 'merry outlaws of the greenwood', Robin Hood, Little John and their band. The tradition depicts Robin Hood as a sort of rural 'Fitz-Osbert', who championed the poor Saxons against their Norman oppressors. Or, to adopt a modern analogy, as an English 'Stenka Razin', who, like his Russian antitype, robbed the rich to help the poor. Robin Hood would indeed have cut an even more picturesque figure than 'William of the Beard' himself as the first English revolutionary, but whilst there is probably something in the tradition, the state of evidence does not, unfortunately, permit the inclusion of either Robin, or, still less, his earlier Saxon predecessor, Hereward the Wake, as pioneers in the revolutionary roll. The utmost we can say is that he *may* have been a kind of English Stenka Razin. The first record of the famous outlaw is to be found in Langland's famous *Piers Plowman*, a century and a half later (c 1370).

Chapter III: Simon de Montfort and Edward the First: The Origins of Parliamentarism

After a long period of civil war the French were finally repulsed, the feudal war simmered down, and Henry the Third, the son and successor of John, found himself in possession of a relatively stable kingdom, as such things were reckoned in the Middle Ages. Unlike his parent, Henry was no loose-liver or tyrant — in fact, he was a deeply religious man after the pattern of Edward the Confessor — but, what was much worse from the standpoint of a mediæval king, as a ruler he was weak, futile and prone to extravagant favourites. Conspicuous amongst these latter were his wife's French relatives and their countrymen who hailed from the south of France. Nor was Henry's foreign policy any more impressive than that pursued at home. His attempts to recover John's lost French territories proved equally a fiasco, even if they led to no such catastrophic disaster as had overtaken John at Bouvines. Moreover, not only did Henry waste a great deal of money on unpopular foreign favourites, but he also dipped his hand freely into the national pocket to finance the grandiose but utterly impracticable ambition of his brother Richard, 'King of the Romans', to get himself elected as Holy Roman (German) Emperor, after the death of the great Hohenstaufen Emperor, Frederick the Second, 'the Wonder of the World', in 1250. In pursuit of this Will o' the Wisp, and in an equally futile attempt to buy the kingdom of Sicily for his son Edmund, Henry spent a great deal of English money in unsuccessfully trying to bribe avaricious German electors, and other Continental potentates, to elect his brother and son.

The upshot of a generation, first of civil war, then of shiftless, futile and expensive government, was, in short, once again to create a coalition of the propertied classes against the King and his costly favourites. There is no need for me to describe it in detail, since it was broadly identical with that which had extorted *Magna Carta* from John. One new feature, however, presents itself. This time the opposition found a capable secular leader in Simon de Montfort, created Earl of Leicester by the King, who had himself originally come to England as one of Henry's foreign favourites, and had married his sister. De Montfort, the son of the famous and utterly ruthless Crusader of the same name, was a rather remarkable man: a good soldier, a politician with advanced ideas for a feudal baron of his age, and a patron of religion and learning. Probably from motives of personal ambition, he associated himself with the opposition to his royal brother-in-law, and by superior capacity soon became its leader.[1]

Under the energetic leadership of de Montfort the Coalition set to work vigorously to bring the King to heel. It is unnecessary for my purpose to follow the somewhat wearisome course of mediæval intrigue and counter-intrigue that ensued. Let it suffice to indicate that in 1259 the barons forced Henry to agree to *The*

1 The 'Crusade' referred to in the case of the elder de Montfort was that against the heretical Albigenses, or Manicheans, of Provence, whom the Crusaders suppressed with frightful cruelty. It was in this Crusade that there occurred the famous answer of the Papal Legate to a hesitating Crusader: 'Kill them all, my son, God will know His own at the Day of Judgement.' As we shall see shortly, the younger de Montfort's association with southern Europe had an important bearing on his subsequent actions in England.

Provisions of Oxford, a kind of restatement of the *Great Charter* 44 years earlier. Again, a committee of barons was appointed to keep the King to his bond.

Like his father, however, Henry eventually succeeded in slipping out of the net, and in dividing the coalition, not a difficult task in a feudal society, where politics were as unstable as the social order which generated them. In 1264, Henry repudiated his obligations and appealed to arms, precisely as his father had done in 1215. With a cunning not unworthy of his father, Henry had persuaded the barons to refer their mutual disputes to the arbitration of the famous King of France, St Louis — Louis the Ninth. As might have been expected of a brother-king — even though a saint! — Louis decided in favour of Henry against his rebellious subjects, with, it is true, a meaningless reservation in favour of the maintenance of the clauses of the *Great Charter*: after all, kings all belong to the same trade union! Louis' award, known as 'the Mise of Amiens', provided the signal for war.

Whilst, however, de Montfort had been outwitted politically, he still held the military trumps. At Lewes on the Sussex Downs, at the head of a mixed army of feudal soldiers and London citizens, he completely defeated the King (14 May 1264). The course of this battle is of even greater political than military interest. One wing of the royal army, led by the King's son, Edward, afterwards the great Edward the First, found itself faced by the Londoners who also formed a wing of de Montfort's army. Filled with contempt for these plebeian 'canaille' — who had, moreover, pelted his mother with rotten eggs some years previously when the royal barge was navigating London Bridge! — Edward charged them furiously, routed them, pursued them recklessly a great distance across the Downs, and returned at last only to find the battle well lost by feudal class-arrogance. Whilst this mediæval 'Prince Rupert' was enjoying the pleasures of the chase and was cutting down his class enemies like so many sheep, de Montfort had routed the main body of the King's army and had taken the King prisoner, along with his brother Richard, the *ci-devant* 'King of the Romans'. Edward himself soon shared the same fate. We shall see that the lessons of that ignominious day were not wasted on that able mediæval prince.

Meanwhile, however, the victory of de Montfort was absolute: his coalition of barons and burgesses was completely victorious, and de Montfort, whilst ruling nominally in the name of the captive King, yet wielded the power of a virtual dictator.[2]

The sequel demonstrated that Simon de Montfort was a dictator, not in the vulgar sense of one who rules with unchecked license, but in the scientific sense of the term; as one, that is, whose government reflects the social needs and aspirations of a rising class. For in 1265, immediately after his decisive victory at Lewes, Simon called the first Parliament ever to meet in England: the first representative assembly ever to meet in England, at least since the Norman Conquest.[3]

A well-known historian of the Middle Ages describes de Montfort's Parliament in these terms:

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2 The Church, the third great ruling 'class' in mediæval society, does not seem to have played much part in this civil war: both the saintly King and de Montfort, the patron of the Franciscans, then newly established in England, were *persona grata* to the ecclesiastical authorities. The Pope, indeed, his 'overlord', sided with Henry and excommunicated the rebels: but de Montfort, notwithstanding, seems to have had the support of many of the higher clergy.

3 The Anglo-Saxon 'Witenagemote' or Council of Wise Men, was rather analogous to the meeting of tribal elders, characteristic of a gentile-patriarchal society than of a class-divided society characterised by differential property relations: it was not a 'parliament' in our sense of the term.

> On the day of the signature of the Treaty, Henry, who accompanied Simon to the West, issued from Worcester the writs for a Parliament that sat in London from January to March in 1265… The special feature of the gathering, however, was the summoning of two knights from every shire, side by side with the barons of the faithful Cinque Ports, and two representatives from every city and borough, convened by writs sent, not to the sheriff, after later custom, but to the cities and boroughs directly.

After deprecating some exaggerated views of the importance of Simon's Parliament, the learned author concludes that:

> What was new was the combination of these two types of representatives in a single assembly, which was convoked, not merely for a particular administrative purpose, but for a great political object. The real novelty and originality of Earl Simon's action lay in his giving a fresh proof of his disposition to fall back *upon the support of the ordinary citizen against the hostility or indifference of the Magnates*.[4]

What was the significance for social evolution and revolution of this political innovation on the part of Simon de Montfort? The last sentence of Professor Tout, which I have emphasised, gives us the gist of the matter. Only not being, like the eminent mediævalist just cited, a liberal 'constitutional' historian who deals in metaphysical abstractions, such as 'representatives' and 'citizens', I propose to look at the innovation from the class-angle provided by the balance of classes in mediæval English society. For the establishment of Parliament, first, temporarily by Simon de Montfort, and later, in permanence, by his conqueror-disciple, Edward the First, marked an important milestone upon the highroad of social revolution in England.

Firstly, where did the idea of Parliament originate? In view of de Montfort's own antecedents, the most probable foreign models would appear to be the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon, and possibly the city-republics of southern France, against both of which the elder de Montfort had fought victoriously. Aragon was — apart from Iceland, which can scarcely have served as a model! — the only parliamentary state in Europe. A parliament, or *cortes*, had existed there since the early Middle Ages. The burgesses of the communes were admitted into the Aragonese Cortes (Parliament) in 1133. It seems altogether probable that de Montfort introduced representative institutions into England, just as, centuries later, the Spanish term 'Liberal' was acclimatised in England and France in the era of the French Revolution.[5]

The model was significant; for the Kingdom of Aragon — Catalonia — was one in which the burgess-merchant class enjoyed great influence. The *Mare Clausum*, the famous code of sea-law, which originated in Barcelona, was accepted throughout Europe for the greater part of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the adoption of the *cortes*, or parliament itself, in Aragon signified the inclusion of the burgesses of the towns with King, Church and nobles in one composite ruling class.

It was precisely this which de Montfort sought to achieve, and which Edward the First did later succeed in achieving permanently through the adoption of

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4 Professor TF Tout, *Political History of England*, Volume 3 (Longmans Green, London, 1905), p 122, our emphasis.

5 See *infra*, Part III.

Parliament in England. The House 'of Commons' was, of course, the House of the old ruling class plus the parvenu burgesses: the peasants, of course, then and for many centuries to come, were altogether outside the august walls of the 'Mother of Parliaments'. A serf could not need a 'representative', any more than did any other chattel! Therefore, it is evident what the rise of Parliament implied: it signified that the burgesses of London, in particular, had become too powerful to be resisted; *they had to be incorporated into the ruling classes in mediæval society*. The adoption of Parliament signified this incorporation. Naturally, the incorporation remained at first within modest limits. The burgesses were still a young class: it would be long before they controlled the Parliament, or Parliament controlled the state. Nonetheless, de Montfort made a beginning of incorporating the rising merchant class within the framework of an old feudal-ecclesiastical state. From a subject-class[6] — the burgesses of London and the towns became a ruling class, one indeed that still pursued its own class interest, but *inside* the framework of feudal society, until the date, still far distant, when the creation of the world market in the sixteenth century transformed the mediæval burgesses into the modern bourgeoisie, and, once again, under vastly different conditions, compelled it to take the revolutionary road. But, meanwhile, and for the rest of the Middle Ages, the burgess class took no part in revolution. It was now on the side of the ruling classes into whose ranks it had been admitted. The peasant-agrarian revolutions of the later Middle Ages will find the city merchants lined up solidly against them alongside of the older ruling classes.

The consummation of this policy, whilst conceived by de Montfort, was not, however, achieved by him. His dictatorship in fact lasted barely a year. While Henry the Third remained a mere puppet in the hands of the masterful Earl, his son Edward was a man of very different calibre from his weak father. Taking advantage of the jealousy aroused by de Montfort's imperious personality, Edward won over a number of jealous magnates, conspicuous amongst whom was the Earl of Gloucester. Having escaped from custody by a stratagem, Edward restarted the civil war. This time, he did not repeat his former military error. He defeated first Simon's son, then Simon himself at the Battle of Evesham (4 August 1265). De Montfort was surprised by a superior army, defeated and himself killed. The leaders of his faction fled abroad, and the rule of the King, or, rather of Edward, was restored. In 1272, the latter, then on Crusade in Palestine, was recalled by the news of his father's death. As Edward the First, the first English king properly so called since the Conquest, he commenced the most memorable reign in English mediæval history.

It is said that just prior to the Battle of Evesham, Simon de Montfort had expressed the opinion that his conqueror was also his best military pupil.[7] But Edward had learned from de Montfort in more than one direction. In particular, he was the earl's best disciple, not only in the military sphere, but, even more so, in that of politics as well. For Edward was a really remarkable man: an excellent general — as we shall see later, to him was due the first recognition of the potency of the longbow in mediæval warfare — a strong personality, and an intelligent politician, who knew when and how to make concessions on the political field when it was absolutely necessary to do so. Not only was he one of the few really able kings in English history; to be sure, he was, with only one possible exception (William of

6 See *supra*, Chapter I.

7 His reported words were: 'By the arm of St James they come on cunningly, but it was I who taught them.' In view of what I said above it is not, perhaps, without significance to note that St James was the patron saint of *Spain*.

Orange), the ablest of all English kings since the Conquest, but, no less, and even more germane to our subject is it to recall that he was an early master of counter-revolution; a kind of mediæval 'Disraeli'. For in the annals of English revolutionary history Edward the First played a role of an intelligent counter-revolutionary politician who stabilised mediæval feudal society, just as, six centuries later, his modern antitype, Disraeli — whose Jewish ancestors were expelled from English soil by Edward — fulfilled a similar role in modern capitalist-imperialist society.[8]

For Edward, seeing that the merchant class had become too strong to be permanently resisted by the old feudal society, *incorporated it in the ruling class* by making de Montfort's improvised Parliament a permanent feature in mediæval society and in what was later to be known as the English Constitution.[9] From 1275 onwards, when Edward called his first Parliament at Westminster, the two Houses, hereditary Lords and 'representative' Commons, formed an integral part of the feudal state right down to the end of the Middle Ages. In the Lords, the older feudal classes, King, Church and feudal lords, continued exclusively to dominate the scene. But in the Commons, the new recruit to the ruling classes, the burgess-merchant class, assumed an ever increasing preponderance. And it assumed it for the same reason as had compelled the feudal state, in the person of its most intelligent leaders, de Montfort and Edward the First, to come to terms with it: viz, the growing power of Money, *the* weapon, *par excellence*, of the city merchants.

For the era of the Crusades had led to a vast expansion of commerce; in the reign of Edward himself the famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo reached China (by land) on a commercial expedition. At the same time, as Professor Tawney has shown in his able book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, the sweeping prohibitions issued by the mediæval Church against 'usury', which included the bulk of financial transactions, were beginning to break down. Money was no longer merely 'made to be spent' (St Thomas), but was more and more becoming the sinews of government. The fact that Edward was enabled to expel the Jews in 1290 — not to be reinstated until the time when capitalism finally triumphed in the person of Cromwell (1655) — demonstrated that there was now a 'Christian' commercial class, able and willing to take the place of those traditional money-lenders of an agrarian society. The first English governmental loan was negotiated by Edward with the Bank of St George of Genoa in 1270. In the same reign, the Italian Lombards arrived in London. 'Lombard Street' perpetuates their name in our own day.[10]

With the incorporation of the merchant class in the ruling class via the agency of Parliament, the revolt of the burgesses in mediæval society came to an end, not to be renewed until the 'world revolution' of the sixteenth century had transformed the mediæval burgesses into the modern bourgeoisie, the international capitalist class. Henceforth, the feudal state will find its enemies elsewhere; amongst the peasants and their ideological champions, the heretical religious sects, who sprang up with increasing vigour from the thirteenth century onwards, as the herald and

8 See *infra*, Part III.

9 As, to follow up the analogy, Disraeli, in a later age, was to incorporate the labour 'aristocracy' into the framework of the modern capitalist state. See *infra*, Part III.

10 Dr Edward Conze has recently advanced an interesting theory that the origins of bourgeois philosophy, as well as of bourgeois economics, can be traced to this period. The 'Nominalist' philosophy of William of Occam (c 1350) was, he holds, the starting-point of all specifically modern (bourgeois) philosophy. The present writer confesses that he lacks the technical qualifications to venture an opinion on this abstruse subject, but it seems not improbable.

concomitant of the ebb of the Middle Ages and the decline of feudal society. It is there, accordingly, that we must look for the next chapter in the serial story of social revolution in England.

In the meanwhile, we may note that the immediate effect of the infusion of new blood into the decrepit veins of the English feudal state was to induce a tremendous output of energy. Edward the First ruled with a vigour and success such as no English king had displayed before. He conquered Wales permanently and Scotland temporarily. He expelled the Jews, curbed the barons more than any earlier English king had been able to do, and even permanently curbed the power of the Church, that bugbear of all strong-minded mediæval kings, by the act of 'Præmunire' (1305–07), which severely limited the power of the Papacy to interfere in English Church affairs: it was this act that Henry the Eighth afterwards used to begin his breakaway from Rome.

Whilst Edward's attempt to unite Great Britain by force was bungled by his weak successor, and was, in any case, probably too advanced for such a technically backward society as was thirteenth-century England, yet it represented a level of political planning not again to be reached until the time of Oliver Cromwell.

As for the merchants themselves, their admission, via Parliament, into the ruling class, demonstrated that old truth, so often and variously illustrated in the course of the history of social revolution, that even an unsuccessful revolution is often the road to successful reforms: viz, if you want reforms, the way to get them is to frighten the ruling class by revolution. In the instance under discussion, our modern reformist Labourites who make a fetish of purely 'constitutional' Parliamentary procedure — 'inevitability of gradualness', etc — might reflect for once that the sacred House of Commons itself, the Holy of Holies of the 'evolutionary' Constitution, owed its existence in the first instance to the feudal fear of revolution. William Fitz-Osbert, Simon de Montfort and other revolutionary martyrs watered the foundations of Parliament with their blood. Without their revolts, the arrogant feudal lords would have continued to chase the merchants at Lewes, but would not have sat with them at Westminster! It was the class struggles of mediæval times which put modern Parliamentarians in a position 'constitutionally' to deny the existence of the class struggle. The origins of 'The Mother of Parliaments' itself is to be sought in civil war. The foundations of the most famous of all reformist institutions were themselves laid in and by *revolution*!

Chapter IV: The Peasant Revolutions of the Middle Ages (The Lollards — Tyler — Cade — Robin of Redesdale)

The thirteenth century was, as we have just seen, the era of revolution conducted by and in the interests of the burgess-merchant class in the towns. This burgess class, as our survey has sought to demonstrate, whilst not itself capable of forcing *its* way into the ruling class, still less of overthrowing the feudal state by its own unaided efforts, was nonetheless able to accomplish the former result by skilfully playing off nobles versus king in the civil wars of the thirteenth century. As the 'rejoicing third' in mediæval society, the merchants, with the City of London at their head, were able to utilise the mutual antagonism of the older ruling classes so as to force their way into the charmed circle of the privileged classes by means of the agency of Parliament, then and for many centuries to come the political instrument through the agency of which the 'middle' class forced its way to the seats of power. From the end of the thirteenth century, the embryo capitalist class had successfully accomplished its transition from the ranks of the 'lower' (unprivileged) classes to those of the 'upper' (privileged) classes, where it remained until the seventeenth century. Henceforth, it would present a 'united front' against social revolution, along with the other dominant classes in the English society of the period. The torch of revolution passed to the remaining subject-classes in mediæval society.

The classes which in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the last centuries of the Middle Ages, took the road to revolution were the peasants and their religious allies, the heretical communistic (or radical) sects. This class, the economic counterpart to the industrial 'proletariat' in modern (capitalist) society, formed numerically the great majority of the inhabitants of mediæval England, but, as I have already stated, it had been hitherto inhibited by ignorance, by the divisions endemic to a peasant movement, and above all by its lack of military potency, from taking any active part in the class struggles of the age: the roar of battle and the struggles of contending classes for political power had passed over the head of the dumb masses of serfs unheeded and without their active participation.

In the fourteenth century, however, as the Middle Ages drew towards their close, a variety of new factors made their appearance which radically transformed the political, economic and military situation, and which, in particular, put new weapons, both military and ideological, into the hands of the peasants. Before glancing at the agrarian revolutions which characterised the fifteenth century, it remains to indicate what these new features were, and, more especially, what precisely was their effect upon the class relationships of contemporary England.

These new factors were four in number, and we note them in the order of appearance.

I: The Hundred Years War: This originally dynastic struggle for the throne of France dragged on intermittently for the period indicated by its title — c 1340–1440. Its political issue may be defined with accurate brevity by stating that whilst England won the battles, France ended by winning the war! From the standpoint of technical military history, so important for social evolution, the early stages of this war — particularly the battles of Crécy and Poitiers (1346–56) — led to a military

revolution of a great social as well as military significance: I refer to the rise of the longbow,[1] a *plebeian* weapon, by the agency of which the English archers, themselves mainly of peasant origin, were enabled to acquire a European reputation and to defeat frequently the haughty feudal cavalry on French, Spanish and Scottish battlefields. Thus, after a millennium of the ascendancy of mounted aristocrats — that noble but stupid animal, the horse, has always been the appropriate steed for 'noblemen' — a 'democratic' weapon, one exclusively wielded by peasants and other commoners, had acquired renown and deadly potency on a feudal battlefield. *The peasant-archer had given his class military significance for the first time in feudal history.* As 'he who has arms has bread', such an acquisition by a class so cruelly suppressed as were the serfs of mediæval England, evidently signified that an age of agrarian (peasant) revolutions was at hand.

II: The Black Death: The Middle Ages have been characterised as ages of 'dirt and religion'. And this description is true, if a trifle vicious. Both the personal habits and the sanitary arrangements of the era in question were crude in the extreme. Hence, in these primitive conditions, any kind of plague or contagious disease could be relied on to spread with a rapidity that is today inconceivable. As the Anglican Litany still testifies, the Middle Ages prayed fervently against 'plague, pestilence and famine': nor were any of these dangers merely speculative; the Middle Ages knew them all only too well. Periodically, mediæval Europe was swept from end to end by the ravages of all three evils mentioned in the Litany. The very devoutness of the age probably facilitated the spread of disease. Crowded in insanitary churches, the congregations inadvertently facilitated the rapid spread of the disease.

The most famous, and probably the most deadly, of these recurring 'scourges of God' was the celebrated 'Black Death', a form, it appears, of bubonic plague which spread, or rather hurtled, across Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. This disease was the price paid by Europe for its growing commercial intercourse with the East that followed the era of the Crusades. The 'Black Death' from the East ravaged Europe as it was only once again destined to be ravaged: by that scourge from the West, the '*morbus gallicus*' (syphilis), which, imported from newly-discovered America, similarly ravaged the Europe of the sixteenth century. The dread scourge reached England in 1348: Weymouth was its port of entry. In the next two or three years it took as heavy a toll in the British Isles as elsewhere: the exact

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1 The longbow had been discovered by Edward the First in his Welsh wars. The Welsh first drew the longbow (not for the last time!). Edward, a military genius in his way, recognised the importance of the discovery, and the famous English archers first made their appearance at the Battle of Falkirk (1298) where they broke the squares of Scotch spearmen with their bail of arrows. (Sir William Wallace had drawn up the Scotch in the old schiltroun, or shield-wall, in which the Saxons had fought at Hastings.) But it was in the French wars of Edward the Third (1327–77) that the English longbow really came into its own. Henceforth, it was the national weapon of England. From a modern military historian we learn that an expert English archer could have three arrows in the air simultaneously and could pierce a coat of plate-mail at a distance of 300 yards! The effect of such a volley against charging horsemen can well be imagined. Our authority adds that down to the eighteenth century, when the flint-lock musket was evolved, no firearms could compare in their deadly potency with the terrible discharge of the English longbow when wielded by the sturdy Anglo-Saxon peasant: see Captain HA Atteridge, *Famous Land Fights: A Popular Sketch of the History of Land Warfare* (Methuen, London, 1914). 'And it has yet to be said that a simple powerful bow was pre-eminently a weapon for peasant militiamen. There was nothing complicated in its mechanism and no professional drill was wanted.' — JE Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward the First* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1901), p 100.

percentage is not available, but a quarter has been accepted as probable by serious investigators, and even a third is not impossible.

The consequences of this fearful mortality, directly upon the economic and social life of mediæval England, and indirectly upon the revolutionary class struggles of the time, were profound and far-reaching. Upon this subject, Karl Marx comments:

> The First Statute of Labourers (23, Edward III, 1349) had as its immediate pretext (not its cause, for such legislation continued for centuries after the pretext had ceased to exist) the Black Death which had decimated the population so effectually, that, as a Tory writer says: 'The difficulties of getting men to work on reasonable terms grew to such a height as to be quite intolerable.'

Having pointed out that, by 'reasonable', his authority really meant 'profitable to the employer', Marx goes on to say that: 'Reasonable wages were therefore fixed by law, and the limits of the working day were also prescribed.'[2]

By the 'Statute of Labourers', in short, Parliament, as the organ of the feudal–burgess coalition that now ruled England, endeavoured to prevent the serfs and wage-earners from utilising 'the law of supply and demand' to their own class and personal advantage. That is, when scarcity of labour gave the serfs an unprecedented opportunity to improve their conditions of labour, and even often to emancipate themselves from legal serfdom, the government, sitting as the 'executive committee of the ruling classes', interfered by legal force to put back the clock of economic history and to keep them where they had been before the Black Death had opened up new avenues to the survivors who had now the value of scarcity.

Hence, by the latter part of the fourteenth century, the peasants had both an urgent case for social reform, a necessity to enforce that reform by revolution, as the state itself had made peaceful reform illegal by its class legislation, and, last but far from least, a military instrument, the longbow, for enforcing reform, and, if necessary, revolution, in the teeth of the hitherto irresistible knights in armour. The English archers, who had so often seen abroad the backs of the proudest and most powerful chivalry in Europe, that of France, were not any longer likely to cringe at home before the English knights whom they themselves had so often saved from disaster on foreign battlefields.

In addition to the above direct causes for revolt on the part of the peasants, two others must be noted.

III: The Jacquerie, or French Peasants' Revolt: In addition to a grievance and a military means of enforcing it, the English peasants also had a foreign example close at hand. This was the famous and ill-fated French Jacquerie,[3] or Peasants' War, which broke out in 1358. The causes of this rising were to be found in the incredible miseries inflicted by the course of the long war: its immediate cause was the huge ransom paid to redeem King John of France, who had been taken prisoner by the English at Poitiers (1356). This last burden represented the proverbial last straw[4] and the Jacquerie followed. It is unnecessary to follow its course. Like nearly all peasant

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2 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Everyman, London) pp 266–67.

3 The title 'Jacquerie' is derived from 'Jacques Bonhomme' the argot–slang–generic title for the French peasant.

4 See Fitz-Osbert, *supra*.

risings, it failed mainly on account of the divisions that seem endemic to a peasantry. After some initial successes, it was crushed (at the battle of Mello) by a feudal army. The French peasants had no longbows and could not consequently face the heavily-armed feudal horse. A 'White Terror' of fiendish cruelty followed: the French knights, beaten by the English archer-peasants, took their revenge so completely on their own serfs that the French peasantry was broken for centuries, and the social evolution of France was arbitrarily arrested. The Jacquerie is but one of many examples to show that there is nothing more brutal than a ruling class beaten in a foreign war. Our own age can testify to that.

The Jacquerie was the first of a long series of Continental revolutions which have had their influence upon the course of English revolutionary history. It was destined to have many successors, for England, if an island, is a European island, and its revolutionary history has reflected this geographical connection. The English peasants had much the same grievances to suffer from as their class-brethren across the water. And with the longbow, which had routed so completely and so ignominiously the conquerors of the Jacquerie at Crécy and at Poitiers, the English Hodge might hope to deal with his own class oppressors in a manner beyond the military ability of the French Jacques to achieve. Hence, the Jacquerie was a model, but not necessarily a warning to the English peasants.

IV: The Lollards: With the decline of the Middle Ages, the power of the Roman Church began also to decline and numerous heresies raised their heads. Dr GC Coulton has recently demonstrated that but for the establishment of the Inquisition and the rise of the Preaching Friars — Franciscans and Dominicans — in the thirteenth century, the Reformation would have occurred in the thirteenth and not the sixteenth century.[5] As I have already indicated, most of these heretical sects reflected the interest of the subject agrarian classes, as against the Roman Church, which remained closely allied with the feudal system until the Jesuits 'reconciled' it with rising capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as I have demonstrated in my book on that Order. In particular, as Max Nomad has very pertinently observed, the heretical sects, such as the Lollards, Hussites and Anabaptists, who arose in the later Middle Ages, represented very especially the ideology of the poor parish-priests, themselves mainly of peasant origin, and, as such, far nearer both in their economic status and in their personal habits and sympathies to their rustic parishioners than to the proud and wealthy Norman abbots and bishops. Consequently, for reasons already stated in my first chapter, the ideal of these peasant sects was a kind of agrarian communism, consciously imitated from the New Testament. In fact, as Nomad very shrewdly observes, the Lollards and Anabaptists themselves aimed at a Theocracy, just as much as did the Roman Church: at a kind of spiritual dictatorship, not of the rich prelates, but of the poor parish 'hedge-priests', 'the victorious lesser clergy'.[6]

In the latter half of the fourteenth century there arose one of the most famous heresiarchs of the entire Middle Ages, John Wycliffe, an Oxford don, later known as 'The Morning Star of the Reformation'. In addition to his specific theological heresies, which do not concern us here, the English Reformer strenuously advocated a poor Church, 'like that of the apostles', that favourite demand of mediæval Church reformers. When we recall how vast was the wealth and 'real property' (land) of the

5 GC Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty* (Ernest Benn, London, 1929).

6 Max Nomad, *Rebels and Renegades* (Macmillan, New York, 1932).

Roman Church, it is obvious that even this reform would have constituted a major social revolution in mediæval society.

Wycliffe himself does not seem to have gone as far in his demands as communism. At least, he died in his bed (1384)! But amongst his followers, styled Lollards by their enemies, was a 'left wing' — in modern political parlance — who went the whole hog and demanded a return to the ideal conditions which were supposed to have prevailed in the Garden of Eden, and which came from the hands of God Himself:

> When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Who was then the gentleman?

With this inspired doggerel on their lips, the Lollards, with the 'hedge-priest' (viz, travelling preacher) John Ball at their head, went round the country stirring up the peasants and preaching agrarian communism. The result, for which the Lollards were primarily responsible, was an era of agrarian revolution, at the chief manifestations of which it now behoves us to glance.

I: Wat Tyler and the Lollards:[7] The first peasant revolution took place in 1381. It was led by Wat (the) Tyler, but its real promoters, as George Kriehn has shown, were the Lollard field-preachers, in particular, John Ball: the Lollards, it seems, had a kind of 'underground' propaganda organisation, though direct evidence of this, promised by Kriehn, has not been forthcoming, so far as I am aware. Wat Tyler, though evidently a man of courage and capacity, seems to have been thrown up rather by accident than design, to the position of leadership which has caused the 1381 revolt to be inseparably associated with his name. Actually the revolution seems to have been carefully prepared, with the Lollards as its chief instigators (John Ball was in prison for spreading sedition at the time when the revolt broke out). The ruling class, who, after all, were in a position to know, showed by their acts subsequent to the suppression of the revolt that they regarded the Lollards as its chief instigators.[8]

i: The immediate causes of the Rising of 1381 were, in addition to the general causes already noted in the preceding section, three in number: these were, respectively, the minority of the young King Richard the Second (1377–99), which led to another orgy of weak government and baronial licence, so often recorded as a potent cause for mediæval social revolts. To this must be added the disastrous turn taken by the French war after the death of Edward the Third, and the heavy taxation imposed on the already discontented peasants. The poll tax of 1381 formed the immediate starting point for the rising.

ii: The course of the Revolt: the rising broke out simultaneously in several parts of the country: but its main strength lay in Kent. The rebel army marched on London, without — a potent testimony to the power of the longbow — meeting any opposition in the open field: the government indeed seems to have been taken

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7 The word 'Lollard' was originally a term of abuse: it signified 'one who went about singing to himself'. The word has also been derived from 'Lollium' — a noxious weed. No one regrets more than I that it is necessary to compress my account of the peasant risings into a few pages: a compression reluctantly forced upon me by the scope of this book and by the very number and complexity of the revolutionary movements with which I have to deal in a short book aimed at reaching as many workers as possible. Those who tell us, *ad nauseam*, that there is no revolutionary tradition in England ought to try to record it in writing!

8 See *infra* — '*De Heretico Comburendo*'.

completely by surprise. Tyler made a short halt on Blackheath before entering London. He entered the capital unopposed: the gates being apparently opened to him by the poorer citizens, who, very significantly, sided with the peasants against the rich burgesses. On 13 June, Wat and his army entered London. They met with no resistance, and the King gave Wat Tyler an audience at Mile End. Here, the rebel leader presented the terms which represented the real interests of the agrarian revolution. These essential conditions were four in number: the abolition of legal serfdom, a free pardon for all concerned in the rebellion, the abolition of the tolls hitherto levied on serfs, and land rents to be limited by law to 4d an acre. Obviously, in a predominantly agrarian society, such as was that of mediæval England, the granting of these demands *in toto* would have implied an agrarian revolution, and the social revolution in the countryside must have transformed all social relations in a society which regarded land as 'real property'.

The interview between Tyler and the King ended inconclusively. No feudal king could possibly have granted such conditions, but for the moment the rebels held the whip-hand in the military sense. The sequel demonstrated that the peasants were not men to be trifled with: hitherto Wat Tyler and his colleagues, among whom was John Ball, had kept strict discipline and had refrained from plundering. Now they determined to give the ruling class a taste of ruthlessness. The peasants broke into the Tower, again unresisted, and put to death the King's ministers who had taken refuge there, beheading the Archbishop and Lord Chancellor, Simon of Sudbury, adding insult to injury by using an improvised wooden block for the purpose. They burnt down the Savoy, the palace of the unpopular Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, the King's uncle. And they struck at the very foundations of feudal 'law and order' by breaking into the Temple and making a bonfire of the legal title-deeds to land which were stored in its archives. In short, they lighted a bonfire with 'real property'! We are also told — and though less authenticated there is nothing improbable in the statement — that, amongst the property of the city-merchants which the 'mob' destroyed were a number of brothels in Southwark, owned by that eminent Christian pillar of society, Sir William Walworth, Mayor of London, whom we are due to meet again in a moment and in another capacity. We have not forgotten that the merchants of London were no longer a revolutionary class!

These goings-on had to be stopped! The government was evidently frightened out of its wits. As the peasants still had the force, there was nothing for it for the ruling class but to try fraud: the web of lies and black treachery that followed furnishes us, yet once more, with the realities of the age of chivalry, which was also that of 'the right of the first night'! The King and his advisers again invited the peasant-general to an interview; this time, at Smithfield, where the cattle-market, then as now, was held. Foolishly enough, Wat Tyler accepted, and at the head of his army met the King outside Aldersgate. Evidently Wat was overconfident in the power of his followers' bows to overawe the court: hitherto, it must be remembered that he had seized the capital and intimidated the court with absolutely no resistance. Nonetheless, his action was naïve and rash in the extreme. He was not the last to trust in the word of an English 'gentleman'. The foul act of treachery that followed, an act so typical of a frightened ruling class in all ages, furnishes but the first of many indications that the rich are only to be trusted when running hell for leather for their lives!

It is altogether typical of ruling-class 'history', as taught by its paid apologists, the university historians, that they have not only disguised the truth about the atrocious murder which followed, but have also endeavoured to misrepresent it by making the boy-king Richard (then aged 15) the hero of the occasion: it is absolutely typical of an 'English gentleman writing history' that it is the 'Liberal' historian John Richard Green, in his history of the 'English People', who has done most to embellish this ruling-class legend. Who has not heard when Tyler had been struck down for threatening the King, how Richard undauntedly faced the peasant-archers, with their bows drawn ready to shoot, crying, 'I will be your leader'? Yet this fairy-tale was repeated in innumerable histories until the German historian George Kriehn punctured the picturesque fable like an inflated balloon in his epoch-making monograph on the 1381 rising.

The actual story of Tyler's murder, which broke the back of the rising, as reconstructed by our authority, was altogether grimmer and more sordid. So far was the death of Tyler from being an accident that it was a carefully planned and calculated murder: the last hope of a cornered ruling class, unable to resist the deadly archers whom Tyler's personality and the propaganda of the Lollards had combined into an irresistible army.

Having taken the communion — to prepare their souls for a hasty exit at the hands of Tyler's archers, if the plot miscarried, a typical prostitution of religion for the basest ends — the court met the peasant leader at Smithfield. Having artfully surrounded him whilst presenting his petition to the King, so as to cut him off from the sight of his followers — a point entirely ignored in the ruling-class version of the story — Sir William Walworth, the Mayor, and several of the King's squires, having first goaded Tyler with insults into making some gesture, probably defensive in character, then suddenly cut him down (15 June 1381). The peasants did not draw their bows to avenge Tyler; still less did Richard offer to place himself at their head. On the contrary, the peasants did not know that Tyler had been killed. They were told, and they naïvely believed, that the King had accepted all their demands, that, as an earnest of his good intentions, he had knighted their leader, and that Tyler, now high in the royal favour, was accompanying the King so as to obtain the formal ratification of the charter of the agrarian revolution. Richard, 'the boy-hero', of legend, did not ride *towards* the bows; contrarily, he rode *away* from them, and was far beyond their reach when the foul news at last leaked out.

It is regrettable to have to add that this diabolical treachery proved completely successful: the court had gauged the weaknesses of a peasant army only too well. '*Sunt lacrymae rerum.*'[9] Bewildered by the sudden loss of their leader, and attacked in the rear by the citizens of London, whom Walworth had raised against them, the peasants foolishly negotiated with the Court, and ended by accepting the King's unconditional ratification of their charter. The main army then broke up and returned home, beaten by that lack of an enduring common purpose which has proved the undoing of so many agrarian risings conducted by an uncoordinated peasantry.

The sequel was only what must be expected from the murderers of Wat Tyler. The King assembled a feudal army, shamelessly broke his pledges to the 'villeins', and put down the rising by force in those country areas where the local risings still continued. The usual 'White Terror' followed the suppression of the English

9 Such are the tears that life sheds.

'Jacquerie'. John Ball, Jack Straw and the other leaders of the revolt perished in a comprehensive bloodbath in which Sir Robert Tressilian, the Chief Justice, played the role of a Judge Jefferies and a 'Bloody Assize'. John Ball, the chief instigator and real hero of the 1381 rising, was hanged, drawn and quartered, on 15 July, meeting his end with the courage of a great revolutionary.

The agrarian revolution of 1381 was an important event in itself, in that it shook the ruling class and the feudal-burgess state to its foundations. But it was also important for its results upon the English and European situation in the ensuing century. These results give the 'Social War' of 1381 an importance which far transcends its own immediate results. Though an immediate failure due, it appears, to its political inexperience and lack of effective leadership after Wat Tyler's death, yet it met with no effective military opposition, and its net effect was, it would seem, to frighten the ruling class into granting reforms which were in line with the current economic development. In short, the agrarian revolution of 1381 demonstrated, once again, that revolution, even if immediately unsuccessful, is the road to reforms.

On this result of 1381 an eminent economic historian observes:

> The peasants were defeated and dispersed; their leaders were tried, sentenced and hanged; but the solid fruits of victory rested with the insurgents of June 1381. It may have been the case that the discontent was too widespread. The peril had been so great, and the success of the insurrection was so near, that wise men saw it was better to grant silently that which they stoutly refused in Parliament to concede… That the claims of the serfs were conceded, or, if you please, the claims of the landlords were dropped, is absolutely certain.[10]

Thorold Rogers goes on to show that the century following upon Wat Tyler's rebellion was a kind of golden age of the English peasant; an arcadian interlude between the feudal rigours of serfdom and the horrors of capitalist 'enclosures' and vagrancy laws, which began in the sixteenth century. Thus, whilst the English 'Jacquerie', like its Continental prototype, failed and was bloodily revenged, yet, unlike its ill-fated forerunner, it did show results. The explanation for this difference, our modern constitution fetish-worshippers might reflect, lay in one word: the longbow! The English knights, unlike the French, could not face their peasants in the field; they had to win by treachery and the dagger of the assassin: this made all the difference. Here, as so often throughout history, 'force was the midwife of progress'. The bow shot evolution forward!

Two further results of the 1381 rising cannot be omitted: firstly the rising itself, and in particular the revolutionary activity of the Lollards, directly influenced a European revolution in the next generation even more important, and far more successful, than was Wat Tyler's revolt. I refer to the famous Hussite, or Bohemian, revolution, which was started by John Huss, also a disciple of Wycliffe, and after his martyrdom by the Church at the Council of Constance (1415), led to a formidable military insurrection under the famous blind general, Ziska.[11] The Hussites set up a military republic at Mount Tabor, based upon an agrarian communism similar to

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10 Professor Thorold Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The History of English Labour* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1884), pp 267–68.

11 In a subsequent book devoted to the general history of revolution, I hope to deal at more length with the Hussites; the 'Bolsheviks' of the Middle Ages.

that advocated by John Ball; they routed, again and again, the 'crusading' armies sent against them by Catholic Europe; and when the Holy City of Tabor did eventually perish, it did so as a result of its — at the time — Utopian economics, rather than as a result of direct military defeat.[12]

We have already seen, and we shall see again and again in the course of these pages, that, if Continental revolutions have repeatedly influenced the course of English revolutionary history, the process has also been a reciprocal one. A belief in internationalism is in fact forced upon the attentive student of the revolutionary tradition in England!

Finally, we must note that the frightened English ruling class henceforth recognised in the Lollards their most dangerous enemies. They showed this by their deeds. Not merely were John Ball and his colleagues summarily executed, but religious — or, rather, social — persecution was 'Constitutionally' embodied in the English Law. This was so, particularly after the weak Richard was deposed by Henry the Fourth (1399–1413), the son of John of Gaunt, Shakespeare's 'time-honoured Lancaster', whose palace, as we have seen, was burned down by Tyler's army. In 1401, Parliament passed the ferocious act, 'De Heretico Comburendo' — 'Concerning the Burning of Heretics'. By this act, religious non-conformity was made punishable by death by fire for the first time in English history — since the jurisdiction of the (Continental) Roman Inquisition, which had existed since 1229, had never been recognised by the English Common Law.

Under this act, Sir John Oldcastle and many other prominent Lollards perished at the stake, and 'heresy' was driven underground until the Reformation. No further proof is needed than this savage repression as to the strength of the Lollards and the revolutionary danger which their movement represented to the ruling classes and their Church. 'Heresy', in the Middle Ages, was perhaps more social than religious in character. For the Church was, as we have seen, virtually equivalent to the mediæval social order itself. It is evident from the very ferocity of their subsequent repression that it was the Lollards, far more than Wat Tyler, who were ultimately responsible for the Great Peasant Rising of 1381, the greatest social revolution which England experienced throughout the Middle Ages.[13]

The sequel, however, showed that local revolts had no ultimate chance of success apart from the main rising. The dispersal of Tyler's army was followed by their bloody suppression and by the execution of their local leaders: a result not obtained without hard fighting in several areas, particularly in Norwich, where the peasants put up a stout resistance. No doubt, these local risings increased the fear of the ruling classes, and assisted towards the abolition of legal serfdom, which, Thorold Rogers assures us, was virtually extinct by the end of the fourteenth century.

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12 The Hussite revolution lasted from 1418 to 1452. See Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe at the Time of the Reformation* (Unwin, London, 1897).

13 Unfortunately, the scope of this book compels me to limit myself strictly to risings of national importance. I cannot therefore afford space for digression on local risings, however picturesque or significant in themselves. But, to indicate the full danger to the ruling classes which the rising of 1381 represented, I must mention, if only in passing, that apart from the main rising in Kent, which was led by Tyler, numerous sporadic risings broke out all over the country; in particular in East Anglia and the Midlands. In the latter area Mr Bonamy Dobrée tells us: 'From the 14th to the 16th [of June] the rebels attacked manors, burnt the rolls, and, in the King's name, obtained charters similar to those which they claimed to have possessed in the reign of Henry the First.' — Bonamy Dobrée, *English Revolts* (Joseph, London, 1937), p 74.

In addition to the great peasant rising of 1381, two other less important agrarian risings must be noted. That of 'the Captain of Kent' in 1450, and the less important local rising of 'Robin of Redesdale' in 1469.

II: The Rising of the Captain of Kent: The rising of 1381 was primarily social, and only political in a secondary sense. That of 1450, which also began in Kent, seems to have been a borderline case; at least as much political as social in character. Whilst from one point of view it may be described as a rising of the poor against the rich, from another, it may, as both Kriehn and Gardner, its best modern historians, emphasise, be regarded as a kind of prelude or overture to the 'Wars of the Roses', that prolonged suicide of feudalism in England.[14]

It is, in any case, as Mr Gardner states, clear from its course, 'that this rebellion was a much more formidable thing than older historians lead us to suppose'. Hence, whilst the rising of 1450 was scarcely the agrarian communist revolution that 1381 had been, or that Shakespeare (or whoever wrote that part of *Henry the Sixth* which describes the 1450 rising itself) represents it as being, I have decided to deal with it, as, at any rate, a borderline case between political and social revolution.

In his brilliant monograph on the 1450 rising, George Kriehn thus contrasts it with its predecessor, the agrarian revolution of 1381:

> It was the first conflict between capital and labour in England. It was a social revolt. The bondmen demanded to be free for ever; the freedmen, that oppressive laws cease to molest them… In other respects the rising of 1450 bears little resemblance to the great upheaval which preceded it. As a political movement, its character was milder than that of a social outbreak. It was much less radical…
>
> The first movement bears more resemblance to the Jacquerie, to the risings of the German peasants; the second is more like the rising of the commons of the North under Robin of Redesdale 19 years later.[15]

i: Causes: These seem to have been three in number, and were broadly the same as in 1381: viz, firstly, the disastrous course of the French war; by 1450 the 'Hundred Years War' had just ended in complete disaster; only Calais now remained of England's former French empire. Secondly, the heavy and irregular taxation arbitrarily levied by the government to pay for the French war. Thirdly, as so often throughout mediæval history, the minority of the saintly but weak Henry the Sixth had led to feudal disorder and endemic confusion. Henry's ministers seem to have been typical products of a decadent feudal system.[16]

ii: Course of Rebellion: This was generally similar to that taken by the 1381 rising. The rising started in Kent, under the leadership of a mysterious individual known as 'the Captain of Kent'. This leader — the identity of whom has never been exactly determined[17] — claimed to be a member of the House of Mortimer, the house of the Duke of York, the legal heir and dynastic rival of the reigning House of Lancaster. On 30 May, the 'Captain' began his rising. In a few days he had assembled an army, in which, unlike that of Tyler, many Kentish squires, as well as

14 See *infra*.

15 See *infra* — next section.

16 The most unpopular of them, the Duke of Suffolk, had been murdered by the outraged people as he fled to France, shortly before the Kentish rising started.

17 See *infra*.

peasants, were enrolled.[18] The rising seems to have been planned in advance. On 4 June, the Captain — who is always referred to as such in the contemporary records — issued a proclamation setting out the grievances of the rebels, and demanding the dismissal of the King's unpopular ministers. The demands set out by the Captain of Kent in his manifesto were mainly political in character, and were directed chiefly against court favouritism and irregular and arbitrary taxation. They contain, however, one social demand of the first importance: viz, the repeal of the 'Statute of Labourers'.

Without waiting for a reply or giving the government time to make any defensive preparations, the Captain marched on London; undoubtedly, correct strategy on his part. By 10 June, the Kentishmen were encamped on Blackheath. Here they halted, and the Captain received, but refused to treat with, a royal embassy, which reported that he kept excellent discipline and considerable state.

On 17 June, Henry the Sixth and his army arrived from Leicester, where the King had been holding an emergency Parliament. Upon his arrival in the capital, the Kentishmen retreated from Blackheath to Tonbridge. Henry, who was a monk by inclination rather than a man of war, sent a force in pursuit under Sir Humphrey Stafford, but this force was bloodily defeated at Sevenoaks on 18 June, and the royal general was killed.

This victory made the Captain master of the military situation. The royal army mutinied and Henry fled from London before the end of the month. On 1 July, the Kentishmen again reached Blackheath. On the 3rd, they forced their way into the city with the help of a rising of the poorer citizens which opened the gates. It was long remembered how the Captain marched in state through London, preceded by Poynings, his sword-bearer, with his sword of state, and how he struck the old London stone with his sword, uttering the proud words: 'Now is Mortimer lord of the city.' The keys of the city were surrendered to the Captain by the City Council.

The sequel was similar to the occupation of 1381. The rebels caught and incontinently executed the Lord Treasurer, Lord Say and Sele, and other of the King's ministers, as well as Crowmer, the sheriff of Essex, and other local objects of the hate of the rebels. In general, however, the Captain seems to have kept strict discipline.

Eventually, however, the Civic Council raised a revolt against the rebels (evening of 5 July), and reinforced by the garrison of the Tower, drove the Kentishmen out of the city; after a bloody but indecisive battle on London Bridge, the rebels, assisted by the prisoners of the Marshalsea, whom the Captain had liberated, succeeded in making good their retreat to Southwark.

The end of the rebellion was as swift as its start had been. A peasant army cannot be kept together for more than a very short time, and easily disintegrates at the first reverse. This now occurred, in 1450 as before in 1381. When on 6 July the Royal Council offered a complete amnesty, this was accepted by the disheartened Kentishmen, who at once dispersed and went home; beaten, as Wat Tyler's army had been, rather by their own political naïveté and lack of permanent military organisation than by any positive inferiority to the royal army. The longbow, that essentially democratic weapon, was still as potent as ever.

The Captain of Kent, however, was not so naïve as the army he led. The record of his rebellion shows that he was no mere adventurer, but that he was a man of no

18 In Kent, the most industrially developed county in England, the exactions of the government must have pressed especially hard: also it had borne the brunt of French coastal attacks.

ordinary ability, and endowed with some, at least, of the qualities of a natural leader of men. He knew that a revolutionary leader with his record could expect no mercy from a ruling class whom he had reduced to the verge of ruin. He retired to Rochester with a body of faithful adherents, and, on 10 July made an unsuccessful attack on Queensborough Castle, on the Isle of Sheppey in the mouth of the Medway.

He was immediately outlawed and a price of 1000 marks placed on his head. Iden, the sheriff of Kent, surprised him as he was, it seems, about to embark for France. Alone, the Captain fled across the Sussex Weald. At Heafield, near Lewes, he was caught and cut down by the sheriff's posse when resting in a garden. His body was identified by his former host at the White Hart in Southwark, and was subsequently drawn and quartered, in accordance with the grisly law of High Treason — which was not formally repealed until 1916, in connection with the case of Sir Roger Casement. The Captain's head was suspended on London Bridge, and the quarters were suspended in the rebellious towns of Blackheath, Norwich, Salisbury and Gloucester, where local disorders had simultaneously occurred.

Who was the 'Captain of Kent'? We do not know his real name, but it is extremely probable that it was actually Mortimer, as he himself claimed it to be. As Mortimer, and as a relative of the Duke of York, he was, at least, accepted by an army which contained many people who were in a position to know. The government did not, evidently, know who he was. He is called, impartially, Mortimer, Aylmer and Jack Cade, the last a notorious Irish murderer of the period. The last name eventually came to be identified with the Captain, no doubt on account of its disreputable associations: as such, it has passed into ruling-class 'history'. But, as Kriehn very pertinently observes, a foreigner with such infamous associations is hardly likely to have been accepted by so many Kentish squires, nor, we may add, is such a supposition at all consonant with the ability, character and moral ascendancy over his heterogeneous army which the Captain of Kent evidently possessed. Shakespeare — as great a reactionary as he was a poet! — has familiarised the reading public with 'Jack Cade', as the appropriate and typical leader of 'the filth and scum of Kent', as he styles the rising. And 'Cade', the leader of the 1450 rising, is for the 'man in the street'.[19]

The sequel to the 1450 rising was political rather than social. As such, it is considered in our next two sections.

III: 'Robin of Redesdale': The rising of the 'Captain of Kent' may be said to have inaugurated the 'Wars of the Roses', that useless and bloody cul-de-sac, amid which the mediæval feudal order finally perished in England. We have seen above that the Captain claimed to be and in fact probably was a member of the House of Mortimer, and a relative of the Duke of York; which prince indeed, though absent in Ireland at the time, was strongly suspected of having a hand in the Kentish rising. At the far-reaching social effects of the Wars of the Roses we will glance in the next section, but, first, we must make a brief reference to a northern revolt engendered by these wars; the revolt led by 'Robin of Redesdale', a northern rising which seems, at least, to have included some social elements in its aims.

19 Mr Gardner has suggested that there were two captains: Mortimer, who died during the rising, and Cade, who succeeded him as captain; but the course of the rising gives no trace of such a dual leadership.

'Robin of Redesdale' was, of course, a fictitious pseudonym like 'Ned Lud', who, in a similar fashion, gave his name to the 'Luddite' machine wreckers of the early nineteenth century.[20]

This Yorkshire rising seems to have been due mainly to the general unsettlement, itself due to the long desultory war, and may therefore be described as a popular rising against feudal disorder. At the head of an army of Yorkshiremen, 'Robin' defeated the King's general, the Earl of Pembroke, at Edgecote (in Northampton, 26 July 1469). The rising is said to have been encouraged by the Earl of Warwick — the famous 'kingmaker' — and other magnates who were discontented at the policy of Edward the Fourth. But when Edward went north in 1470 the revolt collapsed, probably on account of the impossibility of keeping a peasant army in the field for more than a short period; a recurring feature in the agrarian revolutions of the Middle Ages.

IV: The Wars of the Roses: Whilst the Wars of the Roses were in no sense revolutionary wars, their net effect upon society was highly important for the evolution of social revolution in England. For these bloody and desultory conflicts gave the *coup de grâce* to the old feudal nobility of the Middle Ages. In the course of the generation, for the duration of which they raged fitfully, the feudal landlord class was virtually exterminated, and the way was made clear for the 'totalitarian' state of the Tudors in the following century.

Nominally, the Wars of the Roses were waged as a dynastic war for the succession to the throne between the reigning House of Lancaster and the rival House of York, which latter was descended from an elder son of Edward the Third: the horticultural title, 'Wars of the Roses', is derived from the respective badges worn by the adherents of these two factions. In reality, however, the dynastic quarrel was the ostensible pretext rather than the genuine cause of these wars. In actuality, they represented rather the putrefaction of an obsolescent feudal order than a war for any clearly defined purpose. Their immediate cause seems to have been the necessity on the part of the feudal lords to find work for their hungry hordes of men-at-arms and other retainers, whose only trade was war, and who had been left without employment by the disastrous end of the Hundred Years War and the loss of the English possessions in France. By feudal law the lord had to support his men-at-arms: under feudalism there was, despite its numerous faults, a far higher degree of social responsibility than subsequently developed under capitalism; a feudal baron could not 'hire and fire' his vassals at will; everyone was responsible for someone.[21] The Wars of the Roses provided employment! Like the Irish Donnybrook Fair, they started as 'a private fight', with the public gradually joining in! Like the present-day imperialist wars of the twentieth century, these wars of the decline of feudalism were fought for no vital ideology and served no useful purpose: they simply drifted on. As the contemporary *Paston Letters* clearly indicate, they were entirely feudal in character and hardly affected the towns and the merchant class at all.

The Wars of the Roses drifted on in a desultory fashion for 30 years, from 1455, the date of the first battle of St Albans, to 1485, when the final battle of Bosworth

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20 If, as seems probable, the name 'Robin' was derived from Robin Hood, it demonstrates the popularity of that 'Stenka Razin' amongst the masses right down to the end of the Middle Ages. Whilst the identity of 'Robin' has never been certainly ascertained, it seems probable that he was Sir John Conyers, a magnate of the North.

21 See the feudal proverb: 'No land without a lord.'

Field ended in the death of Richard the Third, the English 'Borgia', and in the accession of the Welsh House of the Tudors, a remote collateral branch of the Royal House, after the physical extermination of both the Houses of York and Lancaster. Few of the old feudal families survived the hecatomb, as the genealogies of the modern House of Lords clearly show.[22]

On 22 August 1485, on Bosworth Field in Leicestershire, the Earl of Derby drew the royal crown from the hawthorn bush into which it had fallen in the course of Richard's last furious charge, and placed it on the head of his conqueror, Henry Tudor. The Middle Ages in England were over: the modern era had begun.

22 Their demise was hastened by the military technique of the age. We have seen how impotent was the knight in armour against the deadly English longbow. A century later, the defence had again caught up with the attack. For the Italian armourers of Milan had elaborated such a finished technique in defensive armour that the knights of the later fifteenth century were virtually impregnable in their tortoise-like armour. It was during the self-same generation that a cavalry battle between heavily armed knights in Italy resulted in precisely one casualty: a knight who fell off his horse and was suffocated in the mud, as the weight of his armour forbade him to rise! But, like prehistoric dinosaurs, they were rendered absolutely immobile by the very strength of their defences. As a result, every battle of this period was followed by the massacre of the knights of the defeated party: as the long war dragged on, personal vendettas multiplied and purses grew lean. Hence quarter was seldom given, and the massacre of the captured leaders became a regular feature of the later battles in these wars. The result was the virtual extermination of the English feudal lords of the Middle Ages.

Summary

I shall now briefly summarise the first part of this book dealing with revolution in mediæval England.

The Dark Age in England entirely cut off the civilised Britain of antiquity from the England of Anglo-Saxon times. Anglo-Saxon society represented a cross between a primitive tribal (patriarchal) society and one that was feudal in character.

With the Norman Conquest (1066), England became fully feudal in character. English society assumed, from the twelfth century on, the general make-up and class structure of a typical mediæval feudal society.

This class structure was composed of the following six main social elements: Crown, Church, Feudal Lords, Burgesses (chiefly in London), Peasants (mainly legal serfs) and Religious Heretics (these last chiefly in the later centuries of the Middle Ages). The social revolutions of the Middle Ages were directed by the last three classes against the first three: viz, by the unprivileged classes in feudal society against the privileged.

The first unprivileged social class to take the revolutionary road was the merchant (burgess) class, then enriched by the carrying-trade of the Crusades. The burgess class staged three revolutions: that of Fitz-Osbert (1196); that against John, which resulted in the signing of *Magna Carta* (1215); and that of Simon de Montfort (1264–65), which resulted in the establishment of the Parliamentary system in England — a system probably originally derived from Spain. The first of these risings was waged by the burgesses single-handed, and consequently failed. The second and third were waged in unison with the feudal class against the Crown. As a result of the success of these combined efforts, Edward the First, the mediæval 'Disraeli' — viz, master of counter-revolution — detached the burgesses from the ranks of the subject classes by giving them permanently a share of power through the permanent establishment of Parliament in 1275.[1]

The burgesses having been admitted, via the agency of Parliament, into the ruling classes, the remaining revolutions in mediæval England were conducted by the peasants and their ideological allies, the religious heretics (Lollards, etc). The immediate causes of these agrarian risings were the military potency conferred on the peasants by the rise of the longbow, and the depopulation, due to the Black Death in 1349, which conferred economic potency on the survivors.

There were three agrarian revolutions.

i: The great peasant rising of 1381 — much the most important — led by Wat Tyler but organised by the Lollards.

ii: The rising of the Captain of Kent in 1450.

iii: The rising of 'Robin of Redesdale' in 1469.

Though immediate failures, these risings hastened the abolition of serfdom, so that Thorold Rogers described the fifteenth century as a golden age for the English poor.

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1 Throughout the course of this survey of English revolutionary history we shall have repeated occasion to note the recurring fact that a combination of two classes appears to be absolutely necessary to the success of a social revolution: a one-class revolution seems always to have been unsuccessful.

This age ended, along with the Middle Ages themselves, in about 1500, by which time the feudal lords had been destroyed in England by the Wars of the Roses, and a new social order — capitalism — was coming into being as a result of the contemporary voyages of discovery and the consequent opening-up of the world market; the necessary result of which was to generate a fresh cycle of social revolutions: the revolution of rising capitalism against the declining feudal order, a cycle consummated only in the nineteenth century with the final and definite triumph of capitalism.

This cycle is traced in the second, immediately ensuing part of the present book, dealing mainly with the epoch of bourgeois revolution in England: the classical era, hitherto, of social revolution in England — a classical phase, so far, but one destined to be superseded in that role — let us hope, shortly — by the coming proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century!

Part II: The Bourgeois Revolution[1]

Prologue: The Bourgeois Revolution[2]

In the first part of this book I have traced the 'evolution of revolution' in England throughout the mediæval era; the first of the three phases into which the history of revolution in England may be divided. In the ensuing part I am about to deal with what is, up to the present period, the classical era of social revolution in England: the epoch of the bourgeois (capitalist) revolution, which overthrew the feudal system in England and transformed the England of the Middle Ages — the so-called 'Merrie England' — into the capitalist England of the modern era — an era which, for the masses at least, has been the reverse of 'merry'! For, despite the abhorrence of all species of social revolution manifested by the decadent English ruling class of today, never in all history has there been a more revolutionary class than was the English capitalist class throughout the long era of its rise to power. For almost exactly three centuries, from 1533, the initial date of Henry the Eighth's breakaway from Rome, which furnished the starting-point of the bourgeois revolution in England, down to 1832, when the First Reform Bill admitted the industrial capitalists to the ranks of the landowning and mercantilist oligarchy, thereby embodying the industrial revolution in the political framework of the English state, the rising capitalist class advanced persistently to the conquest of political power. For three centuries, the English merchant class knocked persistently on the threshold of power. To an attentive student of this chapter of revolutionary history, one unexampled in the tenacity of the will-to-power which it manifested throughout its whole duration, the ultra-reactionary character that has today, become the second nature of the English bourgeoisie in the course of its decadence, must appear as one of the most gigantic ironies in all recorded history — 'other times, other manners'!

When we observe the course of English revolutionary history in the broad historical perspective with which this book is especially concerned, we are able, for the purpose of a general analysis, to divide the rise of the English bourgeoisie into three consecutive periods characterised by special features, which themselves corresponded to succeeding phases in the evolution of the bourgeoisie in England. These phases correspond, respectively, with the following events:

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1 The second part concludes with the last Jacobite counter-revolution in 1746. To preserve an appropriate scale, I propose to deal with the Reform Bill of 1832 in the third part of this book: it was, in any case, supported by the proletariat.

2 By the term 'bourgeoisie' I imply the commercial class of the era in question, whether mercantilist or industrialist, as distinct from the feudal class, on the one hand, and the urban poor on the other. The term 'middle class', though often employed with reference to the bourgeois revolution, is not, strictly speaking, correct. For, whilst a 'middle class', in the sense that it stood between the nobles and the masses, yet the bourgeoisie was a propertied class, which the modern 'middle class' is not. The designation is therefore inapplicable to the bourgeois revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The term 'proletariat' cannot be accurately used prior to the late eighteenth century when, for the first time in English history, the factory system had created that class of associated co-workers, the modern proletariat, to whom alone Marxist social science rightly limits the correct use of that designation.

i: The English Reformation (1533–1605): viz, from the suppression of the monasteries to the failure of the Gunpowder Plot.

ii: The bourgeois revolutions against the Stuarts (1640–1746): from the 'Long Parliament' to the last Jacobite counter-revolution in 1745–46 (that of the 'Young Pretender').

iii: The Reform Bill of 1832, that 'Bloodless Revolution' — as the Swiss historian Edward Fueter has aptly termed it — which consummated the capitalist revolution in England.

During these entire three centuries the mediæval burgesses, transformed by the opening-up of the world market in the sixteenth century into the modern bourgeoisie, were pushing forward towards the possession of state power, aided throughout by a favourable historical headwind. When looked at from the angle of world history, it must be conceded that the English bourgeois revolution, if and when considered in its widest aspects, forms the most important chapter in the volume of modern history. For despite its generally reactionary character and the innumerable crimes which signalised its rise to world power, it can scarcely be disputed that the rise of the British Empire forms the central political fact of modern times. What the Roman Empire was to Antiquity, that has been the British Empire in respect of the modern age.

With the world expansion of British capital, the rise and meridian phases of the British World Empire, I am not here concerned, except incidentally and — in the concluding chapters of this book — in relation to the coming proletarian revolutions of the twentieth century. In the following chapters I present the succeeding phases, already enumerated above, of the English bourgeois revolution in its three centuries' entire duration.

Firstly, however, two preliminary points must be noted in connection with this classical era of English revolutionary activity.

The first of these points is the curiously uneven character of the British bourgeois revolution and of the type of English state which arose upon the morrow of its victory. For whilst innumerable economic historians, from Karl Marx onwards, have rightly pointed to modern England as the classical example of a capitalist society from the economic standpoint; yet from a purely political standpoint the modern English state has never been a typical capitalist state. Contrarily, as Hilaire Belloc, virtually alone among modern English historians, has consistently recognised, England, ever since the definitive bourgeois victory of the seventeenth century, has been an oligarchy, a political dictatorship of a few rich men — itself containing not a few feudal elements — and this oligarchy, despite successive political disguises, has endured, virtually unaltered, down to the current generation in which these lines are written.

Modern England, I repeat, is an oligarchy, semi-feudal in form and plutocratic in substance, an analogous regime to that of Carthage in ancient, and Venice in mediæval times. It has never been, at any time, a typical democracy, as, for example, France has been increasingly since the era of the French Revolution. It is precisely this one-sided character, economically capitalist and politically oligarchic in character, that gives to the English bourgeois revolution, and to the unique society which eventually emerged after its conquest of power, that strange and altogether peculiar character which has baffled almost all modern analysts and commentators, both capitalist and socialist, even in our age of self-styled 'scientific' history.

Finally, so that we may subsequently distinguish the wood from the trees, we may note that it has been apparently at all times — and for that matter, in all countries — a recurring feature of the bourgeois revolution, that, in order to achieve permanent success, it has always needed the support of other classes. This recurring feature can be seen in each of the three main phases of the English capitalist revolution. In the age of the Reformation the still immature burgesses, as yet scarcely hatched from their mediæval shell, rose to power in the shadow of the totalitarian Tudor state of the sixteenth century. Victorious in their common assault upon the Church, the partners then fought each other for power in the seventeenth century, when it was with the support of the peasants (yeomen) that the rising merchant class overthrew its erstwhile ally, the absolute bureaucratic monarchy. Finally, in 1832, it was with the support of the newly-created proletariat, the working class, just hatched by the industrial revolution, that industrial capital superseded merchant capital in the direction of the British state, by virtue of the revolutionary Reform Bill of 1832.

In short, this was the sequence in the revolutionary rise to power. The Reformation hatched the bourgeois egg: Cromwell and his Whig disciples taught the new class to rise to the seats of power: the Reform Bill subjected the English state to the conquerors in the industrial revolution.

It is this revolutionary sequence of rising capitalism, the totality of which constitutes the classical era of social revolution in England, that is outlined in the second, immediately ensuing part of this record of the Revolutionary Tradition in England.

Chapter I: The Tudor Totalitarian State

On 22 August 1485, the Battle of Bosworth Field finally closed the generation-old Wars of the Roses, that prolonged act of collective suicide on the part of the mediæval feudal aristocracy. From the dynastic holocaust which had engulfed both Lancaster and York, the two great branches of the House of Plantagenet, there emerged the Welsh House of Tudor, one with an hereditary claim of the most shadowy kind to the throne. Henry Tudor owed his victory, and his crown, to treachery: a last-minute desperate charge by Richard the Third having narrowly failed to cut down the Welsh claimant to the throne, the death of the last Yorkist king left the way clear for the new dynasty to ascend the vacant throne. Two subsequent risings under the Yorkist pretenders, Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, failed to shake the new dynasty, which consequently ruled England throughout the entire duration of the momentous sixteenth century, the most revolutionary epoch which the world has known prior to the nineteenth century: an era characterised pre-eminently by titanic struggles between the rising bourgeoisie and decaying feudalism.

From 1485, the date of Henry's victory, to 1603, the date of the death of his grand-daughter, Queen Elizabeth, the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty, the House of Tudor ruled over England. This era was one entirely remote in its political and its cultural character from both the ages which, respectively, preceded and succeeded it. Feudalism had committed suicide, and the rise of the capitalist oligarchy, which has governed England from the seventeenth century to our own day, still lay far in the future when Henry Tudor triumphed at Bosworth Field.

In the records of political science, the Tudor epoch, one broadly equivalent to the revolutionary sixteenth century, was *par excellence* the era of the State; of a state apparatus that was 'totalitarian' in practically every sense in which that word is used today in the twentieth century. From 1485 to 1603, the last word — and usually the first as well! — not only in war and politics, but equally in economics, culture and religion, belonged to the omnipotent Tudor state. When, eleven years after its downfall in 1640, Thomas Hobbes uttered its swansong in his *Leviathan* (1651), that scientific justification of absolutism did no more than summarise the preceding century and a half of the history of the English totalitarian state, prior to its downfall before the great bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century. The Latin motto which Hobbes inscribed on the title-page of his masterpiece, '*Non est potestas super Terram quae comparetur ei*' — 'There is nothing upon earth which is its equal' (Job, 41:24) — represented no mere flamboyant boast; but was an accurate summary of what the English state had been in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, before that state — at the very time that this great political philosopher sat down to compose its literary justification — had crumbled before the revolutionary blows of Cromwell and his Calvinist Ironsides, the armed vanguard of the new bourgeois ruling class which was destined to succeed it.

The Tudor state was, indeed a 'total' state. Whilst it found it convenient to maintain a kind of Parliamentary fig-leaf — a sort of 'Reichstag', to employ a contemporary parallel — yet, in its prime, under the early Tudors in particular, there was no nonsense about either democracy, individualism and/or economic *laisser-faire* in the Tudor state; 'over all persons and causes supreme', as that typically totalitarian Tudor document, 'the thirty-nine articles of religion', was later accurately

to style it. A state Church, a state culture and a state economy, such was both English practice and English theory under the English 'Leviathan', the absolutist bureaucratic monarchy of the Tudor regime. In particular, England, like any modern totalitarian state, practised a rigid economic autarchy. In absolute antithesis to the Cobdenite 'Manchester School', English economy in the sixteenth century was a *political* economy in the strictest sense of that term.

I am not writing a history of England in the sixteenth century, nor am I concerned here with an academic analysis of the absolutist state of the Renaissance era, that contemporary European regime, the supreme prophet and instructor of which was the Florentine political philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527). Unfortunately, English history, taken as a whole, has never yet found its Marxist historian; but, in the connection now under discussion, many illuminating and suggestive observations on English history in this era will be found in Karl Kautsky's brilliant book *Thomas More and His Utopia*. I have myself dealt with the Machiavellian state of the Renaissance as a European phenomenon in my book *The Jesuits: A Study in Counter-Revolution*, part one.[1] But, whilst I am not here concerned with the general history and political theory of this era, the subject matter of this work itself compels me at this point to direct a glance at the English totalitarian state, since it played a most important part in English revolutionary history, first as a revolutionary force in the sixteenth century, then as a counter-revolutionary force in the seventeenth century.

For it was in alliance with this state, and under its protecting shadow, that the rising merchant class made its first revolutionary onslaught on the feudal-ecclesiastical order inherited from the agrarian Middle Ages. For the great era of the Voyages of Discovery had now created, for the first time in all history, the World Market, by the discovery of America (1492), and of the African sea-routes to the Far East (1496–98). As a direct result of this, there now commenced an age of revolution of unparalleled intensity: of the merchant class, the newly-enriched exploiters of the world market, against the predominantly agrarian social-economic order which had dominated the Middle Ages. This revolutionary era reached England at the end of the first third of the sixteenth century. But in this as yet backward island, the merchant class was not at first strong enough to challenge the mediæval order alone and unassisted. To achieve the overthrow of the Church, the English 'Reformation', which constituted the first phase of the English bourgeois revolution, the bourgeoisie needed the help of the state, which also, both for internal reasons and on account of considerations of foreign policy, was itself compelled to move against the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church.[2]

I proceed accordingly to glance at the causes and character of that formidable political instrument, the Tudor totalitarian state of the sixteenth century, that revolutionary force which, in realising its own totalitarian claims by the destruction of its rivals, the Church and the peasants, effectually — though unwittingly — cleared the way for the rise of the capitalist class to supreme power in the great revolutions of the seventeenth century directed against itself.

What was the reason for the extraordinary power that the Tudor state was able to display through this entire era? The answer to this question is not to be found primarily in the character of the five Tudor monarchs, who indeed varied considerably in vigour and political ability. The real strength of the Tudor state lay

1 I am not aware of any other Marxist books dealing with English history in the era in question.

2 See *infra*, next chapter.

in its unique historical position, as the occupant, so to speak, of the watershed between the declining feudal system and a rising capitalist system, as yet too weak and politically immature to seize power on its own behalf. In general, the power of the Tudor state was derived from its generic position as 'the rejoicing third' in a transitional society, which derived its political supremacy from its ability to play off the rising but still immature forces, the merchants and the religious reformers, against the decrepit classes of the old regime, the Roman Church and the peasantry. In this connection, the virtually complete destruction of the feudal landlords in the Wars of the Roses gave the final impetus to the royal power and to the absolutism which was centred upon it.

In short, the Tudor state, which invented the Balance of Power, which has governed the relations of Britain with the European Continent down to and including our own day, itself rested on an internal balance of power of feudal versus capitalist elements, in which the last word rested with itself. Frederick Engels remarks in his well-known book *The Origin of the State*, that there have been historical epochs when the class struggle reached a kind of temporary stalemate; during such periods, adds this great political thinker, the state itself has been able to become a kind of ruling 'class' and, as such, to direct its contemporary society in all its manifestations. The Tudor totalitarian state was a state of such a kind, as were its contemporary states, the Machiavellian absolute monarchies of the Renaissance. The sixteenth-century bourgeoisie advanced towards its first revolutionary milestone on the crutches of this state, whilst today, the decadent bourgeoisie of our own age totters in senile decay towards its grave and its proletarian 'grave-diggers', also on totalitarian crutches: we can in fact note here, that as elsewhere, 'extremes meet'. In the course of the bourgeois revolution, totalitarianism is a function of its immature youth and of its tottering and senile decay. In its prime, no bourgeois class ever has recourse to totalitarian despotism, which is, for the capitalist order in general, always an abnormal phenomenon; one contrary to all its natural impulses and development.

In the England of the sixteenth century, however, the capitalist class was still far too weak to impress its natural development upon the state: that revolutionary phase still lay far in the future. The balance of power still lay in the hands of the state; and there was then no doubt about the reality of that power, as the following instances, taken, respectively, from its administrative, economic and cultural policy, will show conclusively. I may add that this list of arbitrary royal acts, which no modern 'total' state has ever surpassed, could be extended indefinitely, did but the scale of this book permit it. Here, I am necessarily limited to representative examples.

a: Administrative: Whilst the Tudor monarchs kept Parliament in existence, their real government was carried on by a number of arbitrary extra-Parliamentary courts, of which that court usually known on account of its mural decorations as the 'Star Chamber', was the most famous and powerful. It had a powerful ecclesiastical counterpart known as the 'Court of High Commission', which dealt with Church affairs after the Reformation. In addition, the ordinary administration of the country was carried on by a number of Royal Councils, such as the Councils of Wales and the North. These royal courts were always illegal according to the Common Law of England, but in the Tudor era their power was so great that their existence was never even challenged.

How effective, ruthless and omnipotent was this absolutist extra-Parliamentary Tudor state power could be illustrated from innumerable examples culled from its entire duration. However, the example that I am just going to cite is so perfect an example of an irresponsible and uncontrolled despotism that it relieves me from the necessity of adding any further instances: it is indeed more eloquent than a hundred volumes could possibly be as to the royal despotism in Tudor times.

In his *Remembrances* — his political autobiography — Thomas Cromwell, the all-powerful Minister of Henry the Eighth, records the following entries in relation to the approaching 'trials' of the Abbots of Reading and Glastonbury, then prosecuted for their refusal to acknowledge the supremacy of the King over the Church. These entries run as follows:

> **Item**: The Abbot Redyng [Reading] to be sent down to be *tried and executed* at Redyng with his accomplices [italics in original]…
>
> **Item**: The Abbot of Glaston [Glastonbury] *to be tried* at Glaston, and *also executed* there [italics in original].

Another still more astounding entry reads:

> **Item**: To see that the evidence be *well sorted* and the indictments *well drawn* against the said Abbots and their accomplices [italics in original].
>
> What the King his pleasure shall be touching the learned man in the Tower. — Thomas More

Our authority adds:

> Cromwell established a secret police system to carry out his orders, and made denunciation a part of state machinery; the whole country was enmeshed in the toils of a treacherous and complicated spy system.[3]

'To be tried at Reading and executed'! What a convincing proof of despotism: not many constitutional 'liberties of the subject' here! What more could a Caligula or a Nero have desired? Such was the totalitarian regime of Thomas Cromwell and William Cecil, the two greatest Tudor statesmen, under the auspices of which the modern English bourgeoisie covered their first journey along the revolutionary road. And of such a kind also, we may relevantly add, is our contemporary (twentieth-century) totalitarianism of Mussolini and Hitler — which would rejoice the heart of Thomas Cromwell could he revisit the glimpses of the moon! — under the auspices of which the senile bourgeoisie of our own day reverted to the customs of its brutal youth and sought shelter against the approaching storms of revolution by a renewal of that very arbitrary violence which itself, in its Liberal prime, has taught mankind to despise.

b: Legal: The Tudor state, which so completely disregarded Parliament, also treated the Common Law with the same complete contempt. A single but most convincing example of this contempt must suffice us. According to the Common Law of England the use of torture in legal proceedings has always, at all times, been illegal: in the famous case of 'Rex versus Felton' (the assassin of Charles the First's

3 Gustave Constant, *The Reformation in England: Henry VIII (1509–1547)* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1934), pp 295–96.

Minister, the Duke of Buckingham) in 1628, the judges had no difficulty in proving their contention that the King had no power to order torture, by the citation of overwhelming pre-Tudor legal precedents. But this decision, which ended the use of torture in England, was itself a proof of the overwhelming power of the Tudor state, which had so long been able to defy the law with such prolonged and complete impunity. By 1628, the power of the absolute monarchy was already tottering before the impact of the bourgeois revolution. But in the Tudor epoch the agents of the Crown maimed and tortured at will. The Tower of London kept a permanent arsenal of instruments of torture for 'putting the question' — to use the legal euphuism of the day — in a thoroughly efficient and painful manner. In particular, the rack was kept working 'overtime' on a long and impartial series of eminent Catholics, Protestants, traitors and conspirators, from the Protestant Sir Thomas Wyatt, to Guy Fawkes and his Catholic co-conspirators in the 'Gunpowder Plot'. In both the above cases, the rack, 'the queen of the torture chamber', as the limb-twisting science of the day styled that instrument, did its work so efficiently that neither of its eminent victims was able to sign his name legibly to the 'confession', which so effectively demonstrated its efficiency. No doubt, many of its victims were 'translated' in the manner described by 'the sworn tormentor' of Elizabeth who boasted that at the end of his 'examination' of the famous Jesuit and poet Robert Southwell, the victim was 'a foot longer than God had made him'. I may add that it is satisfactory to a trade unionist to recall that this busy and indispensable Tudor state official received a statutory 'living wage', with extra pay for 'overtime' worked: we do not know if he received a bonus for every 'confession' extracted![4]

Beyond a doubt, a state which could arrange for the execution of High Church dignitaries before their 'trial', and could have a permanent torture-chamber and a ubiquitous spy-system in defiance of the first principles of the law, was not a constitutional state in any proper sense of that term. This despotic Renaissance state was a genuine totalitarian polity in the most exact sense that this descriptive adjective can be applied in connection with any modern state whatsoever.

c: Economic: The discovery of the New Worlds to East and West had greatly increased both the amount and importance of money by the influx of precious metals which ensued and also the volume of current trade. At this period there was, of course, no question of free trade or '*laisser-faire, laisser-aller*'. The universal economic system was then mercantilism, that system of economic autarchy and of the most rigid governmental control of all economic activity, which marked the era of the opening-up of the world market and the subsequent lusty youth of the capitalist system. The Tudor state had, properly speaking, no colonial policy, since it had no colonies; though in Ireland it had the beginnings of what later was to become one: Ireland, Britain's oldest colony, was in due course to be bled white under mercantilist economics, which treated the colonies merely as so many lemons to be squeezed dry for the benefit of the metropolis.[5]

In economic affairs, the Tudor state was as absolutist as in any other sphere. This aspect of its political economy is thus summarised by a great modern historian:

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4 The modern 'cat o' nine tails' is, according to the law, an instrument of correction, but not of torture: there are rumours that its victims do not know enough law to appreciate the difference.

5 It is indeed the modern tragedy of Ireland that she has been the supreme example of such an economically squeezed lemon: every bomb thrown as recently as 1940 by the Irish Republican Army still sounds a renewed protest against mercantilist economics.

> We shall fall into extreme error if we translate into the language of modern political economy the social features of a state of things which in no way corresponded with our own. There was this essential difference, that labour was not looked upon as a market commodity; the government attempting to portion out the rights of the various classes of society by the rule, not of economy, but of equity. Statesmen did not care for the accumulation of capital; they desired to see the physical well-being of all classes of the commonwealth maintained at the highest degree which the producing power of the country admitted; and, population and production remaining stationary, they were able to do it. This was their object, and they were supported in it by a powerful and efficient majority of the nation.[6]

The learned author then proceeds to follow up this general statement of its economic paternalism by an exhaustive list of Tudor legislation which arbitrarily dictated practically every aspect of English economic and social activity, ranging from the control by law of both profits and wages, to state regulation of the amount which a wealthy individual could spend on clothes and private banquets. We may summarise this legislation by observing that the infant English capitalism of the Tudor epoch was essentially a 'controlled capitalism'. Indeed, the modern pundits of the Fabian Society, to whom nationalisation and state control are synonymous terms for socialism itself, must logically conclude that sixteenth-century England was a 'socialist' state under ideal 'Fabian' despots, who effectually repudiated the class struggle and kept a tight rein on both labour and capital.[7]

Not merely did the Tudor state dominate alike administration, law and economic activity in its contemporary England; it controlled, less openly but at least equally efficiently the life of English culture as well. Horrible as it will appear to the adherents of the Oscar Wilde — *Yellow Book* — aesthetic school of 'Art for Art's Sake', the brilliant literature of Renaissance ('Elizabethan') England was a state-controlled literature: the incomparable poetry of the great dramatists and poets of the Tudor Age was pre-eminently a court literature; it faithfully reflected the ideas and ideals of its contemporary absolutist state. The most brilliant literature that Europe has known since the age of the great poets and dramatists of ancient Athens, was itself a totalitarian literature: if Shakespeare and his great contemporaries were divinely inspired, they were also inspired by the Tudor state, an inspiration which is reflected in innumerable ways on every page of their copious writings.

I could cite innumerable examples of this relationship between the Tudor state and the culture of the English Renaissance. I must content myself with only one: from the greatest and most typical of Tudor poets: William Shakespeare himself. For Shakespeare, as I already have had occasion to observe, was politically the faithful mirror of his absolutist age. He sneered impartially at all its enemies alike in his plays: at the peasants of Cade — in *Henry the Sixth, Part One*; at the Puritan

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6 JA Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, Volume 1 (Parker, London, 1856), pp 26–27.

7 It is with the more pain that we note that Bernard Shaw somewhere styles that model 'socialist' king, Henry the Eighth, as an English 'Bluebeard'. Some people seem never satisfied! It is true that Henry was extremely ruthless. But then no Renaissance despotism ruled with kid gloves. In any case, Henry was no more ruthless than Shaw's present-day hero, M Stalin, who surpasses even Henry and Thomas Cromwell in the art — or, rather, science — of arranging trials, executions and 'confessions' as well, in advance of the Day of Judgement!

bourgeoisie — in *Twelfth Night*; at usurpers — in *Macbeth*; at those who denied the Divine Right of Kings — in *Richard the Second*. And we have not forgotten how this loyal servitor of the despotic government of Queen Elizabeth contrived to write a long and detailed play about King John, without so much as making the most distant allusion to *Magna Carta*.

But an even better example than all these aforementioned is to be found in his *Richard the Third*, not one of his greatest plays, to be sure, from the standpoint of great art, but his most accurate political declaration of loyalty to the Tudor Crown and State. *Richard the Third*, whilst a play in form, is in substance a political propaganda pamphlet; by far the most permanent in its effects of the vast arsenal of propaganda issued by, and on behalf of, the Tudor regime.

For, in *Richard the Third*, Shakespeare has popularised and made immortal the view which the Tudor dynasty desired that its subjects should hold about the last Yorkist King of England, whose defeat and death opened the way for the Tudor dynasty to mount the English throne. Already, before Shakespeare, Sir Thomas More had begun the process in his *Life of Richard the Third*. Shakespeare went the whole Tudor hog: his Richard is now the Richard of popular history: a moral and physical monster, as crooked in his mind as in his hunchback body, who waded to the throne through an orgy of wanton murder and the blackest treachery, from whose diabolical regime Henry Tudor (Henry the Seventh) rescued his groaning subjects.

Such was the view of Richard held by the Tudors; such is the view, thanks to Shakespeare, that is universally held today. Do we exaggerate when we call the 'Bard of Avon' the most successful Tudor apologist and pamphleteer, and when we add that the English Renaissance was, essentially, a totalitarian state-culture? Moreover, to indicate that Shakespeare was not unique in this respect, we must also recall that Edmund Spenser, the poetic name that stands next to that of Shakespeare in the literature of the age, wrote a pamphlet on the 'Irish Question', in which he both advocated the extermination of the Irish children at birth, as the only solution of the problem of English rule in Ireland, and justified the treacherous massacre of the Italian troops sent by the Pope to Ireland, after they had laid down their arms on promise of mercy: Spenser, the most aesthetic and cultured of the Elizabethan poets, was in fact the first and one of the most ruthless apologists of English colonial rule in its oldest and most oppressed colony, Ireland; he said about Ireland what the Tudors thought and wished for but which even they dared not say openly.

Thus we observe that the brilliant English literary culture of the Tudor Age was a culture dictated by the state: what else, indeed, can we call an art whose greatest dramatist falsified English history to throw a halo around the origins of the Tudor dynasty, and whose greatest poet wrote pamphlets justifying the most barbarous actions that resulted from his government's colonial policy: the fulsome flattery of Elizabeth which characterised all the English poets, including, especially, the two greatest, is the outward symbol of this dynastic culture.[8]

Such was the Tudor totalitarian state, 'over all persons and causes supreme', under the shadow of which, and in alliance with which, the nascent bourgeois class, the offspring of the newly-created world market, made its first revolutionary onslaught upon the obsolescent social order which had come over from the predominantly agrarian Middle Ages. Supporting each other mutually, the state and the merchant class set out to destroy the two surviving mediæval classes which

8 See the note at the end of this chapter.

opposed both the omnipotent state and its ally, rising capitalism: viz, the Roman Church and the peasantry. The destruction of these two social forces, which represent the first stage of the bourgeois revolution in sixteenth-century England, must now occupy our attention in the next two chapters of this book.

Note on Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* and the Falsification of History: We have seen what the Tudors desired their subjects to think about Richard the Third — 'Crookback Dick of Gloucester' — and how Shakespeare in his play has fixed that character permanently upon the last Plantagenet. We must add that the portrait is propaganda and not impartial history: the Tudors had every reason to blackguard their Yorkist predecessor, particularly as the battle of Bosworth Field had been a desperately close thing, Richard having all but succeeded in his last desperate attempt to cut down his Tudor rival.

In actual fact, Richard was the most interesting and one of the ablest of all English kings: a brilliant politician, after the style of the Italian despots of the Renaissance, who would have delighted the heart of Machiavelli. The irony of the popular reputation which the Tudors bestowed upon him is evident in the fact that it was Richard who began the ruthless, but, under the circumstances of the time, absolutely necessary 'liquidation' of the feudal barons, which the Tudors themselves later achieved by methods at least equally ruthless. In point of fact, Richard saved England from a long minority and a fresh orgy of renewed civil war which this would have necessarily implied: all Richard's executions of unworthy court favourites were fully justified, and even his murder of 'the Princes in the Tower', Edward the Fifth and his brother, probably saved the country from civil war. In any case, it has never been established beyond doubt that Henry the Seventh — who murdered another Yorkist prince, the Earl of Warwick, under almost exactly identical conditions — did not himself order this murder and then ascribe it to Richard.

As far the legend that Richard was a hunchback, the contemporary portrait of this king shows only a slight stoop: the Homeric deeds that he performed at Bosworth, in any case, give the lie to the legend that Richard was a physical monstrosity.

By an ironic circumstance, at the very time that Shakespeare was composing his caricature, the aged Countess of Desmond — who died in 1604 at the patriarchal age of about 140; she fell off a tree whilst gathering apples! — was boasting that in her youth she had danced with Richard and that he was the handsomest and best-made man in the room!

I therefore conclude that this play is a superb example of the cultural dictatorship exercised in sixteenth-century England by the pre-oligarchic absolutist Tudor state. And yet there are those who tell us that cultural propaganda was not invented until the twentieth century!

Chapter II: The English Reformation — The 'Los von Rom'[1]

The English Reformation represented the first of the three main stages of the English bourgeois revolution. It is solely when considering it from this objective standpoint that this historical phase enters the scope of the present study of the English revolutionary tradition: we are, of course, not interested, in this connection, with theology as such. Accordingly, I outline successively the causes, sequence and results of the English 'Los von Rom' that was achieved in the second third of the sixteenth century by Henry the Eighth and Queen Elizabeth, or rather by their two powerful and ruthless ministers Thomas Cromwell and William Cecil.

I: Immediate causes of the English Reformation: These were three in number: i: The world changes of the era; ii: The totalitarian aspirations of the Tudor state; iii: The contemporary needs of English foreign policy. I deal with these *seriatim*: I should add that in the essentially political Reformation in England, unlike that on the Continent, theological and religious motives played only a very minor role even in this ostensibly religious revolution.

a: The World Changes of the Age: The sixteenth century was essentially the age of the opening-up of the world market, and of consequent 'world revolution', the first, properly so-called in all history. The opening-up of America flooded Europe with the precious metals so ruthlessly extracted from the wretched 'Indians'. At the same time, the Renaissance of learning was spread by the new discovery of printing, and led to the emergence of a new secular humanistic culture, independent of the Church. At the same time, the Roman Church on the Continent was rent by the Continental Reformation which began with Luther in 1517. I may add that there was absolutely nothing new in the attempt to 'reform' the Church, which had been frequently attempted during the course of the Middle Ages: the Reformation succeeded in the sixteenth century because of the new world conditions and of the support of the new classes which were engendered by them.[2]

b: The Totalitarian Aspirations of the Tudor Regime: These will already be clear from the foregoing chapter. The power of the Roman Church in England, still by far the greatest English landowner, represented the chief obstacle alike to the omnipotence of the state and to the economic supremacy of the bourgeois class. A Church that owed obedience to Rome could obviously never be completely fitted into the totalitarian pattern. Other more modern absolutist regimes can bear testimony to this! In any case, the Roman Catholic Church is, and always has been, itself a totalitarian regime, 'a state within the state', that permanent *bête noire* of every omnipotent state, from that of Nero to that of Hitler. To Henry and Cromwell, the Papacy represented primarily a rival jurisdiction, one that struck at the very roots of their autocratic regime. Hence the Church represented the chief obstacle in the path of the Tudor–bourgeois alliance, and its overthrow, by causing the destruction of the most powerful survival of mediævalism, represented in itself a social revolution under the circumstances of that era.

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1 Los von Rom — Away From Rome — a religious movement formed in Austria around 1900 by the Pan-German politician Georg Ritter von Schönerer; its aim was the conversion of the Roman Catholic German-speaking population of Austria to Lutheran Protestantism — MIA.

2 See the note at the end of Chapter V.

c: The Contemporary Needs of English Foreign Policy: In the Middle Ages, as we will not have forgotten,[3] the wars waged by English kings were dynastic-feudal wars motivated by a desire to acquire feudal 'real property' — viz, land. In the sixteenth century, however, such wars were becoming impossible for England to wage, on account of the growing disparity between her forces and those at the disposal of the great Continental monarchies, in particular, of the two strongest, France and Spain. As Professor Oman has recently shown, the art of war underwent a drastic military revolution in the era of the Renaissance, one that led to the formation of professional armies in place of the feudal militia; one, in particular, in which firearms played a great and growing part. Against this new scientific militarism, the English feudal levies could make no headway, the more so as the longbow began to lose its importance in the age of cannon and firearms of precision. In 1558, England lost Calais, her last stronghold on the Continent, and there can be little doubt, even from the contemporary admissions of the English government itself, that, had the Spanish Armada in 1588 succeeded in landing, the Spanish army which it was intended to transport to England, that formidable military machine must have succeeded in conquering England, despite the resistance of its brave but untrained levies.[4]

It may perhaps seem a trifle peculiar to the reader to ascribe a purely military reason for a revolution, which, like the English Reformation, was, ostensibly at least, religious in character. What, he may well ask, has the jurisdiction of the Pope over the English Church got to do with the evolution of artillery in the sixteenth century? Surely, it may be objected, this is an irrelevant materialism run mad. In point of fact, however, the connection is not at all difficult to establish.

On account of its military weakness, due to its lack of a standing army — a point of the first importance in English revolutionary history, particularly in relation to the English bourgeois revolution — the English state could only hope to survive as an independent power if it could steer clear of European entanglements: to endure, it must keep the Continent at arm's length, so to speak. Obviously, to do this, it required two things: a strong navy and a policy of isolation. Henry the Eighth and his ministers gave it both. A naval historian has recently described Henry as 'the founder of the English Navy', and it is only since his time that England has consistently pursued that policy, which was aptly summarised by the great French historian M Jules Michelet, when he wrote that 'the history of England is the history of an island'.

What has all this to do with the English Reformation? Simply this: *as long as the English Church was subject to the jurisdiction of Rome, England could not possibly keep clear of Continental entanglements*. This was always so, on account of the primary character of the Roman Church as a Continental Church; and it was so particularly after 1527, when the Spanish army captured Rome, and the Papacy became a mere tool of the Spanish Empire.[5] *For an English government to break with Europe in the sixteenth century meant, under the circumstances of the age, to break with Rome*: the

3 See the first part of this book

4 Professor Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (Methuen, London, 1937); Captain HA Atteridge, *Famous Land Fights: A Popular Sketch of the History of Land Warfare* (Methuen, London, 1914).

5 From 1540 on, the newly-founded Spanish Jesuit Order increasingly dominated the Church in the interests of Spain.

English Reformation was at this juncture a political and military necessity, even more than a religious one, and this was beyond a doubt its most important cause.

But more was needed than a mere breach with Rome. If England was to cut adrift effectually from the Continent of Europe, she must keep clear from the Continental Protestant Churches equally with the Pope. For the terrible era of 'the wars of religion' was just beginning, an age which witnessed a century-long desolation of Europe. Participation in the camp of either Calvin or the Pope would necessarily have involved England in these wars.

In short, what England wanted in that era was a Church neither Catholic nor Protestant, but English. It was precisely this, 'the *Church of England*' — our emphasis — that the English Reformation brought into existence. In fact, the English Reformation was not, as regards its original aim and early stages, a religious reformation at all; as far as doctrine was concerned, Henry was as good a Catholic as his predecessors, and right up to the end of his reign he burnt heretics with an unsurpassed vigour. In fact, M Constant, the most recent Catholic historian of the English Reformation, gives him a testimonial as regards his orthodoxy.

Such were the main causes of the Reformation, if and when considered as a stage in English revolutionary history.

II: Sequence of the English Reformation: As I am not writing a detailed history of the English Reformation, and still less of England in the sixteenth century, I content myself with appending a chronological list of the chief dates and events, which together form the sequential history of the English Reformation.

1501 — Arthur, Prince of Wales, married Catherine of Aragon — 14 November.

1502 — Death of Arthur — 2 April.

1503 — Agreement between Ferdinand of Spain and Henry the Seventh for the marriage of the new Prince of Wales, Henry, with Catherine of Aragon. Brief and Bull of dispensation granted by Julius the Second for this marriage (1504), antedated 26 December 1503.

1509 — Death of Henry the Seventh and accession of Henry the Eighth, 21 April. Henry the Eighth marries Catherine of Aragon, 11 June.

1511 — A National Council against the Lollards meets in England.

1517 — Luther begins to oppose Rome on Indulgences, 31 October.

1521 — Henry receives title of 'Defender of the Faith' from Leo the Tenth (Pope) for his book against Luther.

1525–27 — Battle of Pavia and Sack of Rome make Spain master of Italy, including the Papacy.[6]

1527 — King's first attempt to secure a 'divorce'.[7]

1530 — Death of Wolsey — the last clerical Lord Chancellor. The King, on the advice of Cranmer, consults the universities on the question of 'divorce'.

1531 — Convocation of Clergy recognise the King as 'Supreme Head of the Church of England', but with a restrictive clause.

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6 The Spanish king, Charles the Fifth, was the nephew of Catherine of Aragon.

7 That is, more accurately, an annulment of his marriage on the ground that it had never been properly contracted — the Roman Church has never recognised divorce, in the modern sense of the dissolution of a properly contracted marriage.

The 'divorce' — annulment — of Henry, which figures so largely in most bourgeois histories of the period, must be regarded by Marxist historical science as a pretext, rather than as an effective cause, of the English Reformation. As I have elsewhere observed, 'the breach with Rome lay in the womb of history, not in that of Anne Boleyn'. At the most it may have hastened matters a little.

1532 — Commons petition against the Clergy — 'submission' of the Clergy.

1533 — Henry's secret marriage with Anne Boleyn, 25 January. Cranmer Primate of England, 21 February. Law forbidding all appeals to the Roman Court, February–March. Cranmer, as Archbishop of Canterbury, pronounces the royal 'divorce', 23 April. Coronation of Anne Boleyn, 1 June. Birth of Elizabeth, 7 September. The King appeals to a Council.

1534 — Clement the Seventh (Pope) condemns the royal divorce. Abjuration of Papal authority by the Convocations of Canterbury, 31 March, and of York, 5 May. Laws passed which

a) Deprived the clergy of the right to legislate.

b) Forbade all payments to the Roman Curia and transferred to the King the right of appointing bishops.

c) Abolished Papal jurisdiction in England, and established the order of succession to the throne.

d) Recognised the King, without any restrictive clause, as 'supreme head of the Church of England'.

e) Declaring any refusal to take the oath against papal jurisdiction as an act of treason. Thomas Cromwell appointed as the King's Vicar General in all ecclesiastical matters, December.

1535 — Oath against the Papal supremacy imposed by Parliament and taken by the nation. Execution of the London Carthusian monks, of Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher, etc. Dissolution of the lesser monasteries.

1536 — The Ten Articles, or the First Confession of Faith. Anne Boleyn beheaded and Jane Seymour married to Henry in May. The Pope (Paul the Third) summons a general Council of the Church at Mantua, 2 June. The first royal injunctions upon worship, etc. The Catholic counter-revolution — 'The Pilgrimage of Grace': rising in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, under Sir Robert Aske, in October.

1537 — Bloody repression of 'The Pilgrimage of Grace', January to March. The second Confession of Faith.

1538 — Second injunction on worship drawn up by Cromwell. Suppression of the greater monasteries. Execution of Cardinal Pole's brother and other Catholic leaders. Profanation of the relics of St Thomas à Becket, September (the most popular Catholic saint in mediæval England).

1539 — Treaty of Toledo between France and Spain. Preparations for Continental war of intervention against England (Cardinal Pole intermediary between English Catholics and Continental Catholic powers). Law confirming the confiscation of the monasteries and abolishing all religious orders in England. The three Benedictine Abbots of Glastonbury, Reading and Colchester hanged, drawn and quartered for refusal to agree to the suppression of their monasteries. Act of the Six Articles (June) against heresy.

1540 — Surrender of the last abbey in the realm, Waltham Abbey, Essex, 23 March. Fall of Cromwell, 10 June, execution, 28 July.

1541 — The great Bible placed in every Church under pain of fine. Conspiracy in Yorkshire (Catholic). Execution of the Countess of Salisbury, mother of Cardinal Pole, 28 May.

1542 — Council of Trent summoned by Pope, 22 May.

1543 — Third Confession of Faith. Three heretics burnt at Windsor under Six Articles.

1545 — Council of Trent opened, 13 December.
1546 — Death of Luther, 16 February. Anne Askew burnt as an heretic, 16 July.
1547 — Death of Henry the Eighth, 27 January.[8]

III: Consequences of the English Reformation: The consequences of the English Reformation may be considered under three separate heads: theological, economic, and political. I deal with these, *seriatim*.

A: Theological: In its origins the English Reformation was not a movement which aimed at changing the traditional faith of Christendom. Henry, as the 'Six Articles' showed conclusively by their ferocious condemnation of 'heresy', remained an orthodox mediæval Catholic in faith up to the last day of his life. As a result, doctrinal innovation played no part at all in the original conception and early stages of the English Reformation: a striking contrast to the furious discussions on doctrine which characterised the Continental Reformation throughout. Contrarily, the aim of Henry was simply to acquire unlimited supremacy over the Church, and, for this end, to repudiate the jurisdiction of the Pope, without making the least approach to the Protestant 'heretics'. Gustav Constant, an unimpeachable witness, explicitly testifies to the King's orthodoxy, and states emphatically that what the King aimed at was a 'schismatic' and not an heretical Church: that is, a Church separated from the jurisdiction of the Pope, but orthodox in doctrine from the Catholic standpoint. In the sixteenth century, such a Church was possible, in theory at least, as it was not until the Vatican Council of 1870 that the supremacy and doctrinal authority of the Papacy became an Article of Faith; the denial of which, today, would constitute heresy no less than schism from the Roman Catholic standpoint.

In the main, Henry's aim was achieved; the Church 'of England' has never formally repudiated Catholic doctrine and orders, and its cardinal feature has always been the Royal Supremacy: 'the Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England', has always been the most important of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the official formulary of the English Church. Moreover, there is no doubt but that the monarchy had the bulk of the English nation behind it. To the average man-in-the-street in the sixteenth century the Papacy was an unpopular foreign power, and the Protestants also were regarded with abhorrence as foreign agitators. The nation, apart from a minority of fundamentalists, on the one hand, and of radical intellectuals, on the other, wanted a national Catholicism, like that of the Eastern Churches: orthodox in doctrine, but separated from the jurisdiction of Rome.

Nonetheless, events subsequent to 1547 forced the Church of England further towards the Protestant 'Left' than its founder had desired. Under Edward the Sixth (or, rather under the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland, the Protectors under

8 It is unnecessary to trace the fluctuating details of the English Reformation after the death of Henry. I will merely observe that under his son Edward the Sixth (1547–53), it swung sharply to the left, and Catholics were persecuted as traitors. After the death of the boy-king, the excesses of the Protestants provoked a counter-revolution under the Catholic Mary (1553–58 — Mary was the wife of Philip the Second of Spain), the daughter of Catherine of Aragon. Many Protestants perished at the stake as heretics, but — a very significant fact — even Mary was forced to recognise the confiscation of the Church lands by the state. Under Elizabeth (1558–1603) a final compromise was reached, which has lasted, substantially unaltered, down to the present time. People were tired of a generation of violent fluctuations, and all parties, except a few extremists on either side, accepted this compromise, which was embodied in that masterpiece of theological facing-both-way, 'The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion', with their studied ambiguity. The last serious attempt of the old Church to recover power was in the so-called 'Gunpowder Plot' of 1605 (see the note at the end of Chapter IV).

the boy-king's reign) and — this time permanently — under Elizabeth, the need of English foreign policy to secure allies among the Dutch and French Protestants, so as to counterbalance the overwhelming power of the Spanish Empire, forced the state Church to go further on the Protestant road than its original founders had ever intended. Hence, whilst the English Church still cautiously refrained from committing itself to either side, yet, from the time of Elizabeth on, the popular view has regarded the English Church as Protestant. But this change in the popular point of view was not, I repeat, due primarily to a change in religious conviction, but, like the English Reformation itself, it was due to a *political cause*, viz, the hatred and fear of Spain, the first great military, naval and economic rival of rising English capitalism, which was also the chief Catholic power that, through the agency of the Jesuit Order, ruled the Roman Catholic Church and directed its Counter-Reformation, and, as such, aimed at reconquering England for the Pope by means of the formidable Spanish military power, the greatest of the age.

I repeat, it was a political cause, the fear of Spain, for about a century (c 1550–1650) regarded everywhere as *the* national enemy that made England, in its own estimation, a Protestant country. I must, however, add in this connection that the Church of England still officially adopts the same ambiguous position. As I have elsewhere observed: 'The Church of England has never known whether it is Catholic or Protestant, but it has always known that it is English.' Itself the creation of the absolutist state of the Renaissance, its one constant feature has been its unswerving loyalty to the state which was its effective founder. From Henry the Eighth to Edward the Eighth, its prototype and 'culture hero' has been that model political pensioner, the Vicar of Bray!

B: Economic: As we now know, the downfall of the Roman Church in England was achieved by a coalition of the bureaucratic monarchy and the rising merchant class. The economic cause and nature of that alliance are thus indicated by a modern economic historian of the English Reformation:

> Again, mercantilism sought to make the state strong by making it one. Unification and centralisation were sought. That unity became personified in the monarch. The stronger the monarch, the more unified the nation; hence the tendency towards absolutism made for progress… Back of these movements tending to absolutism and statism were the new middle classes. The economic interests of the new aristocracy of wealth made up of merchants, manufacturers and wool-growers depended on a unified nation and a highly centralised administration. This alone could assure them the possibility of establishing remunerative industries at home, the expansion of commerce abroad, and security both foreign and domestic. It was the middle classes that were back of the Tudor policy of absolutism in the early sixteenth century because a strongly highly-centralised government best promoted their ends. These the Tudors soon took into their confidence and shared the administration. Any factors within the realm that tended to disintegrate and divide the kingdom would be discountenanced by the middle classes. If the attitude of the clergy threatened the unity of the commonwealth as it seemed to do, the Churchmen were discredited.[9]

9 Oscar Marti, *The Economic Causes of the Reformation in England* (Macmillan, New York, 1929),

Under the circumstances, the middle classes would resent more and more the fact that vast sums of money were leaving the realm in the form of annates, Peter's pence, funds involved in appeals to Rome, and Papal taxes in general.

The economic results of the English Reformation amounted in themselves to a social revolution. We have not forgotten both the vast share of 'real property' (land) that was owned by the Church, and the immense ecclesiastical revenues payable to the Roman Curia. The confiscation of these vast revenues and lands by the state (and its impotent client, the 'English' Church), should have given the state an economic supremacy, which, competently handled, should have made the English state absolutely unchallengeable by any rival economic or political force for centuries to come. The fact that Henry, in his last spendthrift years after the death of Thomas Cromwell, alienated the greater part of his vast gains to a circle of rich merchants and courtiers, must be regarded as one of the most important in all modern English history. Without this wholesale transference of economic power, it is very improbable that the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth century would have been successful.

Undoubtedly, Hilaire Belloc seems to be fully justified in asserting that the alienation of the newly acquired Church lands by Henry and Edward the Sixth must be regarded as one of the most important facts in all English history. For two reasons: firstly, *it definitively transferred the balance of economic power from the state to the merchant class, thus making the bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century inevitable*. Secondly, it laid the foundations of those huge family fortunes which formed the basis for the subsequent rule of the Whig oligarchy, that today, though under 'democratic' disguises, is still the real ruler of England. The Cecils (Salisburys) and the Russells (Bedfords) are but the two leading examples of the great oligarchic English 'noble' houses, who laid the foundation of their dazzling family fortunes by obtaining the confiscated Church lands from the bankrupt Henry and his boy-successor, often for a mere song.

I may add that the vested interest of these great thieves in the former property of the Roman Catholic Church soon came to form, along with the growing national hatred of Spain, another potent cause for England's subsequent zeal for the Reformation and her abhorrence of the Pope! Even the Catholic Mary had, as we have already seen, as a condition *sine qua non* for her temporary restoration of the Roman Church, to undertake to respect this already formidable property interest, built on the ruins of Rome.

I therefore conclude that the alienation of the Church lands by Henry and his successor constitutes one of the decisive turning points in English revolutionary history. It decisively shifted the economic balance of power from the monarchy to the merchant class: *this division of function made the bourgeois revolution inevitable*. The facts that ultimately Henry was a bankrupt spendthrift, the last years of whom were spent in debasing the coinage and alienating the newly acquired crown property in a frantic effort to get money, and that his successor was a minor who suffered from hereditary syphilis and was at the mercy of a bunch of racketeering land-grabbers, must be regarded both as a decisive turning-point in English revolutionary history and as an excellent example of the function of the accidental element in historic evolution.[10]

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pp 215–16.

10 'Gresham's Law' — viz, that 'bad money drives out good' — was elaborated by the mercantilist economist Sir Thomas Gresham, on the experience of the disastrous monetary policy pursued

C: Political: We have not forgotten that the three major conservative forces in mediæval society were the Crown, the Church and the feudal landlords. As a result of the English Reformation, the Crown was left in political omnipotence as the sole holder of political power. The feudal barons had virtually committed collective suicide in the Wars of the Roses (1455–85), and the power of the Church was broken by the ruthless expropriation carried out at its expense by Henry and Thomas Cromwell. Henceforth, the power of the Crown was unchallenged by any surviving mediæval institution: the English Church was henceforth the servile pensioner of the state, whilst the feudal elements which continued to survive — and, for that matter, which still survive today — were only relics, mosaic survivals of an older era, incorporated, so to speak, in the framework of the succeeding social order.

By the expropriation of the Roman Church — a process, let me again emphasise, which was carried out by the most ruthless confiscation, without a vestige of legality or a shadow of compensation — the Crown remained the solitary possessor of political power. For a century, from the execution of Thomas Cromwell in 1540, to the execution of the Earl of Strafford, the last of the great ministers of the absolute monarchy, in 1641, by the Long Parliament, the absolute bureaucratic monarchy retained the supreme political direction of affairs. The burgess class was still too weak, besides being too gorged with the spoils of the Roman Church, yet to challenge effectually the absolute monarchy in the political field, though, to be sure, under the last Tudor (Elizabeth), the murmurings of the coming political storm began to be audible to discerning ears. The Crown, I repeat, had the field to itself in a fashion genuinely totalitarian; the state, subsequent to the Reformation, *was* the nation, just as, in its classical era of unchallenged supremacy, the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie was to prove equally successful in identifying its own world outlook with that of the nation itself.

In the totalitarian century between the English Reformation and the 'Great Rebellion' (the bourgeois revolution), the state met with only one form of opposition. This came from the peasants, then reeling before the novel impact of the 'economic blizzard' newly unloosed by the discovery of the world market, and by the consequent economic hurricane that so suddenly crashed upon the entire Western world, sweeping away all traditional landmarks in a common blast of mutual destruction.

For the creation of the world market in the sixteenth century led to a holocaust of social wars all over Europe, the direct consequence of its drastic shattering of all traditional social relationships. In England, it abruptly terminated the brief 'golden age' which the agrarian population had enjoyed in the fifteenth century, in the period between the 'Black Death' (1349) and the opening-up of the world market, consequent upon the discovery of America and the ocean routes to the Far East at the end of the fifteenth century. In 1549 occurred the last of the agrarian revolutions in English history, that led by Robert Ket in Norfolk in 1549.

I now turn, consequently, to this revolt: the last stand of the English peasants, the descendants of Tyler, Ball and the Captain of Kent, against the new capitalist forces which were marching forward into the future in the wake, and under the cloak, of the Tudor totalitarian state.

Appendix to Chapter II: The English Reformation — On Henry the Eighth, Thomas Cromwell — And Machiavelli! Henry the Eighth was the figurehead in the

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by Henry the Eighth in his last years, characterised by frequent debasement of the coinage.

English 'Los von Rom', but its real genius was Thomas Cromwell. The historical importance of Henry the Eighth has been much exaggerated, on account both of his flashy personality and of his theatrical matrimonial horseplay. Mr Peter Wilding, Thomas Cromwell's most recent biographer, does not seem to exaggerate at all when he tells us that:

> Henry the Eighth was essentially a stupid man, vain, conceited, with a great sense of his own importance… his courage was great when there was no danger; in short, he had to rely on his regal figure to cover his lack of those qualities which form the composition of a true sovereign.[11]

This seems to be an essentially accurate portrait of this flashy but meretriciously futile king, who owes his suppositious historical reputation to his Porthos-like personality, reminiscent of the Three Musketeers, and to his reputation as a Bluebeard — though actually Henry was a very moral man, who insisted on marrying the successive objects of his affections, with disastrous results to both himself and them! His reputation rests in fact on no better foundation than his title of 'Defender of the Faith' — that is, of a Church which he was the first English king not to defend!

His minister, Thomas Cromwell, was a far more formidable person. The son of a Putney innkeeper, he had served in the Italian wars of France and Spain, and he was in fact the classical example of the contemporary Italian proverb, that 'an Italianate Englishman is the Devil incarnate'. He was in fact a typical Italian 'tyrant' of the Renaissance era: completely unscrupulous and utterly ruthless both in his own personal aggrandisement and in the service of the absolute monarchy. Next to his pre-eminent part in the English Reformation, Cromwell deserves a place in English political history as the first English disciple of Machiavelli. Cromwell brought Machiavelli's masterpiece *The Prince* to England, and his whole political practice was based upon that Bible of '*realpolitik*'.[12]

We read in this connection that Cromwell wrote to (the future) Cardinal Pole, later to be Mary's last Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, suggesting 'that Pole should forget the principles he had learnt, which might be good enough for universities, and showed him that the way to royal favour and to honours lay in following the principles of Machiavelli, a copy of which he offered to lend him'.[13]

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11 Peter Wilding, *Thomas Cromwell* (Heinemann, London, 1935) p 312.

12 Lack of space forbids us, unfortunately, to conduct an investigation into the interesting and important question of the direct influence exercised by Machiavelli on both the Tudor state and the bourgeois revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; but it was certainly very great. Not only Cromwell, but Queen Elizabeth, Cecil and indeed most of the later Tudor statesmen were ardent students of *The Prince*, that 'Koran' of Absolutist politics in the era of merchant capital. The overthrow of the Roman Church in England might have proceeded according to a line for line study of the two great political books of the Florentine: *The Prince* and *The Ten Books of Livy*. In the next century we shall find Sexby reproaching Oliver Cromwell for his ardent attachment to 'his evangelist' Machiavelli (see 'Killing No Murder', *infra*). Italian cultural influence was very great under Elizabeth, as a study of Shakespeare's literary sources will easily demonstrate. The influence of Machiavelli can be gauged from the fact that there are 395 allusions to him in Elizabethan dramatic literature, mostly in his legendary role as sorcerer and godparent (!) of Satan, 'Old Nick' ('Old Nick' — from Niccolo, the Christian and Satanic — name of the great philosopher of Absolutism). See Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (Felber, Weimar, 1897).

13 That is, an MS copy, which Cromwell, somehow, had managed to obtain: the conversation was

Elsewhere, the same authority tells us that 'he had adopted and made his own the thought of Machiavelli'.[14]

Thomas Cromwell was beyond a doubt the most important figure in the English Reformation: his decade of power — 1530–40 — witnessed all the decisive steps in the breach with Rome, or, rather, with the European Continent, the connection with which was represented by the Papacy under the circumstances of that age. Ruthless as was this breach, it is perhaps arguable as a partial apology for Cromwell's complete ruthlessness, that the use of a less iron hand would have led to an English religious war, with the same disastrous effects as were engendered by such wars on the Continent. Anyway, as, despite its merciless character, the English Reformation was undoubtedly a social revolution, and one at that on the whole progressive in character, Thomas Cromwell must be regarded as a front-rank English revolutionary, and as a worthy precursor of his still greater and more revolutionary relative, Oliver Cromwell: indeed, without both the public and private career of Thomas Cromwell, that of Oliver, the greatest of all English revolutionaries, could never have occurred. What Augustus Caesar was to Julius in the Roman counter-revolution of Antiquity, that was Oliver to Thomas Cromwell in the annals of the evolving English revolution.

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in 1527, the year of 'Old Nick's' death and *The Prince* was published only in 1532, posthumously.

14 Gustave Constant, *The Reformation in England: Henry VIII (1509–1547)* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1934), pp 260–61.

Chapter III: The Last Stand of the English Peasants (Ket's Norfolk Agrarian Rising)

Henry the Eighth died in 1547. His heir, Edward the Sixth, was a sickly child and the political direction of affairs devolved upon the boy-king's uncle, the Duke of Somerset, the brother of Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife. Somerset was a weak man, who proved quite unable to check either the alienation of the Crown lands or the growing power of the new class of mercantilist land-grabbers. Not only did the alienation by the state of its newly acquired Church property to members of this class proceed at an increased pace, but it was precisely at this juncture that there commenced that series of sweeping 'enclosures' of common lands by the new-rich class that did more than anything else to ruin the English peasantry and to create in its stead the beginnings of a class of 'free' labourers,[1] who were in the course of time to become the English proletariat.

As, however, the industrial revolution still lay far in the future, the immediate effect of this wholesale expropriation of the common lands was to create a horde of homeless vagrants, for the special benefit of whom were enacted that series of ferocious laws against vagrancy, of which contemporary writers give such appalling pictures, and which form one of the most ghastly chapters in even the horror-strewn history of that grim age of revolutionary upheaval, the sixteenth century.

The regime of Somerset and the circle of racketeers and capitalist gangsters by whom the well-meaning but weak protector was surrounded, first posited before the English people at large the problems newly created by the substitution of capitalist for feudal economics; to make confusion yet worse confounded, this drastic economic revolution was paralleled and accompanied by a violent and equally disturbing religious revolution. For the new anti-Catholic clique, immediately Henry was dead, proceeded to push the Reformation right over to the Protestant 'Left'. Calvinism, the 'Bolshevism' of the day, made its formidable entry into England, and the immemorial traditions of the mediæval Church and of traditional Christianity were rudely disturbed.

Thus, the simultaneous entry of capitalism and Protestantism into England created a situation that was revolutionary in the extreme. It was under these circumstances that the rising of the Norfolk peasants under Ket occurred: the last stand of the English peasants, now doomed to annihilation by the rapid evolution of capitalist economics.

I: The 1549 Agrarian Revolution of the Norfolk Peasants Under Robert Ket: I shall now consider, successively, the causes, development and consequences of this agrarian revolution, the last of its kind in England.

A: Causes of Ket's Rising in 1549: The causes of the 1549 rising seem to have been almost entirely economic: religion seems to have played hardly any part in stimulating this movement. Whilst there were several minor Catholic outbreaks against the reforming policy of Protector Somerset — these need not detain us both on account of their lack of importance and of their reactionary character — the agrarian revolution in Norfolk seems to have been entirely economic in character.

1 We use the term 'free labourer' in the strictly capitalist sense, as labourers free *from* property.

As such, its motivating cause is to be found in the wholesale substitution of capitalist production for profit in place of feudal production for use. How this substitution affected the peasants is admirably summarised by Kautsky, when he tells us that, whereas the feudal landlords had wanted the land *with* the peasants, the capitalist landlords, from the sixteenth century on, wanted the land *of* the peasants: that is, whilst the value of land in feudal times depended on the number of serfs who cultivated it for the use of the lord, its value under capitalism depended, not primarily on the number of people who tilled it, but upon the amount of profit (surplus-value) that could be extracted from it. In the sixteenth century, as Sir Thomas More tells us in his famous social satire *Utopia* (1516), it was becoming increasingly profitable to put sheep out to pasture, on account of the growing wool trade with the Continent. The centre of the traffic in wool was Norwich, and it was precisely there that the Ket rising started.[2]

To this first agrarian cause of the last English peasant revolution a second, more general economic one must be added. In his classic *History of the Precious Metals*, Alexander Del Mar has calculated that into a Europe almost completely denuded of the precious metals, the Spanish conquerors of America dumped gold and silver bullion to the value of $7,000,000,000 (£1,400,000) in the course of the sixteenth century.

In the resulting violent fluctuation of prices, consequent upon this terrific impact on an unplanned economy, occurred the first 'world crisis' in the history of capitalism: its effects were hardly less devastating than have been those world crises of our own era. The abrupt substitution of a profit-economy, subject to the ever-growing 'pull' of the newly discovered and fast-expanding world market, for the natural economy of use-values current in the chiefly agrarian Middle Ages, had a catastrophic effect throughout all classes of society in the sixteenth century.

But no one was so directly affected by the rapid fluctuation in prices as were the peasant primary-producers. At the mercy of the invisible forces of the world market, their position deteriorated rapidly: the fifteenth century, their golden age, was succeeded by the sixteenth, an age of iron. All ages of world revolution demand their holocaust of victims: upon the altar of capitalist 'progress' an entire class was destined to be obliterated as a sacrificial offering. In England, the classical country of capitalism, there is no peasantry, a fact of incalculable significance for modern English history, in general, and very especially for the revolutions of the twentieth century. The descendants of the famous English archers of mediæval times are no more: the juggernaut wheel of capitalism has swept over them; along with the 'Merrie England' amid which the yeomen of England drank deep and danced their Morris dances around the Maypole on a hundred village greens.

B: The Norfolk Rising of 1549: With the death of Henry the Eighth the absolute monarchy fell into a temporary decline, and, under the nominal rule of his boy-successor, England knew for the first time in her history the delights of capitalist rule. An orgy of enclosures, robbery and religious innovation followed: Protestantism, *the* bourgeois form of Christianity — with its individualism and its

2 The importance of the wool trade in England at this time is still recalled in the 'Woolsack', the symbol of the Lord Chancellor, the highest official of Tudor times. To the dispossessed peasants, driven wholesale from their immemorial common lands, well-nourished sheep were objects of envy and hatred. 'It is better to be a sheep than a man', so ran a poignant proverb of the era: viz, a sheep had economic value; a man had none.

insistence upon the economic virtues — gave its blessing, if at first a trifle cautiously, to the great land-ramp; and England began to capitalise herself with a vengeance.[3]

The new Protestant capitalist oligarchy did not, however, get away with their plunder without meeting with armed resistance. The Middle Ages were still recent; the peasant class had found that its class interests had been served by revolt, at any rate in the long run; and it is, besides, a permanent feature in the history of social revolution that it is those classes who have a good standard of living and then suddenly find themselves abruptly losing it, who are the most liable to revolt. Revolutions are not made most readily by social outcasts, but by *suddenly assaulted classes*. The history of the sixteenth-century English peasants forms, in this respect, a prototype of the classical example of this permanent 'law' of revolutionary development, of which the proletarian English revolution in the twentieth century is destined to afford perhaps the outstanding example in all history.

The early years of Edward the Sixth witnessed several peasant risings of local importance, chiefly associated with the defence of Catholicism. The Norfolk revolt, however, was a genuine social revolution. It also had its local predecessors. In 1537 and 1540, local risings had taken place in Norfolk. In the latter one, John Walker, of Griston, roused the peasants with this battle-cry — 'To Swaffham, to Swaffham!' — adding the stirring declamation that: 'It were a good thing if there were no more gentlemen in Norfolk than there be white bulls.'

These revolts, however, were suppressed, and the author of the above notable contribution to the science of extinct species was incontinently hanged: the English capitalist class had still a long run before it was to become one with Europa's white bull! But its proletarian 'grave-diggers' in the twentieth century may bear John Walker's advice in mind. Certainly, for this phrase alone he deserves to live in the annals of English revolution.

In the reign of Edward the Sixth things went from bad to worse for the English peasants. In 1548, a 'supplication to the Commons' estimated that one plough in each of the 50,000 townships and villages in the country had been decayed, and 300,000 people had been thrown out of work (out of a population of about five millions). In 1551, two years after the Norfolk rising, Bishop Scory wrote to the King, that: 'There are not to this day ten ploughs, where formerly there were wont to be forty or fifty; and that, owing to the great sheep-masters, the rural population had become more like the slavery and peasantry of France than the ancient and godly yeomanry of England.' In 1549, the year of the rebellion itself, a new Vagrant Act was passed, under which confirmed vagabonds — eaten out of house and home by profit-carrying sheep — could be sold into slavery and branded. 'Merry England' must already have been well on the way to be the capitalist hell that it has been for the poor in modern times, when such horrors were of daily occurrence. Meanwhile, the prices of primary commodities were jumping like jack-in-the-boxes under the unseen but merciless pressure of the world market, as the following list will effectively demonstrate:

1547 — Wheat, four shillings a quarter.
1548 — Wheat, eight shillings a quarter.

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3 See RH Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: An Historical Study* (Murray, London, 1926). In fairness, I must not omit to add that Bishop Latimer constitutes a most honourable exception to the above indictment. He boldly denounced the new capitalist ethics and economics: I regret to have to add that my namesake, Dr Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London, was one of the worst and most sycophantic ecclesiastics in this respect.

1549 — Wheat, 16 shillings a quarter.
1547 — Barley, three shillings and fourpence a quarter.
1549 — Barley, eleven shillings a quarter.
Oats from three shillings to six shillings.
Oxen from 39 shillings to 70 shillings in the same period.

Whilst the wages of unskilled labour, during the same period, rose only from fourpence halfpenny to fivepence a day.[4]

The answer of the Norfolk peasants to the above conditions was the revolution of 1549. Such conditions would indeed have caused revolution anywhere; and the English peasants were both fresh from their golden age, and were renowned throughout Europe for their fierce and truculent character: 'the English wild beasts', the great contemporary Italian sculptor Benvenuto Cellini calls them. Men of such calibre do not give up the ghost without a fight. That fight was Ket's rising: the last stand of the English peasants as an independent class.

The leader of the Norfolk Rising was Robert Ket (or Kett), a successful tanner who had become a small landowner. The rising was encouraged by the vacillating policy of the Protector, who made ineffectual attempts to check the enclosure ramp; attempts which only aroused the anger of the landlords and simultaneously encouraged the peasants to offer resistance in the belief that the government would not take energetic measures against them. In June and July 1549, riots broke out all over Norfolk, it would seem, spontaneously. Forming themselves into a regular army under the command of Ket and his brother William, the rebels marched on Norwich and occupied this city, then, next to London, and perhaps to Bristol, the largest and most important city in the country, and the centre of the flourishing wool trade with the Continent. Its occupation, without resistance, by the peasant army raised the revolt from a merely local to a national status.

The army of Ket encamped on Mousehold Heath just outside Norwich. The peasants kept strict discipline and established there a regular camp. But they were in truculent mood, declaring that: 'We must needs fight it out, or else be brought to the like slavery that the Frenchmen are in.' It is interesting to note that they took a special pleasure in slaughtering the landlords' sheep: like the Luddites of a later day with regard to machinery, they dimly realised that their traditional way of life was being ruined by new economic forces. On Mousehold Heath alone some 20,000 sheep were slaughtered. In slaughtering the sheep Ket's rustic followers showed a dim but distinct comprehension of the materialist conception of history!

Apart from this not unnatural burst of ferocity against these animals who, as even Somerset had recently admitted, ate the English peasant 'out of house and home', the discipline kept by the peasants was admirable; so orderly was their camp under the able leadership of Ket, that regular religious services were held under the trees on Mousehold Hill. The peasants seem to have been mainly Protestant in sympathy, and it is not by any means improbable that they had in their ranks many Protestant refugees from the Continent, for whom Norwich would be the natural port of entry.

We have not forgotten how the French Jacquerie was one of the causes of the rising of the peasants in 1381. Similarly, it is not at all impossible that in the ranks of Ket's army were to be found survivors of the famous 'Peasants' War' ('Der Bauenkrieg') in Germany in 1525 and of the still more celebrated Anabaptist

4 AF Pollard, *Political History of England*, Volume 6 (Longmans, Green, London), 1923, p 30.

'Kingdom' of Münster, the meteoric rise, spectacular social innovations and bloody suppression of which, in 1534–35, had set all Europe in an uproar. If so, the Norfolk Rising affords yet another of the numerous examples of the mutual interpenetration of English social revolutions with those on the European Continent. At any rate, it is undeniable that the Norfolk peasants were mainly Protestant: one of their favourite preachers was Matthew Parker, later to be Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Elizabeth, who seems to have been a disguised agent of the government, as might be suspected from his subsequent career.[5]

The followers of Ket, however, had taken up arms, not to hear sermons, but to obtain justice. Soon Ket was at the head of 16,000 armed men and from his camp outside Norwich he addressed demands to the Protector and to the Lords of the Council. These demands are described by Professor Pollard in these terms:

> The German insurgents had sung [in 1525] 'Das Christus hat uns all befreit' ('For Christ has freed us all'), and the Norfolk rustics echoed the refrain, demanding the enfranchisement of all bondmen on the ground that God had by His bloodshed made all men free. Apart from this theological proposition and a request that the clergy should reside on their benefices and be diligent in teaching, their demands were purely agrarian, *and might have been transcribed from the German twelve articles of 1525*. They regarded the enclosure of common lands, the enforcement of private property in the fish of running water and the fowl of the air as theft from the community, and innocently thought that the gifts of God in nature were made to man and not to landlords only.[6]

Ket, however, seems to have made a mistake in not following up his advantage and marching upon London, as Tyler and the Captain of Kent had done. The government was evidently taken by surprise. Moreover, the transition stage of English society between feudalism and capitalism had left the government dangerously weak in the military sense. The state could no longer command the services of the feudal knights, and, at the same time, either could not or would not afford an army on the professional Renaissance model. Hence, it was militarily unprepared, and gained time by negotiations whilst it hired German and Italian mercenaries to 'defend' England against its inhabitants! A herald was sent to Ket, who, however, scornfully refused the proffered pardon, stating that the Norfolk men were no traitors but free Englishmen fighting to defend their inalienable birthright.

The new English capitalism had no time for free Englishmen; not of that kind, at least! It was just then busily engaged in enforcing another kind of freedom: freedom *from* property! The government promptly sent the Marquis of Northampton against Norwich with 1400 men, mostly Italian mercenaries, such as those whom Somerset was then employing in his merciless war against Scotland.[7]

At first, success attended the government's expeditionary force. The richer citizens opened the gates of Norwich to the royal army. But the English yeomen were not the men to turn tail and run before a pack of Italian hirelings. We

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5 In 1568 there were so many Germans in Norwich — refugees — that a special German prayer book was issued.

6 Pollard, *Political History of England*, Volume 6, p 34, our emphasis.

7 Two years earlier, he had defeated the Scots at Pinkie with the aid of German and Italian mercenaries.

remember how in Italy itself they were regarded as 'ferocious wild beasts'. After a fierce fight Ket recovered possession of the city. Lord Sheffield was cut down by the peasants, and Northampton and his Italian hirelings ignominiously fled before 'the wild beasts', the English peasants fighting for hearth and home, the descendants of the bowmen who had terrorised Europe, including Italy, a couple of centuries earlier, when the English condottieri Sir John Hawkwood and his famous English 'White Company' had ranged unopposed over Italy itself. The leader of the Italians was taken and hanged.

The first round rested with Ket, as formerly with Tyler and the Kentish Captain. But the Norfolk leader, though evidently a man of strong personality who knew how to enforce discipline, yet seems to have been too sluggish in his movements to be called a good soldier. A revolution, in particular, must keep on the move if it expects to be successful: a revolution permanently on the defensive is necessarily a lost revolution. That motto of the French Revolution as expressed by Danton: 'L'audace, encore l'audace, et toujours l'audace' — 'Audacity, audacity again, and audacity all the time' — is the motto of all revolutions which really mean business. It was not without cause that no less a person than Lenin styled Danton, the author of this brilliant aphorism, as the greatest of all revolutionaries.

Robert Ket, unfortunately, did not follow up this maxim. After further futile negotiations, it was the government which acted. This time, it was thoroughly alarmed. Somerset himself was now tottering to his fall, and the command of the army of 'Law and Order' devolved upon a far stronger and more ruthless character, John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, one of the most sinister characters in all English history: an able soldier and a ruthless political disciple of Machiavelli and Thomas Cromwell. Incidentally, he was one of the greatest extortioners and landsharks of the period, notorious for his prominent role in the seizure of the common lands by enclosures.

Warwick marched against Norwich with a considerable army, estimated by some authorities as high as 12,000 men. The leading English nobles accompanied Warwick, but the military backbone of his army consisted of German and Italian mercenaries, which this sixteenth-century 'General Franco' led against his own countrymen. That brand of political sycophants who write what the ruling class wants its dupes to regard as authentic English history, passes lightly over this discreditable, but highly instructive episode in its annals. But I, as the historian of English revolution, and as a practical, and not as a merely academic student of the subject, feel it necessary to point out that the English 'gentlemen' do not need to look to foreign history to find their 'Francos' and White Guardist 'Denikins', if, as is not at all improbable, they should come to need them before the twentieth century has run its course. Precisely such a 'Franco' saved them in 1549 from the righteous wrath of the people of England, whose lands they had despoiled and whom they had reduced to the status of felons and slaves by their infamous vagrancy acts. The first capitalist government in England saved itself by the timely aid of foreign mercenaries, the scum of the contemporary European underworld, in 1549: will the last capitalist government to rule this country regard this as a precedent when its own zero hour draws near?

It is creditable to the honour of our race to record that even with this formidable army Warwick did not succeed in occupying Norwich without hard fighting. Unfortunately, however, the scales were now too heavily weighed against the peasants for disaster to be avoided. The Norfolk Rising remained isolated; it

received no support from the mainly Catholic peasantry in other parts of the country; a fresh proof of the endemic lack of unity which has proved the undoing of nearly every purely agrarian rising since the world began.[8]

Moreover, the military status of the English peasants was not what it had been two centuries before. We already have had occasions to allude to the formidable scientific militarism of the Renaissance and to its enormous influence on the English policy of the period. That England could not have held out against the scientific Continental armies of the era was virtually proved by the disastrous conclusions of Ket's rising: a fact which sheds a great deal of light upon the general English policy in the period of the English Reformation.

For some days the fighting in Norwich continued, and it was not until he received a further reinforcement of 1100 German Landsknechts (soldiers of fortune), *en route* for Scotland, that Warwick was rescued from a dangerous position and was able to take the offensive.

A disastrous tactical error on the part of the Norfolk men finally destroyed any chance they had left and sealed the fate of the last English agrarian revolution. Ket had wisely taken up a strong defensive position on Mousehold Hill and there proposed to wait for the attack of the royal army. Unfortunately, his hand was forced by his men, who, like the followers of Spartacus in Antiquity, clamoured for battle. The rustics were encouraged in their resolve to fight by an old local rhyme foretelling that:

> The country gnuffes
> With clubs and clouted shoon
> Shall fill the vale of Dussindale
> With slaughtered bodies soon.

Truly, a proverb of Delphic ambiguity, which was soon to be disastrously fulfilled, though not in the sense imagined by the peasants!

For, emboldened by this prophecy, the Norfolk men forced Ket to quit his strong position on the hill and to offer battle to his highly-disciplined foes upon a terrain in which their superior technique could be employed to the fullest advantage. On a steep hill which would have neutralised both the cavalry and the accurate fire of their trained opponents, the peasants might have fought a defensive action with at least a sporting chance of success. In the open, no untrained men can stand for long against trained soldiers: this axiom constitutes one of the most elementary teachings of military science.

On Tuesday, 27 August 1549, was fought the disastrous battle of Dussindale, which ended the English peasantry and finally closed the era of English agrarian revolutions. The battle was itself too one-sided to call for detailed description. After an initial volley which killed the royal standard-bearer, the untrained peasants in the open were nearly as helpless as the sheep which they had butchered, against the heavily-armed horsemen and the well-trained volleys of the German and Italian musketeers. An age of scientific militarism had dawned and untrained peasants were helpless before it. At least 3000 of them were cut down and the last stand of the English peasants was over: a body who defended themselves on a hill were induced to surrender by treachery. They were given no quarter. Ket and his brother were

8 Incidentally, the government crushed contemporary Catholic risings with the same mercenaries; when capitalist property interests are concerned, theology comes a bad second!

caught and later hanged as they fled from the field, and the usual reign of terror followed, until, at last, even the implacable Warwick had to ask his savage colleagues whether they wanted to exterminate their rustics and perforce 'harrow their land themselves'!

III: Results of 1549 Rising: The immediate result of the 1549 Rising was to cause the downfall of the vacillating Protector Somerset, who fell between two stools and was deposed and executed: he could satisfy neither the landlords nor the peasants. He was succeeded by the conqueror of Dussindale, the Earl of Warwick; this English 'Franco' governed England for the next four years until the death of Edward. Under the aegis of this ruthless merchant capitalist statesman the great capitalist ramp went forward with accelerated speed. Finally, however, it temporarily over-reached itself. On the death of Edward his heiress was the fanatical Catholic Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon. The Duke of Northumberland — the title Warwick had assumed after the fall of Somerset — saw his power slipping away, and made a desperate bid to emulate the example of Richard the Third and to supplant the existing dynasty by a palace conspiracy. His effort to crown his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey — a female 'Admirable Crichton' — collapsed, and it is satisfactory to note that the murderer of so many English peasants himself perished ignominiously upon the scaffold, trying to save his head at the last minute by offering to turn Catholic.

In a far more permanent sense the political result of the failure of the Norfolk Rising was to destroy the English peasantry as a separate class, a fact of incalculable significance for the subsequent course of English history and, very particularly, for the later evolution of capitalism in England. We shall indeed meet the peasantry again on the battlefields of the great bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century, but they will not then be fighting for their own class interests, but will merely be the tail-end of the bourgeoisie. They will no longer be in a position to conduct class battles in their own social interests.

The year 1549 was the end of the English peasant, as such. In this connection, even such a fairly conservative historian as Professor AF Pollard states:

> The peasant revolts in England and abroad involved at once revolution and reaction. Their immediate object was a total failure, but in England alone of the countries of Europe was the peasant entirely divorced from the ownership of the soil he tilled.

The writer adds:

> The consequent mobility of labour facilitated the development of industry and manufactures, and the modern preponderance of English commerce over English agriculture has its origin in the social revolution of the sixteenth century.[9]

Before leaving behind us for good and all the era of agrarian revolutions, there is one last point which we can briefly note: whilst a socially rising class may gain reforms even by unsuccessful revolution, this does not apply to a declining class. In the fourteenth century the Rising of 1381 led to tangible improvements in the peasants' lot, despite its immediate failure. It achieved this ameliorative result because the

9 Pollard, *Political History of England*, Volume 6, p 36.

abolition of serfdom at which it aimed was historically progressive under the circumstances of that era. But by 1549 the peasants had become economically a class that was reactionary in its essential character. The opening-up of the world market, the decisive and basically central fact which dominated the entire sixteenth century, had outmoded small-scale peasant production. The stars in their courses henceforth fought against the peasants. The future lay with capitalism and large-scale landowning, which, despite the brutality and treachery without which a capitalist economy, then as now, could not last for a single day, yet held out, ultimately, more promise for mankind in that it promised it a mastery over the forces of production, over nature at large, which carries for the future of the human race its sure promise of ultimate redemption from the demon of want and from thraldom to the blind forces of a Nature more brutal in the long run than is even the most ruthless exploiting class. Unhappily, human existence hitherto has been largely compounded of blood and tears in the past era of its immaturity. 'Progress' has invariably been a ravening Moloch which has demanded, and has usually obtained, its quota of sacrificial victims: its own progress, hitherto, has been cemented with blood and tears. The vanished peasants of 'Merry England' take their place upon this melancholy role.

The immediate consequence of the failure of the last peasant revolution was to place all power in the hands of the state and its bourgeois allies. Together, they surveyed an England in which no actual and/or potential rivals were to be found. They were 'monarchs of all they surveyed': the old mediæval society, its balance of classes, was gone for ever, never to return.

But henceforth, a rift will increasingly open between the two allies, the totalitarian state and its erstwhile bourgeois supporters. And in the course of exactly a century this rift will yawn into a chasm. In 1549, the coalition of the absolute monarchy and the merchant class drowned the peasantry in blood and brought its leader, Robert Ket, to the scaffold. And exactly a century later, the merchant class, supported by the remains of the peasantry, will overthrow the absolute state in final and decisive fashion, and will bring the successor of the Tudors also to the scaffold. For the Ket Rising revealed the Achilles' heel of the English totalitarian state of the sixteenth century: its lack of a professional army with which to crush, when necessary, the class struggle with blood and iron. It was this fatal gap in the defences of the English 'Leviathan' which opened the way in the seventeenth century for the victorious revolution of the capitalist class.

It is this, up to the present time, classical phase in the English revolutionary tradition that we must now survey in the next chapter of this outline of the evolution of social revolution in England.

Chapter IV: Parliament Versus the Totalitarian State

The execution of Northumberland (Warwick) and Lady Jane Grey led to a temporary swing-back of the pendulum. The reign of Mary (1553–58) witnessed the temporary revival of Catholicism. Cardinal Pole, Machiavelli's earliest critic, became Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Obedience was restored. Mary could not indeed recover the alienated Church lands, but she burnt a good many Protestants — Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, etc, etc — which was unpopular, and she married the King of Spain, Philip the Second, who dragged England into a useless war against France, in which England lost Calais, her one remaining European possession (1558). This pro-Spanish policy was extremely unpopular, probably much more so than was the burning of Protestants — most of whom had done some burning themselves when their faction was in power. But Spain was now, more and more, obviously becoming the major rival to rising English capitalism and the main obstacle to its fast-increasing need for world expansion and for a larger share in the El Dorado (Golden City) which the new colonial world represented to the needy peoples of Europe.

Under Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, denounced from birth as a 'bastard' by the Pope, England again seceded from the Roman Church, this time, finally. The long reign of Elizabeth — 1558–1603 — witnessed a phenomenal expansion of English capitalism. It was in this reign that England seriously set to work to conquer Ireland, that she made her first (unsuccessful) tentatives to colonise the North American continent — see Virginia, named after the Virgin Queen Elizabeth — that Elizabeth granted its charter to the 'East India Company' (1600), the acorn whence was to grow in time that unique and most unnatural of all despotisms, the autocracy exercised by a small island in the North Sea over a subcontinent and civilisation of immemorial antiquity. Last, but by no means least, the reign of Elizabeth saw the first essentially capitalist-commercial war in English history; the war against Spain for a share in the American market, the African slave-trade, and for freedom to navigate the encircling Atlantic Ocean — the contemporary 'Spanish Main'.

With the rivalry between England and Spain, which came to a head with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England definitely ended her era of European entanglement and made her entry into the world market and into world politics. Henceforth, the foreign policy of England was directed primarily towards capitalist ends; towards, in particular, the pursuit of trade. Elizabeth herself took shares in the slave-hunting African ventures of Sir John Hawkins and in the filibustering raids of Drake and Co on the American colonies and treasure ships of the vast Spanish Empire. The enormous popular reputation of Sir Francis Drake — a pirate even when judged by the crude international law of his age! — who yet speedily became the national hero, affords an unanswerable proof of the grip that the new capitalist and Protestant forces were acquiring on the popular mind.

We have not forgotten that it was the national hatred of Spain, rather than any purely religious cause, which first made England a really Protestant country. For the King of Spain was at one and the same time the supreme champion of the Pope and his Church, then effectively ruled by the Spanish 'Company of Jesus' (Jesuits), and

the jealous mercantilist monopolist of the world market, virtually divided between Spain and Portugal by the famous Bull of the Spanish Borgia Pope (Alexander the Sixth) immediately after the discovery of America (1492–93).[1]

Spain was in fact the arch-enemy of both God and Mammon! The rising English bourgeoisie, looking out from its Atlantic seaboards to the vast virgin world and unexampled wealth waiting to be explored and exploited, was entirely at one with that outspoken Renaissance monarch Francis the First of France, who had recently expressed the historic desire — one itself indicative of a new era — to see 'that clause in the will of Adam which divided the New World between Spain and Portugal'! After 1580, when Spain conquered Portugal and became the sole monopolist in both East and West, there could be only one enemy for an aspiring mercantilist economy and for a rising merchant class. The Pope and Spain barred the way to undreamed-of colonial riches: so much the worse for both! English capitalism found its 'sea-legs' in its initial conflict with Spain, the first phase in its long and ever more dazzling evolution.

A less spectacular, but hardly less important and significant development of capitalist economy in this generation is to be found in a very different sphere from that frequented by Drake and Raleigh, viz, the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. With the arbitrary dissolution of feudal relations and the abruptly disconcerting arrival of an unplanned economy, the domestic problems of vagrancy and unemployment, the necessary concomitants of an uprooted and homeless peasantry, were now reaching unmanageable proportions. Elizabeth herself, on tour through her kingdom in her last years, was driven to exclaim: 'Everywhere I see poverty around me.'

Rising capitalism made for unity. It now effected unity on a national scale: it nationalised its oldest and most indispensable industry, it nationalised poverty. From 1601 to the Poor Law Act of 1834, the Elizabethan Poor Law remained in force. It was the first major social reform carried out in its own interest by the new economic system: a reform the indispensable basis for which is the recognition that the first principle of capitalism is this: 'The poor ye shall have always with ye!'

We can indeed say that the reign of Elizabeth witnessed both the acquisition of *economic* power by the new class of merchant capitalists, and also the first appearance of that concentration of wealth in a few hands which was the first stage in the formation of the British oligarchy which was to seize the state power and to govern this country from the mid-seventeenth century on. Indeed, Hilaire Belloc, who, despite of — or perhaps because of — his Catholic bias, has a more objective conception of modern English history than has any of the standard English historians, has named William Cecil (Lord Burleigh), Elizabeth's powerful minister (c 1520–1598), as the founder of the English oligarchy and as 'the chief maker of modern England'.

Whilst, however, the balance of economic power definitively passed to the merchants from the state during the last half of the sixteenth century, yet the state still had the last word in politics. The (illegal) courts (Star Chamber, etc) still exercised their jurisdiction: the (illegal) rack in the Tower continued to 'stretch' its unhappy victims. The Crown continued to levy taxes despite the growing protests of the rich capitalists who had to find the money. *By the end of Elizabeth's reign economic and political power lay in different hands.* Whoso comprehends the nature of class

1 Spain conquered the Portuguese Empire from 1580 to 1640.

struggle as the motivating dynamic of human history will see that only revolution and civil war could eventually emerge from such a social impasse.

The clash, however, did not come under the Tudors. Elizabeth and Cecil, whilst they kept a tight hold of political power, yet exercised it in a manner consonant with capitalist interests. Their Irish policy, their encouragement of exploration — and of piracy! — above all, their anti-Spanish policy, were all entirely in line with the economic needs of the new class. However, the last years of Elizabeth saw the beginnings of a new Parliamentary opposition to the royal administration, which, however, the Queen was too experienced a politician to provoke to extremes.[2]

The reign of the last Tudor then represented a kind of armistice in the class struggle: an interlude between two epochs of revolution. That interlude was abruptly ended by the death of the old Queen in 1603, and the succession of the half-French House of Stuart who had reigned over Scotland as clients of France since the mid-fourteenth century.[3] The Stuarts were an intellectual but not an intelligent family, at any rate, politically. In particular, coming from Scotland, then and for long after an economic backwater as compared with the more advanced lands of the south, the first two Stuart kings showed no appreciation of the precarious political situation in England. On the contrary, they showed an entire disregard for the merchants in both political practice and in governmental theory.

From 1603, the date of the accession to the English throne of James the First — James the Sixth of Scotland — to 1640, when the meeting of the Long Parliament marked the end of the English totalitarian state and the inauguration of the classical era of revolution in England, the country was in a state of increasingly violent tension, which pointed ever more clearly towards the coming of civil war. For both the first Stuart kings, James the First (1603–25) and Charles the First (1625–49) governed with a reckless defiance of capitalist interest and sentiment. James, a learned pedant — denominated as 'the wisest fool in Christendom' by the contemporary French Minister, the Duc de Sully — made peace with Spain, to the wrath of the merchant class, and neglected the English navy to such an extent that Algerian pirates established a colony on Lundy Island, off the coast of Devonshire, and kidnapped a man in the heart of Gloucestershire; for the supposed murder of whom two Englishmen were hanged at the local assizes![4] When in 1621 the Dutch massacred an entire English colony as poachers, or 'interlopers', on their colonial preserves, at Amboona in Sumatra, James could or would do nothing to obtain redress for his aggrieved merchants: this was not the sort of government an aspiring and fast-expanding English capitalism required in order to protect its growing economic interests!

In its home policy, the early Stuarts pursued a policy that was equally hostile to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Both kings openly flouted Parliament, the political organ of the new class, and reasserted emphatically the doctrine — miscalled feudal — of 'the Divine Right of Kings':[5] a doctrine which was itself a product and a

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2 The London merchants, even under Henry the Eighth, had occasionally made trouble in the subservient Tudor Parliaments when their pockets were touched. Sir Thomas More first came into prominence in connection with such an agitation.

3 See the contemporary proverb, quoted by Shakespeare in *Henry the Fifth* — 'He who would France win, must with Scotland first begin.'

4 The North African 'Sallee Rovers' were very active just about this time: in 1624 they actually sacked Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland!

5 The doctrine was *not* a feudal one. It was essentially a product of the new nationalism of the Renaissance, for which it served as a protective disguise and as a counter-blast to the Divine

justification of the absolute states of the Renaissance, and as such had been ardently supported in the preceding century by both the merchant class and the theologians of the Reformed Churches, but which was now falling out of fashion with the growing power of the new social forces. The assertion of this obsolescent doctrine by the Stuarts demonstrates the backwardness of Scotland as compared with England.

From 1603 to 1640 was the 'armaments race', so to speak, which presaged the coming civil war. From a practical standpoint, Parliament after Parliament was successively lectured, insulted and dissolved by the King. And this fact is highly significant to the student of the revolutionary aspects of English history. For it seems to be an unvarying 'law' of social development that every social class, as it approaches its maturity, finds its appropriate political instrument for its seizure of power. In the early seventeenth century, the merchant capitalists 'discovered' — or rather, rediscovered — the House of Commons; that same institution through the portals of which Simon de Montfort and Edward the First had admitted their still immature burgess ancestors into a modest share in the state power. But, since every rising class invents its own 'history', the daring and wealthy bourgeoisie of the first half of the seventeenth century created Parliament in 'the shape of things to come'. In their political alchemy Parliament was the rightful ruler of England, and had always been so in right and law. And by Parliament Eliot, Pym, Hampden and the other leaders of the growing opposition to the Crown meant not King or Lords, but the House of Commons, and a House of Commons, at that, which was really to rule the state, unlike the modest Parliaments of the Middle Ages or the subservient Parliaments of the Tudors.

In short, what 'soviets' were later to mean to the men who made the Russian Revolution, that was Parliament to the rising bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century: its political instrument for seizing and for controlling state power in its class interests. The key to the whole political situation was in fact revealed by a census of the early seventeenth century which indicated that the House of Commons, the stronghold of the new bourgeois class, was three times as rich as the House of Lords, which was the House of the Court nobility, the heads of the royal bureaucracy, and the Bishops of the Established Church.

It is unnecessary for my purpose to survey all the successive milestones on the road to social revolution and civil war which followed each other with increasing frequency throughout the reign of James and, still more, of his son Charles. Here I note only the most significant.

In 1628, as noted above, the Judges prevented the King from employing torture in the case of Felton, the murderer of the spendthrift Duke of Buckingham, Charles' unpopular favourite. The next year Charles dissolved Parliament and for eleven years governed without one. At the same time he arbitrarily arrested Sir John Eliot, the leader of the opposition to his demands. Eliot died in prison in 1631. This period represented the last phase of the absolute state in England. During it, the King's chief

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Right of the Popes to depose and order the assassination of heretical kings, as was asserted by the Jesuits — the Jesuit, Suarez, had a famous controversy with James the First on this question, and a celebrated book by another Spanish Jesuit, Mariana, was burnt by the English government for advocating the murder of heretical kings. For that matter, it is high time that Marxists stopped talking about the bourgeois revolutions against 'feudalism'. Feudalism, in its proper mediæval sense, had been destroyed by the Renaissance totalitarian states long before the classical era of bourgeois revolutions began, and is, today, only a veneer. Political science requires a larger vocabulary.

ministers were the Earl of Strafford, 'Black Tom' Wentworth, a renegade from the Parliamentary side; a kind of seventeenth-century 'Stolypin' of great ability but autocratic temper. And the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, a high churchman of an honest but narrow type, who negotiated unsuccessfully for reunion with the Roman Church, persecuted the Puritans, and sought to revive the mediæval prohibitions against 'usury' — viz, capitalist economics.

The most important internal event during this last decade of the absolutist monarchy was the prosecution and condemnation, though only by a majority vote of the Judges, of John Hampden for refusal to pay Ship Money (1637). Hampden was a rich capitalist and a former leader of the Parliamentary opposition to Charles, who refused to contribute to an arbitrary levy of 'Ship Money', a tax for the upkeep of the Navy, formerly levied only on the coastal districts, but now extended to the whole kingdom. Hampden was fined and forced to pay.[6]

No one who studies the history of revolution can fail to note the important part played in its evolution by defeat in war. Just as the defeat of the French Monarchy in the 'Seven Years War' (1756–63) prepared the way for the French Revolution, and just as the defeat of Russia in 1914–17 undermined the Tsardom and effectually opened the way for the Russian Revolution, so the downfall of the English absolutist state was similarly caused by defeat in war. It was the failure of Charles the First's Scottish policy that first gave the English capitalist class its definitive opportunity to overthrow the totalitarian state and to unite the political and economic power in the same hands: their own.

The Union of England and Scotland, achieved in 1603 by the hereditary succession of James the First to the English throne, remained, of course, only a personal one down to the act of Union in 1707. In 1640, Scotland was an independent kingdom, with the same king, but with an entirely dissimilar political and cultural outlook. For in 1561 Scotland had been the scene of a revolution which made this then isolated and backward land in many respects the 'Russia' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[7] For in sixteenth-century Scotland, as in twentieth-century Russia, political power had been seized by an energetic minority of revolutionaries trained at Geneva, then the centre of international revolution, who had effected one of the most extraordinary cultural and moral transformations in all history. These new rulers of Scotland were drawn from the ranks of Calvinism, the left wing of the Continental Reformation; the 'Bolshevism' of the day, as one could legitimately style

6 Incidentally, it is of interest to note that after their victory the government of Cromwell spent far more money on the Navy than the King had ever done. A class will do for itself what it will never do for its class enemy!

7 The remarkably exact parallel indicated above can be extended even to details: in particular, to the ruthless cruelty which was, unfortunately, to be found in both revolutionary regimes. We have heard in recent years of 'the witchcraft trials of Moscow'. Similarly, in Calvinistic Scotland the burning of witches on their own 'confessions' was virtually the national industry in the heyday of the Calvinist theocracy and the Presbyterian Church. Nowhere did the Renaissance mania for burning witches take such a hold as in Scotland. I may add that there is some evidence for supposing that a Scottish revolutionary movement existed as far back as the thirteenth century. At least, Sir William Wallace, the leader of the national resistance to Edward the First, was made the national hero of Scotland by popular tradition, whilst he was betrayed by the Scottish nobles in his lifetime, and his memory was execrated by the Bruce and Stuart kings who reigned after the defeat of the English at Bannockburn in 1314.

the creed of John Calvin, the 'Karl Marx of the Reformation', as I have elsewhere denominated the Geneva Reformer.[8]

The victory of the Reformation in Scotland represents the example of the breakdown of mediævalism at the weakest and most remote part of its cultural periphery. In this respect, the Scottish Revolution bears, again, a remarkable resemblance to the Russian Revolution of our own time. It resulted, similarly, in a root-and-branch transformation of the national character. The Scottish people, who a visiting Italian ecclesiastic (fifteenth century) Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (afterwards Pope Pius the Second), had described as the most backward and ignorant in Europe, were transformed under the guidance of revolutionary Calvinism into the most keen-witted, mentally alert and politically advanced people, perhaps, in the entire Western World.

From 1561 onwards, the Calvinistic-Presbyterian Church ruled Scotland with the iron hand of an omnipotent theocracy. It dethroned the Catholic Mary, 'Queen of Scots', and drove her into the English exile, where the plots of her adherents led to her tragic and much disputed execution by order of Queen Elizabeth (1587). Nor did the Kirk (Church) show any regard for her son, James the Sixth (of Scotland), and his belief in the royal supremacy. 'God's silly vassal', as the Presbyterian divine Melville called him to his face: not much Divine Right about that! It cannot be wondered after such treatment that James, 'the English Solomon', upon succeeding to the throne of England, said 'goodbye to all that', and stayed south of the Tweed. Thereafter, James, and still more his son Charles, a cultured man but a weak and obstinate ruler, set themselves to get their own back on Scotland and upon 'the democratic theocracy' which ruled it. Charles and Strafford, in particular, set themselves to break the power of the Calvinist Church, the greatest political as well as religious force in Scotland, by imposing upon it a High Church Anglican ritual and government by Bishops. Both these innovations seemed sheer sacrilege and 'Popery' to the dour Calvinists. The second, at least, was directly political; had not James the First himself, in his capacity as 'the English Solomon', pronounced the famous dictum: 'No bishop, no king'; and it must be admitted that there was much truth in the assertion. Wherever it was strong enough to act upon its own logic, Calvinism led straight to republicanism. James' son was to have but too much cause to know it!

The efforts of Charles to force upon Scotland the hated English institutions led to a nationwide armed resistance. Despite its theocracy, Presbyterianism, which had done away with the priestly caste and which, in theory at least, was an ecclesiastical democracy, had the backing of the great bulk of the nation. *Calvinism was, after all, the first mass revolutionary movement of modern times.* The King's attempt to invade Scotland was an ignominious failure, and the Scotch soon assumed the offensive and invaded England. To meet this invasion, Charles was helpless. He had no professional army — the essential weakness of the English Monarchy as already noted — the Treasury was empty, and the strongest and richest class in the country was bitterly hostile to his person and policy, and was so far from being willing to contribute taxes at the King's arbitrary request that it was on the point of rising in revolution and joining forces with the advancing Scotch. The King's hastily raised and unpaid militia had no heart for his cause and crumbled away without putting up any serious fight.

8 See the appendix to the next chapter.

In this hopeless situation there was nothing left for the King to do after his grievous miscalculation of the forces against him, except to call Parliament and come to terms, saving as much as he could from the wreck. The truth was that the development of new economic and social forces had so undermined the old state structure that the decrepit building was already on the point of collapse and finally fell at a last push. In the fall of the *ancien régime* in both eighteenth-century France and twentieth-century Russia we have seen analogous phenomena. In the instance under consideration, the Scotch represented the last straw that weighed down the obsolete structure of the English totalitarian state, undermined already by economic development and by the rising bourgeoisie. Just as the advancing German regiments spelt the doom of the old Romanov regime in the Russia of 1917, so the advancing Scotch regiments in 1640 announced the end of the Tudor–Stuart Absolutism.

There was nothing for it for King Charles but to surrender and get what terms he could. Accordingly, after an abortive attempt to dictate terms to an assembly — known from its speedy dissolution as the 'Short Parliament' (April–May 1640) — Charles was forced to call that memorable assembly to be denominated as 'The Long Parliament', from its (nominal) duration down to 1660. From the very start the Long Parliament was dominated by the bourgeois opposition led with great ability by Pym and Hampden. These leaders, hard business men and wealthy enclosure landlords, knew what they were about and were in no mood to stand any delay. They had the whip and they intended to use it.

Their terms were hard. They spared the Monarchy itself, for republican sentiment was still practically non-existent in England, but the whole framework of the totalitarian state was swept away at a blow. The illegal courts — Star Chamber, High Commission, provincial 'Councils' — were summarily 'liquidated'. By a succession of Acts, Parliament became legally indissoluble and its exclusive control over the national finance was recognised by law. The King's ministers, Strafford and Laud, were impeached and executed (Strafford in 1641 and Laud in 1644). The King was forced to agree to all these measures, and a last desperate effort of Charles to save Strafford led only to threats of mob violence against the King himself and his family.

This constitutional revolution is thus summarised by Edward Bernstein, in his brilliant book *Cromwell and Communism*:

> Meanwhile, concession after concession was wrung from Charles. He was forced to sacrifice his friend and counsellor Strafford, who was impeached by Parliament, condemned, and on 12 May 1641, beheaded. The same fate overtook Archbishop Laud. Charles was obliged to assent to the law providing for the election of a new Parliament at latest three years after the dissolution of its predecessor, even if the King had failed to summon it; to a law which provided that Parliament could not be prorogued or dissolved without its own consent, and to laws which abolished the Star Chamber and High Commission, and deprived the Privy Council of the King of the right to decree arrests and pass judicial sentences. *Not until all these things had been secured was the Scotch army disbanded*.[9]

9 Edward Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1930), p 44, our emphasis.

In short, the year 1640–01 saw the end of the absolute monarchy and of the Tudor–Stuart Renaissance despotism which had ruled England since 1485. At the same moment that Strafford's head fell into the basket, English Totalitarianism fell into the historical dustbin! Where it has remained until today — when the spiritual heirs of Strafford are seeking to revive it.[10]

At any rate, whatever the future chances of its revival, historically the English 'total' state fell before rising capitalism in 1641. Political Absolutism was no more. A decade after its 'taking off' in 1651, the proto-Fascist philosopher Thomas Hobbes, the English 'Machiavelli', outlined its nature and claim in his *Leviathan*, a book of singular eloquence, logic and intellectual power.[11] Hobbes, however, was too late: his swan-song came after the death of the swan! Whilst he was proving by irrefragible logic that Absolutism must exist and could not conceivably be abolished without destroying society, the English capitalists, with that lack of logic which has always pre-eminently characterised their class, had already abolished it! And the society which they proceeded to substitute for it, cannot, whatever its crimes, be fairly charged with any lack of vitality. Life is larger, if not than logic, at least, than the logic of reaction!

Appendix to Chapter IV: 'Gunpowder Plot': In 1605 there occurred the last attempt made by the Roman Catholic Church in this country to restore the pre-Reformation state of things in England. I refer, of course, to the celebrated 'Gunpowder Plot', which, thanks to the annual celebration of the Fifth of November, has long since passed from contemporary tragedy into posthumous comedy. Incidentally, I may add that a more incongruous selection for a figure of fun, a typical 'guy' than was that heroic figure of iron mould, Guy Fawkes, after whom the 'Plot' is named, could scarcely be conceived. Whilst counter-revolutions are usually hatched by political crooks, yet their agents are often men of fanatical sincerity. Guy Fawkes was a man of precisely such a type, and is in fact perhaps the outstanding example of it.

The so-called 'Plot' seems to have been originally hatched by the Jesuits, who were not only the Catholic experts *par excellence* in counter-revolution in general, but who were in particular specialists in tyrannicide. Indeed, the science and art of 'bumping-off' heretical rulers attracted the best brains of the famous Order during this era and occupied an entire literature devoted exclusively to it.

The details of this most famous of all plots are so familiar that it is unnecessary to expatiate upon them. King, Lords and Commons were all to be 'uplifted' together in a common holocaust of destruction. The mine was to be fired by Guy Fawkes, a Yorkshireman who had served in the Spanish army, and the blowing-up of Parliament was to be immediately followed by an armed rising of the Catholic gentry led by Catesby, and by the landing, it seems, of a Spanish army. The dramatic circumstances under which Fawkes was arrested in the Parliamentary cellar are common knowledge. Brought before James, Fawkes announced his frustrated intention of 'blowing all the Scotchmen back to Scotland'! The conspirators finally perished after enduring fiendish tortures. Garnett, the English provincial of the Jesuits, was later executed for his share in the plot, which, if not actually hatched by

10 Will the workers need another Long Parliament to deal with this new totalitarianism which the English capitalist class is seeking to reintroduce in this present era of its senile decay: or, as Trotsky has pertinently suggested, will a *short* one suffice?

11 Hobbes declared that without state absolutism all social life would be intolerable — 'nasty, brutish, desolate and short'.

the Jesuits, was at least planned in accordance with the principles of the famous Order, which was responsible for the 'taking-off' of so many anti-Roman rulers in the era of the Counter-Reformation.

Strictly speaking, the famous 'Plot' was not a revolution. I have mentioned it not because of what it was, but for what it might have been. For though 'Guy Fawkes' Day' has come to be regarded as a huge annual joke, it is quite certain that the English government of the day did not so regard it. When James the First and his ministers set aside the Fifth of November, the day of their 'happy deliverance' as a perpetual holiday, there is abundant contemporary evidence that they were frightened out of their wits. Nor, in the then state of Europe, with the Counter-Reformation at the height of its powers, were their fears unjustified. James had neglected the Navy, and another more fortunate Spanish Armada was far from being out of the question. A temporary restoration of Catholicism was perhaps possible.

With the 'Gunpowder Plot', the last effort of the Roman Church to recover power in England failed. The year 1605 may accordingly be said to mark the conclusion of the English Reformation era, of the 'Los von Rom', which had begun in 1529 with the fall of Cardinal Wolsey and the rise of Thomas Cromwell to power.

Chapter V: 'The Great Rebellion'

The English Revolution of the seventeenth century bears more than one point of resemblance to the great Russian Revolution of our own era. In particular, just as the February Revolution in Russia (1917) abolished the Tsardom, and yet the Civil War did not start until the next year, so, as we have just seen, the English bourgeoisie abolished the absolute monarchy and its 'total' regime in 1640–41, but the Civil War did not start until 1642, when Charles the First was able to collect an army of white-guard 'Cavaliers', and to wage 'heavy civil war' against Parliament and its bourgeois adherents.

This war — the 'Great Rebellion' of the liberal historians — raged intermittently from August 1642, when Charles raised his standard at Nottingham, until 3 September 1651, when Cromwell finally defeated Charles the Second at Worcester. As the scope of this outline of the long English revolutionary tradition does not allow for a day-to-day record of this long and fluctuating war, I merely propose to outline, *seriatim*, the social forces which participated in it, its main course, and the general historic results which it achieved.

I: The Social Forces at Work in the Civil War: On the side of the Parliament were the citizens of London — a population which equalled about ten per cent of the total population of some five millions — the majority of the towns, the more advanced commercial districts — in particular, the Eastern counties, the centre of the wool trade with the Continent — and, last but far from least, the Calvinistic Churches, the 'Independents', as they styled themselves, the 'Puritans' as the Royalists styled them in derision.[1]

On the King's side two separate strata must be noted. In the first place, the monarchy was supported by the majority of the rural population, particularly by the rural gentry of the North and West of England. Indeed, it was this class, which included a considerable Roman Catholic element, who gave to the royal army its nickname of 'Cavaliers'. We have, however, already noted that, with the support of this class alone, Charles could make no headway against the Scotch and the Parliamentary reformers in 1640–41. It was only when the victorious Parliamentarians broke into mutually hostile factions that Charles was able to win over a section of the opposition to his side. Then, and then only, was he in a position to raise the standard of civil war.

The main cause for this division lay in the ecclesiastical policy of the Parliament. Under the influence of the Scotch and the Calvinists (Puritans), Parliament introduced laws to abolish episcopacy and to convert the Church of England into a Presbyterian Church on the Scotch model. Such a policy, however, led to a sharp division of opinion and many moderate members of the opposition were driven into the camp of Charles, along with the Anglican Church itself, in which just then the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings had practically become an article of faith. So much so in fact that from 1642 to 1688 belief in the Divine Right was virtually the fortieth article of the Church of England.

From a general standpoint we may sum up the two sides in the great Civil War in the following terms: the Parliamentarians had two main advantages, the superior financial power of the City of London and the fanatical driving power of the

1 See the appendix at end of this chapter on Calvinism, the 'Bolshevism' of the Reformation.

Calvinistic Churches, the left, and most vigorous wing of the revolutionary forces of that era.[2]

As against these Parliamentary advantages the King had a better constitutional title — he did not recognise Parliament, but, at first, Parliament continued to recognise him. A more tangible point of superiority lay in the royal superiority in cavalry. In the absence of a professional army on either side, cavalry was still the major arm, and the horse has always been the aristocratic arm. It was this purely military advantage which gave the King a substantial advantage in the earlier stages of the Civil War. I must add that, in the absence of a professional army on either side, the English Civil War was at first a very amateurish affair as and when compared with the contemporary wars on the Continent waged by professionals. For this reason, we need not linger over the details of the battles which are of little military importance. Prior to the formation of the 'New Model Army' in the spring of 1645, it is unlikely that either side could have lasted for an hour against the Continental armies of Gustavus Adolphus and Wallenstein, Condé and Turenne, who were then engaged in the 'Thirty Years War'.

We must now glance at the course of the 'Great Rebellion', in which the King, the Lords, the Anglican Church — all the pre-bourgeois forces in English society — plus a dissident bourgeois minority, fought against the House of Commons, the City of London, the merchant class in general, the Calvinistic Churches — in a word, against all the new social forces unleashed by the discovery of the world market and by the English Reformation of the preceding century. For the 'Great Rebellion', when considered against the general background of English revolutionary history, was the second phase in the bourgeois revolution, in direct and logical succession to the English Reformation, which was the first. Only now the merchant class, which in the sixteenth century had sheltered its immature youth behind the state power, turned fiercely against its erstwhile protector. But, whilst now fighting nakedly in its own class interest, it had still not arrived at its full maturity; for it still needed a religious cloak. Not until the French Revolution will the capitalist class be able to come out openly and fully with their secular aims as capitalists, thereby announcing their class maturity.

With regard to the English Civil War, I add only this: in historical perspectives, the decisive factor was one not visible on any English battlefield. It was the newly-discovered world market, which continually drove on the rising merchant class with a silent but even more terrific pressure. It was against the unseen horizons of the world market that Prince Rupert and his romantic semi-feudal Cavaliers broke their lances in vain. For, in that era of rising capital and of its indispensable 'primary accumulation', the world market represented the *Zeitgeist*, or Time-Spirit of the age, and the stars in their courses fought on behalf of the bourgeoisie.

II: The Course of the Civil War: The actual course of the Civil War itself can be divided into three consecutive phases. These are represented, respectively, by the period from August 1642, when the war began, to the spring of 1645, when the 'New Model Army' was formed; from this last date to the execution of Charles the First, on 30 January 1649; finally, the war against Charles the Second and the Scots, which

2 Perhaps the adhesion of the Navy to the Parliamentary side might be counted as an additional factor of decisive importance. It has often been noted that navies have traditionally been more inclined to support revolutions than have armies. Viz, already in classical Antiquity the arch-conservative Plato had noted in his *Laws* that the sea air has a disturbing effect, predisposing those who sail to revolutionary activity: the history of many revolutions bears this out!

ended at the battle of Worcester in 1651. A glance may usefully be directed at these three phases of the English Civil War, though, as I am not writing a military history, it is quite unnecessary to describe the military details of the battles themselves.

The first initial phase of the Civil War was, in general, favourable to the Royalists. The King's cavalry, led by his dashing nephew, Prince Rupert, usually got the better of the early encounters. The country squires who fought for the King were horsemen by tradition and could usually be relied upon to give a good account of themselves against the 'base rabble' who fought for the Parliament. The year 1643 was in particular a bad year for the King's enemies. In that year one Parliamentary army, under the Earl of Essex, was captured *en bloc* at Lostwithiel in Cornwall: whilst another, under Sir William Waller, was routed at Roundaway Down outside the Wiltshire town of Devizes. By the end of the year Charles controlled at least two-thirds of the country. He even penetrated to the outskirts of London, but was unable to take the great city. There can be little doubt but that had the King possessed a regular army the revolution would have been crushed at this point, just as the almost contemporary revolution, known as the 'Fronde', supported similarly by the French bourgeoisie, was crushed by the military power of the French monarchy.

For the first two years the fortunes of war favoured the King. When Pym, the great leader of the constitutional 'Girondist' phase of the English Revolution, died in 1644, the future must have looked very black to the supporters of the Parliamentary cause.

In 1644, however, the tide began to turn. For Parliament had on its side two formidable resources to which the Monarchy could supply no counter-balancing force. These decisive factors in the victory of the great English Revolution were the financial power of the City of London, the great citadel of English merchant capital, and the fanatical driving-power of the Calvinistic (Puritan) Churches. Whilst the King's rustic adherents were forced to pawn their plate in order to fill the depleted war-chest of the bankrupt King, Parliament, as the executive committee of the English bourgeoisie, had at its disposal the ample resources of the wealthy mercantilist class. Ultimately, it was the world market that paid for Cromwell's Ironsides: the growing profits of the East India Company and the African slave-trade. In an age of rapidly expanding commodity productions, when, as the acute author of *Hudibras* was soon to express it — 'The one true value of a thing, Is just as much as it will bring…' — the financial superiority enjoyed consistently by Parliament represented a tremendous advantage.

Revolutions are *caused* by material factors, but in their actual conduct moral and emotional elements play an equally indispensable and important part. Professors of economics invented the 'economic man', but revolutions, though originally conceived on the economic plane, are fought out on a plane of will-power and of moral heroism. 'In war the moral is to the material as three to one'; this saying of Napoleon, in itself a reflection of the tremendous moral fervour aroused by the French Revolution, had also its bearing on the English Revolution. In England its revolutionary vehicle was Calvinism, which in this epoch may almost be considered as another revolutionary 'class'.

With the general influence of Calvin and Calvinism as the 'Bolshevism' of the Reformation, I deal in the appendix at the end of this chapter, as it lies a little off the main historical highway of the English revolutionary tradition, although some comprehension of this mighty revolutionary dynamic is essential to any student of the great English Revolution.

For in 1644 Oliver Cromwell, a squire of mercantile origin, raised a body of horse from the Calvinistic population of his native East Anglia, and with a regiment of these 'Ironsides' — as the Cavaliers soon learned to call these novel shock-troops — set out to win the war by methods of 'blood and iron', very different from the dilatory and half-hearted skirmishing which had characterised the early stages of the war under its ultra-constitutional Parliamentary generals.

It is a fundamental law of all revolutions that *successful* revolutions are only made by revolutionaries. Both as a revolutionary among reformists, and as a cavalry leader of outstanding ability, Oliver Cromwell at the head of his 'Ironsides' quickly forced his way to the front. After some successful skirmishes came the decisive turning point of the war at the battle of Marston Moor — 2 July 1644 — where the royal general, Prince Rupert, was decisively beaten when attempting to relieve York. The victory was due in the main to the brilliant cavalry tactics of Cromwell and to the shattering charge of his formidable brigade of Ironsides.

In the spring of 1645, the second and decisive phase of the Civil War was inaugurated by the formation of an army of a type unknown prior to that day in English history. This was the 'New Model Army', first and foremost, a *revolutionary* army drawn mainly from the Puritans, the 'Independents' of the Calvinistic Churches. The 'New Model' had only one object in view: to win the war! It was strictly disciplined and regularly paid. Its nominal commander was Sir Thomas Fairfax, a competent Presbyterian field-officer but without any special genius. Oliver Cromwell was second-in-command (Lieutenant-General) and was the directing genius of the army from the start. The 'New Model' was constituted on the principle that quality counts far more than quantity; a truth nowhere more evident than in revolutions. Its military organisation and aims represented an extension of two sayings of Cromwell in the earlier phase of the war.

For, observing the superiority of the Royal Horse in the initial phase of the war, Cromwell, then an obscure rank-and-file member of Parliament, announced the germ of his 'Ironsides' in his famous observation to Camden: 'I will raise such men as have the fear of God before them, and make some conscience of what they do; and I warrant you they will not be beaten.' Just prior to the formation of the 'New Model', Cromwell added a second observation, which indeed may be regarded as a classic revolutionary text. Commenting on the failure of the Parliamentary general, the Earl of Manchester, to press home the attack in the indecisive (second) battle of Newbury against Charles in person, Cromwell gave his Ironsides this historic piece of advice:

> I will not cozen you by perplexed expressions in my commission about fighting for King and Parliament. If the King chanced to be in the body of the enemy, I would as soon discharge my pistol upon him as upon any private man; and if your conscience will not let you do the like, I advise you not to enlist yourselves under me.

With this historic adjuration Reform passed into Revolution! The 'New Model Army', which won the war for the Parliament, was organised upon these lines as a genuine revolutionary army. In its mixed composition of political and religious radical elements it presented, perhaps, more resemblance to the mediæval Hussite armies of Ziska, or even to the early Mohammedan zealots, than to such modern revolutionary armies as were the Jacobin and Bolshevik revolutionary armies. Nevertheless, this army, the brain of which was the Calvinistic Ironsides, belongs,

despite its religious element, to the historic company of these famous modern revolutionary *corps d'élite*.

Cromwell's 'ever-victorious' army, which beat the King, carried through the decisive phase of the bourgeois revolution, and united the British Isles by 'blood and iron' for the first time in its history, is thus described by the great Whig pamphleteer, Lord Macaulay. I may add that Macaulay, a political apologist of extraordinary vigour but in no sense a scientific historian, was nowhere more typically Liberal than in the zeal with which he praised the *past* revolutions of his own class, whilst strenuously opposing all revolutionary movements in his own generation.

> But such [he tells us in his *History of England*] was the intelligence, the gravity and the self-command of the warriors whom Cromwell had trained that in their camp a political organisation and a religious organisation could exist without destroying military organisation. The same men who, off duty, were noted as demagogues and field preachers, were distinguished by steadiness, by the spirit of order, and by prompt obedience on watch, on drill, and on the field of battle… In his camp alone the most rigid discipline was found in company with the fiercest enthusiasm. His troops moved to victory with the precision of machines, while burning with the wildest fanaticism of Crusaders.[3]

Thus constituted and driven on equally by historical necessity and by religious fanaticism, this formidable military machine swept all before it. In April, the 'New Model' was formed. On 14 June 1645, Charles was decisively beaten at Naseby (in Leicestershire). This victory was followed up by successful campaigns in the Royalist North and West. In 1646, Charles fled to the Scotch, who handed him over to the English in return for payment of £30,000 owed them for war expenses. The first decisive phase of the war was over.

The second and third phases need not unduly detain us, as they represent merely additional proofs of the military superiority of the revolutionary army.

From 1646 to 1648 a subtle game of intrigue was going on behind the scenes, in which the royal prisoner endeavoured to get better terms for himself by playing off the different sections of his captors against each other; for on the morrow of victory rifts began to appear on the winning side, Parliament versus Army, Presbyterians versus Independents. We need not follow up this sordid story of intrigue and counter-intrigue. Suffice it to say that Charles was eventually kidnapped by a cornet, Joyce, under instructions from the High Command of the Army and brought from his former prison at Carisbrooke Castle, in the Isle of Wight, to London.

Unfortunately for Charles, whilst he was in the prison of the Army and his fate hung in the balance, his intrigues eventuated in a Royalist rising supported by the Scotch, who were doubly alarmed at the growth of the power of England under its new and vigorous bourgeois rulers, and at the increasing strength of the anti-Presbyterian 'Independents' in the army. This rising, which was easily crushed by Cromwell and Fairfax in a lightning campaign in the autumn of 1648, sealed the fate of the double-dealing King. On 30 January 1649, after a judicial trial by a Court handpicked by the Army, the last king of the *ancien régime* in England met the same fate as his ministers had done. He was beheaded in front of his palace at Whitehall,

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3 James Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, Volume 1 (Porter and Coates, Philadelphia, 1848), Chapter I.

meeting his end not without heroism, asserting at the last that 'sovereign and subject are clean different'. Charles the First was the last King of England in the absolutist sense of the word.

After the King's death a republic was proclaimed under the title of 'Commonwealth', with Parliament as the supreme authority. The Civil War, however, was not yet ended. For the English Revolution, again like its French and Russian successors, was the dynamic cause of a new and vigorous nationalism. History had now put the union of the British Isles upon the order of the day. The hour had now come for the expansion of England into 'Great Britain', an enforced union already prematurely attempted by Edward the First, that mediæval forerunner of modern capitalism.[4] The last phase of the Civil War (1649–52) represented, in reality, the conquest of Scotland and Ireland by the dominant English power. In this respect, Cromwell was the victorious successor of Edward the First and the real founder of 'Great Britain'. Thus, whilst in name a continuation of the Civil War, this last phase really represented something quite different, the conquest of all Britain by England: the first stage in the formation of the British, or, rather, the *English* Empire.

For in 1649–50 Cromwell conquered Ireland with a vigour and ruthlessness which even that unhappy island has never known in the course of that eight centuries' Golgotha which its connection with England has represented. For England was now a fully capitalist country, and a capitalist England can never, as long as capitalism lasts, tolerate an independent Ireland, for reasons alike political, economic and strategic in character. Thus, it was in no way an accident that Cromwell, the first capitalist ruler of England, conquered Ireland with a ruthlessness and a thoroughness that none of his Tudor and Stuart predecessors had been able to approach. With the merciless sacking of Drogheda and Wexford, and a total slaughter of Irishmen computed at a figure of 616,000, out of a total population of 1,466,000, the 'Irish Question' may be said to have entered upon that three-century phase of irreconcilable hatred between England and its oldest colony which has lasted from that day to this! A hatred, the refrain of which still echoes in the ears of Englishmen every time the IRA (Irish Republican Army) fires a bomb in the streets of our contemporary cities.[5]

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4 See *supra*, Part I, Chapter III.

5 As Cromwell, despite his ferocity, was beyond any doubt a very great revolutionary indeed, I suppose that, sitting as a jury — or, if one prefers, as a Devil's Advocate — I ought to put forward any extenuating plea that can be urged upon his behalf. From its own point of view, newly-victorious English capitalism had to settle accounts with Ireland. In the case of Cromwell, his political animosity was heightened by the bitterest religious prejudice. For Oliver was a sincere Calvinist, and Calvinism regarded the Church of Rome with deadly hatred. Neither Church in its day of power showed any mercy to the adherents of the other. Moreover, the colonial practice of the age was characterised by extreme ruthlessness. In this respect, the Spanish Conquistadores of America set a bloody enough model, but the English probably surpassed even this (for example, the Elizabethan hero of the *Revenge*, Sir Richard Grenville, used to hunt Red Indians with bloodhounds, whilst we have not forgotten that the poet Edmund Spenser wrote a pamphlet advocating the murder of all Irish children at birth as the only 'solution' to the Irish question). When all this is said, however, it must be conceded that even in that ferocious age of merciless colonial 'primary accumulation', nothing probably quite equalled the English policy in Ireland, of which Cromwell's Irish campaign was the peak point in both efficiency and horror. If a long memory has been Ireland's curse it is hardly to be wondered at, even today, that memory is still a potent political force, and that the Irish have not learnt, even yet, that revenge, however plausible, is not a political virtue.

That era of unequalled misery and crime began with Cromwell, or rather with the definite victory of English capitalism, of which Oliver Cromwell was the formidable prototype. It is in no way an accident that the 'curse of Cromwell' is still the synonym on Irish lips for the curse of England, or rather of English capitalist imperialism, which, under the leadership of Cromwell, first exerted its whole strength against the sister-island, the 'emerald' hue of which it proceeded to paint in blood from the time of Cromwell's 'Ironsides', the product of the lusty youth of English capitalism, to that of the 'Black and Tans', the armed butchers of that same capitalism's decay.

After Ireland, Scotland. In 1650, Cromwell, now commander-in-chief in name as well as fact — the shadowy Fairfax had dropped out after the King's execution — set out to conquer the northern kingdom, the traditional 'Achilles' Heel' of England in its Continental wars. On 3 September 1650, a rash manoeuvre on the part of the Scottish general Leslie rescued Cromwell from an awkward strategic impasse and opened the way for one of those lightning attacks in which the Ironsides excelled. The Scotch army was routed outside Dunbar, in what Cromwell himself described as his 'crowning mercy'.

A year later, Charles the Second, who had come over from the Continent after his father's death, finding himself at his last gasp, invaded England as a last desperate throw. But no English rising welcomed him, and, overtaken by Cromwell at Worcester, the Civil War came to an end with the battle of that name, exactly a year after Dunbar (3 September 1651). Charles himself, after adventures as mythical as those which subsequently befell his great-nephew, 'the Young Pretender', in 1746, succeeded in escaping to the Continent. But the Civil War was over. Only one question remained to be answered. Parliament had begun the war: but Cromwell and his Calvinistic army had won it. Which was to rule in place of the old regime now destroyed for ever?

III: The Results of the Civil War: These can be summarised more conveniently in the next chapter when we shall seek to determine the role of Cromwell's subsequent dictatorship in the evolution of the bourgeois revolution in England. Here, I shall just insist on one point only.

The English Civil War definitely and finally made England a capitalist and Protestant country. Before it, the issue was open and a Guy Fawkes and an Archbishop Laud could plan and dream of reunion with Rome by force or agreement, and with it of at least a partial restoration of pre-Reformation mediæval conditions. After it, no such restoration was any longer possible. Since the mid-seventeenth century the dictum of Michelet that 'the history of England is the history of an island' has been essentially accurate. Since that time Protestant-capitalist ideas have become the very warp and woof of the English nation; and it is since then that England has developed what Hilaire Belloc had so aptly styled as a 'moral unity' which cuts it sharply off from every other Western nation whatsoever. The Elizabethan literature is, in essentials, a European literature: that of post-Civil War England has been exclusively English — insular — in character.

The great English Civil War, therefore, may be definitely said to end that watershed between mediæval and modern times which was represented by the transitional age of the Tudors and early Stuarts. The fall of the totalitarian state and the end of the absolute monarchy may be said to mark the definite emergence of modern England.

A profound historical transformation was signalised by the execution of the last king of the old regime. Insignificant in itself, the execution of Charles the First was nevertheless a revolutionary landmark, like the subsequent executions of Louis the Sixteenth of France and Nicholas the Second of Russia. As an historical landmark, 30 January 1649 is a red-letter date in English revolutionary history; and it was that, not for what it was, but for what it symbolised — viz, the revolutionary ending of the old by the new.

On this point, indeed, Macaulay expresses himself not only with his customary vigour, but with a penetration into the deeper reality of history which is unusual in that dynamic but fundamentally superficial writer. For, speaking of the motives of Charles' judges, he comments very aptly:

> Those who had him in their grip were no midnight stabbers. What they did they did in order that it might be a spectacle to heaven and earth and that it might be held in everlasting resemblance. They enjoyed keenly the very scandal which they gave. That the ancient constitution and the public opinion of England were directly opposed to regicide seem strangely fascinating to a party bent on effecting complete moral and social revolution. In order to accomplish their purpose, it was necessary that they should first break in pieces every part of the machinery of government; and the necessity was rather agreeable than painful to them… A revolutionary tribunal was created. That tribunal pronounced Charles a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer and a public enemy; and his head was severed from his shoulders before thousands of spectators in front of the banqueting-hall of his own palace.[6]

Upon this a great modern revolutionary comments very aptly that in the words and actions of Cromwell, 'resound not blood-lust and despotism, but the recognition of a great historic mission, conferring the right to annihilate all obstacles in the way. The young progressive class, having first realised its vocation, first speaks with the lips of Cromwell.'[7]

The execution of Charles the First convinced the world at large that the English bourgeois revolution had 'arrived'.[8]

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6 Macaulay, *History of England*, Chapter I.

7 Leon Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?* (CPGB, London, 1926), p 147.

8 That this opinion is justified is evident from Milton's spirited defence of Charles' execution against the Royalist scholar Salmasius, in his pamphlets on 'the defence of the English people'. Incidentally, Philistines have been actually found to condemn Milton because in his justification of regicide he accused Charles of reading Shakespeare. One might have thought that the author of his sonnet to Shakespeare was not incapable of appreciating the great Elizabethan *as a poet*. He condemned Charles for reading Queen Elizabeth's court poet, not as a poet, but as a counter-revolutionary. From the most cursory study of Shakespeare's plays it is evident that the great poet of the English revolution correctly judged his greatest predecessor to be a most dangerous reactionary, as indeed we have already seen that he was. 'Art for art's sake' is distinctly out of place in the climax of a revolution! Incidentally, it is gratifying to an English revolutionary, who respects the magnificent cultural heritage of his race, to record that, as if to make amends for Shakespeare, the two next greatest English poets, Milton and Shelley, were ardent revolutionaries and frequently expressed a revolutionary point of view in their poems. With true revolutionary generosity another contemporary, bourgeois poet, Andrew Marvell, paid a fine tribute to the King's courageous end: 'He nothing common did nor mean / Upon that memorable scene.'

The symbolic act was received with mingled horror and admiration. Several envoys of the regicide 'Commonwealth' fell victims to the daggers of exiled white-guardist cavaliers, amid a howl of execration from the adherents of Legitimacy in foreign lands. But, on the whole, that Machiavellian age of *realpolitik* was impressed by the drastic vigour of the regicide court. As Albert Sorel has convincingly shown in his brilliant study of the diplomacy of the *ancien régime*, that age of iron which separated the Renaissance from the French Revolution was not at all squeamish even about regicide. In point of fact, most of the contemporary European powers saw in the English revolutionary regime a formidable potential ally in the ceaseless wars that marked the age. Nor was it only Protestant states which took up such an attitude. In particular, France, 'the eldest son of the [Catholic] Church', then under the political direction of Cardinal Mazarin, as regent for the boy-king, Louis the Fourteenth, displayed the greatest eagerness to secure the alliance of this formidable regicide power as a make-weight against her great European rival, the declining but still formidable Spanish Empire; and it took this line, despite the close dynastic alliances between the Bourbon and Stuart dynasties.[9]

Only on the outskirts of Europe, where monarchy by hereditary right was still regarded with the old superstitious veneration, did the Whitehall tragedy arouse a thrill of horror. For among the correspondents of Charles the First when in captivity was Alexis Romanov, the second Romanov Tsar and 'Autocrat of all the Russias'. At the Court of Moscow the news of the English regicide was received with boundless horror in that still Oriental land; a land not yet even superficially westernised by Peter the Great (the son of Alexis). Alexis, himself the executioner of Stenka Razin, Russia's first great revolutionary, sent money to assist Charles the Second, and declared that all legitimate sovereigns should unite in self-defence against the regicide English revolutionary government. Further, the Tsar issued a ukase (decree) expelling all English merchants from Russia 'as members of a nation guilty of regicide'. Henceforth, the loyal and orthodox Russian people were no longer to be contaminated by the import of foreign sedition by the revolutionary English. At all costs, the English revolution and its wicked ways must be kept out of 'Holy' Russia.

Writing in the twentieth century, it would seem that it is not only in the world of women's fashions that fashions are sharply reversed!

Appendix on Calvinism, the 'Marxism' of the Reformation: It seems to be an unvarying 'law' of revolutionary history that every vital social revolution is inspired by a dynamic ideology of its own. Thus, no serious historian would divorce the ideas of the French Jacobins from the theory of political democracy as put forward by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his famous book *The Social Contract*. Similarly, no one could adequately grasp the significance of the revolutions of our own day — in particular, of the Russian Revolution — without taking into account the revolutionary gospel preached by Karl Marx in nineteenth-century Europe.

In respect of its ideology, the great English revolution of the seventeenth century here also furnishes a yet further analogy to these revolutionary antitypes. The 'Karl Marx' of the bourgeois revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the French Reformer Jean Calvin (1509–1564) whose masterly summary of Protestant theology, *The Institutes* (1536), may be styled in respect of its general influence on the advanced political and religious movements of that age, as the *Das Kapital* of the revolutionary era of the Reformation. From Geneva, where the

9 Charles the First was the husband of the aunt of Louis the Fourteenth, Henrietta Maria: see Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la révolution française*, Volume 1 (Plon, Paris, 1897).

exiled French Reformer had made his headquarters — the 'Moscow' of the sixteenth century — a stream of revolutionary propaganda, and propagandists, had flowed out over the Western world. For Calvinism, unlike the Anglican and Lutheran reformations, was an international and a revolutionary movement, radically destructive not only of the mediæval Church, but equally of the entire structure of mediæval society.

We have not forgotten the role played by this Renaissance 'Bolshevism' in the Scotch Revolution in the sixteenth century. Nor was the influence of Calvinism much inferior in the English Revolution, particularly during its classic decade — 1649–59 — during which the Calvinistic army ruled England, and, it may be added, stamped upon it such indestructible traces of its influence that no amount of subsequent compromise has been able completely to efface them. To glance at the nature and influence of Calvin and his doctrine is accordingly as necessary for an adequate study of the English Revolution as would be some notice of the influence of Marx in relation to its Russian successor.

First as to the French Reformer himself. The Protestant historian, Frederic Seebohm, summarises his career in the following terms:

> He was a Frenchman born in 1509, and so was 25 years younger than Luther. He was educated at the Universities of Paris and Orleans, adopted the Augustinian theology, as Wycliffe, Huss and Luther had done, and became a Protestant. In France heretics were burned, so he left his home to travel in Italy and Germany. In 1536, just as Erasmus was passing to his rest, he came to Basle and began his work as a Protestant Reformer by publishing his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It was these *Institutes* of Calvin which gave rigid scholastic form to those Augustinian doctrines which, as we have said, were held in common by most Protestant Reformers from Wycliffe to Luther, but which have since been called 'Calvinistic'. He rejected Transubstantiation, which Luther did not altogether: and he founded his Church upon the republican basis of the congregation, rather than, as Luther did, on the civil power of the prince.

With regard to his doctrine, there can be little doubt but that it was his basic tenet of predestination, and the iron logic with which Calvin, alone of the Reformers, developed it, which explains its marvellous appeal to the rising bourgeois class of that era of the opening-up of the world market. Indeed, Calvin made himself the direct spokesman of this class by expressly allowing 'usury' — the financial transactions forbidden by the mediæval Church, but absolutely necessary to rising capitalism. The Geneva Reformer laid it down that there was no reason why the income from business should not be larger than that derived from the ownership of land. The doctrine of predestination was far from being new in the sixteenth century: for that matter, it can be traced back to St Augustine, even further, to the writings of St Paul in the New Testament itself.[10] In the case of Calvin, however, the Doctrine of Predestination, of Divine 'Election' — to world power — was just what the rising merchant class, with dazzling new horizons ever expanding before them, wanted at that particular juncture in their historic evolution. Predestination, accordingly, was the missing word for which everyone was waiting; once uttered by the Geneva Reformer the revolutionary merchant class of the epoch seized upon the inspired

10 See the 'Epistle to the Romans'.

slogan with marvellous avidity. Calvinistic Churches arose all over Europe, and, under the circumstances of that transitional age, in which religion and politics were still inseparably intertwined, Calvinism became a revolutionary theocracy, half an extremist republican party and half a new infallible Church — 'new Presbyter is but old priest large' as the extreme radical Milton phrased his protest against the ecclesiastical bureaucracy of the current Presbyterian Church of his day. As such, Calvinism was the revolutionary 'Left' of the day. It led the way in all the major revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

From the revolutionary angle I have elsewhere characterised the historic mission of Calvin in these terms:

> Calvin gave to the most revolutionary class of his day the assurance of its future success. He gave it that which it most required to steel its immature will-to-victory, to develop its consciousness that the future belonged to it.[11]

As for the revolutionary role of this ecclesiastical 'Bolshevism', a brilliant modernist theologian, after quoting with approval my above dictum, adds in this connection:

> It is worth noting too that Calvin's theory of Church government was democratic. He substituted the rule of the elected lay presbytery for that of priest and bishop. This fitted in with the genius of the rising merchant class which hated feudalism and the autocracy of the Church. It was Calvinism that founded a republic in Holland in the teeth of savage Church hostility implemented by Alva's cruelties; it was Calvinism that created Scottish intransigent Presbyterianism and the Covenanting spirit; it was Calvinism that created the republican spirit in England of the seventeenth century.[12]

In this last aspect of its activity, Calvinism formed the moral dynamic behind the great English revolution. If it did not succeed in permanently displacing Anglicanism, or in creating a republic in perpetuity, yet in one decade (1649–59) it left a permanent effect on the English race, which henceforth felt itself predestined to expand to the four corners of the world and to despoil and plunder the planet with phrases from the sacred writings on its lips. Already when the English bourgeoisie was hardly settled in the saddle and the blood on the Whitehall scaffold was scarcely dry, we find John Milton, with his marvellous poetic intention into the dawning needs of his class, boldly declaring in the true spirit of predestination, that whenever God has something good in store: 'He first reveals it to His Englishmen.'

The logic of History, unlike the iron logic of Calvin himself, pursues a winding road, and one unforeseen by its human protagonists, but we may nevertheless assert with confidence that both the major results of the English revolution of the seventeenth century evolved logically from the Calvinistic belief in predestination. The germs both of the industrial revolution and of the British Empire can be traced back to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the 'revolutionaries' hand-book' of the age of the Reformation and of the 'Primary Accumulation' of capital. We should probably not exaggerate if we call Calvinism the greatest of all revolutionary forces

11 FA Ridley, *The Jesuits: A Study in Counter-Revolution*, p 87.

12 JC Hardwick, *Totalitarianism: What It Really Means* (Murby, London, 1938), p 13.

prior to the French Revolution. A study of this important phenomenon from the angle provided by historical materialism represents one of the most urgent needs of Marxist historical literature.

Chapter VI: Oliver Cromwell — The Bourgeois 'Lenin'

Leon Trotsky once denominated Oliver Cromwell as the 'Lenin' of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, adding that in so doing paid Cromwell the greatest of compliments. The comparison is historically relevant: for the part played by Oliver Cromwell in the circumstances of the seventeenth-century English (capitalist) Revolution was broadly equivalent to that played by VI Lenin in the Russian (Socialist) Revolution of the twentieth century. The careers of both these great revolutionary leaders left an ineffaceable mark on the history of their respective countries and upon the history of revolution in general. I may add that, whilst the scope of Cromwell's genius was undoubtedly narrower than that of Lenin — a 'master-builder' in theory as well as practice — yet each age builds on the shoulders of its predecessors, and Cromwell, the greatest of all English revolutionaries hitherto, was in his day and generation as great a revolutionary as Lenin was in his. Trotsky's comment seems, accordingly, to be a trifle unfair.

This much can at least be confidently stated. Both the English and the Russian master of revolution was supreme in his own sphere, and this undisputed pre-eminence was admitted by the keenest minds of his own age. Apart from Fascists and 'Colonel Blimps', no one today could or would dispute that Lenin is the greatest man that the present century has so far known. As for Cromwell, the Venetian ambassador, who represented what was probably still the keenest and most experienced diplomatic service in Europe, referred to him in his own lifetime as 'a man rendered by fortune and industrious skill the most famous in the present century'. Adding that he exercised an 'authority and power, greater, without comparison, not only than that of all the kings that there have ever been in England, but also of all the monarchs who, at present, wield a sceptre in the world'.[1]

This much at least can be said of the comparison between the greatest English revolutionary and the greatest Russian revolutionary: without Oliver Cromwell and Nikolai Lenin, respectively, the great English and Russian Revolutions would resemble *Hamlet* without the immortal Prince of Denmark!

As the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell marked the decisive phase in the evolution of the English bourgeois revolution, I now propose to glance at the influence which was exercised by that dictatorship on the course of English revolutionary history. First, a word must be said on the biography of the first capitalist ruler of England.

Oliver Cromwell was born on 25 April 1599 of a Welsh family originally known as Williams. Having a remote relationship with Thomas Cromwell, the leader of the religious revolution in England, the family acquired considerable wealth as minor enclosure landlords, thus joining the ranks of the new capitalist oligarchy which was just then rising to economic pre-eminence on the proceeds of the confiscated Church lands. The newly-enriched Williams family took the name of Cromwell in gratitude to the founder of their family fortunes, Thomas Cromwell, the formidable Minister of Henry the Eighth, 'the hammer of the monks'. Sir Henry Cromwell was a prominent enclosure landlord in East Anglia under Elizabeth. His grandson Oliver

1 See Diplomatic report of the Venetian Ambassador, Giovanni Sagredo, dated 2 February 1656.

belonged, accordingly, by blood, upbringing and in time in his Calvinistic opinions, to the new social and economic capitalist forces, then on the eve of the bourgeois revolution.

The future Protector — who continued to sign himself periodically as 'Williams' — as a member of a cadet branch of the family was only moderately affluent, and his early career prior to the Civil War was quite without note. He went to Cambridge, but, like many other famous men, was not a success there and took no degree. In 1629 he sat in Parliament, but achieved no distinction there either. During the eleven years' autocracy of Charles — or, rather, of Strafford — Oliver Cromwell practised agriculture as an obscure 'gentleman-farmer' in Huntingdon, where he had already established connections among the 'Independents', left-wing Calvinistic sects (Puritan), of which East Anglia had been the chief stronghold ever since the days of the earliest immigration of Protestant doctrine from the Continent. During the eleven years' dictatorship of 'Black Tom' (Strafford), so gloomy appeared to be the prospects either for Cromwell personally or for his class to overthrow the absolute monarchy that, like the young Napoleon on the eve of the French Revolution, he contemplated migrating to America, where similar Puritan exiles from the tyranny of Strafford and Laud were, just then, laying the foundations of what was to become in time an Anglo-Saxon North America. But accident, or his obviously acute class instinct, kept him in England.[2]

Cromwell again sat in both the 1640 Parliaments, 'the Short' and 'the Long' Parliaments, but remained as an obscure backbencher until the constitutional phase was superseded by civil war. It has often been remarked that the leaders of the militant phase of a revolution are rarely the same men as led its earlier constitutional phase. Bolsheviks do not make good Mensheviks, nor Girondins, Jacobins. Cromwell was no exception to this rule. As a Parliamentarian he was not an outstanding success; he had none of the gifts of the born leader of a Parliamentary opposition, such as characterised Pym in his own generation or Shaftesbury in the generation after.

On the battlefield, it was different! Whilst Cromwell may not have been one of the world's greatest captains, he was undoubtedly a cavalry general of genius, besides being a born leader of men. The shrewd Venetian diplomat, already cited, testifies that he was 'equally apt with sword and tongue', adding that 'he is a man of firm and solid judgement, who knows the nature of the English as a riding-master his horse, and therefore, with a single movement of his cane, he makes them whirl about on every side'. In short, a most formidable military demagogue, ruthless, fanatical and withal, a master-opportunist, as and when the times called for political strategy. The very man, in short, to ride the storms of revolution into the harbour of dictatorship.

We have already noted the successive phases in Cromwell's military evolution. As successively, Captain, Colonel and Lieutenant-General of Horse, from the time of his first independent command (at the cavalry skirmish at Winceby), he revealed himself to be ever more clearly the military genius on the revolutionary side. From the decisive turning-point in the war at Marston Moor (2 July 1644), where the charge of his Ironsides established the ascendancy of the Parliamentary cavalry over

2 Incidentally, it is interesting to recall that Lenin also despaired of the revolution in the interval of black reaction between the failure of the first Russian Revolution in 1905–06 and the second, victorious one in 1917. A further interesting point of similarity between the two men who are perhaps the greatest modern revolutionaries.

that of the Royalist general, the fiery Prince Rupert, Cromwell became the real military leader of the revolution. Though not yet its nominal commander, he was the moving spirit in the formation of the 'New Model', and was the military genius of the decisive operations which finally 'liquidated' the Royalist cause. His was the ruthless will-to-power which impelled the public trial and execution of the intriguing King. Subsequently, in the campaigns of 1649–51 in Ireland and Scotland, Oliver Cromwell, now Commander-in-Chief ('Lord-General') in both fact and name, thoroughly conquered the British Isles, Ireland and Scotland, achieving this first necessity of rising British capitalism in three years; a task of unification which had baffled the energies of all England's kings since the time of Edward the First.

When the Civil War was finally ended at Worcester in 1651 (3 September), Cromwell had become the most powerful man in England. He ruled the Army, and the victorious Army ruled England.

In fact! For, in name, Parliament, or rather its 'Rump' (or 'tail-end' — a term of abuse), was still the legal government. But this Parliament was still predominantly Presbyterian, and out of sympathy with the left-wing Calvinists who dominated the Army; and, in any case, its whole history indicates that, whilst Parliament is the ideal instrument for conducting a bourgeois society in quiet times, it is altogether too cumbersome a political vehicle ever to become the norm of a bourgeois revolutionary dictatorship. The 'Rump' was degenerating into an effete oligarchy out of touch with revolutionary reality. Moreover, its Presbyterian Calvinist orthodoxy was itself becoming static, and therefore inevitably reactionary. For it is obvious that predestination, once its protagonists have 'arrived', must necessarily degenerate into a mere blind adherence to the status quo. Henceforth, the world is predestined *not* to advance. The world looks so different *after* dinner!

The centre of revolutionary gravity had now passed from the Parliament which had begun the war to the Army which had ended it. Since revolutions cannot stand still from their very nature, it was obvious that the government must necessarily pass from the reformist Parliament to the revolutionary Army, and the revolutionary genius who led it.

How Cromwell cut this Gordian knot with the sword is described in these terms by the keenest foreign diplomat accredited to his government, the Venetian Sagredo. For the Venetian oligarchy, the rulers of the oldest maritime state in Europe, already a flourishing commercial state in the days of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy, insisted on the most accurate reports of all contemporary events, and its diplomatic news was of unequalled accuracy. Writing to his government, the Venetian ambassador, after reporting the course of the Dutch war, the greatest achievement of the short-lived Parliamentary Commonwealth, went on to describe the forcible dissolution of the 'Rump' by Cromwell.

> In the end [he tells us], jealousy in various forms began to pullulate between the Army and the Parliament. The latter claimed superiority, owing to its being the representative of the people of England; the former, instead, with the protection of its general, exaggerated the services rendered by it to the state — it having shed its blood in several factions — and would not permit the reform desired by Parliament to weaken the strength of the army.
>
> This want of harmony degenerated into jealousy and open suspicion, and Parliament studying in various sittings the ways to

moderate Cromwell's abuse of power; he, foreseeing the blow (aimed at him) with virile resolution, sent divisions of troops to the principal places in London, entered Parliament suddenly, accompanied by several officers, and said: 'That they sucked the purest blood in the veins of the English to transfer it to their private purses; that everyone was weary of submitting any longer to the misfortunes caused by their imprudent conduct; that for too long a period they had played the part of a prince which did not appertain to them, and that, therefore, they should despoil themselves of the royal mantle and authority and return to their homes, the comedy now being over.'

Amazed and depressed by the daring attempt, the members of Parliament looked at one another, awaiting what the Speaker, the President of the House, would say; and he, taking the Mace, the symbol of the authority of Parliament, asked Cromwell on what authority he claimed to expel a Parliament, composed of members representing the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, it having had authority to make the King himself submit to its judgement, and having conferred on him himself the office of General, then exercised by him.[3]

Then Cromwell, pointing to his sword, replied that in it were placed his reasons, and, snatching from the Speaker's hand the Mace, thrust him out of his seat, which was also done by his followers to the other Parliamentarians, who then left in terror and confusion, without finding any remedy, or any resurrection for their broken-down hopes.[4]

Such was the famous dissolution of the 'Rump' (20 April 1653), the definite supersession of the reformist Parliament by the revolutionary Army, as recorded by a keenly objective contemporary. The sword of revolution had triumphed over the Mace of Parliamentary 'gradualness'. This dramatic *coup d'état* avoided the theatrical by virtue of its very effectiveness: it was the culminating point, the intense *mise-en-scène*, of the English bourgeois revolution. Henceforth, rising English capitalism entered upon that phase of revolutionary dictatorship, which appears from the records of revolutionary history in general from the days of the Greek 'Tyrants' to those of the revolutions of our own day, to be an inseparable phase in the evolution of every rising social class with an historic mission to fulfil. It seems that every dynamic revolution sooner or later comes up against the necessity of removing the 'Mace' — of defying and openly violating its current legality.[5] For the legal system of an old worn-out society can never be the norm of a new dynamic one.

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3 It was at this point that there occurred the famous episode, one not mentioned by our authority, when Cromwell, pointing to the Mace, said: 'Take away this bauble.'

4 See Eucardio Momigliano, *Cromwell* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1929), appendix, pp 290–91. Sagredo adds that the *coup d'état* was popular. A contemporary Royalist pamphlet accuses Cromwell of dissolving Parliament so summarily in order to forestall an inquiry into his embezzlement of the funds of the Welsh bishoprics. A typical counter-revolutionary slander.

5 To remove the Mace is not, of course, under all conditions a synonym for revolutionary activity. Indeed, we recall that this self-same symbol of the British Constitution was itself removed by a Labour MP some years ago, one John Beckett. But then did not Karl Marx once acutely observe that 'history repeats itself, first as tragedy, and then as farce'? Appropriately enough, Beckett later became a Fascist; a logical end for a man who has so little comprehension of the inner logic of history as to confuse its symbolic actions!

Henceforth, Cromwell ruled as Dictator, under the title of 'Lord Protector' (16 December 1653–3 September 1658). As I am not writing his biography it is unnecessary for me to expatiate upon the details of this well-known phase in his career. Suffice it to say that Cromwell, like Julius Caesar before him, and like our own contemporary dictators, soon found occasion to realise the truth of the ancient Chinese aphorism, that 'a dictator is a man who rides upon a tiger and who cannot dismount'.

For whilst Cromwell, as Sagredo testifies, grew more moderate as he acquired more power, and sincerely strove to veil his military dictatorship under at least a mask of constitutional legality, yet this proved increasingly impossible of achievement. Cromwell's Parliaments, drawn chiefly from the Calvinistic Left, proved both too radical and too intractable for the Protector.[6] More and more, Cromwell was forced to approximate his power to that of a monarch. He obtained the title of 'His Highness', the right to nominate his successor (1656), and twice he refused the Crown. By the end of his 'reign' he had entirely alienated the extreme Left, and had he lived a decade longer — he was still under 60 when he died, worn out by anxiety and hard work — or had his sons been men of his own calibre, it seems quite certain that the Welsh Williams–Cromwell dynasty would have repeated the succession of the Welsh Tudors, who had but little better claim to succeed to the throne. Had that come to pass, no doubt, the tempo of English capitalism would have been quickened by its avoidance of the partial swing-back represented by the Stuart Restoration (1660–88), and the industrial revolution, the logical successor of the bourgeois political revolution, might have come some half a century earlier.

Such avoidable frustrations belong to the inevitable accidental element which no mechanical causation can ever entirely exclude from the historic evolution of our race. But, excluding might-have-beens, Oliver Cromwell was both the greatest and the most influential revolutionary in English (or British) history. His career constituted a landmark both in the annals of the bourgeois revolution and in those of this nation. At this work of the English 'Lenin' we can now usefully direct a glance.

The five years' rule of Cromwell exercised an influence upon English history that is fully comparable to that exerted on the course of modern Russian history by the five years' rule of Lenin. This influence can be considered under three headings; the influence of Cromwell's dictatorship on the evolution of English capitalism, on British foreign policy, and on the foundation of the British Empire. For on each of these aspects of English capitalist development the effect of Cromwell's rule was decisive. England was never the same again after his epoch-making rule. The Restoration undid his work only superficially. In essence, it remained irrevocable.

I: Effects of Cromwell's Dictatorship on English Society: As we have already seen, the English totalitarian state was abolished by the Long Parliament in 1640–41. In this connection, Cromwell was faced with a *fait accompli*. Since his dictatorial regime represented only an interlude in the development of the English bourgeoisie, which later reverted to its normal Parliamentary form, we cannot ascribe to Cromwell any legislative enactment comparable, say, to that exercised on French society after the revolution by Napoleon's epoch-making 'Civil Code', which no less

6 That assembly usually known after the MP Praise-God Barebones, introduced legislation on Civil Marriage and Law Reform more radical than anything known up to and including the present day. The conservative legal profession celebrated its enforced dissolution with a bonfire.

a person than Marx himself has indicated as the very epitome and juridical core of a developing bourgeois society. There is no 'Code-Cromwell' enshrined in our laws as a permanent memorial of the all-transforming dictatorship of the English 'Buonaparte'. But the effect of Oliver's rule, if less direct in its result, exercised, nonetheless, a profound influence upon the subsequent course of English historic development, not so much by its incidental laws as in its general cumulative effect.

Speaking broadly, we may summarise this epochal change by stating that the dictatorship of Cromwell marked the definitive, the irrevocable victory of capitalism and Protestantism in English society. Before him, the issue was open; after him, it was closed, and capitalism, with an insular form of Protestantism as its religious ideology, became the very warp and woof, bone and sinew, of the English society and national consciousness. In 1588, with the Armada; in 1605, with the 'Gunpowder Plot', again, under Archbishop Laud, there was a definite danger that the work of the Reformation would be undone, and that rising English capitalism would be crushed under the spiritual and temporal heel of the Roman-Spanish Counter-Reformation. After the iron broom of Cromwell had swept clear the Augean Stables of mediævalism and absolutism, that issue was closed, and the English bourgeoisie marched boldly forward towards its promised land; towards the industrial revolution and 'the workshop of the world'. Henceforth, reaction could only struggle obviously *against* the forward-flowing stream: even its successes were therefore only ephemeral and doomed to a speedy dissolution.

We can sum up the place occupied in English history by the revolutionary dictatorship of Cromwell, as the high-water mark of the advancing bourgeois revolution: as the 'Rubicon' across which the revolutionary merchant class passed onward to the seats of power. If the dictatorial form taken by Cromwell's government was subsequently discarded by the bourgeois revolution, its essence nevertheless remained.

II: On British Foreign Policy: Technically, English foreign policy falls outside the scope of this book. As, however, Cromwell nowhere expressed more accurately the needs of English capitalism, or acted more dynamically than in this sphere, a word may usefully be added with regard to it. For Cromwell's foreign policy formed the most brilliant and sensational aspect of his rule. He united the British Isles by his conquests, thus giving English capitalism its first and most essential expansion on to the 'British' scale. He waged the first *aggressive* wars of English capitalism, against her old rival, Spain, and her new rival, Holland. 'The Navigation Act' of 1650, which struck directly at the carrying-trade of Holland — the second great rival, next after Spain, of English capitalism — may be styled the *Magna Carta* of Britain as a world power.

In pursuit of its new dynamic expansion, England, for the first time in its modern history, became a great power. Cromwell, the dynamic leader of the new capitalist England, was feared and courted by Catholic and Protestant powers alike. Spain and Holland felt the heavy hand of this new maritime Empire; France courted the alliance of this regicide England; Cromwell's long arm extended even to the Alpine valleys of Piedmont, where he intervened effectually to save the Protestant Waldenses (Vaudois, akin to the Lollards) from the persecuting hand of Rome.

Even the Pope trembled in the Vatican before the guns of Admiral Blake, under the command of whom the English fleet penetrated for the first time into the Mediterranean, and laid the foundations of Britain's maritime supremacy in the

'Great Sea' of classical and mediæval times; the first stage on her sea-road to world empire.

III: Cromwell and the British Empire: Oliver Cromwell can be accurately styled as the founder of the British Empire. The war against Holland — 1652–54 — was England's first imperialist war — using that term in its more general sense as implying empire-building. Jamaica, the oldest Crown Colony of the British Empire, was acquired (1655) in Cromwell's war against Spain. Admiral Blake, as remarked above, laid the corner-stone of British world sea-power. If Disraeli may be taken as the flamboyant symbol of British imperialism at its imperialist zenith, Cromwell may equally be taken as its dynamic founder.[7]

Above all, the British Empire was the fruit of Calvinistic predestination. Boundless horizons opened up before the English Calvinistic bourgeoisie flushed with victory alike over English Cavaliers, Scottish Presbyterians and Irish Papist priests. With the same grim determination that had caused them to ride down the royal squadrons at Marston Moor, Naseby and Worcester, the new Puritan rulers of England fixed their gaze on the illimitable ocean horizons that stretched out beyond the narrow seas of mediæval times. And this expansionist urge, favoured by an opportune historical headwind, was destined in time to a development so gigantic as far to surpass the wildest dreams and the craziest ambitions of even the most aggressive English merchant who demanded vehemently a fight to the finish impartially against both 'godless' Catholic Spain and 'godly' Protestant Holland, the old and the new monopolists of the world market.

The connection between Calvinistic predestination and the foundation of the British Empire has been vigorously expressed by the famous modern revolutionary already cited in the course of these pages. On this point, Trotsky writes:

> A fool, an ignoramus, or a Fabian, may see in Cromwell *only* a personal dictator. For, in actuality, here, in the conditions of a profound social rupture, the personal dictatorship was the form adopted by a class dictatorship, and of that class which alone was capable of freeing the kernel of the nation from the old shells and husks… Then Cromwell formed a Parliament from representatives of god-fearing people, in other words, essentially a class Parliament; the god-fearing were the middle-class, who with the assistance of a stern morality, consummated the work of accumulation, and with texts from the sacred writings on their lips set to work on the despoliation of the whole world.[8]

We can in fact say that Oliver Cromwell, the forerunner of the industrial revolution, was the direct founder of the British Empire.

I conclude, accordingly, that Oliver Cromwell's dictatorship represented that historic phase during which England definitively passed from pre-capitalist to capitalist conditions of social existence. As the representative of the new aggressive and dynamic social order, he ruled with a vigour and success not even remotely approached by any preceding English government. He dominated Europe, subjugated the seas, united the British Isles, and recalled the Jews. The tide of red

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7 Incidentally, it was under Cromwell that the Jews, expelled from England by Edward the First, returned to the British Isles: English capitalism was now strong enough to face their competition.

8 Leon Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?* (CPGB, London, 1926), p 128, emphasis in original.

vigorous blood flowed throughout the robust veins of the new capitalist empire, already straining forward to world horizons. And Cromwell was worthy of the unique occasion. The first, he was also the greatest ruler that the English capitalist state has ever known in any phase of its historic evolution.

Oliver Cromwell died on 3 September 1658, at the age of 59. He died in the midst of a great storm. 'The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of Princes' and, according to a contemporary Royalist pamphlet, this storm denoted that the Evil One himself was coming in person for the soul of the regicide Dictator who had for so long embodied his will upon earth. Indeed, it was not long before Cromwell became himself the godfather, so to speak, of Satan.

For, a few years later, after the Stuart Restoration, his former secretary and panegyrist John Milton, now the poet of a temporarily lost cause, wrote his great epic *Paradise Lost*, which effectually recreated Satan in its author's own mould.

For, prior to 1665, when the great epic first appeared, the Prince of Darkness had been both the proverbial 'gentleman' and the frolicsome mediæval Puck, but the Satan of the great revolutionary poet was himself also a revolutionary! It has often been commented that the hero of *Paradise Lost* is the arch-fiend himself, temporarily vanquished, but with unconquerable resolution preparing his revolutionary army to defy omnipotent destiny and again to storm heaven. 'Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven.'

The artist of genius does not, because of his 'inspiration', any the less cease to be a man participating in the life and social struggles of his age. In his portrait of Satan the revolutionary apologist of regicide, Milton has given us a portrait of the English Revolution itself, a portrait recognisably derived from its greatest protagonist, 'Old Noll' (Cromwell), himself the symbol of the heroic era of revolution in England.

For the Satan of *Paradise Lost* is the symbolic embodiment of the revolution, temporarily defeated by the Restoration of 1660, but already, in the pit of defeat and persecution, gathering its forces, undaunted, for a renewed attack; for the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89 which, and this time finally, will install the capitalist class at the helm of the English state and will fashion England itself permanently in the likeness of its capitalist rulers.

Appendix I: The Left-Wing Sects of the Commonwealth Era: In the course of social evolution revolutions represent fundamentally more than merely dramatic episodes. For there is ample scientific evidence for stating that, as in biological, so also in social evolution, history proceeds not only by gradual evolution, but equally by 'leaps'. A revolution, like the appearance of a new organic species, represents an abrupt and catastrophic emergence of new vital forces; the culmination of a long precedent transformation below the surface of human society, which then suddenly discovers the tremendous, though hitherto unsuspected, forces latent in its social composition.

For these reasons a genuine social revolution is not, and from its nature can never be, a movement purely and simply political in and by its very essence. On the contrary, the fiercest intellectual and moral activity form equally indispensable and inevitable aspects of its evolution.

In the case of the great English Revolution of the seventeenth century, no less than of its French and Russian antitypes in more modern times, a tremendous mental and moral afflatus of dynamic inspiration accompanied and paralleled the emergence of the new social order. Those hopeless pedants and benighted 'Blimps',

those incurable social morons, to whom the record of revolution is merely so much 'sound and fury, signifying nothing', should study the formidable intellectual and moral effects of the great English Revolution as set forth, for example, pre-eminently in Edward Bernstein's brilliant book *Cromwell and Communism*.[9]

Unhappily, the whole vital and glowing intellectual aspect of the great English Revolution will have to be entirely passed over in this summary 'outline' of the English revolutionary tradition. To attempt to cover every aspect of this vast field would require not a moderate-sized volume such as is the present one, but a many-volumed veritable 'encyclopaedia of revolution', in order to cover it at all adequately. And yet, in spite of all this, we are still told *ad nauseam* that there is no revolutionary tradition in England!

I must therefore content myself with observing that the era of the Commonwealth and Protectorate produced an entire galaxy of brilliant revolutionary literature. Such books as Milton's *Areopagatica: A Plea For Unlicensed Printing*, that inspiring herald of the freedom of the press, and Harrington's *Oceana*, are of course classics, yet they were not perhaps even the greatest masterpieces of their kind.

Not only in literature, but in science and philosophy, was the age one of the most brilliant and daring speculation. 'The Royal Society', for so long the intellectual leader of modern science, though formally constituted — as its name implies — after the Restoration, arose from the vital germs so freely scattered throughout the most dynamic revolutionary era in our national history. And, however pressed for space, his natural sense of piety must compel any English historian whose work proceeds throughout in accordance with the methodology of historical materialism, to find room for the immortal name of Richard Overton, free-thinker and political 'Leveller', the first English materialist philosopher, whose epoch-making book *Man's Mortality* (1643–55), laid the corner-stone of English materialist philosophy.

That Richard Overton, along with the author of *Killing No Murder*,[10] is today an unknown figure in the annals of English literature, merely demonstrates the intensely reactionary character of modern English society and its professional apologists, the modern university historians, to whom any mistress of Charles the Second — who founded a 'noble' family! — or Royalist reactionary hack, is of incomparably greater importance than Richard Overton, who said the first, if not the last, word on scientific philosophy — viz, materialism — or than the author of the most formidable indictment of an oppressive dictatorship that English or indeed, probably, world literature can boast.

Unfortunately, I must perforce content myself with the briefest references to the three most significant left-wing sects of the day, as this is all the space that I can afford. But, in the lack of any really British scientific work on the intellectual aspect of the great English Revolution, I must again refer the interested reader to Bernstein's excellent book. That so scientific an historian could have become in practice a reformist revisionist of Marxism!

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9 It is a curious but undeniable fact that social-democrats, like Bernstein, the original proponent of reformist 'revisionism' in pre-1914 Germany, and Kautsky, the reformist critic of the Bolsheviks, yet make excellent historians of revolutions long dead and over. It is, of course, axiomatic that no revolution is ever recognised as respectable by any typical social-democrat until it has ceased to represent any possible danger to his contemporary ruling class!

10 See *infra*, Appendix II.

The Great Rebellion was, of course, objectively a bourgeois revolution. But it would be a great mistake, therefore, to suppose that it was one consciously so in the minds of its most active adherents. In fact, it has always been a characteristic feature of bourgeois revolutions in general that the capitalists can only make their revolution with the support of other interested classes in society.

For instance, in the English Revolution the victory of the bourgeoisie would have been impossible but for the support of the yeomen (peasants) and of the left-wing radical religious sects. Yet neither the peasants — doomed to extinction by the large-scale agriculture of the very capitalism they had fought to bring about — nor the religious extremists — who expected not capitalism, but the speedy inauguration of the apocalyptic reign on earth of 'King Christ' — had any idea of the real nature of the actual social forces at work. When the gulf between historical reality and visionary expectation became too sharp and obvious to be ignored, the ultra-lefts of the period went into opposition and formed the three sects of 'Levellers', 'Diggers' and 'Quakers', at which a glance must now be directed.

i: The Levellers: In reality, the Levellers were not so much a definite sect as a loosely connected assortment of military, religious and political radicals. Their common denominator was hostility to Cromwell and to the conservative tendencies increasingly displayed by his regime after the conclusion of the Civil War, when the new state of things began to take measures to stabilise itself. These 'Levellers' — as their name implied — wanted a more radical social order. Their representative, Colonel Rainborough, expressly demanded universal suffrage on the ground that such a political equality must logically lead to economic equality. Cromwell and the 'Grandees' (as the Levellers styled the High Command) opposed it on precisely these grounds.

In general, the Levellers drew their chief strength from the Army. Their political leader was the great agitator, 'Honest' John Lilburn (1614–1657) the stormy petrel of his day, who served a record number of prison sentences under, successively, the Monarchy, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate. Their chief military representatives were General Harrison, the leader of Cromwell's shock-troops and of the millenarian 'Fifth-Monarchy Men', who believed in the proximate Second Coming of Christ, and Richard Rumbold, whose immortal declaration of equality before his execution under James the Second (in 1685) figures on the title page of this book.

The Levellers staged several mutinies and gave Cromwell and his 'grandees' considerable trouble on quite a number of occasions, but, in general, their programme was too vague and their social support too incoherent to afford them any real chance of seizing power. The social future, then and for a long time after, still rested with fast-expanding capitalism.

Indeed, under the conditions of that era of boundless 'primary accumulation', when society was storing up in its power-house the vast potential resources disclosed a century later in the industrial revolution, 'Levelling' was uneconomic, and therefore ultimately reactionary. To acquire, not to share, was still the effective motto of a pre-industrial society. It was this basic economic fact that made capitalism then an historic necessity, and its left critics merely Quixotic dreamers, who looked indeed far into the future; but too far, for they overlooked an entire historical epoch; that era of capitalist world expansion which lay before them for two centuries of political and industrial revolution and of unprecedented material and technical progress in every sphere.

ii: The Diggers: The Levellers, then, may be defined as the left wing of the Army. But, as, proverbially, there are depths below depths, so to the left of the Levellers were the 'true Levellers', or 'Diggers', as they were ironically styled from their solitary practical experiment. In themselves, the 'Diggers' had no influence on the life of the times. Nonetheless, they deserve to be remembered in particular for two reasons: alone of the numerous politico-religious institutions of the era they preached pure communism; and their theoretician and spokesman was Gerard Winstanley, one of the most remarkable men even in that most remarkable age. A man of whom it is no exaggeration to state that he was the first theoretician of the class struggle in England.

The practical activity of the 'Diggers' can be briefly passed over. On Sunday, 8 April 1649, a group of men appeared in Cobham, in the county of Surrey, and began to dig some uncultivated land on St George's Hill in that vicinity. When challenged as to the legality of this proceeding they declared that the land had been stolen from the people at the Norman Conquest, and that they were merely restoring the aboriginal common ownership. When taken before General Fairfax they refused to take off their hats, but offered no resistance to the soldiers, asserting that pacifism and communism went inseparably together.

The age of both, however, still lay far in the future, and the Cobham experiment was quickly disposed of by the armed forces of the capitalist state. The newly arrived bourgeoisie had not made their revolution to abolish private property, but merely to bring property relations into line with the needs of the newly discovered world market

In themselves, the 'Diggers' accomplished precisely nothing. But they nonetheless deserve mention, if only for the sake of Winstanley's association with this sect.

On the social influence of this remarkable man, Bernstein writes:

> And in this respect we may say without exaggeration as to Winstanley that, although not 'armed with the whole of the science of his century', he was as a socialist ahead of his age. He represented the most advanced ideas of his time; in his Utopia we find coalesced all the popular aspirations engendered and fertilised by the revolution.

Gerard Winstanley was a Lancashire man and a Freeman of the City of London, who had lost his money through fraud. He was the author of numerous pamphlets, of which the famous *Light Shining from Buckinghamshire*, and *The Law of Freedom on a Platform; or True Magistracy Restored*, are the chief — the latter is a kind of manifesto of the Diggers' sect.

In these pamphlets Winstanley advances a scheme of thoroughgoing communism. In this he was interesting and stimulating, but scarcely original; we have already seen that belief in some kind of communism was virtually endemic amongst the left-wing sects of the Reformation era. But Winstanley was more than a mere academic theoretician of Utopian communism. He was quite definitely also *the first theoretician of the class struggle in England*; an epoch-making role. For Winstanley had a quite lucid picture of English history as an age-old struggle between the ruling class, whom he identified with the Norman conquerors, and the oppressed masses, whom he identified with the Saxons. This classification of Winstanley is definitely the first analysis of English history in terms of class struggle: it will be clear from the first part of this book — with reference to Fitz-Osbert, in particular — that this

theory contains a very large element of truth indeed; as much, perhaps, as was possible to an age which had no scientific conception of the real nature of surplus value, and it stamps its author as a man of genius. In 1649, Winstanley, the unlettered 'Digger', who regarded academic learning with a healthy revolutionary contempt, had already got further than have our academic pundits in 1948, to whom the real nature of a class-divided society still represents an unfathomable mystery sealed with seven seals!

I have space only for two quotations from the great Digger's own writings:

> And if by conquest he [the landed proprietor — FAR] calls the earth his and not mine, it must be either by the conquest of the Kings over the Commoners or by the conquest of the Commoners over the Kings.

The work of the state Church, he adds, is 'to persuade the multitude of people to let William the Conqueror alone have possession and government of the earth and to call it his and theirs so as not to rebel against him'.

Already in 1649–58, during which time Winstanley's total literary output can be dated, this lonely seer of genius, living spiritually centuries ahead of its time, saw English history as a unified whole, united by an age-old 'class' struggle between the haughty Norman nobles and prelates and the oppressed masses, the victims of their class arrogance and economic rapacity. And he saw — already in 1649 — that the *only* solution of this basic social problem lay in the revolutionary activity of the downtrodden masses leading to the downfall of their historic oppressors and to a classless communistic society.

Winstanley's social ideas were so far in advance of his age that he lived in obscurity and died in his bed! Until the last generation his name has been barely known to academic history. It will be not the least task of an English communistic society, based on scientific socialism — the only possible solution of the class struggle — to disinter from his long oblivion the memory of this great pioneer, and, at long last, to give his rightful place amongst the great men of our race to Gerard Winstanley, pioneer of English scientific socialism and, we may truly add, our first scientific and revolutionary historian.

iii: The Quakers: Alone of the originally revolutionary sects of the era of the Commonwealth the Quakers still survive and flourish — very much so, indeed! — in our midst. In fact, so great is the 'sea-change' that this once militant sect has undergone during the last three centuries that many of my readers may query its right to be called a revolutionary sect in any sense whatever of the term. What, it may well be asked, have the wealthy bourgeois pacifists of the 'Society of Friends' got in common with that era of 'storm and stress', the great revolution of the seventeenth century?[11]

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11 The originally poor Quakers became rich because they were the first to discover those pre-eminently capitalist 'virtues', honesty — proverbially 'the best policy' — and punctuality, which Protestantism was the first to exalt as a *religious* virtue: 'the proletarian who is late at the factory gate cannot be in time at the door of Heaven', as I have elsewhere phrased it. For the Quaker his word was his bond. He cut out the immemorial haggling of the market with his categorical 'yes' and 'nay'. As a result he — unconsciously at first — cashed in on the most valuable of all commodities in the dawning capitalist era — viz, time! He cut out waste. This most mystical of all sects is in fact one of the best extant examples of the workings of historical materialism.

Nonetheless, institutions are not seldom changed out of recognition by circumstances: Christianity itself, that originally anti-Roman Zionist movement which still survives in the glaring colours of the Early Christian Book of 'Revelations', and which has yet survived to become the 'Roman' Church, is itself not the least apt illustration of such a change.

In the case of the Quakers, Bernstein and other historians of the millenarian movements of the Commonwealth era have demonstrated beyond dispute that the followers of George Fox were originally a militant politico-religious radical sect akin to the Levellers and Diggers.

The evidence for this assumption may be briefly summarised.

The term 'Friends' was also used by the Diggers, the uncompromising pacifist tenets of whom we have just noted. Both Lilburne, the leader of the Levellers, and Winstanley, the Digger, died as Quakers (1657; after 1658). Indeed, a Restoration work of controversy — *Christianity No Enthusiasm* — by an Anglican ecclesiastic, Thomas Comber, Dean of Durham (1678), names Winstanley explicitly as the founder of the sect.[12] Furthermore, the Venetian diplomat Sagredo, in its very earliest days — the Quakers are usually dated as an organised sect from 1652 — refers to the sect in these terms:

> Thus he [Cromwell — FAR] has kept changing his religion according to the interests of the state, and he thinks it useful to his policy that in London 246 religions are professed, all agreeing in their alienation to the Pope, but all different and hostile to one another. This disunion of so many different religions causes them all to be weak, *and there is not one of them with followers so numerous as to cause him apprehension*.
>
> There is one religion called the Quakers; these meet in a large room and begin to shake and tremble till they let themselves fall to the ground, and, after remaining there some time as if asleep, in what they call ecstasy, they stand up again and preach extravagant and ridiculous things. There are the Adamites, the Anabaptists, the Lutherans, the Calvinists and endless other sects, to the number of 246.[13]

It is obvious from the portion of the above quotation which I have emphasised that the government of Cromwell regarded these sects, including the Quakers, as a possible source of danger. Nor is this at all surprising in view of the virtually inseparable association of political, economic and religious radicalism which was the characteristic feature of all the left-wing sects of the Commonwealth era.

Moreover, in the case of the Quakers, not all the early members of the 'Society of Friends' were of the harmless type since symbolic of the society. All the early Quakers, including the founder, George Fox himself, had fought on the Commonwealth side in the great Civil War.

Further, the sober Fox was not the only, or, maybe, even the most typical representative of the earliest Quakers. Sagredo testifies to the extravagant mysticism of so many early Quakers, and we have not forgotten the Messianic entry of the Quaker James Naylor into Bristol (1656) in the character of Christ, with crowds

12 In possible justification of Comber's statement it must be remembered that we know nothing of Winstanley's last years, even the date of his death is unknown. He may have been very active in his last years in the Quaker movement. He certainly influenced it.

13 Cited in Momigliano, *Cromwell*, p 300, our emphasis.

crying 'Hosanna', and an escort of adoring disciples who acclaimed Naylor, Fox's chief rival in the leadership of the sect in its earliest days, as God Himself. The ferocious tortures inflicted upon Naylor by special Act of Parliament demonstrated that the government was seriously alarmed at the revolutionary potentialities of Quakerism.[14]

Indeed, it seems to have been fully justified. From the days of Jesus to those of the Soudanese Miandi, Messiah and rebel have usually been synonymous terms. Indeed, the ferocious persecution of the Quakers by both the Protectorate and the Restoration Monarchy shows that the Society of Friends was regarded by all contemporary governments as a revolutionary society. Where there was so much smoke, there must have been, it seems, at least some fire.

I conclude accordingly that in the Quaker society we have before our eyes a living link with the days of Lilburne, Harrison and Winstanley, and with that most dynamic and vital era in English history, the epoch of the greatest and most far-reaching revolution hitherto recorded in the annals of this nation.

Appendix II: ***Killing No Murder***: Oliver Cromwell died of overwork and worry, the latter being accentuated by the exalted and neurotic temperament which he had in common with so many of the Puritan zealots of that age. But over and above such general moods of religious exaltation there was another more concrete cause for fear in the case of the regicide Protector: he himself lived in constant fear of assassination, to avert which he took the most extraordinary precautions.

His fears were not without solid ground. For as he was driving through the streets of London to assume the Protectorate, a huge stone crashed through the glass roof of his magnificent state coach, missing the dictator by a hairsbreadth. As the unpopularity of his military-Calvinistic dictatorship increased, with its military martinets, the major-generals who ruled England in the later years of the Protectorate, its heavy taxation, and its suppression of such gaiety as had survived from mediæval 'Merry England', attempts against the Protector's life grew more frequent. Finally, they culminated in the daring plot of Miles Sindercomb, a disciple of Richard Overton, the 'soul-sleeper', to murder Cromwell as he passed along Whitehall in January 1657.

This plot indeed failed, thanks to Cromwell's efficient and ubiquitous spy-system — for the English 'Lenin' also had his 'Cheka'! — but Cromwell was badly scared. In June of the same year his fear of being 'taken off' was in no way diminished by the surreptitious publication of the famous pamphlet *Killing No Murder*, written under the name of William Allen, but actually by Edward Sexby, an ex-Ironside and Leveller, who had been forced to flee the country on account of his intransigent opposition to the Protector.

Killing No Murder is probably both in form and in substance the greatest pamphlet in the English language — and we are in no way forgetful of the formidable nature of the competition. De Quincey's justly celebrated *Murder as One of the Fine Arts* itself does not surpass in exquisite irony the opening adjuration to Cromwell to consider the benefits that he will confer upon humanity by allowing himself to be assassinated. Milton and Burke at their very best do not surpass the sublimity of the author's language, and no liberal political philosopher ever penned a more trenchant and penetrating summary of the permanent characteristics that are endemic to the rule of every dictatorship. We will not spoil *Killing No Murder* by

14 The Whip, the Pillory and the red-hot Branding Iron were all included by Parliament itself by special sentence after a week's debate on Naylor's case alone.

incidental quotations. The whole pamphlet is required reading for every British revolutionary who wishes to see what that magnificent instrument of expression, the English language, can do when it comes to arguing a revolutionary case. It is our greatest piece of revolutionary literature.

The author of this pamphlet, written avowedly to advocate the murder of Cromwell, Edward Sexby, wrote the pamphlet in Holland, where he was striving to form a united front of the extreme left and right — of Levellers and Royalists — against the Protectorate, as the common enemy of both, which had proved too strong to be overthrown by either singly.[15] The famous pamphlet was printed in Holland, but was smuggled into England at the end of May 1657 by its author, who had himself been at one time employed (in France) by Cromwell's secret service.

It made a tremendous sensation immediately upon its first appearance. Among its most interested readers was the Protector himself! Indeed, though the pamphlet failed to achieve its declared objective, yet Sexby enjoyed the curious satisfaction of at least helping to achieve by his pen what he could not accomplish by means of the dagger: it seems fairly certain that the tremendous impression which we know to have been made upon Cromwell by the pamphlet was definitely a contributory cause of his death by the intense anxiety that it caused him. A strangely effective demonstration of the proverb that 'the pen is mightier than the sword' — or, in this case, than the dagger!

The author of *Killing No Murder* did not himself survive to witness the death of its *bête noire*. He had put his head into the lion's mouth once too often. He was caught by the Protector's political police on 24 July, just as he was about to embark for Holland.[16] On the following 13 January (1658) he committed 'suicide', 'whilst mentally deranged' in the Tower where he had been confined. Readers of *Killing No Murder* itself will recall the eloquent passage in which its author explains how his fellow-conspirator Miles Sindercomb, the would-be assassin of Cromwell, had also committed 'suicide' in the Tower. The author then goes on to explain what is the real meaning of the word 'suicide' under a dictatorship! Yet whilst most academic historians apparently accept the suicide of the great pamphleteer as genuine, we, with all our modern experience of the ways of dictatorships and of their political police, will have no difficulty in agreeing with Sexby on this point, and of adding the name of the greatest English revolutionary pamphleteer to the martyr-list of English rebels who died for their opinions.

I wish to add a final point upon the disputed question of the authorship of *Killing No Murder*; upon which my researches will, I think, enable me to shed a certain amount of fresh light. It is generally agreed that the nom-de-plume of the writer, 'William Allen', is a supposition. There was indeed a well-known Leveller of the period known as William Allen, but he, when questioned by Cromwell personally as to his authorship of the pamphlet, denied it point-blank, adding frankly that he wished he had written it! It is to Cromwell's lasting credit that Allen did not suffer for this bold avowal. After the Restoration, one Captain Titus claimed the authorship and later brought out a bowdlerised edition to give it an anti-French

15 He had just had an interview with Charles the Second, stipulating beforehand that he 'should not have to bend the knee' to the King.

16 Cromwell had a most efficient secret police, under the very competent direction of his able Secretary of State John Thurloe, who owed his life after the Restoration to the unique knowledge that he had acquired! Thanks to him, Cromwell knew the secrets of every government in Europe.

bias. This fact alone is sufficient to prove that he was not the author of *Killing No Murder*, which, in particular, its white-hot peroration, was evidently written by a man of fanatical sincerity. Whoever wrote the great pamphlet, he was evidently not a political swindler.

In general, everything that we know about him and his contemporary movements points to Sexby as the author. There is in fact only one formidable objection to his authorship, and it is precisely that which I believe that I can solve.

How, it has often been objected, could a rough soldier without any special cultural facilities have had at his finger-ends that ready-made arsenal of classical and theological citations, of which his work is so full? A mastery of English classical prose could indeed be possessed by even a rough soldier with a ready command of the Bible, such as practically all the Commonwealth sects had at their finger-ends. Men of no academic training, Winstanley and John Bunyan, demonstrated their equality with the greatest prose writers of even their very great literary age.

But, it is forcefully objected, *Killing No Murder* was not only extremely eloquent, but was immensely learned, and learned, at that, in a highly specialised and recondite art, the 'science' of regicide. The copious quotations from the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and from the classical writers of Antiquity, in support of tyrannicide, could not, it is objected, have been known to a plebeian soldier of fortune like Sexby.

This objection is plausible, but I think it can be resolved. For we find that immediately prior to his writing his masterpiece — which can be dated from internal evidence as February 1657, before Cromwell refused the Crown for the second time — Sexby had been in the closest association with Royalist circles, for the purpose, already indicated, of forming a 'united front' against Cromwell's regime.

Now the intermediary between Sexby and the exiled Royalists was John Talbot, later Archbishop of Dublin, a celebrated Jesuit of the day, who seems to have been in charge of this very 'jesuitical' scheme of uniting the supporters of Divine Right with regicides and 'red' republicans like Sexby and Sindercomb.

Our reference to Guy Fawkes has already demonstrated to us the contemporary role of the Jesuit Order as the contemporary specialists in regicide and tyrannicide, in the gentle arts of 'bumping off' rulers obnoxious to Holy Church. And in this 'art', in which they were the unequalled specialists, the Order — as I have elsewhere shown — combined theory and practice equally effectively: they had both a long list of illustrious victims, and also a vast theoretical literature which discussed every aspect of the subject from every conceivable angle, and which abounded in precisely the sort of theological and classical citations with which *Killing No Murder* itself abounds. We recollect that the Jesuits were both the leading theologians of the Counter-Reformation and the pedagogues of Catholic Europe, who specialised in reconciling the theological culture of the mediæval Church with the classical culture of the Renaissance.[17]

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17 See my book *The Jesuits: A Study in Counter-Revolution* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1938). The Jesuit classic of regicide was Juan de Mariana's book *De Rege et Institutione Regis* (Toledo, 1599), which was burnt by the public hangman in both England and France. It was the prototype of a whole literature abounding in the most curious and subtle distinctions. In 1614, after the murder of Henry the Fourth of France by Ravaillac, the pupil of the Order, a pamphlet appeared in Paris entitled *Maxims of the Old Man of the Vatican Mountain and his Assassins*. I append a list of the chief Jesuit successes, or attempts, at regicide: William of Orange — 1584; Elizabeth (failed) — 1586; Henry the Third of France — 1589; James the First of England (failed — Gunpowder Plot) — 1605; Henry the Fourth of France —1610; Wallenstein, Duke of

We need not, I suggest, look beyond Father Talbot, SJ, for the source of Sexby's special knowledge. The greatest of all English pamphlets represents in fact the perfect combination of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces of the era: its author was trained in the classic school of English revolution, and wrote his immortal attack on dictatorship, primed with the special studies of that Order, which I have elsewhere defined as 'the incarnate genius of counter-revolution'. Why not? All is grist to the revolutionary mill![18]

I must conclude this over-long appendix by apologising to my readers: but surely the English revolutionary tradition includes its literary tradition as well. Hence I have thought that the question of the authorship of the greatest pamphlet of revolutionary literature in our language was at least as important as the innumerable disquisitions of pedantic pundits on obscure works long since otherwise deservedly forgotten. In the schools of England under a revolutionary government, *Killing No Murder* will recover its proper place as the greatest literary classic of our greatest revolution.

Friedland — 1634.

Even Cromwell could not have complained of such a company, had Sindecomb and Sexby, primed by Father Talbot, succeeded in despatching the great English Dictator to join these illustrious predecessors in the Elysian Fields!

I may add that, whilst the primary question raised by *Killing No Murder* — viz, the ethics of tyrannicide — is too vast to be adequately discussed in these pages, yet I think that Sexby and his Jesuit preceptors had an arguable case. In general, political murder must be rejected as anti-social in its effects. But I do not hold it proven that there are no exceptions to this general principle, or that it is not sometimes expedient that 'one man should die for the people'. It would be no easy matter to deny that there have been men whose summary 'taking off' would have, on balance, benefited humanity.

18 It is significant in this connection that Sexby makes a special point of accusing Cromwell of being a disciple of Machiavelli. Now 'Old Nick' was the special bugbear of the Jesuits, both as the supreme anti-clerical theoretician of the secular state of the Renaissance, and also, no doubt, from professional jealousy!

Chapter VII: The Rise of the Whigs and the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89

In the despatch to his government which I quoted above, the Venetian diplomat, writing when Cromwell was at the height of his power, ended by discussing the questions as to who would succeed him and as to whether the revolutionary regime could survive his death. Sagredo concluded that the Protector's sons were men of too weak and sluggish mould to hold supreme power for any length of time; that, in the event of a struggle for power after Cromwell's death, the most likely candidate seemed to be the Sergeant-Major General Lambert who was very popular with the Army. But the shrewd Venetian evidently did not greatly fancy the chances of any lesser man to fill successfully the dazzling role of the great Protector, for he concluded his despatch with the penetrating prediction:

> It is a risk to ask whether the present government will last long, as this concerns the future and is knowledge which God has reserved for himself.
>
> It is true, however, that if there is no alteration before, after the death of Cromwell, viz, of the manager of the present machinery, one might witness a change of scene, according to the universal rule that violence is never permanent.[1]

This acute prediction was quickly fulfilled after the death of the great Dictator. There was simply no one to take his place. In fact, already when he lay dying his shrewd Secretary of State, John Thurloe, wrote that 'our divisions and not his strength will bring back Charles Stuart'.

After the death of the Protector this prediction was soon fulfilled. For the lazy and incompetent Richard Cromwell, who succeeded his father as Protector, proved quite unequal to the position of 'manager of the machinery', and was forced to abdicate in the spring of 1659.[2] Similarly, in the brief struggle for power which followed, Lambert — the Venetian ambassador's suggested nominee — proved to be only a competent cavalry officer with no special political or military aptitude.

Finally, the winner proved to be a 'dark horse', General Monk, the military governor of Scotland, who occupied London at the beginning of 1660. Monk was more like a modern South American political general than a genuine revolutionary leader; his passion was for money rather than for power.

In any case, it was by now clear that the English people were heartily tired of a revolution, the heroic period of which was evidently finished. The rule of a Calvinistic minority of kill-joy 'Saints', always irksome, became intolerable when no longer conspicuously successful. During their decade of power the followers of Calvin and of Cromwell had ridden roughshod over every English tradition: they had closed the theatres, torn down the village maypoles, banned the Morris dances, and had made the face of 'Merry England' grey and sad.

As even the sympathetic Macaulay was constrained to admit in an immortal epigram: 'The Puritans objected to bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear,

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1 See Eucardio Momigliano, *Cromwell* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1929), p 314.

2 Richard Cromwell retired into private life and survived until 1712.

but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.' Such a regime could be rendered tolerable only by a continuous run of successes. When these stopped, it was doomed. A Calvinistic regime in its prime was grim but heroic. Its decadence was intolerable. By the spring of 1660, the effective motto of the great mass of the English nation was that consciously anti-Puritan propaganda slogan of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* — 'Dost thou think because thou are virtuous that we shall have no more cakes and ale?'[3]

General Monk was not the man to try to govern a reluctant nation by the sword in the name of ideals for which he evidently felt little enthusiasm. Pelf, not place, seems to have been his guiding ambition throughout. He recalled the remnants of the 'Long Parliament' to give formal legality to his subsequent proceedings, and sold out whilst still in possession of the intact estate, concluding his brief but important appearance on the stage of English history by retiring to the wings as a Duke (of Albemarle) and a millionaire.[4]

This typically shoddy exhibition of capitalist politics — the visible emblem of a bourgeois revolution in decay — ended with the Restoration of Charles the Second in May 1660, precisely as both Sagredo and Thurloe had predicted.

The Restoration, however, did not restore everything. The absolute monarchy had gone, never to return. Immediately upon the return of the 'Merry Monarch' the French Ambassador reported to his government that, whilst England was once more a kingdom in form, yet her king was far from being a king, as Louis the Fourteenth and his Court understood the term. There was in fact nothing left of the old pre-revolutionary totalitarian state, with its all-powerful illegal courts.

Henceforth the King of England was no longer to be 'the living law', as the Tudor jurists had styled him. 'L'État, c'est moi', was in future to be the mark of Continental despots: 'the nations not so blest as thou, shall in their turn to tyrants fall'; as the author of 'Rule, Britannia' was soon to express it.

Charles the Second was recalled on terms: before returning he had to issue the *Declaration of Breda*. Henceforth, the modest role of the monarchy was to be merely the decorative figurehead on the prow of the ship-of-state. Such, at least, was its sole role in the eyes of the men who framed the Restoration compromise, though, it is true, the monarchy did not become entirely reduced to this merely decorative role until the accession of the puppet House of Hanover in 1714.

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3 The great revolutionary poet of the era with the insight of genius summarises for us the decadent counter-revolutionaries of the age. In *Comus*, and again in *Paradise Lost*, Milton has drawn the life-like portrait of the 'rabble-rout' whose orgies disturbed the calm English countryside: 'The sons of Belial flown with insolence and wine.'

Upon the contrast between the revolution and the Restoration Professor GM Trevelyan gives us a typically purple passage of the brilliantly superficial Macaulay type:

> The wittiest company of comedians that history records had come to tread the stage for a while, as little appreciated on the whole by the English people as were the great tragedians who had played their piece and were departing, undismayed by the howling and the fury, wrapt in the dignity of self-dependent virtue. Republicans without fear, without repentance, without hope. — GM Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts* (Methuen, London, 1906), p 330.

In general, however, it would be true to say that the Cambridge graduate Milton, in 1665, already understood the essential dynamics of the class struggle better than the Cambridge professor understands them in 1948!

4 He held a command in the second Dutch war and died in 1670, leaving behind him a colossal fortune.

The Restoration era — 1660–89 — was in itself a vicious and degenerate epoch. This character is usually ascribed primarily to the clever and witty libertine whose restoration in 1660 gave the next generation its titular designation. Charles the Second, it is true, if he gave us few laws, at least made amends by giving us many legislators! A substantial segment of the House of Lords still, I believe, claims descent from the 'Merry Monarch', who, upon being once saluted as 'the father of his people', is alleged to have replied — no less truly than smartly — 'of a good many of them I believe I am'!

The moral depravity of the age had, however, deeper social causes than a lecherous monarch with his huge brood of bastards! If we do not subscribe to 'the great man theory of history', neither can we entertain any similar 'bad man theory' of the historic process. The Restoration represents in social history a partial frustration of the bourgeois revolution. All ages of counter-revolution are necessarily ages of frustration and of consequent triviality and lack of contact with reality. He who in a revolutionary age breaks with the revolution, breaks with reality: for, in such an age, reality *is* the revolution.

The Restoration was a vicious and trivial age essentially because it was a counter-revolutionary age. It was not otherwise with the French Restoration of the Bourbons (1814–30), or the Restoration of the Romanovs after the first Russian Revolution (1906–17). Yet neither Louis the Eighteenth nor Nicholas the Second, the royal figureheads of these counter-revolutionary regimes, can fairly be described as particularly immoral.

For the student of English revolutionary history the Restoration era is important, not for its vicious orgies, but for the important revolutionary developments which characterised the decades immediately after the Restoration.

For between 1660 and 1680 the origin of the English party system can be definitely dated. About 1679 Titus Oates, the celebrated perjurer of 'Popish Plot' fame, accused the Court and its sympathisers in the country of being Irish Papist brigands, in short, 'Tories', after a band of Irish brigands who then frequented the marshes of Western Ireland, where they waylaid, robbed and murdered good Protestant travellers.

And, not to be outdone, the partisans of the Court labelled the Parliamentary opposition as 'Whigs', after a particularly fierce sect of Scotch Calvinists, who, in defence of the Covenant of the Presbyterian Church, opposed the government in arms and waylaid and murdered bishops of the detested Anglican Church.[5]

Thus, the historic terms 'Tory' and 'Whig' originated as terms of abuse, signifying, respectively, 'Irish brigand' and 'Scottish cut-throat'. Looking below the abuse to its underlying reality, we must now investigate the political connotation of these terms; terms which were destined to furnish the nomenclature and battle-cries of British politics for the next century and a half until the Reform Bill of 1832 transformed the Whigs into the Liberal Party — the party of merchant capital into the party of industrial capital.

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5 For one of the results of the Restoration was to restore the outmoded division of the British Isles until the 'Act of Union' in 1707, which finally created 'Great Britain', and Charles the Second revived with much brutality and some temporary success his father's policy of forcing Episcopacy and the hated Anglican Church upon the recalcitrant Scotch nation: the revolutionary activities of Calvinism and its theocracy had shown only too plainly the truth of James the First's axiom, 'No Bishop, no King'.

As for 'Tory', the name still sticks! British Conservatism under Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, as under Charles the Second and the Earl of Danby, still sticks conservatively to the traditional title of the old Tory firm.

First a word as to the origin of the historic English political parties, before we pass on to consider their essential political character, class affiliation and economic basis.

The English party system, like so many other English institutions, was the result, not of logic, but of political compromise and of historical necessity. Like Topsy (of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fame) 'it just growed'! It was in no way an accident that its major political theorists were empiricists like Locke, rather than masters of logic like the far greater Hobbes. Nor is it at all out of keeping with its origins that the English party system eventuated in that living embodiment of lack of logic, the British Constitution. For the great English political parties grew out of the historical soil of the Restoration compromise rather than were deliberately fashioned by definite individuals.

Speaking generally, we can say that the Whigs and Tories were simply the bourgeois Parliamentarians on the one side, and the Royalist Cavaliers on the other. But to this general statement two qualifications have to be added. Firstly, the Whigs and Tories operated legally, on the ground of the constitution agreed upon in 1660. Secondly, each side was restrained by circumstances from coming out with its full programme.

In the case of the Whigs, they had to live down the unpopularity both of the execution of the King and of the later excesses of the unpopular military dictatorship of Cromwell, which had combined to cause the frenzied joy with which the great mass of the English nation had welcomed the Restoration.[6] The Puritan–bourgeois dictatorship of the Calvinistic minority had ended by becoming extremely unpopular, and its fiasco, after the death of Cromwell, had brought this to a head. Hence, the Whigs had to live down their past. They dared not, consequently, advocate openly either republicanism or the abolition of the Anglican Church, still less, of course, regicide. The great revolution, the 'heroic' era of the English bourgeoisie, had gone too far. The future political activities of the bourgeoisie had to be of a more restrained character than that 'root and branch reformation'. I may add that there was a republican left wing of the Whig Party led by such men as Algernon Sydney and Richard Rumbold. Similarly, the Tories, as we shall see, had their die-hard legitimist wing, which, like the Bourbons of a later day, 'learnt nothing and forgot nothing'; the post-1688 'Jacobites'. But neither of these extremist wings

6 The regicide judges of Charles the First were all executed for high treason after the Restoration. It has always been a mystery how John Milton, the outspoken apologist for Charles' execution, managed to survive. In passing, and to illustrate what manner of men were the heroes of the great revolution, I may mention that General Harrison, Ironside and 'Fifth Monarchy Man' — the leader of the extreme left of the Army — actually rose and struck the executioner after he had been hanged, cut down alive, and his bowels had been drawn from his living body by the executioner, in accordance with the grisly law of high treason. Such were the men of iron who pioneered the revolution to victory! The 'Fifth Monarchy Men' believed that the four great monarchies of Biblical History — Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome — were due to be succeeded by the Second Coming of Christ, and by the Millennium — his Universal 'Fifth Monarchy'. In January 1661, they staged a brief insurrection under Venner in London in which they fought with fanatical courage, and threw London into an uproar, before being crushed by weight of numbers. Venner, an old Ironside, was executed.

dominated their respective parties, which, in general, kept the middle road of political compromise.

If the Whigs dared not come out openly with the Cromwellian programme of the total abolition of the Monarchy and of the state Church, no more did the Tories either dare to come out openly with the pre-Civil War Royalist programme of restoration of the absolute monarchy and of the totalitarian state, and the total suppression of all freedom of conscience to dissent from the Anglican Episcopal Church.

If the days of Cromwell and Milton were passed and over, so also were those of Strafford, Laud and the totalitarian state of the Tudors and early Stuarts, with its courts of Star Chamber and High Commission.

The Restoration could hang the body of Cromwell on the Tyburn gibbet and could hang, draw and quarter the actual regicides, but it could not possibly restore the English *ancien régime* in its integrity. The Ironsides, with the Spirit of the Age riding before them, had charged too well for that! The absolute monarchy could not conceivably be restored, nor could the 246 religions, which had so moved the derision of the Venetian Sagredo, be definitively eliminated from the English scene.

It will be seen from the above that the ambiguous and unheroic character which so sharply differentiated the (so-called) 'Glorious Revolution' of 1668–89 from the great revolution of 40 years earlier, arose not from any accident, but from the confused and unclear policies which were forced upon the contending parties. It was caused both by the nature of the times and by the peculiar historical place occupied by the great parties which arose in that period of political confusion and by that partial swing-back of the bourgeois revolution which the Restoration represented as and when contraposed to the general background of English revolutionary history.

As to the composition of the great historic parties, this was much the same as that of the protagonists in the Civil War. The Whigs represented the party of merchant capital, of the City of London, of the towns in general, and of the 246 Protestant sects, plus the Low-Church party in the Established Church which emphasised its Protestant and anti-Papal character. Whilst the Tories represented the Court (until the 1688 revolution), the country squires, the High Anglican party and the Roman Catholic minority.[7]

In general, therefore, we can style the Whigs as the party of merchant capital and of the bourgeois revolution — the latter 'constitutionally' disguised by a good deal of whitewash. Whilst the Tories were the party of Divine Right, of a strong monarchy, of the landed interest, and of an authoritarian Anglican Church; in general, of as much of the *ancien régime* of pre-Civil War days as seemed capable of restoration after the revolutionary storm had blown and after Cromwell had stamped his ineffaceable imprint on English history in letters of blood and iron.

It remains to add a word on the events which led up to the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89, and to the definitive victory of the Whig oligarchy which that important — though actually far from 'glorious' — event was destined to realise so effectually.

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7 As regards the landed interest, the great bulk of the small squires were Tory, and that party had a much more agrarian and less commercial economic outlook than had its great rival. Notwithstanding this, the Whigs included most of the big landowners on account of that early association of English merchant capital with the ownership of land, which has always been such an outstanding and peculiar feature of the rise of English capitalism, and which gives to it even today such a strong pseudo-feudal appearance.

In the earlier years of Charles the Second, English capitalist influences were still strong. This is indubitably proved by the two bloody and desperate wars which England waged against Holland in 1665–67 and 1672–73. For capitalist England's first rival, Spain, had now entered upon that period of a 'slow and inglorious decay' (Marx), which represented the inevitable result of trying to administer a modern colonial empire with a feudal-Catholic outlook derived from pre-capitalist days.

In its place, there now arose Calvinistic and commercial Holland which, in the generation following upon 'the navigation act' of 1650, became the second great rival of the expanding English bourgeoisie towards 'a place in the sun' — and the world market. The fact that Spain had been Papist, whilst Holland was the most Protestant country in Europe, made no difference at all to those arch-exponents of historical materialism in practice, the English bourgeoisie!

In general, however, the mixed composition of the Restoration government prevented it from prosecuting the interests of the bourgeoisie with the vigour and success that Cromwell had done. This was so particularly in the last decade of Charles' reign, when the King made himself largely independent of Parliament by means of French subsidies, whilst England became in fact little more than a vassal state of France.

In internal affairs, the first major clash of the newly-formed political parties took place in 1679 over the (so-called) 'Popish Plot', but the excesses of the Whigs on that occasion, and their use of agents of the most infamous type to discover mares' nests in the shape of imaginary Catholic conspiracies, eventually severely discredited them.

Charles, who, despite his congenital laziness and loose morals, was an astute politician, knew how to take full advantage of the growing popular anger at the unblushing mendacity of Titus Oates and Co, and of the growing horror at their numerous innocent victims judicially murdered on account of non-existent conspiracies. Consequently, the last years of his reign witnessed a temporary Tory revival. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, the effective founder of the Whig Party, was forced to flee to Holland, where he died in 1683. In 1683, Algernon Sydney, the leader of the Republican left, and other leading Whigs were executed in the Tory White Terror which followed upon Richard Rumbold's attempt to murder the King in the 'Rye House Plot'. At the end of the reign of the 'Merry Monarch' not only had he fulfilled his restoration vow 'not to go on his travels again', but the bourgeois revolution had met with a severe setback. The Crown had recovered much of its former influence, and the doctrine of the 'Divine Right of Kings', now the political slogan of the reaction, enjoyed an Indian summer, and became virtually synonymous with the Tory party and the Anglican Church.[8]

Charles the Second died on 6 February 1685. The sequel demonstrated that the Royalist reaction at the end of his reign was due to the astute political characteristics of the King rather than to the inherent strength of the restored monarchy. For Charles' successor was his brother James, Duke of York, a bigoted Roman Catholic and the *bête noire* of the Whigs at the time of the Popish Plot — when they had sought to exclude him from the succession in favour of the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, the King's illegitimate son. James' accession was a God-send to the Whigs, for he played into their hands in every conceivable way; both his virtues and

8 See the appendix on Shaftesbury, the founder of the Whig Party, at the end of the current chapter.

his vices combining to render the new King as unpopular as his 'Merry' and astute predecessor had been the reverse.

For James was both a hard and unsympathetic martinet and a fanatical Roman Catholic. In his first capacity he put down the risings of the Dukes of Monmouth and Argyle with great brutality. After the defeat of the former at Sedgemoor (in Somerset — 5 July 1685) — the last pitched battle on English soil — James sent Judge Jefferies to conduct 'the Bloody Assize' with its wholesale executions and transportations of the deluded Somersetshire rustics who had followed Monmouth.

James, when Duke of York, had himself suppressed a revolt of the Scottish (Calvinistic) Covenanters with great brutality. In this respect, Jefferies faithfully followed in his master's footsteps.

Actually, 'the Bloody Assize' does not seem to have overstepped the letter of the brutal criminal code of the day. But the innocent nature of the Somersetshire rustics who had fought so gallantly against trained troops at Sedgemoor, coupled with Jefferies' brutal wit, combined to make the infamous 'Assize' stink even in the none too squeamish nostrils of its contemporaries.

The Whigs, of course, like the Tudors before them, invented their own historical mythology after 1689. In their post-revolutionary 'Rogues' Gallery', the hanging Judge, Jefferies, has always occupied the role which the Tudors assigned to Richard the Third. Actually, he was probably not much below the very low judicial standards of that corrupt and cynical age. Whig propaganda did the rest!

James the Second, however, was doubly unfortunate. His virtues were even more damaging to him than were his vices! For if his brutality lost him all personal popularity, his sincerely fanatical Roman Catholic bigotry lost him the support of the most devoted partisans of the monarchy, the Anglican Church and the country squires: in short, of the loyalist Tory party itself. Unlike his brother, who had concealed his Papist sympathies and had only been secretly received into the Roman Catholic Church on his death-bed, James paraded his attachment to the Roman Catholic Church so indiscreetly that even the Pope (Innocent the Eleventh) was alarmed at the possible consequences of the royal indiscretion and advised more discretion on the part of the bigoted King.

A Roman Catholic King; that was the one thing which the supporters of Divine Right had not bargained for! For since the days of Archbishop Laud, Cromwell's regime had intervened. And England was now too far committed to the Protestant–capitalist mentality for the clock to be put back. Even the legitimist Tory party had to bow to the new social outlook. Its 'Divine Right' located its source at Canterbury and not at Rome!

Thus, James' vices and virtues combined to make him a gift-horse for the Whigs. His very fanaticism played into their hands. For it is probable that the High-Anglican Tories might have tolerated a Roman Catholic King who kept his religion to himself. But James went out of his way to strike at the deepest roots of the Tory creed. To obtain toleration plausibly for his own co-religionists, he demanded toleration for all dissenters. In short, in his religious policy he combined in the eyes of the Tories the worst of both worlds. He became not only a Catholic, but also a Whig!

'Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad.' In 1688, James committed two heinous political blunders. He prosecuted the Archbishop of Canterbury and six of his episcopal colleagues for refusing to read his 'Declaration' enforcing toleration, from their pulpits. This was the famous case of 'the Seven

Bishops', the acquittal of whom shook James' power and Tory loyalty to its foundations (29–30 June 1688). At the same time — summer of 1688 — the King brought over an Irish Catholic army to overawe the Metropolis. This led to the composition of a political ballad which made a tremendous sensation — I refer to the once celebrated song 'Lillibulero', the political effect of which was so great that it was stated at the time that its author had caused James 'to be whistled off the throne of three kingdoms'.

Finally, by a singularly inopportune coincidence for the last Stuart king, his Catholic wife, Mary of Modena, at this unpropitious moment gave birth to a son — the later 'Old Pretender' — who thus became the heir to the throne. It was widely stated at the time that the child was a changeling smuggled into the royal bedchamber. Anyhow, he supplanted his Protestant half-sisters, Mary and Anne, and the prospect of a Roman Catholic succession, indefinitely prolonged, now confronted the alarmed Tories and their spiritual allies, the Anglican clergy.

The birth of the 'Old Pretender' represented the proverbial last straw which broke the camel's back. It led to a Whig–Tory coalition against the Stuart dynasty. And this coalition itself led directly to that unsavoury but historically important event, a palace-plot in form, but a social revolution in substance, later to suffer a 'sea-change' in the Whig–Liberal alchemy, and to be 'translated' from the distinctly dirty and unpatriotic political intrigue that it actually was, into the fabulous 'Glorious Revolution'. That 'glorious' event, the mythical praises of which have been sounded by a thousand pens and which is now embalmed in the official mythology that the British oligarchy, whose rule it inaugurated, has for so long presented, '*urbi et orbi*', as the genuine record of the English history that, in reality, it so signally falsifies.

For in the autumn of 1688 the Whig–Tory coalition invited the Dutch Calvinist, William, Prince of Orange, and hereditary chief executive — Stadtholder — of the Netherlands, to invade England and to assume the Crown. For this purpose they promised him the fullest support against the Stuart dynasty.

William of Orange was at that time 38 years of age, and in 1677 (4 November) had married James' eldest daughter Mary, who had been the heiress to the English throne prior to the birth of the Prince of Wales (the 'Old Pretender'). For the past decade, ever since he had repulsed the French by the desperate expedient of opening the dykes and flooding Holland itself, he had been the leading champion of all the Protestant–bourgeois forces in Europe against the overwhelming power of the French 'Sun-King' ('*le roi soleil*') Louis the Fourteenth.

For France was now the greatest power in the Western world, and the invitation of the leaders of the English bourgeoisie to William of Orange signified from the standpoint of world politics, that the two leading capitalist and Protestant powers, England and Holland were henceforth resolved to unite in order to restore 'the balance of power' against the European hegemony of Louis the Fourteenth. For France had now succeeded Spain both as the would-be military dictator of Europe and as the armed champion of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.[9]

When viewed from the more limited perspectives provided by English history itself, this invitation to a new 'William the Conqueror' to invade England with a foreign army again demonstrated that, where their own vital interests were at stake, the English bourgeoisie would stick at nothing. The same class, which had called in

9 This can be dated from 1643 (Battle of Rocroi) to 1713.

German and Italian mercenaries in 1549 to defend its land robbery from the English peasants, was now equally willing to call in a Dutch army in 1688 to safeguard 'our liberties' — viz, their own property and class rule — against 'tyrants' — that is, against *foreign* exploiters such as Roman Popes and Scottish Kings.

The fact that the Dutch invasion was later 'translated' into an 'army of liberation', only proves, yet once again, the truth of that pregnant dictum of Marx: 'The [dominant] ideas of every age are the ideas of its ruling class.' A profound historical truth! And one, we may add, that is nowhere better exemplified than in the 'official' history, still in possession of the field in our academic seats of learning, those faithful echoes of the world outlook of the Whig oligarchy of the eighteenth century and of its Liberal offspring.

The foreign invasion, the historical mission of which was to inaugurate that Whig era — and, incidentally, its world outlook also — went off without a hitch. Like the class which it installed in power, it was sordid, unheroic, treacherous and extremely efficient. William of Orange — accompanied by a band of Whigs who had followed their leader, Shaftesbury, into exile — sailed from Holland in October (19th). By a fortunate accident, the Dutch Armada missed the English fleet that was waiting to intercept it, thus obviating its one chance of failure.[10] On 5 November (Guy Fawkes' Day), the leaders of the new conspiracy landed on English soil, protected by a Dutch army of 13,000 men, on the day annually set aside to commemorate the last heroic Catholic conspiracy, which was bungled by its own inefficiency.

There was nothing either heroic or inefficient about the new conspirators. This was no Monmouth 'Putsch' doomed to miscarry from its ill-conceived start. William of Orange and his English allies had measured the ground well in advance. A general welcome was accorded to the invader, hourly reincarnated as 'the Protestant Deliverer'. Protected from the fate of Monmouth by his Dutch army, and followed by an ever-increasing multitude of English allies, William of Orange proceeded undisturbed on his 'March on London', which was destined to install English capitalism in power until the historic arrival of its 'gravediggers', the proletariat.[11]

The epoch-making 'March on London' passed off as smoothly as did its Italian anti-type on Rome in 1922. But at first, it was not evident that this would be so. For James did not number cowardice among his numerous faults, and he had a regular, largely Irish Catholic, army at his disposal, upon the loyalty of which he thought that he could rely. Moreover, this royal army was led by John Churchill, who had already demonstrated his ability to deal with rebellion by crushing Monmouth at Sedgemoor three years earlier.

Moreover, if there was one man upon the fidelity of whom James had reason to believe that he could rely, it was precisely Churchill. For his sister, Arabella Churchill, was the King's mistress, her son by James, the Duke of Berwick (later to become Marshal of France and Grandee of Spain), was Churchill's nephew, and that brilliant adventurer himself owed virtually all he had to James. When, therefore,

10 The failure of the English fleet to intercept the Dutch invasion seems to have been due partly to bad weather and partly to the excessive caution of the Stuart Admiral, Lord Dartmouth, who kept too strictly to the defensive.

11 William himself was so impressed by his bloodless victory that he ascribed it to Predestination. In an historical sense this ascription is justified. For Calvin was the predecessor of Marx as the bourgeoisie were themselves the historic precursors of the proletariat.

James and Churchill arrived at Salisbury upon the western road a desperate civil war seemed imminent.

It was not so, in reality. For John Churchill, later Duke of Marlborough, was at one and the same time the greatest soldier and the dirtiest politician in an age which was singularly prolific both of great soldiers and of shady politicians. He saw which way the wind was blowing and hastened to salute the rising sun. At Salisbury, when battle seemed imminent, he cut the Gordian Knot by deserting to William of Orange. His deserted and disheartened army simply melted away.

This singularly unsavoury business ensured the bloodless triumph of the revolution by opening the road to London to the invader. William of Orange entered London unopposed on 18 December. James then lost his nerve and fled to France; thus, once again, playing into the hands of the Whigs. So glad in fact were they to get rid of him that, when detected and caught in his first attempt at flight, they let him go again. Had the last Stuart King been a good political tactician he would have refused to budge. For, with the memory of one regicide to live down, the Whigs would not have dared to kill him, and a live king would have been a perpetual embarrassment to the partisans of his son-in-law.

On 13 February 1689, 'William and Mary' were proclaimed joint sovereigns — Mary was added to please the legitimist Tories — but the government was to be exercised solely by William — and 'The Protestant Succession' was proclaimed to be inviolable and sacrosanct, the Catholic heir becoming *ipso facto* 'the Pretender'. In fact, James the Second was the last English king, in the mediæval–Tudor sense of the word, though at the time the outstanding personal abilities and European status of William the Third served to disguise the fact that henceforth the 'Kings' of England were merely foreign puppets brought over from abroad to dance obediently to the tune of their bourgeois paymasters: 'small breast-bestarred wanderers', as a nineteenth-century English republican (Charles Bradlaugh) was later to style them.

Such, begun by foreign invasion, and accomplished by nauseating treachery, was the 'Glorious Revolution', so much belauded and covered with whitewash and/or gilt, by its official panegyrists and beneficiaries for the next two and a half centuries.

All revolutions evolve their appropriate hagiography. But on a calm and disinterested survey it would seem that the writer who best grasped the essential nature of the 'glorious' revolution was its unknown contemporary; that man of a keen political insight amounting to genius, who wrote that immortal summary of his inglorious era in his 'potted' biography of 'The Vicar of Bray'. The spirit of that evergreen 'yes-man', of that model perpetual pensioner, hovers smugly over the real, as distinct from the fictitious revolution which finally overthrew the *ancien régime* in England, and installed definitively in its place the Whig oligarchy of merchant capital.

In 1694, the Bank of England received its charter. A City clergyman who 'improved' that inauspicious occasion by denouncing 'usury' in the spirit of Aquinas and Laud was incontinently ejected from his living. 'Usury', henceforth, was to be a forgotten word. The Holy Days of the Saints were to merge into the Holy of Holies itself, into 'Bank Holiday'! The Middle Ages, at long last, were finally liquidated. The Bourgeois Revolution in England, begun indirectly by Thomas Cromwell and William Cecil, had been directly concluded by Oliver Cromwell and William of Orange. The acorn had become an oak, soon to throw its luxuriant shadow athwart the entire planet. The infant class, which had received its political baptism by the

waters of Runnymede, had now finished its slow maturity. The English bourgeoisie had arrived.

Note on The Monmouth Rising: The Monmouth–Argyle Rising was a political rather than a social rising, but as a borderline case I suppose that I ought to mention it. The leading Whigs, apart from a few extreme 'leftists', cautiously steered clear of it. Monmouth claimed the Crown, alleging that his mother, Lucy Walters, had been secretly married to Charles the Second. He came over from Holland and landed on the west coast on 11 June 1685. He raised a small army among the Puritan Somersetshire rustics and the Taunton bourgeoisie, and proclaimed himself King at Taunton.[12] After some successful skirmishes he advanced on Bristol, then the second largest town in England, but failed to force an entry.

He then retreated to Bridgwater, where he attempted a night attack on the royal army carelessly encamped on Sedgemoor, outside that town. The attack, however, failed to reach its objective on account of a huge unsuspected ditch known as the 'Bussex Rhine', which covered the royal camp (5 July). In the ensuing battle, the rustic followers of Monmouth fought with great courage, but were eventually routed by the royal regular troops under John Churchill, later to be the famous Duke of Marlborough. Monmouth basely deserted his followers, but was captured and executed — it took a dozen blows to get his head off!

A simultaneous rising under the Duke of Argyle and the ex-Leveller Richard Rumbold also miscarried even more completely, and its leaders were executed also. It was on this occasion that Rumbold — the ex-leader of the 'Rye House Plot' against the life of Charles the Second in June 1683 — made the immortal revolutionary statement which figures on the title-page of this book.

Appendix I: The Earl of Shaftesbury: The Founder of the Whig Party: Fundamentally, the Whig and Tory Parties represented the continuation of the Civil War on a legal and constitutional basis, with all the limitations and subterfuges that the change of scene enforced. As I indicated in the text, the two great English political parties grew naturally out of the historic soil of the Restoration rather than were the deliberate creation of consciously scheming politicians.

Whilst, however, in general this is true, yet history is, after all, made by individuals, in the immediate sense at least. 'Man makes his own history, but under given conditions.' (Marx) That of the great English political parties conformed to this principle. In the case of the Tories, the constitutional 'Cavalier' party, one could describe either Clarendon, the King's first Chancellor, or his later Chief Minister, Danby, or, perhaps more plausibly than either, even Charles the Second himself, as the historic founder of the party.

Be that as it may in the case of the Tory Party, with regard to its great rival, no such uncertainty is possible: the historic founder of the Whig Party was Anthony Ashley Cooper, later created the Earl of Shaftesbury. As the influence of its Tory and Jacobite rivals is not even remotely comparable to that exercised by the Whigs between 1688 and the Reform Bill of 1832, a word may be usefully added on the career and historic role of Shaftesbury, who, more than anyone else, was the founder of the Whig oligarchy which governed England for a century and a half after its founder's death; and, I may add, the influence of which is still all-pervasive throughout English political and social life even today.

12 Taunton was a well-known Puritan centre at that date.

Anthony Ashley Cooper was born on 22 July 1621 and died (in exile) in Holland on 21 January 1683. By descent he was a rich landlord, with interests in both West Indies plantations and the African slave-trade. It is an ironic fact that both Shaftesbury, the founder of the Whig Party, and WE Gladstone, the founder of its Liberal successor, sprang from families enriched by the slave-trade. *White freedom had its roots in black slavery.* In the Civil War he changed sides, serving first with the King, then with Parliament. He played a leading part in the politics of the Commonwealth and Protectorate era, as a member of the 'Bare-bones' Parliament (June 1653), and later of the Council of State. Eventually he broke with Cromwell, and after his death played a leading role in assisting General Monk to bring about the Restoration.

From 1660 to his death in 1683, Cooper was one of the outstanding personalities in English politics. At first, he supported the Restoration Monarchy, was created Earl of Shaftesbury, and was a member of Charles' famous Secret Cabinet, or 'Cabal'[13] in 1668–70. Later he broke with the King, and for the rest of his life English domestic politics revolved around the political duel between himself and the King. He was perhaps the greatest leader of the opposition in English constitutional history.

Both in foreign and domestic affairs Shaftesbury was the champion of rising English merchant capital. In the first capacity, we will note only that he was the arch-champion of the three contemporary wars against Holland, which had now superseded Spain in Eastern waters as the chief maritime rival of expanding English capitalism. The three Anglo-Dutch wars were in fact the first *aggressive* wars of English capitalism. On 5 February 1673, Shaftesbury made the famous speech in support of the vigorous prosecution of the third Anglo-Dutch war. In the course of this speech 'he first urged the prosecution of the Dutch war, the Dutch being the common enemies of all monarchies and our chief rivals in trade'. He ended with the famous words: 'Delenda est Cathago' — 'Carthage must be destroyed!'

The same year (1673) he went into opposition. In this capacity we can note only his chief political activities, which eventuated in the rise of the Whig Party. In the late 1670s he became President of the notorious 'Green Ribbon Club', that may be defined as the embryo of the Whig Party, which received its name a little later. In the general election of 1679 (February), the 'Green Ribbon Club' became a kind of nationwide caucus which swept the Whigs into power in a sweeping electoral victory. Shaftesbury, as the Clubs' organiser-in-chief, was virtually the first party boss in English history, and his success made him the most powerful man in the country. Shaftesbury introduced and carried the 'Habeas Corpus Act' in the same session. Upon his relationship to the newly formed Whig Party Professor Trevelyan tells us:

> The Whig Party — as it came to be called in the heat of the Exclusion struggle — was a combination of part of the aristocracy with the middle class to wrest political power from the Crown, and to force the squirarchy and the bishops to grant toleration to dissent. To obtain these ends the Whigs played upon the popular fear of Catholicism, which they themselves shared.

13 From the initials of its members: Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley and Lauderdale — Ashley was Cooper's title at the time.

> A party with this platform was perhaps a natural outcome of the social, religious and political institutions of the day; but its actual formation was the work of Shaftesbury…
>
> When he arrived at Westminster, his daily task was to unite the opposition in both chambers in a course of action prearranged by himself.

Our authority adds that 'he was a master of debate'.[14]

As leader of the Whig Party, the great Tribune dominated the political era of the 'Popish Plot' and he was the dominating figure in the embittered Parliamentary debates, 1679–81, when the Whigs sought to exclude (the future) James the Second from the succession.[15] But this first major party battle in our history, during which England was on the verge of civil war, ended, despite their initial successes, in the defeat of the Whigs. After the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament in 1682 by Charles, a Tory reign of terror was inaugurated. Shaftesbury himself, after a narrow escape from the judicial murder which overtook so many of his friends — he owed his life to the refusal of a London jury to convict — fled to Holland at the end of 1682, where he died a few weeks later.

Essentially, the founder of the Whig Party was a constitutional 'Cromwell' and his very important political role in the annals of social revolution in England was as the political genius who established the necessary compromise between the bourgeois revolution and the need to live down the memory of the excesses of its heroic period under Cromwell. For the combination of its ruthless Calvinistic logic, military dictatorship and an unpopular regicide, had caused that revolution to stink in the nostrils of the English people.

The Whig Party represented that revolution, but in a form which did not clash too violently with pre-revolutionary English traditions. Thus, Shaftesbury and his Whig disciples, though republicans and Calvinists at heart, could not openly attack the Monarchy and the Anglican Church, the power of which institutions they had to content themselves with curtailing. Nor dared the Whigs advocate any kind of military dictatorship. On the contrary, warned by the fate of Cromwell's execrated military regime, they took in future very good care to join with their Tory rivals in denouncing even a large standing army as a standing menace to English liberties.

A revolution curbed in its excesses and deprived of its own proper logic! Such was the Whig revolution of 1688–89, as and when compared with the great — and logical — revolution under Cromwell 40 years earlier. And Shaftesbury, the founder of this second, no less indispensable phase in the revolutionary era made by and in the interests of English merchant capital, occupies thereby a place in the annals of English revolutionary tradition, much less spectacular and heroic indeed, but scarcely less important than that occupied by his great revolutionary master, Oliver Cromwell himself.[16]

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14 Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts*, pp 389–90.

15 Shaftesbury went to live in Aldersgate, in the business quarter of the City, to demonstrate his solidarity with the merchant class, always the driving-power behind the Whig Party. He was, in short, the first 'Tammany Hall' party manager in modern times.

16 In his political satire *Absalom and Achitophel*, written designedly as a burlesque of the Whigs by the contemporary Tory poet John Dryden, Shaftesbury is featured as Achitophel, the crafty Jewish Old Testament intriguer who lures the young Absalom (Monmouth) to his ruin. The great Whig statesman is portrayed in these lines:

> Of these the false Achitophel was first,
> A name to all succeeding ages curst:

In the evolution of that tradition a major role must necessarily be accorded to the founder of the Whig Party, the father, even more than the actual leaders of the 1688 revolution, of that ruthless and super-efficient oligarchy, which not only ruled England with both a political and a spiritual dictatorship for a century and a half, but under whose dynamic administration the formerly obscure North Sea island became the seat of the industrial revolution and the centre of that worldwide empire which has bestrode the modern world like an overshadowing Colossus.

Apart only from Cromwell, the great master of bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century, and from Disraeli, the great master of bourgeois counter-revolution in the nineteenth, the revolutionary role of the founder of the Whig Party, Dryden's 'Achitophel', is as important as that of any political leader in the annals of the English revolutionary tradition.

Appendix II: The Jacobite Counter-Revolutions:[17] Thanks to Churchill's treachery and to James' ill-timed flight to France, the Whig revolution of 1688–89 passed off without bloodshed as far as England itself was concerned. Nevertheless, the cause of the Stuarts did not expire in 1688. Contrarily, for the next two generations there remained in existence an extreme legitimist right wing of the Tory Party which adhered loyally to the cause of the pre-bourgeois *ancien régime* and to the ill-starred but romantic dynasty which represented it.

From 1688 to 1746 an active reactionary party existed in England, and still more in Ireland and Scotland, which represented a permanent danger to the revolutionary settlement and to the 'Protestant Succession' which typified and guaranteed the rule of the bourgeoisie. During the period of two generations, the 'Jacobites' — as the High Tory Legitimists were usually styled — represented a permanent nuisance to the Whig dictatorship, and on at least one occasion (1745–46) a serious danger.

The main strength of the Jacobite movement was drawn from the oppressed and economically backward parts of the British Isles, in particular from Catholic Ireland and from the Stuarts' native land, Scotland.

In England there was never any large Jacobite party, though for the next generation after 1688, when the revolutionary regime was still precarious and unstable, most of the leading politicians of the era deemed it prudent to keep an eye on St Germain, where the Stuart 'Kings in exile' had established their court under the protection of the French monarchy.

Between 1689 and the Accession of the House of Hanover in 1714, there were very few Tory, and not too many Whig statesmen who did not at one time or

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For close designs and crooked counsels fit;
Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit;
Restless, unfixed in principles and place;
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace:
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pygmy body to decay,
And o'er informed the tenement of clay
A daring pilot in extremity;
Pleased with the danger when the waves went high,
He sought the storms; but for a calm unfit,
Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.
Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.
In friendship false, implacable in hate;
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state.

17 Jacobite, from Jacobus — Latinised form of James.

another help to swell the post-bag of 'the King across the water'. After all, another Stuart Restoration, however improbable it might seem at the moment, had looked even more improbable before 1660. And certainly the Whig revolutionary government was no stronger than had been that of Oliver Cromwell, and so could easily share the same fate when once its formidable chief, William of Orange, was gone.

There was reason as well as revenge in the enthusiastic Jacobite toast to the 'little gentleman in velvet' — viz, the mole upon whose hill William's horse stumbled, thereby giving its rider the injury that proved fatal to the Dutch 'Cromwell' (8 March 1702). Once the great revolutionary statesman was gone, the same happy restoration might restore the fortunes of the Stuart regime as had ensued after the death of the great revolutionary soldier.

In general, it seems probable that a Jacobite Restoration was impossible, at any rate for any period even resembling the 1660–88 Restoration generation during which the first one had lasted. The evolution of Protestantism and capitalism in England had gone too far. Moreover, the Stuarts had two fatal handicaps: with admirable fidelity, but with very defective political judgement, they resolutely adhered to Roman Catholicism; and they accepted the protection of the Kings of France.

This combined error must be held to have damned for ever their chance of any restoration on terms, such as Charles the Second had obtained in 1660. For Rome was by now the national bugbear and France the national enemy, the great eighteenth-century military, naval and colonial rival of the English merchant capitalist class, then on the threshold of its unprecedented world expansion.

In face of such formidable forces, which a French–Catholic Restoration would menace in their most vital interests, we can state with substantial certainty that the contrary statement of the most recent historian of the Jacobite Movement can be dismissed as merely a reactionary wish-fulfilment.[18]

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18 See Sir CA Petrie, *The Jacobite Movement* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1948) for the contrary view. In this well-documented but fundamentally superficial book a modern High-Tory historian tries to argue that a Jacobite Restoration was really possible. But he virtually ignores the deeper causes that decisively militated against such a conception. Even if we accept his ingenious but not very convincing argument that the Young Pretender could have taken London in 1745–46, yet, without something approaching a miracle he could not have held it without French aid. Even if that had been forthcoming in sufficient strength it is against all historical probability to suppose that the decadent Bourbon France of the period could have imposed a client-king permanently upon British capitalism, then in its lusty and powerful youth.

It was fundamentally the fact that France, the Protector of the Stuarts, was the mortal enemy of British capitalism with which it was just then locked in a life-and-death struggle all over the world, that was the fatal Achilles' Heel of a second Stuart Restoration. The Whigs, it is true, had used Holland as a base for their plots against the Stuarts, and had themselves invaded England in 1688–89 with a Dutch army, but then Holland was a Protestant country, and by 1682–88 had fallen out of the commercial struggle against England and represented, rather, an ally against the Roman–French Continental danger.

This made all the difference. In spite of Petrie, apart from their own proven political incapacity the Stuarts were beaten in advance by the very nature of the religious and political forces with which they were forced to ally themselves; just as the pro-Spanish English Catholics had similarly under Elizabeth been stultified as the allies of the national enemy, or — to take a contemporary example — as the English (Mosley) Fascists are today regarded merely as the local 'Fifth Column' of the recent national enemy!

By playing on discontented Irish and Scottish nationalism, still groaning under the new English ascendancy, and by harping on the perennial romanticism associated with the House of Stuart since the publication of the *Eikonbasilike* in 1649 — the fictitious autobiography of Charles the First, which was a Restoration bestseller — the Stuart cause was kept alive. But after 1688 it was always a forlorn hope. Its victory would have done rising English capitalism too much harm for it conceivably to have been allowed to succeed.

I shall now briefly note the chief stages in the Jacobite counter-revolutions between 1689 and 1746.

i: In 1689–90, James returned to Ireland with a French army. Simultaneously, a Scottish rising broke out under the Scotch Tory leader James Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, for long previously the scourge of the Scottish Whigs. Claverhouse defeated the royal General Mackay at Killiecrankie (27 July 1689) but was himself killed, and the Scotch revolt collapsed for lack of any effective leadership.

In Ireland, James, after some initial successes, failed to take Londonderry (April–May 1689) and was beaten at the Battle of the Boyne on 1 July 1690. Finally, the Jacobite General, Patrick Sarsfield, surrendered at Limerick (August 1691), and he and his followers took service with France as the celebrated Irish Brigade.

ii: James died in 1701 (16 September), and William in 1702 (8 March). Anne, James' younger daughter, succeeded to the English throne. But though a loyal Anglican, Anne is said to have favoured the succession of her younger brother James — dubbed 'The Pretender' by the Whigs — who had succeeded his father as the Jacobite claimant. Had James turned Anglican, he might have secured the succession, but, like his father, he was a fanatical Roman Catholic. Even so, when Anne was dying in 1714, a last-minute intrigue was staged by the superficially brilliant Tory Minister Lord Bolingbroke to secure the accession of the Pretender. This intrigue, however, failed on the sudden death of Anne (1 August 1714) — Bolingbroke fled to St Germain, and the Whigs proclaimed the German House of Hanover.[19]

iii: After the death of Anne, the Jacobites had no hope except in armed (counter-)revolution. The accession of the House of Hanover in 1714 was followed by risings in both England and Scotland. The English rising was an insignificant affair, which was put down by a skirmish at Preston. The Scotch rising was more serious, and a Highland army about 10,000 strong, under the Earl of Mar — known locally as 'Bobbing John' — occupied Perth and fought a drawn battle with a royal army at Sheriffmuir, 13 November 1715. James himself came over from France to lead the 1715 rising. But his leadership was uninspiring and it proved impossible to keep the Highland army together. 'The Fifteen' petered out rather than was actually suppressed by superior governmental force.

iv: After 1715, the Hanoverian General, Marshal Wade, dug military roads through the hitherto inaccessible Highlands, so as to prevent a repetition of 1715. But the immediate result of this policy was to produce the precisely opposite effect. For it led to a revival of Jacobitism among the Highland clans threatened in their hitherto inaccessible fastness and their immemorial patriarchal (pre-feudal) ways of living.[20] The final upshot of a generation of English 'permeation' was the Jacobite counter-

19 There is a brilliant but highly imaginative account of this episode in WM Thackeray's remarkable historical novel *Henry Esmond*.

20 RL Stevenson has vividly portrayed this period in his fine novels *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*.

revolution of 1745–46, by far the most dangerous rising, thanks to the military weakness of the English government and to the remarkable military gifts of Charles Edward, 'the Young Pretender', who led it as deputy for his now aged father.

Charles Edward was the maternal grandson of John Sobieski, King of Poland, who had won European fame by saving Vienna from the Turks in 1681. He inherited his military gifts. For he landed in the Highlands (19 August 1745) with only seven companions — after waiting in vain for a French army under the famous general Maurice of Saxony to escort him — and swept across Scotland in a lightning campaign, captured Edinburgh with a Highland army, routed in a few minutes an English army under Sir John Cope at Prestonpans (21 September) — 'Sir John brought the news of his own defeat' — and, invading England, got as far as Derby, whence he, rather mysteriously, was persuaded to retreat against his own better judgement. Just when London was in a panic and the Bank of England was paying out in sixpences to avoid a financial crash.

Returning to Scotland, he defeated General Hawley at Falkirk (17 January 1746), but was eventually driven into the Highlands, and was finally crushed at Culloden (16 April 1746), the wild rush of the Highland clans failing against the shattering fire of the English regulars. After mythical escapes the Young Pretender contrived to take ship to France where he survived until 1788 on the eve of the French Revolution. James, 'the Old Pretender', had died in 1766.

The last Jacobite rising was put down with ferocious brutality by the governmental army led by George the Second's younger son, the Duke of Cumberland, who earned thereby his soubriquet of 'Butcher' Cumberland — a London Jacobite ironically suggesting upon his return to London, that he be made a member of the Butchers' Guild!

The 1745–46 rising, if ultimately hopeless, was immediately quite dangerous. Had Charles gone on at Derby, it is just possible that he might have got into London, though he could not possibly have held it. He certainly made a mistake in turning back, as a revolution on the retreat is a lost revolution. But, during his invasion, he received practically no English support. English capitalist development during 1714–15 had obviously made Jacobitism an anachronism in the more advanced parts of Great Britain. The policy of the Whigs in neglecting their standing army in favour of a strong fleet and the use of foreign mercenaries was, in the last resort, historically justified, but it exposed the island metropolis to serious dangers. If a few thousand barbaric Highlanders, not much better armed and much worse disciplined than were the Zulus of the next century, could overrun Scotland, defeat two British armies, penetrate England as far as Derby, and cause a panic in London itself, how exposed was the centre of the Empire to foreign invasion in the very generation that witnessed the composition of 'Rule, Britannia', and the rise of Britain to the status of a world power. Had the powerful Spanish and French armies landed any time — except perhaps under Cromwell — between 1588 and 1745, England must have succumbed, temporarily at least, to such far more powerful invaders. It is in fact impossible to understand the English foreign policy of this era — in particular, its insistence on the permanent retention of a 'balance of power' in contemporary Europe — without taking into account this extreme vulnerability of the Metropolis itself to foreign invasion.

The last Jacobite Pretender, Henry, Cardinal of York, the younger brother of the hero of 'the Forty-Five', died in Rome in 1807. In his last years he received a pension

from the Hanoverian King George the Third! For the Stuarts after 1746 had ceased to be dangerous and had become merely picturesque!

For in 1749 Bolingbroke, the Tory 'Elder Statesman', had written *The Idea of a Patriot King*, a key text in the evolution of Toryism between the days of Charles the Second and those of Disraeli. In this book the Tory Party becomes Whig! The Divine Right of Kings — 'to govern wrong' — goes by the board. The Tory Party is advised to make a virtue of necessity, to march with the times, and to accept the Whig revolution and its logical consequence, the House of Hanover. In short, to shed its surviving mediæval relics, including the Stuarts, as a *sine qua non* for political survival in the essentially capitalist age of the industrial revolution, a sordid age of iron which had no place for relics, however romantic. At the same time, the elder Pitt enrolled the sons of the men of Prestonpans and Culloden in the first Highland regiments in the British Army, to gain their first laurels in the 'Seven Years War' (1756–63), which created the British Empire. He thus deprived Jacobitism of its only possible army.

After 1749 the Jacobite Movement ceased to be a cause and became merely a sentiment. Only a few incurable romanticists, blind to the realities of the new industrial age that was dawning, survived to wear the White Rose of the Stuarts, to commemorate every 30 January 'the Royal Martyr' Charles the First and his tragic end, and to drink, in defiance of the logic of all history, the loyal toast to 'the King across the water'.

Summary of Part II: The Bourgeois Revolution

In general, it can be said that it was the discovery of the world market in the sixteenth century that evolved the mediæval burgesses into the modern bourgeoisie. It was in that century also that the English merchant class, driven on by the economic forces of the new era, began its long evolution towards the mastery of the state, which it then used to transform society in its own likeness into a capitalist country.

This long 'evolution of revolution' lasted for about a century and a half, from the fall of Cardinal Wolsey in 1529 and the subsequent break with Rome, to the revolution of 1688–89 and its postscript, so to speak, the Accession of the House of Hanover as the puppet rulers of a bourgeois English state in 1714.[1]

The classic era of the bourgeois revolution (1529–1689) can itself be divided into two consecutive periods, the first, of indirect, the second, of direct, revolutionary activity. In the first phase of the bourgeois revolution, the English Reformation, the rising class was still too weak to stage its own undisguised revolutionary struggle for power.

To shelter its own political immaturity, it advanced under cover of the totalitarian state of the Tudors: it was under the protection of that state, and in alliance with that state, that the English capitalist class achieved its first great victory, its 'Los von Rom', the English Reformation, which made England, for the first time in its history, a genuine island freed from Continental entanglements. As and when considered from the point of view of the subject of this book, the Reformation represented the first phase in the evolution of the bourgeois revolution in England.

From this initial stage in the bourgeois revolution two main results followed directly. Firstly, the alienation of the Church lands by the impoverished Crown to the rich merchants in the third and fourth decades of the sixteenth century, decisively transferred the balance of economic power from the absolutist state to the rising bourgeois class. Secondly, the entry of English capitalism into the world market under Elizabeth (1558–1603) led to the initial capitalist struggle with Spain.

It was in the course of the conflict with the Spanish Empire, at one and the same time both the monopolist (by the Papal Decree of 1493 consequent on the discovery of America) of the newly discovered world market and also the armed champion of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, that the new Protestant and bourgeois mentality sunk deeply into the general consciousness of the English people.

By the opening years of the seventeenth century the revolutionary coalition of the absolutist state, which had risen on the ruins of feudalism — after that system had committed suicide in the Wars of the Roses — and the merchant class, had reached the parting of the ways as far as its respective leaders were concerned. Victorious alike over the Roman Church and the English peasantry, its domestic enemies — the latter finally 'liquidated' as a political force in 1549 with the

1 In 1832, in the First Reform Bill, we shall see a yet further evolution in the bourgeois revolution itself, when mercantilism and the merchant capitalist class will give way to industrial capitalism, the dynamic offspring of the industrial revolution, as mercantilism itself had been of the opening-up of the world market.

suppression of the Norfolk Agrarian Revolution — the coalition now represented that fundamental division of function, which in a class-divided society is the condition *sine qua non* for social revolution: the state still held the political power, but the balance of economic power had now shifted to the rising bourgeoisie, which therefore required a bourgeois state so as effectually to safeguard bourgeois economic interests. It was this fundamental question which dominated the seventeenth century in English history, and which made that century the heroic era of the bourgeois revolution, the classic age of revolution hitherto known in and to our history.

That 'century of revolution' can itself be divided into three phases. In the first of these, the revolutionary class, using Parliament — that 'two-handed engine at the door' (Milton, *Lycidas*) — as the effective instrument of its revolutionary will, battered down the old despotic regime by constitutional action, acting in the name of, and as the leader of the nation, which the bourgeoisie dominated both by its wealth and by its superior political ability.

This initial phase of direct revolutionary activity culminated in the 'Long Parliament', the abolition of the 'Star Chamber', and the rest of the illegal jurisdiction, and the impeachment of Strafford — the English 'Stolypin' — to employ an apposite analogy from the last days of the Russian absolutism.

There succeeded the phase of civil war, whence resulted the execution of the King and the dynamic military dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, that revolutionary broom of iron which swept clean the Augean Stables of absolutism and imprinted in letters of blood and iron a bourgeois mentality upon a still politically confused and ideologically immature people.

Inspired with the dynamic ideas of Calvin, the Ironsides made a clean break with, 'a root and branch reformation' of, the old order in Church and State, thereby becoming the prototype of the later Jacobins and Bolsheviks in respect of the teachings of Rousseau and Marx.

During that memorable decade (1648–58), the peak-point of the English bourgeois revolution, Calvin and Cromwell, the 'Marx' and 'Lenin' respectively of the bourgeois revolution, administered to England an operation of revolutionary surgery, the like of which it had never known. By a policy of 'Blood and Iron' Oliver Cromwell expanded England into 'Great Britain' and for the first time in the history of the island made it the greatest power in the Western world.

The operation, however, was too drastic for the patient! The death of the great Protector led to the Restoration and to the partial swing-back of the revolution, which that compromise settlement implied. However, the *ancien régime* could not be restored, and the bourgeois revolution soon revived. But its temporary defeat had taught it to avoid excesses, and when it revived, it did so again in a constitutional and Parliamentary form, in the shape of the Whig Party, founded (in 1679) by Shaftesbury, the initiator of the third phase of the bourgeois revolution; that sordid, unheroic, compromising but extremely efficient phase, which culminated in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89, when the Roman Catholic fanaticism of James aroused England's now fundamental Protestantism, and gave the Whigs their opportunity for their decisive *coup d'état*, which they were prompt to seize.

The revolution of 1688–89, accomplished, as we have seen, by fraud rather than by violence, proved permanent in the essential features that it inaugurated. It definitively made England a bourgeois country and installed for a century and a half that oligarchic regime, the foundations of which had been laid at the time of the

Reformation by the acquisition of the confiscated Church properties by a few rich men.

The rule of that predominantly Whig regime which Disraeli was to denominate with brilliant historic insight as 'The Venetian Oligarchy', endured unbroken from 1689 to 1832, that next great epochal milestone in the English revolutionary tradition, which was to substitute the rule of industrial, for that of mercantilist capital.

The seal was set upon the Whig dictatorship by the installation of the Hanoverian dynasty in 1714 upon the death of Anne. In the name of these German 'Merovingians' the Whig 'Mayors of the Palace' ruled undisturbed, and triumphantly went on to complete what their great predecessor, Cromwell, had had time only to begin: the elevation of England from the status of a minor European island to that of a world power; to the most dazzling place in the modern sun.

A modern historian who views the processes of English history from a Catholic and therefore in this respect — like a Marxist — from an objective angle, summarises the English bourgeois revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in these concise terms:

> Class government [viz, the oligarchy — FAR] arose in England historically during those generations which produced modern England as a whole; the generations of the religious revolution (1536–1688). Class government began to oust the old national popular monarchy after the confiscation of the ecclesiastical lands — the property of monastic corporations, colleges, hospitals, guilds and the rest — for the benefit of the squires and greater territorial lords.
>
> This new state of things was but partly and precariously established and the rising power of wealth not yet fully conscious of itself, when the great William Cecil, the chief maker of modern England, protected its origins under Queen Elizabeth (1558–1603). It triumphed in arms in the next generation when the squires and wealthier yeomen, relying on the money power of the City of London, not only conquered the Crown in the great Civil War (1642–46), but put the King to death (1649). It firmly established itself immediately, in the second half of the seventeenth century, from the return of the murdered King's son (1660) to the violent deposition and expulsion of his brother James the Second by the rich merchants and nobles who replaced him by creatures of their own (1688).
>
> Class government was by that time already the rule in England. The Crown, already thoroughly inferior by 1660, sank lower and lower in power by the next generation. An attempt to revive it failed; and from 1688 onwards the change was fully accomplished. The Crown had become a puppet, and an oligarchy of wealthy men henceforward determined the affairs of England.

Our author adds:

> This oligarchy presided over the great commercial expansion of England and her great corresponding colonial Empire.[2]

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2 JHP Belloc, *An Essay on the Nature of Contemporary England* (Constable, London, 1937) pp 22–23. By 'class government' our non-Marxist author means to imply the British capitalist oligarchy

Such were the main features of the English bourgeois revolution, the second and hitherto decisive phase in the evolutionary record of social revolution in England. By 1688, England was definitely a capitalist country. Henceforth, her pre-capitalist institutions were merely outmoded relics, conserved either for the sake of their picturesque qualities, or else on account of their utility as convenient fig-leaves for the effective rule of the bourgeoisie. Thereafter, the motives and incentives which dominated the life of England — now expanded to 'Great Britain' again by the Scottish 'Act of Union' in 1707 — were the motives natural and inevitable under a social system now dominated virtually exclusively by the economic profit-motive and by its political prerequisites.

The political revolution of the bourgeoisie was now completed. But political revolution in and for itself has never been a bourgeois practice. For the bourgeoisie, at all times and places, and despite all ideological camouflage, the economic is always the end; to which the political means is always subservient.[3]

It was because of this unvarying characteristic of a bourgeois society that the political revolution of the bourgeoisie in its first major European country, England, did not remain as 'an end in itself', fixed in the void like the legendary coffin of the Arabian Prophet. Contrarily, it was precisely because England was the first capitalist country politically that it subsequently became also the first country industrially. The industrial revolution of the eighteenth century was the inevitable offspring of the political revolution of the seventeenth, which provided both its moral dynamic and its material incentive. When Cromwell's Ironsides thundered across Marston Moor they had the Machine Age on the horizon!

With the coming of the industrial revolution, the natural sequel to the Whig victory in 1688–89, we enter upon a fresh epoch in English revolutionary history; the third historic phase, according to the computation adopted in this book.

In this era, which comes down to and includes our own day, and is as yet uncompleted, we shall see, first, industrial, and then, finance capital, each equipped with its own appropriate ideology and waging its own class struggles in and on behalf of its own historic evolution.

Finally, arising against the capitalist system itself and against the bourgeoisie in its totality, we shall observe the emergence of a new historic class, the proletariat, which, by the iron logic of its own existence, is forced — not indeed without frequent setbacks and consequent necessary changes in its political mentality and direction — to become the historic 'grave-digger', not only of capitalism, but also of every precedent class-divided society; thus completing and triumphantly concluding the long 'evolution of revolution' in Britain. That is, concluding it in the only possible way, by making further social upheaval totally unnecessary in a land of liberty and under a regime based, at long last, upon equity and upon social justice: that is, by the inauguration of scientific socialism.

This final revolutionary sequence will occupy the third and final part of this summary of *The Revolutionary Tradition in England*.

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which captured power at the 1688 Revolution. 'Class government' itself had, of course, existed long before.

3 It was, after all, that typical bourgeois economist David Ricardo who, long before Marx was born, raised the undeviating practice of his own class to the level of a permanent theory, by proclaiming that 'the economic is primary'!

Part III: The Industrial Age and the Social Revolution

Prologue

In the first volume of this book we traced the stormy sequence of English revolutionary history from its far-off origin in the early Middle Ages down to the definitive triumph of the bourgeoisie in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89. With this last event, the seal of capitalist class rule was firmly imprinted upon the entire framework of English society. From 1688 right down to the present day, there has been silently but nonetheless effectively woven that web of bourgeois ideology which has transformed the character of this nation into that unique pattern amid which it is still enmeshed: into what Hilaire Belloc has aptly styled as the 'moral unity' of the English nation along with its ruling class — we say 'English' advisedly, since in the non-English parts of our islands the amalgamation has been much less far reaching and effective.

Two political events consummated the work of the Glorious Revolution: the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, which transformed 'England' into 'Great Britain' — a necessary culmination of capitalist economics already temporarily achieved under the short-lived Cromwell–Commonwealth regime — 1649 to 1660 — and the accession of the House of Hanover upon the death of the last Stuart, Anne, in 1714.

With the accession of this mediocre dynasty of 'small breast-bestarred wanderers' as Charles Bradlaugh later aptly styled the royal genus to which the Hanoverian Kings belonged, a harmless rubber stamp was affixed to the Whig dictatorship of merchant capital which the revolution — as the growing Whig mythology styled the sordid intrigue of 1688 — had finally installed in power in Britain. The new dynasty, like the Tudors, had only the weakest of hereditary claims to the throne. Like the Tudors again, it was foreign in origin, unlike that masterful dynasty, it was devoid of any especial political ability; indeed, the earlier Hanoverians were barely acquainted with the English language itself; and the coming of the puppet German dynasty represented, at one and the same time, a guarantee that the republican excesses of the regicide Cromwellian era would not recur, whilst reducing the monarchy to the level of a harmless figurehead.

Whereas even Anne had repeated the age-long miracle of auto-suggestion known as 'touching for the King's evil' — an 'evil' which traditionally only yielded to the supernatural touch of a legitimate monarch ordained by God — the Georges dared not put their dubious kingship to the test by attempting the miracle — viz, the monarch could only 'touch', as long as the monarchy itself remained untouched: the Whigs, who abolished the absolute monarchy, abolished the miracle along with it!

Thus it is indubitable that, however insignificant an event in itself, yet the revolution did form a definite landmark between mediæval and modern times. The Middle Ages were dead beyond hope of recovery, and the transitional order between mediæval and modern which the Tudor–Stuart regime represented was ended by the revolutions of the seventeenth century which themselves ended in 1689. The failure of the romantically futile Jacobite counter-revolutions of 1715–1745–1746 indicated that the new order had come to stay.

What were the political characteristics of the modern era in the English revolutionary tradition? Of a less clear-cut and heroic type certainly than were those of the classic epoch which had been traced in the first volume of the present book. For the golden age of revolution in England, thus far, was unquestionably the seventeenth century; the culminating era of the bourgeois revolution — the revolution of the 'middle class'. As and when compared with that stupendous upheaval, the revolutionary movements of succeeding centuries lacked body, clarity and epic quality. The 'Ironsides' have not charged twice!

In the annals of the British revolutionary tradition, Oliver Cromwell still remains 'our chief of men'. The classic figure in the annals of the bourgeois revolution, the great Calvinist remains the 'culture hero' of revolution in England: neither 'Old Noll' nor the men of iron that he led have been equalled, let alone surpassed, in English revolutionary annals. It is true that I hold, and on grounds not easily shaken, that before the present (twentieth) century has run its course, this nation will be the scene of a classic rising of the proletariat and its ally, the (so-called) lower middle class, equal if not superior to even the 'great rebellion' of the mid-seventeenth century. But this epoch-making crisis has not yet arrived. The British Empire and the counter-revolutionary ideology which, since Disraeli's day, is its inseparable concomitant, have yet, alas, to plunge the British people through a whirlpool of suffering and disillusion before a tardy enlightenment at last dawns upon the masses.

Consequently, the movements which I shall seek to outline in the current concluding part of this book are of a more mixed, ambiguous and indeterminate nature than were the previous revolutionary sequences, both those of feudal and of the early modern times, which I have sought to trace above.

The era which I shall seek to trace is one characterised pre-eminently by two revolutions and a counter-revolution. To the first category belong the industrial revolution of the mid-eighteenth century, which entirely transformed the social scene in Britain, and therewith the nature and course of the modern class struggle, and that world-shaking event, the French Revolution of 1789, the inspiration and 'onlie begettor' of a whole era of social change in Great Britain: to be sure, from 1791, the date of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, down to 1848, the date both of another French Revolution and the swan-song of the Chartist movement, revolutionary tendencies in England followed like an obedient shadow in the wake of successive avatars of the Spirit of Revolution in France — 1789–1830–1848. For half a century the spiritual capital of progressive England was the Paris of the Jacobin Club.

The year 1848, 'the year of revolutions', represented not only the culmination of the era of the bourgeois revolution which began with the storming of the Bastille — 14 July 1789 — but also the origin of the proletarian revolutions, of scientific socialism, and of the *Communist Manifesto*, that 'New Testament' of revolutionary science, which inaugurated both. Unhappily, however, England, through the century that has elapsed since then, has not followed in the wake of the revolutionary genius of Marx, but in that of his 'Satanic' counterpart, that other man of genius, the master of modern counter-revolution — as Marx is himself of revolution — Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881). Disraeli, the pre-eminent master of modern counter-revolution, is also the master of modern England.

If we today still live in what Leon Trotsky has aptly styled as 'the most conservative country in the world', it is above all due to Disraeli and to the masterly technique of counter-revolution which was originally patented, so to speak, by that

brilliant soldier of fortune. Democracy in the metropolis on the basis of dictatorship in, and scientific exploitation over, the colonial periphery: 'Tory democracy' in Britain — 'a terminological inexactitude' which was Beaconsfield's master-stroke — supported by a colonial slavery without precedent in human annals, such is the social style which enabled the British bourgeoisie to recover from the storms of the French Revolution and to enjoy another century of dazzling wealth and overwhelming power. This triumphant essay in 'the identity of opposites' was first and foremost the work of Disraeli. It is high time that historical science ceased to accept the (Tory) 'stupid party's' account of its own saviour, and to rank Beaconsfield not with such comparative mediocrities as the ponderous Gladstone and the atavistic Salisbury, but as that which in reality the great Jewish soldier of fortune was: viz, the greatest political genius of the nineteenth century and the supreme master of counter-revolution in modern times. For the past two generations Britain, in the language of astrology, has inhabited the 'house' of Disraeli.

For this reason, we must rank the era — 1848 to 1948 — as an age not of revolution, but emphatically of counter-revolution indeed, without any real parallel in human annals; unspectacular indeed, but incredibly efficient. If recently, in the midst of a life and death struggle, Britain was the only country in the world which allowed a measure of criticism and recognised the rights of 'conscience' to refrain from military service even in wartime, this fact constitutes proof positive of the overwhelming internal strength of the capitalist-imperialist regime in Britain; in that unique creation of a political strategy of genius: Disraeli's England, the pampered 'free' centre of a worldwide slave empire.

Whilst, however, the Victorian age is essentially one of counter-revolution rather than one of revolution, yet the post-Victorian era has known one period of revolutionary activity. For, just as the French Revolution set in motion a tidal backwash which disturbed the surface of English society for two generations, so the Russian Revolution — the proletarian historic counterpart of the initial bourgeois revolution in England under Cromwell — also set in motion a tidal wave of revolution which, as promulgated by the Communist International — the organisation specifically designed to promote it — set in motion a hurricane of revolution which in the decade following upon 1917 swept over virtually the entire planet.

In Britain, it is true, this wave of revolution was reduced to a modest wavelet by the impenetrable granite of British conservatism; yet even here, though not comparable to the results of the French Revolution in either effect or duration, the impress of the Russian Revolution was not entirely negligible. To be sure, British Communism never could boast of a Paine, a Godwin or a Shelley, but, notwithstanding, 'the spectre of Communism' sent more than one shudder down even the stolid British spine. And once, when the revolutionary forces combined in temporary coalition with the first phase of Britain's economic decline, the resulting 'general strike' of May 1926 raised, for one horrid moment, the vista of revolution before the horror-struck gaze of the British ruling class.

However, 'twas but a passing mirage'. British imperialism was still far too strong and, one can add, the revolutionary instincts of the masses were still far too undeveloped for any prolonged, yet alone victorious, revolution to arise and proceed to victory on British soil. The year 1926 was thus far indeed the end of an entire epoch in social history, as is now evident in retrospect.

In conclusion, in a final epilogue, we shall essay to cast a glance ahead through the dense murk that now encircles us, towards the coming era in human history, an era which everything combines to indicate as the most revolutionary epoch in human annals. Nor, in England, as elsewhere, will such a character be lacking. Indeed, there are very strong reasons for surmising that in the course of the historical era that lies immediately ahead, England will become transformed from the least to the most revolutionary land in existence. Not merely is it extremely probable that England will participate in the worldwide revolutionary upheavals which accompany a moribund capitalism as it plunges to destruction, but such a transformation from extreme reaction to extreme revolution is also rendered well-nigh inevitable by the very nature of British conservatism itself.

For every technique of political strategy, not excepting even a technique devised by genius of the highest order has concurrently its Achilles' Heel. As will hereafter be demonstrated, the political master of modern Britain, Disraeli, prolonged capitalism in England by basing it upon imperialism on a worldwide scale. But, by making the British metropolis dependent on its world Empire, *Disraeli also ensured its downfall when that Empire shall no longer exist to exploit*. The first and indispensable stage in the coming British revolution is the destruction of the British Empire and of the world power of British capital. '*Ecrasez l'empire*' is the first 'commandment with promise', as far as the science of revolution itself is concerned specifically with Britain.

In conclusion: in the first part of this book I described both the revolutions of the feudal age and the classical era of bourgeois revolution in England: in the second ensuing part I deal successively with the rise of industrial capital, as expressed in and by the transformation of Whiggism, the dictatorship of merchant capital, into Liberalism, the dictatorship of industrial capital by the agency of that 'bloodless revolution' — the (so-called) 'Reform Bill' of 1832. I trace in that broad outline consonant with the scope of this book, the early, still tentative, revolutionary movements of the era of the French Revolution, culminating in the Chartist movement, that 'light which failed', but which, notwithstanding, still serves today as a source of inspiration for the British revolutionaries of our own time. Both the counter-revolution of finance-capital, of imperialism in its classical Leninist sense, and the almost contemporary movements inspired chiefly by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, will occupy our attention.

Then, having thus completed our survey of the whole river of English revolution along its winding and deviously undulating course, I shall hope to have succeeded in what is, after all, the fundamental object in my writing this book: to throw back in the teeth of the bourgeois philistines and of their Labour lackeys the lie that revolution, *per se*, is alien to the English temperament; that 'human nature' here is 'different' from what it is in less favoured lands; that England, as so often asserted by bourgeois 'historians', has no revolutionary tradition, that consequently, revolution is here an impossibility, in the future, as allegedly in the past.

It is primarily to nail that lie for ever that I offer these lines to that vast and ever-growing public which, taught by the ever-augmenting horrors of capitalist imperialism in its death-rattle, shakes off the mental slavery of reactionary tradition and notes well that, for Britain as for the world in general — and perhaps even more so — the choice today is between international socialism and the barbarism of a new dark age. And that it is, here as elsewhere, the science of revolution which alone can untie the Gordian knot.

Chapter I: The Whig Oligarchy and the Industrial Revolution

The 'Revolution' of 1688–89 resulted in the arrival in Britain of a political regime which has had no parallel in modern times.[1] For, from its birth in the bloodless 'Revolution' of 1688–89 — that is, bloodless in England — down to its death, or rather to its reincarnation, in the (similarly) bloodless revolution in 1832 — the so-called 'Reform Bill' — in Great Britain it represents the perfect example in modern history of a political oligarchy, of an aristocratic or, more exactly, of a plutocratic state.

For, to find any precise parallel to the Whig dictatorship of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it would be necessary to go back to ancient and mediæval times, and to investigate the very similar political regimes of classical Carthage and of mediæval Venice.

Indeed, Disraeli, with the piercing glance of a genius, has aptly denominated the Whig regime installed by (what its historians persisted in describing as) the revolution, as 'the Venetian Oligarchy' and indeed the comparison is most accurate. For the Whig dictatorship, like the England it created, was something without either parallel or precedent in the scheme of modern life. As Belloc acutely remarked, one takes for granted the air one breathes. The 'air' of modern England is essentially still the air of 1689. Though modified in form by the revolution of 1832, and in substance by the technical revolutions of recent times, yet England has remained astonishingly true to type. Fundamentally, the British policy even today in the twentieth century is still the creation of the Whig oligarchy which overthrew the Stuarts at the end of the seventeenth century.

The era of Whig ascendancy stretched, as stated above, from the 'Revolution' of 1688 to the Reform Bill of 1832, when the new manufacturing classes created by the industrial revolution forced their way into the hitherto charmed circles of governmental power and privilege. But the above epoch of domination can itself be divided into two dissimilar sub-epochs. From 1689 to 1789, from the English to the French Revolution, that exact century represented the golden age of Whiggism. Throughout that century the Whig dictatorship ruled without a rival: it was 'monarch of all it surveyed'. Scarcely a ripple of revolution disturbed the placid equanimity of English political life throughout this century of the 'Revolutionary Settlement'.[2]

With the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, this century of blank reaction came to an end. Struck in succession by two revolutions, the 'industrial' revolution, as modern terminology agrees to describe the great technical

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1 In the final section of this book, the term 'England' used exclusively in the first and second parts, gives way to 'Great Britain', the correct designation of this island since the 'Act of Union' with Scotland in 1707. As heretofore, the stormy revolutionary history of Ireland (Eire) lies entirely outside my scope; in the matter of revolution, as of many other aspects of human mentality, the Irish Sea, which separates two islands in name, separates two worlds, in fact!

2 In Scotland, as pointed out in my last appendix, this was not entirely true, for there, in the native land of the Stuarts, some embers still stirred of mediævalism and Jacobite counter-revolution; but even there, after Culloden, no sound was heard even in the land of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' and of Alan Breck.

transformation of the late eighteenth century, and the French Revolution — the Continental equivalent of the English bourgeois revolutions — the spirit of revolt awoke once more in Britain: from 1790 to 1832, indeed to 1848, it is hardly too much to say that the dominant feature in the British history of the period was the revolution that never took place: throughout these two generations of storm and stress a spectre continually haunted the decadent (Whig–Tory) oligarchy of the period; the spectre of revolution.

That volcanic era will form the subject of my next two chapters. Here, in this present one, I am solely concerned with the classical century of Whig domination — viz, the century that directly followed the revolution (1689 to 1789): the classical era of British oligarchy, which was not then forced to hide its naked rule under the ever-thicker fig-leaf of an alleged democracy, as has been the case with the British ruling class in succeeding centuries. The self-same oligarchy, which today dodders in senile decay, under the political leadership of Churchill and Halifax, was then in its lusty and powerful youth, flushed with 'revolutionary' victory and drunk with the lust of a class newly arrived at power.

It is an observed truism, powerfully reinforced in our own day and generation by the late Third Republic of bourgeois France and by the contemporary 'Communist' Russia of Stalin, that the heirs of a revolution are themselves seldom revolutionary![3] It was not otherwise with the eighteenth-century heirs of the 'Glorious Revolution' of the late seventeenth century. Seldom indeed in all history has there been a more sordid and fundamentally reactionary caste of politicians than the heirs of 1689. An acute thinker of our own generation has lately trenchantly reminded us that the essence of *all* recorded (class) revolutions has been simply to substitute the rule of one privileged minority for another. The revolution, persecuted whilst in opposition, becomes a band-waggon upon the day *after* the seizure of power: this truth of universal historic import was nowhere more evident than in the century of despotic rule which resulted upon the final victory of the bourgeois revolution in England.

For the century that followed upon the hard-won issue of the long-drawn-out 'middle-class' revolution was itself, beyond any doubt, the most sordid and reactionary era in our entire political history. For ruling as they did under the shadow of a puppet dynasty and through the agency of a Parliament elected by but an infinitesimal minority of the population, the Whig clique was entirely alien to any consideration of altruism or humanitarianism. Its zeal for revolution had been slaked by victory. For it, *the* Revolution which installed it in power was a final and definitive thing. One cannot improve upon perfection! Moreover, the later decades of the eighteenth century saw so intense a transformation of the country, thanks to the industrial upheaval, that the Parliamentary instrument by means of which alone the oligarchy kept in some remote touch with public opinion, became entirely unrepresentative.

To be sure, the scandal of the 'Unreformed' Parliament became eventually the Achilles' Heel of the obsolescent dictatorship. Moreover, no high ideal, no dynamic impulse, drove the Whigs forward to 'fresh fields and pastures new' of the spirit. The old heroic Calvinism, which had imparted a touch of grandeur to the great Puritan revolutionaries of the age of Cromwell, had been slain by surfeit. The Whigs of the eighteenth century represent perhaps the classical example that predestination

3 See Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution: A Century of Social Conflict Told Through the Lives of Blanqui, Marx, Bakunin, Nechayev, Makhno, Most, Stalin* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1939).

is only a revolutionary doctrine when in opposition. Victory automatically sanctifies what is. Revolution, in Calvinist theology, 'suffers a sea-change' into counter-revolution the day after power has changed hands.

The (Whig) dictatorship of merchant capital was, however, not merely peculiar in its character as a close corporation of aristocratic plutocrats governing through a (nominally) representative Parliament. Its manner of domination was no less unique. For every political regime is itself dictated to by its own economic role: there has never yet been a dictatorship to which economic necessity did not itself act as a peremptory dictator. The rule of the Whigs was, at bottom, the rule of merchant capital, and capitalism, then in its early industrial stage, required above all things freedom; freedom *from* legal necessity, in order to arrive at freedom *for* economic necessity. For freedom *from* property is always the *sine qua non* of a smoothly functioning capitalist system in its relations with the producing majority.

Hence, it was impossible for the Whigs to set up anything in the nature of a 'totalitarian' or 'corporate' state of the modern Fascist type, for this would have made the development of capitalism and the evolution of the industrial revolution a stark impossibility. Freedom of contract is at all times and places the lifeblood of a fast-expanding capitalist order of society based on private property; this can be seen best in the two supreme examples of such a fast-expanding capitalism: viz, the Britain of the industrial revolution (c 1750 to 1850), and the America of the machine age, of the triumph of technocracy (1900 to 1930). Such rapid economic movements must have freedom to move!

The Whig oligarchy recognised this necessity. If it did not help its contemporary technical revolution, it at least did nothing to hinder it. Freedom was its watchword. As we have not forgotten, it based its charter to rule on a bowdlerised *Magna Carta*, in which that remote landmark in the evolution of the commercial classes became a legendary palladium of human freedom composed by thirteenth-century 'Whigs'. Consequently, the dilemma: how to exercise (what in practice soon became) the most powerful and all-transforming dictatorship in modern times in the name of a gospel of freedom?

For an almost religious emphasis on individual freedom was, I repeat, forced on the Whig rulers of England by the very nature of their economic regime. For the age of the early industrial revolution was the age sacred to freedom of contract, to the dawning right 'to hire and fire', in a sentence, to the 'substitution of contract for status'. It was in no way an accident that the most popular literary 'best-seller' of that era was the apotheosis of 'rugged individualism', Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

In such an age, political practice had to be brought in line with economic if the Whig dictatorship was to survive, since politics in a class society exist for the sake of economics, and not vice-versa.

The Whigs solved the problem: they squared the circle, and exercised a dictatorship in the name of freedom. At the very height of their power, the great Whig tribune William Pitt the Elder (Earl of Chatham) proclaimed the gospel of freedom in language of grandiose magniloquence: 'The storm and rain may beat into the cottage of the poor man, but the King cannot enter it.' 'The legal limitations of sovereignty', in a sentence!

To exercise an absolute domination in the name of a principle of such sweeping liberty might at first sight appear impossible, yet it was done: the Whigs achieved it; unlike the earlier dictatorship of Cromwell, they needed for their rule no huge

military establishment, no martial law, no major-generals. They exercised a virtually absolute authority without any of its normal instruments. That they did succeed in exercising it there can be no doubt at all. When George Meredith once stated that the Normans beat the Saxons so soundly at the Conquest that ever since, the aborigines have had a crick in the neck which makes them look *up* at a lord, he was actually in error. It was from the Whig domination of the eighteenth century — from the invasion of Dutch William, and not from his remote Norman predecessor — that there dates the modern caste system, the worship of rank and wealth, which is still the essential characteristic of modern England, *the* oligarchy, *par excellence*, of modern times. We have not forgotten what kind of respect England had for lords in the days of Oliver Cromwell and his Ironsides!

The Whig regime was, I repeat, a dictatorship; but a dictatorship with a difference. For the Whigs ruled not directly by force — to be sure, they conserved that hatred of a standing army which was the lasting legacy from the hateful military despotism of Cromwell's major-generals. Rather, they ruled through ideology: through the brilliant success of their foreign policy, which laid the foundations of (what later became) the British Empire and enriched the commercial classes beyond the dreams of human avarice by the spoliation of India and America, the 'glittering prizes' of its dazzling victory over France in the epoch-making 'Seven Years War' (1756–63). And, almost simultaneously, by one of those accidents which defy all exact causation, there occurred a religious counter-revolution, which effectually transformed the revolutionary Puritanism of the seventeenth century into the reactionary Methodism of the eighteenth century.[4] As a result, by the time of the French Revolution both the upper and the lower classes were anti-revolutionary to a very large extent, the former as a result of victory abroad and expanding trade; the latter as a direct result of the success of the religious counter-revolution represented by the Methodism which achieved phenomenal success, in particular among the lower middle-class.[5]

The eighteenth century was, prior to the French Revolution, perhaps the most consistently reactionary era in our entire annals. The 'revolution' of merchant capital had arrived; and, regarding its own achievement as beyond criticism or improvement, it did not look forward to fresh revolutions in the future. No movement subversive of established thought in any sphere existed anywhere, apart from the Deists, who never at any time mustered more than a handful of supporters.[6]

The foreign policy of the government was brilliantly successful — it was under the political direction of Chatham in the 'Seven Years War' that Britain became a world power for the first time in her history. Meanwhile, the only new ideological movement with a mass basis — viz, Methodism — was intensely reactionary. Thus, throughout the golden age of the oligarchy hardly a ripple stirred the smooth surface of reaction. The brutality of the masses which still lives for us in Hogarth's cartoons, was matched by the unexampled ferocity of the contemporary criminal law, in which death was the penalty for virtually all save the most trifling crimes: 'You are to be hanged not for stealing horses, but that horses shall not be stolen.'

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4 See the appendix to this chapter, 'The Methodist Counter-Revolution'.

5 There was, of course, a third even more far-reaching movement in the industrial revolution; but that epoch-making event did not become politically operative until the next (nineteenth) century: as a purely technical movement it falls outside the scope of these pages.

6 See the note on the Deists at the end of this chapter.

This typical utterance of an eighteenth-century judge may be said to summarise the legal jurisprudence of the age. Never probably in all history has there been less social sense than in the eighteenth century, and never certainly has a sharper social and cultural contrast existed than between the ultra-polished, highly-cultured elegantly Gallicised aristocracy of the epoch, and the illiterate, gin-sodden brutalised masses. In the annals of social revolution the century of Whig dictatorship is a complete blank; and in those of social satire, only the biting literary shafts of the High Tory Jonathan Swift do something to indicate the seamy side of the age; and to suggest a doubt as to the perfect appropriateness of the favourite philosophic formula of the upper classes of that age: viz: 'Everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.'

If we would seek for the explanation of the totally reactionary character of this age — an age which, after all, owed its existence to a revolution — we can find it in the fact that the class struggle, that essential dynamic of progress, was entirely suspended. The age was in fact a social watershed: the middle ages were dead, along with the peasantry; the bourgeoisie had arrived, whilst the next creative class, the proletariat, the creation of the industrial revolution, was not yet. Hence party politics, the lifeblood of an ascending society, were absent; the dictatorship ruled over a social vacuum.[7] It was entirely characteristic of the oligarchy that the one word which was taboo in the 'best circles' was the word 'enthusiasm'.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, the smooth surface of this era of revolution-turned-reaction began to crack under the stresses and strains of new impacts. The War of American Independence (1776–83) sharply arrested the hitherto continuous run of successes which the Whigs had enjoyed in their foreign policy: their brilliant sequence of colonial conquests was abruptly arrested when Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown and a new nation came into being across the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, the American War, disastrous as it was, was too far off to affect in any great degree the domestic structure of British society. It is extremely noteworthy that the only revolution conducted by (colonial) Englishmen against an English government itself aroused no revolutionary movement in England herself. No doubt this was partly due to the fact that the oligarchy itself was divided on the expediency of fighting in defence of an outpost of empire which was, in any case, too remote to be held permanently against its will by a trans-Atlantic government. We have not forgotten the eloquent speeches delivered by the dying Chatham and the young Burke and Fox against the attempt of the King and his 'friends' to coerce the revolting colonists. Indeed, by discrediting the last attempt made by an English monarch to govern as well as reign, it may even have strengthened the rule of the oligarchy. Had George the Third succeeded in imposing his personal policy on America, another revolution might have been necessary to get rid of him in England.

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7 After 'The Forty-Five' the Jacobite Movement was virtually dead. So also was the Tory Party in its old pre-1688 form as the party of the Stuarts, of Legitimacy, and of the *ancien régime*. In the evolution of Toryism a key text is the once famous book of Lord Bolingbroke, *The Patriot King* of 1749, which purged the Tory Party of its belief in Divine Right and of its former attachment to the Stuart cause. Henceforth, of the old Toryism little remained except the name of the Old Firm. The Tory Party of the late eighteenth century, as revived by George the Third, Lord North and the younger Pitt, had little in common with the older Toryism, and was rather a Whig schism, viz, it accepted the 'Protestant Succession' and the whole 'Revolutionary Settlement' and did not differ on any important point from traditional Whig policy. Virtually, the Whigs were the only political party during this era.

As it was, his attempt to recover power (on the lines laid down by Bolingbroke in his *Patriot King*) was a complete failure, and the 'Mayors of the Palace' resumed their interrupted rule in the name of the Hanoverian 'Merovingians', hereafter permanently reduced to the role of royal cyphers.

A far more serious danger to the oligarchy was represented by the growing transformation of the country by the vast technical 'revolution' which between 1750 and 1800 definitely transformed Britain from a predominantly agrarian country into 'the workshop of the world'; into the metropolis of the new industrial era that was then just dawning. For by 1776 — when Adam Smith evolved the economics of the new manufacturing system in his world-famous economic classic *The Wealth of Nations* — the new England was already coming into being.

With the industrial revolution as such this book cannot concern itself if it is to keep within its appointed limits. In any case, its outlines may be presumed to be by now generally known. Suffice it to observe once more that British capitalism did not start with the industrial revolution, as has so often been erroneously stated, but that the economic revolution was the direct and necessary *result* of the political revolution which, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, had raised the commercial classes to power. As the Russian scientist B Hessen pointed out a few years ago in an illuminating monograph, it was the Cromwellian revolution that led directly to the founding of the (so-called) 'Royal Society' in the Restoration era; and that the great scientific renaissance to which this gave rise was due essentially to the new needs of British society as it entered its capitalist era. Indeed, since invention is merely the adaption of a general scientific theory to particular practical ends, it can be truly said that the whole scientific revolution of the eighteenth century, which created modern industry and the specifically 'modern' world, was implicitly contained in the programme of the savants of the Royal Society around 1660, 'to enlarge the empire of science and the boundaries of useful knowledge' as, early in the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon (Lord Verulam), that 'John the Baptist' of the industrial revolution, had already expressed it in his prophetic *New Atlantis* (1626).[8]

Indeed, so far was the industrial revolution the direct outcome of the political revolution which installed the commercial class in power that the two are related as cause and effect: merchant capital arose on the basis of the newly-discovered world market in the sixteenth century. The merchants seized power in Britain by the revolutions of the seventeenth century. The removal of feudal, clerical, absolutist 'restraints on trade', on industrial and technical evolution, directly gave rise in an already (merchant) capitalist Britain to the industrial revolution of the eighteenth

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8 See contribution by B Hessen on 'The *Principia* of Newton', *Science at the Cross-Roads* (Kniga, London, 1931).

Assuming that invention is merely the practical application of theory we may say that the whole scheme both of the industrial revolution and of the machine age to which it ultimately gave rise, can be found in Swift's *Voyage to Laputa* — the third and greatest of *Gulliver's Travels* — to be sure, the whole essence of the industrial revolution is to be found in Swift's imaginary 'Academy of Projectors', whom the great satirist projected in the 'Floating Island' (in Laputa). With the glance of genius he perceived the essential drifts of the age that was dawning. We have not forgotten that in the self-same work Swift had himself anticipated the discovery of the two moons of the planet Mars and their ratio to the parent: surely one of the most marvellous pieces of imaginative guesswork in all history. The above examples demonstrate that (what we may style) the 'idea' of the industrial revolution was 'in the air' on the very morrow of the bourgeois *political* victory.

century. This last was not the *cause* but the *result* of the political victory of capitalism in Britain: Cromwell prepared the way for the factory system.

The Whig oligarchy of the eighteenth century was, as remarked above, the dictatorship of merchant capital. Hence it was bound to be outmoded by the growth of the higher stage of the evolving capitalist system, which was represented by the industrial capitalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries — just as this latter, in its turn, was outmoded in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century by the subsequent evolution of the still higher finance capital that today represents the last phase of the capitalist system when itself taken as a whole.

At first, rather complementary than politically distinct, the industrialists (manufacturers) and the workers were alike revolutionary, not yet against each other — that phase still lay far in the future — but against the reigning oligarchy, largely dominated by the merchant landlords. Against the economic ideology of merchant capital — that is, mercantilism — the new classes advanced free trade, the new revolutionary demand of a new manufacturing class whose teeming output increasingly outstripped the closed markets of mercantilism: the then revolutionary economics which Adam Smith and (in the opening years of the nineteenth century) David Ricardo flung like a bombshell into the Lilliputian world of pre-industrial production.

Politically, the new classes demanded the abolition of the unreformed Parliament dating from Stuart times, in which the new industrial districts had no place and workers and manufacturers no representation. As in the days of the early Stuarts, political and economic powers were increasingly in different and antagonistic hands, the merchant–landlord oligarchy monopolised Parliament, and also local government, whilst the richest class, the manufacturers, were still treated as political outcasts.

Already as early as the American War, bold reformers like Major Cartwright were demanding Parliamentary reform. The classic pre-revolutionary situation was already in process of formation, when political and economic power are in different hands. Already by 1789 the ground was beginning to rumble beneath the feet of the oligarchy. New class struggles threatened to end the century-old stagnation of the Whig dictatorship and its puppet 'Merovingian' Hanoverian monarchy. Already the Prime Minister William Pitt (the younger — 1759–1806), the 'Witte' of the old regime in Britain, had his ear to the ground, seeking to hear and to appease the growing groundswell.[9]

At this precise moment a political bomb of dynamic intensity was thrown into the stagnant ocean of the *ancien régime*. On 14 July 1789, the Paris 'mob' stormed the Bastille. On 4 August of the same year, the remains of feudalism, the *ancien régime*, and the absolute monarchy were abolished by the Third Estate. The French Revolution had arrived: an era of revolution was precipitated on the world. A huge tidal wave of Continental revolution swept across the Channel into an England already seething with potential class conflict. The century of post-revolutionary stagnancy was over. A new epoch of revolution was on its way in Britain.

Note on the Deists: Whilst the eighteenth century was, in general, virtually denuded of revolutionary movements, yet a brief mention must be made of one movement of religious and theological criticism. This was the movement of Deism, or anti-Christian Unitarianism, which, though never a mass movement, yet

9 Count Witte — Tsarist politician and Minister of Nicholas the Second, who sought to prevent revolution in Russia by a policy of reforms.

produced a number of writers and aroused considerable controversy and a spasmodic amount of persecution.

The Deist movement deserves mention for two reasons: it was the only movement directed against orthodoxy throughout the period in question: though not directly political, it attacked the established Church which stood in closest political relations with the Whig state. Secondly, Deism made a deep impression on the famous French revolutionary writers who took refuge in England during the period in question, such as Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau, who were both Deists. Through their agency Deism exercised considerable influence on the subsequent course of the French Revolution. Robespierre was a Deist, and his famous 'Feast of the Supreme Being' was a public acknowledgment by the French revolutionary state of the truth of this doctrine.

In England, the Deists were non-political until the French Revolution, when, as we shall shortly see, Thomas Paine united the doctrines of political revolution and religious revolt. Paine himself was both the greatest of the Deists and the greatest of modern British revolutionaries. In the former connection, his famous *Age of Reason* gave Deism, hitherto the monopoly of a clique, a genuine mass appeal.

Prior to Paine the two chief Deistic books were *Christianity Not Mysterious* by John Toland, a disciple of John Locke, and *Christianity as Old as the Creation* by Matthew Tyndal, a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford (1696 to 1730). There were a number of orthodox replies to the Deists, of which Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion* still enjoys a vogue in religious circles.

In addition to attacking the whole concept of Revealed Religion and Church orthodoxy, the Deists defined God — 'The Supreme Being' — as 'the great mechanic' — who originally wound up the universe and only intervened occasionally to repair it: an obvious reflex of the Industrial Age then dawning.[10]

Appendix: The Methodist Counter-Revolution: As remarked above, the eighteenth century was an era virtually devoid of any social conscience. 'The condition of the people' question, which the Liberalism of the following century placed on the order of the day, was almost completely lacking in and throughout the golden age of the Whig rule. The masses of the population, illiterate and brutalised, might as well have lived on a different planet from the highly-cultured aristocracy of the ruling class. And, as is common knowledge, the early decades of the industrial transformation, with the appalling toll of suffering which they exacted, did nothing whatever to improve the harsh material conditions under which the great majority laboured.

Under such circumstances, it would be natural to expect a widespread revolutionary sentiment similar to that which among the famished French masses laid the *ancien régime* in ruins in 1789. And in fact, as our next chapters will demonstrate, the spirit of revolution was far from being unknown among the broad masses of the English people. Indeed, as I shall hope to show, a huge question-mark hung over Britain for the two generations that separated the two Continental revolutions of 1789 and 1848: whether the revolution was to be or not to be; whether or no England would take the Paris road, the road of the Jacobin club strewn with the heads of the old mercantilist–landowning oligarchy who were beneficiaries of the old regime.

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10 See Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (John Murray, London, 1927) for a good and sympathetic account of this radical religious movement.

If in the long run England decided in the negative, and indeed remained and remains today, 'the most conservative country in Europe' (Trotsky), the one country where the French Revolution found no imitators; this was due very largely, perhaps primarily, to that movement of counter-revolution of the mid-eighteenth century, which is associated with the name of John Wesley; to be sure, the most powerful figure in the annals of British counter-revolution next to Disraeli. Indeed in the general effect of his influence, the 'Disraeli' of the spiritual sphere.

We have already had several occasions to note the powerful effects of religion on English society in general, and upon the history of revolution in particular. We have noted and carefully distinguished between the revolutionary world outlook of these popular religions engendered by the oppressed masses themselves and that much better known type of religion, 'the opium of the people' — which has been in all times the servile henchman of the ruling class. In English history we have not forgotten the dynamic revolutionary role of the Lollards and Anabaptists, who illustrated the social standpoint so concisely expressed by a modern historian of mediæval heresy:

> Every heresy disclosed a social content at times socialistic. The heretics spoke to the people for the people. They wanted a return to the teaching of Christ, a return to the simple and righteous, life of the early Christian communities.[11]

Such indeed has been the role of revolutionary religion, with its backward-looking communism inspired by theocratic models drawn from its scriptures.

In contradistinction to revolutionary religion of the above type, we recall the conservative role of the Roman Catholic Church in mediæval times and of the Anglican Church in the great Civil War and Restoration, with its slavish devotion to the dogma of the Divine Right of Kings.

The Anglican Church of the eighteenth century, subjugated by the 'Revolution' of 1688–89, did not believe in the Divine Right of Kings; and, theologically speaking, was devoid of fanaticism, leaning towards a 'Broad Church' interpretation of Christianity. Politically, as the Church of the oligarchy — whose benefices were 'livings' (usually reserved) for the younger sons of squires — eighteenth-century Anglicanism was entirely reactionary. Any consideration of (what was later styled) the 'social question' was entirely alien to it; and the Divine Right of Squires — and 'their poor relations' — had by now succeeded the obsolete dogma of the Divine Right of the Stuarts.

We have not forgotten that from the days of the Civil War, the strength of Anglicanism lay in the rural areas; that of Puritanism in the towns.

For this reason, however, the essentially upper-class Anglican Church had but a negligible influence on the masses. As it did not speak their language, its reactionary 'opium' was of the feeblest quality. It remained, as despite all modern efforts to broaden its social basis it remains today, as the exclusive religion of 'gentlemen'. Indeed, an Anglican democrat in the age of the French Revolution would have been a sheer monstrosity.[12]

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11 Historical science, like history itself, is full of ironies: the above quotation is taken from a life of the mediæval reformer and martyr, John Huss, by — of all people — Benito Mussolini!

12 In so far as the Established Church had a social philosophy it was that so concisely summarised in the apt couplet: 'God bless the Squire and his relations / And keep us in our proper stations.'

For these reasons, the Anglican Church exercised little influence outside the narrow sphere of the ruling class in eighteenth-century England; a class the cultured latitudinarianism of which its higher clergy largely shared.

Its place, however, as a provider of 'opium' for the masses was taken by another powerful movement of essentially middle-class religion which was promulgated by John Wesley in the middle of the eighteenth century. This movement, originally emerging from the Anglican Church itself as an adaptation to the growing spiritual requirements of the lower middle class, was eventually driven from the Anglican pale by its narrow exclusively upper-class clergy and was forced, much against the will of its founder, the celebrated John Wesley, himself originally an Anglican clergyman with an Oxford training, to form a separate Church, that of Methodism or Wesleyanism, in sharp opposition to the Established Church.

John Wesley (1703–1791) was a 'Fundamentalist' of genius; an extreme reactionary in both the political and religious spheres — he believed in witchcraft just then falling into complete discredit — but was endowed with almost every gift of a great demagogue: a powerful personality, an iron constitution, an able organiser, and a superb mob orator, who fervently believed in his own brand of spiritual goods. With tremendous activity he ranged the whole country, preaching a crude evangelical Christianity which emphasised the 'enthusiasm' that was taboo in respectable Anglican circles, who were just then engaged in arguing against the Deists that Christianity — in the words of an already-quoted controversial work of the preceding century — was 'No Enthusiasm'.[13]

Wesley's movement and his indefatigable preaching fell entirely flat in the oligarchic circles of the ruling class, but its effect upon the spiritually-starved masses of the epoch, and very particularly upon the lower middle class, were tremendous and nationwide in effect. The theology of the Wesleyan–Methodist movement, one of fundamentalist crudity, falls outside the scope of these pages; but its political effects, amounting to a veritable counter-revolution, must be taken into account.

In substance, it can be said that Wesley created an anti-revolutionary form of Christianity. The result of his movement was to transform revolutionary Puritanism, which originated among the upper middle class, into Dissent, the reactionary gospel of the lower middle class, which the industrial revolution was then bringing into existence. As a brilliant American writer has recently pointed out: a whole mountain of errors could have been avoided if historians had been careful to distinguish between these two entirely distinct and opposed movements; revolutionary Puritanism as originated by Calvin and his British disciples, and counter-revolutionary Dissent, as founded by Wesley and his Methodist followers. The first was revolutionary and cultured — Calvin, Milton and even Oliver Cromwell were highly cultured men — and played a progressive role in its contemporary social evolution. The second was counter-revolutionary and crude — modern Dissent, the spiritual offspring of Methodism, has contributed little to culture and much against it — and it is due to its influence probably more than to any other factor, that the French Revolution failed to spread to England, as it so nearly did in the stormy years after 1789.[14]

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13 See Thomas Comber, Dean of Durham, *Christianity No Enthusiasm* (1670) — already cited in Part II of this book — see the Appendix on Quakers.

14 See VF Calverton, *The Passing of the Gods* (Scribners, New York, 1934).

How powerful was this counter-revolutionary influence exercised by the Evangelical Revival is thus indicated by one of the most profound historians of this epoch.

Having pointed to the wide diffusion of revolutionary thought emanating from France, which affected both English politics and English religion in the closing years of the eighteenth century, WEH Lecky tells us that:

> England on the whole escaped this contagion. Many causes conspired to save her, but among them a prominent place must, I believe, be given to the new and vehement religious enthusiasm which was at that very time passing through the middle and lower classes of the people, which had enlisted in its service a large proportion of the wilder and more impetuous reformers, and which recoiled in horror from the anti-Christian tenets that were associated with the Revolution in France.

Lecky goes on to emphasise the essentially lower middle-class atmosphere of the new Evangelicalism.[15]

In enumerating the failure of the revolutionary movements which I am about to describe, this powerful soporific must be kept in mind; it was Wesley, more probably than any other single individual, who prevented the spreading of the French Revolution to Britain: a frustration which, all things considered, must be said to rank as the greatest tragedy in modern British history, and as the chief cause of the terrible ideological backwardness which still today makes this formerly pioneer country of the bourgeois revolution the greatest obstacle to the social revolution in the West.

15 WEH Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, Volume 3 (Longmans, London, 1892), p 145.

Chapter II: The French Revolution and the English Jacobins

The revolutionary sequence which overthrew the mediæval regime and inaugurated modern capitalism upon an international scale can itself be divided into several successive and supplementary stages. Firstly, the Reformation displaced the Roman theocracy and its world outlook, itself the most important single element in the mediæval social order. Then in England — and even earlier in Holland — the bourgeois revolution overthrew the absolutist regime in Church and State, by a revolutionary movement that was half religious and half secular in character. As we have already seen, Calvinism on the theological plane and the struggle for Parliamentary control on that of political action combined in the great English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century.

With the French Revolution of 1789 the bourgeois revolution at one and the same time spread across the international field provided by Western Europe and itself reached the culminating point at which a bourgeois revolution is capable of arriving. Building upon the labours of its predecessors — we do not forget that most of the French writers of the pre-revolutionary generation had themselves been in exile in England — the French Revolution shed the religious disguises that had to a great extent masked the class character of its predecessors, the Reformation, and even the great English Revolution. Unlike them, it came out openly as a movement of a virtually completely secular character.[1]

The French Revolution was, then, the first integral revolution staged by the bourgeoisie. That is, it was what it pretended to be: viz, a rising of the Third Estate. It did not profess to be something which it was not, as the earlier, still semi-religious bourgeois revolutions had done. Instead of professing, as the earlier Calvinist revolutionaries — Calvin, Knox and Oliver Cromwell — had professed, to set up the Kingdom of God on earth, the French revolutionaries more modestly and unambiguously aimed merely at achieving their own class supremacy, the supremacy of the bourgeoisie, of the 'Third Estate'.

'What?', demanded its earliest theoretician, Abbé Sièyes, in his famous pamphlet written at the original opening of the States-General: 'What is the Third Estate? Everything! What has it been hitherto in the political order? Nothing! What does it desire to be? Something!' And in its slogans, destined to world fame: 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', the whole social gospel of the commercial classes, its entire programme of 'immediate demands', is to be found in its entirety.[2] 'Liberty' — from

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1 To be sure, there was an undercurrent of Deism, as expressed in Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, and we have not forgotten Robespierre and his short-lived cult of the 'Supreme Being'. Nonetheless, in relation to the role played by Calvinism in the earlier anti-feudal revolutions, the part played by religion in the French Revolution was negligible.

2 That the famous trinity of slogans had a concrete class interpretation and were not simply vague ideals is conclusively demonstrated by their subsequent history when the proletariat, in its turn, came treading at the heels of the bourgeoisie with its own revolutionary demands. We recall the inspired *bon mot* of Karl Marx himself in this connection, when that profound student of French history declared that, as far as the French workers themselves were concerned, they very quickly found that Liberty meant cavalry, Equality meant infantry, and Fraternity: artillery: see Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Buonaparte*. NB: The famous slogans originated amongst those early bourgeois ideologists, the Freemasons. As far back as 1747 they

feudal-absolutist bondage, from 'the [feudal] high justice, the middle and the low'. 'Equality' before the law — a law shortly to be codified by Napoleon, that heir of the revolution — in place of local codes administered by class caprice. 'Fraternity' — the union of the whole bourgeoisie and of the entire nation under its dynamic leadership in defence of its newly-acquired rights against the émigré White-guardist French nobles and the invading armies of the European Legitimacy.

In these inspired slogans the whole quintessence of the bourgeois revolution is summarised aptly and trenchantly.

The French Revolution of 1789–94 was, then, the classic example of a 'middle-class' revolution arrived at full maturity. As such, it supplied a revolutionary incentive to the down-trodden masses of the Europe of the old (transitional) regime, that absolutist watershed between the high feudalism of the Middle Ages proper, and the high noon of capitalism in the nineteenth century. As the armed spokesman of the European liberal (bourgeois) revolution, revolutionary France — particularly at its peak under the Dictatorship of Jacobin Paris in 1793–94 — aroused responsive echoes over the entire European Continent groaning under the oppressive heel of the absolutist monarchies, the Church and the feudal privilege. The tocsin that summoned the Paris workers to storm the Bastille thundered across Europe like a clarion call to action.

> Through clouds its shafts of glory rain
> From utmost Germany to Spain. — Shelley

And not only on the European Continent did the events in Paris arouse a responsive echo: they also crossed the Channel too, making an irresistible appeal to the bolder spirits amongst the English Radicals of the time. For whilst in revolutionary genealogy the French Revolution was the immediate successor of the English Revolution of 1688, yet that event was, as we have already noted, rather a compromise than a clean-cut social solution. Anyhow, the French Revolution, which built upon the shoulders of its predecessors, went very much further than they did. In its ultra-left Jacobin phase, when it naturally exercised the most powerful attraction for foreign sympathisers, revolutionary France went very much further than the tepid opportunists of 1689 had gone. Not merely did it do away with monarchy, Church and the last vestiges of feudalism in a manner even more drastic than the most radical phase of the English Revolution had ever dared to do, but, unlike the earlier English revolutionary governments, the Jacobin dictatorship promulgated consciously an international outlook, and even at one time seemed on the point of adopting officially the later Bolshevist conception of the duty of armed intervention in the internal affairs of foreign counter-revolutionary states. Eventually, it is true, the imperative need of looking after her own defences against both domestic treachery (in La Vendée, etc), and a hostile Europe leagued in arms against her compelled even the Jacobins to drop this too-ambitious plan as impracticable, yet there was always the possibility of its being revived, and the example of France itself was sufficiently contagious.[3]

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are quoted as Masonic ideals: see Eugene Lennhoff, *The Freemasons* (Methuen, London, 1934).

3 In the matter of intervention abroad, Robespierre expressed the final standpoint taken up by the Jacobins in his famous phrase — 'one does not spread liberty at the point of the bayonet… for no one loves an armed missionary' — but if space permitted, it would not be difficult to show that Robespierre's own standpoint changed several times on this question. Actually, it

Nevertheless, the French Revolution as it was exercised an influence upon the advanced English political movements of the succeeding half-century which was profound and incalculable in its effects. If we hold that the most important event in the political history of Great Britain in the nineteenth century was the revolution which never occurred, so, by the same style of calculation, we may by an accurate metaphor style the French Revolution itself as the major event in *British* political history for the two generations that immediately followed up 1789. Throughout this era of storm and stress the Seine flowed into the Thames, to paraphrase the famous metaphor of Juvenal.[4]

It will be clear already from the preceding chapter that the prerequisite conditions for a social upheaval already existed in Britain in 1789, when the stirring news from Paris came speeding across the Channel. The Whig oligarchy, which had just attained its centenary (1689 to 1789), was already obsolescent and was becoming increasingly outmoded and unrepresentative in the new industrial age. So much so in fact that its astute political director William Pitt (the Younger) was forced to make a show of modernising the effete structure.[5]

In fact, so rotten was the cracking structure of the old social order that Pitt, the last great statesman of the old Whig regime, was forced to dabble with Parliamentary reform and free trade already before the French Revolution had begun.

It will be clear from the above that danger threatened the oligarchy from two distinct sources: from the new manufacturing plutocracy, still virtually excluded from political power by the unrepresentative nature of Parliament; of a Parliament, that is, which was still entirely pre-industrial in its composition, and concurrently from the newly-born industrial workers, the proletariat, properly so-called, just then setting out upon its ultimately epoch-making career.

To these potential sources of danger to the oligarchy must be added a third; the danger of an internal split in the decaying society and among its political representatives. This last was represented by that Whig minority, then led by the great 'tribune of the people' Charles James Fox, that represented the left wing of the oligarchy, and which preferred a policy of 'appeasement' — that is, political concessions — to the new social forces rather than a demonstrable hopeless attempt to dam up forcibly the headlong tide of change.

It was from these three forces that the revolutionary movements of the next two generations arose. Before, however, glancing at these attempts to displace the old order in a more or less violent manner, we may profitably turn our attention for a moment to study the direct impact of the French Revolution itself upon its contemporary Britain.

The first reactions to the events of 1789 by the British ruling class were not unfavourable. In its early constitutional phase — that dominated by Mirabeau and his moderate Anglophile Party — the French Revolution did not aim at anything more than a very moderate programme of a limited monarchy and parliamentary

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was the military necessity of her own defence rather than the ethical idealism so eloquently expressed by the great orator, that explained why France did not press her foreign propaganda more vigorously.

4 'The Orontes flows into the Tiber.' — see Juvenal's *Satires*.

5 William Pitt the Younger (1759–1806), Prime Minister since 1783, when the collapse of his American policy ended George the Third's brief effort to revive the royal power by playing on the divisions of a decadent oligarchy.

government avowedly based on the English 'Glorious Revolution' of the preceding century. The British oligarchy, which still professed to govern in virtue of that event, was not displeased at an imitation which is, proverbially, 'the sincerest form of flattery'. Moreover, France was still the main commercial and maritime rival of the growing British Empire and had recently in America demonstrated, by her effective assistance to the revolting colonists, that she could still be a most dangerous enemy.

At first it seemed to Pitt that her domestic struggle would weaken rather than strengthen France. Accordingly, that wily statesman professed at first a strict policy of neutrality, of 'non-intervention' to the succeeding phases of the Gallic scene.

This early phase, however, did not last long. It soon became evident that it was easier to start the French Revolution than to stop that political landslide when once in motion. As the revolution swung more to the left, as the surging tide of refugee nobles and priests began to cross the Channel, as the European monarchs prepared openly for armed intervention, and as the French, in reply, began to reiterate that forthright saying of one of their philosophers (Jean Meslier) that the world would only know peace and progress when 'the last king had been strangled with the entrails of the last priest', as the first mutterings of the coming Terror began to break the stillness of the traditional political atmosphere, the ruling class of Great Britain, along with its European colleagues, began to change its point of view. Suspicion succeeded a tepid indifference, fear succeeded suspicion, hatred succeeded fear, and, finally, a frenzied loathing for the Paris 'Reds' swallowed up and obliterated all other political emotions.

At this juncture, in the autumn of 1790, a brilliant and unscrupulous Irish journalist crystallised this growing hatred into a pamphlet of superficial brilliance and of resounding rhetoric, which, as is the manner of really effective journalism, said exactly what its clients wanted to hear, and said it much better and more eloquently than they were capable of saying it themselves.

I refer, of course, to Edmund Burke's once celebrated *Reflections on the French Revolution*, a pamphlet so timely and consequently influential that, though of no permanent value in itself, it yet assumed the importance of a major political event.

Reflections on the French Revolution made a tremendous sensation and constituted an European event, and its author as an European power. From the King downwards, the entire ruling class read the glowing rhetoric with which its author, like a genuine romantic, painted the glories of the *ancien régime* in France in roseate colours. For Burke, like all romantics, doted on ruins.

But the author — a kind of Irish 'Cicero' who like his Roman prototype combined reactionary opportunism with a talent for imaginative rhetoric that amounted to genius — had correctly interpreted the feelings of his class. Thirty thousand copies were sold — an enormous sale for the time — and practically everyone who counted in the narrow political circles which then alone mattered in that oligarchical society, was converted to the author's point of view. Even Pitt eventually came round to it. From the autumn of 1790, when the pamphlet appeared, to the spring of 1793, when the British oligarchy pronounced openly for armed intervention and declared war on France, Burke's *Reflections* held the field as the gospel of the growing British reaction; as a sort of eighteenth-century *Mein Kampf*. Virtually the whole British oligarchy said 'Ditto to Mr Burke'.[6]

6 Some years earlier, when Burke had been elected MP for Bristol, he delivered a tremendous harangue which left his hearers gasping, concluding with the peroration: 'What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue.' When his Tory colleague was then called upon to speak, he

The services rendered by that eloquent rhetorician to the British oligarchy have been so great that he has become one of the saints in that astutely contrived mythology which passes muster today in official circles as the authentic record of British history. In reality, however, he was not more than a superficial time-server with a talent for rhetoric and a remarkable flair for divining and expressing the mind and the contemporary interests of his class — for example, he supported the American Revolution but opposed the French. The subsequent apotheosis of this plausible time-server — a fundamental charlatan with a streak of journalistic genius — into a kind of Whig Saint — Aristotle and Dean Inge rolled into one! — is one of the most peculiar results of modern political 'history' — as written (unconsciously, of course) according to the dictum of Marx that, 'the ideas of every age are the ideas of the ruling class': than which no better example could be found either than English history itself or Burke's own inflated role in it. The oligarchy have rewarded that political adventurer not only with a pension in his lifetime, but with posthumous glory — St Edmund — of the French Revolution!

Reflections on the French Revolution was the most influential book published in its time in Britain; to be sure, it is the most important counter-revolutionary work in English literature. It aroused the ruling class to demand, and eventually to obtain, from its still undecided government, that war of intervention against France which more than anything else prevented the immediate victory of the French Revolution, not only in France, but all over Europe.

For it is scarcely open to doubt that without British intervention, the Liberal revolution would have been permanently victorious all over Europe, which would indeed probably have been united, at least temporarily, by Napoleon. It is in fact impossible to doubt in good faith that the British war of counter-revolution against the French Revolution and its European offspring was one of the greatest and most disastrous crimes in all modern history.

So decisive was the intervention of Britain on the European Continent in checking and ultimately in defeating (1814–15) the Liberal revolution all over Europe, that it is not too much to say that it put back the clock of progress for the best part of a century, and directly caused that great chorus of unnecessary human anguish and of avoidable misery which was represented by the victory of the European reaction between 1814 and 1848 — a victory, I repeat, due in the last analysis to the decisive intervention of Britain armed with her two trump cards of industrial monopoly and overwhelming sea-power.

For that most disastrous of all counter-revolutionary interventions, the war of the British oligarchy versus the (Liberal) revolution between 1793 and 1815 — Edmund Burke was more responsible than any other single man — even than Pitt, who displayed considerable hesitation in intervening, and whose genius, in any case, was financial rather than military in character. He well earned his pension and posthumous glory; but it is high time that the halo was swept from the head of a reactionary adventurer whose chief contribution to human history lay in instigating one of the most disastrous crimes that have ever been committed against it.

Though, unfortunately, Burke's advocacy of armed intervention on the Continent coincided so completely with the self-interest of the ruling class as to carry all before it, yet it was not allowed to pass without effective rejoinder. From within the Whig Party itself, Charles James Fox proclaimed the fall of the Bastille (14 July

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was so dazed by Burke's torrential flow that he merely replied: 'I say ditto to Mr Burke.'

1789) to be 'the greatest and best event in the history of the human race'. And even when the majority of the Opposition (Whig) Party followed Burke into coalition with the government of Pitt, Fox and a minority held to their pro-French outlook which indeed the great Radical orator only abandoned at the very end of his life, when the death of Pitt (23 January 1806) placed him in power for the last few months of his stormy life.[7]

But the most effective reply to Burke came, not from the eloquent but unstable Fox, but from a far greater man than either of them. For no sooner had *Reflections* begun to flutter the dovecotes of the ruling class, and itself to provoke yet further reflections — on the desirability of intervention in the fast-approaching Continental war against the French Revolution — than Thomas Paine, already a major figure in the American Revolution, sat down in the Angel Inn at Islington and, in reply to Burke, wrote his immortal *The Rights of Man*, the first part of which duly appeared at the beginning of the next year (1791).

The Rights of Man is, of course, a classic, and its author, now at last emerging from the ocean of slander and interested lies with which the ruling class and its hired hacks have for so long surrounded him, is today pretty generally admitted as one of England's great men. To be sure, from the point of view with which this book is particularly interested, 'the English revolutionary tradition', Thomas Paine is one of our foremost men: he was beyond a shadow of doubt our greatest modern revolutionary; and his books, *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* in particular, were for the ensuing half-century the classics of a revolution which remained, unhappily, potential only, which remained just below the surface, but which just failed to erupt.

In an appendix at the end of this chapter I shall turn in more detail to the career and historic role of this great man. Here let it suffice to remark that in his reply to Burke, Paine 'wiped the floor' with his verbose opponent. Even in style, the lucidity of the *Rights of Man* more than compensates for its lack of the florid rhetoric in which the Irishman excelled. Far more important, as a reply to Burke's *Reflections* the reply of the Islington pamphleteer was complete, crushing and final. With the insight of genius Paine put an unerring finger on Burke's essential weakness — his exclusive preoccupation with an idle and parasitic ruling class and his complete neglect of the real causes of the revolution in the unbearable privations which the *ancien régime* inflicted upon the masses — in his whole world outlook. Paine laid this bare in a single piercing epigram: 'Burke pities the plumage but forgets the dying bird.'

It was assuredly no wonder that the government had to appeal to the criminal law so as to decide the literary controversy in favour of Burke, and to ensure for his lachrymose eloquence, devoid of depth or historical perspective, the monotonous refrain of reiterated senseless adulation that it has received, and in reactionary circles still receives from conventional historians — shall we say, rather, writers on what the ruling class is pleased to consider as authentic history.

A modern writer has very aptly and trenchantly summarised this famous political controversy:

> Burke wrote a political pamphlet and earned an income of £1500 a year and a pension of £2500. Paine wrote a great historical document for which

7 His earlier pro-French attitude cost him the friendship of his lifelong political associate Burke, who repudiated him in a melodramatic scene in the House of Commons, following upon a fresh avowal of Fox of his radical views in the course of a tempestuous debate.

> he received nothing in money, not even the ordinary profits of an author. He received persecution while living and vilification when dead. But he was not without his revenge. For one who has read the *Reflections on the French Revolution* a thousand have read *The Rights of Man*. The one has flattered the bigotry of fools and self-interest of rogues. The other has lightened as a torch for men and women that would light them along the road of human betterment. Conway was right, Paine dived where Burke had only dabbled.[8]

The Rights of Man made a sensation among the unenfranchised masses at least equal to that which *The Reflections* of Burke had made among the ruling classes. For the next 60 years Paine's masterpiece was the political Bible — more exactly, the English *Social Contract* — of the English revolution which during this entire epoch, boiled and simmered only a hands-breadth below the surface of British society. Had the history of our country taken only a very slightly different course to that which it actually did take, it is altogether probable that the writings of Thomas Paine would today be universally regarded in all our schools as the writings of Rousseau have been regarded in France since the French Revolution. In that eventuality, Paine would now be remembered as the prophet of the British Liberal revolution, whilst Edmund Burke, instead of being a 'classic', would have been relegated to the complete obscurity which has long since engulfed the innumerable hired hacks and reactionary French pamphleteers who so unceasingly lampooned and black-guarded the great Continental revolution. In the literature that relates to the class struggle, the success or failure of revolutions makes or mars not only political, but literary reputations also.

That *The Rights of Man* was a formidable weapon in its contemporary class struggle was at once recognised by the astutely reactionary government of Pitt. Paine, warned by the great poet and artist William Blake, fled and left Dover by the last boat, only 20 minutes before the warrant for his arrest arrived (13 September 1792).

He was tried and condemned for treason in his absence, and the publishers of his books were subjected to a generation-long persecution which, however, did not prevent them from enjoying a huge though clandestine sale. Paine never set foot on British soil again, where he remained an attainted outlaw until his death (in America) in 1809.[9]

The next year (1793) saw Pitt join the Continental coalition against revolutionary France. It also saw the appearance of another revolutionary classic, much less influential and popular indeed than were the works of Paine, but philosophically more advanced, and in the intellectual sphere probably a greater book; certainly a more original and ultimately profound one. I refer, of course, to William Godwin's *Political Justice*, one of the greatest political books in our language, and the original pioneer of that libertarian philosophy today known as anarchism (published in January 1793).

In comparing these two celebrated political books — the most outstanding revolutionary political books, perhaps, in the English language — *The Rights of Man*

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8 Chapman Cohen, 'Introduction', Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason* (National Secular Society, London, 1939), p xix.

9 A brief reference will be made to his part in the French Revolution; see the appendix at the end of this chapter.

and *Political Justice* — we will do well to bear in mind the masterly distinction made in our own day by Lenin between a propagandist and an agitator: viz, that 'a propagandist gives a large number of ideas to a few people, while an agitator gives a few ideas to a large number of people'.[10]

Broadly speaking, one can say that this distinction is a valid measure of the mental calibre and intellectual services rendered to revolutionary ideas, respectively, by William Godwin and Thomas Paine. The distinction is not indeed exact, for Godwin's work had considerable popular appeal — *Political Justice* went through quite a number of editions — whilst the work of Paine was much more than highly effective journalism and contained ideas of permanent intellectual value. Yet, in the main, the distinction may stand. Paine was fundamentally a man of the masses, who wrote for — and at — the masses! Godwin was a recluse, an original thinker, who was more interested in ideas themselves than in their popular reception. The former was, in the very best and highest sense of the word, a journalist, a populariser; Godwin, pre-eminently a thinking machine, was centuries ahead of his time — and, for that matter, in many ways, of ours also, who was both too far to the left, and also too much over the heads of the masses, too much of a spiritual hermit to make any mass appeal.

Whilst Thomas Paine is still widely read, Godwin is today chiefly known through the agency of his son-in-law Shelley, whose poems, if and when considered as the poet seems to have largely regarded them himself — as essays in ideology — may be said to be little more than *Political Justice* translated from the cold statuesque prose of Godwin himself into the glowing splendour which characterised the greatest lyric poet in our language. Briefly, Godwin thought and Paine spread ideals already, so to speak, 'in the air'.

The very same month that saw the publication of *Political Justice* saw also the execution of Louis the Sixteenth of France by the now victorious Jacobins, and the proclamation of the first French Republic. This last event finally precipitated England into the war of intervention already raging upon the Continent. This act of international counter-revolution was followed immediately by the introduction of a domestic reign of terror at home. Everyone of advanced opinions was singled out for persecution and struck down. Habeas Corpus and virtually all other constitutional safeguards were suspended. The houses of even moderate radicals, such as the famous scientist and Dissenting divine Dr Priestly, were burned by the mob. The 'Corresponding Societies', framed on the model of French associations in order to advance radical and republican propaganda, were ruthlessly suppressed, and their leaders, with doubtful legality and an entire disregard of the substance and often of the forms of justice, were sent to long terms of transportation at Botany Bay — then

10 Long before Lenin saw the light, no less a person than Pitt himself, the arch-enemy of everything that Paine and Godwin alike stood for, had already virtually stated in anticipation his above-quoted distinction between the propagandist and the popular agitator. For, whilst subjecting Paine and all his works to savage persecution, he declined a suggestion to prosecute the author of *Political Justice* on the very practical grounds that the price of the book (two guineas) was far above the pecuniary level of the class to whom it was most likely to appeal! A Leninist anticipation! As we shall see, Godwin died in the odour of respectability. Yet theoretically, he was as far to the left of Paine, as, to take a modern example, the anarchist Prince Kropotkin was to, say, Henry George, the radical reformer; for *The Rights of Man* is not much beyond a modern left-liberal standpoint. Godwin, however, was too far in advance of his generation to have much direct influence on it. In this connection, another aphorism of Lenin is very apposite: 'Justice can never be in advance of the economic conditions.'

newly established as the enforced rendezvous for the most depraved and abandoned criminals.

Espionage on a scale reminiscent of the ubiquitous 'Delators' (professional informers) of the early Roman Empire, was made use of by the government. Of course, it goes without saying that even the tentative movements towards Parliamentary reform which public opinion and economic necessity had forced Pitt to entertain prior to 1789, were incontinently abandoned.

Whilst the great Parliamentary reputation and powerful aristocratic connections of Charles James Fox barely secured his personal safety, yet the opposition Whigs whom he led were reduced to entire political insignificance. When Edmond Burke, who had sowed his Cadmus-like crop of reaction with his *Reflections*, died in 1797, he had the satisfaction of seeing Britain as the tombstone of liberty at home, and its executioner abroad.

A modern radical writer has summarised this orgy of reaction in these words:

> The reaction was already rampant and vindictive, and before the year 1794 was out it had crushed the progressive movement and postponed for 38 years the triumph of Parliamentary reform. It requires a strenuous effort of the imagination to conceive the panic which swept over England as the news of the French Terror circulated. It fastened impartially on every class of the community, and destroyed the emotional balance no less of Pitt and his colleagues, than of the Tory working-men who formed the 'Church and King' mobs. Proclamations were issued to quell insurrections which had never been planned, and the militia was called out when not a hand had been raised against the King throughout Great Britain. So great was the fear, so deep the moral indignation, that 'even respectable and honest men'[11] turned spies and informed on their friends from a sense of public duty. A mob burned Dr Priestly's house near Birmingham for no better reason than because he was supposed to have attended a Reform dinner which, in fact, he did not attend. Hardy's bookshop in Piccadilly was rushed by a mob, and his wife, about to be confined, was injured in her efforts to escape, and died a few hours afterwards.[12] A hunt went on all over the kingdom for booksellers and printers to prosecute, and when Thomas Paine was prosecuted in his absence for publishing *The Rights of Man*, the jury was so determined to find him guilty, that they would not trouble to hear the case for the Crown.[13]

Finally, the refusal of a London jury — influenced, it would seem, by a pamphlet of Godwin — to convict Hardy, Holcroft, Horne Tooke and other leading radicals (members of the London Correspondence Society) did something to check the current reign of governmental terror. Notwithstanding, England, for the next

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11 The phrase is Holcroft's, a leading radical of the time.

12 Hardy was the founder of the London Correspondence Society, which numbered 30,000 members and was the chief pro-French organisation in Great Britain.

13 HN Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle* (Oxford University Press, London, 1913), pp 38–39. We must, of course, remember not only the fear of France, but also the ever-present Irish question which flamed into actual insurrection in 1798, and which gave the French an excellent opportunity to invade, which they attempted several times, apart from a sporadic landing in Milford Haven in South Wales.

generation, remained a very unhealthy climate for republicans and radicals. 'The liberties of the subject' as secured by the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth century, if not completely abolished, at least only hung by the skin of their teeth to the most precarious existence. From 1792 to 1832, Britain was a hotbed of black reaction.

The main theatre of revolutionary activity in that age was, however, not Britain but France, then and for a long time after the headquarters of the Liberal 'world revolution'. Despite its blunders and excesses, probably inevitable in the circumstances of that day, the French Revolution marked the decisive inauguration of a new era in human annals. After it, the world could never be the same as before it: the Jacobin Club was a broom that swept clean the Augean stables of the old regime, and released dynamic forces for human betterment on a scale never previously known to the historical process. For the next three-quarters of a century, France and progress were virtually synonymous terms. Whether in power or in opposition, the revolutionary spirit was stronger there than anywhere else. Throughout the classic period of the Liberal revolution (1789 to 1848), France was the undisputed leader of all that was new and vital in Europe and in the civilisation that was derived from Europe.

In the course of these pages we have frequently had occasion to note the close connection between the revolutions of the Continent and their contemporary revolutionary movements in Britain. In this connection, the French Revolution was a source of light and encouragement to the incipient revolutionary movements in Britain.

Though internationalism, in its genuine sense as world brotherhood, had to wait for the coming of the world proletariat — the first class constituted as such by the very fact of its humanity and not by any system of exploitation and property-rights — yet capitalism, in this aspect of life as in so many others, prepared the way for its historic 'gravediggers'. The germs of internationalism as a potent force can be traced back to the great humanitarian idealists who made the revolution in 1789.[14]

If, in the older cosmopolitan sense of the word, the founder of internationalism may be said to have been that old (Stoic) Roman poet Terence, who wrote, 'I am a man, and nothing that belongs to humanity is outside my interest', so the founder of modern secular internationalism may be said to have been the great Thomas Paine himself, with his immortal utterance: 'The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, to do good is my religion.' In the light of the actual circumstances of the modern world, this magnificent utterance may be said to have marked the starting point of a new era, one implicitly contained in the lofty idealism which was present in the French Revolution as in all others of any significance, an elevated humanism which found perhaps its most sublime expression in the inspired writings of the English revolutionary poet Shelley.[15]

Only, under the capitalist system that the great revolution actually inaugurated, this advanced social phase can be but imperfectly approached. To attain it in its fullness, the nineteenth century must be succeeded by the twentieth, and the Liberal revolution must find its continuation and its completion in that of international socialism as inaugurated by the workers and peasants throughout the entire planet.

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14 At a dinner in honour of the French Revolution, Paine actually gave the toast: 'The Revolution of the World.'

15 See the appendix at the end of this chapter.

All this, however, lay far beyond the ken of Pitt and the British oligarchy as it faced the storms that roared across the Channel from a Paris where the voice of reason seemed scarcely audible alongside the ever-recurring click of the guillotine and the apparently endless swish of decapitated heads of aristocrats falling into ever-renewed baskets. For revolutionary France, menaced on all sides by the invading armies of émigré French White Guards and the professional armies of Legitimist monarchs, had replied with the Red Terror (1793–94). The Jacobin dictatorship reacted sharply to the historic adjuration of Danton: 'The Kings of Europe threaten us in coalition: let us hurl at their feet, in defiance, the head of a King.'

Moreover, not only did the ragged French conscripts roll back in battle after battle the soulless mankillers of the *ancien régime*, but, still worse, the ideas of the revolution began to penetrate into the old strongholds of reaction themselves. A revolution is always terrible to property and privilege, but a revolution that fights with ideas, that essentially modern political phenomenon then making its appearance for the first time, was something dangerous beyond all measure.

Accordingly, the British ruling class recalled the contemporary remarks of two eminent pillars of reaction: Frederick ('The Great') of Prussia, who warned his class: 'If the bayonets start to think, we are lost.' And that typical ornament of the British oligarchy, Edward Gibbon, the great historian of the Roman Empire, who had just come home from Lausanne in fear of the French Revolution, where *The Decline and Fall* had been written, giving as his reason the considered opinion that he was just the sort of person whom revolutions exist to execute! And who should know more about revolutions than the illustrious historian who had described so many in the voluminous pages of his *magnum opus*? Decidedly, 'the bayonets' must not go on thinking, and the source of these ubiquitous streams of poison must be scaled up in the interests of Law, Order and Security.

Such were the motives which plunged Britain into the longest, bitterest and — in its total effects at least — the most evil and retrogressive war in her history: the war of intervention against France, more precisely, against the French Revolution, which lasted, with one short armistice — The Treaty of Amiens (1801–02) — from February 1793 to June 1815, when Napoleonic France at long last collapsed under the strain on the field of Waterloo at the end of a quarter of a century of '*Athanasius contra mundum*' — of revolutionary France versus Europe — and the British Empire.

It is hardly open to doubt that it was the last factor which was ultimately decisive. It was the combined naval and industrial strength of Britain that far more than anything else ultimately brought Napoleon to his knees. In the sphere of military operations no army of the period would have stood the slightest chance against the incomparable military genius of Buonaparte and his superb revolutionary army.[16]

What ultimately beat Napoleonic France was British sea-power and, still more, the virtual British monopoly of the industrial revolution. But for the former, 'The Grand Army of England', which lay encamped at Boulogne from 1803 to 1805 waiting for 'the three foggy days' that alone stood between Buonaparte and world empire, would have made short work of the English defences, patriotic mythologies

16 The Duke of Wellington is not even to be considered in such a connection; viz, it took Napoleon six weeks, and Wellington six years, to conquer Spain; whilst at Waterloo Napoleon, with an army consisting mainly of untrained schoolboy conscripts, would undoubtedly have won if his marshals had carried out his orders.

to the contrary notwithstanding. Prior to his Russian debacle in 1812, Buonaparte was not only unbeaten, but unbeatable. It was the Russian climate and not the armies of the reaction which finally disposed of that incomparable fighting machine, probably the finest army in all history, which the revolution created, Carnot organised and inspired, and Buonaparte led to uninterrupted victory. We have not forgotten that five years earlier, in 1798, Napoleon had crossed and re-crossed the Mediterranean on his way to and from Egypt with perfect impunity, despite Britain's already uncontested naval domination. Compared to this remarkable feat, to cross the Channel was relatively easy. Buonaparte had every reason to expect success in such a venture, and was very unlucky that his 'three foggy days' never came his way.[17]

Even more than the British Navy, however, it was British industrial and financial power which provided the rock upon which Napoleon and his revolutionary dictatorship finally crashed. It was the endless British subsidies that kept Russia and his other Continental enemies in the field: therefore, no British subsidies, no march on Moscow, no '1812'!

Moreover, despite Napoleon's Continental blockade, despite his 'Berlin Decrees' banning British goods, and his huge armies of excise officers and coastguards, British goods could not be kept out of the European Continent. Virtually unobtainable elsewhere, the 'law of supply and demand', central and irresistible in a capitalist economy, contrived a thousand loopholes through which British goods found their surreptitious but effective way. After years of blockade directed by the greatest soldier and administrator of modern times, with Europe at his feet, and the most formidable military machine in recorded history at his disposal, the measure of the Emperor's success can be inferred from the interesting fact that when Britain's arch-enemy marched on Moscow in 1812, his own Life Guards marched behind the great general, clad in overcoats made in Bradford! If the Old Guard survived the Russian winter and lived to make its last charge against the British squares at Waterloo, it owed its preservation to the efficient machinery installed in Yorkshire factories!

The economic factor is primary in human affairs: even before Karl Marx was born, the imperial Corsican had only too much cause to know it! Indeed, the great political duel that was decided eventually in 1814–15 by the downfall of Napoleon and the restoration throughout Europe of the *ancien régime*, may in one sense be called the War of the Two Revolutions: the French Revolution versus the Industrial Revolution. For Buonaparte, with all his faults and crimes, was the heir of the first, and the British oligarchy, by accident rather than by any conscious design and despite its own pre-industrial outlook, found itself the virtual monopolist of the second.

Buonapartism, in the annals of the French Liberal revolution bears indeed a strong generic resemblance to our contemporary Stalinist regime in relation to the Russian socialist revolution. That is, each regime preserves and extends where

17 It has always been an undisputed axiom of a belligerent Britain that her enemies are *ipso facto* immoral and enrolled among the forces of evil. As 'the Corsican Ogre', Buonaparte, the most dangerous enemy this country has ever known up to the present time, figured in the role of Anti-Christ both in his own day and for long after. Notwithstanding, a scientific appraisal of his place in history and of the political nature of the Buonapartist regime must concede that both his role and his regime were fundamentally revolutionary in character, at least in comparison with the Legitimacy that was restored by his final overthrow.

possible the new property relations introduced as a result of its precedent revolution: capitalist relations in the case of France — to be sure, Buonaparte codified the gains of the French Revolution in his *Code Napoléon*, that 'quintessence of bourgeois juridical conceptions' (Marx); and Stalin has made Russia fundamentally collectivist by the Five-Year Plans.

Nevertheless, both Buonapartism and Stalinism represent an undoubted degeneration of the original revolutionary impulse, since each implies the harsh and aggressive rule of a militarised bureaucracy with the dictator at its apex. Both regimes, moreover, are destructive of personal liberty and are openly contemptuous of the ethical and humanitarian impulses which played so important a part in both these two great revolutions.

Still with these very important reservations, the French and European regimes of Napoleon may justly be termed revolutionary. After all, wherever they went, the French abolished the old order: the Temporal Power of the Pope in Italy, the Inquisition in Spain, feudal servitude in Germany; all these anachronisms were abolished by Buonaparte, and restored by his conquerors.

From the standpoint of European civilisation, the aphorism later enunciated by Nietzsche — 'England is a bad European' — was never proved more conclusively than by Britain's counter-revolutionary war of intervention on the Continent between 1793 and 1815. Throughout this period Britain was pre-eminently the cuckoo in the European nest, engaged in illustrating the political aphorism of one of the leaders of the British oligarchy in the preceding (eighteenth) century, 'England is safe only as long as Europe is divided' (Lord Carteret). If Adolf Hitler could claim to lead a united Europe against the evil genius which has kept it divided for so long, artificially playing upon and augmenting its divisions, it is above all to this evil period that he could most plausibly appeal for support.

Internally, not less than externally, the British oligarchy was the gaoler of progress and the executioner of European liberty. It was the English fleet under Nelson that safeguarded the counter-revolution in Naples, whilst her *lumpen proletariat* (*lazzaroni*) enjoyed a (literal) cannibal feast in the streets on 'meat' supplied by the still warm corpses of murdered Liberals. It was the English army of Wellington that restored the Inquisition in Spain, that self-same Inquisition which, in the days of Elizabeth and the dawn of English capitalism, England had professed to regard with vehement abhorrence.

If the final victory at Waterloo was proverbially 'won on the playing fields of Eton', the Liberal revolution was drowned in blood and was steeped in a morass of blood and needless agony by the British plutocracy which had been trained on those identical fields. One can in fact say of the British ruling class of this period, what that brilliant French woman Madame De Stael said after a personal interview with its best-known military leader in its war of intervention, 'the Duke of Wellington has not got an idea in his head', an apt enough summary of the whole regime which that dour and brainless 'Colonel Blimp' personified so completely for the next generation.[18]

18 It was in fact its very tenacious stupidity that made the oligarchy so dangerous an enemy. It had not enough imagination to know when it was beaten. When the French Marshal Soult made the historic statement after a battle with them in Spain, that 'the English did not know when they were beaten' he was not paying them a compliment, but was merely recording a fact!

I have already stated that, in my considered opinion, the greatest tragedy in our national history was the failure of the French Revolution to spread to England. Such an expansion of revolution would have made impossible the counter-revolution's victory in contemporary Europe and that hideous but little-known generation of reaction and the Holy Alliance (1814–48) — with its hecatombs of martyrs: one of the most hideous epochs of retrogression, stultification and avoidable suffering in the entire annals of human society: that age of reactionary gibbets and of counter-revolutionary dungeons, of which Byron's immortal *Ode to the Prisoner of Chillon* constitutes the permanent memorial in English literature.

The regime of Buonaparte was the continuation of the French Revolution, in a form, it is true, somewhat debased — already as early as 1794 Robespierre had warned the Convention in his last speech that the outcome of a prolonged revolutionary war against intervention could only be the enforced emergence of some kind of military dictatorship.[19] Nonetheless, in its main essentials, the policy of Buonaparte continued the work of the revolution both at home and abroad.

For this reason it appears to me to have been an unmitigated misfortune for mankind, and not least for the best interests of our own country, that the French invasion of 1803 and/or the Continental blockade did not succeed. As he himself explained at St Helena, Napoleon would have liberated Ireland (Eire) — which itself would have saved millions of lives plus a legacy of implacable hatred which is still a political force on both sides of the Atlantic — he would have smashed the oligarchy irrevocably, thereby saving our country from an orgy of reaction, and perhaps the world from the subsequent tyranny of British imperialism. He would have reformed Parliament, made England a democratic republic, done away with the squires and their iniquitous landed system based on hereditary entails, primogeniture and landless agricultural serfs, and would have swept away her feudal–ecclesiastical vestiges in the Established Church and the House of Lords. The removal of these mountains of obscurantism and reactionary rubbish would have been cheap at the expense of a few lost battles and a temporary French occupation.[20]

Buonaparte would, willy-nilly, have been forced to rely on the democratic forces in Britain, and would have been compelled to complete the bourgeois revolution in Britain, and to recreate a landed peasantry, thus removing the greatest anomaly of modern British society, its total lack of a peasant class.

However, it is useless to consider might-have-beens. The victory of the oligarchy ensured its perpetuation, and Britain is still the one country in Western Europe where the influence of the French Revolution has never penetrated.

From the British oligarchy's own standpoint, its Continental intervention was a triumphant success. It prolonged its own existence and its power for a century and a half longer: firstly in the form of the open dictatorship which it wielded down to

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19 Incidentally, this acute prediction goes far to disprove the 'great man theory of history': viz, the rise of Buonaparte — an unknown subaltern at the time that the great Jacobin made this prediction — was due far more to the contemporary historical conditions than to his own genius, colossal as this was. In point of fact, Buonaparte was not the original choice of the French bourgeoisie for the office of dictator, and chance played a large part in his eventual selection for that role: see Eugene Tarle, *Buonaparte* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1937).

20 In any case, such an occupation could not possibly have lasted long, since it is quite certain that, had Napoleon died as Emperor — as, had he conquered England, he presumably would, since there would then have been no Russian fiasco — his European empire would soon have dissolved in a civil war of his marshals who, like Alexander's 'Successors', would have torn the empire to pieces in the course of a mutual war for the succession.

1832, and even to 1848 and to the end of the Chartist movement; secondly, in the far more subtle and disguised, but more efficient dictatorship under the cloak of imperialism and Tory democracy which was, so to speak, 'patented' by Benjamin Disraeli, the master of the British counter-revolution, from about the middle of the century onwards.

It remains for me to trace these developments, from which our contemporary Britain was destined to emerge. Before doing so, I must cast a brief glance at the successive abortive attempts at armed insurrection and conspiracy against the oligarchy which recurred throughout the generation of Britain's counter-revolutionary war; risings altogether devoid of success but which, whilst of no great significance in themselves, are yet significant pointers to that unrecorded tragedy; to that 'Light which failed', to that English revolution which, had the fates been kinder, ought to have ushered in simultaneously both the nineteenth century and the dawn of English Freedom.

Biographical Note on English Revolutionaries and Others: 1789 to 1815: The repercussions of the great Continental revolution in Britain were tremendous. At first, practically all the younger intellectuals pronounced in its favour, even including such subsequent pillars of reaction as the poets Robert Southey, Wordsworth and ST Coleridge. We have not forgotten the Utopian 'pantisocracy' — a communistic colony founded by these young men directed upon the principles of William Godwin — or the famous line of Wordsworth: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.'

But, apart from such vague and, as the event proved, unstable dreamers, the English revolutionary movement boasted some remarkable men. Space forbids me to mention them all, but I feel myself obliged at least to add a biographical note on the half-dozen leading figures. These were Charles James Fox, Thomas Paine, William Godwin, the poets PB Shelley and Lord Byron, and Richard Carlile. I refer to these *seriatim*.

i: Charles James Fox (1757–1806): CJ Fox was hardly a revolutionary. He came of one of the great hereditary Whig families — his father was Lord Holland — and he ended — February to September 1806 — after the death of his lifelong rival, Pitt, as a leading minister of the Crown, and as such, a supporter of the war against France. Nevertheless, most of his political life was spent in opposition. He supported both the American and the French Revolutions. In respect of the latter, after the publication of Burke's *Reflections* which split the Opposition Whigs, Fox was left practically alone to wage the Parliamentary battle against intervention and in defence of political radicalism at home. His opposition was extraordinarily courageous and skilful. A modern (Liberal) Prime Minister has styled Fox as the finest debater in the entire history of the House of Commons.[21] As such, he fought intervention tooth and nail.

How far he went in this direction may be judged from a letter written by him in 1801:

> To tell the truth, I have gone much further in hate to the British government than perhaps you and the rest of my friends, and certainly further than with prudence can be avowed. The triumph of the French

21 See Lord Rosebery, *Pitt* (MacMillan, London, 1891).

> government over the English does in fact afford me a degree of pleasure which it is very difficult to disguise.[22]

Fox was in fact one of those radical aristocrats, endowed with a generous nature and wide cosmopolitan sympathies, which the British oligarchy throws up as 'sports' periodically. Fox was a Whig who took the revolutionary tradition of Whiggism seriously. He was a throwback to its earlier era. Though not a revolutionary, as his final lapse demonstrated, he was about the nearest approach to one the House of Commons has ever known. He was probably its greatest leader of the Opposition, and he certainly lived up to the conception of opposition, which has it that the primary duty of an Opposition 'is to oppose'. He certainly did! There was no 'my country right or wrong' about this great English Radical.

ii: Thomas Paine (1737–1809): If CJ Fox can hardly be styled a revolutionary, there is no such ambiguity about Thomas Paine. To be sure, he was the greatest of all modern English revolutionaries. He is the only Englishman to play a major role in three revolutionary movements, in America, France and this country. Born at Thetford in Norfolk (1737), Paine, originally an exciseman, went to America at the age of 37. There he played a front-rank role in the American Revolution — his fundamental importance in this connection has only recently been fully understood. Before Washington or any native American, he advocated complete independence from Great Britain. He also seems to have been the first man to use the words 'The United States of America'. In his famous *Crisis* and his *Common Sense* that began with the famous words, 'These are the times that try men's souls', he exhorted the Americans to stand firm and fight it out to the end.

After the American War Paine returned to England, where he invented the first iron bridge. On the outbreak of the French Revolution, he ardently supported it from the start. His famous controversy with Burke that resulted in *The Rights of Man* has already been alluded to, as also his prosecution by the English government and his flight to France. In Paris he was elected to the Convention, but associated with the moderate Gironde and voted against the execution of the king. This moderation nearly cost him his life, for he was imprisoned during the Jacobin Terror in 1794 and only escaped the guillotine by an accident.[23]

Paine was released after the fall of Robespierre in July 1794. In 1802, he took advantage of the Treaty of Amiens with England to return to America, where he died in 1809, his last years embittered by the narrow religious bigotry of a then predominantly 'Fundamentalist' America. For whilst in his French prison Paine had added religious to political heresy, by writing the first part of his famous *Age of Reason*, which he subsequently completed in 1797.[24]

It is quite impossible to over-emphasise the importance of Thomas Paine for the revolutionary movement in Great Britain at any time between 1791 and 1848. Savagely defamed during his lifetime, insulted after his death by the contemptuous prefix 'Tom' attached to his surname by a ruling class which would not even allow him a posthumous civility, attainted in his lifetime, and his works banned, and his

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22 Rosebery, *Pitt*, p 29.

23 The gaoler marked a cross on the outside of the door of the cells occupied by those marked for execution next day. By mistake he marked the cross on the *inside* of Paine's door. The fortunate prisoner promptly rubbed it out and thus escaped!

24 Paine was a voluminous writer. The most noteworthy of his minor works was his *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*.

successive publishers gaoled for a generation after his death, it is hardly too much to say that Paine *was* the spirit incarnate of the British revolution that surged only a hands-breadth below the surface of our society for the whole era between 1791 and 1848, when the simultaneous collapse of Chartism and appearance of the *Communist Manifesto* marked the end of the revolutionary era pre-eminently inspired by the French Revolution.

The proof positive that, notwithstanding official 'history', Britain was actually on the verge of revolution throughout this entire period, and that the universally hated oligarchy only survived by the skin of its teeth, is to be found above all in the execration with which Paine, living and dead, was regarded by that oligarchy. It is, after all, a universally sound maxim that the hatred of the ruling class is the best index to the actual danger represented to their interests by the revolutionary object of their hatred.

Judged by that infallible criterion, Thomas Paine was not only 'the most useful man that ever lived', as the American Deist Elihu Palmer declared, but was also the most dangerous man of his time to the British oligarchy. What Julian the Apostate was to the ancient, and Voltaire to the modern Christians, what Marx and Lenin are to the ruling class of our own day, that was Paine to the British reaction of the last decade of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century.

He was so for three reasons: as an internationally known and experienced revolutionary, the hero of three countries in revolt; as a great journalist and a master populariser whose writings emphatically 'got over' to the awakening masses; as, most of all, a 'double-first', because he united and became the incarnation of both political and of religious revolution. For *The Rights of Man* was the Bible of political radicalism, and the *Age of Reason* of religious revolt; in the latter, the aloof hole-and-corner Deism of the preceding (eighteenth) century acquired for the first time a mass voice and a mass following. Just as Church and State were united in a common reaction in Erastian Whig England, so the revolt against both was henceforth symbolised in Paine's two masterpieces.

Such was 'Tom' Paine, the most important English revolutionary of modern times, a pariah in the 'history' of the past: a hero in that of the future.

iii: William Godwin (1756–1836):[25] William Godwin was born in a Dissenting family in 1756. He was originally intended for the Church, but gave it up on account of loss of belief. He soon became an advanced Radical and wrote, *inter alia*, a history of the Commonwealth which was for long a standard work. When the French Revolution broke out he welcomed it; but his own philosophical standpoint was far to the left of any political and social phase actually attained by the revolution. His famous *Political Justice* may be said to embody a libertarian, or anarchist-communist philosophy, though this descriptive title was still unknown in his day. The ethical basis of this book is the belief, more common then than now, in the unlimited progress and perfectibility of human nature.

Political Justice, despite its ultra-left views, was a success, even commercially, and made its author the hero of the younger generation of radicals. Godwin further popularised his ethical and philosophical views in several novels, of which one, *Caleb Williams*, once famous but now forgotten, was a 'best-seller' of the day. Godwin later married Mary Woolstonecraft, an early pioneer of feminism, and authoress of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She was the earliest woman of

25 The remaining figures can be dealt with in a more summary fashion, since their revolutionary role was more indirect.

outstanding intellectual calibre to support the revolutionary movement in Britain. Her daughter Mary, the birth of whom cost her her life (1797), eventually married Shelley and became the authoress of *Frankenstein*, the once well-known novel of the occult.

Godwin himself found his later life burdened with pecuniary trouble. His views grew more conservative with age, and he eventually supported the Reform Bill of 1832. He received a minor official post from the first post-Reform Bill government, and died in 1836 as a thoroughly respectable member of society, on the threshold of the Victorian age.

Godwin led no party, founded no school, and took, directly, but little part in his contemporary political life. Nevertheless, though an abstract thinker and a visionary rather than an active revolutionary, his influence was considerable, and he deserves to be remembered as a pioneer. If we hold, as does the writer, that the goal towards which human society more or less consciously steers is some kind of anarchist-communism which will combine economic security with an absence of governmental coercion, and the maximum of personal and social liberty, then the first and thus far the greatest libertarian writer in our language deserves a place in permanent literature. As a modern writer has said by way of summary: 'Let us write Godwin's epitaph in his own Roman language. He stood erect and independent. He spoke what he deemed to be the truth. He did his best to purge the veins of men of the subtle poisons which dwarf them.'[26]

iv: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1790–1822): The poets Shelley, Godwin's son-in-law, and Lord Byron were both ardent revolutionaries, though they took no direct part in their contemporary English revolutionary movements. Shelley, as was said above, popularised Godwin's political philosophy in his poems. In particular, his 'Masque of Anarchy', a passionate denunciation of the massacre of Peterloo (1819 — see next chapter), is probably the finest avowedly revolutionary poem in our language, with its famous aphorism: 'Ye are many, they are few.' His splendid poem 'Hellas' was written in support of the Greek national revolution against the Turkish yoke: a revolution which aroused the warmest sympathy among European revolutionaries. Incidentally, the final stanzas of 'Hellas', that sublime hymn to the future of humanity, represents perhaps the finest summary of the ideals of the French Revolution to be found anywhere in literature.

v: Lord Byron (1788–1824): Despite his aristocratic birth, Byron, the most famous, though not the greatest poet of his age, shared and preserved to the last revolutionary sentiments. Many of his poems record these; in particular his immortal 'Ode to the Prisoner of Chillon'.[27] Byron, moreover, took up the cause of the revolution in practice as well as in theory. In 1812, virtually alone, he spoke in the House of Lords on behalf of the Luddite 'machine wreckers' against the ruthless governmental legislation for their repression. At the very end of his life he went to Greece to fight for the revolution. It was there that he died, in a certain sense a martyr for the revolution, which all the Western internationalists of the time regarded as a holy cause. Whilst Byron was in no sense a scientific revolutionary, yet the enormous vogue enjoyed by his poems all over Europe, combined with his spectacular martyrdom in the cause of European liberty, unquestionably had an incalculable effect in popularising the ideas of the Liberal revolution amongst the younger generation, whose hero was the brilliant author of *Childe Harold*.

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26 Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle*, p 185.

27 Bonnevard — a victim of the ultra-reactionary Duke of Savoy.

vi: Richard Carlile (1790–1843):[28] Unlike the aristocratic poets, Richard Carlile was of working-class origin. For a generation he carried on a virtually single-handed struggle for the freedom of the press, particularly in connection with the works of Paine. For selling unstamped newspapers, the price of which made them inaccessible to the general public, Carlile was imprisoned again and again: in one instance fortunately for himself, for had he been at large the government had intended to inculpate him in the 'Cato Street' conspiracy of 1820.[29] Assisted by his devoted wife and a staff of loyal assistants — who went to gaol in rotation! — Carlile did more, probably, than any single man to secure the existence of a popular (unstamped) press.

28 A vigorous and most informative account of the life and times of this remarkable but little-known agitator is given by GA Aldred in his excellent monograph *Richard Carlile: Agitator*.

29 See the next chapter.

Chapter III: The Dawn of the Proletarian Revolution in Britain

The period from 1791 — the date of Paine's *The Rights of Man* — to the date of the collapse of Chartism may be defined in general as the era of a revolution striving to be born. As such, it may be divided into three periods.

a: The sporadic disturbances, without any clear-cut class basis, that featured intermittently throughout the long drawn-out war against the French Revolution, and the postwar economic slump of 1793 to 1820.

b: The political struggle for the reform of the Whig Parliament — a struggle proceeding right up to, though not over, the verge of the civil war — 1820–32.

c: The Chartist movement, the first mainly proletarian movement to arise not only in England, but in any European country — 1837–48.

Our next three chapters will survey these successive movements in the English revolutionary tradition. But I may usefully add at this juncture that the only one of these three revolutionary (or quasi-revolutionary) movements to leave any trace on our national history was the second, that resulted in the Reform Bill of 1832. This combined movement of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat benefited only the former: *to be sure, it completed the bourgeois revolution in Britain*. It was a genuine revolution just as much as 1688 had been. *It saved the oligarchy by broadening its basis.* It admitted the upper crust of the newly-enriched industrial magnates, the lords of mill and factory and the beneficiaries of the industrial revolution, into the old mercantilist–landowning oligarchy. *It amalgamated industrial with merchant capital.* Such was the real significance of the Reform Bill of 1832, *the third bourgeois revolution*. 'The bloodless revolution', to adopt the excellent phrase of the Swiss historian Eduard Fueter.[1]

Contrarily, our other movements in the period under review achieved little. The Chartist movement has, for obviously sentimental reasons, received a disproportionate amount of attention from modern labour historians and sociologists. But it was only doubtfully revolutionary; it was too deeply divided from the start to have had any real hope of success. Whilst as for positive results these were precisely nil. Except, perhaps, for some later reforms which it helped to terrify the ruling class into granting, its practical effects were again nil. Chartism in fact, valuable as an example, occupies in the annals of our revolutionary tradition a role analogous to that of those vast and terrifying reptiles, whose monstrous torsos, dating from the remote Saurian Era, appear to the modern zoologist as freaks of nature, as fantastic 'sports' far removed from any genealogical table of any existing species. Such, in science, as distinct from sentiment, was Chartism. No contemporary movement anywhere claims descent from it; and from the standpoint of revolutionary science, despite much talent and not a little individual heroism, as a practical revolutionary movement it represents an example to be followed only in that sense in which, for example, the Fathers of the Church used to refer to the epicurean wisdom of the biblical book of 'Ecclesiastes' and the 'Song of Songs', viz, as an example of how *not* to behave!

1 Eduard Fueter, *World History 1815 to 1920* (Methuen, London, 1923).

Hence, if we dismiss Chartism in, as it may seem to its admirers, a somewhat cavalier manner, we can only plead in extenuation that, as a revolutionary and not a romantic writer, our interest is neither in ruins nor in relics, but rather in revolutions that do actually get somewhere: that do, as it were, revolute!

If this is so with regard to Chartism, still more is it so with the sporadic risings that spasmodically punctuated the generation of the British counter-revolutionary war against France. With no clear class backing, and with an ideology devoid of penetration and/or perspective, they were doomed from the start. Nonetheless, some brief notice of these ripples on a surface that always remained potentially revolutionary is necessary, if only to demonstrate the essentially revolutionary character of this era: an era of which it can be truly said that a British revolution fully comparable even to that of France only missed fire by a hair.

I: The Naval Mutinies of 1797: Britain declared war on France in the spring of 1793. With regard to the earlier phases of the war, it is in general an accurate description to state that France had the better of it by land and England by sea. Whilst they retained their primitive revolutionary vigour, the French armies were invincible despite their original lack of the discipline and equipment of their opponents. To be sure, the maxim of Buonaparte — 'in war, the moral is to the material as three to one' — is merely an inspired summary of this first age of revolutionary ardour.

By sea, however, the British held the advantage from the start. Cromwell and his Admiral Blake had made England a great sea-power as far back as the mid-seventeenth century. It soon became evident that sea-power was the very life-blood of the fast-expanding British Empire. If Britain could fight her land battles with the mercenary armies of her European allies, she could not fight on the sea by proxy. The Jacobite invasion of 1745–46 demonstrated how weak Britain was by land. The remedy was a sea-power so strong as to make all invasion impossible. Had 'the Young Pretender' been accompanied, as originally intended, by a French army, the Stuarts would probably have been restored, at least temporarily, to the throne of their ancestors. Whilst had the French Revolutionary generals Hoche or, still worse, Buonaparte, been able to land, it would have spelt *finis* to the rule of the British oligarchy. In the words of a contemporary: 'Then, heads will roll!' (Adolf Hitler)

To the British oligarchy it was therefore literally a strong fleet or the guillotine! Hence, England, already acutely sea-conscious since the 'Seven Years War' had made her a world power, now became more, so to speak, 'fleet-conscious' than ever: only her navy — taking into consideration her vast military inferiority — could save England of the *ancien régime* from foreign invasion and from revolutionary invasion: from what that most typical of British bourgeois poets, Lord Tennyson, was later to style 'the red fool-fury of the Seine'. Against this cataclysm, this cross-channel hurricane alike of arms and subversive ideas, the British oligarchy had only its navy, its 'Wooden Walls', in the language of the day.

It may therefore be judged how blind was the panic which overtook the ruling class when in the spring of 1797 the supposedly impregnable 'walls' — immune *to* shot and *from* ideas! — suddenly showed acute symptoms of disintegration. I refer, of course, to the celebrated 'mutinies' of the fleets off Spithead and the Nore: mutinies that were all the more dangerous in that this was the self-same year in which the Corsican general Buonaparte commenced his unequalled career of victory with his marvellous Italian campaign that laid low England's chief European ally, the Austria of the last Holy Roman Emperor.

The mutiny of the fleet off Spithead does not seem to have been due, in any large measure at least, to political agitation. It need not therefore detain us. It seems to have been directed at the harsh discipline, bad food and extreme brutality which then prevailed universally in the 'Senior Service'.[2]

The Spithead mutiny was then, strictly speaking, not a revolutionary, nor even a political movement, but solely a protest against intolerable serving conditions. Once the Admiralty promised redress, the men 'went back to work' — that is, resumed their task of fighting the battles of the counter-revolution! Perhaps, however, I should be justified in ascribing their protest against flogging to the humanitarian reform effected by the French Revolutionary government, who abolished flogging altogether in all their fighting services: a reform, incidentally, which, as those acquainted with the hideous floggings common in both the British army and the navy of the era will agree, saved an amount of human suffering compared to which the (painless) execution of the Paris 'Reign of Terror' dwindle into absolute and complete insignificance. In this matter at least, Buonaparte spoke like a true heir of the French Revolution when he expressed his horror at the English system, and at the bestial degradation to which the British oligarchy habitually subjected its troops.[3]

Richard Parker and the 'Mutiny of the Nore': The Spithead Mutiny can therefore only be described as revolutionary in the most indirect sense. The much more formidable mutiny which soon followed in the fleet off the Nore seems to have been a good deal more than this: it is hardly doubtful that this 'floating republic' — to borrow the language of the mutineers themselves, as reproduced by their most recent historians — was directly inspired by the French Revolution and consequently over and above its 'immediate demands' — broadly similar to those put forward at Spithead — had, at least, a 'left wing' of conscious revolutionaries, whose leader was Richard Parker who, despite his lamentable end, must be held to deserve a place in the permanent annals of the British revolutionary tradition.

From the standpoint of revolutionary, as distinct from naval history, the Mutiny of the Nore Fleet may be accurately described as virtually synonymous with the brief public career of Richard Parker, who, if not its sole organiser, was at least both its practical leader and its directing intelligence. Our notice of this mutiny, the nearest thing to a revolution in England during the actual war against France, may be usefully prefixed by a brief notice of its *fons et origo*,[4] Richard Parker himself.

This remarkable man was born about 1767 in Exeter and came of a middle-class family. He was evidently a man of education and had formerly been a schoolmaster, besides having, it seems, seen service in the mercantile marine: though the accounts of his alleged dismissal for debauchery have been conclusively proved to be the usual kind of lies told by official hacks about revolutionary leaders. We have in fact but little trustworthy information about Parker prior to the date of his joining the Navy as an able-bodied seaman.

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2 These unbearable conditions, common to the whole mercantile marine, can still be glimpsed by the curious reader in the vivid pages of Tobias Smollet's picaresque novels, *Roderick Random* and *Humphrey Clinker*, written by an ex-naval officer in the generation prior to the French Revolution. We also recall the contemporary 'Mutiny of the Bounty' in the Pacific about this time, due to the appalling brutality of its commanding officer, Captain Bligh, a typical naval martinet of the period.

3 See Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarlé, *Buonaparte* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1937), appendix.

4 That is, the spring and source.

This last event took place on 31 March 1797. A few weeks later — 10 May — the mutiny started. Though he had only been in the Navy for a few weeks, Parker at once took the lead and retained it right up to the end of the mutiny. This swift rise to pre-eminence argues either — or both — a superior personality and intellect on the part of Parker himself and/or the pre-existence of a secret revolutionary organisation, in which Parker at once took the lead.

Anyhow, a council of delegates was formed to direct the mutiny, of which Parker was appointed president. On the 23rd the flag of Vice-Admiral Buckner was forcibly struck, and a red flag — then making its revolutionary début! — was hoisted. The committee of delegates sat virtually continuously on the flagship — the *Sandwich* — to direct what one of them called 'the Floating Republic', an ominous name within three years of the Jacobin 'Reign of Terror'!

At first, the mutineers carried all before them: they paraded Sheerness with red flags, blockaded the coast, and scornfully refused to open negotiations with a commission composed of three Lords of the Admiralty who visited them on 29 May. The military dared not fire on the mutineers, ostensibly on account of the naval officers whom they held as hostages; actually, we may surmise, because of the lively fear of the government that Parker and his colleagues would put to sea and surrender the fleet to the French. Had they done this, 1797 would at least have seen the end of the British oligarchy which dated from 1688.

There can be little doubt that this is what the bolder spirits among the mutineers would have liked to have done, including Parker himself. It seems on the face of it probable that the liberal funds with which the mutineers, according to contemporary accounts, were well supplied, came, if not from the French government, at least from its British sympathisers.[5]

At any rate, whatever the real intentions of Parker and his naval 'soviet' may have been, there is no doubt about the panic which they caused in London. The three per cent government issues went down to 0.47: then as now finance is an ultra-sensitive barometer of the state of the current political weather. On the Continent, Buonaparte was carrying all before him, whilst only a single British warship was left to patrol the Dutch coast against impending invasion. Meanwhile, Britain's main fleet, 13 ships of the line plus frigates and other auxiliary vessels, was temporarily converted into a 'soviet' — the first since the army 'soviets' in the days of the Commonwealth 'Levellers', with 'Naval Commissar' Parker at its head. England's 'wooden walls' were painted red!

Such a situation, however, was too precarious to last: in such a case, it is either 'get on' or 'get out'. Thanks to insufficient political knowledge — nowhere in all Europe were the masses more politically ignorant than in eighteenth-century England — and perhaps to a lack of initial resolution on the part of the politically inexperienced Parker himself, the mutiny collapsed, instead of boldly putting out to sea and revolting openly against the government, either alone or in conjunction with the French. Forgetful of the audacity which can alone preserve a revolution when once started — '*audace, audace, et toujours l'audace*' — 'boldness, boldness, and yet again, boldness', in the inspired slogan of Danton — his would-be imitators hesitated and remained in inactivity.

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5 Parker himself was in no state to supply it, as he had recently been released from a debtors' prison! Whilst the miserable seamen's pay of this period could not have built up much of a war-chest.

Then as now, 'he who hesitates is lost'. The Mutiny of the Nore perished in and of stagnation. The mutineers were given time to appreciate the enormity of their offence and the danger of their current position. They sagged, and the mutiny was over. First the *Clyde*, then the *San Fiorenzo* and the *Serapis* restored their officers to command and capitulated. The rest of the fleet wavered. Then at last Parker did what he ought to have done, and what he probably could have done successfully at the beginning of the mutiny: on 9 June he gave the signal to put to sea. All the ships answered, but none obeyed the signal.

It proved the signal for the end of the mutiny. The next day (10th) the officers of the *Leopard* cut the cables, and having regained control, took the ship out of the fleet. On the 13th, the red flag was hauled down from the *Sandwich*. Parker himself was put in irons, along with the other delegates. Law and order reigned supreme. The mutiny was over. The sea once more was closed to invading armies. The England of George the Third and Pitt breathed once more in security.

The usual scene followed the restoration of Law and Order. Parker had led the mutiny and Parker should die for it. Condemned to death after a four days' trial — 19–23 June — Richard Parker was sentenced to death and was hanged at the yard-arm of his ship, under grisly circumstances, on the 30th. His trial was fair when judged by the standards of that age: the government could afford to be so, for no other sentence was possible, then as now, under Naval Law, for a convicted leader of a formidable mutiny in war-time. But the King personally showed the greatest vindictiveness, and strove hard to have his body hanged in chains, as an 'example' in defiance of the law itself — an attempt which failed, probably because the government was afraid of its effects on the still unsettled naval situation. We cannot believe that the ultra-reactionary judges of Lord Eldon's day would have raised any legal objection to mutilating the body of a dangerous mutineer left to rot in the wind.

It is regrettable to have to add that Richard Parker showed much pusillanimity in his last hours, and wrote a deplorable letter on the eve of his death declaring that the poor would always end by deserting their benefactors, and that their misery was their own fault. In actual fact, Parker's intelligence seems to have exceeded his capacity for practical leadership; but he must, nonetheless, have been a remarkable man.

The government made a scapegoat of Parker but, on the whole, behaved with leniency: it could not afford another mutiny in the life-and-death struggle upon which it was engaged. Soon after, the naval victory of Camperdown ended the first French attempt at invasion. As the best road even to reforms is the revolutionary road, the sailors do seem to have secured some amelioration of their harsh lot.

The mutiny of 1797 has a twofold interest. It demonstrates as an old historic lesson, aptly commented on by Eduard Fueter, that navies are always much more prone to welcome revolutionary ideas than armies. Many subsequent examples — including the most famous of all — the Russian Black Sea cruiser *Potemkin* (1906) go to prove this. No one in 1797 could have expected a mutiny in the brutalised British *army* of the period. And it demonstrates the boiling volcano that was the Britain of the generation of the French Revolution: an England ripe for revolution had the fates been kinder: an England where, doubtless, many dumb 'Thomas Paines' thought in silence, and where many 'mute inglorious' Richard Parkers uttered their inaudible murmurs, even when the British reaction, through the mouth of its favourite

executioner of liberty, Lord Nelson himself, call on its seamen 'to do their duty' and to make revolution impossible at home by drowning it in blood abroad.[6]

II: The Luddites: The Mutiny at the Nore undoubtedly endangered the existence of the British state. The same cannot be said of the next movement to engage our attention. The Luddites, the original 'machine-wreckers', were, strictly speaking, not a political movement at all. Moreover, since their conscious object was to get back to the pre-machine age, their real aim was a retrogressive, a counter-revolutionary one. Nonetheless, if objectively reactionary, this first blind revolt of the industrial workers against the machine age and the factory system was, at least subjectively, of a revolutionary character: if blind and confused in its expression, it was a *first* step towards social revolution on the part of the proletariat; 'Ned Ludd' and his followers may be truly described as the first working-class militants, not only in Britain, but in the modern world.

The industrial revolution had, of course, caused not only extreme misery but, worse still, complete insecurity: the old fixities were gone for ever. To the modern Socialist, with the nineteenth century, not to mention *Das Kapital*, behind him, all the misery and insecurity that were the inseparable concomitants of the industrial revolution, now appear as evils indeed, but as necessary evils, as the price that the slow and chequered process of human evolution has to pay for its technical progress towards a higher state of society in which similar evils shall be forever unknown. But it would be to make unreasonable demands on human nature to expect from miserable victims of the harsh onset of the dawning machine age, a philosophic comprehension of so detached a point of view. To the former hand-workers, whose means of subsistence was suddenly torn from them by the onrush of the factory system, the machine was *the* enemy, and 'machine-wreckers' — in the happy expression of Ernst Toller — they accordingly became.

The 'Luddite' riots raged intermittently through 1811–13, when the culminating years of the long and bitter Napoleonic struggle added its quota of suffering to the general horrors of the industrial revolution. In a certain sense indeed we can style the 'Luddites' as the joint victims of both the industrial revolution and Napoleon's 'Continental Blockade'.

The 'Luddites' derived their name from their unknown eponymous leader, 'Ned Ludd', who signed all their manifestos. Whether an individual or a committee — and the question of his 'historicity' is now probably insoluble — 'Ludd' seems to have demonstrated considerable organising ability, and to have effectively directed a campaign of factory-smashing and machine-wrecking all over the Northern and Midland counties. The chief victims were the stocking and lace manufacturers of Nottingham and Leicestershire: the initial 'outrages' took place in Nottingham at the end of 1811. At first the followers of 'General Ludd' — as the 'hidden hand' behind the riots soon became known — did not resort to violence against human beings.

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6 An excellent factual account of the mutinies of 1797, though deficient in historic perspectives, is to be found in Bonamy Dobrée and George Ernest Manwaring, *The Floating Republic: The Astonishing Story of the 1797 Naval Mutiny at the Nore and Spithead* (Pelican, London, 1937). I may add that revolutionary and even communistic traditions were not unknown among British sailors even in the eighteenth century. I refer, in particular, to the incredible pirates' republic of 'Libertatia' — 'the land of the free' — in Madagascar in the early eighteenth century. In this communistic republic, stranger by far as fact than its contemporary *Gulliver's Travels* as fiction, English seamen took a leading part: the 'Admiral' of the 'Republic', Thomas Tew, was an Englishman: see Charles Johnson, *Lives of the Pirates* (Hubbard, Norwich, 1814), chapters on Mission and Tew.

Needless to say, the manufacturers and their ruthless agent, the Tory government of Lord Liverpool — Pitt's successor — showed no such scruples. At the request of a threatened manufacturer named Horsfall, a band of Luddites were shot down by soldiers. Horsfall was soon murdered in retaliation. Whereupon the conflict passed into a bloodier stage.

The government did not try to arbitrate. Whilst the manufacturers were still excluded from political power both in Parliament and in the inner councils of the oligarchy, after all, if not yet on a level with the landed owners of 'real property', they were still men of substance and ready cash; far superior to mere landless and pauperised scum such as unemployed manual labourers! In a social conflict touching the very roots of property, the government of the oligarchy could forget its differences with the manufacturers, and could lend them the full power of the state to protect the 'sacred rights of property' that were common to all sections of the ruling class.

Accordingly in February 1812, the government introduced a Bill of Draconian severity making the destruction of the newly invented stocking-frame a capital crime. In the House of Lords, where a few years later all the bishops even voted against a Bill to abolish the death-penalty for sheep-stealing, such a Bill would normally have gone through unopposed. On this occasion, however, a single bold voice was raised on behalf of the hand-weavers turned Luddite out of sheer misery and loss of employment. In a brilliant speech, as bold as it was sound, the great poet Lord Byron, with already a European reputation to back up his plea and secure him a hearing, argued boldly on 27 February in defence of the weavers, first starved and then judicially murdered. But even the impassioned eloquence of the author of *Childe Harold* pleading for the underdog could not move that assembly representing reaction incarnate. The Bill became Law. Henceforth, the gallows, not to mention the treadmill and Botany Bay, were enrolled on behalf of the new factory system and the sacred right to 'hire and fire' whenever the interest of profit-making should demand it.

The final stage in the 'Luddite Riots' was fierce and bloody. Legal terror was met and matched by illegal. Wholesale hangings followed in batches, the hanging of one such batch at York resulted in such a dislocation of the Luddite activities hitherto prevalent that it has been plausibly conjectured that the unknown organising genius, 'General' Ned Ludd himself, was among the victims on this occasion. However, the severe privations consequent upon the economic slump that followed the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, led to a revival of rioting in 1816 and later years. Nor, despite the alleged execution of the apocryphal 'General Ludd', does the rioters' organisation seem to have lost any of its pristine efficiency. In the later riots, which extended right over the kingdom, a vigilant system of sentinels repeatedly baffled the attempts made by the military to come to close quarters with bands of nocturnal Luddites 'on the job'.

Finally, the movement died out as such, and became merged into the later subversive movements in that stormy generation of quasi-revolution. It was entirely futile in its immediate results; for, despite the brutality of its initial directors, the future, after all, lay with the machine, which was both historically progressive and the only road to a higher civilisation in which the age-long drudgery of manual labour could be finally abolished.

Nonetheless, if objectively the modern socialist will reject their methods, subjectively he will honour these poor hand-weavers suddenly bereft of home and

livelihood by the onrush of the mechanical Frankenstein's monster, the machine. In the burnings and factory-smashing of the nocturnal bands of 'General Ludd' we salute the historic dawn, still necessarily confused and obscure, of the proletarian class-consciousness that is destined to save and to transform the world.

Salute to 'General Ned Ludd', leader of the proletarian vanguard, of the first proletarian rising! The World Revolution will be the last.[7]

III: Robert Owen and the Origins of Socialism: The generation of the Liberal (French) revolution also witnessed the birth of Socialism — a name first heard of in England and France about 1830. In historic sequence Socialism follows, of course, upon the footsteps of the Liberal (capitalist) revolution. Thus both Henri St Simon and Charles Fourier, the founders of Socialism on the Continent in the generation that followed upon the French Revolution, had both received their first political impression from that mighty event. French Socialism started as the 'left wing' of the Jacobin Club, as a conscious extension of 'the ideas of 1789'.[8]

In France, Socialism became almost immediately a political force, despite the somewhat fantastic form it took in the theory of the two eccentric geniuses — St Simon and Fourier — who were its founders. In England, it also attracted considerable attention right from the start; though it would scarcely be true to say that the Socialist school of thought had any serious influence on current events: here, after all, there was no French Revolution![9]

In England, for the whole generation that followed the Napoleonic Wars, the name and fame of Socialism was inseparably associated with the name of one individual: Robert Owen (1770–1858).

The career of Owen is too well known to need any detailed biographical notice. Who has not heard of this model 'industrious apprentice', who, having amassed a fortune by 'self-help' in the best Smiles' manner, started his model factory at New Lanark, that fruitful parent of all subsequent schemes of 'profit-sharing' philanthropy, in which everything is done *for* the workers, and nothing *by* them? Who also has not heard how Owen, ruined ultimately by trying to live like a Socialist in the midst of the super-rapacious capitalism of the era — to be sure, it reflected the greatest credit on his heart, though not on his head — spent the rest of his very long life in propounding Utopian schemes for the uplifting of human nature — under capitalism! — into 'a new moral order' (the title of one of his works).

The practical effects of such a policy on the generation of Pitt, Wellington and the 'Peterloo' Massacre can well be imagined! It was precisely nil. The early 'Utopian' Socialism has always tended towards the futile on account of its hazy ideology — compounded of wishful thinking and social anticipations — and by its total lack of any effective class outlook and backing. The Utopians soon enough

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7 The German socialist dramatist Ernst Toller has drawn a powerful and sympathetic portrait of the Luddites in his well-known play *The Machine-Wreckers* (1922). Another well-known German dramatist of the last generation, Gerhardt Hauptmann, has written an even more powerful play, *The Weavers* (1892), around the very similar riots of the Silesian weavers, a generation later, due to causes that were virtually identical with those that caused the Luddite riots in England, the land of origin of the industrial revolution.

8 See Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution* (William Heinemann, London, 1909).

9 In this connection, as in many others, it is impossible to understand the rise of Socialism without taking primary account of this fact. It is this, indeed, that most of all differentiates modern English history from that of the modern European Continent, which, without the French Revolution, would resemble *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark!

found out what a modern idealist (Professor Tawney) has stated with a somewhat belated insight: 'A (capitalist) tiger cannot be skinned alive.'

In Owen's case, that arch-Utopian added to his purely idealist conception of society a mountain of ethics, metaphysics and a crude, though then fashionable, psychology that assumed 'human nature', as such, to be 'good *per se* and swiftly perfectible'. If, in Owen's own case, some glimmerings of comprehension of the determining role of the material environment did at times display themselves, they were never sufficient to put him into close enough touch with the life of his own generation to exercise any appreciable influence upon it. It is no accident that the sole practical effect of his career was to found some communistic 'colonies', those pathetic efforts so common among Utopians to 'save society behind its back', as Marx later defined them in a phrase of genius; and to inspire (in his own lifetime) the later Cooperative Movement — 'the Rochdale Pioneers' — which the determining hand of economic necessity has now transformed into a pillar of our contemporary capitalism, 'working-class capitalism', as Bernard Shaw has styled it, with, for him, remarkable accuracy.[10]

In truth, it may well be asked what place have Owen and 'Owenism' in any account of the English revolutionary generation. In fact, only an historical place. For Owen, after all, was the founder of British Socialism; and historic circumstances will compel the coming social revolution to be a Socialist one.

We may add that, apart from the name, it will owe little enough to Owen. To be sure, he is the authentic parent of British 'Socialism' — that is, of the whole non-revolutionary Fabian Society–Labour Party tradition. Indeed, there would be much truth in the historic generalisation that the modern anti-Socialist, counter-revolutionary Labour Party is the (illegitimate) offspring of Owenism and of British imperialism. From the former, it derives sentiment by the bucket: from the latter, chauvinism by the ton: from the former, its nominal theory, from the latter, its actual practice. It was no accident that Ramsay MacDonald, the last 'Labour' leader who meant anything in the actual world, was always boasting that, not Marx — and still less, of course, any unspeakable Bolshevik — was the originator of British 'Socialism', but rather the great moralist Owen, in whose comprehensive theory class struggles were merely unpleasant and unnecessary ripples on the broad sea of a genial and ever-peaceful evolving humanity!

Historically, MacDonald was right: such is the authentic genealogy of 'Labour'. It descends by a direct line from Owen — not that I would for a moment compare that honest, if ineffectual idealist with the brood that he has unknowingly fathered. Hence, the Socialist historian of the English revolutionary tradition will acknowledge Owen as indeed the father of English Socialism, will respect him as a sincere reformer in his personal capacity, and will enrol him as a practical politician, not among British revolutionary, but rather among objective counter-revolutionary forces. For the rest of the nineteenth century, Socialism, mainly due to his influence, played no part in the revolutionary struggles of the era: Owenism, reformist subjectively, was objectively counter-revolutionary in character.

IV: The Massacre of Peterloo: The generation-long war against France ended in April 1814, with the defeat and enforced (first) abdication of Buonaparte (30 March 1814). Thereafter, Britain enjoyed peace until the Crimean War of 1856,

10 See C Gide, *Communist and Cooperative Colonies* (Harrap, London, 1930).

excepting only for the brief episode of the 'Hundred Days' and Waterloo, which ended Buonaparte's brief restoration.

The years that immediately followed the peace were years of great hardship and economic dislocation, with severe financial crises and widespread suffering both among the middle classes and the masses. This intense misery was not only due to the 'postwar slump' that followed the European War against Buonaparte — the term 'world war' would hardly be too strong — but was artificially stimulated by the high price of corn imposed during the Napoleonic war by the Parliament of mercantilist-landlords for the enrichment of its own members: this fiscal policy hit the manufacturers by raising the price of land, and the workers — much more severely, of course — by raising the price of bread. Consequently, it combined both the manufacturers and their workers against the ruling class and its virtual political monopoly and executive, the unreformed Whig Parliament of 1689, that had survived both the industrial and the French Revolutions virtually unimpaired as the monopoly of the dictatorship of merchant capital and its political executive, the Whig oligarchy.[11]

The years immediately after 1814–15 were consequently years of tumult, disorder and almost thinly-veiled civil war. The government, deprived of the genius of Pitt — as we styled him above, the 'Witte' of this British 'Tsardom' — were now led by a bunch of atavistic mediocrities, epigones of the late Pitt, equally reactionary, but without the genuine political talent that had taught that astute reactionary statesman when and where it was necessary to give ground and seek a compromise with the new social forces. Contrarily, Liverpool, Castlereagh, Sidmouth, Eldon & Co relied solely on panic legislation and blind orgies of repressive violence. Their master-stroke in the first line was the ferocious 'Six Acts' (autumn of 1819) which abolished at a blow all the hard-won 'liberties of the subject' in the second, the infamous 'Peterloo' massacre.

This last event, the culmination of a series of riots and repressions, which I must regretfully pass over for lack of space, took place on 16 August 1819, when a monster demonstration assembled in Peterloo Fields on the outskirts of Manchester, the capital of the industrial north, to hear Henry Hunt, a well-known radical orator of the time. It is well known how the yeomanry, drawn exclusively from the reactionary ranks of the upper middle-class, wantonly charged this peaceful gathering. How many of the peaceful crowd were cut down or trampled to death will never be known for certain: that the official figures, a few score casualties only, fell far short of the mark, is now generally admitted.[12] The promoters of the meeting, including the speaker, subsequently received stiff prison sentences for their 'crime' in saying aloud what 90 per cent, probably, of the British people thought about 'their' government.

Such was the way in which a decadent oligarchy celebrated at home its victory over revolution abroad. Peterloo was the sequel to Waterloo!

The massacre of Peterloo was on a scale large enough to arouse widespread horror at home and abroad. In distant Italy, Shelley recorded his horror and disgust in his inspired 'Masque of Anarchy', one of the finest revolutionary poems extant in any language. In language of fire, in imagery of Apocalyptic intensity, Shelley

11 We have not forgotten that the 'Tory Party' of Pitt and Lord Liverpool was, in reality, a Whig schism, rather than a genuine Tory Party of the traditional type.

12 'A dozen killed and hundreds of injured in the stampede' is the typical conservative estimate of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

painted the unflattering portrait of the Whitehall assassins, in particular of the arch-reactionary Castlereagh:

> Very smooth he looked, and grim;
> Seven bloodhounds followed him.

And the poet, 'pale ineffectual angel' no longer, summoned the workers to rise in an impassioned clarion call:

> Rise like lions after slumber.
> In unvanquishable number:
> Shake your chains from off like dew,
> Ye are many; they are few.[13]

The words of Shelley struck an echo. The oligarchy was indeed 'few'. The very next year it narrowly escaped being fewer still! 'Cato Street' came within an ace of avenging Peterloo.

V: The 'Cato Street Conspiracy': The sequel to the 'Massacre' of Peterloo was the 'Conspiracy' of Cato Street. We have many historic examples to demonstrate that a movement driven underground by violence resorts, in its turn, to violence of a surreptitious and personal kind. We have observed this recurring phenomenon already, particularly in connection with Guy Fawkes and still more in that of the 'Leveller' Sexby.[14] The ethics of Tyrannicide lie, as such, outside our present scope, though I have already recorded my opinion that Sexby — in *Killing No Murder* — and his preceptors, the Jesuit theologians, Suarez and Mariana, made out a strong case in favour of 'bumping off' tyrants who are too strong to be attacked openly by the processes of open war. And, we may add, that what doubtfully applied to the political regimes of James the First and Oliver Cromwell, applied much more forcibly and directly to the mentally and socially bankrupt Tory regime of Lords Liverpool, Eldon and Castlereagh in 1820.

Such at least was the opinion of Arthur Thistlewood, one of those remarkable social misfits — known to the French by the expressive title of '*enragés*' — who usually become bar-loafers, bad eggs and ne'er-do-wells in general; a social genus, however, which has also to its credit some excellent revolutionaries, like Marat and Nechayev, in the annals of French and Russian revolution.[15] In English revolutionary history, Richard Parker, already noted, and Arthur Thistlewood are our best examples: we should perhaps add that Buonapartist émigré Colonel Francis Macerone.[16]

At any rate, just as the career of Richard Parker is synonymous with the Nore Mutiny, so the career of Arthur Thistlewood is the virtual equivalent of the 'Cato Street Conspiracy' of 23 February 1820.

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13 And yet, forsooth, so completely did the revolutionary tradition die out in the succeeding Victorian age, that Matthew Arnold could be taken seriously as a great critic of literature, when, after *this*, he could utter his famous description of Shelley as 'a pale ineffectual angel beating his wings impotently against the void'. And this gibberish still passes muster as classical criticism!

14 See *supra*, Part II.

15 In his remarkable historical novel of the French Revolution, *The Gods are Athirst*, Anatole France has drawn a masterly portrait of such an *enragé*.

16 See next chapter.

By the commencement of 1820, Thistlewood was already a veteran in the revolutionary struggle. Born in 1770 near Lincoln, the (probably illegitimate) son of a well-to-do family, Thistlewood, like so many of the bolder spirits of his generation, was converted to revolutionary views by reading the works of Paine. Later he went to Paris and became a follower of Robespierre and the Jacobin 'Left' of the revolution during the Jacobin ascendancy in 1794. After the execution of Robespierre in July 1794, he returned to England to propagate his doctrines. At this time, we are told by the contemporary Tory historian Allison, Thistlewood was 'firmly persuaded that the first duty of a patriot was to massacre the government and to overturn all existing institutions', from which typical piece of reactionary rhetoric we may infer that Thistlewood represented those internationalist doctrines, in the advocacy of which we have already seen that the Jacobins at first seemed disposed to anticipate the Bolsheviks. It was then, as a revolutionary of the most dangerous type, as a direct propagandist of 'The Reign of Terror' which had terrorised property-owning Europe, as not only a student of Paine, but as a direct disciple of the terrible Robespierre, the 'Lenin' of his day, as a direct advocate of the Jacobin terror and of the Jacobin guillotine, that the future hero of 'Cato Street' appeared before the English ruling class as their predestined executioner.

In England, Thistlewood was at first associated with the 'Spencean Society', a radical association for land nationalisation, founded by that eccentric agrarian reformer, the Newcastle bookseller Thomas Spence, the 'Henry George' of his day, whose theories similarly startled his own generation. There he met the elder James Watson and other revolutionaries of a more advanced character, with whom he established relations of a lasting nature.

During the war against Buonaparte, Thistlewood served in the militia as a lieutenant, doubtless, as his subsequent career proved, with the laudable revolutionary objective of gaining military experience. At the end of the war, he went to France again (in 1814) with the object presumably of renewing revolutionary contacts, a procedure that caused him, from the end of 1814 onwards, to be marked down by the government as an exceptionally dangerous character.

Upon his return to England, Thistlewood took a leading part in the revolutionary agitation that assumed so prominent a role in the stormy aftermath of the wars of the counter-revolution against France. On 2 December 1816, Thistlewood was one of the official speakers at Spa Fields, 'at which it was determined to inaugurate a revolution':

> For several months before the meeting Thistlewood constantly visited the various guardrooms and barracks, and he was so confident that his endeavours to increase the existing dissatisfaction among the soldiery had been successful, that he fully believed that the Tower guard would throw open its gates to the mob. At the outset the Tower and Bank were to be seized. The military arrangements under the new regime were to be committed to his [Thistlewood's] charge.[17]

So terrified was the government that the 'Habeas Corpus Act' was suspended on 17 February 1817. However, the soldiers did not mutiny and the 'mob' was dispersed after sacking a few gunsmiths' shops. How dangerous the situation was, however, is indicated by the fact that when Thistlewood was arrested *en route* for America in the

17 *Dictionary of National Biography*, article on Thistlewood.

following spring, the Attorney General dared not prosecute, and the prisoner at the Bar was discharged without trial (17 June 1817). Immediately, he resumed his revolutionary activities, the government not daring to interfere. He got control of the Spencean Society and turned it into an active agent for armed insurrection. Another attempt was to be made on 6 September, the date of St Bartholomew's Fair: 'The Bank was to be blown open, the post office to be attacked, and artillery seized.'[18] Again, however, the government was well informed by its spies, and the plot miscarried, though again no criminal proceedings against the plotters dared be undertaken.

As a sequel to these abortive efforts, Thistlewood broke with the moderate radicals, such as Henry Hunt, whom he accused of sabotaging his revolutionary efforts. In the spring of 1818, he was betrayed into a rash act, which gave the government an opportunity which they were quick to seize to put him away.

On 18 May 1818, he challenged the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, to a duel. Though technically illegal at Common Law, duels were not uncommon at this epoch. Leading statesmen such as Canning and the great Pitt himself did not disdain to 'defend their honour' with sword or pistol on occasions. But this, of course, was only between 'gentlemen'. Former members of the Jacobin Club did not qualify in a category which would enable them to cross swords with His Majesty's Ministers! Thistlewood was promptly arrested and got a year for a 'breach of the peace'. In Horsham Gaol he was treated with exceptional brutality in a cell nine feet by seven. Nor did the moderate Reformers succeed in propitiating him, though Hunt wrote him a friendly letter congratulating him on his attempts 'to overrun the horrid power of the Rump'.

On 28 May 1819, Thistlewood was released and at once resumed his revolutionary activities, both speaking on public platforms and taking the lead in a new revolutionary junta, with a secret directory of 13: a kind of embryo 'Committee of Public Safety', to direct the coming revolution. In the autumn of 1819, England undoubtedly hovered on the brink of civil war. Broadly speaking, Thistlewood in the Fall of 1819 was where Lenin was in Russia in the Fall of 1917: the acknowledged leader of a revolution that seemed on the verge of coming to a head. At the end of the year, the 'Peterloo' Massacre seemed the alarm bell that gave the signal for the coming explosion: it looked as if the aged George the Third (1760–1820), who had already seen America torn from his grasp by revolution, and the head of his 'brother of France' Louis the Sixteenth severed from his shoulders, would just live long enough to see his throne go the same way and share the fate of Charles the First at the hands of a new revolutionary regime.

However, the revolution hung fire. Thistlewood himself was unable, for lack of funds, to go to Manchester after the Peterloo affair, to carry out his original project of starting the rising in the industrial north. Meanwhile, though he remained in ignorance of it right up to the very end, one of those spies for which the period was notorious, one Edwards, wormed his way into the confidence of the conspirators and was appointed a member of the revolutionary junta of 13. Regularly informed by this British 'Azef', the government was able effectually to forestall every movement of the conspirators.

By the beginning of 1820, the chance for what he called 'a straightforward revolution' seemed hopeless to Thistlewood. Either because of sheer despair, or to

18 *Dictionary of National Biography*, article on Thistlewood.

provoke a new revolutionary wave by a political crisis, he now fell back on a reserve card which he had already considered playing: he resolved, like Guy Fawkes before him, to remove the entire government, including all the leaders of the oligarchy, by one catastrophic act of collective vengeance. The whole Cabinet was to be assassinated simultaneously.

The death of the old king on 29 January, and the succession of the universally execrated and libertine George the Fourth — 'the First Gentleman', and first scoundrel in Europe — afforded an excellent opening. Preparations were at once set on foot to murder the Cabinet. The conspiratorial rendezvous was changed from 4 Fox's Court, Grays Inn Lane, to a stable at the back of Cato Street off the Edgware Road. Here, arms were stored until, in the later testimony of a police officer at the trial, 'the place resembled a miniature arsenal'. A committee of five was appointed to manage the affair — four, or, at least, one, too many! For it included the spy Edwards, whose inclusion ruined the plot, the success of which otherwise seems to have been virtually certain.

As it was, the conspirators walked into a carefully baited trap. On 22 February, *The Times* announced that the entire Cabinet was to dine in Grosvenor Square at the house of their colleague the Earl of Harrowby, the Lord President of the Council. On the spy Edwards showing this to Thistlewood, the latter determined to act at once: curiously enough, the 'Achilles' Heel' of this veteran plotter lay in his blind confidence in the agent provocateur whom the government had been fortunate enough to place at the elbow of their most formidable enemy.[19]

Accordingly, on 23 February, the band of conspirators made its way to Cato Street by separate routes, and there they armed hastily before setting out to 'gate-crash' into Harrowby's house and to create a few irreplaceable vacancies in the ranks of the British oligarchy! Peterloo was to be avenged, and Castlereagh and his 'seven bloodhounds', with other pillars of the British and European reactions, were to be sent below to the infernal bloodhound Cerberus in the Shades! The conspirators were just about to set out when a posse of police arrived at the run and stormed into the loft-turned-arsenal.

A scene worthy of the Rome of the Borgias followed: lights flared up and down and swords clashed. Police Constable Smithers sprang at Thistlewood, eager, no doubt, for the reward which the government had offered for the apprehension, dead or alive, of the arch-conspirator. His reward was of another kind; for Thistlewood 'lunged swiftly with his sword at the present'. The police officer fell, mortally wounded. Lights went out and pistols cracked. Finally, the policemen tumbled out of the loft even quicker than they had tumbled in; their commander, to save his own skin, being forced to join in the conspirators' fierce shout: 'Aye, kill them.'

In the class state, it is the function of the army to support the police. A company of soldiers, already stationed nearby in readiness, was quickly on the spot. Most of the conspirators were seized before they could get clear of Cato Street. Their leader, however, succeeded in making a getaway. The government was well served by its spies: the next morning the great conspirator was seized in bed at 8 White Street, Moorfields, EC. He was committed to the Tower and charged with high treason.

The 'trial' took place over three days — 17–19 April. Its result was a foregone conclusion: caught red-handed in treason and murder, Thistlewood and his

19 In the similar Russian case of Malinovsky, the veteran Bolsheviks with Lenin and Stalin at their head, demonstrated a similar credulity.

associates were doomed from the start. The Crown did not even find it necessary to put the spy Edwards in the witness box. The conspirators were all condemned, under the grisly mediæval law of treason, still unrepealed, to be hanged, drawn and quartered. Speaking from the dock before sentence, the leader of the 'Cato Street Conspiracy' delivered an impassioned speech, ending with these burning words:

> Albion is still in the chains of slavery, I quit it without regret. My only sorrow is that its soil should be a theatre for slaves, for cowards, for despots.

With these magnificent words, worthy of Robespierre himself, the greatest English disciple of the Jacobins took his leave of a land still plunged amid the blackest shadows of reaction. On 1 May he was hanged at Newgate, meeting his grim end with iron courage, his last minutes insulted by an inquisitive Tory alderman who pestered him right up to the scaffold with vulgar abuse. His last words, 'Now we shall know the answer to the great enigma' — a favourite expression of the Deists — shows how closely allied were religious and political radicalism in the minds of Paine and his school, as of Robespierre before them. He was decapitated after death, but the government dared not 'quarter' and hang his body, as by sentence.

The 'Cato Street Conspiracy' itself was probably a council of desperation, though even so, the universally execrated oligarchy held power by so precarious a tenure that the simultaneous removal of its leaders might well have unloosed a storm that could have overthrown it. In any case, the meagre notices given to Thistlewood and the conspiracy in the standard (bourgeois) histories, fail to do justice to a formidable revolutionary who played a considerable role in the political struggles of his time. He was a national figure in his day: it is not every agitator who can compel the government of the most powerful state in the world to suspend its constitutional guarantees! Thistlewood seems to have had most of the qualities of a revolutionary leader. Given only slightly more favourable conditions, he could have played an important, even a decisive, role in an English 'Jacobin' revolution. Robespierre and 'Tom' Paine, between them, seem to have had at least one English disciple who was worthy of his teachers.

VI: Note on 'Oliver the Spy':[20] A prominent feature of the generation of the French Revolution was the habitual use of spies by the British government both at home and abroad. So far from being 'un-English', espionage was raised through this period almost to the dignity of a normal institution of state. On the Continent, the 'agents' of Pitt became a household word. Nor were they less active at home. We have not forgotten how, when the young Wordsworth and Coleridge used to meet to discuss their glowing dreams of Utopian 'Pantisocracy' and to read each other their youthful poems in praise of the French Revolution — 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' — they had an unseen audience in one of Pitt's spies, who enjoyed the (probably unappreciated) honour of listening from the shelter of a neighbouring bush to the inspired dawn of the renaissance of English romantic poetry!

Spies, in fact, shadowed most of the revolutionary movements of the period. In the person of Edwards, British espionage secured its biggest haul in the 'Cato Street Conspiracy'. But the most famous individual member of this 'learned profession'

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20 The real name and antecedents of Oliver have never been established with certainty, see FW Chandler, *Spies and Provocative Agents* (Chandler, Sheffield, 1936).

was the (in)famous 'Oliver the Spy', who was employed 'professionally' in connection with several of the subversive movements of the era.

'Oliver's' biggest 'job' was in connection with a local revolt in the Midlands, known as 'the Derbyshire Blanketeers', which he first egged on to revolt and then betrayed (9 June 1817). The poor yokels who composed it were routed by an ambush of cavalry, and their leader, Jeremiah Brandreth, along with several of his associates, were hanged at Nuns Green Derby on 7 November 1817, on the sworn testimony of 'Oliver', who, unlike Edwards, was called as chief witness for the Crown. It became evident in the course of the proceedings that 'Oliver' had met the insurgents when 'talking red' in a public house and had fanned the vague discontent of the simple yokels to the point of revolt.

For his services in this and other movements, this loathsome reptile was finally rewarded with a 'soft job' in the government service in Cape Colony, presumably to escape the well-merited vengeance of his dupes. Here, he appears to have added pecuniary dishonesty to his other crimes, and to have swindled his employers wholesale. Creatures like Oliver and Edwards demonstrate what a sink of iniquity Britain was under the reaction. Political and economic cesspools, no less than their physical counterpart, automatically breed scum of the filthiest and most evil-smelling kind.

Chapter IV: The Reform Bill of 1832: The End of the Bourgeois Revolution in Britain — The 'Bloodless Revolution'

The revolutionary struggles of the generation of 1789 to 1820 were too vague in class composition to achieve any definite end. Even had Thistlewood led his revolution to victory, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that such a victory at such a time, by removing the dictatorship of merchant capital vested in the oligarchy which was the common enemy of both industrial 'capital' and 'labour' in the new industrial world, would certainly have precipitated the inevitable class struggle between the manufacturers and the workers.

As it was, the common enemy of both remained in power until 1832. As a result, both the militant elements of industrial capitalism and of industrial labour remained in the same revolutionary camp and together faced the common enemy of both.

As usual, practice expressed itself as theory. It was precisely at this time that the great (bourgeois) economist David Ricardo, 'invented' — more exactly, deduced from the concrete conditions of his time — the 'labour theory of value'. In its original (pre-Marxist) form all that the famous theory amounted to was that the socially useful and historically progressive classes should oust from political and economic power the parasitic oligarchy, with its outmoded mercantilist economics and its blood-sucking absentee landlords and rentiers who bled the useful classes in the community white by their arbitrarily imposed Corn Laws. In its origins, the labour theory of value emerged historically as the economic formula for the political union of the 'industrious classes, *capital and labour*', against a parasite caste of landowners and an outmoded mercantilist economics. After all, we cannot blame Ricardo, a millionaire and a Director of the Bank of England, for not foreseeing that Marx would steal his thunders, and apply in the interests of historically progressive labour against a by then parasitic capitalism, the masterly logic that he himself had used with such devastating effect against the political and economic regime of the decadent Whig oligarchy.

The 'Cato Street Conspiracy' was the last of what we may term the 'Utopian' revolutionary movements which aimed at a general 'overturn' without any specific class basis. Now, however, we pass into a new era of precise class conflicts, waged with a definite backing, with a definite goal, and with a precise objective in view, which governed the struggle, and to which the struggle limited itself.

We have seen in essentials what this struggle was, and who were its protagonists: in essence, it was a struggle for political and economic power between the old mercantilist–landowning oligarchy which derived, with substantially unaltered power, from the 'glorious revolution' of 1688–89. Against this 'Venetian oligarchy', whose last constructive statesman was Pitt, were arrayed the whole forces of the new manufacturing England recently unleashed by the industrial revolution.

How strong these forces were is (involuntarily) confessed by a Tory writer of the period.

> The age [he writes] which now discloses itself to our view promises to be the age of industry. By industry, alliances shall be dictated and national friendships shall be formed. The prospects which are now opening to England almost exceed the boundaries of thought; and can be measured by no standard found in history… The manufacturing industry of England may be fairly computed as that of all the other continents taken together, and 16 such continents as Europe could not manufacture as much cotton as England does.[1]

The revolution of industrial capital, of the factory system against the dead hand of the mercantilist landlords; such was the real nature of the social conflict that ended in the Reform Bill of 1832. Or, if one wills, *a struggle of the second, industrial phase of capitalism against the first, mercantilist phase*.

Such was the social end of the struggle: it now remains to glance at the political means, at the instrument of power around which the social conflict was fought.

We have already seen what this instrument was: the seventeenth-century merchants had fought out their political struggle for power with the Crown over the question of Parliamentary supremacy over the executive and over the national purse. 'No taxation without representation' had been the effective battle-cry of Pym, Hampden and (in his pre-power phase) Cromwell. It was in the name of Parliament, too, as we have not forgotten, that Shaftesbury and his Whig disciples effected the revolution of 1688–89. And from this later date to 1832, it was again in the name of Parliamentary supremacy that the Whig junta ruled: in the name of 'The People of England'.

By this latter term, however, the Whigs did not understand 'The People of England' actually taken as a whole, or even as a majority. On the contrary, by this term the Whigs implied, in essence, the dictatorship of the Whigs! The Parliament in which they ruled was the Parliament, not of the British people, but of predominantly the merchant–landlord class, who ruled over the people, or, as they would themselves have expressed it, on behalf of the British people: to be sure, the above distinction — between 'over' and 'on behalf of' — is not unknown in some of our contemporary regimes as well; it covers a multitude of sins!

To establish a dictatorship of such a nature, one combining so happily the *appearance* of freedom with the *reality* of despotism, it was not, fortunately for themselves, necessary for the Whigs to invent a new instrument of government. All they had to do was to conserve Parliament exactly as it had always been, thereby effectively disenfranchising the great bulk of the population. In this respect, the industrial revolution, which transferred population wholesale from the towns of the (represented) south to the new towns of the (unrepresented) north and Midlands, where the new factory towns were growing up, aided and abetted the process, by making an unrepresentative Parliament more unrepresentative still.

For, if the pre-industrial Parliament had afforded representation only to a minority of the nation, the unreformed Parliament, *after* the industrial revolution, afforded representation only to a minority of a minority! That is, the new manufacturing towns were cut off automatically from any adequate representation. The result was that, by the end of the Napoleonic Wars and after a generation of the industrial revolution, power in the British state had reached the position that

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1 *Quarterly Review*, June–August 1826, pp 92–99, cited in Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, Volume 1 (National Labour Press, London, 1921), p 283.

political power, held in virtue of Parliamentary control, rested in one set of hands! Those of the oligarchy which controlled the out-of-date representation, with its 'rotten boroughs'.[2] Whilst, simultaneously, the new manufacturers, the lords of mill, factory and workshop, the wealth of whom increasingly dwarfed that of the old ruling class — *and which would have completely dwarfed it but for the Corn Laws which artificially weighted the economic scales in favour of land against capital* — increasingly controlled the economic resources of the nation.

In other words, political and economic power lay in different hands. We have been faced with this situation before. Where? In the England of Pym and Cromwell; on the eve of the great bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century. *It is in fact the classical definition of a revolutionary situation.*

The Parliamentary system had changed but little since the seventeenth century, when even James the First commented on the historic anomaly by which the former cathedral city of Old Sarum had the right of returning two MPs, though in the time of the first Stuart King it was already a mere grassy mound. By the eighteenth century, matters had got much worse on account of the vast economic changes noted by us above.

The French Revolution of 1789 threw a powerful and penetrating searchlight on the rotting and obsolete institutions of the era. The England of the 'Venetian oligarchy' had indeed no Louis the Fifteenth, no Madame de Pompadour, no 'Pare aux Cerfs',[3] but how did the British Parliament look in the light of 'the immortal principles of 1789', where the ratio of representation was as follows:

> It was estimated in 1793 that, with a population of some eight and a half millions, 287 members (that is, a majority of the House of Commons) were returned by 11,057 electors; that in 51 constituencies there were less than 50 voters, and that 130 boroughs had less than 300 electors apiece; and that whereas 92 county members were returned by 130,000 voters, 84,000 electors in the boroughs had 421 representatives. 'The rotten boroughs', that is, those which were under the control of the Crown or of a patron, were admittedly the most indefensible parts of this parody of principles and facts.
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> 'The Society of the People' undertook in 1793 to prove that the Lords of the Treasury, 71 peers and 82 commoners, could together nominate 306 out of 558 members, that is, make a decisive majority. The influence of the Crown — that is, of the government — through the patronage of the navy, army, Church, judiciary, civil and colonial service was enormous, and secured the steady voting support in the Commons without which no administration considered itself safe or even possible. 'In 1770 there were 192 placeholders in the Commons.'[4]

Such was the outmoded system of government which embodied the rule of an outmoded oligarchy. Old Sarum — a grassy mound with seven 'electors' — and

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2 See this chapter, *infra*.

3 That is, the royal harem of Louis the Fifteenth.

4 'Reform Movement', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition), Volume 19 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1929), p 46. Already in the early nineteenth century, the radical ('utilitarian') philosopher James Mill referred to the civil service of the government-controlled East India Company as 'the outdoor relief of the middle class.'

Duncombe — with 14, and half-submerged under the sea — two MPs each in perpetuity! Manchester, now world famous as the metropolis of the industrial revolution, and Birmingham, industrial capital of the Midlands: no representatives! They did not figure in the land registers of William the Conqueror!

Translating the above facts from the formulæ of political arithmetic into the underlying methodology of historical materialism, it is evident that the situation depicted above could only end in drastic reform or in revolution. Either the old must compromise with the new, or else be forcibly overthrown by it. For it was not possible for the new heady wine of the industrial revolution to simmer indefinitely in these old political bottles. Despite the powerful mythology created by the Whigs, the Revolution of 1688–89 was no more final and unalterable than any other. Another revolution now stood on the order of the day.

That 'revolution' was represented by the Reform Bill of 1832, one of the few social revolutions in modern (or indeed, any) times that was (comparatively) bloodless, whilst nevertheless effecting fundamental social change. We can now glance briefly at the sequence of events that led up to this completion of the bourgeois revolution in Britain.

The protagonists of Parliamentary reform were the famous demagogue John Wilkes — member both of the House of Commons and of the notorious 'Hell-Fire Club', which held its bizarre meetings in the steeple of West Wycombe Church — and John Cartwright — brother of the inventor of the power-loom, one of the creators of the industrial revolution.

The latter, in particular, conducted a life-long agitation on behalf of the cause of Parliamentary reform. In 1773, on the eve of the American War of Independence, they began the agitation for Parliamentary reform. In 1776, Cartwright founded his propagandist organisation for Parliamentary reform, 'The Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights'. This date may be considered as the birthday of modern radicalism in Britain.

So glaring were the anomalies of the old system that the new radicalism, with an ideology expressed in the economic and political fields, respectively, by Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham, made rapid headway. So rapid in fact that even the arch-timeserver Edmund Burke had to make a show, at first, of supporting it, and even the arch-reactionary Pitt, alarmed at the growing groundswell beneath the feet of the old regime, had — as noted already — to make a show of going some distance to meet — and to satisfy — its demands.

The radical agitation was, we have not forgotten, postponed for a generation by the reign of terror that was let loose by the reaction concurrently with its war of intervention against the European revolution. Though not entirely suppressed, the reform movement was reduced to a few tentative and spasmodic gestures during the regime of black reaction and tyrannical suppression that was represented by Pitt, Lord Castlereagh, 'The Six Acts' and Peterloo. The return of Sir Francis Burdett as MP for Westminster in the teeth of governmental opposition, represented perhaps its best effort during this generation of political atavism (1807). Nonetheless, in the postwar period the agitation broke out afresh, powerfully reinforced by the appalling economic depression that followed upon the first great war of the industrial age.[5]

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5 Roland Farbairn McWilliams, *Does History Repeat Itself? A Comparison of the Conditions Political and Economic which Followed the Napoleonic War with Those of the Present Time* (Dent, London, 1932).

The combined movement of the social forces released by the new age proved ultimately irresistible. One by one, the old regime was forced to abandon its old outposts. In 1825, trades unionism, whose earlier manifestations had been declared illegal by Pitt during the terror, was officially legalised — though, within the next decade, the tragic fate of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' was to testify to the precariousness of its legal position, which indeed had been of a strictly qualified kind. In 1812, the Nonconformist Emancipation Act was passed.[6] The following year saw the Act of Roman Catholic Emancipation passed by a Tory government: a flat denial of the most sacred 'No Popery' principles of 1688! All that was now needed for the victory of reform was the conversion of the official opposition; the acquisition of a first-class political organiser and a strong impetus from outside Britain.

By 1830 all these prerequisites were in existence: from 1820 onwards the official Whig opposition came over, under the nominal leadership of Lord Grey, and the real direction of Lord John Russell and Henry (later Lord) Brougham. In this connection, the powerful political journalism of that great literary agitator William Cobbett undeniably played an important part in stirring up public opinion by his racily vigorous denunciations of the monstrous abuses of the old order. The organiser appeared in the person of the Charing Cross ex-tailor Francis Place, perhaps the supreme example in all English history of a 'Tammany Hall Boss' — viz, a superb political tactician and an unrivalled manipulator of the party caucus, the 'Shaftesbury' of the 1832 revolution, the *de facto* founder of the British Liberal Party, whose public life was indissolubly bound up with the struggle for reform.

Last, but by no means least, the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Britain was undoubtedly hastened by its precedent completion in France — and, on a smaller scale, Belgium — then the two most advanced industrial countries on the European Continent. I refer, of course, to the (Second) French Revolution of 1830: to the 'July Days' which — this time definitively — 'liquidated' the restoration monarchy of the absolutist Bourbons, and erected in its stead the constitutional regime of Louis Philippe, the Bourgeois King — not 'King of France' but, significantly, of 'the French'. The French counterpart of the English 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–89.

It was this last event that probably made the 'Reform Bill' inevitable: it affords yet another proof both of the age-long interdependence of European and British revolutionary movements, so often and so necessarily referred to by us in the course of these pages, and, very particularly, of the profound influence exerted by revolutionary France on British history throughout the two generations between the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, that is, throughout the epoch that may be accurately described as the era of the French Revolution.

In 1831–32 it looked as if the 'July Days' were going to be repeated beyond the Channel; so fast and furious did events move. Under the impetus of the events in Paris, the general election of 1831 returned a Whig (Opposition) government headed by Grey and Russell, and definitely pledged to 'the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill', as their supporters enthusiastically phrased it. The new King (William the Fourth — 1830–37) refused his assent to the Bill, and when the Tory House of Lords threw it out, dismissed the Grey–Russell ministry, and sent for a Tory administration headed by that most unyielding of reactionaries, the Duke of Wellington. But the industrial revolution was too strong even for the victor of

6 This year was one of black distress: two million people — at least 15 per cent of the total population — were in receipt of public relief.

Waterloo! Place organised a masterly 'run on the banks' — 'go for gold and stop the Duke' — which, backed up by the whole power of industrial capital, was probably more dangerous to the government than any number of riots.

Not that these were lacking: to be sure, all over the country pandemonium was let loose. In Bristol matters got to such a pitch that the 'mob' burned down the palace of the Bishop: the wealthy and ultra-reactionary Tory Church, ruled by plutocratic bishops who were die-hard reactionaries and very often permanent absentees from their dioceses, was particularly unpopular. The attitude of the ruling class to the established Church is aptly expressed in two brilliant aphorisms of that master of cynicism, Lord Melbourne, who, being once reproached with showing favouritism to the established Church, made the historic rejoinder: 'I favour the established Church because it *is* established. Get your damned sect established and I will show favour to that, too.' The same authority also remarked: 'No one respects Christianity more than I — but, really, when it comes to interfering in private life!'[7] We recall in this connection the contemporary sad case of the chaplain of Archbishop Howley of Canterbury, who complained to the Primate that he had been hit by a dead cat flung at him from the street: whereupon His Grace, with true Christian meekness, told him that he ought to be thankful that it was not a live one![8]

Dead cats did not exhaust the arsenal of the English radicals in 1831–12. Preparations for armed revolt were systematically undertaken by an embryo 'Committee of Public Safety', professionally advised by the celebrated General Sir Charles Napier, the future conqueror of Sind (NW India). Arms were manufactured in great abundance. Nor was instruction in their use lacking: for in 1831 an Italian exile and ex-Buonapartist colonel, Francis Macerone, former *aide-de-camp* to the great French cavalry general, Joachim Murat (brother-in-law of Buonaparte, who made him King of Naples) — published the most remarkable pamphlet on street fighting in the English language — *Defensive Instructions to the People* — with an appendix describing a new kind of 'foot-lance' invented by the author for the special purpose of resisting cavalry in street charges.[9] This masterly monograph — now most undeservedly forgotten — placed at the disposal of the British workers the ripe experience of a generation of Continental revolutions and of the new art and science of street-fighting that dated from the storming of the Bastille. In the condensed pages of this little classic, the English revolutionary between 1831 and 1848 — for the Chartists also used it extensively — could find a wealth of information invaluable in those days of still elementary firearms, when street-fighting had no tanks or aeroplanes to contend with.

But perhaps the most permanent lesson contained in Macerone's little compendium is his reiterated insistence on the elemental right and primary 'constitutional' duty of every able-bodied citizen to carry arms and to become

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7 Yet this hard-boiled sceptic lived to usher in the prim evangelical respectability of the Victorian age as the 'great' Queen's first Prime Minister!

8 It is to be feared that Jeremy Bentham, the great philosopher of the reformers, who died just before the Bill finally went into law, after a lifetime spent as the supreme ideologist of the British Liberal revolution and its radical exponents, would not have approved of this anecdote: for it was said of him that this arch-philanthropist and champion of humanity 'loved his kind only a little less than he loved his cats', who invariably dined at table with the illustrious champion of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

9 In his subsequent *Memoirs*, Macerone tells us that 200,000 copies of his pamphlet were sold. A fabulous sale for the time. In his introduction to the pamphlet he predicted that the British revolution would have overthrown the oligarchy by 1835!

proficient in their use: that 'he who has iron has bread', this famous axiom of a contemporary French revolutionary (Auguste Blanqui) was already known in effect to our author. The celebrated phrase in fact concisely sums up the fundamental political lesson of the French revolutionary era: *only an armed people is a free people!* For the rest, Colonel Macerone did not forget that deep-rooted attachment to the Bible, then considered as endemic in every true Britisher. *Defensive Instructions*, in its capacity as the 'revolutionaries' handbook' of the era, contained an instructive chapter on the religious duty of defence, and its title page was adorned by a most apt quotation from the New Testament: 'Let him that hath no sword sell his cloak and buy one.' Hardly the scriptural quotation that Archbishop Howley and his cat-smitten chaplain would have selected! It was about this time that that cynical Whig aristocrat Lord Melbourne warned his colleagues in the Cabinet that: 'If we don't hang together, we will all hang separately!'

The actual armed revolution, however, did not come to a head. Terrified by the universal revolutionary clamour, the oligarchy and its royal puppet gave way. Even their sluggish imaginations were stirred by the vision of the guillotine at work on Tower Hill, with the heads of decapitated oligarchs carried on spikes along the streets. The memories of the Jacobin Terror of 1794 had not yet faded. That crowned personages vividly recalled them is convincingly proved by a letter written (with her own hand) by the Queen, Marie Adelaide (wife of William the Fourth) to a friend at this time. The Queen ended by expressing the fervent hope that God would grant her strength to go to the scaffold with the same courage as Marie Antoinette (wife of Louis the Sixteenth) had done in Paris in 1793, when the English revolution took place. It seems clear from her context that she regarded this event as inevitable.

So, obviously, did her consort and the oligarchy of which he was the figure-head. To avoid complete destruction, they gave way. The intractable Duke of Wellington resigned in the spring of 1832. In the summer, the government of Grey and Russell passed the Bill amid nationwide rejoicing. The die-hard opposition of the House of Lords was only overcome by the reluctant consent of the King to exercise his constitutional right of swamping the House by creating enough new (opposition) peers to pass the Bill.

Properly speaking, 7 June 1832, the date of the Reform Bill, was the end of the old, undisguised 'Venetian oligarchy' that had ruled since the revolution of 1688. This 'bloodless revolution' may therefore in a certain sense be styled as the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Britain. Nonetheless, 1832 was far from seeing a complete social revolution in Britain. To estimate, accordingly, in what respects the Reform Bill of 1832 was and was not a genuine social revolution, it is necessary to do a little historical stocktaking, so to speak, and to try to reach definite conclusions as to what sort of society actually resulted from the social struggles that culminated in 1832.

In what respects and to what extent was the Reform Bill of 1832 a social revolution — that is, a genuine transference of power from one social class to another, as distinct from a mere reshuffling of the electoral machinery?

In the first place, it is obvious that it was not what the 'Levellers' of the Commonwealth would have styled as a 'root and branch reform' (viz, revolution). The actual terms of the famous Bill were very moderate, and, in themselves, by no means amounted to a complete changeover in political power from one class to another (that is, to a genuine social revolution). The main provisions of the Bill are described by our authority in these terms:

> By the Reform Acts of 1832 the representation of the United Kingdom was reconstructed. In England, 56 nomination boroughs returning 111 members were disenfranchised; 30 boroughs were each deprived of one member, and Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, which had returned four members, were reduced to two. Means were thus found for the enfranchisement of populous places. Twenty-two large towns, including Metropolitan districts, became entitled to return two members, and 20 less considerable towns acquired the right of returning one member each. The number of county members was increased from 94 to 159, the larger counties being divided for the purpose of representation… The elective franchise was also placed upon a new basis. In the boroughs a £10 household suffrage was substituted for the narrow and unequal franchises which had sprung up. In the counties, copyholders and leaseholders for terms of years, and tenants at will paying a rent of £50 a year, were added to the 40 shilling freeholders.

After adding that similar acts were passed for Scotland and Ireland, our authority adds the significant comment that:

> The most decisive feature of these Reform Acts was not so much the extension of the franchise, but the fact that five-sixths of the male population were still without a vote, *the working-classes being practically without a vote*.

And he concludes:

> But what the Acts did do, once and for all, was to take the control of the constituencies, particularly by the disenfranchisement of the 'rotten boroughs', out of the hands of the peers who had hitherto bought and sold the right of nomination of candidates. *From henceforth the political balance of power was shifted from the Lords to the Commons*.[10]

If we translate the political arithmetic of the above into the social and class realities which underlay it, it is fairly obvious what the Reform Bill actually did — and did not — do. Therewith also, we obtain the means of forming an opinion as to how far 1832 represented a genuine social revolution.

From what has been said above, a clear picture emerges as to the kind of society which the Bill created. We can summarise this in the following terms.

The Reform Bill of 1832, in the first place, represented a compromise between the old (Whig) oligarchy and the new class of industrial manufacturers, rather than a clean break with the oligarchy and its replacement by a genuine democracy on the Continental model set by the French Revolution. The Reform Bill of 1832 *broadened the basis of the oligarchy by the inclusion of industrial capital rather than abolished it altogether.*

The economic expression of this compromise was exhibited by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the economic postscript, so to speak, to the political events of 1832. By the repeal, merchant capital invested in and interwoven with landed

10 'Parliamentary Reform', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition), Volume 17 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1929), our emphasis.

property yielded up its monopolistic position and ceded pride of place to industrial capital. Nevertheless, even here there was a compromise. For the English landed system based on hereditary entails still remained; and the law, with its usual archaic disregard of contemporary reality, went on styling landed property as alone 'real property', just as if the industrial revolution had never occurred.[11] Far more important, no agrarian revolution on the Continental model took place, or, to this day, has taken place in Britain, which alone in Europe remains without a freeholding peasantry.

The political expression of the reforms of 1832 is to be found in the rapid subsequent transformation of the Whig Party, the historic party of merchant capital, into the Liberal Party, the party of industrial capital. We can in fact state with substantial accuracy that between 1832 and the epoch-making transformation of the Tory Party by the genius of Disraeli about a generation later, the Tory Party stood for the remains of the old (pre-1832) oligarchy in opposition to rising and victorious liberalism, the party of the industrial revolution; the complete futility of Toryism between 1832 and 1868 — at which latter date Disraeli 'dished the Whigs' with his new political strategy as expressed in his Second Reform Bill — is the reflex of its outmoded historical role.

Thus we see in 1832 a social revolution indeed, but not a clean-cut revolution. Like its historic predecessor, the revolution of 1688–89, only even more so, 1832 ended in a compromise.[12]

Still, if the Reform Bill of 1832 was a compromising revolution, still it was a revolution and not a mere reform of political machinery.

We have seen what it was; and we have also seen what it was not. The victory once won by their common effort, the victors parted company! The manufacturers were absorbed into the old ruling class; but the industrial workers who had supplied the mass backing to the reform movement were left out in the cold without any share of political power. They had fought and won; but they had not reaped the rewards of victory. On the contrary, they had been left in the lurch by their former allies, the manufacturers. Henceforth, with the 'arrival' of industrial capital at the seats of power, for the first time since the great transformation effected by the industrial revolution, the class alignment was now clear-cut and set for the future struggle. Thereafter, the proletariat, now making its bow to History, faced the serried ranks of the property-owners, both pre-industrial and post-industrial, inexorably barring the forward movement of the workers to their historic goals of political power and economic emancipation for themselves immediately, and ultimately for all humanity.

This fundamental antagonism, henceforth cardinal and primary in human relationships, needed indeed the genius of Marx to reveal its full significance to the workers themselves. Nonetheless, the acts of the post-Reform Bill government soon spoke clearer than words to the workers, announcing that, where property was concerned, the workers were the common victims and enemies of all sections of the capitalist class. For, on the very morrow of the Reform Bill, its hero, Lord John Russell himself, announced that measure to have achieved a perfect constitution, one

11 Not until 1923 did that proverbial 'ass' the law make the great discovery that Queen Anne was really dead!

12 Since Cromwell's too clean sweep of the institutions of the past, the sign of compromise has consistently hung over our subsequent British revolutions!

that had attained absolute 'finality' — whence his subsequent nickname of 'Finality Jack'.

The actions of the government matched the words of its spokesman. For in 1834 the government struck, in the person of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' — the seven Dorchester labourers transported to Botany Bay for organising a rudimentary trade union amongst the half-starved agricultural workers — at the elementary rights of trade unionism, which even the pre-Reform Tories had been forced to concede. Worse still was to come. For in the same year (1834), a Royal Commission of 'Manchester' (*laisser-faire*) economists set aside the (more or less) patriarchal Poor Law legislation that had subsisted with little alteration since Elizabeth's Act of 1601 and which had indeed been somewhat improved by the benevolent and widely imitated scales of extra relief voted, to relieve war-distress, by the Speenhamland Magistrates (1795), and in its place drafted a soul-destroying Act — immediately passed into law by the first post-Reform Parliament — by which the separation of the workers *from* property was made absolute, and was enforced by a draconian code, by which the mere fact of poverty was constituted as in itself the worst of crimes: outdoor relief was done away with altogether; and workhouses — 'human hells' and 'Bastilles of the poor' as indignant public opinion styled them — were made the compulsory abode of the helpless, the aged and the infirm. In these 'workhouses' — as they were appropriately styled — the most inhuman conditions prevailed: absolute segregation of the sexes, husband and wife included, in accordance with the precepts of that super-bourgeois economist Malthus, and a discipline so harsh, and a standard of living so low, that even the miserably paid and overworked factory-slaves of that era of unbridled industrial ruthlessness would prefer their miserable lot to entering these sinks of misery. The Poor Law Act of 1834, that monument of bottomless brutality of an irresponsible capitalism, was indeed compiled upon the assumption that its framers had discovered the exact nature of that 'sin' against the Holy Ghost, which it had baffled the age-long inquiries of theologians to discover: it was poverty! The Manchester economists had, at last, discovered what Christ really meant! Did not one of their number declare about this very time that 'Jesus Christ is Free Trade', thus enrolling the Carpenter of Nazareth in the ranks of the 'Anti-Corn Law League'?

One of the horrors of the new workhouses consisted of ringing bells all night, in order to prevent the wretched inmates from sleeping in comfort. This mental torture was truly symbolical. For the Poor Law of 1834 acted as an alarm bell to arouse the still immature political consciousness of the workers to the fact that industrial capital, their ally of yesterday, was now their most implacable enemy; and to the necessity of meeting the united class-front of their exploiters with a united class-front of their own.

The alarm did not pass unheeded! The answer of the workers to the betrayal of 1832 and its sequel was quickly given. The year 1837, which witnessed the titular inauguration of the Victorian age, witnessed concurrently the inauguration of the first mass movement of the proletariat in modern times. The sequel to the new class alignment that resulted from the victory of industrial capital in 1832 and from its admission to the ruling class, was the Chartist movement: that 'light which failed', but which is nonetheless a veritable beacon to all future revolutionary movements of the workers of Britain.

Chapter V: The Chartist Movement

As I have suggested above, the practical effects of the Chartist movement were virtually nil, and I cannot therefore attach to it the importance which some have seen magnified, as I hold it to have been, by the transforming mists of sentiment that have necessarily gathered around the first mass movement of the British workers. For myself, ardently as I pay my tribute in sincere revolutionary piety to our heroic forefathers who first challenged the hideous regime that emerged from the industrial revolution, yet I must frankly confess that I do not hold it proven that the Chartist movement ever really had any chance of success.

Indeed, in this respect, I rank its chances not only far below those of the revolution which would certainly have broken into flame in 1832, had the King listened to Wellington and his fellow 'Blimps' and refused his assent to the Reform Bill, but also below those of Thistlewood's planned insurrection in 1819–20. I think that, between the outbreak of the war against France and 1832, a revolution on the French model was perfectly feasible in Britain and in fact only awaited its 'Cromwell'. And though it is of course true that such a revolution, the times being what they were, would necessarily have evolved into a capitalist society, yet it would have been on the French model, and not, on that account, by any means identical with what actually transpired.

For we miss altogether the real character of modern, including contemporary British, society, if we fail to realise that it is still pre-eminently characterised by two social features which the French Revolution, under the direction of the Jacobins, made for ever impossible on the bulk of the European Continent: viz, the rule of an hereditary aristocratic caste, and the preservation of a landed interest, based on entails and primogeniture, which has effectually stopped the creation of a free peasantry.[1]

I hold that a genuine Jacobin revolution could have succeeded in England between 1791 and 1832, had the insurrectionary movement, which commanded the services of such outstanding revolutionaries as Thomas Paine, Arthur Thistlewood and Francis Macerone, only had that element of 'luck', of that happy combination of circumstances, of in short that 'accidental element', which in revolutions, as elsewhere, is the indispensable corollary even to the most favourable material and psychological circumstances. If it be objected that such a revolution would have led, as in France, to a capitalist society, true — but what of it? Capitalism was then on the historic order of the day as a social phase. And in any case, will anybody be bold enough to tell us that a democratic republican Britain without oligarchs and with a peasantry, would not be a more progressive jumping-off ground for the social revolution than the caste-ridden society that we still have today?

However, the Fates were unkind. We can only console ourselves with the thought that if 'the gods fought for the victors', 'Tom' Paine 'fought for the vanquished'!

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1 In this respect, we must equate Britain with regard to its social structure and despite its vast industrial progress, as the social counterpart of Spain, where the Jesuits, supported by the bayonets of Wellington's army, similarly succeeded in extinguishing the light from across the Pyrenees.

Whilst, however, a 'Jacobin revolution', supported by both (industrial) capital and labour could — or so, at least I hold — have come to fruition between the French Revolution and the Reform Bill, yet after this latter event, we have seen that the by now divergent and conflicting interests of these former allies had taken them into rival camps. Henceforth, the workers, in opposition to all sections of capital, and, *unlike France with no peasantry with which to ally itself*, were forced to fight alone. The Chartist movement was the first movement of such a kind: a pioneer movement, and for this reason, glorious; and for precisely the same reason, premature and therefore doomed to failure from the start.

As the most important thing about Chartism was — in our opinion at least — that it tried to do the impossible, we regard it as justifiable and indeed necessary, to begin by giving the reasons for our already recorded opinion that it was indeed doomed from the start.

Speaking broadly, it can be said that Chartism failed for three primary reasons: it was a one-class movement without class allies; it was waged by an historically immature class — hopelessly vague, and sharply divided at that, about its ultimate aims; and it was directed against a capitalism, which, far from being moribund, was on the eve of its maximum expansion known anywhere up to that date — the most powerful in all history prior to the American super-boom of the 1920s, with its Messianic belief in the (capitalist) myth of eternal prosperity. To which indeed the free trade 'religion' of the Manchester School furnished a close nineteenth-century analogy.

An immature, divided and isolated working class, facing a capitalist class on the eve of the maximum expansion of all history: in our opinion, we repeat, such a combination of circumstances made Chartism a forlorn hope from the start. To expect victory under such circumstances and against such overwhelming odds would be utopian: to sentimentalise over the failure of a movement so placed is surely superfluous.

The Chartist movement lasted from 8 February 1837, when the famous 'Six Points' — equal electoral areas, universal suffrage, payment of members, no property qualifications, vote by ballot, and annual Parliaments — were embodied in the *People's Charter*, to 10 April 1848; when the movement reached simultaneously its climax and supreme fiasco in the monster petition at the Kennington Common public meeting. Thereafter, the movement dragged on for a few more years of decline and dissolution, but was no longer a serious force.

We can most conveniently consider this somewhat heterogeneous movement by treating it under the following headings: a) its immediate causes, b) its class composition, c) its political outlook — or rather, outlooks and aims, and d) its actual evolution. We have already glanced at the fundamental causes for its failure, but it will be necessary by way of summary to refer to these in more detail.

I: Originating Causes: Fundamentally there were two main causes of the Chartist movement: the acute economic stresses under which the masses laboured, a distress which had just culminated in the ruthless 'Poor Law Amendment Act' of 1834. And the fierce anger and acute disillusion of the politically conscious workers, who had demonstrated on the streets for the Reform Bill, only, as subsequent events had proved, to be left in the lurch, and in the political wilderness, by their former bourgeois allies. 'The Social Contract' between capitalist and workers, to win the franchise for both, had ended in fraud on the part of the former. As is usual in such

cases of black treachery, a nasty taste was left in the mouth, leading to thoughts of vengeance on the part of the duped workers.

Both these basic motives are evident in the agitation for the *Charter*. The economic emancipation of the masses found expression in such utterances of its leaders as Julian Harney's famous 'definition' of the real aims of the ostensibly political 'immediate demands' of the *Charter*:

> That all shall have a good house to live in with a garden back or front, just as the occupier likes; good clothing to keep him warm and make him respectable, and plenty of good food and drink to make him look and *feel* happy.[2]

The 'Christian Socialist' Reverend JR Stephens, in the course of his powerful oratorical agitation for the *Charter*, put the underlying economic basis of the *Charter* in a nutshell in his trenchant phrase: 'Chartism, my friends, is a knife and fork question.'

The conscious economic motive behind the *Charter* is directly reflected in its exclusively political clauses; and so is the concurrent fact that it was originally drafted by the 'London Workingmen's Association' drawn almost exclusively from the (relatively) well-paid and skilled London workers, amongst whom conscious political motives bulked larger than motives due to direct economic distress. It was their leader, William Lovett, who had played an active part in the Reform Bill agitation, who actually drafted 'the *People's Charter*'. And it was highly significant that the man to whom the Reform Bill had owed perhaps more than to any other individual, the great political manager Francis Place himself, assisted Lovett to draw it up. Though, to be sure, he appears to have soon experienced a genuinely bourgeois revulsion at the sight of a workers' movement doing anything for itself by the method of class struggle, and he quickly dropped out of the ranks of the *Charter*.[3]

II: Class Composition: Speaking broadly, we can say that the Chartist movement was purely proletarian in character. The reasons for this have already been stated by us above: viz, desertion of the 'middle' (bourgeois) class after 1832, and the total absence of a peasantry. The only qualifications that it is necessary to add are the attachment to the *Charter* of a small fringe of declassed petty-bourgeois elements: to be sure, several of the Chartist leaders were drawn from this class; I have in mind, in particular, Feargus O'Connor and Bronterre O'Brien.[4] No bourgeois, properly so-called — except, perhaps the 'currency crank', the banker Attwood — either capitalists or intellectuals, took part in the Chartist movement as far as I am aware.

Thus the *Charter* was the fighting standard of an almost purely proletarian movement. In fact, the only real class distinctions in its ranks lay in the considerable difference in pay and educational opportunities between the skilled workers of

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2 *London Democrat*, 27 April 1839, original emphasis.

3 We may opportunely recall, in connection with this co-founder — with Bentham — of the British Liberal Party, that felicitous definition of a Liberal, which has it that a Liberal is one who burns with sympathy to do something *for* the workers, and burns with anger if they try to *do* anything for themselves! It seems that this was true as far back as the dawn of proletarian class consciousness in the formation of the Chartist pioneer movement.

4 From the fact that several of its leaders were Irishmen it has been inferred with doubtful accuracy that there was a distinct strain of Irish revolutionary origin in the Chartist movement.

London and the South, and the poverty-stricken, largely illiterate and unemployed colliers, loom-workers and mill-hands of the North and Midlands.

With these minor qualifications, we can accurately describe the Chartist movement as a purely one-class movement, as of the working-class, and of the working-class alone. This exclusively proletarian character constitutes, to be sure, its pioneer character and claim to distinction. But equally, it describes its weakness and explains its ultimate failure. For we have not forgotten that recurring 'law' of revolutionary development, noted and established by us in an earlier section of this book, that makes a one-class revolution abortive, and which sees victory in the fruitful cooperation of two (or more) exploited classes. Here, as elsewhere, *it is cooperation that counts*.

The record of the Chartist movement affords indeed one of the best historical examples extant of the ultimate futility of a one-class revolution. Moreover, even that one class, as we shall now see, was far from being either completely homogeneous or revolutionary. Its divergent policies indeed reflected its confused outlook, which, in its turn, afforded infallible testimony to its fundamental political immaturity and consequent historic inadequacy to its revolutionary task of emancipating the workers from the yoke of capital.

III: Political Outlooks: The political immaturity of the working class of the early Victorian era — one, no doubt, inevitable, since political experience and consequent clarity do not come by the light of nature, but have to be acquired by bitter experience — reflected itself in the divided and directly contradictory outlooks that found themselves ranged side by side in the Chartist camp. For the *Charter* was, rather, a common fighting standard, around which all shades of working-class opinion gathered, than the battle flag of an homogeneous army advancing unitedly, animated by a common world outlook, towards a single world goal.

So far was the Chartist movement from possessing such a world outlook, that in actual fact three main outlooks can be clearly discerned in the Chartist ranks, all utterly divergent, and only one having any claim at all to be considered as revolutionary.

Chartism was divided into a right wing, a centre and a left wing; the last alone having any claim to be considered as revolutionary. The outlooks of these respective groups, and of their most prominent representatives, can be described with substantial accuracy in these terms.

The right wing embodied the views of the great demagogue Feargus O'Connor, the most notorious and (probably) the most influential Chartist leader. So far from being a revolutionary, or even a radical movement, it aimed consciously at a return to the pre-capitalist agrarian past. Its ideal social system, to be realised by the legislation of a Chartist Parliament, was a small landholding peasantry, similar to that which had been realised on the Continent by the French Revolution and its imitators.

There can be but little doubt that the immediate source of these ideas was to be found in the contemporary Irish movement, headed by the great Irish tribune of the people Daniel O'Connell, in whose ranks Feargus O'Connor — himself an ex-Irish MP — had served his political apprenticeship. O'Connor's abortive land company and agricultural colonies may also have been inspired, in part, by Robert Owen's similarly Utopian schemes.[5]

5 See this chapter *infra*.

Whilst such ambitions were capable of being realised by a political revolution, they were obviously far from being socially revolutionary, or even radical in substance. They could only be realised in a pre-machine, pre-industrial, 'back to the land' society. If, since Marx, we hold on unshakeable grounds that the industrial revolution and the machine age, despite their fearful abuses under capitalist direction, were nevertheless absolutely necessary preliminaries to ultimate human emancipation, it becomes obvious that no such retrogressive policy as that advocated by O'Connor and the Chartist right wing, can be regarded as other than ultimately reactionary. Not even the creation of a peasantry — highly desirable as it was — could compensate adequately for so fearful a retrogression. Not 'back' but 'forward' is the motto of every true revolutionary movement that has arisen since the machine age. Indeed, as we have not forgotten, it is precisely this forward-looking character that distinguishes the modern revolutionary outlook from that of its ancient and mediæval forerunners who sought their golden age in the legendary past. Those who regard Chartism as a revolutionary movement, pure and simple, are asked to reflect that the state of society envisaged by its most powerful leader and its (probably) numerically strongest section, was virtually identical with that of the exactly contemporary 'Young Tory' movement, led by that arch-master of the coming British counter-revolution, Benjamin Disraeli! We recall that Disraeli himself was one of the small minority of members of Parliament who spoke in sympathy with the *Charter* (1839).

Besides the right, the Chartist movement embodied, concurrently, two other distinct views that may be accurately termed centre and left.

The centre drew its chief strength from the skilled London artisans who formed the 'London Workingmen's Association'. The political aims of this body were moderate: a reflection of its (relatively) privileged economic position; and were as vague as the views of such centrist bodies usually are. Its leaders were William Lovett, the original draftsman of the *Charter* itself, and Thomas Attwood, a Birmingham banker, with an incurable craze for currency 'reform'. Both had played an active part in the Reform Bill agitation, and had been left in the lurch by its exclusively 'middle-class' victory. Attwood, in particular, that nineteenth-century 'Major Douglas', saw life exclusively in terms of currency — to be sure, he was perhaps the first victim of that recurring and endemic insanity which constitutes the specific sub-species known as the 'currency crank' — and for him, the *Charter* boiled down simply to the New Jerusalem viewed in terms of the currency reform that he expected the first Chartist Parliament to pass promptly into law.

But, in general, apart from Attwood's own sub-section, who, like their leader, were solely concerned with currency reform, the general political attitude of the Chartist centre was vague and had little concrete ideas beyond the immediate attainment of the *Charter* itself. In fact, Lovett, Attwood and the 'Workingmen's Association', really aimed at the creation, via the agency of a democratically elected Parliament along the lines provided by the *Charter*, of a moderate progressive 'labour' party, aiming at social reform and gradual enlightenment along strictly constitutional lines. In short, at a 'Fabian Society' in 1837, instead of 1885![6]

6 Space considerations holding us to a strict economy, we are reluctantly unable to give more than a bare notice to that remarkable group of proletarian British economists, whose demand for what Anton Menger has styled 'the whole product of labour' contained not a few happy anticipations of Marxist economics. I refer, of course, to the school of such men as Henry Hodgskin and the 'Mutualist' Thomas Bray. The influence of such men on the Chartist

So far, we have only seen the reformist elements of Chartism: its 'constitutional' centre and its social retrogressive right wing. But in addition to these frankly non-revolutionary elements, there was also a left wing which gives Chartism whatever claim it has to be regarded as a true social-revolutionary movement. For this section of the movement stood, unquestionably, for a genuine armed insurrection, for a true social overturn, for a new social order, that, if not definitely socialist — a creed on which even the Chartist left did not reach complete unanimity — was at least genuinely representative of the most advanced radical, republican and democratic forces of the era. It was this section of Chartism that came to stand for the entire Chartist movement in the eyes of the frightened property-owners and their political representatives.

Whilst even this revolutionary wing of the Chartist movement did not shed altogether the traces of its political immaturity and achieve complete clarity as to its ultimate social objectives, yet as a practical revolutionary movement it stood for aims that lend themselves to fairly precise definition. Despite some socialist infiltrations — represented particularly by the influence of Chartism's most intellectual leader, Brontere O'Brien — Chartism, or rather its revolutionary wing, can be styled with substantial accuracy as *a proletarian continuation of the French Revolution*. It represented a logical sequel to the movements previously associated with Thomas Paine and Arthur Thistlewood; but was more consistently proletarian, on account of the amalgamation of bourgeois radicalism — formerly revolutionary — with the ruling class after 1832. For revolutionary Chartism, Paine's *Age of Reason* and *Rights of Man* were still authentic gospel. Macerone's *Defensive Instructions* was its 'revolutionary handbook', the Paris of the Jacobins (1789–94) was its Mecca, and the great revolution, its Hegira, the starting point of its revolutionary tradition. Its two most able and influential leaders, the sailor Julian Harney and the Irish publicist Brontere O'Brien, were ardent disciples of the Jacobins. To be sure, Harney was styled the English 'Marat' after the great French Tribune of the Terror, and gloried in the appellation with its ultra-left associations. Whilst O'Brien, a profound, student of French revolutionary history — himself the biographer of Robespierre and the translator of that contemporary revolutionary classic, Buonarotti's *History of the Conspiracy of the Equals* (1796)[7] — knew how to link up this greatest of all the revolutions of the past with the proletarian revolution of the future in a manner, and with an insight, that at times anticipates the most brilliant pages of Marx and Engels themselves.

Such then was the Chartist movement — a kind of political trinity uneasily united around the unity of the *Charter*! From a revolutionary standpoint this was no doubt inevitable in view of the circumstances of the age. All the same, one could wish that O'Brien, Harney and the Chartist revolutionaries could have cut the umbilical cord that bound them throughout to their reformist colleagues, and had

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movement was considerable. We must also remember that Robert Owen, who survived until 1858, was active throughout all this period. In the Chartist right and centre he had many disciples. Though he never joined the movement himself, his influence must be reckoned with. It represented a socialist influence indeed, but one that was the precise reverse of revolutionary.

7 The Conspiracy of the Equals (1796) was led by 'Gracchus' Baboeuf, and represented, concurrently, both the last spasm of the Jacobin revolution and the first modern insurrection having the establishment of communism as its conscious aim. Baboeuf was executed by the Directory, but his co-conspirator, F Buonarotti — a descendant of the great Michelangelo — survived to write its history, a pioneer work in revolutionary socialist literature.

gone down fighting glorious if ultimately hopeless battle, rather than be suffocated, as they were, ignominiously, by their confused and ever-vacillating reformist allies.

IV: The Evolution of Chartism: The Chartist movement as a serious force lasted for eleven years (1837 to 1848). Its activities can be conveniently divided into three successive periods.

a: From the drawing-up of the *Charter* in 1837 to the 'Battle of Newport' — its one actual armed rising — on 4 November 1839.

b: After a period of decline, it flared up in 1842 in its second petition, followed by widespread strikes.

c: The year 1848, after another period of decline, saw (what proved to be) the Chartist swan-song; its monster demonstration on Kennington Common on 10 April 1848, which seemed to the terrified bourgeoisie of the day to be the immediate prelude to a British revolution on the Continental model in that 'year of revolutions' 1848, the year of the (bourgeois) 'world revolution'.

After the ignominious fiasco in which the 'revolution' fizzled out, thanks (mainly) to O'Connor's vacillation — to use a politer term, perhaps, than his actual conduct warranted — Chartism sank into hopeless decay, and, despite the gallant eleventh-hour efforts of Ernest Jones to revive it, may be said to have expired about 1854.

It now remains to glance at these succeeding phases of the Chartist movement.

First Phase — 1837–39: As we have already seen, the *Charter* was drafted as a single document by the 'London Workingmen's Association' on 8 February 1837, by William Lovett, with the assistance of the redoubtable Francis Place. On 8 May 1838 — when the Victorian age had already begun the previous year with the Queen's accession — the *Charter* was published. It was formally approved, and the movement may be said to have been officially launched, at a great meeting held on Newhall Hill (8 August), at which the *Charter* was received with acclamation, and at once became the centre and rallying point of the new mass agitation.

The times, objectively, seemed ripe for such a movement. 'The Hungry Forties', that terrible decade of almost universal want, were just about to dawn. And already the country was in a state of such profound agitation that when that very year (1838) the young Queen was crowned, the Russian Ambassador wrote to Tsar Nicholas the First, that arch-pillar of the European reaction and of 'The Holy Alliance', expressing the mournful opinion that the ill-fated young lady was destined to close forever England's long and glorious (sic) line of monarchs!

At first it looked as if the *People's Charter* would end that process of royal disintegration, which the *Great Charter* (*Magna Carta*) had traditionally begun. For the Chartist movement wasted no time, but got 'on the job' at once. The 'London Workingman's Association' stumped the country with the greatest energy. For this purpose, they employed the services of expert propagandists — 'missionaries' in the current Chartist phraseology — of whom the eloquent, though moderate, Henry Vincent, who 'evangelised' the West of England in a series of mass meetings, seems to have been the most successful, to judge from the tremendous enthusiasm that he excited.

Simultaneously with the Chartist 'Missionaries', the 'Tory Factory Reformers' Richard Oastler and Reverend JR Stephens conducted a violent campaign against the universally execrated 'Poor Law Amendment Act' of 1834, 'which aimed at making

poor relief more unpleasant than the most unpleasant means of earning a living outside'.[8]

Our authority goes on to tell us:

> Oastler and Stephens, whose campaign succeeded in postponing its [the Poor Laws' — FAR] application, threw their weight into the Chartist movement, and over the whole northern area torchlight meetings were held at night on the moors, in which armed insurrection was freely advocated.[9]

Formidable riots broke out in many big industrial cities, particularly in Birmingham, where monster meetings were held in the Bull Ring, and for several days armed bands of Chartists against whom the police could make no headway, paraded the streets, singing 'Fall, Tyrants, Fall!'. In the North, matters had reached such a pitch that Sir Charles Napier, the former military expert of the 1832 revolutionary plans, was sent with an army to restore 'law and order'.

In 1839, as a decade earlier, England seemed to be, and probably was, on the verge of civil war.

Napier's appointment may well have prevented the actual outbreak of civil war on account of the unexpected moderation displayed by him, for he was that rare bird, a genuinely radical general, a kind of Shavian 'General Burgoyne' in *Arms and the Man*: a typical 'Blimp' of the Wellington school would have provoked civil war quick enough.

In 1839, events moved fast and furiously. On the motion of Attwood — now MP for Birmingham — an 'anti-Parliament' was elected by the disenfranchised majority. This 'Parliament' was known as the 'Convention' — a name redolent of the Jacobin reign of terror and correspondingly terrible to the propertied classes — and presented to the House of Commons a petition signed by 1,280,000 people, demanding that the *Charter* should at once be passed into law. If the Commons refused, a general strike was to be proclaimed — or, as some classically trained Chartist styled it, 'The Sacred Month' — the name by which it was usually known.[10]

The Convention met on 4 February 1839. On 12 July, after a deliberate long postponement, the Commons rejected the petition, which had been duly presented by Attwood at the Bar of the House. Meanwhile, the public temper was rising. In this stormy atmosphere frequent fights took place between the Chartists and police, in which the former often won.[11]

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8 One must be acquainted with the literature of the period to realise the unspeakable degradation that this implied. See F Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes* in 1844, and — from a very different angle — the contemporary novels of Charles Dickens. Perhaps *Oliver Twist* is the best for this precise purpose.

9 See 'Chartism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition), Volume 5 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1929). These meetings were attended by men armed with pikes, guns and, it would seem, Macerone's famous 'foot-lances'.

10 The term is derived from an episode in the class struggle of ancient Rome between the Patricians and Plebeians when the Tribunes of the People, by officially declaring the month 'sacred', thereby interdicted any work from being , done therein — viz, the earliest form of the general strike!

11 We may note that one of the secondary results of the Chartist movement was the creation of a nationwide police force, founded by the Tory millionaire politician Sir Robert Peel — whence the nicknames attached to the force, 'Bobbies' and 'Peelers'.

To 'beat up' the police, however, is not the same thing by a long way as ousting the capitalist class from political power! Hitherto, the moderate Chartists — the 'moral force' men, that is, constitutionalists, as distinct from the 'physical force' men, who advocated armed insurrection — had managed to maintain a precarious control of the Convention. Now, however, in the general fury aroused by this abrupt rejection of the people's petition by 'their' (sic) representatives in Parliament, a wave of popular fury swept the left into control. Forthwith, the 'Sacred Month' was called. But the result was a complete fiasco. As usual with right-wing constitutionalists-at-all-costs, talk had substituted for action right up to the last minute. Nobody and nothing was ready. With no organisation or preparation, and with the full force of the state in front, nothing was left but a retreat, that, after the preceding high-sounding threats, was a veritable bathos.

Retreat, possible for a reformist, is death to a revolutionary movement. Something drastic had to be done. It was a clear case of 'get on or get out'. They now did what they should have done at the start, considering their position *vis-à-vis* the capitalist state: hastily, and with belated wisdom, they prepared for armed insurrection.

Already, whilst the Convention was still sitting, the Chartist left, with Julian Harney at its head, had formed a tentative military committee for the purpose of organising armed insurrection. Our authority describes the sequel as follows:

> During the Convention a secret military organisation had been formed, directed by a committee of five: its plans were completed at a private conference held in the autumn at Heckmondwike. The signal for the insurrection was to be given by the capture of Newport (Monmouth) and the release of Henry Vincent from Monmouth Castle. The other centres of revolt appear to have been in Lancashire and Yorkshire.[12]

The Chartists in fact demonstrated their revolutionary immaturity by adopting the amateurish strategy of piecemeal revolts. In fact, one is forced to the conclusion that their actual 'staff work' was throughout about as bad as it could conceivably have been. One can only regret that a real master of the strategy and tactics of civil war, like Colonel Macerone, was not at hand to advise them.[13]

The Welsh rising — the last actual armed rising up to date on British soil — was a picturesque but futile affair, and it was never followed up. As far as the military organisation of the Chartists was concerned, something was clearly 'rotten in the state of Denmark'. Several of the Chartists' leaders were able men; but, on the whole, they seem to have been stronger in talk than in action, and to have been surprisingly and lamentably ignorant of the available technique of civil war, as recorded in the rich arsenal of Continental experience in the generation of the French Revolution, which Colonel Macerone had summarised for the benefit of English revolutionaries. Anyway, it is a recurring political truth that a revolution yoked, as

12 'Chartism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition), Volume 5 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1929).

13 Macerone, then living in extreme poverty, published his autobiography in 1838 — in it, he tells us that he never received a penny for his great work on street-fighting. He died in 1846, and only a meagre footnote in Max Beer's well-documented *History of British Socialism* preserves the bare name of this remarkable man.

Chartism was, with reformists, usually represents a three-legged race, with both parties mutually tripping up each other, and quickly ending on the floor.

Major Beniowski, an experienced Polish revolutionary who had fought under Napoleon, was to have led the actual Newport rising, but seems to have arrived too late.

As to the 'Battle of Newport' itself, as we have no space for merely picturesque detail, we may content ourselves with quoting the bald summary given by Mr Postgate in his already quoted article:

> The attack on Newport was led by the ex-Mayor and JP, John Frost, on the morning of 4 November 1839. It was to have been in three columns, but owing to mismanagement the columns failed to unite at Risca and Frost attacked alone with about 3000 men armed with rifles and mandrils (colliers' picks). Warning had been given and the Chartists walked into a trap in the square outside the Westgate Hotel. [Troops from the regular army had been drafted into Newport — FAR.] They were defeated after a very brief struggle, leaving a considerable number (the figures are disputed) of killed and wounded. The leaders, Frost, Jones and Williams, were sentenced to death, afterwards mitigated to transportation. The police also rounded up nearly every other Chartist leader of importance, and secured sentences of one and two years' imprisonment.[14]

The Newport Rising was bungled from the start. It started too soon and was entirely unsupported; upon receipt of the news, the other plans for revolt simply fizzled out. This ignominious disaster coupled with the simultaneous arrest of all its most active and influential leaders — including the 'Directory of Five' — effectually checkmated the Chartist movement for a year or two. But when its leaders had served their time and came out, Chartism, now aided powerfully by 'the economic blizzard' of the 'Hungry Forties', once more made rapid headway. The most prominent internal events of this second phase were the by now unceasing quarrels between left and right wings — 'physical force' versus 'moral force' men — and the concurrent rise to a supremacy in the movement that bordered on personal dictatorship of Feargus O'Connor.

This verbose and vituperative Irishman combined a socially reactionary policy of 'back to the land' with an unceasing flow of revolutionary rhetoric inciting to armed violence. The acid tests of history, before which O'Connor failed so miserably, compel us to pronounce his leadership of the Chartist movement to have been an unmitigated misfortune. For he was proved by the arrival of crisis to be fundamentally a 'windbag', a virtuoso in hot air. Nonetheless, O'Connor had many of the qualities of a great demagogue, and, in particular, his mastery of blistering invective fell little, if at all, short of that of his former leader, 'the Liberator', Daniel O'Connell himself, the merciless lash of whose torrential vituperation penetrated even the obtuse Tory hide and made even an early Victorian assembly of English 'gentlemen' realise that there was such a place as Ireland! In a very similar manner, as an acknowledged czar of the soapbox, the great Chartist orator came to dwarf all his colleagues in public estimation, though several of them, O'Brien, certainly, and

14 'Chartism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Fourteenth Edition), Volume 5 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, London, 1929).

probably Harney, were far abler men than he was, when one got beyond sound to substance.

Nonetheless, despite — or rather, because of — his theatrical qualities and fundamental defects, O'Connor entirely dominated the second phase of the Chartist movement; and his paper, *The Northern Star*, acquired an enormous circulation. Between 1842 and 1848, the Irish tribune with the lungs of a giant and — as events were to prove decisively — the heart of a chicken, stood in the eyes of bourgeois and Chartist alike for the movement, and for the revolution, itself.

At first, O'Connor's leadership promised to infuse fresh vigour into Chartism. By 1842 a new organisation was in existence, the 'National Charter Association', which, though technically illegal, acted as a rallying point for the revived movement. In the same year, a second monster petition in favour of the *Charter* was presented. This was backed by the phenomenal figure of 3,315,752 signatures (out of a total population of about 15 millions, a high proportion of whom were illiterate). Its rejection (2 May) was immediately followed by a wave of strikes, beginning with a local strike at Ashton, and subsequently the Chartist executive turned it into a general strike, the chief centres of which were Lancashire, Cheshire and the Potteries. The name 'Plug Riots' has been attached to this wave of strikes, on account of the strikers' practice of knocking the plugs out of the boilers where resistance was offered. This practice is also recorded of the Luddites previously; no doubt many veteran Luddites marched in the ranks of these Chartist 'machine-wreckers'. This epidemic of strikes extended as far north as Aberdeen.

At this decisive moment when the strike-wave had reached the verge of civil war, O'Connor, faced like every other revolutionary leader who provokes capital to the point where it invokes the armed intervention of the state — that 'particular power of [class] suppression' (Engels) — with the decisive alternative of armed revolution or a precipitate retreat, chose the latter, like the poltroon that, at bottom, he fundamentally was. He declared the strike to be a plot got up to discredit Chartism by its bitterest rival for the support of the working class, the 'Anti-Corn Law League', the Free Trade propaganda organisation of Richard Cobden and the (bourgeois) Radicals.

This *volte-face* finished the strikes, which promptly petered out. It also virtually finished Chartism for several years. But, a much greater misfortune than either, it failed to finish O'Connor! By the sheer force of words, by his thunderous floods of oratory, this verbal hypnotist, though proven poltroon and incompetent, yet remained the outstanding leader of the movement.

There followed a phase of decline, in which the movement, baffled as a revolutionary movement, but still dominated by O'Connor, frittered away its energies on 'land colonies' and similar Utopian schemes in the style of Robert Owen. A 'National Land Company' was founded by O'Connor for the purpose of settling Chartists as freeholders on the land. One such 'colony' only was founded: 'O'Connorville' (1847) at Herringsgate, Bucks. But this typically Utopian attempt 'to save society behind its back', and to recreate a landed peasantry apart either from a revolution or from normal economic development turned out, as usual, a complete fiasco. It went bankrupt in 1848 (6 June) under circumstances that suggested certainly gross incompetence and at least a suspicion of fraud, though this latter was probably unfounded.

Meanwhile, Richard Cobden and his 'Anti-Corn Law League' were making hay whilst the sun of Chartism was obscured. Cobden himself, in a public debate' at

Nottingham, 'wiped the floor' with the mighty O'Connor himself, the strong point of whose eloquence was invective and not statistical inquiry! In 1846, aided by the bad harvests and Irish Famine, the unflagging propaganda of the league, brilliantly led by Cobden and the great Radical orator John Bright, roused public opinion to the point where even the Tory Ministry of Sir Robert Peel was forced, at long last, to repeal the Corn Laws. It was the second great victory of the Liberal Party, the economic sequel to its first (political) victory in 1832. Thereafter the Tory Party was deprived of its traditional economic basis. It remained in this position, like the traditional 'Mohammed's coffin' swinging unwanted between Heaven and Earth, until a generation later, when it found its man of genius, Benjamin Disraeli, who gave Toryism, and along with it the renovated British oligarchy, a new lease of life, which has lasted down to and including our own day, by allying Toryism, the party, *par excellence*, of the oligarchy, with the rising forces of imperialism and finance-capital, in place of its former agrarian interests, long rendered archaic by the industrial revolution.

All this, however, still lay in the future in 1846, when the repeal, a social revolution almost in itself, gave capital its definitive victory over land. For the next generation, the Liberal Party was supreme. Henceforth, and for the next generation — the golden age of her supremacy in the world market — Britain, in astrological language, dwelt in the 'House' of Free Trade!

That is, England, on account of her overwhelming naval supremacy and economic superiority, enjoyed the right to force the colonial world to buy her goods, unhindered by effective competition. For the instructed historical materialist cannot remind himself too often, that in actual history, in the actual world of fact and not of economic theory, the essence of free trade was simply this, and never anything else but this: *the world monopoly of Britain under an illusory guise of freedom. The belief in unrestrained competition, because in fact no one was in a position to compete successfully with Britain.*[15]

The 'repeal', viewed in ultimate perspective, spelt the approaching end of the 'Hungry Forties' and heralded the sharp economic turn of the tide which followed. It therefore heralded the end of Chartism, since men in the mass are influenced by concrete facts, not by abstract theory; and why revolt against a regime marked so conspicuously by all the signs of progress? It is almost an historic 'law' that, where an economic system can be mended by reform, it will never be ended by revolution. Chartism and for once O'Connor himself were absolutely correct in regarding middle-class Radicalism as the most dangerous enemy of the revolutionary movement.[16]

However, just as the swan sings loudest before it dies, so Chartism on the eve of its final exit from history, flared up in a last combustion that flamed across the English sky in lurid letters of fire. The red light spelt revolution. For 1848 is upon us: 'the year of revolutions', the year, *par excellence*, of the 'world revolution' of the nineteenth century.

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15 When, later on, the industrial revolution spread to the Continent, and there *was* serious competition, then free trade lost its magic, and *pari passu* the demand for protection grew with giant strides. After all, even in economic theory, 'the proof of the pudding lies in the eating'.

16 O'Connor, to do him justice, fiercely opposed all attempts made by a section of the middle-class radicals to form what would now be styled a 'popular front', usually on the basis of universal suffrage. Even O'Brien was taken in by arguments which our own day has seen reproduced substantially unaltered.

Upon the Continent, the Paris workers rose in February and chased Louis Philippe across the Channel to England, then in its Liberal hey-day as the impartial refuge of out-of-work kings and exiled revolutionaries.[17]

From Paris the fiery breath of the revolution swept over Europe, embracing Italy, Germany and Hungary, and hurling kings from their thrones and priests from their altars. It reached England also; for, here as well as elsewhere, we are still in the epoch dominated by the French Revolution. Indeed, 1848 marked the final term of the two generations during which British revolutionary movements walked faithfully in the footsteps of the successive avatars of the French Revolution, from 1789 to 1848.

Here also, in 1848 as in 1832, we are faced with a might-have-been. Had it not been for the precedent Reform Bill and 'Repeal of the Corn Laws', who can say what would have happened? As it was, the force of the cross-Channel revolutionary tempest was considerably modified by these bourgeois buffers against insurrection. Even as it was, had a stronger man than O'Connor been at the helm of the Chartist movement, 1848 would certainly have seen civil war on both sides of the Channel; though, even so, the hour had probably passed for a decisive Chartist victory.

The year 1848 will be held noteworthy by the scientific historians of a socialist future — when, we may hope, British history will no longer be written scientifically only by foreigners! — on account of two major events that occurred on British soil: the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* in London by Marx and Engels early in the year, and the last, and in the eyes of the ruling class, the most dangerous, mass demonstration in favour of the *Charter* on Kennington Common on 10 April.

The first of these events was, in the last analysis, by far the more important in ultimate perspective. To be sure, the publication of the *Manifesto* was probably the most important event to happen, not only in England, but also anywhere even in that *annus mirabilis* of social revolution, 1848. One does not require to be a 'Marxolator' nor even to accept every word of the *Manifesto* as entirely applicable to the events of today, to pronounce that superb 'unity of theory and practice', of resounding declamation and of the first really scientific précis of world history; to be the 'New Testament' alike of revolutionary socialism and of true social science. We must add, however, that when viewed from our limited perspective of English revolutionary history, the famous *Manifesto* fell flat and its influence on our subject in its own time was nil.

In this respect indeed, our analogy of the *Manifesto* with the New Testament can be accurately extended. Neither of these epoch-making books has exerted any appreciable influence on its place of origin. In this respect, Marx, like Christ before him, had occasion to recognise that 'a prophet is not without honour save in his own house'. For modern England, like ancient Palestine, has walked in the steps of other cults. Its 'ascendant' star, to be sure, is that of a Jewish master, but not of Marx, the Master of World Revolution, but of his Satanic counterpart, Benjamin Disraeli, the pre-eminent master of the British Counter-Revolution.

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17 'The Bourgeois King' departed in a bourgeois manner: we recall the pleasant story of his departure. When Louis the Sixteenth had stepped on to the scaffold in 1793, the priest in attendance exclaimed: 'Fils de St Louis montez au ciel' — 'Son of St Louis, depart to Heaven' — before the blade fell. His cousin, 'the Bourgeois King' unheroically took a cab to the station in 1848. Whereupon a local wag shouted out: 'Fils de St Louis, montez au fiacre' — 'Son of St Louis, depart in the cab!' The age of romance had vanished, that of life insurance had arrived!

Before, however, this counter-revolution could come to a head, Chartism had to flare up in one last terrific explosion before finally departing to join 'the snows of yesteryear' and to make its final exit from British history. In 1847–48, the impetus of Continental events gave the *Charter* what proved to be its 'Indian Summer'. In 1847, O'Connor was elected MP for Nottingham. Under the impetus of the (third) French Revolution, Chartism flared up in a last agitation. On 10 April of that year, the Chartist leader announced that he would himself present the petition to the assembled Commons. For this purpose, a monster meeting was called on Kennington Common on the above date in support of the *Charter*.

If Chartism was now on its death-bed, its last convulsions, seen against the stormy skies of Europe of 1848, struck the liveliest terror into the ruling class and its political leaders. For weeks before the given date the excitement was tremendous; O'Connor and his associates openly boasted of their intention to dominate Westminster with their armed bands in a manner reminiscent of the followers of Wat Tyler and 'Jack Cade'[18] The government evidently had the liveliest fears that this would be so and that their fate would be that of their mediæval predecessors.[19]

To prevent an English repetition of the 'February Days', the government took the most extraordinary precautions. The bulk of the diminutive regular army of the period were concentrated in London, with the aged Duke of Wellington in command — to crown a lifetime of sanguinary service in the cause of the European reaction by the bloody suppression of the last English revolution. A huge force of special constables was levied from the 'middle classes' — amongst them, appropriately patrolling the Park Lane beat — was the exiled Louis Buonaparte, soon to be 'Emperor of the French', and as the 'Man of December' to be the Continental grave-digger of the European revolution of 1848–49. The Queen and her young family were packed off to the Isle of Wight to be immune from the fate of Marie Antoinette. Thus, armed to the teeth, the government and all England with it, waited in breathless expectation for 10 April — for '*Der Tag*' — for 'The Day'.

The tenth of April duly arrived and an enormous crowd assembled on Kennington Common, both to hear O'Connor speak and to escort the charter to Westminster. 'The Day', however, instead of being the '14 July'[20] of the English revolution, can be more accurately compared to that earlier date in French history known as the 'Day of Dupes'.[21]

For 10 April 1848 proved to be about the biggest fiasco in all English revolutionary history. If the 'Battle' of Newport was a tragedy as well as a farce, its expected successor on Kennington Common was farce pure and simple. Indeed, the sorry sequence could have suggested to Karl Marx himself that happy *bon mot* in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Buonoparte* a few years later (1852). When the great exile wrote (in London) that 'History repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce', he might have had the tragedy of 1839 and the pure farce of 1848 in mind.

For, when all was set for the revolution, its leader turned tail and ran. Confronted by the whole power of the state, and intimidated by the Commissioner of Police in person with threats of the direst legal penalties, O'Connor almost

18 See Part I of this book.

19 As we do not credit Wellington, Peel & Co either with much imagination or knowledge of history, it seems probable that a livelier fear was excited by the recent events in Paris, on which the exiled Louis Phillipe was at hand to advise them.

20 That is, the date of the fall of the Bastille.

21 That is, in 1631, when Cardinal Richelieu quashed the palace conspiracy to supplant him.

literally 'called the revolution off', the roaring lion became a sucking dove. In an incoherent speech he bade the expectant crowd go home. Sullen and bewildered, they obeyed him — for the last time! Later in the day, a modest hansom cab escorted the *People's Charter* to its last resting place in the House of Commons, where the now fallen idol presented it to a sniggering, but inwardly much relieved House of Commons.

Worse was to come! Nothing was spared the dying movement and the exploded windbag who had led it, not only to defeat — that was probably inevitable — but, far worse, to universal ridicule. For the votes for the *Charter* petition turned out to be, not 5,706,000 signatures, as O'Connor himself asserted, but only 1,975,496. Worse still, many of the signatures were fictitious, some even grotesquely so!

The bourgeoisie gasped with relief; but had it been any other than O'Connor — say Thistlewood or Macerone…? They were supremely fortunate in their man, otherwise they would not have escaped so easily. The stars in their courses fought consistently for English capitalism throughout the nineteenth century.

This time, O'Connor was finished; but so also was Chartism itself. As his official biographer admits with considerable, though incomplete truth: 'The absolute failure of Chartism may indeed be traced very largely to his position in the movement.'[22]

Feargus O'Connor and Chartism gave up the ghost at almost identical times. O'Connor was declared bankrupt immediately after the April fiasco. In 1852, he was declared insane, and in 1855 he died. An enormous crowd — estimated at 50,000 — attended the funeral at Kensal Green Cemetery of the evil genius of Chartism. But the former popular idol had now become a nine days' wonder only: a funeral subscription only raised a few pounds.

Chartism itself finally perished about the same time. A final feeble attempt at armed revolt by the 'physical force' men in the summer of 1848 had to be first postponed and then abandoned, thanks to the efficiency of the police and their spies. We do not forget that the modern nationwide police force was first evolved by the bourgeoisie in answer to Chartism. In vain a new talented and idealistic leader arose in the person of Ernest Jones, who led what was left of Chartism for the few years that remained to it. Jones vainly strove to revive the legal movement in a series of 'Missionary' speaking tours, which, however, were productive of little except remarkable oratorical talent on the part of the ill-starred last Chartist leader. Concurrently, Julian Harney translated the *Manifesto* into English: to be sure, Engels, if not Marx, was known personally to many of the Chartist leaders, and had himself contributed articles to its press during his residence in Manchester.

These last-minute efforts to pump life into the dying movement's veins were doomed to failure. After 1854, Chartism may be considered as dead, smothered by the growing profits that accrued from British capital's fast-expanding hegemony over the world market, crumbs from which 'rich man's table' began to fall among the workers, as the absolutely 'Hungry Forties' began to be transformed into the (relatively) prosperous 1850s.

Soon, the smug and increasingly 'respectable' — key-word of the high Victorian era! — workers enrolled in their reformist trade unions, benefit societies and slate clubs, began to stare with blank uncomprehending gaze at 'the spectre of revolution' as represented by the late Chartist movement and at the incredible

22 See Feargus O'Connor, entry in *Dictionary of National Biography*.

apparition of their bygone selves parading with pike and gun on the northern moors, or scattering the police like chaff before them with 'foot-lances' and hand-grenades. Quickly the vision faded as the stormy battle-cries of the last era of British revolution sank ever deeper into the forever vanished past, and as the thrill of revolution was effectually smothered beneath the ever-augmenting mountain of reform. 'From Chartism to Labourism' is indeed a distinct period in English history, brief in time, but vastly influential; the supersession of an epoch of revolution by its dialectical opposite, one entirely and supremely reformist in its social character. Then, and then only, when the workers enrolled by this time either in the Liberal Party or in 'Tory democracy' could be trusted to make a 'safe' use of their political 'rights', could five out of the six points of the *Charter* be conceded without any fundamental danger to the capitalist social order. But this is not the explanation given by the bourgeois historians![23]

With the passing of the Chartist movement there ends, speaking in strict accuracy, the 'English revolutionary tradition' up to the present time. Since 1848, modern British history has indeed known ripples and eddies of a socially revolutionary character; but, since the fall of Chartism, no mass movement of revolt has arisen to ruffle the bottomless complacency, and to disturb the limitless respectability of modern British society — 'the most conservative in the world', as Trotsky has aptly styled it with reference to the post-Chartist era. Who so indeed fails to apprehend that the history of Victorian and post-Victorian England from the end of Chartism to the time at which these lines are written, is essentially a record not of revolution, but of counter-revolution, is precluded absolutely from any realistic approach to the revolutionary problems with which we are faced today.

For this reason, instead of concluding in 1848, our account of the 'revolutionary tradition in England', as in strictness we should conclude it, we propose now to deal with the Victorian counter-revolution that must be considered as pre-eminently the work of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, the (Jewish) genius of the modern British counter-revolution. It is indeed doubly necessary to do this, both because its

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23 In this so utterly remote an era, the surviving leaders of Chartism ended their days for the most part in misery, as relics of a vanished age. Ernest Jones indeed went back to the Bar, and our age has witnessed the bizarre spectacle of the son of a Chartist leader as a judge of the Central Criminal Court, the main function of which, as of the bourgeois 'criminal code' in general, is to defend successful thieves against unsuccessful ones! O'Brien died in extreme misery in 1864. Julian Harney lived to the end of the century, and I know a man who has spoken in the flesh to this last of the Chartists. Despite their faults, and political immaturity, such men towered over the reformist and petty-bourgeois 'labour leaders' of the succeeding generations. 'Sunt lacrimae rerum' — 'Such are the tears that life sheds.' Such is the traditional penalty which those must pay who are wiser than their generation.

There is, unfortunately, no classic history of Chartism. There is an excellent factual history by a Tory historian, Mark Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1925), but his perspectives are — well, what one would expect from a Tory historian! The book *The Age of the Chartists* by JL and B Hammond (Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1934) gives a more sympathetic and admirably documented background. A masterly account of the transition from Chartism to labourism is given by the (Russian) Bolshevik author Theodore Rothstein in his remarkable book of that title (*From Chartism to Labourism*, Martin Lawrence, London, 1929): one of the few genuinely scientific books dealing with English social history. In this connection we may relevantly add that, so *potent* is the ruling-class mythology which currently passes muster for English 'history' that very few English 'historians' seem able to free themselves from its spell. This no doubt accounts for the at-first-sight curiously high proportion of scientific works on English history that have been written by foreigners!

real character and the real genius of its political master, have been misunderstood with touching unanimity by all the modern historians — both 'socialist' (Fabian) and bourgeois alike.

And even more so, because we are today (1947), once again in sight of a new revolutionary era, and the real tasks of this era cannot even be visualised, let alone approached, unless we first understand, as a result of a brief examination of its genesis and rise, what was the real nature of that counter-revolution which followed the Chartist movement, and what is the nature — a very peculiar, indeed, unique, nature! — of our contemporary British society which has emerged from this counter-revolution.

Thus only, by grasping how that society is *really* constituted, can we grasp what must be done to end it forever in the coming era of the world revolution: which era, impelled by irresistible social forces, I hold to be hard upon us and destined to be realised within the lifetime of the present generation.

Chapter VI: Disraeli and the Victorian (Imperialist) Counter-Revolution

Chartism, as we have seen, was dead soon after 1850. Round about the same year Karl Marx, then (since 1849) living in the direst poverty as an exile in London, wrote to an associate making the prediction that the Tory Party was now doomed to extinction as a result of the Reform Bill and the repeal of the Corn Laws (1832–46). The great sociologist added that the social battles of the future were destined to be fought out between the Liberal Party — henceforth, the sole surviving party of capitalism and the bourgeoisie — and the rising claims of socialism embodied in the renovated forces of labour.

For once, the great philosopher was wrong in his forecast: even the wisest of men are liable to err! We today in 1947, and looking back on the history of the last 90 years, can see that, as regards this prophecy at least, the keenest political intellect of his century went wrong in his forecast. It is not the Liberal, but the Tory Party that has in fact acted as the pacemaker of British capitalism in its evolution into the imperialist age; and it is the Liberal Party that has failed to stay the historic course and that is, today, an outmoded and crumbling political relic in the age of imperialism with which capitalism culminates.

Even more germane to our purpose is it to note that it is in the Tory and not in the Liberal Party that there has evolved that unique and phenomenally successful counter-revolution which has made British capitalist society by far the strongest in the world: 'the most conservative country in the world', to repeat the entirely correct dictum of Leon Trotsky. The only capitalist country, I repeat, where the left is even more imperialistic than the right, where the ruling class is strong enough to tolerate opposition even in wartime when it is fighting for its life, where in the midst of technical evolution and a multiplicity of reforms, there still exists a caste system of more than Hindu rigidity, where, in the native land of the industrial revolution, and after two centuries of its course, the British oligarchical society is still of such cast-iron strength and rigidity, that, as an eminent American novelist (Louis Bromfield) has recently accurately and usefully reminded us: 'From the second kitchen-maid to the steps of the throne the social hierarchy remains unbroken.'

Yet in the middle of the last century, when Marx made the above-quoted prophecy, there was no evidence extant that such would be the state of British society from the next generation onwards. Far from this being so, everything combined to confirm the prediction of that profound student of the British industrial revolution and of its political aftermath and to make it altogether probable that the Tory Party, like Chartism itself, was about to be left high-and-dry as an outmoded survival by the rapid advance of Liberalism and free trade, and by the colossal and ever-augmenting ascendancy of the Liberal manufacturers — the mainstay of political radicalism — both at home in Britain and in the world market generally, during this golden age of British industrial monopoly — circa 1846–80.

Indeed, if we would view his contemporary society through the historic spectacles of Marx himself, it is evidence that, round about 1850, the social scene in his contemporary Britain would have presented some such spectacle as this.

The Reform Bill of 1832 had clipped the claws of the old Tory–Whig oligarchy on the political plane. Far more effectually, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had

cut the economic basis of its power from under the feet of the oligarchy. It had cut it effectually by breaking the agrarian stranglehold on industry that was represented by the artificially inflated prices of cereals which the Corn Laws had fixed in perpetuity for the benefit of the Tory monopolists of the land. Obviously, therefore, assuming the truth of his cardinal tenet that 'the economic is primary', it was natural for Marx to expect that the Tory Party would soon follow its economic basis into oblivion. Had that occurred — as by all the laws of contemporary probability it ought to have occurred — then the latter part of Marx's prediction would also have run true: the Liberal Party — the party of industrial capital — would have ruled upon the ruins of both Chartism and Toryism. It would have ruled by a reformist policy of concessions to the workers *on the basis of its industrial ascendancy in the world market*. When this came to an end — and no one knew better than the brilliant author of *Capital* did, how and why it must come to an end — *there would then necessarily be an end to reformism, followed by a new socialist and revolutionary movement directed against the rule of capital exercised by the Liberal Party.*

By all laws of contemporary probability, we repeat, this is what should have happened. The founder of scientific socialism was not given to facile generalisations. Nevertheless, Marx was evidently wrong. He forgot, or rather failed to anticipate — Disraeli. Or, to speak more precisely, he did not anticipate that the rise of imperialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century — which in itself he probably foresaw — would reveal to a political master of counter-revolution a triumphant exit for both British Toryism and capitalism from an otherwise impassable dilemma.

For from about the middle of the nineteenth century on, the Tory Party, now deprived for ever of its traditional basis in land monopoly in a society still predominantly agrarian, accepted as the only alternative to an otherwise inevitable destruction, the political leadership of that most un-English of men, the Jewish novelist Benjamin Disraeli. From about 1850 right up to his death in 1881, the universe beheld with a misunderstanding amazement this incredible caricature of 'the identity of opposites' which was represented by the traditionally 'stupid party' of landed squires led by the most intelligent counter-revolutionary politician of the century: the most conventional of parties led by the most bizarre of personalities.

Gallons of ink have been squandered by historians of the Victorian era and by the numerous biographers of the great Jew in offering explanations as to how it was that so incongruous and imaginative a figure as the green-coated author of *Lothair* and *Vivian Grey* yet managed to force his way to the head of a party of English 'gentlemen' noted chiefly for their proficiency in foxhunting — and, apart from that, mainly for sheer stupidity. Many of these 'explanations' reflect great credit on the ingenuity of their authors, but the real explanation seems to have entirely eluded them without exception. Yet it is so obvious that upon reading the transparently bewildered panegyrics of Disraeli's biographers — Monypenny, Fronde, Brandes, Maurois, etc — I have often been reminded of that trenchant observation of Schopenhauer, one so entirely applicable to the case under discussion: 'We do not understand the ways of nature because they are too simple for us.' The same axiom surely applies to history as well!

For Benjamin Disraeli, later (1876) created Earl of Beaconsfield, became the leader of the Tory Party and the master *par excellence* of the British counter-revolution, neither because of his bizarre clothes, nor because of his unique capacity for writing symbolical novels — which in any case, his fellow Tories were far too stupid to understand — nor even because he was the best debater in the House of

Commons of his day. He became Prime Minister of Great Britain and the outstanding statesman of his century because he alone had the wit to apprehend the drifts of the coming age and to show his adopted class the way out, the way both to prevent the recurrence of another British revolution, and, concurrently, how in his own words — 'to dish the Whigs' (viz, Liberals) — by enabling decrepit Toryism to jump over the head of its Liberal rival and to regain the leadership of the capitalist class and of the British state.

It was because Disraeli was the only man who was able to do this, that a Toryism which obviously never understood him was obliged to accept his leadership and policy as the only alternative to a sure and otherwise inevitable destruction.

Disraeli, as we know, was the most eloquent and scathing opponent of Darwinism. When the scientific hypothesis of evolution was first promulgated in *The Origin of Species* (1850), no one found more biting gibes to hurl at 'the survival of the fittest' than did the author of *Ixion in Heaven*. When on the occasion of his famous answer to his own query: 'Is man an ape or an angel?', he added his scathing rejoinder — 'My Lord, I am on the side of the angels!' Nonetheless, rhetoric does not dispose of facts: the 'law' of survival still survives! We may add that no one's career, according to our interpretation, proves more adequately the famous 'law' of the 'survival of the fittest' in its given milieu, than does the rise of Disraeli himself to the leadership of the Tory Party against all the superficial probabilities just at that precise historic moment. Reactionaries will never recognise it, but the 'laws' of science, and equally of historical dialectics, still apply even to those who reject them!

For what was it essentially that Disraeli did during his generation of political leadership? Viewing the question, not from the standpoint of petty biographical detail, but from the very widest historical perspectives, we may construe Disraeli's epoch-making lifework in the following terms.

The Tory Party by 1850 was, we have not forgotten, bankrupt. Its political monopoly had been destroyed in 1832, and its (agrarian) economic monopoly in 1846. Because of the loss of the latter, it could not hope to recover the former. Disraeli gave to Toryism *an entirely new economic basis*. In place of its vanished agrarian basis, now gone beyond recall, Disraeli perceived the drifts of the coming age, and allied Toryism with the by now dawning age of imperialism and finance capital, which, from about the middle of the century on, began to gain ground at the expense of industrial capital.

In other words, just as Liberalism, the party of industrial capital, had jumped over the head of Tory-Whiggism, the party of merchant capital, thus gaining for Liberalism its historic lead, so henceforth Toryism, as the party — despite its archaic name — of the most modern forms of capitalism, imperialism and finance capital, now in its turn jumped over the head of its Liberal rival, and became the 'Old Guard' of British capital, destined to accompany it to the end of the capitalist regime in Britain.

Such, in essential summary, was the first part of the British counter-revolution inaugurated by Disraeli. Whereas from 1832 to 1868 — the date of Disraeli's Second Reform Bill which 'dished the Whigs' and inaugurated 'Tory democracy' — the Liberal Party set the pace and Toryism faithfully walked in its wake, living, so to speak, on its cast-off clothing, now, henceforth, as we shall soon see, the exact opposite was to be the case. It was Tory imperialism that led the way: whilst the opposition parties — first Liberals, then later, Labour — successively borrowed its ideology and, in their turn, obediently walked in its wake.

To be sure, from the moment when the former 'Little Englander', WE Gladstone, conquered Egypt against his own will (1882), thus carrying out an imperialist policy originally conceived by Disraeli, to 1947, which finds the Labour Party, Liberalism's successor, faithfully underwriting an imperialist war under an arch-imperialist Tory chief, and in defence of a Tory-controlled Empire, it is the Tory Party that has been the pacemaker of British imperialism and of the British state. Marx has, in this instance, been proven wrong by the actual course of events. It was under the auspices of Toryism that the British counter-revolution went through.

I have elsewhere summarised the counter-revolution, begun by Disraeli's marriage of Toryism and imperialism, with particular relation to the character of the new social basis thereby created for the continued rule of the British oligarchy, the history and social development of which I had previously outlined from its origin in the Reformation to the Reform Bill of 1832:

> Disraeli was the leader, or virtual leader, of British Conservatism from about the middle of the century until his death in 1881. During this period he was the Prime Minister twice (1868, 1874–80) but the real significance of this great master of counter-revolution — the greatest genius of counter-revolution perhaps of the nineteenth century — lay not primarily as a statesman of positive achievement, but rather in the silent transformation effected by British Toryism and the British oligarchy under his guidance. This silent revolution in its character and its social basis effected under Lord Beaconsfield's inspiration preserved the British oligarchy from certain extinction and prolonged its life and power for another century, after Marx had predicted its speedy extinction.
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> On account of considerations of space I must content myself with the most general summary of the transformation effected by Beaconsfield (Disraeli) in the social basis of the British ruling class and in the character of its rule. The great reactionary statesman has aptly summarised it in 'the short programme' in which he announced the political aims of the new Toryism as a result of the 'sea change' which that party had undergone under his transforming guidance. Its new and henceforth fundamental aims were announced by Disraeli himself in these terms:
>
> a: Retention of our old institutions, including the Crown.
>
> b: The preservation and extension of the British Empire.
>
> c: The continuous improvement in the living conditions of the British people.
>
> If, in accordance with the methodology of historical materialism, we translate these words into the underlying realities which conditioned them, this programme must be construed in the following terms.
>
> By 'continuity' with 'our old institutions', Disraeli inferred that, despite superficial changes, the oligarchy would continue substantially unaltered, with the Crown, the symbol of social continuity, preserved as its apex.
>
> By the greatness of the British Empire, Disraeli, the ex-'Little Englander' — who, as late as 1852, had denounced the retention of the British colonies on the ground that they were (in his own words) 'millstones hanging around England's neck' — now declared that the leopard had changed its spots, and that the Tory Party had jumped over

the head of its Liberal rival, which in 1832 had transformed itself from the Whig Party — the party of merchant capital — into Liberalism — the party of industrial capital. From a predominantly agrarian party — the former party of first 'Church and King', then later, after Bolingbroke, of the landed monopoly artificially preserved by the 'Corn Laws' — Toryism, under the leadership of its strategist of political genius, transformed itself into the party of imperialism, into the party of finance capital — as Lenin in his classical study, *Imperialism: The Last Phase of Capitalism*, was later to define imperialism. *Henceforth, the social and economic basis of the British oligarchy lay outside England in the British Empire.*

The third point in Disraeli's programme arose necessarily from the preceding two: to keep the essential power in the hands of the oligarchy, for the masses, aroused by newly-established popular education — a concession forced on capitalism by the very nature of the machine age itself — and Gladstonian demagogy, demanded concessions which menaced the power and ultimately the very existence of the oligarchy. Henceforth, the danger was to be averted by the loot augmented by scientific exploitation of the fast-expanding British Empire. *In future, the colonial Empire — or, more accurately, the world power and exploitation of British capital — would provide the British workers with the necessary 'bread and circuses' to keep them quiet.*

The essential character of the new (post-Beaconsfield) British oligarchy can in fact be adequately summarised by saying that, *in relation to the Empire — that is, to the world power of British capital — the British workers were themselves, in relation to the colonies, admitted as junior partners of the oligarchy. Such in fact was the real significance of Disraeli's famous discovery of 'Tory democracy'. Thereafter the Empire became the lifeline of the British oligarchy which effectually laid the spectre of revolution at home by ruthless world exploitation abroad.* Henceforth it was the Empire which paid for the inevitable reforms that had to be passed in the next generation to satisfy the growing demands of the masses, whilst still leaving the British oligarchy, as formerly, in a position of virtual dictatorship over the state. Cecil Rhodes, the supreme populariser, along with Kipling, of the new imperialism in the generation after its founder's death, expressed its essential character in a sentence — 'The Empire is a question of bread.'[1]

Such then, in briefest outline, was the silent but incredibly effective counter-revolution which disproved Marx with regard to the future of British Toryism, which prevented the revival of a revolutionary successor to Chartism when Britain lost her world industrial monopoly towards the 1880s; which has incorporated the British workers in the British state and in support of British imperialism by a policy of 'colonial fascism' in a manner far more effective than any other ruling class in the world has been able to do: fascist or non-fascist alike. So much so in fact that it is today absolutely correct to affirm of the whole British people, including the workers, that — to paraphrase the old Russian proverb — 'If you scratch an Englishman, you find an imperialist!'

1 FA Ridley, 'The Evolution of the British Oligarchy', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1939, original emphasis. I have slightly altered and extended the last paragraph — FAR.

From the 1870s to the present day, the character, or what Aristotle would have styled as the 'substance' (essence), of the British society that has emerged from the silent Victorian counter-revolution — one indeed that we have come to take for granted like the air that we breathe — can be construed in these terms.

The dictatorial rule of a financial oligarchy in the metropolis (Britain herself) which governs the colonies with the iron hand of a naked military and police dictatorship, but which governs the metropolis itself under a veil of democratic illusions based on a sequence of reforms ultimately paid for out of the surplus value ruthlessly extracted from the dumb and helpless masses of Britain's 500 million colonial slaves — plus her numerous 'semi-colonies' and 'spheres of influence'.[2] By means of this 'technique' the whole British nation — 'from the second kitchen maid to the steps of the Throne' — is constituted as a gigantic exploiting caste that lives off its colonial periphery in a manner unequalled in history, and unapproached even by its nearest historical exemplars, the slave-holders of the ancient Roman and the modern Spanish Empires. Such, since Beaconsfield, has been the *real* as distinct from the professed nature of British society: the 'substance' behind its vaunted 'democracy', the hitherto impregnable rock upon which the waves of revolution have dashed in vain: 'the most conservative country in the world', in the entirely accurate statement of Trotsky.

Dictatorship on the circumference, and democracy in the metropolis! Such is post-Beaconsfield British society. It is the strongest conservative society in the world: in fact, the only country in the world where revolution is a myth to the masses and a joke to the ruling classes. But, like everything else in life, it has its 'Achilles' heel'. *British class society could not now possibly survive the destruction of the British Empire.* Then, its own technique would be a murderous boomerang recoiling upon its own head with truly devastating force. When the British Empire will fall, we do not know; though it would be distinctly rash to gamble on its eternity. But there is no safer prophecy than that within a decade of its fall, the British Isles will face a revolutionary situation as fierce as any in all history. The British workers today walk in their sleep, drugged by the heavy fumes of imperialism. We have the best medical

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2 Details of the incredible colonial exploitation that alone still enables oligarchy — and even a still semi-feudal aristocracy — and democracy to run in double harness in the metropolis can be found in such recent books as Reginald Reynolds, *The White Sahibs of India* (Socialist Book Centre, London, 1946), and the Negro author, George Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* (Wishart, London, 1936). To avoid being accused of socialist prejudice I merely cite a single reference — the non-socialist eminent statesman William Jennings Bryan, three times US Presidential candidate and Democratic Secretary of State (1913–15). Bryan visited India and recorded his impressions in his pamphlet, *British Rule in India* (British Committee on the Indian National Congress, Westminster, 1906): 'The government of India is as arbitrary and as despotic as the government of Tsarist Russia ever was, and in two respects it is worse. First, it is administered by an alien people. Secondly, it drains a large part of the taxes out of the country.' He concludes that the British rule has demonstrated 'man's inability to exercise with wisdom and justice, irresponsible power over helpless people. While he had boasted of bringing peace to the living he has led millions to the peace of the grave; while he has dwelt upon order established between warring troops he has impoverished the country by legalised pillage. Pillage is a strong word, but no refinement of language can purge the present system of its iniquity.' *Mutatis mutandis* — the above is an accurate description of the whole of that coloured colonial empire, of which it has been said as tersely as truly that 'over it the sun never sets, and inside it, wages never rise'. And *that* is what alone makes the appearance of British 'democracy' coexist with the reality of the British oligarchy, which still exercises its dictatorship on behalf of finance capital from the City of London.

testimony for it that suddenly-awakened sleepers are apt to become exceedingly violent, particularly if, as is only too probable, they are awakened with a fascist kick. We recall again that pregnant dictum of Balzac — the favourite author of Karl Marx — that: 'There is nothing in heaven or earth so dangerous as a revolution made by a crowd of frightened sheep.'

Such in brief was the way out for the British oligarchy — for the oligarchy remains supreme, though its basis is now primarily financial, and not land or industrial monopoly. The marriage of Toryism, and through its agency, of British society, with capitalist-imperialism, was celebrated by Disraeli in the sixties and seventies of the last century, and was, so to speak, consummated and popularised in the following generation (1881 to 1914) by such men as Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain in action, by Sir John Seeley, Sir Charles Dilke, and JA Froude[3] in theory, by, above all, Rudyard Kipling, through whose imaginative fiction, beyond any other single factor, the broad masses of the British people became imbued with 'Empire consciousness'.

Nevertheless, these men and their like were only popularisers. 'Where O'Flaherty sits is the head of the table!' It was Disraeli who was the real founder of British imperialism, and the real political strategist who saw with the glance of a genius the unique social possibilities that the dawning age of imperialism offered as a safety valve against revolution. The man who, when a 'young Tory', had spoken for the *Charter* in 1839, by the irony of fate lived to devise the political strategy that did more than anything else to make a second Chartist movement impossible. It was Disraeli who crowned Victoria as Empress of India, who acquired for the British Empire the all-essential domination of the Suez Canal, her henceforth indispensable lifeline to the East (1875–76) — to be sure, it *was* Disraeli also who planned the conquest of Egypt, the gateway to Britain's African Empire, though he fell from power and died (1880–81) before he could actually achieve this epochal conquest.

But, far more important than any of these imperialistic details, it was Disraeli who hit upon the brilliant idea of 'Tory democracy' — that is, upon the gradual incorporation of the masses into the ruling class on the basis, ultimately, of reforms paid for by the colonial slaves of the Empire: it is this 'Athenian democracy', this union of all classes into a close-knit metropolitan caste living off the Empire in common, and subordinating all internal class struggles to the mutual and primary need of keeping the Empire intact: it is this counter-revolutionary stroke of genius that establishes Disraeli as the greatest master of English counter-revolution, and the fundamental architect of modern British society, which itself is merely a continuous extension of the great reactionary statesman's principles.

Indeed, it constitutes a striking proof of the incredible incapacity of the British for theoretical analysis — Napoleon's 'Nation of Shopkeepers'! — that the (bourgeois) historians still rank such comparative mediocrities as the ponderous Gladstone and the atavistic Salisbury as equal with, or even as above, the greatest master of counter-revolution in modern times. The British oligarchy itself, rich in horse-sense, if weak in abstract theory, has no such illusions. It has canonised its

3 See JA Froude, *Expansion of England*, *Greater Britain*, *Oceana*. [JA Froude wrote *Oceana: Or England and Her Colonies* (Longmans Green, London, 1886); Charles Dilke wrote *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries During 1866 and 1867* (Macmillan, London, 1868); and JR Seeley wrote *The Expansion of England* (Macmillan, London, 1868) — MIA.]

saviour in a quasi-religious cult, of the 'Primrose League', that is, symbolised by, of all the flowers in the world to associate with Disraeli, a mythical primrose.[4]

The essential history of British society since Disraeli's death (21 April 1881) has been the brilliant, persistent and entirely successful permeation of the British masses by the psychology of imperialism and the (imperialistic) counter-revolution. Viewing British history from the angle of a world perspective, there is no other fact about the British history of the last two generations that can even remotely be compared with this central and decisive fact. Between 1881 and 1947, the innermost consciousness of the entire British people has been welded into a cast-iron pattern, into a homogeneous mould, into what Hilaire Belloc has so aptly denominated as the 'moral unity' that so sharply sunders off the representative British mentality from that of any other nation whatsoever.

If Disraeli himself — in the very last speech he ever delivered in the House of Lords — could state, accurately enough at the time, that 'the keys of India are in London', we today can invert this aphorism with even greater truth. It is the keys of London, and indeed the whole of the metropolitan Britain, which are now in India, taking that 'brightest jewel in the King's diadem' as not only still by far the most important and lucrative possession of the British Crown's dominions, but also as representative of the whole colonial Empire.

The American socialist author Upton Sinclair has aptly denominated the British Empire as 'the most colossal trading company in all history'. Before the rise of imperialism, except for a few 'Nabobs' (India merchants), City merchants and landlords, the British ruling class was relatively poor.[5]

From 1881 to 1941, I repeat: British society has been constituted as a gigantic metropolitan *cooperative of exploitation*. The entire British people is a caste of imperial slave-owners, a caste which, however much divided by internal disputes, can always be relied on to present a united face to the exploited colonial masses. Like the Spartans of antiquity, who exploited in common the produce of their helots (slaves), the British metropolis, despite the glaring internal contrasts of wealth and poverty that it presents, has yet a common interest, and one at that of overwhelming strength, in the maintenance of its common world exploitation, in which all classes indirectly share, and from which all directly profit, even if in unequal degrees. After all, 'the proof of the pudding lies in the eating'! Every crisis that endangers the Empire, up to and including imperialist war, finds the nation united like one man behind the ruling oligarchy. If, in the age of industrial capital, it was broadly true that 'what Lancashire thinks today, England thinks tomorrow', so, and even more truly so, we can amend this axiom to suit the age of finance capital, and say that the practical political thought of England is a pale echo of that of the 'City of London'.

For not only has the Tory Party been indissolubly welded since Beaconsfield's day to the interests of finance capital and to the creed of imperialism, but by an astounding triumph, the opposition parties of the (so-called) left have become equally ardent converts to the imperialist creed. First the Liberal Party in its Gladstone–Asquith heyday (1882 to 1914) and then, after the decline of the Liberal Party, its (nominally more left) successor, the Labour Party (1924–47) have

4 See the appendix at the end of the chapter — Disraeli and the Primrose League.

5 The menu has been preserved of a Guards' regimental dinner, at which Royalty was present: it came (c 1825) per head, to about the modern equivalent of an average dinner in a 'Lyons' Corner House'!

successively capitulated to the imperialist creed.[6] And very useful they have been to it! We may in fact summarise the historic 'division of function' of the British political parties in the service of the imperialist counter-revolution, when we state that *Toryism has been mainly responsible for getting the spoils, and Liberalism for handing (part of) them out.* This 'ransom' — as Joseph Chamberlain called it — was paid in reforms in order to keep the masses quiet by 'bread and circuses', by their share of the imperial loot. *In general, Toryism has supplied the force; and Liberalism the ideology (for home consumption) that 'gets over imperialism' among the British masses.*

The Tory Big Stick to beat up the sweated coolie, and the Liberal demagogue to provide the moral justification for both the exploitation and the beating up: such in essentials has been the relationship of the British political parties to their common creed — to the acquisition and to the administration of which they owe the fact they are able to exist at all. The political motto of post-Beaconsfield England, as far as its Empire is concerned, can be piously taken from Holy Scripture: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive', or, in more profane speech: 'England expects every coolie to do his duty.' Never, we repeat, has there been in all history such a nation of slave-owners, an entire race amongst whom a common bond of exploitation is so taken for granted. Since life has a rough but effective justice of its own, at least when measured in terms of epochs, by all the lessons of history, the ultimate nemesis will be also terrible beyond precedent.

From the end of the First World War on, the Labour Party — with a mass working-class basis enrolled in the trade unions and a professedly 'socialist' programme — has succeeded the Liberal Party as 'His Majesty's Opposition'. In 1924 and again in 1929–31 it has formed minority governments. Today, 1947, it forms a majority government.

The Tory and Liberal Parties are, after all, capitalist parties: to be sure, generally speaking, they represent respectively the financial and industrial wings of the British capitalist class. The Labour Party, contrarily, is a working-class party, and professedly anti-capitalist in its political philosophy. If, accordingly, imperialism was merely an interest and policy of the ruling class, we should naturally expect 'Labour' energetically to oppose it.

The exact opposite has been the case! *Indeed, the essential feature of the evolution of the British Labour Party has been its progressive — more accurately, retrogressive — submission to imperialism.* Today, the Labour Party represents the final link of the chain of 'Tory democracy'. It culminates the process which we termed above as 'the

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6 Our space does not permit any extensive multiplication of detail. In any case, we assume throughout, as generally in this book, that the main facts of English political history are known to our readers. We may, however, point out that the conversion of the Liberal Party to imperialism may be said to date, as already observed, from Gladstone's conquest of Egypt in 1882, when to the horror of old-fashioned 'Little Englanders' in its own party, the Liberal government carried out the identical policy that its arch-enemy Disraeli had decided upon at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when his own Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, admitted that 'we seized Cyprus as a stepping stone to Egypt'. The shamelessly imperialist Boer War — against which even Pope Leo XIII protested on ethical grounds — saw the Liberal Party divided as to its 'justice'. But after the accession of the pro-Boer War Asquith as Prime Minister (1908–16), the capitulation of the Liberal Party to imperialism was swift and complete. A Liberal government made the First Imperialist War in 1914; more recently, what is left of the Liberal Party stood solidly behind the ex-Liberal cabinet minister Winston Churchill, in full support of the Second Imperialist War for the preservation of the British Empire against its imperialist rivals.

cooperative of exploitation'. It registers the decisive political fact of modern British history, viz, the incorporation of all classes in British society — including the workers — within the framework of the imperialist state in a kind of 'corporate state' — without corporations! The workers take for their model Janus, the Roman god with two faces. *As slaves they face their masters at home: as masters, they face their (colonial) slaves abroad.* They are in fact the junior partners of British imperialism. And we may add: as *junior* partners, they are even more anxious about the future of the joint-stock company 'British Empire Ltd' than are their capitalist seniors themselves. For if things go wrong, and the Empire falls, *capital can migrate, but Labour must stagnate: the senior, but not the junior partner in the imperialist firm can still emigrate!*

As I have elsewhere written:

> As for the Labour Party, the [British] oligarchy does not object in the least to opposition that is merely verbal. What else can it be? Is not the maintenance of the British Empire the economic basis not only for the British oligarchy itself, but also for working-class reformism, that is, for the non-revolutionary Labour Party itself? If the definitive end of the world power of Britain means the end of the senior exploiter, British capital, still more does it mean the demise of the junior partner, Labour.[7]

No wonder the leaders of the Labour Party broke with Chamberlain because he did not defend 'our' — yes, 'our'! — Empire with sufficient vigour. In particular, for neglecting our 'essential' highways to the East — and to the El Dorado of exploitation. Rather join with Churchill, their bitterest local class enemy, rather join with the man who broke the General Strike, and would have drowned the Russian Revolution in blood if he could, rather than lose the Empire: rather than get off the backs of their common colonial slaves. Yes, rather admit King George the Sixth himself to the Trade Union Congress — after all, he is the symbol of their common exploitation — than admit the colonial dark-skinned helots to the privileges of the (white) aristocracy of labour! The success of the counter-revolution is complete. The cynical shade of Beaconsfield must be chuckling sardonically in the Elysian Fields!

Appendix: Disraeli and the Primrose League: A great deal of ink has been wasted upon this extraordinary horticultural choice. For surely Disraeli the Bizarre was about as adequately represented by a primrose as Oscar Wilde would have been by a bluebell! We recall, in particular, the eloquent astonishment of Disraeli's French biographer, M André Maurois, upon being confronted with this mysterious choice.

In actual fact, however, the eloquence was uncalled for. There was no flower that was less likely to attract the flamboyant Disraeli than 'the rathe primrose that forsaken dies'. I believe that I have discovered the true solution to this unnecessary mystery: Queen Victoria herself placed a bunch of primroses on the great statesman's grave at Hughenden, surmounted by the inscription — 'His favourite flower.' 'His!' Who's? Not Disraeli's, as was naturally thought at the time, but the Queen's own deceased husband, the Prince-Consort Albert's. For it seems that Victoria always referred to her dead husband by this term: certainly, the Primrose League is more likely to derive its name from the horticultural tastes of that sober German bourgeois prince than from those of the flamboyant novelist and adventurer.

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7 FA Ridley, 'The Evolution of the British Oligarchy', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1939.

Incidentally, we may usefully add in this connection that one of the side-lines of the new imperialism was a romantic revival of monarchical sentiment, typified by Disraeli's own attitude to Victoria. Today, this sentiment has become, with the growth of the Empire, an important element in the imperialist class structure: the publicity accorded to the monarchy, as Leon Trotsky once wrote, will necessarily grow in importance as a screen for the operations of capital as and when the Empire declines.

This changed attitude also dates from Disraeli. For the monarchy before Victoria had fallen to zero in public estimation. The later Hanoverian Kings were objects of universal contempt: the obituary notices in *The Times* about George the Fourth and William the Fourth would provoke a criminal prosecution if they were written today in a labour paper about a monarch! Even in early Victorian times (bourgeois) republican sentiment was strong in Britain. But from the 1870s the cult of the monarchy has become a fetish.

In this connection, we cannot refrain from recording the pleasing story which illustrates the lowest depths ever reached by the British monarchy after that undignified scene when George the Fourth hired a guard of prize-fighters to keep his separated wife Caroline out of Westminster Abbey during his coronation ceremonies — 1820. The next year (1821), Buonaparte died in St Helena. The then Prime Minister went to the King with the news, and this dialogue followed:

PM: 'Your Majesty's greatest enemy is dead.'
HM: 'Is she, by God?'

It is a far cry from this state of things to the elaborate mythology that has grown up since Disraeli's day around Victoria and her descendants.

Chapter VII: The Russian Revolution and British 'Bolshevism'

From the middle of the nineteenth century on, a heavy pall of reformism descended upon the British workers, which has lasted substantially unaltered down to and including the present day. This fundamental transformation in the world outlook of the British working class was due ultimately to the causes traced by us above: viz, in the first instance, disillusion and apathy after the collapse of the *Charter*, for such moods invariably follow collapses of large-scale revolutionary movements.

In the normal course of events this defeatist mood would have passed away and have been succeeded by a fresh upsurge of insurrection. That this has not happened, on any large scale at least, between 1850 and 1947, is due to the causes outlined above: viz, in the first instance, to the British industrial monopoly of the world market; at its zenith between 1850 and 1880, the golden age of free trade — when Britain was virtually the sole 'residuary legatee' of the industrial revolution — in the second, to the imperialist policy — traced in the last chapter — which constituted the British worker as a parasitic tribute-drawing class as far as the British Empire was concerned. That social phase is still with us.

To be sure, Theodore Rothstein, in his remarkable book *From Chartism to Labourism*, has drawn a truly masterly picture of this generation of transition, of, from our point of view, a retrogressive transition without parallel in modern social history. He paints a vivid picture of the, as it were, spiritual transmigration which overtook the workers when 'the hungry forties' passed away, converting the hungry and physically down-at-heel, but militant and hungry-for-knowledge workers of the Chartist era, into the smug, well-fed and mentally inert workers of the 'Victorian era'.[1]

Our author has traced in considerable detail with luminous insight what were both the material and the psychological causes of this, at first sight, astounding transformation in class psychology from the two stormy generations that followed upon the French Revolution, to the stagnant era of social reforms and to the fetish-like worship of bourgeois respectability of 'constitutionalism'-at-all-costs that has stretched from the fall of Chartism to the present day. We have seen what its fundamental causes were: a virtually unceasing stream of reforms from above: both Tories and Liberals vying with each other in this respect: reforms paid for, firstly, by the vast profits on their overseas trade made by the British manufacturing interests in their generation of unbridled profits and fast-expanding production; secondly, from about 1870 on, the rise of imperialism, coupled, particularly from the time of the Boer War onward, with an intensive barrage of imperialist propaganda: that twentieth-century 'queen of the sciences'.

The result of all this, as far as the workers themselves were concerned, was to substitute an age of reform for one of revolution, of trade unions for working-class political parties, of 'industrial disputes' for armed insurrection. The organised working-class forgot all about revolution. It lost its (proletarian) 'class consciousness'

1 An era, we may add, which in its popular sense as the golden age of bourgeois England — of respectability incarnate — and of Mrs Grundy — did not start in 1837 with the accession of the Queen, but only got into its 'Victorian' stride after the collapse of Chartism in 1848.

altogether: it became merely an appendage, the 'tail-end', either of 'Tory democracy' or, perhaps more so, of the 'great Liberal Party', the party of bourgeois reformism *par excellence*. A Paine or an O'Brien would have died of starvation in such an atmosphere. (In fact, the latter nearly did so!) The Victorian and post-Victorian working class in fact entirely ceased to have any 'class consciousness' of its own.[2] Not, indeed, that it had really ceased to be class conscious. Far from it. The working class changed its class subjectively in its own consciousness: it ceased to be proletarian and became more 'petty-bourgeois' than were the petty-bourgeoisie themselves!

How complete was this mental 'revolution', itself the ideological reflex of, first, British industrial monopoly, and then imperialism, was only demonstrated conclusively, when at the turn of the present century the trade unions broke officially with the Liberal Party and formed their own 'Labour Party'. Despite its collectivist paper programme and its socialist fringe, the Labour Party is essentially a reformist party, a typical 'Victorian' party. It is indeed today (1947) the sole surviving institution that pathetically clings to the dogmas of that vanished age. Its shibboleth is still 'the inevitability of gradualness' (Sidney Webb), that quintessence of the Victorian era, in which the very conception of revolution was forgotten, and everything — very particularly, the British Constitution — 'broadened down from precedent to precedent', that phrase of its leading poet (Tennyson) which so perfectly sums up the 'gradualist' outlook of the era itself.

And even today the Labour Party is the authentic successor, according to all the principles of 'gradualness', of Liberalism and not of Chartism. Its leaders may have discovered that Queen Anne is, after all, dead: but the sad news has never yet reached them that Queen Victoria has also departed this life! To capitalism, and still less to imperialism, they were never an 'enemy', but always merely an 'opposition'! Now in the age of incipient 'totalitarianism' when (bourgeois) democracy is itself drifting into fascism, the Labour opposition responds faithfully to the needs of the new 'total' era — when the first duty of an 'opposition' is *not* to oppose!

Indeed, the sole historic service which the Labour Party has rendered to the British working class is to be found in its *name*. By the very fact of its cloaking its bourgeois policies under the name — though only the name — of Labour, it has (inadvertently) prepared the way for the future (revolutionary) party that will represent not only the name of Labour, but the real interests and the real consciousness of class solidarity that the name logically implies.

In the 1880s, William Morris and others led the revival towards a genuine socialist movement. The praise that must unreservedly be given to Morris cannot, unfortunately, be extended, at least not without considerable qualification, to his formidable colleague HM Hyndman, founder of the 'Social Democratic Federation' which from 1885 to 1914 was the chief organ of 'revolutionary' socialism in Britain. Hyndman, it is true, carried on a vigorous agitation for a generation, his sincerity was unquestionable, and he was undoubtedly a man of great learning: to be sure, his last book *The Evolution of Revolution* (1920) — though far from being a classic, is still the best book written in the English language on the most important subject of our time. (We regret to have to add that this is not very extravagant praise!) However, though he ended by supporting the First Imperialist War, we shall adhere to the old

2 Surviving Chartists such as Harney, who lived to 1897, must have felt like prehistoric monsters, or inhabitants of an alien planet.

Latin tag: '*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*'[3] Our epitaph on 'The Chief' shall be mild: he would have been a revolutionary if he had not had the misfortune to be born an English 'gentleman'.

In 1893, the ILP came into existence — with the advice and assistance of Engels, who lived until 1895 — as an 'Independent Labour Party' — that is 'independent' of the bourgeois (particularly the Liberal) political world. But whilst the present writer adheres today to this party (ILP) as that one most in tune with the English revolutionary tradition, yet political honesty compels the admission that when first founded (January 1893, at Bradford), the ILP was still far from being clear either as to its ultimate political aims or to the practical strategy necessary to get possession of political power. In fact, it is not until the last decade that such political clarity has been obtained and the ILP be just styled as a revolutionary socialist party. Nevertheless, Keir Hardie and his colleagues in 1893 marked, under the conditions of their day, an important and necessary preliminary advance towards the retransformation of the British workers again, and this time on a higher scientific plane of social consciousness, into a class keenly aware of its revolutionary mission to overthrow the power of capital.

Unfortunately, however, these groups could make but little headway against the granite strength of the British counter-revolution, and merely constituted passing ripples on the stagnant 'Sargasso Sea' of 'respectable' British (bourgeois) society. Marx himself described England as fully ripe for a social revolution on the material plane, but held back both by the lack of militancy amongst the workers and by their inability for generalisations.[4]

When Marx and Engels died in London (1883, 1895), it is absolutely correct to state that there was no country in the entire planet where the influence of the founders of scientific socialism was so feeble as in the land which had seen the birth of *Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the *Anti-Dühring*, *A Prophet*, etc! And the same can equally truly be added of the rival Anarchist school (in the First International) of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta — all of them at one time or another residents in Britain — whose fiery rhetorical rockets just sizzled out in the vast revolutionary void that was Victorian Britain: '*Vox, ot praeterea nihil.*' — 'Sound, and nothing more.'

It was, however, from the latter school that the next wave — or rather, wavelet — of social revolution arrived. For in the years immediately prior to 1914 the anarcho-syndicalist movement crossed the Channel — just then given a European vogue by Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* with its incomparable flair. In pre-1914 Britain a wave of syndicalist strikes swept the country, and the revolutionary philosophy behind it attracted widespread attention, thanks mainly to the powerful oratorical agitation of Tom Mann.

Then 1914 arrived, the year of the First Imperialist War: the year one, as we can now see, of the decline of capitalist civilisation.

The First World War quickly led to the first socialist revolution. In February (old style) 1917, the Russian workers and peasants overthrew the Tsar: in October (old style), the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, overthrew the Menshevik (Social-Democratic)–Liberal interim government of Kerensky. The

3 Speak only good of the dead.

4 At its Southport conference in 1946 the ILP completed its transformation into a revolutionary party. Then it completely broke with 'Labour reformism' and adopted a completely revolutionary policy.

Bolsheviks at once established in Russia — henceforth the 'Union of Socialist Soviet Republics' (USSR) — a collectivist economic regime, safeguarded by the political dictatorship of Lenin's party, which thereafter adopted the name of Communist, as a protest against the imperialist chauvinism of the Western European Social-Democratic parties of the Second International — founded in 1889 — to which the Bolsheviks had originally adhered.[5]

This is not the place to estimate the historic role of the Russian Revolution in human history in any detail. Suffice it to remark, that, despite its undoubted subsequent degeneration and revolutionary frustration — due chiefly to its failure to spread beyond the confines of Russia itself — the Russian Revolution may accurately be styled as the opening move in a new historic epoch, that of the proletarian-led world revolution.

Whilst, in point of time, the Russian Revolution is the historic successor of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century (bourgeois) revolutions of 1789 and 1848, and of that proletarian overture in 1871 (the Paris Commune), yet viewing it in the broadest historical perspectives we find a more exact analogy in our English Revolution of 1642–60 — which inaugurated capitalism in England, but which subsequently failed to spread, and which also degenerated from a revolutionary standpoint.

Similarly, the Russian Revolution of 1917 inaugurated socialism on the national (Russian) scale, it was, to be sure, the first major workers' revolution, but it also subsequently failed to spread, degenerated and ultimately compromised with its own revolutionary principles. For just as Cromwell was succeeded in 1688–89 by the opportunist Whigs, so Lenin and his revolutionary colleagues have been succeeded by the opportunist, Machiavellian and compromising regime of Stalin. The English Revolution with regard to capitalism, and the Russian with regard to socialism, have occupied broadly similar historic roles.

In the course of the present survey of the sequential succession of revolutions in England, we have had repeated occasion to note the profound influence exercised upon 'our island story', notably in its revolutionary aspect, by the successive major social revolutions on the European Continent. The influence, to be sure, has been reciprocal; revolutionary propaganda and ideology follow no one-way traffic. We have not forgotten what the 'Holy Russia' of Tsar Alexis 'the Good' thought about Oliver Cromwell and his regicide government.[6] After all, the 'good' Tsar had only too much cause to fear the same fate at the hands of Stenka Razin! Proverbially, 'fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind'.

The influence of the Russian Revolution on Britain has been exercised through the (Communist) Third International and specifically through the British Communist Party. These organisations were founded, respectively, in January 1919 and August 1920. The influence of either was never very great in this country, and the scale upon which this book is planned does not, consequently, permit us to do more than briefly to sketch in bare outline their main activities culminating in the General Strike of 2–11 May 1926, in which some have been able to detect a genuinely 'revolutionary situation', I may add, quite wrongly, in my opinion.

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5 The term — Bolshevik — like, say, Jesuit, is only a popular nickname: it means, literally, 'majority', and originally referred to the London–Brussels conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Party in 1903, when Lenin and his revolutionary policy got a majority. Their reformist opponents were henceforth known as Mensheviki — or minority-men.

6 See Part Two, *supra*.

The Russian Revolution was, as stated above, the first victorious proletarian revolution of the dawning socialist era in world history. As always, therefore, in the epoch of class society, its political character was determined fundamentally by the social needs of that class the interest of which it represented, and it is virtually self-evident that the working class has today two essential needs: production for use *internally* — that is, socialism — and, *externally*, for internationalism.

It is in fact precisely because the means of production — the ultimately determining factor in every society — have now long outgrown both the means of exchange and the national frontier, that we are entirely justified in propounding the current antithesis that confronts our civilisation: international socialism or ultimate chaos and the barbarism of a new Dark Age. Indeed, for a socialist revolution to renounce its internationalism is equivalent to suicide on its own part. It is, for instance, now become abundantly clear that the Stalinist slogan 'Socialism in a single land' (viz, Russia) when first propounded (1928), marked the abandonment by the Russian state of the social revolution, and its embarkation upon the slippery slope that ended in the tragi-comedy of the 'Moscow Trials' and in its 'Pact' with Nazi Germany in 1939.

This, however, was not the Soviet world outlook in 1917. Then, the Russian leaders, Lenin and Trotsky in particular, knew that if the revolution could not spread, it must eventually collapse. Not for a proletarian revolution even were the vague international aspirations that had characterised the Jacobin revolution of Robespierre and Paine. A revolution is a precise thing, and it needs precise instruments for its advancement. To promote a genuine 'world revolution', a special instrument was required adapted specifically for that purpose. Such was the genesis of the Third International (Communist), in its original conception the Foreign Office, so to speak, of the *Russian Revolution* — not, be it noted, merely of Russian nationalism, as it has since become in the course of its Stalinist degeneration.[7]

The Third International was founded in 1919, its classic era was from 1919 to 1927, when Trotsky and the revolutionary wing were expelled. It was a highly centralised affair from the start: the local autonomy of the constituent parties being strictly limited, with all matters of importance radiating outwards in military fashion from the centre. I may add, that in my opinion — whilst space is lacking to do justice to the question — those who ascribe the eventual failure of the Third International to its military centralisation are in error. After all, what organisation could be more centralised or militarised than were, and are, the Jesuits? And yet what organisation has there been in all history that has met with such permanent and phenomenal success as has the famous 'Company'? A European and American power for four centuries. For that matter (Italian) Fascism and Nazism have both admittedly borrowed heavily from Leninism in organisational matters.[8] And neither can fairly be charged with failure!

In my opinion, the ultimate failure of the Communist International to spread was due, in last analysis, to the strength of imperialism in the West, which had developed a huge reactionary 'middle class' (petty-bourgeoisie) besides acquiring a

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7 Trotsky's theory of 'the permanent revolution' is the completest theoretical defence of the first internationalist phase of the Russian Revolution. In close agreement with it is Lenin's own famous declaration, that, without a concurrent revolution in Germany, the Russian Revolution would not last three months. We may add, incidentally, that a close analysis of this statement gives the key to the whole subsequent history of the Russian Revolution from that day to this.

8 To be sure, in this aspect, Hitler may well be styled Lenin's 'best disciple'.

potent influence over the workers themselves by means of the agency of the Social-Democracy, that junior partner of Western imperialism.[9] Insofar as there was any weakness in the Communist organisation, it lay in the fact — in itself unavoidable at the time — that its world centre lay too far from the centres of Western industry to establish really effective contacts. In my opinion, also, a recent historian of the Third International is absolutely correct in suggesting that Stalinism, along with the revolutionary degeneration inside Russia that it implies, is essentially the result and not the cause of the collapse of the international revolutionary movement.[10]

The British Communist Party during its 27 years of existence (August 1920 to 1947) when these lines are being written, has represented a very curious political phenomenon. It has always had a great deal of publicity — far more indeed than its intrinsic importance warranted — but its practical effects have been virtually nil. From the standpoint of theory, in itself an excellent test of the political maturity of the workers, the British Communist Party has always been very backward, like the British labour movement in general. It has little theoretical work to its credit, and has produced no outstanding theoreticians — R Palme Dutt is perhaps an exception. Indeed, the fact that its solitary theoretician is a Hindu about gives the intellectual measure of the British Communist Party!

To be sure, Dr Franz Borkenau has drawn attention to the very illuminating fact that the English party has never been rent by any serious ideological dispute, being in this respect unique among the major parties in the International. This fact alone speaks volumes for the political and intellectual immaturity of even the advanced British workers. For as the Catholic Church, that oldest and most experienced of human institutions, long ago discovered, 'It is necessary that heresies should arise', that is, no dispute about truth demonstrates that there is no interest in truth! In the air of reformist England, abstract ideas simply wither up! Yet it was not always so in the past; will it always be so in the future?[11]

The British Communist Party's history can be conveniently divided into three consecutive sections. These were:

a: From its foundation in August 1920 — itself the result of an amalgamation between several smaller groups, amongst whom the 'British Socialist Party' and the left wing of the ILP were conspicuous — to 1928. During this period the party worked to spread the revolutionary standpoint within the mass British labour

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9 American finance, itself the reflex of the growing strength of American imperialism in its march towards world hegemony, also did much to stabilise post-1918 European capitalism.

10 See Dr Franz Borkenau, *The Communist International* (Faber and Faber, London, 1938).

Though the Third International is, since its dissolution in 1943, finished, at least in its present form, I may add that I do not myself believe there is any future for the revolution anywhere — *including Britain specifically on account of the vast strength and political experience of its ruling class* — without some kind of cast-iron revolutionary organisation of the kind that Lenin, walking here in the footsteps of Loyola, envisaged. The idea that the imperialist sharks in particular, the British, the oldest and most rapacious of all, who have swindled and robbed and murdered all over the planet, will ever disgorge as a result of any vague 'left' agitation, still less, at the bidding of an 'enlightened democracy' — under imperialism! — is a tale (in the French phrase) 'only fit for the marines'. In another book we hope presently to pursue this question further.

11 In this connection, I may relevantly cite the opinion of a very able Catholic theologian of my acquaintance that in England there is no interest in speculative theology even amongst his own co-religionists. It is not the only point that the Catholic Church and the Communist International have in common!

movement. Its chief activities being in connection with the General Strike of May 1926, prior to which event several of the party leaders were arrested and gaoled.[12]

b: From 1928 to 1935, during which period the party, under direct orders from the newly established Stalinist regime in Moscow, pursued an ultra-left sectarian policy, concentrating the bulk of its fire, both here and on the Continent, against the Social-Democracy — in Britain represented by the Labour Party — then denominated as 'social fascists' and as the chief enemies of the workers in their advance towards socialism. It strove to disintegrate the trade unions by setting up rival (revolutionary) unions.[13]

c: From 1935 to October 1939, the Communist Party 'zig-zagged' on to an ultra-right course in the era of the self-styled 'Popular Front', when all propaganda for socialism and revolution was taboo, and the aim was to unite all 'progressive' people in defence of (bourgeois) 'democracy' — in the era of imperialism! To be sure, this policy can only be readily understood by reference to the foreign policy of Soviet Russia during these years. At this time the fear of Nazi Germany — 'Fascism' — was an obsession with the Kremlin, which needed the alliance of the rival (democratic) imperialisms, France and Britain.

The same consideration dominated the attitude of Russia and its satellite parties abroad during the so-called 'Civil War' in Spain. The sequel showed that in a revolutionary epoch one cannot switch revolutions on and off to order. The result was to put Franco in power in Spain, thanks, firstly to Stalin, secondly, to the 'Non-Intervention Committee' — the reward given by the 'great democracies' for strangling the Spanish Revolution. 'Who sups with the Devil' — in this instance, imperialism dressed up as bourgeois 'democracy' — 'needs a long spoon.' Moscow had no spoon long enough to reach to Madrid!

Lastly — bathos! For, from 1935 to 1939 the Communist Party, under orders from Moscow, had been urging support for 'democracy' — that is, British and French imperialism — against 'Fascism' — that is, German imperialism hungry for its 'living space' at the expense of its world rivals. But in August 1939, Stalin, not strong enough, or sure enough of his Western allies, resolved to come to terms with Hitler rather than fight him. Came the Moscow Pact (23 August). As a witty diplomat accurately expressed it: 'All the "isms" became "was'ms".'

Swiftly — 1–3 September — there followed the Second Imperialist War. As for the now derelict Third International, in the words of the old song, 'When Uncle says turn, we all turn.' Heretofore, it had been a sacred war for 'democracy' against 'Fascism'. Hereafter, Red Infallibility had pronounced 'ex Cathedra', if not a sacred war 'for Fascism against democracy', it was at least to be something closely similar! With a single goosestep motion, the whole Stalinist International swung into the 'new line'.

There was, at first, one exception! Theory is not the strong point of the English Communist. He remained on the old line for about six weeks too long! Hence, for

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12 See the note on the General Strike, at the end of this chapter.

13 I may say that I consider this policy to have been right in substance though wrong in form. There is no doubt that the Labour Party and trade unions *are* the major strongholds of imperialism amongst the workers. Contrarily, the form taken by the theory was unfortunate: a 'social fascist' is a species of white blackbird unknown to social science! Social-Democracy represents the maturity of capitalism; Fascism is the sharpest expression of its decay. It is impossible that they should be combined in a single formula. See the previous chapter, also the appendix on 'Whither Britain' at the end of the current chapter.

September and part of October 1939, a delighted universe beheld a professedly revolutionary party urging the British workers to support an imperialist war on the ground that it was nothing of the sort, but a war 'against Fascism'.[14]

In October, Moscow cracked its whip and 16 King Street — British Communist Party headquarters — came into line. But is it necessary to investigate any further the credentials of a professedly revolutionary party which — in the age of imperialism — is not able to recognise for what it is the central fact of our times: viz, an imperialist war? From Lenin, the classic authority on imperialism, to the party of Harry Pollitt and his fellow 'anti-Fascist' crusaders is indeed a steep decline. We recall anew the dictum of Marx: 'History repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce!'[15]

It only remains to add that the vast world changes between 1919 and 1941 have had but little effect upon the British workers who remain reformist and imperialist to the core. The 'Labour' government of 1924 was a farce: that of 1929–31 a bigger farce ending in a downright fraud. Imperialism has no stauncher servants than were the two governments of Ramsay MacDonald. In 1932 indeed, the ILP came out of the Labour Party, and, not at first without some fumblings natural after a generation of reformism, commenced its transformation into a revolutionary party completed in 1946. It alone, plus a few small 'Trotskyists' and syndicalist groups, opposed the Second Imperialist War from an avowedly revolutionary standpoint. The only papers that opposed the imperialist war from a revolutionary standpoint are *The Socialist Leader*, organ of the ILP, and the anarcho-syndicalist paper *War Commentary*, *The Socialist Standard*, organ of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, plus a few 'Trotskyist' sheets. The official Labour Party entered the government of the arch-imperialist Winston Churchill, thereby logically concluding that incorporation of the workers into the imperialist state on the basis — not of fascist castor oil, but of far more appetising colonial plunder — which, since Disraeli, has been the central feature of British history. Concurrently, the trade unions, which began with the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' in the criminal courts, have ended in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace presenting the gold medal of the TUC to — the King!

In so happy a land why resort to fascism? As we write, the British masses are solidly united with the ruling class in defence of their common property: the British Empire. Everything indicates that the workers will remain united — until there is no Empire to defend! And then they will unite — for what? Echo answers — what? Major road — ahead!

Note on Reformism — 'The Lesser Evil': Space is unfortunately lacking for us to do justice to the whole very important question of working-class reforms. We may merely add that the spate of reformism reached its height during the Liberal administration of 1905–14, which depended for its political existence, in part, on Labour Parliamentary support. However, both Tories and Liberals increased the franchise progressively so as to include the working class. To be sure, with a working-class predominantly (bourgeois) Liberal in political and economic outlook, it was now perfectly 'safe' to grant belatedly this point in the *Charter*! Moreover, both Tories and Liberals entered, so to speak, on a competition to get working-class support by passing reforms. It was cheaper than suppressing a revolution! And,

14 Its subsequent 'switch' to support the war after June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia, falls outside the period covered in and by this book.

15 See the note on the Communist Party, *infra*.

after all, it was the colonies — or the world market — which paid for them ultimately.

In this connection, we must draw attention to the point — in itself of primary importance — that, contrary to many people's opinion, the substantial improvements in the conditions of the British working class and unemployed during the last half-century that have been undoubtedly effected during the era of reform, does not at all refute the Marxist theory of 'the increasing misery of the working class that is inevitable under capitalism'. This theory presupposes *normal* conditions of capitalist development. It necessarily does not apply to the altogether exceptional case of a metropolitan proletariat, living ultimately on the backs of its colonial slaves. After all, all the improvements in *British* conditions *have* been paid for by 'increasing misery' in the colonies. Viz, India was the richest country in Asia when the British arrived, now it is the poorest.[16] Many other examples could be cited, such as the lucrative British opium trade which was forced on China at the point of the bayonet by the 'Opium War' of 1840, and has ruined countless lives — in connection with this last instance, we may mention that the 'Christian General' Gordon, who, acting as the armed agent of British capital with his 'ever-victorious' army, forcibly prevented the union of China by the Taipings and thus preserved the 'Celestial Empire' for the Shanghai merchants and the opium trade, thereby making 'the break-up' of China inevitable, has probably ultimately caused more deaths in China than there have been people altogether in Britain since his day.[17] Whilst in South Africa the Negroes, the *majority* of the population, are treated precisely as the Jews were in Nazi Germany.

In an entirely different field we must note the influence of the meiliorist Victorian literature on the growth of a reformist ideology amongst the 'upper strata' of the workers — the so-called 'aristocracy of labour' — was undoubtedly considerable. We have in mind particularly novels of Dickens, which had an enormous vogue and influence amongst the workers. Along with Tennyson, Dickens represented the quintessence of reformism, which the great novelist contributed so powerfully to spread.

I am, however, writing the history, not of reformism, but of revolution. In this limited connection there was absolutely no mass revolutionary movement in Britain during the era under discussion. The nearest approach to one in the mid-Victorian period was the considerable (middle-class in the main) republican and militant Freethought movement which conducted a vigorous agitation against the monarchy, the aristocracy and the established Church. This active movement attained a considerable vogue, and two well-known radical politicians of the period at first supported it: Joseph Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke. Its leading personality, however, was the great orator Charles Bradlaugh, whose formidable personality attracted wide attention — we recall his trenchant definition of the Hanoverian dynasty: 'small breast-bestirred wanderers'.

Bradlaugh was the founder of the 'National Secular Society' which, though never socialist or revolutionary in the precise sense, in its early days under

16 See HM Hyndman, *The Awakening of Asia* (Cassell, London, 1919); Lester Hutchinson, *The Empire of the Nabobs* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1937); R Reynolds, *The White Sahibs of India* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1937); George Padmore, *Africa and World Peace* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1937); WJ Bryan, *British Rule in India* (British Committee on the Indian National Congress, Westminster, 1906).

17 See Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1938).

Bradlaugh and his successors carried on a vigorous agitation for republicanism and for far-reaching reforms which would have extended the influence of the French Revolution to this country. In addition to which the NSS carried on, and still carries on today, a most valuable cultural and critical propaganda in the spheres, chiefly, of religious, ethical and scientific ideology: in this latter connection, its present leader, Mr Chapman Cohen, though less interested in politics than his predecessors Charles Bradlaugh and GW Foote, has established himself as a devastating critic of traditional ways of thought.

I may add that I fully recognise the permanent value and the powerful, though indirect, revolutionary character of British Freethought propaganda, also that no merely political revolution will get very far or make a permanent impression without a concurrent revolution in ideas. Ideas are themselves the most potent revolutionary dynamite! It is with great reluctance that I have had to give so little space to this ideological aspect of the revolutionary tradition; the more so, as it is an aspect to which I am myself deeply attracted. I am, alas, inhibited from doing so by considerations of time and, still more, space, which impose their own 'relativity'!

Apart from this, nothing but a few riots and a few small groups of quasi-revolutionary agitators. In the first connection, we may note the riots in Hyde Park in the 1860s, when the 'Mob' tore down the railings and thus secured the right of free speech which still exists at the Marble Arch; and the later riots in Trafalgar Square in the 1890s, when the unemployed did at least bring the fact of their existence before the propertied classes.[18]

Concurrently, a few small semi-revolutionary groups made their appearance in the 1880s. In his charming fantasy of the socialist future, *News From Nowhere*, the poet and artist William Morris accomplished the literary miracle of creating a 'Utopia' in which one would actually like to live![19] To be sure, William Morris was also a great socialist in practice, and if he was not a practical revolutionary, that was only because there was no revolution in his time to practise on. Otherwise, one need not have looked further for the John Ball (and Shelley combined) of our era. A great revolutionary who never got his chance was William Morris.[20]

Note on the Composition of the Communist Party: I append some figures on the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

June 1931 — 2756 members.
September 1931 (after sell-out by Ramsay MacDonald) — 6263.
1932 (period of acute world crisis and vast unemployment) — 5400.
1935 (period of inauguration of the 'Popular Front') — 7000.
1939 — the figure is believed to have stood at about 10,000.

The membership, except for a 'hard core' of permanently employed officials — whose patron saint is the Vicar of Bray! — fluctuates with its policies: proletarian and even lumpen-proletarian (riff-raff) in its ultra-left phases; petty-bourgeois in its reformist phase.

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18 After a few windows in Piccadilly had been smashed, the Lord Mayor's Mansion House Fund for the starving unemployed doubled overnight. A minor but interesting example that if one wants reforms, there is nothing like even the threat of revolution for producing them!

19 The only other Utopia that I know of in English from which anything is to be learnt is Buliver Lytton's remarkable short story *The Coming Race*, which is as superior in scientific interest to that of Morris, as it falls short of it in literary grace.

20 His fellow art connoisseur John Ruskin also had some potential revolutionary qualities.

The party also runs a considerable number of subsidiary organisations and periodicals amongst which the *Labour Monthly* is conspicuous. The party organ, *The Daily Worker* (daily) — temporarily suppressed as pro-German, January 1941 — and its predecessor, *The Sunday Worker* (weekly), had a fair circulation. The original Chairman of the party was Arthur McManus, and its present leader is Mr Harry Pollitt.

Note on the General Strike: The postwar (1914–18) period was one of widespread discontent, powerfully fanned by the Russian Revolution and subsequent European movements of revolt. In 1919, the London dockers refused to load the *Jolly George* with arms intended for a war of counter-revolutionary intervention against the Russian Revolution, a war then waged primarily at the instigation of Winston Churchill, a duodecimo 'Pitt' — whom the mellow hand of all-transforming time has since converted into the present champion of 'democracy' and of human freedom!

A wave of strikes followed, and the militancy of the industrial workers reached its peak at the Scarborough (1925) Trade Union Congress. That same autumn the Tory government of Baldwin granted a subsidy to the coal industry in aid of wages. The refusal of the government to renew this the following May led directly to the General Strike — the nearest thing to a mass revolutionary movement that this country has known since the Chartists. From 2 to 11 May, the bulk of the working class came out on a strike in support of the miners; whilst Churchill and his Tory die-hards talked wildly about 'red revolution'.

Red Revolution! Unfortunately this description fits the General Strike as well as the term 'Holy Roman Empire' fitted the creation of Charlemagne, according to Voltaire: viz, the strike was neither red nor a revolution: indeed as a strike it was not even 'general'. Despite the heroic solidarity displayed throughout by the rank-and-file strikers, this 'General Strike' was lost before it was begun. As this book is in no way interested in industrial disputes considered merely as such, we propose to view the General Strike from the standpoint of revolutionary strategy.

On this question, there are only two points that we need to consider: can a general strike — even if genuine — overthrow the state? And, if not, what else is required to do so?

The first of these questions raises the whole problem of syndicalism. In this connection we will merely remark that the syndicalists have nowhere proved their favourite theory that, unsupported by political action, the general strike is able to overthrow the state. Georges Sorel indeed made out at least a plausible case that it could: but the concurrent argument by the brilliant author of *Reflections on Violence* that faced with the general strike the bourgeoisie would prove incapable of fighting back in a counter-revolution, has already been disproved by the rise of fascism founded by his own most ardent disciple, the ex-syndicalist Mussolini. It is true that a recent anarcho-syndicalist philosopher has hinted at a new strike strategy that will solve all revolutionary problems — but this great secret, this 'open sesame' of revolution, still eludes the ken of science and baffles the curiosity of an expectant universe![21]

We conclude, therefore, that the modern imperialist state cannot be overthrown by the general strike alone. To succeed, such a strike is merely the overture, so to speak, to armed insurrection.

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21 See Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (Freedom Press, London, 1940).

With regard to the second point: the question as to whether the leaders of the General Strike of 1926 were prepared for armed revolution admits of only one answer — no! Even the masses had only reached the fringe of revolutionary activity. The Russian Revolution had shaken, but had not displaced, imperialism as the ruling philosophy of the British workers. As for the trade-union leaders, the very idea of them at the barricades positively is a huge joke! When in fact, at the preliminary trade-union conference before declaring the strike, Mr WJ Brown warned his colleagues that what they were doing meant ultimate civil war, with the alternative of fighting it out or dying for high treason, he was received with blank incredulity — Mr Brown told the present writer this himself. Apart from Arthur Cook, the militant miners' secretary, the trade-union leaders had no more idea of starting a revolution than the man in the moon![22]

Is it really necessary to ask whether such a movement was capable of transformation into a revolution — and into a revolution at that against the most powerful empire in the world? Without leaders — without arms — most important of all — without the knowledge even that it was a revolution! The very idea is fantastic: the world is certainly a queer place. But hardly as queer as that!

Appendix on Lenin — Trotsky — and Disraeli: For a few stormy years after 1917, the Russian Revolution, via the agency of the Communist International, threatened to spread over Europe. There were short-lived 'soviet' republics in Hungary, under Béla Kun, and in Munich under Ernst Toller; also risings in other localities. The international bourgeoisie, still without its fascist 'technique', was frightened nearly out of its wits; had any of the major countries of the West gone 'Red' between 1917 and 1923, there can be little doubt that a European revolution would have followed.

It is hardly open to doubt that it was upon the British Empire, more than upon any other single obstacle, that the revolution crashed. It was the British monolithic society, that impregnable rock founded upon the super-profits of imperialism, that imposed an insuperable barrier to the '*Drang nach Westen*' of Communism in the postwar years. In symbolical imagery we see the two great masters, respectively, of revolution and counter-revolution — Lenin and Disraeli — fight out their international conflict.

And it was the latter who won! The westward drive of the Russian Revolution crashed helplessly against the granite foundations of the slave-holding imperial metropolis which Disraeli had bequeathed to his successors. Upon British soil his technique was still too strong for that of Lenin. The British workers were, and are, still more conscious of their solidarity with their own capitalist fellow beneficiaries from exploitation, than with their fellow-*workers* in other lands. Against this cardinal fact of present-day British society, international socialism dashed itself in vain.

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22 The British government under that astute defensive politician, Stanley Baldwin — whom I have elsewhere styled the 'Fabius Cunctator' of modern British politics — showed its usual cunning in letting the strike beat itself without resorting to violence — which would have effectually destroyed the constitutional fetish in its chief stronghold, the minds of the British workers themselves. He was far wiser than Churchill, who would have drowned the strike in blood: the British ruling class knows how to select its instruments for the appropriate occasion.

Incidentally, Churchill, the later *ci-devant* leader of the 'European revolution' against Hitler — truly a case of 'Beelzebub casting out Beelzebub'! — has only seen one 'revolution' at close quarters: we refer to the glorious day when he led the British army in a charge of the old guard in Sidney Street (1910) — against that deadly enemy of the British Empire — 'Peter the Painter'.

Such shrewd social strategists as were the Bolshevik leaders did not, of course, fail to note this strange failure of the British workers to respond to revolutionary propaganda. Nor did they underestimate its importance: to be sure, the conquest of Britain by Communism represented a decisive move in the advance of the world revolution. Both Lenin and Trotsky — the 'Robespierre' and 'Carnot' of the Russian Revolution — its two outstanding world-masters, devoted whole books to the specific case of Britain: *Infantile Leftism* by Lenin (1919) and *Whither Britain?* by Trotsky (1925).

Each of these books was a masterpiece in its way, but neither came within sight of solving the fundamental problem. The British workers still were, and are, the best organised and the most politically backward in the Western world. Class conscious in *non-essentials* with their fellow workers, but in *essentials* with their own imperialist exploiters. Lenin is dead. Trotsky is dead. But the generic political character of the workers remains where it has been for half a century. In fact, when in 1936 the Tory government voted a salary of £2000 a year ex-officio for the Leader of the (Labour) Opposition, the policy of absorbing the workers into the imperialist state received its final touch. The Hegelian dialectic — 'the identity of opposites' — was officially incorporated into the British Constitution!

Actually, despite their political genius, neither Lenin nor Trotsky really grasped the problem which confronted them, and which confronts those super-daring souls who are faced with the truly Herculean task of making a British revolution. The truth is that no British revolution can *begin* in the metropolis, Britain, but only on the circumference, the British *Empire*. It can only *end* in Britain. Whilst the Empire exists and can be made to pay and/or dazzle the workers, the ruling class can, and do, laugh at revolution. But smash the Empire, the world-power of British capital, first, and here also the best laugh is the last! Hence the whole art and science of the British revolution can be expressed in this single fundamental formula: *Whilst the British Empire stands, there can be no revolution in Britain. Wherefore, smash the British Empire is the first commandment with promise.* Then — and not till then — the ruling class will be running too fast to spare breath for laughter! Disraeli has made the Empire the bulwark of the British counter-revolution: the man who will checkmate the historic work of Disraeli will start where Disraeli ended. Revolutions can also learn from counter-revolutions as well as the reverse process.

Unfortunately, neither Lenin nor Trotsky could see this for all their genius. Lenin wrote in *Infantile Leftism* a permanent historic document — a masterly and trenchant analysis of the permanent moods of sectarianism and political 'solipsism'. 'Go to the masses' was his slogan. It seems clear that he thought that if the British Communists went, the masses would listen to the revolutionary message. The Communists went, but the masses were still as far from listening, as sunk in reformism as before.

'Something was clearly rotten in the state of Denmark' — or at least in Lenin's arguments. The truth was that even that master of '*realpolitik*' failed to be realistic enough when it came to England. Even he failed to penetrate into the *real* nature of the unique society that has arisen in post-Beaconsfield Britain. The rigid definitions of 'orthodox' Marxism do not know such an economic genus as a proletarian slave-owner! Even Lenin, most orthodox of Marxists, did not recognise this strange social monstrosity originally conceived by the bizarre imagination of the great Hebrew

master of the British counter-revolution. Even Lenin could not conceive of proletarian Cossacks![23]

Indeed, Lenin's solitary political weakness was an undoubted tendency to idealise the workers. In Russia, where the revolutionary workers deserved all praise, this was a virtue rather than a fault. In Spain also, it would have been a virtue. But in England, things being what they were, this weakness of the great master had serious results.

A few years later, the other great Bolshevik pamphleteer turned his attention to the question of Britain. In *Whither Britain?* (1925), Leon Trotsky dealt with the same question of how to make a revolution in Britain. Brilliant, witty, abounding with the epigrams and lively sarcasms that distinguish the best work of this 'Emperor of Pamphleteers' (Bernard Shaw), Trotsky also propounded his solution: turn out the reactionary Labour leaders — the MacDonalds, the Thomases, the Snowdens — and let the Communists or near-Communists take their place. Then the Labour Party would be radicalised, the Communist Party would become a mass party, and — hey-presto — for the revolution along the Moscow Road!

It all sounded very clear in the great orator's vigorous prose. 'We will do this': 'You will do that', and so on! But alas, the workers remained where they were, deafened to the revolutionary siren: the Labour Party, far from going left, got worse and worse; indeed, as compared with that of today, the Labour Party of 1925–26 was almost a revolutionary party. As for the Communist Party, it is well known what the author of *Whither Britain?* came eventually to think of it!

Again, something was clearly rotten in the arguments of this most brilliant of controversial exponents.

In point of fact, Trotsky put the cart before the horse. It was not the reformist Labour leaders who made the Labour Party what it was, but vice versa, the reformist Labour Party who made the Labour leaders what they were! It was indeed, an inverted compliment — strange, from so bitter a critic as Trotsky — to MacDonald, Thomas, etc, to suggest that they could stop any party from doing anything it wanted! They were not men of that calibre, as their most merciless critic should have known. Of course, in actual history the Labour Party, like everything else, is tied to its primary function. It is the junior partner of 'Tory democracy', of British imperialism, without the colonial tribute of which neither reformism nor the Labour Party itself could last for the proverbial day. Individual leaders make no difference. For that matter, Trotsky's special *bêtes noirs* — MacDonald, Thomas, Snowden — all cleared out of the Labour Party in 1931, without compulsion, but the party is more reactionary now than when they were there.

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23 In actual fact, it was Lenin's reformist opponent Karl Kautsky who did once almost stumble upon the real social role of the British workers. Kautsky, no revolutionary at any time, but an historian and historical thinker of remarkable talent and insight, once compared the British workers with the original 'proletariat' of ancient Rome; that is, the 'poor whites' who lived on doles — '*panes et circenses*' ('bread and circuses') — provided ultimately by the labour of the slaves. Against whom the Roman proletariat would always unite with the Roman ruling class in defending the exploitation that was common to the whole 'free' Roman class. *Mutatis mutandis*, this is the social function of the British workers since the inauguration of 'Tory Democracy' by Disraeli. See Paul Lensch, *Three Years of World Revolution* (Constable, London, 1918).

Incidentally, I cannot agree with Dr Borkenau that *Infantile Leftism*, though remarkable in its way, is really the masterpiece of the author of *Imperialism* and *The State and Revolution*.

I conclude, accordingly, that the real role of the Labour Party, and therewith the real nature of contemporary British society, was never understood by the Bolsheviks. The real key to that society lies in the fact that the British *worker* is himself a colonial exploiter, and to preserve that privileged role is the historic function of the Labour Party, which must fight for the Empire that alone makes it possible. When that Empire goes, *and not before*, there will again be revolution in Britain.

Epilogue: Towards the British Revolution (A Parallel — And a Forecast; England and Spain)

> Our wrath comes after Russia's wrath, and our wrath be the worst. — GK Chesterton

I have now completed the task that I have set myself of tracing in broad outline the course of the revolutionary tradition in England from its origins in the twelfth century down to the present day.

Successively, we have enumerated the three main revolutionary periods in English history: the mediæval era; the bourgeois revolution; and the early stages of the proletarian revolution, the decisive phase of which still lies in the future, but which promises ultimately to be of all the most profound and permanent in its effects.

For it is the peculiar and unique feature of the workers' revolution that, by a dialectical necessity which arises from its very nature, and from the character itself of the communist society to which it leads, it closes altogether the revolutionary epoch itself, along with the class society and the class struggle that gave rise to it.

In the peaceful and humane socialist society of the post-revolutionary era, when the struggle of man versus nature has finally succeeded and displaced the age-old struggle of man versus man, then the class struggle itself, along with its sharpest expression in the revolutionary act itself, will take their place in that ancient chamber of memories, amongst that band of 'old unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago', which haunt the evolution of our race, both in its distant childhood and in its present adolescence.

Historic evolution moves in cycles. And what can be safely discarded at one stage is still vitally necessary in another more primitive one.[1]

In the epoch of class society and the state, the science of revolution is, of all the sciences, the most necessary. By its agency mankind cuts the Gordian knots that successively confront it: through its instrumentality, and often enough through that alone, humanity is able to leap the historic hurdles that confront it and to spring with seven-league boots confidently forward across the gigantic chasms that sunder the great epochs of history from each other. In such epochs, the revolutionary agitator is the priest of humanity, who ever urges it on and ever upward.

It is now evident to all who have eyes to see that we today are faced with the most drastic and far-reaching of all revolutionary 'leaps': one indeed unique and decisive in its effects. That 'leap' from the 'kingdom of necessity' to the 'kingdom of freedom' of which Engels once wrote: that 'leap' from human immaturity to maturity which marks the final coming of age of our race.

It is now evident that this most colossal epoch-making advance in all history since the simian brethren of Pithecanthropus came down from the trees and became men, can only be achieved by the agency of revolution. The walls of the capitalist

1 We do not, of course, forget that all progress is relative. For example, the City of London represents a very advanced stage of human society, whilst the Esquimaux represent a very archaic stage, yet these primitive Arctic communists would be horrified at the 'morals' of the Stock Exchange — if indeed they could be brought to the point of comprehending them!

Jericho will not fall down of their own accord. Only one Aladdin's spell will bring them down, it consists of two words: world revolution!

The world revolution does not exclude national revolution any more than a profound definition excludes a superficial one: rather does it include it, as the greater includes the less. The coming world revolution will not happen out there in the geographical globe collectively known as the 'World', but rather in those individual countries, the separate annals of which make up, in the present stage of human development, the sum total of human history. By the term world revolution, the decisive term of the coming era, we necessarily imply the sum total of the national revolutions throughout that era now dawning as we write these lines.

Internationalism comes into being through nationalism: the two terms are supplementary, not contradictory. An English revolutionary, for example, by the very fact that he is such, takes his place in the ranks of the world revolution. It is precisely because England, along with the world, must plunge into the shadows of a new Dark Age if capitalist imperialism continues, that we have the precise guarantee both for England and also for the world of ultimate revolutionary victory.

For whatever pedants and pessimists may say, mankind will not commit suicide voluntarily and with his eyes open when there is a constructive alternative available: viz, international socialism — 'the economics of plenty'.

It is this fundamental antithesis that makes it ultimately certain that the contemporary reaction, whether fascist or imperialist, cannot possibly last for more than a few years. Why, even in the past civilisations of 'scarcity' when his own technical immaturity bound him to the age-long treadmill of poverty, yet, again and again, the masses have risen and have brought the ruling classes of the day to the verge of destruction before their own social immaturity brought them down. What the great Spartacus so nearly did in his premature day, that supreme act of social emancipation, the machine age will today enable the proletariat and its class allies to accomplish. Willy-nilly, and whether we like it or no, this is the age of the world revolution. I repeat: *our age is only significant when — and where — it is revolutionary*.

I have written my history of the 'English revolutionary tradition' for two main reasons. Firstly, to dispel the current mythology — compounded about equally of half-truths and bare-faced lying which has for so long passed muster as the authentic record of British history amongst the university historians and their hired (or voluntary) hacks.[2]

And in the second instance I have sought to acquaint the revolutionary workers of Britain with the mighty tradition to which they are the heirs, because, once again, an era of revolution approaches fast. The time is coming — we may hope, soon! — when new chapters will have to be added to the third part of this book — to the 'revolutionary tradition in England'!

Above, we have stated briefly why, in our opinion, an era of world revolution is now hard upon us. To these general reasons, which again it supplements but does not supersede, a local reason of decisive importance must be added. For it is hardly open to an intelligent observer of current world affairs to doubt that *the British Empire is on its last legs*. The modern Nineveh cemented with blood, and reared on corpses like its ancient prototype, is visibly tottering. Or, to vary the metaphor, the vast 'leaning tower' lurches towards its final fall amid a murmur of execration,

2 In an appendix at the end of this epilogue we return to the analysis of this Medusa's brew that has for the past century drugged the workers with its poisonous fumes.

presently swelling to an earth-shaking roar, from a hundred nations, long crushed beneath the iron heel of the modern Assyrian juggernaut.

For despite the final issue of the Second World War, yet already Adolf Hitler — the modern Attila, the modern 'Scourge of God' as it is now the fashion to style this former idol of British Toryism since he began to demand his 'living-space' at its expense! — has dealt a mortal blow to that joint stock company unlimited — the British Empire. Already, as Trotsky aptly phrased it: 'The cost of defending the [British] Empire is becoming greater than the profits derived from it: this is the sure road to bankruptcy.' Its proximate demise, our author adds, will *ipso facto* inaugurate a regime of colossal social upheaval, of gigantic class conflicts.

In this respect — whatever his general crimes and ultra-reactionary role — this modern 'Scourge of God' has, at least, prepared the way unknowingly for one general act of subsequent liberation.

We have already seen what this means. *Since Disraeli the British Empire and British capitalism are one and indivisible. One could not conceivably survive the other. The end of the British Empire means, swiftly and inevitably, the beginning of the British revolution.* The common exploiters of today will become the deadly enemies of tomorrow. The partnership in imperialist exploitation once dissolved, the ex-partners will hate each other as only ex-partners can! Everything conspires to indicate that the transition *back* from reformism to revolution will be even quicker than was that of the post-Chartist transition from revolution to reform, and will be of a violence that will be absolutely incredible. Surviving Liberals and Fabians will find themselves — reversing the process of the Chartists — marooned like prehistoric monsters upon an alien shore.

A centre without a circumference! A rentier without an income! A metropolis without an Empire! All these metaphors apply in general to post-imperialist Britain. However, historical analogy, to be effective, should be precise. Instead of dealing in general metaphors, let us choose a concrete illustration: instead of seeking to peer through the mists of the future, let us look at Spain. In the 'Decline and Fall' of the Spanish Empire, we have the nearest of all historical analogies to the present 'Decline and Fall' of the British Empire and to its revolutionary aftermath. There is to hand, south of the Pyrenees, a lucid and powerful mirror in which, without any aid from necromancy, and with full regard to historical materialism, the coming era in British history can be vividly delineated, conformably to that favourite axiom of Buonaparte which has it that 'history is the only true philosophy'.

The Spanish World Empire (1492 to 1898) was the first of the great colonial empires of modern times. To be sure, it was of this empire, and not originally of its British successor, that there was first coined that haughty phrase: 'The Empire upon which the Sun never sets.'[3] From East and West, spices, gold and silver poured into the barren semi-desert mediæval land, converting it into a short-lived El Dorado. From the Americas and from the East alike, a colossal stream of tribute flowed in. The formerly frugal Spanish people was converted into a gigantic nest of parasitic exploitation. From the grandees of Spain in their gorgeous renaissance palaces to the beggars who swarmed on the streets, a gigantic 'cooperative of exploitation' was formed: all paid for ultimately out of the treasures of the Incas, the ravished gold of

3 A Spaniard told Captain John Smith — the first coloniser of Virginia — that over his Sovereign's Empire 'the sun never set'. At that time (1580–1640), Spain also included the Portuguese Empire in the East.

Montezuma, the pitiless exploitation of the Indian peons (coolies) who sweated silver in the mines of the Potosí (Bolivia).

In time, however, the Spanish World Empire — due to a combination of political and economic causes into which I cannot here enter — fell into that prolonged state of decline and disintegration which Karl Marx himself has trenchantly summarised as 'an era of slow and inglorious decay'. The land of Renaissance millionaires insensibly changed into the land of starving beggars. In world politics, Spain became a pawn of her powerful neighbours England and France. From the time of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–13) onward, Spain became a cipher and her Empire henceforth existed only on sufferance. Finally (1808–98 — Napoleonic invasion to final loss of Cuba) it broke and crumbled away, thanks to war and revolution, to Bolívar and to the guns of the American war-fleet.[4]

Finally (1898 — Spanish–American War) the Empire had gone: the Spanish 'cooperative of exploitation' was dissolved. The various classes in Spanish society, now no longer united in their common exploitation of (American) Indian, Cuban and Filipino, were left face to face. A new era in Spanish history now dawned.

With the passing of the Spanish Empire, I repeat, a new era dawned. What kind of an era followed the dissolution of that collective exploitation carried on for a whole historic era by the Spanish nation, and in the interests of which its own *internal* class struggles were suspended for the duration of that entire epoch? We know only too well what kind of an era it was: an era of relentless class struggles, of sanguinary civil war alternating with ferocious repression, of, finally, the bloodiest and most brutal civil war perhaps in all history — 1936–39 — followed by a repression, compared to the merciless ferocity of which the much-trumpeted horrors of the Spanish Inquisition fade into absolute insignificance.[5]

To be sure, these last events are too near us to need any further description. It is crystal clear that the passing of the Spanish Empire, of the 'cooperative of exploitation' as I have styled it above, has led within Spain herself, now a metropolis without a periphery, to a carnage of blood, of fire, of terror, the like of which even the bloodstained history of our planet can but rarely have seen. For the Spanish oligarchy, now having no colonies left to exploit, *introduced colonial imperialism into Spain itself*. The Spanish people, which had conquered the Americas for its masters, now tasted what the civilised Indians of the Western hemisphere had tasted, from the days of Montezuma and Tupac-Amaru onwards. The countrymen of the Inca Atau-Hu-alpa can now enjoy a posthumous revenge! From the moment that it lost its empire to the moment of its future obliteration at the hands of the eventually victorious Spanish workers and peasants, the ruling class of Spain — and also the Church of the Borgias which originally (1493) pronounced its Divine Right to rule — and to exploit — the Americas, had only one future left: to treat the metropolitan masses themselves as Indians.

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4 Details of the incredible exploitation of the Americas by Spain can be found in Alexander Del Mar's classic *History of the Precious Metals* (George Bell, London, 1880) or in any standard history of the Spanish Conquest. For example, the average working life of an Indian miner of Potosí was about 18 months. Details of the internal decay of Spain herself can be found in TH Buckle's well-known work, *Civilisation in England* (Longmans Green, London, 1868), and in the writer's book, *The Papacy and Fascism* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1937).

5 Indeed, it is highly improbable that the Inquisition altogether, from Torquemada to its close (1472–1808) killed as many people in its *auto-da-fés* and its torture chambers as General Franco and his Hispano–Moorish 'White Guards' have killed in the last seven years (1939–46) *after* the Civil War had come to an end with the overthrow of the Republic.

It is this primary social relationship that constitutes present-day Spain, despite the temporary triumph of the reaction with foreign fascist aid, as almost the (potentially) most revolutionary country in the world. For there historic conditions make it absolutely inevitable that the class struggle shall be fought to a finish. The appropriate 'motto' of the present-day Spanish class war is that defiant slogan of the Spanish defenders of Saragossa against the French armies of Buonaparte: 'War to the Knife.'

For since an exploiting class cannot physically exterminate that class by the exploitation of which itself lives, only the 'liquidation' of the ruling class itself offers any final exit from the blind alley of merciless class conflict into which the downfall of her Empire has inexorably precipitated contemporary Spain. Such are 'The Ruins of Empires', such their ultimate Nemesis!

We have raised the tragic but highly instructive example of Spain not primarily on account of its historical interest, great as this is, but rather on account of its urgent practical instruction and peremptory warning. *For in the Spain of today we see the England of tomorrow*, at least in the general outlines of its broad historical position. *Post-imperialist Spain is today where post-imperialist Britain will be tomorrow.*

After what has been said above regarding the social structure of post-Beaconsfield England, it is unnecessary to elaborate the parallel further: all the fundamental phenomena are reproduced in the metropolitan centre of the British Empire that we have already noted south of the Pyrenees.

Indeed, the ultimate explosion, when it does eventually come, will be even fiercer than in Spain. For two reasons. Firstly, Britain is overcrowded. What will happen to the superfluous metropolitans when the world power of British capital has gone? The more so, since Britain, unlike Spain, has no agriculture, her aristocracy having traditionally preferred foxes to food! Secondly, the Spanish oligarchy never gave rise to a Disraeli nor systematically indoctrinated the Spanish masses with 'Tory democracy', with the belief that they were 'free' and the citizens of a free democracy.

What will happen when all this is suddenly withdrawn, *when the pampered metropolis itself becomes a colony, to be exploited as Ireland was exploited in the nineteenth century or as India and Kenya are exploited today? What will happen to the self-satisfied 'democrats' when they themselves become the coolies of the most ruthless of all ruling classes in history* — not even excepting the Spanish — of the class which killed Irish babies at birth, which hunted Red Indians with bloodhounds, which systematically cut off the right hands of the (Indian) weavers of Dacca in order to prevent them from under-selling British machine-made goods, which blew revolting Hindu patriots from the mouths of guns, and smeared those dying under the lash with sacred cow-fat so as to add the psychic fear of damnation to the physical horrors of dissolution under torture, which poisoned whole generations of Chinese with opium for its own profit, which tore the body of the Sudanese Mandi from his tomb, and, amputated of head and nails, flung it into the Nile — Churchill, present champion of 'human freedom', was one of those who accomplished this last infamy (1898) — which even today, thinks no more of flogging a Negro to death in Africa than of cracking an egg for breakfast.

What, we ask, will be the feelings of the pampered metropolitan democrats and trade unionists of yesterday, when they face this grisly tomorrow? For face it they certainly will as surely as tomorrow's sun will rise, when once the Empire has gone — and though prophecy is alien to our present scope, it does not at present look as if

we shall have long to wait for this last event to transpire. Ever since the Boer War (1899–1902), its last *aggressive* enterprise, British imperialism has been increasingly on the defensive — the sure sign of decadence and approaching downfall.

This, we repeat, this, and nothing else but this, is what awaits the British masses. When once Britain's World Empire has gone — *they will themselves become the coolies*. What else can possibly occur? Are we to suppose a miracle — the first of its kind in all history? Are we to suppose that a class of imperialist exploiters, having no coolies left, will not imitate the example of its class brothers in Spain, and *turn its metropolitans into coolies*? The Court and the City, not to mention the House of Lords and the Bench of Bishops, will still have to be kept somehow in 'the style to which they are accustomed' — and it is not a plebeian style either!

We repeat: this stage of things is coming, according to all present indications, soon. Confronted with such a situation what can, and will, the masses do? Evidently one of two things only, fight with a fury equal to their unprecedented situation, or go down, not only to a terroristic slavery without parallel in human annals, but to literal physical decimation — since a post-imperialist Britain could not conceivably support the population that had originally only come into existence because it sat on the back of the world. A non-agricultural Ireland burdened with the population of the former 'Workshop of the World', that will be post-imperialist Britain. Only a colossal euthanasia, a gigantic collective suicide, could overcome this gulf between past and present.

Faced with such a dire alternative, what will the masses do? The answer is simple, certain and unequivocal. They will fight, and with all the fury that the occasion demands. For it is only in the pessimistic fairy-tales of petty-bourgeois Jeremiahs that whole nations lie down quietly and die whilst an alternative exists. An era, consequently, of the fiercest conflict lies ahead: it is here and not in some vague Fabian Utopia that the real future of Britain lies. Reformism will disappear, (bourgeois) democracy will disappear, and the fight will be to the death. If beaten once, twice, thrice, the workers will revolt again: they will revolt as the Spanish workers have revolted again and again, if necessary, despite defeat after defeat. They will revolt because there will be nothing left for them to do but to revolt.

Once that ultimate position is reached — in England as in Spain — there is no question of alternatives. Revolution becomes a categorical imperative. History itself lays on the whip. *The post-imperialist history of Britain not merely may, but must, be an era of social revolution of unprecedented ferocity that can end only with one termination: the historic 'liquidation', final and irrevocable, of the British oligarchy and of British capitalism. It can only end in this way, in England as in Spain, because history — in the given milieu — supplies no other termination.* Once again we recall the dictum of Cecil Rhodes: 'The Empire is a question of bread.'

It may be assumed from its whole history that the British oligarchy will not peacefully quit the scenes of its pomp and power. No more than the Spanish oligarchy — its imperial predecessor — will it shrink from violence. The British bourgeoisie, that collective 'Jenghis Khan', has been reared on violence. Calvinism consecrated its violent youth and the early tradition of ruthlessness has come down to it from its earliest days. No one need be deceived by (proverbially) deceptive appearances or by its present smooth 'democratic' façade and soft talk at election times. When it senses its end on the historic horizon, all that cold pitilessness, all that shameless treachery that centuries of swindling and robbery on a world scale have converted into second nature, which it has used habitually against Indians,

Egyptians, Chinese and generally against 'the lesser breeds without the law', will then be turned with redoubled fury against its white coolies, the British workers themselves. We may add that it is not until her colonial 'Gauleiters' and her out-of-work Indian proconsuls and 'strong men' are returned to her shores that we may expect a real British 'fascism' directed by those immemorial experts in 'colonial fascism'.

As I have written elsewhere:

> The whole structure of British imperialism is a metropolitan one, and if the British Empire goes north, south, or most likely east, it will not be long before the ruling class goes west!
>
> It would be absurd to suppose that the British oligarchy, which has killed on a scale undreamed of by Jenghis Khan, will find any dearth of 'General Francos' when its zero hour approaches. The favourite sport of the English 'gentlemen' has always been killing — foxes in England, workers everywhere else.[6]

Will the last and greatest British revolution succeed in overcoming the cold fury of the British counter-revolution?

Ultimately, at least, it cannot fail to win out despite the furious resistance which will certainly be offered it by the former lords of the planet. It must win, not only because of its historically necessary character — though, to be sure, all the contemporary currents of history run today as strongly *against* the British oligarchy as a century ago they ran *with* it — but also because the workers have two overwhelming assets on their side. The ruling class itself, in its insatiable greed for profit, has industrialised the country so heavily that the workers represent a veritable Cadmus-crop of dragons' teeth springing up from the factory and mill to overwhelm their former exploiters! Furthermore, the collapse of the world power of British capital, by decimating and reducing to intolerable misery that vast class of petty-bourgeoisie (the so-called 'lower-middle' class), that traditional stronghold of reaction, will itself bring about that victorious combination of two revolutionary classes which the course of actual revolutionary history infallibly demonstrates to be the sure and precise formula for final victory.

Instead of the peasantry — sacrificed on the altar of that useless butchery of animals known as 'sports' — of those new-style gladiatorial games of the oligarchy — to be sure, it is still a far greater crime to *shoot* a fox than a proletarian! — we have a vast class, distinct at least in its own estimation from the workers: the 'middle class', doomed to a rapid and horrible destruction with the retrogressive collapse of the world power of British capital. Fascism, based on conquest, on expansion, can offer it nothing.[7] History itself — the leader of the revolution! — will force it to throw in its lot with the working class. The combination will be so overwhelming, that given, of course, a bold and scientific revolutionary leadership — and England, as we hope our record has shown, has no lack of precedents for such — the victory of the British social revolution is inevitable. Therewith history opens a new volume, human evolution advances on to a new and higher plane.

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6 FA Ridley, 'The Evolution of the British Oligarchy', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1939.

7 British fascism can only be a 'quisling' fascism, an anti-nationalism, the receiver in bankruptcy of British capital.

However, the actual British revolution still belongs to the future — and the future cannot correct our proofs! All that we can say now is that one era, an era of unprecedented reformism, is coming to an end, and that a new and entirely different era, an era which everything indicates will be one of revolution without parallel, is shortly due to succeed and to supersede it. For this reason, I have deemed it to be expedient and useful to the people of Britain to write this history of the 'revolutionary tradition in England', and to place before them this record: a record, which, however imperfect, will serve to remind them of the glorious tradition to which our race and class are heir. That same tradition which the historians of a socialist Britain, substituting historical science for the current official mythology, will hold up before the eyes of our descendants as the most glorious chapter in our entire history, one, at that, by no means lacking in glory.

Gigantic battles lie ahead, vast vistas unfold, a new world is in process of creation out of the crumbling ruins of the old. The English revolutionary tradition, emerging from the reformist mists, will assert itself once more in its glorious integrity. In such a supremely revolutionary hour without parallel in all recorded history, we recall the revolutions that have been in Britain; we herewith resolve to renew the record of a glorious past in a yet more glorious future.

We recall therewith the memory of the great revolutionary giants of our race, from John Ball and the Lollards to Thomas Paine and the Chartists. Great figures loom up from the forgotten past, mighty deeds renew their youth. The great revolutionary masters of England, long slandered and despised, once more come into their own as amongst the greatest names in the history of our race. We herewith dedicate ourselves to walk in their footsteps until final victory is won.

May we prove worthy of them.

Note on the Second Imperialist War and the Revolution: Writing as I was in the midst of a life-and-death imperialist struggle, it was not possible for me to be precise as to the actual milieu amid which the British social revolution will ultimately take place.

It is now obvious that the only future for imperialism lies in the sequence of colossal world wars, which, as far back as 1876, Michael Bakunin indicated as the final graveyard of capitalist civilisation: a warning later reiterated by Rosa Luxemburg.

As America has won this war and ushers in a brief era of the world domination of Wall Street, then the British workers, again in unity with the European workers, will fight for European socialism against the imperialist hegemony of Wall Street, plus its then British vassals — the 'City of London' and the British oligarchy. In this eventuality, the British Empire might continue on sufferance under the shadow of America just as that of Spain continued — in the eighteenth century — under the shadow of England and France.

Thus there arises a point of the very first importance, the British and the European revolutions are henceforth inseparable. Under the concrete conditions of our day, with the Empire once gone, a socialist Britain is inseparable from the 'Socialist United States of Europe'. We need hardly add how profound will be the mutual influence and interrelationship of the British and European revolutions.

The Channel will disappear, no longer will the history of a (socialist) Britain be merely the 'history of an island'.[8]

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8 See my pamphlet *Wall Street Versus Wilhelmstrasse: An Analysis of the Causes of the War and of its Probable Development* (ILP, London, 1941).

Appendix: On the Writing of English History From Mythology to Science: One of the most powerful levers of bourgeois ideology is to be found in its view of English and British history which it sedulously spreads amongst the ignorant masses with extraordinary persistency and skill. One of the most necessary features in a scientific British revolutionary movement is a scientific theory of British history in order to counteract the official 'history', which is merely a crafty system of apologetics for the historic rise, for the world role, and for the world robbery — practised for the past four centuries — by the British oligarchy in the successive phases of its expansion from the earliest days of mercantilist capitalism to the latest exploits of finance capital and imperialism.

To be sure, it is a misfortune of the first rank that British revolutionaries have hitherto neglected their own history in favour of that of other countries. For example, had the British Communist Party in its hey-day devoted the same amount of attention to the real history of Great Britain as it did to that of Russia, it would have been very much better occupied. It is no contradiction to internationalism to state that the eventual British revolution will take place in *Britain*. This and no other is the historic terrain the very peculiar outlines of which it behoves us to study before all else.

Speaking generally, we can state with substantial accuracy that the official British historians present a world view which can be expressed in these terms.

England has pursued, both at home and abroad, an age-long policy of political and social meliorism. Gradually — what British historians would do without this word we really do not know! — educating first the British people, then the British Empire in the direction of liberty, constitutionalism, Parliamentarism and social advancement. Firstly, the British people won 'liberty' for themselves at the time of the Civil War in the seventeenth century. Then, with 'The Mother of Parliaments' as the model, the British people — always 'the people'! — entered upon what was in effect an age-long crusade in order to spread 'British institutions' over the entire globe without sordid considerations of self or gain: the whole process culminating in 'The British Commonwealth of Nations' abroad — that long 'education for liberty' — and in a half-century of unexampled social reform and 'consideration of social welfare' at home.

With a few unavoidable 'blunders' and a few 'regrettable crimes' due to the inevitable shortcomings of 'human nature', such is British history: a serial story of social and political meliorism steadily expanding over the centuries: such, in substance, is the elaborate fairy tale that is virtually taken for granted in official 'history', is inculcated in a hundred subtle ways and through a thousand propaganda channels and has now penetrated the very bone and sinew, warp and woof of the British nation at large: and, very particularly, of the British workers, who usually lack both the time and the cultural facilities to trace to its source the reigning mythology.

We have no room here to go into the rival schools of British history. The dominant school is still the Whig-Liberal school of Lord Macaulay in the last century, and of his great-nephew Professor GM Trevelyan in this. But even the minority view, the chief protagonists of which were JA Froude in the last century and Hilaire Belloc in this, is rather reactionary than revolutionary and looks back to the pre-oligarchic England of the Middle Ages for its inspiration. This 'opposition' view is, so to speak, opposition from the wrong side — from the past rather than the future: it is in fact closely connected with the current neo-Catholic revival — hardly

a revolutionary tendency! There is virtually no Marxist school of British history, though some excellent monographs have been written on episodes in British history — chiefly by foreigners![9]

For a mythology it is, pure and simple. Not that we have, of course, any wish to deny the great qualities and achievements of the British people themselves. We hope we have made this clear enough in the course of the precedent narrative. Nor even have we any desire or ability to deny a species of political genius, of unrivalled cunning, and of matchless tenacity in the pursuit of an age-long strategy, to the British oligarchy itself. Far from it! The British ruling class, from that earliest of 'Machiavellians' Thomas Cromwell, down to the present day when all its vast arsenal of political ringcraft is being now brought into play to save its tottering world Empire, has proved itself to be more Machiavellian even than 'Old Nick' (Machiavelli) himself.

To be sure, the British ruling class is the ablest body of politicians in the modern world — we doubtfully except 'The Black Pope' and his disciples — viz, the Jesuit General and the famous 'Company'. We should not indeed greatly err if we said that the British oligarchy — Whig and Tory alike — combines in itself all the best political and all the worse moral qualities of the classical oligarchy of Rome and the classical plutocracy of Carthage. An Indian politician who attended the 'Round Table Conference' in London (1931) told me that in the presence of the British politicians he and his compatriots felt like children — 'Honest John Bull'.

Indeed, here as elsewhere, 'the proof of the pudding lies in the eating'. The fact that this roaring lion who has gone the round of the world 'seeking whom he may devour', has been able simultaneously to pass himself off as a 'sucking dove' — the very picture of innocence and benevolence in *Britain*, the ability of the British oligarchy itself to pass off its bare-faced mythology as the authentic record of British history itself in the eyes and brains of its deluded subjects, constitutes the very best evidence of its truly extraordinary political ability!

For, in actual *fact*, the real history of modern Britain and of the rise and culmination of the British Empire bears little enough resemblance to the current mythology outlined above. The actual growth of the world power of British capital bears, in actuality, about the same relationship to the myth, as, let us say, the actual Christian Church which Christ (or his impersonators) founded, bears to the coming 'Kingdom of Heaven' that disclosed itself to the glowing vision of that sublime mystic of the Galilean hills![10]

It will already, we think, be evident from the incidental references in the course of our narrative what have been the main features that have characterised modern British history. In the case of mediæval history, the distortions, whilst existing, are not so gross, as the capitalist class has no merely academic interest in times before it arose: to be sure, a love of truth for truth's sake has never been a bourgeois virtue!

The modern (post-Reformation) history of Britain has been, in essence — in what Aristotle would have styled its 'substance' — the history of two things. *Externally* the history of modern England has been, to repeat the well-known dictum of Jules Michelet — 'the history of an island'. Whilst *internally* the history of the British state has been the history of an oligarchy.

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9 See our bibliography.

10 See the apt observation of Alfred Loisy: 'Jesus expected the Kingdom of Heaven, but it was the Church which arrived.'

Its whole essential history arises from these two facts. In the first connection, *modern British history is the history of the world's supreme land-ramp*. With her money, Britain kept adjacent Europe permanently divided — the so-called doctrine of 'the balance of power' — playing on and fomenting the endemic divisions of Europe — whilst with her fleet she conquered the world. *A colossal trading concern combining commodities with cannon: that is the British Empire of actual history — that — and nothing else.* All the rest is merely eyewash and self-interested camouflage. For example, most of the 'benefits' which British imperialism has 'given' to its subject peoples are of the same kind as that 'magnificent railway system' in India, which the *Daily Mail* once cited as an example of the unrivalled 'beneficence' of the British Raj. Actually the British originally built railways in India solely because the lack of such rapid transport nearly proved fatal to them in the so-called 'Indian Mutiny'. That is, they 'benefited' India by continuing to exploit it!

As for the higher interests of humanity, compared to the gigantic hecatombs of human victims, enslaved races and obliterated tribes with which its foundations have been bloodily cemented, not even the most terrific 'Scourges of God', wholesale destroyers of their kind, an Attila, a Jenghis Khan, a Tamerlane, can even begin to enter a comparison in the statistics of slaughter with the cold, steady, methodical, merciless, age-long massacre, by means of which the obscure mediæval North Sea island transformed itself into the modern Empire upon which the 'sun never sets'.

And if this was so with regard to the more distant continents, its record with regard to adjacent Europe has been even worse. This has been shown above so often in the course of our record that we are excused from giving further examples. 'England is safe only as long as Europe is divided.' This axiomatic eighteenth-century maxim of a Whig Oligarch (Lord Carteret) has been the motto of Whitehall in its relations with the European Continent. It is no accident that British foreign policy has always been 'above party' — from William the Third to Ramsay MacDonald! From Elizabeth to Pitt — and later — it has been the cause of innumerable totally unnecessary wars. Anyone who tried to unite Europe has had Britain for his relentless foe. 'War to the knife against European unity' has been the unalterable watchword of British foreign policy since Elizabeth. '*England is a bad European*': this aphorism of Nietzsche is too mild. 'England's shadow over Europe' has been one long shadow of blood.

As a recent Italian writer has reminded us — rival imperialism, like rival Churches, can usually be relied upon to tell the truth about *each other!* The usual British technique has been to accuse the then dominant European power of seeking to establish an 'hegemony over the European Continent', or, as he trenchantly put it: 'When an English statesman utters the word "hegemony" throats are due to be cut on the European Continent.' He goes on to point out very aptly, that, by then blockading her European rival from the sea, Britain drives him to expand landwards — thereby creating the very hegemony that she has previously deprecated.[11]

Incidentally, we may usefully recall that the British overseas expansion is still very recent. As late as 1687 England was beaten in a war with — Siam! That very same year the Court historians of Aurungzebe (the Indian Great Mogul) regarded their master's war with the East India Company as simply too insignificant to be worth any record, though their annals of the year itself were voluminous and

11 See Carlo Scarfoglio, *England and the Continent* (Putnam, London, 1939), an excellent book apart from occasional lapses into Italian imperialist jargon — worth all the official English 'Histories of Foreign Policy' put together.

detailed! It is in fact only since the 'Seven Years War' (1756–63) that Great Britain can be accurately described as a genuine world power.

Four centuries of non-stop aggression. That is the *real* history of the British Empire. What a colossal irony that this satiated brigand-turned-churchwarden should now be waging war (ostensibly) 'against aggression'. For the British Empire to accuse anyone of *that* is surely a glaring example, if ever there was one, of a black sheep reproaching its piebald colleague on account of its *very* peculiar colour!

So much for that part of the mythology that deals with the Empire. As for the nature of Britain as an oligarchic state, we have had so many opportunities already for observing this that we need really hardly do more than barely allude to it again. We have had abundant occasion to note how, ever since the great land-ramp at the Reformation (1533–58) upon which the entire history of modern England is based and from which the British oligarchy itself derives, Britain has been ruled by a narrow caste, which, however much it may have evolved in its social structure and in its political technique, remains at least constant in its basic character as an oligarchy. To be sure, Britain is, in this fundamental political character, the modern counterpart of Carthage and Venice, respectively, the classical and mediæval oligarchies *par excellence*. *Before Disraeli, the British oligarchy regarded democracy as a Tragedy, whilst since his day they have staged it as a Comedy — as a puppet show, as 'bread and circuses' for the metropolis, to be paid for by the colonies.* Not much democracy there, even in the limited bourgeois sense of the word! *A metropolitan velvet glove for a colonial mailed fist* that is all that democracy is in the Metropolis itself: it is all that it ever can be in the imperialist age.[12]

In this connection I have written elsewhere:

> Politically the higher departments of Church and State, despite 'open' examinations, are still the virtual monopoly of the ruling class, as are its exclusive public schools — 'public' is about the one thing, incidentally, that these schools are not. They are in fact only 'public' in the same sense as the law, which a learned judge once assured us was 'open to all, the same as the Ritz Hotel'.
>
> If, despite the British Constitution, we would see what is the value of democracy in Britain, we have but to consider this very significant fact: undoubtedly the two most important and sensational decisions in postwar British history were the deposition of Edward the Eighth — the King in law represents the whole nation — and the Munich Agreement, yet in neither event were the representatives of the people ever consulted. A handful of 'nobles', plutocrats and their political and clerical hangers-on decided for the British people both who 'their' King should be, and whether they should have the honour of dying for a democracy which was thus shown to be conspicuous by its absence.[13]

In short, ever since the Reformation, the genesis of the modern (capitalist) era, England has been governed by a kind of triune oligarchy — 'a political — "trinity in unity"'. By successively the 'Venetial' (Whig) oligarchy of merchant capital (1688–1832), by the Liberal manufacturers, the lords of the industrial revolution (1832–74). From this last date, that of Disraeli's epoch-making imperialist ministry down to the

12 Today, over two-thirds of the national capital is held by two per cent of the population.

13 FA Ridley, 'The Evolution of the British Oligarchy', *Modern Quarterly*, Autumn 1939.

present day, by the financial oligarchy of the 'City of London', ruling through its political instruments, the Tory Party and an upper-class bureaucracy, and bribing the British workers with a share of its colonial spoils to become its junior partners, and as *junior* partners, '*plus Royaliste que le roi*' — more imperialist than the imperialist Tories themselves! — British 'democracy' was given from above; the masses never won it by their own efforts!

And *that* is the essence of the *internal* history of Great Britain when seen as it actually occurred![14]

I conclude by expressing the hope that the state of things described above will be but of short duration. Wanted urgently — a revolutionary school of scientific historians! We envy them: they have a vast and almost virgin field to explore! Very particularly do we envy the future Marxist historian who will paint for our successors that vast canvas which will present the stupendous panorama of 'The Decline and Fall' of the British Empire — the modern successor to that of classical Rome. What a colossal scope, enhanced by the subject's own Satanic grandeur!

In the meanwhile, if the present book can serve merely as a pointer towards the creation of such a scientific school of British revolutionary historians, it will, apart from any practical result, have abundantly justified itself.

Revolutionary practice and theory should go hand in hand in the construction of a true revolutionary movement.

The End

14 We have not space, unfortunately, to go into what we may term the 'superstructure' of the 'mythological interpretation' of British history. We can but barely glance at a few of its 'heroes', whom every 'right' — and, unhappily, 'left'! — thinking child is taught in official text-books to revere.

Of these we will merely choose a few at random, remarking that our great Elizabethan 'hero', Sir Francis Drake, was simply a pirate judged even by the none-too exacting-standards of his own day. The 'great Duke of Marlborough' was, successively and literally, a pimp who traded his sister's honour and his own for cash down, a traitor, an agent of a foreign power, and a wholesale swindler — it is true that, with all this, he really was a great General! 'Diamond' (Thomas) Pitt, the founder of the most powerful family in eighteenth-century England, was an East India merchant of such dubious reputation that even one of his own associates referred to him as 'little better than a pirate'. Yet his dynasty dominated Britain for half a century, led her to world power, and gave her two dictators — 1756–1806. In this connection we recall the classic defence of Clive, the founder of British power in India, when impeached for corruption before the House of Lords: 'His Lordship [Clive] replied by, in general, admitting the truth of the charge against him, but he added that, when he saw what others took and when he thought what he could have taken, he stood astonished at his own moderation!' The verdict? 'Robert, Lord Clive, hath rendered great and meritorious services to his country!' (Compare the remark of Sheridan at the impeachment of Warren Hastings: 'The East India Company garnished, collected and carefully sought out all that the locusts had rejected.') An epitome of imperialism!

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NB — In the compilation of this work, I have, of course, consulted the leading historians, both English and foreign, including the *Dictionary of National Biography*, making all necessary allowance for their reactionary bias.