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*The Age of Peel or "Why did
Chartism fail and the Anti-Corn Law
League succeed?"*

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

In 1840, Great Britain suffered from severe political, social, and economic ills. The middle-class Anti-Corn Law League and the working-class Chartist movement challenged the political supremacy of the landed upper classes. An air of fierce class competition pervaded society. The economy was wracked by severe and prolonged recessions and depressions.

By 1850, many of the political, social, and economic tensions present in 1840 had eased. The landed upper classes shared with the middle classes at least part of their Parliamentary power, and the working-class Chartists demanded political rights with less vehemence. Social division, while undeniably prevalent, did not spark the same intense mutual class hatred found in 1840. A new and seemingly limitless prosperity coursed through the economy.

Many forces contributed to the contrasts in Britain between 1840 and 1850. Through his sweeping economic reforms while Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel established the base of a growing national prosperity. The Anti-Corn Law League, though it agitated on a platform of economic reform, produced significant changes in the political

order. By their persistent though unsuccessful political agitation, the Chartists alerted the country to a pressing need for social reforms. Those social improvements demanded but not acted upon by the Chartists advanced through the efforts of upper-class philanthropists and government bureaucrats.

The Corn Laws were a major obstacle to reform. They were the hallmark of the landed upper classes, guaranteeing the existence of the traditional political, social and economic order. Protection, or the Corn Laws, prevented political reform, stifled the progress of the industrial system, and, by preventing economic prosperity, insured the continued degradation of the working classes. The void left after the repeal of the Corn Laws insured the establishment of extensive political, social, and economic changes.

Peel's Ministerial policies modernized British government. Before his Ministry, Parliament had been the preserve of private interests. Peel weakened landlord control of government through his political and financial reforms. By discouraging private interest in Parliament and stressing the common weal, Peel made British government responsive to changing social conditions.

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Chapter I

PEEL AND THE CORN LAWS

In British history, the decade from 1840 to 1850 is sometimes referred to as the Age of Peel. During these years, Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850) placed his distinctive political mark on British government and administration. As Prime Minister from 1841 to 1846, Peel introduced effective political and financial innovations that helped to determine the future of the country. He created a new Conservative party out of the remnants of the old Tory party. He updated and streamlined the government revenue system. He curbed the inflationary potential of customary banking practices. And he ultimately eliminated the protectionist economic system, ensuring Britain's unfettered growth as a manufacturing power.

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ideal, Peel improved the economic and social condition of most of the British people. Because of the practices he initiated, government became responsible to an ever-widening body of Britons. Later events bore out the correctness of many of Peel's ideas. His reforms were well suited to the age in which he lived.

Though he may have been instrumental in creating the political basis of the modern British state, Peel was certainly not prescient. He had a vague idea of what his political and financial innovations might lead to. But he was not always certain which direction his reforms should take. In the case of economic theory, Peel held to protectionism until he realized that it was no longer tenable and then gave his firm support to its direct opposite, free trade.

Peel's conversion to free trade was a shocking and pivotal event in British history. It was as unexpected as it was influential. Peel's political power rested on his adherence to the protectionist system. His very party was rooted in this traditional economic ideal. Peel's about-face on the protectionist question ruined his political career, but it enhanced his reputation among the British populace. It shattered the traditional organization of British government but set the

foundations for a fairer political, social, and economic future.

Because Peel was the head of the Conservative party, he became Prime Minister in 1841. He had led the Conservatives in defeating the Whig government of Lord Melbourne at the general election. His party now had a majority in Parliament. The Queen was obliged to invite Peel, as the recognized leader of the victorious party, to become her first minister.

As long as Peel retained strong support and exercised strong leadership, he would remain as Prime Minister. He could only lose his position upon the passing of a Parliamentary vote of no-confidence, the loss of his party at a general election, or the loss of party support. The Queen would be little justified in asking Peel to step down, without citing any of the above reasons.

Peel became the leader of his party after much personal effort and political experience. He had worked his way up through the political ranks. From 1812 to 1818, Peel held the difficult and unenviable post of Chief Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. As Secretary, he personified, to the Irish, the odious presence of England in Ireland. From 1822 to 1827 and

from 1828 to 1830, Peel held the responsible position of Home Secretary. Here, he gained much experience in civil administration and instituted Britain's first national police force.

While Home Secretary, Peel became embroiled in the controversial Catholic question. In 1829, Peel and the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) pressed the Catholic Relief Bill through Parliament. With the passage of the Bill, a measure of Catholic emancipation came to Ireland. Parliament recognized the Irish Roman Catholic Church, and Irish Catholics could henceforth become Members of Parliament. Peel's bitter experiences as Irish Secretary convinced him of a national need for the reduction of religious and political tension in Ireland.

It was unheard of that Peel, a young and promising Tory, should advocate Catholic relief. He was a rising figure in a party determined to defend the traditional English constitution and the established Anglican Church, and to resist liberal reform measures. Peel aroused the ire of many Tories, making them doubt his political and ethical consistency. Peel later claimed that he risked his political career for the sake of a principle which "was wholly at variance with that which the regard for my own personal interests or private feelings would have

dictated."¹

Peel's advocacy of Catholic emancipation did not destroy his political career. His position within the Tory party remained strong. When the Whig Ministry of Lord Melbourne (1779-1848) ended in 1834, the King called for a Tory Prime Minister. The Duke of Wellington advised the King that Peel was best suited for the position. Peel's first Ministry had little prospect for success or survival, based as it was upon a minority in the House of Commons. It lasted from late 1834 to early 1835, over a span of less than five months.

Though Peel's first Ministry may have ended in 1835, his strong leadership of the Tory party had only begun. He became the leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons. Peel, as Tory leader, organized an alternative government, opposed to the Whigs in power, to which the King could turn at any time. From 1835 to 1841, Peel's Shadow Ministry made plans for the day when the Tories would again come to power.

Peel reorganized the Tory party. He updated its political philosophy and strengthened its electoral base. His reforms converted the Tory party into an early version of the modern Conservative party. Peel retained the traditional core of Tory beliefs but adapted their

forms. Innovation strengthened the Tory hand from 1835 to 1841. When Peel's second Ministry began in 1841, his new Conservatives were able to legislate sweeping, effective programs.

A great confusion of parties existed after the Reform Bill of 1832. The Whigs, who pressed the bill through Parliament, fell from power in 1834. They returned after Peel's five-month Ministry. Up to the late 1830s neither the Whigs nor the Tories had clearly definable political aims. Nor were their philosophies easily separable. The Whigs disliked reform as much as the Tories but passed the Bill of 1832 out of a fear of doing otherwise. Both parties wished to maintain the traditional, unreformed political order. Peel intended to distinguish the Tories from the Whigs. Traditionally, Tories resisted change. But they did not resist change which they believed to be necessary and useful. Increasingly, it became apparent that the Whigs would resist any further alterations in the old political order. Peel wished to distinguish his Tories from this Whig recalcitrance and created forward-looking policies. In 1837, Peel stressed his aim of creating a Conservative party capable of "animating industry, encouraging production, rewarding toil, correcting what

is irregular, purifying what is stagnant or corrupt."² Many politicians have had intentions like Peel's but have failed to carry them out. Peel successfully converted his theories into reality. He capitalized on the novel political conditions created by the Reform Bill of 1832. The Bill added 217,000 voters to an electorate of 435,000. It increased the number of small landholders who could vote and created a more proportional representation of counties and cities. Further, the Bill required that voters be registered. Peel based his new party organization on registered voters. Tory leaders would still create policies, but they would now do so with an ear to the wishes of the electors. They had to make their policies attractive to voters, not simply to themselves, if they wished to enjoy political power. Unlike past Tory policies, Peel's innovations created a definite direction and a solidity unprecedented in Tory history.³ In 1838, Peel wrote that

there is a perfectly new element of political power - namely the registration of votes ... That party is the strongest in point of fact which has the existing registration in its favour ... The registration will govern the disposal of offices, and determine the policy of party attacks.⁴

By 1841, the Tory party had become the Conservative party. Yet it still held traditional, conservative beliefs. Conservatives and their supporters saw the party as the defender of economic protection. Protectionism played a major role in maintaining the traditional social and economic order of Britain. Any tampering with protection, held the Conservatives, would be fatal to the British nation. Other, similar views typified Conservatives. Most Conservatives agreed in their advocacy of an established Anglican Church, British rule in Ireland, and resistance to further political reforms. Their party was a conservative party, and their attitude toward protection best represented their views. Sir Robert Peel's power, and the very unity of the Conservative party, rested upon protectionism. Supporters of protection made up the bulk of Peel's party; they were the indispensable weight of Peel's majority.⁵ In the general election of 1841, Peel won an overwhelming victory. He was elected by landowners and tenant farmers. They thought that Peel would never betray them, that he would never disown protection. Peel was a sensible man, they reasoned, and would never destroy a brilliant career by betraying his strongest supporters.

Economic protection was typical of British government policy for centuries past. It was applied to all goods, whether manufactured or agricultural. Protection shielded English producers from foreign competition. It was believed that national interests were best served by reserving the domestic market for native producers. Protectionist theory had been applied in various ways throughout the two centuries preceding the Age of Peel. By 1841, protection was the hallmark of the traditional, landed upper class, and the bane of the rising, manufacturing middle classes and the suffering, laboring lower classes. Agricultural protection took the form of restrictive or prohibitive tariffs called Corn Laws. These tariffs, or duties, were extremely high and thereby prevented the import of foreign grains below a certain restrictive or prohibitive price. High tariffs discouraged foreign producers and prevented them from competing in the British domestic market. Grain could be produced cheaply outside of Britain, but, upon importation, cheap grain became highly expensive grain. Foreign producers could not afford to pay the duties required to maintain artificially high grain prices within Britain. The Corn Laws, or agricultural laws in

protection, served to discourage foreign competition and allowed domestic producers, landlords and tenant farmers, to charge what prices they pleased for their grain.

In theory, protection benefited the whole country. Landlords and their tenant farmers reasoned that when they profited, Britain profited. Advantages accruing to them would, naturally, percolate down to the middle and working classes. In protecting domestic producers from foreign competition, tariff barriers strengthened the nation. Artificially high prices, created by the Corn Laws, encouraged domestic producers to become more efficient, produce more grain, and capture a wider share of the guaranteed, profitable food market.

The agricultural interest was not wholly munificent, even in its economic theory. Protection was especially valuable to the landed upper classes. The Corn Laws guaranteed their incomes. As long as protection maintained artificially high prices, landlords and tenant farmers could obtain artificially high incomes. They could afford to pay high food prices; they did not concern themselves with how the middle and working classes managed to pay these same high prices.

The very fabric of the traditional social order relied on protection in general, and the Corn Laws in

particular. High aristocratic incomes maintained upper-class control of politics. Economic power meant political power. Agricultural protection was the ace in the hand of the upper classes. Without protection, without legal force backing private interests, the landed aristocracy would lose the political, social, and economic pre-eminence it had held for centuries.

By 1841, protectionism as a theory was becoming increasingly untenable. In preceding years, protective tariffs, especially those for agriculture, served a clearly useful purpose. Yet the upper classes had always been the obvious beneficiaries of protection. Doubts gradually spread as to the salutary effect of tariffs on the middle and working classes. The middle class Anti-Corn Law League and many members of the working-class Chartist movement attacked the established scheme of duties, and the Corn Laws in particular, as their bitterest enemy.

In practice, by 1841, protection benefited no class as extensively as it had done previously. Yet there were no clearly viable, proven alternatives to protection as a national economic system. However, it had become obvious that protection did not play the same economic role that it once had. Instead of increasing domestic

productivity, the Corn Laws encouraged laxity in agricultural production. Landlords were not inclined to put effort into their product when they had a guaranteed market no matter what the quality or price of the goods. Protection increased a bitter sense of class rivalry by demarcating those who would profit and those who would lose from high prices. By clinging to protection in the face of rising general obloquy, the upper classes made their traditional pre-eminence ever more precarious.

Protection characterized many aspects of government economic policy. It applied to all sorts of goods and services, not simply agricultural products. At the beginning of Sir Robert Peel's second Ministry, in 1841, the entire general duty scheme had been called into question. Critics, both outside and inside government, blamed many of the nation's economic ills on the protectionist system. They charged that protection was an unhealthy check on natural, national economic advances, that it brought the unfair class system into economics, and that it would ultimately drive the nation to civil strife. Peel entered his second Ministry, sworn to uphold the Corn Laws, which were the heart of the notorious protectionist system.

In 1841, government finances were in a sorry state.

Whig Ministries in the previous decade had burdened the nation with an enormous debt. For the years 1837 to 1842, the Whig deficit amounted to £7,500,000. In theory, revenues from protection and indirect taxes should have prevented such a deficit. Obviously, they did not do so. The Whigs attempted to eliminate the debt by other means, turning to loans, increased indirect taxes, higher duties, and higher postal rates. These panaceas did not work. They slowed commerce and created only a negligible amount of additional revenue.

Peel intended to reform the government's financial system. Thereby, he believed, the country's economic prosperity would increase. There were two primary steps in Peel's reform plans. First, the revenue scheme had to be systematized. Second, inflation, due to the excessive growth of paper currency, had to be curbed. Finances could be improved, but only if an extensive reform program was instituted. Peel abandoned the hesitant, piecemeal financial reform policies pursued by the Whigs.

Economic reform had to take account of existing interests, Peel realized. He considered the general protectionist system to be sound. In questioning certain aspects of protection, Peel had no objection to the Corn

Laws. He recognized their central role in the maintenance of the existing social order, and he believed that they served a necessary economic function. Whatever the degree of his reforms, Peel's economic policy would remain protectionist. Of this, he assured both himself and his supporters by supporting the Corn Laws.

From the start of his second Ministry, Peel emphasized his lack of partisanship. He realized that the Corn Laws were the bulwark of the landed upper classes, but he did not support them primarily because of this. Peel claimed that if he became convinced that the Corn Laws must be eliminated, he would not resist their repeal. He would not allow personal or party considerations to deter him from acting on what he believed was a right principle. Peel declared that he would administer in a manner becoming a responsible Prime Minister.

Peel wished to administer the country's business according to his own discretion. Just as he would not allow personal biases to interfere with public policy, he expected those in his Cabinet, his party, and in his general body of supporters to forego the indulgence of lobbying him. Peel would not be cajoled or coerced into surrendering his political and administrative

independence. Peel received the free hand that he desired and was thereby enabled to pursue his financial reforms. In exercising his discretion, Peel did not challenge the idea of protection. Joseph Hume (1777-1855),

Peel approved of protection as an economic principle but did not agree with its contemporary application. Duties should be an important part of revenue, but they must not stifle trade. By 1841, protective tariffs, by their multiplicity and prohibitive rates, hindered commerce. Reduced consumption meant reduced revenues. Peel meant to use his Ministerial power to remedy this unhealthy situation and used revolutionary, unprecedented means to do so.

Prior to Peel's second Ministry, many in government questioned the role of protection. These critics, particularly members of the Board of Trade, advocated free trade.⁶ They claimed that the nation's schedule of duties could not rationally stand for both protection and revenue. By restricting imports, tariffs thereby restricted revenue. The relationship between protection and revenues had to be clarified. If the two were to be reconciled, the schedule of duties must be updated and systematized. Were this to be done, protection would serve vulnerable, not vested, interests.

The findings of the Select Committee on Import Duties presaged Peel's revenue reforms. It presented its report in 1840, one year before Peel entered office for the second time. Its chairman, Joseph Hume (1777-1855), was a free trader. His ideas permeated the findings. The report declared that protection served private interests to the detriment of revenues. It was this public exercise of private power that was damaging Britain's foreign trade and causing unnecessary economic privations. The report suggested that the number and level of tariffs be reduced. Increased trade would bring increased revenues in spite of a reduction in duties. Therefore, the committee recommended that

as speedily as possible the whole system of differential duties and of all restrictions should be reconsidered, and that a change therein be effected in such a manner that existing interests may suffer as little as possible in the transition to a more liberal and equitable state of things.

Lord Melbourne's Government did not have a chance to apply the Hume Committee's recommendations, for it fell in August 1841. Sir Robert Peel, as Prime Minister, did apply them, but in a slightly different spirit. He agreed with the committee's conclusions but not its assumptions. Protection must indeed be reformed, but not

as a prelude to complete free trade. The customary protectionist scheme was correct, but it had been debased. Peel made these basic ideas the foundation of his revenue reform policies. As we have seen, Peel claimed and received a free hand to put his policies into practice.

The first and greatest state of Peel's Ministerial economic policies came on 11 March 1842. On this Friday, Peel introduced a sweeping revenue reform scheme. He pointed to the massive budget deficit his Whig predecessors had left him with and declared that it had to be eliminated. Improvements in the revenue schedule could bring a return to a balanced budget or a surplus. But duty revenues and indirect taxes alone could no longer assure a healthy budget. These important sources of finance must be augmented. Peel's solution, when he finally presented it, created a great stir.

Before presenting the centerpiece to his budgetary remedies, Peel discarded customary deficit solutions. He would not turn to such Whiggish policies as loans, increased indirect taxes or duties, or higher postal rates. In the short run, these methods did little to alleviate budgetary problems. In the long run, they actually harmed the nation. In accepting loans, the

government solved its current difficulties but burdened future governments with the inescapable weight of debt. Increased indirect taxes or duties, while bringing a slight increase in revenue, would slow the growth of commerce. Similarly, were postal rates raised, fewer people would have access to the post. Peel refused to inconvenience the British people by vitiating policies that were meant to serve them. Government should be a benefit, not a burden.

Peel believed that increased commerce would bring increased revenues to the state. Tariffs had to be reduced to spur consumption. With cheaper prices, more goods could be bought. Each item would carry a smaller impost, but the increased number consumed or imported would produce higher revenues. Increments of revenue might be smaller, but their unitary value would be greater. Peel's theory was an alternative to the demonstrably incorrect existing revenue system which failed to prevent a massive budget deficit from developing.

In 1842, there were 1,200 separate items of imports subject to tariffs. Peel reduced or eliminated the duties on 750 classes of imports. He weeded out prohibitive duties, reduced duties on raw materials for manufacture, and relaxed duties on partly or wholly

manufactured imports. His goal in doing so was the stimulation of commerce, not revenue. In maintaining 450 duties in their existing form, Peel saw three advantages. First, reliable and reasonable sources of revenue would remain after intelligent changes were made. Second, interests dependent upon the maintenance of these duties would not be harmed. Here, Peel recognized and submitted to the pre-eminence of the landed interest and the Corn Laws. Third, delicate, pre-existing commercial negotiations would not be disturbed by his reforms.

Theoretically, revenues from each remaining tariff class would be higher than formerly. Still, the quantity of reductions in dutiable items lessened the overall revenue from protection. Clearly, the budget could not be balanced by a scheme that weakened the tariff system, a mainstay of revenues. Peel's solution to this conundrum set English government on the road to economic modernity.

Peel imposed Britain's first peace-time income tax. This tax was to offset any revenue losses resulting from reductions in the tariff system and was to actually create a budget surplus. It would insure revenues while the new duty scheme settled into its functions. Increased consumption resulting from a relaxation of

protection would be slow in developing. Revenue from the improved duties would appear gradually and not in the immediate future. Peel's income tax was a form of insurance; should his tariff reforms fail, income tax revenues would maintain the budget until protection could be fully reimposed. But were his tariff reforms successful, the income tax and protection would work as partners in the new revenue system.

Peel's income tax applied to both landowners and manufacturers. Any income above £150 per year was subject to a nominal tax. This tax stood at the low rate of 3 percent, or seven pence in the pound. Because it was a peace-time income tax, it was more liberal than war-time income taxes. Under the 1806 tax, all incomes above £60 were taxable. Peel had to make his unprecedented, peace-time tax more palatable and therefore raised the taxable income rate to £150.

The income tax was to be the main contributor to a revived budget. It was augmented by revenues from stamp taxes, spirit duties, and coal export duties. By Peel's calculations, these new imposts would create a revenue of £4,380,000 for the fiscal year 1842-1843. This revenue would offset a deficit of £2,570,000 for the year, and thereby create a budget surplus of £1,810,000. It was

this projected surplus which encouraged Peel to proceed with his revenue reforms. Without his income tax, Peel could not have experimented with the system of protection.

Peel's revenue reforms and income tax did not threaten agricultural protection. By clarifying its role and systematizing its functions, Peel emphasized the central position held by protection in economic policy. He attempted to integrate it more fully into the revenue system, even creating different levels of protection. After 1842, where protective duties remained, colonial produce would be subject to tariffs lower than those applicable to wholly foreign goods. For Peel, protection served a vital purpose in securing British economic interests before those of foreign producers. In reforming protection, Peel tried to insure its survival. In doing so, he satisfied both himself and his supporters.

Parliament accepted Peel's revenue reforms and passed them into law. Peel's innovations slaked the thirst of many free traders. At last, their theories would be put into at least partial practice. They hoped that this reduction in duties would usher in an era of free trade, where no tariff barriers would exist

anywhere. Simultaneously, Peel satisfied the great body of protectionists: he had acted in a protectionist spirit, by reforming and not removing the duty scheme. The Corn Laws had remained inviolate. Both free traders and protectionists found promise in Peel's reforms. Parliament recognized this unlikely accord and gave Peel's innovations and corrections the force of law.

Two years passed before Peel initiated a second, major supplementary reform. During these two years, economic conditions in the country greatly improved. Peel had introduced his revenue reforms during the fierce depression of 1842. In 1843, the economy gradually revived. By 1844, Britain was prospering again. The effects of Peel's reforms began to spread through the country. Prosperity vindicated Peel's unprecedented tariff modifications and peace-time income tax. Free traders urged the complete elimination of protection, claiming that even greater fortune would come thereafter. Protectionists began to fear and resent the idea of further revenue reforms, realizing that their position would become even more tenuous.

With economic health re-established by 1844, Peel intended to secure its continued existence. He did not contemplate further duty alterations or tax increases.

Rather, Peel wished to rest the economy on a sound monetary platform. He wanted to curb the inflation attendant upon returning prosperity. Peel's next great financial measure involved his attempts to control this inflation.

On Monday, 6 May 1844, Peel introduced the Bank Charter Act to Parliament. His monetary reform had three principal sections, each of which had a lasting influence on British economic policy. First, he firmly established gold as the main standard of value. Second, he limited the number of bank note issues and outlets. Third, he reformed the Bank of England, dividing it into separate banking and issuing branches. All of these reforms limited the production of new money, insuring that the pound would have a stable value. Prosperity would stand on firm ground, safe from the shifting sands of widely fluctuating monetary values.

Peel believed that gold was the best standard of value. In doing so, he followed a long line of eminent economists. He defended the existing gold standard as a sound basis upon which to develop monetary reforms. It was the least of all commodities subject to changes in value. Because of this, Peel held that gold should be the basis of the majority of coin and note issues. Peel

specified that only £14,000,000 could be issued against securities held by the Bank of England or by the government.

Because of Peel's injunctions requiring relative parity between bullion and note issues, the number of issues and outlets had to be limited. Peel held that government had a right to control issues. He would not disturb the existing issue rights of country and private bankers. They had customarily held such rights. Peel wanted them to obey the direction of government by not issuing notes beyond the limits of their actual bullion holdings. He did not want them to have even this circumscribed power but had to bow to the weight of precedent. Peel wished to insure the gradual elimination through attrition of private banks holding issue rights; he declared that no new banks of issue could be created. As the number of such banks naturally dwindled, government would collect all issue rights into its own hands.

Peel overhauled the Bank of England, preparing it for the issuing powers that would increasingly devolve upon it. He divided it into separate banking and issuing branches, responsible only to the government. The banking branch would carry on its customary government

activities. The new issuing branch would now hold all government supplies of bullion, hold part of the government's supply of securities, issue coins and notes against its supply of bullion, and determine the amount of issues allowed to country and private banks.

Combined, Peel's tariff alterations and monetary innovations were part of a coherent economic reform system which materially increased national prosperity. There were to be no more serious depressions like those of 1838 and 1842. In spite of better economic conditions, social unrest still prevailed: the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League called for complete free trade and the working-class Chartists demanded political, social, and economic reforms. The landed upper classes, disturbed by the agitation of the middle and lower classes felt reassured by Peel's continued support of the Corn Laws. Prosperity slightly lessened these class differences but could not eliminate them.

Relative national economic prosperity and eased social tensions did not continue uninterrupted. In August 1845, agricultural difficulties appeared which threatened the improvements of the preceding three years. A blight appeared on crops in Kent, Essex, and South Wales. From England and Wales, the disease spread across

the Irish Sea to Ireland, where it attacked the potato crop.

By September 1845, the disease had gained a strong foothold in Ireland. It blighted potatoes in all stages of development. Many rotted in the ground. Other, seemingly healthy potatoes, upon opening, proved to be contaminated. Potatoes were the staple food of the majority of Irishmen. Their farms were devoted to the production of the root, and few were wealthy enough to find alternate food sources. As the pestilence spread, the potato supply dwindled, and famine set in. By November 1845, Ireland was on the verge of starvation.

The Irish had little prospect of survival through the winter of 1845-1846. Food could not be well supplied from England, Scotland, or Wales, for they too were suffering from the blight. These countries had no ready surplus which could be supplied to Ireland. Food in large amounts could be imported from abroad, but the Corn Laws restricted its entry into the British Isles. The impoverished Irish could not afford to pay the high prices caused by protection, even to stay alive.

Sir Robert Peel sought means to curb the disease and prevent famine, without resource to extraordinary measures. He dispatched two eminent scientists to find a

cure for the disease, but to no avail. By early November, nothing could repair the damage done to the Irish potato crop. The following year's crop would also be ruined. Peel now realized that he had to rely on foreign food sources. Northern Europe, particularly Holland, also suffered from the crop blight. He could turn to Spain, Portugal, or Southern France for potatoes, or to America for grain. In any case, by November 1845, Peel concluded that British ports had to be opened to imports of foreign food.

The Irish potato famine brought the necessity of the Corn Laws into question. Peel knew that, at the very least, the Corn Laws must be suspended. But, after their suspension, the Corn Laws might not easily be reimposed. Their character had been compromised by the role they played in keeping food out of a starving Ireland. Peel's revenue reforms had already brought the protectionist system under critical scrutiny. The Irish famine contrasted the distress caused by the protectionist Corn Laws and the prosperity produced by Peel's tariff reforms. Any attempt to reimpose the Corn Laws after their role in the Irish famine would be politically unsound. It would demonstrate landlord control of political power, exercised contrary to the needs of the

largely unrepresented British people.

Peel realized the controversy that would arise over the suspension or repeal of the Corn Laws. His own Conservative party would resent his betrayal of protectionism. Free traders would press for repeal, instead of suspension. The middle classes would fight against the upper and lower classes. The workers feared that repeal would lead to lower wages, while the aristocrats believed the fall of protection would mean the end of their order. Society would be thrown into a turmoil. Peel proceeded with caution, broaching the subject of repeal to a select few in the hope of preventing excessive strife.

Cabinet unity had to be achieved before any repeal measure could be seriously contemplated. The Cabinet, the guiding force of the Conservative party and the maker of Parliamentary policy, could not be divided on so important an issue. On 6 November 1845, the Cabinet flatly refused to contemplate suspension or repeal. Without Cabinet unity, Peel's Ministry could not continue and would certainly fall. Peel worked feverishly to unify his Cabinet. Finally, only Lord Stanley (1799-1869) and the Duke of Buccleuch resisted the idea of repeal. Because of this seemingly insuperable rift,

Peel's Government foundered and fell on 5 December 1845.

The Queen had no alternative but to turn to the leader of the Whig Opposition, Lord John Russell (1792-1878), as her new Prime Minister. On 22 November 1845, Russell had announced that he was in favor of total repeal. Russell wished to put an end to the protectionist system,

which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter divisions among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people.

Grand as Russell's plans were, he would never put them into practice. The Whigs were so divided upon the subject of repeal that Russell could not form a Ministry.

After an interregnum of 15 days, Peel returned to power on 20 December 1845. His old Ministers returned with him, save for Lord Stanley. The Duke of Buccleuch finally assented to repeal on 22 December. Thereafter, Peel's Cabinet was nominally unified. Privately, the Ministers might differ with Peel on the role of the Corn Laws, but publicly, they had to present a unified front opposed to the maintenance of protection. In the time remaining before the new session of Parliament Peel, in

Cabinet, drafted the particulars of the repeal measures he would pass.

When Parliament opened on 22 January 1846, Peel faced a divided and restive Parliament. The bulk of his own majority was now set against him. The protectionists, Conservative and otherwise, believed that Peel had betrayed a solemn trust. But Peel did not stand alone. In addition to his Cabinet, Peel could rely on the support of an unlikely alliance of free trade Conservatives, Whigs, and radicals. Only the free trade Conservatives were loyal to Peel. The Whigs supported him for two reasons. First, Russell had sworn his party to free trade. Second, they wanted Peel to divide the Conservatives irreparably so that the Whigs would be sure to obtain power. The Whigs would withdraw their support after repeal, and Peel would fall through the lack of a majority. Similarly, the radicals backed Peel in hopes of speedy repeal and intended to withdraw their support soon thereafter.

On 27 January 1846, Peel introduced the concluding phase of his sweeping economic reforms. It was an unexpected conclusion to those innovations which included the revenue reforms of 1842 and the Bank Charter Act of 1844. Prior to autumn 1845, Peel would not have

considered advocating complete free trade. The Irish potato famine forced him to extend those free trade principles radically which he had experimented with in 1843. He had orchestrated a shipment of American grain to Ireland before Parliament met but believed that famine could be averted only by total repeal.

Peel tried to make his repeal measures as little unpalatable as possible to agricultural protectionists. With difficulty, he attempted to press those demands which would result in a definite lessening of landed political, social, and economic supremacy. Peel claimed that all classes had types of protection. Aristocrats had the Corn Laws, while the manufacturers had industrial protection. All types of protection were equally bad. Further, it was the manufacturers who introduced the system of protection to England, the system which so muddled economic policy. Peel used the words of Adam Smith (1723-1790) to lend credence to his statements. He quoted that passage in the Wealth of Nations which states,

Country gentlemen and farmers, dispersed in different parts of the country, cannot so easily combine as merchants and manufacturers, who, being collected into towns, and accustomed to that exclusive corporation spirit which prevails in them, naturally endeavour to obtain,

against all their countrymen, the same exclusive privilege which they generally possess against the inhabitants of their respective towns. They accordingly seem to have been the original inventors of those restraints upon the importation of foreign goods, which secure to them the monopoly of the home-market. It was probably in imitation of them, and to put themselves upon a level with those who, they found, were disposed to oppress them, that the country gentlemen and farmers of Great Britain so far forgot the generosity which is natural to their station, as to demand the exclusive privilege of supplying their countrymen with corn ... They did not, perhaps, take time to consider, how much less their interest could be affected by the freedom of trade, than that of the people whose example they followed.

In advocating the elimination of protection, Peel stressed that it served neither agriculturists nor manufacturers. But it was clear, from the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League and the circumstances of famine in which the question sharply arose, that agricultural protection as embodied in the Corn Laws was the object of Peel's attack. Peel claimed that in calling for repeal he was merely culminating the changes he had put in motion in 1842. The prosperity that resulted, at least partially, from these reforms would advance after repeal. A clinging to protection of any sort would be irresponsible and impolitic.

Peel's repeal legislation contained two major reforms. First, the system of agricultural protection would be eliminated. With this, the assured incomes of landed aristocrats and tenant farmers would dissipate. Second, landed aristocrats would no longer hold their traditional responsibilities in the countryside. In the future, the government would supervise and finance many municipal and district functions. These two major reforms spelled an end to legally recognized upper-class supremacy, a tradition that was centuries-old.

Peel gingerly broached the topic of repeal to Parliament. He prefaced his remarks by further limiting protection on articles entering into manufacturing and into the production of crops. This done, he called for the eventual repeal of the Corn Laws. At present, Peel declared, they should only be relaxed. In the existing state of national emergency caused by famine, relaxation would be sufficient. Peel did not want to cause certain social upheaval by immediate repeal. Protection must be gently eased out of the economic system. Therefore, the Corn Laws would remain in effect, albeit in an ever-decreasing potency, up to February 1849. After this date, free trade must characterize economic policy. Logically, Peel realized that he could not repeal

the Corn Laws, which would lower upper-class incomes, without reducing the pecuniary responsibilities of the hereditary aristocracy. Peel transferred these burdens from the upper classes to his newly revived treasury. In the future, the government would finance land-improvement projects. Recipients of charity would no longer be sent to the parishes of their birth, as was the custom, but would be the charges of the centrally directed Poor Law Guardians of that place where they had most recently lived for a period of five years. Highways were to be maintained by a limited group of 600 highway authorities, instead of by 16,000 different local authorities. In all of these areas, and more, Peel enhanced central power at the expense of localized, aristocratic power. The British people would now look to London for services, and not to the local manor. radical supporters into a Free Trade. Between 27 January and 25 June 1846, Peel's repeal legislation provoked a continuous flow of ferocious debate. The protectionists bitterly resisted the surrender of the Corn Laws and railed at Peel as the vilest of traitors. The free traders, for their part, valiantly pressed their views against a shower of invective. Sir Robert Peel labored to maintain a tone of sobriety and purposefulness during the extensive debates

concerning such controversial legislation. He realized that there was little prospect of his Ministry surviving the repeal of the Corn Laws. His diverse free trade support would dissipate, and he would lose his fleeting majority. social and political repercussions outweighing any Peel did not care about his retention of power after repeal. He wished only for the end of protection, for the good of the nation. Peel realized that his credibility had been ruined by his about-face on the Corn Law issue. It would be impossible for him to ever lead a united Conservative party again, since he had split it into two irreconcilable factions. Further, he could not become a Whig leader, for his political orientation was Tory at heart. Richard Cobden (1804-1865), the great Anti-Corn Law Leaguer, urged Peel to unite his Conservative, Whig, and radical supporters into a Free Trade party. Peel refused the idea, declaring that a political party must be based upon steadfast principles, not upon ephemeral circumstances of unity.

Peel's bitterest opponents over repeal came from within his own Conservative party. In repudiating the old Tory credo of protection, Peel made himself vulnerable to attacks from erstwhile allies. Lord George Bentinck (1802-1848) and Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

led the Conservative-protectionist opposition to Peel's measures. They rested their platform on three supports. First, they maintained that Irish crisis or not, free trade was an incorrect economic policy. It would have unhealthy social and political repercussions outweighing any commercial advantage. Second, the protectionists charged that Peel acted incorrectly in not consulting his entire party before advocating repeal. Third, they claimed that Peel was a traitor to his party and its protectionist philosophy. Conservatives retained the old Tory distrust of democracy. Conservative protectionists feared that free trade would spell the end of privileged government. Protection was one of the last bulwarks against the "ultimate triumph of unrestrained democracy."¹⁰

Free trade, by destroying the security of upper-class incomes guaranteed through artificially high prices, would reduce aristocratic resistance to middle-class financial bids for political power. Economic strength led to political strength. The political, social and economic changes to be expected under a middle-class rule would not be favorable to the privileged classes. The protectionists were determined to maintain the existing economic, and therefore

political, balance of power by preserving the Corn Laws. Peel, in his memoirs, regretted the blindness of his

The Conservative-protectionists resented Peel's failure to consult them before initiating repeal legislation which could spell the end of the traditional economic, political, and social order. They believed that Peel took his momentous step lightly and failed to consider all of its ramifications. They did not consider why Peel purposely restricted his original repeal ideas to his Cabinet. He saw the need for a solid core of support that would unswervingly press repeal. If the entire Conservative party had known Peel's plans from the first, fractious agitation would have destroyed any opportunity for a swift end to the Irish crisis. As it happened, the five-month series of debates precluded an alacritous government response to Ireland's difficulties.

Peel's Conservative opponents charged him with gross betrayal. He had sworn to uphold the Corn Laws, and he had broken his promise. Peel's political credibility was persistently impugned. His opponents bitterly called him an opportunist of the shoddiest kind. They cited Peel's advocacy of Catholic emancipation in 1829 as a sign of his lack of integrity and wished that it could have

forewarned them of the Corn Law betrayal of 1846.

Peel, in his memoirs, regretted the blindness of his opponents. They had neglected to recall the discretionary powers in economic policy that they had allowed him in 1841. They had failed to consider that conditions would change, whereby a sober politician like Peel would have to alter his theories. Such a change of conditions had occurred twice in Peel's career, in 1829 over Ireland and in 1845 over the Corn Laws. In July 1847, recalling the invective of 1846, Peel wrote,

If, from the confidence which the agricultural interest had reposed in the Government, and the support they had freely given to it, that interest had a special claim upon me, I should have ill satisfied that claim by giving advice at a very critical period which might certainly have been more acceptable - which might have protected myself from the imputation of being inconsistent and unfaithful - but which in my heart and conscience I believed to be, as applicable to that time and those circumstances, unsound and dangerous.

In spite of strong protectionist opposition, Peel's majority forced repeal through the House of Commons on 5 May 1846. The Duke of Wellington then pressed it through the House of Lords on 28 June 1846. However, the day of Peel's hardest-won victory was also the last of his Ministry. His protectionist opponents, led by Bentinck,

shattered his majority by capitalizing on divisions over a relatively minor piece of legislation.

The Irish Coercion Bill, initiated by Peel's Government, was meant to maintain civil order within Ireland. The Irish MPs, who formed part of Peel's repeal majority, refused to advocate coercion. They, along with a large number of Whigs who felt the Bill was poorly framed, therefore entered Bentick's camp. A new alliance of protectionists, Whigs, and radicals defeated Peel's Government by a majority of 73. No Ministry can stand after a defeat on any measure, and Peel accordingly resigned on 29 June 1846.

Peel did not live to see the changes he had set in motion, for he died on 2 July 1850. In Parliament, he was remembered with a tinge of bitterness. In the country, he was well thought of. Most Britons thanked him for the abundance and cheapness of provisions which appeared after the repeal of the Corn Laws. He had brought free trade into economic policy, where it boosted national prosperity for many decades.

Sir Robert Peel's second Ministry was pivotal in English history. There was a stark contrast in national conditions between the opening of Peel's Ministry and its close. In 1841, there was a huge budget deficit, rampant

inflation, and a severe depression. In 1846, there was a budget surplus, a stable, expanding economy, and general prosperity. This improvement was not due to the repeal of the Corn Laws; that blessing would manifest itself only in the 1850s. It owed its existence at least partially to Peels early economic reforms as Prime Minister and partly to general European economic revival from the Napoleonic Wars.

Peel was instrumental in reviving his country. His far-seeing policies replaced the piecemeal concessions to necessity of preceding Governments. He established a foundation of economic security upon which future Governments could build a centralized state. As we shall see, it was Peel's Ministry which ultimately put Anti-Corn Law League theories into practice, eased the economic privations which produced working-class Chartism, and oversaw the establishment of humanitarian factory and health legislation. Peel contributed much to the development of the modern British state.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹Justin McCarthy, Sir Robert Peel (London, 1906) p. 67.

²Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics 1832-52 (Oxford, 1965) p. 144.

³Ibid., p. 143.

⁴A.H. Hanson and Malcolm Walles, Governing Britain (Glasgow, 1975), p. 44.

⁵Gash, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement 1783-1867 (London, 1960), p. 322.

⁷Joseph Hume, Esq., Report From the Select Committee on Import Duties (Shannon, 1970), p. vi.

⁸Sir Robert Peel, Memoirs (London, 1857), volume II, p. 178.

⁹Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations (Glasgow, 1805), pp. 251f.

¹⁰Peel, op. cit., p. 203.

¹¹Ibid., p. 106.

Parliament had long been the preserve of landed

Chapter II

COBDEN AND THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE

Throughout Sir Robert Peel's second Ministry, which lasted from 1841 to 1846, the Anti-Corn Law League exercised increasing political pressure on the government. In doing so, it represented developing forces of social and political change in Britain. Led by Richard Cobden (1804-1865), the League advocated complete free trade. This singular goal was to be achieved by the complete repeal of the protectionist system, as represented by the Corn Laws.

In calling for repeal of the Corn Laws, the Anti-Corn Law League spoke for the great body of the manufacturing middle classes. Though it claimed to agitate for the entire British nation, the League was first and foremost a middle-class political movement. It represented the new economic power held by the middle classes after the Industrial Revolution and demanded political power and social influence commensurate with that financial strength. Repeal of the Corn Laws would demonstrate Parliamentary recognition of the new economic and political position of the middle classes.

Parliament had long been the preserve of landed

aristocracy. The protectionist system, especially the Corn Laws, guaranteed their high incomes, and therefore secured for them economic and political hegemony in Britain. Should Parliament repeal the Corn Laws, upper-class economic strength, and therefore political power, would begin to slip away. The Anti-Corn Law League was determined that that economic and political power should fall into the hands of the middle classes where it seemed to belong.

The League had both negative and positive arguments. It presented its views throughout England, using lectures and circulars, and within Parliament itself, using Members of Parliament elected on the repeal platform. The League claimed that protection was destroying the nation by stifling its economy, corrupting its political system, and sharpening its awareness of class divisions. Free trade could reverse these unhealthy trends and guarantee prosperity for Britain and peace for the world. Improvement would come slowly, but under free trade it would certainly come.

Richard Cobden was not the Anti-Corn Law League's only leader, but he was certainly its greatest and most outstanding spokesman. In setting out part of Cobden's life and career, we will also follow the history of the

Anti-Corn Law League from its modest beginnings to its spectacular success. Cobden was intimately connected with the League from its inception to its dissolution.

the Richard Cobden was born in Sussex on 3 June 1804.

He received but slight education as a child, and whatever he learned came through independent effort. Before he was thirty, Cobden was conversant with and an advocate of those free trade theories of political economy made famous by Adam Smith. Like Smith, Cobden maintained that commercial freedom from protection would guarantee national prosperity and international peace.

In 1830, Cobden settled down from his life as a commercial traveller and established a calico print works. He made his home in Manchester, the industrial capital of Lancashire. Here Cobden grew wealthy and like began to concern himself with Manchester politics. In the general election of 1837, Cobden failed to be elected as MP for the nearby constituency of Stockport. As a result, he confined himself to local politics and continued to advocate the incorporation of Manchester. In 1838 Manchester received its charter of incorporation. Previously, Manchester, a populous city, had no official recognition and no Parliamentary representation.

Cobden formed close connections with Manchester's

city government. He became its alderman, or vice-mayor, and worked to improve Manchester administration. Cobden was determined to make the city managers responsible to the rate-payers and prevent them from using public monies for private profit. In this, we see a foreshadowing of his League efforts to eliminate the exercise of public authority to gain private ends. In both cases, private interest had to give way before public welfare.

On 24 September 1838, a group of Manchester manufacturers founded an Anti-Corn Law Association. They were inspired to do so by the example of a similar Association founded in London in 1836. The London Association had failed to espouse its free trade beliefs effectively. The founders of the Manchester Association were more dogged in their support of free trade but, like the Londoners, they did not call for total Corn Law repeal. They demanded significant reductions in the level of the tariff barriers created by the Corn Laws. Agricultural protection, they claimed, stifled their productivity by limiting imports. It was this group which Cobden took in hand and transformed into a middle-class political movement.

Cobden saw in the Manchester Association an opportunity for a wide dispersion of free trade theories.

In December 1838, he took two steps toward converting the local association into a national league. First, he united the voice of Manchester city interests, the Chamber of Commerce, with the Association. Now, the Association would have the political backing of an industrial giant in dealing with county or central government representatives. Second, Cobden gave the Association a clear, unequivocal agitation platform. It would no longer call for partial modification of the Corn Laws but absolute repeal. Cobden's two steps insured that the Association would be no half-measure but a movement that would cause sweeping and lasting tariff reforms favorable to the middle classes.

In early 1839, Cobden completed the operation he had begun. He realized that other, similar Anti-Corn Law Associations had sprung up in England since 1836. He united them into a loose, national federation. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce became the supreme council of this federation. Cobden called for subscriptions to support the free trade work of the new, national organization in January 1839. By March of that year, £5,000 in subscriptions had been collected, and the Anti-Corn Law League was formed. It began with firm leadership, good organization, and generous financial

support.

All of the associations which federated to create the Anti-Corn Law League held certain, similar free trade beliefs. The League maintained that protection damaged the whole nation and might one day involve it in common ruin. There were four main principles behind the League's advocacy of free trade. Each concerned a particular level of British society, but combined they faced problems threatening all of England.

First, the Anti-Corn Law League contended that protection damaged the economic interests of the manufacturing middle classes. It did so through the Corn Laws, which insured high upper-class incomes through artificially high grain prices. The Corn Laws kept food prices high by keeping foreign grain out of the country. This allowed the upper classes to charge what prices they pleased in the domestic market. By restricting agricultural imports, the Corn Laws drove foreign governments to retaliate. They established import screens on British manufactures to compensate for English tariff barriers against their agricultural produce. Because of this, English manufacturing profits were not what they could be under a free trade system.

Further, the Corn Laws threatened the future

prosperity of the manufacturing middle classes. They encouraged the growth of foreign industry which might later compete with British manufacturers. Because the Corn Laws restricted foreign agricultural imports, foreigners could not exchange their chief domestic products for English manufactured goods. If they could not readily satisfy their manufacturing needs through English supply, foreigners reasoned, they would create domestic industries for themselves. Germany was the principal continental power to reason in this manner. The English manufacturers pointed accusingly at the Corn Laws as the origin of foreign industrial competition.

The second main principle of the Anti-Corn Law League concerned industrial laborers. Leaguers complained that manufacturing workers were unable to meet the artificially high food prices caused by the Corn Laws. Because employers did not make enough profits due to a Corn Law-stifled export trade, they were unable to pay wages sufficient for high grain prices. When the middle classes suffered, so did the workers.

Third, like their manufacturing counterparts, agricultural laborers could not afford to buy grain. Landlords and tenant farmers, in spite of their Corn Law-induced high incomes, refused to pay their workers

living wages. As we shall see later, the landed upper interests expected agricultural laborers to augment their paltry wages by turning to charity. Unfortunately, wages and charity combined were not usually sufficient for farm workers to buy food. The price of grain was still too high.

Fourth, the League maintained that protection endangered the very upper classes it was meant to serve. Landlords and their tenant farmers irresponsibly maintained the invidious Corn Laws, in the face of rising middle- and working-class discontent. In doing so, the upper classes were insuring their downfall through a potentially violent social revolution. The League intended to convince the upper classes that the Corn Laws had to be eliminated. The Anti-Corn Law League offered them the chance of peaceful renunciation of protection through legal processes, instead of bloody dispossession in an increasingly likely social upheaval.

The Anti-Corn Law League, a middle-class movement in origin and philosophy, also claimed to be a national movement. In the new industrial age, the middle classes were becoming the foremost social class. They provided capital, initiative, and direction to the developing English economy. Rightly, they believed that what

benefited them would also benefit the nation. The upper and working classes, however, refused to agree with the Anti-Corn Law League from its inception. This clash of views provided much of the tension in politics and society during the Age of Peel.

Richard Cobden superintended the formulation of the basic Anti-Corn Law League credo. In advocating free trade theory, Cobden maintained certain deeply held views which influenced his presentation of the case. He had moral arguments against protection and for free trade.

Cobden believed that the Corn Laws were not only economically unsound and unfair, but that they were also morally wrong. Protection served vested interests at the expense of the unrepresented. People suffered, starved, and died for the sake of high aristocratic incomes. The Corn Laws were the most glaring example of a corrupt economic system that hid behind a facade of Parliamentary legality.

For Cobden, free trade was a gospel. Throughout his League agitation, from 1839 to 1846, Cobden maintained that free trade had a Christian essence. Cobden gave a clear statement of this view late in his Anti-Corn Law League career, in January 1846, when he declared, "We advocate nothing but what is agreeable to the highest

behests of Christianity - to buy in the cheapest market, and sell in the dearest."¹

Free trade would bring peace to the world, partly by diffusing the kindly influences of Christianity and partly by exercising a mercantile sway over national governments. A free and peaceful exchange of goods would be in the Christian spirit of brotherhood. Further, merchants, under an increasingly prosperous free trade system, would refuse to tolerate war-like gestures or activities on the part of their governments. War brought chaos and ruin to commerce, and hence to the mercantile interests. They would not accept an economic system under which they could not trade peacefully. Cobden believed that the merchant classes would hold economic supremacy, and that their trading interests would be the main concern of future governments.

Cobden combined free trade theories with his moral views and used the League apparatus to spread his ideas. From 1839 to 1841, he exercised direct influence over League activities. He coordinated local agitation by giving financial and philosophical support from Manchester, hoping to convert each local cry for free trade into an advance for the Anti-Corn Law League. He sent out lecturers, circulars, tracts, and newspapers to

clarify League theories to free trade supporters. And he attempted to gain Parliamentary backing for his cause by lobbying MPs sympathetic to free trade.

Members of the Anti-Corn League realized that without a voice in Parliament, middle-class free traders would have little prospect of repeal. Parliament did not readily listen to the opinions of unrepresented Britons. By 1841, Cobden had achieved general middle-class support for repeal, but this meant nothing without Parliamentary influence. The Reform Bill of 1832 had given the middle classes only a slight voice in Parliament, incapable of overruling the interests of the landed upper classes.

In the general election of summer 1841, after the fall of Lord Melbourne's Whig Ministry, Richard Cobden and other free traders stood for election on a free trade platform. The repealers refused to associate themselves with either the Whigs or Conservatives. Cobden was returned for the constituency of Stockport, where he had been defeated in 1837. This general election also marked the beginning of Sir Robert Peel's second Ministry, which ended in the repeal of the Corn Laws. From the start of his career as an MP, Cobden was determined to press the Anti-Corn Law League goal of repealing the Corn Laws.

As a repeal MP, Cobden faced two almost insurmountable difficulties. First, as a political radical and as a member of a social group poorly represented in Parliament, he had to press his heterodox free trade theories onto unflinching adversaries. Cobden was an infidel in the house of protection. He was directly opposed to Peel's Conservative, protectionist majority and in uneasy alliance with other radicals, who were united in name only. Second, as a middle-class manufacturer, he faced the unfavorable social biases of the upper-class MPs. To them, Cobden's theories were obnoxious, and his speech, mannerisms, and appearance were patently absurd.

From 1841 to 1843, while League agitation continued outside, Cobden labored to establish a firm political base within Parliament. By 1843, Cobden made it clear to the Commons that he and his repealers were not to be deterred from pressing free trade. He countered protectionist theorizing and ignored the bigoted jibes of upper-class MPs. In his rare speeches, Cobden demonstrated his keen economic abilities and his uncompromising attitude. He kept close watch on economic legislation and persistently tried to exert a free trade influence upon it.

Cobden viewed Peel's revenue reforms of 11 March 1842 with disappointment. He supported the new tariff scheme as far as it went, but believed that all 1200 types of import duties should have been lifted. In this, Cobden echoed the free trade views of the 1840 Hume Committee on imports. Cobden regretted the half-way character of the new tariff. It was in spirit a free trade reform, but in maintaining the Corn Laws, it left intact the strongest bulwark of protection.

Peel's new income tax, intended to supply revenue under the reformed tariff, drew upon itself many indignant attacks. Cobden disliked the idea of an income tax, believing that manufacturers more than agriculturists would suffer from it. Unlike the aristocrats, the middle classes would be unable to augment their taxed income by tapping the Corn Law revenues. Cobden did not foresee that the income tax might provide a budget surplus upon which a freer trade could be founded. He looked at the immediate, unfair effects of the income tax and failed to see the extent of its free trade potential.²

Cobden saw one small consolation in Peel's tariff and income tax innovations. The tax clearly divided the interests of the upper classes and the middle classes.

Manufacturers resented the lesser tax burden of the aristocrats, whose incomes came in large part out of trade revenues and were therefore more inclined to advocate total repeal. Under free trade, aristocrats would be as weighted by taxation as the middle classes. Realizing this, Cobden wrote on 12 March 1842 that the new tax did

more so much to render Peel vastly unpopular with the upper portion of the middle classes, who will see no compensation in the tariff for a tax upon their incomes and profits. If this be the result of the measure, it will do good to the Corn Law cause, by bringing the discontented to our ranks.³

Throughout 1843, Cobden advocated free trade as feverishly outside Parliament as he did within. It was a year of great out-of-doors, or non-Parliamentary, agitation. Cobden and numerous other free trade speakers conducted huge popular meetings and rallies in cities and counties all over England. League agitators hoped to win large numbers of industrial and agricultural workers, and undecided landlords to the cause of repeal.

The year 1843 was a time of returning national prosperity. As economic conditions improved, albeit very slowly, undercurrents of social discontent lessened slightly in their severity. The Anti-Corn Law League relied on economic distress to emphasize its free trade

message. Heavy economic privations made free trade images of abundance and cheapness of provisions appear more attractive. Large popular meetings were necessary to bring wandering minds back to contemplation of a brighter, free trade future. Many undecided workers and landlords did join the free trade movement, but still many more set themselves squarely against Cobden and the League.

Working-class distrust of the League centered around the question of wages. Industrial workers, more than agricultural laborers, disliked the Anti-Corn Law League. They suffered from paltry manufacturing wages, while farm workers received meager agricultural pay. The two types of workers had different sources of income. Protectionists capitalized on the wage dispute, hoping to draw attention away from the Corn Laws and onto the hideous system of factory slavery. This plan had positive effects on factory reform, but little ultimate influence on League advances. We will confine ourselves to the wage controversy as it applied to Leaguers and industrial workers.

During the Age of Peel, there was an economic theory current which postulated that low grain prices meant low wages. If food was cheaper, less wages need be paid to

keep the working class fed. This incorrect theory was wrongly imputed to Cobden. Unfortunately for the free League's reputation of consistency, many of its advocates did not fully understand or correctly present free trade ideas. Among the working-class Chartist leader, Feargus

Cobden was often forced at popular meetings to vindicate his actual views, reiterating the true free idea that wages would rise, not fall, after repeal. Under free trade, manufacturing profits would increase due to more foreign demand. Simultaneously, grain would be cheaper because more foreign supplies would be admitted. These factors would combine, creating a situation where manufacturers could pay higher wages, due to greater profits, and workers could buy more grain at lower prices. Workers would have a wage surplus after buying food, which they might dispose of as they pleased. Though Cobden patiently reasoned these views out to wary audiences, the wage controversy, stirred up by upper-class protectionists and working-class Chartists, persisted until 1846. Good will of other classes, it was

The early months of 1844 involved setbacks for the League in Parliament. Cobden failed to arouse legislative opinion against the Corn Laws by bemoaning the plight of the agricultural laborer. Peel's Bank Charter Act, by

shoring up the bases of improving economic conditions, went further to strike the urgency out of Cobden's free trade message. Only in late summer 1844 did an event occur which added force to the League's arguments. By defeating the working-class Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor (1794-1855), in debate, Cobden added many workers to the ranks of the repealers.

On 12 March 1844, Richard Cobden rose to speak in Parliament. He called for a Parliamentary commission to inquire into the effects of the Corn Laws on farmers and agricultural laborers. Cobden had two motives in advocating the commission. First, he intended to make protection appear untenable on agricultural as well as manufacturing grounds. Second, he wished to draw critical attention away from horrible factory conditions and onto similarly dreadful agricultural predicaments.

From the start of the Anti-Corn Law League, repeal agitation centered around the plight of the manufacturers. Though Leaguers gave passing recognition to the protection-induced ills of other classes, it was clear that theirs was a predominantly middle-class agitation. Cobden realized that the League had to have a wider appeal if it were to succeed. The large public meetings of 1843, many of which were held in the

agricultural countryside, drew the cautious support of many farmworkers.

Cobden hoped to strengthen his agricultural free trade base by instituting a Parliamentary commission expressly devoted to undermining county support for the Corn Laws. In his speech of 12 March 1844, Cobden declared,

I wish it to be understood I do not admit that what is called protection to agriculturists has ever been any protection at all to them; on the contrary, I hold that its only effect has been to mislead them.⁴

Cobden hoped that this commission would force protectionists in Parliament to question the Corn Laws. Otherwise, all of the League's out-of-doors agitation would be for nought. The opinions of an unrepresented countryside meant nothing if the House of Commons ignored its calls.

Cobden also hoped to protect his cause from extraneous philanthropic movements, which were bent on stopping the exploitation of manufacturing workers at the hands of their employers. He wanted to counter the humanitarian cries of Lord Ashley (1801-1885) and the factory reformers which exposed the degradation of the industrial laborers. Cobden feared the bad reputation that the middle class received at the hands of the

philanthropists, aware of the damage it did to the cause of repeal. Factory reform, by its mere existence, reminded manufacturing workers that the Anti-Corn Law League was run and supported by the very employers who were crushing their lives.

Through his proposed commission, Cobden intended to demonstrate that agricultural conditions, caused by landlords, were as dreadful as industrial conditions caused by manufacturers. This action would not make manufacturers look better, but it would make their abuse of workers seem less unique. The commission's findings would put both landlords and industrialists on the same low level.

Cobden was as sickened by factory conditions as Lord Ashley was. Yet he insisted that only by repealing the Corn Laws could these conditions be appreciably improved. Economic laws, not humanitarian meddling, would eliminate the degradation of the workers. The Corn Laws stifled that prosperity of the middle classes which would improve the lot of all Britons. Cobden did not want factory reform, though he agreed with its aims, to endanger the free trade cause.

Parliament, packed with protectionists, refused to consider Cobden's initiative. It was defeated by a vote

of 224 to 133. The upper classes would not tolerate a commission designed to undermine the Corn Laws. William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) presented the most telling protectionist argument against Cobden's motion. Speaking of the plight of the agricultural laborers, Gladstone declared,

The real question was not whether the distress existed but whether the Corn Law was the cause of it ... The hon. Gentleman was bound to recollect that there were those who maintained, not only that the Corn Laws were not the cause of distress, but that they greatly tended to limit it in the agricultural districts.⁵

Another blow to the League cause came on 6 May 1844, when Peel introduced his Bank Charter Act. Peel's financial reform, as we have seen, reduced the supply of paper currency, and thereby partially curbed inflation. Cobden realized that the reform, while good for the national economy, might be bad for the League. He knew

that by 1845, barring an economic slump, national prosperity would be rapidly advancing. With each economic advance, the urgency for repeal weakened.

By mid-1844 Cobden concluded that the tactics of League agitation had to be altered. Out-of-doors efforts were less effective in the face of improving economic conditions. Cobden concocted a new scheme for pressing

free trade within Parliament. On 4 June, Cobden wrote,

The agitation must be of a different kind to what we have hitherto pursued. In fact, we must merely have just so many demonstrations as will be necessary to keep hold of public attention, and the work must go on in the way of registration labours in those large constituencies where we can hope to gain anything by a change of public opinion.⁶

Cobden intended to swell the ranks of free trade voters and advised supporters to invest in 40 shilling freeholds. As landholders, these supporters might then legally obtain a vote. They could then, through electoral processes, gradually vote repeal MPs into Parliament. Cobden's new scheme, combined with a propitious event later in the summer, boosted the League out of its slump.

On 5 August 1844, Richard Cobden and his closest League associate, John Bright (1811-1889), met in debate with the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, and his lieutenant, Thomas M'Grath. The middle-class Anti-Corn Law League and the working-class Chartists had scheduled demonstrations on the same day in the same place, Northampton in central England. This coincidence prompted the leaders of the two groups to challenge each other in argument. Cobden and Bright hoped to win the workers to the free trade cause by besting O'Connor and

M'Grath. O'Connor merely attempted to maintain his hold over the Chartists and gave little thought to winning middle-class support.

Cobden and Bright attempted to disabuse the workers of their class misconceptions. The two Leaguers reassured the workers that wages would rise, not fall, after repeal, that not all manufacturers were merciless exploiters, and that free trade was a guarantee of better economic conditions. Protection, not industry, caused the degradation of the workers. Certainly, the manufacturers would make more profits, but workers would also gain larger wages.

The Chartists had long been duped, both by their own class hatreds and by the influence of protectionists, into believing that free trade would mean their enslavement to the middle classes. They were convinced that degradation protection was preferable to slavery under free trade. The Chartists would support protection until they had a political voice and could defend themselves directly against insidious upper- and middle-class designs. Once they had the vote, the aim of all Chartist agitation, the workers would decide the correct national economic policy. They would not be seduced by the free trade siren-calls of the manufacturing middle classes.

The Leaguers, with their persuasive arguments and

O'Connor and M'Grath did not directly defend the Corn Laws in debate. They were not dedicated protectionists and believed only that the Corn Laws were a necessary evil, an effective screen against middle-class exploitation. Further, as we shall see, the Corn Law issue was not foremost in O'Connor's mind at the time of their debate. He was more concerned with founding his Land Plan for the working classes. Being but half-hearted protectionists, O'Connor and M'Grath debated poorly and in the end clung only to their demand for the Chartist ideal, a vote for able members of the working classes. Cobden recouped League losses from the Cobden sympathized with the Chartist desire for universal male suffrage. But he placed an important condition upon his support for this revolutionary idea. It was Cobden's cherished hope that a more popular government would one day come, but he believed that widespread education must precede it. As far back as 17 August 1838, Cobden wrote, Yorkshire, more than £200,000

had been I have faith in the people and would risk universal suffrage tomorrow in preference to the present franchise. But we shall never obtain an approach toward such a change, except by one of two paths - Revolution or the Schoolhouse. By the latter means we shall make permanent reform.⁷

Nature, by creating a crop blight in August 1845. The Leaguers, with their persuasive arguments and

polished debating skills, bested the ~~Charter~~ reader. Cobden's victory, which soon became common knowledge in England, lifted the League out of its prosperity-induced slump. It strengthened the free trade cause in two main ways. First, O'Connor's grip on working-class support weakened after his loss to Cobden. He had been unable to provide coherent counter-arguments to free trade theories. In the future, there would be less organized working-class opposition to the League. Second, Cobden won many previously uncommitted workers to the free trade cause. The League ranks swelled with new, dedicated repealers. Throughout 1845, Cobden recouped League losses from the first half of the previous year, consolidating support inside and outside Parliament. The number of repeal MPs increased in direct response to Cobden's electoral innovation. His 40 shilling freehold scheme had created approximately five thousand new free trade electors in three Midlands counties. In these counties, Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, more than £200,000 had been invested in the cause of creating an electoral base for repeal. By August 1845, MP, electoral, and working-class support for the Anti-Corn Law League had never been stronger. ~~Though he failed to form a Ministry,~~

Nature, by creating a crop blight in August 1845,

unleashed the forces which caused monumental political, social, and economic changes in Britain. The Irish potato famine brought the Corn Laws into question. Cobden's League apparatus and his Parliamentary and country-wide support were to be put to the test. The stage was set for the final battle between upper-class protection and middle-class free trade.

By November 1845, Sir Robert Peel concluded that British ports had to be opened to supplies of foreign grain. Otherwise, the Irish famine would grow even more severe. The Irish would certainly starve. By contemplating a suspension of the Corn Laws, Peel acted under League influence. Cobden's persistent agitation over the preceding six years had left its mark on Peel's thinking. Peel finally realized what the League had always taught, that the Corn Laws unnecessarily restricted England's food supply.

On 22 November 1845, Lord John Russell publicly advocated an end to the Corn Laws. The Whig leader did so for two reasons. First, like Peel, he had finally accepted Cobden's theories. Second, Russell hoped to topple Peel's divided Ministry and create a Whig-free trade government. Though he failed to form a Ministry, Russell insured the victory of the Anti-Corn Law League.

The Whigs had openly blessed the cause of repeal and were now bound to press it through Parliament.

Sir Robert Peel proposed repeal of the Corn Laws to a fractious Parliament on 27 January 1846. The Corn Laws were to be gradually reduced in force up to January 1849, when a free trade economy would be fully established. Peel did not call for immediate repeal, realizing that the national economy would be thrown into turmoil, exposed as it would be to unlimited foreign competition. England needed to be weaned from protection, not cruelly pushed unprepared into a free trade stance.

Peel's speech owed much to Cobden's previous free trade calls in Parliament.⁸ In a speech to his constituents at Tamworth in July 1847, Peel cited Cobdenistic reasons for advocating repeal. Peel declared,

My confidence in the validity of the reason on which I had myself heretofore relied for the maintenance of restrictions on the import of corn had been materially weakened. It had been weakened by the conflict of arguments on the principle of a restrictive policy; by many concurring proofs that the wages of labour do not vary with the price of corn; by the contrast presented in two successive periods of dearth and abundance, in the health, morals, and tranquillity and general prosperity of the whole community; by serious doubts whether, in the present condition of this country, cheapness and plenty are not ensured for the

future in a higher degree by the free intercourse in corn, than by restrictions on its importation for the purpose of giving protection to domestic agriculture.⁹

In the five months between Peel's speech of 27 January 1846 and the passage of the repeal bill through the House of Lords on 28 June 1846, Cobden labored in support of Peel. Cobden, because of the excitement of the previous autumn, had fallen ill. He made few speeches, relying on his ready ally, John Bright, to crusade for repeal. Cobden's efforts were less apparent, but more vital. Cobden united the diverse Parliamentary supporters of repeal, emphasizing the need for unity in the face of powerful protectionists. He reiterated that only through free trade could famine be averted and future prosperity be assured.

On 29 June 1846, Sir Robert Peel resigned as Prime Minister. His government had been defeated on the previous day over a division on the Irish Coercion Bill. Peel's Government fell on the Irish issue the same day that the Lords passed the repeal bill. In his resignation speech, Peel credited Cobden for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Peel declared,

Sir, there is a name which ought to be associated with the success of these measures. It is not the name of the noble Lord, the member for London, neither is it my name. Sir,

the name which ought to be, and which will be associated with the success of these measures is the name of a man who, acting, I believe, from pure and disinterested motives, has advocated the cause with untiring energy, and by appeals to reason, expressed by an eloquence, the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned - the name which ought to be and will be associated with the success of these measures is the name of Richard Cobden. Without scruple, Sir, I attribute the success of these measures to him.¹⁰

Without Peel's support, Cobden could not have succeeded in 1846. Repeal would have come in time, due to the ever-increasing financial power of the middle classes. The manufacturers, through economic pressure, could eventually have forced the upper classes to submit. Peel defused the potential for ugly social conflict by repealing the Corn Laws. Cobden did indeed exert a great influence on Peel's final economic decision. But Peel, from the start of his Ministry, had been an economic innovator. He applied many of his own, already existing theories of political economy to the repeal question. With success, the League had no further reason for existence. Accordingly, on 2 July 1846, the Anti-Corn Law League disbanded. Cobden, after the repeal victory, needed a respite from public life. Exhausted, he vacationed abroad, hailed as the apostle of free trade.

He returned to an active political life which extended to the end of his days. From the time of repeal to his death on 2 April 1865, Cobden was an unflagging defender of England's, and the world's, first free trade economy.

The Anti-Corn Law League succeeded because its message was timely and because it enjoyed competent leadership. Britain needed free trade for her economy to advance. Protection could not indefinitely restrain the nation's growing manufacturing energies. The League guided new industrial forces through organized channels, allowing a peaceful change in England's economic system. Without League influence, economic change, and therefore political and social change, might not have peacefully occurred.

Free trade suited the Age of Peel, but British society had to be convinced of this truth. The Anti-Corn Law League spread the free trade gospel throughout the land. Its word was backed by the growing financial power of the manufacturing middle classes. The newly ascendant social class had an entirely new economic theory. It intended, by the achievement of its goal of repeal, to refashion politics in the image of the already-changed social hierarchy.

The middle classes, though the aristocrats and

workers resisted, were becoming socially pre-eminent. The Industrial Revolution had transferred financial power into their hands. Of necessity, politics and society had to accommodate themselves to an economic fact. The upper classes, through protection, had for decades successfully resisted a change dictated by the iron laws of economics.

Richard Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League was the most coherent expression of economic, social, and political forces for change during the Age of Peel. Cobden was their catalyst, converting these potent but diffuse forces into programs capable of peacefully effecting necessary reforms. Ostensibly a political movement based upon limited economic goals, the league nonetheless had implicit, far-reaching social and political aims.

Cobden made the Anti-Corn Law League an efficient organization. Through his able leadership, the League gained a clear free trade theory, an unswerving goal of repealing the Corn Laws, an assured existence through continuous middle-class financial support, a growing body of advocates in Parliament, and a wide range of adherents among all social classes. For these primary reasons, Cobden's League achieved its goal.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

¹"Cobden," The Encyclopaedia Britannica (London, 1911), volume VI, p. 611.

²John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden (London, 1896), volume I, p. 240.

³Ibid., p. 240.

⁴Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (London, 1844), volume LXXII, column 863.

⁵Ibid., 904f.

⁶Morley, op. cit., p. 294.

⁷Ibid., pp. 127f.

⁸Ibid., p. 349.

⁹Sir Robert Peel, Memoirs (London, 1857), volume II, p. 102.

¹⁰Morley, op. cit., pp. 388f.

Chapter III

LOVETT, O'CONNOR, AND THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

William Lovett (1800-1877) published the People's Charter in May 1838. The Charter embodied in its political program the economic and social aspirations of the English working classes. In general, the Charter demanded the reform of Parliament. Specifically, it called for changes in the electoral policies of the House of Commons.

The Six Points of the People's Charter included manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, payment of Members of Parliament, annual Parliaments, equal electoral districts, and abolition of the property qualifications for MPs. Though the Charter was a politically radical statement, its ideas had been extant since the late eighteenth century. Unlike earlier, similar radical manifestoes, Lovett's Charter gained wide working-class support.

The Charter became popular because its appearance was timely. By 1838, worker discontent had become strong and found a means of expression in the Charter's political program. Labor unrest arose for three principal reasons, without which Chartism might not have existed.

First, the factory system degraded the living and working conditions of the laboring classes. Second, employers and the government persistently tried to suppress trades unions. Third, the new Poor Law, by denying outdoor relief, unfairly penalized workers unemployed by economic slumps.¹

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, workers and philanthropists prodded the government to regulate factory hours and safety. In spite of few victories, Lord Ashley and his factory reformers persevered in Parliament. By the time Lovett's Charter appeared, many local short-time committees, disillusioned by the slow progress of their pleas in the Commons, sought new methods of expression. They now hoped that factory reform might be gained in a Parliament remodelled along Chartist lines. Lord Ashley did not subscribe to this view and maintained his pressure on the existing Commons, without hoping for a change in government. As we shall see, his policy was vindicated.

Through trades unions, without the influence of upper-class philanthropists such as Lord Ashley, the working classes also tried to ameliorate their grim laboring and living conditions. With the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825, local trade unions sprang up

all over England. From 1830 on, working-class organizers attempted to collect those independent groupings into trades unions. These organizers hoped that, through trades unions, a collective force could turn employers and government onto paths favorable to the working classes. When the middle classes abandoned their working-class allies, after gaining the Reform Bill of 1832, the workers relied increasingly on trades unions to press reforms favorable to labor.

Of the working-class societies, the most famous was the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of February to August 1834. Its organizer, Robert Owen (1771-1858), hoped to use the pressure of an organized working class to convert Britain from a competitive to a cooperative industrial society. The G.N.C.T.U., like other trades unions of its kind, soon collapsed. It did so primarily because employers forced workers to sign declarations that they would not connect themselves with unions. By 1835, trade unionism had lost whatever chance it had of effecting either factory reform or changes in government.

To the disillusioned trades union organizers of the early 1830s, the People's Charter of 1838 offered new hope. In the Six Points, they now had a coherent

political program which, if agitated correctly, might lead to Parliamentary reforms favorable to lower class ways of life and work.

Lovett's Charter also strongly appealed to the many and bitter opponents of the new Poor Law. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 eliminated the traditional system of local poor relief. In the future, the dispensation of charity was to be overseen by the government. Relief was to be given only to those in Poor Law workhouses, under the supervision of local Board of Guardians.

The Act was improperly conceived. It was designed primarily to eliminate the augmentation of low laboring wages with relief funds. The practice of subsidizing wages with charity was a phenomenon of the agricultural South and West. It did not occur in the industrial Midlands or North, nor in industrial areas of Scotland and Wales. Yet, the new Poor Law was applied in both agricultural and manufacturing districts.

In the South and West, the Poor Law met with little interference, but in industrialized areas it met fierce opposition. After the failure of the Labourers' Revolt of 1830-1831 in the South, agricultural workers had little spirit to oppose the application of the Act starting in 1835. When the Poor Law finally came to the

North in 1836-1837, the industrial laborers stiffly resisted. The unemployed workers were allowed no charity unless they entered the workhouse, and then only after separation from family and home.

A major recession began in 1837 and extended through 1838. Thousands of industrial workers lost their jobs through no fault of their own. The new Poor Law, intended both to reduce landlord and employer rate-paying responsibilities and the number of paupers, offered little solace. There were not enough workhouses or relief funds. Outdoor, or private, relief could not meet the needs of the ever-growing population of industrial paupers. Into this sorry state, caused by the combined effects of trade depression and the harsh Poor Law, descended the People's Charter in late 1838.

In writing the People's Charter, William Lovett reached a high point in a career devoted to working-class causes. Lovett grew up as a rope-maker's apprentice in his birthplace, Newlyn in Cornwall. In 1821, he became a London carpenter and worked regularly at his trade for seven years.

Gradually, Lovett developed an interest in working-class politics. He advocated manhood suffrage, supporting the agitation which led to the Reform Bill of

1832. This electoral reform was not as extensive as Lovett had hoped. It granted voting rights to a wider electorate, which now included many middle-class manufacturers, but still left the working classes without a direct political voice. Lovett was sorely disappointed with the middle classes, many of whom called for manhood suffrage in unison with the workers, but who after the Reform Act ignored the cries of the still-voteless laborers.

During 1833, Lovett became involved in schemes for great, national trades unions. Since 1830, organizers such as John Doherty and Simeon Pollard had combined separate trade societies into united trades unions. Soon, plans arose for giant, national trades unions. Once organized, such labor combinations could monopolize sources of production. Through a single, massive strike, these unions might bend the country, and the government, to the working class will.

From 1833 to 1834, Lovett was involved with the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Robert Owen. He agitated for its program of cooperative labor and eight-hour work days. Lovett failed in his attempt to insert a call for universal suffrage in the G.N.C.T.U. program. The collapse of the G.N.C.T.U. convinced Lovett

of the futility of extra-Parliamentary political agitation without a considerable working-class voice in the Commons. He believed that only through political reform could needed changes be made in the economic and social condition of the English working classes.

In June 1836, Lovett formed, along with other London artisans, an educational and political society called the London Working Men's Association. Lovett hoped that, through self-improvement, the workers might demonstrate themselves worthy of the right to vote. Like Richard Cobden, Lovett believed that education must precede political responsibility. Unlike Cobden, Lovett was not willing to indefinitely postpone the question of working class voting rights.

From mid-1836 to early 1837, the L.W.M.A. examined the questions of private interest interfering in Parliamentary policy and the living and working conditions of weavers. The L.W.M.A. also began preparing a loose federation of similar artisan groups throughout England. These groups would espouse the soon-to-be-formulated L.W.M.A. political platform. In February 1837, Lovett's L.W.M.A. agreed on the six political demands which later became the People's Charter.

In writing the People's Charter, Lovett accepted the

advice, but not the leadership, of middle-class radical MPs. He insisted upon maintaining working-class initiative in and leadership of the L.W.M.A. Lovett feared that radical MPs might use the working class L.W.M.A. as a vehicle for gaining further middle-class electoral reforms and subsequently abandon the workers as they had after the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832.

The L.W.M.A. finally broke with the radicals over trade unionism. The middle-class MPs refused to countenance trade union violence and advocated union repression. In contrast, Lovett's L.W.M.A., while disapproving of violence, supported the union activity as a sign of working-class initiative. On this point, the radicals and the L.W.M.A. could not be reconciled. Therefore, by March 1838, there was little hope of an L.W.M.A.-Parliamentary radical alliance. The L.W.M.A. now lacked even the already-small radical voice in the Commons. It retained only a handful of Parliamentary supporters.

In May 1838, as we have seen, Lovett published the People's Charter. Drafted in the form of a Parliamentary Bill, the Charter contained the Six Points agreed upon by the L.W.M.A. back in February 1837. As 1838 progressed, the Charter gathered to itself those working-class

members who demanded factory reform, wanted a revived trade unionism, and hated the workings of the Poor Law of 1834.

Once published, the Six Points spread to working class political groups throughout England. The Charter attracted the attention of the Birmingham Political Union, organized by Thomas Attwood (1783-1856). Before 1832, Attwood's B.P.U. had agitated for those electoral reforms ultimately appearing in the great Reform Bill. Attwood revived the B.P.U. in 1836, creating a National Petition containing a reform program similar to the Six Points. Attwood, a middle-class banker, hoped to use his reforms to institute an economic system based upon extensive credit.

Early in August 1838, the B.P.U. accepted the Charter as its reform document, while the L.W.M.A. redrafted the Six Points along the lines of the B.P.U.'s National petition. Lovett and Attwood were united in their intention to use reason and persuasion to gain Parliamentary approval of the Charter.

On 6 August 1838, to the later dismay of the L.W.M.A. and the B.P.U., Feargus O'Connor (1794-1855) advocated the Charter and the Birmingham Petition in his newspaper, The Northern Star. In 1832, O'Connor became an

Irish MP and an adherent of Daniel O'Connell's program to separate Ireland from Great Britain. As an MP, he became interested in working-class distress and battled against the new Poor Law. In 1835, O'Connor lost his Parliamentary seat. He subsequently attempted to unite London radical groups against the Poor Law.

In 1837, after the failure of his London anti-Poor Law Central National Association, O'Connor moved to Leeds. There, in one of the centers of industrial discontent, O'Connor launched a new working-class agitation. He espoused his five-point political reform program in the first issue of The Northern Star, in November 1837. O'Connor's central view held that universal suffrage might eliminate the Poor Law and factory slavery. O'Connor's working-class support grew quickly in a West Yorkshire suffering under a growing recession, rising unemployment, and the arrival of the new Poor Law.

With The Northern Star's advocacy of the Charter in August 1838, a loosely united Chartist movement had appeared. The L.W.M.A., B.P.U., O'Connorites, and Scottish reformers all agreed that the Charter must be presented to Parliament, with the united backing of all the working classes. However, the Chartists were not

agreed on whether to use moral force or physical force to strengthen their radical position.

This disagreement became a major issue at the first Chartist Convention, which began in London on 4 February 1839. Representatives of the working classes, including trade unionists and short-time committee members, met under the aegis of the L.W.M.A., B.P.U., Northern radicals, and Scottish reformers. They determined that a National Petition, signed by members of the working classes, must be presented to the Commons.

All present at the Chartist convention agreed in principle to Lovett's Six Points. They could not agree on procedures to be followed after the certain rejection by Parliament of the petition. From this disagreement arose the moral force and physical force schools of Chartism.² Lovett, Attwood, and the Scots insisted that reasoned persuasion directed through constitutional channels would be the strongest support possible for the Charter and the Chartist reputation. Against this moral force party stood O'Connor and his Northern radicals. The O'Connorites declared that persuasion might prove futile and that threats of violence or actual violence might spur Parliamentary acceptance of the People's Charter.

The moral force Chartists believed that the workers ought to gracefully accept defeat. In doing so, they would establish a character of temperance and reasoned good sense with the ruling classes. A calm working-class demeanor might incline those in political power to consider a further extension of the suffrage. Lovett and Attwood frowned upon threats of Chartist violence, knowing the harm it did to the working-class reputation.

The physical force Chartists, which consisted in large part of O'Connorites, laid plans to insure Parliamentary acceptance of the National Petition. If refused, these Chartists threatened to seize all of the gold in metropolitan and country banks, avoid consuming goods holding government duties, deal only with merchants sympathetic to the Chartist cause, exercise the constitutional right to keep and bear arms, and begin a massive general strike. The plan for a general strike illustrated the influence of the old trades union losers over physical force Chartism. They hoped to apply the strike principle which had been submerged since the collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834. The intemperance of the physical force faction ruined the respectable Chartist image sought by Lovett and Attwood.

On 13 May 1839, the Chartist Convention reassembled in Birmingham after leaving London. The Chartists wished to avoid government harassment, which they risked by remaining in London. However, the mayor of Birmingham feared disturbances caused by unruly Chartists and called in government police. Quarrels broke out between the police and the Chartists. Lovett issued statements condemning police suppression of the constitutional right of free speech.

The House of Commons discarded the first Chartist Petition on 12 July 1839. In spite of the 1,283,000 signatures appended to the working-class plea, the threats of the physical force Chartists, and the reasoned arguments of the Lovettites, Parliament refused to consider the People's Charter, the political expression of multitudes of the working classes.

Lord Melbourne's Whig Government set out to stifle the Chartist leaders. On 6 August 1839, it imprisoned Lovett upon a conviction of seditious libel for his role in the Birmingham unrest. By stifling Lovett, the government succeeded in eliminating the mainstay of reason and constitutionality in the Chartist movement. During his confinement, Chartism fell irretrievably into the hands of O'Connorite Chartists. Lovett emerged from

prison in April 1840, his health broken. Though its originator and philosopher, Lovett was no longer Chartism's premier leader and retained only a peripheral influence over the movement.

Though Parliament rejected the National Petition, no organized Chartist revolt was immediately forthcoming. The intemperate blustering of Feargus O'Connor and the physical force Chartists appeared hollow. No national strike appeared, to the disappointment of the old trades unionists.

However, on the night of 3 November 1839, a Chartist outbreak occurred in South Wales. There is conflicting evidence as to why the Chartist miners staged the Newport Rising. Some believed that it was the first strike of a national revolution. Others believed that it was merely an attempted jailbreak.

Whatever its purpose, the Newport Rising was unsuccessful. A dozen or more Chartists were killed by government soldiers while attempting to release imprisoned Chartists. Two Chartist brigades were involved, both of which fled in the face of gunfire. Though a small skirmish, the Newport Rising gained national attention. It spurred the government to even sterner methods of repression and gave the Charter an

unsavory revolutionary reputation.

Though Feargus O'Connor's connection with the Newport Rising was unclear, the government convicted him of seditious libel in March 1840. It implicated him as part of a plot designed to combine a series of local working class armed revolts into a national Chartist revolution. In spite of flimsy evidence, O'Connor remained in prison until September 1841. During his imprisonment, Chartism further lost its original educated artisan influence and gained a more complete, uneducated working class following.

In 1840, the essayist Thomas Carlyle published a small tract entitled, "Chartism." Like many men of letters and in government, Carlyle noted and feared the growing Chartist movement. In it, he recognized a potentially violent threat to Britain's traditional social, political, and economic order. Carlyle advised all thinking Britons to consider the forces which underlay Chartist unrest.

Carlyle, in "Chartism" posed the condition of England question. He tried to root out the sources of Chartism, asking,

Why are the Working Classes discontented; what is their condition, economical, moral, in their houses and their hearts, as it

is in reality and as they figure it to themselves to be; what do they complain of; what ought they and ought they not to complain of? - these are measurable questions; on some of these any common mortal, did he but turn his eyes to them, might throw some light.³

Carlyle's solution to the condition of England question differed from that of the Chartists. He discarded the Chartist remedy of an extended suffrage and a reformed Parliament. Rather, education and emigration would eliminate working-class unrest.⁴ A system of national education would bring order to the chaotic mind of the laborer. Emigration would reduce undue competition in the industrial and agricultural labor markets. Without excess population, the condition of the working classes would improve.

Save for a handful of radicals, members of the upper and middle classes did not sympathize with Chartist aims. Like Carlyle, they were increasingly aware of the sources of Chartism but refused to consider political reform as a panacea for the nation's ills. Many in government and politics, including Sir Robert Peel and Richard Cobden, believed that gradual economic advances would weaken the forces for discontent. Once the industrial system had been perfected, economic slumps and factory slavery would be controlled and eliminated.

Like Carlyle, Peel, and Cobden, Lord Ashley and the philanthropists dismissed suffrage reform as a solution to the condition of England question. Ashley maintained that government supervision of laboring conditions would eliminate those barbarous practices which enslaved the workers. The government could shield workers from unscrupulous employers by regulating hours of labor and safety conditions. Government must not be exercised by the workers, but for them.

During O'Connor's imprisonment, from March 1840 to September 1841, the character of Chartism changed. Disillusioned by the rejection of the Charter in 1839 and disgusted by the belligerence of the O'Connorites, the moral force group, which included the Lovettites, Attwood's Birmingham Political Union, and Scottish Chartists, dropped out of the Chartist movement. These now-independent groups respectively concentrated upon education, disbanded, or created a new moral force party.

As a political movement, Chartism by 1840 consisted of an immense body of uneducated, hungry, and hate-filled workers. O'Connor's lieutenants, while their leader was in prison, organized the old physical force faction into a new National Charter Association, based in Manchester. The N.C.A.'s political program involved local agitations

for the Charter. Chartists were to disrupt county and borough Parliamentary bye-elections and Anti-Corn Law League meetings, demanding motions in favor of the Charter.

Late in 1841, two events occurred which ultimately drove the main body of the working class political movement into the camp of O'Connorite Chartism. Upon his release from prison in September 1841, O'Connor assumed command of the N.C.A. He immediately laid plans for a second National Petition to be presented to Parliament. Almost simultaneously, during November 1841, Joseph Sturge (1793-1859) began the Complete Suffrage Union, centered in Birmingham. Sturge, a middle-class Quaker politician, gathered support for his manhood suffrage program from old moral force Chartists, philanthropists, and members of the Anti-Corn Law League. By 1842, O'Connor refused to tolerate C.S.U. competition for working-class support, which threatened the strength of the N.C.A.

Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union was an anomaly, representing an attempt to unite the working and middle classes against upper-class Parliamentary exclusivity. Though Lovett frowned upon middle class leadership over working-class politics, he supported the

C.S.U., hoping it might produce further ~~suffrage~~ reforms. Lovett looked upon the N.C.A. as a disreputable agitation which debased the spirit of the Charter with its intemperance and upon O'Connor as an irresponsible demagogue.

Some members of the middle class Anti-Corn Law League subscribed independently to the C.S.U. program. Though Richard Cobden hoped for an extension of the suffrage, he would not approve such an act before the workers were educated. He refused to divert the force of his free trade agitation into other political spheres such as franchise reform. Cobden allowed Leaguers to support the C.S.U. program, provided they did not directly link free trade agitation with calls for manhood suffrage.

In spite of the C.S.U.'s middle-class origins, Feargus O'Connor opposed it on wholly different grounds. Unlike Lovett during the early days of the L.W.M.A., O'Connor was not averse to middle-class radical support when it ~~redounded~~ to his political benefit. He mistrusted the C.S.U. for its potential to erode his base of power, by wooing distressed workers away from the N.C.A.

O'Connor might have easily stopped the C.S.U. early

in its career by uniting his N.C.A. supporters against its program. However, throughout 1842, O'Connor never directly condemned Sturge's movement. O'Connor did so for two main reasons. First, he was too busy with organizing his own Chartist Petition and dealing with the after-effects of its Parliamentary rejection. Second, O'Connor hoped to seize control of the C.S.U. in the event of the N.C.A.'s collapse or defeat.

As the year 1842 progressed, the National Charter Association and the Complete Suffrage Union were the two major working-class political movements competing for the laborers' support. The N.C.A., based in Manchester, led approximately 400 local associations and gained the allegiance of 40,000 workers. The C.S.U., O'Connor's closest competitor, controlled around fifty or sixty urban branches.

In April 1842, O'Connor's N.C.A. sponsored a national Chartist Convention, which drafted a second National Petition for presentation to Parliament. On 2 May 1842, Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, a radical MP, presented the Charter, with 3,317,752 signatures appended, to the House of Commons. After a long debate on 3 May 1842, the Commons rejected Duncombe's plea to consider the Chartist Petition by a vote of 287 to 49.

During the debate of 3 May, opposition to the Charter centered around the effects of universal suffrage. Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859) stressed the notion that private property would no longer be safe because working class MPs would redistribute manufacturing capital and landed wealth among the laborers. Both Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell expressed a fear that universal suffrage would destroy the constitution by spreading democracy and instituting a working-class tyranny.

Defense of the Charter rested not upon the possibility of a violent revolution following Parliamentary rejection, but upon pleas that the workers, because of their efforts in industry and agriculture, deserved the right to vote. Speaking of the workers, Dr. J. Bowring declared that they had,

in proportion to their means made greater sacrifices than the more privileged and opulent of their fellow-subjects. They could not understand why greater wealth should imply greater aptitude for political sagacity - why the rights of citizenship should be monopolized by the few and denied to the many; but they knew by experience that the privileged few did exercise their authority, not for the interest of the subject many, but for their own special and sinister interests.⁵

O'Connor and his National Charter Association had no

new political program to embark upon after Parliament rejected the Charter for the second time. O'Connor's Chartists, in spite of their physical force character, failed to advocate coercive measures similar to those postulated in 1839.

In August 1842, a series of strikes broke out in the North. Beginning in Lancashire, where employers reduced wages in the face of advancing economic depression, the strikes soon spread to the Midlands and Glasgow. Workers left their factories, mills, and mines by the thousands. Lancashire laborers pulled the plugs on their factory boilers to halt production - thus giving the name "Plug Plot" to this series of strikes.

The Chartists attempted to convert the Plug Plot into a strike for the Charter. The idea of a general strike to gain political reforms, present in the G.N.C.T.U. program and the coercive measures planned by the physical force Chartists for summer 1839, appeared once again in the Chartist alliance with the Plug Plot strikers.

Feergus O'Connor did not want to associate Chartism with the Plug Plot but was pressed by his followers into doing so. His lieutenants were now more brash than he was and ignored O'Connor's warnings that the Plug Plot

was foredoomed to failure. O'Connor realized that the strikes were too weak, from bad organization and a lack of sustenance, and that the government, which held a monopoly on coercive force, was too strong. Because of his new, moral force vacillation, O'Connor lost his leadership over many Chartists. These former O'Connorites left the Chartist cause and turned to other types of working-class agitation.

By September 1842, as O'Connor predicted, the Plug Plot dissipated. It failed primarily because the strikers, weakened by hunger and poverty, returned to work of their own accord. In failing, the workers settled more deeply into the yoke of the industrialists. Chartism, because of its connection with the Plug Plot, sank ever lower in the esteem of many laborers and inclined the upper and middle classes to ever greater distaste for its political aspirations.

O'Connor intended to revivify the Chartist movement. Seeing the weakness of his own N.C.A., embodied in Parliament's rejection of the second Petition and in the Plug Plot disaster, O'Connor intended to capture the machinery and supporters of Joseph Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union. Since early in 1842, O'Connor had intended to use the C.S.U. as a reserve movement in the

eventuality of an N.C.A. defeat. If he could not capture it, O'Connor intended to destroy Sturge's C.S.U., and thereby eliminate a major competitor to his own working-class agitation.

In December 1842, Joseph Sturge struggled to finalize C.S.U. policy. He agreed with Lovett's Six Points but refused to associate the word "Charter" with his C.S.U. Sturge knew the depth of upper and middle class feeling against Chartism and did not want his policies vitiated because of the bad connotations of a word. "Chartism" conjured images of Newport Risings and Plug Plots, which the ruling classes feared as threat to established social and political order.

Lovett insisted upon the use of the word "Charter" in C.S.U. policy. He would not compromise with Sturge and would not settle for the less inflammatory term "Bill of Rights." Since Lovett retained a considerable following among artisans, as the originator of the Charter and one of the leaders of early Chartism, Sturge could not lightly ignore his wishes.

O'Connor joined Lovett in his defense of the word "Charter." He did so partly out of a sincere respect for the images evoked by the Charter and partly because he wished to capitalize on the division between Sturge and

Lovett. Combined with Lovett, O'Connor's forces outnumbered Sturge's radical following. Once Sturge was eliminated, O'Connor might capture leadership of the C.S.U. before ~~its~~ organization liquidated and push Lovett out of any position of power.

The combined ~~cavilling~~ over semantics of O'Connor and Lovett exasperated Sturge, who withdrew his plans for a C.S.U. agitation. Lovett, who despised O'Connor as a deceiver and a demagogue, dropped away from the rump of the C.S.U. O'Connor controlled only those Complete small Suffragists which remained after the departure of the Sturgeites and Lovettites. Combining the shade of the C.S.U. with his already-depleted National Charter Association, O'Connor began formulating new plans for working-class political agitation.

By March 1843, O'Connor devised a curious scheme, which he maintained would be in the interests of Chartism. He proposed a Land Plan designed to convert the excess industrial laborers into small-holding agriculturists. With an increase in peasant proprietors, competition for industrial employment would diminish and result in a rise in the level of manufacturing wages. Further, a growing peasant class would provide a ready market for industrial products.

O'Connor hoped by his land plan to create a considerable body of established, laboring class support for the People's Charter. He realized that the progress of the scheme would be unbearably slow but hoped that its potentially successful application might incline the government to adopt both it and the Charter.

The Land Plan proposed by O'Connor involved subscriptions by workers to a land fund. With this fund, the N.C.A. would buy estates, subdivide them, and issue them to subscribers according to lottery. Each new small proprietor would be provided by the N.C.A. with the requisite farm buildings and equipment.

O'Connor's hold was strong over the still-considerable body of Chartists. He persuaded the other Chartist leaders to back his ambitious land scheme. Though he met with stiff resistance from many Chartists, O'Connor convinced them that the land scheme might help the workers while agitation for the Charter stood in abeyance.

On 5 August 1844, while still building the foundations of his Land Plan, O'Connor debated Richard Cobden and John Bright. As we have seen, the two Anti-Corn Law Leaguers bested O'Connor and his lieutenant, Thomas M'Grath, on the topic of the Corn Laws.

defend the Corn Laws, which had been touted by the aristocrats and many Chartists as the last barrier between the workers and total slavery to their employers, O'Connor weakened his position as the undisputed leader of the working classes.

Cobden's persuasion and Bright's eloquence won many workers to the free trade cause. The Anti-Corn Law League diverted the working class support needed by Chartism to exist as a potentially effective political movement and channeled it toward middle-class goals. O'Connor still retained a hold over a considerable number of workers, but much of the force and urgency of his message had vanished. Many workers now believed in free trade where once they had been devoted primarily to the Chartist goal of manhood suffrage.

From 1845 to 1846, O'Connor finalized the machinery of his Land Plan. In May 1845, the old National Charter Association became the Chartist Cooperative Land Society. After registering under the Companies Act, the Land Society became the National Land Company. O'Connor acted as the treasurer of the N.L.C. and began seeking out estates for conversion.

During 1845, spurred at least partially out of sympathy for working class economic and social

degradation, Benjamin Disraeli published Sybil, or The Two Nations. In Sybil, a novel concerning in part the economic and political forces behind Chartism, Disraeli hopes for a Tory Government which might eliminate such evils. In tones of regret, Disraeli writes of

Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets, who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws... THE RICH AND THE POOR.⁶

O'Connor directed his efforts toward knocking down the barriers between the two nations. He staked his aims upon the success of his Land Plan. In 1847, it seemed that two events marked only the beginning of a revived Chartist movement. First, the National Land Company bought and began converting five estates in accordance with O'Connor's land scheme. Second, in July 1847, O'Connor became the first Chartist MP.

Upon entering the House of Commons as MP for Nottingham, O'Connor did not advocate the Charter or the Land Plan. Instead, in November 1847, he moved for the repeal of the union between Great Britain and Ireland. In doing so, O'Connor returned to a position he had last advocated in

1835, under the Irish MP, Daniel O'Connell.

In 1848, the confusion of purpose O'Connor demonstrated in the previous year vanished. He reacted both to threats of a Parliamentary investigative committee assigned to examine the workings and finances of the National Land Company and to calls for renewed, direct Chartist agitation in response to the European year of revolutions.

A national Chartist Convention met in London on 3 April 1848. Many Chartists who had abandoned the cause in disgust over O'Connor's leadership, returned, intending to make another great bid for the Charter. The convention quickly drew up a third National Petition, minus the provision for vote by ballot, and began collecting signatures. The Chartist leaders called for a mass procession, starting in Kennington Common, to present the People's Charter to Parliament on 10 April 1848.

The government took measures to prevent any sort of revolutionary uprising. It sealed off entrances to the City of Westminster, the seat of government and the heart of London, dispersed troops to maintain order, and forbade any mass gathering. The Kennington Common meeting of 10 April 1848 proved a disaster for O'Connor. Few Chartists

appeared, and O'Connor was constrained to quietly escort the National Petition to Parliament. The Charter was not immediately rejected but sent into committee for inspection and consideration.

By August 1848, a Parliamentary investigation into the National Land Company had irreparably damaged O'Connor's Land Plan. It found the Company had no legal standing, that it had no regular accounts, and that it was either already bankrupt or on the verge of insolvency. O'Connor's honesty was not impugned, but his financial competence came into question. The Commons declared that the National Land Company must settle its accounts and liquidate thereafter. Those small-holding communities already established under the Land Plan remained as the only evidence of O'Connor's ambitious land program.

After the demise of the National Land Company, all ~~that~~ the Chartists could hope for was Parliamentary acceptance of the third National Petition. Once fears of revolution had passed, Parliament felt safe enough to dash the Chartists' hopes. The commons rejected the Charter in July 1849 by a vote of 222 to 17. Ostensibly, 5,700,000 workers' signatures had been appended to the document. Upon examination, this figure was reduced to

approximately 3,000,000. Many false signatures had originally been counted as legitimate, including "Victoria Rex," Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington, and "Mr. Punch."⁷

Chartism never recovered from the triple blows of the spectacular Kennington Common debacle, the shocking collapse of the National Land Company, and the ignominious rejection of the Third National Petition. Though Chartism as a political philosophy lingered for another decade, its effectiveness as a political movement ended in 1848-1849. Lovett's original dream of electoral reform and O'Connor's quixotic land scheme had been the two outward Chartist goals. When it became abundantly clear that neither of these aims could be realized during or immediately after the Age of Peel, Chartism foundered.

The principal reason for Chartism's failure did not lie in its political program. Chartism was a hunger movement, arising out of the grim economic conditions of the 1830s and early 1840s. The workers were literally starving to death, and Chartism provided a means to overcome dire misery. Government showed little or no inclination to help them, but Chartism offered a coherent program of self-help. Chartism lacked the cloying

humanitarianism of the philanthropic factory reformers and sought the political roots of economic and social inequity.

"Hunger and hatred" drove the laboring classes into the Chartist movement.⁸ By 1843, Sir Robert Peel's tariff and income tax reforms had begun to improve economic conditions. Returning prosperity lessened the pangs of hunger. By 1848, hatred of the new Poor Law in the industrial districts had lessened. Fewer workers were sent into the Poor Law Bastilles because prosperity reduced the number of paupers. By the end of the Age of Peel, Chartism was no longer "a knife and fork question."⁹ The workers were less hungry and more contented.

Chartism's failure also resulted from the lack of qualified leaders. Unlike Richard Cobden of the Anti-Corn Law League, William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor were flawed leaders. Lovett was a thinker, not a man of action. He was too pensive to be the guiding force of an unruly, hungry, hate-filled group of miners, machinists, weavers, and nail-makers. In contrast, O'Connor could not think clearly enough, for he was mad during much of his Chartist career. His vituperative, quixotic behavior was the result of madness and served only to confuse

Chartist agitation.

In contrasting Chartism with the Anti-Corn Law League, other reasons for its failure become clear. First, Chartism lacked strong financial support, which the League possessed in abundance. Second, Chartism lacked a respectable political theory. Manhood suffrage was too radical a political notion for the Age of Peel. In contrast, the League's free trade platform, while not considered orthodox, was at least the province of respectable thinkers. Third, Chartism lacked a direct, sustained voice in Parliament. As a Chartist MP, O'Connor advocated repeal of the union between Great Britain and Ireland, not Chartist causes. Cobden and John Bright, in contrast, advocated free trade as the direct representatives of the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League.

Chartism failed because it was overly emotional, poorly led, and never wholly unified in its policies. In contrast, the Anti-Corn Law League succeeded because it was coolly rational, well-led, and solidly united behind free trade. Direct reforms necessary for the well-being of the working classes during the Age of Peel did not result from Chartist activities. Rather, at least some of the reform the Chartists hoped for came, as we shall

see, from the humanitarian actions of Lord Ashley and Edwin Chadwick.

Chapter III

¹G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (London, 1965), pp.

²ibid., p. 49.

³Thomas Carlyle, Miscellaneous Essays (London, 1872), volume VI, p. 114.

⁴ibid., p. 175.

⁵Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (London, 1842), volume LXIII, column 35.

⁶Robert Blake, Disraeli (London, 1967), p. 201.

⁷Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870 (Oxford, 1938), p. 185.

⁸Cole, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹ibid., p. 216.

FOOTNOTES

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¹G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (London, 1965), pp.

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²Ibid., p. 49.

³Thomas Carlyle, Miscellaneous Essays (London, 1872), volume VI, p. 114.

⁴Ibid., p. 175.

⁵Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (London, 1842), volume LXIII, column 35.

⁶Robert Blake, Disraeli (London, 1967), p. 201.

⁷Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870 (Oxford, 1938), p. 145.

⁸Cole, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹Ibid., p. 216.

Chapter IV

LORD ASHLEY, CHADWICK, AND WORKING-CLASS SOCIAL REFORMS

During the Age of Peel, industrial working-class life at home and in the factories improved only slightly. Though the working-class Chartist political movement failed to gain needed social and economic reforms, other factors did succeed in somewhat lessening the workers' plight. As the industrial economic system settled itself more firmly into British society, as Sir Robert Peel's tariff and banking reforms made themselves felt in the national economy, and as humanitarians and bureaucrats made social reform a fixture of politics, foundations were laid for a more promising working-class future.

Since the late 1700s, British manufacturers struggled to establish themselves in the rising industrial economic system. Manufacturing competition was fierce, and employers harshly drove both themselves and their workers. Low wages and long working hours insured the cheapness and abundance of manufactures. Though employers sometimes profited by thus exploiting their laborers, the workers themselves sank ever deeper into poverty and exhaustion.

By the late 1840s, industrial competition had grown less fierce because of ever larger manufacturing markets.¹ As a result, the manufacturers were more inclined to grant higher wages, shorter working hours, and better laboring conditions. They had concluded that there was little profit in limitless exploitation, that impoverished and unhealthy employees did not make efficient producers.

Britain's increasingly healthy economy, from which the workers would ultimately benefit, owed much of its existence to Peel's innovations while Prime Minister. His tariff reforms, including those of 1842 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, widened overseas markets for British manufactures and assured cheaper and more abundant supplies of foreign commodities. Peel's Bank Charter Act of 1844, by limiting the extension of credit, reduced inflationary threats to Britain's growing industrial economy.

Though Britain's economy improved during the 1840's, the working class hardly felt the effects of prosperity before the 1850s and 1860s. Throughout the Age of Peel, their ways of life and work remained in a most barbaric state. Neither the government nor the industrial employers were wholly willing or fully able to eliminate

working-class misery. Only through the persistent prodding of humanitarians and utilitarian reformers did government and industry stir themselves to aid the working classes. By the end of the Age of Peel, in 1850, the government had instituted a number of increasingly effective guarantees of working-class health and safety.

In the 1840s, Britain's economy depended heavily upon the well-established industrial system. Factories for spinning cotton and weaving textiles continued to edge smaller cottage industries out of the market. The factories employed considerably more workers than the old cottage industries did and produced larger quantities of goods. An extensive coal-mining industry had sprung up to serve the steam engines which allowed increased factory production.

The cotton industry adopted the factory system in the late eighteenth century. By 1830, Lancashire was a well-established center of cotton spinning factories. In contrast, even in the 1840s, Yorkshire was divided between cotton factories and small cottage industries involved in cotton spinning and weaving. In Scotland, too, particularly in Glasgow and Paisley, cotton factories and cottage industries competed for markets.

The textile industry also concentrated great numbers

of workers into factories. Where frame workers were too scattered to labor in textile mills, they were obliged to weave in their own homes. This arrangement predominated in the Midlands, especially in the counties of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and Leicestershire. In Wales, the neighboring towns of Llanidloes and Newtown had textile manufacturies. The Sottish town of Kendal, in the county of Cumberland, was also a textile center.

The coal industry, which grew as a result of the cotton and textile industries, was concentrated in Lancashire and Yorkshire in England, and in remote areas of Scotland and Wales. The coal mines and pits were run either by large commercial firms, by agents for agricultural landlords, or by small contractors. The Durham pits in Scotland were part of a semi-feudal estate controlled by Lord Londonderry. The collieries of South Wales were usually run by an ironmaster who used coal in the production of iron goods. not located in urban

Other types of industry employed many workers but not in the concentrated factory system of the cotton and textile industries. In large cities, primarily London and Birmingham, artisans such as William Lovett worked at their crafts. These small masters worked at their own pace, unlike the sweated labor of the urban dressmaking

industry. In the countryside, particularly in the Black Country outside Birmingham, nail-makers and metal-workers provided components that went into the making of factory equipment.

The majority of laborers, whether they worked in cotton factories, textile mills, collieries, urban sewing shops, or nail-plants, received wages that often fell below the subsistence level. Hence, the quality of their homes, their food, and their health was often substandard.

Most industrial laborers clustered together into great manufacturing towns such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds. Here, cotton spinners and textile weavers lived in overcrowded, dilapidated, badly-ventilated, unsanitary tenements. Miners often dwelled in similarly forbidding dormitories. Sweat-shop laborers, like any factory workers, lived in shoddy urban apartments. Nail-makers, though many were not located in urban centers, lived in rustic circumstances as deplorable as those found in the cities.

Impoverished as the workers were, most made little effort to drag themselves out of their slough. After paying their rent and purchasing their food, many laborers had little or no wage money left, or found

themselves further in debt to a landlord or grocer. When there were extra funds, and even when there were not, workers often amused themselves with gin-drinking, prostitutes, or gambling.

Some early nineteenth-century observers foresaw the unfortunate working and living conditions into which a laboring class might fall and sought legal hindrances to industrial abuses. Up to 1833, factory reforms applied only to the cotton industry. In 1802, Parliament prohibited the exploitation of juvenile Poor Law wards by legally limiting their working time to twelve hours per day. The traditional local law enforcement authorities, the Justices of the Peace, were enjoined to administer the workings of the Act. In 1819, the House of Lords passed a further Factory Act, again sponsored by Sir Robert Peel the Elder (1750-1830), which prohibited any child under sixteen, whether a Poor Law ward or voluntarily employed, from working more than twelve hours per day. This Factory Act contained no provision for enforcement by the Justices of the Peace, who had neglected the injunctions of the 1803 Act.

Aside from minor amendments to the Factory Act of 1819, occurring in 1825 and 1831, little more was done to ease the long-hour, low-wage exploitation of the

industrial laborers until 1833. Factory reformers, of all classes, continued to seek a shorter working day for every age group of industrial laborers. They concentrated their efforts upon limiting the working hours of children, knowing that adults could only labor with the assistance of small helpers.² Children, with their nimbler fingers and smaller size, were better equipped to manipulate and clean the intricate machinery used by factories; when they could not work, adult laborers would also be unable to work.

Late in 1832, Michael Thomas Sadler (1780-1835), because of electoral difficulties resulting from the Reform Bill of 1832, lost his status as an MP and was therefore obliged to relinquish his Parliamentary leadership of the growing ten-hour movement. He was succeeded in his role by Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885), the future seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, on 5 February 1833.

Lord Ashley was a deeply religious man and very conscious of his Christian obligation to help others. As a child, he had been poorly treated by domestic staff and boarding school supervisors. He knew what it was to suffer and determined to save others from misery caused by cruelty.

Sadler's committee report on factory conditions, which concentrated upon the long hours of labor faced by women and children, prompted Lord Ashley to devote himself to the short-time cause. He believed that remedies ought to and could be found for industrial abuses such as excessively long hours and dangerous, unhealthy working conditions. Lord Ashley singled out factory reform as his crusade, not because he despised industrialists, but because he believed that the manufacturing system was the most tangible, but most reformable source of misery in England.

Lord Ashley believed that factory reform was the duty of government in general, and of the hereditary aristocracy in particular. The traditional ruling order, of which he was a member, had national responsibilities which had for too long been neglected. Lord Ashley held that his class must rule in the interests of the unrepresented. A Tory and an aristocrat, Lord Ashley refused to consider the idea of the working classes representing themselves. The aristocracy would rule for the workers but certainly not with them.

The factory reformers, led by Lord Ashley and inspired by Sadler and Richard Oastler (1789-1861), eventually influenced the passage of the Factory Act of

1833. This new Act applied to all textile plants, except silk mills, in addition to cotton factories. It excluded children under nine years of age from factory labor, prohibited those under thirteen years from working more than nine hours a day or forty-eight hours per week, and restricted laborers between thirteen and eighteen years of age to twelve-hour work days or sixty-nine hour work weeks. No laborer under eighteen years old was allowed to work at night. All operatives less than thirteen years of age were to attend school for two hours on each working day. The Act also provided for a team of factory inspectors to enforce its injunctions. This new inspectorate assumed the responsibilities formerly held by the Justices of the Peace under the Factory Act of 1802.

From the passage of the Factory Act of 1833 until the Mines Act of 1842, the industrial working classes met with no further favorable legislative reforms. Lord Ashley and local short-time committees struggled to no avail for nine years. Manufacturers encouraged their MPs to resist further factory reform bills. Because the inspectorate provided by the Act of 1833 was poorly conceived, existing factory legislation was very imperfectly enforced.

While Lord Ashley occupied himself with factory reform during the 1830s, Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890) became increasingly concerned with the health of the working classes. As an administrator of the Poor Law Act of 1834, Chadwick in the course of his work was much involved in alleviating the difficulties experienced by industrial paupers.

Chadwick owed his career as a Poor Law official at least partially to the influence of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). He subscribed to those utilitarian principles conceived by Bentham and once espoused by the younger Mill. As a Benthamite, Chadwick believed that the purpose of all legislation should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Unlike Bentham, Chadwick maintained that the state should actively promote the common good through extensive social reforms.² Chadwick was a consummate bureaucrat and did much to establish the foundations of Britain's extensive civil service.

Edwin Chadwick, as a Benthamite and bureaucrat, was concerned with making the new Poor Law effective. He saw that many industrial paupers had sunk to their sorry state through ill health. Paid paltry wages when

employed and impoverished when unemployed, these paupers could never improve their condition and became the perpetual wards of the Poor Law system.

Chadwick realized that the Poor Law Act of 1834 had been designed to curb the growth of pauperism, whether in the countryside or in industrial towns. He concluded that one of the roots of continued urban pauperization lay in poor working-class living conditions. Living as they did, in pestilential slums, the laboring classes could never be physically healthy. Chadwick wanted to ferret out the sources of working class disease and implement preventive measures against continued contagion. He intended thereby to reduce the number of sickly paupers which drained Poor Law funds.

Lord John Russell, Home Secretary in the Whig Ministry of Lord Melbourne, ordered the Poor Law Commissioners to inquire into the causes of disease among the working classes on 21 August 1839. Influenced by Chadwick's view, Russell hoped to curb Poor Law expenses by cutting off sources of illness at their roots. Russell's instructions were extended to Scotland on 28 January 1840.

Edwin Chadwick, in implementing the orders of the Home Office, relied upon the administrative apparatus

already supplied by the network of local Poor Law authorities. In November 1840, Poor Law officials and doctors throughout England and Wales began collecting evidence for a later Poor Law Commission report.

Simultaneously, in Scotland, where there was no Poor Law machinery, doctors and local authorities voluntarily compiled evidence for the same projected report.

In July 1842, Chadwick submitted to Parliament his Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain. The Chadwick Report, as it came to be known, contained both documentary evidence of the physical causes of working class ill-health and Chadwick's suggested remedial measures. Chadwick's fellow Poor Law Commissioners did not agree with his conclusions and refused to be parties to the production or presentation of the Report.

The Chadwick Report contained exhaustive, county-by-county reports of the living conditions of the working classes. Though it contained information pertaining to agricultural laborers, the Report's primary emphasis was upon the state of life in urban tenement districts. Here in abundance were found many of the factors which destroyed the health of the working classes. Chadwick declared,

In his report, Chadwick concluded that working-class illness arose both from apartment living conditions and from the state of the urban environment. The workers were obliged to live in impossibly overcrowded, unventilated tenements. When one person became ill, due to noxious city conditions which will be discussed presently, the disease would soon spread in close living quarters and could not easily be expurgated because of a lack of flowing air currents.

The urban environment was similarly insalubrious. Chadwick maintained that diseases arose out of a lack of city hygiene codes and proper sewage removal arrangements. Little or no provisions were made by urban authorities to remove collections of human waste. Excreta lay in streets, overfilled cesspits, dunghills, and poorly-engineered sewers. Drainage and sewer systems, designed to serve the needs of medieval burghs, could not fulfill the demands of a burgeoning industrial population.

Chadwick feared this alarming evidence but realized that much working-class disease could be prevented by official responsibility and foresight. He sought to jar the central government into action. Underscoring his evidence, Chadwick declared,

A conception may be formed of the aggregate effects of the several causes of mortality from the fact that of the deaths caused during one year in England and Wales by epidemic, endemic, and contagious diseases, including fever, typhus, and scarlatina, amounting to 56,461, the great proportion of which are proved to be preventible, it may be said that the effect is as if the whole county of Westmoreland, now containing 56,469 souls, or the whole county of Huntingdonshire, or any other equivalent district, were entirely depopulated annually, and were only occupied again by the growth of a new and feeble population living under the fears of a similar visitation.⁴

Chadwick's report offered solutions to the urban health problem. He recommended that apartment owners and city officials implement his suggestions under the supervision of central government authorities in London. Chadwick advised that all tenements be constructed according to rigid ventilation codes and supplied with copious amounts of piped, running water. He suggested that new semi-circular sewer channels should be constructed to replace unfunctional, flat-bottomed sewage ducts. Improved sewage systems would expedite the flow of human waste out of cities and into the countryside where it could be used as agricultural fertilizer. Regular street cleaning would eliminate the noxious threat of inert filth and insure a cleaner urban

atmosphere.

Parliament was deeply impressed by the Chadwick Report's evidence and recommendations. It pondered Chadwick's urgent message,

As to the means by which the present sanitary condition of the labouring classes may be improved: - The primary and most important measures, and at the same time the most practicable, and within the recognized province of public administration, are drainage, the removal of all refuse of habitations, streets, and roads, and the improvement of the supplies of water.⁵

Parliament ordered the establishment of a Royal Commission on the Health of Towns on 9 May 1843. The new commission was to investigate the soundness of Chadwick's evidence and recommendations. The commission's reports, submitted to Parliament on 27 June 1844 and 3 February 1845, corroborated Chadwick's findings. The combined influence of the Chadwick Report and the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns eventually resulted, as we shall see, in the revolutionary Public Health Act of 1848.

While the public health movement advanced in the early 1840s, Lord Ashley and the philanthropists succeeded in pressing factory reform. In 1840, the same year in which Edwin Chadwick set Poor Law officials to work collecting evidence, Parliament instituted a

Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines. This commission was charged with investigating the conditions of female and child labor in mines. It was required to give particular attention to the notorious truck system of coal cartage and the trap system of mine safety.

The commission published its report in May 1842. On 7 June 1842, Lord Ashley demanded that Parliament reform the mining abuses exposed in the report. He described the truck system in grim detail saying,

The child, it appears, has a girdle bound round its waist, to which is attached a chain, which passes under the legs, and is attached to the cart. The child is obliged to pass on all fours, and the chain passes under what, therefore, in that posture, might be called the hind legs; and thus they have to pass through avenues not so good as a common sewer, quite as wet, and oftentimes more contracted. This kind of labour they have to continue during several hours, in a temperature described as perfectly intolerable.⁶

Lord Ashley also lamented the state of youthful trappers, who were forced to spend long hours in continual darkness while manipulating mine-shaft ventilating doors.

A month later, on 8 August 1842, Parliament passed the Mines Act, under the influence of the commission's report and Lord Ashley's fervent pleas. The Mines Act of 1842 forbade females of any age from working underground

and prohibited the employment in mines of any male worker under ten years of age. Parliament established a team of mine inspectors to enforce the workings of the Act.

Lord Ashley's successful mining reform won many disaffected workers back to the short-time cause. Discouraged by the persistent lack of industrial reform after the Factory Act of 1833, laborers throughout England abandoned their short-time committees in 1839. They turned to Chartism, hoping to find a reduction in hours through united working-class pressure on employers. With the Parliamentary rejection of the second National Petition on 3 May 1842, and with Lord Ashley's mining reform victory of 8 August 1842, old Chartist short-timers returned to their philanthropic leaders. Many Chartists were convinced by Lord Ashley's success that industrial reform must come through upper-class intermediaries and not through unilateral working class political agitation.

Lord Ashley determined to press for further industrial reforms and for the extension of such legislation to all branches of industry. Faced with the enormity of his task, he wrote on 8 August 1842:

Whatever has been done, is but the millionth part of what there is to do

... The more I labour, the more I see
of labour to be performed, and vain
at last will be the labour of us all.
Our prayer must be for the Second
Advent, our toil "that we be found
watching."⁷

Throughout 1843 and part of 1844, Lord Ashley labored fruitlessly on the question of shorter industrial working hours.

In March 1844, a debate ensued between Lord Ashley and Sir James Graham (1792-1861), the Home Secretary in Peel's second Ministry. Lord Ashley emphasized, in his speech of 15 March 1844, that the government's province extended to insuring the "moral and physical well-being of her people."⁸ Graham countered Lord Ashley's view on 18 March 1844, claiming that his Government would only harm Britain's economy through further interference in industrial affairs. He maintained that a Ten Hours Act would reduce laboring wages by 25 percent and pitch the already impoverished workers into dire penury.⁹

In spite of Graham's recondite reasoning and calculations, Parliament took another step toward a Ten Hours Act. It passed an amendment to the existing Factory Act on 6 June 1844, prompted by Lord Ashley's speech of 15 March 1844 and further investigative committee findings similar to those of the 1840 Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines.

The Factory Act of 1844 applied to cotton factories, textile mills, potteries, nail plants, and other smaller industries. In 1845, calico print-works were also placed under the stipulations of the Act. The amended Act required a maximum six-and-a-half hour working day for all child laborers between eight and thirteen years of age. All females over the age of thirteen were to work a maximum of twelve hours per day. All factory machinery had to be fenced to provide a modicum of safety for the operatives.

Lord Ashley was disappointed with the twelve-hour maximum working day provided for by the Act. He had agreed to a ten-hour daily labor limit for all workers but when threatened with the complete failure of the amendment, Lord Ashley settled upon an eleven-hour day. By the time the Bill passed its third reading, the eleven hour time limit had been increased to twelve hours, and the provision had vanished for applying the amended Act to male workers.

In 1845, while both Lord Ashley and Edwin Chadwick were involved in their respective activities, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) published his book, The Condition of the Working Class in England. Engels' book combined into one volume treatments of laboring class working and

living conditions. He relied upon evidence gathered from personal experience, Parliamentary speeches by factory reformers such as Lord Ashley, and investigative committee findings such as the Reports of the 1840 Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines and the Chadwick Report.

Like Lord Ashley, Engels called for an end to intolerably long factory hours. Like Edwin Chadwick, he noted the sources of working-class disease in repulsive urban living conditions. Engels' book presented a shocking picture of the condition of the English working classes. His picture was also accurate, culled as it was from responsible contemporary sources such as doctors and government investigators. Engels vehemently maintained that all of the working-class misery uncovered in England was "due solely to the revolting greed of the middle classes!"¹⁰

From the beginning of the Irish famine in late 1845 to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the question of protection versus free trade delayed the progress of Lord Ashley's factory legislation and Edwin Chadwick's public health movement. Lord Ashley resigned as MP for Dorset on 31 January 1846. He had been elected upon a protectionist platform but would no longer support the

Corn Laws. Feeling constrained to step down, Lord Ashley handed his Parliamentary leadership of the ten hours movement to John Fielden, a Chartist sympathizer. On 22 May 1846, the Ten Hours Bill which Lord Ashley had introduced on 29 January 1846 and which Fielden had subsequently guided, was defeated by a vote of 203 to 193.

Lord Ashley and Fielden, encouraged by the narrow margin of defeat on the 1846 Bill, presented a similar motion on 26 January 1847. No longer their Parliamentary leader, Lord Ashley encouraged his erstwhile lieutenants to support Fielden's legislation. Eventually, after passing through three readings in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Ten Hours Bill became law on 1 June 1847. On that day, Lord Ashley wrote in his diary,

News that the Factory Bill has just passed the third reading. I am humbled that my heart is not bursting with thankfulness to Almighty God - that I can find breath and sense to express my joy. What reward shall we give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath conferred upon us?¹¹

The Factory Act of 1847 represented a victory for the ten hours movement which Lord Ashley had labored at since 1833. The Ten Hours Act retained all the

stipulations and influence of previous factory laws but reduced the daily working hours of women and children to ten hours per day. Theoretically, this limitation should have of necessity shortened male workers' hours as well. As we have seen, it was widely believed that men could only work with the assistance of small operatives to keep the machinery running.

Through a flaw in the Ten Hours Act, some employers kept their male operatives at work from five-thirty in the morning to eight-thirty at night using a split-shift system. On 5 August 1850, this flaw was eliminated by an amendment to the 1847 Act which restricted male workers to twelve hour daily shifts and women and children to ten-and-a-half hour working days.

The 1850 amendment, though it increased the maximum working day by one half hour, insured the effectiveness of the 1848 Act. It shielded all workers from limitless exploitation by placing a ceiling on the working day for men, women, and children. Henceforth, no employer could circumvent the Act by exploiting vague clauses. Also, the 1850 amendment was the last legally required hour reduction until 1874, which came long after the end of the Age of Peel.

While the short-time cause met with a major success

in the Factory Act of 1847, the public health movement gained added impetus from the Public Health Act of 1848. Parliament passed the Act on 31 August 1848, under the influence of the Chadwick Report of 1842 and the findings of the 1843 Commission on the Health of Towns.

The Public Health Act of 1848 was designed to improve the sanitary condition of industrial cities. It created a Board of Health to supervise the activities of local agents, either existing town councils or newly formed local Boards of Health, in implementing the Act. This bureaucratic machinery, similar to the 1834 Poor Law apparatus, was to establish a nationwide comprehension and application of the most current scientific methods of sewer construction, street-paving, and plumbing. The Act, therefore, concentrated upon improving the urban environment but not upon bettering working-class domiciles.

Edwin Chadwick and Lord Ashley were both made Commissioners of the Board of Health. Chadwick was intent upon creating a highly centralized bureaucracy and thereby alienated many local health authorities. Further, Chadwick did not have the Parliamentary support or financial backing to make the Board efficient. Lord Ashley, while not as headstrong as Chadwick, was just as

passionate a bureaucrat. "In their hands the Board became a kind of monster."¹² Because of general resentment at Chadwick's uncompromising advocacy of central control over public health and general disgust at the corruption of certain public health officials, Parliament allowed the official status of the Board of Health to lapse on 31 July 1855.¹³

Lord Ashley and Edwin Chadwick were the primary leaders of their respective reform movements during the Age of Peel. Lord Ashley labored for fourteen years before he achieved a major factory reform. Even then, the Factory Act of 1847 did not extend as far as he had hoped; Lord Ashley wanted an eight-hour working day but was obliged to be satisfied with a maximum of ten hours' labor per day. Chadwick had struggled since 1832 to bring local Poor Law and health officials into a national bureaucracy. The Public Health Act of 1848 seemed to vindicate Chadwick's efforts, but his eagerness lost him the Board of Health.

The years following the Age of Peel brought further, more extensive factory and health reforms. It was Lord Ashley and Chadwick who made these future alterations possible by creating organized bodies of supporters and concrete reform programs.

Both Lord Ashley and Edwin Chadwick brought comfort to the miserable working classes by their social reforms. Unlike the Chartist leaders, William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor, they produced practical reform platforms which provided immediate benefits to the workers. Unlike the People's Charter and the Land Plan, their aspirations could be realized during the Age of Peel. Few middle-class or aristocratic MPs were willing to contemplate universal ~~manhood~~ suffrage, but many realized the humanity and usefulness of factory and health reforms.

Lord Ashley realized the importance of his work, and that of Chadwick, in lessening the discontent of the working classes. On April 13, 1848, after the failure of the Kennington Common demonstration, Lord Ashley wrote,

A Sanitary Bill would, in five years, (1844), confer more blessing and obliterate more Chartism than universal suffrage in half a century, but the world, when ill at ease, flies always to politics and omits the statistics of the chimney-corner, where all a man's comfort or discomfort lies...¹⁴

¹¹ Hadder, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

¹² Percy D. Jones, *Edwin Chadwick and the Early Public Health Movement in England* (Iowa City, 1931), p. 111.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV

¹G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (London, 1965), p. 23.

²Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870 (Oxford, 1938), p. 149.

³David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century (Harmondsworth, Mdx., 1977), pp. 30f.

⁴Edwin Chadwick, Esq., Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (Shannon, 1971), p. 143.

⁵Ibid., p. 526.

⁶Norman Gash (ed.), The Age of Peel (London, 1968), pp. 135f.

⁷Edwin Hodder (ed.), The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G. (London, 1892), p. 232.

⁸Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (London, 1844), volume LXXIII, column 1076.

⁹Ibid., column 1212.

¹⁰Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, translated by W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chalones (Oxford, 1958), p. 188.

¹¹Hodder, op. cit., p. 369.

¹²Dorsey D. Jones, Edwin Chadwick and the Early Public Health Movement in England (Iowa City, 1931), p. 114.

CONCLUSION

¹³Ibid., pp. 124ff.

¹⁴Hodder, op. cit., p. 393.

tain changed from a largely agricultural society to the world's first industrialized society. Increasingly after 1846, the needs of the manufacturing middle classes determined the direction of government legislation and economic policy. The aristocracy, the traditional ruling order, was obliged to govern in partnership with the middle classes.

Throughout the Age of Peel, and for many years afterward, the working classes remained subordinate to the middle and upper classes. Since they had almost no political voice, the workers relied upon sympathetic members of other social orders for needed factory and health reforms. Unlike the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, during the 1840s extensive working-class reforms were applied with relative success.

Reform marked the establishment of industrial society in England. The Anti-Corn Law League succeeded in gaining political reforms which recognized the growing economic strength of the middle classes, where Chartism failed, factory and health reformers succeeded in easing

CONCLUSION

During the Age of Peel, Britain changed from a largely agricultural society to the world's first industrialized society. Increasingly after 1846, the needs of the manufacturing middle classes determined the direction of government legislation and economic policy. The aristocracy, the traditional ruling order, was obliged to govern in partnership with the middle classes.

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Reform marked the establishment of industrial society in England. The Anti-Corn Law League succeeded in gaining political reforms which recognized the growing economic strength of the middle classes. Where Chartism failed, factory and health reformers succeeded in easing

the miseries of working-class life. The Anti-Corn Law League sought to secure the existence of a national industrial society, while Chartists and humanitarian reformers attempted to ease the shock inherent in such a fundamental social alteration.

The Age of Peel witnessed revolutionary political, social, and economic changes. Unlike the Continent, change came to Britain through relatively peaceful reform. Politicians in Parliament, not mobs in streets, determined the direction and pace of reform. Thereby, firm foundations, based upon consensus, were laid for England's unparalleled prosperity later in the nineteenth century.

Smith, Adam, Wealth of Nations: Volume II (Glasgow, 1805); The source of many aspects of the free trade doctrine. Necessary to an understanding of Cobden's motives and Peel's economic policies.

Parliamentary Debates

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Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Volume LXII (London, 1842); Columns 1373-1381 contain the second Chartist National Petition. This document gives an understanding of the deep emotion behind the Chartist agitation.

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