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3 'Really useful knowledge': radical education and working-class culture, 1790-1848

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Introduction

One of the most interesting developments in working-class history has been the rediscovery of popular educational traditions, the springs of action of which owed little to philanthropic, ecclesiastical or state provision. For a long time these traditions remained hidden, though they appear in some early social histories, especially those written in one period of radical education (1890s to 1920s) about another (1790s to 1840s).[1] But it was not until the 1960s that more fully researched accounts appeared, forming part of the general recovery of early working-class radicalism. In 1960 Brian Simon's *Studies in the History of Education* drew attention to the continuity and the liveliness of independent popular education from Jacobinism to Chartism. In 1961, J.F.C. Harrison's *Learning and Living* examined traditions of adult self-education in one locality. Harold Silver's important book, *The Concept of Popular Education* (1965), looked at 'developments in attitudes to the education of the people' more generally, but focused especially on Owen and Owenism, Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) permitted a fuller contextualization of others' findings, but also stressed the intellectual character of early-nineteenth-century radicalism and the role of 'the articulate consciousness of the self-taught'.[2] These themes have become more explicit in later studies of Owenism and Chartism and of the radical press, the main 'educational' medium.[3] Related to radical traditions, but not yet connected in the historiography, were other educational resources which have been receiving increasing attention from historians - especially the extent and uses of private schools.[4] Some recent studies of Sunday schools have shown the co-existence of schools under popular control with more clearly philanthropic institutions.[5] There is, however, no adequate study of the other important popular educational resource: the working-class family itself.

The radical press remains the obvious route of entry into popular educational practices and dilemmas. It was extremely articulate, indeed talkative, providing a weekly set of commentaries on everyday life and politics. Although it is the main source for what follows, this use is in itself problematic, posing additional questions which must be answered *en route*. For we cannot assume that the attitudes of radical leaders and writers were those of 'the workers' (any more than we can assume that radicalism was 'unrepresentative' or the downwards extension of middle-class 'ideas').[6] For one thing, radicals differed a lot on some essential matters. For

another, popular opinion itself was not homogeneous. Moreover, radical leaders were clearly involved in a process that was part mediation or expression of some popular feelings, and part a forming or 'education' of them, an attempt to achieve, from very diverse materials, some unity of will and direction. This necessarily involved fostering some tendencies and opposing others. The image of the educator or 'schoolmaster' is itself interesting here. It was one of the commonest guises adopted by radical journalists.[7] Though it was an identity often adopted jokingly and as a conscious play upon Henry Brougham's populist 'schoolmaster abroad' speeches of the 1820s, it was an image that constructed some distance between 'teachers' and 'pupils', despite the involvement in a common enterprise. It is important, then, to understand the particular position of leaders and journalists within radical movements and, more generally, within the popular classes as a whole. It is necessary, in other words, to face squarely the problem of the 'popularity' of radicalism. This is an especially important question for the concerns of this essay, which puzzles around the relation between various kinds of radicalism, understood as 'educative' or transformative ideologies, and the conditions of existence and lived culture of some of the groups which radicalism addressed. But first it is necessary to describe some salient features of radical education over this period, concentrating, at first, on some common elements. Later we shall look, more discriminatingly, at some internal differences and changes over time.

The radical dilemma

There were four main aspects to 'radical education'. First, radicals conducted a running critique of all forms of 'provided' education. This covered the whole gamut of schooling enterprises from clerically dominated Anglican Sunday schools, through Cobbett's 'Bell and Lancaster work', to the state-aided (and usually Anglican) public day schools of the mid century. It also embraced all the institutes, clubs and media designed to influence the older pupil - everything from tracts to mechanics institutes. Plans for a more centralized state system of schooling were also opposed, a feature to which we will return. This tradition, then, was sharply oppositional: it revolved around a contestation of orthodoxies (and some unorthodoxies too) both in theory and practice. Nor was this critique limited to formally 'educational' institutions. In its later phases radicalism developed a practical grasp and a theoretical understanding of cultural and ideological struggle in a more general sense.

The second main feature was the development of alternative educational goals. At one level these embraced a vision of a whole alternative future - a future in which educational utopias, among other needs, could actually be achieved. At another, radicalism developed its own curricula and pedagogies, its own definition of 'really useful knowledge', a characteristically radical *content*, a sense of what it was really important to know.

Thirdly, radicalism conducted an important internal debate about education as a political strategy or as a means of changing the world. Like most aspects of

counter-education, this debate was also directed at dominant middle-class conceptions of the relation between education and politics, especially the argument that 'national education' was a necessary condition for the granting of universal suffrage. But it expressed real radical dilemmas too.

Finally, radical movements developed a vigorous and varied educational practice. The distinctive feature was, at first sight, an emphasis upon informing mature understandings and upon the education of men and women as adult citizens of a more just social order. But radicals were also concerned with men and women as educators of their own children and they improvised forms for this task too. It might, however, be truer to say that the child-adult distinction was itself less stressed in this tradition, or in parts of it, than in the contemporary middle-class culture of childhood. This is one reason why, in what follows, no large distinction is made between the education of 'children' and 'adults'. Such a distinction is not found in nature by educators, but has actually, in large part, been constructed.

We can move beyond a rather descriptive listing like this by seeing these elements as aspects of a particular, lived, dilemma. This dilemma was not unique to early nineteenth-century radicals. It is arguable that it represents the *typical* popular educational dilemma under capitalist social conditions. Nineteenth-century radicals, however, certainly experienced it with a particular sharpness. On the one hand, they valued the acquisition of knowledge very highly indeed, often with a quite abstract passion. Knowledge or 'enlightenment' was *generally* sought: it was a good in itself, a use value. This passion can be traced in many working-class autobiographies in which the fervent 'pursuit of knowledge' always looms large, in the language and educational stance of the unstamped press, in the popular reception of quite abstract texts, and in an educational rhetoric as exalted and sometimes as high-flown as the more familiar Broughamite language of middle-class liberals:

> Self-reformation is the only reform that will establish the happiness of mankind. Man must be taught to know what are, as well as what are not his rights; he must learn the dependence of his happiness on the happiness of his fellow-creatures; his mind must be cleansed of all the many and pernicious prejudices, which, when it was too weak to resist their influence, even at the time of its birth, took root around it, and have hitherto choked up its real nature and hidden from it the lights of truth; he must be made to love, instead of fearing - to pity, instead of blaming - to reason, instead of listening - to be convinced, instead of believing - and, above all, he must know his weakness as an individual, and his strength in proportion only as he UNITES and co-operates with others.[8]

At the same time, however, radicals were aware of the poverty of educational resources to hand - a recognition often enforced by personal experience. This was partly a quantitative scarcity - lack of schools, lack of books, lack of energy, lack of time. But there was also a qualitative question involved. In the course of the period some of the quantitative deficiencies were supplied: certainly from the 1830s there was a growth, in real terms, of educational facilities of the provided kind, if not of opportunities for their use. Yet as 'facilities' grew, the dilemma act

deepened. The quality of what was on offer never matched the aspirations. Far indeed from promising liberation, provided education threatened subjection. It seemed at best a laughable and irrelevant divergence (*useless* knowledge in fact); or, at worst, a species of tyranny, an outward extension of the power of factory master, or priest, or corrupt state apparatus. There is a continuity of comment of this kind from Paine's initial warnings on the educational tendencies of hereditary monarchies and established religions to the caveats of the *Northern Star* on government education schemes. Paine taught radicals that monarchy, being based on so irrational a device as inheritance, tended to 'buy reason up' and that priests were employed to keep the people ignorant.[9] Cobbett, the original de-schooler, extended this to cover schools and schoolmasters. Note the industrial and political analogies:

> He is their over-looker; he is a spy upon them; his authority is maintained by his absolute power of punishment; the parent commits them to that power; to be taught is to be held in restraint; and, as the sparks fly upwards, the teaching and restraint will not be divided in the estimation of the boy.[10]

Early radical journalists put each new educational innovation into a place already prepared for it in Painite theory. Schooling was not about 'political education' at all, not about 'rights' and 'liberties'; it was about 'servility', 'slavery' and 'surveillance', about government spies in every parish, about the tyranny of the schoolroom. This theme was elaborated in a hundred ingenious ways: reporting injustice in individual schools, parodying hymns, catechisms and teaching methods, exposing Dr Bell's sinecure, stressing the ideological rationale of schooling by which all evils were ascribed to 'popular ignorance'.[11] By the 1830s new forms of provided education had appeared, especially mechanics institutes, infant schools and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), some of which were less obviously 'knowledge-denying' than tracts or monitorial schools. Yet radicals maintained a critical opposition. The SDUK was universally ridiculed: infant schools were attacked by Owenites (as a corruption of Owen's ideals) and parodied in the Chartist press;[12] and mechanics institutes, the most popular of the innovations, were very cautiously evaluated and, on the ground, openly opposed or instrumentally used.[13] *The English Chartist Circular*'s comment on the SDUK was typical:

> Their determination is to stifle inquiry respecting the great principles which question their right to larger shares of the national produce than those which the physical producers of the wealth themselves enjoy.[14]

There was also a host of jokes on all possible variants of the epithet 'useful knowledge'.

> In conformity with the advice of Lord Brougham and the Useful Knowledge Society, the Milton fishermen, finding their occupation gone, have resolved to become capitalists forthwith.[15]

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being apprenticed to a milliner?'[16] 'What' asked the *Poor Man's Guardian*, 'is useful *ignorance*? - ignorance useful to constitutional tyrants.'[17] One editor of the Unstamped even produced a one-off issue of a little thing called 'The Penny Comic Magazine of an Amorous, Clamorous, Uproarious and Glorious Society for the Diffusion of Broad Grins'.[18]

It was '*really* useful knowledge', then, that was important. But 'education-mongers' offered the opposite. They didn't offer 'education' at all; only, in Cobbett's coinage, 'Heddekashun', a very different thing.[19] So how was really useful knowledge to be got? How were radicals to educate themselves, their children and their class within cramping limits of time and income? The main answer for the whole of this period was by their own collective enterprise. The preferred strategy was substitutional. They were to do it themselves. A series of solutions of this kind were improvised, all resourceful, though none wholly adequate. Radical education may be understood as the history of these attempts.

Forms

The key feature was *in*formality. Certainly, Owenites and Chartists did found their own educational institutions and even planned a whole alternative system. Secular Sunday schools and Owenite Halls of Science, for instance, represent the most visible, formalized (and best documented) aspects of activity. They remain extremely interesting. Yet to concentrate on counter-institutions would be seriously to misread the character of the radical response and the nature of the transition in the practices of cultural reproduction through which working people were living. There is a danger, too, of separating out 'the educational' and constructing a story parallel to but different from the usual tales of schools and colleges.[20] Radical education was not just different in content from orthodox schooling: its formal principles were different. It was constructed in a wholly different way. There is also a temptation to exaggerate the extent and, especially, the permanence of such institutions in collusion with the invariably euphoric reporting of their activities.

Typically, then, educational pursuits were not separated out and labelled 'school' or 'institute' or even 'rational recreation'. They did not typically occur in purpose-built premises or places appropriated for one purpose. The typical forms were improvised, haphazard and therefore ephemeral, having little permanent existence beyond the more immediate needs of individuals and groups. Educational forms were closely related to other activities or inserted within them, temporally and spatially. Men and women learned as they acted and were encouraged to teach their children, too, out of an accumulated experience. The distinction between 'education' (i.e. school) and not-education-at-all (everything outside school) was certainly in the process of construction in this period, but radicals breached it all the time. As George Jacob Holyoake put it, 'knowledge lies everywhere to hand for those who observe and think'.[21] It lay in nature, in a few much-prized books, but above all in the social circumstances of everyday life.

Radical education cannot be understood aside from inherited educational

resources. It rested on this basis but also developed and enriched it. We mean the whole range of indigenous educational resources, indigenous in the sense that they were under popular control or within the reach of some popular contestation. Struggle of some kind was possible, of course, in every type of school or institute but there were also whole areas that were relatively immune from direct intervention or compulsion by capital or capital's agencies. We include, then, the educational resources of family, neighbourhood and even place of work, whether within the household or outside it, the acquisition of literacy from mothers or fathers, the use of the knowledgeable friend or neighbour, or the 'scholar' in neighbouring town or village, the work-place discussion and formal and informal apprenticeships, the extensive networks of private schools and, in many cases, the local Sunday schools, most un-school-like of the new devices, excellently adapted to working-class needs.

On top of this legacy, which in nineteenth-century conditions was very fragile, radicals made their own cultural inventions. These included the various kinds of communal reading and discussion groups, the facilities for newspapers in pub, coffee house or reading room, the broader cultural politics of Chartist or Owenite branch-life, the institution of the travelling lecturer who, often indistinguishable from 'missionary' or demagogue, toured the radical centres, and, above all, the radical press, the most successful radical invention and an extremely flexible (and therefore ubiquitous) educational form.

The product of these two levels of activity may best be thought of as a series of educational networks. 'Network' is a better word than 'system', suggesting a limited availability, fragile existence and a highly contingent use. The ability to use them, even at high points of radical activity, was always heavily dependent on chance individual combinations of more structural features. Accordingly, the working-class intellectual was (and is) a rare creation. The fully educated working man and, still more, working woman was, in Thomas Wright's phrase, 'an accidental being'.[22]

We have, however, many accounts of such people, for they often wrote about their lives. It is worth tracing through a few individual histories, not to present them as representative, but to illustrate the place of the various elements as we have mentioned in a kind of educational progression. It is in autobiographies, besides, that we have the clearest evidence of networks and their use.

Biographies

Parents, relations and friends were a crucial initial influence. Samuel Bamford's parents bestowed on their children 'a sort of daily fireside education'.[23] It was his father - a 'superior man', a weaver, a Painite, once a private schoolmaster - who implanted in the future radical a predisposition towards politics. Bamford, typically, was sure he had learned more at home than at school, regretting only his father's refusal to let him learn Latin.[24] William Lovett's educational experiences commenced with a disciplinarian Methodist mother and a great-grandmother of eighty who taught him to read.[25] Joseph Gutteridge, silk-weaver and amateur scientist,

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owed much to a schoolmaster uncle, a father who 'always carefully helped me' and the freedom to botanize in the fields and lanes around Coventry.[26] Roland Detroisier, the radical lecturer, was brought up by a Swedenborgian tailor who established his fertile contact with the Sunday schools of that sect.[27] 'My father', wrote John Wood, son of a West Riding weaver, 'being able to read and write a little taught me all he knew.'[28] But, like other lads, John also took lessons, *gratis*, from friends who, for instance, knew more arithmetic than he. We might note, in passing, that something more is suggested in these cases than the generalization that parental influence is enormously important in forming the interests and character of children. More interesting are the historical (and historically changing) conditions in which, say, fathers could quite commonly teach their sons to read, a practice which requires both an inherited literacy and time for its reproduction.

The educational resources of home and neighbours were invariably supplemented by some form of schooling. Schooling was common but took different forms, differently used. Dame schools and private schools, for instance, were quite casually used. When public or charity schools were also included they were used in much the same way, were changed often and were left early. Tutelage under any one schoolteacher in any one school was, in the total sum of educational experiences, usually quite marginal. The major exception here, in some cases, was Sunday schooling, which seems to have been more likely to create an abiding loyalty than any other form of contemporary schooling. Thus, George Jacob Holyoake, after attending dame schools in fits and starts, went to a Methodist Sunday school for five years, later joining John Collins, another Birmingham Chartist and Co-operator, teaching Sunday school at Harborne.[29] Bamford attended several Sunday schools and two different free grammar schools; J. Passmore Edwards, later a radical journalist, learned the three Rs at 3d. a week in a school kept by an injured ex-tin miner.[30] Julian Harney, the revolutionary Chartist, was, exceptionally, educated at the Boys' Naval School at Greenwich in the expectation that he would become a merchant sailor.[31] Gutteridge remembered with affection a Quaker dame who helped him to read newspapers by the age of seven, but suffered under a savage schoolmaster at a local charity school.[32] Lovett's mother sent him off to school after school, strictly enforcing attendance. He went to 'all the dame schools in the town', two private schools with severe, even sadistic masters, and ended up at a local Anglican school.[33] This somewhat experimental approach to schooling was, according to later official reports, a not uncommon one: some respectable working-class parents certainly sought a better school by a process of trial and error.

One of the most interesting aspects of the relation of radicalism and the education of children is the quite pervasive figure of the radical schoolmaster or mistress. The common philanthropic distrust of the intelligent but unsupervised teacher of working-class loyalties undoubtedly had a basis in fact.[34] Schoolmaster was quite a common occupation among prominent radicals.[35] Teaching was indeed an obvious resource for an intelligent, self-educated man or woman especially if he or she had already fallen foul of employers or other authorities. Two examples must suffice to illustrate the way in which such people actually became school-

teachers, either full-time or as a bye-employment.

Mary Smith, radical schoolmistress of Carlisle, was the daughter of a rural artisan, a shoemaker, in a Gloucester village. She could not remember a time when she could not read and her father took pains to provide her with books from second-hand sales.[36] Even so, she went to a string of schools, ending with one of 'higher grade' run by Methodist ladies who stressed deportment and polite accomplishments. Unmarried and with characteristic independence, she left home and, in the 1840s, set up school in Carlisle. Supporting herself by teaching farmers' daughters, she soon developed an alliance with some local workers, sharing many of their political enthusiasms. She attended lectures by James Silk Buckingham and by Henry Vincent, of whom she became an enthusiastic supporter.[37] She rejoiced 'with the best when unkingly kings were uncrowned' in 1848, and later took to freelance, crusading journalism and became involved in the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act. Violently anti-Tory and not afraid to offend the orthodox religions, she gave secular lectures to working women on Sundays and helped in evening schools.[38] One imagines she had something useful to teach.

Roger Langdon's father was a parish clerk and Sunday school teacher but sent the boy off to work under a brutal ploughman at the age of eight.[39] He ran away and after many wanderings, became a railwayman and eventually, in 1867, a stationmaster. He was a self-taught amateur astronomer, making his own telescopes. He never went to school himself, but 'somehow or other' learnt to write. For most of their married life, he and his wife ran a private school, a practice begun for the education of their own children. His wife taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and sewing, while Roger taught scripture, provided scientific apparatus and made the benches for the schoolroom.

> His teaching [recorded his daughter] was unorthodox and advanced, and he always gave us plenty to think about. When later on we went to school at Taunton we found ourselves in most subjects in advance of children who attended schools in the town.[40]

Two main factors seem to have been important in maintaining an educational progression once the influence of parents or schoolteachers came to an end. The passion for reading was sometimes expressed in a catholic appetite for print (as in the famous case of Thomas Cooper) or in the desire to devour, and preferably to possess, a very particular book.[41] But the reading habit itself needed to be supported by some kind of fellowship in the effort to understand. This might be associated with religious questioning, a very common feature in youth, or with accounting for ordinary conditions of life, or might happen in a less self-conscious way in the course of ordinary sociality. For George Howell, for example, who learned his later liberalism within a radical culture, it was discussion with his mates in a shoemaker's workshop which provided the stimulus. The radical press, in this case as very often, furnished texts of debate, bridging a more private educational experience and the more public world of a movement.[42] (Mayhew's typification of London trades by 'intelligence' suggests that an education at the work-place was,

where conditions still allowed, quite common). From this point on 'the educational' becomes indistinguishable from more general currents in radical culture and the approach via individuals distorts a more collective pattern, in which 'living' and 'learning' are hard to disentangle. The most important experiences were those that have been examined by students of the cultural life of 'infidelity', the more heterodox forms of religion and especially Sunday school teaching, the local life of radicalism, Owenism and Chartism. Thus Holyoake, under the influence of the Birmingham Owenites and Unitarians, became a social missionary, while Lovett, Cooper and Harney brought very different attributes to Chartism. Gutteridge, still pondering on nature, read Voltaire, Volney, Paine and Owen and joined a group of free-thinkers. A later generation, following Bamford in many ways, brought a characteristically educational orientation to popular liberalism.

Press

It was, perhaps, the press, in each distinctive phase, that epitomized the forms of radical education. Its general historical importance is now well established. In the first phase it was the main source of unity: '1816-1820 were, above all, years in which popular Radicalism took its style from the hand-press and the weekly periodical.'[43] The unstamped press from 1830 to 1836 was both an educative force, developing much later Chartist theory, and a practical example of the struggle against unjust laws and oppressive government.[44] More recently, it has been established that the press was important within the dynamics of Chartism itself and that 'the establishment of a national newspaper [the *Northern Star*] was a vital prerequisite to the emergence of the Chartist party'.[45]

The political importance of the press was closely linked to its versatility as an educational form. It was a resource that could be used with great flexibility. It could be carefully studied and pondered over, as the more expository parts of, say, the *Poor Man's Guardian* must have been. It could be read aloud in declamatory style in pub or public place as Cobbett's or O'Connor's addresses were.[46] It reached its 'pupils' at different levels of literacy and preparedness for study. The conjunction, it is true, sounds somewhat paradoxical: because of our experience of the modern popular press, we are not used to thinking of a newspaper as an educative medium. An example may convince. We can take the *Northern Star* as the hardest case, the most newspaperly of the radical media and that with the strongest reputation for sheer demagoguery.

The *Star* was certainly a newspaper. It 'could complete with any adversary for coverage', using paid journalists and local correspondents.[47] It remains, as a result, the best source for the study of Chartism everywhere. Yet the *Star* was also saturated with an educational content, even if we interpret 'education' in the most conventional sense. It contained regular advertisements and reviews of radical literature, drew attention to travelling lecturers likely to appeal to popular audiences, noted prosecutions of flogging schoolmasters (presumably to warn readers off such offenders) and published Charles Dickens's exposé of boarding

schools from *Nicholas Nickleby*.[48] It gave special attention to Sunday schools, noting the opening of new ones, reporting on meetings of Sunday school teachers and covering the doings of Sunday school unions in Chartist localities. It supported the fund-raising efforts of schools belonging to the more adventurous chapels and sects.[49] It carried reports of Sunday school festivals and outings. In June 1838, for instance, it printed an account of the festival at Keighley, noting a Radical presence in the usual procession through the town: 'the most conspicuous was the Providence, or as it has been charitably denominated by its pious neighbours, the Infidel Sunday School'. The children were preceded by an 'excellent band' and a banner carrying the words 'No Sin to Write'.[50] O'Connor, in his strenuous tours of branches of the National Charter Association, often noted and praised their educational efforts, including those for children.[51] In all these ways, quite aside from its 'teaching', we can certainly see the *Star* as an educational medium. The distinction between 'physical' and 'moral' force Chartism and the tendency to identify O'Connor with the latter has distorted understandings of the *Star* as a newspaper and of O'Connor as a leader.[52] A study of the newspaper itself does not support the contention of R.C. Gammage, Chartism's first historian, that O'Connor 'never sought to raise the Chartist body by enlightening its members'.[53]

Content

Perhaps the phrase 'really useful knowledge' is the best starting point. It was more than just a parody of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It was a way of distancing working-class aims from some immediate (capitalist) conception of utility and from recreational or diversionary notions. It expressed the conviction that real knowledge served practical ends, ends, that is, for the knower. The insistence on this was unanimous:

> This knowledge will be of the best kind because it will be practical. [*The Co-operator*, an early Owenite journal]

> All useful knowledge consists in the acquirement of ideas concerning our conditions in life. [*The Pioneer*, an Owenite/trade union journal]

> It is a wrong use of words to call a man an ignorant man, who well understands the business he has to carry on . . . . [Cobbett]

> What we want to be informed about is - *how to get out of our present troubles*. . . [*Poor Man's Guardian*]

> A man may be amused and instructed by scientific literature but the language which describes his wrongs clings to his mind with an unparalleled pertinacity. [*Poor Man's Guardian*][54]

A concern that knowledge should be relevant to the experienced problems of life was reflected in the criticisms of the SDUK and of the fare of mechanics institutes as trivial and childish.[55] A slightly different criticism was sometimes addressed to lecturers and to the more 'philosophical' of fellow radicals: a criticism of wilful

abstractness or abstruseness, of the failure to speak plainly. When a reviewer in the *Pioneer* exhorted his readers 'to call on men of talent to instruct you in the highest branches of science', a fine Cobbett-like editorial, probably by James Morrison, put him in his place:

> No proud, conceited scholar knows the way - the rugged path that we are forced to travel; they sit them down and sigh, and make a puny wail of human nature; they fill their writings full of quaint allusions, which we can fix no meaning to; they are by far too classical for our poor knowledge-box; they preach up temperance, and build no places for our sober meetings . . . but we will make them bend to suit our circumstances.[56]

There is a lot going on in these few pungent sentences. There is a hostility to the scholar and a recognition that his skills may dominate or mystify. There is a moment of self-deprecation ('Poor knowledge-box'). But there is also a sense of the idealism or triviality of much 'preaching' and of the absence of that really materialist grasp of conditions which 'we' ourselves (for all our lack of learning) actually possess. There is also a determination to work through the problems politically, to make the 'intellectuals' work *for* us. Very similar themes appear in a running debate within radicalism between those who argued that we remain ignorant and need to get knowledge and those who inverted the intellectual pyramid and argued that 'we' were really wiser than 'they'.

Radicals, however, also argued that their conception of knowledge was wide, much more liberal than philanthropic offerings. Education should be comprehensive in *every* meaning of the word: widely available and extensive in content. The language of universal enlightenment occurs again and again in radical propaganda, the contrast being with the confining of knowledge by monopoly or control. In one of its earthier analogies, the *Poor Man's Guardian* compared knowledge with capital and with manure:

> If manure be suffered to lie in idle heaps, it breeds stink and vermin. If properly diffused, it vivifies and fertilizes. The same is true of capital and knowledge. A monopoly of either breeds filth and abomination. A proper diffusion of them fills a country with joy and abundance.[57]

A fuller formulation was that given in 1853 by Benjamin Warden, a Marylebone artisan, trade unionist, Co-operator and later Chartist.

> Knowledge was very differently understood in its application to the people generally. Brougham and others summed it up as little more than honour and obey the King, and all who are in authority under him. 'You may get practical science', say they, 'but it is only to make you better servants'. Their views expressed a limited range, while our own were founded on all known facts. Mechanics Institutes were not intended to teach the most useful knowledge but to teach only as might be profitable to the unproductive, He trusted, however, we should now get working men to inquire how the produce of their labour was so cunningly and avariciously abstracted from them, and thence go on to the attainment of truth, in order to obtain, before long . . . happiness and community.[58]

The 'practical' and the 'Liberal' were not seen as incompatible as they tend to be in modern education debates. For the practical embraced 'all known facts' and 'the attainment of truth'. Despite the stress on a relation to the knower's experience, there is no narrowly *pragmatic* conception of knowledge here. Knowledge is not just a political instrument; the search for 'truth' matters.

Radicals did distinguish, however, between different kinds of knowledge and the practical priorities between them. While a really full or human education, embracing a knowledge of man and nature, would certainly be achieved once the Charter had been won or the New Moral World ushered in, some substantive understandings had a special priority, here and now. Certain truths had a pressing immediacy. They were indispensable means to emancipation. These truths were several simple insights. Once grasped they provided explanations for whole areas of experience and fact. Once these truths were understood, the old world could indeed be shaken.

Because the radical 'theory' of this period is already well known, it is possible to be very brief. There were three main components in what we might term the 'spearhead knowledge' of early-nineteenth-century radicalism. For the radical mainstream, running from Jacobinism through Cobbett and the unstamped and into the Chartist movement, 'political knowledge' maintained its pre-eminence. As a number of studies have now shown, Paine's popular radical liberalism was the most powerful continuing influence on radical political theory.[59] Yet it is important to stress the historical distance that separates Paine's world of the French and American Revolutions from the Britain of the 1830s. The changes had been very great, not least within the British state. This was not just a question of the Reform Act of 1832, the bringing of industrial interests within 'the constitution' and the exclusion of the propertyless. Under Whig auspices after 1832 the state was increasingly employed in a dynamic and transformative manner both to discipline individual capitals and to secure the conditions of capital accumulation as a whole. This involved attacking the customary defences of the poor and handling the hostility which this itself produced, both by coercive means and by modifying the most aggressively forward policies. Radicals schooled in natural right theory and the 'aristocratic' character of state and church had to come to some understanding of Poor Law, Factory Acts, the professionalization of civilian police, the reform of secondary punishments and important changes in the criminal law. Nor was it altogether convincing to attack the educationalists of the 1830s in the same terms as the conservatives of the 1800s like Dr Bell, John Weyland and Patrick Colquhoun.

Something of these changes was grasped in later radical theory, especially in the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the *Northern Star*. While retaining the theory of natural rights as a kind of moral underpinning of the demand for universal suffrage and, certainly, on occasion, speaking of the evils of taxation, the *Guardian* changed Paine's political sociology and developed a more active, interventionist view of 'government'. From the Reform Act, the *Guardian* learnt to draw relations of power (and exploitation) between property as a whole and the working class, not, as in Paine, between 'aristocracy' and 'people'.[60] The *Guardian* was much more interested too in the law and in the actual operations of government: government was

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an instrument of great power - hence the absolute priority of changing it and the centrality of political solutions:

> From government all good proceeds - and from government - all evils that afflict the human race emanate. There is no power except that of government, that can extensively effect the state of man. How necessary - how important it is - that government should be pure, not alone in its acts but in its constitution - in its construction.[61]

The primary strategic problem was how to secure a 'government of the whole people to protect the whole people'. This once achieved 'the majority' would be in a position to introduce 'Owenism, St. Simonism or any other -ism' that would ensure the well-being of the whole.[62] This was the core of what the *Guardian* called 'knowledge calculated to make you free'.[63]

Like 'political knowledge', the Owenite's 'social science' or 'science of society' incorporated a central ethical notion and a simple principle of social explanation. In advanced versions of 'political knowledge' these were the rights of man and an extreme (political) democracy and the principle of the class nature of the state. Owenism centred on 'community' and a rational altruism and the principle of the educative force of competitive social relationships and institutions. Social co-operation among equals-in-circumstances was the only enduring source of progress and happiness. (It was also 'true Christianity', unlike the priestly kinds.) But why was Society so unlike what Reason prescribed? The explanation hinged on the socializing force of institutions and, in the end, on a fairly mechanical environmentalism. To live in this old immoral world was to become irrational, to have one's character misshapen as competitive, disharmonious and violent, and to learn the great untruth that the fault lay with oneself. The competitiveness of the economic system was reinforced by a whole range of social institutions. There was little indeed which did not, in the Owenite analysis, count as an ideological resource. But it was in relation to three key institutions - the family, the church and the school - that Owenite ideas were most forcibly expressed: in Owenite feminism, in Owenite secularism and in Owenite educational theory.[64] Owenism, then, added whole dimensions to the analysis of privations and a much more rounded view of liberation. It also tended to counter the overwhelmingly conspiratorial view of ruling-class actions promulgated by most of the radical press. The *Crisis*, for instance, spent some time explaining why it was impossible for men like Lords Grey and Brougham or the Duke of Wellington to analyse society rationally. They too were creatures of circumstance:

> The circumstances of an hereditary Earl, of one trained in the profession of law, and especially of English law, and now a Lord, and of a successful soldier of fortune, now a Duke, are the most unlikely to form human beings competent to understand the *real cause* of the errors and evils of society . . . .[65]

Or as the *Pioneer* put it, 'Ye are as circumstances made you; nor praise nor blame from us.'[66]

The third main element of spearhead knowledge concerned questions of poverty and exploitation. How was it, in the midst of the production of wealth, that the labourers remained so poor? Economic justice prescribed that the labourer should have the full fruits of his toil; 'labour economics' or 'moral' or 'co-operative political economy' showed how capitalists stole a proportion in the shape of a 'tax' called profit. Though such theories gave a central place to capital, unlike the older notions of poverty through taxation or land theft, the capitalist still tended to be understood in his role as factor, merchant or external organizer of production, and exploitation was still understood as something that happened in exchange. The characteristic solution was to attempt to cut out the middle man from the process altogether and subject production and distribution to communal control.[67]

When radicals spoke of 'really useful knowledge' they usually meant one or other or all of these understandings of existing circumstances. As Patricia Hollis has argued the radical repertoire was built accumulatively not in some simple developmental sequence towards the more 'socialist' elements. Newer insights tended to be expressed in the older rhetoric.[68] Yet these understandings were very powerful. They embraced, after all, a theory of economic exploitation, a theory of the class character of the state and a theory of social or cultural domination, understood as the formation of social character.

'How to do as many useful things as possible'

It is not possible to do justice here to all the elements in radical conceptions of knowledge. Chartism, for instance, was possessed of a rich literary culture. There was a widespread popular interest in the natural sciences, important in some forms of radicalism for its iconoclastic relation to 'Superstition' and 'Church Christianity'. Any more complete treatment should also consider the startling modernity of Owenite experiments in the education of children, especially the stress on the child's own activity, the width of the curriculum and the insistence on reasonable adult behaviour towards the young.[69] One more theme must suffice: the relation of knowledge to production, or what is now often summed up (misleadingly) as the question of 'skills'.

Cobbett's approach to this question is particularly interesting.[70] Like all radicals he was concerned with political education. 'I was', he wrote, with typical immodesty and a grain of truth, 'the teacher of the nation: the great source of political knowledge.'[71] But he added a stock of notions about the education of children, attempting to distinguish a real 'education' (a word worth rescuing) from mere 'Heddekashun'. Education meant 'bringing up', 'breeding up' or 'rearing up'. It included the cultivation of 'everything with regard to the *mind* as well as the *body* of the child.[72] It embraced book-learning where this was useful, but much more besides. One central concern was to teach the child to earn a living, to acquire an economic independence - a 'competence' in both sets of meanings of the word. Such an education should occur almost imperceptibly in the course of play or labour. 'Heddekashun' by contrast was artificial, coercive and divorced from

real needs. It involved learning irrelevancies from books. It was a thing quite outside the control of parents and children, resting on alien purposes. It meant 'taking boys and girls from their father's and mother's houses, and sending them to what is called a school . . . .'[73]

The two most important constituents of 'rearing up' were an emphasis on practical skills and on the educative context of the home. Since Cobbett almost always had in mind the village labourer or small farmer, his prescriptions often have an old-fashioned or 'Tory' ring. He sometimes used the language of a traditionalist squire or farmer, especially when blaming 'Heddekashun' for encouraging artificial social ambitions.[74] Yet the appropriate education of the labourer or small farmer was not particularly limiting. The first priority was to teach the practical skills of husbandry and of 'cottage economy': gardening, rearing animals, making bread, beer, bacon, butter and cheese, tending trees, and, for boys, ploughing, hedging and ditching. Farmers must know how to ride, hunt, shoot and manage accounts. A healthy body and sober habits were also important. Yet more literary skills, as tools, should also be accessible to all. 'Book-learning is by no means to be despised; and it is a thing that may be laudably sought after by persons in all states of life.'[75] So when Cobbett praised the native wisdom of the untutored person, it was not to justify the withholding of literacy, a common argument among 'Tories'.[76] Cobbett was concerned, rather, to stress the value and rootedness of common sense and customary knowledge and to show the inadequacy of purely literary or abstract study. This was most startlingly expressed in a defence of the illiterate.

> Men are not to be called *ignorant* merely because they cannot make upon paper certain marks with a pen, or because they do not know the meaning of such marks when made by others.[77]

By the same rule, those whom the world called wise were often very stupid. Of the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* and of others with a facility for words, he wrote, 'they were extremely enlightened, but they had no knowledge'.[78]

Cobbett's positive evaluation of more literary skills was expressed more fully in his *Advice to Young Men*, and his *Grammar of the English Language*, works which ought to establish his reputation as a conscious educator. These texts were certainly intended for a popular audience, though one that was almost wholly male. *Advice to Young Men* was sub-titled 'and incidentally to Young Women' and addressed to 'every father'; The *Grammar* was intended for 'soldiers, sailors, apprentices and ploughboys'. (Cobbett was indeed the original patriarch, a theme to which we will return.) In the *Grammar* Cobbett sought to democratize the subject and to rescue it from its association with dead languages. He understood the connection between forms of language and social domination and saw the teaching of grammar as a way of protecting the ordinary man 'from being the willing slave of the rich and titled part of the community'.[79] Arithmetic too was a 'thing of everyday utility'.[80] History also was valuable, as a study of 'how these things came'. Cobbett actually wrote his own history book, but he was teaching how these things (tithes, taxes, the National Debt and his whole demonology) came, all the time.[81]

His curriculum, then, had the same feature as other radical versions. Working back from the living situation of adults, he ended with a range of 'competences' that combined the practical and the liberal.

His stress on the educative role of the family was linked to his political suspicion of schools. But we cannot understand this part of his writing without remembering two points made about Cobbett in *The Making of the English Working Class*: his 'personalisation of political issues' and the fact that 'his outlook approximated most closely to the ideology of the small producers'.[82] The central experience in his educational writing is Cobbett the father. Moreover, he actually lived (or envisaged) a situation in which production, domestic labour and the reproduction of skills all remained within the control of the father in the family of the direct producer. In such a situation the natural way for boys or girls to learn was alongside father or mother in the ordinary tasks of the day. All Cobbett's descriptions emphasize such learning situations; learning to make hurdles by helping father at work in a Hampshire copse; learning to manage a farm and read and write letters through the medium of a hamper that passed from family to prison cell; the daring image of the Sandhill, a description of a childhood game to set beside the philanthropic ban on play.[83] His own children were taught 'indirectly'. Things were made available - ink, pens and paper - 'and everyone scrabbled about as he or she pleased'. So 'the book-learning crept in of its own accord, by imperceptible degrees'. Cobbett's conclusions, then, appear equally inevitable:

> What need had we of *schools?* What need of *teachers?* What need of scolding or force, to nduce children to read and write and love books.[84]

Cobbett's personalisms were based on rather special circumstances, 'a marvellous concatenation of circumstances such as can hardly befall one man out of a thousand', according to the *Poor Man's Guardian's* critique.[85] As writer and farmer engaged (between politics, prison and exile) in two unalienated forms of labour, Cobbett spent much time at home in conditions of economic independence. (One is also curious about the relative roles of Mr and Mrs Cobbett in the 'rearing up' of their children.) If he expressed, in ideal form educational practices appropriate to the small producer household, he expressed them at a time when they were becoming less easy to realize.

Cobbett's ideal united mental and manual labour through the father's control of production. Owenites argued that monopoly or distortion of knowledge was a feature of capitalist industry. Capital seized hold of the secrets of the trades (once reproduced within the labourer's culture) and made of their workers 'unthinking slaves'.[86] Although these themes are everywhere present in the theory and practice of co-operation, they were most elaborately expressed by the 'early Socialist', William Thompson.[87]

Thompson argued that capitalist production tended to divorce labour from a knowledge of productive processes, to divide, in Marx's terms, mental and manual labour, conception and execution. He also argued that 'commercial society' had a more general effect on the production of knowledge itself. There was a direct

interest in the development and application of the physical sciences which, by multiplying machinery, would enrich the wealthy. Political and moral sciences, however, were neglected or shaped according to the interests of the rich. In the absence of a knowledge of 'the natural laws of distribution', machinery became a means of oppression. In co-operative activity and ultimately in a new world, mental and manual labour would be reunited and knowledge of man and nature develop in harmony. Co-operative activity was often a conscious living out of these themes. It aimed at re-appropriating the capitalist's control of production and exchange. As the *Birmingham Co-operative Herald* put it:

> Labourers must become capitalists, and must acquire knowledge to regulate their labour on a large and united scale before they will be able to enjoy the whole product of their labour.[88]

The knowledge part of this was important: the Co-operative equivalent of Cobbett's 'how to do as many useful things as possible' was how to repossess the knowledge and skills appropriated by capital. The activity of the collective organization of 'affairs', including affairs of business, was itself an important education:

> They are obliged to exercise their judgement, to weigh and balance probabilities - to count the profit and loss - and to acquire a knowledge of human character . . . . If the mind continues to be occupied in this manner, for a series of years, it will receive a practical education much more improving than the dry lessons of schools, which exercise the memory by rote, without opening and strengthening the understanding. All co-operators will become, to a certain extent, men of business. But they cannot become men of business without becoming men of knowledge.[89]

Popularity

It is difficult, perhaps foolish, to try to weigh the impact of the solutions we have discussed - their 'popularity' - in some simple quantitative sense. We have neither the conceptual means nor the evidence. We do not really know how to 'think' the 'circuit' of such effects: from the conditions from which radical theory arose in the first place, through the educational practices themselves, to success or failure in actually forming people's principles of life and action. The difficulty illustrates the need for an adequate theory of culture/ideology. Empirically, we might begin by establishing what David Jones has called 'the various indices of activity'.[90] We can assess the circulation of the presses, multiplying for collective readership. We can count and place geographically the more formal solutions of schools and halls. We can set this beside the overall geography of the movements themselves and an assessment of the extent to which they moved masses in different places and at different times. Beyond this there are really imponderable questions. How many working men followed Lovett's 'unpopular' advice to economize on drink and spend the surplus on radical journals?[91] How many talked politics with their wives in the spirit of equality advocated by radical women? How common was the practice of Sophia of Birmingham who gave her children a political education by telling

them 'all we learn of good' and never shirking difficult questions?[92] How many recipients of tracts conducted this kind of dialogue with the authors?

When a tract is left me (which is the case almost every Sunday) I examine it, and where I find a blank, there I write some very pithy political or philosophical sentence, and so make them subservient to a purpose diametrically opposed to their intent - namely the diffusion of truth.[93]

How significant a contribution did radical education make to basic attainments - literacy for instance? What kind of effect did radical hostility to provided schooling have on popular patterns of school use?

From existing knowledge something can be said on some of these questions. The indices run very high at peak points of radical activity. The largest ever circulation for a radical paper was that achieved by the *Northern Star* in the summer of 1839 - perhaps 50,000 copies.[94] At such moments radicalism acquired a mass character. Radical ideas and organization could also penetrate into the most unpromising environments, under the noses, for example, of conscientious local paternalists.[95] But even Chartism had marked geographical limits. Whole communities, especially in the countryside and in the south and east, lacked organization, though it is impossible to assess sympathies.[96] (The prior defeat of the southern labourer in 1830 is a crucial unevenness in working-class history.) In the north and Midlands, by contrast, many localities had a continuous history of radicalism throughout the period, often punctuated by major mobilizations. In such areas radical education in its various forms had a continuous and lively history, supported by groups of provincial leaders. It is also clear that radical politics and cultural activity secured, for thousands of individuals, some educational progression, providing a motive for learning. Yet it is certain too that radicalism's more formal solutions did not and could not match the provided forms in extent and solidity. The dream of Lovett and others, of a whole alternative system of education, remained a dream. One might guess, however, that the more democratic institutions had a greater effect on their pupil's consciousness of the social world than a more routine schooling.

It is important to do more work on all these questions, but it may be more useful to approach the broader problem somewhat differently.

As our knowledge of popular movements, especially of Chartism and its antecedents, deepens, much of an older anonymity has been dispersed. It is possible now to identify and name levels of leadership well beyond the kind of national figures discussed in Cole's *Chartist Portraits* and subsequent biographies. For some localities a local leadership has been described quite closely. These were the people whom we have termed, with deliberate looseness, 'radicals' throughout this study. They were the journalists, the demagogues, the lecturers, the national and provincial leaders, the organizers, directors and 'educators' of radical movements. We may refer to many of these people as 'intellectuals'. The value of this term is to mark both the coherence of understanding that was developed and the 'educative' functions that were performed. We might even speak of radicals, and especially Chartists and

Owenites, as constituting political parties or proto-parties. In some analyses of party, indeed, the terms party and intellectual are closely connected. For Gramsci, for example, parties were organizations that enabled the production of intellectuals whose experiences and allegiances were, organically, those of the class which they served. Certainly some such distinction - between party and class - between radical 'intellectual' and those whom they addressed - is in this context a useful one. We may then speak of a more or a less 'internal' or 'organic' relation between the two.[97] The question of the 'popularity of radicalism' becomes, then, more qualititive and relational.

There are, of course, great difficulties in answering this question too: it needs to be explored for each movement, each locality and perhaps for each major leader. Edward Thompson's comparison of Owen and Cobbett underlines the importance of individuality:

> If Cobbett's writings can be seen as a relationship with his readers Owen's can be seen as ideological raw material diffused among working-people, and worked up by them into different products.[98]

We might none the less risk the generalization that from 1816 to the early 1840s the relationship between radical leadership and working-class people was extraordinarily close.

One common, but not decisive, test of the organicism of a leadership is its social class origins. It is a common test because it is 'obvious' that people of working-class origin will have a more intimate knowledge of the problems of their class and a stronger sense of loyalty than others. It is not 'decisive' because there seems to have been very many exceptions to this rule: renegades, 'gentleman agitators', 'intellectuals'. The relationship between some of the radicals who were not working class and their working-class 'constituents' seems often to have been peculiarly close - John Fielden, Feargus O'Connor and Bronterre O'Brien are exemplary cases.[99] It would be wrong, however, to regard Chartism or its predecessors as typically led by middle-class people. Perhaps the most important feature of nineteenth-century radicalism was its capacity to produce an indigenous leadership. It is not difficult to understand why this was so, for working people with an inclination towards mental labour *had* to stay within their own class, or occupy positions of great social ambiguity like elementary or private schoolmastering or journalism or lecturing. There were few open roads to co-option. At the same time an education and a sort of career were available within radical movements themselves.

The more decisive tests of organicism are those discussed by Gramsci in a 'note' on Italian idealism, though, as usual, the problems of popular communist organization were not far from his mind:

> One could only have had . . . an organic quality of thought if there had existed the same unity between the intellectuals and the simple as there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals

> of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity . . . . Is a philosophical movement properly so called when it is devoted to creating a specialised culture among restricted intellectual groups, or rather when, or only when, in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to 'common sense' and coherent on a scientific plane, it never forgets to remain in contact with the 'simple' and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problem it sets out to study and to resolve? Only by this contact does a philosophy become 'historical', purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become life.[100]

Early nineteenth-century radicalism did indeed find in the everyday life of the masses 'the source of the problems it set out to study and resolve'. 'Spearhead knowledge' centred, as we have seen, on the experiences of poverty, political oppression and social and cultural apartheid. It gave a wider, more 'historical', more coherent view of everyday life than customary or individual understandings. This was possible, in part, because the commonest inhibitions to such an internal relation were weakly developed. There was nowhere else but contemporary experience from which an appropriate theory could derive: no pre-existing socialist doctrine to be learnt and therefore no danger of the rigidity or autonomy of dogmas. Perhaps there was a tendency of Painite theory to crystallize thus, but, in general, there were simply no historical parallels for the situation of working people in England from which relevant theory might have been derived. A similar argument relates to forms of organization. Though radical groups can be considered parties in a looser Gramscian sense, they were hardly parties on a stricter Leninist model. But organizational looseness had compensations. There were few organizational orthodoxies either, little growth of bureaucracies, little of the more extreme kinds of internal division between 'officials' and 'rank and file' which were to dominate trade union, social democratic and communist politics. The main inhibition to a notably democratic practice was the *amour propre* and charismatic character of some leaders, who, however, could be jettisoned or ignored. In this sense, radicalism had little except its 'popularity' on which to depend. Many of the formal characteristics of its education project stem from this: informality for instance, and the 'practical', 'unintellectualistic' (had we better say unacademic?) character of its 'theory'.

Shifts and differences

The most important shift, over time, was a heightened awareness of the immense difficulty of sustaining radical education. We can, with the benefit of hindsight, see this as the beginning of a longer transformation in working-class educational strategies. From the 1850s and more surely from the later 1860s, the strategy of substitution - of an alternative working-class system - was replaced by the demand for more equal access to facilities that were to be provided by the state. This became the main feature of popular liberal politics and then of the Labour Party's

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educational stance.[101] Thus while radicals, Chartists and Owenites all opposed 'state education' except as the work of a transformed state, later socialists actually fuelled the growth of state schooling by their own agitations. The consequences of this adaptation were immense: it involved, for instance, accepting, in a very sharp form, the child-adult divide, the tendency to equate education with school, the depoliticization of educational content, and the professionalization of teaching. In all these ways the state as educator was by no means a neutral apparatus.

A study of discussions in the radical press from the later 1830s shows very clearly the preference for, but also the limitations of, a more independent route. Independence remained the central feature of the tradition. Most early radicals had accepted the Godwinian case against every authoritative direction of learning. Cobbett opposed 'national education' right up to his death in 1835. The *Black Dwarf* even opposed the setting up of national libraries on the ground that learning should support itself.[102] Owen himself sometimes, and rather rhetorically, called on government to supply (an Owenite) education: most Owenites probably agreed with Shepherd Smith about 'the folly of looking to governments for aid'.[103] The usual Chartist line was an inversion of that of middle-class reformers: 'national education' could and would follow universal suffrage rather than precede it: any education worth the name was unlikely and would probably be very dangerous beforehand. There was even some debate about the wisdom of a state organization of schooling after the Charter was achieved.[104]

As independence was asserted in still more class-conscious forms, difficulties multiplied. Radicals before the 1830s had tended to see the problem mainly in terms of monopoly. Secular and religious authority kept the people ignorant, ignorant even of the laws they were to obey. The task, then, was to spread knowledge where none had existed before - or only that lack of knowledge which Paine had called 'superstition': hence that unreasonable faith in reason and in their own presses, legacy in part from their own Enlightenment sources.[105] Besides, as Thompson has stressed, enlightenment seemed to work. But radicals of the 1830s and 1840s, faced by defeats, developed a greater sense of the ideological resources of competitive society, the need to 'un-teach' old associations and the significance, as positive sources of 'error', of institutions like the churches. The Owenite analysis of society's immense ideological weight, which in less sanguine times might have bred a deep fatalism, posed at least the problems of where to start.

The second set of difficulties concerned the material conditions for radical education. There was now much more emphasis on such practical limitations as lack of time, income, rest, and peace and quiet. A sense of these problems seems to have fuelled a move towards more collective and formal solutions, especially for children, different in kind from Cobbett's hearth-based remedies.[106] It was those media with readerships rooted in the industrial north and Midlands - the organs of the factory movement, the Birmingham and union-based *Pioneer* and the *Northern Star* - that seem to have responded most sensitively to new needs.

The factory movement itself is the most obvious example of the newer emphases,

for it campaigned on matters of time and the reduction of the working day both for children and adults. It was also the first example of a working-class strategy of pressure on the state to secure well-defined reforms. Of course, the educational content of the movement should not be exaggerated: freedom from excessive toil as a human right or a Christian obligation was also stressed and the factory was attacked as a source of many evils. But the agitation over hours can certainly be read as an attempt to reinstate the educational importance of the family. The need for education was often cited as a motor of the movement and factory reformers put forward their own educational schemes. These sometimes had a Tory or Anglican character but the programme of the Society for Promoting National Regeneration, for instance, put forward a working-class alternative, similar to but more modest than later substitutional schemes.[107]

Working-class difficulties were also often explored in debates with 'education-mongers' - those who saw education as a sufficient remedy for social evils. When Thomas Wyse, a leading educational reformer of the 1830s, commenced his own agitation, he had a series of visits from Robert Owen who gently explained the irrationality of his plans.

> In fact, while the labouring population are kept constantly immersed in pecuniary difficulties, struggling in a whirlpool of evils arising from intermittent employment, and low wages while in employment, the amelioration hoped for by the mere mental reformer can never be achieved.[108]

Similar arguments were repeatedly put by the *Northern Star*. O'Connor himself often wrote on this theme, stressing the indispensability of leisure, the attacks of authority on popular amusements, the perversion of Sunday, the exhaustion produced by 'debasing and life-destroying drudgery', the destruction of physical health and the removal from nature. Working people had little positive incentive to learn or to educate their children. They were shut out from opportunities for economic and political initiatives. The solution was to secure their comforts and political rights first. Once this was done, the people could be trusted to educate themselves.[109] *The Pioneer* put the same argument in more literary form, but with typical concreteness.

> Now mark the toilsome artisan: the bell arouses him from slumber:- soft ease invites him to another nap, but jerk must go to the eyelids, - the half-stretched limbs must spring, - on go the vestments, - up lifts the latch, - and with a hurried steop he hastes to work . . . . To work, toil, toil, till strength requires a breakfast - thanks if the cupboard hold one; - a demi-hour allowed to gulp it down. To work again till hunger calls for dinner, - a scanty meal, - and off again to labour until night. Night comes, and now for peaceful leisure. - A book perchance - A book! - A noisy brat to nurse; a scramble for a loaf's small dividend; a cry of pain; a half-a-dozen little feet held up, petitioning for shoes; fit scene for quiet musing. A cluster round the homely hearth, scrambling for scanty rays of heat. A pretty picture, that - fine opportunity for useful training! The mother half worn out, her temper chafed, too busy far to rear the tender thought, - a rap 'o the head more

like, eliciting a charming chorus. O, what a wretched catechism is that between a labourer's child and his poor jaded mother! Their little souls grow full of brambles; their health depends on fickle chance; their wanton playfulness has no room to sport in; and *these are but the sweets of poverty.*

Having portrayed family circumstances in this poem of everyday life, the author turns angrily on the charitable:

Pooh! Cry the rich, it is the lot of poverty - There *must* be rich and poor - the poor are *naturally* ignorant. . . . Wrapped up in vile conceit, and ever ready with the admonition, ye, too, do join the cry, the craft cry of over abundant wages; the hackneyed slang respecting rights of capital; the enormous wrong of scorning our base origin; the wicked partiality of law; the sordid crippling of light amusements; the maw-worm whine of puffed up charity; the tract, the soup, the caps and tippett tippetts, and little leather breeches . . . . .

Were conditions equalized - 'just let our noisy brats enjoy a turn or two in your trim nurseries' - there would be no more charges of ignorance and brutishness.[110]

Most of these arguments were directed at targets outside the movement, but they also bore on internal radical debates. The radical enthusiasm for education was composed of several strands, some of them in potential conflict. We began by stressing the dilemma of the desire for education in straightened circumstances, further complicated by the distrust of philanthropy. Counter-education *was* an attempt to solve this dilemma, but it was not *merely* compensatory. Although all radicals saw education as an aspect of equal rights and a goal to be fought for, education was also part of a strategy or method. For Owenites, education (which always included the power of 'institutions', 'writings' and 'discourses' as well as schooling) was the principle means of agitation, but as J.F.C. Harrison has stressed, Owenism was 'not purely a movement to found schools and literary institutes'.[111] Similarly, in the political-radical mainstream, politics and education went together in a complicated web of means-ends relationships. Education without politics was deemed inadequate: it must be allied to some kind of power, some 'physical' or 'moral' force, some purchase on authority. As the *Poor Man's Guardian* put it:

I may be plundered of my purse by a gang of thieves - I may know *how* they took - *where* they have placed it - *the best way of recovering it;* but, without the means, will this knowledge restore the purse? Certainly not. In England a gang of thieves legislate for the community, and it is not sufficient that we *know* this to be the case, we must possess the means of protecting ourselves from this depredation.[112]

But politics without education was also inadequate. Certain kinds of knowledge were immediate means to the Charter: all sections of the Chartist movement gave to 'intelligence' a key role in mass agitation. This in turn meant that all activity that led to a general raising of levels of literacy and articulacy was to be fostered. There was no division at all in Chartist ranks on this particular theme.

The unity of the compensatory and political aspects of educational enthusiasm

did rest, however, on very particular conditions. The whole substitutional strategy was sustained by the belief that sooner or later the Charter or the New Moral World would be secured. Within the terms of this belief, the individual pursuit of knowledge or the general aim of 'improving' the whole class, or the desire to concentrate on the education of children, could all be held together. The task was to prepare for success and speed it. The larger education objectives, utopian indeed in existing circumstances, could be asked to wait. Soon, all would be achieved.

So when political challenges were blunted and hopes of immediate success began to fail, difficult tactical and strategic questions emerged. The commonest response was to hold the existing combination, limit educational ambitions, hope and work for some resolution at other (i.e. political) levels. But the history here is different within the Owenite and Chartist connections. Owenism was a protean movement that met frustrations by once more changing form, stressing yet another aspect of a very fertile repertoire. Chartism faced the problem of power, and had intermediate goals of great clarity (universal suffrage). Setbacks were correspondingly more traumatic, diversions more contentious and battles about strategy more ferocious and debilitating. None the less, somewhat similar debates can be traced within the two movements.

From the perspective of what remained the dominant tendency, the characteristic 'deviation' was to give to education schemes a priority independent of sensible tactical judgement. Since the commonest form of such schemes focused on the education of children, the threat was that radicals would become *merely* schoolmasters. This was certainly a tendency recurrently feared by the sanest of Owenite theorists: William Thompson up to his death in 1833, James Morrison in the *Pioneer* and Shephard Smith in the *Crisis*. They warned against the expenses, the diversion of effort and the tendency to 'sectarianism'.[113] But the history of Owenism is full of instances of education project-launching. In 1830, John Finch of Liverpool planned a college to provide a 'superior' residential education for hundreds of children of Co-operators.[114] The *Birmingham Co-operative Herald* enlarged this scheme: there should be preparatory schools in every town and country college with model farms and small-scale manufactories.[115] In 1833 this plan was revived by two groups. One scheme, proposed by a Mr Reynolds, was supported by Monsieur Philip Baume, a French philanthropist, who offered to lease fourteen acres for a college and give 'everything I possess'.[116] In the same year a group called 'the Social Reformers', meeting in Lovett's Coffee House, planned a boarding school to be supported by 'the intelligent and well-disposed among all classes'.[117] In 1835, an Owenite lecturer called Henderson described a plan for 'a very superior school' before an audience at the Charlotte Street Institute. Children were to board at from £18 to £28 per annum, to study all subjects and, since it had not been positively proved whether Man was 'herbaceous, gramnivorous or carnivorous', they were not to eat too much meat.[118] In 1838 there was a debate in the *New Moral World* about whether to accept £1000 from William Devonshire Saull, a London wine merchant, for educational purposes. The money was eventually used to start an 'Educational Friendly Society', one object of which was to found an

'Educational Community'. At the same time, plans for a Co-operative College were revived.[119] There was more than a hint of education project-building in the programme of the Association of All Classes of All Nations and in the Rational School Movement of 1839 to 1843. In 1839, 'Socius' in the *New Moral World* advocated converting Halls of Science into schools and the setting up of a 'Model Normal School'.[120] The proposal coincided with the debate between church and state over the Whig government's 'Normal School' plan of February 1839.

It was natural that Owenites should wish to found their own schools to show the world how children really could be educated and to avoid using the schools of Church or Dissent. In its more usual forms - more improvised, combining adults and children, and connecting schooling with other activities - Owenite schooling, especially at the level of the local branch, was a widespread and sensible response. But the education projects often bear the mark of the crankier, more philanthropic aspects of the movement and invariably involved middle-class aid and, perhaps, a loss of independence. One might doubt the value of 'superior' residential education to the children of working-class Co-operators or their ability to raise £1 per month per child (the Social Reformer's scheme) or £18 a year (Henderson's).

The equivalent within Chartism was the Lovett/Collins pamphlet of 1840, the ostracism of the 'new movers' in the battle that followed and the swinging of the main Chartist body behind O'Connor and the *Northern Star.*[121] Lovett's plan was to build a comprehensive system of counter-education eschewing the aid of 'irresponsible government' but allowing a role for middle-class sympathizers. The plan bore the stamp of Owenite influence, not least in its ambition: infant, preparatory and high schools in every place, reading rooms, lectures and libraries for adults in newly built district halls, agricultural and industrial schools for orphans, tracts, schoolbooks, and a system for the training of teachers with at least one 'normal school'.[122]

This was less a middle-class scheme, as the O'Connorite criticism went, than an illustration of the ultimate limitations of the strategy of substitution. While mainstream Chartists continued more modest educational work and indeed increased its intensity, Lovett's association became a progressive but not too successful experiment in middle-class philanthropy. The founding of the first day school was delayed till 1848. By this time Lovett himself had actually become a schoolmaster and, under the influence of William Ellis, had entered 'a new epoch in my life'.[123] Ellis, a founder of the Birkbeck Schools, was a militant teacher of political economy.[124]

But the orthodox Chartist route did not constitute a solution either. By the mid 1840s it had reached its limits. In the decades that followed and in the wake of the political defeats, independent working-class education continued; in the better-off sectors it may even have increased. But it took on more individualized forms ('self-education') or lost its connection with politics ('mutual improvement') or became the cultural preserve of the aristocracies. It certainly lost the ambition of being an alternative system, especially with regard to children. At the same time a new kind of educational agitation began to emerge, linked to popular liberalism and the anti-Anglican alliance. Working-class activists began to demand education

through the state, even though initially, like the Chartist rump of 1851, they insisted still on some popular control.

Future questions

Explanations of the whole mid-nineteenth-century shift, of which the story of radical education is a part, have tended to focus on material improvements (economic trends of a largely quantitative kind) or on changes in the mode of 'hegemony' or 'social control' understood mainly as occurring within cultural and political relations. There have also been attempts to rework Lenin's theory of 'the aristocracy of labour'.[125] One common tendency, across very different accounts, has been to treat early-nineteenth-century radicalism rather unproblematically as the politics of a class-conscious working class, made or in the making.[126] We now know a great deal about the culture and forms of organization of this period, yet the position of the different groups of working people within economic relations remains surprisingly obscure. The most important questions concern the relations between labour and capital in the actual production of commodities, in what we might call the direct relations of production. What were the forms and degrees of the dependence of labour within production? How far did capital control through the labour process itself, as opposed to more externally or 'formally' through the ownership of materials or a monopoly or exchange? We badly need more exact categories for describing all the transitional forms between the relatively independent small producer and the fully proletarianized worker. The terms derived from contemporary parlance, like 'artisan', remain too loose for serious analytic use.[127]

These questions have tended to be bypassed by social historians though they are present in Marx and in some of the older economic histories. Yet they are crucial for an understanding of the wider questions which now concern our historiography, especially all the questions around 'control', 'hegemony' or 'reproduction' (in the global sense). For capital's control and labour's subordination were formed first and foremost in production. Certainly the forms of the relations there set the terms of what was struggled over elsewhere. But there are other very important questions too. For our educational themes, it is crucial to establish the effects of a deepening subordination of labour in production on the forms of the reproduction of labour, especially, of course, the production of new generations of labourers. The study of forms of the family and of relations between the sexes then becomes very important. The family was a site of reproduction *and* of production of both capitalist and non-capitalist kinds. These latter questions are only now being properly posed. Answering them requires a different sort of research, one that focuses on structure rather than culture. Even so, it is worth ending with some speculations on what structural changes our materials might suggest.

Initially, the independent tradition appears to have drawn on educational resources that could only have existed had capital's control of production and of the reproduction of labour power been relatively loose. Perhaps the most important of these resources lay in various forms of the small producer household, already

partially transformed in its relations to capital, but still possessed of a space or autonomy for activities of an educational kind, including the teaching of skills to children. The educational story we have just described (not by any means the whole story of working-class education) corresponds to the economic experience of the small-producer-becoming-proletarian. The main mechanism here seems to have been the curtailment or interruption of the educative or reproductive autonomies of family and community through, primarily, the more complete subordination of labour (male, female and juvenile) in production. This pressure from the sphere of production and the enforcement of capitalist economic relations was reinforced, of course, by direct intervention into the reproductive sphere, of which the growth of state and provided schooling is the most relevant example. At the same time as indigenous educational resources were squeezed, alternative forms were offered or enforced. The erosion of an indigenous educational capacity seems to have occurred in different ways. It happened in a few trades through the concentration of production in the factory and, eventually, the separation of the household and the sphere of capitalist production. The employment of children, often a concomitant of factory production but occurring on an extended scale outside, had, itself, obvious educative effects. But perhaps the most important form of pressure on the family was through a deepening dependence of domestic outwork on the capitalist merchant, factor or middleman and the reduction of margins of time and income through the prolongation of the working day. Low income not only changed the (necessarily educative) relations within the family but also made the family more and more dependent on the labour of the children. But effects such as these would have to be established for particular trades, times and places.[128]

We may understand radical education as an attempt to expand and develop those areas of autonomy and control over reproduction which remained. If this is accurate, it is important to say that it was not a fully 'working-class' phenomenon: it did not rest on fully proletarian conditions of existence. Indeed, the material spaces which it occupied were actually shrinking. This was accentuated by the changing geographical basis of radicalism which was also a changing social basis. The early radical phases rested upon artisans, trades like weaving with relatively recent histories of some independence, and, perhaps, petit bourgeois and lesser professional groups, more modern analogues of the small producer. The spread of the factories, the deepening subordination of the outworkers, the growth of sweated trades, together with the geographic shift northwards in Chartism, gave to radicalism a more fully proletarian base. To such people some of the earlier solutions must have seemed grossly inapplicable. We might compare Cobbett's fatherly idyll with Morrison's poem of everyday life. Perhaps the whole substitutional strategy was inapplicable too: certainly its ambitious Lovettite forms were. Yet it took time to find another route, appropriate to proletarian conditions, and a much longer haul to socialism. The priority, perhaps, *was* to build barriers to capital's appetite for labour and then to its tendency to intensify it. So far as education is concerned the period from the 1790s to the 1830s did *not* see 'the making of the English working class', did not see, that is, the development of the characteristic class strategies of

later periods. *This* story really begins, thinly, with the factory movement and continues with the educational strategies of late Chartism, popular liberalism and the early-twentieth-century labour movement.[129]

4 Imperialism, organized y

Michael Blanch

Introduction

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