

LANGUAGES OF CLASS

STUDIES IN
ENGLISH WORKING CLASS HISTORY
1832–1982

Gareth Stedman Jones



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INTRODUCTION

Each of the studies collected together in this book concerns the relationship between society and politics in England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: in particular, the changing place attributed to the 'working classes' or 'working class' within the development of the polity. If this topic merits new historical attention, it is certainly not because it has previously been ignored, but rather because the ways in which it has been considered important and the reasons given for its importance have generally been taken for granted. There are of course countless studies and histories of the working class. But most of them proceed all too smoothly along tramlines welded together long ago from a rough but apparently serviceable mixture of utilitarian, evolutionist and Marxist assumptions. In the new historical epoch which we appear to have entered, in which a whole set of conventional beliefs about working-class politics have been put into doubt – both nationally and internationally – a critical scrutiny of some of the intellectual premisses upon which these beliefs have been based can only be a gain. In England, what Eric Hobsbawm has recently described as 'the halting' of 'the forward march of labour' suggests the need not simply to examine 'the halting', but also to question the metaphor itself.¹ It is in this spirit that these essays have been collected together. It may not be possible for a historian to ask what sort of substantive reality 'the working class' as such might have possessed outside the particular historical idioms in which it has been ascribed meaning. But it certainly is possible to investigate how the

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (1981).
(All titles published in London unless specified otherwise.)

historical picture changes, once certain of the assumptions informing these idioms are no longer presupposed.

Some of the most deeply entrenched of these assumptions have clustered around the notion of class. In a country like the United States, it has never been possible for historians simply to infer class as a political force from class as a structural position within productive relations. In England, on the other hand, such equations between social and political forces have been only too easy to make both because much of modern English political history has generally been thought to coincide with class alignments and because, at the level of everyday speech, one of the peculiarities of England has been the pervasiveness of the employment of diverse forms of class vocabulary. Unlike Germany, languages of class in England never faced serious rivalry from a pre-existing language of estates; unlike France and America, republican vocabulary and notions of citizenship never became more than a minor current, whether as part of everyday speech or as analytic categories; unlike the countries of southern Europe, vocabularies of class did not accompany, but long preceded, the arrival of social democratic parties and were never exclusively identified with them. In fact, in England more than in any other country, the word 'class' has acted as a congested point of intersection between many competing, overlapping or simply differing forms of discourse – political, economic, religious and cultural – right across the political spectrum. It is in this very broad sense that class, however we define it, has formed an inescapable component of any discussion of the course of English politics and society since the 1830s.

But the easy derivation of political from social forces common among English historians is not explained simply by the pervasiveness of vocabularies of class or by the apparently self-evident facts of political history. It also derives from the large theoretical superstructures built upon them. Just as eighteenth century England had proved the seedbed of theories of commercial society (in fact more Scottish than English),² which already contained strong notions of social

² On this, see Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue, the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge (1983). I have on the whole confined my discussion to England. In some cases, particularly when

determination, so from the early nineteenth century, in a society in which languages of class grew earliest and most extensively, England became the privileged testing ground for novel theories of class conflict and class consciousness.³ In particular, as the progenitor of the first generally acknowledged working-class movement, the English working class provided the initial empirical basis for the formulation of the most portentous theoretical construction in this area – the Marxian theory of modern industry and proletarian revolution. Elements of a specifically English development between the 1770s and the 1840s were captured in an exceptionally compelling theoretical mesh and transformed into a universal theory of stages of proletarian class consciousness culminating in an epoch of social revolution. The *Communist Manifesto* represented a generalization of the model of English proletarian development produced by Engels in his ‘Condition of the Working Class in England’.⁴ Thus we may add another reason for a re-examination of English working-class history. Not only does such an examination throw some historical light upon the imaginative origins of the Marxist vision of the proletariat but also, in so doing, it may pinpoint more accurately some of the limitations of the explanatory framework that it offered for the interpretation of that history. Since much current social and labour history writing has been informed by Marxist assumptions or questions – including some of the essays reproduced here – such a line of enquiry is not solely of historical interest.

That questions deriving from a Marxist theoretical tradition should have informed some of the best contributions to English social history in the last twenty-five years is not as self-evident as it might at first appear. It is not difficult to understand why eighteenth and early nineteenth century

the state is discussed, the term ‘Britain’ might be more appropriate. I try to confine my discussion to England, however, because when languages of class have been fused with or inflected by languages of the (subordinate) nation, as they have in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, the political effects have been noticeably different.

³ For early usages of class terminology, see Asa Briggs, ‘The language of “class” in early nineteenth century England’, in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (1960).

⁴ For Engels’ place in the construction of this theory, see G. Stedman Jones, ‘Engels’ contribution to Marxism’, in Eric Hobsbawm (ed.), *History of Marxism*, vol. 1, Brighton (1981).

England should have been seen by different theorists as the *locus classicus* of a universal model, whether of commercial society, parliamentary liberalism, industrialism or proletarian revolution. But, from the vantage point of the late twentieth century, what stands out more saliently is not England as an ideal-typical example of socio-economic transformation but rather the particularity of English political development. Despite or perhaps precisely because it became 'the first industrial nation', English industrialization did not provide a usable model which other countries could reproduce. The 'disappearance of the English peasantry', true only in a highly qualified sense, was more the product of a highly individual balance of political forces than a simple case study of the working out of an economic logic. The longevity of the English state, its settled frontiers, the relative ease with which it extended its sway over subordinate nationalities (except in Ireland), and its relative freedom from regional, religious or ethnic conflict, all features which help to account for the salience of class, also highlight what has been peculiar to the English polity rather than what might have been prototypical of a universal stage in human history.

And much the same could be said of Marx's and Engels' conception of the English proletariat. In its pristine form, their picture could not survive the Chartist defeat at Kennington Common. The 'independent working class party' disappeared and, when it eventually re-emerged as the Labour Party, its goals and practices were more notable for their native idiosyncrasy than for their embodiment of an immanent proletarian logic. Thus, from the 1850s to the 1940s, there was little serious attempt, even among socialist and labour historians, to align the Marxist picture with the course of English development or to explain their discordance; and, so far as there were significant native attempts to theorize English social and political history within this period, they were the offshoots of liberalism, Fabianism or romanticism rather than Marxism or continental sociological traditions.⁵

⁵ It was from these continental traditions, however, that two of the most important attempts at overall categorization came. See E. Halévy, *History of the English People in the 19th Century*, 6 vols., (1924-48); K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation, the Political and Economic Origins of our Time* (1944).

It was not until the 1950s that this situation began to change. The apparent arrival of an 'age of affluence' posed new historical questions and rekindled interest in the character and representativeness of English social development. Internationally, Britain as a pioneer of industrialization attracted the attention of American economists and sociologists interested both in models of 'growth' or 'modernization' and in the types of social conflict which accompanied them. In Rostow's famous *Stages of Economic Growth* the English Industrial Revolution was again invoked, not this time by a dawn chorus of political economists and socialists, but by a self-appointed owl of Minerva looking back from the halcyon years of *Wirtschaftswunder* as if from the achieved millennium of an age of 'mass consumption'.⁶ Domestically, on the other hand, from the mid-1950s, the social democratic consensus achieved by the Labour Party in the previous decade became an object of serious criticism both for Croslandite revisionists and for the New Left.⁷ The stage was set for a novel and important confrontation between history and social theory.

If England from the 1950s, once again and somewhat paradoxically, became the focus of ambitious attempts to plot its development upon global economic and sociological grids, the process was further aided by the emergence of new conceptions of history on the part of historians themselves. What came to be known as *social history* derived from a variety of sources – from new ways of posing historical questions pioneered by the *Annales* and *Past and Present*, from the critique of economic versions of Marxism which developed after 1956, and from a growing interest in the methods and preoccupations of sociology and anthropology. What came to characterize this new idea of social history at its most expansive was a totalizing ambition which would both displace the narrow concerns of traditional practitioners and make history central to the understanding of modern society and politics.

It was the historical analysis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which was to become the battleground upon

⁶ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, Cambridge (1960).

⁷ See, for example, C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (1956); E. P. Thompson (ed.), *Out of Apathy* (1960); P. Anderson, 'Sweden: Mr Crosland's Dreamland', *New Left Review* (NLR) 7, 9 (1961).

which so many of these new issues, both political and methodological, were to be fought out. So far as the nineteenth century was concerned there was, however, nothing new in the presumption of what it was that needed to be explained. This was the seemingly abrupt change from economic dislocation and class conflict to social peace and political stability that was thought to have occurred around 1850. As far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century, the breach in continuity between the Chartist and post-Chartist periods had been highlighted both in the work of the Webbs and in that of liberal historians for whom the 'hungry forties' represented a 'bleak age' preceding free trade.⁸ Now the interpretative challenge, represented by a society which within a century had moved with such apparent rapidity from 'stable hierarchy' through bitter class antagonism to a new but class-based harmony, attracted a rich array of new efforts at theorization. Such projects could be couched in terms derived from Weber, Durkheim or Parsons, as the work of Smelser, Tholfsen or Perkin testified.⁹ They could draw creatively from the insights of the Chicago school and of urban sociology in the work of Briggs and Dyos.¹⁰ In the treatment of more recent history they could involve attempts at a synthesis of Marxian and Weberian motifs in the social analysis of Lockwood and Goldthorpe,¹¹ or the radicalization and resituation of cultural criticism in the work of Hoggart and Williams.¹² Finally, in the case of historians of the left, they could take the form of an ambition to revitalize a Marxist picture of social change and to overcome the gulf between theoretical expectation and actual history. The works of Eric Hobsbawm, Edward

⁸ S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edn); J. and B. L. Hammond, *The Bleak Age* (1934).

⁹ N. J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution: an Application of Theory to the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1770-1840* (1959); T. Tholfsen, 'The Transition to Democracy in Victorian England', *International Review of Social History*, vi (1961); T. Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (1976); H. J. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (1969).

¹⁰ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (1963); H. J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (1968).

¹¹ J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer, J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*, Cambridge (1968); id., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge (1969).

¹² R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957); R. Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (1958).

Thompson, Royden Harrison, Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and others could all be viewed as different attempts to marry a broadly defined Marxist conception of the working class to what Thompson called 'the peculiarities of the English'.¹³

This was the context in which the earliest written essays in this book were conceived. I began with the strong conviction both of the inadequacy of simple empiricist approaches to nineteenth and twentieth century history and of the inability of conventional Marxism or other prevalent forms of social theory satisfactorily to illuminate the actual course of events. My initial ambition was to arrive at a more fruitful juncture between history and social theory. I hoped that the combination of a non-empiricist approach to history and a sceptical relation to received social theory might become the distinguishing trait of a new type of history. As I originally conceived the problem, partial or wishful depictions of the 'social' had led to the inability to explain the political, cultural or ideological in the light of it. My scepticism did not extend to the character of social determination in itself. But as my preoccupation with this theme developed – and as the later essays in the book bear witness – I found myself obliged to redefine the problem: in short, to dissociate the ambition of a theoretically informed history from any simple prejudgement about the determining role of the 'social'. In particular, I became increasingly critical of the prevalent treatment of the 'social' as something outside of, and logically – and often, though not necessarily, chronologically – prior to its articulation through language. The title, *Languages of class*, stresses this point: firstly, that the term 'class' is a word embedded in language and should thus be analysed in its linguistic context; and secondly, that because there are *different* languages of class, one should not proceed upon the assumption that 'class' as an elementary counter of official social description, 'class' as an effect of theoretical

¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester (1959); id., *Labouring Men, Studies in the History of Labour* (1964); id., *Industry and Empire* (1968); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); id., 'The Peculiarities of the English', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register*, 2 (1965); Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists, Studies in Labour and Politics* (1965); Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *NLR*, 23 (1964); Tom Nairn, 'Anatomy of the Labour Party', *NLR*, 27, 28 (1964).

discourse about distribution or production relations, 'class' as the summary of a cluster of culturally signifying practices or 'class' as a species of political or ideological self-definition, all share a single reference point in an anterior social reality.

Because of this change in the direction of my approach, my usage of the term 'class' does not remain constant through the essays. The earliest contributions play upon a tension between Marxist definitions of 'class' and the historically observable behaviour of particular groups of workers; and attempts are made to explain the gulf between the predictions of the Marxist explanatory model and the actual assumptions which appear to have guided the activities of the groups of workers with whom I was concerned. In the later essays, 'class' is treated as a discursive rather than as an ontological reality, the central effort being to explain languages of class from the nature of politics rather than the character of politics from the nature of class. Thus, although the essays follow a rough chronological order in real historical terms, the story that the book tells is as much that of my own theoretical development as of the history of the working class itself. If this development has any claim to be of more than biographical interest, it is that of a case study suggesting how the growing explanatory ambition of social history led to an increasing awareness of its limits as a self-sufficient form of historical interpretation.

The reader should therefore be alerted to the dating of the different essays, since the order of their composition does not correspond to the order in which they are presented in this book. The essay on Chartism (Ch. 3), for example, was in fact one of the most recently written and represents my current approach. By contrast, the review essay 'Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution' (Ch. 1) represents an earlier and significantly different theorization of a similar set of themes. What follows in the rest of the Introduction is a brief résumé of the context in which each of the essays was written and some attempt to explain, at a more concrete historiographic level, the reasons that led to the shift of focus observable between the earlier and later essays in the book.

The earliest essay in the book, 'Working-class culture and working-class politics' (Ch. 4) was written in 1973-4. In one

sense, it might appear to be a tailpiece to my book *Outcast London*, but its intention was to pose a question that was quite distinct from those raised in my book.¹⁴ *Outcast London* was primarily concerned with 'the social problem' as it came to be constituted in the mid-Victorian period, not with the actual attitudes and behaviour of London workers themselves. Any investigation of the subjective character of the London working class between 1850 and 1914 entailed a direct engagement with an area of social and labour history with which I had not been previously concerned. Since at the time of writing I largely accepted the picture of working-class development in the first half of the nineteenth century presented in Edward Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, it seemed obvious that some explanation was required for the gulf which separated the working class depicted in his book from that existing in the twentieth century. Accordingly, the aim of the essay was to construct, in the case of London, some sort of arch which might connect the working class of the 1830s and that more familiar to the twentieth century. The text was thus pointedly subtitled 'Notes on the remaking of a working class'.

'Working-class culture and working-class politics', as the title implies, attempted to establish a systematic linkage between culture and politics at a time when historical investigation of popular culture had barely begun. It is not surprising that subsequent research and reflection has put some of these linkages in doubt. It has been questioned, for example, how far and in what sense the 'culture' described in the article was distinctively 'working class' as opposed to 'popular', 'urban' or 'metropolitan'. But so far as the analysis of London itself is concerned, such a dispute is ultimately terminological. Whether one describes the cultural milieu of the majority of London workers as a working-class culture or a mass urban culture does not bear centrally upon the argument. It was certainly never suggested that this culture was the self-conscious creation of workers or that it was confined to workers, only that, by sheer weight of numbers, the preoccupations and predilections of workers imposed a discernible

¹⁴ G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*, Oxford (1971); 2nd edn, London (1984).

imprint upon the shape taken by this culture. The example of music-hall was an attempt to illustrate this point.

More problematic was the relationship established between this culture and the politics of the period. The weakness of independent working-class political activity in late Victorian London was largely attributed to the emergence of a culture in which politics played a marginal role. That culture in turn was placed in symbiotic relation to a casualized economy and the decline of artisans as a cohesive force. While it still seems to me that these were important obstacles to political mobilization or organization, I no longer think that the character of popular politics in the period can be attributed so simply or directly to these social and cultural features. Casual labour and small workshop production remained a characteristic feature of the inter-war London economy to a far greater extent than I originally imagined, and so did many of the hallmarks of the culture which I described.¹⁵ Yet the face of popular politics was transformed. In the aftermath of the First World War, the unemployed became a vocal political presence in working-class districts and even some of the poorest and most demoralized districts of the East End became Labour strongholds.¹⁶ Conversely, in the period before 1850, it is by no means clear that evidence of a more widely diffused radicalism among the London working classes was in the first instance to be attributed to the condition of the trades or the culture of the metropolitan artisan.

What I did not sufficiently stress in this article, was the importance of the national political dimension. In general, the temporality of periods of heightened *political* conflict and *political* mobilization is determined, in the *first* instance, not by the conditions of the local economy nor by cultural factors,

¹⁵ On the character of the inter-war London economy, I am indebted to the work of Jim Gillespie, see 'The Effects of Urbanisation and Urban Segregation on Working Class Stratification in Early 20th Century London', Cambridge University Ph.D., forthcoming; for an interesting examination of the political discussion about the culture I described among socialists and labour/liberal progressives in the 1890-1914 period, see Susan Pennybacker, 'The Labour Question and the London County Council 1889-1919', Cambridge University Ph.D., forthcoming.

¹⁶ In the case of West Ham, see John Marriott, 'London over the Border: Industry and Culture in West Ham, 1840-1939', Cambridge University Ph.D., forthcoming.

but by the activity of all those institutions of government and political order, both legislative and executive, central and local, which in short we call the state. A strike is a strike. A strike in which employers are assisted by troops, or whose leaders are sentenced to transportation, inevitably acquires a political dimension. What sort of political dimension it acquires, others things being equal, depends upon the existence of a political organization or current with a capacity convincingly to portray the particular sequence of events as an instance of a coherent general position on the character of the state and a strategy for its transformation. Of course, state activity itself, when it is of an innovative or disruptive kind, may be a response to an economic or social situation which is conceived to be politically dangerous. Innovative state activity in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was primarily of this type. But it may equally be a response to a perilous situation in international relations, as it was during the First World War,¹⁷ or a perceived threat in the international economy, as it was at least to some degree during the Edwardian period. The 'depoliticization' of late nineteenth century London was probably more pronounced than in other urban or industrial regions for the reasons I described. But, virtually everywhere in industrial England, the degree of political confrontation was higher in the 1830s and 1840s and then again in the period between 1910 and 1926 than it had been in the decades in between.

One reason for this underestimation of the political was that I did not possess a clear conception of the limits of social explanation, i.e. in what senses the political could not be inferred from the social. My ambition at the time was to show how much political history could be explained in social terms and my attitude was, 'on s'engage et puis on voit'. Secondly, however, and more specifically, I did not possess an interpretation of my own for the defeat and disappearance of Chartism. I had therefore to make the best I could from the existing historiography on the subject. It was partly from a sense of dissatisfaction with this literature, and a conviction

¹⁷ In the case of the militancy of Clydeside ship-builders during the First World War, for example, see Alastair Reid, 'The Division of Labour in the British Shipbuilding Industry, 1880-1920', Cambridge University Ph.D. (1980).

that much of the interpretation of the social and political history of the 1850–1914 period depended upon it, that I looked for an opportunity to re-examine the character of radical and working-class politics in the first half of the nineteenth century.

At this point, I was primarily interested, not in embarking upon a programme of empirical research, but rather in developing a theoretical framework within which to interpret the conflicts of the pre-1850 period. One way forward had been pioneered by Edward Thompson. His powerful and imaginative account of *The Making of the English Working Class* involved a considerable revision of orthodox Marxist assumptions about consciousness, the economy and the place of politics. Although sympathetic to the historical fruits of these revisions and heavily indebted at the time to his conception of ‘culture’, I continued to have reservations about his conception of historical method. My own predilection was towards a theoretical revision in a more structuralist direction and was inspired more by French than English currents of thinking. For me, the relationship of the historian to theory was not an external one – the attempted empirical validation of a pre-existing categorical currency (class consciousness, class struggle, labour aristocracy etc.) – but rather the location and construction of an invisible structure capable both of illuminating the direction of change on the surface and suggesting the limits within which it operated. So far as the interpretation of Marx was concerned, I was considerably influenced by the ‘reading’ put forward by Louis Althusser and his associates.¹⁸ Particularly important for me was their stress upon *Capital* rather than Marx’s early works, and their elaboration of the notions of mode of production and social formation.

Especially pertinent to the problem of interpreting the 1790–1850 period was the highlighting by Etienne Balibar of the distinction made by Marx between the ‘formal’ and ‘real’ subordination of labour to capital.¹⁹ I therefore re-read Marx’s *Capital*, paying particular attention to his analysis of ‘manufacture’ and ‘modern industry’, from which this distinction was drawn. During the epoch of manufacture, according

¹⁸ Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (1970).

¹⁹ Etienne Balibar, ‘Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism’, in Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*.

to Marx, the control over wage labour exercised by the capitalist was only 'formal': that is to say that while the capitalist owned the means of production and was able to combine and specialize the work of wage labour in order to increase productivity, the technical basis of the division of labour remained handicraft. The means of labour, the tool, remained an extension of the human hand, the tempo of production was that of manual labour. If one followed the analysis presented by *Capital*, the Industrial Revolution could be defined in terms of the replacement of a division of labour based upon handicrafts by a division of labour based upon machines. The subordination of labour to capital now became 'real' in the sense that it rested not solely upon the structure of ownership, but also upon the character of the labour process itself. This now entailed larger units of production (factories) and a different technical relationship between labourers and means of production. If one started out from a strict application of these categories, I thought, it might be possible to develop a more adequate interpretation of the social character of the industrial conflicts of the pre-1850 period than that implied in the *Communist Manifesto* or that generally associated with Marxist approaches to nineteenth century labour history. They could be seen as battles, not about ownership but about control.

The appearance in 1974 of John Foster's *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, a forceful restatement of an orthodox Marxist-Leninist interpretation of nineteenth century working-class development, provided me with an initial opportunity to discuss these issues.²⁰ By focussing upon this distinction between 'formal' and 'real', I hoped not only to illuminate the social context of Chartism, but also to open up a new line of enquiry into the changed tenor of industrial relations in Lancashire in the second half of the century. For it was not the alleged emergence of a privileged section of the working class that needed explanation, but rather the changed behaviour of the working class as a whole. Of course, this was only one of the features which might help to explain such a shift; I was very conscious of the need to avoid economic determinism. But so far as the change was located at the socio-

²⁰ John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (1974).

economic level, this seemed to me a more creative use of what might remain valuable in Marx's theory than the tired and forced recourse to the notion of a 'labour aristocracy'.

In the light of what has been written since, even at the socio-economic level, my interpretation would have to be modified. While the distinction between 'formal' and 'real' remains useful for certain purposes, it must be detached from the implication that the bargaining or obstructive power of labour was necessarily much less in a situation of 'real' control. It was certainly different, but not necessarily or irreversibly worse. Undoubtedly the loss of the technical indispensability of the male mule-spinner with the adoption of the self-acting mule did change the pattern of industrial relations. Nor does it seem to me doubtful that the threat of such a change was a potent source of the spinners' political involvement in the 1830s. But, so far as the post-1843 situation was concerned, the detailed research of William Lazonick has shown that the spinners remained well organized and retained a great deal of leverage on the organization and pace of their work.²¹ In my article it was implied that employers preserved the status of the spinners primarily for social reasons. What Lazonick shows, however, is that the spinner retained his position because it made good economic sense for the employer to continue to delegate to him both the functions of supervision and of labour recruitment. In this sense the continuities were more marked and the position of the spinner was less precarious than my argument implied.

How far, at a more general level, the triumph of modern industry inaugurated a more accommodative style of popular politics in the post-1850 period remains a debated question. Interesting evidence supporting this argument is adduced by Patrick Joyce in his major study of post-Chartist Lancashire, *Work, Society and Politics*.²² But no unambiguous connection is established. Not only were the effects of 'real' control less absolute than Ure or Marx anticipated – the growth of textile trade unionism from the 1850s was one indication of this – but

²¹ William Lazonick, 'Industrial Relations and Technical Change: the Case of the Self-Acting Mule', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 3 (1979).

²² Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics, the Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England*, Brighton (1980).

also the chronology of its implementation was slow and its geography uneven. Of course, no one except a strict technological determinist would expect a close correlation between advances of 'real' control in particular factory districts and concomitant changes in popular politics. Even at the economic level, many other features would play a part, most obviously the growing stability and prosperity of the cotton trade itself.²³ However, the original intention of the argument was not to establish that sort of case. It was rather to establish how structural changes in work relations consolidated and reinforced a pattern of politics which had come into existence in the first instance for other reasons. What these other reasons were was the problem left unresolved by the article.

A concern to demarcate a more adequate theoretical framework for the interpretation of social change in the nineteenth century was also uppermost in my essay, 'Class expression versus social control?' (Ch. 2), written in the autumn of 1975. The paper was the result of an invitation to comment upon a wide and representative cross-section of contributions towards a social history of leisure to be presented to a conference held at the University of Sussex. From reading these papers, it struck me that one distinctive feature of the methodology of social history, as it had emerged and crystallized, was a bland and often unconscious conflation between Marxist and functionalist categories for the explanation of social change. In the light of its origins, this was perhaps not surprising. Many of the preoccupations and some of the terminology of the new social history had begun life as an offshoot from, or reaction to, the 'modernization' theories of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the ensuing development, the prevailing tendency among social historians had been towards the blending or incorporating of elements from opposed conceptual sets into forms of social-historical synthesis; and, if one were attempting to write a social history of social history, one might say that the result had been the growth of a new professional lingua franca serving to legitimize the autonomy of social history as a distinct discipline.

²³ On this, see, for example, D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896*, Oxford (1979).