



# A cry of protest before accommodation? The dialectic of emancipation and domination

Chris Cutrone

**HOW ARE WE TO REGARD** the history of revolutions? Why do revolutions appear to fail to achieve their goals? What does this say about consciousness of social change?

One common misunderstanding of Marx (against which, however, many counter-arguments have been made) is with respect to the supposed "logic of history" in capital.

The notion of a "historical logic" is problematic, in that there may be assumed an underlying historical logic that Marx, as a social scientist, is supposed to have discovered. Marx's (and Engels's) idea of "science," however, is not the conventional one of recognizing objective facts independent of the scientific observer, but rather the Hegelian one of knowledge aware of its own conditions of possibility.

This philosophical approach to "science" began with Kant, and regards theoretical concepts as self-critical reflections arising from practice. In other words, Hegelian "science," in the original Marxist sense of Marx and Engels's use of the term, is the attempt to raise practice to greater self-awareness. "Consciousness" is formed in the dialectic of theory and practice. Furthermore, consciousness develops in a dialectic with "social being."

This is because Marxism was not concerned with how social being "determines" consciousness, but with how both social being and consciousness can *change*. It was the unfreedom of this process of change in modern society that Marx sought to address in his critical account of capital. For Marx, the "logic of capital" was not a *logic* at all.

Capital was, in Marx's view, a process of social disintegration, in fits and starts, and no wheel of history—at least not in terms of freedom.

In what way was Marxist thought and political practice "critical"? Marx sought to raise greater awareness of the potential possibility of the transformation of society in freedom, which meant as a function of changes in consciousness as well as in social being. Following Kant and Hegel, Marxism asks: is consciousness merely to be the Stoical recognition and submission to inevitable change?

How are we to regard the history of the Left? One plausible way regards the history of political change as belated response to social development. In this view, revolutions come about as adjustments to processes of social change already underway or completed. Political revolution crowns the achievement of social transformation, as the old order reveals itself to be already gone. Knowledge appears only in retrospect: according to Hegel, the "Owl of Minerva flies at dusk."

But what of the obverse? What if revolution was only the delicate beginning of change, and consciousness its dawning awareness? Then failure would be explicable: failure to think or act.

As Bayard Rustin described the Black Power turn of the late 1960s, "passionate self-assertion can be a mask for accommodation."<sup>1</sup> This spoke to the entire 1960s moment. In hindsight, it is difficult to disagree with this diagnosis.

At the time, such a disenchantment of protest was regarded as a conservative response to a potentially revolutionary situation.

But the point was that the apparent revolution was not the one the revolutionaries claimed to want, but rather one that used their discontents for other purposes. This involves a complex theory of social change that is worth considering. How might avowedly "revolutionary" ideology repress actual possibilities?

We are living in a time of change. The question is whether and how we can claim to be bringing this change about. Or, is the change already happening, beyond our control, and are we merely, in protest, registering our pain in the transition, as we accommodate and adapt to it?

Can politics be something more and other than the process of submission to domination? Is the goal of emancipation possible? History seems to show otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

If we imagine that history is on our side, we threaten to rationalize a course of change already underway that we have yet to control. Our protest against it may already be our resignation to it, in the guise of calling us to task.

The world is changing. The question is whether and how we are a function of that change. IP

1. Quoted in John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 475. See also: Bayard Rustin, "The Failure of Black Separatism," *Harper's Magazine* (January 1970); Adolph Reed, "Black Particularity Reconsidered," *Telos* 39 (1979), later expanded as "The 'Black Revolution' and the Reconstitution of Domination," in *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era*, ed. Adolph Reed (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Adolph Reed, "The Limits of Anti-Racism: Vague Politics about a Nearly Indescribable Thing," *Left Business Observer* 121 (September 2009), available online at <<http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Antracism.html>>.

2. See Chris Cutrone, "Egypt, or, History's Invidious Comparisons: 1979, 1789, and 1848," *Platypus Review* 33 (March 2011).

## Marxism today, continued from page 1

out anything substantial. Also, more in detail, they've disputed with me concrete historical, dramatic events in China, not only the Cultural Revolution, but also, in the late 1950s: the Great Leap Forward. Their answer is that these are merely the portrayals of "bourgeois propaganda." Now, some archives are opened, and they do demonstrate that it was a mega-tragedy, the Great Leap Forward, what happened there. But, crucially, for the Left, we need to deal with our heritage. I don't like the Left that has the attitude that, "Yes, Stalinism was bad. But look at the horrors of colonialism!" Yes, I agree there are the problems of neo-colonialism, post-colonialism, etc. But the problem with the Stalinist 20<sup>th</sup> century, even now, with all the liberal and conservative critiques, is that we don't have a good account of what really happened. What we get is quick generalizations. You look for philosophical origins. You say, "Rousseau. This is a direct consequence of such an approach."

Here I am very critical of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They are an extreme example. They address fascism. Look, I've done my homework. But you will notice that the Frankfurt School almost totally ignores Stalinism—despite Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*. But there is no true theory of Stalinism. They think that the totalitarian potentials that exploded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century started already with the most primitive logic of manipulation of matter, the philosophy of identity, etc. I don't think that this really works, the philosophical approach to establishing some transcendental matrix that explains the possibility for 20<sup>th</sup> century events. The task is still ahead. With all the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the liberals' account is insufficient. It remains for the Left to explain this.

HA: But it is a *dialectic* of Enlightenment! What gives rise to totalitarianism is also what gives rise to possibilities for freedom.

SZ: I know that they say that the problem of Enlightenment demands more enlightenment. They are very clear about this. I don't agree with Habermas's critique of Horkheimer and Adorno in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. But maybe he has a minor point. The emancipatory aspect of Enlightenment is much less explicated by Adorno and Horkheimer. You get some mystical formulations, about the "wholly other." In the recently published small book by Verso, the dialogues between Horkheimer and Adorno from the late 1950s, what strikes me, to be blunt, is how empty this was.

I appreciate [Moishe] Postone claiming that what we need to rehabilitate today, at all levels, is the critique of political economy. Not only as an economic theory, but also, with Marx, it is much more. I am tempted to say that it is rather a historical transcendental *a priori*. The categories that Marx uses in his deployment of the critique of political economy are not just categories to analyze a certain sphere of society. They are stronger categories. They organize the totality of social life. This is what needs to be rehabilitated today. But where I don't agree with Postone is that, sometimes, he sounds as if the class division somehow becomes secondary and gets lost. No. As if commodity fetishism is a kind of general structure more fundamental than class struggle. I think he sometimes goes too quickly in this direction of reducing class struggle just to a certain empirical historical occurrence. Here, I appreciate much more the young Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*, who is very clear about this non-empirical, historical *a priori* for the critique of political economy, but at the same time speaks totally to class struggle.

Even if we no longer have the old working class—I agree here. In the sense of what I was improvising here [at the Jan van Eyck Academie] today, that we need to conceptualize the emancipatory subject, even if we cannot ground it in the old Marxist working class. You must include the so-called "rogue states," outside the capitalist dynamic. You must include unemployment, which is becoming a much stronger category. This is the task: how to truly render things, apparently. Postone approaches this. If we cut the bullshit, can we speak of, and in what sense, Marx's labor theory of value? For instance, I like to provoke my friends, who think I am attacking Chavez and defending the United States. But you cannot mechanically apply Marx's so-called labor theory of value. Because you have to conclude, for instance, today, that Venezuela is exploiting the United States through oil profits. But Marx tries to demonstrate in *Capital* that natural resources are not a source of value. So this means that we need to rethink the category of exploitation.

Another point that I make is that when Marx, in the famous passage of the *Grundrisse*, speaks about the "general intellect," in the sense of general, common knowledge, this is Marx at his best, but also, at the same time, his worst. Because Marx thought that when knowledge becomes the center of agency, of generating social wealth, then the capitalist logic of exploiting labor, following the labor theory of value, becomes meaningless, because it no longer works. But Marx here sounds like some kind of a technological determinist, when he says that capitalism becomes meaningless, because the time of labor is no longer the source of value. What Marx doesn't see is that you can have this "general intellect," which, as a general intellect, is then, in a perverse way, privatized. So you can't just return to Marx. In view of today's global capitalism, we must ask the question of how to rethink the critique of political economy. This is a great task: I don't see any answers.

HA: A lot of what you say is very close to what Platypus has to say. Platypus's main slogan is "The Left is dead!—Long live the Left!"

SZ: This is great! This is the only way to truly resuscitate the Left. Because it refers to all varieties of the Left. 1968 is a model for how the movement recuperated and gave an incredible new boost to capitalism. All the post-1968 phenomena show this.

HA: Platypus emerged in the context of the anti-war movement. So, it emerged in response to the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," and thus the support for far-right Islamist Iraqi insurgent groups out of anti-Bush-ism.

SZ: I know we must avoid Islamophobia. But I reject totally the idea of Islamic fundamentalism's emancipatory potential. The question is why the contrast between liberal permissiveness and fundamentalism is totally immanent to the system. Liberalism generates such fundamentalism, which is not restricted to Islamism, but also Christian fundamentalism in the U.S., for instance. While it is not serious theory, Thomas Frank's book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* speaks to this. Kansas was once, traditionally, the most radical state—John Brown was from there. This bastion of radical social demands became the center of Christian fundamentalism. I don't buy claims about Islam's "sense of justice," etc. Some people go so far as to claim that if you critique theology then you are imperialist, practically, and in the camp of the enemy. I don't buy this.

HA: But much of the Left buys into this logic.

SZ: I got into a shouting match with the big anti-colonialist theorist Samir Amin over this. He shouted at me when I said that there is a historical legacy that every leftist should be thankful for in Bush, the second President. I pointed out, ironically, that, let's cut the crap, the biggest result of the Bush presidency is that the U.S. is becoming merely a local superpower. They are effectively gradually losing true hegemony. They were close to becoming a universal policeman. But, ironically, or cynically speaking, perhaps this development is not good. Take the Congo: Let the U.S. intervene there. What I am saying is that Bush's stupidity accelerated so-called multi-centricity. We should not merely point out how bad the U.S. is. But we should apply the same standards, for example, to China—let's forget about Tibet, a complex problem—with what they are doing in Myanmar or Africa: neocolonialist exploitation collaborating with tyrants, etc. This is where Amin exploded. Whenever there is a crisis, we should be critical of the U.S., but my God, they are not always the enemy. Look at India and what they're doing in Kashmir, for example. The main resistance group in Kashmir formally renounced violence and said, "We will do the political struggle," but the Indian establishment still treats them as terrorists. That's all I'm saying. I also don't like—another horror I will tell you—the kind of Marxism that has an automatic Pavlovian response, when one speaks of "universal human rights": "Oh, you're speaking the language of the enemy! You're apologizing for imperialism." Most of the time, yes, but not all of the time. I know this whole Marxist game, "You say 'universal,' but you really mean white, male," etc.

But let's not forget that universality is nonetheless maybe the most important tool of emancipation we have. I am deeply suspicious of postmodern models. And, here, we should be at the same level with Postone and the Frankfurt School and some others, against postmodernism's mantra that every universality is potentially "identitarian" and totalitarian. I am very suspicious of "resistance to global capitalism" along the lines of multiple particularities resisting globalization, etc. I think it is important to speak to universality. At the same time, I wrote previously, years ago—which brought me many enemies—of "multiculturalism, the logic of global capitalism."<sup>2</sup> I don't agree with those neo-colonialists like Homi Bhabha, who said, at some point, that capitalism is universalizing and wanting to erase difference. No. Capitalism is infinitely multiculturalist and culturally pluralist. Why? This is what American right-wing populism is, not "correct" about, but is a response to a real problem. They've got the lower classes manipulated with their basically correct insight that, in today's global capitalism, as my friend David Harvey also points out, there is no longer the metropolis screwing the Third World countries. Rather, for higher profits, one turns one's own country into a colony. What this means is that, through outsourcing, etc., today's American capital is willing to sacrifice American workers. Capitalism is really universal today. American capital cannot be considered that of the U.S. I don't agree with my Latin American friends who say that capitalism is inherently "Anglo-Saxon," etc. Alain Badiou emphasizes this. Capitalism is truly universal. It is not rooted in any culture. It is not Eurocentric. The effect of the ongoing crisis will be the definitive end of any such "Eurocentrism." This is not simply a good process. For instance, there is "capitalism with Asian values"—that is, capitalism more productive than liberalism and without democracy.

HA: We in Platypus would agree with this. For example, Platypus held a reading group last summer, for the second time, on "radical bourgeois philosophy," including Rousseau, Adam Smith, Benjamin Constant, and others, on the emergence of the modern notion of freedom.

SZ: Yes. I don't agree with Claude Lefort, for example, that bourgeois freedom is only formal freedom. No, it's not true. Radical bourgeois freedom fighters were well aware that freedom comes only insofar as it is truly social freedom. They were well aware of the social dimension, and upheld the right to organize collectively, etc. On the other hand, this critique of formal democracy as bourgeois democracy is deeply anti-Marxist. As Marx was deeply aware, form is never simply form. To begin a break, one must have first a "formal" break. For instance, when Marx wrote of the development of capitalism, first there was "formal subsumption" of production under capitalism. This means that the production was the same as before, for instance knitting at home, only, then there was the merchant who was buying from them for money. Following this formal subsumption, however, they were drawn into the factories. We should totally drop this prejudice that form follows content; that, first, something new develops, and then it acquires a form. No.

HA: Just a few years ago, during the Iraq anti-war movement, the salient comparison for the Left was the Vietnam anti-war movement. But how has the situation today and opportunities for the Left changed (for the better) from the 1960s?

SZ: Here I agree with Postone, very much. For example, with all these Iraq anti-war protests, there was never



Image used to advertise a series of round-table discussions hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society, asking the question, "What is the #Occupy Movement?" Designed by Benjamin Koditschek.



# The elusive “threads of historical progress”

## The early Chartists and the young Marx and Engels

By David Black

**THE FIRST EVER REACTION** by the Victorian ruling class to “Marxism” is found in a *London Times* leader of September 2, 1851 on “Literature for the Poor,” “only now and then when some startling fact is brought before us do we entertain even the suspicion that there is a society close to our own, and with which we are in the habits of daily intercourse, of which we are as completely ignorant as if it dwelt in another land, of another language in which we never conversed, which in fact we never saw.”<sup>1</sup>

The “startling fact” in question was the “evil teachings” contained in the Chartist weekly, *The Red Republican*, founded in 1850 by George Julian Harney. The *Times* chose not to name the paper—“we are not anxious to give it circulation by naming its writers or the works to which it is composed”—but did extract some of Helen Macfarlane’s translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, serialized by the *Red Republican*. The selection included this passage:

Your Middle-class gentry are not satisfied with having the wives and daughters of their Wages-slaves at their disposal—not to mention the innumerable public prostitutes—but they take a particular pleasure in seducing each other’s wives. Middle-class marriage is in reality a community of wives.<sup>2</sup>

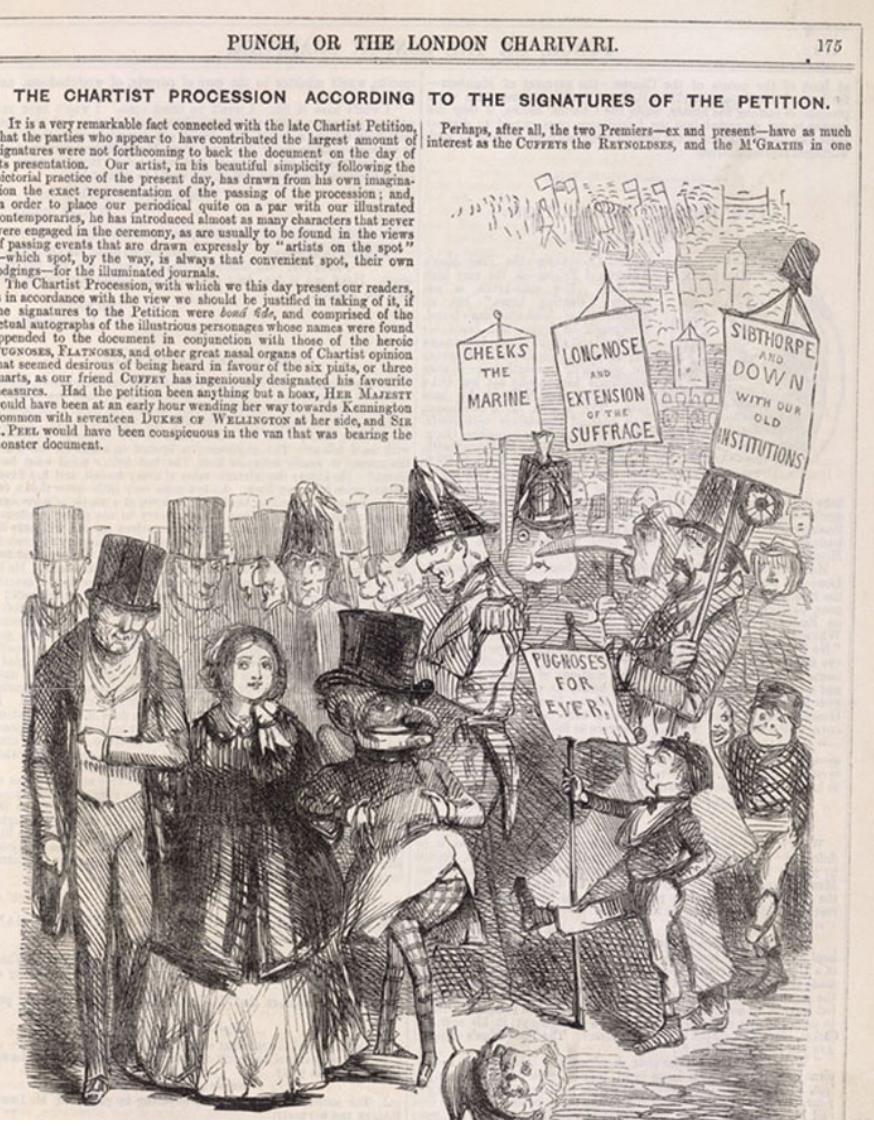
The perceived threat was overestimated. With Chartist in terminal decline, Harney’s semi-legal press was on its last legs, and he himself was about to emigrate to the United States. Also soon to disappear from British shores was Macfarlane, Harney’s most talented contributor and the first English commentator on Hegel to translate any of his writings (in Harney’s monthly *Democratic Review*). The publication of the *Manifesto*, which Harney presented as “the most revolutionary document ever given to the world,”<sup>3</sup> was the last great act of Chartism. The first was the founding of the National Convention of 1839. Actually called the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, so as not to scare off the moderates, the bourgeois press, who wanted to portray the Chartists as the harbingers of French-style Revolutionary terror, called it the “National

O’Brien translated and published, showed that because the American and French Revolutions had left the “institutions of property” intact as “germs of social evil to ripen in the womb of time,” the great democratic gains had been subverted by counter-revolution from “within and without.”<sup>4</sup> The next revolution, therefore, had to be social as well as political.

In 1838 the five-point *People’s Charter* was drawn up by the London Working Men’s Association and the Birmingham Political Union. It was essentially a program for universal male suffrage. Delegates to the National Convention were elected at mass meetings promoted by Feargus O’Connor’s mass-circulation weekly, the *Northern Star*. On February 4, 1839, a permanently sitting Convention assembled in London with fifty-five delegates. By the spring, huge demonstrations were taking place; muskets and pikes were being procured in large numbers. Even though the male leadership of the movement had decided that a demand for the female franchise would impede the enfranchisement of men, female Chartist associations were being formed.

In July 1839, after Parliament debated and rejected the Chartist petition bearing 1.2 million signatures, massive rioting broke out in Birmingham and Newcastle. By this time, the “moral force” delegates of the Convention had resigned and many of the “physical force” delegates had been arrested. The Convention voted for a general strike, but there was little agreement on how to make it effective. In September, the Convention, having lost all credibility, voted to dissolve itself. But in its last days, resolutions arrived from the miners of South Wales calling for armed struggle as well as the strike. A “Secret Council” was formed by Convention delegates favoring revolutionary action, which the Welsh were to initiate as a signal for other areas to follow. But on November 4<sup>th</sup> the Newport Uprising, led by the “reluctant revolutionary,” John Frost, was met by the armed force of the state: Twenty-four Chartists were shot dead and fifty more were wounded. The follow-up rebellions in England were hastily called off. Hundreds of Chartists were imprisoned, transported to Van Dieman’s Land, or driven into exile.

When Seymour Tremenheere, a government agent,



Cartoon appearing in *The Illustrated London News*, 1848, mocking the Chartist petition presented to parliament in April of that year. From the British Library.

In fact, questions of political economy exercised Chartists’ opinions from the beginning. The London Working Men’s Association had been founded by William Lovett as “a political school of self instruction... to examine great social and political principles.” An important ally of Lovett was Francis Place, who acted as a parliamentary lobbyist for trade unions. Place, having made the transition from Jacobinism in the 1790s to moderate radicalism in the 1820s, was of a generation of artisans who were self-educated in the political economy of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Indeed, some of the radical liberals in the parliamentary Whig Party had supported the New Poor Law of 1834 on Ricardian “principles”; in the project of securing “just” rewards for labor, workhouses and representative democracy were not necessarily incompatible. Place accepted the Malthusian argument that pauperism was simply a product of population growth, but differed on the remedy. Malthus wanted to impose sexual abstinence by separating husbands from wives in the workhouses, whereas Place advocated sex education and contraception. William Lovett, for his part, had less faith than Place in the laws of the market, according to Malthus, and believed that “surplus labour is at the mercy of surplus wealth.”<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Harney and O’Connor, were suspicious of Lovett’s associations with Place and his friends in Parliament, whom they despised as “Whig-Malthusians.” These Chartist radicals were equally hostile to the Ricardian free-traders, for whom the main obstacle to Parliamentary reform was the landlord class, whose political dominance could only be broken by the repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws.

Shortly after the failed General Strike of 1842, Friedrich Engels met the Chartists in England and found a lifelong friend in George Julian Harney. In embracing the proletarian cause Engels began to criticize the bourgeois ideology expressed in political economy. His 1843 article, “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy,” bowled over a young Karl Marx and set him on the path to writing *Capital*. In it, Engels wrote, “Political economy came into being as a natural result of the expansion of trade, and with its appearance elementary, unscientific huckstering was replaced by a developed system of licensed fraud, an entire science of enrichment.” And, “The nearer the economists come to the present time, the further they depart from honesty... This is why Ricardo, for instance, is more guilty than Adam Smith, and McCulloch and Mill more guilty than Ricardo.” Just as inconsistency in theology forced it to “either regress to blind faith or progress towards free philosophy,” so inconsistency in the economy of free trade would produce regression to mercantilist-monopolism on the one hand and socialism on the other. The English Socialists, Engels believed, had long since proved the case, both practically and theoretically, for the abolition of private property, and were “in a position to settle economic questions more correctly even from an economic point of view.” In a socialist economy, “The community will have to calculate what it can produce with the means at its disposal; and in accordance with the relationship of this productive power to the mass of consumers it will determine how far it has to raise or lower production, how far it has to give way to, or curtail, luxury.”<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1970s, Left historians have debated whether Chartism was a forerunner of working-class socialism or merely the tail end of the bourgeois popular radicalism espoused by Thomas Paine and William Cobbett. Gareth Stedman Jones, in arguing the latter position, sees the former as taking the same ground as the “progressivist” Whig theory of history. Stedman Jones correctly says that, “as a coherent political language and a believable political vision,” Chartism really disintegrated in the early 1840s, not the early 1850s. But Stedman Jones’s Althusserian, post-structuralist method rules out any analysis of the birth of Chartism as an expression of the capitalist crisis that Ricardian political economists feared would bring social development to a standstill, or the 20-year history of Chartism (1838–1858) as the history of its failure as a conscious attempt to resolve the problems of capitalism by breaking forever the power of “Old Corruption.” Stedman Jones reduces the entire history of Chartism to an ideology of “popular radicalism,” held together from the 1770s to the 1860s by the grievance that too much power lay in too few hands.<sup>7</sup>

Contra Stedman Jones’s position, Chris Ford and I argue in our new book, 1839: *The Year of Chartist Insurrection*, that what existed in 1839—and ceased to be thereafter—was a mass working-class, democratic movement with revolutionary and socialist tendencies,

of which its political language was an expression.<sup>8</sup> After 1839, the industrialized working class, in a huge swathe of territory stretching from South Wales to North East England, would never again be as united and armed in the cause of democracy as it was that year; and never again would the ruling class, its army, and its police be so unprepared for revolution. In 1839 the revolutionary bourgeois ideas of Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Adam Smith, and David Ricardo stood in dialogue with the socialist thinking of Spence, Owen, and Babeuf.

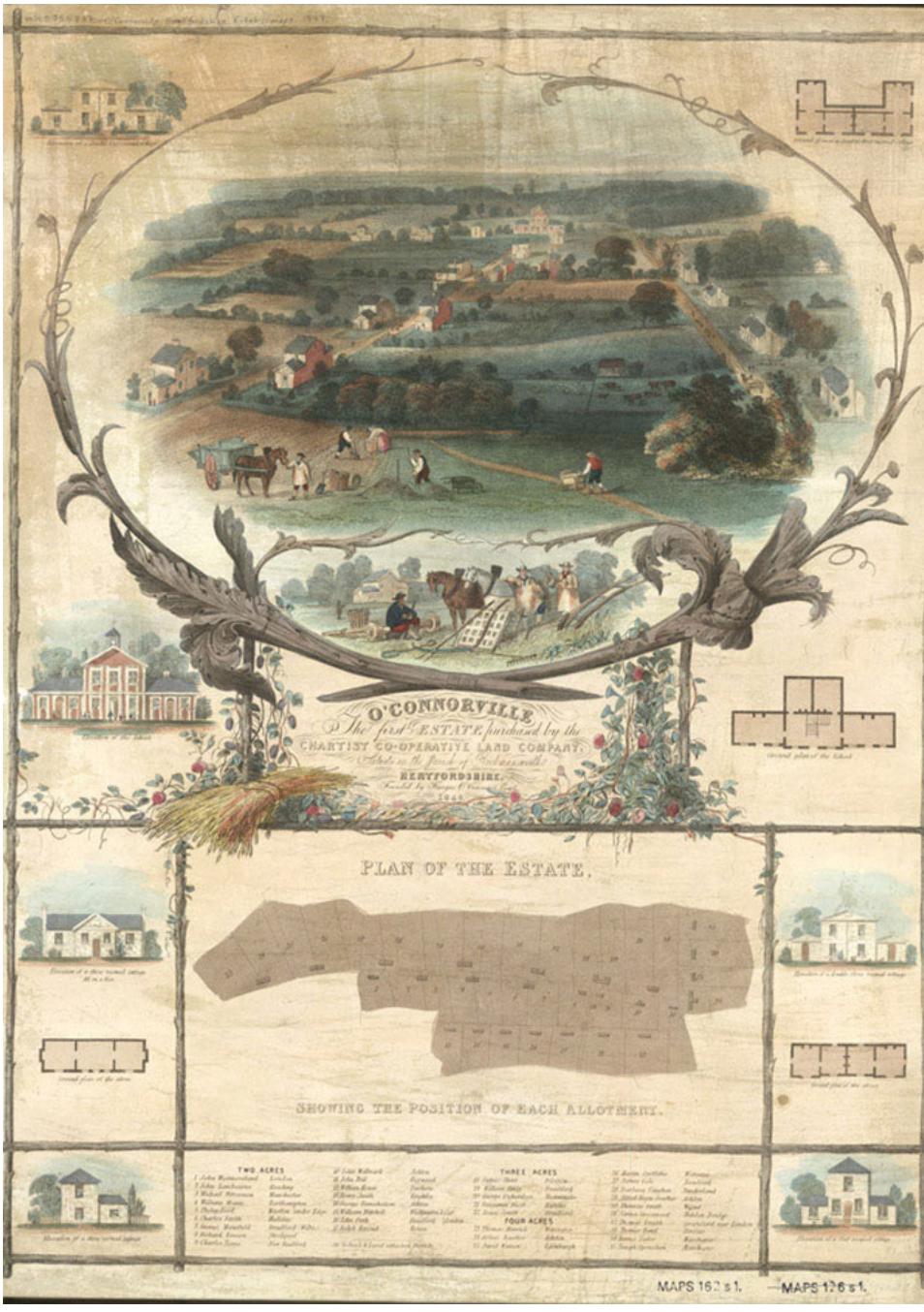
After the defeat of the General Strike of 1842, Chartism became a fractious coalition of interest groups: Teetotal Chartism, Free Trade Chartism, Co-operative Chartism, Land Scheme Chartism, and Christian Chartism.

Prior to his piece on political economy, Engels had reported from England to the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842 that, whereas on the Continent the revolution was talked about as almost inevitable, in England popular wisdom held that, “even the lowest class of the nation is well aware that it only stands to lose by a revolution, since every disturbance of the public order can only result in a slow-down in business and hence general unemployment and starvation.” This “national English standpoint of the most immediate practice, of material interests” also stood in contrast to German Hegelian philosophy, which sought the “motivating idea” behind political phenomena and held that, “the so-called material interests can never operate in history as independent, guiding aims, but always, consciously or unconsciously, serve a principle which controls the threads of historical progress.” Engels concluded that, although he thought revolution was “inevitable” for England, he was convinced that “as in everything that happens there, it will be interests and not principles that will begin and carry through the revolution; principles can develop only from interests, that is to say, the revolution will be social, not political.”<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the Chartist radicals of 1839 believed that “immediate practice and material interests” made revolution rational and necessary rather than foolish and impossible. They told their supporters that the Charter would be won in a very short space of time, and the practical issues immediately addressed. But as Marx would later argue, in modernity the threads of historical progress were underpinned by a dialectic of labor and capital which, in the absence of an immediately practical alternative and a revolutionary subject to implement it, had its own “principle” of development—as it still has.

British historians writing on Marx, Engels, and the 1848 Revolution have tended to concentrate on their concerns with the events taking place in Continental Europe rather than in England. However, according to a seminal study by historian John Foster, the various stages of class consciousness outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* do reflect the history of the Lancashire workers movement from the 1790s to the 1840s.<sup>11</sup> The *Manifesto* states, “This proletarian class passes through many phases of development, but its struggle with the middle-class dates from its birth.”<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century, the struggle passes from individual workplaces to “those of an entire trade in a locality against the individuals of the middle-class who directly use them up.” In the “Luddite” phase, the workers “attack not only the middle-class system of production; they destroy machinery and foreign commodities which compete with their products; they burn down factories and try to re-attain the position occupied by the producers of the middle ages.” In opposition to Old Corruption and the Corn Laws, the bourgeoisie encourage the workers to form “a more compact union,” but do so for “their own political ends.” At this stage, “the proletarians do not fight their own enemies but their enemies’ enemies.” But the alliance of worker and factory owner is constantly eroded by the class struggle at the point of production. In due course, “the incessant improvements in machinery make the position of the proletarians more and more uncertain,” and collisions “assume more and more the character of collisions between two classes.” The trade unions organize strikes and “here and there the struggle takes the form of riots.” Eventually, the *Manifesto* contends, with the spread of railways, steamship lines, and other new means of communication, the working-class unites, nationally and internationally, as a political party. Clearly, the *Communist Manifesto* could never have been written if its authors had not been engaged with English Chartists and following their fortunes very closely.

In 1848 the news boards at London’s Charing Cross Station announcing the February Revolution in France



Plans for a Chartist land settlement named after Feargus O’Connor, 1847. From the British Library.

Convention.” The Chartist radicals, like Harney, favored that name anyhow, so it stuck.

In France the bourgeoisie had to fight a revolutionary war to extirpate the old order, but in England the Civil War and “Glorious Revolution” of the 17<sup>th</sup> century made possible what came to seem a compromise. The Whigs’ Reform Act of 1832 extended the electoral franchise to a good section of the middle class, but the working class, who supported the Whigs’ Reform agitation, remained excluded from the franchise. Throughout the 1830s the radical press was persecuted, trade unionists transported, Ireland subjected to paramilitary police terror, and the hated workhouse system established by the New Poor Law.

Bronterre O’Brien, editor of *The Poor Man’s Guardian*, saw Owenite socialism and Thomas Spence’s program for land nationalization as giving the working classes the aspiration that they should “be at the top instead of at the bottom of society—or, rather that there should be no bottom at all.” Babeuf’s *Conspiracy for Equality*, which

was sent to South Wales in the aftermath of the Rising of November 1839 to investigate its causes, he was beset by a rumor that he had been sent to “take account of the number of children, and that the government intended to have one in ten put out the way.” Tremenheere seemed to be unaware of the provenance of this “theory.” The year before the rising, a mischievous Swiftian pamphlet entitled *On the Possibilities of Limiting Populousness*, written by Marcus, drove the arguments of Thomas Malthus’s political economy to what he saw as their logical conclusion: a “rational” argument for mass extermination. When Marcus put out a follow-up along the same lines in 1839, entitled *The Book of Murder*, many of those who had only heard of the pamphlet were prepared to regard it as proof of a nefarious government agenda. In 1839 the Female Chartist Association of Ashton, Lancashire called on women “to do all that in you lies, to prevent the wholesale murder of your new born babies, by the Malthusian method of painless extinction.”<sup>9</sup>

“Early Chartists” continues on page 4