

## **CONTEMPORARY HISTORY AND POLITICS**

**Original Series No. 14**

**Working Class Development and Class Relationships  
In the Industrial North West, 1820-1850:  
A Theoretical and Historical Discussion**

**David Walsh**

ISBN: 1 870365 65 8

The University of Salford's European Studies Research Institute (ESRI) houses researchers from a number of the University's departments: Academic Information Services, Business and Management Studies, Economics, English, Environmental Health and Housing, Environmental Resources Unit, Geography, Information Technology Institute, Modern Languages, Politics and Contemporary History, Sociology, Surveying. Its remit is to encourage research in a number of areas including Literary and Cultural Studies, Policy Studies, Language and Linguistics, Contemporary History and Politics, each strand offering a programme of seminars and related research activities. ESRI regularly publishes series of "Working Papers" focusing on the research areas of its member departments.

For further information on this series, contact the Editors, University of Salford, Salford, M5 4WT

P. 1 INTRODUCTION

P. 4 SECTION ONE  
TOWARDS A THEORY OF CLASS, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND  
DEVELOPMENT

P. 22 SECTION TWO  
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

P. 36 SECTION THREE  
WORKING CLASS DEVELOPMENT AND INTER-CLASS  
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NORTH-WEST INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS  
1820 - 1850.

P. 37 i) THE STATE OF THE DEBATE  
P. 42 ii) WORKING CLASS DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE 1832  
P. 60 iii) DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1832  
P. 80 iv) SOME CONCLUSIONS.

WORKING CLASS DEVELOPMENT AND CLASS RELATIONSHIPS IN THE INDUSTRIAL  
NORTH WEST 1820-1850: A theoretical and historical discussion.

INTRODUCTION.

It should be stated at the outset that the paper that follows should not be read in any sense as a definitive statement on the subject of working class development. Rather, its aim is to promote and provoke discussion. In basic terms, the thesis being presented here is that in the industrial North-West, the process of working class sectionalization and the subsequent fragmentation of class consciousness can be traced back to the mid 1830's, and the period of 'responsible' trade unionism, working class reformism and a general quietism in terms of class relationships.

We suggest that working class consciousness reached a very advanced stage of development in the period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the Reform Crisis of 1831/2 - a stage of development and level of sophistication which few historians have acknowledged - Edward Thompson apart. To support this argument, we shall point to the levels of working class-based activism, the development and delineation of working class-based political theories and schemes of action; and a concerted and unified will to promote social and political change on behalf of the working class. But further, we shall attempt to show that, in this early period, the level of working class consciousness can also be measured by the threat their actions posed to those groups socially placed above them. When one begins to compare middle class reactions to working class activism after 1832 with those before this date, significant differences can be detected. By 1850 the struggle for supremacy between capital and labour was effectively over, leaving the middle class manufacturers in almost complete control in their urban fiefdoms.

What this paper sets out to explain therefore is why this was so, and in order to achieve this we have to examine the decades leading up to the period of so called working class quiescence. The



paper is divided essentially into three sections with the final and longest section divided into two sub-sections. It may be useful to briefly outline the contents of each.

In the first section we outline the theoretical basis for the development of class relationships in early modern capitalist society. To do this we return to the works of the two most influential writers and thinkers on the subject; Karl Marx and Max Weber. In this section we present the theories of Marx and Weber not in an exhaustive attempt to explain their grand ontological/philosophical sweep, but rather to build an abstract platform of class and class relationships from which we can begin to construct a hypothesis to take into the field and empirically research. We suggest the philosophical fusion of Marxian and Weberian notions in relation to class is not only possible, but indeed preferable in terms of enhancing the understanding of working class development and the wider social significance of class relationships in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In section two we attempt to bring the reader up to date with a historiographical outline of some of the modern writers of working class development and early nineteenth century class relationships. Here we examine the work of four influential historians; E P Thompson, John Foster, Harold Perkin and Gareth Stedman Jones. This also sets the tone of the paper by pointing out the significant areas of debate, difference and discussion which are of relevance to our thesis.

In the final section we produce the evidence. Firstly we trace the development of class relations from 1820 up until the mid-1830's, endeavouring to show that the events described were not merely the growing pains of a developing class as has been depicted by some historians, but in fact posed a significant enough threat as to provoke reactions on the part of the middle and governing classes which began the transformations in the British political culture which occurred after 1832.

Secondly we examine the changing situation in the manufacturing districts of the North-West region after 1832. Two inter-related themes are explored here; firstly the growth of working class dependence on the manufacturing middle classes, and secondly the increase in the intra-class status differentiation which we suggest was highly significant in the fragmentation of working class consciousness after 1832. In this section we also engage in two further comparative examinations of industrial development. Firstly



we look at the threat posed by the Chartists in the period 1839/42 and compare it to that of the Reform crisis of 1831/2, and secondly we attempt to explain why there appears to be such wide variations amongst the districts which made up the industrial North-West, with regard to the differing levels of working class consciousness and class actions after 1832. We end the paper with a brief set of tentative conclusions.

This then is the basic structure of the paper. But of course no piece of historical description and analysis can be totally true to structural form, and indeed there are occasions in what follows where reiteration and elaboration render it necessary to re-acquaint the reader with added background explanation. At the very start of the final section for example, we continue the historiographical theme of section two, but with a different perspective. In section one we are primarily concerned with what various historians have said regarding class and class consciousness. At the beginning of section three however, we outline the state of debate regarding class development and inter-class relationships, and further we examine the accepted chronology of development and suggest that changes in class relationships took place earlier than some historians have thought. Again towards the end of section three we re-introduce an element of abstract theorization, primarily to acquaint the reader with the significance of an appropriate conceptualization; the Gramscian theory of hegemony. Thus there are reflective and reiterative passages which appear in the paper from time to time the hope is that these do not confuse but add to the overall understanding of what is an extraordinarily complex question of British historical development.

## SECTION ONE: TOWARDS A THEORY OF CLASS, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS DEVELOPMENT

As we suggested in the introduction, the primary aim of this paper is to place within the context of working class development in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the complex set of social and political relationships between the working class and other groups in society. In this section we aim to place before the reader what we regard to be the most important theoretical propositions regarding working class development. These are centred chiefly, but not exclusively, on the postulations of Marx and Weber. Let us be true to chronology, and begin with Marx.

### THE MARXIAN THEORY OF CLASS DEVELOPMENT.

The odd thing about the Marxian view of class is that although the concept is absolutely central to the Marxist theory of economic, political and social change, Marx himself never systematically outlined what he meant by the term. All we are left with is a tantalizingly incomplete section at the very end of volume three of Capital[1], in which he sketches the briefest of outlines of what he meant by the term, the three main classes are:-

... The owners of labour power, owners of capital and landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit, and ground rent, in other words, wage labourers, capitalists, and landowners constitute then three big classes of modern society based upon the capitalist mode of production.[2]

Because of the incompleteness of Marx's view of class, later Marxists in turn have had to piece together what the great man actually meant. This led to much debate and not a little



confusion. However, for the sake of clarity and simplification, we can suggest that Marx meant the term 'class' to be used in two senses. The first is what might be termed the objective and is essentially an economic criteria of use, what Eric Hobsbawn has identified as Marx's 'macro theory', [3] of 'so many people in relation to the ownership of the means of production'. The second usage is where Marx utilizes the term 'class' in a subjective manner, and this primarily refers to class consciousness. The term 'class' only becomes meaningful when the two usages reach a dialectical unison at a moment in history when class development has reached a point when the class acquires a consciousness of itself. This is what might be termed the subjective awareness in a mass sense by the class (in our case the working class) members of the objective reality of their position in society. The elaboration of this conceptualization can be found in Marx's attempt at contemporary history: The Eighteenth Brunaire of Louis Bonaparte. However it must be stressed at the outset that, for Marx, classes do not exist in society in political harmony: class conflict is everywhere apparent. But, before expanding on this, let us return to basics. There is little original in the above quote from Capital; indeed, David Ricardo, the classical economist said virtually the same thing half a century before Marx. But what Marx did (and what Ricardo did not) was to offer an abstract theory of class development, and it is worth tracing this in some detail in order to clarify Marx's later position.

Marx drew on many sources in his theoretical postulations. With regard to class formation, he owed much to the French philosopher Henri De Saint-Simon. Along with Saint-Simon's Marx's theory of class was formulated in an attempt to understand the nature of the changes which had dramatically transformed the traditional social structures of Europe. Of those changes the most salient was the shift of society away from an agrarian or peasant based feudal economy to an industrial, capitalistic economic system. For Marx, following Saint-Simon, this pointed to the emergence of an industrial working class who, by their size and power were destined to become the only class in society. What Marx did was to give the theories of Saint-Simon a logical coherence which the French thinker never achieved for himself. Common to both however, was the central notion that class ascendancy; (ie the rise of one class, the decline of another, and the domination and subjugation of one class over another) was based on the conflict which existed between classes in a given epoch. This is a theme which recurs in Marx's thought and one to which we shall subsequently return.



However, let us begin by outlining Marx's theory of agrarian and early capitalist class development.

For Marx, primitive man encountered a very low division of labour, (that is the division between work-as-thought and work-as-physical-toil, as well as the diversification of work tasks) this resulted in primitive man becoming alienated (removed from or separated) from nature. In order to overcome this, primitive man attempted to increase his mastery over the material world. As a process, this served to 'humanize' primitive man and develop his cultural faculties. However, there was a price which had to be paid for this narrowing of the gap between man and nature. Because man had endeavoured to utilize, for his own benefit, the goods nature had to offer, the division of labour increased, and with it the potential for exploitation. Thus the price man pays for the reduction of his alienation from nature is to increase the tendency for human self-alienation. This, for Marx, was one way to see the transition from 'tribal', or as Engels termed them, 'primitive communist' societies into feudal societies.

In these tribal societies, with their low division of labour, such property as exists is owned in common by the members of the community. The expansion of the division of labour, together with the increased levels of wealth which this process generates, is accompanied by the growth in the ownership of private property. This involves the creation of a surplus product (for example the products left over from basic subsistence in a feudal society) which is appropriated, at a fraction of its real labour cost, by a minority on non-producers who consequently stand in an exploitive relationship with the majority of producers. It could be argued that exploitation and self-alienation lie at the root of Marx's theory of class development.

Marx was careful to emphasize that what constitutes a 'class' will not be the same in the various types of society. It may well be that classes share similar formal properties which enable us to define them as such, but it does not inevitably follow that class conflict, as a necessary development, will take the same course in all societies. Several of the factors which characterized the origins of the capitalist mode of production in Western Europe existed previously in ancient Rome, including a merchant/manufacturing class and the development of money markets. But, because there were other elements which existed in Roman society, most notably slavery, whatever class struggles existed in Rome resulted in not a new and higher form of society, but in the

disintegration of the existing society, because of the imbalance in that societies social fabric.

For Marx, capitalism replaced feudalism because a new class system, based on manufacturing and located in towns began to dominate the agrarian based, feudal class structure. This process of the replacement of one type of property ownership (based on the land and the enforcement of labour services) by another (based in towns and on merchant and manufacturing capital) was gradual but nonetheless a revolutionary clash of two competing forms of techniques.

While capitalism, like feudalism, carries 'the germ of its own destruction' within itself and, while this self-negating tendency is also expressed in the shape of overt class struggles, their underlying character is quite different from those involved in the decline of feudalism. Class conflict in capitalism does not represent the struggle of two competing forms of technique, but stem instead, according to Marx, from the inherent contradictions between the existing productive technique (industrial manufacture) and other aspects of 'the mode of production' - namely, the organization of the capitalist market, and the uneven distribution of the profits accruing from capitalism.

The access of a new class to power does not on this occasion involve the ascendancy of a new form of private property, but instead creates the conditions under which private property is abolished. The proletariat is so important to Marx (and here the term is the equivalent of Saint-Simon's 'industrials'), because it becomes the only class in society, its hegemony signals the disappearance of all classes in society.

This then is the basic historical theme of Marx's theory of class formation and development, but there are major problems, not least of which is Marx's use of the term 'class' which, as we noted at the outset, is complicated by the fact that at no time does he offer a concrete definition of what he means by the term. He constantly shifts from one conceptual definition to another, and, even though Marx's thought is an undoubted improvement on the chaotic ramblings of Saint-Simon, it still lacks a definition of precisely what he intends to convey when he uses the term 'class'. Part of the problem is that Marx moves from a "pure" or abstract model of class domination, which applies to the various types of class systems, to a more concrete description of specific classes in specific societies. Similarly, there are pure and concrete



models of capitalist structure and development. Marx's abstract or pure models can be said to be dichotomous, with property relations acting as an axis between the two main class groupings - proletarian and bourgeoisie - who Marx respectively categorized as the producers (the majority) and the non-producers (the minority). Both of the two main classes are locked in a relationship of reciprocity out of which neither class can escape from without thereby losing its identity as a distinct class. This can be said to apply to all 'modern' or industrial class societies. The non-producers source of income is the surplus product extracted from the producers because of the formers ownership of the means of production. In this model, 'class' is objectively defined as a series of relationships, involving groups if individuals, to the ownership of the means of production. This again is directly linked to the division of labour (and the alienation and emiseration that this produces) because in relative terms a highly developed division of labour is necessary for the creation of surplus product, without which classes cannot exist.

Income groupings are never the sole determinants of class for Marx. If class were to be identified with the source of income within the division of labour, there would result a countless plurality of classes with little or no homogeneity within a given class. Consumption, like class, is always related to, and determined by, the relation to the ownership of the productive process. This is why it is possible for two individuals with identical incomes, even with the same occupation, to belong to two different classes; for one may own his own business and be imbued with bourgeois cultural tendencies, whilst the other is an employee in a company and a member of the proletariat.

However, this dichotomous model of class is not purely economic. Marx believed its tentacles embrace social culture and ideology as well as practical political power. Those who own the means of production are also in possession of the dominant culture and also lay down the ideological patterns of an epoch. These patterns seek to rationalize the bourgeoisie's economic and political domination and explain logically why the subordinated should remain in that position. As Marx states:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie, the class which is the ruling material (Marx's emphasis) force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class with the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over



the means of mental production, so that, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.[4]

This leads to a second point concerning Marx's abstract model of class, which is founded upon mutual dependence and mutual conflict. Dependence for Marx, means far more than simple material or economic dependence imposed by the division of labour between classes: the reality is that neither class can escape from the relationship without losing its identity as a class. In Marxian dialectics, this is a union of opposite forces and its interplay gives society its specificity and the ability to transform itself. This is because, when a class elevates itself from a position of subordination into one of domination, it transforms that society in the process.

The Marxian view of dependence is not a contract freely entered into: there is no sense of collaboration. The model is best viewed as asymmetrical: the aim is still the extraction of surplus value (the expropriation of the surplus product of the wage labourer by the capitalist) by one over the other. It is at this stage that class conflict - the engine of societal change for Marx - becomes important. On the one hand, both of the two main classes need each other for each to exist - the capitalist for the extraction of surplus product and the wage labourer for the means of subsistence. However, on the other hand, both classes are mutually exclusive: it is this separateness which is the basis for class conflict. Open class conflict can only arise when the opposition of interests, presupposed by the exploitative nature of the dichotomous class relationship, fully reveal themselves to the subordinate class. In capitalism, the two sides of this relationship are always present. For class conflict to openly reveal itself in the form of class action on the part of the subordinate group, the class must act as a class - its members subjectively aware of their objective class position - and not as large groups of individuals merely pursuing their common interests.

Class only becomes an important social agency when it develops an inherently political character, and that political character has its base in the form of communal action. The language utilized by working class leaders and representatives may suggest a realization of the exploitative nature of the overall class position at a given point in time, and the subsequent actions of the working class may also act as a key or guide to the levels of class consciousness within the working class. However, it is important to reiterate



that it is only when it is conscious of the collective response it should make, and has an awareness of its real position in the world coupled with a developed sense of the communal response to change the social and political fabric in global terms, that a class moves from a 'class-in-itself' to a 'class-for-itself'. According to Marx, only then can this class be said to possess a degree of revolutionary consciousness in a class sense. Marx's acceptance of the stages and importantly, for our thesis, his further acceptance that there may be levels of class consciousness within the working class, especially when the class is at the class-in-itself stage of development, is an important conceptual guide to understanding the apparent fluctuations in the early nineteenth century working class.[5]

Let us at this stage briefly and momentarily leave the Marxian theory of class development and develop the concept that there could have existed differing levels of class consciousness within the working class in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the third section of this paper we aim to show that for most, if not all, of the period 1834 to 1850 the working class of most (if not all) of the cotton textile industrial region of Lancashire were operating only at the class-in-itself stage of development, and that essentially, with regard to the 'pure' Marxian model, class consciousness never reached the 'revolutionary' stage. However, we suggest further that what later Marxists have termed 'false consciousness' has led to an emotive distortion of the actual circumstances of working class existence of this period. We suggest that the class-in-itself stage of development can itself be subdivided for the sake of clarification of the actual historical position, into four levels of consciousness. The fifth level may be said to be the class-for-itself stage of revolutionary class consciousness.

The first and most basic level of class consciousness is that the term denotes a fairly accurate perception of class membership on the part of the individual. The factory manual worker who ascribes himself as belonging to any particular class is obviously not class conscious. This simple awareness and acceptance of one's objective class position constitutes then the first level of our scale of class consciousness. Second, class consciousness may denote a certain limited perception of what the immediate interests are of the class one is conscious of being a member. For example, this working class member may realize that a political group or trades union is attempting to protect or advance the interests of the working class and, by understanding this, the working class

member is aware of what the immediate interests of the class are. However, even when the first two levels of class consciousness are apparent, it may well be that they do not lead to a third level of class consciousness which involves a desire or will to act and advance the interests of the class as a whole. Thus, it is possible for an individual to have a clear perception, and a self-identification coupled with a knowledge of what the basic interests of his class are, but still lack the will - or be somehow diverted from doing anything in order to advance the interests of his class. Even at the third level of consciousness, when a will-to-act has been attained, it is still possible to detect among a section of the working class, a member or a group of workers, who desire to escape from their class.\* This may be for various reasons: a material improvement in wages or working conditions; lack of effective leadership which may result in demoralization; or of coercive pressure or other more subtle influences and inducements. This kind of deviation can occur to a section of the working class or to individuals located at any of these first three levels of class consciousness.

These class members who, for whatever reason, renounce or abandon the struggle for working class autonomy can still be said to have a perception of working class membership even though they are not displaying overt signs of being class conscious in the more

---

\*It should be stressed that there is a flourishing debate surrounding those skilled members of the working class who acted, by virtue of exclusive trades unions, in their sectional interest. These 'labour aristocrats' may have moved up and down our scale of class consciousness. In the 1820's they were to be found in a relationship of co-operation with the less skilled members of the working class. Whilst in the mid thirties and forties they began to operate exclusively in their own interest. Thus at certain stages they may have operated close to level four, dropping, as mature capitalism developed through level three, to possibly only a level two consciousness by the 1860's.



obvious sense of the terms usage. This can also act in reverse for a member of the middle classes: here some of the middle class members are class conscious in terms of the first two levels but have chosen to ally themselves with the interests of the subordinate class. Such figures have been familiar in working class political movements often in positions of leadership. However, with regard to working class consciousness, these second and third levels may be said to correlate with notions of a reformist or labour consciousness. Here the members of the working class may act collectively in a class sense in the pursuit of limited aims and objectives, but they act within the bounds of the legal and political constitution.

The fourth and most difficult level to attain is the point at which class consciousness may be said to have reached a state of development where the individual members not only retain the

elements of the first three levels but in addition have a particular and specific perception of what their class advancement requires and how this should be attained. Agreement of a specific set of social, political and economic programmes may be reached throughout the class which if brought to fruition would affect the whole of society in national and indeed possibly in global terms. The dispute may arise as to the method of carrying out these aims and objectives: some may still advocate working within the existing constitutional apparatus, (for example Parliamentary legislation), whilst others may have dispensed with constitutional means and advocate revolution. It is when the overwhelming mass of the working class advocate revolution, that a fifth and revolutionary level of class consciousness may be said to have been reached.

Although Marx did not give the working class consciousness levels of development in the way we do, he did suggest that the growth of working class consciousness is a developing process along with the increasing dominance of industrial capitalism as the chief mode of production. However, we argue that this development of class may also be retarded at certain times, and, as we shall hopefully discover later, the theories of Max Weber may shed some light as to why this was so.

However, to return to Marx, one of the major problems of the application of the Marxian concept of class is the combination of the abstract model with the specific or concrete historical forms of societal development. Although Marx's terminology is somewhat

confusing what he means is clear enough. He maintained that all historical societies contain 'intermediate' and 'transitional' classes. By transitional classes, he means those groups who have lingered on into an epoch where a new mode of productive relations exist: examples of this may include the existence of slaves in eighteenth century Europe, or the fuedal classes that remained in significance in the Europe of the nineteenth century. The term intermediate classes is used by Marx to describe those groups who are situated outside the conventional two or three class society. Examples of these may include the professional middle classes or the intelligentsia, who neither own productive capital nor produce goods themselves. Marx maintained that, on the occasion of revolutionary class struggle, these intermediate classes would be subsumed into one of the two main competing classes. It is important to note that the existence of the transitional classes or the intermediate classes do not upset the balance of the dichotomous class system, for in the case of the transitional classes they are numerically small - and, over time, become even smaller. Furthermore, in the case of the intermediate classes, they do not enter into the relationship of the mode of production, but they do make it easier to recognize the cultural patterns of the middle classes.

These intermediate and transitional classes will be grouped differently around the two major classes and take differing forms. They may be traces of what will become the next dominant class: as the bourgeoisie and the free urban proletariat were in fuedal society. Even though the abstract dichotomy still prevails, the existence of these transitional and intermediate groupings shows that for Marx all societies may contain overlaps and sectionalizations within the dichotomous class systems and also that radical change in society is a slow process. Even within the two dominant classes there may be sub-divisions. The petty-bourgeoisie, for example, in capitalism may be said to be subsumable under Marx's category of the middle classes; but their interests may be divergent from that of large scale capital. What Marx apparently fails to realize, at this crucial stage of explaining sectionalization within the dominant classes, was the operation of forces such as status on the subjective side of class relationships. Or, if he did realize it, he fails to grant the significance such a concept merited in the actual workings of class society. However, we shall consider this in more detail as we outline the concepts developed by Max Weber below.



### WEBERIAN CRITIQUE

By far the most significant contribution to the theory of class after the Marxian model, and one that is important to the thesis presented here, was that postulated by the German School of social thought in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries, most notably the work of Max Weber. Whilst this school was directly influenced by Marx, they attempted at the same time to criticize and reformulate the Marxian theory. One procedure has been to compare Weber's concepts of 'class', 'status' and 'party' - a mere portion of Weber's Economy and Society - with the presentation of the Marxian position, usually to the detriment of the latter.[6] We do not seek to throw out the Marxian theory by utilizing Weber's ideas, but to use his concepts to provide significant additions to the basic Marxian position. By doing this, we hope that a clearer conceptualization of working class development will result when we examine the empirical evidence in part three of this paper.

It has been argued [7] that Marx treated 'class' as a purely economic phenomenon, and, moreover, regarded class conflict as, in the same way, the inevitable outcome of clashes of material interest. According to this argument, he failed to realize that the divisions of economic interest which create classes do not necessarily correspond to sentiments of communal identity which constitute differential 'status'. Thus status, which depends upon a subjective evaluation on the part of the individual, is a separate dimension of stratification from class, and the two may vary independently. There is also a third dimension which Weber recognized as an independently variable factor in 'stratification', but which Marx treated as directly contingent on class interests. This is the factor of power, or as Weber termed it, 'party'.

We contend that, by utilizing these two dimensions of status and power, the basic Marxian position as outlined above becomes more tenable and indeed, provides a clearer and more uniform theoretical basis from which to proceed in an investigation of class relationships.

Essentially, within the economic dimension, Weber's analysis was similar to Marx's. Economic class was determined by the individual's market situation, which in turn depended on his share of property and the value of his labour. Weber delineated four major class groupings; firstly, the manual working class, divided



in turn between skilled and unskilled workers; secondly, the petty-bourgeoisie; thirdly, the propertyless white collar workers and fourthly those privileged through either their ownership of property or their education. In essence this is not dissimilar to the dichotomous model posited by Marx. However, Weber's viewpoint strongly emphasizes a pluralistic conception of classes. Here, Weber's distinction of the 'plurality' of classes is between 'acquisition classes' and 'ownership classes', and is based upon a fusion of two criteria. Weber writes:- "On the one hand the kind of property that is usable for returns, and, on the other hand the kind of services that can be offered on the market." [8] This produces a more complex system of groupings within the dominant class man objective sense, as Weber himself points out in the somewhat verbose German style:-

Ownership of dwellings; workshops; warehouses; stores; agricultural usage land in large or small holdings - a quantitative difference with possibly qualitative consequences; ownership of mines; cattle; men; (slaves) disposition over mobile instruments of production, or capital of all sorts, especially money or objects that can be easily exchanged for money, disposition over products of one's own labour or of other's labour differing according to their various distances from consumability; disposition over transferable monopolies of any kind - all these distinctions differentiate the class situation of the propertied. [9]

Furthermore, the class situation of the propertyless also varies according to the types and degrees of 'monopolization' of the marketable skills they possess. Weber goes on to claim that, as a consequence, there are various types of 'middle classes' which stand between the 'positively privileged' classes (the owners of property) and the 'negatively privileged' classes (those who possess neither property nor skills which fetch a significant price in terms of wages in the market). While these lower middle and working class groups are propertyless to a greater or lesser extent compared to the propertied; there are those amongst them who own, according to Weber, 'nominal property' but who possess little skill as a marketable commodity; for example small shopkeepers. Meanwhile, there are those who possess virtually no property but do possess a highly sought after and marketable skill content, for example, the highly skilled wage labourer. As Weber suggests in the above quote, the dominant classes may be divided between those owning the sorts of property which may be used to obtain market returns. The first he termed rentier groups, who, as their name



implies gained their source of income by the ownership of property, and secondly acquisition groups, who Weber terms entrepreneurial, whose income is derived from the application of capital.

Within the acquisition classes - those associated with the rise of modern capitalism - educational qualification takes on a special importance and may vault these people from the border area between the negatively and positively privileged into a privileged group simply, on the strength of learning and its application in the market, ie, they have learnt the skills society needs - like, for example industrial chemists or lawyers.

Thus, although Weber's breakdown of society into stratified classification is more complex than Marx's, it may prove to be of greater use when we, as historians come to examine the subjective side of class relationships, that is the status (or social honour and esteem) individuals or groups believed themselves to have and were regarded as having by their peers and other social groups. Weber, like Marx, maintains that a clear cut distinction must be made between 'class-in-itself' and class-for-itself. 'Class' in his terminology, always refers to market interests, which exist independently whether men are aware of them or not. Thus class, through the operation of the market, has an 'objective' characteristic influencing the life changes of men. However, according to Weber, only under certain conditions do those sharing a common class situation become conscious of, and act upon, their mutual economic interests. In making this emphasis, Weber intends to separate his position from those 'hard' Marxists who adopt what he terms a 'pseudo-scientific operation' whereby the link between class and class consciousness is always treated as direct and immediate. Such a consideration underlies the emphasis which Weber placed upon 'status groups'. However, Weber suggests that, under certain given circumstances, a class may be a subjectively-aware community, or locality, grouping, an important point to note in our third section when we examine the phenomena of high levels of the working class consciousness in certain parts of the north-west but not in others at the same point in time.

The importance of status - which are normally communities - is derived from the fact that it is built upon a criteria of grouping other than those stemming from the market situation. The contrast between classes (those groups determined by purely objective market arrangements) and status groups (those not determined by the market) is portrayed by Weber as one between the objective and the subjective, or put another way between 'social being' and 'social



consciousness'. However, it is also one between production and consumption. For, as 'class' expresses relationships involved in production, status groups express those involved in consumption in the form of specific 'styles of life'.

Weber suggests that status affiliation may cut across relationships generated in the market since membership of a status group usually carries with it various types of monopolistic privilege. In most cases, however, objective class identity and status group membership tend to be closely linked, especially through relations to property: the possession of property is both a major determinant of class situation and location, and also provides the basis for following a definite 'style of life'. The point of Weber's analysis is that classes and status communities represent two possible and competing modes of group formation in relation to the distribution of power in a society. He is quite explicit about saying that classes, status groups and parties are all "phenomena in the distribution of power." [10] What Weber is insisting and where he is at variance with Marx, is that power is not to be assimilated, or made to conform to, the 'pure' position of economic domination. The political party is orientated towards the acquisition or maintenance of political leadership; it represents, like class and status grouping, a major focus of social organization relevant to the distribution of power in a society. Weber is quick to point out that it is only a recent characteristic of the modern 'national' state.

Although, as with Marx, Weber's postulations regarding class are not complete works, they do take us further than Marx's in that they offer a concise conceptual analysis and give a sense of definition which is somewhat lacking in some of Marx's writings on class. However, it is evident that for Weber, as it was for Marx, the advent of industrial capitalism dramatically changed the general relationships and the character of the connections between classes and society. The emergence of the labour contract as the predominant type of class relationship is tied to the expansion of economic life, and, in a political (national) sense, to the formation of a national and international economy, which has been the growing characteristic of capitalism in Britain since the end of the Napoleonic wars.

Much of Weber's thought is concerned with refuting the Marxian generalization that class conflict and struggles form the main dynamic process in the development of society. Marx's position is called into question in a theoretical sense in two main respects.



Firstly, by seeing political power as secondary and derivative of the economic situation prevailing in the capitalist system. Here, Weber suggests, Marx is exaggerating the overall significance of the 'pure' economic relationships within the workings of social organization. Secondly, an over-emphasis on the economic base fails to take into account the part played in the historical development of status group application. Status may also serve as a basis of group formation within a given class, and, furthermore through processes which are not universally dependent on class relationships. This is an important point to note when we come to look at intra-class sectionalization in part three of this paper.

However, the contrast between Marx's and Weber's position should not be exaggerated. Weber himself accepted that it is the 'class situation' rather than the 'status situation' which is "by far the predominant factor in the system of relationships generated by modern capitalism.[11] He recognised that modern capitalism is a 'class society' in two important senses: firstly that capitalism vastly increased the rate of market operation beyond those which were the characteristic of previous periods; and secondly that class is a relationship between capital and 'free' wage labour. His interpretation differs from Marx in that he refutes the universal domination of the economic sphere.

On the nature of the relationship between the state and society, Marx's writings contain moments of ambiguity. Marx advanced the theory that the state is little more than a vehicle whereby the interests of the dominant class are realized: effectively the state is an agency of class domination. On the other hand many of Marx's comments upon the capitalist state do show an awareness of the administrative significance of the state as the supervisor of the operation of capitalist production.[12] An ambiguity is undoubtedly present here, but it is not as contradictory as some critics have maintained, since it is clear that Marx wishes to argue that the very administrative function of the capitalist state, by ensuring the operation of the contractual obligations upon which the idea of 'freedom' in the 'free' labour market depends, are of key importance to the maintenance of the class relationship of capital and wage labour. The state provides the coherent legal and political framework for the class structure inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

There are nonetheless problems with Marx's position and Weber points them out. First of all, there is the assertion that the state, is in a direct sense, the instrument of class domination,



and hence that most of its organizational characteristics are contingent upon the capitalist system of class relationships. Secondly, there is Marx's assertion that the state is a co-ordinating agency which is responsible for the overall administrative operations of a society inside which there is a relationship of class domination which operates in the economic sphere. Weber's significant contribution is the emphasis on the political as well as the economic relationship within the infrastructure of social organisation, especially in the role of the bureaucracy. Weber places great emphasis on the proposition that the bureaucracy within the machinery of the state, (at all levels) offers a paradigm of a typical form of social organization which is called into play by the emergence of capitalism. The determining factors are not only class relationships: but also political in the sense that the administrative nature exemplified in the bureaucratic state constitutes the necessary framework of the 'rationalized' economic enterprise. Effectively the bureaucratic state is acting as a type of managing agency which the demands of free-enterprise capitalism dictate.

Weber does not dispute that the separation of the capitalist market economy, if left to function in an unfettered manner, acts in favour of the material interest of capital, but the transformation of this situation, he believed, through the abolition of private property in the means of production, could not provide the whole means for the complete transformation of society as postulated by Marx. This is primarily because the political/administrative elements embodied in the capitalist state would still remain intact, if only for the regulation of civil society. A gloomy forecast, but one which the history of the development of 'socialist' or pseudo-socialist states has proved to be basically correct.

These then, in abstract terms, were the main points of divergence between Weber and Marx. There were other methodological and historical points of departure, but they need not concern a discussion centred mainly, as this paper is, on class relationships. It could be argued that, with the consolidation of western capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century, Weber is in a sense completing the work began by Marx in mid-century, and the combination of the two theoretical positions is a formidable basis from which to investigate the practical side of class relationships and the politics of early industrial capitalism.

We have seen that Marx produced the basic position when he argued that classes exist in an objective relationship with the ownership of the means of production. Marx also suggested that, throughout the differing stages of capitalist development, high levels of working class consciousness may result as workers become subjectively aware of their objective position. He also suggested that this development may be impeded - since "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" and the influence of this bourgeois ideology and the implementation of constraints and controls may lead to sectionalization within the working class.

However, this is not the entire case. What we are suggesting is that, although the Marxian objective economic position may serve as a basis for the understanding of the class situation, the subjective experience this affords the actor is also important. The point is, however, that this subjective element - the actor's social consciousness - is highly variable. In order to explain working class sectionalization and fluctuating levels of class consciousness we feel the Weberian concepts of status and party must be given equal emphasis, whilst still retaining the objective economic dimension of the Marxian model.

Weber recognized that economic class may act as a basis for a sense of community and conflict, but suggested that such a development was not always a necessary outcome. He argued that each individual or group were placed according to the degree of 'social honour' afforded them by the rest of society. Society may be stratified into a series of status groups which may be distinguished by common life styles; but as importantly by social evaluation, self-education or self-ascription. Whilst the possibility of making successful claims for status often depend on income, property ownership and occupation, other factors such as race, religion and political affiliation may be equally important.

We argue that the Marxian basis should be accompanied by the Weberian additions. We suggest that, during the periods of high levels of working class consciousness, the subjective element of self-ascribing status may not be as evident. Indeed, we argue that intra-class co-operation and the relative absence of intra-class sectionalization is evidence that the working class are operating at a high level of class consciousness. Conversely, when levels of status differentiation are perceptible, class consciousness may be fragmenting or declining.



It appears that Marx, like ourselves, believed that in the main the industrial working class of Britain to be at the 'class-in-itself', or a 'class-against-capital', stage of development for most of the first half of the nineteenth century. He writes "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class against capital, but not yet for itself." [12] If this was the situation - and the evidence suggests that it was - it says something about what later Marxists have said regarding the notion of false consciousness. We suggest that the inclusions of the Weberian concepts into a general theory of class based on the Marxian model mean that the term false consciousness can only be meaningfully applied to those working class members who: A) have no perception of working class membership or have rejected that membership, regardless of what stage of development the working class is at. Or B) those class members who deviate from the mass of the working class when that class is at the revolutionary stage of development in a mass sense. However, we suggest that in an overall sense that revolutionary stage was never achieved during the period from the mid-1830's to the 1860's: in effect only very briefly or in certain areas did the working class ever even approach that class-for-themselves stage and that for most of the period and over most of the industrial North West they were operating at the class-in-itself stage of development.

We suggest that there were several reasons why a mature class consciousness in the Marxian sense was never achieved. Important among the explanations was the intra-class sectionalization which occurred in several manifestations, and the imposition of controls and constraints imposed upon the working class from above. In order to make these points clearer we have suggested that the level of class consciousness among the working class in the first half of the nineteenth century never remained stable for very long. We further suggested above that a four level model of class consciousness may be a useful guide in locating the intensity of working class consciousness at a specific point in time and indeed in particular parts of the industrial North-West.

It is a conjoint exploration of these related explanations which we intend to outline in our final section, but first it is important that the recent historiographical context related to class and class consciousness be briefly sketched.

## SECTION TWO

### THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

Any historiographical discussion of the development of the English working class in the first half of the nineteenth century should begin with an evaluation of the contribution of Edward Thompson.[13] This is not done merely as an act of deference to a brilliant - although controversial - piece of social history, but also because, even after a quarter of a century, The Making of the English Working Class has still many important points to make. Indeed for the purpose of this study we can regard Thompson's work as serving as the locus of the debate regarding the development of class consciousness of the English working class. For The Making of the English Working Class is still the only piece of scholarship which attempts to give us a broad descriptive account of the development of the working class as a whole during the formative years of the industrial revolution, as opposed to the somewhat narrow - although useful - regional studies, or the studies of specific groups, sections or trades within the working class. Also Thompson's work is of direct relevance to our study in that we contend that his thesis sets the limits to which we can usefully discuss the problems of the scope and inherent content of working class consciousness and development. There are two reasons for this. The first, as will become apparent subsequently below, is that Thompson's thesis ends its discussion at a particularly appropriate point in time: 1830-32. For it is after this period - as we shall discover later - that the real problems regarding class relationships undergo a series of dramatic changes and adjustments. Secondly, at the level of practical historical method, Thompson's work sets the limit to what we as social historians can do in attempting to offer descriptions and analysis of a) working class experiences over given periods, b) working class behaviour as far as it can be historically noted, and c) the forces which operated at the time to possibly form those experiences and occasioned their behaviour.

Let us at this stage briefly detail what Thompson has to say, put in its most simple terms the Thompson thesis contends that the identification of the various social groups in England during the industrial revolution can be best achieved if one examines the



changing relationships - and ensuing struggles - between the emergent proletariat, bourgeoisie and the greater and lesser aristocracy in the period from the 1780's to the Reform crisis of 1832. The Making of the English Working Class opens with Thompson's assertion: "The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making." [14] He suggests that this 'making' was an active process, 'which owes as much to agency as conditioning'. [15] Here, Thompson is taking a swipe at the 'crude' Marxists who assert that the early English proletariat was the mere product of the introduction of the factory system. In fact for Thompson, 'the working class made itself as much as it was made'. [16] The 'agency' Thompson refers to was the conversion of a collective experience into a social consciousness which effectively gave the group its definition and created the class itself. Or as Thompson puts it:

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is usually determined by the productive relations into which men are born - or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which the experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class consciousness does not... class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is the only definition. [17]

The process Thompson adopts to explain the above formative definition is in three consecutive movements. In the first section of the book he reconstructs the cultural and political traditions of English radicalism prevalent in the eighteenth century. These include popular revolts and tumult, religious dissent and the constitutional conviction which many felt as a result of the erosion of their basic political rights during the decades of Whig supremacy. He ends this first section with an account of Pain's disavowal of constitutionalism, and describes the brief growth of English Jacobinism in the 1790's and the Tory reactions to it. The second section of The Making of the English Working Class is concerned with detailing the occasions of the dreadful social consequences of the industrial revolution, as it was experienced by various primary producers - field labourers, artisans, handloom weavers. Also in this section Thompson assesses the debate pertaining to the standard of living, proselytization, the struggle



of workers to defend traditional work practices and independence, also the community associations and institutions of working people during this period. In the third part of the book Thompson describes the growth of class consciousness amongst working people during and after the years of the Napoleonic wars. This he does by outlining the successive political and industrial struggles against the new forces of dominance in a rapidly changing society: the outbreaks of machine breaking in the North and Midlands; the campaigns of parliamentary reform in London; the leaders of national popular radicalism, Hunt and Cobbett; the 'Peterloo' massacre, and the spread of utopian primitive socialism in the form of Robert Owen and his beliefs. Finally, by the time he reaches the Reform crisis of 1832, Thompson concludes that, 'the working class presence was the most significant factor in British political life'. [18] Hence, he ends his superb survey with the logical statement that: "...at this point the limits of this study have been reached; for there is a sense in which the working class is no longer in the making, but has been made. To step over the threshold, from 1832 to 1833, is to step into a world in which the working class presence can be felt in every county in England, and in most fields of life." [19]

In terms of his general themes - the parity and close approximation of 'agency and conditioning', the development and growth of working class social consciousness, the realization and self-perception of their class position in an objective sense - we can go along with the Thompson thesis. But several questions need to be asked not only of The Making of the English Working Class, but also of the class development when we 'step over the threshold' of 1832 and beyond. These questions could include for example: What does Thompson believe the approximate size of the working class to be by 1832 in proportion to the rest of society? This, I suggest could be a reasonable question at the end of 900 pages. Also what was the level and how uniform was their class consciousness? This begs the further question in a classically Marxian sense: how 'revolutionary' or otherwise were the English working class by 1832/3?

These last two points will be dealt with in some detail below, not only with regard to Edward Thompson but also other historians of the nineteenth century working class. However, let us quickly examine the problem of quantification of the working class. If we assume, for the sake of a general evaluation that the receipt of wages in return for the sale of labour, (Carlyle's 'cash nexus' or Marx's notion of 'so many people in relation to the ownership of



the means of production') offers a starting point for determining the size of the working class, then some formulations can be made. N J Smelser, in Social Change and the Industrial Revolution[20] suggests that in 1832 the cotton operatives of Lancashire numbered slightly over 200,000 with 75,000 involved in power-loom weaving. Charles Booth, in 1841 gave a more general quantification of the industrial working class. He calculated that there were 210,000 operatives involved in the mining industry in England and Wales, 188,000 working in the metal trades, and 604,000 in textiles, of whom 300,000 were operatives in the cotton mills of Lancashire.[21] In terms of the Lancashire cotton operatives, by 1844-6 the total was 340,000, of whom 150,000 were power-loom weavers. The population of mainland Britain during this period was 13,896,797 in 1831; 15,914,148 in 1841; and 17,927,609 in 1851, however the figures can be deceptive. On the one hand it can be argued that for most of the period under discussion the industrial working class were a minority, albeit a rapidly growing and important minority. On the other hand, if one takes into account other wage labourers, in, for example, the London sweated trades or in the agricultural sector, plus their family dependents, the real size of the working class is placed into focus.

Let us briefly look at the levels and significance of working class consciousness at this time. Thompson tells us that, as historians of the working class, we must adjust our approach to that history by viewing working class society from their perspective, or as he terms it 'from below'. With this we agree, but only insofar as the approach must be balanced by looking at the development from other angles; from the position of the lower middle class (the small manufacturer or the 'shopocracy') or the professional classes and indeed the manufacturing middle classes. When we do this it tells us much about the significance of working class consciousness as well as possible levels of intensity. For when material evidence is short from the working class themselves (as it invariably is) the reactions of those social groups placed above the working class were to the various levels of working class consciousness tell us much as to its significance at a particular point in time. Even when working class consciousness is low it may still be socially significant as the work of Gareth Stedman-Jones[23] has demonstrated, but when it is high its significance to society overall is also enhanced. When one thus examines the levels and significance of working class consciousness from their different angles, concentrating on the threat posed to those placed socially above the working class, the picture which emerges is one of fluctuating levels of intensity and significance, with the



increasing tendency of intra-class sectionalization, as we shall discover in the course of this paper. However, at this stage, let us introduce another Marxist historian into the debate.

The concentration of class feeling is something which John Foster in Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution[24] has addressed himself. As we suggested in Part One of this paper one method of viewing the problem of working class consciousness may be to form levels of consciousness as analytical categories. But, as we also stressed, we do not contend that a revolutionary stage - in a classically Marxian sense was ever achieved by the working class during the period under discussion. John Foster, on the other hand, has suggested that the workers of Oldham did exhibit signs of a 'revolutionary' class consciousness dating from the period when the Thompson thesis ends in the early 1830s. According to Foster the period from the early 1830's to the late 1840's witnessed a rise in the social and political education of the working class at a time when the obvious brokers of power - the big bourgeoisie - were experiencing a period of crisis. This in turn was followed by a phase of 'liberalization', which, although it corresponded with a consolidation of capitalist expansion, was a product of the concerted response by the bourgeoisie to the revolutionary threat posed by the working class. This tended to sectionalize the working class and consequently retarded the growth of class consciousness. The working class of Oldham, according to Foster displayed a revolutionary consciousness in the 1830's and 40's, by their control of local political institutions, their organized opposition to the initiatives of the bourgeoisie in the form of mass demonstrations, strikes, exclusive dealing, and, in general terms exhibited an informed awareness of the social, economic and political aims and objectives of working class struggle. This mobilization of working class action was achieved by a 'vanguard' of the proletariat who acted as leaders. Organizing, educating and directing their followers much in the same way as Lenin advised after the Menshevik/Bolshevik split of 1903.

However, there are problems of interpretation inherent within the Foster thesis and these have been pointed out most glaringly by Gareth Stedman-Jones[25] and indeed, by Edward Thompson.[26] Without opening up the points of interpretation, which have in any case been discussed far more effectively elsewhere, we suggest that the Foster thesis also contains problems of logic if the working class of Oldham, and, by implication, the rest of the north-west



were truly revolutionary. We suggested in the first part of this paper that it is only when the overwhelming mass of the working class advocate social, economic and political revolution - the complete transformation of existing society - level five on our scale of class consciousness - can the working class consciousness be said to be 'revolutionary'. Not only must there be a will to revolutionary action but also there must be a comprehensive blueprint for society which is to replace the old order. In the case of the Foster thesis and other historians[27] who stress the radical nature of working class consciousness in the 1830's and 40's, the strike of the late summer of 1842, is held up as a classical manifestation of revolutionary action. Now there is no doubt that the industrial working class were operating at high levels of class consciousness at this time, but can this be described as revolutionary? One of the major problems is the attempt to explain why, even with such high levels class consciousness and with such a degree of pre-planning and forethought, did the strike end in such disarray and apparent failure. One of the chief reasons was pointed out by the Manchester Guardian at the time, in that there was no overall comprehensive plan of action once the initial object of stopping the factories had been achieved. In mid-August a report ran: "The strikes will be resolved because", said the Manchester Guardian, "the leaders and the led don't know what to do next once they have accomplished their initial object of closing the mills. 'What is to be our next step? What have we got by all this? What are we likely to get? Are the questions the workmen are asking themselves.'"[28] Even though the Manchester Guardian was the high voice of Manchester Liberal capitalism and even though, as such a mouthpiece, it would act in concert with the manufacturers and not the striking workers, nevertheless the subsequent events of the strike reveal that there was some truth in what the writer said. One of the lasting effects of the dispute of 1842 was that it tactically split working class radicals over the issue of whether future strikes should contain or be fought over 'political' aims and objectives rather than the narrower, but often more achievable and realistic 'economic' issues. This tactical separation of the 'political' from the 'economic' can be seen in Marxian terms as a retardation of class consciousness, in that the political dimension of class action is a vital element in the definition of a high level of working class consciousness.

However, even when we examine the period when the political and the economic elements of class consciousness were linked, the quote from the Manchester Guardian highlights the essential problem for



Marxian historians who attempt to outline the spread and depth of working class self perception and consciousness. One can suggest that the leadership of the working class believed that the increased representation of the class in terms of the legislative process would lead to an improvement in the conditions of working class existence, (a position incidentally which was essentially reformist in character and not revolutionary). One can also show that this in turn gave the periods when these ideas gained a mass following in some way reveals the scope and intensity of class consciousness. Even when class consciousness is high there is of course the obvious problem of assuming the leaders and the led were united in their aims and objectives (something, incidentally which is virtually impossible to assert conclusively), however, the question remains what were the levels of their class feelings during the periods of quiescence? Eric Hobsbawn, in a seldom cited early work[29] suggested that an oscillation process operated among the industrial working class. Although chronologically vague and still historically unproven, it suggested that trades union, or economic dominated issues were the focus of working class aims and objectives at periods of economic prosperity, which, according to the Leninist scheme would constitute a 'labour' consciousness. Conversely, the oscillation theory maintained that political and social activism on the part of the working class flourished in a mass sense only at periods of economic distress - which when again placed within the theory postulated by Lenin, would correspond to the beginnings of a 'revolutionary' consciousness. Whatever theoretical line the student of the early nineteenth century wishes to take, it is clear that, for most Marxists who have broached the question of working class development, a developed social consciousness can only begin to be discussed when the historical actors empirically display evidence of a political awareness of their class position. This of course could take various forms which may cover a span ranging from the attendance of discussion classes, peaceful petitioning, through to acts of rebellion and the calls to arm themselves against their class oppressors. The point is that evidence of all these variations of class actions can be found in the period 1815 to 1850.

But the uncomfortable fact for most Marxian historians of the period is that throughout its duration, there appears to have been a significant section of the working class who opposed their radical leadership in their economic and political objectives, and further that these dissentient groups were used as a focus - both at the time and since - to consolidate the position of both the established political order and the economic order of capitalism.



This raises two important questions. Firstly, with regard to the Marxist position, does the notion of 'false consciousness' adequately explain in political terms the deviant behaviour of some sections of the working class? Secondly, have social historians (of any genre) adequately investigated the various political and social forces which acted upon the social consciousness of the working class and which were controlled by agencies outside that of the working class?

With regard to the question of false consciousness, as we suggested in part one of this paper, the sociological distinction of objective social being as distinct from subjective social consciousness is important. But so too are the emotive connotations used by some Marxists of class betrayal and class perfidy. This brings us to the second point - an examination of the forces of social and political control in this particularly formative and crucial period. As we suggested above, that Marxist should have virtually ignored this question is puzzling, a point reiterated by a leading Marxist theoritician of the present day. Ralph Miliband in a quote deserving of extended quotation:-

But the fact remains that 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal' does have 'control at the same time of the means of mental production'; and that it does seek to use them for the weakening of the opposition to the established order... There is absolutely nothing remarkable about all this: the only remarkable thing is that the reality of the matter should be so befogged; and that Marxists should not have done more to pierce the fog which surrounds what is after all a vital aspect of the battle in which they are engaged.[30]

We suggest that the thesis proposed in this paper goes further in attempting to explain these questions - even whilst still operating within the theoretical framework of the methodology of radical history - than has been present in the British historiographical tradition thus far. The main body of the descriptive analysis of our thesis is contained in the third and final sections of this paper. However, it may be useful to briefly outline its central thrust by way of reiterative contrast with the two historians we have looked at so far. At the level of historiography, we suggest that the contrast between Edward Thompson and John Foster is illuminating in two respects. Firstly, we argue that the Thompson thesis remains inconclusive because of its very inclusiveness. It simply is not specific enough in relation to questions of regional,



cultural, occupational or political variations within the nascent working class. Secondly, the exclusive nature of the Foster thesis, relying as it does on material drawn chiefly from the Oldham district, renders the work open to the charge of selectivity, even though the writer implies that his conclusions can be applied across the textile district.[31] For our part, in methodological terms, we suggest that any far reaching and meaningful evaluation of working class development in the first half of the nineteenth century must include three main ingredients. Firstly, the analysis must contain evidence drawn by comparing and contrasting the north-west region as a whole - (the assumption being that it was in this region and in this period, (1820-1850) that the increasing consolidation of mechanized industrialization, with the attendant paradigmatic identification of the relationship between capital and labour, was most developed. Secondly, the different experiential elements (work, the factory, independence, social issues, and importantly politics) that affected the working class and, importantly, how these historically changed over time. Thirdly, and finally, although it is vital to see class relationships from the perspective of the working class, (from 'below' so to speak), any analysis of class relationships during the period must also include an evaluative explanation of the situation from the perspective of other social groups involved in the relationship - most obviously and notably, the manufacturing middle class.

There have, of course been other (mostly non-Marxist) historians who have attempted to view the question of class relationship from some of the perspectives outlined above. Harold Perkin for example, in his Origins of Modern English Society[32] stresses wider social and political forces rather than economic change as being the engine of class formation. For although the source of income is still important to Perkin, it does not have the pivotal role which the 'relations to the ownership of the means of production' has for Marxist historians. It is more the 'ideals' held by the four main social groups which bind them as a class. Source of income however, has a role to play in the identification of the four groups, here Perkin is following the classical economists, Adam Smith and David Ricardo and the views of the later nineteenth century economist T H Marshall as well as the twentieth century sociologist, Raymond Aron. The four groups are: those who derive their income from wages, the working classes; from profit, the entrepreneurial classes; from rent, the aristocracy or landed class; and finally; the 'forgotten' middle or professional class who derived their income from the selling of their specialized



services, and who, according to Perkin, in comparison with the other three groups, were placed firmly above the economic battle. This assertion has now been challenged by more recent research[33]. However class consciousness, of any social group plays little or no role for Perkin and his followers.[34] Indeed the term is not even mentioned in his book. With regard to describing social consciousness within a given class he prefers the term 'ideal' which corresponds to the experiences and aspirations of each of the social groups in relation to and as distinct from each other. It was the conflict between the holders of these 'ideals' which became common in the nineteenth century, the chief battle however was not for economic control, but for political power at various local and national levels; parliamentary and administrative reform, the New Poor Law, education, the role of the established state church, public health, the army and the civil service; in short this was a battle for the control of the state. This was a battle in which, according to Perkin, the ideal of the working class was the eventual loser to the entrepreneurial ideal of thrift, sobriety, hard work, charity, and the minimum government intervention.

The placing of political struggle to the fore - or at least giving equal emphasis with the economic conflict - is to be welcomed, if, as we noted in part one of this paper, theoretical balance is to be achieved in relation to empirical findings. By outlining these political elements in class relationships, Perkin's thesis is of value. Furthermore, whilst Edward Thompson and John Foster attempt to describe and explain the specificity of the development of the working class as the possessors of a unique cultural heritage as well as a potential for economic and political power in the first half of the nineteenth century, Perkin endeavours to outline the development of all the major groups in society simultaneously. This is a broader perspective, and, as with the work of Edward Thompson, the charge of inclusiveness could be levelled. But the attempt at the evaluation of social groups in relation to each other historically is a major credit of the Perkin thesis, for it is only in this way do we see a balanced picture of class relationships.

However there are some problems in relation to class in the distinction between 'social being' and 'social consciousness'. As we noted in our first section social being refers primarily to the individual or groups objective position in society, whilst social consciousness refers in general terms to his subjective evaluation of his objective experience. With regard to Perkins' handling of the objective side of class identification, he ignores, as R J



Morris has pointed out, "groups which derived income from a variety of factors of production." [35] These could include the land-owning industrialist - a vitally important element in 1820's and 30's; and again in 1870's and 80's. For example during the first phase mentioned in the Lancashire region much needed capital came from greater and lesser county gentry, this involvement in manufacturing industry, did much to transform localized county toryism into 'new conservatism' in the 1830's. But, according to Perkins' thesis, we have no mention of this fusion of the ideals of rent and profit, nor of its political potentialities. Nor is there mention of other important intermediate groups such as the small self-employed artisan or craftsman, the shopkeeper who rented his premises, or the shopkeeper who sought profit and owned several cottages. At least within the Marxian scheme we have some understanding of the marginality of these intermediate and transitional groups, in Perkin's scheme we have no such understanding for they remain largely ignored.

Secondly, with regard to the relationship between social being and social consciousness and how it affects a group 'ideal', here the problem is Perkin's apparent rigidity with regard to the ideals a given group held and their source of income. Here the problem with Perkin is similar to that of the Marxian view of false consciousness: that of when sections within groups or classes do not conform to their designated class ideals or consciousness. Perkin refers to these sections or individuals as 'social cranks'. As we noted in the first part of this paper, status (or the degree of esteem one self-assigns or the amount of social esteem an individual or group is held in by others) is an important ingredient in a discussion of social class. Now, although Perkin notes that status divisions exist within classes, we contend that he does not give the concept the emphasis it deserves.

Status groupings and class groupings were closely linked in the first half of the nineteenth century in the sense that the individual or group tended to remain fairly rigidly within the inter-marrying, inter-associating status boundary of their social class. Indeed, to be regarded as a 'skilled' working man or a 'professional' member of the middle classes was an ascribed expression of one's status within one's class, and was also a reflection of the individuals style of life. But status also encroached in other spheres of the individuals social consciousness. The possibility of making expressed claims for status ranking may often have depended on occupation, income and wealth, but other factors such as political affiliation, race,



religion may also have been important. Meanwhile in the 1830's, the question of the political status of the working class gives us an example of how intra-class sectional status could be eroded in certain situations, or at least the effects of intra-class status differentiation lessened. As we noted above, the primary aim of the expressions of working class resentment in the 1830's and 40's was that, although they were aware of their position in the ranking of society, and indeed were proud of being designated members of the working class, they were at the same time resentful of their exclusion from political representation. The feeling was that their political status (and hence their social status) was not being given its true weight in relation to their economic importance. In periods of intense political activity (for example 1831/3 or 1839/42) this served to erode the significance of the intra-class status boundaries, and presented instead, a picture of a united and highly class conscious working class with class and status coinciding. However, when the period of intensity fell away, intra-class status sectionalizations began to re-appear, the consequence of which was a reduction in the levels of working class consciousness. In objective terms the social being of the various sections of the working class remained the same as in the phase of intense political activity, but the re-assertion of intra-class status differences served to heighten the areas of conflict between the various working class sections - over say religion or political party affiliation - and thus reduced the united posture of the working class as a whole.

This is a point we shall return to in the final section of this paper, but it is worth noting here that status as well as class must be considered in any understanding of the development of nineteenth century class relationships. Furthermore, it is worth considering that if inter-class social mobility was the exception rather than the rule in nineteenth century Britain, then status positions were equally static and rigid. For example, one of the reasons the Ultra Tories feared the Reform Act of 1832 was that the House of Commons might be flooded by the 'new men' of industry in the borough constituencies of the north and midlands. These, they felt, were of a lesser social status and not in a position to be trusted with the constitution. Harold Perkin rightly draws our attention to the driving force of entrepreneurial ambition being the attainment of status in the form of gaining social esteem or 'honour' through the acquisition of local power and prestige.[36] But it is worth noting here that status differentiation played a much subtler role in the historical development of nineteenth



century society, and as we have noted, it is something we shall discuss in some depth in our final section.

We end this section of the historiographical discussion of the early nineteenth century working class with the most recent developments, that is to say with the language of class. A pioneering study in this area was that of Asa Briggs in 1959,[37] who pointed out that the common usage of the term 'working class' dates from the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, and suggests evidence of the emergence of a specific social grouping. This theme however, has been pursued and expanded in a recent piece of work by Gareth Stedman-Jones,[38] which has relevance to the debate surrounding class relationships and working class consciousness in two important areas.

Firstly, he suggests that we, as historians of the working class, should empirically analyse with more care what the working class were actually saying themselves and further what was being said by their class representatives on their behalf. The language of their representatives, Stedman-Jones assumes to be the language of political radicalism.[39] Now there are problems here, and it is a point we shall shortly return to, but let us firstly outline briefly why language is so important to Stedman-Jones. He rightly asserts that language - the medium through which experience is objectively expressed and transmitted, either orally or in a literary form - is a highly complex area of analysis. He suggests that the problem of language is particularly acute for social historians who rely so heavily on the languages of the past for primary evidence. What they have either been unaware of, or deliberately overlooked according to Stedman Jones, is that language is itself part of the material of the objective reality of social existence ('social being') in terms of its structure and modes of use. It is precisely because language is a material entity in its own right that it is virtually impossible to deduce from its use 'some primal anterior reality',[40] or the 'social being' of the experiences of the users. The very structure of language, determines the articulation of its use, and thus the deep experiential meaning that the language is supposed to convey (and for social historians to abstract) is lost.[41] This has grave ramifications for the historian attempting to assess the levels of class consciousness merely by extrapolating key expressions of the language used. For we can never be sure that what was being said (or written) was the expression(s) or the manifestations of the shared experiences of those making the statement, (in essence of social meaning) because of the complexity of the structure of



language itself. Stedman-Jones's answer to this is to apply 'non-referential' conception to language. By this he means analysing, in a very detailed manner, what terms and propositions the language actually contains and then setting this in the wider material context - rather than extrapolating some deep significance from specific propositions as expressing some deep experiential significance of the users. Or as he rather verbosely puts it: "exploring the systematic relationship between terms and propositions within the language rather than setting particular propositions into direct relation to a punitive experiential reality of which they were assumed to be the expression." [42]

This brings us to the second area in which the Stedman-Jones thesis is of relevance to the analysis of working class consciousness and class generally; and this is the crucial and important area of politics. Given the deeper analysis and the wider use of language, what we intend to do in the final part of this paper is to employ Stedman-Jones's technique to examine the political language of the 1830's and 1840's and evaluate how it affected, and what the effects were on the working class. We intend to see how the interests, aspirations, political aims and objectives manifested on the one hand, in the political language utilized by the working class, and on the other by those attempting to politically influence the working class. This brings us back to Stedman-Jones's assumption that nineteenth century radicalism was the political language of the working class: this, we shall argue was not always the case. It is true that at certain times the political language of radicalism held a wide constituency within the working class; for example 1831/3 or 1839/42, but there were also other political languages containing differing political principles, such as Conservatism or Liberalism, which although less effective in the years of high working class consciousness, gained more purchase in the periods of intra-working class sectionalization. The point is that political languages began to change in order to accommodate A) the interests of those to whom they were addressed, and B) the situation or point in time in which the context of their use must be understood. What Stedman-Jones is saying is highly pertinent to the discussion of nineteenth century class relationships, and he is, in our view, correct to promote the importance of the politics of a given age to the analysis and evaluation of these relationships. As he himself says:-

What we must therefore do is to study the production interests, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves. We need to map out the

successive languages of radicalism, liberalism, socialism etc., both in relation to the political languages they replace and laterally in relation to the rival political languages with which they are in conflict.[43]

Quite so, but we must also be careful not to assume that on all occasions the overwhelming majority of working people were susceptible to a single, given political language, or even uniformly agreed to the principles inherent within a single political language. But as we argued in the first part of this paper, the importance of the political context can never be forgotten in the history of nineteenth century class relationships, or indeed in the production of a class consciousness. As Gareth Stedman-Jones rightly asserts '...it was not consciousness (or ideology) that produced politics, but politics that produced consciousness.'[44]

SECTION THREE.      **WORKING CLASS DEVELOPMENT AND INTER-CLASS**  
**RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NORTH-WEST INDUSTRIAL**  
**DISTRICTS: 1820-1850.**

In part one of this paper we outlined the theoretical basis of the development of class during the consolidation of modern industrial capitalism as presented by Marx and Weber. It may be recalled that the objective nature of class as suggested by Marx could be accepted. But also that further refinements were required when the question of defining class consciousness arose. The need for a definition of class consciousness - of the subjective perception of one's objective class position - was not, we argued, answered sufficiently well by Marx's reliance on the 'pure' economic relationship, that in effect other factors needed to be brought into play. The adequacy of the concept of class was enhanced, we argued by the work of Max Weber when his notions of 'status' and 'party' are applied to the basic Marxian model of working class development and their relationship with other social groups. The work of Weber is particularly relevant with regard to the problem of intra-class sectionalization, for his notions of status differentiation and the added sophistication of the political element of 'party', when applied to the actual research of the period, come nearer to solving the apparently contradictory



nature of working class development. The fact of the matter is that when applied to actual research, the 'pure' Marxian model of class leaves many questions unanswered. This does not mean however, that it should be discarded. As a methodological guide to working class development and inter-class relationships Marx's scheme is extremely useful, and is in our view, basically correct. However, we contend that more questions are answered when the conceptualizations of Weber are included in an analytical model.

#### THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

It should by now be fairly obvious to the reader that any description and analysis and class relationships in the first half of the nineteenth century is extremely complex, and the subject of much debate. In the second part of this paper we attempted to outline the basic historiographical position of differing types of Marxist historian, also a non-Marxist description of class and finally that of a language-based approach to working class political development. In this section we aim to gather all these threads together and at the same time offer a slightly different explanatory context - than has been thus far expounded - for the apparent failure of the industrial working class to politically assert themselves as a class in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In section two we looked at the state of the historiographical debate regarding class and working class consciousness. In this section we must briefly return to a historiographical discussion in order to point out the debate surrounding the chronology of working class political development from 1820 to 1860, and the significance of the changes which occurred at this time that have been put forward by historians. In essence this historiography began just after the first World War in the context of the rise of the Labour party and the mounting Labour unrest in the years just prior and just after the First World War. Also of significance to historians of the left, who were guided by the materialist conception of historical development, was the apparent success of Lenin's Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution of 1917. These factors were the background to a reappraisal of the British industrial working class in the four decades following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. Intellectually, and also at the level of scholarship the mapping out of the basic problems of working class development had

been set by the work of Sidney and Betrice Webb in their History of British Trades Unions first published in 1894. The Webb's suggested that the history of British Labour could be most graphically outlined in the attempts at workers combinations and political struggles. This, they suggested had three phases. Before we outline these phases we must at the outset make clear our positions. Whilst not wishing to dispute the basic chronology of development we are interested in the various explanations put forward by historians as to when and why changes occurred. Especially the commonly held view that change occurred around 1850, whilst we hold the view that perceptible changes in working class development and relationships can be traced back to the mid 1830's.

For the Webb's the first phase of working class development ran from about 1790 to the early 1850's and saw the working class increasingly flexing their political muscles in an attempt to regain lost political and social rights. The period from 1838 to 1848 saw this phase at its height in terms of the mass action engaged in by the first truly working class based political party; the Chartists. The end of the 1840's saw the decline of Chartism and a tactical withdrawal from politics by the working class leaders. This ushered in a second, more pragmatic phase of working class developments based primarily on purely economic self-preservation. The chief instrument of this was what the Webb's termed the 'New Model' trades unions, and this phase lasted until the 1880's. These respectable, non-political, some times described as 'aristocratic' trades unions of the skilled working class were organized on the basis of maintaining what limited economic gains the working class had made, and further stressed the need for working men to accept the existing political situation, and work within the system whilst at the same time pressing for piecemeal economic and social reforms. The Webb's suggested that the reward for this 'intelligent' acceptance of the necessity for 'respectable' and socially acceptable behaviour on the part of the working class leadership led to the extension of the electoral franchise in 1867.

However, a third phase was ushered in with the wave of disputes and disturbances organized primarily by the leaders representing the semi and unskilled workers in the 1880's and 90's. This led to a resurgence of British socialism, on this occasion with a mass base, and resulted in the formation and eventual success of the Labour party in the first decades of the twentieth century.



This essentially Whiggish approach to the writing of working class history by the Fabians and the Workers Education Association was never seriously challenged until the late 1920's and early 1930's, and indeed is still apparent at the present. Throughout the twenties and thirties, however, John and Barbara Hammond maintained the tradition of the romanticized view of English labour,[45] of more value in terms of scholarship was the posthumously published The Chartist Movement written by Mark Hovell, but at the level of analysis again missed some important points. G D H Cole addressed himself to the question of working class development in a series of books, the most influential of which was probably The Common People, published in 1938, but again the basic three phase model set by the Webb's was not seriously called into question.

Further to the left on the political scale several works noted the originality of the experience of British labour in the 1820's, 30's and 40's but stuck rigidly to the progressive nature of working class development and looked primarily at the emerging proletariat - and effectively sidetracked any serious analysis of their relationship with other social groups. From the perspective of the Marxist/Leninist materialist approach the most significant was Theodore Rothstein's From Chartism to Labourism, published in 1929. Rothstein's work was of major significance because for the first time the subtle nature and characteristics of social relations inherent within industrial capitalism were explored, especially the role and position of the state in political terms, as the defender of the interests of industrial capitalism. Thus, in emphasising the importance of the 'political' side of the class relationship, he pre-dated Stedman-Jones by almost half-a-century.

Rothstein's work was also important in that for the first time the inter-connectedness of the basic dichotomous relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was also stressed. He wrote:- "We must include in our field of vision the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which, as the dominant class, could render the circumstances propitious or otherwise for the development of an opportunist mentality among the workers." [46] The Rothstein thesis suggests that the Chartist period was potentially revolutionary in a socialist sense, but its defeat heralded a reformist reaction among the working class which diverted this revolutionary potential into what Rothstein (and Lenin) termed 'Labourism'. Rothstein was particularly aware of the positive role played by the manufacturers and other members of the

middle classes who encouraged the reformist and conservative/traditionist tendencies amongst the working class. But still the watershed of 1848/50 was seen as a major turning point, and the Webb's period classification still held good.

It was only in the late 1960's and 1970's that the picture drawn by the Webb's began to be re-evaluated. This reassessment revolved around two related questions. Firstly, just how much reliance should historians of class relations place on the Webb's assertion that the years around 1850 constituted a major break with the past? And secondly, what evidence is there of a perceptible shift in class relationships. Or put another way, was there a major break or was the process continued, albeit gradual? Given that the Webb's essential context of explanation was trades unionism, A E Musson has suggested that the process was a continual one, and points to the fairly long tradition of 'aristocratic' skilled unions prior to 1850.[47]

We suggest that a case can be made for both the watershed and continuity viewpoints depending on what criteria and context of explanation is adopted. But this does not lead us very far: what we must do is examine - as Rothstein advised in the 1920's - the complex nature of the inter-class relationships and the experiences of both of the two main protagonists in the rapidly changing industrial society of the period 1820-1850. But further, we must examine these factors comparatively, over geography and over time.

The 1970's saw the beginning in explanatory terms of this new approach. The Webb's watershed of 1850 was in the main retained but a spate of new historians began to examine the question of working class quiescence by looking at a wider set of criteria with regard to class relations. We noted in section two how on the left and specifically in the work of John Foster, the explanatory concept of the labour aristocracy - first utilized by Eric Hobsbawm in the 1950's - was promoted as a major contributory factor in the process of working class 'liberalization'. Here, following on from Lenin, the argument ran that sectionalization at the level of craft skills, or pacemaking or workers acting as impromptu managers weakened and fragmented a previously unified working class consciousness, and that this hastened the 'incorporation' of the working class into an all-embracing web of capitalism and bourgeois liberal-political values.



Less ideological historians, such as Patrick Joyce,[48] suggested that this picture was not only crudely simplistic and reductionistic with its over-emphasis on social control, but wrong in its general argumental thrust. Joyce pointed to the increased dependence of industrial workers on their employers in the 1850's and 60's in the era of mature capitalist social and economic organization. He interestingly compares the relatively high levels of working class consciousness in the West Riding of Yorkshire where industrial capitalism is less developed, with the fragmented working class consciousness of those workers of Lancashire who were experiencing the effects of large scale factory units. Joyce suggests - and here he is supported by Gareth Stedman-Jones - that the completion of mechanized capitalism, plus the inherent failure of Chartism to maintain a radical critique of the capitalist system, lost the movements its mass membership and left the proletariat in a vulnerable and essentially defensive position. At the same time limited concessions in the form of governmental social reforms, and employer acceptance of (non-political) trades unions, coupled with displays of philanthropy and paternalism inculcated a work and community inspired attitude of deference amongst wide sections of the urban working class. The disruption and activism of earlier decades set against the consolidation of flourishing capitalism, left many workers reconciled to accepting and working within the capitalist system out of a basic need to find security. This was met, according to Joyce, by reviving the traditional paternalistic family network in a community sense, and it found its assimilation completed, and indeed complimented in the operation of the large-scale factory unit.

The credit of Joyce's work lies in the widening of the criteria of investigation to include not only working class social and political issues, but balanced with those groups above them; in essence of discussing the wider social relationships. However we do take issue with Joyce. Concepts like deference, dependence and paternalism and an implicitly concession-orientated political consciousness are all important ingredients of the historical picture after 1850. But they are all to be found in the previous two decades prior to 1850, albeit in a less pronounced form. Nor was the period after 1850 noted for its harmony with regard to the negotiation of the position of many workers. Part of the answer to working class quietism after 1850 lies in the reformist nature and limited aims of working class politics, and the forces which served to engender this situation. In order to outline these changes we



must return to the height of the struggle for working class autonomy in the developing capitalist economy of the 1820's.

#### WORKING CLASS DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE 1832.

One point should be made clear at the outset of any region-wide survey of working class development and class relationships in the first half of the nineteenth century. This is that few generalized statements regarding overall trends can be made at any point in the period. All parts of the region were different - different in size; in occupational structure; in economic advancement; in productive capacity, in social relations and in political make-up. With regard to the important question of political leadership, this came from various social groups who were dominant in different areas at different times. However some political trends are apparent. For example the middle class Liberal values of Laissez-Fair capitalism was the dominant political strain for many years at Manchester; the region's largest urban unit; but lower middle class radicalism was in the ascendancy at Rochdale, Bury and Stockport. Working class-based extreme radicalism was for many years the guiding political creed of Oldham and Ashton-under-Lyne. Whilst further to the north and west in Burnley and the Colne valley popular politics bore a tory-radical stamp, not surprisingly considering this areas close proximity to the tory-radical heartland of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Further south the new conservatism of Peel held sway at Blackburn. The 'scot and lot' borough of Preston, with virtually an open franchise in 1832, was evenly balanced between popular conservatism and popular liberalism with a strong third group of independent radicals. Moving south again, Wigan, Chorley and Warrington remained conservative for much of the period as did the county town of Lancaster in the far north. Whilst at Bolton the Conservatives and Liberals were equally matched in the 1830's, with the Liberals gaining the advantage in the 1840's, only to loose this in the 1850's and 1860's. Before we address ourselves as to why in political terms this was so, which we intend to do at the end of this paper, we must, as we suggested, return to the experiences of the 1820's and 1830's.

One possible way the historian can gauge the effectiveness of working class consciousness is to evaluate the reaction it had on those groups who were immediately affected by it, that is to say the localized lower middle class and manufacturing middle class community. Who, in turn passed on their fears to the state



authorities. The period between the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 and the early 1830's was one of considerable disturbance, as the Home Office papers reveal. In social, political and economic terms the manufacturing region of Lancashire was undergoing a dramatic and violent transformation as the capital based factory system began to be introduced on a widespread scale. In fact, the growth of working class consciousness during this period was especially disturbing for the local (and national) political leadership for there was little the authorities could do to curb the increasing acts of working class resistance, short of attempts at containment by overt coercion on the part of the state. In short the old mechanisms of social (and political) control were no longer effective in the mushrooming manufacturing towns of the North-West, as Harold Perkin pointed out.[49]

In the eighteenth century social control operated in a very loose and informal manner based primarily on localized paternalism and accepted notions of the 'fair' price and natural justice, and the tacit acceptance of one's place in society. In terms of governmental control, the essential basis of maintaining a relatively contented population had been since the early seventeenth century the protection of the staple domestic industries, thus keeping the population in employment, and further that domestic agriculture be given protective pre-eminence so that basic foodstuffs should be available. Indeed the experience of the eighteenth century appears to bear these tactics out in that there were few serious political disturbances, the only serious riots up to the 1780's were bread riots.[50]

However, during the first decade of the nineteenth century, serious disturbances broke out in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire over the imposition of mechanized improvements to those regions staple industries. In terms of forming the basis for a mass realization of the objective class position of the working class, these primarily economic struggles can be said to set a precedent. There was, at this early stage, little shape to the workers agitation: what appears to have occurred was that a disadvantaged section turned their blind fury on the objects (the machinery) which they saw as the major threat to their occupational status. However, the reactions of the local and national bodies of civil authority was swift and savage. Necessary they argued to prevent the slide to civil disorder and prevent the possibility of revolution, similar to that which had occurred in France in 1789, and which had led Britain into an ongoing protracted and damaging major European war.

At the conclusion of the war in 1815 a brief calm descended on the cotton districts of the North-West, but a trade recession in 1816/17 brought the spinners and weavers onto the streets. On this occasion their grievance was primarily the reductions in wages but their aims and objectives, although limited, took on such a violent form as to alarm once again the local middle class leadership. As witnessed by a letter from the chief magistrate and local vicar of Blackburn, T D Whittaker, to the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth:

The Hundred of Blackburn is in a state approaching that of a general insurrection in consequence of a wage dispute betwixt the weavers and their employers... We have been compelled hitherto to use conciliation, which has only had the effect of emboldening the mob and encouraging them to acts of greater outrage.

In the same town a general trades association was formed and the first women's trade union instigated. Also in 1818 the first sign of a political edge to working class consciousness can be detected, again among women as well as men in the formation of the first Female Reform Societies which came into existence as Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackburn, Bolton, Manchester and Preston.[51] This was evidence of the raising of working class consciousness and bears out what Edward Thompson suggests in The Making of the English Working Class, that the growth in the self-perception among the working class came as a result of their experiences of struggle.

The year 1819 witnessed the most savage reaction thus far on the part of the local bodies of civil authority when a section of the Lancashire and Cheshire Yeomanry charged an unarmed public meeting assembled to hear the speech of 'Orator' Hunt at St Peter's Fields, Manchester, killing several and wounding many. The government in turn responded by imposing the draconic 'Six Acts', suspending Habeas Corpus, re-doubling the money to paid informants and sending letters of congratulation and support to the organizers of the Yeomanry raid, Ralph Fletcher and William Hulton, both of Bolton.

However, local and national governmental actions did not prevent the activities of the disaffected working class, and the most sustained and seriously violent outbreak of resistance to their loss of independence through the imposition of the factory system came in 1826. The dispute began in what was at this time



the fiercely radical area of East Lancashire. At a meeting of the Blackburn weavers in late March it was announced that out of a work force of 10,786 town-based handloom weavers, only 2807 were in full employment, 6412 were unemployed and the rest, 1467 on half-time.[52] It was also noted that the poor rates were exhausted as was the subscription fund. The blame for this situation was placed firstly on the free imposition of power looms without any taxation of the horse-power capacity; the lack of a minimum wage; the lack of a uniform price list for cotton cuts; and finally (and importantly, for here we have a political element) the government for the prejudiced operation of the Corn Laws.

On April 18 a group of manufacturers were stoned as their coach arrived at Sykes power loom factory in Accrington and the 1st Dragoon Guards dispatched from Blackburn. On Monday, April 24 mass meeting was held at Enfield, situated half way between Accrington, Burnley and Blackburn, at which delegates from weavers association throughout Lancashire held a conference and then addressed the meeting. Afterwards 10,000 marched to Blackburn as a show of strength. At the time the Blackburn Mail noted: "They came in good order and quietly into the town; about 500 were armed with pikes, several with fire-arms (these were called 'captains'); some with large hammers, and the remainder with various weapons." [53] A reporter from the Preston Chronicle gives another report of the scene that Monday afternoon. "The mob supposed to be about 10,000 had rather a terrific appearance as they marched through the streets, about 300 having pikes on their shoulders, many said to the shopkeepers who were shutting up their shops 'never mind yer shops folk, we shallna meddle whe yo'". [54]

On the Tuesday the attacks on the Blackburn Mills began. Messrs Haughton's was visited and all the looms destroyed, at the factory of Bannister Eccles not only were the looms broken, but a crude bazooka made out of gas pipes and filled with explosives destroyed the entire factory. The mills of Feildens were visited as were those of Thorp and Townley, but these were left intact as no looms had as yet been delivered.[55] On the same day (the 25 of April) in Manchester the mills of T and M Harbottle were attacked and all the looms broken, also the factory belonging to Hugh Beaver was attacked and the buildings fired, also those of Clegg and Norris at Long Millgate; the foundry of Peel and Williams and Company was attacked and much damage done.[56] On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of that week mills were attacked at Rochdale, Bury, Helmshore, Edenfield, Oswaldtwistle, Clitheroe, Chorley, Darwen, Wigan and Barrowford near Colne.[57]



It may well be that this was a spontaneous outbreak of mindless violence, but given the fact that many representatives of these areas had met in conference at Enfield on the Monday of the same week, some organized co-ordination of strategy could have taken place, and indeed is most likely.

On Thursday the 27th at Blackburn the military assembled in force and the magistrates read the riot act, in the ensuing confrontation six of the machine breakers were killed. On the same day at Chorley a correspondent of the Preston Chronicle wrote, "I saw the rioter at work, and the coolness and determination with which they destroyed everything was surprising. There was no appearance of haste, but on the contrary, the greatest serenity." The mob, he said came from Blackburn, but that "there can be no doubt a great multitude of the townspeople were their friends...the women supplied the rioters with stones, concealing the missiles under their aprons." [58]

The following week the troubles continued and spread. On Sunday, April 30 a mass meeting was held at Tandel Hill near Oldham, and then the factories of Cleggs were attacked, also those of Milne, Travis and Milne, on the Monday the mills of Collins and Lancashire were destroyed. At Chadderton, also near Oldham the mills of Aikins were attacked and in the pitched battle with the military, eight rioters were killed. [59] There was a serious riot at Macclesfield and power loom factories were attacked as far away as Wakefield and Bradford in Yorkshire. [60]

On the Monday of this second week a series of demands were issued to the manufacturers of Blackburn, and they were based essentially around three points. Firstly it was demanded that a list of prices be drawn up which would be applied consistently to power-loom weavers, handloom weavers and spinners. Secondly the use of power-looms was to be regulated and employed only in the manufacturing of non-intricate cuts, its status being downgraded to that of semi-skilled work suitable for women and children, the idea here being to control the access to skilled work. Thirdly a tax was to be levied on all power looms driven by steam, this, in order to equalize the conditions of competition, and it was further suggested that some part of the proposed tax could be held in trust for the occasions when the weavers suffered privation due to the downturn in trade. The tax had also a sense of symbolic justice about it in that it seemed as though the manufacturers were escaping from their obligations of paying tax, whilst the



operatives in their turn were taxed on a whole range of items indirectly, as well as the direct burdens of the poor rate and the Church rate. On this occasion all the demands were refused by the manufacturers, and when the magistrate amongst them announced that on that very day news had arrived that the King had given a donation of 1000 to the relief fund, for his pains the magistrate was stoned.[61]

There were, however, regional variations regarding tactics among the weavers. At a meeting in Manchester on Saturday April 29 a weaver named Jonathan Hodgins from Stockport urged moderation without violence,[62] a man named Aikins from Bolton pursued the same line arguing that petitions and memorials would serve the weavers interests better in the long run than direct action. This kind of working class leadership may explain why there was little violence at either Bolton or Stockport at this time, a point we shall consider in some depth later. But it is important to take note of the harmony within the working class with regard to the apparent closeness of the working relationship between the various textile crafts (handloom weavers, power loom operatives and spinners) at this time. Indeed, the spinners maintained a strike for two months after the disturbances over the issue of a uniform price list for all textile workers. What is interesting is the apparent lack of occupational status differentiation during the disputes of 1826. It would seem that the handloom weavers did not wish to eradicate the use of power looms in competition. This enhancing of the bargaining position reveals that this was not mere Luddism evidenced by the fact that at no time was the mechanized spinning equipment touched. Indeed it is notable that the town of Preston escaped the violence primarily because a uniform list of prices was already in operation and the mills in this town operated power and handloom weaving with apparent harmony; the former manufacturing the mass produced shirting and the handloom weavers the fine calicos,[63] all in the same mill complex. Also of relevance is that of the various textile workers associations in operation at this time all contained representatives from each of the branches of the textile trade, with equal emphasis apparently given to each.

One of the main reasons why this form of direct action was undertaken at this time, and why the memorialists and petitioners found their calls for moderation rejected, was that memorials had been tried with little effect. Another chief cause of the dispute was the terrible privation the handloom weavers were suffering at this time. This latter point is graphically displayed on the

occasion when the secretary of the Blackburn weavers wrote to Sir Robert Peel just prior to the outbreak of the disturbances, "in the unavowed language of the British Mechanics."

Within the last eleven years we have experienced rapid reductions in the prices of labour: and often there was not the least reason, until at this time we cannot procure more than one or two meals a day. Every article of value has disappeared, either to satisfy the cravings of hunger or to appease the claims of relentless creditors; our homes where plenty and contentment resided are now become abodes of penury and wretchedness. This, however, is only a faint picture of those fully employed. No adequate idea can be formed of the sufferings of those who are unemployed, of whom there are upwards of 7000 in this town and neighbourhood. Were a human man, Sir, to visit the dwellings of four-fifths of the weavers and see the miserable pittance which sixteen hours of labour can procure divided between the parents and the little ones, he would sicken at the sight and blush for the patience of humanity.[64]

Indeed the situation of the Blackburn weavers before the outbreak of the disturbances became so bad, that their relief gained a national prominence, and support for them came from parts near and distant: from Liverpool, London, and the weavers of Yeovil in Somerset organized meetings and collected money specifically for the weavers of East Lancashire.[65]

However, the employers of the Blackburn area remained adamant in their refusal to discuss the joint weaver/spinner demands - unlike Bolton[66] and Stockport where discussions and meetings were held, and serious disturbances averted. Indeed it appears that, on occasions, the only form of solace for the weavers came from a most unlikely - and for the government a very worrying - source. As Thomas Duckworth, an apprentice weaver from Haslingden recalled as a witness in the Lancaster trials.

That morning we set off to the loom-breaking. When we had got on the road we saw the horse soldiers coming towards us. There was a stop then. The soldiers came forward, their drawn swords glittering in the air. The people opened out to let the soldiers get through. Some through their pikes over the dyke and some didn't. When the soldiers had come into the midst of the people, the officers called out, 'halt!' All expected that the soldiers were going to charge, but the



officer made a speech to the mob and told them what the consequences would be if they persisted in what they were going to do. Some of the fellows from the mob spoke. They said, 'What are we to do? We're starving. Are we to starve to death?' The soldiers were fully equipped with haversacks and they emptied their sandwiches among the crowd. Then the soldiers left and there was another meeting. 'Were the power looms to be broken or not?' Yes, it was decided, they must be broken at all costs.[67]

What happened next is recorded in a letter from a cavalry officer to Home Secretary Peel, it's tone is reflective of the panic on the part of the forces of the state when confronted with a determined, organized and violently disaffected civil population.

At Haslingden yesterday, notwithstanding the vicinity of a troop of cavalry, a mill was attacked and the machinery destroyed... Colonel Kearney went to Haslingden this morning to endeavour to see something of the state of things, and as early as seven o'clock the population were in movement to the number of almost 3000 and successfully destroyed the power looms of three mills. Having been applied to most earnestly by the proprietors of two other mills for protection, the colonel got together a picquet of 15 dragoons of the Bays with 20 men of the 60th Rifle Corps, when the first Riot Act was read by a magistrate and every means used to prevail upon the mob to desist, but without effect, the military were consequently put in a position to defend the mill at Chatterton, belonging to Mr Aitken, when they were immediately assailed with volleys of stones, which placed the Colonel in the necessity of ordering them to fire. Several of the mob were killed (the actual number was six) and it is to be feared from the incessant firing, which was kept up for more than a quarter of an hour, that a considerable number must have been wounded. Between 500 and 600 shots were fired. The populous then dispersed gradually, but with the avowed intention of returning with overbearing force... The obstinacy and determination of the rioters was most extraordinary and such as I could not have credited had I witnessed it myself.[68]

In the end the forces of the state acted. The county magistrate swore-in large numbers of special constables, who, under cover of darkness began to round-up suspected leaders, who were immediately sent to Lancaster gaol. David Whitehead, a

manufacturer from Rawtenstall described the scene in his locality in another letter to Peel.

The inhabitants were all in amazements, one telling another that such and such had been fetched out of bed... This method of arresting them and taking them away at once completely put a stop to the breaking of power-looms... The rioters were so frightened that a-many durst not go to bed in their own houses. Some left for the country, others hid themselves for weeks, some in one place, some in another, some in coal pits - some who few, if any, would have thought would have been guilty of such a crime.[69]

Report after report makes the same point that the disruption caused by mechanization was turning moderate, sober-minded individuals into insurgents and 'radical demagogues'. Again another sign that as a unit the homogeneity of the working class was apparent in a class conscious sense.

We have already noted that perception of the lack of working class political rights was apparent in the developing working class consciousness from 1818 throughout the north-west industrial district. The violent disputes of 1826 however were not overtly political in the sense that the struggle was mounted directly for the purpose of securing lost political rights. But the political element was just under the surface, as the Blackburn Mail bore witness when it referred to those involved in the 1826 dispute as "the disciples of Paine and the blasphemies of Carlile." [70] The logic of the situation also suggest in that here were a large section of people suffering appalling privations due to trade recession and industrial rationalization and the state appeared not to be acting in their interests but in the interests of that group who the working class believed were the cause of their problems; the industrial manufacturers of nascent capitalism. Not only this but the government seemed unwilling, indeed hostile to combating high food prices by the allowing into this country cheaper foreign grain and sticking rigidly to the 1815 Corn Laws seemed to be protecting one group in society at the expense of another. It is thus only a short step from being able to recognise one's objective class position in economic terms, to forming a political consciousness which identifies the source of the problem as that of the states inability or unwillingness to act or legislate on behalf of those who feel they are being repressed. The obvious solution which developed in the late 1820's was to gain a working class representation within the institutions of local and national



political control. In the local sense this was focussed on those ancient institutions of local politics; the open vestry and the select vestry, and in the national sense on the growing realization of the necessity of the reform of parliament to include representatives of the working class interest.

One point which needs reiterating regarding the disputes of the 1820's - for these did not end with the 1826 disturbances - and this is, as we noted above, the homogeneous nature of the working class response. Evidence of this comes in the nature of the developing theory of general unionism and in the way the various trades were able to cooperate with each other. We have already observed that in East Lancashire the hand-loom weavers, power-loom weavers and spinners were able to work together on equal terms. But throughout the region as a whole many other tradesmen were involved in pre-Reform Act working class politics; shoemakers, hatters, tailors, mechanics, builders, joiners etc etc, all of high status in occupational terms and mixing quite freely and equitably with those - such as power-loom weavers - of a lesser occupational grade in terms of status.

We suggested above that one can gain some idea of the level of working class consciousness by examining the responses of those social groups who were directly affected by it. We also said that in the 1820's the old mechanisms for politically and socially controlling the working class were no longer capable of containing the development of increased levels of working class consciousness and its possible consequences. Firstly the responses of the manufacturing middle classes and other socially raised groups varied across the region. At Stockport for example overt displays of middle class public and private charity appear to have placated the working class and temporarily tempered their demands.[71] Here the local working class political leader, William Longson, only advocated the breaking of looms in the last resort and mounted his campaign around the issues of wage equalization, the re-allocation on equal terms of work between hand and power loom operatives (an early form of work sharing) and the reductions of the duties of cotton thread exports and grain imports. At Bolton and Preston the conciliatory attitude helped to prevent serious confrontation, and Bolton especially did have a reputation for machine breaking earlier in the century.[72] By contrast, in the Oldham area, the manufacturers resisted all working class demands and serious violence ensued, the same kind of development occurred in East Lancashire as we have seen.



The overall effect of the working class struggles of the 1820s on the middle class consciousness was to induce fear and shock: if they had dismissed the Jacobin 'cranks' and demagogues' in the past, in the 1820's, they began to take their threats seriously, and lobbied the local and national political leaders for the imposition of effective powers of control.

Evidence that these controls were lacking was the ease with which the working class were able to destroy the mills. Apart from sending in a highly stretched, under-manned military force, there was little the state could do to protect property against a determined mob. There was virtually no regular police force; all the local magistrates could do was to hope to keep a line of communication with the sources of potential trouble with the use of spies and informants, or sign-in special constables, or form a loose and undisciplined local yeomanry and of course keep the national authorities informed. A less coercive means of attempting control through passivity was by acts of private and public charity, but the sheer scale of the recession of the mid-1820's rendered this inoperable in many parts of the North-West. Many of the middle class began to feel threatened and intimidated by a potentially violent and 'revolutionary' working class, they felt helpless and confused, and they too began to blame the government for its apparent inability to adequately protect property. The most extreme form this middle class fear took was the 'vigilante' tactics of Colonel Ralph Fletcher and his Bolton 'blackfaces' who made raids on radical meetings and picked off working class leaders in the dead of night.[73] There can be little doubt that during this time the middle classes were extremely fearful of what they saw as an organized and united working class.

Before we begin to evaluate the level of class consciousness prevalent in the working classes of the North-West before 1832, let us briefly describe the high point in terms of the development of political action on the part of working people which occurred in the final years of the 1820's and the first years of the 1830's.

It has been suggested by some historians that the main indicator that the working class had not manifested a recognizable class consciousness in the early nineteenth century - let alone a 'revolutionary' consciousness - was that they had no advanced political theory or strategy,[74] indeed some have suggested that they had no political aspirations at all.[75] In the same vein the agitation surrounding the moves for Parliamentary reform in the



early years of the 1830's, involvement by the working class is portrayed as merely the tale of a middle class inspired strategy.[76]

Firstly let us examine the arguments that the working class displayed no political side to their agitation in the period 1815 to 1830. We have attempted to show above that during the early phase of these struggles in 1817/18 - although the primary aim was the removal of economic impediments to working class independence - a political edge did develop as witnessed by the widespread formation of the Parliamentary Reform Associations throughout the manufacturing districts of the North-West region. Indeed these associations included branches formed by arguably the most disadvantaged group of all; the women. Although the mass involvement in these associations may have waned and been re-lit during times of trade recession, this does not necessarily mean that working people lost interest in political solutions to their collective predicament. It merely means that probably they were engaged in other things, most notably the very act of working for a living. In most of the large demonstrations of working class grievances, both locally and at a region-wide level, the working class political symbols were to be found; the tricolour - the symbol of the French revolution of 1789, and the white-scarf - the symbol of universal suffrage. More often than not the speeches would also include references to political matters, be it Parliamentary reform, or the unjust nature of the operation of the Corn Laws, or the acts of repression on the part of local and national governmental bodies. Thus to suggest that during this period the working class had no political aspirations is highly misleading.

We can now turn to the claim that working class politics had not developed any sense of political strategy or theory. This is more difficult to disprove but there are hints that an abstract form of political thought based on popular democracy was being articulated and developed among wide sections of working people before 1832. This took various forms - from the simple re-capturing of lost rights to the calls of William Benbow in 1831 for a month long strike by the working class during which they would assume control of the nations resources and government.[77] If we have to point to a single work or works by a single author which had the effect of proselytizing the idea of popular democracy amongst the working class, and encapsulated their feelings during the first three decades of the nineteenth century (and indeed beyond), then it would probably be Tom Paine's Age of Reason and



Rights of Man, (especially the latter) both of which date from the last years of the eighteenth century. Neither book, nor indeed any of Paine's work, rank as important works of political thought, but on the level of popularizing a series of ideas regarding the abuses inherent within the British political system at that time, he was extremely successful. Paine's call was essentially one in which the people of Britain be given definable and legitimate rights based upon common justice and fairness, in short a call for a Bill of Rights comparable with that of the U.S.A. Simultaneously, the legislature had to be purged of the place hunting, fund holding, sinecurists, and the corrupt 'hangers on' of the aristocracy. Once these had been swept away a popular legislature would be formed based on the mandate of universal suffrage. At the time of Paine's political activities in the 1790's, his ideas received a direct attack. From the Conservative Whig, Edmund Burke, who had the misfortune to utter two words which inflamed the passions of working people in a manner even in excess of Paine, when he described the lower orders as the 'swinish multitude', such perjorative language did not endear the starving industrial workers of the 1820's to the side of Paine's opponents.

In the fifth chapter of the second part of Rights of Man, Paine offers a series of proposals which were to become the bedrock of radical reformism for the next two hundred and fifty years. He advocated the reduction spending with regard to the army and navy, remitting the poor rates, the church rates and other taxes. Necessary revenue was to be raised by the introduction of a graduated income tax, rising to 20 shillings in the pound for those with an income of £23,000 or above. Finance raised was to be spent on alleviating and improving the conditions of the poor. A system of family allowance was to be introduced, a state aided system of general education for children, an old age pension, benefits for newly married couples, a maternity benefit and the building of combined lodging houses and workshops to help migrants and the unemployed. Just how much purchase these ideas gained among the working class is difficult to assess, but Paine's works sold very well and it is highly probable that many of his ideas were explained to many of the working people to whom they were expressly designed.

Paine's works are radical, but they are essentially reformist, albeit couched in the language of republicanism. Nowhere does he speak of economic levelling, or the end of the basically subordinate relationship between labour and capital; indeed, he extols the virtues of commercial and industrial enterprise. Thus,



if we are seeking to trace the thread of reformism in the political thought and actions of the British working class in the nineteenth century, Painite radicalism takes us back a very long way. Of course, there were other theorists of working class political action, not least Robert Owen and the primitive socialists, also the secularist, Richard Carlile, and the two popular activists of the period William Cobbett and Henry Hunt. But basically all were variations on the Painite theme of the necessity of restoring the political rights of the 'free born Englishman', and reforming the corrupt and inefficient Houses of legislature. Thus, in this light, we can see there was an abstract core to working class political actions, and this theme of popular democracy increasingly took on specifically working class characteristics as we approach the early 1830's.

This brings us to the third argument, that the working class were used by the middle class reformers to gain them a greater involvement in parliamentary politics. This view suggests that all working class political activity was merely a tale of the middle class led organization for Parliamentary reform and that working class actions, during the reform crisis of the early 1830's were never revolutionary. Again the evidence here is contradictory. Some areas were more active than others, and those activities took on differing forms depending on the area. If one examines the politics of Birmingham[78] for example during this period, one undoubtedly is aware that the calls for reform and its subsequent organization are firmly in the control of the middle class and the lower middle class. But if one goes to Bolton or Manchester or Blackburn or Oldham, one sees those same Political Unions, based on the Birmingham model, but firmly under the control of the factory based working class. One of the main reasons why one would not find this situation in Birmingham was that in that city there was not a large factory population; it certainly had industry, but this was based around a network of small workshops and 'little mesters', unlike the factory towns and cities of the North-West.

The conventional argument is that the national leaders of the moves for parliamentary reform - Place, Atwood, Brougham, Parks etc - merely used the threat of working class resistance, and even revolution as a means of negotiating a settlement suitable for all bar the most die-hard defenders of the old system. But the fact is that the Tory resisters to reform - Wellington, Peel, Croker et al - were well aware of the blackmailing efforts of Brougham and the reform leaders, but quickly realized that once the revolution threat had been put in train the chances of the middle class

leadership being able to contain it were very slim. This fact was also known to the working class leaders as well. As the Poor Man's Guardian pointed out in October 1831 during the height of the first phase of the reform crisis:-

... a violent revolution is not beyond the means of those who threaten it, but it is also to them their greatest object of alarm; for they know that such a revolution can only be affected by the poor and despised millions, who, if excited to the step, might use it for their own advantage,...who would thus (then) have their clear rights of property endangered; (?) be assured that a violent revolution is their greatest dread.[79]

Also the reforming ministry was well aware of the dangers of giving too much by way of reform and carefully drew a precise line as to who was to receive the franchise and who denied it. As Lord Grey said in the House of Lords in November 1831 in an attempt to forestall any leaps in the expectations of the extreme radicals:- "If any persons suppose that this reform will lead to ulterior measures, they are mistaken: for there is no one more decided against annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the ballot than I am. My object is not to favour, but to put an end to such hopes." [80] In the immediate aftermath of this statement many of the aspirations of the radicals were dampened, but many of the working class in the manufacturing towns still clung to the idea of a radical reform, even after Grey's speech, and they began to take over the organization of the movement from the middle class reformers. As Francis Place noted also in 1831:-

The systematic way in which the people proceeded, their steady perseverance, the activity and skill astounded the enemies of reform. Meetings of almost every description of persons were held in cities, towns and parishes, by Journeymen tradesmen in their clubs and by common workmen who had no trade clubs or associations of any kind.[81]

In all the manufacturing towns of the North-West Political Unions were formed, and as we noted above, by 1832, the majority were in the hands of the working classes. Just how this was achieved is interesting, and offers an example of the high levels of working class consciousness operating at this time. At Bolton the local Political Union was formed in the Autumn of 1830 and was at this time made up predominantly of the lower middle class 'shopocracy', the small manufacturers and the skilled working men.



However, by December 1831 its committee of 25 persons was made up overwhelmingly by what a contemporary source described as "chiefly working men"[82] What happened was that the moderate lower working class reformers had been ousted by the more extreme working class radicals. The split occurred in October 1831 when the Reform Bill was finally thrown out by the Lords after much wrecking and prevarication. In Bolton, a public meeting was called for but refused by the Boroughreeve on the specious grounds of the cost to the ratepayers. The situation deteriorated and reached a potentially dangerous point in late November when the King issued a Royal Proclamation outlawing the Political Union and banning all political meetings. On November 27 a meeting of the Bolton Political Union was held and attended by the entire committee. Votes were taken and resolutions passed calling for universal suffrage, vote by ballot and annual parliaments without either property qualification for the electors or the elected.[83] At this meeting the shopkeepers and moderate radicals led by William Naisby walked out when a call came to hold an open-air public meeting the next day in defiance of the Royal Proclamation. Thus the council of the Political Union was now firmly in the hands of the working class radicals. On the 28th (a workday) the public meeting was held in Bradford Square. In the chair, Thomas Smith, a weaver opened the meeting by calling for a Painite Bill of Rights, and again reiterated the call for a radical reform of parliament, whilst at the same time conceding "that all property honestly acquired, be sacred and inviolable." [84] But the cry was also 'down with the Bishops' and 'No Peers', [85] thus underscoring once again the Painite influence. At this time the Bolton Union claimed a membership in excess of 4000 and all the members paid a regular membership fee of 2d. per month, its total funds by the end of 1831 were put at over £1000. By the standards of the 1820's and 1830's this level of working class political organization is impressive, and it was to become mobilized to an even greater extent in 1832 when Lord Grey's government resigned and created the so called 'days of May' crisis.

The working class of the North-West believed (wrongly as it quickly became apparent in 1833) that the Reform Bill of 1832 was but the first step in a series of reforms which would restore their political, social and economic rights. Thus it had to be supported at all costs even in the face of the discouraging statements made by Grey, Lansdowne and Russell. The Tory opposition to the Bill believed in roughly the same kind of scenario, they heard Grey's denunciation of extremists and how he would preserve property at all costs and further how moderate the claims of the Reform Bill



were. But the prevailing Tory fear was to allow one crack in the dam of the constitution and the 'revolutionary flood would rush in', [86] as the Tory editor of the Blackburn Standard so graphically put it. Many of the above factors are evident in a letter sent by the former Tory Admiralty chief, John Wilson Croker, to the Home Secretary, Melbourne. However, the most important point to note here is that the working class of the North-West had been mobilized and many of them set off to march to London 'to carry the bill', under the most spurious of pretences.

I think it right to acquaint you that there arrived today in this little village some workmen from Manchester, who under the pretence of offering some cotton yarn for sale, were strong and sturdy beggars. I saw but two of them, but they told me they had left Manchester in a considerable body (Croker's emphasis) and that there were 40 (men) in this and the neighbouring villages of Houghton, Houghton Crouch, Molesey etc. The article they had for sale could be of no value to villagers and it is clearly a pretence. After some conversation, and when I had declined to buy any of their yarn (I suppose a half-pence would have been the extreme value of all they had) or give them any money, they said that they would not go back to Manchester until they had carried the Reform Bill with them - that there were thousands and thousands resolved upon that - and that the Reform Bill would put down machinery and enable the poor to gain a livelihood. [87]

Two final comments by later historians confirm the view that, at this particular time, working class consciousness was sufficiently high to bring about an open rebellion if not an actual revolution. The first comes from G D H Cole, who said in The Common People: "Never since 1688 had Great Britain been so near an actual revolution as in 1831; never in all the troubles of the next two decades was she to come so near it again". [88] Secondly, the judgement of Edward Thompson in the Making of the English Working Class was that: "In the autumn of 1831 and in the 'days of May' Britain was within an ace of a revolution which, once commenced, might well (if we consider the simultaneous advance in co-operative and trade union theory) have prefigured, in its rapid radicalization, the revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune." [89] Thompson bases his assessment on the power of the middle class/working class radical alliance, suggesting that the working class response had a strength which had not been seen before. In fact, as we have shown above, working class political development



in certain parts of the North-West region was even in advance of this as witnessed by the way their leadership dispensed with the lower middle class dominated Political Unions and took over their organizations, advocating a much more working class oriented set of aims and objectives.

The Tory opposition certainly expected trouble, indeed revolution. The Duke of Wellington personally supervised the preparation in case of a possible seize of Strathfieldsaye, his country home.[90] Croker arranged for ships in order that his family and friends may flee the country,[91] and even the unflappable Peel began to arrange his own private army at Drayton.[92] Even the usually taciturn Francis Place - one of the leaders of Reform but no friend of revolution or indeed radical working class politics - noted in May 1832:-

We were within a moment of a general rebellion, and had it been possible for the Duke of Wellington to form administration the Thing and the people would have been at issue... Barracodes of the principle towns - stopping the circulation of paper money...(in short) it would have been an act of the whole people to a greater extent than any which had ever before been accomplished.[93]

Rebellion or revolution was prevented on the one hand by the reformers moderate national leadership being able to convince the working class that the Reform was merely the first stage in a series of reforms designed to rectify social and political imbalances, and on the other this process was assisted by the statements of national leaders like William Cobbett who suggested that half a loaf was better than none. Also it should be noted that violent revolution was not essentially what the working class actually wanted. What they did want was those placed socially above them to witness their plight and to see their point of view. In this sense revolt could only occur as a last resort. But the situation was getting very serious as incidents at Derby, Nottingham and Bristol revealed. However, in the final analysis it must be said that a revolution would have to have been forced on the working class by the intransigence of the 'diehards' and 'ultras'. Basically, even when operating at this high level of working class consciousness the working class were in the main constitutionalists, and this ran deep in the British radical tradition.[94]

However, working class consciousness was operating at a very high level in the pre-Reform period. There was also intra-class political unity coupled with a developed sense of political awareness in a class sense, there was also a will to advance in the interests of the class in a political sense and there was a will to act on behalf of those interests. Here we see the beginnings of a working class based programme for political and social change based on a crude, but effective form of political theory linked to popular democracy and an economic theory based on co-operation. Finally there was a sense of mass unity without the sectionalization inherent within intra-class status differentiation. In the five years after 1831/2 however, this high level of class consciousness was to fragment, and we suggest it never reached the same pitch of intensity for the next fifty years. For, although class consciousness did rise during the first phase of the Chartist years, from 1838 to 1842, changes in the structural relations between capital and labour coupled with subtle changes in the nation's political culture in the years 1832 to 1842 meant that Chartism never looked likely to succeed in dramatically and radically changing society in comparison to the potential the working class had in 1831/2. Evidence for this judgement comes on the one hand from the fear among those social groups above the working class, and on the other of the inability of the local and national authorities to control a very dangerous situation. It is the deeper consideration of how this situation began to change, and further how inter-class relationships were improved and the initiative seized by predominantly middle class groups after 1833 that we now turn our attention.

### III DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1832.

It would be true to say that what we have suggested above is not the conventional view taken by most historians of working class development in the first half of the nineteenth century, certainly not those who have specialized in the evaluation of the Chartist period,[95] and the post-1850 quiescence.[96] However, in order to make clear our picture of working class development, we must describe in some detail the changes in the social structure which affected working class 'social being' after 1832, and further explore how the various agencies of social change operated on the social consciousness of the working class at an experiential level. As we suggested above, in short we contend that the opportunity the



working class had of transforming society by their actions and high levels of class consciousness in the 1820's, culminating in the Reform Crisis of 1831/2, was never to be repeated. We take this position in the light of the subsequent changes in the structure of industrial society brought about by the transforming capacity of developing capitalism. The effect these changes had on the social consciousness of the working class was to render them more susceptible to intra-class sectionalization; fragmenting their political unity and making their class consciousness highly transient.

Again, we reiterate the point that we freely admit that at times during the Chartist period the working class, in a mass sense achieved high levels of class consciousness. Merely that these high levels were more susceptible to containment and control in the late 1830's and early 1840's than they were in the late 1820's and early 1830's. This was essentially because industrial capitalism (and the forces of the state) had consolidated itself, and economic, social and political control devices were in position in the late 1830's which were far stronger than those in existence in the late 1820's and early 1830's. These devices of control and containment operated at the objective level of structure, (such as the work-system, an effective or much improved police facilities, poor relief, housing etc) also this operated at the objective level of the effect these changes had on the experiential consciousness of the working class (such as formal and informal socialization through education and religion and political reformism). The result of all this was to make the working class of the industrial North-West far more dependent overall on the manufacturing capitalist and the capitalist system they controlled in the later 1830's, than had been the case in the 1820's and early 1830's. We shall conclude this section with a comparison between Chartist period and that of the pre-1832, but first let us begin this final section with an examination of both the changing structure of society after 1832 and the possible experiential effects of this changing agency.

As we noted above, as a region the North-West contained several overlapping occupational/industrial structures. There were areas where cotton spinning predominated (South Lancashire and South East Lancashire); others where weaving was the chief occupation (North Lancashire, the Colne Valley, parts of East Lancashire) but in the main the trend throughout the 1830's was to mix spinning and weaving within the same locality. However, the types of cloths woven and yarn spun varied from locality to locality, flannels in



Rochdale, fancy heavy cuts in Bolton, shirting in Blackburn and so on. For much of this early period the type of product determined the size of the factory unit. Heavy and light 'fancy' cuts were better produced - in economic as well as qualitative terms - in smaller units, than the mass produced medium cuts such as shirting. Thus these very large factories (those employing 1000 persons or over in a single productive unit) tended to first appear in that part of the region where non-fancy, average quality cotton goods (such as calico's) were produced, and this was in North Bolton, East Lancashire and the Preston district of the region. From the mid 1830's the smaller units (those factories employing less than 500 persons) tended to remain well into the 1850's around the Ashton, Middleton, Rochdale, Bury and Oldham areas. Manchester, the largest city in the region tended to support the smaller sized factory units. In 1841 at Blackburn and Preston for example, we have calculated that there were four manufacturers employing over 1000 (with one of over 900) persons in the former town and three in the latter.[97] At Ashton, Bury, Leigh, Middleton, Bolton, Wigan and Manchester there was only seven mills who employed over 1000 workers, and at Oldham and Rochdale there were none. In fact at Oldham the average factory size was 223 in 1841 and at Rochdale it was 180 [98] workers per unit. Whilst at Blackburn the average employees per factory was 604 and at Preston 520.[99]

What then, are we to make of the social consequences of this differentiation between large and small factory units? Patrick Joyce suggests that the larger capitalist was better placed, as the factory system became consolidated in the 1840's, to engender the spirit of deference and respect among his employees, than could the smaller employer. He suggests further that two tendencies emerged in the smaller unit; on the one hand feelings of direct hostility towards the employer by the employees, or on the other in the very small units 'something like a camaraderie of equals'. [100] Certainly the maintenance of the radical political tradition of the working class of Oldham and Rochdale and their fiercely guarded independence well into the 1860's appears to justify Joyce's findings.

It is also noteworthy that it was in the large factories and the communities surrounding them that the workers status became important. To be skilled or hold special responsibilities was to place a worker on a higher social plane than the semi-skilled who, in turn believed himself to be a superior animal than the mere labourer. Communal, cultural, political and recreational lines of demarcation began to be drawn among the working class of these



large factory communities in the 1830's. In the 1820's the skilled worker had been at the forefront of the working classes struggle to maintain their independence, in the 1830's however, increasingly this type of worker strove to ensure tolerable levels of his own, or his status peers' independence. The periodization is worth reiterating. Increasingly the tendency to build these large factory units was a feature of the 1830's in North and East Lancashire. gradually more and more began to be built in the south of the region in the 1840's and 50's. It is noticeable as we shall discover shortly that the first workers to moderate their political tone were those of the North and East of the region, who, in the 1820's, as we have seen were among the most militant and violent. It is also worth noticing that by the 1850's this trend of working class quiescence and political reformism appears to have covered the whole of the region, but the trend was begun in the years immediately following 1832.

Another factor of these large factory units which is also possibly of importance in the sense that it increased the level of worker dependence on his employer, was the provision of worker housing. Most of the large millowners when building or extending these large factory units - usually in an out-township away from the town centre - also built rows of small cottages for their workforce. As a trend this had begun in North and East Lancashire in the 1820's and early 1830's, in the south of the region the building of worker housing by employers was not a feature until the 1840's and 50's, and then only partially. At Preston the towns largest employers, Messrs Horrocks and Messrs. Ainsworth housed all their workers from the mid 1820's.[101] At neighbouring Blackburn, to the South East, the Hornby family began building worker housing from 1829, and by 1835 all the town's large employers had started to provide employee housing.[102] This meant that in these out-townships the large factory or mill owner was also the largest landlord. In the Brookhouse district of Blackburn for example, the Hornby family owned no housing in 1826 but by 1836 they owned 72% of the housing in that district as a provision for their 1400 workers, and by 1850 they owned 96% of all the housing in the area.[103] Across the town in the Nova Scotia district the mill owner Robert Hopwood, owned, in 1836 19% of the housing in the district, by 1850 he owned 98.5% of the areas housing.[104] Also, again in relation to status differentiation, different types of housing was provided for different grades of workers: for the semi-skilled machine minder and labourer the basic two-up, two down, cottage, whilst the clerks, foremen and overlookers had the luxury of an added kitchen and an outside toilet.



It could well be that these millowners who provided worker housing did so out of a sense of philanthropy coupled with a desire to realize a profit on an investment. But, importantly, one of the consequences was that not only did the workers face the loss of independence in the well-disciplined large-scale factory unit, but they were also totally dependent on their employers for their housing as well as their living, and, invariably the worker had no choice in the matter, his employment was conditional that he lived in one of his master's cottages.[105] This meant that if a worker displeased an employer in any way not only did he lose his job, but also that he and his family were effectively homeless, and this did happen.[106] But even if this power was not used by the employer, the psychological effect that it may be was an effective device of containment and control. This therefore means that the employers ability to direct and influence his workers both inside and outside the place of work, has been greatly enhanced compared to the situation in the 1820's.[107]

But the employers grip on these communities in the out-townships of North and East Lancashire went even further than the provision of worker housing and employment. They built shops in an area, which reduced the potential for exclusive dealing on the part of the working class, for one cannot shop exclusively when one's opponent owns all the shops in an area. They built day and Sunday schools and probably ensured that the masters and ministers were sympathetic to the employer and to the spirit of capitalistic enterprise. They built public houses, again a traditional place of working class radical politicization. Thus we can see that on the purely practical level of social structure, the employers were in a far better position - in this part of the region at least - to contain and control their respective work-forces in the mid-1830's than they had been ten years previously.

In another important sphere of their existence the working class of the North West region experienced a change in the mid-1830's, and this was in the dispensation of poor relief. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act dramatically tightened up the administration for the dispensation of poor relief. Under the terms of the Act, responsible men were to oversee the collection of the local poor-rate and its dispensation in the form of Boards of Guardians elected by the Parish's ley-payers. In practice these local boards were made up overwhelmingly of the middle and lower middle classes, and were the scenes of fierce party political rivalries and conflicts. Under the old system of poor-relief, the



administrators were chosen by a mixture of election by the parish vestry (which could, and often was 'packed' by the working class) and nomination by the Select Vestry, and appointment by the local magistrates. With the new system the working class were excluded from the process of the election and appointment of overseers and guardians, as indeed they were in other branches of political choice, by virtue of the property qualification. Under the New Poor Law qualification was weighted by the amount of property owned by an individual, thus an employer may have up to six votes at the election of a parochial official, while his employee had none.

But the working class were still expected to pay the Poor Rate when not in receipt of it, thus those most affected by poverty had least say in its administration and distribution. Also under the terms of the 1834 Act and the theory of less-eligibility, the dispensing of out-door relief was to end. In the North-West with the large towns and severe trade recessions which might throw 20,000 people out of work at a stroke, the local boards found it totally impractical to dispense with out-door relief. But the building of the workhouses, and the possibility of the breaking-up and separation of one's family, was again a powerful form of psychological control which the working class of several towns in the North-West fought vigorously to prevent.

But eventually virtually all the region (Rochdale apart) succumbed to the New Poor Law and even though it was not implemented with the rigidity the National Commissioners would have liked, it undoubtedly was a device of working class containment. For example several strikes and industrial disputes were settled to the advantage of the employers by 'starving the men back', for strikers and their families were not entitled to parochial relief, and were almost always dependent - especially when their own limited funds had run out - on donations from workers in other parts of the town or other parts of the region. On occasions the opposite tactics were employed. If, for example, as happened at Blackburn[108] in 1838 or at Bolton[109] in the same year, a middle class political group wished to court and influence working class opinion - as in the case of the conservatives in the former and the Liberals in the latter - then arrears for poor-rates would be conveniently waived and relief extended.

Furthermore, even over poor-relief the question of working class differential status could have been important. For the stigma of being forced to claim relief may have separated some workers, who, for whatever reason, could not manage their affairs,



from those 'respectable' workers who did not need to claim relief. As was frequently pointed out at the time by the anti-poor-law lobby, under the terms of the Act and the concept of less eligibility, it appeared as if it was a crime to be poor.

Examples of overt displays of private charity on the part of the urban middle classes also increased in the 1830's and 40's. Here local manufacturers would attempt to out-bid each other with their donations to a charitable venture, and also ensure that the lists were published in the local press for all to witness their munificence and concern for the socially disadvantaged. Also it can be argued that the New Poor Law served to purify the private charitable act. For the old law made no distinction between the needy and the unneedy recipient. Thus the private donator may have held back believing that he/she had contributed enough to the soaring cost of the relief of poverty. Under the New Law however, a distinction could be made by the donators and supplementary funds given. On the part of the recipient these private acts of charity may have looked even more generous given the disreputability and social stigma attached to the claiming of public relief.

Dr Thomas Chalmers, an eminent social thinker and writer of the 1830's and 40's hoped that the handouts received by working people and given by the middle classes as examples of their munificence, would promote "a general blandness and tranquility between the classes".[110] Thus the use of philanthropy by the local industrial elites was known at the time and has been uncovered by subsequent historians. Brian Harrison, for example has noted that, "Philanthropy helped to validate existing social institutions by highlighting the generosity of the rich and the inadequacies of the poor".[111]

In the sphere of politics another piece of Whig 'reforming' legislations of the 1830's was the 1835 Municipal Reform Act. This had two main controlling and containing effects for the industrial working class. Firstly it meant that with the reduced powers of the vestry by the transferring of many of its roles to a municipal corporation, elected once again by a franchise based on property qualification, the working class were excluded from the popular assemblies of local government.[112] Which, in the past by 'packing' the vestry they could at least gain a hearing and on occasions have some decision making powers.[113] These new borough councils were virtually devoid of working class representatives and were made up once again by the middle and lower middle classes.



Another effect of the Municipal Reform Bill was the imposition for the first time of a local police force. It is at once obvious that with the rapid expansion of the urban areas - by 1851 Lancashire was second only to Middlesex in the density of its population - and the proportionate growth in crimes of all descriptions, some form of policing was required. But also the possibility of controlling proletarian mass action and the protection of property had been greatly enhanced by the imposition of the borough police from 1836. Wigan, Liverpool and Preston quickly took advantage of the opportunity provided by the 1835 Municipal Reform Act to form and increase their local police forces. Manchester and Bolton had done likewise by 1842 (though not very effectively in Bolton until 1850) and Salford by 1844. To cover the areas in between the boundaries of the various borough authorities a county police force of 502 men was inaugurated in 1839.

In most areas the imposition of a local police force was greeted by the working class with contempt as yet another example of the ever strengthening web of constraints. On several occasions the introduction of police was greeted with violence, the most serious occurring in the Colne Valley.[114] It is worth noting that no such facilities were available in the 1820's and 1830's, which made the disturbances in that period all the more threatening to the middle classes. Similarly the improvement of the forces of the state to control a potentially insurrectionary urban population were enhanced by the improved communications brought about by the widespread introduction of railways throughout the North West in the 1840's and the electric telegraph. These innovations meant that forces could be deployed with far greater speed than had previously been the case.

In outlining the changes in the social structure of the North West region thus far from the mid 1830's, it is at once apparent that there was greater potential for the coercive use for all the agencies of working class control and containment, whether in fact they were designed or used as such or not. But there were other, more subtle and less coercive agencies and devices of control and containment available to the middle classes of the North West in the 1830's and 1840's. For example religion was believed by the urban middle classes to be an agency capable of bringing the respectable working man back within the pale of society and rescuing him from the unruly effects of mixing with the 'residuum'. Also there is evidence that from the mid 1830's these attempts

began to be successful among some sections of the working class.[115] By the mid 1850's, for example, in Manchester and Salford, one contemporary estimated that there were 240 Sunday schools with 90,000 scholars and teachers.[116] Church attendance, like temperance became associated with working class respectability. It reflected a positive self-evaluation of the individual, and the home and, also it reflected the virtues of the disciplined, restrained and sober-acting (and minded) working man who wished to extol the virtues of the above with the spiritual oneness with his Maker, his family and his class. It also displayed to his peers and those placed socially above him that he, unlike others of his class, was a responsible individual who could be relied upon.

But religion, like politics, was extraordinarily divisive throughout the nineteenth century, especially between the Catholics and the various Protestant sects which ran across class lines. So not only do we see intra-class status differentiation between the church attending and non-church attending working man, but also a sense of deep-rooted prejudices between working people who were followers of the various religious creeds. Once again this may have been an important element in the growth of working class sectionalism and the reduction in the levels of class consciousness.[117]

We have already noted that many manufacturers in the North-West region began, from the mid-1830's, to build schools of various kinds for the children of their employees. These schools tended to follow the religious persuasion of their originator, and eventually so too did a section of their work-force. Thus the social and religious divisions between the sections of the working class was perpetuated in the 1840's, 1850's, and beyond. Also in the mid-1830's there grew a substantial working class following for the various institutions of adult education: the Mechanics Institutes, the Temperance Societies, various types of evening classes and discussion classes. Many of these organizations and institutions were founded, funded and often run by the middle or lower middle classes, and, although many were often working class in character, the emphasis of these agencies of improvement was to force home the distinction between those of the working class who were willing to rise above the crude pleasures of the residuum and those who were not, and again these agencies often embodied middle class inspired values and virtues tailored to a working class palate.



There were of course working class based institutions of self-improvement - the trade unions, the friendly societies, the various clubs; (Oddfellows, Forresters and Buffs etc) mutual improvement societies, and later in the period the Co-operative societies - but even these agencies often stressed the need to conform to the existing hierarchy of society, and whilst they stressed the need for working class independence, and objected strongly to obvious forms of middle class social control, they also stressed the need to work within the system, and sought assistance and approval from those groups placed socially above them, and these types of bodies became much more numerous after the mid-1830's.

All of the above forms of informal and formal socialization placed those members of the working class who became involved - and many did - firmly in the orbit of the value system of the bourgeoisie, and separated them at a certain level from those of the working class who did not join in such ventures. The participatory members of the working class were told that the capitalist factory system was a necessary evil and that it could have material benefits for those of the working classes who would help and not hinder its progress. It was stressed that social differentiation was a divine ordination, as the vicar of Blackburn implied in 1839 in a sermon to the Chartists:-

Is it not plain also that no equality can (his emphasis) exist so long as God endows men unequally with gifts mental and personal? And is it not clear, that, if all were made equal in respect of property at some imaginary point in time, they could not for the above reason remain equal for a week.[118]

But at the same time as pointing out the necessity of functional structural social differentiation, the middle class also taught the mutuality of interests between classes, of how one were dependent on the other. This was noted by a working class Conservative as early as 1835:-

Our interests then, and yours are the same and inseparable, (cheers) so intertwined are they that the wealth of the rich cannot be withdrawn without taking with it the comforts of the poor, (cheers) neither can the labours of the poor be dispensed without diminishing the comforts of the rich (loud cheers). Being, then, alike interested, we are alike called

upon to consider seriously, questions of common interests to both.[119]

However, as T R Tholfsen has noted, this stressing by the middle classes of the interdependency of the various grades in society did not represent any possibilities of advanced social mobility. He writes: "Their (the middle classes) notion of improvement for all did not involve any blurring of class lines. They assumed a stratified and static society, which encouraged movement within separate social classes." [120]

Attempts at the political socialization of the respectable working class was also begun by the middle classes after the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill. The first regional Conservative Association was the South Lancashire formed by William Hulton of Bolton in the wake of the Conservatives poor showing at the first general election held after the passing of the 1832 Act. By 1836 Operative Conservative Associations had been initiated in every town (and many villages) in the North West, many with ward branches in the various towns.[121] Also by 1836, Operative Reform Associations had been formed on behalf of the working class by the emerging Liberal party. Nor did these party organizations fulfil a purely political role. But also performed important social functions in several spheres of working class existence. Ranging from the provision of centres of contact and amusement to the occasionally vitally important limited welfare services in the form of sick and burial clubs and the subsidised treats and dinners. Although these political institutions never attracted a truly mass working class membership at this time, they did, on the one hand serve to convince an influential section of the working class of the validity of respectable politics; indeed of how their involvement might be of benefit to working people as opposed to the 'destructive' schemes of the extreme radicals. But on the other hand further assisted the tendencies in the mid-1830's and 40's of working class sectionalization. This was yet another example of changes in the social structure of Britain in the immediate post-Reform era. On this occasion it was a change in the political culture of the nation, which, even though the working class (or the vast majority of them) were still excluded from the political contract, attempts were strenuously and seriously made to integrate sections of them into the machinery of party political control and influence.



Thus far in this section we have outlined the levels of working class consciousness prior to 1832, and suggested that on occasions this was very high, and also examined the fundamental and significant changes in the structure of society after 1832 which may have affected the relationship between capital and labour. Further, we have suggested that the agencies of these structural changes profoundly affected working class development in the North-West, some sooner than others; and we further contend that the process was begun in the mid-1830's; and that by the 1850's the working class of the whole region had been affected by these changes. We suggest that by 1850 the working class, as an objective whole was recognizable, but in terms of its social consciousness was hopelessly fragmented and sectionalized.

There remain two vitally important questions which we have not yet dealt with. Firstly, was the threat posed by the working class in the years 1839/1842 when Chartism was at its peak as great as that of the Reform crisis? and secondly, why does there appear to be so much variation in a regionwide sense of working class political affiliation in the period after 1832? But before we end this section with a discussion of these two integral questions, let us briefly recapitulate the theoretical basis of the thesis presented here and add a new theoretical explanation as to the reason for working class sectionalization and the subsequent reduction in working class consciousness.

The growing dominance of the middle classes after 1832 in the political, economic and social spheres, of not just working class, but virtually all social structures of early Victorian Britain should not be underestimated. Theorists and historians of nineteenth century working class development have only since the 1960's began to touch the surface of its significance. All too often, as we noted at the outset of this paper, the superordination of the nineteenth century middle classes has been omitted by historians of the left in order to place in sharp relief the heroic nature of the working class struggle. Of course, the working class were a vital ingredient in the development of social and political relations throughout the nineteenth century, and on many occasions the struggles they engaged in were remarkable for revealing the speed of their intellectual development on the one hand, and their apparent disregard for personal injury and suffering on the other. Furthermore we must not lose sight of the fact that it was during



the first half of the nineteenth century that the working class became, in objective and subjective terms, a viable and recognizable class, as distinct from, and, in the first decades of the century at least, usually opposed to, other classes. But, by 1850, the struggle - in the short-term at least - for supremacy between capital and labour had been won by the former. Assisted by changes in the attitude of the state, and of political ideology generally, the endeavours of industrial capitalism were lauded to the heavens, as witnessed by the Great Exhibition of 1851. The days when the 'new men' of manufacturing were regarded with hostility and suspicion by the elites were virtually gone.

Within the structure of society the triumph of the middle classes ran deep. What they succeeded in achieving was to give the working class view of the world a series of concepts and an overall paradigm which, whilst remaining distinctly working class, slotted easily into the middle class view of society. The working class knew their place and were willing to take the lead from their social superiors. If, on occasions, the negotiations broke down and strikes and disturbances ensued, they could be controlled: all the apparatus of control and containment were in place, and we suggest that as a process this began to take effect from the mid-1830's. The negotiations, at all levels between the middle classes and the working class were always after 1850 on terms set by the middle classes and it was they who set the agenda. Indeed sections of the working class began to display middle class orientated traits; the necessity of a social hierarchy; of sobriety; self-help; political moderation, deference and toleration; almost as if they had incorporated middle class values into a working class world.[122]

In the first section of this paper we noted,, and endorsed the Marxian notion of class development and objective identification. But we suggested that the 'pure' economic basis of class was too narrow and that political implications of class relationships needed to be brought to the fore. We also suggested that a greater emphasis was required on the subjective side of the social being/social consciousness dialectic, and that significantly much of this was provided by the work of Max Weber, especially with his concepts of 'status' and 'party'. That in effect the Marxian basis of the theoretical understanding of class would become more viable if augmented by the conceptualizations of Weber. It simply was not good enough for Marxists to write off working class deviance in relation to social consciousness or lower levels of class consciousness as 'false consciousness'. This we suggested was not



good enough and that there had to be historical reasons as to why levels of working class consciousness were susceptible to fluctuation. We constructed a four level scale of the intensity of class consciousness, but also suggested that working class sectionalization and the subsequent fragmentation of class consciousness, may have been a result of a number of factors - such as the development of intra-class status differentiation which could be manifested in various forms, increasing levels of working class dependence on the middle class manufacturers in an objective sense; or the efforts made by the middle classes to socialize and politicize working people away from working class-based radical politics and towards political respectability and conventional bourgeois reformism. But we also made the point that a 'revolutionary' consciousness in the 'pure' Marxian sense was never achieved by the working class, they were always at the 'class-in-themselves', never reaching the class-for-themselves stage of development. Later in the paper we suggested that the situation of 1831/2 was more potentially revolutionary than that of the following decades, but, even though working class consciousness was very high, possibly up to level four on our scale, it still, in a mass sense, failed to reach the pure revolutionary stage.

In the period 1833 to 1850 working class consciousness was extremely transient, and, as we noted above, significant and influential sections of the working class appeared, by 1850, to have accepted the social leadership role assumed by the middle classes. Weber suggests that the possible reason that one group seeks to influence and control another was not merely to secure power, but also to establish the right to wield power; to legitimate middle class authority over the working class, and preferably to have this right freely given them by the working class or important sections of that class. This concept of legitimizing authority is taken from the Weberian model of power, which, we suggest, refines the view of Marx.

But there is even a refinement of this view. One Marxist thinker who devoted some time to the question of middle class control and influence over the working class was Antonio Gramsci[123] in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Initially Gramsci is conventional enough in the Marxist sense in his discussion of the dialectical nature of the cultural development of classes, consciousness, the State and revolution. Where he deviates from classical Marxism is his analysis and emphasis placed on the importance of the 'superstructure' of society, rather than the conventional Marxian emphasis of the



economic 'base'. This he did by the formulation of his concept of 'hegemony'. By hegemony Gramsci refers to a socio-political situation or 'moment' in which the abstract and practical sides of societal development come together or fuse into a form in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, and in which a conceptualization of life, meaning and existence is diffused widely throughout society.

Diffused in such a way that a single form of existence is institutionally and individually manifested, affecting, with its spirit and form, a society's cultural traits, such as taste, manners, political and religious principles and affecting virtually all social relations and their intellectual and moral connotations. This is an extraordinarily powerful form of societal direction and control, but those involved need not necessarily be conscious of it, or indeed perform their roles wittingly. This we suggest is something akin to the situation of the middle class dominated society of the North-West in the 1850's. We also suggest that this situation had been developing steadily since the middle of the 1830's. However the two vital questions regarding the respective threats posed by the working class in 1831/2 to that of the early Chartist phase, and secondly, the problem of accounting for working class political regional variation, remained to be discussed, and it is with these two questions (bearing in mind the theoretical constructs we have outlined, and the historiographical sketches of section two and the beginning of section three) that we propose to end this paper.

Firstly the point that the Chartists of the late 1830's and early 1840's posed more of a threat to the manufacturing middle classes of the North-West, and the State than did the working class actions of the 1820's, culminating in the crisis of 1831/2. Secondly there is apparent in the Chartist period significantly more working class sectionalization and intra-class status differentiation than is sometimes described. It would appear that on occasions in the industrial districts of the North-West region the early Chartist period contained a good degree of intra-class co-operation as manifested through the close relationship of the various skilled, and semi-skilled trade associations with the Chartists, often the membership of the two groups were the same.[124] But it is well known that even here, and during this phase of a return to high levels of working class consciousness, there was considerable disagreement, at a rank and file and leadership levels, with regard to tactics between the 'physical force' and 'moral force' sections. Across the nation as a whole



these differences were compounded. At Sheffield for example the relationship between the trade unions and the Chartists were not as apparently harmonious as across the Pennines, as the Sheffield Independent reported in September 1839 after the failure of the 'National Holiday':- "Trade Unions are for botching up the old system; the Chartist are for a new one. Trade Unions are for making the best of a bad bargain, the Chartists are for a fresh one." [125] In London the Chartists were taken to task by a working man named Payne in August 1839:-

He had often asserted that the working men of London were an aristocracy in themselves. He did not mean to say that they were too well fed and clad; but the fact was that they were employed and had good wages, and they had no wish for change as long as they could keep the wolf from the door. [126]

As we noted there is evidence of intra-class co-operation in Lancashire and the 'Holiday' of August 1839 was supported in certain parts of the region, for example at Bolton, but not in others, for example at Blackburn or Preston. But even in this region there were localities who expressed alarm at apparent working class sectionalization, as witnessed by the report of one delegate in the Northern Star.

It was a fact that unanimity towards Chartism could only be found in the worst paid ranks. The man who earned 30 shillings a week cared nothing for those who earned 15 shillings, and the latter cared as little for men who worked for 5-6 shillings per week, there was an aristocracy of the working classes as well as the gentry and nobility. [127]

Also in Lancashire some Chartists from certain parts of the region expressed grave doubts regarding the level of intra-class perception, which of course was a vital element for a high level of class consciousness, as John Stowe from Colne reported to the Chartist convention.

The principal obstacle in the way of the holiday arises from those operatives and trades who are receiving remunerating wages for their labour, and whose apathy and indifference arise more from ignorance of their real position than an indisposition to benefit their fellow men. [128]

Thus it is at once apparent that, although on occasions the working class of the North-West did display high levels of class consciousness and low levels of status differentiation (as in August 1842), there were other occasions during the Chartist disturbances, and other parts of the region where this was not the case. The evidence for 1831/2 points to a far greater incidence of a class uniformity, both in terms of concerted action and with regard to aims and objectives.

Also, as we have noted above, the feelings of panic on the part of the middle classes to the high levels of working class consciousness was not as apparent in 1839/42 as it had been in the 1820's or 1831/2. A major possible reason for this may have been the changes in the social structure of the industrial North-West and the imposition of devices of working class containment firmly under the control of the middle classes. During the height of the 1842 disturbances for example, the Manchester Guardian reported at the onset of the disturbances in the radical areas of Ashton, Bury and Oldham region that, "Disguise it as we may, the present movement is a rising against the Government and the Law. Call it by what name we please. IT IS REALLY AN INSURRECTION".[129] But a few days later the chief organ of the manufacturing elite had recovered its composure, and with some truth reported that the Chartists had little by way of a plan or scheme of action. "The leaders and the led do not know what to do next once they have accomplished their initial object of closing all the mills, 'what it to be our next step? What have we got by all this? What are we likely to get? are the questions the workmen are asking themselves."[130]

In the far south of the region at this time the disturbances, once commenced, were quickly over:

The disposition of the operatives of Macclesfield (who are chiefly silk weavers) to resume work, continued to increase. They were beginning to declare, openly and emphatically that they did not stand out in reference to the Charter; that they did not care about the Charter, and would resume work provided they could obtain the wages they sought...it was apparent from the speeches and the dissatisfaction expressed by some working people, that already disunion is commencing, and that, ere-long, the turn-out will be separated into two parties - those who are merely seeking an advance in wages, and the Chartists.[131]

Thus the evidence taken at different times and in different parts of the region offer a paradoxical and seemingly contradictory picture. In Oldham, Ashton, Bury and parts of Manchester the 1842 disturbances received widespread working class support. At Bolton,



Wigan and the north of the county the support was nothing like as concerted. What is noticeable about 1831/2 was the uniformity of the working class response which was uniform throughout the region and throughout the working class, regardless of status. As we have attempted to show above, the crisis of 1831/2 was very serious and potentially more dangerous and indeed revolutionary than that of 1839/42, especially if we gauge this by the threat posed to the middle classes and the State. Even those historians who have doubts as to whether a revolution was possible in 1831/2, for example Joseph Hamberger in James Mill and the Art of Revolution concedes that:-

The soil that nurtures revolution is not easily analyzed; widespread disorders and severe discontent need not produce violent upheavals, while rioting such as occurred in Britain in 1831, even though was on the whole petty, could in some circumstances lead to revolution... The seriousness of the threat of revolution must therefore be judged by the adequacy of the defending forces as well as by the potency and organization of the revolutionary impulse.[132]

As we noted above the forces of the state were dramatically different in 1831 than in the 1840's, and Hamburger admits that on the former occasion the absence of police meant that:- "The machinery for the defence of the established order was grossly inadequate especially on the civil side." [133] Also in 1831/2 the reactions of those at the highest levels of government and opposition was one of intense apprehension and of impending disaster. The reactions of government in the 1840's was nothing like as fearful. Indeed the administration of Sir Robert Peel could point to assisting to ameliorate the plight of working people by removing the main material basis of popular unrest by cutting the length of the working day, repealing the Corn Laws, promoting and providing the first systematic health legislation as the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham wrote to Peel immediately after the 1842 Chartist disturbances:- "We must augment the means of education; we must keep down the price of articles of first necessity; we must endeavour to redress the wrongs of the labourer; we must mark an honest sympathy with his wants: and while we uphold the authority of the law with firmness, we must temper it with mercy." [134] As Gareth Stedman-Jones has pointed out, this reformist posture of the Conservatives in the 1840's had the effect of stealing the thunder of the radicals, their political language began to be no longer effective in the light of the transformation of governmental ideology. Even at the highest levels of the state, as we noted earlier, the theme of inter-class interdependency was regarded as vital to the maintenance of law and order, as the Attorney General noted "...These two great elements of the high state of cultivation in which we are placed ought not to be set in hostile array against each other." [135]



The point as to why there appears to be so much region-wide political differentiation after 1832/3, is a complicated question full of seemingly contradictory evidence and problems. However we suggest that three factors should be borne in mind. These are, firstly, the developmental stage of industrial capitalism; secondly the level of working class dependency on the manufacturing middle class in a given area; and thirdly the existence or absence of a predominantly radical or moderate working class leadership, or, indeed any leadership.

The development of capitalism is of obvious importance when considering a comparison between say 1826 and 1842. It may, however, be of significance to note - as we suggested above - that those areas where the large factory units were first developed, that is North and Eastern part of the region, were also the areas where status differentiation first became apparent and working class consciousness first begins to fragment and decline. However we have also endeavoured to show that this process was by no means uniformly or evenly distributed throughout the region as a whole. The structures that were incorporated (either wittingly or unwittingly) by the manufacturers into the large-scale factories and surrounding communities of the north and eastern part of the region were not as apparent in Rochdale, Oldham or Ashton, areas which manufacturer orchestrated encroachments on worker independence was resisted, and where there was maintained radical (albeit declining) working class political posture into the 1850's. As usual Edward Thompson makes the point lucidly when he observed:-

Each advance within the framework of capitalism simultaneously involved the working class far more deeply in existing status quo. (Thompson's emphasis) As they improved their position by organization within the workshop, so they became more reluctant to engage in quixotic outbreaks which might jeopardize gains accumulated at such cost. Each assertion of working-class influence within the bourgeois-democratic state machinery, simultaneously involved them as partners (even if antagonistic partners) in the running of the machine. Even the indices of working-class strength - the financial reserves of trade unions and co-ops - were secure only within the custodianship of capitalist stability.[136]

Our second factor follows on from this in that worker dependence on the manufacturing middle class was more widespread and apparent in the areas where capitalist development was advanced than in those areas where it was not. Thus, in the late 1830's and 1840's, we find a more economic labour consciousness amongst the working class of North and East Lancashire where dependency levels were high, than in say Oldham, where, as John Foster has pointed out, class consciousness was more marked. But even here the



devices of control and containment and increasing levels of worker dependency on the manufacturers eventually lowered the radical political nature of working class consciousness.

Thirdly the availability of working class political leadership is an important factor in the discussion of the regional variations of the levels of working class consciousness. At Blackburn and East Lancashire where working class consciousness had once been so high in the late 1820's and early 1830's, various causes explain the lack of a working class radical leadership. Initially this was decimated by trials and imprisonment of many of the radical working class leaders and organizers of the disturbances of 1826 and other outbreaks of worker militancy. In the early 1830's Blackburn did have a Political Union but it remained in the hands of the lower middle class shopocracy, unlike say, Bolton or Manchester, where the working class radicals assumed control. Also the tone of Blackburn's lower middle class radicals was more moderate than in other areas of the Region. The working class of Blackburn did continue on occasions to 'pack' the vestry, and radicals controlled the Select Vestry until 1834/5, but again political responsibility and 'respectability' reveal themselves in the issues they pursued: Church-rate reform and the legitimization of trade unions and so on.

By 1836, Blackburn's dominant political group, the Conservatives, were active on several fronts in the pursuance of working class based issues. Here, for example the New Poor Law, although introduced with little opposition, was never the draconian measure some of its opponents alleged was the practice in other poor Law Unions. Similarly the middle class Conservatives were active in the sphere of factory reform and other working class related issues such as sanitation and public health. Also most of the Conservative employers of Blackburn and Preston were among the first in the region to be willing to accept trade unions, and negotiated wage and other factory disputes openly with trade union leaders. This appears to have had the effect in this part of the region of reducing the incidence of working class militancy so long as the negotiations between the various class leaders was operational. When this broke down, as it did at Blackburn in 1842 or the textile workers strike of 1847, or as at Preston in the widespread strike of 1853/4, then working class activism once again became apparent. But it no longer had the political edge of the 1820's or early 1830's and also, importantly, it was controllable.

At Preston many workers had the vote after 1832 by virtue of the 'scot and lot' franchise, indeed the working class here were by far the largest single electoral group. But at no time in the Parliamentary elections of the 1830's (in 1832/3, 1835 and 1837) did they return a radical candidate. In fact in the election of 1832, they voted out the foremost national leader of working class



based radical politics, Henry Hunt. At Blackburn, the workers were not an electoral force and here the elections of the 1830's were the scenes of considerable disturbances, but significantly these were centred around the political rivalries of the two main political parties and not working class related issues.

Elsewhere in the region during the 1830's and 40's the trend was inexorably towards political respectability. Then, as we have seen in the various nostrums of the working class political leadership; towards non-political trade unionism, the various clubs and political associations which were, in reality, the working class tail of nascent Liberalism or Conservatism. This further moderated the posture of the working class leadership; pushing the working class as a whole further down the road to political reformism.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

At the outset of this paper we suggested that its primary purpose was to provoke discussion, a discussion moreover, in which certain preceding conclusions made by historians would be challenged. We were engaged in a sense involved in constructing a fresh hypotheses of class development based on theoretical positions of Marx and Weber. The hypothesis outlined initially in this paper was one in which the whig and pseudo-whig views of progressive class development was to be questioned and the complexity of the political and social nature of the relationship between capital and labour was to be investigated. We argued that not only should working class historical development be viewed 'from below' but also from above, in the sense that we should, as historians examine and evaluate the threat the various levels of working class consciousness posed for the middle classes, whilst at the same time taking into account the stage of industrial capitalist development. It could be argued that with such an ambitious venture - and given the limitations of space - categorical conclusions would be difficult and that the best we could hope for would be a series of tentative final arguments and evaluations.

In the first section we offered a theoretical scheme of class, class development and inter-class relationships, which utilized the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber on the basis of a hypothesis which we could test in the field of empirical research. We suggested that the Marxian view of objective class identification operates far more successfully when allied to the Weberian concepts of 'status' and 'party'. By way of an abstract model of class consciousness we constructed a four level index of class



consciousness, whilst suggesting also that during the period under discussion the working class were always at the 'class-in-themselves' stage of development, or as Marx more usually terms them, a class-against capital, and that a fifth or 'revolutionary' stage of the 'class-for-themselves' was never attained. We also suggested that when the working class were operating at a high level of class consciousness, intra-class differentiation would not be apparent, but when class consciousness was reduced and the political identification of class interests fragmented, status differentiation would be found to be high among the working class of the industrial North-West.

A tentative conclusion could be that this model does seem to operate when one examines working class development from 1815 to 1850. Throughout the 1820's, and early 1830's levels of class consciousness were increasing throughout the region and this manifested itself in various forms; from the opposition of the working class to the loss of independent work practices caused by the imposition of large-scale factory units, to the setting up of working class political associations: to the development of a working class based theory of popular democracy; to the mobilization of working class political activism during the Reform crisis of 1831/2. We also suggested that the threat posed to the middle classes and the State by this heightening of working class consciousness was considerable at this time.

However, by the mid-1830's, the threat posed by the working class had been met head-on by a series of reactions on the part of the urban middle classes and by the apparatus of various State agencies. Devices of working class containment and control were positioned. Some of these devices had greater potential for coercion than others. Some were subtle and utilized methods of influence and proselytization. However, the combined effect was to increase the levels of dependency of the working class on the middle class throughout the North-West region. But we also discovered that the levels of dependency varied according to which part of the region one examines. We found that dependency levels were more pronounced in those areas which had begun the development of the large-scale factory unit first: that is in the North and Eastern part of the region. In the South of the region, specifically in the urban areas around Oldham, Rochdale and Ashton etc, the radical nature of working class politics was retained for much of the period, but even here political moderation and reformism was eventually the outcome. If one examines the working class of Preston or Blackburn in the late 1830's the picture will be one of considerable status differentiation and intra-class political differences, compared to the situation in the 1820's and early 1830's. However, in Oldham in the later 1830's, and early 40's it is not so apparent. But ten years later, Oldham too has



succumbed to this feature of class sectionalization and the fragmentation of working class consciousness.

The essential point is that the working class did not cease to be the working class in an objective sense; - there was no trend of Victorian 'embourgeoisement' in operation - but there were a vast range of forces which were being applied against sections of them from the mid 1830's which began to distort their subjective evaluation of their objective class position. The overall effect of this was to reduce the levels of mass class consciousness. This however, whilst leaving the middle class in positions of social and political superiority, also made them aware of the need to adopt more subtle devices of influence. It was realized, possibly by the experience of the 1820's and early 1830's, that the working class could not be hammered into submission but that influence and negotiation were to be utilized. When this broke down - for whatever reason - conflict could ensure, indeed conflict was never far from the surface in the 1840's and 1850's, but, it was invariably a situation which could be contained. The importance of the 1820's and the early 1830's was that the middle classes felt they could not control the escalation of conflict which the high levels of working class consciousness produced.

The section of the working class who received the most attention from the middle class were those who exhibited traits of respectability and responsibility. These working class members were gradually integrated into a network of social and political institutions dominated by middle class hegemonic values and norms adapted for working class consumption, in mainstream politics the Conservatives were particularly adept at this. Among these sections of the working class, on the subjective side of the class dialectic (social consciousness) the tendency was to 'look down' on those working class members who did not share aspirations and objectives, but in an objective sense they still remained working class, and indeed were proud of being so. Again in a subjective sense, these working class members saw their role as attempting to influence those groups below them to follow their path, and that this would be of benefit to the class as a whole. In many parts of the region this process was begun in the mid 1830's as evidenced by the spate of middle class endorsed/working class based organizations, in, for example, adult education, political societies and associations, the temperance movement, (none of which were around in the 1820's) and by the mid-1840's this intra-class influence from above was prevalent throughout the North-West and the overall effect was to lead large sections of the working class in the direction of political reformism.

But it should also be remembered that the structure of industrial society was changing rapidly and dramatically in the years following the Reform Bill crisis, and that the agencies which



affected working class consciousness were very powerful. Within a generation these forces of change had altered the appearance of the working class in the eyes of many of the middle class and the governing elites, from being in the 1820's and early 1830's a potentially revolutionary group, into, by the 1850's, a section fit enough to be included into the political contract. But as we have seen the transformation was complex and one in which static generalization cannot be easily made. The process of historical change which we have attempted to outline above, which although rapid, was merely part of wider social changes of which class relationships was only a part - albeit an important part. Our final conclusion is that many of these processes of change began in the 1830's and 1840's, and it is the investigation of these decades which require new approaches; fresh evaluation and more rigorous work by present historians.

#### FOOTNOTES.

1. Marx, K., Capital, Moscow 1877.
2. Ibid vol.3 pp 885/6.
3. Hobsbawm, E J., 'Class Consciousness in History', in History and Class Consciousness, Ed. Istvan Meszarus, London 1971, p.6.
4. Marx, K., The German Ideology, Peking 1979 p.65.
5. See for example Marx, K., The German Ideology, Peking 1979 p.48. The Communist Manifesto (with Engels, F.) or Drafts for the Civil War in France, or the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, p.126.
6. Dahrendorf, R., Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Stanford 1959.
7. Ibid.
8. Weber, M., Economy and Society, vol. 1, New York 1968 Edition pp.307-9. Also a further discussion in Vol.II pp.926/40.
9. Weber, M., op cit Vol.II p.928.
10. Weber op cit p.927.

11. Weber op cit p.930. Especially the post Capital writings, see for example The Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875).
12. Marx, K., The Poverty of Philosophy (1847) Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1978 Edition p.168.
13. Most importantly, Thompson, E P., The Making of the English Working Class, London 1963. Or 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?' Social History, Vol.3, No.2. May 1978.
14. M.E.W.C. p.9.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid, p.213
17. pp.9/10/11. Later re-statements of this by Thompson has included women.
18. M.E.W.C. p.12.
19. Ibid, p.887
20. Smelser, N J., Social Change and the Industrial Revolution, London 1959, p.194.
21. Booth, C., 'Occupations of the United Kingdom, 1801-1881'. Journal of the Statistical Society, June 1886, pp.314-435.
22. Census for 1871, Vol.4, Tables 1-9. Appendix A.
23. Stedman-Jones, G., Outcast London, Oxford 1971.
24. Foster, J., Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, London 1974.
25. Stedman-Jones, G., Languages of Class, Cambridge 1983. pp 25/75.
26. Thompson, E P., 'Testing Class Struggle' Times Higher Educational Supplement 8/3/1974.
27. For example Sykes, R., Unpublished PhD thesis, Chartism and Trades Unionism Lancashire, Manchester 1982 or Jenkins, M., The General Strike of 1842, London 1980.
28. M.G. 17/8/1847.



29. Hobsbawm, E J., Economic Fluctuations and some Social Movements, Economic History Society Paper, 1951. Reprinted in Labouring Men, London 1964. See also Briggs, A., Chartist Studies, London 1959. Briggs' introductory remarks are especially relevant.
30. Miliband, R., Marxism and Politics, Oxford 1977, p.50.
31. Foster op.cit. pp 251/2. The places he specifies are Bolton, Bury, Ashton and Stockport.
32. Perkin, H., The Origin of Modern English Society: 1780-1880, London 1969.
33. For an example of this see the soon to be published Great Gas Scandal, John Garrard.
34. See for example Calhoun, C., The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundation of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution, Chicago 1982. or Evans, E J, The Forging of the Modern State, London 1983.
35. Morris R J., Class and Class Consciousness in the Industrial Revolution, 1780-1850, London 1979, p 13.
36. Perkin, op cit., p 85.
37. Briggs, A., The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century England, in Briggs and Saville (J) Eds. Essays in Labour History, London 1960, pp 43-73.
38. Stedman-Jones, G., The Languages of Class, Cambridge 1983.
39. Stedman-Jones op cit. p 105.
40. Ibid p 20.
41. Ibid pp 20/21.
42. Stedman-Jones op cit. p 21.
43. Stedman-Jones op cit. p 22.
44. Ibid p.19.
45. See for example, Hammond, J and B., The Village Labourer, 1911, or The Town Labourer, 1914, or The Bleak Age, 1934.

46. Rothstein, T., From Chartism to Labourism, London 1929, p 226.
47. Musson, A E., British Trade Unions 1800-1875, London 1972.
48. Joyce, P., Work, Society and Politics, Brighton 1980.
49. Perkin, H., The Origins of Modern English Society, London 1969, pp 17-62.
50. For a more detailed account of the implications of this see Rude, G., The Crowd in History 1730-1848. London 1964.
51. Public Records Office, H.O. 42/181 Whittaker to Sidmouth.
52. Preston Chronicle 25/3/1826.
53. Blackburn Mail 29/4/1826.
54. Preston Chronicle 29/4/1826.
55. Blackburn Mail 26/4/1826.
56. Manchester Mercury 29/4/1826.
57. Preston Chronicle 29/4/1826 and 6/5/1826 and Blackburn Mail 3/5/1826.
58. Preston Chronicle 29/4/1826.
59. Ibid 6/5/1826.
60. Manchester Mercury 6/5/1826.
61. Preston Chronicle 6/5/1826.
62. Manchester Mercury 6/5/1826.
63. See for example Spencer, K M., Social and Economic Geography of Preston. M.A. Thesis University of Liverpool, 1968 pp 50/58.
64. H.O. 44/16 letter unsigned date April 9, 1926. Public Records Office, Kew.
65. Mumby, L., (Ed) The Luddites, London 1971, pp 46/7.
66. Bolton Reference Library. Meeting Sheets and Advertisements 5/5/1826.



67. Aspin, C., A Local History of Lancashire, Helmshore 1969 p 48.
68. H.O. 44/74 unsigned officer to Peel. 26/4/1826.
69. H.O. 44/19 undated Whitehead to Peel.
70. At the time the disturbances were regarded as having a political element. See letter in Blackburn Mail 14/6/1826.
71. See Glen, R., Urban Workers and the Early Industrial Revolution, Beckenham 1984, pp 272/5.
72. See Bolton Archives, Bolton Reference Library, The letters of William Moor and Robert Taylor and the disturbances of 1808-1812.
73. Ibid.
74. See for example Pelling, H., The History of British Trade Unions, London 1963 or Musson, A E., British Trade Unions, 1800-1875, London 1972.
75. Musson, op cit, or Thomis, M I., and Holton, P., Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848, London 1977.
76. See Butler, J R M., The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, London, 1914, or Briggs, A., 'The Background of the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities', Cambridge Historical Journal, 1952.
77. See Ruter, A J C., 'Benbows Grand National Holiday' International Revue of Social History, 1936, p 27.
78. Briggs op cit.
79. Poor Man's Guardian, October 1831.
80. Cited in Thompson op cit., p 892.
81. British Museum Add Mss, Place Papers 27, 789.
82. Brimlow, W., Political and Parliamentary History of Bolton, Bolton 1882.
83. Bolton Chronicle, 5/12/1831.
84. Ibid.

85. Speech of Walter O'Carrol, Bolton Chronicle 5/12/1831.
86. Blackburn Alfred 21/1/1833.
87. Croker to Melbourne 18/5/1832, Volume 26 of Croker letter book, Croker Papers, William Clemants Library, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan.
88. Cole, G D H., and Postgate, R., The Common People, London 1938 p 255.
89. Thompson op cit. pp 898//899.
90. The Times 18/5/1832.
91. Croker Papers 18/5/1852 letter to Lord Hertford, Ann Arbor,
92. Ibid, letter Croker to Peel 11/11/1831.
93. Place Papers, British Museum, Ass Mss 27, 295/ff 26/7.
94. See Thompson op cit. p 889.
95. See for example Jenkins, M., The General Strike of 1842, London 1980, or Sykes, R., Popular Politics and Trade Unionism in South-East Lancashire, 1929-42, unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 1982.
96. See Foster, op cit or Joyce, op cit or Kirk, op cit.
97. Inspector of Factories Reports, 1841 in Parliamentary Papers, 1847.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Joyce op cit p 191.
101. See Spencer, K M., Social and Economic Geography of Preston. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Liverpool pp 164/5.
102. Factory Royal Commission, Parliamentary Papers 1834, A I Northern Districts.
103. Rate Books of Blackburn 1836/7. 1842/3, 1851/2.



104. Ibid.
105. See evidence of Richard Marsden, Northern Star 9/10/1841, and Preston Guardian 16/1/1847.
106. See evidence of John Norris, an employee of Hopwoods in Blackburn Standard 9/6/1847.
107. For a larger and much more detailed examination of the question of worker housing see Walsh, D, Working Class Development, Control and New Conservatism: Blackburn 1820-1850, unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Salford University, 1986. Or shortly to be published article, Walsh, D., Working Class Housing and Dependency in East Lancashire: 1830-1850.
108. Blackburn Standard, December 1838.
109. Bolton Free Press, October 1838.
110. Quoted in Lacelles, E C P., Charity in Early Victorian England, in Young, G M (Ed) (Title as above) London, 1934 Vol 2, p 337.
111. Harrison, B., 'Victorian Philanthropy', Victorian Studies, 1966, p 368.
112. For a much fuller discussion of this point with reference to Salford, see Garrard, J., The Functions of Nineteenth Century Political Parties, Occasional Papers in Politics and Contemporary History, Number 1, Salford 1986.
113. The radical representatives of the Blackburn working class controlled the Vestry and the Select Vestry up to 1836, when the Conservatives assumed control. Foster, J. op cit gives examples of how the Oldham working class radicals held control of the local political institutions up to the mid 1840's.
114. Manchester Guardian 2/5/1840.
115. See Machin, G I T., Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868, Oxford, 1977, pp 8/10.
116. Chadwick, D., 'On Free Public Libraries and Museums' in Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, 1857.

117. For a discussion of this and related questions for the post-1850 period see Kirk, N. The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England. Beckenham, 1985. Especially Chapter 7.
118. Whittaker, T W., A Sermon Preached to the Chartists at Blackburn Parish Church on Sunday, August 4, 1839. Blackburn 1839.
119. Speech of James Longton at the third annual dinner of the South Lancashire Conservative Association at Newton Preston Pilot 17/10/1835.
120. Tholfsen, T R., 'The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability'. Political Science Quarterly Vol 86, No1, March 1971 p 65.
121. For a more detailed study of this question see Walsh, D., Operative Conservatism in Lancashire, 1833-1846, some comments on a changing political culture, Salford 1987.
122. For a more detailed discussion of the ramifications of this question see Gray, R Q., The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain, London 1981. Or Kirk op cit. In fact Kirk is suggesting that working class respectability was a self-generating process. This may at times have been the case, especially after 1850. But equally so too could the argument that sections of the working class were defining their respectability with a close proximity to middle class values and influences.
123. Gramsci, A., Selections from Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Hoare, Q., and Nowell, G., London 1971.
124. See Jenkins, M., op cit and Sykes, R., op cit.
125. Sheffield Independent, 29/9/1839.
126. Police report of a meeting at Harper's Field, Bayswater, 14/8/1839, H.O.44/52.
127. Northern Star, 20/7/1839.
128. John Stowe to Convention, 7/8/1839. British Museum. Ass Mss 34, 245B.
129. Manchester Guardian 13/8/1842.
130. Manchester Guardian 17/8/1842.



131. Manchester Guardian 20/8/1842.
132. Hamburger, J., James Mill and the Art of Revolution, New Haven 1963 p 203.
133. Ibid.
134. Graham Papers, Bodlian Library, Oxford, Graham to Peel 8/9/1842.
135. Jenkins, M., op cit p 238.
136. Thompson, E P., 'The Peculiarities of the English' in Poverty of Theory London, 1978.