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## THE SECOND REFORM BILL

### Foreword

August 1967 was the centenary of the passing of the Second Reform Bill. That the events of the years 1866-7 are still alive is suggested by the publication, after the following essay was written, of a 450 page book on the subject (Maurice Cowling "1867 Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution"), Among its themes, is the argument that "there was no 'capitulation' to popular pressure" (p. 310). "This book ... may be treated as ... an attempt to uncover the logic of conservative resistance, to show how class consciousness permeated consideration of an electoral system and to display the impact of political respectability on political agitation." (p. 4)

Maurice Cowling has dedicated his book "to the Prime Minister", Harold-Wilson. This adds point to his argument, for what is at stake in understanding the passing of the Second Reform Bill is understanding the nature of reforms in a capitalist society. The reason for publishing an account of what happened in "Our History" is not just because this is a centenary, but because by studying the complex and ambivalent history of particular past reforms, the working-class movement may learn to win further reform without taking a step backwards at the same time.

## T H E            S E C O N D            R E F O R M            B I L L

### The Half-Reformed Parliament

The passing of the Reform Bill of 1832 said John Bright, "was itself a revolution, for it broke down the absolute power of the aristocracy and of the borough-mongers and introduced into the House of Commons a large element of popular opinion and control." ("John Bright's Memoir of his Youth" in Wallings "Diaries of John Bright")

The cynical virtuoso William Beckford summed it up by saying that it was "not only wanted to amuse the people, but might be looked upon as the manufacturing interest cutting its eye-tooth." (L. Melville, "Life and Letters of William Beckford", p. 188) The "manufacturing interest" certainly did very well out of the Bill, since a considerable number of seats were taken away from English rotten boroughs and transferred to the new industrial towns. The Whig reformers of 1832 did not include in the "manufacturing interest" the workers employed in manufacturing industry, it was deemed necessary to limit the franchise to the "respectable classes" The most important guarantee of this was the new borough franchise for occupiers of property with a rateable value of ten pounds a year or more,

The level of rents had of course risen a great deal since the eighteenth century and in England and Scotland there were many more "ten pound householders" than in Ireland so there was some doubt as to whether the new franchise would really secure "respectability". King William IV would have preferred a €20 franchise but he was reassured by his Cabinet after enquiries had been made in the new boroughs,

In Scotland, the "ten-pound" franchise drew an effective bar between the "middle" and "working" classes; it was not as simple in England and Wales. Before 1832 there had been a considerable number (perhaps 65) of "popular", or "open" boroughs where a large number of workers had votes. The only persons disfranchised were those whose boroughs had been abolished and those who claimed a vote in such constituencies as Westminster and Preston merely because they happened to be living there on election day. The Act did, however, introduce a number of conditions which a person enjoying the franchise must satisfy, most of which remained in force until 1918.

As late as 1912 an M.P., who had struggled for months to prepare a Franchise and Registration Bill, declared that: "The intricacy of our franchise, laws is without parallel in the history of the civilised world". (J. A. Pease in Hansard, 17 June 1912) It was however made quite clear in the Reform Act of 1832 that ten pound householders must actually have paid their rates, and, although "compound householders" who paid their rates to their landlord with the rent were held to be entitled to vote, their position was so ambiguous that in practice a large number of them did not establish their claim to a vote- The most stringent provision was probably that which required an elector to have resided continuously in the constituency for at least twelve months after the roll of voters had been made up, In practice it took about twelve months for the electoral roll to be made up in England and Wales, so the elector usually had to live for two years in the constituency before he could cast a vote. Since a large section of the population were very mobile they were thus disfranchised by the nature of their work or living conditions. Receipt of poor relief always disfranchised and this exclusion was maintained till 1918. On the other hand old voters still made up a large proportion of the electors. However, as late as 1865, the county voters in England and Wales exceeded those in the boroughs (about 550,000 as against 489,000) although the county representatives were much less numerous than those from the boroughs,

It is of course true that during the generation after 1832 prices, rents and wages all rose considerably and that as a consequence some of the better-paid workers were able to secure the franchise, but it is too much for the late Sir Winston Churchill to claim in his biography of his father that in London and the larger towns the franchise was already approaching household suffrage before 1867. The exact facts were for a long time a matter of dispute- In 1866 however Gladstone was able to secure a full statement from the Poor Law officials which was laid before Parliament. This provided the material for his speech of the 12th March 1866 proposing a new Reform Bill and although there was some dispute as to interpretation the facts themselves could not be contested. They showed that the gross total of voters in the English and Welsh boroughs had increased by 82% since 1832- whereas the population had increased by 79%, and that between 1851 and 1865, when there had been a very great inflation due to the influx of gold from Australia and California, the increase in the number of voters had been actually less rapid than between 1832 and 1865, The explanation of this was that the increase in the number of "ten-pound householders" had been offset by the number of old voters, "freemen" and "scot-and-lot voters", who had died off; the working class had not obtained any real increase in its share of the franchise,

The overall picture as revealed in 1866 was that in England and Wales only one adult male in seven had the Parliamentary vote (women's suffrage was a dream of the future). The returns laid before Parliament suggested that 26% of these voters belonged to the working class, but this figure included small shopkeepers, beer-sellers and others who were not wage-earners and on second thoughts Gladstone concluded that 21% would be a more true estimate. There were said to be nine English boroughs where the working-class voters were in the majority, but, except for Greenwich, they were not industrial towns and the voters were not genuine representatives of the working-class but old freemen whose rights had been preserved because they sold their votes for money. The returns and the Parliamentary debates of 1866 made it quite clear that those who were excluded from the franchise were precisely the workers in the industrial centres whom the Whigs had intended to exclude in 1832. As Gladstone put it "this distribution of the working class is not only unequal but I must say, being myself a northerner, it is least where it ought to be largest, I mean in the towns of the north. As an illustration of this I will mention the names of six towns - in Oldham, with a constituency of 2,285, the working class represent 315\* or one in 8 of the population; in Halifax, with a constituency of 1,171, the working class stands at 171 or one in 10; in Stockport, with a constituency of 5,189, the working class is 438, or one in 12; in Leeds, with a constituency of 7,217, the working class stands at 523, or one in 14 ... What is the case in Rochdale? With a constituency of 1,358, the enfranchised working class stands at only 68, or one in 20". (Hansard, 3/c/xxxii, 38)

A specific example was given by John Platt, the well-known textile machinist of Oldham: "In his own neighbourhood he employed about 5,000 adult males in one of the most important branches of mechanical enterprise, and one in which the best class of artizans in England were engaged. Among those 5,000 adults there were only sixty-nine who had votes; and out of that sixty-nine there were only thirty-five who could be properly described as belonging to the artisan class". M.Ps who claimed that there was a high representation of the working class could only point to a few places with very high rents (Manchester, Salford, Sheffield and Wolverhampton), boroughs with a large number of "old freemen" (Nottingham and Leicester), and some places in the South of England-

The very small share of political power enjoyed by the industrial workers was still further reduced by the maldistribution of seats in Parliament,. It is true that the Reform Act of 1832 had suppressed a number of rotten boroughs and had reduced a number of small towns to single-member constituencies, the representation being transferred to counties and new boroughs, but this was very far short of establishing the "equal electoral districts" demanded by the People's Charter, Thomas Love Peacock who in his "Melincourt" of 1817 had brilliantly satirized the old unreformed system wrote in his preface to the 1856 edition: "The boroughs of Onevote and Threevotes have been extinguished; but there remain boroughs of Fewvotes..." On the other hand Greater London, with one-tenth of the population of England and Wales; only returned 22 members to Parliaments

During the generation following 1832 the disproportion grew worse, since the under-represented towns were rapidly increasing in population while the old-fashioned county towns were often stagnating. In addition the spread of railways and the development of new industries such as iron shipbuilding were calling into existence entirely new towns which had not been considered worthy of note in 1832. As Walter Bagehot put it in his "English Constitution", a penetrating analysis of the British political system published just on the eve of the Second Reform Bill: "Year by year the North (as we may roughly call the new industrial world" gets more important, and the South (as we may call the pleasant remnant of old times) gets less important. It is a grave objection to our existing parliamentary constitution that it gives much power to regions of past greatness, and refuses equal power to regions of present greatness "

The picture we have drawn refers specifically to England and Wales, but one must not forget that the Acts of Union had left Scotland and Ireland with a Parliamentary representation much inferior to that of the "predominant partner" Until 1885 they were under-represented since the number of their M.P.s did not correspond with their population and it was only after that date that the fall in Irish population created an over-representation. On the other hand a smaller proportion of the population enjoyed the vote in Scotland and Ireland than in England. In Scotland before 1832 there was no class of small freeholders corresponding to the English "yeomen" and the burgh franchise had been limited to narrow municipal oligarchies, so that after that date there were few voters other than "ten-pound householders" and the wealthier tenants in the counties. The majority of Irish M.P.s were returned for the counties where the number of electors had been so drastically reduced by the disfranchisement which had accompanied Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and by the Great Famine and subsequent evictions that in some districts hardly any electors were left, In 1850 an Irish Reform Act increased the number of county electors but reduced those in the boroughs. As the result of this only one adult Irishman in twenty had the vote and the majority of the artisans followed the Irish Republican Brotherhood which treated the whole British Parliamentary system with contempts

Arguments as to the extension of the franchise were to a great extent vitiated by the fact that elections in Britain were not the expression of a free choice but as John Bright put it, Parliament was "to a large extent the offspring of landlord power in the counties, and of tumult and corruption in the boroughs " Most of the rural voters elected the candidates sponsored by their landlords without being expressly told to do so.

Intimidation also took place in the towns,, especially where a large number of workers depended on a single employer. In 1868 the Conservatives at Blackburn issued what their opponents called the "Screw Circular" calling on millowners and overlookers to ensure that their operatives voted the right way On the other hand, a Liberal millowner at Ashton admitted that after the same election he had dismissed forty of his employees who had not carried out his instructions to vote for Milner Gibson, so the score between parties was about even. In most towns however workers could change their

employers and voters demanded cash down. After the Reform Bill of 1832 bribery may have become even more extensive and as a twentieth century scholar puts it: "previously in many boroughs the landlord, the patron the council enjoyed absolute power without the need to buy votes; now the suffrages of the free and independent electors had to be bought at the current market price." (B. Keith Lucas, "The English Local Government Franchise", - p.172) Conditions were worst in the older boroughs and in towns where the decay of local industries had produced general impoverishment. In such places the disappearance of Chartism and left political demoralization, and an old man at Leicester who took 17/6 for his vote put it: "There's no woolcombing now."

The obvious safeguard against corruption was the ballot, and in the 1830's this was the shibboleth of all Radicals, and was even supported by Macaulay. After a time however Members of Parliament lost interest in the subject and motions in its favour found little support. The Ballot had of course been one of the "Six Points" of the Charter, and we are told that this "also tended to discredit it in the eyes of the middle classes." (Cornelius O'Leary, "The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868-1911" P.26)

#### The Reform Movement

On November 20th 1837 the leader of the Whigs in the House of Commons, Lord John Russell, made a clear-cut enunciation of the policy of his party, admitted "that at the late elections corruption and intimidation prevailed to a very lamentable extent" but stated that he was not prepared 'for a repeal of the Reform Act, and placing the representation on a different footing,

In fact it was the opinion of Earl Grey, an opinion stated by him in the House of Lords, and an opinion stated repeatedly by Lord Althorp in the House of Commons, that it was safer to make a large and extensive measure of reform - than a small measure, for this reason, that in bringing forward the extensive measure we might be assured that we were bringing forward one which might have a prospect of being a final measure." The policy of "Finality Jack" was made more explicit by Macaulay in his speech against the second Chartist Petition of 1842.

The attitude of the Whigs and of the conservative section of the bourgeoisie was in no way modified by the disappearance of Chartism, for the Chartists reappeared as trade unionists, whose activities were also a source of alarm: From a bare 100,000 in 1842 the number of trade unionists in Britain rose to more than a million in 1875 and was perhaps half a million in 1865. Great strikes and lock-outs took place in the 'fifties and 'sixties; and whatever their ostensible cause it was clear that the real issue was that of collective bargaining and recognition, which was eventually settled in favour of the workers. A great impression was made by the struggle of the London building workers in 1859-61, as the outcome of which a large section of workers who had hitherto been poorly organised and many of whom were unskilled were able to defeat a rich and powerful body of employers. It appeared that working men who could do this might also make their influence

felt in the political field if the franchise were to be extended. Lord Palmerston, the veteran Prime Minister of the Whigs, told Lord Granville that a large extension of the franchise would have the effect of "giving up the representation of the great towns to the trade unions" and "practically disfranchising... the wealthy and intelligent men in those seats of manufacture and trade".(Palmerston to Granville, 26th December 1859. P.R.O ,G & D., 29:18) Similar forebodings were expressed by a rising young Liberal M.P., Robert Lowe (afterwards Viscount Sherbrooke), by Walter Bagehot in his "English Constitution", and by the "Times" newspaper. The latter wrote as late as the 11th October 1866: that the trade unions "possess a giant power, and what security can we have against them using it like a giant ... A large measure of enfranchisement must ever be a leap in the dark, and those who are wont to look before they leap must not be condemned too severely for their hesitation in taking it."

These were the views generally held among the bourgeoisie in the days when as Cobden put it in his letter to W.S. Lindsay on the 23rd March 1858: "The great prosperity of the country made Tories of us all." There was however a Radical section of the bourgeoisie who were not quite as prosperous as the others and who were not so satisfied with the existing political arrangements. As Bagehot put it: "The great capitalists, Mr. Bright and his friends, believe that they are sincere in asking for more power for the working man, but, in fact, they very naturally and very properly want more power for themselves. They cannot endure - they ought not to endure - that a rich, able manufacturer should be a less man than a small, stupid squire" Nor were the Radical bourgeoisie prepared to accept the political leadership of the Whig aristocracy without question. Marx wrote of the Whigs that: "Under the condition that the Bourgeoisie should abandon to them, to an oligarchy of aristocratic families, the monopoly of government and the exclusive possession of office, they make to the middle class, and assist it in conquering, all those concessions; which in the course of social and political development have shown themselves to have become unavoidable and undelayable.... They can support, more easily than the Tories, a decrease of their rental revenues, because they consider themselves as the heavenborn farmers of the revenues of the British Empire .... After 1688 we find them united with the Baskocracy, just then rising into importance, as we find them in 1846, united with the Millocracy." ("The Elections in England - Tories and Whigs" in "New York Daily Tribune"., August 21st 1852) All this was very expensive and the Radicals were thrifty people who doubted whether they received value for their money. The Whigs had done very little to reform the central government after 1830, being more concerned to transfer its abuses to their own profit, and they had even extended them to the colonies, described by Bright as "a gigantic system of out-relief for the younger sons of the aristocracy" The Radicals, most of whom were Nonconformists or freethinkers, disliked the State Church of England because it was endowed by law and also because it still dominated public education, which most thinking people regarded as very defective. The misgovernment of Ireland

continued to be a running sore and caused concern even to people who were not Irish. Above all the Radicals opposed the foreign policy which Palmerston had transferred from the Tories to the Whigs and which his critics regarded as a mixture of unnecessary provocation, aggression and expensive wars. They pointed out that these wars did not help trade very much and increased the National Debt inherited from the Napoleonic War. This was felt all the more keenly since despite Peel's Income Tax and Repeal of the Com Laws the main burden of the taxes still fell on those of limited means. As Bagehot himself admitted in the second edition of his "English Constitution".) published in 1872: "the class to whom the great body of the ten-pound householders belonged - the lower middle class - were above all other classes the one most hardly treated in the imposition of the taxes, A small shopkeeper or clerk who just, and only just, was rich enough to pay income tax, was perhaps the only severely-taxed man in the country. He paid the rates, the tea, sugar, tobacco, malt, and spirit taxes, as well as the income tax, but his means were exceedingly small."

Another challenge to the Whig monopoly of political power came from the Tories. They had suffered a political as well as an economic defeat in 1846, and for the next forty years were only able to form one stable government, the others being "caretaker" administrations which came to office during splits between the Whigs and Radicals. As Marx put it in the article we have quoted: "The Tories recruit their army from the farmers, who have either not yet lost the habit of following their landlords as their natural superiors, or who are economically dependent upon them, or who do not yet see that the interest of the farmer and the interest of the landlord are no more identical than the respective interests of the borrower and of the usurer. They are followed and supported by the Colonial Interest, the Shipping Interest, the State Church Party, in short, by all those elements which consider it necessary to safeguard their interests against the necessary results of modern manufacturing industry, and against the social revolution prepared by it." As a reinforcement they sought to recruit the factory workers left leaderless by the decline of Chartism; as Marx put it: "not daring to come forward themselves, they endeavour to undermine the Cotton-lords by directing the popular force against them through the medium of the State Church Clergymen." ("New York Daily Tribune", March 15th 1853) Even with this reinforcement however the Tory army was not strong enough to secure a majority of seats in Parliament and its leaders began to work out plans for extending the franchise without giving the vote to the labourers on their own estates. This was the course sketched out by Disraeli, though as Robert Blake has pointed out in his recent biography the great Tory leader had as yet no definite plans and was prepared to watch for a chance provided by his opponents.

By 1851 the combination of the discontented was strong enough to force the hand of Lord John Russell, On the 20th February of that year Parliament gave Mr. Locke King leave to bring in a Bill to reduce the

qualification for the county vote to £10; although the Bill was not carried Lord John was compelled to abandon his doctrine of "finality". In the following year he brought in a Reform Bill of his own which in the words of John Stuart Mill "created greater anomalies than it proposed to remove" and expired without any notice having been taken of it. As Disraeli prophesied the alternative was now "Reform or War" and he correctly prophesied "a war and no Reform". The Crimean War brought Palmerston into office again and let loose an orgy of militarism and jingoism which reached its climax in 1857. In that year Palmerston dissolved Parliament in order to gain a majority for his policy of intervention in China and secured a tremendous victory. His greatest triumph was the defeat of the "Manchester School" in Manchester itself, where the conservative Whigs, at that time led by the "Guardian".- enlisted the aid of the Tory minority and Bright was at the bottom of the poll, Ernest Jones was also at the bottom of the poll at Nottingham and next year the National Charter Association was dissolved.

John Bright soon found another seat at Birmingham, having so far modified his Quaker pacifism as to support the use of force to put down the Indian Mutiny. This was a great relief to Cobden who wrote to Parkes on August 9th 1857: "the social and political state of that town is far more healthy than that of Manchester; and it arises from the fact that the industry of the hardware district is carried on by small manufacturers, employing only a few men and boys each; sometimes only an apprentice or two: whilst the great manufacturers in Manchester form an aristocracy, individual members of which wield an influence over sometimes two thousands persons... The great capitalist class formed an excellent basis for the Anti-Corn-Law movement, for they had inexhaustible purses, which they opened freely in a contest where not only their pecuniary interests but their pride as "an order" was at stake,; But I very much doubt whether such a state of society is favourable to a democratic political movement...."

The "state of society" in Birmingham itself did not really provide a oasis for a Reform movement, and Bright was shrewd enough to see that nothing could be done without the organized workers. As an employer he did not like trade unions writing to a Blackburn millowner on November 3rd 1860, that "combinations, in the long run, must be as injurious to himself the working man as to the employer against whom he is contending," In the same year however he had declared in a public speech that: "Working men have associations; they can get up formidable strikes against capital - sometimes for things that are just, sometimes for things that are impossible. They have associations, trade societies, organizations, and I want to ask them why it is that all these various organizations throughout the country could not be made use of for the purpose of obtaining their political rights!" By this time the surviving Chartists, starting from a very different pointy had come to much the same conclusion as John Bright, "There can be no doubt" wrote Ernest Jones, "as to the wisdom of allying with the middle classes and their leaders if they offer such a measure of reform as we can be .justified in accepting" ("People's Paper, May 9th; 1857). When Bright was elected for Birmingham he was called by Jones "the best men of the Manchester

School, and the one most likely to sympathise with democratic tendencies'' ('People's Paper' August 15th, 1857). In February 1858 Jones called a conference to launch Chartism on a new footing to which he invited both delegates from trade unions and "middle-class reformers" including Bright,

Bright did not attend the Chartist conference and it was clear that his long-term objectives were very far removed from those of the working-class reformers. Jones had made it quite clear that he could not accept anything less than Manhood Suffrage whereas Bright and his associates only desired "household" or ratepaying" suffrage- The essential difference was of course that while it was comparatively easy to identify a man it was very difficult to define a householder or a ratepayer, and with any definition a large section of the working class would be left voteless. The workers accordingly maintained their own political organizations and as a twentieth century British historian tells us: "The Chartist Conference and its clear and unequivocal demand for Manhood Suffrage was the beginning of that proliferation of Manhood Suffrage associations all over the country which was such a notable feature of the early sixties." (John Saville, "Ernest Jones: Chartist", p. 72).

At the outset these "associations" were very small, their membership being composed of the few surviving Chartists; it was some time before they gained a mass basis in the trade unions. One of the most successful was the Northern Reform Union led by Joseph Cowen, a Radical brick manufacturer who was afterwards M.P. for Newcastle. One of the leading members of the Northern Reform Union was the former Chartist John Kane of Alnwick, secretary to the new union of Malleable Ironworkers which later affiliated to the First International and it soon gained the support of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association. In 1861 the Glasgow United Trades Council issued an "Address to the Working Men of the United Kingdom" calling for "a monster national petition" for Parliamentary reform and suggesting that "the various trade societies of the country are the best existing machinery for carrying out a successful movement of this kind." ("Reynold's Weekly Newspaper?" November 10th, 1861) The only place from which such a movement could be effectively launched was London, and this was repeatedly driven home by such veterans of Chartist days as Robert Hartwell the compositor and Benjamin Lucraft the cabinetmakerr In 1862 their appeals met a response with the formation of the Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association, supported by most of the leaders of the London Trades Council.

The American Civil War brought British class antagonisms into the political arena once more,. The Whig and Tory aristocracy, headed by the aged Lord Palmerston, looked forward to their revenge on the descendants of the "rebels" of 17?6 and were even ready to go to war with the North. In this they were supported by the "shipping interest", the Liverpool cotton importers and other capitalist interests who hoped to see the destruction of a dangerous trade competitor. On the other hand the organized workers came out unmistakably in opposition to war on behalf of the Southern Confederates. The iron and steel manufacturers who followed the lead of Bright and who were rapidly growing from small into big capitalists were also in favour of a Northern victory, if only because the rapid economic expansion of the North was providing a tremendous

market for their wares. The Radical manufacturers could see clearly that the slaveowners would certainly lose in the long run, and that a Britain faced with a triumphant and hostile North and a rebellious Ireland would be in a dangerous position indeed.

"One day in early spring, March 26th. 1863": wrote the American historian Henry Adams, "the Minister requested his private secretary (Henry Adams himself) to attend a Trades-Union meeting at St. James's Halls which was the result of Professor Beesly's patient efforts to unite Bright and the Trades-Unions on an American platform...."

...The audience cheered furiously, and the private secretary felt peace in his much troubled mind, for he knew how careful the Ministry would be, once they saw Bright talk republican principles before Trades-Unions; but while he did not, like Roebuck; see reason to doubt the courage of a man. who, after quarrelling with the Trades-Unions, quarrelled with all the world outside the Trades-Unions he did feel a doubt whether to class Bright as eccentric or conventional" ("The Education of Henry Adams-, An Autobiography" 1919 edition, pp. 189-190). Karl Marx was also in the audience and reported to Engels on April 9th: "I attended the meeting held by Bright at the head of the trade unions. He looked quite like an Independent and every time he said, "In the United States no kings, no bishops, "there was a burst of applause. The workers themselves spoke excellently, with a complete absence of bourgeois rhetoric and without in the least concealing their opposition to the capitalists (whom Father Bright, by the way, also attacked)"

The North was victorious in the Civil War and the British capitalist class was faced with an entirely new situation. The working class was now conscious that it could really achieve something in the political field; it had recently set up the International Working Men's Association. It was also painfully obvious that British industry could no longer compete successfully with the United States and the Continent of Europe without very great changes in the political structure, which would involve Parliamentary Reform, and it was now a question of how little the working class could be induced to take. Since 1852 a series of futile Reform Bills had been introduced by the Whigs and Tories; as Gladstone later put it: "In 1860 we spent about ten nights in trying, I may say, to do nothing" (Hansard', clxxxii (1866), 26). By 1864 however it was clear that this charade would no longer suffice and on May 11th of that year Gladstone himself; then Chancellor of the Exchequer under Palmerston, declared that "I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution."

With this encouragement the "middle-class reformers" called a conference at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester on April 19th and 20th 1864, the initiative coming from George Wilson, formerly of the Anti-Corn-Law League who had kept together Bright's followers in the city. This launched a National Reform Union,

whose first aim was "To obtain such an extension of the franchise as shall confer the parliamentary suffrage, in counties and boroughs, on every male person, householder or lodger, rated or liable to be rated for the relief of the poor." A series of meetings was launched but they did not meet with much response from the workers, many of whom would have been left out by this definition. Accordingly the "middle-class Radicals" decided to call a demonstration in London and in January 1865 appealed to the General Council of the International Working Men's Association for their support.

It is true that attempts have been made by later writers, especially by Royden Harrison in his "Before the Socialists"; to call in question the account given by Marx of what transpired. The Minute Book of the First International, however, makes it quite clear that the appeal was made to the General Council and not to any other body, for the very good reason that there was no other working-class political organization with any mass supports. As Marx put it in his letter to Engels of February 1st 1865: "Without the trade unions no mass meeting is possible and without us the trade unions are not to be had." The matter was discussed by the General Council on January 31st and as Marx told Engels:

"On my motion it was decided: (1) To send the deputation merely as 'observers' (in my motion I excluded foreigners but Eccarius and Lubez were elected as 'English' and as silent witnesses); (2) So far as the meeting is concerned, to act with them if, in the first place,, manhood suffrage is directly and openly proclaimed in the programme, and, in the second, if people elected by us are brought on to the regular Committee: so that they can watch the fellows and when the fresh treachery, which, as I made clear to them all, is certainly planned, can compromise them. I am writing to E. Jones about the affair to-day."

In his reply of February 10th, written with a view to being read at the General Council, Ernest Jones expressed his agreement with the measures outlined and stressed in particular the need to counter the propaganda of the National Reform Union with a broad working-class movement for manhood suffrage. The Minute Book of the First International tells us that on February 21st 1865,

"The Secretary then introduced the question of the suffrage he also read a letter from Mr. Beales on the question, and it was generally understood that no measure short of manhood suffrage would receive the support of the Council. It was also thought advisable that as many as possible should attend the meeting on Thursdays"

At "the meeting on Thursday" (February 23rd 1865) it was decided to set up a Reform League, its objects being:

1st - To secure the extension of the Elective Franchise to every resident and registered adult male person of sound mind and unconvicted of crime.

2nd - To obtain for the voter the protection of the Ballot."

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On March 14th 1865 the Minute Book of the First International records that: "Citizen Cremer stated his intention of proposing at the next sittings That the Central Council should appoint delegates to the forthcoming Reform Conference at Manchester..." The majority of delegates at the Conference were middle class Radicals and followed the line of Bright, who wished to limit the aims of the movement to "household suffrage" but it was attended by a number of trade unionists including Howell as Secretary to the Reform League and William Randall Cremer and George Odger on behalf of the International Working Men's Association. The Minute Book of the General Council records that on May 23rd 1865;

"....Cremer gave report of his mission in conjunction with Citizen Odger to the Manchester Reform Conference. They had fought hard for the principle of manhood suffrage but had been unsuccessful. They feared the conference like others which had preceded it would prove to be abortive of good results."

As a consequence the Reform League and the National Reform Union retained their separate identities but they continued to co-operate and Bright spoke at the demonstration organized by both bodies. Oratory counted for a great deal a century ago and Bright was generally considered the best English orator of his time. In practice the trade unions provided the audiences and Bright did the speaking but this counted for a great deal since there was no radio or television in those days and the majority of the population were hardly able to read a newspaper.

#### The Reform Bill

In October 1865 the political monopoly of the Whig aristocracy came to an end with the death of Lord Palmerston. He was succeeded as Prime Minister by Lord John Russell but the real driving force of the Cabinet was Gladstone who was committed to Parliamentary Reform, and on March 12th 1866 he introduced his Reform Bill into Parliament. This was very modest, its main provisions being the lowering of the qualification for the, borough franchise to £7 a year and of the county franchise to £14, but it was supported, by John Bright, after much searching of heart the Executive Council of the Reform League decided on March 20th that they "deem it their duty under the circumstances to support the Government against the combined Conservative and sham Liberal parties in enabling such Bill to pass." The Conservatives under Disraeli opposed the Bill according to the rules of the Parliamentary game, while reserving the right to bring in a Reform Bill of their own, but the real opposition came from the "sham Liberals" led by Robert Lowe. In his speech of March 13th Lowe threw down the gauntlet to the working class.

"The first stage, I have no doubt, will be an increase of corruption, intimidation, and disorder, of all the evils that happen usually in elections. But what will be the second? The second will be that the working men of England, finding themselves in a full majority of the whole constituency, will awake to a full sense of their power. They will say 'We can do better for ourselves.- Don't let us any longer be cajoled at elections. Let us set up

shop for ourselves. We have objects to serve as well as our neighbours, and let us unite to carry these objects. We have machinery, we have our trade unions, we have our leaders all ready. We have the power of combination, as we have shown over and over again, and when we have a prize to fight for we will bring it to bear with tenfold more force than ever before." ("Hansard", cixxxiii, (1866); 149). Lowe's followers, whom Bright called the inmates of the "Cave of Adulla", were not very numerous, but they were sufficient, to cause the defeat of the Reform Bill and the resignation of the  
the Liberal Government.

The indignation of the workers at the rejection of the Reform Bill was heightened by the extremely offensive attacks made upon them by Robert Lowe and others; The Reform League called for a demonstration in Hyde Park on the evening of July 23rd, 1866. On July 17th, however, Sir Richard Mayne, the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis declared that such a meeting would be illegal and that "all necessary measures" would be adopted to prevent it. When the demonstrators led by Edmond Beales, Robert Hartwell, Charles Bradlaugh, J. Leno, Colonel Dickson and others reached the Marble Arch on the evening of the 23rd the gates were closed and guarded by the police. Beales and the other leaders attempted to enter the Park, but when stopped by the mounted police withdrew and held the meeting in Trafalgar Square. A large section of the crowd had not however left the Park and the following scenes were reported in the trade union journal the "Beehive" of July 28th, 1866:

"Several thousands of people had by one means or another contrived to get into the Park and these kept calling out to the thousands in front of the Marble Arch along the Bayswater Road and in Park Lane to come in. The brutality and violence of the police was excessive in the extreme, and they lost no opportunity of using their truncheons indiscriminately upon the people, whose exasperation was extreme. The pressure of the crowd in Park Lane was so great that at least about a hundred yards of the iron palisading of the park (near to the Marble Arch) forming one side of that narrow thoroughfare, was forced in by pressure, and through the gap there made several hundreds of people were precipitated into the ornamental flower beds inside the park, several people being seriously injured by falling upon the spikes of the railings. Immediately upon seeing the accident a body of about 50 policemen rushed to the spot, and, instead of assisting those who had fallen down, began belabouring them most cruelly over the head and back with their truncheons, acting upon the order given by a sergeant of the division (we believe No. 8) to "Use your truncheons freely, men!"

"The crowd who witnessed this dastardly and brutal conduct of the police became greatly excited, and the cry of "Down with the railings" was instantly responded to, and yard after yard of palisading was at once pulled down until not a piece was left standing from the Marble Arch to the gate near Apsley House, an extent of about half a mile in lengths As fast as the police

lined a breach, or took up a position where an escalade had been successful, similar movements were attempted at other points. Further attempts to break down the railings were successful in two or three different places along the Bayswater Road and in each case several hundreds of persons got access to the Park. This kind of skirmishing, which was accompanied by continuous hooting at the police and cheering each other on the part of the crowd in and out on the part of the park, was maintained from about half-past six to nearly half-past seven o'clock....

"This scene continued until about 8 o'clock, at which time two companies of the Grenadier Guards, with fixed bayonets, under the command of General Lowe Fox, entered the park and took up a position behind the Marble Arch. Shortly afterwards, two squadrons of the Life Guards, of 250 men each, fully armed and accoutred, and with swords drawn, entered the Park and took up a position in the drive running parallel with the Bayswater Road. The soldiers were loudly cheered while the police were as loudly hissed. The onslaught of the police on the people caused by one or two boys occasionally throwing stones still continued .... About ten o'clock orders were given to the Life Guards and the mounted police to form a line in various directions so as to effectually prevent any more rushing on the part of the people who then became divided into sections. Between the hours of eleven and twelve people quietly left the Park and in about half an hour all the Guards and policemen had likewise marched off."

Despite the fact that a number of people were badly injured there was no actual loss of life and the assault on the Hyde Park railings was a mild affair compared to the events of Chartist days. It was however, as "Reynolds' Newspaper" put its "The men of London have shown by their behaviour and achievements on Monday last that if Hyde-park be royal property it is also the people's property" and it was clear that there was to be no more trifling with the working class on the franchise issue. The London demonstration was the first in a chain of mass meetings throughout the country, culminating in another great demonstration organized by the trade unions on February 11th 1867 on the occasion of the opening of Parliament.

One of the most successful was that at Glasgow on October 13th 1866; of which the following is a contemporary description:

"During the Reform agitation of 1832, a large assemblage of Reformers, numbering about 70,000 met together on Glasgow Green; and this morning a similar meeting, only of twice the size, estimated at 150,000 persons, assembled on the same spot, under the auspices of the Reform League, to pass resolutions in favour of another Reform Bill. A large Trades procession, containing 30,000 persons, was formed on the Green at eleven o'clock, and marched thence through the principal streets of Glasgow and back again to the starting point, where from various platforms several meetings were held simultaneously, and resolutions in favour of Reform adopted, Mr. Bright, M.P., who had accepted an invitation to address the inhabitants of Glasgow

at an evening meeting, witnessed the procession from the window of the Cobden Hotel in Argyll Street. As, the procession and the immense crowd that accompanied it passed by the Hotel, repeated cheers were given for Mr. Bright, who bowed his acknowledgements. Flags and banners of the Glasgow colours floated from the windows on every side along the route of the procession. Business in the city was almost entirely suspended throughout the day and almost every shop was closed. Each trade carried numerous flags. The cabinet-makers of Glasgow marched under the inscription, 'The people should be the cabinet-makers.' One of the flags bore a huge coloured portrait of Mr. Gladstone, and a companion picture representing Mr. Bright on another flag bore the inscription, 'Honour Bright'

The background of these demonstrations was by no means one of untroubled calm, since Victorian prosperity had been broken by a cyclical trade depression, involving the collapse of iron shipbuilding on the Thames. On April 5th 1866 the Tory "Standard" reported: "A frightful spectacle was to be seen yesterday in one part of the metropolis. Although the unemployed thousands of the East End did not parade with their black flags en masse, the human torrent was imposing enough. Let us remember what these people suffer. They are dying of hunger. That is the simple and terrible fact. There are 40,000 of them...." On January 1st 1867 the "Times" published a letter signed "W.D.B." and written from the Office of the Society for the Relief of Distress, beginning:

"Sir, I imagine that the position of the working poor of the metropolis has seldom been quite as anomalous as it is at present. The sensational inscription of "Fat beast - starved man", which may be here and there seen decorating our blank walls, is not without a certain amount of significance and truth\*

"Thousands of would or should be working men in London are at this moment standing all the day idle; their families, if not all the day starving, are dependent on the Trades' or the parish Union for daily foods..."

In addition the dreaded cholera reappeared and swept the country as in 1832. Once again the main incidence of the epidemic fell on the working classes,

It was now evident to Disraeli that the Tory government was sitting on a volcano and after a long period of argument they agreed to his proposed "leap in the dark". As is well known the Tory Reform Bill introduced on March 18th 1867 had as its main object "dishing the Whigs" by giving the franchise to all ratepayers in the boroughs, which was much more than Gladstone had offered. This, however, was offset by a number of "fancy franchises" giving plural votes to persons with a certain educational or property qualifications, the intention being to establish a counter-weight to the

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working-class and also to extend the Tory influence among the middle classes of the towns. The Liberals had of course been out-manoevred, since they could hardly oppose a Bill which offered more than the one which most of them had supported, and they concentrated on amendments directed to getting rid of the "fancy franchises."

Whilst the great demonstrations were convulsing the country the political leaders were holding private consultations as to how little the working class could be persuaded to take. In particular John Bright was pressing his advice on Disraeli, who was quite willing to listen since as Trevelyan tells us in his "Life of John Bright" (1913 edition, p.370), "The relations of the two men had for fifteen years past been friendly and sometimes strangely intimate." On the 1st March 1867 we find an entry in Bright's Journal that he had a conversation with Disraeli in the lobby:-

"I advised him to advance his offers, so far in regard to the suffrage that he would not be driven to accept defeat on every proposition - that £5 rating franchise or household suffrage would save him in the boroughs, and that £10 or £12 would do for the counties. He said that he did not care much for the counties. The working class question was the real question, and that was the thing that demanded to be settled. He had once proposed a £10 franchise for the counties..."

The outcome of this conversation was a letter from Bright of the 9th March 1867:-

'3rd month, 9. 1867

Confidential

Letter to Disraeli

SUGGESTIONS ON THE COMING REFORM BILL

'What is wanted is (1) a Bill on which the Cabinet can be agreed, (2) one which the House will accept, and (3) one which will so far content the people as to extinguish the Associations now agitating the Question.'

It should have been evident by now that, as in 1832, the middle class would use the working class to secure their own aims and that whatever emerged from the Parliamentary contest wrangling it would not be manhood suffrage. The difference between John Bright and his followers and the Reform League, was, however, that the former knew exactly what they wanted and were determined to get it, whereas the League had already given up their own standpoint by supporting Gladstone's Bill. It is true that on February 27th 1867 a meeting of 230 delegates from Trades, Friendly Temperance, and other Societies, and of

Metropolitan branches of the Reform League was held at the Sussex Hotel, which adopted five very radical resolutions. The first of these declared that Disraeli's Bill "is wholly unworthy of the support of this meeting, or of the true Liberal Party of this Country", while the second reaffirmed the demand for "residential, registered Manhood Suffrage, protected by the Ballot". The last contained the sanctions "That unless a satisfactory prospect is held out in Parliament of the Working Classes being universally enfranchised upon the principles of the Reform League it will be necessary to consider the propriety of those classes adopting a universal cessation from Labour until their political rights are conceded." For a moment it seemed that the ghost of Chartism had come to life again, but the leaders of the Reform League were frightened of themselves, and at another conference in March contented themselves with calling for election committees to secure the return of M.Ps who would declare "in favour of the League programme, or of household suffrage for boroughs unfettered by ratepaying clauses, and supplemented by a liberal lodging franchise ..."

This bartering away of principles was not so much evidence of the treachery or incapacity of individual leaders as of the inner weakness of the Reform League itself. The League shared with the First- International the handicap that it only enjoyed the full support of the most advanced section of the British workers. Like the International it was "London based" and enjoyed the whole-hearted support of a number of unions such as the West End Cabinetmakers (also affiliated to the International). The large Amalgamated Trade Societies however were not prepared to sink their identity in the Reform League or any other body and in 1866 the Executive Council of the Engineers had warned their General Secretary not to identify himself too closely with political movements. Outside London the Reform League secured a number of affiliations from trade unions in the Birmingham area, though here the influence of John Bright was predominant. In the North-East its place was taken by the Northern Reform Union, which took a more consistent stand in favour of manhood suffrage. In Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire however, which still contained the greatest concentration of industry, the Reform League was at its weakest. The majority of the textile workers would have nothing to do with Bright on account of his opposition to the Factory Acts and made no secret of their loyalty to Disraeli. The skilled artisans did not share this attitude and the National Reform Union sought to win their support. In 1866 the Amalgamated Society of Engineers were able to secure an interview with Platts of Oldham, who had taken a leading part in organizing the lock-out of 1852, and John Platt, M.P. gave them a favourable testimonial in the House of Commons. On the whole the workers in the North were content to follow the Liberal and Conservative Parties and the efforts of Ernest Jones to build up the Reform League as an independent force found little response outside Manchester itself.

On the other hand the Reform League had opened its membership to members of the middle classes, some of whom gained a dominant position. The accounts of the League preserved in the Bishopgate Institution show that only a part of its income came from its local branches, the balance being made up by collections at public meetings and individual donations, some of which were quite

substantial. It eventually became clear that most of the middle-class leaders; whilst strongly in favour of manhood suffrage in principle, were not inclined to allow their principles to stand in the way of getting something on account, especially when they hoped to become Members of Parliament themselves. It also became clear that George Howell and other working-class leaders had come round to their point of view and the Reform Bill passed into law without much fuss.

The much-amended Bill received the Royal Assent on August 19th 1867. In its final form it extended the borough franchise to all householders who paid rates, the system of "compounding" by which rates could be paid through the landlord being finally legalized by the Assessed Rates Act of 1869. In addition the borough franchise was also given to "lodgers" whose rent amounted to £10 or more annually. The county franchise was given to all occupiers of property to the value of £12 or more per annum. Thirty-three members were taken away from English boroughs, of which twenty-five were given to more deserving English constituencies and the remainder divided between Scotland and Ireland. The Scottish Reform Act followed the lines of the English, but no provision was made for "compounding of rates." The Irish Reform Act made little change.,

After allowing for plural voting and the grossly defective state of the electoral register it appears that the total number of persons entitled to the franchise in England and Wales was about a million before 1867 and that this number was nearly doubled by the Second Reform Act. This probably gave an electoral majority to the working class, which was not the case in any other large European country. Those left without the vote included the farm workers, the bulk of the miners and a large number of others (such as Beatrice Webb's working-class relatives at Bacup in Lancashire) who happened to live on the wrong side of a borough boundary. Also left unfranchised were the poorer workers in the boroughs. since it was very difficult in practice for a lodger to get on the register and the residence qualifications acted as a wholesale disqualification. Even as late as 1911, when the county franchise had been lowered to the borough level by the Second Reform Act of 1884, only about 59% of adult males in the United Kingdom had the vote ("Parliamentary Papers". 1911, Ixii, pp. 679-700; Neal Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom 1885-1918" in "Past and Present", December 1965). In London where the effects of disqualification by residence were not limited to the poor, it was found in 1908 that the number of voters was only 53.9% of the number of adult males but many of these were plural voters so it is doubtful whether half the men over 21 were really on the register ("Hansard"/ clxxxii (7th February 1908, 1234-5); Blewett op.cit. p. 37 note39).

During the debates on the Second Reform Bill an amendment providing for Womens' Suffrage was moved by John Stuart Mill but it only received 73 votes, including that of John Bright. That the opposition was not entirely based on sex prejudice is shown by the fact that two years later very little objection was raised to the extension of the municipal franchise to women ratepayers without husbands. Married women at that time could not be householders in their own right and it was quite clear that neither the Liberal or the Conservative

Party would consider giving votes to men or women merely because they happened to have reached a certain age, unless they had attached themselves to some piece of property. Womens' Suffrage in the United Kingdom therefore had to wait until the enactment of Manhood Suffrage, which was not until 1918.

Once the extension of the suffrage had been granted the opponents of the Ballot were ashamed to continue their arguments against it. and it became law in 1872. Other points of the People's Charter had to wait, since there was no real mass movement on their behalf. The skilled artisans of the towns were fairly content once they had secured the vote for themselves and. the Reform League dissolved itself in 1869. The only real agitation for an extension of the suffrage was carried on by the Northern Reform Union which secured the affiliation of the Northumberland and Durham miners' unions: At the instance of the miners and farm workers the Trades Union Congress decided to press for the extension of household suffrage to the counties: this was actually done by the Third Reform Bill of 1884; but they asked no more. As the Webbs put its "The student of Continental labour movements will find it difficult to believe that in the representative Congress of the English artisans, amendments in favour of Manhood Suffrage were even as late as 1882 and 1883 rejected by large majorities. Nor did the Parliamentary Committee put even the County Franchise into their own programme until it had become the battle cry of the Liberal Party at the General Election of 1880,. The Extension of the Hours of Polling becomes a subject of discussion from 1878 onward? but the Payment of Election Expenses does not come up until 1883, and Payment of Members not until 1884," ("History of Trade Unionism", 1892 edition, p. 354) Parliamentary democracy was not really introduced into Britain until the first World War and the Russian Revolution had brought into being a new set of ideas,



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