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THE CLASS STRUGGLE  
IN  
LOCAL AFFAIRS

## THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN LOCAL AFFAIRS

### Pre-Industrial England - tradition and reality

Before the Industrial Revolution most English people lived in villages or small country towns. Here the usual form of local government was the Vestry meeting of the parish church, that is, the annual meeting of all the parishioners for the purpose of "making the rate" for the coming year and electing various officials to deal with parish matters.

The Vestry originated as a body for controlling church affairs, but it accumulated other functions as the older manorial courts died out and as Parliament laid more duties on the parish- Besides the Churchwardens responsible for church matters, the Vestry officials included the Overseer of the Poor who paid out parish "relief" to widows, old people, orphans, and the able-bodied unemployed; the Surveyor of Highways responsible for the roads; and the Constable who had to keep order in the village.

The Vestry was the organ of local government. All those- who occupied land, even a smallholding, had the right to attend the meeting and to vote, and the duty of taking office from time to time. But landless people, and also everyone who had received poor relief during the year, were excluded from, voting and exempted from paying rates.

The Vestry was a form of local government that was taken for granted, because it had grown up to meet, the needs of the village. (W.E.Tate has pointed out in "The Parish Chest" that the Vestry even took over from, the defunct manorial court the management of the open fields and commons, and could initiate new methods of farming.) It was workable, because the population of most parishes was small enough for people to know each other. As a form, of democracy it was only a limited one, because of the exclusion of women (except those who were ratepayers), paupers, and landless workers-

The Vestry was not a "democracy on principle". The inhabitants were not so much concerned with their "rights" as with evading the onerous duty of taking office. For this reason, in practice the affairs of the parish often fell into the hands of the more substantial inhabitants. Again, as the Poor Rate was levied according to the value of land occupied, the biggest occupiers were tempted to economise at the expense of those who depended on poor relief. Voting was by show of hands, i.e. on the principle of "one man, one vote"; but no doubt it would be risky for a tenant to vote against his own landlord on any important issue.

Besides the villages governed by a Vestry, there were also boroughs. Those were market towns which had been freed from; the local lord of the manor by a charter. Their form, of government varied as to voting rights and the qualifications needed for election to the governing body. Power in the boroughs was in practice either monopolised by the wealthier citizens or else, if the smaller freeholders had voting rights, the system of open voting made their bribery and intimidation possible.

So England on the eve of the Industrial Revolution had a tradition of local self-government, but in practice the poorer sections of the population had no real power in local affairs.

From parish pump to city sewer

The social problems created by the Industrial Revolution arose most acutely in the growing towns. The Liberal historians J.L. and Barbara Hammond - who are so much under fire nowadays from the defenders of Capitalism-in-all-its-glory - analysed the difference between the modern industrial town of this period and the towns of classical Greece and Rome or medieval Europe. The old towns, though overcrowded and insanitary, were seats of learning and culture, the home of craftsmen whose buildings are their memorial, and the object of the civic pride of their citizens. The towns of the Industrial period, on the other hand, whether overgrown villages or old towns swamped by a new population, were "not so much towns as barracks... they represented nothing but the avarice of the jerry-builder catering for the avarice of the capitalist".

Descriptions of the overcrowded and insanitary industrial towns, by middle-class observers and Government investigators, are sufficiently well known. They are quoted by the Hammonds and by many local historians. They were quoted by Engels too, to supplement his personal observations of the contemporary scene in the mid-19th century, "The Condition of the working class in England in 1844"» These descriptions are so horrifying that some modern historians shy away from them as "exaggerations".

It would be easy to say that the main trouble with the industrial towns was the complete lack of sewers. Nowadays we take sanitation for granted. Not only is permanent sewerage provided in all except the more remote villages, but every organiser of a summer camp or an air-raid shelter, or even a coach tour, knows that the first essential is "sanitary arrangements". Yet the industrial towns were allowed to grow, builders were allowed to put up housing, people were allowed to flock in from the countryside, without any provision being made for disposal of sewage.

But behind the lack of sewers is the lack of democracy. The governing body of the industrial towns, whether the corporation of an old borough or the manorial court of an overgrown village like Manchester, was not under democratic control. Its members were not of the kind who lived in the smelly slums. Except during cholera epidemics, which endangered even the comfortably-housed, it was possible for the town authorities to ignore the social problems of the town.

Unless research brings new facts to light, there is little evidence that the working class of this period took any decisive action against the wretched living conditions. Why were they passive sufferers? Why did they not clamour for action through the machinery of local government? It is difficult to reconcile the apparent apathy of the working class in this matter with the militant spirit of the early trade unionists, of the hundreds of thousands who protested against the Peterloo Massacre and the transportation of the Tolpuddle farm-labourers, and the millions who signed the Chartist petitions.

politically-minded sections of the working class in the affairs of their own town. The explanation may lie in the circumstances of the migration of people from, the villages to the industrial towns, Those who left their village would tend, in the nature of things, to ~~be~~ those who were already landless or paupers; and, as we have seen, democratic rights in parish affairs depended on the occupation of land and on not being in receipt of poor relief. A good many of the new town population must have been people who had already lost their rights in the villages from which they came. It would not seem strange to them that they still had no rights - or responsibilities - in their new home.

### Instruments of Repression

In the long period of the Industrial Revolution, which we can count roughly from, the mid-18th century to the end of the Chartist period a century later, there was one aspect of local government that was brought very forcibly to the notice of the working class. This was the means by which "Law and Order" were preserved - or, to put it more bluntly, the means by which the ruling class tried to keep the class struggle from becoming too dangerous to themselves.

In those days before the creation of a police Force, the key people in the suppression of the class struggle were the magistrates - Justices of the Peace. It was the magistrates who had the duty of keeping an eye on working-class activities, reporting the latest news of a strike or "food-riot" to the Home Office. It was the magistrates who had the job of dispersing any peaceful demonstration by reading the Riot Act, which allowed one hour for the crowd to disperse, after which the crowd became technically a mob of rioters who could be shot down in cold blood. It was the magistrates who had the power to send for the military to do the shooting, or the Yeomanry (Volunteer cavalry) to charge into the crowd and disperse it with sabre-slashes.

(it was the same magistrates who sat in judgment over the crimes of poverty - poaching, sheep-stealing, and petty theft - and committed the wretched victims of capitalist society to trial at the Assizes where the penalty was death or transportation.)

After the French Revolution, and especially after the declaration of war against revolutionary France in 1793, the class struggle sharpened in Britain, and the magistrates came to the fore. It was their duty to take the ballot for the militia for the unpopular War, a fact that directed the people's anger against them. The magistrates had to try to prevent the anti-war demonstrations and the planting of "Trees of Liberty" in their towns.

In years of bad harvest coupled with wartime profiteering, so-called "food-riots" took place - well-organised "direct action" by workers and housewives, who marched into the market and fixed the price of foodstuffs, or confiscated them. to sell at a reasonable price. There are many examples of this during the Napoleonic War. The role of the magistrates is shown up clearly in this advertisement which appeared in the local press of Blackburn on Sept. 24th, 1800 (quoted by G.C.Miller in "Blackburn! The Evolution of a Cotton Town") :

"The Magistrates of this Division, and principal inhabitants of the town, hereby inform all farmers and dealers in flour, meal and other provisions, that they are determined to protect all persons and their property who attend this market, and hope no person will be deterred in future from, coming forward with their laden waggons and carts, as it was believed was the case this day, from a rumour of a serious riot having taken place but which was happily checked in its birth, by the Magistrates reading the Riot Act and the prompt attendance of the Blackburn Cavalry and Infantry Associations."

The "prompt attendance" of the military was due to Government policy. The Hammonds quote the Prime Minister, Pitt, in 1795 as justifying his policy of building barracks in the industrial areas by saying?

"The circumstances of the country, coupled with the general state of affairs, renders it advisable to provide barracks in other parts of the kingdom. A spirit has appeared in some of the manufacturing towns which makes it necessary that troops should be kept near them."

So long as magistrates and the military intervened so openly in the industrial and political struggles of the working class, the machinery of local government was apt to be seen as merely a repressive weapon in the hands of the ruling class. At every turn the progressive movement was thwarted by this local machine. It was the magistrates who sent troops to break up the gathering of the Blanketeers in Manchester in 1817, at the start of the first "Hunger March" to London. The same magistrates first banned a Reform demonstration in Manchester in 1819 and then, after allowing it to be held a fortnight later in St. Peter's Fields, sent the Yeomanry cavalry riding in to slash at the great crowd in what has been called the "Battle of Peterloo".

By this time the industrial workers regarded magistrates as their natural enemy. But the Peterloo Massacre had its effect on another section of the population, the politically radical middle classes of the old cities with a long tradition of local self-government. The Court of Common Council - the governing body of the City of London - passed a resolution expressing "the strongest indignation at these unprovoked and intemperate proceedings." In Norwich, at the annual election of the Freeman's Sheriff, the successful candidate, a Radical wool-factor, said that "the late dreadful and bloody scene" in Manchester "has taught those who have the choice of their magistrates to be vigilant and circumspect in their selection." He contrasted the unfortunate inhabitants of Manchester who "have no voice in the election of their magistrates" with the people of Norwich who still elected their sheriff and he promised them that if they wished to hold a Reform meeting "I shall feel it my duty to be present. Not indeed to let loose upon you a military force, but to assist you to the best of my ability in the discharge of so important a duty," (shouts of applause).

("Norwich Mercury", . Sept. 4th, 1819)

In the later part of the 19th century the demands for the appointment of working-class magistrates and for democratic local control of the new Police Force were part of the programme of Radicals and socialists alike.

### The very Select Vestry

In those post-war years of repression the ruling class did not forget the institutions of local government. An Act was passed in 1818 (known as the Sturges Bourne Act, after its initiator) to alter the constitution and franchise of Vestries. This was not merely of interest to churchgoers. The Church Vestry, the governing body in each parish, was still the only body responsible for social conditions (sanitation, if any, and the operation of the Poor Law) in vast new built-up areas which did not yet have the status of a Borough. London, especially, was governed by Vestries; for, outside the old City,, the whole of this thickly-populated area was still treated as a series of overgrown villages, each governed by its old parish machinery.

According to the Webbs, during and after the Napoleonic War when the Reform' movement became militant,; Vestry meetings were used as a forum for Radical propaganda and resolutions. This helps to explain why the Government decided that the "tumultuous" meetings of open Vestries, which every ratepayer had the right to attend, must be prevented by a change in the law. The Sturges Bourne Act of 1818 encouraged the conversion of Open Vestries into "Select Vestries". This name explains itself. Instead of the parishioners as a whole having the right to attend Vestry meetings; a limited number of Vestrymen were to be elected. In order to prevent "unsuitable" persons from being elected, there was a property qualification for candidates. Worse still, "plural voting" was introduced for the first, time into English local government affairs. Below £50 rateable value a man had only one vote, but at £50 two votes, and for every additional £25 an extra vote up to a maximum of six votes. Voting was to be by poll,, instead of by show of hands as in the Open Vestry. The "tumultuous" meetings were thus eliminated. And, assuming that a good many of the smaller ratepayers would take no interest in the elections, the plural vote could be relied on to give power to the biggest property owners.

The Sturges Bourne Act was not the beginning of Select Vestries. Some Open Vestries had already been converted by private Act of Parliaments In the Forth of England, too, Select Vestries were the traditional form of Vestry. It is possible that at any rate in the pastoral parts of the Forth where villages were small and everyone was related to everyone else, and there was scarcely a separate class of landless labourer, a Select Vestry of twenty-four men (the usual number) was not. undemocratic but merely a convenience. But the position was rather different in, for example, the parish of Marylebone, in London, with a population (in 1821) of 120,000.

As it happens, we know quite a bit about the goings-on of the Select Vestry of Marylebone because a Parliamentary Inquiry in 1829 into the working of Vestries, heard a number of witnesses from, this London parish. This Select Vestry had been created in 1753 when the village fields were just beginning to be built over. At the time of the Inquiry the Select Vestry was under heavy fire from a section of the population; who complained of "the principle upon which the Select Vestry of our parish is founded, that of self-election; the secrecy of their proceedings, all their proceedings being entirely kept from the parishioners, all done within closed doors; and the degree of irresponsibility which attaches to that body from the accounts being entirely withheld from the inspection of the parishioners."

Public meetings had been held, a committee; of "independent resident gentlemen" was elected, and Parliamentary permission was obtained to inspect the Vestry accounts. The Vestry was accused of increasing the rates by 50%, cooking the accounts, converting the voluntary Easter offering- into a compulsory tax, and generally opposing the "parishioners' wishes. The Vestry included a number of "noblemen and Members of Parliament" who were out of Town all the summer and attended so rarely that in order to retain their membership the Select Vestry would instruct its clerk:

"Do, pray, go and see. him, and get him to come and show his face, merely that we may have his name entered in the books, and then he may go again."

However, 'we need not have illusions about the "independent resident gentlemen" who led" the campaign against this very Select Vestry. What. they proposed was only, in effect, their own admission into a slightly less select Vestry. The Vestrymen, with a high property qualification, should be elected, but only by those with property rated at £40 p.a. This would conveniently eliminate at least two-thirds of the householders. One of the leaders of the "reformers" said bluntly that if the rest of the parishioners would not agree to "an elective franchise qualified in such a way as to prevent popular commotion, I 'will secede and have nothing to do with it. I would rather see the present Vestry remain as it is, than have popular confusion."

"No working-class witnesses whatever were called to this Inquiry. Although the Marylebone Vestry accounts were closely examined, especially the expenses of the Poor Law committee who rode about in "glass coaches" and finished up every one of their frequent visits to the workhouse, the orphans, the lunatics, and the "refractory poor" by wining, and dining, there was absolutely no mention made of the conditions under which these working-class paupers were living.

#### The workers and the Poor Law

Things were different in the little market town of Cambridge. Here, according to the Report on the Poor Law (1834), the Open Vestry was converted into a Select Vestry in 1825. The Vestrymen elected then were "all persons of substance in the parish." These people "began quickly to discontinue relief in money as a general practice, and gave, instead, orders for admission to the workhouse." There was a "popular outcry" against this, and in 1828 when the general vestry meeting was held to elect the Select Vestry "there was a very numerous attendance of the smallest ratepayers, and a scene of confusion and tumult took place. A low mechanic was called to the chair by general acclamation, and the elections fell upon a class of persons whose appointment the magistrates refused to sign. No appointment of a Select Vestry has since taken place."

The effect of this popular victory was that "the old method of relief of necessity came back, for the Overseer no longer found himself (having lost the protection and responsibility of the vestry) in a situation to refuse relief."

This episode in Cambridge was but a foretaste of a great mass struggle that developed against the New Poor Law of 1834, the law which forbade "outdoor relief" and provided new workhouses with the object of establishing "a discipline so severe and repulsive" as to make them a terror to the poor and prevent them from entering".- so one of the Assistant Commissioners told Richard Oastler, leader of the mass revolt in the West Riding against the new law. Oastler's biographer, Cecil Driver, describes the "guerrilla tactics" of this movements

"First they tried to carry the local elections and pack the Boards of Guardians with members pledged to frustrate the scheme. Then they tried to prevent the necessary officials from being appointed. When these methods proved inadequate they resorted to demonstrations, intimidation and rioting.. And when the Government still continued unshaken in its course, the leaders of resistance openly began talking of civil war and their followers started to lay in stores of arms and ammunition."

The campaign was most intense in the manufacturing Forth of England, but articles in "Our History" (March and October 1954) showed that the struggle was also carried on in agricultural districts. In so far as it became an open struggle of direct action against the building of the hated "bastilles", this movement"cannot be classed as a purely "local government" struggle. But, as the above quotation shows, the resistance began by using the machinery of election provided by the new Act.

The New Poor Law could not be prevented. Boards of Guardians began to function, and became an important part of the machinery of local government. For a long time the working class was not able to influence their policy, because of the powers of "plural voting" given to the bigger rate-payers, and the property qualifications of candidates. But when these were abolished in 1894 the Boards of Guardians came into the sphere of working-class activity, as will be shown later.

#### Chartism: and local government - a clean sweep?

Although the movement against the New poor Law was one of the strands of the class struggle of the 1830's which led to the development of Chartism, the Chartists do not seem to have taken much interest in local government affairs as such. The campaign for the Charter was carried on mainly by large open-air meetings"and processions, delegate conferences and the collection of signatures for Petitions to Parliament. The Chartists did not work through either the organised trade union movement or the existing, local government machinery. .

Yet until more local research has been done into Chartist activities, it. would be rash to say that they never made use" of the possibilities of. local government. There was, for example, the occasion of the Vestry election in Leeds in 1842, when Chartists flocked to the meetings at which the Churchwardens and the Board of Surveyors of Highways were elected. By show of hands Chartists were elected as Churchwardens, and at the next annual election the Vicar said they had "conducted themselves in an honour-able, straightforward and gentlemanly manner", and "he could not wish for better churchwardens." The Chartists were not so successful in the election for the Surveyors of Highways. Their election on a show of hands was challenged at a" stormy meeting, and at the poll vote taken the next week they wore narrowly defeated. (See, article "Fireworks in the Vestry", in "Our History, Dec. 1953.)

But Leeds was in a rather special position. According to the Webbs', the radical element amongst the smaller ratepayers had been sufficiently string to prevent the introduction of plural voting, by undervaluing all property so that in no case was the limit of £50 rateable value exceeded. The old principle of "one man, one vote" therefore still applied in Leeds, and when the smaller ratepayers - shopkeepers, craftsmen and so on - turned to Chartism they still hold their democratic civic rights in their own hands.

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So far as the Chartist programme was concerned, no special mention was made in the Charter of the right to vote in local elections. No doubt: it was understood that the greater included the lesser, and that in demand-  
-ing the right, to vote in General Elections and to stand as candidate for Parliament, the Chartists were also demanding local democracy.

But the Chartists do not seem to have worked out any scheme for a practical reform, of local government. Some speakers referred to the Chartist movement as a "knife and fork question", since the fight for political power had as its ultimate object: the social improvement of the working class. But the Chartists looked to Parliament for this reform, not to local institutions. They were thinking of the improvement of trade and the reduction of unemployment, rather than of such local improvements as slum clearance and the provision of sewers.

There is a clue to the Chartist attitude towards local government, in an issue of the "Northern Star" just before the famous demonstration in London of 1848. On April 1st Feargus O'Connor covered the front page with what was obviously intended as a final exhortation to make the supreme effort for the Charter on April 10th. In an open letter addressed "To the Imperial Chartistst Brother Chartists and Fellow Labourers", O'Connor outlined the now social system, which Chartists proposed to substitute for the present one when they had gained political power. There is no indication that this was any more than a "paper constitution" worked out by O'Connor himself for occasion, a private Utopia of his own imagining. But it . . . may well be a sample of the kind of ideal that O'Connor had been putting forward in his own oratorical speeches and therefore a fairly true picture of what rank-and-file Chartists believed they were fighting for. It included the well-known demands of the People's Charter, followed by a whole medley of reforms, great and small, thrown together as in a brantub where everyone would find his heart's desire.

What O'Connor says here about local government is quite specific. Each Electoral District (of which there were to be 400) would appoint twelve. Justices of the Peace,

"who shall constitute a local board for the due performance of all local business, thus destroying that system of centralisation which has grown up" in this and other countries, and leaving the "assessment and levying of local taxation as well as the enforcement of education, of instruction, trade, and labour regulations, to be legislated upon by this local board of twelve magistrates."

In the light of what we know of England's tradition of local self-government, and of the actual development of the last hundred years since

Chartism, this drastic regimentation of all aspects of social life seems the height of fantasy. In his reaction against "centralisation" O'Connor ignores the possibility of social progress by national legislation. Yet at the same time, all existing experience of local self-government is to be thrown away in favour of a narrowly-based and all-powerful body of magistrates (who, one assumes, would have to be Chartists.) This unpractical approach to the problem, of social reform: was one of the weaknesses of the Chartist movement. It was a mistake that was avoided by the socialist movement at the latter end of the 19th century.

#### Middle-class reformers

All through the middle part of the 19th century, during and after the Chartist period, the Labour movement does not seem to have given much attention to local affairs. Even the appalling conditions of housing and sanitation did not arouse organised protest. The initiative was taken instead by middle-class individuals, usually doctors but sometimes business men, who succeeded in reusing public opinion and vanning new powers and new organisations to deal with questions of public health.

In Liverpool, where as early as the 1780's and again in 1802 local doctors had raised demands for a water supply and the closing of cellar-dwellings, the successful campaign, which won the Liverpool "Health of the Town" Act in 1842 was led by a doctor and a builder. This campaign led the way to a general Public Health Act in 1848 which set up Local Boards of Health. In Leeds, Dr. Robert Baker campaigned for sewers as a means of combatting cholera epidemics. (See. "Our History" Oct. 1955)- Later, as towns appointed Medical Officers of Health to administer the now laws on public health, these officials became relentless enemies of the old privy midden and pioneers of the water-closet.

It goes without saying that these public-spirited men were opposed at every turn by property-owners. It is difficult to say how much support they had from, the working class, but there is not much evidence of it until the last quarter of the 19th century. This may be due partly to the lack of any local, nucleus of working-class organisations, such as the Trades Councils provided later on; and partly to the obstacles put in the way of working men taking part in local government, (see below)

During the 1860's a new idealistic attitude towards local government began to develop in Birmingham. It was inspired by a group of Nonconformist ministers, who succeeded in instilling their enthusiasm into the business men who controlled the Town Council. Under the leadership of one of these business men, Joseph Chamberlain in his radical days, Birmingham became "the best, governed city in the world". The reformers, according to the Rev. Dale who was one of them,

"spoke of sweeping away streets in which it was not possible to live a healthy and decent life of making the town cleaner, sweeter and brighter; of providing gardens and parks and music; of erecting baths and free libraries, an art gallery and a museum; they insisted that great, monopolies like the gas and water supply should be in the hands of the corporation..." (quoted by Asa Briggs in his "History of Birmingham")

This programme was carried out by the business men, who showed, in effect, that public health, municipal gasworks, and even cultural amenities could be a worthwhile investment for ratepayers. But the problem of working-class housing was not tackled in Birmingham. Slum streets were indeed swept away, but the inhabitants were not re-housed, it was only after years of criticism that land was first bought in 1889 for working-class housing.

#### Obstacles to local democracy

There was more democracy in some local elections than in General Elections, for in the boroughs the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 had given the local vote to all ratepayers. (Wives, grown-up children, lodgers, and paupers, being of course excluded by this definition.)

This may explain why the campaign for the vote in the 1860's concentrated on the Parliamentary vote and did not then attempt to extend local democracy. (The Reform Act of 1867, although falling far short of the working-class demand for adult suffrage, gave the Parliamentary vote to householders in the towns, with a fairly low property qualification. Further extensions of voting rights were won bit by bit, but the local vote was not given to all men and women over 21 years until 1944. )

Other local bodies such as the Boards of Guardians and the Local Boards of Health were not so democratic as the Borough Councils, as plural voting according to value of property was in operation here. In London the Vestries remained "Select" until 1894, when they were opened to all ratepayers equally. The Metropolitan Board of Works (created in 1855? and forerunner of the London County Council of 1888) was appointed, not elected; and various other ad hoc bodies were appointed.

But lack of voting rights was not the only obstacle for the working class. Even for those who possessed a vote (as in the boroughs) there were snags. In the first place, voting was still open, and so bribery and intimidation continued at elections, both Parliamentary and municipal, in spite of laws passed to prevent them. They had rather different effects. Bribery made it impossible for a poor man to stand as candidate, quite apart from property qualifications. It also put power into the hands of the bribeable minority who could decide the poll by swinging over to the richer candidate. Intimidation either discouraged people from using their vote when they had one (e.g. tradesmen often preferred to remain "neutral" in the eyes of their customers), or else penalised them afterwards. The workers, who could be sacked from their jobs, were of course particularly vulnerable. So were tenants of tied cottages in agricultural and mining areas.

These obnoxious effects of open voting created a public opinion in favour of the secret ballot., which was finally won, for Parliamentary and local elections, in 1872. The Parliamentary Inquiry which preceded this Act shows how bad the position was. The Mayor of Nottingham, put the case very clearly to the Select Committee. Out of 7,689 municipal voters, 2,320 "require money" before they will vote, and as the price increases "the better class of people<sup>1</sup>" such as shopkeepers can also be tempted.

In the Borough elections of 1867 in Nottingham., in the Byron Ward,

"an election was tried on purity principles. The poll commenced at 9.0, and at 12 o'clock one side had polled less than 100 votes, and the other under 40; there being 1330 votes in the whole ward. At 12 o'clock the 40 party offered 3/6; this caused a run, and the other side then offered 5/-, which won the election."

(The following year) "in the same ward not more than 200 had polled at 12 o'clock. 2/6 was then offered, the place "was at once besieged; the price rose to 5/- and at 4 o'clock 900 had polled.

"The effect of this is, that a great many of the respectable voters will not vote at all; they consider that the result of those contests is simply this, that those who give the most money win, and therefore they abstain from voting."

As for intimidation, witnesses at this Inquiry gave conflicting evidence as to whether it was serious or not. Probably the witness who said that it was decreasing, because of "the more independent feeling among the workmen" was near the truth. The witness from Leeds thought that any attempt there at intimidation by an employer "would have the contrary effect to what the employer intended". All the same, the employers were still prepared to try, as the case of Blackburn showed. Here, in 1868, the local November elections were taken more seriously than usual because a General Election was to take place a fortnight later. On October 12th the Blackburn Conservative Party issued a circular letters

"At a .very influential meeting of the Conservative party... it was decided that all millonwners and their managers and overlookers, and all master tradesmen and others possessing influence, should be strongly urged to exert that influence so as to secure, in the municipal elections as well as in the Parliamentary, the success of the candidates who adhere to the constitution in Church and State. . . and who are opposed to the levelling principles, demoralizing in tendency, which would make Christian England a Godless nation, undermine the stability of the Throne and the security of property, and hasten on an era of anarchy and misrule.... We venture to urge upon you most strongly the necessity of vigorous personal effort to secure the return of" (the Conservative candidates are then named,)

This circular was probably not at all unusual. What is noteworthy is the way the working class immediately reacted against this "putting on the Screw". The "Screw Circular" led to public meetings of protest, at which a fund was set up to help any workers who we,re victimised for voting Liberal. Both the municipal and Parliamentary elections in Blackburn that year were accompanied by hooligan violence against the Liberals, and a Petition to Parliament resulted in the unseating of the Conservatives who had just been elected.

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Another difficulty in the way of working-class participation in elections was the inconvenience of the hours of polling, which prevented many workers from using their vote even when they had one. This applied

as much to local as to Parliamentary elections. The, polling booths were opened after most workers had gone to work and were closed before they got back. For workers who were employed in the same area in which they lived, it was possible to vote in the dinner hour, or even in some places in the breakfast break (for people who started work at 6,0 rushed home for a quick meal about 8. o'clock). Serious trade unionists would take time off during the day, to their own loss, rather than miss their vote.

ge Shipton, secretary of the London Trades Council, told a Parliamentary Inquiry in 1877 that of the 20,000 members of his organisation about half would not vote within the hours of 8.0 and 4.0 either because they worked from 8.0 to 8.0 or because they lived out in the suburbs. John Nieass, a plasterer, said that building workers, worrking from 6.0 to 5.0, were sent all over the place on their jobs and often could not vote. William. Marston, a tailor from Leeds representing the Trades Council, pointed out that "building and other seasonal workers could not afford to "break time" in order to vote. So many went to vote in their dinner hour that there were queues down the street, and many had to leave without voting. In Hunslet Ward the miners, working at pits three, miles away, "are practically disfranchised" because they cannot get back in time.

In spite of all the evidence given by working men, this Select Oramitteo decided against an extension of hours, on the excuse that polling after dark might cause "disturbances" which would inconvenience the police.

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The London School Board elections were about the only one to allow a full twelve hours for polling, and this fact, coupled with the traditional interest, of the trade union movement in matters of education, may help to explain the greater role played by the working class on this body. But outside London only seven or eight hours were allowed for polling for the School Boards as for other local bodies.

The workers object .

As the Labour movement became more militant and independent, with the revival of Socialism, and the fight for independent. Labour representation, everything that was put in the way of working men participating in local government, was resented and opposed by them.

The plural vote, which had been introduced into the Select Vestries in 1818 and then into the elections of Guardians under the new Poor Law Act of 18J4s, was bitterly o.pposed in the latter part of the century by Radicals and Socialists. "One man, one vote", was their cry. And when this was at last achieved in 1894 the Labour movement was ready to take advantage of it. In Battersea, for example, where the marxist Social Democratic Federation was already in the habit of putting pressure on the Vestry from outside, and had won public libraries, baths and wash-house.s and a Town Hall, the new voting system allowed the Labour movement to sweep the beards at the next Vestry election. At the same time a member of the S.D.F., Mary Gray, was elected a Guardian in Battarsea, where she put up a great fight for the working-class victims of the Poor Law and George Lansbury started on his political career as a Guardian in Poplar.