

Lecture 11 handout: historiography

Structure of the lecture:

- Historians' debates over the threat of revolution
- Historians' debates over the language of radicalism
- Historians' debates over the significance of the Reform Act

Object of the week: E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968)

pp. 212-3 –

When every caution has been made, the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of the 'working class'. This is revealed, first, in the growth of class-consciousness: the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interests of other classes. And, second, in the growth of corresponding forms of political and industrial organisation. By 1832 there were strongly based and self-conscious working-class institutions – trade unions, friendly societies, educational and religious movements, political organisations, periodicals – working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community patterns, and a working-class structure of feeling.

The making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic, history. It was not the spontaneous generation of the factory system. Nor should we think of an external force – the 'industrial revolution – working upon some nondescript undifferentiated raw material of humanity and turning it out at the other end as a 'fresh race of beings'. The changing productive relations and working conditions of the Industrial Revolution were imposed, not upon raw material, but upon the free-born Englishman – and the free-born Englishman as Paine had left him or as the Methodists had moulded him. The factory hand or stockinger was also the inheritor of Bunyan, of remembered village rights, of notions of equality before the law, of craft traditions...The working class made itself as much as it was made.

Historians' debates over the threat of revolution

- 1790s
- the 'black lamp' controversy 1801-2
- moderate interpretations

H. T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (1985), p. 61: 'it is no longer possible to accept that the Luddite disturbances of 1811-12, any more than the naval mutinies of 1797 or the Black Lamp agitation of 1801-2 were solely and simply the product of economic distress and sought only the amelioration of material conditions'.

- loyalism and conservatism

Royle's factors, *Revolutionary Britannia?*:

- nature of the popular movement
- geography and the problem of London
- loyalism and the silent majority
- cohesion of social welfare
- religion
- strength of the state
- authority of the law and forces of order

Historians' debates over the language of radicalism

- Postmodernism and the 'linguistic turn'
- The 'constitutionalist idiom'

Epstein, 'Constitutionalist Idiom', 568 – ...can or should such political ideologies be considered "class" ideologies? Or perhaps more subtly, was the constitutionalism of English working-class radicals of the early nineteenth century less of a class ideology because it sought to appropriate and radically restructure elements of a hegemonic political system of ideas and beliefs?

- class

Historians' debates over the significance of the Reform Act

- unreformed state
- challenging the significance of 1832
- rethinking 1832

Further reading:**The 'black lamp' and revolution debates:**

Dinwiddy, J. R., 'The Black Lamp in Yorkshire, 1801-1802', *Past and Present*, 64 (1974)

Elliott, M., 'The Despard Conspiracy reconsidered,' *Past and Present*, 75 (1977)

Knox, T. R. , 'Thomas Spence: the Triumph of Jubilee', *Past and Present*, 76 (1977)

Wells, R., *Insurrection: the British Experience, 1795-1803* (1983)

McCalman, I., *Radical Underworld: prophets, revolutionaries, and pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge, 1988)

Royle, Edward, *Revolutionary Britannia?: reflections on the threat of revolution in Britain* (2000)

Loyalism and conservatism:

Philp, M., 'Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3,' *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), 42-69.

O'Gorman, Frank, 'The Paine Burnings of 1792-1793,' *Past & Present*, 193 (2006), 111-56.

Colley, Linda, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820,' *Past & Present*, 102 (1984)

Sack, J.J., *From Jacobite to Conservative, Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c.1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993)

Postmodernism:

Stafford, W., 'Shall We Take the Linguistic Turn? British Radicalism in the Era of the French Revolution,' *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 583-594

Vernon, James (ed.), *Re-reading the constitution: new narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1996)

Epstein, J., 'The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth Century England,' *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1990), 553-74.

Epstein, J., *Radical Expression, Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England* (Oxford, 1994)

Cultural turn:

Poole, Robert, "'By the Law or the Sword": Peterloo Revisited', *History*, 91:302 (2006), 254-76

Poole, Robert, 'The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England', *Past & Present*, 192 (2006), 109-53

Rogers, Nicholas, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (1998)

Unreformed and reformed state:

Namier, Lewis, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929)

O'Gorman, Frank, 'The unreformed electorate of Hanoverian England: the mid eighteenth century to the Reform Act of 1832', *Social History [London]*, 11:1 (1986), 33-52.

Phillips, John A., 'Participatory politics in Hanoverian England', *Social History [London]*, 16:2 (1991), 223-30