

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

CHARLES BRADLAUGH AND THE WORLD OF POPULAR RADICALISM,
1833-1891

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by

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.&P.	Accounts and Papers
B.S.U.	British Secular Union
E.C.R.L.	Executive Committee of the Reform League
G.C.R.L.	General Council of the Reform League
I.D.A.	International Democratic Association
I.W.M.A.	International Workingmen's Association
L.&L.L.	Land and Labour League
L.L.R.L.	Land Law Reform League
L.T.R.A.	Land Tenure Reform Association
N.A.	<u>Northampton Albion</u>
N.G.	<u>Northamptonshire Guardian</u>
N.H.	<u>Northampton Herald</u>
N.L.A.	New Liberal Association
N.L.R.U.	Northampton Liberal and Radical Union
N.M.	<u>Northampton Mercury</u>
N.R.	<u>National Reformer</u>
N.R.A.	Northampton Radical Association
N.R.L.	Northampton (branch of the) Reform League
N.S.S.	National Secular Society
O.L.A.	Old Liberal Association
P.P.	Parliamentary Papers
R.L.	Reform League
S.C.	<u>Secular Chronicle</u>
S.R.	<u>Secular Review</u>
S.R.&S.	<u>Secular Review & Secularist</u>

U.L.A. United Liberal Association

U.P.L. Unemployed Poor League

W.R.S.U. West Riding Secular Union

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Resistance to Birth Control
propaganda in late Victorian
Britain', in Population Studies,
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INTRODUCTION:

Charles Bradlaugh, (1833-1891), famous in his own time and remembered since as the ablest popular atheist propagandist of the Victorian Age, notorious as an extreme radical, republican and birth-controller whose exclusion from the House of Commons from 1880 to 1885 constituted one of the more dramatic episodes of nineteenth century constitutional history, has been the subject of two substantial studies. To produce what aspires to be yet another requires some justification. The solid biographies by his daughter, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, in collaboration with his disciple, John Mackinnon Robertson¹, published in 1895, and by David Tribe, published in 1971², provide a detailed knowledge of the man's personal life and a considerable portrait of his public one. Added to these are several less extensive, but not less useful studies, among which Robertson's Charles Bradlaugh (1920)³, the centenary collection of essays entitled Champion of Liberty (1933)⁴ and W.L. Arnstein's The Bradlaugh Case (1965)⁵ are especially valuable. Inevitably, however, in treating of one who was involved in so many causes and controversies, there is much, especially of a critical nature, that is left unsaid. To some extent, their concentration on the man has been to the neglect

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1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, Charles Bradlaugh: A Record of His Life and Work, with an account of his Parliamentary Struggle, Politics and Teachings by John M. Robertson, (2 vols London, 1895).
 2. D. Tribe, President Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., (London, 1971).
 3. J.M. Robertson, Charles Bradlaugh, (London, 1920).
 4. J.P. Gilmour, ed., Champion of Liberty: Charles Bradlaugh, (London, 1933).
 5. W.L. Arnstein, The Bradlaugh Case. A Study in Late Victorian Opinion and Politics, (Oxford, 1965).

of the wider institutional and ideological context of which he was a part. By adopting a thematic rather than a strictly chronological approach the present study aims to remedy this neglect.

As was appropriate for the leading militant atheist of his time, Bradlaugh was the founder and long-serving President of the National Secular Society. He was, in this, an inspiring example to many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of working class atheists throughout the United Kingdom. He was responsible for the establishment, maintenance or revival of numerous local societies of secularists. More than any other person, he was able to unite into an effective organisation a body of people who, naturally individualist and militant themselves, were not given to deference or the ready acceptance of authority, least of all from fellow-secularists. To have succeeded in uniting such people is testimony to the considerable ability and charisma of the man. Nevertheless, the process was not as easy nor the organisation as united as one might believe from the standard biographies.

That there was more to organised atheism and secularism in nineteenth century Britain than the ability of Bradlaugh to rally, unite and command, is clear enough from the literature of the subject in general.

British Secularism in the nineteenth century has not been a neglected area of study. On Secularism as an organised move-

ment there have been at least five doctoral dissertations¹ and four published works². Nor has there been any scarcity of printed works on the subjects of Freethought and Freethinkers³, while the litany of articles and books dealing incidentally with these themes in general should be sufficient to satisfy all but the most ardent inquirer⁴. As to dissertations, Royle's work is an excellent account of the movement up to 1861, and while Budd takes the story from that point to 1966 in a wide-ranging survey, her work omits detailed attention to the regional development of the movement. Krantz, while professing to deal with British Secularism as a 'movement' does little to estimate its real strength. The same observation is applicable

1. E. Royle, 'George Jacob Holyoake and the Secularist Movement in Britain, 1841-1861' (Cambridge Ph.D., 1968); S. Budd, 'The British Humanist Movement, 1860-1966' (Oxford D.Phil., 1968); R. Billington, 'Leicester Secular Society, 1852-1920: a study in Radicalism and Respectability' (Leicester Ph.D., 1968); C.K. Krantz, 'The British Secularist Movement: A Study in Militant Dissent' (Rochester Ph.D., 1964); W.D. Nelson, 'British Rational Secularism: Unbelief from Bradlaugh to the Mid-Twentieth Century' (Washington Ph.D., 1964).

2. J.E. Mc Gee, A History of the British Secular Movement (Kansas, 1948); E. Royle, Radical Politics, 1790-1900 (London, 1971); E. Royle, Victorian Infidels, The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866 (Manchester, 1974); S. Budd, Varieties of Unbelief, Atheists and Agnostics in English Society, 1850-1960 (London, 1977).

3. J.B. Bury, A History of Freedom of Thought (London, 1913); J.M. Robertson, A Short History of Freethought, ancient and modern (London, 1899); J.M. Robertson, A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1929); A.W. Benn, The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century (2 vols. London, 1906); A.O.J. Cockshut, The Unbelievers: English Agnostic Thought, 1840-1890 (London, 1964); W.S. Smith, The London Heretics, 1870-1914 (London, 1967).

4. From among the many: P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, The Struggle for London, 1870-1914 (London, 1967); K.S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England (London, 1963); S. Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement (London, 1967); L.E. Elliott-Binns, Religion in the Victorian Era (1st ed., London, 1936); J. Eros, 'The rise of Organised Freethought in Mid-Victorian England', in Sociological Review, ii, July 1964, pp. 98-120; F.B. Smith, 'The Atheist Mission, 1840-1900', in R. Robson, ed., Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain, Essays in honour of George Kitson Clark (London, 1967); S. Budd, 'The Loss of Faith: Reasons for Unbelief among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950', in Past & Present, no 36, April 1967, pp. 106-125.

to the work of Nelson, who, making no attempt to assess the strength of the National Secular Society, nevertheless reached the odd conclusion that at some unspecified date, this body was surpassed by the rival British Secular Union, the latter in reality a short-lived and numerically unimpressive body.

Not to refer in detail to the sense of triumph which marks the estimates given by Freethinkers themselves, one observes that for a sect invariably composed of Radicals, they seldom provide anything other than a Whig interpretation of their own history¹. If one is thus sceptical of sceptics, what is to be said when, even in so competent a work as Thompson's, one finds the membership of the National Secular Society, in the middle of the 1880s, quadrupled².

Even with a multiplicity of works, questions remain to be answered. How many active, organised groups of secularists there were between 1850 and 1890, the localities and regions in which they were active, the time and causes when they went into decline, and the history of the National Secular Society as an organisation, from foundation in 1866 until Bradlaugh's death in 1891, are all questions which the first two chapters of this work try to explore. How far Bradlaugh himself was responsible for the foundation, failure or success of local and national organisations is dealt with in detail. Although the

1. L.H. Holdreth, The Spirit of Inquiry (London, 1857), cited in C.K. Krantz, op.cit., p.76, asserted that there were 10,000 'declared' Freethinkers in Britain in 1857. In January 1879 Charles Watts claimed that there were over 1,000 in the N.S.S.; yet, according to Bradlaugh, by 1875 there were hardly 300 in it. National Reformer, 6 Nov 1870, 27 May 1888. See also G.H. Taylor, A Chronology of British Secularism (London, 1957).

2. P. Thompson, op.cit., p.32, note 5.

National Secular Society was established in 1866 it has not been generally recognised that it was largely a nominal body until 1874; and although organised secularism was strong in London by the 1880s, it needs to be stressed that provincial secularism, especially in Lancashire and Yorkshire, was much stronger for three decades before this, than it was in the metropolis. When organised secularism began to decline, that decline could be seen coming first in the provinces when the movement was still at its ephemeral height in London. In organising secularists Bradlaugh provided himself with an initial base from which to launch a successful public career; his commitment to that career, inevitably distracting his attention from organised secularism, ultimately led to the erosion of that base.

The atheist mission was the original inspiration and most enduring cause in Bradlaugh's life. It was, however, but one among many. If his early life gave him reason to reject revealed religion that rejection in turn caused the young man to experience poverty directly, at a formative stage of his life. He was but fifteen years old when obliged to depart from his father's house, having been denounced by his local vicar as an atheist when his doubts about the truth of Scripture could not be dispelled. Unable to earn a living, debts forced him to join the army in 1850. From his discharge in 1853 until his death in 1891 he was seldom free from the anxiety of personal debt and was always aware of the problems of poverty in general. Consciousness of the extensiveness and degrading effects of

poverty led him to look for solutions in the study of political economy, in particular that of John Stuart Mill and Malthus, as mediated by the writings of Dr George Drysdale. It was Drysdale who led him to neomalthusianism and the advocacy of birth control as a solution to poverty¹. Convinced of the correctness of birth-control as a solution, Bradlaugh spent fifteen years in an apparently fruitless attempt to convert fellow-secularists and working class radicals to his view. The decision to court prosecution for publishing Charles Knowlton's Fruits of Philosophy, and the resulting legal conflicts and trials from 1877 to 1879 through which he hoped to establish the legality of advocating birth-control and to gain widespread publicity for the cause, was taken at the risk of destroying the atheist organisation he had built up and of frustrating his personal political ambitions as well. The opposition of fellow-secularists within the National Secular Society to his neomalthusianism has not been stressed in earlier studies and Chapter Three of this one attempts to remedy the omission. Following the famous Fruits of Philosophy trial of 1877 Bradlaugh, with his colleague Annie Besant, became a founding member of the Malthusian League. The extent of his commitment to the work of the League has not been critically assessed before. Earlier studies fail to bring out the fact that his refusal to accept the more doctrinaire attitude of the League's President, Charles Drysdale, and his failure to promote formally the League's objectives when at last he was in Parliament, from 1886, led to a feeling of dis-

1. See below Chapter Three, pp. 169-171.

appointment on the part of the League leadership. For all that, his promotion of neomalthusianism from 1860 not only prejudiced him in the eyes of some fellow-secularists, but also had important implications for his influence over, and connexions with radical working class politicians, from the late 1860s. Of the latter, some of the more advanced, even if they accepted the sincerity of his intentions, rejected the orthodox economic theory on which his case for birth-control rested. The implications of this are to be seen in the history of the republican movement and his part in it.

By the late 1860s he had already acquired a reputation for extreme radicalism, a reputation earned partly by his involvement in agitation on the Land Question, but mainly through his activity in the Reform League. Despite the great significance of the Land Question in the history of nineteenth century radicalism, no detailed, systematic study of Bradlaugh's opinions and activity in regard to this issue has previously been undertaken. Chapter Four of the present study is devoted to this theme. John M. Robertson, who wrote the most concise account of Bradlaugh's social, economic and political views¹, had little of a critical nature to say on this question. Such summary as Robertson did provide has not been questioned, analysed or developed by any of the later students of Bradlaugh, not excluding Tribe. The absence of a detailed study here is of considerable significance: the particular attitude Bradlaugh came to adopt in regard to the Land Question at any one time is

1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, ii.165-202.

critical for any attempt to locate Bradlaugh's position in the world of popular radicalism. That he was actually an advocate of land nationalisation in 1869-1870 has escaped the attention of, or has been ignored by all previous writers: yet, it was critical in giving him entree to the Land & Labour League of which, for a period, he was a leading member¹. Ultimately, he abandoned adherence to this doctrine and reverted to a stance which favoured an ill-defined combination of peasant proprietorship, free trade in land and compulsory cultivation. His position on the issue was unstable and badly worked out. In few, if any, other areas did he ever leave himself open to charges of inadequacy or inconsistency, directed against him from socialists and conservatives alike, so easily or so justly. It is, in short, one of the areas where he was fated to appear at his least assured and successful.

If Bradlaugh's understanding of and contribution to reform of the Land Question was not one of the more notable chapters of his public life, the same cannot be said of his connexion with Northampton. The story of his long constitutional struggle to be allowed, as an atheist, to take his seat after being elected for the borough in 1880, has already been told in detail by Arnstein and is not repeated in this study. There are, nevertheless, other interesting aspects of Bradlaugh's political association with Northampton which merit notice, and Chapter Five is directed to this. If the loyalty of Bradlaugh's political supporters in the town ultimately secured

1. See below Chapter Four, pp. 260-262.

for him the realisation of his greatest personal ambition, it was also true that he made a profound contribution to Northampton's local politics. The borough had a reputation as the most radical town in England, a reputation that has never been scrutinised, much less justified, for the nineteenth century. It is contended in Chapter Five that until Bradlaugh came to Northampton as a parliamentary candidate in 1868, the Radicals there were few and disorganised, and that progressive politics were dominated by Whig-Liberals. Bradlaugh's coming changed this and changed it decisively so that, not only in terms of parliamentary, but also in terms of municipal political life, Radicalism became organised and triumphant. In understanding Bradlaugh's role, it has to be stressed that the borough's parliamentary politics became inextricably bound up with its municipal politics: only a detailed exposition of the frequent sectional quarrels, shifting alliances and eventual reconciliation of progressive factions can clearly trace the connexion and establish the extent of the impact Bradlaugh made there.

By the time he first came to address Northampton electors, Bradlaugh had a national reputation as a Radical, acquired largely through his part in the Reform League agitation. Bradlaugh's part in the League and in the politics of radical reform in the 1860s has been dealt with in some detail in the biographies by Bradlaugh Bonner and Tribe¹, and in an incidental

1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.220-237; D. Tribe, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-97.

manner in general histories of the period and in biographies of radical associates¹. In no case has full justice been done to the nature, extent, and limitations of his contribution to the League and the reform politics of the decade.

The detailed treatment by Bradlaugh Bonner and by Tribe concentrates on the man's public role as organiser and speaker in the League's agitation. In the earlier work there is no study, and in the later one an inadequate study of his part in the internal politics of that organisation. The treatment in the more general works is inevitably inadequate: their passing references and occasional pauses to dwell on his role, provide neither continuity nor context. In them he appears as a man of extremism, militancy and even truculence. From both kinds of treatment one emerges with an incomplete and un-systematised understanding of his place in the Reform League and in the radical politics of the decade. Given Bradlaugh's great energy and extraordinary ability as a platform orator, the role he played in the League's agitation was always important; but, more than that, at times his contribution to decisions taken in the inner councils of the League was critical. Writing in 1959, H.J. Hanham was the first historian to show adequate appreciation of this, as is clear from the fact that he attributed to Bradlaugh major responsibility for the quarrel

1. H.J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management: politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone (London, 1959); R. Harrison, Before the Socialists, studies in labour and politics, 1861 to 1881 (London, 1965); F.B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill (Cambridge, 1966); F.M. Leventhal, Respectable Radical, George Howell and Victorian working class politics (London, 1971).

which 'killed off the League'¹. Although Hanham was correct in seeing Bradlaugh as having critical importance in the League's inner politics, he was wrong in his attribution of blame and was less than just to Bradlaugh as a result. The matter was partly corrected in the 1960s through the researches of R. Harrison and F.M. Leventhal, though their treatment of Bradlaugh was naturally incidental². Consequently, there is still much, both as to fact and interpretation, about Bradlaugh's part in the League, that needs to be set down. Chapter Six purports to be the first full study of this particular theme, offering some new information and attempting a more balanced interpretation and a fuller assessment than has yet been made. While Bradlaugh's involvement in the League contributed greatly to his stature as a popular Radical, its dissolution in the spring of 1869 left him without an effective vehicle for that radicalism. Almost immediately he proposed the formation of a People's League, as a replacement, but the proposal fell on deaf ears. Later in that year, finding himself unable to join the infant Labour Representation League because it was not radical enough or its principles not defined clearly enough, he entered the Land & Labour League, but eventually found his position uncomfortable once he had abandoned land nationalisation. From this quandary of political isolation, of lacking an effective vehicle for his views and an extensive and firm base of support, he was to be rescued in the early 1870s by the development of the English Republican Movement. In any attempt to assess the

1. H.J. Hanham, *op.cit.*, p.342.

2. R. Harrison, *op.cit.*, pp. 151, 179, 182; F.M. Leventhal, *op.cit.*, pp. 89, 106.

quality of Bradlaugh's radicalism, his position in this movement is of central importance.

The English republican movement of the late 1860s and early 1870s has received meagre notice in standard historical accounts of the Victorian period¹. If viewed as nothing more than a notorious episode of the time, it deserved, perhaps, no better; but, if considered as a persistent and significant element of the radical tradition dating from the 1790s and one which came to climax and then anti-climax in the 1870s, then republicanism merited more than mere passing attention. It has never been the subject of a single, substantial historical work: and given that the phenomenon is so inextricably bound up with other elements of nineteenth century radicalism, perhaps it never will. Nevertheless, it has been accorded something more than passing reference through the work of Gossman², Hardie³ and Harrison⁴.

1. A half page is devoted to it in L.C.B. Seaman, Victorian England: aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837-1901, London, 1973, p.444; a paragraph on the Queen's unpopularity in R.C.K. Ensor, England, 1870-1914, 1st ed., London, 1936, reprinted 1960, p.26; two lines in R.K. Webb, Modern England, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present, 1st ed., London, 1969, 2nd ed., 1971, p.343; and the merest hint in G.M. Young, Victorian England, portrait of an age, 1st ed., London, 1936, 5th ed., 1949, p.113. There is no mention of the subject at all in, inter alios, G.M. Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century and After, 1st ed., London, 1922, 2nd ed., reprint 1962; E. Halevy, History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, VOL 4, Victorian Years, 1841-1895, part ii by R.B. Mc Callum, 1st ed., London, 1951, reprint 1961; A. Wood, Nineteenth Century Britain, 1815-1914, London, 1960; G. Best, Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875, London, 1971.

2. N.J. Gossman, 'Republicanism in nineteenth century England', in International Review of Social History, vol 7, 1962, pp. 47-60.

3. F. Hardie, The political influence of Queen Victoria, 1861-1901, 1st ed., London, 1938, reprint 1963.

4. R. Harrison, Before the Socialists, studies in labour and politics, 1861 to 1881, London, 1965.

Gossman's is the most wide-ranging treatment of the theme to date and yet is the most unsatisfactory. While certainly correct when he pointed out that the cost of the monarchy, the issue of 'royal extravagance', was a valid issue but not a dynamic one¹, in other respects his work is unsatisfactory. He was mistaken in implying that George Julian Harney always favoured a violent means to achieving the Republic². Equally, it is difficult to understand how Gossman could have described Bentham as 'a champion of the artisan classes' along with Harney and George Odger³ - presumably a confusion of Bentham with Bradlaugh. Among other errors are his statements that Odger called the Sheffield Republican Conference of December 1872 which led to the foundation of the National Republican Brotherhood, and that Odger was present at the Birmingham Republican Conference of May 1873 which led to the foundation of the National Republican League⁴ - the one a serious mistake in that the kind of republicanism for which the National Republican Brotherhood stood was not the kind that Odger envisaged, the other a serious mistake in view of the fact that Odger's failure to attend was one of the more surprising features of that event. Finally, Gossman saw the English Republican Movement of the time as beginning with C.C. Cattell's initiative in Birmingham in January 1871⁵: he altogether misses the significance of the Unemployed Poor League in the revival of republicanism in London as early as 1868-9.

1. Gossman, loc.cit., p.58.

2. *ibid.*, p.50; for evidence to the contrary see below p.438.

3. *ibid.*, p.55.

4. *ibid.*, p.54.

5. *ibid.*, p.50.

The work of Hardie, though produced originally some twenty four years before Gossman's, is marred by fewer blunders. Nevertheless, he too manages to find Odger present at the Birmingham Conference¹. Although more than a little is known about Odger and his abilities, the evidence to date does not suggest that he possessed the gift of bi-location. Hardie notes furthermore that the other notorious republican, Bradlaugh, in his Impeachment of the House of Brunswick, spared Victoria from criticism²: the fact is that Bradlaugh, in that work, described Victoria's influence in politics as 'most mischievous', and he went on to condemn her niggardly contribution to famine relief in India³. Hardie's opinion that the illness of the Prince of Wales in November 1871 'proved in itself enough to prick the bubble of Republicanism'⁴ is not entirely borne out by the facts. As will be seen, the Republican Movement had almost two years of growth after that date⁵. This questionable interpretation arises mainly from the perspective in which Hardie chose to view the subject - almost exclusively in the light of parliamentary politics. One of the principal features of Chapter Seven of this present study is to insist rather that the Republican Movement was a movement from 'below', a movement of popular, rather than parliamentary radicalism. If viewed in this perspective one cannot so readily agree with Hardie's verdict that the English Republican Movement 'was in no way

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1. Hardie, op.cit., p.215.
 2. ibid., pp. 214-5.
 3. See below pp.464-465.
 4. Hardie, op.cit., p.214.
 5. See below, pp.469-460, 475-483.

identified with socialism'¹. One of the outstanding aspects of the phenomenon, it is argued in Chapter Seven, is that it began in 1868-9 as a socio-economic and not as a 'political' movement. It was initiated by those who set up the Unemployed Poor League and the International Democratic Association: some of them had associations with former Chartists, were members of the First International and the Land & Labour League, and who preached, in their own words, 'the social republic', the republic of labour'. It was only two or three years after this that democratic republicans like Bradlaugh, Foote and Cattell pressed to the fore, and a struggle between them and the social republicans like G.E. Harris, John Johnson, H.J. Canham, and Thomas Smith of Nottingham, ensued. That division and struggle was one of the critical factors in the failure of republicanism as a popular radical movement. In that struggle, as Collins and Abramsky were the first to point out², Bradlaugh was victor. They might have added, but did not, that it was a pyrrhic victory he achieved.

Something of the significance of this point comes through the work of Harrison, though his statement that 'the story of proletarian republicanism begins in the autumn of 1869 with the foundation of the Land and Labour League'³, is not strictly correct. The story begins at least a year earlier with the Unemployed Poor League, and in 1869 itself the significant

1. Hardie, op.cit., p.220.

2. H. Collins & C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International, (London, 1965) pp. 276-8.

3. R. Harrison, op.cit., p.215.

republican organisation was not the Land and Labour League, but the International Democratic Association.

Finally, one comes to Bradlaugh himself and his role in the republican movement as seen by his major biographers, Bradlaugh Bonner and Tribe. Here there is little to fault in what they have said. It is the impression created by what they have left unsaid that one wishes to question. Both provide great insight into the difficulties of Bradlaugh's personal life in the years 1868-1874, but they convey no idea of the political quandary in which he found himself. They convey an impression that his political path was clear: the only thing clear is his intense ambition to enter parliament. His precise relationship with other popular radicals and his exact position in relation to contemporary radical movements were far from clear. Once the Reform League was dissolved he lacked an adequate organised base for support. The implications and consequences of this for Bradlaugh and for the cause of the English Republic are more complex than his biographers indicate. It is the purpose of Chapter Seven to explore this complexity and to argue that his involvement in republicanism provides the first indication of his fundamental moderation, the first clear sign of the limits of his radicalism.

Just how radical Bradlaugh was, to what extent his radicalism manifested growth and development, to what extent it was limited, emerges clearly from a study of his opinions and activity in connection with Ireland and the Empire. The importance of the Irish question in the history of popular radicalism in nineteenth

century Britain has never been explored in a systematic, comprehensive manner. While it is well known that individual Irishmen made significant personal contributions to the development of radical ideas and movements - John Doherty, James Bronterre O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor in the first half of the century, George Bernard Shaw and Michael Davitt in the second half, to name but a few - they did so as heirs of an English or European radical tradition, not as exponents of Irish nationalism. Similarly, while there were individual English radicals who developed a deep sympathy and concern for Ireland, such as John Cartwright, William Cobbett and Thomas Wakley in the earlier half of the century, or Ernest Jones, John Sketchley, Joseph Cowen and Henry Labouchere in the latter half, it cannot be maintained that they derived their radicalism from concern for Ireland. It was, rather, the reverse. Furthermore, if one of the recurring themes of popular radicalism in the history of Anglo-Irish relations in the last century was the ideal of 'a union of the democracies' for the achievement of common political aims, the historically important fact concerning that theme is that it remained, for the most part, an unrealised ideal. It has been argued by Strauss¹ that Irish nationalism made a vital contribution to the shaping of English radicalism and democracy, but it is an argument that lacks adequate proof. Irish nationalism and British radicalism developed simultaneously and in parallel, but the evidence of

1. E. Strauss, Irish nationalism and British democracy, (London, 1951).

vital influence is missing¹. This does not mean that the Irish question is, therefore, unimportant in the history of British radicalism: its real importance lies, as recently demonstrated for the period 1874-1895², in the fact that the Irish question defined the 'dimensions' of British radicalism; it established the limits beyond which radicals were not prepared to go in preaching and promoting the doctrines of liberty and the right to self-determination. Just how far they were prepared to go on this question varied from one radical to another: that variation is of considerable importance in assessing the radicalism of Charles Bradlaugh.

Bradlaugh's part in the history of Anglo-Irish relations forms one of the most courageous chapters of his life in radical politics. That chapter has been studied in some detail by his daughter and her collaborator, John M. Robertson³ and by Sinnott⁴, who, between them, have brought out his devotion to the cause of justice for Ireland. It was a devotion all the more remarkable for the fact that it never wavered despite the hostility towards him of a majority of Irish nationalists in the early 1880s, a hostility that played a critical part in his exclusion from his seat in the Commons. Arnstein⁵ has unravelled the complexities of the relationship between Bradlaugh and the Irish nationalist M.P.s and has offered a convincing explanation

1. P. O'Farrell, Ireland's English Question, Anglo-Irish relations, 1534-1970 (London, 1971); T.W. Heyck, The dimensions of British radicalism, the case of Ireland, 1874-1895 (London, 1974).

2. Heyck, *op.cit.*, passim.

3. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.252-262.

4. N.H. Sinnott, 'Charles Bradlaugh and Ireland', in Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, vol lxxvii, No 225, Jan-June 1972, pp. 1-24.

5. W. Arnstein, *op.cit.*, pp. 201-225.

for their hostility to him. Nevertheless, the picture which emerges from previous accounts of Bradlaugh on the Irish question is a static and partial one. It is static in the sense that previous accounts show no sense of development in Bradlaugh's approach to the Irish question: it is as if the opinions he held in 1871, or 1881, or 1891 were the opinions he had always held. Robertson, for example, speaks of Bradlaugh as 'all along' a Home Ruler¹. The reality is otherwise, and it is possible to discover and trace a process of growth in his understanding of the nature of the Irish problem and in the remedies which he considered appropriate at different times. That process of growth and change in him was but part of a wider process that applied to radicals in general as they were confronted by the Irish question in the period 1860-1890. The picture given by previous accounts is also partial in that it is isolated: if Bradlaugh was a radical, how radical? Was he in advance of all other radicals on this question, from the beginning to the end of his life? A major reason for the importance of the Irish question is that it was the oldest of British colonial questions. Just how advanced any radical was prepared to be on the Irish question depended on the way in which he viewed British interests and the extent to which the interests of Britain, in his view, were bound up with empire. It is the contention of Chapter Eight that the Irish question not only shows a growth in Bradlaugh's understanding, but also clearly establishes the limits of his growth and radicalism;

1. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.192.

that, although anti-imperialist as far as further annexations after 1877 were concerned, there was a distinct imperial element in Bradlaugh's political outlook seen first and most clearly in the case of Ireland, but to be seen also in his attitude to India; that, although regarded by his contemporaries from the mid-1860s as an exponent of the most extreme radicalism, his attitude to Ireland and India reveal him to have been relatively a moderate. If his role in the republican movement, as examined in the previous chapter, first indicated this, the Irish question demonstrates it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Bradlaugh's considerable influence in the world of working class radicalism was derived largely from his great sympathy for the poor, his courage and sacrifice in championing the cause of democracy, and his sincere efforts to better the lot and promote the interests of labour. In the 1880s that influence was challenged seriously for the first time. The challenge came primarily from the socialists. Their growing influence undermined the attractive power of his National Secular Society, seriously questioned the premises on which he based the economic argument for birth control, and their insistence on a collectivist solution to social and economic problems ran counter to his deepest beliefs and prejudices. He himself emerged as one of the most famous opponents of socialism in the age. In the process he acquired a reputation as an 'extreme individualist', a reputation which Chapter Nine of this study contends is inaccurate and seeks to modify.

Individualist he certainly was, doctrinaire or extreme he was not. However, it was not merely the opposition of socialists,

nor his attacks on them, which posed the threat to his popular influence. Once in parliament he became concerned with three major areas affecting the interests of Labour: truck legislation, the issue of employers' liability and the question of an eight hour working day. His contribution to debate and legislation on these has never been the subject of detailed analysis and Chapter Nine is in part devoted to redressing this. His contribution on these issues, and especially on that of employers' liability, was to embroil him with the trade union leadership and its parliamentary representatives who misunderstood and misrepresented his intentions and efforts. The 1880s certainly represented a turning point in the career of Bradlaugh as popular radical: continuing to adhere to an outdated political economy, he was to be caught in a cross fire between hard-headed Lib-Lab pragmatists on one side and visionary socialists on the other. He never altered the fundamental principles underlying his view of society, but in response to the pressure of socialist argument on the one hand, and the altered economic fortunes of his country on the other, there came a discernible change of emphasis in his pronouncements. Defending the rights of Labour and condemning the wrongs of Capital in the 1860s and 1870s, he came in the 1880s, while still maintaining the rights of Labour, to stress also the rights and the problems of Capital. Unwittingly, through his opposition to socialism and through his pious regard for the procedural forms of parliament, the former iconoclast found himself increasingly accepted by a formerly hostile establishment. Inevitably, as far as Labour went, he became caught in the contradictions of his own philosophy and fell a victim to his own good intentions.

For all that, Bradlaugh left behind him not only the memory of an enthralling oratory, a tireless energy and a matchless courage, but also a perceptible influence on the constitution, religion and values of his country. It is hoped that to examine the nature and stress the limits of that influence, as this study tries to do, will help towards establishing Bradlaugh's true place in the world of popular radicalism of nineteenth century Britain.

CHAPTER ONE : The organisation of atheists and the emergence
of a leader, 1850-1874

i. The Background:

Freethought had its notable exponents long before the French Revolution, but it was only in the nineteenth century that it became an ideology and a popular movement, with Paine, Bentham and J.S. Mill, among others, as its philosophers and Carlile and Taylor as its most notable propagandists. Though Carlile and Taylor attracted individual disciples¹, freethought might never have become the movement it did but for Robert Owen, 'a vehement anti-clerical and freethinker in all things'². Centred in Manchester, Owenism was to be strongest in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire, a fact of great significance in the future history of secularism for close on forty years. By the late 1830's the Owenite movement was becoming more aggressive, and believing Christianity to be a constant barrier to its own progress, it joined issue with it: one of the first public debates between Owenites and Christians took place at Manchester in 1837³. Though Owen himself warned his followers to avoid such debate as it was a diversion from the implementation of his schemes, some exponents of his doctrines ignored him⁴.

1. Robert Cooper was a disciple of Carlile's while a notable convert of Taylor was Miles Mc Sweeney; for Cooper and Mc Sweeney, see Appendix 1, Biographical Notes, pp.631,644.

2. W.D. Nelson, 'British Rational Secularism: Unbelief from Bradlaugh to the mid-Twentieth Century' (University of Washington, Ph.D., 1963), p.72.

3. E. Royle, Victorian Infidels, The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866, (Manchester, 1974) p.52.

4. *ibid.*, p.67.

Owenism continued to spread: at its Birmingham Congress of 1839, the Rational Society was established, and by 1841 Halls of Science had been founded at Manchester, Liverpool, Bradford, Huddersfield, Coventry, Birmingham, Halifax, Sheffield, Glasgow, and London¹. Both its continued expansion and the tactical disagreement of some of its leaders provided the basis and background for organised secularism - the first by providing something of a ready-made organisation at local level, and the second by throwing up militants who fostered the ideology of freethought at popular level through propaganda. Chief among those who disagreed with Owen's policy of avoiding encounters with Christians was Charles Southwell who brought out his atheistical The Oracle of Reason in November 1841². Its success in broadcasting blasphemy landed Southwell in jail, and brought to his rescue George Jacob Holyoake, the future founder of secularism³.

Holyoake had met Owen in 1837, and thereupon took up the view that religion was the obstacle to social progress as 'the cardinal principle of his life'⁴. Taking over the editorship of The Oracle of Reason while Southwell was in jail, led Holyoake to atheism and to his career of literary propagandist, and at the same time, his remaining within the ranks of Owenism kept him in contact with the elements of a future organisation. By late 1843 he was editing his own journal, The Movement, and began to plan a better future

1. *ibid.*, pp. 63-68.

2. For Southwell, see Appendix 1, pp. 651.

3. Royle, Victorian Infidels, p.76.

4. Nelson, *op.cit.*, pp.81-2.

for the Freethought movement¹.

By 1846 when Owenite Socialism was in decline, Holyoake tried to organise freethinkers into a single body, The Society for the Promulgation of Naturalism, with a new paper, The Reasoner, as its organ. The running of the latter kept Holyoake in London and the propagation of freethought in the former centres of Owenism was taken up by Southwell in August 1849 when he launched his Lancashire Beacon, at Manchester². This journal failed early in 1850 and Holyoake's own paper, requiring a minimum circulation of three thousand per issue was falling below a third of that number throughout 1849. In the same period his Society underwent decline³. As Owenism waned in the mid-forties, it was eclipsed by Chartism as the attracting force for radical endeavour, and among those attracted were former, contemporary and future freethinkers: Holyoake, the Owenite, found himself on the Chartist Convention of 1848; Thomas Cooper, an atheist since 1843 and who was to bring to his future advocacy of secularism all the skill and zeal of his Methodist preaching years, joined Mazzini's 'The People's International League' in the summer of 1847, finding himself there in the company of fellow-freethinkers James Watson and Henry Hetherington, and radicals like Linton, Stansfeld and P.A. Taylor; two years later he was contributing to the political ferment with his own paper, The Plain Speaker⁴.

1. Royle, op.cit., p.87.

2. *ibid.*, p.97.

3. *ibid.*

4. T. Cooper, The Life of Thomas Cooper: written by himself. (London, 1872), pp. 261-2, 299-300, 316.

Another who had renounced Christianity in 1848 was Joseph Barker; when not absent in America, he was one of the most untiring Freethought lecturers of the Midlands. In the space of a few days in 1848 he became a Chartist candidate for Bolton, was charged with sedition and conspiracy, was overwhelmingly elected to Leeds Town Council, and released from prison when the Attorney-General entered a nolle prosequi. Barker, too, contributed to the political excitement of the time with his own journal, The People¹. Thus, while some of the leading Freethought lecturers were caught up in the political crisis, there was less likelihood of their followers giving as much attention to Biblical contradictions and difficulties of Christian dogma, and only when the crisis had passed did theology resume the role of prime target.

In 1850, therefore, Freethought was represented throughout the country by individuals and local societies. Central organisation was non-existent. Its leading exponents were invariably political radicals, inheritors of the tradition of Paine, Carlile and Taylor, who frequently found their living in printing, publishing and bookselling. In London, Freethought found its expression in this form in a small circle around the widow of Richard Carlile who lived in Warner Place; and here evolved the Victoria Park Mission, as described by the Freethought bookseller, J.P. Adams:

the members being provided with movable pulpits, station themselves at the various entrances to the Park on Sundays, and shout incessant anathemas against

1. J. Barker, The Life of Joseph Barker, written by himself, (London, 1880), pp. 286-292, 305-8.

the pleasure-seekers passing to and fro. Our headquarters are at Temperance Hall, Warner Place, Hackney Road, an establishment already causing much uneasiness to the clerical gentlemen who supply orthodoxy to the neighbourhood¹.

Among provincial towns in which Freethought found similar expression was Leicester, where William Holyoake, the local radical book-seller, and Jonathan West, a local newsagent, were active².

Where Freethought found expression in local societies, this was due to either the remnants of Owenite organisation, to the efforts of Holyoake to form his Society of Theological Utilitarians, or to a combination of both. In Northampton it was due to the combination of the two: the first president of its secular society was Joseph Gurney, who had been the Owenite organiser for the area in 1841-2; this position was then taken up in 1843 by Richard Foster who was later branch secretary of Holyoake's Theological Utilitarians³. But by far the most significant source for organised expression of Freethought, however limited, was the remnant of the Owenite centres. Almost without exception, these were confined to Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, the north Midlands and London.

ii. Holyoake and Secularism:

Although as early as 1843, Holyoake's trial and imprisonment had made him the 'acknowledged leader of popular freethought

1. The Reasoner, 3 Apr 1850, J.P. Adams to Editor.

2. For Holyoake, see F.J. Gould, The History of the Leicester Secular Society, (Leicester, 1900), pp. 8-11; for Jonathan West (1801-1881), see National Reformer, 23 Jan 1881, p.55.

3. Royle, op.cit., p.100.

in England' his efforts to unite freethinkers into a single movement were abortive prior to 1850. The reasons lay both in the material and in the would-be moulder: as to the former, it took the decade of the 1840's to show the Owenite free-thinkers that their socio-economic doctrines could not work effectively in contemporary society; after this they were in a position to join with the political radical freethinkers in the cause of freethought in preference to the lost cause of Utopian socialism; as for the latter, it was not until 1850, after he had left behind his earlier extremism, both philosophical and political, that he was able to arrive at and articulate those views which were to be his characteristic contribution to Freethought, and to which he gave the term 'Secularism'.

Holyoake first used the term in December 1851¹. Though it was to be a source of differences in the future², the expression was a most fortunate one - it had the simplicity of a slogan without the pejorative emotional connotations of 'Atheism' and 'Infidelity'. Its value went deeper than this; the freethinking political radicals, the disciples of Carlile and Taylor, might have had no need to abandon atheism for secularism, but that greater body of Freethought, represented by the Owenites, had need of a positive programme to replace the dream of Queenwood, and as Holyoake developed the implications of the phrase in issue after issue of The Reasoner, it grew from a neat term to such a positive programme, a programme which called forth and attracted organisation.

1. The Reasoner, 3 December 1851.

2. See N.R., 20, 27 March, 10 Apr 1870.

Giving an address to freethinkers in London, on 29 December 1851, he declared:

It is necessary that the party who propose to follow Reason, should no longer suffer themselves to be confounded with those who expose themselves to the accusation of being sensualists The Freethinkers who do think should be distinguishable from those who do not think, and this can only be done by announcing a principle, defining aims and creating an organisation to attain these aims¹.

The principle of secularism which he announced was 'the practical side of scepticism', and its aims were 'to give precedence to the duties of this state', and 'to attach primary importance to the morality of man to man'². In enunciating the principle he also attempted to prescribe the policy, and this by cautioning secularists not to say 'every man ought to give exclusive attention to this world, because that would be to commit the old sin of dogmatism'³. Though his Chartist colleague, Linton, looked on this as an effort of Holyoake's to simply please his moderate friends, Holyoake himself denied that it was a disguise, insisting that it was essential for the expression of a positive 'ethical element' which "the terms 'Infidel', 'Sceptic'. 'Atheist' do not express"⁴. As he elaborated on this, his own defence of the term was convincing, for he regarded it as a call to maturity and responsibility, whereby man was to be justified by his

1. The Reasoner, 14 Jan 1852.

2. *ibid.*, 19 Jan 1853, 'Secularism, Its Sphere and Its Services', by G.J. Holyoake.

3. *ibid.*

4. The Reasoner, 8 Jan 1854, 'Outlines of Secularism', by G.J. Holyoake.

conduct, not by the fundamentalist Christian 'justification by Faith in Christ'¹. In the light of these premises, his conclusion with regard to the policy to be pursued by secularists was logical, namely, that the criticism of sacred texts and existing religions should be pursued 'only to the extent to which these 'seem to contradict ascertained Moral Truths and are impediments to a Rational Progress'². Subsequent disagreements among secularists will be seen to have revolved around just this question of extent.

iii. Attempts at national organisation:

Holyoake's attempt to gather freethinkers into a secularist organisation kept pace with his development of the implications of the term he had coined. In December 1851 he had organised the Central Secular Society in London, which body was a 'Council of Friends' with The Reasoner as their organ and national organisation of secularists as their objective³. On 29 December, at the Owenite Hall of Science in City Road, London, he held the 'First Free Discussion Festival', chaired by the freethinking Oxfordshire magistrate, W.J. Birch. Leading freethinkers James Watson, Thomas Cooper and Robert Cooper were among those present. Possibly because of the disagreement of the latter with Holyoake's policy, nothing came of this effort to create an organisation from London⁴.

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*, 14 Jan 1852.

4. *ibid.*, 14 Jan 1852; Cooper preferred 'that policy which bearded the priest in his lair'.

The most fruitful attempts in the near future were to be made in the provinces¹. On 4 July 1852, a district meeting of West Yorkshire freethinkers was held at Bradford. Delegates attended from Bradford, Keighley, Heckmondwike, Leeds, Halifax, Wilsden and Hawerth². The result of their meeting was the foundation of the West Riding Secular Association. This body met every three months in a different area, organising lectures and maintaining such contacts as would foster the cause of Freethought³.

In the next month a preliminary conference at Manchester, with delegates from London, Rochdale, Stalybridge, Bolton, Leigh, Pendleton and Stockport agreed to hold a secular conference at Manchester in October 1852 to promote a national organisation⁴. The list of delegates to this conference, which met on 3 October, indicated the makings of a truly national body⁵. Holyoake was chairman of the meeting and among the more prominent in the future movement were Joseph Firth of Keighley, the Owenite doctor-philosopher Henry Travis, and Arthur Trevelyan of Tyneholm, a most consistent benefactor of secularism and its causes⁶. This meeting provides the first insight

1. Holyoake had gone on a lecture tour in Lancashire and the North-East in 1850, and a further successful tour in the area by Robert Cooper in the spring of 1852 indicates the region as one for potential organisation; for these tours, see Royle, *op.cit.*, p.173.

2. The first five of these towns were to have a most persistent record of organised secularism over the following twenty five years.

3. The Reasoner, 21 July 1852.

4. *ibid.*, 8 Sept 1852.

5. Delegates came from London, Glasgow, Newcastle, Ashton-under-Lyne, Bolton, Blackburn, Bradford, Bury, Heywood, Leigh, Manchester, Nottingham, Oldham, Paisley, Rochdale, Sheffield, Todmorden, Preston, Stafford and Stockport.

6. For details of these men, see Appendix 1, Biographical Notes, pp. 634, 652-653.

into the numerical strength of organised Freethought at the beginning of the 1850's. The following list of societies and their membership reveals it:

Society	Membership	Society	Membership
Bolton	27	Manchester	70
Blackburn	50	Newcastle	--
Burnley	28	Nottingham	31
Bury	--	Paisley	50
Bradford	49	Preston	20
Glasgow	50	Rochdale	15
Keighley	12	Stafford	'a few'
Leigh	16	Sheffield	32

It is revealing that of the total of 450, 58% were in the Lancashire towns and villages while over 22% were in Scotland.

The principal achievement of the conference was to agree on the formula for the constitution and objects of secular societies, and to concur with Holyoake's definition of secularism as 'the philosophy of the things of time (giving) precedence to the duties of this life'. With regard to organisation, local autonomy was agreed to, while it was hoped that a yearly conference of delegates would also be held. Finally, a subsequent such conference was to elect a Central Council which in turn was to appoint a Central Director and Secretary to co-ordinate effort at a national level. Until that time, Holyoake, Birch, Watson, Trevelyan and William Chilton¹ were to superintend the nascent organisation as a provisional committee².

1. A Bristol compositor, Chilton was a freethinker who broke away from Owen, and joined with Southwell in November 1841 to produce The Oracle of Reason, see Royle, op.cit., pp. 68,71-72.

2. The Reasoner, 20 Oct 1852.

What ultimately transpired, however, was that no Central Director was ever appointed, no Central Council was ever instituted, but the provisional committee in London maintained a nominal existence till 1857 at least. However representative the Manchester conference had been, no enduring national organisation resulted; developments during the remainder of the decade lay in the continual rise and fall of local societies and district organisations, and in delegate meetings which insisted on the need for a national body without ever succeeding in effecting one.

Thus in May 1853, at a meeting chaired by James Watson, the London Secular Society was formed, with himself as first president and J.P. Adams as its first secretary¹. By the time of its first quarterly meeting, on 17 July, it had enrolled one hundred members², and by the end of December it claimed a total membership of two hundred and ninety-one³. As for district unions, these were formed only in Lancashire and Yorkshire; it was not till years later that they were organised elsewhere⁴. The West Riding Secular Association founded in July 1852 does not appear to have lasted long, for, in March 1854 delegates from the West Riding met again at Bradford to consider forming a West Riding Secular Union, and appointed a committee to implement the idea⁵. This appears to have been successful: as late as December 1859 there were

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1. *ibid.*, 18 May, 13 July 1853.
 2. *ibid.*, 27 July 1853.
 3. *ibid.*, 12 Feb 1854.
 4. See below, pp.53,84,119.
 5. The Reasoner, 18 March 1854.

occasional reports of the activities of the W.R.S.U.¹. It may have been due to the existence of such a federal union that Yorkshire local societies proved enduring. Bradlaugh, after a national tour in 1859, said as much when he found the West Riding to be 'certainly in the first rank' of organised Freethought². Federal organisation in Lancashire was much less successful. In July 1854 a conference at Stockport attempted to organise a 'Manchester District', embracing 23 towns in the region, but it apparently came to nothing, until almost three years later when a second district conference decided to organise the Lancashire-Cheshire area and appointed a central board to this end³. In 1856 an abortive effort to organise the secularists of Newcastle, Shields and Darlington into a 'Northern Union of Secular Societies' was made⁴. Organisation in this region had to wait until the 1870's. In London also, despite its huge population and its infidel tradition, the organisation of secularism was surprisingly weak, only seven societies meeting on and off in the decade from 1850⁵.

Attempts at national, were as abortive as those at district organisation, in the 1850's. In July 1854 a conference of secular delegates at Stockport tried to organise a national union. This conference merely passed a resolution that 'a

1. *ibid.*, 27 May 1855, 3 Aug 1856, 11 Dec 1859.

2. *ibid.*, 11 Dec 1859, 'Secular Organisation', by 'Iconoclast'.

3. *ibid.*, 8 July 1854.

4. Royle, *op.cit.*, p.184.

5. *ibid.*, p.192.

Secular Conference be held at Leeds as early as expedient and that all friends in England and Scotland be requested to send delegates to same, and that the object of the Conference be to unite all the towns and branches for the more fully organising of the National Secular Society¹. When the Leeds conference convened, however, delegates appeared only from three societies, those of Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield².

A conference then met in May, at Holyoake's headquarters in Fleet Street, with delegates attending from throughout the country³. Holyoake, Tyrrell and Robert Le Blond, all of whom lived in London, were appointed as a provisional committee 'to ascertain prospects of the General Conference in order to secure unity of action'. London secularist, John Maughan, general secretary to this committee, issued an address in June 1855, urging the need for national organisation⁴. Six months later he reported that replies to his address indicated a widespread feeling in favour of a national body and for the appointment of a paid organiser⁵, but pointed out that the promise of financial aid for these ends was not so evident. Consequently, the desire remained unrealised. The major reason for this emerged in the following April when Henry Tyrrell pointed out that Maughan, despite encouraging letters from the provinces, had no official backing to do anything about them - and this from one of the officials whose function was to

1. The Reasoner, 6 Aug 1854.

2. The Reasoner, 14 Jan 1855; in addition the societies at Keighley and Stalybridge sent letters of encouragement.

3. Represented were Glasgow, Huddersfield, Hyde, Bolton, Newcastle, Sunderland, London and the W.R.S.U.

4. The Reasoner, 17 June 1855.

5. A suggestion which appears to have been made by C.C. Cattell of Birmingham, see The Reasoner, 23 Dec 1855.

promote such organisation¹. In effect, there was no commanding leadership.

West Riding secularists, apart from being the best-organised, were also among the most militant at this time. Two of their number in particular, William Mitchell and W.H. Johnson², were impatient at the delay in effecting national organisation, and had little sympathy for the moderation of Holyoake's propaganda. In October 1855 Johnson attacked Holyoake in Mitchell's Yorkshire Tribune, asserting that under Holyoake the movement had 'arrived at a decrepit old age'³, and in a private letter he informed him that 'throughout Yorkshire there is one feeling against too much Newmanism in the Reasoner At present it is too dull'⁴.

In reply, Holyoake observed that 'Mr Johnson, like many others, is always hankering after victories like those of Carlile, of excitements like those of Taylor', and dismissed him as a 'young man of mixed promise'⁵. Holyoake

1. *ibid.*, 6 Apr 1856.

2. Mitchell was a committee-member of the W.R.S.U. and produced The Yorkshire Tribune, a monthly journal in 1855, which advocated universal suffrage, state-provided secular education, nationalisation of the land and the distribution of wealth on the co-operative principles of Owen: The Yorkshire Tribune, (The official Organ of the West Riding Secular Alliance), No 1, July 1855. W.H. Johnson came to Huddersfield in 1850 and two years later was the first to spread freethought in the district, making possible subsequent lectures in the area by Holyoake, Robert Cooper and Barker.

3. Yorkshire Tribune, Oct 1855, 'A Letter to Mr George Jacob Holyoake on the Present State and Policy of the Freethinking Party'.

4. Co-operative Union Library, Manchester, Holyoake Letters, No 790, W.H. Johnson to G.J. Holyoake, 1 Oct 1855.

5. The Reasoner, 2 Dec 1855, editorial; W.H. Johnson did not die before 1888, yet, among the Holyoake Letters there is extant a printed memoriam card of W.H. Johnson, (1835-1856), appended to letter 790 cited above; it describes Johnson as dying in January 1856, as a 'sincere and penitent Christian'; it may have been a ruse of Holyoake's to discredit his young assailant; it has not been the subject of any comment by contemporary sources or present-day students.

was justified in being wary of militants¹, but he himself, who, as the most prominent secularist, was the most likely leader, would have no truck with questions of leadership, at least publicly:

Disputations about leadership shall never disturb our unity so far as we are concerned. At no time have we ever pretended to it. There ought to be no supremacy in a rational society².

Thus, Holyoake was a problem; he would not be seen as leader, and would view no one else as such. This appears graphically in an article of his in late June 1857, on the subject of national conferences. He excused the delay in organising these on contradictory grounds: 'if a District Conference should propose to call a National Conference, it would be usurping the function of the Central Committee', while, 'this Committee can do little until local organisation is more general'³. At the very time of saying this, the number of societies had risen to 38 from the 26 of 1853⁴. It was in this manner that secularism developed without a national co-ordinating body until the end of the 1850's and beyond.

iv. Enter Bradlaugh - Time of Troubles - 1858-65:

The secession of Thomas Cooper, and the evidently altered and very modified sentiments of our late president, Mr George Jacob Holyoake, are causing considerable distrust

1. He had witnessed the return of Carlile to his own brand of religion, see G.J. Holyoake, The Life and Character of Richard Carlile, (London, 1853), pp. 25-7.

2. The Reasoner, 9 Dec 1855, editorial.

3. The Reasoner, 28 June 1857, 'District and National Conferences', by G.J.H.

4. Royle, op.cit., Appendix 1, 'Distribution of Provincial Secularism, 1837-66', p.298.

and suspense, and predispose men to hold aloof from a public movement whose leaders are liable to such transitions In the present position of the Secular ranks while there is so much apathy and indifference, the time would seem very inopportune for effecting any solid union among Secularists.

So wrote John Maughan, vice-president of the London Secular Society, in March 1859¹. His gloomy outlook was repeated by Austin Holyoake, when he wrote, in July of the same year, of the London societies as

dragging out a miserable existence, are so few in number that they are scarcely observable. At Cleveland St the average audiences number 30 At Edgware Road they are doing nothing. South London is closed, and will be sold tomorrow².

By 1859 his brother, George, had quarrelled with almost all the leading secularists³. The London Secular Society's membership had fallen from 291 in December 1853 to 92 in November 1858⁴, and the total number of known secular societies had fallen from 38 in the years 1856-7 to 28 in 1858⁵.

While the London secularists were quarrelling among themselves and allowing their societies and membership to fall away throughout 1858-9, one young London secularist was touring the provinces, lecturing and reporting on the state of societies there. In September 1859 he spoke at Holmfirth and Halifax, in October at Windhill, Doncaster, Sunderland, Glasgow and Paisley. After speaking on 'Bible History and the Deluge' at Halifax on 18 September, a Methodist minister stepped forward and congratulated him, and Jeremiah Olive, president of the W.R.S.U. wrote

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1. London Investigator, 1 Apr 1859.
 2. Holyoake Letters, No 1113, Austin to G.J. Holyoake, 15 July 1859.
 3. He quarrelled with Robert Cooper, W.H. Johnson and William Mitchell in 1855, with J.P. Adams, John Maughan and Frederik Farrah in 1858; the latter dispute arose over Holyoake's responsibility for the imprisonment for debt of one of his employees, Thomas Wilks; see London Investigator, March 1858, 15 June 1858, and 1 Apr 1858. For the first series of disputes, see The Reasoner, 9 Dec 1855.
 4. London Investigator, 1 Nov 1858.
 5. Royle, op.cit., Appendix 1, p.298.

that 'these lectures have caused the greatest excitement they have been a real success'¹. His expose of the frauds of revival meetings, delivered in Glasgow City Hall one month later, created very great excitement². By 1860 even the reluctant Holyoake was forced to acknowledge the phenomenon:

.... in the chief towns in which he has appeared an increased popularity follows upon his reappearance there. The frequency of his lectures and discussions creates and sustains considerable excitement. The debates with the Rev Mr Rutherford, the Rev Mr Grant and Dr Brindley, follow in rapid succession³.

When he set out on this provincial campaign Bradlaugh was but twenty five years of age. Born in 1833, he left home in 1847, lodged with Elizabeth Sharples Carlile at Warner Place in 1848, became a freethinker and produced his first anti-Christian tract in 1850. He then entered the army until his discharge in 1853. Thereafter, apart from the occasional reported lecture, he was relatively unknown, even among secularists, until 1858. In the spring of that year he replaced Holyoake as president of the London Secular Society and began on the provincial circuit that was quickly to make him the best-known freethinker in the country. Yet, this rise to prominence was more a case of rapid recognition than of rapid development. The army years were not wasted, for it was in that period that he developed three outstanding traits, physical stamina of no ordinary degree, an equally strong moral courage, and a knowledge of the Scripture languages and allied subjects. Armed with the latter, by the age of twenty-five, it is little surprise that he should evoke the admiration of a Methodist minister, even in the act of blasphemy.

1. The Reasoner, 2 Oct 1859.
 2. Glasgow City Sentinel, 15 Oct 1859.
 3. The Reasoner, 24 June 1860.

Over the years from 1850, when he produced his first tract against Christianity, A Few Words on the Christian's Creed, he developed his atheistic position with a thoroughness not to be found in any other contemporary secularist. Buchner's Force and Matter, published in England in 1855, exercised a major influence by providing him with his ontological ideas. In 1856, his own contribution to Half Hours with the Freethinkers revealed a deep interest in and familiarity with the work of Spinoza. His greatest anti-religious platform was to be devoted to the abolition of bibliolatry. From his first published attack, The Bible, What is it, in 1856, he condemned the morality of the Old Testament, not for the sake of condemnation itself, but to undermine its position as a work of divine inspiration; and in a country where Christianity had ever a marked inclination towards the Old Testament, this approach was a strategically sound one. By 1860 he had reached a fully atheistic position, and the arguments put forward in Is There a God ?, first published in that year, were to be for him as proof against Christian apologetics in 1890 as they were in 1860.

Aptly for an assailant of bibliolatry, he took the name of Iconoclast and the motto of 'Thorough':

Our policy is aggressive. We are, at present, of opinion that there is much to do in the mere clod-crushing sphere, in uprooting upas trees, hewing down creed-erected barriers between man and man, and generally in negating the influence of the priest We respect the sower who delights in the positive work of scattering seed on the ground, but we fear that the weeds destroy much of the fruit of his labours¹.

1. London Investigator, 1 Nov 1858, editorial.

In thus describing his position, Bradlaugh placed himself in the camp of Carlile, Johnson and Robert Cooper, as distinct from that of Holyoake. How he came to be editor of the London Investigator is not clear. This journal was founded in 1854 by Robert Cooper who passed it on to Johnson in 1856. It was under the latter's management until March 1858, by which time it was running at a loss. John Maughan then agreed to become its financial manager, and he succeeded in clearing off all but £10 to £12 of debt. Bradlaugh then became editor, in November, six months after his first public debate with the Rev Brewin Grant had made him the new leader of aggressive freethinkers¹. When he took over the editorship, Bradlaugh knew what was before him:

It only sells about 1250 at present and the sale must be doubled before it will pay printing and publishing expenses².

Yet within a year he wrote its last editorial and folded up the Investigator with the words, 'Unite and let us not be a divided and scattered flock wandering through life without leader or object'³. This unsuccessful venture into journalism left him in personal debt of £60, which contributions from freethinkers had reduced to £26, and in April 1860 he was obliged to issue a circular calling for further contributions⁴. Meanwhile the secularists were no nearer to unity or national organisations.

In the summer of 1860 the largest meeting of freethinkers

1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, Charles Bradlaugh, A Record of His Life and Work, (2 vols, 3rd ed., London, 1895), pp. 84-87.
2. Bradlaugh Collection, National Secular Society, London; a copy of letter by Bradlaugh, 18 Oct 1858, addressee unknown.
3. London Investigator, 1 Aug 1859, editorial.
4. Bradlaugh Collection; printed circular of Apr 1860.

hitherto in the history of the movement, took place in the open-air at Castle Hill, two miles outside Huddersfield¹. Its convening was the work of the Sheffield secularists, in particular of the organising secretary, Henry Turner of Sharrow Vale². All the leading secularists, the Holyoakes, Joseph Barker, Bradlaugh, John Watts and Robert Cooper attended³. Its main purpose was to gather all of them together to decide at last on a national convention, to meet at Halifax in the coming October. At the Halifax Convention which met on 7-8 October 1860, the plan for a national body was to have been submitted by G.J. Holyoake. Yet Holyoake himself later declared:

We never were friendly to calling National Conferences, unless there is an agitation of thought and a multiplicity of local societies likely to respond in a national sense The Halifax Conference, held in the name of a district, and proposing to do work really within its power, acts with modesty and is likely to be useful⁴.

In other words, Holyoake refused to recognise it as a national convention, preferring instead to call it a district conference, and thus not empowered to act nationally. Not surprisingly, in view of the foregoing, Holyoake did not attend - but the list of those who did indicates how representative the Halifax meeting was⁵. In the absence of Holyoake, Bradlaugh moved the formation of a central committee to lay down a plan of

1. The Reasoner Gazette, 29 July 1860, and 12 Aug 1860, where an attendance of 5,000 was claimed.

2. *ibid.*, 29 July 1860; two years previously, the Sheffield secularists had organised a 'camp meeting' of Yorkshire free-thinkers, an event which marks the beginning of their dominance in the affairs of the W.R.S.U., see Royle, *op.cit.*, p.240.

3. Bradlaugh distinguished himself on the occasion when, on Holyoake's admission, he forced the police to desist from impeding the sales of freethought literature to the audience.

4. The Reasoner, 21 Oct 1860, italics mine.

5. From London came Maughan, Watts, and Bradlaugh; from the provinces there were Barker, Trevelyan, Jagger of Rochdale, Mitchell of Bradford, Joseph Firth of Keighley, James Dodworth and Henry Turner of Sheffield, and Jeremiah Olive of the W.R.S.U., among others.

organisation. Seconded by John Jagger of Rochdale, this was unanimously agreed to. The latter then moved that Holyoake, Barker and Maughan be members of this committee - the inclusion of Holyoake suggests that however reluctant he himself was, there could be no national body without him - while Barker moved the addition of Bradlaugh and Watts¹. Finally, it was resolved that a further convention be held in June or July 1861 on a date to be fixed by the London-based central committee.

It might have been predictable that the work of this committee would come to nothing when the nature of its personnel is considered: the direct, aggressive Bradlaugh who openly expressed the need of leadership for any proposed national body; Holyoake, devious and opposed to the idea of any leadership; and Barker, unstable in character and beliefs. Such was the case. A number of separate disputes broke out in early 1861, involving all the members of this central committee. The Leeds Secular Society, under the leadership of J.H. Gordon², fell foul of Holyoake for its aggressive propaganda methods, and retaliated by attacking the kind of advocacy Holyoake wanted, namely, 'advocacy that considers the respectable rather than the honest, the polite rather than the true'³. There then arose a serious dispute over financial matters between John Watts, sub-editor of Holyoake's Reasoner, and Joseph Barker, which soon had Holyoake himself and Joseph Firth of Keighley entangled in its toils⁴. A more serious dispute still, in that it involved a matter of principle, broke out in April between Holyoake and

1. The Reasoner Gazette, 21 Oct 1860.

2. For details of Gordon, see Appendix , biographical notes, p.

3. The Reasoner, 17 Feb 1861, extract from the minutes of the Leeds Secular Society of 10 Feb 1861.

4. *ibid.*, 24 Feb 1861, 'The National Reformer and the Sub-Editor of the Reasoner', J. Firth to editor.

Bradlaugh. The latter was involved in a lawsuit at Wigan, in which he declared his readiness to take an oath¹. Holyoake commented that it was 'idle in Mr Bradlaugh to say that he should take the oath, as though that was a thing within his power. With his position and opinions, it is seriously inconsistent in him to take it'². This dispute went on into May, when a correspondent in The Reasoner deplored the fact that 'one of the leaders of the Secular Society should be found anxiously pleading with a judge to be permitted to swear a lie'³. By June Barker and Holyoake were at loggerheads on the same issue⁴.

During the same period, fundamental changes in the field of secular propaganda were taking place. After the dispute with Barker, John Watts resigned his post with Holyoake⁵. The latter, involved in politics, and about to depart for America, decided to cease publication of The Reasoner⁶. Meanwhile, the Sheffield secularists had begun their own paper, to which they appointed Barker and Bradlaugh as co-editors⁷. This provided Bradlaugh with a platform from which he broadcasted praise and censure to local freethought societies, and from which he was soon commanding even the leading secularists:

Mr Barker, Mr Holyoake, Mr John Watts, Mr J.H. Gordon, Mr J.R. Cooper and Mr Jagger should follow one another at intervals of a week in large places, or at fortnightly intervals where the population is not so large. As for my own course, I especially want to visit those places in which Freethought lectures have not hitherto been delivered⁸.

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1. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i, 168-170.
 2. The Reasoner, 28 Apr 1861.
 3. *ibid.*, 12 May 1861.
 4. *ibid.*, 9 June 1861.
 5. *ibid.*, 23 June 1861.
 6. *ibid.*
 7. The Reasoner Gazette, 12 Feb 1860, 11 Mar 1860, 18 Mar 1860.
 8. National Reformer, 1 Sept 1860, editorial.

In April 1860 he claimed personal credit for newly founding or reviving societies at Bradford, Halifax, Oldham, Windhill, Leeds and Liverpool:

This has been done alone Mr Joseph Barker was, until lately, in America, Mr Robert Cooper confined to his house and Mr G.J. Holyoake also incapacitated¹.

While he was quick to take such credit, Bradlaugh was quite justified. In November 1860 he deplored the lack of progress in Newcastle and determined to visit the town on his way to Scotland². To Scotland he went, breaking new ground in Dumfries in January, and by the next month the secularists of Newcastle had founded a new society³. That same winter brought the Iconoclast to Plymouth where his lectures led to the foundation of a secular society⁴, to Leigh which heard its first Freethought lectures in twenty-five years⁵, to Birkenhead for its first in twenty years, to Holmfirth where he founded another society, and to Warrington, where the local journal lamented:

Surely Warrington has enough temptations to ungodliness without any assistance from stipendiary peripatetics⁶.

But, while local progress was real, the central committee was merely nominal. Barker complained that 'The committee appointed by the Halifax Convention cannot do anything. The members cannot even meet each other'⁷.

While Barker cannot be saddled with sole responsibility for the ineffectiveness of this committee, his own instability and Bradlaugh's advocacy of birth-control were now to lead

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1. *ibid.*, 14 Apr 1860, editorial.
 2. *N.R.*, 3 Nov 1860.
 3. *ibid.*, 23 Feb 1861.
 4. *ibid.*, 20 Oct 1860.
 5. *ibid.*, 12 Jan 1861.
 6. *Warrington Guardian*, cited in *N.R.*, 12 Jan 1861.
 7. *N.R.*, 24 Nov 1860, 'Organisation', by J. Barker.

disaster. By December 1860 Barker was prophesying that

Secularists never will - never can - all unite in one body any more than can Calvinists and Methodists, Protestants and Catholics We may as well therefore give up all hopes of an organisation that shall include all Secularists¹.

On 18 May 1861 Bradlaugh published his proposals for a 'Malthusian League', and thus initiated a train of events which were to lead to a breach between the two men, to Barker's loss of the editorship and to Bradlaugh's assumption of full control². A more serious loss than that of Barker, resulting directly from Bradlaugh's promotion of birth-control, was the alienation of John Maughan. Though a shadowy figure in point of personal detail, Maughan was one of the earliest exponents of secularism and one of the most prominent of those concerned with its organisation³. In antagonising so effective an organiser, Bradlaugh seriously injured the cause of national organisation which he had done so much to promote up till then. Maughan's alienation began in September 1860 and reached its most intense by late August 1861, thus embracing the period in which the second convention was to have taken place. In the event, the central committee did nothing to promote this, but the Convention was held nonetheless, at Castle Hill, on 22 July 1861, with Watts and Bradlaugh as the only prominent Londoners present. The latter had been hoping for an attendance of 10,000, but bad weather reduced the numbers to 2,000 in the morning, and 5,000 in the afternoon sessions⁴. Apart from

1. *ibid.*, 8 Dec 1860, 'Answers to Correspondents'.

2. An interesting contemporary view of these developments is given in P.W. Perfitt, 'Joseph Barker and the Secularists', in *The Pathfinder*, No 149, (n.s. No 46), 16 Nov 1861.

3. See below Appendix 1, p. 643.

4. *N.R.*, 3 Aug 1861; the figures are Bradlaugh's own estimates.

speeches urging national organisation, no proposals were adopted.

Bradlaugh was undaunted by this; although he had lost Barker, Maughan and Dodworth of Sheffield, he had gained Holyoake, who, having temporarily abandoned the idea of producing a paper to replace The Reasoner, had joined Bradlaugh on the National Reformer as its chief contributor¹. Bradlaugh exulted:

Our prospects are cheering Numerically the Freethought Party in England is strong enough to do ten times its present work, and with the New Year, a National Secular Organisation, under the presidency of Mr G.J. Holyoake, will afford the means of efficient and well-directed effort².

A week later, Holyoake announced that the time for national organisation was at last at hand:

I have always said that there could be no organisation until there were local societies and parties to be organised They exist now. Organisation is possible now. I have arranged with Mr Bradlaugh that Mr Jagger shall be the General Secretary of a National Organisation of which the readers will soon hear more³.

One week later, Watts, Bradlaugh, Jagger and Holyoake issued an advertisement calling on secularists to meet in London on 18 December, 'with a view to the formation of a United and National Party'⁴. The manner in which Holyoake had made these announcements was singularly autocratic for one who publicly professed antipathy to the idea of any leadership among rationalists, and though he believed 'organisation was now possible', there were some who thought otherwise. The W.R.S.U. had lapsed at this time, and in a successful attempt to revive it, Joseph Firth of Keighley argued along the lines Holyoake had used in the 1850's, and which he had now abandoned, namely

1. *ibid.*, 16 Nov 1861, editorial.

2. *ibid.*, 16 Nov 1861, editorial.

3. *ibid.*, 23 Nov 1861, 'One Paper and One Party', by G.J.H.

4. *ibid.*, 30 Nov 1861.

that national organisation was pointless until local and district organisation was a fact¹. John Child, secretary of the Leeds Secular Society, Firth's colleague in the revived and newly-named Yorkshire Secular Association, also insisted that provincial organisation was a prerequisite². A further obstacle to the Bradlaugh-Holyoake party lay in London, where John Maughan was engaged in his own reorganisation of metropolitan Freethought: on 24 November 1861 his new General Reformers' Secular Society, aspiring to national leadership, invited freethinkers throughout the country to affiliate³.

When the meeting advertised for 18 December was held, it was 'more numerously attended than expected'⁴. Maughan was among those whose attendance might not have been looked for, and when Holyoake submitted a plan of organisation, Maughan moved an amendment proposing the plan on which his G.R.S.S. had been founded. This was lost, and Holyoake's plan, based on his Principles of Secularism, on being put to the meeting by Bradlaugh, was carried. A committee to implement the plan was then elected, with Holyoake as chairman, Watts as vice-chairman and Jagger as secretary; invitations to join the National Secular Association were thereupon issued⁵.

Yet, within three months of this apparently successful manouvre, Bradlaugh was admitting defeat:

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1. N.R., 14 Dec 1861.
 2. ibid., 14 Dec 1861.
 3. ibid., 7 Dec 1861.
 4. ibid., 4 Jan 1862.
 5. ibid.

The National Secular Association, so far as London is concerned, is a failure; it has not commanded the united action of the London friends in the way we hoped it would have done, and we therefore recommend the various districts to pay attention to their own consolidation and organisation let us dispense with an association which does nothing¹.

Even with united effort it would have been difficult to run a national body at this time. Trade was bad and money scarce, with the result that secularists throughout the country, as everyone else, felt the effects. The efforts of the Yorkshire Secular Association to get back on its feet were being hampered by lack of finance²; and the Lancashire Secular Union's executive meeting of April 1862 found local society reports from each town 'far from cheering, owing to the panic in the cotton trade'³; there was little change in this situation throughout the year, and in November the L.S.U. set up a distress fund for secularists, with Thomas Ellis of Manchester as treasurer⁴.

In March 1862, however, Bradlaugh's despondency was caused much less by secularists' financial problems than by another serious quarrel, this time with Holyoake, over the running of the National Reformer. On 8 March he resigned the editorship⁵, Holyoake negotiated with the directors for this post, on Bradlaugh's own recommendation⁶, but a meeting of shareholders on 23 March voted Bradlaugh back into office⁷. Litigation

1. N.R., 15 March 1862, editorial.

2. ibid., 14 Dec 1861, 8 Feb 1862, 1 Mar 1862.

3. ibid., 12 Apr 1862.

4. ibid., 6 Dec 1862.

5. ibid., 8 Mar 1862, Advertisement, 'To The Shareholders of The National Reformer Company Limited'.

6. Bradlaugh Collection, i) W.J. Linton to J. Crawford, 28 Jan 1863;
ii) Crawford to Linton, 2 Feb 1863;
iii) Crawford to Linton, 3 Feb 1863.

7. Bradlaugh Collection, Minutes of a meeting of 27 Feb 1863 between Bradlaugh and Crawford; N.R., 5 Apr 1862, report of a Special meeting of the Shareholders of the National Reformer Newspaper Company Ltd.

resulted which prolonged their quarrel for two years¹. The repercussions of this dispute were far-reaching, involving more than a difference with Holyoake and the officials of a newspaper company, for some of these officials were also prominent provincial secularists, Dodsworth, Evans and Taylor of Sheffield, Hiram Ottley of Burnley and John Child of Leeds. By mid-1862, therefore, Bradlaugh had alienated groups of secularists in London, Sheffield and Leeds, and had had to abandon all prospects of national organisation. Barker had left the movement², as had J.H. Gordon³, while Holyoake went his own way to produce his Secular World, in place of The Reasoner. Of the latter, at this time, an independent secularist, J.J. Bebbington, commented: 'Mr Holyoake was once deeply engaged in mathematical pursuits - when he abandoned these he sadly mistook his vocation'⁴.

In April 1862 the secularists of Leeds and Huddersfield met to consider what attitude to adopt to the prevailing dis-union and its fomenters. Delegates from sixteen societies assembled for this purpose at Huddersfield⁵. Though the leading speakers, Firth of Keighley, Fielding of Huddersfield, Frank Field of Dewsbury, Rudi Hirzel and John Child of Leeds, and James Dodsworth of Sheffield, refrained from any severe attack on Bradlaugh, they gave strong indications of sympathy with Holyoake. The prevailing opinion was that excessive dependence had been placed on a few men in London, and the remedy was suggested in a

1. Bradlaugh Collection, C. Bradlaugh to Messrs Morris, Ashurst & Knight, 3 Aug 1863.

2. The Counsellor, No 5, Dec 1861.

3. Appendix 1, pp.637-638.

4. The Propagandist, 3 May 1862.

5. The Secular World, 17 May 1862.

resolution moved by Hirzel:

That this meeting sees in a stronger union between the different societies the only means for counteracting the injurious effects which recent differences between leaders at London have had on the movement, and thinks the time has come when a policy independent of London ought to be adopted; and that this union will be best effected by i) regular correspondence between the societies, ii) frequent conferences and meetings similar to the present one, iii) the promoting of provincial organisation as a basis to national organisation¹.

This resentment against London, and in view of the fact that from the beginning of the movement in the early 1850's its real strength had been in the Lancashire-West Yorkshire area, a justified resentment, was sardonically expressed sixteen months later by Child. In a long review of the history of the attempts at national organisation, he described the members of the London Central Committee - Barker, Bradlaugh, Holyoake Maughan and Watts - as 'more likely to digest each other than a plan of organisation', and characterised Maughan's G.R.S.S. as founded by 'a small section of London secularists who kindly afford us a national organisation, like cheap clothes, ready-made'².

When Child wrote this scathing indictment, Bradlaugh was no longer editor of the National Reformer, having resigned in February 1863 because of ill-health, and not resuming control until April 1866. In these three years Bradlaugh was much less active than before; Holyoake was preoccupied and Barker was gone. With these men out of the way, Child suggested a new approach to national organisation - the amalgamation of the Yorkshire and

1. *ibid.*, for Rudi Hirzel, see Appendix 1, Biographical Notes, p. 638.

2. N.R., 8 Aug 1863, 'Organisation, Past and Future', by J. Child.

Lancashire societies - and urged a preliminary conference for this purpose to meet in September 1863¹. Despite the initial reluctance of L.S.U. secretary, Thomas Saville Oates of Rochdale, to favour this idea², preliminary arrangements for the amalgamation had been completed by November, and the first delegate meeting was arranged for 15 November, at Huddersfield³. Though there was some opposition to the amalgamation, the leading delegates, Thomas Slater of Bury⁴ for the L.S.U., and W.R. Crofts⁵ for the Y.S.A., strongly urged its desirability, with success. A constitution, setting forth five main objects, was adopted unanimously. These objects were, i) to promote the diffusion of 'sound knowledge' on social, moral, political and scientific subjects, ii) to uphold freedom of speech, iii) to take 'special action' in cases of injustice suffered by any secularist, iv) to help local societies to set up schools, meeting-places and libraries, and v) to engage and exchange lecturers⁶. In addition they decided on holding an annual congress for the transaction of business, the first one being fixed for Rochdale on the Whitsun of 1864, with Slater as its first president, and the expenses being borne proportionately by the separate executives of the L.S.U. and Y.S.A.

The apparent ease with which these provincials had finally established an organisation in a single day is in sharp contrast to the meanderings of the leading London secularists over the

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, 15 Aug 1863, for T.S. Oates, see Appendix 1, p.647.

3. *N.R.*, 7 Nov 1863, letter to editor from W.R. Croft on behalf of the committee of the Yorkshire Secular Association.

4. Appendix L p.651.

5. Appendix 1, p.632.

6. *N.R.*, 21 Nov 1863.

previous five years. Unfortunately, whether the proposed conference ever met at Rochdale is a mystery, as the National Reformer, the only secularist organ in existence in 1865, made no references to it. All that it did report in these two years was the continuing failure of the London secularists to organise¹, and the continuing example of the L.S.U., to whose inspiration was due the foundation in May 1864, by northern secularists, of the North of England Secular Union².

In 1860 Holyoake had declared national organisation to be premature; in late 1861 he declared that it was no longer so; in late 1865 there was still no national body, so called; and though Holyoake's statements may have been but expedients, on the eve of the foundation of the N.S.S. it is necessary to attempt some evaluation of the real position, and to do so by attending to the rise and decline of secular societies on a regional basis, in the period 1851-65.

Regional Distribution of Secular Societies, 1851-65³

1. London

Organised secularism in London had two main sources, the free-thinking Owenites with their centre in the John Street Institute, whose leading personnel included the Holyoakes and Edward Truelove⁴; and the followers of Carlile at Warner Place, Hackney, among

1. *ibid.*, 3 Dec 1864, 'Secularism in London', by 'G.M.'.

2. *ibid.*, 25 June 1865, First Anniversary of the North of England Secular Union.

3. In this and all subsequent analyses up to 1893 the U.K. is divided into seven separate regions: i, London; ii, West Riding of Yorkshire; iii, Lancashire-Cheshire; iv, North of England; v, Midlands + East; vi, West Midlands, Wales, South West, South + South-East; vii, Scotland.

4. Appendix, pp. 653-654.

whose chief members were his widow, James Savage , and later, Bradlaugh. But no rigid distinction between the two groups should be made - Robert Cooper, for example, was a convert of Carlile's and, at the same time, a devoted adherent of Owen.

The number of societies:

1851	6	1857	6
1852	7	1858	5
1853	8	1859	6
1854	9	1860	6
1855	7	1861	7
1856	8		

Development was somewhat haphazard, though there were important dates: in 1853 the London Secular Society was founded, and reached its peak in 1856 with three branches at Woolwich, Paddington and John Street. Its decline thereafter was caused by the defection of Thomas Cooper in 1857, and a quarrel between Holyoake and Bradlaugh in 1858¹. Over this period there were eight constantly active areas, five in the East End, two South of the river, and one in the West End. A significant point with regard to organised secularism in London was the failure of societies to federate, a feature which applied until the time of G.W. Foote.

1862	5, 5, 5, 7; (5) ²
1863	7, 7, 6, 6; (6)
1864	5, 5, 5, 6; (5)
1865	6, 7, 7, 8; (7)

1. T. Cooper, op.cit., pp. 352-353.

2. Up till 1861 the figures provided by Royle are used; thereafter, until 1895, the figures are my own, based on Reports of Meetings, and Guide to the Lecture Room sections of the National Reformer; as this entails a week-by-week survey over thirty years the citation of sources is not included, except in reference to comments on specific societies in the body of the text. For each year five figures are given; the first four represent the number of known active societies in each quarter; the fifth figure, in brackets, represents the average over the year. In effect, though there might be 'x' number of societies reported as functioning from one end of the year to the other, it will be found that in some areas only a small percentage of these were active throughout; this will be of much greater significance from 1869 to 1893, when the National Secular Society published its Almanack and made claims therein to a total number of societies which do not correspond to the total arrived at by a weekly analysis.

In the period 1862-5 there was no noticeable change from the 1850's. There was a constant pattern of dis-organisation and reorganisation, a phenomenon due mainly to the difficulty of obtaining meeting-places. Thus, the South London S.S. held no meetings from 24 January to 15 August 1863, for this reason. The figures indicate no marked progress whatsoever. The only point worth noticing in these years was the foundation in December 1862 of the Freethought Propagandist Society, with John Maughan as its first president; it was destined to have a long and independent history.

The Provinces

As has been noted, secularism in the provinces owed its origin on an organised basis, to Owenism, and the textile towns of the West Riding and Lancashire constituted its stronghold. From the figures provided by Royle over the period 1851-61 there is evidence of an overall rise in the number of societies:

1851	10	1857	38
1852	27	1858	28
1853	26	1859	33
1854	28	1860	38
1855	29	1861	45
1856	38		

But, as these figures are not broken down into areas, it is not possible to know in detail the location of all societies in these areas throughout the given years. The occasional evidence afforded by The Reasoner and London Investigator, provide a very rough guide, while for the period 1862-5 there are detailed figures available from the weekly National Reformer.

ii. West Riding of Yorkshire

In 1852 this area had at least seven societies, at Keighley, Leeds, Halifax, Heckmondwike, Wilsden, Hawerth and Bradford. By 1859 it also had societies organised in Huddersfield, and Sheffield. As with the London societies, these were all subject to periodic failure and revival. Sometime in 1853 the Leeds S.S. lapsed and was re-organised in January 1858; a similar fate befell the societies at Bradford and Halifax which were re-organised by Bradlaugh in the course of his first provincial campaign of 1858-9. His exertions brought the number of West Riding bodies back to eight by April 1860¹. However, the paucity of sources in this period throws little light on the extent of this phenomenon. The most noteworthy feature of the region was that it was the first to initiate district federation. As early as 1852 there was a West Riding Secular Association². How long this lasted is not clear, but by March 1854 a new version was in existence, the W.R.S.U.³, which lasted at least until late 1859⁴; it appears to have lapsed after this until in late 1861 John Child became secretary of its revived form, the Yorkshire Secular Association⁵. This met regularly until August 1862, when it lapsed. Attempts to revive it in February 1863 came to nothing, but in May 1863 the efforts of Frank Fielding of Dewsbury led to its re-establishment for a short time⁶; but after October 1863 there is no evidence of district

1. N.R., 14 Apr 1860.

2. The Reasoner, 21 July 1852.

3. ibid., 18 Mar 1854.

4. ibid., 11 Dec 1859.

5. N.R., 14 Dec 1861.

6. ibid., 30 May 1863; the secretary of the Y.S.A. was W.R. Croft, and he attributes its successful revival to Fielding.

organisation in the region for over ten years¹. In the first half of the 1860's therefore, district federation was no more striking in its success than it had been in the 1850's. The figures for local societies stress the same point:

1862	8, 8, 6, 3; (5)
1863	3, 3, 3, 4; (3)
1864	3, 5, 5, 6; (4)
1865	5, 3, 3, 5; (4)

Indeed, the average figures are somewhat less than those for the year 1852. This indicates little support for Holyoake's contention in 1861 as to the existence of a multiplicity of local societies.

iii. Lancashire-Cheshire

Manchester being the capital of Lancashire and the headquarters of Owenism, it is not surprising that this area was a stronghold of organised secularism. The region had at least 14 societies in 1852, and over 58% of organised secularists, as opposed to the West Riding's 20%². In 1854 there were at least 21 societies³, but from then until 1861 there is no evidence as to the total number, and little as to the pattern of failures, revivals and new foundations. The region shared with Yorkshire the distinction of having district organisation. This came initially in August 1854 when the 21 societies entered into an informal union based on Manchester⁴; three years later a Central Board was established there, to intensify propaganda in Lancashire and Cheshire⁵.

1. N.R., 6 Sept 1874; mentions, in passing, the Annual General Conference of the West Riding Lecturing Circuit.

2. The Reasoner, 20 Oct 1852.

3. ibid., 6 Aug 1854.

4. ibid., 6 Aug 1854.

5. ibid., 8 July 1857.

How long this arrangement worked is not known, but from January 1862 until December 1865 and beyond, there met regularly a federation called the Lancashire Secular Union. Against this, however, is the fact that there was nothing like the number of societies which the area possessed at times in the 1850's, for the figures for the early sixties are:

1862	6, 8, 5, 5; (6)
1863	3, 4, 5, 6; (5)
1864	5, 5, 5, 5; (5)
1865	5, 5, 4, 6; (5)

iv. North of England

In the period 1851-61 there is little evidence of the presence of secularism on an organised basis apart from Newcastle, where there was a society in 1852¹. This was still operating in 1855 when James Charlton, its secretary, was delegate to a London conference². From then until February 1858 it was inactive; in that month an unsuccessful effort was made to revive it³, and it was only when Bradlaugh visited the area in 1860-1 that it became firmly established⁴. Prior to 1861 no successful attempt was made to form any district organisation, since there was but the one society. In early 1862, there was a society at Sunderland, but it is only reported as functioning until the middle of that year, while a second society of 1865 in the village of Blyth, Northumberland, lasted but a few months.

1862	2, 2, 1, 1; (1)
1863	1, 1, 1, 1; (1)
1864	1, 1, 1, 1; (1)
1865	2, 1, 1, 1; (1)

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1. The Reasoner, 20 Oct 1852, 23 Mar 1853.
 2. ibid., 27 May 1855.
 3. ibid., 27 Jan 1858.
 4. N.R., 3 Nov 1860, p.5; 23 Feb 1861.

Yet, though for most of the period it had only a single organised group, the area did develop a district body; where those of Lancashire and the West Riding existed in order to co-ordinate the activities of several societies, the North of England Secular Union, originating in 1864, based on Newcastle, had as its objective, the spreading of secularism in isolated areas. It was operating from July 1864 to the end of this period, December 1865, by which time it was meeting regularly every month¹.

v. Midlands and East

In this area secularism was represented by three fairly consistent societies in Nottingham, Northampton and Leicester; the last-named society owed its existence to the radical William Holyoak, and had an erratic but persistent history prior to 1867, for, it was founded in 1853, re-founded in 1861 and a third time in 1867². The Northampton society, founded by John Bates, in 1854³, lasted till 1856, and lapsed from then till its revival in 1860⁴. Nottingham had a society of 31 members in 1852, but nothing is known of its origin or history thereafter until 1860, when it was re-constituted⁵. The eastern coast showed no evidence of organised secularism prior to 1861. In the period 1862-5 the position of secularism over the entire area continued to be erratic in the extreme:

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1. *ibid.*, 3 July 1864, 5 Feb 1865, 4 June 1865, 3 Dec 1865.
 2. F.J. Gould, *op.cit.*, pp. 8-11.
 3. London Investigator, Oct 1854.
 4. Reasoner Gazette, 9 Sept 1860.
 5. *ibid.*, 15 Apr 1860.

1862,	4, 5, 2, 2;	(3)
1863	2, 2, 2, 2;	(2)
1864	3, 2, 2, 2;	(2)
1865	2, 1, 1, 2;	(2)

Apart from the three major societies, new ones arose in Norwich and Great Yarmouth in 1862, but the latter did not survive beyond the year. In January 1863 the Norwich S.S. was suffering poor attendances, and ascribed this to economic distress¹; by September it had a large debt and a small membership², and by March 1865 it had ceased to meet. It is surprising that Hull, which had one of the strongest branches of the Anti-Persecution Union in 1844³, had no secular society until September 1865, and the history of secularism in the town thereafter is very haphazard. Why there was an organised group in Great Yarmouth is not clear, and the foundation of another, at Ipswich, in late 1865, is also obscure⁴. It would be a mistake to see in the foundations at Hull and Ipswich around the same time an indication of growing strength of organised secularism in the Midlands-Eastern region, for at that very time the societies at Leicester, Norwich and Northampton had temporarily lapsed, the latter because its members could get no meeting-place⁵.

vi. West Midlands, Wales, South-West, South and South-East

Before 1861, Birmingham apart, this entire region was singularly free from organised ungodliness; and though Bradlaugh's descent

1. N.R., 31 Jan 1863.

2. ibid., 22 Aug 1863.

3. Royle, op.cit., p.85.

4. N.R., 22 Oct, 5 Nov 1865; the names of no prominent local secularists are extant, and none of the leading London men seem to have lectured in the area.

5. ibid., 13 Feb 1864.

on the area in 1860 resulted in the establishment of a Plymouth society, there was no record of its activities in over a decade; in 1871 further lectures by Bradlaugh gave rise to a new society there¹. In 1864 a society was founded in Wales, at Abergavenny, and by December 1865 there was a second one at Bristol; there was also a short-lived society at Dudley, in Worcestershire.

1862	1, 1, 1, 1; (1)
1863	1, 1, 1, 1; (1)
1864	1, 2, 2, 2; (2)
1865	3, 2, 2, 3; (2)

vii. Scotland

Scotland had a surprisingly strong history of organised secularism in the period 1851-61. In 1852, 22% of organised secularists were Scottish, in two strong societies at Glasgow and Paisley. The leading secularists always made a point of lecture-touring in the area, Holyoake and Le Blond doing so in late 1853-early 1854, Bradlaugh in 1859, while Robert Cooper represented Glasgow at the London secular conference of May 1855².

1862	3, 3, 2, 2; (2)
1863	2, 2, 2, 3; (2)
1864	2, 2, 1, 1; (1)
1865	1, 2, 1, 2; (1)

In the period 1862-5, however, there was nothing remarkable about Scottish secularism. The Paisley S.S. appears to have failed sometime before this, against which a new society was

1. N.R., 3 Sept 1871, 17 Mar 1872.

2. The Reasoner, 12 Feb 1854; 30 Oct 1859, no 46, 13 Nov 1859; 27 May 1855, respectively.

operating in Edinburgh. In addition, Dundee had a society which lapsed in August 1862, and there was another in Greenock which failed in March of the same year.

Conclusion

This detailed regional analysis indicates no general pattern of development; in point of local societies, the three main regions of Lancashire, Yorkshire and London, appear to have been worse off in 1865 than in the best years of the previous decade. It is probably true that there were more individual secularists by 1865 than there had been in the early 1850's; the figure of 450 in 1852 is minimal. Royle gives a rough estimate of from two to three thousand for the 1850's, but there is no way of knowing how far even this rough estimate is correct. When Austin Holyoake was deploring the apparent decline of secularism in 1859 he made a point of importance:

Everything ultra-liberal is breaking up. The Sunday League is nearly defunct The day of the half-religious, half-freethinking people appears to be coming¹.

In effect, although it is clear that there were many thousands of unwitting secularists, there can be no mistaking the lack of progress in the number of individual societies, and Bradlaugh's role in this period now remains to be considered.

Bradlaugh's term of office as president of the London Secular Society appears to have had no effect whatever on the state of societies in the metropolis. In the provinces he could

1. Holyoake Letters, No 1113, Austin to G.J. Holyoake, 15 July 1859.

claim successes not equalled by any other secularist. Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Halifax, Holmfirth, Oldham, Newcastle and Plymouth, - these eight societies owed their foundation or revival directly to his efforts. If some of them lapsed soon afterwards, the fault hardly lay with him. Against this must be set the fact that he himself was directly responsible at a critical juncture for destroying the chance of founding a national organisation. There was nothing equivocal about his position in this regard: unlike Holyoake, he explicitly advocated the need for leadership and organisation, but his persistence in recommending Drysdale's Elements and in the promotion of contraception shattered the secular ranks¹. It is true that for Barker this was just one excuse among a possible many, for rollicking in disunion, but the alienation of Maughan and some of the leading provincial secularists was another matter. Bradlaugh did not abandon priorities, however, and his adherence to neo-malthusianism without remiss says much for his consistency. The lesson for secularists was, that if ever Bradlaugh were to be leader he would have to be accepted for what he was, and not for what they wanted him to be.

1. See below Chapter Three, pp. 219-230.

v. False Start, 1866-74:

We request the secretaries of the various Secular Societies in Great Britain to send us as early as possible a report showing the number of members and the number of known Free-thinkers, not members, stating what lectures are being delivered in the district give us the best possible information as to the state of opinion We desire especially that every sermon or lecture against Infidelity may at once be notified to us¹

Thus wrote Bradlaugh in June 1866. Once again he was editor of the leading Freethought journal, and had the field to himself². A month later, he made known his reason for wanting these reports,

so that we may renew an old plan, i.e., that of a General Secular Society having its centre in London and with affiliated societies in the large towns and direct members for the parent society where there may be no local organisation³.

Over the coming months he chided and wooed the provincial secularists, complaining that Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North had not fully responded to his request for information, urging the formation of tract societies, and declaring that 'The Lancashire Secular Union has several members able to write an effective tract (and) Yorkshire has an embarras de richesse'⁴. By August 1866 he was asking for plans of organisation, stating that if sufficient interest were shown, a conference would be held in Lancashire or Yorkshire, and a further one in London, to inaugurate the new body⁵.

The first to respond to all this was Joseph Firth of Keighley, who, in late August, suggested that Bradlaugh, Watts and

1. N.R., 10 June 1866.

2. Holyoake was at this time more involved in the co-operative movement, and was editing the English Leader.

3. N.R., 8 July 1866.

4. ibid., 15 July 1866.

5. ibid., 5 Aug 1866.

Holyoake be constituted a provisional committee to form the counties into districts and to get people to act as corresponding secretaries for the latter, and that a national conference be held at Rochdale or Sheffield. As a possible agenda for such a conference he suggested, inter alia, the questions of i) a fund for the relief of distressed free-thinkers, ii) a fund to reimburse members who had suffered financially through refusing to take an oath, and iii) a fund to enable them to lobby for the introduction of an affirmation bill into parliament¹.

Bradlaugh professed to welcome Firth's plan, and suggested an additional fund for the hiring of propagandists for remote or ill-organised areas². In September he published his own proposed programme, largely embracing Firth's ideas, but suggesting, in addition, the institution of secular schools and adult education classes, the promotion of local companies for the purchase of halls, the intensive diffusion of approved tracts and the promotion of the sale of the National Reformer as the official organ of the association³. He left little uncovered in the proposed programme: quarterly membership subscriptions were to be one shilling, the secretary should be a paid officer under the control of the president, and until a general conference should be called, the first secretary was to be Charles Watts⁴. As for the presidency, Bradlaugh suggested Holyoake, Robert Cooper, John Watts, Harriet Law or

1. N.R., 19 Aug 1866.

2. ibid., 26 Aug 1866.

3. ibid., 9 Sept 1866.

4. For Watts, see Appendix 1, p.655.

himself. He added a beguiling rider:

The first president will only act until the organisation be efficient enough to call a good conference, and in the event of no decided expression of opinion to the contrary, Iconoclast will be willing to act as the first president¹.

The position now was that Bradlaugh had circumvented Firth's call for a national conference which would organise a national body, by abstractly creating the national body and saying it would later call a national conference. He did at least wait two weeks for receiving objections to Iconoclast for president; on 23 September 1866 a National Reformer editorial stated baldly:

"National Secular Society

President (pro. tem.) Mr C Bradlaugh

Secretary (pro. tem.) Mr C Watts',

and declared that 'a General Council is required with whom the Secretary and President can communicate'².

In the history of secularism nothing contrasted more sharply with the muddled attempts at national organisation in the period 1858-64 than the actual institution of the National Secular Society by Bradlaugh in late 1866. He left little to quibble at in point of thoroughness. The society's principles were issued, after emendation by Henry Travis³, membership' cards were got ready and as soon as the first one thousand had been enrolled a national conference was to take place. To hasten this day, he sent his sub-editor Charles Watts off on a lecture-tour of Scotland and the North of England, to enrol members⁴.

1. N.R., 9 Sept 1866.

2. N.R., 23 Sept 1866.

3. For the original principles and their revision by Travis, see Appendix 2, pp.657-8; for Travis, see Appendix 1, pp.652-653.

4. N.R., 30 Sept 1866.

Within a year, among leading secularists who supported him were W.E. Adams of Newcastle, J.P. Adams of London, John Bates of Northampton, Arthur Trvelyan, T.S. Oates, Thomas Bentley of Dewsbury - one-time president of the Y.S.A., Joseph Wood of Leeds - ex-secretary of the Halifax S.S., John Wade - secretary of the Norwich S.S., and Austin Holyoake¹. The last-named was a considerable gain, by virtue of his abilities and because earlier he had been hostile to Bradlaugh²; he now consented to act as a vice-president of the new organisation. The only major figures to hold aloof were John Maughan, Harriet Law and G.J. Holyoake. Bradlaugh tried to win over Maughan by singing his praises, but it was wasted effort³. Two years later he was denouncing him as 'a common libeller without honour, truth or courage, and utterly unfit to belong to the secular body'⁴. Law was invited to become a vice-president at its first annual conference, but she appears to have refused, for, a year later, she formed a 'Freethought League' with herself as president⁵. Nor did he succeed in drawing

1. *ibid.*, 21 July 1867; 24 Mar 1867; 25 Nov 1866; 6 Jan 1867; 14 Oct 1866; 25 Nov 1866; 25 Nov 1866; 25 Nov 1866; 7 Oct 1866; respectively; for biographical details, see Appendix , pp.

2. Holyoake Letters, No 1113, Austin to George, 15 July 1859: '.... the only paid advocate of Freethought is Bradlaugh and he does not do much!'; No 1366, Austin to George, 3 Nov 1861: 'I feel I could not take a position under him (Bradlaugh). It is not natural. It could never be.'

3. *N.R.*, 13 Jan 1867, '.... we draw attention to the laudable efforts of Mr John Maughan to carry on an active secular propaganda'

4. *ibid.*, 5 Sept 1869; but, in the opinion of Frederic Harrison, Maughan was 'a highly respectable secularist', see Harrison Papers, L.S.E., Section A, No 1, Harrison to Beesly, ? May 1867; Bradlaugh's bitter words were evoked by Maughan's continued attacks upon his promotion of birth-control.

5. *N.R.*, 1 Dec 1867, 7 Mar 1869; this league does not appear to have ever got off the ground. Another woman who refused a vice-presidency was Eleanor, wife of Martin Boon; she was an active member of the Paddington Secular Society; see *N.R.*, 10 Jan 1869.

in G.J. Holyoake. In view of the latter's eminence, and of the fact that Bradlaugh had constituted himself president, Holyoake could hardly have been expected to join the new body. Instead, he became involved in an attempt to set up a rival organisation: the Lancashire Secular Union called a conference for 14 July 1867, to consider 'the present and future of secularism', and Holyoake was to preside¹. One hundred and fifty delegates, from Oldham, Ashton, Manchester, Bury, Rochdale, Sheffield and Huddersfield attended, but Holyoake's hour and a half speech contained no derogatory references to the N.S.S.². Though no details are extant, the conference determined in favour of a general organisation, apparently at the instigation of Frank Field of Oldham. Bradlaugh commented testily:

The National Secular Society is an organisation embodying the spirit which has sustained this journal for some time, as the sole representative of British secularism³.

The L.S.U. conference, however, never resulted in a general organisation, and Holyoake backed down⁴. Bradlaugh's N.S.S. had had the advantage of a first start, and began attracting members and local societies, even if not so speedily or

1. N.R., 7 July 1867, editorial, 'Secular Conference at Stalybridge'; Bradlaugh was naturally not invited to this.

2. N.R., 28 July 1867.

3. ibid., 6 Oct 1867.

4. N.R., 13 Oct 1867; in a letter to Bradlaugh, Holyoake pleaded that if the L.S.U. had resolved on a 'general organisation' it had nothing to do with him; Charles Watts then diplomatically asked him to attend an N.S.S. conference at Bradford in December 1867, and he accepted as long as it would not be taken as interfering. Bradlaugh welcomed this, feeling sure in regard to Holyoake that 'nothing will fall from his lips which will not materially advance the objects which we have in view', N.R., 17 Nov 1867; in the event, Holyoake did not attend the conference, being 'unavoidably prevented from reaching Bradford', N.R., 1 Dec 1867.

numerously as he had hoped. By June 1867 he claimed 300 had joined, and by November, over 500¹. Societies were slower to affiliate; up to 1870 only six are reported as having done so - those of Leeds, Oldham, Bradford, Sheffield, Northampton and the North of England Secular Union². Despite not having enrolled 1,000 members, Bradlaugh decided to call the first N.S.S. conference at Bradford on the last Sunday in November 1867. Sixteen towns were represented, by fifteen delegates, and among the more prominent attending were Harriet Law and Thomas Slater of Bury. Bradlaugh was elected president with but one dissentient³.

In the afternoon session the main concern of the speakers was with three issues - the need for education, the building of secular halls and the appointment of a paid lecturer. How he was to be appointed is not clear, but in early December Bradlaugh simply stated that Charles Watts had been named as the first 'special lecturer'⁴. For the cause of local secularism this was to be the most fruitful of the three issues; when he reported on his first six months' work, Watts had delivered over ninety lectures and a dozen societies had been founded or revived⁵. Up to the middle of the 1870's, the other two issues, the building of secular halls and the organisation of education classes for secularists owed nothing to the N.S.S.⁶.

1. N.R., 16 June 1867, 24 Nov 1867.

2. ibid., 4 Aug 1867; 1 Dec 1867; 20 Oct 1867; 17 Feb 1867; 21 July 1867.

3. This was probably Firth of Keighley who had proposed that the president be chosen from membership of the Bradford or Oldham societies.

4. N.R., 8 Dec 1867.

5. ibid., 7 June 1868.

6. As for the former, the New Hall of Science at Old Street was inaugurated in late September 1869 at a cost of c. £1,400; half of this had been paid off by February 1870, and the debt was then being reduced by £9 per week; in October 1869 the Birmingham secularists opened St George's Hall, while their Manchester colleagues founded a Secular Hall Building Company around the same time: N.R., 3 Oct 1869; 10 Oct 1869; 17 Oct 1869; 13 Feb 1870.

The manner of Watts's appointment may have been vague, but in the years 1867-74 there was something a great deal more vague, namely, that though organised secularism may have been progressing at local level, (something which remains to be seen), the N.S.S. remained a purely nominal body. As this has generally escaped acknowledgement, it requires some attention.

The second annual conference of the N.S.S. was held at Bradford in December 1868; the number of delegates was not listed, no statement as to the organisation's finances was issued, and no indication was given of the number of members or of affiliated societies¹. The third conference was held at Keighley in November 1869²; Bradlaugh was absent due to illness and apart from the re-appointment of the entire executive, no matter of moment was touched on. Again, the number of delegates, affiliated societies and members was not given, and the state of finances was not disclosed. This time the conference 'adjourned' for three months - but after the lapse of this time it did not reconvene. In May 1870, a note in the National Reformer declared that 'As the National Secular Society is being re-organised it is... requested... that from this date forward, all members' subscriptions be sent to Mr Austin Holyoake'³. No previous or subsequent indication was given as to the reasons for or the nature of this 're-organisation'. In the annual conference of 1870, held in London on 20 September delegates names were issues for the first time, showing a

1. N.R., 20 Dec 1868.

2. ibid., 28 Nov 1869.

3. N.R., 29 May 1870.

representation of eight known provincial and three London societies; as for finances, all that was reported was a balance of £4-3-4¹. An increase in membership was claimed by Watts, but no figures were given, and again the number of affiliated societies was not revealed. The next conference, at Birmingham in September 1871 brought a change of executive; for some reason, unknown, Bradlaugh refused to stand for re-election. Arthur Trevelyan became president, R.A. Cooper of Norwich, treasurer, and David Knell Fraser, who was not even at the conference, was elected secretary². After this the N.S.S. existed in name only. No annual conferences were held in the three years 1872-4. Fraser, as secretary, was responsible for organising executive meetings; this he tried to do, but as no one bothered to attend them, he gave up calling them³.

This state of affairs did not pass without comment. George Reddalls, a young but rising secularist of the Midlands, deploring the 'disorganised state of the Secular party' in September 1873, urged that

some plan should be adopted by which the Secular societies in different towns can be connected together, and local lecturing abilities utilised to their utmost extent. We might learn something from the Methodists by a study of their plans, circuits and local preachers,

and he requested secularists to make suggestions upon the issue⁴. Reddalls was not alone in his complaints. William Pratt, an ex-member of the London Secularists Propagandist

1. *ibid.*, 2 Oct 1870.

2. *Secular Chronicle*, 13 June 1875; *N.R.*, 1 Oct 1871.

3. *N.R.*, 16 Feb 1873.

4. *Secular Chronicle*, Sept 1873; hereafter abbreviated to *S.C.*

Society¹, agreed with Reddalls that 'there can be no doubt but that the party is thoroughly disorganised throughout the country', and he urged, that irrespective of a central society, there should be a number of unions established in various regions, 'taking the large towns as centres and including, say, a twenty miles' circuit'². A.W. Frow, secretary of the United Secularists' Propagandist Society³, agreed with Pratt, finding that 'the party is apathetic disgracefully so'⁴. James Barker, secretary of the Huddersfield S.S.⁵, with seven years' experience in the movement as a provincial lecturer, joined the chorus of complaint, and likewise urging the establishment of 'secular circuits', claiming that Methodism was no older than their own movement and yet had had far greater success⁶. H.V. Mayer, a freethinker for twenty years, and a leading provincial secularist⁷, added to the chorus:

Freethought has no head, no executive, no general council, no recognised authority. It once had its so-called 'National' Society, but its life was short, its career inglorious, its end unsatisfactory. This apology for an Executive having failed, the movement depends upon individual zeal or isolated effort⁸.

None of this mounting discontent was referred to in the National Reformer, but the complainants were of such standing that the matter could not be long ignored. In June 1874, Bradlaugh announced that

at the request of many of the London and Provincial Secularists, we resume temporarily the Presidency of the

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1. Appendix 1, p.647.
 2. S.C., Oct 1873.
 3. Appendix 1, p.637.
 4. S.C., Nov 1873.
 5. Appendix 1, p.629.
 6. S.C., Nov 1873.
 7. Appendix 1, p.643.
 8. N.R., 7 June 1874.

National Secular Society. We shall submit the matter to meetings at Manchester and Castle Hill, at each of which we hope to see some thousands of Freethinkers, and we shall take a vote on the subject. After getting the society again into working order, we shall call a national conference

The Secular Chronicle's litany of regrets condensed into two basic complaints, firstly that the N.S.S. was merely existing in name, and secondly, that secularism in general was disorganised rather than organised. As to the first, it has been seen how true this was, at least from 1871 when the triumvirate of Bradlaugh, Watts and Holyoake resigned, until late 1874. In the years 1866-71 Bradlaugh was strenuously active in the cause of secularism, delivering continuous exhortations¹, trying to clear off building debts², involved in the re-organisation of London secularism from March to May 1870³, editing the National Reformer and lecturing. In May 1870 he had resolved 'to entirely give up all business and to devote myself solely to the movement'⁴, and the result was that throughout 1870 he gave 170 lectures, 50 of them at personal expense⁵. At the end of his summer campaign of 1871 he felt it was 'on the whole one of the most satisfactory tours we have ever had. Adherents join us from all sides'⁶. But from then until mid-1874, the brunt of the battle was borne by Charles Watts, and Bradlaugh's other activities resulted in a significant lessening of his active secularist

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1. N.R., 3 Jan 1869; 14 Feb, 7 Mar, 12 Sept, 21 Nov, 18 May 1870, 19 June 1870.
 2. ibid., 13 Feb, 29 May 1870.
 3. ibid., 27 Mar, 29 May 1870.
 4. ibid., 23 May 1870, editorial.
 5. ibid., 8 Jan 1871.
 6. ibid., 19 Nov 1871.

work. As this coincides with the period when the N.S.S. was ineffective, it goes far to provide the reason.

As to the second point, a regional analysis of organised secularism will reveal how far the Secular Chronicle complaints were justified.

Regional Distribution of Secular Societies, 1866-74:

i. London area 1866-74:

1866	8, 7, 7, 7,	(7)
1867	8, 6, 6, 8,	(7)
1868	7, 8, 8, 8,	(8)
1869	8, 7, 7, 7,	(7)
1870	7, 9, 7, 7,	(7)
1871	5, 6, 6, 6,	(6)
1872	6, 6, 7, 6,	(6)
1873	5, 6, 6, 7,	(7)
1874	7, 8, 7, 7,	(7)

It is immediately apparent with regard to London that there was little increase in the number of active societies in these years over the numbers which existed in the period 1862-5. Within the years 1866-74 themselves, there is an undeniable, if slight, decline from mid-1871 to mid-1874, coinciding exactly with the time in which decline in national organisation has been found. This gives some substance to the complaint of London secularist, A.W. Frow. Among societies with an erratic history in the period was the Greenwich & Deptford S.S., which, for some unexplained reason discontinued meeting from early January 1866. In March, P.A.V. Le Lubez reported that it was reviving again¹, and it met regularly

1. N.R., 28 Mar 1868.

from then till May 1872; between the latter date and October 1873 it appears to have met but once¹; it met once more in December 1873, and in the following year it again met but once from July till December². A similar, though more clear-cut fate befell the Independent S.S. of Hoxton, which, meeting regularly until the second quarter of 1867, lapsed thereafter owing to the illness of its secretary, Twyman; an attempt to re-organise it in September 1867, as the East London S.S., led to a schism³; this resulted in the appearance of two separate bodies, the Independent S.S., and the East London S.S.⁴. The latter met regularly until June 1870 when it ceased activity, while the former had disappeared already in January 1869. Another victim of the decline of the early 1870's was the Paddington S.S.: it met without a break from January 1866 until December 1870, after which it met no more until late January 1874, when it revived temporarily in May; but by June it was inactive again until beyond the end of this period.

It was not an unrelieved story of continually lapsing societies - otherwise the statistics would show a sharper decline - and the reason is, that as societies lapsed, new and different ones arose. Thus, what began as an open-air Freethought 'mission' in North London in the last quarter of 1866, grew into an organised North London S.S. by late August 1867, and this

1. *ibid.*, 8 Sept 1872.
 2. *ibid.*, 4 Oct 1873.
 3. *ibid.*, 14 July, 8 Sept 1867, 12 Apr 1868.
 4. *ibid.*

functioned regularly to the end of these years. Similarly, John Maughan's United Secularists' Propagandist Society, which had lapsed prior to the beginning of this period, revived in August 1869. A further new body, the Hackney Secularists' Association was formed in October 1872 and was still active in December 1874.

One area where the secularists failed to organise, despite determined effort, was in Kingston-on-Thames. In January 1869 Charles Watts and Le Lubez descended on the area and engaged a hall for the N.S.S. for three months¹. Bradlaugh came to lecture there in February²; by March the local Christians were organising counter-lectures and began denouncing Bradlaugh. Mrs Law entered the fray on his behalf, and he himself returned to the scene in March, but no society could be got going as a result³.

In March 1870 a conference of London freethinkers, presided over by Bradlaugh, was held at the New Hall of Science, in order to intensify open-air propaganda, to institute a tract society, and to consider areas of the city where N.S.S. branches might be successfully launched⁴. Among those present were Austin Holyoake, William Pratt, and Grout, the latter later to be one of the most active members of the Malthusian League. Bradlaugh promised to lecture anywhere it was intended to open a branch of the N.S.S., but, that apart, there was no formal

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1. N.R., 24 Jan 1869.
 2. ibid., 14 Feb 1869.
 3. ibid., 21 Mar 1869.
 4. ibid., 27 Mar 1870.

attempt made to co-ordinate the activities of the various societies. When this conference reconvened in May, pleas for unity made by Lake of the Stratford secularists, who called attention to successful unions in the provinces, and of Burdon of the North London S.S., 'authorised by his society to state that they were prepared to enter the confederacy at once', no federation came about¹. Though no excuse was given at the time for this failure, the reason is understandable. There was a strong spirit of independence among the London groups, and during the sittings of the conference, Bradlaugh made it clear that he wanted London secularism to be dominated by his N.S.S. This is quite clear from similar developments two years later, with the emergence of George William Foote into the limelight. In late July 1872 a further Freethought conference was presided over by Bradlaugh, at Foote's request. Bradlaugh reported this in a half-suppressed manner, merely noting that 'a considerable section of those present resolved upon the formation of a new organisation for mutual improvement'². Foote's insistence on the publication of details revealed that what had been organised was the London Secular Society, 'a new secular organisation altogether independent of any existing national or local society', with himself as president, agreed upon by a close vote of 57 for and 53 against³. The consequence was the frustration of Bradlaugh's attempts to extend the N.S.S. in the metropolis, the institution of another, though erratic,

1. N.R., 29 May 1870.

2. N.R., 4 Aug 1872.

3. ibid., 18 Aug 1872.

secular society, and a continued lack of unity. A further attempt at unification, made in August 1872 by William Ramsey of the U.S.P.S. came to nothing¹.

ii. West Riding of Yorkshire, 1866-74:

1866	5,	4,	5,	6,	(5)
1867	6,	6,	6,	7,	(6)
1868	7,	6,	6,	6,	(6)
1869	6,	6,	5,	6,	(6)
1870	7,	8,	8,	7,	(7)
1871	7,	6,	6,	6,	(6)
1872	6,	6,	6,	6,	(6)
1873	6,	5,	8,	8,	(7)
1874	8,	7,	6,	7,	(7)

For a period in 1862, the West Rising was to have what was to be its largest number of active societies for over a decade. At no time between 1862 and 1874 was this number exceeded, and though it was equalled for a period in 1870, it was not till late 1873-early 1874 that it was maintained with any consistency. This might appear to justify the jeremiahs of people like H.V. Mayer and G.H. Reddalls in 1873. Nevertheless, though spectacular development was absent, there was no catastrophic decline. Throughout the period 1866-74 there was, on average, almost consistently double the number of active societies existing in the years 1862-5. What caused frustration in this area may not have been the actual number of societies so much as the lack of permanent co-ordination. District federation failed in October 1873, when an attempt was made to effect a union of societies. It appears that Reddalls' plea 'to learn

1. *ibid.*, 18 Aug 1872 ; it was not till January 1874, when yet another conference, attended by Watts, Le Lubez and Foote, *inter alia*, decided on the immediate institution of a social club at the Hall of Science, where all London secularists could meet, that the first steps in achieving harmony were taken; *N.R.*, 4 Jan 1874. For Ramsey, see Appendix 1 , p.648.

something from the Methodists' was being heeded in this region, for, in November, the Huddersfield S.S. suggested the immediate appointment of a managing committee to carry out a scheme for a 'Yorkshire Lecturing Circuit', that this circuit embrace Halifax, Heckmondwike, Batley, Dewsbury and Mirfield, to be extended as the need arose; that rules be drawn up, a staff of lecturers be appointed, and that 'Secular love feasts be held quarterly at which members be requested to bear testimony to the value of Secularism'¹. A meeting was held to this end, in December 1873, attended by delegates from six of the eight active societies. Suggestions to have the circuit embrace all Yorkshire were rejected in favour of confining it initially to the West Riding. Huddersfield became the headquarters, and James Barker the secretary of the Y.S.L.C.². A controversial resolution that 'each society separately pay all the expenses of the lecturers engaged by them' almost brought this federation to a premature end: in early January 1874 J. Harris of the New Wortley S.S. complained of the December conference that

the resolutions passed were nothing more or less than useless, leaving, as they do, each society in exactly the same position as before, viz., to have a lecturer only when they are in a position to bear the expense³.

He wanted the Y.S.L.C. income to be levied on each society 'in proportion to its position and income' and argued that, under the present scheme

districts with few or no members at all are left to struggle on in darkness and obscurity, whilst (in) towns where societies of talented members exist are occupying the time of lecturers who might be far better employed in working up new districts⁴.

1. N.R., 9 Nov 1874.

2. For Barker, see Appendix 1, p.629.

3. N.R., 14 Jan 1874.

4. ibid.

As a result of this dissent, and despite the attempts of Y.S.L.C. secretary, Barker, to justify the framework devised by the conference, the New Wortley society opted out¹. Nonetheless, the Y.S.L.C. survived long enough to hold its next annual general meeting, where it called on Bradlaugh to reconvene a conference of the defunct N.S.S.².

iii. Lancashire-Cheshire, 1866-74:

1866	5, 5, 5, 5, (5)
1867	5, 5, 5, 5, (5)
1868	3, 5, 6, 6, (5)
1869	5, 6, 6, 6, (6)
1870	8, 9, 10, 7, (8)
1871	11, 11, 10, 9, (10)
1872	8, 8, 5, 6, (7)
1873	7, 4, 5, 5, (5)
1874	5, 6, 6, 6, (6)

This region underwent a marked progress, in terms of the number of active societies, between 1866 and 1872, years when Bradlaugh was devoting determined effort to set up the N.S.S. On the eve of this rise, the latter half of 1868, there were organised secularists in Ashton, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, and Stalybridge. When this progress reached its peak in early 1871, additional societies were operating in Birkenhead, Bolton, Darwen, Heywood and Warrington³. When decline followed, it hit even the long-established societies. That in Ashton lapsed in August 1870, revived to amalgamate with Stalybridge in late January 1871, but appears to have been immediately inactive

1. *ibid.*, 25 Jan 1874.

2. *ibid.*, 6 Sept 1874.

3. Watts was responsible for the origin of the Darwen S.S., as his lectures in the area in March 1869 indicate: *N.R.*, 21 Mar 1869; Bradlaugh can be credited with the foundation of one at Leigh: *N.R.*, 11 Sept 1870; the origins of the others is not clear.

again, until August of the same year. More decided was the failure of the Liverpool society in February 1873, for, no reports indicate its meeting at any time thereafter till beyond this period. The Lancashire Secular Union, still operating in 1868, lapsed in March 1870; efforts to revive it in September-October 1871 were of no avail¹; and further efforts in August 1874 were equally abortive². The reasons for the decline after 1871 are not at all evident; all that is clear is the fact that there were as many societies active in 1862 as in 1873-4 when the N.S.S. was merely nominal; and this experience of the region appears to confirm the complaints of the Secular Chronicle.

iv. North of England, 1866-74:

1866	1,	1,	1,	1,	(1)
1867	3,	3,	3,	3,	(3)
1868	3,	3,	3,	3,	(3)
1869	3,	4,	4,	5,	(4)
1870	5,	3,	6,	5,	(5)
1871	5,	6,	5,	6,	(5)
1872	6,	7,	5,	5,	(6)
1873	4,	3,	4,	3,	(4)
1874	4,	3,	3,	2,	(3)

As with the Lancs-Cheshire region, this area also experienced marked progress, up to mid-1872. It was, however, a more impressive one, from the single society at Newcastle in 1866, to the seven in April-June 1872. At this point the Societies were shared almost equally between the large towns - Newcastle, Sunderland, West Hartlepool, Jarrow, - and the colliery villages -

1. N.R., 1 Oct 1871.

2. ibid., 30 Aug 1874.

Crook¹, Spennymoor², and Bedlington³. That organised secularism should have made its way into these remote villages is surprising, but no other area owed so much to the direct efforts of Bradlaugh and Charles Watts, the latter in particular. The Crook S.S. was brought together by Watts in 1870⁴, and thereafter, both he and Bradlaugh lectured there⁵. The society at West Hartlepool was founded in March 1872 and Bradlaugh had lectured in the vicinity in November 1871⁶. The societies in Spennymoor, Stockton and Bedlington must also have owed whatever persistence they had to Watt's attentions⁷.

From late 1872 onward, however, there was a distinct decline: the society in Crook lapsed from June 1872 till February 1873, and from June 1873 to March 1874; that at Spennymoor from September 1872 till the end of 1874 at least; and that at Jarrow from December 1872 till September 1873, from October 1873 till July 1874 and from August 1874 till the end of the period and beyond. From around the same period, 1872, the Newcastle Secular Union had nothing but bad debts, and it was not until mid-1874 that it was sufficiently solvent to contemplate a conference of Northumberland and Durham secularists in order 'to bring about an organisation for the purpose of securing a permanent lecturer for the district'⁸.

1. Situated in Co. Durham.

2. South of Durham town.

3. West of Blyth, in Northumberland.

4. N.R., 23 Oct 1870; its secretary, M. Stitt- acknowledged that it was Watts 'who brought us together'.

5. ibid., 5 Feb 1871, for lectures by Bradlaugh; 15 Oct 1871, for lectures by Watts.

6. ibid., 19 Nov 1871.

7. ibid., 27 Feb, 18 Sept 1870; 11 Aug 1873; 8 Feb 1874.

8. ibid., 7 June 1874; 28 June 1874.

v. Midlands and East, 1866-74:

1866	1, 1, 1, 3, (1)
1867	5, 4, 4, 4, (4)
1868	6, 5, 6, 5, (5)
1869	6, 7, 6, 7, (6)
1870	6, 5, 6, 5, (6)
1871	5, 6, 6, 5, (6)
1872	4, 5, 5, 4, (5)
1873	4, 4, 4, 4, (4)
1874	4, 4, 4, 3, (4)

In the years 1866-74 the story of secularism in the Midlands region is identical to that in the North. Early in 1866, the only society reported as active was that in Ipswich; but by the end of the year, groups were active again in Hull and Northampton, and early in the next year, at Grimsby and Nottingham. That at Grimsby was, for a time, to be one of the most successful in the country¹. The Leicester S.S., which lapsed in May 1862, was refounded in August 1867, with John Sketchley among its provisional committee². Thereafter it met without a break to the end of the period. But new societies at Derby, Mansfield, Kettering and Norwich were not so enduring; that at Kettering, formed after a lecture by Bradlaugh in March 1868, disappeared permanently in October 1869³. The Derby S.S. was founded as a result of propaganda by James Hooper of Nottingham, but failed without revival in August 1870⁴. The origin of the Norwich society was inspired by a visit to the area of G.J. Holyoake in late 1869, but in January 1872 it disappeared, despite

1. N.R., 30 June 1867: '.... since Secularism has been started in Grimsby it has been a success. It is now four months since a few friends met together since then we have formed a Society have funds in hand and fifty volumes of books towards our library'; this early report was not unjustified euphoria; it had about 30 members in January 1868, and though it appeared inactive from March 1868 to January 1869, it met regularly from then beyond the end of the present period; by the end of 1871 they had erected their own hall, capable of holding 400, and the society was singled out by Watts as an example to others: N.R., 19 Jan 1868, p.46, 29 Jan 1871.

2. ibid., 1 Sept 1867; for Sketchley, see Appendix 1, pp.649-650.

3. N.R., 29 Mar 1868.

4. ibid., 6 Mar, 13 Mar 1870; for Hooper, see Appendix 1, pp.638-639.

lectures by Watts there, in May and July 1872¹. The Mansfield S.S. only lasted from May to September 1868. As in the cases of Lancs-Cheshire and the North, the decline from 1872 provides grounds for the complaints of Reddalls, Frow and company, though not quite so dramatically, as the position, even in 1873-4, was better than in 1862-5, if only just².

vi. West Midlands, Wales, South-West, South and South-East,
1866-74:

1866	3,	3,	3,	3,	(3)
1867	3,	3,	2,	3,	(3)
1868	3,	3,	3,	2,	(3)
1869	4,	6,	7,	7,	(6)
1870	5,	6,	5,	7,	(6)
1871	7,	7,	7,	6,	(7)
1872	8,	9,	9,	10,	(9)
1873	6,	5,	5,	5,	(5)
1874	5,	5,	3,	2,	(4)

Organised secularism underwent greater development in this area over the years 1866-74, than in any other. From having the lowest number of societies in 1862-5, it came to have the second highest number in the early 1870's. The rise began in early 1869, when, to the previously-existing societies of Abergavenny, Birmingham and Wednesbury, were added new ones at Portsmouth³, Bristol, Oldbury, Wolverhampton, Coventry and Cardiff⁴. By 1872 further societies were active in Aberdare, Plymouth, Hanley, Leek and Kent. At times in this period there were no fewer than four district federations: i) the Kent Secular Union, ii) the South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire Secular Union,

1. *ibid.*, 12 May, 7 July 1872.

2. See above, p.60.

3. *N.R.*, 10 Jan 1869; it began with 15 members.

4. Watts made a great impression when he visited the area in August 1869, the result being the first-ever secular society in the city: *N.R.*, 22 Aug 1869.

iii) the West of England and South Wales Secular Union and
 iv) the Midlands Secular Union. The first, a short-lived one, was organised by Robert Forder of Woolwich, when, in late July 1872, he invited delegates from the towns of Deptford, Gravesend, Chatham, Northfleet and Maidstone, to a conference devised to organise some means of intensifying propaganda in Kent County, and though it 'commenced active work by lecturing in Chatham and Rochester', after the middle of September it fell through¹. The S.S. & E.W.S.U. was founded by H.V. Mayer of Dudley on 2 April 1871 at Wednesbury, with C.C. Cattell of Birmingham as its first secretary². It operated without lapse until beyond the end of the period under consideration. The W.E. & S.W.S.U. was founded on 8 September 1872 at the instigation of the Cardiff S.S., at a conference there, attended by delegates from Bristol, Aberdare and Merthyr. Its object was to 'unite the Secular Societies and the many isolated individuals in the counties of Gloucester, Somerset, Wiltshire, Monmouth and Glamorgan', and to 'encourage local talent by sending lecturers among the towns and villages whether possessed of societies or not', so that 'secularism can penetrate where it has never been before'³. This was a point then being overlooked farther north by the West Riding Lecturing Circuit; but for all its ambition, the W.E. & S.W.S.U. shared the same fate as the Kent Secular Union, for, after October 1872 it disappeared.

1. Reports of the K.S.U. no longer appear in the National Reformer after 15 September 1872. For Robert Forder, see Appendix 1, pp.635-636.

2. N.R., 9 Apr 1872; Bradlaugh had lectured in this region in February, and a result of this was a desire for the formation of some kind of union; the S.S. & E.W.S.U. was the result: N.R., 8 Oct 1871, pp. 228-230, 'Secular Organisation, Mr H.V. Mayer's Address to the Conference in Birmingham, 17 Sept 1871'.

3. S.C., Oct 1872.

Finally, there was the Midland Secular Union, formed at Oldbury on 4 April 1869, with Cattell of Birmingham as its begetter and first secretary¹. This union claimed to have supporters in Dudley, Coventry, Oldbury, West Bromich, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Leicester and Nottingham. In its first year it was responsible for 'some fifty or sixty lectures' in the two contiguous regions. In the absence of other evidence, it may well be that the marked rise in the number of societies from 1869 to 1870 was due to the activities of the M.S.U., for its origin and that rise are contemporaneous; however, the continued rise in the number of societies thereafter, cannot be attributed to it, for, by February 1871, it too had lapsed.

vii. Scotland, 1866-74:

1866	2,	2,	1,	1,	(1)
1867	1,	1,	2,	2,	(2)
1868	3,	3,	3,	4,	(3)
1869	4,	4,	4,	3,	(4)
1870	5,	5,	8,	8,	(6)
1871	7,	7,	7,	7,	(7)
1872	8,	8,	6,	6,	(7)
1873	3,	3,	4,	4,	(4)
1874	4,	3,	3,	2,	(3)

The Scottish region adheres with remarkable similarity to the pattern already established in the other areas. Sole representative of organised secularism in late 1866, the Glasgow Secular & Eclectic Institute (G.S.&E.I.) was joined by a revived Paisley society in late 1867. In 1868 a branch of the N.S.S. was founded in Edinburgh, and a further one at Greenock in November of that year brought organised secularism back to this town after two years of disarray²; but, by late July 1869 Greenock secularism

1. For Cattell, see Appendix 1, p.630.

2. N.R., 15 Nov 1868.

was evidently in disarray again, for there were no reported meetings from that date until September 1870 when nine secularists met to form a branch of the N.S.S.¹. The real expansion began in 1870, by the end of which year there were branches of the N.S.S. in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Greenock, in addition to independent societies in Paisley, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Bradlaugh had lectured in Edinburgh four times in 1870, and his presence was obviously the deciding factor in the founding of the N.S.S. branch there². Hopes for a Scottish Secular Union, which Bradlaugh had encouraged specifically for this region, were not realised, however, in these years³. The phenomenon of two separate societies in a single town was unique to Scotland at this period, and the slump which hit societies all over the U.K. from 1872 onward, when the N.S.S. was in abeyance, is nowhere better illustrated than in Scotland: the drastic fall from eight to four societies, from the beginning of 1872 to the end of 1873, was due mainly to the disappearance of the branches of the N.S.S. The first to fall was the Edinburgh branch, after May 1872, while the independent Edinburgh S.S. continued in being; the Glasgow N.S.S. disappeared sometime in the first quarter of 1873, whereas the G.S. & E.I. thrived⁴; the Greenock N.S.S. went astray around the same time, and the Paisley society had fallen in May 1872. It would appear from this that the ineffectiveness of the N.S.S. at headquarters led to demoralisation throughout the branches, and possibly even to the extent of affecting the more numerous independent societies.

1. *ibid.*, 11 Sept 1870.

2. *ibid.*, 5 June 1870.

3. *ibid.*, 12 Sept 1869, 1 May 1870, 12 Jan 1873.

4. The G.S. & E.I. Report for 1873 showed a strong financial position, and double the membership of the previous year, N.R., 18 Jan 1874.

Conclusion:

There were at least 22 active societies in the U.K. in 1866. A steady increase occurred until a peak was reached in 1871-2 when there were over twice as many. The decline which came in 1873-4, sharp as it was in most regions, left organised secularism better off by half than it had been in the 1860's. The rise began in 1868, and no single factor can explain its universality; but the following events of that year are suggested as relevant points: the N.S.S., though 'founded' in 1866, did not hold its first conference until the end of 1867, and only from then did it begin to find its feet; although it never claimed the allegiance of the majority of secularists in this period, it must have acted as a source of influence and inspiration, the *moreso* as its organ, the National Reformer, was the only regular printed medium of communication among secularists until 1872. More pertinent is the fact that the foundation of the N.S.S. led to the appointment of Watts as a paid propagandist, and it would be futile to deny that his intense lecturing campaign had no results, since the regional analyses indicate the opposite. The political situation may have been another relevant agent. It has been suggested that the decline in Holyoake's Society of Theological Utilitarians between 1847 and 1850 was due to the diverting political preoccupations of the time, and its subsequent revival due to the removal of that diversion¹; similarly, the passing of the Reform Act of 1867 did away with some of the political pre-

1. See above, pp.25-26.

occupation for secularists, leaving the field to more strictly 'freethought' attentions from 1868 onward; and in 1868-9 there were most assuredly reasons for such attentions, firstly in the attempted prosecution of their sole organ, the National Reformer¹, and secondly, in their hopes for the passage of an Affirmation Bill. Furthermore, that the passing of the Reform Act removed one diversion for secularists, is clearly true in the case of Bradlaugh:

During the year (1868) he lectured frequently in London, beside visiting Grimsby, Bedlingtonm Newcastle, Hull, West Bromich, Birmingham, Kettering, Northampton, Huddersfield, Bradford, Sheffield, Ashton, Manchester, Bury, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Keighley, Sunderland, Plymouth and other towns².

The society at Kettering owed its origin to his lectures there, and when in May 1872 he decided to devote himself full-time to the movement, the results go some way to explain the rise in the number of societies. His campaigns of 1870-1 were marathons, and the results could be found, among other places, in West Hartlepool, Edinburgh and the S.S. & E.W.S.U. Indirectly, by being Watt's mentor, he could claim credit for additional societies in Crook, Spennymoor, Normanton and Bedlington.

While organised secularism clearly owed a great deal to Bradlaugh and Watts in this period, the N.S.S never grew into a genuinely national body. In effect,

the propagandist work performed in the name of the National Secular Society prior to 1871, was in fact, then, and has since been, executed by Messrs Bradlaugh, Austin Holyoake, Watts and their friends³.

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1. D. Tribe, op.cit., pp. 101-102.
 2. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.245.
 3. N.R., 16 Feb 1873, 'Reports of Mectings'; this report, unfortunately, is unsigned.

This leads to an explanation, not only of the rise of organised societies in 1868-72, but also of their partial fall in the next two years. In September 1874, a pseudonymous writer, Veritas, commented with insight:

Both as regards numbers and organisation Secularists are themselves liable to be deceived. They go to great meetings to hear Mr Bradlaugh speak, and fancy that the numerical progress of Secularism is commensurate with the increase in his auditory, forgetting that Mr Bradlaugh is a great orator, and that the majority of his hearers are enamoured, not so much of what he says as of the way in which he says it. Mr Bradlaugh boasts truthfully enough that he can gather together an audience of three to four thousand people in Manchester, but I am sure that the Secularists of Manchester do not equal one tenth of that number

. . . . there is an exaggerated belief in the efficacy of mere logic to accomplish great social and religious aims, a proneness to regard men as mere logical machines. The same critical process which destroys Christianity will not build up Secularism The ultimate appeal in every ethical system is to a feeling, not to a thought¹.

For the unity and progress of organised secularism, there were two inherent weaknesses in Bradlaugh's role. His brand of secularism, a ruthlessly logical and militantly critical assault on orthodoxy did not contain in it this 'ultimate appeal to a feeling', but was dominated by intellect. This was the case with the members of the Manchester Secular Institute, who said of that body, in June 1870, that it was

mostly occupied with the negative or apologetic side of Secularism A strong feeling has, however, arisen (that) the positive side has to be shown, and that new order, that higher morality, sounder culture and truer humanity which Secularism teaches must begin to be wrought out and realised.

This 'strong feeling' led them to found the Manchester Secular

1. S.C., Sept 1874, 'Secular Organisation' by 'Veritas'; his suggestion that it was not so much what Bradlaugh said as the way in which he said it that drew the crowds, is also expressed in an interesting letter from Professor J.S. Blackie, to Bradlaugh, in which he lauds his oratory while having reservations as to its content: Bodleian Library, Oxford, Thomson Papers, J.S. Blackie to Bradlaugh, 24 May 1872.

Club so that they might meet 'for mutual improvement and brotherly conference'. Clearly, it was under the influence of the same feeling that the Huddersfield freethinkers, in seeking a closer union urged that 'love-feasts be held at which members be requested to bear testimony to the value of Secularism'; and this 'strong feeling' led H.V. Mayer to complain in 1873, that

Our lectures for the most part have been tirades against Christianity and superstition - well enough and needful enough by the way. But something more is wanted¹.

But to articulate that something more was another matter. Bradlaugh tried to do just that in his concern with such issues as birth-control, land reform and the abolition of unjust privilege, but the fact that his fellow-secularists did not see it this way, and insisted that his Freethought work was negative is the only relevant consideration here.

The second weakness in Bradlaugh's role was one of more direct consequence. As 'Veritas' pointed out, Bradlaugh's militancy required constant application, and when the militant was absent the ranks could and did fall away. Thus, in 1873 he was a great deal more preoccupied with other matters than he had hitherto been: in May he went to visit Spain and Portugal; from September 1873 to January 1874 he was absent in America. Even when he was in England in 1873, he was devoting energy to the cause of the agricultural labourers and the land question. When he returned to England in January 1874, it was to contest his second and third Northampton elections, and these absorbed the energies of Watts as much as of the candidate. Watts was

1. S.C., Dec 1873, 'Secular Shortcomings', by H.V. Mayer of Dudley.

being forced to devote less attention to the lecturing circuit than hitherto, partly because Bradlaugh's absences confined him to London, and partly because the special lecturing fund which financed his tours, was not meeting expenses; as early as September 1872 it was £20 overdrawn. The natural result was that societies founded directly or indirectly by them fell by the way.

Nevertheless, though organised secularism suffered a temporary set-back, the gains of 1868-72 were not lost in 1873-4; and at local level and in individual endeavour there was an undeniable quickening of secular activity: halls were being acquired or built in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Grimsby, Bradford, Oldham and Cardiff¹, while good club-houses already existed in Leicester, Huddersfield, Sheffield and Nottingham².

Individual secularists were going forward in elections to school boards, such as Arthur Trevelyan at Pencaitland, R.A. Cooper at Norwich, and John Page Hopps in Glasgow³. Bradlaugh and the bolder secularists were not so frequently subjected to the type of reception he had experienced in Guernsey and Wigan at the beginning of his career⁴; he found in 1872 that 'there has been exhibited during the last two years much more favour to Freethought views in the counties of Northumberland and Durham⁵, while Watts reported in 1870 that 'on entering Mansfield and Mexboro recently, how different was my reception to that of a few years since. Formerly in those places, stones were the arguments used to answer me'⁶.

1. N.R., 3 Oct 1869; 17 Oct 1869

2. *ibid.*, 3 Apr 1870.

3. *ibid.*, 13 Apr 1873; 29 Mar 1874; 20 Apr 1873.

4. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.164-7, 189-93.

5. N.R., 7 Jan 1873.

6. *ibid.*, 6 Mar 1870.

Finally, progress was visible in the extension of written propaganda. Watts claimed in August 1871 that sales of tracts and the circulation of the National Reformer were higher than ever before¹. In the August of the next year the National Reformer was joined by the Secular Chronicle of Birmingham; indeed, the very complaints of its editor, and other Midlands secularists at the apparent lack of progress, was a virtual index of progress - prior to the period 1868-74 there had been no West Midlands secularists sufficiently organised and articulate to make such complaints. In effect, the real basis of these complaints was not the lack of local progress, but the absence of a genuine, national organisation to register and reflect it. This was shortly to be put right, by the arrival of Besant and the return of Bradlaugh.

1. *ibid.*, 27 Aug 1871.

Chapter Two: The Rise and Decline of the National Secular Society, 1875-1893

i. The climax of organised secularism

Bradlaugh announced his return to the struggle for national organisation, in June 1874¹. To justify the unconstitutional manner of temporarily resuming the presidency he determined to submit his action for approval or condemnation to projected meetings at Manchester and Castle Hill. When the Manchester meeting convened in late June 1874 he received 'a glorious reception' and 'a very forest of hands' endorsed his action². At Castle Hill, on 5 July, the first meeting there in thirteen years, 7,000 were present at the morning session, and 25,000 in the afternoon³. Here too, his action was overwhelmingly endorsed. He thereupon proceeded to re-organise the N.S.S. He set up a corresponding council, requiring its prospective members to send him the type of local detail he had first requested in 1866. First to be appointed was George Standring for Hackney, in early August⁴, and between then and July 1875 forty others were appointed throughout the U.K.⁵. In this same period, previously independent societies in Manchester, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Heckmondwike, Northampton, Nottingham and Bedlington,

1. N.R., 7 June 1874.

2. ibid., 28 June 1874.

3. ibid., 12 July 1874; although the majority of the 25,000 were probably non-secularists who attended from curiosity, there must also have been a great many freethinkers present.

4. ibid., 2 Aug 1874, for Standring, see Appendix 1, p.652.

5. Among other London corresponding members were Forder for Woolwich, Ramsey for Bethnal Green, Le Lubez for the West End, and J.P. Adams for Tottenham: N.R., 2, 16 Aug, 6 Sept 1874, 4 July 1875.

affiliated to the N.S.S.¹, while hopes were expressed for new branches in London's East End, Glasgow, Brighton, Dublin, Dresden, Cardiff, Stockton, Derby, Edinburgh, and Plymouth². Even in places where a society did not affiliate, many of its members did so as individuals: in August 1875, the Oldham S.S. had at least 31 of its members in the N.S.S., while the North Shields S.S. had 26 members affiliated³. This quickening of activity on the part of the reviving N.S.S. proved infectious, resulting in the foundation or re-organisation of further independent societies as in Leeds, Southampton, Deptford & Greenwich, Todmorden, Burnley, Halifax, Bradford, Bingley, Batley, and Rossendale⁴.

Before his second visit to America, in September 1874, Bradlaugh ensured that his absence would not be attended with the same adverse results as in late 1873-early 1874, for he appointed an executive committee of Watts, Standring, Le Lubez and Ramsey, to act in his absence⁵. For once, matters were to turn out as he had planned, for the N.S.S. was well on the way to being 'again in working order' when he and the Executive decided to hold the national conference for Whitsun, 16 May 1875, at Manchester.

When the conference met, 58 provincial areas were represented, in contrast to the 8 of 1870⁶. In seeking re-election Bradlaugh

1. *N.R.*, 6, 13 June, 11 July, 15 Aug 1875.

2. *ibid.*, 5, 26 July, 2, 16, 23, 30 Aug 1874; 28 Mar, 26 Sept 1875.

3. *ibid.*, 8 Aug 1875.

4. *ibid.*, 12, 26 July, 23, 30 Aug, 25 Oct 1874, 6 June, 5 Sept, 24, 31 Oct, 21 Nov 1875.

5. *ibid.*, 6 Sept 1874.

6. See above, p.71.

declared, in reference to the manner in which he had resumed office in 1874, that if 'they deemed that irregular then let them make all things regular now'¹. Cattell then proposed him for president and he was unanimously elected.

In this, the first conference since 1871, Bradlaugh was faced with the opposition of the Midlands secularists, led by Reddalls. These were actuated by hostility to him by the way he and Watts had resumed office, and by the apparently shady episode of the disposal of the Berwick legacy². They had been pressing for national and district organisation, and for the holding of a national Freethought conference, especially from January 1875 onward. When Bradlaugh announced the proposed N.S.S. conference for May 1875 they objected, since

if delegates are sent from Freethought Societies, they will not be allowed to take any part in the most important of the proceedings, unless they are members of that society (the N.S.S.)

and Reddalls threatened:

unless considerable alterations are made in the plan of Mr Bradlaugh's proposed conference, we should think it would be best to hold a Conference that will really represent the Freethought Party³.

Bradlaugh's reply, that 'delegates of Freethought Societies are granted the opportunity of voting on all questions except the election of officers and finance', merely provoked Reddalls to respond that this was 'a very limited privilege indeed, as no other business is at present proposed to be brought forward'⁴. Whereas Reddalls threatened, the Glasgow S. & E.I. acted, by resolving that 'after the reply given in the National Reformer

1. N.R., 23 May 1875.

2. Appendix 3 for this episode.

3. S.C., 11 Apr 1875.

4. ibid.

we can take no part in the proposed Conference'¹. Reddalls, however, backed down, and attended the conference; here he probed into the events involving the N.S.S. from 1871 to 1874, and into the issue of the Berwick legacy. Bradlaugh tried to win Reddalls over by nominating him for a vice-presidency, during the election of officers, but Reddalls refused to accept². In the afternoon session, Bradlaugh again proposed him, Annie Besant seconded it, and it was carried with such hurried unanimity that the bewildered Reddalls had no choice but to accept. Thus, the opposition was quelled, and it was with truth that Annie Besant, in her speech to the evening session, could claim that the N.S.S. was at last 'national'³.

A few months later, Bradlaugh again departed for America, a departure attended by no adverse effects, for the N.S.S. continued to grow, and one of the chief agents of this growth was Annie Besant.

Mrs Besant is an ambitious woman and when the fit is on her, will do and say any mad thing. She is very young, and in all worldly matters, very foolish.

Thomas Scott (1874)⁴

Mrs Besant est une femme tres intelligente, que j'espere de voir sue notre platform dans l'avenir. Elle est un des 'writers' for Thomas Scott's series. If she stays with us, poor Mrs Law may say her prayers

Bradlaugh (1874)⁵

In July 1874, then on the road to atheism, Annie Besant read

1. *ibid.*, 18 Apr 1875.

2. *S.C.*, 23 May 1875. These events are not reported in the *National Reformer*.

3. Other examples of the efforts made to disarm the reluctant or the hostile were, i) the unanimous passing of resolutions to invite the independent-minded G.W. Foote and Harriet Law to become vice-presidents, and ii) the suppression of Owen Balmforth's attempt to get details as to the Berwick Legacy. Balmforth was secretary of the Huddersfield S.S. and a prominent Midlands republican; see Appendix

4. Holyoake Letters, No 2274, Thomas Scott to G.J. Holyoake, 12 Sept 1874.

5. Bradlaugh Collection, Charles to Alice and Hypatia Bradlaugh, undated, but from context, sometime in 1874.

her first National Reformer. On 2 August she met Bradlaugh at the Hall of Science, and one week later she had joined the N.S.S.¹. By the end of August she was on the staff of the National Reformer, writing under the name of Ajax². She gave her first lecture on 25 August 1874, on 'The Political Status of Women', and thereafter never looked back³. By early February 1875, she was on her first provincial lecturing tour, exhorting and reviving local societies in the way Bradlaugh and Watts had done in the years 1868-72. Her first visit to Longton in April 1875, prompted secularist Francis Neale, to enthuse:

In Mrs Besant the Secular party possess one of the most cultured and ready speakers that has appeared on the Secular platform within the last thirty years⁴.

She spoke at Southampton on 23 May, and a new society held its first meeting there one week later⁵; the day after lecturing in Southampton she was speaking in Middlesboro, where another society was founded⁶. And within the hierarchy of the N.S.S. her rise was as remarkable, for within nine months of joining, she was a vice-president, took part in the deliberations of the 1875 Conference as if she were a veteran freethinker, and by July 1876 was acting on its executive⁷.

As for Bradlaugh, on his return from the States, he launched

1. A. Besant, An Autobiography, (2nd ed. London, 1893), p.135; N.R., 9 Aug 1874; ironically, two other women in Bradlaugh's circle received their membership cards at the same time, his wife, and Kate Eunice, wife of Charles Watts.

2. Besant, op.cit., p. 180. N.R., 30 Aug 1874.

3. Besant, op.cit., pp. 181-2.

4. S.C., 18 Apr 1875. For Neale, see Appendix 1, p.646.

5. N.R., 6 June 1875.

6. ibid.

7. As executive meetings were unreported unless matter of importance arose, she may have been on it prior to this; S.C., 23 July 1876; on this occasion the matter of importance was the expulsion of G.W. Foote, for reasons unknown.

into as vigorous a lecturing campaign as ever he had conducted. The result was that the Leeds Conference of June 1876 was 'the most extensive gathering ever known in the annals of our party'¹. Even the old dissidents presented themselves, Frank Field of Oldham, Harriet Law and G.J. Holyoake². Holyoake accepted a vice-presidency, and, in addition, became chairman of a committee which the conference appointed to review the N.S.S. constitution and to suggest improvements³.

After the Leeds Conference, the progress of the N.S.S. continued. Among adhesions at this time were the entire Burnley S.S., 17 members of the Paisley S.S., and 14 members each from the Plymouth and Shipley societies, in addition to the opening of new branches at Stourbridge and Seghill⁴. Independent societies located in Hetton, South London, and Exeter affiliated in August and September 1876, while Bradlaugh's lectures were responsible for the rise of new societies in Norwich and Portsmouth⁵.

But this progress, even the very future of the N.S.S., was soon placed in jeopardy by one of the factors which effectively destroyed hopes for national organisation in 1861, viz., Bradlaugh's advocacy of birth-control. In January 1877 he and Besant took the decision to publish Charles Knowlton's birth-control pamphlet, Fruits of Philosophy. They took this decision

1. S.C., 11 June 1876.

2. The inference from this is that they could no longer afford to ignore the N.S.S. if they did not want to be left out on a limb.

3. N.R., 11 June 1876.

4. ibid., 2 July 1876, 16 July, 20 Aug, p.127, 24 Sept 1876.

5. N.R., 23 July, 10 Sept 1876.

deliberately, to court prosecution and seek a judgement as to the legality of publishing birth-control literature, after their colleague Charles Watts had been prosecuted for publishing the same work but had refused to defend it, pleading guilty instead. Their decision resulted in legal proceedings which came to a climax in a famous trial at the Court of Queen's Bench, from 18 to 22 June 1877. That decision and its consequences caused a crisis and split among secularists, the details of which are discussed later¹.

The Consequences of the Schism:

The decision of Bradlaugh and Besant to make a stand on the Knowlton tract confronted organised secularists throughout the country with a nasty choice. The attitudes of only 23 societies are known, by inference, from statements made by them in the Freethought press. Of these 23, only one, the Liverpool S.S., declined to interfere, but it was soon alienated by Bradlaugh². Two societies, the Crewe N.S.S., and the Boyne S.S., condemned both Bradlaugh and Watts³. Of the remaining 20, nine supported

1. See below Chapter Three, pp. 219-230.

2. S.C., 13 May 1877; the reason for its estrangement was that Bradlaugh refused to publicise the reports of its meetings, though what the reason for this was, is not known.

3. Secular Review, 1 June 1878; N.R., 4 Feb 1877; although the Boyne S.S. regretted Watts's decision, it voted money towards his defence and found that Bradlaugh had 'acted prematurely, if not oppressively', towards Watts.

Watts and eleven Bradlaugh¹. There was no discernible pattern geographically. In Scotland, the Glasgow S. & E.I. supported Watts, while the Dundee society condemned Bradlaugh in no uncertain terms:

the members of this society approve the course taken by Mr Watts regarding the pamphlet, 'Fruits of Philosophy', and condemn what they can only consider the despotic and tyrannical conduct of Mr Bradlaugh².

They then cancelled Bradlaugh's intended lectures there, for 15-16 March. Against this Edinburgh and Aberdeen supported Bradlaugh. Nor were individual societies unanimous either way: While the Portsmouth society defended Bradlaugh with but a few dissentients, the Leeds society was split down the middle³. But the schism was seen in its worst light, not among the individual societies, but among the leading personnel of the movement. To judge by the fact that the following attended the subsequent Sheffield Conference of 1878, - R.A. Cooper of Norwich, Thomas Slater of Bury, J.W. Crowther of Halifax, Forder of Woolwich, Le Lubez and the rising young lecturer,

1. The break-down is as follows: supporting Watts were Burnley N.S.S., Nottingham N.S.S., Hull N.S.S., Huddersfield N.S.S., Oldham S.S., Manchester S.S., Glasgow S. & E.I., Dundee S.S., and North London S.S.; the sources, respectively, are: N.R., 29 Apr 1877, Report of a meeting of the N.S.S. Executive; C.S., 4 Mar 1877, James Hooper to editor; S.C., 29 Apr 1877; Secular Review, 26 Jan 1878; ibid., 27 Apr 1878; ibid., 4 May 1878; N.R., 11 Feb 1877; ibid., 11 Feb 1877; ibid., 18 Feb 1877.

The eleven supporting Bradlaugh were Wakefield & Normanton N.S.S., Edinburgh S.S., Portsmouth N.S.S., Southampton S.S., Stourbridge N.S.S., Bristol S.S., Sheffield S.S., Bedlington S.S., Aberdeen N.S.S., Halifax N.S.S., and Barrow & Dalton S.S.; the sources, respectively, are: S.C., 15 July 18-7; ibid., 22 July 1877; N.R., 4 Feb 1877; ibid., 18 Feb 1877; ibid., 18 Feb 1877; ibid., 18 Feb 1877; ibid., 20 May 1877; ibid., 20 May 1877; ibid., 12 Aug 1877; ibid., 12 Aug 1877; ibid., 12 Aug 1877.

2. N.R., 11 Feb 1877.

3. ibid., 4 Feb 1877.

Joseph Symes¹ - they must have remained loyal to Bradlaugh.

But the list of prominent seceders was more impressive: Holyoake, Charles and Kate Watts, Foote, Harriet and Edward Law, Cattell, Mayer, Josiah Gimson and Thomas Wright of Leicester, John Judge of Nottingham, Owen Balmforth of Huddersfield, Francis Neale, Frank Field, and J.P. Adams and Arthur Moss of London².

The necessity for the existence of the British Secular Union appears to me to be based upon the fact that there are many persons now unconnected with any organisation, who place principles before men - and above men³.

Thus wrote C.C. Cattell in January 1878. When the N.S.S. Conference of 1877 was held, at Nottingham, the calmness of its deliberations belied the fact that the agents of secession were at work. Watts, Foote, Law and Gimson formed themselves into a committee to explore the possibility of an alternative body to the N.S.S. Having sounded out unnamed secularists in various parts of the country, they found an 'unqualified expression of opinion in favour of an immediate extensive Secular organisation', and the outcome of this was the British Secular Union. The constitution and programme of the B.S.U. was published in September 1877, and the signatories included twelve of the sixteen leading dissenters previously cited, led by G.J. Holyoake⁴. Its London-based committee of Holyoake, Foote, Watts, J.P. Adams and Edward Law met regularly for the rest of that year, and by January 1878 had decided on holding the first conference at Bradford, on Easter Sunday⁵.

When the conference was held, Bradlaugh's National Reformer

1. For Symes and Crowther, see Appendix 1, pp. 652, 632.
2. For those not previously mentioned, see Appendix 1, pp. 627, 634,
3. The Secular Review & Secularist, 5 Jan 1878. 637, 640-1, 645, 656.
4. S.R. & S., 15 Sept 1877.
5. ibid., 5 Jan 1878.

ignored it, while Watts's Secular Review claimed for it a success 'beyond the most sanguine expectations of its promoters'¹. Between one and two hundred individuals attended, from over forty places², and this included all the leading dissenters except H.V. Mayer of Dudley³.

In the wake of the conference, B.S.U. branches were set up in Leeds, Leek, Sheffield, Huddersfield and London⁴. By August 1878 the B.S.U. had a membership of a little over 260⁵. At the same time it claimed to have branches in Glasgow, Huddersfield, Kidderminster, Leek & Congleton, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, London, Oldham and Sheffield⁶. The Glasgow branch had over 30 members, and by January 1879 that in London had over 100⁷. Further branches were being set up in Bolton, Liverpool, Dundee, Edinburgh, Grimsby, Newcastle and Stockton⁸. By the end of 1878 it had issued over 80,000 tracts⁹. In the year up to its second conference, it had had a financial turn-over above £230 and its membership had risen to 400¹⁰. At the third annual conference, letters of support from leading secularists like R.A. Cooper, William Stewart Ross (Saladin), George Chetwynd Jones (Lara), and the attendance of veterans Willis Knowles of Hyde, Hugh Coulter of Chesterfield, and Thomas Garbutt of Sheffield, seemed to suggest that the B.S.U.

1. S.R., 27 Apr 1878; Foote resigned his position as joint editor of the Secular Review & Secularist in February, and by December 1878 had sent out a prospectus for his new venture, The Liberal. Meantime, Watts became sole owner and editor of the S.R. & S. and changed its title to the Secular Review: S.R. & S., 2 Mar 1878; N.R., 8 Dec 1878.

2. S.R., 4 May 1878.

3. He was unable to attend, but supported its aims.

4. S.R., 29 June, 13, 27 July, 17 Aug 1878.

5. ibid., 27 July, 4 Aug 1878, published lists of B.S.U. members, amounting to 266.

6. ibid., 17 Aug 1878, 'First Quarterly Report of the B.S.U.'.

7. S.R., 25 Jan 1879.

8. ibid., 17 Aug 1878.

9. ibid., 7 Dec 1878.

10. ibid., 19 Apr 1879.

was destined to growing strength¹. It may well have been this initial growth which led Nelson to call the B.S.U. 'an organisation that would rival and surpass the National Secular Society'². He was mistaken, however. In January 1880, its secretary, Arthur Moss, complained that provincial organisation 'has not proved so successful as it might have done'³, and a month later Foote admitted that it was 'hampered by lack of means'⁴. Moss was obliged to resign in May 1880, and in the same month, Watts's editorial praise of the annual N.S.S. conference suggests that he was hoping for a reconciliation⁵. The balance-sheet of the B.S.U.'s third year reveals a mere increase of £5 in receipts, over those of 1879, while in 1881, 1882 and 1884 no financial receipts or branch details were disclosed⁶. At its sixth annual conference, in 1883 - destined to be its final one - Watts was elected president⁷, but he was perforce an ineffective one as he was soon away to America⁸. For unknown reasons, no conference was held in 1884. In October of that year, Saladin, in his usual, forthright manner, remarked:

There is no such association as the British Secular Union. An association requires members; further, an association requires officers. The officers of the B.S.U. were elected for a year. The year has expired and there has been no conference to re-elect them, or elect anyone else. We did not relinquish Christian shams to take up with Secular ones⁹.

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1. Appendix 1 passim.
 2. Nelson, op.cit., p.129.
 3. S.R., 10 Jan 1880.
 4. ibid., 21 Feb 1880.
 5. ibid., 29 May 1880.
 6. ibid., 6 Aug 1881.
 7. ibid., 11 Aug 1883.
 8. ibid., 6 Oct 1883; he departed sometime between August and October 1883 and returned in the Spring of 1884.
 9. S.R., 25 Oct 1884. Ross had taken over the sole ownership of the S.R. from Watts, in early August 1884, as the latter's American interests were then taking up most of his time: S.R., 24 Aug 1884.

Thus ended the formal embodiment of the secular schism, after eight years. As for the N.S.S., it ignored the B.S.U., and continued to progress. Just before its re-organisation began in 1875, the N.S.S. had little over 300 members¹. In the five months after the Leeds Conference of 1876 it claimed to be recruiting at the rate of over 150 members per month². At the Sheffield Conference of two years later its total membership was 2,007, at a time when the B.S.U. had just over 260³. At this Sheffield Conference, Bradlaugh referred to the fact that the current economic distress had not affected its growth in membership, though it did affect its finances, for the lecturing fund had a deficiency of over forty pounds⁴. This hampered propaganda to the extent that the proposal, considered at the Sheffield Conference, to appoint three special lecturers, was abandoned until 'a revival of trade in the manufacturing and colliery districts' should occur⁵.

Assuming that no marked drop in membership took place, by the Newcastle Conference of 1879 there was a total membership of 2,660, an average increase of 50 per month, and by 19 October this had risen to 2,900⁶. Furthermore, the lecturing fund debt of £40 had been completely eliminated, and of 35 branches making returns, only 5 were in debt. In mid-1879, therefore, the N.S.S. had six times as many members as the B.S.U. While the London branch of the B.S.U. had 110 members in April 1879, the Central

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1. N.R., 27 May 1888, speech of Bradlaugh at annual conference.
 2. ibid., 19 Nov 1876.
 3. S.R., 15 June 1878, N.R., 16 June 1878.
 4. ibid., 16 June 1878.
 5. ibid., 4 Aug 1878.
 6. ibid., 19 Oct 1879.

London branch of the N.S.S. claimed 220 in February 1880, and it was but one of five London branches¹. At the London Conference of 1880, the special lecturing fund had a balance of over £116, over 1,080 lectures had been given and £3,800 spent in propaganda, as compared with 889 lectures and an expenditure of £2,436 in 1878-9².

It is clear from this that the schism did little damage to the National Secular Society as an organisation. It remains to consider the developments in organised secularism locally, over the period 1875-80.

Regional Distribution of Secular Societies, 1875-80:

i. London area, 1875-80:

1875	9, 8, 7, 8, (8)
1876	7, 8, 10, 9, (9)
1877	8, 9, 8, 10, (9)
1878	8, 9, 9, 10, (9)
1879	9, 8, 8, 7, (8)
1880	9, 9, 8, 10, (9)

It is clear from the figures, minimal though they are, that organised secularism in London, reached its peak in the years 1875-80. Even its lowest representation, in the years 1875 and 1879, was a maximum for the previous period, and a maximum only attained once, in 1868. As in the previous period, however, the failure and revival of societies was a constant process. The schismatic East London S.S. which had disappeared around June 1870³, reappeared in January 1875 to function without a break up to December 1880. The same applies to the Deptford & Greenwich secularists; last heard of in December 1873, they were

1. N.R., 8 Feb 1880.

2. ibid., 23 May 1880, 6 June 1880, 4 July 1880.

3. See above, p.75.

re-organised in August 1875, had at least 36 members in September 1877¹, and met regularly up to November 1879. The Stratford secularists, originally organised in the second quarter of 1870, and who fell apart in the first quarter of 1874, came together again in November 1875 as the Stratford, West Ham & Plaistow S.S. and met regularly till July 1876, after which it had an erratic history until April 1880². Among new societies was the Walworth Association of Freethinkers, formed - probably by Edward Law - in April 1876, to make 'a new militant assault on Christianity in South London'³. On the other side of the river, the North London S.S. had lapsed in February 1875, but a meeting on 28 May 1878 formed a new society of 17 members for the district⁴. The West End remained a problem: a meeting in Notting Hill on 6 August 1876 formed a new society for the area, but it never got off the ground; four years later, a further effort was made, this time by the N.S.S., but was attended with like results⁵. As before, the strongest district was the East End, and another new society, the Finsbury S.S., centred on Clerkenwell Green, was formed in May 1880⁶.

It has been seen that attempts at union among London secularists in the years 1868-74, came to nothing, a reason partly ascribed to Bradlaugh's desire to see the N.S.S. dominant there. The area was no nearer to unity in this period; indeed, no ostensible attempts were made. Yet, although the rival B.S.U. had at

1. N.R., 2 Sept 1877.

2. There are no reports of its meeting between July 1876 - June 1877, July 1877 - October 1877, and October 1879 - April 1880.

3. N.R., 30 Apr 1876; Edward Law reports its organisation, and no other name is mentioned.

4. ibid., 28 May, 4 June 1876.

5. ibid., 17 Oct 1880.

6. ibid., 2 May 1880.

least 100 members in London, from mid-1878 onward, Bradlaugh's wish was partially realised; excluding the B.S.U., the expansion in the area was due mainly to the N.S.S. When the East London society was formed, it was as the Mile End Branch of the N.S.S. The same applies to the North London society, in May 1876, and to that at Woolwich in December 1877. In addition, independent societies were affiliating to the N.S.S. The South London S.S. did so in September 1876, and the Walworth secularists in the next month¹. The relative position of the N.S.S. in London during this period is seen below:

Year	Total of Societies	N.S.S. Branches	Percentage
Dec 1876	9	5	55%
Dec 1877	10	6	60%
Dec 1878	10	5	50%
Dec 1879	7	5	71%
Dec 1880	10	7	70%

ii. West Riding of Yorkshire, 1875-80:

1875	7,	6,	7,	11,	(8)
1876	13,	14,	13,	14,	(14)
1877	14,	12,	12,	14,	(13)
1878	10,	9,	14,	13,	(11)
1879	14,	10,	11,	12,	(11)
1880	11,	10,	10,	11,	(11)

The West Riding experienced an unprecedented expansion; even its lowest number of societies, the eight of 1875, was greater than the highest number of any previous period, from 1862. But a caution is necessary in view of the fact that the figures,

1. N.R., 17 Sept, 1 Oct 1876.

however high, show much instability from quarter to quarter. The reason is readily found: a number of these societies were small, might be reported as meeting only once or twice in every three months, and only then to hear lectures from the major secularists, Bradlaugh and Besant. Among such were the societies at Batley, Shipley, Birstall, Bingley, and Boyne near Wakefield, - all of them N.S.S. branches. Thus the Batley society, founded in October 1875¹, met regularly until January 1878, but from then until December 1878 is reported as meeting only three times, and after March 1879 is heard of no more. The Bingley branch of the N.S.S. is first reported as active in late February 1877², but is unheard of from then until 9 January 1879 - when, on the previous Sunday, Bradlaugh had lectured to them³; from then until December 1879 it is unheard of, until Bradlaugh lectured to them once more⁴. What is the case with Batley and Bingley is true of the rest of those mentioned: what the N.S.S. in its Almanacks and in the National Reformer sometimes claimed as active branches, amounted to no more than ad hoc committees to prepare for lectures by Bradlaugh, and 'Veritas's' observation in 1874 still had some point in the ensuing years. A further qualification arises as a result of the schism caused by the Knowlton pamphlet, and this was the duplication of secular societies in a single town. By the middle of 1879 there existed a Leeds S.S. and a Leeds N.S.S., and by 1880 the same applied in Huddersfield.

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1. *ibid.*, 24 Oct 1875.
 2. *ibid.*, 25 Feb 1877.
 3. N.R., 9 Jan 1879.
 4. *ibid.*, 21 Dec 1879.

Yet, even with this qualification, progress was undeniable. It is seen in the new societies which sprang up in Wakefield¹, and York², where hitherto they had been confined to the textile towns and villages. District federation was another pointer to the progress. After a lapse of ten years the Yorkshire West Riding Lecturing Circuit was started, in 1873³, and it continued active until the end of the decade. Its fifth half-yearly conference at Leeds, in March 1876, reported the affiliation of nine societies, had a lecturing staff of fourteen who had delivered over thirty lectures in the previous six months⁴. Its fourth annual conference, at Farsley in August 1877, reported the Y.S.L.C. 'in a flourishing condition': it had arranged 79 lectures in the year, as opposed to 60 in the previous year⁵, and its financial deficit of 1876 must have been wiped off, for it was considering the appointment of a permanent lecturer in addition to its unpaid staff⁶. The N.S.S. had much the same relative strength as in London:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	14	9	64%
Dec 1877	14	10	71%
Dec 1878	13	9	69%
Dec 1879	12	8	66%
Dec 1880	11	6	54%

1. *ibid.*, 16 Jan 1876.

2. *ibid.*, 29 July, 12 Aug 1877; it started off with 10 members and had 24 by October, *N.R.*, 28 Oct 1877.

3. See above, pp.78-80.

4. *N.R.*, 12 Mar 1876.

5. *S.C.*, 10 Sept 1876.

6. *N.R.*, 9 Sept 1877.

iii. Lancashire-Cheshire, 1875-80:

1875	7,	9,	8,	12,	(9)
1876	13,	13,	12,	10,	(12)
1877	11,	10,	12,	14,	(12)
1878	13,	13,	13,	16,	(13)
1879	13,	12,	9,	9,	(11)
1880	13,	10,	10,	9,	(11)

The decline in organised centres of secularism in 1873-4, was abruptly terminated in 1875 when the revival of the N.S.S. gave rise to a renewed intensity of propaganda. It says little for the schism of 1877, that a new peak was reached in 1878 when the highest number of societies was recorded. As in the case of the West Riding, some of these new societies were ephemeral. This was especially the case with those of Crewe, Accrington, Congleton and Bootle. The Crewe society first met in February 1877, is reported as meeting once again in April, once in September to hear Bradlaugh speak¹, not again until September 1878, once in May 1879, and after August 1879 not at all to the end of this period. The same feature applies to the others. There was only one instance of duplication - in Manchester, where, from March 1878 there existed a branch of the B.S.U. alongside the Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. The Liverpool society, which had lapsed in February 1873 was re-established in May 1875, and met regularly to the end of this period. It was joined by a society in Birkenhead, which, lapsing in late December 1876, was re-organised on 23 September 1877, but failed permanently in December of that year². A significant index of progress in the region was the foundation of a society at Wigan, in October 1877, for this was a town whose hostility

1. N.R., 23 Sept 1877.

2. N.R., 30 Sept 1877.

to Bradlaugh a decade before, had been extreme; nor was it short-lived, for it was active to the end of the present period. N.S.S. progress in the region took two forms, the foundation of new branches and the affiliation of previously independent societies. At least four societies were founded directly as branches - Wigan in Oct 1877¹, Bury and Pendleton in October 1878², and Leigh in September 1879³. Six older societies affiliated - the Manchester S.I. in June 1875, Rossendale S.S. in January 1875, Burnley S.S. in October 1876, Crewe S.S. in December 1876, Barrow & Dalton S.S. in August 1877, and the Congleton Secular & Progressive Club in November 1877⁴. The exact number of N.S.S. branches is not definite, but minimal figures provided in the table below, indicate its dominance in the region:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	10	5	50%
Dec 1877	14	8	57%
Dec 1878	16	13	81%
Dec 1879	9	8	88%
Dec 1880	9	7	77%

There is but one feature in which the area differed from the West Riding - in the complete absence of district union. Following the abortive efforts of August 1874, no further attempts were made in the 1870's to revive the Lancashire Secular Union.

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1. *ibid.*, 28 Oct 18-7.
 2. *ibid.*, 13, 20 Oct 1878.
 3. *ibid.*, 7 Sept 1879.
 4. *ibid.*, 6 June 1875, 2 July 1876, 24 Oct 1875, 18 Feb, 12 Aug, 18 Nov 1877.

iv. North of England, 1875-80:

1875	4, 8, 6, 8, (6)
1876	8, 8, 9, 8, (8)
1877	10, 8, 8, 6, (8)
1878	5, 6, 4, 8, (6)
1879	7, 8, 9, 10, (8)
1880	9, 8, 12, 13, (10)

The growth from a minimum of 4 societies in 1875, to a maximum of 13 in late 1880 is eloquent expression of the general trend initiated by Bradlaugh's intensified efforts from 1875 onwards. Yet, the growth was as unstable as it was impressive. This is apparent in the doubling of the number of societies in the first two quarters of 1875, and a close look at the various societies reveals how dependant many of them were, upon the leading London secularists, and how unstable this caused them to be. Over these five years, no less than 22 societies can be found, with varying life-spans, but mostly short. Of the 22, only 10 existed without apparent aid, in their institution or maintenance, from outside sources, viz., Blaydon, Guisboro, Eston, Hartlepoole, Houghton-le-Spring, Newcastle, North Shields, Pelton Fell, Seghill and Sunderland. The remaining 12 owed their origin or revival to leading secularists: Annie Besant's influence was responsible for the establishment or revival of 5 - Bedlington, Crook, Middlesboro, Stockton and West Auckland¹ -

1. West Auckland, formed as a result of preparations for a visit by her in March 1875, was inactive from March 1875 to November 1880, N.R., 21 Mar 1875. Crook had lapsed in May 1874, and was revived on 21 Feb 1875 to prepare for her visit to the vicinity of Bishop Auckland; it then disappeared till after the end of the period under review, N.R., 21 Feb 1875. Bedlington S.S. had ceased meeting in November 1874; it revived in May 1875 to hear a lecture from Besant, N.R., 30 May 1875. Middlesboro was founded in June 1875 after lectures by Besant in the vicinity in late May, N.R., 6 June 1875. Stockton S.S. lapsed in November 1875; a lecture by Besant in July 1876 revived it for two years; it failed the second time in June 1878, reappeared in October 1878 when she lectured in the area, and lapsed again till April 1880, N.R., 16 July 1876, 20 Oct 1878.

Watts's lectures in late March 1876 were responsible for the origin of the Darlington S.S., but it was inactive from November 1879 till August 1880 when prospective lectures from Edward Aveling brought it back to activity¹. The Willington society, east of Crook in Durham, lapsed in May 1875 and was revived by G.W. Foote's visit in October; by December of the same year it had failed permanently². A new version of the Jarrow S.S. was due to a lecture by Harriet Law in early 1876, and was sustained by a further one from Besant, in July, after which it lasted till October 1878, and then disappeared. Three newcomers to the Freethought ranks were responsible for the remaining three: Joseph Symes for that in Spennymoor³, Touzzeau Parris for the one at Wolsingham in Durham⁴, and J.B. Redfearn, ex-corresponding secretary of the Leeds S.S. who had removed to Scarborough sometime between 1878 and 1879, for the first society ever in that town⁵. All three had an erratic course. It is clear from this that the leading secularists, and Annie Besant in particular, exercised a critical influence on organised secularism in this region; when this influence was withdrawn the societies fell away, and this will be seen as a vital factor in the history of the movement throughout the country in the 1880's.

The proposed conference of Northumberland and Durham secularists in mid-1874, to organise a permanent lecturer for the area, came to nothing⁶. A second attempt one year later was also abortive. A third attempt was made in late December 1876 when a conference at Middlesboro, chaired by Samuel Meir, launched

1. N.R., 9 Apr 1876, 8 Aug 1880.

2. N.R., 17 Oct 1875.

3. ibid., 15 June 1879.

4. ibid., 21 Sept 1879.

5. ibid., 9 Mar 1879.

6. See above p. 82.

the North Yorkshire & South Durham Secular Association¹. This union met for about a month before it too disappeared. Despite Bradlaugh's exhortations to secularists of the region, to federate, as late as 1879, no successful effort was again made in these years². But the N.S.S. grew in strength in the area, until, by December 1880 every society there was a branch of the national body:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	8	5	62%
Dec 1877	6	5	83%
Dec 1878	8	7	87%
Dec 1879	10	9	90%
Dec 1880	13	13	100%

v. Midlands and East, 1875-80:

1875	5, 6, 6, 7, (6)
1876	7, 6, 6, 5, (6)
1877	3, 3, 4, 5, (4)
1878	7, 6, 5, 6, (6)
1879	3, 2, 1, 2, (2)
1880	3, 3, 3, 5, (3)

Far from experiencing the general progress over the years 1875-80, to which the other regions were subject, the Midlands and East reveal a pattern of extreme instability. The re-organising vigour of Bradlaugh and Co. did lead to a peak in 1875-6 whereby secularists were organised in Derby, Grimsby, Leicester, Northampton, Nottingham (2) and Wheatley Hill, but such a peak had already been consistently reached over the

1. N.R., 7 Jan 1877

2. N.R., 31 Aug 1879. Here Bradlaugh called for a district union of secularists in Middlesboro, Stockton, Hartlepoole and Darlington.

years 1869-71, and even there the decline was not as dramatic as in 1879-80. Two local factors, and one external, will help to account for it: the lack of halls, duplication between independent societies and N.S.S. branches which led to instability, and externally, with the exceptions of Northampton and Hull, it was not an area cultivated by the leading secularists in the way the North of England was. While the Northampton district was visited by Bradlaugh and colleagues as a parliamentary prospect, it had no meeting-place. Indeed, one correspondent of the Secular Review wrote to say he found 'a great number of Freethinkers in that town, but no effort being made to propagate Secular principles among the inhabitants'¹. A Northampton elector wrote to confirm the paradox, saying it was 'a puzzle to outsiders who know that Northampton possesses a Branch of the National Secular Society, but who do not know why it is that this Branch does nothing to justify its existence'². The result was that the Northampton society, revived in March 1875, lapsed from June 1876 to May 1880³. The same applies to Hull which Watts cultivated with an eye on parliamentary honours, but where the lack of a hall led to very irregular meetings⁴. In Nottingham the older society was joined by a branch of the N.S.S. in October 1875, but this failed in October 1878. In Leicester the N.S.S. set up a branch in January 1878, which vied with the Leicester S.S. until the branch disappeared in January 1879. Adding to this instability were the erratic

1. S.R., 16 Aug 1879.

2. ibid., 30 Aug 1879.

3. In March 1878 it was reported that secularists there 'feel much the want of a hall', N.R., 10 Mar 1878.

4. For Charles Watts and the parliamentary representation of Hull, see, S.R., 1, 8 Feb, 21 June 1879.

Derby society and the shorter-lived Wheatley Hill S.S., outside Nottingham¹. The consequence was that district federation never came about², and the N.S.S. was poorly represented, in contrast to other areas:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	5	3	60%
Dec 1877	5	4	80%
Dec 1878	6	3	50%
Dec 1879	2	1	50%
Dec 1880	5	3	60%

vi. West Midlands, Wales, South-West, South, & South-East,
1875-80:

1875	3, 4, 4, 6, (4)
1876	5, 5, 7, 7, (6)
1877	6, 7, 8, 7, (7)
1878	6, 5, 5, 5, (5)
1879	8, 7, 6, 6, (7)
1880	5, 4, 5, 6, (5)

The renewed activity of 1874-5 had its evident effect upon this region; in January 1875 there were only the societies of Birmingham, Bristol and the S.S. & E.W.S.U.; by the end of the year additional ones were active in Brighton, Plymouth, and Southampton. The last-named owed its existence to the 'talent and earnestness of Mrs Annie Besant'³, and, with Birmingham, it

1. The Derby society was re-founded in October 1874 after a lapse of five years; it met irregularly until June 1879, when it disappeared, N.R., 25 Oct 1874. The Wheatley Hill S.S. appeared in September 1875, and disappeared in March 1876.

2. In his Address to the Party in September 1875, Bradlaugh had urged the formation of a district union embracing Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, but the suggestion fell flat, N.R., 19 Sept 1875.

3. N.R., 6 June 1875.

was to be the most stable society in the region. She was also responsible for the establishment of the Swansea society in July 1876, though this one failed soon after¹. Indeed, all the new bodies in Wales - at Cardiff, Merthyr, and Newport² - were short-lived. A new society in Portsmouth owed its origin to a visit from Bradlaugh; he also established the N.S.S. branch at Birmingham, in August 1880, which, with over ninety members within a month, was a strong rival to the Birmingham S.I.³. Against these successes was the failure of the S.S. & E.W.S.U.; attempts were made to revive it in April 1876, but by June of the same year it had gone permanently. The entire region was then without district organisation, but the strength of the N.S.S. rose:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	7	2	28%
Dec 1877	7	3	42%
Dec 18781	5	3	60%
Dec 1879	6	3	50%
Dec 1880	6	4	66%

1. *ibid.*, 16, 23 July 1876.

2. Attempts to form a Cardiff society in 1875, failed; efforts were successful in July 1877, but not very, as it does not seem to have survived the month, *N.R.*, 27 June 1875, 29 July 1877. Merthyr N.S.S., formed in early February of 1879, appears to have lapsed after that October. Newport, Monmouthshire, was formed in September 1877 and lasted till March 1878, *N.R.*, 23 Sept 1877.

3. *N.R.*, 29 Aug, 12 Sept 1880.

vii. Scotland, 1875-80:

1875	2, 2, 2, 3, (2)
1876	3, 3, 3, 4, (3)
1877	3, 2, 4, 6, (4)
1878	4, 4, 5, 4, (4)
1879	4, 3, 2, 3, (3)
1880	2, 2, 2, 2, (2)

The experience of the Scottish region in the years 1875-80 is almost identical to that in the decade prior to 1875: just as the intensified activity of 1868-71, in which Bradlaugh figured so prominently, led to a peak, so the vigour of secularism, inspired by his re-organisation in 1874-5 led to a climax in 1877-8, from which Scottish organised secularism declined, so that, by 1880 it was in the same position as in 1875, with just the two societies at Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is indeed significant that this pattern also applies to the two preceding areas, suggesting that the out-lying regions were not places where organisation could develop unaided. The significance of this will be apparent in the mid-1880's.

The rise to six societies in the last quarter of 1877 was due to the addition of organised groups in Aberdeen, Hawick and Dundee, and to the institution of a branch of the N.S.S. in Glasgow alongside the existing Glasgow S. & E.I. When the growth was taking place, from 1876, an attempt was made 'to establish a Scottish Union of Freethinkers', based on Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow¹. The resulting Scottish Secular Union survived to hold a second annual conference in Edinburgh in

1. N.R., 2 July 1876.

September 1877¹, but there was little spirit of unity in the region owing to rivalry between the N.S.S. and independent societies. In August 1878 the Glasgow S. & E.I. and the Glasgow N.S.S. agreed to amalgamate², but the Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Secular Union, at its annual general meeting on 1 September 1878 voted against affiliation to the N.S.S., 'on account of it being understood that should the motion (for amalgamation) be carried, the minority were determined to form a separate society'³. By 1880, with only two societies active in the area, the union was merely nominal. As will be seen from the table below, by 1880 the same applied to the N.S.S.:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1876	4	1	25%
Dec 1877	6	4	66%
Dec 1878	4	3	75%
Dec 1879	3	1	33%
Dec 1880	2	0	0%

Conclusion:

Where there were 22 definite societies active in the U.K. in 1866, there were 43 in 1875, and by 1880 there were at least 51. Though the number had more than doubled, it was not straightforward progress: a peak was reached in the years 1876

1. *ibid.*, 1 Oct 1876; officers were based in Glasgow while the rest of the managing committee were selected from Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Perth.

2. *ibid.*, 11 Aug 1878.

3. N.R., 25 Aug, 8 Sept 1878.

and 1877, of 58 and 57 societies, respectively. But the subsequent decline was not as sharp as it had been in the years 1872-4. The N.S.S. partook of this expansion in a remarkable manner:

	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
1875	43	-	-
1876	58	30	51%
1877	57	40	70%
1878	54	43	79%
1879	51	35	68%
1880	51	40	78%

The N.S.S. rose from having half of organised secularists within its ranks in 1876, to having over three-quarters within four years. In the light of the history of the movement up to 1874, it is clear that Bradlaugh was chief agent of this growth, although at local level only three foundations were due directly to him¹. One other figure looms large in the years 1875-80 - Annie Besant. She was directly responsible for the institution or revival of at least seven societies, a number not even approached by any other secularist, Bradlaugh included. As her advent was an integral part of this expansion, the subsequent decline will be seen to have owed much to her departure. Twice in the history of the movement in these years, the number of organised freethinkers is not too vague: just before the N.S.S. Conference of 1875 there were a little over 300 members²; in 1879 there were over 3,000, shared between the National Secular Society (2,660) and the British Secular Union (400). Even

1. At Norwich, Birmingham and Portsmouth.

2. N.R., 27 May 1888, 'Before the Conference in 1875, Mrs Besant and I made up a list of members, and had trouble in showing many over 300'.

giving as many as 1,000 in societies affiliated to neither body, there were not more than 4,000 in the U.K. in 1880; nonetheless, the N.S.S. had tenfold the number in that same year than it could count five years before.

There were any number of reasons why secularists should have organised. The primary one was for the 'conversion' of Christians to a rationalist philosophy, and for the mutual strengthening of the tenets of those so converted. This is the obvious, but major raison d'etre for organisation, and serves to justify the close, if tedious attention which has had to be given to this area of the subject. But statistical and regional analysis can tend to obscure the fact that organisation, per se, was not the whole end of secularist activity. The assault on an essentially hostile society required an alteration of its laws, if not of its very structure. The first area for that assault was that directly touching secularists, viz., the laws concerning oath-taking and blasphemy. From its inception, this was part of the 'Proposed Programme for the National Secular Society'¹. Although the first N.S.S. conference emphasised the need for permanent meeting-places and for secular education, the oaths and blasphemy issues were never ignored² - at the Keighley Conference of 1869, Watts drew attention to the fact

1. N.R., 9 Sept 1866.

2. The history of these questions will not be dealt with in this study, as the subject has already been adequately dealt with in the following: J.D. Nokes, The History of the Crime of Blasphemy, (London, 1928), J.B. Bury, The History of Freedom of Thought, (N.Y., 1913), W. Arnstein, The Bradlaugh Case, (Oxford, 1965), Nelson, op.cit., pp. 111, 139, 326, and Krantz, op.cit., pp. 10-13.

that the N.S.S. Executive had been responsible for the insertion of a clause in Denman's Evidence Amendment Act (1869), whereby a secularist was enabled to give evidence upon affirmation¹. In 1873, Bradlaugh urged his followers to renew this agitation so that heretical jurymen could affirm, and to call for the repeal of the blasphemy laws². This plea was repeated at the National Conference of 1875³, and in the year 1877-8 the N.S.S. had organised 135 petitions, bearing over 11,000 signatures for repeal of these laws⁴. The ultimate failure to achieve this object illustrates the fact that, however impressive the growth of the N.S.S., even at its best it was very much a drop in the ocean of opinion. This, however, was not to be known in the years up to 1880.

The political field was an equally important one for the secularist attack on the Christian polity of the U.K.; in the issues of republicanism and land law reform, this assault was to be seen at its most intense⁵. As political radicalism was an essential component of the secularist view, this aggressive intention begot effective organisation, in the N.S.S., and was frequently expressed in Bradlaugh's periodic addresses to that body. Before leaving for America, in 1875, he declared:

It must not be forgotten that the Freethought party now wields a distinct political influence, and that the better they are organised the more usefully the political power may be utilised. The politics of the Freethought body are essentially Radical, and here the co-operation of the large working men's associations may be permanently secured It is on the land question that the great fight will turn,

1. 32 & 33 Vict.c.68,s.4, (1869), An Act for the further Amendment of the Law of Evidence, The Law Reports, The Public & General Statutes, 1869, vol.iv, pp. 359-60.

2. N.R., 28 Nov 1869.

3. ibid., 23 May 1875.

4. N.R., 16 June 1878.

5. See below Chapters Four and Six.

and until the power of the landed nobility is broken, the English Church will never be dis-established¹.

How effective an assault could be made through his N.S.S. is clear from the fact that in the next year, largely through Besant's labours, no less than 104,000 signatures were organised in petitions against Royal Grants².

But, by the beginning of the 1880's a crucial stage had been reached: when the most prominent secularists broke away in 1877-8, the N.S.S. became more than ever before, Bradlaugh's willing instrument. Throughout the 1870's he had been fighting solely for national issues, and the N.S.S. became an agency for their promotion. From 1880 to 1886 he himself became a national issue; the N.S.S. expanded in the heat which the 'Bradlaugh question' generated, and was to contract, when, no longer an issue, he became just part of an institution.

1. N.R., 19 Sept 1875, 'Address to the Party'.
2. The National Secular Society's Almanac for the Year 1877, London, 1878, pp. 15-16. For the issues of Royal Grants, and Perpetual Pensions, see below p. 496.

ii. False eminence, 1880-84:

The 104,000 signatures to petitions against royal grants has been cited as indicative of the growing activity of the N.S.S. in 1876. In the year 1880-1, 964 petitions with over 270,000 signatures calling for the abolition of perpetual pensions, were organised mainly through the agency of the N.S.S.¹. In his report to the Conference of 1881, Bradlaugh remarked that the N.S.S. Executive 'has been more active in political work than at any previous period in its existence'². This was evident from more than monster petitions, for it was mainly through the N.S.S. that Bradlaugh had organised a land law reform conference which launched the Land Law Reform League in that year³. Two other objectives of the programme of 1866 were also on the way to being realised, viz., the institution of a relief fund for distressed or ageing freethinkers, and the establishment of education classes.

A Benevolent Fund Committee had been organised in May 1879; at the end of the year 1880-1 this had a balance of nearly £90, after having relieved 29 cases⁴. As for education, following the recruitment to the N.S.S. of Edward Aveling, in 1879, classes were begun, and with the aid of Bradlaugh's daughters and Annie Besant, thirteen courses were being conducted in London by 1883⁵; in the same year, similar schemes were being considered for the Manchester branch⁶. In another aspect of

1. N.R., 12 June 1881.

2. ibid.

3. See below Chapter Four, pp.275-280.

4. N.R., 23 May 1880, 12 June 1881.

5. Besant, op.cit., pp. 249-250.

6. N.R., 7 Jan 1883.

the education question, it appeared that the N.S.S. was making real progress, viz., in the contesting of school board elections. In November 1882, Edward Aveling successfully contested the London School Board election for Westminster, polling more votes than any other Liberal candidate¹. Two months later, R.T. Smith, vice-president of the Plymouth branch of the N.S.S., sponsored by the town's junior Liberals, was returned to the Devonport School Board unopposed²; and in August 1883, secularist W. Nuttall of Todmorden, was successful in the school board election for that district³.

A further cause for rejoicing occurred in June 1881, when the most virulent of the schismatics, George Foote, attended the N.S.S. conference and effected a reconciliation with Bradlaugh⁴. Two years later, another of the founders of the British Secular Union, Arthur Moss, returned to the fold⁵.

The N.S.S. in particular, organised secularism in general, received added stimulus from the prosecution of Bradlaugh, Foote, Ramsey and Kemp, for blasphemy, beginning in July 1882. It started as just another stratagem of Bradlaugh's political opponents - most notably Sir Henry Tyler - to bring him to ruin. Foote's penny weekly Freethinker, once published by Bradlaugh and Besant, but abandoned by them and taken on by Ramsey when a questionable series of comic Bible sketches appeared in its pages, led to the institution of a blasphemy

1. ibid., 5 Nov 1882, 3 Dec 1882.

2. N.R., 28 Jan 1883.

3. ibid., 2 Sept 1883.

4. ibid., 12 June 1881. Foote, whose Mr Bradlaugh's Trial and the Freethought Party, published in late June 1877 was the most caustic polemic in the course of the schism, was warmly received, and Bradlaugh hoped that 'next year they would have the honour of numbering him among the vice-presidents of the N.S.S.'. His hope was fulfilled.

5. N.R., 8 June 1884; Moss spoke at the afternoon session of the Plymouth Conference of the N.S.S.

prosecution, on 11 July 1882¹. The attempt to implicate Bradlaugh caused its adjournment until 17 July, and on its resumption, Bradlaugh gave his by now usual display of legal ability, while the recourse of the prosecutors to such devices as the inspection of his bank-books, together with the Lord Mayor's highly prejudiced conduct of proceedings, won sympathy for the prosecuted². The matter was again adjourned until 21 July, when the defendants were committed for trial. On 27 July Bradlaugh applied for a writ of certiorari; continued persecutory tactics by the plaintiff, Tyler, brought further disrepute upon himself, and led to the foundation of an Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, by the Plymouth Unitarian minister, Sharman³. Legal technicalities prolonged the proceedings until, in early November Bradlaugh succeeded in having the case against himself temporarily quashed⁴.

Nothing daunted by these proceedings, Foote produced an even more inflammatory issue with the Christmas edition of his Free-thinker. This led to a fresh prosecution against himself, Ramsey, and the latter's employee, H.A. Kemp, in February 1883⁵. The trial opened in the Central Criminal Court on 1 March 1883 and was to bring the defendants a degree of sympathy commensurate only with that of prejudice exhibited by Mr Justice North. Dismissing his dissenting jury, he ordered a new trial which began on 6 March and which ended with the conviction and jailing of Foote, Ramsey and Kemp⁶.

1. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.316; G.H. Taylor, A Chronology of British Secularism, London 1957, p.15.

2. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.316-8.

3. *ibid.*

4. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.320.

5. *ibid.*, ii.324.

6. W. Arnstein, op.cit., pp. 250-255.

Meanwhile the original trial of Bradlaugh did not come on until 10 April 1883, when he faced his opponent of the Knowlton case, Sir Hardinge Giffard, and was once more acquitted by a jury who took over an hour to reach their verdict. The press in general tendered Bradlaugh reluctant but genuine congratulations. Never before had the press been obliged to express such sympathy for secularists, and at the resumed original trial of his colleagues, in late April, the jury again dissenting, the prosecution admitted defeat by entering a nolle prosequi.

Nothing like the events of 1882-3 had been witnessed since the stormy days of Carlile, Taylor, Southwell and Holyoake.

Properly however, these events should not be isolated; they were merely part of the greater struggle in which Bradlaugh was engaged in order to win his right to take his seat in the Commons. Elected on 2 April 1880, his struggle began on 20 May when a Select Committee of the House decided against his claim to affirm; between then and 13 January 1886, he was to fight eight court cases and five elections, in the process of which he was to achieve an unprecedented national prominence.

The blasphemy trials and the parliamentary issue gave an urgency to the need for the relevant legislation, an urgency lacking in the 1870's when Bradlaugh had pressed these causes on the attention of organised secularists. It was to the oaths question that the N.S.S. devoted greater energy. On 19 February 1883 the Government successfully moved for the introduction of an affirmation bill¹; within two months, 767 petitions bearing

1. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 276, col. 384, 19 Feb 1883.

over 88,000 signatures had been presented in its favour, organised, again, mainly through the N.S.S.¹. On 3 May the bill was defeated on second reading, by a majority of three². A further, though equally unsuccessful introduction of an affirmation bill by Hopwood, in July 1885, had produced 556 petitions with over 77,000 names, again through the agency of the N.S.S.³.

That these events of 1880-4 made an impact on the N.S.S. is clear from more than its ability to get up such petitions, at short notice. Available statistics, though meagre and uneven, clearly show this, both in terms of numbers and of branches⁴. As to numbers, with 2,007 members in mid-1878, the N.S.S. had an annual accession of new members over the next six years, to 1884, as follows⁵:

1879	660	1882	1,300
1880	730	1883	1,880
1881	830	1884	1,750

Not surprisingly, the N.S.S. did not publish the number of old adherents whose membership lapsed in these years, and until 1883, never published the amount of members' subscriptions; consequently, the exact membership from 1878 to 1882 cannot be known; but a hypothetical maximum, assuming no losses, is as follows:

1878	2,000	1881	4,220
1879	2,660	1882	5,520
1880	3,390		

1. N.R., 29 Apr 1883.

2. Arnstein, *op.cit.*, p.200.

3. *ibid.*, p.295.

4. Krantz claimed that the size of the N.S.S. 'is unknown', and consequently, was equally vague as to when it declined, suggesting merely 'sometime in the 1880's'; Krantz, *op.cit.*, pp. 76, 216; both questions, however, can be answered in approximate fashion, see below pp.

4. Sources, with comment, are given in Appendix Four.

In 1883, members' subscriptions amounted to £187-16, indicating a nett membership of 3,760. In 1882 subscriptions rose to £252-16s, giving a membership of 5,050 by mid-1884; the N.S.S. claimed an accession of 1,750 new members over the year 1883-4, and consequently, there was a loss of 450 old members. Given the fact that no such losses have been deducted in the years 1878-83, it is likely that the nett figure of 5,050 members in mid-1884 was a peak greater than the nett figure of any previous year. During these years of oath question and blasphemy trials the membership doubled from what it had been in 1879.

The same applied to N.S.S branches. There was an average of 40 such in 1880; over the next four years the figures were:

1881	47,	47,	45,	53,	(48)
1882	53,	59,	59,	68,	(58)
1883	75,	66,	69,	77,	(72)
1884	76,	75,	69,	68,	(68)

The remarkable rise to 77 branches at the end of 1883, that is, in the middle of the year 1883-4, is consistent with the equally impressive increase in subscriptions from £187-16s in 1882-3 to £252-16s in 1883-4, and with the increased nett membership from 3,760 to 5,050. It is not without reason that the real climb began in October-December 1882, the time when the blasphemy trials were taking place. It remains to examine the position locally.

Regional Distribution of Secular Societies, 1881-84:

i. London area, 1881-84:

1881	9,	8,	8,	9,	(9)
1882	11,	11,	13,	18,	(13)
1883	20,	22,	20,	21,	(21)
1884	21,	23,	23,	21,	(22)

The expansion of organised secularism in London, which began in 1875, became an unprecedented climb from late 1882, until by late 1884, there were treble the number of societies as existed a decade previously. No reasons were ever given at the time, for this, but the blasphemy trials are clearly a major reason, since the rise from late 1882 coincides with them. But, of great importance also was Bradlaugh's renowned parliamentary struggle. An additional reason would be that the secularist lecture force was at its strongest in these years, with Bradlaugh, Besant, Foote and Aveling, besides the other official N.S.S. lecturers, pulling together for once. The main areas of this expansion were north and south of the river. Of the 10 societies in the first quarter of 1882, 2 were located in the centre, 2 in the East End, 2 in North London, and 4 in the South, at Walworth, Balham, Peckham and Kennington. By the end of that year, 18 societies were active, 2 still in the centre, 4 in the East End, 4 in North London, and 7 in the South. Thus, in the space of twelve months, the number in North London had doubled, and almost doubled in the South, the latter area having almost 40% of the total. Finally, of the maximum 23 societies in July-September 1884, Central London still had 2, 5 were in the East End, 3 in the West End, 5 in the North, and 8 in the South. This expansion was almost solely due to the N.S.S., for, throughout the period, over 90% of these bodies were N.S.S. branches:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	9	8	88%
Dec 1882	18	15	83%
Dec 1883	21	20	95%
Dec 1884	21	20	95%

ii. West Riding of Yorkshire, 1881-84:

1881	13, 12, 8, 9, (10)
1882	8, 9, 9, 10, (9)
1883	9, 8, 9, 11, (9)
1884	10, 11, 11, 10, (10)

The figures for the West Riding area are a surprising contrast to those for London, in that they indicate a decline from the years 1875-80. Furthermore, the figures conceal the duplication of branches in single towns. Of the 13 societies in January-March 1881, 6 were divided between Huddersfield, Leeds and Bradford, where N.S.S. branches and independent societies co-existed; and at the end of this period, the same pattern is revealed when they co-existed in Huddersfield, Bradford and Sheffield. Consequently, the N.S.S. was by no means as dominant as it was in London at the same time, as the following indicates:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	9	6	66%
Dec 1882	10	6	60%
Dec 1883	11	7	63%
Dec 1884	10	8	80%

Attention to area's district federation will reveal the symptoms of this decline as early as the late 1870's, although it is not registered by the statistics until the early 1880's: the Y.S.L.C. reached a peak in 1877, and the reports of 1878 and 1879 show no increase in affiliations, and disclose nothing as regards finances or the number of lectures it had arranged. The Y.S.L.C. lapsed sometime in 1879-80, and no attempt was made to revive it. It is interesting that the blasphemy trials and parliamentary struggle made no noticeable impact in the region.

iii. Lancashire-Cheshire, 1881-84:

1881	11, 11, 8, 10, (10)
1882	12, 13, 17, 20, (16)
1883	17, 15, 16, 20, (17)
1884	16, 16, 17, 13, (15)

Though not in so marked a degree as London, the Lancashire-Cheshire region experienced progress in this period. If the blasphemy trials registered no impact in the West Riding, they appear to have done so here, where, in October-December 1882, was recorded a higher number of societies than ever before. It was to be a short-lived peak, however, for, by December 1884 the number had declined to that in 1882, on average. No attempts were made to organise district federations, but the N.S.S. was predominant:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	10	10	100%
Dec 1882	20	19	95%
Dec 1883	20	19	95%
Dec 1884	13	13	100%

iv. North of England, 1881-84:

1881	11,	11,	11,	13,	(11)
1882	8,	9,	8,	7,	(8)
1883	7,	8,	5,	8,	(8)
1884	7,	7,	7,	8,	(7)

The North of England region shows a most interesting development. The progress from the 6 societies of 1878 to the 10 societies of 1880, was continued through to 1881, when a maximum of 13 societies is recorded¹. After this there is a steady decline, and neither the excitement of Bradlaugh, half-in, half-out of parliament, nor of Foote, wholly in jail, appears to have made the slightest impression. The reason is implicit in suggestions already made when discussing this region for the years 1875-80, namely, that it required the constant cultivation of the London-based secularists - and in the years 1881-84 Bradlaugh, Besant and Foote were very much London-based. It shared, therefore, with the West Riding, a decided decline. No district organisation existed and no efforts were made to foster it in the period. The N.S.S. continued to dominate the area, even into decline:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	13	13	100%
Dec 1882	7	7	100%
Dec 1883	8	8	100%
Dec 1884	8	8	100%

v. Midlands and East, 1881-84:

1881	4,	2,	5,	6,	(4)
1882	6,	5,	6,	6,	(6)
1883	7,	5,	6,	6,	(6)
1884	5,	3,	3,	6,	(4)

1. They were in Bedlington, Brotton, Darlington, Eston, Guisboro, Hartlepoons, Jarrow, Middlesboro, Newcastle, Stockton, South Shields, Spennymoor, and West Auckland.

It has been noted of this area in the years 1875-80, that it was characterised by extreme instability. This was still its most notable feature. In January-March 1881 there were active societies in Derby, Nottingham, Grimsby, and Northampton. Within three months, of these only that at Nottingham appears to have been still operating, being joined in May 1881 by a revived Norwich society. With the exception of Nottingham, all other societies were subject to repeated lapses and revivals, presumably for the same reasons as before. The seven societies of January-March 1883 were Derby, Mansfield, Nottingham, Norwich, Peterboro', Ilkeston and Leicester. That at Peterboro', the first ever in the area, appeared in October 1882 and lasted till July 1883; another new one was that at Wellingboro, formed in July 1883 and lasting until November 1884. Equally erratic were the societies at Hull and Grimsby; the first operating as a branch of the B.S.U. in October 1881, was then heard of no more till April 1883 when it appears active for a month as a branch of the N.S.S.; the second was functioning as a branch of the N.S.S. for a while in early 1881, was unheard of again until October 1882, but appears inactive thereafter until beyond the end of this period. There is little to suggest that the excitements of 1882-3 had much effect on the region, unless the small peak of seven societies in January-March 1883 is regarded as a response to it. The N.S.S. had much the same representation in the area as it had in the years 1875-80:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	6	4	66%
Dec 1882	6	6	100%
Dec 1883	6	6	100%
Dec 1884	6	5	83%

The slight decline in the number of societies places the region in the same position as the West Riding and the North, in contrast to London and Lancs-Cheshire.

vi. West Midlands, Wales, South-West, South, & South-East,

1881-84:

1881	7,	9,	8,	11,	(9)
1882	12,	10,	12,	13,	(12)
1883	17,	13,	14,	16,	(15)
1884	12,	12,	12,	13,	(12)

The progress of organised secularism in this region was almost identical to that of London over the same period. The growth is especially noticeable from late 1882 through 1883, and is followed by a slight decline. It is clear, therefore, that the Bradlaugh question and the blasphemy trials made an impact here. The area is so vast, however, that it requires a regional analysis of its own. Taking Wales first, there was but one society active in the area in January-March 1881, at Aberdare. In January-March 1883 there were 3, at Aberyschan, Bristol and Cardiff, the first-mentioned short-lived, the others fairly stable. The number never exceeded 3 in Wales in these years. Along the south coast there were also three very stable groups in Portsmouth, Plymouth and Southampton. The Plymouth society was very strong; Forder, secretary of the N.S.S., claimed that when he first assumed this office, it had but 14 members; by mid-1884 it had over 160¹. In the Warwickshire-Staffordshire district there were societies in Hanley,

1. N.R., 8 June 1884.

Stourbridge, West Bromwich and Birmingham; in the last-mentioned, an independent society and a branch of the N.S.S. were active throughout this period. In the South-East societies arose in Chatham, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Kingston, Brighton and Reading. How any of the newer societies which sprang up in this region originated is not evident; in the late 1870's the constant lecture-tours of Bradlaugh, Besant, Law and Watts provide the key, but in the early 1880's no inside information is given in Bradlaugh's National Reformer. That there should come to be as many societies in this area as in Lancs-Cheshire or London is a subject for surmise: one notes, for example, that the societies in Wales were not situated in the mining towns as were those of the North of England in the years 1875-80, and in the entire region the only heavily industrialised areas were the Potteries, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. How does one explain the rise of societies in the south-east, a region of not particularly concentrated working-class populations? There is no apparent, ready answer. All that can be noted is that in the years 1881-84 secularism seems to acquire a southward orientation; leaving Lancashire-Cheshire aside, this will appear from the fact that the West Riding, the East, the North and, as will be seen, Scotland, all experienced a decline at this time.

Most of the new groups which arose in these years were N.S.S. branches and its strength in the region was similar to that in London:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	11	10	90%
Dec 1882	13	10	76%
Dec 1883	16	14	87%
Dec 1884	13	10	76%

vii. Scotland, 1881-84:

1881	3, 3, 3, 3, (3)
1882	3, 5, 5, 6, (5)
1883	5, 5, 4, 6, (5)
1884	5, 3, 3, 4, (4)

Organised secularism in Scotland experienced no remarkable growth. The maximum of six societies in the last quarters of 1882 and 1883 had already been reached in 1877, and was more impressive on that occasion, for the six societies of this period were due simply to duplication; for, the independent societies of Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow which existed throughout 1881, were joined by N.S.S. branches in the same towns over the next two years. Only once did a new society appear, in November 1883 at Perth, but it was short-lived. The growth of the N.S.S. in the region over the years 1882-3 may have been due to the blasphemy trials - there is no extant explicit evidence to be dogmatic about it; yet, even accepting it as true, the growth was by no means impressive, but the position of the N.S.S. was not as weak as in the years 1875-80:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	3	0	0%
Dec 1882	6	3	50%
Dec 1883	6	3	50%
Dec 1884	4	3	75%

Conclusion:

N.S.S. membership reached its highest in mid-1884 when it numbered 5,050 adherents. Branches had also increased remarkably, from at least 40 in 1880 to 75 in December 1883. In terms of the total of organised secular societies the position was as follows:

Year	Total	N.S.S.	Percentage
Dec 1881	61	51	83%
Dec 1882	80	66	82%
Dec 1883	88	77	87%
Dec 1884	75	67	89%

This analysis brings out two features of importance: firstly, how great was the effect at national level, of the politico-legal events involving Bradlaugh and Foote, which brought organised secularism to its highest point by the end of 1883, after which a decline began; secondly, how London came to dominate the scene for the first time in the history of the movement; from 1876 to 1880, around 10% of secular societies were located in London¹; in 1881 it rose to 14%, and by 1884 it was 28%; secularism was becoming southward-orientated, for, with the exception of Lancs-Cheshire, all the non-southern regions declined, and the West Riding and the North to a significant degree. The reason is as clear as the consequences were to be adverse with regard to organisation: the days of Iconoclast, the scourge of provincial orthodoxy, were coming

1. The exact figures are: 1876 - 11%; 1877 - 10%; 1878 - 8%; 1879 - 9%; 1880 - 13%.

to an end; the freethought platform was taking second place to the political forum; and, as will be seen, this applied to more than Bradlaugh.

iii. Decline and Metamorphosis, 1885-1891:

The recruitment of new members by the N.S.S. in 1884 was 1,750, being 100 less than in 1883. The President, in his report to the Plymouth Conference, admitted to some disappointment, but claimed, correctly, that the 'phenomenal increase' in 1883 was 'owing to the Blasphemy conviction and the prosecution of Mr Bradlaugh'¹. In 1885, the number of new adherents fell to 1,370, and in 1886 to 990². What the annual reports did not publish was the loss of old members, and when this is also taken into account, a marked falling off is apparent³:

Mid-Year	New Members	Losses of Old Members	Nett Membership of the N.S.S.
1884	1,750	450	5,050
1885	1,370	2,630	3,790
1886	990	1,220	3,560
1887	500	1,460	2,600
1888	590	1,130	2,060
1889	490	760	1,790
1890	710	350	2,150
1891	790	-	2,330
1892	1,070	800	2,600

1. N.R., 8 June 1884.

2. ibid., 31 May 1885, 20 June 1886.

3. The method at arriving at these figures is set out in Appendix Four.

It is clear that 1884 marked the climax, and from 1885 decline set in rapidly. In his report to the Birmingham Conference in May 1885, Bradlaugh gave one reason for this:

The past year has been one of serious trial to our movement in consequence of the severe depression prevailing in various industries throughout the country by diminishing on the one hand, the renewal payments of members and hindering fresh accessions, and on the other, by increasing the claims upon the Benevolent Fund¹.

How true this was is clear from the fact that over 2,600 failed to renew their membership. Just as Holyoake's movement had been diverted by the political ferment of 1848, so the N.S.S.'s agitation for repeal of the Blasphemy Laws suffered as a result of the attention being given to the issue of electoral reform in 1884². But two years later, this excuse no longer applied, and nevertheless Bradlaugh was upbraiding the N.S.S. branches and 'the Freethought party generally' for the 'lack of activity this year in petitioning Parliament either for the passing of an Affirmation Bill or for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws'³. This complaint was made in April, three months after he had won his long struggle for the right to take his seat, and perhaps his de facto victory removed the urgency of the de jure situation, for, no affirmation bill had been passed⁴.

Bradlaugh was still complaining of the adverse effects of economic depression on the movement, at the Glasgow Conference of June 1886; he drew attention to the consolation of a recruitment of 990 new members without mentioning the loss of over 1,200

1. N.R., 31 May 1885.

2. This was the explanation given by Bradlaugh for the fact that 'Very little progress has been made in Parliament since our last Conference, towards the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws', N.R., 31 May 1885.

3. ibid., 4 Apr 1886.

4. The Speaker, Peel, simply let Bradlaugh take the oath without hindrance, see Arnstein, op.cit., pp. 310-11.

old ones over the period 1885-6. Conference after conference, his reports professed to rejoice in the number of new adherents, while making no mention of the greater number of those who fell away; month after month attention was drawn to the foundation of new branches, while the disappearance of old ones was bypassed in silence. But, as will be seen in detail later, the decline after 1884, took its toll of societies as much as of members.

As for blasphemy law repeal, in 1887 Bradlaugh was still deploring the fact that the agitation for it had 'made but little progress during the past year'¹. When Courtney Kenny brought forward his bill for the abolition of prosecutions for the expression of opinion in matters of religion, up to 10 April only a miserable two petitions with 143 names were presented in its favour. Bradlaugh made bewildered comment:

It is clear that for some unexplained reason, the Free-thought Party will not now take the same part in the work of petitioning Parliament, in which they figured so well in the four years 1880-3. The last circular to the branches of the National Secular Society has rested practically without response².

This apathy in the organisation was the subject of much discussion at the South Shields Conference in May of that year. Bradlaugh tried to present a positive picture, claiming that they had recruited more members over the year than the entire organisation possessed in 1875; but others, such as secretary Robert Forder, and G.W. Foote found little consolation in past progress, present stagnation³. The latter successfully moved the institution of a committee to inquire into organisation, consisting of himself,

1. N.R., 1 Jan 1888.

2. N.R., 22 Apr 1888.

3. ibid., 27 May 1888.

W.H. Reynolds, George Standring, Seago and Robertson. The need for such a committee is illustrated by the fate of a Liverpool secularist's stand for election to his local school board in November 1888 - he was not only defeated, but, to quote the irate Bradlaugh, 'has polled less votes than were polled by him three years ago. The regrettable defeat is attributed to the lack of organisation, and to the apathy of the local branch of the National Secular Society, of which, it is stated, several members did not even vote'¹. Two further failures confronted the N.S.S. Executive in the same month when 'Messrs Bland and Ellis, the candidates of the London Secular Federation' for West Lambeth and Finsbury, failed to gain election².

In early 1889, while the Organisation Committee was still at work, Bradlaugh urged that a practical step towards re-organisation should be made immediately, and suggested that some member of the Executive should make a tour of the country districts for this purpose³. Foote volunteered, and visited South Lancashire in early May, where he found the societies at Oldham, Stalybridge and Rochdale in apathy and disarray⁴.

The report of the Committee on Organisation was read by Foote to the annual conference of June 1889. It recommended i) a vigorous initiating executive, claiming that up till then the N.S.S. Executive had only carried out exactly what each annual conference suggested; ii) the establishment of district federations in Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and Tyneside;

1. *ibid.*, 25 Nov 1888.

2. *ibid.*, 9 Dec 1888; the success of Annie Besant in the same elections may have been a consolation, but it redounded little to the credit of the N.S.S., as she was a well-known individual in her own right.

3. *N.R.*, 10 Mar 1889.

4. *ibid.*, 19 May 1889.

iii) the adoption, by provincial branches, of open-air propaganda tactics, rather than confining themselves to lectures in their halls; iv) the institution of a standing committee on organisation, and v) the adoption of some effective fund-raising scheme.

Foote's report was accepted and the Executive was authorised to implement as many of its recommendations as possible¹. In the immediate wake of this conference, there appeared to be a revival: a visit by Foote to the Woolwich area in July resulted in the establishment of a new branch there²; the Brighton society began to pick up new members, among them none other than G.J. Holyoake³; a tour of the North in July-August by Arthur Moss led to a new society at Ox Hill, near Chester-le-Street⁴; and in late August a new branch was being formed at Finsbury Park in London⁵. When the next annual conference met, at Manchester in May 1890, major personnel changes had occurred: Bradlaugh had resigned in February⁶, Besant resigned her vice-presidency in March⁷, and Foote stepped into Bradlaugh's place, on the latter's recommendation. How far these changes brought a corresponding change in N.S.S. fortunes, and to what extent Foote's recommendations on organisation were implemented, now remains to be seen.

In his first report as president, Foote claimed an increase of membership from 492 new members in 1889 to 710 in 1890, the

1. *ibid.*, 16 June 1889.

2. *ibid.*, 21 July 1889.

3. *ibid.*, 21 July 1889.

4. *ibid.*, 11 Aug 1889.

5. *ibid.*, 8 Sept 1889.

6. *N.R.*, 23 Feb 1890; his reason was ill-health.

7. *N.R.*, 9 Mar 1890.

foundation of seven new branches in the U.K., and the imminent formation of district federations in South Lancashire and Yorkshire¹. He succeeded in carrying motions reducing subscriptions in an effort to attract new members², and he urged the immediate despatch of lecturers on tour, at the expense of the central fund. By the end of his first year it seemed his initial zeal was achieving results: the General Fund rose from £172 to £217, almanack sales increased 40%, and there were eleven new U.K. branches. But by 1893 this position was reversed: funds, membership, subscriptions, the number of new members and branches, and almanack sales had all fallen, and the society was racked by internal quarrelling³.

All this sorry tale from 1884 to 1893 was reflected at local level, in a manner not to be gleaned from the annual conferences or reports. No detailed account of the disappearance of each society will be necessary, and only the failure of the more prominent ones will be noted.

Regional Distribution of Secular Societies, 1885-93:

1. London area, 1885-1893⁴:

1885	21,	24,	20,	18,	(21)
1886	19,	19,	19,	19,	(19)
1887	15,	15,	19,	17,	(16)
1888	14,	14,	15,	15,	(15)
1889	12,	15,	16,	15,	(14)
1890	13,	9,	10,	12,	(11)
1891	12,	13,	10,	14,	(12)
1892	14,	12,	9,	10,	(11)
1893	10,	8,	6,	-	(8)

1. *ibid.*, 1 June 1890.

2. Individual subscriptions were reduced from 4/- to 1/- per year, and branch remittances to headquarters from 1/4 to 6d.

3. *N.R.*, 25 May 1893.

4. The absence of a figure for the last quarter of 1893 is due to the fact that the only source for these statistics, the National Reformer, ended its long life after the first week of October 1893.

The number of active societies declined steadily, with a brief recovery in 1891. In early 1886, 'one of the largest, and what might have been one of the best Branches in London, the Finsbury Branch' lapsed¹. Among the older societies which passed away were the Walworth Freethought Institute, which disappeared in May 1887, the Hackney N.S.S. in January 1888, the Paddington N.S.S. exactly twelve months later, the Peckham & Dulwich branch, which lapsed in November 1887, revived from July to September 1888 and is then heard of no more, and the Mile End branch, which, inactive from November 1888 to April 1891, had a short period of life in June 1892 and then disappeared. The Central London branch, possessing over 200 members in 1880, met only during the winter months from October 1885 to October 1889 and sometime after that was disbanded 'as no longer necessary in the changed conditions of the metropolis'². What precisely Foote meant by this is not clear, but one change of significance in the late 1880's was the coming into fashion of ethical societies: in October 1892, both the East London N.S.S. and the West London N.S.S. ceased to be 'secular' and became 'ethical' societies³. One novel feature of metropolitan organisation in these last years was the nominal achievement of federation, after repeated failures from the 1850's. Foote was the architect of this: in late 1887, early 1888 he attempted to organise the N.S.S. branches of the area into a union⁴. The

1. N.R., 28 Mar 1886, 'The National Secular Society', by Robert Forder.

2. ibid., 1 June 1890, Annual Report of the N.S.S.

3. N.R., 2 Oct 1892.

4. ibid., 29 Jan 1888, 'Rough Notes': Bradlaugh welcomed Foote's initiative, but was sceptical of its success.

first council meeting of the resulting body, the London Secular Federation, was held on 2 February 1888 when delegates from most of the London societies attended to discuss the co-ordination of outdoor propoganda. This body also devoted attention to the return of secularists to school boards in the elections of 1888, but with little success¹. Though it was reported in 1892 as still working well, it appears to have been unable to do anything to stay the falling away of societies. The slight recovery in 1891 was probably a result of Foote's initial thoroughness in his first year of office, but by 1893 organised London secularism had declined to its position in 1868 and 1875.

ii. West Riding of Yorkshire, 1885-93:

1885	12,	9,	8,	7,	(9)
1886	9,	8,	7,	7,	(8)
1887	6,	7,	4,	5,	(6)
1888	7,	6,	4,	6,	(6)
1889	4,	4,	4,	4,	(4)
1890	5,	3,	3,	3,	(3)
1891	5,	4,	3,	5,	(4)
1892	5,	6,	5,	4,	(5)
1893	4,	3,	3,	-	(3)

The decline in the West Riding appears to have begun as early as 1882; after a negligible improvement in 1884, there was a steady fall, until by 1890 there were fewer active societies than at any previous time since 1863. The Barnsley society disappeared in March 1886, followed a month later by the long-

1. Besant, for Tower Hamlets, was the only successful secularist; the failure of Bland and Ellis, the other secularist-sponsored candidates, has already been noted.

established Dewsbury society. The equally old Todmorden body disappeared in August 1888, after being inactive from June 1887 to July 1888; the Bradford S.S. fell away in February 1888, and though the Bradford N.S.S. lasted till beyond the period covered in this study, its existence in the years 1885-93 was extremely precarious¹. At the end of 1890 the whole region had societies active only in Halifax, Heckmondwike and Sheffield. There was a short revival in 1891, with the result that by January 1892 there were organised groups in Huddersfield, Bradford, Farsley and Leeds, in addition to those at Heckmondwike and Sheffield. Foote's call for the establishment of district unions was responded to in early June 1890, when the Yorkshire Secular Federation came into existence²; but nothing is known of its history. The recovery of 1891 was short-lived: by 1893, the entire West Riding, so fertile an area for organised secularism in the 1850's, had but three societies, at Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford.

iii. Lancashire-Cheshire, 1885-93:

1885	14, 13, 10, 13,	(13)
1886	12, 7, 10, 10,	(10)
1887	7, 7, 8, 7,	(7)
1888	7, 4, 4, 4,	(5)
1889	5, 5, 5, 6,	(5)
1890	4, 4, 6, 5,	(5)
1891	6, 5, 5, 5,	(5)
1892	4, 2, 2, 4,	(3)
1893	5, 3, 2, -	(3)

1. It was inactive over the following periods: Feb-Oct 1888, Nov 1888-Apr 1891, June-Nov 1891, and Dec 1891-Jan 1892.

2. N.R., 1, 15 June 1890.

This region, the original home of organised secularism, experienced the most dramatic decline, in two stages: firstly, in the three years following the peak of 1884, and secondly, in the second and third years of Foote's presidency. The first societies to disappear permanently were those of recent origin, such as Preston, Burnley and Heywood¹. Soon the older ones followed: Darwen in April 1888, Wigan in November 1889, Oldham in April 1891 and Stalybridge in November 1891. There existed a Lancashire Freethought Federation from 1885, but apart from the fact that it appears to have failed in January 1888, nothing is known of its activities². In 1892, a Lancashire & Yorkshire Secular Federation was formed in Manchester by Sam Standring, who had moved to that city³, but its formation came too late; by mid-1893 organised secularism in the area reached its nadir, with but three societies active, in Bolton, Liverpool and Manchester.

iv. North of England, 1885-93:

1885	5,	4,	4,	3,	(4)
1886	4,	3,	3,	3,	(3)
1887	3,	3,	4,	4,	(4)
1888	6,	6,	5,	6,	(6)
1889	6,	4,	6,	5,	(5)
1890	3,	3,	3,	6,	(4)
1891	7,	4,	9,	6,	(6)
1892	5,	6,	4,	4,	(5)
1893	4,	4,	4,	-	(4)

1. Disappearing in October 1885, January 1887 and March 1887 respectively.

2. N.R., 22 Jan 1888, Fifth Quarterly Meeting of the Lancashire Freethought Federation, at Manchester, on 15 Jan 1888; no further meetings are recorded after this date.

3. ibid., 12 June 1892; he was the brother of George Standring previously mentioned.

As with the West Riding, the decline here had already begun in 1882, and after 1884 there was a fairly stable pattern. Again, there was a minor peak in 1891 and this must be due to Foote's first year as president. A North Eastern Secular Federation was set up in early May 1889, with Newcastle as headquarters: Foote had visited the area in early April, calling at Chester-le-Street, South Shields and Newcastle¹, and by June 1889 these societies, with Bedlington, Cramlington, and West Hartlepool, constituted the Federation's affiliates. Once again the influence of the prominent secularists was apparent, with Foote assuming the role once played by Bradlaugh and Besant in turn, for, the establishment of the Federation aside, his visit led to the foundation of a branch of the N.S.S. at Darlington². That there was no decline after his departure may well have been due to further Northern tours by his colleague, Arthur Moss³. The North Eastern Secular Federation was still operating in mid-1892, and had organised continuous tours by Moss, Charles Watts, and newcomers Sam Standring, C.J. Hunt, and Stanley Jones⁴. Clearly it was to these persistent lectures that the Northern region avoided the dramatic decline experienced by Lancs-Cheshire; yet, by 1893, in terms of active societies, the region was back to where it had been in 1873.

1. *ibid.*, 19 May 1889.

2. *ibid.*, 16 June 1889.

3. *N.R.*, 11 Aug 1889, p.87, 17 Aug 1890, pp. 102-3.

4. *ibid.*, 12 June 1892

v. Midlands and East, 1885-93:

1885	4, 5, 4, 4, (4)
1886	5, 2, 2, 3, (3)
1887	4, 4, 2, 2, (3)
1888	2, 3, 3, 2, (3)
1889	3, 5, 4, 4, (4)
1890	3, 1, 2, 2, (2)
1891	2, 1, 1, 3, (2)
1892	4, 1, 2, 3, (2)
1893	4, 3, 1, - (2)

In this area the decline was sharp, and the small revival which characterised the preceding areas in 1891, does not apply, for after 1889 there was no significant recovery, only a continued instability. In 1888, Bradlaugh had urged the establishment of a district association for the region, but nothing came of the suggestion¹. The maximum of five societies in April-June 1889 was owing to the revival of organised groups in Wellingboro and Grimsby, the latter due perhaps to Foote's visit to the town. By mid-1893, with active societies only in Hull, Ipswich and Nottingham, the area had receded to the point to which it had fallen already in 1880.

vi. Wales, West Midlands, South-West, South, & South-East,

1885-93:

1885	15, 10, 13, 12, (12)
1886	14, 11, 11, 11, (12)
1887	11, 10, 8, 8, (9)
1888	8, 7, 6, 6, (7)
1889	7, 4, 6, 8, (6)
1890	7, 4, 4, 5, (5)
1891	4, 4, 4, 4, (4)
1892	7, 6, 5, 6, (6)
1893	8, 8, 7, - (8)

1. N.R., 29 Jan 1888.

Decline in this region was not as dramatic as elsewhere; it had reached its lowest in 1891, and thereafter there was a decided recovery. It is interesting that this did not, as elsewhere, take place in Foote's first year. It was most likely due to Charles Watts, who, returning from Canada upon Bradlaugh's death, settled in Birmingham and began to organise a Midland Secular Union¹. Watts's appearance in the area undoubtedly compensated for the absence of the region's two most outstanding organisers, Mayer of Dudley and Cattell of Birmingham who were no longer active after 1885. Furthermore, in 1893 Watts was joined in the district by a newcomer, Chapman Cohen, a future president of the N.S.S.; the constant lectures by these must have been the key factor in the revival after 1890.

vii. Scotland, 1885-93:

1885	4,	4,	2,	3,	(4)
1886	3,	3,	2,	3,	(3)
1887	3,	2,	2,	2,	(2)
1888	2,	2,	2,	1,	(2)
1889	2,	1,	1,	1,	(1)
1890	1,	1,	1,	1,	(1)
1891	1,	1,	1,	1,	(1)
1892	3,	2,	2,	2,	(2)
1893	2,	1,	1,	-	(1)

Scotland conforms markedly to the general pattern which has been by now established, viz., a decided decline from 1885 to 1891, followed by a short recovery and then relapse. In July 1890, N.S.S. secretary, Robert Forder, observed that 'inquiries reach me concerning the cessation of active propaganda at

1. N.R., 12 June 1892.

Paisley, Perth, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen'¹. He went on to urge the formation of a Scottish Federation. With the Glasgow group as the only active society in the entire country throughout 1890, his prompting was somewhat belated. The recovery in 1892 was due to the revival of organised groups in Edinburgh and Hamilton, but they were short-lived. In 1852, one of every five active and organised secularists was to be found in Scotland: forty one years later there was but a single society: this was decline indeed.

When brought together, these figures present the story of that decline, on a national level, as follows:

1885	75,	69,	61,	60,	(66)
1886	66,	53,	54,	56,	(57)
1887	49,	48,	47,	45,	(47)
1888	46,	42,	39,	40,	(42)
1889	39,	39,	41,	44,	(40)
1890	36,	25,	29,	34,	(31)
1891	36,	32,	33,	38,	(34)
1892	42,	35,	29,	33,	(34)
1893	38,	31,	24,	-	(31)

Conclusion: The Reasons for the Decline:

Two reasons were given by the N.S.S. for the decline it experienced after 1884. Firstly, the large increase of 1883-4, consequent upon the sympathy which the parliamentary oath and blasphemy trials issues brought to the movement, was bound to

1. N.R., 20 July 1890.

fall off after the excitement of these issues had subsided¹. This, however, will only explain why it should have receded to the position obtaining just before that great increase occurred, viz., around the middle of 1882. It is now abundantly clear, however, that the decline went further than this, so far, indeed, as to obliterate the gains made from 1875 onward, when the N.S.S. was becoming effectively organised. A second reason proffered by Bradlaugh was economic depression². Again, some weight must be given to this factor, but the factor was only temporary. Furthermore, the N.S.S. had ridden out the economic depression of 1878-9 without apparent damage³.

Our geographical analyses have suggested an additional reason, with particular respect to provincial areas: their dependance upon the leading London secularists. In the years 1874-80, Watts, Bradlaugh, and Besant successively provided this presence. In the decade which followed, Watts was frequently, and for long periods, abroad, Bradlaugh was preoccupied in London, and Besant's attention was diverted to additional fields of endeavour, in the Malthusian League and the Socialist movement. Consequently, certain regions, the North and Scotland in particular, were neglected. The Midlands and Lancs-Cheshire regions had ever been less dependant than either Scotland or the North, and this was so partly because they threw up leaders of their own, as active at local level as Bradlaugh or Besant were nationally. Take for example Notts County and James

1. ibid., 27 May 1888; a reason given by Bradlaugh in his report to the N.S.S. Conference at South Shields in 1888.

2. N.R., 20 June 1886.

3. ibid., 16 June 1878, 5 Jan 1879; at the Conference of 1878 Bradlaugh noted that the depression was having no effect on the N.S.S.; in early January 1879 he warned his followers to expect that its continuation must ultimately have some adverse effects, but the figures for 1879, 1880 and 1881, in addition to the optimism expressed at each of the conferences of those years, show that the expected ill-effects had not materialised.

Hooper: in 1873 he delivered 147 lectures and engaged in 5 public debates, as well as working full-time for his livelihood¹; in 1874 he delivered 132 lectures and engaged in 10 public debates². In Birmingham there was Cattell, in Warwickshire H.V. Mayer, in Lancashire Thomas Slater of Bury and N.J. Ridgway of Manchester, in Leicestershire Josiah Gimson and Thomas Wright: all of these without exception, were as earnest and as prominent locally as was Hooper. None of these was active after 1885. A lack of active men in the provinces, was therefore, an important factor in decline, after 1884.

There were also a series of departures at national level with adverse effects. Aveling had joined the movement in July 1879, and from then until mid-1884 did the cause much service through his lectures and writings³; but his borrowing escapades soon brought him into Bradlaugh's disfavour. At an executive council meeting of 28 August 1884 he was forced to resign from the N.S.S.⁴. W.J. Ramsey, prominent in attempts at organisation in London, from as early as 1870, on the N.S.S. Executive by 1875 and a vice-president by 1885, decided to make some money on the side, by forging or selling forged copies of Besant's Law of Population; Bradlaugh told him in August 1886 that he was 'shocked beyond measure both at your inexcusable dishonesty in thus robbing Mrs Besant and myself, and at your folly in imagining that you could continue to do it without being found out'⁵.

1. N.R., 11 Jan 1874.

2. ibid., 10 Jan 1875.

3. In his first year, up to May 1880, he gave 116 lectures throughout the country; N.R., 23 May 1880.

4. Bradlaugh Collection, N.S.S. Circular, 2 Sept 1884, reports the whole business in detail.

5. ibid., C. Bradlaugh to W.J. Ramsey, 21 Aug 1886 (copy).

Thereupon Ramsey resigned from the N.S.S., and was heard of no more¹. In June 1887, P.A.V. Le Lubez's long career as an active secularist came to an end when he resigned as treasurer of the N.S.S. on the grounds of ill-health². Robert Forder, who had joined a secular society in Deptford on the same day as Bradlaugh had joined his first, back in the 1850's, and who was the N.S.S.'s first paid secretary after the departure of Watts, resigned on the same grounds three years after Le Lubez³.

By far the most serious loss was that of Annie Besant. Though her final break with the N.S.S. did not come until March 1890⁴, she had ceased to devote the same energy to it, from the early 1880's: from 1879 she was caught up in the affairs of the Malthusian League; by 1883 she was editing her own journal, Our Corner; in April 1884 the Bradlaugh-Hyndman debate led her to consider the claims of Socialism⁵, and by mid-1885 she had joined the Fabian Society⁶. Thereafter, in all but name, she was virtually lost to the secularist movement as an active member, though continuing to promote, implicitly, secular objectives.

Her loss, serious in itself to the organisational aspect of the movement, was symptomatic, and leads to a consideration of what was to be one of the chief reasons for the decline. This

1. N.R., 5 Sept 1886, p.151, Report of a meeting of the N.S.S. Executive of 25 August; Ramsey sent a letter to the Executive rather than face Bradlaugh or Besant.

2. ibid., 5 June 1887.

3. ibid., 1 June 1890.

4. N.R., 6 Apr 1890, Report of a meeting of the Executive of the N.S.S. on 26 March: she resigned on the grounds that 'it would be impossible for Mr Foote and myself to work harmoniously together'.

5. Besant, op.cit., pp. 301-2.

6. Pease, op.cit., p.47.

was, in general, politics, in particular, socialism.

Bradlaugh's six-year struggle to enter Parliament, was essentially a matter of politics, and the sympathy it evoked among those of radical inclinations must have been a factor in drawing many into the ranks of the N.S.S., who, when that struggle was over, drifted out again. At the N.S.S. Conference of 1889 this was admitted as a fact¹. Political issues arose after this which continued to command the attention once given to Genesis: the mid-1880's was the era of the Irish Question, and in his presidential report of 1889, Bradlaugh confessed that

the acute political interest excited by the Irish Question since the commencement of 1886, and the very large number of meetings held on the Home Rule question, has (sic) in some degree checked the activity of Freethought propaganda².

But, the rising Socialist movement had a particular effect, and that, for a particular reason, namely, that its appeal was to Radicals, and almost invariably, secularists were Radicals³.

The collapse of Chartism and the Owenite movements, by 1850, left radical secularists with little to distract their attention from emphasis on secularism, and that for over thirty years. By the mid-1880's the growing attractive power of socialist ideas was bringing to a close the secularist interregnum of 1850-80.

1. In the previous year, Bradlaugh had sent out circulars to branches, asking their opinion as to the decline. According to his report to the Conference of 1889, the consensus was that there were '.... many hundreds of persons who joined during the exciting struggles of a few years ago, whose membership is almost nominal and who seldom attend the ordinary meetings of the local branch', N.R., 16 June 1889.

2. N.R., 16 June 1889.

3. The only example I have come across of a conservative secularist was Abraham North (1808-1878) of the Huddersfield S.S., who latterly worked for the Conservative Party 'in all election contests' yet, even he in his youth was a Chartist, and was also involved in the Anti-Corn-Law-League and the Ten Hours Movement: N.R., 15 Dec 1878, obituary notice.

One can descry the beginnings of this in 1879, when the ex-Catholic, ex-Chartist and prominent Leicestershire secularist, John Sketchley, became secretary of the Midland Social Democratic Association: ten years later he is found addressing the Stalybridge branch of the N.S.S. on the question, 'Is Socialism Practicable?'¹. The result was, that after Foote visited the area in May 1889, he recorded that 'no Freethought propaganda worth speaking of has been done in Stalybridge for a long while. Nothing is heard of but "politics, politics, politics"'². He found at Oldham that 'several of their best working members have been absorbed by politics to the neglect of Freethought', and in Rochdale he discovered a similar 'unpleasant condition of things'³.

It was in London, however, that this development was most marked. There were others of the younger generation, apart from Aveling and Besant who were to go over to Socialism. In 1881, Capt Tom Lemmon, George Most and Ambrose Barker, all of the Stratford branch of the N.S.S., finding that a majority of the branch members felt social questions should take priority over anti-theological issues, broke away and formed the Stratford Radical and Dialectical Club, a body which lasted four years and played a part in the foundation of the Social Democratic Federation. Other London-based individuals who underwent a

1. N.R., 19 Jan 1879, 3 Mar 1889.

2. ibid., 19 May 1889.

3. ibid., 19 May 1889.

4. Stanley Shipley, 'The Stratford Radical & Dialectical Club', a paper read at the 3rd Ruskin College History Workshop, 1969, to be published: Shipley's main source is an unpublished manuscript, Reminiscences of a Revolutionist, by Ambrose Barker; for Lemmon, Most and Barker, see Appendix 1, pp.628-629, 641-642, 645-646.

similar process were John Burns¹, Harry Snell² and Tom Mann³. The disaster for organised secularism was that these 'defectors' were men whose loss could be least afforded, since they were thoughtful and active individuals. Bradlaugh's report on the answers to his circular of 1889 admitted that the left-wing political clubs of the metropolis were absorbing the energies of once active secularists⁴.

Finally, there is Bradlaugh himself to consider. The movement which began to forge ahead from 1875, owed this very progress to his energies, especially as exerted in his country-wide Freethought lectures. By 1886 the emphasis in such lectures was on politics rather than Freethought. Of the 75 reported lectures which he delivered in 1866, 5 were on labour questions, 18 on theological questions and no less than 57 on political topics. There is no question that he had changed his opinions on matters of belief or unbelief, nor is there evidence of his interest slackening; his career in parliament did not show any attempt to play down his beliefs. He realised one of the objectives of the 'Proposed Programme' of 1866, and for which he had agitated for over two decades, the enactment of an affirmation bill⁵. He took up the question of repeal of the blasphemy laws in the House, and if he failed in this latter object, the fault, in so far as it lay with secularists, lay with the rank and file, and not with him. At the beginning

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1. W. Kent, John Burns: Labour's Lost Leader, (London, 1950) pp. 17, 31, 299.; D. Torr, Tom Mann and His Times, (London, 1956, 2 vols), i.185-6.
 2. H. Snell, Men, Movements and Myself, (London, 1936), pp. 32-4, 55, 156.
 3. Torr, op.cit., i.66, 85.
 4. N.R., 1 Jan 1888, 'Review of the Year', by Bradlaugh.
 5. 51 & 52 Vict. c.46, An Act to amend the Law as to Oaths (1888).

of 1888 he complained to his N.S.S. followers, of the lack of support he was receiving for the repeal movement. At the Conference of 1890, J.M. Robertson successfully moved that the N.S.S. should appeal to Bradlaugh to try again, by introducing a bill 'to secure the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws in so far as they affect the right of this Society to receive legacies'¹.

Bradlaugh's reply was that he saw

little hope of dealing with the matter again, until after a general election, and then only with success if branches get up reasonably signed petitions².... .

But if his beliefs and actions in parliament showed no change in the man, there was some decline in the old militancy. The problem of the lack of support from the rank and file, illustrates this; if the general body of the N.S.S. yearly became diminished, diverted and apathetic partly for the reasons already outlined, it was also due in part to the very fact that his victory in the six year struggle caused him to give more attention to political matters than to those of Freethought. It has been seen how dependant organised secularism was upon constant lecturing by leading freethinkers; when parliamentary occupations rendered lecturing on the scale of the earlier years impossible, he might well have resigned the presidency, for it is clear that the temporary revival of 1891 was due to the thrust given by the new Executive. In the late 1850's, 1860's and 1870's Bradlaugh made no bones about the need for a real leadership; but in 1889 he chose to question the possibility of a strong executive in a voluntary society, confessing that

1. N.R., 1 June 1890.

2. ibid., 8 June 1890, italics mine.

'he had been inclined for many years to think their strength came from the branches'¹; yet, on the same occasion, speaking on the idea of district federations he observed that 'they flourished, as a rule, when kept going by one energetic man; when that man moved away they died out'². From 1886 that man, Bradlaugh, had moved away.

The study of the years 1858-66 has shown how attempts at national organisation were attended by persistent conflict of personalities, and how only one strong enough to win through that conflict, could achieve it. The years 1868-80 reveal the triumph of that man and the achievement of that organisation. But the undoing of that organisation in the following decade did not involve the undoing of that organisation's raison d'etre, the propagation of a secularist philosophy. Commenting on the attractive power of Socialism and the political clubs, Forder observed that 'many members had gone to these, remaining Free-thinkers but giving their activities to politics'³. After the 1880's, the old organised expression of Freethought at street-corners and assembly rooms was no longer necessary; the secular Hall of Science had become as irrelevant as the Parish Hall, and this is the measure of a major change in English society, and one of which Bradlaugh was a not inconsiderable agent.

1. *ibid.*, 16 June 1889.
 2. *ibid.*
 3. N.R., 27 May 1888.

CHAPTER THREE : BRADLAUGH AND BIRTH CONTROLBirth Control and Bradlaugh to 1876:

At the very time that Bradlaugh had achieved prominence as a leading atheist and had displaced Holyoake from the leadership of London secularism, at the end of the 1850s, his attempts to create a national organisation of secularists were to be thwarted by disunity caused by his own promotion of birth-control. It is an indication of the importance he attached to the population problem and its solution that he was prepared to jeopardise the organisation of atheists and his leadership of them. But, the question of population was literally a matter of life and death.

When Malthus proclaimed his 'law' that population tended to outstrip the food supply, and Ricardo put forward the view that there was a fixed fund out of which wages could be paid, together they posed an acute problem for contemporaries: the view of society consequent on their doctrines which gained rapid and extensive acceptance, offered no prospect for a diminution of, or an end to mass poverty¹. Among early nineteenth century radicals there were two kinds of response to this dilemma. The first was to reject the validity of Malthus's doctrine and thereby to deny that poverty was caused by over-population, and to insist instead that it was due to unfair distribution of wealth occasioned by monopoly of power and privilege. This approach was adopted in varying degrees by radicals like William Godwin, William Thompson, James Bronterre O'Brien, among others, who thereby contributed to the making

1. H.A. Boner, Hungry Generations. The nineteenth-century case against Malthusianism (N.Y., 1955) pp. 81-2, 86, 128.

of a tradition of hostility among advanced sections of the working class¹. This tradition lasted down to the time of the First International and the Land and Labour League in the 1860s and beyond them into the 1880s. It was a tradition of hostility which Bradlaugh was to encounter in his association with working class radical movements in London.

The second response was not to reject Malthus and Ricardo, but, accepting the validity of their arguments, to seek a solution not in late marriage and prudential restraint but in artificial birth-control. Out of this response came the doctrine of Neomalthusianism, a doctrine which accepted the Malthusian theory of population and the Ricardian theory of the wages fund and which saw the solution to poverty in terms of limiting the numbers of those who were to avail of that fund. This doctrine was first clearly set forth by Francis Place in his Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population in 1822 and first propagated in practical form in his Diabolical Handbill campaign of birth-control in 1823². Among Place's more notable converts were the youthful John Stuart Mill³ and the militant freethinker Richard Carlile⁴. Indeed, for the greater part of the century Neomalthusianism was to owe its advocacy exclusively to men who were radical in politics and godless in philosophy. Thus, following the publications of Place, and of Carlile's Every Woman's Book (1826)⁵ Robert Dale

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1. P. Fryer, The Birth Controllers (London, 1965) pp. 79-82.
 2. N. Himes, Medical History of Contraception (N.Y., 1936) pp. 213-217; J. Peel, 'Birth Control and the British Working Class Movement, a bibliographical review', in Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin, no 7, Autumn 1973, pp. 16-17; P. Fryer, op.cit., pp. 43-48.
 3. M. St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill (London, 1954) pp. 55-59.
 4. N. Himes, op.cit., p.222.
 5. R. Carlile, Every Woman's Book: or, What is Love ? (London, 1826).

Owen produced his Moral Physiology in 1831 and Charles Knowlton his Fruits of Philosophy in 1832¹. The publication history of Knowlton's work clearly illustrates the association with radicalism and atheism: James Watson produced its first English edition in 1833 and publication rights passed from him to George Jacob Holyoake, to the latter's brother Austin, and finally to Bradlaugh's colleague Charles Watts².

The original birth-control and neomalthusian campaign of the 1820s had died down by the mid-1830s and although birth-control literature continued to circulate over the next forty years it did so without national debate and with no apparent effect³. Attempts to gain an effective hearing of the case for neomalthusianism met with apparently insuperable obstacles. In this long period one of the obstacles to the acceptance of the doctrine among working class radicals was clearly the tradition of hostility based on a rejection of Malthus already alluded to. But it was hardly the most important obstacle at that stage. Of greater importance was the absence of an authoritative medical treatment of the subject presented simply and published cheaply. George Jacob Holyoake, himself a neomalthusian, said as much in 1848 when he declared that although people such as J.S. Mill had dealt with the economic case for birth-control no comparable medical exposition was available⁴.

This remained true until in 1854 Dr G.R. Drysdale produced

1. R.D. Owen, Moral Physiology; or, a brief and plain treatment on the Population Question (1st ed. N.Y., 1831, 1st English ed. London 1832); C. Knowlton, Fruits of Philosophy; or, the Private Companion of Young Married People (1st ed. N.Y., 1832, 1st English ed. London, 1834).

2. F.H.A. Micklewright, 'The Rise and Decline of English Neo-Malthusianism', in Population Studies, xv, no 1, July 1961, p.34.

3. D.V. Glass, Population Policies and Movements in Europe (Oxford, 1940) p.32; P. Fryer, *op.cit.*, p.84; N. Himes, *op.cit.*, p.223.

4. Reasoner, 5 July 1848.

Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion¹. Yet, the publication of this work provided no solution: Holyoake's own reaction to it illustrates the most important obstacle of all to the case for neomalthusianism and birth-control, namely, the morbid delicacy of the age surrounding discussion of sexual matters. Holyoake himself who had deplored Richard Carlile's tasteless treatment of the question in Every Woman's Book, and who had called for an authoritative medical exposition, was appalled by Drysdale's choice of title and by the tone of reverence for the body and its pleasures with which the work was infused². Although Drysdale changed the title of the second edition, in 1857, to The Elements of Social Science, he retained the original name in the work's subtitle and Holyoake remained dissatisfied:

we are sorry to see the new edition defaced with terms of which we complained before. If an author designed to bring Freethought into contempt he could not do it more effectually than by the mischievous phrase 'Sexual Religion' The terms which quacks celebrate are paraded at the heads of chapters Without in any way impugning the intentions or convictions of the anonymous author we doubt now the moral tendency of his book We refuse to advertise it - first on the ground of the grossness of its title, and next from the ambiguity of its contents³.

Holyoake's reaction to Drysdale's work and his sensitivity to discussion of the question in general was not unique: although the publication of birth-control literature from its origin in the 1820s had become the preserve of secularists, not all secularists were prepared to discuss the question. In 1848 when Holyoake was calling for an adequate medical work on birth-control the Yorkshire secularist Joseph Barker rejected

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1. A Student of Medicine, Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion (1st ed., London, 1854).
 2. Reasoner, 25 Mar 1855.
 3. ibid., 17 May 1857.

neomalthusianism on both economic and moral grounds, arguing that overpopulation was simply untrue and that 'the idea of urging people to pursue a particular course to prevent the increase of their families is utterly unnatural'¹. Again, the influential London secularist John Maughan, in December 1853, attributed poverty and low wages 'to the system of property and commercial exchange which society has adopted, and to the ignorance and intemperance of the poor themselves'².

In the first half of the nineteenth century, therefore, although the advocacy of neomalthusianism and of birth-control depended on men who were secularists, not all secularists were happy about this: some rejected the economic or demographic theory on which it based its case; others rejected it on moral grounds in addition; and some who accepted the validity of the neomalthusian position, like Holyoake, were highly sensitive to the manner in which it was presented and feared that its open advocacy could link the cause of atheism with sexual licence. Such was the situation Bradlaugh was to face when he took up the doctrine of neomalthusianism and the cause of birth-control. That he was induced to take up this crusade at all was due in very great degree to the influence of G.R. Drysdale.

Despite the dubious reception accorded to Drysdale's work in the 1850s by the only prominent secularist clearly favourable to neomalthusianism, his book was of great significance for the birth-control movement and for Bradlaugh. It has been contended that when Bradlaugh tried to form a Malthusian League in 1860 he had attracted Drysdale³ but it is probably more correct to

1. The People, vol.1, no 13, (n.d.) 1848.

2. Reasoner, 21 Dec 1853.

3. J. Peel, 'Birth-control and the British working class movement: a bibliographical review', in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, no 7, autumn 1963, p.18.

suggest that it was Drysdale who first attracted Bradlaugh to neomalthusianism. Drysdale was the only important theorist of the movement in the early 1850s. Dedicating his book to 'The Poor and the Suffering', he was less concerned with birth-control technique than with justifying its practice as the ultimate cure for low wages and poverty¹. Not resting content with producing his book, Drysdale went on to produce a periodical called The Political Economist and Journal of Social Science in 1856². Looking at the 'miserable existing state of society', his aim was to explain and propagate 'the natural laws on which poverty and wealth depend', and to point out 'the true cause and only cure of the evils existing in our society'³.

Drysdale's belief that birth-control was the 'only cure' introduced a doctrinaire note into neomalthusianism which distinguished him from earlier theorists like Place. Ignoring the sensitivity of people like Holyoake he insisted that 'the main questions of political economy resolve themselves into sexual questions', and claimed that until this was admitted and properly investigated 'all treatment of social evils must be superficial and delusive'⁴. He saw the main obstacle to progress in the 'morbid delicacy and vehement prejudice against the open discussion of sexual questions', and declared that

1. N. Himes, op.cit., p.232.

2. The Political Economist and Journal of Social Science, edited by the Author of The Elements of Social Science, and published by Edward Truelove. It ran for fifteen issues, January 1856 to April 1857. Truelove had already been the publisher of Drysdale's Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion.

3. The Political Economist & Journal of Social Science, no 1, Jan 1856.

4. *ibid.*

'as long as the working classes permit this discussion to be suppressed their case is hopeless'¹. Yet, for all of this, he himself devoted more space in his paper to presenting the economic case for birth-control than he did to discussing sexual aspects of the subject. Typical of this was the second issue of his periodical in which he tried to elaborate on the theory that wages depend 'on the proportion between the laborers (sic) and Capital'², or the ninth issue in which he criticised the idea that the cultivation of waste lands could be a remedy for poverty, a suggestion, he argued, that was as useless as that of emigration since the temporary relief would lead only to further procreation and the ultimate problem would remain³. It may have been advisable to devote time and effort to the theoretical justification of population control on socio-economic grounds, but in 1857 correspondents to his journal pointed out that what was needed most were cheap tracts in simple language explaining to ordinary people how they could limit their families. In replying, Drysdale became the first to suggest the idea of a birth-control propaganda organisation and movement:

If a tract society could be organised for the purpose much benefit might be expected to result a public demonstration should be made upon the subject. Such a movement would best come from the working classes they are the least enslaved by fear of public opinion⁴.

This suggestion was made some twenty years before it was realised: Drysdale was unable to organise such a movement and

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, March 1856.

3. *ibid.*, Nov 1856.

4. The Political Economist & Journal of Social Science, Jan 1857.

pressure of work also prevented him from continuing his periodical which lapsed in April 1857¹.

Having left the Army in 1853 Bradlaugh spent the next seven years of his life in getting a living and earning a reputation as an atheist lecturer and propagandist. In these years he showed no concern with birth-control nor with the social misery which was its mainspring. It is by no means clear that his subsequent neomalthusianism 'arose from the generally radical background which he had adopted as the basis for a secularism which was, in his view, of necessity atheistic, republican and neomalthusian', as Micklewright maintained². Between 1853 and 1860 there is no evidence that Bradlaugh concerned himself with social or economic issues; instead, he was pre-occupied with lectures, debates and writings on theological and biblical themes. His first contributions to journalism appeared in the London Investigator in 1857-8 and were devoted to 'Lives of the Bible Heroes'³. Furthermore, when he took over the editorship of this journal in November 1858 he issued an editorial on policy which stressed militant atheism and made no allusion to social questions⁴. In, 1859, still editing this journal, he began to publish extracts from Drysdale's Physical and Natural Religion (sic) but with one exception, without comment. These extracts had nothing to do with population, birth-control or political economy: instead, they were portions

1. *ibid.*, Apr 1857.

2. F.H.A. Micklewright, *loc.cit.*, p.35.

3. The London Investigator, Oct, Nov, Dec 1857, Feb, Mar, Apr 1858.

4. *ibid.*, 1 Nov 1858.

of Drysdale's book dealing with the supernatural as an obstacle to progress. In the sole comment he made on one of these extracts, Bradlaugh declared

we have lately read, with much gratification, the chapter upon Natural Religion in the book on Physical Religion published by Mr Truelove The writer in forcible language illustrates the truism that 'Belief in God is disbelief in Nature'¹.

It was not, in fact, until 1860, that Bradlaugh ever mentioned the subject of birth-control. Furthermore, it was not till the very end of the 1850s that he became concerned with or involved in strictly political questions. In November 1858 he became involved in the Political Reform League²; in March 1859 he received his first mention in The Times in connection with a Hyde Park protest on the government reform bill³ and in 1860 he became caught up in the cause of Garibaldi⁴. It would appear from all this that Bradlaugh began to become interested in neomalthusianism and birth-control just as he was developing political interests at the end of the 1850s and that Drysdale's work was the critical influence upon him in regard to the former. From 1860 onward, Bradlaugh, the man of action, and Drysdale, the theorist, were to cooperate in the advocacy of neomalthusianism. When the London Investigator ceased publication in August 1859 Bradlaugh was fortunate to secure an invitation to become joint editor, with Joseph Barker, of a new atheist periodical, the National Reformer, launched by a group of Sheffield secularists⁵.

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1. *ibid.*, 15 Feb 1859.
 2. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.81.
 3. *ibid.*, i.82.
 4. *ibid.*, i.152.
 5. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.119-121.

Its first issue appeared on Saturday 7 April 1860. The work of Bradlaugh and Drysdale in this journal made it the only periodical for a generation which dared to promote the cause of birth-control.

In the very first number Bradlaugh reviewed a pamphlet Drysdale had written to counter objections to his Elements¹. Three months later, Drysdale himself wrote deploring the fact that in an age when the principle of free and open discussion was so universally granted, neomalthusianism 'has not a single advocate or representative in the periodical press (apart), and has no organised party'. In particular, he singled out for attack The Economist which 'never enters into the deepest economical questions, nor approaches the law of population'². Once again, he explained that this was 'because all allusion to sexual matters is proscribed from feelings of delicacy'. And once again he called for the establishment of a 'Malthusian party or league', urging the secularist party in particular to take up this matter³. He soon received a response from the London secularist J.P. Adams who announced that to further Drysdale's aim of securing open discussion of the subject a series of 'explanatory lectures' on it would be given in the Hall of Science, London, adding that 'as Secularism is specially devoted to the improvement of mankind it will be evident that such a course of lectures will be deserving the attention of secularists'⁴.

1. N.R., 7 Apr 1860.

2. ibid., 9 June 1860.

3. ibid.

4. N.R., 28 July 1860.

However, Adams's proposed course of lectures never took place. In October 1860 he declared he had been delayed in giving them, but no reason was offered¹. It may have been due to personal preoccupations on his part, but there is some evidence to suggest an alternative explanation, namely, that the delay was due to disagreements among secularists on the question and that at a time when they were trying to secure unity and organisation it was expedient to drop any issue tending to disrupt this. In September 1860, at the Cleveland Institute, John Maughan denounced Malthusianism as a fallacy². A dispute then occurred between Maughan and Adams. In a letter to Bradlaugh as editor of the National Reformer Maughan declared his opinion that 'the Malthusian doctrine has been one of the great obstacles to human progress'³. In reply, Adams challenged Maughan 'as a leading secularist' to substantiate this opinion; in a public debate⁴. Maughan responded: 'From J.P. Adams' letter one would imagine he considered me to be an adversary of Secularism because I oppose the Malthusian theory', and he declined the challenge to a public debate 'on the physiological questions involved in Malthusianism'⁵. It is clear from this controversy, that in its first year as an organ of neomalthusianism the National Reformer could not even get beyond its own supporters in meeting obstacles to the mere discussion of the matter.

As for Bradlaugh, he first publicly expressed his views on these

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1. *ibid.*, 6 Oct 1860.
 2. *ibid.*, 22 Sept 1860.
 3. *ibid.*, 3 Nov 1860.
 4. *ibid.*, 17 Nov 1860.
 5. *ibid.*, 24 Nov 1860.

issues in late January at Bradford where he delivered a lecture entitled Jesus, Shelley and Malthus which he published in pamphlet form sometime in 1861. In this lecture he quoted the works of Buckle, Mill and Drysdale, all of whom were exponents of the classical wages fund doctrine which was central to neo-malthusian theory. He chose Jesus, Shelley and Malthus as representing three stages in human thought; the first represented thought fettered, the second thought freed but undisciplined, and the third the 'special application of educated thought to the relief of the human family from at least some of the many evils under which its members suffer'¹. The teachings of Jesus should be assailed because their import is that poverty is a virtue. He told his listeners to go and visit the slums 'and tell me if these betoken the prevalence of God's kingdom?'². Furthermore, if the poverty spoken of in the Gospels was merely one of spirit, then this too should be condemned on the grounds that what was needed was not a spirit of poverty but a spirit of self-reliance³. Shelley he regarded as an opponent of the doctrine of submission, 'a warm and generous-hearted pleader against wrong', but deficient in that he did not appreciate the science of political economy, 'like some of our present popular advocates (who) thought political economy hostile to the people'⁴. As for Malthus's attempt to investigate 'the causes that have hitherto impeded the progress of human kind towards happiness', this admission of misery implied 'a denial of the infinite goodness, or wisdom, or power of God'⁵. With regard to political

1. C. Bradlaugh, Jesus, Shelley and Malthus; or, Pious Poverty and Heterodox Happiness, (1st ed. London, 1861; 7th ed. London, 1877, p.3). He published it originally in the National Reformer, 8, 15 June 1861.

2. *ibid.*, p.4.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

4. *ibid.*, p.8.

5. *ibid.*, p.9.

economy he deplored the fact that the people so little studied it, since it was 'the science of the laws which determined the happiness or the misery of their lives'¹. He saw it as providing the solution to 'the startling paradox that while an immense proportion of the wealth produced is the resultant from the labour of the masses, the wealth producers should be themselves so poor'². That he saw political economy, or the current orthodox version of it, in this light, was clearly due to the influence of Drysdale, an influence often acknowledged in this, his earliest, pamphlet.

The keen awareness of poverty and deep sympathy for its victims which informed the greater part of Bradlaugh's public career was first revealed here in his attempt to defend the advocacy of neo-malthusianism:

I appeal to you in the name of your brothers and sisters whose wage is being reduced as in Northumberland and Durham in the name of many an agricultural labourer whose wretched pittance serves to enable him to rear up a new generation of human machines that instead of trusting unthinkingly to God and Jesus to redress your woes, you will enquire whether these are not the resultant, as certainly as any given effect from cause, and whether by knowing the cause you may not do something to prevent the recurrence of the effect³.

Interesting for what it contained, the pamphlet is of equal interest for what it did not: no specific contraceptive information was to be found in it. Indeed, apart from issuing the Knowlton pamphlet and Annie Besant's Law of Population, in 1877, Bradlaugh never published details of method. This was to be left to people such as Drysdale. At this early stage of his career, and thereafter up to 1877, Bradlaugh's mission was to gain acceptance for the doctrine of neomalthusianism and the idea of birth-control

1. *ibid.*, p.10.

2. *ibid.*, p.11.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

rather than to propagate the details of its practice.

Having publicly committed himself in January 1861, six months later Bradlaugh took up Drysdale's idea of a Malthusian League. In an editorial in May 1861 he declared that 'there were many circumstances which seem to render some such organisation particularly desirable'¹, because despite the fact that the 'truth and extreme importance' of Malthus's principles had been 'acknowledged by every distinguished political economist since his time' the implications of these principles had not been given publicity and individuals had been too weak to overcome the prejudice against such public discussion. The few who had tried to do so were subject to misconception and misrepresentation². He outlined the aims of a Malthusian League as i) the promotion of discussion 'to show that the law of population is the fundamental cause of poverty, prostitution and celibacy, the great social evils of old countries'; and ii) 'to show in particular that poverty is caused by overprocreation and that it might be radically removed if all classes, rich and poor alike, were sufficiently to limit the number of their offspring'. He proposed membership at a mere two shillings annually 'in order to cover any necessary expenses, and yet to admit all who are interested in the subject'.

There was little evidence of support for his proposed league. On the contrary, his co-editor, Barker, who had denounced neo-

1. N.R., 18 May 1861.

2. ibid.

malthusianism as far back as 1848, reviewed Drysdale's Elements a month after Bradlaugh's call for a Malthusian League, and remarked that 'the author appears to us to be one of the partially idiotic class'. He added, 'that the work should have had unqualified recommendations in the National Reformer is an infinite disgrace to the portion of the paper in which they appeared'¹. In August further opposition came from Maughan who expressed to Bradlaugh his concern lest the secularist party should come to be identified with neomalthusianism:

the unconditional approval and recommendation of a certain work by yourself has placed the Secular Party in an unfortunate position of being supposed to coincide in and approve of such teachings, while the fact is that there are few who can approve of all that is recommended in them².

Maughan's reason for expressing his opposition at this stage was the fact that Bradlaugh had mentioned his name as one of those 'willing to aid in effecting a Secular Organisation', and Maughan professed his continued wish for such organisation as long as he did not have to acknowledge as its leader one whom he could not respect³. A week later Barker renewed his attacks on Drysdale's book. He then resigned from the editorship of the Reformer and Bradlaugh became sole editor from the issue of 7 September 1861. Nevertheless, Barker kept up his attacks on Bradlaugh and neomalthusianism immediately in his new paper, Barker's Review, declaring "We are glad, and our friends will be glad, that we are free at last from all connection with the 'Unbounded Licence Party'"⁴.

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1. N.R., 27 July 1861.
 2. ibid., 24 Aug 1861.
 3. ibid.
 4. Barker's Review, 27 Sept 1861.

Bradlaugh could not ignore the significance of these attacks, yet he chose to convey an impression that the League was established and prospering¹. There is no evidence to substantiate this view of progress, but there is some to suggest that he was nettled by the attacks. In September 1861 he expressed his failure to understand "how any rational man could denounce the members of the League as the 'Unbounded Licence Party'", and he hoped his readers would 'not condemn unheard, men with whose views they are but little acquainted'². Later that month, at a lecture in the Hall of Science, he tried to clear himself from the prejudice engendered by Barker's characterisation of the neomalthusians as the 'Unbounded Licence Party'. Apparently he was successful, for, among those present was John Maughan who expressed 'his gratification at having the opportunity of hearing Iconoclast, as much misrepresentation had been attempted'³. What exactly Bradlaugh said to reassure secularists like Maughan is not clear, but, with this breach healed he carried the fight to Barker, challenging him to a public debate in the latter's own strong-hold of Sheffield. Barker instead came to the Hall of Science where he delivered a lecture on 'The Two Classes of Freethinkers' in the course of which he rejected the Malthusian theory of population increase out of hand, and again denounced Drysdale's Elements⁴. The tone and language of his lecture did his cause harm and Bradlaugh's

1. N.R., 14 Sept 1861: in Answers to Correspondents, in reply to one W. Taylor he observed: 'Yours with its £10 enclosure duly received. The Malthusian League is gaining many adherents, notwithstanding the unfounded and unwise aspersions cast on its promoters'.

2. N.R., 14 Sept 1861.

3. ibid., 5 Oct 1861.

4. ibid., 2 Nov 1861.

some good: Maughan here attacked Barker for the injury he had done Freethought 'by his sweeping and imputative language, causing an extent of discredit and dissension among the Free-thought Party which it would take years to eradicate', and pointing out that he (Maughan) 'had been the first among the Secularists to attempt a refutation of the Malthusian theory by the use of reason and argument'¹.

J.P. Adams who reported this meeting for the National Reformer claimed that Barker 'had evidently lost the support and confidence of the large and reflecting portion of the Secularist body' as a result², but this is not to say that it was a victory for Bradlaugh and neomalthusianism. Nothing further was heard of the Malthusian League in 1861. In the middle of 1862 Bradlaugh had to inform a correspondent that the League was still in existence and that membership was free to working men³. Around the same time he complained that some of his secularist friends were still 'rather severe upon me for its advocacy', and admitted he was entertaining doubts:

I am induced to reconsider the views I hold to see whether I am justified in bringing them before the public but doubly I consider it my duty to persist in them if they be right I never felt more the difficulties of my own education than when dealing with this subject. I feel that if I don't make myself clear I must do injustice to a great movement⁴.

He appears to have overcome his doubts by the beginning of 1863.

In a New Year editorial he restated his determination:

We shall seek - even at the risk of renewed misrepresentation from coarse-minded men and petty hypocritical cavillers, and notwithstanding the opposition of others whose help and countenance we should be glad to have - to agitate amongst the masses those great questions on the laws of population which so vitally affect the well-being of the people⁵.

1. *ibid.*

2. N.R., 2 Nov 1861.

3. *ibid.*, 7 June 1862.

4. *ibid.*, 14 June 1861.

5. *ibid.*, 3 Jan 1863.

In the last issue of the National Reformer which he edited in 1863, before handing over the task to John Watts for three years¹, he indicated that the Malthusian League was still in existence and that it was intended to issue a series of tracts 'illustrative of the objects of the League'². What was intended as the first of these - Bradlaugh's Poverty: Its Effects on the Political Condition of the People - appeared in May, in the National Reformer, in the form of an article, and later that year as an eight-paged pamphlet³. Arguing that the stability and well-being of society depended on political emancipation for all citizens, he insisted that this could never be fully achieved while people were rendered ignorant by poverty, and that the critical question in society therefore was 'how to remove or at least to lessen poverty'⁴. Given that poverty was caused by over-population, he concluded, citing Drysdale, that only by limiting population by using preventive checks to over-procreation could the problem be overcome and the happiness of mankind secured. His own immediate aim was to provoke public discussion of this proposal⁵.

Two months after writing this, with his Malthusian League still nominally in existence, Bradlaugh called on working class people favourable to 'the promulgation of Malthusian views' to get in touch with him in order to devise some plan of action, and in particular he sought the aid of people who would act as local distributors of the proposed series of tracts⁶. But no plan of action materialised in this year, nor

1. He was forced to resign the editorship due to ill-health and did not resume it until April 1866, Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.131-2.

2. N.R., 28 Feb 1863.

3. ibid., 30 May 1863.

4. C. Bradlaugh, Poverty: Its Effects on the Political Condition of the People (1st ed. London, 1863, 1890 ed., p.6).

5. ibid., p.8.

6. N.R., 22 Aug 1863.

in any year up to 1877. Nevertheless, Bradlaugh remained consistent in his views on the subject and tried intermittently to gain a hearing for them. Thus, following his call for some plan of action in July 1863, he returned to the subject in a lecture at the Hall of Science in November 1864¹. In March 1865 he produced the third of his pamphlets on poverty and the social question, Labour's Prayer, allegedly issued 'under the auspices of the Malthusian League'². This work reiterated themes already covered in earlier pamphlets: the uselessness of calling on a God to help the poor out of poverty; that poverty was caused by low wages which in turn were too low 'because too many seek to share one fund'³. But he was now prepared to admit that wages were also low because 'the labourer fights against unfair odds' and because the 'fund' was unfairly distributed as well as being too small⁴. Capital and labour did not compete on equal terms, the former having the power of money and political influence that was lacking to the latter⁵. Nevertheless, the ultimate cure for poverty lay in reducing excess population⁶. This tract was followed by Why Do Men Starve ? which covered much the same ground in much the same way⁷.

In these years, in addition to the pamphlets, he gave occasional lectures on the subject, at Bradford and Birmingham in April 1865⁸, at the South Place Chapel, Finsbury, in April and May

1. *ibid.*, 3 Dec 1864.

2. *N.R.*, 12 Mar 1865.

3. C. Bradlaugh, Labour's Prayer, (1st ed. London, 1865) p.3.

4. *ibid.*, p.3.

5. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

6. *ibid.*, p.8.

7. C. Bradlaugh, Why Do Men Starve ?, (1st ed. London, 1865).

8. *N.R.*, 16 Apr, 7 May 1865.

1866¹, and at the same venue in May and June of 1867². There was, however, no sign of progress and continued evidence that his advocacy of neomalthusianism raised up opposition to him. In January 1869 he observed that 'many even of our friends have made the population question a subject of fierce onslaught, but we shall persevere in teaching that population has a tendency to increase faster than the means of subsistence'³.

Over the next seven years, up to the end of 1876, he wrote no further tracts directly on the population problem and rarely lectured on the subject⁴. He did not abandon, or entirely ignore the subject, however, since he continued to publish correspondence on it in his paper and to comment on the publication of various writings which touched on it. Nevertheless, insofar as organising a neomalthusian movement or of recruiting even a limited body of support for the cause was concerned, it seemed as if Bradlaugh's advocacy since 1860 had represented so many years of futile effort. How valid such a view is needs to be assessed in regard to three different spheres: firstly, is there evidence that secularists, as a body, had come any nearer to adopting his view of the matter; secondly, to what extent is there evidence that the working classes came in the 1860s and 1870s to look upon his view of the question with favour; and thirdly, did intellectuals, writers and prominent men in general become concerned with the issue of birth-control ?

1. *ibid.*, 29 Apr, 7, 14 May 1866.

2. *ibid.*, 19 May 1867.

3. *ibid.*, 10 Jan 1869.

4. *ibid.*, 2 May 1875, report of a lecture by Bradlaugh, entitled 'The operation of the law of population in old and new countries and in large cities', Hall of Science, 25 Apr 1875 is the only occasion the present writer could discover for these years.

As to neomalthusianism among the secularists, there is nothing to indicate that the basic hostility of men like John Maughan either to Malthusian theory or neomalthusian practice had in any way abated. Admittedly, there were occasional reports of local secular societies giving time to discussion of the question. Thus, in February 1869 the Manchester secularist and neomalthusian Thomas Ellis had delivered two lectures on 'The Malthusian Doctrine' to the Manchester Secular Institute¹; in late March the Grimsby Secular Society was holding readings of The Elements²; in early July 1869 Dale Owen's Moral Physiology was being discussed in the Leicester Secular Club³; and in July and early August 1869 the East London Secular Society held debates on the population question⁴. But there are very few reports of a similar nature between 1870 and 1876 and one concludes that these were exceptions rather than the rule: it is highly unlikely that Bradlaugh would have failed to advertise the fact that local secularists were coming round to adopting and propagating neomalthusian views. As for neomalthusian writings, apart from Bradlaugh's pamphlets, the following were issued in the years 1860 to 1876: Poverty: Its Cause and Cure, (1861), an anonymous penny publication of extracts from Drysdale's Elements⁵; P.T. Trall's Sexual Physiology and Hygiene (1866)⁶; The Power and Duty of Parents to limit the Number of their Children (1868) which was

1. N.R., 29 Feb 1869; for Ellis's neomalthusianism see N.R., 22 Jan 1863.

2. ibid., 4 Apr 1869.

3. ibid., 11 July 1869.

4. ibid., 18 July, 1 Aug 1869.

5. P. Fryer, op.cit., p.112; N. Himes, op.cit., p.232.

6. D.V. Glass, op.cit., p.41.

anonymous¹; The Marriage Problem, by Oedipus (1868)²;
 A. Holyoake's Large or Small Families (1870), and sometime
 in the 1870s J.H. Palmer's Individual, Family and National
 Poverty³. Of all these, only one was by a well-known secularist,
 that by Austin Holyoake. As to the advocacy of neomalthusianism
 in secularist periodicals, Bradlaugh's National Reformer was
 the only one in this period that gave any publicity whatever
 to the cause: and in the Reformer itself, Bradlaugh and Drysdale
 apart, there were as many contributors writing to oppose as there
 were to support the cause⁴. Bradlaugh was quite happy to
 publish contributions against his point of view on the subject:
 it was better than total silence⁵. Finally, the matter never
 came before any annual meeting of the National Secular Society
 in this period.

As to whether the working classes or their spokesmen came to
 adopt neomalthusian views in the period, there is no straight
 or easy answer. It has to be conceded that birth control
 literature was in constant circulation since the 1830s⁶.
 Against this, Bradlaugh's difficulties in getting secularists

1. M.C. Stopes, Contraception, (London, 1925) p.291.

2. F.H.A. Micklewright, loc.cit., p.37.

3. N. Himes, op.cit., p.240, note 5.

4. For articles and letters opposing neomalthusianism in the
 years 1869-76, see N.R., 10 Jan 1869, 'Poverty and Overwork'
 by 'K' (Joachim Kaspary); ibid., 14 Mar 1869, 'Early Marriage,
 the Destruction of Happiness' by Liverpolitos; 28 Mar 1869, 'The
 Causes of Poverty and of Good and Evil' by Henry Travis; ibid.,
 18 Apr 1869, 'Early Marriages, the Destruction of Happiness'
 by Gordius; ibid., 20 June 1869, 'Early Marriages, Luxury and
 Population' by Gordius; ibid., 1 Aug 1869, 'Wages and the
 Productiveness of Labour' by 'K'; ibid., 8 May 1870, 'The Middle
 Classes with Large Families' by 'J.H.'. For articles and letters
 supporting it see ibid., 11 Apr 1869, 'Early Marriages and Small
 Families' by 'The Happy Father of a very small Family'; ibid.,
 9 May 1869, 'Early Marriages, Luxury and Population' by 'Elbow
 Room'; ibid., 8 Aug & 12 Sept 1869, 'The Balance of Comfort' by
 Austin Holyoake; ibid., 13 Mar 1870, 'Human Lumber' by Austin
 Holyoake.

5. N.R., 30 June 1867.

6. N. Himes, op.cit., p.230.

to adopt a neomalthusian position have already been indicated. No other bodies of working class membership advocated the doctrine in the period either, whether trade union, friendly society or co-operative. Not one prominent radical or working class politician, Bradlaugh excepted, openly advocated it during these years. But, there were working class politicians who strenuously opposed Malthusianism and would thereby be implicitly hostile to neomalthusianism. Ironically, the most prominent of these were men with whom Bradlaugh was associated in the Land and Labour League. Among them was Martin Boon whose pamphlet Home Colonisation made a trenchant attack on the Malthusian population theory¹ thus continuing a tradition of hostility dating from the days of Wooler's Black Dwarf, of Bronterre O'Brien and G.W.M. Reynolds². Another was John Weston. He had heard Bradlaugh lecture on the population problem in July 1867 and had participated in the discussion which followed³. In September 1869 he wrote to Bradlaugh bitterly attacking J.P. Adams who had urged, in the National Reformer, that 'the people be taught to exercise a prudential foresight'⁴. Weston characterised Adams' proposal as 'a wanton and gratuitous insult to the poor and helpless and an evidence of lack of sympathy with their sorrow and suffering'⁵. A fortnight later Weston

1. M. Boon, Home Colonisation, (London n.d. but 1869 ?) cited in N.R., 27 June 1869. Boon dismissed neomalthusianism because 'it never can be needed for a cure for the poverty we have in our midst while we have land that would feed four times the population'.

2. Reynolds's Political Instructor, 9,16 Feb., 2 March 1850.

3. N.R., 7 July 1867.

4. ibid., 29 Aug 1869.

5. ibid., 12 Sept 1869.

lectured on 'Poverty, its cause and cure' and in opposition to the Malthusians asserted that food could increase as rapidly as population¹. The Land and Labour League continued its attacks on neomalthusianism in 1870².

Finally there is the question how neomalthusianism was viewed by writers and intellectuals in the decade or so up to 1876. In 1856 Drysdale had complained of 'the morbid delicacy and vehement prejudice' which prevented discussion of the subject³. There was little change in this respect in the next twenty years. The reluctance to speak openly is nowhere better seen than in the case of John Stuart Mill. He had been involved in the distribution of Place's birth-control handbills in 1823⁴. He remained a neomalthusian at least up to 1869 when he began to abandon the classical doctrine of the wages' fund, and even if he began to doubt the economic theory on which neomalthusianism had rested, it is probably true to say that he still favoured birth-control in any case. In 1868 he wrote privately that 'the morality of the matter lies between married people themselves'⁵. Yet, after the incident of the 1820s he never advocated birth-control in a clear outspoken manner. Despite the fact that in his Principles of Political Economy he was quite forthright in condemning improvidence in procreation⁶

1. N.R., 26 Sept 1869.

2. ibid., 27 Mar 1870.

3. The Political Economist and Journal of Social Science, Jan 1856.

4. N. Himes, 'The place of John Stuart Mill and of Robert Owen in the history of English NeoMalthusianism', in Quarterly Journal of Economics, xlii, Aug 1928, pp. 627-640.

5. ibid., p.633.

6. He remarked: 'That it is possible to delay marriage, and to live in abstinence while unmarried, most people are willing to allow: but, when persons are once married, the idea ... never seems to enter any one's mind that having, or not having a family, or the number of which it shall consist, is amenable to their own control. One would imagine that children were rained down upon married people, direct from Heaven, without their being art or part in the matter': J.S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy, with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy, edited by J.M. Robson (London, 1965) p.369; (vol.ii of Collected Works, based on 1871 edition).

he never gave the impression that he was advocating anything other than the prudential restraint recommended by Malthus himself, namely, late marriage. An almost contemporary comment on Mill's position was offered by Alexander Bain in 1879:

His views of the elevation of the working classes on Malthusian principles have been widely canvassed. But there is still a veil of ambiguity over his meaning. Malthus himself regarded late marriages as the proper means of restricting numbers Mill prescribes a further pitch of self-denial, the continence of married couples. At least, such is the more obvious interpretation to be put upon his language¹.

While Bradlaugh and Drysdale used Mill's adherence to the 'classical wages' fund theory as justification for advocating artificial birth-control, others there were in the 1860s who followed Mill in a strict Malthusianism rather than neo-malthusianism, by urging that 'a little less drunken indulgence in matrimony and child-breeding would at once better their condition, as the Rev Mr Malthus told them long ago'².

In 1860 Drysdale had complained that neomalthusianism had 'not a single advocate or representative in the periodical press'. Six years passed before the slightest change appeared in this situation. In December 1865 an article in The Times declared that large families were the real cause of the miserably low wages of the agricultural population³. To the National Reformer this was 'particularly noteworthy on the part of the Times which has on numerous occasions shown itself a violent opponent of the Malthusian doctrines'⁴. Although far from signifying

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1. A. Bain, 'John Stuart Mill', in Mind, iv, no 16, Oct 1879, p.539.
 2. J. Hollingshead, Ragged London in 1861, quoted in Boner, op.cit., p.179.
 3. The Times, 15 Dec 1865.
 4. N.R., 7 Jan 1866.

the arrival of the time when the practice of birth-control would be an acceptable subject of public discussion in the press, the article did at least herald the coming of a period when the issue of overpopulation in general was to be discussed publicly in places other than manuals of political economy or pamphlets by a few atheists. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this discussion was to be conducted in very general terms and in vague language. Thus in October 1866 the Morning Star referred to the overpopulation issue after Dr William Farr had read a paper, on the population trend in France, to the Social Science Congress meeting in Manchester. But the Star was prepared only to propose emigration as a solution. Nevertheless, the very fact that it admitted to a problem of overpopulation was something which Bradlaugh's National Reformer was quick to notice¹.

In the following year the influential writer Matthew Arnold was to raise the question in his famous articles on 'Culture' in the Cornhill Magazine. Writing in July 1867 he remarked:

I have heard people talk of large families in quite a solemn strain, as if they had something in itself beautiful, elevating and meritorious in them; as if the British Philistine would only have to present himself before the Great Judge with his twelve children, in order to be received among the sheep as a matter of right².

It was very well for Arnold to say this; yet, while he attacked those who produced excessive offspring, he also attacked Bradlaugh, almost the only man consistently advocating a practical solution to the problem:

1. N.R., 4 Nov 1866, quoting Morning Star, ?, Oct 1866.
 2. M. Arnold, 'Culture and its Enemies', in The Cornhill Magazine, xvi, July 1867, pp. 42-3.

The excess of the working class, in its present state of development, is perhaps best shown in the case of Mr Bradlaugh, the iconoclast, who seems to be almost all for baptising us in blood and fire into his new social dispensation¹.

Nevertheless, even Arnold's sneering references to large families was symptomatic of a changed attitude among at least a few intellectuals and publicists. A more significant symptom of this change was the foundation of the London Dialectical Society early in 1865, the object of which was to discuss questions generally ignored in public². Bradlaugh, George Drysdale and his brother Dr Charles Drysdale were among the members. Among the topics discussed were the very ones Bradlaugh and Drysdale had promoted for discussion over the previous years: 'The happiness of the community as affected by large families', in July 1868³; 'The population question in relation to poverty and low wages', in January 1869⁴; and the question of pauperism, in February 1869⁵. The use which a hostile conservative press made of Viscount Amberley's participation in these discussions in order to prevent his election for South Devon in the general election of 1868, indicates that the question of birth-control was still one for closed doors⁶. But the population question in general, whatever about birth-control, was coming to the fore. Thus, for example, in July-August 1868 'considerable correspondence' on the issue arose in the Daily Telegraph⁷, leading one correspondent of the National Reformer to assert that 'it is now pretty generally admitted on all sides that our

1. M. Arnold, 'Anarchy and Authority', in The Cornhill Magazine, xvii, Jan 1868, p.45.

2. B. & P. Russell, The Amberley Papers, (2 vols. London, 1937) ii.115-118.

3. B. & P. Russell, op.cit., ii.167.

4. N.R., 31 Jan 1869.

5. ibid., 28 Feb 1869.

6. B. & P. Russell, op.cit., ii.178-191.

7. F.H.A. Micklewright, loc.cit., p.37.

population is too great and our labour market too full'¹.

Again, in August 1868, Matthew Arnold reiterated his hostility to excessively large families, declaring that 'to bring people into the world when one cannot afford to keep them and oneself decently is just as wrong, just as contrary to reason and the will of God, as for a man to have horses, carriages and pictures when he cannot afford them'². Yet there was no practical suggestion from Arnold as to how the problem was to be overcome.

Three years later, when Henry Fawcett published his essays entitled Pauperism: Its Causes and Remedies, he brought home hard facts about widespread misery existing in an age of plenty³. As for remedies, he asserted that if the National Debt were paid off, standing armies abolished, and if primogeniture and entail were to cease matters would be as bad as ever 'unless these reforms were accompanied by a more general development of prudential habits'⁴. He was at one with Bradlaugh and Drysdale in declaring that 'all kinds of accusations are showered upon those who speak plainly on the subject'⁵, yet he himself could not speak without ambiguity in advocating a solution: while stating that 'positive checks imply vice and misery, whereas the more general operation of preventive checks indicates the diffusion of a high morality'⁶ he did not define

1. N.R., 9 Aug 1869.

2. M. Arnold, 'Anarchy and Authority', in The Cornhill Magazine, xviii, Aug 1868, p.247.

3. H. Fawcett, Pauperism, Its Causes and Remedies, (London, 1871). He pointed out that London had a minimum of 125,000 paupers constantly, and that it rose to 170,000 in winter months, Fawcett, op.cit., p.2.

4. H. Fawcett, op.cit., p.95.

5. ibid., p.96.

6. ibid., p.115.

what he meant by 'preventive checks', and in the end he merely advocated a vague 'prudence' to be instilled by education¹.

Fawcett was therefore impractical in offering a solution to the population problem. That he was so, was implicitly deplored in the most forthright article on neomalthusianism yet to appear outside the tiny circle of Bradlaugh and Drysdale. This was Montague Cookson's 'The Morality of Married Life' which appeared in The Fortnightly Review in October 1872. Cookson considered it 'absurd to look for regulative control after marriage among the lower classes of the English people when it is a thing comparatively unknown among the higher classes'². He quipped sarcastically that if there were no remedy for the distress so prevalent other than the prudential check, then 'we had best yield to our fate with as much resignation as we can muster'³. He maintained, however, that there was another remedy:

the limitation of the number of the family by obedience to natural laws which all may discover and verify if they will.

and he declared recourse to this remedy 'as much the duty of married persons as the observance of chastity is the duty of those that are unmarried'⁴. Surprisingly, this article evoked no response of either horror or admiration from other contemporary periodicals, a fact which stresses that while broad discussion of the population problem had become common since 1866, specific

1. *ibid.*, p.117: when Bradlaugh tried to clear up this vagueness at a critical moment six years later, Fawcett was quick to resent it; see below p.217.

2. M. Cookson, 'The Morality of Married Life', in Fortnightly Review, new series, xii, Oct 1872, p.408.

3. *ibid.*, p.405.

4. M. Cookson, *loc.cit.*, p.412.

discussion of methods of birth-control was still surrounded by a wall of silence, and one which Bradlaugh had as yet been unable to surmount.

In these years, 1866 to 1872, when intellectuals and writers were giving a new attention to the general question of population, Bradlaugh wrote no further tracts and lectured but seldom on neomalthusianism; but he continued to devote some attention to it through comment in his National Reformer. He reviewed Fawcett's contribution to the debate favourably, and invited his 'friends of the Land and Labour League' to read the work carefully, and in particular its third chapter, entitled 'On the Increase of Population' in which Fawcett had predicted deteriorating conditions unless prudential population checks were applied¹. Again, in 1872, when a seventh edition of Malthus's Essay on Population was issued, he welcomed it, all the more so as the summary of it in Drysdale's book 'is not available because of the prejudice against The Elements². As most 'of our Communist and Land and Labour League friends are anti-Malthusians, often without knowing a word of Malthus's Essay' its republication was therefore particularly timely. A year later, Bradlaugh was still deploring the fact that in England 'the question is evaded' and that 'only a few have the courage to look the matter boldly in the face'³. In 1874 he had to defend himself again for advocating neomalthusianism when,

1. N.R., 30 July, 13 Aug 1871.
 2. ibid., 2 June 1872.
 3. ibid., 23 Mar 1873.

in the Northampton by-election of 1874, his Liberal rival, William Fowler, made innuendoes concerning Bradlaugh's recommendation of The Elements¹. In the next year he lectured but once on the topic². By 1876 he had lost confidence that any progress could ever be made in the cause. In January that year, he confessed:

we are sure as to the evil of overpopulation; we are not sure as to the remedy we have been for more than fifteen years recklessly assailed in this respect by enemies, and by those who should have been co-workers³.

His uncertainty as to the remedy is hardly surprising in view of the continued absence of any sign of support for the cause. Since Cookson's article in 1872 the periodical and newspaper press had contained nothing of a favourable nature. Bradlaugh had nothing to show for fifteen years of neomalthusian advocacy. It would have been no surprise if his uncertainty in 1876 had given way to total despair of ever getting a reasonable public hearing for birth-control. At the end of the same year, however, an unexpected incident in Bristol was to change this situation dramatically.

The Time of Trials, 1876-1880:

In December 1876 a bookseller named Cook was tried in Bristol for selling an obscene publication, namely, Charles Knowlton's Fruits of Philosophy⁴. Its publisher was Bradlaugh's sub-editor on the National Reformer, Charles Watts. Cook, however, had

1. N.R., 11 Oct 1874.

2. ibid., 2 May 1875.

3. ibid., 16 Jan 1876.

4. Bristol Mercury, 30 Dec 1876; N.R., 21 Jan 1877.

interleaved Watt's publication with 'improper pictures'¹. Watts went to Bristol to declare himself the publisher, and Cook was convicted and jailed with two years' hard labour². Though he informed the Bristol authorities that he was going to cease publication of Knowlton's tract immediately, Watts was nevertheless arrested on 8 January 1877 and was committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, to be heard on 5 February³. Watts decided not to defend the publication, but to plead guilty to the charge of publishing an obscene libel⁴. Having pleaded guilty, and the Recorder accepting that it had been published 'in ignorance', he ordered Watts' release on his entering into recognizance of £500, with costs⁵. As a result of pleading guilty no formal judgement had been passed on the pamphlet: 'no jury registered a verdict and the judge stated that he had not read the work'⁶.

Originally, Watts had hesitated whether to plead guilty or to defend his publication of the work: that hesitation arose from the desire of Bradlaugh and his colleague, Annie Besant, that the work should be defended⁷. When, to their great disappointment, he decided to enter the plea of guilty, they decided to reissue the pamphlet, entering a formal partnership and setting

1. A. Besant, An Autobiography, (2nd ed. London, 1893) p.206.

2. N. Himes, op.cit., p.239.

3. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.16.

4. C. Watts, A Refutation of Mr Bradlaugh's Inaccuracies and Misrepresentations as contained in the National Reformer of February 11th under the title of a so-called 'Plain Statement of Facts' (London, 1877) p.10.

5. N.R., 18 Feb 1877.

6. C. Knowlton, Fruits of Philosophy, An Essay on the Population Question, (2nd, new ed. London, n.d. but 1877) publishers' preface, p.iv; the publishers being Bradlaugh and Besant.

7. K.E. Watts, Mrs Watts' Reply to Mr Bradlaugh's Misrepresentations (London, 1877) p.4.

up the Freethought Publishing Company in March 1877, expressly for that purpose¹. They determined to test the right of publication of a manual of birth-control. On Friday 23 March Bradlaugh and Besant handed in a copy of the republished Fruits of Philosophy to the chief clerk to the magistrates at the Guildhall, with a notice to the effect that they would publicly sell copies of it on the next day. In addition they handed in copies and a similar notice to the Detective Department at the Head Office of Police². On the next day they sold some eight hundred copies of the pamphlet. Warrants were accordingly issued and Bradlaugh and Besant were arrested on 5 April³. They appeared before Alderman Figgins at the Guildhall, charged with having 'unlawfully sold and published a certain obscene book'⁴. Only formal evidence was given on this occasion, Bradlaugh having succeeded in getting the case adjourned as he intended to subpoena 'about forty witnesses'. They were released on bail of £200 each, until further examination at the Guildhall on 17 April.

Two days before the resumed Guildhall hearing, Bradlaugh and Besant in a joint editorial tendered their resignations from the executive of the National Secular Society, 'so that it may not be pretended by any one that we desire to invoke the Society in our act'⁵. The executive declined to accept the resignations⁶. When the hearing of the charges was resumed at the Guildhall on

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1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.17.
 2. N.R., 1 Apr 1877.
 3. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 6 Apr 1877.
 4. ibid.
 5. N.R., 15 Apr 1877.
 6. A. Besant, Autobiography, p.206.

18 and 19 April, the presiding magistrate found there was a case to answer and committed the defendants for trial at the Central Criminal Court on 7 May. Bradlaugh, however, fearing that the excitement of the case already raised by articles in the press would prejudice a common jury of that Court, successfully applied on 27 April to have the case tried before a special jury at the Queen's Bench¹.

Meanwhile, the excitement of the issue led to increased circulation of secularist publications. The National Reformer was now selling 5,000 copies per week above its normal issue². In the three months up to the Queen's Bench trial in June Besant claimed that 125,000 copies of Knowlton's Fruits had been sold, and if this was an exaggeration, nonetheless the Solicitor-General complained at the end of May that it 'is being sold in the streets by thousands at 6d a copy'³. Apart from efforts to intercept Bradlaugh's mail in the post, police and members of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, on 15 May 1877 raided the premises of Edward Truelove, seizing over 1,200 copies of Palmer's Individual, Family and National Poverty and over 200 copies of Dale Owen's Moral Physiology⁴. A week later Truelove was prosecuted at Bow Street and his committal for trial at the next session was to bring about further legal entanglement for Bradlaugh and to raise further legal questions as to the propagation of neomalthusianism⁵.

1. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 28 Apr 1877, N.R., 6 May 1877.

2. N.R., 13 May 1877. What exactly was the normal circulation is not clear. In 1861 it was between 3,600 and 5,300 copies per issue, N.R., 4 Jan 1862. In 1874 the poet contributor, James Thomson, claimed it had a weekly circulation of 7,000 to 8,000, A. Ridler, Poems and Some Letters of James Thomson, (London 1963) p.xviii.

3. N.R., 10 June 1877.

4. ibid., 20 May 1877.

5. ibid., 27 May 1877; see also below, pp.199 ff.

The major trial at the Queen's Bench, under Lord Chief Justice Alexander Cockburn, opened on Monday 18 June 1877 and lasted four days. Sir Hardinge Giffard, later Lord Halsbury, Solicitor General in Disraeli's administration, prosecuted, while Bradlaugh and Besant conducted their own defence. Opening for the prosecution, Giffard argued that the case at issue was not whether the defendants were right in publishing what they thought was a work on a matter of national interest and importance, but whether the book in question was obscene or not, regardless of intentions. He thereupon tried to establish that it was obscene.

Annie Besant then began her defence which ran on into Tuesday 19 June, while Bradlaugh completed his on Thursday 21 June¹. The two defences were different in matter and manner. Besant's was emotional and oratorical, emphasising the extent of social misery and the consequent need for effective means of limiting families, thereby essentially justifying the defendants' action in the light of their humane intentions, despite the fact that the prosecution had already stressed the irrelevance, in law, of intention. Bradlaugh's defence was a highly technical one involving extensive and laborious citation of medical texts, comparing them page for page with the Knowlton text and thereby attempting to show that Knowlton was not an obscene publication but a serious medical treatise. Summing up his case for the prosecution, Giffard maintained that it was not a medical work, but 'a dirty, filthy book which satisfies a prurient curiosity'².

1. In the High Court of Justice: Queen's Bench Division, 18 June 1877: the Queen v. Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant (London, 1878) pp. 151-232. This work is a transcript of the proceedings published by Bradlaugh and Besant, cited hereafter as Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant.

2. *ibid.*, p.251.

Cockburn's summing up of the case, for the jury, was a lengthy one. He deplored the initiation of such a prosecution and the fact that the real prosecutors were never revealed. He agreed with the prosecution's view that the intention of the defendants was irrelevant, yet he did go to some trouble to be fair to them:

There is a great difficulty in a case of this kind in determining whether that which is put forward in the shape of a publication is matter tending to vitiate and corrupt public morals, or whether it is matter which it is of interest to mankind to have discussed, and which calls for an expression of opinion on it.

As for the prosecution's claim that Knowlton's plea for birth-control on the grounds of preventing misery and poverty was a sham and a disguise for promiscuity, Cockburn remarked 'I think you will agree with me that that is a most unjust accusation', an observation which brought applause from the body of the Court. In charging the jury, with respect to the physiological details in Knowlton, he pointed out that if these were calculated to debase public morals, then 'every medical work is open to the same imputation'¹. He made it clear to the jury that they would have to decide whether the advocacy of birth-control was immoral, and that 'if it would be an immoral course of proceeding, the man who recommends an immoral course of proceeding in an open publication is guilty of an offence against the law'². After retiring for an hour and a half, the jury returned and declared:

we are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motives in publishing it³.

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1. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, p.261.
 2. ibid., p.265.
 3. ibid., p.267; The Echo, 21 June 1877.

Cockburn had no choice but to interpret this as a verdict of guilty, and a week later he sentenced the defendants to six months' imprisonment, with fines of £200 each. He stayed execution of the sentence to allow Bradlaugh appeal. Bradlaugh successfully sued for a writ of error on the grounds of a faulty indictment and the appeal case came for trial before lord justices Bramwell, Brett and Cotton on 29 January 1878¹. In this case Bradlaugh sought a reversal of the Queen's Bench judgement on two grounds; firstly, 'that the advocacy of non-life-destroying checks (to population) is not a misdemeanour at common law'; secondly, 'that the indictment being for the publication of words supposed to be criminal, the words ought to have been expressly set out in the indictment'². On 5 February the three judges concurred in reversing the judgement on the second of these two grounds, namely, that in an obscene libel, the indictment must set out the words alleged to have been obscene. Nevertheless, this was not a judgement on the Knowlton tract and the defendants were warned that if it were wrong to publish the work, then republication would result in a guilty verdict and an even more severe sentence³. Thus ended one train of events begun by the decision of Bradlaugh and Besant to defend the pamphlet. Before assessing a number of aspects of this case, however, it remains to examine another train of events that had been set off by that same determination, namely, the prosecutions arising from the raids on the premises of Edward Truelove.

1. N.R., 3, 10, 17 Feb 1877.

2. ibid., 3 Mar 1877.

3. N.R., 3 Mar 1878.

Truelove appeared before magistrate Vaughan at Bow Street on 22 May 1877, prosecuted by Mr Besly on behalf of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, charged with the common law misdemeanour of publishing obscene libel, to wit, Palmer's Individual, Family and National Poverty, and Dale Owen's Moral Physiology¹. Having been committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court in the next session, Truelove secured a writ of certiorari removing the case to the Queen's Bench². While these proceedings were occurring he continued to sell the Knowlton tract, until, on 25 May he was summoned again to Bow Street, prosecuted by D.C. Collette of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. On the information of one John Green, Collette proceeded to prove the sale and seek an order for the destruction of the confiscated Knowlton tracts³. At this point Bradlaugh stepped in, claiming to be their publisher, and thus involved himself in a second trial before the major one had even begun. Vaughan refused to hear him at this stage and adjourned the case for six weeks until a judgement might be expected from the Queen's Bench in the original Knowlton case. When the adjourned case came up again on 13 July the common law misdemeanour charge was withdrawn and the magistrate refused to order the destruction of the Knowlton tracts until the outcome of Bradlaugh's appeal against the Queen's Bench judgement of 22 June were known.

At this point Truelove had no further liability in the prosecution of 28 May since the pamphlets were Bradlaugh's

1. *ibid.*, 3 June 1877.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*

property as publisher. But he still had to face the consequences of the prosecution of 22 May 1877 for having been both publisher and seller of the works of Palmer and Owen. Having got his writ for removing this case to Queen's Bench, his trial did not take place till 1-2 February 1878. The jury having failed to agree a verdict, the case was dismissed¹. Five days later, C.H. Collette of the Society for the Suppression of Vice had a second summons served on Truelove over the same two pamphlets. Postponed until 18 May 1878, the case was argued a second time, in the Criminal Court before Baron Pollock and a common jury. After the summing up by Pollock, the clearest in all of the trials of 1877-1879, the jury returned a verdict of guilty and Truelove was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and a fine of £40².

Bradlaugh now tried to do for Truelove what he had already done for himself and Besant, namely, to obtain a writ of error because 'the only offence alleged in the indictment is the advocacy of non-life-destroying checks to population and that such advocacy has never yet been held to be an offence at common law'³. But the writ was refused, and from this there was no appeal. Bradlaugh commented: 'our only hope now is to use pressure through the House of Commons' to get a mitigation of the sentence⁴. This he proceeded to do.

In an editorial on 19 May he called on freethinkers to collect

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1. *N.R.*, 10 Feb 1878.
 2. *ibid.*, 19 May 1878.
 3. *ibid.*
 4. *ibid.*, 9 June 1878.

signatures for a petition to the Home Secretary, Richard Cross, for Truelove's release¹. Even while he wrote this, steps were already being taken, for the first memorial, bearing 'several hundred signatures' had been presented to Cross by Joseph Cowen². On 21 May Cross replied to this, stating that 'having carefully considered the application he found no sufficient ground to justify him, consistently with his public duty, in advising any interference with the prisoner's sentence'³. Further petitions from throughout the country, presented by prominent Radical M.P.s were fruitless. Two further deputations to the Home Office, by Cowen, had no effect. Truelove served out his sentence until 12 September 1878 when he was released to a hero's welcome⁴.

Meanwhile the case involving the order for the destruction of the Knowlton pamphlets seized from Truelove's premises had been held over until the final judgement on the technicalities involved in the Bradlaugh-Besant trial of June 1877. After two further adjournments it was heard finally before magistrate Vaughan on 19 February 1878. He ordered that the destruction be proceeded with, justifying this decision on the ground that although the jury in the Bradlaugh-Besant trial of June 1877 had absolved the defendants from malice, it had nevertheless found the book to be obscene⁵. Bradlaugh's motto of 'Thorough' was immediately evident: two days after Vaughan's decision he gave notice of appeal against it on no less than seven grounds⁶. This appeal came before the Middlesex Quarter Sessions at the Guildhall, Westminster, on 13 April 1878, only to be adjourned till 11 May when it was heard before

1. N.R., 19 May 1878.

2. ibid.

3. ibid., 26 May 1878.

4. ibid., 15 Sept 1878.

5. ibid., 24 Feb 1878.

6. ibid., 3 Mar 1878.

Justice Eldin, with Bradlaugh appearing for himself, and Besly acting for D.C. Collette of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. After hearing both sides over two days, Eldin decided that 'we are of opinion that this is an obscene book, a book suggestive of the grossest immorality we therefore affirm the magistrate's order (and) all the copies seized be forthwith destroyed'¹. Even at this stage Bradlaugh refused to give up. On 24 May he was granted a writ by the Lord Chief Justice and Mr Justice Mellor removing the order of the Middlesex magistrate to the Queen's Bench with a view to its being quashed². On 19 June 1878 he lodged this writ and in early November 1878 this last case came to a climax at Queen's Bench before justices Mellor and Field. Complex arguments over legal technicalities occurred: Besly, acting for the Society for the Suppression of Vice, tried to have Bradlaugh's case thrown out on the ground that the granting of a writ of certiorari from the magistrate's court and from the Court of Quarter Sessions to the Queen's Bench, was barred by statute. But for all the legal technicalities, the Society had made one fatal error: their original prosecutor, John Green, had died³, and the original order for destruction of the pamphlets, granted by magistrate Vaughan on 19 February 1878, was found to be bad since it lacked the name of the original prosecutor. Both Mellor and Field concurred on this and the result was victory for Bradlaugh.

1. N.R., 21 Apr 1878.

2. ibid., 1 June 1878.

3. ibid., 24 Nov 1878; he died on 25 May 1877.

Unfortunately for Bradlaugh, however, this victory was to be marred by the legal fate of the other pamphlets, namely, those by Palmer and Owen. Shortly after his release, Truelove was again summoned by the Society, to show cause why these two pamphlets should not be subjected to a similar order for destruction¹. After a long legal odyssey, involving a judgement by magistrate Sir James Ingham, at Bow Street on 3 October 1878, that the pamphlets were obscene, and an order by him that they be destroyed², followed by an appeal on technical grounds in May 1879, followed by another appeal in Queen's Bench on 21 February 1880³, the order for destruction was finally executed⁴. Three years of trials had finally come to an end, leaving the question of the legality or illegality of advocating birth-control as ill-determined in 1880 as it had been in 1876.

Legality and Morality:

In the Knowlton case in June 1877, and in all the subsequent, related cases down to 1880, four main questions were at issue, as far as Bradlaugh and Besant were concerned: i) was public discussion of population problems and their remedies illegal; ii) was the Knowlton pamphlet (and Palmer's and Owen's) obscene because of its language; iii) was it obscene because it published physiological detail; iv) was it obscene because it advocated artificial checks to population and the means of applying them.

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1. *ibid.*, 13 Oct 1878.
 2. *N.R.*, 20 Oct 1878.
 3. *ibid.*, 4 May 1879, 29 Feb 1880.
 4. N. Himes, *op.cit.*, p.243.

As to the first question, in the initial hearing of the case on 17 April 1877, the prosecuting counsel, Douglas Straight, conceded that overpopulation was a question 'which may be fairly discussed'¹. In the summing up in the major trial itself, on 22 June 1877, agreement with this view was implicit in Cockburn's references to Malthus and other political economists². Furthermore, it was explicitly laid down by Cockburn in February 1878 when summing up in the trial of Truelove for the publication of Owen's Moral Physiology and Palmer's Individual, Family and National Poverty:

no one can doubt that the question of population is one which a man has a right to publish as well as to form his opinion on, and as far as in him lies to freely express his views. About that there cannot be the slightest doubt³.

This was a straightforward answer enough, yet Annie Besant justly pointed out that 'you can no more discuss the population question without physiology than you can solve an arithmetical one without figures'⁴. The critical problem arose therefore in relation to the legal answer to the other three questions. In the Bradlaugh-Besant trial in June 1877 no such answer was forthcoming, for, despite the fact that the jury returned a verdict of guilty, it was meaningless: not because the defendants subsequently won their case on a technicality, but simply because the indictment failed to indicate precisely which of the three points, language, physiology, or birth-control, constituted the obscenity in Knowlton's pamphlet. Since the trial failed to clarify this, it may be argued that Bradlaugh and Besant were defeated in their aim of getting a clear legal statement

1. N.R., 22 Apr 1877.

2. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, pp. 259-260.

3. N.R., n.d., February 1878: this was a special trial edition of the paper, bearing no date, but published between the issues of 10 & 17 Feb.

4. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, p.66.

on the issue of birth-control, however well they may have succeeded in their aim of publicising the cause. An examination not just of this trial, but of aspects of the various legal struggles from then till 1880 will show that answers were given only by implication, and not at all clearly, to the questions whether or not i) the publication of physiological detail and ii) the advocacy of artificial checks to population, constituted obscenity.

With regard to the publication of physiological detail, in 1868 Cockburn, in the famous case of Queen versus Hicklin, had pointed out that even in a medical work such publication could be obscene, though without being indictable¹. But he was then careful to add that 'the immorality must depend on the circumstances of the publication'². This morbid attitude, that the publication of physiological details even in a medical work could be obscene, was even more pronounced in the charging of the jury by the Recorder, Russell Gurney, at the Central Criminal Court in May, in the course of the legal preliminaries to the major trial. He declared:

There are, undoubtedly, circumstances which will justify the publication of what you would not hesitate to describe as highly indecent works - take for instance, that it may be lawfully published in a medical lecture-room as being necessary to give the requisite instructions to students³.

Here the implication clearly is that although lawful in a medical course, even there, there is something indecent about physiological detail. The only clear judicial statement on physiology, free of such an attitude, was that made by

1. J.R. Bulwer, ed., The Law Reports, Court of Queen's Bench, vol.3 (London, 1868) p.367.

2. ibid., p.367.

3. N.R., 13 May 1877.

Baron Pollock when summing up in the Central Criminal Court in the second trial of Truelove for publishing Palmer and Owen, on 15 May 1878. Referring to such details in Owen's pamphlet, he declared:

no sane man could for a moment suppose that if in a discussion between men of science in medicine or surgery, on sanatory (sic) or other subjects, matters were necessarily brought forward and dealt with - things that otherwise and in other places, might be thought to be obscene, indecent and improper - were, therefore, properly subject to criminal law¹.

The statements by Cockburn in 1868 and by Gurney in 1877 implied that physiological details were per se unclean, that only their context justified their publication without making them any less unclean. Against them, Pollock's remarks show a finer insight into the true nature of obscenity as being the violation of something in itself integral by taking it out of its proper context.

These contrasting judicial statements reflected conflicting attitudes within society in general to this whole area, conflicting attitudes which were to be found even among the free-thinkers themselves. This has already been seen in the contrasting attitudes of Holyoake and Bradlaugh to Drysdale's Elements which Holyoake deplored because of its lack of delicacy. It will be seen again in the attack made upon Bradlaugh by the secularist, William Stewart Ross or 'Saladin', who looked upon Bradlaugh's publishing of Knowlton's Fruits as in effect 'dragging the banner of Freethought through the mire'².

1. *ibid.*, 19 May 1878.

2. See below p. 229.

Must one conclude that, even within the terms of Pollock's statement, Bradlaugh and Besant transgressed by publishing details of physiology outside of the lecture-room, that is, out of proper context? On the contrary, for neomalthusians with their keen awareness of social degradation, overpopulation and contemporary poverty created the very context which made the publication of such details quite justifiable.

If the mere publication of physiological details, whatever the intention, could constitute an obscenity, then it is not difficult to see what the judicial attitude to artificial birth-control would be. In the major trial in June 1877 Cockburn had been quite clear in putting this question to the jury for decision: he left it to them to decide not only whether artificial birth-control were immoral, but even recourse to the infertile period:

Now suppose a married man and woman, with limited means, and having as many children as they can maintain, were to come to the resolution to avoid conjugal intercourse at the particular period at which conjugal intercourse mainly produces its natural result, would that be an immoral course of proceeding? If it would be an immoral course the man who recommends an immoral course in an open publication is guilty of an offence against the law¹.

It was unfortunate that the indictment, in the way it was framed, made it impossible to know from the verdict whether the jury had decided it was immoral or not, or what exactly it was the jury had found to be immoral. However, even if, in the abstract, birth-control methods artificial and otherwise, were no more moral or immoral than the publication of physiological

1. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, p.263.

detail, like the latter, its publication could be indictable on the grounds of its tendency: it was this which led Alderman Figgins in April 1877 to commit the case to the Central Criminal Court, because he judged that Knowlton's work was

a production against the public morals because it is a publication which directly points out, not only how the families of married women may be limited, but how unmarried women may gratify their passions without fear of the natural consequences¹.

Bradlaugh's argument against this seemed to be sound enough, namely, that 'if it be not obscene ab initio, anything that becomes of that work after it leaves our hands, we have nothing to do with'². He pointed out that just as anyone could acquire copies of a medical work with motives contrary to its author's intention, so likewise with his publication of Knowlton's work. He cited more than purely medical works on this line of defence. He referred to Montague Cookson's article of 1872 which did advocate birth-control and declared

You tell me, 'you may discuss the question, but you must not circulate your book'. If I must not teach the poor what are to be the checks to population, of what earthly use is it teaching them to the rich? It is the poor who feel the misery; it is the poor who suffer the distress; it is the poor whose homes are wretched³.

This speech, coming straight after the citation of Cookson's plea for birth-control in the Fortnightly Review, implied that it was fair enough to discuss birth-control among well-off readers of fashionable periodicals, but among the poor its advocacy was indictable.

When the legality of advocating birth-control failed to be decided clearly by the Knowlton trial, Bradlaugh tried to have

1. N.R., 29 Apr 1877.
 2. ibid., 22 Apr 1877.
 3. N.R., 22 Apr 1877.

it decided in his appeal case when he submitted that judgement was in error, among other things, because 'the advocacy of non-life-destroying checks to population is not an indictable offence at common law'. But the appeal judges ruled that this point 'could not be discussed because there was nothing on the record to show that these checks had been advocated'¹. A fresh opportunity arose in February 1878 in the first trial of Edward Truelove. Here again Cockburn put the issue squarely:

if he be persuaded that overpopulation is productive of mischief and misery to mankind, he is perfectly justified in suggesting any means which may check the evil which he desires to correct, as long as the means he proposes are not themselves a greater evil than the evil he seeks to displace It is for you (the jury) to consider whether these practices would or would not have a demoralising tendency².

Here again no answer was forthcoming, as the jury failed to agree on a verdict. When Truelove was tried the second time a verdict of guilty was found, but again, the precise point as to whether or not it was the advocacy of birth-control which was illegal was not determined, and for the following reason: in putting the issue to the jury, as it arose in Palmer's pamphlet, Pollock declared:

What your minds should really be addressed to is whether this book which undoubtedly is a book which treats upon a subject of the greatest delicacy and of the greatest difficulty in one sense as a matter of moral and social philosophy - whether it contains passages which in themselves are of such a character that their direct and immediate effect is to deprave people's morals whether in the minute details of technique there is not in these details that which would be held to be mischievous upon the ground that it tended unnecessarily to deprave the minds of the people³.

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1. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, appendix, p.325.
 2. N.R., 10 Feb 1878.
 3. ibid., 19 May 1878.

It is remarkable that in this summing up it was not the birth-control technique, but the publication of physiological detail which it necessarily involved, that Pollock put to the jury for decision. Consequently their verdict found Truelove guilty of publishing an obscene libel by virtue of his publishing physiological detail which had a tendency to deprave, not because of its advocating birth-control as such. The position as to birth-control propaganda was therefore still in doubt. As the Bradford Observer noted, 'the law on the point has not been cleared up by Thursday's proceedings, but it is surely time that it should be, once and forever'¹. That it was birth-control which rendered Knowlton's Fruits obscene was not cleared up either by the case at the Middlesex Quarter Sessions in May 1878 which Bradlaugh had brought to test the validity of magistrate Vaughan's order for the destruction of the seized copies of Knowlton's work. In giving his ruling, the judge, Eldin, merely remarked 'this is an obscene book, a book suggestive of the grossest immorality', without saying whether it was obscene because it published details of physiology or because it advocated birth-control². When magistrate Sir James Ingham similarly ordered the destruction of Palmer's and Owen's works, at Bow Street, on 3 October 1878, his judgement was equally general: he found that 'these pamphlets are obscene publications, and that the publication of them would in my opinion, be a misdemeanour and proper to be presecuted'³. Attempts to get parliament to do something to

1. Bradford Observer, 18 May 1878.

2. N.R., 1 June 1878.

3. ibid., 20 Oct 1878.

bring about 'a clear enactment of the law as to discussion of the Population Question', as when Sir Charles Dilke presented a number of petitions from various parts of England, on the last day of the Session in 1877, brought no results¹.

There was, therefore, no clear statement for the future. In this sense Bradlaugh and Besant, though not for want of trying, clearly failed to achieve one object. They had been warned that any further issuing of Knowlton would result in further prosecution². Nevertheless, they persisted in its sale after the final issue of the case in February 1878. When the secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice applied to the Treasury to prosecute them again, the Treasury declined to take any steps³. Sometime between June and October 1877 Besant produced her own pamphlet, The Law of Population, to replace the outdated Fruits of Philosophy, and although it was rumoured in the Reformer that the Society for the Suppression of Vice intended to make 'a raid against it', no prosecutions materialised⁴.

Consequences of the Trials:

The Reaction of the Press:

If the legal outcome of three years of court cases was inconclusive, Bradlaugh and Besant continued to promote neomalthusianism and birth-control unhindered by further prosecution.

1. ibid., 19 Aug 1877.

2. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, appendix, p.352.

3. N.R., 27 July 1879.

4. ibid., 16 June 1878.

If they failed in their object of getting a clear legal statement, they succeeded in their object of promoting discussion of the issue. The attempt to obtain publicity for it, which had proved fruitless for Bradlaugh over seventeen years, was quite suddenly realised by the trials, and in particular by that of June 1877 in the Queen's Bench. Press reporting of this major trial, from 18 to 22 June, was extensive. The chief London dailies covered it in detail¹, and some provincial newspapers gave equally detailed reports². In some cases, such as the Echo, or the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, the reporting of the trials gave rise to correspondence and debate on the population question and on neomalthusianism, debate which previously had been confined to Bradlaugh's periodical³.

Even if press comment was, on the whole, hostile, it at least drew attention to an issue which had remained untouched because of 'morbid delicacy'. Whether hostile or favourable to Bradlaugh and Besant, the most general reaction of the press to the major trial was to share Cockburn's regret that the proceedings had ever been instituted. Thus, the conservative Standard bemoaned a trial 'which gave publicity to something better forgotten'⁴. The independent Echo commented that 'the prosecution in fact, had been instituted to indict an offence which the prosecution principally contributed to produce'⁵, while the Newcastle Daily Chronicle agreed that it was an 'ill-advised prosecution' and believed that 'the authorities were committed

1. The Times, Standard, Echo, Daily News, Daily Telegraph, 18-22 June 1877.

2. Leicester Daily Post, North of England Advertiser, 23 June 1877.

3. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 26 May, 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 June, 14, 21 July 1877, The Echo, 17, 18, 20-31 Aug, 1, 4 Sept 1877.

4. The Standard, 22 June 1877.

5. The Echo, 22 June 1877.

to a false step by the over-zealous officialism of some subordinate of Scotland Yard'¹. The advanced liberal Blackburn Times passed caustic comment on the Solicitor-General for maintaining that Knowlton's was 'an obscene book not because it contains language usually called "obscene", but because it gives details of sexual physiology which "prurient minds" might pervert - in other words, that are likely to deprave minds already far gone in depravity'².

J.A. & O. Banks maintain that journals favourable to Malthusian views were 'liberal, progressive or independent' in political views, and that the conservative press was uniformly hostile, and that as to the issue of birth-control in particular, the liberal press was hostile and only the independent press would give it a hearing³. This is not strictly so. There were sufficient exceptions to blur this categorisation. Thus, the 'Liberal-Conservative' Nottingham Journal, circulating generally throughout the Midlands, remarked in September 1877:

The chief preventive to poverty must be a check of some kind to the increase of population Is it reasonable to expect to forego the pleasures of married life? Certainly not, and the only course that remains open is that by which some method may be adopted which will prevent the usual consequences of matrimony. But it will be said that this is unnatural. What can be more unnatural than to bring children into the world to die of starvation⁴?

And, for an 'independent' journal which should have been favourable to birth-control if one adheres to the Banks' classification, the North of England Advertiser could but comment:

1. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 22 June 1877.

2. The Blackburn Times, 23 June 1877.

3. J.A. & O. Banks, 'The Bradlaugh-Besant Trial and the English Newspapers', in Population Studies, viii, 1954, part I, p.31.

4. Nottingham Journal, 6 Sept 1877. For political complexion, see Mirchell, p.86.

We have a certain amount of respect for the energy and loyalty which Mr Bradlaugh displays in seeking to rally men and women around a crestfallen flag; and for Mrs Besant we have no other feeling than that of the utmost sympathy; but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that these two are desirous of upsetting the whole constitution of the land because they see, 'through a glass darkly' that there are some things wrong¹.

The latter's comment was not exceptional for an 'independent' journal; likewise the independent metropolitan Echo, while sympathising with Bradlaugh and Besant, believed 'it is well that a jury have found a verdict that points to the possibility of danger to public morality'². Finally, in a contrary manner, although liberal in politics, the Devon Evening Express while agreeing that the prosecution had been ill-advised, declared that

Art is said to be man's nature, and therefore, it is as much of nature as the simplest law. But if it be decided that artificial means are not to be used in keeping down a surplus population, we are driven back to the conclusion that it was the intention of Providence that children should be born into the world for whom there should be no food³ !

Most surprising was the attitude of the radical, working class press, such as it was in the late 1870s⁴. Here, if anywhere, one might have expected that imperviousness to Victorian, middle-class respectability would have led to sympathy for, if not open support of Bradlaugh. The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, upholding a long tradition of radicalism in the north, and whose editor, W.E. Adams was a long time friend of Bradlaugh and who 'shared Bradlaugh's basic attitudes on almost all matters'⁵ gave detailed factual accounts of the legal struggles

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1. North of England Advertiser, 22 Sept 1877.
 2. The Echo, 22 June 1877. For its politics, Mitchell, op.cit., p.18.
 3. Devon Evening Express, 23 June 1877. For its politics, Mitchell, op.cit., p.59.
 4. A topic not covered in the Banks' review of press reaction.
 5. J. Saville, ed., introduction to W.E. Adams, Memoirs of a Social Atom, (N.Y., 1968) p.20.

from April 1877. But its editorial comment was sparse, detached and no more than not unfriendly. Referring to the verdict in June 1877 it confined itself specifically to the pamphlet, saying that 'to place it on the same level as works which everybody knows to be indecent is simply absurd'¹. The only other editorial comment, on the sentence, was to the effect that the trial had 'procured indiscriminate circulation of a pamphlet which during forty years probably never before fell into improper hands'².

Equally remarkable was the silence of Reynolds's Newspaper. From April to July 1877 it gave adequate reports of the various legal developments, but on not a single occasion did it offer comment. Even the verdict and sentence went unremarked³. No attitude was expressed by it either to the doctrine of neomalthusianism or to the practice of birth-control, and no correspondence on the population question was entertained. St Crispin, the trade journal of shoemakers, a class of men who composed a large part of Bradlaugh's following in Northampton, made no reference whatever to the trials, although it did report one incident showing continued support for Bradlaugh in Northampton despite the trials⁴. George Potter's Industrial Review, formerly the Bee-Hive, entirely ignored the trials of 1877-8, and the only letter on the population problem which it published in these years, merely suggested abstinence as a remedy⁵. Of

1. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 23 June 1877.

2. ibid., 30 June 1877.

3. Reynolds's Newspaper, 24 June, 1 July 1877.

4. St Crispin, a weekly journal devoted to the interests of Boot and Shoemakers, 1 July 1877. It ran from 2 Dec 1876 to 29 Dec 1877.

5. Industrial Review, 30 June 1877. See also, S. Coltham, 'George Potter, the Junta and the Bee-Hive', in International Review of Social History, ix, 1964 & 1965; x, 1965, p.52.

journals representing the agricultural workers, whose cause Bradlaugh had championed in speeches and writings in the 1860s and 1870s¹, only the Labourers' Union Chronicle reported his prosecution, and that without comment². Such was the contribution of England's radical and working class press to the events of 1877-1880. With some justice Bradlaugh remarked, after his major trial, that it 'enabled me to count the number of those on whom I may rely in the hours of difficulty and danger'³.

Individual Support for Bradlaugh and Besant:

The support of prominent individuals on whom the defendants could rely in their hours of difficulty was as unremarkable as that of the radical press. Bradlaugh had intended to call 'about forty witnesses' for the defence⁴. In the event, he called but three: medical student Alice Vickery, her husband Dr Charles Drysdale, and the publisher H.G. Bohn. Two others who offered their services as witnesses and whom the defendants intended to call concerning population problems in pauper London were the Rev. Michael Horsley and the Rev. Stewart Headlam⁵. Headlam gave an example of selfless support, as he was opposed to Bradlaugh's views. He remarked that he would 'far rather take measures to prevent idleness among the rich than to prevent the conception of children among the poor', but, he added, 'it

1. See below, Chapter Four, pp. 269-273.

2. The Labourers' Union Chronicle, 14 Apr 1877. After 14 April 1877 it fused with Howard Evans's The English Labourer, to become The English Labourers' Chronicle, but no further attention was given to the issue from April till the end of 1878.

3. N.R., 1 July 1877.

4. ibid., 15 Apr 1877.

5. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, pp. 239-240; N.R., 17 June 1877.

is the principle of free publication, I take it, which you are contending for, in which contention I wish you success'¹.

In sharp contrast to this was the attitude of Henry Fawcett and his wife. Bradlaugh who had once defended Fawcett when Marx had dismissed him as a 'scientific nullity'², intended to call Fawcett simply to support the validity of the Malthusian viewpoint: but, as Bradlaugh reported,

asked to come and prove certain statements in his own book - and he was asked to do nothing more - he refused; summoned to the Guildhall, he would not go; at last, when the trial was fixed, a subpoena was sent to him calling him to produce his own books, and a second to Mrs Fawcett to produce a book of hers. Mr Fawcett refused to take the subpoena said he would send Mrs Fawcett out of the country rather than that she should appear If he had been asked to approve of Knowlton one could understand but that he should be afraid to accept the responsibility of his own books is most extraordinary³.

The Fawcetts were not the only ones frightened off by Bradlaugh's wish to make use of their writings. According to Besant, when Montague Cookson heard he would be quoted in the case he wrote to Bradlaugh 'putting some limitations on his words which we do not find in his essay, an essay which is utterly unguarded'⁴. As for others, when the publisher Duncan Cameron wrote in support to Bradlaugh at the time of the April prosecution, he suggested that 'Cowen, Dilke and others should be kept au courant in the matter'⁵, but there is no evidence that either of them supported Bradlaugh. Admittedly Dilke did present petitions to the Commons calling for clear enactment of the law on the issue of public discussion of population problems, but

1. N.R., 22 Apr 1877.

2. See below Chapter

3. N.R., 17 June 1877.

4. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, p.116.

5. N.R., 15 Apr 1877.

this is not tantamount to supporting Bradlaugh. Similarly, it has been seen how Cowen proved tireless in his efforts on behalf of Truelove, but he was silent on the issue of the Bradlaugh-Besant prosecutions.

Some friendships Bradlaugh had made in the 1860s, however, did bring him support. General Paul Gustave Cluseret sent a small contribution towards defraying defence costs¹ and Garibaldi was a member of the Defence Fund Committee². The support was most striking in the case of miners and some of their representatives. John Bryson, then president of the Northumberland Miners' Association wrote to enter his name on the Defence Fund Committee and declared, 'your action is approved of by everybody down here'³. Later he became a vice-president of the Malthusian League which was set up after the trial of June 1877: he was the only trade unionist known to have associated himself publicly with the League⁴. The secretary of the Cleveland Miners wrote to 'applaud your efforts in the use of a Free Press'⁵, while J. Firth, secretary of the South Yorkshire Miners' Union regarded the issue as 'a vital question, especially to the working classes', for whom 'your book, from what I can gather, will be a source of much good'. He concluded that 'many of our leading men express their entire approval of your action'⁶.

The greatest single indication of support came from working men

1. N.R., 22 Apr 1877. For Cluseret's association with Bradlaugh see below Chapter Eight, pp.509-512.

2. Queen v. Bradlaugh & Besant, p.237.

3. N.R., 22 Apr 1877.

4. ibid., 21 Oct 1877.

5. N.R., 29 Apr 1877.

6. ibid., 6 May 1877.

throughout the country in contributions to the Defence Fund. These ranged from pennies to shillings, seldom over this sum, recorded week by week in the National Reformer from the institution of the Fund in March 1877 until February 1880. They amounted to over £1,700 and covered the entire cost of all the trials, including the cost of the case brought by the Rev. Frank Besant against his wife for custody of their daughter¹.

The Trials and the Secularists:

Given Bradlaugh's claim to 'have been for more than fifteen years so recklessly assailed by those who should have been co-workers', over his promotion of neomalthusianism, it says much for his courage, if not for his wisdom, that he decided to make an issue of the Knowlton pamphlet. Only a conviction that his efforts had been getting nowhere could have led Bradlaugh to take the step he did. No more than Annie Besant had he anything personal to gain; like her, he might have a great deal to lose: personal freedom by a possible jail sentence; personal ruin by a possibly crushing financial burden; personal ambition by jeopardising his chances of ever being elected to parliament²; and personal power by splitting the secularist party whose unity and organisation he had done so much to foster. In the decision to make a stand on the Knowlton pamphlet it is clear Annie Besant was the prime mover³. Bradlaugh

1. A. Besant, Autobiography, pp. 231-232. If the average contribution was one shilling, which is what the N.R., suggests, then individual contributions came to over 30,000.

2. For the repercussions of Bradlaugh's stand on his position and prospects in Northampton politics see below Chapter

3. A.H. Nethercot, The First Five Lives of Annie Besant, (London, 1961) pp. 119 ff.

initially entertained doubts as to its advisability. On January 12 1877 he told Kate Watts that he had wished 'the prosecution had been against any other book, for this one places me in a very awkward position. I cannot appeal to the (secularist) party to defend it, for it does not belong to them'¹. On the evening of this date Charles Watts and his wife, Kate, together with Bradlaugh and his daughters and Annie Besant met in the latter's house to discuss the issue. Here Bradlaugh declared that Besant stated the 'party' could indeed be appealed to, and he added that 'it had taken a very long time to bring him round to her way of thinking, but now he was thoroughly converted'².

A circular to the secularist party, on the decision to fight the Knowlton case arising from the Bristol prosecution, was then issued, but on the very next day, 13 January, after some wavering, Charles Watts decided not to defend himself but to plead guilty instead³. This decision of Watts, after Bradlaugh had committed himself to defence of the pamphlet, led to a rancorous quarrel and ultimately to a split in the secular ranks. The split was not due entirely to the personal quarrel and recriminations due to erupt between Charles and Kate Watts on the one side, and Bradlaugh and Besant on the other: the antipathy of certain secularists to any form of neomalthusianism, as in the case of men like Maughan, or to certain expressions of it, as in the case of G.J. Holyoake, ever since the 1850s, has already been noted. Watts's decision not to contest the

1. K.E. Watts, op.cit., p.4
 2. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
 3. C. Watts, op.cit., p.10.

matter was the immediate occasion of the split. It was a decision not uninfluenced by George Holyoake who, when the Bristol proceedings began, advised Watts to withdraw the pamphlet from sale¹. On 21 January 1877 Holyoake commended Watts's decision, declaring that his conduct 'does him the highest credit. It is of the utmost importance that Free Thought literature should be kept free from the suspicion of immorality'². On the same day Watts announced his decision in the National Reformer, justifying it on the ground that he failed to see 'any good principle to contend for in such a fight, or any moral victory to win If Fruits of Philosophy be a medical work let it be sold (if at all) at a medical depot, and not at the head-centre of Freethought literature'³. In the same issue of the National Reformer Bradlaugh declared his outright disagreement with Watts on this, but, at this stage, he refrained from personalities. But other secularists soon began an affray. Still on the same day William Willis, secretary of the Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund, expressed the view that

as Mr Watts represents to some extent a large party, upon whose support he could rely, the case should have been fought out boldly and carried to the highest possible tribunal so that an authoritative decision might have been obtained as to the character of this and similar works.

He hoped that

it may not be too late for the adoption of a line of defence which shall be more in accordance with our principles of freedom of action than the one yet taken⁴.

1. Daily News, 20 June 1877.

2. The Secular Review, 21 Jan 1877; hereafter cited as S.R.

3. N.R., 21 Jan 1877.

4. The Secular Chronicle, 21 Jan 1877; hereafter cited as S.C..
This journal was edited by Harriet Law.

A week later the influential J.P. Adams controverted Willis, claiming that if the latter's advice had been followed it would have led 'to results which would damage the Freethought Party and be most disastrous to its exponents and defenders'.

Instead, Watts's decision would 'best consult the interest of the party, respect his own dignity and finally, purge our literature of a work which never ought to have been mixed up with it'¹.

Significant at this point was the support for Watts which came from veteran secularist lecturer, Harriet Law. She had not been 'upon the list of Mr Watts's personal friends' for many years, owing to a 'difference of opinion', but nevertheless she felt his decision was his own concern, and that by it 'he does not forfeit the support of his friends'².

Bradlaugh thought otherwise. On 28 January 1877 he announced that Watts 'has already ceased to be sub-editor of this journal, and I have given him notice determining our connection on and from March 25th'³. In fact, Bradlaugh did not give Watts any notice, withdrew all printing and publishing work from him and sued him for £40 of debts⁴. The secularist R.A. Cooper of Norwich stepped in to arbitrate this matter, but after further disagreement with Cooper's arbitration, Bradlaugh took Watts to court. One week before the Bradlaugh-Besant trial came before the Queen's Bench on 18 June, the case Bradlaugh versus

1. S.C., 28 Jan 1877.

2. ibid.

3. N.R., 28 Jan 1877.

4. The Secular Review and Secularist, 14 July 1877; hereafter cited as S.R.&S. It was edited by Charles Watts and George Foote.

Watts was tried in the Court of Common Pleas and was decided in Watts's favour¹. In turn Watts claimed £20 compensation from Bradlaugh for having had his publishing contract terminated without notice, but his claim failed: Bradlaugh was able to produce a document which Watts had signed without noticing a clause which exempted Bradlaugh from any claim for compensation in the event of a sudden termination of business². This unpleasant episode indicates that if Bradlaugh were 'thorough' in defence of a principle he was also ruthless in attacking an enemy.

Returning to events of January, money which had been sent for Watts' defence by secularists in Plymouth, and which had been addressed to him care of the National Reformer was sent back to them by Besant³. Although this was just since it had been given on the understanding that Watts would defend the pamphlet, her action served only to add to the growing rancour. Watts' impending trial led to the formation of the Charles Watts Defence Fund in the last week of January. Prominent among secularists who contributed were Arthur Trevelyan, John Weston, William Stewart Ross, alias 'Saladin', Joseph Symes and J.P. Adams⁴. There were 211 contributors between then and 11 February 1877, after which date the fate of the fund is unknown⁵.

In reference to Bradlaugh's legal assault on Watts, and to J.P. Adams' support of Watts' stand, one J. Hughes of Burton-on-Trent, in a letter to the Secular Chronicle, remarked that he

1. *ibid.*
 2. S.R.&S., 14 July 1877.
 3. N.R., 21 Jan 1877.
 4. S.C., 28 Jan, 4, 11 Feb 1877.
 5. *ibid.*, 4 Feb 1877.

thought Mr Bradlaugh was the apostle of Freethought, (but) it appears he is the apostle of this own thought exclusively Mr Bradlaugh states that there is no ground for determining his relations with Mr Watts other than this difference of opinion. Well, if this be so, where is the liberty of thought? Has not Mr Watts the same right to his own opinion as Mr Bradlaugh, without incurring pains and penalties and threats of utter ruin ¹?

At this point an attempt to review the situation dispassionately was made by the republican secularist, Cattell, of Birmingham. For the welfare of the secularist party he found the case to be 'unprecedented and unfortunate'. As to Watts's excuse for stepping down because the pamphlet seemed to be contrary to the law, Cattell gave little credit to this plea, saying 'is it not a fact that the law is against nearly all our publications? being condemned by law does not necessarily imply wrongdoing'². At the same time, however, he remarked:

As regards Mr Bradlaugh's dismissal of Mr Watts and his cancelling all business transactions with him - while admitting his right to do these things I confess the necessity for them does not appear, unless it can be shown that Mr Watts is unfit to do other work because he refuses to do this. If Mr Watts was so bound hand and foot to do anything and everything he was told, he has only himself to blame - if not, I think Mr Bradlaugh demanded more in this case than was needful³.

Cattell felt Bradlaugh should not have sacked Watts, but should have asked instead for his resignation, and thus save himself from appearing as 'an oppressor and arbitrary employer'⁴.

Cattell's review of the situation did nothing to calm it. Bradlaugh and Watts had already carried the quarrel into the provinces.

On Thursday 25 January 1877 Bradlaugh went to Leicester where he spoke on the quarrel with Watts⁵. The following Sunday Watts

1. *ibid.*

2. *S.C.*, 4 Feb 1877.

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. *ibid.*, 4 Mar 1877; *N.R.*, 11 Feb 1877.

lectured at Nottingham and after his lecture the secularists there passed a motion of confidence in him and one of condemnation of Bradlaugh¹. On 15 April 1877 Bradlaugh and Besant were arrested and ten days later, Robert Forder, assistant secretary of the National Secular Society, called a special meeting of its executive so that Bradlaugh and Besant could tender their resignations. The executive refused to accept them².

When the prosecution of Bradlaugh and Besant took place in the third week of April 1877 Harriet Law conceded that Besant 'defended herself with considerable ability', but a week later Law insisted that 'the advisability of publishing the work under the auspices of the Freethought Party will still remain a subject for discussion'³. A week later, Bradlaugh himself answered this by stating that 'the Freethought Party is no more the endorser of our Malthusianism than it is of our Republicanism, or of our advocacy of woman suffrage'⁴.

Within the same month, the annual general meeting of the N.S.S. took place at Nottingham. It went off quietly enough despite the presence of all the major antagonists, Bradlaugh, Besant, Watts, Foote and Holyoake. But some embarrassment was caused when Josiah Gimson of Leicester said that 'the Society wanted someone as President who was tolerant the personal differences between Mr Bradlaugh and other workers were such that there was hardly any prospect of their working harmoniously

1. S.C., 4 Mar 1877.

2. ibid., 15 Apr 1877; N.R., 15 Apr 1877.

3. S.C., 6 May 1877.

4. N.R., 13 May 1877.

together'¹. R.A. Cooper spoke in favour of Bradlaugh's re-election to the post, 'though he did not say that Mr Bradlaugh's conduct had always been judicious'².

Bradlaugh was re-elected 'by a large majority'³. In standing for re-election Bradlaugh stated clearly that he did not intend that the N.S.S. should be identified with Besant's and his publication of Knowlton⁴, but, in July 1877 Besant claimed that their re-election to their N.S.S. posts at the Nottingham meeting was 'an emphatic endorsement of our action by the N.S.S.'⁵. This claim by her eliminated whatever healing effects the Nottingham conference may have had. For one thing, it was only with such a distinct disclaimer as Bradlaugh had given on that occasion, that Holyoake allowed himself to be elected as a vice-president of the Society⁶. Nevertheless, if Besant had some responsibility for perpetuating the strife after the Nottingham conference, Holyoake was not blameless either. On the first day of the Bradlaugh-Besant trial, on 18 June 1877, his name had been mentioned as a former publisher of the Fruits of Philosophy. Two days later, with the trial still in progress, he wrote to the Daily News and The Times in an attempt to disassociate himself:

I was never the publisher in the sense of issuing the book by my own selection and choice. It was sold at my house in Fleet Street only as 'agents' for my old friend James Watson There is no danger now to the liberty of the Press in England - the only question is its use, and therefore we are all the more bound to show honour and wisdom in its employment⁷.

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1. S.C., 27 May 1877.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid.
 4. S.R. & S., 14 July 1877.
 5. N.R., 8 July 1877.
 6. S.R. & S., 14 July 1877.
 7. Daily News, 20 June 1877.'

Bitterly, Bradlaugh replied in an editorial that 'Mr Holyoake has managed in his haste to rush into print, to do us the most grievous and irreparable wrong', and, he added, 'the letter had really weighed against us with the jury'¹. When the guilty verdict was found, Harriet Law in her Secular Chronicle, refrained from comment². But George Foote, in the Secular Review and Secularist, showed unrelenting hostility: 'The verdict is a complete justification of the course pursued by Mr Watts the attempt to involve our party in this business is abominable'³. For his part, commenting on the verdict, Holyoake revealed no bitterness and simply professed to take the view that the whole matter should now be forgotten. But, when he read Bradlaugh's attack on him in the National Reformer of 1 July 1877 over his own letter to the Daily News and Times he became as bitter as Foote. He repudiated Besant's assertion that the Nottingham conference had endorsed the defendants' action, and repudiated likewise her suggestion in the National Reformer of 1 July that he had made a profit out of selling Knowlton. As to their own edition of Knowlton, which they had prefaced with a defensive introduction, he commented sarcastically:

we did not print apologetic prefaces with what we defended; we did not omit damaging particulars we did not move to quash the trial or get up appeals to Courts of Error. We made a clean fight. Watson or Hetherington did not make pathetic declarations⁴.

At the same time Foote remarked 'the sentence is undoubtedly heavy, but they have deliberately brought it on themselves'⁵.

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1. N.R., 1 July 1877.
 2. S.C., 1, 8 July 1877.
 3. S.R. & S., 30 June 1877.
 4. ibid., 7 July 1877.
 5. ibid.

Matters were now made worse when Watts revealed the details of the legal conflict between himself and Bradlaugh over the previous months¹. As a result of publishing this he received a letter from Bradlaugh's solicitors demanding a public retraction and apology, followed on 18 July with a writ containing a claim for damages². A Watts defence committee was organised to counter this legal threat, with contributions coming from J. Gimson of Leicester, H.V. Mayer of Dudley, J.P. Adams and William Stewart Ross, among others³. When last mentioned in the secularist press this fund reached a little over £25, by no means indicative of widespread support for Watts. However, no legal actions seem to have gone to court. Nevertheless, the conflict was maintained by a second major confrontation over Knowlton. The occasion was that of a public lecture given at Cleveland Hall, London, on 15 July, by G.J. Holyoake, on the subject 'Secularism: its relation to the late Trial', with Watts in the chair⁴. Holyoake's main point was that 'secular policy determined that no subject should be made a party one upon which all Freethinkers were not in union', a point which Harriet Law reported as being 'heartily applauded'⁵. She herself professed to be neutral in regard to the quarrel between Watts and Bradlaugh, but she denied that the Knowlton case was one of liberty of the press⁶. Moderately temperate up to this point, the meeting erupted when

1. *ibid.*, 14 July 1877.

2. *ibid.*, 21 July 1877.

3. *S.R. & S.*, 21, 28 July, 4 Aug 1877.

4. *S.C.*, 22 July 1877.

5. *ibid.*

6. *ibid.*

George Foote then denounced Bradlaugh and Besant because the former had said at Nottingham that the case was not one involving the party while the latter claimed that Nottingham had endorsed their action¹. In turn, two Bradlaugh supporters, Standring and Grout, roundly abused Foote. When William Stewart Ross then rose and declared that 'Charles Bradlaugh has dragged the standard of Freethought through the mire of Holywell Street' the meeting got completely out of hand².

Despite the strong opposition to Bradlaugh on the occasion, it appeared that the pro-Knowlton forces were in the majority. As the hostile Ross put it, 'Those who could not accept Christ but who seemed eager to accept Onan, were largely in the ascendant', and he admitted that Bradlaugh was 'the hero of the hour', at least with the 'rougher and less cultured order of Freethinkers'³. This meeting, when it resumed the following week, did nothing to heal the split. In late August when Cattell, who had kept his own counsel since February, travelled from Birmingham to London to lecture at the Hall of Science he was given the cold shoulder by Bradlaugh⁴. He thereupon resigned from the N.S.S., and a week later his example was followed by J.P. Adams⁵. The ground was now prepared for an alternative organisation of secularists which would involve those anxious to work 'not for the glorification of, nor in any spirit of loyalty to, one or two individuals, nor for an extraordinary medley of Atheistic Secularism and Knowltonian-Malthusianism,

1. *ibid.*; *S.R. & S.*, 28 July 1877.

2. P. Agate, *Sexual Economy as taught by Charles Bradlaugh*, (London, 1885) p.5.

3. P. Agate, *op.cit.*, p.5.

4. *S.R. & S.*, 18 Aug 1877.

5. *ibid.*, 25 Aug 1877.

but for Secular principles, pure simple and undefiled'¹.

On 15 September 1877 the formation of the British Secular Union was announced. The original members included Holyoake, Foote, the Watts, Harriet and Edward Law, J.P. Adams, C.C. Cattell, H.V. Mayer, J. Gimson, Francis Neale of Burslem, J. Routledge of Manchester and J.B. Redfearn of Scarborough². Although the forces of secularism were now, and for some years to come, badly split, they were not, as Nelson maintained, 'permanently divided'³, nor did the split do irreparable damage to Bradlaugh. After a lecture tour in July and August 1877 Joseph Symes reported to the hostile Secular Chronicle that the provinces on the whole supported Bradlaugh's stand. Indeed, had local secular societies in any great number come out against Bradlaugh it is likely that Foote's or Law's journals would have reported the fact. At no stage down to December 1877 did either do so. One concludes that the Knowlton affair and Bradlaugh's part in it caused no great diminution of his own power and authority among the rank and file of secularism, but that it caused a great crisis among the leaders. In the short term it did the cause of secular organisation and unity no good whatever. Its consequences here have already been explored⁴ and it suffices to say that the Knowlton trial served to re-emphasise how little was the unanimity with which neomalthusianism was accepted among prominent secularists.

1. *ibid.* The phrase was that of Francis Neale in a letter to the editor.

2. *ibid.*, 15 Sept, 20 Oct 1877.

3. W.D. Nelson, *op.cit.*, p.129.

4. See above, Chapter One, pp. 46 ff.

The Trials, The Birth-Rate and the Revival of the Malthusian League:

It would be difficult to overemphasise the importance of the trials in attracting a widespread attention to the population question and in aiding the diffusion of birth-control literature. Paradoxically, however, it would be easy to overemphasise the importance of the trials in affecting the birth-rate. The coincidence of the trials and a dramatic decline in the birth-rate in the years 1876-1880 led Himes in 1936 to find the 'only explanation' in 'a great increase in control over conception'¹. Innes, however, in 1938, drew attention to the fact that compulsory registration of births became effective only in 1875 and concluded that this may have been 'the really significant conjuncture', and that 'Bradlaugh and Besant were not, after all, very influential'². As late as 1967, Glass, bemoaning the lack of adequate data and the impossibility of exact calculation, inclined to follow Innes in questioning whether the decline immediately followed the trials³. Although the effect of the trials on the birth-rate must, therefore, remain a matter of doubt, the trials had one undisputed result, the revival of the Malthusian League. To say 'revival' is not strictly correct: the League which came into existence in July 1877 certainly owed its origin as an idea, to the example of Bradlaugh's nominal body of the 1860s, but it owed its actual formation to the suggestion of Annie Besant.

1. N. Himes, *op.cit.*, p.243.

2. J.W. Innes, Class Fertility Trends in England and Wales, 1876-1934 (Princeton, 1938) p.1.

3. D.V. Glass, *op.cit.*, p.14, note 1.

Admitting to having 'borrowed' the idea from 'a League of this same name started by Mr Bradlaugh some seventeen years ago', Besant suggested the idea to some members of the London Dialectical Society and to the Bradlaugh-Besant Defence Fund Committee¹. The latter resolved itself into a meeting for the formation of such a League and appointed an organising sub-committee of ten on Tuesday 10 July 1877. Among the ten were Bradlaugh, Besant, their trial witnesses Alice Vickery, her husband Dr Charles Drysdale, Edward Truelove and R.G. Hember, secretary of the Dialectical Society². Having drawn up a programme of rules and aims this committee launched the Malthusian League in the last week of July 1877³. By the first week of August it claimed to have recruited some 500 members and to have set up branches at Deptford, Nottingham and Manchester⁴. By early October it claimed a membership of 900⁵ after which recruiting figures declined. At the end of its first year the League claimed a membership of 1153 and between then and July 1879 it recruited only 71 new members⁶. After that date, down to Bradlaugh's death and well beyond, its membership is unknown⁷. The League's objects were to agitate for the abolition of all penalties on public discussion of the population question, to obtain such 'a statutory definition as shall render it impossible in the future to bring within the scope of the common law, as a misdemeanour, the publication of

1. N.R., 15 July 1877.

2. ibid.

3. ibid., 22 July 1877.

4. ibid., 16 Sept 1877.

5. ibid., 21 Oct 1877.

6. ibid., 27 July 1879.

7. No figures were published by the organisation.

works dealing with this question', and to spread a knowledge of the law of population and 'its practical application' among the people¹. The League failed to get the legal clarification it sought and although Bradlaugh and Besant were never again prosecuted for their activities in the cause, several people did suffer legal penalties in the 1880s². As to its object of spreading the doctrine of neomalthusianism and the practice of birth-control among the people, it achieved some success in generating debate, but it faced formidable obstacles. Apart from its own financial and organisational limitations, the chief obstacles it faced were the continuing general hostility of public opinion to the discussion of sexual questions, the hostility of religious interests and the medical profession itself, and, by no means least, the opposition of socialists and of those radicals who accepted the teachings of Henry George, with their rejection of the economic theory on which the neomalthusians and the League based their case. The full story of these obstacles has been detailed by the present writer elsewhere and needs no repetition here³. It remains only to consider Bradlaugh's role in the Malthusian League and his position on birth-control from the time of the trials till his death in 1891.

1. N.R., 15 July 1877; reiterated in The Malthusian, June 1885.

2. Fryer, *op.cit.*, pp. 169-174.

3. F.A. D'Arcy, 'The Malthusian League and the Resistance to Birth Control Propaganda in late Victorian Britain', in Population Studies, xxxi, no 3, Nov 1977, pp. 429-448. A copy is enclosed with this work.

Bradlaugh and Neomalthusianism, 1877-1891:

Bradlaugh initially played a major part in getting the Malthusian League off the ground. He first introduced it in a lecture at the Hall of Science on 15 July 1877 and used the occasion to enrol 'a great number of members'¹. He lectured to 'packed houses' on the population question at Newcastle in mid-September, at Southampton later that month and at Glasgow City Hall in October². In addition he agreed to having his National Reformer act as the official organ of the League, until it produced its own journal, The Malthusian, in February 1879³. It was also at this time that he produced his last specifically neomalthusian writing, an article entitled 'The value of emigration as a remedy for poverty' which was to have been reissued for the League as one in its series of Malthusian Tracts. In this he urged:

let there be as much emigration as you can, to lessen the pressure of to-day; let there be such new land laws enacted that men may, on their own lands, grow their own food for tomorrow; and let the people be taught such prudential restraint that they may not again crowd children to hunger's portion and misery's doom⁴.

He was a member of the League Council until the middle of 1880. When he was elected for Northampton in April 1880 the Council hoped he would 'still continue to remain a member'⁵. But he had become less active even before his victory in Northampton. He had been absent from every Council meeting

1. N.R., 22 July 1877.

2. North of England Advertiser, 22 Sept 1877; N.R., 30 Sept 1877; Glasgow News, 12 Oct 1877.

3. N.R., 16 Sept 1877.

4. The Malthusian, Feb, Mar 1879. It was to have been issued as a Malthusian Tract, but appeared instead as a separate pamphlet put out by the Freethought Publishing Company in 1879 under the title Hints to Emigrants to the United States of America (London, 1879, 62 pp + 16 pp).

5. The Malthusian, May 1880.

from September 1879 to April 1880, and upon his Northampton victory he felt 'he would no longer be able to spare the necessary time' for the League. He agreed to accept the nominal position of a vice-presidency¹. He was right about lacking time. The six years which followed constituted an exhausting series of legal conflicts over the Oath, as time-consuming and as vital as the three years of legal conflicts over Knowlton and other birth-control pamphlets². In short, he never attended a single annual general meeting of the Malthusian League from 1880 until his death, a situation which hardly indicates that 'Bradlaugh was a dominant influence in its affairs'³.

Within the limits allowed to him by such circumstances, it remains to be seen if Bradlaugh used such opportunities as did arise, to advocate neomalthusianism in general and to promote the objects of the League in particular. From the League's view-point one such opportunity was presented by the holding of the Industrial Remuneration Conference in late January 1885. Charles Drysdale, president of the Malthusian League, represented his organisation at this conference and was bitterly disappointed by the treatment accorded to him by the conference chairman, Sir Charles Dilke:

The President had only five minutes allowed him to speak... by Sir Charles Dilke, who omitted, as he had done in all other cases, to announce him as the President of the Malthusian League. Thus all topics except Malthusianism were discussed and listened to all kinds of schemes for the bettering of the poorer classes, except the Malthusian one, which the secretary had written to say was not within the scope of the Congress⁴.

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1. The Malthusian, Aug 1880.
 2. W. Arnstein, op.cit., passim.
 3. As stated by J. Peel, loc.cit., p.19.
 4. The Malthusian, Mar 1885.

Bradlaugh was also a delegate to this conference, not however, for the Malthusian League, but for his own organisation, the Land Law Reform League¹. Unlike Drysdale's contribution on neomalthusianism, Bradlaugh's was welcomed by the audience. Unlike Drysdale, he never mentioned the population question, but confined himself to the issues of land law reform, and the need for a bureau of labour statistics². Why Bradlaugh should have been silent on the population question is not clear; it may have been due simply to his view that Drysdale himself would cover it adequately. Whatever the explanation, the League itself was disappointed with his silence, or so one infers from the fact that he wrote to them some months later to say that 'there was little chance of his forgetting the Neo-Malthusian question, since he was continually being attacked by some political opponent because of his publications on that subject'³. That he was under such attack in the 1880s is clear enough. In 1885 Peter Agate brought out the scurrilous tract, Sexual Economy as taught by Charles Bradlaugh, the title of which is sufficient indication of its contents⁴. Three years later the libellous biography of Bradlaugh by Charles Mackay showered abuse on him for 'becoming rich by selling obscenity'⁵. Even among some who favoured birth-control, its advocacy by Bradlaugh in the past was a subject of denigration.

1. Industrial Remuneration Conference, Report of Proceedings and Papers, (London, 1885) pp. 170-2.

2. *ibid.*

3. The Malthusian, June 1885. His letter was read to the eighth annual general meeting of the League on 13 May 1885.

4. P. Agate, Sexual Economy as Taught by Charles Bradlaugh (London, 1885).

5. C. Mackay, Life of Charles Bradlaugh, M.P. (London, 1888) p.243.

Thus, Arnold White, in 1886, declared that

Limitation of families is a subject that has been spoiled by Mr Bradlaugh In the public mind there is an indissoluble alliance between deliberate restriction and aggressive atheism¹.

By the 1880s, however, Bradlaugh was well hardened to scurrility and it would not have prevented him speaking his mind on any subject. Parliament offered considerable opportunities for speaking his mind, yet he never promoted discussion of the issue there, and merely referred to his beliefs on the subject in passing. Thus, for example, in bringing forward his Bill for the compulsory cultivation of land, in 1886, he observed that it could only do good on the supposition that there was to be only a limited number of future births to participate in the additional land the bill aimed to make available².

In the following year Dr Henry Arthur Allbutt, a member of the League, was struck off the register after the General Medical Council found him guilty of 'gross misconduct in a professional respect' in connection with his publication of a birth-control manual, The Wife's Handbook³. He thereupon began what turned out to be an abortive legal quest for justice. The whole affair was to lead to further disenchantment of the League with Bradlaugh. In referring to the action of the General Medical Council, the League president, Drysdale remarked 'I cannot fathom their motives and can only say that it is time this question was discussed in the House of Commons,

1. A. White, The Problems of a Great City (London, 1886) p.58.
 2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 304, 14 Apr 1886, col.1590.
 3. P. Fryer, op.cit., p.169.

and I trust that it may be raised as soon as possible in that assembly'¹. Bradlaugh's comment on this remark was defensive and somewhat evasive:

Unless a Bill is introduced limiting the powers of the Medical Council I hardly see how this matter can come before the House of Commons. If the Council have exceeded their powers the matter is one for the Queen's Bench The Law of Population written by Mrs Besant immediately after our trial and published jointly by us at 6d, is our attempt to convey the necessary knowledge to the poor².

Undaunted by this reply Drysdale had an interview with Lord Derby in connection with Allbutt's case, in early December 1887, and he told Bradlaugh that he hoped Derby, or 'the natural champion of free speech in this matter, yourself, may be willing to introduce such a Bill as soon as Parliament assembles'³.

Although Allbutt himself conveyed to Drysdale his wish that a Bill to amend the Medical Act of 1858 which governed the G.M.C. be introduced, and suggested that Bradlaugh might consent to introduce it, the matter was never raised in the House by Bradlaugh⁴.

Although the League did not abandon hope that Bradlaugh might use his parliamentary position to promote neomalthusianism, at the private session of the League's annual general meeting in May 1888, one J.T. Blanchard, with some ruefulness, urged the League to adopt a new policy of bringing pressure to bear on M.P.s in regard to the whole question:

he hoped Mr Charles Bradlaugh might, ere this, have been able to introduce the subject to the present Parliament, but, as he had not done so, perhaps it would be as well to urge some M.P.s to call attention to the impossibility of

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1. N.R., 4 Dec 1887.
 2. N.R., 4 Dec 1887.
 3. ibid., 11 Dec 1887.
 4. The Malthusian, Feb 1888.

doing much for the poor so long as the birth-rate was so high¹.

Finally, in the year before Bradlaugh died, Drysdale was still hoping in vain that the question of discouraging rapid births could be brought forward in the House², but Bradlaugh remained silent on the issue.

It is clear that the League lost Bradlaugh's active support in the 1880s. This is not equivalent to saying that Bradlaugh abandoned his neomalthusianism, or, what is a slightly different matter, his public advocacy of it. There is no evidence to suggest that he abandoned his belief in the doctrine. The last piece of evidence to the contrary dates from 1886 when he acknowledged it in introducing his Bill for compulsory cultivation of land³. It is certainly true that he was never as doctrinaire in his neomalthusianism as the League president, Charles Drysdale, or even the latter's brother, George. In late 1878 George Drysdale had produced his pamphlet, State Remedies for Poverty, in which he put forward an extreme solution to poverty and social misery:

However strongly opposed to the prevailing opinions and sentiments, (the) endeavour to extinguish poverty by direct legal enactment in the only way in which this could possibly be done, namely, by means of a statute limiting the size of families, and forbidding anyone, whether rich or poor, to have more than a small number of children, (will) become the most momentous of practical questions in every country of Europe⁴.

Although Bradlaugh never commented on this, given his growing hostility to state legislative interference in people's lives in the 1880s it is clear he would not agree with this prescription.

1. *ibid.*, June 1888.

2. *ibid.*, Apr 1890.

3. See below p.291, n.1.

4. State Remedies for Poverty, by the Author of The Elements of Social Science, (London, 1878), quoted in N.R., 15 Dec 1878.

Charles Drysdale adopted George's suggestion, and throughout the 1880s and 1890s put forward the opinion that birth-control was the only solution to contemporary poverty. Typical of his expression of this was his observation in his presidential address to the League in 1883, that 'we, alone, friends, possess the key to human happiness'¹. Charles Drysdale dismissed as irrelevant all other possible reforms. In doing so, however logical and doctrinally correct he could have been, Drysdale, in attempting to gain the ear of the working class, made a major blunder. It was not a blunder Bradlaugh made. He recognised that there were other reforms which, even if they might have limited effect, were nevertheless worth pursuing, both for their own intrinsic merits and justice, and because they were also politically wise for radicals to promote. Among these was reform of the land laws. Yet, his failure to raise the issue of birth-control in Parliament - the point of disappointment for the League - remains to be considered.

How could he have raised this issue effectively ? One way he could have pursued was to have agitated for legal review of what constituted obscenity. Yet, in the 1880s, Bradlaugh's practicality was often evident: no other M.P. in the House, and Malthusian Leaguers apart, few people outside it were willing at the time to openly profess belief in birth-control. Was it therefore realistic to press for legislation in such circumstances ? In view of the fact that the fifty three petitions to the Commons, got up by the League in July-August

1. The Malthusian, June 1883.

1877, pressing for alteration in the law of obscene libel, caused not a ripple, the answer clearly is no. The realistic course in these circumstances was the one Bradlaugh did pursue: to continue the dissemination of neomalthusian propaganda among the people first, and if limitation came ultimately to be practised, it would matter little what was professed. The subsequent history of birth-control bears this out: the law was not changed, but the practice of birth-control and the history of the birth-rate were .

Although Bradlaugh produced no new writings on neomalthusianism after 1879 he did not abandon its advocacy: he continued to publish earlier versions of his tracts, in new editions after 1880 . If he dropped from a prominent place in the advocacy of neomalthusianism from 1880 it was not without justification: as early as 1862 he had made it clear that he would not desist from its advocacy until he had compelled 'a fair and complete discussion' of the question : his stand in the Knowlton affair had ensured the realisation of that aim. It was a major, but never the sole aim of his public life. If poverty was caused by overpopulation, it was also caused by unjust legislation . This realisation led him to take up the Land Question with as much zeal as he had devoted to the problem of population.

CHAPTER FOUR : BRADLAUGH AND THE LAND QUESTION

1. Background.

The great debate on the land question in nineteenth century Britain¹ assumed its most intense form in the last three decades² when a wide range of ideas challenging the existing land system was constantly before the public. There were suggestions for schemes of allotments for labourers, for preservation of the remaining commons and open spaces, for 'colonisation' of waste lands, for compulsory cultivation of uncultivated lands; there were proposals for legal reforms to abolish the game laws, to do away with primogeniture and entails, to establish compulsory registration of titles and to facilitate land transfer; there were efforts to promote security of tenure, long leases and compensation for improvements made by tenant farmers, to promote peasant proprietorship, to impose a single tax on land, and to fully nationalise the land, with or without compensation to the dispossessed.

This ferment of ideas was accompanied by the rise of a variety of organisations which campaigned within and without parliament, in town and countryside in the attempt to realise these ideas: the Land and Labour League, the Land Tenure Reform Association, the Irish Land League, the Land Law Reform League, the Land Nationalisation Society, the English Land Restoration League, the 'Back to the Land' Movement, the Free Land League, and the Liberty and Property Defence League. They represented all sides

1. D. Martin, 'Land Reform', in P. Hollis, ed., Pressure from Without in early Victorian England (London, 1974) pp. 131-158, provides a compact yet wide ranging survey with extensive bibliography.

2. H.J. Perkin, 'Land Reform and Class Conflict in Victorian Britain', in J. Butt & I.F. Clarke, eds., The Victorians and Social Protest (Newton Abbot, 1973) pp. 177-217.

of the political spectrum, from socialism to conservatism. All, save the Liberty and Property Defence League¹, had one aim in common, viz., the ending of the system of landed monopoly which had been so effectively demonstrated by John Bateman, George Broderick and others². While there was great diversity of opinion on what kind of land system was to replace that of virtual monopoly, once the latter had been broken, three general concepts incorporated this diversity: that of common ownership, state ownership, or land nationalisation; that of 'free trade in land', and that of producer ownership or peasant proprietorship. The advocacy of the first concept was confined up to 1880 to a few extreme working class leaders such as O'Brien³, Harney⁴ and Jones⁵ while the second and third tended to be espoused, in a rather complex way, by radical politicians and publicists from the middle classes⁶.

Although this upsurge of land reform organisations, especially after 1880, is striking, the ideas they promoted were not new, but rather part of an unbroken tradition of debate on land which had its origins in the writings of Spence and Ogilvie in the late eighteenth century and of the classical economists in

1. N. Seldon, 'Laissez-Faire as Dogma: the Liberty and Property Defence League, 1882-1914', in K.D. Brown, ed., Essays in Anti-Labour History: responses to the rise of Labour in Britain (London, 1974) pp. 208-233.

2. J. Bateman, The Acre-ocracy of England. A list of all owners of three thousand acres and upwards, with their possessions and incomes culled from 'The Modern Domesday Book', (London, 1876); The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland, (London, 1878); G.C. Brodrick, English Land and English Landlords (London, 1881).

3. A. Plummer, Bronterre: a political biography of Bronterre O'Brien, 1804-1864, (London, 1971), p.220.

4. A.R. Schoyen, The Chartist Challenge: a Portrait of George Julian Harney, (London, 1958), p.197.

5. J. Saville, Ernest Jones, Chartist, (London, 1952), pp.152-7.

6. D. Martin, loc.cit., 134, 138, 141-2.

the early nineteenth century. In the works of Spence¹ and Ogilvie² lay the beginnings of land nationalisation and single-tax doctrines³. The tradition of thought of which they were the inspirers was carried on in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Owenites and Chartists. Despite the decline of Owenism and Chartism as mass movements, after 1848 men like Robert Owen, James Bronterre O'Brien, W.J. Linton, G.J. Holyoake and Ernest Jones still discussed the question of land or else still exerted an influence which ensured that the land question would remain an issue of central importance in working class political thought and action⁴. The middle

1. T. Spence, The Meridian Sun of Liberty, or, the whole rights of man displayed, (London, 1796); The Rights of Infants a dialogue between the Aristocracy and a Mother of Children. To which are added Strictures on Paine's Agrarian Justice, (London, 1797).

2. W. Ogilvie, An Essay on the Right of Property in Land, (London, 1781).

3. Ping-Ti Ho, 'Land and State in Great Britain, 1873-1910, a study of land reform movements and land policies', Ph.D. thesis, (Columbia University, 1952), p.5; J. Mackaskill, 'The Treatment of land in English social and political theory, 1840-1885', B.Litt. thesis, (Oxford, 1959), pp. 4-6.

4. The continuing influence of Robert Owen can be seen in the principles of the West Riding Secular Association, set up in 1855; it listed among these principles that of land nationalisation, and advocated the Owenite idea of 'Home Colonisation': The Yorkshire Tribune, n.d. (but first issued 1855), p.2.

The influence of Bronterre O'Brien can be seen in the period 1869-1881 in the persons of Charles Murray, James Francis Murray, Patrick Hennessy and other members of the Land and Labour League, the Manhood Suffrage League, and the Holborn Branch of the National Reform League: A. Plummer, op.cit., pp. 2-6, 273.

For Linton on the land question, The English Republic, a series of tracts (London, 1851-3), pp. 89-91, 246-247; and his remarkable letter to the editor of the Nation, advocating a single-tax on land, reprinted in The Reasoner, vol.vii, no.188, 2 Jan 1850, pp. 411-418.

For Holyoake, The Reasoner, vol.i, no.7, 15 July 1846; no.21, 21 Oct 1846; vol.iii, no.58, n.d., pp. 371-2, 1847; vol.vii, no. 167, 8 Aug 1849, on the Freehold land movement.

Ernest Jones, in the 1850's and 1860's continued to engage in propaganda on the land question: E. Jones, Evenings with the People, (London, 1856-7), Adress No.1, 'The Workman and his work', 7 Oct 1856, and Adress No.2, 'The Hereditary Landed Aristocracy', 4 Nov 1856; The Co-operator, vol.iv, no.50, Apr 1864, speech on land by Jones at the Co-operative Festival, Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 23 Feb 1864.

class reformers of the free trade school, however, derived their ideas on the evils of landed monopoly and on the need for a reformed land system from the writings of Ricardo¹, James Mill², W.T. Thornton³, and John Stuart Mill⁴. From these there developed the attack on a land monopoly which had been carefully preserved by a jungle of complex law - an attack which in turn articulated a desire for a free land market, and in some cases for peasant proprietorship⁵.

While the tradition of discussion on land was continuous, it was conducted at varying intensity, and the period 1850 to 1870 was one when the land question appeared not to have the prominence or urgency for the middle or working classes which it had had in the preceding, or which it was to have in the succeeding three decades. It was a period when debate on land

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1. D. Ricardo, On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, (1st ed., London, 1817), in which he argues that the rent of landlords is gained at the expense of the community.
 2. J. Mill, Elements of Political Economy, (1st ed., London, 1821), p.253, where he proposes State appropriation of rent.
 3. W.T. Thornton, A Plea for Peasant Proprietors, (1st ed., London, 1848).
 4. J.S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy with some of their applications to social philosophy, (1st ed., London, 1848).
 5. It is necessary to make a distinction between those who advocated 'free trade in land' and those who advocated peasant proprietorship; the abolition of primogeniture and entails and the cheapening of land transfer in order to make land a commodity like any other, thereby subject to the market would not necessarily have led to a system of peasant proprietorship. Although 'free trade in land' was what free traders like John Bright and James Beal wanted, not all political economists of free trade views were persuaded of the viability of a peasant proprietary system. Thus, whereas Thornton could argue at length in favour of peasant proprietorship, Henry Fawcett who was just as much a free trader was not at all convinced of its possibilities, from its economic as distinct from its social aspects: H. Fawcett, Manual of Political Economy, (6th ed., London, 1883), p.199.

was conducted without benefit of formal organisations got up for that purpose¹. This was the period in which Bradlaugh's views on land, as on other issues, were developed.

In Bradlaugh's public life the question of the land was to assume an importance second only to his concern with the question of birth-control. It is surprising, therefore, that the sources for the origin and development of his concern with and opinions on the land question are not clear. His army experience in Ireland between 1851 and 1853, where he could observe a rack-rented peasantry, lacking security of tenure and deprived of all initiative by being allowed no compensation for improvements made by them to their holdings, may well have directed his attention to the subject. It is equally possible that he acquired an interest in the matter from contact with Owenite and Chartist elements in the secularist movement².

The first work devoted to land which Bradlaugh is known to have read was James Beal's Free Trade in Land³, which he reviewed in the National Reformer in 1860⁴. Although he devoted over three columns to the book, it was mainly to quote it extensively, and his own comment is unrevealing: the book was a 'creditable' treatment of 'an important subject'.

1. There are two exceptions to this: the Freehold Land Movement, begun by John Taylor or Birmingham in 1847, with the aim of getting 'land for the people' and 'votes for working men', The Reasoner, vii, no.167, 8 Aug 1849, pp. 89-90, and Mackaskill, *op.cit.*, p.147; and the Commons Preservation Society, founded in 1865, W.G. Hoskins and L. Dudley Stamp, The Common Lands of England and Wales, (2nd ed., London, 1963), p.80.

2. Bradlaugh kept no diary; as for private correspondence, the extensive collection in the National Secular Society contains no references to the land question before 1880, and after that date references are few. What we know of Bradlaugh's development, therefore, derives from his writings in pamphlet and press.

3. J. Beal, Free Trade in Land, (1st ed., London, 1855). This work provides, inter alia, a lucid exposition of the history of English land law.

4. N.R., 6 Oct 1860.

It was not until as late as 1868 that Bradlaugh spoke on the subject with positive proposals. The occasion was his first election contest in Northampton when, in his manifesto issued in July, he called for abolition of primogeniture and entail, for cheap land transfer, and for greater taxation of the landowning aristocracy¹. Such issues were the common currency of contemporary radicalism, and the abolition of primogeniture and entails in particular, was one of the constant themes of G.R. Drysdale. Drysdale, who had been the major influence on Bradlaugh in regard to birth-control²; also wrote on the land question, at first in his own periodical, the Political Economist and Journal of Social Science³, and soon after in Bradlaugh's National Reformer. Drysdale first wrote on the subject in Bradlaugh's paper in May 1862⁴. He argued that the tenure and division of property in land was an important issue for the working class. He argued for a peasant proprietorship as being the best system of land tenure, and that the existing system in Britain, where leases were either short or non-existent, led to a situation where land was badly worked. He concluded by pointing out that the state had 'a right of interference in the case of landed property which it could not warrantably exercise in the case of moveable goods'⁵. There is no problem in tracing the sources for Drysdale's views, for, his acknowledged authorities were John Stuart Mills's Principles of Political Economy and William Thornton's

1. B.M., Add. Ms 44111, ff.64-66, C. Bradlaugh to W.E. Gladstone, (?) June 1868, enclosing a copy of his election address, 'To the present and future electors of Northampton'.

2. See below Chapter Three, pp. 169-170.

3. Political Economist and Journal of Social Science, No.9, Nov 1856, 'The Uncultivated Lands and Growth of Towns Fallacies'.

4. N.R., 31 May 1862, 'Property in Land', by 'G.R.'.

5. Ibid.

Plea for Peasant Proprietors¹.

Drysdale returned again and again to the issue of land, attempting to show the economic disadvantages and basic injustice of the English system; examining the system currently in force on the continent; and all to one purpose: to urge the need for a system of peasant proprietorship in England². In assailing the existing system Drysdale concentrated his attack on three items: (i) the expense of land transfer; (ii) the practice of primogeniture; (iii) the law of entail³. Making no comment on Drysdale's contributions, Bradlaugh opened the columns of his paper to discussion of the question. In 1864 the radical William Maccall wrote to propose the formation of a 'National Land League' for the realisation of the three items Drysdale had singled out⁴. In urging this Maccall did so not as 'an anarchic revolutionist but as a conservative'⁵.

1. J.S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy with some of their application to social philosophy, 2 vols., (5th ed., London, 1862), i.277-284, (on this occasion it was the 5th ed which Drysdale used); W.T. Thornton, op.cit. passim.

2. N.R., 7 June 1862, 'Property in Land'; 5 July 1862, 'Peasant Proprietors'; 16 July 1864, 'The Land Question'; 12 Nov 1864, 'The Law of Primogeniture'; 3 Dec 1864, 'Mr Cobden on a Land League'; 29 Jan 1865, 'The Saturday Review on Primogeniture and Entail'; 12 Feb 1865, 'Land Companies'; 24 June 1866, 'The Daily Telegraph on Primogeniture'; 20 Oct 1867, 'The Law of Primogeniture'; 7 Mar 1869, 'Primogeniture, Aristocracy and the Land'; all by G.R. Drysdale.

3. N.R., 5 July 1862, 'The Land Question', by 'G.R.'. The articles which he wrote for the National Reformer in 1862 appeared in pamphlet form a year later: G.R. Drysdale, The Land Question, (1st ed., London, 1863); it went to a second edition, unchanged, in 1868.

4. ibid., 23 Jan 1864, 'National Land League', by William Maccall; this also resulted in a pamphlet, The Land and the People, (London, 1865); Bradlaugh reviewed a second edition of this in 1869 but without saying anything to reveal his own opinions: N.R., 14 Mar 1869.

5. ibid., 23 Jan 1864. It was not the first time Maccall had called for a 'land league': he had already done so in 1857; The Reasoner, 31 Mar, 21, 28 Apr 1857.

He returned to the subject within a month, arguing that 'since the sins of a class may mean the ruin of a nation it is necessary to uphold the need for just agrarian law'. He stressed that he saw the object of new agrarian legislation as not being 'to end classes but to multiply classes'. He admitted that 'to excite the same enthusiasm for a national land league that bore the anti-Corn Law League to final victory will be difficult', but he gathered hope from the recent speeches of Bright and Cobden on the subject¹. He ended by hoping that these would now press the issue at Westminster².

There were some penetrating rejoinders to Maccall's views, and by that token to Drysdale's, early in 1864. The secularist William Willis pointed out that changes in the law of the land would not necessarily lead to a change in the customary practice of landowners in the matter of bequeathing realty³. Willis's argument was repeated with greater force by one William Gray of Glasgow in February 1864. Gray argued that to change the law in order to bring about 'free trade in land' would only be advantageous to 'land jobbers and moneyed men'. Given that birth-control was still a forbidden question, Gray felt that the 'next best and speediest means of improving the condition of our proletaires' was an organised system of emigration⁴. Willis returned to the issue in March 1864 to argue that it would not be the ordinary people, but the sons of the proprietors who would benefit by the abolition of

1. G.B. Smith, The Life and Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright, M.P., (2 vols, London, 1881), ii.117 for the Cobden and Bright speeches at Rochdale and Birmingham in Nov 1863 and Jan 1864.
 2. N.R., 20 Feb 1864, 'Free Trade in Land', by William Maccall.
 3. ibid., 13 Feb 1864, 'The Land League', by William Willis.
 4. N.R., 20 Feb 1864, 'The Land League and Emigration' by William Gray.

entail and primogeniture¹. Ernest Jones had already in February 1864 pointed out that such land law reform would not give the land to the working classes². But this was the limit of accord between Jones and Willis, for the latter held the opinion that in nine cases out of ten the poverty of the people was their own fault³.

The debate on the matter continued in the National Reformer in the summer of 1864, and into 1865, but without any realisation of a land league. As to Bradlaugh, he made no contribution to, or comment on, this debate in his paper, nor were any of the pamphlets which he wrote between 1850 and 1870 devoted to the subject. He appears to have first spoken publicly in May 1867 when he declared that the accumulation of land in the hands of a few was the main support of the hereditary aristocracy and the main cause of the wretched plight of the agricultural labourers. What positive proposals he had to remedy this situation are not clear, however⁴. His election address of 1868 apart, it was not until two years later, in a public lecture on the topic of land that Bradlaugh first expressed his opinions clearly. The first principle he held was that there was no right of private property in land, citing Rousseau as his authority. Unlike capital, it was a natural product and therefore 'should be considered national property and be held for the benefit of the nation'. He considered Peter Locke King's bill, then before parliament, and which

1. *ibid.*, 12 Mar 1864, 'The Land League', by William Willis.

2. The Co-operator, Apr 1864, speech of Ernest Jones at the Co-operative festival, Manchester, 23 Feb 1864.

3. N.R., 30 Apr 1864.

4. *ibid.*, 19 May 1867, 'The Aristocracies of Birth, Wealth and Intellect', a public lecture by Bradlaugh at New Hall of Science, 14 May 1867. It is reported very briefly.

sought to ensure that in cases of intestacy the division of land between children be that which applied to the division of personalty, as an 'infinitesimal reform'. The laws of primogeniture and entail should be abolished; but even that would not be enough, for there should also be an alteration in the laws of bequest¹. In this last item Bradlaugh went beyond what Drysdale thought necessary to achieve, but not beyond what John Bright thought necessary, for the latter had argued this in January 1864². What Bradlaugh sought was legislation similar to that in France whereby the power of bequest was limited to only part of the realty. The lecture was delivered in July and he followed it up in August with an open letter to Gladstone in which he pointed out that although the rent-roll of the aristocracy had trebled in sixty years the land tax had remained constant³.

At this point, in the autumn of 1869, one thing is clear: Bradlaugh wanted the breaking up of the great estates. This was a position common to all radicals, however moderate or extreme at the time. It is not clear, however, where Bradlaugh stood in regard to the next step. Did he want, like Drysdale, a system of peasant proprietorship? Or did he want state ownership of land? Or did he simply want a system of free trade in land, from which, after all, it was equally possible for small peasant proprietary or a new landlordism to develop?

1. N.R., 1 Aug 1869.

2. J.E. Thorold Rogers, ed., Speeches by the Rt. Hon. John Bright, M.P., (London, 1878), p.455, 'The Distribution of Land', speech at Birmingham, 26 Jan 1864.

3. N.R., 1 Aug 1869, open letter to W.E. Gladstone: 'Are You For A Class or For The People?'.

ii. Bradlaugh and the Land and Labour League, 1869-70:

In the secularist and political clubs of working class London opinion in favour of land nationalisation, 'home colonisation' and cultivation of waste lands by the unemployed developed throughout the year 1869. After a lecture by an unnamed speaker on the land question in the Deptford and Greenwich Secular Society in March 1869, it was reported that 'a majority of the large attendance favoured land nationalisation, the localities to be the administrators of their land, and the holders to pay the State enough to replace all other taxation'¹. The revival of working class interest in nationalisation at this time was directly related to the serious unemployment in the East End which was continuously acute from the winter of 1867-8 through to the end of 1869². From this unemployment there arose the Unemployed Poor League and from both, the better-known Land and Labour League. The Land and Labour League, in turn, was to lead Bradlaugh to crystallise his opinions on the land question.

Maccoby has referred to the obscure origins of the Land and Labour League³, while Ping Ti-Ho, following Cole and Stekloff, has dated its foundation two years too early⁴. Harrison has

1. N.R., 21 Mar 1869; the very anonymity of the speaker and brevity of the report are significant in themselves; if the speaker had been a reasonably well-known O'Brienite disciple like Patrick Hennessy, or the society a well-known radical one like the Holborn Branch of the National Reform League one might be less surprised at the opinion of the audience.

2. Reynolds's Newspaper, 5 Jan 1868, 31 May 1868, 30 Aug 1868, 1 Nov 1868, 2 Aug 1869, 9 Aug 1869.

3. S. MacCoby, English Radicalism, 1853-1886, (London, 1938), p.164

4. Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., p.24 n.69, citing G.D.H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement (2 vols, N.Y., 1928-30), ii.143; G.M. Stekloff, History of the First International, (London, 1928), p.402.

removed much of that obscurity¹, but none has adverted to the existence of the Unemployed Poor League, the origins and history of which are equally obscure but not unrelated to the genesis of the L. & L.L.

The distress of the unemployed which was so acute in the winter of 1867-8, when some six to seven thousand of shipyard workers of Millwall were out of work², remained severe into the summer of 1868. The first known meeting of the body calling itself the Unemployed Poor League was held at the end of August of that year. It met to consider what steps could be taken to remedy the situation and adopted a resolution calling on the Government 'to amend the poor laws' and adopt a more 'humane plan' of aiding the poor. No known radicals, and in particular no known members of the International Working Men's Association nor of the future L. & L.L. appear to have been present³. But on the next reported occasion, that of an open-air meeting at Millwall in early September three prominent working class radicals were in attendance and took an active part in the proceedings. They were Frederick Riddle, W.J. Mote and John Weston. Riddle moved a resolution to the effect that it was the duty of the State to provide employment for the unemployed⁴. At the next reported open-air meeting of the Unemployed Poor League in October these three were again present and addressed an audience at Hoxton. The assembly passed a resolution urging upon all constituencies

1. R. Harrison, Before the Socialists, Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881, (London, 1965), p.215.

2. Reynolds's Newspaper, 5 Jan 1868.

3. ibid., 30 Aug 1868.

4. ibid., 13 Sept 1868.

'the vital importance of pledging their parliamentary candidates to introduce or support in the next reformed parliament a self-supporting system of home colonisation, on British soil, in the cultivation of well-selected waste lands for all the unemployed and able-bodied poor'¹. With the same men again present at two further meetings in October and November 1868 identical resolutions were passed². On Thursday 3 December 1868 at Tarlington Hall, John Weston delivered an hour-long address outlining the objects 'of himself and his co-workers of the Unemployed Poor League'. Their ultimate object was 'the solution of the labour question', and their immediate object 'was to create a public opinion in favour of the necessity of providing State employment for all who needed it the nature of the employment he proposed was the preparation of the waste lands of Great Britain and Ireland for cultivation'³.

This was the first occasion when the existence of the U.P.L. was adverted to by Bradlaugh. A week later it was reported as meeting on a regular weekly basis⁴. Bradlaugh first heard Martin Boon speak on the land question under U.P.L. auspices in late January 1869⁵. He was greatly impressed by Boon⁶.

1. *ibid.*, 18 Oct 1868.

2. *ibid.*, 25 Oct, 1 Nov 1868.

3. *N.R.*, 13 Dec 1868.

4. *ibid.*, 20 Dec 1868.

5. *ibid.*, 24 Jan 1868; Boon was a disciple of Bronterre O'Brien, a member of the I.W.M.A., a republican, leading figure in the Land and Labour League, and author of several tracts on nationalisation. For details, see Plummer, *op.cit.* pp. 267-268.

6. *N.R.*, 24 Jan 1868; 'those (addresses) of Mr Boon have a special claim to recognition, being directed to the examination and elucidation of the Land and Money questions. This gentleman possesses very great logical and persuasive powers he is a powerful advocate of social reforms'.

This is the last mention of the U.P.L. under that name. Whether it ceased to exist or was transformed into an organisation bearing another name is not clear, but, four months later a body called the Poor People's Union was meeting in Hyde Park under the guidance of the republican J. Johnson¹. At its first reported meeting Frederick Riddle addressed the 'Unemployed Poor' on the land question. On Sunday 13 June another meeting of the Poor People's Union, on Clerkenwell Green, was addressed by John Weston and William Osborne². The object of the P.P.U. was precisely that of the U.P.L., viz., to exert pressure on the government to introduce legislation to aid the poor³. On 27 June it was reported that the O'Brienite Holborn branch of the National Reform League⁴ had joined forces with the P.P.U. in outdoor propoganda, and a combined meeting was held on that date 'for the purpose of establishing a League in the place of the late Reform League'⁵. The result was the setting up of the International Democratic Association on 5 July 1869, with Johnson as honorary secretary, pro. tem.⁶. Again, the declared aim of the new body was 'to insist upon the Government giving a practical recognition of the right of the people to live'⁷. But, despite its declared aim, the I.D.A. in the months of July and August became sidetracked into activity on the issue of an amnesty for the Fenian

1. *ibid.*, 30 May 1869.

2. *ibid.*, 20 June 1869.

3. *ibid.*

4. Plummer, *op.cit.*, p.199.

5. N.R., 4 July 1869; on 12 March 1869 the Executive Committee of the Reform League resolved on its dissolution: Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Reform League, Howell Collection, Bishopsgate Institute.

6. Reynolds's Newspaper, 11 July 1869; originally styled the International Republican Association, the word Democratic replaced International, after a heated debate at a meeting on 5 July. Details of this debate have not survived and the only reason assigned for the change was 'to steer clear of the law'. See below

7. *ibid.*, 4 July 1869.

prisoners¹.

Meanwhile, between January when he first heard Boon speak on land, and July, when the I.D.A. was set up, Bradlaugh became increasingly preoccupied with the land question. In April he announced his intention of proposing the formation of a 'People's League' to compel a change in the land laws in order to deprive the aristocracy of their economic and political monopoly². It was a matter of extreme urgency:

we are of opinion that unless parliamentary and other moral action be taken, widely, and at a very early date, the most serious results will arise in a few years from an actual physical contest between the large mass of the poor, growing poorer, and a small knot of rich, growing richer³.

Boon wrote to Bradlaugh sometime between 15 and 25 April welcoming Bradlaugh's suggestion for a league⁴, but there was no other immediate response. Nevertheless, discussion of the land question continued. Around May 1869 John Weston's tract, The Origins and Source of Enforced Idleness appeared, and about the same time Martin Boon's Home Colonisation. Weston's publication was to show that a difference of view existed between the radicalism of Bradlaugh and that of the men associated with the U.P.L. and the P.P.U. In his tract, Weston argued that 'enforced idleness is caused because capitalists choose to employ only a certain proportion of labourers leaving the surplus unemployed'. To use up this surplus he proposed 'a great scheme for cultivating the waste lands of the United Kingdom'⁵. Bradlaugh, in reviewing this,

1. See below chapters 7 and 8.

2. N.R., 18 Apr 1869.

3. ibid., 9 May 1869.

4. ibid., 25 Apr 1869; Bradlaugh suggested that Boon would make 'a first class secretary for such a League'.

5. N.R., 30 May 1869; I have been unable to locate the original, but it is quoted extensively by Bradlaugh in the source cited.

denied Weston's primary assumption, and as to overcoming the surplus by cultivating waste lands, Bradlaugh doubted whether 'his remedy would be permanent, even if practicable'. In Bradlaugh's opinion, 'the surplus of unemployed labourers is hardly dependent on the volition of capitalists, unless in exceptional and limited circumstances'. He regarded waste land cultivation as a palliative which 'would not strike at the root of the evil'. But he did not suggest an explanation nor a remedy on this occasion. But from what has been seen of Bradlaugh's opinions on birth-control, it is clear that he saw the root of the evil in over-population and the remedy in birth-control¹. It was precisely these opinions that Boon contested in his Home Colonisation. He dismissed Malthusianism because 'it never can be needed for a cure for the poverty we have in our midst while we have land that would feed four times the population'². What Boon suggested was that 'the same system be carried out in England as in Prussia: issue to the peasant-holder Land Debenture Bonds redeemable during the next forty or fifty years'. His reason for seeking this was 'to secure the land for the people without shedding blood or taking life, being fully convinced that a landless people are a dangerous people'³.

Bradlaugh did not reply to Boon but he was still deeply concerned with the land question. On the matter of forming a

1. See above Chapter Three.

2. N.R., 27 June 1869; I have been unable to locate the original, but as with Weston's tract, it is very extensively cited in the above, due to a long correspondence which resulted from a critique of the tract by William Willis.

3. ibid.

land league, he renewed the invitation of April, in July, calling on 'the Working Men's National Reform League and other similar societies' to communicate with each other with a view to concerting action on the question¹. He followed this up on 1 August with his open letter to Gladstone calling for the increased taxation of the aristocracy², and in a speech on Clerkenwell Green in September he now argued that the government should have the power of compulsory acquisition of uncultivated lands³. He may not have accepted Weston's idea as a panacea, but apparently the latter had persuaded Bradlaugh to see some value in it. It is pretty certain that it was Weston and Boon who led Bradlaugh to the theme of waste lands and compulsory cultivation. This theme, taken up by him in September 1869, he never abandoned to the end of his days.

In the critical period of July to October 1869 when Bradlaugh's opinions on land were being influenced by these men, his own activities on the land question are in one respect somewhat obscure. In the first week of August 1869 Bradlaugh heard of the private, preliminary meeting called by John Stuart Mill, the ultimate outcome of which was the Land Tenure Reform Association⁴. This meeting was held on Wednesday 28 July, and Bradlaugh was not present⁵. But, at the end of August he revealed that 'to the first of the preliminary meetings (of the L.T.R.A.) we were summoned and took an active part

1. N.R., 18 July 1869.
 2. ibid., 1 Aug 1869.
 3. ibid., 5 Sept 1869.
 4. ibid., 8 Aug 1869.

in the proceedings; it was then decided that the matter stood adjourned until after the long vacation. A second meeting appears to have been called without notice to us'¹.

It appears therefore that the preliminary meeting which Bradlaugh claims to have attended was that of 3 August 1869, and which he describes as 'the first preliminary meeting'. There is no record of what contribution he made, as he himself does not detail the nature of his participation. Why he was not invited to its next meeting must, therefore, remain a matter of surmise². On 5 September 1869 the programme of the infant L.T.R.A. was discussed at a meeting of the Holborn branch of the Reform League, the majority opinion declaring the programme too moderate³. Ten days later the H.B.R.L., on the initiative of J. Johnson, decided to arrange for a conference of working class reformers on the land question. At a further meeting on 20 September it was decided to invite Bradlaugh to address this forthcoming conference⁴. That conference, which was held in three sessions at the Bell Inn, on 13, 20 and 27 October, witnessed the birth of the Land and Labour League⁵, a body devoted to the cause of land nationalisation.

There is no evidence that Bradlaugh attended the first session on 13 October. Such moderate spokesmen as did attend, like

1. N.R., 29 Aug 1869; in fact, the second preliminary meeting was held on 3 August and the third meeting on 7 August: L.T.R.A. Papers; neither these papers, the Bradlaugh Collection, nor the J.S. Mill-Charles Dilke correspondence in the Dilke Mss, British Museum throw any light on this. H.S.R. Elliot, Letters of John Stuart Mill, (2 vols, London, 1910), and M. St.J. Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill, (London, 1954), are equally unrevealing.

2. None of the manuscript or printed sources consulted in this connection provide any insight.

3. N.R., 19 Sept 1869.

4. ibid., 3 Oct 1869.

5. ibid., 24, 31 Oct, 7 Nov 1869.

George Potter and Andrew Reid, both members of the council of the L.T.R.A., received short shrift when they objected to the adoption of land nationalisation¹. When John Weston moved the resolution calling for nationalisation, at the second session on 20 October, an amendment, moved by William Osborne, calling simply for 'home colonisation' failed to find a seconder. In moving this, Osborne made an attack on the ideas of Bronterre O'Brien. Bradlaugh was present, rose to the defence of O'Brien's memory and supported Weston's resolution. He declared

he understood the objects of the proposed league to be to take the land and the political power out of the hands of those who held them, as quickly as possible the people would do this themselves, if the Government did not move in the matter, in a way which would not be pleasant to many. He endorsed the doctrine that the land should be nationalised and he did not think it would take three hundred years to achieve it².

When the third session took place on 27 October the Land and Labour League was formally launched. On this occasion John Weston moved that George Odger be made president, while Johnson and G.E. Harris³ moved that Bradlaugh be elected to the office. It was, however, a resolution by John Hales to the effect that there be no office of president that was adopted⁴. A general council was then elected, with Weston as treasurer, Boon and J.G. Eccarius as secretaries. Bradlaugh was a member of the general council which met every month with his New Hall of Science as its headquarters⁵.

That Bradlaugh, in defending O'Brien and in advocating

1. *ibid.*, 24 Oct 1869.

2. *N.R.*, 31 Oct 1869, italics mine.

3. Bookseller and member of the I.W.M.A., Plummer, *op.cit.*, p.268.

4. *N.R.*, 7 Nov 1869.

5. *ibid.*, 7, 28 Nov 1869; on the General Council were leading English trade unionists and members of the I.W.M.A. such as George Odger, Benjamin Lucraft, John Hales, Charles Murray, Patrick Hennessy, W. Randall Cremer, P.A.V. Le Lubez, William Osborne, Frederick Riddle and Thomas Mottershead.

nationalisation, was not simply playing to the crowd on the occasion of the conference, that he genuinely believed in nationalisation is clear from two other sources. On 24 October he wrote a detailed essay, exhorting the secular societies throughout the country to agitate the question. He put it to them that 'all legislation relating to the land should endeavour to recognise the principle and advance towards the end that the State should in time be the only landowner'¹. He followed this six days later with a public lecture on 'The Landlords and The Landless' in which he now put forward the view that the simple devices of abolishing primogeniture and entails and of cheapening land transfer were not sufficient 'to place it in the hands of the people as they would still be too poor to buy it the land should be held by the government on behalf of the people'².

These statements mark a notable advance on the John Bright-ian radicalism which characterised his thinking in 1868. Here was the implicit equation of 'the people' with 'the poor', an equation never at any time contemplated by Bright and other middle class radicals of the Manchester school. In the space of three months Bradlaugh's thinking on land had led him from moderate to extreme radicalism. It is difficult to explain this change. Bradlaugh never offered any explanation for it. In the absence of documentation all that can be suggested is that he allowed himself to be borne along on a current of opinion in favour of nationalisation in the particular circles in which he was then moving, until such time as he was able

1. *ibid.*, 24 Oct 1869, 'Secular Work'.
 2. *N.R.*, 7 Nov 1869.

to clarify his thinking on the subject. All that is clear is that his adoption of land nationalisation was not only not permanent, but relatively short-term: his position over the next two years in relation to the L. & L.L. and the L.T.R.A. was not consistent.

iii. Bradlaugh and the Land Question in the 1870's

On 17 January 1870 Bradlaugh was to have lectured on the principles of the L. & L.L. in Barbican¹, which would suggest that he was committed to that body. In addition he gave encouragement to the recently issued Democratic News, which, he declared, 'may be put forward as representing in the main, the views of the L. & L.L.'². In April 1870 he produced a leading article in which he insisted that 'the true theory of land should be that the state should be the only freeholder, all other tenures being limited in character', and that 'cultivation ought to be a special condition of tenancy'³. Nevertheless, in this same article he reveals ambiguities in his thinking on the subject. It was all very well to hold such a theory, but how was it to be realised? He listed five major methods or means: firstly, the adoption of the Prussian system which enabled occupiers 'to acquire proprietorship at twenty years' purchase, paid to landlords in rent debentures issued by the State and bearing four per cent

1. N.R., 16, 23 Jan 1870; illness forced him to cancel the lecture.

2. ibid., 16 Jan 1870; it had at least three issues, but it does not appear to have survived; neither B.U.C.O.P. nor B.M. catalogues list it.

3. ibid., 3 Apr 1870; 'The Land Question: Large Estates Inimical to the Welfare of the People'.

interest, and gradually redeemable by means of the one per cent difference, which at compound interest extinguishes the principal in a little over forty one years; secondly, the State should compulsorily acquire uncultivated lands, compensating the owners by assessing it not at its real value but by its 'actual return for the last five years', the land so occupied not being sold but simply being leased to tenants; thirdly, since they keep land in an uncultivated state, the game laws should be abolished; fourthly, there should be a heavy graduated tax on large estates, and finally, primogeniture should be abolished.

On the one hand, the second item indicates adherence to land nationalisation; on the other, the phrasing of the first item shows the aim to be peasant proprietorship.

The ambiguities were not resolved at the time and it appears he was undecided on the matter. The only thing he did seem clear about was the fact that 'the present land monopoly must be broken by legislation or it will be destroyed by revolution'¹. He advocated mass meetings of protest to convince the government of the urgent need for such legislation², and urged the members of his National Secular Society to get up petitions in support of P.A. Taylor's bill for the abolition of the game laws³. At the same time he encouraged the L. & L.L. to publish propaganda on the extent of the uncultivated lands⁴.

1. N.R., 3 Apr 1870.

2. ibid., 17 Apr 1870.

3. ibid., 17 Apr, 12 June 1870.

4. ibid., 10 Apr 1870.

It was also at this time that the general council of the L.T.R.A. adopted a new programme:

- i) To remove all legal and fiscal impediments to land transfer;
- ii) To secure abolition of the law of primogeniture;
- iii) To restrict the power of tying up land;
- iv) 'To claim, for the benefit of the State, the interception by taxation of the unearned increment of the rent of land (so far as the same can be ascertained), or a great part of that increase which is continually taking place without any effort or outlay of the proprietors, merely through the growth of population and wealth';
- v) To promote a policy of encouragement to co-operative agriculture by State purchase of estates and letting them to co-operative associations;
- vi) By similar means to acquire lands for letting to small cultivators;
- vii) Lands belonging to the Crown, public bodies and charitable and other endowments to be similarly treated;
- viii) 'All lands now waste and requiring an Act of Parliament to authorise their enclosure, to be retained for national uses, compensation being made for manorial rights or rights of common';
- ix) Less fertile portions of waste lands to be kept as public property for the enjoyment of the community¹.

Bradlaugh's reaction to this revised programme was to regard its famous fourth item as 'very valuable', though, for him, it did not go 'far enough'. Why it did not, he himself did not specify, nor did he comment on the radical nature of items five and six. Without assigning reasons, therefore, he put himself to the left of the L.T.R.A. Clearly, the only reason was that he himself was just then advocating nationalisation, the vital issue of difference between the L. & L.L. and the L.T.R.A. Nevertheless he argued that the L.T.R.A. should receive support and encouragement. Odd though this may seem, it was typical of Bradlaugh to support any reform movement while holding views in advance of that movement himself, and in this particular case it was noteworthy that George Odger

1. N.R., 1 May 1870.

and John Weston who were intimately involved in the L. & L.L. found no difficulty in simultaneous membership of the General Council of the L.T.R.A.¹.

Between May and October 1870 Bradlaugh was silent on the land question, but returned to it in November when he wrote the first instalments of what was later to appear as the pamphlet, The Land, The People and The Coming Struggle².

The pamphlet contained nothing he had not said before. Its main theme was the amount of land lying waste, some eleven million acres that could have been profitably cultivated, and the need for legislation to compel such cultivation. But, if he said nothing he had not said before, it is worth noting that he omitted to say things he had said before. There was now no mention of land nationalisation³. This did not prevent the unofficial organ of the L. & L.L. from recommending the work⁴.

As to the L. & L.L. and Bradlaugh's position in regard to it: it held a general meeting for the election of officers on 11 August 1870. In the nominations for president there were ultimately three candidates, Patrick Hennessy, Bradlaugh and Odger. Hennessy was elected with 17 votes, followed by Bradlaugh with 16, and Odger tailed with 4 votes⁵. The

1. L.T.R.A. Papers, Howell Collection, 333.3/57(16), Bishopsgate Institute, Report of Inaugural Public Meeting, Freemason's Hall, London, Monday 15 May 1871, shows both men in this capacity; at this inaugural Weston regretted the fact that some of his L. & L.L. colleagues, meaning Boon and Johnson, had seen fit to oppose the L.T.R.A., and declared it as his opinion that it was worthy of support; as to Odger, it was he who secured the Bell Inn for the foundation conference of the L. & L.L. and was twice a candidate for its presidency; N.R., 7 Nov 1869, The Republican, 1 Sept 1870.

2. This first appeared in the N.R., 13 Nov 1870, pp. 305-6, 20 Nov 1870, p.321, 8 Jan 1871, p.41.

3. N.R., 13 Nov, 20 Nov 1870, 8 Jan 1871.

4. The Republican, March 1871.

5. ibid., 1 Sept 1870.

closeness of the voting suggests either the high regard in which Bradlaugh was held or ignorance on the part of the electors of Bradlaugh's exact position on the land question, and on contemporary politics. Between Boon and Bradlaugh for example, there was a serious divergence in respect of each's attitude to Gladstone. At this August meeting Boon attacked Gladstone for failing 'to do anything for the people' and said that 'all his measures were class measures'¹. Bradlaugh, on the contrary, remained an admirer of Gladstone and at a meeting in the Hall of Science in January 1871 to protest at British policy in respect of France, Bradlaugh tried to defend Gladstone while condemning his Foreign Secretary². Indeed, even on this occasion the more moderate Odger denounced Gladstone for deception³.

It appears that Bradlaugh retained the confidence of the L. & L.L. throughout the next six months. At the annual general meeting in February 1871 when Boon became president, Bradlaugh was elected to the General Council with the highest number of votes⁴. If the L. & L.L. members were still in any

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, Feb 1871.

3. Moberg, *op.cit.*, p.278, citing Marx to Engels, 5 Apr 1869: 'Odger (and Applegarth are both) possessed with a mania for compromise and a thirst for respectability'; and in relation to the Land Question Odger was much less extreme than Bradlaugh, for, whereas Bradlaugh would compel purchase of uncultivated lands, Odger would not: for Bradlaugh, see *N.R.*, 13, 20 Nov 1870, 8 Jan 1871, 'The Land, The People and The Coming Struggle'; for Odger, see G. Odger, 'The Land Question', in *Contemporary Review*, vol.xviii, August 1871, pp. 23-42.

4. *The Republican*, March 1871: Bradlaugh received 18, Odger 11 and Chatterton 8 votes. The League had at this time become active in getting up petitions against the dowry to Princess Louise, and as Bradlaugh was prominent in this it may help to explain his high place in the elections.

doubt as to Bradlaugh's views on land, by the end of 1871 they could no longer be in any doubt. In a lecture at the New Hall of Science in early December he at last made his position unequivocal:

he believed private property in land to be productive of social mischief, yet, in the present state of things he did not hold with the nationalisation of the land. He should do so if he were like J.S. Mill, writing for the studies of future generations, but, as a politician seeking to make a revolution, he was bound to consider only that which was practicable¹.

His idea of the practicable was 'to pass a law making it criminal to hold in an uncultivated state land capable of cultivation'. Having renounced land nationalisation, he had nothing further to say on the subject for another eight months. When he returned to the land question, it was to lend his support to the formation of the anti-Game Law League in August 1872. By October he was on the committee of the League and was urging his friends to support its objects². In March 1873 he attended a large meeting of the L.T.R.A. at Exeter Hall, and though repeatedly called on to speak, he did not address the meeting. He came away from it with the impression that an amendment by George Shipton in favour of land nationalisation was carried by a large majority, though other sources suggest that the amendment was lost³.

Reaction to Bradlaugh's changed position by members of the L. & L.L. was slow in coming, but, in September 1873 John Weston

1. N.R., 10 Dec 1871.

2. ibid., 20 Oct 1872.

3. Harrison, op.cit., pp. 242-243, citing the Standard, 20 March 1873; N.R., 23 March 1873.

attacked Bradlaugh for his commitment to free trade in land and to the abolition of primogeniture and entail¹. Weston found it 'unaccountably strange that one so anxious as I believe Mr Bradlaugh to be to befriend the cause of labour should unwittingly support the very same thing as our enemies rightly perceive would strengthen their hands for perpetuating their system of wholesale plunder'². Bradlaugh made no reply.

When, in October 1874, Bradlaugh addressed the electors of Northampton, his proposals on the land question were in no way different from those he had urged in April 1870: he still sought abolition of the game laws, compulsory cultivation of uncultivated land, and heavier taxation of the aristocracy³.

Over the next five years, though reiterating the view that the land question was 'the most vital' question of the day and that the programme of the L.T.R.A. was inadequate, Bradlaugh had nothing new to add on the matter. Despite such generalities, and ambiguities⁴, and despite the variety of his other commitments, to freethought, republicanism,

1. N.R., 12 Oct 1873; Weston's criticism was made in a lecture at the Minerva Club, 21 Sept., entitled 'Mr Bradlaugh's Address to the Electors of Northampton'; in this Bradlaugh had called for the abolition of primogeniture and entail, and the cheaper transfer of land, N.R., 7 Sept 1873.

2. ibid.

3. ibid., 11 Oct 1874.

4. Bradlaugh had now adopted compulsory cultivation of uncultivated or waste land, with compulsory purchase in default; in essence his object did not differ from that outlined by Weston in his Origins and Source of Enforced Idleness, yet Bradlaugh had originally criticised that as a palliative; and more seriously, as already noted on p.267, while he regarded private property in land as socially mischievous, he regarded nationalisation as impracticable, and between the two he could find no alternative over-all plan, for compulsory cultivation was a matter of limited application.

birth-control, journalism, litigation, electioneering and earning a living, there was one particular aspect of the land question in which he took an active interest, viz., the cause of the agricultural labourers.

iv. Bradlaugh and the Agricultural Labourers

Before Bradlaugh had ever expressed opinions on the land question in general he showed concern for the plight of the rural labourers. In June 1866 he gave publicity to Canon Girdlestone's efforts on their behalf¹. Two years later, when Girdlestone formed a league to promote the improvement of the wages, education, accommodation, and general welfare of the labourers, Bradlaugh's name was added to the committee which included among its members Edmond Beales and Henry Fawcett². Whether this committee was ever particularly active, or what part Bradlaugh played on it is not known³, but in the next year he spoke publicly on the condition of rural labour and urged his audience to agitate until government attended to the problem⁴.

In 1870 he continued to deplore the condition of the labourers and of children in the rural work-gangs⁵. A year later he

1. N.R., 3 June 1866; Girdlestone, of Halberton, Devonshire, appears to have had no biographer as yet; for such details as are available see: F.G. Heath, The English Peasantry, (London, 1874), W. Hasbach, A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, (London, 1907), G.E. Fussell, From Tolpuddle to T.U.C.: A Century of Farm Labourers' Politics, (Slough, 1948), P. Horn, Joseph Arch, (Kington, 1971), J.P.D. Dunbabin, Rural Discontent in nineteenth century Britain, (London, 1974), pp. 234, 245.

2. N.R., 12 Apr 1868.

3. Horn, op.cit., p.19, indicates that the response of the labourers was 'too weak' and these efforts came to nothing; in addition, Fussell, op.cit., p.49, claims that Heath overestimated the influence and success of Girdlestone.

4. N.R., 4 July, 1 Aug, 10 Oct 1869.

5. ibid., 3 Apr 1870.

publicised the efforts of agricultural labourers in Herefordshire to improve their wages by combined action¹. When strikes of labourers broke out in 1872 he advertised the efforts of London radicals to aid the strikers, efforts which resulted in the setting up of the Agricultural Labourers' London Central Aid Committee². In early December 1872 when Samuel Morley chaired a great meeting in Exeter Hall in support of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union Bradlaugh was present. When he addressed the meeting, to argue that no permanent improvement in the labourers' condition could materialise while the existing land system remained intact, he was hissed down by Joseph Arch and his colleagues, although the meeting in general agreed with him. So he alleged two years later³, though Arch himself told a different story, claiming he was well-disposed, from the beginning, to Bradlaugh⁴. Independent sources provide no confirmation for the claims of either party⁵, though it is not without significance, perhaps, that throughout the following year Bradlaugh had nothing to say to, for or about the agricultural labourers.

By that time Arch had achieved national prominence as the best known leader of the rural labourers. He went to Canada in August 1873 to investigate its possibilities as an outlet

1. *ibid.*, 23 Apr, 1 May 1871.

2. *ibid.*, 31 March, 5, 12, 19, 26 May, 2, 9, 16, 23 June, 21 July, 4 Aug, 15 Sept, 3 Nov, 22 Dec 1872.

3. *N.R.*, 9 Aug 1874, 'The Agricultural Labourers' Movement'.

4. J. Arch, The Story of his Life, (London, 1898), pp. 122-123; speaking twenty-five years after the event, Arch paid tribute to Bradlaugh's contribution to their cause at the time.

5. D. Tribe, *op.cit.*, p.136, H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i. 376-377, do not confirm Bradlaugh's version, while Horn, *op.cit.*, does not mention Arch's version. The incident is not referred to in any of the histories of the labourers' movement as cited on p. 269, n.1.

for English agricultural workers. He returned in November, convinced that in emigration lay a major solution for the labourers' problems¹. Bradlaugh, however, did not share Arch's view and felt strongly enough on the matter to speak out publicly in March 1874. He held emigration to be impracticable because of the numbers involved, to be undesirable as the weaker and less enterprising labourers would be left in England, and to be irrelevant in that it would leave the fundamental problem of the land unsolved². He returned to this subject in August 1874 at the end of the strike and lock-out of the labourers. He deplored the failure of their strike but pointed out once again that since the movement's leaders ignored the broader issues involved, they could have expected no other outcome. He attributed his own very limited contribution to their campaign to the personal hostility of Arch at the December 1872 public meeting. He pointed out that the agricultural labourers' movement would now have to enter a 'new phase' - the internal migration schemes of Girdlestone and the emigration schemes of the N.A.L.U. had had only limited effect, and nothing but the ending of the existing land system could have a permanent result. He concluded:

if Joseph Arch cannot face this problem with all its possible consequences and possible dangers, he must stand aside for those who will and dare³.

In the following year Bradlaugh, on being invited to address

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1. Arch, op.cit., pp. 180-198; J.P. Dunbabin, 'The Revolt of the Field', in Past and Present, no.26, Nov 1963, pp. 84-85.
 2. N.R., 15 March 1874.
 3. N.R., 9 Aug 1874.

the fourth annual general meeting of the N.A.L.U. at Yeovil, on a platform shared with George Mitchell and George Potter, he spelt out clearly what he regarded as the limits of what they could achieve as a single class-interest: he did not believe that

the mere joining the Union would obtain for them all that some of the speakers had said. He did not, for instance, believe that the hardships of the agricultural labourers' life should be charged against the farmers, but against the landlords who monopolised the land. He had been told that wages in that district were no more than eleven shillings a week, and their chairman had told them that the remedy was emigration. He did not agree with that It was their duty to stay at home and make the land worth living in They should organise not to go to America but to get the waste lands of this country under cultivation and into the hands of the people. There then would be room enough and food enough and independence for all. They would have gained one step towards this end when they had a voice in the making of their laws¹.

This latter was a theme he pursued in September 1875 when speaking at an agricultural labourers' meeting at Upper Basildon, Berkshire. He moved the first resolution calling for the extension of the borough franchise to the counties². But from then until 1879 he had nothing further to add on the labourers' cause.

By that time, the end of the 1870's, the militancy of the agricultural labourers was broken; agricultural depression had well set in; the Land and Labour League was dead, as was the Land Tenure Reform Association; and Bradlaugh finally came down clearly in favour of peasant proprietorship: in a speech to Bradford secularists in June 1879 he advocated 'the

1. Weekly Dispatch, 23 May 1875.

2. N.R., 12 Sept 1875.

imposition of a higher land-tax, increasing in amount according to the size of the separate holdings with the object of breaking up the great estates and encouraging the formation of a class of peasant proprietors'¹. A new phase in Bradlaugh's concern with land was about to begin.

v. Bradlaugh and the Land Question in the 1880s

Between the deaths of the L.T.R.A. and L. & L.L. and the birth of the various land reform movements of the 1880's² Bradlaugh made a determined effort personally to create a land reform organisation and movement. He sought to knit together the various streams of land reform thinking in order to create a body that would make the land question a serious issue in the next general election and to provide a programme that would be marked by practicality, by the possibility of implementation in the near future.

To this end he called a preliminary land law reform convention which met at the Hall of Science on Saturday 11 October 1879. The chairman John Galbraith, described as 'a well-known London radical', introduced Bradlaugh who urged that at the coming

1. N.R., 13 July 1879, italics mine.'

2. Mackaskill, op.cit., Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., W.I. Wilks, 'Jesse Collings and the "Back to the Land" Movement', M.A. thesis, Birmingham, 1964; A.J. Peacock, 'Land Reform, 1880-1919, a study of the activities of the English Land Restoration Society and the Land Nationalisation Society', M.A. thesis, Southampton, 1961; Perkin, loc.cit.

election a distinct programme on the land question should be put forward and that

the platform must be a platform of compromise between the various sections of the Radical and Liberal party, each conceding a little so that the change sought might be radical enough to benefit the country and yet not so radical as to be unattainable by legislation¹.

To pursue this aim he suggested an organisation along the lines of the Reform League, and referring to the 'very strong land movement in Ireland'², he hoped a united front with the Irish land agitators might be possible³. Some of the speakers who came after him wanted to know the precise nature of Bradlaugh's intended land reforms⁴. Bradlaugh, wanting to avoid a discussion on this which might only divide those present and prevent any united action, insisted that no precise programme could be dictated at this preliminary meeting. He was successful in moving that an executive committee be charged with the task of getting the feeling of the city and the country on this⁵. A second meeting then decided that a full conference to launch a programme and an organisation to press that programme should be convened in London at an early date⁶. By early December, February 1880 had been fixed on for this conference and liberal and radical associations throughout the country were to be circulated and invited to aid⁷. As the day of the conference drew near

1. N.R., 19 Oct 1879.

2. The Irish Land League had been set up in late 1879, M. Davitt, The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, (London, 1904), p.173.

3. N.R., 19 Oct 1879.

4. No details are given of speakers' names.

5. N.R., 19 Oct 1879; the executive consisted of Bradlaugh, Mottershead, Nieass, Burrows, Darlow, Patrick, Lyon, Carger, Forder and Croucher.

6. N.R., 2 Nov 1879.

7. ibid., 14 Dec 1879.

Bradlaugh urged the co-operation of all who were against the existing land system:

there is now a crisis in the history of land-holding which must end in reform or revolution. It may be possible to delay reform but this will only make the revolution more mischievous when it comes¹.

Bradlaugh's sense of urgency was not misplaced. In Ireland, the policy of boycotting which intensified the land struggle there throughout 1880 was already foreshadowed in a speech of John Dillon's in October 1879²; in England the Richmond Commission had been set up by Disraeli in August 1879 to enquire into depression in agriculture³, and Parliament was to be dissolved and a Liberal administration to replace the Conservative one in March 1880.

At a meeting of the conference organising committee on 17 January 1880 Bradlaugh outlined the programme of land reform which he intended to put to the conference. If elected to Parliament he would press for i) the same law for realty as for personalty in cases of intestacy, the abolition of primogeniture and the limitation of the power of devise; ii) the abolition of the power to entail for non-existing lives; iii) the cheap and easy transfer of land, security to be had through the compulsory registration of all land dealings; iv) the abolition of all preferential rights of landlords over other creditors; v) abolition of the game laws; vi) compulsory cultivation of uncultivated lands capable of being cultivated with profit; vii) security to the tenant for improvements made

1. *ibid.*, 4 Jan 1880.

2. *Nation*, 11 Oct 1879.

3. W.H.B. Court, British Economic History, 1870-1914, commentary and documents, (Cambridge, 1965), p.38.

by him; viii) a re-evaluation of land for a more equitable imposition of the land-tax; ix) the land-tax to be graduated so as to press most heavily on the largest holdings; x) the same land laws to apply to Great Britain and Ireland¹.

The old Chartist, Charles Murray, disagreed with this and instead advocated land nationalisation, while Thomas Mottershead, though agreeing in principle with nationalisation, called for an acceptance of Bradlaugh's programme as the maximum practicable at the time². At the final meeting of the conference committee on Saturday 7 February 1880 Bradlaugh adverted to the fact that he had been attacked for failing to advocate nationalisation. His answer is revealing: he held that

the State should be the only landowner, but it was not alone that which he held (which) should be considered: in dealing with practical politics they should also think what could be carried into practice.

Even as regards the programme of reforms he now put forward and which some had called 'trimming',

there was little chance that any more than one or two of the most moderate items could be carried by any parliament elected on the existing franchise: as to items like compulsory cultivation, forfeiture of un-cultivated lands and the imposition of a graduated land-tax, if these were to be advocated by anyone in the existing Commons, their advocate would stand alone, to be denounced as a revolutionary enthusiast³.

His position now seemed quite clear: land nationalisation was an ideal, but present conditions required realisable suggestions. As to the objection made against his attitude in the past that to create a class of small owners would preclude the possibility of ever obtaining nationalisation,

1. N.R., 25 Jan 1880.

2. ibid.

3. ibid., 15 Feb 1880.

it was an objection he had not answered in the past and did not answer now.

The Land Law Reform Conference opened on 10 February at St James's Hall, with Bradlaugh as chairman¹. The attendance of representatives of radical and liberal bodies from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland was a testimony to the success of the efforts Bradlaugh and the committee had made². Apart from delegates representing a variety of political associations and trade unions³, individuals present included Joseph Arch, Thomas Burt, Randall Cremer, Alexander Mc Donald, Edward Aveling and Michael Davitt.

The first resolution moved by a delegate from the N.A.L.U. and seconded by a representative of the Durham Miners' Association simply proposed 'the formation of a Land Law Reform League for the purpose of advocating a radical reform in the land laws', and was passed unanimously. Exactly how radical such reform was to be quickly became the central issue of the debate and remained so through all three sessions of that day. In summary, three positions emerge. Firstly, there were those who, while holding land nationalisation to be the ideal solution, also believed it to be impractical at the time, and were therefore prepared to support any radical reform or series of reforms that might conceivably be

1. It was widely but briefly reported in the press: Weekly Dispatch, 15 Feb 1880; The Echo, 10, 11 Feb 1880; Evening Standard, 10 Feb 1880; English Labourers' Chronicle, 21 Feb 1880; Glasgow News, 12 Feb 1880.

2. Bradlaugh had personally written over five hundred letters of invitation, N.R., 8 Feb 1880.

3. For a list see Appendix Five.

implemented by the next parliament. This view was put forward by spokesmen of the London Trades Council. Secondly there were some who advocated such reforms as would secure free trade in land and nothing more. Their views were represented in the speeches of the Glasgow Home Rule Association's representative, Ferguson. Finally, there were some who advocated nationalisation outright, without entering into any detail as to how this was to be accomplished. Their views were represented by William Morgan of the Manhood Suffrage League, Charles Murray and Michael Davitt. Davitt's speech was particularly militant, and when he described Parliament as 'an assembly of land sharks and a senate of idle aristocrats' it brought Bradlaugh to his feet in its defence.

For all the divergent views on how radical the programme should be, the Conference agreed on adopting that put forward by Bradlaugh as the programme of the Land Law Reform League. Although the Conference was successful insofar as a wide range of radical opinion was represented, and insofar as Bradlaugh got his own compromise programme adopted, it was a limited success. The response of Liberal associations disappointed Bradlaugh, and press reporting of, and comment on the Conference was meagre. With regard to the Liberal associations, Bradlaugh admitted that he had written repeatedly to the 'Birmingham Federation of Liberal Associations', inviting attendance, and had not received one reply. From Liberal associations in Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire a variety of excuses were given for declining the invitation¹. The

1. N.R., 15 Feb 1880.

Weekly Dispatch which had given advance publicity to the Conference gave an extremely short report of it, devoid of comment¹. The conservative Evening Standard gave a fairly long report, and among other things described the attendance as 'not large, about one hundred and fifty persons being present', but also refrained from comment². The liberal Leeds Mercury and the radical English Labourers' Chronicle gave extremely brief reports, also devoid of comment³. The only papers which noted the Conference in detail were the Echo and the Glasgow News, together with Bradlaugh's own paper. The Echo regarded Bradlaugh's programme as 'formidable' but was happy that it began with 'free trade in land', and that the supporters of nationalisation 'had been voted down'⁴. The Glasgow News singled out Bradlaugh's point concerning compulsory cultivation for most attention, and asked:

if it is made a misdemeanour to hold cultivable lands in an uncultivated state, the question will naturally arise, what is uncultivated or waste land? And what is cultivable land? at what point is the law to step in and declare to a land-owner that he is in possession of cultivable waste land?⁵

The comment caught Bradlaugh at the weakest link in his chain of land reform proposals, and though he was aware of the News's comment he made no reply to it⁶.

The League itself was not formally operating until a meeting on 1 May 1880 at which Bradlaugh was elected president with

1. Weekly Dispatch, 15 Feb 1880.
2. Evening Standard, 10 Feb 1880.
3. Leeds Mercury, 11 Feb, The English Labourers' Chronicle, 21 Feb 1880.
4. Echo, 11 Feb 1880.
5. Glasgow News, 12 Feb 1880.
6. N.R., 22 Feb 1880.

Robert Forder of the N.S.S. as secretary¹. Between then and the end of the year branches were formed and meetings held in widely separated areas of the country².

Despite the variety of his other commitments, among which his fourth election contest for Northampton loomed large, Bradlaugh became extremely active after the foundation conference, and spoke throughout the country in the course of the next year on aspects of the land question, in order to promote recruitment for his Land Law Reform League³.

There was nothing new in what he had to say, but the criticism of his views was searching. In a speech at Sheffield in September 1880 Bradlaugh had warned his audience against the delusion that English labourers, by emigrating to the U.S.A., could support themselves there by small farming and spade husbandry. The Sheffield Daily Telegraph then asked him to explain how 'if a man cannot live by spade husbandry in the best land the New World has to offer, how is he to do it in this country where only the worst land is likely to fall to his share?'⁴. As far as the Telegraph was concerned,

1. N.R., 9 May 1880; the executive had eight members, and none of them were well-known, Forder and Bradlaugh apart. Among the vice-presidents were Arch, Burt, Aveling, Annie Besant, and Gurney of Northampton. P.A. Taylor and Ashton Dilke became vice-presidents shortly afterwards; N.R., 16 May, 20 June 1880.

2. Bradford in late February, Edinburgh in Late March, Liverpool in late April, Sheffield in late July, Brighton in early September, Staleybridge, Plymouth and Devonport in October: N.R., 29 Feb, 14 March, 2 May, 8 Aug, 12 Sept, 17 Oct, 24 Oct 1880.

3. 1 At Wigan on 1 March, Sheffield on 11 Sept, Rotherham on 25 Sept, Liverpool on 18 Sept, Staleybridge on 9 Oct, Brighton on 2 Nov, Eccles on 4 Dec, Darlington on 18 Dec; reported respectively in Wigan Observer, 3 March; Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 13, 14 Sept; Rotherham and Masbro' Advertiser, 2 Oct 1880; N.R., 26 Sept, 17 Oct, 7 Nov, 12, 26 Dec 1880.

4. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 14 Sept 1880, editorial.

the whole issue of the viability of agriculture under a system of peasant proprietorship in an age of giant producers was increasingly being called into question. If Bradlaugh was aware of this he made no reply to it at the time, and indeed, at no stage before 1886 did he advert to it.

As to the Land Law Reform League: in its first year of life individuals and corporate bodies in a variety of areas throughout England became members as a result of the itinerant propaganda of Bradlaugh, Besant and Aveling; thirty thousand copies of its programme were circulated¹, and six separate tracts dealing with the land question were issued². But, the first annual general meeting held on 13 April 1881 does not appear to have been a largely attended event³. Thereafter, until 1885, Bradlaugh's Land Law Reform League became increasingly inactive⁴. It is easy to explain this. From 1880 to 1886 Bradlaugh's struggle with Parliament over the oath question, and the various legal battles this entailed, absorbed the greater part of his time and energy. In addition, as he himself pointed out in January 1885, his movement had been 'temporarily thrown into the shade, first by the Irish land question and next by the agitation for the extension of

1. See above, p.280, n.2.

2. No. 1, 'Property in land', selections from J.S. Mill, compiled by Annie Besant; No. 2, 'Peasant proprietors', also compiled from Mill; No. 3, 'What are the Game Laws?'; No. 4, 'John Bright to the tenant farmers of Great Britain'; No. 5, 'The creation of peasant proprietors in Britain'; No. 6, 'The land tax, what it is and what it ought to be'; the present writer has not been able to locate any surviving copies of any of these, but their existence is referred to in N.R., 10 Oct, 7 Nov 1880.

3. N.R., 24 Apr 1881, gives a very brief report, with no details.

4. No further general meetings appear to have been held at all.

the franchise'¹. Finally, between the time of the foundation of the Land Law Reform League and the year 1886 a number of rival land reform organisations grew up, the extremism of whose views and the dedication of whose organisers overshadowed the L.L.R.L. with its compromise programme and its embattled founder.

Despite this, although the L.L.R.L. went into decline after its first year, Bradlaugh's own interest in the question remained as strong as it had ever been. This interest was to be seen in two areas: in his writings and speeches where he continued to be involved in controversy over the general theoretical issue of land nationalisation versus free trade in land and peasant proprietorship, and in the House of Commons where he not only took an active interest in attempts by others to reform the land law, but where he himself promoted the issue of legislation to compel cultivation of land. An examination of the first area of conflict shows the fundamental moderation of Bradlaugh's views: an examination of the second area shows the well-meaning radical out of his depth, promoting a specific that was itself impractical.

The most important precipitating cause for the radicalisation of English opinion and activity on the land question from the beginning of the 1880s was clearly the revival of agitation on the question in Ireland under the auspices of the militant

1. N.R., 4 Jan 1885.

Land League¹. The creation of that League was itself, however, a response to agricultural depression in both islands: its effects being disastrous in Ireland the response there was correspondingly violent; less severe in its effects in England it nevertheless also helped to bring a new urgency to the issue here, and did this at a time when the strength and confidence of radicalism was growing². Added impetus to the radicalisation of the debate was to come from the publication of Henry George's Progress and Poverty in England in 1881³, but this clearly was secondary: already A.R. Wallace had founded the Land Nationalisation Society in 1880⁴ and

1. The Radical, 4 Dec 1880, 'The English and Irish Land Question', unsigned; 1 Jan 1881, 'Are Landlords Necessary', by W. Webster, in which he remarks, 'the question of land reform has received an extraordinary and all-pervading impulse from the successful action of the National Land League of Ireland'; 10 Oct 1881, 'The Land Movement', editorial in which Frank Soutter observes, 'It is undeniable that the Land Movement in Great Britain, which only began after the passing of the Irish Land Act, has gained in force and volume and that it will shortly culminate in the passing of a similar measure, or measures for England and Scotland'; 22 Apr 1882, editorial 'Radicalism', in which Samuel Bennett claims that 'The Land League alone has really managed to rouse the people, and in the Land War which has begun we see the chance of uniting the people of the whole kingdom in a great democratic uprising'.

2. Perkin, loc.cit., pp. 179, 202-3.

3. H. George, Progress and Poverty: an inquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth. The remedy, (New York, 1880, London, 1881).

4. A.R. Wallace, My Life: a record of opinions and events, 2 vols, (London, 1905), ii.240, says it was founded in 1880, but does not specify the date; it was after the publication of his article, 'How to nationalise the land', in Contemporary Review, vol.38, Nov 1880, pp. 716-736; Mackaskill, op.cit., p.249, gives no date but says it was 'in early 1881'; Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., p.165, gives late 1880 as the time, citing Wallace; Dr G.B. Clark, writing in June 1882 gives the date as March 1881, The Radical, 24 June 1882, and this is confirmed by J. Morrison Davidson, The Annals of Toil, being Labour-History, Roman and British, (London, 1899), p.414, where he gives the precise date 6 March 1881.

Patrick Hennessy had attempted to revive the Land and Labour League in January 1881¹. There followed in June 1882 the formation of the Land Nationalisation League, in 1883 the Land Reform Union, and in 1884 the English Land Restoration League². In working class circles land nationalisation doctrine enjoyed a vogue greater than at any time since 1869-70³.

Bradlaugh's response to such developments is seen most clearly in his reviews of the various publications relating to land which accompanied this revival of interest. To Arthur Arnold's Free Land⁴ he extended a warm welcome, recommending every workman to read it. He particularly welcomed Arnold's statement that 'all landed property must be held subject to the claim of the State and that it is Parliament which has the right from time to time to enforce and interpret that claim'⁵. He concluded that though Arnold himself might find Bradlaugh extreme on the issue of compulsory cultivation there was a

1. The Radical, 8 Jan 1881, Patrick Hennessy to editor, 'How are we to reform the land laws?'

2. The Land Nationalisation League was formed in June 1882 as a breakaway from the Land Nationalisation Society, the cause being the frustration felt by G.B. Clark, W.F. Sabin and others at the inactivity of the original body; The Radical, 24 June 1882. For the English Land Restoration League see Mackaskill, op.cit., pp. 250-251. For the Land Reform Union, the original form of the Restoration League, see Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., pp. 150-152.

3. D. Neville, Under Five Reigns, (New York, 1910), pp. 206-207 for Joseph Chamberlain's observations on the spread of George's and Wallace's doctrines among radical London workers.

4. A. Arnold, Free Land, (1st ed. and 2nd ed. London, 1880).

5. N.R., 21 March 1880, citing Arnold, op.cit., p.188. It should be noted that in reviewing this work Bradlaugh got its title confused, calling it Free Trade in Land, instead of Free Land. It happens that Arnold had already published a tract entitled Free Trade in Land, but that was in 1871, in a series for the Cobden Club.

wide and general agreement between them.

His response to Arnold's work was in sharp contrast to his reception, two years later, of A.R. Wallace's Land Nationalisation: Its Necessity and Aims¹. In a lengthy and detailed review he criticised Wallace for overstating the degree of contemporary poverty, for denying that improvement in well-being had taken place among the artisan class over the previous sixty years, and for failing to see a connection between existing poverty and deficiency in production. Wallace, according to Bradlaugh, had insisted that even the poorest agricultural land produced a surplus over what was required for subsistence². Bradlaugh denied this, citing in support of his denial evidence taken before the Bessborough³ and Richmond⁴ Commissions of Inquiry. As for Wallace's statement that the remedy for poverty was to give 'every labourer freedom to enjoy and cultivate a portion of his native soil', 'surely', Bradlaugh wondered, 'Mr Wallace cannot mean that the whole adult population of this country are individually to be turned into agricultural labourers or that it would be wise to make the attempt'⁵. Returning to the critique of Wallace in a second notice of his work in July 1882, Bradlaugh took him to task for his concept of 'occupying ownership'⁶, for it seemed to involve 'the very private property which he (Wallace)

1. A.R. Wallace, Land Nationalisation, its necessity and aims, (1st ed., London, 1882).

2. N.R., 11 June 1882. Wallace never said this at all, anywhere in this work.

3. Report of H.M. Commissioners of Inquiry into the working of the Landlord & Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the Act amending the same, Parl. Papers 1881, xviii, p.xix.

4. Royal Commission on the Depressed State of the Agriculture Interests, 1880-1882, Cd. 2778, Cd. 3096, Cd. 3309, Parl. Papers 1881, xv, xvi, & 1882, xiv.

5. N.R., 11 June 1882; Wallace, in fact, denied this, and at some length, Wallace, op.cit., p.220.

6. Wallace, op.cit., p.192.

proposes to completely abolish'¹. Wallace's attack on the idea of 'free trade in land' was something Bradlaugh did not like, especially as he found Wallace elsewhere advocating 'an occupying ownership freely saleable or otherwise transferable'. In short, he found that Wallace's work contained serious contradictions. It is not the fact that he found Wallace contradictory, however, but the fact that he devoted so much space to exposing the contradictions, that appears significant.

Worthy of note in this connection is the surprising fact that Bradlaugh never once between 1881 and 1882, nor indeed thereafter adverted directly to Henry George's Progress and Poverty in any detail, nor at any time at all to George's lectures in his first English tour in 1881. In attacking Wallace, and thereby the Land Nationalisation Society, Bradlaugh was attacking a man who favoured compensation to landlords in the event of nationalisation, and a society that was not so extreme as its name suggests². In virtually ignoring Henry George he ignored one of the most influential publicists on the land question in the late nineteenth century - and one who, in dismissing Malthus was dismissing one of the central sources of Bradlaugh's social and economic beliefs³. He never once adverted to the doctrine of the

1. N.R., 30 July 1882.

2. Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., p.167.

3. While Bradlaugh never reviewed Progress and Poverty, and never commented on George's lectures, a contributor to the National Reformer, one J.H. Levy, wrote a long and sharply critical account of one of George's lectures in London in September 1882. Furthermore, a month later, in reply to a correspondent, Bradlaugh declared that Levy's views and his own on political economy 'generally' coincided. Nevertheless, this is hardly sufficient evidence to indicate Bradlaugh's opinion of George's views.

single tax, but it is clear that he refused to regard any single land reform or combination or reforms as a panacea. In 1885, for example, in reviewing Edward White's Land Reform and Emigration, he declared:

we have for more than a quarter of a century advocated radical land law reform; we still advocate it, but unless prudential restraint be also taught, neither land reform nor emigration will suffice¹.

He left the attack on Henry George to others. Alarmed at George's popularity and the danger to vested interests inherent in his views, a group of conservative individuals, including W.H. Mallock, and Baron Bramwell, set up the Liberty and Property Defence League in the summer of 1882². Among the anti-Georgeite tracts the League published was one written by Bramwell, entitled Nationalisation of Land³. Bradlaugh reviewed this in February 1884 and found that the objections to Progress and Poverty raised by Bramwell 'seem to us fatal to the theory of land nationalisation propounded by Mr George'⁴. Bradlaugh's position was a matter of regret to Stewart Headlam, one of George's earliest and most earnest disciples⁵. In April 1885 in his paper the Church Reformer, Headlam deplored the fact that

now that the Land Restoration movement is claiming its position in Radical politics Mr Bradlaugh's great power as a Radical leader should be devoted to such comparatively inadequate measures as are advocated by the Land Law Reform League⁶.

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1. N.R., 25 Jan 1885; reviewing E. White, Land Reform and Emigration, the two remedies for overcrowding, (London, 1884). White was minister of St Paul's Chapel, Hawley Road, London.
 2. N. Soldon, loc.cit., p.208.
 3. G.W.W. Bramwell, Nationalisation of Land: a review of Mr Henry George's 'Progress and Poverty', (1st ed., London, 1884). It ran to a second edition in 1885 and a third in 1892.
 4. N.R., 17 Feb 1884.
 5. Founder of the Guild of St Matthew and leading member of the Land Reform Union: F. Bettany, Stewart Headlam, (London, 1926), P. d'A. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival, (Princeton, 1968).
 6. N.R., 26 Apr 1885, citing the Church Reformer, n.d.

He asked Bradlaugh to state to whom the land belonged.

Bradlaugh in reply declared

it belongs to those who own it, subject to the right of Parliament to limit the holding whenever the circumstances attending that holding conflict with the general well-being¹.

It was a short reply, but he had promised Headlam that he would deal more closely with the matter in his forthcoming tract, The Radical Programme. First appearing in the National Reformer in instalments between April and May, the Radical Programme in regard to the issue of land put forward a platform almost identical to that put to the land law reform conference in 1880². The only difference was that two items were now dropped, viz., abolition of the game laws, and his call that there be the same land law for Britain and Ireland. He did not, as promised, deal at length with the land question in this latest production, though he went into some detail on the proposal for a graduated land tax³.

He envisaged the graduated land tax as the instrument for the breaking up of the great estates, thereby forcing large quantities of land onto the market, as the 'free trade in land' school had always wanted. There was also a little more detail on his proposals for compulsory cultivation. Any landed proprietor holding in a waste or uncultivated state land cultivable with profit should, he proposed, be subject to expropriation by the local authority, but the proprietor so

1. *ibid.*

2. C. Bradlaugh, The Radical Programme, (1st ed., London, 1885, 2nd ed., 1889).

3. *ibid.*, 2nd ed., pp. 9-10: 'Supposing a normal 1/- per acre land-tax, over 5,000 acres each acre would be 2/-; over 10,000 acres each acre would be 4/- per acre; over 20,000 each acre would be 8/- per acre', and so on.

dispossessed should be paid in land bonds a sum equal to the capitalised agricultural value of that land. As for the land so obtained, it could be sold in 'comparatively small holdings', or, 'what would be far preferable', retained as municipal lands and let to occupying cultivators on terms of tenancy extended according to the improvements made'¹.

Thus The Radical Programme, although not containing a lengthy exposition of his views on land, showed in regard to land tax and compulsory cultivation a concern for more detail than had been the case any time previously. Nevertheless, for one who had rejected schemes of nationalisation on the grounds of their impracticability, since there was no hope that any parliament of the time would sanction them, Bradlaugh was surprisingly optimistic in believing that any parliament of that same time would ever consent to compulsory cultivation with expropriation in default, or to a severe graduated land tax.

It may be wrong to take his proposals on land reform out of context of the full 'Radical Programme': he also saw that a reform of the Lords, to make it an elective chamber, was essential to the success of his land reform and other reform proposals. Yet, recognising this, he was to press for land reform rather than Lords' reform and the result was to be seen in the fate of such proposals as Bradlaugh did introduce to parliament once the struggle over the oath had been resolved in his favour.

1. The Radical Programme, 2nd ed., p.10.

It is surprising, in addition, that of the two issues to which some detailed attention was devoted in The Radical Programme, he was to give priority to compulsory cultivation rather than to the graduated land tax. Even from within his own camp of radical secularists of the N.S.S., his proposal for compulsory cultivation came in for criticism. The most devoted and by far the ablest of his followers, John Mackinnon Robertson, described the compulsory cultivation proposal as 'a question of detail', and pointed out:

it is not clear how we are to settle precisely what land is to be considered cultivable with profit or where the line is to be drawn fixing the amount of pleasure-ground that a man may reasonably hold.

He suggested that:

the course at once most logical and most expedient would be simply to tax uncultivated land at a higher rate than cultivated; and to make the tax cumulative in the one case as in the other. The tax would operate in the two cases to prevent large holdings¹.

Robertson concluded that 'such taxation will be hard enough to carry without attempting the task of passing a law of absolute confiscation'.

Despite Headlam's regrets and Robertson's serious objections Bradlaugh determined to press ahead with the specific of compulsory cultivation. On 22 January 1886 he obtained leave in the House of Commons to bring in a Bill to Promote the Better Cultivation of the Land².

1. N.R., 14 June 1885.

2. Journals of the House of Commons, vol.141, p.19, 22 Jan 1886.

vi. Bradlaugh and the Land Question in Parliament

Bradlaugh moved for the second reading of his bill on compulsory cultivation in April 1886, despite the fact that he himself was not satisfied with it as it 'did not go far enough'¹. Basing himself on Maxse's famous article in the Fortnightly Review², and on the Royal Commission on Depression in Agriculture³, Bradlaugh estimated that there were ten million acres of profitable land which could be returned to cultivation in the United Kingdom and which 'would provide possible remunerative employment for the whole of the unemployed in this country'⁴. As for those like Lloyd of Wednesbury who argued against him that land was forced out of cultivation by low prices⁵ he replied that such land was now not profitable because it had to support three classes, the landlords, the farmers and the labourers. If it had to support only those who produced from it then it would be profitable⁶. After this short speech, Henry Broadhurst in an even shorter one asked Bradlaugh to withdraw the bill in view of his own admission that it was unsatisfactory⁷. With characteristic impishness Labouchere also urged its withdrawal, but only because it was too mild; he advised Bradlaugh to bring in a bill, later on, in more drastic form, 'including in its

1. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol.304, 14 Apr 1886, c.1583.

2. F. Maxse, loc.cit., pp. 198-215.

3. See below

4. Hansard, 3rd series, vol.304, 14 Apr 1886, c.1584.

5. *ibid.*, c.1595.

6. *ibid.*, cc.1591-1592.

7. *ibid.*, c.1598.

provisions urban as well as agricultural land'¹.

Only one member urged Bradlaugh to persist - Joseph Arch², but Bradlaugh, in face of friendly advice as well as hostile, agreed on withdrawal³. A year later he returned to the issue and attempted to get the House to adopt a resolution in favour of the principle of compulsory cultivation⁴. Once again charges of vagueness were made that Bradlaugh was either unwilling or unable to answer. One of those who made such charges was Henry Chaplin of Lincolnshire who wanted to know

on what grounds the Hon. Member was going to dictate to persons whose capital was invested in land unless he intended to apply the same principle to those whose capital was invested in trades and manufactures⁵.

Bradlaugh had already answered that question to his own satisfaction in the debate on his bill in the previous year, when he cited J.S. Mill on the unique nature of land and on the right of the community to legislate uniquely for it⁶.

It was the kind of answer that little satisfied the conservatives in the House. Much more searching was the criticism levelled at Bradlaugh's resolution by Walter Long, then secretary of the Local Government Board. He insisted that Bradlaugh's proposals

1. *ibid.*, c.1601.

2. *ibid.*, c.1603.

3. *ibid.*, cc.1611-1612.

4. *Hansard*, vol.316, 1 July 1887, cc.1501-1509. The full text of the resolution he proposed was: 'That, in the opinion of this House, ownership of land should carry with it the duty of cultivation, and that in all cases where land capable of being cultivated with profit and not devoted to some purpose of public utility or enjoyment, is held in a waste or uncultivated state, the local authorities ought to have the power to compulsorily acquire such land by payment to the owner for a limited term of an annual sum not exceeding the then average net annual produce of the said lands, in order that such local authorities may in their discretion let the said lands to tenant cultivators, with such conditions as to term of tenancy, rent, reclamation, drainage and cultivation respectively as shall afford reasonable encouragement, opportunities, facilities and security for the due cultivation and development of the said land'.

5. *ibid.*, c.1514.

6. *ibid.*, vol.304, 14 Apr 1886, c.1590.

on compulsory purchase of uncultivated or waste land would leave the owners in occupation of good land while 'their bad land shall be taken from them and handed over to an unfortunate class of people'. In Long's opinion Bradlaugh's proposal turned out, in one way, to be 'very favourable to the landlord'. Even so, he too found it 'too vague' and would therefore reject it¹.

One of the most telling flaws in Bradlaugh's arguments on this occasion went unnoticed. In concluding his speech moving the resolution, he declared:

The Land Question of this country would be the battle question of this country. It might be made a peaceful battle-ground if Gentlemen of large property on both sides of the House would understand that by small concessions they might grow richer as well as enrich the poor; and if they made none the crash would come which the wisest would be unable to prevent and which would carry ruin on all sides².

As a general proposition this might be true, but it is hard to see in what way they could grow richer if they allowed themselves to be subject to compulsory purchase orders on uncultivated lands. Given the composition of the House in 1887, and the vagueness of Bradlaugh's proposal, the division which recorded almost a two to one decision against his resolution requires no comment. Sir Richard Temple who was present during the debates in April 1886 and in July 1887, and who was very partial to and impressed by Bradlaugh, remarked of the latter on the occasion of the resolution:

he generally understands exactly what he is talking about. In this latter respect his reputation will have suffered considerably, however, by his performance last night by the criticism which immediately followed

1. *ibid.*, vol.316, 1 July 1887, c.1521.

2. *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.316, 1 July 1887, c.1507.

from various parts of the House, they (Bradlaugh's proposals) were torn to shreds, and the proposer was abundantly shown to know little, if anything, about landed affairs, however well acquainted he may be with other parts of the national life¹.

Bradlaugh, however, persisted, and almost a year later again, he introduced a resolution in almost identical terms². On this occasion there wasn't even a quorum in the House and the proceedings came to naught. With three years of his life left, Bradlaugh never returned to the question of compulsory cultivation in particular, nor to the land question in general.

vii. Conclusion

To compare the condition of things in respect of the land question at the beginning of Bradlaugh's public career with that which obtained at its end is to provide the framework within which to judge Bradlaugh's contribution and assess his achievement. At its beginning, in the late 1850's, debate on land was muted, land reform organisations did not exist, and the land system was not threatened by significant legislative change. At its end, in the late 1880's, debate was fervent and constant, organisations existed representing a wide variety of opinions and programmes on land, but while the system was being openly challenged, outside of Ireland

1. R.C. Temple, Letters and character sketches from the House of Commons, (London, 1912), p.390.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol.325, 1 May 1888, cc.1081-1084. The only change was that in compulsory purchase local authorities would pay compensation not on the basis of the average net value of the annual produce of the land, as indicated in his resolution of 1887, but on the basis of a sum representing the capital agricultural value of such lands.

legislative change was hardly significant¹.

To the quickening of that debate Bradlaugh made a positive contribution. In his National Reformer, from its earliest days, he provided an open forum in which debate was constant. In terms of extreme radical politics and the land question this contribution must not be understated: apart from Reynolds's Newspaper Bradlaugh's was the only radical periodical of the metropolis, ever open to the most extreme views, which had an unbroken run in the period 1860-1890.

That debate began to quicken in 1869, and it was in 1869 that he himself called for a land league. While that call went unheeded and did not result in any organisation founded

1. There was no shortage of legislation on land in this period, 1850 to 1890, but none of the enactments changed the fundamental nature of the landed system. Compensation for improvements made by outgoing tenants was, for example, made possible by the Agricultural Holdings Act of 1875, 38 & 39 Vict., c.92, but it was optional until amended by an act of the same name in 1883, 46 & 47 Vict., c.61: Sir William Holdsworth, A History of English Law, vol.xv, (London, 1966), p.180; Wilks, op.cit., p.22; Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., p.86. Attempts to provide allotments for labourers through legislation, were made in the Allotments Extension Acts of 1882, 45 & 46 Vict., c.80, and 1887, 51 & 52 Vict., c.48, and in the Small Holdings Act of 1892, but all proved disappointments: Wilks, op.cit., p.123, Ping Ti-Ho, op.cit., pp. 109,118.

Compulsory registration of deeds and titles had been strongly recommended by the Real Property Commissioners as early as 1830, but Lord Westbury's Acts of 1862, 25 & 26 Vict., c.42 & c.53, Lord Cairn's Act of 1875, 38 & 39 Vict., c.87, and the Land Transfer Act of 1887, 60 & 61 Vict., c.65 all failed to provide a system of compulsory registration on a nation-wide basis: Holdsworth, op.cit., pp. 184-188.

The only really radical legislation was the Settled Land Act of 1882, 45 & 46 Vict., c.38, but despite it, entails were not completely abolished and have not been yet: A.W.B. Simpson, An Introduction to the history of the land law (3rd ed., Oxford, 1967), pp. 259-260.

No better comment has been made on the subject than that by Dicey, in his famous article of 1905: 'the constitution of England has, whilst preserving monarchical forms, become a democracy, but the land law of England remains the land law appropriate to an aristocratic State', A.V. Dicey, 'The Paradox of the Land Law', in Law Quarterly Review, xxi, 1905, pp. 221.232, cited in Holdsworth, op.cit., xv.192.

and controlled by Bradlaugh, it has been shown that it was as much his encouragement as anyone else's that led to the foundation of the Land and Labour League. Eleven years later, after the intensity of debate had slackened temporarily and after the Land and Labour League and the Land Tenure Reform Association had decayed, Bradlaugh was the first man in England to call together a land conference and to set up once more an organisation to promote a reformed land system.

His positive contribution and achievement thus stated, it is necessary to state its limits. Most obviously, the Land Law Reform League had a short and uneventful life, and its influence cannot have been significant. It has been seen that his exhausting struggle with parliament limited its chances of growth. But those chances were limited much more profoundly by the very position of moderation and compromise which it sought to adopt and which Bradlaugh himself had wished it to adopt. When doctrines and schemes of nationalisation attracted working class radicals and socialists the appeal of the Land Law Reform League to that particular audience was inevitably limited. When more modest schemes such as that of allotments for labourers had Jesse Collings and his movement to attract the rural worker, the Land Law Reform League's appeal to that sector was correspondingly lessened.

On the matter of significant legislative change, Bradlaugh never lived to see any of the reforms he promoted enacted. Primogeniture and entails survived into this century. Compulsory registration of title did not take place. The game laws were tampered with rather than abolished. The

graduated land tax was still a radical dream after Bradlaugh was dead and buried. A peasant proprietorship was never realised, except, oddly enough, in Ireland where militant agitation and Conservative legislation combined to achieve the nearly impossible¹. And for all Bradlaugh's persistence, compulsory cultivation died of inertia². To describe Bradlaugh's contribution to breaking the monopoly in land, to ensuring cultivation of wastes, and to promoting peasant proprietorship requires but one word, failure.

It would be, however, an oversimplification to leave the assessment at this, for the argument is not simply that Bradlaugh had a clear cut, logical objective, with a programme suited to achieve it, and failed. It is, rather, that on the land question Bradlaugh was confused.

He wanted the breaking up of the great estates: on that much only was he clear. What he wanted after that and how it could best be achieved is unclear and contradictory. In October 1869 he advocated land nationalisation³. In November 1870 he had abandoned it⁴. In a controversy with Herbert Burrows in 1886 he denied he had ever advocated it until Burrows quoted Bradlaugh's own speeches as reported in the National Reformer itself⁵. He desired the State to be the

1. Legislation making possible peasant land purchase in Ireland began with the Ashbourne Act in 1885 and ended with the Wyndham Act in 1903, see J.E. Pomfret, The Struggle for land in Ireland, 1800-1923, (Princeton, 1930).

2. As early as May 1886 Bradlaugh was complaining that 'on the land cultivation question the branches of the N.S.S. did very little', and only 25 petitions containing 1,895 signatures in favour of his bill could be got up, N.R., 2 May 1886.

3. See above, p.260.

4. See above, p.265.

5. Ipswich Free Press, 24 Apr 1886, N.R., 9 May 1886, 31 Oct, 7 Nov 1869.

only proprietor of land, with its occupants as State tenants. He also wanted to promote peasant proprietorship. He dismissed John Weston's scheme of cultivating waste lands as a remedy for unemployment as impracticable and ineffective. Yet he pursued this matter himself with a persistence worthy of a great cause. While he worked out in some detail, with studious citation of sources, the extent of uncultivated waste lands in Britain and Ireland, he had to admit the difficulty of proving it was potentially profitable land¹. He never worked out the economics of compulsory cultivation though private correspondents directed his attention to this², and he never answered the criticism of the editor of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph in this regard. In terms of the economics of the land question his most surprising omission was his failure to consider the trend in prices of agricultural produce in the period 1870 to 1890. Bad harvests, falling prices, and competition from the giant overseas producers augured ill for any peasant proprietary that might have been created in England. In the Commons he had insisted that waste lands could be made to yield a surplus if they had only to support the producers and not three classes, yet this could only be proven by practice. He himself had argued against Wallace that the poorest agricultural land could not produce a surplus but there was no way of guaranteeing that land compulsorily purchased would be anything other than the poorest. Through Drysdale, Mill and Arnold he accepted the doctrine of 'free

1. C. Bradlaugh, Compulsory Cultivation of Land: what it means and why it ought to be enforced, (1st ed., London, 1887), p.12.

2. Bradlaugh Collection, John Middlemass, Peebles, to Bradlaugh, 2 July 1887, James Long, Hendon, to Bradlaugh, 2 July 1887.

trade in land' and promoted it himself by placing abolition of primogeniture and entail at the head of his various programmes, yet he never considered in depth the probability that free trade in land would more likely lead to a new landlordism than to a peasant proprietary: the experience of Ireland under the Encumbered Estates legislation of 1849 provided a classic confirmation of this.

Finally, in respect of tactics and strategy there is something inexplicable in his decision to concentrate on compulsory cultivation rather than reform of the Lords, despite his own admission that the former would have little hope of getting through a parliament in which one chamber at least was totally dominated by great landowners.

In making this assessment and in adverting to his uncritical acceptance of J.S. Mill, it must also be said that it was no detraction from his ability to have accepted a doctrine that more prominent figures of his own time, like Henry Fawcett, also accepted. And if Bradlaugh, in his particular contribution to the land question, failed to achieve significant change, his failure was only part of a much more general failure of radicalism on that question. That general failure was due to a complex interaction of causes. For one thing, the onset of severe agricultural depression in Britain from the mid-1870s changed the nature of the question and made the by then traditional terms of debate irrelevant. Secondly, if the land question in Ireland was a major cause of the revived and intensified attack on the land system in England from 1880, it was also the Irish question - in the form of Home Rule six

years later - that doomed all radical hopes of a signal victory in the struggle. Furthermore, that hostility to the landed aristocracy which came so easily to middle class radicals in the period 1840-70, was no longer so simple or straightforward: a profoundly important shift of middle class business interests over to Conservatism and the side of the traditional elite was already occurring at this time : indeed this shift was hastened by an alarmed response to the trend of events in Ireland as affecting the rights of property¹. Thirdly, whatever hopes the remaining middle class radicals, after 1886, had of recruiting working class support for a concerted and persistent attack on the land, were rendered increasingly remote and unreal by the growing strength of trade unionism and of socialism from that time: the one, preoccupied with getting its workers to achieve as much gain as possible from the industrial estate; the other preoccupied with persuading workers to look upon that estate and its wealth as a greater, more relevant enemy than the traditional landed estate had ever been.

Finally, no attempt at a systematic study of Bradlaugh's concern with the land should be taken out of the general context of his humanist outlook and concern for the welfare and dignity of his fellows. To one whose supreme teacher was Malthus, and who saw in birth-control the great agency of social salvation, the land question was not one to be considered in isolation. Following Mill, one of the great virtues he saw in peasant proprietorship was its possibilities as a social

1. Perkin, loc.cit., pp. 207 ff.

system conducive to population control. The example of France was no more lost on him than it was on Mill. Confused and inconsistent at times Bradlaugh certainly was, on the land question; but, he was neither political philosopher nor professional economist; rather, an extremely active politician and journalist whose personal circumstances and devotion to diverse causes left little time for the luxury of consistent or creative thought.

CHAPTER FIVE: Bradlaugh and Northampton

The cause of atheism brought Bradlaugh to Northampton for the first time in January 1859¹. Had his parliamentary ambition in the town, however, had to rely on Northampton atheists for its realisation he would never have come near to being a member of parliament. Although there was a secularist presence in Northampton from 1846 at least, organised secularism had a chequered and by no means triumphant history there. The local secular society had a spasmodic existence and was greatly dependant for vitality on irregular visits from nationally known atheists². Local atheists were few in number and Northampton had a reputation as 'the most puritan town in England'³.

How many nonconformists there were in Northampton, or what proportion they bore to its total population at any time between 1851 and 1891 it is not possible to say. Nevertheless, the official religious census of 1851, and the unofficial census carried out by certain provincial newspapers in 1881 as later summarised by The Nonconformist and Independent, provide a useful view of the relative strengths of nonconformity and the established church at the time of Bradlaugh's association with the town.

Throughout the period 1851 to 1881 nonconformist attendance at worship and nonconformist provision for worship were numerically

1. Reasoner, 30 Jan 1859; the date given by Bradlaugh was the autumn of 1857: C. Bradlaugh, Autobiography of Charles Bradlaugh, (London, 1873), p.9, and A.S. Headingley, The Biography of Charles Bradlaugh, (London, 1880), p.89; it was probably a lapse of memory on his part; his daughter could find no proof of his having been there in 1857 and his most recent biographer follows her in this; H.B. Bonner, op.cit., i.72, 74, 87; D. Tribe, op.cit., p.62.

2. See above Chapters One and Two.

3. A.P. White, The Story of Northampton, (Northampton, 1914), p.115.

greater than the Church of England's. In this thirty-year period when the population rose by 115%, established church accommodation rose by only 22%, non established church accommodation by 80.9%¹. In the case of attendances at worship, however, the situation is different, for those of the established church rose by 87%, those of the others by only 40%².

If much reliance may be placed on these censuses, and especially on that of 1881, it was the Nonconformists rather than the Anglicans whose incidence of public worship was at a significantly declining rate against the overall population of the town. Despite this, it is important to stress that in 1881 as much as in 1851 Nonconformists were more numerous in attendance at worship and still provided more sittings. To that extent Northampton's puritan reputation is upheld, but to that extent only, as will shortly be seen.

As to the nature of that Nonconformity itself, Northampton was a town where 'old dissent' was considerably stronger than the new: with regard to numbers of chapels, numbers of sittings and numbers of attendants in 1851 Baptists and Independents combined far surpassed the various branches of Methodism³. In detail, the strongest group was the Particular Baptists, and then the Independents. Next came the Wesleyans who constituted the majority of Methodists, the Primitives being comparatively weak and the New Connexion non-existent.

1. Appendix 6, pp. 669-670, The Structure of Religion in Northampton.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

In 1881 this situation had not changed: Baptists still had the largest number of sittings and attendances, still followed by Independents, Wesleyans and Primitives¹. Since 1851, the population having increased by 115% Baptist sittings rose by only 50%, Independents' by only 35%, Wesleyans' by 50% and the Primitives by 350%. Of the smaller bodies the Quakers' remained static, the Unitarian sittings rose by 20% and the Roman Catholics by 85%. The Primitives were therefore the only religious group whose sittings and attendances rose at a rate greater than that of the population in general, but their numbers were so small that this growth did not alter the balance of religious forces in the town.

Though Nonconformity appears to have been stronger than Anglicanism their combined forces were weaker than sheer indifference to religion. 'Look at the figures whichever way you will, there still remains the fact that the larger half of the population go to no place of worship', commented the Guardian². How true that comment was is indicated by the fact that on the first Sunday in November 1881 only 26% of Northampton's population went to public worship³.

By such a criterion Christianity appeared to be a declining force in Northampton. The town's experience in this was not unique, however, but merely a local version of what was occurring nationally⁴. Soaring population growth was but one of many

1. ibid.

2. Northampton Guardian, Nov 1881, cited by The Nonconformist and Independent, 2 Feb 1882.

3. This was below the average for separate worshippers for all the places surveyed in 1881, which was estimated at 29.2% by The Nonconformist and Independent, 2 Feb 1882. See also Appendix Six.

4. For the national situation see, inter alia, K.S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England, (London, 1963), S. Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement, (London, 1967), J.D. Gay, The Geography of Religion in England, (London, 1971), A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914, (London, 1976).

factors contributing to the problems of church and chapel nationally. It was a factor which applied with equal force to this local situation. For most of the nineteenth century the population of Northampton grew at a prodigious rate:

Table I : Population of Northampton

1801	_____		
1811	8,427 (1)	1861	32,813 (6)
1821	10,793 (2)	1871	45,080 (7)
1831	15,351 (3)	1881	57,544 (8)
1841	21,242 (4)	1891	70,872 (9)
1851	26,657 (5)	1901	76,070 (10)

The percentage decennial increases were:

1811-21	28.7%	1851-61	23%
1821-31	42.2%	1861-71	37.3%
1831-41	38.3%	1871-81	27.6%
1841-51	25.4%	1881-91	23.3%
		1891-1901	7.3%

To a remarkable extent this constantly rising population depended on shoemaking for its livelihood. This was as true in the earlier as it was in the later part of the century.

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1. P.P., 1812, 316 & 317, Census of Great Britain, Enumeration Abstract 1812, p.230.
 2. Accounts & Papers, 1822, xv, 502, Enumeration Abstract 1821, p.230.
 3. ibid., 1833, xxxvi, 149, Enumeration Abstract 1831, p.440.
 4. Reports from Commissioners, 1843, xxii, 496, Enumeration Abstract 1841, p.210.
 5. Accounts & Papers, 1852-3, lxxxiii, 962, Return of the population of each county, division of a county, city and borough in Great Britain etc., p.8.
 6. ibid., 1866, lvii, 259, Returns showing the population of counties and parliamentary divisions and of parliamentary cities and boroughs in the United Kingdom etc., p.7.
 7. ibid., 1877, lxviii, 432, Return relating to parliamentary constituencies etc., p.8.
 8. ibid., 1883, liv, 321, Return of electoral statistics in county and borough constituencies in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland p.13.
 9. ibid., 1893-4, civ, Census of England and Wales, 1891, Cd.6948, p.260.
 10. ibid., 1902, cxx, Census of England and Wales, 1901, Cd.1359, p.5.

No other occupation came remotely near to employing as many:

Table 2 : Principal Occupations in Northampton

	1841 ⁽¹⁾	1891 ⁽²⁾
Boot & Shoemakers	2,609	13,138
Domestic Servants	1,210	2,325
General Labourers	384	595
Tailors	226	411
Carpenters	191	409
Butchers	108	257
Bakers	104	208
Bricklayers	66	285

Where the numbers in a majority of other trades and occupations doubled in these fifty years the number of shoemakers increased five-fold.

While the population rose steadily throughout the century the number of electors on the register, at least until 1872, far from following suit, fluctuated:

Table 3 : Number of Electors on Northampton Registers³

1832-3	2,497	1862-3	2,690	1877	7,621
1835	2,178	1865	2,857	1878	7,830
1836	2,079	1866	2,857	1880	8,189
1837	2,103	1868	6,619	1883	8,711
1847	2,390	1869	6,621	1885-6	9,582
1848	1,771	1872	6,482	1888	9,945
1849	1,819	1873	6,472	1892	11,180
1852-3	2,263	1874	6,829	1894	11,233
1859	2,526	1875	7,063	1895	11,442
1860	2,338	1876	7,258		

1. Reports from Commissioners, 1844, xxvii, 587, Occupation Abstract 1841, pp. 135-6.

2. Accounts & Papers, 1893-4, cvi, Census of England & Wales, 1891, Cd. 7058, pp. 115-122.

3. The precise sources for the twenty-nine separate figures given in Table 3 are too numerous to cite here but appear in Appendix 7, Sources for the Number of Electors on Northampton Registers, pp 671-672.

As with all boroughs the greatest increase was caused by the Representation of the People Act, 1867, which almost tripled Northampton's electorate. But even before this extension of the franchise Northampton was remarkable for the number of its artisan voters. In 1866 there were eighty nine boroughs in England and Wales where working class voters constituted more than twenty five per cent of the electorate. Of these Northampton came eleventh with 1,249 out of 2,620 voters, or 47.7% of its electorate being working class¹. Although the town had a large working class electorate, one thing it had not got was a labour movement. It was largely a one-industry town with a small master economy: of its heads of households in 1851 some 43% were semi-skilled workers, 26% were small masters, shopkeepers and clerks, and a mere 11% were skilled craftsmen². That one industry was largely unmechanised for the greater part of the century: not till the 1850s did labour saving machinery begin to make a slight impact, and it was not till the 1880s that it began to run on the lines of modern factory

1. Accounts & Papers, 1866, lvii, 170, Return of the several parliamentary cities and boroughs in England and Wales, arranged in order to the proportion of electors belonging to the working classes on the register etc., p.2. The first twelve of the eighty-nine constituencies which had 25% or more working class voters were:-

Coventry	:	electorate with	69.8%	of working class voters;
Stafford	:	" " "	57.7%	" " " " ;
Maldon	:	" " "	55.8%	" " " " ;
Newcastle-under-Lyme:	"	" " "	54.7%	" " " " ;
Pembroke	:	" " "	54.2%	" " " " ;
Beverley	:	" " "	53.4%	" " " " ;
Greenwich	:	" " "	52.7%	" " " " ;
St. Ives	:	" " "	51.0%	" " " " ;
Southampton	:	" " "	49.7%	" " " " ;
Devonport	:	" " "	49.5%	" " " " ;
Northampton	:	" " "	47.7%	" " " " ;
Southwark	:	" " "	47.4%	" " " " ;

2. J. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, (London, 1974), p.76.

production¹. Until that time labour costs were held down by drawing from a large pool of surplus labour from the countryside and by the extensive employment of women and children from the 1850s². Hostile to the Anglican clergy who dominated the countryside of their birth, this large force of rural immigrant labour readily shared the outlook of the Nonconformist employers. In such a situation no vigorous labour movement was to be expected and before the 1880s none materialised. Insofar as the town had a reputation for radicalism³ - a reputation that has never been analysed in depth - it was a radicalism of a negative, narrowly political kind: anti-Conservative and anti-aristocratic, not given to expounding principle, and not so much concerned with the possible use, as with the simple acquisition, of power. Such a judgement may in itself appear unduly harsh and negative: that there were Chartists in Northampton, for example, cannot be doubted⁴, but how vigorous or influential Northampton Chartism was has been disputed⁵. That a man like Joseph Gurney whose anti-religious views were well-known yet shared by not much more than a score of Northampton folk, could nonetheless be successful in the town's municipal

1. A. Adcock, The Northampton Shoe, (Northampton, 1931) pp. 41-3.

2. Foster, *op.cit.*, pp.85-6.

3. Truth, 1 Apr 1880, in which Henry Labouchere claimed that 'the mildest Liberal in Northampton would be termed a Radical elsewhere'; cited by Tribe, *op.cit.*, p.105.

4. The People, vol.i, no.42, (n.d.), 1849; R. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854, (Newcastle, 1894), pp.36-8, 97, 117, 256-8.

5. J.O. Foster, 'Capitalism and Class Consciousness in early nineteenth century Oldham', Cambridge Ph.D., 1967, pp.9-10, argues that although Northampton's primary poverty was high its class consciousness was not developed and Chartism was not strong there. In a paper to the Ruskin College History Workshop, October 1969, entitled 'The Class Struggle in Northampton', Martin Turner has argued that it was strong. The argument cannot be resolved until more specialised work on the subject has been undertaken; nevertheless, judging by the history of radicalism in Northampton in the forty years after 1850, as will emerge in this present chapter, Foster's assessment would appear to merit greater acceptance than Turner's.

elections in 1858¹ and be elected mayor in 1875² and 1879³ may seem to justify that radical reputation, but it is possible that his success was achieved despite, rather than because of his views on religion. It is not amiss therefore to consider politics and radicalism in the borough before 1868 when Bradlaugh first stood there as a candidate for parliament.

As early as 1845 one commentator on Northampton politics observed with regret that although the majority of the electors were Nonconformist they were content to return as parliamentary representatives men who were members of the Church of England⁴. This was to remain the case until 1880 when Henry Labouchere whose religious faith was purely nominal and Charles Bradlaugh whose faith was non-existent were both returned. Behind the election of Bradlaugh lay almost twenty years of dissension in Northampton advanced politics, between Whig and Whig-Liberal elements growing all that time weaker and the Radical element growing all the time stronger.

In 1845 politics in the town were described as being 'subservient to the Whig ascendancy'⁵. Given that the borough had been represented by two Whigs, Raikes Currie⁶ and Vernon Smith⁷, without a break since 1831, it was a fair comment. Vernon Smith continued to represent the borough until his elevation to the peerage as Lord Lyveden in 1859. He was then replaced by

1. The Reasoner, 14 Nov 1858.

2. N.R., 14 Nov 1875.

3. Northampton Mercury, 15 Nov 1879, hereafter cited as N.M.

4. The Citizen, 1 Apr 1845.

5. ibid., 1 Sept 1845.

6. Raikes Currie (1801-1881), London banker and insurance company director, Liberal M.P. for Northampton 1837-1857, M. Stenton ed., Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, vol 1, (London, 1976)p.98.

7. Robert Vernon Smith (?-1873), holder of various offices in Whig-Liberal administrations from 1830 to 1858, M.P. for Tralee 1829-31, for Northampton 1831-59, created Lord Lyveden, Stenton, op.cit., p.354.

another Whig, Lord Henley¹, until 1874. Raikes Currie continued to hold the other seat until his retirement in 1857. He was replaced by Charles Gilpin² who had been recommended to the town's liberals by Samuel Morley when the latter declined an invitation to stand. Gilpin was an advanced liberal, standing on a platform of disestablishment of the Irish Church, abolition of church rates, extension of the suffrage and secret ballot³. Apparently he was adopted against the wishes of the town's Whig element⁴ and to that extent was a popular candidate. In Gilpin's second election contest in 1859 he headed the poll, thereby displacing Vernon Smith from the position of primacy he had held for twenty eight years. Beyond the support for Gilpin, however, there seemed to be little or no electoral support for radicalism in the town in the thirty six years between the two great electoral reform acts⁵.

The history of formal organisation among liberals in the borough in the 1850s and 1860s is obscure. It appears that certain individuals of the town by 1855 had become disenchanted with the manner in which the Whigs dominated municipal politics

1. Lord Henley (1825-1898), Deputy-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire 1846, County Sherrif 1854, borough M.P. 1859-1874, Stenton, op.cit., pp. 187-8.

2. Charles Gilpin (1815-1874), Quaker, publisher, Chairman of the National Freehold Land Society, M.P. for Northampton 1857-1874, Stenton, op.cit., p.155.

3. N.M., 14, 21 March 1857. He won the nomination at a meeting of liberal electors, being chosen in preference to Woodhouse Currie, son of the retiring M.P., and against Arthur Otway, M.P. for Stafford who wanted to transfer to Northampton.

4. So the radical newsagent and secularist, John Bates, claimed later: N.M., 30 Aug 1873, John Bates to editor.

5. The Chartist McDouall contested the borough in 1841, getting 176 votes; a radical named Epps contested the borough in 1847 and polled 141 votes, and in 1852 another radical candidate named Lockhart fought for a seat but took only 109 votes: N.M., 7 Feb 1874. Between then and 1868 no candidate calling himself radical tried for a seat and Northampton appeared to be a borough safe from radicalism.

and kept any 'extreme' people from being nominated as candidates¹. As a result an association was formed in October 1855 'by the Chartist body of this town', and was called the New Reform Association. Its object was to give an independent voice in town politics to those of advanced views, and to promote the causes of suffrage extension and secret voting². The chairman of this body was Joseph Gurney.

It appears, however, that it was also in this year that a body known as 'The Bundle of Sticks' was formed to give liberalism some formal expression. According to one Frederick Parker, speaking eleven years later, this body then fused 'with another society', presumably the New Reform Association, to form the United Liberal Association³. The U.L.A. does not appear to have been very strong or active, however⁴. In the very year when the U.L.A. was founded the conservatives gained control of the town council. They maintained that control for ten years running. Discontent at such a situation came to a head in 1860 when the conservatives returned four councillors for the liberals' two. Gurney ascribed the poor showing of the latter to bad organisation and in an attempt to remedy the situation he sought to set up a new organisation, but without success⁵. Discontent continued over the next two years. In 1861 the U.L.A. reached an electoral compromise with the

1. N.M., 27 Oct 1855.

2. ibid.

3. N.M., 1 Dec 1866, speech of Frederick Parker at the annual general meeting of the U.L.A. Parker's memory of this is corroborated by the first mention of the U.L.A. in the local press: in December 1858 the Mercury reported the third annual general meeting of the U.L.A., where those who would later be known as moderate liberals and radicals were present: N.M., 18 Dec 1858.

4. Lack of alternative sources compels sole reliance on the Mercury, an organ always hostile to radicalism.

5. N.M., 3 Nov, 15 Dec 1860.

conservatives to share the representation¹: in 1862 they did not bother to nominate a candidate for the South Ward, a conservative stronghold and nominated only one candidate for the relatively open East Ward².

As a result of this Bates led a deputation of the 'ultras' to the U.L.A. executive to protest at liberal laxness, but he got no satisfaction. As far as he was concerned 'there was a real split in Liberalism in the town'³. In the following year warring liberals held rival ward meetings coming up to the municipal elections, with Gurney, Bates and another radical William Starmer, acting in opposition to the U.L.A. in the East and West wards⁴. The outcome in the West Ward was a drawn battle insofar as the U.L.A. liberal William Collier and an 'ultra' William Shoosmith, were both returned. The result in the East Ward was failure for both sides, while the South, as ever, went to the conservatives⁵.

But in 1864 matters appear to have mended: Gurney attended the annual general meeting of the U.L.A., which he had not done in 1863, and the U.L.A. itself, with 170 members, was reported to be in a 'flourishing condition'⁶.

The differences which marked local liberal politics in the period 1855-1865 seem not to have arisen on grounds of principle so much as strategy. It was the failure of the U.L.A. to fight

1. *ibid.*, 9 Nov 1861.

2. *ibid.*, 1 Nov 1862.

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*, 31 Oct 1863.

5. *ibid.*, 7 Nov 1863.

6. *N.M.*, 29 Oct 1864.

every ward against the conservatives that appears to have led men like Gurney and Bates to attempt to set up rival bodies which in turn proved to be as inactive as the U.L.A. itself. That there was no real difference of principle is clear from the unanimity which marked the adoption of Lord Henley as a replacement for Vernon Smith in 1859. The 'ultra' John Bates was as well satisfied as the moderate William Dennis with Henley's platform of abolition of church rates, secret ballot and extension of the suffrage¹. It is also clear from the history of the sporadic meetings on parliamentary reform between 1855 and 1865. At meetings in 1855 and 1858 on the questions of suffrage extension and secret voting respectively, moderate liberals shared the same platform and the same views as the 'ultras'².

Not only does there not seem to have been any difference of principle between liberals and 'radicals', there was never any reported use of the term 'radical' by local politicians of advanced views at any time between 1852 and 1867. Those who held to advanced opinions described themselves as 'ultras', but at the same time never gave any evidence of wishing to constitute a political body separate from liberalism. The first reported use of the term 'radical' did not come until 1867³, and a political body, distinct from the liberal one and styling itself 'radical' did not materialise until 1868⁴.

1. *ibid.*, 25 June 1859.

2. *ibid.*, 19 May 1855, 3 July 1858.

3. *ibid.*, 19 Oct 1867, in a speech by Stephen Clarke supporting the nomination of Gurney as a candidate for the West Ward in the municipal elections of that year.

4. See below, p.333.

Local politics, then, was marked by a complacent liberalism, weakly organised, prodded from time to time by the discontent of a few individuals who described themselves as ultras. In the middle of the 1860s this situation was about to change. That change was brought about by the national revival of the issue of reform and by the activities of the Reform League.

The Reform League, Local Politics and the 1868 Election:

We are a Liberal Association and we are also a United Liberal Association. This would seem to imply that at some time or other there may have been or that there may yet be certain questions on which we agree to differ, not in any way compromising our individual convictions, but for the purpose of carrying out great principles.

Charles Gilpin, 1864¹.

The meetings on reform which had been held in Northampton in 1855, 1857 and 1859 were in no way great meetings. The next meeting of this kind was held in April 1865, two months after the inauguration of the Reform League in London. It was convened by the mayor who had received a requisition containing one hundred signatures, and, although liberal councillors and aldermen were on the platform the meeting had to be adjourned so poor was the attendance². When it eventually reconvened on 9 May resolutions were passed calling for 'a substantial measure of reform', and for the secret ballot³. But there was no evidence of any great or widespread enthusiasm for reform in the borough, and no other meeting on this subject was held for almost a year.

1. N.M., 29 Oct 1864.
 2. ibid., 29 Apr 1865.
 3. ibid., 13 May 1865.

It was in response to developments at Westminster where a reform bill was introduced by Gladstone in February 1866 that the question was again taken up in Northampton. On this occasion it was a large and enthusiastic meeting presided over by the mayor in the Town Hall on Tuesday 10 April. Both Henley and Gilpin were present and a resolution declaring that the bill then before parliament was extensive enough to deserve the fullest support was proposed by one of Bradlaugh's most bitter opponents of future years, the Rev Thomas Arnold¹.

Three months later, on 16 July 1866, one week before the Hyde Park riot, the Northampton branch of the Reform League was set up with an initial membership of thirty one. By late August the membership had quadrupled, by the end of October it had reached five hundred and fifty five². On 22 October Northampton witnessed its greatest political demonstration in favour of reform. A procession one mile long was headed by Reform League president Edmond Beales, accompanied by Bradlaugh, Gurney, William Shoosmith, John Middleton Vernon and Moses Philip Manfield. It was Bradlaugh's first visit to the town in a purely political cause and marked the beginning of his long and close association with Northampton. To judge by the speech he delivered it was a good beginning to that association:

They had been told that the Reform Bill did not intend to attack this and to attack that. Let it be his purpose for a moment to tell them what it did attack. It intended to attack the sham of class distinction in reference to electoral right. It declared that Government should be the best contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human want; and it declared that every man in the State should

1. N.M., 14 Apr 1866. It was Arnold's first appearance, publicly, in town politics.

2. ibid., 2 Mar 1867.

have a voice in the making of the laws which he was compelled to obey It was the labour of the people that made the greatness of the country it was the labour of the people that made the great wealth of the nation. If they asked whether wealth should be represented, he answered that the riches of the poorest man were as important as the thousands of the rich man If the working man had a representation in the House of Commons they would be able to get justice Let them remember that, upon the way in which they fought this battle depended the liberty of their children and their children's children¹.

Bradlaugh's manifest interest in and emphasis on the political right of labour to representation was important in a constituency where almost half the voters were working men at the very time he spoke. But for Bradlaugh's political future in the borough, of as much importance as the speech he made was the one which Lord Henley did not make: although he agreed with the policy of Russell and Gladstone in regard to the reform question he refused to attend and speak at the Northampton demonstration. In a reference to the Hyde Park proceedings in July, he remarked in a letter to William Curtis, joint secretary of the Northampton Branch of the Reform League, 'I do not approve sufficiently of the course Mr F. Beales has taken upon the Reform question'².

The foundation of the Reform League branch in Northampton, and the great demonstration in October marked a revival of liberal political power in the town. In the November elections two newcomers to municipal politics, the shoe manufacturers Richard Turner and M.P. Manfield, captured the East Ward for the liberals, and in so doing, broke conservative ascendancy on the council³. Now equalling conservative strength on the

1. *ibid.*, 27 Oct 1866.

2. Henley to Curtis, 24 Sept 1866, cited in *N.M.*, 27 Oct 1866.

3. *N.M.*, 3 Nov 1866.

council, the liberals were about to begin a period of dominance.

The Northampton Branch of the Reform League¹ entered 1867 some six hundred strong, with a committee dominated by men who would later be identified as radicals². Yet, although it held four public meetings in the course of the year its membership was reduced until, at its second annual general meeting in February 1868 it numbered only two hundred. At that time its committee reported that it had 'very few points of interest to refer to during the past twelve months'³. The Reform Bill had been passed and the committee was waiting to see 'how the new Bill works' before it would 'press forward in any new political action'⁴.

At this stage the N.R.L. regarded itself as a distinctly working class body, separate from but not hostile to the U.L.A.⁵. But the issue of the choice of candidates for the parliamentary elections and the entry of Bradlaugh was to shatter not only the relations of N.R.L. and U.L.A., but the N.R.L. itself.

There is no clear indication as to when Bradlaugh decided on the possibility of a parliamentary career. His daughter Hypatia considered late 1865, early 1866 as the earliest possible date that her father ever thought of standing, but she cites no

1. Hereafter abbreviated to N.R.L.

2. N.M., 9 Mar 1867. Committee: John Bates, Thomas Purser, John Corby, James Allen, William Hollowell, T. Curtis, W. Clark, W. Swindell, George Pickering, Thomas Ward and William Jones.

3. ibid., 22 Feb 1868.

4. N.M., 22 Feb 1868.

5. ibid., Its annual report declared: 'If the middle class who have held the political power of the nation for the past thirty five years do not understand Peace, Retrenchment and Reform and do not protect the nation against the enormous increase of its burdens, how far shall we (the working class) /sic/ be prepared to give a better account of our stewardship to the succeeding generations'.

source¹. Bradlaugh loosely confirms her view, however: speaking in Northampton in July 1868 he declared: 'For two years now I have hoped and wished for that position which I have been told is an impossible thing'². But he had not settled on any particular constituency: 'it was my intention to offer myself to any body of men where I thought I had a fair hope of success, without waiting for them to ask me'³.

When and why he finally decided on Northampton is not certain either. Although he had visited the town several times between 1859 and 1868 these visits were not of the frequency associated with nursing a constituency or wooing potential voters.

Although Bradlaugh said he would present himself to a constituency without waiting to be invited, Tribe suggests that in the case of Northampton it had been suggested to him by John Bates that he stand for nomination⁴. Though Tribe gives neither source nor date for this it is partly borne out by the comment of Bradlaugh's friend W.E. Adams who wrote that Bradlaugh 'did not offer his services without first being solicited to offer them'⁵. Tribe declares that Joseph Gurney and Thomas Adams, Bradlaugh's future election agent, 'nominated him in his absence in February (1868) and supporters began to subscribe towards his expenses, but it was not until June that he published his acceptance and election address'⁶. With no source being given for this there is a difficulty in accepting

1. H.B. Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.263.
 2. *N.R.*, 26 July 1868.
 3. *ibid.*
 4. D. Tribe, *op.cit.*, p.79.
 5. *N.R.*, 23 Aug 1868.
 6. Tribe, *op.cit.*, p.105.

it: if Gurney and Adams had 'nominated' Bradlaugh in February he himself would surely have publicised the fact, and furthermore, such an action would have precipitated a crisis in the N.R.L. precisely as was to happen in July. In short, all that the existing evidence allows is the fact that Bradlaugh decided in June 1868 to contest the borough and issued his election address at that time¹.

In that first election address Bradlaugh declared that he would 'give an independent support to that party of which Mr Gladstone will probably be chosen leader'. He would support that party so long as it try to bring about:

- i) a system of compulsory national education.
- ii) a change in the land laws, involving abolition of primogeniture and entail, diminution of the expenses attending land transfers, and getting security to the cultivator of the soil for the improvements he made upon it.
- iii) a change in the extravagance of national expenditure so that 'our public departments may cease to be refuges for destitute members of the so-called noble families'.
- iv) an improvement of labour legislation so that 'employer and employed may stand equal before the law'; the setting up of conciliation courts and the abolition of the jurisdiction of unpaid magistrates in this area.
- v) a change in taxation policy so that the greater burden of taxes in future would fall on 'those who hold previously accumulated wealth and large tracts of devised land'.
- vi) separation of church and state and removal of the prelates from the House of Lords.
- vii) the provision of means 'by which minorities may be fairly represented in the legislative chambers'.
- viii) abolition of civil disabilities for holding or rejecting 'any particular speculative opinion'.
- ix) reform of the House of Lords, new peerages to be limited to life and to be granted only for 'great national services, voting by proxy to be abolished and peers habitually absent from the House to lose their privileges.
- x) the abolition of the old Whig party as a governing class and its replacement by a national party which 'shall destroy the system of government by aristocratic families'.

1. B.M., Add.Ms 44111, ff.64-66, Charles Bradlaugh to W.E. Gladstone, ? June 1868.

Henley and Gilpin were determined to contest the election, though there was some dissatisfaction with the former, arising from his refusal to attend the reform demonstration in October 1866. It was an indication how moderate the U.L.A. was that a month later when it held its annual general meeting he was reported to have been received with enthusiasm¹. Unfortunately for him, however, in April 1868 he fell foul of the U.L.A. as a result of a speech in the Commons in which he put forward views as to compound rating which the U.L.A. found regrettable², and he became even more unpopular with the radicals by his absence from a vote for the abolition of flogging in the army³.

There was sufficient doubt about one of the sitting members therefore, to encourage Bradlaugh in his ambitions. In late June, having determined to stand for Northampton, he went to the Executive Committee of the Reform League⁴ to announce his intention and then issued his election address. He received the private support of individual members of the E.C., among them the shoemaker George Odger, in this intention, but there was no question of official endorsement.

He opened his campaign on 30 June with a public meeting in the Market Square, Northampton, chaired by John Bates who was a member of the committee of the N.R.L. At this meeting Bradlaugh declared that he 'came under the auspices and with the sanction of the committee of the Reform League, who authorised me to say that they wished me to be here'⁵. From that moment dissension

1. N.M., 1 Dec 1866.

2. ibid., 25 Apr 1868.

3. N.R., 12 July 1868.

4. The Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Reform League do not record this; the evidence is based on a statement made by Committee member George Odger to a meeting of the N.R.L. held on 13 July, N.M., 18 July 1868.

5. N.M., 4 July 1868.

began in Northampton liberal politics that was not to end until twelve years later.

The N.R.L. had already met in that week, and had decided at that stage, against supporting any candidate as 'they were still feeling their way'¹. Bates had gone against that decision by publicly supporting Bradlaugh and Bradlaugh had created a problem by claiming to have official sanction from Reform League headquarters. He realised he had created a problem when on 4 July he wrote to League secretary George Howell:

It becomes necessary in my fight for the seat at Northampton that I should be able to state officially that I have the support of the Council of the Reform League in my candidature. I have already stated that my candidature was with the knowledge and sanction of the election committee but I have now to ask you to submit the matter to the Council so that I may be able to meet our common foes with the written declaration of the League in my favour².

The Committee of the N.R.L. also wrote to London to query Bradlaugh's claim and received a reply to the effect that Bradlaugh had not got official support from them and that they were sending George Odger down to investigate, to attempt to resolve the difficulty and to report back³.

When Odger arrived in Northampton the committee of the N.R.L. was at loggerheads, its president James Wells sending in his resignation on that account. On 13 July an extraordinary general meeting of the N.R.L. was held, with Gurney in the chair. In explaining that his resignation was due to a split down the middle of the committee over Bates' public support

1. *ibid.*, 18 July 1868, speech of Stephen Clarke at N.R.L., 13 July 1868.

2. Bishopsgate Institute, Howell Collection, Bradlaugh to Howell, 4 July 1868.

3. *N.M.*, 18 July 1868.

for Bradlaugh, contrary to N.R.L. policy as it was at that time, Wells pointed out that the N.R.L. represented Northampton's working men, and that although it might think itself powerful enough to act independently of the town's middle class and the U.L.A. it would be better to be cautious and that the opinion of all liberals in the town should be tested before the N.R.L. committed itself to any candidate. Wells was followed by two speakers, William Jones and Stephen Clarke who condemned Bates for his independent action, while a third speaker, Benford, supported Bates' right to act as he had done, and attacked Wells for trying to deny Bates that right¹.

Odger then interposed; he explained how Bradlaugh had announced to the executive committee of the Reform League in London his intention of contesting the borough, and how he, Odger in wishing Bradlaugh success, 'never thought this implied the sanction of the League', for Bradlaugh's candidature. Odger further explained that his brief was that if he found the N.R.L. opposed to Bradlaugh he was simply to report the fact to London; if he found the N.R.L. favourable to Bradlaugh, he, Odger, was to use his individual effort, 'as representing the League', to aid Bradlaugh, and that either way the Council of the League was not committed. He proposed as a solution to their difficulties that a committee should be formed, composed of five members of the N.R.L., five members of the U.L.A. and five Bradlaugh supporters to discuss the question, and that Wells should resume his presidency. Wells however, would only do so if Bates, as a member of the N.R.L. executive,

1. *ibid.*

suspended his public support of Bradlaugh until the matter was decided. Bates refused to suspend his support or to resign from the executive: if the N.R.L. rejected Bradlaugh then he would abandon the N.R.L.; if a majority of the electors rejected Bradlaugh as a candidate, then he would abandon Bradlaugh¹.

Another speaker rejected Odger's proposals as to a meeting of three five-man committees as this virtually implied recognition of Bradlaugh's candidature. The speaker, William Hollowell, also objected to the manner of Bradlaugh's coming to contest Northampton:

When he first read Mr Bradlaugh's address it appeared to him as if they were the serfs and he the master Mr Bradlaugh had not consulted the people of Northampton as to whether he should come here, but had sent down his address in the same way as a landed proprietor would send down to his steward or his servants in the country that he was coming down from London².

A motion was then carried, calling on Wells to resume office. A second motion that Bates remain a committee member and a counter-motion that he be requested to resign were put amid confusion. The result was not known, but Bates interpreted it as against him, and left the meeting. A five-man committee was then appointed to confer with five members of the U.L.A. as to choice of two liberal candidates, and there the meeting ended³. Bradlaugh's claim to have League sanction was queried at two public meetings after this stormy occasion. At the first of these on 15 July, in the Theatre, Northampton, where he lectured on 'Capital, Labour and Trade Unions', on being asked was he under the auspices of the Reform League, he

1. N.M., 18 July 1868.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

replied frankly:

Well, I don't know. I am one of its vice-presidents. I have received communication from eight branches of the Reform League, expressing the hope that the reformers of Northampton won't be untrue to their trust, but return me I dare say the whole Council (of the League) who have told me individually their opinion will tell you what their opinion is collectively and officially in a few days. I shall be quite content if the Council of the League say I am not fit to represent you¹.

Seven days later, the executive committee of the Reform League, having heard a favourable report from Odger, adopted a resolution from its parliamentary committee, to the following effect:

That having heard the report of the deputation to Northampton which is highly satisfactory regarding the prospects of Mr Bradlaugh as a candidate to represent that Borough in a new reformed Parliament, and considering that he has offered to submit to an aggregate meeting of the liberal constituents the choice of their liberal candidates, and that he will withdraw from the contest rather than divide the liberal interests should a show of hands be against him at such meeting, this committee hope that every true reformer will adopt this most fair and honourable proposition, and that should Mr Bradlaugh be the chosen candidate he may receive the hearty support of the constituency².

They sent a copy of this resolution to Charles Gilpin, but it did nothing to lessen his regret that

Mr Bradlaugh or any other member of the League, seeking a place in Parliament, should, instead of contesting one of the many boroughs represented by Tories, seek to displace a member who so uniformly supported the great principles of civil and religious liberty as my colleague Lord Henley³.

The Reform League's resolution amounted to a conditional, not a complete endorsement and sanction for Bradlaugh. Yet he interpreted it as complete on the very next day when, at a public meeting in the town, he declared

Somebody had asked him on the last occasion if he stood on that platform under the auspices or sanction of the National Reform League. Whether he did then, or not, he thought he did, and he was happy to tell them that night

1. N.M., 18 July 1868.

2. Howell Collection. Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Reform League, 22 July 1868.

3. ibid., Howell Correspondence, Charles Gilpin to George Howell, 25 July 1868.

that now he had no doubt of it. The Parliamentary Committee of that League had decided to sanction his candidature, and the Executive of the League had unanimously endorsed that decision by deciding to support him. Before he had issued his address he had the individual promises of support from nearly every member of that Committee in London. He had not their official vote then, because he foolishly thought he was so well known in Northampton that it would hardly be expected. He had made a mistake. They all learned lessons in life, and he was glad there had been the delay, because the vote of the Reform League Committee deciding to support him after the objection was taken, was better than if it had been given him on the first day he saw the committee there¹.

Some members of the N.R.L., among them James Wells, were clearly not happy with this development. They had even less cause for rejoicing when a meeting of the N.R.L. in the first days of August 1868 was held to consider a proposal that a Leeds temperance reformer, Dr Frederick Richard Lees, be asked to come forward as a candidate. This proposal was rejected, and another one pledging support for Bradlaugh was carried². The membership of the N.R.L. had recently risen from one hundred to about one hundred and fifty, and some forty of that additional fifty were said to have joined solely to support Bradlaugh. Following this developemnt the N.R.L. committee met on 12 August, and, with one exception, all resigned 'feeling they could not carry out the resolution' of the previous meeting to support Bradlaugh³. Five days later a Bradlaugh coup d'etat was a fact when a new executive was elected³. There was now an effective breach in Northampton liberal-radical politics, the U.L.A. going on to support Gilpin and Henley, the N.R.L. going on to support Bradlaugh.

1. N.M., 25 July 1868.

2. ibid., 15 Aug 1868.

3. ibid., 22 Aug 1868.

The campaign which Bradlaugh commenced on 30 June did not end until 17 November 1868. From the beginning he made it clear that it was Lord Henley's seat he was after; at the same time he also made it clear that should a majority of liberal constituents at any public meeting, where Gilpin and Henley would also be present, vote against Bradlaugh's persisting in the campaign, he would immediately abandon it¹. He would not be responsible for the splitting of the liberal vote. The offer was never taken up.

The central theme of the election address already noticed, and of the campaign he conducted over the next five months, was the attack on the aristocracy: 'the future welfare and happiness of this country depended upon the union between the middle classes of England and what were called the lower classes. The upper classes were going'². In a constituency of small manufacturers and artisans and where the Nonconformists were a substantial body, it was a programme that should have been well-received, and as will be seen from the discussion of the nature of Northampton radicalism, later in this chapter, his desire for a fusion of middle and working classes was precisely the desire of the self-made radical manufacturers of the town. His call for a compulsory, national system of education and for the separation of church and state were also issues no Nonconformist could fault. Other issues were not neglected: on the issue of temperance and drink legislation he replied to a question at a public meeting on 23 July that he would vote

1. N.R., 5 July 1868.
 2. N.M., 18 July 1868.

for a Permissive Bill, though he would prefer that people could be made sober by education rather than be prevented from getting drunk by legislation¹. It was an attitude which he extended to other areas: on the question of secret voting, he favoured the ballot but 'wished men were strong enough to do without it'²; on the issue of his republicanism he declared: 'the character of a government must depend on the character of the people. In theory he held that a republican was the best form of government, but he was not here to advocate a republican government which was at present an impossibility, but to show how tolerably good government was possible under our monarchy'³.

Regarded as a notorious radical by the national press of the day because of his religious views and his attacks on the landed aristocracy, Bradlaugh's basic moderation was to be seen clearly in his attitude to labour relations. Conciliation, not class conflict, was his doctrine here. Speaking at the Theatre on 15 July, he maintained that wages ought to give a worker and his family the basic necessities of life with leisure for self-improvement; that the worker should be equal before the law with the employer; that workers and employers alike had a right to combine to protect their interests, but not to coerce anyone else. Asked what his attitude was to the trade union principle of the limitation of apprentices he said it 'was not the way to increase wages', though he failed to say what was. Asked finally whether he would guarantee to enact laws that should satisfy all trade unions, his reply was frank:

1. N.M., 25 July 1868.

2. ibid.

3. N.R., 6 Sept 1868.

Certainly not. I dare say I should give as much dissatisfaction to trades unionists as anybody. But that would not be my fault. I should act honestly and if the trade unionists were the bulk of my constituency and they thought I had acted erroneously, I should resign my trust into their hands¹.

The straightforwardness which marked his attitude to issues applied equally to personalities: when a working man speaker at a lecture by Bradlaugh one week later complained of Henley's conduct on the compound rating question, Bradlaugh refused to take up the issue as Henley was not present to defend or debate his stand on this.

The attraction of his programme and his straightforward conduct did not prevent the hostility of the press from developing quickly. The Mercury, which supported Henley, was naturally hostile from the beginning, and maintained that hostility until it was taken over by S.S. Campion of the Northamptonshire Guardian in 1885². The only other Northampton newspaper of the time, the conservative Herald, could obviously not support him, but preferred him to Henley - no doubt to maintain divisions in the liberal camp³. With the sole exceptions of the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle and Reynolds's Newspaper⁴, the national dailies and weeklies were hostile to Bradlaugh and attacked him for his atheism and for splitting the liberals in the town. The

1. N.M., 18 July 1868.

2. W.W. Hadley, 'Northamptonshire Memories' in Northamptonshire Past & Present, vol. 2, no. 3, 1956, p.124.

3. Northampton Herald, 4 July 1868: 'Mr Bradlaugh's address is as comprehensive and thorough as the most ultra Radical could desire, and includes among its objects "the abolition as a governing class of the old Whig party". He has put it to the issue, - Bradlaugh or Henley? The question is - what will Lord Henley do? Hitherto his lordship's course has been a yielding one he has never yet held a principle too dear to be cast overboard at the first rumbling of a storm. But now, if he divests himself of his entire cargo, it will profit him nothing. He cannot o'erleap a Bradlaugh. Truly his lordship's position is by no means an enviable one'.

4. Reynolds's Newspaper, 13, 20 Sept, 11 Oct, 1 Nov 1868.

first national to attack him was the liberal Daily News, which did so four days after Bradlaugh began his campaign¹.

But the chief organ of hostility was the liberal Daily Telegraph whose leader writer devoted one full column of abuse to Bradlaugh in early September².

Bradlaugh began his campaign with little money and no organisation. But as a result of his lecture on 'Capital, Labour and the Trade Unions' in Northampton on 15 July, a meeting at which Odger spoke on his behalf, an election committee of sixteen was organised³. Surprisingly, its secretary, John Bates, was the only well-known local radical on it. Neither Joseph Gurney nor Thomas Adams were involved. The sixteen men worked as volunteers, and for financial support Bradlaugh depended, as he was often to do in the future, on a host of small offerings from secularists and working class admirers throughout the country. The only large contributions were sums of £30 from Dr G.R. Reynolds⁴, £10 each from John Stuart Mill and Arthur Trevelyan⁵.

It was to be a great blow to Bradlaugh's hopes that the retiring members refused to go before an aggregate meeting of electors in order to avoid a split. A further blow fell in early August when Frederick Lees decided to enter the contest⁶.

Whether Lees was deliberately introduced in order to sabotage

1. Daily News, 3 July 1868: 'Mr Charles Bradlaugh, who is better known by the name Iconoclast, has addressed the electors of this town The only effect of Mr Bradlaugh's appearance will be to divide the Liberal interest'.

2. Daily Telegraph, 8 Sept 1868: 'When we say that Mr Bradlaugh is Iconoclast, the public will probably be not much the wiser. We have no wish or inclination to enter on a discussion of that gentleman's claim to notoriety. It is enough for our purpose to say that he is known merely as the editor of an obscure Secularist newspaper, and as an itinerant lecturer against the Christian religion'.

3. N.R., 26 July 1868.

4. N.R., 12 July, 9 Aug, 12 Oct 1868.

5. ibid., 6 Sept 1868.

6. ibid., 9 Aug 1868.

Bradlaugh is not known: Tribe points out the existence of a Northampton election poster which claimed that Lees was paid to intervene by a wealthy local radical, Starmer¹, while the N.R.L. itself met in early August to consider Lees as a candidate. Who proposed Lees at the N.R.L. is not reported, only the fact that a resolution supporting Bradlaugh, not Lees, was carried². It was after this meeting that the N.R.L. split and was taken over by the Bradlaughites.

Though Bradlaugh lacked the support of any significant number of weighty names in Northampton itself and in the country at large - excepting the support of J.S. Mill³ - he was not left entirely to speak for himself. George Odger, as shoemaker, trade unionist and reform leaguer cannot but have carried weight with the Northampton workers when he spoke for Bradlaugh in July⁴. Connolly and Howell, also of the Reform League executive, spoke for him in the town in August⁵, and the London Unitarian clergyman, James Kay Applebee, a vice-president of the Plymouth branch of the Reform League, spoke and worked for him in August and September⁶.

But among Northampton workers, Bradlaugh's own past record and his eloquence commanded a devotion that needed little reliance on outside support. A glimpse of that devotion can be had from the diary of the Northampton poacher and cobbler, James Hawker. Bradlaugh he described as

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1. Tribe, op.cit., p.345, n.131.
 2. N.M., 15 Aug 1868.
 3. Bonner, op.cit., i.267, 275.
 4. N.R., 26 July 1868.
 5. ibid., 8, 23 Aug 1868.
 6. ibid., 6, 20 Sept 1868.

a poacher on the privileges of the rich class the greatest, most fearless of Democrats that I ever knew. I never left that man - politically - till death parted us. I was in all his struggles¹.

It is a testimony all the more persuasive for being unsolicited. Hawker was but one of three hundred men working under the direction of the original committee of sixteen. By late September they had organised fourteen separate district committees and were working voluntarily and enthusiastically for Iconoclast. By that time all the liberal and radical candidates were in the field. Mounting attacks on Bradlaugh by the national press became intense from mid-September², and he himself mounted an attack on Lord Henley with an open letter on 20 September in which he denounced Henley's opposition to compulsory education³. He repeated this attack in the Town Hall on 23 September, and further attacked Henley for his failure ever to do a thing for the cause of the agricultural labourers, and for his record on and attitude to the Reform League and reform question⁴. He continued to press for an aggregate selection meeting, but Gilpin refused to budge on this, and at a U.L.A. meeting on 8 October, stood loyally by Henley.

Six days later, the three men met publicly for the first time on the same platform, in the Town Hall and what had been intended as a Gilpin-Henley meeting turned out to be a pro-Bradlaugh meeting when the hall had been filled with Bradlaugh supporters⁵. From that time Bradlaugh began his house-to-house canvass and

1. G. Christian, ed., A Victorian Poacher: James Hawker's Journal, (London, 1961), p.23.

2. N.R., 20, 27 Sept 1868.

3. N.R., 20 Sept 1868.

4. ibid., 4 Oct 1868.

5. ibid., 18 Oct 1868.

by 15 November had received 1,377 promises of support. Had promises been kept it would not have been sufficient to bring victory: when the results were announced on 18 November he had come second last. His chief foe, Henley, had received almost twice Bradlaugh's number of votes:

C. Gilpin	2691 ¹
Lord Henley	2154
C.G. Merewether	1634
W.F. Lendrick	1396
C. Bradlaugh	1086
F.R. Lees	492

Bitterly disappointed though he was, Bradlaugh had to admit that Henley's influence was greater than he had believed. But it was also true that his own influence was greater than the world at large believed: the Pall Mall Gazette, no friend of Bradlaugh, had to admit that it was 'a remarkable circumstance that he should have polled 1066 (sic) votes when we think of the principles on which he stood That a man who technically commits a crime whenever he publishes his most characteristic opinions should have polled more than a thousand votes in a considerable borough is certainly a sign of the times'².

Bradlaugh left Northampton defeated and in debt. His total official election expenses amounted to almost £370³. Although the total amount of election subscriptions came to £757⁴, he claimed in 1870 that he still owed £250 arising from money

1. Accounts and Papers, 1868-9, 1,424, Returns of the abstract of the expenses incurred by or on behalf of each candidate at the last general election etc. The total electorate was 6,619, and not 5,729 as stated by Bonner, op.cit., i.268.

2. Pall Mall Gazette, 18 Nov 1868.

3. A. & P., 1868-9, 1,424, Returns of the abstract of expenses incurred by or on behalf of each candidate at the last general election, p.19.

4. N.R., 24 Aug 1873.

borrowed to clear his election expenses¹. Though he left the town in defeat and in debt, he did not leave it unchanged. Between the beginning of his first campaign in June 1868, and his second in 1874, liberal party unity was shattered and radical opinion became concentrated to a new and marked degree. The divisions which his coming precipitated, however, were not based on fundamental difference of principles, but on personalities and on a desire of radicals for a real share of power in municipal and parliamentary politics.

Local politics and the rise of the radicals, 1868-1874:

In August 1868 the N.R.L. had become a Bradlaugh radical body. In September 1868 working men of the West Ward decided to form a 'Radical Association to watch over their interests in the municipal and parliamentary elections'². Even before the parliamentary struggle had ended the municipal contests took place. At an East Ward liberal meeting on 23 October, where retiring liberal councillor John M. Vernon and a newcomer, William Jones, were proposed as candidates by Councillor Shoosmith, the latter deplored liberal divisions arising from the parliamentary contest, and he revealed that a committee of U.L.A. and N.R.L. members had met to propose some compromise formula in order to preserve some kind of unity for the

1. *ibid.*, 1 Aug 1870. At every stage of his adult life Bradlaugh's finances present insoluble difficulties in assessment. No satisfactory account of them has been, or is ever likely to be given. In the particular case of this election of 1868 there are serious discrepancies: as noted above, his official return of expenses lists them as amounting to £370; his election subscriptions came to £757; he claimed in 1870 that he still owed £250: this claim is vaguely corroborated by the fact that Charles Watts declared that they had to borrow £150 in November (*N.R.*, 22 Nov 1868) and in addition the Bradlaugh Collection contains a letter from Bradlaugh to one John Macke, 23 Nov 1868 bearing an I.O.U. for £100. On the basis of all the foregoing, one could conclude that the election cost him in the region of £1,000.

2. *N.R.*, 27 Sept 1868.

municipal elections¹. Significantly, radical councillor Joseph Gurney seconded the nomination of Vernon, and shared Shoosmith's concern for unity. But the equally radical Thomas Adams was not so obliging: he insisted that 'there were hundreds of working men electors in the East Ward and they wanted to see William Starmer nominated with Vernon: if the liberals of the U.L.A. really wanted unity, the nomination of Starmer was the only way of conciliating the Reform League. Unfortunately, Starmer got a mixed reception at the nomination meeting, whereas William Jones was listened to without interruption. Which candidate ever got the nomination is not clear, but it was Vernon and Jones who were ultimately elected, gaining a seat from the conservatives, and Vernon becoming the first liberal mayor in several years².

In the West Ward there was also friction. The two retiring councillors were the liberals, William Dennis and William Jeffery, and they were nominated in the face of vigorous opposition. Here the N.R.L. and the newly formed Radical Association intervened when John Corby³ proposed the nomination of Thomas Adams as a candidate for the West Ward. Significantly, Corby explained that although the N.R.L. and the Radical Association had endorsed the candidature of Starmer in the East Ward and Adams in the West, they had submitted these names to the U.L.A., before it had selected its candidates for nomination, in the hope that the U.L.A. would consent to shared

1. N.M., 24 Oct 1868.

2. N.H., 14 Nov 1868.

3. Vice-president of the N.R.L. and newsagent by trade, N.M., 22 Aug 1868.

candidatures: 'it was not unreasonable that the members of the Reform League and Radical Association should have their own candidates'¹. The U.L.A. apparently rejected this claim for a share in power, and so the N.R.L. and the Radical Association determined to go before the ward meetings to attempt to secure adoption of their own radical candidates. In the West the vote went against Adams, who accepted the verdict of the electors and recommended his supporters to vote for Dennis and Jeffery. In the South Ward the liberals put up two candidates without any opposition from the radicals².

The result was an unprecedented victory for the liberals. For the first time since the reform of the municipal corporations in the mid eighteen thirties they captured both South Ward seats, retained both West Ward seats, and by also returning two councillors in the East they gained one seat there³. They now had the greatest representation on the town council that they were ever to have in the nineteenth century, with seventeen members against seven for the conservatives. The radicals seemed powerless against them, and the U.L.A.'s indifference to radical claims for a share in power is readily understandable.

The triumph of the local liberals was to continue. In January 1869 it was reported that the U.L.A. had expelled some of its members who had failed to vote for Henley in November⁴.

Bradlaugh was delighted:

1. Speech of John Corby at West Ward meeting on 23 Oct 1868, N.M., 24 Oct 1868.

2. ibid.

3. N.H., 7 Nov 1868.

4. N.R., 24 Jan 1869.

we are rather glad to hear that the United Liberal Association prefers suicide to natural death. We never can hope to get their support and the more members they drive out of the 'camp of Saul' the more friends we shall probably have at the next election¹.

But local radicals were not to be allowed to share Bradlaugh's gladness: in February 1869 a West Ward bye-election was held when two of the sitting liberal councillors became aldermen. On 2 February, John Yorke, secretary of the N.R.L., wrote to Horatio Warren, secretary of the U.L.A., to hope that 'in the event of the League abstaining from nominating more than one candidate to fill the two vacancies the Association will adopt the same course and nominate one only'². The suggestion having been rejected, the N.R.L. and the Radical Association nominated two candidates, Thomas Adams and George Bass, while the U.L.A. nominated Alexander Milne and Pickering Perry. The result was disastrous for the radicals, both their candidates being beaten by a ratio of two votes to one³.

That disaster was repeated in November 1869. On this occasion the liberals ventured on a new departure. They abandoned the traditional practice of holding meetings for each ward in the nomination and adoption of candidates. The U.L.A. now chose its candidates beforehand and then held a general meeting where all their candidates were presented readymade for adoption. The liberals were in the generous mood occasionally characteristic of conquerors: speaking at this general meeting on 26 October, Councillor William Adkins declared, 'it had been

1. *ibid.*

2. *N.M.*, 27 Feb 1869.

3. The results in the West Ward, with 1312 registered electors, were Perry 560; Milne 533; Bass 264; Adams 260; *N.M.*, 27 Feb 1869.

suggested that they should nominate nobody for the South Ward; he agreed; after all, the Conservatives should have some representation on the Town Council'¹. Uproar greeted this remark. The eminent manufacturers Manfield and Turner were then proposed for the East Ward; but a young, Unitarian radical, Frederick Covington, proposed a third candidate, William Starmer, and remarked:

There is a growing disposition on the part of the Liberals who were dominant in the town, towards a close corporation and a self-elected body (Cheers). A glimpse at the political horizon was sufficient to show that Radicals must figure greatly in the future of the nation².

Seconding the nomination of Starmer, a working man named Robert Dykes said he had formerly worked for Turner and Manfield in their campaigns, but they ignored the existence of the radicals, and so he would now work for them no longer:

he wanted to see men in the Town Council who would look after the interests of the working classes and not men to look after the interests of the middle classes³.

When it came to the nominations for the West Ward, William Collier and Alexander Milne were proposed for the liberals and Thomas Adams and J.P. Berry for the radicals. Uproar developed and the meeting had to be abandoned. The next night the radicals met and went through the motions of nominating Adams and Berry⁴.

The results recorded yet another radical defeat and liberal triumph. Liberals retained both seats in East and West Wards, and the conservatives were returned unopposed in the South⁵.

1. N.M., 30 Oct 1869.

2. N.M., 30 Oct 1869.

3. ibid.

4. ibid.

5. ibid., 6 Nov 1869. Results: East Ward: Turner 982; Manfield 693; Starmer 430; West Ward: Milne 553; Collier 537; Berry 492.

This situation did not change as a result of the municipal elections of 1870. The return of the radical Joseph Gurney for the West Ward in that year was not significant - he had been on the Council for thirteen years - and in any case could only come in second to the liberal candidate P.P. Perry. In the East Ward the only radical candidate came last, even behind a conservative¹.

In 1871 all six retiring councillors were liberals. To the chagrin of the radicals, they came to an arrangement with the conservatives whereby the latter would be unopposed in the South while the liberals would be unopposed in the East. With no ward meeting being considered necessary by the liberals, the radicals held an indignation meeting in the town on 23 October. Two nights later a 'Radical United Wards' meeting was held to adopt radical candidates. In the ensuing election, not one radical was returned. The Mercury warned:

neither in the Wards or the Borough are the Radicals strong enough to carry a candidate of their own, but they are strong enough if they insist on dividing the party to facilitate the return of a Conservative candidate².

Concluding that it was unfair to the radicals to try to force the hands of the liberals it pointed out that it was equally unfair of the liberals 'to ignore the just claims of the Radicals to some say in both municipal and parliamentary electoral affairs'³.

Coming from the source it did, this was a surprising and highly significant admission. The persistence of the radicals

1. N.M., 5 Nov 1870.

2. N.M., 4 Nov 1871.

3. ibid.

over three years showed no sign of weakening and might eventually bear fruit, if not in victory for them, then in victory for the conservatives; and 1870 was the last year when the liberals had seventeen town councillors, it having declined in 1871 to fifteen against nine conservatives. It was also significant that as early as November 1871 the beginning of the end had come for Lord Henley. On 7 November, Gilpin and Henley made their first visit and address to their constituents since their re-election three years before¹. In the Town Hall Gilpin made a report on his work at Westminster since that date, but when Henley tried to speak he received a frightening reception - a reception so hostile that even the radical John Bates was moved to try to get a hearing for the nobleman. Henley, who suffered from a stammer, and who was unable to speak, left the Hall and never again attempted to address an open meeting in Northampton².

This outburst of radical fury seems to have had an effect on the liberals: when vacancies were created by the election of Manfield and Collier as aldermen in early November 1871, the radical demand for compromise and a share in power was met for the first time. Their candidate, Thomas Tebbutt, was to be unopposed by a liberal in the East while the liberal G.F. Newton was to be unopposed by the radicals in the West. In 1871, as a result, the first self-styled radical, apart from the venerable Gurney, was elected to Northampton Town Council³.

1. N.M., 11 Nov 1871.
 2. N.M., 11 Nov 1871.
 3. ibid., 18 Nov 187.

In the following year a Northampton Radical Society was founded, with Gurney as president, Arthur Tebbutt as secretary and Thomas Adams as treasurer¹. In addition, there also existed by this time a 'Radical District Secretaries Association', concerned with the organisation of the radicals in the various districts of the town². In early 1873 moves were being made to achieve a re-union of liberal and radical forces³. Apparently they came to nothing: Adams reported on a meeting with the 'Liberal Association' telling them that he did not think amalgamation was likely but that he felt co-operation was possible. He put it to Perry of the U.L.A. that the radicals had a right to representation in the West as well as in the East Ward, but what the U.L.A.'s response to this claim was does not emerge⁴.

No doubt the talk of reunion was prompted by the threat of a dissolution of Parliament which loomed up in the second week of March 1873. Bradlaugh was determined to fight Northampton again, unless there was 'a distinct intimation that the people do not want us to do so'⁵. He spoke to Northampton secularists on 3 March, and on 26 March he was enthusiastically received at a meeting in the Town Hall⁶. He remained totally unwelcome to the Mercury, however, which maintained attacks upon him throughout the year⁷. Though it attacked Bradlaugh, it was also becoming restless at the failure of Gilpin and Henley to

1. N.M., 11 Jan 1873; no reports of its foundation were given in 1872.

2. ibid., 8 Mar 1873.

3. ibid.

4. N.M., 12 Apr 1873.

5. N.R., 23 Mar 1873.

6. ibid., 30 Mar 1873.

7. N.M., 30 Aug, 6 Sept 1873.

make an appearance in the town, with the prospect of an election not too distant:

It is high time that both Lord Henley and Mr Gilpin should come before the constituency their delay in meeting their supporters - especially in the case of Lord Henley - is doing serious injury, not only to their own prospects, but to the Liberal cause¹.

Bradlaugh himself already suspected that Henley was in trouble.

In July he wrote:

We believe we are correct in saying not only that the Nonconformist party in Northampton will not vote for Lord Henley at the next election, but that prominent English nonconformists refuse at present to allow a candidate to be nominated against Mr Bradlaugh².

The latter part of this statement was too optimistic on Bradlaugh's part. In mid-August 1873 John Bates reported a meeting Joseph Gurney had had with four unnamed, but leading Nonconformists of the borough. Gurney found they were against Henley, primarily because he refused to support Edward Miall's motion on disestablishment of the Church of England, but that they would not support Bradlaugh either. Only if Bradlaugh stood down would they unite with the radicals in running an agreed second candidate, along with Gilpin³. Gurney was not impressed. He claimed the Nonconformists controlled only 600 votes whereas Bradlaugh was certain of 1,100 without taking into account the increase of the electorate since 1868, and the introduction of the ballot since 1872⁴. While the number of Nonconformist electors is not known, it is clear that Gurney's figure of 600, out of an electorate which numbered 6,472 in 1873, is ludicrously understated.

1. *ibid.*, 23 Aug 1873.
 2. *N.R.*, 13 July 1873.
 3. *N.R.*, 17 Aug 1873.
 4. *ibid.*

With the political situation in Northampton very uncertain, Bradlaugh issued his electoral address in early September¹, before he left for an American tour on the sixth of the month. There was nothing substantially new in this second address. It was slightly more detailed in relation to parliamentary reform: he wanted now to see the equalisation of county and borough franchise qualifications, a redistribution of seats and parliaments of shorter duration. In regard to the House of Lords, he wanted their veto on legislation to be merely suspensory. It was an address neither more nor less radical than before, although in the interval between that of 1868 and this of 1873 he had become a leading figure in the rise of the English republican movement². It was in the light of the latter that the Mercury, never at a loss for an argument against him, now attacked him for the 'tameness' of his programme, with its 'careful' avoidance of 'any reference to the excellence of Republican institutions'³.

Bradlaugh sailed for America on 6 September 1873 and did not return to London until 8 February 1874. He was caught out badly: parliament was dissolved on 24 January, polling took place on 5 February and the results were out two days later. Unable to reach England and Northampton between the dissolution and the polling day he had to rely on Charles Watts to direct his campaign, aided by Austin Holyoake, George Foote and the Northampton friends.

1. *ibid.*, 14 Sept 1873.
 2. See below Chapter Seven.
 3. N.M., 6 Sept 1873.

Watts arrived in Northampton three days after the dissolution to find everyone caught unprepared, but within two more days a central election committee of twelve had come together, had organised the machinery and circulated Bradlaugh's address. Smaller than the election committee of 1868, John Bates and Frederick Ames were the only members of the 1874 committee who had served in 1868. Gurney and Adams were now members, for the first time¹. The day after Watts arrived a deputation was sent to Gilpin to ask him to abandon Henley and ally with Bradlaugh. Gilpin refused to ally with Bradlaugh, but interestingly, Watts reported that he also refused to run in harness with Henley, and that he would publish an individual address². Gilpin did indeed publish an individual address but eventually ran jointly with Henley³; but when the liberals held a meeting in the Town Hall on 2 February the vote of confidence in Henley and Gilpin was carried only by a small majority, despite the fact that it was a ticket-only meeting⁴.

Regardless of the best efforts of his supporters, Bradlaugh came bottom of the poll, with 1,653 votes as against the 1,086 of 1868. Yet it was a considerable increase and Bradlaugh's supporters had the consolation of seeing Lord Henley lose his seat:

Phipps (C)	:	2690 ⁵
Gilpin (L)	:	2310
Merewether (C)	:	2175
Henley (L)	:	1796
Bradlaugh	:	1653

1. N.R., 8 Feb 1874.

2. ibid.

3. N.H., 31 Jan 1874; Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.395.

4. N.R., 8 Feb 1874.

5. A. & P., 1874, liii, 358, Return of charges made to candidates at the elections, 1874, etc., p.24.

It was significant that in an electorate that had risen from 6619 to 6829, Bradlaugh was the only one of the three non-conservative candidates to increase his number of votes and his percentage of the votes cast:

Candidate	Votes for in 1868	% of poll	Votes for in 1874	% of poll
Bradlaugh	1086	11.49	1653	15.5
Gilpin	2691	28.4	2310	21.7
Henley	2154	22.7	1796	16.9
Merewether	1634	17.2	2175	20.5
Lendrick (1868) to Phipps (1874)	1396	14.7	2690	25.3
Lees	492	5.2	-	-

Gilpin had lost over 300 votes and Henley had also lost over 300 while Bradlaugh had gained over 560. Since the conservatives had increased their votes since 1868, and since the electorate had only increased by 200, it is hard to come to any conclusion in regard to Bradlaugh's increase other than that he gained it at the expense of the official liberal candidates.

Looking back at the contest and its outcome, Watts made the prophetic remark that the results had

placed the so-called Liberals of this town in the position that at the next election they must either allow Mr Bradlaugh to be put forward in conjunction with the gentleman they select, or incur the grave risk of this Liberal Borough having for its representatives two Tories².

At this point, the Mercury, maintaining its complete opposition to Bradlaugh, now abandoned Henley:

1. Based on a comparison of A. & P., 1868-9, 1, 424, p.19, and A. & P., 1874, liii, 358, p.24.

2. N.R., 15 Feb 1874.

In our judgement, Lord Henley and Mr Bradlaugh are impossible candidates under these circumstances there is no reason why both sections of the party of progress should not agree upon a candidate whom both would support heartily¹.

Bradlaugh replied to this in March, offering to place his candidature under the arbitration of Gilpin himself², and asking the Mercury to state its solution to the dilemma. The latter replied curtly, 'the only possible solution is his (Bradlaugh's) withdrawal'³. At the same time it was reluctantly forced to recognise the strength of the radicals in Northampton: 'we admit that the Radical section of the Liberal party in Northampton have not hitherto been as fully consulted in the choice of our representatives as they have a fair right to demand'⁴, but, recognising that, it still refused to recognise Bradlaugh.

With this impasse continuing, the worst fears of both sides 'of the progressive party' were soon to be realised: by late May 1874 Gilpin's health had broken down, and by late June he had determined to resign his seat⁵. At that point it was the liberals rather than the radicals who faced a dilemma: having abandoned Henley and refusing to consider Bradlaugh, they had to find a suitable newcomer, willing and able to capture sufficient votes to defeat Bradlaugh and any conservative candidate in the now inevitable bye-election. As early as March, Joseph Chamberlain was expressing interest in Northampton. Writing to Charles Dilke, he asked:

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1. N.M., 28 Feb 1874.
 2. N.R., 8 Mar 1874.
 3. N.M., 14 Mar 1874.
 4. ibid.
 5. ibid., 30 May, N.R., 21 June 1874.

in confidence, do you know anything about Northampton ? If Gilpin resigns and Bradlaugh does not stand I shall probably go there. I was asked before, but refused to stand against Bradlaugh¹.

On 23 May 1874, Manfield and Perry and other members of the U.L.A. waited on Gurney to see if Bradlaugh could be induced to abandon Northampton so that a compromise candidate could be sure of the support of liberals and radicals alike². But Gurney refused to move. A campaign now developed in the pages of the Mercury, with letters from the radical Luke William Moore and the minister Thomas Arnold, among others, indicating that Bradlaugh could never be accepted by them, because of his atheism³.

Bradlaugh replied to Arnold in a reasonable way, pointing out the coincidence of their political views, their common ground on issues like disestablishment, or the repeal of the unpalatable clauses of the 1870 Education Act. He urged Arnold to extend to him the freedom of opinion Arnold himself enjoyed, and claimed that after the election in February, Gilpin, in an interview, told Bradlaugh he now favoured the latter's parliamentary ambitions and that 'he had urged on his friends in the event of a vacancy they ought to vote for me'⁴.

Having failed to induce Bradlaugh to withdraw, the U.L.A. began the search for a candidate of their own. That quest only got under way seriously with Gilpin's death on Tuesday 8 September, 1874⁵. Within days of his death there were three

1. B.M., Add.Ms 43885, Dilke Papers, ff:25-26, Chamberlain to Charles Dilke, 17 Mar 1874: Chamberlain got little consolation, as Dilke replied, 'I think Bradlaugh sure to stand', f.26, n.d., Mar 1874.

2. N.M., 30 May 1874.

3. ibid., 6, 20 June 1874.

4. N.R., 28 June 1874.

5. Daily News, 9 Sept 1874.

candidates mentioned, apart from Bradlaugh: Edwin James, formerly M.P. for Marylebone, an Australian, Marmaduke Bell, and Jacob Bright of Manchester. Within a week, both James and Bell had withdrawn, on the grounds that they did not wish to add to liberal division in the borough¹.

In the week following Gilpin's death the secretary of the Manchester Liberal Association came to Northampton and indicated Bright's willingness to stand if sufficient signatures could be got up to indicate his chances². The U.L.A. set about organising a requisition, and by 19 September had collected 1,200 names. At a crowded special meeting of the U.L.A. on the 19th, chaired by its president, P.P. Perry, and attended by leading town liberals, William Dennis, M.P. Manfield, John M. Vernon, Henry Marshall and William Adkins, only four hands were raised against Vernon's motion that a deputation be sent to Manchester to formally invite Bright to stand³.

This deputation, consisting of Perry and Manfield, met Bright on 22 September. His reply was polite and brief: 'the difficulties which were apparent some weeks ago appear to be in no way removed, and therefore I am compelled to arrive at a decision adverse to your wishes'⁴. When they reported this decision to a large meeting of the U.L.A. that same evening Perry was asked, in some desperation, to suggest other names. He mooted Handel Cosham of Bristol, Bernal Osborne, Arthur Arnold, Tillett of Norwich, Fowler of Cambridge, and Peter

1. Northampton Albion, 17 Sept, Daily News, 15 Sept 1874; another potential candidate was an independent, Dr Pearce, who also gave up, for lack of support, Northampton Albion, (hereafter cited as N.A.), 24 Sept 1874.

2. N.A., 24 Sept 1874.

3. ibid.

4. Manchester Evening News, 22 Sept 1874.

Rylands of Manchester. For good measure, the Rev. J.T. Brown threw in the name of James Wright of Birmingham, and a nameless voice suggested Joseph Chamberlain¹.

A committee was appointed to decide on one out of this motley group. They settled on Arthur Arnold who, on being requested to stand, refused, 'owing to the delay which had taken place in asking him'². The committee persisted and sent a deputation to him. Its members returned, exhausted, only to report that he refused to take on a Tory and Bradlaugh as well. He would stand only if he were to win a show of hands over Bradlaugh³.

They then settled on William Fowler, without even knowing his views. Fowler agreed to their invitation and came before a meeting of the liberal electors in the Town Hall on the morning of 25 September 1874. From the moment he spoke there was uproar. Radicals who had gained entrance put him to a severe test of questions: on separation of church and state he agreed that no state preference should be given to any religion, 'but as to how the present situation could be remedied he did not give any opinion at the moment'. Asked if he favoured total repeal of the game laws, he answered 'not total'. He would not vote for a permissive bill, and would not support a compulsory, national system of education if it meant excluding the Bible. Each reply was received with derision by the radical element present, but he carried the show of hands at the end⁴. The

1. N.A., 24 Sept 1874.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. N.A., 1 Oct 1874.'

liberals had got their man at last.

The contest which was now about to begin had a significance beyond local considerations. The Northampton by-election was to attract national attention not only because of Bradlaugh's prominence and notoriety, but because the future nature of the Liberal Party was being tried. It was the battle between moderate and radical reform.

It was the consciousness of this fact which led Henry Labouchere to intervene. On 25 September he wrote to the editor of the Daily News and claimed that Gilpin had told him after the election of 1868 that for any future elections he wanted his followers to come to an arrangement with those of Bradlaugh: that arrangement was to be that Gilpin's followers were to support any person - not excluding Bradlaugh - brought forward by Bradlaugh's supporters, while the latter were to support any person - not excluding Gilpin - brought forward by the latter's supporters. As there was now only one vacancy, Labouchere proposed firstly, that Bradlaugh's supporters should nominate three candidates and from these Gilpin's supporters should select the one they preferred, that one to be put forward and supported by all Northampton liberals and radicals for the single vacancy; secondly, that the candidate so chosen should have no special claim to be a candidate at the next general election: instead, each side would put forward three candidates, the other side to choose one of the three, and the two candidates so chosen to be supported by all liberals and radicals in the next general election¹.

1. Daily News, 26 Sept 1874.

It was a proposition which would have effectively eliminated Bradlaugh from any future election, if agreed to. Superficially reasonable, it betrayed ignorance of the depth of feeling which motivated both parties in Northampton liberalism. It was a scheme which fitted in with the views of the editor of the Daily News, and incidentally with those of the editor of the Northampton Mercury, that whatever Bradlaugh's merits and support, as long as he persisted liberalism would fail and conservatism triumph in Northampton. On the day before Labouchere's suggestion, for example, the Daily News commented:

Mr Bradlaugh is in the habit of reminding the constituency that his political opinions do not differ from those of the majority of the Liberal Party in the borough, and he is probably right It is pretty certain, however, that the party cannot be reunited by Mr Bradlaugh¹.

On the next day, when Labouchere's letter appeared, one of a different kind attacked the editor. The writer was the radical, Baxter Langley, who seized on the national significance of the Northampton problem:

I have read with regret your leading article, because it tends to perpetuate the division in the Liberal party by assuming - as the Whigs did at the last election - that the Radicals alone are called upon to retire or make sacrifices for the sake of the party. For many years the representative men of the Advanced Liberal section gave way, and showed their loyalty to the Moderate section. We were never thanked for it, and our views found no expression through those whom we had assisted to place in Parliament. The enlargement of the franchise made us the larger section of the party in many of the large towns, and where two members were returned the Advanced Liberals reasonably demanded that they should nominate one of the Liberal candidates. This having been refused, the Radical party has only one resource left - namely, to act independently and let the Whigs feel they are powerless without us. Union between the two sections can only be based upon mutual concessions. The Northampton election shows the Whigs and Nonconformists in their true light the Whigs who never make any sacrifices, call upon the Radicals

1. Daily News, 25 Sept 1874.

to withdraw their candidate the Nonconformists reject Mr Bradlaugh because of his religious views, though they loudly claim that 'religion shall be freed from all State patronage and control'. We have removed the civil disabilities of Jews and Catholics, but the Dissenters of Northampton are prepared to ostracise Mr Bradlaugh because he believes more or less than they do¹.

What Langley said in regard to the conflict between Whiggery and radicalism in the Liberal party had already been borne out in the Southwark by-election of 1870, and the struggle there between George Odger and Sidney Waterlow². It was now to be borne out, not just in the Northampton conflict itself, but in the press reaction to it. The two leading liberal national dailies, the News and the Telegraph, castigated Bradlaugh for placing himself before the interest of the Liberal party³. The radical Newcastle Weekly Chronicle and Reynolds's took the line that the right of radicals to a share in power was unfairly denied, and that Bradlaugh was not only first in the field, but had been willing to submit himself to a vote of liberal electors⁴.

While the moderate liberals, with time running out, 'ransacked political society in search of an available candidate'⁵, until they finally got Fowler in late September, Bradlaugh had continued to argue his own cause without a break since the February election⁶. He took up serious preparations when he met his election committee in Northampton on 10 August, making contingency plans should he once again be in America on his

1. ibid., 26 Sept 1874. J. Baxter Langley to editor.

2. W.K. Lamb, 'British Labour and Parliament, 1865-1893', University of London Ph.D. (1933) pp. 222-8.

3. Daily News, 10, 25, 26, 28 Sept, 7 Oct 1874; Daily Telegraph, 10, 28 Sept, 7 Oct 1874.

4. Reynolds's Newspaper, 27 Sept, 11 Oct 1874; Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 26 Sept, 3, 10 Oct 1874.

5. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 26 Sept 1874.

6. N.R., 8 Mar, 31 May, 21 June 1874.

resumed tour, when the election might take place¹. Lecturing to his supporters on that occasion on the subject of national taxation, he concluded with an onslaught on the local Whigs and moderates. Referring to the coming municipal elections, he told his radical following 'not under any circumstances to let them (the Whigs and moderates) be returned', if they in turn could not vote for him:

He wanted the issue to be an open one he asked them not to allow a Whig who stood in his way, to represent them in the municipal borough; and if there was a Conservative in for every office and post in this borough, he should know that they had been true to him and that they had thrown every Whig out².

After Gilpin's funeral Bradlaugh issued his address, identical to that of February, and spoke to an audience of four thousand in the Town Hall on 14 September. He was accompanied by Odger who appealed to the workers to vote for one who favoured amendment of the labour laws. Later in the month, support came from the Unitarian minister of South Place chapel, Moncure Conway, and from the radical Captain Maxse³. In addition there was now a newspaper in Northampton set up by one William Gavin Mc Greig, and published by John Bates, for the purpose of promoting Bradlaugh's cause and 'the cause of the Radical Working Men of England'⁴. Although it only went to two issues, its very appearance reflected an intensity of enthusiasm exceeding that of Bradlaugh's two preceding contests.

If it was an enthusiastic election it was also a hard and bitterly fought one, not between the conservative candidate

1. *ibid.*, 16 Aug 1874.

2. *N.M.*, 15 Aug 1874.

3. *N.R.*, 27 Sept 1874.

4. *The Northampton Radical*, No. 1, 30 Sept 1874.

Merewether, and the liberals, but between Bradlaugh and the liberal candidate Fowler. There is no doubt that Fowler used the religious stick with which to bludgeon Bradlaugh, and insofar as preventing Bradlaugh's election went, it worked; as far as winning the election went, it did not. The results were announced on 6 October¹:

Merewether	2171
Fowler	1836
Bradlaugh	1766

With the same register in force as in February the vote for the official liberal had declined by over 470, while that for Bradlaugh had increased by 113. If this was any consolation for Bradlaugh, it was not for his supporters who, after he had left for America, rioted in the borough, directing their disappointment at William Fowler and the Northampton Mercury, while the full representation of the borough was in conservative hands for the first time in over forty years.

Given this disappointment of Bradlaugh's supporters, given the bitterness of the radical press which cursed the bigotry of the town's nonconformists, and given Bradlaugh's own threats that the failure of moderate liberals to support him would result in his own supporters' voting for conservatives in the next municipal elections, what transpired immediately afterwards was remarkable.

Firstly, there was a serious split and resignations from the Radical Association, and secondly, there was a treaty or

1. Daily News, 7 Oct 1874.

compact made between the liberals of the U.L.A. and the radicals. With regard to the first: following Gilpin's death, the Radical Association met on 12 September and passed a resolution to the effect that 'the introduction of another candidate to contest the seat now vacant is fraught with great danger to the Liberal party and that the candidature of Mr Bradlaugh ought to be supported by every true liberal'¹. When Bradlaugh had once again been defeated some leading radical members of the Association became convinced that radicalism would get nowhere while Bradlaugh remained a radical candidate. In consequence they wrote to Gurney, president of the Radical Association, on 12 October, to tender their resignations. Among the twelve who did so were Stephen Clarke, Arthur Tebbutt, the secretary, together with his brother George and his father Thomas.

With regard to the second: on the morning after the conservative victory, alderman John Middleton Vernon met Gurney in John Bates' newspaper shop and deplored what had happened. They agreed that something would have to be done. Vernon also met Thomas Adams the same day and evoked a similar response. The result was the appointment of two committees, of liberals and radicals, which met ten days after the election². The result of that meeting was the adoption of the following important resolution:

1. N.M., 17 Oct 1874.

2. ibid., 31 Oct 1874. Among those present were the liberals Perry, Manfield, Vernon, Adkins, Marshall, William Jeffrey and William Jones, and the radicals Gurney, Adams, Edward Lightwood and W.C. France.

That this meeting admits the right of the Radical section of the Liberal Party to nominate one of the two candidates to represent the town in parliament¹.

Who that one nominee would be was left open, but obviously it was no one else but Bradlaugh. This, the compact of 1874, was to have a considerable effect on the political calculations and actions of the liberals in Northampton right up to the general election in 1880.

A second result of the meeting was an agreement in regard to municipal elections: both sides were to have one candidate each to contest the East and West Wards in all future municipal contests, all of them to be fully supported by the liberals and radicals alike².

Within two weeks of the parliamentary by-election, therefore, a remarkable situation had developed: leading town radicals abandoned the Radical Association because they felt that in its continued loyalty to Bradlaugh's candidature it was backing a loser; at the same time, leading town nonconformist liberals had in effect given in to Bradlaugh's claim after eight years of adamant opposition to him.

Gurney was able to sell this compact to his own fellow radicals with no known dissentients³. How far the leaders of moderate liberalism could carry their supporters with them into this unholy alliance remained to be seen in future years. In the immediacy, the effect was a cordial co-operation at the municipal elections which resulted in an outcome happy for both sides. It was the

1. N.M., 31 Oct 1874.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.

radicals, however, who gained most. For the first time, they returned two candidates, Frederick Covington and Thomas Adams, both Bradlaugh men¹.

Liberal-Radical conflict, 1875-1880:

At the end of 1874 the radicals had gained all they had ever asked for: an actual share of representations in the East and West Wards and an admission of their right to share in the representation of the borough at Westminster. On this basis a real union now existed between radicalism and liberalism. When Bradlaugh next visited Northampton, on 21 April 1875, that union appeared to be strengthened. At a dinner in his honour in the Town Hall, presided over by Gurney, Charles Tebbutt and Thomas Purser who, a few months before had broken from the Radical Association because of its continued support for Bradlaugh, were present. Purser now declared himself a Bradlaugh supporter:

They all knew that up to the present time he had not been in favour of the candidature of Mr Bradlaugh But he had now come to the conclusion, with, perhaps, many others, who up to the last election had different opinions, that they as a party must be united in this town Politically speaking, Mr Bradlaugh on the whole represented his views many of his friends would be surprised to hear of his presence here tonight and some timid ones would still withhold from the amalgamation, but he believed that the bulk of the Nonconformist party would join with them².

Others who announced their conversion to Bradlaugh's cause were Frederick Tonsley, owner of the Palmerston Inn - William Fowler's campaign headquarters in the by-election - Charles Tebbutt and William Billingham³. Billingham, interestingly, pointed out that as an association the U.L.A. was practically dead, whereas the Radical Association had four hundred members⁴.

1. ibid., 7 Nov 1874.

2. N.M., 24 Apr 1875.

3. N.R., 2 May 1875.

4. N.M., 24 Apr 1875.

Billingham was correct in his remarks. The U.L.A. had ceased to meet. The only progressive political organisation that now existed in the town was that possessed by the radicals. The benefits of the liberal-radical cessation of hostilities, and of radical organisation were apparent in the elections of 1875 when two more radicals were returned, and brought their own strength on the Town Council to four¹. In addition, Gurney became the town's first radical mayor, with his election to that office in November².

In the following spring the radical cause was further strengthened when the Northampton Guardian newspaper was set up.

Destined to run until 1890, it provided an alternative to the monopoly of liberal readership previously exercised by the Mercury³. The radical cause continued to prosper in 1876, whereas the liberals ran into difficulties: in the municipal elections two more radicals were returned for the West Ward, which they now fully controlled with six councillors, while in the East Ward the liberals lost one seat to the conservatives⁴.

The disarray of the liberals was evident in early October 1876 when rumours were current that Merewether might have to resign his seat. Faced with that prospect the Mercury called for a reorganisation of the 'old Association'⁵. The call was not unheeded. While liberal-radical co-operation in municipal contests continued, the question of parliamentary representation remained a source of tension despite the compact of 1874.

1. N.M., 4 Nov 1875.

2. ibid., 11 Nov 1875.

3. W.W. Hadley, loc.cit., p.124; see also W.W. Hadley, The Bicentenary Record of the Northampton Mercury, 1720-1920, (Northampton, 1920) p.45.

4. N.M., 4 Nov 1876.

5. ibid., 7 Oct 1876.

That compact, as far as the liberals were concerned, had conceded the right of the radicals to nominate one of the parliamentary candidates: it did not imply that liberals would be bound to work or vote for that candidate, but merely that they would not put up a candidate to work against him. The radicals were to claim, however, that their understanding of the 1874 compact was that not only might they put up a candidate but that all liberals should support him - an understanding that is certainly not apparent from the actual terms of the resolution embodying the compact. In June 1876 that tension was evident when for no known or apparent reason Thomas Adams at a meeting of the Radical Association attacked the Northampton liberals for their hypocrisy in using radical help in the municipal elections while refusing to agree to help Bradlaugh in a future parliamentary one¹.

By the end of 1876 it became clear that not all borough liberals had accepted the compact of 1874. The call of the Mercury for a reorganisation of liberals led to a meeting of anti-Bradlaugh Nonconformists on 1 December 1876. That meeting set up a specifically anti-Bradlaugh body, the New Liberal Association². With Jonathan Robinson as president and Edward Cooke as secretary, its best-known members included the Rev. Thomas Arnold, the Primitive Methodist minister Rev. Joseph Ashford, the Baptist Luke William Moore, Robert Brice, G.F. Newton and Henry Marshall. By March 1877 it claimed to have a membership of three hundred³.

1. N.M., 17 June 1876.

2. ibid., 9 Dec 1876, 10 Feb 1877.

3. ibid., 10 Mar 1877.

In response to this development, those Nonconformist liberals who had been involved in the compact of 1874 revived the U.L.A. in late December 1876, and were from this time onward known as the Old Liberals, and their association as the Old Liberal Association¹. Their leading figures were Manfield and Perry. The former invited the Birmingham Liberal Association to send a delegation to Northampton to promote some scheme that would end liberal divisions in the borough². The result of this was a public meeting on 24 December 1876 in the Town Hall, presided over by Perry. Present from the Birmingham Liberal Association were its most prominent members, J.S. Wright, its chairman, Frank Schnadhorst, its secretary, and Jesse Collings, at that time a Birmingham alderman³.

Perry opened the proceedings on a note of realism: united they could defeat the conservatives; disunited they would not; that Bradlaugh would stand again was certain, and whatever Perry felt personally about Bradlaugh, he could not question 'the right of some 1,700 to 1,800 men to bring him forward as a candidate'⁴. To sort out the dilemma he then introduced Jesse Collings. Collings immediately launched into an attack on the recently formed N.L.A., because, being based on the principle of excluding Bradlaugh from Northampton, it could never be representative. Bradlaugh had as much right to his opinions as the Nonconformists had and his political programme was almost identical to theirs. Furthermore, the promoters of

1. *ibid.*, 26 Dec 1876.

2. *ibid.*

3. *N.M.*, 26 Dec 1876.

4. *ibid.*

the N.L.A. were really doing Bradlaugh a good turn by magnifying his importance. He then went on to explain the operation of the Birmingham scheme or system, and how it might be applied to Northampton. The Northampton liberals should say nothing about any candidate until they first had set up a comprehensive party machine, representative of all shades of liberalism and radicalism, and only after that, by a majority vote should they settle on the names of candidates for the borough. Once these names were chosen, they must be supported by all. Unless they did this, they would get nowhere¹.

Perry spoke immediately after this, dissenting from what Collings said because 'he could not assent to vote for any man with whose principles he did not accord'. He then called on J.S. Wright, who urged the adoption of the Birmingham scheme, and appealed to the Nonconformists to accept the nomination of Bradlaugh as one of the candidates. Schnadhorst's contribution was short, merely indicating that Birmingham liberals would do all they could to help their Northampton brethren. Thereupon, M.P. Manfield rose and proposed the following resolution:

That in the opinion of this meeting a Liberal association should be formed based on the Birmingham model, including all sections of the Liberal party, and that a committee, consisting of Alderman Manfield, Alderman Perry, Alderman Gurney, Alderman Vernon, Robert Brice junior, R. Cleaver, R. Turner, Rev. T. Arnold, T. Adams, F. Covington, J. Robinson, J. Blackwell and W. Westley be formed with power to add to their number².

The resolution was carried unanimously. Whether all the people mentioned in the resolution had been consulted beforehand is unknown, but the list of names included literally all sections

1. *ibid.*

2. *N.M.*, 26 Dec 1876.

of liberal opinion, pro-Bradlaugh, anti-Bradlaugh, and those who, though anti-Bradlaugh, were primarily simply pro-Liberal unity. That such people could work together to adopt a scheme of unity was highly unlikely, and the Mercury, for one, was determined that they should not:

the proposal is only an attempt to secure the nomination of Bradlaugh as the candidate of the Liberal party we cannot recommend the adoption of the Birmingham nostrum¹.

However hostile it was, the Mercury was facing facts, and a man like Perry was deluding himself in thinking that, while not voting for Bradlaugh and while remaining neutral to him any such scheme could be adopted in the way Collings outlined it. Perry and the liberals of the O.L.A. recognised the power of the radicals to prevent the return of any liberal unless Bradlaugh too were returned; unwilling to perform a quid pro quo, they wanted radical support for a liberal candidate while withholding support from the only possible radical one.

The reaction of the N.L.A. came in early February 1877 when they rejected the Birmingham scheme out of hand, and renewed their determination to oppose Bradlaugh².

How Gurney, Adams and the other radicals reacted to the Birmingham scheme in early 1877 is unclear. In mid-February, Thomas Adams was reported as saying to his Radical Association colleagues that 'in a few days they would have an opportunity of subscribing their names to the Liberal Association formed on the Birmingham plan'³, implying that a new Liberal organisation

1. N.M., 30 Dec 1876.

2. ibid., 10 Feb 1877: 'The Association (N.L.A.) is composed of Independent Liberals who are determined to resist the attempt made by Secularists throughout the country to impose upon this constituency the Apostle of Atheism'.

3. Northamptonshire Guardian, 17 Feb 1877, hereafter cited as N.G.

had been, or was about to be set up. This implication is supported by a report in late March 1877 which referred to the existence of the Northampton Liberal Association¹, based on the Birmingham model, and which claimed that it was 'meeting with a reception amongst the great bulk of the Liberal voters which has surpassed the most sanguine expectations'². Yet, in this same report, the Guardian claimed that the radicals rejected the scheme as a plan to get rid of Bradlaugh, and it appealed to them, in an attempt to disabuse them of this belief, to join the new organisation³.

By early May 1877 the Northampton Liberal Association, according to one report, had 2,000 members, and the new Liberal Association decided, before adopting any policy towards it, to wait and see whether the Northampton Liberal Association decided to vote for or against the nomination of Bradlaugh as a candidate⁴. Clearly the Northampton Liberal Association was simply the old U.L.A. under a different name and divested of the totally anti-Bradlaugh liberals who had joined together in the New Liberal Association.

If the radicals were opposed to the Northampton Liberal Association in March 1877, as the Guardian claimed, they were still opposed to it in August 1877, according to the Mercury:

the scheme itself must be totally inoperative so long as the two existing societies, the New Liberal Association and the Radical Political Guardians remain unconverted⁵.

The apparent contradiction between Thomas Adams' favourable attitude to the scheme in February and the radicals' remaining

1. N.G., 24 Mar 1877.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. ibid., 5 May 1877.

5. N.M., 4 Aug 1877.

'unconverted' in August is readily resolved: in February 1877, Bradlaugh, together with Annie Besant, took the momentous decision to defend Charles Knowlton's Fruits of Philosophy, and on 23 March they duly published their own production of the pamphlet¹. That decision resulted in the Queen's Bench trial in June, with its adverse verdict which was later reversed on a technicality. That Bradlaugh subsequently got the verdict quashed did not alter the fact that the Knowlton trial created, or threatened to create a whole new political situation in Northampton politics.

The Mercury did not conceal its jubilation:

there is good in everything, and if the 'Fruits of Philosophy' have done great harm to the community, they have, we trust, knocked Charles Bradlaugh's candidature on the head².

After Bradlaugh and Besant had been sentenced the Mercury was convinced that 'all can now cordially co-operate in selecting men worthy to represent this important constituency in the interest of our common cause'³. Generous with the prospect of assured victory it insisted on the right of the radicals to nominate a man whose views might even be far in advance of its own. Bradlaugh was finished⁴. Its radical rival, the Guardian, in the face of this potential disaster for Bradlaugh, could only remain silent.

Bradlaugh himself did not underrate the calamitous possibilities of what had happened, and went down to Northampton on 3 July to make a statement and to get a vote on whether he was to

1. See above Chapter Two.
 2. N.M., 23 June 1877.
 3. ibid., 30 June 1877.
 4. ibid.

continue as a candidate or not. At a meeting chaired by Gurney he declared he would immediately retire from Northampton politics if that vote went against him. But he did not shirk the issue. Asked by one who had supported him from the beginning whether he thought the Knowlton tract a fit or proper work to place in the hands of a fifteen year old daughter, Bradlaugh replied simply: 'there was no instruction that was impure unless it was impurely given'¹. He took up the Knowlton issue because he had advocated Malthusian views 'for the last twenty years', and because he was 'always for free and full and fair discussion'².

Referring to the moves towards unity in Northampton and the adoption of the Birmingham scheme, Bradlaugh declared that if the vote went against him he would retire: if it were for him he would still place himself 'in the hands of any united Liberal party which may make its organisation in this town, and will abide by their decision as loyal if it be against me as if it be for me'³. He emerged from the meeting with a vote of confidence carried with 'an overwhelming majority'. But damage had been done. One of his supporters, Alfred Johnson, said Bradlaugh had made a major blunder and had now lost the potential support of those liberals of the O.L.A. who had been neutral.

A week after Bradlaugh's re-endorsement by his supporters the radicals decided to proceed with talks with the Northampton Liberal Association, to 'carry out the Birmingham scheme'⁴.

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1. N.G., 7 July 1877.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid.
 4. ibid., 14 July 1877.

Four radicals, Gurney, Adams, Stimpson and Yorke, met with Manfield, Perry, Turner and Sheffield on 2 and 3 August 1877, but failed to reach agreement. The radicals refused to be bound by a joint test ballot to decide on two candidates, because, if that ballot resulted in Bradlaugh's being one of the candidates, the liberals refused to pledge themselves to work for and vote for him¹. This they refused to do mainly because of his conduct in the Knowlton affair².

Following on this failure of negotiation, the New Liberal Association met on 7 August to discuss what action should be taken to get two good Liberal candidates for the next general election. Chairman Jonathan Robinson pointed out that not only had the body 'which formed the Birmingham scheme' collapsed, but that 'many' of Bradlaugh's former adherents had now abandoned him - some six hundred, according to one member of the Northampton Liberal Association, said Robinson, but he himself would put the figure as high as one thousand: 'it therefore becomes a question for us whether, if 1000 votes were told off, we could not successfully contest the election and return two Liberal candidates'³. But no decision to promote two candidates was taken at this meeting on 7 August.

On 11 August, however, four days after this meeting, and following on the failure of the talks between the Radical Association and the Northampton Liberal Association, the latter decided to promote one liberal candidate and named

1. ibid., 4 Aug 1877.
 2. N.G., 4 Aug 1877.
 3. N.M., 11 Aug 1877.

their man as Arthur Arnold, former editor of The Echo newspaper¹. The exasperated Mercury declared:

the knot of local liberals who have always imagined that by some kind of hocus-pocus they might obtain the votes of Mr Bradlaugh's supporters without paying the price which Mr Bradlaugh demands for his support are still labouring under their old infatuation².

Though the Mercury found Arnold to be quite an acceptable liberal, it argued that neutrality towards Bradlaugh would be an insufficient basis for winning Northampton: when the election time came, Arnold would have to tell his supporters to support, oppose or simply ignore Bradlaugh. To support him would lose liberal votes, to oppose him would lose radical votes, to attempt neutrality towards him would lose the votes of both camps³.

The news of the Old Liberals' decision to seek a nomination of Arthur Arnold had repercussions on radicals and New Liberals alike. This one-sided action by the Old Liberals provided the New Liberals with a real possibility of engineering the exclusion of Bradlaugh from any hope of winning a seat. On 16 August, five days after the decision of the O.L.A. an emergency committee of the N.L.A. met and decided to attempt the adoption of two liberal candidates. It instructed the Rev. Thomas Arnold to communicate with a Manchester temperance reformer, Henry Lee, to ask if he would consent to become a candidate⁴. The second candidate, though it was not stated at the time, was to be the O.L.A. nominee, Arthur Arnold. On

1. *ibid.*, 18 Aug 1877.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

4. N.M., 8 Sept 1877.

21 August, Lee consented to accept, and the general committee of the N.L.A. approved the action of its emergency committee¹.

By promoting two candidates itself, one of whom would be the man chosen by the O.L.A., the N.L.A. hoped to create a situation where Bradlaugh would be effectively excluded. But, as N.L.A. president, Jonathan Robinson, pointed out, to secure success in this it was essential that there should be unity among the liberals. To the decision of the O.L.A. to promote Arnold, and to the decision of the N.L.A. on 16 August to promote two candidates, the radicals reacted strongly. On 22 August, the day after Lee had accepted the N.L.A.'s proposition, the radicals met and decided that if the borough liberals promoted two candidates the radicals would retaliate by also promoting two². By this means they could not hope for success in an election, but they could prevent liberal success at least. One week later, the radicals, who until 1877 had called themselves the Radical Political Guardians Association, changed their name to the Northampton Radical Association (N.R.A.), and admitted three hundred new names to membership³.

It was with a view to exploring the possibility of unity that Robinson, Henry Marshall and Thomas Arnold met with Perry, Manfield and Adkins of the O.L.A. on 4 September. Perry pointed out that he still felt bound by the compact of 1874 not to promote more than one candidate. It was, he argued, not solely a question of honour, but also one of realism: in

1. *ibid.*

2. *N.G.*, 25 Aug 1877.

3. *ibid.*, 8 Sept 1877.

view of the fact that Bradlaugh commanded well over one thousand votes it would be folly to put up more than one candidate and thereby outrage the radicals¹. That evening the N.L.A. delegates reported on this exchange to a general meeting of their body. The members were not satisfied with the outcome of the deliberations as the O.L.A. people had not made it clear in putting up only one candidate what attitude that candidate and his supporters were going to adopt towards Bradlaugh. It was decided to send a further deputation to meet with the O.L.A. spokesmen, to get clarification on this².

This second conference was held on 18 September, chaired by shoe manufacturer Richard Turner. Intense debate over the compact of 1874 took place. Although some of the O.L.A. speakers were former Bradlaugh supporters who had abandoned him over the Knowlton affair, notably Richard Cleaver and (temporarily) Frederick Covington, and though most others had never been his supporters, all of them refused to agree to put up more than one candidate. Refusing to support Bradlaugh, they would nevertheless keep their compact with the radicals by not opposing him. Again it was clear that loyalty to this compact was not exclusively founded in a sense of honour: the radicals' threat of retaliation by promoting two candidates had not been in vain, for Richard Turner pointed out that the registration of all liberal voters had been for over two years 'entirely in the hands of Mr Thomas Adams':

Mr Adams knew how nineteen out of twenty of the new voters were going to vote, and he (Turner) believed the strength of the Radical party was much greater than they thought.

1. N.M., 8 Sept 1877.

2. ibid.

That being the case it was perfectly absurd of them to think of bringing forward two candidates, and therefore the wisest plan was to adopt one¹.

To achieve unity, however, it was not sufficient, as far as Thomas Arnold and the N.L.A. was concerned, that the O.L.A. should not support Bradlaugh: it was essential that they state officially that they would not support him. Such a statement, Frederick Covington countered, would be tantamount to an outright declaration of war on Bradlaugh, and 'that would make the breach as wide as ever'².

At the end of the debate the Old Liberals remained adamant on putting forward only one candidate and wanted an immediate vote there and then on unity with the N.L.A. on that basis. But the latter's delegates could not be party to such a vote without consulting their general membership. The meeting thereupon adjourned to allow such consultation to take place³.

When the conference again resumed on 2 October 1877 the N.L.A. had stepped down:

Satisfied by the declaration of the chief leaders of the Old Liberal Association that they are not prepared to support the candidature of Mr Bradlaugh, this association thinks it desirable to co-operate with them in the selection of a suitable candidate for the next parliamentary election⁴.

This concession was made by the N.L.A. on three conditions:

i) that the O.L.A. do not 'corporately' give support to Bradlaugh as a second candidate; ii) that the N.L.A. are left free to vigorously oppose Bradlaugh; iii) that the N.L.A. reserves the right to nominate a second candidate 'should changed circumstances make that desirable in the interests of the Liberal party'⁵.

1. N.M., 22 Sept 1877.

2. N.M., 22 Sept 1877.

3. ibid.

4. N.M., 6 Oct 1877.

5. ibid., 13 Oct 1877.

No fusion of organisations took place, and all that was achieved was an agreement to co-operate in parliamentary elections. With regard to municipal elections, the N.L.A. decided not to participate officially in nominating candidates of its own, owing to 'the complicated nature of the relations subsisting between the leaders of the Old Liberal Association and the supporters of Mr Bradlaugh'¹. This left the way clear for the O.L.A. and the radicals to act in the united way they had been doing for three years in the case of municipal elections. Speaking for the radicals in the O.L.A., Covington interpreted this decision not as neutrality on the part of the N.L.A. but as fear on its part that it might expose its own real weakness². Whether it was fear or not it proved to be a wise move, for it was the radicals' and the O.L.A.'s weakness that was exposed in the municipal elections of 1877. Their candidates did not fare well.

In the East Ward the O.L.A. candidate, Manfield, and the radical candidate, Covington, running together, were both defeated by conservatives. In the West Ward, where for the past three years radicals had taken both seats, they now took only one, the other going not to a conservative but to William Collier, a liberal of N.L.A. persuasion³. Jonathan Robinson interpreted the result as a reprimand by the liberal electors on those who had refused to dissociate themselves entirely from Bradlaugh, while Thomas Arnold saw it as 'a sign of the disintegration of the Liberal party. They were broken and

1. N.M., 6 Oct 1877.

2. N.G., 15 Dec 1877; Covington held joint membership of the O.L.A. and N.R.A.

3. N.M., 3 Nov 1877.

humbled'¹.

Complicated as the situation in regard to parliamentary and municipal politics the town of Northampton now was, it had been rendered even more complicated by the entry of an independent liberal into the stakes for liberal nominations. The prospective nominee in this case was Thomas Wright, native of Northampton but practising as a solicitor in Leicester. His appearance, allegedly backed by a requisition signed by some two thousand voters was first adverted to by the Mercury in mid-September 1877². On 8 September a deputation of independent liberal electors took this requisition, dated 30 July 1877, to Wright at Leicester. A member of the Church of England who had latterly come to accept the need for its disestablishment, uncommitted to permissive bill legislation but believing public houses should be better regulated, and wanting to see an extension of the borough franchise qualifications to the counties, Wright declared his complete innocence of any idea that he was to be asked to stand as M.P. for his native town, but duly flattered with so numerously signed a requisition, he agreed to accept³.

Attacked by the N.L.A. for his political inconsistency, Wright retaliated, remarking of Thomas Arnold that 'there is no deadlier foe to the unity of the Liberal party in Northampton'⁴, and announcing his determination to stand for the constituency. That determination was maintained until March 1880, when he finally abandoned the attempt to get adoption as an official Liberal candidate⁵. Between July-September 1877 and March 1880

1. ibid., 10 Nov 1877.

2. N.M., 15 Sept 1877.

3. ibid.

4. ibid., 20 Oct 1877.

5. N.G., 27 Mar 1880.

he played an independent, non-committal role that successively absorbed the attention of Old Liberals, New Liberals and radicals and thereby added to the chaotic situation which obtained in the borough up to the last days before the polling in the next general election took place.

Against the background of Wright's intervention, and the complication of the municipal contest, the N.L.A. proceeded to implement the agreement of 2 October, by taking steps to confer with the O.L.A. to secure an agreed single candidate. In February 1878 they announced that Henry Lee had withdrawn from consideration as a candidate because of the continuing uncertainty of the Northampton situation¹. On the question of Wright's intervention they set up a joint committee with the O.L.A. on 26 December, to ascertain 'Mr Wright's intentions and position in reference to our Borough'². Their concern was to verify the requisition with its two thousand signatures, for, if genuine, they could not afford to ignore Wright's presence. This committee communicated with Wright, but after many meanderings in search of the signatures and these not being forthcoming, they concluded that they were either fictitious, or else, if genuine, were the signatures of Bradlaugh radicals. If the latter were true and Wright became a candidate the ludicrous situation would have developed where the radicals would have had two candidates³. This effectively disposed of Wright as far as both liberal bodies were concerned. As to Arthur Arnold, he withdrew his name in April for precisely the same reason as Henry Lee had done, because the Bradlaugh

1. N.M., 9 Feb 1878.

2. N.M., 6 Apr 1878.

3. ibid.

difficulty had not been overcome¹. The way was now clear for the O.L.A. and N.L.A. to work together in securing a suitable candidate. Sometime between April and July 1878 the N.L.A. president, Robinson, accompanied by Perry and Shoosmith of the O.L.A., went to London to interview Acton Smee Ayrton as a possible candidate. The former M.P. for Tower Hamlets and Commissioner of Public Works declared himself in favour of standing alone, without reference to Bradlaugh, and being a liberal who favoured separation of church and state and widening of the county franchise, he was deemed an acceptable candidate². A joint committee to promote his cause in Northampton was then set up and was instructed to bring Ayrton to speak in the town³. Ayrton did not come until October, and the radicals saw to it that he had no easy reception.

The same period, July 1877 to July 1878 which saw Old and New Liberals coming together and getting a potentially strong candidate prepared to ignore Bradlaugh, turned out to be a time of troubles for the radicals. Despite Bradlaugh's successful presentation of his action over the Knowlton affair to his Northampton supporters in July 1877, some leading radical figures like Richard Turner and Richard Cleaver deserted him. Others, like Covington, wavered in allegiance. The radicals' defeat in the municipal elections that October was a second set-back. The coming together of O.L.A. and N.L.A. constituted a third one. With some 1700 to 1800 votes for Bradlaugh, the radicals recognised that they could prevent the return of a

1. *ibid.*, 20 Apr 1878.

2. *ibid.*, 13 July 1878. An acceptable, but not an ideal candidate - at least for the town's temperance lobby, as Ayrton had not supported permissive legislation.

3. *ibid.*, 20 July 1878.

liberal, but they could not secure the return of Bradlaugh without liberal support. Clearly it was in recognition of their weakness in this that the Radical Association decided in December 1877 to issue a manifesto calling on liberals to join the ranks of the radicals¹. In January 1878, through Gurney, they invited the borough's liberal electors to make a second attempt to introduce the Birmingham scheme, but got no response². Following this failure the radicals determined to perfect and extend their organisation throughout the borough³. At the Town Hall on 29 May 1878, with Bradlaugh present, they set up a body called the Radical Hundred to ensure the perfection of their party machinery. Yet, however perfect their party organisation, the basic problem remained that they could not carry Bradlaugh to victory on an independent ticket.

What was true for them was true for the liberals, Old and New combined. This was to be demonstrated with a vengeance in October 1878 when Ayrton finally made his public appearance in the town. Introduced by Perry to a crowded public meeting, attended by liberals and radicals alike, Ayrton gave an account of his previous political experience, outlined his attitude to major political questions and declared that at the elections he would not coalesce with anyone. Gurney then asked him if he would not coalesce with Bradlaugh since their views were similar. Ayrton repeated that he would not. Gurney then tried to propose a resolution, but the chairman, Perry, intervened to say that Jonathan Robinson had the floor. Robinson then moved

1. N.M., 19 Jan 1878.
 2. ibid., 19 Jan, 9 Feb 1878.
 3. ibid., 11 May 1878.

that 'this meeting, having heard Mr Ayrton, and being satisfied with the expression of his political opinions, invite him to become one of the candidates for the representation of Northampton, in the Liberal interest'. Amid uproar, Manfield seconded. Gurney then moved and Covington seconded an amendment 'that as the division between the Radical and Liberal electors may again allow two Tories to misrepresent this borough, this meeting declares that it cannot pledge itself to support any candidate who will not coalesce with the nominee of the Radical party'. Put to the meeting, Robinson's resolution was defeated and Gurney's amendment was carried¹. Months of work by the liberal coalition had come to naught. On 14 October 1878 Ayrton wrote to Robinson:

It appears to me, with great deference to the opinion of your committee, that its members do not sufficiently appreciate the fact that they have not a sufficient organisation for election purposes to attain the end they desire to accomplish I think it will be better to suspend any further action on my part².

Until such time as the liberals got adequately organised, therefore, they could not rely on the candidate they finally succeeded in getting.

If this was a victory for the radicals it was only a pyrric one - the real beneficiaries were the conservatives. This was borne out in the municipal elections a few weeks later. Of the two liberal candidates for the East Ward only one was returned, the other being defeated by a conservative. Of the two radical candidates in the West Ward only one was returned, the other also being defeated by a conservative³. In the South Ward both conservatives were again returned. For two years running,

1. N.M., 12 Oct 1878.
 2. ibid., 9 Nov 1878.
 3. ibid.

the radicals had now lost one of their West Ward seats and the liberals had lost three seats in two years. The Mercury, not surprisingly, blamed the reverses on liberal-radical disunity created by Gurney's intervention at Ayrton's meeting¹, a view shared by Luke Moore and Jonathan Robinson of the N.L.A.². Gurney accepted the thanks of his fellow radicals for what he described as an attempt to bring the liberals 'to their senses', but modestly pointed out that the credit should really go to Covington³.

The debacle at the Ayrton meeting, and the defeat at the municipal elections had significant effects on both liberals and radicals. On Wednesday 11 December 1878 the Radical Association, at Covington's behest, took a decision in principle to promote two candidates at the next parliamentary election, and to leave the selection of the second nominee to the executive committee of the Association⁴.

Whether this was a genuine decision or merely a kite-flying exercise to influence the liberals cannot be proven either way, but it is not without significance that one month later the New Liberals initiated a new departure. At their annual general meeting on 14 January 1879, on the proposal of Jonathan Robinson, they changed their name from the New Liberal Association to the Northampton Liberal Association. But of greater significance than this was the proposal of the Rev. Joseph Ashford that they change Rule 2.

This rule which formerly read

The special objects of this association shall be i) the

1. N.M., 19 Oct, 9 Nov 1878.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid., 23 Nov 1878.
 4. ibid., 14 Dec 1878.

union of all those whose principles will not permit them to accept of Mr Bradlaugh as a candidate for election to parliament, nor, if accepted by others, to support his election,

was now changed, to read

The special objects of this association shall be to promote the election of a Liberal candidate or candidates whose character, principle and talents would be likely to command the support of the whole of the Liberal electors¹.

In effect, in an attempt to gain complete unity with the Old Liberals, the N.L.A. had ceased explicitly and formally to be an anti-Bradlaugh body. The change in rule constituted a change in tone rather than in substance, but it nevertheless represented a reluctant admission that continued outright opposition to Bradlaugh would not bring victory.

After a recruiting drive which brought them over eighty new members in January - according to themselves - their electoral committee now thought of inviting Ayrton to appear again².

Before their next meeting in March Ayrton agreed to come, and fifteen hundred tickets were issued to a closed Town Hall meeting³. Ayrton repeated his account of himself and again Gurney intervened. Saying that Ayrton was a good man, and acceptable to the radicals, he asked 'is there going to be unity or not?'. To loud applause the chairman replied

He thought Mr Gurney, as a reasonable man, would be satisfied with leaving the question of voting for a second candidate entirely open to the conscience and opinion of each elector⁴.

With that, a resolution accepting Ayrton as liberal candidate was carried with acclamation. There were only eight dissentients. While this was something of a victory for the liberals it left the ultimate fate of the constituency still an unknown one.

1. N.M., 18 Jan 1878.
 2. *ibid.*, 15 Feb 1878.
 3. *ibid.*, 15 Mar 1878.
 4. *ibid.*

Neither liberals nor radicals could yet be sure of success.

The radicals immediately organised a deputation to Ayrton to bring to his knowledge the compact of 1874 and their understanding of it, namely, that each side having put forward one candidate, the two candidates would then have joint committees, joint publicity and a joint campaign¹.

Ayrton thereupon asked to see a text of the 1874 compact and found that it said nothing at all about joint publicity, committees or campaigns. Consequently he refused to consider any form of joint action, adding that this was no reason why there should be any animosity². Greatly put out by this, Thomas Adams led the radical deputation away, observing as he did that any hope of unity was now extremely remote³.

Publicly, Bradlaugh did not appear dismayed at this development. Since his re-endorsement by his supporters, in July 1877, following the Knowlton affair, he had visited the town on five occasions and was enthusiastically received each time⁴. Towards Arthur Arnold, and then towards Ayrton he professed indifference, claiming that if either did not join with him, they could not expect to be elected when the time came⁵. He had issued his fourth election address as early as December 1878. There was little new in his programme except a declaration in support of women's suffrage, a declaration of opposition

1. *ibid.*, 24 May 1879.

2. *N.M.*, 24 May 1879.

3. *ibid.*

4. On Friday 26 Oct 1877, 22 Mar 1878, 19 August 1878, 16 Oct 1878, 7 May 1879, for which see *N.R.*, 26 Oct 1877, 31 Mar, 25 Aug, 20 Oct 1878, 11 May 1879 respectively.

5. *N.R.*, 26 Aug 1877, 29 June 1879.

to any further extension of the empire, and that with regard to the peerage all future creations were to be for life only¹. Following the failure of the radical deputation to make Ayrton move away from a position of neutrality towards Bradlaugh in May 1879, Bradlaugh himself came to the town to lecture on the history of radicalism there. He used the occasion to put forward his own calculations of the various voting positions.

He estimated that the electorate had 8,000 voters², of whom 3,000 were conservatives and 1,000 were electors who never bothered to cast a vote. Of the remaining 4,000, some 2,000 were his supporters. Of the final, critical 2,000, some were bound to vote for Thomas Wright if he persisted in his candidature. Consequently Ayrton could not hope to get all of the remaining 2,000 non-Bradlaugh votes. Even if for some reason he did get them it would still mean that the Tories with 3,000 would be assured of victory, and for that situation he, Bradlaugh, would not be responsible³. Consequently the recent union of New and Old Liberals and the formal change in N.L.A. policy would still not guarantee the return of an official liberal.

Privately, however, one may doubt his professed indifference to Ayrton and his appearance of being undismayed. In a strange letter to Charles Dilke in July 1879 which it is best to reproduce fully, Bradlaugh wrote:

My dear Sir Charles,

It appears that the so-called Moderate Liberals mean to fight for one seat only at Northampton. I therefore can

1. *ibid.*, 22 Dec 1878.

2. Bradlaugh's estimate was quite close to the mark: in 1878 there were 7730 and in 1880 there were 8189 electors.

3. *N.M.*, 28 June 1879.

fight only for myself - This means that Phipps's seat (is) sure, and the second either myself, Merewether or Ayrton (sic), and I think the order expresses subject to contingencies, the probability.

There are one or two constituencies and several boroughs where moderate liberals will stand who cannot be elected without the votes of my friends. I am now consulted as to what my friends in such cases ought to do. Speaking moderately I think I could surely prevent the return of five or six moderates and render doubtful the return of ten or twelve more.

Is it reasonable to expect me to aid those who do me the most possible mischief? I owe no debt of gratitude to anyone in England, except the people who love me; may it not be as well for me this coming election to pitch say twenty seats and make a few burnt offerings by way of example, and to show the moderates that I am strong enough to be worth reckoning with? e.g., if there is a fight in North East Lancashire every vote there will be needed, and we have a goodly few, not enough to send a man, but enough to easily turn a majority into a doubt of a minority

As things now stand my actual position at Northampton looks very strong, but perhaps I overrate, and having fought for eleven years I do not want to waste at my time of life another half dozen. Ayrton's minority hopes to make itself into a majority by splits from mine and the Tories', but the hope is not likely to be realised so far as mine are concerned - my men will plump at least seven tenths, and if the Conservatives run Merewether, Ayrton cannot get 250 there.

Yours very truly, C. Bradlaugh¹.

That Bradlaugh wielded the influence he claimed, in any borough outside Northampton, let alone in 'five or six', is highly unlikely, and his letter is best interpreted as a threat, issued in the hope that Dilke might be persuaded to use his influence to induce the Northampton liberals to reconsider their attitude to Bradlaugh and their determination to put up Ayrton without reference to Bradlaugh.

As for Bradlaugh's supporters, after their failure to move Ayrton they regarded the compact of 1874 at an end, even as

1. B.M., Add.Ms 43910, Dilke Papers, vol xxxvii, f.326, Bradlaugh to Dilke, 26 July 1879. There is no evidence in the Bradlaugh Collection of any letter from Dilke around this time.

regards municipal elections. At a conference with the liberal leaders on 4 October 1879 they announced that they 'could not be depended to vote for liberal municipal candidates unless the Liberal party would agree to a joint platform at the next parliamentary election'¹. The Northampton Liberal Association thereupon decided, as an organisation, to abstain from the municipal contest².

For the liberals the result was a disaster: putting up only two candidates, one in the East and one in the South, both were defeated. For the radicals it was a mixed result, Covington being also defeated in the East, but both candidates being returned in the West³. They soon after had the satisfaction of seeing Gurney once again become mayor⁴. They enjoyed a much more substantial victory in the school board elections in January 1880. Of three liberal candidates only one was elected, whereas of seven radicals five were returned. Three of these five, Covington, Tebbutt and Sears, were Bradlaugh men and headed the poll⁵.

At that point, late 1879-early 1880, the situation in regard to parliamentary politics in the borough had not changed. Bradlaugh opened his fourth election campaign on 21 January at a meeting with the Radical Two Hundred, presided over by Thomas Adams⁶. Meanwhile, however, growing discontent began to develop in the Northampton Liberal Association because of the failure of

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1. N.M., 11 Oct 1879.
 2. ibid., 18 Oct 1879.
 3. ibid., 8 Nov 1879.
 4. ibid., 15 Nov 1879.
 5. N.R., 18 Jan 1880.
 6. N.G., 24 Jan 1880.

Ayrton to appear among them¹. Liberal canvassers were anxious to go to work on his behalf, but could not do so as Ayrton had not provided them with an election manifesto². Serious discontent was evident at the meeting of the N.L.A. on 10 February 1880, three weeks after Bradlaugh's party had gone to work. One member, Evers, declared it was the committee's fault that Ayrton had not come since the committee had done nothing to get him to come. A long-standing member, D. Thornton, then caused an outcry by suggesting that Ayrton was not strong enough a candidate to win through, and that a last-minute change of policy in respect of a liberal-radical coalition should be considered .

Matters were somewhat mended when Ayrton finally came and addressed a meeting in the Town Hall on 17 February and re-affirmed his determination to fight independently of Bradlaugh³. But, a problem still remained in the person of Thomas Wright who, at the beginning of March 1880, began attacks on Ayrton as a third candidate. At the same time he tried to make overtures for an alliance with the Bradlaugh radicals⁴. Then, on Tuesday 9 March, disaster befell the liberals when Ayrton retired from the contest after a riding accident⁵. Manfield, the Old Liberal secretary of the Ayrton election committee, then went in search of another candidate and came back from London with the name of Hugh Balfour, Congregationalist, cousin of Charles Gilpin, nephew of John Bright and chairman of the

1. N.G., 14 Feb 1880.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid., 21 Feb 1880.
 4. ibid., 6 Mar 1880.
 5. ibid., 13 Mar 1880.

East Surrey Liberal Association¹. With such impeccable connections, Balfour seemed an ideal replacement. Unfortunately, although he would not coalesce with Bradlaugh, he told Manfield that neither would he object to going on the same public platform with the radical. This was enough to cause disquiet at the liberal gathering which assembled on Friday 12 March to meet him. This disquiet was overcome and the meeting was prepared to adopt him. However, he himself wanted twenty four hours to sound out opinion in the constituency before the adoption would be completed:

He would do nothing to weaken the Liberal party and if he was not convinced that his coming would strengthen the Liberal party he would not go on².

On the following day he met a deputation from Thomas Wright's committee and told them he would retire from the contest if their man would not³. Later that evening, or on the following day, with Wright still persisting in his candidature and estimated to control some seven to eight hundred votes, Balfour met the joint committee of liberals and told them that unless there were union with the Bradlaughites it was pointless to continue⁴. The committee split on this and Balfour then retired⁵. On Monday 15 March, the distraught liberals met and announced that efforts were being made to get yet another replacement⁶. By the next day the news was circulating that that replacement was to be Henry Labouchere, who had intervened to such little purpose six years earlier⁷. On hearing of this,

1. *ibid.*, 20 Mar 1880.
 2. *N.G.*, 20 Mar 1880.
 3. *ibid.*
 4. *ibid.*
 5. *ibid.*
 6. *ibid.*
 7. *N.R.*, 21 Mar 1880.

Wright's committee and association met and by a narrow margin they passed a resolution calling on their nominee to retire from the contest¹.

It was not even clear at this stage what position Labouchere was to take in relation to Bradlaugh. The joint liberal committee which had split on Balfour arranged for Labouchere to speak on Friday 19 March 1880, the handbill convening the meeting being signed by Perry of the O.L.A. and Robinson of the N.L.A. Labouchere immediately made his position clear:

I am not coming here to try to slip in myself with a conservative that being so I should say to every Liberal elector of this town do not vote for a conservative, do not plump for one of the candidates, split your votes with the two².

Robinson then explained that his association could not pledge itself to Labouchere's cause, but would have to consider this situation. The Rev. Thomas Arnold was less restrained, declaring that he and his friends 'could never be drawn into any confederation or arrangement or coalition which would commit them morally to the support of Mr Bradlaugh³. But the most important contribution was that made by Manfield, for, when he spoke, the coalition of Old and New Liberals was finished and a coalition of Old Liberals and radicals was begun:

Mr Arnold had told them that he and his friends would stand aside and take no part. If he and his friends could desert the Liberal party in an hour of supreme peril such as this, he did not envy them their conscience. (Great cheering). He did not feel that the party with whom Mr Arnold acted were justified in taking this high position from their numbers he suggested there were other Christians in the town besides Mr Arnold. (prolonged cheering). They might not profess as much. The only thing he questioned was their right from their

1. N.G., 27 Mar 1880.

2. ibid.

3. N.G., 27 Mar 1880.

numbers and influence to attempt to dictate to the Liberal party in this borough¹.

After twelve years of accusations that they were splitting the Liberal party in Northampton, Bradlaugh and his radical following now heard that accusation reversed. By doing no more than persisting in that candidature and by perfecting their organisation, Bradlaugh and the radicals had at last made their point. They had not shifted from the position they had taken up in 1868; nor, for that matter had Robinson, Arnold and the members of the New Liberal Association shifted fundamentally. It was the Old or Moderate Liberals who, in the face of a chain of misfortunes, finally cracked. On Monday 22 March 1880 the first 'united Liberal and Radical meeting' took place, where Manfield and Vernon spoke in praise of Bradlaugh².

The Mercury greeted this remarkable development sourly. Refusing explicitly to retract one word of what it had said of Bradlaugh down the years, it advised no liberals under any circumstances to vote conservative. It would 'support the cause of Liberalism so far as conscience allows'³.

After consulting the liberal chief whip, Adam, Thomas Wright announced his retirement and his support for Bradlaugh and Labouchere on 26 March. Thereafter it was a straight fight with the conservatives and a double victory over them:

Labouchere	4158 ⁴
Bradlaugh	3827
Phipps	3152
Merewether	2826

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*

3. N.M., 27 Mar 1880.

4. A. & P., 1880, lvii, 382, Return of charges made to candidates at the late elections etc., pp. 26-27.

For Bradlaugh it was a long-sought and dearly paid-for triumph. He spent more than any other candidate in this election¹.

Bradlaugh	£683- 7- 0
Labouchere	472-11- 8
Phipps	290- 6-10
Merewether	290- 6-10

He estimated that some 637 liberals had failed to vote for the liberal-radical joint ticket², but the coalition had held firm. For Bradlaugh it was the end of one long war and only the beginning of another. The story of that other war, with Westminster, needs no repetition here³. Let it suffice to say that the struggle with Parliament over the oath forced upon him another five elections before he was at last free to sit in the Commons: in April 1881 when he defeated his Conservative opponent E. Corbett by 3437 to 3305, in March 1882 when he again defeated him, by 3796 to 3688, in February 1884 when he defeated the Conservative H.C. Richards by 4032 to 3664, in November 1885 when the general election returned Labouchere with 4845, Bradlaugh with 4315, and the Conservative Richards lost with 3890, and finally in July 1886 when the general election returned Labouchere with 4570 and Bradlaugh with 4353, defeating the Liberal Unionist R. Turner who received 3850 and the Conservative T.H. Lees with 3456⁴.

1. *ibid.*

2. *N.R.*, 11 Apr 1880.

3. W. Arnstein, The Bradlaugh Case, a study in late Victorian opinion and politics, (London, 1965).

4. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, ii.204-208.

Problems in the 1880s:

The activities of the Reform League in London and in Northampton, activities in which Bradlaugh played a central role, gave the first impetus to radicalism in Northampton town. But it was Bradlaugh's own determination to win Northampton and defeat its Whigs which provided the town's radicals with a cause, a source of identity and cohesion over twelve years. Bradlaugh's victory in 1880 was as much a victory for Northampton radicalism as for himself. The essential feature of that victory was not the recognition by the liberals of the radicals' right to choose their own candidate, though that was important, but, granting that recognition, also ultimately agreeing to work for the Radical as much as the radicals had always been prepared to work for the Liberal.

Once that recognition had been fully granted in 1880, barriers to unity were removed. In the summer of 1880, following negotiations between Manfield for the Liberals and Adams for the radicals, the much talked-of Birmingham scheme was finally implemented: the Northampton Liberal and Radical Union was set up in July, the membership of its General Committee of three hundred, of its executive committee of thirty and of its ward committees being composed equally of former moderate liberals and radicals¹.

1. N.G., 31 July 1880. The inaugural meeting of the Northampton Liberal and Radical Union (N.L.R.U.) was held on 16 August 1880, with Gurney as president and Manfield as vice-president. On 6 October 1880 the Northampton Radical Association, satisfied with the reality of union, dissolved itself: N.G., 21, 28 Aug, 9 Oct 1880.

Given this union of forces, the radicals should have been assured of continuous victories in the municipal contests, paralleling Bradlaugh's continuous electoral triumphs until his death in 1891. Such was not the case. While their stronghold in the West Ward returned radical candidates unbeaten until 1887, their experience in the East, far from being a triumphant, proved to be an extremely chequered one¹. In 1887, as well as losing a seat in the East, they lost a seat in the West to the conservatives for the first time since 1878. In the next year they lost all four seats, their worst defeat in the history of Northampton radical politics. By that time the traditional battle between liberals and radicals against conservatives no longer obtained. New political elements had entered the situation, and had either to be accommodated or defeated. Those elements were labour and socialism.

Up to 1887 there is no evidence of a distinct 'labour' consciousness in Northampton. The leaders of the radicals, just as much as the liberals, presumed to speak for the workers as much as for themselves. They insisted that their interests were identical, their dependence mutual and they discountenanced any talk of class. This presumption was seldom challenged by working class radicals, and that this was so should occasion no surprise. There is sufficient evidence to support the view that

1. In the East Ward the radicals returned only one candidate in 1880 and were beaten for both seats by the conservatives in 1881. In April 1882 they lost in a by-election and were again beaten for one seat in November 1882. It was not until 1883 that they won both seats, only to lose one again in 1884. They won both seats in 1885 and 1886. But in 1887 they suffered a set-back, losing one seat when, for the first time, a labour candidate appeared: N.M., 3 Nov 1883 (which gives results for 1880, 1881, 1882 and 1883); ibid., 7 Nov 1885, 6 Nov 1886, and N.G., 5 Nov 1887 for the remainder.

those employers who were radical were born in Northampton with nothing, or came to the town early in life with nothing, and in the years after 1850 worked their way to wealth and municipal honours¹. Those employers who were of Old or New Liberal persuasion, on the other hand, came from middle or lower middle class backgrounds².

The radical presumption of an identity of interest between employer and worker, though never seriously challenged at any time before 1886-7, gave rise to tensions in the Radical Association from time to time. Thus, W.C. France, a working class, secularist member of the Association, objected to the adoption of Thomas Purser and Thomas Tebbutt as radical candidates for the West Ward in October 1876 because they were employers. He received short shrift from the radical leader, Gurney, who dismissed France's objection, declaring 'he disliked anything in the shape of class distinction. He did not like the idea of any working man setting up, as a class, in opposition to another class because one was the employer and the other employed'³.

This kind of tension came to a head with another episode within the Association three years later. France, together with two other working class members, called for the expulsion of an employer-member, Webb, who was giving out work under price, and thereby outraging the town's trade unionists. The Association, with Gurney in the chair, voted against the

1. Appendix 8 : Backgrounds & Biographies of some Liberal and Radical leaders in Northampton, 1850-1891, pp.673-674.

2. *ibid.*

3. *N.M.*, 7 Oct 1876.

expulsion of Webb, and at the next meeting the three workers left the Association¹.

Until Bradlaugh's election in 1880 and his final victory in January 1886 when he was allowed at last to take his seat, such tensions were contained. But the promise held out by Bradlaugh's triumph in 1880 and by the union of liberals and radicals which followed, was never fully realised: having enjoyed a few short summers of success the radicals ran into heavy weather, caught in the cross-currents of labour and socialism. At the very time when Bradlaugh was making his way in parliament he himself came under increasing attack from the upholders of the cause of labour and of socialism. In Northampton, by an ironic parallel, labour and socialism also began to be heard for the first time. The politics of the borough took on new dimensions. Victorian Northampton, like the wider world that Bradlaugh also represented, was passing away at the very time of radical Northampton's and radical Bradlaugh's greatest success. The reason is not hard to find.

From the middle of the 1860s until the middle of the 1880s the radicals in the Town Council never gave the slightest evidence of social concern. Their motivating force was the desire for power - power, not to change town administration and to work for specific improvements - but power for the honour it conveyed. One searches almost in vain for any distinctive principle in local radicalism, and insofar as any principle can be occasionally discerned, it was that of economy: thus, the remarkable

1. *ibid.*, 16 Aug, 20 Sept 1879.

radical successes in the school board elections of January 1880 was presumed to lie in their opposition to a proposal for the building of an industrial school, which would have increased the burden of the rates¹. Self-made men, adhering to the doctrine of self-help, the Northampton radicals never tried to force the implementation of artisans' dwellings legislation. When Robert Reid brought a charge of neglect, in this regard, in the N.L.R.U. in March 1884, and moved a resolution calling on the Town Council to implement existing legislation, he was answered by Stephen Clarke to the effect that 'the existing building societies afford a better mode for working men to acquire houses'². When Edward Powell, a working class radical, objected, saying that 'only one man in twenty or thirty got a house through a building society', he carried no weight. Reid's motion was lost 'by a large majority of votes'³.

A supporter of the Paris Commune in 1871, Reid was an isolated socialist in Northampton. The first time that socialism made a formal appearance in the town was in late May, early June 1886, when J. Fielding of the S.D.F. came and lectured. He was followed a fortnight later by H.H. Champion whose public meetings attracted a large audience⁴. Within a month, with a by-election pending in the East Ward on the death of William Adkins, a small group of workers put forward Henry Gray, secretary of the Finishers & Rivetters Union, as a 'non-political'

1. N.M., 10 Jan 1880.

2. ibid., 15 Mar 1884: Clarke had been a member of the committee of the N.R.L. in 1868, N.M., 15 Aug 1868.

3. N.M., 12 Apr 1884.

4. N.M., 12 June 1886.

candidate, meaning thereby that he would be a candidate who would not be an instrument of the N.L.R.U.¹. In early August, however, they had met again, under the chairmanship of Reid, and, after a vote, one W.L. Roberts was chosen instead². It was the first time in Northampton history that a Labour candidate stood for election. This move was greatly resented by the N.L.R.U. Gurney commented:

Did a man cease to be a working man when he ceased to be a journeyman? He had been a working man all his life ... he invited those working men who said they wanted a working man candidate, to join the union³.

Manfield admitted that the 'time was coming when working men must take an increased share in the direction of public affairs', but added that they should do it democratically - in other words, through the N.L.R.U.⁴.

Roberts' failure in the by-election⁵ did not deter his small group of supporters who soon formed 'a socialist league' to further the attempt to get a labour candidate into the Town Council⁶. The appearance of Hyndman in Northampton to address a public meeting on 15 August may have been connected with this decision⁷, but whether his appearance or the demonstration of black flags against the visit of the Prince of Wales in the following year, brought any adherents to socialism is not known⁸. To judge by Roberts' performance at subsequent elections, it is unlikely⁹.

1. N.M., 31 July 1886.

2. ibid., 7 Aug 1886.

3. ibid., 7 Aug 1886.

4. ibid.

5. ibid., 21 Aug 1886; results: Banks (C) 1,441, Rainbow (L) 1,676 and Roberts (Lab) 55.

6. N.M., 21 Aug 1886.

7. ibid.

8. ibid., 21 Aug 1886, 22 Oct 1887.

9. ibid., 6 Nov 1886, 5 Nov 1887: Roberts' vote in 1886 went from 55 in the by-election to 200 in the November election, but fell to a mere 27 in the November election of 1887.

But labour consciousness was to develop quite dramatically and suddenly in Northampton as a result of the great strike and lock-out which began in July 1887 and did not end until January 1888¹. The story of that dispute has already been told². Before that dispute the riveters and finishers had some three hundred to four hundred members unionised in Northampton. After it they had some three thousand³. Before that dispute neither it nor any other Northampton trade union had ever tried to promote the cause of labour in local elections. After it, conscious of their numerical strength and temporarily disillusioned with radicalism they determined to promote the candidature of Daniel Stanton in the labour interest, forcing the town's official body, the N.L.R.U., to adopt him against its wishes⁴. Before that dispute no Northampton union was ever known to have made any legislative demands. Within a year of its conclusion a ballot of the riveters' membership showed a vote in favour of pressing for a statutory eight-hour day⁵. This demand, which at national level Bradlaugh strenuously opposed, was pressed with growing force over the next year⁶. Bradlaugh himself never once intervened in the dispute. He made not a single comment on it nor did he ever comment on the rapidly developing independent views of labour in the town⁷.

1. Northampton Daily Reporter covers it in detail throughout.

2. J.H. Porter, 'The Northampton Arbitration Board and the shoe industry dispute in 1887' in Northamptonshire Past & Present, 4, 1868-9, pp. 149-154.

3. N.M., 1 Sept 1888.

4. N.M., 15 Sept 1888; in proposing Stanton, the local union president, Frederick Inwood declared that the experience of the strike made it vital for them to have a labour man on the Town Council, while one George Todd, in seconding this, remarked that though he had been a member of the Radical Association for ten years every time he had suggested anything about a working man candidate, he had been shouted down.

5. N.M., 13 Apr 1889.

6. ibid., 8 Mar, 9 May 1890; April 1890 was the occasion of a great demonstration on the issue organised by the local branch of the Gasworkers and General Labourers Union.

7. On the growing power of labour and socialism generally, and on the special question of the statutory limitation of hours, Bradlaugh had much to say, nationally. See below Chapter Nine.

Although the story of that long dispute has been told, its effect on radicalism has to be noted. In November 1887 the N.L.R.U. lost a seat in the East, and even one in the West Ward as well, where there was no labour candidate to split the vote. As a result, the conservatives gained control of the Council. In the following year the radicals faced the rivalry of the rivetters' union who decided to run candidates for both wards. In the East they decided to promote Daniel Stanton, a member of the N.L.R.U., and much to the embarrassment and confusion of that body, they succeeded in getting him nominated at a public ward meeting after the N.L.R.U. had already selected its official candidates. In the event, the executive of the N.L.R.U. had to suffer the humiliation of letting one of its official nominees go by the board in order to draft in Stanton in an attempt to avoid any conflict between radicalism and labour¹. This in turn led to conflict within the executive of the N.L.R.U. where Thomas Adams denounced the action of the East Ward committee of the Union in allowing Stanton to be adopted:

The fact of selecting Mr Stanton was tantamount to a declaration of war against every Liberal and Radical shoe manufacturer in the East Ward².

After much conflict, Adams succeeded in getting a vote passed whereby the N.L.R.U. officially withdrew from the East Ward contest. Thereby, a victory for Stanton could not be interpreted as a victory of labour over radicalism³.

In the West Ward similar conflict was apparent when a public ward meeting rejected the nomination of radical shoe manufacturer

1. *N.M.*, 15 Sept 1888.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*, 29 Sept 1888.

Charles Tebbutt who had been a councillor for years. Instead, the meeting adopted Frederick Inwood, shoe laster and trade unionist, and together with him the hotelier Thomas Purser, who had been one of the few radicals who had not appeared in a hostile light to the workers during the great strike¹.

Both labour candidates, Stanton and Inwood, came last in the East and West wards. The conservatives emerged victorious with three gains, while the rejected Charles Tebbutt was also victorious². The votes for labour were considerable, and although they came last they had prevented the N.L.R.U. from dictation and success³.

In the following year, in deference to labour, the N.L.R.U. proposed to nominate only one candidate for the West Ward, thereby leaving one seat to be contested by Inwood⁴. In the end Inwood declined to stand and the N.L.R.U. then put up two candidates, both of whom were successful⁵. In 1890 the N.L.R.U. adopted both Stanton and Inwood as official candidates while the socialists also put forward candidates for the first time under that name. In the West their candidate, Edward Morgan, gained sufficient votes to prevent the return of Stanton⁶.

A form of accommodation had been reached. After the strike and election trouble of 1888, unanimity was restored within the N.L.R.U., for a time at least. When Bradlaugh died and the question of his replacement came before them, the N.L.R.U.

1. *ibid.*, 3 Nov 1888.

2. *ibid.*, 3 Nov 1888; results: East Ward: Barry (C) 2369; Tomes (C) 2218; Rainbow (R) 1999; Stanton (Lb) 1760; West Ward: Law (C) 952; Tebbutt (Indpdnt Rad) 904; Purser (R) 818; Inwood (Labour) 646.

3. *ibid.*

4. *N.M.*, 5 Oct 1889.

5. *ibid.*, 9 Nov 1889.

6. *ibid.*, 7 Nov 1890.

recognised in principle the claim of labour to representation at parliamentary level. They ultimately had two possible candidates before them, M.P. Manfield, and a labour man William Inskip, secretary of the National Union of Boot & Shoe Operatives. In proposing Inskip, Stanton remarked that 'they were only anxious to obtain a recognition of the claims of the (labour) party to representation'. When a resolution 'that this Executive is in favour of representation' was passed Inskip's name was withdrawn, Manfield became official candidate and was ultimately elected¹.

But the unity of the N.L.R.U. was not to be preserved for long. On 1 February 1892 a small group of former Bradlaugh supporters set up the 'Bradlaugh Radical Association', declaring that 'the fight which began in 1868 would have to be recommenced'². Behind this move lay a dispute regarding the future representation of Northampton in parliament. At the time of Manfield's adoption and election, it had been understood that he would serve for only one parliament and then make way for a more radical running mate for Labouchere, in order to restore the balance struck in 1880 and incorporated in the very name N.L.R.U. Manfield did not retire, but went forward again and was again adopted by the N.L.R.U. on 21 February 1892³. The dissidents of the Bradlaugh Radical Association, including Joseph Gurney, John Yorke, John Corby, R.S. Johnson and Frank, son of Thomas Adams, then invited John Mackinnon Robertson to stand⁴. Although he came to Northampton to speak, Robertson

1. *ibid.*, 13 Feb 1891.
 2. *ibid.*, 5 Feb 1892.
 3. *N.M.*, 26 Feb 1892.
 4. *ibid.*, 25 Mar 1892.

did not stand and Manfield returned to Westminster with Labouchere in July 1892¹. Despite Robertson's failure to persist, the Bradlaugh Radical Association continued its separate existence and challenged the N.L.R.U. with Bradlaugh Radical candidates in the East and West Wards that November. They were not its only rivals. The elections of 1892 were characterised, especially in the East Ward, with a plethora of candidates; in the East there were two conservatives, two radicals, one Bradlaugh radical, one socialist, and for the first time, one I.L.P. man, while in the West there was another socialist contesting, in addition to conservative, radical and Bradlaugh radical candidates.

Although N.L.R.U. radicals won the West Ward, in the East they lost both seats. It was a serious blow:

Northampton has cut a sorry figure in municipal elections this week. Two radical seats in the East Ward have been handed over to the Tories the result of the Conservative victories is to throw the balance of power in the Northampton Town Council into the hands of the Tories And that is Radical Northampton²!

Conclusion:

If the foregoing account of the long drawn out and complicated struggle between Liberals and Radicals in Northampton offers little or no commentary upon or analysis of the meaning of radicalism in the town, this is not by reason of oversight or deliberate omission, but rather by virtue of necessity: the struggle was not one of political philosophy or of programme

1. *ibid.*, 8 July 1892.

2. *ibid.*, 4 Nov 1892.

so much as of power. No more than the Liberals did the Radicals, when they came to dominate, seriously explore the ends of power: power itself was the end¹. Not till the mid-1880s with the rise of a labour consciousness and the appearance of socialists did any earnest debate on the purpose and the ends of power develop. This is not to belittle or minimise Bradlaugh's contribution to and role in Northampton political life, but hopefully to state it accurately. He contributed in a remarkable degree to the organisation of a body of local politicians who for a time successfully sought a share of that power which previously had been confined, on the progressive side, to Whig-Liberals. He contributed not only in terms of organisation but of substance: he did not provide a uniquely novel political programme: rather, he himself became the programme around which the forces of Northampton radicalism gathered. Before he came to the town its Radicals were unorganised and powerless. From the time of his arrival they went from strength to strength. Within a year of his death they were divided, disorganised and facing the rivalry of organised labour and socialism. Just as they had wrested concessions and a share of power from the previously dominant Whig-Liberals, they too now had to make the concessions and share the power.

1. Cf. J.R. Vincent, Pollbooks: how Victorians voted, (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 49-50, and The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857-1868 (London, 1966), Introduction, passim.

CHAPTER SIX BRADLAUGH, THE REFORM LEAGUE AND RADICAL
POLITICS

The issue of parliamentary reform and extension of the suffrage, in the twelve years after the rejection of the third Chartist petition, failed to generate a sustained nationwide agitation. Nevertheless, the issue was far from total neglect: no fewer than four parliamentary reform bills were introduced in the House of Commons and the question remained the major inspiration of working class radical endeavour.

That the question failed to gain the support of a mass movement in the period owed much to the confusion and cross purposes of radical politics. The tensions, mutual suspicions and antipathies between middle and working class radicals in the age of the Chartists were carried over into the radical politics of the 1850s¹. Middle class radicals tended to be divided on the question whether financial reform should have priority over parliamentary, with Richard Cobden favouring the former and John Bright the latter. They also tended to be divided on the question whether an alliance with the masses was desirable or expedient. Working class radical leaders were also divided for most of the 1850s on the same question of class alliance. Some of the Chartist leaders believed that no alliance with the middle class radicals was possible since the middle class wanted a limited extension of the suffrage based on rights of property while the working class wanted full

1. F.E. Gillespie, Labour and politics in England, 1850-1867, (Durham, North Carolina, 1927), p.80.

manhood suffrage based on natural rights. In the course of the 1850s the outstanding leaders of this body of working class radical opinion were George Julian Harney and Ernest Jones. But there were other Chartist leaders, who were to be associates of the young Bradlaugh in the secularist movement in the 1850s, who favoured such an alliance. Outstanding among these were James Watson and George Jacob Holyoake. Holyoake's belief in the benefits that might arise from such a tactical and strategic alliance led him to support one of the earliest reform organisations of this twelve-year period, the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, founded in January 1849¹.

In addition to such divisions, middle and working class radical leaders were also divided on the issue of foreign policy, the former favouring pacifism and non-intervention as a matter of principle, the latter favouring intervention in certain cases. This discord came to a climax during the Crimean War. It was only after this time that Ernest Jones, the leader of the most advanced section of working class radical opinion, began to abandon his hostility to, though not his suspicion of the dangers of an alliance in the cause of parliamentary reform. From the middle of 1857 he began to entertain and try to promote such an alliance². It was against this background that Bradlaugh began his career in radical politics.

In the interval between leaving the army in 1853 and engaging

1. Gillespie, *op.cit.*, p.86.

2. J. Saville, Ernest Jones, Chartist. Selections from the writings and speeches of Ernest Jones, with introduction and notes. (London, 1952), pp. 62-65.

in his provincial lecture tour that brought him national prominence in 1859, the history of Bradlaugh's political development is obscure, though we know from W.E. Adams that he was secretary of the Defence Committee of Edward Truelove who was in 1858 prosecuted for publishing the tract Tyrannicide: Is It Justified?¹. But it is an indication of his interest in parliamentary reform that this was the first political cause in which he was involved, and this was some months before his involvement in the Truelove case. In February 1858 he was among the radicals who attended the conference organised by Jones to discuss the question of an alliance with the middle class radicals on the reform issue². The outcome of this conference was the formation of the Political Reform League, a body which lasted into the late part of that year before falling victim to dissensions³. It is the earliest evidence there is of Bradlaugh's association with a number of radical leaders later to be prominent in the Reform League in the mid 1860s, most notably Benjamin Lucraft and J. Baxter Langley⁴. In November 1858 he was prominent at a meeting in Tower Hamlets got up to endorse the principles of the Political Reform League⁵: here he seconded a resolution in favour of manhood suffrage moved by Lucraft, and was one of the main speakers with Digby Seymour⁶ and Jones⁷.

1. W.E. Adams, Memoirs of a social atom, (reprint of 1st ed., N.Y., 1968), p.362.

2. Gillespie, op.cit., p.162.

3. Saviile, op.cit., pp. 68-71.

4. Gillespie, op.cit., p.162.

5. Tower Hamlets Mail, 20 Nov 1858.

6. William Digby Seymour (1822-1895), elected M.P. for Sunderland, 1852, and for Southampton, 1859; was Recorder for Newcastle-on-Tyne at the time of this meeting: D.N.B., xvii.1273-4.

7. London Investigator, 1 Dec 1858 reports the meeting's Chairman, Hows, as remarking that 'he had not met that young man, Bradlaugh, before that night, but he was most highly pleased to find in him such an able advocate of principle: he hoped he would be as good and able an advocate when he became old'.

Within four months, Bradlaugh was called on to address his first Hyde Park political meeting, organised to protest at the inadequacy of the Government's reform proposals¹. From that time onward his interest in the cause of reform never slackened. When he became editor of the National Reformer in April 1860 he devoted attention to the cause, deploring the fact that so few could be found to speak 'on behalf of the people' in Parliament², giving publicity to a London reform conference on 24 April³, and providing space for W.E. Adams to contribute on the matter⁴. When Russell announced, on 11 June, the Government's decision not to proceed with its Reform Bill, Bradlaugh met its end with a certain fatalism: 'The Reform Sham, which was never meant to be a reality, is now entirely withdrawn', he commented, but he also called for a prompt and decisive manifestation of working class feeling on the subject⁵.

That manifestation did not materialise in 1860, nor in the following year despite the holding of a Reform Conference at Leeds in November 1861⁶. Bradlaugh had no part in the Leeds Conference, but in May 1862 he attended a Reform Conference held at the Whittington Club, presided over by George Wilson of Manchester. At this gathering, the critical question of how

1. The Times, 7 March 1859, whose reporter described Bradlaugh as 'a young man well-known in democratic circles'; he was one of only two speakers whose speeches were reported in any detail by The Times on the occasion.

2. N.R., 12 May 1860.

3. ibid.

4. ibid., 9 Feb, 6 Apr, 18 May 1860; Adams, op.cit., p.15.

5. N.R., 16 June 1860.

6. ibid., 30 Nov 1861.

much extension of the suffrage should be sought, sparked off a lively debate. Along with Joseph Cowen of Newcastle and Lucraft, Bradlaugh was among the speakers calling for manhood suffrage. However, the resolution embodying this, moved by Washington Wilks, was not carried. Instead, a compromise formula secured the majority vote: this was to the effect that they should strive for 'such extension of the franchise as will confer the franchise upon every male person, householder or lodger who is rated or liable to be rated to the relief of the poor, together with a more equitable distribution of seats, vote by ballot and a limitation of the duration of parliament to three years'¹. It was a compromise which Bradlaugh, for one, did not want, but he concurred in it rather than bar the way to united action by the middle and working classes in the reform cause². One of the earliest expressions of Bradlaugh's own political realism, it was a compromise which resulted in no mass agitation and, for Bradlaugh, the issue was a dormant one from then till 1865.

There was no 'decisive manifestation' of working class feeling on the subject in the early part of the 1860s, if by that, Bradlaugh meant a nationwide working class agitation precipitated by the deliberations of a single conference such as that held at the Whittington Club: there was, rather, a gradual growth of interest in the question, promoted by several separate efforts to organise an effective reform movement: Joseph Cowen's Northern Reform Union founded in 1858³; the London Manhood

1. *ibid.*, 31 May 1862.

2. *ibid.*

3. Gillespie, *op.cit.*, p.166.

Suffrage Demonstration Committee set up in the spring of 1859¹; the call of the Glasgow Trades' Council for political action by trade unionists in the cause in late 1861²; the foundation of the Trade Unionists' Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association in November 1862³; the establishment of the Universal League for the Material Elevation of the Industrious Classes in December 1863⁴; these, and the middle class National Reform Union, founded at Manchester in April 1864⁵, all proved unable to inspire a widespread and sustained agitation of the cause. Bradlaugh's desire to see such an agitation was not to be realised until the foundation of the National Reform League.

Destined to be the most successful and important popular organisation and movement between the decline of Chartism in the 1840s and the revival of Socialism in the 1880s, the Reform League was founded on 23 February 1865, and formally launched on 23 March 1865 when its rules were adopted⁶. Bradlaugh claimed to have been involved from the beginning⁷, but the evidence for this does not bear out his claim. He is not mentioned as a member of the original twenty-nine man organising committee⁸, nor does he appear on the twelve man 'Permanent Committee' of April 1865 as described in the early minutes of

1. Saville, *op.cit.*, p.71.

2. Reynolds's Newspaper, 10 Nov 1861.

3. D.R. Moberg, 'George Odger and the English Working Class Movement, 1860-1877', University of London Ph.D., 1953, pp. 55-58.

4. *ibid.*, pp. 58-60; F.M. Leventhal, Respectable Radical, George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics, (London, 1971), p.50.

5. Moberg, *op.cit.*, p.87; W.K. Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.80.

6. Bee-Hive, 25 Feb, 25 March 1865.

7. N.R., 14 Oct 1866; 24 Feb 1867.

8. A.D. Bell, 'The Reform League from its origins to the Reform Act of 1867', University of Oxford, D.Phil., 1961, p.12; nor does the Bee-Hive mention his name in any issue from February to April 1865.

the League¹. He was, however, a member of the League Executive Committee in May 1865 and from then on he was to make a substantial contribution to the League and its propaganda.

It was Bradlaugh who proposed that George Howell be appointed paid permanent secretary of the League in May 1865², replacing Robert Hartwell: whether this change was engineered by Odger and his fellow trade unionists who were opposed to George Potter and Robert Hartwell, as Coltham suggests, the surviving evidence does not allow one to decide with certainty³. There is no evidence in the Bradlaugh Collection, nor in any other contemporary sources to suggest that he was aware of the power struggle between the Odger and Potter groups, and his support for Howell in the question of the secretaryship was most likely based on his view of what was likely to be of practical good to the League at the time. At this stage Bradlaugh himself was the first to help the League in a most practical way by offering to pay a weekly contribution towards its running expenses in general, and Howell's salary in particular, until proper funding could be organised⁴.

In the course of its life the Reform League had five formal elections to its Executive: in September 1866, in February and November 1867, and in May and December 1868. Apart from his period of service in the summer of 1865 until the formation of the compact fifteen-man Executive in September 1866, Bradlaugh was elected to serve three times: he was elected in September

1. Howell Collection, Bishopsgate, Ms 4052, Minutes of the Executive Council of the Reform League, 21 Apr 1865.

2. *ibid.*, Minutes, 24 May 1865.

3. S. Coltham, 'George Potter and the Bee-Hive Newspaper', University of Oxford D.Phil, 1956, p.26; Coltham misdates Howell's election as taking place in April—Leventhal, *op.cit.*, pp. 60-63, brings out the quarrelling between the Odger and Potter factions but also adverts to the uncertainty whether Howell's replacement of Potter's friend, Hartwell, was the product of a factional struggle.

4. Howell Collection, Ms 4052, Minutes 24 May 1865 (hereafter cited as E.C.R.L. Minutes); Bradlaugh was the first to offer.

1866 with fifty-two votes, a creditable achievement when it is considered that personalities as well-known as Joseph Guedella, Ernest Jones and Professor E.S. Beesly failed to gain election, apart altogether from the failure of Potter and Hartwell¹. He was re-elected in February 1867 and came joint third with fifty-four votes². But after that period of service he was absent from the Executive until re-elected in the final phase of the League's history in December 1868, again with a solid fifty-four votes³. He served from then till the dissolution of the League in March 1869. Although he served four out of a possible six terms his attendance was far from complete, though this is hardly surprising in view of his business and lecturing commitments. He attended only six meetings of the Executive in the long period from April 1865 to September 1866. In the next phase, either his ability to, or his interest in attending improved and he was present on twenty-three occasions between September 1866 and February 1867. He attended seven

1. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 28 Sept 1866: the returns were E.D. Rogers 80; Colonel Dickson 79; G. Odger 64; J.B. Leno 63; J. Cunnington 61; W.R. Cremer 55; B. Lucraft 54; J. Merriman 54; G. Mantle 54; J.B. Langley 53; C. Bradlaugh 52; W. Osborne 45; J. Weston 41; G. David 40; T. Connolly 32. Not elected were G. Potter 32; J.R. Taylor 29; W. Bonner 27; G.M. Murphy 27; Montague Levenson 27; J. Guedella 26; E.S. E.S. Beesly 26; R. Hartwell 25; G. Brooke 24; E. Jones 21; J. Beal 20; J.D. Nieass 17; J. Finlen 15; S. Brighty 14; G. Eccarius 13; J. Hales 10.

2. *ibid.*, 20 Feb 1867: the returns were J.B. Langley 64; E.D. Rogers 59; C. Bradlaugh 54; J.J. Merriman 54; P.W. Perfitt 53; G. Odger 50; G. Mantle 46; T. Connolly 46; R.A. Cooper 45; W.R. Cremer 42; Col. Dickson 41; J. Weston 39; B. Lucraft 36; A.J. Bannister 36; J. Guedella 34; Not elected were G. Potter 33; J. Finlen 32; W. Osborne 30; Morgan 24; Edge 16; G. Eccarius 16; Bland 14; Brish 13; Richardson 11; Young 7; Picard 6; Williams 5; Bubb 5; Hawker 4; Pottle 4; Pearson 1.

3. *ibid.*, 9 Dec 1868.

meetings from then until May 1867, and then came a long absence until in the last phase of the League's existence he was present on four occasions between early December 1868 and March 1869.

Bradlaugh's long absence from May 1867 to December 1868, an important time in that it embraced the period when the Reform Bill reached the statute book, and the general election of the following year, was due to his resignation from the Executive. On his own confession he felt compelled to resign because sections of the press used his atheism as a stick with which to beat the Reform League¹. That other considerations may have prompted the resignation at what was a critical moment in the League's history will be considered shortly. Although his relationship with the League's administration was therefore marked by a long period of resignation, he was nevertheless a member of the Executive in the most critical and publicly active period in the League's history, from October 1865, when Palmerston died, to May 1867 when the decisive confrontation which resulted in the resignation of Home Secretary Walpole, occurred. Although his service on the Executive in this period was marked by many absences from meetings, he played a critical part on a number of the occasions when he did attend. That part cannot be evaluated properly without reference to the major public occasions in the life of the League.

Between the foundation of the League in February 1865 and the enactment of parliamentary reform on 15 August 1867 there were

1. N.R., 19 May 1867: but, the resignation almost coincided with a visit made by Bradlaugh to Gladstone on the morning of 3 May 1867 in connection with the government attempt to prohibit the League's meeting in Hyde Park on 6 May. This visit provided ammunition for enemies of Bradlaugh later on, they suggesting that he had been forced to resign because he visited Gladstone on a League matter without its consent. See below pp.418-422.

some fourteen major London demonstrations on the question of a Reform Bill or on related questions like the right of public meeting, which were organised directly by the League or involving prominent League members. These were as follows: 14 May 1865, the first Reform League public demonstration and meeting in St Martin's Hall¹; 12 December 1865, the second major public demonstration also in St Martin's Hall²; 11 April 1866, to muster support for the decision of the League Executive to back Gladstone's bill introduced in the Commons on 12 March³; 21 May 1866 on Primrose Hill⁴; 27 June 1866, when Lucraft, exasperated at the moderation of the League Executive, precipitated a period of intense working class agitation by holding a meeting in Trafalgar Square⁵; 2 July 1866, an official League demonstration in Trafalgar Square, partly in response to Lucraft's initiative in the previous week, but mainly in response to Russell's resignation and the Queen's acceptance of it; it was the League's first major demonstration success⁶; 23 July 1866, the occasion of the famous Hyde Park incident⁷; 20 July 1866 in the Agricultural Hall as a follow-on to the Hyde Park meeting⁸; 8 August 1866 in the Guildhall⁹; 3 December 1866 organised by George Potter and his London Working Men's Association at St James's Hall¹⁰; 11 February 1867, a demonstration on the reassembling of Parliament¹¹; 11 March 1867 in Trafalgar Square, again as a

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1. Bell, op.cit., p.70.
 2. Bee-Hive, 16 Dec 1865.
 3. *ibid.*, 14 Apr 1866.
 4. *ibid.*, 26 May 1866.
 5. *ibid.*, 30 June 1866.
 6. *ibid.*, 7 July 1866.
 7. *ibid.*, 30 July 1866.
 8. *ibid.*, 4 Aug 1866.
 9. *ibid.*, 11 Aug 1866.
 10. *ibid.*, 8 Dec 1866.
 11. *ibid.*, 15 Feb 1867.

result of the League Executive's being pressurised by Lucraft's militancy¹; 6 May 1867, the critical meeting banned by the Government and then revoked, one of the League's greatest successes²; and that of 5 August 1867 against the Royal Parks' Bill, the final occasion of a Reform League demonstration in London³. Bradlaugh was present at, and prominent as a speaker in no less than twelve of these fourteen major gatherings. He was in them either as speaker, marshall or as one of the Executive members who took the decisions to hold them.

Public agitation of a sustained nature by the League began after Gladstone introduced his limited measure of reform on 12 March 1866. The introduction of this measure presented a major problem of policy to the League. To refuse to support it might prejudice the goodwill of moderate Liberals within and without Parliament; to accept it might appear to contradict the League's commitment to the principle of manhood suffrage. The decision to support the measure as an instalment received majority consent at Executive meetings on 16 and 20 March 1866⁴. Bradlaugh does not appear to have been present at either of these meetings, nor at the next one on 23 March. Nevertheless, at the latter he was elected in his absence as one of the seven members of a committee to prepare for a public meeting to consider the Gladstone bill⁵. As far as the Executive was concerned, a major reason for the meeting was to get endorsement for their decision to support Gladstone⁶. Although Bradlaugh's

1. The Times, 12 March 1867.

2. ibid., 7 May 1867.

3. ibid., 6 Aug 1867.

4. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 16, 20 March 1866; the general feeling at these meetings was expressed by the League president, Beales, who said that the Gladstone bill was inadequate, but that it was to be supported as better than nothing: see also N.R., 8 Apr 1866, and Bee-Hive, 24 March 1866 for this.

5. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 23 March 1866; the other members were Odger, Leno, Truelove, Davis, Dell and Osborne.

6. Bell, op.cit., p.75.

position on the matter was not clear at the time of the Executive's decision, it was one he fully supported. This is clear not only from the fact of his agreeing to serve on the preparatory committee, but later on from his reaction to the decision of Ernest Jones to resign from the League on the issue. Jones communicated his decision to resign, to the League secretary, Howell, in a letter of 4 May 1866¹. Bradlaugh regretted Jones's move: 'after carefully considering how Mr Gladstone's measure, though a very small one is undoubtedly a very honest one, can by any possibility be regarded as an insult, we are obliged to deny most positively that there is the slightest colour for Mr Jones's criticism'². When the public meeting was held, on 11 April, it was a success in that it satisfied three needs: it got endorsement for the Executive's decision; it gave notice to Parliament that there was now widespread support among the working class for reform, and it gave the League the kind of popular support it needed, the kind of 'decisive manifestation of working class feeling on the subject' that Bradlaugh had hoped for a few years earlier. The details of Bradlaugh's own speech at this meeting are not recorded, though it appears that he made a strong and favourable impression on the crowd³.

The success of this meeting led to the planning of what was intended to be the League's first great outdoor gathering, on Primrose Hill, to be held on Whit Monday, 21 May 1866. Although there was doubt as to whether the demonstration ought to have

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1. Howell Collection, Jones to Howell, 4 May 1866.
 2. N.R., 27 May 1866.
 3. Bee-Hive, 14 Apr 1866, The Times, 12 Apr 1866.

been held, the Executive of the League decided to proceed, and chose Bradlaugh as one of the speakers¹. He did not disappoint the confidence which the League had placed in him, on this, its first time to name him as an official speaker. According to the hostile Standard, Bradlaugh brought the meeting to life after the torpor of the first speakers. Few details survive, but he launched an attack on the House of Lords, declaring that 'he would like to see that institution that battered on the life-blood of the English people, swept away for ever'². At the same time he called for support of the Gladstone bill and concluded that 'the real time for speaking on this question would be when an attempt was made by the House of Lords to reject the measure'³. Bradlaugh's support of what was a very limited attempt at parliamentary reform would seem to mark him out as being a moderate, despite the attack on the Lords. Yet, his real position at this stage is not quite clear. In the month before this meeting took place, and in the two months after it, a number of the more extreme members of the Reform League became discontented at the failure of the League to move quickly enough, or sharply enough, in organising the pressure of public opinion, at a time when the fate of the moderate Gladstone measure of reform was threatened by the disorganisation of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons. Frustrated by this disorganisation in the Commons, these League members, led by Benjamin Lucraft, wanted a greater degree of

1. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 17 Aug 1866; the others were Odger, Cremer, Lucraft, Mahoney, Mote and Goalen.

2. Standard, 22 May 1866.

3. Bee-Hive, 26 May 1866.

public pressure to be exerted on the legislature. Lucraft took the initiative by organising a series of public meetings in Clerkenwell in April¹, and he tried to keep this pressure up through holding a series of public meetings in May and June. Although Bradlaugh was always anxious to preserve the unity of the League, as his regret at Jones's resignation indicates, he was more anxious to ensure that there was no slackening of pressure on Parliament; he therefore joined forces with Lucraft in a number of these unofficial demonstrations. He took a prominent part at one of these in Clerkenwell in April² and in another in Trafalgar Square in June³. In this light his association with Lucraft seemed to place him in the front rank of the most militant members of the League.

His involvement with such demonstrations increased with the defeat of the Liberal Reform Bill on 18 June 1866. After Russell's resignation on the 26 June, it was Lucraft who once again took the initiative by organising the first great Trafalgar Square demonstration⁴. It was a move which forced the Executive of the Reform League to proceed more vigorously, and a move with which Bradlaugh was associated as one of the speakers⁵. It was a meeting which led the League Executive to respond by organising the Trafalgar Square demonstration of 2 July 1866, which in turn inaugurated the first great climax in the history of popular pressure for the second Reform Bill. Bradlaugh was not present at the Executive meeting which took

1. G.H. Dyer, Benjamin Lucraft, (London, 1879), p.7; Bee-Hive, 16, 28 Apr 1866.

2. Beehive, 21 Apr 1866.

3. The Times, 28 June 1866, Bee-Hive, 30 June 1866.

4. H. Evans, Sir William Randall Cremer, (London, 1909), p.43; Bee-Hive, 30 June 1866.

5. The Times, 28 June 1866, Bee-Hive, 30 June 1866.

this decision¹, but he was one of the principal speakers to the crowd of eighty thousand who gathered in Trafalgar Square on that day². It was the League's most successful event up to that time. It was soon followed by one of the most critical events in the history of the League as a constitutional pressure group, the decision of the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, Sir Richard Mayne, on the 18 July 1866, to prohibit the next planned demonstration on Monday 23 July in Hyde Park³. A crowded meeting of the Council of the Reform League assembled on Friday 20 July⁴ to consider Mayne's proscription. Bradlaugh at once moved that the meeting be persisted in. Four members, including W.R. Cremer, who subsequently claimed that he had moved the resolution to go ahead, spoke against this; but, supported by Truelove, Weston, Osborne and Lucraft, Bradlaugh's motion was carried⁵. The result was the demonstration of 23 July which resulted in the famous Hyde Park riots. It was a turning point in the history of the League, giving it confidence and stature to an extent it had not previously possessed, and destroying the arguments of those who held that there was not sufficient opinion in favour of reform to warrant legislation at that time. The meeting of 23 July was quickly followed by that of 30 July, again in defiance of the Home Office. Held in the Agricultural Hall before an estimated audience of 25,000, it was a meeting which confirmed Bradlaugh's eloquence and his popularity⁶. In the course of his speech

1. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 29 June 1866.

2. Bee-Hive, 7 July 1866.

3. Not 22 July as stated in H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.223.

4. N.R., 29 July 1866, Bell, op.cit., p.82; not 21 July as stated in Leventhal, op.cit., p.75.

5. Bee-Hive, 21 July 1866, N.R., 29 July 1866.

6. Bee-Hive, 4 Aug 1866.

Bradlaugh remarked that

Sir Richard Mayne has made a mistake; he fancied that he was a prefect in Paris instead of being a servant paid to keep the peace in England. (Hear, hear & cheers). The police must never be the masters of the people (Great cheering). They have nothing to do with the exercise of our political rights; their only duty is to preserve order, while the conduct of the present government has been such as to break order¹.

It was from this time that Bradlaugh made his most vigorous contribution to the reform cause in his role of propagandist. He spoke for the cause in Bristol to twelve thousand in September², at Pimlico on 10 October³, at Northampton on 22 October⁴, at Battersea on 29th⁵, at Lambeth on 31 October⁶, at Whitechapel on 19 December⁷, and at Birmingham on 20 December⁸, by which time he was inundated with requests from the provinces and out of pocket as a result⁹. Although the campaign of public demonstrations had been called off by the Executive in November, until Parliament would reassemble in February 1867, the great expansion of the League continued in this period and it was a period when Bradlaugh regularly attended Executive meetings. He was closely involved in the organisational arrangements for the joint Reform League and London Trades' demonstration on 11 February 1867¹⁰. With J. Baxter Langley he was appointed to assist Col. Dickson in the organisation of this meeting and was one of the speakers to the crowd of twenty thousand who attended the Agricultural Hall on the occasion¹¹.

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1. Bee-Hive, 4 Aug 1866.
 2. N.R., 16 Sept 1866.
 3. Bee-Hive, 13 Oct 1866.
 4. Northampton Mercury, 27 Oct 1866.
 5. Bee-Hive, 3 Nov 1866.
 6. N.R., 4 Nov 1866.
 7. Bee-Hive, 22 Dec 1866.
 8. N.R., 30 Dec 1866.
 9. ibid.
 10. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 16, 18, 28 Jan, 1, 6, 8 Feb 1867, and Minutes of Delegate Meetings, 25 Jan, 4 Feb 1867.
 11. Bee-Hive, 16 Feb 1867.

It was an indication of his popularity at this stage that he came third in the elections to the Executive, held on 20 February 1867¹.

Despite all his great activity at this period, Bradlaugh was becoming more disenchanted and increasingly militant in the spring of 1867. Petitioning Parliament seemed to him to be useless. At Executive meetings in the first half of February he seconded motions by Lucraft to the effect that 'the Reform League, having no confidence in the present House of Commons, declined to recommend any further petitioning to that House, believing it to be a mere waste of time and of no practical effect'². At this time, militant figures in the League, dissenting from the moderation of Beales and Howell, gave a sharper tone to League pronouncements and began to press, as they had done in the previous summer, for a greater intensity of agitation and a more menacing expression of pressure³. Bradlaugh was not only identified with this group, but was a leader of it. He was himself surprised at his re-election to the Executive which he feared he 'might injure by a policy too advanced'⁴. That policy was to defy any attempt by the Government to limit the right of public meeting, and to 'do so by openly breaking any law the Government might attempt to enact and implement in regard to that right'⁵. Bradlaugh's wish at this stage was to 'have no more weary and costly processions: we shall have cheaper and more menacing meetings within a mile of Parliament'⁶.

1. Howell Collection, Minutes of the General Council Meeting, 20 Feb 1867.

2. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 6, 8, 15 Feb 1867.

3. Leventhal, *op.cit.*, p.89, Moberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 205-206.

4. N.R., 3 Mar 1867.

5. *ibid.*

6. *ibid.*

The introduction of the Government reform proposals on 18 March 1867, far from undermining that militancy, only served to increase it because of the limited nature of the proposals¹. In Bradlaugh's case this increased militancy of tone was to be found in his article Reform or Revolution which he published in his journal on 21 April, and subsequently as a pamphlet². With characteristic directness he spoke the language of democracy:

lawful government only existing with the concurrence or possibility of concurrence of the whole of the inhabitants of the country, all other government is unlawful usurpation and tyranny. These are propositions which the nation regards as too clear for further disputation and which it will soon seek to enforce; it has talked long enough, and the time for doing something beyond talking has now arrived if you seek to prevent the reform which shall make our constitution a reality you will provoke a revolution which shall sweep away your obstinate policy of obstructiveness.

He went on to threaten a 'refusal to pay taxes should reform be longer withheld'³.

The weekly meetings in Trafalgar Square inaugurated the chain of events which led to the great climax in the history of the League, the demonstration in Hyde Park on 6 May 1867. Bradlaugh was the central figure in forging the links in that chain. From early March he had been anxious for such a demonstration⁴.

Beales and Howell, unwillingly blessing the Trafalgar Square meetings, were reluctant to risk another Hyde Park confrontation⁵.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 186, 18 March 1867, col 6. The proposals offered household suffrage in the boroughs, limited by personal payment of rates and two years' residence, and plural votes for property, together with education, saving bank deposits, and taxation votes.

2. N.R., 21 April 1867, 'Reform or Revolution: An Address to the Lords and Commons of England, in Parliament Assembled'.

3. ibid.

4. ibid., 3, 12 March 1867.

5. Howell Collection, George Howell to William Osborne, 23 March 1867.

Bradlaugh, however, pressed the issue to a division at the Executive meeting on 18 April. His motion, seconded by Lucraft, was carried by the narrow vote of five to three¹. It was the most decisive act in Bradlaugh's involvement with the League. On 1 May the Government issued a notice to the League, warning it against holding the proposed meeting², though it had already decided at Cabinet meetings on 26 and 27 April not to close the Park³.

At a special delegate meeting on the same day Bradlaugh again persuaded the League leaders to defy the ban⁴. Despite the intervention of four M.P.s led by Thomas Hughes, on 3 May, Bradlaugh's determined position prevailed⁵, and he was appointed one of the principal speakers for the meeting. By 5 May, the eve of the meeting, it was known to Hughes, and probably to Beales, that the Government would not bring on a collision⁶. On the next day London witnessed one of the greatest of political demonstrations of the nineteenth century.

The action of the League helped, according to one recent assessment, to 'hasten the modification of the Government Bill'⁷, a process of modification which has been the subject of some controversy as to its precise cause. That the League was directly responsible for bringing Disraeli to accept a more radical measure, in particular through the successful defiance

1. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 18 April 1867.

2. Minutes of Delegate Meeting, 1 May 1867.

3. Derby Mss, Box 192/1, Earl Derby to Queen Victoria, 1 May 1867.

4. Minutes of Delegate Meeting, 1 May 1867.

5. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 3 May 1867. The others were Whalley, The O'Donoghue and P.A. Taylor.

6. Derby Mss, Box 52/8, Thomas Hughes to Auberon Herbert and Auberon Herbert to Thomas Hughes, both 5 May 1867. Herbert had this information from an undisclosed source and passed it on to Hughes.

7. F.B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill, (Cambridge, 1966), p.190.

of the Home Office, at Hyde Park on 6 May, cannot be maintained¹; but indirectly the League's pressure did create a climate of urgency which, together with Disraeli's anxiety to outdo and outwit Gladstone, brought about a measure of reform greater than either party leader had ever intended, though less than the League wanted. Apart from a final demonstration against the Royal Parks Bill, on 14 August 1867, on the day the Reform Bill received the royal assent, the agitation was over and the League found itself searching for a new role.

Although Bradlaugh was a member of the Executive at the time of the Hyde Park demonstration in May, he was no longer a member when the Reform Bill reached the Statute Book. He had resigned soon after the demonstration: on the very next day, to be precise², and his resignation is a reminder that his involvement with the League was not an uncomplicated one. The decision to resign had been forced on him, ostensibly by attacks on his atheism, which was used as propaganda against the League itself, and against Beales especially³. He had earlier thought of resigning: he sent in his resignation in February 1867, mainly because of the pressure of other commitments⁴, but was prevailed on to withdraw. The sectarian attacks in the press, which followed on this in March however, ultimately forced him again to offer his resignation. This time Howell did not press him to reconsider⁵.

The moment of this resignation was unfortunate in that it seemed

1. M. Cowling, 1867; Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution. The Passing of the Second Reform Bill, (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 40-44, 283-285. For a contrary view, see R. Harrison, Before the Socialists, Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-to 1881, (London, 1965), pp. 132-133.

2. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.235.

3. Bee-Hive, 16 March 1867; Saturday Review, 9 March 1867; E.C.R.L. Minutes, 18 March 1867.

4. Howell Collection, Charles Bradlaugh to George Howell, 15 Feb 1867.

5. Bradlaugh Collection, George Howell to Charles Bradlaugh, 10 May 1867.

to give substance to allegations that Bradlaugh, while pressing the League to militant action, had gone behind the back of its Executive to treat with Disraeli and the Home Office at the same time. This charge was allegedly made by Thomas Hughes when he attempted to dissuade the League leaders from proceeding with the Hyde Park demonstration of 6 May. There was a sufficient minimum of fact in what Hughes alleged to provide a hostile press with material with which to try to damage Bradlaugh later on. Thus, in 1870, the Burnley Advertiser published a story that, at the critical time of the May 1867 demonstration, Bradlaugh had been privately to Gladstone and Disraeli's secretary pretending that he was against all violence and was trying to hold back the leaders of the League, when in fact he had been the very man who hounded them on'¹. The story apparently came to the attention of the Burnley Advertiser by way of Hughes². A long and acrimonious exchange developed which was resolved in an inconclusive way when Edmond Beales, in substance though not in detail, supported Bradlaugh's version of what exactly had transpired³: on Thursday 2 May 1867 with Beales's approval, Bradlaugh went with a personal petition to Gladstone, against the Royal Parks Bill; Gladstone discussed the question of the legality of the coming demonstration of the following Monday, and then sent Bradlaugh with a message to Walpole on the latter

1. Burnley Advertiser, 2 July 1870.

2. To judge by the lengthy correspondence in the Bradlaugh Collection on the matter: Hughes to Bradlaugh, 4, 9 May, 6 June 1872; Bradlaugh to Hughes, 7 June 1872; Bradlaugh to Beales, 7 June, Bradlaugh to Howell, 7 June 1872; Howell to Bradlaugh, 7 June, Bradlaugh to Hughes, 8 June, Beales to Bradlaugh, 8 June, Bradlaugh to Hughes, 10 June, Bradlaugh to Beales, 10 June, Beales to Bradlaugh, 11 June, Bradlaugh to Beales, 14 June, Bradlaugh to Hughes, 14 June, Howell to Bradlaugh, 15 June, Bradlaugh to Howell, 26 June, Warry, Robins and Burges to Bradlaugh, 17 June, and finally, Bradlaugh to Warry, Robins and Burges, 18 June 1872.

3. Bradlaugh Collection, Edmond Beales to Charles Bradlaugh, 11 June 1872.

subject. Bradlaugh duly delivered Gladstone's message, the content of which is not known, and duly communicated the same to Beales. Nothing more was heard of this until on the morning of 6 May, according to Bradlaugh's dating, Hughes, in an attempt to persuade the Reform League Executive not to proceed, suggested that Bradlaugh had been going behind their backs. When Bradlaugh then explained to the Executive the nature of his communication with Gladstone and others, Beales supported Bradlaugh's explanation¹. Hughes subsequently claimed that there was great indignation in the Executive against Bradlaugh on hearing Hughes's disclosure, an indignation which ties in neatly with Bradlaugh's resignation the next day.

The truth is difficult to unravel here. The minutes of the League give no indication of any such incident as Hughes records in letters to Bradlaugh in 1870. Howell's diary makes no mention of it. There is no record in any Gladstone papers, nor in those of Disraeli's private secretary, Montague Corry, in those of Disraeli himself, nor in those of Spencer Walpole of any communication with Bradlaugh at the time. Furthermore, the spirit and tone of Howell's letter to Bradlaugh four days later, in which he acknowledged the latter's note of resignation, would appear to go against Hughes's story². There is a note of incongruity, however, which does not fully help Bradlaugh's version. He never denied that he had visited Gladstone and that he had gone from there to Spencer Walpole. What he denied was the purpose. His claim is that he went simply with a personal petition against the Parks' Bill, that Beales knew about it

1. *ibid.*

2. Bradlaugh Collection, George Howell to Charles Bradlaugh, 10 May 1867.

before he went, that Gladstone had asked him to go to Walpole with a message, the contents of which are today unknown, and that he apprised Beales of all that had transpired that same day. Hughes claimed that he had gone to Gladstone to offer himself as a martyr; that is, that on the day of the demonstration the Government arrest him but allow the meeting to go on quietly. Bradlaugh claimed that Hughes made this allegation at the critical meeting on the morning of 6 May. However, if, as is now known from the Derby papers, Hughes knew on the afternoon of 5 May, that the Government had already backed down, why would he have used these allegations against Bradlaugh to try to dissuade the League Executive from proceeding, on the morning of the 6th of May ?

It now appears from the available evidence that this incongruity arose from Bradlaugh's misdating of the events of 1867 in the quarrel with Hughes five years later. It is clearly at the meeting of the Executive on 3 May which Hughes attended with three other M.P.s that he made the allegation, the day after Bradlaugh had visited Gladstone, and two days before Hughes got to hear of the decision of the Cabinet to back down, a decision taken on 26 and 27 April.

Only one mystery remains: why should Bradlaugh have chosen so ill-timed a date as 2 May to visit Gladstone with a personal petition against a Royal Parks Bill at a time when the League Executive was embroiled in heated debate on whether to proceed with the 6 May demonstration, and therefore at a time when such an unauthorised action could give colour to charges of disloyalty?

The explanation lies in the events of the day before Bradlaugh took this action. On the evening of Wednesday 1 May 1867, the Reform League held a public meeting to protest about any attempts by government to prohibit political assemblies in Hyde Park. Bradlaugh was the principal speaker. As he was defending the right of public meeting the police came through the crowd and chose that moment to hand him a copy of Walpole's prohibition of the 6 May meeting, thereby causing a sensation in the crowd¹. His object in going to Gladstone on the following day was not to arrange any deal with the Government through Gladstone, as Hughes seems to have believed, but to see if he could be heard at the Bar of the House against the Bill, and therefore against Walpole's proclamation, thereby preventing the possibility of a serious clash on the following Monday².

Although Bradlaugh resigned on 7 May, his private mission to Gladstone and then to Walpole does not appear to have injured the League in any way, nor to have damaged his own reputation within the League, to judge by the facts that he at all times remained a League vice-president and that he was re-elected to the Executive in December 1868 with the exact number of votes he had obtained at his previous election in February³.

After the passing of the Second Reform Bill the League became subject to tension which ultimately led to its dissolution. That tension was generated by two issues in particular, the Irish

1. The Day, 2 May 1867; file in Disraeli Papers, Hughenden.
2. Bradlaugh Collection.
3. G.C.R.L. Minutes, 9 Dec 1868.

question, and the question of relations with the Liberal Party. Bradlaugh was closely involved in both. The first issue is considered elsewhere¹, the second may be appropriately considered here. The themes of Bradlaugh's relationships with the Reform League and with the Liberals involve certain ambiguities. The ambiguities lie firstly, in Bradlaugh's ideological position in regard to the League itself, secondly, in his position in regard to the Liberal Party and the Liberal leadership.

With regard to the first, it is clear that at all times Bradlaugh favoured and tried to promote harmony within the League. He was always loyal to Beales and was always ready to praise the efforts of members as diverse as George Odger and George Howell². He could even find it possible to praise as difficult and irascible a character as William Randall Cremer³. While he deplored Ernest Jones's resignation, no hint of personal acrimony entered into his criticism of Jones and he was fulsome in welcoming Jones's return to the fold. Yet, for all this, his closest associate in League propaganda was Benjamin Lucraft. This association, and Bradlaugh's own decisiveness on critical occasions, firmly stamped him with the brand of militant. It is the argument of this chapter, however, that he was a militant not so much to ends as to means. No more than any other League member would he be satisfied with any provisions short of complete manhood suffrage; yet, he was prepared to look upon any 'honest' measure that fell short of this as something to be

1. See below Chapter Eight.

2. N.R., 14 Oct, 2 Dec 1866, 24 Feb, 14 July 1867.

3. ibid., 14 Oct 1866.

accepted rather than rejected. What he would not accept was any attempt at vacillation, and it was this which made him strident in language and militant in action during the critical stages of the League's struggle for the extension of the franchise.

What is argued here in regard to his relationship with the League applies equally to his attitude to the Liberal Party and the Liberal leadership of Gladstone. From the middle of the 1860s Gladstone gained an extraordinary hold over the minds of the liberal and radical middle and working classes. That a working class radical of the moderation, aspirations and respectability of George Howell should conceive an admiration and respect for Gladstone is perhaps not surprising¹. That a man of such independent, outspoken, radical and anti-religious opinions as Bradlaugh, should also have looked with respect on the author of as conservative a work as The State in its relations with the Church², is less readily understandable. From his conversion to electoral reform in 1864, Gladstone viewed the matter in a fundamentally different way from that in which Bradlaugh viewed it: the former seeing the franchise as a moral right, the extension of which was justified by the apparently increasing respectability of sections of the working class; the latter seeing it as a natural right. Furthermore, until 1868 Gladstone showed little willingness to tackle vested interests, when he at last turned his attention to the Irish

1. Leventhal, op.cit., p.115.

2. W.E. Gladstone, The State in its relations with the Church, (London, 1838).

Church establishment. Nevertheless, Bradlaugh was prepared to give credit to Gladstone's very modest reform proposals of 1866 and to defend them against the criticism of Jones. At a public meeting, in December 1866, when Gladstone's sincerity on the reform question was impugned by one speaker, Bradlaugh was again quick to defend him, 'believing him to be the most honest and able statesman which the people have on their side'¹. From that time onward, Gladstone became a kind of Moses for Bradlaugh, who confessed he looked to Gladstone 'as leader in the great struggle in which only the first step has been taken'².

When the Second Reform Bill became law the attention and energies of the League leaders came to be directed to the next general election and to the prevention of the return of as many Conservative M.P.s as possible. The prevention of Conservative success did not automatically mean the promotion of all working class Reform League candidates. The ambiguity in this was to create divisions within the League and to contribute ultimately to a climate of opinion which favoured its dissolution. Bradlaugh was to be one of the victims of this ambiguity.

The history of the Reform League and election contests is a tortuous one. One of the standard historical accounts saddles Bradlaugh with much responsibility for the quarrel which 'killed off the League'³. Closer attention to the history of Bradlaugh's role in the League shows that far from this being so, Bradlaugh

1. N.R., 6 Jan 1867.

2. B.M. Add.Ms 44111, ff 67-68, Charles Bradlaugh to William Ewart Gladstone, 18 July 1868.

3. H.J. Hanham, Elections and party management: politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone, (London, 1959), p.342.

was seriously wronged, and it was the duplicity of Howell which created the tensions and quarrels which led to its demise. The central issue here was the question of official League support for Parliamentary candidates. That support took three forms: i) the endorsement of candidates; ii) actual organisational help for candidates in the constituencies; iii) financial help for candidates, either in the course of their campaigns or in contributing cash to pay off election debts after particular contests.

With regard to the general electoral policy of the Reform League and its endorsement of particular candidates, although it is true that down to the end of 1867 the League had not become involved in any particular election, electoral policy had been the subject of discussion. Hanham has purported to show that as early as June 1867 serious divergences existed as to what attitude should be adopted towards Liberal candidates who were not Reform League members or supporters. These divergences in the League Executive, he argued, resolved themselves into four schools of thought. The first was one which supported 'a frank alliance with Gladstonian Liberalism', and believed that the League should work 'to secure the return of Members of Parliament favourable to Liberal principles'. This was the position of the president, Beales, and of the secretary, Howell: to support all Liberals, but not Whigs; and this was the dominant position, having been endorsed by a six to five vote in the Executive in June 1867¹.

1. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 17 June 1867; Hanham, op.cit., p.331.

The second school of thought, he continued, did not like the idea that all Liberals except Whigs should be supported, and argued instead that only 'good' Liberals should be backed; that where this was in doubt, rival candidatures should go to arbitration. This school, Hanham argues, was represented by George Odger¹. The third group was composed of 'old fashioned independent Radicals, conscious of their principles and unwilling to concede anything to circumstance'; they were closer to middle class ultra-Radicals in outlook than to the trade union leaders; they were led by Bradlaugh and Lucraft and they 'constituted the most important opposition to Howell and Beales'². The final group consisted of revolutionary Fenians and continentals; they were uninterested in anything less than revolution and were not very influential.

This classification of opinion, although convenient, is misleading. With regard to the first and dominant group in the Reform League, the view that they would support all Liberals but not Whigs, is invalid, at least in the case of Howell. Hanham cites a letter of Howell's written in May 1868, in which the League secretary said 'We must go in for the best man we can get to come forward, but better to have new Liberals than old Whigs. I hate the Whigs, they have ever been our enemies and are now'³. Nevertheless, when it came to the case of the election contest in Northampton, he was not prepared to support Bradlaugh's claims against the Whig, Lord Henley . Neither

1. *ibid.*, p.332.

2. Hanham, *op.cit.*, p.332.

3. *ibid.*, p.331, Howell to Jackson, 11 May 1868.

was he prepared to support the cause of the radical E.O. Greening at Halifax and thereby risk upsetting the Whig-Liberal partnership of Ackroyd and Stansfeld¹. Indeed, if the favouring of all Liberals and exclusion of all Whigs is the criterion for the first school of opinion, then Bradlaugh himself should be included in it. If the criterion of being unwilling to compromise is the criterion of the third group, then Bradlaugh cannot be placed here, despite Hanham: throughout the struggle at Northampton Bradlaugh avowed his willingness to go to arbitration². In this regard he differed not at all from George Odger who is classified in the second group on the basis of his agreeing to arbitration in the election contest at Chelsea³.

Hanham goes on to point out that this four-fold division of opinion caused no difficulty to the League throughout 1867 for three reasons: firstly, because the supporters of Howell's view gained a majority on the Executive in November 1867; secondly, because there was no question of action until election time was nearer and funds available; and thirdly, because 'the most formidable opponent of the Liberal alliance, Bradlaugh, was safely out of the way looking for a seat, so that there was no immediate prospect of trouble from that quarter'⁴. Whatever about the first two reasons, the third is unacceptable: it implies that Bradlaugh spent all his time from August 1867 when the Reform Bill was passed, till June or July 1868, looking for a seat. As seen earlier, Bradlaugh took very little time to

1. Leventhal, op.cit., p.109.

2. See above, Chapter Five.

3. Hanham, op.cit., p.332.

4. Hanham, op.cit., p.333.

decide on Northampton. Furthermore, he was not a doctrinaire opponent of a Liberal alliance, and there is no evidence to support the view that he was. Like Howell, he supported Gladstone. Like Howell, he hated Whigs. Like Howell, he carried that hatred into action in an election contest¹.

On the matter of electoral support for individual candidates, the League throughout its history was prepared to endorse, or give moral support and organisational help to particular candidates. It supported Ernest Jones in his intention to stand for Manchester, at the end of 1867². It supported Samuel Morley at Bristol in May and again in July 1868³. It supported Edmond Beales in his contest at Tower Hamlets, sending in Thomas Mottershead to help him⁴. It supported Charles Reed for Hackney⁵; it decided to sponsor Baxter Langley for Greenwich in March 1868⁶, and supported Alderman Carter for Leeds⁷. But Bradlaugh it did not support. The reason for this relates to the third kind of support the League gave or could give, that of finance. With little or no finance of its own for election purposes, the League was to receive some £2,000 from a special fund controlled by Samuel Morley. The history of the Liberal Party's Special Fund has already been written and needs no detailed repetition here⁸. That fund, controlled by Howell at the Reform

1. Howell contested Aylesbury against a Whig-Tory alliance: Leventhal, op.cit., p.117.

2. W.K. Lamb, op.cit., p.167, Bell, op.cit., p.369.

3. Leventhal, op.cit., p.104.

4. *ibid.*, p.104; Lamb, op.cit., p.167.

5. Bell, op.cit., pp. 366-369.

6. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 22 July 1868.

7. Bell, op.cit., p.369.

8. Harrison, op.cit., pp.151 ff; Hanham, op.cit., pp.334 ff; Leventhal, op.cit., pp. 186 ff.

League end of things, tied his hands and effectively placed the League at the virtual disposal of the Liberals, and in particular at the disposal of the Whip, George Glyn. The agreement was that the League would help to organise special efforts in ninety two Conservative-held boroughs, 'together with any others in which the League or Glyn might be particularly interested'¹. The idea was for the League to send two-men delegations to the boroughs in order to organise the working class voters. In some places the organising delegates were to discourage candidates who might split the Liberal vote. But Glyn, Morley and Howell, as it turned out, were the ones who defined what constituted 'Liberal', and in the case of Northampton, Henley came within this definition. Consequently, while the Executive of the League, under Howell's control, tried to appear neutral on the Bradlaugh case in Northampton, in reality Howell and Cremer, who were the delegates for that town, under the terms of the agreement with Glyn, tried to prevent Bradlaugh's getting support. Bradlaugh was quite justifiably upset at the failure of the League to support him against the Whig Henley. In a letter to Glyn, Howell claimed in late November, that the reason for Bradlaugh's sense of grievance was that 'he thought that we could give him money for his election, but we kept to our arrangement and would not swerve even for one of our own Council'². This was not accurate. It was not the question of money that upset Bradlaugh so much as the failure of a working class radical body like the League to support a Radical against a Whig. The truth of the matter

1. Hanham, *op.cit.*, p.334.

2. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.181, citing George Howell to George Glyn, 30 Nov 1868.

comes out more clearly from the pen of Howell himself in a letter he wrote to Morley on the next day: 'Now I felt as the man having more control over the fund than anyone else (in the League) that I should not be doing my duty if I allowed the money so subscribed to be used in Northampton against Lord Henley'¹. So much for Howell's hatred of the Whigs, though in extenuation, Howell's position in the Northampton case in particular, might not have been so subservient had it not been for the persistence of the Liberal M.P., Charles Gilpin, in remaining loyal to his running mate, Henley². Hanham's treatment of the affair as it relates to Bradlaugh is not accurate: to describe Bradlaugh as launching an independent candidature 'in opposition to other liberals' betrays ignorance of just how Whiggish Henley was³.

Bradlaugh got no financial support from the League Executive in the Northampton contest. In the long term he was not unique in this: only three League figures did get financial support before, during or after election contests, viz., Beales⁴, Odger⁵, and Howell⁶ himself. Cremer is a possible fourth⁷. Neither did Bradlaugh get moral support, and here again he was not unique. A similar fate befell Col. Dickson at Hackney, where secretly Howell tried to prevent his going forward⁸, and a similar fate befell Greening at Halifax⁹.

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1. *ibid.*, p.182, citing George Howell to Samuel Morley, 1 Dec 1868.
 2. Howell Collection, Charles Gilpin to George Howell, 25 July 1868
 3. Hanham, *op.cit.*, p.339.
 4. Leventhal, *op.cit.*, p.111.
 5. *ibid.*, p.111.
 6. E.C.R.L. Minutes, 20 Jan 1869.
 7. Cremer got financial support from Glyn in his contest at Warwick, S. Higgenbotham, Our Society's History, Manchester 1939, p.88; he also got money to cover his expenses in his work for the League, E.C.R.L. Minutes, 13 Jan 1869.
 8. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.179, citing Howell to C.S. Butler, 5 Apr 1869.
 9. Leventhal, *op.cit.*, p.109.

Bradlaugh tried to raise the whole question in the General Council of the League¹, but he could make no headway in bringing it to an issue until the General Election of 1868 was over, partly because to have raised too great a row at that stage would have done his own cause no good, and partly because, until the Election was over, he was isolated in his sense of grievance. Greening was not based in London and had no influence in the Executive or on the General Council of the League. Dickson was, according to Harrison, uninterested in making an issue². It was only when George Odger, who felt a sense of grievance at not receiving financial support or full official endorsement for his stand at Chelsea, raised the issue of League support for working class and Radical candidates after the Election was over, that Bradlaugh was able to probe the whole matter. This he did between September and December 1868, supported by Odger. Bradlaugh eventually declared himself satisfied with the explanations as to Howell's and Cremer's conduct of affairs in the Northampton case, but by that stage, early in 1869, the unity of the League was rent. Its dissolution in March came as no surprise. Bradlaugh had sent in his resignation from the Executive before the dissolution³, though not, it must be added, in any spirit of anger or discontent⁴. Beales resigned on 10 March 1869⁵ and the League itself was dissolved on 13 March⁶.

1. G.C.R.L. Minutes, 4, 16 Sept 1868.

2. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.179.

3. Howell Collection, Bradlaugh to Howell, undated 1869, but at a time when Beales was still President.

4. *ibid.*,: 'I have sent the President my resignation. Permit me to send you my thanks for your honest work in our Cause. I know my thanks are of little worth, and trust that some day your intelligent, honest toil for reform may have some real acknowledgement. Till then permit me to sign as, Your friend, Charles Bradlaugh'.

5. Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.200, Moberg, *op.cit.*, p.258.

6. Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.200.

The dissolution of the Reform League left the advanced radicals without a single organisation or a single unifying cause to pursue in the immediate future. As for Bradlaugh, he lost little time in trying to arrange a replacement for the defunct League. On 18 April 1869 he announced a proposal to form 'a People's League', with the object of 'obtaining a House of Commons containing a proportionate number of representatives of the people'¹. For him the passing of the Reform League marked a beginning as much as an end: over the next five years, through his promotion of the English Republican movement he was to reach new heights of notoriety as one of the leading popular radicals of the age.

1. N.R., 18 Apr 1869.

CHAPTER SEVEN : BRADLAUGH AND ENGLISH REPUBLICANISM

Bradlaugh's contribution to the Reform League was significant, even critical. It must also be noted that the League's contribution to Bradlaugh's career as political radical was also critical. Up to 1865-1866 when he became involved in it, Bradlaugh's career in radical politics rested on two bases which were relatively narrow - his control of the National Reformer, and his leadership of the atheist movement. Although the Reformer circulated throughout Britain its readership was very limited; although atheism had its adherents throughout the country, its appeal was restricted; it was a sectional movement of limited potential. The Reform League was the first radical political organisation of a truly national character with which he was associated. At its beginning Bradlaugh was a national figure, but only in the context of the atheist movement; at the end of the League in 1869 he was a national figure in the widest political sense: he had come to know and work with working class and middle class radicals, had met or corresponded with leading political figures, had stood as a parliamentary candidate.

In the process of moving into the mainstream of radical politics he acquired a reputation for militancy. In this reputation he was surpassed by no other major Reform League figure. That reputation was to develop greatly over the next five years as a result of his involvement in and leadership of a movement which challenged the centre point of the English Constitution, the Monarchy. Paradoxically, while his promotion of Republicanism seemed to mark him out as the most advanced extra-parliamentary

radical of the age, a close study of the movement will show his limitations and his essential moderation.

The dissolution of the Reform League in the spring of 1869 brought in its wake a return to sectionalism in radical thought and action which was to last throughout the next decade and beyond. No single issue was sufficiently dominant to command the attention of radicals and the support of the masses in a sustained agitation to the exclusion of other issues. The question of the land system and its reform, in general, and support for the cause of the rural labourers in particular, perhaps came closest to this in the 1870s. But in the years immediately after 1867 a variety of causes and their appropriate organisations competed for precedence and dominance. Among the middle classes the issues of liquor law, education reform at university and primary school level, and land law reform along the lines of 'Free Trade in land' came to be the most pressing questions; among the working classes, the issues of labour representation, and trade union law reform tended to be most to the fore, although in this sector the land question was also to prove an important issue.

It is in this immediate context of divided priorities for radicals that the Republican Movement and Bradlaugh's involvement in it are located. But there was also a wider context: the republican movement in the 1870s was also the climax of one important element of the radical working class tradition dating from the 1790s. The roots of English republicanism go back to the seventeenth century; nineteenth century republicans admired and derived inspiration from their seventeenth century

predecessors¹, but as a working class phenomenon it had its effective beginning in the transmission of Paine's thought by the London Corresponding Society. The tradition was carried over from the radical world of the 1790s to that of the 1830s and 1840s in which Bradlaugh grew up, principally by Richard Carlile², in the home of whose widow Bradlaugh found refuge at a critical moment in his life. That tradition of English republicanism had two aspects of relevance. Firstly, its ultimate aim was to replace the monarchy with a republic. Secondly, deriving from this ideal, it involved an attitude of hostility to hereditary privilege in all its forms. Consequently, in addition to the longterm goal of the English republic there was the more immediate aim of attacking the monopoly of power as exercised by the aristocracy and Anglican clergy. In particular, attacks were made on the extravagance of the Royal Family, on the system of 'perpetual pensions', on tithes and church rates.

The first aspect of the tradition was, throughout the period 1790 to 1870, the preserve of extreme working class radicals; but the second aspect, the attack on extravagance and privilege, was one which attracted the support of middle class radicals, whether of Benthamite, Manchester School or Nonconformist persuasion and outlook. The first aspect tended to come to the fore in times of national and international crisis, in the early 1790s, or late 1840s for example; but the second aspect was ever

1. W.J. Linton consoled his readers, after the collapse of Chartism, with the thought that 'there are some men yet in England, besides Thomas Carlyle, who respect the work of Cromwell; some men who honour the memory of Milton, some few who hold sacred the grave of Pym and Eliot and Hampden'. Linton, The English Republic, (London, 1851) p3.

2. G.A. Aldred, Richard Carlile, Agitator, his life and times, (3rd ed., Glasgow, 1941), p.110.

present from 1790 to 1870 and beyond. This second aspect, the attack on monopoly and exclusiveness, helped to make republicanism a more persistent element than it might otherwise have been. Thus it was that although in the 1830s and 1840s radical protest and organisation were at their most vigorous in the struggle for the freedom of the press, in the resistance to the new poor law system, in the factory movement, in trades unionism, in Owenism and above all else in Chartism, the republican tradition was never entirely submerged despite the passing of Richard Carlile. At the end of the 1840s, partly in response to the example of events in France, and partly in response to the comparative vacuum created by the defeat of Chartism, the republican ideal was brought to the fore again through the work of a number of radical journalists of whom the most important were C.G. Harding who brought out a volume entitled The Republican, in 1848¹, Joseph Barker of Sheffield who issued between May 1848 and February 1849 a paper called The People², George Julian Harney whose Red Republican appeared between June and December 1850 when its title was changed to Friend of the People which ran till July 1851³, and W.J. Linton, the radical engraver whose English Republic, issued originally from Leeds in the spring of 1851, had four volumes up to its demise in April 1855⁴. Despite the differences in political outlook and in temperament between

1. C.G. Harding, The Republican: A Magazine advocating the Sovereignty of the People, London 1848; not G.M. Harding, as cited in N.J. Gossman, 'Republicanism in 19th Century England', in International Review of Social History, vol 7, 1962, p.49.

2. J. Barker, The life of Joseph Barker written by himself, (London, 1880), pp. 286-288.

3. F.G. & R.M. Black, The Harney Papers, (Assen, 1969) p.259.

4. W.J. Linton, The English Republic, edited with an introduction and notes by Kinton Parkes (London, 1891), p.x; W.J. Linton, Memories, (London, 1895), p.127.

Linton, Harney and Barker, for example, they shared certain assumptions: firstly, that they were not concerned with special systems of legislature so much as with the one vital principle of 'the Sovereignty of the People'¹; and secondly, that the English Republic would be achieved only over a long period by political education of the masses, and not by revolution². However much Harney's version of an English Republic might differ from the less extreme versions of Harding, Barker, G.J. Holyoake³ and W.E. Adams⁴, and the difference was great, as Adams, for one, noted⁵, Harney shared their refusal to entertain the idea that it could be achieved speedily or by force⁶. In this regard the English republicans of the late forties and early fifties were in marked contrast to Irish and continental exponents of that doctrine.

Nevertheless, English republicanism in the mid nineteenth century owed a very great deal to the example of men and movements on the continent and to a lesser extent in Ireland. As to the latter, John Mitchel and the insurrection in Ireland in 1848 evoked the admiration of Harney though it also served as a warning against the ineffectiveness of any recourse to insurrection by the few⁷. As to the former, the struggles of the Poles and Italians from the 1830s, far from being ignored, were observed with great sympathy by English radicals⁸. The writings and

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1. The Republican, 1848, p.1; The People, 27 May 1848, p.1.
 2. The Republican, 1848, pp. 21-22; The People, 27 May 1848.
 3. The Reasoner, 5 July 1848, report of a republican speech by Holyoake at Staleybridge on 18 June 1848.
 4. W.E. Adams, Memoirs of a Social Atom, p.262.
 5. *ibid.*, p.262.
 6. Red Republican, 6 July 1850.
 7. *ibid.*
 8. H. Weisser, British working class movements and Europe, 1815-1848, (Manchester, 1975) passim.

activities of Mazzini in the Italian cause, and of republicans like Ledru-Rollin in France in 1848 or in exile in England thereafter, provided an example which brought the English republican tradition to some fitful prominence between 1848 and 1870. In the 1850s republican organisations existed in a number of English towns. Thus W.E. Adams, a young journeyman printer greatly influenced by the French Revolution in 1848, set up a republican club in Cheltenham in 1851¹ following an appeal by Linton in the last issue of Harney's Red Republican to promote the cause in England². Adams worked on the production of Linton's English Republic till the project was abandoned in 1855³. When he came to London in that year he found there was a republican club there⁴. At the same time radicals of Newcastle on Tyne, led by Joseph Cowen junior, set up a Republican Brotherhood in that city in January 1855⁵. As with other English republicans of that decade, the Newcastle men admitted that 'the glorious object of our hopes may be far off', but they added, 'we are content to sow the seed', even if they never lived to see the harvest⁶.

But republicanism never developed as a mass movement in this period. It remained the ideal of a small leadership drawn from the ranks of the Chartist and secularist movements who proved unable to bring the mass of the people to take up the issue as a radical political cause with potential. This was the

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1. Adams, op.cit., pp. 11, 119.
 2. Red Republican, 30 Nov 1850.
 3. Adams, op.cit., p.279.
 4. *ibid.*, p.321.
 5. The Reasoner, 21 Jan 1855.
 6. *ibid.*, 28 Jan 1855.

situation as Bradlaugh moved from adolescence to manhood between 1848 and 1853 when he came out of the army. When he took up the editorship of the National Reformer seven years later he made it clear from the outset that it would be an organ of republicanism as much as of other causes. In this sense, Bradlaugh never 'adopted' republicanism or grafted it on to the body of other radical opinions as he grew older. He matured politically in a quarter in which republicanism was an integral part of the working class radical political philosophy. At a critical stage in his youth, before he entered the army, he had found refuge in the home of the widow of Carlile, the most avowedly republican of the earlier nineteenth century working class radicals. Five years after leaving the army he took over the editorship of the London Investigator from Robert Cooper who was one of Carlile's disciples. In the same year he got to know W.E. Adams¹, a critical date and meeting since it was in July 1858 that Adams wrote and Edward Truelove published the famous defence of Orsini, Tyrannicide: Is It Justifiable?². Bradlaugh became secretary, and James Watson who in earlier times had been a compositor on Carlile's Republican³, treasurer of the committee for the defence of Truelove who was prosecuted for the publication⁴. In the winter of the following year, Bradlaugh invited Adams to become a contributor to the National Reformer when it would appear⁵. Writing under the pseudonym, Caractacus, Adams was to be the leading contributor to the paper, from the ranks of republicanism, in the 1860s.

1. Adams, op.cit., p.407.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 358-369.

3. F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan, William James Linton, 1812-1897, (Manchester, 1973), p.18.

4. Adams, op.cit., pp. 356-369.

5. *ibid.*, p.15.

During this decade Bradlaugh himself adverted to the republican ideal, from time to time. When he resumed the editorship of the National Reformer in May 1866, after a three year absence, he made his position and policy quite clear:

We attack the Crown because, denying hereditary rights to monarchs, we contend that the chief of a nation should be voluntarily elected by the nation We affirm that the people form the only rightful source of any sovereignty... We attack the Crown so long as it makes a pretence to exist 'by the grace of God' instead of by the desire of the nation¹.

Furthermore, he attacked the House of Lords because they enshrined the practice of hereditary privilege instead of being elective and 'reflecting the highest intellects and virtues of the nation'². In the beginning of the next year he lectured on the contrasting history of English reform and American republicanism from 1810 to 1848 and he came to the conclusion that 'the Crown, Lords and Commons were hostile to the people's progress, and if they could not be brought into greater harmony with the wants and rights of the masses, the sooner they are removed the better'³. Yet, he was not urging their immediate removal, and when in the middle of 1867 the Staleybridge Constitutional Association tried to smear the Reform League by alleging that Bradlaugh and Beales were extremists trying to bring about a republic, Bradlaugh responded quite decisively:

Where, in the teachings of the Reform League, do the Staleybridge Constitutionalists find the advocacy of Republicanism? We who have ceased to be of the League Executive, are Republicans in theory, but we are also of the opinion that England is not yet fit for a Republic⁴.

He remained of that opinion over the next two years: as late as May 1869 he told a correspondent unequivocally 'an avowed republican association is not yet possible. Mr W.J. Linton

1. N.R., 6 May 1866.

2. ibid.

3. N.R., 20 Jan 1867.

4. ibid., 18 Aug 1867.

tried the experiment more than once but without success'¹.

Such was the general context and tradition from which the republicanism of the 1870s and the republicanism of Bradlaugh developed. But in the 1870s, it developed for a time and in a way that it had not done before: it grew beyond the confined circle of a few radical journalists and working class leaders and threatened to become a mass movement and one of the key movements of the years after the Second Reform Act. No single personality and no one cause explain this. As on previous occasions when republicanism seemed on the point of becoming a dominant radical crusade, in the 1790s and in the 1840s, the influence of foreign events was important. The collapse of the Second Empire and the declaration of the Third Republic in France on 4 September 1870 were significant. In addition, the well-known public dissatisfaction with the retiring nature of the Monarch - ten years in mourning by 1870 - was a significant new factor not present in 1848². But even combined, these do not explain fully the dimensions which republicanism threatened to assume in the early 1870s. There were two other factors which were important. One was the political situation which developed for radicals in the aftermath of the enactment of the Second Reform Bill and the outcome of the General Election of 1868. The second was the economic distress which was growing in parts of London especially, throughout 1868 and 1869.

The political situation was one in which sectionalism had returned. No one issue could command the united support of all

1. *ibid.*, 9 May 1869.

2. Pall Mall Gazette, 29 Sept 1871, in which the Queen's seclusion is given as the reason for the growth of anti-monarchical sentiment.

sections of advanced radical opinion after 1868. The ablest of the trade union leaders were caught up in the cause of trade union law reform; some became involved in the issue of labour representation; others again in the cause of land law reform, or in emigration schemes as a solution to the ills of the age and their class. Middle class radicals concentrated attention on the issues of liquor laws or a national system of education among others. Given the tensions which existed between middle class and working class radicals, as embodied for example in the two separate parliamentary reform bodies, the Reform Union and the Reform League, a union between them on a comprehensive programme was unlikely. This was so firstly because the middle class radical objective of household suffrage had been realised while the working class one of manhood suffrage had not; secondly, because the divisive issue of the relations between Capital and Labour had been much to the fore since 1866. At that same time the first Gladstone administration entered office in the expectation of achieving great reforms. By late 1869 its achievements were still few and the obstruction of the Lords considerable, especially on the question of the Irish Church¹.

Yet, in itself this political situation is insufficient as a factor. What gave the initiative and a special sharpness to anti-monarchical feeling among a section of the working classes at the time was not simply the expense of a Monarchy and Royal Family that did not give value for money in terms of circuses,

1. E. Eyck, Gladstone (London, 1938), p.197; F.J. Feuchtwanger, Gladstone (London, 1975), p.152.

but the fact that it appeared to do little or nothing by way of providing bread either: the expense of Monarchy was growing at a time when it appeared that working class poverty was on the increase. It was certainly on the increase in certain areas of London. In the late 1860s, the shipyards and ironworks of Millwall were in trouble due to the competition of Glasgow, Belfast and South Wales. In January 1868 some six to seven thousand unemployed of the London shipyards met to discuss their plight¹. In the summer of 1868 no relief was in sight for those who worked once in what were now 'the silent and deserted shipyards of the Isle of Dogs'², and no relief came at any time over the next year³.

So it was in the autumn of 1868 that there developed in the East End a body known as the Unemployed Poor League which held frequent public meetings over the next two years. At these meetings, government was attacked for failing to do anything to solve unemployment, the idea of 'home colonisation' of waste lands was advanced as a partial remedy, and attacks were made on extravagant provision for the royal 'paupers'. Thus, at a meeting in Hoxton Market Place in mid-October 1868, the speakers for the unemployed denounced the government and opposition parties alike for their 'heartless indifference to the plight of the English poor', and at the same time congratulated the Spaniards on their own successful revolution⁴. A week later, again in Hoxton, led by W.J. Mote and John Weston, the Unemployed Poor League passed a resolution urging that in the next parliament the plight of the unemployed and starving should take precedence

1. Reynolds's Newspaper, 5 Jan 1868.

2. ibid., 31 May 1868.

3. S. Pollard, 'The decline of shipbuilding on the Thames', in Economic History Review, 2nd series, iii, 1950-1, pp. 72-89.

4. Reynolds's Newspaper, 18 Oct 1868.

over any application by or on behalf of the Prince of Wales 'for an addition to his already excessive annual income for doing worse than nothing'¹.

Out of the distress of the late 1860s came a revival of emigration schemes, and while these received the enthusiastic support of some well-meaning aristocrats and the more grudging support of trade union leaders such as Daniel Guile and Robert Applegarth², extreme working class radicals associated with the Unemployed Poor League and with the Land and Labour League which was set up in late October 1869, deeply resented the readiness and enthusiasm with which schemes of emigration were recommended by those who were unlikely to have need of them personally. Thus, in early January 1870, when the first public meeting of the Working Men's Emigration Society was held, under the chairmanship of Sir George Grey, a resolution was moved by Sir James Lawrence that 'the present depressed state of trade throughout the country necessitates the removal of part of its population to such colonies as may afford them a better prospect of earning a livelihood by labour'³. Patrick Hennessy of the Land and Labour League and Weston of the Unemployed Poor League moved amendments to the effect that emigration was unnecessary while land lay idle at home⁴. At the next public meeting later that month the working class radical John Johnson attacked the emigrationists and insisted that if emigration there must be, it was 'Royalty and aristocracy (that) should emigrate and not the poor people'⁵.

1. *ibid.*, 25 Oct 1868.

2. Weekly Dispatch, 9 Jan 1870.

3. Weekly Dispatch, 9 Jan 1870.

4. *ibid.*

5. *ibid.*, 30 Jan 1870.

The point of all this is that some time before the events in France led to a republic in that country there were developments in England conducive to a revival of republican sentiment. It was a combination of political and economic factors from 1868 onward that initially created the climate for a revival of republicanism in a more vigorous and extended form than hitherto witnessed in nineteenth century England. Already in August 1869 the retiring nature of the monarchy was being deplored: 'What has become of the First Estate?', one commentator inquired at the time, and answered, 'The Queen holds Drawing Room or rather doesn't, and retires to Balmoral What else is there now for Royalty to do (having been) reduced by legislation to the politically inane'. He wondered how long the masses would continue to pay up for the frills when there was no substance, and concluded that 'it has become every day plainer to forecasting statesmanship that we are on the high road to universal suffrage and a virtual republic'¹.

At the very time the inactivity of the monarchy was coming to prominence the obstructive activity of the Second Estate was likewise coming to the fore. It was in September 1869 that J. Boyd Kinnear called for the abolition of the Lords in an article in the Fortnightly Review². Even before this, it was noticed by Bradlaugh who, touching the subject in July 1869, addressed himself to the possibilities of a republic in Britain. The occasion was a public meeting in Bristol, attended by some five thousand, in which Bradlaugh took as his theme the Lords and the crisis over the Irish Church legislation. In the course

1. *ibid.*, 1 Aug 1869.

2. J. Boyd Kinnear, 'The question of the House of Lords' in Fortnightly Review, o.s., vol 12, Sept 1869, pp. 270-286.

of an attack on the Lords Bradlaugh declared that 'he believed a Republic to be the best form of government but they could only have a Republican form of government in a country where the masses of the people were educated; where they were out of the dominance of the territorial aristocracy; where they understood their duty as well as their right'¹. He went on to state his belief that the country needed a second legislative chamber, but it should be 'a senate of men of leisure, men of brain, men of intellect, men of honesty, and men of endurance but he did not believe men were born to that position Whig and Tory lords had conspired in keeping up a system which had been a system of downright and defiant robbery of the people'².

In effect, at this stage as earlier in the 1860s, Bradlaugh believed a Republic was a distant prospect and that it would have to be preceded by a major change in the nature of the House of Lords. Furthermore, it could not be expected to come about until the masses were politically free of aristocratic domination, and that would not be so until the implementation of secret voting and universal suffrage. Yet, despite these reservations and qualifications, within a year and a half Bradlaugh was no longer of the opinion that a Republic was all that far away: 'on the contrary, we are fast progressing towards a republic in this country', he wrote to an American correspondent in December 1870³. In March 1871 he had become president of the London Republican Club⁴; in April he now believed that in England 'a Republic will be possible in a few years'⁵. By the

1. Bristol Daily Post, 19 July 1869.

2. *ibid.*

3. N.R., 11 Dec 1870.

4. *ibid.*, 2 Apr 1871.

5. *ibid.*, 16 Apr 1871.

following year he was urging the institution of a central British Republican Association that would act as a unified national party of radicalism¹. In the middle of the year after this he became the leading figure in the foundation of the National Republican League². This rapid change of view and rise to prominence as the leading English republican propagandist owed little to his own initiative in the opening stage from 1869 to 1871, and conceals from view the reality of his position within and of his attitude towards the republican movement.

With regard to the development of republicanism as a movement in the period 1868 to 1875, the initiative came from the small body of leaders of the London unemployed, men who were members of the O'Brienite Holborn Branch of the Reform League, of the Land and Labour League, and who were in some cases also members of the First International.

The Unemployed Poor League was founded sometime in 1868, probably in August, in the Hoxton area of London³. For the rest of that year, and into 1869 its open-air meetings, chaired by Joseph Cooke and addressed by Frederick Riddle, W.J. Mote, and John Weston, were organised to draw attention to the plight of the pauperised unemployed and to press government to do something constructive about it. They particularly wanted government to support schemes of colonisation of waste lands⁴. At the same time they attacked extravagant public provision for the Prince of Wales⁵. Held originally in Hoxton, these meetings were

1. *ibid.*, 19 May, 6, 27 Oct, 3 Nov 1872.

2. Birmingham Daily Post, 12 May 1873.

3. Although there are references to meetings of the unemployed before this, the earliest mention of the Unemployed Poor League by name is to be found in Reynolds's Newspaper, 30 Aug 1868.

4. Reynolds's Newspaper, 30 Aug, 13 Sept, 18, 25 Oct, 1 Nov 1868.

5. *ibid.*, 25 Oct 1868.

moved to Hyde Park in June 1869¹. It was around this time that Martin Boon published his pamphlet, Home Colonisation, in which the huge incomes of Royalty and aristocracy were attacked², and it was again at this time that the Unemployed Poor League called on 'republican and democratic friends' to help in organising the people to press government for legislation to improve the condition of the poor³. The leading figures in this were Johnson and Weston⁴. At the end of June 1869 the Holborn Branch of the National Reform League began to reinforce these meetings. A public meeting was planned for Sunday 4 July at Goswell Hall, to set up 'a league in the place of the late Reform League', and the attendance of republicans was particularly invited⁵. Here, and the next day at another meeting at Pentonville Road, was set up a body called the International Democratic Association⁶. Among those present were G.E. Harris⁷, Martin Boon⁸, and John Johnson as secretary. There was much discussion whether the new organisation should be called the International Republican Association or the International Democratic Association⁹. The

1. N.R., 20, 27 June 1869.

2. N.R., 13 June 1869 contains extensive extracts from the pamphlet.

3. ibid., 20 June 1869.

4. Johnson was a member of the First International and later of a body called the Universal Republican League; he was noted for flamboyant speeches and impetuosity and was a supporter of the Paris Communards. Weston was a former Owenite, a carpenter by trade, a member of the Executive Committee of the Reform League, a member of the General Council of the International and a leading figure in the Land and Labour League.

5. N.R., 4 July 1869.

6. Reynolds's Newspaper, 11 July 1869, N.R., 4 July 1869.

7. George E. Harris, a former Chartist, a disciple of Bronterre O'Brien, member of the Reform League, was one of the most left-wing of the English members of the General Council of the International from 1869 to 1872, was its Financial Secretary in 1870-1 and editor of The Republican, 1870-2.

8. Martin Boon, a mechanic, also a follower of O'Brien, was secretary of the Land and Labour League and also a member of the General Council of the International in 1869-72, eventually emigrated to South Africa.

9. Reynolds's Newspaper, 11 July 1869, N.R., 11 July 1869.

latter was chosen in order to avoid any legal snares, but it was in effect the first republican body since the ineffective clubs of the 1850s. The genesis of this new body was described by an unnamed participant in the following terms:

Several of us considering the growth of democracy since the old Chartist days in this country and republicanism and socialism on the Continent, felt the time had arrived for England to speak out and keep pace with other nations, and being discontented with the lukewarm advocacy of the liberties of the people we met and incorporated the Poor People's Union (sic) with the International Republican Association¹.

Over the next three months, weekly meetings were held in various parts of London, and the International Democratic Association's activities broadened to include agitation on the Irish question in general and in support of the movement to obtain amnesty for the Irish political prisoners in particular. As far as leading International Democratic Association members were concerned at this time, the questions of unemployment, the land monopoly and Ireland were not unrelated. One of the great anxieties expressed by the leaders of the unemployed movement in London was the great influx of Irish into the metropolis. At a meeting of the unemployed in August 1869, W.J. Mote carried a resolution for repeal of the Act of Union on the basis of his belief that if the Irish controlled their own affairs they might have a chance of creating work at home rather than being forced to compete for work in England². At the end of August 1869 the International Democratic Association was attempting to organise a great Trafalgar Square demonstration of 'republicans of all nations' specifically to demand the release of the political prisoners³.

1. N.R., 4 July 1869, contribution by 'Socialist'.

2. Reynolds's Newspaper, 9 Aug 1869.

3. N.R., 29 Aug 1869.

After this demonstration on 20 September 1869 public meetings on the themes of Ireland, the rights of man, and the unemployed were organised in London by the Association into early 1870¹. In May 1870 they were preparing for a great republican demonstration in Hyde Park in honour of French republicans². In the two months between then and the French declaration of war against Prussia which was to be the catalyst for a wider republicanism in England the International Democratic Association held weekly lectures on republicanism and on 'social republicanism' at that³.

In the light of all the foregoing, what was Bradlaugh's position up to the French declaration of war? With his failure in the general election in 1868 and with the dissolution of the Reform League in March 1869, Bradlaugh was left in a quandary. It was not so much now that he found himself a rebel without a cause as a rebel with several causes but without effective organisation and without certainty as to which particular cause was likely to prove the most fruitful one for an aspiring political radical to pursue. The cause of atheism remained an important one and was receiving increasingly efficient promotion through the agency of his growing National Secular Society; nevertheless, it was a sectional issue with a necessarily limited appeal. The cause of birth-control had already proven itself even more limited by virtue of the failure of his proposal for a Malthusian League. One month after the dissolution of the Reform League came his proposal for a 'People's League', but this too fell on

1. *ibid.*, 3, 24 Oct, 5 Dec 1869, 30 Jan, 13 March 1870.

2. *ibid.*, 15 May 1870.

3. *N.R.*, 12 June, 3, 10 July 1870.

deaf ears¹. Later in the year he became closely involved in the early history of the Land and Labour League, but his wavering on the central issue of land nationalisation is indicative of some uncertainty of direction in him at the time. Again, he attended the inaugural conference of the Labour Representation League in November 1869, but he expressed himself unhappy with its failure to issue a clear cut declaration of principles, and had nothing to do with that organisation².

What applies to these will be found to apply also in his reaction to the republicanism which emerged from East London in 1868-9. The movement which developed from 1868 and which resulted in the foundation of the International Democratic Association in July 1869 received no support from Bradlaugh. In February 1869 he cast cold water on a suggestion to stage a demonstration in Hyde Park against any proposed addition to the income of the Prince of Wales³. In May 1869, two months before the foundation of the International Democratic Association he declared that the institution of a republican association would be premature⁴. He told Johnson in early September 1869 that he did not favour the proposed amnesty demonstration in Trafalgar Square, not because he was opposed to an amnesty for the Fenians, which he was not, but that the cause would only benefit from a more widespread support and more extensive agitation. Until there was evidence of such support, weak demonstrations as organised by the International Democratic Association would, in his opinion, only retard that cause⁵. At no time in his career was Bradlaugh

1. *ibid.*, 18 Apr 1869.

2. A.W. Humphrey, A History of Labour Representation, (London, 1912), pp. 34-35.

3. N.R., 21 Feb 1869.

4. *ibid.*, 9 May 1869.

5. *ibid.*, 12 Sept 1869.

ever the type of man to shrink from a crusade because of the initial scarcity of crusaders; and this was a peculiar excuse to come from one who hitherto had been involved in movements of small beginnings and which acquired considerable proportions and relative success by his own part in their agitation. In the light of this it was probably not the initial dimensions of the republican amnesty agitation that led him to discouraging remarks, as he indicated, but rather the kind of people by which it had been initiated. This was something he could hardly point out publicly at that stage. Interestingly, he gave no detailed report, but merely an obscure reference to a major Amnesty demonstration held in Hyde Park in late October 1869. On this occasion the main part of the demonstration had been got up by and was attended by Fenian sympathisers and former Reform League members and supporters; but, the I.D.A. sent its own contingent and organised its own speechmaking beside the main body. Although Bradlaugh never reported any of the proceedings he was present at the demonstration. According to The Times, when he made an attempt to get on to the main platform he was politely but firmly prevented by the chief speaker, J.J. Merriman¹. Thus snubbed by the main centre of the demonstration, it appears that he moved over to the I.D.A. platform where he intervened to condemn remarks made by Johnson in the course of the latter's speech to the effect that if peaceful agitation failed, physical force ought to be used to gain the amnesty².

1. The Times, 25 Oct 1869.

2. N.R., 3 Oct 1869 gives an obscure report; but Bradlaugh provided further details in N.R., 2 July 1871 in which he accused Johnson of being either a lunatic or an agent provocateur.

In short, Bradlaugh's position in the second half of 1869, and for quite some time after that, appears uncertain. He rejected the extreme statements of I.D.A. speakers but at the same time he himself believed that 'an entire change of our present system of class government is imminent'¹. He claimed it was his intention 'so to rouse the nation that the people will refuse to have an expensive monarch', but he added the significant qualification 'unless at least he be sober, virtuous and intelligent'². It was not an intention that he acted on immediately. Not till March and April of the next year did he begin to deliver lectures on the history of the monarchy³, which initially directed to an attack on the extravagance of the first two Hanoverians, were later to form the basis of his most notorious publication, the Impeachment of the House of Brunswick. This first appeared in the pages of the National Reformer a year later⁴. Although he regularly included the subjects of the Monarchy and the Prince of Wales in his lecture topics from mid 1870 onwards he made no attempt to launch any kind of republican organisation.

Although the Franco-Prussian War broke out on 19 July 1870 Bradlaugh was silent until twelve days after the French declared a Republic on 4 September. On 12 September 1870, in an article entitled 'What shall it be, Blood or Peace?', he came out fully in support of the Republic. He admitted that the French would have to pay the penalties of their folly in allowing

1. N.R., 3 Oct 1869.
 2. ibid.
 3. N.R., 17, 24 Apr 1870.
 4. See below p.466.

themselves for so long to be misled by their Emperor whom he described as 'a perjured liar, a cold blooded murderer'. At the same time he urged the French to fight to the last rather than yield an inch of French territory to the Prussians¹.

If Bradlaugh's attitude to the possibility of an English republican movement was hesitant or negative up to the declaration of the French Republic, it remained so for quite some time after this event. Indeed, a most striking feature of Bradlaugh's position from September 1870 until May 1871 when the Commune collapsed, is the way in which he approached the whole matter as one of 'foreign affairs', drawing from it no lessons for England. In this he was in marked contrast to the members of the I.D.A., to the Land and Labour League, and even to George Odger. From the time the French Republic was declared Bradlaugh's concern was simply with getting peace between the belligerents and recognition of the Republic by the British Government. It was these two issues which brought about his involvement in the various public meetings held in London on the French question at the time. Quite separate from the I.D.A.'s Trafalgar Square demonstration on 19 September², Bradlaugh got together a meeting at the Hall of Science on the same evening, to organise opinion in favour of peace³. The Positivist Richard Congreve, some of whose pamphlets Bradlaugh had recently reviewed favourably, was present and seconded Bradlaugh's motion for an address to Gladstone⁴. The main outcome of the meeting was the appointment

1. N.R., 18 Sept 1870.
 2. The Times, 20 Sept 1870.
 3. ibid.; N.R., 25 Sept 1870.
 4. ibid.

of a committee to organise a much larger and hopefully more representative gathering of radicals and advanced liberals, for St James's Hall. Invitations were sent to various well known public figures, including the M.P.s Henry Richard, Charles Gilpin, P.A. Taylor, Henry Fawcett, Charles Dilke and Henry Hoare. Hoare was the only M.P. who attended the meeting which was held on 24 September with an audience of around three thousand. Among those present were Congreve, who acted as chairman, his Positivist colleague Professor Beesly, the radical Colonel Dickson, George Odger and various members of the International Working Men's Association and other radical political organisations. Here Bradlaugh confined his speech to a simple appeal for peace between the countries at war, making no criticism of Gladstone's failure to recognise the Republic, nor any reference to the lessons English radicals and republicans might draw from the events across the Channel¹. By contrast, his friend Odger felt that 'now was the time for action, for, the Republic of France acknowledged, we should be on the high road to proclaiming liberty for ourselves'².

As an attempt to organise English radical opinion in support of the French Republic the meeting was a success; as an attempt to induce the British Government to grant recognition, it was a failure: a deputation to Gladstone on 27 September, led by the trade union leaders Coulson and Applegarth and the Positivists Beesly and Congreve, to press for recognition, received nothing more than vague promises of good intentions³. Although

1. The Times, 26 Sept 1870.

2. The Times, 26 Sept 1870.

3. Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 27 Sept 1870.

the Government had made efforts to dissuade France and Prussia from entering into conflict¹, once war began it remained neutral. Eleven days after the St James's Hall meeting Gladstone stressed to the Queen the Cabinet's determination to preserve neutrality², and it was not till mid February 1871 that they decided in principle to grant recognition³.

In the three months that followed the September meetings Bradlaugh contributed little enough on the issue of republics or republicanism whether French or English. He gave one lecture in support of the idea of a republic for England, in late November⁴. In December he attended one demonstration organised by the I.D.A. in protest against the apparent indifference of the Government to the plight of the French. At this, admittedly, he moved a resolution dissociating the people of England and Ireland from their Government's failure to recognise the French, but this was as far as he was ever to go in criticism of Gladstone's ministry on this issue. In the same month he expressed again the belief that 'we are fast progressing towards a Republic in this country', but he was quick to add 'there are many difficulties yet'⁵. His relative inaction in this period was not unique: radicals in general entered a phase of relative inactivity on the issue, between September and December 1870. Early in the new year agitation was revived, a series of meetings held, and Bradlaugh was again involved. He was the only speaker who could gain full attention in the

1. P.R.O., Cabinet Office Papers, 41/2/33, Gladstone to Queen, 14 July 1870.

2. ibid., 41/2/41, Gladstone to Queen, 5 Oct 1870.

3. ibid., 41/3/7, Gladstone to Queen, 15 Feb 1871.

4. N.R., 27 Nov 1870.

5. N.R., 11 Dec 1870.

meeting at St James's Hall, on 10 January where neither Harrison, Beesly or even Lucraft could gain a hearing amid the excitement and clamour of conflicting bodies, among them members of the International Working Men's Association, of secular societies, trades unions, the I.D.A. and the Land and Labour League¹. The sense of the occasion was conveyed the next day by Frederic Harrison when he reported the meeting as 'an immense success crowded to the ceiling people at the Hall told me the greatest they had ever known. Tremendous enthusiasm'². Much of the uproar however, was not due to simple enthusiasm, but rather to the din which arose when Harrison tried to move a motion calling for war on Prussia, and when Lucraft tried to counter this by moving an amendment calling only for peace. The din was quelled only when Bradlaugh entered just at that moment and rose to speak³. Despite his performance at this and other similar meetings Bradlaugh's position was not the highly critical one towards the Government adopted by the Positivists and Odger. Basically it remained one of regarding the French issue as one devoid of domestic implications, and he again proved reluctant to countenance any criticism of Gladstone for failure to recognise the Republic. Although he shared many a platform and many opinions with Odger, criticism of Gladstone and a spelling out the implications of events in France for republican prospects in England was something he did not share.

1. The Echo, 11 Jan 1871.

2. Harrison Papers, L.S.E., F. Harrison to John Morley, 11 Jan 1871

3. The Echo, 11 Jan 1871.

In this one finds one of the earliest indications of Bradlaugh's basic moderation as it was to emerge clearly in the politics of the republican movement. At a meeting on 5 January in the Hall of Science he was content simply to describe the Franco-Prussian conflict as a war of German aggression. Odger went further than this and pointed out that because of the events associated with the war 'the democracy of England never had such an opportunity as the present to assert itself against the fageyism of the House of Commons'¹. Odger strongly disagreed with Bradlaugh's view, expressed on this occasion, that Gladstone was not responsible for the inadequacies of the Foreign Secretary, Granville, and he went on to say that this meeting 'would be one of the precursors of a Republic in England. They were about to form not a Reform, but a Republican Association'². On the next evening, at a similar kind of meeting in Mile End, Bradlaugh again confined his remarks to the situation in the Franco-Prussian War, whereas Odger went on to argue that the example of the French would show that the vast majority of the English people were also republican³. Though this claim was absurd, the point is that Odger was using the example of events on the continent as of relevance to politics in England. It is not surprising, therefore, that the initiative in launching the republican club movement did not come from Bradlaugh. Neither, however, did it come from Odger in London, as might have been expected given his remarks at the meeting of

1. N.R., 15 Jan 1871; The Republican, Feb 1871.

2. ibid.

3. Eastern Post, 14 Jan 1871.

6 January in Mile End. Instead, it came from one of Bradlaugh's fellow atheists of the National Secular Society, in Birmingham. Here, on 24 January 1871, C.C. Cattell called together the meeting which founded the Birmingham Republican Club, the first of the seventy or so that were to be set up throughout Britain over the next three years¹. As for Bradlaugh, far from being enthusiastic at this initiative, he merely commented 'we trust our good friends will keep in mind the acts relating to treason and sedition'².

It is clearly the case that the original inspiration for the establishment of the first provincial republican club since the 1850s came from the example of events in France. The spread of the phenomenon in the provinces thereafter, however, received impetus from discontent at the expense of the Monarchy, beginning with the issue of the dowry for Princess Louise in 1871 and moving on to the allowance for Prince Arthur on his coming of age, and then to the question of the Civil List in March 1872. Although the thanksgiving service for the recovery of the Prince of Wales from typhus, in February 1872 and the attempted assassination of the Queen in the same month, together did much to restore Royal popularity³, the Republican club movement did not decline there and then⁴. On the contrary it appeared to grow in strength well into 1873 and only after that date did it subside. There was therefore more in the movement than mere discontent at royal extravagance: it was a serious

1. Birmingham Morning News, 15 Feb 1871; N.R., 22 Jan, 5 Feb 1871.
 2. N.R., 29 Jan 1871.
 3. F. Hardie, The political influence of Queen Victoria, 1861-1901, (2nd ed., 1938), p.214.
 4. N.J. Gossman, 'Republicanism in nineteenth century England', in International Review of Social History, vol 7, 1962, p.54.

attempt by advanced radicals to find a unifying issue and to develop a movement that could take the cause of political progress further on.

Although Bradlaugh's response to the Birmingham development was not initially enthusiastic, within a fortnight he satisfied himself that the club was not illegal. He thereupon gave it a warmer approval and hoped that hundreds of such clubs might be set up throughout the country¹. In late February and March 1871 the Birmingham example was followed in Middlesborough, Newcastle, Nottingham, Shields, Bedlington and Jarrow². Yet Bradlaugh remained cautious as he witnessed this development and claimed that 'English Republicans are in no hurry to make a Republic; they would prefer that England should grow into one; they do not wish it to leap into one'³. At the same time he himself became president of the London Republican Club founded on 24 March, with a new recruit to the ranks of organised atheism, George William Foote, as secretary⁴. Although Bradlaugh lectured frequently on the theme of republicanism in this period he still refrained from taking the initiative in organising republican sentiment into a formal movement. How to make a great national republican movement out of the mushrooming of republican societies became the concern of Odger rather than of Bradlaugh. It was Odger who convened a meeting to discuss

1. *N.R.*, 12, 26 Feb 1871.

2. *ibid.*, 26 Feb, 5, 12, 19, 26 March 1871.

3. *ibid.*, 19 March 1871.

4. *ibid.*, 2 Apr 1871.

this question two days before the London Republican Club was even founded¹. At this meeting a committee was appointed to carry out the idea of welding all existing republican bodies into a national organisation. However, it was a feature of Odger's character that although earnest, he lacked persistence, and that he was better at initiating than carrying things through to a conclusion. It was well illustrated in the case of his involvement in republicanism². Nothing came of his committee's ambitious intentions and the organising of the movement on a national basis came not from Odger in London, but from republicans in Sheffield, Nottingham and Birmingham. This was to be some time in the future. Until then Bradlaugh was content to leave the initiative to Odger and he remained peculiarly reluctant to show any desire to place himself at the head of any nationwide organisation. At this stage, in April 1871, he now believed a Republic would be possible 'in a few years', but the immediate task, as far as he was concerned, was not to go all out to achieve the necessary revolutionary constitutional change, but rather 'gradually to train men to take part' in a movement towards the attainment of the republican goal³. He was unwilling that any premature attempt at holding a national conference of republicans should be made, 'until delegates from the provinces had had the fullest opportunity, in solemn conference, convened after

1. F.W. Soutter, Fights for Freedom, the story of my life, (London, 1925), pp. 117-118.

2. This trait of Odger's character was to be a decisive factor in the row over his resignation from the General Council of the First International: rarely attending its meetings, he allowed his name to be appended to those of other Council members when they issued Marx's The Civil War in France without having read it and then found to his cost that he disagreed with its contents.

3. N.R., 16 Apr 1871.

long notice, of expressing their opinion, so that any Executive Council might come forth with the full endorsement of the majority'¹.

This was the general position Bradlaugh seems to have adopted down to April 1871, a month after the declaration of the Commune in Paris. This picture of Bradlaugh as a moderate, adopting a role of wait and see, refusing to become too closely involved with the I.D.A., and leaving to others the initiative in the organisation of individual republican clubs and later of a national republican body, is not one that was presented by the contemporary national or provincial press. Nor is it one that emerges from biographies of Bradlaugh since then. Before Bradlaugh became involved in the movement of the 1870s, his republicanism had been used to discredit the Reform League². But from April 1871 until 1873 and beyond that year, among certain sections of the press Bradlaugh achieved a degree of notoriety and an amount of abuse for his republicanism that had previously been reserved for his atheism:

In looking at affairs in Paris we should not forget that the views publicly propagated by Bradlaugh and Holyoake are the views of these Red Republicans

commented one journal³. Three months later the liberal Morning Advertiser, referring to the foundation of the London Republican Club, observed sarcastically:

The Republican Club would teach the working classes to swim in blood. Having studied the glorious triumphs of the Commune in Paris Mr Bradlaugh has seized the opportunity to preach Republicanism in the most open manner he preaches Revolution A President of the London Republican Club is a personage simply not to be

1. *ibid.*

2. N.R., 18 Aug 1867.

3. North Wilts Herald, 1 Apr 1871.

tolerated at all, and we call upon Englishmen not to tolerate him¹.

Although such comments were ill-informed, they were prompted in part by the new vigour which entered Bradlaugh's attacks on monarchy and advocacy of republicanism from the middle of 1871 onwards. It was in this year that he first delivered the lectures which were later published in serialised form in the National Reformer in 1871², in condensed form as an article in The Gentleman's Magazine in 1873³, and separately as a pamphlet in 1872⁴, under the title The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick. That he was refused the use of Birmingham Town Hall in order to deliver one of these lectures⁵, and that he decided not to use Northampton Town Hall which was secured after considerable opposition, lest disorder result⁶, is testimony in itself to the apparent extreme nature of his republican views. The Impeachment was perhaps the most searching expose of the extravagance, incompetence and corruption of the Hanoverians to appear in print in the nineteenth century. The work had its strongest point in abuse: under the Hanoverians fifteen sixteenths of the National Debt had been contracted; huge pensions had been provided for the already wealthy while the poor were left to fend as best they could; 'our best possessions in America had been lost', and Ireland rendered chronically discontented by the mismanagement of the Georges; the Brunswick monarchs were 'costly puppets useful only to the

1. Morning Advertiser, 20 June 1871.

2. N.R., 23, 30 July, 6, 20, 27 Aug, 3, 10, 17, 24 Sept, 1, 8, 22 Oct, 10 Dec 1871.

3. The Gentleman's Magazine, n.s., vol x, Jan 1873, pp. 32-37.

4. It ran to eight editions by 1881, revised in 1888, reissued in 1890 and had a 10th edition in 1891.

5. East London Observer, 14 Oct 1871.

6. Tower Hamlets Independent, 10 June 1871.

governing aristocracy as a cloak to shield the real wrongdoers', viz., the aristocratic monopolists of wealth, land and power. Reign by reign, from George I to William IV, the huge extravagance of this 'obstinate and vicious family' is detailed, not excepting even Victoria whose interference in politics 'has been most mischievous'; she 'is enormously rich is also generous and a year or two since gave not quite half a day's income to the starving poor of India'¹.

However, although strong in abuse, sufficiently so to have brought Bradlaugh overnight notoriety if he had never been heard of until then, the work was surprisingly weak in theory and argument. Bradlaugh did not list these abuses for the sake of sensation, but to provide background moral justification for his argument that the dynasty and the monarchy could be terminated without recourse to violence or revolution. The right of succession was one which derived only from the Act of Settlement: it was a right enacted by parliament and therefore capable of repeal by parliament: and parliament 'possesses no legislative right but what it derives from the people'². In this argument Bradlaugh overlooked or ignored the fact that the sovereignty of parliament resided in three estates: when he argued that the dynasty could be terminated by peaceful repeal of the Act of Settlement he did not advert to the fact that repeal legislation would have to receive the Royal Assent. Would such assent be forthcoming without the threat if not fact of coercion? When Bradlaugh published a version of The Impeachment in The

1. C. Bradlaugh, The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick, (6th ed., London, 1877), p.99.

2. *ibid.*, p.4.

Gentleman's Magazine it was replied to by John Baker Hopkins who concentrated on the argument rather than on the account of extravagance and who stressed this very point in particular. Although Bradlaugh had made it clear that he had no wish to see any sudden end to the reign of Victoria, he had made equally clear his profound objection that she should ever be succeeded by the disreputable Prince of Wales. Again, Hopkins, in the February 1873 issue of the magazine, in a rejoinder, pointed out that parliament could not deprive the Prince of the succession without the Royal Assent, and here again the issue of coercion arose. Bradlaugh's reply to Hopkins' arguments was not very satisfactory. He merely reasserted his belief in the omnicompetence of parliament which he equated with the House of Commons and made no reference to the problem of the Royal Assent. It was one of the very few, perhaps the only occasion in his career when Bradlaugh's arguments were weak and he knew it: his part in the debate in the Magazine ended on an uncharacteristic note:

I am only a plain, poor-born man, with the odium of heresy resting on me and the weight of an unequal struggle in life burdening me as I move on¹.

The weakness of Bradlaugh's contribution to the debate arising from the publication of the Impeachment did nothing to impair the vigour of his advocacy of the cause from the time that he took up this particular theme in public lectures in 1871. Early that year, despite the course of events in France, the

1. C. Bradlaugh, 'The Republican Impeachment', in The Gentleman's Magazine, vol x, n.s., Jan 1873, pp. 32-37. For Hopkins' first criticism and his later rejoinder to Bradlaugh's reply see also vol. ix, n.s., Nov 1872, pp. 540-546 and vol x, n.s., Feb 1873, pp. 157-167.

movement in England spread. Much of the impetus was due to the fact that the issue of further public provision for members of the Royal Family came greatly to the fore at that time. In February 1871 the Queen's speech on the reassembling of Parliament included a request that provision be made from public funds for an annuity of £6000 and a dowry of £30,000 to Princess Louise on her forthcoming marriage to the Marquis of Lorne¹. Gladstone went to considerable pains to justify this. The only M.P. to question it in the House was the radical member for Leicester, Peter Alfred Taylor. Taylor pointed out that there was much ill-feeling on the subject in the country and that any grant should be made from the Civil List², a suggestion that was rejected by 350 to 1 in committee on 16 February³. A few months later further parliamentary opposition arose over the question of an annuity to Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught. On this occasion 51 M.P.s voted for a reduction and 11 for a refusal of the annuity⁴.

While George O. Trevelyan, in his pamphlet What Does She Do With It, made some contribution to anti-monarchical sentiment in the ranks of M.P.s, the greatest contribution at the time came from Sir Charles Dilke. One of the most independent of the M.P.s on the left of Gladstone's Liberal Party since 1863, Dilke became notoriously associated with the growing republican sentiment when he spoke on the issue of Louise's dowry, and on

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 204, 1871, 10 Feb, cols 119, 146; 13 Feb, cols 174-5, 16 Feb, cols 359-

2. ibid., 16 Feb 1871, cols 359-360: Dilke and Fawcett supported Taylor but do not figure in the vote as they were tellers.

3. ibid., 16 Feb 1871, col 371.

4. ibid., 3rd series, vol 208, 31 July 1871, cols 570-590.

the expense and inefficiency of the monarchy in general, at Newcastle on 6 November 1871¹. He followed this with similar speeches in Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool and Bolton in November². Following the illness of the Prince of Wales at the end of November 1871 Dilke did not persist with republican speech-making outside parliament. Early in 1872 he raised the issue of the Civil List in the Commons but could secure only 2 votes against 276 for his motion for a Select Committee of Inquiry³. That was the limit of his contribution to the English republican movement, and contributions by fellow radical M.P.s were considerably more meagre. In short, the history of the English republican movement is not to be found in the surviving manuscripts of prominent radical parliamentarians or in the records of their parliamentary speeches: fundamentally it was extraparliamentary and popular in the basic meaning of that word: it was a movement which came from the populace. Since radical M.P.s like Taylor or Herbert were not prepared to take the issue any further inside parliament after March 1872, republicanism, insofar as it had any future as a movement, depended on its extraparliamentary advocates for that future. By the middle of 1871 Bradlaugh had become identified in the public mind as the foremost of these.

He continued to urge the need for considerable public debate before any dramatic constitutional change could be hoped for:

1. R. Jenkins, Sir Charles Dilke, a Victorian tragedy, (London, 1958), p.69.

2. Jenkins, *op.cit.*, pp. 72-73.

3. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 210, 19 Mar 1872, cols 251-252, 290-291, 317.

in October 1871 he expressed his hope that the present reign would not end before five years at least, that is, before the people would be prepared¹, but he was resolutely opposed to the idea of the Prince of Wales ever succeeding, even as regent², and hoped that a concerted republican propaganda drive could be organised. To this end he determined to confer with Odger, to promote some co-ordinated effort. But this hope for a united movement was to be dashed from the outset by the events surrounding the fall of the Commune and the reactions to this in England. When the French Republic had been declared in September 1870 an extensive united front had been formed in radical London, consisting of secularist republicans led by Bradlaugh, radical trade unionists led by Odger, members of the First International and of the Land and Labour League such as Weston and Hales, and the Positivist intellectuals like Harrison and Congreve. Bradlaugh had united with these in getting up one of the first big meetings in support of the French. With the rise and fall of the Paris Commune, that front was shattered. In May 1871 Harrison had written in defence of the Commune, praising among other things its attempt to achieve decentralisation, that it tried 'to govern from centres in which the workmen have a clear preponderance'³. Bradlaugh passed no comment on this at the time, but in December of that year he gave a public address on the events that had occurred in France over that period. In the course of this he launched an attack on Harrison's interpretation of the Commune, and incidentally on the Communard's

1. *N.R.*, 1 Oct 1871.

2. *ibid.*, 22 Oct 1871.

3. F. Harrison, 'The Revolution of the Commune', in *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., vol 9, May 1871, pp. 556-579; 'The Fall of the Commune', *loc.cit.*, n.s., vol 10, Aug 1871, pp. 129-155.

recourse to arms. Commenting in particular on Harrison's claim that the Commune sought to govern from centres in which the workers had a clear preponderance, Bradlaugh remarked 'This is not Republicanism: it is class dictation'¹. He went on to deny that the workmen had any right to take up arms for their cause:

'Having arms in their hands', says Mr Harrison, 'the workmen of Paris resolved to secure a true and real Republic'. This they had no right to do. If the majority had been for the Republic, the elections were the true battle-fields. If the majority were against the Republic, there was no right to overpower them by force of arms².

As far as Bradlaugh was concerned, republicanism in France 'would have enough difficulty without class war'.

Not only did Bradlaugh quarrel with Harrison and the Positivists at this stage, he had already come into conflict with Marx and the International Working Men's Association. In this quarrel Bradlaugh expressed a bitterness of tone he had never before used in differences with radical opponents: and Marx, for his part, devoted more time at one meeting of the General Council, to a sustained attack on Bradlaugh than he had ever done on any other individual, in that place³. Although Bradlaugh had joined the I.W.M.A. as early as September 1865, he did not maintain his membership⁴; nevertheless fellow secularists like his rival, Harriet Law, and his friend, Peter Le Lubez were long-standing members, and some of his closest political allies such as Odger, Lucraft and Weston were prominent and active on its General Council. Up to 1870 Bradlaugh had never found

1. N.R., 24 Dec 1871.

2. ibid.

3. Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 19 Dec 1871.

4. N.R., 8 Oct 1865.

reason to make any direct attack on or criticism of the I.W.M.A. Instead he claimed to sympathise with its aims as originally drawn up. Furthermore, he welcomed those papers which devoted space to its activities, such as Harris's The Republican¹, and William Harrison Riley's International Herald². Nevertheless although as late as December 1871 Bradlaugh could praise the I.W.M.A., claimed it was 'entitled to support for we had too much national spirit excited by rulers for their own purposes and too little international spirit'³, by that date the serious quarrel had developed.

The conflict originated in March 1871 when the General Council of the I.W.M.A. turned its attention to the growth of the republican movement in England as seen in the foundation of the London Republican Club in that month. At the Council meeting of 28 March Engels and Hermann Jung expressed the opinion that good might come to British workers from this development, but a majority view, as expressed by Mottershead, Harris and Marx, voiced hostility to the movement and its 'wire pullers'⁴. The conflict came to a head indirectly from events concerning the Commune, from Bradlaugh's own visits to France in his attempt to secure peace, and from the publication, ironically by Edward Truelove, of Marx's The Civil War in France. This work was issued officially under the auspices of the I.W.M.A. in June 1871 and had two further editions between

1. N.R., 8 Jan 1871.

2. ibid., 10 March 1872.

3. ibid., 3 Dec 1871.

4. Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 28 March 1871.

then and August. Admitting that it had been written 'by a master-pen' comparable to the fire of Cobbett and the thoroughness of Thelwall, Bradlaugh devoted a leader in his journal, on 9 July 1871, to an attack upon it. Marx, he claimed, weakened a strong case by recourse to personalities, and he noted that Odger and Lucraft had resigned from the General Council because of Marx's address¹. One week later, G.E. Harris, financial secretary of the Council, wrote to defend the address, pointing out to Bradlaugh that the personal and financial dishonesty of men such as Jules Favre* and Jules Ferry which Marx had exposed had the greatest political implications: it ill became Bradlaugh to have praised these men in speeches at St James's Hall months before and to now misrepresent the true significance of the charges brought against them by Marx². Bradlaugh failed to refute the arguments advanced by Harris, and a fortnight later he was attacked by Harris in the latter's capacity as editor of The Republican and member of the General Council. Harris charged Bradlaugh with visiting France and using the events there as a way to 'parade his pretensions to be the Champion of the People'³. Such evidence as survives suggests that the charge that Bradlaugh visited France in April 1871 to promote his own reputation is probably unjust, but the evidence is insufficient to make that judgement certain. In September 1870 he had been requested by a French emissary, Vicomtesse de Brimont Brassac, and by the French charge d'affaires,

1. They resigned after a stormy meeting of the Council on 20 June 1871, Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 20 June 1871.

2. N.R., 16 July 1871.

3. The Republican, 1 Aug 1871.

Charles Tissot, to help the cause of the Republic by using his great abilities as a public speaker¹. He responded generously to that request, and that the Government of the Republic appreciated his efforts at that stage is clear from the correspondence cited by Bradlaugh Bonner and Tribe² which is extant in the Bradlaugh Collection³. In the months which followed, however, Bradlaugh became acquainted and friendly with Jerome, cousin of the fallen French emperor, and the Thiers Government understandably became suspicious of Bradlaugh, as Tribe was the first to point out⁴. In April 1871 Bradlaugh made his visit to France to act as an intermediary between Thiers' Government and the Communards. According to both Bradlaugh-Bonner and Tribe, he did so at the request of 'some of the French leaders'⁵. Yet neither author cites any evidence as to who these leaders were, or to support the view that he received any such invitation. He may well have made the visit on his own initiative. The fact that he was arrested and briefly detained by the Versailles Government would suggest that they had sent no request for his help as intermediary. Whatever the justice or injustice of Harris's charge, Bradlaugh responded to it with an attack on the I.W.M.A. and described it as a society in England with 'but few members and little influence'. He discouraged English workers from joining it, not least because its secretary, John Hales, had justified

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1. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.314-318; Tribe, op.cit., p.120.
 2. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.316-318; Tribe, op.cit., p.120.
 3. Bradlaugh Collection, copy of letters from Charles Tissot to Jules Favre, 29 Oct 1870, 29 Nov 1870; originals in Archives des Affaires Etrangeres, Correspondence Politique Angleterre, vol 754, 1870.
 4. Tribe, op.cit., pp. 120-121.
 5. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.322-324; Tribe, op.cit., p.124.

the burning of Paris as 'a piece of military strategy'¹. In turn Hales, as secretary, denounced Bradlaugh in the Eastern Post declaring that Bradlaugh had 'never yet been recognised by the working men of England as a leader in any Labour movement' and that it would be time enough for him to give advice to English workers 'when he understands something about labour questions'². In October Bradlaugh answered Hales, declaring that the International had become a body 'in which the leaders, self-elected, are nearly all foreigners and which, while professing to have 'millions' of members, has not influence enough on the Continent to hinder foreign workmen from coming to Newcastle'³. He wondered why Odger and Lucraft had felt it necessary to resign from its General Council and he ended with a direct challenge to Marx:

So long as Dr Marx appealed to France, Germany, Belgium and Spain we were silent; now that he and his friends claim authority in England we invite them to hold a public meeting at which their objects may be discussed⁴.

The International did not respond publicly to this but in December the quarrel between Bradlaugh and Hales broke out again at a public lecture by Bradlaugh⁵. By this stage allegations were appearing in the press to the effect that Communard refugees in London were refusing to accept funds raised for their relief by Bradlaugh⁶, allegations he believed had been instigated by the International and which he refuted⁷.

The quarrels in which Bradlaugh became involved in 1871 with members of the International over the Commune were dominated

1. Eastern Post, 9 Sept 1871.

2. ibid., 23 Sept 1871.

3. N.R., 8 Oct 1871.

4. ibid.,

5. Eastern Post, 2 Dec, N.R., 3 Dec 1871.

6. Evening Standard, 14 Dec 1871.

7. The notorious Maltman Barry later admitted in the General Council of the I.W.M.A. that he had been responsible for sending these reports to the press: Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 6 Feb 1872.

publicly on both sides by personal recriminations rather than by differences over principles. Nevertheless, they were sufficient to ensure little prospect of any unity for the growing republican movement in the country, all the more so in view of the fact that Bradlaugh was not the only republican involved: Odger shared Bradlaugh's position, while the republican John Johnson of the International Democratic Association took the side of Marx¹. The quarrelling was to continue into 1872 when fundamental issues of principle did come to the fore, which, as will shortly be seen, served clearly to mark Bradlaugh out as a moderate. In the meantime, the issue of a centralised republican movement and body continued unresolved.

In January 1872 Bradlaugh advised a northern correspondent who inquired as to what steps were being taken to initiate a central body to contact Odger on the matter². In October nothing had been done and Bradlaugh explained to another correspondent that he had been assured 'many months ago by Sir Charles Dilke and Mr Odger that they were about to act in the matter'; he still hoped that others would take the lead, and failing this, he himself would act to launch some kind of central organisation³. In late October 1872 when lecturing on the subject 'Republican prospects in England and Europe' Bradlaugh at last adopted a note of urgency and called for the 'speedy formation of a British Republican Association, with a broad platform which might deal with such questions as those of the land, redistribution of seats, dis-establishment of the church, abolition of the

1. The Republican, 1 Aug 1871.

2. N.R., 14 Jan 1872.

3. ibid., 6 Oct 1872; Eastern Post, 26 Oct 1872.

hereditary peerage etc.'¹. In an editorial in early November he had to explain that his delay in promoting a national body had not been due to lukewarmness towards the idea, but simply to his understanding that Dilke and Odger were going to act. In view of their failure to do so he himself was now determined to delay no longer². There was, however, more than just this explanation behind Bradlaugh's decision to move just at that moment: the initiative had already been taken by a group of republicans in South Yorkshire. Led by Thomas Garbutt of Sheffield, these held a delegate meeting at Mexboro' on 20 and 27 October 1872. They set up a district executive to organise in the area and determined to call a national conference of republicans to meet in Sheffield at the beginning of December, with a view to establishing a national organisation³. In late November Bradlaugh who at that stage had received no invitation to the proposed Sheffield conference, nevertheless encouraged as many as possible to attend it. At the same time he announced that a separate conference would be held in London or Birmingham early in 1873 with the aim of setting up a national organisation. At this stage, in November 1872, Bradlaugh's position and intentions were far from clear: for three years he had left the initiative in national organisation to others; when the initiative was finally taken by Garbutt of Sheffield he encouraged people to attend a conference the aim of which was national organisation; and yet, at the same time, he mentioned a later conference for Birmingham or London for early 1873 with an identical purpose. It was only in

1. N.R., 27 Oct 1872.

2. ibid., 3 Nov 1872.

3. International Herald, 9, 30 Nov 1873, N.R., 3 Nov 1872.

December that Bradlaugh tried to explain the ambiguity: as early as 25 October 1872 the London Republican Club of which he was president had received an invitation to the Sheffield conference: after much discussion, the Club secretary, Foote, was instructed to tell the Sheffield organisers that the London Republican Club supported the aim of that conference in principle but felt that it might not be sufficiently representative of republican opinion nationally: they therefore requested the Sheffield organisers to hold that conference merely as a preliminary to a larger conference in early 1873¹. At the same time the London Republican Club set up a committee headed by Bradlaugh and Foote to prepare for the latter². One week later, when Bradlaugh again spoke on the matter, the Sheffield republicans had stolen a march on him: ignoring his suggestion they had set up a National Republican Brotherhood³.

Bradlaugh's fear that the Sheffield conference might not prove nationally representative was well-founded: a mere twenty two republican clubs were represented. The report of the proceedings in the International Herald tried to convey the image of an imposing gathering, claiming that the twenty two clubs sent delegates⁴. In reality the twenty two clubs were represented by a mere ten delegates⁵. The Brotherhood was to be governed by an executive of five plus treasurer and secretary. The first executive was to be elected by direct vote of the various clubs, was to hold office for six months, and to be based in Nottingham for its first term. The programme of the N.R.B. was to be 'adult suffrage, a pure

1. N.R., 1 Dec 1872.

2. ibid.

3. International Herald, 7 Dec 1872.

4. ibid.

5. N.R., 8 Dec 1872; report by C.C. Cattell who attended and tried to give a favourable report of the proceedings.

ballot, equal electoral districts, no state church, free secular education, nationalisation of the land, repeal of the game laws, reform of the currency, shorter parliaments, the payment of M.P.s, and the establishment by legal means of the republican form of government¹. When the election returns for the executive were completed and announced early in January 1873 it was found that Bradlaugh had been elected, together with his friends in the National Secular Society, Charles Watts of London and George H. Reddalls and C.C. Cattell, both of Birmingham, the fifth man being William Harrison Riley of the International Herald². The treasurer was the Nottingham republican and member of the I.W.M.A., Thomas Smith³. It was ironic that Bradlaugh had been apparently nominated and elected without his own consent: within a week of the ending of that conference and a month before the election returns were published he denounced the N.R.B. as 'a treasonable conspiracy'⁴. This extraordinary, even farcical situation arose from the person of the man who was elected secretary. John Morgan, alias John de Morgan, formerly an elocution teacher in County Cork, had been run out of Ireland because of his attempts to get up branches of the I.W.M.A. there. He arrived in England in July 1872 and endeavoured to earn a living as a lecturer on republicanism. He approached Bradlaugh for help in publicity, help which Bradlaugh gave until he learned that de Morgan had some time before absconded with the funds of a temperance society. He came to the conclusion that de Morgan was unstable

1. International Herald, 21 Dec 1872.

2. Birmingham Morning News, 12 Apr 1873; International Herald, 4 Jan 1873.

3. International Herald, 4 Jan 1873; P. Wyncoll, 'Thomas Smith, a working class defender of the Commune', in Marxism To-day vol 15, No 3, March 1971, pp. 86-89.

4. N.R., 8 Dec 1872.

and given to making violent speeches of a politically dangerous nature. De Morgan's speech at the Sheffield conference in early December led Bradlaugh to believe that the N.R.B. could be indicted for conspiracy of treason. He therefore denounced it as such¹. Neither he, Watts, Reddalls nor Cattell served on the N.R.B. executive and in March 1873 their places were filled by Garbutt and John Judge of Nottingham, Christie and Rymer². For the three months between the first and second elections to the executive, the N.R.B. was rendered impotent by this absurd situation, and it remained largely impotent after that date. The whole matter served only to divide republicans and to discredit their cause.

In early 1873 Bradlaugh pressed ahead with his own plans for an alternative national conference. By February, the London provisional committee's secretary, Foote, could report some progress despite attempts made by de Morgan and the N.R.B. to dissuade republicans from supporting the idea of an alternative conference and organisation. Such opinion as Foote had consulted agreed on the suitability of Birmingham as a venue, and support was promised by branches of the Land and Labour League, the Universal Republican League and other radical societies³. Foote proved to be an energetic but also a controversial secretary. In reporting progress in March 1873 he expressed the view that the provisional committee while wishing that the conference discuss and adopt as broad a platform of principles as possible,

1. ibid., 8, 15 Dec 1872; International Herald, 18 Jan, 8 Feb 1873.
 2. International Herald, 15 Mar 1873.
 3. N.R., 26 Jan, 9, 16 Feb 1873.

hoped it would not include 'those vexed economical or social questions which so greatly divide even avowed republicans'¹. This was hardly a view that would have been shared by Odger, or by William Lowe and H.J. Canham of the Universal Republican League, all of whom were on that provisional committee. The secretary of the U.R.L., J. Funnell, commented that his organisation could not understand the artificial divorce between political questions and social and economic ones, and he deplored the fact that one London branch of the I.W.M.A. was refusing to attend the conference - planned for May - because of the suggestion, deriving doubtless from Foote's ill-timed remark, that the discussion of such questions might hopefully be excluded. As far as Funnell was concerned, it was entirely up to the delegates attending the conference to ensure that such questions were debated². Foote's remark also divided republicans in Nottingham. There the club secretary, Judge, failed to prevent the selection of a delegate to attend the Birmingham conference³.

Although such divisions were ill omens the conference eventually met on 11 May 1873. It could make some claim to have been representative, at least geographically: apart from London, over thirty provincial centres were represented⁴. Against this, however, the conference received no encouragement from those

1. *ibid.*, 16 Mar 1873.

2. *ibid.*, 4 May 1873.

3. *ibid.*, 13 Apr, 4 May 1873.

4. *N.R.*, 18 May 1873 gives the list as follows: Aberdeen, Bath, Bilston, Birmingham, Burton-on-Trent, Chatham, Chesterfield, Crewe, Dewsbury, Glasgow, Gloucester, Grimsby, Hastings, Heckmondwike, Heywood, Hinckley, Huddersfield, Kettering, Kidderminster, Kingston-on-Thames, Leeds, Leek, Leicester, Manchester, Northampton, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Paisley, Plymouth, Potteries, Rochdale, Stafford, Staleybridge, Walsall, West Bromwich, and Wolverhampton.

parliamentary radicals who earlier had been identified with hostility to royal extravagance, and apart from Bradlaugh, no nationally known extra-parliamentary radical attended. Even Odger was absent. Bradlaugh, as the first speaker, was nevertheless quick to claim that it was a truly representative gathering, and equally quick to insist that it would have no truck with any kind of illegality¹. Almost all of the time on the first day was devoted to speeches stressing the need to observe the law and insisting that the Republic was a long term goal to be achieved only by a process of political education. Apart from other speeches dealing with administrative forms for the new organisation, to be called the National Republican League, the only suggestion of concrete political interest came from Cattell. He expressed the hope that the movement might become one which would supersede existing political associations to become a single great union of all radical organisations, capable of overcoming the dispersal of energies that marred contemporary radical endeavours with their multiplicity of associations for all purposes². This pious suggestion was lost in the discussion which arose over the name for the new body. It was only on the resumption of proceedings on the next day - when many of the delegates had already departed - that the question of the N.R.L.'s principles was debated. Foote launched the debate with a definition of republicanism couched in terms of an advanced political liberalism, 'meaning by a Republic a state

1. Birmingham Daily Post, 12 May 1873.

2. N.R., 18 May 1873.

which guarantees the fullest individual liberty compatible with security'¹. He went on to argue forcefully that it was 'absolutely necessary that there should be some distinction between the sphere of individual action and of State action', and the 'only way, therefore, in which the individual could be protected was by narrowing the limit of State action'². His resolution defining republicanism in these terms was carried unanimously³. Most of the other resolutions, such as those calling for universal suffrage, constituency reform, Home Rule for Ireland, further extension of local government powers, church disestablishment, gave rise to little discussion.

It was only when Funnell of the U.R.L. called for a national system of education that would be compulsory, secular and free, that controversy arose. Bradlaugh and Foote both opposed the notion of free education. Foote did so strenuously on the ground that he could not see why a man with two or three children should be taxed to pay for the education of another man's five or six children. The counter-argument of the London delegate, Brighty, that it would be better to be taxed for their education as children than for their maintenance as criminals due to lack of education, failed to convince him⁴. Bradlaugh shared Foote's opinion though he presented his case more diffidently. He regretted the 'growing disposition on the part of men of advanced opinions to look to the Government to do work for them which they ought to be prepared to do themselves'⁵. If this was the only

1. N.R., 18 May 1873.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. ibid.

5. ibid.

occasion of controversy during the meeting, it was also the only occasion when the views of Foote and Bradlaugh did not prevail in a conference which they had otherwise dominated.

As the proceedings moved to a close a resolution of sympathy and support for the republican cause in Spain was passed and Bradlaugh was instructed to deliver it to the Spanish leader, Castelar. The only other issue of note was the support given to Bradlaugh's request that the League executive should consider its policy for the coming general election in such a way that wherever 'a half-hearted Whig came forward as a Liberal' he should be opposed by a republican candidate, even at the risk of giving the seat to a Tory¹. With that, the conference finished its work. After a public meeting of the newly formed League that evening in Birmingham Town Hall, Bradlaugh left for Spain.

The holding of a republican conference in Birmingham was predictably greeted with alarm by the national press. Typical of comment on the occasion was that of the Leeds Mercury on the next day when it declared that 'men are not prepared at the instigation of Mr Bradlaugh to turn the English government into a Republic and for a purely imaginary benefit to plunge the country into years of anarchy and bloodshed'². But, the local press which had no reason to entertain any different view of Bradlaugh and republicanism up to the time of the conference, was quite unhysterical in its reporting of the event, and was even surprised at the relative moderation of the delegates' views.

1. N.R., 18 May 1873.

2. Leeds Mercury, 13 May 1873.

The Post remarked that the meeting of the conference

is very likely to be misunderstood. People at a distance may fancy that Birmingham has suddenly gone over to the 'Republic' or possibly to the Commune and that everybody here is excited as if by the occurrence of some tremendous event. Well, it really is not so. We are very peaceful in Birmingham, perfectly calm, not a bit more Radical than usual This explanation is worth making because we observe that some of our contemporaries are magnifying the meeting of Mr Bradlaugh and his friends We do not think the meeting deserves to be made a matter of importance it is all theory, a mere speculative profession of political belief¹.

That it was all theory and mere speculation seemed a harsh judgement on the earnestness of Bradlaugh and company. It was, however, a judgement that was echoed in a much more serious way in a much more politically advanced quarter. The Leicester atheist, former Chartist and future Social Democrat, John Sketchley, who had contributed to Bradlaugh's National Reformer in the 1860s, reported on the conference for Riley's International Herald. In this he reviled the inadequacies of the conference's principles, programme and resolutions. Referring to the motion calling for the disestablishment of the Church he pointed out that no speaker had a word to say on what would be done with Church income and property after such an event². The central statement of principle in the conference was that in which a republic was defined as that state 'in which the sovereign power resides in deputies elected by the people'³. Sketchley observed that 'that principle is the negation of republicanism' and added:

But not only is the programme set forth by this conference not republican politically; it omits altogether the measures essential to solve the social problem!

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1. Birmingham Daily Post, 14 May 1875.
 2. International Herald, 24 May 1873.
 3. N.R., 18 May 1873.

He proceeded to attack Bradlaugh's belief that its attainment would be far from immediate:

But as if it were not enough to issue a programme that is nothing more than a sham, one of the speakers publicly declared that if the Republic could be had tomorrow he would not accept it¹.

Worse was to follow: in the issue of the International Herald for 7 June 1873 the nature of the representation at the conference was analysed by de Morgan. He claimed that twenty towns were represented which had no republican clubs at all, that Chatham was represented by Bradlaugh although that town's club had broken up, that Kidderminster was represented by a delegate although that club had refused to send one and had protested about it, as did Bristol which Watts claimed to represent, despite the fact that the Bristol Club actually sent people down to Birmingham to expose the fact. How true or even partly true de Morgan's analysis was it would appear that the representation in general owed much to branches of Bradlaugh's National Secular Society which had transformed themselves into republican clubs with the same personnel. It is certainly true that the aftermath of the conference was an anti-climax. Little was done in either the short or the long term to capitalise on the occasion. Typical of what followed was the first meeting of the London Republican Club after the conference, the account of which had nothing more to report than that 'after a desultory conversation on politics the meeting broke up'². The meeting of the N.R.L. executive in late June suggested the idea of setting

1. International Herald, 24 May 1873.
2. N.R., 15 June 1873.

up lecturing circuits and of appointing a special lecturer to spread the movement. This development was planned to commence in September with Foote being suggested for the role of lecturer¹. Apparently this was not a sufficient earnest of endeavour: at its meeting of 26 July the U.R.L. unanimously condemned the unbusinesslike way the N.R.L. executive was conducting operations². The executive's secretary, Foote, made an attempt to answer the allegations, but all he could offer in defence was the observation that 'at present there are eight members of the Executive Council in London, of whom only three can be relied on to attend council meetings', and he ended by excusing his own inability to attend³.

An even more telling indication of the relative impotence of the organisation and movement was to be seen in the last attempt made at a major public demonstration against further grants to the Royal Family. The occasion arose on the marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh and the introduction of a bill to increase his annuity. Bradlaugh called a meeting for Sunday 3 August 1873 in Hyde Park to protest, and Watts reported an immense turnout of 20,000⁴. The Daily Telegraph estimated it at 10,000, the Standard at 2,000 and the Daily News at 1,500⁵. Whatever the true figure, the point of importance to note was the remark by Watts in his report, that 'an association should at once be formed having for its object the prevention of further grants to members of the Royal Family'⁶. Whatever had happened to the National Republican League ?

1. ibid., 6 July 1873, the suggestion being Bradlaugh's.

2. ibid., 3 Aug 1873.

3. ibid., 10 Aug 1873.

4. N.R., 10 Aug 1873.

5. Evening Standard, 4 Aug 1873; Daily News, 4 Aug 1873; Daily Telegraph, 4 Aug 1873.

6. N.R., 10 Aug 1873.

Foote did become special lecturer for the League and commenced his organising tour in September 1873, but by late November he was complaining of a crippling lack of financial support. He had nothing to report thereafter. In March 1874 Bradlaugh himself expressed his disappointment at the attendance for his lecture for the London Republican Club - an admission he had never to make for a lecture in any other cause before or after that time¹. And from that time republicanism as an organised movement declined and disappeared. No other conference of the N.R.L. was ever held. The various local republican clubs fell by the wayside.

That the N.R.L. proved so ineffective in the year after its foundation was due in part to the distraction of the leadership by other issues, and in Bradlaugh's case particularly by the Northampton elections. Another consideration of relevance, and one not referred to by leading writers on the subject was the way in which government responded to the growth of republican ideas and organisation over the previous four years. When the Keighley Republican Club was preparing for a lecture by Foote in November 1873 it got out an advertising placard which read 'Down with Monarchy ! The Curse of Humanity ! Hurrah for the British Republic !'². A concerned local solicitor drew the attention of the Home Secretary to this document five days before the meeting³. The West Riding's Chief Constable was instructed to send along plain clothes men to watch the proceedings⁴. When the whole matter finally came to the Attorney-General

1. N.R., 8 March 1874.

2. P.R.O., Home Office Registered Papers, 45/9353/28535.

3. ibid., 45/9353/28535/1, R.H. Hodgson to Secretary of State, Home Office, 14 Nov 1873.

4. ibid., 45/9353/28535/2, A.F.O. Liddell, Home Office, to D. McNeill, Chief Constable, West Riding Constabulary, Wakefield, 17 Nov 1873.

for his opinion, in December 1873, he advised 'this is a case in which it will be better no proceedings should be taken'¹. This incident was typical of the Government's response over the entire period. An even more striking example is to be found in the case of the Sheffield Conference which Bradlaugh had described as 'a treasonable conspiracy'. It was an opinion shared substantially by the Attorney-General who held that the National Republican Brotherhood was 'an illegal society', but again no action was advised and none taken². So long as martyrs were not made and rights of free speech and meeting were not threatened, so long would united action by the divided republicans and extreme radicals be forestalled. For this and for other reasons the League and Bradlaugh's republican crusade failed to secure the support of a wide cross-section of radical opinion. To the vast majority of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary radicals it seemed not only extreme, but irrelevant. It also appeared irrelevant, but ironically too moderate to the more advanced body of working class radicals associated with bodies like the Land and Labour League, Universal Republican League and the First International. As far as they were concerned the constitutional changes envisaged by Bradlaugh's movement would merely replace one ruling elite by another, leaving the real centre of power unaltered. At a time when the majority of national and provincial newspapers were describing Bradlaugh as a dangerous extremist they saw him as a 'dangerous' moderate, dangerous because he had the ability to distract or mislead the masses.

1. *ibid.*, 45/9353/28535/9, John Gray to A.F.O. Liddell, 9 Dec 1873.
2. *ibid.*, 45/18163/2, J.R. Coleridge and G. Jessel to Attorney General, 17 Dec 1872.

This was a view of the man which could not have been advanced confidently by those who knew Bradlaugh in the year after the passing of the Reform League. He came out of the Reform League with a justified reputation as one of its few extreme radicals prepared to challenge government and risk confrontation at critical moments. Soon after he became closely involved with the Land and Labour League to the extent of calling for land nationalisation, a position which put him considerably in advance of the leading labour leaders including even Odger who supported the Land Tenure Reform Association. But the event of the Commune and the quarrel with the General Council of the International was sharply to divide radicals: in that division Bradlaugh was not to be found in the more extreme camp. The issue of class is of central significance here.

Experiencing poverty from an early age, and forced into the army because of it during his adolescence, Bradlaugh throughout his life devoted himself to social and political means of remedying poverty. His major political appeals were directed to and his political support derived from the working classes. The issue of class was a primary fact of his political existence and awareness. As far as he was concerned government and society in England had been and still were ruled by one class. Unlike Bright who feared the masses, Bradlaugh believed justice in society would not be fully achieved until every member who comprised the adult masses had the vote. In this sense he was a radical democrat where Bright was an advanced liberal. Yet there was much that he shared with Bright whom he regarded basically as 'an enlightened and patriotic advocate of public

rather than class interests'. With Bright, he equated class society and class dominated government with the privileged landed aristocracy. Bradlaugh could be most forthright in language, declaring in 1871 that 'the privileges of property have been respected while the rights of labour have been disregarded by our governing classes'¹. But this rhetoric concealed a fundamental difference between him and the most advanced section of the Left at the time. He was not against the 'privileges of property', but rather against their being given undue weight to the detriment of labour. Implicitly he believed there was nothing fundamentally wrong with existing society, nothing that could not be put right by successful peaceful pressure for reform. Consequently the achievement of a democratic republic would see the abolition of class government. He wanted to see the abolition of class, not the replacement of the domination of one class by another: this he believed would have been the outcome in France if the Communards had succeeded. Hence his attack on Harrison.

It took the episode of the Commune to make these views clear and explicit for the first time. Unorthodox in rhetoric, Bradlaugh was quite orthodox in political economy. Shortly after the fall of the Commune he reviewed Millicent G. Fawcett's Political Economy for Beginners, and he suggested enthusiastically that 'the chapter on capital may be studied with advantage by some of our earnest friends who treat every capitalist as if he were a Rothschild'². In July and August of the same year he warmly

1. N.R., 28 May 1871.

2. ibid., 26 May 1872.

praised Henry Fawcett's Pauperism, Its Causes and Remedies, particularly for its suggestion that no permanent progress could be hoped for if warnings on the need for population control were disregarded¹. This was in sharp contrast to the attitude towards Fawcett and contemporary orthodoxies in political economy adopted by radical contributors to The Republican such as James Harvey of Liverpool who could not understand how men like Bradlaugh could attack monopoly in land while ignoring monopoly in finance². Harvey had sent a vigorous article to the National Reformer in which he described the Franco-Prussian conflict as 'the last of the dynastic wars. The next struggle will be between capital and labour. The working men of all nations will turn on the landlord with his monopoly of land and exorbitant rent, but more especially will they turn on the villanous and merciless pawnbroker, on the Scotch pedlar, mortgagor, bill discounter, money scrivener and banker'³. His article was refused insertion and appeared instead in Harris's paper. At the same time Bradlaugh denounced the author of a paper entitled 'Monarchical Conspiracy', read before a branch of the Land and Labour League in March 1871, for suggesting that all the 'privileged classes were vicious'⁴. A pseudonymous writer from Bath subsequently criticised Bradlaugh as one who stated contemporary problems correctly but failed to provide answers, that his kind of a republic would be able to do nothing

1. N.R., 30 July, 13 Aug 1871.

2. The Republican, 1 Nov 1870.

3. ibid., Mar 1871.

4. N.R., 23 Apr 1871; the article was later published in The Republican, 15 Apr, 15 May, 1 July, 5 Aug 1871.

to decrease the misery of the poor since it ignored the critical issue of monopoly of capital¹. Harris himself who claimed that 'more than twenty years ago we spoke and wrote with men whose motto was 'The Charter and something more', was even more forthright in his attitude to Bradlaugh's version of republicanism: in August 1871 he remarked

Strike away the entire Civil List to-morrow and the amount would be devoured in a more insidious and greedy way by a 'base, bloody and brutal' plutocracy unless the people become cunning enough in the meanwhile to devise means which shall secure to themselves the fruits of their own industry².

This conflict of opinion was carried over from exchanges in the National Reformer and The Republican into the conflict between Bradlaugh on the one side and the General Council and some English branches of the I.W.M.A. on the other. When Marx, in the General Council, attacked Fawcett as a 'scientific nullity' and as one whose claim to renown 'rests entirely on a vulgarisation for the use of schoolboys of Mr John Stuart Mill's compendium of political economy'³, Bradlaugh came to Fawcett's defence, declaring that those involved in this attack 'deserve strong reprobation'⁴. In turn, the West End section of the I.W.M.A. on receiving a circular from the London Republican Club inviting it to the Birmingham Conference, expressed its 'astonishment at the ignoring and exclusion from its programme of all important questions of a true social character', and it refused to become involved in a movement for constitutional change which would 'leave the workers in the hands of and at the mercy of the

1. The Republican, 15 May 1871.

2. The Republican, 19 Aug 1871.

3. Minutes of the General Council of the I.W.M.A., 16 Apr 1872; Eastern Post, 20 Apr 1872.

4. N.R., 28 Apr 1872.

capitalist class'. Instead, it preferred to wait until they felt sufficiently powerful 'to strike for the realisation of the true Republic - the Republic of Labour'¹. Bradlaugh was bewildered:

how an organisation of the various advanced political associations would leave the workers in the hands of and at the entire mercy of the capitalist class is beyond our comprehension².

Here was a division in understanding he could not at that time, nor ever afterwards, bridge. It would be easy to miss the significance of this because of the well-known struggle between Bradlaugh and the socialists in the 1880s.

Up to 1870-4 Bradlaugh had never been placed in a situation where this fundamental conflict of ideology had served to stress his position vis-a-vis the Left, republican or otherwise. The struggle for the second Reform Act which developed in the 1850s and 1860s in which Bradlaugh came to political maturity and national fame was one in which the essential difference between the agitators, as expressed in the two organisations, the Reform League and the Reform Union, was one between radical democracy and liberalism. This was a struggle in which ex-Chartist socialists like Ernest Jones and Charles Murray shared common ground with democrats like Bradlaugh, Lucraft and Odger. That particular struggle served to give Bradlaugh great prominence as an extreme radical politician: at the same time, it served equally to conceal the limits of that extremism. The struggle for republicanism, in the aftermath of the Commune, and the ferment of ideas it brought to the surface of radical political debate, forced Bradlaugh for the first time to place himself apart from the Left and the social republic. His reservations

1. *ibid.*, 6 Apr 1873.

2. *ibid.*

about the National Republican Brotherhood and his insistence on founding a rival National Republican League arose from more than just personal antipathy to the character and conduct of John de Morgan. They arose even more so from the fact that the N.R.B. sought the social republic, the republic of labour, whereas Bradlaugh repudiated the implied dominance of a single class. Leading members of the N.R.B., de Morgan, Garbutt, and Smith of Nottingham, were also prominent provincial members of the I.W.M.A. Given the quarrel between Bradlaugh and the General Council of the I.W.M.A., the split of republicanism into two rival movements was not surprising. It was a matter of piquant pleasure to Bradlaugh that the decision was taken in 1872 to move the General Council from London to New York, though oddly, Bradlaugh thought Marx was furious at this decision¹.

In the conflict between Bradlaugh and the International, the latter came off second best. Bradlaugh's republican campaign throughout 1872-3 won over radical working men away from branches of the International, which underwent rapid decline as his movement enjoyed a continued, if short-lived growth². A most peculiar denouement came about five years later: on 15 November 1877 a new organisation, The International Labour Union, was founded in London to take the place of the earlier body³. Bradlaugh took a prominent part in the foundation meeting, along with the secretary of the defunct International, John

1. N.R., 15 Sept 1872.

2. H. Collins & C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International, (London, 1965) pp. 276-278.

3. N.R., 16 Dec 1877.

Hales, with whom he had quarrelled so bitterly before¹. In the elections to the Provisional Council Bradlaugh came second only to Hermann Jung, while the trade unionist George Howell failed to gain election². Adding to the irony was the affiliation of the 26th Section of the First International, Philadelphia, at the I.L.U.'s inaugural meeting on 29 January 1878³. Even the once extreme Thomas Mottershead who had castigated Odger and Lucraft for their resignation from the General Council of the I.W.M.A. over Marx's Civil War in 1871, became involved. But the new organisation proved as ineffective as the older one in winning any significant support in England. By that time republicanism as an organised movement was as much a thing of the past as the First International. Nevertheless, although dead in that sense, republicanism was still alive as a sentiment. There is sufficient evidence of this in the fact that one of Bradlaugh's younger atheist supporters, George Standring, was able to conduct his own journal, The Republican, from 1880 to 1886, expatiating on the themes that had characterised the Paineite republicanism of Bradlaugh and of Carlile earlier in the century. Only in 1886 was he forced to broaden the appeal of his journal, changing its title to

1. *ibid.*, Also prominent were Howell, Eccarius, Jung and Weston, together with the young radical priest, Stewart Headlam, and the young radical atheist, Annie Besant.

2. *ibid.* The returns were as follows: Jung, 40; Bradlaugh, 37; Hales, Weston and Edith Simcox, 35 each; Besant, 34; Eccarius, 30; Hill, Van der Hout and Harriet Law, 28 each; Brown, 27; Ackill, 26; Foote, 24; Shipton, 22; Grout, Hodgson and Pratt, 20 each; Barvis, Kean, Schuman, Delahaye and Howell, 19 each.

3. *ibid.*, 17 Feb 1878.

The Radical, under which name it continued till 1889¹. Nor did Bradlaugh himself ever abandon the attack on monarchy and on royal extravagance: outside and inside parliament in the 1880s he kept up his attacks on the extravagance of the system of perpetual pensions. In 1880 he published a pamphlet on the subject² and brought out a second edition of it in 1881, while as late as 1889 he issued a second pamphlet, Northampton's Voice on the Royal Grants. In parliament, once the great struggle over the oath had been resolved, he succeeded in March 1886 in getting a committee of inquiry into perpetual pensions. But though it was a never-neglected theme in his political life, republicanism ceased to be central for him, after 1874. The attempt to develop republicanism as a great unifying force for radicalism failed. Bradlaugh himself turned to other causes: to getting himself elected to parliament, to promoting the issue of birth control, to seeking justice for Ireland. The struggle between his individualist republicanism and the social republicanism of the Internationalists, although fought out to an apparent end in the early 1870s was to revive in a new and more vigorous way in the 1880s between Bradlaugh and the socialists.

1. The Republican, Aug 1886: 'It is useless to disregard the fact that the title of the paper has always been a stumbling-block in its path'. Standring added, 'I am now more Republican than I have ever been; but for many years I have seen that the only way in which the cause of republicanism in this country can be forwarded is by helping the movement which is carrying the nation towards our ideal. That movement is Radicalism'.

2. C. Bradlaugh, Perpetual Pensions, (1st ed., London, 1880).

CHAPTER EIGHT: BRADLAUGH, THE IRISH QUESTION AND EMPIRE

1 Background

The importance of the Irish question in British history of the nineteenth century requires no lengthy illustration. That question caused the fall or resignation, directly and indirectly, of more administrations than any other single issue in the whole range of politics. Some eleven fell or were induced to resign through it between 1800 and 1900.¹ There were few years in the course of the century when Ireland was not subjected to extraordinary public order legislation: over the same period 1800 to 1900 it was subject to coercive legislation for eighty-two years.² In 'normal' years the country was garrisoned by some twenty-seven thousand troops of the regular army, which was one quarter of the entire army stationed in the United Kingdom at the time of Bradlaugh's birth.³ This was in addition to the local armed constabulary force which numbered twelve thousand men in 1850⁴ and thirteen thousand thirty years later.⁵ The Act of Union had been intended as a solution to the Irish problem, but from its inception it proved to be more an aggravation. Extraordinary legislation and a heavy concentration of armed men were needed to maintain a union that was legal and nominal. The ultimate consequences of this situation were, for both England and Ireland, profound.

A superficial analysis might suggest that the root cause of the problem was sheer ignorance of Ireland. English

1. Appendix Nine.

2. R.B. O'Brien, Dublin Castle and the Irish People, (Dublin and London, 1909), pp.75-76 for details of the legislation.

3. R.B. McDowell, Social life in Ireland, 1800-1843, (Dublin, 1957), p.74.

4. Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory for 1850, (Dublin, 1850), p.87.

5. O'Brien, op.cit., p.192.

commentators were as numerous as Irish in suggesting this as an explanation. William Nassau Senior¹ and Richard Cobden² were merely two of the more celebrated observers to make this point. Yet, ignorance is not a convincing explanation, since there was no dearth of information on the subject of Ireland. In the twenty years before the birth of Bradlaugh over one hundred and seventy-four separate commissions of inquiry investigated, reported on and made recommendations concerning Irish affairs.³ If ignorance is an inadequate explanation, that of indifference is hardly better. It would be true to say that very few Englishmen were willingly interested in the Irish question, for most of them the Act of Union was an end, a solution in itself. Only for the very few, and these were radicals, was it merely a means to an end, a means to a new treatment of Ireland. But, if most Englishmen were not willingly interested in Ireland and its difficulties, the Act of Union made the Irish question an English question. Because of the Union the bags and baggage of every Irish grievance ended up in the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster. Even before the great crisis of the 1880's the Irish question obtruded on English politics decade by decade.

However, mutual misunderstandings and conflicts of interest will explain a great deal where ignorance and indifference will not. Misunderstanding and misconception of the nature of Irish needs arose mainly from a belief that British

1. W. Nassau Senior, Journals, conversations and essays relating to Ireland, (2 vols. London, 1868), i.130.

2. R. Cobden, England, Ireland and America, (1st ed. London, 1835), reprinted in The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, (2 vols. London, 1867), i.51.

3. N. Mansergh, The Irish Question, 1840-1921, 3rd ed., (London, 1975), p.69.

interests and Irish interests were identical. Even the best-intentioned, most comprehensive and 'progressive' of British commentators and politicians laboured for long under the belief that the interests of both countries being identical they would therefore be served best by a common economic and political system. The Irish issue, more than any other, revealed the limits to which British understanding and concessions could go before their own interests were threatened. While this was true of British political thinkers and politicians in general, it was true of radicals in particular because they regarded themselves as the most ardent champions of liberty, the least identified with vested interests, and because they more than others were prepared to initiate or sustain an earnest debate on the Irish question. The Irish question more than any other exposed the limits of their understanding, the depth or superficiality of their prescriptions and, in short, the very dimensions of their radicalism.¹

ii Radical Opinion and the Irish Question, 1800-1868

Given that radicals were least identified with established interests in either country, most hostile to the landed class and the state religion in both countries, and most sympathetic to the cause of freedom and nationality in other countries, it was not surprising that they would make a significant contribution to the debate on the Irish question and its solution. There was, however, no uniform British radical attitude to, analysis of or prescription for the Irish problem.

1. To use the phrase of T.W. Heyck, The dimensions of British radicalism, the case of Ireland, 1874-1895, (London, 1974).

Nor was this surprising, for, not only had British radicalism many faces, but so had the Irish problem.

That problem consisted of three major elements, the religious, the economic and the political. The religious factor was the one which evoked the least divided response from radicals. Although the Roman Catholic Church throughout the greater part of Europe in the nineteenth century was identified with autocracy, against liberty, in the minds of atheist, Nonconformist and Anglican radicals alike, in the Irish situation the Catholics presented the spectacle of a majority religion coerced by a minority Church supported by the State. To the extent that all radicals favoured freedom of conscience they were obliged to support the same freedom of religion for Catholics as they enjoyed or sought to enjoy for themselves. Consequently, radicals as diverse in their political and religious outlook as William Cobbett, Richard Cobden, John Bright and John Stuart Mill, to name but a few, could all agree on the need for the abolition of the State Church in Ireland. That opinion was widely held and promoted long before Gladstone took up the issue in 1868-9.

On the economic aspect of the Irish problem there was among radicals in general considerable agreement as to cause but some diversity of opinion as to cure. The fundamental cause of the economic aspect of the Irish problem lay in the land question. Here was a country with an alien aristocracy one third of which was always absentee: whether absentee or not, almost all Irish landlords had no bond of interest, affection or loyalty with their tenants; they were unable or unwilling to provide capital for the land, security of tenure or compensation for improvements, yet they seldom

failed to demand and to get the highest possible rents.

There was a monopoly of landownership, an absence of capital, an absence of demand for labour, and a surplus population.

Writing on the problem in 1835, as well informed a commentator on Irish affairs as Richard Cobden, and few English commentators on the country knew Ireland directly or as well as he did, saw part of the solution in emigration, but a greater part of it in the introduction of English capital.¹ Fourteen years later, in the immediate aftermath of the Great Famine, his political ally John Bright took a largely similar view of the matter: there would be no solution until capital and the market system were given free rein in Ireland, and that would only be brought about when the land monopoly was broken and free trade in land introduced.²

'Free trade in land' and the introduction of English capitalist farming remained the basic prescription of Bright, Cobden and the Manchester School to the 1860's at the least.³ Their faith in this solution owed much to the effects of the Famine in bankrupting many old landlords, thereby offering the prospect of the sale of estates, and their purchase and consolidation by a new class of commercial owners. That faith was largely unshaken until economic depression hit Irish agriculture with a vengeance in the late 1870's.

Not all middle class radicals took the view of Bright. William Thornton and John Stuart Mill, influenced in part by the Famine,

1. Cobden, *op.cit.*, i.83-4.

2. J.E. Thorold Rogers, ed., Speeches on questions of public policy by John Bright, M.P., (2 vols. London, 1868), i.347.

3. R.D. Collison Black, Economic thought and the Irish question, 1817-1870, (Cambridge, 1960), pp.33-4.

but a great deal more by the observations of continental commentators, came to the conclusion in the late 1840's that the solution lay in a system of peasant proprietorship of reclaimed wastes.¹ Advanced in that tentative form in the 1840's, by 1868 Mill had come out fully for this proposal as the remedy, declaring that 'The Irish peasant must be given permanent possession of the land - subject to fixed burthens. Such a change may be revolutionary; but revolutionary measures are the thing now required'.² Mill's view on peasant proprietorship as a solution, as advanced in 1868, represents a significant development in the British radical approach to and understanding of the Irish problem. It is the first occasion on which an important British commentator and politician took a view of the Irish problem that happened also to be an essentially Irish view of it. In presenting this view Mill was conscious of abandoning British assumptions. He declared 'there is no other civilised nation that is so conceited of its own institutions and of all its modes of public action as England is', and as a consequence of this, no other nation was less fitted to rule Ireland.³ He came to the core of the problem as no other major English writer on economic questions did in pointing out that Irish civilisation and culture was fundamentally different, that the Irish originally had no concept of absolute ownership of property in land and could not therefore be expected to be reconciled to the idea of landlordism. A permanent solution to the Irish land question would therefore have to be on Irish terms.

1. W.T. Thornton, Over-population and its remedy, (London, 1846), pp. 431-6, and A Plea for peasant proprietors (2nd ed. 1874), p.262.
 J.S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy (1st ed. London, 1848), i. 381-400.
 2. J.S. Mill, England and Ireland, (1st ed. London, 1868), p.21.
 3. *ibid.*, pp.9-11.

However, it was only in the economic aspect of the Irish problem that Mill was able to escape from the distorting effect of English preconceptions and assumptions. On the final aspect of that problem, the political, he never departed from the belief that the Union was unquestionably a good and permanent arrangement. He made this clear in the same work where he advocated the 'revolutionary' proposal of peasant proprietorship. Although he castigated British misgovernment of Ireland, and sarcastically asked 'What are we thinking of when we give our sympathy to the Poles, the Italians, the Hungarians, the Serbians, the Greeks, and I know not how many other oppressed nationalities?', he could see no good coming from a separation of Ireland from Britain: 'I see nothing that Ireland could gain by separation which might not be obtained by union, except the satisfaction which she is thought to prize, of being governed solely by Irishmen'.¹ Coming from a political economist this betrayed a surprising narrowness of view since it failed to consider the problem, posed under the Union, of an economic policy desired by the Irish which would be inimical to British interests.

However advanced, and ultimately influential, his economic prescriptions were, Mill's views on the political aspect of the Irish problem were quite unremarkable: Grote, Hume, Cobden, Bright, Roebuck, indeed almost the whole body of middle class and parliamentary radicals from 1800 to 1867 shared the assumption that the Union was a good and permanent arrangement. John Bright provides an extreme example of the

1. *ibid.*, p.31.

assumption just noted in Mill's case: in 1866 Bright confessed his belief that the majority of Irish people wanted to be rid of English authority for good, but he was not prepared to concede one iota of wisdom or justice to that wish.¹

Throughout the first sixty years of the Union the only English radicals willing to contemplate a repeal of the Act of Union as a solution to the Irish problem were William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, Thomas Wakley and Ernest Jones, none of whom had any significant influence in Westminster, though all three had influence on working class radical opinion and movements. Indeed, outside parliament, it was only in working class radicalism that any consistent sympathy for an Irish political solution to the Irish problem could be found. This is not to say that all working class radicals or radical spokesmen for the working class favoured such an approach or were singularly free from preconceptions and prejudices. Radicals such as Richard Carlile, Thomas Cooper or George Jacob Holyoake were never particularly interested in the Irish question. Others, such as Samuel Bamford, were hostile to the Irish.² But there were working class radicals or radical spokesmen such as Cartwright, Cobbett and Hunt, who were interested in Ireland and who argued strongly and pleaded earnestly for combined action of the Irish and English masses in seeking an end to common injustices. They also recognised separate injustices, and in return for Irish help in the cause of parliamentary reform they were prepared to support the cause of repeal of the Union.³ The

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 181, 17 Feb. 1866, cols. 685-695.

2. S. Bamford, The Autobiography of Samuel Bamford, Vol. One Early Days, (3rd ed. London, 1967), p.229.

3. F.A. D'Arcy, 'Daniel O'Connell and English radicals, 1798-1847', in D. McCartney, ed., O'Connell Bicentenary Essays, (to be published, Dublin, 1979; copy enclosed).

desire for this particular kind of alliance or 'union of the democracies' gained its firmest expression in the Chartist movement. In the late 1840's the Irish cause and the idea of united action received support from Ernest Jones.¹ But united action outside parliament never materialised. The Irish insurrection of 1848 proved to be a dismal failure, as did the last great Chartist demonstration in the same year. Hopes of extreme Irish nationalists and extreme English radicals for united action were dashed. For almost twenty years after 1848 the Irish question ceased to menace seriously the peace of the United Kingdom, and went to the periphery of English political life and thought, radical and otherwise. From 1850 until the middle of the 1860's, insofar as radical opinions on the Irish question were voiced at all, they expressed the moderate middle class view that in the solution of the land question lay the solution of the Irish problem. The dominant version of that particular prescription was the doctrine of free trade in land; the extremer version, second to it but gaining in favour and authority, was the Thornton-Mill prescription of peasant ownership. Such was the climate of radical opinion on the Irish question at the time when Charles Bradlaugh was growing to manhood.

Bradlaugh and Ireland, 1851-1867

Few English radicals prior to 1880 had direct experience of Ireland. Bradlaugh was one of the few. His experience was gained at a formative stage of his life, for he was only turned seventeen years when he arrived in the country as a private in the 7th Dragoons in 1851. He spent all of his short army

1. Northern Star, 26 Feb. 1848. See also J. Saville, Ernest Jones, Chartist, (London, 1952), pp.216-218.

service in Ireland, leaving it in October 1853.¹ In those three years he was stationed in Dublin, Kildare and Cork. He arrived at a time when the processes of emigration and consolidation of land, so long advocated by political economists, were occurring at an unprecedented rate. In the year before his arrival some 104,000 evictions had taken place.² In the three years of his stay the total figure of evictions of tenants, their wives and children was 136,106.³ In the year of his arrival over 250,000 people emigrated, and in the course of that decade the figure was 1,216,000, the highest ever in the history of the country.⁴ He himself was to be involved in one of those many evictions, at Ballincollig, County Cork, and was to witness the death of the tenant at the moment of eviction. Three nights later, while on guard duty, he saw the bereaved widow holding her two children dead in her arms.⁵ The memory of that event remained fresh in his mind well over thirty years later.⁶ What that event and its memory contributed precisely to his understanding of the Irish problem it is not possible to say, but it is clear that it greatly contributed to his sense of moral outrage at the oppression of people and engaged a deep sympathy for Ireland that was never to leave him.

1. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.27-8.

2. Return by provinces and counties of cases of evictions which have come to the knowledge of the Constabulary in each of the years from 1849 to 1880, H.C. 1881, (185) lxxvii.

3. *ibid.*

4. Commission on emigration and other population problems, 1948-54, Report, Pr. 2541, (Dublin, 1954), pp.118-119.

5. Humanitas, Charles Bradlaugh, M.P. and the Irish Nation, (London, 1885), pp.34-35.

6. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 310, 31 Jan. 1887, cols. 280-282, Bradlaugh's speech on the third night of the debate on the Address.

For all that, outrage at the oppression of a subject people led to no action by him on behalf of the Irish until the late 1860's. Instead, his radical sympathies were first to be actively engaged on behalf of Italians and Poles. It was in 1858, for the first time, that Bradlaugh interested himself in the cause of oppressed nationalities. The occasion was the attempt on the life of Napoleon III by Orsini, and the consequent arrest of Edward Truelove for publishing W.E. Adams's discussion of this attempt, Tyrannicide, is it justifiable?. Bradlaugh became secretary of the Truelove Defence Committee, and at the same time became involved in aiding the defence of Simon Barnard who was accused of complicity in the Orsini affair.¹ These events of the spring and summer of 1858 were to introduce him to the circle of continental exiles and revolutionaries in London. In 1859 he came to know and admire Mazzini, and in the early 1860's used the occasion of business trips to Italy to collect and deliver to England political despatches for Mazzini and other Italian nationalists. In 1860 he became caught up in the tide of English sympathy and support for Garibaldi. Bradlaugh lectured extensively for the Italian cause in that year and collected funds to aid Garibaldi in the fight for Italian freedom.² He gave extensive cover to the Italian question in his National Reformer throughout this period³ and went so far as to express the hope that the spark of revolution struck by Garibaldi in Sicily might spread fire through Italy, Hungary and Poland.⁴ He further hoped that

1. A.S. Headingley, The biography of Charles Bradlaugh, (London, 1880), p.94.

2. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.152.

3. N.R., 16,23 June, 14,21 July, 18 Aug., 1,8,15,22,29 Sept., 13 Oct., 3.17,24 Nov., 1860.

4. ibid., 8 Sept. 1860.

'England's people will not allow any name or power to intervene between these struggling peoples and the liberty they strive for'.¹ In 1862 he was still prominently involved in demonstrations of support for the Italian nationalist cause, and in the next year was much to the fore in organising moral and financial support for the Polish struggle.² His house at Tottenham had become a regular visiting place for French, Russian, Italian, Hungarian and Polish revolutionaries, and he himself had become well known as a champion of nationalism and freedom for continental countries.

On the Irish question however, he was not active, and as late as 1867 it is impossible to say what his attitude and understanding was. Nevertheless, although he did not declare any public interest on the issue until 1867, his general sympathy could be seen from the fact that he gave free rein to George Drysdale to write on Ireland in the National Reformer. Given Drysdale's interest in political economy it is not surprising that his contributions on the Irish problem, which began to appear in 1865, were concerned with the land question. Drysdale was convinced that 'the bad system of land tenure' was the 'very root' of the matter, and derived that conviction from John Stuart Mill's view of the subject.³ Like Mill in 1848, Drysdale believed that a scheme of cultivation of waste lands, leading eventually to a system of peasant proprietorship, would prove the answer to the evil. A beginning could be made with the abolition of entail and primogeniture.⁴ This was, of course, precisely the same prescription that Dr. Drysdale

1. *ibid.*

2. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.152; Tribe, *op.cit.*, pp.83-85.

3. N.R., 9 Apr. 1865.

4. *ibid.*, 30 Apr. 1865.

wrote for the vastly different English land question.¹

How far Bradlaugh was influenced in his attitude to the Irish problem by Drysdale's writings, it is impossible to say. It was not until 1867 that Bradlaugh first took up and became involved in the Irish question actively. The date was significant, since it was the year of the Fenian insurrection. It would seem that nothing concentrates political attention so wonderfully as political violence, for if he took up the Irish cause in that year of Irish violence, he had taken up the Italian question in response to Italian violence some nine years before.

The Fenian attempt at insurrection in Ireland took place on 5 March, and their proclamation of an Irish Republic appeared in the English press on 8 March 1867.² It is signal testimony to his reputation as a sympathiser with oppressed nationalities that the Fenian leaders, headed by Col. Thomas Kelly and General Gustave Paul Cluseret, contacted Bradlaugh at this time. A great deal of mystery surrounds this curious episode. The most detailed account is that given by Bradlaugh's daughter,³ which is based on conversations with her father and on Headingley's biography of him as published in 1880.⁴ The kernel of that account is to the effect that Kelly and Cluseret went to Bradlaugh for legal advice, had 'many consultations' with him early in 1867, and that one result of this contact was the drafting of the Fenian proclamation of the Irish Republic.⁵ Bradlaugh produced a draft in his own hand,⁶ but

1. See below Chapter Four.

2. The Times, 8 March 1867; L. O Broin, Fenian Fever, an Anglo-American dilemma, (London, 1971), pp.147-152.

3. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, i.252-256.

4. A.S. Headingley, *op.cit.*, p.209.

5. *ibid.*

6. J.M. Davidson, Eminent Radicals in and out of Parliament, (London, 1880), p.214.

the final product as it appeared in print was not his work. Later writers on Bradlaugh, such as Arnstein, Tribe and Sinnott have accepted this account.¹

That there was more to the story of Bradlaugh's involvement with the Fenian chiefs than merely legal advice on the drafting of a proclamation is admitted by Bradlaugh's daughter; she pointed out that Bradlaugh was reluctant to say anything more on the matter for fear of endangering people involved, not least himself. How much more was involved has never been stated and remains a matter of conjecture. The odd part of the historiography of the matter is the way in which previous accounts have accepted that Kelly and Cluseret approached Bradlaugh for legal advice on drafting a proclamation announcing a Republic. It is absurd to believe that hardened military men and dedicated revolutionaries like Cluseret and Kelly, on the eve of an armed uprising, would seek advice on the legal niceties involved in drafting a proclamation that was per se a treasonable document. It is more probable that they approached Bradlaugh with a more substantial request than legal advice.

Already in the summer of 1866 Cluseret had tried to get the cooperation of English radicals of the Reform League for a joint insurrection in England and Ireland. He approached George Odger, William Randall Cremer and John Bedford Leno.²

1. Tribe, *op.cit.*, pp.38-39; Arnstein, *op.cit.*, p.17; N. Sinnott, *loc.cit.*, pp.12-14.

2. J.B. Leno, The Aftermath (London 1892), p.71; D.R. Moberg, 'George Odger and the English working class movement, 1860-1877', Ph.D. thesis, L.S.E., 1953, p.164; H. Evans, Sir Randal Cremer, his life and work, (London, 1909), pp.47-49.

According to Leno, Odger made sympathetic noises but that Leno himself rejected the idea out of hand and the matter was dropped.¹ According to the London correspondent of the Birmingham Daily Post, writing ten years after the event, it was Odger who threw cold water on the scheme.² Whichever is the true version, Cluseret received no encouragement. It is clear from Evans's biography of Cremer³ and from the autobiography of the Irish Fenian and later American labour leader Frank Roney,⁴ that Cluseret made a second attempt to recruit such support in 1867. Evans does not state which English radicals were approached on this occasion, and Roney's account is extremely confused on dating. But Roney did meet Bradlaugh and it is possible that Bradlaugh was the radical that Cluseret sought out in February 1867 with a view to securing practical cooperation for the imminent rising. If this is so it would explain the reason for the 'many consultations' between Bradlaugh, Cluseret and Kelly coming up to the events of 5-8 March 1867. At that stage the Fenian movement was well infiltrated by spies and there was very little the British government did not know about.⁵ The fact that Bradlaugh was never arrested suggests not that the government was unaware of these consultations, but that it was satisfied that Bradlaugh did not encourage the revolutionaries. The fact that although the police had his house under

1. Leno, op.cit., p.71.

2. Birmingham Daily Post, 10 March 1877, cited in Moberg, op.cit., p.164.

3. Evans, op.cit., pp.47-49.

4. I.B. Cross, ed., Frank Roney, Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader, an autobiography, (Berkeley, 1931), pp.117-121, 148, 153-154.

5. L. O'Broin, op.cit., passim.

surveillance, he was not arrested, despite his drafting of the proclamation, suggests furthermore that the version he drafted bore little relation to the end product.

Until new evidence comes to light the whole episode remains obscure. What is not obscure, however, is the fact that over the next two years the Irish question engaged a large share of Bradlaugh's energy and attention. His first major public statement came in a lecture on 3 March 1867, on the eve of the Fenian Rising in Ireland. In this he presented the contradiction that was to embarrass a number of English radicals at the time:

Englishmen have long been eloquent on the wrongs of Poland and other downtrodden nations, insisting on their right to govern themselves, but have been singularly unmindful of their Irish brethren and their thralldom.¹

It was, however, a contradiction that he himself was not to resolve fully, either then or ever afterwards. His own analysis of the problem on that occasion amounted to no more or less than what had been understood by middle class radicals since 1848: that the problem lay in landlord monopoly and insecurity of tenure for those who worked the land.²

Meanwhile, the Fenian troubles continued. Kelly had been arrested and, together with another Fenian leader, Deasy, was rescued at Manchester on 18 September 1867.³ In the course of the rescue occurred the death of one of the escorts,

1. N.R., 10 March 1867.
2. N.R., 10 March 1867.
3. The Times, 19 September 1867.

Sergeant Brett, and from that, in turn, came the arrest, trial and verdict of guilty on dubious evidence, of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien. They were sentenced to be executed on 23 November. Before that execution Bradlaugh made strenuous efforts on behalf of the condemned men and of the imprisoned Fenians in general. In the face of the widespread, hysterical reaction of the English press¹ and of the fierce indignation of the general public at Fenian outrages, he felt compelled to speak out. In a leader in his paper on 20 October, he pointed out how English people in the recent past had justified the right and praised the practice of revolution by the oppressed in the cases of the Poles and the Italians. Furthermore, English aristocratic landowners had cheered the rebellion of the Southern States against the Federal Union. He himself deplored the Irish attempt at rebellion which, he believed, was doomed to failure from the outset; but he claimed that the Fenians' discontent was justified and their recourse to insurrection understandable. Their country had been taken by force, held by force and, despite the legislative union, had never been given equal treatment. The country's agriculture was in a situation of serious decline, a situation of which Fenianism was not the cause but the outcome. He appealed to Englishmen to remedy Irish wrongs before it was too late, and to do this by abolishing the land laws, sweeping away the Established Church, setting up a commission of inquiry to hear all other grievances and make recommendations for removing them: 'those who have caused the wrong at least should frame the remedy'.²

1. N. McCord, 'Fenianism and public opinion in Great Britain', in M. Harmon, ed., Fenians and Fenianism, centenary essays, (Dublin 1968), pp.39-42.

2. N.R., 20 October 1867.

A month later, he took a prominent part in a meeting at Clerkenwell to petition the government for clemency, at which Finlen, James Murray and Benjamin Lucraft were the other main speakers who addressed the 3,000 working men present.¹ In his own speech Bradlaugh expressed his opinion that there was serious doubt whether the condemned men were guilty at all, and that they certainly did not deserve the fate of common murderers. At the same time he was realistic enough to believe that the petition would have not the slightest effect on government and that the proposed deputation to the Home Secretary would be in vain: nevertheless, it should be proceeded with as it was essential that some gesture of protest be made. Events proved him right: the deputation never even secured an interview with the Home Secretary.² There followed another protest demonstration on Clerkenwell Green, on Wednesday 21 November, at which Bradlaugh cautioned his audience against language or conduct that might provoke trouble, and expressed his dread that the executions would only lead to civil war between Englishmen and Irishmen.³

Bradlaugh's pleadings were in vain: the day before his Clerkenwell speech of 17 November appeared in his National Reformer, the executions had taken place. Correct in believing the petitioning would be in vain he was equally right in believing that Irish reprisals would follow British executions. Three weeks later, on 13 December, not far from where Bradlaugh, Finlen, Murray and Lucraft had pleaded for

1. The Times, 18 November 1867.

2. The Times, 20 November 1867.

3. ibid., 22 November 1867.

the lives of the Manchester Fenians, twelve people were killed and one hundred and twenty injured in the Fenian attempt to blow up Clerkenwell Gaol.¹ The Manchester executions did not deter Bradlaugh from persisting in his efforts to urge a policy of reform for Ireland. Speaking at Leeds on the day after the executions, he claimed that it was for the people of England enjoying political freedom, to press the government for Irish reform, though he did not specify what reform was required.²

If Bradlaugh was prepared to condemn the British government for its misrule in Ireland, he did not hesitate to condemn the Fenians for resorting to violence which resulted in the Clerkenwell deaths: it was an 'insane and cowardly act'.³ It was a condemnation which his friend, Peter Fox, a member of the Reform League executive and of the First International, could not accept. In that same issue of the National Reformer he dissented from Bradlaugh's opinion, pointing out that 'British dominion in Ireland and the measures necessary to preserve it, barbarise and demoralise the Irish people and precisely on that account ought that British dominion to be abolished', and adding that what had happened at Clerkenwell was inevitable after the Manchester executions.⁴

Bradlaugh made no reply to Fox, but over the next two years he continued to condemn the Fenian resort to violence, appealing to the Irish to desist since 'humanity and liberty are higher than nationality', and arguing that continued

1. The Times, 14 December 1867.
 2. Leeds Mercury, 28 November 1867.
 3. N.R., 12 January 1868.
 4. ibid.

violence would only plunge British and Irish 'into a fratricidal struggle'.¹ Although he condemned Irish violence, he saw its perpetrators as victims; he lectured in support of funds for Irish political prisoners' dependants, denounced the treatment of those prisoners and became involved in the Amnesty movement on their behalf in 1869.² Equally, he condemned the failure of British policy towards Ireland. In August 1863 he delivered a fierce attack on Disraeli for claiming that Ireland was now tranquil and that congratulations to the British were therefore in order:

Do you indulge in felicitations because you have the sullen submission of the people, enforced by bayonet which you do not withdraw? ... Why spend so much on spies, detectives and scoundrels, if all be tranquil? Why not have restored the operation of the Habeas Corpus Act if your boasted tranquility be real? You ... dared to mock your hearers with a lie. Ireland is not tranquil. It is wretched, rightly or wrongly.³

As to positive proposals, Bradlaugh's own recommendations at this stage were limited to a call for the disestablishment of the Irish Church⁴ and a reform of the Irish land system.⁵ These proposals, originally put forward by him in his 'Plea for Ireland' leader in October 1867, formed the basis of his pamphlet, The Irish Question, which he published in the summer of 1868. This was the limit to which he was prepared to go at this stage. The most revealing clue as to the nature of his position is to be seen, however, not in what he was prepared to advocate, but in what he was not prepared to

1. N.R., 16 Feb. 1868, speech at Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2 Feb. 1868.
2. ibid., 4 Apr., 5 Sept., 31 Oct., 1869.
3. N.R., 9 Aug. 1868.
4. N.R., 3 May 1868, speech at Ashton, 17 Apr. 1868.
5. ibid., 20 June 1869, speech at Liverpool, 13 June 1869.

advocate. This he first made clear in a speech in the Mechanic's Institute, Dublin, in March 1868. On what was to be his second and also his last visit to Ireland, he took as his theme 'the Irish difficulty and its solution': that difficulty would be solved by land reform and disestablishment, but it would not be solved by Tories and Whigs; it would only be solved if significant extension of the suffrage and introduction of vote by ballot were secured so as to enable the Irish to send genuinely representative M.P.'s to Westminster. Turning then to the Fenians, he observed:

Fenianism sought an Irish Republic. He said he was a Republican in sympathy and principle. He believed a republican form of government to be the best, but he was opposed to a Republic in Ireland for these reasons - first because he did not believe that Ireland and England could afford to be separated. He did not say it in the interest of Ireland but in the interest of England.¹

The statement was bald enough and he did not elaborate on it at the time. But he returned to this central theme of Anglo-Irish relations in his pamphlet a few months later.² In this work he considered four possible solutions to the Irish problem. One was the immediate institution of a comprehensive and impartial committee of inquiry to look into all Irish grievances, to make specific recommendations and to have them implemented in remedial legislation. This was the option which he exclusively urged, as being the wisest for the interests of both countries and also the most practicable.³ A second possibility was to engage in a campaign of military coercion to crush dissent altogether. It was an option which,

1. Freeman's Journal, 18 March 1868.

2. C. Bradlaugh, The Irish Question, (1st ed., London 1868).

3. *ibid.* p.15.

he pointed out, seemed to find extensive favour in English opinion at the time, were one to judge from the tone and substance of comment in a wide range of English journals. It was, however, an option which was both inhumane and impractical.¹ A third option was to provide Ireland with a domestic legislature such as was enjoyed by Canada, Australia, or even Hungary, the kind of option for which Daniel O'Connell had striven for so long in vain. Oddly enough, Bradlaugh confessed that it was one on which he did not feel competent to offer an opinion.² The fourth option was to accede to Fenian demands and to grant complete independence. It was an option he was forced to dismiss as unacceptable 'if England is to retain her place amongst the great powers of Europe'.³ He did not deny that the desire for complete independence was not confined solely to Fenian members but was also shared by the mass of the peasantry; but he believed it was a misconceived desire based solely on previous Irish experience of misgovernment: 'I trust and hope that it may be checked and changed by the adoption of another and more humane course of conduct in Irish legislation'.⁴ This, in short, was the limit of Bradlaugh's radicalism on the Irish question in 1868: prepared to see, and willing to work for a radical change in its land law as would ultimately see the end of traditional landlordism and privilege, he was not content to see the end of British rule - the ultimate privilege of insisting that one people be incorporated within the political culture and system of another.

1. *ibid.*, pp.8-10.

2. *ibid.*, p.14.

3. *ibid.*, p.7.

4. *ibid.*, p.7.

Bradlaugh's position on the Irish question in 1868 was, therefore, exactly the position entertained by middle class radicals like Bright and Mill, Bradlaugh was in no way in advance of them here. The question arises in any attempt to locate Bradlaugh's radicalism in the context of British radicalism in general at the time, was this as far as any British radical was prepared to go? Were any progressive politicians prepared to go further, or able to escape from the profoundly British assumption that the Union was a good and permanent feature? If the answer is that there were no such radicals at the time then one must conclude that Bradlaugh's position, the position of Mill and Bright, was the most advanced radical position of the time. But it was not.

The year which saw the publication of Mill's England and Ireland and of Bradlaugh's Irish Question saw also the publication by the Positivist Richard Congreve of an essay on Ireland.¹ Writing in March 1868, Congreve pointed out that the prescriptions of those who saw the answer in terms of disestablishment of religion and reform of land law were inadequate. They were merely palliatives, resting on the acceptance 'of the present relations of England and Ireland as the basis of their policy', in which they implicitly regarded Ireland as 'a province of an empire' and in which they implicitly denied the fact of a distinct Irish national consciousness.² Congreve took the view that the only completely satisfactory solution was to accept 'the Irish national view' that British policy must be to stop trying to

1. R. Congreve, Ireland, (1st ed. London, 1868), republished in R. Congreve, Essays, political, social and religious, (3 vols., London 1874, 1892, 1900), vol.ii, 179-215.

2. Congreve, op.cit., i.180, 183-184.

make Ireland English and to 'direct our attention to the reconstitution of Ireland as a self-existent state', one 'as distinct as Holland or Belgium'.¹ Pouring in English capital to bribe the Irish away from their distinct political consciousness would not work 'for there are other elements in the problem than mere material prosperity, feelings which no amount of such prosperity can satisfy'.² To allow the Irish to go their own way, Congreve admitted, implied the dismemberment of the Empire, but as far as he was concerned, that would be a good thing.³ If then, Congreve was anti-imperialist, where does this place Bradlaugh?

Congreve admitted that it would be impractical for this complete separation to occur immediately, but the principle should be accepted as the goal, and in the interim, as a path to that goal, the country should be governed along the lines of Indian government: a strong viceregal executive advised by an Irish council, until the country had been made ready for separation. Congreve went on to examine the objections to separation, and the chief of these he found to be English fears of danger from an independent Irish state. In reply to this objection he argued forcefully that, by itself, Ireland could not constitute a threat, but only in alliance with some foreign power, in particular, either the United States of America or France. But, argued Congreve, adopting a line that was ultimately borne out in the history of Irish foreign relations in the present century, if

1. *ibid.*, i.185-186.
2. *ibid.*, i.187.
3. *ibid.*, i.190.

independence were freely and peacefully given, Ireland would have no reason to seek such an alliance, and furthermore, would be no more willing to accept the domination of a foreign power after having for so long been under the domination of Britain. Congreve's views were as radical as could be, on the Irish question, and were far in advance of what was entertained by Bradlaugh or indeed by the vast majority of contemporary radicals: Congreve wanted reform legislation for Ireland as a means of ultimately setting them free: Bradlaugh wanted it in order to retain them: it is in the light of this that one argues that Bradlaugh did not resolve the contradiction between urging the independence of Poland and Italy and denying it in the case of Ireland. Congreve admitted that his views were 'the manifesto of a small circle'. Ironically, one member of that circle was Edward Truelove whose plight in 1858 had been responsible for involving Bradlaugh in the campaign for freedom for oppressed nationalities abroad. Furthermore, Bradlaugh knew of Congreve's work which was published by Truelove. In April 1868 he drew attention to it, summarising very briefly its main argument, and adding, 'we shall probably have occasion to notice it at greater length in an early issue.'¹ In fact, he never referred to Congreve's work again.

iii Fenianism and English Radicalism 1867-1869

As a military attempt to end British rule Fenianism was a dismal failure in 1867. But it was highly important and significant in that it offered a profound challenge to the moral authority and justification of British rule. The

1. N.R., 12 April 1868.

challenge it presented evoked the most sympathetic and earnest response from advanced radicals, but it was a divided response. Precisely because that response to Ireland was divided for the first time since 1848, Fenianism served to indicate the varied dimensions of that radicalism. Since the time in 1834 when William Cobbett declared that he was 'now of the opinion that a Repeal of the Legislative Union would be a good thing for England and Ireland'¹ and the time in 1856 when Ernest Jones declared 'We ask not to swerve from a single national object of your own. Ireland for the Irish - England for the English be our mottoes'², Congreve was the first English radical propagandist to suggest that the answer to the Irish problem lay in an Irish, not a British view, of that problem in its political aspect. His pamphlet on the Irish question threw radical thought on it into sharp relief: among other things, it indicated just how moderate and limited was Bradlaugh's understanding of and position on the Irish question in 1868.

The impact of the Fenian movement was not confined to illustrating differences of degree in radical thought on what was a major colonial issue: it also had a significant impact on radical organisations. Two organisations in particular felt the divisive impact of Fenianism in compelling a reappraisal of English radical attitudes to Ireland, the one the Reform League, the other the International Working Man's Association.

As a result of the Fenian challenge to the moral authority

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 21, 14 Feb. 1834, col. 354.
 2. People's Paper, 8 March 1856, cited in Saviile, op.cit. pp. 216-8.

of British dominion in Ireland, the Irish question came close to destroying the Reform League, the most representative and comprehensive of advanced radical bodies in England in the 1860's.

The Irish Question and the Reform League

The trouble posed by the Irish question for the Reform League began from the time early in 1866 when Peter Fox, a League member, called for complete Irish independence, and caused other League members to dissociate themselves from his views.¹ It came to a head in October 1867 when, at a meeting of the League Council, the secretary Howell read a letter from the president, Beales, which sought to dissociate the League from Fenian physical force activity: in this letter Beales departed from his usual moderation when he denounced Fenianism's 'violent, sanguinary and greatly irritating but abortive proceedings, exciting a spirit of animosity and hostility here, tending only to retard the political and social advance of their own country'.² This drew from Benjamin Lucraft a most vigorous response in which he argued that the Irish were fully justified in resorting to physical force. In this he was supported by Odger who pointed out that if he were Irish he too would be a Fenian.³ In turn, the publication of Odger's speech in defence of the Fenians was taken up by the press to support the charge that the Reform League sympathised with terrorism, a charge which caused the

1. Commonwealth, 17 Feb. 1866.

2. Minutes of the General Council of the Reform League, 23 Oct. 1867, Beales to Howell, 19 Oct. 1867.

3. *ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1867; Bee-Hive, 26 Oct. 1867.

threat of resignation by some moderate members, and forced Howell to write letters of assurance to the League's more prominent middle class supporters and patrons.¹ Howell himself, a moderate League member, regarded the Fenian issue as an irrelevance and a dangerous distraction from the organisation's main concern of further political reform. He succeeded in securing a compromise on the Irish question, that the League endorsed Odger's call for clemency for the Fenian prisoners, and at the same time, that it 'indignantly repudiated any sympathy with assassination or secret organisations for political objectives'.²

Although the compromise preserved the life of the League, the issue of Fenianism had seriously undermined the sense of unity in its leadership and had heightened distrust between the officers, Howell and Beales, and the more militant executive members like Odger and Lucraft.³ Bradlaugh was not involved in the League's debate on the Fenian issue. He was absent from meetings in October and the first week of November and was not a member of the Executive in the period after that, from 8 November 1867 to 6 May 1868. Nevertheless, it is clear where he stood on the issue from his statements around the time of the League debate on the Irish question from October 1867 to January 1868. If justifying militant action to achieve parliamentary reform in 1866 and 1867 had placed him alongside Lucraft as the outstanding Reform League radical, he parted company with Lucraft's militant radicalism on the Irish question, and was to be found to occupy the position of

1. Howell to Thorold Rogers, 23 Nov. 1867; to W.E. Forster, 17 Dec. 1867, cited in R. Harrison, Before the Socialists, (London 1965), p.141.

2. Minutes of the General Council of the Reform League, 1 Nov. 1867.

3. F.M. Leventhal, op.cit., p.90.

George Howell. Howell's position, as he sketched it in January 1868, was simply as follows: he abhorred and denounced Irish violence; he sympathised with the plight of the Irish; radical reformers had been making progress in England; Fenian extremism produced anti-Irish feeling and thereby threatened the prospects of English reformers being able to bring about remedial legislation for Ireland.¹ Bradlaugh's position as outlined to an audience in Leeds two months before this was almost identical: Ireland's wrongs were indeed great; but no man was right in 'resorting to the sword except when the sword was raised against him, or except when the sword was the sole and only means of deliverance from his wrongs'; in the present case it was not the only means, because, even if there were not complete liberty of speech and action in Ireland, there was in England, and English radical friends of Ireland, now with political power in their hands, could help Ireland.²

The Irish question, in its Fenian form, caused division and dissension in the Reform League leadership; it caused a division which served to place Bradlaugh among the moderates; it caused a dissension which exposed the inconsistency of some English working class radicals and radical spokesmen like Bradlaugh who were prepared to justify the use of force by Italians and Poles but refused to justify its use by the Irish. But, if it caused problems for the Reform League, it did likewise for the First International and its General Council in London.

1. G. Howell to J. McGee, 10 Jan. 1868, Howell Collection.
2. Leeds Mercury, 26 Nov. 1867.

The Irish Question and the First International

In its efforts to recruit support and members in Britain, the International relied to a great extent on the trade unions, yet the sympathy and support expressed to the International's General Council for the Manchester Fenians caused three affiliated unions to resign. It was the only occasion on which any English trade unions ever resigned from the International¹ and it secured few trade union affiliations after that date.² It not only caused problems between affiliates and the executive, but also was the occasion of division within the General Council itself. Here the division arose between continental members who tended to support the Fenians fully, and the English members who voiced reservations. Thus, at a discussion of the Irish question in November 1867, Hermann Jung deplored the tendency of English workers to take what he regarded as a wrong view of the Fenian struggle when they argued that only moral force was appropriate. He pointed out that the very success of the 'moral force' of the Reform League rested on the very real threat of physical force behind it.³ Similarly, the French corresponding secretary, Eugene Dupont, denounced English liberals who told the Irish to use only 'legal' means to obtain redress.⁴

The most serious division was to manifest itself precisely two years later, when the Irish amnesty movement had become organised in Britain as well as in Ireland. On 16 November 1869 Marx initiated a debate in the General Council on the Irish question and the attitude of the British government to

1. The Times, 27 Oct. 1871.

2. H. Collins & C. Abramsky, *op.cit.*, pp.170,290.

3. Documents of the First International, vol. ii, Minutes of the General Council, 19 Nov. 1867, p.175.

4. *ibid.*, vol. ii, Minutes, 19 Nov. 1867, p.177.

it. In this he attacked Gladstone for failing to initiate or promote amnesty and Marx proposed a resolution condemning him.¹ Odger came to Gladstone's defence and urged earnestly that the tone of Marx's resolution be changed from one of demand to one of petition.² More outspoken than Odger was Thomas Mottershead who, praising Gladstone, denied altogether that the Irish could ever be independent: 'if we relinquish our hold it would only be asking the French to walk in'.³ Indeed, as on the executive of the Reform League, the only English workers to take a stand as radical as their continental counterparts were Lucraft and John Weston, the latter arguing that, in the Irish case, 'no reforms were of any use, the Irish must have Ireland to themselves'.⁴ While Marx's resolution on the Irish question was passed without substantial change, the failure of the Bee-Hive newspaper to publish the General Council's resolution on Ireland led the International finally to break with that paper. It was not the first time that this radical English working class journal had suppressed unpalatable views on the Irish question: at the very foundation meeting of the International five years before that, the denunciations of British colonial policy in Ireland made by the chairman, Beesly, were suppressed in the Bee-Hive's account.⁵

Difference of opinion on the Irish question in the General Council of the International cannot be said to have done the

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1. *ibid.*, vol. iii, Minutes, 16 Nov. 1869, pp.179-183.
 2. *ibid.*, vol. iii, Minutes, 23 Nov. 1869, pp.185-186.
 3. *ibid.*, vol. iii, Minutes, 23 Nov. 1869, p.186.
 4. *ibid.*, vol. iii, Minutes, 30 Nov. 1869, p.194.
 5. Collins & Abramsky, *op.cit.*, p.35.

latter any serious harm, but it does serve to illustrate, yet again, how their view of the Irish question tended to mark the limit to which English radicalism was prepared to go. If English working class radicals for the most part, were not prepared to concede to the Irish the right and justification of revolt, to the extent that continental radicals on the General Council were, it need have caused Marx and Engels no surprise or disappointment at the failure of the English workers to respond to the cause of the Paris Communards.

A fit symbol may be found in the figure of the one time firebrand Chartist, friend of Engels and the man who first introduced Karl Marx to an English working class audience, George Julian Harney. Writing from the United States to the General Council, in May 1870, six months after Marx's Irish resolution and six months before the Commune caused trouble for the General Council, Harney denounced Marx's resolutions, insisting that Ireland was an integral part of the British Empire.¹ Imperialism was a feature of Harney's radicalism:² it was a feature of it even in his most radical days long before he went to the States. Writing in 1850, on 'The British Empire', Harney was proud to boast:

the creation of this empire has been the work of the veritable People. It is true that the middle class have shared in and led the commercial progress of the mother country, but they could not have done so but for ... the skill of our wealth producers and the hardihood of our mariners - all proletarians.³

The fact that, so far, these proletarians had gained nothing for their efforts but 'stripes, bonds and degradation' was no

1. Documents of the First International, vol. iii, 24 May 1870, p.241.

2. H. Saville, ed., The Red Republicans & The Friend of the People, (2 vols., London 1966), Introduction, p.xiii, n.65; A.R. Schoyen, The Chartist Challenge, (London 1958), p.277ff.

3. The Red Republican, 24 Aug. 1850.

reason to wish the dismemberment of the Empire:

it may content 'the Manchester School' to preach up 'economy' at the cost even of a dissolution of the empire. But I trust the proletarians will not be misled by any such false 'philosophy'. The integrity of the British Empire must be maintained.¹

Imperialism as a feature of working class radicalism was not exclusive to Harney: it is a neglected feature of advanced radicalism in general in the mid-Victorian period: it was, even, a feature of Bradlaugh's radicalism. It was the Irish question, as he responded to it and expounded his understanding of it, in 1867-8 that first illustrated this aspect of his political ideology. It was an aspect that was to become somewhat clearer in the years 1870-1891.

iv Bradlaugh and the Irish Question 1869-1879

However extreme a radical Bradlaugh may have appeared in other respects in the 1860's as he came to prominence, his position on the Irish question was one of relative moderation. This emerges clearly when contrasted with the views of Congreve, or with the kind of debate conducted on the question in the councils of the Reform League and First International. But, the moderate position Bradlaugh had reached in the 1860's was not a fixed position. His thoughts on the Irish question developed beyond the limitations of that time: he did not mention the Irish question in his election address of that year: in future election addresses he never failed to mention it.

The basic argument against Fenian strategy and tactics of violence and revolution used by Bradlaugh was that such methods

1. *ibid.*, 31 Aug. 1850.

were unnecessary: a reformed parliament such as would be returned after the 1868 general election would ensure fair treatment and reform for Ireland. If the Irish were sceptical of this they can hardly be blamed: in January 1869 Bradlaugh himself expressed his doubt when he exclaimed 'Poor Ireland! we feel the present parliament will do little for her'.¹ It was a bad year for Bradlaugh's Irish hopes. In July he was forced to agree with John Weston that Gladstone's bill to disestablish the Church in Ireland was, even in its original form, altogether too kind to vested interests and had, furthermore, in its passage been so mutilated as to be scarcely worth proceeding with.² In September 1869 he had to record with regret the release of another Irish political prisoner who had gone insane.³ His sympathy never flagged: he lectured to provide funds for Irish prisoners' wives in March;⁴ spoke on the Irish land question at Liverpool, in June;⁵ attended a great amnesty demonstration in Hyde Park, in October.⁶ But he could not escape a sense of disappointment, a disappointment that made a mockery of his argument against the Fenian recourse to violence. That sense of disappointment coloured his response to Gladstone's Irish Land Bill of 1870 which he believed inadequate to satisfy the Irish people.⁷ Yet he offered no positive suggestions on the question himself, at the time. Indeed, the only way in which his thoughts were directed to Ireland arose from his growing involvement with republicanism.

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1. N.R., 31 Jan. 1869.
 2. ibid., 11 July 1869.
 3. ibid., 5 Sept., 1869.
 4. ibid., 4 April 1869.
 5. ibid., 20 June 1869.
 6. The Times, 25 Oct. 1869.
 7. N.R., 6 March 1870.

The Irish question, of necessity, was of major significance for an English republican since the achievement of an English republic would place all aspects of Anglo-Irish relations in a new light. Bradlaugh's consideration of the issue is most revealing as stressing yet again the imperial element in his radicalism. In an editorial on 'The Abdication of the Queen', which he wrote in October 1871, he made his position clear:

a point not to be overlooked in a Republican movement, consequent on the abdication of Her Majesty, is the Irish Question. If Britain is to hold any place in the world at all, it cannot afford to lose Ireland.¹

The problem, then, for the British, he pointed out, was to discover 'on what conditions will the Irish work with us as brethren'.² He did not suggest what those conditions might be, in 1871, but in the following year he advanced to support, for the first time, the idea of Home Rule, in a speech in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. In 1873, in reply to a French correspondent, he admitted that Home Rule would only be a half measure, and that his proposals for just treatment of India would only be a half measure also; but he added:

we should be equally against a separation from Ireland and an abandonment of India. Our crimes in either country would not be repaired by an abandonment of dominion. You think us too Conservative in our politics; we are glad to read this because most of our fellow-countrymen think us much too ultra-Radical.³

If he was explicit in admitting that Ireland could not be given freedom because it was not in Britain's interest, he was equally explicit in admitting the nature of that interest in India:

1. N.R., 10 Oct. 1871.
 2. *ibid.*
 3. *ibid.*, 4 May 1873.

we cannot afford to lose India. It is possible to make it bear a part of our home taxation.¹

The issue for Bradlaugh, then, was not and never would be independence, but good government, even if that required some degree of limited self-government. If, by 1872, he came to support Home Rule for Ireland, he came to support a version of it for India, by 1873.² Yet, there was little of a practical nature that he could do to advance either cause. He included the Home Rule plank in his election platforms of 1874 and he spoke of the need for 'an alliance between Irish and British democrats'. It was not an alliance that Irish republicans were prepared to contemplate. Generally, they despised the moderation and theoretical nature of Bradlaugh's republican movement. Their sniping attacks led Bradlaugh to ask 'why do not our Irish friends unite with us a little more cordially?'. If Irish republicans in the 1870's were not prepared to do so, the more moderate Home Rulers did come to work with him to a limited extent in the late 1870's. One of the most memorable occasions occurred in Glasgow in September 1876 when he spoke on Irish Home Rule alongside the famous obstructionist M.P., Joseph Biggar. Here Bradlaugh made clear his support for the Home Rule cause, while stressing that support was given only on the condition that Home Rule did not lead to complete separation. He concluded by calling on the Irish and English to work together to bring about the break up of the great landed estates.³

1. *ibid.*, 9 March 1873.
2. *N.R.*, 27 April 1873.
3. *Glasgow News*, 5 Sept. 1876.

v Bradlaugh and the Irish Question 1880-1891

That cooperation appeared to be about to develop in an important way when, in 1880, Bradlaugh succeeded in securing the presence of Michael Davitt and the representation of the Irish Land League at the inaugural conference of his own Land Law Reform League.¹ But the differences in understanding and approach to the land question between Bradlaugh and Davitt were very great, and Davitt's contempt for parliament was something Bradlaugh greatly resented. A few months later, his own election to the House of Commons and the problem of securing his seat that arose over the question of the Oath, were to destroy effectively any hope of serious cooperation between him and the Irish nationalist M.P.'s for some years to come.

The complicated story of the relations between Bradlaugh and the Home Rule M.P.'s has been told in sufficient detail by Arnstein to require no substantial repetition here². The great majority of Irish Home Rulers at Westminster voted repeatedly against Bradlaugh's being permitted to take his seat, and their votes were critical in the whole affair over five years. The most usual explanation offered by themselves was that Bradlaugh had incurred their enmity by supporting the Liberal government in its coercive legislation and conduct towards Ireland in 1880-2. As Arnstein has shown, it was an excuse invalid from the start.³ Home Rulers in Westminster voted against Bradlaugh and spoke against him even before he was allowed to take his seat temporarily, in the period July 1880 to March 1881, long before he became

1. See above Chapter Four.

2. W.L. Arnstein, *op.cit.*, pp.201-224.

3. *ibid.*, pp.213-214.

involved in the Forster coercion crisis. The attack began as early as 21 May 1880 when Frank Hugh O'Donnell dragged into the debate the issue of the Fruits of Philosophy.¹ The real explanation is to be found in the question of religion: Home Rule M.P.'s would not support Bradlaugh's admission either because they themselves abhorred his atheism, or else because they were sensitive to Irish ecclesiastical opinion on it. Yet, although the idea that he supported coercion is unjust, the years 1800 to 1882 saw the beginnings of attacks on Bradlaugh by working class radicals and saw charges against him to the effect that, once in parliament, he began to backslide and to forget his radicalism.²

It was the development of the Irish question over the period 1880 to 1882 which provided the occasion for these charges. The increasing pace of agitation in Ireland by the Land League caused the Liberal Chief Secretary, Forster, in the summer of 1880, to ask for a renewal of the coercion act about to expire that year. Although his request was rejected, the Cabinet increasingly became divided, and towards the end of that year the radical Joseph Chamberlain came to agree with the decision that Parnell should be prosecuted. In turn, English working class radical opposition to repression in Ireland intensified and resulted in the foundation, that November, of the Anti Coercion Association.³ This body set up a journal in December 1880 called The Radical. Edited by William Webster, Samuel Bennet and Frank Soutter, the Radical became the main source of charges against Bradlaugh over the next two years.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 252, H.C., 21 May 1880.

2. Reynolds's Newspaper, 1 Jan. 1882; The Radical, 15, 19 Jan. 1881.

3. Heyck, op.cit., p.56.

The trouble began as early as the first public meeting of the Association. While lecturing at Leeds on 31 October, Bradlaugh received a telegram from Soutter and Bennett, the organising secretaries, asking for a telegraphic reply of support for the objects of the meeting. This Bradlaugh refused to give, on the ground that he had no idea what kind of resolutions he was being asked to support.¹ Furthermore, he could see 'no evidence of any coercion on the part of the actual Government towards the Irish people'. As to the prosecutions of Parnell and his colleagues, Bradlaugh declared 'I am in principle opposed to all criminal prosecutions for spoken words which do not incite to wrongdoing', he disapproved of the particular prosecution, but added, 'it is a prosecution in which the procedure in no way savours of harshness. The traducers will be able to defend and explain their views before a jury of their fellow countrymen, and being at liberty, will experience no difficulty in preparing their defence'.²

In refusing to support a meeting the precise objects of which were not clear to him, Bradlaugh was perfectly within his rights, but it was not the kind of response that demonstrators for freedom of speech and association had learned to expect from him down the years. Again, in insisting that those about to be prosecuted still enjoyed the right of bail, the freedom of preparing a defence, and the right to trial by jury, Bradlaugh was legally correct, but it was a correctness that ran totally counter to the moral indignation of Irish nationalists and advanced English working class radicals like

1. N.R., 7 Nov. 1880.

2. ibid.

Soutter. From that time Bradlaugh played no part in the history of the Anti Coercion Association. He refused to attend a great Hyde Park demonstration against coercion on 13 February 1881, and urged London radicals to stay away from the Hyde Park demonstration of June 1881, organised to protest against evictions in Ireland.¹ Furthermore, he remained silent on the arrest and imprisonment of Davitt on 3 February 1881, despite the support Davitt had given to Bradlaugh's land conference a year before.

Inside parliament, in January 1881, he spoke and voted in a way that was bound to alienate Irish nationalist M.P.'s and English extra-parliamentary radicals. The most striking occasion occurred on the night of 25-26 January, when Gladstone moved that the two coercion bills which Forster had at last prevailed on the Cabinet to promote, namely, the Protection of Person and Property Bill, and the Peace Preservation (Ireland) Bill, be given precedence over all other business. The Irish members responded by causing an uproar that led to the suspension of Biggar.² Bradlaugh, along with all other Radical M.P.'s present, voted in support of the suspension.³ As for Gladstone's motion, only one English M.P. spoke against it. That M.P. was Joseph Cowen. He objected to the motion because it interfered with 'the few and fast diminishing privileges of private Members', and because 'it was an attempt to put at a disadvantage the Irish Members while the liberties of their country were being forcibly confiscated'. He pointed out that they were in a 'hopeless minority' and consequently that their opposition was

1. The Radical, 28 Jan. 1882.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 257, H.C. 25-27 Jan. 1881, cols. 1349-1350.

3. ibid.

reasonable and honourable, and that there was no excuse for trying to gag them. He went on to denounce the 'ostentatious preference that was made by the Ministry for repressive rather than remedial measures'.¹ Bradlaugh made no response, but cast his vote in support of Gladstone.² Indeed, during this time Bradlaugh became increasingly hostile to the Irish M.P.'s because of their parliamentary tactics. On 16 January 1881, in his paper, he deplored the way in which they had moved an adjournment of the House on a triviliaty and forced a division so that he was 'driven into the lobby the first time this session against the Irish members, only to vote that the business of the House was not to be stopped by an utterly irregular discussion'.³ Later that month, he remarked that the Irish M.P.'s would get more support from British colleagues if they desisted from obstruction and aided in 'generally useful legislation'.⁴ He returned to this censure in February, and again in March when he argued that their tactics would result in 'striking a series of mortal blows at free speech in Parliament'.⁵ By 1882, he was driven to remark that 'for the Irish Land League Members, except three or four, I have only contempt'.⁶

In the same period that he came to deplore Parnellite obstruction in parliament, Bradlaugh tended to speak of Gladstone and his ministry in general in a tone of respect and moderation that incensed the editors of The Radical.

When the intention of the government to proceed with coercive

1. *ibid.*, cols. 1469-1477.
2. *ibid.*, col. 1486.
3. *N.R.*, 16 Jan. 1881.
4. *ibid.*, 23 Jan. 1881.
5. *ibid.*, 6 March 1881.
6. *ibid.*, 19 March 1881.

legislation was announced in January 1881, Bradlaugh felt compelled to support Parnell's amendment. But, in his speech on the third night of that debate, he was at pains to point out that the Government 'might be in possession of facts not within the knowledge of individual Members' and which may have prompted them to consider coercion necessary. He confessed that, as a result, 'the position of Radical Members like himself was an extremely difficult one ... They did not wish to embarrass the Government...'.¹ A month later, during the debate on the Second Reading of Forster's Protection of Persons and Property (Ireland) Bill, he again made it clear that although he was compelled to speak and vote against the Bill, 'he did not intend in what he should say to imply any kind of attack upon the Government or upon the Members of the Ministry. He believed that every Member of Her Majesty's Government produced this measure with reluctance and pain'.² In taking this stance, Bradlaugh was in no sense unique: with the possible exception of Joseph Cowen, all Radical M.P.'s were placed in an acute dilemma by the strains and contradictions imposed on a Liberal Government and a Liberal majority in the Commons by the Irish question.³ Like the rest of them, Bradlaugh believed that the Government, even Forster himself, acted in good faith. Nor was this belief confined to embarrassed parliamentary Radicals: even as extreme a political figure as William Morris, privately admitted that although the Bill was 'a very bad bill, (but) I fancy the Government will give way a little in Committee:

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 257, H.C., 10 Jan. 1881, cols. 386-7.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 258, H.C., 4 Feb. 1881, col. 182.

3. A. O'Day, The English face of Irish nationalism: Parnellite involvement in British politics, 1880-1886 (Dublin, 1977), pp.80-84.

and anyhow, Forster don't intend to use it tyrannically'.¹ Such considerations, however, did not serve to prevent The Radical and its contributors from charging Bradlaugh with abandoning the radicalism which had carried him into Westminster in the first place. From January 1881 to April 1882 it constantly charged him with deference, backsliding and even treachery.² Nor did it prevent the Irish Members from attacking him: his hostility to Parnellite obstruction and his tone of respect to Gladstone and Forster, provided them with apparent justification for voting against his admission to the House. He became, in their eyes, identified with coercion, an enemy to Irish aspirations.³

His expression of contempt for the Irish members and his hostility to their tactics can be readily explained. From 1880 to 1882 he was placed under great personal strain by the Oath question and the role of the majority of Irish members on this issue only added to his difficulties. In addition, however, deeply committed to parliamentary forms, he placed great faith in what could be achieved by parliamentary debate and did not, at this stage, fully appreciate the frustration of Irish nationalists in attempting to make an alien assembly take their view of Irish problems. He was genuinely shocked by their obstruction tactics. Finally, a devoted admirer of Gladstone since the 1860's, it did not come easily to him to adopt towards the Prime Minister and the Liberal Government the harshly critical tone of the Irish M.P.'s. The outcome was that by mid-1882 there had

1. P. Henderson, The letters of William Morris to his family and friends, (London, 1950), pp.143-144, William Morris to Mrs. Morris, 10 Feb. 1881.

2. The Radical, 15, 29 Jan., 5,12,19,26 Feb. 1881; 28 Jan., 11 Feb., 25 March, 1 April 1882.

3. Arnstein, op.cit., p.214.

developed, temporarily, a mutual incomprehension and hostility, and Bradlaugh's reputation for radicalism suffered temporarily as a result. But, a survey of his contribution to the Irish question in parliament from 1880 to his death will show that the tensions of 1880-2 which led him, for one, to be critical, little reflected the true state of his feelings and the extent of his commitment to justice for that country, and little reflected the way in which that commitment was to deepen his understanding; this, in turn, was to lead Irish nationalist M.P.'s' hostility to abate.

An important starting point in examining this matter is to note that the General Election of 1880 returned to parliament some 120 Radical M.P.'s. Nearly all of these included Irish land reform in their programme, but only some 15 of them included Home Rule.¹ Bradlaugh was one of these 15, and, from the start therefore, occupied a position on the Irish question in parliament that was in advance of that of most Radical M.P.'s. Before the Oath question developed fully into the constitutional impasse that kept Bradlaugh out of parliament until 1886, he was enabled to speak and to vote for nine months, from 2 July 1880 until 31 March 1881.

The first occasion in that period that he ever spoke in the House on a subject other than the Oath, was in relation to Ireland. This was on 3 July 1880 when he had been effectively a Member for only one day. On this occasion he pleaded for a generous government aid for the relief of distress in Ireland.² The last occasion on which he ever

1. Heyck, *op.cit.*, pp.6,50.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 253, H.C., 3 July 1880, cols. 1471-1472.

spoke on Ireland in the House was a mere two months before he died, and again the occasion was to support a grant for the relief of distress in that country.¹ Between these two occasions, insofar as he was allowed to speak at all, his record was an impressive one. When the Queen's Speech in January 1881 indicated the prospect of coercive legislation for Ireland, Bradlaugh rose to speak against this, on 10 January, and four days later he voted in support of Parnell's amendment to the Address.² On the very day when Gladstone moved for leave to bring in the famous Liberal coercion act, 24 January 1881, Bradlaugh was on his feet to announce that he, for one, intended 'in the strongest possible manner to oppose the measure'; that Forster had signally failed to show that the existing law was inadequate to put down offences, and that the government should be trying to introduce remedial, not repressive legislation.³ He spoke a second time in this debate against the measure, on 31 January-1 February. On the first night of the debate on the Second Reading he was the first M.P. to rise and propose an amendment to postpone the Bill for six months. He argued that it would be an easy matter to get a bill of coercion through Commons and Lords, but much less easy to get a decent measure of land reform through: consequently, government might find that having got a coercion act into force they might find it impossible to get a measure of land reform in force as well, and in such a situation of what use were government good

1. *ibid.*, vol. 349, H.C., 4 Dec. 1890, cols. 570-572.

2. *N.R.*, 19 March 1882.

3. *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 257, H.C., 24 Jan. 1881, cols. 1260-1264.

intentions?¹ Four nights of debate followed before his amendment was thrown out and the Second Reading carried.² He opposed every clause of the Bill in committee, and he spoke and voted against the Third Reading on 28 February 1881.³

All of this he did despite the fact that it incurred the hostility of a significant number of his own constituents. A meeting of the Northampton Liberal & Radical Union met on 9 February to consider his conduct and that of Labouchere on this question. Bradlaugh actually offered to resign his seat and it was only the chairman, Gurney's, refusal to put a motion of censure to a vote, and his success in getting the meeting adjourned, that averted a serious crisis in Bradlaugh's political career.⁴ At the resumed meeting on 23 February, after a three hour debate, a majority vote was eventually secured endorsing the position of the two M.P.'s on the issue of coercion.⁵ One month after his vote on the Third Reading he was barred from parliament and was unable to speak or vote again until January 1886.

In that five year interval, great changes had occurred in the debate on the Irish question, a debate which came to a climax in Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule. Inevitably, given

1. *ibid.*, vol. 258, H.C., 4 Feb. 1881, cols. 182-187.

2. *ibid.*, vol. 258, H.C., 9 Feb. 1881, col. 468.

3. *ibid.*, vol. 258, H.C., 28 Feb. 1881, cols. 1815-1816.

4. *N.M.*, 12 Feb. 1881.

5. *ibid.*, 26 Feb. 1881; see also R.J. Hind, Henry Labouchere and the Empire, (London 1972), pp.68-9.

the pressures of the legal struggle on the Oath question, Bradlaugh's contribution to that debate outside parliament was limited. However, once he got wind of the rumours of Gladstone's impending conversion to the policy of Home Rule, Bradlaugh called on him to state his policy immediately and clearly.¹ Ten days before he was permitted to resume his place in the Commons, Bradlaugh spelt out his own view on the issue in a detailed way for the first time: a measure of Home Rule for Ireland would mean that a parliament in Dublin should have complete control over 'all Irish private bill legislation, of all matters now dealt with by the Irish Local Government Board, the Irish Education Board, the Irish Board of Works, and Fishery Board, and of all other internal Irish affairs, subject to the like right of veto as is now exercised in reference to colonial legislation'. Furthermore, 'as the abolition of the present Castle government must be part of any such Home Rule scheme, the Irish police would ... be controlled by the local authorities', and finally, he added, 'Irish representatives would continue to sit at Westminster'.² In reply to a correspondent, he was to add that he favoured, in principle, similar assemblies for England, Wales and Scotland.³

As Tory opposition to the measure introduced by Gladstone in April mounted, Bradlaugh himself rallied radical opinion outside parliament in support of it. He was directly responsible for organising a great meeting in St. James's Hall on 22 April 1886, and secured the attendance of 15 M.P.'s, the largest number he ever succeeded in getting to support any

1. N.R., 27 Dec. 1885.
 2. *ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1886.
 3. *ibid.*, 17 Jan. 1886.

demonstration organised by him.¹ Chaired by Henry Labouchere, the meeting heard Bradlaugh declare that though he gladly supported the principle of the Bill, he was unhappy at its proposal to exclude Irish representation from Westminster, and he deplored the speech of John Morley at Newcastle where the latter had insisted on such exclusion. As far as Bradlaugh was concerned, they had no right to deprive Ireland 'of the right to share in Imperial legislation'.²

Inside parliament he spoke in support of the Bill on the third night of the debate on Gladstone's motion for leave to introduce it, and spoke three times during the twelve nights of debate on the Second Reading.³ In the longest of these speeches he delivered a stinging attack on Joseph Chamberlain for his inconsistency in maintaining that he supported the basic principle but would vote against it because he disagreed with some of its clauses. Bradlaugh, who had been kept out of parliament by the religious prejudice of Irish Catholics and English Protestants, deprecated observations by Chamberlain that could incite to religious hatred: Bradlaugh insisted that it ill became the British who had persecuted Irish Catholics for one hundred and fifty years to argue that Irish Protestants would be threatened by a Home Rule parliament in Dublin: 'it lay upon us to be reticent in speaking of religious differences and sectarian ascendancy'. He concluded a powerful speech with an appeal to Chamberlain and Trevelyan not to vote

1. The Times, 23 April 1886.

2. ibid.

3. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 304, H.C. 12 April 1886, cols. 1376-1381; vol. 306, H.C., 1 June, col. 779, 3 June, col. 846, 3 June 1886, cols. 895-903.

against the Bill, thereby supporting the party which had thwarted every effort in the cause of radical reform.¹

With the defeat of the Bill, the fall of the Government, and the coming to power of the Salisbury administration, he continued his attacks on the Liberal defectors. On the third night of the debate on the Address, he made a blistering attack on the Irish policy of the new government as outlined by Irish Chief Secretary, Hicks-Beach.

Concentrating in particular on its intention to promote peasant proprietorship in place of dual ownership which underlay the Gladstone Land Act of 1881, Bradlaugh wished to know if the tenants were in the meanwhile to go on starving, and 'were the peasant proprietors to be created for the benefit of the landlord at the cost of the State? In that case they would have to enact that there would be an Irish peasant proprietary at the expense of England and the working men of England'.² He insisted instead, that 'the true remedy was for Ireland to redress her own grievances in her own Parliament by Members elected by her own people'.³

In the following year he was one of the most active of all opposition M.P.'s in Irish debates, surpassed only by his Northampton colleague, Labouchere. Increasingly, he now found himself forced to appreciate and sympathise with Irish obstruction tactics in parliament, and to support their objections to amendment of House procedural rules. Two examples will suffice here. In February 1887, John Dillon tried to draw the attention of the House to the way in which

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 306, H.C., 3 June 1886, cols. 895-902.

2. *ibid.*, vol. 308, H.C., 1886, col. 308.

3. *ibid.*

legal proceedings against him in Dublin were being conducted, the Speaker tried to overrule him. Bradlaugh was the first English M.P. to spring to his defence, supporting Arthur O'Connor's motion for an adjournment of the House, and declaring 'it should give all right-minded men some cause for pain when a Member asking for an adjournment of the House had it refused', and, as for Dillon, 'there had not been that generous treatment of a Member speaking under great difficulties which one would have expected from an assembly of English gentlemen ... the words of earnest appeal (from Dillon) had been met with jeers and laughter'.¹ Despite this appeal by Bradlaugh and others, the motion for an adjournment was lost.²

The second example arose immediately after this date, when the Irish Chief Secretary, W.H. Smith, proposed new restrictive measures regarding closure of debate.³ On the fourth night of the discussion on this, Parnell proposed an amendment to Smith's recommendations, and Bradlaugh was one of the main speakers to support the Irish leader's move: six years experience in the Commons had now convinced him that British fair play was sometimes a myth when it came to Irish questions: 'we have had, without doubt, over and over again, within the past few years, instances in which there has been no British fair play towards one portion of these kingdoms'.⁴ He returned again to this theme on the tenth night of the debate. He argued that the need for revised rules had arisen, not because of the conduct of Irish M.P.'s, but

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 310, H.C., 17 Feb. 1887, col. 1833.
 2. ibid., vol. 310, H.C., 17 Feb. 1887, col. 261.
 3. ibid., vol. 311, H.C., 21 Feb. 1887, col. 190.
 4. ibid., vol. 311, H.C., 24 Feb. 1887, cols. 520-522.

because

whilst the Irish Members confined themselves to what I may call the legitimate methods of Parliamentary discussion, their representations were treated with comparative contempt ... For the exceptional state of things which now exists ... of the extension of debate to too great a length, the blame should rest with the great majority of the English, Scottish and Welsh Members who, in years gone by, passed without notice the questions raised by the Irish Members.¹

As a reflection of the impotence of the Irish M.P.'s under the leadership of Isaac Butt in the 1870's, until the coming of obstruction tactics and the rise of Parnell, this was an accurate comment. It also indicated a deeper sympathy and a greater understanding on Bradlaugh's part, than was evident in 1881 when, although he opposed coercion, he deplored the parliamentary tactics of the Parnellites. The depth of sympathy clearly emerges in the large part Bradlaugh took in the attack on the Criminal Law Amendment (Ireland) Bill. Smith moved, on 22 March 1887, that this Bill be given precedence over all other business.² On the second night of the debate, Bradlaugh described this as an attempt to gag the Irish people. The Tories themselves, in their election manifesto, had claimed that no peace would come to Ireland till the land question was solved, yet, now instead of remedial legislation, a renewal of repression was sought:

he, as an English Member, protested against the postponement of all important questions affecting the welfare of the working classes of England and Scotland simply because the Government wanted to have a whip and a scorpion to lash and sting the unfortunate Irish people'.³

He went on in language he had never before used in the House:

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 311, H.C., 9 March 1887, cols. 1694-1696.

2. *ibid.*, vol. 312, H.C., 22 March 1887, col. 1154.

3. *ibid.*, vol. 312, H.C., 23 March 1887, col. 1231.

It was a Criminal Bill, and those who introduced it would hereafter be described in terms which he could not employ consistently with the Rules of Debate.¹

He concluded by addressing himself for the first time ever in the House to the central question of Irish nationalism:

Was it so very wicked to talk about the nationality of Ireland? He was not great on nationalities. Greater crimes and follies had been committed for the cause of what were called nationalities than for any other cause .. But it did not lie in the mouth of an English Government to denounce the doctrine of nationality after the encouragement which England had given to the nationalities of Poland and Italy, Greece and Bulgaria. We might have nationality without rebellion - without even separation.²

Over the next few months, Bradlaugh took a most active part in the marathon debate on the Bill, after its formal introduction by Balfour on 27 March 1887. Bradlaugh described it as 'one of the most shameful and indefensible violations of liberty that had ever been attempted by any Government within the last century'.³ He fought the Bill with as much doggedness and obstruction as any Parnellite M.P.⁴

What makes Bradlaugh's contribution to parliamentary debate on the Irish question outstanding is not simply that he rose to the great occasions when fundamental matters of principle were at stake, as in the debates on Home Rule in 1886, or on coercion in 1881 and 1887. Many Radical M.P.'s did likewise.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 312, H.C., 23 March 1887, col. 1235.
2. ibid., cols. 1236-1237.
3. ibid., vol. 313, H.C., 1 April 1887, col. 280.
4. ibid., vol. 314, H.C., 29 Apr. cols. 380-381, 439,440; 2 May cols. 652-653; 3 May, cols. 809-811; 9 May, col. 1389; 10 May, cols. 1479-1480, 1508-1509; 11 May, col. 1588; 13 May, cols. 1916, 1922; vol. 315, H.C., 17 May, cols. 265-266, 306-310; 8 June, cols. 1356-1357; 9 June, cols. 1461-1463; 13 June, cols. 1772-1773, 1775-1776, 1887.

But Bradlaugh's concern for Ireland was to be constantly expressed in particular episodes and relatively minor occasions as well. At such times he was surpassed by no Radical M.P., and equalled, perhaps, only by Labouchere and Morley. He was, for example, the only English opposition M.P. to speak on the Mitchelstown affray in September 1887. He made an impassioned attack on the 'monstrous course' being pursued by the Government:

You value the lives of the people so lightly that you have the official who ought to be responsible for the peace and prosperity of Ireland telegraphing to his representatives in Ireland to shoot down the people if necessary.¹

He went on to attack his own Liberal and Radical colleagues for failing to press for a censure motion 'against the action of the Government which, while pretending to maintain the Union, are shooting down innocent people in Ireland'.² Along with Labouchere, he was the only English M.P. to ask questions on the Kilrush disturbances in April 1888.³ Later that year, he succeeded in getting the House adjourned to discuss the case of an Irish tenant farmer who had been imprisoned for contempt of court, who had been at that stage in jail for twenty-three months, and whose health was breaking down. Though his motion for an adjournment on this occasion was defeated, he persisted in asking questions on the case until he received satisfaction.⁴ In a similar way, in March 1888, he took up the case of an Irish prison warden who had been demoted, wrongfully as Bradlaugh believed, and he extracted from Balfour a promise that the case would be

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 321, H.C., 12 Sept. 1887, cols. 406-410.

2. *ibid.*, col. 410.

3. *ibid.*, vol. 324, H.C., 10 April 1888, col. 860.

4. *ibid.*, vol. 331, H.C., 29 Nov. 1888, col. 529-533, 8 Dec. 1888, cols. 1495-6, 11 Dec. 1888, col. 1775.

reconsidered in six months.¹ He raised the question again at the end of that period and got satisfaction.²

His most impressive and effective intervention in an Irish matter came in June 1890. In May of that year meetings were organised in the towns of Cashel and Tipperary to welcome the return of John Dillon to his constituents. The meetings were proclaimed, and when they were held despite the proclamation, the police charged the crowds with batons drawn and without warning, at the meeting in Tipperary. On 9 June Dillon moved the adjournment of the House to consider 'the violent and unconstitutional action of the police and magistrates'. Balfour flatly contradicted the account of events given by Dillon. In turn, Bradlaugh rose and attacked Balfour for contradicting a man who was an eye witness, without telling the House his own source for contradicting the Dillon version. Bradlaugh succeeded in pinning Balfour down to particulars, in compelling him to admit that his contradiction was inadequate.³ In the course of a powerful speech, Bradlaugh observed:

The Chief Secretary for Ireland said that very little damage was done. But is it no damage .. to drive a police car into a crowd so that the shafts catch a poor woman on the breasts .. Is it a trifle to charge among the people with batons and to use the butts of rifles? It used not to be a trifle in England, and we must have got into a degraded state indeed when an English government can defend this in the House of Commons.⁴

As if to confirm his own observations about the myth of British fair play when it came to Ireland, despite his debating success over Balfour the motion was lost.⁵ Seven months later

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol. 323, H.C., 6 March 1888, col. 365.
 2. ibid., vol. 330, H.C., 9 Aug. 1888, cols. 91-92.
 3. ibid., vol. 345, H.C., 9 June 1890, col. 395.
 4. ibid., col. 398.
 5. ibid. vol. 345, H.C., 9 June 1890, col. 428.

Bradlaugh was dead.

Alike in attention to details of particular episodes and incidents, and in regard for great issues of principle, Bradlaugh's record in the House of Commons was outstanding. No British M.P. entertained opinions on the Irish question in advance of his, and from the beginning of his parliamentary career until his death he was far in advance of most M.P.'s on it, despite the treatment accorded to him by most of the Irish nationalist Members, in the years of his exile from the House. His record of concern and work for Ireland in the 1880's shows clearly a growth of understanding. At all times against coercive measures, in the early 1880's he failed to appreciate the Irish tactics of obstruction. As a new M.P. in 1880-1882, he could hardly have been expected to understand the inability of the Irish to gain a hearing in the 1870's when, under Butt, they observed normal parliamentary procedure. By 1887, he fully understood the reason and justification for such tactics, and had come to adopt the attitude expressed by Cowen alone in 1881. In turn, towards the end of the 1880's, the hostility of a majority of the Irish nationalist M.P.'s towards him, declined.¹ In the 1880's for the first time in his career he explicitly accepted the fact of Irish nationalism and the right of Irish nationality. He accepted something of what Congreve was arguing in 1868, that reforms of a material, economic nature, were not the whole answer to the Irish problem. The result of that growth of understanding was a magnificent record of devotion to the welfare of the people he first came to know as a private in the British Army.

1. W.L. Arnstein, 'Parnell and the Bradlaugh case' in Irish Historical Studies, xiii, 1962-3, pp.235-6.

But to that growth of understanding which is evident in the 1880's, there was a limit beyond which he never advanced. With Parnell, he fought for Home Rule. But for Bradlaugh it was an end, for Parnell merely a beginning. If Parnell held that no man had the right to set bounds to the march of a nation, Bradlaugh held a contrary opinion from which he was never to move: he would fight for Irish rights as long as they did not lead to separation from Britain. He did not want a different or a separate treatment of Ireland: he wanted the country to be placed on an equality with England: consequently, while advocating Home Rule for Ireland, he maintained that, should the need arise, devolved government should also be granted to the other three components of the United Kingdom. He was perfectly consistent, therefore, in insisting that Irish M.P.'s should continue to sit at Westminster, in the Imperial Parliament, after such time as Home Rule might be enacted, and deplored the views of those who thought otherwise.¹ If, therefore, his immediate concern in the 1880's, indeed ever since the mid 1860's, was for a just and equal treatment of Ireland, his ultimate concern was for the unity of the United Kingdom. What is true of Bradlaugh's understanding of Ireland applies equally to his approach to the question of India, and of the Empire in general.

Bradlaugh, India and the Empire

Bradlaugh's remarkable work for India, in parliament in the 1880's is well-documented, and requires no detailed repetition

1. N.R., 2 May 1886.

here.¹ Equally well known are his denunciations of, and organised demonstrations against imperial expansion, from the 1870's. His courageous, and almost lone leadership of popular demonstrations against Disraeli's imperial adventures in 1878 appear to mark him out as one of the outstanding anti-imperialist extra-parliamentary radicals of the age.² He made his position quite clear in January 1878, in an article entitled 'Our Policy in Politics': 'I am against all attempts to add to our territorial dominions in Egypt or elsewhere ... I am opposed to any increased expenditure on our naval and military service'.³ In the next year he denounced the Government for its 'wanton and unprovoked inroad on Kaffreland', remarking that the blood shed there by Britons called for vengeance not against the Zulu king, 'but against those in this land who initiated the indefensible and imperial policy of land stealing'. He asked 'How long is this charlatan Earl to add to our taxation?'.⁴

Once in parliament, he remained true to the policy of denouncing further annexations. In July 1882 he expressed his opposition 'to involvement in Egypt', declaring simply that 'we had no business there'.⁵ Three years later, he was the leading figure in organising a great peace demonstration in St. James's Hall. He secured the attendance of radical M.P.'s like Thorold Rogers, Randal Cremer and Labouchere, together with the Positivist Beesly and the socialist

1. Bradlaugh Bonner, *op.cit.*, ii.106,108,198,409,416,426.
 2. Tribe, *op.cit.*, p.185.
 3. *N.R.*, 6 Jan. 1878.
 4. *ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1879.
 5. *ibid.*, 9 July 1882.

William Morris.¹ At this he urged withdrawal from the Soudan:

The Soudanese were day by day described in the public press as 'rebels'. Against whom were they rebels? They owed this country no allegiance and British power had no dominion over the Soudanese ... It was said that our prestige and glory would be affected by any withdrawal from the Soudan; but our glory and prestige did not depend upon such actions. Our real glory had ever been won by the works of industry carried out under a peaceful flag, and our prestige could not be maintained by destroying villages, by the slaughter of peoples and by defeats which left behind them the hateful feelings of despair and revenge.²

Two years later, again, he attacked the annexation of Burmah, an annexation which, he claimed, had been engineered to suit the interests of the Rangoon, Manchester and London Chambers of Commerce.³

To that extent, of denouncing annexations in Africa and the Far East, and in calling for withdrawal, Bradlaugh was undoubtedly an anti-imperialist. But in regard to territories already held prior to 1877 his attitude was not so simple or direct. On the occasion in January 1878 when he first clearly outlined his hostility to further imperial annexations, he did not suggest that the British should get rid of such areas as they already held. Instead of annexing new areas, he declared 'I would prefer that we tried to govern humanely the territory we have already acquired'.⁴

The key area of concern for him was India. As early as 1872-3, as previously noted, he had clearly stated his own conviction that continued control of India was essential to

1. The Times, 3 April 1885.

2. ibid.

3. Our Corner, Jan. 1887.

4. N.R., 6 Jan. 1878.

English power. From that position he never deviated. His work for India thereafter, both outside and within parliament, was geared to securing that same just treatment for Indians as he sought for the Irish, in order to reconcile them to continued English rule. His most considered general statements on India are to be found in the period from 1885 until his death.

Writing in Annie Besant's Our Corner, in August and September 1885, he argued against annexing Afghanistan as a way of forestalling any threat to British rule in India. The best guarantee of continued British rule in India was 'to win the sympathy and help of the native races ... by generous legislation and liberal policy'.¹ He was pleased to note that 'the mass of Hindu and Mahomedan feeling throughout India is at the present moment more in favour of English rule than it has ever been', and he argued that 'our plain policy as well as our bounden duty, should be to encourage and justify the increase of this favourable feeling'.² Again, in April 1890, speaking in Northampton after returning from his Indian visit, in the course of a long speech recording his own work in parliament for that country, and indicating the proper line of policy to be pursued, he declared

we are British: for right or wrong our flag floats over India, and we can only give our help to her people in the hope that, forgetting all the shame and wrong in the past that has gone, they will help us make our workers' conditions easier, so that there shall be no need to keep British armies in India, but the people shall be their own armies ... The best fortifications are to have the 200,000,000 desirous that we should rule them ... And the best fortification of all shall be when the 200,000,000 and the 50,000,000, separated by much and held together by little, find it to their own interest to govern themselves in the strength of our common empire and our common good..³

1. Our Corner, Sept. 1885.

2. ibid.

3. Northampton Mercury, 19 April 1890.

All of his own work in parliament in the 1880's on behalf of India was directed to promoting the fulfilment of that imperial duty and imperial ideal. Fundamentally, his position on India, as on Ireland, was to strengthen, not to dismember the Empire.

The charges made against him that he slid backwards or abandoned his radicalism once elected to parliament, as far as Ireland, India and the Empire are concerned, were unfounded. It was not the case that he ever regressed. His insistence on maintaining the connection with Ireland, made in 1886, or with India, made as late as 1890, differed in no way from his statements on these issues in 1872 and 1873. What these questions did, and the question of Ireland in particular, was to illustrate clearly the limits of his radicalism. That others went beyond him, and on the Irish question those who did were few indeed, made his radicalism appear less advanced or extreme than it really was. If the Irish question was the one which first occasioned the charge of backsliding, the question of Labour and the revival of socialism in the 1880's was the one which gave most apparent substance to the charge, and caused the most serious challenge to his popularity and authority among the common people. It is to this final area of Bradlaugh's place in popular politics in late Victorian Britain that we now turn.

CHAPTER NINE : BRADLAUGH, LABOUR AND SOCIALISM, 1860-1891.

i. Background

From the middle of the 1880s Bradlaugh came to be described as an 'extreme individualist', as if to deny that he ever possessed much sympathy or achieved much good for the cause of Labour. To describe him in this way is tantamount to placing him in the same camp as W.H. Mallock who argued in 1882 that 'a man is starved in a garret not because great wealth is being created around him, but because he himself is taking no share in creating it'¹; as Herbert Spencer who, two years later, declared that those 'who wish to mitigate by law the miseries of the unsuccessful and the reckless propose to do this in small measure at their own cost and mainly at the cost of others'², or as Auberon Herbert who, in 1891, condemned trade unionism out of hand³. This is precisely how socialists did place him.

Thomas Binning of the Socialist League referred, in 1886, to 'those great apostles of Individualism - Mr Herbert Spencer, Hon Auberon Herbert, Mr C. Bradlaugh, M.P.'⁴. Three years later, George Bernard Shaw made a similar identification, referring to 'the champions of individual rights - (to) Mr Herbert Spencer, Mr Auberon Herbert, Lord Bramwell, Mr Leonard Courtney, Mr John Morley, Mr Bradlaugh and the rest'⁵. The most forthright description of Bradlaugh in this light was to come from Henry Hyndman who remarked of Bradlaugh that

He was an individualist of individualists. Every man must make his own way with his own right arm. That the weakest

1. W.H. Mallock, 'The Functions of Wealth', in Contemporary Review, xli, Feb 1882, p.215.

2. H. Spencer, 'The Sins of the Legislators', in Contemporary Review, xlv, June 1884, p.771.

3. A. Herbert, 'The True Law of Deliverance', in T. Mackay, ed., A Plea for Liberty (London, 1891) p.294.

4. Commonweal, Feb 1886.

5. D.H. Laurence, Bernard Shaw, Collected Letters, 1874-1897 (London, 1965), p.231, G.B. Shaw to Editor of Truth, 26 Nov 1889.

should go to the wall was a beneficial fact for the race. That he, Bradlaugh, would survive in this competition as one of the fittest, he had no doubt whatever. And he took good care to impress this view of himself upon all with whom he came in contact¹.

In more recent times at least one historian of the late nineteenth century British labour movement has characterised Bradlaugh in like manner². How accurate such description is this chapter will explore.

Far from accepting the inevitability of poverty as men like Spencer, Mallock and Herbert did, Bradlaugh deplored its existence and believed it could be overcome. In the earliest of his social writings, in the 1860s, his deep sympathy and concern for the poor was quite clear. It remained clear during the rest of his life. It is true that he attributed poverty to overpopulation, declaring in 1863 that it was 'the only real cause of social poverty'³. It is also true that in political debate and propaganda during the 1860s and 1870s he generally placed his main emphasis on the problem of overpopulation rather than that of maldistribution. Thus, as early as 1861 he insisted that since the law of population was the fundamental cause of poverty, poverty might be radically removed if all classes, rich and poor alike, were sufficiently to limit the number of their offspring⁴. Eight years later he went so far as to recommend Drysdale's Elements, from which he had derived this view, to the attention of members of the International Working Man's Association, as 'essentially a

1. H.M. Hyndman, The Record of an Adventurous Life (London, 1911), p.337.

2. D.W. Crowley, 'The Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement from Liberalism, 1875-1906' (University of London Ph.D., 1952), p.65.

3. C. Bradlaugh, Poverty: Its Effects on the Political Condition of the People, p.7.

4. N.R., 18 May 1861.

poor man's book'¹. Two months after this he declared that the unequal distribution of wealth and the 'present landholding system' were not the root cause of poverty and that changing the land laws would not therefore remove it². Nevertheless, he was not fanatically attached to this view. In 1876 when sixteen years of trying to win support for neomalthusianism had yielded not the slightest sign of success, while still maintaining his belief that overpopulation was the prime cause of poverty, he entertained doubts as to the remedy for it³, and by 1879 he was prepared to concede that emigration and land law reform could contribute something to its alleviation⁴.

Although he accepted the Malthusian population theory and the classical doctrine of the wages' fund from the early 1860s, he was not then, nor at any time afterwards, totally doctrinaire on the matter. In Labour's Prayer, (1865), while stating that 'wages are low because too many seek to share one fund', he added 'wages are lower still because the labourer fights against unfair odds The fund is unfairly distributed as well as too widely divided'⁵. He went on:

the capitalists may and do absorb for their portions an improper and unfairly large amount The intelligent capitalist makes the laws the capitalist forms the government of the country, which in turn protects capital against labour⁶.

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1. *ibid.*, 28 Mar 1869.
 2. *ibid.*, 3 May 1869.
 3. *ibid.*, 16 Jan 1876.
 4. The Malthusian, Mar 1879.
 5. C. Bradlaugh, Labour's Prayer, p.3.
 6. *ibid.*, pp. 4 5.

From the 1860s he was not only sympathetic to the plight of the poor but was, furthermore, sympathetic to attempts by labour to secure a more equitable distribution of wealth. He regarded himself as a supporter of working class attempts to advance themselves by appropriate institutions. In Labour's Prayer, observing that the odds were stacked against labour, he noted that capitalists combined to protect their own interests and asked 'why should labour not combine also?'. He answered, 'Organisations of labour are therefore, wise and necessary'¹. That there was more to this remark than mere rhetoric to flatter the prejudices of his working class readers in order to gain a hearing for neomalthusianism is clear from his first election campaign in Northampton in 1868. Addressing an audience in the town on the theme of 'Capital and Labour' he declared that wages should be at least sufficient to provide the worker with adequate food, clothing, shelter and leisure to improve himself 'that he might have an opportunity of rising to be something more than a mere labour machine'². He deplored the inferiority of labour as implicit in the phrase 'the law of Master and Servant', called for a genuine equality before the law for both parties, and advocated the institution of conciliation courts to decide in trade disputes³. He expressed his belief that the 'future welfare and happiness of this country depended upon the union between the middle classes of

1. ibid., p.5.

2. Northampton Mercury, 18 July 1868.

3. Northampton Mercury, 18 July 1868.

England and what were called "the lower orders"', and concluded that the days of the upper classes were numbered. It was the aristocracy that previously had impoverished England, and he called for middle and working class union to displace them from power¹.

Against the background of the kind of class debate that was to develop from the early 1880s this position may not have been extremely advanced, but it was as progressive as the position of contemporary middle class sympathisers with Labour like Mundella or Hughes², or of foremost Labour leaders like Howell or Allan in the 1860s³. As much as any of these he was a defender and an advocate of trade unionism. On the Sheffield Outrages he expressed the view that while the outrages were 'very frightful and saddening' 'it must not be forgotten that class education and miseducation had a great part in causing it', and if unions were regarded as illegal there was little wonder that there should be violence⁴. Similarly, on the famous case of the Five Gas-stokers in the early 1870s, he expressed his satisfaction at the remission of their sentences, only regretting that Gladstone had not acted earlier in the matter⁵. From 1866 he took a special interest in the cause of the agricultural labourers⁶, supported their

1. *ibid.*

2. W.H.G. Armytage, A.J. Mundella, 1825-1897: the Liberal Background to the Labour Movement (London, 1951), pp. 27-8, 31-2, 60; E.C. Mack, Thomas Hughes, The Life of the Author of Tom Brown's Schooldays (London 1952), pp. 146, 165, 196-7.

3. F.M. Leventhal, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-7; D.W. Crowley, *op.cit.*, pp. 39, 55; D. Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.46.

4. N.R., 30 June 1867.

5. *ibid.*, 16 Feb 1873; W. Hamish Fraser, Trade Unions and Society, The Struggle for Acceptance, 1850-1880 (London, 1974), pp. 139, 192.

6. See above Chapter Four.

strike action and their unions from 1872¹, and was invited to address the annual general meeting of the N.A.L.U. at Yeovil in 1875².

With the miners' trade unions, especially in the north of England, he developed close bonds of friendship. In the summer of 1873 he received his first invitation to address the North-umberland Miners at their annual gala in Newcastle. In the following year he was invited for the first time to address the Durham Miners' annual gathering⁴. He attended again in 1875⁵. In that same year he spoke at the West Yorkshire Miners' annual meeting⁶. At the Durham Miners' gala in 1876 he spoke fervently against strikes and in favour of a decent system of arbitration. At the same time he made a strong defence of trade unionism:

wages formed but a small proportion of the increased cost which had put us in a disadvantageous position with other countries in the world. It was not unions of workers who drove away trade, it was pressure from above, not from below. The unduly large profits and consequent large fortunes of the few must count for something⁷.

Two years later he was again invited to Durham, and in the same year first appeared at the Cleveland Miners' gala⁸. He continued to attend and to speak at these yearly miners' gatherings well into the 1880s, a fact that in itself is testimony to his popularity among a numerically and politically important sector of the labour movement.

1. N.R., 31 Mar, 5, 12, 19, 26 May, 2, 9, 16, 23 June, 21 July, 4 Aug, 15 Asept, 3 Nov, 22 Dec 1872.

2. Weekly Dispatch, 23 May 1875.

3. N.R., 20 July 1873.

4. ibid., 23 Aug 1874.

5. ibid., 11 July 1875.

6. ibid., 1 Aug 1875.

7. ibid., 16 July 1876.

8. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 13 July 1878, N.R., 16 June, 14 July 1878.

He was not only a staunch advocate of trade unionism, but also of the idea and practice of political action by the unions. Drawing attention to the evils of the truck system, in 1871, he pointed out that it 'never could have existed in this country but for the fact that our artisans are unrepresented in Parliament, and that the privileges of property have been respected while the rights of labour have been disregarded by our governing classes'¹. The idea of labour representation was one for which he continuously expressed support from the late 1860s. He applauded the determination of the Northumberland Miners to carry their own candidate, Thomas Burt, to success in the 1874 general election². In a series of lectures delivered in London in 1875 he deplored 'the disposition of trade societies to take no part in politics', arguing that if the unions could come to see that all social questions ultimately become political ones 'they might have had, by this time, not two, but twenty representatives in Parliament'³. In January 1876 he expressed his regret that Alsager Hay Hill, editor of Labour News, had seen fit to criticise the Trade Union Congress for giving 'undue prominence' to 'political questions'⁴. Six months later he told Northumberland miners that 'politics was a weapon trades unions could not afford to neglect'⁵. Finally, in 1878, in a speech in London, he returned to the theme of labour representation and called for payment of M.P.s, shorter parliaments

1. N.R., 28 May 1871.

2. ibid., 13 Oct 1872.

3. ibid., 18 Apr 1875.

4. ibid., 23 Jan 1876. In contradiction of Hill's and in support of Bradlaugh's view that the T.U.C. was not sufficiently 'political' at the time, see W.J. Davis, The British Trade Union Congress: History and Recollections (London, 1910) p.54.

5. N.R., 18 June 1876.

and a lessening of the cost of elections as means of promoting this¹.

To judge from the kind of political organisations with which he was associated from 1860 to 1880 he appeared as a friend of Labour in action as well as in opinion. He attended and spoke at a three-day conference of the International Working Man's Association in London in September 1865 and actually became a member². Although he did not maintain his membership he remained friendly to the organisation until the crisis of 1870-1 discussed earlier³. His critical role in the working class Reform League has already been examined in some detail⁴. Once the Reform League was dissolved he was among the first to suggest a replacement. The very fact that he felt unable to join the Labour Representation League arose from his belief that it would do more harm than good to Labour by its deference to the Whig Liberal Party. To judge by labour candidates' experiences at the Maidstone by-election of 1870 and that at Norwich in 1871 that belief was justified⁵. It was all the more justified in the light of the fact that Robert Applegarth prevailed on the Labour Representation League in 1871 to censure Bradlaugh for his attacks on royalty⁶. Bradlaugh found for himself an alternative forum for his opinions and activity in the Land and Labour League, the most advanced working class organisation of the day.

1. *ibid.*, 3 Nov 1878.

2. *ibid.*, 8 Oct 1865.

3. See above Chapter Seven.

4. See above Chapter Six.

5. D. Kynaston, *op.cit.*, p.51.

6. W.K. Lamb, *op.cit.*, pp. 234, 263; D.R. Moberg, *op.cit.*, p.269; D.W. Crowley, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-66.

From the Political Reform League in the late 1850s through to the Land and Labour League in the early 1870s Bradlaugh came to know and to associate with the leading working class radicals and labour leaders of the age, Howell, Odger, Lucraft, Apple-garth and others. On certain issues and tactics he was in advance of some of them. Up to 1870 none of them could have described him justly as an enemy of the cause of Labour, though one or two, such as Martin Boon and John Weston, would regard him as a misguided friend because of his adherence to Malthusian population theory. Even after the crisis of 1870-1, arising from the effect of the Paris Commune and the quarrel with Marx, most would regard him as an ally. To the extent that he was unacceptable at all, it was due more than anything to his anti-religious opinions and activity, and not to deficiencies in his approach to questions of labour politics¹.

All of this would suggest that Bradlaugh was far from being an exponent of the doctrine of 'extreme individualism', and that he could lay a firm claim to being a friend of Labour. Nevertheless, even in the period 1860-1880, there were certain inconsistencies and ambivalence in his attitudes, associations and statements. If he stressed the overbearing power of Capital, and admitted in Labour's Prayer that 'capitalists formed the government of the country' this did not prevent him from calling for a union of the middle and working classes to oust the aristocracy from power. He belonged to the working class Land and Labour League rather than the middle class Land

1. D.W. Crowley, op.cit., p.65.

Tenure Reform Association, yet he deplored class conflict, class politics and the notion of the dominance of any single class. His position in the Land and Labour League was a peculiar one: he advocated land nationalisation in 1869, only to abandon it and preach a combination of free trade in land and peasant proprietorship soon after. Again, in the mid-1870s when he preached the importance of trade union political action he caught himself in a contradiction: speaking on the theme 'Struggles of Labour for Liberty in the Future', he deplored the failure of the unions to see social questions in political terms, their failure to take a vigorous part in politics, their failure to seek adequate representation in Parliament; in his next sentence he went on:

One growing evil is a disposition on the part of the people to look too much to the Government to do things for them; it is a vicious principle, for you are most likely to find the Government doing more than you want it to do. It is on the efforts which the workmen make for themselves that the future of English labour depends¹.

What then, was the point of encouraging the unions to seek political power if no positive legislative aims were to be entertained as the reason for that power seeking? It was one contradiction, among others which he did not resolve. But, in the 1870s when collectivist thought in working class consciousness was confined to and expressed by a very small body of radicals, this was not a major cause of embarrassment for Bradlaugh. It was only in the 1880s, with the revival of socialism, that he faced a growing challenge to his views and the contradictions in his political philosophy were exposed.

1. N.R., 18 Apr 1875.

It was only then that the threat to his popularity and influence among radical workers became serious.

ii. The Revival of Socialism and the Challenge to Bradlaugh:

One of the most important impulses to the revival of socialism in England in the 1880s came from the publication of Henry George's Progress and Poverty¹. Though never a socialist himself, George in this work offered the first serious challenge in several generations to popular acceptance of the doctrine of Malthus and drove a wedge between Malthusian population theory and the classical wages' fund doctrine. In doing so it became a bridge over which working class leaders passed from radicalism to socialism. The radical Frank Soutter who read it in 1881 confessed that Progress and Poverty 'comes before us with the startling surprise and pleasure of a positive revelation'². The land nationaliser, A.R. Wallace, found it 'the most remarkable and important book of the century'³. The radical clergyman and friend of Bradlaugh, Stewart Headlam, confessed in 1882 that until he read the work he found it very hard to see how any reforms could do away with poverty⁴. George Bernard Shaw heard George speak in London in September

1. H. George, Progress and Poverty. An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy. (1st English ed., London, 1881). See also, J.A. Hobson, 'The influence of Henry George in England', in Fortnightly Review, n.s. lxii, Dec 1897, pp. 835-844; J. Saville, 'Henry George and the British Labour Movement: a Select Bibliography with Commentary', in Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin, no 5, Autumn 1962, pp. 18-26.

2. The Radical, 28 May 1881.

3. ibid., 16 July 1881.

4. The Malthusian, Nov 1882.

1882 and was instantly converted from concern with agnosticism and freethought to concern with economics, which in turn soon led him to a study of Marx¹. In 1880 the young working class radical, Tom Mann, found himself 'much attracted by the Malthusian theory of population', and, like Headlam, did not 'feel equal to meeting the many arguments advanced by the Malthusians'. But reading Progress and Poverty provided the answers².

Those who preached Malthusianism or neomalthusianism preached a doctrine which implied that there was little or no positive political action that could secure ultimate relief from poverty. When Henry George appeared to demolish the validity of Malthusian theory, there now appeared to be a political remedy for poverty; at the least, nationalisation of the land, or, on a more advanced scale, socialism. This caused those who continued to argue the Malthusian line to appear as political reactionaries in the eyes of the newly enlightened. Henry George therefore offered a serious challenge to Malthusians and neomalthusians. It was not a challenge that Bradlaugh ever took up: he left it to his colleagues of the Malthusian League to do so, which they did, but without conspicuous success³. By rejecting Malthus, and by influencing radical working class leaders, like Mann, to do likewise, George gave a new lease of life to the tradition which saw the cause of poverty in maldistribution, economic and political monopoly, and which saw its solution in collectivist terms.

1. D.H. Laurence, op.cit., p.18; H. Pearson, Bernard Shaw, a biography (1st ed., London, 1942, reissued 1975) p.68; St John Ervine, Bernard Shaw, His Life, Work and Friends, (London, 1956) pp. 104-5.

2. T. Mann, Tom Mann's Memoirs, (London, 1923) p.27.

3. F.A. D'Arcy, 'The Malthusian League and the Resistance to Birth Control Propaganda in late Victorian Britain', in Population Studies, xxxi, No 3, Nov 1977, pp. 442-444.

However, there were signs of the coming revival of socialism sometime before Henry George made his considerable contribution to the quickening of radical political life. Bradlaugh's atheist colleague of the 1860s, the former Leicester Chartist John Sketchley, who had attacked the inadequacy of Bradlaugh's republicanism in 1873, was preaching and writing on social democracy from 1879. It was in that year that Sketchley, then living in Birmingham, produced his Principles of Social Democracy¹, published in London, declared Bradlaugh in a review, by 'the social democratic party'². It was in the same year that the economist William Cunningham drew attention to the growth of socialism in England³. And it was in the same year that Ernest Belfort Bax first read Marx's Capital⁴, which was followed two years later by his article on Marx in Modern Thought, the first exposition of Marx's views for English readers⁵.

Bax was to become one of the most acute intellects on the socialist side from the 1880s. An exponent of the doctrine of historical determinism, he came to attack the individualism and liberalism of men like Bradlaugh not because it was 'wrong' but because it was obsolete. In The Religion of Socialism (1886) he was, furthermore, to attack popular secularism and freethought as equally obsolete: popular freethought was, he argued, simply the obverse side of popular dogmatic theology,

1. J. Sketchley, The Principles of Social Democracy, (1st ed., London, 1879).

2. N.R., 2 Mar 1879.

3. W. Cunningham, 'The Progress of Socialism in England', in Contemporary Review, xxxiv, Jan 1879, pp. 245-260.

4. J.C. Crowley, 'The Life and Writings of Ernest Belfort Bax: a critical analysis', University of London Ph.D. 1965, p.49.

5. J.C. Crowley, op.cit., p.51.

and, 'with theology played out, secularism is also played out'. Replacing both worn out creeds was the new one of socialism which was neither religious nor irreligious but which, rather, 'reaffirms the unity of human life', and 'brings back religion from heaven to earth': in socialism, practical politics and the ideal are united¹. Bax's attack on the philosophy of popular, freethinking radicals like Bradlaugh was novel and important. Hitherto, his political opinions had been attacked as inadequate or irrelevant by working class radicals of more advanced views, than himself, such as Boon of the Land and Labour League, Hales of the International, or John Sketchley, while his religious opinions were attacked quite separately by Christians, but to find his opinions on both attacked by a socialist was new.

Bradlaugh deplored Bax's onslaught on the hypocrisy of the middle classes, and remarked:

we are not sure from our more lowly birth that we have any right to defend the 'middle class'; but does Mr Bax do well to defile all those who have been hatched in his own nest ?

He was surprised at Bax's idea that theology was all 'played out', which, Bradlaugh felt, was 'unfortunately not even approximately true'². Beyond this, Bradlaugh had little to offer by way of criticism of Bax's work. To some extent Bax was correct in arguing that secularism and popular freethought were obsolete, or on the way to becoming so, for, it was in the early 1880s for the first time that a number of Bradlaugh's own

1. E.B. Bax, The Religion of Socialism, (London, 1886), pp. 48-53.
 2. N.R., 9 Jan 1887.

Freethought followers were to abandon atheist propaganda in favour of socialism. Outstanding among these at the time were Edward Aveling¹, John Burns, Tom Mann, Harry Snell and Annie Besant². Four years before he had produced The Religion of Socialism Bax had joined the flow of those who were to enter the ranks of socialism when he joined the Democratic Federation set up on the initiative of Henry Hyndman³. More than any other political propagandist of the late nineteenth century it was Hyndman who offered the most famous challenge to Bradlaugh, in the struggle between socialism and radicalism. The first, and most celebrated, occasion of challenge was the public debate between them in St James's Hall, London, on 17 April 1884, under the chairmanship of the Positivist, Professor Beesly⁴. Opening the debate on the subject, 'Will Socialism Benefit the English People?', Hyndman defined socialism as 'an endeavour to substitute for the anarchical struggle or fight for existence, an organised co-operation for existence'⁵. He pointed out that never before were man's productive powers as great, and were increasing at a greater rate than population. Consequently, existing misery could not be accounted for by overpopulation. Why was it that the producers were the poorest while those who did not produce were the richest people in the land? For every pound sterling of value created by the worker three quarters went on rent,

1. C. Tsuzuki, The Life of Eleanor Marx, 1855-1898, a Socialist Tragedy, (Oxford, 1967), pp. 90-91.

2. See above Chapter Two, pp. 156, 158-159.

3. E.B. Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian, (London, 1918) p.38.

4. C. Tsuzuki, H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism, (London, 1961) p.54; A.H. Nethercot, *op.cit.*, p.224.

5. Justice, 19 Apr 1884.

interest and profit. Increasing mechanisation was doing nothing to alter this, and was only making matters worse. The solution to recurrent crises of production was social control of the system of exchange in the interest of the whole community. So great was the anarchy and degradation in the past, resulting from uncontrolled competition that even this middle class state had been compelled to introduce factory legislation. Even middle class economists like Thorold Rogers, Henry Sidgwick and Henry Fawcett admitted that such legislative interference by the state was beneficial to the community¹. The system of democratic control in the interests of the whole community does not hinder individuality, whereas the existing system, far from ensuring a real individuality, forced the mass of individuals 'to keep their noses to the grindstone every day of their lives'². Hyndman advocated 'light labour for all', arguing that collective ownership of land, capital, machinery and credit would create a situation where 'three or four hours work a day' would be 'more than sufficient to cover comfort and luxury for every man'. In that sense socialism would benefit the English people.

Bradlaugh began his reply by admitting that both Hyndman and he recognised the existence of many evils, but the difference between them was that Hyndman wanted the State to remedy them and that he wanted the remedy to come from individuals. He complained that Hyndman had not given a clear definition of

1. Justice, 19 Apr 1884.

2. ibid.

socialism and that if vagueness prevailed there was no point in attempting a discussion. He went on to give his understanding of the distinction between social reformers and socialists, the one being for reform, the other for revolution. It was all very well for Hyndman to say that socialism could be achieved by argument, if possible, but if it were not possible by argument, then only force remained. It was the danger associated with this that led Bradlaugh to accept the challenge issued by the editorial board of Justice and to come to the debate 'at the expense of much misrepresentation'¹. He then went on to assert that no socialistic experiment had ever succeeded, that socialism denied all right to private property and that to implement a socialist state would require a physical and mental revolution. Even if initially successful, this would ultimately prove fatal to all progress by paralysing all individual effort. A socialist state would have to be achieved by physical force since property holders would never yield their property through argument. To forcibly dispossess them would be to dispossess the majority since the majority of the people were property owners. Some 1,057,000 persons, representing over four millions, owned plots of land. In addition, there were 1,900,000 depositors in savings banks and some 2,706,612 depositors with the Post Office. Since, therefore, some ten million people were in possession of recorded property, 'you must use force against ten millions of the population'².

1. *ibid.*

2. *Justice* 19 Apr. 1884.

Hyndman expressed surprise that the argument was to be developed by Bradlaugh into a war of statistics and detail. The kind of revolution he had in mind was fundamentally an intellectual one and not an armed revolution. The fact that they were able publicly to debate socialism indicated that such a revolution was already in progress. As for the issue of force, Hyndman pointed out that Bradlaugh himself had been the victim of force, that force was used by the dominant class, within the letter, but against the spirit of law. It was not the social democrats, but the existing system driving men to desperation that would result in physical force unless men were persuaded by reason. He denied he had said that the majority of people were starving; rather, that the majority were competing against each other for a subsistence wage. As for Bradlaugh's millions of property owners, it had been shown that as to landholders, the 'Blue Books have been fudged up and a single owner sometimes figures as eight or ten'¹. In any case, the small property of allotment holders and the small savings of workers faded away in times of depression. He rejected as unworthy Bradlaugh's argument that all progress was motivated in individuals by desire for personal gain.

In his second contribution to the debate Bradlaugh insisted that Hyndman had failed to deal with the problem of personal freedom in a socialist State. Furthermore, Hyndman's argument that socialists who try to achieve their ends by argument, and failing that, by force, was a doctrine of highway robbers, 'your

1. *ibid.*

money or your life'. As to Hyndman's claim that it would have been impossible to debate socialism publicly in the past and that because it could be debated now this was a sign of a mental revolution already occurring, socialism had been publicly discussed forty years ago by Robert Owen, James Bronterre O'Brien and Lloyd Jones¹. In his final contribution, by way of reply to Bradlaugh, Hyndman said it could not be denied that the income of the workers was but one third of the national income. As for Bradlaugh's attack on socialist doctrines as an incitement to class war, the class war was already a fact.

Despite several interruptions the debate was conducted and received in reasonable calm and concluded in reasonable harmony. It clearly revealed an unbridgeable gulf in the approach of both men to the social question and did nothing to move either party to an appreciation of the other's viewpoint. Despite this, it was a highly significant exchange of views. On the actual night, by virtue of his sheer platform ability, it is generally acknowledged that Bradlaugh secured the honours; but, in the long term, the real victory was Hyndman's. It cannot be shown that any socialists of the time were converted to Bradlaugh's radicalism and individualism: but the debate did ultimately lead some radicals to socialism. One important point is that it was the first major occasion when socialism was given a national platform². For Bradlaugh himself it was merely the

1. Justice, 19 Apr 1884.

2. J. Saville, ed., A Selection of the Political Pamphlets of Charles Bradlaugh, with a preface and bibliographical notes (N.Y., 1970) p.9.

most famous of a number of debates with socialists in which he engaged in the decade. Even before the debate with Hyndman had been held, he had already begun a three part review of socialism in Annie Besant's journal, Our Corner. This in itself resulted in a written debate with the talented socialist propagandist, J.L. Joynes¹. Here again he repeated the basic arguments used against Hyndman, namely, that to be achieved, socialism would require a physical and mental revolution; that if achieved, it would stifle initiative and progress; and that the socialist state would prohibit freedom of political expression. Joynes, in turn, reiterated the basic arguments of Hyndman, namely, that under existing arrangements individualism was already crushed, and that Bradlaugh's citation of property statistics was irrelevant since he avoided the key issue of surplus value. Three years later again, he engaged in a similar written debate with Bax, marked by what had then become a well-established mutual incomprehension². Bax's long account of the historical basis of socialism Bradlaugh dismissed as 'romance', his argument that capital was becoming concentrated in fewer and fewer hands he flatly contradicted, his attempt to define socialism he characterised as vague and inadequate. He did agree with Bax that the 'army of labour' was being steadily augmented, but the solution lay not in socialism but in population control. While he agreed that the number of

1. C. Bradlaugh, 'Socialism', in Our Corner, Mar, Apr, May 1884; J.L. Joynes, 'Socialism', in *ibid.*, June 1884; Bradlaugh, 'Socialism', in reply to Mr Joynes', in *ibid.*, July 1884.

2. The Commonweal, 21, 28 May, 11, 25 June, 16, 23 July, 1887; N.R., 22, 29 May, 12, 26 June, 17, 24 July 1887.

workers was all the time growing, he denied Bax's contention that poverty and pauperism were on the increase. There was no increase in the size of the problem; it was, rather, the case that awareness of the problem had increased so that greater publicity was now given to it¹. As to the question of surplus value, Bradlaugh maintained that the margin of surplus over costs of production 'is usually very small'².

Bax, in reply, insisted that the historical dimension of the subject could not be ignored, that socialism could not be understood without reference to its historical context and that his definition of socialism as 'a new view of life having an economic basis' and the goal of which was 'equal participation by all in the necessaries, comforts and enjoyments of life, and the equal duty of all to assist in the necessary work of the world' was as clear as any definition could be³. To support his case that capital was becoming concentrated in fewer hands he cited the growing power of Huntley and Palmer in the London bakery trade, and that of Chamberlain and Nettlefold in screw manufacture. He declined to provide statistics to show that there was more poverty than ever, and rested his case for this on the contention that 'taking things all round the tendency towards a polarisation of wealth and poverty is making itself apparent in a yearly accelerating ratio'⁴.

The Bradlaugh-Bax debate followed the basic pattern of the earlier ones with their catalogue of assertions and counter-

1. N.R., 22 May 1887.

2. N.R., 29 May 1887; The Commonweal, 28 May 1887.

3. N.R., 12 June 1887; The Commonweal, 11 June 1887.

4. N.R., 17 July 1887; The Commonweal, 16 July 1887.

assertions. Superficially, Bradlaugh appeared to find it easy to punch holes in the grand exposition of the socialist case by insisting throughout in bringing the debates down to the specific, the concrete, the quantifiable. For all that, this did not prevent the socialists from propagating their vision of an alternative society with some success. In this context, after the debate with Hyndman, the most important one in which Bradlaugh became involved was not that with Joynes or with Bax, but one with Annie Besant in 1886. If Bradlaugh had got the better of Hyndman in the short-term in the debate of April 1884, he was to suffer a major casualty in the long-term directly through that debate, in the loss to the socialists, of Besant.

Although Besant had naturally supported Bradlaugh on the occasion of the exchange with Hyndman, that debate awakened in her an interest in socialism. As a result of studying socialist arguments over the next year, she came to adopt a socialist position¹. Her defection was a major blow: not only was she Bradlaugh's business partner, closest moral supporter and co-editor of his journal, she was also a widely-known and gifted speaker and an able writer. Indeed, she was a much better writer than Bradlaugh. In the first half of 1886 she produced a series of articles entitled Modern Socialism, in her own journal, Our Corner. In these she insisted that no mere modification, rather a complete revolution of the industrial system was needed: 'Capital must be controlled by

1. A. Besant, An Autobiography, (London, 1893) pp. 301-6, 311; A.H. Nethercot, op.cit., pp. 227-8, 231-2.

labour, instead of controlling it'¹. Bradlaugh's argument that socialism would check individual initiative and energy was based on a false notion that 'the impulse to initiative must always be desire for personal money gain', and she pointed out that 'even under the individualistic system no great discovery has ever been made and proclaimed merely from desire for personal money profit'². Besant published these articles in pamphlet form in late May or early June 1886, and Bradlaugh replied to her in a review of her work on 6 June. Praising the earnestness that lay behind 'the carefully and powerfully written pamphlet' of his 'most loyal and devoted co-worker'³ he seized upon 'the basic confusion' which ran through the whole work, namely, its failure to provide a proper definition of private property. Besant had argued that all socialists were agreed that 'while individuals may hold private property for use, none should hold capital, that is, wealth employed in production, for individual profit' . Bradlaugh simply observed that he found it impossible to distinguish between property for personal use and property used in production for profit. He doubted the validity of her claim that all socialists were agreed that the only rightful holders of capital 'are industrial groups or one great industrial group - the State'. He felt that many socialists would deny the right of 'industrial groups', other than the State, to hold capital. He ended his review on a cautionary note of significance: 'All the faults are not on the side of capital; all the virtues are not on the side of the workers'⁴.

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1. Our Corner, Mar 1886.
 2. ibid., May 1886.
 3. N.R., 6 June 1886.
 4. ibid.

Bradlaugh's most basic beliefs in regard to Capital and Labour had not changed markedly between 1860 and 1886, but, there was a distinct change of emphasis and tone in his approach to the question. In his writing and speeches in the 1860s and 1870s, it was the wrongs of Capital and the rights of Labour that he had stressed. As already seen, even though he accepted the doctrine of the wages fund in the 1860s, he had insisted that it was 'unfairly distributed as well as too widely divided'¹. He added at the time that capitalists got too large a share of the wealth produced. That was in 1865. Eleven years later he had readily pointed out that wages formed 'but a small proportion' of the increased costs of production that threatened Britain's competitive position, and that it was the 'unduly large profits' which were driving away trade². In 1886, for the first time, he introduced a note in defence of capital, vague and generalised though that note was. Such however, was the impact of Besant's conversion to and promotion of socialism on him. From there, he went on in the next year in the debate with Bax to assert that the surplus value absorbed by capital 'is usually very small'³. The end result of his debates with the socialists and the change of emphasis which these led him to make was that from the mid-1880s the notorious atheist, republican and birth-controller appeared as a defender of the existing order. Yet, he himself, persisted in believing that he was a friend of Labour. He justified that belief on the basis of his attitude to and work in three main areas of labour politics, truck legislation, employers' liability and the issue of an eight-hour day.

1. See above, p. 559.

2. See above, p. 562.

3. See above, p. 577.

iii. Bradlaugh and the Truck Question:

One of the notable features of Bradlaugh's debates with the socialists was his insistence on attention to specifics and detail. This characteristic was also to be reflected in his approach to the question of the appropriate public policy on matters affecting the interests of Labour at Westminster. For Bradlaugh the 'social question' was nothing if not a question of detail, of specific wrongs to be righted. Of such wrongs, that of the truck system was one that loomed large for him. He first showed awareness of the problem in 1871 when he drew the attention of his readers to the extensiveness of 'this terrible social evil which degrades to a low pitch the miserable population'¹, an evil emphasised by the reports of the Truck Commissioners at that time². The initiative in getting a commission to investigate the issue had come from A.J. Mundella in 1870, at a time when six years of falling prices resulted in a revival of the problem³. The Commission found that some 147,000 people worked under employers who practised the system, but attempts at legislation came to nothing⁴. As on previous occasions earlier in the century, a return of rising prices led in the early 1870s to a decline in truck practice. The recurrence of falling prices from the late 1870s, however, led to a revival of truck, especially in the nail-making, chain-making and rivetting trades of the Midlands, and in Scottish and Welsh coalmining. This revival brought renewed attention

1. N.R., 28 May 1871.

2. Report from the commissioners on the truck system, with minutes of evidence and appendices, H.C. 1871, xxxvi (C.326, C.327).

3. G.W. Hilton, The Truck System, including a history of the British Truck Acts, 1465-1960, (Cambridge, 1960) p.135.

4. ibid.

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to the problem in the mid-1880s, and Bradlaugh, having secured the right to his seat in the Commons from the beginning of 1886, took a keen interest in it.

In March 1886 he put a series of questions to the Home Secretary, Matthews, relating to prosecutions against the Rhymney Iron Company, of which the Conservative M.P., Sir Henry Tyler, who had been prominent among those who fought to exclude Bradlaugh from the House, was chairman. The Company had been convicted of breaches of the Truck Acts in May 1885, and had appealed against the convictions, only to lose the appeal in December 1885. Bradlaugh wished to know if the Company had kept its truck shop open in the period when the appeal had been pending¹. Matthews replied that the Inspector of Factories was investigating the matter and procuring evidence with a view to further prosecution if necessary. From this incident Bradlaugh began a personal investigation of the problem in general throughout the United Kingdom and came to the conclusion that if the Rhymney case was an isolated one in Wales, the law was constantly violated in Scotland. In September 1886 he raised this matter in the House only to be told that the Chief Inspector was not aware that such was the case, but that he was about to look into it. A week later Bradlaugh returned to the question and charged that if the Inspectorate had no knowledge of the problem there was no excuse for its ignorance. He himself had investigated two hundred cases and had secured documentary proof of wholesale breaches of the law in the cases of the textile trade

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 303, H.C., 11 Mar 1886, col 435.

in the Shetlands, and in the mining industry in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. He claimed that the workers were being paid at fortnightly or longer intervals and, being in need of credit on their wages, were given advances on which they were illegally charged high interest. If the Home Secretary had no knowledge of the practice, there were some 30,000 to 40,000 workers who unfortunately had, he claimed, adding that they were afraid to come forward unless the Government took up the matter¹.

Matthews replied that he was still waiting for official reports and could not comment.

At this stage Bradlaugh, who had been the only M.P. to have raised the issue in the 1880s up till then, was joined by two Scottish radical M.P.s, Donald Crawford of North East Lanark, and Dr G.B. Clark of Caithness. They confirmed Bradlaugh's allegations of widespread truck practice in the mining and Highland districts². Further questioning of the Home Secretary at the end of the month still found him without official confirmation. In early January 1887, therefore, Bradlaugh determined to attack the problem himself by initiating legislation³. He introduced a bill of his own to amend and extend the law relating to truck, and Crawford introduced a similar measure, both receiving First Reading on the same day, without debate⁴. After Second Reading, again without debate, Bradlaugh's bill went into Committee in April and May 1887, where it commenced

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 308, H.C., 9 Sept 1886, cols 1764-8.

2. ibid., cols 1770-1.

3. N.R., 16 Jan 1887.

4. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 310, H.C., 28 Jan 1887, cols 242, 230.

a long and difficult passage. So many amendments were proposed, not least by the Government, that members soon became confused. The members' complaints, beginning on 28 April, were quite succinctly expressed by Sir Joseph Pease on 3 May when he remarked:

I would call attention to the state of this Bill, one of the most puzzling Bills, in its present form, I have ever had to deal with. The Government Amendments are larger than the original Bill, and when you come to look at these Amendments together with the original Bill, you have the greatest difficulty in finding what is the real state of the proposals before the House¹.

It was not only the complexity of the Bill and the Government's amendments which came principally from Stuary-Wortley, Under-Secretary at the Home Office, that caused confusion and irritation, but the fact that on every occasion, they were discussed in the early hours of the morning. Bradlaugh however, did not profess any embarrassment or resentment at the situation but actually thanked the Government for the trouble it was taking to make the Bill a good one². Throughout May, June and July the proliferation of amendments and the feeling of confusion continued. On 12 July Bradlaugh had to make a strong plea against a motion to have the entire Bill re-committed, arguing that it would never be enacted if the whole process had to be repeated³. From July onward, evidently desperate to get his measure through in some shape or form, Bradlaugh began to act in a way that was to cost him prestige among

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 314, H.C., 3 May 1887, col 835.

2. ibid., col 836; N.R., 8 May 1887.

3. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 317, H.C., 12 July 1887, cols 610-611.

Radical and Labour M.P.s. He tried to secure the rejection of some amendments which offered positive good for the workers. On 15 July Donald Crawford proposed the insertion of a clause stating that where deductions were made from wages to cover the cost of medical attention at work, the workers were to have the sole right of nominating the doctor, and that where an employer made a contribution to such costs, he was to have a share in the choice of doctor to an extent to be agreed upon between workers and employer¹. Arguing that this was considered by miners to be an important issue, G.B. Clark supported Crawford². Bradlaugh, however, tried to dismiss the proposal, arguing firstly that such a clause had no place in a Truck Bill, and secondly that the workers in any case made very few complaints about employer-nominated doctors, but two other Scottish M.P.s, Stephen Mason of Mid-Lanark and R. Preston Bruce of Fifeshire West, contradicted him on this point³. R.B. Haldane deplored the way Bradlaugh had tried to dismiss Crawford who was not, he argued, being given any justice or fair treatment in the matter⁴. Nevertheless, Bradlaugh got his way, and the Third Reading passed without debate on 18 July 1887⁵.

In the Lords, the Bill had a quicker, but rougher passage, in that four clauses were struck out altogether. The rejection of one of these, Clause Four⁶, had important repercussions for

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1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 317, H.C., 15 July 1887, col 1078.
 2. ibid., col 1078.
 3. ibid., cols 1079-1080.
 4. ibid., cols 1081-1082.
 5. ibid., col 1145.
 6. Parl. Papers, H.C. 1887, vi, Public Bills, (377) p.2.

Bradlaugh's reputation as a friend of Labour. The Clause provided for the weekly payment of wages in Ireland and had been added to the original Bill in the Commons at the insistence of the Belfast M.P., Thomas Sexton. When the amended Bill from the Lords came before the Commons on 19 August Bradlaugh objected to its having been struck out, and the Commons agreed with him that the Lords should be asked to reconsider this¹. Bradlaugh had the full backing of the Labour representatives in the House on this issue: indeed, this was the only occasion that one of their leading figures, Henry Broadhurst, had spoken at all on the Bill². Furthermore, the T.U.C., then meeting at Swansea, had sent a telegram of protest to the Home Secretary over the action of the Lords³. But the Lords refused to change their mind. Bradlaugh's response to their persistence came on 12 September when he asked the Commons to accept the situation: he regretted the need to do this, but argued that the Bill was still so valuable that he would be wrong to abandon the whole for the sake of a clause. In answer to the T.U.C.'s claim that the Bill was now valueless, he pointed out to the Commons that it was still a great improvement on previous legislation: it extended the application of Truck Law to all trades; it compelled the advance of wages without interest; it outlawed dismissal for refusal to trade in any particular shop, and it provided better facilities for prosecution. He moved, therefore, that the House accept the Lords' amendments⁴.

Not surprisingly, Sexton urged the rejection of Bradlaugh's

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1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 319, H.C., 19 Aug 1887, cols 1237-1238
 2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 319, H.C., 19 Aug 1887, col 1238.
 3. Pall Mall Gazette, 8, 9 Sept 1887.
 4. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 321, H.C., 12 Sept 1887, col 445.

motion: it was not good enough for the House to give way to the Lords since it had already after long debate, twice made clear its decision to retain Clause Four. If the Bill were valueless, as the T.U.C. claimed, they ought to know what was good for the workers¹. He was supported by some who argued that it were better the Bill be lost now and won later than that an emasculated measure should reach the Statute Book². A sharp exchange developed between Bradlaugh and the Welsh miners' leader, Will Abraham, M.P. for Rhondda. Expressing his appreciation of Bradlaugh's efforts, he observed that with Clause Four missing, the Bill 'loses its utility as far as the working classes are concerned'. That Bradlaugh resented Abraham's remark is clear from his reply to the effect that the clause was no part of his Bill. Abraham insisted that it was, because, although it had been proposed by Sexton, it had been accepted and originally defended by Bradlaugh against the Lords. It was the thin edge of the wedge, argued Abraham: if weekly payment of wages by law were implemented for Ireland, it would soon become part of the law in England and no longer would workers 'have to go cap in hand to ask for enough to buy food'³.

Despite the opposition of the Labour representatives and the Irish Nationalist M.P.s, Bradlaugh's motion to accept the Lords' amendments was carried, 129 to 47⁴. Four days later, Bradlaugh's Truck Bill received the Royal Assent⁵. Bradlaugh was the first

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, col 451.

3. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 321, H.C., 12 Sept 1887, cols 452-453.

4. *ibid.*, col 454.

5. *ibid.*, 16 Sept 1887, col 552. 50 & 51 Vict. c.46.

M.P. to draw attention to the problem of Truck in the 1880s. Having failed to get adequate response from the Government he took the initiative himself and, after a prolonged and wearying battle, succeeded in carrying the first major legislation on the subject since the Act of 1831. He claimed it was a valuable measure, the Labour representatives professed to regard it as useless. Who was right ?

It is certainly true that Bradlaugh's Truck Act of 1887 theoretically overcame one of the great deficiencies of the original Act of 1831, namely, the problem of getting people to venture to prosecute. Clause Thirteen of his Act gave responsibility of enforcement to the Factory and Mines Inspectorate. In addition the Act did outlaw interest charges on wage advances, forbade deductions for the repair and sharpening of tools, extended previous legislation to all workers covered by the Employers and Workmen Act of 1875, extended the truck legislation to domestic workers in cloth, fur and leather trades as though they were normal wage earners, and extended the legislation of 1831 to Ireland. In theory therefore, it greatly extended the area of legislative protection of workers¹. In practice, however, his Act was not so impressive. Where truck practice persisted, the newly responsible inspectorate still found workers reluctant to testify². Bradlaugh himself admitted the problem of enforcing the Act a year after its passage, when he declared that even those workers who wrote

1. A.T. Flight, 'Mining Legislation in the Nineteenth Century, 1840-1887', University of London Ph.D., 1937, p.282.

2. Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops for the Year 1893, H.C. 1894, xxi, p.328.

to him providing examples of its persistence and who asked for his help, were themselves afraid to testify for fear of victimisation¹. In any case, by the time the legislation was enacted, the system was already in serious decline under the combined impact of an increasingly refined technology and an increasingly powerful trade union opinion². There are no reports of the mining inspectorate having initiated any prosecutions in the decade after 1887, and in the same period the factory inspectorate entered on only nine prosecutions, securing only two convictions³.

It would appear therefore, that Bradlaugh had manifested concern and expended energy worthier of a better cause. Admittedly he had secured the gratitude of a number of working class organisations, notably the Aberdeen United Trades' Council, the Bristol Operatives' Liberal Association, the Hyde and District Trades' Council, and the Aberdeen branch of the Blacksmith's Society⁴, but all this was before his acceptance of the Lords' amendments. After that he got no thanks and much abuse from the Labour leadership. If, while regarding himself, sincerely enough, as a friend of Labour, he wanted Labour to so regard him, he made a major error in his crusade over Truck. Having himself drawn the attention of the Home Secretary to the hostility of the T.U.C. to the Lords' amendments, and having initially justified that hostility himself by insisting in challenging the Lords, to have backed down from the challenge in the end

1. N.R., 22 July 1888.

2. P.S. Bagwell, Industrial Relations in Nineteenth Century Britain, (London, 1974) p.55.

3. Minutes of Evidence taken before the Truck Commissioners, Part IV, Parl. Papers, H.C. 1909, xlix, p.136.

4. N.R., 15, 22 May, 15 July 1887.

did his reputation no good. An unfounded but damaging story was circulated among workers that Bradlaugh had deliberately sabotaged the wages' clause of the Bill. This story was repeated, among others by Will Abraham on the alleged authority of Ben Pickard, the Yorkshire Miners' M.P., who denied responsibility, and repeated by William Randall Cremer on the alleged authority of Henry Broadhurst who also denied responsibility¹.

iv. Bradlaugh and Employers' Liability:

If the issue of Truck was one of declining importance for workers in the 1880s, that of employers' liability and workmen's compensation for injuries represented an issue of growing importance, and one that was not to be fully and finally dealt with until the middle of this century. It became a question of practical political concern for Labour in general from the 1870s and in particular from the Liberal Government's Employers' Liability Act of 1880.

At the centre of the question was a legal conflict between the rival doctrines of 'vicarious liability' and 'common employment'. The former, deriving from Roman Law, held that an employer was responsible for injuries done by his agent or servant; the latter, a judge-made law, based as it was on the case Priestly versus Forder in 1837, held that a worker suffering injury

1. *ibid.*, 26 Feb, 15, 22 Apr 1888.

through the act of a fellow-worker, the injured party had no case against the common employer¹. The defence of common employment was justified by its supporters on a variety of grounds, not least that the contract of employment already included in the wage an implicit remuneration to the worker for the risks inherent in employment². It was a classic expression, in legal form, of the philosophy of economic individualism, and its staunchest defenders were, in the 1880s, extreme individualists, such as Lord Bramwell. It was a fitting proof that Bradlaugh was not an 'extreme' individualist to be placed in the company of people like Bramwell, as Shaw and others placed him, that he was an opponent of the doctrine of common employment.

Up to 1880 a worker had a defence at Common Law for compensation for injuries sustained by the personal negligence of an employer, providing he had the financial resources to initiate an action and the proof to make a successful case. But, for injuries received at work from the negligence of fellow workers he had no defence³. One of the first two working class M.P.s, Alexander Mac Donald, had tried to get abolition of the doctrine in 1876, but his efforts were fobbed off by Government promises of action, promises still unfulfilled when it fell in 1880. Despite election promises in 1880 that they would abolish it, the successful Liberal Administration, instead of introducing radical new legislation on the issue, merely revived a compromise of a Bill sponsored unsuccessfully by Thomas Brassey in 1879.

1. D.G. Hanes, The First British Workmen's Compensation Act, 1897 (London, 1968), pp. 11-12.
 2. *ibid.*, p.13.
 3. S. & B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, (1st ed., London, 1894) p.350.

This compromise proposal became the Employers' Liability Act of 1880¹. Instead of abolishing the defence of common employment it restricted it, allowing the doctrine of vicarious liability to apply to five cases where workmen were injured through the negligence of superintendents or foremen. Its greatest deficiencies were that it restricted the maximum compensation to the earnings of the injured person over the previous three years; secondly, that it did not prevent parties from contracting out of it, and thirdly, that it was a temporary measure due to expire in 1887². The Labour Movement in the country and their representatives in Parliament, Thomas Burt, Alexander Mac Donald and Henry Broadhurst, were dissatisfied with the Liberal legislation of 1880, and in particular with its failure to prevent contracting out, the legality of which was upheld in the case Griffiths versus Earl of Dudley³. Even before the Bill had been enacted Broadhurst had declared his dissatisfaction with it, stating that 'There could be no reasonable settlement of this question that did not absolutely abolish the law of common employment'⁴. His view was shared by Burt, though the latter preferred the measure to none at all⁵.

Bradlaugh took a close interest in the legislation of 1880, and shared Burt's position on it. During the Committee stage he intervened to ensure that workers would have adequate

1. D.G. Hanes, op.cit., pp. 15-19.

2. S. & B. Webb, op.cit., p.351.

3. S. & B. Webb, op.cit., p.351, n.3.

4. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 252, H.C., 3 June 1880, cols 1116-1117

5. ibid., col. 1135.

remedies for injuries received from defective machinery¹. It was clear from his contributions at this stage that, like the Labour representatives, he was opposed to the doctrine of common employment. Speaking in support of an amendment by Morley which was designed to ensure that the workers would have a remedy against injury by fellow-workers from another department of a given firm, Bradlaugh said:

he had heard Hon Members present represent over and over again that acceptance of the principle of making employers liable for the negligence of one servant to another would entail absolute ruin to mine owners. He thought that when so much had been said about the rights of property that something should be said on the other hand with regard to human life².

He himself was directly responsible for getting acceptance of an amendment whereby the obligation of notice of intention to seek compensation under the Act might be dispensed with in cases of death, if a judge considered that there was reasonable excuse for failure to give notice³. Three weeks later, the Bill became law⁴.

Over the next five years attempts by Broadhurst and Burt to secure an improved measure came to naught. With the coming to power of the third Gladstone administration on 1 February 1886, the prospects ought to have brightened. The radical element in the Commons, and in the Government, was stronger than ever before, and the potential influence of Labour was all the greater with Broadhurst, secretary to the Parliamentary Committee

1. *ibid.*, vol 255, H.C., 3 Aug 1880, col 131.

2. *ibid.*, vol 255, H.C., 4 Aug 1880, col 273.

3. *ibid.*, vol 255, H.C., 16 Aug 1880, col 1191.

4. *ibid.*, vol 256, H.C., 7 Sept 1880; 43 & 44 Vict. c.42.

of the T.U.C., becoming Under Secretary at the Home Office¹. Ten days after the opening of the session, two separate Bills to amend the Act of 1880 were read for the first time without debate². It was, however, an odd comment on the radicalism of Labour, that the Bill sponsored by Burt and Broadhurst was much less comprehensive than that sponsored by the Irish Nationalist M.P.s Arthur O'Connor and Thomas Sexton. O'Connor's Bill proposed to prevent contracting out, to increase compensation to a maximum of £150, to include seamen, and to make the Act of 1880 permanent³. Burt's and Broadhurst's Bill, supported by the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., and despite their own opposition to common employment, made no serious effort to abolish it, did not offer to increase the amount of compensation or to extend the period allowed for giving notice under the Act of 1880⁴. Burt, in fact, admitted that O'Connor's was a more comprehensive measure⁵. The Government expressed its sympathy with the objects of O'Connor's Bill, but, refusing to commit itself to any of its specific proposals, recommended, successfully, that it, and Burt's Bill, be sent to a Select Committee⁶. Bradlaugh, who had taken no part in the debates up to this point, found himself nominated a member of this Committee, which was appointed on 16 March 1886⁷. Chaired by Sir Thomas Brassey, the Select Committee consisted initially of sixteen, and later

1. H. Broadhurst, The Story of his Life, from a Stonemason's Bench to the Treasury Bench, (London, 1901) pp. 187-190. Annual Register for 1886, p.38.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 302, H.C., 22 Jan 1886.

3. Parl. Papers, H.C. 1886, ii (2), Public Bills, (60), pp.281-282.

4. ibid., Public Bills, (76), pp. 281-282.

5. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 302, H.C., 23 Feb 1886, col.1091.

6. ibid., col.1094.

7. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 303, H.C., 16 Mar 1886, cols 1056-7.

of eighteen members, eleven of whom were Liberals or Radicals. The Committee sat on eighteen occasions between 26 March and 11 June 1886¹. It recommended that, with certain amendments, the Act of 1880 be made permanent. It recommended that no contract entered into by a workman should bar recovery unless the employer had contributed to an insurance fund for the worker against all accidents at work and unless the benefit from such fund be fully adequate. It added that subcontracting by an employer should not be a bar to his liability. It suggested that courts should allow action where, for sufficient reason, notice had not been given of intention to seek damages; that a judge could order trial by special jury if needed, and that parties in Scottish actions have the same right to jury trial as parties in English cases. Finally, it reported, therefore, that there was no need to amend the Bills of O'Connor and Burt as submitted to it².

Bradlaugh, who attended all eighteen sittings, played a prominent and even decisive role in the proceedings. Of twelve motions proposed by Committee members in the course of formulating their report and recommendations, Bradlaugh was responsible for five, O'Connor for three, Forwood for two, and Pease and Crompton for one each. Of these twelve motions, nine were adopted as resolutions, and of the nine, five were Bradlaugh's. The one motion he failed to carry was the critical one that it was 'desirable to prevent any contracting out of the Act',

1. Report from the Select Committee on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, H.C. 1886, viii (192), p.ii.

2. *ibid.*, pp. iii-iv.

which was lost by the casting vote of the Chairman¹. To compensate for this loss, he successfully moved that there could be no contractual barrier to recovery under the Act unless the employer contributed fully to a fund for all accidents arising and that the benefits of such fund be deemed fully adequate compensation². He successfully moved the resolution that courts should allow actions for compensation where, for reasonable cause, no notice of intention had been given, and with equal success moved that a judge could order trial of an action before a special jury, and that parties in Scottish actions have the same right to jury trial as those in England³. Finally he moved successfully that the 1880 Act was of benefit to workers, of no hardship to employers and that it should be made permanent⁴.

From the motions which were adopted, the earnestness and sincerity of Bradlaugh's attempts to benefit Labour seem clear. It appears even more clearly from the motions which he supported and which failed. The critical one of preventing contracting out has already been mentioned. Another was the motion by Crompton that no limit be placed on the amount of compensation⁵. Equally it was clear from his efforts to get as influential a body of Labour representatives to attend before the Committee as possible, though in this case, his appeals to Will Abraham

1. Report from the S.Comm. on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill, H.C. 1886, viii (192), p.xi. Despite this, Bradlaugh has been represented in at least one recent study as being against employers' liability legislation. See S. Budd, op.cit., p.66 where it is stated that 'Much hostility was created when he refused to support the Employers' Liability Bill'.

2. *ibid.*, p.xii.

3. *ibid.*, p.xiv.

4. *ibid.*, p.iv.

5. *ibid.*, p.xiii.

and Henry Broadhurst to co-operate in this, fell on deaf ears: in the event, the only major Labour figure he was personally responsible for securing as a witness was George Shipton of the London Trades' Council and Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C.¹.

It is evident that to a considerable extent Bradlaugh dominated the work of the Committee and his impress is to be found clearly in its recommendations. Reporting in June 1886, the Committee's recommendations fell victim to the political defeat that brought disaster to Gladstone's Government that same month. Early in the new parliament, which met in August 1886, Burt, O'Connor and Broadhurst again introduced Bills to amend the 1880 Act, but these came to naught². At the same time, the Conservative Home Secretary, Henry Matthews, announced the Government's intention to bring in an amending Bill in the next session³. Despite repeated promptings from Broadhurst, Bradlaugh and O'Connor, however, no Government Bill materialised until the following year. Matthews eventually moved its Second Reading on 17 May 1888. Declaring that he found it impossible to sweep away the doctrine of common employment, his Bill nevertheless included all the major recommendations of the 1886 Committee. To that extent, although the voice was that of the Conservative Matthews, the hands were those of the Radical Bradlaugh. Yet, despite this fact, Broadhurst, no longer in Government, announced his objection, and that of

1. N.R., 30 Dec 1888. Leading article, subsequently published as a pamphlet, C. Bradlaugh, Employers' Liability Bill. Letter to Thomas Burt, M.P., (London, 1888).

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 308, H.C., 20 Aug 1886, Bills No 2 & 17.

3. ibid., vol 309, H.C., 10 Sept 1886, col.22.

'the labour party' to the proposed measure. He sarcastically observed that Matthews would find himself relying greatly on Bradlaugh to pull his measure through for him¹. Broadhurst became the leading opponent of the Bill: if Matthews made contracting out illegal by making insuring out of the Act legal, that did not meet Labour's requirements; he stigmatised the maximum compensation of £150 as altogether inadequate, and argued that if an employer could insure himself against all liability for accidents merely by contributing a paltry sum to an insurance fund 'his motive for saving life would be greatly diminished if not entirely destroyed'². This last argument, that what the workers wanted was not compensation for injuries so much as proper safeguards to prevent them, came to be a leading argument from the Labour viewpoint.

When the Second Reading debate resumed next day, 18 May 1888, Broadhurst was proved right about Matthews: Bradlaugh became the leading defender of the 'government bill', which he saw as 'an honest endeavour to meet some of the recommendations of the Committee'³. Defending the 'insuring out' aspect of the Bill, Bradlaugh argued that Broadhurst's fears that employers would thereby take no heed for safety were groundless: whether men were contracted out of the Act or not, employers were already able to insure themselves against liability in any case. Furthermore, as far as he could see, the vast majority of workers preferred to have some kind of insurance, since this

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 326, H.C., 17 May 1888, col. 644.
2. ibid., col. 646.
3. ibid., vol 326, H.C., 18 May 1888, col. 723.

spared them the hazards and forbidding costs of legal actions¹. On this point history proved Bradlaugh to be correct: actions under Employers' Liability had up till then cost, and continued afterwards to cost more than they were worth, and proof of negligence was always difficult to establish. In, 1890, of 389 cases tried for £63,000, 208 were successful to the sum of £8,679, or, £41 per case where successful². But Lib-Lab M.P.s, and M.P.s friendly to Labour, who followed after Bradlaugh, took Broadhurst's view of the Bill. Among the more moderate in their hostility, Abraham thought it a good bill as far as it went: even if it did not abolish the operation of common employment it was another step on the road to its eventual abolition. But, like Broadhurst, he was totally opposed to the provision for insuring out of the Act, a provision which had originated with the 1886 Select Committee³. Likewise, Ben Pickard of the Yorkshire Miners, attacked this aspect and flatly contradicted Bradlaugh's assertion that the workers favoured insurance: his miners did not, he claimed⁴. Despite Labour opposition, the Bill secured a Second Reading, only to be referred to the Standing Committee on Law⁵. It was not till early December that it again came before the House. Three days before it did so however, the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. resolved in a special meeting to see W.H. Smith, to express their utter opposition to Clause Three: it was 'vicious';

1. *ibid.*, cols 719-721.

2. D.G. Hanes, *op.cit.*, p.25.

3. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 326, H.C., 18 May 1888, cols.729-731.

4. *ibid.*, col.739.

5. *ibid.*, vol 327, H.C., 14 June 1888, cols.226-7.

it tended to strike at the foundation of free combination amongst workmen, to enslave the labour of the community and to destroy personal freedom. Every M.P. was to be given a copy of their resolution expressing these views, and would be requested to oppose the measure¹. In the Commons, Broadhurst sought to ensure its defeat by moving that its consideration be postponed for three months. The Government had failed to meet Labour's objection to Clause Three:

The Bill had been kicked and cuffed from pillar to post till within a few days of Christmas and now, with a Parliamentary pistol at their heads, they were asked to pass the bill in one night².

At this stage Broadhurst made quite clear the real objection of Labour to the Clause: it would enslave workers and undermine trade unionism by tying workers to an employers' insurance fund. The Bill as a whole had few advantages and many disadvantages over the Act of 1880: it was 'a sham', 'misleading, mischievous, a worse Bill was never introduced into this House', and consequently Labour preferred to see its defeat³.

Broadhurst's attack on the Bill incensed Bradlaugh who rose to defend it. His anger at Broadhurst arose from the fact that it went further than the Bill Broadhurst himself had sponsored with Burt when he had been in Gladstone's Government. He regarded Broadhurst's attitude as a narrowly political one, all the more reprehensible since the Bill was fundamentally the work of a Liberal Select Committee whose requests for Labour witnesses Broadhurst had done nothing whatever to meet⁴. He

1. Minutes of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., 4 Dec 1888, ff.30-32.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 331, H.C., 7 Dec 1888, col.1428.

3. ibid., cols. 1428-9.

4. ibid., cols. 1435-6.

attacked Broadhurst's inconsistency and a heated personal exchange resulted that was ultimately damaging to Bradlaugh's reputation. Broadhurst's own account of this affair was so brief as to be misleading and less than just: 'The main incident of the discussion was a violent attack upon me by Mr Bradlaugh, who supported the Government', was all he had to say on the matter¹. Bradlaugh's attack on Broadhurst was followed immediately by the Conservative Home Secretary's defence of the Bill and blistering attack on Broadhurst for denouncing a Bill which had been the outcome of a committee appointed by a Government of which he had been a member. To a considerable extent the attacks on Broadhurst's conduct and his description of the Bill were justified. But, the attacks placed Bradlaugh in the position of an ally of the Conservative Matthews, their views on the measure being identical. However, it was not Broadhurst so much as the other Labour members who placed Bradlaugh in a bad light. Thus, Charles Fenwick, an old friend of Bradlaugh's, in a quite moderate speech, explained that Labour attacked the Bill not for party purposes but because it was thought to be bad: he pointed out that Bradlaugh had voted against contracting out when he had been on the Select Committee, but now defended it². Similarly, Donald Crawford argued that Clause Three placed the worker in a new subservience since his contributions to an insurance fund would tie him to a particular employment³. Abraham,

1. H. Broadhurst, *op.cit.*, p.214.

2. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 331, H.C., 7 Dec 1888, cols.1449-1451.

3. *ibid.*, cols.1455-1457.

Pickard and Burt followed with similar condemnations, Pickard in particular expressing surprise that Bradlaugh should have so harshly attacked the Labour representatives¹. Even the aristocratic Harcourt defended their opposition to Clause Three and attacked Bradlaugh's performance². Although Broadhurst's motion was defeated, the Bill itself was withdrawn on 14 December 1888. Bradlaugh had spent time and energy and staked his reputation as Labour's friend in vain. No subsequent attempt to amend the Act of 1880 succeeded and it was left to a Conservative Government, after Bradlaugh's death, to solve the problem by the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897³, ironically still denounced by Broadhurst as a version of compulsory insurance designed to destroy trade unionism⁴.

The debates on the Employers' Liability Act (1880) Amendment Bill of 1888 led to an irreconcilable conflict of interpretation between the Labour representatives and Bradlaugh. They claimed that it did nothing to stop contracting out. He claimed that it severely curtailed contracting out and that if the Bill were lost, that full contracting out of their responsibilities by employers as allowed by the Act of 1880, would therefore continue. In this he was correct; but his position was misunderstood and his conduct on the course of the Bill misrepresented. His attack on Broadhurst for the latter's extreme and inaccurate remarks on the Bill became erected into an attack on all the Labour representatives in the House.

1. *ibid.*, col.1468.

2. *ibid.*, col.1479.

3. 60 & 61 Vict. c.37.

4. P.S. Bagwell, *op.cit.*, p.79; D.G. Hanes, *op.cit.*, p.155.

Pickard felt that a personal attack on all of them had been made by Bradlaugh in the House - a mistaken impression, as Hansard reveals, but one that quickly gained currency. Motions of condemnation and censure and remarks of misrepresentation poured down on Bradlaugh from all sides of Labour. He was condemned by organisations such as the London Cigar Makers, Hull Trades' Council, South Derbyshire Miners' Union, North Brighton Liberal Working Men's Club, the Council of the National Boot & Shoe Riveters and Finishers, and the Midland Counties Miners' Federation, among others¹. Nor was he spared by individual Labour leaders. John Burns, in a letter to Reynolds's, later republished in Justice, described him as 'the greatest enemy of labour in the House'². Unjust as the charge may have been, the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Bradlaugh's good intentions gained wider currency than did his attempts to refute the charges.

It was one thing to be attacked or challenged by socialists whose claim to be spokesmen for the workers, at least in the early 1880s, had doubtful foundations; it was quite another to find himself attacked by and in direct conflict with trade unions and leading members of the Congress. If his relationship with the Labour Movement was rendered difficult, and perhaps unjustly so, by the conflict over Employers' Liability, it was made even more so by the issue of legislative control of the hours of labour and the position he adopted on this.

1. N.R., 6, 13 Jan, 3, 24 Feb 1889, 18 May 1890.

2. ibid., 5 May 1889, citing Reynolds's Newspaper.

v. Bradlaugh and the Eight Hours' Question:

The ideal of the Eight Hour Day was advocated by Robert Owen as early as 1817¹. It was not until the 1880s, however, that it came to be a much-debated issue and developed into a movement. In 1882 Stanley Jevons referred to the existence of a 'widespread' feeling in favour of statutory limitation of hours in all industries², and two years later the Social Democratic Federation had taken up the question of an Eight Hour Day for public employees³. Two years later again, in 1886, the issue was taken up by the Knights of Labour in the Black Country and by the National Federation of Labour on Tyneside⁴. The idea gained its greatest initial impetus from the pamphlet by Tom Mann on the question in 1886, the first ever publication devoted exclusively to the matter, and from his own work of propaganda on its behalf in the succeeding years⁵. Indeed, it was the socialists and the New Unionists who most vigorously promoted the question in the 1880s. The Old Unionists, the T.U.C. and the Lib-Lab M.P.s, while favourable to a reduction of hours, were, in the first half of the decade, opposed to the idea of parliamentary enactment of an Eight Hour Bill for industries in general. They feared that allowing Parliament to regulate hours would be an open invitation to it subsequently to regulate wages⁶. In addition, some unions, such as that of

1. The Crisis, iii, No 23, 1 Feb 1834.

2. S. Jevons, The State in its relation to Labour (1st ed., London, 1882, 3rd ed., London, 1894), p.67.

3. S. Webb & H. Cox, The Eight Hours' Day, (London, 1891) p.21.

4. *ibid.*, p.21; D.W. Crowley, *op.cit.*, pp. 316-7.

5. D.W. Crowley, *op.cit.*, p.315.

6. *ibid.*, p.302.

the cotton operatives, feared that statutory regulation of hours might cause unemployment by raising costs at a time of stiffer international competition¹. Finally, face workers in Durham coalmining were already on a seven-hour day and were naturally opposed to a Parliamentary eight-hour one². However, as the 1880s progressed, support for the idea increased.

First raised formally at Congress in 1887, the idea secured official endorsement in the Congress of 1890. By that time Bradlaugh had made his position on the questions of the Eight Hour Day and statutory regulation of hours quite clear.

His best known contribution of the subject was an article published in the New Review, in July 1889, and produced shortly afterwards as a pamphlet, The Eight Hours' Movement³. In this he expressed his firm opposition to parliamentary enactment of an Eight Hour Day for adults in industry. He based his opposition on the assertion that Parliament had no business to fix the hours of adult labour, that the hours should be decided separately for each industry 'by mutual discussion and understanding between the employers and the organised employed'⁴. To prevent industries working for longer than eight hours a day would be ruinous, and to prevent men working longer would involve serious reduction of wages⁵.

At the same time, he made it clear that he supported the idea

1. *ibid.*, p.309.

2. *ibid.*, p.308.

3. C. Bradlaugh, 'The Eight Hours' Movement', in The New Review, 1, July 1889, pp. 125-139; this is given the incorrect title and dating in S. Webb & H. Cox the Eight Hours Day London 1891, p.272.

4. C. Bradlaugh, The Eight Hours' Movement (London, 1889) p.3.

5. *ibid.*, p.3.

of 'the shortening hours of labour to the lowest possible point consistent with the profitable conduct of each industry'¹. He stressed how conflicting was the opinion of Labour leaders themselves on the subject, and went on to argue that using a shorter day as a means to increase employment would not increase purchasing power, but rather merely raise up foreign competition². The solution for unemployment in the long term lay in reducing overpopulation and discovering new sources of employment³. Furthermore, recent experience of legislation to shorten hours in the United States had not found it effective⁴. He concluded by making it clear that he would oppose any attempt at legislation on the matter, hoping thereby 'to prevent any breaking down of the self-reliant spirit which puts the bulk of our population materially in advance of most European peoples'⁵.

The subject was to be the occasion of another public debate between Bradlaugh and Hyndman in London in July 1890, in St James's Hall, before an audience of 5,000 people⁶. Hyndman proposed the motion that a legally enforced maximum eight-hour day, or forty eight hours week in all enterprises conducted for profit would prove 'a valuable palliative of our present industrial anarchy', and Bradlaugh the counter-motion that it was desirable that all wage earners should work the shortest possible hours per day consistent with profit, that the limitation

1. *ibid.*, p.4.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

3. *ibid.*, p.10.

4. *ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

5. *ibid.*, p.16.

6. The Times, 24 July 1890. S. Webb & H. Cox, *op.cit.*, p.32, misdate it as taking place on 19 May 1890.

of hours to eight per day as the maximum to be worked in an industrial establishment would be fatal to many large industries, and that the settlement of hours should be arranged between employers and workers' representatives by discussion. Hyndman began by pointing out that the only difference between them on the issue was simply how the shortest possible hours could be achieved. He then went on to attack Bradlaugh's concept of the 'profitable', asserting that no industry was profitable which sapped the vitality and destroyed the intelligence of its workers. It was an anarchic situation which allowed 100,000 men to be unemployed in London while others were forced to work very long hours. The State was bound to intervene, not only on grounds of expediency but of ethics. In recommending mutual agreement between employers and employed as the means to achieve shorter hours, said Hyndman, 'Bradlaugh was for mutual arrangement between the shark and the flying fish'. It was impossible, as Bradlaugh's own promotion of truck legislation proved, for mutual agreement between the parties had failed to eliminate that particular evil and the legislature had been forced to intervene. It was equally clear, argued Hyndman, that trade unions were incapable of successfully dealing with the question of hours, the gasworkers, for example, having won an eight hour day only to lose it again¹.

Bradlaugh, as usual, began by attacking the lack of clarity in Hyndman's proposition and in his defence of it: it was not

1. The Times, 24 July 1890.

clear if Hyndman meant that no industry was to work for longer than eight hours in a single day, in which case the textile industry, for one, would be ruined. As for Hyndman's citation of his own Truck Act against him, Bradlaugh argued that it was not an interference designed to regulate the relations between employers and employed: it was designed to prevent or punish the defrauding of the worker by the employer. Turning to the issue in hand, he asked what would be 'the increased cost of production from the diminished hours of labour?'. Hyndman had said nothing on that. Bradlaugh ended by insisting that eight hours in one job could be harmful or gruelling while it could be quite harmless in another¹.

In reply to Bradlaugh, Hyndman declared that it was not his suggestion that any given industry should be limited to working eight hours but merely the individuals in it. Failing legislative interference to shorten hours, the alternative method of achieving it was the wasteful one of strikes which had no guarantee of success. Bradlaugh, in turn, insisted that Parliament 'ought not to limit the freedom of the individual except in respect of acts injurious to the life, health or property of other individuals'².

Unlike the first debate between them six years earlier, this was a noisy, often-interrupted occasion: but, like it, it was one which provided no means of assessing easily who had the better of the argument, no vote being taken. But, once again

1. *ibid.*
2. *ibid.*

the tide of opinion in Labour circles was flowing in the direction indicated by Hyndman rather than by Bradlaugh. If in 1886 when the issue first came to the fore, through the writing and work of Mann, a large body of trade union opinion as reflected in Congress was against a legal eight-hour day, by the time of the Bradlaugh-Hyndman debate in 1890, it had moved over to favour it. At the annual Congress in September 1890 a clear-cut decision in favour of it was carried for the first time¹. Favourable opinion was growing not only in Congress and the trade unions, but in the working class movement in general. Already in November 1889 the Council of the London Liberal and Radical Union had voted in favour of an eight hour day for government and municipal workers². More significant than this, just two months before the debate, Bradlaugh's former colleague in the National Secular Society, Edward Aveling, had organised a demonstration in London in favour of the movement. With an estimated 250,000 taking part, it was probably the largest demonstration ever witnessed in Britain in the nineteenth century³. Shortly after the debate, the Metropolitan Radical Federation adopted the principle of a legal eight hour day as one of its goals⁴. By the time of the debate, then, not only socialists and trade unionists, but working men of the radical clubs, precisely the kind of men who had formed the backbone of Bradlaugh's support up to the middle of the 1880s, came to take a position on the question

1. The Times, 9 Sept 1890.

2. ibid., 15 Nov 1889.

3. ibid., 5 May 1890; C. Tsuzuki, The Life of Eleanor Marx, a socialist tragedy, (Oxford, 1967) p.201.

4. The Times, 13 Oct 1890.

which was at odds with his own.

Equally, however, it was some years before this debate, or his article and pamphlet The Eight Hours Movement, that Bradlaugh had taken up his position on the general question of working hours. The clearest insight is afforded by his contribution in Parliament, which emerges in particular from his part in debates on Sir John Lubbock's attempts to get legislation on shop hours and in debates on coalmining regulation bills.

In January 1886 Lubbock had introduced a Bill to prevent the employment of children aged thirteen to eighteen for more than twelve hours per day in shops. Despite deficiencies, such as the exclusion of public houses and restaurants, and the failure to provide for inspection, the Bill engaged a general sympathy in both Houses, and received the Royal Assent in June 1886¹. Bradlaugh took no part in any of the debates on it. Two years later, however, when Lubbock got to the Second Reading stage, a more ambitious Bill, designed to limit the trading hours of shops in general, Bradlaugh put himself to the fore in opposing it. Defending this Bill, Lubbock claimed that most shopkeepers favoured it, though it was opposed by organisations like the Liberty and Property Defence League. 'What liberty and whose liberty' commented Lubbock:

Not the liberty of the shop assistants, but that of the capitalist to work his assistants fourteen or even sixteen hours a day it was almost enough to make people

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 302, H.C. 22 Jan 1886, col.186; 18 Feb, cols. 679-680; 17 June, col.1803; 18 June, col.1869; vol 307, H.C., 25 June 1886.

socialists to find an Association actually defending the power of making men and women work fourteen hours of labour a day in the name of property¹.

Rising immediately to move its rejection, the Conservative M.P. and retailer, Sir Blundell Maple, declared that 'men could take care of themselves and it was unnecessary in this country to legislate for persons who could take care of themselves'². He was supported by Bradlaugh as seconder of the amendment to reject the Bill. Bradlaugh left no doubt as to his position:

He desired to offer the strongest possible opposition to the second reading, not only on account of the principle of the Bill itself, but on account of the principle it challenged however strongly they might feel that individuals were suffering, it was not useful for Hon Members to allow their emotions to govern them too much in their legislation. This Bill proposed to interfere with grown up people under circumstances in regard to which, so far as he knew, no Act of Parliament had yet endeavoured to interfere The Hon Baronet urged that the great majority of shopkeepers desired this Bill. If that were true they could carry out their desire without the Bill The Bill was, he thought, absurd in its details and immoral in its principles³.

When the precedents of merchant shipping, mining, Irish land and even his own Truck legislation were cited against his argument by M.P.s who followed, Bradlaugh offered no reply⁴. Irish Nationalist M.P.s, like Barry of Wexford, and Labour M.P.s like Burt, were alike dismayed at the arguments, and all the more so that they came from one who had for so long been identified with working class interests⁵. In the division which followed, all the Labour representatives voted with Lubbock, Bradlaugh voted with all the leading Tories, and the Bill was defeated⁶.

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1. *ibid.*, vol 325, H.C., 2 May 1888, cols. 1098-1105.
 2. *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol 325, H.C., 2 May 1888, col.1108.
 3. *ibid.*, cols. 1128-1132.
 4. *ibid.*, col.1133.
 5. *ibid.*, cols. 1141-1154.
 6. *ibid.*, col.1172.

Likewise, during the Committee stages of the Conservative Government's Coal Mines' Regulation Bill, in the summer of 1887, Bradlaugh, while supporting Labour amendments to prevent the employment of boys aged ten to twelve, strongly opposed their attempts to stop the employment of girls aged thirteen to sixteen years, around the pits. When Atherly-Jones, M.P. for Durham N.W. and son of Ernest Jones, described the working of women in mining as too laborious and morally degrading, Bradlaugh opposing him, declared his opposition in principle:

I fear there is a strong tendency, especially among advocates of the democracy, to look to the House of Commons to redress all grievances and to make all people moral as well as taking care of where they live and what they do. I think that is the most dangerous tendency that can possibly be conceived If this Amendment and the consequent amendments on the Paper are carried, this Committee and other Committees of this House must be prepared to say that, whenever in their judgement, any kind of employment is destructive to the health of the grown individuals engaged in it, they will prevent it, without regard to the feelings of such individuals ...¹.

Once again he was placed in direct opposition to the Labour representative. Fenwick argued that Bradlaugh had not considered properly how far the doctrine of individualism was to be carried². Broadhurst declared that his arguments had come many years too late³. Even Mundella, who was to support Bradlaugh in the critical division against Lubbock's Bill in 1888, found that Bradlaugh's arguments, conceivably suitable in a debate on hours, were totally inappropriate when applied to the issue of the employment in mining of thirteen to sixteen year old girls⁴.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 316, H.C., 22 June 1887, cols. 792-4.
 2. *ibid.*, col.794.
 3. *ibid.*, col.810.
 4. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 316, H.C., 22 June 1887, col.798.

Despite Bradlaugh's attitude, the Bill was passed by both Houses and received the Royal Assent in September 1887¹.

Not only in his public verbal and written debates, and in his writings of the 1880s, such as Some Objections to Socialism, Capital and Labour, Socialism, Its Fallacies and Dangers, The Eight Hours' Movement, and Parliament and the Poor², but now in parliamentary debates and divisions Bradlaugh increasingly found himself at odds with the ideals and aims of the Labour Movement. He found himself embroiled in sharp exchanges with Labour representatives like Broadhurst, and socialist M.P.s like Cunningham-Graham³. The man whose arch-enemy had always been Toryism was observed by these to support some Tory measures, to support Tory opposition to other measures, and even to use language and arguments identical to those used by Tories like Stuart-Wortley or Blundell Maple, in support of or in opposition to various pieces of social reform legislation.

In such circumstances, charges of backsliding were to be expected, but were also unjust. It was not that Bradlaugh went back, but rather that, Labour, Liberal and Conservative alike, in general, moved forward. As a new collectivist outlook and political philosophy gained strength in an increasingly complex society, the inadequacies and inconsistencies of his own social and political philosophy became apparent, to others,

1. *ibid.*, vol 321, 9 Sept 1887, col.3.

2. C. Bradlaugh, Some Objections to Socialism (London, 1884); Capital and Labour (1st ed., London, 1886 2nd ed., 1888); Socialism: Its Fallacies and Dangers (London, 1887); The Eight Hours' Movement (London, 1889); Parliament and the Poor: What the Legislature Can Do; What It Ought to Do (London, 1889).

3. For conflict with Cunningham-Graham, see Hansard, 3rd series, vol 343, H.C., 22 Apr 1890, cols. 1153-1164, during debate on a motion concerning the relations between Capital and Labour.

if not to him. The Lib-Lab M.P., Fenwick, caught the essence of the matter when he charged Bradlaugh with being unable to define the proper limits of the doctrine of individualism. When Bradlaugh promoted compulsory cultivation of land, legislation on employers' liability and truck, and supported Irish land legislation, and at the same time opposed legislation on shop hours, eight hours, the employment of girls and women in mining, the inconsistency was obvious. He defended truck legislation on the ground that the victims could not protect themselves, but professed to believe, without being able to prove, that overworked shop assistants could. He insisted that shorter working hours in general could be achieved through discussion between employers and organised workers, yet the vast majority of workers were not organised, and those that became so during the 1880s, like the gasworkers, were unable to maintain their advances in this regard. From the time of his greatest triumph, the vindication of his right as an atheist to a seat in the House of Commons, until his death five years later, much of what he had to say became increasingly unacceptable to Labour and increasingly acceptable to the upper classes.

Bradlaugh never altered his fundamental political, social and economic beliefs, rather the beliefs of the wider society altered. Yet, this is not the whole explanation of the growing divergence between Bradlaugh and Labour. He did not alter his beliefs, but, in the 1880s for the first time in his life, he did change the emphasis of them. If he had stressed the rights of Labour in the 1860s and 1870s, then, in the 1880s, while

continuing to do so, he also came to stress the rights of Capital. This change of emphasis was partly in response to the growth of socialism and the increasingly militant spirit of Labour in general, but it was also in response to the altered economic fortunes of British industry. In 1875, for example, he had defended the miners, claiming that increased costs of production owed very little to labour and a very great deal to the demands of royalties, rents, interest and profits¹. In the 1880s this emphasis had changed: while still maintaining the rights of Labour he insisted that Capital had rights, rights to 'fair profit and reasonable insurance against loss'². In Parliament and the Poor he pointed out that legislative control of hours would result in the capitalist transferring his capital out of the country³. In his last debate with Hyndman he asserted that in North Country coalmining the reduction of hours during a 'given period' had increased costs of production by 21 per cent⁴.

Furthermore, if in the 1860s and 1870s he had stressed constantly the magnitude of the problem of misery and degradation caused by poverty, in the 1880s, without denying that poverty continued to exist, he now stressed the advances made: conditions of life were getting better, not worse, and conditions had improved because people as individuals and organised groups, not the legislature, had improved them:

1. See above p.562.

2. C. Bradlaugh, Capital and Labour (2nd ed., London, 1888)p.9.

3. C. Bradlaugh, Parliament and the Poor (1st ed., London, 1889) p.8.

4. The Times, 24 July 1890.

The improvement in this country has been marvellous. The dwellings of the great mass of workers, the education and the general tone of the people, are, as compared with the time when I was a lad, something of which every inhabitant of this Kingdom may be proud¹.

This was in contrast to his belief, expressed in 1869, of 'the large mass of the poor, growing poorer, and a small knot of the rich, growing richer'². Bradlaugh was indeed an opponent of excessive state interference, and if this makes him an individualist he was not an extreme or doctrinaire one. Extreme individualists like Herbert Spencer or Baron Bramwell, and indeed, many parliamentary Radicals, Liberals or Conservatives, could not be found in the late nineteenth century explicitly to advocate trade unionism, to urge that employers should actually welcome strong trade unions, seriously to recommend workers' co-operative production, or most striking of all, to explicitly advocate the right of workers to see the detailed accounts of employers' transactions and profits. All of these things Bradlaugh did advocate³. His promotion of truck and employers' liability legislation represented an admission on his part that individualism was not enough, that state compulsion could in certain cases be necessary, but he remained reluctant to extend the area where compulsory legislation should operate. This reluctance left him open to charges of inconsistency, and it was this reluctance, rather than an aggressive or doctrinaire individualism that lost him the ear of Labour and earned him the enmity of socialists.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vol 343, H.C., 22 Apr 1890, col.1163.

2. N.R., 9 May 1869.

3. Northampton Mercury, 9 Jan 1886.

Ironically, in at least one key area, subsequent history followed the line of his arguments rather than those of Labour in the late 1880s. On restriction of working hours, Labour insisted on its being realised by legislation, Bradlaugh by negotiation. The eight hour day became a fact, but not a law. Yet, this is not the critical point in assessing Bradlaugh's contribution to the history of Labour. The critical point is that the 1880s witnessed a growing divergence^{between} Bradlaugh's and Labour's ideas of the appropriate means to a secure, happy and prosperous society. Although not even his harshest socialist and labour critics could deny his considerable contribution to freedom and political democracy in Britain, they could and did deny, with growing effectiveness the adequacy of his analysis and the relevance of his prescriptions for the problems of the mass of the people in the later nineteenth century.

CHAPTER TEN : CONCLUSION

Charles Bradlaugh died on 30 January 1891 at the age of fifty seven. The many thousands who followed his remains to Brookwood Cemetery on 3 February bore silent witness to the passing of one who had made a not inconsiderable mark on his time.

His parliamentary successes were not all that many: but, regarded on their own merits and at the same time against the background of hostility against their promoter, they were impressive. In February 1886 he pressed successfully for the setting up of a Bureau of Labour Statistics¹. It was due directly to his persistence that a Select Committee was appointed to inquire into the system of 'perpetual pensions' in 1886, and again in 1887². Likewise his persistence led to the setting up of the Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls in 1887³. In the same year he succeeded in securing a significant extension of the law relating to truck. In the following year he at last secured the enactment of his Affirmation Bill, giving to Free-thinkers the same legal rights as enjoyed by religious believers⁴.

He experienced as many failures: failure to secure a Royal Commission on Indian grievances, to achieve a repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, to secure legislation on the compulsory cultivation of land and on employers' liability. In no case,

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1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.39.
 2. *ibid.*, ii.368, 374; D. Tribe, op.cit., pp. 254, 261.
 3. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.377; D. Tribe, op.cit., p.262.
 4. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., ii.392.

however, were the failures due to want of energy or endeavour on his part. In successes and failures alike, his huge energy and industry won him the respect of former bitter enemies.

His achievement and significance will not be justly measured by reference to the record of a few short years in parliament. Twenty five years of public life before his election in 1880 provide a more impressive record of attainment. Bradlaugh was the first to succeed in uniting atheists into a national organisation. He was, with Besant, the first to succeed in compelling a full and fair discussion of birth control as a remedy for poverty. By defiance of government he added materially to the growing freedoms of his age: by successfully resisting the attempts of successive governments under Disraeli and Gladstone to prosecute and suppress his National Reformer newspaper¹; by persuading the Reform League Executive to defy the Home Office ban on the famous Hyde Park demonstration, to mention but two examples.

More than anything else, it was his physical and moral courage, eloquence and energy in organising resistance to oppressive, exclusive and arbitrary government that brought him popularity and influence in the world of radical working men in Victorian Britain. The diaries, biographies and autobiographies of working men and their leaders testify to the extraordinary impact Bradlaugh made on his age and on their political consciousness.

1. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, op.cit., i.137-151.

Of all the public figures encountered by Robert Applegarth in his long life the first to make an impression on him was Bradlaugh, to whose skill as a public speaker and debater he paid generous tribute¹. Despite the different positions taken by Bradlaugh and Applegarth on the International at the time of the Paris Commune, the latter harboured no lasting resentment and recalled with admiration Bradlaugh's stout-hearted opposition to Disraeli's foreign policy in the later 1870s². What crowned Bradlaugh's memory in Applegarth's eyes was the simple fact that 'after a life of hard work, he died poor'³.

Joseph Arch, who crossed swords with Bradlaugh in the 1870s, remembered him as 'a fine statesman' who had given his support to the rural labourers⁴. The working class labour agitator, Harry Snell, first heard Bradlaugh speak in 1881. The occasion left a lasting impression:

I have never been so influenced by a human personality as I was by Charles Bradlaugh as man, as orator, as leader of unpopular causes and as an incorruptible public figure he was the most imposing human being that I have ever known⁵.

Lesser-known figures, by virtue of their relative obscurity, provide more striking evidence. The diary of the Northamptonshire poacher, James Hawker, clearly conveys to posterity the impact of Bradlaugh and suggests the reason for it:

He was the greatest, most fearless of Democrats that I ever knew. I never left that man - politically - till death parted us. I was in all his struggles. When they

1. R. Applegarth, 'People I Have Known', unpublished typescript of paper read at the Hotspur Club, 12 March 1898, copy in Bishops-gate Institute, p.12.

2. *ibid.*, p.12.

3. *ibid.*, p.13.

4. J. Arch, The Story of His Life, told by himself (London, 1898) p.123.

5. H. Snell, Men, Movements and Myself (London, 1938) pp. 30-31.

kicked him out of Parliament I helped to put him back ... Bradlaugh was a man without an equal¹.

For Hawker, and thousands like him, Bradlaugh was the outsider who triumphed over privilege: his hostility to the establishment was their hostility, his ultimate victory, in the teeth of bitter opposition, was their victory. Where Northamptonshire provided a poacher to testify to Bradlaugh's significance, Oxfordshire provided a chimney-sweep, William Hanes, to do likewise². But, more than that, Hanes provides an important example of the limitation of Bradlaugh's influence and significance: Hanes' was a follower of Bradlaugh until the revival of socialism in the 1880s led him to abandon radicalism for socialism. What was true of Hanes in Oxfordshire, applied equally to Tom Mann and others in London³.

Hostility to arbitrary authority, in State, Church, or society in general, was the mainspring of Bradlaugh's radicalism. The radicalism of Bradlaugh was by the 1880s the radicalism of an older generation. Essentially it was one which saw freedom as an ideal to be achieved by removing restrictions, destroying prejudices and resisting encroachments by the State. He spelt out this version of radicalism clearly and frequently enough in the 1880s to leave no doubt as to his position. In its best known form he sketched it in the pages of his National Reformer in a series of articles in April and May of 1885, published soon after as a tract entitled The Radical Programme⁴.

1. G. Christian, ed., A Victorian Poacher: James Hawker's Journal (London, 1961) p.23.

2. J. Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism, 1884-1924 (London, 1926), p.93.

3. T. Mann, Tom Mann's Memoirs (London, 1923) p.27.

4. C. Bradlaugh, The Radical Programme (1st ed., London, 1885; 2nd ed., 1889).

As he understood it, radicalism entailed equality before the law, equality of opportunity and equality in political representation, all leading to a society where the poorest could, by hard work and ability, rise to the highest positions in the State, as was the case, he argued, in America. Radicalism aimed for a polity where ability, not status or privilege, was the sole qualification for office. The Radical Programme called for universal suffrage, shorter parliaments, redistribution of seats, payment of M.P.s, abolition of the House of Lords as a hereditary legislative chamber, reform of the land laws, complete religious equality, a limitation of expenditure, a reduction of taxation, an open diplomacy and a foreign policy of peace¹. He saw the duty of radicalism as being to check the tendency to look to the State to provide food and work for the people. This body of proposals, repeating what he had said many times before, as for example at Kettering in October 1883², and what he was to say many times again before his death, as at Birmingham in September 1887³, represented substantially a fusion of the aims of Chartism on the one hand and of the aims of Cobden, Bright and company on the other: in brief, it was a programme of political democracy coupled with peace, retrenchment and reform: in fact, it was the stock in trade of popular radicalism of the previous forty years.

When he first stood for parliament in 1868 Bradlaugh, as Radical, regarded the aristocracy as the great enemy of progress,

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1. C. Bradlaugh, The Radical Programme, pp. 3-13.
 2. Northampton Mercury, 20 Oct 1883.
 3. N.R., 2 Oct 1887.

the cause of class conflict and the exponent of class politics. In The Radical Programme, in 1885, and again at Birmingham in 1887, he still saw the political situation in this light. Politics was still about the struggle between 'the classes and the masses', 'or, in other words, the people and the aristocracy', 'on the one side the party of the representation of labour, manufacture and commerce, and on the other, of the land, privilege and inherited property'¹. The ideas and rhetoric of this radicalism, like that of John Bright and Richard Cobden from the 1840s, were becoming increasingly inadequate, inaccurate and irrelevant in Bradlaugh's later years: the 'party of the representation of labour' could no longer be so comfortably coupled with that of 'manufacture and commerce', while at the same time, the people of manufacture and commerce were increasingly coming to see eye to eye with the people of privilege and landed property.

The content and rhetoric of Bradlaugh's political philosophy was not only in sharp contrast to that of the socialists in the 1880s, but also to that of a younger generation of radicals who were every bit as opposed to socialism as he was, and whose radicalism was represented by Joseph Chamberlain, T.H. Escott and Jesse Collings and expressed in their own Radical Programme in 1885².

Superficially, their Radical Programme is similar in content and form to his own. The hostility to the aristocracy, the failure to contemplate any antagonism between the middle and

1. N.R., 2 Oct 1887.

2. D.A. Hamer, ed., Joseph Chamberlain & Others, The Radical Programme (London, 1971).

working classes, the subsuming of both classes into the convenient phrase 'the people', and among various specific proposals the insistence on the need for the breakup of the great estates, are common to both. But closer reading reveals differences of a profound nature between the radicalism of Bradlaugh and that of the Chamberlainites. These differences centre on two areas in particular, the land, and taxation.

On the land question, neither in this work nor in any other, did Bradlaugh ever reconcile the contradictions inherent in his wish to promote free trade in land on the one hand and a system of peasant proprietorship on the other. He failed to contemplate a massive programme of state financial aid to achieve a system of peasant proprietorship, such as government considered and soon after implemented in Ireland: and failing this, he had no specific proposals to bring about such a system. But the compilers of the Chamberlainite Radical Programme made quite clear the inadequacies and dangers of the doctrine of free trade in land and made equally clear their view of the essential role of the State in providing the legal and financial support necessary to the multiplication of small landowners¹.

It is, however, on the question of taxation, that the difference in their versions of radicalism is most starkly evident. A graduated tax on landed estates was as far as Bradlaugh ventured in his scheme of radicalism. The Chamberlain group proposed a graduated tax on income in general. As Hamer points

1. J. Chamberlain & Others, op.cit., pp. 53-54, 225, 228.

out¹, the implications of this are of great significance. Such a proposal threw out the Gladstonian principle of equity of taxation, the Gladstonian fiscal ambition of reducing income tax to the point of abolition, and replaced them with a vision of a State with a greatly increased income available for social purposes. In doing this, the Chamberlainite proposal departed from the long radical tradition of suspicion of the State. In the Chamberlainite radical scheme, retrenchment of government expenditure and reduction of taxation were 'dethroned' from the first place they had occupied in the mid-Victorian radicalism of Cobden, and liberalism of Gladstone. There is the clearest evidence of the relative moderation of Bradlaugh's radicalism by the 1880s, that he shared with Gladstone a deep-rooted antipathy to this cardinal feature of the Chamberlainite Radical Programme - the ideal of 'social politics', the notion of 'construction', or, as Morley put it in his Life of Gladstone, 'taking into the hands of the State the business of the individual man'².

The difference between the radicalism of Bradlaugh and that of the Chamberlainites was profoundly one of different generations. Growing up when the trials and triumphs of Carlile, Watson and Hetherington were still fresh memories, Bradlaugh's fear of the State was entirely understandable. Such freedom as the men of his youth enjoyed had been wrested from an oligarchic State by defiance and agitation. It was precisely his own

1. D.A. Hamer, ed., op.cit., p.xxvii.

2. J. Morley, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone (2 vols. London, 1905) ii.413, cited in D.A. Hamer, op.cit., p.xxxiii.

crusading zeal in defiance of oppression and prejudice that made him so popular among working class radicals from the 1860s to the 1880s. But, in the 1880s, his persistent emphasis on the coercive potential of the State and his failure to consider its potential for creating welfare and actually enhancing freedom, especially against the background of a growth towards a mass electorate, made his radicalism outmoded. He passed away, therefore, an object of admiring remembrance rather than a subject of abiding influence.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : Biographical Notes

Adams, J.P.

Born in Norwich, a member of the Norwich Committee of the Anti-Corn-Law League; was an active Freethinker in London by 1850 where he was a prominent outdoor propagandist in charge of the 'Victoria Park Mission'; a founder-member and first secretary of the London Secular Society; he regarded the Knowlton pamphlet as a coarse publication and defended the stand taken by Watts on the issue; he also differed from Bradlaugh on the Republican Movement of the 1870's, believing that those involved made themselves a 'laughing-stock'; was a founder-member of the B.S.U. Dates unknown. (Reasoner, 3 Apr 1850, 18 May 1853, 13 July 1850, The Republican Chronicle, No.2, May 1872, and National Reformer, passim.)

Balmforth, Owen

Founder-member and first secretary of the Huddersfield Republican Club, opened on 16 April 1873; a corresponding member of the Council of the N.S.S. for Huddersfield, from June 1875; one of the secularists who were disturbed at the manner in which Bradlaugh had resumed the presidency in 1874; as secretary of the Huddersfield S.S. in 1877, turned against Bradlaugh when the latter, through Forder, refused to allow a lecturer

of the N.S.S. to lecture to the independent society of which Balmforth was secretary; the result was the loss of the Huddersfield S.S. to the B.S.U. (S.C., May 1873, S.R.&S., 26 Jan 1878, S.R., 13 July 1878, 7 Aug 1880, N.R., 13 June 1875).

Baker, Daniel

Joined the N.S.S. in January 1868 as a member of the Birmingham S.S.; accepted a vice-presidency in December 1870; was still a v-p. and an active member in June 1890; his commitment to it did not prevent his attendance at the annual conference of the B.S.U.; he was a major figure in the resurgence of Midlands organised secularism after 1891, making Baskerville Hall, Birmingham, available to Charles Watts, together with a donation of £100, to aid in re-organisation in the area. (S.R., 6 Aug 1881, N.R., 5 Jan 1868, 11 Dec 1870, 1 June 1890, 24 Jan 1892.)

Barker, Ambrose

Born in Earls Barton, Northants., in 1860, his father a staunch Bradlaughite, co-operator and Chartist; came to London in 1878 as a school-master, joined the Stratford secularists shortly after this, but became disillusioned with Bradlaugh in 1880; always an anti-parliamentarian, he claimed to be the first English Anarchist, and was certainly one of the first to openly proclaim himself an Anarchist; made a sustained attack on Bradlaugh's record

on Irish coercion in Frank Soutter's journal, The Radical, in 1881; he joined the S.D.F. and then left it to join the Socialist League; he was a regular contributor to Foote's Freethinker until his death in 1942. (The Radical, 19 Feb 1881, 26 Feb 1881, and S. Shipley, loc. cit., passim.)

Barker, James

First appears in the secularist ranks, as assistant-librarian to the Nottingham S.S. in January 1870; in the 1870's was an indefatigable lecturer and organiser in the Midlands, directly responsible for the foundation of the Derby S.S.; was secretary of the Huddersfield S.S. by 1873 and of the Y.S.L.C. by 1874. Dates unknown. (N.R., 9 Jan 1870, 14 Dec 1873, 6 Sept 1874.)

Bates, John

Northampton bookseller and secularist, active from 1849 until at least 1880. (Reasoner, 19 Dec 1849, 11 Feb 1855, 19 Apr 1857, 9 Sept 1860, N.R., 13 Feb 1864, 9 May 1880.)

Burns, Ernest

Birmingham secularist, first appears active in November 1863 as assistant-secretary of the Birmingham S.S., and was secretary by February 1865, and thereafter for over a decade; was another of the Midlands secularists tending to oppose Bradlaugh; in Burns case this was in regard to the Berwick Legacy; does not appear to have been involved in the schism of 1877

and may have left the movement by that time.
 Dates unknown. (N.R., 7 Nov 1863, 12 Feb 1865,
S.C., 29 Nov 1874, 20 Dec 1874, 10 Jan 1875.)

Broadbent, J.E.

Secretary of the Oldham S.S. from January
 1873 to June 1880 at least; was that society's
 delegate to the first conference of the B.S.U.
 at Bradford in 1878. (N.R., 5 Jan 1873,
 13 June 1880, S.C., 27 Apr 1878.)

Cattell, C.C.

(1830-1910) was secretary of a re-organised
 Birmingham S.S. from November 1861 until 1865;
 a frequent contributor to the N.R., on the
 Land Question, Secularism and Republicanism;
 first secretary of the Midland Secular Union
 in 1869, and president of the Birmingham
 Republican Club in 1871; claimed himself to
 be the initiator of the Republican Movement
 of the early 1870's, but that he abandoned it
 when he saw it being taken over by 'continental'
 extremists; though regarding the Knowlton
 pamphlet as perfectly defensible, he was
 estranged from Bradlaugh by the latter's
 conduct towards Watts, and became a leading
 figure in the B.S.U. By the mid-1880's he
 was no longer active in the movement. (N.R.,
 23 Nov 1861, 11 Apr 1869, The Republican,
 No.13, 15 June 1871, The Republican, No.11,
 Feb 1881, J. Mc Cabe, A Biographical Dictionary
 of Modern Rationalists, (London, 1920), p.151.)

Child, John

A leading West Riding secularist in the 1860's; was secretary of the Leeds S.S. from February 1861 at the least, and resigned this position in January 1863 to make way for a younger man; was prominent in attempts at provincial organisation in 1863, had been the main figure behind the revived Yorkshire Secular Association. (N.R., 31 Jan 1863, 8 Aug 1863, 29 Aug 1863, 21 Nov 1863, The Reasoner, 17 Feb 1861.)

Cooper, Robert

(1819-1868) disciple of Carlile, and admirer of Robert Owen, was one of the leading militant London secularists throughout the 1850's; a constant opponent of Holyoake, he founded the London Investigator in 1854; frequently urged the need for a national organisation in the 1850's; was a founder of the Reform Union in 1864. (Royle, op.cit., p.309.)

Cooper, R.A.

Norwich secularist, prominent in the 1870's; first appears as delegate of the Norwich Free-thought Society to the N.S.S. Conference of 1870, in London; on the resignation of Bradlaugh, Austin Holyoake and Watts from the Executive in 1871, Cooper became treasurer of the N.S.S.; was a vice-president by 1878; during the Bradlaugh-Watts quarrel he became arbitrator, but could not prevent Bradlaugh from settling his differences and taking Watts

to court; after this Cooper appears to have dropped out of the N.S.S., but he attended the 4th and 5th annual conferences of the B.S.U. in 1881 and 1882. (N.R., 2 Oct 1870, 1 Oct 1871, 16 June 1878, S.R.&S., 14 July 1877, S.R., 6 Aug 1881, 12 Aug 1882.)

Croft, W.R.

Leading Yorkshire secularist of the early 1860's, an advocate of national organisation; as a committee member of the Y.S.A. was prominent in the attempts to amalgamate the Y.S.A. and the L.S.U. in 1863; thereafter he appears to have dropped out of the movement. (N.R., 14 Sept 1861, 7 Nov 1863, 21 Nov 1863.)

Crowther, John W.

Yorkshire secularist of the late 1860's and early 1870's; the leading figure in the re-organisation of the Halifax S.S. in 1866; was one of the original members of the N.S.S. in the same year and was Halifax's delegate to the first N.S.S. Conference in 1867; he was still acting as secretary of the Halifax S.S. in 1870. (N.R., 28 Oct 1866, 1 Dec 1867, 6 Feb 1870.)

Coulter, Hugh

A member of the Council of the N.S.S. from its inception in 1866, was Swinton delegate to its first annual conference in 1867, and Chesterfield delegate to the 3rd annual conference of the B.S.U. in August 1880. (N.R., 25 Nov 1866, 1 Dec 1867, S.R., 7 Aug 1880.)

Dodworth, James

Leading Sheffield secularist of the 1850's and early 1860's; best known for his role in the foundation of the National Reformer of which he was a director. As president of the Sheffield S.S. he invited Joseph Barker to become an editor along with Bradlaugh, in 1860; in the previous year he had contributed generously to the fund for the elimination of Bradlaugh's printing debts, but he broke with Bradlaugh in the quarrel which ultimately led to the latter's control of the paper; after this he is heard of no more in active secularism. (The Reasoner, 11 Dec 1859, 4 Mar 1860, The Reasoner Gazette, 12 Feb 1860, 11 Mar 1860, N.R., 13 Oct 1860, J. Dodworth, An Account of the Proceedings At The Shareholders Meeting of the National Reformer Co., Held at Sheffield, 23 March 1862: Giving a true version of the Way in which the Editor was re-elected, Sheffield 1862.)

Evans, Thomas

President of the Birmingham Secular Club & Institute in 1873; he was the originator of the idea of a Midland secularist journal, suggesting the idea to George Reddalls who then brought out the Secular Chronicle; upon Reddalls' death in late 1875, Evans became its temporary editor until it was taken over by Harriet Law; Evans was Birmingham delegate to the 2nd annual conference of the B.S.U. in April 1879. (N.R., 2 Nov 1873, S.C., 10 Oct 1875, 21 Nov 1875, S.R., 19 Apr 1879.)

Field, Francis

One of the longest-active secularists; was Heckmondwike delegate to the conference in 1852 which led to the foundation of the West Riding Secular Association; eleven years later was Dewsbury delegate to the conference at Huddersfield which met to effect the amalgamation of the Y.S.A. & L.S.U.; unlike his Dewsbury colleague, Thomas Bentley, he was an opponent of the N.S.S., and attempted to institute a rival organisation in 1867; but he must shortly after have joined the N.S.S., for at its 2nd annual conference in 1868 he attended, opposing Bradlaugh's re-election to the the presidency; in 1878 he represented Oldham at the 1st annual conference of the B.S.U., and acted in the same capacity in August 1880.

(The Reasoner, 21 July 1852, N.R., 21 Nov 1863, 17 Nov 1867, 20 Dec 1868, S.R., 27 Apr 1878, 7 Aug 1880.)

Firth, Joseph

Like Field, one of the longer-active secularists; also attended the founding conference of the W.R.S.A. in 1852, as delegate from Keighley; was also its delegate to the first national conference of secularists at Manchester in October of the same year; prominent at the first Halifax Convention of 1860 which attempted to launch a national organisation; attempted to revive the W.R.S.A. in 1861, and supported Bradlaugh's organisation of the N.S.S. in 1866; was delegate for Keighley at

its 1st conference in 1867; appears to have dropped from the movement sometime after this. (The Reasoner, 20 Oct 1852, 21 Oct 1860, N.R., 14 Dec 1861, 19 Aug 1866, 1 Dec 1867.)

Forder, Robert

Joined a secular society in the Greenwich area sometime in the early 1860's, was assistant-secretary of the Greenwich & Deptford S.S. in 1863, at the age of nineteen. The son of a Yarmouth labourer, he began work at the age of eight, and came to London in 1860 where he found work with a marine engineer at Deptford. Like Bradlaugh, he began his career speaking against secularists, and soon became one of their number. When he moved to Woolwich where he worked in the Arsenal, he became prominent in local radical circles; was Woolwich delegate to the Council of the Reform League; was secretary of an aid-committee for the agricultural labourers in 1874 during the lock-out; in 1876 he was active in the movement to save Plumstead Common from enclosers and as a result was sent to trial at Maidstone Assizes charged with 'riotous proceedings', in company with John de Morgan. Forder was acquitted.

He had become corresponding member of the Council of the N.S.S. for Woolwich in August 1874, and three years later was appointed first paid secretary of the N.S.S. Three years later he became secretary of Bradlaugh's Land Law Reform League. Ill-health forced his resignation from the N.S.S. in 1890. (N.R., 3 Oct 1863, 28 Sept 1890, The Republican, Feb 1886.)

Fraser, D.K.

Secretary of the Cleveland Metropolitan Institute in October 1865, was elected secretary of the N.S.S. in 1871, but by February 1873 was in some desperation at its ineffectiveness; Watts took over from him sometime between February 1873 and 1875, and Fraser no longer appears as an active secularist. (N.R., 1 Oct 1865, 14 Jan 1866, 16 Feb 1873, S.C., 13 June 1875, 4 July 1875.)

- Frow, A.W. Nothing is known of Frow beyond the fact that he was secretary of the United Secularists Propagandist Society in the early 1870's. (S.C., Nov 1873, July 1874.)
- Garbutt, Thomas Sheffield secularist, first became prominent in the Republican Movement in the early 1870's, as first secretary of the Sheffield Republican Club; delegate to the Republican Conference of December 1872 and by March 1873 was a committee member of the National Republican Brotherhood which Bradlaugh had denounced as 'a treasonable conspiracy'. He was Sheffield delegate to the 3rd annual conference of the B.S.U. in August 1880, and was an owner of Turkish Baths in Sheffield in the early 1880's. (The Republican, No 12, 1 June 1871, The International Herald, No 37, 14 Dec 1872, No 50, 15 Mar 1873, No 58, 10 May 1873, S.R., 7 Aug 1880, 20 May 1882.)
- Gimson, Josiah (1818-1883) Prominent Leicester secularist and businessman in engineering; was a leading figure in the formation of the B.S.U. in 1877-8; upon his death in 1883 he left £100 a year for ten years to the Leicester S.S. (S.C., 27 May 1877, S.R., 27 Apr 1878, 19 Apr 1879, N.R., 6 Jan 1884.)
- Gordon, John H. A militant Leeds secularist for a short time in the late 1850's and early 1860's, whose methods of propaganda incurred the wrath of

Holyoake in 1861; wrote for the National Reformer under the pseudonym 'B.B.B.'; was reconverted to Christianity in 1862. (The Reasoner Gazette, 29 July 1860, The Reasoner, 10 Feb 1861, 17 Feb 1861, N.R., 1 Sept 1860, 3 Aug 1861, The Propagandist, 2 Aug 1862.)

Hirzel, Rudi

A Swiss Freethinker who had joined the Leeds S.S. in the early 1860's, played a leading role in the Huddersfield Conference of April 1862, convened to consider the policy to be adopted towards the prevailing disputes among the secularist leadership; he resigned the secretaryship of the Leeds S.S. in June 1862, and went to London to work at the International Exhibition, after which he is heard of no more. (The Secular World, 17 May 1862, 5 July 1862.)

Hooper, Abraham

Best-known as the father-in-law of Bradlaugh, he was a radical and secularist in his own right; he died in 1891 at the age of eighty-six. (N.R., 28 June 1891.)

Hooper, James

Delegate of Nottingham secularists to the N.S.S. Conference of 1871, he was also secretary of the left-wing Nottingham Republican Club in the same year; made a furious attack upon Bradlaugh in February 1877 in the course of the Bradlaugh-Watts quarrel, but does not appear to have been active in the B.S.U. (N.R., 1 Oct 1871,

The Republican, No 11, 15 May 1871, S.C.,
11 Feb 1877.)

Jagger, John

A Rochdale secularist, prominent for a short time in the late 1850's and early 1860's; one of the speakers at the Halifax Convention of 1860 on the theme of national organisation; Holyoake brought him to London in 1861 with the intention of employing him on his projected Secular World, and then arranged with Bradlaugh to have him elected secretary of the short-lived National Secular Association; but is heard of no more after the failure of that body in March 1862. (The Reasoner, 21 Oct 1860, N.R., 1 Sept 1860, 13 Oct 1860, 23 Nov 1861, 4 Jan 1862, 11 Jan 1862, 29 Mar 1862.)

Johnson, W.H.

Prominent West Riding secularist in the mid-1850's, a militant disciple of Robert Cooper, took over the editorship of the London Investigator, and under the pseudonym 'Anthony Collins' produced a series of Half Hours With the Freethinkers to which Bradlaugh contributed.

Jones, Sidney

Cardiff secularist of the early 1870's, was district secretary of the West of England & South Wales Secular Union. (N.R., 15 Sept 1872.)

Jones, Stanley

A Liverpool secularist who succeeded Forder as secretary of the N.S.S. in May 1891; at the annual conference of the next year Foote introduced a resolution calling for an honorary secretaryship, and Jones, who had left his job to become secretary, found himself without work, despite attempts by opponents of the resolution to give him notice of six months; in June 1892 he presided over the first annual general meeting of the Lancashire & Yorkshire Secular Federation. (N.R., 12 June 1892, 17 May 1891.)

Judge, John

Nottingham secularist prominent in the 1870's mainly as a republican; delegate of the Stroud Republican Club to the 2nd annual conference of the National Republican Brotherhood in September 1872; corresponding secretary of the Nottingham S.S. in January 1873, and Leeds delegate to the 1st annual conference of the B.S.U. in 1878. (N.R., 19 Jan 1873, The International Herald, No.27, 27 Sept 1872, S.R., 27 Apr 1878.)

Law, Harriet

(1832-1897) The foremost female secularist lecturer until the advent of Annie Besant in 1874; an ex-Baptist, she was converted by the lectures of Charles Watts, but ever remained an independent member of the movement, repeatedly refusing Bradlaugh's offers of a vice-presidency in the N.S.S.; Cleveland Hall,

London, erected as a Freethought Institute in 1865 and which fell into the hands of 'Spiritualists' within the year, was retrieved by Harriet Law in 1866 and for three years she made it self-supporting; she lost it in 1869 owing to the expiry of the lease, but regained control once more in 1876; in June 1872 she was a member of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, along with fellow-secularist John Weston; on the death of Reddalls she took over the Secular Chronicle which she ran till 1879; though professing to be neutral in the Bradlaugh-Watts quarrel of 1877, she was a major figure in the foundation of the B.S.U.; by the end of the 1870's she was no longer very active as a touring lecturer. (S.C., 27 Aug 1876, International Herald, No.9, 1 June 1872, S.R., 27 Apr 1878, G.H. Taylor, op.cit., pp. 11, 20.)

Lemmon, Capt.
Thomas

President of the Stratford Radical & Dialectical Club in 1881, he was born in 1843 and spent the early part of his life in the merchant navy; by 1874 was practising as a pawn-broker in Leyton; a staunch Atheist, he married a Christian wife in 1877 and in 1878 she joined the N.S.S.; with Barker and George Most he abandoned the N.S.S. in 1880; a financial

speculator, Freemason and 'Fair Trader', he became a member of the S.D.F.; a visit to Germany in autumn 1884 impressed him with that country's social welfare schemes; in 1885 he was involved in attempts to organise the seamen with Havelock Wilson.

(S. Shipley, loc.cit.)

- Maughan, John For details see p.184, footnote 1, infra.
Apart from the facts given there, nothing is known of Maughan, beyond the fact of his death on 9 July 1875, unremembered and unlamented. (S.C., 18 July 1875.)
- Mayer, H.V. First appears in January 1860 as a contributor to the fund for the defraying of Bradlaugh's printing debts; was reared in the Church of England, in a small country town of Staffordshire; left school at the age of twelve and for three years served an apprenticeship to 'a semi-literate master'; at the age of twenty he read Holyoake's Reasoner, and then Barker's The People (1848); Paine's Age of Reason was the final determining influence in his road to Freethought; he emerged as a leading Midlands organiser in the early 1870's responsible for the foundation of the South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire Secular Union in April 1871; was a founder member of the B.S.U.; but was no longer active after 1880. (The Reasoner, 1 Jan 1860, N.R., 9 Apr 1872, 15 June 1873, S.R. & S., 15 Sept 1877, S.R., 27 Apr 1878, 30 July 1887.)
- Mitchell, William Prominent West Riding secularist of the mid-1850's; founder of the short-lived Yorkshire Tribune (1855); born in Halifax in 1829 or 1830, he was a Unitarian minister, successively, at Hinckley, Leicester, Glasgow, Accrington,

and Longsight; contributed to The Inquirer, Truthseeker, and The Coming Day; a committee member of the W.R.S.U. in 1856, represented Bradford at the Halifax Convention of October 1860, and though not dying until 1897, appears to have dropped out of the secularist movement after 1860. (The Reasoner, 3 Aug 1856, 21 Oct 1860, F. Boase, Modern English Biography, Containing Many Thousand Concise Memoirs of Persons Who Have Died During the Years 1851-1900, 3 vols & 3 supplements, Truro, 1890-1921, vol.vi, supplement to vol. iii, p.221.)

Mc Sweeney, Miles (1814-1881), born in Enniskillen, came to Britain as a saddler on the tramp, travelling all over England and Scotland; on hearing Robert Taylor speak at the Rotunda in 1830 he became an ardent Freethinker; he settled in London as a book-seller around 1850, where he was a well-known exponent of the 'myth theory' concerning Christ; took part in the conference of London Freethinkers in March 1870 aimed at co-ordinating the propaganda of metropolitan secularists; never appears to have been a member of the N.S.S. (N.R., 27 Mar 1870, 13 Feb 1881.)

Meir, Samuel (1813-1880) prominent Northern secularist of the 1870's, was secretary of the first society in Middlesboro, from January 1875; four years later was Middlesboro delegate to the N.S.S.

Conference at Newcastle; was president of the short-lived North Yorkshire & South Durham Secular Association in 1876. (N.R., 6 June 1875, 7 Jan 1877, 8 June 1879, 25 Apr 1880.)

Moss, Arthur B.

(1855-1937) born at Horsleydown, London Bridge, son of a wharf-manager, received a grammar-school education, and became a reporter and dramatic critic for a South London newspaper; attending Leone Levi's lectures on Political Economy at King's College he became steeped in the works of J.S. Mill; became a Freethinker in the early 1870's, giving his first lecture around 1875-6; was a founder member of the B.S.U., but returned to the N.S.S. in 1884; engaged in extensive lecture tours in the North in 1889 and 1890, and became a vice-president of the N.S.S. in the latter year; between 1883 and 1934 was a frequent contributor to Foote's Freethinker. (N.R., 11 Aug 1889, 17 Aug 1890, 1 June 1890, S.R. & S., 20 Oct 1877, S.R., 5 Jan 1878, The Radical, Mar 1889, G.H. Taylor, op.cit., p.30.)

Most, George

Once a member of Bismarck's Reichstag, sought political asylum in England where he produced his paper Freiheit; applauding the assassination of Alexander of Russia, in this journal, he was arrested and tried, and gained much support from London radicals; with Ambrose Barker and Lemmon, he was a member of the Stratford Radical &

Dialectical Club, and with them, led the secession from the N.S.S. in 1880. (S. Shipley, loc.cit.)

Neale, Francis

A West Midlands secularist, prominent in 1870's, he was a journalist and honorary secretary of the Birmingham Press Club; gave his first public lecture in the Birmingham Secular Club & Institute in May 1873; appointed corresponding member of the Council of the N.S.S. for the Burslem district in August 1875; though he felt the criticisms of Reddalls concerning the closed nature of the N.S.S. Conference of 1875 to have been unjustified, he was alienated from the N.S.S. by the treatment of Watts over his stand on the Knowlton pamphlet; he attacked Besant for claiming that the N.S.S. had endorsed the pamphlet, and welcomed the establishment of the B.S.U. as affording an organisation 'for Secular principles, pure, simple and undefiled'; he was a signatory of the B.S.U.'s original programme and constitution; he was Birmingham delegate to its 2nd annual conference in April 1879, but is heard of no more after 1883. (N.R., 15 Aug 1875, S.C., May 1873, 25 Apr 1875, S.R. & S., 7, 14 July 1877, 25 Aug, 15 Sept 1877, S.R., 19 Apr 1879, 30 July 1887.)

- North, Abraham (1809-1878) member of the Huddersfield S.S., active in the Anti-Corn-Law League, the Ten Hours Movement and in Chartism, in which he was 'a great supporter of Feargus O'Connor'; later became an active worker for the Conservative Party in local elections; supported the stand taken by Bradlaugh and Besant on the Knowlton pamphlet. (N.R., 15 Dec 1878.)
- Oates, Thomas Saville Secretary of the W.R.S.U. in August 1856, secretary of the Lancashire Secular Union in 1863, represented Rochdale at the Huddersfield Conference of November 1863 between the Y.S.A. and the L.S.U.; he was secretary of the Rochdale S.S. in 1864, and still secretary of the L.S.U. in 1871. (Reasoner, 3 Aug 1856, N.R., 15 Aug 1863, 21 Nov 1863, 29 Oct 1864, 22 Oct 1871.)
- Olive Jeremiah President of the W.R.S.U. in 1856, was secretary of the organising committee of the Halifax Convention of October 1860, and was the collector in the Halifax area of subscriptions for the relief of Bradlaugh's debts in 1859. (Reasoner, 13 Nov 1859, 3 Aug 1856, 7 Oct 1860.)
- Pratt, William Once active member of the London Secularists' Propagandist Society, removed to Walsall; was one of the Midlands group who complained of the failure of the N.S.S. in the early 1870's. (S.C., Oct 1873, Oct 1874.)

Ramsey, William J. Prominent London secularist in the 1870's and early 1880's; was a delegate to two London conferences in 1870 convened to establish a union of metropolitan Freethought propagandists; as secretary of the United Secularists Propagandist Society in 1872, organised another conference to this end, though without success; was appointed corresponding member of the N.S.S. Council for Bethnal Green district in 1874, and in the following year was acting on the N.S.S. Executive; in 1885 he was made a vice-president, but was forced to resign in September 1886 when his selling of forged copies of Besant's Law of Population was discovered by Bradlaugh; was heard of no more after this. (N.R., 27 Mar 1870, 2 Oct 1870, 18 Aug 1872, 16 Aug 1874, 12 Sept 1875, 31 May 1885, 5 Sept 1886.)

Reddalls, George H. (1846-1875) born at Hinckley, Leicestershire, moved to Nottingham in 1856 and to Birmingham in 1869 where he became a compositor on the Daily Post and a Freethinker; decided to set up for himself on the advice of Thomas Evans; just before moving to Birmingham he was corresponding secretary to the Nottingham S.S. Though it was always in debt, he kept the Secular Chronicle going for over three years; was the leading figure among the Midlands secularists who were opposed to Bradlaugh, but accepted a vice-presidency of the N.S.S. in

mid-1875; died of typhoid fever, 13 Oct 1875.
 (S.C., 10 Oct 1875, 24 Oct 1875, N.R., 9 Feb
 1868, 17 Oct 1869, The Radical, July 1889.)

Redfearn, J.B.

Like H.V. Mayer of Dudley, he first appears
 in 1859 as a contributor to the fund for the
 relief of Bradlaugh's debts; not heard of
 again until 1876 when he is corresponding
 secretary of the Leeds S.S.; on removing to
 Scarborough in 1876-7 he set up a secular
 society there; was a signatory of the original
 programme and constitution of the B.S.U. (The
 Reasoner, 9 Oct 1859, N.R., 23 July 1876, 9 Mar
 1879, S.R. & S., 15 Sept 1877.)

Ridgway, N.J.

A Lancashire Owenite, born 1809, was a founder
 of the Old Hall of Science, Campfield,
 Manchester; was appointed corresponding member
 of the Council of the N.S.S. for Manchester
 in 1875; was Manchester delegate to the N.S.S.
 Conference of 1884 and died three years later.
 (N.R., 6 June 1875, 8 June 1884, 12 June 1887.)

Sketchley, John

Born in the late 1820's or early 1830's in,
 or around, Leicester; reared as a Catholic,
 was first drawn to Chartism when his father
 took him to hear a Chartist, 'Rev. Mr Simmons'
 speak at Earl Shilton, ten miles from Leicester,
 in late March 1839; defied his priest's injunc-
 tions against listening to Chartist speeches
 and became Chartist local secretary for
 Hinckley and district, though he did not

abandon his religion until a decade later; was greatly attracted by the lectures of Thomas Cooper in the late 1840's and was disposed to 'physical force Chartism'; though threatened with arrest for his activities in 1848 he was never arrested and after the fiasco of 1848 continued to believe in the possibilities of Chartism; was one of a committee got together to establish a paper for joint editorship by Harney and Jones. In 1850-1 he turned to study the writings of 'the immortal Mazzini', and in 1851 he organised a Republican group in 'connection with the Republican Movement inaugurated by W.J. Linton ; in 1867 was on the committee which reorganised the defunct Leicester S.S.; wrote scathing, and in some ways justified, reports of the Birmingham Conference of Bradlaughite Republicans in mid-1873, declaring that these republicans ignored the fact that 'true Republicanism includes the solution of the social problem'; in 1879 he became secretary of the Midland Social Democratic Association, and in the 1880's was lecturing to Lancashire secularists on Socialism. (N.R., 1 Sept 1867, 19 Jan 1879, 3 Mar 1889, The International Herald, No 60, 24 May 1873, To-Day, July 1884.)

- Slater, Thomas Prominent Lancashire secularist of the 1860's and 1870's; active as such in October 1864, he was president of the L.S.U. in 1871; born 15 Sept 1820 at Barnoldswick, Craven, Yorkshire, brought up as a Wesleyan by his mother, his father having died while Slater was still a child; claims to have become 'connected with the Chartist and Socialistic movements'; became a Freethinker in 1846 through reading The Reasoner; was also an ardent co-operator; Bury delegate to the Leeds Conference of the N.S.S. in 1876 where he was elected a vice-president; appointed an official lecturer of the N.S.S. in August 1878, and by the time of the Conference of 1884 was a Bury Town Councillor; though still a vice-president as late as 1888 he does not appear to have been active as a secularist after 1884. (N.R., 21 Nov 1863, 2 Oct 1864, 22 Oct 1871, 4 Aug 1878, 8 June 1884, 20 June 1886, 27 May 1888, S.C., 11 June 1876, 28 Apr 1878, The Republican, Apr 1885.)
- Southwell, Charles (1814-1860) An Owenite socialist missionary, he broke with Owen in 1839-40 and began a career of militant Freethought propaganda; in 1841 he began his Oracle of Reason and in 1842 was jailed for blasphemy. Emigrated to New Zealand in 1856 and died there four years later. (Mc Cabe, op.cit., p.751.)

Standring, George (1855-19??) Became a Freethinker in 1873 and in 1875 replaced Watts as honorary secretary of the N.S.S. Founded his Republican Chronicle in 1875 but it did not outlast the year; but his advocacy of Republicanism was taken up again in The Republican which ran from 1880 to 1886, being replaced in the latter year by The Radical which ran till 1889. He also contributed frequently to Foote's Progress and Freethinker. (Mc Cabe, op.cit., p.756.)

Symes, Joseph (1841-1906) Served as a Wesleyan preacher from 1867 to 1872 and then resigned on becoming a Rationalist. In 1876 he began lecturing for the secularists, and was a special lecturer for the N.S.S. until in 1883 he emigrated to Australia. He returned in 1905 and died the next year. (J. Mc Cabe, op.cit., p.777.)

Travis, Henry One of the longest-active secularists of the century; born at Scarborough in 1807 of a family of physicians traditionally associated with that town; from an early date was attracted to Robert Owen's ideas, especially as to education; was one of the three of the 'Old Guard' who were identified with the socialistic aspect of co-operation beginning in Manchester in 1827; in 1851-3 was editor of the penny weekly Robert Owen's Journal; he

differed from Owen, however, in maintaining that man's condition was determined by the combined action of the environment and the individual will- was a delegate to the first national secular conference at Manchester in October 1852, and thereafter was prominent in all major attempts at national organisation throughout the 1850's and early 1860's; was a frequent contributor to the National Reformer and author of the following tracts: Effectual Reform, Free Will and Moral Law, Moral Freedom reconciled with Causation, English Socialism, and A Manual of Social Science. He died on 4 Feb 1884. (The Reasoner, 20 Oct 1852, The Radical, Nov 1886.)

Trevelyan, Arthur A Scottish land-owner and Justice of the Peace, a friend of Holyoake's, he wrote for The Movement, and The Reasoner, and for Bradlaugh's National Reformer; became president of the N.S.S. upon Bradlaugh's resignation in 1871, but resigned very soon after election; remained a vice-president and constant benefactor of the society till his death in 1878. (N.R., 1 Oct 1871, S.C., 23 May 1875, Mc Cabe, op.cit., pp. 812-3.)

Truelove, Edward (1809-1899) A follower of Robert Owen, he took part in the New Harmony venture in Hampshire

in 1844-5; for nine years was secretary of the John Street Institute; in 1852 opened a shop in the Strand for the sale of radical and secularist literature, publishing, inter alia, d'Holbach's System of Nature, Taylor's Diegesis and Paine's complete works; was prosecuted in 1858 for publishing W.E. Adams' Tyrannicide, Is It Justified ? ; Bradlaugh became secretary of his Defence Committee; was jailed in 1878 for his part in the prosecutions of birth-control literature; became a martyr and a vice-president of the N.S.S. until his death in 1899. (J.M. Wheeler, A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of All Ages and Nations, London 1889, p.319).

Turner, Henry

West Riding secularist prominent for a short time in the late 1850's and early 1860's; a Sheffield delegate to the Halifax Convention of October 1860, and organising secretary of the Castle Hill Aggregate Meeting of the previous July; secretary of the Sheffield S.S., and secretary of the National Reformer Newspaper Company Ltd.; is heard of no more after the disputes of 1861-2. (The Reasoner, 4 Mar 1860, 21 Oct 1860, The Reasoner Gazette, 12 Feb 1860, 29 July 1860.)

Watts, Charles

(1836-1906) Turned to Freethought under the influence of Charles Southwell, shortly after coming to London. In 1864 he entered the publishing business with his brother, John, and became a sub-editor of the National Reformer until the quarrel with Bradlaugh in 1877. Soon after, he took over the Secular Review from Holyoake, with G.W. Foote, and later with W. Stewart Ross. In 1886 he went to Toronto where he founded the paper, Secular Thought; on Bradlaugh's death he returned to England and became a regular contributor to Foote's Freethinker and founded his own journal, The Literary Guide.

Watts, John

(1834-1866) Born in Bedminster, Bristol, son of a Wesleyan local preacher, and tradesman; at an early age he became a Sunday School teacher, and trained as a compositor. When his brother, Charles, was 'converted' by Southwell, John entered into a press controversy with him but he too abandoned religion after meeting with Southwell. Coming to London as a printer, he became sub-editor of G.J. Holyoake's Reasoner; at the same time he took up active freethought propaganda; he afterwards became sub-editor of the National Reformer and entered a publishing partnership with Austin Holyoake; on Bradlaugh's resignation of the editorship of the N.R., in 1863, Watts took over the post, but chronic ill-health from 1864

onward led to his death two years later.

(N.R., 11 Nov 1866, pp. 305-6.)

Wright, Thomas

Prominent Leicester secularist and businessman, born 1818; like Gimson he was a supporter of the B.S.U. and was Leicester delegate to its first conference in 1878; was also delegate to its third conference at Sheffield in 1880 and died in the year following. (N.R., 25 Sept 1881, S.R., 27 Apr 1878, 7 Aug 1880.)

Appendix 2 : Principles of the N.S.S.

- i. as outlined by Bradlaugh
- ii. as revised by Henry Travis

i.

1. The association declares that the promotion of human happiness is the highest duty.
2. That the religious teachings of the world have been, and are, obstacles to the proper attainment of human happiness.
3. That in order to attain human happiness it is necessary that the bulk of the human family should be self-reliant workers for their self-development.
4. That human happiness cannot be enjoyed until perfect civil and religious liberty be attained, and that, therefore, it is the duty of all members to actively attack all barriers to freedom of thought and utterance on political or theological questions.

(N.R., 9 Sept 1866)

ii.

1. This Association declares that the Promotion of Human Improvement and Happiness is the highest duty.
2. That the Theological Teachings of the World have been and are most powerfully obstructive of human improvement and happiness; human activity being guided and increased by a

consciousness of the facts of existence; while it is misguided and impeded in the most mischievous manner when the intellect is prostrated by childish and absurd superstitions.

3. That in order to promote effectually the improvement and happiness of mankind, every individual of the human family ought to be well placed and well instructed; and all who are of a suitable age ought to be usefully employed for their own and the general good.
4. That human improvement and happiness cannot be effectually promoted without civil and religious liberty; and that, therefore, the duty of every individual, a duty to be practically recognised by every member of the Association, to actively attack all barriers to equal freedom of thought and utterance for all, upon Political and Theological subjects.

(N.R., 23 Sept 1866)

Appendix 3 : The Berwick Legacy.

On 9 August 1874, the National Reformer announced that a Dr G.C. Berwick had bequeathed £500 to the N.S.S. and £200 to Mrs Harriet Law¹. In late November of the same year, the Birmingham secularist, Ernest Burns, assuming that it had not yet been decided how this £500 was to be disposed of, suggested that some of it should be given to aid the Secular Chronicle whose insufficient circulation was causing it to incur increasing debts². Burns's advice was apparently not acted upon, for Charles Watts wrote to George Standring to say that he feared 'no help can be obtained from the source mentioned by Mr Burns'³. Standring then informed the editor of the Secular Chronicle, Reddalls, that 'at a meeting of the Council (of the N.S.S.) at which I was present, it was decided how to dispose of the money, and the Council endorsed Mr Bradlaugh's arrangement, in which the affairs of the Secular Chronicle were not mentioned'⁴.

What precisely Bradlaugh's 'arrangement' was, or when this Council meeting was held, is not known; what is clear is that Standring's disclosure was both ill-phrased and untimely, leading Reddalls to remark that 'if Mr Standring's statement be correct, there can be no question that the money has been expended - to say the least of it - in a very irregular manner, as the party has not even been acquainted with the manner in which it has

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1. N.R., 9 Aug 1874.
 2. S.C., 25 Nov 1874.
 3. ibid., 6 Dec 1874.
 4. ibid.

been disposed of'¹. The affair thus far appeared even more strange in view of the fact that there was no constitutional justification for Bradlaugh's and the Council's supposed disposal of the money, for the simple reason that Bradlaugh, Watts and Standring were not, de jure, members of the Executive Council, having resigned in 1871 and no subsequent national conference having re-elected them.

Ernest Burns himself then demanded an explanation as to the 'arrangement'². Thereupon Standring committed another blunder in his reply to Burns, saying curtly that he had 'no authority to give the desired information', suggesting that Burns apply 'to the Secretary of the Society', and then declaring that 'as my memory is rather vague on the point I would prefer not to commit myself to any statement which might turn out to be erroneous'³. As it was not clear who in fact the secretary was, this advice was not very helpful; Fraser was the appointed secretary, and Watts the de facto one. At an Executive meeting on 17 January 1875 the latter made a statement that 'the society is unable to get possession of the money at present', but that on Bradlaugh's return from America 'active measures will be taken'⁴.

Nothing further was heard of the matter until the N.S.S. annual conference six months later. There are but two extant contemporary accounts of its proceedings, in the National Reformer and the Secular Chronicle. The reports of both, so far as they related to the Berwick Legacy are cryptic in the extreme; that

1. ibid.

2. S.C., 20 Dec 1874.

3. ibid., 27 Dec 1874.

4. ibid., 24 Jan 1875; N.R., 24 Jan 1875.

by Annie Besant in the National Reformer reports Bradlaugh as declaring nothing more than the fact that 'The legacy was not left to the party; it was left to the President of the National Secular Society'¹; that in the Secular Chronicle gives slightly more detail in so far as it reveals the prevalent disquiet as exhibited by Reddalls's persistence in demanding the facts, despite attempts by Bradlaugh to silence him by evasiveness: in his first reply to Reddalls he merely offered in explanation the fact that 'As to the manner of disposing of it, he had consulted with all the corresponding members of the Council and they approved his plan'; Reddalls reiterated his question, but 'Mr Bradlaugh declined to state, as circumstances had altered and it would not be disposed of in the manner originally proposed'².

Why Bradlaugh should have been so reticent is not clear. In September 1875, four months after, he announced that 'The only reason the Berwick Legacy has not been paid is that Mr Robert Makepeace of Tokenhouse Yard, the executor under Dr Berwick's will, embezzled about £18,000 of the estate'³. At the Leeds Conference in the following year, Bradlaugh returned to the issue, and now observed that the £500 had been originally left to the N.S.S., and not to its president as had been suggested in Besant's report of the preceding conference. He revealed that on first hearing the news of the Legacy, it had been decided to give £100 of it to Mrs Austin Holyoake who had been

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1. N.R., 23 May 1875.
 2. S.C., 23 May 1875.
 3. N.R., 19 Sept 1875.

left in distress by the untimely death of her husband in 1874. But, as the money had not been received, Bradlaugh asserted that he himself had been giving her £2 a week for one year, ending on the last week of May 1876. He then concluded: 'I have reason to believe, however, that a sum of £25 will yet be paid to the Society from the late Dr Berwick's estate'¹. And this was the last of the matter. Whatever the full story may have been, the vagueness which surrounded it at the time caused much uneasiness and opposition among Midland secularists towards Bradlaugh.

Appendix 4 : Sources for the Statistics of Membership of the N.S.S.

1) Accessions of new members (to the nearest ten)

Year	No.	Source
1879	660	<u>N.R.</u> , 8 June 1879.
1880	730	Not given, but see below ¹ .
1881	830	<u>N.R.</u> , 12 June 1881.
1882	1,300	<u>N.R.</u> , 4 June 1882.
1883	1,880	<u>N.R.</u> , 29 Apr 1883.
1884	1,750	<u>N.R.</u> , 8 June 1884.
1885	1,370	<u>N.R.</u> , 31 May 1885.
1886	990	<u>N.R.</u> , 20 June 1886.
1887	500	<u>N.R.</u> , 5 June 1887.
1888	590	<u>N.R.</u> , 27 May 1888.
1889	490	<u>N.R.</u> , 16 June 1889.
1890	710	<u>N.R.</u> , 1 June 1890.
1891	790	<u>N.R.</u> , 24 May 1891.
1892	1,070	<u>N.R.</u> , 12 June 1892.
1893	780	<u>N.R.</u> , 25 May 1893.

¹ Note: In the report of the Conference of 1880 the number of new accessions over the year is not given; but in the four months after the Conference of 1879, that is, up to late October 1879, there were 244 new members enrolled: N.R., 19 Oct 1879, p.682. Assuming this rate of enrolment continued to mid-1880 there were about 730 new members in that year.

ii) Members' subscriptions are given for the following years:

Year	Subs.	Source
1883	£183- 6-10	<u>N.R.</u> , 8 June 1884.
1884	£252-16- 0	<u>N.R.</u> , 8 June 1884.
1885	£189-13-10	<u>N.R.</u> , 31 May 1885.
1886	£177-19- 3	<u>N.R.</u> , 20 June 1886.
1888	£137- 6- 6	<u>N.R.</u> , 27 May 1888.
1891	£116- 7- 2	<u>N.R.</u> , 12 June 1892.
1892	£130- 4- 9	<u>N.R.</u> , 12 June 1892.

The figures of members' subscriptions are not given directly for the remaining years, i.e., 1879-1882, 1887, 1889, 1890 and 1893.

Up to the middle of 1886 branch remittances were 1/- per member per year; undoubtedly there were members who, not belonging to branches, paid directly, but the vast majority will have been branch members, and the statistical difference in not counting individual remittances is assumed to be negligible.

At the Conference of 1886, the branch remittances were increased for the future to 1/4 per member per year - not 4d per member as stated by P. Thompson, whose oversight in this regard led him to quadruple the membership of the N.S.S. in the years after 1885¹.

1. P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, The Struggle for London, 1885-1914, p.32, note 5: apart from this error, the citation of figures from the National Reformer is so jumbled as to be meaningless. For the correct figure paid by each branch for each member in each year, see N.R., 20 June 1886.

At the Conference of 1890 it was decided to lower branch remittances to 6d per member per year¹, and for the years 1891-3, the adjustment in calculation must be made accordingly.

iii) Years 1884-92

The figures of new accessions is given for each of these years. For those years for which members' subscriptions are given directly, it is a simple matter to calculate the nett membership; therefore, by comparing it with the nett membership of the previous year, and contrasting the difference with the new accessions, the number of lapsing members is readily arrived at.

For the years 1887, 1889 and 1890, membership subscriptions are not given; but what is given in every year from 1884 to 1892, is the amount of the general fund, and so, an approximate membership can be arrived at. Thus the method for 1887:-

Year	Members	General Fund
1885	3,790	£98
1886	3,560	£85
1887	'x'	£80

Between 1885 and 1886 membership-difference = 230

and general fund difference = £13

Between 1886 and 1887 membership difference = 3,560 - x

and general fund difference = £5;

A loss of 230 members causes a loss of £13;

A loss of (3,560 - x) causes a loss of $\frac{13(3,560 - x)}{230}$

1. N.R., 1 June 1890.

Therefore $x = 3,471$; but revised subscription-rate after 1886 brought remittances to $1/4$ per year, and therefore, on the revised scale, $x = 2,603$.

Thus, in 1887 the membership was approximately 2,600.

Using the same method, with the necessary variations of figures for the year 1889, gives $x = 1,788$, and consequently, in 1889 the membership was approximately 1,790.

Using the same method, with the necessary variations of figures for the year 1890, gives $x = 2,150$ ¹.

No figures whatever being given in 1893, nothing is known for that year.

1. Cf. S. Budd, *op.cit.*, p.100 who estimates membership at 'about four thousand' in the mid-1880s.

Appendix 5 : Delegations to the Land Law Reform Conference,
1880.

National Reform Union (Manchester); Irish National Land League;
 Tower Hamlets Liberal Club; Tower Hamlets Radical Club;
 Amalgamated Labour League; Home Rule League of Derry; Lambeth
 Radical Association; Young Men's Liberal Association; Communists
 Arbeits Bildung; Hoxton Cosmopolitan Club; Dudley Nailmakers'
 Co-operative; West London Bootclosers; London Trades Council;
 Durham Miners Association; Northumberland Miners Association;
 London Patriotic Club; West Yorkshire Miners Association;
 Southampton Liberal Association; Clarendon Club; British
 Secular Union; Kingston Branch of the British Secular Union;
 Lambeth Advanced Liberal Association; Progressive Club; Bury
 Land Law Association; Bury Trades' Council; Oldham Above Town
 Liberal Association; Bookbinders and Machine Rulers Association;
 Radnor Liberal Association; Cleveland Miners Association;
 No 2 West End Bootmakers Association; Social Democratic Club;
 Colchester Liberal League; Chelsea Combined Radical Clubs;
 Thetford District Labourers Association; No 4 Alliance Cabinet-
 makers; Leeds Federated Liberal Clubs; Great Grimsby Liberal
 Association; Paddington Amalgamated Bootmakers Association;
 National Agricultural Labourers' Union; Borough of Hackney
 Working Men's Club; Kent and Sussex Labourers Union; Manhood
 Suffrage League; General Council of Radical Clubs and Associations;
 Operative Bricklayers Society; Northampton Radical Association;
 Northfleet Liberal Association; National Secular Society;
 Leicester Radical Association; Central Committee of United
 Social Democrats of London; Glasgow Home Rule Association;

Eye District Agricultural Labourers Association; Waplude and Halesworth Labourers Union; and the following branches of the National Secular Society: East, North, and Central London; Walworth; Deptford; Bedlington; Paisley; Guisboro'; Liverpool; Leigh; Greenwich; Glasgow; Dewsbury; Jarrow; Blackburn; Manchester; Bingley; Woolwich; Bradford; Leeds.

Visitors included Randall Cremer, Alsager Hay Hill, Thomas Mottershead, Joseph Arch, Annie Besant, Edward Aveling, Michael Davitt, Alexander Mac Donald and Rev. Stewart Headlam.

Source: N.R., 15 Feb 1880.

Appendix 6 : The Structure of Religion in Northampton

In 1851 the Church of England had 6,840 sittings, in 1881 it had 8,370 sittings, an increase of 22.3%¹.

In 1851 non-Anglican churches had 7,428 sittings, in 1881 they had 13,442 sittings, an increase of 80.9%².

In 1851 Church of England attendances were 5,500, in 1881 they were 10,287, an increase of 87%³.

In 1851 non-Anglican attendances were 9,170, in 1881 they were 12,894, an increase of 40.6%⁴.

The relative strength of the various denominations may be seen from the following table for 1851⁵.

Denomination	Places of Worship	Sittings Provided	Number of Attendants, morning/afternoon/evening
Particular Baptists	5	2121	1545/675/1495
Independents	3	1806	1518/---/ 987
Wesleyans	2	1397	796/388/1236
Primitives	1	300	79/ 92/ 128
Wesleyan Association	1	214	107/---/ 120
Wesleyan Reformers	0	----	---/---/----
Unitarians	1	290	230/---/ 160
Friends	1	400	59/---/ 450
Roman Catholics	1	300	---/---/----
Mormons	1	400	---/---/----

1. The Nonconformist and Independent, 2 Feb 1882, p.11, Table IV.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. A. & P., 1852-3, lxxix, 33, Census of Great Britain 1851, Table F, p.cclxv.

The comparable position for 1881 is as below¹:

Denomination	Places of Worship	Sittings Provided	Number of Attendants, morning/afternoon/ evening
Particular Baptists	-	3200	1433/---/1826
Independents	-	2450	1214/---/1519
Wesleyans	-	2102	865/---/1045
Primitives	-	1350	366/---/ 501
Wesleyan Association	-	-----	-----/---/-----
Wesleyan Reformers	-	350	145/---/ 347
Unitarians	-	350	201/---/ 206
Friends	-	400	42/---/ 17
Roman Catholics	-	550	453/---/ 388
Mormons	-	-----	-----/---/-----

1. The Nonconformist and Independent, 2 Feb 1882, p.7.

Appendix 8 : Sources for the Number of Electors on Northampton Registers, 1832-1895

YEAR	SOURCE
1832-3	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1866, lvii, Cd.3626, p.184.
1835	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1836, xliii, 199, p.24.
1836	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1837-8, xliv, 329, p.67.
1837	: <u>ibid.</u>
1847	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1849, xlv, 16, p.7.
1848	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1850, xlvi, 345, p.3.
1849	: <u>ibid.</u>
1852-3	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1852-3, lxxxiii, 106, p.5.
1859	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1860, lv, 400, p.4.
1860	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1860, lv, 129, p.3.
1862-3	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1866, lvii, 259, p.7.
1865	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1866, lvii, Cd.3626, p.184.
1866	: <u>ibid.</u>
1868	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1868-9, l, 424, p.19.
1869	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1874, liii, 381, p.5.
1872	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1872, xlvii, 343, p.3.
1873	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1874, liii, 381, p.5.
1874	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1874, liii, 176, p.4.
1875	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1875, lx, 153, p.4.
1876	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1876, lx, 170, p.4.
1877	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1877, lxxviii, 174, p.3.
1878	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1878, lxi, 127, p.3.
1880	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1880, lvii, 382, pp. 26-27.
1883	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1883, liv, 72, p.3.
1885-6	: <u>A. & P.</u> , 1886, lii, 199, pp. 44-45.

- 1888 : A. & P., 1888, lxxix, 395, p.7.
1892 : A. & P., 1893-4, lxx, 423, p.46.
1894 : A. & P., 1894, lxxviii, 40, p.10.
1895 : A. & P., 1896, lxxvii, 145, pp. 46-47.

Appendix 8 : Backgrounds and Biographical Notes of some Liberal and Radical leaders in Northampton, 1850-1891.

Bradlaugh Radicals/Employers:

Thomas Adams (1831-1890), born in Drayton, near Daventry, the son of a small grocer, Adams 'came to Northampton a poor boy, with fourteen pence in his pocket', became an apprentice baker, journeyman baker, and in the 1850s a master baker who was several times treasurer and president of the Master Bakers' Association. He was a Congregationalist from birth, attended Thomas Arnold's Doddridge Street Chapel until he became a free-thinker in the 1860s. (N.M., 15 Feb 1890).

John Bates (1818-1883), began life as a journeyman basket-maker, but eventually became a newsagent in the town. (N.M., 25 Aug 1883).

Thomas Tebbutt (1815-1889), born of 'working class parents' in Earls Barton, was apprenticed in the shoe trade, came to Northampton and went into business for himself in 1846. By 1873 he was running a large factory in King Street, and in that year was first elected as a radical councillor for the West Ward, along with Joseph Gurney. A Baptist of College Street Chapel, he became mayor in 1877. (N.M., 16 Feb 1889).

Liberal leaders/Employers:

John Middleton Vernon (1809-1883), son of a Towcester grocer, began as a wine and spirit merchant there. He opened a branch in Northampton in 1854 and subsequently bought a farm. A director of the Northamptonshire Union Bank, a Congregationalist

of College Street Chapel, he first became a liberal councillor in 1857, mayor in 1868, and was a liberal alderman from 1871 till 1883. (N.M., 17 Mar 1883).

Pickering Phipps Perry (1823-1890), born in Northampton, son of a successful miller; a liberal supporter of Gilpin, and in 1874 of William Fowler against Bradlaugh, he first became a councillor in 1868 and mayor in 1870. He was an alderman from 1874 till 1880 and then retired from politics owing to ill-health. (N.M., 5 Sept 1890).

William Adkins (1820-1886), was born at Towcester, son of a miller and farmer, was apprenticed to a Northampton chemist, and having run his own chemist shop in the town for a few years, he took up milling and farming after his father's death. A Congregationalist of Commercial Street Chapel, he became a liberal councillor in 1864 and was mayor in 1869 and 1875. (N.M., 24 July 1886).

APPENDIX 9

THE IRISH QUESTION AND BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

1800 - 1900

The administrations concerned were:

1. Pitt, March 1801.
2. Grey, July 1834.
3. Melbourne, November 1834.
4. Peel, April 1835.
5. Peel, June 1846.
6. Disraeli 1868. (The major issue of the election being Gladstone's Irish Church policy).
7. Gladstone, March 1873.
8. Gladstone, June 1885 (39 Irish Home Rulers voted with the Tories).
9. Salisbury, January 1886 (74 Irish Home Rulers voted with the Liberals).
10. Gladstone, July 1886.
11. Salisbury, August 1892 (81 Irish Home Rulers voted with the Liberals).

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7. Theses
8. Books
9. Articles

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- a. Charles Bradlaugh Collection: (over 3,000 letters and documents, mainly personal and legal, but containing correspondence with various political figures of the age).
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ii. Bishopsgate Institute:

- a. G.J. Holyoake Collection: Minutes of the Committee of the Garibaldi Special Fund (1860-1).
- b. G. Howell Collection:
 - i Howell's Correspondence (1864-1910).
 - ii Howell's Diaries (1864-1909).
 - iii Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Reform League.
 - iv Minutes of the General Council of the Reform League.
 - v Minutes of the Finance Committee.
 - vi Election Reports (1868).
 - vii Minutes of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association (1866-9).

- viii Robert Applegarth Typescript, 'People I have known', speech, 12 March 1898.
- ix Land Tenure Reform Association papers.

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- b. Henry Solly Collection.
- c. Frederic Harrison Collection.

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- b. Charles Dilke Papers: Add Mss. 43875, 43878, 43885, 43890, 43892, 43895, 43897, 43898, 43902, 43909, 43910, 43911, 43914.
- c. William Ewart Gladstone Papers: Add Mss. 44095, 44111, 44112, 44113, 44125, 44149, 44295, 44381, 44387, 44410, 44420, 44431, 44434, 44454, 44457, 44459, 44461, 44462, 44782, 44783, 44784.
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- e. William Morris Papers: Add Ms. 45345.

- f. Positivist Papers (Letters to R. Congreve):
Add Ms. 45241.

v. Public Record Office:

a. Board of Trade:

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BT 31/1220/2810C (files relating to the
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ii. Radical Press

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