

The Class Struggle and The House of Commons: The Parliamentary Response to the London Riots of 1886

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The London riots of 1886 are an important part of English working-class history and mythology, and this examination of parliamentary voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill, which was the response of Westminster to the riots, assesses the value of using social conflict theories to explain the policy formulations of political élites. The conclusions which follow from this are two: the Conservative party was indeed divided along class lines; but for the Liberals and Irish Nationalists and for the Conservatives who spoke in the debates, other factors — partisanship, the holding of government office, and, especially, constituency — were more important. For the London riots of 1886 and their parliamentary aftermath, social class describes with great force the nature of public disorder and the reaction of parliamentary Conservatives to it. For the Liberals and Irish Nationalists in Parliament, however, partisanship tamed social class and territorial conflict overlaid it.

Les émeutes de Londres de 1886 ont une place importante dans l'histoire de la classe ouvrière anglaise. L'article qui suit est une analyse du vote du Parlement sur le "Compensation for Damages Bill" — projet de loi qui fut la réponse de Westminster aux émeutes — qui rend compte de l'importance de la théorie de la lutte des classes dans la conduite des élites politiques. À ce sujet, on peut tirer deux grandes conclusions: le parti conservateur était divisé, de toute évidence, selon les classes sociales; mais, au contraire, chez les Libéraux, les nationalistes irlandais et les Conservateurs qui prirent part au débat, d'autres facteurs — le militantisme, la retenue des charges gouvernementales, et, plus particulièrement, la division entre districts électoraux — furent plus importants. La division en classes sociales, perçues comme ayant été au coeur des désordres de 1886, a donc dicté la marche politique à suivre aux parlementaires conservateurs. Toutefois, des conflits d'ordre territorial ont détournés les Libéraux et les nationalistes irlandais de la question de la lutte des classes.

The Cabinet today decided in favour
of giving compensation to those who
were looted by the socialists.
Lewis Harcourt Journal,
22 February 1886¹

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1. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Harcourt deposit, 377, f. 169, Lewis Harcourt Journal, 22 February 1886.

Histoire sociale — Social History, Vol. XVIII, N° 35 (mai-Mai 1985) :000-000.

The London riots of 1886 occupy an important place in English working-class history and mythology because they reflect the political motivations of popular disturbances. It is also an incident which permits an assessment of the motivation of political élites. An examination of the London riots, and the political responses to them, makes possible a social analysis of political actions because, if conceptions of the class struggle are important for an understanding of working-class behaviour, it can be argued that parliamentary responses to social unrest were rooted in similar considerations. In a brief compass, the London riots of 1886 serve as an episode which illuminates both lower-class behaviour and the policy formulations of political élites.

Conceptions of social class and the class struggle are among the most disputed issues in all of social history. "À dire vrai," Marc Bloch once observed, "ce mot de classe est un des plus équivoques du vocabulaire historique."² And so it proves to be. Nevertheless, since much of nineteenth-century political analysis is cast in terms of a relationship between social structures and political actions, scholars return again and again to this difficult and complex subject. Namier believed the social history of England could be written from a knowledge of the social composition of the House of Commons.³ The importance of class in British politics is made manifest in P.G.J. Pulzer's famous statement, "class is the basis of British politics; all else is embellishment and detail."⁴ Conceptually, definitions of social class have been fraught with vagueness and imprecision. A gentleman has been defined as a man having the capacity "to live idly and without manual labour."⁵ Sir George Sitwell, Bt., who sired a generation of great writers and who sat in the House of Commons in 1886, believed the development of a nation depended not upon geographical position, natural resources, or military strength, but "upon the discussion of classes and their relation to each other and to the soil."⁶

Musings such as these are not very helpful, and they are not wholly satisfying as organizing devices to set right the chaos of historical social experiences. Is class wealth or status or consciousness? Is it a structure or a category at all? On this E.P. Thompson, whom all quote on this subject and who must be quoted here, takes the line of doubt. In a famous passage he defines class "as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships." And directly Thompson puts the point rather more expansively: "We cannot have love without lovers, nor deference without squires and labourers. And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs." "Class is defined by men as they live their own history," he says. "In the end, this is its only definition."⁷ In another place Thompson distinguishes between class as an historical category (it is something which changes over time), the sense in which he uses it, and sociological conceptions which are static.⁸

2. Quoted in Alfred COBBAN, "The Vocabulary of Social History", *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXI (March 1956), p. 6.

3. Sir Lewis NAMIER, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 3.

4. P.G.J. PULZER, *Political Representation and Elections: Parties and Voting in Great Britain* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 103.

5. Quoted in Peter ROEBUCK, *Yorkshire Baronets, 1640-1760: Families, Estates, and Fortunes* (Oxford: University of Hull Press, 1980), p. 1.

6. Quoted in COBBAN, "Vocabulary of Social History", p. 1.

7. E.P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963), pp. 9, 11.

8. E.P. THOMPSON, "Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?", *Social History*, III (1978): 147-48.

Yet even as Thompson uses it, class is an expression which is open to observation and measurement because it is possible to identify squires, workers, businessmen, and the members of other social groups, their common and differing experiences, and the way they defined these characteristics. These social categories, which changed over time, express, if not class itself, perceptions of social difference and variation, and the statements about these matters found in such places as Dod's *Parliamentary Companion* and Burke's *Landed Gentry* are the more valuable because they represent not only the way other contemporaries felt about individuals and groups, but also the ways those individuals felt about themselves.

No one would advise the rash use of such materials for, like all historical materials, they are imperfect. Caution is always necessary, especially when we find negative results in comparing the data on social class with political actions in the corn-laws and home rule crises.⁹ Indeed a modern study of electoral behaviour during the period from 1885 to 1918 has cast the gravest doubt upon the value of social conflict theories in accounting for the actions of constituents.¹⁰ Other considerations, as this paper will show, factors other than social class, such as partisanship and constituency background, sometimes supervened. In his famous paper on the growth of class consciousness in early Victorian England, Asa Briggs attributes it to four events, the imposition of Pitt's income tax, the impact of the Napoleonic war, the struggle for parliamentary reform, and the corn law controversy.¹¹ Each of these events had profound political elements, and one cannot help but be driven to thoughts about the ways in which thinking about class was rooted in thinking about politics and the ways in which consciousness of social positions was embedded in consciousness of political positions. Between class conditions and action, as Giovanni Sartori has observed, there are intervening variables, the working and influence of institutions, which generate class feeling.¹² What follows, therefore, is a scrutiny of the parliamentary responses to the London riots of 1886 to see how far class concepts can be used to account for the behaviour of Members of the House of Commons.

The facts of the case can be readily summarized. On the afternoon of 8 February 1886, a meeting of the unemployed summoned by the Fair Trade League gathered in Trafalgar Square. The Social Democratic Federation, led by H.M. Hyndman, disrupted the meeting, denounced the Tories and their efforts to exploit unemployment, and put forward a programme of revolution and socialism. After some pushing and shoving, the S.D.F. led part of the crowd out of the Square and towards Hyde Park. In Pall Mall, antagonized by clubmen, the marchers stoned the Carlton and other clubs. Transformed now into a riot, the procession attacked property, signs of wealth and privilege, and looted Piccadilly. The S.D.F., having lost control of the situation, retired at Hyde Park, but the

9. W.O. AYDELOTTE, "The Country Gentlemen and the Repeal of the Corn Laws", *English Historical Review*, 82 (January 1967): 47-60; W.C. LUBENOW, "Irish Home Rule and the Social Basis of the Great Separation in the Liberal Party in 1886", *Historical Journal*, XXVIII (March 1985).

10. Kenneth D. WALD, *Crosses on the Ballot: Patterns of British Voter Alignment Since 1885* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). For other treatments of this issue see, Paul T. PHILLIPS, *The Sectarian Spirit: Sectarianism, Society, and Politics in Victorian Cotton Towns* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) and R.S. NEALE, *Class in English History, 1680-1850* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981). For an attempt to rearticulate much of the best in a class analysis of social history, see Gareth Stedman JONES, *The Language of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

11. Asa BRIGGS, "Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846", *Past and Present*, 9 (April 1956): 9.

12. Giovanni SARTORI, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology", in *Politics and the Social Sciences*, ed. by Seymour Martin LIPSET, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 83-85.

workers continued on to South Audley Street, ravaging shops as they went, and then returned to the East End by way of Oxford Street. The authorities responded swiftly. Hugh Childers, the Home Secretary, sacked Sir Edmund Henderson, the chief commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. The Government introduced a bill into Parliament to compensate owners and businessmen for their damages.

It is easy to see how a class interpretation could be placed on the event. Ideas of class and class struggles ran rampant in the political thinking of the 1880s. George W. Smalley, whose articles in the press provide one account of this episode, described the working-class crowd as a mob which consisted of "the criminal classes." Though not a social revolution as described by continental observers, "the Socialists have shown their colours. Hyndman, Burns, and the other Trafalgar Square speakers knew perfectly well what sort of men they were talking to. They welcomed the brigands of the East End as allies."¹³ Alfred Pease, a Liberal MP who was there at the time, expressed his shock when the rioters assaulted Brooks' Club.

I went with others to the windows, and saw a mob running up St. James's Street — in front were about 500 men in loose order, who were running followed by a dense roaring mob which filled the street as far as you could see, led by two men carrying small flags, one a red one, on the end of sticks. While watching them we suddenly realised they were dangerous, for a great volley of stones came crashing through every window, followed by more, driving us to take covert, some members diving under the furniture. The servants had been quick in closing the doors. We remained under a bombardment as long as the great mob was passing, but it travelled very fast, and passed in perhaps ten minutes. Forty large panes of glass were smashed to atoms, the floor and tables right across to the fireplace were strewn with stones, bits of pavement, glass, books, inkpots, and things knocked off the tables.¹⁴

The Times reported panic in all quarters of London on February 9th and 10th, and what one historian has called a *grand peur* swept the city. Rumours of roughs gathering came from Deptford, Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, and Camden Town. The propertied classes responded by closing down firms and banks in the City and in the West End, by drawing the gates of Downing Street, by shuttering places of business, by barricading the bridges, and by calling out the police.¹⁵

Those with rather more sympathy towards the working classes expressed rather more pleasure at this turn of events. Wilfred Scawen Blunt had been in Trafalgar Square as the crowd began to gather. He thought it "orderly enough. As far as I [cou]ld judge the people in the Square were bona fide working men, thin & hungry looking, not mere thieves." He left and went to have tea with William Morris at Hammersmith; and, as the riot gathered force, they "had a long talk ab[ou]t the prospects of the 'revolution', but Morris does not think it yet in sight." They only learned later what they had missed. When they did, as Blunt concluded, "the riot seems to have been more important than at first reported; and it will certainly make a landmark in the history of our Revolution, as it is the first time a mob has actually pillaged shops & attacked property on principle." Blunt now regretted

13. George W. SMALLEY, "The London Riots", in *London Letters and Some Others*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1890), 330.

14. Sir Alfred PEASE, *Elections and Recollections* (London: ??, 1932), p. 105. See also Lord Cranbrook's Diary, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, and 26 February 1886, in *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy, Later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892: Political Selections*, ed. Nancy F. JOHNSON (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 597-99.

15. Gareth Stedman JONES, *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press: 1971), pp. 292ff.

that he had not joined the S.D.F. in 1884, when Hyndman had invited him. "My sympathy is entirely with the destructive part of socialism. It is only the constructive I cannot stomach." When Blunt visited the Carlton Club two days later he found all attention still riveted on the riot. Sydney Herbert, who had recently won the Croydon by-election for the Conservatives, "could not raise a smile" when Blunt joked about it.¹⁶ Later Morris described the riot and its aftermath as "the first skirmish of the Revolution." Edward Avling believed a "revolutionary situation would have existed, had the socialists been able to prepare for it." Engels described the rioters of February 8 as "masses of the poor devils of the East End who vegetate in the borderland between working class and lumpen-proletariat, and a sufficient admixture of rougns and 'arrays' to leaven the whole into a mass ready for any 'lark' up to a wild riot *a propos de rien*." George Gissing, who was writing his novel *Demos* at the time, took much of his understanding of working-class politics from his own experiences in the 1880s, and the riot at the end of his novel is said to be based upon the events of 1886.¹⁷ Whether this was a social revolution or not, whether it can be considered part of the proletariat's history, whether or not the London riots were based upon, or spawned, class feeling, contemporaries judged the event in terms of class conflict and class animosity. E.P. Thompson, whose word on such matters must always be consulted, summarizes one kind of conclusion which can be drawn from this evidence. "All the submerged class-fears and hatred of the bourgeoisie, "he writes, "suffered nearly a week of naked exposure."¹⁸

What about the reception of the London riots in the House of Commons? How far were parliamentary reactions, and the formulation of policy, governed by ideas of class warfare? How far were the motivations of Members of Parliament dictated by economic interest? Not many Members spoke in debate, and, as the home rule crisis grew, the articulations of eminent politicians took themselves to the cloud in the West, rather than to discussing the policy implications of the London riots in their letters, diaries, and memoirs. The second reading division on the Compensation for Damages Bill on March 4th, the legislation designed to indemnify those who had suffered losses in the riots, provides evidence which can be examined in an assessment of the social basis of political action. Here Members could assert, by extending or withholding their political support, their reactions to social crisis because they could reveal by their willingness to indemnify those who had suffered losses in the riots their sympathy towards property values or towards protests against those values.

This division list includes, insofar as they voted, the legislative decisions on the indemnification question by the Members of the House of Commons. Some Members could not vote, having been expelled for reasons of electoral corruption or having passed to the fathers. Others may have been absent from the House because of professional or business interests. So, while incomplete, there is no missing evidence, and division list data are likely to be the most complete political information that historians can have. When evidence about the backgrounds of Members of the House of Commons is compared with their votes, it is possible to say something about the grounds and motivations of their political behaviour. This latter evidence includes whether or not they belonged to the landed classes, that is

16. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Blunt MSS., 334-1975, ff. 45-46, 46-47, W.S. Blunt Diary, 8, 9, and 10 February 1886.

17. These references are cited in Stedman JONES, *Outcast London*, p. 345. See also Pierre COUSTILLAS, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 15; Jacob KORG, "Introduction"; George GISSING, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (New York: AMS Press Edition, 1971), p. iv; GISSING, *Demos*, pp. 453-54.

18. E.P. THOMPSON, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 406.

whether they were connected to the peerage, the baronetage, or the landed gentry through the paternal line, through maternal descent, or through marriage. (It is possible to assess their votes in light of business or professional interests as well, but this analysis turned up nothing, and the most important social data proved to be whether or not Members were associated with the landed classes.)¹⁹ The evidence concerning the background of MPs in what follows also includes their partisan affiliations, that is whether they were Conservatives, Liberals, or Irish Nationalists. Finally, this evidence includes material on the constituencies of MPs, particularly the region in which MPs' constituencies were located, the size of the electorates of those constituencies, and whether those constituencies were county, borough, or university seats.²⁰ This evidence on the partisan affiliation of Members and the nature and location of their constituencies makes it possible to consider alternative hypotheses and to judge how far the cross-pressures imposed by party and constituency may have altered or limited the significance of voting along social lines.

When the evidence of parliamentary voting is compared with the evidence concerning the social, political, and constituency backgrounds of Members, the results can be expressed in the table which follows.

The evidence on the social backgrounds of Members shows a social basis and motivation for political behaviour. There is a positive relationship between the votes of Members and whether or not they were landed gentlemen. Members having no connections to landed society tended to divide themselves nearly equally on the question, but with a slight majority opposing the bill. On the other hand, landed gentlemen supported it decisively.

This pattern holds up when the social basis of the votes of Conservatives alone is considered. Tories who were not landed gentlemen tended to support it. Not enough Conservatives spoke in the debate on the bill to use their spoken words as amplifications or explanations of their votes, and the votes themselves describe a pattern rather than reveal its meaning, but much of the debate by Conservatives goes against a social interpretation of Tory voting behaviour. Sir Robert Peel, Bt. (Conservative: Blackburn), the owner of 9,000 acres and the holder of the family seat of Drayton Manor near Tamworth, far from supporting the bill as other Tory landed gentlemen tended to do, was one of its leading

19. Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*, Edward Walford's *Great Families* (1886), the various editions of *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage and Landed Gentry*, (G.E.C.) *The Complete Peerage*, *The Financial Reform Almanack*, *The Liberal Yearbook*, 1887, *The Constitutional Yearbook*, 1887, and the thousands of autobiographies and pious biographies for the period provide a wealth of evidence concerning the connections of MPs to the peerage, the baronetage, and the landed gentry, as well as their business and professional interests and their educational backgrounds. In the statistical tests upon which the analysis of this paper is based, I compared voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill with all of these data. The relationship between voting and landed status was the most fruitful and revealed the most interesting pattern, and it is that comparison which is reported here.

20. The sources from which this evidence was drawn include Dod's *Parliamentary Companion*; *The Constitutional Yearbook*, 1887; *The Liberal Yearbook*, 1887; F.W.S. CRAIG, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Frederick H. McCALMONT, ed., *The Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections from the Reform Act of 1832 to February 1910* (London: 1910, 7th edition). All students of British elections, of course, look to Henry PELLING, *The Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London, Melbourne, Toronto, and New York: Macmillan, 1967) for guidance. The use of these data does not commit the ecological fallacy because they refer neither to electors or to their behaviour. These data reveal characteristics of constituencies, not electors, and the point is to see if there is a relationship between certain kinds of constituencies and the MPs who sat for them. Other studies which have made signal advances using an analysis of the attributes of constituencies include W.O. AYDELOTTE, "Constituency Influence on the British House of Commons, 1841, 1847", in *The History of Parliamentary Behavior*, ed. W.O. AYDELOTTE, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Hugh W. STEPHENS and David W. BRADY, "The Parliamentary Parties and the Electoral Reforms of 1884-1885 in Britain", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, I, 4 (1976): 491-510.

Table 1 Social Class, Partisan, and Constituency Bases of Voting—Second Reading, Compensation for Damages Bill, March 4, 1886

I. <i>Social Class:</i>	% +	% -	N
Whole House			
Landed Gentlemen	81	19	64
Not Landed Gentlemen	44	56	127
Conservatives Only			
Landed Gentlemen	78	22	32
Not Landed Gentlemen	31	69	32
Liberals Only			
Landed Gentlemen	90	10	30
Not Landed Gentlemen	84	16	61
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II. <i>Partisan Affiliation:</i>			
Conservatives	64	35	45
Liberals	86	14	91
Irish Nationalists	2	98	53
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III. <i>Region of Members' Constituencies:</i>			
Southern England	83	17	48
Northern England	73	27	60
Wales	67	33	8
Scotland	80	20	15
Ulster	25	75	16
Southern Ireland	2	98	41
University	100	0	1
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IV. <i>Type of Members' Constituency:</i>			
County	48	52	115
Borough	71	29	73
University	100	0	1
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V. <i>The Size of Electorate in Members' Constituencies:</i>			
0-4999 Electors	33	67	9
5000-7499 Electors	36	64	47
7500-8999 Electors	42	58	43
9000+ Electors	77	23	90

Sources: Dod's *Parliamentary Companion* (1886) Burke's *Landed Gentry* (1886), Craig's *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (1974).

opponents. His biographer described this strange man as one wanting in "moral fibre." "His volatile character, an absence of dignity, an inability to accept a fixed political creed, prevented him from acquiring the confidence of his associates or the public."²¹ Peel had been a junior Lord of the Admiralty in 1855 and was considered a Liberal. He became Chief

21. *Dictionary of National Biography*, XLIV, p. 223.

Secretary for Ireland, also in a Liberal Government. By 1874 Peel had come to consider himself a Liberal-Conservative and he opposed Gladstone's Near East policies. The electors at Huntington returned him to the House of Commons as a Conservative in 1884. Peel sought office in Salisbury's first administration, but found himself frustrated in this. He was "concerned and grieved" to think he had "incurred the heavy displeasure of the Queen" in such a manner as to disbar himself from government. In 1885 the electors of Blackburn returned him as a Conservative, and Peel wrote to Salisbury to congratulate him on his son's success at Darwen.²² Unable to find a place for himself in Tory ruling circles, Peel's relations with his leaders eroded during the spring of 1886. He abstained on the home rule bill, the only Conservative to do so. In the general election of 1886 Peel stood as the Liberal candidate for Inverness Burghs, with the support of Mr. Gladstone, against Robert Finlay, the sitting Member and a Liberal Unionist, whom Gladstone described to Peel as "one of the keenest and most vehement adversaries to the policy which you and I think to be recommended by the broad principles of justice and by clear dictates of expediency." In the same letter Gladstone went on to describe Finlay's political position in such a way as to shed light on both Peel's and Gladstone's notions of correct partisan behaviour. Finlay "calls and thinks himself a Liberal Unionist but this is Toryism of the worst type, the Toryism which breaks up Empires, the Toryism of George III and Lord North, not the Toryism which will ever stand associated with the name of Robert Peel."²³ With such a political creature as this third baronet it is perhaps not possible to expect political or social consistency. His vote on the Compensation for Damages Bill was atypical of the trend in the votes of other Tory landed gentlemen. His speeches on the bill, moreover, dwelt upon regional rather than social considerations. He regarded the bill as a "grievous injustice that would be inflicted on large provincial towns such as Nottingham, Manchester, Blackburn, Ashton, and other places where popular tumults may accidentally arise."²⁴

A similar point can be made for Stanley Leighton's intervention in the debate. Leighton, the second son of Sir Baldwyn Leighton, Bt., whose estates in Shropshire exceeded 4,000 acres, sat as the Conservative Member for the Oswestry division of Shropshire. Like Peel, Leighton was a landed gentleman; like Peel, Leighton opposed the Compensation for Damages Bill, and, like Peel, Leighton opposed it on regional rather than social grounds. "Why should the whole country pay for London," Leighton asked, "if London does not help pay for the whole country?"²⁵ Sir Robert Fowler, a banker as well as a baronet, who sat as a Conservative for the City of London, supported the bill, but as a measure protecting the interests of his constituency rather than as a protection for property. "This Bill is one of great importance to the Metropolis, and it is because it only applies to the Metropolis that the Government are asked to postpone its consideration."²⁶ Even in defending the measure this Conservative resorted to a constituency plea. John Edmund Wentworth Addison, a barrister and Queen's Counsel, the Conservative Member for Ashton, like other Tories who were not landed gentlemen, opposed the Bill, but not because he wished for property to lack protection. As in the cases of Peel and Leighton, Addison spoke on behalf of regional interests, and asked the Home Secretary to "enlarge

22. Hatfield House, Herts., 3d Marquess of Salisbury MSS., Class E, Peel to Salisbury, 6 June 1885, 29 June 1885, and 4 December 1885.

23. British Library, Gladstone Papers, Additional MSS., 44548, folio 103, Gladstone to Peel, 23 June 1886.

24. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2001.

25. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2007.

26. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2004.

his measure, or bring in one which will remedy the grievance not only of the Metropolis but of the whole country.”²⁷ The thrust of the debates, consequently, ran in a direction different from the thrust of Tory voting. Tory voting shows a clear pattern of social influence in political behaviour. In their debates, Peel, Addison, and Leighton reflected a regional rather than a social influence. And this is a point to which this essay will shortly return.

When one turns to the pattern of Liberal voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill quite a different aspect of the case emerges. This shows no relationship at all between the social background of Liberals and their votes. The Liberals did not divide themselves along class lines. They were the party of Government, this was a Government measure, and therefore, for the Liberals, this was a party question. The fissioning and fractioning of the Liberal party, so evident in this parliamentary session,²⁸ was not present in voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill. They were not absolutely united, but 86 percent of the Liberals who voted supported the measure. Those who dissented expressed views rather like those of Peel, Leighton, and Addison on the Tory side: they were not opposed to the protections which ought to be granted to property; they wished to defend regional interests against the claims of the metropolis. As Henry Labouchere (Liberal: Northampton) put it:

As we know, the State bears four-ninths of the cost of the Metropolitan Police — it is alleged it does that because the police are used for public services — but there is really no earthly reason why the Exchequer should pay four-ninths of the damage recently done in London.²⁹

In calling for equal treatment for the metropolis and the provinces, Alfred Illingworth (Liberal: Bradford West) and John Carvell Williams (Liberal: Nottingham South) took a similar line.³⁰

As the pattern of Liberal voting makes clear, partisanship is a factor with which to reckon in any interpretation of the parliamentary responses to the London riots. As the evidence in the table about the relationship between party affiliation and voting makes even clearer, this was a question of the Liberals and a majority of the Conservatives, together, against the Irish Nationalists. Conservatives may have disagreed amongst themselves on this measure, and their disagreement followed class lines, but two-thirds of the Tories supported the bill. They joined a much more united Liberal Party. The Irish Nationalists, almost unanimously, opposed the bill. This point can be put rather more sharply by describing the relative positions of the Conservative and Liberal leaders on this occasion. Front bench Members of both parties, reflecting their governmental and administrative experience, strongly supported the bill; the whole of the Liberal front bench, all fourteen Liberal leaders who voted on the second reading of this measure, and all Conservative leaders save one, voted for the bill. The opposition to the bill came from a united Irish Nationalist party who were joined in the division lobby by isolated Members of the Liberal and Conservative backbenches.

The strong Irish Nationalist opposition to the Compensation for Damages Bill opens the possibility that voting on it was indeed based upon class with the Liberals and Conservatives supporting the interests of property and with the Nationalists opposing property

27. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2002.

28. W.C. LUBENOW, “Irish Home Rule and the Great Separation in the Liberal Party in 1886: The Dimensions of Parliamentary Liberalism”, *Victorian Studies*, XXVI (Winter 1983): 161-80.

29. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2009.

30. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2010-2011, 2008.

interests. This interpretation falls to the ground once again when one consults the debates. Irish Nationalist spokesmen took positions on the measure which were close to those taken by Peel, Leighton, Labouchere, and Williams: their primary consideration was region, not social class. T.M. Healy, who represented the southern division of Londonderry, criticized the Government for bringing in a bill which required provincial towns, towns which might themselves suffer outrages, to pay for their own losses while allowing London to charge off its damages. John Deasy, an Irish Nationalist whip who sat for the western division of county Mayo, said: "I do not see why we in Ireland should be asked to contribute towards the payment of any damages done in England, unless it is understood that the people of England are also prepared to contribute their portion of the cost of any damage done during riots in Ireland."³¹

Partisanship and the holding of government offices, then, are two qualifications which must be made to a class interpretation of the parliamentary responses to the London riots, and an impression gained from a reading of the Conservative, Liberal, and Irish Nationalist speeches in the parliamentary debates is that the constituency attributes of MPs is a third. In the first place, as the evidence in the table makes clear, there was a strong regional pattern to the voting. Large majorities of Members from English, Scottish, and Welsh constituencies (these were slightly less in northern England and Wales) supported the Compensation for Damages Bill. Members from Ulster and Southern Ireland (these were the Irish Nationalists, of course) opposed the bill. There is even a regional bias amongst Conservative landed gentlemen: Tory Members who were connected with the peerage-baronetage-landed gentry who sat for northern English seats were nearly equally divided on the measure (six supported the measure and five opposed it), while those who sat for southern English seats supported the measure by a proportion of nearly six to one (twelve voted for the bill and two voted against it). There was an additional urban-rural aspect to voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill, as these constituency reckonings indicate. Members for counties, with nearly equal proportions, stood on both sides of the question. Members sitting for boroughs, on the other hand, and by a substantial majority, supported it. Furthermore, Members who held constituencies with small electorates, presumably the less urban seats, tended to oppose the bill while MPs whose constituencies had even larger electorates, presumably the more urban seats, tended to support it in even larger proportions.

To summarize, as this analysis of parliamentary voting has shown, there is some evidence which supports a social class interpretation of the parliamentary responses to the London riots in 1886. Principally this is found in the descriptions of votes for the House of Commons as a whole and in the votes of the Conservatives taken by themselves. However, when the debates and the votes of the Liberals and the Irish Nationalists are examined, and when the constituency characteristics of Members are brought to bear, different patterns of political motivation emerge. In these patterns the cleavages fall along partisan and regional lines, as opposed to those of social class. The trend in the figures is stark and staring and it is a trend which is inconvenient to those who wish to impose social conflict theories on parliamentary politics. To put the matter another way, if social class in parliamentary politics is treated as a testable hypothesis, it does not test very well. It is always uncomfortable to find oneself going against established interpretations of political events, but, as the figures for partisan and regional behaviour reveal, one can only take comfort sheltered beneath the arch of probability.

31. Hansard (1886) 3d ser., 302: 2000-2001, 2009, 2011.

The pattern of regional cleavage is sufficiently important to deserve additional explanation because it defies the broad body of modernization theory which incorporates interest and class theories of political conflict. In the modern state, after all, territorial conflicts were supposed to be replaced by social conflicts, nation-wide, whose basis was differing economic interests. The patterns of regional cleavage discovered in parliamentary voting on the Compensation for Damage Bill in 1886 are manifestations of peripheral-central conflict through which regional impulses resisted the centralizing and integrating efforts of strong political centres. This was no new thing. It was a political consequence of events involved in the medieval formation of the English state. These events had forged a traditional territorial structure through a process in which the central offices of the state established control over outlying regions while at the same time providing for the direct representation of regional élites at Westminster. The Irish Act of Union in 1800 was only the most recent expression of this strategy.³² At times in the nineteenth century the tensions between centre and peripheries had a class edge and content to them, but only in the sense in which they were about class issues; conflict was not fundamentally between class interests and class groups, and class politics had to be fitted into this older territorial style.³³ Territorial conflict was not merely the persistence of an anachronism in modern politics, nor was it a reactionary force. It was — and is — a radicalizing element, enhanced by romantic culture in an industrial age which gets its bonding power from a capacity to draw on sentiments and feelings which are at odds with industrial machinery and the machinery of the modern state. If these territorial conflicts were not new in Britain in the nineteenth century, neither were they unique to Britain; and expressions of the same phenomena can be found in German and French legislative politics at the time of the revolutions of 1848, and in the British House of Commons during the same period.³⁴

Something, however, was new in the 1880s. Regional forces were released, *almost* paradoxically, by processes such as industrialization, urbanization, and electoral reform, processes which modernization theory presumes should produce political integration. The democratic reforms of the nineteenth century, of which the franchise and redistribution reforms of 1884-1885 were the most recent and the most powerful, acted as forces for political organization and mobilization. Indeed, one aspect of these processes was integrative: they brought newer and larger numbers of persons and groups into the political system. Another aspect of these processes, however, was disintegrative, at least in its potential, in the sense that it stimulated and revived ancient territorial impulses. Because the political reforms of the nineteenth century coincided with a vast increase of central government's activities, they produced a debate on the existing territorial structure and the relationship between the regions and Westminster. Additionally, they provided the political means for mobilizing this debate.³⁵ The emergence of the Irish Nationalist party and the

32. G.C. BOLTON, *The Passing of the Irish Act of Union: A Study in Parliamentary Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

33. Derek W. URWIN, "Territorial Structures and Political Developments in the United Kingdom", *The Politics of Territorial Integrity*, ed. Stein ROKKAN and Derek W. URWIN (London, Beverly Hills, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982) pp. 43, 54, 65. The regional dimension of political behaviour is also discussed in J.P.D. DUNBABIN, "British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Regional Approach", *The English Historical Review*, XCV, (April 1980): 241-67; AYDELOTTE, "Constituency Influence"; STEPHENS and BRADY, "Parliamentary Parties and Electoral Reforms".

34. Heinrich BEST, "Biography and Political Behavior: Determinants of Parliamentary Decision Making in Germany, France, and Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century" (Social Science History Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.: October 27-30, 1983), pp. 20-21, 30.

35. URWIN, "Territorial Structures", pp. 40-41, 55; and, by the same author, "Towards the Nationalization of British Politics?: The Party System, 1885-1940", in *Wahlerbewegung in der Europäischen Geschichte*, ed. O. BUSCH (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1980), pp. 225-58.

election of Members to express the grievances of the Scottish crofters in the 1880s are two expressions of this kind of mobilization.

Such effects of democratic reform are only superficially paradoxical. The strong association of region with partisanship in which the Conservatives represented the impulses of the centre and the Liberals — and later Labour — represented the grievances of territorial peripheries blunted centrifugal energies. Wales and Scotland, for example, did not follow Ireland into devolutionism: the existing partisan arrangements were sufficient to manage their resistance to Westminster and Whitehall; they benefitted from the industrial revolution; they could find in imperialism the same kind of hope the English did; and neither had experienced the kind of direct intervention expressed by the Dublin Castle regime and the settler ascendancy. Becoming strongly rooted in Wales and Scotland, the Liberal party declared for these peripheries their characteristic reservations to the territorial constitution: Welsh and Scottish disestablishment, land reform of the crofter sort, and demands for the Scottish Office. For the Welsh and the Scots and the English of the north representation at Westminster retained its political value. When Mr. Gladstone took up Irish home rule on behalf of the Liberal party in 1885-1886 he was seeking to preserve, by the same strategy, an integrationist approach, a unionist one, for his party in Ireland. For Ireland, this was too late and, by 1886, the only thing the Irish wanted from Westminster was liberation, not representation. Nonetheless, while serving as representatives of Ireland in the British House of Commons, Nationalist MPs could use their votes to represent their regional and territorial interests on the occasion of the second reading of the Compensation for Damages Bill. These were their interests, not a social interest shared fraternally with the working classes of London.

The point of this discussion of territorial conflicts in parliamentary politics has not been to run afield, but rather the reverse: to fit the policy dispute over the parliamentary responses to the London riots into the behavioural regime it best fits. Now, it might be objected that voting on this legislation was unrepresentative of political behaviour in the nineteenth century. And so it was, but in a very special and technical sense only. When all of the divisions of this parliamentary session are examined to construct ordinal scales of the Guttman type,³⁶ an extensive dimension describing left-right ideological voting in the House of Commons emerges. The division on the Compensation for Damages Bill does not fit it. By itself this division finds an ideological relationship with only nine other items (the House of Commons divided on 143 questions in 1886), and, of these nine, only seven fit a common voting dimension. This is a way of saying that, statistically speaking, the Compensation for Damages Bill stood on the metes and bounds of parliamentary life. What put it there? Not, the evidence suggests, the pattern of regional conflict described above, but rather a perverse pattern of partisan voting. In voting on items fitting the major ideological dimension in 1886 the Irish Nationalists and the Liberals tended to support these questions, though there is a strong pattern of Liberal dissent,³⁷ while the Conservatives opposed them. In voting on the Compensation for Damages Bill the Liberals are where they can be expected: in support of the bill. The Conservatives and the Irish Nationalists

36. For a dimensional analysis of parliamentary voting in 1886, see my "Ireland, the Great Depression, and the Railway Rates: Political Issues and Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons of 1886", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 122, 4 (August 1978): 204-13. For other discussions of this approach, see W.O. AYDELOTTE, "Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840s", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, V, 2 (January 1963): 134-64; Duncan MacRAE, Jr., *Issues and Parties in Legislative Voting* (New York, Evanston, and London: 1970).

37. See my paper "Irish Home Rule", *passim*.

are not where one would expect to find them. As the evidence for partisanship described in the table above serves to indicate, a substantial majority of the Conservatives supported the bill and the Irish Nationalists, almost unanimously, opposed it. It is this voting realignment which cast the bill out of ideological relationship with the other great questions of the age. This allows a pretty neat summary of the motivations of the major parliamentary groups as they responded to the policy consequences of the London riots: for the Liberals it was partisan, for the Tories it was social class, for the Irish Nationalists it was regionalism.

What is unusual in the voting on this measure is not regional voting, but voting along class lines. In the great political disruptions of the nineteenth century, in the corn laws crisis and the home rule crisis, the parties did not divide themselves along social lines.³⁸ In fact, for much of the nineteenth century social questions were quite on the periphery of parliamentary action. In the 1840s they divided parties³⁹ and, in fact, segregated themselves into distinct ideological dimensions.⁴⁰ By the 1880s they had become more fully integrated into the parliamentary agenda but not as completely as political and land reform, disestablishment, and even Ireland. It would remain for the twentieth century for social questions to find their place in parliamentary politics.⁴¹

This essay began as a discussion of the social basis of political action, and so, but as a cautionary tale, it ends. Social conflict theories have been important for very good reasons. Of great heuristic and dramatic value, they are pronounced in their narrative uses. They have guided much useful research in western politics. They carry great conviction. It is a comfort to find, in fact, the pattern of social cleavage in the Conservative party which is described above. It is rather gratifying that at least one of our regnant orthodoxies is not wholly wrong. Consequently, it is not that social class theories belong to some twilight world of fancy, speculation, and moralism; at least no more than other value systems. They have an empirical basis, but a basis which is limited and circumscribed by other politically forceful elements. Politics is a highly complicated topic, subject to many cross-pressures, of which social class is only one. The conditions of their application must be specified with great care, and with as much exactness as possible. For the London riots of 1886 and their parliamentary aftermath social class describes the nature of public disorder and the parliamentary reactions of Conservatives in Parliament to it. For the parliamentary Liberals and Irish Nationalists, on the other hand, partisanship tamed social class and territorial conflict overlaid it.

38. AYDELOTTE, "The Country Gentlemen"; LUBENOW, "Irish Home Rule" and "The Social Basis of the Great Separation in the Liberal Party in 1886".

39. See my *Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes Toward State Intervention, 1833-1848* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), pp. 40-41, 82-84, 116-17, 146-47, 195, 203, 210, 214.

40. AYDELOTTE, "Voting Patterns", pp. 152, 155-57, 161-62.

41. I shall have something further to say about the integration of social issues into the political agendas of the 1880s in an extensive study I am making on parliamentary voting. For the emergence of social policy in late nineteenth and early twentieth century politics through the mobilization of public finance, see Jose HARRIS, "The Transition to High Politics in English Social Policy, 1880-1914", in *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain, Ten Studies*, ed. Michael BENTLEY and John STEVENSON (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1983), esp. pp. 73-79.