

The Value of Labour in Question

Discussing Economic Crisis in Glasgow's Unstamped Press, 1816-1835

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Abbreviations

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| GMM | <i>Glasgow Mechanics Magazine; and Annals of Philosophy</i> |
| HTA | <i>Herald to the Trades Advocate; and Co-operative Journal</i> |
| SU | <i>Spirit of the Union</i> |
| WJ | <i>Weavers' Journal</i> |

1. Introduction: Representing an Ill-Fated Trade

Francis Jeffrey's Speech on Behalf of the Glasgow Weavers, 1812

Tell the Manufacturers, if they cannot pay these men something like a reasonable reward for *their labour*, they ought to give up *their trade*. Tell them it is unjust, it is disgraceful, to employ men for a pittance so miserable, and force them to sacrifice their strength, their time, their acquired skill, without a fair equivalent.¹

In February 1812 the Glasgow based Association of Operative Weavers approached the Glasgow magistrates, Sheriffs of Lanarkshire and finally the Justices of Peace seeking legal approval of a wage table for weaving.² The previous year the association had unsuccessfully petitioned the parliament regarding apprenticeship restrictions and wage settlements. The employers argued for the flexibility of wages depending on the demand of the market for woven commodities and suggested a different table. The JPs initially ruled for the weavers as they had done frequently in the past.³ Their decision was based on the logic of moral economy according to which authorities were obliged, by custom, to act in the interest of the “common

¹ Jeffrey, *Substance Of a Speech*. My italics.

² The association was established in 1809, based in Glasgow but included weaving communities from Perth and Stirling. Maver, *Glasgow*, 52.

³ Fraser, *Conflict*, 90-91.

weal".⁴ However, the manufacturers appealed and raised doubts concerning the competence of the Justices of the Peace to fix wages at all. Furthermore, the legality of the combination of workers into an association was increasingly scrutinized, considering that combinations had been outlawed by the British Parliament in 1799.⁵ After an official affirmation of the JP's' previous decision, weavers refused to work for less than was determined on their wage table while the manufacturers rejected to employ them at the new prices. A large strike followed, rendering the Lanarkshire authorities increasingly anxious. The weavers' protests, entailing confiscation of working equipment and intimidation of non-strikers, were copied elsewhere in Scotland and England.⁶ Moreover, the reoccurrence of popular radicalism personified by veteran radical Maurice Margarot, who had returned from transportation, as well as the possibility of English Luddism being transmitted to textile workers north of the border, added significantly to the authorities panic.⁷ In December a proclamation was issued, alerting people to the criminalisation of workmen combinations and threatening of reluctant strikers as part of the authorities' agenda for the following year. As a

⁴ Thompson, *Customs*, 188-9.

⁵ *Dictionary of World History*, "Combination Acts," *Oxford Reference Online*.

⁶ Fraser, *Conflict*, 91-94.

⁷ Margarot targeted in particular deprived areas. Pentland, *Spirit*, 14-5. Luddism was the activity of machine wrecking, carried out by artisans in the textile industries of North England "when faced with replacement of their own skilled labor by machines." Binfield, *Luddites*, 14. There had been similar activities in Scotland, for example, in Deanston, however, Luddism never spread there and remained mainly an English phenomenon between 1811 and 1813. *Ibid.* Also compare Fraser, *Conflict*, 93.

consequence, the leaders of the Glasgow Weavers' Strike of 1812 were arrested in February 1813.⁸

Francis Jeffrey, editor of the Whig periodical *Edinburgh Review* and professional lawyer, defended the weavers throughout this crisis.⁹ His speeches earned him the support of all three Glasgow mainstream newspapers, regardless of their various political complexions; their kindness, however, quickly disappeared after the weavers' defeat became obvious.¹⁰ In a *Substance Of a Speech, Delivered Before the Justices on Tuesday 3rd November, 1812*, Jeffrey reflected upon the present state of the Weavers' as a "sum of misery and wretchedness" that awakened in him "every painful emotion" of sympathy.¹¹ Jeffrey established that a weaver working 10 to 12 hours a day only earned 8 shilling per week compared to workers engaged in other trades earning at least 16 shilling.¹² After referring to the unhealthy conditions of the weaver's work shop and rapidly changing fashions, putting operatives employed in "fancy" weaving in a precarious position, Jeffrey called for the declaration of a "reasonable wage" of about 11 ½ s per week as lawful.¹³ Although he acknowledged the impact of the fluctuations of foreign trade, he refused the idea that those variations could "be supposed to produce all the evils

⁸ Ibid., 93-96.

⁹ Together with Henry Cockburn, Jeffrey drafted the Burgh Reform bill for Scotland, approved in 1832; the reform bill is briefly mentioned in chapter three. Fry, "Jeffrey, Francis, Lord Jeffrey (1773–1850)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁰ Glasgow's mainstream newspapers: *Glasgow Courier*, *Glasgow Herald* (both conservative), *Glasgow Chronicle* (liberal). Cowan, *Newspaper*, 30-31.

¹¹ Jeffrey, *Substance Of a Speech*.

¹² Shilling hereafter = s (abbreviated).

¹³ Jeffrey. *Substance Of a Speech*.

represented by our opponents”.¹⁴ Finally Jeffrey articulated the statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Notwithstanding Jeffrey’s compassion, his distinctive use of the words ‘trade’ and ‘labour’ as belonging to a different set of people –people that were involved in the commercial exchange of products and people that manually produced commodities for that commercial exchange – is evidence of a point of view that took this division of trade for granted. It was thus noticeably detached from an older sense of craft community that must still have been in living memory for at least some of the weavers.¹⁵ Jeffrey had studied under Dugald Stewart, “himself a pupil of Adam Smith”, and David Hume at the University of Edinburgh and had internalised Enlightenment ideas emphasising economic and scientific progress rather than traditional values.¹⁶ He, moreover, encouraged the dissemination of the new science of political economy by including many essays by its supporters, for example J.R. Mc Culloch, into the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁷ Therefore Jeffrey, while speaking on behalf of the weavers during their strike in 1812, stood also for a constituency that accepted and supported unrestrained industrial commerce. Jeffrey’s, and even more so the *Edinburgh Review*’s, political affinity was with the liberal, progressive Whig party.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fraser, *Conflict*, 17-39. See also Murray, *Handloom Weavers*, 7 and 31.

¹⁶ Fry, “Jeffrey, Francis, Lord Jeffrey (1773–1850),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁷ Ibid., On McCulloch’s educational schemes see Tyrell “Political Economy, Whiggism and the Education,” *Scottish Historical Review*, 151-165.

After the case had definitely shifted in favour of the employers, an article in Glasgow's leading advertiser, read and sponsored mainly by merchants and manufacturers, brought home explicitly what the powerful opinion on wage fixing was: The *Glasgow Herald* claimed that "labour is just as much a subject to traffic as the article which it produces". Therefore, "judicial interference ... is just about as idle as any attempt to fix the winds".¹⁸

The stark contrast between this perception and the self-representation of the weavers' case twenty-three years later is remarkable. William Thomson in 1835, a weaver and trade unionist from Glasgow, did not miss an opportunity to point out that it was not the employers' trade but *his* trade he was talking about. He argued with a similarly naturalising metaphor as the author in the *Herald* had done, that competition was a 'mighty river' that required regulation should it not destroy *his* trade.¹⁹ Thomson's appeal, which will be analysed in more detail at the end of this thesis exemplifies lucidly that a different, a more popular understanding of economy had developed between 1812 and 1835.

Objectives

The main concern of this thesis is with the emergence of a modern and popular economic debate. The 1812-experience of devaluation, impoverishment and indignation signalled the end of early modern moral economic beliefs and practices

¹⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 7 December 1812. For political sympathies see Cowan, *Newspaper*, 21 and 31.

¹⁹ *WJ*, 31 October 1835. My italics.

in Scotland, not only but particularly in Glasgow, and necessitated the development of a new critique of economic arrangements. My argument is that the understanding of this experience was mediated first through semi-economic arguments put forward by radical reformers between 1816 and 1819 as well as 1830 and 1832; secondly by the macro-economical and imperative approach of political economists during the 1820s, thirdly by the more ethically defined ideas of Owenite socialists occurring at the same time and finally by the nascent national trade unionism of the 1830s. This investigation testifies, furthermore, that these discourses existed parallel and often in conjunction with each other and were not clearly distinguishable or even in direct opposition to each other. By 1835 there existed a popular counter-discourse to the orthodoxy of political economy favoured by the elite. Conclusively, this counter-discourse was diverse, consisting of the different strands of interpretation just mentioned but also including traces of traditional moral economic assumptions. The novelty of this evolving anti-capitalist critique was a modified labour theory of value that, paradoxically, originated in political economy. Previously this theorem was used by the elite as an apology for the devaluation of manual labour, but was turned upside down by early socialists who utilised it to explain capitalism's inherent tendency to produce permanent economic crisis.²⁰ Due to its dominance in the primary sources the problem of devaluation of manual labour, initially reflected in the decrease of weavers' wages, but also occurring in other trades, will be the main focus of analysis.²¹ Only limited

²⁰ Thompson, *People's Science*, 219-221.

²¹ The cotton industry was nother trade were industrial disputes regarding wage levels were fought out fiercely. Compare Butt, "Scottish Cotton Industry," in *Scottish Textile History*, eds. Butt and Ponting, 139-161.

attention will be given to the associated problems of 'free' trade, political representation, radicalisation, education, poverty and trade unionism.

Sources

The primary sources underlying this research are Glasgow's unstamped periodicals published between 1816 and 1835. The unstamped periodical by way of continuous publications of an ever altering but connected content is to distinguish from the eighteenth-century political pamphlet which often circulated one article multiple times. The unstamped weekly or monthly offers a particular good insight into contemporary attitudes because it often contained a discussion involving several participants (including readers), instead of a singular message by just one party.²² In terms of popular opinion on economic matters the unstamped press is also better qualified than other forms of (unstamped) popular serial prints common at the time, namely broadsides and chapbooks, which mainly fulfilled entertaining functions.²³ It was also different from elite magazines like the *Edinburgh Review* or the *Rambler*, the content of which was mainly directed at literary and educated circles.²⁴ The unstamped press finally differs from the stamped newspaper, the price of which after 1815 was generally about 7 s per number, unaffordable to people on labour wages. The high price was caused by stamp duties (4 pence per

²² Compare Pentland, "Pamphlet Wars," in *History of the Book Vol. 2*, eds. Brown and McDougall, 390-398. See also Collison, *Street Literature*, 1-10.

²³ Ibid. Compare also Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 8-20. For topics in broadsides see also <http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/highlights.html>.

²⁴ Bell, "Periodical," in *History of the Book, Vol. 3*, ed. Bell, 340-343. Shattock "Reviews and Monthlies," in Ibid., 343-358.

issue in 1815) on papers offering news coverage, a way of the British government to inhibit political discussion, especially in the aftermath of the French revolution.²⁵ Although readers often shared subscriptions or read the newspaper in public houses, the emergence of the unstamped weekly in 1816 took the labouring classes by storm. William Cobbett, editor of the *Political Register*, costing 1 s,2/1 d in 1816, found a way to publish one of his leading articles, "To the Journeymen and Labourers", as an unstamped pamphlet for 2d. This avoidance of newspaper tax through legal loopholes rapidly turned into a trend. Conductors of unstamped weeklies normally fashioned a periodical around a leading essay "which could incorporate prohibited news content by way of commentary" and frequently included "miscellaneous essays, reports, poetry, extracts, and correspondence".²⁶ However, after the Six Acts of 1819 extended the stamp duty to papers containing commentary on news the unstamped weekly disappeared in many places. In Glasgow it only returned in the 1830s as popular political papers discussing Owenism, parliamentary reform, trade unionism and later in the decade, Chartism. While this survey will focus on local material, produced in Glasgow, it will contain much that is applicable to the British context of an evolving modern, popular critique of political economy.

²⁵ Compare Murray, "Newspapers," in *History of the Book, Vol3*, ed. Bell, 370-385.

Pence hereafter = d (abbreviated).

²⁶ McCalman, "Unstamped Press," *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age. Oxford Reference Online*.

Historical Background and Elite Attitudes towards Economy

The events of 1812 in Glasgow symbolised a definite split from the discourse of moral economy to the economic theory and practice of political economy, which had developed from a subversive undercurrent at the beginning to an overbearing counter-discourse by the end of the eighteenth century.²⁷ Moral economy originating in ancient and Christian ideas emphasising fair exchange of products and labour as well as upholding the ideal of a universal right to charity; was still prevailing for much of the eighteenth century. It can be understood as a popular consensus, constantly determining and negotiating legitimate economic practices through food riots, strikes and court appeals.²⁸ This economic consensus was particularly important for the regulation of grain prices, but it was effective also in the realm of work.²⁹ The influence of trade incorporations on local councils, which had since the fifteenth century protected prices, determined the quality of goods and regulated the influx to trades by apprenticeship regulations, was facilitated by the authorities' affiliation with community based paternalism.³⁰ Political economy, on the other hand, stressed the economic benefit of self-interest to the whole nation in the context of an international, unregulated market. This profound rupture in economic discourse was intensified by the rapid transformation of Scotland's and in particular Glasgow's economy. Glasgow's transformation from a

²⁷ Berg, *Luxury*, 5 – 37. For the Scottish context see Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*, 12.

²⁸ On consumer-consciousness and the 'bread-nexus' see Thompson, *Customs*, 189-200. Compare also Claeys, *Machinery*, 2-9.

²⁹ For recent study on the meal market in early nineteenth-century Ayr see Whatley, "Custom, Commerce and Lord Meadowbank," *Scottish Historical Studies*, 1-27.

³⁰ Fraser, "Protest," in *People and Society*, eds. Devine and Mitchison, 277-283.

commercial to an industrial city between 1780 and 1830 was largely built upon the expansion of the textile trade, first of woollen and linen, subsequently of the cotton industry. These industries benefitted from the plentiful provision of coal in the region ensuring the application of steam power to modern technology, and drew on already existing connections to overseas markets established earlier, during the commercialisation of the city in the eighteenth century.³¹ While local trade incorporations remained a formidable force in Scotland until 1812, the forces of this expanding commercial society had gradually undermined their influence. Changes unfavourable to tradesmen were initially most noticeable for weavers, “Glasgow’s single most important occupational category”.³² Demand and wages rose until the end of the eighteenth century while control of entry vanished, causing unskilled men, women and young people to enter the weaving industry, but deeming it less likely for journeymen to become masters. Moreover, large weaving firms and the “cutthroat competition” of small capitalists gradually pushed down weavers’ wages.³³ Additionally, the new commercial elite of Glasgow and the West of Scotland formed organisations, such as the ‘Chambers of Commerce and Manufacturers’ in 1783, which lobbied the parliament to adopt legislations fostering individualistic and unrestrained capitalism.³⁴ While the need for the liberation of trade from protectionism was often justified with the political economy put forward in the *Wealth of Nations* (1767), it was generally ignored that

³¹ Campbell, “Industrial City,” in *Glasgow, Vol. 1*, eds. Devine and Jackson, 184-214.

³² Whatley, “Labour,” *Ibid.*, 375.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Nenadic, “Modernisation,” *Ibid.*, 293-4.

Adam Smith had also argued for a high-wage economy in order to stimulate industriousness and consumption among the labouring classes.³⁵ Another publication that had a verifying impact on the attitudes of the commercial elite was Thomas Malthus' essays on the *Principles of Population* (1798). Malthus argued on the basis of the new science of statistics that a rise in living standards would inevitably lead to population growth which in turn would outstrip food supplies and thus diminish recently raised living standards.³⁶ Closely associated with Malthus's *Principles* but, nonetheless, a work that influenced socialism to a greater extent, was David Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817). Ricardo's *Principles* concerned natural laws declared to determine rents, profits and wages. Drawing on Malthus' essays, Ricardo theorised that population increase would drive food prices up. While land of poorer quality was utilised for food production, rents would rise at the same time as profits and wages would fall.³⁷ He, furthermore, propounded a labour theory of value that was inspired by Adam Smith, however, applied it more effectively than Smith had done to capitalist society. Ricardo explained that a commodity's value was determined by the amount of labour time spent on its production, but "recognised that, in capitalist production, the wage reflects only a portion of the value of the labor invested".³⁸ The capitalist required the remainder, or surplus value, for further production. This

³⁵ Compare Book I, Chapter VIII in Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 64-88.

³⁶ Pullen, "Malthus, (Thomas) Robert (1766–1834)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

³⁷ Calhoun ed., "Ricardo, David," *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. *Oxford Reference Online*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Ricardo was also member of parliament from 1819-1823. Peach, "Ricardo, David (1772–1823)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

concept was taken up and revised by early socialists inspired by mill owner and social reformer Robert Owen.³⁹ Chapter two elaborates how Owenite socialists acknowledged the science of political economy as a useful tool but remodelled Ricardo's theory of profits and wages into a concept that explained enduring devaluation of labour as a distinctive capitalist feature.⁴⁰ Political economy, often labelled 'dismal science' by contemporaries due to its emphasis on mathematics and its detachment from moral philosophy, was nonetheless echoed by religious leaders.⁴¹ A famous example was Reverend Thomas Chalmers, who, originally from Kilmany, took over Glasgow's Tron parish in 1815. Inspired by Malthus, Chalmers promoted the education of "men in spontaneous communal benevolence" and tried to stimulate in the labouring poor industriousness and responsibility in order to offset a reliance on legalised poor relief. His most influential work, *The Christian Economy of Large Towns*, was based on his controversial poor relief experiments at St. John's in Glasgow.⁴² While Chalmers ideas became influential especially in the poor law debate of the 1830s, the idea of poverty being inevitable and even necessary for economic growth lent itself easily to a commercial elite that believed in the priority of self-interest.⁴³ It had swung away from the concept of paternalist obligation towards the less privileged, to embracing economic ideas in which

³⁹ Owen had purchased the New Lanark mill south of Glasgow together with other partners in 1799 and started a controversial but successful experiment in philanthropic management. Claeys, "Owen, Robert (1771–1858)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *People's Science*, 158-191.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9. Compare Pullen, "Malthus, (Thomas) Robert (1766–1834)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴² Brown, *Chalmers*, 144-146.

⁴³ Mitchison, *Poor Law*, Ch.6-9.

stately interventions and provisions were believed to inhibit economic progress and create more poverty. The self-made man was the new ideal of the age and the master manufacturer the very personification of it.⁴⁴

As much as Glasgow was a microcosm where shifting elite attitudes were amplified by rapid economic growth and social mobility, popular economic attitudes were transformed, too, often representing the social cost of industrialisation.

Considering that the largest occupational group of its inhabitants constituted of workers undignified by the loss of social status, economic identity and by poverty, the Weavers' Strike of 1812 must have been a defining experience, signalling that practice and justification by custom had become ineffective and that times demanded a different approach to industrial disputes. The criminalisation of workmen's combination as a result of this event while employers' combinations like the 'Glasgow Chambers of Commerce' remained unquestioned, however, raised the stakes for all Scottish men employed in manual labour. Required was an economic concept of their own; a concept that could explain the ever increasing loss of value in manual labour, offered alternative schemes rewarding labour appropriately, or could justify the need for the renewal of traditional trade regulations.

⁴⁴ Compare Dickens depiction of the ideal-type of a 'self-made' man as the literary character Bounderby in his 1854-novel *Hard Times*.

Methodology

Considering the economic and political inequality, defining especially early nineteenth-century Britain, it seems compelling to adopt a Marxist theoretical framework for its analysis, a trend pioneered by E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Plenty of similarly motivated studies exist for Scotland.⁴⁵ *Conflict and Class: Scottish Workers, 1700-1838* (1988) by Hamish Fraser is probably the most representative and important of these studies for the early modern period, but there are others with analogous theoretical suppositions such as Norman Murray's *The Scottish Handloom Weavers, 1790-1850* (1978) or, indeed, Christopher Whatley's chapter "Making and Breaking of the Scottish Working Class" in *Scottish Society* (2000). Social, but especially labour historians of early nineteenth-century Scotland seem to concern themselves mainly with problems relating to 'class', in particular 'class' struggle, 'working-class' formation and 'working-class' identity. Questions regarding working people that go beyond a Marxist-historical orthodoxy are noticeable only by their absence. Even when the historical convention was challenged by Fiona Montgomery in her 1974 PhD thesis "Glasgow Radicalism, 1830-1848", the questions raised were still confined to the problem of 'class': the definite existence of a working-class or of a reality indicating more complex relations between classes, obscuring the notion of a working class identity.⁴⁶ While remaining sceptical of their theoretical assumptions this work will draw on the valuable insights that are, nonetheless, on offer in those studies,

⁴⁵ For example Johnston's *History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (1946), Young's *Rousing of the Scottish Working classes* (1979), Dickson ed. *Capital and Class in Scotland* (1982).

⁴⁶ Montgomery, *Glasgow Radicalism*, 5.

especially in regard to local information and the unstamped press. While the Marxist style of Scottish social historians remains largely uncontested, it was confronted with more success in England (and beyond) during the 1980s and 1990s by a new generation of post-structural scholars. Post-structural historical positions are often inspired by the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who, based on insights of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, revived a theory of language and extended its validity to social systems which he subsequently deconstructed as 'texts' indicative of prevailing power discourses.⁴⁷ The strongest impact on British social history caused Gareth Stedman Jones' essay "Rethinking Chartism" in 1981, which instead of assuming Chartism to have been "the essence of a class movement" brought about by "new relations of production engendered by modern industry", focussed on the continuity of radical critique and found that the origins of the Chartists' political language stretched as far back as the eighteenth century and, thus, preceded modern industrial relations of production.⁴⁸ A more moderate poststructuralist method was employed by Dror Wahrman in *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (1995). Wahrman like Jones focused on political language, but modified the linguistic approach by defining the relationship between social being and representation as a space with "*a logic and dynamic of its own*".⁴⁹ This dynamic

⁴⁷ Scott and Marshall, "'Post-Structuralism,'" *A Dictionary of Sociology*. *Oxford Reference Online*.

⁴⁸ Jones, "Rethinking Chartism," in *Languages of Class*, 92. The Chartists, a movement unsuccessfully trying to establish an independent popular political party in Britain between 1837 and 1854, worked out a six-point charter to that effect, demanding first and foremost universal (manhood) suffrage. Cannon ed., "Chartism," *A Dictionary of British History*. *Oxford Reference Online*.

⁴⁹ Wahrman, *Imagining*, 8. Wahrman's italics.

space is not “determined or dictated by the social process” such as productive relations, nor is it “prescribed” by discourses of power or “some property inherent in language”.⁵⁰ In that way, Wahrman overcame a weakness inherent in Marxist historical theory and post-structuralism alike, their tendency towards determinism. While the primacy of economic relations are assumed by the former, the latter tends to uphold power discourses as dominating, if not deciding the outcome of, historical events, processes and experiences. Wahrman, moreover, stressed the significance of unforeseen events such as the Peterloo massacre in 1819, which figures in chapter one below, as important components profound enough to rupture discourses. By, additionally, stressing the existence of “dynamics of choices between different possible representations of social reality”, Wahrman was able to take into account agency and contingency as essential factors of historical change.⁵¹ In its linguistic focus and theoretical merit, Wahrman’s study serves, therefore, as a guide for the present thesis. Consequently, this inquiry aims to acknowledge economic structures and imperative discourses as significant forces shaping popular economic attitudes, but nevertheless, regards events, such as the outcome of the 1812 Weavers’ Strike as well as the related collective experience of deprivation and indignation, as additional and significant factors forcing working people to rethink their social and economic concepts and strategies.

Two, more recent works offering a similar theoretical perspective, but particularly relevant due to their focus on the Scottish context, are Gordon Pentland’s *The Spirit of the Union* (2011) and *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland 1820-*

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 8-10.

1833 (2008). In *Spirit* Pentland claimed that a radical reform network was formed by veteran radicals touring Scotland between 1812 and 1820, a process that was fostered by the widespread distribution of radical pamphlets and newspapers. This network, as is apparent in chapter one, contributed to the explanation of the devaluation of labour in political terms with the result that distress was channelled into the pursuit of parliamentary reform.⁵² Pentland's analysis of political languages during the years 1830 to 1833 in *Radicalism* is particularly relevant for chapter three, especially in its ability to demonstrate the utilisation of different, sometimes contradictory languages in association with each other within the context of reform agitation.⁵³ Leaving Scottish radical politics behind, the theoretical complexity in which a modern popular understanding of economy evolved comes to the fore particularly well in Noel Thompson's *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Crisis 1816-1834* (1984). Largely focussing on English unstamped periodicals such as the *Gorgon* and the *Black Dwarf*, Thompson investigated how an alternative political economy, inspired by anti-capitalist and Owenite socialists, was developed throughout this period, often mixing with other languages such as political economy, utilitarianism and radicalism in order to legitimise itself.⁵⁴ The present survey shares common ground with Thompson's investigation in terms of its main objective, to demonstrate the development of a popular understanding of economy between 1816 and 1835, but for Scotland. It resembles the *Peoples' Science* furthermore in its use of the same,

⁵² For period 1812-1816 see Pentland, *Spirit*, 13-19

⁵³ Pentland, *Radicalism*, 147-153.

⁵⁴ Thompson, *People's Science*, 1-8. For evolution of early socialist thought see Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*.

but Scottish, primary material, the unstamped press, read and influenced by working people.

Chapter one offers a focus on the years 1816 to 1819 and looks at the different arguments that were brought forward to explain post-war distress in Glasgow's unstamped periodicals. The first half focuses on the *Tribunal* of 1816, an unstamped monthly that united a diversity of explanations of economic crisis. Some of the ideas included were related to the radical reform movement, others anticipating early socialist thought or pointing to traditional customs. The dissent of the radical reform movement and the submergence of economic issues are exemplified in the second half with two unstamped weeklies, the *Spirit of the Union* and the *Reformer* from 1819. Chapter two highlights the efforts to popularise classical political economy during the 1820s, of which an article by Francis Place on "Combination Laws" in the *Glasgow Mechanics Magazine* is exemplary. The second half outlines the evolution of a socialist political economy, influenced especially by ideas regarding the value of labour put forward by Robert Owen, William Thompson and John Gray. The political and intellectual background established in the first two chapters becomes particularly relevant in chapter three, where the interaction of the languages of political economy, Owenite socialism and radicalism is analysed in a few unstamped papers published in Glasgow between 1830 and 1834, but especially the *Herald to the Trades Advocate*. Before summary and conclusive remarks, the last chapter offers an analysis of William Thomson's (not to be mistaken with William Thompson, the socialist, mentioned above)

understanding of competition and the value of labour as compared to Jeffrey's appeal examined at the beginning.

Chapter 1: Labour Exploited?

Discussing Economic Crisis in Glasgow's Tribunal, 1816

1. ... how comes it that ... weaving is reduced to such a state that the operatives are next to literal starvation? ... 2. ... how comes it that, now when peace is universal, commercial distress is almost unexampled? ... 3. How comes it that poor workmen eventually gain nothing by the greater part of all discoveries...? ... 4. How happens it that, in all nations where much ... appearances of unbound riches take place, those 'thrown into the shades' of life are in proportion miserable? Is this the case now in the united kingdoms? Is this so in Glasgow?⁵⁵

In 1812 popular economic attitudes in the press were often filtered through the words of representatives like Jeffrey. But we can at least recognize the weaver's belief in traditional economic practices through their persistence in pursuing their

⁵⁵ *Tribunal*, 6 July 1816.

case with the Justices of the Peace.⁵⁶ We can, furthermore, understand their anger, despair and indignation from reports of riots and attacks on soup kitchens when their efforts failed.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the experiences and opinions of other tradesmen were as good as absent from the contemporary Scottish press, so it should not be assumed that the behaviour of the destitute weavers spoke for more than this particular section of working people or that Jeffrey's plea for legislative protection was meant to be applied to any other than this particular industry.

After the Napoleonic wars, however, economic distress was not anymore confined to separate occupations but affected the whole of British society. Naturally this generated a broader discussion about its causes as well as possible remedies and provided a fertile ground for subversive ideas delivered for instance by the radical reform movement. Between 1813 and 1815 veteran radical Major Cartwright campaigned throughout Britain, including Scotland in 1815, to build a national platform. He focussed particularly on troubled areas in order "to channel distress into activity for radical political reform rather than industrial violence".⁵⁸ Radicals, moreover, published political pamphlets and newspapers. Cobbett's *Political Register* was the most widely circulated radical newspaper.⁵⁹ But there were other papers, such as the unstamped weeklies *Black Dwarf* and the *Gorgon*, that facilitated dissenting groups to understand their economic grievances in political

⁵⁶ Detailed account of the 1812 Weavers' Strike in Fraser, *Conflict*, 91-96.

⁵⁷ For example in Calton, weavers' subscription money was used to dole out food; it was meant as a charitable gesture, but perceived as offensive by the weavers who had fought against the downward pressure on wages. Pentland, *Spirit*, 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁹ Fraser, *Conflict*, 104.

terms.⁶⁰ Retrenchment and parliamentary reform through universal (manhood) suffrage and annual parliaments, were generally put forward as an “umbrella solution” to compound economic as well as political crisis.⁶¹ Although the denunciation of ‘old corruption’ was a dominant feature in the rhetoric of radical reformers, the exploitation of labour was a recurrent theme, also. Cobbett in particular raged against the fact that the value of labour was not rewarded with an equivalent value in wages.⁶² The search for the reason of labour exploitation was, however, not based on an analysis of unjust economic arrangements but tended to refer to factors of political or legislative nature. The Bank Restriction Act of 1797 was believed to have created a ‘paper swindle’ by banning gold as a currency. Increased taxation to pay off national debt that had been accumulated during the war was seen as another source of widespread economic suffering.⁶³ Additionally, the Corn Laws of 1815 allowed parliament to prevent the import of wheat until domestic grain prices reached a certain level and were opposed by reformers as an unjust protection of landed interest.⁶⁴ Finally, attacks were often directed against individuals and groups who were presumed to manipulate the otherwise smooth running of the economy, such as kings, priests, nobles and financial speculators.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Thompson, *People's Science*, 111-124.

⁶¹ Gordon Pentland, *Spirit*, 24.

⁶² Thompson, *People's Science*, 112-113. Pentland, *Spirit*, 21-23.

⁶³ Thompson, *People's Science*, 114-121.

⁶⁴ Cannon ed., "Corn Laws," *A Dictionary of British History*. *Oxford Reference Online*. Corn Laws were opposed by Robert Owen, too, in 1815. Claeys, *Machinery*, 37.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *People's Science*, 117-118.

Those arguments were echoed in the *Tribunal*, the only obtainable Glasgow periodical claiming to speak to – and for – the labouring classes directly after the Napoleonic wars.⁶⁶ The *Tribunal* circulated from June to November 1816 as a monthly 36-page magazine at the cost of 6d. It was published by William Lang, who also printed the Hampden Club circulars for Scotland.⁶⁷ A diverse correspondence was published as the first half of every number, while the second half was allocated for ‘enlightened’ entertainment, containing fictional literature and poetry copied from the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Trifler* or the *Rambler*. In the discussion forum labour was regarded as an exploited asset of working people, close to Cobbett’s interpretation:

we speak of the *unnatural* state of inequality which ... consists in the absolute subjection, both in body and mind, of those who labour, *to* those for whom they are doomed to labour.⁶⁸

However, explanations and suggested solutions varied considerably. They included parliamentary reform, early socialist schemes, the dissemination of political economy and the renewal of traditional protection through trade associations. Predictably the reform-minded editors devoted large sections persuading their readers of the necessity of parliamentary reform to counteract economic injustice:

⁶⁶ There are references to other “such publications, in Glasgow particularly” in the *Tribunal*, many of which “have so soon failed, probably from not having fulfilled public expectation”. *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816.

⁶⁷ Those clubs, named after a seventeenth-century parliamentary politician, were founded by Major Cartwright and were popular with the working classes. Harrison “Hampden Clubs,” *The Oxford Companion to British History*, ed. Cannon. *Oxford Reference Online*. Pentland, *Spirit*, 17.

⁶⁸ *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816. Italics in original.

The unparalleled distress of the country calls loudly for some measure to be adopted; and it is impossible that we can have any security against greater evils, without a faithful representation of the people.⁶⁹

Senex, a labourer taking on the synonym of a well-known Glasgow manufacturer, affirmed the editor's opinion when lamenting that he and his colleagues "drudge like slaves for a scanty pittance", hence they could only manage to share a single subscription of the *Tribunal*.⁷⁰ In the journal's second number B., who presumably was the same person as Senex, asked the questions quoted at the beginning of this chapter.⁷¹ B.'s questions highlighted once more the crisis of the weavers who were bearing the brunt of industrial change and pondered about post war distress and inequality. B., furthermore, considered the introduction of machinery as a system devaluing human labour. Coincidentally, Robert Owen had identified mechanical power as a social problem in *Observations on the Effects of the Manufacturing System* (1815) a year earlier. There he wrote that machinery due to its profitability and affordability compared to human labour tended to devalue the latter.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6 July 1816. Leading articles in first and second number are about parliamentary reform and report on Thrushgrove meeting in last number.

⁷⁰ *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816. Senex could have named himself after Robert Reid, known as Senex, who was a muslin manufacturer. Stronach, "Reid, Robert (1773–1865)", rev. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. There existed also another Senex, James Elishama Smith, in Glasgow who was a religious writer and journalist, later associated with the Millennium movement and Owen. But at the time of the *Tribunal's* publication, Smith was only 15 and studied at the University of Glasgow, so it's unlikely to be the same person. Also Smith's Israelite Christian outlook does not seem congruent with the anti-religious sentiments of Senex in the *Tribunal*. Stunt, "Smith, James Elishama [Shepherd Smith] (1801–1857)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷¹ Suspected to be the same person by 'lover of order.' *Tribunal*, 3 August 1816.

⁷² Claeys, *Machinery*, 38-40.

It is likely that B. was aware of Owen's thoughts on mechanisation because we know from a later number that he had read Owen's *A New View of Society Or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character* (1813-1816).⁷³ Owen's *New View* stressed the importance of education for moral development. In the second part, published in 1816, Owen openly attacked Christianity for keeping people in a state of subordination. Unsurprisingly, this caused a controversy, discussed for instance, in the *Glasgow Chronicle*, but finding its way into the *Tribunal*, also.⁷⁴ Correspondent Juvenis, for example, while calling for liberation and revolution from tyranny and governmental misrule, clearly rejected Owen's recommendation of educating the lower classes as misleading and distractive. The inner conversion of the soul was achievable "by the irresistible sanctions of religion alone".⁷⁵ Yet another reader aware of Owenite ideas, was M., who identified not the tyranny of illegitimate stately leaders as the ultimate source of economic misery, but "a tyranny ... founded upon the most abominable of all principles – that of avarice".⁷⁶ In his *Observations* Owen had identified the search for the highest possible return through "buying cheap and selling dear" as an immoral principle, that exploited human labour.⁷⁷ It was employed by small manufacturers especially, in order to satisfy their newly emerged hunger for luxuries.⁷⁸ M., however, pinpointed the

⁷³ *Tribunal*, 19 October 1816.

⁷⁴ Compare *Glasgow Chronicle*, 3 August 1816.

⁷⁵ *Tribunal*, 16 November 1816.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1816.

⁷⁷ Owen quoted in Claeys, *Machinery*, 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

“purse-proud” master manufacturer more directly than Owen, who had experience as a cotton manufacturer himself, as the opponent of labour.⁷⁹ Accordingly, M.’s proposed solution emphasised protective unionism and less so education. Associations of tradesmen ought to check the profits masters were making and prevent or recover those made unjustly (without benefit to the labourer), but without a rise in the price of the product itself. This idea was contested by the *Tribunal*’s editors and most of its contributors as a “wild, irrational and impractical theory” teaching the “the highest ingratitude” towards employers.⁸⁰ A scheme of special sale-rooms, where goods would be sold at market price and profits directly returned to the operative, was suggested by an anonymous reader in another number. This correspondent, moreover, suggested that hand-loom weavers should buy yarn at first hand instead of the manufacturing warehouse, in order to avoid manipulation through merchants.⁸¹ Although certainly in touch with new, especially Owenite ideas, both M. and the latter correspondent, undoubtedly also hinted at the traditional role of trade incorporations and associations.

Despite the obvious intent of the *Tribunal* to channel economic suffering into pursuit of parliamentary reform, its liberal approach allowed for the publication of extremely diverse opinions. Among the more conform opinions published was the view of M.W. who fiercely criticised the journal for its “mischievous attempt to rouse industry from its labour by scattering around it the weapons of envy and discontent” and explained the problem of post war distress with the principles of

⁷⁹ *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816. See also Thompson, *People’s Science*, 122-123.

⁸⁰ *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816 and 3 August 1816.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3 August 1816.

political economy. According to M. W., post war depression was a result of the re-opening of trade barriers that had restricted foreign competition during the French wars.⁸² Lunaticus, “for whom an unwearied attention to business ... have secured a decent competency”, also complained that the distrust of the labouring population was intensified by publications like the *Tribunal*, but that distrust and discontent were originally caused by a weak understanding of “the real nature of facts”, referring to the new science of political economy based on precise, mathematical equations.⁸³ As M.W. and Lunaticus’ essays demonstrate, while political economy did not play a big explanative role in periodicals like the *Tribunal* it was, nonetheless, acknowledged by inclusion and thus anticipated the efforts of political economy’s popularisers which would become very significant during the 1820s.⁸⁴

The journal’s output appears to have stopped in November 1816, coinciding with the aftermath of a mass reform meeting at Thrushgrove near Glasgow. The *Tribunal*, like the *Glasgow Chronicle*, reported extensively on the public meeting but more than the latter portrayed it primarily as a meeting of distressed working people, who were now able “to give their grievances a tongue, and to speak of their complaints”.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid.,

⁸³ Ibid., 6 July 1816. In *Hard Times*, Dickens illustrates and condemns the ‘philosophy of facts’ (including maths, statistics and political economy). Its disseminators are represented as the teacher Mr Gradgrind, the character who opens the novel with the words: “Now, what I want is, Facts.” Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1.

⁸⁴ The importance for working people to have knowledge of political economy was particularly emphasised by John Wade, the *Gorgon*’s editor. Thompson, *People’s Science*, 9.

⁸⁵ *Tribunal*, 8 June 1816.

Radicalisation and Political Dissent, c.1816 - 1819

After Thrushgrove the radical reform movement itself dissented into three groups. Space does not permit to go into a detailed analysis of this process, but the following summary should suffice to understand the key points of disagreement.

A radical mass platform offered a political explanation of economic distress, fostered by nation-wide read radical papers like the *Political Register* and the *Black Dwarf*.⁸⁶ This type of protest was restricted to established forms: mass meetings, petitions to parliaments and campaigning for constitutional reform in the medium of print. After Thrushgrove, however, some reformers began to transcend established protests within constitutional limits and pursued insurrection, an underground movement that was particular strong in impoverished areas where belief in the effect of petitioning subsided increasingly after 1817.⁸⁷ A third reform strategy, adopted especially by Whig politicians, on the other hand, aimed to temper the political reform agenda by suggesting public works and other sources of economic relief as more appropriate means to address unemployment and desolation.⁸⁸

Dissent increased further when early in 1819, the parliament introduced taxes on key consumption articles such as beer, tea, coffee and spirit, confirming the radical view that a corrupt parliament burdened the already suffering and unrepresented

⁸⁶ See footnote 62.

⁸⁷ Pentland, *Spirit*, 30-31.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

people with rapacious taxes.⁸⁹ The authorities' hostility came out in the open during the Peterloo massacre, a mass gathering of reformers, who had met to hear the radical Henry Hunt, brutally dispersed by the yeomanry on St. Peter's field in Manchester on 16th August 1819.⁹⁰ A public meeting in Meikleriggs, organised as a reaction to Peterloo in September, caused severe disturbances in Glasgow and Paisley, the ferocity of which polarised the British and Scottish reform movement further.⁹¹ Many Whigs, who previously had been compassionate, after the riots in Glasgow and Paisley, recoiled from supporting a popular radical reform and not seldom adopted a loyalist agenda instead.⁹²

One of the key differences to 1816-17 was the acute unease that the reform movement triggered in its opponents in 1819.⁹³ The crisis of 1819, and in particular the manipulation of deprived tradesmen and labourers into pursuing radical reform, was regarded by Whigs and loyalists alike as inherently dangerous and alarming.⁹⁴ Although radical reformers still adopted ordered protests as a key strategy, those now coincided with violent disturbances, especially in areas with loyalist and radical strongholds.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁰ Wahrman, *Imagining*, 200-214.

⁹¹ Pentland, *Spirit*, 59-63.

⁹² Ibid., 61 and 79.

⁹³ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 62.

There were two Glasgow periodicals printed in the second half of 1819 which testify this dissent. The *Spirit of the Union*, a journal that aggressively denounced the “moderate line being taken by liberal newspapers” like the *Glasgow Chronicle* represented the more resolute among the radical reformers.⁹⁶ The *Reformer*, which ran almost simultaneously to the *Spirit*, condemned radicals as “beardless boys” presuming “themselves competent to manage the complicated machinery of Government, with as much ease as they do the spindles of cotton mills”.⁹⁷

The *Spirit of the Union*, printed by G.Macleod and edited by W. Carse and H.M. Kendrick from October 1819 to January 1820, filled an important gap in the radical press for Scotland. Similar to the *Black Dwarf* it reported weekly, for 3d per number, on English news regarding the development of radical reform, but was unique in its dense treatment of Scottish themes and radical activity.⁹⁸ A poem published in December 1819, four months after Peterloo and three months after the Glasgow and Paisley riots, exemplifies the radical account of economic distress, including the devaluation and exploitation of labour. “The Twa weavers; or, The Days o’ Langsyne” contained typical arguments brought forward by radicals targeting “old corruption” but also attempted to explain the desolation of material conditions. Unsurprising, this little poem resembled almost a summary of all matters discussed in the *Tribunal*. The war, taxation and the “paper swindle” are named as sources of distress. “Machinery” was blamed to have created mass unemployment. The tyranny of avarice was personified in “Manufacturer, Grocer,

⁹⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁷ *Reformer*, 3 November 1819.

⁹⁸ Pentland, *Spirit*, 66.

and Laird”.⁹⁹ The priests were portrayed as hypocrites who told their congregations that distress was “brought on by the poor people’s crimes”.¹⁰⁰ Despite similarities with arguments discussed three years before, the suggested method to resolve those problems was somewhat extreme. The author of the poem wished “The BLACK BOOK”, referring to radical John Wade’s publication and denunciation of parliamentary expenses in 1819, to go up in flames and a “new score” to begin, evidently an image of revolution rather than of reform.¹⁰¹

The *Reformer* on the other hand, running weekly from November to December and also costing 3d per number, shared common ground with Whigs and loyalists in criticising radical conduct. The paper was conducted anonymously by a reformer of “nearly twenty years” and particularly concerned with the lack of piety and prudence among the working classes.¹⁰² For this author “reform commences at home ... with a radical reformation of the heart” and subsequently of behaviour, resulting in an improvement of material conditions:¹⁰³

You must, therefore, if you would better your condition, begin by reforming your idle and dissolute habits, and by living industriously and soberly; for without this, though you got the property of your neighbours, you could no more keep it than you did your own earnings in the years that are past.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *SU*, 4 December 1819.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Wahrman, *Imagining*, 205.

¹⁰² *Reformer*, 3 November 1819.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The *Reformer's* ideal of a 'moral revolution' reminds of loyal and evangelical exhortations, congruent with an elite perspective that blamed idleness, imprudence and intemperance for the pressing problem of poverty in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Poverty was a challenge particularly pronounced in densely populated cities like Glasgow. For many contemporaries Glasgow must have been an obvious testimony of Malthus' theory of economic growth leading to overpopulation and finally to increased poverty. 1819 was also the year when Chalmer's quarterly instalments of the treatise *The Christian and Civic Economy in Large Towns* began to be published.¹⁰⁶ There Chalmers represented his experiments with parish community relief at St. John's as a proven plan that, if applied to the entire British nation could create "a godly commonwealth of stable Christian communities".¹⁰⁷ Legal poor relief would be replaced by a revived spirit of benevolence among parishioners and a rekindled sense of independence, industriousness and temperance among the poor. Chalmer's ideas were not foreign to Whigs. Following encouragement of Francis Jeffrey in 1817, Chalmers had published two articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, but had withdrawn from this arrangement after persuasion from his more conservative supporters.¹⁰⁸ The *Reformer's* alignment, too, shifted between a loyal evangelical and a Whig agenda. His tirade against the "total incompetency" of some reformers "to discuss, much less to decide, on a subject so confessedly difficult and complicated" as taxation

¹⁰⁵ Pentland, *Spirit*, 34-39.

¹⁰⁶ Published in three volumes, comprising each eight numbers.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Chalmers*, 144.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

resembled the Whig's attitude, deeming working class radicals generally as unfit for political participation due to a lack of proficient leadership and education.¹⁰⁹

The year 1819 ended with the passing of the Six Acts extending the power of the state to counteract seditious activity. To prevent the spread of libel, the stamp duty on periodicals with news comment was increased, raising their cost to 6d per number.¹¹⁰ This affected also Glasgow publications. Whereas the *Reformer* had stopped publication already in December 1819, the editors of the *Spirit of the Union* were arrested in January 1820 and the circulation of the *Spirit* stopped after just one more number.¹¹¹ The distinctiveness of the *Spirit of the Union* and the *Reformer* epitomises the splintering of the Scottish and British reform movement into radicalised and moderate groups after 1816 and especially after Peterloo and Meikleriggs, a development that charged the political sphere with anxiety and hence demanded unambiguous statements of political alignment and identity.¹¹² As a result, ideas on labour devaluation became submerged in a "tug of war" between loyalists and radicals.¹¹³ In the calmer political atmosphere of 1816, the editors of the *Tribunal* were able to blend a variety of extra-parliamentary political and economical positions into one unique periodical. While they gave priority to the support of parliamentary reform as a remedy against economic distress, they permitted for other plans to be printed and discussed. Rudimentary ideas of

¹⁰⁹ *Reformer*, 5 December 1819. Pentland, *Spirit*, 44-46.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86. Thompson, *Making*, 768.

¹¹¹ *SU*, 8 January 1819.

¹¹² Compare Wahrman, *Imagining*, 9-10.

¹¹³ Term taken from Wahrman's title of Part II, *Imagining* 155-221. See also Pentland, *Spirit*, 82.

socialism and trade unionism as well as political economy hinted at in the *Tribunal*, became more elaborate and influential in the 1820s when the outcome of the Radical War caused hopes for parliamentary reform to collapse.

Chapter 2: Knowing the Principles of Trading¹¹⁴

The Popularisation of Political Economy during the 1820s

Of all things which are of importance to the working people, the most important by far is a knowledge of the principles which govern profits and wages, including, of course, the principle of population.¹¹⁵

In April 1820 radicalised groups attempted an armed revolt against the authorities in the West of Scotland and widespread strikes broke out in Paisley and Glasgow.¹¹⁶

Many contemporaries would have agreed with the prevailing modern interpretation of this event as an attempt at insurrection caused mainly by hunger, degradation and indignation.¹¹⁷ However valid such analysis is, it is necessary to stress that the radical movement of the late 1810s, like any other political movement, was as much influenced by ideas mediated through speeches,

¹¹⁴ Francis Place's term, *GMM*, 11 March 1826.

¹¹⁵ *GMM*, 4 March 1826.

¹¹⁶ Fraser, "Protest," in *People and Society*, eds. Devine and Mitchison, 285-286.

¹¹⁷ Pentland, *Spirit*, 53.

pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals by activists who were not driven by deprivation but first and foremost by idealism. Their rhetoric often originated in an intellectual and political tradition preceding the social and economic squalor of the early nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ In the aftermath of the abortive insurrection, radical voices were initially silenced, leaving space for loyal and Whig interpretation of the events. Considering this defeat and suppression of popular discourse on political and economic issues, it is unsurprising that during the 1820s a more authoritative account, in general affirming new industrial and capitalist society, was commonplace. In order to preclude further social unrest, conservatives, Whigs and moderate radicals went to great lengths to popularise the principles of political economy among the labouring classes. Thomas Chalmers, for example, addressed the problem of labour devaluation in his 1826 published third volume of the *Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*. He suggested “preventative actions” based on the Malthusian and Ricardian doctrine of an existing correlation between population growth and decreasing wage levels. Correspondingly, Chalmer’s preventions focussed on the reduction of the labour force through delayed marriage, leading to smaller working peoples’ families. But he also advocated voluntarily abstinence from work when wages were too low. Savings banks, mushrooming at the time, could help to accomplish this by “encouraging labourers to accumulate a small capital when times were good” and, thus, enabling them to refuse work when the level of wages had decreased to an unacceptable low

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 53-89. Compare also Jones’ investigation into the origin of Chartist language. Jones, “Chartism,” in *Languages of Class*. Radical critique of the state of the late 1810s drew for example heavily on the writings of agrarian radicals of the eighteenth century such as William Ogilvie, Thomas Spence and Thomas Paine. Thompson, *People’s Science*, 40-45. Claeys, *Machinery*, 21-30.

level.¹¹⁹ Chalmers had for that reason supported the repeal of the combination laws in 1824, pushed through parliament by radical Joseph Hume.¹²⁰ Rejecting the justification of wage reduction in terms of the competitiveness of the foreign market, Chalmers emphasised the significance of home consumption for national wealth and the need for the labouring classes to be elevated and educated. They would be transformed “into an industrious class of mass consumers” by moral and religious education in small parish communities.¹²¹

Apart from an upsurge in the belief of religious education, the early 1820s also beheld the establishment of secular institutions like the Edinburgh School of Arts and the Glasgow Mechanics Institute designated for the instruction of working people in science and mechanical arts. Whigs like Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and J.R. McCulloch suggested the addition of constitutional history and classical political economy to the educational programme as a means of preventing the return of popular radicalism.¹²² The Glasgow Mechanics Institute was connected to the ‘Anderson University’, an educational body established in the late eighteenth century to promote “useful knowledge” and its practical application in commerce and industry. The Mechanics Institute issued the *Glasgow Mechanics Magazine* from 1824 to 1826 and after a suspension due to lack of funds, again from 1832 to

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Chalmers*, 147.

¹²⁰ Hume, at that time was MP for the Aberdeen burghs. Chancellor, “Hume, Joseph (1777–1855),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹²¹ Brown, *Chalmers*, 147.

¹²² Tyrell, *Political Economy*, 154-155. Thompson, *People’s Science*, 59. Born into a landed family, Brougham was co-editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, member of parliament and reformer of education. Lobban, “Brougham, Henry Peter, first Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778–1868),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

1835.¹²³ Respectively, this periodical emphasized the profusion of “scientific information among the industrious classes of the community” and, furthermore, appealed to them to discuss scientific innovations and to propose their own mechanical inventions.¹²⁴ Owing to the rise of the stamp duty on news commentary, political and even economic discussions were largely absent from the five volumes of weekly three-penny publications. Despite the focus on scientific innovations the journal’s political patronage became more obvious in Volume five when the journal published essays endorsing the dissemination of political economic doctrine. In one such essay “On Mechanics Schools and on Political Economy as a Branch of Popular Education”, Chalmers stressed the usefulness of such an education in purging the popular mind of radical delusions.¹²⁵ In another number the propagation of classical political economy occurred through the hand of Francis Place. Place, who had started his working life as a breeches-maker in London became one of the fiercest advocate for the education of the working classes in political economy. He believed that poverty worsening traits like improvidence, ignorance and impulsiveness could be fore come by education, a belief that was inspired by his experience as a distressed tradesman himself during a slump in 1791 and 1792. Although a radical rejecting the undeserving wealth of landed and aristocratic society, Place embraced the ideal of the self-made man

¹²³ Sher, “Enlightenment,” in *Glasgow, Vol.1*, 312-360.

¹²⁴ *GMM*, 4 March 1826.

¹²⁵ *GMM*, 3 June 1826. See also Thompson, *People’s Science*, 59.

which found validation in the emergent discipline of political economy.¹²⁶ In 1818 and 1819 Place had already contributed articles on decreasing labour wages to the London based *Gorgon*. He had furthermore published his Malthusian views on population growth and diminishing returns in the *Black Dwarf*.¹²⁷ Place, additionally, exercised his influence through the Mechanics Institutes, founded in Glasgow, Liverpool and London in 1823 and many other, especially industrial cities.¹²⁸ He wrote an essay on the “Combination Laws” for the *Glasgow Mechanics Magazine* in 1826, “meant to accompany the Memoir of Mr. Hume”, whom he had supported in parliament two years earlier to repeal the laws prohibiting workmen associations.¹²⁹ Despite his espousal of combinations, Place deemed the widespread opinion that combination “laws were the cause of low wages” as misleading.¹³⁰ He objected that employers and legislators were governed by an irrational “fear of high wages” while working people expected “that if these laws were repealed, a great sudden rise of wages would take place”.¹³¹ Place referred to recent “attempts to raise wages” through strikes, organised by newly emerged workmen combinations, as haven proven predictably futile. The reason for this was that “labour, like other commodities, had its market price; ... it was regulated as to

¹²⁶ Member of the ‘London Corresponding Society’ from 1794 to 1797, involved as a conductor of the Westminster elections between 1807 to 1820. Thomas, “Place, Francis (1771–1854),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹²⁷ Thompson, *People’s Science*, 58.

¹²⁸ Cannon ed., “Mechanics’ Institutes,” *A Dictionary of British History*. *Oxford Reference Online*.

¹²⁹ *GMM*, 4 March 1826.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

price, by supply and demand”.¹³² Nonetheless, Place believed that combinations were good for communicative and educational purposes. He regarded them as self-help organisations that enabled workmen “to discuss their grievances—to compare their actual condition”, “to ascertain the causes of their poverty, and suggest remedies”.¹³³ This would eventually liberate them from a state of dependency forced upon them by conservative masters, manufacturers, the government and “the saints”.¹³⁴ Place was, moreover, unambiguous about the “important truth”, that low wages, and thus the poverty of labourers, were primarily caused by a surplus in labour supply: “while there was employment for one only, two were produced to do the work”, the “two would have no more than the wages of one between them”.¹³⁵ Thus, Place advised first and foremost “a restriction in numbers”. The labouring population should cease “to produce workmen faster than employment can be found for them”.¹³⁶ In order to achieve this, the author thought a “little school learning” to be sufficient since it was normally accompanied with improvement of conduct, namely prudence and temperance. The quotation at the beginning of this chapter confirms Place’s devotion to the dissemination of political economy. Nonetheless, he was not an uncritical disciple of Malthus. Place judged the proposal of delayed marriage to avoid large families as naive and

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *GMM*, 11 March 1826.

encouraged the use of contraception, an inclination that cost him many friendships.¹³⁷

The *Scotch Tradesman's Correspondent*, a newspaper set up by a Glasgow tradesman in 1824, discussed emigration to Canada as one solution to tackle surplus labour and thus confirms that Ricardian and Malthusian ideas have had, indeed, some impact on working people.¹³⁸ Place, like many other political economists and contemporary educationalists, promoted the education of working people, but emphasised individual competition at the same time.¹³⁹ In fact, many thinkers like him believed that unemployment and poverty were caused mainly by ignorance of the laws of political economy. Even though Ricardo and Malthus had acknowledged the possibility that overproduction of one commodity could lead to a glutted market and subsequently to redundant labour and unused capital, they were adamant about the temporary nature of such economic difficulties. Those would eventually be overcome by identification and production of under-produced commodities.¹⁴⁰ In this context, the devaluation of labour, and connected with this individual degradation, were believed to be mainly affected by the imprudent behaviour and the moral deficiencies of the labouring classes themselves, who were too uninformed as to behave according to the 'true facts' declared by political

¹³⁷ Thomas, "Place, Francis (1771–1854)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹³⁸ Pentland, *Radicalism*, 36.

¹³⁹ Tyrell, for example, gives an account of Mc Culloch's educational activities and the Mechanics Institute in Haddington. Tyrell, "Political Economy," in *Scottish Historical Studies*.

¹⁴⁰ Thompson, *People's science*, 159-160.

economy and unable to restrain themselves to the production of smaller families.

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Popular Political Economy during the 1820s

Counteracting this individualistic concept was the work of early socialist writers such as William Thompson, John Gray and Robert Owen who highlighted capitalism's inherent tendency to degenerate as the very reason, not only of temporary economic depressions, but of permanent crisis. These writers argued that capitalists, instead of producing goods satisfying real needs, were compelled to produce certain commodities returning high profits in order to pay rent and other expenditures apart from labour. Thompson, author of *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* (1824) and *Labour Rewarded: the Claims of Labour and Capital Conciliated* (1827), in particular stressed capitalism's bias to produce luxury articles the demand of which depended on the fickleness of taste and fashion creating, thus, an unstable economic structure.¹⁴² Consequently, early socialists emphasised the production of 'useful' commodities which could be exchanged without a profit but for a 'just' price. Drawing on Ricardo's labour theory of value, this 'just' price of a product was to be based on the average time of labour spent on its production. Conclusively, Owen suggested labour notes containing this pre-fixed labour value as an alternative currency to money in his *Report to the County of Lanark* published in 1820.¹⁴³ Removing profits from the price of 'useful'

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *People's Science*, 164.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 166-168.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75 See also Claeys, *Machinery*, 45.

goods, Owen believed, would stimulate their demand and provide satisfaction of 'real needs'. An economy based on 'real needs' instead of desire for luxuries could therefore ensure a constant level of productivity. 'Useful' goods would be valued according to their social utility, not their monetary value on a 'free' market.¹⁴⁴ Conversely, as a consequence of the eighteenth-century luxury debate, the border between necessities and luxuries had become obscure. Hence, the distinction of 'real needs' and desire for luxuries must have been a difficult one to uphold at a time when consumption of 'conveniences' or luxuries was believed to have civilising and motivating social functions, not to speak of its stimulating effect on the economy.¹⁴⁵

While classical political economists justified money as a simple medium merely assisting with the exchange of goods, John Gray and Owen sternly attacked it as an instrument for speculation, profit making and capital accumulation.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, constant money deficiency also reduced labour wages to below subsistence level.¹⁴⁷ Resulting from this was a collapse of the labouring classes' purchasing power which in turn reduced demand for 'useful' goods, affecting unemployment.¹⁴⁸ Yet Thompson, Gray and Owen believed that material abundance existed; its distribution was merely distorted by unfair economic arrangements:

¹⁴⁴ Thompson, *People's Science*, 176-181

¹⁴⁵ Phillipson, *Adam Smith*, 200-239. Compare also Berg, *Luxury*, 21-23.

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, *People's Science*, 178. Gray was author of *A Lecture on Human Happiness* (1825), later also published *The Social System: a Treatise on the Principle of Exchange* (1831).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

¹⁴⁸ Thompson, *People's Science*, 169-170.

The means to create wealth to an unlimited extent have been discovered but the knowledge how to distribute and enjoy it has been hidden from us.¹⁴⁹

Thus, the introduction of labour notes as a more appropriate medium of exchange as well as the moral “formation of character” in schools would ensure a fair distribution of material wealth among all members of society, who would then be able to live in a state of harmony.¹⁵⁰ The communitarian yearnings of Owenism drew on the Millennialist movement, the semi-Christian belief in the arrival of a utopian period. However, they differed in one important point: “With the Owenites the Millennium was not to arrive, it was to be *made*, by their own efforts”, underpinning Owenism’s tendency towards secularism and its idealistic confidence in the potential of communitarian self-help.¹⁵¹ Considering Owen’s earlier ventures as entrepreneur and manager of the New Lanark Mills, thus himself epitomising the self-made man, it is not surprising that he was able to uphold a faith in schemes that assumed self-responsibility, if on a communitarian instead of an individual level.¹⁵² Accordingly, Owen himself did not identify employers, manufacturers and masters as the enemy of the labouring population. Owen regarded the devaluation of labour as a malfunction inherent in the system of capitalism, especially in the modes of exchange and distribution. Gray and Thompson, however, were in closer proximity to other early socialists, such as George Mudie and Thomas Hodgskin, who thought of labour devaluation as an exploitive act rather than a failure in the

¹⁴⁹ Owen quoted in *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵¹ Thompson, *Making*, 883. On Millennialist movement p. 877-85.

¹⁵² Claeys, “Owen, Robert (1771–1858),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

capitalist system of distribution:¹⁵³ “If exchange was the mechanism through which labour was exploited, it was capital which utilised it”.¹⁵⁴

Owenite socialists suggested co-operative communities that existed relatively independent within capitalist economies in order to practically realise their ideas. Those communities were thought of as microcosms able to function on the more primitive basis of a ‘barter economy’.¹⁵⁵ Instead of money, labour notes could be circulated there, enabling labourers to exchange their products directly with each other on so-called labour bazaars. Owen was actively involved in attempts to establish co-operative communities in Britain and the United States. The community ‘New Harmony’ that existed in southern Indiana for a brief period in the 1820s was regarded as “the most vibrant and sophisticated” among them.¹⁵⁶ Similar short-lived Owenite communities were formed in Scotland by disciple and tanner Abram Combe, who led the ‘Owenian, Friendly or Practical Society’ in Edinburgh in 1821 and was involved also in the establishment of the ‘Orbiston Company’ south of Glasgow in 1824. Initially founded as a community experiment based on Owenite educational principles and millenarian in character, the ‘Orbiston Company’ was also set up to combat economic distress. Gray and Owen visited

¹⁵³ Claeys, *Machinery*, 67. See also Thompson, *People’s Science*, p. 122-3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁵⁶ Claeys, “Owen, Robert (1771–1858),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Orbiston but criticised its approach and management. The community, lacking funds, management skills and unity by purpose dissolved in 1828.¹⁵⁷

Despite the Owenite's anti-capitalist sentiments and ventures, early socialist thought was connected to political economical theory in a significant way. Instead of rejecting political economy as completely unrepresentative of working people, socialist writers of the 1820s acknowledged its value theory of labour as a vehicle to explain labour devaluation and permanent economic crisis in a nascent industrial economy that was increasingly market-orientated and diversified. In addition, the ideal of 'free' trade was not repudiated as such, but utilised to defend workmen associations attempting to advance labour wages as the fair equivalent to employers' combinations trying to lower them. 'Free' trade was also demanded regarding the Corn Laws which were economic restrictions assumed to facilitate landowners and bakers to establish a monopoly on harvest failures.¹⁵⁸ Owenite socialists' were, however, mainly concerned with faults in the distribution of wealth, which meant that issues related to the production process were hardly identified and addressed.

For reasons of brevity Owenism's theory of labour devaluation was outlined here in a very condensed form and corrective suggestions of profit-sharing as well as mutual co-operation completely omitted from discussion. Notwithstanding, chapter two should have demonstrated sufficiently that Owenite socialism was a popular version of political economy, offering economic explanations better suited to the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. On the Orbiston community compare also Fraser, *Campbell*, 19-28.

¹⁵⁸ Especially by Hodgskin, Thompson, *People's Science*, 170-1.

concerns of working people than classical political economy. It replaced to some extent simplistic radical interpretation of labour exploitation as a mere by-product of unfair taxation, currency legislations, lack of parliamentary accountability and the tyranny of state and church leaders.¹⁵⁹ Owenite socialism's complex relationship with early nineteenth-century liberal and radical discourse is a feature also traceable in Glasgow's unstamped 1830s periodicals, material underlying the next chapter. Respectively, chapter three will offer a close-to-source analysis of the way in which early socialist writers in Glasgow worked with the mixture of languages outlined in the first part of this thesis. It will, moreover, look at how readers responded to ideas put forward in those periodicals.

Chapter 3: Working with the Principles of Trading

Discussing Labour Devaluation in Glasgow's *Herald to the Trades Advocate*, 1830 –

1831

Let the operatives, therefore, become their own capitalists and employers; and the price of their labour will soon rise. Let them unite their small but numerous means, for the employment of each other.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 219-221.

¹⁶⁰ *HTA*, 18 December 1830.

The *Herald to the Trades Advocate and Co-operative Journal* was one of the papers emerging out of the Owenite movement. Alexander Campbell, who, originally from Kintyre, had worked in Glasgow as a joiner since around 1810, was one of its organisers.¹⁶¹ By the late 1820s, his enthusiasm for Owen's ideas as well as the stagnation of the building trade caused Campbell to join the Orbiston community near Motherwell by Glasgow. After the collapse of Orbiston, Campbell was disillusioned with capitalist investors and lobbied for the establishment of a trades' union that combined representatives and members of all Glasgow trades, who would raise the funds and capital necessary for co-operative schemes among themselves. The 'Committee of Trades' was established in the summer of 1830; Daniel Macaulay, a power loom tenter and trade unionist, was its president.¹⁶² An unstamped trades newspaper was proposed as the means of communication for the trades' union, affordable to all workers and controlled, exclusively, by them. The *Herald to the Trades Advocate* was only intended as a preliminary to the suggested union paper. It circulated on 2d per weekly issue from September 1830 to May 1831, when it was suppressed by the Solicitor of Stamps.¹⁶³

An informed press for workers that rejected to be an "*exclusive* conductor of sparks from electric batteries of Cobbettites, *Owenites*, *Humenites*, or any other *ites*",

¹⁶¹ Fraser, *Campbell*, 6. Montgomery, "Glasgow Radicalism," 41.

¹⁶² Fraser, *Campbell*, 32-35.

¹⁶³ Although Campbell was an influential contributor to the journal it was probably edited by teacher John Warden. *Ibid.*, 56. Harrison had suggested before that Campbell was the editor. Harrison, *Owenites*, 349.

required independent financial sponsorship.¹⁶⁴ In view of that, shareholders for the union paper, which was to be called the *Trades Advocate*, were enrolled among operatives, not capitalists. Before its suppression, the *Herald* accomplished 1243 shares among artisans representing all of Glasgow's trades at the time, but especially "cotton spinners, tenters, factory workers and dressers."¹⁶⁵ Owenite ideas figured prominently in the *Herald*. In the anonymous article 'Proposed Trades' Union', for instance, the main aims of such a union were defined as provision of employment and "equalisation of the prize of labour".¹⁶⁶ Low wages were ascribed to the "introduction of machinery, in competition with manual exertion".¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, this critique was combined with an acknowledgement of Malthusian principles: To prevent mechanisation's

evil effects arising to the operatives ... it is necessary that in order to keep up their wages, that their numbers should be reduced in the labour market; because labour, like every other marketable article, will rise and fall in proportion to its demand.¹⁶⁸

Once the labour market was brought under control in this way, the union's next goal was the erection of an Operatives Hall with

committee rooms, extensive bazaar, for the receipt of the produce of the members employed, or the United Operatives' Bank; and last, though not

¹⁶⁴ *HTA*, 13 November 1830.

¹⁶⁵ Montgomery, "Glasgow Radicalism," 38. Tables listing the shareholders, 39-40.

¹⁶⁶ *HTA*, 30 October 1830.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

least, seminars of learning for themselves and their hitherto neglected offspring.¹⁶⁹

The article, furthermore, echoed ideals of responsibility and competence. Instead of exhausting funds on “keeping hands idle” in strikes, finances and capital would be accumulated by using subscriptions to employ people, which in turn guaranteed a level of stability and even growth for the union. The ‘Committee of Trades’ aspiration to buy the prospective union members “out of the present competitive state of society” in this way and enabling them to “set down on their native soil, Independent, Happy and Free” lucidly exhibits some of the more utopian aspects of Owenism.¹⁷⁰

The *Herald* and its proposal of a general trades’ union was received positively, a case in point being the *Glasgow Mechanics Institute*, hitherto disseminator of classical political economy. In November 1830 the institute displayed an altered attitude. Although it supported education in the “*great truths*”, it was time

to direct the energies of the professors to the most important subject, viz. That the scientific and mechanical power now brought into existence in Britain ... be *distributed* for the benefit of the working classes.¹⁷¹

Reader’s responses, positive and negative, were united by the identification of a faulty distribution of wealth as the main cause of the degradation of the working classes. In addition their conception of the relationship between labour and capital

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ *HTA*, 6 November 1830. Italics in original.

was largely coherent. Correspondingly, contributor R.C.K. in “Reciprocal Benefits due betwixt Capitalists and Labourers” stressed the interdependency of employer and labourer:

without the employer’s capital, the labourer could not act efficiently for his own and family’s maintenance; neither could the employer increase or preserve his small capital, without this individual’s labour.¹⁷²

Despite this balanced statement, the author held that if an employer employed 10 or 100 more labourers his obligation and gratitude due to them grew proportionally, since “it is from the labourer and the artisan, in the very first instance, that all profit in trade takes its commencement”.¹⁷³ Expressing a construct of labour valuation commonplace in radical papers between 1816 and 1819, R.C.K. additionally revealed his affinity with Owenism by highlighting capitalism’s profit-seeking tendency on the expense of labour:

If the employer of operatives were to pay them the full value of their labour, there would be no increase of capital.¹⁷⁴

Consequently, the author called for the establishment of a community of mutual exchange, a suggestion that was, of course, hailed with support by the editors, reflected in the remark quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Even a critical observer, who complained about the corruption of co-operators misusing

¹⁷² *HTA*, 18 December 1830

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

members' subscriptions, argued in line with and not in opposition to the concept of labour being inherent in all prosperity:

Labour is wealth. The poor man is making it every day he works; but he is so stupid, careless and indolent, that he will not keep it when made.¹⁷⁵

It is revealing, also, that this reader referred to himself as a 'non-producer' and, therefore, expressed his familiarity with the Smithian idea of unproductive and productive labour, only the latter offering tangible goods for exchange. This distinction of labour had been reinterpreted by Patrick Colqhoun in his *Treatise on Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* (1813) and also by Robert Owen in his *Report*. According to both, productive labour was to constitute the greatest possible class in society, the employment of which should be advanced by legislative regulations instead of Malthusian schemes attempting to decrease labour surplus.¹⁷⁶

Despite the common denominator of many readers, the Owenite critique of capitalism and support for co-operation was never a united movement. Many supporters remained religious and saw co-operative societies merely in economic terms. They were often modelled as consumer co-operatives, similar to eighteenth-century predecessors, confining themselves to "purchasing ... unadulterated goods which could be sold at minimum cost".¹⁷⁷ The secular tendencies of Owenism certainly were a problem and it is not surprising that in April 1831 the *Herald to the*

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Claeys, *Machinery*, 43.

¹⁷⁷ Fraser, *Alexander Campbell*, 41. Early modern consumer co-operatives had sometimes organised bulk purchases of oatmeal to distribute at an affordable price. Ibid., 9.

Trades Advocate aimed to detach itself from them by sacrificing its subtitle *Co-operative Journal*. When the initially suggested general ‘Glasgow Trades Union’ was eventually set up in May 1831, the distance between co-operative and trade union ideas was visible in its proposal to merely monitor labour legislation and lobby for parliamentary reform.¹⁷⁸

The Value of Labour and Reform Agitation, 1830-1831

The *Herald’s* political target was a gradual amendment of the constitution. Campbell argued for the inclusion of workers into the exclusively Whig ‘Glasgow Reform Association’, on the basis that the fabric of society depended on manual labour. He considered this political union achievable “by lowering price of subscription to six pence per quarter”, a plan that was refused by the ‘Reform Association’.¹⁷⁹ The *Herald’s* conductors, however, stressed the importance of the collaboration between all social classes. A “broadly-based Political Union” for parliamentary reform was eventually established by James Turner of Thrushgrove in November 1831.¹⁸⁰ The mass radical reform meeting of 1816 had taken place on his grounds, however, the conduct of radicals between 1817 and 1820 was openly dismissed as obsolete.¹⁸¹ Views on how parliamentary representation of working people could be achieved differed in detail, but were most likely drawn from the

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷⁹ *HTA* 20 January 1831. Fraser, *Campbell*, 36.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

democratic legislative suggestions of utilitarian James Mill.¹⁸² In his *Essay on Government* (1820) Mill made a controversial case for an extension of the franchise to all men over forty, frequent elections and the shortening of representatives' stay in office.¹⁸³ A voted assembly government that would often change, and release representatives back into the ranks of people they were drawn from, could guarantee that every man received the greatest possible share of the fruits of his labour. This was important Mill claimed, because labour was essentially agonising and naturally avoided; people needed an incentive to work. A government that only represented classes who lived off the produce of the working people gave no motivation to labour but plenty of reasons for social unrest. Mill's position differed strongly from the Whig's opinion that individual representation was ineffective and their emphasis on 'virtual representation', meaning representatives drawn from the more educated and, thus, more responsible social classes to represent all community interests.¹⁸⁴ In spite of that, Mill was criticised by some for not casting the circle of enfranchisement wide enough to include younger men and women.¹⁸⁵ The *Herald* had corresponding views on the inclusion of women.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Mill was a utilitarian philosopher associated with David Ricardo and Jeremy Bentham and co-founder of political economy club Ball, "Mill, James (1773–1836)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* See also Pentland, *Radicalism*, 150.

¹⁸⁵ For example by Jeremy Bentham himself, but also by Owenite William Thompson, who together with Anna Doyle Wheeler, had worked on an early nineteenth century feminist classic, *An Appeal of one Half the Human Race* published in 1830. Thompson, "Thompson, William (1775–1833)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁸⁶ Montgomery, "Glasgow Radicalism," 37.

Yet approving of parliamentary reform, Owenites like Campbell insisted that it would not “banish the mischief arising from a system of competition” or “dissipate the mists of ignorance that envelope the mind of the working population”. After all mutual co-operation and education were the most effective solutions to economic and social problems.¹⁸⁷ Others were more hopeful about political reform: G.D., probably Georg Donald who also sat on the *Herald’s* organising committee, believed that “government corruption, waste of public money, --taxation, --misrepresentation of people, --restrictions, --monopolies” caused industry to suffer. He advised “Let these be removed, and substitute in their room reform, economy, retrenchment, reduction of taxation, free trade &c., and all classes will then be happy.”¹⁸⁸ Apparently the paper’s political alignment was far from definite, underscoring its aim to remain independent and neutral. Instead it adopted a mix of different languages. Radical critique of ‘old corruption’ as well as Benthamite utilitarianism existed in close proximity, sometimes even in one and the same sentence.¹⁸⁹ A similar blend of languages was taken up by the *Literary Cabinet*, a one-penny weekly, edited by “self-proclaimed Benthamite” Thomas Atkinson and printed by W.R. Lang, the printer that had published the *Tribunal* in 1816.¹⁹⁰ While the *Herald* worked against the ignorance of working people and promoted their knowledge as “the very soul of Liberty and Happiness”, the *Cabinet* criticised government legislators for not engaging enough with the principles of political

¹⁸⁷ *HTA*, 6 November 1830.

¹⁸⁸ *HTA*, 20 January 1831 Montgomery, “Glasgow Radicalism,” 41.

¹⁸⁹ Pentland, *Radicalism*, 147-153.

¹⁹⁰ Pentland, *Radicalism*, 151

economy.¹⁹¹ The British government, wrote Atkinson, obviously deemed “itself degraded to come in contact with the ingenious manufacturer, or the plodding merchant”.¹⁹² The *Cabinet*, moreover, denounced the *Loyal Reformers’ Gazette*, which had probably taken over the readership of the *Herald*, for its commonplace polemic against ‘borough mongers’ instead of informing more rationally on reform questions.¹⁹³ The *Radical Reformers Gazette*, while engaging in similar polemical rhetoric, nevertheless, contained some economic arguments. It supported, for instance, the factory bill to shorten children’s labour to less than 10 hours daily, put forward by social reformer and political economist Michael Sadler.¹⁹⁴ Sadler, furthermore, campaigned for legislative labour protection for adults and argued against prevailing parliamentary opinion that employer and employee were on equal terms in the labour market, a notion echoed in the *Gazette*.

After the Burgh Reform, 1832-1834

In 1832, the extension of the franchise to men possessing £ 10 or more in property came as a disappointment to people whose only ‘property’ was labour, but on the

¹⁹¹ *HTA*’s heading of every issue was: “Ignorance is the base of all Despotism and Misery/Knowledge is the very soul of Liberty and Happiness”.

¹⁹² *Literary Cabinet*, 15 October 1831.

¹⁹³ Editor of *Loyal Reformers’ Gazette* was Peter MacKenzie. Fraser, *Conflict*, 138. Pentland, *Radicalism*, 151.

¹⁹⁴ *Radical Reformers Gazette* edited by Francis Reid. On Sadler: Weaver, “Sadler, Michael Thomas (1780–1835),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

other hand gave some hope for further and bolder parliamentary reforms.¹⁹⁵

Instead of giving way to disillusionment, Campbell, for instance, argued more pungently than before that trade unions should eventually become political unions.¹⁹⁶

The actual general trades' union paper, the *Trades Advocate*, ultimately appeared in June 1832, presumably continuing the argumentative course taken by the *Herald* though no copies of the *Trades Advocate* seem to exist anymore.¹⁹⁷ The paper was overseen by John Tait, who additionally edited *The Liberator* until 1836.¹⁹⁸

Alexander Campbell re-emerged as editor of two other unstamped weeklies, the *Trades' Union Gazette* and the *Tradesman*, through which he continued his influence between 1832 and 1834.

Rather than contesting political economy the *Herald* to the *Trades Advocate* and other unstamped weeklies worked with its central convictions. The belief that labour wages were being determined mainly by market forces and inevitably related to the Malthusian rules of population was accepted knowledge in the 1830s. 'Free' trade, too, was not an idiom foreign or revolting to the contributors and readers of the *Herald*. A case in point was "A weaver", who blamed economic restrictions for enabling monopolies like the East India Company to form and, subsequently, eat up "the very vitals of trade", showing that he clearly had a good

¹⁹⁵ Pentland, *Radicalism*, 156

¹⁹⁶ Fraser, *Campbell*, 49.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹⁸ After the change in editorship to John Taylor in 1836 the *Liberator* became an influential Scottish Chartist newspaper. Fraser, *Conflict*, 140.

understanding of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.¹⁹⁹ 'Free' trade, concerning the freedom of working people to unite and co-operate to better their position in the labour market, was also valued positively by the editors. The paper on the other hand inherited features of popular radicalism, with many articles condemning the stamp duty as a "tax on knowledge" or its involvement in parliamentary reform bodies like the 'Political Union'.²⁰⁰ However, the main sources of inspiration were the educational, social and economic insinuations made by Owenite socialists, especially William Thompson.

After 1834, Owenism and the communitarian co-operative movement disintegrated. Thompson died in 1833 while Owen lost interest in socialist political economy considering that many of his followers had become sectarian, preferring to provoke anti-clericalism to thinking effectively about economic questions.²⁰¹ The degeneration of Owenism was visible in Glasgow, too, where it gave way to attempts to establish effective networks of individual trade unions on a national basis. Nonetheless, Owenite thoughts fed into the language of trade union representatives. A short analysis of this language on the example of Glasgow trade unionist and weaver William Thomson shall precede a summary and the conclusive remarks featuring the next and final chapter.

¹⁹⁹ *HTA*, 27 November 1830.

²⁰⁰ *HTA*, 18 December 1831, on newspaper tax: 9 April 1831, on suppression by Stamp Officer see last issue 28 May 1831.

²⁰¹ Hodgskin applied himself to the campaign against corn laws while Gray intensified his research into currency issues. Thompson, *Peoples' Science*, 221-2.

Conclusion - Working against the Principles Trading

The Self-Presentation of an Ill-Fated Trade: William Thomson's Appeal, 1835

Competition runs like a mighty river through all healthy professions, ...; we find it in every department of labour, but in which of them, except *our own* unfortunate *trade*, is an unbounded swell given to its impetuous current.

...?²⁰²

By 1833 the Glasgow handloom weaver's earnings had further deteriorated to about 3s per week compared to 8s in 1812. During the early 1830s, three trade unions were formed in Glasgow and Paisley, combining the General Protecting Union, the Glasgow Harness Union and the Paisley Harness Union. Similar to the Association of Operative Weavers and Jeffrey in 1812, these unions attempted to impose a wage table on their respective employers, a successful but short-lived strategy between 1833 and 1836.²⁰³ In 1835 the union paper *Weavers' Journal* was launched as the central medium of communication between the three unions and their members. William Thomson, "a weaver from Parkhead near Glasgow", was the editor of the monthly one-penny periodical which circulated until spring 1837.

²⁰⁴ Leading the first number of the journal was the "Appeal to the Hand-Loom

²⁰² *WJ*, 31 October 1835. My italics.

²⁰³ Fraser, *Conflict*, 145. Murray, *Handloom Weavers*, 196.

²⁰⁴ Fraser *Conflict*, 136 and 145.

Weavers of Great Britain and Ireland". There, Thomson blamed "the merciless spirit of unlimited competition" for the decrease in value of the weavers' labour and called for a regulation of wages which was to be achieved through the trade union's petition to parliament.²⁰⁵ Support came from various MPs, but in particular from John Maxwell of Pollok, Whig MP for Lanarkshire between 1832 and 1837. Similar to Sadler, Maxwell contested the widespread reluctance of Whigs to campaign for protective labour legislations.²⁰⁶ The weavers had petitioned parliament since 1832; in 1834 Maxwell was able to secure and chair a select committee at Westminster to investigate their grievances. He approved of the weavers' proposals to authorise local trade boards to fix wage levels, but the bill he respectively introduced a year later was refused.²⁰⁷ Thomson's appeal must be seen in the context of that defeat, as a further attempt to affect protective regulation in a political climate that embraced the doctrines of *laissez faire*. Connecting to a narrative familiar to weavers, Thomson referred to a "spirit of independence" that had been alive in "the golden age of our industry", during which the weavers' moderate income allowed for enjoyment of religion and education.²⁰⁸ Descriptions of painful privation followed this portrayal. The paragraph illustrating the destitution of the weaver resembles to a great degree Jeffrey's depiction of the situation in 1812. Nonetheless, while never referring to weavers as labourers but

²⁰⁵ *WJ*, 31 October 1835.

²⁰⁶ Maver, "Maxwell, Sir John, of Pollok, Eighth Baronet (1791–1865)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁰⁷ Fraser, *Conflict and Class*, 145-146

²⁰⁸ *WJ*, 31 October 1835. Ward, "Trade Unionism," in *Scottish Textile History*, eds. Butt and Ponting, 128. See also Murray, *Handloom Weavers*, 168-172.

rather addressing them as artisans, fellow-operatives and workmen, Thomson demonstrated identification with the trade built upon skill and industry, not upon labour, a notion absent from Jeffrey's speech. Additionally, Thomson frequently used the possessive pronoun "our" before "trade", "industry" and "labour" to underscore a sense of belonging and unity necessary to cement the trade's union. The quotation at the beginning of this chapter is representative of his style. Despite his reliance on mainly traditional arguments, Thomson's essay also contained new ideas developed by political economists, early socialists and radicals between 1816 and 1835. A case in point is his engagement in theoretical calculations of the value of the British weavers' labour. Thomson estimated the weavers' labour value to "about fifteen hundred million" sterling between 1793 and 1815 and "a goldmine to its [the country's] treasury".²⁰⁹ Despite the opposite being the case, he stated optimistically that "demand for our labour is every year increasing". The weavers' labour was "a flourishing and an immense property to defend" against the mal-application of machinery, specifically power-looms, but in particular against the "ruthless destroyer, internal competition", mainly caused by adventure capitalists.²¹⁰ A central trade union on a national level with branches in every industrial district of Britain and Ireland would not only safeguard the labour of weaver-operatives but also encourage the conduct of "honourable employers", who in an unregulated state of capitalism were compelled to reduce wages in order to compete with "speculating" adventurers.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *WJ*, 31 October 1835.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Thomson's condemnation of excessive competition as labour-exploitive was a typical argument often voiced by contemporary British weavers.²¹² As discussed earlier, Owenite socialists had suggested competition as an essentially destructive ingredient of capitalism a decade earlier. Nonetheless, as can be seen from the quotation heading this chapter, it was regarded by Thomson less unavoidably vicious. His understanding of competition resembles more the moral economic distinction between healthy and destructive competition, the latter being unrestrained.²¹³ Thomson identified competition as a natural force that, when tamed, was vital to all professions. The fight of the weavers against "the extinction of our trade" was equally naturalised and so legitimised.²¹⁴ However, competition in the way orthodox political economy proclaimed it was unarguably unhealthy, because favouring "the great buyers of labour".²¹⁵ Trade unions were presented as self-defence organisations against unrestrained competition. Thomson's ideas on labour protection, too, drew more on the regulative function of early modern trade incorporations than on Owenite schemes of labour value fixation. However, his proposal for a national organisation in its grand scale differed from both. Early modern moral economic practices had been contained to urban and regional communities; Owenite co-operatives, too, were mainly applied on a community level.²¹⁶ In a similar way as reformers had done before and in line with his aim to

²¹² Fraser, *Conflict*, 145. Compare Berg, *Machinery Question*, 235-249.

²¹³ Claeys, *Machinery*, 188-190.

²¹⁴ *WJ*, 31 October 1835.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ However, Campbell also called for a 'National Association of United Trades' in 1833. Montgomery, "Glasgow Radicalism," 131.

establish a national platform for trade unionism, Thomson created a common enemy by charging the idle aristocracy and speculating labour buyers as oppressors of the working people. Moreover, a poor-rich divide as well as the condemnation of taxation laws rhetorically employed by radical reformers, were repeated by Thomson. Like the editors of the *Herald* and the *Literary Cabinet* he had, moreover, no problems connecting radical language with the political economic idioms such as 'free' trade:

Do they [our legislators] wish to make the world believe that ours is a free trading country, because the rich are endowed with the transcendent privilege of oppressing the poor ...?²¹⁷

In another paragraph the author adopted a moral economic tone again by calling upon the authoritative power of God to support his case: "God has said, that we have a right to live on the fruits of our industry, he has given us a charter to that effect".²¹⁸ The reference to the charter was no coincidence and pointed towards Thomson's later involvement in Chartism and his editorship of the *Chartist Circular*.²¹⁹

The editors of the *Weaver's Journal* were not able to uphold the optimism and passion that Thomson showed in its first article. There was, indeed, nothing left to be optimistic about. Further attempts by Maxwell to empower local trade boards to fix a minimum wage were refused in parliament again in 1836 and 1837. From 1836

²¹⁷ *WJ*, 31 October 1835.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Murray, *Handloom Weavers*, 230.

the paper mirrored increasing despair and defeat in the face of continuous decline that not even a strongly supported trade union could stop.²²⁰ Despite wretched conditions and undercut wages, the trade continued to exist till the end of the nineteenth century, when “the long agony of the handloom weavers was reaching its close”.²²¹ It is somewhat paradoxical that the extinction of the handloom weaver coincided with the manifestation of the language of labour in the name of a political party that represented British and in particular Scottish working people in parliament ever since.²²²

Summary

This study has investigated popular economic attitudes traceable in the unstamped press of Glasgow, between 1816 and 1835. Initially liberal elite attitudes were exemplified with an analysis of a speech held by Francis Jeffrey before the Lanarkshire Justices of Peace on behalf of the weavers in 1812. Recognising its linguistic style to be distinguishable from an appeal published in the *Weaver's Journal* by William Thomson in 1835, the question was whether a different understanding of economy was the cause and how exactly a popular understanding of the decrease in the value of manual labour could be described. Subsequently, popular explanations of labour devaluation in unstamped periodicals between 1816

²²⁰ Fraser, *Conflict*, 146.

²²¹ Ward, “Trade Unionism,” in *Scottish Textile History*, eds. Butt and Ponting, 131.

²²² Fraser's *Scottish Popular Politics*, for example, investigates the continuity of political themes that the Scottish Labour Party inherited from nineteenth-century radicalism.

and 1819 and again between 1830 and 1834 were surveyed. Chapter one offered an outline of the radical discourse feeding into these explanations as well as alternative suggestions pointing towards a popular political economy as developed by Owenite socialists such as Robert Owen and William Thompson. Efforts to popularise orthodox political economy during the 1820s in Glasgow and beyond were investigated in chapter two. Additionally, the emergence of Owenite socialism, marking the beginning of a coherent language centring on the problem of the value of labour was analysed there. Chapter three demonstrated lucidly how effective this language, indeed, was in the unstamped press of Glasgow between 1830 and 1834. While the *Herald to the Trades Advocate* epitomized the Owenite understanding of economy particularly well, a mixture of languages combining radical ideas, utilitarianism and political economy, was evident there, too.

Conclusive Remarks

The most notable change between Jeffrey's speech in 1812 and Thomson's appeal in 1835 is the shift from presentation to self-presentation through official spokespersons that had experience as tradesmen themselves. The end of the practice of appealing in court regarding wage rates made lawyers as representatives superfluous. Certainly, representatives from other social ranks continued to play an important role, especially in the realm of political representation until the establishment of the Labour Party at the end of the century. But the expansion of affordable print and the emergence of the unstamped newspaper made it more likely for working people to find ambassadors

among their own ranks, and enabled them to respond to suggestions, for example in letters to editors.

The experience of representatives like Francis Place, Alexander Campbell and William Thomson as tradesmen doubtlessly impacted upon their choice of language. For instance, Thomson affirmed traditional narratives of the weavers' 'golden age' and their subsequent decline, a common language among handloom weavers. However, the impact of 'working-class' experience could lead in entirely different directions due to the uniqueness of every trade community, but also due to differences in personality. Experience of manual work did not determine their ideological or political alignment. Francis Place, for example, although having experienced extreme deprivation during a slump in the breeches-trade did not support protective labour legislation or indulge in anti-capitalist polemic, but instead advocated the education of working people and emphasised the importance of self-improvement. Consequently, despite their economically and socially formative place in society, working people were, nonetheless, receptive to different discourses. As this investigation has shown, the application of prevailing discourses to real life experience was diverse, integrated and not always coherent. The different languages on offer explaining economic crisis in general and the devaluation of labour in particular were often mixed and utilised in combination with rather than in opposition to each other. This was especially obvious in the case of the *Tribunal* and the *Herald to the Trades Advocate*. However, the climate in which these two papers appeared were relatively tolerant compared to the year 1819, for example, which was riddled with political tensions or the 1820s which

produced governmental prohibitions and widespread efforts to affirm the existing social and economic order against an unruly, unsatisfied 'mob'. Indeed, during the fourteen years between the publication of the *Tribunal* and the *Herald* the popular discourse on the problem of political inequality, economic distress and the devaluation of labour was largely silenced. Only conforming opinions were fostered and disseminated through government legislations, revealing their power on the visibility of popular discourse. Yet, this power had its limits and could not completely stamp out dissenting voices. During the 1820s, a consistent anti-capitalist theory began to evolve parallel and sometimes in conjunction with political economy, revealing just how strong and complex the discursive relationship between capitalism and socialism was from its very beginning. Another new feature was the shift from community based schemes of addressing economic problems to trade unions which started to function on a national basis, corresponding with ambassadors from other social ranks like Maxwell to lobby the parliament in their favour. While this can be regarded as a symptom of a modern, urbanising and expanding society, the legacy of the radical reform movement which aimed to create a national platform for parliamentary reform as early as 1815 is also visible here.

Notwithstanding the changing nature of elite and popular economic attitudes of the early nineteenth century, lines of continuity transporting traditional values into the new world are observable, too. Moral economic values were emphasised particularly by Thomson, ambassador of the continuously declining handloom weaving trade. Competition as a force that was only 'good' when constrained

pointed towards an eighteenth-century economic consensus, evoking, moreover the notion of an adequate reward for skill and labour, legitimised by the authority of a Christian god. As we have seen in the case of Thomas Chalmers, in the elite narratives of the early nineteenth century, this God had moved on and favoured self-responsibility to paternalist support of the 'common weal'.

Owenite socialism disintegrated after 1834, however, its embryonic labour theory of value lived on in the work of Karl Marx. In *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867-1893) Marx verified political economy's theoretical treatment of labour as the source of a product's value. But Marx criticised that in the theory of Ricardo and Smith, labour was treated as a commodity, quantifiable, buyable and sellable.²²³ Correspondingly, capitalists ignored the identity of workers as human beings and equated labour simply as part of their productive equipment. Moreover, Marx took up Owenite ideas when he theorised that the extraction of surplus value by the capitalist from the labourer was necessary for the accumulation of capital. The consequence was the devaluation of labour, low wages and a contradictory system that diminished the purchasing power of its workers, thus reducing the consumer demand needed to maintain its productive power.²²⁴

It is no coincidence that Marx formulated his critique of political economy in Great Britain, an industrialising society that offered plenty of empirical and theoretical material for his conception of the *Capital*. However, his global impact as the most influential critic of capitalism and the application of his and Friedrich Engel's

²²³ Calhoun ed., "Marx, Karl," *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. *Oxford Reference Online*.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

theories to communism, the rival political and economic system, is a sign of the profound effect modern capitalism had on this world, with socialism inevitably representing the other side of the same story.

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