

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

"Reform, therefore, means rule of the mob."

May 5, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

In 1858, John Bright, the radical MP whose name is associated with free trade and advocacy for the repeal of the corn laws alongside Richard Cobden, embarked on a speaking tour across Northern England and Scotland to clamor for parliamentary reform, working class enfranchisement, the secret ballot and other measures associated with his milieu. In his speeches, he railed against the lords and peers of the realm (whose strength was "derived from an unholy participation in the fruits of the industry of the people"), and he went as far as to abrogate the role of the monarchy in the British constitution. It is this that prompted Henry Drummond (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Drummond_%281786%E2%80%931860%29) to forcefully rebuke him in a 40-page letter (<https://archive.org/stream/lettertomrbright00drumuoft>).

Although conflicted in some places owing to the influence of topical issues like the corn laws and to its physiocratic take on the economy, the letter displays a distinctive High Tory temperament.

Right from the beginning, Drummond dissects Bright's speech, bringing up the latter's drawing an equivalence between reform and democracy. Since parliamentary reform entails "to place the power of governing in this country exclusively in the hands of the dregs of the people — i. e. in the hands of those who are by necessity, in all ages and in all countries, the most distressed, the most ignorant, the most improvident, and the most reckless class of the community," and democracy is later used synonymously, Drummond naturally concludes: "Reform, therefore, means the rule of the mob."

Drummond thought the real liberties of the nation depend exclusively on the existence of a body which is independent both of the Crown and of the people.

One perspective he vigorously held which is rarely seen today is his sheer antipathy toward rule by the middle class, nothing more than an engine of graft and narrow-mindedness:

Hence, all things else being equal, a nobleman is more fitted for a ruler of a great country than a cotton-spinner. The nobleman considers the claims of all classes equally; the cotton-spinner considers everything to be good or bad according as it extends the interest of cotton. Let the cotton-spinner's son inherit an independent fortune from his spinning father; let him be sent to Eton or Harrow, Oxford or Cambridge, to get his mind enlarged by learning what has occurred in ancient times with all nations, he then will be as competent to rule as the nobleman. We have all seen an example of this before our eyes. The first Sir Robert Peel was a cotton-spinner, with all the narrow-mindedness of his class; his son went to Harrow and Oxford, had his mind enlarged, and became a first-rate statesman. The expression "a ruling class," is absurd; it is contemptible in a man like you to use it. You mean it to designate men with titles, who are always with you objects of envy and of hatred.

Drummond also cites the autistically utilitarian reform of the Poor Law that prohibited outdoor relief, and the subsequent abuses and scandals in workhouses, something I've mentioned before. (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/06/05/how-classical-liberalism-got-pwned-in-brief/>). "There is no equality nor justice in your manhood suffrage which does confer upon the poor the right of choosing the guardians of the unions, as well as to the rate-payers, whose immediate interest it is to starve them, and which they certainly would do, were it not for the interference of the magistrates, "the ruling class," who reside in the neighbourhood."

The only reform he could tolerate is an indirect electoral collage system with wider suffrage in it: "Every man might have a vote for as much share in the common wealth as he possessed. In large towns, the right of choosing Members of Parliament was always vested in the men who possessed the wealth which was the peculiar product of the place, whether under the name of burgesses, freemen, or any other; whilst all the inhabitants might have the right of voting for those with whom the choice of members rests. The towns might still continue to return members as well as the counties. By these means the franchise would be extended to all, and yet the order and suborder of all classes preserved as they ever were in the days of our Saxon, Norman, and English ancestors, and must be still."

A fun battering of radicalism, no doubt, and one with empirical backing (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/10/25/electoral-violence-in-america-or-why-your-country-had-to-be-pozzed/>), as electoral liberalization was followed by rioting and brawling at or near the polling station, a pathology that took decades to suppress.

It's also interesting to take a look at the repercussions of "reform" beyond the narrow meaning of extending the franchise, into the more general maladies caused by (or the result of) "civil society," civic activism, political clubs — whether as top-down efforts of rationalization and the blowback from subsidiary interests that they receive, or as the more conventional political activist pattern of the middle fucking the low at the service of the high. Actually many people love to speak of high-low-against-middle since it's such a perfect populist/producerist slogan that appeals to all the natural prejudices of the embourgeoised workers (or the Middle American Radicals in U.S. parlance), and because it seems to fit the period euphemistically known as "white flight," but I don't think it has been that common. Problem is, "middle" is far too broad. The "low," the underclass, aren't people who generally represent themselves. There's nearly always a middle proxy speaking for them.

The French diplomat Édouard Alletz published a two-volume set on the July Revolution in 1837, which was translated into German by one of the country's greatest of Catholic conservatives, Franz Josef von Buß (1803-1878), as "Die neue Demokratie: oder die Sitten und die Macht der Mittelklassen in Frankreich."

I quite like the sound of "die Macht der Mittelklassen." It really conveys the gravity of the whole situation.

In the twelfth chapter, Alletz says that "the July government gave France freedom, and what is freedom for the citizens, if not power? Simple private persons have increased in proportion to the humiliation of the highest positions; luck is amazed to participate in the distribution of state offices, and to give way to merit on all sides; the power of the state fell into the hands of the capable, and as each one drew a shadow of the greatness of the equality instituted among all, those who appear the farthest to the government, approach it, and in a certain way possess it, hope to get to it. Our institutions satisfy this great passion, which is, as it were, the foundation of human nature, I mean *ambition*."

Alletz appeared to be optimistic that the youthful middle class elite, growing up with bitter experience of political tumult engraved in their conscience, would mature into responsible leaders who would pave the foundations for a moral renaissance of French national culture. Specifically, he thought that the theater can be transformed, "by virtue of a moral supervision, which reconciles the interests of morals with the dignity of writers, especially by diminishing the drama halls so that the entrances to them cease," that moreover "literature will exert a nobler influence," and most bafflingly of all, Alletz believed that "the violent and unregulated power of the press will gradually give way to the light that it itself spreads." (p.80)

If only he had added "the light that blinds us."

Now we have more conventional pre-modern reform efforts, like doing away with seigneurial agriculture and replacing it either with some form of private enclosure, or by dividing up latifundia into many free smallhold plots owing cash rent to the royal coffers. Maria Theresa's agricultural reforms in Bohemia had this nature: all the peasants were to become leaseholders paying a rental fee, with full possession and use of the land and the right to sell or mortgage it whole. All buildings, equipment and animals of the manors were to be auctioned off to the peasants. The lord's status was lowered to being more akin to a tax collector, capable of revoking leases for dereliction of duty and reserving the right to approve of any divisions of conveyanced lands. However, the corvee system (or *robot*) was to be done away with and the peasants owing no duties on demesne land. This had two clear implications: the serf no longer supplied with and himself the fixed capital of the lord, had his customary safety net cut off (sans government storage houses), and furthermore the need to accommodate the formerly landless and the herdsmen meant the number of plots outstripping the population, hence the settling of immigrants, such as the Saxons and Prussians who came to Pardubice after 1778.

Complaints, especially by cotters, were frequent — they were being overtaxed, others were being unfairly compensated, their fences were torn down, they were forced to station Hussar regiments, etc. etc. Many of these were justified. Furthermore, the peasants had far more bargaining power (<https://www.pitt.edu/~votruba/qsonhist/contractualvillagesslovakiahungary.html>) over the seigneurs than one would expect (and often the two classes jointly colluded to evade taxes), hence there was barely any "exploitation" being ended. "Unfree" simply meant owing the *robot*.

This was a direct result of cameralist influence, especially Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi, who was close to Maria Theresa's advisor Count von Haugwitz, and a tutor to the latter's son. Justi's views, as described by (Liebel-Weckowicz and Szabo 1981) were:

Justi already espoused ideas of free enterprise. Government was to leave its subjects "all possible and reasonable freedom". Freedom of religion was to be assured so that merchants of all faiths would bring their commerce and industry. Mere population increase, however, would not assure the strength of the state. It had to be tied to a favourable standard of living. Increasing the state revenues was to be the major goal of all economic policies. Efficiency had to be introduced to crown domains. These were not to be alienated. Leasing such lands or giving them in assured hereditary tenure was recommended. The main obstacles to agricultural prosperity lay in ignoring the interest of peasants and landlords. Large estates were to be divided into smaller ones. Yields could be improved by a better technology and by emancipating the peasants. This meant encouraging private property ownership. Ownership would spur the peasant on to exerting his maximal efficiency. Justi also argued that the landlords had to realize that it was also in their interest to convert the Robota into cash payments to achieve greater labour productivity. Justi suggested pressuring the landlords into selling their property to the peasants by taxing land not farmed by the owners. The lords and not the peasants were to pay such taxes, the policy that Maria Theresa eventually introduced.

The emancipation of the peasantry led to a booming exodus into the towns (especially after 1815), bringing with it pauperism, prostitution, petty crime, housing shortages, and so forth. With it, the spectre of social crisis and widespread commentary, e.g. Thomas Carlyle and his "Condition of England Question." The aristocratic anti-capitalist (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/bonald-and-the-socialists-some-unsettled-debts/>), thinkers with their traditional and corporatist solutions were ultimately ignored, despite often being pioneers in the fields of sociology and social policy that their enemies would ultimately take over, and instead Social Democracy and labor radicalism prevailed. For a time, anyway.

The Bourbon reforms in Spanish America (as opposed to Spain itself, where they were worse) after the close of the War of the Spanish Succession are a second case of top-down enlightened mayhem. Viceregal power was made near absolute by the 1750s, especially within the context of the exchequer's fiscal policy: the farming, collection and administration of royal revenues, including the mercury monopoly and the Mints were entrusted entirely to the viceroy's absolute discretion, without capability of being contested by traditional judicial bodies as the *audiencias*, or any treasury officials, governors and ministers. All sales of posts in the audiencias, royal treasuries and to corregidores (district governorships) were abolished, and the local creole elite steadily pushed out and replaced by peninsular Spaniards. Eventually creole leaders like Jose de San Martin and Cornelio Saavedra would be at the forefront of Spanish American independence. Religious orders were suppressed, and the Indian parishes long administered by friars and observants secularized.

If the Habsburg case constituted an elevation of the low, then the Bourbon case was a snubbing of the elite and a denial of their share to the *patria*. Come the Peninsular War, they took it back by force through regional juntas and ultimately declarations of independence.

Going further, we can look at the more pertinent to our time case of a modern middle class reformer of academic background in an industrial society. There are few primary sources more interesting on the thought processes and experiences of a turn-of-the-century progressive than Frederic C. Howe (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_C._Howe)'s autobiography *The Confessions of a Reformer* (1925).

Opening up in Chapter 1, Howe says his three formative influences were Robert T. Ely, Woodrow Wilson and James Bryce.

"At Johns Hopkins individual authorities took the place of my small-town herd. Professor Ely showed me a cruel industrial system, Woodrow Wilson and James Bryce the evils of party politics. Mr. Bryce said that America, with no leisure class devoted to statecraft, as in Great Britain, was to be saved by the scholar. Unthrilled by eloquence — for Mr. Bryce was a dull lecturer — I accepted his creed of responsibility and service. *Democracy must be salvaged from the hands of spoilsmen and politicians; it must be salvaged even from Senator Quay and the Andrews Brothers,*" he wrote.

Now at first Howe seems to have an explicitly racial orientation, "a strong belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon" and the English as "the chosen people."

This does not appear to have served as any roadblock to pie-in-the-sky idealism. By Chapter 7, which Howe titled "My Friends the Irish," he describes his evolution (<http://www.cooperative-individualism.org/howe-frederic-confessions-of-a-reformer-1925-02.htm>) from praising the Anglo-Saxon to praising the Celt (i.e. the Irish). "To the people of the East Side it meant getting something for themselves and their friends. To me duty to the state was the important thing; to them the duty was to themselves. Government meant the district leader, the policeman, the local boss." Howe loved this vision of standing by the gang as a superior model to Anglo-Saxon constitutionalism, which by then he regarded as a state ruled by men of wealth and leisure against the interests of the people.

Later, Howe becomes a supporter of Tom L. Johnson as Mayor of Cleveland (1901-1909). Johnson was a fervent Georgist and single-taxer, a leading evangelist of the land value tax at the time. At first, Howe didn't like Johnson when he heard him speak, for he "did not seem to be a reformer. He was not indignant enough. He said nothing about waste and extravagance; about bad men; about politicians; about the spoils system."

He warms up to him, Johnson is elected mayor, and so begins "an experiment in democracy, in municipal ownership, in town-planning, and the taxation of land values."

Unfortunately, the financiers, the propertied interests, and the streetcar owners all thwart him through the courts and other venues. The white flag of counterrevolution had sadly prevailed.

In Chapter 15, Howe quotes William McKinley's campaign organizer and later Ohio Senator Mark Hanna and his disgustingly "feudal" view of society: "Some men must rule; the great mass of men must be ruled. Some men must own; the great mass of men must work for those who own." To some it is feudalism, to others it is Pareto distributions. Hanna himself was a very gentle boss to his workers, but he had long (already in his own time) been made the representative icon of the sleazy crook politician.

Howe goes on to study the United States Constitution in greater depth and concludes it was an instrument of Hamiltonian aristocracy to subvert the popular will — a less sophisticated view anticipating Charles A. Beard's economic interpretation of the Constitution.

In Chapter 18, Howe diagnoses the issue like so: "We had given power to the corporation but not to the state. The text-books talked of political sovereignty, but what we really had was business sovereignty. And because the business corporation had power while the political corporation had not, the business corporation had become the state."

He developed a democratic/progressive platform of direct primaries, recall of all elective officials (including judges), constitutional and legislative referendums, complete home rule for cities, and interestingly he wanted to eradicate or reduce the influence of SCOTUS. This was back when SCOTUS was still promoting Lochner era laissez-faire doctrines to some extent, which by the way, as the Volokh

Conspiracy have pointed out, were in some ways more egalitarian (https://eh.net/book_reviews/rehabilitating-lochner-defending-individual-rights-against-progressive-reform/), than the progressive judicial doctrines that followed.

In Chapter 20, Howe describes losing faith in English common law as a whole. It is, you guessed it: "The common law was developed into a system of jurisprudence at the hands of mediaeval lawyers who were paid retainers of the old aristocracy. It was custom developed into law for the convenience of the ruling class. The American colonists brought the common law to America, and here, as in England, it has resisted change."

He regarded lawyers as unfit to rule because they were supposedly resistant to change.

Chapter 24 supplies us with an interesting portrait of American radicalism from 1914-18, a period when it was booming:

Socialism was the vogue, also women's suffrage. Graduates of Harvard, Columbia, and Vassar, concerned for the well-being of society but not for its conventions formed an American youth movement. They protested against industrial conditions, suffered vicariously with the poor, hated injustice. ...They started radical periodicals for the expression of their ideas. Muck-rakers, it seemed, had had their day. Mere uplift was inadequate. Constructive change was demanded.

There were leaders among these leaders. Max Eastman, handsome, eloquent, winning, was associate professor of philosophy at Columbia. Poet and dreamer of better conditions, he was drawn from the university into life. Crystal Eastman, a graduate of Vassar and later admitted to the bar, held an important position as secretary of the Workmen's Compensation Commission, to which she had been appointed by Governor Hughes as the result of a brilliant investigation of housing and industrial conditions in Pittsburgh. This brother and sister became the centre of a group of writers, artists, and poets, who started *The Masses* in 1912 and carried on its publication until 1917, when it was discontinued as a result of the war. ...Jack Reed, recently from Harvard, was beginning that tempestuous career as poet, magazine writer, war reporter, and finally revolutionary agitator which led him first to Mexico with Villa and then to Russia, where he died, honored by a monument erected by the revolutionists. Boardman Robinson and John Sloan, the artists, Mary Heaton Vorce and Inez Haynes Irwin the well known fiction-writers, formed part of the group that contributed to *The Masses* as a forum for the expression of their ideas in art and literature.

[Fun fact: Max Eastman eventually became a Misesian libertarian and wrote for the *National Review*.]

Howe becomes Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island. Despite influxes of anarchistic alien terrorists, all he can think about is how to "Americanize the alien," and dismisses any concern about communist violence as being hysteria. In fact, the so-called "Red Scare" was entirely justified. (<https://www.socialmatter.net/2017/05/25/forgotten-history-americas-first-red-scare/>).

One of the most revealing statements as to the liberal activist complex is near the end of the book, in p.322, when Howe describes his faith in the intelligentsia:

In New York I stayed with it. I enjoyed membership in clubs, social contacts incident to my work as director of the People's Institute. It was good form to be a liberal; it involved no sacrifices. Indeed, it gave distinction. I never lost my feeling of being one of the elect, of helping to keep America true to the ideals of the fathers. I believed that the things I wanted would come about in time; that they would be brought about by liberals — liberals as represented by the New York Nation, the New Republic, the insurgent group in Congress. I was confident that peace societies would end war. I believed in discussion; in the writing of books and magazine articles in making speeches. We liberals had the truth. If we talked it enough and wrote it enough, it would undoubtedly prevail. By eloquence and reason abuses would be ended; the state would be cleaned up. I believed in the mind and in facts. Facts were a Rock of Gibraltar. We had them — facts about government ownership, about free trade, about land.

Even as he was growing skeptical of his own class, he reoriented his faith toward the working class, reasoning that "by necessity labor would serve freedom, democracy, equal opportunity for all."

Howe's haute-bourgeois technocratic outlook had its more popular variant in all the voters' leagues, civic clubs, good government clubs, women's organizations and similar associations that emerged to fight machine-run city authorities.

There were at least two major reformist discourses, both of them borrowing from the other. One was the language of "moral government," with special emphasis on stamping out rum, whoring and gambling. "Moral city," "strong moral purpose," etc. The other was the language of "efficiency," "experts," "business methods," "right people," etc.

Interestingly, in places like Pittsburgh, women's participation was quite high in such civic clubs. What had happened is that there was a conflict between the Victorian view of female moral cleanliness and the view that a woman's rightful place is in the home. Women's elevated role to moral guardianship had concomitantly led to an expansion of the definition of "home," and domesticity more generally. As states now concerned themselves with child labor laws, playgrounds, safety laws and other measures, there grew a "domestication of politics" alongside the more classical progressive initiatives of busting trusts, regulating railroads and rationalizing industry, as Keith Zahniser documents. The slogan of the Civic Club in Pittsburgh became "municipal housekeeping," and local newspapers ran headlines such as "Civic Club will Actively Labor for Cleaner City — Municipal Mothers to Wield the Broom and Help Make Things Shine."

In school reform, the same occurred. First, already by the 1840s and 1850s, the old district schooling model where schools were largely private and linked to specific religious confessions had been put down by the rise of the "common school movement" of taxpayer-funded public schools, in the name of economic development but also working class regimentation. Parental apathy was a problem for decades, which school boards loathed. There were also unsuccessful attempts by Catholics, most notably Bishop McQuaid in Rochester, to lobby for "Christian free schools," an early confessional analogue to school choice.

If parochial schooling could not be maintained, then parental resistance became imperative. Women's clubs proliferated to this effect.

William J. Reese, in *Power and the Promise of School Reform*, speaks of the metaphor of "domesticity" in women's activism:

Home-related metaphors dotted the speeches and writings of municipal club women. Helen Montgomery of Rochester characteristically interpreted widened opportunities for reform as a prerequisite for sound motherhood and citizenship. "It is not enough that the house is kept clean, if the street be wrong, and the ward unhealthful," she asserted in an interview in the Democrat and Chronicle in 1896. "There should be a broadened housekeeping, to extend out of doors and all over the city. All these things will help women to gain full enfranchisement." "What rights do mothers have in regard to the public school education of their children?" asked some angry representatives of the local Political Equality Club to the ward leaders on the school board. When they learned that they only had the right to vote for school commissioners—who were always men, since the party caucuses were male-dominated—the women quickly retorted that modern mothers could only ensure children's welfare if they stepped beyond their own front door.

Democratic participation in the political process becomes a constantly escalating series of attacks and counter-attacks between social classes, destroying any pretense to men having an ordained station in life, blurring the distinction between high and middle, and breeding a general sense of restlessness in all social problems. Hence: "Reform, therefore, means the rule of the mob."

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