

“Mouvements protestataires, contestations politiques et luttes sociales en Grande-Bretagne (1811-1914)”

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Programme à consulter en ligne



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ABSTRACTS

“Peterloo and the Radical Movement”

Robert Poole (University of Central Lancashire)

<https://www.uclan.ac.uk/academics/professor-robert-poole>

The British radical movement for parliamentary reform took off in the years 1815-20, during the years of poverty and unrest following the Napoleonic wars. The core demand was for the vote for all adult males by right of citizenship rather than property. Compared with the 1790s, issues arising from oppressive wartime government were at the forefront. The movement's centre of gravity lay in the industrial north, with a clear 'mass platform strategy' of mobilising sheer numbers to force the issue. Political demands were framed in constitutional terms, seeking to solve all problems by restoring the supposedly lost role of the House of Commons as the representative of the whole people. It was universally expected that such a radical change

could only be achieved by radical means, but most reformers expected the government to capitulate peacefully and (despite angry rhetoric) few were willing to use armed force. The movement failed, mainly because of repression centred on the attack on the ‘Peterloo’ mass meeting at Manchester in 1819. Reform of the franchise, when it came in 1832, made only minor concessions to democratic principles. It did, however, involve a capitulation by government in the face of mass pressure very similar to what the post-war radicals had hoped to achieve.

“Chartism revisited - a pre-Marxist view”

Michel Prum (Université Paris Cité, UMR ECHELLES)

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Chartism was criticized by defenders of the ruling classes but also within the ranks of the working class. This paper will focus on a ‘pre-Marxist’ criticism of the Chartist strategy, levelled by a printer living in West Yorkshire, John Francis Bray (1809-1897), whose main book, *Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy* (Leeds, 1839) was, in Holyoake’s words, “a good deal read by co-operators of the time”. Bray did not believe that ‘Universal Suffrage’ (actually male suffrage). was ‘the grand panacea for all our evils’ (Feargus O’Connor). He thought that the Six Points of the People’s Charter, like all the claims limited to mere political changes, could not put an end to workers’ exploitation. If the Chartists finally managed “to catch the bubbles which have hitherto charmed them”, he wrote, they would “only grasp a shadow”.

“Women, workers and citizens. Rethinking the political role of the Owenite movement, 1820-1845”

Ophélie Siméon (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

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In the wake of a historiographical revival that began in the late 1960s and which has helped to rehabilitate “utopian” socialism as a theoretical and political school of thought in its own right, this talk explores the origins, organisation and posterity of the first British socialist movement, also known as Owenism (1800-1845). It examines the paradox of a group that seemed apolitical at first glance, yet was nonetheless in touch with the political upheavals of its time, in connection with the desire to provide a set of definitive solutions to the “social question”. The delicate balance between the rejection of party politics on the one hand, and militant action on the ground on the other, will be explored through the study of structural tensions between Owen’s often paternalistic attitude and the democratic aspirations of many of his followers. The cross-analysis of three interdependent fields of action (workers’ rights, women’s rights and the question of suffrage) will help carry out a political assessment of both Owenism and the concept of “utopian socialism”.

“Popular Politics and the Abolition Movement in Britain, 1787-1833”

Ryan Hanley (University of Exeter)

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What did colonial slavery look like to ordinary, working British people? Was it a purely moral outrage? Was it another example of the political injustices they themselves faced, underlining the need for a new kind of worker solidarity, stretching across ethnic lines and spanning the Atlantic? Or was it an unwelcome distraction from their own struggles for freedom and representation? For many decades now, historians have viewed the British antislavery movements as outgrowths of the Atlantic ‘Age of Revolutions’; one part of the great tide of egalitarian and democratic thought arising from the ideals of the European Enlightenment. In this view, popular abolitionism was a radical movement, readily aligned to the campaigns for electoral reform and the improvement of labour conditions for the working classes. It is true that practically all British radicals despised slavery, and some were happy to share a stage with abolitionists, especially in the years following the onset of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Yet it is also true that many leading abolitionists – notably the great parliamentary figurehead of the movement, William Wilberforce – espoused profoundly reactionary domestic politics. At the same time, many British radicals struggled to reconcile the demands for freedom made by the enslaved in the West Indies with their own social movements, and some even embraced new ideas about ‘racial’ difference to reinforce white Britons’ special claims to personal rights and freedoms. For some, exploited factory workers, emaciated farm hands, and starving women working at the loom were greater ‘slaves’ than the descendants of Africans held in bondage in the Americas. For others, such claims amounted to little more than dangerous rabble-rousing, designed to undermine faith in Britain’s uniquely stable and generous systems of government. In this lecture, we will explore some of these tensions, charting both the radical and conservative currents of popular abolitionism in Britain during some of its most politically turbulent decades.

“The relationship between the British Socialist and Suffrage Movements, 1884 -1914”

Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière (Sorbonne Université)

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Although the link between socialism and suffragism can be traced back to the Owenite and Chartist movements of the 1830s and 1840s, between 1884 and 1914, the new phase of the campaign for women’s suffrage coincided with the socialist revival, then the emergence of the Labour Party — so the socialist and women’ suffrage movements were bound to interact, if only to position themselves on those questions, while many women and men were active in both. Yet, the issue of women’s suffrage has generally been overlooked by historians of British socialism, and one has to look mostly to feminist historians to assess the importance of the

relationship between the two. After a brief recall of the composition and evolution of the British socialist and suffrage movements in 1884-1914, this paper will study their complex, shifting divisions and alliances along their main two debates: class v. sex, and adult v. women's suffrage.

“Anti-imperialism in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain: the paradoxes of a fragmented current”

Yann Béliard (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

<http://www.univ-paris3.fr/m-beliard-yann-35311.kjsp?RH=1180965642044>

Whereas abolitionists, in spite of their divisions, shared the same legislative goal, it is more difficult to identify such a common denominator among those who, between the 1840s and 1914, raised their voices against British imperialism. In the 19th century, protesters in the metropole, whatever their cause, struggled to understand imperial expansion, if only because it was a new and ongoing phenomenon. My paper, following the arguments made by Bernard Porter and Gregory Claeys, will show how empire critics and sceptics target imperialism more vehemently than the British Empire as such. I will also present the recent epistemological shift operated by P. Gopal (2021) with her emphasis on how British anti-imperialists' views were shaped by contacts and exchanges with colonial rebels, both in the colonies and in London. The rejection of imperialism by 19th century Britons was full of ambiguities, as exemplified by the Workmen's Peace Association, the Social Democratic Federation and the Congo Reform Association. In its final part my paper will address more particularly the tension between anti-racist internationalism and “white labourism”. For all its shortcomings, British anti-imperialism constituted a persistent strand of protest, still worthy of further explorations.

“The Knights of Labour in Britain”

Steven Parfitt (independent scholar)

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One of the great hinge moments in the history of the British labour movement and of protest in Britain more generally was the new unionism. In the late 1800s and early 1890s, British workers went on strike and organised in unprecedented numbers, and though many of their early gains were lost for a time they also laid the groundwork for the later emergence of the British Labour Party. This paper is about one of the great international influences on the new unionism, the American-born Knights of Labor. The Knights, by their example in the great strike wave of the mid-1880s known as the Great Upheaval, and by their own extension into Britain during the 1880s, provided models, precedents and inspiration for many of the leaders and activists who went on to play major roles in the new unionism. This paper is about the British Knights and how, and why, they came to play that role.

“The British Left and Migrant Socialism, 1889-1914”

Daniel Renshaw (University of Reading)

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The position of the British left as regarded the treatment of migrants did not arrive fully formed. Rather, the eventual stance of socialists that was broadly tolerant of the presence of immigrants and supported open borders was the result of more than two decades of debate and action. This paper will consider the parameters of that debate by examining two inter-connected points. Firstly, there was the much-discussed question of whether migrants undermined the hard-won gains achieved for the British proletariat through strike action from the end of the 1880s onwards. Secondly, there was the nature of migrant socialism in British cities in the decades before the First World War, and the exact role that migrant radicals and those from minority communities played in the wider movement. Were migrant and ‘domestic’ forms of radical political formation fundamentally similar, or were there key differences, especially concerning the utility of violence to achieve ends? Three key junctures will be examined that threw these questions into sharp relief – the strikes across London in 1889, the passing of the Aliens Act in 1905, and the Houndsditch murders and subsequent siege of Sidney Street in the winter of 1910-1911.