



Decade of Reform

and

"Orator" Hunt

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In Decade of Reform, Geoffrey B.A.M. Finlayson shows how parliamentary reform, political reforms at the municipal level, factory reform and reform of the Poor Law were actually measures which consolidated the domination of the landed aristocracy and the middle class at the expense of the working class which remained excluded from participation in the political process. On page 9 Finlayson writes that the Reform Act "had done little to shake the dominance of the established interests and classes" and that the manufacturing, middle class became a "junior partner" with the landed aristocracy in the sharing of power. The Municipal Corporations Act, Finlayson writes, further democratized the political process at the local level by expanding the franchise and providing for the direct and indirect election of officials, but still excluded the working class through the introduction of the £10 householder voter (page 24) so that the houses of the working class were not rated at all (page 30). Legislation in the areas of factory reform and reform of the Poor Law, Finlayson writes, did not mean that laissez faire principals had been abandoned (see page 70) but rather reflected the desire of the dominant classes to further exploit the working class (see pages 42 and 59).

To summarize, it is Finlayson's position that political reform during the 1830s "was of little consequence to the working classes; it simply replaced one set of masters by another" (page 75) and that such reform was motivated by class interest, with the intent of further exploiting the working class.

*Seems a little skewed. I am not certain he goes this far.*

*Strong on factory reform?*

In "Orator" Hunt, it is John Belchem's position that Henry Hunt was not merely a "vainglorious, empty demagogue" (page 1), but was a radical politician who mobilized the workers into an extraparliamentary movement which demanded the restoration of the constitutional democratic rights for all the people (page 4). Belchem asserts that Hunt was not a revolutionary nor did he advocate violence; he promoted democratic radicalism (page 42).

However, the evidence presented by Belchem seems to suggest that Hunt was actually an unscrupulous rabblrouser who was motivated by personal reasons to agitate the workers against the dominant classes. In chapter 1 Belchem shows how Hunt, who was a "gentleman farmer," was ostracized by members of his own class, and that his "abandonment of loyalism, then, can be explained in local and personal terms" (page 23). Then in 1812 Hunt encouraged a crowd to riot before the general election (page 38) and established a "working alliance" (page 57) with a "revolutionary party" which advocated insurrection. On page 58, Belchem writes that "forcible intimidation, mass agitation situated on the borderline of legality, became the fundamental policy of the popular radicals ... to menace the authorities." On page 106 Belchem writes of the "famous drilling on the moors which came into prominence in Lancashire radicalism" and on page 126 quotes Hunt as having reportedly said "that he would fight for them [the people's rights] and die for them," a highly inflammatory statement. And Richard Carlile feared that Hunt was using the Radical Reform Association "to play over again the tricks and games of 1816, 17, 18 and 19." (page 198)

*inflammatory  
yet yes  
but not  
necessarily  
dominated  
by personal  
considerations*