RADICALISM IN PAISLEY, 1830-1848:

and its economic, political, cultural background

Archibald Leitch

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Department of Scottish History
University of Glasgow

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Summary

This work looks at events in Paisley, one of Scotland's major towns, between the years 1830 and 1848. It is an examination of the Parliamentary Reform agitation, the Movement for Repeal of the Corn Laws and Chartism in the town against the background of Paisley's political tradition and economic development. It is set within the context of the current debates in British historiography on the Industrial and French Revolutionary periods.

The study arose from a Project on Chartism in Paisley for a Fourth Level Arts Course at the Open University. The emphasis in that Project was on the sources and bibliography for the history of Chartism both locally and nationally. The main topic for debate was the division of the Chartist Movement over the question of Moral or Physical Force as the most effective means of obtaining the Six Points of the People's Charter. During the Chartist years Paisley experienced devastating economic problems but nevertheless was considered by historians to have been firmly in the Moral Force camp under the leadership of the Rev. Patrick Brewster. This placed the town generally within the mainstream of Scottish Chartism which traditionally has been portrayed as a Moral Force Movement which did not pose any revolutionary threat.

To ascertain if this was an accurate assessment, and if it was, to understand the reasons for this, given the serious economic depression in the town, called for a deeper study than the Project on Chartist historiography. A more thorough far reaching study of Chartism in the town was required and other Reform activities at the time also needed to be studied. The period 1830-1848 was decided upon for several reasons. Approximately 1830 marked the commencement of the agitation for Parliamentary Reform which culminated in the Act of 1832 and it was also the beginning of the period of Whig hegemony.

At the other end, 1848, approximately marked the conclusion of the Chartist agitation although it lingered in a changed and weakened form for a few more years. In addition to the Parliamentary Reform agitation and Chartism the period also embraced the Movement for Repeal of the Corn Laws which was achieved in 1846.

However, the town's political tradition and economic development cannot be fully understood by restricting study to the given period so a brief account of earlier events in the town has first to be made. This introductory section deals with the Reform Movements which appeared in the closing years of the eighteenth century and immediately following the French Wars. Secondly it considers the particular economic development of Paisley. Historians, who are sceptical about the Moral Force interpretation, feel that insufficient attention has been paid to these earlier years of the town's history.

The growth of Paisley during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution was so rapid that the town was sometimes referred to as the Manchester of Scotland. Late eighteenth and nineteenth century Paisley was therefore a place which is worthy of study in its own right but some knowledge of earlier events is necessary for a proper understanding of the various Reform Movements which arose between 1830 and 1848.

The bulk of the work, however, comprises a study of the Reform agitations in the town between c1829-1832, the Anti-Corn Law Movement and Chartism. As a contribution to the study of Radicalism in Scotland, the work examines the extent of the town's involvement in Reform activities, the classes of townspeople who participated, the motivation for their actions and the threat, if any, that was thereby posed to the constituted authorities.

As a contribution to Scottish history the study will be placed in the

context of the current debate between historians about this period. The late E.P. Thompson, in his major work, The Making of the English Working Class, has stimulated a similar discussion about the development of class consciousness in Scotland. Scottish historians, like Dr. Fiona Montgomery and Professor T.C. Smout, have found little evidence of the existence of a separate, identifiable working class consciousness by the time of the 1832 Reform Act. Instead they have emphasised the tendency towards class collaboration and co-operation. Smout has found that the response of Paisley to its economic problems between 1841 and 1843 was community based rather than class based. Related to this moderate response was the absence of any threat to the authorities in the form of violence or revolution. An orthodoxy has thus developed which portrays Scotland during the years of the French and Industrial Revolutions as a basically stable, well ordered society.

This orthodox interpretation of Scotland has been challenged in recent years by other Scottish historians. J. Young in his Rousing of the Scottish Working Class, has sought to portray a more active, assertive class conscious working man than the docile, passive image presented by Montgomery and Smout. Other historians, too, who do not go as far as the Marxist interpretation of Young or Thompson, have also challenged the Smout and Montgomery thesis. Tony Clarke and Tony Dickson have challenged Smout specifically over his interpretation of events in Paisley between 1841 and 1843 and by implication, the wider interpretation of all Scottish Radicalism as essentially limited by an intellectual and cultural tradition of general co-operation. While they accept that the economic structure of Paisley facilitated the development of class collaboration, they have sought to show that there were more Radical elements, too, which were always present in the town.

It is in the context of this debate that the bulk of this study will be set. After the initial background has been considered, the events in Paisley c1829-1832 will be studied and the local questions outlined above examined. The main focus will be on the two

organisations set up in the town to campaign for Reform of Parliament during these years, the Paisley Reform Society and the Renfrewshire Political Union. The Paisley Reform Society has not been previously identified by Scottish historians who have focused all their attention on the class collaborationist Renfrewshire Political Union which was not formed until over a year after the Society had come into existence. The Paisley Reform Society was tangible evidence of the existence of a more Radical element in the town's politics as suggested by Clarke and Dickson. Some comparison will then be made with the situation in Glasgow. An attempt will also be made to ascertain the effect of the Reform Act in Paisley and a brief study made of early voting patterns. It is hoped to make some contribution to the argument between Clarke and Dickson and Smout over the existence of a more Radical, extreme element in the town.

The study of the local Anti-Corn Law agitation will also be made in the context of the wider ongoing national debate in examining the town's contribution to the Movement. No real detailed study of the town's Anti-Corn Law agitation has previously been undertaken. The issue of Chartism as has already been indicated presents more scope for debate over the threat of revolution or social disorder. However, it was over the issue of the Corn Laws that the authorities perhaps perceived the greatest threat to social order in Paisley so that in the context of Scottish Radicalism it was the Anti-Corn Law Movement which was more significant in developing and shaping attitudes than Chartism which is a reversal of the usual historiographical approach.

Chartism in Paisley will be examined bearing the same questions about local participation and motivation in mind once more within the context of the national debates. In addition the influence and contribution of the Rev. Patrick Brewster will also be assessed as it was probably his participation in the Chartist Movement which has made his name most well known although he was also active in other causes particularly Corn Law Repeal. The predominantly Moral Force standpoint, believed to have been adopted by Paisley in the Chartist

Movement has always been attributed to the influence of Brewster. Brewster's reputation is shown here, however, to have been less generally influential than has hitherto been believed.

It is hoped that each of these studies of events in Paisley, a large town experiencing the effects of industrialisation, will make a small contribution to the wider national debate amongst Scottish historians about the extent of Radical protest in Scotland and the development of class consciousness. It is hoped, too, that the account of these events will make some contribution to the historiography of Paisley.

CONTENTS

Chapter One

EARLY RADICALISM IN PAISLEY AND ITS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

It is necessary before examining the events between 1830 and 1848 to establish Paisley's political tradition because ideas of Radical Reform had been apparent in the town at least since the late eighteenth century. It is also essential to look at the economic, social, cultural and religious background which had a significant bearing on the development of Radicalism locally. Only by such a study can the part played by the town in the Reform activities, the classes of townspeople involved, their motivation and the threat that this activity posed to the constituted authorities be properly assessed.

Such a study must also include consideration of the development of class consciousness in Paisley in light of the important work undertaken in England on this subject by the late E.P. Thompson (1). This has inspired studies on the same topic with regard to Scotland. In recent years studies of this particular subject have appeared dealing specifically with Paisley which is a fruitful area for this type of research. Another aspect which has been much debated in recent years by historians of the period spanning the French and Industrial Revolutions has concerned the nature and extent of Reforming activity in Scotland. An orthodoxy has developed that the poorer, working classes in Scotland were much more passive and much less inclined to violent protest than their counterparts in England. Professor Smout, one of the leading Scottish historians, who has expounded this viewpoint, chose to highlight the events in Paisley during the depression of 1841-1843 as a classic example of the basic social stability of Scotland and the absence of class conflict (2).

This prevailing view of a well ordered stable society with an absence of class consciousness, has been challenged in recent years by a number of Scottish historians, most notably James Young who has subscribed to the Thompson interpretation (3). Young has tried to prove that Thompson's view about developments in England are equally

applicable to Scotland. Moreover, other Scottish historians have also challenged this orthodoxy. Two of them, Tony Clarke and Tony Dickson, have tackled Smout specifically on his interpretation of events in Paisley between 1841 and 1843 (4). They claim that Smout's argument is flawed as he has, in their view, paid insufficient attention, in his analysis, to the earlier economic development of Paisley and the long standing Radical political tradition of the town.

For this reason, if for no other, it is necessary to look briefly at that political tradition and the town's economic development before turning to an examination of the 1830-1848 period. An examination of events in Paisley from the late eighteenth century up to about 1830 will first seek the birth and growth of this tradition which can then be shown to have been stimulated by the economic development of the town during this period which resulted in a high level of interest in political matters.

It was the view of an old but still important work by H.W. Meikle that there was little widespread interest in political questions in Scotland generally prior to the American Revolution.

> while industrially and intellectually Scotland by 1780 was thus an awakened country, politically it was still asleep (5).

Even by that time religious issues were still regarded of greater importance as the opposition to the extension of the 1778 Roman Catholic Relief Bill to Scotland illustrated

> These anti-Popish riots showed that religious affairs still held the foremost place in the minds of the populace (6).

Although the issue may have been religious, however, the agitation can be regarded as an early example of political organisation as more recent historians, J. Brims and E.C. Black, have clearly shown (7).

The organisations formed in protest at the proposed legislation, such as the Committee for the Protestant Interest, the Society of the Friends to the Protestant Interest or the Scottish Protestant Association used political means such as petitioning, meetings, pressure and coercion from without to defeat the proposed measure. Significantly, too, Black noted

> Most startling is the humble status of the members of the Committee of Friends to the Protestant Interest (8).

This finding would also seem to contradict another earlier view held by Meikle, echoed by Norman Murray, the modern historian of the handloom weavers in Scotland, that only liberal minded lawyers, merchants, and occasionally landowners were concerned about political matters (9). It is true that on the surface in the Paisley area, landowners such as Speirs of Elderslie or Maxwell of Brediland appeared to have been sympathetic at an early date to ideas of Reform, and evidence of similar activity amongst the handloom weavers is difficult to trace. The weavers paraded to show loyalty to King George the Third and opposition to Reformer John Wilkes but this had been discontinued by 1790. K.J. Logue, in his account of the election riot in Renfrew on 17 April 1784 involving mainly weavers from Paisley, concluded that it could not be taken as evidence of an expression of direct political sentiment but Black and Brims showed that they could be stung into criticism of their political situation and rights (10).

Historians in Scotland have taken the view that it was only with the outbreak of the French Revolution that Scottish society generally began to take a real interest in political matters. The French Revolution certainly aroused the interest of the working classes and occupational groups such as the handloom weavers on a large scale. A contemporary writer, Lord Cockburn, also stressed the importance of events in France when he said,

> Everything, not this or that thing but literally everything, was soaked in this one event (11).

Cockburn claimed, disapprovingly, that around 1793 and 1794 this resulted in

> a ridiculous aping of French forms and phraseology (12).

Doubtless he was referring, among other things, to the formation, first in England, then in Scotland, of Societies which called themselves Friends of the Constitution and Friends of the People but as Black has shown there was a precedent for such bodies in the earlier agitation over the Roman Catholic Relief Bill so that it was not wholly an imitation of the French. People of 'humble status' had been involved in these earlier Societies and at the time they had been successful in postponing the legislation so there is a continuity here. The concern for the authorities was that the objective now was Reform of Parliament with the example of the terrible events in France very much in mind.

Paisley was one of the places where such Reform Societies were formed and one of the charges brought against Thomas Muir at his trial was that he had distributed and circulated Paine's publication entitled A Declaration of Rights and an Address to the People, approved by a number of the Friends of Reform in Paisley. By 1792 there were two such Societies in the town called Paisley Society and Paisley United Society. The town was well represented by delegates from both Societies at the First General Convention of the Delegates from the Societies of the Friends of the People in Edinburgh from 11 to 13 December 1792. The town was also well represented, with an increased number of delegates, at the Second General Convention of the Friends of the People in the same city from 30 April to 3 May 1793. A third Convention was held in Edinburgh in November 1793. Paisley historian, John Parkhill, writing in 1857, claimed that 1793 marked the beginning of the town's interest in political matters

> Paisley, in 1793, made that year the advent of her future numberless political struggles and we may safely say that no town in Britain has had more.

Although these Societies were run by working men, Parkhill revealed the pride felt locally that because of the prosperity the town had enjoyed in the 'Golden Age' and the knowledge acquired then, they

> were possessed of very general information on all the prominent topics of the time (13).

The town had prospered during the eighteenth century but significantly the years of 1792 and 1793 were a time of temporary economic recession. Unrest continued in 1794 but then the situation generally quietened down and the next year, 1797, when there was some Radical action in Scotland, there is no evidence of any significant activity in Paisley. Some further unrest occurred in the town in 1800 when the

> spirit of 1794 politics and the present scarcity excited the disaffected to tumult and insurrection (14).

However, there was in general little Radical activity between 1792-93 and the end of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. One reason for this inactivity was the largely successful appeal by the Government for loyalty during the Wars. The Paisley weavers have been described as 'temperate, religious and loyal' and any Radical, Republican sentiments did not deter them from answering their country's call. A further reason for the lack of local Radical activity during the Wars was the relative prosperity which the town enjoyed during much of the period of the hostilities

> Perhaps the most prosperous days for Paisley were those from 1803 to 1810 when the Continent was the seat of war (15).

The firm, indeed harsh, repressive action taken by the Government

which resulted in the transportation of leading figures of the Edinburgh Conventions, Muir, Margarot, Gerrald, Skirving and Palmer was undoubtedly a further deterrent to would-be Reformers. J.D. Brims has also shown clearly that much of the 'quietness' of Scottish Radicals was consciously adopted as an act of circumspection during this peiod. Those who were prominent in the Friends of the People like the representatives from Paisley, were anxious 'to destroy the Old Corrupt regime and transfer political power to ordinary Scottish people' but their 'choice of strategy and tactics was largely influenced by their assessment of the opportunities presented by the changing political circumstances they found themselves in'. In other words those who represented Radicalism in towns like Paisley were unlike the stereotypes presented by Meikle. They rejected not only nationalism but also that unionism symbolised by the present Parliamentary set-up in Westminster (16).

After the Wars, however, economic depression and scarcity of work led to a renewal of Radical activity which was clearly lying dormant but ready to be fanned into flames by the writings and oratory of English Reformers such as Major Cartwright and Henry Hunt. A Meeting was held as early as 5 October 1816 in the Relief Church, Paisley. Archibald Hastie, a baker, who had been one of the local delegates to the Edinburgh Convention in 1793, showing the continuity of working class Radical political interest, was the Chairman of this Meeting which wanted the people to 'have the appointment of their representatives' and 'to have a constitutional control over them in annual elections' so that post 1815 Reform agitation was built on what was already there (17).

A large open air demonstration was held at Meikleriggs Moor, on the outskirts of the town, on 17 July 1819. Like the Meeting at the Relief Church the object was

> consideration of the present distresses of the poor (18).

This was attributed to taxation in the late War. The crowd estimated at between twenty and thirty thousand heard a call for Universal

Suffrage, Annual Parliaments and Election by Ballot. There was the traditional complaint against the system of Old Corruption, the system of placemen, pensioners etc. who grew fat on the taxes levied on poor working men and their families and who were able to do so by their control of the 'unrepresentative' representative system. Even at this early stage, they were asking for more than was to be granted in the 1832 Reform Act. The proceedings passed off peacefully because

> the people of Paisley have always had the moderation to make their sentiments known in a peaceable and respectful manner (19).

There was clearly considerable support for Reform but no threat to the constituted authorities as Paisley at this time conformed to the image of a stable well ordered community as portrayed by the majority of Scottish historians. However, following the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, a further highly significant Meeting was held at Meikleriggs Moor on 11 September 1819 (20). This seemed to signify a more desperate strain in local Radicalism. A week of rioting followed in the aftermath of this Meeting which caused great consternation and made the authorities more concerned about Paisley. The town was rightly regarded thereafter as a centre of Radicalism and a potential flashpoint. The anxiety felt by the local authorities after this incident, eventually led to the permanent quartering of troops with the establishment of barracks in the town.

Matters once more appeared to quieten down after this but

> In the latter end of 1819 agitation became rampant in Paisley (21).

In the early part of 1820 the Radicals were believed to be arming and drilling in the Paisley area. When the Radical Rising took place on 1 April 1820, Paisley was once more a centre of activity. The local weavers went on strike, refusing to resume until 'grievances are redressed'. By 6 April, however, the tradesmen were returning to work

when the expected Rising failed to materialise. On 8 April, a search for arms led to the discovery of a number of pikes in Paisley and four lives were lost in the town as a result of the Rising (22). More serious violence occurred elsewhere, however, at Greenock and at the so called Battle of Bonnymuir. The consequences were less serious, too, for the Paisley Radicals than for some of those elsewhere but some of the local Radicals, including John Parkhill, had to flee the town, mostly to America, for a time , although a few did not return. A trial of those who had been arrested in Paisley resulted in an acquittal and the dropping of all charges.

By 1820, therefore, Paisley had established a political tradition which was clearly Radical. In both the agitations in the late eighteenth century and in the years between 1817 and 1820 the town had played a prominent part. The agitation had been undertaken almost entirely by the working classes, mostly weavers, largely concentrated in the west end of the town in the Maxwellton area where John Parkhill, local historian and active participant in these events, himself lived. Sympathetic middle class Radicals, like Peter Kerr, had quickly distanced themselves at the first hint of violence.

Nevertheless, 1820 represented a substantial defeat for Radicalism which resulted in little activity in the next decade although there were some signs in the early years of the 1820s that there was still some life in the Movement. In January, 1821, a Meeting of the County of Renfrew was held to attack the Government over the affair of Queen Caroline and the massacre at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester. On 31 October, 1822, a Meeting was held in the Saracen's Head Inn, Paisley, to celebrate the release of 'Orator' Henry Hunt, the speaker at the Peterloo Meeting, from Ilchester Prison. In July 1823, another Meeting was held to raise a subscription for the Spaniards under threat from the Holy Alliance. The Chairman of this Meeting was Archibald Stewart, a cloth merchant, who was later to be President of the Paisley Reform Society (23).

The agitations of the 1790s undoubtedly owed much to news of the

events in France but the economic problems after the war seem to have been the chief motivation for the agitation between 1817 and 1820. The solution was seen to be Reform of Parliament which would put an end to the present representative system and also a reduction in taxation. This solution included Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage.

The economic distress was general throughout the whole country but it was particularly serious in Paisley because of the pattern of economic development which can be shown by a brief look at the town's economic history. Many aspects of the town's development and growth had been exceptional which influenced greatly the reaction to Radical Reform.

The first exceptional feature about Paisley's development was the rapid growth of the population in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. Paisley is the largest town in Scotland, outside the four cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee and this has been the position since the middle of the nineteenth century. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century only Glasgow and Edinburgh had larger populations than Paisley. The history of Paisley dates back even before the twelfth century when the town grew up around the Cluniac monastery founded in 1163, to the time of the Romans. Although the town always seems to have been fairly prosperous, the population was not remarkable by 1755. Alexander Webster's Census of 1755 gave the population figure as 6,799. Growth was beginning to take place, however, because in a footnote to an edition dated 1779, there was evidence of a marked increase

> From the rapid progress of manufactures in this Town, the inhabitants now amount to above 20,000 (24).

Although there were similar footnotes for several other towns which revised upwards the original figure, none of them represented such a substantial increase as Paisley. The rate of growth has been described as 'remarkable' by a recent historian (25). Accepting Webster's figure of 6,799 in 1755, the population rose to 31,179 in

1801 and to 47,003 by 1821. Rapid population growth was a feature of many West of Scotland towns during the period of industrialisation. Paisley's rate of growth was, however, exceptional because between 1755 and 1821 on these figures, the town had increased in population by more than six times, whilst Greenock had increased by more than five times and Glasgow had increased fourfold (26). Paisley had been eighth in population terms in Scotland in 1755 behind Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Perth, Dundee and Dunfermline but was by 1801, in third position, behind the first named cities. The town, therefore, was experiencing the transition from a village based on a mainly rural economy to a large town with all the problems which accompanied rapid urbanisation and industrialisation when the ideas of Parliamentary Reform were beginning to make an appearance. In such circumstances the town's representation in Parliament was bound to be sought.

Nationally, the growth in population can be explained by an increase in the birth rate, the fact that fewer children were dying in infancy, that life expectancy was gradually becoming longer and that there was increased immigration largely from Ireland. All these factors applied locally but the main cause was the movement of people into the town firstly from other Scottish areas such as Ayrshire and the Highlands then later from Ireland. The existence of a Gaelic Chapel at Oakshaw in the town as early as 1793 is evidence of the Highland presence. These immigrants came to find employment and a better standard of living due to the phenomenal growth of manufacturing industry in the town. A contemporary local historian, Crawford, after having noted that the town was the third largest in Scotland, proudly described the town's manufacturing importance

> In respect to manufactures, by which it has arisen to importance, it is perhaps the first (27).

Like many other places in the second half of the eighteenth century the town's manufacturing industry was based on textiles but was again exceptional in the extent of dependence placed on this one industry. As early as 1695 the Poll Tax for Renfrewshire listed 294 occupations in the town of which by far the largest group were weavers (28).

During the eighteenth century, the linen industry was the single most important manufacture in the country and in Paisley the linen trade greatly increased. The number of local looms rose from about one hundred at the Union of 1707 to 855 in 1766 and to 2,400 in 1784. This represented the peak of the local industry when it was producing about 2,000,000 yards of cloth which yielded a value of almost £165,000. In the 1780s, there were 11,684 persons employed in the local industry which comprised 2,400 weavers, 7,384 spinners, 1,000 winders, warpers and clippers, one hundred overseers and 800 makers of machinery and implements. Paisley was involved in working the finer linens,

> Paisley became a centre of the manufacture of lawns, a finer fabric, both plain and embroidered (spotted and flowered) (29).

By 1810, however, the local industry, long in progressive decline, had virtually died out altogether to be replaced by newer, more vital industries. A number of inherent weaknesses, identified below, which were never resolved, contributed to this decline.

It was to be a characteristic feature of successive phases of the local textile industry that the town would be involved in the quality end of the market. This was to have advantages as well as disadvantages. It meant that there were greater financial rewards and higher status for the weavers engaged in this branch of the textile industry. It also affected class relationships in the town facilitating collaboration and social mobility. It meant, too, that when there was a recession it was felt first by weavers of quality

goods because these were the first products that people stopped buying when money was scarce. Another characteristic feature of all phases of the industry in the town was the prevalence of small manufacturers, known as 'small corks'. This was to prove to be ultimately harmful for the local industry because they engaged in unrestricted competition which led to overproduction and wage-cutting. Over-reliance on textiles meant that alternative forms of employment were never fully promoted in the town.

The thread industry developed almost simultaneously, with linen, introduced into the area by Christian Shaw in 1722. It was brought to Paisley by Alexander McGregor in 1735. By 1744 there were ninety-three thread mills in the town. Almost 5,000 people were employed in the industry by 1783 in the area. A year later 120 machines in the town were producing 288,000 spindles of thread with a value of £64,000. This represented about twenty four per cent of the total number of thread mills and thirty per cent of the production of Scotland. In 1791, 137 thread mills were turning out goods valued at £60,000 a year. Although the number of mills had dropped to twelve by 1812, when cotton had become dominant, the thread industry was to revive later in the century.

Another flourishing local industry was silk gauze which provided employment for 10,000 people, comprising 5,000 weavers and a similar number of warpers and winders. This industry was brought to the town by Humphrey Fulton and it benefited from the Spitalfields Act which caused a relocation away from London. Fulton had 600 looms in the town by 1760 and the local number rose to 702 by 1766 and to 876 by 1773. Again 1784 represented the peak of the industry which became less prosperous from then and died out altogether in 1812. The years from the middle to the end of the eighteenth century represented a period of expansion and prosperity for the town. A local historian, M. McCarthy, has noted that it was during the 1780s that

> the silk weavers of the town created the legend of the prosperous handloom weaver who owned his own house and loom, sometimes kept a horse, dressed like a gentleman (30).

This 'legend' was ideologically important to the Radical mythology of the nineteenth century and the idea that there had once been a 'Golden Age' in the weaving industry.

A consequence of this continuing prosperity was an influx of people to the town. M. Blair, historian of the town's thread industry, believed that immigration at this time was mainly from other parts of Scotland with the largest Irish influx only after 1846 (31).

However, the Irish were beginning to come to the town, Alexander Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of the County of Renfrew, saying:

> Immigration from Ireland to this part of Scotland became constant about 1800 (32).

There was general agreement that people came to the town in search of employment and a better standard of living. Most found work in the textile industry but many worked also as

> labourers in erecting buildings, deepening rivers, cutting canals (33).

There was plenty of work to be found as Paisley was then an expanding, prosperous town but this prosperity continued to depend on a strong, healthy textile industry.

After 1785 cotton became the most important manufacture and remained so until about 1830. An estimated 35,000 people were employed in the cotton industry in the West of Scotland. In Paisley, 6,750 weavers were employed by local manufacturers, each one assisted by two more people employed in bleaching and tambouring. At the peak of the industry between 1785 and 1810, 20,250 people were employed locally in the various trades of weaving, warping, tambouring, sewing and bleaching. The industry had a value of £675,000 annually. Paisley again acquired a reputation in the quality end of the market. In the early years of the nineteenth century

> the superiority of the Paisley weavers in these ornamental fabrics is so fully admitted that Paisley is resorted to as the original seat of this branch of muslin manufacture (34).

The continuing local prosperity in the early nineteenth century also owed much to the town's most famous product, the Paisley Shawl. The French were leaders in the field but the local product found a market because

> Paisley's refinements led to a cheaper shawl which retained good qualities of colour and wear (35).

The Shawl was also a considerable employer of labour. Eleven people, dyer, winder, warper, weaver, drawboy, cutter, sewer, fringer, picker, washer and dresser were all involved in the production of one Shawl. Consequently the town's population continued to increase during the 1820s but the growth was becoming less rapid.

A pattern of recurring economic depressions had begun to develop from the late eighteenth century, the most severe of which had occurred at the end of the French Wars. These became more serious by the late

1820s so that it was after 1830 that it came to be recognised that the town's boom years were over and that decline had set in.

H. Hamilton, a historian of Scotland's Industrial Revolution, has divided the whole process into two phases (36). The first was from 1780 until 1830 when textiles were the premier industry and the second phase was from 1830 until 1880 when the metal industries replaced textiles. The problem for Paisley was that while it had successfully adapted to the different phases of the textile industry it was unable to cope with the transition to the heavy industries.

The historian of the handloom weavers in England, Duncan Bythell, has dated the decline of the industry from 1826 (37). The historian of the handloom weavers in Scotland, Norman Murray, divides the development of the industry into three phases. The first was from about 1790 to 1812 when there was considerable expansion in the industry and wages were relatively high. The second phase from 1812, the year of the Scottish weavers strike, until 1840 witnessed a drop in wages and a decline in living standards while the workforce continued to increase. The third phase, after 1840, was a time of further decline, culminating in the ultimate disappearance of the industry as the Industrial Revolution moved into the second phase identified by Hamilton (38).

A broadly similar conclusion regarding the handloom weavers was reached independently in an earlier work on Paisley. In this work the industrial and urban development of the town was divided into two phases. The first phase was the period before the end of the French Wars in 1815 when the weavers were well paid and the town was expanding. The second phase was the time from then until the economic crisis of 1841-1843. The latter period covers years in which the flow of immigrants into the town continued but they were also years which were punctuated by frequent trade depressions (39).

Figures given by Murray for net wages in the chief branches of handloom weaving from 1810 to 1838 and for a single individual, James Smith, a Paisley weaver, for the years 1806 to 1838, confirm the downward trend and the general decline of the later period leading to an overall drop in living standards. Smith's best years were in 1810 and 1814 when his earnings were £70-8/8d. (£70.43p) and £59-15/- (£59.60p) respectively. Although there were obviously fluctuations he never attained such rates in the later years. A table of Smith's earnings over this period is given below to illustrate the problem which faced the weavers (40):

Earnings of James Smith for Weaving

	£	s	d		£	s	d		£	s	d
1806	37	14	7	1817	41	4	8	1828	33	11	3
1807	41	17	6	1818	58	1	10	1829	31	15	0
1808	31	6	2	1819	47	3	3½	1830	40	7	4
1809	44	6	10	1820	40	19	0	1831	31	16	4
1810	70	8	8	1821	49	8	6	1832	31	10	6
1811	54	6	0½	1822	56	18	1½	1833	29	7	6
1812	40	7	5	1823	50	16	1	1834	29	14	3
1813	50	11	0	1824	45	18	5	1835	37	17	0
1814	59	15	0	1825	44	15	2	1836	40	6	6
1815	56	13	4	1826	11	7	2	1837	30	1	6
1816	40	1	7½	1827	37	17	6	1838	33	5	2

Unfortunately the figures stop before the onset of the serious economic depression which hit the town in the early 1840s. The general trend is, however, clearly discernible in the above table where the figures in the third column representing Smith's earnings in the later years are for the most part lower than the other two columns. The worst year of all, however, was clearly 1826 and the best years as already noted were during the French Wars. This economic decline, which can be said to have started on the evidence of these figures in 1826, continued irreversibly.

The economic decline, which was becoming apparent between 1826 and 1830, leading to a decline in living standards and increasing criticism of the political system, was reflected in other areas of activity, too. In the field of literature, there had always been enormous local pride over the number of poets that the town had produced. This local pride is most evident in the substantial two volume work, The Paisley Poets, by the town's leading historian, Robert Brown (41). Two of them, Robert Tannahill and Alexander Wilson, were long revered in the town for their common touch, their emphasis on the values of the common man; and the self respect and confidence which the utterance of such sentiments reflected was seen as expressing the weavers' right to reflect on fundamental political ideas. The poetic tradition of Wilson continued after 1830 with some capable, though lesser, exponents of the art such as Edward Polin, a more fiery active Chartist who expressed the sort of views that Wilson had earlier represented. Many of the poets supported Reform which was reflected in their writings. It was because of his political views that Alexander Wilson had had to emigrate to America. A number of other poets were influenced by the French Revolution and played an active part in Reform Meetings. In the earlier period these included William McLaren, James Scadlock, Duncan Henderson and James Yool. In the later period the foremost Radical poet, mentioned above, was Edward Polin who was active in the local Chartist Movement. Most of these poets were relatively minor but they made a worthwhile contribution to the intellectual, cultural life of the town and the significance of their work has recently been emphasised in a new study by Tom Leonard (42).

Other cultural, intellectual activity which took place in the earlier, more prosperous days of the town included the formation of the Paisley Library Society in 1802, the Paisley Trades Library in 1806 and the Paisley Theological Library in 1808. The Paisley Literary Institution

began in 1812 and Sabbath Schools were set up in 1819 (43). These ventures give some indication of the extent of cultural, educational activity which took place while the town was still prospering and that the constituency which supported such activities was one of weavers not professional men shows the formers' active public attitudes. As the economic climate worsened in later years such activity began to be curtailed.

Another perceived manifestation of decline, which caused concern, was an increased neglect of religious observance. Lack of information about attendance figures in this period renders this difficult to ascertain. The Church of Scotland had five places of worship at the end of the eighteenth century which, inadequately, remained the situation until 1835 despite the huge increase in the population which had taken place during this period. The total number of churches, however, in the town increased during the 1820s from sixteen in 1820-1821 to twenty-two by the end of the decade due to the growth of Dissenting bodies. There was a further increase in the total number of places of worship in the town after the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 (44). No attempt was made during this period to count the numbers of people who attended worship although such a Census was taken in March 1851.

This Census is outwith the period of this study but two of its findings are worth commenting on briefly. The total number of worshippers, given at this Census, in Paisley was 22,452 which was almost half of the population of around 48,000. This compares quite favourably with the 28,523 who attended in Aberdeen which had a larger population and which has been studied in some detail by A.A. McLaren (45). The other comparison, made with Aberdeen, would suggest that the Church of Scotland, following the Disruption in 1843, had held its ground slightly better in Paisley. Despite economic distress the tradition of self respect, public involvement in the country's institutions and the critical attitudes which a church going life style implies, still clearly lingered in this Paisley context.

Much more could be said about this subject particularly with regard to the unreliabilty and unsatisfactory nature of this Census. This is

not the purpose of this study. The two points to be made are that on the evidence of this Census the fears expressed about decline in religious observance in Paisley would seem to be somewhat exaggerated and the weakness of the Established Church likewise over emphasised. Other matters, concurrent with the economic problems, which gave cause for concern were a general decline in moral standards, drunkenness, an increase in crime and a growth in the number of pawnbrokers in the town. The cumulative effect of all these concerns on the local population was a growing discontent with the existing political system.

Basically this concludes the brief discussion of the origins of the town's Radical political tradition, economic, cultural and religious development before 1830 although some account of events between 1826 and 1830 would seem to be more usefully included in the chapter on Parliamentary Reform. The two main points which this introductory passage has sought to illustrate are that by 1830 Paisley had established a political tradition which was continuous from the 1790s at least (if not earlier indeed) which was clearly inclined to be Radical and had undergone a transition from a prosperous boom town to a centre of impoverishment.

Radicalism had been defeated in 1820 but the problems which had given rise to that agitation had not been solved and a Radical political tradition had been established in the town through the local activity undertaken in response to each major national development. Through the Societies of the late eighteenth century, the riot after the meeting at Meikleriggs Moor and the weapons finds at the Radical Rising of 1820, enough evidence of intent had been shown by the Radicals in Paisley to give the authorities cause for concern in the future.

From the late 1820s there was a growing awareness of a change in economic conditions which seemed to herald a general decline in living standards which was felt especially by the Paisley weavers. It was natural that they should look again at Reform of Parliament for a

solution as the climate of opinion began to swing in that direction by about 1830. As indicated sufficient activity had already taken place in the town to justify anxiety on the part of the authorities and the worsening economic situation in the town could only serve to increase their fears.

One indication of the changing economic conditions was an arrest in the growth of the population which became virtually static during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The 1831 Census revealed that Aberdeen now had a larger population than Paisley. By the 1841 Census, Dundee, too, had more people so that Paisley was now only the fifth largest place in Scotland. The arrest in population growth was caused by the decline in fortune of the handloom weavers as the textile industry lost its dominant position in the Scottish economy..

Hence the belief in a 'Golden Age' which the handloom weavers had once enjoyed. The term is not simply an invention by historians but was actually used at the time. The Weavers Journal in 1835 describing conditions in the past, said

> That was the golden age of our industry (46).

David Gilmour, a local historian, who worked in a weaving shop, did not enjoy the experience but believed that it had been much easier in earlier times (47). The historian of the Scottish handloom weavers, Norman Murray, is cautious but seems to accept the idea of a 'Golden Age'

> Indeed, a considerable amount of quantitative data on weavers wages in the late eighteenth century, supported by qualitative observations on the lives of the Scottish handloom weavers, indicate that the concept of a 'Golden Age' has some validity (48).

Other historians have dismissed the idea of a 'Golden Age' as a myth or have taken the view that the situation of the handloom weavers, even in their prosperous time was not as good as has often been claimed (49).

What people believed at the time is more important than the theories of historians with the benefit of hindsight. The way that people perceived the situation in which they were living was the factor which determined their actions. Whether it was a myth or not, the belief in a 'Golden Age' acted as a powerful stimulus to Reform because as Sir L. Woodward has said

> Demands for reform were more for the redress of grievances, or for a return to standards enjoyed in the past (50).

There were a number of reasons for the decline of handloom weaving by the 1840s which reflected a national trend but many of these reasons applied particularly to Paisley. The development and structure of the local industry meant that when fortunes changed, the whole town was particularly badly hit.

One problem which affected the textile industry in general was susceptibility to the whims of fashion. This resulted in recurrent periods of recession. It was the main reason for the decline of the silk gauze industry in Paisley at the end of the eighteenth century and it was an even greater catastrophe when changed tastes led to a drop in demand for the Paisley Shawl. Parkhill blamed changes in fashion for the town's problems

> I am of opinion, however, that the changed fashions are the true causes of the depression, as if the fabric was wanted, no town in Europe could furnish a better than Paisley. In fact, ours was the head town for this kind of goods, and I am truly sorry for its declension (51).

These changes in fashion tastes did prove to be particularly catastrophic for weavers such as those in Paisley or Bolton, who

specialised in the expensive, quality end of the market. Such weavers were also more likely to work at the loom full time whereas those employed on more simple work frequently combined this with other forms of employment such as at Airdrie

> It is probably true to say that the population of Airdrie could turn more readily than those in some other areas to other forms of employment in the mid-nineteenth century when the textile industry declined (52).

Duncan Bythell, the historian of the handloom weavers in England, identified the problem as the difficulty of finding

> Comparable alternative occupations into which they might be absorbed as their economic position worsened (53).

The lack of alternative occupations was alluded to in a work of fiction about the town

> Greysley on the other hand, had no variety of occupation (54).

The problem had been identified as early as 1819 by G. Crawfurd, a local historian but Lord Cockburn in his Journal blamed the weavers because they were unwilling to seek other types of work (55). Another school of thought blamed the manufacturers for the failure to diversify because

> they do not wish to embark in the grain or coal trade (56).

Some attempts were, however, made at diversification over the years. As a result by 1852 there were in the town, print and dye works, iron and brass foundries, tanneries, breweries, distilleries, soap works,

timber yards and extensive bleachfields. Nevertheless, this could not compensate for the fact that Paisley's economy was overwhelmingly dependent on the textile industries as that of Leicester's was on the framework knitters.

Another factor in the decline of the textile industry was the prevalence of small manufacturers known as 'small corks' who engaged in intensive, unregulated competition which led to overproduction and wage-cutting. Without trade unions there was no protection for workers nor any way to stop the influx of immigrants leading to overmanning in the industry. Alexander Richmond remarked on this almost unrestricted freedom of admission and he made special reference to Paisley (57).

The Bowl Weft System, which was a system of fraud, practised by small manufacturers and weavers alike, was a further self inflicted wound. Mechanisation did not help the Paisley weavers either as it was not until about 1840 that the Jacquard loom was introduced for the Paisley Shawl. These factors led to the decline of the industry and the terrible depressions which were worst in 1826 and between 1837 and 1843 (58).

The results, whatever the reasons for the economic decline, were socially horrific. There were 12,000 people unemployed in the town in 1826 and as many as 15,000 in the early 1840s out of a total population of around 50,000. Other one industry towns such as Bolton or Leicester, seemed to have coped better, both continuing to register some increase in their populations. The Town Council of Paisley was declared insolvent in 1843 and did not become solvent again until 1872. Paisley was the only place in the country which attracted some assistance from the Government which was sufficiently concerned to send two officials, Twistleton and Ramsay, to the town to investigate and take charge of the Relief operation. There had never been many rich inhabitants in the town but as the result of the recession Provost Henderson claimed in answer to some searching questions from the Select Committee on the Distress in Paisley on the lack of support from the richer inhabitants of the town,

> We are now left in the condition of being nearly an universally working population (59).

Undoubtedly such a situation with the potential for unrest would cause concern to the authorities and it must have been with a sense of relief that the Select Committee, set up to question witnesses from the town and report to the Government, was able to say that there had been no disturbances in Paisley (60).

As a result of the Select Committee Inquiry a number of solutions were proposed. One of the solutions which was particularly favoured in Paisley was the establishment of Boards of Trade to fix wage rates. Paisley weavers had been thinking along such lines as early as 1812 when they had wished a Table of Prices to be drawn up. This early depression of 1812 was the most serious which had then been experienced and was ascribed to a number of causes with the manufacturers receiving some of the blame for

> the total abandonment of every regard to the subsistence of the operatives, by the rapid depreciation of the wages of labour (61).

This was how the weavers saw it and it was early evidence that a change of perception was beginning to take place away from the idea that the problem was the system of Old Corruption and that it was becoming a conflict between capital and labour. The problem was not to find work but to be fairly recompensed for that work. The 1812 strike left a lasting impression and a legacy of bitterness in the town then which increased in 1815 when an unfairly elected House of Commons passed the Corn Law protecting landowners. This brought about an emphasis on a fairer Parliament leading to a fairer social and economic order. A number of other solutions were suggested which included education for apprenticeships, taxes on machinery and imported French goods, and reduction of the number of operatives. Emigration, however, was not considered an acceptable solution.

None of the remedies suggested could solve the problem which Paisley had of over-reliance on the textile industry and an almost entirely working class population. The points can be illustrated by looking at samples of selected streets in different areas of the town available from the Census in 1841, the first year where the data is available in sufficient detail.

A limited attempt had been made in 1821 to list the occupations of 4304 male householders and 1393 female householders in the town. Unfortunately the occupations of the female householders were not broken down but were said to be mainly in weaving (62). A total of 2195 or just over half of the total number of male householders were engaged in the textile industry, 2004 weavers and the rest in ancillary occupations. The breakdown of occupations of those engaged in the textile industry was -

Paisley -Occupations 1821 - Textiles

Occupation (Weaving related)		Other Textile	
Weavers	2004	Cotton Spinners	41
Warpers	41	Bleachers	9
Flower Lashers	28	Flax Drawers	4
Pattern Drawers	20	Dyers	21
Callenderers	17		
Reed Makers	10		

When the unspecified number of female householders engaged in weaving is included plus the many others such as drawboys who would not be householders, the total percentage of the town's workforce employed in the textile industry would be considerably greater.

The figures also lend support to the idea that Paisley was overwhelmingly a working class town. The second largest occupational group is that of labourer. This is unlikely to represent the total number of labourers in the town, the majority of whom would not be householders but would more probably live in lodgings. Conversely, the 170 manufacturers, down in fifth place, would be likely to represent the majority of people so employed as most would be householders. Only two engineers were listed at a time when the Industrial Revolution was beginning to turn towards the heavy industries. The top five occupations listed were as follows:-

Paisley 1821 - Major Occupations

Weavers	2004
Labourers	437
Shoemakers	164
Wrights	159
Manufacturers	130

Some Other Occupations 1821

Merchants	73
Vintners and Spirit Dealers	77
Engineers	2

More information about forms of employment becomes available in 1841 when the Census Enumerators Books begin to give listings of occupations. In the 1841 Census more detailed information was provided about occupations and place of birth. This was still defective and much depended on the conscientiousness and the accuracy of the individual Enumerators in each particular area. The information which can be gleaned from this source is therefore necessarily limited and has to be treated with great caution but nevertheless can give a more consistent view of the town's social structure than hitherto.

Inevitably there are some inaccuracies and discrepancies to be noted. On examination of successive Censuses, for example, cases have been found where a person's age cannot be reconciled with that given for the same individual ten years earlier. Clearly the Books can give no indication whether a particular individual was a Reformer or a Radical which is another limitation of their use for this study. But for the purposes of this study, a sample of certain selected streets in all areas of the town has been examined in the Census Enumerators Books in order to get an idea of the town's social profile. Two areas in particular have been examined, parts of Maxwellton Street and parts of Old Sneddon Street. These two areas have been identified in a study by A. Dickson and W. Speirs to illustrate the differences between the rest of the labour force in areas like the Sneddon and the elite weavers who congregated in areas like Maxwellton Street.

> They lived in geographically distinct areas (such as Maxwellton), carefully preserving the social distance between themselves and the immigrant communities that grew up in the Sneddon and the New Town (63).

Maxwellton Street also figured prominently in the 1820 Radical Rising, significantly amongst the better off weavers. This was very much a weaving area at the time of the Rising, and even twenty years later it can be seen that weaving remains the predominant industry comprising 76.2% of the occupations listed (64). The greatest number of these were cotton weavers but there were a surprisingly large number of silk weavers, too, despite the demise of that branch of the trade about 1810. It can be clearly seen, too, that the occupations listed were overwhelmingly working class. No manufacturers appear on the list. Only male occupations were given. A complete breakdown of the ninety-seven occupations listed is given below:

Maxwellton Street 1841 - Occupations

Handloom Weavers - 74

Cotton Weavers	- 50 + 2 Apprentices		
Silk Weavers	- 19 + 2 Apprentices		
Wool Weavers	- 1		
	=74		74

Other Textile Workers - 9

Drawboys	- 5	
Pattern Drawers	- 2	
Cloth Lappers	- 1	
Bobbin Makers	- 1	
	= 9	9

Other Occupations - 14

Agricultural Labourers	- 7	
Shoemakers	- 3	
Wright	- 1	
Tailor	- 1	
Baker	- 1	
Spirit Dealer	- 1	
	= 14	14
		= 97

There is no real evidence in this admittedly very small sample of any diversification taking place. The Rev. R. Burns and the Rev. R. McNair, authors of the entry on Paisley in the New Statistical Account, published in 1845, had claimed that fathers were less ready to bring their sons into the trade than they had been formerly (65). But such a trend must have been very recent, since 1841, on this evidence. The town's social structure was supposed to have facilitated class collaboration because manufacturers lived in the same area as the weavers until the wealthier inhabitants began to move away from the town centre. This trend was believed to be a later

development but clearly even in 1841 there was no social mix between manufacturers and weavers in the Maxwellton Street area.

Dickson and Speirs, in their study, have shown, however, that there was scope for weavers to make the transition to small manufacturer relatively easily so that the links upwards were often stronger than with other working class occupations,

> Thus in many situations the links between manufacturers and weavers were closer than those between the weavers and the rest of the labour force (66).

The Census evidence, therefore, may be interpreted as both allowing for co-operation via upward mobility opportunities and at the same time a sense of group and class solidarity because of conformity of work experience.

The table below gives a small sample of the concentration of weavers in certain selected areas in different parts of the town. It clearly illustrates the difference between Maxwellton Street and Old Sneddon Street where most workers were employed in factories or as labourers:

	Total No. of Occupations	Handloom Weavers
Maxwellton Street (Nos. 1-29)	97	74 (76.2%)
Espedair Street (Nos. 14-32)	51	30 (58.8%)
Castle Street (Nos. 1-17)	135	60 (44.4%)
Storie Street (Nos. 1-20)	199	59 (29.6%)
Orchard Street (Nos. 14-32)	236	25 (10.5%)
Old Sneddon Street (Nos. 1-21)	170	21 (12.3%)

There were clearly substantial areas of the town where a large proportion of the households were dependent for their livelihood on the textile industry and which would be very badly affected by its decline. But there were clearly 'superior artisan' areas where a

consciousness of their differences in skill and status might reinforce their political awareness and resentments.

Places of birth for the same sample confirm that Old Sneddon Street was the area where most immigrants, many of them Irish, tended to congregate. The 1841 Census only gave Renfrewshire as place of birth. The table below gives the numbers in each of the sample areas who were born in Renfrewshire, other parts of Scotland, Ireland and England. In the case of the Castle Street sample three were unknown, in Old Sneddon Street there were four unknown and in Orchard Street there was one who had been born in France.

	Renfrewshire	Scotland	Ireland	England
Maxwellton Street	310 (82.8%)	42 (11.2%)	22 (5.8%)	0
Espedair Street	193 (87.7%)	21 (9.5%)	6 (2.7%)	0
Castle Street	270 (83.3%)	33 (10.1%)	17 (5.2%)	1
Storie Street	405 (68.5%)	56 (9.4%)	128 (21.6%)	2
Orchard Street	339 (75.8%)	68 (15.2%)	34 (7.6%)	5
Old Sneddon Street	237 (51.9%)	81 (17.7%)	127 (27.8%)	7

(67).

These small samples are only intended to give some indication of the widespread and extensive nature of the weaving industry throughout the town. The latter figures on a small scale give an indication of the extent of immigration to the town and confirm the thesis of Dickson and Speirs that the largest concentration of weavers were in the Maxwellton area, geographically distinct from the immigrants in the Old Sneddon area. But they might also it is suggested be brought in as evidence of the cohesive nature of the handloom weaving elite, literate and self consciously political which would tie in with the continuous tradition of popular Radicalism which had been in evidence since the 1780s.

The object of this opening chapter has simply been to try to set the scene for the study of the Reform activity which took place in the town of Paisley between 1830 and 1848. It has been shown that at least from the time of the French Revolution the town had been

developing a Radical, Reforming political tradition. This tradition was strongly influenced by the example of the French Revolution but the intellectual, cultural environment of Paisley fostered by the handloom weavers during their years of prosperity provided fertile soil for its growth.

The economic hardship which the town began to endure after the end of the French Wars added a new urgency to efforts to achieve Reform. Even before the end of the War the actions taken by the manufacturers against the weavers in 1812 which led to the strike heralded the beginning of a greater realisation of the differences between the classes as part of the problem. Nevertheless the sources of the time in much of the reported rhetoric of the Meetings held between the end of the War and the Radical Rising of 1820 was still directed against the system of Old Corruption. But from about 1812 in these also a new sense of political grievance and exclusion based on economic suffering began to surface.

Although the Radical Rising failed and no armed Revolution occurred there can be no doubt that in 1820 many of the Radicals were now prepared to fight and it was lack of proper organisation and co-ordination rather than a lack of willingness that prevented more serious consequences. In Paisley, the 1819 riot, the arms finds and the increasingly desperate economic situation of the town provided the Government with ample justification for future concern. The local middle classes and some of the wealthy landowers who had disengaged themselves from participation were similarly concerned and sought to gain control of later Reform activities in the town. After the defeat of 1820 there was a lengthy period of respite but when cries for Reform began to be heard again in the late 1820s the middle classes of the area tried to take control of the Movement although even then they remained aloof for a time and the early moves were once more taken by the weavers as the next chapter will seek to show.

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CHAPTER TWO

AGITATIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY REFORM (1829-1832)

To most Scottish historians who subscribe to the view held by Professor Smout that there was no danger to social stability in Scotland posed by Radicals who wanted change, the period of agitation for the Reform Bill 1830-1832 represents probably the clearest example of class collaboration. According to this school of thought, throughout the period of Parliamentary Reform agitation into the years of Chartism, Scotland remained basically a well ordered, stable society with little class conflict. Smout used the 1841-1843 depression in Paisley to demonstrate

> the strength of community as opposed to class feeling in confrontations between the provinces and the State (1).

Such studies have resulted in a general perception of Scotland as a place where protest was muted and essentially non-violent during the years of upheaval caused by the disruptions of the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and the periods of agitation for Reform.

Possibly the foremost exponent of this point of view for the years 1830-1832 has been Dr. Fiona Montgomery. Writing about the Parliamentary Reform Movement of that time in Glasgow, she has reached the conclusion that there was

> class collaboration rather than class war (2).

in that city. A brief comparison between the Movement in Glasgow and that in Paisley will be attempted later in this chapter to test this view. In their study of the Reform Movement in Paisley, even Tony Clarke and Tony Dickson, who take a somewhat different line from

Montgomery and Smout, have commented that

> A striking feature of the Reform Bill crisis in Paisley was the relative ease with which members of the local bourgeoisie and some of the county landowners were able to initiate an alliance, albeit an uneasy one, with working class Radicals (3).

This 'uneasy alliance' took concrete form in the Renfrewshire Political Union which was formed in 1830 in Paisley. It was one of many such organisations which were established throughout the country to campaign for Parliamentary Reform. These organisations were modelled on the middle class Birmingham Political Union set up by Thomas Attwood. The Renfrewshire Political Union undoubtedly played a significant part in the Reform Movement in Paisley which no local study of the period can ignore and consequently it will figure largely in this chapter. It is important to stress, however, that the Renfrewshire Political Union was not the only organisation in Paisley which had Parliamentary Reform as the primary reason for its existence.

It is necessary to look back at events in the town in the three or four years before 1830 to learn about the beginnings of the 'uneasy alliance' and about the other Reform organisation in the town, the Paisley Reform Society, which preceded the more well known Renfrewshire Political Union and which was more representative of the earlier Radical tradition of the town in the demands which it made. The Paisley Reform Society was also more representative of the local working classes.

It is the view of this writer that it was the working class Radicals in the town who were the instigators and the initiators during those years with the bourgeoisie and landowners having to follow behind. It is hoped to show that the local working classes spearheaded by the

weavers were to the forefront in the Parliamentary Reform agitations, prepared to set up their own organisations if middle class support was withheld. It was an indication that the self-confidence engendered by the 'Golden Age' had not totally disappeared by 1830. Nevertheless, there was a recognition by leading working class Radicals following the disaster of 1820 that middle class involvement was essential to achieve success, which in turn could be used as an argument in support of the Smout and Montgomery theory of class collaboration.

An acceptance of middle class involvement, even leadership, did not necessarily mean, however, an acceptance of the limited aims of middle class aspirations. More far-reaching demands continued to be made by working class Radicals and were frequently voiced even at middle class Reform Meetings where they were likely to be given an unsympathetic reception. Nor does this acceptance imply that the local working class Radicals were prepared to wait patiently until the middle classes chose to become involved. It also illustrates that they recognised that they were a separate class although at present they shared a mutual interest in Reform of Parliament.

Clarke and Dickson have clearly shown how the structure of the town's economy facilitated the development of class collaboration due to a shared viewpoint between the small manufacturers and the leading handloom weavers. Nevertheless, they imply, too, that there were more Radical elements in Paisley than is usually acknowledged. Such an interpretation is only possible because of their apparent ignorance of the existence of any other Reform organisations such as the Paisley Reform Society which came to be active in this period. This was an organised body with duly designated officials such as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, where those more far-reaching demands could be expressed. It was a body which clearly spelt out in its aims and in the Meetings which it held in the town, the Reforms which it wished to see implemented. These went much further than the middle class dominated Renfrewshire Political Union was prepared to

go and these greater aspirations were not met by the 1832 Reform Act. As Clarke and Dickson have rightly stated

> Working class aspirations were more radical than those of the R.P.U., whilst the Reform Bill itself retreated much further from Universal Male Suffrage (4).

The existence of an organised body in the town, the Paisley Reform Society, which gave a clear voice to these Radical aspirations lends support to this contention and gives a further justification for any anxiety felt by the authorities regarding discontent or a threat to stability.

Clarke and Dickson, continuing the theme of inter-class co-operation, have also stated that

> Nevertheless, the trade unions and their members in Paisley were harnessed with some success to the campaigns of the R.P.U. (5).

Again this writer would take issue with any implication that the Renfrewshire Political Union, with its leadership of bourgeoisie and landowners, was forcing the issue of Reform in Paisley while a leaderless working class had no organisation to express its more Radical aspirations. Such an implication ignores the efforts made mainly by weavers in the years before 1830 to establish a Reform organisation. If recognition were given to the existence of the Paisley Reform Society that would seem to strengthen the case which Clarke and Dickson actually wish to make in support of a more assertive, active working class than has traditionally been portrayed. In this writer's view the actions taken by the local middle class Reformers, far from initiating or leading a Reform Movement in the area, were a response on the one hand to national trends while reacting on the other hand to local working class, Radical pressure.

The same authors, Clarke and Dickson, have tended towards the view that the later Government intervention in Paisley in 1841-1843 sprang not from humanitarianism but rather was an exercise in social control which arose from a justified fear of unrest whereas Professor Smout took the view that there was no threat of public disorder. The formation of the Renfrewshire Political Union could also be viewed as an effort to maintain social control. It may not have been the Government on this occasion but the principle was the same namely to show concern for working class problems, and identify to some extent with their interests in order to maintain social stability. At the same time a much sought middle class aspiration could be realised.

The study of these two similar but different bodies will form the background to the discussion in this chapter as the town's involvement in the Parliamentary Reform Movement, the motivation for participation especially the impetus of economic conditions and the threat, if any, that was posed to the constituted authorities, are examined. A further aspect considered will be the local consequences of the Reform Act in terms of the extent of enfranchisement, the results of the first elections and the relationship of the elected representatives with the local community.

The last point will also be discussed in the context of the great interest which was taken in politics locally. This interest was evident from the widespread participation in the Reform agitations and was further illustrated by the turnout at the first Parliamentary elections and the expectations raised in the community by representation in the House of Commons. The explanation for such a high level of political awareness has to be found in the considerable number of literary and debating clubs which had been formed in the town, often by weavers in their days of prosperity. Local historians, in their writings, reveal the pride which was taken in these organisations. Knowledge of political matters occasioned the same sense of pride in local historians even those who were of a Tory

inclination, such as Brown, who disagreed with the aspirations of the Radicals.

Although the Reform agitation may have become most conspicuous in 1830 the beginnings can be found in the economic depression of 1826. No discernible Reform Movement developed in that year but the seeds were undoubtedly sown then. A brief discussion of the years before 1830 is therefore necessary to put the local Reform Movement into proper perspective.

It has already been noted that some Reform activity still took place in Paisley in the early years of the decade. In general, however, the Glasgow Chartist, John McAdam, was correct when he said that he personally had not involved himself in political matters before 1830 but pointed out that little had been happening

> Until early in 1830 I had meddled little with politics. Indeed little had been doing since the 'Radical days' unless some expression of sympathy with Catholic Emancipation though public opinion had grown steadily for Parliamentary Reform since the ill-advised attempt of 1820 (6)

That this situation prevailed not only in Scotland but throughout the country is confirmed by Thomas Jonathan Wooler in the Black Dwarf which ceased publication in 1824

> In truth, all hope of any Reform is at an end. The people are satisfied without it; and the ministers would be generous indeed to grant what is no longer demanded (7).

Significantly, by this time, there had been a general improvement in national economic conditions in which Paisley also shared. John

Parkhill noted that trade was brisker between 1821 and 1825. The other Paisley historian, Robert Brown, said

> The unfavourable condition of trade which prevailed, more or less, between 1817 and 1822, was followed in 1823 and 1824 by great prosperity (8).

The removal of this important stimulus to Reforming activity allied to the harsh measures which had been taken in 1820 against some of the Reformers, especially Baird, Hardie and Wilson, who were executed, resulted in the virtual disappearance of agitation for a few years. A further reason may have been the policies now pursued by the Government according to the Glasgow Chronicle newspaper which was broadly sympathetic to Reform. For example, in March 1826, the newspaper commented on

> the liberal and enlightened policy pursued by the present government (9).

This newspaper was read by many Paisley weavers as testified by David Gilmour who said that the newspaper came to the weaving shop, where he was employed, three times a week and that all work stopped while it was read and discussed (10). Presumably the opinions expressed in the newspaper had some influence on the thinking of the local weavers.

It is wrong to ignore the later years of the decade in the context of Reform and to treat the agitation as commencing only in 1830 although the bulk of the activity undoubtedly took place after that date. Although no visible Reform Movement developed at the time, the seeds were certainly sown in the terrible economic depression of 1826. The depression began in the latter part of 1825 and lasted into 1827. Local historian, Robert Brown, described this depression as

> the most severe that had been experienced (11).

Overwhelmingly there was a determined effort on the part of the middle classes, at least, to concentrate on the distress itself and means of immediate relief without recourse to political discussions. There was a concerted effort to maintain a united, community based response to the crisis. A recurring theme evident throughout all the Meetings held by this class, the letters which were written and all the other manifestations of concern described below was the fear of public disorder and how that might lead to discontent about the existing political situation. This concern was evident at a Meeting of Noblemen, Freeholders, Justices of the Peace, and Magistrates of Towns in Renfrewshire for Relief of Unemployed Weavers held on 27 March 1826 at which it was agreed that the distress was worse than it had been in 1817 or 1819 (12). That, of course, had been the period of the last significant Radical agitation but what was noted with a sense of relief at this Meeting, was that the people were well behaved. Agreement was reached that a Committee should be set up to give relief or to find work.

Concern about public order was no doubt what moved the Glasgow Chronicle in July 1826 to praise the reaction of the Paisley weavers in their peaceful efforts to obtain assistance

> We therefore with pleasure call the attention of the public to the judicious measure of petitioning the King adopted by the weavers of Paisley (13).

As well as petitions to the King, the Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, had received a letter from a leading Paisley weaver and veteran Reformer, James Fleming, which informed him of the great distress in the town due to want of employment. On the brink of starvation, many industrious mechanics had resorted to the pawnbroker. Fleming claimed that an appeal to the Local Authorities had not resulted in any action after three weeks. Fleming was closely involved in all the Radical agitations which took place in the town but he made no

reference in his letter to any possibility of public disorder (14).

In May of that year, Peel received a more significant letter from Major General John Hope which did express concern about the possibility of disturbances in Glasgow and Paisley, in particular with regard to the smashing of machinery which had taken place already in parts of England (15). In a further communication, Hope found that the disposition of the people in Glasgow was generally good but he was clearly more concerned about Paisley because he said

> In Paisley there has always been a worse spirit than in other parts of the West of Scotland (16).

Hope did not wish to march troops from Glasgow which might cause unrest but 200, who had recently landed at Greenock bound for the Highlands, could be diverted. It is highly significant that such a statement of concern about Paisley should have been communicated to Peel in the light of his subsequent actions as Prime Minister in 1841-1843, during the serious depression in the town. Undoubtedly Peel would place reliance on the views of a senior military man like Hope who was on the spot in close touch with the situation and such a statement would help to create an impression in Government minds that Paisley was a potential troublespot. Hence there would be considerable concern about the likely reaction when a more serious recession in a more volatile time hit the town. This evidence must strengthen Clarke and Dickson's theory that the Peel Government's motivation for acting as it did in 1841-1843 was to maintain social control.

Another letter to Peel from John Dunlop also illustrated the concern that was felt about the possibility of social disorder. The writer said that trade was still bad but that there was no sign of trouble. He claimed that the townspeople were 'too well informed' to break machinery but he cautioned that the old Radicals of 1819-1820 were

beginning to reappear to hold Meetings about the paper currency and that they would go to any lengths to achieve their political objectives (17).

Provost Farquharson, in a letter to Peel, reported that over 2,600 looms were now idle, and that even a fifty per cent increase in poors assessment was proving insufficient to meet the demand. However, naturally trying to present a favourable image as Provost of Paisley he stated that

> The present conduct of weavers in this large town deserves great approbation. Combinations, among this class, for raising wages, have not been known for a long time; they sustain the existing calamity with exemplary patience and fortitude; and hitherto there has not been the least indication of a riotous disposition (18).

Nevertheless, despite this apparent evidence to the contrary, Farquharson still expressed considerable anxiety about the possibility of disturbance. Such concern was expressed by someone who held the position of Provost of Paisley from 1824 to 1827 and who gained much respect from all quarters in the town for his actions during this period of crisis.

The fact that the population of the town was comprised predominantly of the working class was a further cause of the anxiety which existed regarding the likelihood of public disorder. The imbalance in the town between the number of rich and poor was alluded to in a letter to the London Relief Committee which had been set up to help to alleviate the situation

> Paisley and its environs ... contain a far larger proportion of the working classes and a much less proportion of the wealthy classes than any other district of the country (19).

The purpose of this statement was to draw attention to the fact that the lack of wealthy inhabitants naturally affected the amount of relief which could be raised locally and was a recurrent theme when outside help was sought. Another earlier letter to the London Relief Committee from the Sub Committee on Distress had indicated that at that time there was no prospect of improvement and that with only £1670 left in the fund more money was needed but the desire to avoid any Government intervention was clearly expressed

> They trust, however, that this will still be obtained from the appropriate and unexceptionable source of private benevolence (20).

The lack of wealthy inhabitants and the preponderance of the working class was clearly a further source of concern as it could bring about a situation where more Government intervention was sought which in turn might lead to calls for further Reform.

Consequently there was a determination at this stage at Meetings dominated by the middle or wealthier classes to avoid any political discussion. The more Reform minded who tried to introduce politics, met with little success. A local merchant, William Boyd, who was later to become a leading figure in the town's Anti-Corn Law Movement, tried to draw attention to the reasons for the distress at a Meeting of Bankers, Merchants, Manufacturers and Shopkeepers in 1826. Boyd claimed that the crisis was brought about

> not by natural, but by artificial causes; and it was to government ....

but he was forced to sit down amid cries of 'no politics' (21).

Similarly, at a Meeting of the County of Renfrew, later in the year, Wallace, Maxwell and Speirs, who were to become leading figures in the local Reform agitation of 1830-1832, blamed the distress on bad Government but again they were in a minority. Carlile and Napier were anxious to avoid politics. Lord Belhaven and Sheriff Campbell wished any Resolution to make no mention of the cause of the distress. (22).

It is clear, therefore, that at this stage there was little support to be found amongst the middle classes or wealthier landowners in the area for Parliamentary Reform. There were only a few such as Wallace, Maxwell or Speirs amongst the landowners or Boyd of the merchant class who were sympathetic to the cause Reform and prepared to raise the issue. The dominant concern of these classes appeared to be a continuing fear of public disorder and an anxiety that the Government should not be blamed for the distress nor become involved in relief efforts. The distress should be recognised as part of the natural order of things rather than as a direct result of Government policy or the shortcomings of the political system.

The local working classes, however, where they held Meetings or were in the majority were much less reticent about identifying the problem as caused by the Corn Laws and taxation and that they saw Reform of Parliament as the cure. A petition from the inhabitants of Paisley in August, 1826 claimed that the Corn Laws were the only reason for the distress and disaffection and urged the Government to open the ports to foreign grain. John Neil, the Radical weaver who had been a leading figure in the 1820 agitation was the prime mover of this petition at a Meeting of the County in St. James Street Chapel. The tone of the protests was much quieter than in 1819, however, and at a Meeting of Inhabitants at the same venue also in August a Resolution on Reform was withdrawn (23).

As the depression continued into the autumn of 1826, a Meeting of the Operatives in October showed none of the qualms evident elsewhere about identifying the political causes of the distress. The Operatives agreed to call for a County Meeting to take place the purpose of which was

> to state their grievances, - & to petition Parliament for a Repeal of the Corn Laws- a Reduction of three-fourths of the taxes - & a thorough Reform in the Commons House.

At this Meeting, too, it was revealed that the weaver, Neil, had written a letter to supposed wealthy sympathisers, Maxwell, Speirs and Wallace seeking their assistance, in which he said

> If ever our country is to be restored to prosperity again, it can only be through the union and cooperation of all classes.

This was a clear plea for class collaboration but the initiative was coming from a member of the weaving fraternity who had been active in the 1820 Radical Rising. The Paisley Advertiser, which was always hostile to the Radicals, applauded Maxwell and Speirs because they

> have had the good sense to take no notice

Although Wallace had replied, the newspaper stated that his answer was

> couched in more humble phrase, &, while it implies support, speaks of caution, consideration, & a present declining to come to any specific opinion on the mode to be adopted (24).

It is very important to emphasise the reluctance of these wealthier Reformers, particularly Maxwell, to enter into an alliance with the weavers at this stage in the light of the co-operation between the classes which developed later at the time of the Reform Bill agitation. Maxwell has been credited with a leading role in bringing about this later liaison (25). Neil may have been seen to represent a more extreme element with which these middle class leaders would not wish to be associated in view of his past participation in 1820.

Although no organised movement developed in 1826 to campaign specifically for Parliamentary Reform it is clear that the working classes at least in Paisley led by weavers such as Neil saw Reform of Parliament, the abolition of the Corn Laws and generally an end to the whole system of Old Corruption as exemplified by the taxation system, as the solution to their problems. There was, however, no suggestion of a resort to violent tactics to achieve their objectives. The methods which were employed were to hold Meetings, to petition, to write letters to the Government and to seek the co-operation of potentially sympathetic members of the wealthier classes which, at that time, was withheld. From the middle of 1827, the economic situation began to improve once more which led to a cessation in Reform activity.

The fact that no identifiable movement in favour of Parliamentary Reform did emerge in the town may be partly attributable to the help that was given by the Relief Committees set up in Edinburgh and London. There were also the considerable efforts made locally by Provost Farquharson. Moreover, Government policy, in general, did seem to be more enlightened and less repressive than it had been in the years following the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Even the Radical of 1820, John Henderson, when he wrote to Home Secretary, Peel, about the unprecedented distress said that there was not a murmur of discontent due to the enlightened policies pursued by the Government (26). Furthermore there was no organised, national

movement campaigning for Parliamentary Reform at this time.

The economic upturn in 1827 proved to be only temporary and another serious depression began in 1829. Peel once more found himself in receipt of letters from various sources in the town including the weaver Fleming, William Aitken, President of the Committee of Distressed Operatives, Farquharson, no longer Provost, Provost Boyd and later Provost Gilmour. Sheriff Campbell admitted that there was again no sign of disorder nor destruction of property which had occurred elsewhere, most especially in England but clearly the possibility still concerned him as he again saw fit to make reference to the matter (27).

The situation did improve somewhat by the autumn of 1829 but by 1831 distress prevailed once more and Campbell was sending weekly reports now to Lord Melbourne who had become Home Secretary (28). The problems of 1829, however, proved sufficient to provoke the Paisley weavers to begin to make some positive moves to organise pressure groups to support abolition of the Corn Laws and Parliamentary Reform.

The first effort to set up a society was made at a Meeting of weavers' delegates in Glasgow in July 1829 when a deputation from Paisley was in attendance. This deputation claimed to have got the sanction of about thirty manufacturers and others, such as merchants and grocers, to join them in an association for the purpose of 'getting rid' of the Corn Laws. They proposed a National Union, following the example of the Catholic Association, to collect a penny from each member weekly and to give the money thus collected as a premium to those manufacturers who would take grain in exchange for their goods. They maintained that this would reduce the price of provisions, give work and cheap provisions to the distressed labourer and increase the comforts of every class in the nation. The plan, however, encountered strong opposition from the delegates present.

It was felt that it was 'consummate folly' for a group of starving men to commence an association unless they could obtain help from such eminent personages as the Whig advocates Lords Jeffrey or Cockburn. The Chairman brought the discussion to an end by suggesting that the Paisley proposition should be laid before the districts (29).

A week later, the Glasgow Chronicle reported on a Meeting in the Thread Street Relief Meeting House, Paisley, to consider the propriety of forming such a society. William Aitken, the Radical schoolmaster, was the Chairman but once more there was opposition to the proposal. One unnamed gentleman

> stated that it was impossible to infuse spirit sufficient for the forwarding of this measure into the manufacturing population. Their long and severe sufferings had now rendered them hopeless of ever bettering their condition, by any exertions of their own.

Someone else who was present at this Meeting blamed everything on taxation

> It was then put to the meeting whether the proposed association should be entered into or not, when it 'was carried, nearly unanimously, that the measure was inexpedient'.

In addition

> it was carried unanimously and with acclamation that taxation was the only cause (30).

The defeatist attitude which had been expressed at this Meeting was not universal, the local weavers would not be denied, and a Society was formed in the town. So it was that The Paisley Reform Society

was born only a few days later at a Meeting on 17 July 1829,

> In consequence of an address by Messrs. Hunt and Cobbett, a pretty numerous meeting of the friends of Parliamentary Reform took place in Mr. Aitken's School-room, Castle Street, Paisley, on the 17th. inst. to consider the propriety of forming a Society in Paisley, to communicate with the London and other Reformers Societies throughout the kingdom (31).

The formation and existence of this Society has not been noticed by historians who have tended to concentrate in studies of the 1830-1832 Reform activity in the town on the more widely known Renfrewshire Political Union. Even historians who have sought to show that there were more Radical Reformers in Paisley than those represented by the Union and who have shown some sympathy with these elements have not specifically identified this Society.

This is unsurprising if news of local events is sought only in the Paisley Advertiser which was consistently unsympathetic to Radical Reformers and which said nothing about the formation of this Society. No reports of the Society's Meetings appear in the local newspaper although other sources indicate hat it was a fairly active body. The only reference which has been found in the pages of the Advertiser was to a dinner given by the Society in honour of Mr. Archibald Speirs. A 'flattering eulogy' on the Paisley Reform Society was given at this dinner by Robert Wallace of Kelly. Alexander McAndrew, a veteran weaver Reformer of 1820, who had been the first Chairman of the Paisley Reform Society, took the opportunity to express his pleasure in witnessing the aristocracy now meeting with the people. This dinner was held in 1832 by which time the middle classes had taken over the leading positions in the Society. This facilitated the collaboration with the wealthier landowners (32).

The fact that the local newspaper chose to ignore the Paisley Reform Society in this way is a clear indication that the organisation did not meet with the newspaper's approval. The paper claimed that it was unaware of Reform Meetings held locally when it referred to a speech made by Henry Hunt in the House of Commons (33). Hunt claimed to have received a letter from a Meeting in Paisley which denounced the proposed Reform Act. The newspaper claimed that it knew nothing about such a Meeting having taken place in the town. Following a strong Tory tradition which was most stridently enunciated under the editorship of the poet, William Motherwell, this was an example of the newspaper's attempt to minimise the significance of the more Radical Reformers in the town, represented by the Paisley Reform Society.

The hostility of the newspaper must have been due to the nature of the Reforms which the Society was demanding because as will be seen the organisation did not pose any threat to public order. The leadership of the Society was in the hands of men who stressed the need for peaceful protest and totally eschewed any resort to violence. The Society may have been closer in ideology to the 'illegal tradition' which stretched back to the early Jacobin Reformers but there is no indication that it held Meetings in secret and good relations were established and maintained with the Renfrewshire Political Union when it came into existence. Some of the leading figures in the Society, such as James Fleming, the Radical weaver, even held positions in both organisations.

The formation and some of the early Meetings of the Society did get reported in the Glasgow Chronicle which was more sympathetic than the local paper. From this source some information can be gleaned about the Society's aims, objectives, strategy and names of the leading figures and office bearers. The evidence is, however, very scanty as the Society appears to have left no records and the Renfrewshire Political Union attracted most of the press coverage. The Society

represented one strand of the town's Reform Movement which clearly spoke for a sizeable sector of the local population and as such it deserves to be remembered.

The Paisley Reformers Society met again on 20 July 1829, when the articles for management were brought forward and agreed to. The Society was to meet once a fortnight, every member was to contribute one penny at each Meeting and the public were to be admitted on the same terms but were to have no voice in the proceedings. It was stated that

> the funds and whole aim of the Society shall be directed to the procuring, in a lawful manner, an extension of the lawful franchise, so as to give every man of sane mind a vote by ballot, in the choosing of his representative in Parliament.

The Society was therefore, clearly not a Trade Union or a Trade Society of any kind. It was formed with one specific purpose, to campaign for Parliamentary Reform. The Society was seeking Universal Manhood Suffrage and vote by ballot which were not to be achieved for many more years. It was made clear at the outset that the Society was not prepared to turn to violent or unlawful methods to accomplish its aims. The formation of the Society was obviously a response to the prevailing economic conditions to which reference was made

> The unexampled depression which pervades every town, and almost every branch of trade in the kingdom, is felt doubly severe in Paisley (34).

The objectives of the Society to obtain Universal Suffrage and vote by ballot surely entitle it to be considerd as a valid Reform organisation like the Renfrewshire Political Union, the Birmingham Political Union and the organisations which were formed later in

Glasgow. The aspirations, which it enunciated, were the more Radical ones of the working class and the Trade Unions, identified by Clarke and Dickson. The Society provided a forum for these aspirations to be voiced to a wider audience than that available to the Trade Unions which, as Clarke and Dickson have shown were weak in Paisley in any case due to the economic structure of the town.

Little information can be found about the Society during the next couple of years after it was founded though it was apparently very active. Alexander McAndrew, the veteran weaver Reformer, was the President of the Society at the end of 1829 and was therefore the first holder of this office. At the election of office bearers in October 1831, Archibald Stewart, a cloth merchant, was elected President. Robert Bisset, a manufacturer and Provost of the town from 1838 to 1841 and who became a prominent Radical and Chartist, was Vice-President. The Secretary was Robert Urie, a drawer, and the Treasurer was Matthew Neilson. In a report of this Meeting and election of officials, the Glasgow Evening Post praised the work of the Paisley Reform Society over the past two years,

> Since its establishment, in July 1829, this Society has been of great use in distributing political tracts amongst the public, and much important information on the same subject, that could not have been obtained otherwise than by such an institution, amongst its members. The members meet regularly every two weeks (35).

It is clear therefore that the Society met regularly and provided some political education for the ordinary members of the public. The emergence of Stewart and Bisset in the Presidential positions suggests that, in late 1831, leadership of the Society was passing from weavers, such as McAndrew, into the hands of the town's petty bourgeoisie. By this time, the middle classes had become fully

involved in the Reform Movement both locally and nationally. It was their efforts which now attracted most attention and which have been most discussed subsequently by historians.

Consequently unlike 1826, a national agitation for Parliamentary Reform developed concurrently with the economic depression of 1829-1831. Undoubtedly the economic depression was one factor which helped to promote this agitation. The recurrence of depression within a few years led many people to look for more permanent means of relief rather than merely stopgap measures. Other influences, too, were at work.

As in the late eighteenth century, there was the example of a Revolution in France. On 2 September 1830, a 'respectable gathering' held a Meeting in Mr. Baird's Church in St. James Street, Paisley, about the recent Revolution in France. Such a description of those present generally implied that they were middle class but there seems to have been a fairly broad social mix on this occasion. Sir John Maxwell occupied the Chair and resolutions which congratulated the French were moved by Barr, Wallace, Crawford, Fleming and Gilchrist and seconded by Speirs, McFarlane, Lee and Mason, a veteran Reformer of the agitations in the 1790s. There was some criticism of the local Magistrates who had refused to give their sanction to this Meeting. As a result of this Paisley Meeting, a donation of £22 was sent with a letter from the inhabitants of Paisley to General Lafayette signed by Hugh McFarlane, whose son was to become a leading figure in the Anti-Corn Law agitation, which said,

> In no place does your heroism and bravery, impart a more heartfelt satisfaction than in this town and neighbourhood (36).

The important development in 1829-1830 which had been missing in 1826 was seen to be the growth of pressure groups, throughout the country,

seeking Parliamentary Reform, called Political Unions. These Unions were modelled on the Birmingham Political Union founded by Thomas Attwood in January 1830. Attwood was a Birmingham banker whose main reason for engaging in political issues was to further his chief object of currency reform. The leadership of the Birmingham Political Union was middle class and initially it was supported by some ultra-Tories but not by Joseph Parkes who was the foremost figure in Birmingham Radicalism at that time. A modern history of the Birmingham Political Union has sought to show that its influence in bringing about Reform was not so great as was then thought (37).

Nonetheless Attwood was possibly the most popular man in the country in the heady days of May 1832. Russell, Grey and Durham all considered that he had played the important part in the Reform Movement. However, the Birmingham Political Union did not organise Conferences or Conventions in the way that the Anti-Corn Law League or the Chartist Movement, in which Attwood was also involved, were to do later. Nor did the Union send lecturers throughout the whole country, as the other Movements did, but confined its speaking activities to a much smaller area in the Midlands. It cannot, therefore, be said that the Birmingham Political Union led a National Movement in the way that the Anti-Corn Law League, for example, can be said to have led a National Movement for Repeal of the Corn Laws. Furthermore other Reform Movements had been formed earlier. Nevertheless the Union in Birmingham seemed to make an impact and did serve as a model for similar Unions which were set up throughout the country. The existence of these Unions in different areas, the number of Meetings which they organised, the amount of support which they received, give some indication of the strength of the Reform Movement in a particular locality. These Unions gave the Reformers a forum in which to express their opinions.

The West of Scotland lagged behind England in the formation of these Unions. This meant that Robert Wallace of Kelly felt himself obliged

to join the Birmingham Political Union until such time as Glasgow or Paisley had their own. In a letter to the Paisley Reform Society, which was published in the newspapers, he wrote

> I can boast the privilege and honour of being a member of the Birmingham Political Union; an honour I solicited the moment I read their Rules, and trust that I shall continue to enjoy, until the Reformers of Glasgow and Paisley and the West of Scotland generally, shall also form Political Unions.

However, if he had wished, Wallace could have joined the then established Paisley Reform Society but the rest of his letter explained why he did not do so. He felt that the Paisley Reform Society wanted too much too soon and wanted more than the Birmingham Political Union. He claimed that in the long term he supported the aims of the Paisley Reform Society but that these aims were unlikely to be achievable at present. He advocated a more cautious, gradual approach. In his letter Wallace wrote

> I well know, Gentlemen, that your views on the subject of Reform go much further than those of the Birmingham Union. Like you, I am an advocate for political liberty in its most extended sense, but I now see it to be prudent to go by degrees towards the accomplishment of this work, and therefore, I have deemed it to be my duty to forego in part my former declarations, and to content myself with endeavouring to obtain all that can be looked for, as likely to be got ere it be too late (38).

Despite this difference in outlook, good relations were maintained between Wallace and the Paisley Reform Society. It seemed that closer links were being forged all the time with middle class Reformers in general. At a dinner given by the Society in his honour at a local hotel in November 1830, Wallace praised the organisation

> Mr. Wallace observed, regarding the Paisley Reform Society, that it was equal to, if not before, any other in Scotland. It had been distinguished for its length of duration, & the constancy & caution of its members more than any other society in Scotland (39).

In the four months between writing the letter and the dinner in his honour, Wallace had presumably become even more sympathetic towards the Society as the wealthier, middle classes in the area began to take more interest in the Reform Movement. Wallace may have even come to believe that an alliance of some kind could now be brought about as the Society had established itself as a responsible, law abiding organisation. Significantly, Wallace praised the Society for its caution. Middle class fears had been eased by the responsible behaviour of the Society.

A Meeting, presumably of the Paisley Reform Society, had taken place earlier in the month of November with William Colquhoun, a weaver, in the chair. This Meeting discussed a petition from the Merchants, Manufacturers, Burgesses and other inhabitants for a Public Meeting to be held on Reform at which Wallace, Maxwell and Speirs would be present (40). At last there seemed to be the possibility of meaningful co-operation between the different classes of Reformers in the area.

Although there is no evidence that Maxwell, Wallace or Speirs ever actually joined the Paisley Reform Society, it was Sir John Maxwell who occupied the chair on the motion of David Ritchie, a local

grocer, when this Meeting of the Society took place a week later in the New Relief Meeting House, Thread Street, Paisley. At this Meeting, George Gardner, a writer, urged speedy Radical Reform and vote by ballot which was seconded by the veteran Reformer, Mason. However, John Neil, another veteran weaver Reformer, proposed a much more Radical amendment which called for the liquidation of the National Debt by the sale of state property, Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments. This amendment was seconded by Fisher. John Henderson, yet another veteran like Neil of the 1820 Radical Rising, appealed for the unity of all parties whilst William Barr, who was a writer, urged the Meeting not to be influenced by 'firebrands'.

> Mr Neil then requested that his motion be put from the chair, - when a gentleman rose and begged of the meeting to be united - they had on this occasion the countenance of the great, and he implored them not to fall into discord.

This intervention illustrates the importance that was attached to the new involvement in the Reform Movement of the wealthier, middle classes. When a vote was taken the amendment by Neil was heavily defeated with only twenty supporters.

> Mr.Gardner, Mr. Speirs and others, urged the propriety of being content with such claims as at present would be listened to, which was not likely to be the case with the amendment (41).

Historians have claimed that the economic structure of the town lent itself to class co-operation and unanimity on such issues as Parliamentary Reform and the Corn Laws. This made it easy it is claimed for the wealthier, middle classes, particularly Sir John Maxwell, to bring into being an alliance of all the Reformers in the town (42). The events at this Meeting make it clear, however, that

even in late 1830 there was not total unanimity but that there were more Radical elements who could not be accommodated in this alliance; and who were not willing to wait always on the initiative to come from middle class Reformers. It is also the case that the middle class Reformers were only now in late 1830 prepared to associate themselves with the Movement for Reform and join with the working classes and petty bourgeoisie who had been striving towards this end for some time in their own organisation.

The aftermath of this Meeting was not an infusion of new middle class members into the Paisley Reform Society but the creation of a new organisation for the county a few days later. On 3 December 1830 the Renfrewshire Political Union was formed at a Public Meeting of the County, held within the County Hall, Paisley (43). The formation of the Union represented the culmination of the increased interest taken in Reform by the wealthier, commercial middle classes who dominated the new organisation. The Chairman was Sir John Maxwell, Bart. who was to become the first M.P. for Paisley in 1832. The first eleven names on the Committee were all owners of property in the area. These included the Maxwells of Pollok, the Speirs of Elderslie, William Maxwell of Brediland, and also Robert Cunningham Bontine of Ardoch. The Committee also included five manufacturers, two writers, two doctors and a surgeon, all from Paisley. Robert Wallace of Kelly was the Convener and the Paisley grocer, David Ritchie was the Vice-Convener. The Paisley weavers were represented on the Committee, too, in the persons of the veteran Reformers, James Fleming and William Colquhoun but the Union was clearly not a working class organisation.

It was very much a Union of the middle, commercial, business classes. This was spelt out very clearly at this first Meeting by Wallace and he also made clear whom the efforts of the Union were intended to benefit when he warned

> those who would be within the elective franchise to be careful what kind of a man they elected. Let them choose a man of business, who by understanding his own profession could understand theirs.

Wallace went on to emphasise which class he wished to be given the right to vote and the sort of person who should be elected

> let him be a professional man, who understood their wants, and who would legislate for them accordingly. The commercial, manufacturing and mercantile interests must now be represented.

This was because 'the commercial was now predominant over the landed interest' but there was no mention here of the working classes.

Similar language emanated from another prominent member of the Committee, John Maxwell the younger of Pollok, who claimed that it was time for the middle classes to be enfranchised because they were

> alike removed from the temptations of great wealth and great poverty, and were consequently the best qualified for the exercise of the great privilege.

Maxwell was not an advocate of Universal Suffrage nor of the enfranchisement of the working classes and he further stated that this was the popular feeling because

> He believed the people of Scotland, of whom they had lately seen such animating spectacles, had no desire to bring within the franchise any other class, than those, who, from their circumstances were above bribery.

The Committee of forty-five members appointed at the formation of the Renfrewshire Political Union, as well as its middle class domination, had a strong representation from Paisley. Three of the eleven property owners, William Maxwell of Brediland, Robert Orr of Ralston, and John Adam of Colinslee, were within the area now regarded as Paisley. Of the other thirty-four names on the list, twenty-five were from Paisley. In addition, Alexander Craig was from Hawkhead and John Bell was from Woodside, both of which places would now be regarded as part of Paisley. There were three members from Renfrew, three from Kilbarchan and one from Houston. Having been formed in Paisley, with so many members of the Committee from the town, the Renfrewshire Political Union merits consideration in this study of local Radical, Reforming Movements. The Union gave the Reformers in Paisley a second organisation which they could join to press for changes and some of the weavers availed themselves of this opportunity.

After the list of names of the Committee members, the document spelt out the ten objects of the Union, most of which would have been supported by all Reformers. Throughout the document there is a very marked emphasis on the necessity to follow legal, peaceful, constitutional means to obtain Reform. This emphasis, which was shared by the Paisley Reform Society, may indicate that those historians who see no threat in the Reform Movement to the constituted authorities have some justification for their argument. However, the emphasis on legality is such a recurrent theme, repeated again and again, that there can be little doubt that a real fear of public disorder must have existed in the minds of the framers of the document for the Union. The knowledge that another Society existed locally which made more far reaching demands with members who had been involved in the more violent Movement of 1820 concentrated minds, even if the other organisation made a similar public disavowal of violence.

The first object of the Union was stated to be

> to obtain by every just, legal means Reform in the Commons House of Parliament to ensure real, effectual representation of all classes of the people.

This was sufficiently vague to be likely to win support from most or all Reformers but it did not exactly specify who should be entitled to vote. Their concern about the lower classes was expressed in another object which was to enquire periodically

> respecting the rights and liberties of the industrious classes.

This was another fairly general objective which would be unlikely to spark any great controversy. Similarly safe was the wish to obtain Burgh and Law Reform in Scotland and in the election of Members of Parliament

> to secure the return of upright, able Representatives of the People.

They also wished to seek a reduction of taxation and national expenditure and to prepare 'Petitions, Addresses and Remonstrances' to bring about the Repeal of Bad Laws and the enactment of Good Laws. The fear of public disorder and the wish to maintain social control of Reform agitation was more clearly apparent in the object

> to organise peaceful expression of Public Opinion

That the framers of the document had not forgotten the events of 1820 was evident in object number ten which was

> to avoid all private or secret proceedings

Yet again the opportunity was taken to re-emphasise that it was

> the fixed basis of the Union in all things to obey and conform to law.

There was no area of disagreement in any of this amongst local Reformers because the Paisley Reform Society had similarly heavily stressed the desirability of using only peaceful, lawful methods to obtain Parliamentary Reform. There was, however, scope for disagreement with objects number six and seven of the Union document. Object six stated that the Union was in favour of shorter Parliaments by the Repeal of the Septennial Act. Neil, in his amendment at the Meeting prior to the formation of the Renfrewshire Political Union, had called specifically for Annual Parliaments. This was further than the Union was prepared to go and an example of the more Radical elements in the town who found a voice in the Paisley Reform Society.

Object number seven of the Union was

> to obtain the extension of Elective Franchise at least to all male householders.

This was somewhat less than the Paisley Reform Society's aim from the time that it was founded that 'every man of sane mind' should have the vote. Again it was considerably less than the call for Universal Suffrage made at the Society's November Meeting in the defeated amendment by Neil seconded by Fisher. Significantly, neither Neil nor Fisher appeared on the list of forty-five names on the Committee of the Union. Gardner, Mason, Barr and Henderson, who spoke on that occasion in favour of a more moderate approach, were all on the Committee of the Union.

Clearly dominated by middle class elements, the Union was, nevertheless, open to everyone aged eighteen or over who conformed to the Rules and Regulations. A record of the names and designations of members was to be kept. The cost of membership was sixpence (two and a half new pence) per quarter which was payable in advance. This was two shillings (ten new pence) in a year which was comparable with the Paisley Reform Society where members paid a penny at each fortnightly Meeting which would total approximately two shillings in a full year. Artisans would probably find it more acceptable, however, to pay one penny at each Meeting which they attended rather than pay out six pennies all at once in advance whether or not they were able to attend Meetings of the Union which were to be held once a month or oftener. Strict control was to be exercised over the Funds which were to be used solely for the objects of the Union.

There was to be a General Meeting of Members on the first Monday of July annually to choose the Council who appointed the collectors of contributions and other officers. A record was to be kept of the proceedings at the monthly Meetings which were to be open to all members and to reporters of the public press. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman on a requisition by seven Councillors or one hundred ordinary members could call Special General Meetings. These had to be advertised eight days before and their purpose notified. The Secretary was to produce the books for inspection. Alterations or additions could only take place at an Annual General Meeting and must emanate from the Council or be submitted in writing by five members of the Union one month before. Any alteration required a two thirds majority. Anyone was able to withdraw at any time by writing to the Secretary.

The document also outlined the duties of members where the overwhelming emphasis was once more on the need for peaceful conduct and legality. The first duty of the members, for example, was

> to be good, loyal, faithful subjects and to obey the laws of the land

They were also expected to attend all the General Meetings at which they were to

> conduct themselves peacefully and legally

To underline these points everyone was to be regarded as an enemy who should in any way

> invite or promote violence, discord or division, or any illegal or doubtful measure.

Such persons were to be excluded from membership of the Union. Every effort was clearly being made to ensure that membership of the Union would not be used to incite disorder or instil any revolutionary ideas.

The duties of the Council were, firstly, to bring about the objects of the Union

> by every just, legal, constitutional and peaceful means.

Secondly, they were to watch the proceedings of the Legislature and present 'Petitions and Remonstrances' to Parliament. Thirdly, they were to use their influence by personal example to preserve the public peace and order of the country. Such a duty imposed upon the Councillors suggests that their role was seen to be in the preservation of social order and social control rather than the achievement of Parliamentary Reform. Finally, although such strong emphasis had already been placed on the need for peaceful protest and the necessity to obey the laws, the document again insisted, after

the duties of the Council on the need for legal means to be employed

> In conclusion, let it ever be held in mind that the basis of this Union is obedience to the laws, and conformity to the principles of our constitutional rights.

Anyone who participated in activities which were inconsistent wih this was to be automatically expelled.

Such is the emphasis on the preservation of peace in this document that the primary aim of the Union could almost appear to have been the maintenance of a well ordered stable society rather than the achievement of Parliamentary Reform which seems to have been virtually relegated to a secondary role. Fear of a repetition of the events of 1820 or the riots of 1819 appear to have been uppermost in the minds of the framers of the document. It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that the leaders of the Union did not genuinely wish to bring about Reform of some sort and benefit to the country in general. Nor did they wish to exclude anyone from their deliberations because they differed about certain points

> to render the objects of this Political Union as definite as possible - the duration of Parliament - the extent of the Elective Franchise, and the mode of exercising the right of voting, have been specially included. Yet as it is possible that some few who may become members, will not have the same opinion on these particular points, it is to be understood, that each member shall be entitled to exercise his own judgment; and it is hoped, that no sincere Reformer, on such grounds, will be withheld from joining this Union, the essential principle of which is, the prosperity of our country, and happiness of her subjects.

The Renfrewshire Political Union, like the Paisley Reform Society, appears to have been a fairly active pressure group. The Meetings held by the Union, however, were more widely reported in the newspapers than those held by the Paisley Reform Society. It had been included in the Rules and Regulations that the Meetings were to be open to the public press. At Meetings of the Union it was not uncommon for more Radical voices to be heard calling for greater Reform than the Union sought or than was proposed in the Reform Bill so that although there was an alliance, there was never total unanimity. At one of the early Meetings held in February 1831 in Baird's Church, Barr, Clerk of Supply of the County of Renfrew, warned about the opposite danger of asking for too much but this was unusual. At this Meeting, the Union was asking for the equalisation and reduction of taxation, thorough Parliamentary Reform, Burgh Reform, shorter Parliaments, the franchise to all male householders and voting by secret ballot. The veteran weaver Reformer, James Fleming, was also present to remind them about the Corn Laws which had not been included (44).

At the Meeting in March 1831, the weavers, McAndrew and Colquhoun, were present to express the opinion that the proposed plan of Reform did not do enough for the working classes. Another veteran Radical, John Henderson, was also present on this occasion with facts and figures to prove that, under the proposal, very few people in Paisley would be given the right to vote. Furthermore he claimed that those who did become entitled in Paisley under the £10 qualification were not very liberal (45). A number of other Meetings were held by the Union which were well reported in the newspapers. Most of these Meetings were held in Paisley though a few did take place in other towns or villages in the county. Sometimes these Meetings were held in response to national developments such as the refusal by the King to agree to Earl Grey's request to create enough new Peers to push the Reform measure through the House of Lords.

Meetings of other bodies were sometimes held in the town to express sympathy with Reforming ideas. At a Public Meeting of Bankers, Merchants, Manufacturers, Professional Gentlemen and other Inhabitants, John Neil suggested that the vote should be extended below the £10 householder. He was supported by Joseph Cunningham who moved an amendment to a Resolution which had been proposed, in which he said that the Reform Bill should not be wholeheartedly supported but only 'as far as it goes'. Neil, naturally supporting Cunningham's amendment, said that he

> did not wish to see a resolution introduced, calling the reform proposed efficient, when such was not the fact. He would stand by the order to which he belonged; he was a working man, and gloried in that title, and had no wish to rise higher in society. (This observation raised a general laugh). He begged the Committee to alter the resolution, agreeably to Mr. Cunningham's amendment (46).

This amendment, which had only about twenty supporters, was heavily defeated but it serves as a further indication that even during the agitation for the Reform Bill in the town there was not total unanimity. Even at this time there were more Radical elements who were not afraid to call for greater Reforms at middle class dominated Meetings where they were bound to be in a minority.

As well as holding Meetings which sometimes attracted large numbers, as many as 8,000 to 10,000 on at least one occasion, other means of pressure were also employed. Memorials and Petitions were prepared and sent by the Union to Earl Grey and to His Majesty from Noblemen, Gentlemen, Freeholders, Commissioners of Supply, Heritors, Magistrates of Towns, Justices of the Peace, Merchants and Manufacturers of the County of Renfrew.

Personal letters were also sent by the leading figures in the two Reform organisations in the town to prominent politicians. Maxwell wrote to Earl Grey on the question of the £10 suffrage in August 1831 (47). Archibald Stewart, the cloth merchant, as President of the Paisley Reform Society, wrote to Joseph Dixon, M.P., a detailed letter on the complexities of the proposed Reform Bill and the inadequacies of the existing system (48). Stewart had been encouraged to write because Dixon had evidently declared his intention to have the Reform Bill amended. This letter was a foretaste of the sort of pressure to be put on the local Members of Parliament in later years when the town had obtained the franchise. Stewart's letter presents a well reasoned, well argued case which shows a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the question. It is further proof that the Paisley Reform Society, although now overshadowed by the Union, was still not an insignificant body, but was able through its leading officials to make a worthwhile contribution to the argument over Parliamentary Reform.

Further stimulus was given to the local Reform Movement by the visits to the town of two prominent English Reformers, Joseph Hume and William Cobbett. That such prominent individuals should visit the town at all and the comments they made during their visit provided evidence of the vitality of the local Reform Movement and the standing of the town. Hume visited Paisley in September 1830 when he spoke in the Burgher Meeting House and visited local factories and warehouses. He recognised the importance of the town when he said

> as the Manchester of Scotland, every question affecting your interests is connected with the welfare of the country, and is felt by every man in England (49).

Cobbett's visit to the town was in 1832 when he had the opportunity to realise what he claimed to have been a long held ambition

> I have always wished to have had an opportunity of dating a Register from Paisley (50)

Clearly, a considerable amount of Reforming activity took place in Paisley, during the years 1830 to 1832. This activity and the high level of political awareness occasioned much local pride which can be seen expressed in Parkhill's writings on the history of the town. The pride was frequently expressed at public gatherings, too. In September 1831 at a Meeting of the Renfrewshire Political Union, there was a toast to the Paisley Reform Society which was represented by Duncan Henderson, a weaver, poet and supporter of William Cobbett

> The Paisley Reform Society having been given, Mr. D. Henderson returned thanks, and remarked that Paisley had always been celebrated for the sound political views of its inhabitants; they were the best politicians in the West of Scotland and were never in the background (51).

The validity of such a boast will be tested later in the examination of the early election results. Aitken, the Radical Paisley schoolmaster, also showed this sense of pride when he claimed that Renfrewshire was unique because so many county landowners had taken a leading part in the Reform Movement,

> There was no other county in Scotland where as many gentlemen of rank came forward and acted with the people in endeavouring to have their representative system put on a proper footing (52).

Admittedly, these 'gentlemen of rank' presumably including Maxwell, Wallace and Speirs did have genuine sympathy with the Reform cause. The argument of this work, however, is that they also came forward in such numbers because they saw a large, working class population in

Paisley, seething with unrest due to harsh economic conditions with a history of violent protest but also an enlightened, literate heritage which produced articulate leaders capable of organising protest and stirring unrest. In such circumstances some action had to be taken to maintain social control.

Other sources, too, paid tribute to the Reform Movemenet in the area but particularly to the Renfrewshire Political Union to which considerable importance was attached

> The Institution from the manner it has been supported by the spirited gentlemen of Renfrewshire, who move in the first circles of society, and by the people at large, has now become the most important political association in Scotland, and the most timid cannot but have confidence in the legality of its proceedings (53).

Once again despite the praise heaped on the Institution there is recognition of the fear engendered by the potential of these bodies.

There was therefore clear recognition of the amount of activity which had taken place in the town and county which was overlaid locally with a keen sense of pride. Although the Union represented the whole county, so many of the leading figures lived in Paisley and so much of the Union's activities took place there that it can really be regarded as a second Reform organisation in the town. There were differences which have been identified above but despite these, the two bodies seem to have been able to maintain a generally good relationship. Such a situation invites comparison with much larger near neighbour Glasgow where there also existed two Reform organisations for a time.

The Glasgow Reform Association, which was formed in early October 1830, appears to have been a largely middle class dominated organisation. James Dawson Burn, in his Autobiography, stated

> This body was composed of the resident gentry, merchants and manufacturers of the Whig Party (54).

The Committee of twelve, a much smaller number than the Renfrewshire Political Union, consisted of seven merchants, one manufacturer, two writers, one doctor and one university professor. The Association, therefore, from the outset, was exclusive of the working classes. Glasgow, unlike Paisley, was a University town and the Reform Association came under the influence of individuals from that institution such as Professor Mylne

> What the learned Professor Mylne wanted was a nice, snug, little oligarchical club, which would exclude the operative classes (55).

Proposals at the Meeting held on 12 November 1830 that the name should be 'Union' rather than 'Association' and that Public Meetings should be held with the people, if only to prevent the operatives organising by themselves, were defeated by Professor Mylne. Mylne was born in 1756 and he died in 1839. Before he became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, he had been a predecessor of the Rev. Patrick Brewster as Minister of the Second Charge at Paisley Abbey from March 1783 until October 1797. As a result of Mylne's actions, the manner of the Association's formation could also be criticised,

> From the manner this institution was formed, it could be considered little else than a mere private club. It did not derive its authority from any public meeting (56).

This was very different from the situation in Paisley where Public Meetings were held at the formation of both Reform organisations and where the operatives had initially associated by themselves. They formed the Paisley Reform Society when their earlier overtures to the middle class Reformers had seemingly been rejected. The historian of the Reform Movements in Glasgow, Dr. Fiona Montgomery, concludes from the evidence that the Association was

> what its critics claimed: a group of middle class men setting up a club to further moderate reform and give themselves a sense of importance (57).

The author continued that the Rules and Regulations bore out the 'essential middle class philosophy' of the Association. The subscription for membership was five shillings (twenty-five new pence) which was more than double the fee of the Paisley Reform Society or the Renfrewshire Political Union. Moreover, despite protests, this subscription fee was not reduced until late 1831 by which time another organisation had been formed in the city. Members of the Association had to be over twenty-one years of age which compared with only eighteen in the Renfrewshire Political Union. It was also necessary that a member

> be a householder in Glasgow or certified to be a resident by a householder or member of the Reform Association (58).

No such condition appears to have applied in the Paisley Reform Society. The Renfrewshire Political Union naturally included members from a wider area. When at the Meeting of the Association on 17 March 1831, a larger Committee of twenty-seven came into being it included

> for show 3 cotton spinners (59).

A comparison could be made here with the presence of the handloom weavers on the Committee of the Renfrewshire Political Union although Fleming and McAndrew would make their presence felt and no doubt the three cotton spinners on the Glasgow Committee did likewise. It would appear therefore, that in general it was easier to gain access to the two Reforming organisations which had links with Paisley than it was to become a member of the Glasgow Reform Association, especially for the local working classes. This was reflected in the Reform Association's comparatively low membership of 300 in a city with a population at that time of just over 200,000. The dissatisfaction, which was felt with the Reform Association, culminated in the formation of the Glasgow Political Union in late 1831.

The Glasgow Political Union represented another strand in the Reform Movement. It had a wider range of interest than the Reform Association. It represented a 'more popular approach' but it did not tend to extremism and it was still 'heavily imbued with middle class ideology'. There was a slight 'lowering' of social 'tone' in the twenty-one Committee members, a larger number than the Reform Association. The six main office bearers who were elected in December 1831 comprised one brewer, one tea dealer, one merchant, one bookseller and two of independent means. Dr. Montgomery concludes that there was in Glasgow a considerable amount of co-operation between the working classes and the middle classes who wanted Reform and she gives reasons for this

> Co-operation was fostered by the social and economic structure. Glasgow had a variety of avenues to combat social unfairness. Social mobility was possible (60).

Clarke and Dickson had reached a similar conclusion in their study of Paisley where they found that the prevalence of small manufacturers in the town meant that it was relatively easy for handloom weavers to

make the transition upwards. This social mobility facilitated class collaboration in Paisley, too. Another conclusion reached by Montgomery was that Glasgow handloom weavers or working men

> had no hankering after a pre-industrial golden age (61).

There would seem to be a difference here with Paisley where some writers did express just such a 'hankering' but the Paisley weavers, because of the nature of their fancy work, did enjoy a better standard of living in those earlier years than their Glasgow counterparts. Montgomery believes that the attitude of the Glasgow handloom weavers led to schemes of self-help rather than

> a denunciation of machinery or a call for parliamentary reform (62).

There was a similar belief in schemes of self-help in Paisley but this did not result in a rejection of Parliamentary Reform as a possible solution. The weavers of Paisley were strong advocates of Boards of Trade to regulate prices, for example, as one possible solution but throughout there were always calls made for Parliamentary Reform alongside other potential remedies.

Dr. Montgomery states that

> On the whole Glaswegians tended to hold the attitudes of a business community (63).

Paisley, where many of the weavers were employed by Glasgow houses, was a much more working class community and consequently held the attitudes of that branch of society. Montgomery's conclusion about the Glasgow Reform Movement is that like Oldham there was co-operation between the classes rather than conflict. Glasgow's role, however, between 1830 and 1832 was not negligible because the city

provided a notable amount of political agitation and pressure. From this analysis by Montgomery of these two Reform bodies in Glasgow, some comparisons can be drawn with the Movements in Paisley.

The first comparison, which can be made with Paisley, is that both the Glasgow Reform Association and the Glasgow Political Union were set up after the formation of the Birmingham Political Union and were modelled on that organisation. Montgomery says of the Glasgow Political Union

> like the Reform Association, it was supposedly set up in imitation of the Birmingham Political Union (B.P.U.) (64).

The Paisley Reform Society, though not the Renfrewshire Political Union, had been formed before the Birmingham Union and was part of an older Radical tradition linked with the London Reformers. It was therefore the only one of the four organisations considered here which did not owe its existence to the influence of Attwood's Union and it was the local weavers who had been to the forefront in establishing the Paisley Reform Society. It was the successful culmination of several attempts by the Paisley working classes led by the weavers to set up an organisation specifically to campaign for Parliamentary Reform. Of the four organisations discussed, the Paisley Reform Society appears to have been the most open to working class influence. Furthermore it seems to have been the most Radical in the demands that it made. It seems to have been fairly active both in the number of Meetings which it held and in the amount of material which it produced but information about it in the press is sparse. It was formed two years before the Glasgow Political Union provided a similar organisation which catered for a wider audience in that city. By their leadership in the formation of this Society, the Paisley weavers maintained their long established Radical tradition but their influence was already beginning to wane and they were soon

supplanted even here by the petty bourgeoisie who were even more amenable to overtures of friendship from the middle classes and wealthy landowners when they became involved in Reform activities.

In support of her argument in favour of class collaboration, Montgomery shows that the working classes in Glasgow wished to join with the middle classes in the Reform Movement

> the operatives themselves first thought in terms of co-operation, that is, they wished to join the Reform Association, rather than immediately set up their own breakaway movement and were willing to help the middle classes to recover their rights (65).

Similarly the Paisley weavers had wished to join with the wealthier classes to push for reforms as early as 1826 but had received no encouragement. Neil, the Radical weaver, had stated at that time that only through the classes working together could the situation be improved. When support from the middle classes was still not forthcoming three years later the Paisley weavers had gone ahead on their own. However, once the middle classes had become involved with the formation of the Renfrewshire Political Union, the two oganisations were able to exist together. By that time the working class hold on the Paisley Reform Society had been somewhat weakened. The involvement of the middle classes and wealthier inhabitants was generally welcomed and seems to have been regarded as necessary for the success of the Reform Movement.

In her coverage of the Reform Movements in Glasgow, Montgomery finally concludes that

> All in all the parts played by the Reform Association and the Political Union had been minimal - despite protestations to the contrary (66).

The Paisley Reform Society, like the two Glasgow organisations, had also played a very minimal part. It was less important or influential than the Renfrewshire Political Union which was dominated by prominent, well known figures such as Wallace of Kelly, Speirs of Elderslie and the Maxwells of Pollok. It received much less press coverage and consequently its existence has not been noticed by historians.

Montgomery also concluded that

> The main interest and significance of the Reform Association and the Political Union lies in how they illustrate different strands in the reform movement; and in the reactions to them (67).

The Paisley Reform Society and the Renfrewshire Political Union also represented different strands of the Reform Movement. In the case of the former it is a strand whose existence has been recognised in the work of historians like Clarke and Dickson but not positively identified in organisational form hitherto.

Nevertheless, the Paisley Reform Society represented a serious attempt by mainly weavers, at the outset, to improve their worsening conditions in a peaceful manner through political means. Such references as can be found in the newspapers to the Society, were generally favourable. It seemed to have acquired credibility as a responsible organisation. Moreover, as dissatisfaction with the Reform Association in Glasgow led to the formation of the Political Union in that city so the mere existence of the Paisley Reform Society, originally dominated by weavers who were liable to ask for Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments helped to bring into being a more moderate, middle class but also a more influential Reforming organisation in the area. In Glasgow, a predominantly middle class body was replaced by a more popular, more working class organisation

whereas in Paisley the trend appears to have been away from working class leadership towards a more middle class dominated Movement. The climate of opinion, nationally, towards the end of 1830 was more favourable towards the idea of Reform which encouraged the middle class involvement but there undoubtedly had been pressure in that direction even earlier in Paisley from the working classes.

Having played such a prominent part in the agitation it was fitting that the Reform Act of 1832 gave the town the right to elect an M.P. to represent it in Parliament for the first time. However, in a town with a population of about 60,000 in 1831, the number of people who were entitled to vote was only 1,242, a very small percentage of the populace. Two candidates stood in the town at the first General Election of 1832. One was Sir John Maxwell who was already well known locally as a Reformer through his participation in the Renfrewshire Political Union. His opponent was the much lesser known Conservative candidate, John McKerrell, who was described as an 'East Indian Nabob' by the Loyal Reformers Gazette which not surprisingly supported Maxwell.

> The good old veteran, Sir John Maxwell, will be made a 'Member' for the first time, by his neighbours the honest Radicals of Paisley, in spite of all the East India Nabobs among them! His heart is in the right place there can be no doubt (68).

The newspaper was proved to be absolutely correct in this prediction because Maxwell proceeded to win the contest comfortably to become the first M.P. for Paisley. It is interesting in the light of the town's Radical tradition that a candidate chose to stand in the Conservative interest. In Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock and Perth, although there were contested elections, the candidates were all described as Liberals of one sort or another. The reason almost

certainly was that few of the Reformers in Paisley were eligible to vote under the £10 qualification which might just have enabled a Conservative candidate to squeeze in. Nonetheless, in keeping with the town's Radical tradition it was the candidate who was believed to be a Reformer who was predictably successful.

The result of the local election was as follows:

Paisley - 1832 - December 21 - Constituency, 1242

L Sir John Maxwell Bart. of Pollok	775
C John McKerrell, Manufacturer, Paisley	180
Liberal Majority	595 (69).

However, Sir John Maxwell was already over sixty years of age by the time of his election and it would require a man of considerable energy to satisfy the hypercritical Paisley voters and perhaps equally importantly the large majority of non-voters who frequently held joint meetings with the voters where they had an opportunity to express their opinions and exert some pressure of their own. Much was expected from the Reformed Parliament in general and much was expected locally from the town's elected representative, especially in light of the prominent part Maxwell had played in the Union which had undoubtedly helped to ensure his victory.

Sir John had been on the original Committee of the Renfrewshire Political Union and other landowning members of that body also stood for Parliament in 1832. Sir John's son secured a comfortable majority in Lanarkshire which he continued to represent until 1837. Speirs of Elderslie had died in 1832 but Robert Wallace of Kelly was elected in Greenock which he represented until his resignation in early 1845. However, Robert Cunningham Bontine of Ardoch, another member of the original Committee of the Union, was unsuccessful against Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, Baronet of Greenock and Blackhall,

in the election contest in Renfrewshire. Sir Michael was regarded as a moderate Reformer but in his Address to the Electors, he upheld both the Corn Laws and Church Patronage, which alienated him from the Radicals. Furthermore he had taken no part in the Renfrewshire Political Union. Although a considerable part of Bontine's expenses were met by the Radical Associations, he did not receive the support from leading figures in the Union that he was perhaps entitled to expect. Wallace could not afford, without seriously damaging his own political prospects to go against Bontine's opponent, Stewart, because of the latter's influence in Greenock. Sir John Maxwell had long beem a friend of Sir Michael Shaw Stewart and was only prevented from lending him his active support by the Paisley Radicals who wanted Bontine to win (70). It is clear, therefore, that the Renfrewshire Political Union was not a unified political grouping in the modern sense of a political party and that its members were still subject to patronage and influence.

Sir John Maxwell did not last long as M.P. for Paisley. Evidence of dissatisfaction with his performance in the House of Commons was early apparent, and was voiced only two months after his election by the Glasgow Evening Post. Following Sir John's vote against the abolition of sinecures, the newspaper said,

> He was the first Baronet in Scotland who joined the middle classes of society, to assist them in obtaining their rights, and no one whatever in that rank has at any time gone so far for the purpose of extending the elective franchise to all classes of Society, and for the extinguishing of all abuses in the state. Yet since ever he has taken his seat in the House of Commons, on every division that has taken place, he has been a wanting on the popular side. In no contested election in the country was the popular party so triumphant as in Paisley.

> This is an evident proof they possess the whole power, and we trust they will never fail to exercise it ...No representative has been returned more firmly pledged than the representative for Paisley, and if he should forget that he is so, we trust the people will not. But should both parties neglect their duty, we shall endeavour to hold them to it (71).

The extent of interest in political matters in Paisley was too great, however, for Maxwell's conduct to go unnoticed in the town. The question of pledges was taken very seriously as is shown in the press quote above and at a Public Meeting in March, Aitken, the Radical schoolmaster, expressed the disappointment that was felt with Maxwell when he said,

> the people of Paisley had been completely deceived by their representative.

Another speaker at the same Meeting, Erskine McFarlane, went as far as to propose that the voters should take action against Maxwell when he said

> the only thing the electors should do was get up a requisition, calling on Sir John to resign, as he had already violated his pledges (72).

This, however, was not supported. In an Address to the Electors before the Election, Maxwell had described himself 'As a warm friend to the principle' that pledges should be given to the electorate by the candidate (73).

Later, Sir John was described as 'behaving himself better' and 'giving satisfaction'. In February 1834, however, Sir John Maxwell did resign his seat stating that it had never been his intention to

remain in Parliament if he was not giving satisfaction. He had represented the town for just over a year. In a letter addressed to Provost William Hardie, Sir John had said,

> When I consented to become Member of Parliament for Paisley, I agreed to resign my seat at the close of a Session, if my short career failed of giving satisfaction to my constituents. In accordance with this principle I now tender my resignation (74).

The local pressure and dissatisfaction was clearly the reason for his resignation rather than disillusionment with the job since he was induced to stand for Parliament again at the Renfrewshire Bye Election in January 1837 caused by the death of Sir Michael Shaw Stewart. He was no more successful than Bontine had been a few years earlier as he, too, was defeated by the Conservative candidate, George Houstoun (75).

His resignation naturally necessitated a Bye Election in Paisley which was held on 24 March 1834. The size of the electorate had changed very little since the General Election in 1832. There were now 1,261 voters which was a very small increase of nineteen. There were three candidates in this Bye Election of whom two stood as Liberals. These were Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford, a Professor of Greek at Glasgow University and John Crawford. The other candidate was a Conservative, Lieutenant James E. Gordon.

The Bye Election resulted in a narrow victory for Sandford over the other Liberal candidate, Crawford. Again, interestingly, a candidate had stood in the Conservative interest but the votes were cast overwhelmingly in favour of the two Liberal candidates. The result of the Bye Election was

Paisley - 1834 - March 24 - Constituency, 1261
On the resignation of Sir John Maxwell

L Professor Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford	542
L John Crawford, London	509
C Lieut. James Edward Gordon, London	29
Liberal Majority	1022 (76).

The party designations, however, were somewhat misleading in this Bye Election because as the local newspaper had said,

> The great struggle, on this occasion, has been between moderate reform and established church principles, on the one hand, and radical reform and voluntaryism, on the other (77).

It was recognised that both Gordon and Sandford were on the side of moderate Reform and the Established Church. The Glasgow Courier, which was a Tory newspaper edited for a time by William Motherwell after he left Paisley, described them thus

> one is a reforming conservative - the other a conservative reformer (78).

John Crawford was recognised as the representative of Radical Reform. A more Radical candidate, Douglas, had withdrawn before the Bye Election in order not to split the Radical vote. Sandford may have been thought to favour Reform but he was a most unlikely candidate to represent Paisley despite the support that he received from the Loyal Reformers Gazette edited by Peter McKenzie

> Here is our man! - Nor do we hesitate for one moment to declare that our hearts beat high for his success (79).

The Tory Glasgow Courier had a much clearer perception when it commented wryly on

> The nomination of this learned personage to represent the most thoroughly radical borough in broad Scotland (80).

The Glasgow Saturday Post, more sympathetic to the Reformers, was also more perceptive when it gave grudging support to Crawford, not to Sandford, although it would really have preferred the more Radical, Douglas. After the election of Sandford, the Glasgow Courier again drew attention to the irony of the situation, emphasising the religious aspect

> Paisley - the town where a week ago, to have doubted the omnipotence of the Voluntary Church party would have been considered madness - is now to be represented by a man more decidedly pledged to support the Established Church than any other member from Scotland, and all owing to the disgust occasioned by the intolerance of the late dominant faction (81).

The last part of this statement referred to the success in the local election four months earlier of the Voluntary Church party. Sandford himself was an Episcopalian and as such a supporter of Established Churches.

There were a number of reasons which can be given to explain why the Bye Election resulted in a victory for Sandford rather than Crawford. It was certainly not as simple as suggested by the Glasgow Courier. The influence of the Established Church was probably greater than the Glasgow Courier thought or than the result of the recent local election indicated. The interference of the Glasgow 'Clique', a

group of Whigs who tended to control elections in that city, in support of Crawford, was resented in Paisley, always jealous of its independence from its larger neighbour. Crawford himself, born in Islay, ex-Governor of Singapore, former ambassador to Cochin China, was less well known in Paisley than Sandford and could be represented as a bit of a carpetbagger being pushed into the constituency to get a Glasgow Reformer a seat. Sandford was able to remind the electors that his brother had successfully defended Speirs in the 1820 trial which had been a highly popular result in the town, although the bulk of the defence work was probably done by John Peter Grant.

It was not the case though that the Reformers or weavers simply failed to recognise Sandford as an unreliable ally to their cause, as the main explanation for his victory was the still unrepresentative nature of the franchise following the 1832 Reform Act. If the franchise had been extended below £10 householders which would have enabled more weavers and artisans to vote then the outcome of the election would have been very different.

A breakdown of the occupations of those who were entitled to vote clearly illustrates that despite the fact that the number of weavers in the town exceeded the number of manufacturers overwhelmingly, more of the latter were enfranchised. Furthermore as can be seen from an examination of how these two occupational groups voted, the manufacturers gave their support to Sandford whereas the weavers more emphatically supported Crawford. Of the 137 manufacturers enfranchised, seventy-eight voted for Sandford, fifty for Crawford, three for Gordon and six were non-voters. Of 105 weavers enfranchised, sixty-nine voted for Crawford, a mere three for Sandford and only one for Gordon.

A similar pattern can be found in other occupational groups. Merchants, for example, followed the manufacturers in supporting Sandford by twenty-eight votes to thirteen for Crawford, with five votes for Gordon. The town's shoemakers, on the other hand, another

occupation with a Radical tradition, supported Crawford by ten votes to four, with no support for Gordon. Grocers also supported Crawford by forty-two to thirty-one with only one grocer voting for Gordon. Bakers by nineteen to eight and wrights by nineteen to fourteen were other occupational groups who gave their support to Crawford. Spirit dealers, however, by twenty-six to seventeen voted in favour of Sandford. An exceptional occupational group was the town's twenty-one writers of whom only one voted for Crawford, nine voted for Sandford, one did not vote, and the largest number, ten, voted for the Conservative candidate, Gordon.

Support for Sandford was greater in the middle and low parishes of the town where few weavers were enfranchised and much less in the Abbey and High parishes. In the High parish even the manufacturers, by nineteen to twelve, gave their support to Sandford. It is interesting to note how the Committee members of the Renfrewshire Political Union cast their votes in this Bye Election. Of the twenty-four who can be positively identified in the list of voters there was overwhelming support for Crawford but it was not unanimous. The breakdown was sixteen votes for Crawford, four votes for Sandford, one for Gordon, and three were non-voters (82).

The margin of Sandford's victory was fairly narrow so that it seems safe to assume that a wider franchise would have resulted in the election of Crawford. The voting pattern across occupational groups strengthens the conclusion that if the franchise had been extended to greater numbers of the working classes the small majority that Sandford secured, would have been overturned. Such a conclusion gives added weight to the fairly accurate prediction of the Glasgow Courier that Sandford

> will fail - miserably fail. It is utterly impossible that a person of his acquirements and

> taste can have any real sympathy with the mass of his constituents. They will harass him to death, before he has been three months a member, and pelt him with brickbats if he does not resign. No man that was ever born of woman will satisfy the expectations of the Paisley constituency (83).

The newspaper was more or less correct because Sandford resigned in September 1834, after only six months, with the complaint that it would require an M.P. for each weaving house in the town to satisfy Paisley. This was somewhat unfair on his constituents as more than they were unhappy with his performance after his election. The Loyal Reformers Gazette, for example, which had warmly supported Sandford at the Bye Election, now said,

> Sandford, we say, is no longer to be trusted as a Reformer. He has gone over to the Tories of Glasgow, as glaringly as any man could do (84).

Nevertheless, the reason for Sandford's resignation clearly illustrated the high level of interest in political matters that continued in the town even after the passage of the Reform Act. This high level of interest had been evident in the amount of Reforming activity undertaken prior to the passage of the Act and it continued to be reflected in the high turnout of voters in the early contested elections in Paisley which compared favourably with other towns and cities in Scotland. This point will be developed more fully later. Sandford's resignation also serves as a further indication of the pressure that could be brought to bear on elected representatives and which was brought to bear by the Paisley constituents. This pressure came not only from the voters but also from non-voters who made their voices heard frequently at joint Meetings which were held with the voters.

No new member was elected to replace Sandford until January 1835 when

there was another General Election. In Paisley, on this occasion, there was a straight contest between two candidates, Captain A. Graham Speirs and Captain Horatio Ross, both designated as Liberals. Speirs was regarded as the Reformer. Once more the expectations of the Radical Reformers were great

> there will not be a contested election in the whole country that will terminate more triumphantly for the reform cause than that of Paisley; nor to all appearance will a more decided Reformer be returned

The return of Sandford, who was now regarded as a Tory, at the previous election was attributed to the

> disunion that exists among the Reformers (85).

but was considered to be only a 'momentary triumph' for the Tories.

The electorate of Paisley had increased slightly once more by 1835 so that it now numbered 1,510 against the previous 1,261. This increase was clearly insufficient to alter the balance of the electorate or markedly increase the number of weavers or members of the working classes enfranchised. Victory went to the more Liberal candidate, Speirs.

> Paisley - 1835 - Jan. 19 - Constituency, 1510
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | L Alex. Graham Speirs of Calcreuch | 661 |
> | L Horatio Ross of Rossie Castle | 477 |
> | Majority | 184 (86). |

Although the result would not have been altered, the margin of victory would have been greater had it not been for the continued unfair

franchise. A breakdown of how occupational groups voted clearly demonstrates that the weavers gave their support overwhelmingly to Speirs whereas the manufacturers only did so by a very small margin. Of 119 weavers described as electors, only sixteen supported Ross, eighty-seven voted for Speirs and sixteen either did not vote or, although described as electors, were not properly qualified. Of the 165 manufacturers, fifty-two voted for Ross, fifty-five voted for Speirs, and fifty-eight were non-voters.

A glance at other occupational groups confirms a similar trend to that which was evident in the previous election. The seventeen shoemakers again supported the more Liberal candidate. Ten voted for Speirs, while only one voted for Ross and six were non-voters. The eighty-one merchants supported Ross with twenty-seven votes, twenty-two votes for Speirs and thirty-two non-voters. Another closely divided occupational group were the writers who voted nine for Ross, eight for Speirs and seven were non-voters. Other occupational groups generally gave their support to Speirs. Spirit dealers supported him by twenty-seven votes to seventeen with nineteen non-voters. Similarly, grocers voted forty-eight to nineteen in favour of Speirs with twenty-three non-voters; bakers voted eighteen to seven with eight non-voters; and wrights voted eighteen to eleven with ten non-voters (87).

There were allegations of intimidation and bribery from both sides in this contest. The Glasgow Evening Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer drew attention to the bribery and intimidation which had been directed at the supporters of Speirs (88). The Glasgow Courier, however, which had supported Ross, counterclaimed of intimidation by supporters of Speirs,

> to such an extent has grocers and bakers, and spirit dealers, and fleshers, and other retail dealers been annoyed by intimidation, that many of them bitterly regret being put in possession of the franchise (89).

An examination of the voting pattern in the previous election in the town, however, when no such claims appear to have been made, reveals that bakers, in almost the same proportion, and grocers, too, had given their support to the candidate who was deemed to be the more liberal. Only spirit dealers would appear to have markedly changed their allegiance which tends to suggest that the intimidation may not have been as prevalent as the Glasgow Courier suggested. However, in his farewell speech to his supporters in the Saracens Head Inn, Ross clearly felt that intimidation had been a very significant factor in his defeat,

> It was a sad, a humiliating thing, to see this great city, the 4th. town of Scotland, in point of population, and 1 of the 1st. in point of intelligence, surrendered into the hands of the mob (90).

Speirs was to prove no more acceptable as the town's representative in the House of Commons than his two predecessors had been. Early in 1836 he, too, resigned and the town once more faced an election. Like Maxwell and Sandford before him, Speirs had proved to be a disappointment to his constituents. In Speirs case he appears to have made little impression in the House of Commons,

> We have had 3 Representatives already, without our existence as an enfranchised town being known in Parliament; it is now certainly time, therefore, that the name of Paisley should be occasionally mentioned in the House of Commons (91).

Paisley's expectations about representation in Parliament were perhaps unrealistic and almost certainly too much was expected too soon from the elected member but it provides further evidence of the continuing widespread local interest in political matters.

In the ensuing Bye Election, which was held on 17 March 1836, the two candidates were Archibald Hastie, a merchant, and James Aytoun, an Edinburgh Advocate, both of whom were described as Liberals. The local Reformers seem to have decided to give their support to Aytoun. At a joint Meeting of Electors held in the Old Low Church chaired by Provost Hardie and of Non-Electors chaired by John Osborne, it was decided to support Aytoun and to ask Hastie to withdraw which he wisely did not do. Prominent local Reformers such as Kennedy, Barr and Henderson were in attendance at this Meeting (92).

The size of the electorate for this Bye Election had dropped slightly from 1,510 in 1835 to number now 1,457. Despite the decision of the Reformers to support Aytoun, it was Hastie who emerged as the victor,

Paisley - 1836 - March 17 - Constituency, 1457
On the resignation of Mr. Speir

L Archibald Hastie, Merchant, London	680
L James Aytoun, Advocate, Edinburgh	529
Majority	151 (93).

Again the result had been affected by the imbalance in the franchise because the weavers gave their support to Aytoun. Of 119 weavers who voted, eighty-four supported Aytoun against thirty-five who voted for Hastie. On the other hand the 172 manufacturers supported Hastie by 125 votes to forty-seven. The eighty-five merchants who voted, gave their support to Hastie by sixty-three votes to twenty-two. Grocers, however, supported Aytoun with fifty-six votes against thirty-four for Hastie. Shoemakers by nine votes to seven also supported Aytoun. If more of the working class and more of those sympathetic to the cause of Reform had been able to vote then Aytoun would almost certainly have won (94).

Once more it appeared that the hopes of the Reformers had been disappointed, not by the elected member's performance in the House of Commons as on the previous occasions, but even earlier because they believed that the wrong man had been elected. The Glasgow Evening Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer voiced the disappointment felt by many of those sympathetic to the cause of Reform

> The Paisley Election has terminated in favour of Mr. Hastie, contrary both to our expectations and wishes (95).

Only a month later, however, the same newspaper had reversed its opinion due to Mr. Hastie's performance in the House of Commons, where he voted in a manner which was likely to find favour with the vast bulk of his constituents,

> Mr. Hastie continues to vote, not only with the Liberals, but with the real practical Reformers, usually denominated Ultra Radicals (96).

After the disappointments with the first three elected members for the town following the divisions caused by the agitation for the Reform Bill, there at last seemed to be the possibility of real political stability in Paisley. The first local burgh elections had taken place in 1833, and Paisley had returned what was generally regarded as a Radical Council. John Henderson, Robert Bisset, and Robert Cochran, who were all prominent local Reformers later to be involved in the Chartist Movement and the Anti-Corn Law League, had all been elected to office. Archibald Hastie was to remain M.P. for the town until his death on 9 November 1857. He was re-elected in 1837, 1841, 1847, 1852 and 1857. On all but the last two occasions he was returned unopposed although William Thomason, a Chartist from Vale of Leven, did stand against him at the Hustings in 1841. Hastie, therefore, remained the town's representative in Parliament throughout the terrible depression

of the early 1840s, the agitation for Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Chartist Movement. He supported Repeal but he did not support the Chartists which was why they opposed him in 1841. The details of the three remaining elections in the town during the period of this study, their dates, results and size of constituency are given below:

Paisley - 1837 - July 25 - Constituency, 1600

L Archibald Hastie — Unopposed

Paisley - 1841 - July 2 - Constituency, 1257

L Archibald Hastie	157
Ch William Thomason, Vale of Leven	0

Paisley - 1847 - Aug. 2 - Constituency, 1600

L Archibald Hastie — Unopposed (97).

At the 1841 election, Thomason won the majority of support at the Hustings but he withdrew when Hastie called for a Poll. Despite Thomason's withdrawal a Poll had to be held at which there was no support for the Chartist candidate. This was a stark illustration that enfranchisement did not extend to the many townspeople who supported the Charter. Apart from this one instance, there appears to have been no real challenge to Hastie's position between 1836 and 1852 when finally another Liberal candidate stood against him.

Nevertheless, an illustration of the considerable interest taken in political matters in the town had been the consistently high turnout at the contested elections which were held between 1830 and 1848, when compared with other towns and cities in Scotland. In each of the four contested elections held in Paisley between 1830 and 1848, which were

those of 1832, 1834, 1835 and 1836, the number of votes cast as a percentage of the number of people entitled to vote exceeded seventy five per cent on every occasion. This can be contrasted with the voting record in other Scottish towns at this time.

A brief examination has been made of the number of votes cast in contested elections in the constituencies of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock and Perth between 1830 and 1848. In none of these constituencies was such a high level of electoral turnout maintained throughout the period. In Aberdeen only three contested elections were held during those years. The first of these in 1835 achieved a sixty four per cent turnout but the later elections in 1841 and 1847 both fell below fifty per cent. Similarly in the other constituencies a very high turnout at the first contested election after the passage of the Reform Act, in 1832 in every case except Aberdeen, was not sustained in later contests even in places such as Perth or Dundee with reputations for Radicalism. Greenock was the only other constituency which ever again in those years achieved over seventy per cent turnout, in 1845 after Wallace's resignation and in 1847 but even then did not reach the seventy five per cent which was the lowest figure at the Paisley elections.

Tables of the election results in each of these plaecs are given below for the purpose of comparison.

Results of contested elections in the major towns and cities of Scotland between 1830 and 1848:

Aberdeen - 1835 - Jan. 19 - Constituency, 2101

L Alex. Bannerman	938
C Admiral Sir Arthur Farquhar	372
Lib. Maj.	566
Turnout	64.7%

Aberdeen - 1841 - July 6 - Constituency, 2723

L Alex. Bannerman	780
C William Innes of Raemoir	513
Ch Robert Lowrey Newcastle	30
Lib. Maj. over C.	297
Turnout	48.5%

Aberdeen - 1847 - Aug. 3 - Constituency, 3101

L Alex. Dingwall Fordyce of Brucklay	918
L Col. William Henry Sykes, London	422
Maj.	496
Turnout	43.2%

Results of contested elections (contd.).

Dundee - 1832 - Dec. 22 - Constituency, 1622

L George S. Kinloch of Kinloch, Perth	852
L David Charles Guthrie, Merchant, London	593
Majority	259
Turnout	89%

Dundee - 1837 - Aug. 2 - Constituency, 2283

L Rt. Hon. Sir H.B. Parnell	663
C John Gladstone of Fasque	381
Lib. Majority	282
Turnout	45.7%

Dundee - 1841 - July 3 - Constituency, 2027

L George Duncan, the Vine, Dundee	577
L John Benjamin Smith, Manchester	445
Majority	132
Turnout	50.4%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Edinburgh - 1832 - Dec. 21 - Constituency,6048

L Rt. Hon. Francis Jeffrey (Lord Advocate)	4035
L Rt. Hon. James Abercromby	3850
C Forbes Hunter Blair Edinburgh	1519
Lib. Majority	6366
Turnout	78.5%

Edinburgh - 1834 - June 2 - Constituency, 6512
On appointment of Mr. Jeffrey as a Judge of Court of Session

L Sir John Campbell (Attorney-General)	1932
C John Learmonth of Dean	1401
L James Aytoun, Advocate	480
Lib. Majority	1011
Turnout	58.5%

Edinburgh - 1835 - Jan. 16 - Constituency, 7863

L Rt. Hon. James Abercromby	2963
L Sir John Campbell	2858
C Lord Ramsay (subsequently Marquis of Dalhousie)	1716
C John Learmonth	1608
Lib. Majority	2497
Turnout	58.4%

Edinburgh - 1846 - July 15 - Constituency, 5929

On Mr. Macaulay's appointment as Paymaster-General of the Forces

L Rt. Hon. T.B. Macaulay	1735
L Sir Culling Eardley Smith Bart. of Hadley, Middlesex	832
Majority	903

Edinburgh - 1847 - July 31 - Constituency, 7114

L Charles Cowan of Valleyfield	2063
L William Gibson-Craig	1854
L Rt. Hon. T.B. Macaulay	1477
C Peter Blackburn of Killearn	908
Lib. Majority	4486
Turnout	44.2%

Edinburgh returned two candidates to Parliament at the above elections.

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.)

Glasgow - 1832 - Dec. 21 - Constituency, 6994

L James Ewing of Strathleven	3214
L James Oswald of Shieldhall	2838
L Professor Sir D.K. Sandford	2168
L John Crawford, London	1850
L John Douglas of Barloch	1340
L Joseph Dixon, Dumbarton	995
Turnout	88.6%

Glasgow - 1835 - Jan. 17 - Constituency, 8241

L James Oswald of Shieldhall	3832
L Colin Dunlop of Tollcross	3267
L James Ewing	2297
Turnout	57.0%

Glasgow - 1836 - Feb. 17 - Constituency, 8883
On resignation of Mr. Dunlop

L Lord W.H. Cavendish Bentinck	1995
L George Mills, Merchant, Glasgow	903
Turnout	32.6%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd).

Glasgow - 1837 - May 27 - Constituency, 8773
On resignation of Mr. Oswald

L John Dennistoun of Golfhill	3049
C Robert Monteith of Carstairs	2298
Lib. Majority	751
Turnout	60.9%

Glasgow - 1837 - July 28 - Constituency 8773

L Lord W.H. Cavendish Bentinck	2767
L John Dennistoun	2743
C James Campbell of Stracathro	2124
C Robert Monteith	2090
Lib. Majority	1296
Turnout	55.4%

Glasgow - 1841 - July 6 - Constituency, 8130

L John Dennistoun	2789
L James Oswald	2738
C James Campbell of Stracathro	2435
L George Mills	314
Lib. Majority	3406
Turnout	50.8%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Glasgow - 1847 - July 31 - Constituency, 9589

L John McGregor, London	2196
L Alex. Hastie, Lord Provost of the City	2082
L William Dixon of Govanhill	1872
L John Dennistoun	1748

Turnout 41.3%

Glasgow, like Edinburgh, returned two candidates at these elections.

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Greenock - 1832 - Dec. 24 - Constituency 985

L Robert Wallace of Kelly	493
L John Fairrie, Sugar Refiner, Greenock	262
Majority	231
Turnout	76.7%

Greenock - 1837 - July 28 - Constituency, 1158

L Robert Wallace	401
C James Smith of Jordanhill	202
Lib. Majority	199
Turnout	52%

Greenock - 1841 - July 7 - Constituency, 1168

L Robert Wallace	406
C Sir Thomas John Cochrane	309
Lib. Majority	97
Turnout	61.2%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Greenock - 1845 - April 18 - Constituency, 962
On the resignation of Mr. Wallace

L Walter Baine, Merchant, Greenock	350
L Alex. M. Dunlop of Corsock, Advocate	344
Majority	6
Turnout	72.1%

Greenock - 1847 - July 31 - Constituency, 1094

L Viscount Melgund (V.H. Elliott)	456
L Alexander Murray Dunlop	315
Majority	141
Turnout	70.4%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Paisley - 1832 - Dec. 21 - Constituency, 1242

L Sir John Maxwell, Bart. of Pollok	775
C John McKerrell, Manufacturer, Paisley	180
Liberal Majority	595
Turnout	76.8%

Paisley - 1834 - March 24 - Constituency, 1261
On the resignation of Sir John Maxwell

L Professor Sir Daniel Keyte Sandford	542
L John Crawford, London	509
C Lieut. James Edward Gordon, London	29
Liberal Majority	1022
Turnout	85.6%

Paisley - 1835 - Jan. 19 - Constituency, 1510

L Alex. Graham Speir of Calcreuch	661
L Horatio Ross of Rossie Castle	477
Majority	184
Turnout	75.3%

Results of contested elections in Scotland (contd.).

Paisley - 1836 - March 17 - Constituency, 1457
On the resignation of Mr. Speir

L Archibald Hastie, Merchant, London	680
L James Aytoun, Advocate, Edinburgh	529
Majority	151
Turnout	82.9%

Results of contested elections in Scotland 1830-1848 (contd.).

Perth - 1832 - Dec.26 - Constituency, 780

L Laurence Oliphant of Condie	458
L Lord James Stewart	205
Majority	253
Turnout	85%

Perth - 1835 - July 29 - Constituency, 900

L Hon. Arthur Fitzgerald Kinnaird	355
C Sir P. Murray Thriepland of Fingask	188
Majority	167
Turnout	60.3%

Perth - 1841 - July 2 - Constituency, 949

L Hon. Fox Maule of Dalguise	356
C William Faichney Black, London	227
Lib. Majority	129
Turnout	61.4%

All these election results have been taken from T. Wilkie, The Representation of Scotland, and the percentage turnout worked out from the figures given there.

Coupled with the dissatisfaction expressed with the town's first three elected Members this high turnout provides further evidence of the considerable interest which was taken locally in political matters. This interest had its roots in the climate of debate and intellectual discussion fostered by the clubs which had been formed in the town by the weavers during their years of prosperity. It was an indication, too, of the pressure which could be brought to bear on those who were enfranchised by those who were not. It was a recognition of the value and importance of possession of the right to vote which had only been achieved after a hard, determined struggle. So far as can be ascertained from a brief look at these constituencies none of them appears to have experienced the same problems with their elected members which occurred in Paisley. The explanation has to be found not so much with the individuals elected as with the excessive expectations of the Paisley constituents and non-voters.

The composition of the Town Council and the initial satisfaction with Hastie meant that the Glasgow Evening Post and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer felt able to comment contentedly at the end of April 1836

> Paisley is thus placed in exactly the position it ought to be; we have a Radical Council doing everything in their power to extend the liberties and privileges of the people, and we have a Radical Representative in the House of Commons, pursuing the same course - a course which may lose Mr. Hastie the support of those who took him up because they could not get Mr. Colquhoun of Killermont, but which is certain to gain him the hearty approbation of the great majority of the electors, and of 4/5 of the whole inhabitants (98).

The situation of the town in 1836, if as described, was just reward for the determined efforts by so many of the townspeople in support of Reform during the previous six or seven years. The number of Meetings which were held by a wide spectrum of the populace, the number of letters and petitions which were prepared and the fact that the town had served as a base for two active Reform organisations, bear ample testimony that Paisley can surely stand comparison with anywhere in the amount of Radical, Reforming activity which took place.

All classes of the community had become involved to some extent. The town's commercial, middle classes had united with the county landowners to form arguably the most important Reform organisation or pressure group in Scotland. However, as this chapter has sought to show the motivation behind the formation of the Union owed as much to a desire to maintain social stability as it did to a desire to achieve widespread Parliamentary Reform. Nor was the Union as important or as influential as was sometimes claimed at the time. Even leading figures in the Union such as Wallace of Kelly still needed to, and were not too idealistic not to, rely on patronage, that vestige of Old Corruption, to some extent to ensure election; in Wallace's case from Sir Michael Shaw Stewart. Furthermore, the formation of the Union did not lead to real unity or mutual support amongst the leaders as Robert Cunningham Bontine of Ardoch discovered in the Renfrewshire Election of 1832. It was undoubtedly a vehicle for furthering personal political aims and a means of helping to gain election to Parliament for ambitious men whose desire for some measure of Parliamentary Reform was nonetheless genuine.

It is important to note that prior to the formation of the Union, the working classes and the petty bourgeoisie, led by a hard core of weavers, had taken the initiative to form their own Society. Leading figures such as Fleming, McAndrew and Neil, all weavers, had been involved in the earlier agitation in 1820 from which they had learned much. As a result of the experience gained at that time coupled with

the general enlightenment associated with the town from the days of the 'Golden Age' they possessed the organisational ability and self confidence to set up the Society. Following the failure of 1820, they recognised the need to obtain the co-operation of the middle classes. In other words as Neil's letter seems to make clear they saw themselves as a distinct class. They felt, however, that there was an identity of interests between the two classes and that by working together they could achieve their mutual aims. This implied furthermore a clear recognition of their own position of weakness as a class, a belief which had been strengthened by the defeat of 1820. Clarke and Dickson make the point that the Radical War of 1820

> must be interpreted as a considerable defeat for the Jacobin revolutionaries, after which the proponents of a constitutional route to Parliamentary Reform regained the initiative (99).

There was certainly a realisation of the futility of employing violent tactics. Many of the personalities involved in 1830 were the ones who had been active ten years earlier and they always thereafter remained wary about the use of violent methods. Only with the appearance of Chartism did a credible alternative political leadership of the working classes emerge in the town which was prepared to countenance 'physical' means to achieve political change. The 1820 Rising did cause the local propertied classes who were Whig inclined to seek to take control of Reform agitations in 1830-1832 as suggested by Clarke and Dickson but they were also surely influenced by the more recent positive action taken by leaders of the working classes in setting up their own Reform Society.

The alliance, which came about so easily in 1830, did so because for over three years it had been sought by some of the leading weaver Reformers and in that sense it cannot be said to have been initiated by the bourgeoisie or county landowners. The Meeting held prior to

the establishment of the Renfrewshire Political Union showed, however, that there were a number of Radicals in the town who would not be welcome nor who would wish to participate in that body and whose interests would be better served by joining or remaining within the Paisley Reform Society. Sir John Maxwell may indeed have been 'to the fore in forging a broad class alliance on Reform' through his part in the Renfrewshire Political Union but he seems to have shown little interest in such activity when invited by Neil in the letter he had written a few years earlier.

This does not contradict the findings of Clarke and Dickson regarding the moderate elements who fostered a class alliance nor the unvenness in the development of working class consciousness and the existence of alternative political leaderships. It does strengthen, however, the view to which these two historians seem to incline that even at the time of greatest harmony and co-operation between the classes in 1830-1832 there still existed a more extreme element within Paisley Radicalism. This element was always present in the town forming a link between the 'illegal tradition' defeated in 1820 and the supporters of Physical Force Chartism of later years. It also shows that the whole situation was more subtle and less of a categorical clash between simple opposites such as 'Physical' and 'Moral'.

The means adopted to achieve Reform were the same in both the Paisley Reform Society and the Renfrewshire Political Union but the ultimate objective was not always identical. Violence was not favoured but the more extreme position of the Paisley Reform Society was evident in the demands for Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments. There was, therefore, no real physical threat posed to the constituted authorities but the fear of such was understandable and to a large extent justified in view of the past history of Radicalism in the town allied to the deteriorating economic conditions and living standards. This fear was always present after the riots of 1819 even in the minds of those among the wealthier, middle classes who were

sympathetic towards the cause of Reform. The evidence of the letters to the Government from leading figures in the area such as Provosts, Magistrates, Sheriffs at the times of economic distress illustrates the fear that existed in their minds about public disorder. A remote Government in London was bound to take heed of the views of the people on the spot.

In Paisley even after the apparently satisfactory situation which existed by 1836 there was still much for the Reformers to do. As has been already noted the Reform Act of 1832 fell far short of the more Radical minded aspirations. Only a very small proportion of the local population had been enfranchised. There was dissatisfaction with the elected M.P.s. Annual Parliaments and the Ballot had not been achieved. Moreover the most serious economic depressions were still to come in the late 1830s and 1840s so the Parliamentary Reform legislation had not solved these problems nor helped the worsening position of the weavers. Even bribery, corruption and patronage were still evident in post-1832 elections. There were still many issues to be tackled by Reformers in the Chartist Movement and there was also the question of Repeal of the Corn Laws to be resolved.

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THE ANTI-CORN LAW AGITATIONS
and the Development of Ideas in the 1830s and1840s

There would seem to be widespread agreement amongst historians that Repeal of the Corn Laws was another issue where there was a substantial degree of co-operation and collaboration between the classes. This was the issue along with Parliamentary Reform on which the small manufacturers and petty bourgeoisie could unite in common cause with the handloom weavers and working classes of Paisley according to the study by T. Clarke and T. Dickson (1). It therefore fits into the general theme of the relationship between classes and the development of class consciousness. It is also an important issue in a study of the extent and nature of protest which took place.

Repeal of the Corn Laws was part of the Radical package of Reform and it was generally supported by the weaving communities. Support for Repeal as an issue in the local Reform Movement played a large part in the town's history, throwing light on the classes of townspeople involved, their motivation and the threat that was posed to the constituted authorities. Arguably this was the issue which caused the Government the greatest concern as that which was most likely to lead to a breakdown of law and order in the town. Recent historians of the Anti-Corn Law agitation in Scotland have sought to show that considerable activity took place in Scottish centres, challenging the long held view that it was an essentially Manchester dominated Movement. These Scottish studies have concentrated on the larger cities of Scotland so that no real study has been made of the history of the Movement in Paisley. Nevertheless there was considerable activity in Paisley, too, which began early and continued to a greater or lesser degree until 1846. Like Chartism and the agitation for Parliamentary Reform the Movement for Repeal was not new as its Scottish historian, K.J. Cameron, has clearly shown,

> Considerable continuity existed from previous agitations and the evolution of the movement in Scotland underlines, as in the case of chartism, the importance of precedents (2).

The argument was over Free Trade or Protectionism. The Corn Law of 1815 prevented the importation of foreign wheat if the price of the home grown produce fell below eighty shillings per quarter or eight bushels. The Act safeguarded the farming interest but it tended to make food scarce while keeping the price high enough so as to be bound to affect the lower paid working classes in a very fundamental, practical way. The 1815 Bill was, however, only a stage in a whole series of such measures which had been passed in a contest between the claims of producers, the landowners and consumers that stretched back into the eighteenth century. Traditionally it was a much more emotive issue than political representation had ever been. A modern historian, B. Lenman, has pointed out that

> ... between 1735 and 1800 ... roughly two-thirds of all popular disturbances seem to have been triggered off by absolute shortage or high prices of food (3).

There was, however, a dilemma for Reformers who could support Repeal as part of their programme of political change and of land law Reform in their continuing struggle against the landowning classes in the belief that it would be the first measure passed by a Reformed Parliament. If Repeal were passed by an unreformed Parliament, however, then opponents of Parliamentary Reform might accept it as the lesser of two evils and use that as an argument against the need for further change in the legislative system. After 1832, the failure of a Reformed Parliament still to introduce Repeal led to renewed agitation on the issue.

There was some disagreement amongst contemporaries over the extent of working class participation in the national Anti-Corn Law Movement. Early writers on the history of the Movement such as Archibald Prentice, who was one of the founder members of the Anti-Corn Law League, and John Morley, biographer of Richard Cobden, the League's leading figure, both tended to minimise the extent of involvement of the working classes (4). Both writers were anxious to stress the leadership, which was middle class, and the organisation, which was good, that the Anti-Corn Law League brought to the previous uncoordinated agitations. Morley quoted Richard Cobden, himself, speaking in 1842, on the middle class nature of the agitation,

> I do not deny that the working class generally have attended our lectures and signed our petitions, but I will admit, that as far as the fervour and efficiency of our agitation has gone, it has eminently been a middle class agitation (5)

Cobden's purpose in making this statement was to distance the Movement from the Chartists and to allay worries which had arisen on that score in some quarters. His biographer, Morley, admitted that later the picture did change,

> As time went on, the share of the working class in the movement became more satisfactory. Meanwhile it is important to notice that they held aloof, or else opposed it as interfering with those claims of their own to practical power, which the Reform Act had so unexpectedly baulked (6).

An opposite view which indicated early working class involvement was put forward by the Chartist, Robert Lowery, who said,

> ... the middle classes and shopkeepers as a body never petitioned for the repeal of the corn laws and but few of them were conversant with the subject. It was not until the working men had held meetings and petitioned until they were tired, and had turned to seek an entrance into political power in order to carry these and other changes, that the trading community began to study these subjects and to seek for free trade (7).

Free Trade suited the economic outlook of textile mnufacturers and, at the same time, gave them a cause with which to advocate Reform all without fundamentally changing the existing system.

A very different observer, the Scottish Tory, Robert Aiton, writing in 1820, the year of the Radical Rising, also testified to working class concern regarding the Corn Laws when he said

> The Tories believed the distress was the result of the transition from war to peace; the Whigs attributed it to their exclusion from office; the Radicals blamed the distress on the absence of annual parliaments and universal suffrage; while the working classes blamed everything on the Corn Bill (8).

The handloom weavers were believed to be largely in favour of Repeal. It was the finding of Jelinger C. Symons in his Report on the industry that

> the duties on the importation of foreign corn are alleged to be the chief cause of depression in all the departments of manufacturing industry, but more especially that of handloom weaving (9).

Symons returned to this point repeatedly throughout his Report to emphasise the weavers' support for Repeal, stating that

> The only measure desired by the weavers, or advocated by the manufacturers, as a sufficient remedy for the existing depression, is the repeal of the corn laws (10).

This was not strictly true because Trade Boards were put forward as a possible solution by weavers and manufacturers alike and were particularly favoured in Paisley. Nevertheless, Clarke and Dickson, in their study of Paisley, also suggest that the weavers were supporters of Repeal and refer to the

> continued appeal of Corn Law repeal to sections of the working class (11).

This meant that the issue was one of the factors which

> continued to generate a tendency towards class alliance on particular issues in the 1830s and 1840s (12).

Recent work by Scottish historians has also challenged the long held view that Scotland was later than England in taking up the issue and the belief that the whole Movement began in Manchester and remained uunder the leadership of that city. Early writers, such as Morley, gave the impression that it was only after the appearance of the Anti-Corn Law League and the efforts of their lecturers that there was any activity in Scotland. When Morley described the visit of four missionaries, Cobden, Bright, Thompson and Moore to Scotland in 1844, he indicated that the idea of Repeal was new in Scotland,

> In Scotland the new gospel found a temperate hearing and much acceptance (13).

Much modern work on Repeal has also tended to concentrate largely on the activities of the League and its origins in Manchester (14).

Fortunately, the recent studies on Scotland have shown that there was considerable activity here, too, and much of it long before the appearance of the Anti-Corn Law League (15). Research has been undertaken which illustrates the importance and early involvement of Glasgow which might well have resulted in that city rather than Manchester becoming the centre for the agitation. Later, Edinburgh assumed leadership in Scotland. Important Scottish figures have been rescued from comparative obscurity to be accorded their rightful recognition in the history of the Movement, such as William Weir of Glasgow and Duncan McLaren of Edinburgh who became a Liberal M.P.. There is a rather flattering two volume biography of McLaren by J.B. Mackie (16). There is no full scale biography of Weir, who was actually a more important figure in the campaign for Repeal of the Corn Laws than McLaren, but there are some excellent articles by K.J. Cameron (17).

Weir was the editor of the Glasgow Argus newspaper which began publication in 1833, six years before the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League in Manchester, and he made Repeal the main plank of its policy. An attempt was made shortly after this to set up a Free Trade newspaper, the Western Independent, in Paisley but it was not of long duration although the editor continued his career and policy elsewhere.

> The Western Independent, Radical and Voluntary, ran for a few months from February, 1834, and is notable only as an early free-trade ally of the Glasgow Argus, with a policy for which its editor, James Adam, found fuller scope in the Aberdeen Herald (18).

The broad social spectrum of the Movement in Scotland, at least in the early phase, is also recognised in these recent accounts. Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, from its formation in 1783, is known to have consistently taken a prominent part in opposing the Corn Laws, advocating Free Trade in grain in 1787 and petitioning in 1822. Glasgow Town Council also advocated Free Trade in grain as early as 1791 (19). Corn Laws in Scotland had existed since before the 1707 Union with England and demands for modification or Repeal had been intensifying in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The means of agitation took the various forms of riots, uncoordinated petitioning or pressure on Members of Parliament (20). There appears to have been comparatively little direct activity by way of protest in Scotland between about mid 1815 and 1825. As far as Paisley was concerned there was admittedly a banner at the Meiklerigg Moor demonstration in 1819 which called for Corn Law Repeal. It may not have been the burning issue at this time but it was still part of the Reform package which was consistently sought.

The most intense activity generally occurred during times of hardship or prior to the introduction of legislation such as Peel's measure in 1828 which brought in a sliding scale. Between 1828 and 1832 the energy of the Reformers was expended in the Reform Bill agitation. It was hoped that the first measure of the Reformed Parliament would be Repeal of the Corn Laws but when these hopes were disappointed it acted as a stimulant to renewed agitation in the late 1830s. Economic conditions in towns during the mid 1830s were relatively good so that important impulse to action was absent.

Nevertheless, the working classes in Edinburgh established the Edinburgh Mechanics Anti-Corn Law Association on 20 November 1833 which has been described as

> the first society in Scotland with the specific and exclusive aim of repeal (21).

A short-lived Committee had been formed by Dundee operatives in 1826-27. The Glasgow Anti-Corn Law Association was formed in 1838 with a much more middle class membership. Both bodies were, therefore, established before the Anti-Corn Law League in Manchester. As a historian of the Scottish agitations, Dr. Fiona Montgomery, has pointed out,

> In general, therefore, current historical interpretations have tended to overemphasise the part played by Manchester in the agitation and wrongly ignore the city that had advocated repeal many years before Manchester (22).

This necessary, valuable work on the agitations in Scotland has shown how much activity there was in the country's major cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, with some mention of events in other places where Anti-Corn Law Associations had been established, such as at Dundee.

In examining events in Paisley, it is clear that there were early signs of protest in that town, too, against restrictions on corn imports. It is further clear that all the customary means of protest were employed at various times in Paisley, namely riots, Public Meetings, petitioning and pressure on M.P.s. The Town Council, manufacturers and societies had opposed the 1774 Act which placed restrictions on oatmeal. This was as early as Glasgow which

> had displayed a continous interest in corn laws since the last quarter of the eighteenth century (23).

In 1791, thirty-two delegates from Incorporated Trades and Friendly Societies in Paisley passed a resolution against the legislation of that year. This legislation sought to encourage exportation by the giving of bounties and restrain importation by the imposing of duties. The resolution claimed that the measure would adversely affect

> the peace and welfare of the labouring poor who are the radical instruments of British opulence and prosperity (24).

At the turn of the century, poor crops led to scarcity of provisions which resulted in corn dealers and farmers being mobbed in the town. The Lord Lieutenant and Sheriff had to issue a proclamation which offered a reward for information leading to the arrest of the ringleaders after inflammatory placards appeared and riotous and disorderly mobs assembled (25). This demonstrated the passions which could be aroused by this issue and the potential for violence which it created. The issue of the Corn Laws brought many of the local Radical leaders into political life for the first time. It was at an Anti-Corn Law Meeting in the Saracen's Head Inn in June 1813 that John Parkhill made his first appearance as a public speaker. In his Autobiography he commented that

> we were half a century too early, Mr Cobden, I presume, being a very little boy then (26).

Paisley, therefore, like other major Scottish towns, had clearly shown a long term interest in, and opposition to, the Corn Laws and despite the image of a well ordered law abiding town as portrayed by Smout and contemporary newspapers there had been some disorder.

It was the proposed legislation of 1815 which sparked off the strongest opposition so far in the town as it did elsewhere. The first Provost of Paisley, John Orr, presented a petition on 5 March 1814, to Kirkman Finlay who was an M.P. from 1812 to 1818, against the proposed Corn Bill (27). The town, although entitled to do so by the Charter of Erection of the Burgh, had only appointed its first Provost in 1812, a move which in itself recognised the growing importance of Paisley and the increasing civic pride (28). Kirkman Finlay was a Glasgow merchant who had successfully evaded Napoleon's

Continental Blockade. He was believed to favour Repeal but was later to have his windows smashed by the Glasgow mob when his actions proved otherwise (29). Finlay was applied to on this occasion because he was believed to be sympathetic to Repeal and Paisley still did not have a representative in Parliament.

On 29 April, 1814, there was a meeting of the heads of the Incorporated Trades in the town at the request of their members to consider the proposed Corn Bill (30). In the chair was John Morris, Deacon of the Shoemakers. Also present were Deacons of other trades such as David Wylie of the Tailors, Alexander Watson of the Fleshers, John Robertson of the Gardeners, Alexander McQueen of the Wrights, Robert Wylie of the Bakers, Walter Lindsay of the Smiths, and William Alexander of the Masons. Seven resolutions were passed at this Meeting. Like their predecessors in 1791 they decided to

> unite with their fellow citizens and subjects

against the measure which they considered would be 'injurious to all'. They professed no deep knowledge of political economy but were sufficiently aware that all the main authorities were against legislative interference in trade which was practised, they claimed, only in countries under abject slavery. They did not wish to express any hostility towards landowners but did not see why they should be treated differently from other classes. This resentment over the political advantages that the landed classes had through their representation in Parliament was linked to the need that working men felt to protect their own interests by guaranteed representation. It was a further example of the growing awareness of class differences.

Reference was pointedly made to the blame heaped on operatives when they had attempted to fix a minimum wage when 40,000 handloom weavers had participated in the strike of 1812, and this remained a particularly sore point in the town. They wondered why the two

situations should be treated differently. This was another step towards an increased realisation of the differences of class as the real problem and there followed a warning that unless something was done these divisions would be widened. They advised the landed proprietors that they should identify with other classes or they would earn the reputation of 'grinders of the poor' whereas previously they had been relatively well respected. This was the beginning of erosion of the idea that the traditional representatives could be trusted to look after the general good of all in their constituencies. There was a growing recognition by the working classes of the need to be represented by someone who shared their interests. The M.P. for Renfrewshire was urged to oppose the proposed measure. Copies of the resolutions were to be submitted to Lord Archibald Hamilton, M.P. for Lanarkshire from 1812 until his death in 1827, and Kirkman Finlay. Finally they thanked the Provost and local Magistrates for their efforts, presumably a reference to the petition sent by the latter to Finlay, and urged other Corporations and Public Bodies to follow their example.

This Meeting was similar to others which were being held in Scotland around this time, also by working men, for instance by the Rutherglen weavers at the Trades Hall, Glassford Street, Glasgow (31), by the Trades and Friendly Societies in Hamilton (32), the Coopers and Tailors in Glasgow (33), and the Friendly Societies in Ayr (34). In May 1814, another General Meeting of the Inhabitants of Paisley was held in the Methodist Chapel in Storie Street, where it was unanimously agreed to petition both Houses of Parliament against the proposed Bill. A Committee was appointed to manage the business with Alexander Manson, a reedmaker, as President. During the speeches, reference was again made to the previous efforts of the workers to obtain relief, the danger to trade from the Bill and the effect on the Poor Laws (35). Petitions were being presented from all over the country at this time but because the legislation was postponed the agitation died down in the second half of the year (36). There would

thus appear to have been a wide consensus of opinion amongst all classes in the town against the Corn Bill which eventually passed through Parliament in 1815 with very little opposition but there seemed also to be a growing awareness of class differences, and there had been considerable activity by the working classes and the trade unions.

Between 1815 and 1825 there was relatively little agitation for Repeal. Rather it appeared as only a part of the Radical programme. It does not appear to have been one of the issues which preoccupied the Radicals in 1819-1820 to any great extent although there was a banner, calling for Repeal, carried at the Meikleriggs Moor demonstration in September 1819. Meetings on the subject were held in the town in October and December 1821 (37). In 1826, the inhabitants of Renfrewshire were again roused to attend a Meeting on the Corn Laws because of the proposed legislation which culminated in the 1828 Act (38). The situation was aggravated by the extreme distress which was being experienced in Paisley during that year. With Mr. Clerk of Greenock in the chair, the Meeting in St. James Street Chapel was 'crowded to excess'. The Glasgow Chronicle was moved to comment on the propriety of conduct at this Meeting in contrast to the general demonstrations in Autumn 1819. One of the main speakers was John Neil, one of the Paisley Radicals who had been jailed in 1820. His main demand was for Repeal of the Corn Laws but he claimed that this would be no use except as part of a general economic re-think which must include a reduction in taxes. He stated that the regressive system of taxation in which revenue was raised mainly from consumption, not income tax, was the main grievance. He also called for the Reform of Parliament and condemned emigration as a solution to the distress. John Maxwell, M.P. for Renfrewshire, supported the call for popular election and Reform. He said that the working classes had won many friends, who had previously considered them to be hostile to the laws and constitution, by their recent conduct in the face of acute distress. Maxwell was M.P. for Renfrewshire from 1818 until 1830 and for Lanarkshire from 1832 until 1837. He was to become a leading figure in the Renfrewshire Political Union.