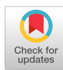

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ARTICLE

Myth, Manchester, and the Battle of British Public Opinion during the American Civil War

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Abstract

Manchester 'working men' approved an address in support of Abraham Lincoln's emancipation policy and the American Union at the Free Trade Hall on 31 December 1862. The US president described their gesture as 'sublime Christian heroism' when hopes of restoring the cotton supply and reopening the mills were better served by Confederate recognition. This transatlantic exchange became an integral part of the scholarly traditional interpretation that the British working class frustrated the pro-Confederate designs of the upper classes during the American Civil War. It formed the historiographical orthodoxy until revisionists countered that Lancashire workers advocated Confederate recognition. The Manchester meeting, revisionists claimed, was contrived to give the impression of working-class support for Lincoln which was, in fact, a myth. These two incompatible interpretations simplify and flatten the complexity of an event with local, national, and international ramifications. This article presents the first detailed examination of who organized the Free Trade Hall meeting and why. It moves scholarly understanding of the British public response to the American Civil War beyond its current stasis of 'traditional' versus 'revisionist' by placing the field in conversation with the recent history of radicalism and 'class' in the Victorian era.

The study of Victorian radicalism and reform politics turned upside down a generation ago in a heated debate over class and theory. The torch passed from an older generation of celebrated historians working in a Marxist tradition, most notably E. P. Thompson, to those taking a post-structural approach, such as Gareth Stedman Jones and Patrick Joyce, stimulating a backlash led by Neville Kirk and John Belchem among others. While 'class' was deconstructed and reconstructed by Victorianists, class remained central and unproblematic to a different group of historians studying British public opinion of the American Civil War. Indeed, class remains at the heart of the fierce historiographical debate between the 'traditional' interpretation of a pro-Union

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working class, at its strongest in the key propaganda battleground of Lancashire, and the contrary view of 'revisionists' who contest this view as a myth. Both sides take the explanatory logic of class for granted and, consequently, have missed, simplified, and even obscured the significance of the meeting at Manchester's Free Trade Hall on 31 December 1862. Scholars of Victorian radicalism since the linguistic turn have treated 'class' as multivarious and discursive rather than stable and fixed. This is the best way to approach the Manchester meeting and it highlights the problems of the class paradigm framing the historiography of this event and of British public opinion and the American Civil War in general.

The most famous discussion of the 'American question' during the war outside of the United States forms the cornerstone of the traditional interpretation because it sent a strong message of approval to Abraham Lincoln. It was 'a great meeting of the working classes', veteran campaigner George Thompson put it, 'of persons plunged into the deepest distress by the want of cotton' as the Federal blockade of Confederate ports prevented supplies from reaching Liverpool.[1] Revisionist historians countered it was stage-managed by middle-class partisans associated with John Bright and Richard Cobden and unrepresentative of working-class opinion. In fact, the meeting cannot be credited to one class or the other. A tight-knit group of Manchester working- and middle-class radicals, allies for many years in pursuit of reform, were the organizers. They presented themselves collectively as 'working men'. This discursive position underpinned and legitimated their right to intervene in British debate over the war that intensified in late 1862 following Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Well known in Manchester's radical politics, they acted in conjunction with anti-slavery and liberal allies to address local, national, and international concerns. Yet they are flattened and caricatured along class lines in a one-dimensional literature to date. Recovering their biographies from scattered sources, most importantly co-operative records, and establishing their wider network reveals a far more interesting and complicated story than previously depicted.

This article explains who organized the Free Trade Hall meeting and why. It sheds new light on pro-Union mobilization in Britain in late 1862, the relationship between domestic radicalism and the US, and connections to suffrage extension, from the Manchester radicals' perspective. The first part points out the flaws in Mary Ellison's revisionist dismissal of the meeting's authenticity which should no longer cast such a long shadow over the event. The second part situates J. C. Edwards and Edward Hooson, the meeting's primary organizers, within the 'advanced' working class, not the rank and file. As labour leaders and veteran campaigners, they assumed 'a unique insight into the needs and concerns of their class'.[2] The third part examines their partnership with members of the 'advanced liberal' middle class distinguished by long

[1] George Thompson to William Lloyd Garrison, 25 Dec. 1862, Ms.A.1.2.31.164, Boston Public Library (BPL).

[2] Matthew Kidd, *The renewal of radicalism: politics, identity and ideology in England, 1867–1924* (Manchester, 2020), p. 30.

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careers in Manchester radical politics. The fourth part finds the meeting's spark in the London Emancipation Society's (LES) November 1862 call to protest against the alleged Confederate sympathy of the British public and press. The decision to champion the Union, not just emancipation, was highly contentious, within the radicals' inner circle and in wider public debate. These seasoned political operatives, the fifth part argues, nonetheless put on a united front in presenting a statement of 'working men' at the Free Trade Hall intended as a significant intervention at a critical moment in the British response to the war. They did so in a hitherto unknown collaboration with Francis W. Newman – liberal intellectual, UCL professor, and driving force of the LES – who drafted the Lincoln address. The enthusiastic response of the Free Trade Hall audience, the sixth part concludes, was crucial to the founding of the Manchester Union and Emancipation Society (UES) dedicated to abolition *and* restoration of the Union. The polemical stalemate as to who was responsible fails to appreciate that the meeting's organizers were actually uncertain of the audience's reaction, which was essential to approving and legitimating the Lincoln address. The Manchester meeting marked the beginning of an organized pro-Union movement in Britain, but as Lancashire operatives held differing views of each side in the war, not one monolithic perspective, the endorsement of Lincoln and Federal policy that night cannot be regarded as prototypical of wider opinion.

I

Historiographies are usually built on layers of prior scholarship that merge over time but, in this case, dichotomous interpretations of the Free Trade Hall meeting co-exist. The traditional interpretation was built on contemporary evidence which generally concurred that the working class had spoken.[3] The Liverpool *Daily Post* applauded 'one of the most startling meetings ever held' in Manchester as 'working men…refused to remain any longer silent'. Having earlier disparaged their 'sheeplike attitude', Karl Marx was delighted with 'workers' meetings in Manchester, Sheffield, and London' on New Year's Eve that opened 'the Yankees' eyes', hoping Germans might stage 'similar demonstrations'.[4] Working-class stoicism during the cotton famine, epitomized by the Free Trade Hall meeting, was linked with the International Working Men's Association established in 1864 and the 1867 Reform Act. The Confederate newspaper published in London, *The Index*, could only complain that 'scarcely a single person of respectable character was present'. The memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, Union general and later American president, recalled Manchester's 'monster demonstration…when their workmen were

[3] E. D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (London, 1925), and Donaldson Jordan and Edwin Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War* (Cambridge, 1931) are the founding texts. See also James Ford Rhodes, *History of the Civil War, 1861–1865* (New York, NY, 1917).

[4] Liverpool *Daily Post*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 4; Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 17 Nov. 1862, 2 Jan. 1863, in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: collected works*, XLI (New York, NY, 1975), pp. 430, 439.

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almost famishing'.[5] Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the working men's 'sublime Christian heroism' and accepted their address 'with lively satisfaction' according to Secretary of State William H. Seward. Lincoln took just three days to reply. His speedy response was written during a particularly difficult period. Criticism of the 22 September Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation compounded the losses the Republican Party suffered in the November 1862 mid-term elections. The disastrous rout of Federal forces at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December ramped up the pressure. Many addresses were sent to Charles Francis Adams, US minister to Britain, and usually received a polite acknowledgement in due course. The Manchester reply was written by the president and delivered in person by the secretary of the US Legation.[6]

Five decades ago, Mary Ellison sought to demolish the traditional interpretation. The 'most famous and most misleading meeting of the war' was at the centre of her critique. The Free Trade Hall event was 'carefully arranged' to give 'an artificial but lasting impression of sincere working-class support for the North', Ellison asserted, 'contrived' rather than 'springing from spontaneous conviction'. Ellison cited *The Courier*'s scepticism – shared by *The Guardian* – of 'a very artfully contrived enterprise on the part of the friends of Messrs. Cobden and Bright'. Local newspaper editorials supposedly uncovered a 'carefully selected meeting of handpicked men who in no way represented the feelings of the town'. The 'middle-class mayor', Abel Heywood, 'led a middle-class deputation which probably dominated' proceedings 'and was largely responsible' for resolutions that attacked slavery and favoured the North. But 'the sentiments voiced there' were taken 'to typify the feelings of operatives not only in Manchester but throughout Lancashire'. Ellison concluded that 'myths are easily born but are often an unconscionable time dying'. The revisionist thesis was instantly acclaimed and politicized in Peter d'A. Jones's 'The history of the myth', the epilogue to *Support for secession*.[7]

Philip Foner bluntly responded that Ellison's selective reading of newspaper reports showed 'no evidence that nonworking-class elements' controlled the meeting. Richard Blackett more skilfully restated the traditional view of the Manchester event 'meant to demonstrate the depth of working-class support' for emancipation and the Union 'organized, financed, and dominated by the working class'.[8] Twenty-first-century historians are not so sure. Duncan Andrew Campbell defended Ellison's critique of the Free Trade Hall meeting in his influential 2003 monograph. Lancashire workers 'blamed their misery on what they perceived to be northern imperialism', Campbell agreed, so

[5] London *Index*, 8 Jan. 1863; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York, NY, 1894), p. 664.

[6] Abraham Lincoln to the 'Working Men of Manchester', 19 Jan. 1863; William H. Seward to Charles Francis Adams, 16 Jan. 1863, *Senate document 49*, 3rd sess., 37th Congress.

[7] Mary Ellison, *Support for secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* (Chicago, IL, 1972), pp. 5, 81–2 (citing Manchester *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 6), 199–219.

[8] Philip S. Foner, *British labor and the American Civil War* (New York, NY, 1981), pp. 20–4 (quote 21), 39–45; R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2001), p. 81.

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'we must abandon the unsustainable traditional interpretation'.[9] A recent scholar writes of the 'cliché of Civil War historiography to praise the Lancashire cotton operatives for refusing to support British intervention'. Another finds Lincoln's letter 'contributing to a deliberately reductive characterization for political ends' rather than a genuine response.[10] The taint of fraud is clear. Was Lincoln part of a charade orchestrated by Cobden and Bright?

No is the answer. *The Guardian* and *The Courier* opposed working-class radicalism and its proponents.[11] A *Guardian* editorial complained that the 'chief object of the meeting seems to have been to abuse' the newspaper but its New Year's Eve issue invited the abuse.[12] The offending article reported Edward Horsman's speech, praising the 'self-control manifested by the operatives of Lancashire'. Radicals regarded Horsman – Liberal MP for Stroud (and future Adullamite) – as a despised reactionary and were unlikely to be flattered by his remark. They were undoubtedly antagonized by his assertion that 'the whole operative class' shares a 'unanimous feeling of complete acquiescence in the course our government adopted' to the war. Worse, *The Guardian* editorial responded to Horsman's speech by warning that the operatives 'must not be perverted to the service of conclusions with which it has no concern'. Admirers of 'the form of government of which the United States have hitherto been considered an exemplar', it continued, cannot approve of its 'present course' bringing 'democratic institutions into discredit'. Even if they did, 'they would know better than to allow the organised expression of their opinion as a class to be thrown into one scale or the other in a foreign Civil War'. This patronizing advice was directed at the radicals but backfired. The US consul in Manchester noted 'attendance was greatly increased' because 'the *Guardian* rather sneeringly deprecated the [meeting's] intention…in its morning edition'.[13]

Primary organizer Edward Hooson underlined that 'he had been goaded to the calling of that meeting' by *The Guardian*.[14] Lines recited from its incendiary editorial defending the Confederacy's right 'to be left alone in the enjoyment of the institutions which they have lived for 80 years' prompted 'hisses and groans' from the Free Trade Hall audience.[15] *The Guardian*'s accusation that

[9] Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English public opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 5–11 (first quote 6), 194–206, 222–6, 246 (second quote).

[10] Tom Sancton, *Sweet land of liberty: America in the mind of the French left, 1848–1871* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2020), p. 76; Simon Rennie, 'This "Merikay War": poetic responses in Lancashire to the American Civil War', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 25 (2020), p. 129.

[11] David Ayerst, *The Manchester Guardian: biography of a newspaper* (Ithaca, NY, 1971), pp. 62–3, 99–101, 123–7.

[12] Manchester *Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

[13] *Guardian*, 31 Dec. 1862, pp. 3, 8 (editorial); Henry M. Lord to William Seward, 1 Jan. 1863, Despatches from US Consuls in Manchester, 1847–1906, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the vote in British politics, 1848–1867: the making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 116, 185, 202–3.

[14] *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 9.

[15] Manchester *Weekly Times*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 7.

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J. C. Edwards and Hooson were 'practised hands at agitation' who 'had got up the meeting' – implying a partisan gathering without genuine support – was not the first time the duo, or the reform causes they advocated, were attacked in print.[16] *The Courier* and *The Guardian* further alleged they concocted a role for the mayor. Foul play was detected when the proceedings began without a chairman, a position usually filled in advance. Mayor Abel Heywood was present, however, and his 'connection with the working classes in the past, and their esteem for him', Edwards maintained, 'entitled [him] to the position'. Hooson agreed and a show of hands elected Heywood unanimously. *The Courier* and *The Guardian* called this a 'dodge'.[17] The 'apparent surprise had been planned beforehand' with Heywood the 'juggler's accomplice…placed among the crowd whose senses he has undertaken to deceive'. The meeting gained a 'fictitious weight of sanction', an exalted status, consequently.[18]

Heywood had been earmarked for chairman, a position he had occupied frequently during his long career. Having become mayor on 10 November 1862, however, he faced a dilemma. This meeting was called by 'working men', not the city of Manchester. Both newspapers accused Heywood of 'impropriety' afterwards, recklessly associating his office with a cause contravening official government policy. *The Guardian* asserted that if his role had been known in advance the meeting would have been 'confronted by an opposition' and perhaps 'prevented by the remonstrances it would have elicited'.[19] Heywood insisted that he had not read the meeting's resolutions beforehand and took the chair in a personal, not an official, capacity. He did not wish to 'compromise any members of the council' but held a life-long 'interest in the proceedings of working men' and 'believed that the interests of working men and of this great country were intimately bound up with the question' that evening.[20] Manchester editors did not accept the explanation. Had they, or revisionist historians, realized that Heywood quietly joined the executive committee of the LES a week before the meeting, his position would no doubt have been further scrutinized.[21]

Unfortunately for scholars following the editorial trail, there is no reason to doubt Heywood's motive or standing. Ellison was misled by newspapers representing 'the views of the more wealthy manufacturers', as the *Daily Post* stressed. Heywood was a major figure in Manchester radicalism over three decades who worked side-by-side with Edwards and Hooson. He came from abject circumstances in Angel Meadow, Manchester's notorious slum called 'Hell upon Earth' by Engels, where he moved after his father, a weavers' putter-out, died when he was young.[22] Education was the key to Heywood's route out of poverty. He was a founding member of the New Mechanics' Institution in

[16] *Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 2.
[17] *Guardian*, 1 Jan. 1863, p. 3; *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 6.
[18] *Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 2.
[19] *Guardian*, 2 Jan. 1863, pp. 2–3; *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 6.
[20] *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 9.
[21] London *Daily News*, 25 Dec. 1862, p. 2.
[22] *Daily Post*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 4; Friedrich Engels, *The condition of the working class in England in 1844* (London, 1892), p. 53.

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1829, established to assert working-class influence over local education controlled by the middle class.[23] He opened a penny reading-room in 1831, known for its radical literature, became wholesale distributor of *The Poor Man's Guardian*, and was jailed in 1832 for refusing to pay stamp duty he regarded as a tax on knowledge. Heywood's service in municipal government after the borough of Manchester's incorporation in 1838 – as police commissioner, alderman, and on numerous committees – was testament to his tireless labour on behalf of Manchester's working class from where he came.[24]

Heywood was an intermediary between political factions and classes. From an Owenite background, he was appointed treasurer of the Chartist Manchester Political Union in April 1838 and the National Charter Association in July 1840. In the 1840s, he sought to bring Chartism and co-operation together and bridge divisions between Manchester Chartists and the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL).[25] Instrumental to the formation of a local branch of the middle-class Parliamentary and Financial Reform Society in September 1851, four years later Heywood chaired a working-class meeting advocating political reform 'as laid down in the people's charter'.[26] This was not an easy path to navigate but he found a willing ally in Edward Hooson, the 'acknowledged leader' of Manchester Chartists by the late 1850s.[27] They founded the Manchester Manhood Suffrage Association (MMSA) in an attempt to unite liberals and radicals. Dedicated to 'the principles of registered manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, triennial parliaments, and equal electoral districts' the first meeting of the MMSA was chaired by Hooson on 12 November 1858.[28] Heywood was persuaded by Hooson to stand in the 1859 Manchester parliamentary election. His agenda proved too radical for mainstream, ACLL-affiliated, liberals, however, whose rival Lancashire Reformers Union could only contemplate heavily watered-down measures. Although he was a prominent member of the Lancashire Reformers Union as well as the MMSA, mainstream liberals shunned Heywood who campaigned as 'the nominee of the unenfranchised thousands' excluded from the political system. *The Guardian* and *The Courier*, surprisingly reactionary in a city known as a radical stronghold, ridiculed 'the Chartist candidate's' unsuccessful campaign.[29] The enmity ran deep. Six years later, Heywood stood again for parliament once more insisting on 'fullest extension of the franchise'.[30] His

[23] Joanna M. Williams, *Manchester's radical mayor: Abel Heywood* (Stroud, 2017), pp. 21–4.

[24] Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 131–2, 144, 196–8.

[25] Ibid., pp. 108, 143, 150–1; Williams, *Manchester's radical mayor*, pp. 30–43.

[26] *Northern Star*, 27 Sept. 1851, p. 5; *Weekly Chronicle*, 27 Sept. 1851, p. 323; *Guardian*, 27 Jan. 1855, p. 9.

[27] Martin Hewitt, *The emergence of stability in the industrial city: Manchester, 1832–1867* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 252.

[28] *Guardian*, 13 Nov. 1858, p. 3.

[29] *Examiner and Times*, 7 May 1859, p. 4; *Courier*, 23 Apr. 1859, p. 7; 3 May 1859, p. 2; Williams, *Manchester's radical mayor*, pp. 92–105.

[30] *Courier*, 6 June 1865, p. 1.

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second defeat was 'a great triumph for the *Manchester Guardian*' one supporter griped.[31]

The aspersion that Bright and Cobden pulled strings was a further attempt to discredit the meeting but they were not directly involved. *The Guardian* – which attacked Lincoln in particular – and *The Courier* were as critical of the American Union as they were of domestic reform.[32] Bright and Cobden were the leading parliamentarians sympathetic to the United States and the Free Trade Hall their symbolic home. They remained close to Manchester politics through the ACLL's legacy and continued organizational reach, as Heywood found to his cost in 1859.[33] However, Cobden would not break his doctrine of 'non-intervention' in the affairs of another country. He turned down an invitation to join the LES, explaining that a British campaign might 'help the wrong side', the Confederacy, compromising continued neutrality.[34] Bright was far more forthcoming in defending the US and its president in public. Both of these great liberal statesman corresponded with Americans during the war, most importantly Charles Sumner.[35] Bright sharply rebuked Gladstone's infamous 7 October statement the Confederates had 'made a nation' in an important speech in early December. 'The Free States are the home of the working man', he responded, who was not 'excluded from' voting, a theme taken up on New Year's Eve.[36] It was Bright who informed Cobden of the 'great meeting of working men…for slavery, abolition, & for the Union', that 'the mayor will be in the chair', and 'Bazley is to be there, but the speakers are to be mainly of the working class'. Thomas Bazley, an ACLL veteran elected Liberal MP for Manchester in 1858, was possibly the source.[37] Nonetheless, Bright's presence on New Year's Eve was in spirit only. His position on suffrage extension was not clearly aligned with the radicals and both parties surely realized a more powerful statement was made without Bright or Cobden. Bright did not join the LES or the UES although he spoke at several meetings. G. M. Trevelyan's claim that he organized the pro-northern grassroots response, repeated by leading historians on both sides of the Atlantic, is erroneous.[38]

[31] Edward Greening, cited in Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the romance of politics, 1819–1869* (Oxford, 2003), p. 217.

[32] Ayerst, *Manchester Guardian*, pp. 151–5.

[33] Antony David Taylor, 'Modes of political expression and working-class radicalism, 1848–1874: the London and Manchester examples' (Ph.D. thesis, Manchester, 1992).

[34] Richard Cobden to William Evans, 9 Dec. 1862, fos. 36abcd, Evans papers, Alfred Gillett Trust.

[35] Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: a Victorian political partnership* (London, 1967), pp. 218–29.

[36] Frank Moore, ed., *Speeches of John Bright, M.P. on the American question* (Boston, MA, 1865), pp. 124–5.

[37] Bright to Cobden, 24 Dec. 1862, British Library, Add. MSS 43,384.

[38] G. M. Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright* (New York, NY, 1913), pp. 308–9; Philip Shaw Paludan, *'A people's contest': the Union and Civil War, 1861–1865* (New York, NY, 1988), pp. 269–70; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: greatness and illusion* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 452.

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II

Edwards and Hooson were 'working men' denoted as 'secretary and 'treasurer' respectively in advance notices of the meeting. Rather than vindicate the traditional interpretation, however, they must be carefully situated within mid-Victorian society where 'class' took many forms, in and of itself explaining little. Edwards and Hooson stood at the forefront of Manchester post-Chartist radicalism, a position which distinguished, if not distanced, them from the majority of their peers. Hooson was a wire-drawer from Halifax, who continued working as a wire-drawer during his long career as an agitator. Inspired by *The Northern Star*, he came to prominence at the end of the Chartist movement.[39] After moving across the Pennines in 1850, he became Manchester's leading Chartist but, in the changed climate of radical politics after 1848, advocated consensus not conflict. Rapprochement with middle-class liberals would have 'constituted a betrayal' previously but these were changed circumstances.[40] Hooson's 'lifelong commitment to the interests of the working classes' was flexible not dogmatic, it was stressed at his funeral, built on 'deep-seated principles and influenced by the needs of universal humanity'. He epitomized the 'new pragmatism' of radicalism at mid-century, to use historian John Belchem's term.[41]

John Charles Edwards, born in 1833 in Manchester (it is assumed), was a mechanic who earned his reputation as a temperance lecturer in his teens. The positivist intellectual Frederic Harrison, who visited Lancashire in early 1863, found him 'very intelligent, frank, cheerful and sensible, and out and out Chartist', the 'Leader of Manchester working men in political and social movements'. Chartist is misleading here. Edwards was not only too young to join the movement, but was 'a Coop. believer' with 'faith' and 'all his money' in co-operation, although he 'admits that it has its weaknesses'. Moreover, Harrison stressed, Edwards placed 'no faith in trades unions', finding them 'tyrannical and unreasonable'.[42] In other words, Edwards rejected direct protest advocated by most Chartists and by trade unions that grew stronger in the capital after the formation of the London Trades Council in 1860.[43] It was the co-operative movement that offered the best way forwards.[44]

Edwards and Hooson were co-operative evangelists, well known on the lecture circuit. Their regional, indeed national, reputation was made as rising stars who helped secure passage of the 1862 Industrial and Provident Societies Act enabling individual co-ops to group together collectively.

[39] *Commonwealth*, 17 Nov. 1866, p. 4.

[40] John Breuilly, Gottfried Niedhart, and Antony Taylor, eds., *The era of the Reform League: English labour and radical politics, 1857–1872* (Mannheim, 1995), p. 18.

[41] *Examiner and Times*, 24 Dec. 1869, p. 7; John Belchem, *Popular radicalism in nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1996), p. 102.

[42] Frederick Harrison, 'Diary of journey through Lancashire', Harrison correspondence, 2/1, London School of Economics Archives and Special Collections (LSE).

[43] James Owen, *Labour and the caucus: working-class radicalism and organised liberalism in England, 1868–1888* (Liverpool, 2014), pp. 7–8, 25–7.

[44] *Co-operative News*, 19 Mar. 1881, p. 185.

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Edwards subsequently became the first secretary of the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Society that 'ushered in a new phase' of the flourishing movement in 1863 when forty-eight societies established one umbrella organization.[45] Without doubt, the duo were not rank-and-file members of the working class. Were they plebeian radicals, to borrow Eugenio Biagini's term, upholding 'the continuation of older and genuinely popular plebeian traditions' after Chartism?[46] Were they proponents of popular radicalism, popular Liberalism, or popular liberalism (without links to the Liberal Party)? Clear-cut distinctions are difficult to discern.[47] At what point did the 'the respectable artisan' become the 'labour aristocrat' aloof from the masses? Engels's 1858 complaint that 'the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois' was aimed at labour leaders. Historians reject the labour aristocracy thesis, however, agreeing with D. G. Wright that it is 'no longer possible to regard working-class aspirations towards respectability and independence as merely imitating the middle classes'.[48] More broadly, Edwards and Hooson were part of an international radical movement dedicated to 'popular sovereignty, human equality, and universal emancipation locked in battle against the defenders of dynastic rule, aristocratic privilege, and inherited inequality'.[49] A transnational approach brings the Civil War closer to their immediate interests. Edwards and Hooson were also radical men with a gendered outlook. Establishing the contribution of women to the Free Trade Hall meeting is hampered by 'the disappearance of working-class women from the public sphere' in the mid-nineteenth century unfortunately.[50]

Edwards and Hooson can be approached in various ways but they were 'working men' – radicals in the vanguard of the advanced working class – first and foremost. They were 'the principal representatives of the operatives', Max Kyllmann wrote, 'two very intelligent men and good speakers, and known as the leaders of the most advanced section of the Manchester working men'.[51] Goldwin Smith sharply contrasted 'the working men of our cities' with the 'peasantry' in his lecture before a Boston audience in 1864. 'The intelligence of the class resides' in the former, who follow the war 'with eyes almost as keen and hearts almost as anxious as your own' and 'thronged' to meetings 'in favour of your cause'. Smith, Regius Professor of Modern History at

[45] John F. Wilson, Anthony Webster, and Rachael Vorberg-Rugh, *Building co-operation: a business history of the co-operative group, 1863–2013* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 47–55 (quote 53).

[46] Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, retrenchment, and reform: popular radicalism in the age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (New York, NY, 1992), p. 6.

[47] Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the people: industrial England and the question of class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 65–75.

[48] Engels, cited in Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Notes on the Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement', *History Workshop Journal*, 18 (1984), p. 127; D. G. Wright, *Popular radicalism: the working-class experience, 1780–1880* (Harlow, 1988), p. 166.

[49] Don H. Doyle, *The cause of all nations: an international history of the American Civil War* (New York, NY, 2015), p. 85.

[50] Helen Rogers, *Women and the people: authority, authorship and the radical tradition in nineteenth-century England* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 23.

[51] J. S. Mill to John Elliott Cairnes, 16 Dec. 1862, vol. 55, Mill–Taylor collection, LSE. Mill copied verbatim extracts from the letter of 'a strong Lancashire abolitionist' – Kyllmann – that is lost.

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Oxford and active member of the LES and the UES, perhaps had the duo in mind when contrasting Manchester's 'keen interest in great political and social questions' with Liverpool 'where trade reigns supreme'.[52] Smith caricatured the two northern cities for a New England audience in a speech designed to repair Anglo-American relations. But the assumption of an elite stratum within the working class post-Chartism was sharpened during the American Civil War. Radical leaders embraced the identity, which granted status and authority, and used it to forward their reform agenda. The discursive significance of the 'working man' was advanced by liberal intellectuals and Liberal politicians responding to the war and contemplating extension of the franchise.[53]

III

Radicalism in the world's first industrial city was not defined by class. Edwards and Hooson were the meeting's public face but were integral members of a larger group from diverse backgrounds. Internally, class lines were fluid, classic Marxist distinctions porous. But 'languages of class' suffused Victorian society and externally their partnership was one of class co-operation.[54] Middle-class colleagues included two kinds of advanced liberals. The first group came from the temperance movement. Thomas H. Barker, the son of a Lincoln cabinet-maker, moved to Manchester in 1844 and was a founder member of the United Kingdom Alliance in 1853. He was the driving force of this temperance organization which quickly grew in size and influence.[55] Samuel Pope, a Manchester barrister, was also a prominent member of the Alliance who stood as Liberal parliamentary candidate for Stoke in 1859. Although defeated, the non-electors gifted him a gold-embossed teapot, appropriately, 'as a token of their great respect for his talents and virtues'.[56] Temperance converged with radicalism for Barker and Pope. Temperance held particular appeal for Manchester's working-class elite, historian Brian Harrison notes, going hand-in-hand with co-operative goals of personal improvement. Even those not abstaining from alcohol generally supported the goal of moral uplift by the early 1860s.[57]

A second group consisted of those who might be described as Abel Heywood's peers, Manchester radicals dedicated to fundamental change. Elijah Dixon was the veteran. His father's manufacturing business bankrupted by the Napoleonic wars, Dixon began working in a Manchester mill before

[52] Goldwin Smith, *England and America: a lecture read before the Boston fraternity, December 1864* (Manchester, 1865), pp. 14, 18.

[53] Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian nation: class, race, gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 71–118.

[54] Patrick Joyce, *Democratic subjects: the self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 161–76.

[55] P. T. Winskill, *The temperance movement and its workers: a record of social, moral, religious, and political progress*, I (London, 1891), pp. 250–1.

[56] *Weekly Times*, 18 June 1859, p. 3.

[57] Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: the temperance question in England, 1815–1872* (London, 1971), p. 205.

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joining the reform movement in 1816. Imprisoned and released without trial a year later and present at Peterloo in 1819, he chaired the very first co-operative congress in May 1827. Dixon agitated for poor law and factory reform, was a thorn in the side of the ACLL, and part of the resurgent co-operative movement at mid-century as well as later attempts to extend the franchise.[58] Obituaries called him 'the father of English reformers'.[59] John Watts, the son of a ribbon weaver, was unable to work manually after suffering partial paralysis as a result of scarlet fever. Resident in Manchester from 1841, he was an Owenite, a late convert to Chartism, and a co-operationist who became 'one of the most indomitable advocates of extensive Parliamentary reform'.[60] Watts was instrumental to Manchester's civic improvement from the creation of parks to public education and libraries.[61] The brothers James and Robert Cooper were prominent Manchester Chartists famed for their insistence that negotiation was preferable to violence. Friends with Robert Owen, they began public lecturing at an early age. James Cooper's obituary noted his part 'in local agitations of almost every kind which concerned the interests of the working classes', an observation equally applicable to all group members.[62]

Two men completing the inner circle were of middle-class or higher social standing. Thomas Bayley Potter became president of the UES in January 1863 – its 'embodiment' according to the journal of the National Reform League.[63] The son of Manchester's first mayor, Sir Thomas Potter, he had a privileged education at Rugby School and University College London. This did not preclude participation in radical politics, though, where Potter's family were insurgents deposing the establishment. A Tory/Anglican elite contested power with a Liberal/Nonconformist challenger in nineteenth-century Manchester until municipal government was established in 1842. By the time city status was granted in 1853, the Liberal reign was in full swing.[64] The Potters built a large mercantile business and attended the famous Unitarian Cross Street Chapel where Manchester's 'leading commercial, professional, scientific and literary figures' worshipped.[65] Unitarians detested slavery and no doubt the prospect of British recognition of the Confederacy alarmed Potter.[66] Little is known about the German businessman Max Kyllmann, who

[58] *Commonwealth*, 1 Dec. 1866, pp. 4–5; George Jacob Holyoake, *The history of co-operation in England*, II (London, 1906), p. 640.

[59] *Courier*, 29 July 1876, p. 10; Rob Hargreaves and Alan Hampson, *Beyond Peterloo: Elijah Dixon and Manchester's forgotten reformers* (Barnsley, 2018).

[60] Hewitt, *Emergence*, pp. 292–3.

[61] Percy Redfern, *The story of the C.W.S.: the jubilee history of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1863–1913* (Manchester, 1913), p. 92.

[62] *Examiner and Times*, 15 Aug. 1874, p. 7.

[63] *Commonwealth*, 8 Dec. 1866, p. 1.

[64] V. A. C. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the pursuit of liberal hegemony in Manchester, 1790–1839', in Derek Fraser, ed., *Municipal reform and the industrial city* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 16–60.

[65] Alan Kidd, *Manchester: a history* (Lancaster, 2006), p. 60.

[66] Douglas Charles Strange, *British Unitarians against American slavery, 1833–1865* (Rutherford, NJ, 1984).

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emigrated to Manchester in the early 1850s, other than he founded a co-operative mill run on a profit-sharing basis. George Holyoake, his colleague in the venture, famous co-operator, and later historian, wrote of Kyllmann's 'passion for promoting public improvement beyond that which Englishman ordinarily displayed'.[67] By the mid-1860s, both men were demonstrably radical liberals, Potter in his capacity as newly elected MP for Rochdale and Kyllmann helping to establish the first female suffrage society in Manchester. Potter's natural affiliation was mainstream liberalism, but US minister Charles Adams found him of 'the radical school' that 'connects the issue of our struggle with the chances of progress in this Kingdom' when they met in 1864.[68]

Members of the advanced working and middle classes united under the banner of Manchester radicalism on New Year's Eve. Edwards, Hooson, Pope, Potter, and Watts spoke as well. This intra-class alliance reflected the broad realignment of radicalism, from Chartism to Liberalism, in which commitment to outright manhood suffrage was the major continuity. The failure of Parliamentary Reform Bills in 1859 and 1860 halted the movement nationally but did not deter the Manchester radicals. The inaugural meeting of the Manchester Working Men's Parliamentary Reform Association (MWMPRA) in February 1862, successor to the MMSA, was their latest drive for the franchise.[69] Martin Hewitt regards the 'proliferation' of Manchester suffrage organizations as 'a sign of weakness' but Malcolm Chase interprets provincial initiatives like these more positively.[70] For Heywood, Hooson, and the rest, there was surely a collective strength from persistent activism when mainstream liberalism was uninterested locally and nationally. A straight line can be drawn from the MMSA and the MWMPRA to the National Reform League, established in 1865, in their case. The day after another reform bill was defeated in parliament in May 1865, Edwards proposed that Potter, Heywood, Watts, Pope, Hooson, and himself attend a forthcoming conference to 'urge the adoption of manhood suffrage as the basis of a great national movement'.[71] Their long list of municipal improvements within Manchester perhaps facilitated confidence in the existing system and a determination to persist within it.

The frustrations over suffrage were counterbalanced by the rapid progress of the co-operative society the radicals founded. The driving force of the group was the Manchester and Salford Equitable Co-operative of which Hooson was president and Edwards secretary (he was also inaugural president). Reports of the Free Trade Hall meeting noted that a 'working men's organisation' covered costs.[72] That organization was the Equitable, which opened for business in

[67] Holyoake, *History*, p. 411. See also Max Kyllmann, 'Co-operation in Germany', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (London, 1864), pp. 630–40.

[68] Charles Francis Adams, Sr, 1 Dec. 1864, Diary, Massachusetts Historical Society; Anthony Howe, *The cotton masters, 1830–1860* (Oxford, 1984), p. 244.

[69] *Courier*, 1 Mar. 1862, p. 9.

[70] Hewitt, *Emergence*, p. 252; Malcolm Chase, 'The popular movement for parliamentary reform in provincial Britain during the 1860s', *Parliamentary History*, 35 (2017), pp. 14–30.

[71] *Examiner and Times*, 10 May 1865, p. 3.

[72] *Guardian*, 1 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

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June 1859, founded and run by the men who three and a half years later debated the Civil War. Formed relatively late in comparison to other Lancashire co-ops, the Equitable followed an established modus operandi and joined a growing movement. Membership consisted of 'labourers' from 'the manufacturing industry of our city'. Abel Heywood was the society's 'arbitrator', the first entry of its minute book recorded, and, just two days before New Year's Eve 1862, he chaired the Society's fourth annual meeting alongside Watts, Pope, Edwards, Cooper and others. Three weeks later, Potter donated '1500 cookery books' and Kyllmann 'the complete works of John Stuart Mill'. Shortly after that, the committee recommended Potter for the position of auditor. Co-operation was prominent, if not uppermost, in the careers of many of these men and one suspects that the Equitable constituted their crowning achievement.[73]

The Equitable was a resounding success story with nearly 3,000 members by mid-1862. Weekly profits fell from £1,500 to £500 during the cotton famine but more capital was invested in the Society than ever before. As the foundation stone of the new Central Store was laid in Ardwick (in central Manchester) in November 1863, Edwards recalled they had been derided as '"dreamers" for believing it possible to make our daily wants a stepping-stone to an improved social position'. But they had made their 'co-operative store a medium for social intercourse and literary culture – a sort of Working-men's Club, without the patronage'. Kyllmann anticipated 'the whole body of the working classes will enjoy the material and moral benefits of co-operation'. It led to higher goals. 'Give men social freedom', Kyllmann continued, 'and their political enfranchisement too may be obtained.'[74]

Co-operation was not simply an economic venture to the Equitable's founders, more a way of life. While rooted in the local, the movement demonstrated a progressive, international vision, as recent histories have begun to articulate.[75] Most importantly, the goal of individual and community uplift complemented the pursuit of working-class political participation, rather than taking the 'less overtly political' direction which Neville Kirk asserts co-operation encouraged.[76] It was forward-looking, leaving behind the conflict which marked labour relations previously. The organization's progress demonstrated 'class' was not fixed by economic struggle but, as Patrick Joyce notes more broadly of the mid-Victorian period, 'took diverse forms' that 'were political, moralistic, and quite capable of understanding society in ways to which conflict was foreign'.[77] This suggests a break from the past running counter to

[73] Manchester and Salford Equitable Co-operative, committee minutes, GB127.M473/1/1/1, 27 Apr. 1859; GB127.M473/1/1/2, 19, 28 Jan. 1863, Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives (MLIA); *Examiner and Times*, 31 Dec. 1862, p. 3.

[74] Committee minutes, 21 July 1862, MLIA; *Co-operator*, 46 (Dec. 1863), pp. 97–100.

[75] Peter Gurney, *Co-operative culture and the politics of consumption in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester, 1996); Anthony Webster, *Co-operation and globalisation: the British Co-operative Wholesales, the co-operative group and the world since 1863* (New York, NY, 2019).

[76] Neville Kirk, *Change, continuity and class: labour in British society 1850–1920* (Manchester, 1998), p. 45.

[77] Joyce, *Visions*, p. 29.

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the stress on radical continuities across the nineteenth century posited by some historians of radicalism.[78]

IV

Why did busy Manchester radicals turn to the American question in late 1862? A demonstration in support of Lincoln's emancipation policy to be enacted on 1 January 1863, heralding the beginning of the end of a detested institution, was seemingly axiomatic. Abolitionist meetings had previously been disrupted by Chartists, who complained of wage slavery and wanted problems at home addressed first and foremost, but this was a different era.[79] The presence of two African Americans on the platform symbolized that change. William Andrew Jackson became a British celebrity as 'President Davis's escaped coachman' after crossing the Atlantic in late 1862. The self-emancipated Jackson, still legally in the service of the Confederate president, 'was loudly called for' by the Free Trade Hall audience and 'addressed the meeting at some length with his usual eloquence and humour'.[80] James Watkins escaped from Maryland and travelled to England in the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. He was well known on the British antislavery lecture circuit and Heywood published the 19th edition of his autobiography.[81] African Americans stoked the fire of antislavery in Victorian Britain and would play a crucial role in the campaigns of the LES and the UES so their participation was entirely fitting.[82]

Hatred of slavery, stirred up by the possibility of British intervention, was a central theme of the meeting. Speakers attacked the emissaries who agitated for Confederate recognition in Blackburn, Ashton, Stalybridge, and elsewhere during the summer and autumn of 1862. The link between the Confederacy and slavery was obscured by propaganda emphasizing Lincoln's caution and asserting emancipation would be carried out by an independent South. But Edwards ridiculed 'what were called representative meetings of the cotton workers of Lancashire' deploying money and alcohol 'to encourage a secession feeling amongst the working classes of Manchester'. Lancashire was the battleground of British public opinion and Manchester 'naturally the centre' of the contest, as the leading Confederate agent James Spence recognized. Some inroads were made, most notably in Stalybridge, where a committee of '150 of the principal inhabitants' wrote to James M. Mason, Confederate envoy in London, in September informing him they were advocating recognition 'to

[78] Eugenio F. Biagini and Alistair J. Reid, eds., *Currents of radicalism: popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1–19.

[79] Betty Fladeland, '"Our cause being one and the same": abolitionists and Chartism', in James Walvin, ed., *Slavery and British society, 1776–1846* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1982), pp. 69–99.

[80] *Weekly Times*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 7.

[81] James Watkins, *Struggles for freedom; or the life of James Watkins, formerly a slave in Maryland* (Manchester, 1860).

[82] R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an antislavery wall: black Americans in the Atlantic abolitionist movement, 1830–1860* (Ithaca, NY, 1983); Hannah-Rose Murray, *Advocates of freedom: African American transatlantic abolitionism in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 2020).

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remedy the distress'. The meeting confronted this insurgency within their midst.[83]

The foregrounding of the Union cause, however, was controversial and atypical. It was exceedingly timely in a national context where Lincoln's vacillation on the slavery question, hostility toward the protectionist Morrill Tariff of 1861, and fractious diplomatic relations prompted by inflammatory rhetoric and incidents like the *Trent* affair, had soured Anglo-American relations in the first eighteen months of the war. The Union was regarded with suspicion or confusion, or not at all, in British responses. Meetings and lectures discussing the American question typically focused on the war's causes, the Constitution, the cotton supply, and the future of slavery. News of Lincoln's about turn on slavery crossed the Atlantic by early October 1862 but did little to change negative views. Most newspapers, including the influential *Times*, reported a cynical, desperate, or reckless ploy.[84] The leading historian of Anglo-American diplomacy argues that Lincoln's announcement raised fears of a bloody race war to encourage, not diminish, British support for the Confederacy.[85] Radicals, liberals, and antislavery folk were dismayed.

The London Emancipation Society formed in mid-November 1862, therefore, 'to counteract the alleged sympathy of this country with the South' but took 'no opinion upon the [war's] purely political aspects'. Its priority was emancipation and reawakening British antislavery feeling.[86] Edward Owen Greening was the Manchester link. Acquainted with LES figurehead George Thompson while secretary of a Manchester antislavery society, Greening took on the job of LES 'honorary secretary' with instructions, presumably, to recruit northern members.[87] It is not clear how Greening knew Hooson and Edwards. Although emerging as a major co-operative figure by the mid-1860s, Greening was not part of the Equitable. He was a member of the United Kingdom Alliance and perhaps consulted with Thomas Barker and Samuel Pope. Adhering to LES protocol, Greening envisioned 'a purely philanthropic movement, unconnected with politics'. The claim made in *The Commonwealth* that Greening deserved 'the entire credit of originating and founding' the Union and Emancipation Society was wrong, according to UES committee member Thomas Fowe. Greening 'spoke and voted against' the inclusion of 'Union' in the UES's name and mission. No record of this crucial discussion

[83] *Daily Post*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 4; William Boon to James Mason, 17 Sept. 1862; James Spence to Mason, 16 June 1863, James M. Mason papers, Library of Congress (LOC).

[84] Keith Wilson, '"The beginning of the end": an analysis of British newspaper coverage of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation', *Journalism History*, 34 (2009), pp. 230–9.

[85] Howard Jones, 'Wrapping the world in fire: the interventionist crisis in the Civil War', in Don H. Doyle, ed., *American Civil Wars: the United States, Latin America, Europe and the crisis of the 1860s* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017), pp. 41–2.

[86] George Thompson to Charles Francis Adams, 8 Nov. 1862, encl. in Adams to Seward [28 Nov. 1862], Despatches from US Ministers to Great Britain, 1791–1906, NARA; *Daily News*, 14 Nov. 1862, p. 4; LES circular, *National anti-slavery standard*, 27 Dec. 1862.

[87] Edward Owen Greening, *Memories of Robert Owen and the co-operative pioneers* (Manchester, 1925), p. 5; Tom Crimes, *Edward Owen Greening: a maker of modern co-operation* (Manchester, 1923), pp. 20, 30.

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has survived, unfortunately. Greening did not attend on New Year's Eve, perhaps because the decision went against him. Nonetheless, Fowe credited his 'courage and generosity to join the majority' by later agreeing to serve as UES secretary.[88]

It was Edwards who insisted that 'a mere Emancipation Society could not accomplish the work he had in hand'.[89] His view prevailed before the meeting and in founding the UES in January 1863. The organization worked in conjunction with the LES but went further in its 'desire to see the American Union preserved', aligning British interests with those of 'the great, free and kindred transatlantic Republic'.[90] Edwards's obituary called the UES 'the great success of his life' and underlined the divisiveness of his decision to support the Union which touched 'political considerations...with which the people of this country had no right to interfere'.[91] A sense of the controversy is detectable in newspaper adverts appearing in late December (perhaps because arrangements were only settled at the last moment). A 27 December notice of the 'working men's meeting' to discuss 'Freedom *versus* Slavery' appeared to follow the formulaic agenda of British meetings up to that point. Three days later, however, the subject was more specifically defined as 'The Abolition of Slavery and the Maintenance of the American Union' with resolutions and an address against 'secession and slavery' and 'in favour of union and liberty'.[92]

This momentous change of direction had majority support according to Fowe, but Greening was not a lone dissenter. In mid-December, the Equitable committee narrowly rejected a proposal to 'allow our branches to be announced as places where tickets can be had for the meeting to be held in the Free Trade Hall' by one vote.[93] The co-operative movement as a whole was divided. Its major journal *The Co-operator* – published in Manchester by the Equitable's ally Henry Pitman – announced in May 1863 that 'Young England' (J. C. Edwards's pseudonym) would discuss 'the momentous questions involved in the American struggle' in its next issue. But regular correspondent M. D. Hill insisted that the editors 'guardedly limited the "Co-operator" strictly to co-operation.' He added that 'the complexity of the subject, and the hold it has over passions' made 'a true verdict' on the war impossible even if taking 'all your columns for the next twelve months'. The article was duly shelved 'not alone through fear of causing a schism in the co-operative camp, or from an under-estimate of the importance of the subject to every Englishman, and especially to co-operators', but because the war constituted a 'foreign' topic.[94] The strict separation of politics and co-operation most likely explains the Equitable committee's decision as well, although members undoubtedly joined their leaders at the Free Trade Hall. Others were maybe critical of Lincoln's record, single-mindedly focused on achieving

[88] Thomas Fowe to editor, *Commonwealth*, 17 Nov. 1866, p. 5.
[89] *Co-operative News*, 19 Mar. 1881, p. 185.
[90] *Examiner and Times*, 24 Jan. 1863, p. 5; 31 Jan. 1863, p. 7.
[91] *Co-operative News*, 19 Mar. 1881, p. 185.
[92] *Examiner and Times*, 27 Dec. 1862, p. 1; 30 Dec. 1862, p. 1.
[93] Minutes, 17 Dec. 1862, MLIA.
[94] *The Co-operator*, 38 (May 1863), p. 205; 40 (June 1863), pp. 8–9.

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emancipation like Greening, or preferred not to mix politics and co-operation. Recovering public opinion of the war is complicated and support for either side cannot be assumed by reference to class or radicalism or co-operation.

Why Edwards insisted on Union is elusive. 'Enthusiasm for the American cause permeated his work and thought', a co-operative historian emphasized, and the motto of the Co-operative Wholesale Society – 'Labor and Wait' – was spelt in American English at his insistence.[95] 'America' was 'a highly volatile signifier', historian James Epstein notes, so teasing out Edwards's understanding of the more opaque 'Union' from the mere snippets reported of his speech, lasting an hour, even more difficult.[96] Two points stand out though. First, Edwards wanted the meeting to show 'sympathy for those who were the champions of free labour on the great American continent'.[97] As Mark A. Lause observes, the meritocratic concept of free labour was capacious but crucial in the 1860 presidential election when 'radical labour reformers provided the core of the Republican effort' in urban areas like New York's East Side.[98] While not exactly analogous, the co-operative creed of self-improvement, consisting of the holy trinity of thrift, industry, and sobriety, similarly stressed the virtue of hard work and the dignity of labour. Historian Tom Scriven argues that British Chartists were influenced by American labour radicals and abolitionists to a much greater extent than usually appreciated. The Free Trade Hall meeting suggests that their successors shared important – stronger probably – transatlantic affinities.[99]

Second, Edwards praised Lincoln, calling him somewhat confusingly 'one of the greatest constitutional monarchs of the present age'. Adam I. P. Smith notes that Lincoln's appeal to late nineteenth-century British radicals lay in his rise from the 'plough to the presidency' but the self-made American president captured the radical imagination in Manchester long before that.[100] Some possibly recognized parallels with their own careers. 'Starting from a humble position', Heywood stated in 1859, I 'have, by untiring industry, acquired a liberal competency' to stand for universal suffrage and trust 'the great working class of this country with political power'. Lincoln arguably represented the pinnacle of the working man's achievement. The pro-Confederate British establishment wanted the US to break up, Hooson complained, because they 'were afraid that if America continued to rise…it would be too powerful an example for them to be able to resist manhood suffrage'. The Civil War was indelibly

[95] W. H. Brown, *The Rochdale pioneers: a century of co-operation in Rochdale* (Rochdale, 1944), p. 33; *Co-operative News*, 29 May 1875.

[96] James Epstein, 'America in the Victorian cultural imagination', in Fred M. Leventhal and Roland Quinault, eds., *Anglo-American attitudes from revolution to partnership* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 112.

[97] Salford *Weekly News*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

[98] Mark A. Lause, *Free labor: the Civil War and the making of an American working class* (Urbana, IL, 2015), p. 20.

[99] Tom Scriven, 'Slavery and abolition in Chartist thought and culture, 1838–1850', *Historical Journal*, 65 (2022), pp. 1262–84.

[100] *Weekly News*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 3; Adam I. P. Smith, '"The stuff our dreams are made of": Lincoln in the English imagination', in Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton, eds., *The global Lincoln* (Oxford, 2011), p. 127. See also Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 77–81.

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connected with their domestic struggle for political reform and the radicals' rebuke of those who denied working men the vote crystal clear.[101]

V

In the contentious arena of Victorian reform, disagreement was inevitable. It was part and parcel of campaigning. No matter their personal view of Lincoln and his administration, the radicals rallied behind the cause. Edwards 'planned the meeting' but with the help of his colleagues.[102] Further encouragement and assistance came from the national liberal intelligentsia. The European response to the war was at a crucial phase in late 1862. Prime Minister Palmerston and his cabinet rejected a French proposal of joint mediation at an 11–12 November meeting, but nobody could safely say that was the end of the matter. John Stuart Mill, Britain's leading liberal and the most illustrious name on the LES's membership list, was concerned. He corresponded with Kyllmann, telling him that 'hardly anything could do more good at present than such a demonstration from the suffering operatives of Lancashire'. The Manchester radicals intended to grasp the opportunity of redirecting public debate favouring the Confederacy with both hands.[103]

The speakers on New Year's Eve were carefully selected. Kyllmann informed Mill it was 'not decided yet whether any M.P.'s will be allowed to join in this demonstration; or whether merely working men will be the speakers'.[104] Thomas Bazley, Manchester MP and pillar of the Cotton Supply Association, was approached by 'a deputation', presumably members of the radical group, 'to ask him to join in the proceedings'.[105] Bazley was a Union supporter, as Henry Adams, son of the US minister in London, found out during his trip to Lancashire in late 1861 and perhaps that was why he was chosen.[106] Many might have been invited but only local men appeared on the platform (plus Jackson and Watkins), warding against the accusation of outside interference. The 'working men' of cottonopolis intended to present a public statement designed to win over the Free Trade Hall that evening and a public audience subsequently. They had done so on many prior occasions be it promoting co-operation or suffrage reform and this was the start of a new campaign. Their role was to persuade and mobilize the masses, their outlook 'neither hegemonic nor passive' as Neville Kirk puts it more generally of Victorian labour leaders.[107]

[101] *Reynold's Newspaper*, 24 Apr. 1859, p. 3; *Guardian*, 1 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

[102] Redfern, *Story of the C.W.S.*, p. 379.

[103] John Stuart Mill to Max Kyllmann, 24 Dec. 1862, *Collected works of John Stuart Mill*, XV (Toronto, ON, 1991), p. 813.

[104] Mill to Cairnes, 16 Dec. 1862, LSE.

[105] *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 9.

[106] Arthur W. Silver, 'Henry Adams' "Diary of a visit to Manchester"', *American Historical Review*, 51 (1945), p. 87.

[107] Neville Kirk, *The growth of working-class reformism in mid-Victorian England* (London, 1985), p. 168.

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Preparing the Lincoln address and resolutions was the critical task. The question American antislavery stalwart Samuel May Jr asked his friend and regular transatlantic correspondent Richard Webb, the Dublin abolitionist, has been unanswered by historians. 'Who wrote the Manchester Address to the President? It is *admirable*, for clearness, for dignity, for a generous view & estimate of our National policy.' It was 'Professor Francis W. Newman', Webb replied, 'an elegant scholar, who has his heart in the cause of emancipation'.[108] Newman – younger brother of Cardinal John Henry Newman, a towering figure of British nineteenth-century theology – was a member of the 'radical don' university scholars who took up the Union's cause, 'the lights of liberalism' as Christopher Harvie called them.[109] Newman's contribution to the LES is less well appreciated. He was a founder member, present at the first meeting on 14 November 1862, and spoke at several meetings in London subsequently. Newman was a sharp writer who captured 'the best & wisest & truest things of our war', May noted.[110]

In early December, Newman's exchange of letters with Gladstone, published in several newspapers, caused a minor furore. Like Bright, he objected to Gladstone's 7 October speech 'intended to feel the way towards the recognition of the South'. Newman's response emphasized steps taken by Lincoln's administration towards emancipation.[111] He surely did not know this minor spat would serve as preparation for drafting the Manchester meeting's most important statement, but it possibly caught the attention of one of the organizers. Newman was certainly well placed to compose the Lincoln address which demonstrated deep familiarity with the war and foregrounded the Union's legislative attack on slavery – emancipation in the District of Columbia and the Territories, formal agreement to suppress the international slave trade, confiscation of fugitives, as well as recognition of Liberia and Haiti – despite Constitutional restraints.[112] How was Newman connected with the radicals though?

Newman taught at Manchester New College between 1840 and 1846. He was a member of the Unitarian Cross Street Chapel and friends with its minister William Gaskell (husband of the author Elizabeth) and James Martineau (younger brother of abolitionist Harriet Martineau). He may have been approached by someone from the Unitarian network although he also worked with Thomas Barker promoting temperance.[113] T. R. Wilkinson, a UES committee member from Manchester's literary circles, was Newman's student in the 1840s. He remained in contact with his 'affectionate friend' and perhaps

[108] Samuel May Jr to Richard D. Webb, 16 Jan. 1863, Ms.B.1.6.9.58, BPL; Webb to May, 31 Jan. 1863, Ms.B1.6.15.95, BPL.

[109] Christopher Harvie, *The lights of liberalism: university liberals and the challenge of democracy, 1860–1886* (London, 1976), pp. 11 (quote), 108–15.

[110] *Nonconformist*, 19 Nov. 1862; May Jr to Webb, 1 July 1863, BPL.

[111] *Dial*, 6 Dec. 1862, p. 6.

[112] 'The workingmen of Manchester and President Lincoln', UES Tracts No. 2 (Manchester, 1863), p. 1.

[113] Giberne I. Sieveking, *Memoir and letters of Francis W. Newman* (London, 1909), pp. 65–100; Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 226.

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asked his mentor for help.[114] Definitive proof is lacking, but as Newman reminded the Manchester Athenaeum in 1863 he 'never ceased to sympathise with the working classes'. His Athenaeum lecture contrasted 'the disgrace brought upon England by the sympathy of the aristocracy and gentry with the wicked Slave Power' with 'the very opposite spirit and conduct of the artizans'. Newman 'would rather have the chief power in the hands of the intelligent working men, *at present*, than in those of any other class' because of their principled stand. The Lincoln address 'did them the highest honour', Newman continued, and 'redressed the dishonour of England' to invite transatlantic 'reconciliation'. He did not claim authorship then or at any other time as far as is known.[115]

Historians usually connect radical activists and the liberal intelligentsia in the run-up to the Second Reform Act, but this relationship was forged before the Manchester meeting and cultivated afterwards through the UES. It is surely not a coincidence that Gladstone suggested all men were 'morally entitled' to the vote in parliament in May 1864 while the emancipation movement flourished. Yet scholarship on the origins of the 1867 Act overlooks links to the American Civil War.[116] Newman's contribution also emphasizes the inadequacy of seeking a monolithic class explanation of the Free Trade Hall meeting. It was not widely recognized at the time and has been forgotten subsequently but there is no evidence of a cover-up. Kyllmann straightforwardly informed Mill a few days before the meeting that its 'address and the resolutions are drawn up by Mr Francis Newman'. Twenty-five years later, Wilkinson said exactly the same to a large audience in the Manchester Literary Club.[117]

Newman's original text was not necessarily that sent to Lincoln because it was standard practice to discuss and revise meeting documents. Evidence confirms that they were vetted. Mill informed John Elliott Cairnes, the Irish political economist, that he was 'pleased with the Resolutions & Address' which had been sent to him in mid-December by Kyllmann. But Mill supported Kyllmann's 'endeavour to get the passage about the "rights of husbands" struck out'.[118] This phrase was not excised from the final version of the address, but objections were evidently raised. Edits were deliberated and agreed by the meeting's organizers therefore. Without doubt, the Manchester radicals reviewed the Lincoln address and resolutions diligently. Diehard revisionists might claim deception because of Newman's involvement. But the meeting's foundational documents echoed the speeches made that night and – by connecting the university and the co-op, the liberal intellectual with the radical – elevated a significant event to a higher level. A counterpoint to the prevailing hostile view of the president and American democracy was

[114] T. R. Wilkinson, 'Reminiscences of former Manchester: a Christmas symposium', *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club* (1889), p. 86.

[115] F. W. Newman, 'Organic reform', *Pitman's Popular Lecturer and Reader*, No. 7 (July 1863), pp. 193–4.

[116] Gladstone, 11 May 1864, in Hall, McClelland, and Rendall, *Defining*, p. 3. The Civil War is barely mentioned in this excellent study of the 1867 Reform Act.

[117] Mill to Cairnes, 16 Dec. 1862; Wilkinson, 'Reminiscences', p. 89.

[118] Mill to Kyllmann, 24 Dec. 1862, *Collected works*, p. 813.

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established and the battle of British public opinion took a turn in the Union's favour at Manchester.

VI

The meeting's address and resolutions were 'adopted by acclamation' on New Year's Eve, as LES secretary F. W. Chesson put it.[119] They were tabled, debated, and ultimately approved, amended, or rejected by the audience, regardless of their provenance. Estimates vary, but the crowd most likely numbered between five and six thousand people and it overwhelmingly endorsed two resolutions and the address when put to the vote.[120] A token objection was made to the second resolution. Advocating emancipation and, more controversially, 'profound sympathy with the efforts of President Lincoln and his colleagues to maintain the American Union', it was opposed by 'four dissentients'.[121] This quartet constituted the entire opposition to the three votes that evening. Otherwise, the audience offered unanimous approval.

Did those in the Free Trade Hall genuinely approve pro-Union sentiment? Henry Lord, US consul and eyewitness, indicated they did. 'The reading of the address to President Lincoln', he observed 'was frequently interrupted by the cheers & acclamations of the assembly'. When Samuel Pope stated they met to '*speak for themselves*, their true sentiments to their kindred in America', Lord continued, 'the demonstrations of the audience broke out beyond all bounds, & the air was nearly darkened with the hats that were thrown up in recognition of "their" delight at the opportunity this afforded them'.[122] Chesson heard from a friend in the audience 'that the heartiness and enthusiasm of the working men' was 'glorious'. An overheard conversation proclaimed 'they would rather remain unemployed for twenty years than get cotton from the South at the expense of the slave'.[123] These anecdotes fed back to the liberal intelligentsia. 'In their hour of sorest trial', Cairnes wrote, 'the working-men of England have shown themselves more alive to the claims of political morality than a large section of those who arrogate for themselves the exclusive possession of the qualities which fit for political power'. This new passage in the second edition of *The Slave Power*, the most influential pro-Northern tract published in Britain, was inspired by the Manchester meeting.[124]

Hyperbole? Two letters, purportedly from locals, questioned the audience's commitment. 'R.E.B.' complained tickets were given to 'juveniles' because

[119] F. W. Chesson to William Lloyd Garrison, 9 Jan. 1863, Ms.A.1.2.32.4, BPL.

[120] Henry Lord reported 6,000, the *Daily Post* 5,000, and Bright claimed '5000 or 6000 men'. Lord to Seward, 1 Jan. 1863; *Daily Post*, 2 Jan. 1863, p. 4; Bright, 3 Feb. 1863, Moore, ed., *Speeches*, p. 162. Neither *The Guardian* nor *The Courier* provided a figure.

[121] *Guardian*, 1 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

[122] Lord to Seward, 1 Jan. 1863 (emphasis in original). *The Guardian* also stressed that 'the reading of the address was frequently applauded', 1 Jan. 1863, p. 3.

[123] Chesson to Garrison, 9 Jan. 1863.

[124] John Elliott Cairnes, *The slave power: its character, career, and probable designs* (2nd edn, London, 1863), pp. 300–1; Cairnes to Mill, 4 Feb. 1863, LSE.

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'adults would refuse to pocket them' and asserted that the meeting should not be considered 'influential'. 'Mancuniensis' was accosted on the street and forced to take a ticket; 'anything to fill the hall' he complained. The revisionist case was evidently made in the meeting's immediate aftermath but rebuttal letters of dubious reliability were commonly placed in newspapers after major events. Thomas Edson did not hide behind a pseudonym in dismissing them as 'coloured by their Southern animus'. He urged the authors 'to meet the arguments' rather than 'make malevolent and unfounded assertions'. A few boys were present, Edson wrote, but 'attendance was almost entirely men of the artisan classes, with a fair sprinkling of people in better attire'. Lord had no reason to embellish in calling the meeting 'the most enthusiastic I ever witnessed'.[125]

Two insiders, from opposing sides, provide compelling evidence that the audience was not only enthusiastic but committed to the radicals' cause of emancipation and Union. Henry Hotze took charge of the Confederate campaign in Britain midway through the war after an inauspicious beginning. He complained that 'Lancashire operatives' were the 'one class which as a class continues inimical to us'. Their 'aversion to our institutions is as firmly rooted as in any portion of New England, to the population of which they, indeed, bear a striking resemblance'. He was unsure why and blamed 'the astonishing fortitude and patience with which they endure' the cotton famine on 'emissaries of the Federal Government'.[126] There were no federal agitators on the ground in the autumn of 1862 so that Confederate opposition was home grown.

Second, and crucially, the decision to form an independent pressure group, the UES, rather than a northern branch of the LES, was taken because of the audience's enthusiastic, seemingly unanticipated, reaction. Heywood and Greening, as well as Potter, Watts, and several others with Manchester addresses, joined the LES in late December 1862.[127] They could have formed an LES affiliate, indeed it would have been far more straightforward to piggyback on an existing organizational structure with growing momentum. But, as Potter informed Charles Adams in early January, 'recent events have unmistakably demonstrated that, amongst working men especially, true views on the American question generally prevail'. The discovery 'that there is in Lancashire a much stronger sympathy for the Anti-Slavery Administration of the North than was anticipated' was decisive in establishing the only British organization officially committed to restoration of the American Union.[128]

The revisionist myth of the myth has persisted for fifty years but the Manchester meeting was organized by local 'working men' and the audience sent its address to Lincoln in good faith. Claims that it 'skewed popular

[125] 'Mancuniensis' and 'R.E.B.', *Guardian*, 3 Jan. 1863, p. 6; Thomas Edson, *Guardian*, 7 Jan. 1863, p. 4; Lord to Seward, 1 Jan. 1863.

[126] Henry Hotze to J. P. Benjamin, 26 Sept. 1862, Henry Hotze correspondence, LOC.

[127] *Times*, 29 Dec. 1862, p. 4.

[128] Potter to Adams, 5 Jan. 1863, encl. in Adams to Seward [16 Jan. 1863], Despatches from US Ministers, NARA.

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perceptions of the response of the region' make sense only from the flawed dichotomy of the traditional/revisionist paradigm.[129] The political views of the Lancashire operatives, like those of the men profiled here, were complicated and cannot be assumed from a single event. The Manchester radicals' pro-emancipation and pro-Union agenda was settled on after internal debate and responded to local, national, and international concerns at a moment of crisis. It was not an endpoint but the start of a campaign that by August 1863 had established forty-three UES branches across the north-west and beyond.[130] The Free Trade Hall meeting must be placed within the tradition of the radical platform, the showpiece of Victorian political culture in the nineteenth century. Plebeian politics, in decline after Chartism's demise according to some, was reignited in Lancashire during the American Civil War with meetings held far and wide in a short period of time.[131] Political opinion was shaped and directed as much as rendered visible at such events. Far greater opposition to the pro-Union position was evident in the mill towns than in Manchester and much remains to be understood about the UES campaign.[132] If the field is to move forwards from its present stasis, it must abandon the search for a monolithic class position and incorporate the substantial body of scholarship complicating 'class' and Victorian politics.

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[129] Rennie, 'This "Merikay War"', p. 128.

[130] *Examiner and Times*, 18 Aug. 1863, p. 3.

[131] Joseph S. Meisel, *Public speech and the culture of public life in the age of Gladstone* (New York, NY, 2001), pp. 223–74.

[132] There are only three detailed studies. In addition to Ellison and Blackett, see Philip John Auger, 'The cotton famine, 1861–1865: a study of the principal cotton towns during the American Civil War' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1979).

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