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CHARLES HALL, EARLY ENGLISH SOCIALIST*

Charles Hall's importance has been recognized by a number of scholars. He has been described by C. R. Fay as "the first of the early socialists", and by Mark Blaug as "the first socialist critic of the industrial revolution".¹ According to Max Beer he provided "the first interpretation of the voice of rising Labour", and Anton Menger regarded him as "the first socialist who saw in rent and interest unjust appropriations of the return of labour, and who explicitly claimed for the worker the undiminished product of his industry".² Menger, in his book *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour* (first published in German in 1886), devoted three or four pages to Hall and drew attention to his early formulation of the theory of surplus value. Since then there have been several discussions of Hall's work, but almost without exception they have been quite brief: perhaps the most notable are those provided by H. S. Foxwell in his introduction to the English translation of Menger,³ and by Beer in his *History of British Socialism*.⁴ H. L. Beales, who also wrote a few pages about him in his

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¹ C. R. Fay, *Life and Labour in the Nineteenth Century*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1943), p. 168; M. Blaug, *Ricardian Economics* (New Haven, 1958), p. 148.

² M. Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, 3rd ed. (2 vols; London, 1953), I, p. 127; A. Menger, *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour*, translated by M. E. Tanner, with an introduction by H. S. Foxwell (London, 1899), p. 48.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxi-xxxviii. In a manuscript note in one of the copies of Hall's *The Effects of Civilization in the Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature*, University of London, Foxwell wrote: "It is a really wonderful statement, in the clearest terms, of the first principles of modern Socialism."

⁴ Beer, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 126-32. See also H. L. Beales, *The Early English Socialists* (London, 1933), pp. 72-75; Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin* (London, 1946), pp. 262-69; Alexandre Chabert, "Aux sources du socialisme anglais: un pré-marxiste méconnu: Charles Hall", in: *Revue d'Histoire Economique et Sociale*, XXIX (1951), pp. 369-83. This last piece is enthusiastic about Hall, but is marred by inaccuracy and adds little of substance to earlier accounts.

book *The Early English Socialists*, lamented some twenty years ago that Hall (in common with several other pioneers of socialism and democracy in Britain) had not yet found a biographer.¹ In fact it seems unlikely, owing to the paucity of material, that a biography will ever be possible. But it is nonetheless surprising that Hall has received so little individual attention; and the author of a recent summary of his ideas (again in the context of a general history of socialism) could describe him as “ce précurseur quelque peu oublié”.² It appears that an essay may usefully be written drawing together what is known about him and attempting a fuller examination of his writings than has been provided hitherto.

Hall was born in 1738 or 1739: so much can be gathered from the records of the University of Leyden which show that “Carolus Hall, Anglus”, matriculated there in May 1765 at the age of 26.³ He obtained the degree of M.D. from that university with a thesis on pulmonary consumption, and he published in 1785 *The Family Medical Instructor*, which was described in the *Monthly Review* as “a compilation from different authors on medical subjects calculated for the general use of country families”.⁴ The fact that the book was printed at Shrewsbury suggests that Hall was then practising in that area, but twenty years later when he published the work for which he is remembered, *The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States*, he was living and practising at Tavistock.

The chief sources of information about this latter part of his career are two letters which he wrote to Thomas Spence, the advocate of land nationalization, in 1807,⁵ and the reminiscences of the Owenite Socialist John Minter Morgan. Hall told Spence in August 1807 that he was a widower of nearly seventy, and that as he found his long rides fatiguing he was intending to retire from his practice before long. He was thinking, he said, of moving to London when he retired, though his family would expect him to live “at little expence”, and he asked Spence how much it would cost to rent or purchase a set of chambers

¹ Introduction to R. K. P. Pankhurst, William Thompson (London, 1954), p. viii.

² François Bedarida, “Le socialisme en Angleterre jusqu’en 1848”, in: *Histoire générale du socialisme*, I, Des origines à 1875, ed. by Jacques Droz (Paris, 1972), pp. 288-90.

³ R. W. Innes Smith, *English-Speaking Students of Medicine at the University of Leyden* (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 105.

⁴ Robert Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica* (4 vols; Edinburgh, 1824), I, p. 458; *Monthly Review*, LXXXVI (1787), p. 74.

⁵ These letters are preserved in the Place Papers, together with two letters from Spence to Hall, British Library (formerly British Museum), Add. Mss 27808, ff. 280-85.

in one of the less frequented Inns of Court.¹ That he did in due course move to London, though not to one of the Inns of Court, is clear from Morgan's memories of him. After praising *The Effects of Civilization*, Morgan goes on to say:

"The author was in very reduced circumstances, – his work was published without funds to make it known: and as it concerned the poor who could not purchase, no bookseller would incur the risk of advertising. Dr. Hall reached the age of eighty years; but he died in the Rules of the Fleet prison, where I frequently saw him: occasionally when he could obtain a day-rule he dined at my chambers; – his conversation was particularly animated and intelligent: although skilled in the classics, he was more distinguished for attainments in natural philosophy. He had friends who would have released him from prison; but he was confined through a lawsuit, – as he considered unjustly; and rather than permit the money to be paid, he had resolved to remain incarcerated for life."²

The records of the Fleet Prison show that the sum involved was small (£157) but that Hall remained in detention for eight and a half years from the time of his arrest in Somerset in December 1816. He did not apparently die in the rules of the Fleet, for there is a record of his being discharged on 21 June 1825, but as he was then eighty-six it is not unlikely that he died soon afterwards.³

Hall's one major work, *The Effects of Civilization*, was first published in London in 1805, and reprinted in 1813. Appended to the latter edition, and to some copies of the former, was a shorter work entitled *Observations on the Principal Conclusion in Mr. Malthus's Essay on Population*.⁴ A further edition of the main work, omitting the *Observations on Malthus* but otherwise unaltered except for the title-page, appeared in 1820 under the title *An Enquiry into the Cause of the Present Distress of the People*. In 1850 John Minter Morgan reprinted *The Effects of Civilization* in a series called *The Phoenix Library*;⁵ and

¹ Hall to Spence, 25 August 1807, *ibid.*, f. 280.

² [J. M. Morgan,] *Hampden in the Nineteenth Century* (2 vols; London, 1834), I, pp. 20-21.

³ Public Record Office, PRIS 2/118, No 18187; 10/149, f. 4.

⁴ Although the shorter work has its own title-page, the pagination continues that of *The Effects of Civilization*, the pages being numbered 325-49.

⁵ This is the only edition held by the British Library, and Beer believed it to be the second edition and the only one extant. But several copies of the 1805 edition survive, for instance in the British Library of Political and Economic

in 1905 a German translation (not of the whole work but of selected chapters) was published in a series of *Hauptwerke des Sozialismus und der Sozialpolitik* edited by Georg Adler.¹

In the preface to *The Effects of Civilization* Hall says that although the practice of medicine may not at first sight provide a qualification for writing on political subjects, a physician does have unique opportunities for studying the condition of the people, being admitted into their homes, being able to observe them at all stages of life, and often being taken into their confidence on a wide range of subjects.² The work itself begins with a neutral definition of civilization: "It consists in the study and knowledge of the sciences, and in the production and enjoyment of the conveniences, elegancies, and luxuries of life." But he goes on to say that the most striking feature of civilized societies – the feature that would most impress a visitor from an uncivilized part of the world – is the contrast between the "great profusion and splendor" of some people and "the penury and obscurity of all the others". He concedes that the people in a civilized state may be divided into many different orders, but he maintains that "for the purpose of investigating the manner in which they enjoy or are deprived of the requisites to support the health of their bodies and minds" only the one horizontal division between rich and poor is of real significance.³

The basic fact about the rural poor is that they are insufficiently supplied with the necessaries of life. He points specifically to the inadequacy of their wages, the meagre nature of their diet, and the much higher rate of mortality (especially infant mortality) among them than among the richer classes. As for the manufacturing poor, he maintains that the nature of their employment is generally injurious to their health and stultifying to their minds, and to reinforce the latter point he quotes Adam Smith's famous passage on the mental torpor that

Science and in the Goldsmiths' Library; copies of the 1813 edition exist at Columbia University and in the National Library of Australia; and the Goldsmiths' Library has a copy of the edition of 1820.

¹ C. Hall, *Die Wirkungen der Zivilisation auf die Massen* (Leipzig, 1905). Adler contributed a twenty-page introduction entitled "Mehrwertlehre und Bodenreform in England im 18. Jahrhundert und Charles Hall"; but this threw little if any new light on Hall and his work.

² He adds later that the sufferings of the poor, though they "obtrude themselves on every body's notice", present themselves "more unavoidably and affectingly to a medical practitioner than to any other person". *The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States* (London, 1805), p. 223.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–4. Hall did not actually use the word "horizontal", but this was clearly his meaning; cf. Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London, 1969), p. 209.

results from the division of labour. Hall is in no doubt that the physical and mental deprivations suffered by the poor do amount to a deprivation of happiness: the attempts of certain writers and preachers to recommend contentment to the poor by arguing that “the measure of happiness is much the same in all conditions” he describes as “adding insult to oppression”.¹ Treating the hardships of the poor as too obvious to require further description, he proceeds in the sections which follow to analyse the causes of these hardships.

In his opinion scarcity (which he believes to be a chronic condition in European states, not one confined to years of bad harvest) is basically due to the fact that too few people are employed in cultivating the land. The cultivators furnish provisions for themselves, for those employed in trade and manufactures, and for those who do nothing. Commerce in itself is unproductive, and international trade only contributes to the people’s sustenance when the goods exported are exchanged for “articles of prime necessity”: Hall does not believe that this happens to any significant extent since the imports of European countries consist mainly of various luxury goods, very few of which “come down to the use of the poor”.² As for manufacturing industry, Hall admits the need for what he calls coarse manufactures, producing articles of “prime and general use”; but he believes that far too many hands are employed in the “refined” manufactures, which produce articles that are purchased only by the rich.

The fact that so much labour is diverted from occupations which produce the necessaries and comforts of life for the people themselves to other occupations which do not – and which on the contrary sentence those employed in them to work in offensive and often noxious conditions – can only be attributed in Hall’s view to some kind of compulsion; and his analysis of this compulsion leads him on to a radical interpretation of property. In the hands of the rich, he says, are concentrated all those things which compose wealth: the land, the livestock and crops raised on it, the raw materials and machinery of industry, and stocks of manufactured goods ready for sale. The rich thus control, and the law firmly secures to them, all those things that the poor man stands in need of; and they can consequently require from him as a condition of providing for his basic needs whatever

¹ *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 4ff., 24-26, 28-30. He probably had in mind William Paley, *Reasons for Contentment* addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public (London, 1793), and Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, *Sermon* preached before the Stewards of the Westminster Dispensary (London, 1793) – a sermon entitled “On the wisdom and goodness of God in having made both rich and poor”.

² *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 36-38, 82-83.

work they please. Hence wealth is definable as “the possession of that which gives power over, and commands the labour of man”. Since the rich consume only a limited quantity of the necessaries of life the major part of their income is spent on various refinements and luxuries, and their demand for such things means that a large section of the labouring class can only find employment in supplying them. Hume had been praised by Adam Smith for being the first to observe that manufactures had freed the people from servile dependence on the feudal barons; but he failed to recognize, says Hall, “the new species of dependence of the lower orders on the rich”. Although a poor man in a modern society is not obliged to work for any particular individual, he has to work for some member of the wealthy class, and “the power of wealth pervades the whole country, and subjects every poor man to its dominion”.¹

Next Hall considers some of the lines of argument that have been used to defend or justify the existing system of property. With regard to arguments based on natural right, Hall denies that any man can have a natural, original and exclusive right to any portion of land, except perhaps to as much as will furnish him and his family with the necessaries of life; and with regard to prescriptive rights, he maintains that an unjust appropriation of the land does not “become just by time” unless time removes the sufferings which the original injustice produced. As for the incentives doctrine advanced by Hume and Paley in their utilitarian defence of property, Hall’s reply to it is worth quoting *in extenso*:

“It has been alleged, that if property were not to be acquired, and held out as a reward of labour and industry, mankind would be indolent and inactive, having no stimulus to exertion. In my apprehension this is directly contrary to what really happens. Things of every kind being already appropriated and in the possession of certain persons, and firmly secured to them by the laws; the prizes, which might be held out to be gained by the many, are taken, as it were, out of the wheel; and the chance of a man, without education or connexion (which is the condition of the great mass of mankind) of bettering his fortune by any efforts of his own, is a thousand to one against him; so as utterly to act as a discouragement to all attempts of that kind.”²

In response to Burke’s view, expressed in his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, that the rich are as useful to the poor as the poor are to the

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-52.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 55-60.

rich, Hall says that while the poor man produces by his labour almost everything that the rich man eats, drinks, wears and enjoys, the rich do nothing for the poor man except give him access, through money, to a modicum of those goods which poor men have produced, and which he might have provided for himself in much greater quantity if his labour had been at his own disposal.¹ It is to the interest of the rich man to get as much of the poor man's labour, and to give him as little of the produce of that labour, as he can, and the control of the rich over the means of life ensures that they are almost always in a position to dictate terms to those they employ.²

Hall tries to calculate statistically – by estimating the average working-class family income, multiplying it by the number of such families, and dividing this figure into an estimate of the total produce of labour in agriculture and industry – how much of the produce of his own labour is actually consumed by the working man and his family; and he concludes that the proportion is only about one eighth.³ Moreover, Hall believes that because of “the opportunities that wealth gives to acquire more wealth” there is a clear tendency for the rich to get richer; and since the accumulation of wealth in its various forms extends its possessors' claims over the labour of the poor and diminishes the proportion of that labour devoted to producing what the poor themselves require, the condition of the poor tends to deteriorate conversely. This is brought about “not only by those already in a state of subjection being placed in a state of still greater subjection, but also because more people are reduced to that state” – those on the borderline between rich and poor being forced down below it.⁴ As the hardships of the poor become more and more difficult to bear, it is likely that a spirit of resistance will begin to show itself – first in a greater frequency of thefts and robberies, and then in open insurrection;

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-03; Edmund Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (London, 1800), p. 3. Burke and his pamphlet are not specifically named, but the allusion to them seems clear enough.

² *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 111-13. Hall also alludes here to the combination laws; on the so-called freedom of contract, cf. pp. 72-73: “There is no voluntary compact equally advantageous on both sides, but an absolute compulsion on the part of masters, and an absolute necessity on the part of the workman to accept of it.”

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-95. In a later section (pp. 138-40) Hall describes the dread of poverty felt by those just above the dividing line, and their “continual struggle and jostling” to prevent themselves from sinking below it. He also remarks on the fierce competition produced among the poor themselves by the insufficiency of the means of life: “every man's interest becomes opposite to every man's”.

and this in turn will produce an increasingly repressive mode of government.¹

Hall sees the state and its institutions as instruments of class domination. Almost all civilized states are aristocracies of wealth, he says, since it is in the hands of the wealthy that effective power of all kinds – political, ecclesiastical, military – is lodged. Even in absolute monarchies the authority of the monarch is dependent on the support of the rich, who expect in return for their support that the monarch's power will be used to preserve their wealth. Hall cites Smith's remark that civil government, insofar as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor; and he adds that the powers requisite for this purpose need to be very extensive.

“To keep people that are cold, naked, and hungry, from taking fuel to warm themselves, clothes to cover themselves with, and food to satisfy their hunger, when plenty of all those things are before their eyes, [...] requires a magistracy armed with powers indeed; they must have a power of inflicting punishments greater than the sufferings of the poor; which, as these sufferings are continual and unremitting, it is not easy to invent.”²

However, Hall notes that “artifice” as well as the more naked forms of power has contributed to the subjugation of the poor. He points out that the monopoly of knowledge is a vital aspect of the supremacy of the rich,³ and he maintains that the realities of exploitation are quite successfully disguised even from the poor themselves. Since exploitation (he does not use the actual word) is carried on “in a regular, orderly, silent manner, under specious forms, with the external appearance of liberty, and even of charity, greater deprivations are submitted to by the poor, and more oppression exercised over them, [...] than force alone was ever known to accomplish”.⁴ One of the most striking examples, he suggests, of the way in which the poor are made to serve the purposes of the rich is provided by war. Modern warfare arises from competition between the rich of the different civilized countries for the control of trade or territories which will help to supply their inordinate wants; or it can arise merely from the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75, 115, note, 181-82.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-52: “Learning, in the unequal shares it is divided among individuals in Europe, is clearly prejudicial; giving some an unfair advantage over others [...]. It is the chief instrument by which the superiority is gained by the few over the many; and by which the latter are kept in subjection.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

arrogance and ambition of the rich and powerful. While it is the poor who bear the burden of warfare (both in the fighting itself and through a further diversion of national resources away from the production of the necessaries of life), they stand to gain nothing from it: indeed wars are sometimes entered into, as in the case of the war against revolutionary France, for the deliberate purpose of increasing their subjection. Yet so great is the hold of the few over the many that they "can call them out into the field at any time".¹

Does Hall see any possible remedy for the situation he describes? He recognizes that, strong though the position of the rich may be, it will be endangered when oppression is carried to "a certain point which cannot be borne by the people". But he is not preaching or confidently predicting revolution: on the contrary, he wishes to avoid anything of that nature. The practical proposals he puts forward are much more moderate than his previous analysis would lead one to expect, and he explains his caution by saying that great disorders and even convulsions are apt to be produced, in the political as well as the physical constitution, by "a hasty and indiscreet use of powerful remedies". The redress of political grievances should not if possible be entrusted to those who are aggrieved, as they can hardly be expected to effect it in a cool and temperate manner; "it would be better therefore that the redress of the grievances of the poor should originate from the rich themselves".²

One must admit that other sections of his work make this outcome seem rather unlikely. He has shown that the education of the rich leaves them almost wholly ignorant of the condition of the poor, and imbued not with philanthropy but with a love of glory. The history of their country is presented to them as if it were exclusively a history of kings, lords, bishops and generals, and "the books they read treat of little else than of heroes and the exploits of heroes, that is, of bloody warriors and bloody wars". Insofar as political economy is studied, Hall does not believe that it is approached in the same dispassionate way as some other branches of knowledge. Being a complex and abstract subject, it can only be handled by people of education, but these are generally people of some property or members of the learned professions, "for whose interest it is that things should remain as they are". Some of these people will actively discountenance and do

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-74. Cf. H. W. Laidler, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1927), pp. 99-100: "Hall's economic analysis of the causes of war sounds as if it had been made but yesterday." Hall was not thinking in terms of competition for markets or outlets for capital, but he did anticipate Hobson in locating the roots of imperialism in the unequal distribution of wealth in civilized countries.

² *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 190, 215-16.

their best to discredit any attempts to present the truth about social conditions; others, though not wilfully blind to the truth, will tend unconsciously to close their minds to it. "As our interest secretly biasses us in favour of everything that promotes itself, so does it secretly divert us from everything that opposes itself."

Nevertheless, despite his awareness of what Bentham termed "sinister interest" and "interest-begotten prejudice", Hall finds it impossible to believe that once the rich are made fully acquainted with the evils occasioned by their wealth they will resist the reforms necessary to alleviate them.¹ He is particularly sanguine about this because the measures he has in mind will be gradual in their operation and will not substantially diminish the real comforts of the rich. These measures are, first, as a move towards a more equal distribution of property, the abolition of primogeniture and the laws which support it; and secondly the prohibition of, or the imposition of heavy duties upon, the "refined manufactures", with the aim of bringing about a shift of both labour and capital from industry to agriculture.²

These proposals are made in a practical spirit as reforms that might actually be effected in current circumstances. Hall goes on, however, to outline in the closing section of the book the social system which in his view would be most productive of happiness – and here he gives full rein to his Utopian ideals. He takes as his starting point Hume's view that happiness flows from a balanced combination of activity and relaxation, and he maintains that in modern civilized societies neither rich nor poor can be truly happy because the former have an excess of leisure and the latter an excess of toil. The right proportions of labour and rest would be achieved, he thinks, if each man worked only as much as was necessary to support his family and if he were able to enjoy the full fruits of his labour. Hall's ideal is a society in which the land would be collectively owned and distributed to families in allotments proportioned to their numbers (with scope for subsequent adjustments to take account of changes in the number and size of families). Though a few people might be selected to devote themselves to the arts and sciences, and a few others might be retained in industrial employment to provide those necessary articles that could not be produced within the family unit, the way of life would be essentially agrarian and families would be as self-supporting as

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 172, 227-33.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 216-19, 316-17. A further measure which he evidently regards as desirable, though he does not include it in the same initial "package", is a reform of the fiscal system; he recommends a graduated income tax, and supports the proposal with a remarkably clear exposition of the diminishing marginal utility of income (pp. 201-08).

possible. "The labour of a father of a family, working a few hours daily on the land, would provide all the food necessary for its comfortable subsistence; and the industry of the other parts of the family would furnish what was necessary for their clothing, etc." Hall calculates that if the land of Britain were shared out equally, there would be as much as thirty-six acres for each family. But he thinks that very much less than this would be sufficient, and he devotes the last pages of his book to showing how a family of five, possessing a spade, a few mattocks, a cow and some poultry, could support themselves in comfort on a holding of three and a half acres.¹

A strong believer in the virtues of intensive hoeing, weeding and manuring, Hall is inclined to discount the possibility of diminishing returns to labour in agriculture; at least he claims that "the produce of the land would increase in proportion to the number of hands employed upon it, till the whole has arrived at the most complete garden culture".² This is one of the positions from which he argues against Malthus in the *Observations* which form an appendix to his main work.³ He is prepared to concede the possibility of eventual over-population; but he believes that owing to the vastly increased numbers which the land, if properly distributed and cultivated, could be made to support, this prospect is very remote, and could be almost indefinitely postponed by preventive measures such as colonization and the regulation of marriages. Any tendency there has been in European states for population to press on subsistence has been due not to the growth of population, but to the distribution of wealth and the diversion of labour from agriculture. In the prevailing conditions of inequality, even a *decrease* of population would not make food any the less scarce, as the proportion of the working class employed in producing it would not be allowed to increase.⁴

Malthus had proposed in the second edition of his *Essay on Population* that official notice should be given that no child born after a certain date should ever be entitled to poor relief: "He should be taught that the laws of nature had doomed him and his family to starve; that he had no claim on society for the smallest portion of food."⁵ Hall protests

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-66, 277-78, 295ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 317.

³ On Hall's *Observations* on Malthus, cf. Foxwell, introduction to Menger, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi, and Kenneth Smith, *The Malthusian Controversy* (London, 1951), pp. 52-56. Smith credits Hall with being the earliest of Malthus's critics (apart from Godwin), and says that the ideas he put forward were to "appear over and over again in the course of the subsequent controversy".

⁴ *Observations* on Malthus, pp. 327-34, 346-47.

⁵ T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 2nd ed. (London, 1803), p. 538.

against the attribution to nature of what is attributable to wealth, and against the injustice of the notion that people who produce in their working lives many times more than they consume should have no claim on society for their subsistence. He acquits Malthus of any deliberate malevolence towards the poor, but fears that his general doctrine will encourage those “who were too much before inclined to oppress, to push their tyranny still further”. He concludes that what is necessary to relieve the artificial scarcity that currently exists is a more equal distribution of land.¹

It goes without saying that in an England still very conscious of the French Revolution and still at war with France the educated classes were even less likely than usual to be receptive to radical ideas about property. When *The Effects of Civilization* first appeared more than one reviewer remarked on its resemblance to the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* by “the too celebrated J. J. Rousseau”.² But in general the book was treated as eccentric and paradoxical, rather than dangerous. Facetious remarks were made about “the sage of Tavistock” and his “new political gospel”, and the reviews echoed with complacency the fashionable consensus on economic matters. The *Monthly Review*, for instance, observed:

“It is mentioned by Dr. Hall as a most distressing circumstance, that ‘capitals in almost all sorts of businesses are increasing’; and in his view this capital is a mere instrument of tyranny in the hands of the possessors. How vainly has Dr. Smith exquisitely elucidated the important and beneficial operations of this mighty engine!”

The *Critical Review*, commenting on Hall’s division of the people into rich and poor and his dismal description of the latter, asked: “Of what country can the author be speaking? Not of England assuredly.” And the *Literary Journal* described the book as one that might arouse discontent among the poor and ignorant, but could only “excite ridicule among the well-informed”.³

If Hall’s views were very far removed from the orthodoxies of his

¹ Observations on Malthus, pp. 339-41, 349.

² Annual Review and History of Literature, IV (1805), pp. 298-99; Monthly Review, LI (1806), p. 15.

³ Ibid., pp. 15, 18, 21; Critical Review, Third Series, VI (1805), pp. 50-51; Literary Journal, V (1805), p. 706. James Mill (later a strong opponent of Hodgskinite ideas) was probably the author of this last article, see R. A. Fenn, “James Mill’s Political Thought” (Ph.D. (Econ.) thesis, University of London, 2 vols, 1972), II, pp. 26, 142.

time, they were not much less remote from the views of the leading advocates of reform. This is clearly shown by two letters of his which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in the years following the publication of his main work. The first was written in the spring of 1807, after Whitbread's bill for a reform of the poor laws had been introduced in the House of Commons.¹ The letter was written (as Hall told Spence) partly as a "general answer to the reviewers", and it restated in abbreviated form the central argument of *The Effects of Civilization*.² But it also commented adversely on Whitbread's scheme, maintaining that the measures proposed in it for the alleviation of pauperism would be "circuitous, weak, and of inconsiderable effect", and adding that some of them³ seemed to be "calculated rather for the easing the contributors to the poor-rates, than for the benefit of those who stand in need of their contributions". The second letter, published in October 1811 under the heading "Thoughts on Corruption, and on the Defects of the Representation of the People in Parliament", dealt with a subject which had been in eclipse since the 1790's but had recently returned to prominence. The letter was signed "C.H., Tavistock", and has not previously been noticed by historians; but it is of considerable interest as it tells us something of Hall's views on the political aspects of reform, which he had virtually passed over in his earlier published work.

Hall observes that, although the influence of government on parliamentary elections is generally reprobated, the influence of other descriptions of men is rarely spoken of with disapproval, though its effects in vitiating the representation of the people may be no less serious:

"Whenever any class of people, whether it is that which composes the ministry or government, whether it is that of landed proprietors, whether it is that of master manufacturers, merchants, etc., is able to send a majority of members to parliament, they can enact such laws as they please; and, unless it can be supposed that these members are perfectly upright men, and wholly regardless of their own interest, they will pass such laws as are favourable to themselves, and unfavourable to the rest of the people. Thus for many centuries, the landed interest prevailed; when we find that laws favourable to themselves, were enacted by them;

¹ Cf. J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (London, 1969), pp. 207ff.

² Hall to Spence, 9 June 1807, *Place Papers*, *ibid.*, f. 282; *Monthly Magazine*, XXIII (1807), pp. 329-31.

³ For instance the offer of rewards to working men who brought up their families without assistance from the parish.

namely, the laws for distress for the recovery of the rent of land, when no other debts are recoverable in that severe manner; the game laws; the laws excluding all others but themselves from the house".¹

It has been argued, Hall notes, that since there are now substantial numbers of merchants and manufacturers in the Commons as well as landowners, a sort of balance has been established between the classes and no "overruling interest or influence" prevails. But he maintains that although in a secondary classification these groups may be considered as having different and even opposing interests, in the "grand and primary division" of the people into rich and poor they form but a single class. Under the present electoral system this class alone is represented. No poor man sits in the House of Commons, and although a few of the poor have votes they are rarely if ever able to cast them freely. Those in the House who do support the poor "in cases that materially affect their own interests, must be, if any such there be, men of uncommon degrees of disinterested virtue, and for the poor to depend on these rare aves is a very precarious situation". Referring to recent debates in parliament, he says that while members have shown some disposition to reduce bribery they have shown no desire to reduce the influence of property, and they have really been aiming at no more than an adjustment of the balance between different kinds of influence. The reforms that have been proposed take no account of the rights and interests of the poor, for whom such measures would mean a "change of masters, not of their condition".²

For its time, Hall's exposition of the class-basis of English politics and legislation is remarkably penetrating. It is true that in some publications of the 1790's one can find passages which anticipate the cogency of his treatment.³ But it is hard to think of any writer who had combined so fully an uncompromisingly radical critique of the political structure with an equally radical critique of the social and economic system.⁴ The latter, of course, was the more fully developed by Hall, and this is his contribution to the development of socialism. Two questions that remain to be discussed concerning it are what

¹ He also mentions in a footnote that in some enclosure bills the removal of a piece of fencing has been made a capital crime. Cf. J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer, 1760-1832* (London, 1919), p. 64.

² *Monthly Magazine*, XXXII (1811), pp. 226-28.

³ See for example John Thelwall, *The Tribune* (3 vols; London, 1795-96), II, pp. 59-62, 82, 376.

⁴ William Godwin is a possible exception, though he had not applied himself so directly to the criticism of existing political institutions.

sources he may have used in constructing his theory, and how far he in turn exerted an influence on later writers.

Hall told Spence that he had read few books on the subjects on which he wrote,¹ but the range of references given in *The Effects of Civilization* shows this to have been scarcely true, and various influences on his work can be at least tentatively identified. So far as the origins of his economic ideas are concerned, his emphasis on the land as “the basis, the source and substance of all wealth”² is clearly in tune with the Physiocrats, though how far he was acquainted with their works at first hand is not clear. He may have known them partly through the writings of John Gray, whose book *The Essential Principles of the Wealth of Nations* (1797) was to earn Marx’s commendation for its accurate summary of Physiocratic doctrine and its dexterity in turning that doctrine against the landowning class.³ Also, although the general tenor of his work was so different from theirs, Hall appears to have taken a certain amount from the English classical economists, especially Adam Smith. Besides the direct citations of Smith noted above, Hall’s assumption that the proper measure of exchange-value is “the quantity of the labour employed in making the things exchanged” would seem to reflect Smith’s influence.⁴ He may even have drawn something from Malthus: at least Malthus had argued – and Hall notes their agreement on this point – that a nation’s commercial and industrial wealth may increase greatly without having any tendency to give the poorer classes a “greater command over the necessaries and conveniences of life”.⁵ Still more striking as an anticipation of Hall’s argument is a passage in Lauderdale’s *Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth*, a work which was published in 1804 but was evidently read by Hall as he refers to it more than once in *The Effects of Civilization*. Lauderdale pointed out that the distribution of property determines the nature of demand, and thus “regulates and

¹ Hall to Spence, 25 August 1807, loc. cit.

² *Effects of Civilization*, p. 73.

³ K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (3 vols; London, 1969-72), I, pp. 382-86. Hall does not refer to this work of Gray’s but does refer (p. 118) to his pamphlet *The Income Tax Scrutinized* (London, 1802), which applied to a specific issue the principles expounded in Gray’s earlier book.

⁴ *Effects of Civilization*, p. 68. It has been suggested that, with the exception of Hodgskin, the so-called Ricardian Socialists of the next generation derived their labour theory of value more from Smith than from Ricardo. See Esther Lowenthal, *The Ricardian Socialists* (New York, 1911), p. 103; Blaug, op. cit., pp. 148-49.

⁵ Hall, *Observations on Malthus*, p. 325. Malthus, op. cit., pp. 420-25. Cf. also the first edition of the *Essay on Population* (London, 1798), pp. 312-13, 320-21, where the point is specifically related to Britain.

decides the channels in which the industry of every society exerts itself". Where there is great inequality there is a high demand for the types of labour that produce goods adapted to the taste of the rich, while the rest of the society suffers "from a diversion to the formation of those things that are calculated to flatter the whims of the luxurious, of a part of the labour and capital that would be more advantageously employed in agricultural industry, for the purpose of procuring an ample supply of the necessaries of life".¹

So far as more general influences are concerned, it has been observed that there is an echo of Locke in Hall's assertion of a man's right to the fruits of his own labour; and Adler firmly located Hall's work "im Banne der naturrechtlichen Auffassung des Staats- und Gesellschaftslebens".² At the same time, Hall seems to have been concerned as much with considerations of "utility" as he was with natural law or natural rights. The proposition that a man should "enjoy the whole fruits of his labour" is advanced not only as a matter of natural right, but as one of the essential conditions of the people's happiness; and Hall says in one of his letters to Spence that the aim of his system is "to produce the greatest possible happiness to mankind".³ It is unlikely that Hall was influenced, as William Thompson was, by Bentham, but (of writers in what came to be defined as the utilitarian tradition) he had read Hume and Paley,⁴ and was probably indebted above all to William Godwin.

Hall does not actually cite Godwin, but echoes of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* – especially Book VIII, "Of Property" – are not infrequent in his work. The notion, described by Foxwell as Hall's "central idea", that wealth is essentially power over the labour of others is to be found not only in Godwin's *magnum opus* but also, very clearly expressed, in his essay "Of Avarice and Profusion" published in *The Enquirer* (1797).⁵ Moreover, in the first edition of his *Political Justice* Godwin had hazarded the view that "in civilized countries the peasant often does not consume more than the twentieth

¹ Earl of Lauderdale, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth* (London, 1804), pp. 281, 329, 341; Hall, *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 18, 302, note.

² R. L. Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (London, 1958), p. 126 and note; G. Adler, introduction to Hall, *Die Wirkungen der Zivilisation*, p. 23.

³ *Effects of Civilization*, p. 261; Hall to Spence, 25 August 1807, loc. cit.

⁴ See *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 61-62, for a quotation from Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785).

⁵ Foxwell, introduction to Menger, op. cit., p. xxxii; Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, 2nd ed. (2 vols; London, 1796), II, pp. 427-28; *The Enquirer* (London, 1797), p. 177.

part of the produce of his labour"¹ – though it was left to Hall to make a more careful attempt at a quantitative assessment of surplus value. Another famous radical whom Hall did not mention (perhaps because he was afraid that to do so would arouse hostile prejudices) was Thomas Paine. Yet the title of Hall's book, and one of its central themes, were surely derived from the opening section of Paine's *Agrarian Justice* (1797), which argues that civilization "has operated in two ways: to make one part of society more affluent, and the other more wretched, than would have been the lot of either in a natural state".²

It is also possible that Hall was acquainted with the works of other critics of inequality such as Mably, Rousseau and Brissot on the Continent, and Wallace and Ogilvie in Britain.³ But he should not be described, as he has been recently in a distinguished work, as a Spencean.⁴ From his correspondence with Spence in 1807 it would appear that he had not previously been acquainted with Spence's work, and the letters reveal some significant differences between them. In particular, just as Spence had criticized Paine's *Agrarian Justice* for being insufficiently radical with regard to property, so Hall criticized Spence for imagining that society could be transformed by the abolition of landownership without the abolition of other forms of wealth: such wealth, being power, would continue to be "exercised by the possessors over the non-possessors".⁵

It was in transmuting anti-landlordism into anti-capitalism, and thus redrawing the lines of class antagonism, that Hall moved on from the position of Ogilvie, Spence and Paine. It is true that he regarded inequality as having *originated* in an unequal distribution of landed property, and also that he regarded all wealth, including that of merchants and manufacturers, as ultimately analysable in terms of

¹ Enquiry concerning Political Justice (2 vols; London, 1793), II, p. 792. In subsequent editions this estimate was dropped.

² The Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. by M. D. Conway (3 vols; New York, 1908), III, p. 328.

³ The only one of these writers actually mentioned by Hall is Brissot, and the work referred to is not his *Recherches philosophiques sur le droit de propriété*, but his *New Travels in the United States of America* (London, 1792). The historical examples given by Hall (pp. 280-81) of societies which had successfully established equality of property – the Jews, Sparta and Paraguay – were models commonly cited by egalitarian writers of the eighteenth century: see André Lichtenberger, *Le socialisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1895), pp. 29, note, 60-63, 153, 218, 229, 438.

⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (London, 1969), p. 65.

⁵ T. M. Parssinen, "Thomas Spence and the Spenceans" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1968), pp. 111-12; Hall to Spence, 25 August 1807, loc. cit.

claims to the produce of the land.¹ But he imputed exploitation not only to landowners but to property-owners in general (to all whose wealth gave them control, direct or indirect, over the livelihood of others), and he included men of quite modest means among the adversaries of the poor.² Asa Briggs has said that Hall “stated clearly for the first time the central proposition of a class theory of society”, and indeed his analysis of class divisions can be regarded as superior even to that of the Ricardian socialists who followed him.³

The general question of how far he influenced later socialist and radical writers is, as such questions tend to be, difficult to answer. It is easy enough to find parallels between his writings and those of the Ricardian socialists. For instance, Hodgskin resembled Hall in tracing the origins of inequality, and hence of the power wielded by those who had property over those who had none, to the appropriation of the land by the Germanic conquerors of Western Europe in the Dark Ages.⁴ John Gray – the author of *A Lecture on Human Happiness*, not the interpreter of Physiocracy mentioned above – calculated by much the same method as Hall’s the proportion of the produce of their labour that was consumed by the productive classes (though, using the statistics published by Patrick Colquhoun in 1814, he arrived at a somewhat different answer).⁵ Also, Hall’s belief that for the labourer and his family to enjoy the whole produce of their labour would be “the highest inducement to industry that could possibly be conceived” was restated with characteristic verbosity by Thompson in a section entitled “The strongest stimulus to production (and that which is necessary to the greatest production) that the nature of things will permit, is security in the *entire use* of the products of labour, to those who produce them”.⁶

¹ *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 71-74.

² Hall says at one point (p. 203) that riches may be supposed to commence at an income-level of £150 per annum.

³ A. Briggs, “The Language of ‘Class’ in early nineteenth-century England”, in: *Essays in Labour History*, ed. by A. Briggs and J. Saville (London, 1960), p. 48; Janet Kimball, *The Economic Doctrines of John Gray 1799-1883* (Washington, D.C., 1948), p. 100.

⁴ Hall, *Effects of Civilization*, pp. 53-55, 132-33; [T. Hodgskin,] *Labour Defended against the claims of Capital* (London, 1825), p. 20; *The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted* (London, 1832), pp. 70-73. As Hall pointed out (*Observations on Malthus*, p. 341, note), these conquests included the Saxon conquest of England; his historical theory of expropriation thus differed from that of the Diggers and Spenceans, who attributed the process to the Norman Conquest, and from that of Marx, who dated it from the sixteenth century.

⁵ J. Gray, *A Lecture on Human Happiness* (London, 1825), p. 20.

⁶ Hall, *Effects of Civilization*, p. 279; W. Thompson, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* (London, 1824), p. 35.

Such repetitions are suggestive, but it is not certain how far they represent direct borrowing from Hall. However, some clear evidence does exist to show that his work was known and appreciated in radical and socialist circles. Although he may not have been justified in claiming in 1808 (in a letter to Arthur Young) that Cobbett and William Spence had appropriated his ideas in their recent attacks on commerce,¹ a long extract from his *Observations on Malthus* did appear in *Cobbett's Political Register* in 1817. Cobbett's sons, moreover, in annotating this passage for their father's *Political Works*, mentioned all three editions of *The Effects of Civilization* and described it as a work of "extraordinary merit".² The Owenite George Mudie discussed the book in his periodical *The Economist* in 1821, and in the 1830s it was invoked on occasion by the journalists of the Unstamped press.³ It was approvingly mentioned by Mary Hennell in her *Outline of the various Social Systems and Communities which have been founded on the Principle of Co-operation*, originally published as an appendix to Charles Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* (1841);⁴ and John Goodwyn Barmby, the man responsible for introducing the word "communist" into the English language, regarded Hall as one of his spiritual ancestors.⁵

It does not seem to be possible with Hall – as it is with Thompson, Hodgskin and J. F. Bray – to establish a direct link between him and Marx, but he did anticipate a number of important Marxist-Leninist doctrines. He was not an innovator in terms of vocabulary, and expressions such as expropriation, surplus value, class antagonisms, proletarianization and imperialism are not to be found in his work; but the concepts are definitely there, in a more or less developed form. As to how Hall himself should be classified in Marxist terminology, he clearly has much in common with the category of "critical-Utopian socialists" described in the *Communist Manifesto*. Socialists of this type, say Marx and Engels, address themselves to society at large without distinction of class and hope to achieve their ends without conflict, believing that once their ideas are properly ventilated and understood they will surely gain general acceptance. It is true that

¹ Hall to Young, 29 November 1808, British Library, Add. Mss 35130, f. 128; R. L. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 356, note, 358. On William Spence's sources, see his letter in *Cobbett's Political Register*, 5 December 1807, cc. 923-25.

² *Ibid.*, 4 January 1817, cc. 27-29; Selections from *Cobbett's Political Works*, ed. by J. M. Cobbett and J. P. Cobbett (6 vols; London, n.d.), V, p. 86, note.

³ *The Economist*, 17 February 1821, pp. 49-50; Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press* (Oxford, 1970), p. 203.

⁴ C. Bray, *The Philosophy of Necessity* (2 vols; London, 1841), II, p. 657, note.

⁵ W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below* (London, 1961), pp. 198-99.

Hall made some proposals which, as he expressly claimed, could not be described as Utopian; but his ideal society (to which he devoted much more space) was an extreme example of reactionary Utopianism – so extreme that even Thomas Spence regarded it as impracticable.¹ Moreover, it was undoubtedly on the critical rather than the constructive side that Hall's most impressive contribution was made.²

However, while the "critical-Utopian" classification fits him well enough in some respects, in others he points the way to socialism of a rather different type. His originality lay in the fact that he approached the phenomenon of exploitation in an analytic rather than a moralistic way, attempting to explain it in terms of the past development and current operation of economic and social forces. It was on this account that Foxwell went so far as to describe his work as "the foundation of the theory of so-called scientific socialism."³ Inevitably, Hall's insights into the nature of capitalism and the industrial economy were limited to some extent by the time and place at which he wrote. As the following passage shows, when he discussed capital he had in mind that of the merchant capitalist (still the dominant figure in the West Country woollen industry) rather than the fixed capital of the factory owner:

"The means enabling tradesmen to share a part of the product of the labour of the poor, is their capital, which puts it in their power to furnish materials to the artificers to work on, and to provide them with immediate subsistence; and on that account is supposed to give the tradesmen a just claim to a part of the productions of the workmen's hands."⁴

¹ Hall told Spence (25 August 1807, loc. cit.): "I think what we should aim at should be to go back a good way towards our natural state; to that point from which we strayed; retaining but little of that only (to wit, of the coarser arts) which civilization has produced, together with certain sciences." But Spence considered that Hall was unrealistic in imagining that people would willingly revert to a "state of barbarism" and "give up every elegant comfort of life" (Spence to Hall, 28 June 1807, Place Papers, *ibid.*, f. 284).

² R. H. Tawney, indeed, wrote that Hall was "a conservative critic of capitalism rather than a socialist". It is arguable, however, that by virtue of his social ideal as well as his critical analysis Hall does qualify to be regarded as socialist: according to Henry Collins, Hall "crossed the threshold which Paine reached", and "entered, as Paine did not, directly into the mainstream of modern socialist thought". See Tawney, introduction to Beer, *op. cit.*, I, p. x; Collins, introduction to Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 44; cf. Chabert, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

³ See the manuscript note cited above, p. 256, note 3; and cf. Menger, *op. cit.*, p. 101, note.

⁴ *Effects of Civilization*, p. 70. Hall himself, of course, considered that "the justice of this mode of acquiring wealth is by no means clear".

Also, Hall did not foresee the extent to which machinery might be used to produce goods for mass consumption; nor did he foresee the scale on which an industrial country might import basic foodstuffs in exchange for the articles it sold abroad. Yet despite these limitations to his vision his analyses of the coercive power of capital and the exploitative nature of profit, and of the economic basis and pervasive influence of class divisions, were more sophisticated than any previously made. Engels, in tracing the rise of Utopian socialism, drew attention to the seminal character of the first decade of the nineteenth century, which saw, besides Owen's early years at New Lanark, the publication of Saint-Simon's Geneva Letters and Fourier's *Théorie des quatre mouvements*.¹ Hall's *Effects of Civilization* (which Engels did not mention) adds very substantially to the achievement of that decade.

¹F. Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (New York, 1901), p. 6.