BOOK REVIEWS

THOMPSON, DOROTHY. Outsiders. Class, Gender and Nation. Verso, London etc. 1993. vi, 186 pp. £34.95. (Paper: £11.95.)

Dorothy Thompson wrote the essays in *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* over the course of a quarter of a century, a period that witnessed both the ascendance within the historical profession of working-class history, and more recently a growing sense of crisis about what constitutes the subject, subject matters, and methods of the field. This volume of six essays, plus an autobiographical introduction, reveals Thompson to be an astute historian who has charted her own sure course through these sea changes in historical scholarship.

The main theme of the collection is a consideration of nineteenth-century English radicalism. Three of the essays will be familiar to readers as they constitute some of the work on which Thompson's well-deserved reputation as a premier historian of Chartism has been based.

The essays on Chartism are initiated in Chapter 1 with a previously unpublished essay, "Chartism and the Historians". As its title suggests, Thompson examines the history of historians' understandings of Chartism beginning with contemporary accounts. In addition Thompson comments on recent trends in social history itself, especially on the changing fate of the concept of class in the hands of historians. In contradistinction both to Stedman Jones's view (which Thompson says has been "surprisingly influential") that Chartist language stemmed from a traditional language of political radicalism rather than class, and to those social historians who have viewed Chartism simply as a response to underlying economic forces, she offers her historical understanding that nineteenth-century working-class activists did not distinguish between what they imagined to be social and economic and what they thought to be political.[1] Rather, she maintains that political exclusion was central to the process by which social discontent fueled a mass movement and class came to be the force that unified its constituents. What is significant about Chartism, Thompson maintains, is the extent to which the movement, assisted by able leaders and galvanized by a nationally distributed journal, incorporated diverse populations who were unified by a sense of class. She develops these arguments about Chartism in the essays that follow.

Three of the essays, "The Early Chartists", "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension", and "Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850", ought to be well known to historians of the period. In "The Early Chartists," originally written in 1971, Thompson argues that Chartism was a mass political movement that emerged from popular radicalism. Chartism, writes Thompson, "was pervaded by a sense of class", but it was a sense of class forged not simply from antagonism against the merchant and employing classes, but one cemented by the shape and actions of the newly reformed legislature following the 1832 Reform Act.

"Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension" was originally published in 1976. The essay deals with the evidence of women's

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[1] For a similar argument see James Epstein, "Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History", *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), p. 203.

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extensive involvement early in the movement, and their puzzling disappearance from the central arenas of Chartist activity in the 1840s. She implies that class unified men and women under a common Chartist program, but unlike the early years of the movement, after 1840 gender differentiated the nature of their participation as women withdrew to devote themselves to home and family, and the more advantaged sectors of the male working class developed increasingly structured and exclusive forms of political organization.

In her essay, "Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism", originally published in 1983, Thompson seeks to demonstrate both the considerable Irish presence in the Chartist movement, and the support given by British Chartists to the cause of Irish nationalism. Rather than religion and/or ethnicity serving as divisive forces within Chartism, there was cohesion among the Irish and English within the Chartist leadership as well as their followers. Further developing the idea that political exclusion and social deprivation interacted to forge Chartist solidarity, Thompson maintains that what Irish and English workers shared was their awareness of political exclusion, and their sense of being attacked by both the state and by the employing classes. What characterized English Radicalism, according to Thompson, was the belief that both these evils were amenable to political solutions, and it was this belief that unified the Irish and the English within the Chartist fold.

In the final and previously unpublished essay that deals with Chartism, "Seceding from the Seceders", Thompson turns her sights across the Irish Sea to examine the political history of Irish nationalism in Ireland and its links with Chartism in Britain. Thompson suggests not only that the histories of the two movements were interwoven, but she explores the important question of why they did not join forces to produce a united front against the British state. She argues that a foremost reason for that failure was the "suppression or extinction of the Jacobin tradition in Ireland itself". By Jacobin tradition, Thompson refers to a radical agenda that opposed slavery, was anti-clerical, anti-aristocratic, predominantly republican, and potentially revolutionary. In both nations, Thompson maintains, "the common people [. . .] shared a vocabulary of democratic thought and to some extent a shared experience of republican revolutionary activity [. . .]" that could have brought about cooperation between the British Chartists and the Irish nationalists. Thompson argues that this did not happen because of the profound differences in their political programs, exacerbated by the hostility to Chartism of Daniel O'Connell, the foremost Catholic leader and spokesman for repeal during the period. While a Jacobin alternative existed within Ireland, it was stifled by O'Connell's group. Although there was dissension within O'Connell's movement, and a splinter group formed, it also did not adopt a democratic platform in its pursuit of nationalism. Thus, while Chartists and allied Jacobin groups were reasonably unified across regional, national and religious lines, the Irish nationalists were divided by religion, class, and political commitments. Neither movement was strong enough by itself to confront the power of the British state. Thompson suggests that the Chartists would have welcomed the cooperation of the Irish nationalists, but it was the Irish nationalists who rejected the Chartists.

Thompson's provocative and insightful essays on Chartism surely will continue to provide historians with new avenues to pursue and many points of historical detail to debate. It is not my intention here to quarrel with her historical reconstructions. Instead, I want to suggest what I see to be the advantages and disadvantages of her approach.

Thompson's empirical studies of Chartism have led her to formulate a clear argument about its class-based nature as a social movement. She maintains first that Chartism was a working peoples' movement unified by a sense of class. Second, class was not made simply by economic forces and experiences, but rather, that political exclusion was a central feature of the class formation that inspired Chartism. Third, while gender and national identities (as well as religious differences) were potentially divisive forces, there was greater unity produced by class than there was disunity fostered by these other potential political identities and causes.

Consistently, then, Thompson has resolutely refused to reduce Chartism to simple socio-economic determinants. Instead, both politics and class are central to her vision of Chartism as a social movement. Furthermore, although class clearly is the center of gravity for Thompson's understanding of Chartism, she explores both gender and nation as arenas of difference and as potential sources of divisiveness. Although she reads her evidence as indicating that class was more unifying than either gender or national identity were divisive, she shows that class unity was not absolute. For the followers of O'Connell in Ireland, national identity superseded other potential radical political identities. Thompson, therefore, makes the exploration of gender, nationalism, and ethnic difference key to her analysis of Chartism.

Yet Thompson's preference for empirical rather than theoretical analysis leads her to see class, gender, and ethnicity as unitary and discrete social categories rather than as being mutually constitutive. Let me use gender as a way of illustrating what I mean. If, for example, as Thompson suggests, class was in part defined by those who were and those who were not enfranchised, where does that situate women *vis-à-vis* class, since the rights of citizenship accrued neither to plebian nor to bourgeois women? Class, then, must have been gendered male. Furthermore, Thompson appears to assume that these potential political identities are alternatives for one another, and must be muted or downplayed if unity is to prevail. In her essay on women in Chartism, Thompson implies that since women did not argue for their gender interests, gender *per se* was not significant to Chartism, although women's activities as members of the working class were. She reports that women increasingly withdrew from Chartist activities to the sanctuaries of their households and speculates that this was caused by the spread among plebian families of the ideology of domesticity, women's support of men's demand for a family wage, and the increasingly formal modes through which Chartist men conducted their political activities. What Thompson overlooks is the possibility that issues of gender were central to Chartist politics. In a recent essay, Anna Clark, for example, has suggested that domesticity was an important subtext in Chartist language, and that Chartists asserted sexual difference as part of their political strategy.[2] It is possible then that solidarity can be created by emphasizing difference rather than by denying or downplaying it.

The problem here is that in the essays on Chartism, Thompson uses the concepts of class, gender and nationality purely as preconstituted social divisions

[2] Anna Clark, "The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s", *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (January 1992), pp. 62–88.

rather than as culturally constructed meanings. In the final essay in the volume, "Queen Victoria, the Monarchy and Gender", however, Thompson examines the significance of gender meanings in the Queen Caroline agitation, and in the possibility that Queen Victoria's gender "disarmed radical republicanism". This essay raises a number of questions that Thompson does not address, for example, how both class and imperialism were implicated in this gendering of royalism. However, it suggests her creative use of gender as a cultural construct, and leads one to suspect that if she were to use such an approach to rethink her Chartist materials, it might inspire her to new insights adding to or perhaps modifying those presented here.

Finally, although Thompson insists that class is central to the history of this period, she does not attempt the admittedly difficult task of defining it. Refusing to essentialize class she argues that historians need to use the word descriptively if not analytically, because nineteenth-century sources are riddled with its use. Scholars who are tackling the crucial analytical problem of how to link the social and economic levels of analysis to the political could benefit from Dorothy Thompson's keen historical sensibilities, but they must then draw out their theoretical implications.

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MOCH, LESLIE PAGE. Moving Europeans. Migration in Western Europe since 1650. [Interdisciplinary Studies in History.] Indiana University Press, Bloomington [etc.] 1992. xii, 257 pp. Maps. $35.00.

Migration has slowly but surely become a popular subject within the field of social and economic history. An important source for this growing interest was the unrelenting stream of publications on immigration to the United States which have appeared since the 1970s and in which much attention was paid to the (supposed) exceptional, spectacular and heroic elements of a mass migration that had an enormous appeal to the imagination and fitted well the national image of the U.S. as a country of immigrants. During the past few years this attention has shifted somewhat to the "normal" instead of the "exceptional" character of migration. Both Tilly and Morawska have pointed to the considerable degree of continuity between the Old World and the New.[1] This trend has been continued in the collection of essays by Vecoli and Sinke in which Dirk Hoerder argues that the phenomenon of migration was essentially related to the general development of the labour market.[2]

Despite fundamental theoretical progress, the emphasis on the United States and on the recent period means the scope of this has been limited. Theories of migration have been applied to other parts of the world, but again often

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[1] See their contributions to Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (ed.), *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (New York etc., 1990).

[2] Dirk Hoerder, "International labor markets and community building by migrant workers in the Atlantic economies", in Rudolph J. Vecoli and Susanne M. Sinke (eds), *A Century of European Migrations, 1830–1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 1991), pp. 78–110. See also his latest publication, *People on the move. Migration, acculturation, and ethnic interaction in Europe and North-America* (German Historical Institute Washington D.C. Annual Lecture Series no. 6) (Providence/Oxford, 1993).