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What Happened to Class? New Histories of Labour and Collective Action in Britain.*

Recently, my family called me a ‘labour historian’. A ‘labour historian’ is one of the last epithets I would give to my thoroughly bourgeois self, so I considered why they made that association. In 2005, I published an article rethinking Luddism, the machine-breaking outbreaks of 1812. It stuck out somewhat incongruously as an old-fashioned topic, although I had reworked it with a postmodernist nod towards the agency of language.¹ In the heyday of labour history in the 1960s and 1970s, it was a natural assumption to connect the study of trade unions and the Labour party with labour’s more troublesome sister, social movements and popular protest. Yet over the past couple of decades, labour history has changed. Many of its historians no longer regard the labour (and Labour) movement as the be-all and end-all of the history of the working class. Their interests have diversified, shedding new light on identities and activities that are not completely subsumed by a narrative of class. Perhaps, indeed, I had mistaken myself for a labour historian of the old sort, even though methodologically and culturally I was far from being so. Although I did not realise it at the time, however, protest history had begun to be rethought and revived in a new direction.

This is a review of recent developments in British labour and collective action history. In 2009, I returned to mythical leaders of machine-breakers. This time they were in the form of ‘Captain Swing’, that head of the eponymous rural agitation of the early 1830s. I duly attended a conference held by the Southern History Society, revisiting the legacy of Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé’s monumental and hugely popular opus,

Captain Swing. Yet the papers presented at the conference were not, broadly speaking, an old-style labour history. The speakers overturned Hobsbawm and Rudé's generalist, class-based approach to the riots, and viewed the agitation through a completely different lens, which will be described below.² Moreover, the research on *Swing* represented only one part of a wide-ranging variety of new approaches to the history of collective action that is only now coming into print. They promise to change our understanding of social relations and conflict in Britain from the early modern period to the present day. These histories of collective action and protest have not as yet made the same impact upon the broader field of social history as the new strands of labour history, but they have an exciting potential to do so.

This article does not promise to offer a complete historiography of labour. The supplements celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the *Labour History Review* admirably assume that mantle.³ Every few years yet another round of special editions and retrospective colloquia appear on the subject of where 'history from below' is heading. Indeed, the zealousness of debates about 'the crisis in labour history' ironically demonstrates the continuing vitality of the discipline.⁴ Rather, this article is a call for historians of collective action to learn from the new research, but more especially to conduct a more comprehensive and meaningful dialogue with labour historians. Labour historians in turn should take insights from early modern and rural protest history in order to broaden their chronologies and methodologies. We need to provide a more nuanced yet still satisfactorily narrative account of 'history from below' that encompasses the material and intellectual experience of the working class within British society. Furthermore, we

need to communicate that message more effectively beyond academic discourse, so that no one automatically presume that all we study are trade unions and riots.

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What has happened to class? Until a few years ago, the answer was ostensibly obvious: it had been deconstructed out of existence by postmodernism. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, postmodernist or post-structuralist methodologies pulled apart class and other super-structures that had shaped previous understandings of agency and change. Vehement controversies about the power of language gripped the field but then outran their course. By the turn of the new millennium, proponents of the 'linguistic turn' had ironically almost run out of things to say.⁵ Labour history in many respects shielded itself from these semantic controversies and the more extreme of its methodological attacks on grand narratives of the development of working-class organization. Scottish and Welsh historians of labour in particular seemed to carry on as if it were 'business as usual'.⁶ In the realm of social movement history, the old master-narratives of class and political development persisted. Such classics as Hobsbawm and Rudé's *Captain Swing*, and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, were somewhat strangely set apart from the deconstructionist ruins left by postmodernism.

Postmodernism nevertheless continues to cast a more diffuse shadow over historical research of many disciplines. The most obvious outcome has been a pervasive attention to language. No one can avoid reading between the lines and constructing 'discourses' from textual evidence, even if many may argue that they have always done so.⁷ The other major impact has been a gradual shift away from class as the be-all and end-all of labour history. Labour history has gradually evolved over the past couple of

decades, although without rejecting its deep and valuable roots in trade unions and socialist polities. It now encompasses a growing recognition that the working class could and did share in multiple identities. Gender especially has taken a much more prominent place in those identities. Karen Hunt, among other historians of women's role in labour movements, have led this direction, forcefully arguing that gender shaped the experience of the working classes as much if not more than class itself.⁸ Broader economic historical research on women and children workers may be included in this still expanding area of enquiry.⁹ Attention to other 'identities' is however still limited, especially those of race and ethnicity.

The other main trends in current labour history involve responses to contemporary politics. There are multitudinous new studies on the Labour party, most obviously stimulated by the rise and fall of 'New Labour' between the mid-1990s to the present day. The decline of the trade unions' role in British society and politics has stimulated another round of investigation into their longer antecedents, fostered by the Society for the Study of Labour History's long-running monograph series, *Studies in Labour History*.¹⁰ Finally, the most recent shoots of growth appear in comparative work on international labour movements and their connections with their British counterparts.¹¹ All these strands are solely overdue and much needed.

Traditional sections of labour history outside the realm of trade unions are also in rude health. The Chartist studies series issued by the socialist publishers Merlin Press is an example of a more traditional history of collective action that is going strong. The steady stream of publications defies presumptions that the history of Chartism 'had been done' by tackling new evidence with new evidence and insights from the cultural

history.¹² Outside this series, a major contribution has been made by Malcolm Chase's 'new history' of Chartism.¹³ On the surface his monograph appears to be a traditional narrative account, but Chase in fact weaves together a rich and nuanced analysis of all angles of the movement. He encompasses the more recent historical 'turns' towards the role of culture, female involvement, and the politics of the everyday. His prose certainly offers a template for historians wishing to reach out to the educated public.

Outside the domain of labour history, but still allied in sympathy, are studies of political radicalism. These have over the past decade or so taken the 'cultural turn'. We cannot now read accounts of well-known events and movements without noting the elaborate ritual, symbolism, and cultural practices that made up the popular experience of politics. This approach is tied in with an emphasis upon popular agency and the participatory politics of the unreformed British state. There are again too many studies to cite in detail, but some of the most interesting cover the 'age of reform'. Robert Poole, Paul Custer, and Michael Bush have rethought events leading to the 'Peterloo massacre' of 1819, particularly in relation to popular experience of and female participation in the reform campaign.¹⁴ James Epstein's work on the cultural rituals and emblems of radical societies is complemented by Bob Harris and Gordon Pentland's examinations of the development and legacies of Scottish radicalism over a longer period.¹⁵ I, among other historians, have highlighted the symbolism of clothing, banners, and visual means of political communication.¹⁶ There is growing, although not enough, research on the interaction between loyalist elites and radical activists in British and Irish popular politics.¹⁷

Public history institutions and museums have also attempted to move away from the more negative associations of the old labour history. The National Museum of Labour History in Manchester rebranded itself as the ‘People’s History Museum’ in 2001. This change was a successful attempt to move away from an ‘us and them’ scenario that no longer fitted the reality of declining union membership. The museum’s strength still lies in its major archive collections of the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. Yet the main theme of the revitalized displays is the broader identity of the ‘people’s history’. It is most prominently visualized by a ‘family tree’ on a wall of the entrance hall, which draws connections from the classic radical heroes of the Diggers, Levellers, Tom Paine, victims of Peterloo, and so on, to the more usual labour suspects of the Tolpuddle martyrs, the growth of national trade unions, the emergence of the Independent Labour Party, the Labour victory of 1945, all the way to the 1984 miners’ strike and beyond.¹⁸

To some extent the history of social movements is still framed within this trajectory of famous events and groups represented on the People’s History Museum wall. The old Marxist and Fabian narratives of class and politicization still exert a powerful influence. Take, for example, the revived interest in another staple of George Rudé’s canon, the Gordon Riots of 1780. With the aid of the innovative analytical tools available through the Old Bailey Online and London Lives digitized archives, this project promises to offer much more detailed insights into the composition and motivations of the rioters and crowds, about which Rudé could only have dreamed.¹⁹ Tim Hitchcock posits a strong thesis for the Gordon Riots as a ‘revolutionary’ outbreak by a newly-conscious ‘London working class’, thwarted only by the military power of the state.²⁰ On

the one hand, he is right to emphasize how the rioters made a conscious shift from religious to political targets, especially the newly remodelled prisons in London. On the other hand, most labour historians would now perhaps balk at the words ‘revolutionary’ and ‘working class’ being used so freely, the more so with reference to a heterogeneous occupational mix of inhabitants of a sprawling city even in 1780. This is not to denigrate the project, just a call to caution.

British labour and protest historians always risk Anglo-centrism (despite occasional nods towards Welsh miners and ‘Red Clydeside’). By focusing on landmark events and the mass membership organizations, it is also easy to slip into the old grand narrative that charts a trajectory from the early nineteenth-century plebeian radical societies, most notably the Chartists, to the development of organized trade unions and the Labour Party. Its chronology is still predominantly focused upon the rise of labour movements during the industrial revolution, and their fall during de-industrialization in the twentieth century. It focuses on politics and overt conflicts in urban areas. This model is prone to segregate discrete and extraordinary events and personalities from the thicker web of experiences and social relations of the everyday. The natural tendency among many political and social historians (particularly if their geographical scope is national) is to gravitate towards protests and events that can easily be identified and categorized. In the 1990s, the sociologist Charles Tilly sustained the narratives of class development and politicization of social movements in England during the industrial revolution. Yet his quantifying approach created a typology of ‘repertoires of protest’ that firstly unsatisfactorily separated types of action that may have been connected, and secondly

unfairly denigrated 'pre-industrial' collective action as disorganized and unsophisticated.²¹

Many of the new histories of collective action are unwilling to conform to these typologies of popular protest. They do not deny that the development of class consciousness and the potential for revolution existed at various points in time and during particular social conflicts. Yet they do not allow these over-arching structures to dictate the search for the reasons behind collective action, the nature of social relations, or the consequences of disturbances. They abandon the Marxist vocabulary of hegemony and social control in favour of 'agency', 'reciprocity', mediation, participation, and negotiation.²² They move away from the polarities between 'elite' and 'popular' in conceptualising power relations. Taken together, they offer a more holistic view of constant negotiations, frictions and tensions, and the complexities of collective action that cannot always be reduced to a single term of 'riot' or an identifiable mass participation political group. The new research defines 'protest' as nuanced and flexible, ambiguous and changing. It rejects the separation of collective action into homogeneous 'movements', and argues that particular protest events must be placed within deeper and more locationally specific patterns of social conflict. This approach is not consciously post-structuralist, however, even if some of its conclusions tend towards downplaying the significance of class in collective action. Rather, the methodology of most studies is decidedly predicated on regional or local studies, combined with attempts to gather a more holistic picture of everyday lives and conflicts.

Notably, the new histories of protest have been produced without a concrete sense of central direction. Unlike Hobsbawm, Thompson, and other noted historians who

attempted to bridge the gap between labour and collective action, its historians do not come from a labour history ‘tradition’ or from a particular ideological standpoint. The acknowledgements pages of classic studies of social protest often express a direct and sincere debt to the intellectual and practical support network offered by the History Workshop, Ruskin College, Workers’ Educational Association, the Society for Labour History Research, and similar groups formed in the mid twentieth century.²³ By contrast, there is no central body to guide the new research. In some senses, this is the point. The variety of approaches and topics cannot be shaped by a single intellectual source. The new studies cover every form of collective action from rioting to subversive activity, and every period from medieval to the modern. There are some shared interests, however, that have served to mould the methodologies and subject matter of these new histories. The influence of early modern studies, and of rural history, is especially prominent. Furthermore, much of the new research shares the idea of ‘weapons of the weak’, a concept popularized by the anthropologist James C. Scott.²⁴ As we will see, although not without its own inconsistencies, ‘everyday resistance’ offers one way of placing outbursts of collective action within a more contextually rich environment. The rest of this article will explore the main strands of the new histories of collective action and posit some further directions that need to be taken.

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First and foremost, there has been a major resurgence in studies of the Swing riots of the early 1830s. Previously, Hobsbawm and Rudé’s *Captain Swing* remained the singular authority on the topic. Although Roger Wells and Andrew Charlesworth added important correctives to the history of the movement, the Swing riots remained predominantly

about rural labourers smashing agricultural machinery in a southern-wide movement against capitalism and its manifestations in tithes, the corn laws and the poor laws.²⁵ Most historians of the movement were essentially searching for a ‘rural proletariat’, and when they were eventually unable to find such a coherent body among the Swing rioters, they dismissed the agitation as a reactionary product of desperation.²⁶ Yet recently, over a dozen articles have been published rethinking the legacy of *Captain Swing*, with more to come.²⁷ Steve Poole, Carl Griffin, Peter Jones, and Adrian Randall, amongst others, have deepened our understanding not just of the Swing riots, but also of general rural agitation in the early nineteenth century. The origins and resonances of Swing are no longer confined to the tight gap between the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act and the 1832 Reform Act. Their central approach is to treat Swing not as a coherent unified movement, but as a complex, multi-faceted series of outbreaks of rural agitation. They place agitation within longer-term patterns of tension and unrest, and emphasize regionally-specific social and economic contexts. They move away from the quantifying and categorizing approach favoured by previous historians of protest. They also stress the impact of interactions between activists and local forces of order, the role of the press in shaping popular perceptions of disorder, and regional differences in juridical discretion.²⁸ These approaches offer much for labour history: they transcend the usual boundaries between urban and rural history, and are applicable to industrial unrest and other ‘rebellions’. Peter Jones, for example, has made a plea for a new ‘history from within’ to supplement the tradition of ‘history from below’.²⁹

Broader research on rural protest continues many of these themes. Barry Reay has moved beyond his study of ‘the last rising of agricultural labourers’ of Hernhill in 1838

to a wider and deeper understanding of rural resistance. He too calls for historians to move away from Tilly's 'modernization' thesis, and for an end to the segregation of urban from rural history.³⁰ Alongside his work on Swing, Carl Griffin has produced voluminous work on incendiarism, enclosure riots, tree and plant maiming, and other aspects of rural resistance in southern England.³¹ Popular opposition to the enclosure of common land has always been a common theme in the historiography of rural life. Its practices and meanings are now being rethought. Briony McDonagh and other early modern scholars have situated conflicts over enclosure and customary rights within much more complex networks of dependencies and relationships between the various social orders than was previously thought. Class was there, but customary resistance indicated a web of social tensions that cannot be characterized in a simple dichotomy between landowners and tenants.³²

The continuing legacy of E. P. Thompson can also be detected in most of this new research. The impact of his classic monograph of 1963, *The Making of the English Working Class*, is perhaps immeasurable. But it is the notion of the moral economy, or the unwritten rules of community justice, that Thompson developed most fully in one of his last works, *Customs in Common*, that has been more consciously applied in recent studies. Adrian Randall's analysis of 'riotous assemblies' is one of the few attempts (along with Chase's *Chartism*) to produce a national picture of collective action in this period without resorting to generalization or cherry-picking of evidence. Randall returns comfortably to the Thompsonian favourites of food riots, strikes, and machine breaking. According to Randall, workers were enacting a defence of customary working practices against the seemingly unstoppable tide of Smithian laissez-faire political economy

imposed on them by manufacturers and a government shrinking from intervention.³³ Here perhaps we see the link between labour and collective action history that we have been lacking. We must, however, exercise Barry Reay's note of caution. Reay warns historians against trying to fit all forms of popular defence of custom and rights within 'an inflexible or coherent socio-political world view'. The moral economy might make a nicely tight analytical framework, but as Thompson himself was keen to stress, it may not have reflected the multivalent identities of all workers and the poor.³⁴

Thompson's other work offered even more of a precedent for recent research. We cannot refer to rural collective action without referring to his monograph *Whigs and Hunters*, or his chapter on threatening letters in the groundbreaking collection of essays on legal and penal history, *Albion's Fatal Tree*.³⁵ John E. Archer's monograph, *By a Flash and a Scare*, had the then unusual focus of animal maiming and incendiarism in nineteenth-century East Anglia. At the time it was somewhat isolated, but its influence upon the new studies of rural collective action can now be fully recognized. Archer alerted social historians to the possibilities inherent in taking a more oblique view at 'social crimes' outside the usual remit of collective action history.³⁶ The publisher Breviary has recently taken to republishing in cheap format the 'classics' of the old 'history from below' guard, including Archer's *By a Flash and a Scare*, Chase's *The People's Farm*, Reay's *Last Rising of the Agricultural Labourers*, and Wells's *Insurrection and Wretched Faces*.³⁷ Surely this is testimony to renewed interest in these topics and a desire to give them greater popular coverage.

The new studies of popular collective action are united by a commitment to a regional or even 'micro-history' approach to historical research. Many micro-studies in

the mode of Reay involve charting particularly complex and instructive incidents of resistance to changes in land ownership and tenure, especially during enclosure, in particular localities. These include: Stephen Hipkin on the late sixteenth-century conflict over Faversham Blean, Kent; Andy Wood on conflicts over land and customs in early seventeenth-century Kirkbyshire, north Yorkshire; Steve Hindle on the mid seventeenth-century dispute over the enclosure of Caddington Common in the Chilterns; and Richard Hoyle and C. J. Spencer on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century debates about the poor pasture in Slaidburn, West Riding.³⁸ Another abiding feature of these and similar studies is a close attention to social conflicts in everyday life as well as major outbreaks of disorder. Many new studies borrow heavily from the notion of ‘everyday resistance’ as conceived by James C. Scott.³⁹ Timothy Shakesheff has demonstrated the subversive potential of wood theft in nineteenth-century Herefordshire; similarly, Peter King has shown how popular defence of the rural practice of gleaning played a part in ‘strategies of the poor’.⁴⁰ Pauper agency is a major theme, and is reflective of wider currents in social history. Steve King and others have shown that the lower orders were not helpless victims of elites and the state, but had a certain level of agency available to them. Applied to collective action, strategies of the poor involved a defence of customary rights. This was not as desperate and reactionary as Hobsbawm and Rudé saw it, but was a vibrant defence of common interests against the perceived intrusion of private property and atomizing capitalism. King’s project on pauper letters, furthermore, highlighted regional differences in ‘strategies of the poor’ that a generalized national picture would have been unable to detect.⁴¹

Environmental history is another expanding field offering great potential for these new histories. It follows a separate line from the revival in studies of resistance to the enclosure of common land. Most of the latter are concerned with traditional accounts of enclosure riots or the rather polite associational forms of opposition, as in for instance, Ben Cowell's study of the campaign to save Berkhamsted Common in Hertfordshire.⁴² An exception to this has been Brian Short's examination of the later Victorian conflict between landowners and tenants over the right to use woods in Ashdown Forest, Sussex. Custom and class were interlinked, even as late as the nineteenth century, when 'the developing ideologies of rural conservation and preservation were intertwined with the intricacies of place-specific culture and class'.⁴³ Geographer Nick Blomley developed another interesting framework, arguing for the powerful symbolic as well as material role that hedges played in marking out power in enclosure disputes. He pays a close attention to the environment not usually seen in historical studies of the topic.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Carl Griffin and Iain Robertson have more recently expanded the repertoires of rural resistance in innovative directions. They point to a 'moral ecology' of collective action, reflecting their growing interest in the potential agency of animal or 'more than human' actors.⁴⁵ David Featherstone's identification of the 'subaltern political ecologies' of the Whiteboy movement in nineteenth-century Ireland offers some intriguing leads in this respect.⁴⁶

Much less research has been done on everyday resistance in urban and industrial settings. Even with the survival of more detailed wages ledgers and other documentation, it is difficult to reconstruct acts of defiance occurring on a quotidian basis. Singular studies of industrial and poor law institutions suggest that there may be more to be found

out about working to time and ‘hidden transcripts’ of language, the ‘opacity of the workplace’, and organization outside trade unions. David Green has made a forceful case for paupers using acts of insubordination in London workhouses to forge resistance to the New Poor Law regime. Richard Soderlund has charted how hand spinners in the Yorkshire worsted industry in the eighteenth century supplemented their declining wages with pilfering wool.⁴⁷

Many labour historians would perhaps rightly shy away from some of the aspects of the new collective action history. The notion of class has been become nuanced or even has been side-stepped so skilfully that it has drifted out of view. A roundtable on class at the 2010 Rural History Society conference provoked a vibrant debate about whether it was possible to replace class as the fundamental conceptual framework for the study of ‘history from below’. The debate failed to resolve the division between class as merely a descriptive term (and therefore fluid and mutable) and class as an agent of change or progression (in the Marxist or Fabian sense).⁴⁸ “Everyday resistance’ is not a completely satisfactory solution to this intractable problem. The old guard of labour historians would argue that a new ‘history from below’ was not necessary; that once the grand narratives of the development of class consciousness and politicization are removed, the resultant *mélange* of competing identities and interests leaves historians (particularly those of rural society, to forgive the pun), unable to see the wood for the trees. In some senses, grounded as it is in particular localities and communities, the model of everyday resistance can serve to reduce collective action to a common denominator. It may indeed denigrate the impact of the blood shed at Peterloo, the

massive popularity of Chartism, the achievements of the Independent Labour Party, or the daring of the flying pickets in 1984.

There are other problems. It is difficult to apply James C. Scott's modern anthropological methods, reliant as they are upon oral interviews and observation, to historical evidence before the twentieth century. Historians of collective action and of labour must be careful not to go too far with the concept. Not every 'social crime' was intended as a political statement, nor every act of theft as a 'protest'.⁴⁹ In the case of Soderlund's study, although evidence of systematic pilfering refutes previous characterizations of early industrial workers, particularly women, as deferential and submissive, his portrayal of such actions as 'resistance' strays towards treating theft as a conscious act of protest against 'the man'. For many spinners, it was a desperate act of self-preservation and survival. Lastly, much of what has been discussed here is Anglo-centric, and indeed based on evidence from southern England. It has not as yet followed labour history's emphasis on comparative geographies and international networks.

So to an agenda for the history of collective action, and of labour more generally:

1. We need to understand more clearly how the 'history from below' interacted with the 'history from above'. Steve Poole has noted the lack of response to Andrew Charlesworth's plea back in 1991 for 'serious studies' of the interaction between local elites and authorities with agricultural rioters and other participants in subaltern activity. Poole's own work on the last site of execution on a crime scene in England helps to redress that balance, as do other historians' studies of the magistrates' responses to the Swing riots in the southern counties.⁵⁰ More is needed in this vein. We need to know more about policing shaped protests as they happened, and how regional patterns of

preference and prejudice in sentencing and conviction affected the outbreak of later collective actions. This applies to urban as well as rural agitation. Again, medieval and early modern historians have already shown the way in this respect. Such classic topics as the Tudor rebellions, the Diggers and Leveller movements, and other popular ‘insurrections’ have been rethought within more nuanced and ‘everyday’ parameters. Steve Hindle, for instance, has deconstructed the Midland Rising of 1607. He suggests we need to move on from simply categorizing the social make-up of the crowd for the sake of showing it to be heterogeneous. Rather, we need also to examine how representations of protesters, both by elites and by activists themselves, also shaped collective action.⁵¹

2. Space and place need to be brought to the forefront of action, as do the interactions between inhabitants and their environments. Historians of collective action need to look beyond the southern counties of England. We need much more for Scotland and Wales, and indeed for Ireland. Furthermore, as labour history is travelling in a comparative direction in relation to international labour movements, so collective action history must stretch to comparative angles. For example, the parallels between the cross-dressing Luddites in my own work have not yet been fully drawn with their French counterparts in nineteenth-century Rouen and the Ariège.⁵²

3. We must tackle the perennial topic of class again. The newer studies in labour history call for a wider definition of ‘labour’ to encompass the lives and activities of all working people. The history of popular protest and collective action needs to follow suit. We need to reconnect with the public in this age when the power of the trade unions and indeed the term ‘working class’ both seem somewhat anachronistic. One way out of the

stalemate over the issue of class, I would argue, echoing Andrew Charlesworth, Barry Reay and others, is to take the long view of social relations. Perhaps we need to move on from producing reams of short case studies of particular places, handy for satisfying future Research Excellence Framework requirements though they may be. E. P. Thompson warned that ‘if we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences’. His proposed solution still stands: if historians are to accept class as a process rather than as a descriptive definition, then they should study social relations over a longer period of change, within a geographical region that offers both depth and room for comparison.⁵³ A longitudinal regional approach does not destroy larger narratives of class and conflict; in many ways it serves to strengthen them with deeper awareness of the variety of processes and identities involved in collective action from the smallest to the largest scales. Acknowledging class relations in the everyday and in the local environment allows labour history and protest history to meet on mutual grounds and develop further. To answer my family, therefore, I may not be a labour historian, but I am a historian of labour, in which protest, collective organization, and everyday life were integrally linked.

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* This essay was prompted by overhearing a conversation in a Manchester pub between Malcolm Chase and Karen Hunt about the good old days of History Workshop.

Subsequent ideas were formed by spirited conversations with Carl Griffin, Iain Robertson, Briony McDonagh, Peter Catterall, and Graham Johnson. I am also indebted to Peter Jones and Steve Poole for pulling apart an earlier, weaker version of this piece.

¹ Katrina Navickas, 'The search for General Ludd: the mythology of Luddism', *Social History*, xxx, 3 (Aug. 2005). My article was a response to Kevin Binfield, *Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore, 2004).

² Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1969); 'Captain Swing Reconsidered: Forty Years of Rural History from Below', University of Reading, 21 March 2009; edited proceedings are published in *Southern History*, 32 (2010). Katrina Navickas, 'Captain Swing in the north: the Carlisle riots of 1830', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxi (spring 2011).

³ Neville Kirk, 'Challenge, crisis, and renewal? Themes in the labour history of Britain, 1960–2010', *Labour History Review*, lxxv, 2 (summer 2010), 162–80; John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, John Halstead, and David Martin (eds), *Making History: Organizations of Labour Historians in Britain since 1960*, *Labour History Review*, lxxv, supplement (spring 2010); Joan Allen, A. Campbell, and Malcolm Chase (eds), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (London, 2010).

⁴ See Stefan Berger (ed.), *Labour and Social History in Great Britain: Historiographical Reviews and Agendas*, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für Soziale Bewegungen*, xxvii (2002), and *Labour History Review* generally, and especially, Malcolm Chase, 'Labour

history in the mainstream: not drowning but waving?’ *Labour History Review*, lx, 3 (winter 1995); Patrick Joyce, ‘Refabricating labour history, or, from labour history to the history of labour’, *Labour History Review*, lxii, 2 (summer 1997); ‘ILWCH roundtable: what next for labor and working–class history?’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 46 (Sept. 1994), 7–92.

⁵ James Vernon, ‘Who’s afraid of the linguistic turn? The politics of social history and its discontents’, *Social History*, xix, 1 (Jan. 1994), 81–97; Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Harvard, 2004).

⁶ Andy Croll, ‘The impact of postmodernism on modern British social history’, in Berger, *Labour and Social History*, *op. cit.*, p. 146; Neville Kirk, ‘History, language, ideas and post–modernism: a materialist view’, *Social History*, xix, 2 (May 1994), 221–40.

⁷ John Belchem and Neville Kirk, eds., *Languages of Labour* (Aldershot, 1997).

⁸ Karen Hunt, ‘Gender and labour history in the 1990s’, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für Soziale Bewegungen*, xxvii (2002), 185–200; Ursula de la Mare, ‘Necessity and rage: the factory women’s strikes in Bermondsey, 1911’, *History Workshop Journal*, 66 (Autumn 2008) 62–80; Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson, *Women and Work Culture: Britain, c. 1850–1950* (Aldershot, 2005); Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Unpicking Gender: The Social Construction of Gender in the Lancashire Cotton Weaving Industry, 1880–1914* (Aldershot, 2004); Margaret Walsh (ed.), *Working Out Gender: Perspectives from Labour History* (Aldershot, 1999).

⁹Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour and the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010); Carolyn Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009); Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England*,

1780–1820: Parish Apprenticeship and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force (Ashgate, 2007).

¹⁰ Nigel Copsey and David Renton (eds), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (Basingstoke, 2005); Alastair J. Reid, *United We Stand: a History of Britain's Trade Unions* (London, 2004); Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy (eds), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 1999).

¹¹ *Labour History Review*, lxxiv, 3 (Dec. 2009), and lxxv, 1 (April 2010); Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot, 2003); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: the History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford, 2002).

¹² Robert G. Hall, *Voices of the People: Democracy and Chartist Political Identity, 1830–1870* (Monmouth, 2007); W. Hamish Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland* (Monmouth, 2010); Paul A. Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor: a Political Life* (Monmouth, 2008). See special issue of *Labour History Review*, 'New directions in Chartist studies', lxxiv, 1 (April 2009).

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