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an unexpected majority of these seats. This came as a shock to the Liberals, many of whom, including Chamberlain, had anticipated a landslide for the party. It was assessed that the extreme language that Chamberlain and the radicals had used had frightened many moderate voters. The setbacks in the boroughs cut the Liberal majority and took the shine off the election victory.

This outcome demonstrated, in Dr Jenkins' view, that the Liberal Party as a whole, not just the Whigs, was not ready for the acceptance and implementation of Chamberlain's radical programme. The main lessons of the election drawn by the party were that there had been a rejection of radical policies and a justification of moderate and traditional Liberal approaches. Even after the 1885 election, therefore, the Whigs did not feel that their position inside the party was anachronistic or under serious threat of being swept away by a tide of progressivism. They believed that they were well placed to fight for their version of Liberalism in opposition to Chamberlain. When, therefore, the Liberal split came in 1886 it was, in Dr Jenkins' assessment, genuinely about Ireland and about Gladstone's style of leadership. There was no ideological divide between radicals and Whigs and the Whigs did not use Ireland as a smoke-screen under cover of which they could leave the party and join the Conservatives. The issue of home rule split the party in an entirely different way. It created a fault line that ensured that Hartington and Chamberlain were actually in alliance with each other in the Liberal Unionists. Of the MPs who rebelled over home rule, only about half were from aristocratic or classic Whig backgrounds; about 30 per cent were businessmen.

There is no doubt that the split of 1886 was immensely damaging to the Liberals,

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demoralising the party and undermining its ability to present itself to the nation as a truly national party; and of course it was a gift to the Conservatives who, with their new Liberal Unionist allies, were able to dominate politics for the next twenty years. While it is true that many of those who left the party in 1886 were from the Whig tradition, this did not have the effect of liberating the Liberal Party in the years immediately following, and allowing it to become a progressive party of welfare and social reform. For example, looking at the Newcastle Programme of 1891, while there were some elements of tax reform clearly inspired by Chamberlain's earlier ideas, the emphasis was on mainly traditional Liberal policies such as home rule, disestablishment of the Scottish church and temperance reform. Dr Jenkins thought highly questionable, therefore, the proposition that the Liberal Party had to divest itself of the Whigs before it could move on to the New Liberalism. By the 1890s and 1900s the political

agenda was changing and politicians of all parties were forced to confront a new landscape. Issues such as old age pensions or social insurance were new; they were not the policies being talked about by Chamberlain in 1885, although ironically Chamberlain was at that time trying to develop policy on these questions from within his alliance with the Conservatives.

In conclusion, Dr Jenkins said he would agree with the view expressed by the late Professor Colin Matthew, editor of the Gladstone diaries, when he speculated that if the Liberal Party had held together in 1886 on the Irish question, it could have become a party of positive social welfare.

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- 1 Denis Judd, *Radical Joe, A Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press), 1993.
- 2 See also, Marji Bloy, *Joseph Chamberlain* in Duncan Brack et al, *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (London, Politico's Publishing), 1998.

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The strange birth of social democracy

Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Profile Books, 2004)

Reviewed by **Frank Trentmann**

The battle for the next election has begun. So far, the main show in town to watch is not the conflict between parties but the contest between Brown and Blair. How to end poverty has become the battleground between rival egos and

rival views of social democracy. In this ambitious and thought-provoking book, Gareth Stedman Jones argues that it is fundamentally flawed to think that the future of social democracy lies with either New or Old Labour. *An End to Poverty?* offers a fresh

account of the birth of social democracy and an earlier vision of how to make poverty history. Instead of to trade unions or the welfare state, Stedman Jones looks to Thomas Paine and the Marquis de Condorcet in the 1780s and 1790s as the founding fathers of social democracy. In response to the American and French Revolutions, and drawing on new knowledge about probability, Paine and Condorcet developed a republican vision that combined social insurance with civic commitment in a commercial society. Poverty, they argued, could be eliminated through social insurance and universal education, paving the way for a republican, more inclusive and egalitarian community. Instead of seeking to navigate between liberalism and socialism, social democratic politics today, Stedman Jones urges, should return to this initial republican project and combine commercial society, social equality, and inclusive citizenship.

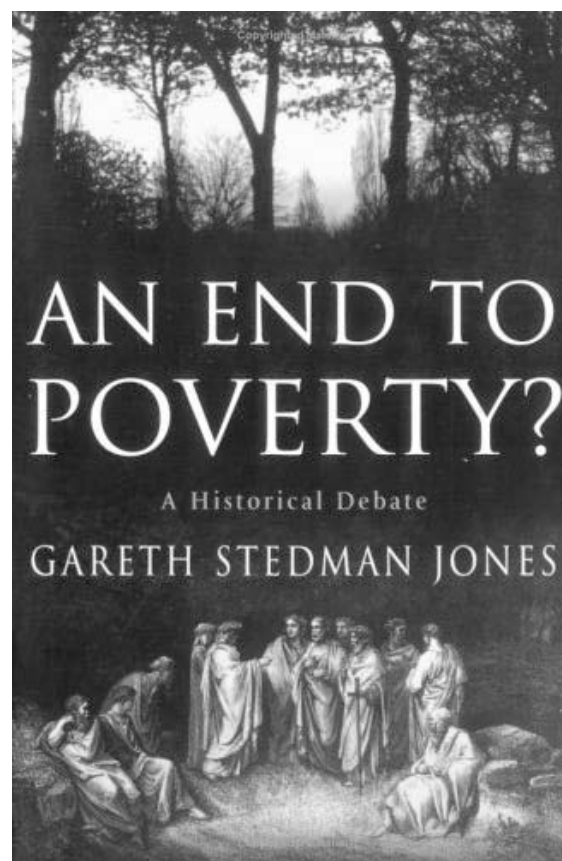
After the 1790s, it is all downhill. Reaction to the French Revolution closed off the space for radical politics. The organic republican vision that fused a commitment to free trade with social insurance was driven apart into ideological extremes of liberal political economy, on the one hand, and socialism, on the other. Where states introduced social reforms, such as the Liberal legislation in Edwardian Britain, these largely lacked the eighteenth-century vision of universal rights and democratic inclusiveness. This book offers a way out of the sometimes tiresome back and forth between Old and New Labour that has been haunting British politics. The future of social democracy does not lie with either New Labour or Old Labour. Rather, both Old and New Labour would do well to rediscover the essence of original social democracy.

This is an inspired and thought-provoking book. Few authors writing today combine historical vision with political

engagement like Gareth Stedman Jones. He offers a razor-sharp account that cuts through many of the more technical debates in the history of ideas and economics to bring to life the changing meanings of political economy for the general reader. Broadly speaking, the account of the rise and fall of the republican social democratic idea is told through the changing readings of Adam Smith. Against the background of an initially optimistic response to the American and French Revolutions, Paine and Condorcet offered a new radical reading of Smith that allowed them to combine Smith's embrace of commercial society with a new and more egalitarian project of a democratic community. Fear of revolutionary anarchy, monarchism, nationalism, and evangelicalism, in turn, later mobilised alternative and ultimately more influential positions of political economy. The social and the political now split, as political economy came to concern itself with economic freedom and markets – not democratic culture. Poverty became an issue of personal behaviour and morality – Malthus' contribution receives much emphasis here – or an economic problem. The elimination of poverty had ceased to be part of a democratic project of creating citizens. Socialism, on the other extreme, divided society into workers versus capitalists, losing sight of the significance of commercial society for civic life recognised by Paine and Condorcet.

One way to describe this book's place in the literature on social democracy is anti-Whiggery. Instead of a heroic rise of the working class and Labour in response to an unfolding industrial capitalism, the narrative here is one of Fall and disintegration. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century social democratic politics lost a richer founding vision. In fact, Stedman Jones' critical discussion of socialism and laissez-faire political economy as two extremes carving up the

liberal-republican vision of the founding fathers is an argument that Labour and socialist movements have fragmented and corrupted true social democracy. Here attention to the ideological fusion of liberal and republican elements in the 1780s and '90s connects with Stedman Jones' earlier, seminal work on *Languages of Class* – and takes him one step further. In that work, emphasis had been on the political language of anti-aristocratic corruption, rather than on socio-economic forces, in the creation of the first large labour movement, Chartism. Now, this political process appears as a merely partial appropriation of a richer, pre-existing social democratic position. Chartists took from Paine an understanding of aristocratic excess and its fiscal burdens, but they no longer carried forth the egalitarian understanding that came with his proposals on social insurance. Moving the founding moment of social democracy from social movements to social thinkers thus leaves Chartists (and class politics more generally) in a more



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subordinate, problematic position. More generally, it reinforces an older historiographical view of the centrality of the revolutionary era – both in generating modern ideas and, through the anti-revolutionary reaction, in casting a long shadow over the nineteenth century.

How much weight can Paine and Condorcet carry in this new story of social democracy? Politicians and historians may have different answers to this question – as indeed will the poor and their champions (the ultimate audience of this republican social democratic ideal). Historians may debate whether the celebration of Paine's and Condorcet's ideas as a foundational moment of social democracy risks minimising the contribution of subsequent traditions. The anti-Whiggery of the book rests on a stark contrast between an organic radical view of the 1780s and '90s and a subsequent polarisation of discourse and politics into two rival camps of laissez-faire individualism and socialism. This narrative may do useful political work in liberating Adam Smith from the clutches of recent neo-liberals. As history, however, it arguably projects twentieth-century programmes of individualism versus collectivism back into the nineteenth century, where popular politics were far less clear-cut. Broadening the discussion from key texts to popular politics might suggest a reverse narrative. Far from having been dislodged, many of Paine's building blocks of free trade and civil society were common pillars of the popular radicalism that peaked in the decades before the First World War.

Stedman Jones' fascination with Paine and Condorcet lies with their organic or republican conception of socioeconomic and political identities. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he argues, this new social democratic language of citizenship was 'pushed aside' by socialism with its antithesis between worker and

capitalist, on the one hand, and 'laissez-faire individualism and a language of producer and consumer', on the other (p. 235). This statement illustrates the problem of causation in a nutshell. True, liberalism and neo-liberalism in public choice theory and public policy have increasingly adopted a producer-versus-consumer view anchored in individualist theories, but this is mainly a recent trend. Few thinkers and social movements in the first half of the nineteenth century gave the consumer a distinct or prominent position. In fact, one of the few political economists who did accord consumption special attention, Jean-Baptiste Say – who figures in this book as one of the thinkers unravelling the radical vision – did so by including the consumption in factories as well as that by private end-users. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that a language of the consumer took shape – and then it did so by fusing civic and socioeconomic ideas and identities, as in battles over consumer rights and consumer representation. In short, it is difficult to see how an individualist free market conception of consumer vs. producer could have played a role in the earlier decline of radical social democracy. Quite the contrary, it could be argued that the Victorian and Edwardian discovery of the consumer injected civic ideas into political economy.

The book is more persuasive in highlighting just how much the reaction to the French Revolution amounted to a profound disjuncture for the history of ideas and politics. Paine's effigies were burnt. His radical bestseller was pushed aside by a wave of loyalist texts. Stedman Jones shows clearly how this reaction and fear of radicalism prompted a new moral, Christian and politico-economic defence of property and individual responsibility. As far as later radical generations are concerned, Stedman Jones emphasises that Paine's writings were only selectively used. But

why did later radical and social-democratic thinkers and movements not pick up again Paine's proposals for social insurance? Why this particular pattern of reception or selective amnesia?

Stedman Jones' plea for a fresh appreciation of the radical ideas of the 1780s and '90s both as an inspiration for contemporary politics and as a historical phenomenon comes close to endowing a particular historical moment with a kind of timeless meaning and significance. The changing appeal of the idea here becomes a battle between rival authors and their texts, fighting over the body of Adam Smith. This approach partly reflects just how much historians of society have turned away from socioeconomic developments and towards language and ideas to explain change. It also, however, assumes that the appeal and function of ideas is relatively autonomous from socio-economic developments. Texts alone cannot explain the changing social and political purchase and reverberations of an idea. Perhaps it was not only textual reinterpretations of political economy, but also the changing material world that made later generations of radicals and social democrats produce and look to other ideas and interpretations of the world. Put crudely, perhaps Paine's republican fusion of commerce, civil society and citizenship worked better for a commercial society than for an industrial or post-industrial society.

This last point brings us to the politicians and political readers targeted by this book. Stedman Jones is rightly critical of the increasingly ahistorical tone and tenor of political debate; fellow historians of the left are criticised for their 'distant and condescending' attitude to the enlightenment (p.9). The 1780s and '90s did produce a progressive democratic vision. But is it a good or adequate vision for our times? Why return all the way to the radical enlightenment rather than simply start with

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later ideas of social justice and social policy, such as the New Liberalism, welfare economics, or more recent theories of justice? Deep down for Stedman Jones, I suspect, poverty and policies to eliminate poverty are of interest less for their size, effect or practicality than for the civic vision lying behind them. Paine and Condorcet would probably be stunned by the dramatic expansion of social services since the late nineteenth century. Schooling is universal. In Britain at the turn of the twenty-first century, more than £12 billion was spent on personal social services; local authorities spent nearly three-quarters of their share on the most vulnerable groups, children and older people. In France in the 1980s (though not in Britain) there was a pronounced trend closing the gap in income between the elderly and the rest of society, surely assisting greater social equality and inclusion. Clearly, Stedman Jones has an important point that the egalitarian approach of radicals like Paine matters, for it includes the poor as equals in a civic community, whereas early welfarist legislation could be hierarchical and exclusionary. A fervent New Labour minister, by contrast, might argue that, rather than having moved away from this older vision, they are moving closer to it, after the well-intended paternalistic welfarism of Old Labour. New Labour discourse and policy initiatives are full of attempts to fuse economy and politics, market and citizenship, and to create 'citizen-consumers'. Such a minister might produce a long list of targets and initiatives intended to replace hierarchical or statist patterns with more local and inclusive forms of civic engagement that involve and give voice to the poor and socially excluded. More than at any time since the Edwardian period, free trade, civil society, and community engagement are staples of Labour Party discourse. The obvious riposte to this only semi-fictional

minister is, of course, that discourse is one thing, putting politics into practice quite another. But it is precisely here that the conceptual gulf between ideas and politics and society opens up in the history of ideas driving this important book. It is not at all clear how Paine's visionary idea would have played out in practice. Nor is it clear at all what particular policy proposals a current minister open to persuasion should take away from the account offered here. What policy blueprint has Paine got to offer a government that is already committed to increased spending on nurseries, health care and social services whilst accepting the virtuous discipline of markets? The historical record of the last century suggests the tremendous difficulty of overcoming poverty, whatever governments' intentions.

What, finally, about political readers with a home in radical politics and social movements? In contrast to his sustained attention to social insurance, Stedman Jones is largely silent about the long-term legacies of the other two elements of the early social democratic trinity: civil society and free trade. This is not because of ignorance; he has elsewhere produced an original perspective on Hegel and civil society. Here, however, the silence about free trade and civil society in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries distracts from some of the evolving limitations, some would say defects, of a theory that fuses social equality and citizenship with free trade. Partly, this has to do with the specific nature and trajectory of Paine's version of civil society. Paine equated the state with aristocratic corruption, war and immiseration. Hence, a strong civil society meant a small state. How such a version of social democracy could be squared with the current demands of social services and taxation is difficult to imagine, as the current dilemmas of pensions' reform amply shows. Paine's strategy for inclusion

The relationship between free trade and a social democratic project to erase poverty is also problematic.

rested on grants to the poor to assist their education. This is very different from the contemporary world where social inclusion requires not only education but access to television sets and fashionable clothes to allow the poor to participate in the lifestyle of a society of consuming citizens.

The republican vision also invokes a certain organic form of a community of like-minded active citizens. There is a principal tension between the idea of such a community and the idea of a commercial society. How could the integrity of such a community be reconciled with the more free-floating, diverse and pluralistic dynamics of an open, commercial society? Paine's and Condorcet's notions of social justice presumed a fairly homogenous community with shared moral beliefs. Societies today are far more pluralistic and include many incompatible beliefs. Civil and commercial societies, unlike small and more closed communities, may be marked by tolerance but they also involve thin identities that do not easily rise to the more active demands of republican citizenship. Arguably, the original social democratic vision was trying to do the impossible and reconcile rival systems of commercial civil society and more communitarian republicanism.

The relationship between free trade and a social democratic project to erase poverty is also problematic. Paine's and Condorcet's vision was global. In the course of the book, however, the focus increasingly narrows to domestic social policies, ignoring global trade and poverty. Some writers have argued that British free trade produced 'late Victorian holocausts' by promoting famine and starvation and resulting in a sharply widening gulf between First World and Third World. While a good case can be made that the abolition of agricultural subsidies in the European Union would raise the standard of living of producers in developing countries, an equally

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good case exists to warn that in a real world of considerably different levels of development, income and power, trade liberalisation has reinforced poverty in the poorest parts of the world. Paine's and Condorcet's vision of the benign and pacific force of free trade was a radical utopian idea at the time but it had little to offer social democratic movements in the early twentieth century dealing with international crises, trusts and cartels or seeking to provide social justice and fair prices for both consumers and producers. There are good historical reasons why successive generations of social democrats moved away from a free trade ideal to explore alternative forms of coordination, regulation, or 'fair trade'. It is not at all clear how social citizenship and social equality can be achieved under free trade conditions. Historians are not prophets, but judging

from the overwhelmingly hostile position of current social movements to global free trade, it is unlikely that a plea for reviving the original social democratic utopia of free trade, social insurance and citizenship will make for very popular politics.

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he also enjoyed the nickname Lord Cupid and his dedication to the social pleasures, on which Chambers elaborates more fully than most previous biographers, may have been too ostentatious for him to be taken seriously as a statesman.

All that changed with the death of Canning. As anti-Catholic as he remained in his personal beliefs, Palmerston saw Catholic Emancipation as a necessity of state, electoral reform as inevitable and a liberal foreign policy as desirable. Consequently, he and the other Canningites parted company with Wellington and Peel, who swallowed emancipation but resisted reform. Under the 1830 Whig administration of Grey, he took the Foreign Office and held that position in the succeeding Melbourne and Russell governments. Despite his reputation of being over-ready to send a gunboat to intimidate some poor defenceless smaller nation, Palmerston's pugnacious foreign policy was more concerned with keeping the peace between European rivals than making marginal additions to the Empire. To that end, he worked hard for the creation of Belgium as a buffer to French expansion and interfered in the politics of the Iberian peninsula to promote constitutional government and limit French influence. Similarly, his endorsement of Italian nationalism was partly a reflection of his Liberal values, but more significantly he sought to limit the over-extension of the Austrian autocracy so that the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained a valuable counterweight to Russian ambition. Everywhere he was aware of the risk of revolution to the unreformed European monarchies, though his brash warnings were rarely heeded by those he sought to protect. Chambers makes the complexities of these Continental affairs clear and this book will serve well those with only a sketchy prior knowledge.

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A very distinguished tightrope dancer

James Chambers, *Palmerston: 'The People's Darling'*

(John Murray, 2004)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, began his ministerial career in 1807, at the age of twenty-two, fresh from university and before he found a parliamentary seat. Yet he did not reach the premiership until he was seventy, the oldest first-time prime minister. His career took him from the Napoleonic wars and the lax aristocratic morality of the Regency period to British Imperial dominance and the height of Victorian conformity. In his preface, Chambers suggests that Palmerston's career was, 'without doubt, the most entertaining; and it was probably the most influential internationally'. Although not a claim that Chambers makes, it can also

be argued that Palmerston was crucial to the success of the Liberal Party.

By family background and an Enlightenment education in Edinburgh, Palmerston should have been a Whig but, in the face of Revolutionary France, he accepted junior office under the Tories. His two-decade apprenticeship in junior office was unusually long and not easily explained. Throughout his life, Palmerston could irritate superiors, from the Queen downwards, combining his insistence on the prerogatives of his own office with disregard for the responsibilities of others, while expressing himself so bluntly that he earned the nickname Lord Pumicestone. As a young man,