Re-Imagining Democracy: Politicisation II July 1st 2008-06-30

Innes: Introduced the second session on general theme of politicisation, and mentioned that while it was the second it was not envisaged only as a sequel to the first – not least because a good proportion of those present had not been at the first. The larger re-imagining democracy workshop is a project with different strands – including French and American ones and a planned German one. This particular strand has tended to be the most diffuse and getting contributions to focus around key themes and ideas has been a challenge. She suggested that part of the problem lay in the fact that this is not a topic that's been well defined by previous British and Irish historiography. In order to help focus discussion, the first session today would focus on the idea of democracy so as to establish a common reference point.

One area to which attention should be given was the issue of what people meant when they used the term democracy and how it was understood and used in different settings. A starting point for the project was the general question of how democracy, which was a negative term for many centuries , at best valued as an element of the mixed constitution, moved to the fore in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, coming to denote a force in politics that had to be reckoned with – democracy was both feared and admired but certainly forms a talking point. The term came to be used in different ways in different places and a comparative approach is therefore appropriate. The topic more generally provides an opportunity to bring historians of political thought and historians of political practice together, to see how their different insights can be combined.

It is particularly important to pay careful attention to what people meant by democracy during this period – and not to interpret what is being said through modern conceptions of democracy. Though words are important, the intention was not to operate only at the level of abstract argument, because people using this terminology were themselves trying to make sense of reality and the developments in society and politics around them. So the hope is to move between what they were thinking and what was happening. There might be new vocabularies emerging or not. We might find that new vocabularies are being applied to old – but new vocabularies might themselves have consequences. Initial sessions in this strand focused on the ideas of democracy, authority and rights, but some participants felt that we were getting stuck at the level of ideas; more recent sessions have therefore focussed more on political practice. This is why we came up with politicisation as a theme.

The study of democracy has become a fashionable topic especially since 1989, because of its salience in current politics. Political scientists are motivated by recent events and concerns, but some of them have looked back into 19th century, seeing there the origin of

democracy as a political force. Political scientists however often start from a modern concept of democracy and then try to establish from history where the practices to which this concept corresponds come from, with the result that thingsd that don't fit the modern concept are often obscured.. Aguably this is not a good framework within which to try to understand the origins of democracy. For instance, one feature of political science literature is the taken-for-granted connection between democracy and voting. The connection however was not obvious in the period explored in the workshop. There may have been an overlap but the two cannot be equated. Also in modern literature, dictatorship is often represented as the antonym of democracy, but in the period considered a more common antonym of democracy was aristocracy. Ways of thinking about democracy during this period were shaped by Montesquieu's analysis of the two types of republics – aristocratic and democratic. It also came to be supposed, as illustrated in Adam Smith's work, that early society was democratic. In such accounts, though democracy was represented as an historically interesting concept it was not seen as one with a political future.

Democracy was not a slogan people took into the American and French revolutions. In France, moreover, democracy came to be identified above all with anti-sectionalism, with the desire to make the will or interests of the whole people prevail . In that context, voting was problematic: it could be linked with the expression of private/sectional interests. Some thought the cause of democracy was furthered by having strong leaders who could ensure that the general will prevailed over sectional groups. Yet, this in turn reinforced an older notion that democracy was likely to turn into dictatorship. The examples of Robespierre and Napoleon could be seen as illustrating that tendency.

For Tocqueville, half a century later, democracy was a social and cultural force, associated with the increasing equality of conditions and the breakdown of aristocratic institutions. Individualism in society made it easy for power to gravitate toward the centre . The main question he wanted to address was whether democracy can involve anything but such a shift. In America, he found a variant of democracy that was different from the French.

While not an aspiration explicitly taken into the American revolution democracy did emerge out of it. Similarly the term 'democrat' was picked up by Americans from the French Revolution. In the 1820s Americans themselves were readier to avow democracy . Crucial in this context was the expansion of the American frontier, creating the need to develop new state constitutions. The same period saw some pressure to remove intermediary bodies (such as state legislatures as nominating bodies for the Electoral College) and an increase in the election of office holders. The expansion of the suffrage was encouraged by the desire to encourage settlement in new states. The same consideration however led to the exclusion of black men from the

vote, so as to discourage black settlement. The establishment of democracy was a process both of inclusion and of exclusion. Similar concerns arose in connection with the issue of how widely the American republic should extend, e.g. should it take in Mexico. These developments also took place against the background of the break-up of the Republican party, in which context there developed a partisan use of the term democracy, associated with Andrew Jackson (with strong roots in the South and associations with the defence of slavery). This association of democracy and the South/slavery was understood by Lincoln and informed his avoidance of the term democracy.

In America the ideas of republic and democracy also stood in an uneasy relationship with one another: people could avow republicanism while being sceptical about democracy in one or another sense. By the late nineteenth century, elites in America had become more sceptical about democracy while Europeans had grown more relaxed about it – there was some convergence between the two.

Philp: In the British case, we need to chart the way the term democracy was used. The British context started out with a strongly negative view of democracy. It was associated with government by the people and with equality of individuals. It was seen as fundamentally unstable as a result of the constant conflict between the rich and poor. It was also associated with the rise of demagogues. The worry was that democracy would give rise to tyranny . It was supposed that it was only possible in small states with relative equality, when supported by civic virtue.

Sources of thinking about democracy in the eighteenth-century include Smith who saw democracy as the form primitive societies take. He did not expect societies to remain democratic for long. Another theorist was Montesquieu who saw democracies as states marked by virtue and equality. His idea that there are two kinds of republic, aristocratic and democratic, had a powerful influence in the eighteenth century. In this context, aristocracy was not necessarily associated with hereditary wealth and power; an aristocracy could derive its position from abilities or wealth without a sense of inherited status and standing.

The 1790s offer a complex picture in relation to democracy. Democracy was commonly viewed negatively. Burke used the notion to attack the French Revolution and supporters of it in Britain. There was a reluctance to claim the word as positive in politics – i.e. Paine did not claim to be a democrat. He did not support manhood suffrage until 1792 (then on the ground that everyone paid taxes). In Pennsylvania he had advocated a property base. In that sense he was less radical than some reformers of the 80s (eg the Duke of Richmond), who however did not call themselves democrats. Paine only advocated representative democracy and preferred the term republic to democracy. Paine was unusual in a British context in treating representative democracy as requiring the exclusion of a role for the elite and monarch: he rejected hereditary privilege. What is

understood by representative government is however unclear and not well-thought out.

Explicitly 'democratic societies' were established in the 1830s in conjunction with Chartism, but in general for Chartists, though political reform and constitutionalism were hot issues, they were not usually argued for in the name of democracy. In large part moreover reform was argued for within the context of mixed government. A major exception might be Bentham. After 1835, democracy became associated less with a particular political system or political institutions and more with a type of society. This partly reflects the influence of Tocqueville. His ideas penetrated English debate through Mill and Roebuck. In Roebuck's papers, a lot is said about democracy as a form of <u>society.</u>

Schofield: To understand Bentham's position on democracy, we should start with his idea about pleasures and pains and his commitment to the principle that each person's interest is equal to any other's. This commitment to equality is at the root of his utilitarianism – his view that everyone's interests ought to count the same. Early in his career, this idea did not translate into a commitment to give everyone a vote. Later – in *Constitutional Code*, his blueprint for reprepsentative democracy on which he began work in 1822 -- he came to support the secret ballot and universal manhood suffrage with a literacy qualification (he also favoured women's suffrage, though thought the context made it counterproductive to advocate it). The secret ballot was important for Bentham because he thought people <u>should</u> vote according to their self-interest. The public interest was made up of the aggregate of individuals' interests. The secret ballot prevented influence/bribery/corruption of people's votes. He supported annual elections and legislative control of the executive and jettisoned the ideal of the balanced constitution as a safeguard for liberty. In his view, voters should be superordinate over the legislature, which in turn should be superordinate over the executive.

The issue of when Bentham became a democrat has been controversial. There are elements of the idea from an early date in his position on equality of interest. But early on he did not say that this necessarily demanded a democratic system. He was initially more concerned to develop a vision of sovereignty than with constitutional structures . The French Revolution did prompt him to think about constitutional design. In that context he proposed universal suffrage both male and female (with a literacy test). But it's unclear whether he thought that was the solution only for France (as Schofield himself believes), or that this was a universally applicable recipe. The Bentham Project has now edited Bentham's poor law writings from the late 1790s. It seems pretty clear in the light of these that the French Revolution converted him not to democracy, but to connservatism. His chief preoccupations were with panopticon prisons and poor law reform. He was also

interested in financial reform. Bentham's career in the 1790s was concerned with solving the problems faced by the British state.

In 1803 however his Panopticon prison plan was rejected. He then concluded that the government was in fact set against reform., and became preoccupied with "sinister interests" pervading the legal, political and ecclesiastical establishments – he recognized that what rulers wanted was not to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number but their own interests at the expense of the people's. He started advocating parliamentary reform from 1809, having been prompted to think about the subject by a speech from his step-brother Charles Abbot in the Commons. He then picked up the programme of the Westminster Committee, advocating householder suffrage and equal electoral districts. He characterised what he wanted as 'democratic ascendancy'. However, he didn't publish these thoughts. Instead, he wrote about education, logic and the church. He only came back to parliamentary reform after 1816. He then advocated manhood suffrage, subject to a literacy test. He published *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* in 1817 and it became popular in radical circles. At about the same time he committed himself to republicanism, though the details are not very clear. He advocated the abolition of monarchy, aristocracy and the established church. In this period, he used representative democracy and republic as synonyms.

From 1811 he seriously began to tout his services as a codifier, writing thus to the president of the US and the emperor of Russia. He moved from the idea that a utilitarian legal code could be introduced in any political regime to the idea that the only regime in which such a code of laws could be successfully introduced was a democratic one. Politics were thereafter always central to his enterprise. In 1822, Portugal accepted his offer. He started work on a constitutional code, on which he was still working ten years later, by which time the Portuguese liberal regime had been overthrown, though he tried to find other 'markets' in Greece, South Americe, and even Tripoli.

Contrary to something Mark had said, Bentham did talk about the sovereignty of the people, though much more work needs to be done on how Bentham's theory of sovereignty relates to his democractic theory.

In the 1820s he also he worked at the question of how to get to democracy. He thought this should be done mainly through education and persuasion of the people. He thought they were deluded by the trappings of power – the crown and throne/Church of England, etc. He established the *Westminster Review* to propagate radical ideas, and tried to work with radical leaders. Ultimately he thought that it might take the threat of force to bring about democracy, then the regime would cave in.

Bentham endorsed republicanism in that he equated it with representative democracy – he used democracy and republicanism interchangeably (Philp commented that equating representation with republicanism was a move also made by Paine and the Federalists). Basically between 1817 and 1820 Bentham embraced representative democracy without aristocracy and monarchy, and without an established church; from that point representative democracy became central to Bentham's position.

An Italian scholar has recently located Bentham's copy of the Federalist Papers. This was the 1812 edition, which Aaron Burr gave him. In the 1790s Bentham's position was that although democracy might be suitable for America, it would not work in more civilised and advanced countries. It was not until the nineteenth century that Bentham came to think that America could provide a useful model for Europe. (Mark commented that a huge Loyalist literature equally denied that the model could work in Europe)

Chase: On Chartism. Chartism is distorted by prevailing historiography in the early twentieth century: too much emphasis is placed on the six points. There were some ambiguities and disagreements among Chartists about certain commitments – Cooper and O'Connor were both sceptical of the secret ballot, for instance. There was also concern lest equal electoral districts favour Irish allocation of seats. Only four of the six points were generally supported, therefore. In 1842, when arguing with complete suffragists, Chartists made it clear that they planned to exclude the mentally ill from the franchise. In terms of their internal organization or government some Chartist groups tended to be rather exclusive: the LWMA had a high membership fee, and members had to be both proposed and seconded.. There was some talk in 1848 of the movement having swelled to an unnatural size. Chartists did not talk much about 'democracy'. In 1839 – after the failure to carry the Charter, the National Convention adopted a declaration of rights – something that has tended to be ignored by socialist historian., who have been more interested in responses in the form of advocacy of physical force and revolt. The content of the document involved appeals to customs of England, a commitment to limited monarchy (though it was supposed that the House of Lords might be reformed), citations of Locke, Sidney, Grotius, Coke, Selden, Tacitus, etc etc., alongside the more standard Chartism commitments – what it did not involve was an appeal to democracy or Paine's ideas about rights. This document raises some questions about how far democracy is at the forefront of Chartism. A rare instance of explicit citation of democracy is supplied by the case of the East London Democratic Association, an association influenced by Spencean ideas, as manifest in its newspaper, the London Democrat. This was Harney's inspiration.

Comment [M S1]: On checking listing of Chartist localities in Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists*, there's less than 30 branches listed wityh 'Democratic' in the title.

Innes:	If the word 'democracy' is not routinely used by Chartism, an interesting question is why not and how is it used when it is. There are different ways to think about explaining this

> 1. the terms democracy and democratic might be "learned" words, in that ordinary people are not familiar with them and they are not part of the political culture. For example, people might talk about giving power to the people, but not call this democracy because is not a vocabulary that comes to people's lips.
> 2. it could be a tactical decision, so as to not seem too radical
> 3. or it might mean they had reservations about extending the vote.

Chase	affirmed that he thought the last applied..

Rogers:	Asked how Chartists see the vote – perhaps as a trust, reflecting one's ability to speak for the community, rather than a right (contrary to the Benthamite notion). Different positions on this entailed different views on the question – do women need the vote or can they be represented by their husbands?

Schofield:	There is an interesting difference on this issue between Bentham and Mill – despite their saying much the same things about the principle of utility, they take a different route to realize the principle. Mill supported open voting for instance because he thought it would encourage voting in the interest of the community. By contrast, Bentham thought the secret ballot would work best towards the greatest happiness. The greatest happiness was an aggregate of each person's individual interest, and that was the basis on which they should vote.

Salmon:	Thought both approaches could be accommodated in the double-member electoral system with the first vote being for the community and the second for personal interests.

Poertner:	Asked whether the rhetoric of republicanism (and its long tradition) acted as a constraint on the development of a language of democracy. She also wondered to what extent empire affected commitments to democracy: did imperial triumphalism affect the perceptions even of Chartists?

Rogers:	Suggested that Chartists used democracy often positively to refer to others, i.e. Canadian democrats

Dowlen:	In exploring the language of democracy it might be interesting to look at representations of Athens. Sparta was more admired than Athens which was increasingly dismissed as chaotic. Also at the influence of Aristotle: Montesquieu eg picked up from him the idea of selection by lot as a defining feature of democracy whereas voting was associated

with aristocracy. Grote's history of Athens described lot but was more interested in election.

Chase: There's no use of sortition by the Chartists but they did a lot of appointment by rotation rather than through the vote.

Poole: Bentham appears to have wanted to extend the role of the central government, unlike many popular radicals who wanted to reduce the scale and scope of government For Bentham, the role of democracy was to get around vested interests – but then the issue is how far this translates into a vision of popular participation. There seems to be more going on in Chartist thinking, with its interest in local forms of political participation. What did Bentham think the extent of government should be once rooted interests are overcome?

Schofield: Bentham emphasized newspapers and open government as a way to involve as many people as possible in discussions of politics. And he got more radical over time – developing a deeper respect for the people (See Jimmy Burns' article: 'From Radical Enlightenment to Philosophical Radicalism'.. Originally he saw the problem as an intellectual one, but then came to see it as a problem of sinister interests. His idea of democracy was linked to the idea of a public opinion tribunal, which he saw as the lifeblood of the democratic state – with people expressing their views and influencing each other, and with a key role for the press. Essentially he was trying to ensure open and transparent government so that it would be subject to pressure from public opinion. He also advocated power to recall MPs, and thought that there should be local as well as national government.

Innes: The issue about the division between the centre and locality was only really expressed in those terms, and made central to political debate, from the 1830s. By mid century these issues were seen as important to thinkers as different as JS Mill and Toulmin Smith..

Philp/Schofield: For Bentham the state should respond to interests that arise: there should be few limits on the state in principle, though it was not supposed to act when no public benefit would arise from its actions (thus, it shouldn't interfere with religion) and there might be limits to its ability to act effectively in practice, determined eg by economic laws.. This is in contrast to the other strand of thinking in this period in which representative democracy was linked with the desire to minimize central government.

Innes: Emphasises that she does not assume that democracy was ever a common word – it was however used descriptively and negatively of a group of bumptious middle class radicals with a popular base – and was associated with the radical programme.

Downs: Notes a petition, discovered by a colleague in the Smithsonian, which uses a pseudonym the radical she is studying Eccleston, often uses, in

which reference is made to "democratic process" He was talking about appointment of representatives when he was in America in the 1770s – complaining about people simply appointing themselves to radical organisations.

Salmon: Asked whether it was a strategy for British supporters of democracy to package their arguments in Anglo-Saxon 'ancient rights and freedoms' rhetoric.

Philp: This touches on the underlying issue of what is meant by democracy. One difficulty is that it is not as though there is a model waiting for them to adopt, they have to create and invent. Radicals don't have a clear language and set of concepts with which they can construct an alternative and in some sense they have to take what is at hand and adapt it. The Spenceans are interesting in this regard, because they flipped back and forwards between 'ancient constitution' and more Painite language.

Rogers: Said she was wracking her brains to think about the BPU: was there an important fault line between support for representative government and more classical participatory democracy. Did radicals consider both as democratic; did they argue over which is the better form?

Philp The 1798 Irish rebellion was condemned as democratic (not corresponding to either of those usages).

Gillen: In Ireland, radicals explicitly embrace the label "democrat.": dictionaries in the 1790s defined the word positively It was explicitly used, for example, in the Northern Star. The Catholicism of Irish democracy was a particular problem for some observers.

Innes It was by no means unknown for British radicals to avow themselves democrat either. They might have the term pinned on them and say they were happy to accept it.

Griffin During the Swing riots some rioters carried the tricoleur, and used the language of revolutionary republicanism.

Jarrige: Asked whether newspapers in Britain have "democrat/democracy" in the title? In Paris there are examples of such. Eg Democratie pacifique, a Fourierist newspaper.

Philp: When the word was more used – more in the 1830s – it was associated with social equality and did not necessarily entail demands about the political system. It involves a transition of the social scene – the rise in democracy and threat to aristocracy.

Downs Eccleston was much concerned with social equality in relation to American Indians.

Chase	For Chartists 'aristocrat' was an important term of opprobrium. They identified aristocracy in the laws and the church, as well as as an interest. Thus eg Bronterre O'Brien
Innes:	Perhaps although people rarely self-identified as democrats, denouncing aristocrats might be taken to imply assumption of a 'democratic' outlook.
Salmon:	Wade's Black Book made much ado about aristocrats. Associated terms of art were "abuse of privilege" and "subjugation". There was talk of 'chartered rights' and 'prescribed rights' (both being positive terms) He suggested that aristocrat was not used in relation to any modern conception of democracy, but rather reflected an English preoccupation with the burden of the past.
Dowlen	Not surprising people were hesitant to avow democracy when it had associations with civil commotion and civil strife.
Chase	For similar reasons, Chartists were wary of equating themselves with C17 reformers: Pym and Hampden were frequently mentioned, Cromwell was not.
Drolet:	Thought that for a variety of thinkers the aristocracy was seen as dying and a new social movement taking place – "civilization" was used in contrast to aristocracy. Tocqueville brought the term 'democracy' into play, but did not equate it with civilisation. He thought 'democracy' was a particular kind of society that could collapse.
Goodrich:	Observed that there was a sense the English aristocracy was decaying but there wasn't a clear sense of what would replace it.
Gurney:	(After lunch: he having been held up such that he arrived late at the first session, and hadn't contributed to that): Thought that democracy and democratic was much more common in Chartism than had been previously discussed or assumed so far. Democracy was also about control and power – in the school room, in the community, etc. It was related to ideas about control, participation, authority. There's a contrast between a politics of the gut and a politics of the head – is Chartism a response to hardship – hungry in a land of plenty – which prompts questioning about the political order. See eg the 1848 autobiography of James Bezer, who says, I was always a democrat, a democrat in the schoolroom, etc
Rogers:	Bronterre O'Brien told ladies they should bring up their children as little democrats

Chase: But there's still a question about what this means – also need to look at the language of democracy in chartist poetry

Goodrich: Raised the issue of whether part of the problem in terms of our knowledge about how these thinkers and actors used "democracy" and "democratic" is that perhaps when this material was looked at previously (for past research) we weren't looking for it or whether it is not there in the first place.

Philp: Mentioned that in his sampling of pamphlets during this period there is not as much use of the terms/or used as widely as he had expected.

Rogers: Thought that the link between education and democracy was interesting because education was how one politicized himself/herself.

Philp: Responded that the thought was interesting – there is a strand of thinking that sees self-government, as government of the self, as preparation for democratic citizenship.

Innes: Thought that until the 1830s in Britain self-government means self-discipline – and was not necessarily connected to taking part in managing society. Though there are some earlier examples of the Rogers/Philp line in Price (and beginning in the 1830s this line begins to be taken up)

Session II: Instrumental and public interest politics

Philp   This session is meant to address the issue of instrumental politics and politics of public interests. The study of democracy needs to pay attention to the way people practice democracy – even perhaps where they engage in practices and establish institutions without necessarily knowing they were democratic or were promoting democracy. One issue is how people argue for change – do they appeal to their own interests or appeal to the public good.

                  Also we want to explore a contrast (that got some mention earlier in the session) between Bentham's view of the vote as the pursuit of self-interest and an alternative conception of the vote as giving people the chance to promote the public good.

                  Bentham presents an interesting case because he advocates a programme of reform that was not in his self-interest and yet people within that political system were presumed to pursue their self-interest. His expectations about how ordinary people should behave seem to be different from the expectations he has of himself.

Another issue to consider is how individuals' conceive of their activity in practices and institutions – including whether they do talk about voting in terms of democracy, or in what other terms– and how far do they think things change or whether the real story might be that meanings change but practices remain stable.

Vincent: The issue of public interest is problematic for someone coming to this issue from a French perspective – particularly during parts of this period in which there is a lack of political liberty. Recent French historiography, focussing on political culture, does help with thinking about instrumental politics. There has been a tendency to think it a French peculiarity that change can only be effected by constitutional change, but now there is greater interest in issues of governance, for example in the part government played in defending the constitution. However, there's much greater difficulty in determining what might be equivalent to public interest politics in the French case – its partly because it is difficult to see where instrumental politics and public interest politics begins and ends. There is however a group of historians around Pierre Rosanvallon interested in the question of how ideas of the public interest were constructed, in connection, for example, with Chambers of Commerce: their work might be relevant.

Philp: On the recognition of public interest in French politics, he thought that perhaps in the French case it may be that constitutions are designed not to allow private interests – or that there's a clearer division of labour between private citizen and government in which the public interest is the concern of the second.

Innes: Said in the British parliament the difference is formally constructed in the categories of public and private bills. Petitioning was traditionally regarded as appropriate in relation to private matters; its use in relation to public questions was much more problematic. But it became more common after the 1770s to petition in relation to public matters; select committee inquiries, previously routine only in the case of private bills, also came to be more widely employed in relation to issues of general public concern, and royal commissions were also developed to aid inquiry: means first legitimated in relation to one category of action were increasingly adopted in another. In the case of private interest politics there was a long-standing recognition of a right to have one's views heard and that meant that there is representation of people from across the social spectrum in hearings – and as the two types of proceeding moved closer – eg as labour issues were debated not just in relation to particular trades, but as general issues of public policy, there's an extension of claims to voice in relation to public issues. Earlier, people had used forms analogous to petitions such as instructions to representatives. It's not clear how self-conscious were the Wilkites about their innovation in petitioning – were they perhaps looking back to the 17th century? The American War marked the point at which public-interest petitioning of parliament took off. The 1780 Association Movement for parliamentary reform was operating in a

very experimental period; at the same time, the Protestant association was doing its own form of experimenting.. Traditionally, inasmuch as there was any petitioning on public interest issues, petitions formally expressed the view of a county or a town. However, from 1780 such petitions were challenged in terms of whether signatories really represented the community. Increasingly, petitions were in practice considered not as the authoritative voice of the community, but more like a public opinion poll; divisions within towns and counties were then reflected in rival petitions – very evident eg in the case of petitioning against Pitt's repressive 'Two Acts' in 1795.

Schofield   Noted that the distinction being drawn here was not reflected in Bentham's thought: he thought of all political action as driven by individual interest; the issue was primarily whether the system allowed certain interests to dominate such that they became sinister interests.

Navickas: What's in the public interest is of course always arguable. Popular demands for participation in that context often focussed on process: on whether the voice of 'the people' was heard. In that context who represented the people was itself commonly contested. Even if people didn't in fact differ greatly about what should be done, they might care about how that view was formulated. These were key issues in the 1830s and 40s, when many conflicts took place in the context of local institutions: that was often where the heart of the action really lay.

Goodrich: There is also the issue of whether petitions weren't sometimes avoided by radicals because the process was seen as entailing deference to the system – petitions were part of the established system and radicals may sometimes not have wanted to use them because of that. It was also argued that they were unlikely to work. Paine was anti-petition, for instance.

Philp: Two lines are noticeable regarding petitioning: one is the anti-subservience issue and the other is that the people who are turning to petitions are not used to participating in that way – and because there is a language of petitioning that they don't know, they are not getting it right because they are not part of the political elite that knows how to use this practice.

Poole: Mentioned that there are public and private parts in petitions. First there is a private statement of grievances (injured sectional interests) It's this appeal to injured interests that's essential to ground the right to seek public actions (such as a public act of parliament). When people make a petition they have to say that they suffer from some kind of grievance and they are looking for redress and involvement in the political process. When petitions are rejected it is often because they don't use the format of private grievance calling for some public remedy.

Griffin	Cobbett by late 1820s was actively arguing against petitions; labourers from Sussex went directly to the King.. At the level of the parish, it was thought important to display unity: for the whole labouring body to be seen to take part..
Goodrich	Said in the case of say Wilkite petitions, part of the point to attract publicity to the cause. Something very different going on when a small community petitions.
Griffin	Threatening letters could have the quality of petitions turned sour
Rogers	Noted contrasting visions of governmental process entailed in petitioning monarch or issuing an 'address' to people like oneself.
Goodrich	Radical societies issued many such 'addresses' to other societies
Salmon:	Petitioning also changes during this period. In the 1830s, there was a decision to not have debates on petitions – and the closure of debate might explain the rise of "addresses" or perhaps had implications for why other forms of democratic expressionism are adopted.
Innes:	Thought petitioning remained an effective tool of political mobilization – as Paul Pickering has argued in relation to Chartism. Also provided an opportunity to send a delegation with the petition, who might do other lobbying while delivering it. When the elder Peel delivered workers' petitions against long hours of factory labour to the Commons, he almost broke down, having been so moved by his encounter with the men: quite unlike his ordinary parliamentary behaviour.
Chase:	It was important for Chartism that it was considered as a constitutional movement and was seen to exhaust the institutional options open to it.
Goodrich:	Petitions as a process – involved gaining support among people who didn't have the vote.
Philp	Was there a rise in the number of select committees?
Innes:	Yes, probably – though hard to compare like with like. Select committees standardly considered petitions on 'private' bills. At the end of the eighteenth century, they started to be used more for public business too. Perhaps aided by a blurring of the public/private boundary, as the government moved to develop general policies in relation to eg labour. Establishing patterns of change is harder because one aspect of change was increasingly full printing of committee proceedings. From the 1810s, routine payment of witnesses began (began with witnesses at contested election committees). Helped make it possible to extend the range of people who attended.

Griffin — but there are also occasions like the Andover bone grinding scandal – when the evidence collected was perverted and the Poor Law report of 1832-4 didn't use the opportunity to speak to the labouring poor. The desire to talk to people does seem to increase but it doesn't mean that they actually take note of what people say.

Schofield: — Bentham was very concerned about the lack of good data on issues

Philp — What was Bentham's experience of trying to get things done, how did he work?

Schofield — He had access to a range of individuals who were of a like mind – people like Brougham, Place, Daniel O'Connell, Joseph Hume. He was largely working through Parliament – envisaged getting up a big petition for law reform – but also saw the press as a major vehicle – hence the establishment of the Westminster Review. Worked though public opinion, using James Mill as a propagandist – he also intervened directly in the quarrel between Hunt and O'Connell
Asked what the group thought about the role of public opinion and the emergence of the press and its relationship to democracy during this period.

Innes: — Can we also address the issue of action through 'non-political' channels. The creation of voluntary societies etc opens up possibilities for direct action, bypassing official processes. How should we fit that into our picture?

Rogers: — There is a narrative of women moving from the private sphere into politics. She thinks however that that is not an inevitable progression. Finding oneself blocked from doing what one tries to do is more politicising. Sarah Martin, the prison visitor she's currently studying, saw herself as doing what God wanted her to do: didn't really conceive of what she was doing in relation to political institutions.

Gurney — There's also the question more broadly of how people become politicised – exclusive dealing is one way in which campaigns develop and have a political effect on people – and there's evidence of 'political shopping' from 1839 – there is a certain amount of apologetics attached because exclusivity is associated with aristocracy; but out of these practices grow cooperatives, joint stock companies. It's not something the Chartists invent – there's earlier anti-slavery 'shopping' and the Tories use it over the reform act. Its also a feature of the Catholic Associations in the late 1820s. When the Tories use it in the 1830s they are seen as beyond the pale. The practice is reported (negatively) by the Times – it's also used by Whigs and liberals. These practices were to some extent dependent on the non-secret ballot: it was the publication of poll-books which made it possible to determine how people had voted.

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Downs	See similarly the (somewhat earlier) development of trade tokens – which also carry very direct messages to the people

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Poole	linked to 'no taxation without representation' boycott of excised articles 1819. Cobbett linked this with an appeal to cultivate self-sufficiency.

Session III	Constitutional politics
Innes:	One area on which this session might focus is whether we should think of the desire for constitutional change as arising out of instrumental politics, a concern with getting things done Or do people just find the system inherently objectionable? There is also the issue of the centrality of voting. Was broadening of the franchise what people most wanted, or perhaps they wanted something different but what they got was a broader franchise so in retrospect we place that at the centre of the story?
Rogers:	Thought that for some radical political actors politics is not really instrumental but about the transformation of the self; it doesn't therefore start or stop with instrumental success or failure.
Downs:	Also thought this description was compelling – in that radicals were not solely goal-seeking and the end for them was not necessarily the universal franchise, but that they would pick up various campaigns attached to various ends/interests. Suggested this was particularly true of nonconformists.
Philp:	Then how to explain why there are more of these sorts of people during this period than in the eighteenth-century?.
Downs:	Thought the explanation might lie in the example of America – that things can be changed and that they could as a result be more radical
Goodrich:	Said that few radicals of the 1790s continued on into the nineteenth century, suggesting that the life of involvement in reform movements was perhaps more continuous in the nineteenth century than between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
Rogers	Cultural issues, such as freedom of thought and expression, are the ones most likely to persist.
Gurney:	Thought radicals were shaped by two twin forces during the period – state repression and industrialisation
Chase:	In the 1820's and 1830's there was a proliferation of local government bodies that were more generous with the franchise than parliament, and that this was a natural forum in which individuals could participate.

Poole:	In light of the agenda to not just focus on extraordinary events but also on what goes on in between, he said that one problem is that during the 1790s to the 1820s for most people there was no "normal time."

      1. there had been a loss of legislative protections
          a. a removal of rights/liberties and protections to the trades and trade unions
      2. there were extreme burdens placed on people
          a. emergency war legislation, and the tax base extended downwards
      3. there was involved in the patriotic effort
          a. after the 1790s in war against Napoleon, widespread mobilization was needed and we witness the rise of constitutional patriotism

        After the war people look to have some of these developments reversed but things seem to get worse. These special circumstances in the period mean that normal politics does not occur until the 1820s.

Dowlen:	Raised the question of how people being to formulate the general emancipatory case versus particular problems – when and how is the case made about the larger picture, i.e. about the moral imperative to change the system.
Gillen:	Thought an import issue was what people expected to get from the vote and why was it so important to them. Conservatives complained that people were being led to expect too much: they supposed that if they had the vote they could overthrow the church and redistribute the land.
Schofield:	Were votes conceded only when the effect would not be to threaten property?
Salmon:	There were various practical reasons why people wanted the vote. They could get money (i.e. could receive political bribes because they had the vote). Possession of voting rights was also linked to a whole range of other legal, educational, etc. freedoms. Therefore, if people wanted to vote, it was not always because they were democrats.
Chase:	Hailed this refreshing cynicism. Said however that key Chartist argument (text of 1839 Petition, e.g.) was that while some individuals lived in the midst of plenty and the sciences and arts were developed, yet many lived in poverty because of the uneven distribution of power. The wide disparities of material wealth help framed the terms in which the vote was demanded and the ends it was expected to serve.

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Goodrich:	Universal suffrage and broader representation were thought as part of the process of changing the structure of society and political rights in a larger way. Issues of corruption in parliament could be dealt with by

bringing in new people and changing the face of politics through these measures. From 1795-6 Thelwall was using socio-economic arguments , long before Chartism

Rogers   Not surprising that people sought political solutions when they saw parliament repealing protective legislation. Bronterre O'Brien said that land should be taken back into the ownership of the people, the poor being compensated for what they lost through not owning land by payment of a share of 'national rent'.

Poole: Economics and politics were not considered as distinct domains for radical thinkers in this period. The critique of free trade was not just that it was supporting a particular class but that it involved the abnegation of responsibility – and there were arguments about the need for more political intervention and regard for individuals' economic conditions.

Innes   There was a complicated interaction between radical and anti-radical politics. From the French Revolution onwards, some MPs thought that it was important for parliament to be seen to be concerned with the condition of the people, in order to take the steam out of reform. But the effect of that could be to make parliament look like a more important forum for ordinary people.

Griffin   There were great expectations of a reformed parliament. Then it passed the New Poor Law. This allowed conservatives to argue that reform was not the answer after all..

Rogers: Asked about the rationale for the time frame of the re-imagining democracy workshop

Philp/Innes: One reason was that people tend to either study the eighteenth or the nineteenth century and the intention was to draw on a period of time that could cross this boundary, and there was a desire to include both the American Revolution and 1848. The other intention was to resist certain teleologies – in that if the end boundary date didn't culminate in universal suffrage, etc. it would encourage a more open narrative..

Rogers   What's the effect of 1848 on perceptions of 'democracy' in Britain?

Innes   One effect may be that 'socialism' takes over as the chief bugbear.

Griffin: Mentioned that there was extraordinary variation/geographical variation among the boroughs in terms of new public spaces developing or whether there was a clamp down the expression of ideas – and thus makes it difficult to construct a linear story of the development of democracy

Salmon: Asked whether it was always radicals driving forward the democratic agenda

Innes:	Raised the issue of whether democratic institutions are a conservative response – as a way of constraining democratic pressures. The Whigs can be seen as having sought to re-legitimate institutions: parliament, the municipal corporations, the poor law.

Schofield:	Asked about the relationship between liberalism and democracy.

Innes:	Said she was unsure as to how far and from what point contemporaries distinguished liberals from radicals. When the term came in on the back of the Spanish revolution of 1820, it had quite a radical edge to it. William Lovett as a young man was a member of a tavern club called the Liberals. Jorg Leonhardt discusses uses of the word in different European countries in a major book, Liberalismus (in German, but including long quotations in the language of the country discussed in each chapter.) Liberal had older and continuing connotations of freedom from constraint and generosity. It was associated with religious tolerance, etc. The relationship with laissez faire economics was initially much less strong than one might think from the way that historians use the term.

Philp:	Liberals tend to be less interested at least until the 1830s in democracy and more in guarantees of certain individual rights

Navickas	Patrick Joyce in liberal city argues that liberal rhetoric was especially closely associated with the reform of municipal corporations.

Jarrige:	In France, liberals were initially democrats, but after 1848, less so. Guizot thought that he was both a liberal and a democrat. Similarly Thiers 1840s. In France, republicanism and democracy were closely linked as concepts. Perhaps at mid century it became more of an economic creed.

Poole:	Thinks liberals worried about 'cargo cult' democracy. One liberal solution was to try to take certain questions out of the realm of politics, Conservatives favoured instead a return to paternalism and care for people: the reacceptance of social responsibility on the part of government and elite classes.

Rogers	Would be interesting to look at middle-class radicals in the 1840s: people like WJ Fox. Were they talking about democracy? Were they interested in extending representation? Or did they prefer other strategies for change, looking eg to reform through education rather than representation.

Chase	Complete suffragists did want to see the six points of the Charter established. Their disagreement with the Chartists was about whether to conceive of this programme as 'the Charter'. The complete suffrage movement is underresearched: Alex Tyrell's study of Joseph Sturge represents the only real attempt to shed some light on it.

Gillen:	Mentioned that "managed democratization" seems to be what was happening in some sense. Giving people rights who might have a claim with the idea that they will go away and not subvert government. Democracy is a device for incorporating people, ensuring their loyalty.
Salmon:	Asked whether all reforms were "aristocratic tricks"
Innes	Not everyone supposes that all the people are disloyal. From Pitt onwards there is a strategy of trying to search out and cultivate popular loyalism – though policies supposing that always tend to embody some form of gamble, as with volunteering: the gamble was that arming the people wouldn't lead to revolution, but there was no certainty about that in advance.
Salmon	There was a conservative reformist rhetoric, involving eg the idea of the Gothic constitution.
Innes	Sometimes different intellectual routes could lead to similar ends: as with both Toulmin Smith and Mill championing local government.
Rogers	The question about how far to go with democracy was a debate among radicals, evident in terms of how they thought about their relationship with their own followers: not just a debate between radicals and conservatives.

On future plans:

Philp/Innes:	The next big stage is that a conference is being planned to bring together the different American, Britain and France strands of the project. The intention is to look cross-nationally at how democracy figures in different areas and encourage a dialogue across the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Significant interaction occurs among thinkers in these three countries during the period – and it is worth looking at how common concepts are internalized, but also how thinkers do different things with them.
Poole	Worth distinguishing between willingness to mobilise people in moments of crisis, eg to repel alien invaders, and idea of institutionalising popular participation.
Gillen	There's a related idea of the people having a right to national independence without that necessarily entailing changes in internal governmental arrangements.
Rogers:	On other issues to explore, she mentioned that there might be interesting work going on in literature/cultural studies – poetics of reform and radicalism. Ian Hayward, Mike Sanders work in this area. She also suggested inviting Matthew McCormack.

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