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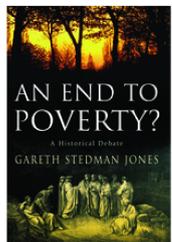
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**An End to Poverty?: A Historical Debate**

GARETH STEDMAN JONES

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**INTRODUCTION** (pp. 1-15)

This book employs history to illuminate questions of policy and politics which still have resonance now. It aims to make visible some of the threads by which the past is connected with the present. It does so by bringing to light the first debates, which occurred in the late eighteenth century, about the possibility of a world without poverty. These arguments were no longer about Utopia in an age-old sense. They were inspired by a new question: whether scientific and economic progress could abolish poverty, as traditionally understood. Some of the difficulties encountered were eerily familiar. Many of the problems...

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**I THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE PROMISE OF A WORLD BEYOND WANT** (pp. 16-63)

It was in the 1790s at the time of the French Revolution that there first emerged the believable outlines of a world without endemic scarcity, a world in which the predictable misfortunes of life need no longer plunge the afflicted into chronic poverty or extreme want. This idea was not another version of the medieval fantasy of the land of Cockaigne, in which capons flew in through the window ready-cooked. Nor was it the update of a more serious invention, *Utopia*, most famously that created by Sir Thomas More in 1516. This was the 'nowhere', or 'good place' according to...

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**II THE REACTION IN BRITAIN** (pp. 64-109)

It has been estimated that in the winter of 1792-3, effigies of Paine were burnt in 300 or so towns and villages in England and Wales. The intensity of the reaction was an indication of the magnitude of the felt threat. His *Rights of Man* was one of the bestsellers of the century; 250,000 copies had been sold by 1793. A London merchant wrote to Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary:

Payne is a dangerous book for any person who does not share in the spoil to be left alone with and it appears that the book is now made...

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**III THE REACTION IN FRANCE** (pp. 110-132)

In France at the beginning of the nineteenth century a separation of political economy from politics similar to that which was occurring in Britain was also declared. In a 'preliminary discourse' preceding his *Traité d'économie politique*, first published in 1803 and destined to become the best-known economic treatise in nineteenth-century France, Jean-Baptiste Say asserted that 'political economy' had too long been confused with 'politics'. Questions about how wealth was formed, distributed and consumed were 'essentially independent of political organisation'. 'Under all forms of government', he went on, 'a state can prosper, if it is well administered.' If there was any...

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**IV GLOBALISATION: THE 'PROLETARIAT' AND THE 'INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION'** (pp. 133-162)

In the years after the battle of Waterloo, discussion of the extraordinary development of the textile industry in Britain and what became known as 'the machinery question' became commonplace in both France and Britain.<sup>1</sup> In France, liberals celebrated the advent of modern industry as a likely bulwark against the opposed forces of feudalism, corporate regulation and protection. In Britain, on the other hand, interest in the possibilities of machinery was overshadowed by Malthusian anxieties about population increase and Ricardian fears about diminishing returns, dramatised by the growth of pauperism and the prohibitive level of agricultural protection afforded by the 1815...

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**V THE WEALTH OF MIDAS** (pp. 163-198)

Say's '*révolutions d'industrie*' were the principal source of the account of the English 'industrial revolution' given by Jérôme Adolphe Blanqui (the brother of the famous French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui) in his *Histoire de l'économie politique* of 1837.<sup>1</sup> Blanqui was a protégé of Say who had gained him the chair of history and industrial economy at the École Spéciale du Commerce.<sup>2</sup> Blanqui also gave courses at the Athénée and at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, where in 1833 he succeeded Say as professor. Following Say, Blanqui wrote of the impact of the Bridgewater canal and emphasised how cotton-spinning machinery and...

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**VI RESOLVING 'THE SOCIAL PROBLEM'** (pp. 199-223)

For Paine and Condorcet in the 1790s, the elimination of poverty had been part of a pitched battle between advancing enlightenment and the receding defences of 'force and fraud'. These powers were personified by the aristocracy and the established church. In this battle, the works of Adam Smith had been a crucial asset. In the eyes of his progressive followers of the 1780s and 1790s, Smith's great achievement had not only been to spell out the historical and political importance of the progress of exchange, but also to distinguish the peaceful and reciprocally beneficial facets of exchange from the self-interested...

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**CONCLUSION** (pp. 224-235)

The argument put forward in *An End to Poverty?* is that the first practicable proposals to eliminate poverty through the creation of a universal framework for social security date back to the 1790s, and were a direct product of the American and French Revolutions. These were not proposals to resolve the 'social problem', as that problem came to be understood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The purpose of the schemes discussed by Condorcet and Paine was not to remove the hostility of the working classes towards private property or to overcome the antagonism between labour and capital, since these...

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