

William Barnes and 'The Unioners' in Dorset¹

Jo Draper

A civil war wo'd be noo benefit
To nobody, an' ef a man can't git
Good bread by sweat, 'e woont, I think, by blood

Many people have been surprised that William Barnes, whose sympathy for the labourers of Dorset is clear from his poetry, wrote nothing about the unrest of the 1830s, or the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834. E. M. Forster noted that Barnes 'could live through the Labourers' Revolt of 1830 without its shadow falling across his verse'.² During 1834 and 1835 Barnes published seven long poems (called eclogues) and sympathetic to the labourers in the *Dorset County Chronicle*. Three – 'The Common a-took in', 'The Lotments' and 'Two Farms in Woone' – highlighted particular problems, namely the *de facto* privatisation of common land through the agency of enclosure, non-compensation of the principal losers – principally rural labourers – by allotments, and the tendency of landowners to amalgamate small farms, dubbed engrossing of farms.³ The central issue of agrarian Trades Unions was never mentioned, although it was the cause of the 1834 trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs,⁴ and an important issue in Dorset throughout the 1830s, and indeed afterwards.

Barnes did not give evidence to the *Report of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture* in 1843, but by the time of the 1867 Royal Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, he was a respected figure, and a Dorset rector. Then his evidence reveals his knowledge and sympathy: 'I can see in a great gathering of labourers and farmers at a fair, that the young farmers are, in the main, finer and more shapely men, and men of a better bodily carriage, than are the often very ungainly, if not stunted, young labourers'. He blamed this on the labourer starting to work too young. He advocated better cottages for the labourers, and disliked women and girls working in the fields. He concluded his long report by observing that, 'What is wanted for the land labourers is

a “rung” in the ladder of rural life, by which he may hope to raise himself by his industry towards a higher position. He cannot now hope ever to step from day labourer to farming. The smallest of our now great farms is beyond his wildest hope’.

William Barnes had moved his school to Dorchester from Mere in June 1835 and *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* was published in 1844. It contained many of his poems already published in the *Dorset County Chronicle*, the local weekly paper based in Dorchester. ‘Eclogue: The Times’ (pp. 270–278) is a dialogue between two farm labourers, one of whom has joined ‘the leagers’, namely the Anti-Corn Law League. The laws protected the price of home-grown corn by practically forbidding the import of cereals until prices rose above a stipulated high levels. The League wanted them repealed in the belief that free trade in corn would lower prices generally, and its principal support came mostly from the north and midlands, as industrialists saw cheaper bread as a means to reduce labour costs to promote the sale of their manufactured goods at home and abroad. The League tried to persuade farmers and landlords that repeal would benefit them too, and by 1844 had achieved but limited success.

A Dorset farm labourer like Tom in the poem might well have supported the League, while his employer, the farmer, and the farmer’s landlord would have most likely been on the other side, supporting protection for British agriculture. However, the poem has some surprising opinions: Tom praises annual parliaments, one man one vote; no property qualifications for MPs, and the secret ballot. Ostensibly, none of these have anything to do with the League, but are familiar because they are the most important of the Chartists’ Six Points (the other two were payment of MPs and equal electoral districts). The Six Points were drafted in 1837, and constituted a very radical blueprint for political reform. Chartist supporters were much more likely to come from trades unions than the League, though if the Charter was implemented, many would have surmised that the corn laws would be speedily repealed to reflect the dramatically altered political realities.

The complete poem is given in its earlier version, published anonymously as ‘The Unioners’ in the *Chronicle* on 16 December 1838, with the changes Barnes made for the 1844 version appearing on the right of the page. Words altered in the 1844 version are italicised. Small changes in the spelling of the Dorset dialect between versions are not shown. The paragraphs have been numbered for reference in the subsequent discussion.

THE UNIONERS

John and Tom

[Some memoranda having been put into our hands, being the substance of a communication overheard between two agricultural labourers working together in a barn in this neighbourhood, on the subject of the Political Unions now forming, a friend has obligingly given the following poetical paraphrase, minutely faithful to the dialect of the speakers. And we trust that the plain good sense of John may be as usefully instructive to his fellow labourers, as we are sure the dialogue will prove amusing to our readers – Ed. D. C. C.]

1. *John* – Well Tom, how be'Settlement?
 Zoo thee'st a-got they niamе
 Among the *unioners** as I've a hiard
2. *Tom* – Ees John, I have Jon; an' I be'nt afeärd
 To own it. Why who woo'den do the siamе?
 We ben't gwáin on lik' this long, I can tell ye.
 Bread is so high an' wages be so low,
 That a'ter workèn lik' a hoss, ya know,
 A man can't yarn enough to vill his belly
3. *John* – Ah! Well: now there, ya know. Ef I wer sure
 The *unioners*† woo'd gi'e me work to do
 All drough the year; an' gi'e me muore
 Than I be yarnen now, I'd jine em' too.
 Ef I wer sure tha'd bring down things so cheap
 That what 'ell buy a poun' o'mutton now
 Would buy the hinder quarters, or the sheep:
 Or what 'ell buy a pig woo'd buy a cow.
 In shart, ef tha' cou'd miake a shillèn go
 In market jist so ver as two,
 Why then, ya know, I'd be the'r man;
 But D'hang it, I don't think tha' can.
4. *Tom* – Why ees tha' wul; ya know, but you don't know it
 Why Mr *Vincen*‡ miade it clear.
 Why vust-tha'd zen up members ev'ry year
 To Parli'ment, an' ev'ry man 'o'd vote.

* Leaguers

† theösum men

‡ theösum men

Though è mid be as poor as a church mouse*
 Still 'e'd be fit to vote, and fit to goo
 To miake the la's at Lunnen too
 Var if a feller idden WSCRO.'th a louse
 Why, why should he be kept out o' the house?†
 An' when the poor vo'ke got a shiare
 In miaken o' the la's, tha'll tiake good kiare
 To miake some good oones var the poor.
 Do stan' by reason, John, because
 Thay‡ that be sent, to miake the la's
 'Ell miake 'em var thezzelves, ya mid be sure

5. *John* – Ees', that tha' wull. The men that you mid trust
 To help you, Tom, would help ther own selves vust.

6. *Tom* – Aye, aye. But we would have a better plan
 O' voten than the oone we got. A man
 As things be now, can't goo an' vote
 Agen another man, but he must know't.
 We'll have a box an' bals var voten men
 To pop ther vists into, ya know, an' then
 If tha' don't happen var to like a man
 Tha'll dräp a little black bal from ther han'.¶

7. *John* – But ef a man ya woulden like to 'front
 Should chänce to cal upon ye, Tom, some dae,
 An' ax ye var yer vote, what could ye zae?
 Why ef ya woo'den änsWER, or shou'd grunt
 Or bark, he'd know ya mieran'd "I won't".
 To promise oone a vote an' not to gi'e't
 Is but to be a liar and a cheat.
 An' then bezides, when tha' did count the bals
 Ef the white promises wer hafe turn'd black,
 'Dhangye, e'ed think the voters al a pack
A rogues together – 'e'd think al' o'm false.

* Var if a fellow midden be a squire

† Why shoo'den fellers miake good la's an' speeches
 A-dressed in fusti'n cuots an' cardrây breeches?
 Ar why shoo'd hooks an' shovels, zies an' axes
 Keep any man vrom votèn o' the taxes?

‡ The men

¶ An' zend en huome agen. 'E woon't be led
 To choose a man to tiake away his bread.

An a'ter al, so very thick my plate is
 That I don't understand how this is yable
 To put a jinte o'beef upon my tiable,
 Or buy me flick to grease my tiaties
 The times be pinchen I, as well as you,
 But I cān't tell what ever tha' can do.

8. *Tom* – Why miake the farmers gi'e they liabouren men
 Muore wages, hafe or twice so much agen
 As what tha' got.

9. *John* – But Thomas you cānt miake
 A man pāy muore awoy than 'e can tiake.
 Ef you do miake en gi'e to till a yield
*Muore than the groun' itself da yield**
 'E'll shut out farmen – ar 'e'll be a goose –
 An' goo an' put his money out to use.
 Wages be low because the hands be plenty;
 Tha' would be higher if the hands wer' skenty.
 Liabour jist lik' the produce o' the yield
 Do zell as market price, jist what 't'ell yield.
 Thee wou'dsten gie a sixpence, I da guess,
 Var six hen's eggs, ef that wer zwold var less.
 Ef thiese here *Union* Vo'ke could miake muore lan's
 And stratch it out jist twice so big agen,
 Tha' mid be doen zome'hat var us them.

10. *Tom* – But ef we wer a zent to Parli'ment
 To miake the la's ya known, as I've a zaid,
 We'd knock the carn la's in th ehead,
 An' then the lan'lards must let down ther rent,
 An' we shou'd very soon have some cheaper bread.
 Farmers wou'd gi'e less money var ther lands.

11. *John* – Aye zee tha' wou'd, 'an git a low'r
 Prize var the produce o'm, an' zoo ther hands
 Wou'd be jist wher tha' wer avore.
*The carn is very dear, but then the reason
 Is mainly that we've had a bad wheat season,
 An' ef the unioners‡ do hold together*

* So much agen as what the groun' da yield

† theosum vo'ke

‡ theos men

'Dhangye tha' can't miake la's to channge the weather
 Tha' ben't so mighty as to think o' frightenen
 The vrost and râin, the thunder and the lighntenen!
 An' as var I, I don' know what to think
 O' tha' there fine big ta'ken, cunnen
 Men that do come vrom *Bâth an'** Lunnan
 Tha' de live well therselves an' eat an' drink
 The best at public house wher' tha' do stây:
 Tha' don't work gratis, tha' do git their pây;
 Tha' wou'den pinch therzelves to do we good,
 Nar gi'e their money var to buy us food.
 D'ye think ef we shou'd meet'em in the street
 At *Bath*† ar Lunnan, that tha'd stan' a treat?

12. *Tom* – Ees, tha' be paid becaze tha' be a zent
 Here by the *unioners*,‡ the poor man's frien's,
 To tell us al' how e mid gâin our en's,
 And zen our *charter*¶ up to Parli'ment§

13. *John* – 'Tis very odd ther idden any friend
 To poor vo'ke hereabout, but men mus' come
 To do us good, away vrom t'other end
 O' Englan'. Hant us got noo fren's near huome?
 I mus' zay Thomas that 'tis rather odd
 That strangers shou'd become so very civil:
 That al' our vo'kes be children o' the Divil,
 And Lunnan vo'kes be al' th' vo'kes o' God;
 Ef we got any fren's at al'
 Why who can tell – I'm sure thee cassen
 But that the squier ar the pa'son
 Mid be our friend, Tom, a'ter al'***
 Var thee dost know the pa'son and the squier
 Do git us coals to miake a bit o'vire,
 An gi'e us many a meaty bouns to pick,
 An' zend us medicine when we be zick,
 An' then ther liadies, bless ther lives,

* Strange men a-comen down vrom Lunnan

† Zome dae

‡ carn-la

¶ Piapers

§ 'The Times' continues for 2½ pages with a fable of the pig and the crow

** 20 lines omitted from 'The Times'

Do come an' gi'e things to our wives.
 The squier's wife do often send us down
 A cuoat, or blanket, or a shirt or gown.

14. *Tom* – Aye let 'em zen their dry buones to the mill:
 We woon't pick buones, we'll zee ef we can't vill
 Our bellies wi' fat beef, an' have a pint
 O beer at dinner to wash down the jinte.

15. *John* – I wish we mid, Tom; but, ef we do trust
 Thiese men to git it, 'twull be zome time vust.
 That there's what I do zay, an' zoo thee't vine it
 If thee dust wait till tha' be yable
 To put thee jintes o'beef upon thy tiable
 I fear thee wooten have noo teeth to grine it:
 I think that thee midst larn a lesson
 Vrom Mr P:iers's book o' Preson*
 The times be hard, God knows, an'tha' that got
 His blessens shou'den let therzelves vorgit
 How tis var he that never got a bit
 O' meat a buoilen in his rusty pot.
 He that can zit down in his easy chair
 To flesh, an' vowl, an' vish, should try to spiare
 The poor, these times, a little vrom his store;
 An' if 'e don't, why sin is at his door.

16. *Tom* – Ah! We woont look to that, we'll have our right,
 Ef not by fiair means, then we wull by might:
 We'll miake times better var us, we'll be free
 Ov other vo'kes and others charity.

17. *John* – Ah, I do think ya mid as well be quiet:
 You'll miake things woose, I' ma'be, by a riot:
 You'll git into a mess Tom, I'm afeard:†
 You'll goo var wool an' come huome shear'd:
 You'll blunder out o' water into mud:
 A civil war wo'd be noo benefit
 To noobody, an' ef a man can't git
 Good bread by zweat, 'e woont, I think, by blood.
 Why I do mind we had a bad wheat year
 Now thirty seven year ago, ar muore,

* 'The Times' restarts (and finds its title)

† 'The Times' finishes here

An' bread, ya know, wer than so dear,
 'Twer quite beyand the yarnens o'the poor:
 Var one an' ten pence wer a gied
 Vor ev'ry luoaf o'bread a' body zeed:
 But yeet we rub'd along the winter then
 An' I do hope we sholl to year agen.

18. *Tom* – Well John, I'm sure I hope we shal;
 But ev'ry oone is war hizzelf, mind, John.

19. *John* – Zoo be the man that ya da'pend upon;
 But God ya know is var us al'.

Notes to the two versions

The most obvious change is the name, and the changing of all references to 'unioners' into 'leagers' or 'theosum men'. In paragraph 4 'Mr Vincen' was Henry Vincent (1813–1878) one of the founding Chartists and a fine public speaker. In November 1838 he was one of the speakers at a large public meeting held at Charlton Down, near Blandford, in support of the Charter. Vincent and Robert Hartwell came from London, and Mr Roberts and Mr Philips from Bath, which accounts for the references to Bath in paragraph 11.

Paragraphs 4 and 6 lay out four of the Chartist's six points – annual parliaments: one-man, one-vote: no property qualifications for MPs and the secret ballot. Paragraph 10 gives the anti-Corn Laws argument, that free trade would mean cheaper food. Paragraph 12, in the original, refers directly to the Charter. 'Mr Piers's book o'Preson' in paragraph 15, is unclear though 'preson' presumably means prison.

A note in the local columns of the *Chronicle* of 27 December 1838 suggests that the poem may have been printed as a pamphlet; 'An amusing and instructive little tract, in the shape of a dialogue between two labourers has been published under the title of John Bull and Tom Stiles. It is worth perusal in these times, and we hope that it will have a circulation commensurate to its merits'. But the pamphlet is not catalogued by the British Library, and no copy has been traced.

Background to 'The Unioners'

In the autumn of 1838 huge meetings were held by the Chartists all over the country. Those in the north were the most successful, and in November a rally was organised at Charlton Down, near Blandford. The local press reported that

the political agitators who are going through the country exciting strife between the labourers and their masters have endeavoured to get up a demonstration in the county. For several days past placards have been exhibited and posted in various parts of the county, announcing that a meeting in support of 'the people's Charter' was to be held.⁵

George Loveless, the leader of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, who had recently returned to England after the remittance of the remainder his transportation sentence, publicised his support for the meeting, and another reprieved Martyr – George Stanfield – who had only been back six months, actually attended. James Frampton, one of the magistrates who brought the case against the Tolpuddle men, wrote to Lord John Russell, the Home Secretary, in August 1838, warning of 'a great many labourers' joining the Union, which the Magistrates accepted – perhaps reluctantly – as legal, 'but as a large assemblage of labourers meeting ... on an open down would certainly occasion a very great sensation and alarm in the County and might ultimately lead to a breach of the Peace'.⁶ However, in stark contrast to 1834, Russell refused to intervene against peaceful populist mobilisations in Dorset.

Local reaction to the Chartists was swift: on 5 November 1838, before the meetings even convened, the Rev. Octavius Piers wrote a pamphlet, *An Affectionate Warning to the Agricultural Labourers in the Parish of Preston-cum-Sutton* – where he was vicar – in which he repeated one of his sermons:

Having heard that certain persons had come into our Parish and were endeavouring (under the mask of friendship) to induce you to combine together, for the purpose of compelling your masters, at once "to raise your wages", and "to lower the price of bread"

he considered his duty to warn his parishioners not to be taken in by these 'gross deceivers'. Combining together in a union to force the masters to raise wages was 'EVIL', 'ungodly and unscriptural, and if generally acted upon, would be productive of the most awful consequences throughout the kingdom'. He assured farmworkers that better wages for labourers are impossible, and claimed that all that the agitators want is 'discord and rebellion'. A wealth of biblical quotations reinforce his arguments, though he strangely omitted, 'The labourer is worthy of his hire'.

Soon afterward Piers published *A Few Hints Respectfully Addressed to Landowners and Farmers throughout the Kingdom: More Particularly to those in the County of Dorset*. He reiterates even more clearly that 'the utmost the Agricultural Labourer can ever expect to obtain, by the sweat of his brow, in this or any other country, is a bare maintenance for himself and

his family', but he is also concerned that in Dorset they are not even receiving that much, and he advocated that landowners should specify a the payment of minimum wage of seven shillings a week in farmers' leases, which with piece-work should increase earnings up to a weekly nine shillings or a little more. Piers additionally assumed that labourers were provided with a free cottage and potato ground, by their employers, and sold wheat at sub-market prices for their own consumption.

I would, therefore, earnestly entreat both Farmers and Landowners, more particularly the latter, on whom devolves the paternal care of their people, to look into these things, and see that they have that which is just and equal; that if it should be our lot to have murmuring and complaining in our streets, we may at least have the satisfaction of knowing it is *without a cause*'.

Piers finally quotes 'The labourer is worthy of his reward', and the whole tone of the second pamphlet is very different, in accepting that low wages are a serious problem for recipients.

The Chronicle claimed that the meeting on 14 November was a failure, but admitted that there might have been as many as 1,500 people there. Other estimates were much higher, some suggesting an attendance of between five and six thousand.⁷ The formal resolutions put to the meeting included the six points of the Charter, and that 'an immediate advance should take place in the Wages paid to Agricultural Labourers'. One of the speakers, Mr Roberts stated that their purpose was 'to elevate the labourer in the social scale. The time was come when some great moral blow would be struck to emancipate the working classes of England from the chains of that oppression under which they laboured'. The editorial of the *Chronicle* the following week commented on the 'political agitators' who were still 'urging upon the labourers the pernicious course of adopting organised unions for the seditious purposes contemplated'. The arguments used against unions, published in the same newspaper three weeks later, are very similar to those Barnes repeats in the poem.

The labouring men very naturally and very pertinently ask what they are to gain by arraying themselves against their masters. They cannot discover any connection between Universal Suffrage and an increase of wages: they do not see how the Ballot can give them an extra loaf of bread or an additional pound of meat: they are at a loss to know in what manner Annual Parliaments are to benefit them; or how the comforts and the prosperity of the nation in general are to be increased by abolishing the Property qualification for Members of Parliament, and sending to the House of Commons, men who, having empty

pockets, will be the longer in filling them. The labouring class may be assured that if their present condition is hard, it will not be improved by acting in hostility towards those to whom they have to look for the means of maintaining themselves and their families; and that they will only injure their own cause by encouraging seditious strangers, who – for their own selfish purposes, and that they may eat the bread of idleness, wrung from the wages of industry, – roam over the country, exciting discord and disaffection, and engendering bad feeling between those who, standing in the relation of master and servant, ought, for the good of both, to regard each other with the kindest and best feelings.

James Frampton described the meeting on Charlton Down in his history of The Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry, and

another in the Town of Blandford in the evening a few days afterwards, also one evening at Tolpuddle and some other small villages, at which inflammatory speeches were made, which were not confined to wages, but where universal suffrage, Vote by Ballot etc., were advocated. Soon after this the Emissaries went away; it is supposed owing to their not having met with the success they expected; but they left the minds of the labourers in a very unsettled and dissatisfied state; which in a great degree took off the feeling of confidence between them and their employers. The Tolpuddle men who had been convicted of administering unlawful oaths in 1834 and who were so injudiciously and unjustifiably pardoned by Lord John Russell, had returned from Transportation and having been held up as Martyrs and made a shew of by this association, were very active on this occasion.⁸

There were a few Chartist meetings in the county during 1839, including one at Shaftesbury in April where 'the Mayor very properly refused the use of the Town Hall' and in December 1839 the *Dorset County Chronicle* published 'A Hymn for Christmas Day' attacking the Chartists:

Chartists disqualified for the due Celebration of Christmas

Can Chartists join in sacred praise
With hearts prepar'd glad hymns to raise
And glorify that God most high
Whose law and pow'r they dare defy

Can Chartists hail "the Prince of Peace",
Wishing his "Government's increase,"
Who in arm'd hosts together band,
And spread mad tumulus through the land?

When seraph's chant "good will to men,"
 Can Chartists join a glad "Amen,"
 When they combine with murd'rous hate,
 And spill and treason mediate?

Let them confess their guilt to God,
 Own they deserve His vengeful rod,
 Then hail with joy His natal day
 Who came to bear man's sighs away.

and so on for another six stanzas.⁹

Possible reasons for the changes to the poem

In late November and early December 1838, when Barnes wrote the first version of the poem, it was unclear how many Dorset labourers would support the union and the Charter. Many letters and several editorials in the *Chronicle* admit the poor conditions and wages of the labourers but also ridicule the Chartists and the union men. Some who joined the Union were sacked: Henry Fookes, farmer of Whitchurch, was accused of having dismissed eight men for joining the union. In a letter published on 2 January 1839 he states that six of his men had asked for weekly wages to be increased to ten shillings.

I told them that depended on circumstances; for if they belonged to the Union that was now forming, I should not advance one penny – that my money should never go to pay those demagogues who were travelling the country to pocket their pence, to poison the minds of the labourers, and set them against their masters, who, in my opinion, were their real friends.

The men sacked by Fookes were unable to secure work elsewhere, and returned ten days later saying that they had left the union. Fookes explained that, 'I set them to work, with the exception of one young man, who being impertinent, I told him to go about his business'. Fookes paid reasonable wages, but in the face of his oppression of the labourers it is galling to find the *Chronicle* editorial of 10 January 1839 extolling 'the manly mind and good feelings of this honourable but abused class of men', namely the farmers. 'Mr Fookes is an excellent specimen of the true English farmer'.

Given the ultimatum of the sack as the price of union membership by the true English farmer, it is not surprising that the organisation did not make headway in Dorset. The *Chronicle* editorial of 17 January 1839 rejoices that since 'the labourers of Dorsetshire having nobly

withstood the dangerous seductions exercised by the agitators who recently came amongst them', the labourers 'deserve that investigation into their condition which will serve to ascertain whether in all parts they receive that amount of wages to which they may be considered as fairly entitled'.

Thus the union was defeated, and by 1844 when Barnes published 'The Times' the Anti-Corn Law movement was far more topical in Dorset. In May 1843 it held a public meeting on Salisbury Field, Dorchester. *The County Chronicle* reported the presence of only about a thousand people, 'among whom were a large number of youths and women of the lowest class'. The meeting was aimed more at farmers than labourers, and the former's reaction was simply put by A Dorset Yeoman writing to the same paper the next week: headlined, 'TO THE DORSET YEOMANRY "Up, boys, and at them!"', it asserted: 'Brother farmers – the time is arrived when we can no longer remain quiescent. By the duty we owe to ourselves, to our families, and to our country, we must stand forward manfully against our great enemy, THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE'; he later described it as a 'revolutionary conspiracy'. By September an editorial in the *Chronicle* lumped all the reformers together:

whether we look at the Anti-Corn Law League, the Chartist Association, or the Suffrage Extension tribe, we find them "one and all", every mischievous democratic society hostile to the Institutions of the country in Church and State, and to the rights of agriculture and other settled property, framed, conducted, and supported by the Dissenting Radicals.

The Conservative *Chronicle* reflected the views of virtually all the farmers and land-owners of Dorset, who formed a principal part of its readership.

The possibility of agricultural labourers supporting the League seems to have become more important in 1844. In February, huge meetings of farmers were held in all the Dorset towns to organise opposition to the League. At Sherborne, Chairman Ensor, 'a much esteemed yeoman', claimed that repeal 'would not only ruin the labourer but destroy the farmer, and ultimately bring down the landlord also'. The League had been trying to attract labourers: 'The emissaries have said the League is the labourer's friend, but I am quite certain that nefarious body has other objects in view. I say the League is the labourer's greatest enemy and if it promises to give him a loaf for 4d. *I should like to know who would give him the 4d. to buy it with?*' The Rev. Harry Farr Yeatman, a landlord with 14 or 15 tenant farmers, revealed from the same platform that he

considered that *laissez-faire* principles should be applied *only* to the labour market.

I have heard much of the destitution of the Dorset labourer, and I deeply regret it; but I feel that philanthropy must not run away with our public sympathies too rapidly. When it is said that labourers are to receive, and ought to receive a certain amount of wages, I confess, sir, that I am surprised at the simplicity of those who maintain that proposition; for I am convinced myself painfully – but truly – that ... like any other commodity [but not corn] must find its level in the market, according to the supply and demand and according to the quality of the article thus offered. Again ... the labourer can only be paid remuneration wages when the source of wealth out of which these wages are to be drawn are [sic] increased – increasing, or abiding; and, therefore, when I see reflections cast abroad on the county of Dorset, because in some certain parishes there are certain labourers to be found who are paid at the rate of 5s. and 5s. 6d. per week for their work and no higher sum, I feel rather jealous of the honour of my native county – and I feel that in their haste to apply balm to the wounded and the weak, our accusers have over-looked certain principles of sound economy which in a case of this kind cannot be laid aside, or departed from without drawing too largely on the capital of the country (Continued cheering).¹⁰

Yeatman cited Adam Smith in support of his reverence's *laissez-faire* principles respecting the price of labour. To most Dorset landlords and the overwhelming majority of the county's farmers, continued protection of the price of corn was vital, but any mode of interference with the wages of labourers, irrespective of their destitution, was simply wrong. By 1844, Chartism in Dorset was manifestly moribund, while the increasing national influence of the Anti-Corn Law League – however muted its echoes in Dorset – was visibly manifest; within two years of the publication of Barnes' revamped poem, the Sir Robert Peel's Tory ministry was to repeal the laws. By changing the focus of the poem from unions and Chartism, to the League, Barnes was making it absolutely up-to-date, fully reflecting the importance of the issue for land-owners, farmers and labourers.

Notes

1. I am very grateful to Dr Joe Bettey and Professor Roger Wells for their comments on this article.
2. E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), p. 210.

3. These issues exercised a broader social constituency than labourers, including many traditionally-minded Tories. Their most consistent expression can be found in the writings of that quintessential Englishman, William Cobbett. For a recent discussion see R. Wells, 'The moral economy of the English countryside', in A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds), *Moral Economy and Social Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority* (2000), pp. 209–71.
4. R. Wells, 'Tolpuddle in the context of English agrarian labour history, 1780–1850', in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism 1750–1850: the Formative Years* (1988), pp. 98–142.
5. *Dorset County Chronicle*, 15 November 1838.
6. D[orset] C[ounty] R[ecord] O[ffice], D/FRA/X32.
7. R. Wells, 'Southern Chartism', in John Rule and Wells (eds), *Crime, Protest and Popular Politics in Southern England, 1740–1850* (1997), p. 129.
8. DCRO, D/FRA/X4.
9. *Dorset County Chronicle*, 4 April and 26 December 1839.
10. *Ibid.*, 15 February 1844.