GEORGE RUDÉ
A MEMORIAL MEMOIR

"Lucid, systematic, erudite..... one of the leading historians of the French Revolution"
Eric Hobsbawm, The Guardian

"A distinguished lecturer and teacher, he found time to write a prodigious number of books"
The Times

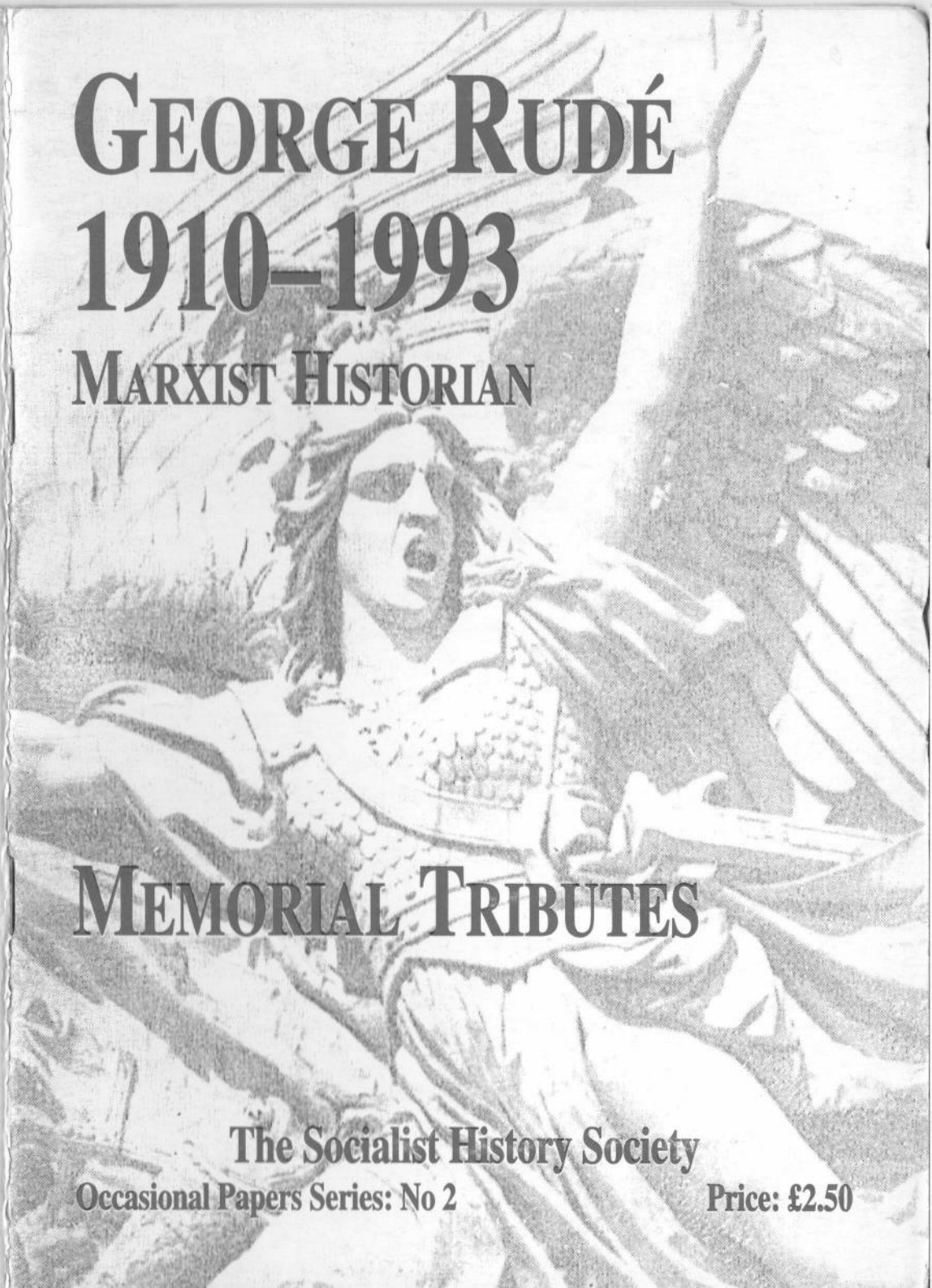
"[Rudé] put mind back into history and restored the dignity of man"
AJP Taylor

"George Rudé always said that his interest in history was kindled by his readings of Marx and Engels- from whom he acquired the directive to 'study all history afresh' ".
Harvey J Kaye, The Independent

Cover illustration: *The Spirit of Revolution, carved for the Arc de Triomphe in 1833 by François Rude.*

GEORGE RUDÉ 1910–1993

MARXIST HISTORIAN



MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

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George Rudé
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Marxist Historian
Memorial Tributes

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George Rudé 1910–1993: Marxist Historian

Foreword

George Rudé, whose life and work was celebrated at a memorial meeting organised by the Socialist History Society at the historic Marx House, Clerkenwell Green, London, on 5 June 1993, made an outstanding contribution to the study of popular protest and the active role taken by the "common people" in shaping history.

In holding the meeting, the Society also affirmed Rudé's close association with it and its predecessor, the CP History Group and his enduring contribution to the development of a Marxist historiography that is both academically distinguished and politically inspiring. Among the group, he was, as Eric Hobsbawm has said a "lone explorer" in the field of 18th century social movements.

Pioneering studies brought together in his book, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century*, showed, by the use of contemporary police records how, on occasions, near spontaneous protest tends to give way to more organised armed revolt and drew attention to '..a truism that the historian's end product depends almost as much on the questions he asks as on the records he uses to answer them' – in short, what? who? and how? and why?

He applied the question 'who?' in writing *Wilkes and Liberty* when setting out to answer the questions 'who composed the crowd'; 'who were the Middlesex freeholders' and 'who were the 60,000 petitioners that, in 1769, demanded that Wilkes be recognised by Parliament as the lawful MP for Middlesex'.

In identifying the many faces in the crowd Rudé gave dignity to the "common people" previously neglected by historians. His main concern was "to trace the origins and development of the ideas that (in Marx's phrase) 'grip the masses'" as he described in his essay *Marxism and History*. In doing this, he asked all the important questions to show how the "pre-industrial crowds" were organised, what interests and ideas motivated them, and what circumstances gave rise to class alliances that could initiate successful revolutionary change, the prime example being the French Revolution. Despite a keen awareness of the political implications of writing history, he did not allow polemic to distort his arguments which were always based on the most scrupulous archival research.

In his work, *Robespierre*, which he described as a political, rather than a 'warts and all' portrait and a personal biography, he attempted a work of synthesis rather than one of original research. He saw Robespierre as the 'first great champion of democracy and the people's rights' and emphasised the importance of the French Revolution as 'one of the great landmarks in modern history' – and one which enthused much of his work as *The Crowd in the French Revolution* illustrates.

As a Communist, George Rudé had to overcome political discrimination against him in his academic career before his talent as an historian could fully flower and before he could develop his work in portraying 'history from below' in which he had been influenced by the French Marxist historian Georges Lefebvre. In his introduction to *Hanoverian London 1714-1808* he pin-pointed 'the elements of a genuine citizens' democracy' and the emergence of City Radicalism in the 1760s – when the unenfranchised citizens, vulgarly known as "the mob"' were drawn into political activity.

'In every period of history, certain turning points are more significant and more pregnant with further change than others' George Rudé wrote in *Europe in the Eighteenth Century* in which, by means of broad themes, rather than by countries or events, he set out to stress movement 'which is the very stuff of history – as well as conditions, 'structure' and continuity'. Part of that movement was portrayed in *Captain Swing* in which, in collaboration with Eric Hobsbawm, the great rising among the English agricultural labourers in the early years of the nineteenth century is seen.

The Socialist History Society has pleasure in presenting this record of tributes paid to George Rudé and urges study of his important contributions to understanding the role played by 'the people' in the development of present day society.

GEORGE RUDÉ – Memorial Meeting
Marx House, 5th June 1993

June Cohen, Chair:

I welcome you most warmly on this sad occasion, but also, we hope, a joyful one in remembering George Rudé. We do especially welcome Doreen Rudé. The Socialist History Society has convened this meeting so that friends would have an opportunity of honouring the memory of our late esteemed group member, George Rudé, whom we were very sad to lose in such an untimely way. I wonder if you would join me in standing for a moment, please. Thank you very much.

We have had many messages and apologies; from Rodney Hilton, John Saville and Pat Thane. I personally only had the pleasure of meeting George once, sadly that was on the occasion of the memorial meeting we had for Leslie Morton. It was Leslie, who, when I was studying history, only a few years ago, consulting him about books, said to me, "I should use Rudé, my dear, George is always very good". We have the titles of his books around the room.

I will now ask Eric Hobsbawm, our president, who probably knew George longer than most of us here, if he would kindly address us.

Eric Hobsbawm:

It is true that I met George more than once. In fact I met him first in 1939, together with other students when he came up to Cambridge. I remember him and Doreen; I think that we should notice that from then on until the end these two were together; very different people, but as Hugh Stretton once said, talking about George, "complementary rather than identical". Even professionally George was a very important influence; in my very first book, **Primitive Rebels,** I already noted that very few people had been working on the question of city crowds, city mobs and riots, but Dr George Rudé was one of them, and I owed him a great deal. That was in the late '50s. I think he also read my book later on, and was influenced by that; this, I think, was the basis of our collaboration on **Captain Swing,** which has been, I am happy to say, republished quite recently in a nice paperback.

He, I think, came onto the subject via the Australian convicts in which he had, naturally, got interested when he moved to Australia. I got onto the subject because, sometime in the '50s, I'd been engaged in doing some work for the Victoria County History of Wiltshire on trade unionism there, which didn't ever come off, but it got me very interested in – and I'd done a good deal of work on – the labourers' rising of 1830 in Wiltshire. So we decided we might well combine forces, as we were thinking about these matters in the same sort of way, and so we wrote that book together. So we worked together in so far as people could who were separated by one, or possibly two, oceans. One of the major impressions I have of George is how extraordinarily easy he was to collaborate with. If you have

ever tried to collaborate with someone, write something jointly, you will realise that this is almost like marriage. It is a very useful and important combination but not one which can always be done without friction. With George it was done without friction, I can tell you that. We discussed things where we had a disagreement; we agreed or we disagreed, we came to a conclusion; he was a marvellous person to work with.

Later on I saw him decline physically; I saw him revive physically after they discovered that he had this brain tumour which had been partly responsible for his physical troubles. I saw him later on decline again in the later and really quite miserable years, both physically and even mentally without ever losing his balance, his good temper.

So it's been a long time since I first got to know George and I knew him for a very long time. I don't want to go into lengthy biographical details: lots of people wrote about them in the obituaries and there are some very good and sympathetic memoirs in the essays in honour of George Rudé which were published from Montreal and partly republished by the Oxford University Press, called **History From Below.** To these essays, I am happy to say that Christopher, and Victor and I, contributed as well as what you might call the international Marxist team of French Revolutionary historians, of which he was for such a long time a part. His close friend, the late Albert Soboul; Markov, the German; Tennyson, the Norwegian; Barry Rose, from Australia – all except Richard Cobb, with whom he had been very friendly in those days, and why Richard Cobb was not in on it is a matter I do not understand, but there you are. Some people, like George, maintain a continuity in their lives while others are less anxious to maintain continuities.

However, while I do not want to talk a lot about George's life I still think something should be said about his Communism and his faith as a victim of the Cold War. He joined the CP in 1935 and he remained a Communist for a very long time, even after he quietly dropped out of the party, not wishing to advertise the fact that on a number of issues, for instance the behaviour of the USSR in Eastern Europe, which he no longer felt happy about. Nevertheless the main thing George got from being a Communist was a hard deal. The Cold War was a bad time to be any kind of Communist, but especially a Communist intellectual. While in this country we didn't have McCarthyism in anything like the way they had it in the United States – partly, of course, because British universities and others were not anxious for public scandal such as firing people. Nevertheless,there was, unquestionably, a difficulty for, essentially, those of us who were lucky to get into university teaching, or similar jobs before 1948 – roughly before the Berlin Airlift crisis – we were OK. For about ten years we didn't get any promotion or anything like this, but nobody tried to throw us out. But for those who did not manage to get in before, as it were, the fateful date, they couldn't get in. George was not the only one who suffered, there are a

Born to toil: the French peasant of the early eighteenth century

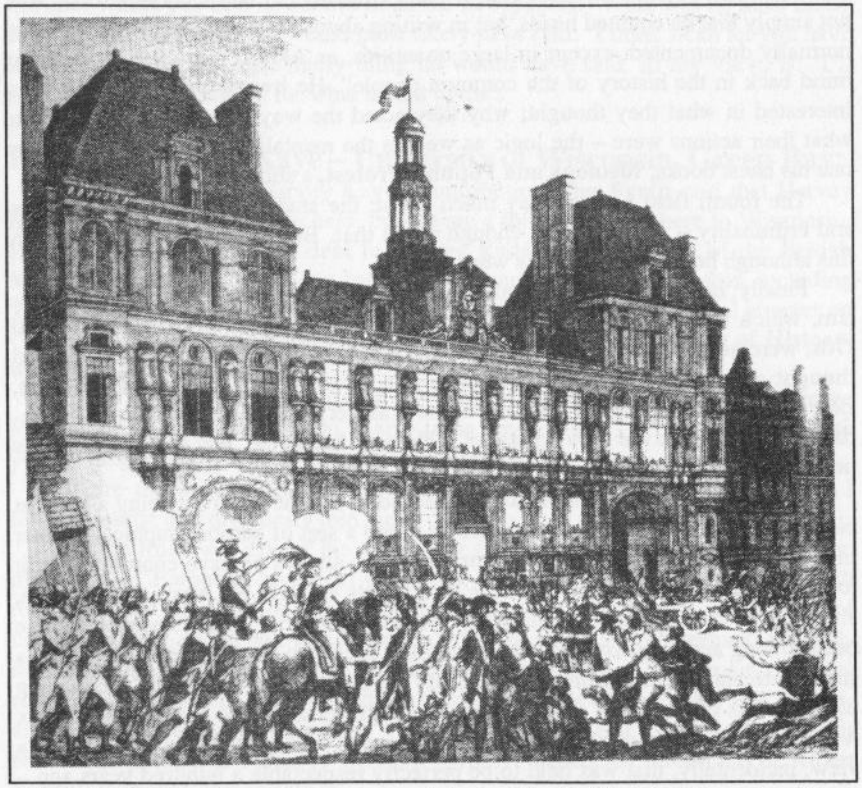
number of others who never got into academic life, who were very well qualified – I won't mention any names. Nevertheless George suffered in a particularly bad way, because, in the first place, he was thrown out of his school in 1949 on the pressure of parents who didn't want to see their children's teacher distributing Communist material on the street corners. After he became a qualified historian, thanks to the attitude both of his supervisor, the late Alfred Cobban, and, of course, of the innumerable universities, polytechnics and other places to which he applied in those days, he couldn't get a job. Not in England. This wasn't because he wasn't qualified. George, who took a part-time degree while he was teaching, got his PhD in 1950 on "the Parisian wage-earning population and insurrectionary movements 1789-91". From that moment on in terms of sheer productivity, both in quantity and quality, there is absolutely no question about his merits. In the 1950s (I've tried to count it up) he published 17 articles and one book; in the 1960s he published about 20 articles and chapters in books, plus four books; in the 1970s he published a bit less in the way of articles, only about 11, but he published six books. So you can see that he was really what we used to call in the olden days, a Stakhanovite, in historical production.

So, even in the 1950s, he had plenty, as it were, on the record. He won the Alexander Prize of the Royal Historical Society; he was recognised. But – it didn't help. Plenty of excuses: chap coming over late; spending his time teaching; many years at a comprehensive school; wasn't even teaching history but language. Any excuse. In the end he managed to get a job in Australia, not without difficulty, in 1960. This is the reason why George's professional career was overwhelmingly conducted overseas, in Australia, and later on in Canada, much to the benefit of the academic life of those countries, and they greatly appreciated it.

He never complained about it. It was bad, but he thought that's the way the world was; he didn't like it. In the end it seemed to me that even the man who had blackballed him, Cobban, had a bad conscience about it.

Let me finish by saying something about George and his work as an historian. I suppose his work comes under four or five headings: firstly, of course, an historian of the French Revolution and the French revolutionary period. In this he represented a particular phase in the debate on this period, dominated by the great French historian Georges Lefebvre, when, in a sense, something like a Marxist interpretation – Lefebvre modified, or amplified, by Soboul – was virtually the teaching and the official orthodoxy. This has been severely criticised since then, originally by George's supervisor, Cobban, who wasn't then taken seriously, but later was. I think that, towards the end of his life, George was, to some extent, the victim of this rather politically motivated debate, which reached a peak in the year of the 200th anniversary of the revolution in France, when all the people who thought there shouldn't have been a revolution – and anyway it shouldn't have been a Jacobin one – came out and more or less hogged the public scene. Nevertheless two of his most important books were published about this: one the famous **The Crowd in the French Revolution** (1959), which basically answers the question "Who actually stormed the Bastille?". Then, in the 1970s, a book which some like a great deal, but is not very popular among the anti-French revolutionaries of later days, namely his study of **Robespierre: Portrait of a Revolutionary Democrat.**

Secondly, he wrote general European history in large quantities, because publishers soon noticed that he was enormously reliable and sensible. I think the two books which are most interesting are, firstly, one which many of you may know, **Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815;** then a less well known book which I think is quite original, called **Debate on Europe 1815-1850.** It is quite unknown because there was supposed to be a series on this, and the only one who turned in his manuscript in time – as always – was George. Nobody else turned anything in



The fall of Robespierre: the scene outside the City Hall in the Place de Grêve.

and shortly afterwards the publisher went bankrupt, so only George's book appeared.

Thirdly, probably the field of history with which he will be most closely associated, namely history from below. History, as it were, seen from the grass roots. Here I think the studies which are based on primary work are those most likely to survive, simply because sooner or later somebody will have to go back to them. Even on something like **Captain Swing,** which is no longer the last word on the subject, other people have put in new material, or new means of analysis, but still, if you are interested in this field, you have to go back and read it. The same applies to the many other fields of this kind which George pioneered. The Gordon Riots in the eighteenth century; Wilkes and Liberty, on which he wrote a book; the French revolutionary riots and popular movements on which he wrote. His methodology, and, indeed mine, were sometimes criticised by people who wanted the thing to sort of be more romantic, more full of local empathy. In fact George's merit was not simply that he counted heads, but in writing about ordinary people, who are not normally documented, except in large quantities, as AJP Taylor said, he "put the mind back in the history of the common people". He treated them right. He was interested in what they thought; why they acted the way they did, not simply in what their actions were – the logic as well as the mentality. He developed this in one his latest books, **Ideology and Popular Protest,** a short and very useful work.

The fourth field I cannot say much about: the studies of Australian convicts and criminality – I don't know enough about that. But he worked intensively on this although he did not finish his work there.

Finally, he took part in general discussions simply because the kinds of Marxism, which became fashionable with the new radicalisation in the late '60s and '70s, were very different from the stuff which we had been brought up on and had thought out for ourselves. For instance, like a lot of people of our generation, Edward Thompson, myself and others, he was very critical of Althusser. Nowadays a lot of people are very critical of Althusser, but in the '60s and '70s that was not so common.

Basically he remained a Marxist. What did he feel he got from being a Marxist historian? At one time in the early '70s he wrote a sort of autobiographical chapter in a book called **The Historian's Workshop.** As always he gave enormous credit to his critics and did not advertise his own merits enough. He was a modest man, although he knew he had serious gifts. "Marxist historical ideas", he wrote, "have been so long and so insistently misrepresented in certain countries, that it may be a surprise to some that a professor of history should actually claim that the reading of Marx was of any solid advantage to him in his craft. What I learnt from Marx was not only that history tends to progress through a conflict of social classes – a view, incidentally, that was held to be perfectly respectable a hundred years ago – but that it has a discoverable pattern and moves forward, not backwards, in circles

or in inexplicable jerks, broadly from a lower to a higher phase of development. I learned also, that the lives and actions of the common people are the very stuff of history, and, though material actions rather than institutional and ideological factors are primary, that ideas themselves become a material force when they pass into the active consciousness of men. Moreover, I have also learnt from Engels that, whatever the excellence of historical systems, like his own and Marx's, for example, 'all history must be studied afresh'. What I never at any time learnt from either of them was that history should be interpreted in terms of a narrow economic determinism."

Now – will he be remembered among historians? The answer is 'yes'. How will I remember him, myself? Probably on a beach in Ostia in 1955 when we were coming out of the International Historical Congress, with a bottle of wine and in a swimming costume. As we are asking these artificial questions, let me finish with the ones which you find nowadays in all the newspapers: 'What was he most likely to have said....?' I think he would most likely have said: 'I think I can let you have it by then'. And the least likely thing he would have said, in my view, is: 'I'll never forgive that bastard for what he did to me'.

Professor Harvey Kaye – University of Wisconsin, Green Bay:

Before reading out Harvey Kaye's contribution, **Jim Fyrth** said that Harvey Kaye would have liked to be here, but we are a long way from here to Wisconsin. He feels he owes a special debt to George Rudé as an historian of the British Marxist tradition. Harvey Kaye has written a number of books on this, including **The British Marxist Historians.** An update of this, including a special chapter on George Rudé, **The Education of Desire – Marxists and the Writing of History,** was published last year.

Thank you for informing me of the memorial meeting for my mate, George Rudé. I am very sorry that I am unable to be present, and I very much appreciate your willingness to read my sentences to those who are.

Before any words I send strongest hugs and biggest smiles to Doreen, whom I love so dearly; and my family join me in doing so.

George Rudé was one of the truly great social historians, joining together the most critical European historical traditions, the British Marxist, and the French revolutionary. His work on the eighteenth century was pioneering. His studies of the crowds of London and Paris were radically original, and his remarkable writings of a comparative and synthetic nature were inspiring. All the main essential reading for students of history. With his comrades of the Communist Party Historians' Group, like Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan and Eric Hobsbawm, and his fellow musketeers of Paris, as Georges Lefebvre called the threesome of Albert Soboul, Richard Cobb and Rudé.

George developed history from below, or, as I would say to make George

himself laugh, "history from the bottom up". In fact George and his comrades carried out the revolution in historiography which, in continuing opposition to the ambitions of those ever-anxious scoundrels who would declare that we have reached the end of history, reminds us that popular struggles for liberty, equality and democracy, do not await the words and licence of rulers and elites.

George's passing is mourned around the world. I speak as an American, although, admittedly one who has had the audacity to presume to serve as the historiographer of the British Marxist tradition. In the past few months I have received messages from across the American continent expressing not only sadness upon hearing of George's death, but also proclaiming tremendous and continuing admiration for his many contributions to the historical discipline and profession. Yet that is not all; everyone – repeat, everyone – whether in letters or in person at conferences, states how they remembered their meetings with George, and how dear, sweet, wonderful and helpful they found him. This is said not only by radical historians, both young and old, of whom you'd expect it, perhaps; but equally so it is said to me by liberals and even conservatives. And I must note that often, to my amusement, and I am sure to George's as well (if he happens to be listening in), they will add "not quite what you'd expect of a Marxist, is it?"

I myself recall so well Doreen and George's visit to Green Bay, Wisconsin, in October 1986, and I know George will appreciate me all the more for placing Doreen at the heart of the tale. When I first approached the renowned Professor Rudé in 1985, to invite him to come and speak to my colleagues and students at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, I carried a personal burden of guilt, which I was regularly reminded of by Christopher Hill. That is I had failed properly to include treatment of George's work, and also that of Victor Kiernan in my first book **The British Marxist Historians** in 1984. Indeed, I was trying to get George to come to Wisconsin in order to interview him, for I was planning an article on George Rudé, Social Historian, in order to make up for my earlier failing. I distinctly recollect what happened the first time I telephoned the Rudé apartment in Montreal. Doreen answered, and following my 'hello' and introduction, she harangued me for a full twenty minutes for having failed to attend to George in my book. We should all be lucky enough to have such women and partners in our lives! She was right – I was wrong, and I have loved her ever since. When, finally, I was able to explain the reason I was ringing, Doreen told me it was good I was coming to my senses, and added that I should ring back later when George would be home from his morning classes at Concordia University. And please note George, the ever committed and ever beloved teacher, was 75 years old at the time. Telephoning back a few hours later I was filled with anxiety. If Mrs Rudé was so tough, what, I thought, should I expect from the professor? I was most happily surprised. Contrary to my foolish expectations, George was very warm and welcoming, perhaps trying to comfort me after Doreen's passionate directness. He

even let me know that he had just reviewed **The British Marxist Historians** for an Irish historical journal, and, moreover, he told me that he actually liked it. Also, he graciously accepted my invitation for the two of them to come and visit Green Bay and to stay with me and our family in our home. I cannot tell you how fabulous was their weekend with us in the autumn of '86. Both George and Doreen were tremendous hits. My vice-chancellor loved them; my colleagues loved them; my students loved them; my family adored them. Doreen's bright Irish eyes and voice regaled and charmed the university folk with first-hand adventure stories; and together, Doreen, my daughters and I, went hunting in every possible shop in north-east Wisconsin for some obscure American perfume. I came home smelling something awful, and my wife, Lorna, thought the whole thing hilarious.

George's lecture on the Friday morning was on 'Ideologies and the Revolution of 1789'. He was fantastic. Leaning back against a high stool in order to relieve the pressure on his legs, he gently placed the overflow audience of 300 faculty and students in the palm of his hand and took them on a time-travel to late eighteenth century France. He carried them from city to country, introducing them to aristocrat and bourgeois, *sans-culottes* and peasant; it was remarkable. Following the one-hour talk, students eagerly approached him for autographs, as if he were a Hollywood celebrity, and of course he was handsome enough to be taken for one. They asked George to sign everything from **The Crowd in the French Revolution** to (no kidding!) **The Communist Manifesto.**

Later that evening George was a true saint: he not only lifted from my shoulders the burden of guilt I had about **The British Marxist Historians,** but offered me the opportunity to perform a special good work. I use the religious imagery fully realising that George's anti-clerical views and my own historical Judaism would abjure such popery. He said that he was in the process of completing what might be his last major book, **The French Revolution,** and needed someone to take charge of his collected essays. He had heard that I was editing Victor Kiernan's articles, and added that with such a recommendation, along with that of our mutual friend Ellen Meiksins, he felt he could trust me. At that I bounced up to the ceiling with excitement. Needless to say I accepted the commission as soon as I could collect the words to do so. In 1988 I edited **The Face of the Crowd – Studies in Revolution, Ideology and Popular Protest – the Selected Essays of George Rudé** (Harvester/Wheatsheaf). The only thing left to feel guilty about was that I did not allow him to smoke his cigars in our house; still, I wasn't all that hard on him, for I did accompany him out of doors when he felt the need for tobacco.

As *chargé d'affaires* of George's writings, it pleases me when I see that his work is not only sought after for reprinting and excerpting by historians and history editors, but just as much by sociologists and political scientists. George was insistent that an engagement be pursued between history and the social sciences. I know very well that the three great Rudéan works are **The Crowd in**

the French Revolution, Wilkes and Liberty, and with his dear friend Eric Hobsbawm, **Captain Swing;** but I would add that for pedagogical purposes my personal favourite of his books is **Ideology and Popular Protest,** and I am now endeavouring to get it republished here in the States.

George is sorely missed. How do we honour his memory and his historical contributions? My introduction to the volume **The Face of the Crowd** closes with the words of Marx and Engels, which George himself urged me never to forget: "All history must be studied afresh." When we do so we honour George Rudé.

Willie Thompson:

I have to start by stressing my virtually complete lack of qualifications for paying this tribute to George Rudé; I never had the privilege of meeting him and I feel all the more acutely conscious of that in a room that contains his close colleagues and dear friends. But perhaps I am qualified in a negative way, because one way of paying tribute to a great historian is for someone who knows him only through his writings and what has been written about him to say something about the impact that that has had upon him.

I remember that about thirty years ago, in the early '60s, I was visiting a friend in Glasgow, when someone called who was a representative of Collins, the publishers. He said "We've got a cheap line in paperbacks – I've got two interesting historical texts in which you may be interested. One is by a guy called Hobsbawm, called **The Age of Revolution,** and the other is by George Rudé, called **Revolutionary Europe**". Since they were going cheaply, I purchased them both. Now I'd heard of Hobsbawm, but I'd never heard of Rudé. I came to read **Revolutionary Europe** and, like Eric's text as well, it was a revelation. I had taken a degree in history a couple of years earlier, but the French Revolution wasn't part of our syllabus. The French Revolution was covered at greater length in George's book, which had a narrower chronological scope than Eric's, and I was absolutely fascinated. Ever since then, in fact, that historical episode has been the one which I find most fascinating and most moving; and it's from reading George Rudé that that feeling originates. I can pay him that personal tribute.

Later on I read his other general texts: the pamphlet that he wrote for the Historical Association on **Interpretations of the French Revolution,** and the book that Eric mentioned, which now seems to be something of a rarity, **Debate on Europe, 1815-50** I found that also enormously enlightening, and it opened up a whole range of new vistas. If George Rudé had written nothing but these general texts, he would still have been a very considerable historian, one who would have been remembered for many years after his death. But, of course, that was, in a sense, the lesser part of his work; the greater part was what he did in relation to his studies of the people, the individuals, the anonymous masses – so-called – who were involved in the social developments and the revolutionary

upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Usually they were defeated, they were the historical losers; but I think that there is one thing that has come out of the work of the pioneers of British Marxist history: that is, in Edward Thompson's phrase, "to overcome the condescension of posterity" towards these groups and these individuals.

When I begin my courses at the start of a session, what I say to my students is that we are going to be looking at developments, at trends, at broad social forces; but never forget that behind all of them there are particular individuals, each of whom had a life that was as important and as valuable to them as yours or mine is to ourselves. When we look at the people who get biographies written about them, when we consider the leaders and the outstanding individuals, then, depending on the quality of the biography, we can get something of that feel of what it was like to be participant in a particular set of events, in a particular social milieu. But what George Rudé and the other British Marxist historians have done is to enable that to be achieved for the previously anonymous masses; able to give an identity, a character, a face to numerous people, male and female, who had been dismissed, written off as the raw material of history; who appeared on the historical stage without even a speaking part, and then disappeared. They come to life in the writings of people like Christopher and Eric and Victor and George Rudé.

But these people are not sentimentalised, they are real human beings, whether they are Parisian *sans-culottes* or rural machine-breakers, or the London crowd of the eighteenth century, or the convicts transported to Australia and other colonies. They become real, yet at the same time, the fact that they are part of an evolving historical process is not forgotten; that is the particular virtue of this group of historians. Harvey Kaye in his book, **The Education of Desire,** as has been mentioned, draws the comparison with Gramsci – I think that is absolutely correct and proper. The understanding that social conflict is a dialectic of submission and resistance, it's never all one way, and the people who took part are real people, like you and me; sometimes we know what their names were, other times we don't.

As has been pointed out today, George could also handle the famous; my greatest disappointment of the year so far was when his biography of Robespierre came on the second-hand market; it was gone before I could even make a phone call. Perhaps I will be luckier next time, but that is indicative of the esteem in which George Rudé's name is held.

John Saville:

Before reading out John Saville's contribution, **Bill Moore** said, "perhaps I can say just a word from myself about George. I never had the good fortune to meet him, except at Leslie Morton's memorial meeting, when I had a few minutes with him. But his work, of course, is a different matter. My own work is concerned particularly with the history of the labour movement in Sheffield, which begins in

John Wilkes: the champion of 'Liberty' as seen by a critic, William Hogarth

the late eighteenth century at the time of the French Revolution. When I began work on that early period the first thing I read again was **Wilkes and Liberty** to get a picture of the general popular movement at the time, which was reflected in Sheffield: it had the biggest Constitutional Society in the country, one that stood up against the government longer than any other, even the London one. So I had a great deal to thank George for, not only **Wilkes and Liberty,** but his other books on the French Revolution, which gave the international background to what was happening in my own hometown".

I first met George at the Communist Party's headquarters in King Street, Covent Garden, sometime in the late summer of 1946. I had been in India for a couple of years at the end of my army service and had been demobilised in England during April. Some months later I was co-opted onto the India Committee and the first meeting I attended was chaired by someone I had never seen before: a good looking chap in a neat, dark suit, who proved to be an effective arbiter over what turned out to be a series of somewhat turbulent meetings. Some on the committee, like myself, had served in India, and had been much influenced by the Indian Communist Party, and especially by PC Joshi, the general secretary; also by younger members of the central committee, such as Mohan Kumaramangulam, whom some of this audience will remember from his Cambridge days. The Indian Communist Party had some differences with King Street, whose orthodoxy was articulated by a man called Rajani Palme Dutt.

I suppose George was asked to chair the India Committee because of his membership of the London District Committee, and no doubt he must have become known as a good man to have in the chair. His own war service was full time in the fire service, and I wish we knew more about his experiences. John Horner had been elected general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union in mid-1939 and the big problem was their relationship with the members of the Auxiliary Fire Service. There is no doubt that the extraordinary mixture of people who became auxiliary firemen contributed massively to the unionization of the whole member-

ship, and the political radicalization which accompanied the building of the union. George Rudé was among very good company: George Sanderson, later to become general secretary of Equity; Jack Dash and Ted Dickens; Peter Payne, later a High Court judge; a future professor of music at St.Andrews; and about 80,000 others. George, an active Communist since 1935, would undoubtedly have been much involved politically.

Most of us will know how George came to be sacked from his teaching post at St. Paul's. My version is that one afternoon George was on a soap-box somewhere in West London when a little boy and his father passed by. "That's my teacher", said the boy; the outraged father complained to the governors of St. Paul's who asked George to leave, which he did without publicity. His story during the 1950s is a disgrace to the academic community in this country; it exemplifies the moral weaknesses within the British academe, which were to be demonstrated once again in striking ways during the dismal decade of the Thatcher years. In the 1950s the Cold War was much colder than is mostly recognised; we didn't have the open brutalities of the McCarthy years in the United States – not for the most part, anyway – but George Rudé was by no means alone in being victimised and excluded from his rightful place in the educational system. A large part of the mayhem was carried out in the usual British gentlemanly fashion, and in the university sector it was mostly done by easily coded phrases in testimonials and references, or by telephone conversations in well-modulated accents. There were some well-known Labour intellectuals who would include a note in a reference to the effect that, while they themselves would not be influenced by the fact, it must be mentioned that the candidate was a Communist.

In George's case it was, as we all know, the late Alfred Cobban who supervised his thesis and never after forgave him. We must pay our tribute to the University of Adelaide who first gave him a post commensurate with his abilities and then a professorial chair. The ten years that Doreen and George spent in Adelaide have been well described by George Stretton in the *festschrift* which George's Canadian colleagues brought together for him, and there will be those in this present meeting who will speak of the significance of his erudite and lucid historical writings. What I would emphasise is the encouragement that George gave to his own generation and to his younger colleagues by the continuation and enlargement of the Marxist tradition of historical scholarship. His last book of 1988 was unpleasantly criticised by some who had subscribed to the febrile fashions of the 1980s, those, that is to say, who look increasingly stupid in the *soi-disant* new world order of the 1990s.

I met George only seldom after he went to Australia; the last time was in Canada a few years ago. I have always regretted that I never asked George about the famous visit to Russia in 1932, when the party he went with included David Low and Kingsley Martin. We know the impact the visit had upon George himself,

and it would have been interesting to have heard his comments on the group in whose company he was.

I very much regret that I cannot be with you today, and I offer my deepest sympathy to Doreen and to all of you, his friends and comrades. There is a mediaeval inscription in Tamworth church which reads: "Do good while thou livest, if thou wishest to live after death". George Rudé did good while he lived, and he will continue to live in the memory of all who honour the Good Old Cause, for which he laboured so long.

Christopher Hill:

I am sorry I was a little late, and I was rather appalled when I found that Eric had said practically everything that I had intended. However, he hadn't said quite everything, because John Saville said the other things that I had in mind about George; so I'm afraid that, to a certain extent, I've got to repeat some things that have already been said.

I didn't know George as well as I wish I had done; our periods, of course, were very different – at least a century apart – we occasionally bridged the gap. But it was, of course, his absence from England for most of his working career that was the reason for my not having got to know him better. I would like to express just a little bit more indignation than has already been expressed at the outrageous treatment that he received, because he came onto the market at exactly the wrong time, when the bad decade of the '50s was starting. Even the prestigious Alexander Prize which the Royal Historical Society gave him, which usually opens the door to an academic career, didn't help him to get a job in England.

I think we ought to reflect a little on the vileness of the '50s, because, as Eric said, these things weren't done in a brutal American way in England, but they had the same effect on people's careers and lives. A lot of my pupils in the '50s, who ought to have got academic jobs, didn't get them. One of my colleagues in Oxford who had a three-year appointment, with every expectation of it being renewed, was told after three years that the money had given out and he had better apply for other jobs. So he did so; as soon as he'd applied for them, they found they had got enough money after all, curiously enough; so the job was advertised and, just for the hell of it he put in for it, and he wasn't short-listed. That got rid of him in a totally gentlemanly way, nothing nasty there, no sacking. I was, like Eric, one of the lucky ones who got tenure while it was still possible; I think at my college I could have been sacked only for bankruptcy or gross immorality – you've got to be quite rich to be bankrupt, and none of us ever knew what the 'gross' in 'gross immorality' meant. But those without tenure had a very nasty time indeed.

It was very fortunate for George that he did get to Adelaide, one of the most liberal and exciting universities in the Commonwealth, and I'm sure he had a whale of a time there and got a lot out of them, as well as doing them good. It

was a terrible loss for England that he wasn't about: we couldn't go and talk to him, argue with him; it must have handicapped him nearly as much as it handicapped us.

What he really did – and this is something that we can't overestimate – was to give a flying start to "history from below". Other people took part in this, too, but his work, starting from the '50s on the Parisian crowds and their influence in the Revolution, started up a whole new technique of using detailed scholarly research methods to rewrite history from a different angle. This has spread into all sorts of other areas, so that now perhaps we tend to take it for granted, but Rudé was one of, if not the founding father of, what has been one of the most exciting new trends in English historiography of the last thirty years. It is a sad reflection on England that a man who got professorships in Australia and Canada, visiting professorships in America and Japan, was never honoured in his own country. He never attained the dubious honour of becoming a fellow of the British Academy, although he deserved that a great deal more than some of the historians who were responsible for keeping him out, as Eric and I know.

I don't think we ought to take too much for granted that these things do not happen in England, they do periodically – they happened again in the Thatcher years – and they are always likely to happen. Because they are done in a gentlemanly way, and because nobody asks any questions about them, we think that that is just the way things are in England; it's not like McCarthyism, where there is open political hatred which can then be disavowed afterwards. The British McCarthyism isn't ever disavowed because it never comes to the surface. I was one of the lucky ones, but I applied for chairs on several occasions in the '50s and I didn't get them: of course there might be many reasons for that, I quite agree, but I was told by friends inside the appointing body on two occasions, that I was boycotted for political reasons. On a third occasion the vice-chancellor of the university I was applying for asked me if, if I were appointed, I would give a guarantee not to write articles for the **Daily Worker.** An extraordinary thing for an academic to ask another academic in a country priding itself upon freedom of speech. Well I had, at the time he asked me the question, recently resigned from the Communist Party, and hadn't the slightest intention of writing articles for the **Daily Worker;** but I was damned if I was going to have that imposed on me as a condition for being considered for his job, so I'm afraid I was rather rude.

Unlike Eric's point about the phone calls and the phrasing of your approval with slight cautions, this vice-chancellor was coming right out into the open; he ought to have known well enough to keep his mouth shut on such a subject, and found out from one of his subordinates whether I would give that sort of guarantee, but he did it in person. We can't be too much on our guard against this sort of thing. The great thing about George was, of course, that he did the things he wanted to do in Australia and Canada, he wrote the books he wanted to – and

marvellous books they are – so he wasn't silenced by people who didn't want him to get a job in England. He was put to some personal inconvenience, but he did the job that – if I may coin a phrase – God created him to do, and he did it superbly, and we all benefit from him; but it is not the way an academic system ought to be run. This is something we ought always to remember, I think, even when we are thanking God for George and saying what a marvellous career his was, and how much he added to the history of all of us. But there is always a knife edge that may pop up above the surface at any time.

Doreen Rudé:

I am glad to see so many of you, and after Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hill I feel somewhat predictably intimidated. However I can cast one or two other lights on George.

George not only was a very modest man about his achievements, but somehow he got conned into going to a nudist club, once, by William the Gasman, with whom he had a great friendship. William the Gasman had seen a lot of snapshots in our house which were somewhat misleading, with George at San Tropez in very abbreviated shorts on the nudist beach. But what William had forgotten was that George was wearing briefs and covering his legs was, predictably, **Le Monde** which he always pinched from Albert Soboul, who wanted it all day and he wanted it first – and he never got it. Anyhow there was George on the beach, covered with **Le Monde;** of course William the Gasman thought George was nude. Then, when George came home, he said "I want you to come to my club in London, I'm longing to introduce you to my friends", but he didn't say what kind of a club, although I had a sneaking feeling it was a nudist club. So George went up, unsuspectingly, and when he walked in to pay, there was this lady absolutely starkers, sitting there. That was a bit of a shock, but he thought perhaps she was a Turkish bath attendant. So he trustingly walked in, then, to his horror, he saw a lot of nude gentlemen playing snooker; surrounding these were ladies who were frightfully respectable in little black dresses and little white caps serving tea. Altogether a curious atmosphere; with typical grace he carried it off, and William had no idea of the agony that was going on. He made his way back to Strand-on-the-Green and I heard him shout from the door; "Doreen! Has this got something to do with you? You wait!" Of course I denied it. I said "Oh no, George, nothing to do with me; a misunderstanding, I think. But then your life is surrounded by misunderstandings, why should you mind? At least they only thought you were a nudist. What about the Tasmanians who almost died when they heard you were a Communist? Now you take your pick: a Communist, perhaps; a nudist, perhaps. Or perhaps a nudist-Communist."

There wasn't exactly a clear choice. But there it was, George was always marvellous; graceful, one of the most graceful people I've ever met. When he was

dying, the last forty-eight hours in the hospice in Battle, he said to me: "Doreen, if I had it all to do again, I'd be a better Communist".

Victor Kiernan:

I would like, on this occasion, to pay a brief tribute to George Rudé, a man for whom I had an immense admiration both as a man and as a historian.

I didn't meet him very often, and what I can say now is rather fragmentary, because my direct contact with him was fragmentary. When on occasions like this you sit down to review your memories you are led to some philosophical reflections on the fragmentariness of life in general and human relations, especially in the modern world. I have just been re-reading an old Jacobean play that Christopher Hill will certainly have read, where somebody says that in this world we are all like tennis balls, being knocked about in the air; we don't know who is hitting us, or where we are flying to....

George was, in his way, quite a wanderer, a cosmopolite. I didn't know for a long time that his name Rudé was really Norwegian. His family having started from Norway, he made himself at home in London, in Paris, in Australia, in Scotland and, of course, in Canada. One of my memories does relate to Scotland; but I might just take the occasion to say, since a good many hard things have been said, today, about English universities and their narrow-mindedness, to remind you that Scotland is a different place. At the new University of Stirling George was welcomed. It was a matter of great regret to me and many others that he did not stay there longer. Perhaps in spite of Norway he found the climate a bit much, for he was there only a short time. Very early on the student History Society at Edinburgh University lost no time in inviting him to come to Edinburgh and give a lecture on the French Revolution. I well remember the packed audience waiting to hear him – students and teachers.We were kept waiting some little time because the committee of the History Society is more generous and lavish in entertaining visitors than student bodies usually are. The committee and George were having a festive dinner together before the lecture began; when they all trooped in for the lecture they were evidently in high spirits for this very serious subject. George did manage to give it a certain hilarious tone: he had a great deal to say, I remember, about a *sans-culotte*, somehow making the *sans-culottes* quite amusing as well as a very serious part of history.

Another memory, from late in 1979, is of Montreal, when I again attended a lecture by him on the French Revolution; this was a new one he said he had written and evidently contained new ideas which he felt very important. One thing that impressed me was that he was going to deliver the same lecture again the next day and – it being a bilingual country – in French. Eric Hobsbawm, no doubt, could do that with ease, but it always impresses me. Next day he gave me lunch and also the friend I was staying with – a very different sort of person, a lapsed Catholic theolo-

gian. But we all got on very well together and I felt that George was, in general, a man easy to get on with in all kinds of different companies. Another thing that struck me was how cheerful and uncomplaining he was in spite of the fact that, as he told me, he was suffering from very serious hip trouble and was facing an operation; one would not have guessed that from anything in his manner.

There has been a mention of the volume of essays published in his honour when he was leaving Concordia University, edited by his colleague Fred Krantz. I am proud to have been associated with that. I wrote an essay about the Scottish Covenanters. The Scottish Covenanters were splendid fellows: martyrs, heroes, but you can't imagine them being very cheerful company. I was a little surprised when George wrote to me about my essay and described it as "rumbustious", a rather surprising adjective. But thinking of that in later days it has occurred to me that it is an adjective that I, and others perhaps, might think naturally of applying to George himself. When I try to recapture his personality, I feel that "rumbustious" is a word that he had a good claim to.

It recalls a third memory, which I must end with. The party historians were in session at the dear old Garibaldi Restaurant, now vanished, where we used to hold our momentous debates. I was sitting near the front, quite close to George who was chairman on that occasion. What we were talking about I can't say, but what has survived in my mind is a clear image of a big, healthy-looking, vigorous individual, towering above me, an embodiment of the confident hopes we felt in those days. Since then it must often have seemed to many of us that we were spending our lives rolling a stone up a hill, like Sisyphus, and watching it roll down again. Thanks a good deal to the kind of memories I have been talking of, our old hopes have not entirely deserted us.

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