CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION
IX.1 The epoch of the Industrial Revolution saw the emergence of the opposition between two main classes of capitalist society in England - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It was growingly realized by some sections that the material basis of production was such that the cause of the growing 'wealth' of the former, necessarily lay in the growing 'poverty' of the latter. Thus, the period produced its intellectuals who began to consider the 'cause' and 'remedy' of prevalent poverty and misery in the midst of growing prosperity. For some time, the 'causes' were traced to the existence of landlords. In the latter period, i.e. the period that we have essentially talked about in this thesis (roughly 1820-1840), broadly speaking, the 'social thinkers' had finally to take either of the two positions - back the bourgeoisie and give superficial reasons to explain poverty as well as superficial remedies for it, or back its opponent, i.e. the proletariat by adopting a radical approach calling for a change of the whole system. The 'Ricardian Socialists' as the spokesmen for the working class may be included in the latter.

IX.2 We saw that, the 'Ricardian Socialists' were called so, not really because they followed Ricardo's principles in every detail, but because they believed
principally in the 'labour theory' and based their arguments on a certain interpretation of the 'labour theory of value' of which Ricardo was the most influential exponent by that time. They were called 'socialists' because the social reforms they suggested on the basis of their economic analysis were against 'private' ownership and upheld the 'social' ownership of the means of production. However, clearly, they had no familiarity with 'scientific socialism' and as such rejected the 'private' ownership of the means of production at the essentially moralistic level. In other words, their hostility to 'private property' was confined to its 'capitalistic form' of exploitation of man by man. Otherwise, they in fact defended 'private property' as long as it was organized along the lines of a peculiar system of petty commodity production, i.e., production based on some form of 'ownership' of means of production in their proposed 'social system'.

IX.3. To classify the main themes of their work, the 'Ricardian Socialists' concentrated on three points: Their contemporary society, their 'ideal' society and the way the latter could be achieved. Barring Hodgskin, the others generally paid much more attention to the 'ideal' society than their contemporary one, dealing in detail mainly with 'what ought to be' rather than 'what is'. While emphasizing
the capital-labour conflict they did not, however, theoretically, follow Ricardo's main achievement—his analytical attempts to use the labour theory of value to demonstrate the inverse relation between the rate of profit and wages, under conditions of competitive capitalism. The labour theory of value having in their hands been simplified and turned into a doctrine of 'the right of the labourer to the whole produce of his labour', they could not establish this relationship scientifically and hence their work cannot be regarded as reflecting true continuity with Ricardo's work in this respect. In a way their explanation mixes ethics and analysis, with the former providing to a great extent, the basis of the arguments. This over-all ethical approach had two distinct, even opposite effects. Firstly it undermined in their own period the scientific basis of the labour theory of value enabling thereby its easy rejection by a whole host of economists. (See, Meek, 1973, pp 124-26). Secondly, they provided Marx with a corpus of work which he could reject as being unscientific and yet develop the insights of the labour theory of value along scientific lines. In other words, the 'Ricardian Socialists' at the same time anticipated

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1 Ernest Mandel (1971, pp. 43-48), argues, in fact, that Marx who had earlier rejected the labour theory of value, returns to it after some mere reading principally of the 'Ricardian Socialists', but even while recognising their contributions, Marx rejects them as being unscientific and proceeds to resurrect the labour theory of value as more scientific principles.
Marx in his providing the historical-political dimension to the labour theory of value. Hodgskin, however, was somewhat unique among them to have paid closer attention to a theory of political economy.

IX.4 The historical political dimension of the work of the 'Ricardian Socialists' in respect of the labour theory of value emerges in their criticism of the exploitation of labour by capital and their vision of the 'ideal' society and the role of labour in it. All able-bodied members in their 'ideal' societies were expected to work. What this prescription does is, to highlight the nature of capitalist exploitation by which one section of society toiled to ensure idleness and comfort for another. Not being able however, to provide a 'theory of value' and related to it a 'theory of distribution' they criticize distribution in their contemporary society as merely as being 'unjust', while the framework for distribution in their 'ideal' society turns out to be hinged upon the utility concept of exchange and an ascetic compromise between the producers. For, the doctrine of the 'right of labourer to the whole produce of his labour' would not provide any practical means to measure the share of each producer. That is why, though they took 'labour-time' as the determinant of 'value', the labourer's right to the whole
produce of labour measured by his satisfaction at the end of exchange determined distribution in practice. Even if on this basis distribution could take place at all, since savings and investment were provided for on an arbitrary basis, the society was left without a plan and could practically come to a 'halt' if not dissolve in chaos. As such the 'Ricardian Socialists' narrow understanding of the 'labour theory of value' (excepting Hodgskin's) not only in regard to their contemporary society but also in regard to its application in their ideal society, helped the decline of the labour theory of value and paved the way for the emergence of a utility linked concept of value.

IX.5 [Despite the fact that the 'Ricardian Socialists' could recognize the class based conflict of interests in their contemporary society, they could never think of a class based struggle to achieve their 'ideal society'. 'Reason' and 'peace' turned out to be the only means through which the 'new system' could grow within the 'old' one. They could argue, on the basis of the 'natural order' or 'first principles', the inevitability of a radical change in the system (to remove poverty and misery) but the concept of the 'natural order' or 'first principles' could never guide them in finding the motion of history as being
principally from 'within' - i.e. as an objective force inside the 'system' itself. Though they differed in degrees in respect of their analysis of the economic categories and prescriptions for their 'ideal society' nevertheless, in respect of the mode of attainment of the 'ideal society' all of them displayed remarkable unanimity. That is why, the 'Ricardian Socialists', uniquely shared the ideas of the 'utopian socialists' and in a sense like them fell back on petty bourgeois socialism which "dissected with great acuteness the contradictions in the conditions of modern production" (Marx and Engels, 1952, p. 81 and also pp. 89-93), but flattered in their scientific conception of a new system and the historically conditioned movement towards it. Therefore, they rendered themselves inconsequential in practice, but nevertheless remained as the historical link between Pre-Marxian classical political economy and utopian socialism on the one hand and the full-fledged scientific labour theory of value and scientific socialism of Marx and Engels on the other.