

# The Republican.

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**T**he Republican was a British radical newspaper which flourished from 1819 to 1826. In April 1817, Richard Carlile joined William Sherwin to publish Sherwin's Political Register, and also pamphlets written by Thomas Paine and by Henry 'Orator' Hunt. Carlile was a strong believer in the ability of the printing press to change society. He was a man of great idealism and great tenacity. "The printing press... will... give freedom to the whole human race by making it as one nation and one family."

The Manchester Patriotic Union Society, formed in 1819 to press for parliamentary reform, decided to hold a mass meeting on 16th August which Hunt and Carlile were invited to address.

The magistrates became concerned that the town was in great danger, and the military were called in. Most of the speakers were arrested, but 18 people were killed and around 100 injured in what came to be known as the Peterloo Massacre. Richard Carlile evaded arrest and took the first coach to London. Next day, the paper reported "Horrid Massacre in Manchester". Carlile's shop was raided and all his stock confiscated.

Carlile now decided to change the name of the paper to The Republican. He wrote extensively about the Peterloo Massacre, and also criticised the Government for its role in the incident. This brought him within the scope of the laws against seditious libel. He was charged, found guilty of seditious libel and also blasphemy, sentenced to 6 years imprisonment in Dorchester Jail, and fined £1,500 which he refused to pay, so his stock was again confiscated.

While in prison, Carlile was still able to write articles for The Republican, and to send them up to London, where his wife continued to publish it.

In November 1819, the Home Secretary announced new legislation to curb radical journals and meeting the danger of armed insurrection. The Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act greatly increased the punishments on conviction, and the Newspapers and Stamp Duties Act imposed a tax of fourpence on all newspapers, including those like The Republican which had previously been exempt since they only published opinion and not news. The Act also stipulated that they could not be sold for less than sevenpence, and thus put it out of reach for most working people.

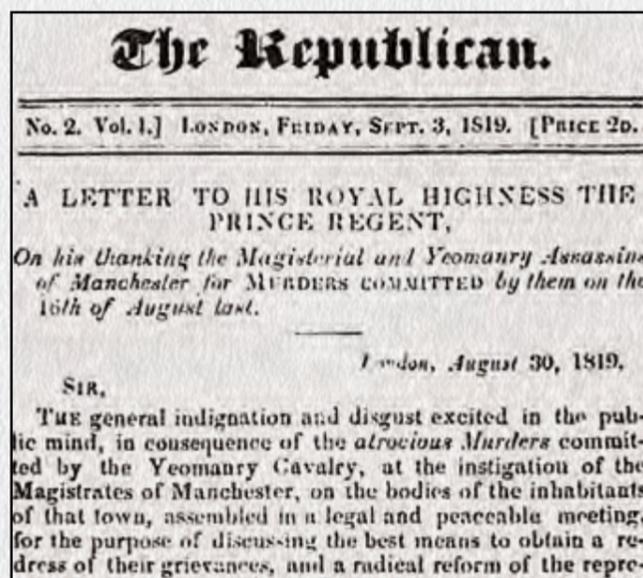
The Stamp Tax was unpopular, and campaigners derided this "tax on knowledge". The circulation of The Republican increased considerably as a result of all the publicity about this trial. His wife was prosecuted in 1821, and sent to join her husband

in Dorchester, where she later gave birth to a short-lived daughter, Hypatia. Her sister was also prosecuted, and sentenced to two years imprisonment. The authorities also proceeded against the individuals who sold the paper.

Susannah Wright was a Nottingham lace-maker who sold the paper with her six-month old daughter on her arm. She was described as an "abandoned creature who has cast off all the distinctive shame and fear and decency of her sex" and was a "horrid example" of a woman who gave support to the publication of "gross, vulgar, horrid

blasphemy." Joseph Swann was arrested for selling the paper in Macclesfield, and said in his defence that he had been out of work for some time and his family was starving. He added copy and for another reason, the weightiest of all; I sell them for the good of my fellow countrymen; to let them see how they are misrepresented in parliament... I wish every man to read those publications." He was sentenced to three months hard labour.

The assistants in his shop were subject to prosecution on the evidence of paid informers. This was overcome by putting up a screen with an indicator showing the goods on sale. Customers would set the indicator to show what they wanted, and it would be put in a slot for them.



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## Additional notes

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Sources: Website: Spartacus Educational website -  
<https://spartacus-educational.com/PRcarlile.htm>

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Further reading: Fleet Street: 500 years of the Press, D Griffiths, British Library, 2006

Additional notes