

The Origins, Nature and Development
of Moral Force Chartism, 1836 - 1850.

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Abstract.

This thesis offers a thematic and broadly chronological examination of a currently neglected section of the Chartist movement. Though moral force Chartism was once contrasted favourably with the O'Connorite mainstream, in the later twentieth century a renewed interest in class led historians to reverse this judgement, dismissing moral force as increasingly irrelevant in a movement defined by its physical force and class-conscious mainstream. This thesis reassesses the origins, nature and influence of moral force Chartism, and in so doing rejects both a return to the past historical elevation of moral force over physical force and the more recent relegation of moral force to the margins of Chartist history. Instead moral force will be represented as influential not only in the making of Chartism but also for its continuing contribution to the Chartist mainstream throughout the 1840s. The differences between moral force and physical force Chartism will be shown as strategic rather than ideological, and personal rather than rooted in class. Far from moral force Chartists being mere props for moderate, middle-class liberal individualism, they are shown continuing in the commitment, shared by many Chartists, to democratic reform as the only sure pathway to radical social change. The recent revival of Feargus O'Connor's reputation and the corresponding belittling of moral force Chartism suggest that historians have latterly given too much credence to O'Connor's own physical force rhetoric, with its insistence that supporters of moral force should be excluded from the ranks of 'genuine' Chartism. This thesis draws on the recent emphasis on language and its implications for the concept of class to re-examine critically O'Connor's rhetorical attack on the moral force Chartists, and argues for the recognition of moral force as a significant part of the broader Chartist movement.

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Abbreviations.

BAPCK	British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge
BL	British Library
CSU	Complete Suffrage Union
ELDA	East London Democratic Association
LDA	London Democratic Association
LWMA	London Working Men's Association
NA	National Association for the Promotion of the Political and Social Improvement of the People
NCA	National Charter Association
NUWC	National Union of the Working Classes
PFRA	Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association
PRA	Parliamentary Reform Association
PCU	People's Charter Union
PIL	People's International League
PL	People's League

Chapter I.

Chartism, Politics and History.

Friedrich Engels, in his *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), believed that from the hatred of the bourgeoisie exhibited in the Chartist movement would develop a working class movement committed to Communism.¹ Though he later recognised his youthful over-enthusiasm in his 1892 Preface to the same work, Engels never retreated from his claims that Chartism was ‘of an essentially social nature, a class movement’.² This has remained an attractive argumentative thread for some socialist historians to the end of the twentieth-century.³ Though it will be argued in this thesis that class rightly remains an important analytical concept in the study of Chartism, Engels’ simple determinism has been seriously questioned and found wanting by most subsequent historians.

Central to the historical assessment of different sections of Chartists has been their perceived relationship to working-class consciousness. Engels considered that, though Chartism was proletarian, its ‘Socialism is very little developed’, and that ‘Chartists are theoretically ... backward’ compared to Owenite-socialism which, though more ‘far-seeing’, was ‘bourgeois’.⁴ Engels argued that what was required to advance the cause of Communism in England was the ‘union of Socialism with Chartism’, the meeting of a proletarian but only vaguely socially

¹ Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1987 edition), pp. 34-46.

² Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, p. 241.

³ John Charlton, *The Chartists: The First National Worker’s Movement* (London, 1997); Paul Foot, *The Vote: How it Was Won and How it Was Undermined* (London, 2005), pp. 89-124.

⁴ Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, p. 242, 244.

conscious political movement with a more theoretically advanced but 'tame and peaceable' Owenite-socialist agitation.⁵ This thesis seeks to re-evaluate the place of moral force Chartism within the broader Chartist movement and will argue that it was in fact the kind of hybrid social Chartism desired by Engels - even if the moral force approach was not quite what he had envisaged. Moral force Chartists will be defined as those Chartists who wished to achieve radical political reform by a gradualist strategy of diffusion of radical principles and qualified co-operation with more moderate, middle-class and parliamentary radicals but whose politics were closely bound up with the co-operative-socialist and Republican social reform programme of its prominent members. It was far from Marxist Communist in nature but was a variety of British social democracy which drew on its own experiences and interpretations of radical reform agitation and the doctrines of co-operative-socialism and Republicanism.

It will be argued that for the first half of the twentieth century moral force Chartism was elevated by radical-liberal and Fabian-socialist historians to a favoured status due to their gradualist approach. At the same time Marxist historians tended to search for the presence of working-class consciousness in advanced sections of the Chartist movement, following Engels in arguing for a model of 'true' socialist consciousness - a model into which moral force Chartist moderation did not easily fit. From the 1960s, a neo-Marxist approach developed that argued for a broader definition of class consciousness. But despite expanded terms of reference for locating class in working-class radicalism, moral force Chartists were - with their methods of educationalism and cross-class radicalism - pushed to the margins of Chartist history as 'middle class' and not constituent of the 'genuine' working-class nature of the movement. Since the 1980s, the 'linguistic turn' and post-modern challenges to class have emphasised the continuity of radical rather than class language before, across and after Chartism but have not accounted for the radical social reform programme that existed behind moderate radical political language.

⁵ Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, p. 242, 244.

The central contention of this thesis is that historians - liberal, Fabian-socialist, Marxist, neo-Marxist and post-modern - have noted (and elevated or rejected) the moderate means but not the radical social ends of moral force Chartists. This thesis will show that moral force Chartists were firmly social Chartists but not of a kind that believed in the efficacy of class politics, class rhetoric or the politics of intimidation of the mass platform. But first it will begin with a more detailed examination of Chartism's long historiography.

Politics and Chartist historiography.

The first published history of the Chartist movement, that of R. G. Gammage in 1854, argued that the political method of Chartism was a positive attempt by the labouring population to palliate social ills. More typically, Thomas Carlyle's *Chartism* of 1839 took a different view, that Chartism was the inarticulate cry of dumb creatures poorly treated by their masters. Carlyle's view was shared in large part by contemporary novelists, such as Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Kingsley and Disraeli. This view of Chartism as an essentially non-ideological struggle responding to popular distress continued as the dominant attitude of the establishment towards Chartism during the Chartist period and into the later-nineteenth century. According to this view, order could be restored by paternal social responsibility and economic growth - a situation apparently achieved in the mid-Victorian period.

Chartism has been a long and fruitful source of historical contention. Controversy has existed among both activists and historians since the mid-nineteenth century as to its place in British history. These debates have to a large degree reflected varying perceptions of Chartism according to changing social and political contexts. By the late nineteenth century three broad interpretations had emerged concerning Chartism. The Carlyleian-Tory view of Chartism saw it as a response to a failure of paternal social responsibility - Chartism was

responding to the failure of elites rather than rooted in the positive political action of the people. An alternative Whig model agreed that distress was the cause of Chartism but presented the movement as a premature political development, demanding of the British constitution more than could be conceded at that time. A 'labour', model also emerged in which Chartism was seen as an early manifestation of independent labour politics. All of these approaches, though, saw in Chartism their own reflection.

Chartism was, in fact, concerned with the practical achievement of democracy rather than the narrower concerns of later party politics. Chartism sought to promote radical political principles over the politics of expediency. Chartism did not leave a simple legacy for later political parties to inherit, though its ideologists and members fed into later political parties. Rather, as a large movement for one broad radical reform - the establishment of political democracy along the lines proposed in the document, the *People's Charter* - its legacy was complex and involved multiple competing social identities and political loyalties. Chartists worked, often at great personal cost, to achieve democracy and the social benefits that they thought it would bestow. Many Chartists were both radical politicians and socialists - in the broad sense of being critics of competition - who had consciously prioritised political reform in the expectation of radical social reform resulting from a democratic legislature. Chartism was never subsumed by mid-Victorian Liberalism or a submerged current that was re-born as Labour and socialist politics. Chartism was its own movement and elements of its fierce working-class radical independence persisted beyond its existence as a movement. References to Chartism continued in the radical press throughout the period from 1850 to the 1880s and a radical liberal view of Chartism as an independent movement of principle against expediency survived into the 1880s.⁶ The radical liberal view of Chartism, as a movement of political principle struggling for liberty against expediency and

⁶ Antony Taylor, 'Commemoration, Memorialisation and Political Memory in post-Chartist Radicalism: The 1885 Halifax Chartist Reunion in Context', in *The Chartist Legacy* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp.255-85.

'aristocratic' politics, continued within Liberal politics but was never easily or entirely co-opted into it.⁷

Likewise, Chartism did not decline to be reborn in the socialist 'revival' of the late-nineteenth century. In the early 1880s when Henry Hyndman met Marx in London, his thoughts were not to form a new movement but to revive Chartism.⁸ But socialists drew only selectively from the popular memory of Chartism. From the emergence of a modern labour and socialist movement in the late nineteenth century, Marxists and the left of the labour movement tended to admire the proto-socialism of 'Chartists and something more' such as James 'Bronterre' O'Brien, George Julian Harney and Ernest Jones. Socialists and Communists adopted positions that elevated this section of the movement. For example, T. A. Rothstein, a communist, argued in 1929 that Harney and the Fraternal Democrats had developed a clearer understanding of class than later 'opportunist' labour leaders.⁹ Left-liberals and Fabian-socialists, on the other hand, tended to elevate the moral force section of the movement that reflected their own gradualist approach to politics. The first authors of scholarly accounts of Chartism, Mark Hovell (a liberal) and Julius West (a member of the Fabian society) favoured the moral force side of the movement.¹⁰ Their views of the movement were in part also influenced by the fact that the autobiography of the prominent moral force Chartist, William Lovett, was a key source and by West's discovery of the Place Papers in the British Library, a source that was heavily skewed towards a moral

⁷ Robert G. Hall, 'Creating a People's History: Political Identity and History in Chartism, 1832-1848', in *The Chartist Legacy*, pp. 232-54.

⁸ Henry Myers Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* (London, Macmillan, 1911), p. 273. See also: Jon Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 163-86; Mark Bevir, 'The Social Democratic Federation, 1880-85', *International Review of Social History*, 37 (1992), 207-29.

⁹ T. A. Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism* (London, 1929), pp. 35-65, 124-47.

¹⁰ Mark Hovell *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, 1918, reprinted, Manchester, 1970), pp. 52-77, 220-29; Julius West, *A History of the Chartist Movement* (London, 1920, reprinted, New York, 1968), pp. 74-100, 186-226.

force perspective.¹¹

By the early twentieth century a dominant liberal-labour view was established that saw Chartism as a political movement rooted in economic distress and social dislocation. Liberals such as the Hammonds broadly concurred with Fabian socialist historians such as G. D. H. Cole in viewing Chartism as a sensible and moderate political response aiming at social and economic amelioration.¹² Moderate leaders, such as William Lovett, were in their accounts regarded as examples of correct leadership in contrast to more militant physical force Chartists, a situation encouraged by continued reliance on the Francis Place papers and Lovett's autobiography. This orthodoxy continued until the 1960s, through historians such as G. D. H. Cole and J. T. Ward, and accorded with a view of Chartism as a precursor of moderate lib-lab politics.¹³ Local studies in Briggs's *Chartist Studies* (1959) started to suggest that the Chartist movement was more complex than the orthodox view allowed although the essays still prioritised social and economic conditions.

The revolution in modern social and labour history began in the 1960s. The scope of the historical debate around Chartism expanded, drawing upon new and influential social histories, such as E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1963), which looked beyond formal labour organisation to the wider culture of the working class from which class politics emerged. Modern Chartist historiography emerged from the influence of E. P. Thompson on labour and social history, emphasising the ability of leaders such as Feargus O'Connor

¹¹ West, *A History of the Chartist Movement*, p. xi.

¹² Barbara Hammond, *William Lovett, 1800-1877* (Fabian Society pamphlet, 1922; reprinted in Michael Katanka (ed.), *Radicals, Reformers and Socialists*, London, 1973, pp.100-126); J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Age of the Chartists, 1832-1854. A Study of Discontent* (London, 1930); G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London, 1941).

¹³ G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits*; Donald Read and Eric Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor; Irishman and Chartist* (London, 1961); J. T. Ward, *Chartism* (London, 1973).

to draw on a class-conscious culture to build the Chartist movement. Rather than being rooted in local economic conditions, Chartism was seen to have arisen from a long working-class radical tradition and culture. A more subtle modification of Marxist class became the basis for a new orthodoxy.

Influential historians such as Dorothy Thompson argued that the background to Chartism was the interaction of working-class radical politics with the social and cultural dislocation experienced by the working classes during the Industrial Revolution. This produced, she argued, an articulate working class hungry for political and economic independence, particularly in the industrialised north and north west of England.¹⁴ This was a renewed Marxist position that emphasised the agency rather than the victim status of working people engaged in class struggle. In this vein, David Jones produced the influential *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975) and Dorothy Thompson provided one of the best general works on the movement, *The Chartists* (1984), which, along with James Epstein's *Lion of Freedom* (1982), stressed O'Connor's vital contribution to the Chartist movement. This new emphasis on politics as an expression of class consciousness also led to John Saville's *1848* (1987), which identified the extent to which vigorous action by the British state was directed against the Chartist movement. The recovery of autobiographies of more minor Chartist figures, by David Vincent amongst others, has fed from and into this new orthodoxy, revealing a movement very different to that presented by Lovett and Place, in which O'Connor and class conscious radical culture were central.¹⁵ Earlier histories of Chartism, which relied upon the autobiography of Lovett and the Place papers were therefore rejected by neo-Marxist historians as an inaccurate

¹⁴ Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London, 1971); Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1984); D. J. V. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London, 1975). See also: Neville Kirk, 'Setting the Standard: Dorothy Thompson, the Discipline of History and the Study of Chartism', in Ashton, Fyson, Roberts (eds.), *The Duty of Discontent: Essays for Dorothy Thompson* (London, 1995), pp. 1-32.

¹⁵ David Vincent, *Testaments of Radicalism, Memoirs of Working Class Politicians* (London, 1977).

caricature of the Chartist movement. Newer histories, influenced by Dorothy Thompson in particular, have recovered a different perspective from the pages of O'Connor's *Northern Star* and newly-available memoirs. In this new picture, Chartism appears as 'O'Connorite radicalism' and fits more easily with a view of Chartism as a movement derived from the response of the working classes to industrialisation.

From the early 1980s, however, a challenge has emerged to this new historical orthodoxy. The nuanced appreciation of the importance of class at the heart of the historical understanding of Chartism that developed from the 1960s has been confronted by the 'linguistic turn'. This post-modern challenge based on the idea of the relative autonomy of language was most controversially put forward by Gareth Stedman Jones.¹⁶ In his 1982 article, 'The Language of Chartism', Stedman Jones argued that the outmoded radical language utilised by Chartists located the causes of social and economic distress in the political sphere and thereby restrained the development of a true revolutionary class analysis.¹⁷ Stedman Jones's argument has been influential despite being vociferously opposed by other historians who have countered Stedman Jones by arguing that, while constitutional representation was the demand of Chartism, the context of the mass platform replete with class-conscious symbolism made it a revolutionary movement to be understood in terms of class.¹⁸ The controversy

¹⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism', in J. Epstein and D. Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 3-58. A longer version was published in Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983).

¹⁷ That is, a Leninist model of 'true' class consciousness, assumed by G. Stedman Jones who then denies its existence in Chartism.

¹⁸ Paul A. Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), 144-62; James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early-Nineteenth-Century England' in J. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 70-99; James Epstein, 'Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity' in *Radical Expression*, pp. 145-65.

aroused by Stedman Jones has, however, contributed to a renewed awareness of the relationship between language, politics and class - an awareness that this thesis seeks to build upon. We are not all post-modernists now, though, since class remains central to a revised Chartist history that looks to language and politics as much as to the social and economic.¹⁹ The 'new political history' has, in the works of Epstein, Pickering and Finn, embraced the centrality of class within a diverse radical political culture.²⁰ Determinist Marxist interpretations of Chartism as part of the inexorable rise of proletarian consciousness through economic struggle are, like the simple progressive labour view, no longer seriously considered.²¹ The works of Marxist revisionists such as Edward Thompson, Dorothy Thompson and John Saville have, however, ensured that class remains an important category for the understanding of Chartism.

A synthesis has begun to take place whereby historians seeking to counter the 'linguistic turn' have developed and deepened their understanding of class in the Chartist period. Historians of Chartism now recognise that whilst the social and economic background of Chartism was central to its character, its form of expression was important and possessed a degree of autonomy. Despite the fact that historians have seen Gareth Stedman Jones's linguistic critique of Chartism as an attack on class, the dialogue between the linguistic and social approaches has led to a recognition of this critical nexus in understanding Chartism. Historical materialists no longer dismiss language as merely a reflection of

¹⁹ Andy Croll, 'The Impact of Postmodernism on Modern British social history', in Stefan Berger (ed.), *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 27 (2002), pp. 137-52.

²⁰ James Epstein, *Radical Expression*; Paul A. Pickering, 'Class Without Words'; Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993).

²¹ The last serious attempt to advance a Marxist-Leninist analysis was John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution. Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London, 1974). John Charlton's, *The Chartists: The First National Worker's Movement* (1997), is a recent but unoriginal Marxist-Leninist survey of Chartism.

social experience. Postmodernists such as Patrick Joyce and James Vernon have made a forthright case for the place of non-class narratives in nineteenth-century radicalism.²² Yet post-modernists have been unable to incorporate the fluid and contested nature of language, as well as linguistic continuities, into their analyses - they do not take into account the role of language in negotiating and changing social experiences.²³

If some historians have taken the rejection of class too far, others, such as Noel Thompson, have remained reluctant to give up their fixed theoretical concepts of class-consciousness, arguing that in the Chartist period the working class was not yet 'made' as it had no clear conception of the nature of its exploitation. According to this logic it was the proto-socialists like Harney, Jones and O'Brien in the early 1850s who advanced furthest in terms of class-consciousness and offered an effective economic programme for the working class.²⁴ This thesis challenges analyses such as Noel Thompson's and seeks to build upon recent revision within Chartist history to examine the relationship between class and politics rather than to search for the antecedents of 'true' socialism. In a movement suffused with an awareness of social class but aiming at radical political reform, it is in the nexus between class, politics and language that the nature of Chartism may be sought. This thesis supports the view that the various

²² Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England* (London, 1982 edition); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People. Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991); James Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993).

²³ Dror Wahrman, 'The new political history: a review essay', *Social History*, 21 (1996), 343-54; Eileen Yeo, 'Language and contestation: the case of "the people", 1832 to the present', in J. Belchem and N. Kirk (eds.), *Languages of Labour* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 44-62; Dorothy Thompson, 'The languages of Class', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 52 (1987), 54-57.

²⁴ Noel Thompson, *The Market and its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1988); Noel Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis, 1816-34* (Cambridge, 1984); Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man: Political Economy for the Working Class, 1775-1850* (London, 1998).

strands of Chartism were not simple social and economic responses but considered strategies in an attempt to improve the condition of the people, the labouring population in particular, through achieving political equality. It seeks to extend this assessment to moral force Chartists who have, in the neo-Marxist literature, been marginalised in the history of the movement. Most Chartists, including those from its moral force section, possessed a relatively open expectation of the positive social results of political democracy. They were neither trapped by a traditional radical analysis nor antecedents of later socialist analyses but enjoyed an assured view of the positive social benefits of political democracy.

This thesis will argue, in broad agreement with the neo-Marxist approach associated with Edward Thompson, Dorothy Thompson, John Saville and others, that the Chartist campaign for political democracy was concerned to achieve radical social reform. However, the neo-Marxist approach has rejected moral force Chartism as 'middle class', as bourgeois individualist in character. In responding to Stedman Jones's critique of Chartism neo-Marxist historians have been keen to stress that class consciousness need not be revolutionary consciousness. Yet there has been no subsequent re-evaluation of the relationship of moderate, moral force Chartism to the Chartist mainstream. The aim of this thesis is to correct a shortcoming in existing Chartist historiography concerning moral force Chartism. It will challenge the rejection of moral force Chartism by arguing that its proponents expected radical social and economic reform to result from the campaign for political democracy and that their emphasis on gradual, peaceful persuasion was strategic rather than any indicator of class betrayal. It will be argued that, in fact, moral force Chartists possessed a radical theoretical vision in advance of that of O'Connor and much of the Chartist mainstream, with its crude association of manhood suffrage with the 'knife and fork question'.

Drawing on the recent historical emphasis on language, O'Connor's class rhetoric will be critically examined. O'Connor's political attacks on his

opponents, particularly moral force Chartists, will be shown to have owed much to rhetorical ability and little to any actual difference in class perspective. O'Connor's class rhetoric was often used to draw support away from radical opponents by presenting them as agents of a politically corrupt middle class. This will be demonstrated in chapters I to IV, which will cover the relationship of several organisations and individuals with O'Connor - the London Working Men's Association (LWMA), the National Association, Henry Vincent, Thomas Cooper and others - all of whom fell victim to O'Connor's deployment of class rhetoric in lieu of debate and co-operation. Chapter V deals specifically with James 'Bronterre' O'Brien, a Chartist leader often considered as a proto-socialist but who was attacked as a 'middle class' apostate by O'Connor, a far less radical leader, for his support in 1842 of radical class collaboration. That aspects of moral force Chartism continued within the National Charter Association will be shown in chapter VI and chapter VII looks at the late Chartist movement by which time O'Connor's methods began to falter.

Chartism and class.

Class-consciousness featured among all groups contributing to the making of the Chartist movement. Chartism not only had a strong political consciousness rooted in traditional radical analysis but also possessed a sense of itself as a class movement. Chartists believed that universal manhood suffrage was required to ensure that working-class interests were recognised in the legislature. This clearly could not be termed as 'objective' consciousness in the rigid Marxist sense, meaning a class that theorises the social and economic basis of its exploitation and oppression. It is, however, possible to understand working-class radicalism in terms of class-consciousness without it having reached this theoretically constructed apogee. That a vigorous debate about the role of class in Chartism has arisen is in part due to over-simplified definitions of class and social movements, that seek evidence of a true 'proletarian' consciousness emerging in the Chartist movement.

Working-class Chartists did not consider their interests to be intrinsically opposed to the social and economic relations imposed by the industrial revolution even though their interests were perceived as different from those of the industrial capitalists or of the aristocracy. Manhood suffrage, it was believed, would bring social and economic reform that would benefit the unrepresented labouring population. This social dimension of Chartism has been argued to have been central to the politics of Chartism 'and something more', whose leaders generally had committed groups of supporters within Chartism. However, the bulk of the Chartist mainstream was built up around O'Connor who was not a social Chartist in that his vision of the society to follow the Charter was paternalist and pastoral rather than concerned with building British social democracy. O'Connor sought to utilise class rhetoric to build a political movement which would scare the political establishment into ceding manhood suffrage. While moral force Chartists opposed O'Connor's strategy, other social Chartists supported him. Unlike these other social Chartists, moral force Chartists expected far reaching social reform to result from political reform even if it came about from alliance with middle-class radicals who pursued suffrage reform for purely political reasons.

Democratic aims gave Chartism a social character that made it threatening to the existing ruling classes in the late 1830s and 1840s. The pervasive idea and language of class - of a separate 'working class' interest and 'middle class' betrayal - made Chartism the most threatening popular movement to the industrial social order yet seen in British history. In the late 1830s the demands of the Charter - re-writing the electoral process and holding the political executive to account - held out the anticipation of social revolution to follow.²⁵ Middle-class condescension towards Chartism was replaced with hostility from the time that O'Connor adopted the Charter and forged a populist mass

²⁵ Miles Taylor, 'The Six Points: Chartism and the Reform of Parliament', in O. Ashton, R. Fyson, S. Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy*, pp. 1-23.

movement around it.²⁶ The shift towards the mass platform and physical force rhetoric, implemented by O'Connor but associated with the radical Toryism of J. R. Stephens and Richard Oastler, altered the perception of the Charter from an attempt to secure support for radical principles to that of an aggressive and threatening class movement. The moral force Chartist argument that social and economic concerns were to be left to be dealt with after the implementation of the Charter was undermined by physical force, however ambiguous the threat was. Such a shift was also in the interests of the government and an establishment that was united in its opposition to further expansion of the franchise at that time. Politicians such as Disraeli and publications such as the *Annual Register* (1839) sought to promote a picture of Chartism as a dangerous class movement. Such an association, fixed in the public mind, served to make problematic a meaningful cross-class radical alliance.

Letters to the Chartist press urged publication on matters relating to the conflict between 'capital' and 'labour'. Rejection of this approach did not mean rejection of its importance. Rather, James 'Bronterre' O'Brien, replying in the *Operative* in November 1838, asked:

... what is the good of discussing what we have no power of interfering with? Of what possible use to broach theories which are incapable of being reduced to practice under the present condition of society? ... I should of necessity alarm and offend many parties which are zealously co-operating with us for universal suffrage. ... until the question of universal suffrage is settled, we cannot with advantage enter deeply into that of labour and capital.²⁷

O'Brien, then, was prepared in late 1838 to adopt a strategy of avoiding social

²⁶ Dorothy Thompson, 'Early Chartism', p. 8.

²⁷ Quoted in Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism* (London, 1929 edition), Vol. 2, p. 44.

questions in order to achieve the greatest possible radical unity around democratic reform. Such a position built upon the conviction that

It is the GOVERNMENT which makes the law. The LAW determines the property - and on the STATE OF PROPERTY depend ... WELL-BEING and happiness ... If the government be wrongly constituted it [law] will be bad ... if the law be bad, the distribution of property will be bad; that is to say, unjust towards individuals or classes, in respect of their fair claims on society ...²⁸

All who favoured democratic reform could, therefore, be co-operated with because their support would ultimately lead to a redistribution of property by a more socially representative government. O'Connor, though, stood opposed to co-operation with moderate middle-class radicals. Instead, he urged a repeat of the mass mobilisation of the working classes to secure for themselves the rights that the middle classes had seized by physical force threats in 1832. As the dominant Chartist leader by early 1838, O'Connor's popularity carried a strategy of physical force and it is O'Connor's leadership and strategy that are now regarded by most historians as the authentic features of early Chartism.

However, in the next chapter of this thesis I shall argue that physical force was not the only or even the most obvious path open to Chartism. The originators of the People's Charter, the LWMA, the membership of which was largely of Owenite-radicals, sought for reasons of political pragmatism and ideology to pursue principled political reform with radicals of all classes.²⁹ Although

^{28.} *Bronterre's National Reformer, in Government, Law, Property, Religion, and Morals*, no. 1, 7 January 1837, pp. 1-2.

^{29.} The prevailing view of class was expressed by Robert Owen who saw it as an unnatural, irrational and self-interested perversion of man's naturally rational and benevolent state, as opposed to the - to us - more familiar view of class as a natural result of social and economic conflict deriving from inequality of access to the means of production associated with Marx, Engels, twentieth century Marxism and sociology. See Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism*, p. 53.

formally independent of the radical middle class, the LWMA sought sympathy and assistance from radical MPs and allowed the membership of honorary non-working class radicals (including, ironically, O'Connor).³⁰ The faith of the LWMA in reason as the driving force of social progress was central to its politics. This faith was partly linked to the Owenite proclivities of many of the prominent LWMA members, such as Henry Hetherington, James Watson and William Lovett.³¹ By creating an educated and well-organised working class it was hoped to persuade Parliament by force of opinion to further extend the suffrage to working men through demonstrating their rational and constitutional outlook and thereby their suitability for political representation. Part of the political strategy of the LWMA was self and collective improvement, 'useful knowledge' being sought to probe the source of 'social evils' - political parity was the first step to social remedies.³²

Issues other than suffrage reform, such as the newspaper Stamp Duty, the new Poor Law and defence of trade unionism had all been agitated against the reformed parliament. But it was Chartism that galvanised radicals in a single effort for the People's Charter; offering as it did something for every radical cause, the possibility of eventual success through a united assault on political exclusion. Formulated by the LWMA in 1837 and published in May 1838, the Charter laid down the 'Six Points' which were to become the characteristic demands of the movement: universal suffrage for males over twenty-one years of age, equal electoral districts, no property qualifications for MPs, payment of

^{30.} *Address and Rules of the Working Men's Association, for Benefiting, Politically, Socially, and Morally, the Useful Classes* (London, 1836), in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Chartist Movement, 1838-1850*, Vol. I (London, 2001), pp. 41-49.

^{31.} John Belchem, *Industrialisation and the Working Class: the English Experience, 1750-1900* (Aldershot, 1990), p. 93 sees the London artisans as little interested in politics until the mid-1830s. Gregory Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, Vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxii also points out the influence of co-operative ideas within Chartism, as did R. K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson (1775-1833): Britain's Pioneer Socialist, Feminist, and Co-operator* (London, 1954), p. 208.

^{32.} *Address and Rules*, p. 44.

MPs, annual parliaments, and voting by secret ballot. The ability of the Charter to unite working class radicals was demonstrated at meetings in Glasgow in May 1838 and at Birmingham in August 1838, where it was adopted along with the National Petition. The LWMA set about trying to organise support for its Charter across the country, sending 'missionaries' to publicise it and campaign for it. The development of the movement occurred with extraordinary rapidity, with the LWMA joining forces with the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) in mid 1837 (and in so doing adopting the idea of a National Petition and Convention that had begun in the BPU). Over one hundred and fifty new or pre-existing WMAs or Radical associations had adopted the Charter by 1838.³³

Moral force Chartism and physical force.

The largely middle class BPU had been a powerful force in the Reform Bill agitation of 1831 to 1832. In 1837 the BPU revived, under the influence of the currency reformer Thomas Attwood, and came out in support of manhood suffrage. This was a crucial step in the formation of a national radical movement for suffrage extension. Tactics developed by the BPU of a National Petition and Convention to advance suffrage reform were adopted by the growing Chartist movement.³⁴ But, touring widely, O'Connor drew on existing anti-Poor Law and factory reform agitations and established his position of leadership through the *Northern Star*, which, carrying reports on and advice to the working-class radical movement, became the spearhead of Chartist journalism and achieved a wide circulation (thirty-nine thousand sales a week at its peak in 1839). The model of political moderation and class-alliance adopted and emphasised by the LWMA was rejected by O'Connor and the majority of the Chartist movement. A tension

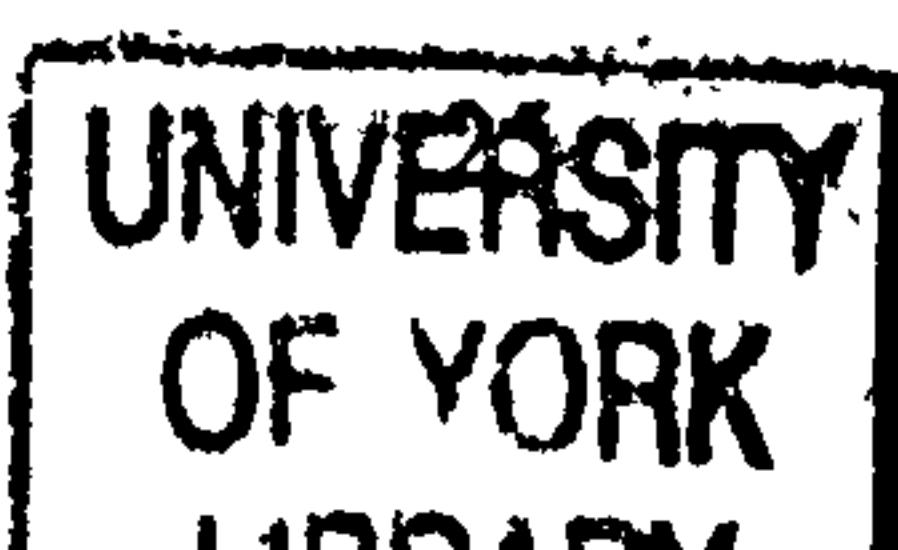
³³ Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 341-68.

³⁴ Carlos Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movement for Reform in Britain, 1830-1839* (Folkestone, 1978), pp. 110-74; David J. Moss, *Thomas Attwood. The Biography of a Radical* (London, 1990), pp. 262-87.

therefore existed between the mass movement that developed under O'Connor's leadership and the origins of the Charter as a document based on the moderate radicalism of the LWMA and the strategy of radical class-alliance.

The LWMA favoured independent working-class radical organisation to try to draw out middle-class support for radical principles in order to create a moral pressure for steps towards political equality. O'Connor, though, revived the mass platform that had been the hallmark of the radical career of Henry Hunt in the years after 1815. In this form of agitation it was not moral improvement or political knowledge that was sought but unity around a 'gentleman' leader who utilised a rhetorical connection between social grievances and the ambiguous threat of social unrest. This sat uneasily with the moderate constitutionalism adopted by the authors of the Charter. The tensions within the movement were absorbed up to 1839 by the expansion of Chartism and the submerging of differences in the hope of rapid success. Both the LWMA and BPU, crucial in forming the programme and strategy of Chartism, were gradually ousted as prominent influences on the movement as the strategic model of the platform, commanded by O'Connor and the rhetoric of physical force, came to dominate.

Had the LWMA remained the dominant organisational force within Chartism the character of the movement would have been a good deal different. What became a mass movement in favour of manhood suffrage reliant on the *Northern Star* and the platform, would have been, in the hands of the LWMA and its supporters, less inclined to 'membership unlimited', more educational and more concerned with how it appeared to radical MPs and their class. That is not to say that it would have been less radical in its aims but merely that it would have chosen a different methodology to effect social change. It is no part of the object of this thesis to suggest that the LWMA offered a more rational or appropriate strategy but it is likely that, far from selling out to 'Whiggery', it would have developed an independent, politically educated group of working-class radicals, clear in their objective and with the sympathy of several radical MPs and sections of the radical middle class. This sympathy was largely absent for



O'Connor and the NCA, linked as they were with a middle class and propertied fear of physical force, a fear cultivated by the establishment and middle-class press.

The moderation of the LWMA has led to it being considered a fringe group, whose Chartism was not that of the mainstream and thus not 'genuine'. But, it will be argued, the rejection of political moderation by the O'Connorites and their use of class rhetoric did not indicate a more socially radical mainstream. Dror Wahrman has stressed that the creation of the 'middle class' as a concept arose around the 1832 Reform Act which associated moderation in radical politics with 'middle class' expediency, caution and self-interested politics.³⁵ This association was drawn on repeatedly by O'Connor in attacks on his opponents. The class language used by O'Connor was not a literal socio-economic description of his opponents but an ambiguous rhetorical association of their political moderation with 'middle class' self-interest. It has often wrongly been assumed that working-class radicalism based on individual improvement and knowledge was elitist and middle class. The elevation of Feargus O'Connor, a self-proclaimed Irish aristocrat, to the historical position of 'working class' leader and the rejection of the LWMA, a group of London working men, as 'middle class', is an unsatisfactory paradox owing more to the balance of power in the Chartist movement than to the weight of historical evidence.

The General Convention held in 1839 in support of the National Petition, brought a clash between moral force and physical force. The political excitement and potential of the Convention and working-class politics in general in the late 1830s led to a sense of national working-class radical unity. Dorothy Thompson has pointed out that William Lovett voted with the majority at the Convention in favour of constitutional arming and the general strike in the May

³⁵ Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 329-76.

Manifesto, and that Henry Hetherington refused, after the Bull Ring riots, to attend another meeting without arms to defend himself against further unconstitutional police attacks.³⁶ Joel Wiener furthers this point by placing Lovett firmly in the Chartist mainstream in the tumultuous late 1830s.³⁷ This has led historians to conclude that, in fact, moral force and physical force are rather limited categories for understanding Chartism.

However, Chapter III will argue that, though differences were not vast, significant tension between moral force and physical force was present within the Convention and, furthermore, it will suggest that the Chartist mainstream had few answers to the rejection of the Charter by the House of Commons in May 1839. A turn to moral force, an acceptance of the need for gradualism, political pressure and class alliance, always remained the most viable option when more militant rhetoric had failed. Chapter III will highlight the tensions within Chartism in relation to events in 1839; moderate political demands, backed by a threatening social movement, once rejected, had nothing to offer but a resort to either actual physical force (which would obviously fail) or a return to organisation, education and pressure of opinion.

The 'new move'.

Following the denouement of the Convention and the imprisonment of hundreds of Chartists and the failure of the agitation of 1839, strands that had previously held together during the unity created by the potential of the early movement began to unravel. Chartism re-formed in 1840 but some moral force sections of the movement were no longer prepared to follow the mainstream. O'Connor attacked these attempts at moral force Chartist reorganisation as a 'new move'

³⁶ Dorothy Thompson, 'Early Chartism', pp. 62-63.

³⁷ Joel H. Wiener, *William Lovett* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 59-68.

designed to divide the movement. At the heart of O'Connor's attack was a linkage of educational, temperance and Christian Chartism to household suffrage, a claim that was entirely false. O'Connor, though, successfully established an imagined link between moral force Chartism and expediency, compromise and corruption. Chapter IV will examine the experience and historical treatment of the most prominent 'new move' organisation, the National Association for the Promotion of the Political and Social Improvement of the People. It will examine in detail O'Connor's attacks on the 'new move' and the inability of moral force Chartists to construct a viable alternative to O'Connor and the *Northern Star* as membership of the mainstream National Charter Association (established in 1840) became synonymous with Chartist commitment. But Chapter IV will also demonstrate that moral force Chartism continued on an organised basis after 1840 and that its supporters continued to be active and committed Chartists despite their different strategic emphasis.

From the point of O'Connor's 'new move' attacks, mainstream Chartism became identified with the National Charter Association (NCA). Chartism as an organised force was only fitfully capable of forming an effective deployment of physical force both across time and between localities. Thus moderation had always to be turned to whatever the preferred strategy or tone. O'Connor's leadership attracted those leaders such as Harney, Peter Murray McDouall and, later, Jones who were drawn to his rhetoric but who were far more radical than O'Connor himself. It was left to moral force Chartists to challenge O'Connor but several leaders within the NCA also adopted aspects of moral force criticism of O'Connor and the mainstream. James 'Bronterre' O'Brien, considered to be a foremost proto-socialist, will be shown in chapter V to have developed elements of a moral force critique of O'Connor and the mainstream in 1842. Chapter VI will show that aspects of moral force strategy continued within the NCA. The moral-'physical' force struggle was not confined to the early struggles between the LWMA and O'Connor but continued into the 1840s and took place within the NCA as well as between the NCA and other organisations. Chartists who challenged O'Connor's dominance did so at the cost of subsequent political

annihilation and their marginalisation from Chartism but they continued to be Chartists despite O'Connor's attempt to define them out of it.

O'Connor and the NCA succeeded in mobilising the majority of Chartists under the NCA umbrella as a 'working class' movement but at the expense of marginalising some prominent mainstream moderates. The condemnation by O'Connor of the self-improving trends within Chartism was, it has been argued, in the interests of unity.³⁸ But the positive view taken by some recent historians of O'Connor's leadership is largely based on an acceptance of O'Connor's own preferred strategy of mass platform and rhetorical threat. Recent attempts by Dorothy Thompson, James Epstein and Glenn Airey to redress a previous Chartist historiography overcritical of O'Connor have fallen into the opposite error, basing their picture of the movement on reports largely from the pages of the *Northern Star*, drawing heavily on O'Connor's self-image.³⁹

O'Connor, class and 'genuine' Chartism.

This thesis seeks to challenge the view that the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor, and his newspaper, the *Northern Star*, were the embodiment of 'genuine' Chartism. This notion has been built up as a consequence of the part O'Connor's brand of radicalism has played in shaping the historical debate about the nature of Chartism. Whilst it will be recognised that the cultural emphasis upon class, associated with Edward and Dorothy Thompson, provides a sound general historical-philosophical basis for the understanding of Chartism, it will be argued that a desire to see class at the centre of mainstream Chartism still hinders our understanding of the nature of moral force Chartism and its relation

³⁸ Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1996), p. 81.

³⁹ Thompson, *The Chartists*; Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*; Glenn Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 – 1855: A Study in Chartist Leadership' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Staffordshire, 2003).

to the Chartist mainstream. The political moderation of some working-class Chartists was made to appear 'middle class' by O'Connor's polemic. What is more, O'Connor has also succeeded beyond the grave in persuading some influential recent historians of Chartism who have admired O'Connor's ability to forge a mass movement, of the same equation of moderation with 'middle class' politics unbecoming the 'working class' nature of 'true' Chartism. Hostile responses within Chartism towards 'moral force' were successfully constructed by their opponents, particularly O'Connor, but these did not correlate with differences in class consciousness. Indeed, the reverse is true, that moral force Chartists shared the radical social vision of the proto-socialists far more than O'Connor did. Moral force Chartists expected social change, even communitarian experimentation, in a post-Charter democratic Britain.

It is the emergence of Chartism 'and something more' that has been generally seen as advancing on earlier polity-centred radical critiques. But the political economy of an earlier co-operative socialism advanced with at least equal appeal and represented a development of British social democracy owing little to the outside influence of overseas revolutionary ideology. The argument that political equality was a means to restoring to labour the value currently usurped by monopolists was commonplace amongst working-class radicals from the 1820s through to Chartism. It existed intertwined with the appeal of communitarian ideas which aimed to refound society on co-operative rather than competitive principles. Aiming to raise the standard of living and quality of life of the working classes, political reform and social and economic re-organisation could not but be addressed together even if, in practice, it was necessary to distinguish the political programme from its social consequences. Thus the historical debate centred on Chartism around language and the ideal (that is, radical analysis) *versus* the social and the 'real' (that is, class analysis) has offered a misleading perception of a division of an experience that was indivisible.

Radical language was ambivalent. It was based on a critique of court and

corruption and was anti-aristocratic. Chartists therefore adopted this language in order to judge the middle class and find them guilty of aristocratic politics. This was certainly class politics but it also permitted a rapid re-integration of the middle class into radical politics through support for manhood suffrage. Moral force Chartists sought an alliance of all radicals to secure a peaceful transition to political democracy but Chartism was bound up with the expectations of gains for the labouring population that were the inevitable result of democracy. Thus radicalism was ever intertwined with class. Radical language played a part as a familiar and shared discourse but as important was class consciousness, expressed not as revolutionary politics or militant rhetoric but as social democracy developed from the British ideology of co-operative-socialism and the experience of Chartism.⁴⁰ This British social democracy sought to improve the condition of the working classes but sought to do so through the enlightened persuasion of men and women of all classes. By the late 1840s, repeated defeat and the failure of independent working class Chartist organisation and the mass platform meant that moderation was the course eventually taken by most remaining Chartists. Chapter VII will examine the denouement of Chartism, the twilight of O'Connor's career and the final failure of physical force. It will also show the increasing importance of Republican ideas and overseas radical movements to the debates amongst Chartists about the future direction of radical politics. Despite the accord generally now given to mainstream Chartism, it was moral force Chartism which concentrated on ideas and pragmatic alliance rather than the platform, that had a deeper and more lasting impact beyond the collapse of the formal Chartist movement.

The relationship between moral force Chartism and the wider Chartist movement across the span of Chartism will form the central investigative thrust of this thesis. As such it will draw upon a rich vein of radical and Chartist journals other than O'Connor's *Northern Star*, such as the *Poor Man's Guardian* (1834 -

⁴⁰ Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair J. Reid, 'Currents of Radicalism', in Biagini, Eugenio F. and Reid, Alastair J. (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1-19.

1836), the *Chartist* (1839 - 1840), the *Charter* (1839 - 1840), the *National Association Gazette* (1842) and the *Cause of the People* (1848), all of which had direct connections to moral force Chartism. It will draw particularly on Chartist journals that have been less utilised by historians of Chartism, such as the *Twopenny Dispatch* (1836) and the *Western Vindicator* (1839 - 1840), but which are fertile sources associated with prominent moral force Chartists. It will also utilise journals edited by James 'Bronterre' O'Brien, such as the *National Reformer* (1837) and *British Statesman* (1842) as well as mainstream journals not directly associated with O'Connor, for example the *English Chartist Circular* (1840 - 1844). Several other journals will also be referred to in order to study the interplay between different sections of Chartism.

Chartists were as fecund in the publication of tracts as they were of journals. Therefore a wide range of pamphlet literature will be drawn on ranging from the much used LWMA pamphlets to less easily available pamphlets such as those of the mainstream critics of O'Connor, William Hill and William Thomason. Manuscript papers from a number of sources were also examined including the minute books of the LWMA which have been trawled more extensively than hitherto and have therefore provided fresh insights into early moral force Chartism. Also used were the newly-available papers of William Lovett at the British Library which provide a large volume of Lovett's private correspondence with fellow Chartists and middle-class radical sympathisers. These throw much new light on the politics and strategies of Lovett in relation to wider Chartism and radicalism.

Through the examination of all of these sources it will be shown that the programme and strategy of the moral force Chartists was at the heart of the origins of the movement in the later 1830s and that their analysis and strategic prescription remained a strong current throughout the 1840s. It will be argued that moral force Chartists were not at the margins Chartism but that, though they were a minority within the Chartist movement, they were nonetheless an important and enduring part of its story.

Chapter II.

Owenism, Radicalism and the People's Charter.

This chapter will argue that the basis of Chartism - the People's Charter - was located in the moderate moral force strategy of cross-class radical co-operation. The creation of a physical force mainstream owed much to O'Connor successfully moving Chartism away from its moderate roots and towards a populist mass movement drawing on class rhetoric. His use of class rhetoric was powerful and backed by tremendous energy and great oratorical skill as well as his control of the influential *Northern Star*. Through these means, O'Connor associated the moderation of the LWMA with 'middle class' politics and 'Whig' corruption. Historians have come to agree with O'Connor's assessment. In recent years historians of Chartism have located the moral force Chartism of the LWMA at the fringes of the movement. As a group of working-class radicals close to middle-class reformers, it is argued that the LWMA and moral force Chartism did not accord with a 'genuine' mainstream Chartism centred around O'Connor and the *Northern Star*. This chapter seeks to challenge this assessment. Moral force means, it will be argued, were not 'middle class' but rooted in the desire of working-class radicals, often simultaneously active co-operative-socialists, pragmatically to prioritise political reform. Further, it will be argued that, far from being at the fringe of early Chartism, the efforts of the LWMA were central to the building of the early Chartist movement.

The LWMA and social history.

While early historians of Chartism looked to the moderation of the LWMA as the 'natural' course for British radical reform¹ more recent interpretations have

¹ Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (1918); West, *A History of the Chartist Movement* (1920) but also more recently Ward, *Chartism* (1973).

tended to represent O'Connor as more 'working class' in his politics than the LWMA who were 'elitist' and more 'middle class'.² As we will see, though, this is to simplify matters by taking O'Connor's line, applying it to modern attempts to find heroes in labour history and to delineate a growing working-class consciousness in nineteenth century Britain and contrasting this to a middle class consciousness that polluted such 'aristocrats' of labour as the LWMA. The influence of this approach has been strong, however, and is currently something of an orthodoxy in Chartist history despite the challenges of those looking to apply new linguistic and post-modern methodologies.

The debate in 1967 between D. J. Rowe and Iorwerth Prothero saw Rowe argue that the LWMA was defined by middle class ideas with Prothero defending its working class character, rightly concluding that 'there could be working-class consciousness together with a willingness to work with individual members of the middle classes. Mr Rowe ... confuses such co-operation with class-collaboration or lack of class feeling'.³ However, Prothero also noted that the LWMA existed outside of mainstream Chartism defined by O'Connor's politics and support.⁴ More recently, in three important texts - James Epstein's, *The Lion of Freedom* (1982), David Goodway's *London Chartism* (1982) and Dorothy Thompson's *The Chartists* (1984) - the distance of the LWMA from mainstream Chartism has been used to present it as not 'genuine'. Rather, it is argued, the Chartist movement was defined by its working-class consciousness, expressed in

² Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975); Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement* (1982); Thompson, *The Chartists* (1984).

³ Iorwerth Prothero and D. J. Rowe, 'Debates: The London Working Men's Association and the "People's Charter"', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 169-76. D.J. Rowe had developed his thesis (to which Prothero responded) of middle class assistance to working class consciousness in the 1830s in his article, 'The London Working Men's Association and the "People's Charter"' *Past and Present*, 36 (1967), 73-86. This lack of consciousness he later laid down as partly the cause of national Chartist division and failure: 'The Failure of London Chartism', *Historical Journal*, 3 (1968), 471-87.

⁴ Iorwerth Prothero, 'Chartism in London', *Past and Present*, 44 (1969), 76-105.

the popularity of O'Connor and hostility to moderation and class alliance.⁵ Yet the LWMA was by definition concerned with asserting a working-class presence in radical politics. As Hetherington asked in 1836, 'If the energies of the working men were concentrated ... what Government could resist them?'⁶ Furthermore, its members were concerned with how radical reform could be utilised to the social benefit of the working classes.

The LWMA and elite culture.

It is to the experiences of Owenite co-operative-socialism and the radical struggles of the early 1830s that we must look to understand the LWMA. Historians, though, have also looked to the artisan culture from which its membership was drawn. Iorwerth Prothero has offered valuable insights into the efforts of the LWMA to construct a 'collective respectability' through the acquisition of 'knowledge' and has pointed to its concentration on specifically political change through this 'enlightenment'.⁷ However, we should be wary of defining too definite an artisan 'elite culture' of respectability based on the LWMA and other artisan groups. Artisans across England, indeed Europe, were at the forefront of radical endeavour as their independence and status came under threat from 'sweating'.⁸ The trades of the LWMA tended towards the skilled trades but these were precisely those workers most likely to be aware of the

⁵ James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*; Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists*; David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-1848* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁶ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, ff. 3-6, 13 July 1836.

⁷ Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and his times* (Folkestone, 1979), pp. 267-99; *Radical artisans in England and France* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 175-201.

⁸ John Breuilly, 'Artisan economy, artisan politics, artisan ideology: the artisan contribution to the nineteenth-century labour movement', in C. Emsley and J. Walvin (eds.), *Artisans, Peasants and Proletarians: 1760-1860* (London, 1985), pp. 187-225; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 259-96.

threat to their independence. They also celebrated 'knowledge' and the emancipatory quality of political education and thus were likely to possess the intellectual self-confidence to challenge political and social inequality. This emphasis on knowledge was not 'bourgeois' but 'the common characteristic of those schooled in the Enlightenment to assume that ... reasonable demands would of their own logic be realized, that means of diffusing light and knowledge were all that was lacking'.⁹ Further, working-class autodidacts in their struggle for 'bread, knowledge and freedom' played a critical role in the creation of a formative British social democracy.¹⁰ William Lovett, later in life of very moderate politics and orthodox political economics, writing a series of letters to the working classes in 1836 put forward a highly un-'respectable' analysis rooting working class misery in existing property relations. He claimed that it was with the utmost difficulty that political equality could survive amidst such social inequality and questioned, therefore, the continuance of private accumulation and the profit-system.¹¹ His politics after these letters changed only very slowly and those of his colleagues, such as Henry Hetherington and James Watson, not perceptibly at all.¹²

As an advanced guard of working-class politicians and self-educated working men who had acquired their co-operative-socialist and radical experience in the agitations, discussion groups and meetings of the struggles of the 1820s and

⁹ Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle. Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago, 1981), p. 134. See also Trygve R. Tholfsen *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1976), p. 15, 22, 25-26 on the intellectual basis of British radical moderation.

¹⁰ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A study of nineteenth-century working class autobiography* (London, 1981), pp. 109-95.

¹¹ *Twopenny Dispatch*, no. 118, 10 September 1836, p. 2; *London Dispatch*, no. 1, 17 September 1836, p. 2; BL, Place Collection, Add. 27,820, Set 56, Vol. I, ff.29-30, 30-31, n.d.

¹² For Hetherington's and Watson's continued Owenite activity in the 1840s see Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the commencement of the millennium. A study of the Harmony community* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 205-206, 226.

1830s, the LWMA owed its emphases and practical bent to those long engaged in the attempt to 'raise' the working class to an awareness of co-operative-socialist and radical principles. The radical newspaper, the *Twopenny Dispatch*, lauded the oratorical and writing skills of the LWMA membership, their intellect, temperance, habits of industry and respectability.¹³ This was, though, not so much a distinct artisanal 'culture' as a point of emphasis arrived at by different radicals at different points. The moderate LWMA members of the late 1830s had been just as much influenced by Spenceanism as had the more militant radicals Harney and Neesom.¹⁴ As Prothero himself notes, '... the secularist tailor Neesom, who was active in the tavern-based post-war Spencean activity and revolutionary London Democratic Association ... was a supporter of temperance, a schoolteacher, and a colleague of Lovett.'¹⁵

Though the LWMA was quickly to be eclipsed by a differently formulated radical movement it would seem rather disingenuous to cast the radical metropolitan vanguard of the reform agitation and the unstamped as 'elitist' and not of a 'genuine' working class radical genus. Educationalism and gradualism has often been the response of radicals following the experience of failure of more militant efforts and a shift in this direction had occurred amongst the LWMA group of radicals. Nonetheless, its political asking-price remained undiluted and members like Hetherington and Watson remained firm Owenites and disseminators of such key radical texts as those by Thomas Paine. This was not the politics of conciliation or the acceptance of the middle-class embrace but the response of a distinct radical group to its experiences in its locality. However, the politics of the LWMA when applied to the national stage were to cause its isolation from the national movement of which it was the progenitor, Chartism.

¹³ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 9, n.d.

¹⁴ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, *English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988), p. 136, 148-51, 165.

¹⁵ Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France*, p. 307.

Co-operative socialism and radical politics.

When the prominent LWMA member, Henry Hetherington, died in 1849 his *Last Will and Testament* revealed the extent to which his political radicalism had co-existed with a strong belief in the communitarian system laid down by Robert Owen. It is worth recording the degree of his conviction:

I quit this world with a firm conviction that his [Owen's] system is the only true road to human emancipation ... ROBERT OWEN'S system, if rightly understood and faithfully carried out ... makes man the proprietor of his own labour and of the elements of production - it places him in a condition to enjoy the entire fruits of his labour, and surrounds him with circumstances that will make him intelligent, rational, and happy. Grateful to Mr. OWEN for the happiness I have experienced in contemplating the superiority of his system, I could not die happy without recommending my fellow-countrymen to study its principles and earnestly strive to establish them in practice.¹⁶

Yet this co-existence of political radicalism and Owenite socialism might seem rather difficult to reconcile with the 'orthodox' Owenite line, which was sceptical of the positive social results of political action. The popular excitement required to successfully carry through political reform, it was argued, disturbed the social stability necessary for social reform.¹⁷ However, it becomes easier to understand if we listen to Hetherington in 1832, stressing that Owenism was futile without political equality, that

¹⁶ *The Life and Character Henry Hetherington, the Oration at Kensal Green Cemetery, the Speech of James Watson: a Tribute by W.J. Linton: Hetherington's Last Will and Testament* (1849), p. 10.

¹⁷ See, for example, *New Moral World*, no.138, 17 June 1837, p. 277; no.139, 24 June 1837, pp. 285-86. Also, *Social Reformer*, no.9, 15 December 1839, p. 2; no.10, 22 December 1839, p. 2.

Independent Co-operation cannot be successfully established in this country – *even as an experiment* – till the working classes obtain their political rights ... first to be removed, is the want of political power in the millions; and till that is removed, Co-operation upon Mr. Owen's comprehensive plan, can never be successfully established.¹⁸

An Owenite perspective was thus quite capable of allowing an awareness of the drawbacks of a lack of popular political power. If we let Hetherington speak again, with a democratic government 'Whatever the people are prepared to demand, such a government will be ready to grant. Whatever speculative minds may then advance for the benefit of man, such a government will be anxious to *examine*.'¹⁹

It has become increasingly clear to historians that no firm lines existed in the nineteenth-century between political radicalism and co-operative activity. The 'linguistic turn' has highlighted the continuities of a tradition of radicalism that located social grievances in the political sphere but, as Hetherington made clear, it was often not democracy for its own sake.²⁰ There was a significant exchange of personnel between co-operation and political radicalism. As Edward Royle has suggested, there is no need to look to the influence of the 'Charter and something more' or international socialist currents to understand British democratic socialism.²¹ It was quite usual for radicals to be 'co-operative in their

¹⁸ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.31, 14 January 1832, pp. 245-46.

¹⁹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.51, 2 June 1832, p. 409. On Hetherington's political career (emphasising his secularism) see: Ambrose G. Barker, *Henry Hetherington, 1792-1849: Pioneer in the Freethought and Working Class Struggles of a Hundred Years Ago for the Freedom of the Press* (London, 1938).

²⁰ For the 'linguistic turn' see Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism', p.3-58; E. F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism. Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1-19.

²¹ Edward Royle, 'Chartists and Owenite - Many Parts but One Body', *Labour History Review*, 65 (2000), p. 2.

economics and democratic in their aspirations for the suffrage.’²² An Owenite-Chartist social-democracy operated as much as a cross-class radical tradition in the formation of popular Liberalism. The emergence of Chartist proto-socialism with hints towards later state socialism has tended to obscure the pervasive influence of co-operative-socialism in British politics despite recent detailed work on Owenite political economy. Further, we must be careful not to underestimate the revolutionary aspirations of the ‘social communities’ towards which co-operative-socialists worked.

Moral force Chartism and co-operative-socialism.

There can be few more intriguing links between Owenism and political radicalism than in moral force Chartism. This group contained Hetherington as well as other prominent political radicals associated with Owenism such as James Watson, John Cleave, William Lovett and George Jacob Holyoake. The first three were all centrally involved with Owenite and radical politics from the early 1830s and into the 1840s. Holyoake was an Owenite sympathiser with Chartism who came to prominence in that role in the late 1840s into the 1850s. It is with the former group that we are concerned in this chapter, with the role of these men in the formation of the Chartist movement. We will return later to Holyoake in chapter VII and another Owenite-influenced radical, James O’Brien, in chapter V.

Hetherington, Watson, Cleave and Lovett were all heavily involved in the London-based British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge

²² Edward Royle, ‘Chartists and Owenites’, 17. Co-operation involved a broad challenge to orthodox political economy and aimed at tackling the inequalities in the exchange process and in the process of production. See Noel Thompson, *The People's Science: the Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis, 1825-45* (Cambridge, 1984) and Claeys' criticism of Thompson's Marxist teleology, ‘Popular Political Economy’, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 51 (1986), 36-39.

(BAPCK) formed in 1829. Though an intended propagandist body it also involved itself from 1832 to 1833 with an abortive bazaar and National Equitable Labour Exchange, which was intended, as other such projects were, to provide capital and training for communitarian projects. Though this operation had the backing of Owen, the contemporaneous political activity of its progenitors must have been a source of vexation to him. Many of the members of the BAPCK were also active in the National Union of the Working Classes (NUWC), which was engaged in the promotion of manhood suffrage in the Reform agitation of 1831 to 1832. Further, members of both the BAPCK and the NUWC were also engaged in the bitter 'War of the Unstamped', in which the 4d duty on newspapers was targeted as an obstruction to the dissemination of 'useful knowledge', which meant radical political and co-operative knowledge.²³

For those engaged in popular political struggle in the 1820s and into the 1830s, Owenism was an important tool for building an alternative to the still aristocratically-dominated but increasingly industrial capitalist society around them. It was, though, just one tool among others. As J. F. C. Harrison noted: 'The working men, building on popular traditions of community, anti-capitalism and millenarianism, found a badly needed social theory in cooperative socialism; and when they subsequently needed a democratic political philosophy they added that too.'²⁴ E. P. Thompson also noted that the influence of Owenism was far more diffuse than any narrow focus on Owen's work will allow: '...*Owenism* from the late Twenties onwards, was a very different thing from the writings and proclamations of Robert Owen.'²⁵ Richard Ashcraft has demonstrated the often simultaneous deployment of natural rights, utilitarian and communist ideas in

²³ For the radical-Owenite contest with the moderate utilitarian Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) over what constituted 'useful knowledge' see David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 133-65.

²⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites* (London, 1969), p. 216.

²⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1980 edition), p. 868.

defence of popular radicalism.²⁶ If general happiness, use and preternatural rights were to be touchstones of social relationships, it was a fairly simple task to align popular radicalism and Owenism with greatest happiness and the people's rights and the 'industrious classes' as of most use to society.

The group of Owenites in the NUWC provide a firm link between co-operative-socialism and a distinct approach to political reform.²⁷ While the commitment of the group around Hetherington, Watson, Cleave and Lovett to political reform remained firm, they were prepared to direct their radicalism into engagement with moderate parliamentary radicals. They could do this because the co-operative-socialist conception of class saw it as an irrational social form derived from the old immoral world and transcended by rational people of good will of All Classes of All Nations. Material class interests from this perspective were not an obstacle to social progress because they could be transcended by ideas. By emphasising their commitment to political principles and by utilising a stringent critique of the British political system based on natural rights and traditional radical targeting of 'Old Corruption', practical political co-operation was possible with those who were intent on attacking the aristocratic state from the different perspective of orthodox utilitarianism and political economy. The political approach of cross-class radical co-operation was adopted by the LWMA, which was founded in June 1836 around Hetherington, Watson and other co-operative-socialist radicals. This was a logical extension and strategic selection of co-operative-socialist and radical precepts rather than a surrender to

^{26.} Richard Ashcraft, 'Liberal political theory and working-class radicalism in nineteenth-century England', *Political Theory*, 21 (1993), 249-72.

^{27.} On the connections between Owenism and Chartism, early and late, see: R. K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, pp. 205-208; Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels. The origins of the British Secularist movement 1791-1866* (Manchester, 1974), p. 3, 134-35, 251-52; Joel Wiener, *William Lovett*, pp. 12-35. For an interesting examination of the influence of Owenite thought on the young Frederick Engels, see: Gregory Claeys, 'The Political Ideas of the Young Engels, 1842-1845: Owenism, Chartism and the Question of Violent Revolution in the transition from "Utopian" to "Scientific" Socialism', *History of Political Thought*, VI (1985), 455-78.

the leadership of parliamentary radicals.²⁸ There was only one eye on what was expedient, on what collaborations were necessary to achieve political reform. The other was firmly fixed on the principles to be fulfilled and, crucially, the social grievances to be met by reform. The LWMA was conscious of social class but it did not consider it to be a barrier to political collaboration. If the tone of the LWMA was accommodating, it sought by the diffusion of ‘useful knowledge’ to lay the foundations of a new society:

Fellow-countrymen, *when we contend for an equality of political rights, it is not in order to lop off an unjust tax or useless pension, or to get a transfer of wealth, power or influence for a party; but to be able to probe our social evils to their source, and to apply effective remedies to prevent instead of unjust laws to punish.*²⁹

‘Progress is slow’: political moderation and education.

The political strategy of the LWMA may be contrasted with both the strategy of William Benbow, a fellow member of the NUWC, and that of William Carpenter, who had been a member of the BAPCK. The LWMA eschewed the sort of outspoken militancy characteristic of William Benbow throughout his radical career. The progenitor of the general strike, Benbow’s ‘outspoken and extreme’ radicalism ran from the post-war period through to the reform agitation of 1866-7 and was quite at home in physical force Chartism with its confrontational rhetoric.³⁰ From the perspective of moderation, on the other hand, whilst the NUWC had opposed the Reform Act as the representation of

²⁸ Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 225.

²⁹ LWMA, *Address and Rules*, in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Chartist Movement, 1838-1850*, Vol. I (London, 2001), p. 44.

³⁰ I. J. Prothero, ‘William Benbow and the concept of the “General Strike”’, *Past and Present*, 63 (1974), 132-71.

property rather than men, William Carpenter had sought an accommodation by which any reform was better than no reform. This kind of compromise was too much in the way of expediency over principle for the LWMA.

Similarly to the post-war radical, Samuel Bamford, whose experience of the failure of post-war radicalism led him to adopt a moderate position of gradual reform, the LWMA adopted a pressure group approach that sought practical alliance with radical reformers from all classes.³¹ Parliamentary radicals were courted to take the firmest radical lines in return for support from the political advanced guard of the working classes. The utilitarian radicals, Francis Place and Dr. Black, had been involved in the project to form the LWMA.³² Originating from the Association of Working Men to Procure a Cheap and Honest Press whose emphasis had been on auto-didactic intellectual and moral improvement of the working classes through the unstamped, the LWMA developed a class conscious radical gradualism.³³ Place, a fervently orthodox political economist, had little of the social reforming zeal and vision which fuelled Owenite enthusiasm but offered a moderate view of gradual radical progress that could integrate with the politics of the co-operative-socialist radicals.³⁴ Place, too, disliked high pitches of political excitement and coarse popular culture for the negative impact they made on the cause of reform. His sense of progress was palpable, witness his advice to the more gloomy and impatient William Lovett in 1837:

³¹ On Bamford see: Martin Hewitt, 'Radicalism and the Victorian Working Class: the case of Samuel Bamford', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), 873-92.

³² Dudley Miles, *Francis Place. The Life of a Remarkable Radical 1771-1854* (Brighton, 1988), pp. 226-47.

³³ *Cleave's Weekly Police Gazette*, no.17, 23 April 1836, p. 3.

³⁴ Place had previously influenced the staunch Paineite Richard Carlile into acceptance of orthodox political economy and neo-Malthusian ideas and it was Carlile's campaign against the newspaper stamp that brought James Watson into the popular radical movement. BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, ff. 355-56, James Watson to William Lovett, 19 September 1867.

What ... is the real difference between us? - this - you look on the dark side of the picture. I look on the bright one. Your anticipations of the future are gloomy music over the reverse. You lament the past and suffer it to distress you. I take the present and comparing it with the past see an immense change for the better. I see that men in this and many other countries cannot be used as they ... were wan [*sic.*] to be used in former times, that they are much further removed from the state of mere animals than they were, and that the sum of happiness is much greater than it was, and hence I infer that it will continue to increase, but the progress is slow, very slow, and must be one of fluctuation but slow advancing.³⁵

Place's regard for popular education as a source of progress was another source of political agreement. The membership of the LWMA was open but it was not numbers and confrontation that the LWMA sought but an efficient core of committed, sober and rational men.³⁶

Here it is quite easy to see co-operative-socialist confidence in education and rationality extended to political radicalism. This approach cut across the grain of 'gentlemanly' leadership of radicalism, which ran from Major Cartwright in the late-eighteenth-century, through Henry Hunt and William Cobbett to Feargus O'Connor with whom the LWMA was destined to cross-swords.³⁷ It was a position visible from the first days of the LWMA group of Owenite political radicals. In 1831, looking around Europe and observing the limited impact of political revolutions (notably France and Belgium), Hetherington noted that mere changes in political leadership would not cut the social reform mustard. The real key to a successful revolution in human happiness was in the mind. For Hetherington, though physical revolutions might be needed to throw off

³⁵ BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 27, Francis Place to William Lovett, 12 January 1837.

³⁶ *Address and Rules of the Working Men's Association*, p. 44.

³⁷ On 'gentleman' leadership and radicalism see: John Belchem and James Epstein, 'The nineteenth-century gentleman leader revisited', *Social History*, 22 (1997), 174-93.

oppression, what Europe required was 'the real revolution ... of its own intellect: self-revolution, self-reformation ... the revolution – the real reform, to which, after all, we aspire'.³⁸

Political reform in itself would clearly be insufficient to produce such an effect. The examples in Europe and America showed that there would be little cleansing of prejudice if the purpose was merely to increase the number of voters in the British political system.³⁹ The key was in how reform was achieved, hence the high pitch of enthusiasm of the LWMA for knowledge and behaviour conducive to imbibing such knowledge. On the one hand the LWMA was distancing itself from what it saw as mere protest and platform casuistry. On the other hand it was rejecting Benthamite utilitarian hedonism in accepting benevolence in human affairs. The radical internationalism of the LWMA was one that emphasised knowledge in the universal cause of democratic advance. In addresses to Canada, Poland, Belgium and Ireland it was popular intelligence that would advance the public opinion that would bring down aristocracy in politics and society.⁴⁰ This radical internationalism of the intellect demonstrates the special role conceived of for working-class radicals in disseminating radical ideas, that 'the working people, uncorrupted by wealth and privilege, had a clearer view of moral issues' and led to 'a conception of their special mission in

³⁸ *Penny Papers for the People*, 26 February 1831, pp. 1-2.

³⁹ See, for example, Jamie L. Bronstein, 'From the land of liberty to the land of monopoly: the United States in a Chartist context', in Ashton, Fyson, Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy*, pp. 147-70; Gregory Claeys, 'The example of America a Warning to England?' *The Transformation of America in British Radicalism and Socialism, 1790-1850*, in M. Chase and I. Dyck (eds.), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 66-80. The heroic examples of America and Europe died hard and in fits and starts of hope and disillusion. For example in the LWMA's address *to the Working Classes of Europe, and Especially the Polish People* (1838), Claeys vol. I, p. 141, the popular intelligence of the USA, Switzerland and Norway are pointed to as examples of the results of democracy.

⁴⁰ See the LWMA addresses *to the People of Canada* (Claeys, Vol. I, pp. 51-59), *to the Irish People*, (Claeys, Vol. II, pp. 369-77), *to the Polish People* (Claeys, Vol. I, pp. 135-42). For the LWMA address *to the Working Classes of Belgium* see *London Dispatch*, no.9, 13 November 1836, p. 65.

achieving international peace and harmony.’⁴¹

Moral force and social reform.

The political radicalism of Hetherington’s LWMA-supporting newspaper, the *London Dispatch*, was militant in its programme of reform. It stood for equality of rights, for free extension of knowledge, the right to the produce of labour, the right of the whole population to an interest in the soil (that is, new property laws amounting to the nationalisation of land along Spencean lines) and new institutions for rendering capital and machinery the property of the many. It stood against interventionist wars, national debt, military torture and impressment, the factory system, the tithing system, the Corn Laws and all the ‘multifarious other abuses in our social state, which inflict so much individual and general suffering’.⁴² Underlying all of this was its opposition to the profit system: ‘the fell, profit-mongering system which is the root and point of the rest ... the history of the world’s experience teaches me that so long as that system survives, it will be morally and physically impossible for men to do unto others as they would wish others to do unto them’.⁴³ Tellingly though, with this militant programme a policy of gradualism was adopted:

Abuses which are the growth of ages cannot be cured in a day or a year. As time, and a multiplicity of slow changes, were necessary to produce them, so it will require time, and a multiplicity of counter-changes, to reform them. To attempt any sudden and sweeping change would be only to precipitate the whole fabric about our ears ... I have incessantly demanded such organic changes as would ultimately produce political and social equality ...⁴⁴

⁴¹ Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870*, p. 112.

⁴² *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 1.

⁴³ *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 1.

A rich man, for example, with an income of ten thousand pounds a year, acquires artificial wants important to him and new laws of tenure would need to secure the full amount due to present possessors (through compensation or lifetime tenure) and their effects spread over thirty to forty years. Unlike Owen's belief that the rich would surrender their privileges once they had realised the superiority of the new moral world, the gradualism of Owenites like Hetherington developed a more realistic perspective. Political reform was the priority and was tied to social regeneration led by the working classes:

The end we seek is THE HAPPINESS OF THE PEOPLE. That happiness we believe to be impossible without REAL SOCIAL EQUALITY. To secure real political equality, we see no other means than UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE ... To promote knowledge, union, and courage, amongst the oppressed classes, will be, therefore, the main object of our mission.⁴⁵

It was therefore quite different to utilitarian attempts to educate working men in the skills of frugality and orthodox political economy, such as Place and Black would have desired it. The shared emphasis on education and moral improvement though, was enough to allow a relationship between utilitarian parliamentary radicals and the LWMA.⁴⁶ Its expression was in the one way that such a relationship could agree - through the realisation of radical political principles. Any dreams of co-operative-socialism would have to await the outcome of political equality, while retrenchment and free-trade could be

⁴⁵ *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 1.

⁴⁶ For example, the LWMA pamphlet *An Address from the Working Men's Association to the Working Classes, on the Subject of National Education* (London, 1837) in recommending a non-religious and anon-aristocratically patronised national system of education allowed plenty of overlap with utilitarian plans in this direction.

accepted as an advance on 'Old Corruption'.⁴⁷ The means were political radicalism but co-operative-socialist in their origins and ambition. By the establishment of communities of the 'honest, sober, and reflecting' parts of the population 'corrupt Government', 'vicious aristocracy', idleness and idolatry' could not be sustained.⁴⁸ The dominant forces within a parliamentary and working class radical alliance would have favoured those little concerned with building a 'new moral world'. But idealist parliamentary radicals were preferable to appeals to either those who were unapologetically politically exclusive, or 'aristocratic', or those whose poverty had made them politically ignorant. Radical principles, then, were the way forward, the grounds of reform consensus. Social questions would be left to the post-democratic society and, as Place (an anti-Owenite) assessed in a letter favourable to an LWMA address of 1837, the emphasis on knowledge and moral principles:

... wisely avoids every subject which has a tendency to cause disputes. It points out the way by which every working man who thinks at all on the condition of the class to which he belongs, may advance his own and their interests, and it leaves the remote question, "what is the best state of society," to be discussed and determined, when the working classes as a *body* shall be sufficiently instructed to ascertain it, and come to a just decision.⁴⁹

Working-class radicalism and 'gentleman' leaders.

The realisation of the need to adopt a cross-class radical campaign did not do away with the impulse to emphasise the need for equality in radical organisation. There was a marked suspicion in LWMA circles of the motives of 'gentlemen'

⁴⁷ David Nicholls, 'The English Middle class and the Ideological Significance of Radicalism, 1760-1886', *Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), 415-33.

⁴⁸ *Address and Rules of the Working Men's Association*, p. 44-45.

⁴⁹ *London Dispatch*, no.57, 15 October 1837, p. 452.

radicals. As well as the shifting and manoeuvring of Radical MPs who ‘imagine that they know better than any body else, and have a right to know better than anybody else, what course their party should pursue ... [inducing] them to make parliamentary arrangements and compromises too often without sufficient regard to public opinion’,⁵⁰ this attitude was directed from the first towards the moves of Feargus O’Connor to adopt the mantle of Henry Hunt in the struggle for manhood suffrage. Following the efforts of O’Connor to form a Universal Suffrage Club in London (Finsbury) in September 1836 the *London Dispatch* issued a call for radical organisational equality. Lovett likewise issued, in a letter to the *Spectator*, a call to be wary of non-working-class leaders, the ‘popularity hunters’.⁵¹ Suspicion of class interests taken to indiscriminate class distrust would, realised the *Dispatch*, ‘lose us our friends, in the blind attempt to ward of[f] our enemies’.⁵² The way to defeat class interest was rather ‘by a rigid and uncompromising adherence to fixed principles and by counting all *names* and *persons* for nothing except in so far as they help to promote the good cause.’⁵³ In general radicals of wealth and education were to be welcomed as valuable assets in the radical struggle.

Nonetheless, the cause of radicalism needed working class leadership. It was not leadership as such that the LWMA objected to but leadership by those, usually not of the working classes, who sought to achieve reform not by the spread of radical principles but by mass agitations and personal popularity. The LWMA, formed of those of the working classes who perceived the way forward as intellectual struggle, believed itself the correct model for working class association:

⁵⁰ *London Dispatch*, no.32, 23 April 1837, p. 249.

⁵¹ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 33, William Lovett to the *Spectator*, n.d.

⁵² *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 4.

⁵³ *London Dispatch*, no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 4.

Many persons imagine the way to organize the working classes, is to form immense societies – in fact, to get every working man into them. This is a great error. First of all, the thing is utterly impossible, not one-tenth of the working classes would, until mental improvement is far more extended, either join or attend associations; and then, if the whole of them could be bought into political associations, in their present state of mental advancement, no good would result from it ... and nothing would be resolved upon but by passionate appeals to their prejudices ... ⁵⁴

Organisation, then, must be more than just meetings addressed by leaders. Rather,

It is to those men amongst the working classes, who in spite of all impediments, march forward in mental acquirements, that we must look for the formation of political associations which are really to benefit their class ... ten intelligent, determined, fully capable men associated and banded together, are really more efficient for political associations, than a thousand in a hodge-podge sort of society.⁵⁵

It was educated working men who must lead their own class, completing the independence that education had begun.

For the LWMA, we have seen, knowledge was the key to working class power and leadership of their own destiny. Radical organisation should therefore reflect and be the means towards this end. It was, after all, only ‘want of reliance on their own power’ that led to their position as an inferior class in the social scale.⁵⁶ There had to be an elevated position for political education in

⁵⁴ *London Dispatch*, no.26, 12 March 1837, p. 201.

⁵⁵ *London Dispatch*, no.26, 12 March 1837, p. 201.

⁵⁶ *London Dispatch*, no.51, 3 September 1837, p. 401.

radical organisation: 'The real friend of the working man is he who has no object of a personal nature to seek. He will not excite, but he will teach; he will not aggravate poor man's wrongs by false colouring to inflame his passion'.⁵⁷ However, beyond the essential teaching of popular rights there must be an emphasis on practical politics, on what the working man '*can* do, and *how* to do it' and on the adoption of 'the most powerful means of enforcing the necessity of its accomplishment on those who have the power to assist them'.⁵⁸ The right of the suffrage was 'a right which they [the working classes] will only obtain by showing their independence' but this should be demonstrated by a reasoned demand by argument, 'not by turbulence, but by firmness'.⁵⁹ It was into this formulation of radical organisation that Feargus O'Connor was expected to mould himself. O'Connor should fit into a radical agitation based on equality and principles:

If Mr. Feargus O'Connor ... volunteers to devote his time and resources to the popular cause, let his services be accepted, and appreciated according to their worth, without any reference to the man's station or fortune. If he makes a good speech, let us applaud and promulgate it for the good it may do – not for the sake of the speaker himself ...⁶⁰

Middle-class radicals regarded the 1832 Reform Act as neither the middle class triumph that some thought it to be nor the betrayal that others accused them of perpetrating. It was, therefore, a practical and realistic political position for working class radicals to seek to draw out parliamentary and middle class radicals in support of comprehensive radical reform of Parliament. The major barrier to such an ambition, however, was the rift that the 1832 Reform Act had

⁵⁷ *London Dispatch*, no.51, 3 September 1837, p. 401.

⁵⁸ *London Dispatch*, no.51, 3 September 1837, p. 401.

⁵⁹ *London Dispatch*, no.51, 3 September 1837, p. 401.

⁶⁰ *London Dispatch* no.1, 17 September 1836, p. 4.

made in the notion of 'the people'. If a language of class had long been developing, the Reform agitation saw it reach hitherto unknown degrees of consciousness.⁶¹ Whereas before 1832 'the people' as a social category had included both working classes and middle classes, after the Reform Act the middle class became politically separated from the working class as the ten-pound household suffrage qualification enhanced the role of property in the qualification for the vote. The LWMA sought to demonstrate the error and injustice of such a distinction and to emphasise the superiority of political representation including the working classes. Middle-class radicals, to press for their demands of retrenchment and free-trade, required the assistance of popular, working-class support. Working-class radicals likewise made the achievement of political reform far more difficult if they aroused the hostility of the middle-class. Such a mutual dependency was eventually to lead to a softening of class attitudes on both sides but in the 1830s working class consciousness was perhaps at its apex in British history.⁶² The distinguishing feature of this class consciousness was its political character.⁶³ More than any other issue, the 'betrayal' of the Reform Act in its rejection of manhood suffrage raised the working class to protest. Not only was political equality eschewed in 1832 but there was a palpable sense that the working part of the 'industrious classes' had been used to gain the vote for 'capital' at the expense of 'labour'. Far from principle guiding their hand, the middle class radicals had abused the traditional alliance of 'the people'. According to the *Voice of the West Riding*:

⁶¹ See Asa Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960), pp. 43-73 and 'Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846', *Past and Present*, 9 (1956), 65-74; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 887-915.

⁶² For a subtle account of the relationship between parliamentary radical support for popular radicalism and class see: David Nicholls, 'Friends of the People: Parliamentary Supporters of Popular Radicalism, 1832-1849', *Labour History Review*, 62, (1997), 127-46.

⁶³ Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, pp. 329-76.

We have long seen the hollow-hearted advocacy of the working mans cause even by those styling themselves 'Liberals.' They use the word 'people,' but it is with the Whiggish Broughamite sense, viz: in contradiction to the 'populace.'⁶⁴

This merely served to accelerate the necessity of advancing along firmly radical lines, of 'the people' (increasingly defined as the working classes) avoiding compromise: 'it [the Reform Act] has shook the system which it cannot tranquilize: are we not nearly in the same position as before? The people then must advance; onward, onward must be the cry'.⁶⁵ There was a pressing need to advance their own cause, 'that the working classes must do their own work – they must be the artificers of their own emancipation. Union is their strength – this union is feared – and is sought to be dissolved: and so will all unions be until every man possess his political rights'.⁶⁶ Despite this awareness, however, the Owenite Joshua Hobson's *Voice of the West Riding* raised a cry for patriotic leadership in the light of the lack of reform fruit of the 1832 agitation: 'let us look around', it cried, 'and call forward men of honour and integrity, to lead on to victory'.⁶⁷

The LWMA, however, took a different stance, shunning leadership from above altogether and establishing a permanent organisation holding forth for principles against a drift to expediency and compromise by parliamentary radicals:

If they [middle class radicals] desire to impart to us their superior knowledge and advice, our laws permit them to do so on terms of perfect equality; but if they desire to rule and govern for their selfish interests,

^{64.} *Voice of the West Riding*, no.1, 1 June 1833, p. 2.

^{65.} *Voice of the West Riding*, no.4, 29 June 1833, p.29.

^{66.} *Voice of the West Riding*, no.21, 26 October 1833, p. 165.

^{67.} *Voice of the West Riding*, no.4, 29 June 1833, p.29.

our rules oppose their domination.⁶⁸

Class and working-class radical politics.

A result of the political emphasis put on class in the immediate post-Reform Act period there was a perceived connection between class and political affiliation. A 'middle class' attitude could be presented as political exclusivity or moderation in pursuit of radical aims. 'Working class' politics on the other hand could be associated with 'rough' conviction and 'plain' language and unwillingness to compromise. As stereotypes they confound the historian's efforts to gauge class consciousness. Thus, contemporary rhetoric which used this class dichotomy could position the LWMA, because of its preparedness to work alongside parliamentary radicals, closer to 'middle class' politics than to 'working class' politics.⁶⁹ But, as we have noted, the LWMA wished to advance the cause of democracy to redress the social and economic grievances of the working classes. It was precisely through knowledge and individual improvement that the evils of class, the 'demon of poverty' next to lavish folly, were to be met.⁷⁰

There was no historic emancipatory role for class for the LWMA as it was a purely negative social feature to be challenged and overcome by a collective increase in rationality. But class language was pervasive in radical discourse in the 1830s and 1840s. As a theoretical concept it could be used to construct new theories of the exploitation of 'labour' by 'capital', such as by the proto-socialist James 'Bronterre' O'Brien. As a rhetorical device it could be used with effect to

^{68.} *Address and Rules of the Working Men's Association*, p. 45.

^{69.} This has continued into modern historiography, to take a fairly recent example, John Belchem, in *Popular Radicalism*, pp. 74-101 talks in terms of mutually exclusive working and middle class radicalism.

^{70.} *Address and Rules of the Working Men's Association*, p. 46.

justify a stance of refusal to compromise with 'middle class' expediency, which we shall see O'Connor and the mainstream of the Chartist movement adopt. It could also, however, be used as a weapon by the opponents of democracy - those who feared the onset of democracy and opposed Chartism as class politics, a movement rooted in working class political belligerence.

The LWMA adopted a tone of working class independence whilst presenting its radical objects in a way that was unoffensive to middle-class or parliamentary radicals. For the LWMA, the role of the working class, far from belligerence, was in understanding radical principles. As the only politically 'disinterested' class, the good of society fell on the development of radical mutual understanding among the working classes. The LWMA pamphlet *The Rotten House of Commons*, is a classic case in point. It lambasted political expediency in harsh tones:

There are persons among the monied class, who, to deceive their fellow men, have put on the cloak of reform; but they mean not that reform so shall so extend as to deprive them or their party of their corrupt advantages ... Many are for step-by-step improvement; they are characterised by their earnest solicitude *gradually to enlighten us*, lest we should see our political degradation too soon, and make any advance towards depriving them of their exclusive prerogative of leading us ...⁷¹

There was little hope of an end to legislation by 'exclusive interests' through the struggle of the wealthy and privileged, the pamphlet argued. The working classes must be the most important agent of change, but here is a crucial *but* - it could not do so by itself, in isolation because the political storm it would create would threaten the whole project of social reform by moral advancement. It was not a movement of the working classes for the working classes that was needed

⁷¹ LWMA, *The Rotten House of Commons, Being an Exposition of the Present State of the Franchise, and an Appeal to the Nation on the Course to be Pursued in the Approaching Crisis* (London, 1837), p. 3.

then, despite the class consciousness that is clear to observe, but a movement led of necessity by the 'disinterested' working class for the creation of a system of government that represented the whole of 'the people'.⁷² It was an object that required the combination of working men in order to cultivate radical knowledge and to persuade the government and the propertied voting classes by virtuous example and popular pressure to radically reform Parliament.⁷³

O'Connor and the LWMA.

While the LWMA made friends with influential reformers, its position came under fire from a different radical current associated with the anti-Poor Law agitation in the north and north-west of England. The rhetoric of 'right and justice' and gradual dissemination of radical principles was not the strategy of those engaged in more direct and immediate struggles against political tyranny. These grew in intensity into 1836 and 1837 as the implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act moved into northern counties. It was from the anti-Poor Law agitation above all that Feargus O'Connor was to derive his leadership of radicalism in the late 1830s.

Despite their suspicions of 'gentleman' radicals, the LWMA had expressed no little support for Feargus O'Connor from 1836 through to 1838. They had defended O'Connor against the Whig-supporting 'sham-radical' Daniel O'Connell (to whose Irish political 'tail' O'Connor had previously belonged) during these years and reviewed his speeches and addresses favourably.⁷⁴ But 'This true Radical apostle', as the *London Dispatch* had referred to O'Connor in mid-1837, turned his considerable vituperative powers against the LWMA in

⁷² *The Rotten House of Commons*, p. 2.

⁷³ *The Rotten House of Commons*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ *London Dispatch*, no.3, 1 October 1836, p. 18, 20; no.11, 27 November 1836, p. 83; no.19, 22 January 1837, p. 142; no.42, 2 July 1837, p. 229.

early 1838. Efforts of the LWMA to attach conditional working class support to radical-liberal MPs, by holding public dinners as occasions for mutual flattery were achieving results, such as Roebuck's early 1837 bid to restore the right to petition Parliament.⁷⁵ The acceptance of an invitation by Daniel O'Connell to an LWMA dinner was welcomed by the *Northern Liberator* as evidence of his shift away from 'Whiggishness'.⁷⁶ However, Edinburgh Radical Association expressed disappointment at the LWMA on its own terms, as the courting of 'great men' and O'Connor went much further.⁷⁷ Despite himself being present by invitation at an LWMA public dinner on at least one occasion in early 1837, O'Connor was, by early 1838, asserting that the LWMA were the tools of the Whigs. It was an inevitable outcome, he argued, of the natural vanity that went with associating with MPs and showed the necessity of appealing to 'more extensive democratic fraternities' less susceptible to the 'sinister influences' of liberal parliamentary apostates.⁷⁸ 'Why', O'Connor asked in response to a surprised plea for toleration from the LWMA, 'put on the cap of Malthusian Whigs and working men coadjutors? What silver tones have changed your warlike notes from proclamation of deadliest hate to recommendations of calm philosophy'.⁷⁹ These attacks changed the whole character of the radical agitation that had been building up around the LWMA's proposed methodology for instituting radical political reform.

For O'Connor, the shift in tone from the militancy of the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the NUWC to the deliberative gradualist moderation of the LWMA was entirely negative. Letters in a newly available collection of LWMA

⁷⁵ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, ff. 3-6, 13 July 1836,; ff. 35-36, n.d.

⁷⁶ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 1, ff. 135-36, 28 October 1837.

⁷⁷ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 1, ff. 137-39, 27 November 1837.

⁷⁸ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 1, f. 146, n.d.

⁷⁹ *London Dispatch*, no.76, 25 February 1838, p. 604; no.77, 4 March 1838, p. 612.

correspondence at the British Library reveal the kind of radicals whose support the LWMA had successfully courted. Correspondence supportive of the aims and methods of the LWMA came from Sir William Molesworth, William Ewart MP, David Mallock, Daniel Whittle Harvey MP, J. Silk Buckingham, Rigby Wason, Dr. John Bowring, J. S. Mill, Joseph Hume MP, Thomas Birkbeck, Arthur Trevelyan, George Rogers and William Carpenter between August 1836 and August 1838.⁸⁰ This was on top of their links to the Benthamites, Francis Place and Dr. J. R. Black, and the joint committee for drawing up the Charter which included Daniel O'Connell. Such links had also dissatisfied the more militant members of the LWMA, notably George Julian Harney who began the trend of more militant radicals labelling the LWMA as middle-class tools.⁸¹ It was soon picked up by O'Connor and Augustus Harding Beaumont, two former, if lukewarm, supporters of the LWMA who owned the two new and prominent radical journals, the *Northern Star* and *Northern Liberator*.⁸² Co-operation with moderate and parliamentary radicals attracted strong opposition, such as Beaumont's charges that Lovett and the LWMA were corrupt for being (falsely) linked to a renewed metropolitan, middle-class radical, anti-newspaper stamp

⁸⁰ BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f.11, Carpenter to Lovett, 7 August 1836; f. 14, Sir William Molesworth to Lovett, 6 March 1837; f. 15, William Ewart to Lovett, 28 October 1837; f. 32, J. S. Mill to Lovett, n.d.; f. 44, D. W. Harvey to Lovett, 31 March 1837; f. 47, Dr Bowring to Lovett, 24 September 1837; f. 57, J. Silk Buckingham to Lovett, 2 May 1837; f. 63, Birkbeck to Lovett, 11 June 1838; f. 73, David Mallock to Lovett, 6 March 1837; f. 76, Arthur Trevelyan to Lovett, 21 August 1838; f. 81, W. S. Crawford, 26 March 1838; f.84, Rigby Wason to Lovett, 27 May 1837; f. 98, George Rogers to Lovett, 14 September 1838; f. 103, Joseph Hume to Lovett, 1 June 1838.

⁸¹ A. R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge. A Portrait of George Julian Harney* (London, 1958), pp. 1-27.

⁸² On the *Northern Star* see: Eric Glasgow, 'The Establishment of the Northern Star Newspaper', *History*, XXXIX (1954), 54-67 and from a different perspective see: James Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the Northern Star', *International Review of Social History*, XXI (1976), 51-97. On the *Northern Liberator* see: Joan Hugman, "'A Small Drop of Ink': Tyneside Chartism and the Northern Liberator', in Ashton, Fyson and Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp.24-47 and on A.H. Beaumont: William Henry Maehl, Jr., 'Augustus Hardin Beaumont: Anglo-American Radical, (1798-1838)', *International Review of Social History*, XIV (1969), 237-51.

agitation.⁸³

It was O'Connor whose growing popularity and gift for making mud stick who really made the slurs on the character of the LWMA damaging.⁸⁴ Anxious to draw upon the class-consciousness developed in the factory movement, trade union and anti-Poor Law struggles and leading on from the violent language used by such Tory anti-Poor Law campaigners as the Rev. J. R. Stephens and Richard Oastler, O'Connor developed a rhetoric of class interests to advance support for the People's Charter. He utilised a rhetoric of the threat of social disorder and, if provoked to constitutional defence, possibly revolution. Opposition to any collaboration by the LWMA with 'middle class' gradualism was thus a strong feature of O'Connor's brand of radicalism. O'Connor accused the LWMA of collaborating with a 'Committee of Capitalists' for co-operating with the Commons' Select Committee on Trades' Combinations and he questioned the working class character of the organisation's membership:

Let those with unshorn chins, blistered hands, and fustian jackets, read the occupations of some of the subscribers to the document, and the bubble bursts ... The greater part of those gentlemen who addressed me [the LWMA] belong to the Fine Arts ... I do more real work in a week than they perform in a year.⁸⁵

Had, asked O'Connor, radicals like Lovett, Hetherington and Cleave, abandoned their previous convictions? Their conduct in co-operating with O'Connell and participating in a hostile enquiry into trade unions suggested that they had, and opened them to the hostility of 'genuine' radicals, those firmly on the side of

⁸³. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, f. 175, n.d.

⁸⁴. On O'Connor's early career and growth in popularity see: James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 7-59.

⁸⁵. *Northern Star*, no.15, 24 February 1838, p. 4.

working men. O'Connor challenged the LWMA over its working class character, arguing with total conviction that as a demagogue he was judged on the correctness of his counsel. With characteristic ebullience O'Connor concluded that the LWMA 'shall either crush me or I will annihilate your Association'.⁸⁶ Such was the tone of O'Connor's attacks and so they continued, and were effective. Dr. Taylor, writing the history of the Chartist Convention of 1839, revealed the suspicions, eroded by subsequent experience, which he had entertained of the LWMA: '... I am bound to confess that I came to London very prejudiced against Lovett and all who belonged to the Working Men's Association, looking upon them as no better than the tools of Place, Grote, Hume, Brougham, and the other leaders of the Malthusian party'.⁸⁷

The LWMA had, though, pressured O'Connell and had satisfied itself that no new combination laws were being considered.⁸⁸ They responded to O'Connor's charges by labelling him the great 'I AM' of Chartism and defended their conduct in giving evidence to the Select Committee as Trade Union members anxious to affect the outcome of the investigation.⁸⁹ No attack was made on O'Connor as a self-proclaimed aristocrat having the nerve to charge a working-class organisation with being 'middle class'. Though suspicious of 'gentlemen' radicals, the LWMA project of courting moderate radical support prevented their attacking O'Connor on grounds of class. O'Connor was attacked as a demagogue in forthright terms but the door to co-operation and toleration, however, was left open.⁹⁰ O'Connor's threat to crush them, the LWMA argued, had been in 'bad spirit' but the LWMA maintained that it 'entertain[ed] no desire to crush you, or any other person pursuing an honest object - even though we

⁸⁶. *Northern Star*, no.16, 3 March 1838, p. 4.

⁸⁷. *Northern Star*, no.102, 26 October 1839, p. 3.

⁸⁸. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 276 a-g, 12 February 1838.

⁸⁹. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 166-67, n.d.

⁹⁰. *Northern Star*, no.15, 24 February 1838, p. 4.

should differ about the means of its accomplishment'.⁹¹ The gap between the LWMA and other more militant radicals on the matter of moral and 'physical' force was one of strategy rather class or ideology. The LWMA was not a corrupt radical body tied to middle-class and parliamentary funds and opinion. It subverted a Tory coronation meeting in 1837, objected strongly to military interference at Newcastle in 1838 and urged the trades to enter the political fray.⁹² Henry Vincent, a fiery LWMA orator, came in for criticism over his militant tone. A letter from Owen's lawyer, W. H. Ashurst, to Lovett regarding the Palace Yard meeting of September 1838 commended Lovett's speech but regarded Vincent as rather unhelpful to the cause:

Cannot some of the leading friends amongst the working classes give a hint to Vincent of the injustice and impolicy of scalding?
What does it prove? Who does it convert?
Could any set of men delegate another as their Agent, to call names?⁹³

The LWMA was a genuinely radical and often outspoken working-class radical association. If we look at the positions adopted by the LWMA in its early years we do not see the middle class poodles presented by O'Connor and others. Rather we see a remarkably consistent strategy in which *all* non-working class radicals were assessed according to how consistently they stuck to radical principles in the face of expediency. O'Connell came in for a good deal of criticism for standing not for genuine liberty but for the 'monopolizing, profit-mongering crew of greedy upstart Whig tyrants'.⁹⁴ O'Connell was to be co-

⁹¹. *London Dispatch*, no.78, 11 March 1838 , p. 620.

⁹² Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 193-94, n.d.; f. 213, 242 a letters between the Home Office and William Lovett, July to August 1838.

⁹³. BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 75, Letter from W.H. Ashurst to William Lovett, 25 September 1838.

⁹⁴. *London Dispatch*, no.4, 8 October 1836, p. 32.

operated with as far as he contended for radical principles but attacked wherever he succumbed to expediency. O'Connell's loyal Irish Catholic support precisely represented the sort of sacrificing of principles for lionization that so diluted the potency of radicalism. 'How long', asked Hetherington, 'will mankind continue to sacrifice the very *essence of the thing* they are contending for, to the *name*? How long will they yield a blind devotion to the *name*, instead of an enlightened attachment to the *cause* which he advocates?'⁹⁵ O'Connell had made a handsome contribution to religious toleration against bigotry but had made none for universal suffrage and was thus not to be considered a true radical.⁹⁶ More positively, the radical MP, J. A. Roebuck, was lauded for his advocacy of democracy in the Commons where he was 'the leader of British democracy'. Roebuck, it was noted, had supported the Poor Law 'but we co-operate with him, and joyfully give our mite of aid to his powerful talents, to enable the people to obtain self-government by universal suffrage, and thus render impracticable any measures repugnant to the people's will and welfare, by Mr Roebuck or anyone else.'⁹⁷ Likewise the radical MP, J. Temple Leader, was a 'manly democrat' whom the working classes should support and Grote, despite the limitations of the ballot without manhood suffrage, was a sincere radical reformer.⁹⁸

The anti-Poor Law agitator Richard Oastler provided a different case. Far from being influenced by Philosophic Radicalism as the radical supporters of the new Poor Law tended to be, Oastler was a self-declared 'ultra Tory'. Whereas Roebuck was supported for his democracy despite his support for the Poor Law, Oastler was supported for his anti Poor Law activity because he was 'the friend

⁹⁵. *London Dispatch*, no.6, 23 October 1836, p. 42.

⁹⁶. *London Dispatch*, no.14, 18 December 1836, p. 110.

⁹⁷. *London Dispatch*, no.21, 5 February 1837, p. 152; no.24, 26 February 1837, p. 188; no.41, 25 June 1837, p. 321; no.42, 2 July 1837, p. 333.

⁹⁸. *London Dispatch*, no.34, 7 May 1837, p. 269; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, Lovett to Colchester Working Men's Association, n.d., f. 166.

of the rights of labour' despite his opposition to universal suffrage.⁹⁹ The LWMA's opposition to the Poor Law was, if not loud, then very consistent and carried conviction.¹⁰⁰ Oastler, however, remained suspicious of the LWMA. Whigs had introduced the new Poor Law, argued Oastler responding to an invitation to honorary LWMA membership, and Whig Radicals supported the LWMA.¹⁰¹

O'Connor sought not moderate working class support but tapped into a nascent militancy among certain groups drawn directly from the anti-Poor Law movement. O'Connor's radicalism increasingly reflected the militant tones adopted by the anti-Poor Law campaign. As part of the anti-Poor Law triumvirate O'Connor adopted a scornful posture towards those considered 'Whig' radicals and a militant and violent tone from the platform.¹⁰² The radicals in parliament were not 'friends of the people' unless they accepted the 'whole hog' of the people's demands. This came for O'Connor to mean not just an acceptance of the People's Charter but its leadership by the 'unshorn chins' and as O'Connor was their self-declared and immensely popular champion, accepting him as the movement's 'father'.¹⁰³

^{99.} *London Dispatch*, no.34, 7 May 1837, p. 269; no.35, 14 May 1837, p. 273. The postscript to Richard Oastler's letter to William Lovett (BL, Lovett MS, Add.78161, f.62, 14 August 1837), outlines the reason for his opposition to universal suffrage: "Universal Suffrage" would initially give all the power into the hands of the working classes - and therefore I cannot support it - I am for no Tyranny, either from the many or the few but I cordially agree with what you say "that all classes should be equally represented." That is, that property ought to have representation equalling that of the working classes.

^{100.} *London Dispatch*, no.14, 18 December 1836, p. 110; no.17, 8 January 1837, p. 129.

^{101.} BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, Oastler to Lovett, f. 61, 14 August 1837.

^{102.} T. M. Kemnitz and J. Fleurange, 'J. R. Stephens and the Chartist Movement', *International Review of Social History*, XIX (1974): 211-27; Michael S. Edwards, *Purge This Realm. A Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens* (London, 1994), pp. 38-76.

^{103.} Timothy R. Burns, 'Jargons of Class: Rhetoric and Leadership in British Labour Politics, 1830-1880', in Burke, Peter and Porter, Roy, *Languages and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 155-81.

The *People's Charter* and radical organisation.

The 'six points' of the Charter were first laid down at meetings of six LWMA members and six Radical MPs on 31 May and 7 June 1837 and formulated in detail in the *People's Charter* published on 8 May 1838.¹⁰⁴ This document very quickly became the cornerstone of a national agitation for manhood suffrage. It was a powerful radical blueprint for the reform of the House of Commons that satisfied existing radical agitations across classes and issues. The Charter laid down a programme that was in many ways familiar to advocates of the traditional radical programme stretching from the late eighteenth century and Major Cartwright through Cobbett and Hunt in the 1820s. What gave it resonance in the late 1830s was its post-Reform Act context. As Miles Taylor has argued, the LWMA was not just laying down an unoriginal programme to stifle 'Old Corruption' but was proposing a 'truly revolutionary' whole new electoral system based not on property and virtual representation but on manhood suffrage and mandatory government. 'The famous six points', Taylor argues, 'were submerged within a much more detailed and far-reaching scheme for overhauling and simplifying the machinery of elections newly established six years earlier'.¹⁰⁵ The LWMA sat on the tail of a critique of 'Old Corruption' in its call for simplified and cheaper government and it therefore appealed to Philosophic Radicals and moderate liberals. It was also, though, recommending a system of government that, from the perspective of the working-class radicals, opened up the possibility of politics directed by constituents, which 'would have revolutionised political life' and behind which 'lurked the threat of social revolution'.¹⁰⁶ Despite the association of the Charter with moderate and

^{104.} The joint committee included the MPs Daniel O'Connell, J. A. Roebuck, J. T. Leader, Charles Hindley, W. Sharman Crawford and Colonel Perronet Thompson and the LWMA members Lovett, Hetherington, Watson, Cleave, Richard Moore and Henry Vincent.

^{105.} Miles Taylor, 'The Six Points', pp. 11-12.

^{106.} Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the threat of revolution in*

parliamentary radicalism its legal and constitutional tone was adopted by even the most militant radicals and it formed the basis of working-class radical politics from its publication through to the early 1850s.¹⁰⁷

The very process of constructing the Charter served to underline that the whole Chartist movement was derived from a moderate radical strategy. Between January 1837 and April 1838 the LWMA was engaged in a project with a section of parliamentary radicals to draw up a joint statement of radical demands which was to be presented to the House of Commons in the form of a legislative Bill. A meeting at the Crown and Anchor in March 1837 had provided the initial basis for radical co-operation along the lines of a Petition whose points would later become the demands of the Charter (excluding only equal electoral districts from the later six points). The support shown at this meeting by liberal MPs led to their being courted for a more formal alliance on a common programme.¹⁰⁸ So far was this programme unifying that James O'Brien, at that time engaged in a quarrel with the LWMA,¹⁰⁹ commented on the absence of division at the Crown

Britain, 1789-1848 (Manchester, 2000), p. 93.

^{107.} See, for example, James A. Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom'; John Belchem, 'Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in early nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 6 (1981), 1-32.

^{108.} BL, LWMA minutes, Add. 37773, ff. 31-34, 24 January 1837; f. 38, 21 February 1837; f. 39, 7 March 1837; ff. 45-46, 18 April 1837.

^{109.} Hetherington's *London Dispatch* had been engaged in a rancorous dispute with John Bell's *London Mercury* for whom O'Brien wrote. The Central National Association, an alliance between Cambridgeshire farmers led by James Bernard and mainly London-based radicals (but including O'Connor), was formed in early 1837. Initial correspondence between Bernard and the LWMA (BL, LWMA minutes, Add. 37773, f. 8, 31 July 1836; f. 9, 7 August 1836; f. 10, 14 August 1836) gave way to attacks by Hetherington on the 'Tory radical' Bernard: *London Dispatch*, no.9, 13 November 1836, p. 65; no.11, 27 November 1836, p. 83; no.29, 2 April 1837, p. 233; no.30, 9 April 1837, p. 236; no.36, 21 May 1837, p. 284; no.38, 4 June 1837, p. 300; no.39, 11 June 1837, p. 308; no.48, 13 August 1837, p. 343. Bell and O'Brien responded by criticising the 'sham radicalism' and exclusivity of the LWMA and its links with Dr. J. R. Black (who it said, had penned the *Dispatch* attacks on the CNA). Bell was also put out at the *Mercury* being left out of the LWMA list of recommended newspapers: *London Mercury*, no.28, 26 March 1837, p. 217; no.29, 2 April 1837, p. 227, 228; no.30, 9 April 1837, p. 233, 236-37; no.31, 16 April 1837, p. 241; no.37, 28 May 1837, p. 289; no.38, 4 June 1837, p.300; no.40, 18 June 1837, p. 511. See also: Gregory Claeys, 'A Utopian

and Anchor meeting:

we had neither toryism nor whiggery, nor sham-radicalism. I verily believe, there was not a single mock-liberal in the room. – the spirit of humbug was completely gone. – There was but one creed, and that was – *Universal Suffrage, and no Compromise!* – Every man of the assembled thousands was going the “whole hog,” and for going it speedily. – No tergiversations [*sic*] – no shuffling – no mental reservations.¹¹⁰

It is interesting to see the phrase ‘whole hog’ associated with the LWMA-liberal radical alliance project as it was later used by O’Connor and others to distinguish ‘true’ Chartism, which did not collaborate with moderates, and ‘false’ Chartism which did. O’Brien also felt no compunction in naming moderate LWMA speakers (Lovett and Robert Hartwell), as well as more militant recommendations (Charles Neesom and G. J. Harney), as potential replacements for himself at a Manchester meeting of non-electors.¹¹¹

The efforts of the LWMA to forge support from amongst liberal MPs continued with the meetings between LWMA members and radical MPs to forge a more concrete alliance. Their object was ‘to ascertain how far members of Parliament were prepared to make exertions for carrying those principles into practice which from their speeches and writings we believed most of them to entertain’.¹¹² At the meetings, although sympathy was affected to the objects of the LWMA, only William Sharman Crawford and John Temple Leader offered any real encouragement to adopt further practical steps for an alliance. O’Connell

Tory Revolutionary at Cambridge: the Political Ideas and Schemes of James Bernard, 1834-1839’, *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 455-78.

¹¹⁰. *London Mercury*, no.25, 5 March 1837, p. 193.

¹¹¹. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 88, n.d.

¹¹² Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, ff. 51-52, 31 May 1837.

suggested a new pragmatic radical body of ‘practical men’ who would

... accept the assistance of all persons honestly disposed to concur in the carrying into effect any part of these improvements.

They will accept any instalment as so much paid of this truly National Debt – but they seek for – demand and insist upon the entire – neither will they ever consent to forego or abandon any part of that entire accepting portions or instalments of their rights only the better to enable them to obtain the residue.¹¹³

Lovett was quick to point out that such a body existed already in the LWMA and the MPs agreed a lukewarm pledge to assist the LWMA and to draw up a Bill embodying radical principles. It fell, however, to Lovett and Francis Place to complete the Bill.¹¹⁴ This critical document in British radical history formed the programmatic core of a vast social movement that was to rock the political status quo for the next decade. Writing in 1895 John Bates of Queensbury noted the unifying quality that the People’s Charter engendered. There had been little radical unity of aim and method and hopes of political accomplishment were slim he recalled, until ‘in 1838, the “People’s Charter” was drawn up ... defining the urgent demands of the working classes, we felt we had a real bond of union; and so transformed our Radical Associations into local Chartist centres.’¹¹⁵ That John Bates associated the Charter with the demands of the working classes was a success for the LWMA in the sense of attracting literally hundreds of existing working class radical bodies to the adoption of its Charter and, significantly, the many Working Men’s Associations set up across the country in imitation of the

^{113.} BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, f. 53, 7 June 1837.

^{114.} BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, ff. 45-46, 18 April 1837; f. 50, 23 May 1837; f. 51, 31 May 1837; ff. 53-54, 7 June 1837; f. 62, 15 August 1837; f. 82, 5 December 1837; f. 100, 20 March 1838; f. 101, 27 March 1838; f. 102, 3 April 1838; f. 105, 1 May 1838, f. 105; f. 106, 8 May 1838; f. 107, 22 May 1838. BL, Place Papers, Add. 27820, Set 55, ff. 8-10, n.d.

^{115.} *John Bates, of Queensbury. The Veteran Reformer. A Sketch of his Life* (Queensbury, 1895; reprinted NY, 1986), n.p.

LWMA. The contribution of the LWMA in this regard is generally overlooked. If Dorothy Thompson is correct to point out the importance of existing radical bodies in forming the movement this should not overlook what was *new* about Chartism.¹¹⁶ The LWMA did a great deal in the years 1837 to 1838 to foster a growing working-class radical consciousness and organisation which it promoted to operate in tandem with its efforts with parliamentary radicals.

Radical missionaries.

Philip Howell has emphasised the importance of political lecturing to the building of a national Chartist movement, emphasising its place in a wider Chartist political culture that reflected its democratic ambitions. Undoubtedly oratory, with a radical press, was critical to the establishment and maintenance of viable political communication within a broad democratic movement. But Howell restricts his analysis to the NCA of the early 1840s and explicitly places the LWMA outside of a platform movement.¹¹⁷ LWMA members were, though, sent out by the LWMA across the country and in many instances were asked to attend meetings as delegates and to give radical lectures. The *Twopenny Dispatch* noted of the LWMA that ‘Almost every man in it is capable of speaking in public well - many of them eloquently’.¹¹⁸ Radical communication was as important to the LWMA as it was to the O’Connorite mainstream.

Henry Vincent and John Cleave toured through Yorkshire in September 1837, where public meetings were addressed in Huddersfield, Lepton, Halifax and Bradford and Working Men’s Associations were formed in Hull, Leeds,

¹¹⁶ Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 60-61.

¹¹⁷ Philip Howell, “Diffusing the light of liberty” : the Geography of Political Lecturing in the Chartist Movement’, in Stephen Roberts (ed.), *The People’s Charter. Democratic Agitation in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 2003), p. 116.

¹¹⁸ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 9, n.d.

Gomersall and Almondbury. In the same month Hetherington announced his intention to commence a radical tour and was appointed a 'Missionary' of the LWMA. In May 1838 Vincent was given credentials to put the Charter to the people of Bath, which was the beginning of his long-running Chartist association with Bath and the West of England. In October 1838, Robert Hartwell was sent at the request of James Loveless to organise the working-class radicals of Dorchester. Further records of localities to which LWMA delegates were sent were Nottingham, Sheffield, Bolton, Barnsley, Blackburn, Middleton, Bristol, Trowbridge, Northampton, Colchester, Ipswich, Norwich, Greenwich, Chelmsford, Manchester and Birmingham, but many other localities were also visited, especially by the indefatigable Vincent who toured Lancashire and Yorkshire and whose temperament and oratorical ability could fit easily into more militant settings. Most prominent LWMA members generally were of limited flair on the stump. Their style followed their method and their stern, sober and educational approach was Dickens' Gradgrind compared to the circus of O'Connor's mass platform. But differing style did not mean difference as to radical substance and intent, radical political lecturing - the transmission of radical ideas to effect political and social change - was central to the activism of the LWMA.¹¹⁹

At many of the localities visited, Working Men's Associations were formed, either around an existing working-class radical nucleus or building new radical consciousness and organisation. According to Dorothy Thompson's appendix of Chartist localities, a total of one hundred and eighty one Working Men's Associations were extant in 1839.¹²⁰ The moderate tone and legalism of the

¹¹⁹. BL, LWMA minutes, Add. 37773, f. 62, 8 August 1837; f. 65, 12 September 1837; f. 67, 19 September 1837; f. 108, 29 May 1838; f. 109, 12 June 1838; f. 112, 10 July 1838; f. 117, 7 August 1838; f. 124, 2 October 1838; f. 126, 16 October 1838; f. 127, 23 October 1838; f. 129, 30 October 1838; ff. 129-30, 6 November 1838; ff. 130-31, 13 November 1838; f. 131, 20 November 1838; f. 132, 27 November 1838; f. 132, 5 December 1838; f. 133, 11 December 1838; f. 135, 2 January 1839; f. 135, 9 January 1839; f. 136, 16 January 1839; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 109, 128, 136-37, n.d.

¹²⁰. Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 341-68.

LWMA were likewise influential, witness Barrhead WMA emphasising its role as one of 'enlightenment', as opposed to 'controversy with the capitalists', in April 1837; or the commendation of the LWMA at an Edinburgh Radical meeting of September 1838. At the formation of Leeds WMA in 1837, John Cleave promoted a rhetoric of self-improvement in contrast to appeals for social equality from J.F. Bray and George White.¹²¹ But this moderation was not vacillation or liberal co-option as O'Connor presented it. In late 1837 the LWMA wrote to the Westminster Reform Society as to the need for full measures of reform and responded angrily, in correspondence with the Leeds WMA, at a claim in the *Northern Star* that the LWMA was supporting a partial suffrage Bill of D. W. Harvey. 'We belong to Democracy', they retorted, 'in the broadest sense of the term we are Democrats'.¹²²

This does not square well with an early Chartist movement that supposedly owed little to a marginal LWMA. The LWMA was of vital importance in building the foundation and programme from which the Chartist movement grew. Its decline may well have been inevitable, however, for, as John Bates noted, the demands of the Charter became those of the working classes and class independence existed in constant tension with political pragmatism. If the leadership of the LWMA could have steered a course to successful reform it never had the chance to try. By mid 1839 O'Connor and the strategy of class confrontation and the mass platform had carried the growing movement and pushed the LWMA and moderation aside.

¹²¹. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, ff. 49-50, n.d.; ff. 99-100, n.d.; Part 2, f. 239, n.d.

¹²². Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, ff. 144 a-b, 29 November 1837; Part 2, f.157, n.d.

Chartism, moderation and the middle classes.

There was a clear tendency within Chartism that emerged from a different strategic background to that of O'Connor and was not 'middle class'. It was moderate but in its heart beat a working-class presence. This was true of the LWMA and was true too of the BPU in the more limited sense that they recognised the need for working class agitation to carry forward a radical agenda in Parliament. Moderation and class co-operation for these organisations was the way forward for radical political demands. To them, the mass platform utilising the violent language and rhetorical threat associated with O'Connor went too far in its attempt to shake the British establishment into frightened acquiescence. The BPU had no objection to using a rhetoric of ultimate physical force of a more cautious type than that deployed by O'Connor but adopted a moral force position in response to a perceived too sharp a drift to physical force. Also the reality of the task it had taken on forced the BPU to acknowledge the difficulties of its position. As it was the working classes that were to force the suffrage issue, the movement must have a radical organisational base. The *Birmingham Journal* argued that 'great public meetings are admirable for kindling and spreading the zeal of the people; for real business they are valueless. They are the fire that subdues the sullen metal to softness; the fashion must be impressed upon it by the hand of the workman.'¹²³ But the BPU leadership wanted to lead the movement and this did not accord with the desire for independence of working-class radicals. For the time being though, the moderate but working-class based movement around the Charter was noted by the liberal press and initially attracted some sympathy as an advanced liberal campaign disrupted by O'Connor and the anti-Poor Law leadership.¹²⁴

^{123.} *Birmingham Journal*, no. 675, 5 May 1838, p. 41.

^{124.} Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 1, f. 34, 2 March 1837; f. 47, 4 April 1837; f. 80, 4 June 1837; f. 81, 11 June 1837; ff. 85-86, 2 July 1837; f. 151, n.d.; Part 2, f. 200a, n.d.; f. 214, n.d.; ff. 214-15, 8 July 1838; f. 221, n.d.; f. 233, 12 August 1838; f. 235, 26 August 1838; ff. 252-58, n.d.

Take, for example, the case of the *London Dispatch* from April 1838, after it had ended its radical proprietorship (Hetherington) and editorship (A. H. and A. J. Beaumont) and the liberal George Glenny had assumed ownership. To begin with Glenny stood by Chartism as an agitation of principle and not threats - the LWMA steering the right course. The People's Charter was regarded as a 'remarkably temperate and enlightened address' and the paper welcomed the rapid progress of the People's Charter agitation and its basis as a programme for the unity of working and middle classes, of 'the people':

They [middle classes] begin to perceive that it is only by making common cause with the intelligent portion of the working classes for Universal Suffrage, that they can extend the franchise with any well-grounded hope of really reforming our institutions, or of correcting the errors and elevating the character of the great body of the people.¹²⁵

This perception was promoted by the 'just views and high moral tone' of the LWMA. The emergent working and middle class alliance for political reform was recognised and accepted as being led by the working classes and followed by the middle classes:

... all that portion of the middle classes whose sentiments are democratic, and all the leading men of the working classes, are beginning to understand their identity of interests, and are coming to good understanding, which will at once lead to an honest and hearty co-operation.¹²⁶

For the *London Dispatch*, the criticism of O'Connor in other liberal papers did not detract from the force of the agitation for the Charter conducted by Lovett

¹²⁵ *London Dispatch*, no.95, 8 July 1838, p. 753.

¹²⁶ *London Dispatch*, no. 96, 15 July 1838, p. 761.

and Vincent, the 'true representatives' of the working classes. O'Connor, the *Dispatch* argued, was not representative of the working classes and damaged Charter-based radicalism through his associated physical force rhetoric. Fear of violence and threat to property were relieved by the efforts of the LWMA and the *Dispatch* defended the Charter and particularly universal suffrage against attacks in the press. Later it welcomed the *Declaration of Rights* that was adopted by the Chartist Convention of 1839.¹²⁷ If support for the Charter is used to define a Chartist then the *Dispatch* can be described as a Chartist publication. If a tone of class hostility marked the *Northern Star* and *Northern Liberator* (the accepted archetypal Chartist journals) and the vast majority of Chartist working men supported these journals, this should not be taken to exclude moderate liberals and their publications from the movement. Class consciousness was certainly an important part of the Chartist experience but it was not the only or the defining aspect.

Just as the *London Dispatch* supported the LWMA, so the LWMA supported the paper by recommending it as suitable reading material for the working classes. It also recommended newspapers which adopted similar moderate liberal and universal suffrage-supporting lines, such as the *True Sun*, *Constitutional* and *True Scotsman*.¹²⁸ This sort of posture of an advanced guard recommending journals of its taste may be unpalatable to historians of left-wing hue but to label

¹²⁷. *London Dispatch*, no.157, 15 September 1839, p. 4.

¹²⁸. Some considerable debate went on as to which journals were indeed suitable for the working classes. The LWMA resolved (BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, f. 15, 25 September 1836) to recommend the *Constitutional* newspaper as 'sincere towards the rights of the people' and wrote to the Edinburgh-based *The True Scotsman*, edited by John Fraser (no.5, 17 November 1838, n.p.), welcoming its tone and content. The newspapers ordered for the LWMA reading room (BL, LWMA Minutes, f. 25, 22 November 1836) were *Penny Political Magazine*, *Penny Magazine*, *Chambers' Journal*, *Mirror*, *Companion to the Newspaper*. This was altered (f. 25, 29 November 1836) and the *Penny Political Magazine* was replaced by the *New Moral World*. It was later agreed to purchase (f. 39, 7 March 1839) *Bronterre's National Reformer*. A sub-committee was formed (f. 45, 11 April 1837) to compose an address recommending the *True Sun*, *Constitutional* and *London Dispatch* to the working classes. A motion was carried later (f. 130, 6 November 1838) recommending and taking in the *True Scotsman* and *Birmingham Journal* and to discontinue *New Moral World* and *Penny Magazine*.

such a position as 'middle class' is to assume utilitarianism and liberalism as a capitalist ideology and to lapse into seeing the mass platform and raucous class rhetoric as somehow more working class. Without taking class in its broad analytical utility out of the equation historians have begun to see popular Liberalism not as the defeat of working class ideology but as a process of negotiation where class consciousness (both working and middle class) born of the radical experiences of the 1830s and 1840s emerged in a loose, pragmatic, ambiguous and problematic alliance of progressive politics. So we can see the support of liberal newspapers and the sympathy of the propertied and professional classes for the LWMA not as evidence of the middle class character (as O'Connor argued) and ideological shortcomings of the LWMA (as some socialists have argued) but a pragmatic acceptance of radical-liberal class alliance by Chartists whose ultimate aim was social reform along co-operative-socialist lines.

For a time the LWMA was nationally influential in providing the programme for a resurgent radical movement. The revived BPU and its proposals for a National Petition and Convention were also important for forging radical unity.¹²⁹ The renewed commitment of the BPU to suffrage reform was welcomed by the LWMA and they sought its input on the content of the Charter (though the BPU was unenthusiastic).¹³⁰ The LWMA resolved shortly after its completion to put the Charter to the Glasgow meeting, organised by the BPU for 21 May 1838, sending the honorary members Thomas Murphy and Rev. Dr. Wade as delegates.¹³¹ At the meeting the LWMA Charter was adopted alongside the Petition and Convention proposed by the BPU. The radicalism of the BPU was pervaded with a vision of Birmingham class unity and a sense of the national leadership position of the Birmingham middle class. It had adopted, however,

¹²⁹. Carlos Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 125-46.

¹³⁰. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 158-59, 7 December 1837; f. 159, 7 January, 1838; f. 174 a, n.d.; ff. 208-13, n.d.

¹³¹. BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, f. 106, 15 May 1838.

‘an expedient appeal to a single class on the basis of a political democracy in which the Ultra-Tory leaders of the union did not genuinely believe’.¹³²

This was the sort of development that the LWMA had sought to encourage - middle class radicals forced to look to the working classes for the furtherance of radical reform. From mid-1837 the LWMA had sent its addresses to and corresponded with the BPU and in December sent Hetherington to address the BPU council on the importance of the principle of universal suffrage, subsequently adopting an address welcoming its adoption by the BPU. Despite an initial lack of interest in the LWMA deriving from the BPU’s elevated opinion of itself, by April 1838 the two organisations were in active correspondence and in May and June mutually approved each others’ radical documents. The LWMA was invited to the great Birmingham meeting at Holloway Head on 6 August and the common moral force position of the two bodies became clearer as the movement progressed and as O’Connor’s brand of physical force challenged moderate leadership.¹³³ The challenge was to be poorly contested by the moderates, due largely to the ambivalent position of the BPU towards the growing Chartist movement. Thomas Attwood was the cohesive force behind the revival of the BPU but his commitment to universal suffrage was always tied to acceptance of the leadership by the BPU of the agitation. Once the movement began to shift towards O’Connor even in Birmingham, Attwood’s frail commitment to the cause waned and the middle class BPU leadership awaited an opportunity to retreat, with as much credibility intact as possible, back to the far more comfortable political world of newly-incorporated Birmingham.¹³⁴

¹³² Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 15-6, 110-24.

¹³³ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, f. 57, 27 June 1837; f. 83, 11 December 1837; f. 104, 24 April 1838; f. 106, 15 May 1838; f. 110, 29 May 1838; f. 109, 12 June 1838; ff. 110-11, 26 June 1838; ff. 114-15, 17 July 1838; f. 115, 24 July 1838. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 152-54, n.d.; ff. 180 a-b, n.d.; ff. 219-20, n.d.

¹³⁴ David J. Moss, *Thomas Attwood*, pp. 262-87.

The general shift in historians' analyses of Chartism can be summarised with reference to Birmingham. Trygve Tholfsen in the 1960s, building upon earlier work by Asa Briggs, saw Birmingham as a bastion of class harmony in the early nineteenth century.¹³⁵ The class conflict of the Chartist years was seen as untypical and as a product of O'Connor's influence on the movement. When this influence faded, it was argued, class alliance was quickly restored through the natural affinity between artisans and masters. Moral force radicalism from this reading was clearly the logical direction of working-class radicalism and explained the early emergence of liberal caucus politics in Birmingham. However, by the early-1980s Clive Behagg was arguing with some force that structural changes in the Birmingham economy, larger workshops and more machinery, had undermined working and middle class relations by the 1830s.¹³⁶ Thus independent working class radicalism was not a product of but a constituency for O'Connor. In this way, rather than the moral force Birmingham Chartist Church of the early 1840s being seen as a restoration of normal class relations, it fell outside of mainstream Chartism with its dynamism in changing socio-economic relations. It is my contention that the truth lies somewhere between these two positions. Doubtless industrialisation brought new class alignments in Birmingham as elsewhere that fuelled working-class consciousness. It was this consciousness, or at least the intellectually 'advanced' part of it, that the LWMA sought to mobilise as a dynamic radical force to achieve manhood suffrage. To do so it adopted a moderate line that had little appeal to raw class feeling, a position represented in Birmingham by the popular working-class politician, John Collins. It was O'Connor, learning from the passionate anti-Poor Law movement, who then successfully tapped a broader and

^{135.} Trygve Tholfsen, 'The Chartist Crisis in Birmingham', *International Review of Social History*, 3 (1958), 461-80 and 'The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus', *The Historical Journal*, 2 (1959), 161-84.

^{136.} Clive Behagg, 'An Alliance with the Middle Class: the Birmingham Political Union and Early Chartism', in J. Epstein and D. Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 59-86.

more amorphous sense of social grievance and class feeling as a source of support for Chartism.

The challenge to moderation.

Thus socio-economic structural shifts were important but so too were the political alignments that followed the Reform Act. It was to be the middle class leadership of the BPU and its assumption that its rightful place was to lead Birmingham radicalism that riled politically conscious Birmingham working men. Perhaps more powerful, though, was the way in which O'Connor in particular successfully associated moderation in the minds of working-class radicals with corruption and subjugation to middle-class leadership and expediency. Taint after taint in the pages of the *Northern Star* and the *Northern Liberator* and in pages after pages of reports of radical meetings, linked moderate radical strategy with 'middle class' politics, political exclusion and self-interest.

During 1838, however, a workable unity persisted as the new movement grew and O'Connor at first seemed happy to allow Attwood to be the figurehead of the new agitation.¹³⁷ The meetings in Glasgow in May 1838 and in Birmingham in August seemed to indicate a radical unity secured around a new Reform Bill and an agreement as to the need for legality. But the Palace Yard meeting in September 1838 displayed a tense atmosphere in which the LWMA speakers and the liberal MP John Temple Leader emphasised the moral, intellectual and temperate nature of the Charter agitation while the once LWMA-friendly John Fraser emphasised the role of O'Connor, and Robert Lowery and John Richardson waxed lyrical on the propriety of defensive arming.¹³⁸ Open

^{137.} *Northern Star*, no.37, 28 July 1838, p. 8.

^{138.} *Northern Star*, no.45, 22 September 1838, pp. 2-3.

hostility, though, did not break out until later in 1838. In September and October the Kersal Moor and Hartshead Moor meetings in the north brought a rising crescendo of rhetoric of defensive arming and physical force. However much O'Connor felt himself to be merely imitating the tactics of the BPU during the Reform Bill agitation, the BPU and moderate liberal supporters were mostly aghast at the turn the movement appeared to be taking. R. K. Salt and Robert Douglas of the BPU engaged in a dispute with O'Connor over his defence of Stephens and use of the rhetoric of arming.¹³⁹ The elected BPU Convention delegate, Thomas Clutton Salt, wrote to Lovett in October praising the 'high moral character' of the LWMA but expressed his distrust of 'physical forcers'.¹⁴⁰ In December Lovett attacked O'Connor and physical force at a London meeting but it was clear by this time that moderation would not carry the movement.¹⁴¹

While the BPU and LWMA had secured plenty of delegates to the Convention, it was clear that they felt increasingly isolated in the movement and correspondence began between the BPU and LWMA expressing mutual concern at the delegates being elected to the Convention from some localities - doubtless reference to the election of Stephens for Ashton-under-Lyne and of militants such as Peter Murray McDouall and George Julian Harney.¹⁴² The radical front that the LWMA had put together at the Palace Yard meeting deliberately excluded such militant speakers. There were those present who were prepared to talk of defensive arming, and for the LWMA and BPU this was folly enough. Others though, hanging on to this rhetoric, were unapologetically militant in tone. If revolution was at the back of, and difficult to pin down in, O'Connor's

^{139.} *Northern Star*, no.53, 17 November 1838, p. 8; no.54, 24 November 1838, p. 4; no.55, 1 December 1838, p. 4; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 147-74.

^{140.} Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 286 a-b, T. C. Salt to Lovett, 26 October 1838.

^{141.} *Northern Star*, no.59, 29 December 1838, p. 8.

^{142.} BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, f. 130, 13 November 1838; f. 133, 11 December 1838.

rhetoric, it was firmly nailed as a cap of liberty to the tricolour of Harney's speeches and writing.

Originally joining the LWMA and applauding its 'brilliant example', members of the East London Democratic Association (ELDA) became disillusioned with the LWMA's gradualist patience and continued association with Daniel O'Connell, who had attacked O'Connorite radicalism in late 1837. Harney, a leading ELDA figure, publicly attacked the LWMA and ceremoniously resigned with other ELDA members, Thomas Ireland and Charles Neesom.¹⁴³ Thereafter the ELDA went on to form a new association, the London Democratic Association (LDA), in direct opposition to the LWMA, declaring its support for O'Connor, Oastler and Stephens and seeing in the proposed Convention a means to violent revolution.¹⁴⁴ The challenge to radical moderation was vociferous and savage:

We deny that truckling to our enemies – of courting the support and countenance of the “respectables” are a part of the means to the regeneration of our fellow-countrymen. What is the inference we draw from this? Why, that the Working Men's Association are as an engine in the hands of some designing enemies ... of the working millions, whose endeavour is to concentrate, by the establishment of this, and other like delusions, the abilities and energies of the people, and then to nullify their effects.¹⁴⁵

The militancy was deliberate and designed to exert an insurrectionist tone to the wider Chartist movement. Harney claimed that 'in the DEMOCRATIC

^{143.} *London Dispatch*, no.28, 26 March 1837, p. 220; LWMA Minutes, Add: 37773, f. 87, 2 January 1838; f. 90, 9 January 1838; f. 91, 16 January 1838; f. 93, 7 February 1838; f. 94, 14 February 1838; ff. 97-98, 6 March 1838.

^{144.} Jennifer Bennett, 'The London Democratic Association 1837-41: a study in London Radicalism', in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 87-119.

^{145.} *Northern Star*, no.19, 24 March 1838, p. 7.

ASSOCIATION, the JACOBIN CLUB again lives and flourishes'.¹⁴⁶

We have seen that the Charter originated with the moral force - gradualist, educationalist and class collaborationist - approach to political reform of the LWMA. Historians in the past have tended to elevate the moderation of the LWMA or more recently to reject its moderation as 'middle class'. However, it has been shown that this approach was rooted in an expectation of radical social reform to follow the achievement of a large measure of political equality. The politics of the LWMA were deliberately moderate but not for its own sake. Its membership consisted of many leading metropolitan co-operative socialists and was composed exclusively of working men. Its commitment to radical class collaboration related both to the pragmatic need to attract as much support as possible to the cause of radical reform and to its rejection of class politics. The LWMA was class exclusive but only in so far as this was necessary to put independent pressure on to middle class and parliamentary radicals to commit to radical principles and reject political expediency. Through such means it was hoped that a large and widespread working-class radical movement would develop which would lead and patronise middle-class and parliamentary radicals, much in the manner that the LWMA allowed honorary non-working class members. Indeed the LWMA, during 1836 and 1837, succeeded in generating support amongst working-class radicals and middle-class and parliamentary radicals. But the alternative strategy of physical force as advanced particularly by O'Connor gained precedence, during the course of 1838, over moral force strategy. As the Convention drew near at the close of 1838, moral force Chartists must have looked with foreboding at the unfolding movement. The will of the BPU leadership was already waning and it would be the Convention delegates associated with the LWMA who would remain to try and maintain some grip on the reins of the Chartist movement.

¹⁴⁶. *London Democrat* no.2, 20 April 1839, p. 13.

Chapter III.

Moral force versus physical force.

The marginalisation of the LWMA in current Chartist historiography has led in turn to a rejection of the importance of the struggle between moral force Chartism and its physical force counterpart. For if moral force Chartism was not 'genuine' it could not by definition have played any important role in the story of Chartism. This chapter seeks to challenge this view and will argue that the struggle between moral and 'physical' force continued into 1839 and the Chartist Convention. Unity was briefly achieved through hopes of success but strategic differences present within the Convention were to be accentuated after its failure despite the relatively small and fluid distance between Chartists of both persuasions. Moral force Chartists were distinct from those, often middle class, delegates who resigned from the Convention during its course as the movement became firmly associated in the public mind with violence and demagoguery. Rather they sought to influence the course of Chartism from within its bounds and their efforts form an important part of the history of the Convention.

Moral and physical force: rhetoric or reality?

The moral and physical force divide above all other issues has dominated the study and teaching of Chartism. Well into the second half of the twentieth-century it was customary to understand the development of the Chartist movement in terms of the defeat of sensible moderation (represented by the LWMA and Lovett in particular) by the irrational forces of class hostility and mob oratory (represented by O'Connor and his followers). However, following E. P. Thompson's seminal *Making of the English Working Class* (1963), a new, neo-Marxist, emphasis emerged. A significant advance was made on the previous moderate liberal and labour history approaches in bringing the social dimension of radicalism more clearly into Chartist history. Chartism had been

told as politics fuelled by socio-economic distress in paradigms of Whig or labour history and emphasised the disputes between leading figures. The new history incorporated agency, localism and tradition into the historical experience of class.

By the later 1970s, with a new generation of historians having undertaken research involving the Chartist movement, a new analytical paradigm had been established. This located Chartism as subject to the influence of local conditions and political tradition but also firmly as a reaction to industrialisation and led by leaders responsive to working-class consciousness, rehabilitating O'Connor as a radical leader worthy of admiration.¹ Despite the widespread influence of Gareth Stedman Jones's 'Re-thinking Chartism' this paradigm has remained largely unchanged by the challenge of the linguistic turn. The importance of language and culture were accepted but the separation of language and ideology from socio-economic experience suggested by Stedman Jones was largely rejected.²

This change in Chartist historiography has impacted on the importance accorded to the moral-physical force debate. The neo-Marxist, socio-cultural interpretation of Chartism marginalised moral force Chartism as being tainted by middle-class ideology and money. A real and sustained moral force challenge to O'Connor and the Chartist mainstream has thus been played down. There has

¹ Most notably this paradigm was established by Dorothy Thompson and Edward Thompson and their research students, a group that still dominates publications on Chartist history.

² See, for example, Neville Kirk, 'In Defence of Class'; Dorothy Thompson, 'Who Were "the People" in 1842?', in M. Chase and I. Dyck (eds.), *Living and Learning*, pp.118-32. G. Stedman Jones's research students Miles Taylor and Jon Lawrence have, however, done much to try and reconcile what seem to have become two camps (post-modern, political versus social, class history). See: J. Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 163-86; M. Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 479-95. See also: R. McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1998), pp.14-29, 98-102.

been some emphasis on the diffuse use of a language of force in Chartism. Robert Sykes, for example, has written of a continuum of positions on force which Chartists occupied at different times.³ Certainly there was much shifting ground in Chartist rhetoric. Different Chartists at different times utilised different rhetorics of force. O'Connor in 1838 and 1839, encouraged by the popularity of J. R. Stephens and Richard Oastler, used his full oratorical skill in promoting an ambiguous physical force *braggadocio*, a line followed by the Great Northern Union.⁴ By the winter of 1839, however, with actual small-scale and unrealistic insurrectionary plans in place, O'Connor was urging caution.⁵ At several points between 1838 and 1840, moreover, O'Connor suggested that moral and physical force were two sides of the same coin - that physical force was the shadow of moral force.⁶ Henry Vincent, John Collins and Robert Lowery, by 1842 were all advocating middle class conciliation, while between 1837 and 1841 they were second only to O'Connor in their ability to deploy physical force rhetoric. William Lovett, by 1840 on the journey to arch-moderation and orthodox political economy, was prepared in 1839 to co-operate with physical force rhetoric, whatever his later misgivings. Local associations, for example the Sheffield Working Men's Association, lauded O'Connor at the same time as emphasising the elevation of the moral and intellectual condition of the working class and their political self-reliance.⁷

We may conclude, then, that the moral-physical force divide within Chartism was not a literal dispute between leaders over fixed positions and attitudes with regard to the utility of pacifism or violence. Most Chartists ultimately held the

³ Robert Sykes, 'Physical-Force Chartism: the Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839', *International Review of Social History*, XXX (1985), 207-36.

⁴ *Northern Star*, no.25, 5 May 1838, p. 8.

⁵ *Northern Star*, no.110, 21 December 1839, p. 3; no.114, 18 January 1840, p. 4.

⁶ *Northern Star*, no.5, 16 December 1837, p. 3; no.57, December 15 1838, p. 8.

⁷ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff.157-58, n.d.

same opinion, that legalism and moral force were critical until the movement acquired an organised and committed majority of public opinion. However, this does not do away with the need to look at why moral force and physical force rhetorics might be deployed against each other. J. R. Dinwiddy, in writing an overview of Chartism in the 1980s, noted that the militancy of O'Connor was rooted in commitment to the Chartist programme and working-class independence and argued that 'It was over matters such as these, rather than over the question of 'moral' versus 'physical' force, that the most important divisions among popular radicals occurred'.⁸ Yet we have seen, and will see further, that moral force Chartists were equally concerned with the integrity of the Charter and working-class political independence. Therefore, we are still left to answer why the moral-physical force debate was the most divisive issue in the early Chartist movement.

It may seem that what we have are rhetorical positions which shift like sands according to events and individual positioning. Rather than being a serious strategic division, the moral - physical force debate might appear merely to indicate unstable, even superficial, differences over the degree of rhetorical threat to be deployed from a common political position. But the categories of moral and physical force do remain useful analytical tools in understanding Chartism. Though a complex arena of linguistic struggle, these linguistic disputes represented real differences of position between radicals as well as reflecting cycles of optimism and pessimism in individuals and the movement. The use of the language of 'force' by O'Connor was part of a different approach to achieving the Charter from that of the LWMA, or indeed O'Brien and other social Chartists. Moral and physical force viewed as a rhetorical continuum, while useful in emphasising the fluid use of such language, fails to address the reasons for the continuity of the moral-physical force antagonism. We have seen that moral force Chartism was critical to the origins of Chartism but it also

⁸ J. R. Dinwiddy, 'Chartism', in *Radicalism and Reform in Britain, 1780-1850* (London, 1992), p. 409.

continued as an alternative to a prevailing strategy within the mainstream Chartist movement of rhetorical threat and the rejection of class alliance.

There was a meaning, then, to the deployment of the rhetoric of 'force', the essence of which was strategy. For a section of Chartism such as the LWMA and later the National Association, the means of achieving the Charter was crucial to the end - anything other than moral force, they argued, could end in catastrophic social results. The core of moral force was pragmatic acceptance of political facts, of the need to pursue radical political reform whilst not offending the political establishment to the point of bloody-minded resistance and, more hopefully, to bring sections of the radical-liberal middle-classes with them. O'Connor on the other hand had almost single-handedly created a confluence of anti-poor law and factory agitation into a mass Chartist platform. As such, it was modelled as the movement of the 1832 'brickbat' and was more unequivocally a movement of the working classes for political power to redress social grievances - it was designed precisely to unsettle the political establishment.

The rhetoric of force and Chartist strategy.

Henry Hunt and then Daniel O'Connell first used the language of moral force.⁹ It was used to counter the charges of revolutionary intentions claimed by their opponents to be the real object of radicalism and repeal. Thus the rhetoric of moral force was used to counter charges of revolutionary threat ascribed to the mobilisation mass-support. But O'Connor revelled in the posturing of the mass platform and when he began to be criticised for using rhetorical allusions to popular violence he responded by claiming that physical force was only the ultimate expression of moral force. Moral force Chartists likewise acknowledged the ultimate sanction of physical force. Hetherington, responding

⁹ John Belchem, 'Henry Hunt and the Evolution of the Mass Platform', *English Historical Review*, XCIII (1978), 739-73; John Belchem, *'Orator Hunt': Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* (Oxford, 1985).

to an attack by Place on his land reform ideas in mid-1837, saw the need for a moral force emphasis but accepted that physical force might, eventually, be necessary.¹⁰ Hetherington realised, though, that a vastly expanded and highly organised radical movement with a clear understanding of its aims and methods would be necessary to force home political reform against the united upper and middle classes with vast resources of real physical force at their disposal.¹¹ It was a question of emphasis. For the LWMA group of radicals it proved possible, through their intellectual inheritance and radical experience, to channel radical and co-operative-socialist enthusiasm into promoting a moderate agitation to attract radical men of influence and power into a fresh reform agitation. O'Connor, though, invigorated by his success in pushing a more militant rhetoric to a more vigorous north and north west in the throes of anti-Poor Law protest, considered that such a platform movement would provide the persuasion necessary to effect manhood suffrage. Such a belief was founded in the agitational fervour in the north, as Henry Vincent observed in 1838:

One feeling prevails in every town – or rather I should say two, feelings – the *first* a general and almost universal radical opinion – resolved to aid in *one more attempt* to obtain by peaceful means a full recognition of the universal rights of the people – and *second* an apparent fixed resolution to appeal to *arms* should this last moral effort fail ...¹²

O'Connor could appeal to such feelings and yet when questioned as to the likely alienation of potential supporters, as at a Sheffield Chartist meeting of 1838, respond that he was merely urging a constitutional mode of redress.¹³ This was supported by coverage in the *Northern Star* of Thomas Attwood's own

¹⁰ *London Dispatch*, no.7, 30 October 1836, p. 52; no.40, 18 June 1837, p. 313.

¹¹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no. 149, 12 April 1834, p. 74.

¹² Vincent to Minikin, 26 August 1838, quoted in Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, p. 119.

¹³ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 195-96, n.d.

commitment to the physical force threat in the 1831-32 reform agitation, which could be seen to legitimise Chartist physical force flourishes:

Here we have a Banker of great wealth, a Statesman of acknowledged ability. A Politician of unimpeached integrity, a Gentleman of acknowledged worth, setting the hobgoblin of revolution and disorder at defiance, and attaching himself to that question which others call dangerous, as the only means of national security and individual protection ... "*Even to the Death!*" [quoting Attwood at the Glasgow meeting]. How marvellously does this sentiment accord with those expressed in the objects of The Great Northern Union, "to use physical force *if necessary*".¹⁴

At the same Chartist meeting in Glasgow in July 1838, Dr. Taylor referred to the physical force policies of 'several excellent statesmen' and its glorious place in British history in 1688. O'Connor contrasted his own rhetoric, born of the people, to the moral force of 'those clever fellows who ground their arguments in metaphysics and abstract sciences' and backed Attwood to lead the new movement as 'a man honest and straightforward in his principles'.¹⁵ The ambiguous but loaded nature of physical force rhetoric was its strength. At a Halifax meeting in August 1838, Dr Fletcher urged the necessity of constitutional defence and arming whilst O'Connor noted the physical force recommendations of the middle-class radicals Attwood, O'Connell and Brougham as well as the Christian sanction of the Bible.¹⁶ What is more, Attwood himself was prepared to threaten, at Birmingham in mid-1838, that if the government rejected the new movement's demands for universal suffrage that working men 'would put a little gentle compulsion upon them'.¹⁷ The problems of the next year, however, were

¹⁴ *Northern Star*, no.29, 2 June 1838, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Northern Star*, no.37, 28 July 1838, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Northern Star*, no. 38, 4 August 1838, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Northern Star*, no.39, 11 August 1838, pp. 6-7.

presaged by the unwillingness of other leading middle-class BPU speakers to endorse physical force rhetoric - instead opposing 'bad laws' and claiming to promote a 'national position'. Whilst Attwood could be seen as a heroic 'friend of the people' (just as O'Connor was), any shift towards moderation could be presented as class betrayal.

We have seen how the moderation of the LWMA was represented in just this way, as working-class radicals selling out to the middle classes. As 1838 progressed and Chartism moved away from its LWMA and BPU origins, the LWMA members and BPU leaders found themselves isolated as proponents of moderation in an increasingly militant movement. In 1839 the LWMA struggled on and lasted past the struggles of the Convention, its members continuing as Chartists in different bodies into the early 1840s. The BPU, however, formed of prominent middle-class Birmingham radicals, did not last the course of the Convention. The BPU delegates resigned to be replaced by radical working men anxious to reject 'middle class' apostasy. The positions of both sets of proponents of moderation were advanced, for different reasons, through the promotion of a moral force strategy. Early exchanges between O'Connor and the LWMA set the fundamental division of early Chartism as that of the mass platform versus pressuring the middle-classes through moderation tied to a far-reaching radical programme. During the course of 1838 the strategic struggle became, in linguistic shorthand, one of moral versus physical force.

A 'reasonable endeavour': the moral force struggle against physical force.

We have seen that the Palace Yard meeting of September 1838 saw LWMA speakers promote morality, intellect and sobriety as the tools towards radical advance and urge that the Charter was not class exclusive. It was not that these issues separated moral from physical force Chartism; for example, John Fraser urged temperance and moral force whilst backing O'Connor's leadership. But the emphasis on moral means served to emphasise a distinct strategic position in

opposition to O'Connor's mass platform. The liberal MP, John Temple Leader, urged a campaign of intellectual pressure, concluding that:

... it was by reason, by obtaining that moral influence which the masses must obtain, that they could eventually succeed – by in all things, and at all times opposing violent counsels; by setting their faces against violent language, and by refusing to participate in violent deeds, they would find safety and the best means of success.¹⁸

This reflected the success of the LWMA in lowering the hackles and suspicions of radicals MPs restrained by the harsh realities of constituency support.¹⁹ From a contrasting perspective, which presented such links as compromise, O'Connor doubted the effectiveness of moral philosophy without physical threat. Robert Lowery reported that the Newcastle Chartists who had elected him as delegate would dare to 'defend with their arms what they uttered with their tongues'. R. J. Richardson urged for 'loaded rifles' to tackle the 'Bourbon police' before universal suffrage could be achieved.²⁰ These arguments rejected moderation and the courting of co-operation with parliamentary radicals in favour of intimidating middle-class radicals into eventual support out of fear of social dislocation. But despite the differences over strategy and rhetoric, if Chartism was to advance the LWMA had to co-operate with physical force. While the London liberal press had distinguished the LWMA from O'Connorite demagoguery, from the Palace Yard meeting onwards they began to see Chartism

¹⁸ *Northern Star*, no.45, 22 September 1838, p. 3.

¹⁹ Take the case of J.A. Roebuck who, in a letter to Lovett (BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, ff. 28-29, 6 September 1838), declined to be a delegate to the Palace Yard meeting as it would compromise his position as an MP: 'I can best promote the cause in the House of Commons ... I am quite certain, that by becoming a delegate I shall materially impede my return to the House. I know pretty well the character of what are called liberal constituencies', which would look with 'jealousy' and 'distrust' on 'those who formed the body of delegates and this not so much from any dislike of the ends sought to be attained by them as from the character of the parts who wish to compose it.'

²⁰ *Northern Star*, no.45, 22 September 1838, pp. 2-3.

as a whole as an inherently flawed movement.²¹

In November 1838, leading members of the BPU clashed with O'Connor over the latter's use of physical force rhetoric.²² Though formally resolved by O'Connor's ambiguous support for the principle of moral force, the issue was merely brushed under the carpet and differences carried over pending future developments. O'Connor's physical force was quite capable of accepting 'that the moral power of the people, if stretched to one-half its bearing, is amply-sufficient to accomplish all they desire to effect'.²³ What was at question though was O'Connor's ability to lend, on the platform, the right of armed constitutional resistance a contemporary relevance and urgency, to present a clear intent of disrupting social and political stability to secure radical reform.

A resolution at a radical meeting at Calton Hill, Edinburgh, in December 1838 resolved in favour of the pursuit of the Charter through moral force means and refreshed the quarrel over 'force'. The subsequent efforts of O'Connor to counter the challenge to his leadership demonstrated the power of physical force rhetoric amongst the growing Chartist movement. The framers of the Calton Hill resolution, O'Connor argued, were not true advocates of the people.²⁴ As usual, O'Connor's attacks were highly effective, presenting his moral force opponents as vacillating cowards while protesting that he had never advocated

²¹ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, ff. 252-58, n.d.

²² *Northern Star*, no.53, 17 November 1838, p. 8; no.54, 24 November 1838, p. 4; no.55, 1 December 1838, p. 4; Flick, *The Birmingham Political Union*, pp. 147-74.

²³ *Northern Star*, no.57, 15 December 1838, p. 8.

²⁴ *True Scotsman*, no.6, 24 November 1838, n.p.; no.6, 24 November 1838, n.p.; no.10, 22 December 1838, n.p.; *Northern Star*, no.61, 12 January 1839, p. 6; no. 62, 19 January 1839, p. 4; no.63, 26 January p. 1; no.66, 16 February 1839, p. 2; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, f. 299, n.d. See also Tony Clarke, 'Early Chartism: A "Moral Force" Movement?', in T. Devine (ed.), *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society 1700-1850* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp.106-21, where the mainstream character of Scottish Chartism is argued.

‘unconditional physical force’.²⁵ While moral force advocates like Abram Duncan and John Fraser were able to re-enter the movement tied to support for O’Connor, others like Reverend Patrick Brewster were permanently removed from positions of influence. It was only the organisational hold that the BPU and LWMA had on their localities and their *kudos* as progenitors of the National Petition and Convention and originators of the Charter respectively, that prevented O’Connor from dispensing with these moderates quite as easily at this point. A London meeting to raise support for the Convention in late December 1838 was dominated by the Calton Hill dispute. Richard Moore complained of O’Connor’s attacks on Fraser and Duncan (hypocritical, he claimed, since O’Connor complained so bitterly of O’Connell’s attacks on himself) and Lovett launched a full-scale assault on physical force:

He (Mr.L.) thought they were deeply injuring their cause by using or approving such language; indeed he thought they ought to deprecate it. They were doing much harm to the cause by condemning all classes. There was not a class in which they had not thousands of friends; then why try to alienate them by denouncing them wholesale. (Hissing and applause.) It could only do harm by driving away many of their friends, then only those would be left who by using violent language will hurry them into some premature outbreak, and the moment they had done so they would leave them and become their bitterest enemies. (Disorder.)²⁶

Lovett declared the folly of tying the Charter to ‘coarse’ attacks on the new Poor Law and the futility and waste of arming. Far better that Chartist missionaries were paid for than that muskets were bought. The language of arming and drilling was anathema to Lovett who believed that reform must be through the ‘moral and mental energies of the people’, not because he was frightened of the prospects of social reform but because, as shown in Chapter II, reform through other means was counter-productive to moral and intellectual progress and it was

²⁵ *Northern Star*, no.61, 12 January 1839, p. 8.

²⁶ *Northern Star*, no.59, 29 December 1838, p. 8.

this, for Lovett, that drove reform onwards:

If the people were to be called upon to arm – if they were to go on using violent expressions which must lead to mischief, he would have nothing to do with them – (uproar) – but if they were re-disposed to go on agitating as they had done for two years, he would do all in his power to forward the cause. (Laughter and cries of “No waiting.”) If they were willing to push onward in a reasonable endeavour to arouse the moral and mental energies of the people, he would be one of them; he was one of them in heart; but if there was to be any arming and fighting, he was not one of them. (Cheers and hisses.)²⁷

O’Connor responded by emphasising his heroic self-sacrifice in the cause, alluding to radicals who made a profit from radical agitation (a swipe at leading LWMA members that curiously applied equally to O’Connor) and assigning cowardice and divisive spirit to those not prepared to oppose the new Poor Law or accept O’Connor’s leadership.²⁸

Attitudes hardened and the LWMA, with the Convention approaching, introduced a resolution affirming that the Charter was based on justice and principles and

... that those principles will be best promulgated and soonest established by moral and peaceful agitation ... all appeals to the passions of the multitude tending to excited to violence and disorder can only be productive of evil and retard the legal adoption of the People’s Charter
...²⁹

The position of Lovett and the LWMA contrasted starkly with that of the LDA,

²⁷. *Northern Star*, no.59, 29 December 1838, p. 8.

²⁸. *Northern Star*, no.59, 29 December 1838, p. 8.

²⁹. BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37,773, f. 135, 2 January 1839.

which as we have seen originated with the dissatisfaction of militant radicals inside the LWMA and supported the militant tone of anti-Poor Law agitation and praised O'Connor, Stephens and Oastler.³⁰

The Chartist Convention and unity.

The prospects for the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, which first met on 4 February 1839, were thus not encouraging. Radicals knew that a united front was needed to stand any chance of the Petition making an impact in the Commons but it seemed mere wishful thinking. However, when the delegates assembled at the British Hotel, Cockspur Street in London, an atmosphere of unity prevailed.³¹ Bridgeton Radical Association commended the 'calm, deliberate, straightforward, and unflinching manner' and its 'legal and constitutional manner' while, from another perspective, Glasgow Chartists wrote of their fear of the corruption of radicals in the metropolis and their delight instead in finding the Convention 'stem and unflinching'.³² The LWMA had secured seven delegates and had managed to prevent LDA members from being elected at the Palace Yard meeting. With the BPU sending five delegates, declared moral force Chartists made up over twenty percent of the total number sitting in the Convention. The large number of delegates secured by the moderates, which would probably not have been secured had the Convention met six months later, meant that those utilising physical force rhetoric needed to exercise restraint. This group, largely formed of delegates from the north of England, made up what may be deemed the centre of the Convention, including

³⁰ *Northern Star*, no.48, 13 October 1838, p. 8; no.53, 17 November 1838, p. 2; no.57, 15 December 1838, p. 8.

³¹ *Northern Star*, no.65, 9 February 1839, p. 4; *The Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 57; *The National: a Library for the People*, 23 February 1839, p. 114.

³² BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, Bridgeton Radical Association to the Convention, ff. 69-70, 27 February 1839; Glasgow Radicals to the Convention, 16 March 1839, f. 133.

O'Connor and O'Brien. To the left of this a handful of members around the LDA leader George Julian Harney (returned as a delegate for Norwich) pushed the case for militancy.³³ For most, physical force rhetoric was not concerned with pushing an insurrectionary line. Harney, though, appealed in the *London Democrat* Chartists to 'ARM! ARM!! ARM!!!' and declared for 'EQUALITY OR DEATH'.³⁴

Despite moral force Chartists being a minority in the Convention, Lovett was near unanimously appointed as the secretary of the Convention³⁵ and the 'Objects' adopted by the Convention were moderate, emphasising the role of the Petition, the courting of MPs to present it and the need

To create and extend, by every constitutional means, an enlightened and powerful public opinion in favour of the above objects, and justly and righteously impress that opinion upon the Legislature, as the best means of securing the prosperity and happiness of our country ...³⁶

Moderation was further promoted by T. C. Salt who put forward the formation of a sub-committee to wait on liberal MPs to push the Charter. The proposal was opposed by O'Brien who, following O'Connor's attacks on the LWMA, declared that 'such a step would cause a very general apprehension among their (the delegates') constituents that they were intriguing with men who could do nothing

³³ Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, pp. 54-97.

³⁴ *London Democrat*, no.1, 13 April 1839, p. 1.

³⁵ *Charter*, no.3, 10 February 1839, p. 45. Only O'Brien had opposed Lovett's appointment as 'he [Lovett] differed very considerably from large masses of the people in the north, as to the means by which the objects of the Convention should be carried out', eventually dropping his objection amidst widespread support for abandonment of 'crotchets'.

³⁶ *Northern Star*, no.70, 16 March 1839, p. 7.

but corrupt'.³⁷ Nonetheless, the Convention backed Salt's proposal, following which O'Brien passed a resolution in support that 'every possible means should be adopted to disabuse the minds of members of parliament of any prejudices or misgivings they may entertain touching the objects of ... Chartists'.³⁸

To support the Petition the Convention also followed the example of the LWMA by sending out missionaries to collect signatures and to promote radical organisation. Having established the legality of their actions, on two occasions in 1839, from February to March and June to July, Convention members were sent out to localities deemed in need of radicalisation. The West Country, southern England, the Home Counties, south Wales and the vicinity of London in particular were all agitated by delegates with moderate success.³⁹ Lowery's and Cardo's stints in Cornwall, for example, recorded 'up-hill' work but resulted in a series of large meetings and enthusiasm, albeit resulting in limited lasting organisation.⁴⁰ As well as this the minute books of the Convention contain a great many letters from localities desperate for Convention delegates to bolster local efforts to raise interest in the Charter and the Petition. There was a good deal of united feeling in the Convention on this educational and organisational aspect of its duty, that the 'principles of the Chartists, require only to be known to obtain universal adoption by the industrious classes'.⁴¹ The majority of delegates were, though, also committed to being something more than a body for

³⁷ *Charter*, no.3, 10 February 1839, p. 45.

³⁸ *Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 52.

³⁹ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, Mr. Hill to the Convention, f.51, 20 February 1839; ff.61-62, 23 February 1839; *Charter*, no.3, 10 February, 1839, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁰ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 120-21, 148, 169-70, 178-79, 435-36, March to April 1839; Add. 34,245B, f. 33, June 1839.

⁴¹ BL, Paper of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245B, ff.230-31, n.d.

'enlightenment' through radical tracts and speeches.⁴²

The LWMA, despite its early January resolution in favour of 'moral and peaceful agitation' and against 'appeals to the passions of the multitude', co-operated with the efforts of the Convention to agitate London. It had in any case begun to open up its organisational structure, dropping its investigation into the 'moral character' of applicants and discussing the desirability of dropping its subscription rates (from 1 shilling to 6d - a resolution not carried only because of financial difficulties and current unpaid dues). In March an LWMA committee was appointed to liaise with the Convention and practical co-operation was demonstrated in a public dinner to John Frost, with toasts to the Charter and the Convention given by Lovett and the physical force Chartists, O'Connor, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Fletcher. By mid-March the LWMA had become totally subsumed into the organisation surrounding the Convention, resolving that 'this Association recommend to their members to form Charter Associations in their various localities upon the plan recommended by the General Convention of the Industrious Classes' and making the Association rooms available to the Convention. On 30 April 1839, the last entry in the LWMA minute book, a motion was passed that members adjourn to attend meetings of their local Chartist Associations.⁴³ Such practical unity made its impact. For example O'Connor, in a July 1839 attack on London radical political corruption, qualified that 'I don't mean Hetherington or Cleave, and those who have really stood by the cause like trumps'.⁴⁴ In spite of the organisational defects and lack of leadership of the Convention noted by Kenneth Judge,⁴⁵ and though it would not

⁴² *Charter*, no.10, 31 March 1839, p. 156.

⁴³ BL, LWMA minutes, Add. 37,773, f. 135, 2 January 1839; ff. 136-37, 16 January 1839; ff. 137-38, 22 January 1839; f. 138, 29 January 1839; f. 139, 5 March 1839; f. 140, 12 March 1839; f. 142, 3 April 1839; f. 142, 9 April 1839.

⁴⁴ *Northern Star*, no.140, 18 July 1839, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Judge, 'Early Chartist organisation and the Convention of 1839', *International Review of Social History*, 20 (1975), 370-97.

last, for a time the Charter and Petition of 1839 infused Chartism with a spirit of common endeavour.

As befitted the constitutional idiom adopted by both moral force and physical force Chartists, the socialist Convention delegate for Reading, B. A. Tight, could find no opening for attaching an Owenite critique of competition to the Convention proceedings.⁴⁶ The delegates were, though, to a man supportive of Peter Murray McDouall's passionate attack on the effects of the factory system. Hetherington seconded Dr. Taylor's resolution that 'this Convention is of opinion that neither peace, comfort, nor happiness, can exist in this country, so long as this [factory] system is allowed to continue', William Carpenter wished to 'perish our foreign trade, if it were to be maintained only by a murderous system like this' and Cleave suggested that McDouall's impassioned speech ought to be brought out as a cheap publication.⁴⁷ O'Connor, in the spirit of unity and for the sake of appearances, withdrew a motion committing the Convention to defend the recently arrested J. R. Stephens.⁴⁸ And, despite O'Connor occasionally stepping on toes, such as the publication in the *Northern Star* of a Convention address to Ireland in advance of its being issued, he was far from as bullish than might have been expected.⁴⁹ His appetite for compromise and unity seemed to know no bounds when, somewhat bizarrely given his attacks on the LWMA in 1838, he suggested a public dinner to the MPs John Fielden, Thomas Attwood, Thomas Wakley and T. S. Duncombe to provide them with 'an opportunity of delivering their sentiments upon the People's Charter'.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 238-39, ff. 391-92, B. A. Tight to the Convention, 11 April 1839, 3 May 1839; ff. 455-56, Association of All Classes of All Nations to the Convention, 16 May 1839.

⁴⁷ *Charter*, no.8, 17 March 1839, p. 124.

⁴⁸ *Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Charter*, no.7, 10 March 1839, p. 108-109.

⁵⁰ *Charter*, no.8, 17 March 1839, p. 124.

O'Connor was a central supporter, too, of the agitation of London using the resources of the National Rent and Convention personnel, backing the LWMA and LDA delegates when the northern delegates expressed displeasure at their constituents subsidising apathetic London radicalism.⁵¹ Francis Place, given the rather surprising degree of unity within the Convention, even confided to William Lovett in mid-March 1839 that, despite some misgivings, the proceedings of the Convention had exceeded his expectations.⁵²

Resignations and militancy.

However, despite encouraging beginnings, within three weeks of the opening, J. P. Cobbett had resigned, ostensibly on the question of whether the Convention should confine itself to the presentation of the Petition but, as his attack on O'Connor made plain, because he was uncomfortable sitting with delegates of far less moderate politics.⁵³ From the very earliest days of the Convention Cobbett had brought motions forward to keep the issue of 'ulterior measures' off of the agenda. Cobbett was of that part of the Convention that represented currents of actual middle-class radical support that were unprepared - in contrast to what may be considered true moral force Chartists - to embrace full-blooded commitment to the Charter come what may. George Rogers, the Convention treasurer, for example, saw the Convention as a petitioning body and resigned when that function was complete.⁵⁴ Rejection of physical force rhetoric for these radicals meant a rejection of practical support for the Charter, whereas for moral

⁵¹ · *Charter*, no.10, 31 March 1839, pp. 156-57.

⁵² Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 2, Place to Lovett, 13 March 1839, ff. 319a-b.

⁵³ · *Northern Star*, no.67, 23 February 1839, p. 4; no.69, 9 March 1839, p. 4.

⁵⁴ · BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 410-11, George Rogers to the Convention, 6 May 1839; *Charter*, no.16, 12 May 1839, p. 252.

force Chartists it was to be fought through organisation within Chartism, not by withdrawing from the movement.

Cobbett was to the extreme of moderation in his stance that 'The Convention were not called upon to do more than deliberate upon the best means of promoting the success of the People's Charter'.⁵⁵ The majority of the delegates were quite prepared to discuss 'ulterior measures' when it was propitious to do so. H. B. Craig, for example, promoted a motion to consider such measures in order, seemingly, to restrict them to such established methods of protest as exclusive dealing, abstention from excisable goods and so on 'in order to remove any erroneous opinions that might arise in the minds of their friends and opponents'.⁵⁶ O'Connor's support for Craig's motion, to inject 'ulterior measures' with a more forthright threat, met with the opposition of moderates Hetherington, R. K. Douglas and Dr. Wade as 'premature and mischievous' but was also opposed as too early by delegates as varied as O'Brien, Vincent, Sankey, Neesom and Bussey.⁵⁷ The consensus of the Convention at this stage was that they were bound first to take the necessary legal steps to establish the Charter. Seen as an act of abandonment of duty, Cobbett's resignation was, however, the first of many several resignations for similar reasons.⁵⁸

An LDA meeting in February 1839 with John Frost in the chair had secured the carrying of the famous Chartist dictum 'Peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must' but a further LDA meeting at the end of February resolved 'The Harney Resolutions', that 'the People's Charter could be established as the law of the land, within one month from the present time, provided the people and their

⁵⁵ *Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 53.

⁵⁶ *Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 50.

⁵⁷ *Charter*, no.4, 17 February 1839, p. 50.

⁵⁸ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 52-53, Hull Working Men's Association to the Convention, 20 February 1839.

leaders do their duty' and urged 'immediate resistance' to acts of government oppression.⁵⁹ The response of the majority of delegates was one of anger, but the attack was led by the moral force contingent and Lovett's motion of censure was passed on Harney, William Ryder and Richard Marsden (who with Charles Neesom, Peter Bussey and P. M. McDouall made up the 'left' of the Convention).⁶⁰

A March meeting to discuss 'ulterior measures' at the Crown and Anchor revealed physical force in its more ambivalent form to be prevalent. W. V. Sankey and George Rogers pressed the need for signatures to the National Petition to be the Convention's priority. O'Connor on the other hand was already thinking beyond the rejection of the Petition and the need to threaten the subsequent rousing of the people in a struggle with a government that had proved itself tyrannical. Dr. Taylor, added that actual physical force would probably be unnecessary if the people were united and prepared enough to deploy it. O'Brien backed defensive arming as a central Chartist activity along with organisation and signing the Petition.⁶¹ These last three positions may be considered representative of the physical force mainstream. Harney, though, went a step further, urging those at the meeting to press the agitation to its conclusion:

There should be no more Conventions. The 6th of May should be the last

⁵⁹ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, f. 307, n.d.; BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 76-77, 28 February 1839.

⁶⁰ *Charter*, no.7, 10 March 1839, p. 108-9. Resolutions published elsewhere by Harney et al also attracted the criticism of the Convention mainstream: BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245B, f. 239, n.d.. On McDouall see: Ray Challinor, 'Peter Murray McDouall and 'Physical Force' Chartism', *International Socialism* (Spring 1981), 53-84; P. Pickering and S. Roberts, 'Pills, Pamphlets and Politics: the Career of Peter Murray McDouall (1814-54)', *Manchester Region History Review*, XI (1997), 34-43; O. Ashton and P. Pickering, 'The 'People's Advocate': Peter Murray McDouall (1814-1853)', in Ashton and Pickering, *Friends of the People: Uneasy radicals in the age of the Chartists* (London, 2002), pp.7-28.

⁶¹ *Northern Star*, no.71, 23 March 1839, p. 4.

day for doubt or hesitation. The people should then set about asserting their rights in earnest, and should have before the close of the year universal suffrage or death. (Loud cheers.)⁶²

It was the persistence of militants like Harney that allowed an easy establishment and press critique linking Chartism with 'levelling' and class politics that led to the alienation of middle class radicals from the Convention and the movement.⁶³ This was seriously damaging to the efforts of moral force Chartism, such as were expressed in the LWMA-supporting paper the *Charter*, to deny that Chartism was directed against the middle classes or that manhood suffrage in itself would result in social equality.⁶⁴ Criticism of 'empty-headed praters' and 'rash' rhetoric and 'loud-mouthed brawlers' also emanated from other moderate Chartist papers such as the *Chartist*.⁶⁵

The BPU delegate, T. C. Salt's early enthusiasm for the national quality of the Petition and its nature as a radical rallying point gave way to disillusionment at the slow rate and poor organisation of signature collection.⁶⁶ Without evidence of a national feeling behind the Convention, its task was probably beyond achievement. In such a circumstance, all that the Convention could do was to

^{62.} *Northern Star*, no.71, 23 March 1839, p. 4.

^{63.} Take, for example, the *Annual Register* of 1839, which declared Chartism as hostile to capitalists and was 'an insurrection directed avowedly against the middle classes'.

^{64.} *Charter*, no.1, 27 January 1839, p. 8; no.6, 3 March 1839, p. 89; no.30, 18 August 1839, p. 465; no.31, 25 August 1839, p. 480; no.38, 13 October 1839, p. 593; *Chartist*, no.22, 30 June 1839, p. 1. Though, as we have seen in Chapter II, many 'moral force' Chartists aimed at the opening up of opportunities for socially egalitarian government polity in a democratic Britain. This inconsistency sometimes emerged, for example, in a comment on a Socialism versus Chartism meeting (*Charter*, no.32, 1 September 1839, p. 498) it was admitted that Chartism 'is a means to an end' - an end obviously far more socialistic than the free trade heaven more openly argued as the results of democracy.

^{65.} *Chartist*, no.3, 16 February 1839, p. 2; no.6, 9 March 1839, p. 1; no.7, 16 March 1839, p. 1.

^{66.} BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, f. 41, T. C. Salt to the Convention, 17 February, 1839; ff.107-10, n.d.

disband on the rejection of the Petition or, more likely, throw caution to the wind and increase the militancy of its tone. For the BPU delegates, as members of the newly incorporated Birmingham establishment, this was an unattractive prospect. A pretext for resignation was provided by a meeting on 18 March, which violated the BPU pledge to legality and

... plainly shows that the General Convention, while professing themselves the enemies of tyranny and oppression in every form, are yet ready and anxious to peril the success of Radical Reform on an appeal to the last and worst weapons of the tyrant and oppressor.⁶⁷

The resignation letter, however, covered only R. K. Douglas, B. Hadley and T. C. Salt, leaving Birmingham represented by only John Collins, an articulate and respected working-class radical. At a meeting shortly after the Birmingham resignations, Collins launched into an attack on O'Connor's 'insinuations' that 'you were to get Universal Suffrage by destroying property' and he defended the BPU council against charges of misuse of Convention funds. Collins, however, in tackling O'Connor's use of physical force rhetoric walked straight into its web of ambiguity, the crowd shouting and groaning him off of the platform. O'Connor had not actually recommended destruction of property but merely suggested that attacks on the people might provoke it. The meeting successfully passed a resolution of censure on the Birmingham seceders and O'Connor's charge that 'the men who buy cheap and sell dear' could not be expected to 'do the will of the majority' carried the day.⁶⁸ Attacks on those who had resigned from the Convention served to irritate the remaining moral force contingent. R. J. Richardson's response to the resignations, that it was a cause for rejoicing, drew a response from Carpenter that the Convention should respond as it would

⁶⁷ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 175-76, R. K. Douglas, B. Hadley and T. C. Salt to the Convention, 28 March 1839.

⁶⁸ *Northern Star*, no.73, 6 April 1839, p. 5.

to any other resignations, by answering the charges of physical force advocacy laid down by Hadley, Salt and Douglas.⁶⁹ A deputation requested by the Birmingham Committee of Observation (established by working-class radicals to hold the middle-class BPU delegates to account) attracted the support of the Convention mainstream and left but, in general, drew the opposition of moral force Chartists and led to a 'long and energetic' debate.⁷⁰ Despite Carpenter being included in the eventual delegation to Birmingham, Dr. Fletcher's report on their return, which attacked the ex-BPU delegates, led to a rancorous debate in which the chair lost control for an hour and a half.⁷¹

Hetherington, in a debate about whether to move the Convention from London to Birmingham, highlighted the difference between the middle-class seceders and moral force Chartists. He declared that he 'would not yield to Mr. O'Connor, on any point where the display of courage would be necessary' and that, if moral force failed, he would do his physical force duty.⁷² But, he qualified, 'He felt great respect for many of those who had seceded, and exceedingly regretted their having done so'.⁷³ And, although he agreed that they had 'acted wrongly in this instance' he blamed the retreat of middle-class radicals on intemperate physical force rhetoric. On his Convention mission, Hetherington 'found that the middle classes invariably raised objections against them in consequence of this constant recurrence to physical force.'⁷⁴ It did nothing, he argued, but create insurmountable opposition as 'the use of such language has been a handle to their enemies for imputing to them a doctrine which they have, as a body, done

^{69.} *Charter*, no.11, 7 April 1839, p. 172.

^{70.} *Charter*, no.10, 31 March 1839, pp. 156-57.

^{71.} *Charter*, no.11, 7 April 1839, p. 172; no.14, 28 April 1839, p. 220.

^{72.} *Charter*, no. 14, 28 April 1839, p. 219.

^{73.} *Charter*, no. 14, 28 April 1839, p. 219.

^{74.} *Charter*, no. 14, 28 April 1839, p. 219.

their utmost to repudiate'.⁷⁵

Division in the Convention continued to widen as the distinctly 'respectable' character of its delegates began to disintegrate, middle-class seceders being replaced by working-class delegates. Christopher Dean, an operative stonemason, was returned for Manchester; Bolton replaced their middle class apostate delegate Mr. Wood with the gardener Mr. Warden; John Powell, Edward Brown and Henry Donaldson, all working-men associated with the BPU Observational Committee, replaced the BPU seceders; Mr. Rae, an opponent of moral force, was chosen to replace the 'coward' resignee H. B. Craig. Several new delegates were elected at meetings and all were working men.⁷⁶ Attempts by the LDA, however, to counter LWMA domination by electing delegates for London districts were unsuccessful. LDA meetings to elect new delegates brought into question the validity of the Palace Yard meeting but the Convention upheld the position of the LWMA delegates as the London delegates and the new LDA delegates were prevented from sitting. The return of LDA candidates for East Surrey and Lambeth, and Tower Hamlets (Williams and Drake respectively) were opposed on technical pretexts, forcing an investigation and his withdrawal until an opportunity of re-election. When William Ryder resigned over the opposition to the return of an LDA candidate it was Lovett who led the successful attempt to pass a motion of censure on Ryder's expression of a loss of confidence in the Convention. Hetherington led an unsuccessful attempt to refuse Ryder's attempt to rejoin the Convention (which was unnecessary as Ryder's West Riding constituents accepted his resignation, forcing him to withdraw).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Charter*, no. 14, 28 April 1839, p. 219.

⁷⁶ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 201, 213, 251-54, 283-84, 287, 289, 398.

⁷⁷ *Charter*, no.14, 28 April 1839, p. 219-22; no.15, 5 May 1839, p. 236; no.16, May 12 1839, p. 252.

In April Patrick Matthew, delegate for Perthshire and Fifeshire, resigned 'on account of the intemperate language and Ultra character of the major party of the convention, who have been carrying the minor or more moderate party along with them', resulting in the alienation of many of the 'Liberal party' from the Chartist cause.⁷⁸ Dr Wade (delegate for Nottingham, Sutton-in-Ashfield and Mansfield) resigned from the Convention in the same month, giving his favour towards moral force as the reason. Wade had previously protested at the 'violent character' of language at a Crown and Anchor meeting and expressed his suspicion of O'Connor. Instructed by his Nottingham Chartist electors not to oppose physical force in the Convention, Wade took the decision to make a noisy withdrawal. He had, he claimed, taken the decision to retire on the ground of his opposition to physical force, before the Nottingham instruction. In a letter to the Nottingham Working Men's Association, Wade argued that the moral force majority in the Convention:

... will obviate national opinion, which is now your friend, and which, assisted by the growing discontent of the middle classes, will become your assistant to overthrow your tyrants, if you do not, by the false steps of violent language and conduct, afford tyranny a pretext, and throw your cause back for fifty years ... The cry of arms, without antecedent moral opinion and union of the middle classes with you, would only cause misery, blood, and ruin ... and with this moral opinion and union of the middle classes with you, then physical force would be unnecessary and superfluous as it is unchristian, brutal and infernal ... I am still a Chartist, though a moral force one ...⁷⁹

Wade's fate was to be compared to the Birmingham seceders as timid and dissembling and replaced by a physical force delegate (James Woodhouse).⁸⁰

^{78.} BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, Patrick Matthew to the Convention, f. 280, 20 April 1839.

^{79.} *Northern Star*, no.75, 20 April 1839, p. 7.

^{80.} *Northern Star*, no.76, 27 April 1839, p. 8; no.77, 4 May 1839, p. 7; *Charter*, no.9, 24 March 1839, p. 140.

The response of liberal MPs bore out Wade's opinion. For example, D. W. Harvey rejected the Convention because of its 'feeble and personal' tone, and Attwood and John Fielden requested an explicit rejection of violent ulterior measures by the Convention before they would support the Petition in the Commons.⁸¹ However, such was the apparent class character of the resignations that by the close of the Convention O'Connor could look back and comment on the desertion of the middle classes from the Chartist delegate body. With fifteen out of twenty-one resignations from the Convention being that of a middle class delegate, O'Connor could declare that 'we have been beaten for the present by treason, not by the enemy', a claim based on a self-confirming strategy that rejected moderation and class alliance and then turned on those that were alienated by it.⁸²

P. H. Muntz, a prominent BPU member and former Chartist, came under attack from O'Brien in June 1839 due to his being a Birmingham magistrate and thus a signatory to a ban on Chartist meetings. This signalled a burst of speeches and correspondence in which Muntz declared the folly of physical force rhetoric which had alienated the middle classes, without whom the Chartists could not hope to succeed:

... instead of conciliation, threats have been employed; instead of prudence, ulterior measures have been talked of; and the middle classes, who, at one time, sympathised with the movement party, alarmed at the threats of physical force, have joined the aristocracy, to prevent anarchy and bloodshed. See the consequence! All hope of any important change is, for the present, at an end ...⁸³

⁸¹. BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, f.211-12, 6 April 1839; f.365, 1 May 1839.

⁸². *Northern Star*, no.97, 21 September 1839, p. 3.

⁸³. *Northern Star*, no. 81, 1 June 1839, p. 3.

O'Connor responded by charging Muntz with having recommended physical force in forthright terms as recently as 1838.⁸⁴ The dispute was not so much about physical force rhetoric as such but its context, Muntz's warnings being of a movement led astray by a dangerous demagogue. Muntz and his radical colleagues of the Birmingham establishment could deploy threats almost with impunity - little bite could be expected from their bark. But O'Connor, speaking from the platform to a radical working-class audience and apparently prepared to throw caution to the wind, represented a very different and far more threatening challenge.

Radical reform and the demagogue.

The demagogue leading the lower classes was the great fear of the British establishment. John Frost, a Newport magistrate, was deprived of his office (with dubious legality) due to his presence on the Chartist platform. In his correspondence with the Home Office, Frost lost his argument that politics was a matter of private opinion, the government being unconcerned as to opinions held in private but very concerned at their being acted upon 'to the danger of ... peace, - and with the risk of spreading alarm throughout the community'.⁸⁵ His presence on the platform should be restricted to promoting order and attendance at the Convention was prohibited.

A movement of the working classes demanding political reform was read as illegitimate protest, as 'levelling'. Clearly the approach of the LWMA made such opposition more problematic. The Charter was carefully crafted in order to

⁸⁴ *Northern Star*, no.82, 8 June 1839, p. 3; no.83, 15 June 1839, p. 8.

⁸⁵ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 4-5, Frost to the Home Office, 19 January 1839; ff. 6-8, 38, Home Office to John Frost, 16 January 1839.

attach prominent parliamentary radicals to the manhood suffrage ticket by making it difficult for them to deny democratic reform when presented as a reasonable radical programme. It was a deliberate exercise spurred on by realisations that, for example, in France 'moderate politicians, are *devotedly attached to most points of the Charter*'.⁸⁶ O'Connor, though, sought precisely to inflame the fears and prejudice of the British establishment in order to set in motion the social instability necessary to extract the concession of manhood suffrage.

O'Connor has been served badly by Chartist autobiographers and historians. R. G. Gammage set the tone with his 1854 history, which condemned O'Connor's egotism. More successful in creating an anti-O'Connor legacy was William Lovett's autobiography of 1876, in which O'Connor was lambasted as a fierce and violent demagogue compared to calm and sober Lovett. From the vantage point of later Liberal politics it was tempting to see Chartism like this. Henry Solly in his fictional *James Woodford, Carpenter and Chartist* (1881) and his autobiography of 1893 repeated the simplistic anti-O'Connorite line in which moral and physical force boundaries were far too sharply drawn. Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering have shown how far Solly's co-operation with O'Connor in the 1840s contrasted with his later writing.⁸⁷ Glenn Airey has pointed to this reconstruction of the popular memory of O'Connor by other figures such as W. E. Adams and William Farish.⁸⁸ Likewise, Robert Hall and Stephen Roberts have written of the difficulty of a Liberal working-class politician, William Aitken, in coming to terms in 1869 with a more militant Chartist past.⁸⁹ Though Ernest

^{86.} *Charter*, no.38, 13 October 1839, p. 600.

^{87.} Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering, 'An 'Earnest Radical': The Reverend Henry Solly (1813-1903)', in *Friends of the People*, pp.29-53.

^{88.} Glenn Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor', pp. 159-69.

^{89.} Robert Hall and Stephen Roberts (eds.), *William Aitken. The Writings of a Nineteenth Century Working Man* (Tameside, 1996), pp.4-13; Robert Hall, 'Chartism Remembered: William Aitken, Liberalism, and the Politics of Memory', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), 445-70.

Jones in particular mounted a fight to place O'Connor in the pantheon of radical martyrs, the mid-Victorian political context elevated Lovett as the Chartist hero of choice, a tendency furthered by liberal and Fabian-socialist historians in the twentieth century.⁹⁰

Early twentieth-century historians such as Mark Hovell and Julius West contributed to the continuance of the O'Connor-Lovett, physical-moral force dichotomy. Yet they have little light to cast on the more forthright memories of other Chartists less keen to bury the militancy of their Chartist days, such as those recorded by Thomas Ainge Devyr of a broiling radical and armed Newcastle of the late-1830s.⁹¹ Highlighting the 'dishonesty' of autobiographers such as Solly contributes to the on-going reassessment of Feargus O'Connor's contribution to nineteenth-century radicalism. Yet it should also point to the reason why O'Connor was so rejected in radical memory. O'Connor singularly failed in his efforts to win the Charter through strong personal leadership tied to a physical force strategy. Despite his enormous impact on the development of a mass movement, he was the single most important figure in undermining the strategic moderation of the Chartist programme. O'Connor's two-fold contribution needs to be recognised - leader and demagogue, unifier and divisive personality. When Liberals looked back on Chartism and on their own careers it must have seemed obvious to them how 'wrong' O'Connor had been and how 'right' Lovett had been. Through these two Chartist leaders the past struggles of Chartism and the tension in Liberal politics were internalised as selective political memories.

That there was a negative aspect to O'Connor and physical force is clearly seen in the widespread opposition to Chartism based on a perception of it as a threat

⁹⁰ Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 150-80.

⁹¹ Thomas Ainge Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century* (1882, reprinted New York, 1986), pp. 183-94.

associated with the dangers of a radical demagogue with a 'mob' following. Violence and revolutionary, 'levelling' aspirations were ascribed to the Chartist movement in several contemporary pamphlets. One contemporary and two later fictional accounts of Chartist lives emphasised the heady violence brought on by Chartist orators and crowds that led to personal disasters.⁹² This perception of Chartism and Chartists far outweighed the responses of sympathisers.⁹³ Such was the situation that Neville Wood, who wrote to the Convention that they should emphasise the Charter to attract the middle and upper classes, surely underestimated the task.⁹⁴ Another correspondent highlighted the problem of negative perceptions of the movement. The Convention, he harangued, should not concern itself with plunder and burning property but should have a national subscription and have representatives from the middle classes.⁹⁵ The liberal press turned against Chartism, seeing in it elements that could not be co-operated with and warning, correctly as it transpired, of the consequences of pushing the middle and upper classes to the protection of the state. Government action in 1839 and 1840 demonstrated the weakness of the movement, with selective

⁹² Montagu Gore, *A Letter to the Middle Classes on the Present State of the Country, Especially with Reference to the Chartist Meetings* (London, 1839); Rev. J. W. Whittaker, *A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church, Blackburn, on Sunday, August 4th, 1839* (Blackburn, 1839); A Friend, *A Few Words to the Chartists* (London, 1839); Rev. Francis Close, *The Female Chartists' Visit to the Parish Church. A Sermon, Addressed to the Female Chartists of Cheltenham, Sunday August 25th, 1839, on the Occasion of their Attending the Parish Church in a Body* (London, 1839); Ignatious Collingridge, *Outline of an Address to the Chartists* (East Dereham, 1839); R. B. De Bary, *A Charm Against Chartism* (London, 1839); Rev. William Gale Townley, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Late Chartist Movements* (London, 1839); *The Chartist: or, the Life and Death of James Arnold; Shewing the Progress and Results of Insubordination* (London, 1841); *The Chartist's Mistake. A Narrative of Personal Recollection* (London, 1870); Evelyn Everett-Green, *Gabriel Garth, Chartist* (London, 1902).

⁹³ One of the People, *The Right and Expediency of Universal Suffrage. A Few Words in Advocacy of The People's Charter* (London, 1838); An Independent, *Chartism v. Whiggism* (Sheffield, 1841).

⁹⁴ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Neville Wood to the Convention, Add. 34245B, f. 38, 9 July 1839.

⁹⁵ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34245B, Francis Clarke to the Convention, ff. 66-67, 27 July 1839.

arrests of prominent national and local leaders.⁹⁶

Eileen Yeo has highlighted the lack of resources in Chartism to deal with the almost total opposition of the non-working classes and the government.⁹⁷ James Epstein has noted the overwhelming opposition to Chartism compared to the movements of 1829 and 1832 on which it was modelled and the problem of the militant pressing of the Charter: 'The divisions within the leadership reflected the dilemma which faced an insurgent movement in what was essentially a non-revolutionary situation'.⁹⁸ The failure of physical force and a lack of resources necessitated a day-to-day democratic counter-culture such as Chartist churches.⁹⁹ The appeal of the *Chartist* in July 1839 to challenge arrests in the courts, to 'Use the Law Against The Tyrants', was mere wishful thinking.¹⁰⁰

Moral force and arming.

I have argued that the Convention seceders were different from moral force Chartists and that this difference lay in the willingness of the latter to fight a rearguard within the movement. An interesting area which highlights how the moral-'physical' force divide was centrally an issue of strategy, of the presentation of broadly similar objectives, was that of arming. The Convention was broadly agreed, when Richardson brought forward a motion to confirm the

^{96.} F. C. Mather, 'The Government and the Chartists', in Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), pp. 372-85; Christopher Godfrey, 'The Chartist Prisoners, 1839-41', *International Review of Social History*, 24 (1979), 189-236.

^{97.} Eileen Yeo, 'Some practices and problems of Chartist democracy', in Epstein and Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience*, pp. 348-49.

^{98.} James Epstein, 'National Chartist leadership: some perspectives', in Ashton, Fyson, Roberts (eds.), *The Duty of Discontent*, p. 40-41.

^{99.} Eileen Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist Struggle, 1838-1842', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), 109-39.

^{100.} *Chartist*, no.23, 7 July 1839, p. 2.

legal right to possess arms for self-defence, that none was needed as it was an accepted right. The middle class moderates, though, worried lest it be seen as a practical recommendation. Moral force Chartists did not generally go as far as W. V. Sankey who presented the Charter as in line with the 'original Saxon Constitution' but they took issue with Harney's assertion that more force existed in carrying arms to meetings than in other forms of argument. In response to Harney's defence of the red cap of liberty, Lovett rejected 'all talk of daggers, and all the swagger of persons who decorated themselves with the cap of liberty'.¹⁰¹ The LWMA delegates in the Convention, however, were prepared to accept sober talk of the right to arm defensively. The Convention address of May 1839 warned against precipitate action and provocative displays of arms at public meetings but advised Chartists to keep arms 'bright and ready at home'.¹⁰² Lovett was also happy to sign the Convention *Manifesto of Ulterior Measures* issued in May 1839. John Collins too was quite happy to use physical force allegories in mid-1839.¹⁰³

Anti-Chartist riots in Devizes in April and an earlier disturbance at Llanidloes had served to confirm the widely held belief in the willingness of the ruling classes, local and national, to use force to put down claims to working class political rights.¹⁰⁴ Further, the Birmingham Bull Ring riots in July served to

^{101.} J. A. Richardson, *The Right of Englishmen to Have Arms: As Shown in a Speech Delivered at the National Convention on Thursday, 9th April, 1839*, in Claeys (ed.), Vol. II, *The Chartist Movement*, pp.11-20; *Charter*, no. 12, 14 April 1839, p. 188-89; no.16, 12 May 1839, p. 52; no.14, 28 April 1839, p. 21; no.15, 5 May 1839, p. 36. Sankey's motion followed a proposal by Pitkeithly to challenge the notions of Chartist 'illegality' through an investigation into 'the boasted Constitution of England': BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245B, f. 254, 1 May, 1839. See also: Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering, 'The Aristocrat of Chartism: William Villiers Sankey (1793-1860)', in Ashton and Pickering, *Friends of the People*, pp. 55-79.

^{102.} *Northern Star*, no.78, May 11, 1839, p.8.

^{103.} *Manifesto of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes*, in Claeys, Vol. II, pp. 137-43; *Northern Star*, no.81, 1 June 1839, p. 6.

^{104.} BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff.228-29, Vincent to the Convention, 9 April.

galvanise moderates to the mainstream as real physical force was applied by the state against Chartists. Defensive arming appeared a pragmatic rather than particularly extreme position to adopt.¹⁰⁵ This was further accentuated by the widespread expectation of a popular reaction to the likely rejection by the Commons of the Charter.¹⁰⁶ However, we must not read into moral force Chartist co-operation with physical force an absence of content to the Chartist 'force' divide. For example, while condemning the government and metropolitan police with regard to the Birmingham riots, the *Charter* desired more than ever a 'junction' of the working and middle classes to secure 'permanent security of freedom', denied the expediency (though accepting the right and legality) of physical force, doubted the efficacy of 'ulterior measures' and offered an educational alternative for the Chartist movement.¹⁰⁷ The *Chartist*, too, complained that real physical force was being directed against and not by Chartism (for example, by local farmers and establishment at Devizes) but objected to the Llanidloes riot because attacks on property, however justified by local grievances, could only be destructive of national Chartist prospects.¹⁰⁸ The delay in the presentation of the Petition due to the Bedchamber Crisis, the subsequent rejection of the Petition and the widespread arrests of Chartists brought the final unravelling of the unity of the Convention.

This unravelling had begun with the resignations of middle-class moderate delegates and the realisation that the Petition would be rejected. It had been clear from the early days of the Convention that the Petition would not amount to the nationally representative document that was wished for. The situation with

^{105.} *Charter*, no.25, 14 July 1839, p. 392; no.27, 28 July 1839, pp. 424-25; *The National: a Library for the People*, 26 January 1839, pp. 47-48.

^{106.} *Northern Star*, no.87, 13 July 1839, p. 4; no.88, 20 July 1839, p. 4.

^{107.} *Charter*, no.17, 19 May 1839, p. 265; no.24, 7 July 1839, p. 375; no.29, 11 August 1839, p. 449; no.37, 6 October 1839, p. 577.

^{108.} *Chartist*, no.10, 7 April 1839, p. 2; no.15, 12 May 1839, p. 1.

regard to the number of petitioners had doubtless contributed to the seceder's desire to jump the Chartist ship. Without overwhelming public support the Petition would be laughed out of the Commons, leaving plenty of loose physical force cannons. O'Connor had, at the end of April, criticised the attendance of his fellow Convention delegates as evidence of 'lukewarmness' and 'timidity', claiming that those who were closest to the working classes had attended most assiduously. O'Connor's own sense of closeness to the working classes should perhaps not be judged by his own attendance record (fifteen and a half absences out of twenty nine days recorded up to the point of his claims) but he persisted with physical force rhetoric. He declared that physical force was not amateur insurrectionaries taking on cannons with pikes but, with the failure of moral force, it would come like an 'electric shock'.¹⁰⁹ This rhetoric reflected a belief as to the efficacy of the example of 1832 and the 'days of May' - no actual armed confrontation between people and government would be necessary, just the willingness to be prepared to do so. T. M. Parsinnen has highlighted the 'anti-parliament' nature of the Convention's role, which saw it as representing the people in a confrontation with the government - an ideal stage for O'Connor's methods and self-image.¹¹⁰

Moral force Chartists saw matters rather differently, believing that the middle class, now enfranchised and cautious, needed to be coaxed rather than coerced into support for manhood suffrage. They did not share the urgency of O'Connor or of Harney, to whom every prospect of advance must be immediate but, rather, had a belief that the movement was a part of the wider rational progress of humanity, that 'movement is slow but sure'.¹¹¹ The *Chartist*, for example, fully accepted defensive physical force when voiced by 'calm, temperate' Chartists but objected to the 'appearance of terror' promoted by 'noisy braggarts' who

^{109.} *Charter*, no. 14, 28 April 1839, p. 219.

^{110.} T. M. Parsinnen, 'Association, convention and anti-parliament in British radical politics, 1771-1848', *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), 528-30.

^{111.} *Charter*, no.39, 20 October 1839, p. 610.

'had contrived it in order to give our peaceful and constitutional cause an air of false ferocity'.¹¹² Discussion of 'ulterior measures' divided moral force Chartists from those physical force Chartists like Dr Fletcher, who openly claimed that the Convention 'sat under the cloak of being a petitioning body'.¹¹³ The promotion by O'Connor of moving the Convention from London to Birmingham also met with a general divide on moral-physical force lines, those wishing to escalate the sense of crisis being for and those wishing to promote an aura of calm principle being against. But the sense of unity in struggle still held, with every expectation of imminent government repression. Consideration was given in May to appointing replacement delegates if mass arrests occurred, and plans were made to return to Birmingham in such circumstances and declare a permanent Convention to launch immediate 'ulterior measures'.¹¹⁴

Ulterior measures and the failure of physical force.

Despite the early expectations of popular fury at the rejection of the Petition, few reports before or after the rejection of the Petition served to provide evidence of widespread mobilisation to demand the Charter. In March Mansfield Chartists expressed their determination to support the Convention 'to the last extremity'.¹¹⁵ But in the same month Sutton-in-Ashfield Chartists had reported that 'were the whole Country in an equal state of preparedness with us, "Universal Suffrage" would quickly be the Law of the Land - But we are afraid that we are in the

¹¹² *Chartist*, no.6, 9 March 1839, p. 1; no.14, 5 May 1839, p. 1; no.17, 26 May 1839, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Charter*, no.14, 28 April 1839, p. 220.

¹¹⁴ *Charter*, no.14, 28 April 1839, p. 220; no.15, 5 May 1839, p. 236; no.16, 12 May 1839, p. 252; no.17, 19 May 1839, pp. 268-69.

¹¹⁵ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 89-90, Mansfield Chartists to the Convention, 1 March 1839.

advance, instead of the rear'.¹¹⁶ As a village they had raised twenty pounds for the National Rent, they protested, while Leeds had raised only three. John Richards warned from the Potteries that it was the places of worst destitution rather than of the most advanced radical organisation that were prone to respond to 'strong language'.¹¹⁷ That revolutionary and even insurrectionary objects were held by the Chartists was commonly felt by desperate labourers as well as by the middle classes. A letter from Houghton of May 1839 declares 'after friday the people are looking for some altiration [sic.] the 6th of may and the sooner the better[.] please to send the particulars of the Abolition of these bastiles', linking Chartism with direct action against the new Poor Law.¹¹⁸

The debate in the reconvened Convention following the Whitsun simultaneous meetings and the eventual rejection of the Charter saw fraught debates over the next steps that might be taken to secure the Charter. In a sense the Convention had by now moved beyond meaningful debates as to 'force'. It was now not what Chartists might do but what they were prepared and organised to do. Moral force as a strategy had hardly been deployed with strength but the movement now found itself backed into a corner with the rhetoric of physical force ringing rather emptily. The Convention 'left' tried to make the best of the situation, and continued to plug an uncompromising tone of revolutionary threat. Marsden passed a motion that all ulterior measures including the 'sacred month' should be implemented and Neesom considered opponents to the 'sacred month' to be enemies of liberty.¹¹⁹ The majority of the Convention supported pushing ahead

¹¹⁶ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 84-85, Sutton-in-Ashfield Chartists to the Convention, 1 March 1839.

¹¹⁷ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, ff. 146-47, John Richards to the Convention, 22 March 1839.

¹¹⁸ BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245A, f.359, Houghton Chartists to the Convention, 1 May 1839.

¹¹⁹ *Charter*, no. 25, 14 July 1839, p. 379; no. 26, 21 July 1839, pp. 412-13; BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245B, f.263, 4 July 1839. On the origins of the 'sacred month' see: I. J. Prothero, 'William Benbow and the Concept of the "General Strike"'.

with the national strike because they had to take some action to obtain the suffrage for their constituents. But Dr Taylor considered that 'ulterior measures' short of the 'sacred month' should be undertaken and that the Convention should be wound up, a cautious approach which received some backing.¹²⁰ J. Moir expressed his doubts about pushing what would amount to a revolutionary tactic without general, let alone universal, support for the Charter.¹²¹ When the Newcastle colliers sent news of their strike for the Charter in July, Carpenter and Moir considered the strike as premature.¹²² Though the 'left' considered that the ends theoretically justified the means, James Taylor, though not opposed in principle, pointed out the impracticality of such a move when supplies had not been built up and plans for its general viability had not been developed. He summed up the central problem of the Convention at this stage when the Petition had been rejected, government arrests had commenced and the people were not spontaneously rising in indignation: 'if we went forward we were lost, and, if we stood still or retreated we were lost ... he did not see how we could get out of the national holiday, without covering itself with disgrace.'¹²³

O'Brien exerted balance at critical points by calling for a 'more general and mature' deliberation regarding the 'sacred month', amounting as it did to a direct and probably armed confrontation with the government and resisted the implementation of motions passed by Convention sittings of only a handful of delegates.¹²⁴ O'Connor and O'Brien, at the centre of the Convention, were well aware of the folly of pursuing partial confrontations that would be likely to lead to the smashing of the movement but also of the need to save some sort of face.

^{120.} *Charter*, no. 24, 7 July 1839, pp. 380-81.

^{121.} *Charter*, no. 26, 21 July 1839, p. 412.

^{122.} *Charter*, no. 26, 21 July 1839, p. 412.

^{123.} *Charter*, no. 26, 21 July 1839, p. 412.

^{124.} *Charter*, no. 27, 28 July 1839, pp. 428-29.

Yet Hetherington's movement of an address to the middle classes prior to the mooted general strike, explaining Chartist principles as connected to reform favourable to cheap and just administration and free trade and appealing for aid in a crisis of withheld rights, met with the objections of 'left' and mainstream. O'Brien explained that he was not against the address, it could do no harm, but 'His own opinion was that the working classes had much more bitter and determined enemies in the middle classes than they had in the aristocracy'.¹²⁵

With talk of 'ulterior measures', letters came in to the Convention from localities urgently informing them that little could be expected of them in terms of 'ulterior measures'. These were accompanied by correspondence from Chartist associations anxious for the Convention to re-emphasise legality and constitutionalism, though the majority of Chartist opinion seems to have been waiting on developments elsewhere.¹²⁶ The problem was that physical force rhetoric was just that, with little beyond a few desperate insurrectionists to push it forward. R. J. Richardson, as we have seen a leading proponent of legal arming, sensed the precarious position of the Convention on retiring as delegate for Manchester in July. With arrests of Chartists adding to a sense of impending crisis Richardson warned the few remaining Convention members to 'judge carefully and above all things act cautiously'.¹²⁷ While he supported the 'ulterior measure' of a gold run on the banks, having toured the south of England and knowing that Manchester factory workers were on short-time, he considered the pursuit of a 'national holiday' for the Charter to be ill-considered and possibly

^{125.} *Charter*, no. 27, 28 July 1839, p. 428. BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34,245B, ff. 266-67, 23 July 1839; f.275, 16 September 1839.

^{126.} BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34245A, f.188, 2 April 1839; ff.204-205, n.d.; ff.304-305, 24 April 1839; f.406, 4 May 1839; f.408, 6 May 1839; f.422, 8 May 1839; BL Add. 34245B, f.57, 21 July 1839; ff.70-71, 30 July 1839; ff.72-73, 31 July 1839; f.74, n.d.; ff.88-89, 1 August 1839; f. 93, 2 August 1839; ff.97-100, 3 August 1839; ff.101-102, 4 August 1839; ff.105-106, 5 August 1839; ff. 109-14, 116, 6 August 1839; f. 119, 7 August 1839; f. 125, 8 August 1839; ff. 127-28, 8 August 1839; ff.192-93, 4 September 1839.

^{127.} BL, Papers of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, Add. 34245B, ff. 53-54, 21 July 1839.

catastrophic.

Chartism, confronted with the rejection of the Petition and selective government arrests, rather than a more obviously indiscriminate and tyrannical attack on the Chartist body, had little to offer in response in the form of constitutional direct action. The arrests of William Lovett and John Collins for their involvement in a 'seditious' protest at the metropolitan police attacks on Chartists in the Birmingham Bull Ring, deprived the Convention of its able secretary and two pragmatic leaders who were prepared to negotiate between moderation and physical force. Eventually, the Convention all but dissolved, its Council resolved at the last moment to abandon the two-week strike for a one to three day version.¹²⁸ It passed with sporadic strikes, protests and riots at isolated locations largely in the factory districts, with limited impact but few arrests.¹²⁹ Disputes began to fill the correspondence columns of the *Northern Star*, such as that between Dr Fletcher and O'Connor, which as with many other disputes centred on the issue of money and accusations of making a profit from Chartism.¹³⁰ The Convention dissolved in the same spirit, failed expectations and hopes feeding into petty squabbles. Even the closing address of the Convention was met by a protest from three stalwart delegates determined to carry on.¹³¹

The wind, by September 1839, was well and truly out of Chartism's sails. O'Brien declared that little more could be done by the Convention delegates until the people had actively embraced the exclusive dealing of the 'ulterior measures', had realised the necessity of being armed for self-defence and, most importantly, become an organised body that the Convention could draw from and

^{128.} *Charter*, no.29, 11 August 1839, p. 461.

^{129.} BL, Place Papers, Add. 27819, f.170, 17 August 1839; f.170, 18 August 1839; ff.171, 174, 180-82, n.d.

^{130.} *Northern Star*, no.97, 21 September 1839, p. 7; no.99, 5 October 1839. p. 4, 6; no.100, 12 October 1839, p. 1, 4; no.101, 19 October 1839, p. 4.

^{131.} *Charter*, no.32, 1 September 1839, p.510; no.33, 8 September 1839, p. 526-27, 533, 535; no.34, 15 September 1839, p. 533; no.35, 22 September 1839, p. 550.

rely on. Continued arrests further compounded O'Brien's pessimism, though he also realised that there was little more that the Convention could have done. O'Connor also recognised, despite his efforts to present its difficulties as class-treachery, that the Convention had been far more united and had achieved much that had not looked possible at the commencement of 1839.¹³² Much had been done to promote the Charter across the country and there had been compromise. But this presented difficulties for the Convention. Physical force could not by definition sit comfortably with appeals to the middle classes. The rhetoric of physical force and class triumphed in non-Chartist minds over the moderate, legal tone of such documents as the *Declaration of the Rights of the People* (a document arguing the legal precedents for Chartist demands), adopted by the Convention in September 1839.¹³³

Retreat to moral force?

Warnings of physical force continued but were generally framed, in late-1839 into 1840, as a more distant risk that the upper and middle classes ran if they continued to deny working men their political rights, rather than as something that Chartists would precipitate in the short term if their demands were not met. This had been the preferred statement regarding the ultimate sanction of physical force of moral force Chartists and represented a retreat by the mainstream that was only partially countered in 1842 and 1848. O'Connor could be found in December 1839 claiming that 'he would not give twopence for physical force unless the people first proved they possessed the moral force to back it'.¹³⁴ Appeals against local risings and spies were issued by the *Northern Star*, which had never backed actual rebellion, least of all in such hopeless conditions as

¹³² *Northern Star*, no.97, 21 September 1839, p. 1.

¹³³ *Charter*, no.34, 15 September 1839, p. 533.

¹³⁴ *Northern Star*, no.110, 21 December 1839, p. 3, 8.

those pursued by handfuls of committed planners of insurrection. The 'dementedness' of a few, the *Star* claimed, would harm the whole movement.¹³⁵

The possibility of successfully deploying physical force rhetoric in the way that it had been in the years 1837 to 1839 was thus removed by 1840. The prosecution and transportation (commuted from death sentences) of John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones following the rising at Newport in November 1839 was a stark warning of the possible results of following through the logic of rhetorical threat.¹³⁶ At the Manchester Chartist delegate conference from which emerged the NCA, the militant John Black of Nottingham urged immediate rebellion and argued that Nottingham was ready and merely awaiting the word. The *Northern Star* reacted in alarm, labelling Black's position as fatuity in the face of the need for practical and useful measures to tackle failure and government opposition.¹³⁷ But as the Chartist movement re-organised as the NCA confidence began to return and with it a renewed sense of Chartism as an instrument with which to threaten the government into ceding manhood suffrage. However, fear of government arrests and a smaller platform presence served, after 1839, to make such statements less bold.¹³⁸ In 1842 the distress and riots in the north and north west of that summer were met with opportunism by Chartist leaders but also pervasive, nervous warnings against spies and suspiciously violent language. In 1839 the mainstream could incorporate militancy; thereafter

^{135.} *Northern Star*, no.114, 18 January 1840, p. 4; no.116, 1 February 1840, p. 5; no.118, 15 February 1840, p. 3; no.119, 22 February 1840, p. 4; no.120, 29 February 1840, p. 4.

^{136.} *Northern Star*, no.112, 4 June 1840, p. 4; no.113, 11 January 1840, p. 4; *Charter*, no.42, 10 November 1839, p. 664; no.43, 17 November 1839, p. 674; no.44, 4 November 1839, p. 690. See also: David Williams, *John Frost. A Study in Chartism* (Cardiff, 1939), pp. 195-239; David J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising. The Newport Chartist Insurrection of 1839* (Cardiff, 1999 edition), pp. 199-29; Ivor Wilks, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839. Class Struggle as Armed Struggle* (London, 1984), pp. 246-52.

^{137.} *Northern Star*, no.122, 14 March 1840, p. 4.

^{138.} *Northern Star*, no.157, 14 November 1840, p. 1; no.167, 23 January 1841, p. 7.

the efficacy of threatening physical force was far more tempered.¹³⁹

The dissolution of the Convention, the disaster of 'ulterior measures', the widespread arrests of Chartist leaders and the debacle at Newport served as a reality check to Chartist hopes after the heady heights of 1838 and the early months of 1839. Middle-class radicals had been tempted into the movement and moral and 'physical' force Chartists had united in common endeavour. But by the close of 1839 the Chartist movement, as it had been, no longer existed. A new Convention briefly sat in London in December 1839 to defend Frost but, like the plans of insurrections rife at the time, served only to highlight the parlous condition of Chartism. The mainstream would reconstruct itself on a more formal basis but moral force Chartists withdrew to form small organisations opposed to 'O'Connorism' and middle class sympathisers for the most part remained aloof from Chartist advocacy altogether. As we shall see in Chapter VI, though, the Chartist mainstream still experienced elements of a moral force critique of O'Connor, physical force and class rhetoric and the mass platform. Moral force Chartism was formative in the construction of the Charter. It continued as a response to the experience of Chartism and the difficulty of achieving ambitious radical political reform in a class-bound and politically unequal society.¹⁴⁰

In July 1839, McDouall had put forward a motion in the Convention to adopt a formal plan of organisation for Chartism, which Lovett and Collins had opposed as illegal.¹⁴¹ The motion had passed but had not been acted upon during the

^{139.} *Northern Star*, no.206, 23 October 1841, p. 4; no.224, 26 February 1842, p. 4, 8; no.235, 14 May 1842, p. 1; no.238, 4 June 1842, p. 4; no.239, 11 June 1842, p. 4; no.240, 18 June 1842, p. 4, 8; no.241, 25 June 1842, p. 4; no.244, 16 July 1842, p. 4.

^{140.} For example, John Richardson and William Burns, both mainstreamers in the Convention signed 'A Few Words of Advice to the Upper and Middle Classes, from Some Members of the Late General Convention' (*Charter*, no.46, 8 December 1839, p. 721), inviting class-conciliation.

^{141.} *Charter*, no.24, 7 July 1839, pp. 380-81.

lifetime of the Convention and did not begin to be discussed seriously until early 1840. It had the backing of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* but not moral force Chartists, who continued to view a national central organisation as illegal and preferred to revert to a local educational approach, a strategy encouraged by the experience of 1839.

A moral force critique, however apparently fuzzy at times, continued to be present throughout the Convention. Joel Wiener has pointed out that the 'shades of difference' between Lovett and O'Connor were not what Lovett later sought to present as his fight against O'Connorite 'extremism'.¹⁴² The gap between Lovett and O'Connor was relatively narrow and the distance between moral and physical force was likewise small. But nonetheless significant differences of emphases were present. Convention delegates such as those of the LWMA sought to press forward with radical reform by the force of a peaceful and rational campaign of radical education and radical class collaboration. These Chartists were temporarily allied with those in the Convention, led by O'Connor, who sought radical reform by the use of an ambiguous rhetoric of physical force. Following the failure of the Chartist Convention, however, these lines of strategic disagreement led to division between moral force associated with local organisation and class co-operation and physical force associated with O'Connor, class rhetoric and a centrally organised Chartist mainstream. What was clear in late 1839 and early 1840, however, was that these were different positions within a common movement. The following chapter demonstrates how moral force Chartists became, as a result of O'Connor's opposition to their strategy, effectively exiles from the movement that they had done much to create.

¹⁴² Joel Wiener, *William Lovett*, pp. 57-68; William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, pp. 205-46.

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Chapter IV.

The National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People.

Following the failure of early Chartism the movement entered a period of reorganisation. The mainstream sought to forge a national party, the NCA, with local branches and an elected national executive. Moral force Chartists, disillusioned with 'O'Connorism', turned to local organisation and emphasised education, temperance and religion. Most prominent of the new moral force organisations was the National Association for the Promotion of the Political and Social Improvement of the People (NA), a London-based body which was based on the LWMA membership. Though the new moral force organisations were Chartist, O'Connor labelled them a middle-class 'new move'. Due to O'Connor's continued dominant leadership of Chartism, his attacks pushed moral force Chartism to the margins of the movement. O'Connor's claims of the middle-class character of the 'new move' stuck and signalled the end of Chartism as a coalition of assorted radical bodies. Chartism became synonymous with membership of the mainstream NCA, a view taken, too, by recent historians such as Dorothy Thompson and James Epstein. This chapter will argue to the contrary, that, whilst moral force Chartists criticised O'Connor and were prepared to co-operate with middle-class radicals, they remained genuine advocates of Chartism into the 1840s.

A new organisation of the people.

During much of 1839 the efforts of LWMA activists were re-directed into the General Metropolitan Charter Association. This body had come together as a conglomeration of seventeen London Chartist associations in support of the efforts of the Convention to agitate London. While the LWMA continued to exist into 1840, it no longer possessed its previous vitality, with very little

recorded activity and no new publications. Following the failure of the GMCA, in early 1840, the efforts of the London moral force core, particularly Hetherington, went into promoting a London-wide Metropolitan Charter Union, which sought to unite different groupings around the Charter along moral force lines:

To promote peace, union, and concord among all classes of the people, to guide and direct public opinion into uniform, peaceful, and legitimate operation; instead of leaving it to waste its strength, in loose, desultory, unconnected exertions ...¹

Initial enthusiasm, though, gave way to wrangling over strategy. The subsequent demise of this organisation pre-figured the final separation of prominent London moral force figures from mainstream London Chartism, which began to organise as the London division of the new NCA.² Prominent London-based moral force Chartists thereafter supported the formation of the NA, which came together around Lovett's and Collins's educational programme published on their release from Warwick gaol in July 1840; *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People*.³ The NA was founded in October 1841 and drew on ideas that had been published by the LWMA in 1838 as an address on national education which promoted local, education-based working-class radical politics.⁴

¹ *Southern Star and London Patriot*, no. 2, 3 May 1840, p. 1.

² Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 3, f. 41, n.d.; f. 115, n.d.; *Southern Star and London Patriot*, no. 2, 3 May 1840, p. 1, 5; no.4, 17 May 1840, p. 1; no.6, 31 May 1840, p. 1; no.7, 7 June 1840, p. 1; no.8, 14 June 1840, p. 1; no.9, 21 June 1840, p. 1; no.10, 28 June 1840, p. 1; no.11, 5 July 1840, p. 1; Goodway, *London Chartism*, p. 38.

³ William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People, Embracing a Plan for the Education and Improvement of the People, Politically and Socially; Addressed to the Working-Classes of the United Kingdom, and More Especially to the Advocates of the Rights and Liberties of the Whole People as Set Forth in the 'People's Charter'*. Written in Warwick Gaol (London, 1840, reprinted, 1969).

⁴ *An Address from the Working Men's Association to the Working Classes, on the Subject of National Education* (London, 1838).

The National Association and Feargus O'Connor

Moral force Chartists now rejected the mass platform and snubbed the new NCA organised mainstream. The NA was one of a number of non-NCA local bodies that emerged in the early 1840s.⁵ These 'alternative' groups of Chartists attracted the condemnation of O'Connor as diversionary to the authentic Chartism represented by himself and the *Northern Star*. O'Connor, despite not taking a formal leadership role in the NCA, was still the dominant influence through his control of the *Northern Star*. In a *Northern Star* article written from York Castle gaol, O'Connor argued that the 'new move' was a deliberate attack on his leadership and a shift from the Charter to household suffrage, behind which lay middle-class corruption.⁶

Some degree of sympathy persisted in the movement for the approach of the NA. The Universal Suffrage Central Committee of Scotland, for example, openly rejected the moral-'physical' force dichotomy but emphasised education and printed *Chartism*, 'An Excellent Work', in its journal, the *Chartist Circular*.⁷ The editor of the *Northern Star*, William Hill, a Swedenborgian minister, had recently signed a Chartist teetotal pledge, co-signed by Vincent, Cleave, Neesom and Hetherington, in which 'self-culture' and education had been promoted.⁸ Hill, in a bold editorial, considered that O'Connor had not displayed his 'usual acumen' in his attacks on the 'new move'. Chartists, who emphasised education, temperance or Christianity in promoting the Charter were, he answered back, not

⁵ On temperance Chartism see: Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism', *History*, 58 (1973), 193-217.

⁶ *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

⁷ *Chartist Circular*, no.1, 28 September 1841, p. 1, 2; no.25, 14 March 1840, p. 102; no.55, 10 October 1840, pp. 221-22; no.64, 19 December 1840, p. 263; no.68, 9 January 1841, pp. 284-85.

⁸ *Northern Star*, no.159, 28 November 1840, p. 3.

exclusive or divisive but part of a wider network of Chartists pursuing an undiluted Chartism.⁹ O'Connor, though, rejected what he saw as a blurring of the Chartist position. Self and social improvement were to be got by the Charter and not prior to it by self-improving schemes: '... get your Charter, and I will answer for the religion, sobriety, knowledge, and house, and a bit of land into the bargain'.¹⁰ The Charter was a demand of the working people to be obtained from the government immediately. O'Connor launched a scathing attack on the 'secret move', which, he argued, was capable of perverting the Charter and dividing the movement. O'Connor was at this stage careful to emphasise that the likes of Lovett, Hetherington and Cleave were misguided rather than personally dishonest. O'Connor's contentions, however, soon became far more personal and his invective less restrained. The NA was, he claimed, the concoction of O'Connell, Hume and Roebuck.¹¹

O'Connor's charges continued the following week. The claim of the NA founders that they wished to avoid the 'gaudy trappings' of the Chartist platform agitation was, he argued, a little rich, coming as it did from persons who had recently taken full part in them.¹² The theme soon caught on with William Ryder decrying the 'Chartist tricksters' who, at the behest of parliamentary radicals, sought to destroy the Chartist movement. Ryder went on to criticise the non-working class character of the London 'moral force' Chartists. They were, he claimed, 'NOT of the veritable blistered hands of the metropolis, but of such soft-flated gentry as Hetherington, Lovett, and Co., whose very souls abhor the idea of work ... they have a greater zest for profit gathered from the counter ...'.¹³ This was a familiar association of moral force with idle, effete, self-serving

⁹ *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p.4.

¹⁰ *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

¹¹ *Northern Star*, no.178, 10 April 1841, p. 1; no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 3.

¹² *Northern Star*, no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 1.

¹³ *Northern Star*, no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 7.

radicalism. H. Ross wrote of the 'new move' proponents as enemies 'dressed in the garb of friendship'.¹⁴ A West Riding delegate meeting recorded a motion of censure against Lovett and Collins as playing into the hands of corrupt middle-class radicals.¹⁵ Even the moderate constitutionalist, W. V. Sankey, publicly rejected the educationalism of the NA as it would 'give a handle to the enemies of the cause'.¹⁶ The attacks on the 'new move' continued with charges made regarding educational exclusivity and divisiveness. O'Connell's name also continued to be dropped alongside mention of the NA and he was asserted to be 'privy to the whole scheme', which amounted to an assault on the leadership of the true friend of the people, Feargus O'Connor. New names were also linked to the same effect, such as the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, Patrick Brewster and the BPU.¹⁷

O'Connor's campaign against re-organised moral force Chartism was thus cast as an assault on attempts to water down and divide Chartism. Unlike the previous disputes with moral force Chartists, O'Connor this time completed a rout. Moral force Chartists had previously exerted a strong influence from within organised Chartism but after O'Connor's efforts against the 'new move' they were consigned to isolation. O'Connor succeeded in placing them, in the mainstream Chartist mind, outside the Chartist movement. In Chapter VI we shall see that many moral force concerns and disputes emerged in the mainstream NCA. But moral force Chartism as a distinct co-existing current with the NCA became impossible. The impact of O'Connor's diatribes was tremendous. Letters began to be printed in the *Northern Star* from those who had initially backed the NA, rescinding their support for a scheme associated

¹⁴ *Northern Star*, no.178, 10 April 1841, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Northern Star*, no.180, 24 April 1841, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Northern Star*, no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Northern Star*, no.180, 24 April 1841, p. 1, 4, 7; no. 181, 1 May 1841, p. 4; no.183, May 15 1841, p. 7.

with O'Connell and household suffrage (both entirely false charges). Under the sub-title 'The "Rats" Escaping from the Trap', fourteen Chartists including John Richards of the Potteries and T. R. Smart of Leicester disclaimed their previous support for the NA plan.¹⁸ The sheer success of O'Connor's vituperative critiques of moral force Chartism meant that Chartists with whom he disagreed were in effect pushed out of the movement. The address of the NCA executive in October 1841 warned that

... that man who, being a member of our Association, endeavours to excite distrust, or sow division in our ranks, deserves to be expelled on account of his knavery, or distrusted on account of his folly. We conceive that the man who is not a member of our Association, and who endeavours to cripple our efforts, or weaken our influence, exhibits great malice towards the people, or proves treachery to their cause.¹⁹

With the historical renaissance of O'Connor's radical reputation, historians have come to see Chartism from his perspective and concerns. While the NCA has been regarded as the first national workers' movement, the NA is seen as outside Chartism because it was outside the mainstream and appealed for middle class support and funds.²⁰ Dorothy Thompson, for example, has described the new organisations springing up in 1840, committed to educational, temperance and Christian means, as the restoration of 'respectable' radicalism. She questions, too, the middle class supporters of the NA as 'hoping to divert energies from the more radical activities of the Chartist movement' and charges it with insensitivity to the majority of workers' problems and lives.²¹ Such a position is, however, rather difficult to reconcile with the actual statements of the

¹⁸ *Northern Star*, no.180, 24 April 1841, p. 5; no.181, 1 May 1841, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Northern Star*, no.204, 9 October 1841, p. 8.

²⁰ John Charlton, *The Chartists*, pp. 13-16, 27-28, 50-52, 70-72.

²¹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 259-61.

Association and its members. It certainly was critical of O'Connor, but not of the NCA nor of any other body prepared to advance the Charter. It was open to support from wealthy patrons, but was far from uncritical of the middle class.²²

The central proponents of the NA plan went to some lengths to refute O'Connor's charges against them. Lovett argued that the NA was only one of a number of different plans and projects that had no secret origins or purpose.²³ Cleave, though later closer to the NCA with his *English Chartist Circular*, defended the NA plan as Chartist, doubted the legality of the new NCA and regretted O'Connor's attack on the 'right of free opinion': '... let us have done with disgraceful vituperation ... If we differ as to the *mode*, let us at least agree to pursue the *end* all profess to hold dear'.²⁴ Neesom, in 1839 at the heart of the 'left' of the Convention and a key LDA member, defended his support for the NA. In a hard-hitting letter to the *Northern Star*, Neesom objected to attempts by William Ryder to get his old-colleague to rescind his signature from the NA plan. He went on, '... had Mr. O'Connor written or spoken in favour of Lovett's plan it would have been applauded to the skies by those who now condemn it'.²⁵ He had signed the plan as one calculated to promote the cause of Chartism and was 'neither an O'Connor's man nor a Lovett's man'.²⁶ The plan, Neesom conceded, may have been ill-timed in appearing as an alternative to the NCA but urged that such plans must be left to the test of support:

I contend that any person has a right to bring forth a "New Plan" every

²² *Receipts and Expenditure of the National Association, from February 22, 1842, to June 24, 1843* (London, 1843).

²³ *Northern Star*, no.181, 1 May 1841, p. 3.

²⁴ *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 3.

²⁵ *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 6.

²⁶ *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 6.

day, and any person may add their names to it who think proper – *motive is everything*. Shall a man be assailed on every side for acting according to the best of his judgment? Is it Democracy or Chartism to say a man is a spy, a traitor, one who has sold himself to the Government, because he appends his name to a document which have for its object the attainment of the People's Charter?²⁷

Hetherington, however, formed the backbone of the moral force fight-back against O'Connor's denunciations. In his letters to the *Northern Star* he accused O'Connor of 'a wilful perversion of the truth' in blending the NA plan with that of Hume's household suffrage plan. Hetherington explained that far from being a vehicle for Hume's efforts, the NA was a result of the rejection by Lovett and Cleave of Hume's plans, being unprepared to drop the name of the Charter however close came to it (Hetherington, though, had not objected as such: '... though I would never abandon the agitation for the Charter, if I saw any prospect of carrying Mr. Hume's plan immediately, I would give it my best exertions ...').²⁸ Hetherington charged O'Connor with being 'destitute of that democratic spirit of freedom and equality which is essential in an advocate of the rights of the people'.²⁹ He defended, too, the charges of secretive conduct in promoting the NA plan, which was the same in format as the LWMA pamphlet on Ireland in 1838: 'The *Northern Star* then [at the time of the Ireland pamphlet] highly approved of the course taken to obtain unity of sentiment, and to give it publicity. The same course now meets with determined hostility. It is called a "secret move"'.³⁰ Hetherington reversed the association of the NA with O'Connell by pointing on the one hand to O'Connell's Whiggery and on the other to O'Connor's desire to lead Chartism as a personal 'tail': '... the cause of Chartism is to be sacrificed to the private and personal malignity of two of as

²⁷. *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 6.

²⁸. *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

²⁹. *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

³⁰. *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

great political humbugs as ever figured in the political arena – Daniel O’Connell and Feargus O’Connor, one with an Irish “tail,” the other with an English one ...’.³¹ Hetherington claimed that the *Northern Star* and not the NA was the truly divisive force, traducing characters and promoting animosity and claimed that O’Connor’s strategy was at fault and misleading:

Mr. O’Connor may promise his poor, deluded dupes ... that they shall have the Charter in three months from the present time; but I am satisfied it will take a much longer period to move a nation. If he could obtain the People’s Charter within the time specified, of what use would it be, if the people were not better prepared to appreciate it than the ten seceders [from the NA plan] who erased their names through fear of Mr. O’Connor and his hired tools? If the people had the Charter tomorrow, and were destitute of a knowledge of their political rights and duties, how long would they retain their liberties? Brief would be the tenure of possession! ...³²

O’Connor’s response to Hetherington was typical of his technique. Not answering any of Hetherington’s points, he launched into a tirade of invective. Hetherington noted that O’Connor had typically not provided evidence for his charges and re-asserted O’Connor as a ‘vile calumniator’ and mocked his pretensions as a radical leader: ‘Your vanity is inordinate ... the wreath of laurel is to be torn from the brow of those who have honestly earned it, and placed on such an empty vain boaster as Feargus O’Connor’.³³ Furthermore, for O’Connor, middle class after all, to attack the London moral force Chartists as non-working class was farcical. O’Connor’s reply was characteristic of his blunt confidence in his role as the national Chartist leader closest to the people. He was not, he asserted, middle class but of the aristocracy from where he had been promoted to

³¹. *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

³². *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

³³. *Northern Star*, no.187, 12 June 1841, p. 7.

'a commission in the democracy'.³⁴ It was precisely his financial independence that allowed him, through the *Star*, to be an honest tribune for democracy. O'Connor did not need consistency. Sheer ebullience, an ability to taint his opponents and total belief in himself as the 'father' of the movement carried his leadership.

Vincent, too, responded to attacks on him for signing the plan. Lovett was a Chartist, he answered, as was he and he knew of no conspiracy. Vincent was a member of the NCA but the attacks on him demonstrated the difficulty of supporting the NA plan from within it. His support for the NA plan, he lamented '... has rendered me a "fallen" Chartist ... I am to be denounced as a "traitor," thief, pimp, Whig, Tory, O'Connellite ...'.³⁵ Watson too, entered into a public debate with John Watkins, a keen supporter of O'Connor and detractor of the 'Lovettites'.³⁶ However, in practical terms, these responses to O'Connor could not reverse the damage done to the NA and moral force Chartists in the mainstream Chartist mind. This was despite the fact that moral force Chartists were radicals, usually working class, who adopted a pragmatic rejection of the rhetoric of physical force and class in favour of a moderate approach that could draw on support from enlightened members of all classes. But like the LWMA, for the NA the Charter was a means to the end of future radical social reform. More egalitarian ends envisaged by most Chartists, though, should be publicly deferred until after the Charter had been gained. Means were important to ends in the sense that peaceful, educational and cross-class radical activity were aimed at forming better citizens for the future democracy. This would ensure the security and longevity of political equality and increase the possibility of further successful social reform.

³⁴ *Northern Star*, no.182, 8 May 1841, p. 7.

³⁵ *Northern Star*, no.181, 1 May 1841, p. 7.

³⁶ *Northern Star*, no.200, 11 September 1841, p. 4.

... in order to check the natural selfishness and ambition of rulers, and induce them to enact just and salutary laws, those who possess the power to *elect* must have knowledge, judgment, and moral principle to direct them, before anything worthy of the name of just government or true liberty can be established.³⁷

‘Peaceful and Moral Effort’: Attempts at moral force revival.

The NA, like the LWMA, sought to exercise the influence of a pressure group, pure in radical principle, mainly working class in composition but courting metropolitan influence. Appeals for a cross-class radical alliance were central to its purpose but were linked to the demands of the Charter, which laid a blueprint for radical action that would remove political privilege as a prop of class society. The NA received considerable support from metropolitan middle-class radicals, amongst whom was J. S. Mill who wrote to Lovett: ‘I have never yet met with any associated body of men whom I respect so much as I do your Association ...’ and, though suspicious of immediate universal suffrage, agreed to aid the NA privately.³⁸ As with the LWMA, the NA’s educational format, complete with ‘Social Festivals’ and ‘rational amusements’, attracted the support of Owenite-socialists such as John Finch and John Goodwyn Barmby.³⁹

The National Association originated as the educational project of William Lovett, who was moving towards orthodox political economy and arch-

³⁷. *At a Meeting*, p. 4.

³⁸. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 4, f. 220 j-n, J. S. Mill to Lovett, n.d.

³⁹. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 4, f. 208a, J. G. Barmby to Lovett, n.d.; BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 125, Richard Taylor to Lovett, 14 February 1841; f. 129, Samuel Wood to Lovett, 20 February 1841; ff. 138-39, John Mitchell to Lovett, 23 March 1841; f. 117, John Finch to Lovett, 15 April 1841; f. 147, Thomas Potter to Lovett, 20 April 1842; BL, LWMA minutes, Add., 37774, ff. 9-10, 16 November 1841; Add. 37775, ff. 34-35, 23 December 1845.

moderation.⁴⁰ However, it is clear from its statements and aims that it aimed at an all encompassing radical renewal of society. The *Objects* adopted by the Association were essentially those laid down in *Chartism*, as were its *Plans, Rules, and Regulations*. A National Hall was to be built and ‘schools for the people’, and a library established ‘To promote the education of the rising generation and ... *for rational amusement* after the hours of toil’.⁴¹ But the Association’s educational focus in no way interfered with its support for universal suffrage as an indispensable priority: ‘*Representation before Education* ... Unless equality of right is recognised for every man, no system of education, worthy of the name can be established’.⁴²

That the ‘new move’ was indeed something new is not contested. Arthur O’Neill, co-founder of the Birmingham Chartist Church, certainly saw his project as joining a distinct new trend within the Chartist movement.⁴³ Likewise, Henry Vincent wrote from Oakham jail of the need for ‘a plan of organisation which, while it aims at investing the people with political power, will moralise, soberise, and intellectualise them’.⁴⁴ The impact of 1839 and the consequent arrests and imprisonments had a profound impact on many Chartists, not least those who served time in the grim recesses of Victorian gaols. Some Chartist prisoners remained unrepentant but these tended to be those whose militancy was confirmed by government oppression, such as William Aitken, P. M. McDouall, George White and William Benbow. Throughout the course of

⁴⁰ Lovett was offered an editorial role at the *Leeds Times* in 1840 by Samuel Smiles: BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 112, Smiles to Lovett, 10 December 1840. See also Lovett’s letter to Walter Mason (*British Statesman*, no.31, 8 October 1842, p. 9) in which Lovett outlines his support for free-trade and the practicality of the anti-Corn Law agitation.

⁴¹ *Rules and Objects of the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People* (London, 1841), p. 4.

⁴² *National Association Gazette*, no.1, 1 January, 1841, p. 4.

⁴³ Lovett Papers, BL Add.78161, f. 94, n.d.

⁴⁴ Lovett Papers, BL Add.78161, f. 114, 18 September, 1840.

Chartism, however, arrests and imprisonment served to moderate its victims, who 'acquired a heightened respect for the power of government, and were dissuaded from employing violent action or rhetoric. Appreciating the barriers to radical reform, they were led to seek middle-class allies'.⁴⁵ William Lovett's prison experience was a 'fault line' in his radical career and, like many others, he began to emphasise self-improvement as an integral element of Chartist organisation.⁴⁶

A small body with few supporters, the NA aimed at social regeneration by the cultivation of the intellect and the achievement of political equality.⁴⁷ Its more immediate role, though, was to attempt to restore the Chartist movement to its original, pre-O'Connorite, strategy. This meant that efforts were restricted to a small didactic association, as 'among men so maddened by calumny, it was judged prudent to persue [sic] our objects *localy* [sic], till the storm of persecution had passed'.⁴⁸ The NA had confidence that the objects of the Charter could be achieved, despite O'Connor, through the dissemination of radical ideas, for which purpose the *National Association Gazette* was launched, edited by J. H. Parry, a well-known London lawyer.⁴⁹ The 'rational plan' of the NA had been attacked, it was argued, by the 'false, intolerant and reckless':

But ... we believe that the great bulk of our British brethren is composed of men whose conviction in favour of the Charter has sprung from

⁴⁵ Christopher Godfrey, 'The Chartist Prisoners, 1839-41', p. 224.

⁴⁶ Joel Wiener, *William Lovett*, pp. 74-79.

⁴⁷ *National Association Gazette*, no.1, 1 January 1842, p. 1. Only two branches were formed, one in the City of London and the other a short-lived (from January to April 1842) Lambeth branch.

⁴⁸ *First Annual Report of the National Association* (London, 1843), p. 3.

⁴⁹ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37,774, ff. 5-6, 19 October 1841; ff. 14-16, 14 December 1841; ff. 16-17, 21 December 1841; f. 19, 4 January 1842; ff. 20-21, 18 January 1842; ff. 26-27, 22 February 1842; f. 29, 3 March 1842; ff. 48-49, 2 August 1842.

observation, inquiry, and patient investigation regarding the causes of political injustice and social misery. Men of this description may be deceived and misled for a season by mistification and falsehood; but their minds, bent on inquiry and ever open to conviction, will soon penetrate the flimsy veil which has been drawn over their understanding.⁵⁰

Chartist meetings, the NA considered, had too often 'been arenas of passionate invective, party spirit, and personal idolatry', retarding rather than advancing the movement.⁵¹ The prescription of the NA was calm deliberation and free discussion of grievances in order to disseminate facts and inculcate principles in order that 'our population will be prepared to *use wisely* the political power they are seeking to obtain'.⁵² The suffrage was a means to mental and moral improvement with the end of 'political freedom' and 'social happiness'. The NA was 'anxious above all things of seeing them [the working classes] instructed in their political rights and social duties'.⁵³ By so doing they sped on the Charter but also prepared virtuous citizens for political democracy so that the people would 'not be half a century exercising the franchise, and at the end of it still find themselves the sport of cunning schemers and wily politicians'.⁵⁴

Several aspects of the politics of the NA suggest that it was a more moderate body than the LWMA had been. It published several pamphlets but these lacked the radical vitality of documents like the *Rotten House of Commons* and demonstrated a distinct drift towards pacifism and support for free-trade. Also, linked to the desire of the NA to avoid potentially divisive controversial topics,

^{50.} *At a Meeting of the Members of the National Association, held at the Globe Tavern, Shoe-Lane, Fleet-street, on Tuesday, September 14th, and on Wednesday, the 15th, by adjournment, the following Address was unanimously adopted:- TO THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL REFORMERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM* (London, 1841), p. 2.

^{51.} *To the Political and Social Reformers*, p. 2.

^{52.} *To the Political and Social Reformers*, p. 2.

^{53.} *To the Political and Social Reformers*, p. 2.

^{54.} *At a Meeting*, p. 3.

the Chartist-Owenite G. J. Holyoake was refused a teaching post at the National Hall in 1846 due to his reputation as an atheist.⁵⁵ ‘Missionary’ activity was far less frequent in the NA and the language of working-class political independence toned down.⁵⁶ Its attitude to the anti-Corn Law agitation was one of broad support and, although Chartists should not be drawn away ‘for any measure of reform which does not go to the root of their political evils’, mainstream Chartist interruption of meetings drew criticism from the NA.⁵⁷ Its radical internationalism (dealt with in greater detail in Chapter VII) involved support for the Democratic Friends of All Nations but also pacifism, with a delegate sent to the Peace Convention in 1843.⁵⁸ Sympathy was extended to the world temperance convention in 1846 (though no delegate was sent).⁵⁹ Support for parliamentary radicals was seen as central to the activity of the NA. T. S. Duncombe, W. S. Crawford, W. J. Fox, Colonel Thompson, George Thompson and Joseph Hume were all lauded for their democratic politics and Edward Miall at Southwark and Joseph Sturge at Birmingham were supported as universal suffrage candidates at elections.⁶⁰ Considerable discussion took place as to whether the new Poor Law was unjust and unbeneficial to the working classes.

⁵⁵ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 4, 27 June 1842, f. 218a; G. J. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life* (London, 1896, 1906 edition), pp. 177, 268-69.

⁵⁶ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 29-30, 15 March 1842.

⁵⁷ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, f. 70, 15 November 1842; ff. 74-75, 3 January 1843; ff. 13-14, 4 February 1845.

⁵⁸ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff.90-91, 30 May, 1843; Add. 37775, f. 6, 8 October 1844; f. 6, 15 October 1844; f. 7, 22 October 1844; f. 8, 5 November 1844; f. 13, 28 January 1845.

⁵⁹ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 50, 14 July 1846; ff. 50-51, 21 July 1846.

⁶⁰ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 56-57, 13 September 1842; ff. 109-10, 7 November 1843; f. 116, 9 January 1844; f. 123, 22 April 1844; f. 124, 14 May 1844; f. 126, 9 July 1844; Add. 37,775, f. 22, 20 May 1845; ff. 27-28, 19 August 1845; ff. 52-53, 4 August 1846; f. 54, 18 August 1846; ff. 87-88, 30 June 1847; ff. 112-13, 26 April 1848; f. 114, 7 June 1848; ff. 114-15, 14 June 1848; Add. 37,776, ff. 128-29, 6 September 1847.

This was linked to the increased prevalence of free-trade ideas, expressed in a vote that, though long hours were injurious to bodies, minds and spirits, government interference was more socially injurious.⁶¹ An address mooted against the Irish Coercion Bill in 1846 divided the NA to such an extent that the Bill had passed into law before it could be issued.⁶² The Factory Education Bill of 1843 was opposed as sectarian, as was the Maynooth grant but a proposed Education Bill of 1847 divided the NA, with some acknowledgment of progress in the government's proposal. It was eventually opposed but not in such forthright terms as Lovett wished.⁶³ The 1847 Health of Towns Bill was welcomed as an example of good legislation.⁶⁴ Opposition to the ballot without manhood suffrage was dropped.⁶⁵ A motion that land was a natural and inalienable right was defeated and replaced with a watered down resolution acknowledging the right to existence in a civilised state.⁶⁶ As the 1840s advanced, liberal government legislation appears to have gained the support of the more moderate membership of the NA.

Yet support for certain legislation in the 1840s should not mask the continued radical character of the NA, however apparently conciliatory. Dorothy

⁶¹ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, ff. 73-74, 3 March 1847; f. 30, 21 October 1845.

⁶² BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 44, 31 March 1846; f. 45, 21 April 1846; f. 45, 5 May 1846; f. 46, 12 May 1846; f. 46, 19 May 1846; ff. 46-47, 26 May 1846; f. 47, 2 June 1846; f. 47, 9 June 1846; f. 48, 16 June 1846; f. 48, 23 June 1846; f. 49, 30 June 1846.

⁶³ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, f. 83, 21 March 1843; ff. 83-84, 4 April 1843; ff. 84-85, 12 April 1843; Add. 37775, f. 24, 10 June 1845; ff. 77-79, 31 March 1847; f. 79, 7 April 1847; ff. 79-80, 14 April 1847; ff. 80-81, 21 April 1847; ff. 81-3, 28 April 1847; f. 83, 5 May 1847.

⁶⁴ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, ff. 85-86, 26 May 1847; f. 86, 2 June 1847; f. 86, 9 June 1847.

⁶⁵ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, ff. 94-95, 25 August 1847; f. 95, 1 September 1847.

⁶⁶ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, ff. 115-16, 28 June 1848; f. 117, 12 July 1848; , f. 118, 26 July 1848; f. 119, 16 August 1848; f. 120, 23 August 1848.

Thompson has rejected the NA as insensitive to the concerns of the great body of working men in Britain in 1842 with reference to the 'Plug' strikes.⁶⁷ Certainly their advice to the manufacturing districts to remain peaceable was platitudinous, as was a resolution of 1845 that machinery, though having a negative impact on some, was generally advantageous to mankind.⁶⁸ The NA, as a London organisation, did not often appear to appreciate either the conditions or feelings extant in the industrial midlands and north of England.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, London was still the largest manufacturing centre in Britain and the NA was responsive to the feelings and interests of the London working class. A mutual assistance society was established for the working class members of the NA and land and building societies approved of for mutual improvement (though not as a principled route to the vote).⁷⁰ A legal challenge was mounted by the NA to police violence at a Kennington Common meeting of 1842.⁷¹ Contact was established with French workmen regarding the Charter.⁷² An anti-Tsar meeting was held in 1844 on his reception by the British aristocracy and monarchy.⁷³ The occasion of the political amnesty to Canadian prisoners was urged by the NA to be extended to the Chartist transportees Frost, Williams, Jones and Ellis.⁷⁴ The

⁶⁷ Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 296.

⁶⁸ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37,774, ff. 50-52, 16 August 1842; Add. 37775, f. 27, 5 August 1845.

⁶⁹ An exception, where members of the NA were touched by the plight of sections of the non-London working class, was in 1844 when a function was held to support distressed coal miners: BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37774, ff. 126-27, 23 July 1844.

⁷⁰ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37775, f. 2, 6 August 1844; f. 32, 25 November 1845; ff. 33-34, 9 December 1846; ff.38-39, 27 January 1846; ff.91-92, 4 August 1847.

⁷¹ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37774, ff. 56-57, 13 September 1842; ff. 64-66, 18 October 1842.

⁷² BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37774, ff. 70-71, 22 November 1842; ff. 72-73, 5 December 1842.

⁷³ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37774, ff. 124-25, 4 June 1844.

⁷⁴ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37775, f. 41, 17 February 1846; f. 43, 17 March 1846.

death penalty and flogging were opposed, as was the proposed re-introduction of the militia draws.⁷⁵ A statue of Cromwell, as well as past monarchs, was proposed for the new House of Commons.⁷⁶ The 1846 fast day for Ireland was opposed.⁷⁷ Penal reform was urged away from ‘pains, penalties and coercion’.⁷⁸ A tea party was held on Thomas Paine’s birthday at the National Hall and the Spenceian, Allen Davenport, elected an honorary member.⁷⁹ The NA stood firmly against household suffrage.⁸⁰ Most stark of all, in response to Thompson’s assertion of an aloof, isolated and elitist body, the NA opened a book to register the skills of its unemployed members, who were, after all, in large part of the working classes.⁸¹

The National Association straddles recent historical approaches to Chartism rather uncomfortably. The NA membership were not uncomplicated class-conciliators but firm adherents to the Charter. Thus they do not offer an easy harbinger of later Liberalism in the vein of Biagini and Reid, who argue that Chartism represented a radical programme that could in time slot comfortably into mid-Victorian Liberalism. Neither was the NA, as urged by Dorothy Thompson and others, less than Chartist because it was a product of ‘artisan’ consciousness and thus unrepresentative of ‘real’ Chartism, which, it is argued,

⁷⁵ BL, LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37775, ff. 37-38, 20 January 1846; f. 42, 3 March 1846; ff. 52-53, 4 August 1846.

⁷⁶ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 32, 25 November 1845.

⁷⁷ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, ff. 74-75, 10 March 1847; ff. 75-76, 17 March 1847.

⁷⁸ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 119, 9 August 1848; f. 120, 30 August 1848; f. 121, 6 September 1848; f. 120, 13 September 1848.

⁷⁹ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 3, 27 August 1844; ff. 65-67, 22 December 1846; f. 67, 29 December 1846.

⁸⁰ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37775, f. 114, 31 May 1848.

⁸¹ BL LWMA Minutes, BL Add. 37774, ff. 105-106, 3 October 1843.

drew on a truer working-class consciousness.⁸² Not 'O'Connorite radicalism' but support for the Charter indicates a Chartist. Though an older view of 'rational' Lovettite moderation versus 'irrational' O'Connorite demagoguery has been superseded, it is nonetheless unsatisfactory to push moral force figures and organisations out of the Chartist equation. Membership of the NCA or admiration of O'Connor does not delineate a 'real' Chartist, however much it formed a mainstream of Chartist strategy, organisation and opinion.

Advocating independent working-class political organisation whilst convinced of the merits of radical class-alliance, the NA was not an organisation of middle-class conciliators. The NA sought to 'convince all classes of our population, how far it is *their interest* to unite with us' in pursuit of the Charter.⁸³ Not just for 'the mere possession of the franchise' but to establish remedies to utilise the resources of the country to 'ADVANCE THE INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL HAPPINESS OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL'.⁸⁴ While accepting that class is an essential concept in understanding this period of British history, the concept has suffered from a crude application, a 'typical' middle-class attitude being a hard-nosed utilitarian while a working-class equivalent is found in fustian-jacketed O'Connorites, preferably unshorn and with dirty hands. Middle-class political sympathy with the Charter is, in this crude view, regarded as 'uneasy' or 'idealist', with working class politics in favour of non-antagonism being seen as 'middle class' collaboration. But the major difference between the NA and the NCA lay in the strategy of gradualist, pragmatic radical class co-operation against a belief in the force of a sectarian, noisy movement utilising class rhetoric. For the NA, raw class feeling led to raw political action; time, education and consideration would demonstrate the correct line for the working class.

⁸² E. Biagini and A.J. Reid, 'Currents of radicalism', pp. 1-19; Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 259-61.

⁸³ *At a Meeting*, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴ *At a Meeting*, p. 4.

‘A new vision of patriarchy’: Moral force Chartism and women.

It has been shown that the NA can not meaningfully be labelled as ‘middle class’ but moral force Chartism has been charged with holding ‘a new vision of patriarchy’ largely because it has been assumed to have been so.⁸⁵ Dorothy Thompson, Jutta Schwarzkopf and Anna Clark have all suggested that the ‘Chartist domesticity’ exhibited by William Lovett and moral force Chartists was more ‘middle class’ than that of mainstream Chartism. Thompson has seen women Chartists of the National Association as distinctly bourgeois when contrasted to the working-class female Chartists of the Lancashire factory districts.⁸⁶ Clark has claimed that Lovett, and by extension moral force Chartism, was complicit in the creation of a model of domesticity that made women central to the instruction of children and the generation of moral rectitude and political and social duty. ‘Lovett’s vision’, Clark argues, ‘was closer to the middle-class sentimental ideal of domesticity’ than to a mainstream that rejected ‘Lovett’s sentimental, self-blaming domesticity ... [and] espoused a melodramatic and biblical narrative that blamed familial misery on the forces of evil - capitalism the New Poor Law, and the aristocracy.’⁸⁷ Jutta Schwarzkopf offers an account (drawing heavily on Dorothy Thompson) of women’s involvement in Chartism tied closely to social and economic dislocation - female Chartist activism being greatest in areas most effected by industrialisation and thus areas of highest Chartist mobilisation. Comparing the Manchester Chartist, R. J. Richardson’s relationship with his wife Elizabeth to that of William Lovett and his wife Mary, Schwarzkopf records a verdict, from a feminist perspective, against Lovett - Elizabeth Richardson taking a secondary but active part in her

⁸⁵ Anna Clark, ‘The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 71.

⁸⁶ Dorothy Thompson, ‘Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension’, in *Outsiders*, pp. 77-102.

⁸⁷ Anna Clark, ‘The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity’, 70-72; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches. Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1995), pp. 220-32.

husband's Chartist activity whilst Mary was more definitely confined to a private domestic role in support of William's public political life. This reading is extended to organised moral force Chartism, it being argued to have been a vessel for Lovett's passive female domesticity.⁸⁸

At the centre of these charges there lies the assumption of a more class-conscious Chartist mainstream and a less class-conscious moral force margin. But class is not an adequate measure of difference between mainstream and moral force Chartism. The evidence presented is decidedly skewed, offering generalisations based upon Lovett's attitudes and ignoring, for example, the fact that R. J. Richardson supported only votes for unmarried women in his pamphlet *Rights of Woman* (1840).⁸⁹ Also Eileen Yeo has indicated the necessity of reading between the lines of Lovett's apparent misogyny, Mary Lovett having played a considerably active part in support of William's public career, including running a shop and political errands during his imprisonment, despite what William may have written when idealising domestic roles.⁹⁰

Certainly there was a perceptible shift towards domesticity, of female political participation confined to the home, as Chartism progressed. But the claim that the sexual politics of mainstream Chartism was preferable to that of inegalitarian Lovettite Chartism is misguided mainly because it draws its sources for Lovett from his later *Social and Political Morality* (1853) and autobiography (1876) whilst the mainstream is represented by the *Northern Star* of the late 1830s and early 1840s. Lovett does indeed, in these later sources, exhibit quite marked misogynistic sentiments and a 'self-blaming' remedy for the working-class

⁸⁸ Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 78-88, 123-73, 245.

⁸⁹ Richardson took a popular Chartist attitude, that included O'Connor, that saw the male head of a household as exercising political judgement on its behalf.

⁹⁰ Eileen Yeo, 'Will the real Mary Lovett please stand up?: Chartism, gender and autobiography', in *Living and Learning*, pp. 163-81.

family though it was not until the late 1840s that Lovett began to move towards the orthodox political economy and rigid domestic ideology that marked his later works.⁹¹ The *Northern Star* of the late 1830s by contrast, can be seen as advancing a critique of the causes of exploitation and poverty which women could support as auxiliaries on the public stage. However, to advance such a position is both to see Lovett through his post-Chartist eyes and to take the *Northern Star's* reportage and critique of its opponents too eagerly as evidence of a more 'feminist' mainstream. It also ignores O'Connor's 'descent' into separate spheres idealism associated with the Land Plan.⁹²

Lovett and moral force Chartism do not represent some kind of renegade working class collaboration with middle class cultural forms but form part of a general shift towards 'domesticity' shared by both working and middle classes. Indeed, Schwarzkopf's distinction between the supposed arch-paternalist Lovett and the allegedly more 'feminist' Richardson does not accord well with her own assertion that domesticity advanced as a psychological response to both the working and middle class male need for a retreat from the harsh public realities of an expanding industrial capitalism.⁹³ If Lovett was part of this, so too was Richardson and the vast bulk of the male population of the early nineteenth century. It is the supposed middle class character of moral force Chartism, drawn from recent Chartist history, that has drawn feminist historians into concluding that it must have been a less accommodating vein of Chartism for women than that of mainstream Chartism. Two mistaken assumptions are at work in this feminist literature - that moral force was 'bourgeois' and that more class conscious radicalism must be more feminist.

The 'domesticity' of the 'new movers' did not exhibit any more marked 'artisan

⁹¹ Wiener, *William Lovett*, p.131.

⁹² Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 61-66.

⁹³ Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*, pp. 264-82.

misogyny' than the Chartist mainstream. Indeed the National Association openly advocated 'the equal educational, social and political rights of woman as well of man'.⁹⁴ The wives of members were encouraged to join the NA and those of several, including Lovett and Hetherington, did so.⁹⁵ But many women with no spousal connection also joined. In the three months following the opening of the National Hall, sixteen percent of new members were women (forty-one of two hundred and fifty-two applicants).⁹⁶ Women were a minority in the NA but they were an important and consistently active component of the Chartist movement whose involvement should not be understated because of the absence of an 'advanced' feminist theory, such as was to be found amongst early Socialists.⁹⁷ It is difficult to see that the 'domesticity' of the Chartist mainstream amounted to an ideal that was much different from that of the NA. Indeed, the NA was aware 'In an age of conventionalisms, [that] it will require some courage to promulgate with fearlessness the truth, that woman [is] in all respects the equal of man, and was not intended by the Creator to be his servant nor his slave'.⁹⁸

If an idiom of 'domesticity' is easily detectable in the language of the Association, it was one that included the female population as equal political agents and that recognised the social basis to a limited degree of the restrictions women faced. Despite the recognition by Barbara Taylor of the theoretically feminist character of most grassroots Owenites (of whom there were several prominent examples in the NA), the emphasis of her work on Chartism is on the

⁹⁴ *National Association Gazette*, no.1, 1 January, 1842, p. 1.

⁹⁵ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 67-68, 25 October 1842; ff. 70-71, 22 November 1842.

⁹⁶ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 45-46, 19 July 1842; ff. 46-48, 26 July 1842; ff. 48-49, 2 August 1842; ff. 49-50, 9 August 1842; ff. 50-52, 16 August 1842; ff. 52-53, 23 August 1842; ff. 53-54, 30 August 1842; ff. 55-56, 6 September 1842; ff. 56-57, 13 September 1842; ff. 57-58, 20 September 1842; ff. 58-61, 27 September 1842; ff. 61-62, 4 October 1842.

⁹⁷ David Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68 (1983), 1-21.

⁹⁸ *National Association Gazette*, no.1, 1 January, 1842, p. 1.

untypical Lovett as a prime example of 'bourgeois' Chartist domesticity.⁹⁹ In any case, Owenite practice did not often conform to the theoretical 'new moral world' making it even more misguided to compare Lovett's 'misogyny' to Owenite 'feminist' writings.¹⁰⁰ Some feminist historians have, then, Clark and Schwarzkopf particularly, wrongly read issues of class and gender too far into Chartist differences that were concerned with strategy and pragmatism.

Class and radical co-operation.

Violence in the pursuit of political ends was proscribed by the NA. As a political strategy, they argued, it was likely to be catastrophic to the prospects of democracy, resulting in political despotism even in victory. Demonstrating the background of many of its prominent members in co-operative-socialism, the NA argued that political knowledge was to be the source of political mobilisation and that their task was to convince all classes of the need for radical political reform. But the dominance of O'Connor meant that their first priority had to be to challenge misapprehension as to Chartist methods and to construct a viable alternative. Having seen the centre of the movement shift away from the LWMA, the NA had difficulty in putting its case - moral force Chartists having been shouted down and pushed out of the movement that they had been instrumental in forming. 'We merely demand', stated an address of September 1841, 'that justice for ourselves which we have suffered to establish for others - *the justice of being heard patiently, and judged of impartially*'.¹⁰¹ The movement had split by the early part of 1841 and the NA was anxious to push 'knowledge Chartism' as the way forward for the movement, or to be able to do

⁹⁹ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 121-22, 265-75.

¹⁰⁰ Royle, Edward, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 145-48.

¹⁰¹ *At a Meeting*, p. 1.

so without the weight of the *Star* being thrown against it. 'Having been mainly instrumental in embodying in the PEOPLE'S CHARTER' and

... many of us having also suffered persecution and imprisonment in defence of its principles; we thought ourselves entitled, *in common with others*, to put forth our views and opinions respecting the best means of causing that measure to become the law of the land.¹⁰²

If it is possible, now, to revise our view of O'Connor's methods as necessary to maintain general Chartist unity, it is not unreasonable to ask what kind of unity and at what cost. Despite the positive revision of O'Connor as a unifying leader, after O'Connor's attack on the 'new move' the movement was split for good and mutual suspicion thereafter was at such a pitch as to make further co-operation impossible. The eighty or so Chartists who appended their names to *The Political and Social Reformers* had soon disowned the NA after O'Connor's attacks upon it.¹⁰³

In the NA's analysis of where Chartism had gone awry, the actions of an O'Connorite 'few' had scuppered the increase in support and influence, especially among the middle class, that the LWMA had cultivated.¹⁰⁴ There was doubtless something of sour grapes concerning O'Connor's dominance of the Chartist movement. Lovett developed a personal loathing for O'Connor derived from his experiences of the early years of Chartism but the question ran deeper, as membership of the NA did not consist of those who sought to 'lead'. Leadership was something of an anathema to their notion of the direct

^{102.} *At a Meeting*, p. 1.

^{103.} *To the Social and Political Reformers of the United Kingdom* (1841), p. 4; *Northern Star*, no.180, 24 April 1841, p. 5; no.181, May 1, 1841, p. 7.

^{104.} *An Address to the Chartists of the United Kingdom, by the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People* (London, 1845), pp. 2-4, 7-8.

democracy and active citizenship to be derived from the Charter.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the democratic emphasis of Lovett and his associates in the NA made them in one sense more class-conscious than O'Connor's 'followers'.¹⁰⁶ Direct democracy was a serious issue for the NA as popular radicalism had spawned too many demagogues:

... both England and Ireland have been cursed by man-worship, to the sacrifice and delay of that freedom we are now contending for, and because we have dared to honestly assert our opinions, we have incurred the highest displeasure of all those whose vanity expects the homage of a crowd, peculiar patronage, and exclusive power.¹⁰⁷

Within Chartism, therefore, it was necessary to foster democratic tolerance.¹⁰⁸ The agitation for the Charter had misdirected energy into fruitless and vain channels. Chartists were implored to reject 'foolish displays' in favour of 'aspiring to the mental and moral dignity of a pure democracy'.¹⁰⁹

The NA declared at its inception that it 'HAD NO WISH TO INTERFERE WITH THE SOCIETIES THEN IN EXISTENCE'.¹¹⁰ In so doing it was attempting to prevent itself from being seen as a counter-agitation to the NCA. If its desire not to be seen as divisive was made problematic by its very existence as an alternative to the NCA, O'Connor's response removed the encouraging

^{105.} See, for example, William Lovett, *Letter to Daniel O'Connell*, in Claeys, Vol. III, p. 200.

^{106.} G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, p.313.

^{107.} *At a Meeting*, p. 3.

^{108.} *An Address to the Chartists*, pp. 5-6.

^{109.} *To the Political and Social Reformers*, pp. 1-2.

^{110.} *At a Meeting*, p. 1.

initial approval of many Chartists.¹¹¹ The plan upon which the NA was established, the NA lamented

... was warmly greeted by the press, and received the commendations of a great number of intelligent minds among all parties, was met with falsehood, intolerance, and bitterest rancour, by the most prominent organ of Chartism, the *Northern Star*. Its proprietor and editor jointly denounced it as a production of Messrs. O'Connell, Hume, and Roebuck – as a plan intended to destroy Feargus O'Connor's political supremacy ... the lowest passions and prejudices of the multitude were appealed to, to obtain a clamorous verdict against us.¹¹²

What was more, the Charter was being despoiled by new and separate demands in the form of the addition of Irish repeal to the 1842 Petition advanced by the NCA.¹¹³ Also, exaggerated claims were being made as to the effects the Charter was likely to bring. The advances to follow the Charter were to be hard won and not immediate, as O'Connor claimed.

That giant oligarchy, landed, commercial and ecclesiastical, the growth of centuries, surrounded by outward circumstance and saturated with wealth, will not yield its power without a fight. Its roots are too firmly in the soil, to be torn up by the first blast of popular indignation. He who believes that it is to be felled at one blow, is a fool; and he who not believing this, propagates the falsehood, is a knave.¹¹⁴

O'Connor did not attack only the NA as part of the 'new move' but also other prominent Chartists. Attacks on R. K. Philp, Bronterre O'Brien and the National

^{111.} *To the Political and Social Reformers*, p. 4.

^{112.} *At a Meeting*, p. 2.

^{113.} *National Association Gazette*, no.5, 29 January 1842, pp. 36-37.

^{114.} *National Association Gazette*, no.15, 9 April 1842, p. 121.

Complete Suffrage Union were reported by the NA and the conduct of the *Northern Star* heavily castigated.¹¹⁵ Attacks on the NA itself continued and the *NA Gazette* was even subject to being deliberately withheld by radical newsagents because of its perceived vacillating character.¹¹⁶

Some effort was made to counter the allegations of O'Connor and criticism was regular in the *Gazette*, though usually restricted to attacks on the use of personal abuse. Such was the hostility engendered by these often personal attacks, on both sides, that the longevity of the dispute was inevitable. Thus when William Lovett was offered the general secretaryship of the NCA land scheme in September 1843 (showing Lovett's continuing popularity amongst sections of the mainstream membership), the dominance of O'Connor was given by Lovett as the reason for the unworkable nature of the proposal.¹¹⁷ The 1845 *Address to the Chartists of the United Kingdom, by the National Association ... on the Conduct of some Chartists* sought to build upon a growing band of ex-leading Chartists pushed from the movement by O'Connor. However, the differences between the anti-O'Connorites were such that no unity on these terms was possible. Vincent, Lowery and Collins had taken a religious route not conducive to the non-religious NA (and the freethought of the likes of Hetherington and Watson) and O'Brien was a proto-socialist.¹¹⁸

The NA was not against co-operation with the NCA. For example, Watson

¹¹⁵ *National Association Gazette*, no.13, 26 March 1842, pp.102-103; no.18, 30 April 1842, p. 144; no.23, 4 June 1842, pp. 183-84; no.25, 18 June 1842, p. 199.

¹¹⁶ *National Association Gazette*, no.16, 16 April 1842, p. 126.

¹¹⁷ William Lovett, *Letter from Mr. Lovett to Messrs. Donaldson and Mason. Containing his Reasons for Refusing to be Nominated Secretary of the National Charter Association* (London, 1843), in Clacys, Vol. III, pp. 201-204.

¹¹⁸ *National Association Gazette*, no.1, 1 January 1842, p. 1; no.17, 23 April 1842, p. 131; no.18, 30 April 1842, p. 139; no.19, 7 May 1842, p. 147; no.20, 14 May 1842, p. 155; BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 36-37, 10 May 1842; ff. 68-69, 1 November 1842; f. 122, 19 March 1844.

pushed for the NA to back the NCA National Petition of 1842 and it was agreed to sign it. However, a *National Remonstrance*, drawn up by Lovett, was adopted by the NA and printed in late January 1842 in protest at the inclusion, in the second National Petition, of 'foreign' elements, particularly Irish repeal. Such amendments, it argued, served only to alienate potential supporters of manhood suffrage from supporting it. The *Remonstrance* was to be printed for circulation and signatures obtained for presentation to the Commons. By early February, however, the general committee of the NA had decided to postpone the obtaining of signatures for the *Remonstrance* out of the desire not to be seen as diversionary to the National Petition. Following the presentation of the National Petition on 2 May it was resolved to collect signatures, though there was some apprehension about its presentation to the House of Commons, the NA document following the rejection of the NCA Petition. Eventually, with the *Remonstrance* failing to attract enough signatures to be credible, the NA abandoned the campaign to avoid mockery from O'Connor. At the same time the resources of the NA were under pressure from its undertaking the renting and renovation of a two thousand-person capacity National Hall in Holborn (complete with library, reading-room, and coffee-room), meaning that few resources could be expended to increase support for the *Remonstrance*.¹¹⁹ The whole affair of the *Remonstrance* demonstrates the difficulties the NA faced in delineating a position of critical support for other organisations, promoting the Charter whilst

¹¹⁹ On the progress of the NA school see: *National Association Gazette*, no.2, 8 January 1842, p. 9, 13; no.5, 29 January 1842, p. 33; no.6, 5 February 1842, p. 41; no.20, 14 May 1842, p. 155; no.21, 21 May 1842, p. 164, 166-67; no.28, 9 July 1842, p. 219; Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, Vol. II, p. 278; BL, LWMA minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 7-8, 2 November 1841; ff. 8-9, 9 November 1841; ff. 9-10, 16 November 1841; ff. 13-14, 7 December 1841; ff. 14-16, 14 December 1841; ff. 16-17, 21 December 1841; ff. 17-18, 28 December 1841; ff. 20-21, 18 January 1842; ff. 22-23, 25 January 1842; ff. 23-24, 1 February 1842; ff. 24-25, 8 February 1842; ff. 25-26, 15 February 1842; f. 33, 12 April 1842; ff.35-36, 2 May 1842; ff. 36-37, 10 May 1842; f. 38, 31 May, 1842; ff. 39-40, 14 June, 1842; ff. 41-42, 28 June 1842; ff. 42-45, 12 July 1842; ff. 46-48, 26 July 1842; ff. 50-52, 16 August 1842; ff. 57-58, 20 September 1842; ff. 64-66, 18 October 1842; ff. 76-77, 17 January 1842; ff. 89-90, 23 May 1843; ff. 90-91, 30 May 1843; ff. 97-99, 1 August 1843; f.104, 19 September 1843; ff. 104-105, 25 September 1843; f. 122, 19 March, 1844; f. 122, 26 March 1844; Add. 37775, ff. 20-21, 29 April 1845; f. 27, 5 August 1845.

ploughing an independent furrow.

The NA, then, existed on uncomfortable ground between expediency and the combative rhetorical thrust often operated by the NCA. The Chartism of the NA, as opposed to the mainstream, was not of a character to mobilise whole communities along radical lines.¹²⁰ Rather it was an intellectual movement and as such its influence was in the dissemination of radical ideas. It inherited a powerful strand of idealism, where the intellect was the source of the discovery of principles, which once realised would result in continued self-improvement in preparation for the citizenship of the future. This was not conciliation and was concerned with the achievement not just of outward forms of institutional democracy but with the social regeneration to be derived from the struggle for its attainment. Class informed the NA but it was not a socio-economic reading of class relations. As the source of social misery lay in political monopoly obstructing perception of the commonweal, the source of politically uncorrupted virtue from which political equality would derive was mainly the unrepresented working class. But the working classes would need to be supported by the enlightened of all classes as the 'moral culture' of the working classes and enlightened middle and upper classes would have to counter the potential perversion of democracy by the influence of wealth and power.¹²¹ Unable to mobilise popular support, the continued educational activities of the NA derived from a belief in the inevitability of its principles extending into practice.¹²²

¹²⁰ John Belchem, 'Beyond *Chartist Studies*: Class, Community and Party in early Victorian Populist Politics', in Derek Fraser (ed.), *Cities, Class and Communication: Essays in Honour of Asa Briggs* (London, 1990), pp. 105-26.

¹²¹ *National Association Gazette*, no.3, 15 January, 1842, p. 22.

¹²² Some early signs of NA activity in Cheltenham, Newport IOW, Aberdeen and Hawick did not come to fruition. The NA repeatedly attempted to grapple with its lack of expansion as a model for radical organisation: BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 11-13, 30 November 1841; ff. 13-14, 7 December 1841; ff. 25-26, 15 February 1842; f. 102, 5 September 1843; Add. 37775, ff. 50-51, 21 July 1846; ff. 51-52, 28 July 1846; f. 53, 11 August 1846; f. 54, 18 August 1846; f. 9, 19 November 1844; ff. 15-16, 25 February 1845; ff. 16-17, 4 March 1845; ff. 17-18, 11 March 1845; ff. 99-100, 13 October 1847; f. 125, 20 December 1848; ff. 125-26, 3 January 1849. Lovett, in *Life and Struggles* (vol. II, p. 292) mentions that there were a few attempts to form branches

Despite limited resources a Sunday-school was established in 1843 and, eventually, in 1848, a day-school under the patronage of William Ellis. Education and the advance of rationality were central to the NA. Radical politics were an extension of right, rational, thinking that would be promulgated through a progressive secular education, which would '... develop the various faculties of mind and body ... so ... that the child shall become a healthy, intelligent, moral, and useful member of society'. The specimen lesson cards given in *Chartism* taught geology and physiology alongside social and political rights and duties.¹²³

Once a knowledge of political rights had been conferred on the population, it was assumed that the sectional privilege retarding it - the suppression of knowledge by a host of diversionary means (party politics, war, corruption, aristocratic extravagance, state-church) - would be swept away. The possession of political knowledge would endure and have better prospects for ultimate success than political activity for the Charter based on the desire to remove immediate material deprivation: 'The power which springs from the maddening sense of undeserved wrong, is undoubtedly a mighty power, but it shrinks into insignificance beside that which has its origins in the intellect and the heart'.¹²⁴

The impulse for radical unity was strong within the NA. Indeed, a union of the working and middle classes was necessary because 'If the Charter is to be carried speedily and peaceably, it must be carried by means of the present elective constituencies'.¹²⁵ Further, both classes were still united by their mutual loathing

outside of London but that all faltered due to lack of numbers.

¹²³ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 87-88, 9 May 1843; ff. 89-90, 23 May 1843; ff. 90-91, 30 May 1843; ff. 100-101, 29 August 1843; ff. 122-25, 2 July, 1844; ff. 37-38, 20 January 1846; ff. 39-40, 3 February 1846; ff. 65-67, 22 December 1846; f. 105, 12 January 1848; f. 106, 19 January 1848; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 4, f. 246, n.d.

¹²⁴ *National Association Gazette*, no.19, 7 May 1842, p. 150.

¹²⁵ *National Association Gazette*, no.22, 28 May 1842, p. 175.

of aristocracy. All of those organisations 'whose polar star is universal representation' should be committed, differences notwithstanding, to assist in their mutual advancement. Allegations by an O'Connorite, George Harrison, at the NCA Convention that the NA was prepared to drop the name of the Charter and co-operate with O'Connell were challenged by deputations of the NA to O'Connor and the Convention.¹²⁶ However, a comparative editorial covering the NCA, NA, CSU and Parliamentary Reform Association (PRA) concluded that 'our aim shall be co-operation, wherever we can co-operate conscientiously'.¹²⁷ However, while the NA recognised the importance to Chartism of the NCA, it could not but see its 'speedy decay' in its linkage of Irish repeal and land schemes to its democratic plan. The PRA, on the other hand, was too conciliatory. The NA was more generous in its treatment of its fellow-Chartist travellers than the treatment it regularly received back, demonstrating critical sympathy with other similar bodies in the *Gazette*.

The NA welcomed developments that appeared to open new fronts for the Chartist movement. W. Biggs's *Midland Counties Charter* was reviewed with hostility in defence of the existing Charter but in February 1841 the *Gazette* welcomed the establishment of the Christian Chartist Church in Birmingham by Arthur O'Neill and John Collins.¹²⁸ In March it printed Henry Vincent's *Address to the Middle Classes*, appending complimentary comments.¹²⁹ In April the Association favourably reviewed Henry Solly's effort to extend Chartist sentiment to other religious ministers in an atmosphere of working-class

¹²⁶ *National Association Gazette*, no.18, 30 April, 1842, p. 139; no.19, 7 May, 1842, p. 147; no.20, 14 May, 1842, p. 155.

¹²⁷ *National Association Gazette*, no.23, 4 June 1842, p. 183.

¹²⁸ *National Association Gazette*, no.3, 15 January 1842, p. 22; no.7; 12 February 1842, p. 51.

¹²⁹ *National Association Gazette*, no.10, 5 March 1842, 1842, p. 76.

disillusionment with Christianity derived from the State Church.¹³⁰ The same issue of the *Gazette* issued a favourable review of the *English Chartist Circular* and urged its purchase by Chartists. Later in April the PRA was given a cautious welcome. Desiring radical suffrage extension but not adopting the name of the Charter and entirely middle class in composition, the PRA was nonetheless 'labouring in the right direction'.¹³¹ A week later O'Brien was defended for his conduct at the first Complete Suffrage Conference against the attacks of O'Connor and his later editorship of the *British Statesman* was welcomed.¹³² Robert Kemp Philp's defence against the *Star* was also given sympathetic coverage in several issues.¹³³ In May, O'Connor's support for Sturge at the Nottingham by-election was greeted with cautious enthusiasm.¹³⁴ In June a motion was reported giving thanks to other papers in the cause of the advancement of the suffrage movement, naming the *British Statesman* and *Morning Advertiser*.¹³⁵ The NA favoured unity with all who advocated radical political democracy and supported its enactment through the implementation of the reforms laid down in the People's Charter.

As we have seen, the NA considered that while political democracy would allow the solutions to social-ills to be developed, political schemers and 'universal medicines' should be treated with caution – the Charter was just the beginning of social improvement. The NA also publicly distanced Chartism from Owenism,

^{130.} *National Association Gazette*, no.15, 9 April 1842, p. 121.

^{131.} *National Association Gazette*, no.17, 23 April 1842, p. 135.

^{132.} *National Association Gazette*, no.18, 30 April 1842, pp. 143-44; no.28, 9 July 1842, p. 223.

^{133.} *National Association Gazette*, no.25, 18 June 1842, p. 199; no.27, 2 July 1842, p. 215.

^{134.} *National Association Gazette*, no.20, 14 May 1842, p. 159.

^{135.} *National Association Gazette*, no.24, 11 June 1842, p. 187.

in which many of the members had been, or still were, heavily involved.¹³⁶ Plans and attitudes that prevented co-operation between political democrats were also to be rejected. Religion came under this category for the NA, which put a ban on theology as a discussion topic at the National Hall.¹³⁷ Indeed, the refusal of Arthur O'Neil to sell the *Gazette* due its 'want of religion' led to a scathing response by the NA, which argued that the zealous character of O'Neil's Christianity retarded his political outlook. John Collins had been scouted as an agent for the *Gazette* from January 1842 and correspondence between O'Neill, Collins and Lovett suggests a sense of shared common moral force cause but the issue of religion appears to have come between the two bodies within six-months.¹³⁸

The case of the NA should be considered without an uncritical acceptance of O'Connor's denunciations. It considered that if Chartism was yet to be successful it must return to its original strategy of quiet, determined campaigning. Other trends were not rejected out of hand but O'Connor was criticised for pursuing a course that was achieving only the irritation of non-Chartists and the alienation of middle class supporters. If today a survey of Chartism reveals that those who supported O'Connor were the dominant Chartist

^{136.} *National Association Gazette*, no.24, 11 June, 1842, pp. 190-91.

^{137.} BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 20-21, 18 January 1842; BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 93, 7 December 1841; *Rules and Objects*, p. 5; Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, Vol. II, pp. 292-93. Hetherington attempted to challenge the no theology rule in relation to NA discussion meetings but was defeated: BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37,775, ff. 9-10, 3 December 1844; f. 11, 17 December 1844; ff. 12-13, 14 January 1845. The no theology rule also led to the resignation of Lovett as secretary following his not forwarding an application for a teaching post at the NA Hall from G. J. Holyoake on grounds of his being a prominent atheist: BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff.10-11, 23 November 1841; ff. 13-14, 7 December 1841; ff. 14-16, 14 December 1841; f.34, 26 April, 1842; ff. 35-36, 2 May, 1842; ff. 36-37, 10 May, 1842; Add. 37775, f. 55, 8 September 1846; f. 56, 22 September 1846; f. 57, 29 September 1846; f. 58, 20 October 1846; f. 59, 21 October 1846; f. 59, 28 October 1846; f. 60, 3 November 1846; *Northern Star*, no.232, 23 April 1842, p. 7; no.233, 30 April 1842, p. 1, 5; no.235, 14 May 1842, p. 7.

^{138.} *National Association Gazette*, no.25, 18 June, 1842, p. 199.

leaders and that it was O'Connor's journal and rhetorical style that held together the mainstream movement, that does not affect the criticism of contemporaries about the damage caused by the same tendency. After all, if political agitation in this period '... aimed too high, or frightened the ruling classes too much', it failed.¹³⁹ It was to an alliance with middle-class radicals on equal terms that the NA pinned much of its hope.

The Complete Suffrage Union.

While 'whiggery', as compromise, was condemned, the NA was in favour of any union on the terms of political equality defined by the six points. In an *Address to the Middle Classes*, mutual class prejudice was appealed against and the middle classes invited to support the Charter and urged not to form a counter-agitation. Two editorials in the *Gazette* on the subject of 'Union with the Middle Classes' demanded principle before expediency and declared the Charter as the only basis for working and middle class unity. The proposals of Joseph Sturge for radical unity were to test the Association's belief in the potential of class-alliance.¹⁴⁰

If a political movement was to be formed to establish manhood suffrage, it was a pre-requisite to challenge the myths that were preventing the middle classes from supporting or joining the movement – that such a movement was by nature violent and socially egalitarian. The successful unity of political reformers depended on the abandonment of prejudice and caricature and the sincere co-operation of radicals of different social backgrounds.¹⁴¹ The only barrier to unity for the NA was the acceptance of political parity. It was this that formed the

¹³⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London, 1999 edition), p. 257.

¹⁴⁰ *A Letter to Daniel O'Connell*, p.199-200; *National Association Gazette*, no.2, 8 January, 1842, p. 9, 12; no.4, 22 January, 1842, p. 28; no.16, 16 April, 1842, p. 128.

¹⁴¹ *National Association Gazette*, no.17, 23 April 1842, pp. 134-35.

basis of its suspicions of the proposals of Joseph Sturge for a radical alliance on a 'Complete Suffrage' platform. While hopes were raised that agreement could be had on principles set out at the meeting addressed by Sturge at the Crown and Anchor in February 1842, the Association adopted an attitude of cautious optimism. Unity, it insisted, must be centred on the Charter and it was the middle class that must overcome its prejudice to the name. Opinion in favour of genuine suffrage was to be applauded and 'Complete Suffrage' not opposed, though the *People's Charter* was still the touchstone of radical commitment. As the first Birmingham Conference of the Complete Suffrage Union (CSU) (5 to 8 April 1842) approached, it was felt that unity, if political principles were its basis, was inevitable and, by like reasoning, that the Charter, as the detailed prescription for the application of such principles, must also be adopted.¹⁴²

Both Henry Vincent and the West Midland District of Scotland issued addresses in favour of pursuing Sturge's campaign and the NA resolved to follow the attempts as far as they might go – Sturge's *Memorial* being signed and Lovett and Parry appointed as delegates to the Birmingham Conference. Indeed, the Conference produced a very hopeful result with all six points of the Charter being adopted in principle and the conduct of delegates being encouraging of further progress. Parry, in reporting on the Conference, appeared confident that a new direction had opened up in the movement, demonstrated by the cautious support of O'Brien. It was the duty of Chartists, from this outcome, if not to support the CSU (pending a more definite demonstration of its character), then not to oppose it. The promise of the Conference to consider the Charter as a document added to the apparent confidence in the forward momentum of the new body. In London the NA took an active role in promoting the CSU and its petition to the Commons. With the co-operation of Chartists with Sturge at the

¹⁴² *National Association Gazette*, no.8, 9 February 1842, pp. 60-61; no.9, 26 February 1842, p. 69; no.10, 5 March 1842, p. 77; no.11, 12 March 1842, pp. 84-85; no.14, 2 April 1842, p. 110; BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 26-27, 22 February 1842; ff. 27-28, 1 March 1842; ff. 29-30, 15 March 1842; f. 33, 12 April 1842; f. 39, 7 June 1842.

Nottingham by-election, radical unity began to appear possible.¹⁴³

In fact, the cracks which had divided the movement were only temporarily papered over. The Nottingham by-election itself, despite apparent unity, revealed the very different character of the O'Connorite method and that of the Sturge Committee. Further, O'Connor encouraged the return of candidates to the second CSU conference in order to stifle the 'middle-class mad New Movers'.¹⁴⁴ Even the NA had a strained relationship with the CSU associations in London. And when the second conference met in late December 1842 the façade of potential unity crumbled. Though there is some evidence that Lovett may have been aware of the move,¹⁴⁵ when the conference was presented with a 'Bill of Rights' pre-arranged by the middle-class delegates and not circulated to working class delegates, he reacted by insisting on the Charter. Lovett, who surprised the O'Connorites by his actions, explained

I, who ... had framed the People's Charter, who had frequently at public meetings pledged myself never to cease agitating for it till it should become law, I ... regarding *the Charter as my definition of Complete Suffrage* ... could not consent to allow that same Charter to be passed over or superseded by another Bill.¹⁴⁶

The Charter had acquired an image that prevented middle class support for it.

^{143.} *National Association Gazette*, no.10, 5 March 1842, p. 73; no.12, 19 March, 1842, pp. 89-90; no.13, 26 March 1842, p. 99; no.15, 9 April 1842, pp. 117-18; no.16, 16 April 1842, pp. 123, 126-27; no.17, 23 April 1842, p. 128; no.18, 30 April 1842, p. 144; no.22, 28 May 1842, p. 175; *The Council of the National Complete Suffrage Union, to Political Reformers of All Shades of Opinion* (Birmingham, 1842), in Claeys, Vol. III, pp. 173-76; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, Part 4, f. 268c, 15 April 1842.

^{144.} *Northern Star*, no. 259, 29 October 1842, p. 4.

^{145.} A letter from B. Boothby to Lovett (BL, Lovett MS, Add 78161, f. 134, 8 December 1842) invited him to 'read over ... what I have for present of the Bill ...'.

^{146.} *A Letter to Daniel O'Connell*, p. 198.

But, as Joel Wiener has pointed out, what appeared an improper, violent and revolutionary threat in the image of the Charter, for Chartists ‘encompassed a web of political and cultural experiences ... which were integral to working class aspirations’.¹⁴⁷ Also, Lovett could not accept the Bill as to do so would have been to cede Chartism to the mainstream, O’Connor having attended to present the O’Connorite mainstream as ‘true’ Chartism. However, if it appeared that cross-class alliance had failed at the price of Chartist unity, the illusion was soon dispelled as Lovett refused to respond to O’Connor’s courting.¹⁴⁸ Yet one more crack, as well as the old ones, opened up at Birmingham – a religious divide – as Collins, Vincent and O’Neil joined Sturge’s ‘moral Radicals’ in leaving the Conference, an event perhaps not so surprising given the increasing tension between the ‘rationalism’ of the National Association and the religious impulse of Christian Chartism.¹⁴⁹ After the conference the NA resolved not to oppose the CSU as ‘the progress of just principles ... will be best secured by each running in parallel lines’ but practical co-operation was replaced by suspicion of political trickery and the Charter was re-affirmed as the blueprint for British democracy over the CSU Bill.¹⁵⁰

O’Connor had successfully labelled his moral force Chartist opponents as ‘middle class’. The desire to co-operate with parliamentary and moderate radicals became, thanks to O’Connor’s ‘new move’ attacks, the mark of a ‘false’ Chartist. Those opponents who sought to take the movement in directions that O’Connor did not favour were picked off as political apostates. O’Connor, by the effective but misleading use of class rhetoric, removed the NA - in every way

¹⁴⁷ Wiener, *William Lovett*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (London, 1872, 1882 edition), pp. 156-61, 223-24, 227; *Northern Star*, no.259, 29 October 1842, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Alex Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), p. 130; *National Association Gazette*, no.22, 28 May 1842, p. 171.

¹⁵⁰ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37774, ff. 70-71, 22 November 1842; ff. 74-75, 3 January 1843; ff. 78-79, 31 January 1843; f. 79, 7 February 1843; f. 80, 21 February 1843; f. 82, 14 March 1843; f. 83, 21 March 1843; ff. 111-12, 21 November 1843.

as radical as himself and the NCA - from a position of influence within the Chartist movement. Membership of the NCA and the acceptance of O'Connor's dominance became the mark of a 'true' Chartist. O'Connor's class rhetoric, however, veiled the fact that many of the NA membership desired co-operative social reform to follow political reform whilst O'Connor and the Chartist mainstream were marked by the absence of a distinct vision of future radical social reform. We shall see in the following two chapters that O'Connor deployed the same class-rhetoric to remove other opponents from positions of influence within NCA Chartism. Moral force emphasizes on peaceful persuasion, rational progress and cross-class radical collaboration were diffused throughout Chartism. The differences between O'Connor, his supporters and his opponents amounted to differences of personality and the desire to manipulate the strategic direction of the movement, rather than to any meaningful variance of political ideology relating to class.

Chapter V.

James 'Bronterre' O'Brien: A Moral Force Chartist?

In the last two chapters we have seen that Chartism contained tensions over strategy expressed from a moral force perspective as a critique of class rhetoric and O'Connor's dominance. We have also seen that the moral force Chartism of many LWMA and NA members included an anticipation of social reform to follow democratic political reform. This anticipation was kept behind a moderate, gradualist approach to radical political reform that aimed at radical class alliance. By contrast, James 'Bronterre' O'Brien developed a social Chartism that was explicit in its aim to extend democratic reform from politics into society and economy. However, though O'Brien was not a moral force Chartist but an alternative mainstream leader to O'Connor, he did adopt rudiments of a moral force critique of the Chartist movement. These included the need to emphasise radical ideas rather than personalities and the platform; and the need, first and foremost, to achieve democracy with committed radicals of other hues. More open and explicit social Chartism, therefore, will be seen to have been no barrier to the pragmatic adoption of a rejection of O'Connor's leadership and a policy of class alliance.

O'Brien adopted elements of a moral force critique in the 1840s, especially during 1842 and the attempt to forge a radical class-alliance around the CSU. O'Brien challenged O'Connor's rejection of the CSU and in so doing embarked on a thorough-going attack on the direction of NCA Chartism under O'Connor's leadership. In doing so O'Brien incurred the full intensity of O'Connor's vituperation - being presented as an ambitious, corrupt, career radical. But the division between O'Brien and O'Connor in 1842 demonstrates that important elements of moral force Chartism - openness to radical class co-operation and an emphasis on principles - also featured in the mainstream Chartist movement.

O'Brien, politics and economics.

O'Brien is the figure above all other Chartist leaders whose radical career can be supposed to represent the emergence of a historical materialist proto-socialism. Certainly, from the perspective of later socialists looking for progenitors of their creed, O'Brien appears to fit with reasonable ease into a narrative of the development of socialist consciousness. O'Brien, especially during his editorship of Hetherington's unstamped *Poor Man's Guardian* between 1832 and 1835, promoted an influential analysis that saw class at the heart of political struggle. Arriving in London from Ireland in 1830, O'Brien rapidly became acquainted with radicalism of various hues during the excitement of the Reform Bill agitation. Like other radicals he drew on a variety of influences. He knew and learnt from Henry Hunt, William Cobbett, Robert Owen and London co-operative-socialists, especially Hetherington. O'Brien came to see social distress as rooted in the unequal relationship between labour and capital and it was this relationship that he spent his political life trying to equalise.

O'Brien argued that it was the mode of acquisition of property that contributed to social inequality and not just, as radicalism had traditionally urged, unfair protection derived from political inequality.¹ However, to see O'Brien, as a pioneer of the welfare state is to take this important radical out of his own context and to fit him into a 'rise of labour' teleology.² O'Brien was a radical of high intellectual ability, having been trained as a lawyer in Dublin and London, but he was a radical politician and was not in any simple way a forerunner of later socialism. O'Brien sought political and social reform 'by establishing the democratic principle in every department of society'.³ His ideas fed into the avowedly socialist politics of the late-nineteenth century but were distinct from

¹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.47, 5 May 1832, p. 377.

² Alfred Plummer, *Bronterre. A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien 1804-1864* (London, 1971), p. 25.

³ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.175, 11 October 1834, p. 281.

it.⁴ Political democracy for O'Brien and for most other contemporary radicals and socialists remained the first and fundamental step on the ladder to greater social equality. O'Brien possessed a sense of benevolent citizenship and appealed for the middle classes to look beyond narrow economic self-interest 'to establish the well-being of mankind'.⁵ It was clear to O'Brien, though, that the relationship of individuals to their social and economic class interests overrode this benevolence. The Reform Bill for O'Brien was of no interest to the working classes because its purpose was merely an expedient aristocratic and middle-class block to more far reaching constitutional innovation.⁶ O'Brien's hopes for full-citizenship were located in an explicitly socially as well as politically democratic state but the middle and upper classes would concern themselves with the welfare of the labouring population only when the working classes too were politically represented, and not before.⁷ O'Brien in the 1830s was, along with other social radicals such as J. F. Bray, a foremost proponent of a more explicitly socially-democratic radicalism than had hitherto existed.⁸ O'Brien possessed a keen sense of class interests and radical politics that emerged as bursts of far-reaching analysis of the radical position, shifting the focus of exploitation from taxes and 'Old Corruption' to rent and profit and the dominance of capital over labour. O'Brien rejected the existing commercial system as destructive of social union, based as it was on competition with its consequent inequality, fraud and falsehood.⁹

⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 249; M.S. Wilkins, 'The Non-Socialist Origins of England's First Important Socialist Organisation', *International Review of Social History*, 4 (1959), 199-207; Mark Bevir, 'The British SDF 1880-1885: From O'Brienism to Marxism', *International Review of Social History*, 37 (1992), 207-29.

⁵ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.49, May 19, 1832, p. 394.

⁶ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.16, 15 October 1831, p. 121.

⁷ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.47, 5 May 1832, pp. 377-78.

⁸ J. F. Bray, *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy, or the Age of Might and the Age of Right* (Leeds, 1839); Lovett Papers, Birmingham Central Library, Part 2, f. 165, n.d.

⁹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.146, 22 March 1834, p. 50; *Hetherington's Twopenny*

Property, appealed O'Brien, should not continue the only qualification for representation but '*Virtue, knowledge, and talent*' as this would ensure the just estimation of the interests of the poor.¹⁰ It was from politics that social reform was to come and one of the first measures of a democratic legislature would be to appropriate the land with compensation.¹¹ More directly and explicitly than any other radical, O'Brien made it clear that the social and the political were different sides of the same coin.¹² O'Brien had short shrift for Robert Owen's anti-politics. Politics were a means to ends and the great difference to be created by manhood suffrage would be that the people 'could then set about with safety what they dare not set about now. What they attempt now, with a rope, as it were, round their necks, they might then accomplish under the protection of a just Government'.¹³ The attacks in the House of Lords on Owenism in 1840 proved the necessity for Socialists and Chartists to make common cause around manhood suffrage as without 'a substantial share in the Government, neither Socialist nor Chartist will long enjoy a moment's security for life, liberty, or property.'¹⁴ There could be no movement '*to emancipate the working classes*' until Chartism had triumphed when a democratic parliament 'would at once enable him [Owen] to submit his system to the test of experiment, under the most favourable circumstances he could rationally expect.'¹⁵ A union between Socialists and Chartists would allow Owenites to disseminate their social theories in Chartist ranks while working towards a political system that would

Dispatch, and People's Police Register, no.114, 13 August 1836, p. 3; *Operative*, no.2, 11 November 1838, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.54, 23 June 1832, p. 434.

¹¹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.199, 28 March 1835, pp. 473-74.

¹² *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.67, 22 September 1832, p. 538.

¹³ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.198, 21 March 1835, p. 468.

¹⁴ *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.3, 2 February 1840, p. 9.

¹⁵ *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.3, 2 February 1840, p. 9.

tolerate their aims.¹⁶

O'Brien saw a great deal of hope for social change in the general trades unionism in the early 1830s as, at a stroke, labour could bypass middle men and exchange the produce of labour for its equivalent.¹⁷ His attack on middle men and belief in the progressive character of trades unionism was attached to an appeal for manhood suffrage.¹⁸ Likewise in the 1842 'Plug' strikes, O'Brien saw little hope in striking for the Charter. Rather than achieving the Charter through trades unionism, it was the 'monopoly of legislative power and protection' of the employers that needed to be levelled before industrial rights could be gained.¹⁹ In effect, co-operation and indeed all plans of social reform were subjugated to the need to acquire political representation for the working classes. It was not that a desire for social reform did not infuse O'Brien's radicalism but that the need to challenge political exclusivity must be the priority. Similarities with the moral force Chartists already discussed are plain. Though O'Brien considered trades unions to operate to 'deeper principles' than political unions in being class homogenous and concerned with production and trade they had one fault: 'that they have not made Universal Suffrage a leading object'.²⁰ Unions were born of the dependence of the unproductive on the productive and the despotism of money and sought to reverse this state of affairs but, like raw social protest, was limited in effect.²¹ Without political equality trades unions were defenceless. However much O'Brien moved beyond traditional radicalism, which he did quite

¹⁶ *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.4, 9 February 1840, p. 4.

¹⁷ *People's Conservative; and Trades Union Gazette*, no.57, 1 March 1834, p. 25.

¹⁸ *People's Conservative; and Trades Union Gazette*, no.57, 1 March 1834, p. 25; no.64, 19 April 1834, p. 81.

¹⁹ *British Statesman*, no.24, 20 August 1842, p. 1, 6; no.25, 27 August 1842, p. 7.

²⁰ *People's Conservative; and Trades' Union Gazette*, no.65, 26 April 1834, p. 93.

²¹ *People's Conservative; and Trades' Union Gazette*, no.70, 31 May 1834, p. 129; "Destructive", and *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.21, 22 June 1833, pp. 164-65.

considerably, he still remained a radical.

O'Brien's attitude to the French Revolution, despite the modern socialist preoccupation with his admiration of Babeuf, was that the middle classes had abandoned the working classes for political exclusivity.²² Chartists, though, had learnt this tendency from the Reform agitation and, being forewarned, could avoid the reaction that led to terror in France.²³ It was always the political that remained the primary inequality that O'Brien sought to challenge.²⁴ After the collapse of general unionism by the mid 1830s this seemed clearer than ever. O'Brien moved away from co-operative-socialism at this time to a more individualistic social reform outlook but his emphasis on the need for manhood suffrage remained fixed.²⁵

O'Brien saw that a social chasm had opened up by the 1830s separating the productive from the unproductive classes. The 'two nations' (O'Brien actually used the analogy) would only be brought together when the 'corpse of the despotism of money' filled the gulf between them.²⁶ Like Hetherington, with whom he continued to be associated until 1836, O'Brien considered that it was universal suffrage that was crucial in balancing social power through equality of political representation. However, while Hetherington from 1836 was prominent in the formation of the moderate LWMA, O'Brien continued with a class-rhetoric in which he argued that *only* the working class possessed a real interest

²² "Destructive", and *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.2, 9 February 1833, p. 10; no.3, 16 February 1833, p. 17; no.42, 16 November 1833, pp.331-32; J. B. O'Brien, *Buonarroti's History of Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality: with the author's reflections on the causes and character of the French Revolution* (London, 1836).

²³ *British Statesman*, no.34, 29 October 1842, p. 1.

²⁴ *Southern Star*, and *London and Brighton Patriot*, no.2, 26 January 1840, p. 9.

²⁵ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-1860* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 158.

²⁶ *People's Conservative; and Trades' Union Gazette*, no.71, 7 June 1834, p. 139.

in achieving political equality. While O'Brien was elected an honorary member of the LWMA at the same meeting as J. R. Black, Francis Place and William Carpenter, his direction at this point was markedly divergent.²⁷ While both the LWMA and O'Brien considered the force of political and social change to be through the working classes, O'Brien considered that appeals to the middle classes in and out of parliament were futile.²⁸ What was wanted by O'Brien was precisely that desired by the LWMA, 'to give labour ... an equality of power – to give every man of every class a voice in the election of those who frame the laws by which all are governed'.²⁹ Yet his belief at this point in the exclusivity of class interests in politics led him to conclude that a broad radical alliance would lend disproportionate influence to its middle-class members. Benevolence, for O'Brien, was restricted in the privileged upper and middle classes by inequality in the economic sphere.

O'Brien's politics looked backwards as well as forwards and, though the seeds of late-nineteenth century state socialism were present, they were still embryonic and located the source of social power in politics rather than economics. O'Brien believed that a government responding to the popular or 'universal' will would challenge much more than unjust taxes. He argued that no common interest existed between labourers and middlemen - labour could not be 'virtually' represented by property. Factional interests and class politics would be countered by a fully representative parliament and the pernicious effect of the Reform Act was its detachment of the working classes from the 'middle ranks'. In this context O'Brien welcomed Thomas Attwood's efforts to re-invigorate the BPU to challenge the finality of the reformed parliament.³⁰ Provincial middle-

²⁷ BL, LWMA Minutes, Add. 37773, ff.7-8, 24 July 1836.

²⁸ *Hetherington's Twopenny Dispatch, and People's Police Register*, no. 109, 9 July 1836, p. 3.

²⁹ *Hetherington's Twopenny Dispatch, and People's Police Register*, no. 109, 9 July 1836, p. 3.

³⁰ "Destructive", and *Poor Man's Conservative*, no.1, 2 February 1833, pp. 4-5; no.4,

class industrialists such as Thomas Attwood and wealthy middle-men such as Joseph Sturge, socio-economic enemies of the working class at the local (in this case Birmingham) level translated on the national political stage as class-allies. Class suspicion centred far more on politics in the Chartist movement, on support for the People's Charter, than on socio-economic status. To be sure, there could be perceived to be a middle class 'interest' that acted against challenging the status quo but the acid test was political allegiance. Thus a movement dominated by working men, the mainstream of which was amply acquainted with the language of class, celebrated at various points the support of Attwood and Sturge for the 'six points' and accepted the leadership of the Irish 'aristocrat', O'Connor.

However, O'Brien considered that, as with the Reform Act, the majority of the middle class would use its position at the head of a popular political reform movement for its own ends. Critical of Joseph Hume's efforts to unite 'all classes of Reformers', O'Brien asked 'what right has he to expect the working classes to work for the Whigs and middlemen, if the Whigs and Middlemen will not work for them?' 'Such union', he urged, 'is not practicable, if it were useful, and would be useless, if it were practicable'.³¹ O'Brien was critical of utilitarian parliamentary radical support for the new Poor Law, condemning Hume and J. A. Roebuck and their like as a 'Whig-radical' and 'sham-liberal' threat to 'true' radicalism:

By adroitly mixing up truth with falsehood – by creating a diversity of

23 February 1833, p.30; no.6, 9 March 1833, p.45; no.10, 6 April 1833, p.76; no.15, 11 May 1833, p. 117; no.17, 25 May 1833, pp.134-35; no.35, 28 September 1833, pp.273-74.

³¹. *London Mercury*, no.20, 29 January 1837, p. 153; , no.26, 12 March 1837, p.204.

views on all popular questions – they make the Radicals appear a disorganised, inconsequential band of contemptible theorists, unfitted for action, and ignorant of their own objects. There is but one way of defeating these impostors. *It is to disown all political communion with them unless they support and vote for the true Radical doctrines, as acknowledged by the great Radical body out of doors, who thank God! are sound and unsophisticated ...*³²

The majority of the population was sound, O'Brien continued, because they had no interest in the existence of privilege and exploitation and only needed the truth placed before them to make them unanimous. It was this placing of the truth before the people that gave education so important a place in O'Brien's radicalism - to make the working classes aware of their own interests rather than to appeal to a cross-class political programme. In this regard O'Brien, like most other contemporary radicals, viewed drink as a threat to the acquisition of knowledge which would provide the radical revolution. Intimidation, too, had no place in working class organisation as it would merely build a rotten structure unable to resist the wind of opposition.³³

O'Brien and the Chartist mainstream.

As the Chartist movement developed, O'Brien became a qualified supporter of Feargus O'Connor and wrote under his famous pseudonym 'Bronterre' in the *Northern Star*. Delineating his anti-moderate line based on his reading of middle class self-interested radicalism, O'Brien entered into the Chartist mainstream. He was prepared to countenance the deployment by his allies of physical force rhetoric, provided it was firmly defensive in character.³⁴ O'Brien's position was

³² *London Mercury*, no.21, 5 February 1837, p. 161.

³³ *Northern Star*, no.19, 24 March 1838, p. 4; *People's Conservative; and Trades Union Gazette*, no.61, 29 March 1834, p. 81; no.65, 26 April 1834, p. 89.

³⁴ *Poor Man's Guardian*, no. 149, 12 April 1834, p. 74; *Operative*, no.5, 2 December 1838, p. 65; no.9, 30 December 1838, p. 129; no.10, 6 January 1838, p. 1; no.28, 12

closer to the O'Connorite mainstream than to the London moral force Chartists. The National Petitioners, he argued, 'did not pray for anything, they did not fall low on bended knee - no, they stood erect as men, in the attitude of demand'.³⁵ His suspicion of the LWMA and its courting of parliamentary 'Malthusians' and his warnings over BPU currency reform correlated with the efforts of O'Connor in particular to forge a more populist constituency for manhood suffrage.³⁶ Initial enthusiasm for the apparent moderate-liberal sincerity with regards to the Charter programme gave way, as the Chartist movement moved away from the LWMA and BPU, to a tone that owed something to O'Brien's own scepticism of middle class motives - expressed as attacks on moderation and class co-operation.³⁷

The abortive effort to unite the agricultural protectionist and currency reformer James Bernard with London radicals by extending his programme to include universal suffrage, attracted O'Brien's support. Having earlier been critical of Bernard in the *Poor Man's Guardian*, O'Brien may have sensed a potential 'Tory radical' unity between farmers and metropolitan radicals but also had at least one eye on acquiring the editorship of John Bell's *London Mercury*, which supported Bernard's Central National Association and for which 'Bronterre' wrote a regular column.³⁸ The affair also served to allow O'Brien to open up some distance between himself and his old comrade Hetherington who was fervent in his support of the rapidly developing LWMA. O'Brien joined with Bell in attacking the LWMA's links with 'sham-radicals', accusing the LWMA of taking up the cause of Canadian democracy to court the influence and money of parliamentary radicals at the expense of domestic causes such as the opposition

May 1839, p. 8.

³⁵ *Northern Star*, no.73, 6 April 1839, p. 5.

³⁶ *Northern Star*, no.40, 18 August 1838, p. 4.

³⁷ *London Mercury*, no.25, 5 March 1837, p. 193.

³⁸ Claeys, 'A Utopian Tory Revolutionary'.

to the new Poor Law.³⁹ Hetherington's opposition to the Central National Association on the grounds that Bernard was a 'Tory-radical' who sought a return to an agricultural golden age (criticism that O'Brien had himself levelled a few years previously) was developed by O'Brien into an attack on the new LWMA's association with Malthusian intrigue. True radicals, O'Brien argued, did not desire the honorary membership of luke-warm liberals like Sir William Molesworth, J. A. Roebuck, D. W. Harvey and Joseph Hume. Hetherington, he argued, had become nothing short of a 'bought tool' of Malthusians and was a dishonest radical; he had 'become a good boy at last: he does not cry "*down with property*" now, for he has now something to lose.'⁴⁰

O'Brien attacked the 'London, Birmingham and Scotland' party, which he accused of attempting to break up the Chartist confederation built up elsewhere around O'Connor. He condemned the Calton Hill attack on O'Connor and Stephens as the work of 'sham-radicals' and urged that Chartists defend these 'real friends' of Chartism from its 'pretended friends'.⁴¹ O'Brien welcomed an LWMA address to O'Connell insofar as it was critical of O'Connell's lack of support for manhood suffrage (despite being an initial signatory to the Charter) but at the same time lambasted the LWMA radical 'gentry' for criticising O'Connor and Stephens:

this cant and gammon will not go down with the Radical public. It is perfectly within the recollection of that public, that for many years the reputed leaders of the Working Men's Association, have been amongst the most "*violent and mischievous*" agitators of their day. We remember the time when they never talked of a parson but as a "*tithe-gorger*," of a soldier but as a "*man butcher*," nor of majesty itself but as "*William Guelph*." We remember the time when they used to threaten Barnes, of the "Times" (not with *moral* force), when they used to exclaim, "no vote,

³⁹. *London Mercury*, no.30, 9 April 1838, pp. 236-37.

⁴⁰. *London Mercury*, no.31, 16 April 1838, p. 241; no.37, 28 May 1838, p. 289.

⁴¹. *Operative*, no.7, 16 December 1838, p. 98; no.8, 23 December 1838, p. 113.

no musket!” when they used to publish wood-cuts representing bristling macerones and barricades; when they used to offer five pounds for the best shot at Chalk Farm; and when it was not unusual to hear them even cry “*down with property.*”⁴²

Henry Vincent, O’Brien pointed out, was just as flamboyant on the platform as those the LWMA sought to chastise. The tools used by O’Brien to denigrate the LWMA emerged as a familiar critique of radical moderation due in part to his own influence through his columns in the radical press. Such a position in the late-1830s was fuelled by the palpable sense of the dangers of moderation, of its susceptibility to men of influence. Ironically, the same critique with which O’Brien lambasted Henry Hetherington and the LWMA was later to be directed against him with devastating consequences for his own radical standing.

At this time O’Brien accepted O’Connor’s domination of Chartism as something to be worked with and around rather than as a hindrance.⁴³ O’Brien also launched, between 1839 and 1841, his harshest and most consistently vociferous criticism of the middle classes. In 1839, O’Brien had laid the blame for the arrests of Chartists on the middle class usurpation of the power of Parliament. It was a ‘reign of terror against the Chartists’ which was ‘the work of the profit-monger and the landlord ... the infernal Aristocracy and of the more infernal swindling Shopocracy’.⁴⁴ Democracy would give labour the same protection as other forms of property, forcing the middle classes to join with the aristocracy to put down Chartism at all costs.⁴⁵ O’Brien pitched at a politically-tinted historical materialism that saw class as rooted in relations between property and ‘slaves’, only to be terminated when the ‘slaves’ acquired representation and thus ended

⁴² *Operative*, no.8, 23 December 1838, p. 120.

⁴³ *Operative*, no.25, 21 April 1839, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Northern Star*, no.91, 10 August 1839, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Northern Star*, no.94, 31 August 1839, p. 4.

‘all class distinctions’.⁴⁶

Much of O’Brien’s writing throughout his radical career was concerned with how to secure political reform that worked to the advantage of the working population.⁴⁷ For O’Brien, reforms such as the ballot and Corn Law repeal were useful only as a consequence of universal suffrage, otherwise they were merely part of a continuing, and more complete, middle class despotism.⁴⁸ So it is far harder to apply the label of ‘middle class’ moderation to O’Brien than to the LWMA and NA. Yet O’Brien was increasingly aware into the 1840s of the need for drawing middle-class support towards universal suffrage and of the danger of using physical force appeals until ‘the popular mind has been fully enlightened beforehand’.⁴⁹ Indeed O’Brien had occasionally suggested that all radicals unite on the issue of rights, leaving what might be done with them firmly in the background - even O’Connell could be co-operated with on these terms.⁵⁰ As Chartism went on and government force demolished illusions as to the physical powers of the Chartist movement, O’Brien adopted an emphasis on

^{46.} *Northern Star*, no.95, 7 September 1839, p. 4; *Operative*, no.25, 21 April 1839, p. 1. It should be pointed out, however, that O’Brien married his materialism with a consistent advocacy of ‘practical Christianity’, which meant not the pursuit of superstition to hold the minds of the working classes but ‘a full share of those blessings which the Creator designed for all’: *Operative*, no.23, 7 April 1839, p. 1; *Poor Man’s Guardian, and Repealer’s Friend*, no.6, 1843, pp. 41-42. O’Brien also defended Jews from Cobbett’s anti-semitism (“*Destructive*”, and *Poor Man’s Guardian*, no.37, 12 October 1833, p.291) and, while Saint-Simonian doctrines were defended by O’Brien against a hostile press, O’Brien considered that their presentation as a new religion was misguided – if religion was wanted that of Jesus Christ was good enough.

^{47.} For example, the ‘Rebecca’ riots in Wales was assessed as a middle class agitation because it did not address political rights or wages but only farmers’ costs (rents, tithes, church-rates): *Poor Man’s Guardian, and Repealer’s Friend*, no.10, 1843, pp. 73-74; no.11, 1843, pp. 81-84.

^{48.} *Bronterre’s National Reformer*, no.7, 18 February 1837, pp. 49-50; *The Operative*, no.11, 13 January 1839, p.1; *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.1, 19 January 1840, p. 8.

^{49.} *Bronterre’s National Reformer*, no.7, 18 February 1837, p. 56.

^{50.} *Bronterre’s National Reformer*, no.9, 4 March 1837, p. 66.

organisation.⁵¹ Further, as his leadership role in the Chartist mainstream declined and his views as to its likely success became more pessimistic, O'Brien's emphasis on education heightened.⁵²

Chartists sometimes swam with the tide of the movement and sometimes against it. Their own sense of personal success or failure and the circumstances of the wider movement meant that many Chartists did both. From the beginnings of the Chartist movement in 1836 through to the presentation of the first National Petition in June 1839, O'Brien swam with the mainstream. He was not given to the excesses of physical force rhetoric or vituperation that the likes of Harney and P. M. McDouall, for example, were. O'Brien's biographer, Alfred Plummer, has argued that he was part of the 'militant left' of the Convention.⁵³ O'Brien, though, was at the centre of the movement and though at home with the rhetoric of class, exerted a moderate influence on the movement during the debate on the 'sacred month' in the summer of 1839, emphasising the need for organisation, preparation and mutual understanding between Chartists. That is, he desired an agitation beyond that of which the Chartist movement of 1839 was capable, based as it was around the mass platform and splendid but ambiguous rhetoric. The Convention, O'Brien considered, had brought the moral and physical force camps into a common effort but the success of Chartism depended on far more unity and effort from the unrepresented.⁵⁴ The upper and middle classes would not give up a share of sovereignty, from which they benefited, without 'actual readiness, the visible preparation; the identifiable materials for action'⁵⁵ from the working classes. This included defensive arming but also truly mass support for

⁵¹. *Northern Star*, no.97, 21 September 1839, p. 1.

⁵². *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.12, second series, 19 December 1846, pp. 1-2.

⁵³. Plummer, *Bronterre*, p. 100.

⁵⁴. *Operative*, no.16, 17 February 1839, p. 1.

⁵⁵. *Operative*, no.19, 10 March 1839, p. 1.

the National Petition and permanently organised associations to act in unison with the Convention to vindicate its constitutional nature.

O'Brien himself became a victim of the government arrests in July and August 1839 but secured his own acquittal at his trial at Newcastle in February 1840. In March 1840, however, O'Brien was convicted at Lancaster. It was the period of imprisonment that followed that led O'Brien to reject the rhetorical extravagances that were part of mainstream Chartism and its mass platform.⁵⁶ But O'Brien first unleashed a series of letters through the *Northern Star* that bitterly criticised the middle class, the class that he considered had despotically incarcerated him. The projected unity of middle and working classes was, he argued, 'all moonshine'. Such proposals sprang from 'false "Chartists"' and 'their secret friends, the profitmongers' and, O'Brien continued, "'Tis all stuff and nonsense to talk of a union with these villains, until Universal Suffrage has been carried - till both parties are on an equal footing ... for then, and then only, could such a union be founded in reciprocal respect and confidence to be guided by mutuality of interests'.⁵⁷ The very acts of the middle classes represented in government proved that union was impossible and O'Brien cited Irish coercion, the Canterbury massacres, new police acts, anti-trade union prosecutions, the attacks on Chartist agitation at Birmingham and the lack of middle class support for Chartism as evidence. The purpose of Chartism, O'Brien contended, was for working men to combine against the middle class.⁵⁸

Within these attacks on the middle classes, however, lay the kernel of a different emphasis. The middle classes had the power to redress working class grievances immediately. That they did not made them enemies of the working classes⁵⁹ but,

⁵⁶. Plummer, *Bronterre*, p. 153.

⁵⁷. *Northern Star*, no.172, 27 February 1841, p. 7.

⁵⁸. *Northern Star*, no.172, 27 February 1841, p. 7; no.173, 6 March 1841, p. 7; no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

⁵⁹. *British Statesman*, no.25, 27 August 1842, p. 1; *Poor Man's Guardian*, and

O'Brien commented, 'if there be a portion of the middle classes *really* friendly to us, *they* will unite with *us*'.⁶⁰ For the middle classes to unite with the working classes it was necessary that they, as individuals and as a class, accepted the People's Charter. O'Brien had consistently acknowledged the primacy of the struggle for political equality and the need to suspend, until after the establishment of the Charter, the discussion of the conflicting claims of labour and capital, which tended to 'alarm and offend' those of the middle class now co-operating for universal suffrage.⁶¹ O'Brien also saw that to connect the movement to a vague 'republicanism' could only damage the cause of manhood suffrage by dividing the movement and providing a pretext for further government repression.⁶² By the early 1840s O'Brien was as critical of the middle classes as ever but he was increasingly aware that attacks on the middle class, if not tied to an increasing crescendo of working class protest and organisation, were backing himself and the Chartist movement into a political dead-end. Physical force was, O'Brien contended, only useful as a defensive doctrine and 'secret projects' were not conducive to positive social change. Likewise, personality clashes and misrepresentation were already beginning to disgust O'Brien and, in his view, retard the development of a national movement.⁶³ Radical class co-operation had to be considered as a way forward. The tone, though, was still hostile and it was the middle classes who had to come to the working classes and renounce their erroneous exclusivity.

Repealer's Friend, no.12, 1843, pp. 89-90.

⁶⁰ *Northern Star*, no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 1; no.180, 24 April 1841, p. 1.

⁶¹ *Operative*, no.4, 25 November 1838, p. 49.

⁶² *Northern Star*, no.42, 1 September 1842, p. 4.

⁶³ *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.2, 26 January 1840, p. 1.

Neither O'Connor nor Lovett: O'Brien and moral force.

O'Brien first broke in a fundamental way with O'Connor over the latter's support for the Tories in the 1841 general election, a policy which O'Brien considered to compromise Chartist independence. O'Brien favoured, rather, a tactic of standing Chartist candidates or supporting manhood suffrage candidates at the next general election, going so far as to stand himself as a candidate *in absentia* at Newcastle.⁶⁴ The relationship between the two radicals had been awkward from the beginning, especially given O'Brien's need to establish himself with a Chartist journal sufficient to support his standing as a Chartist leader. Inevitably, such a journal would clash with the *Northern Star*, which remained unassailed as the leading Chartist journal and was the unofficial journal of the NCA in the 1840s.⁶⁵ Though Chartist journals generally openly welcomed other journals as champions of the same cause,⁶⁶ to establish a successful journal was the prerequisite for establishing a given figure or policy in a position of influence within the movement.⁶⁷ Furthermore, any shifts in circulation of radical journals would have worked to the detriment of both O'Connor and the network of agents for the *Northern Star*.⁶⁸

O'Brien, despite his journalistic ability and a coterie of committed supporters, repeatedly attempted to launch a successful Chartist journal. *Bronterre's*

⁶⁴ *Southern Star, and London and Brighton Patriot*, no.5, 16 February 1840, p. 9.

⁶⁵ See: Eric Glasgow, 'The establishment of the *Northern Star* newspaper', *History*, 39 (1954), 54-67, which emphasises O'Connor's personal control and personal gain. For a more favourable account which emphasises the democratic character of the *Star* and O'Connor generally, see: J. A. Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*', *International Review of Social History*, 21 (1976), 51-97.

⁶⁶ *Operative*, no.5, 2 December 1838, p. 72 saw itself as a 'faithful auxiliary of the glorious "Star"'.

⁶⁷ *Northern Star*, no.52, 10 November 1838, p. 4; no.54, 24 November 1838, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *John Watkins to the People, in Answer of Feargus O'Connor* (London, 1844), pp. 13-14.

National Reformer lasted from January to March 1837, the *Operative* from November 1838 to June 1839, the *Southern Star* from January to July 1840, the *British Statesman* from July to December 1842, the *Poor Man's Guardian and Repealer's Friend* briefly in 1843, the *National Reformer* from November 1844 to May 1847 and the *Social Reformer* briefly in 1849. All of these journals appealed to a certain type of Chartist - intellectually thirsty social radicals who admired O'Brien's approach. For moderates O'Brien went too far in explicitly citing the social consequences of successful Chartist agitation. For the broad Chartist base, O'Brien could exert influence with a column in a paper like the *Northern Star* but a more didactic and demanding paper could never replace the *Star* as a populist agitational journal.⁶⁹ With hindsight it is apparent that O'Brien's Chartism had more elements in common with the LWMA-NA moderates than with the Chartist mainstream. Alfred Plummer has commented that 'Bronterre O'Brien made the mistake of joining forces with the militants, whereas his talents, had he known it, fitted him much better for a campaign of peaceful, though intense, forthright and, if need be, prolonged propaganda in the press and on the platform'.⁷⁰ There is a sense in which this holds true. But perhaps it is more accurate to see O'Brien occupying a dialectical position between moderation and rhetorical threat. O'Brien's position was that the mass platform, the raw material of social protest, must have an element of instruction to transform it into an organised, united and unstoppable mass movement. This led him in late-1841 and 1842 to a recognisably moral force challenge to O'Connor's leadership of Chartism.

On release from Lancaster gaol in September 1841, O'Brien made an immediate attempt to mark himself off from 'O'Connorism'. The demonstrations and public dinners planned for O'Brien's release were cancelled at his request as 'very costly things', the resources for which would be better expended for 'useful

⁶⁹ Plummer, *Bronterre*, p. 87; *Southern Star*, no.1, 19 January 1840, p. 1 saw its object as 'conveying valuable instruction'.

⁷⁰ Plummer, *Bronterre*, p. 247.

and practical purposes'.⁷¹ O'Brien soon made a move that distanced him even further from O'Connor in supporting the efforts of Joseph Sturge to establish the Complete Suffrage Union whose tone was not one of conflict or class but of 'do unto all men'.⁷² Despite the uncompromising position of O'Brien on the question of the Charter, the 'schoolmaster of Chartism' came under fire and suspicion from the *Northern Star* for his contacts with Joseph Sturge's 'complete suffrage' movement.⁷³ However we may see the *Northern Star* as a representative organ of working class democratic politics, it was also a powerful tool for forming political outlooks. If O'Brien's complaints about O'Connor's use of the *Northern Star* were given a little to the histrionics of a working-class leader cut adrift from a permanent journal or organisational function, he nonetheless hit something like the mark when he castigated O'Connor's 'smooth' insinuations of treachery and middle class payment.⁷⁴ O'Brien was perhaps the Chartist leader of most unquestionable radical pedigree and working-class standing to be demolished by O'Connor. As with O'Connor's attacks on the LWMA and NA, charges of class-treachery and taking middle-class gold instead of working-class independence were utilised. O'Brien's contribution and commitment to the language of class-interests in radical propagandism came back to haunt him.

At the first CSU conference in April 1842, O'Brien laid down the conditions under which the CSU project might come to successful fruition. Firstly, there had to be recognition, with a glance at the BPU and the 1832 Reform Act, 'that those who were loudest in denouncing them had been the very men who first

⁷¹. *Northern Star*, no. 196, 14 August 1841, p. 4.

⁷². *The Council of the National Complete Suffrage Union, to Political Reformers of All Shades of Opinion* (Birmingham, 1842, reprinted Claeys, Vol. III, pp. 173-76), p.173.

⁷³. *Northern Star*, no. 231, 16 April 1842, p. 4; no. 233, 30 April 1842, p. 4.

⁷⁴. *Northern Star*, no. 232, 23 April 1842, p. 5.

incited them to think of physical force'.⁷⁵ Far from being violent, the vast majority of Chartists abhorred such incidents as the Newport rising. Defensive force might be necessary at some point but that point might come only when the will of a majority of democrats was opposed by force. O'Brien informed the Conference that he had himself 'been one of the most effectual combatants against those who wished to have a months [*sic*] holiday in the country ['sacred month']'.⁷⁶ Moderation, O'Brien was arguing, was a part of mainstream Chartism. It was O'Connor who personified the association with violence and O'Brien offered no defence of his leadership. He declared his hope that the conference would be devoted to the means of complete suffrage but he emphasised that to succeed it must offer no lukewarm politics, no 'complete humbug'.

There was a great deal of suspicion about the gentlemen who were sitting there; and he was not without his fears that he would be a little suspected by four millions of people, simply for sitting there.⁷⁷

O'Brien was only too correct. O'Connor had urged Chartists to reject Sturge's attempt to establish a new movement under his own direction and to 'stand by YOUR CHARTER AND YOUR ORDER'.⁷⁸ Raised eyebrows at O'Brien's involvement in the Conference were turned, through O'Connor's pen, into denunciations of O'Brien, as well as the NCA moderates, Henry Vincent and R.

⁷⁵ *Report of the Proceedings at the Conference of Delegates, of the Middle and Working Classes, held at Birmingham, April 5, 1842, and the three following days* (London, 1842; reprinted Claeys, Vol. III, pp. 1-102), p. 20.

⁷⁶ *Report of the Proceedings at the Conference of Delegates, of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Report of the Proceedings at the Conference of Delegates, of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 20.

⁷⁸ *Northern Star*, no.223, 19 February 1842, p.1; no.255, 1 October 1842, p. 4.

K. Philp, who had also supported the CSU project.⁷⁹ Typically, such denunciations were joined with public declarations of friendship from O'Connor to O'Brien - the presentation being of a friend informing another that he was in error and had mistakenly taken such 'advice' as denunciation.⁸⁰ O'Brien began to see O'Connor's dominance of Chartism as a major obstacle to further advance. 'Had O'Connor been in the same place', he claimed, 'and acted like part, how different would have been your commentary.'⁸¹ O'Brien accused the *Northern Star's* reporting of the conference as 'artfully got up for the purpose of denouncing me in the estimation of the Chartist public'.⁸² He was, he countered, a Chartist delegate at the Conference and O'Connor had no right to use the public organ of the *Northern Star* to maliciously damage Chartists acting in such a capacity.⁸³ In a letter to his 'Brother Chartists' O'Brien asserted that 'I am neither a Sturgite, an O'Connorite, a Lovettite, or any other *ite*'.⁸⁴ Far from surrendering the Chartist cause to the CSU, it was the support of the middle class that O'Brien thought could be attracted to Chartism and bring support to Chartist candidates at elections:

[Chartists] should hold by their own organization, and on no account dissolve their own union to join another. The Conference had pledged themselves to the six points of the Charter, and as some of them represented a large number of electors they might therefore calculate on their support at an election.⁸⁵

^{79.} *Northern Star*, no. 226, 12 March 1842, p. 4, 7; no. 227, 19 March 1842, p. 4.

^{80.} *Northern Star*, no.234, 7 May 1842, p. 1.

^{81.} *Northern Star*, no.232, 23 April 1842, p. 5.

^{82.} *Northern Star*, no.232, 23 April 1842, p. 5.

^{83.} *Northern Star*, no.223, 19 February 1842, p.1; no.226, 12 March 1842, p. 4; no.233, 30 April 1842, p. 1, 4.

^{84.} *Northern Star*, no.232, 23 April 1842, p. 5.

^{85.} *Northern Star*, no.236, 21 May 1842, p. 1.

At any future conference O'Brien held that 'he would endeavour to do his duty to the people by standing firmly by the name as well as the principles of the Charter'.⁸⁶ O'Brien during the controversy of his involvement with the CSU, made his most sustained challenge to O'Connor and the anti-class alliance majority in the NCA. In July 1842, on assumption of the editorship of the *British Statesman*, O'Brien revelled in his independence from the *Northern Star*. The task of Chartists was to put the cause of poverty and wretchedness, 'class legislation based on property qualifications', before the public, a task made difficult, O'Brien felt, by O'Connor.⁸⁷ O'Brien reprinted his conciliatory general election address of 1841 and contrasted it to O'Connor's 'Tory' policy and a good deal of space was occupied in defending the adoption by the CSU - 'these influential men' - of the six points of the Charter. It had, he argued, given Chartism 'a weight and standing in the country we never had before' and little was to be gained by attacking them for refusing to join the existing Chartist agitation.⁸⁸ It was accepted though that Chartists needed to continue their own agitation, and suspicion was cast on CSU free-trade 'tag-ons' to the suffrage question.⁸⁹ In O'Brien's stinging anti-O'Connor pamphlet *Vindication of His Conduct at the Late Birmingham Conference*, it was considered that the CSU was consistent not just with O'Brien's own utterances as a 'public man' but with the position 'taken by all my Chartist colleagues'.⁹⁰ Such had become the tone

^{86.} *Northern Star*, no.236, 21 May 1842, p. 1.

^{87.} *British Statesman*, no.27, 3 September 1842, p. 9; no.35, 5 November 1842, pp. 1-2.

^{88.} *British Statesman*, no.17, 2 July 1842, p. 1.

^{89.} *British Statesman*, no.28, 17 September 1842, p. 6; no.29, 24 September 1842, p. 1, 7; no.29, October 1 1842, p. 1.

^{90.} *Mr. O'Brien's Vindication of His Conduct at the Late Birmingham Conference; Containing His "Blackguard" to the Editor of the "Star," Which That Personage Suppressed; Also, His Letter to the "British Statesman;" Defence of Him by Mr. M'Gregor, of Edinburgh; Vincent's Portrait of a Demagogue; etc.,* (Birmingham, 1842), p.6.

of O'Brien's views of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* that he was supported by the National Association, the only Chartists to match his vehement rejection of O'Connor's leadership.⁹¹

O'Brien sought unsuccessfully to prevent the second CSU conference proposed for late-1842 being packed with the 'noise and turbulence' of O'Connorites on the one hand and the 'jealous and exclusive spirit' of CSU free-traders on the other.⁹² Charges of the Malthusian and free trade character of the CSU and its purpose of ousting O'Connor had characterised the build up to the second CSU conference in the *Northern Star*.⁹³ O'Brien also defended the name of Chartism not just as a 'superstitious value on a name' but as a valuable unifying attachment 'because the name (being at once indicative of our principles, and of the sacrifices we have made for them) serves to endear the people to one another', thus presaging the issue that would tear the CSU project apart.⁹⁴ The ensuing failure of the second CSU conference was followed by accounts in the *Northern Star* of the 'middle class treachery' of the delegates not prepared to insist on the adoption of the Chartist name (including Henry Vincent, John Collins and Arthur O'Neill who followed the Sturgeite withdrawers for religious reasons).⁹⁵ For O'Brien, though, moves of propertied radicals towards the Charter programme should be welcomed. Though the 'honest' middle classes must come over to the Chartists and 'no Chartist budge from his post, or drop out of the ranks, to run out and meet them', it was a time for moderation:

⁹¹ *National Association Gazette*, no.23, 4 June 1842, pp. 183-84.

⁹² *British Statesman*, no.38, 26 November 1842, p. 4; no.39, 3 December 1842, p. 1; no.40, 10 December 1842, p. 1.

⁹³ *Northern Star*, no.260, 5 November 1842, p. 4; no.261, 12 November 1842, p. 5; no.265, 10 December 1842, pp. 4-5, 8.

⁹⁴ *British Statesman*, no.17, 2 July 1842, p. 1; no.17, 2 July 1842, p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Northern Star*, no.269, 7 January 1843, p. 4; no.270, 14 January 1843, p. 4. Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), p. 133.

Many of you, looking back to our language in the *Destructive, Poor Man's Guardian*, and other former publications ... are apt to suspect ... that we have to some extent deserted your interests, because we do not come out in the STATESMAN with the same withering denunciations of the middle classes which formerly characterised our writings. Do not, good friends, judge us after this fashion ... The language which served you so effectually in 1834, 5, 6, and 7, would not serve you now. It would be wholly unsuited to existing circumstances ... That was no time for soft whisperings and gentle tickling ... it was necessary to sound the trumpet of resurrection into your ears, to summon you to political life and action. The case is widely different now ... *you need no rousing NOW*. The danger now is ... that you will move too fast – that you will move before your friends have time to detach some of your enemy's forces from him, and to make them either neutral or auxiliary to you in the coming conflict.⁹⁶

In the 1830s working class radicals had met with scorn and had thus responded with a revolutionary tone. In 1842, however, with such middle class acts as the CSU, it was the business of Chartists to reciprocate such good faith, 'to show ourselves as disposed to conciliate as to be conciliated', without compromise of principle.⁹⁷ Chartists should not condemn honest sections of the middle class by generalising about the whole and, O'Brien continued, it hindered the working-class radical cause not to adjust its language according to its reception.

The *British Statesman*, under O'Brien's editorship, became a focus for disillusion within the NCA. Most prominent in this regard was R. K. Philp who used the pages of the *Statesman* to rail against the influence of the *Northern Star* in directing opinion in the NCA and to defend the CSU from denunciation.⁹⁸

⁹⁶. *British Statesman*, no.18, 9 July 1842, p. 1.

⁹⁷. *British Statesman*, no.18, 9 July 1842, p. 1.

⁹⁸. *British Statesman*, no.16, 25 June 1842, p1; no.18, 9 July 1842, p. 1; no.32, 15 October 1842, p. 9; no.33, 22 October 1842, p. 6. Philp though was very qualified in his defence of the CSU. He considered that Chartists should not assist the body as it would draw effort from Chartism. Also that the half-middle class and half working class

O'Brien also received support from Arthur O'Neill and Henry Vincent over his criticism of O'Connor's 'sophistry' and denunciation.⁹⁹ Though O'Connor played a 'gallant' part in Sturge's Nottingham election campaign it was inconsistent as the *Northern Star* veered from conversion of the middle classes to vituperation depending on O'Connor's mood.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Thomas Cooper, an O'Connorite who had launched a stinging rebuke of O'Brien for co-operating with Sturge was a prominent activist at the Nottingham by-election.¹⁰¹ O'Brien also slated the irony of the attacks of the *Northern Star* over the expenses of the NCA, given O'Connor's taste for useless 'demonstrations, triumphal cars, and the like trumpery nonsense'.¹⁰² Further, O'Connor had sought to save himself from arrest by praising Peel's tariffs and Tory mill-owners during the furore over the NCA executive's address seeking to attach the Charter to the Plug riots.¹⁰³ For all this criticism of O'Connor and the *Northern Star*, O'Brien received vicious and sustained attacks from the 'O'Connor faction' which brought the *British Statesman* to an ignominious end in dwindling circulation.¹⁰⁴

The second National Convention in May 1842 debated an O'Brien resolution condemning of 'denunciation', which was in effect a motion of censure on O'Connor. Chartists should have a right to reply and editorial comments should

delegates arrangement for the second CSU conference was unjust and the free-trade clause divisive.

^{99.} *British Statesman*, no.16, 25 June 1842, p. 9; no.19, 16 July 1842, pp. 8-9.

^{100.} *British Statesman*, no.22, 6 August 1842, p. 6; no.23, 13 August 1842, p. 6.

^{101.} *British Statesman*, no.26, 3 September 1842, p. 9.

^{102.} *British Statesman*, no.22, 6 August 1842, p. 7; no.39, 3 December 1842, p. 1.

^{103.} *British Statesman*, no.25, 27 August 1842, p. 6; no.26, 3 September 1842, p. 6.

^{104.} *Northern Star*, no.251, 3 September 1842, p. 1; no.253, 17 September 1842, p. 6; *British Statesman*, no.33, 22 October 1842, p. 6. The following year saw O'Brien's *Poor Man's Guardian* fail through poor circulation. O'Brien's sense of persecution - from the government (which he believed conspired against his journals) and from within Chartism itself - reached a new low: *Poor Man's Guardian, and Repealer's Friend*, no.13, 1843, pp. 97-99, 102-103.

be restrained in their reporting to 'if' this or that was said. Reporting of the Sturge conference, for example, had condemned associated Chartists (except a handful of O'Connor loyalists) as 'humbugs' and brought their independence into question.¹⁰⁵ O'Brien's resolution was eventually carried but further discussion of the 'Sturge Conference' took place. The proposed Convention address contained a clause expressing gratification at the adoption of the 'six points' by the CSU. This was opposed on practical grounds - that it was obstructive to the second National Petition and that it encouraged many small organisations rather than one united Chartist body - and by Lawrence Pitkethly on the grounds that it was a middle-class body: 'He was surprised at Mr. O'Brien - a man who had been harder in his denunciations of the middle class than any man in the movement - now turning round and eulogizing them'.¹⁰⁶ In reply, O'Brien explained his position towards middle-class radicalism:

Mr. O'Brien explained that he did not eulogize the middle class; he believed them as a body to be the bitterest enemies of the working classes; those who attended the Conferences were not now connected with the Corn Law party; they were an offshoot from them, and were convinced that nothing short of full, fair, and free representation would benefit the people ...¹⁰⁷

Pitkethly, a prosperous Huddersfield draper, regarded the class 'enemy' from the perspective of a provincial factory and anti-Poor Law agitator.¹⁰⁸ Pitkethly's enemy, his middle class, was thus the industrial capitalists. O'Brien's view of the middle class, on the other hand, was coloured by recognition of the practical necessity for political moderation and class alliance. He therefore saw the

^{105.} *Northern Star*, no. 235, 14 May 1842, p.7.

^{106.} *Northern Star*, no. 235, 14 May 1842, p.7.

^{107.} *Northern Star*, no.235, 14 May 1842, p. 7.

^{108.} Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites', 10-11.

middle class far more as those who did not support the People's Charter. Chartists, he urged, were not restricted to the manual labouring population but included useful professionals¹⁰⁹ whose skills were likewise abused by class legislation (through copyright law, for example) and all unrepresented workers (including students, clerks and shopmen). Shop-keepers, for example, were assailed not for being shop-keepers 'but for being opposed to the just rights of the productive classes'.¹¹⁰ O'Brien held that the Charter would benefit nine out of ten of the middle classes and that they could not progress with reform without enfranchising the working classes.¹¹¹ The liberal press, too, was criticised not for being conducted in the interest of the middle classes but because of its conservatism in refusing to support manhood suffrage.¹¹² Those industrialists who came over to Chartism were no longer middle class but 'friends of the people' and this was a definition that was held by many Chartists.¹¹³ Support for the CSU at the 1842 Convention was also forthcoming from others, as a movement based on the 'six points' and disapproving of the abuse of the middle classes. The majority of the Convention, however, still held to a suspicion of the motives for moves from more moderate conciliatory positions and regarded them as middle class projects to stifle the movement.¹¹⁴

A letter from O'Brien to Lovett in May 1842, after the Convention had voted to censure O'Connor, reveals that O'Brien still retained some faith in the NCA.

^{109.} As opposed to those originating from class corruption such as 'law, religion, politics, national defence, and internal police': "*Destructive*", and *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.30, 24 August 1833, p. 236.

^{110.} "*Destructive*", and *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.34, 21 September 1833, p. 265; no.36, 5 October 1833, p. 282.

^{111.} *Operative*, no.14, 3 February 1839, p. 1; no.25, 21 April 1839, p. 1; *British Statesman*, no.18, 9 July 1842, p. 1.

^{112.} "*Destructive*", and *Poor Man's Guardian*, no.40, 2 November 1833, p. 313.

^{113.} Owen R. Ashton and Paul A. Pickering, *Friends of the People*, pp. 1-5.

^{114.} *Northern Star*, no.235, 14 May 1842, pp. 7-8.

O'Brien explained that he was prepared to work with O'Connor, not because he had any love for him, but because he was a 'magnificent demagogue'. 'Feargus may, or may not, be such a valuable auxiliary to the cause of democracy. My opinion has long been that he will always go with the people whether they go right or wrong'.¹¹⁵ It was radicals like himself and Lovett, O'Brien continued, who carried the burden of politically educating the movement:

... if they [the people] resolve in going right, he will go right too, and do a dozen men's work in urging them along. -
Be it your business then to set the people right, I have done my best in my way, you are doing your's in your way. - Our views & modes of action differ very much, but I verily believe we have both done something in setting the people right. - You acting on one portion of them - and I on another. Well - only set the people on the right road - and I verily believe you will yet find Feargus a valuable auxiliary.¹¹⁶

Part of putting the movement on the right road, O'Brien had concluded by 1842, was to actively engage with middle class moves to extend the suffrage.

O'Brien's new-found faith in the NCA, however, was short lived and did not serve to alter his general scepticism of its basis. He was critical of establishing a single formal organisation and rejected the NCA due to O'Connor's dominance of the organisation from without its democratic structures and he did not return to the mainstream Chartist fold.¹¹⁷ In a reply to 'One of your oldest disciples' of Lambeth, who had suggested that O'Brien ought to support the organisation (NCA) and leader (O'Connor) of the Chartist majority, O'Brien launched a scathing attack on both:

¹¹⁵ BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 118, O'Brien to Lovett, 18 May, 1842.

¹¹⁶ BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 118, O'Brien to Lovett, 18 May, 1842.

¹¹⁷ Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 245-46; *British Statesman*, no.35, 5 November 1842, pp. 1-2.

*The "National Charter Association" is no National Charter Association. It is neither National nor Chartist. It does not include one in a thousand of the Chartists who signed the National Petition, nor ever will. It is a mere coterie of O'Connor's partizans ... Instead of a National Charter Association, it is an association of tools and dupes, designed by its leader to prevent a real National Charter Association ... [which] would be no man's tool, no man's convenience. It might have prominent men, distinguished men: but it would have no leaders, no dictators ...*¹¹⁸

O'Brien periodically entered the NCA fray at moments of growth and crisis but, as a result of his repeated disputes with O'Connor and his didactic emphasis, was repeatedly disillusioned by attacks on his character. Chartists, he suggested, should not feel bound to join the NCA but should join the Chartist association in which they felt they could make the most contribution. This would also serve the purpose of challenging national leadership ambition, the 'spirit of dictatorship' present in the movement, and prevent corruption through minimising centralisation.¹¹⁹ O'Brien had been attacked for being opposed to the NCA but this was, he retorted, complete falsification. Chartists should support whatever society they wished without denouncing any other but, he explained, he regarded the NCA very highly amongst the various associations 'because it appears to me the most popular in its constitution, and the most decidedly democratic.'¹²⁰ Nonetheless O'Brien argued that he was in the majority of Chartists as a non-member of the NCA. As the Chartist agitation began to grow again in 1846 O'Brien warned against it becoming a mere O'Connorite project that would once again merely result in more arrests and transportations (though

^{118.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.3, new series, 17 October 1846, pp. 9-10.

^{119.} *Poor Man's Guardian, and Repealer's Friend*, no.8, 1843, pp. 57-58.

^{120.} *British Statesman*, no.17, 2 July 1842, p. 1; no.19, 16 July 1842, p. 6.

Ernest Jones was noted as a more honest and able associate of O'Connor).¹²¹

With the Chartist revival of 1847 to 1848, O'Brien made a brief return to the centre of the Chartist stage. Returned as a delegate to the National Convention for London, he was involved in a dispute over O'Connor's voting rights. O'Connor being keen to speak but not vote, O'Brien argued that O'Connor must take a full share in the results of the Convention's deliberations. The result was a compromise (that O'Connor and other executive council members *could* vote and speak) and thereafter O'Brien's role was confined to urging the role of the Convention as a body to present the Petition. To take its mandate further the Convention must be returned upon a more soundly democratic and countrywide basis (a point acted upon with the election of a National Assembly once the third National Petition had been rejected). The Chartist body, O'Brien emphasised, was not in a position to move beyond a rhetoric of legality.¹²² The experience of past failures lent a tint of disillusion to O'Brien's emphasis on the need for an organised, disciplined, instructed and democratic mass movement. O'Brien's involvement in the 1848 Convention did not last beyond its early sessions after which he often appeared on the platform of the moral force People's Charter Union (which will be examined in chapter VII).

'Something more'.

Alienated from the Chartist mainstream, after his emergence as a critic of O'Connor and the physical force mass platform in 1842 and, to a lesser degree in 1848, O'Brien appears to have developed an increased perception that a programme of social reforms had to be agreed upon to maximise the social

^{121.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.4, second series, no.4, 24 October 1846, pp.11-12.

^{122.} *Northern Star*, no.546, 8 April 1848, p. 1, 8; no.547, 15 April 1848, p. 8.

benefits of democracy.¹²³ O'Brien's reform outlook was bold and carried democracy explicitly into the social sphere, curbing competition and inequality.¹²⁴ There was a need, O'Brien insisted, for a social reform party to exert its influence within the wider Chartist and reform movement. On the winding up of the *National Reformer* in 1847, O'Brien lamented the lack of support among the working classes for his openly social-democratic journal but he had a marked faith in its influence. If only, O'Brien lamented, 'O'Connor, Vincent, Lovett, and all the other popular leaders assisted us in their development and dissemination, we should have beaten the Government long before this, and opened the road to happiness, for the present and all future generations'.¹²⁵ His faith in the eventual success of Chartist social democracy was scant consolation, however, for the years of sustained effort on behalf of the working classes and his development of a distinct radical creed, which had brought him only denunciation, ignominy and poverty: 'I have suffered for the emancipation of the poor; and what a combination of knaves and slaves it has taken to undo my work'.¹²⁶

O'Brien's 'something more' always had a political core and O'Brien was part of a Chartist Republicanism that sought democracy and virtue as a route to far-reaching social reform. 'Levelling' was not the desired or expected vision of post-Chartist politics for the vast majority of Chartists. Instead, what was

^{123.} Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, pp. 158-61; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, pp. 189-95; *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.1, second series, 3 October 1846, pp. 1-2; no.16, second series, 16 January 1847, pp. 1-2; *Poor Man's Guardian, and Repealer's Friend*, no.5, 1843, pp. 34-36; no.7, 1843, pp. 50-51. Though 'the land' question was getting hold of public attention O'Brien argued necessity of not getting drawn from the Charter, which was the only way to effect significant social reform.

^{124.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.23, second series, 6 March 1847, pp. 1-2.

^{125.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.35, second series, 29 May 1847, p. 9.

^{126.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.29, second series, 17 April 1847, p. 1.

anticipated was the emergence of a British republic, where labour was represented equally with property. A republic required men of philanthropic rather than selfish politics, representing the commonweal rather than self-interested factions. Attwood, was seen as such a man briefly in 1839, when it was rumoured he might quit the Commons for the Chartist Convention: 'Here is a surrender of mock station to public duty - a sacrifice of class distinction for general good.'¹²⁷ O'Brien made clear that the Charter was for the recognition of the interests of those who produced the national wealth, but he also recognised that a democratic revolution required republican virtue. Robespierre, he wrote, 'owed his destruction solely to his virtue ... because Robespierre's politics were those of philanthropy and equality'.¹²⁸ If O'Brien's ideas on the centrality of class interests in politics were new his radicalism still looked to Republican virtue to fulfil its promise. This was an outlook shared by many moral force Chartists who assumed that political benevolence would follow a large measure of political equality and lead to rational social reform but it was shared, too, by other social Chartists.

The late Chartist leader Ernest Jones argued that 'Ultimately, we feel certain, the "Republic, Democratic and Social" must be successful, for it is the only form of government that appeals to the interest of the great body of the industrious classes.'¹²⁹ Miles Taylor's recent biography of Ernest Jones (against existing prevailing views of Jones as a social Chartist) has shown that Jones, despite a friendship with Marx, was no Marxist but a romantic informed by a primitive Christian drive to restore pastoral harmony to British society.¹³⁰ Likewise, P. M. McDouall was strongly against the factory system and, unusually, openly anti-

^{127.} *Northern Star*, no.86, 6 July 1839, p. 4.

^{128.} *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.5, 1 May 1841, p.38; no.9, 29 May 1841, pp. 70-71.

^{129.} *Labourer*, vol.4, n.d., p. 277.

^{130.} Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the Romance of Politics 1819-1869* (Oxford, 2003), pp. v-vi, 77-136.

monarchist. But his republic was not a worker's state but one where 'the will of all rules, the voice of all is heard'.¹³¹ The organisation urged upon Chartist trades by McDouall was in order that they become 'small republics' of the unrepresented and not a recognition of Chartism as class struggle.¹³² Chartism looked much more to classical republicanism and the English Puritan national tradition than to a European Jacobin inheritance.¹³³ The enthusiasm of Chartists for the European political revolutions of 1848, which will be examined in chapter VII, was therefore shared by many middle class liberals. Conviction of the need for balanced government constrained by a strong popular element in the Commons and maintained by civic virtue was widespread throughout the nineteenth century and across social classes. References to seventeenth century Puritan heroes and martyrs and eighteenth century radical forbears were common in both the early and late Chartist press. The Chartist republic would owe much to virtue and relatively little to attacks on property and class struggle.

The effects of a Chartist political revolution, for O'Brien, would reverberate quickly outwards into the social and economic sphere. A democratic legislature could not permit its law to favour factions over the interests of the majority. The just society would arise from just law.¹³⁴ If O'Brien's contribution to social-democracy is often remembered as his lasting Chartist contribution, his spells as

^{131.} *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.1, 3 April 1841, pp 5-8; no.2, 10 April 1841, pp. 9-10; no.3, 17 April 1841, p. 20; no.4, 24 April 1841, pp. 25-26.

^{132.} *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.19, 7 August 1841, p. 146.

^{133.} Margot Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 13-59.

^{134.} *People's Conservative, and Trades' Union Gazette*, no.46, 14 December 1833, pp.362-63; *Reynold's Political Instructor* no.2, 17 November 1849, pp.11-12; no.3, 24 November 1849, p. 22; no.4, 1 December 1849, pp. 29-30; no.5, 8 December 1849, pp. 38-39; no.6, 15 December 1849, pp. 46-47; no.7, 22 December 1849, pp. 55-56; no.8, 29 December 1849, pp. 62-63; no.9, 5 January 1850, p. 75; no.10, 12 January 1850, p. 78; no.11, 19 January 1850, p. 83; no.12, 26 January 1850, p. 95; no.13, 2 February 1850, pp.103-104; no.14, 9 February 1850, pp.110-111; no.15, 16 February 1850, pp. 118-19; no.16, 23 February 1850, p. 126; no.20, 23 March 1850, p. 158; no.22, 16 April 1850, pp. 171-72; no.23, 13 April 1850, pp. 182-83; no.24, 20 April 1850, p. 186; no.25, 27 April 1850, pp.195-96; no.26, 4 May 1850, pp.202-203.

a moral force critic show that his legacy was not a simple one. If, in the end, O'Brien could not be satisfied with moderation as a permanent political course, in 1842 and, to a lesser degree, in 1848 he accepted its logic and opted for class-co-operation and a moderate approach to radical political reform. O'Brien cannot be classified as a firm moral force Chartist as his moderate critique of Chartism was limited to relatively short periods of his radical career. But what these brief periods highlight is that moral force concerns were not restricted to a 'middle class' wing but often emerged as important issues within the Chartist mainstream. The following chapter will show that such concerns even emerged within the NCA and amongst Chartists closely connected to O'Connor and the *Northern Star*. It will be contended that, building on the evidence presented in the last four chapters, formal moral force Chartism was not ungentuine but formed a legitimate and influential position within a movement that often debated and adopted elements of its approach.

Chapter VI.

The National Charter Association and Moral Force.

The National Charter Association originated as a reaction to the failure of early Chartism. A feeling diffused the movement that the organisation of the Chartist movement needed to be put on a firmer, more formal, footing. As we have seen in chapter IV, one such plan was put forward by William Lovett and John Collins. It was rejected by the mainstream of Chartism because of the ability that O'Connor possessed, through the *Northern Star* in particular, to associate certain individuals or plans with 'middle class' compromise. The 'new move' plans, though, were every bit as radical as plans firmly within the mainstream. The *English Chartist Circular*, for instance, printed the National Association plan alongside that for the National Charter Association and that of Peter Murray McDouall.¹ In late 1839 and through 1840, a concern for the spread of radical ideas and an attachment to temperance and religion in Chartist agitation formed an important part of a swathe of reflections and plans that swept the movement. McDouall's plan to organise the Chartist movement as a distinct labour movement tied to the trades was no more typical than that of the NA and was neither more popular nor more practical.² Rather, the plan adopted by the mainstream was one that attempted to formalise the loose coalition of Radical, Working Men's and Chartist clubs and associations that had coalesced in early Chartism. A centralised organisation was created that was that was democratic in structure but which was still dominated by O'Connor's and the *Northern Star*.

As Chapters I to III have demonstrated, the NCA mainstream did not suit moral force Chartists who rejected 'O'Connorism'. Recent historians have argued that

¹ *English Chartist Circular*, no.15, n.d., p. 57; no.16, n.d., pp. 61-62.

² *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.3, 17 April 1841, pp.17-19; no.4, 24 April 1841, pp. 25-26.

the minority character of those outside the NCA lends credence to the view that moral force Chartism was, as O'Connor argued, 'middle class'. This chapter seeks to move beyond these recent readings of Chartism to observe elements of moral force Chartist concerns within the NCA itself. By so doing, this chapter is central to my assertion that, far from being 'middle class', moral force Chartism was a response of strategy and practical politics to the difficulties of carrying democratic reform in the face of establishment hostility and the absence of organised support from the majority of the working classes.

The National Charter Association.

Adopted by a conference of Chartist delegates in Manchester in 1840, the plan for the National Charter Association proposed to establish a national organisation formed of a central executive and local branches.³ Skirting the edge of legality due to the still extant Corresponding Society Act it was agreed that local NCA branches would elect councillors and a national executive. Responsible for national Chartist strategy, the NCA was theoretically a far more democratic organisation than the mass movement of early Chartism, being directly accountable to the organised Chartist grass roots. The distance between the democratic aims and the actual Chartist organisation of early Chartism was thus closed considerably. O'Connor's support for the plan from his prison cell at York castle, where he was a political prisoner from May 1840 to August 1841, meant that it proceeded rapidly into practical existence.

Thus O'Connor and the *Northern Star* remained as central to the Chartism of the early NCA as they had been to early Chartism and subverted the real organisational progress and democratic ambition of the NCA.⁴ Though a

³ John Richard Clinton, 'The National Charter Association and Its Role in the Chartist Movement, 1840-1858' (Unpublished M.Phil., University of Southampton, 1980), pp. 1-44.

⁴ Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 218, 220.

supporter of the NCA, O'Connor refused to run for the executive but sat as its self-appointed advisor through the *Northern Star*. As the single most influential national Chartist leader, O'Connor's refusal to enter a formal power structure whilst still exerting a hugely important position in the movement meant that his dominance was fraught with difficulties. We shall see that a critique of O'Connor's leadership, in many ways similar to that of the moral force Chartists already examined, emerged amongst NCA Chartists. The Chartists William Hill, John Watkins and Thomas Cooper will be examined in relation to the problematic influence of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* on the NCA.

The contentious debate within early Chartism as to how far the middle classes could or should be appealed to for support continued within the NCA. Despite the mainstream and 'working class' character of the NCA it still faced the same practical problems that caused tension in early Chartism. W. Buttermouth, a delegate at the Manchester delegate meeting that adopted the NCA plan, was of the opinion that the Chartists '... would never again get their rights until they adopted a calm and judicious course of proceeding. To do this, he was of the opinion that they must have a greater number of the wealthier classes on their side than they do at present ...'.⁵ The need for moderation was even admitted by a Chartist as apparently militant as McDouall:

... because I hate the whole system, and desire to blunt its sting, and seek out a way through the thorns, and twisting and turning as the coils of the tyrant's chains winds round and round the mighty arm of industry. I might knock away with a sledge hammer at a rough paling, and yet not break through. I might injure myself trying to climb over it, but would save both time and labour if I found a method of creeping through the constitutional posts.⁶

⁵ *Northern Star*, no.122, 14 March 1840, p. 7.

⁶ *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.3, 17 April 1841, p. 17.

McDouall's constitutionalism meant avoiding the easy 'legal' destruction of Chartism by the government. For some of the mainstream, though, the question of moderation remained something rather more positive, involving the need to attract support from middle-class and parliamentary radicals. Also, for the social Chartists of the mainstream, as for most moral force Chartists, the Charter was a first step to a more representative legislature, a republic in which 'class legislation' would give way to enlightened legislation in the interests of all. To use McDouall again, who firmly believed in the Charter as a movement to redress the social condition of the working classes, 'With the Charter we would not have to reason and agitate so much for the purpose of convincing; we would have to deliberate and discuss the best means to be adopted for the improvement of man in his social and domestic condition.'⁷ But both those in favour of radical class alliance and overtly social Chartists were in the minority in the mainstream, part of a movement dominated by an O'Connorite radicalism which favoured class rhetoric over class co-operation but yet which stayed aloof from radical social ideas short of an amorphous appeal to full bellies and happy households beyond the Charter.

Education, temperance and religion all featured strongly in the activities of local NCA Chartists striving to make democratic principles a part of everyday life. Yet efforts to form 'knowledge', 'teetotal' or 'religious' Chartist bodies were opposed by O'Connor. As we have seen in the previous chapter the 'knowledge' Chartism of the NA was attacked as a move against O'Connor's leadership and as a 'middle class' scheme to substitute household suffrage for 'whole hog' Chartism. This technique was also applied within the NCA to individuals and tendencies that O'Connor determined were divisive, usually those that he perceived were challenging his leadership. Several examples will be examined involving challenges to NCA strategy by the prominent NCA Chartists Henry Vincent, John Collins, Arthur O'Neill, Robert Kemp Philp, Richard John

⁷ *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.2, 10 April 1841, p. 9.

Richardson and William Thomason. In each case debates within the NCA were appropriated by O'Connor as an arena for the selective assassination of opponents and strategic alternatives. Vincent and temperance, Collins and O'Neill and religion, Philp and Richardson and the middle classes and Thomason and 'knowledge' will form the individuals and themes through which moral force Chartism is examined in this chapter as a continuity is demonstrated from early Chartist divisions to the later NCA mainstream.

Feergus O'Connor and democratic politics.

O'Connor had long argued that his newspaper, the *Northern Star*, was far more democratic than many other radical journals precisely because he was independent of his readership as its sole proprietor. Unlike joint-stock journals like the *Charter*, he argued, the *Northern Star* was unlimited in its ability to maintain a steady course of leadership and source of advice for Chartists. 'I have always had', he wrote in July 1840, 'and always shall have, so long as I am concerned with the *Star*, undivided possession, and individual responsibility ... There never was, there never will be, so truly a Democratic Journal as the *Northern Star*.'⁸ Yet despite O'Connor's claims and the subsequent acknowledgement by historians of the huge role of the *Northern Star* in forging the tone and national character of Chartism, its democratic influence should not be conceded too readily.

The success of the *Northern Star* and of O'Connor as a Chartist leader were crucially intertwined. O'Connor's work rate as a touring radical was impressive but it was his role as a national giver of advice in weekly letters 'to the imperial Chartists' and other correspondence that enabled him to direct the perception of Chartists with regard to other national leaders. His ownership of the *Northern Star* formed a critical link between locality and national movement through

⁸ *Northern Star*, no.139, 11 July 1840, p. 7.

reports of meetings and demonstrations from across the country. It provided a link between movement and leader, an axis between the support base of Chartism and its dominant leadership personality. But also, crucially, through editorial intervention, it directed the interpretation of its readership of debates and leadership struggles within the Chartist movement. Though the various editors of the *Northern Star* exercised considerable day-to-day control, O'Connor's ultimate dominance was never in question and was asserted at several critical junctures. The *Northern Star* provided an essential buttress to O'Connor's efforts to create a national radical movement in support of the Charter. Through the edited reportage of meetings and demonstrations O'Connor's role as a successful platform demagogue was highlighted and his case for an ambivalent physical force threat was legitimised as popular. O'Connor could not direct Chartism just as he chose but he created a hard earned position from which he could influence those Chartists whose reading of the *Northern Star* was a major point of contact with the wider movement.

The popular radical demagogue, the friend of the people, had a firm pedigree in the early nineteenth century and was a role into which O'Connor consciously placed himself. W. E. Adams recorded in 1903 his boyhood memories of the extent to which O'Connor and the *Northern Star* spoke for and to working-class radicals:

The most constant of our visitors was a crippled shoemaker ... [who] made his appearance every Sunday morning, as regular as clockwork, with a copy of the *Northern Star*, damp from the press, for the purpose of hearing some member of our household read out to him and others "Feergus's letter." The paper had first to be dried before the fire, and then carefully and evenly cut, so as not to damage a single line of the almost sacred production ... he [the shoemaker] settled himself to listen with all the rapture of a devotee in a tabernacle to the message of the great Feergus ... interjecting occasional chuckles of approval as some particularly emphatic sentiment was read aloud ...⁹

⁹ W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (London, 1903, reprinted New York, 1968), pp. 164-65.

It is clear that O'Connor connected in a quite visceral way with the experiences of early nineteenth century British labour.¹⁰ According to Stephens Roberts 'The *Star* was a working class paper, read in workshops, artisan coffee houses, public houses and the open air ... They felt it spoke for them.'¹¹ Chris Yelland has pointed to the early *Northern Star* as offering a newspaper in which, through reports, letters and dialogic and participatory language, its readership actually took part.¹² And, once established as a working-class radical standard, the *Northern Star* remained the undisputed organ of Chartism. Having created that rare production, a successful national radical journal, O'Connor used it to maximum effect and defended his position as a national Chartist leader through it. O'Connor and the *Northern Star* became synonymous with the struggle for 'whole hog' Chartism.

The problem was that that struggle became in part necessary to O'Connor's position. We have seen that, though the LWMA and NA fell a long way short of the sort of the widespread appeal of O'Connor, they nonetheless held to the Charter as firmly. Differences of the LWMA with O'Connor over strategy were not, as is clear from chapter II, reducible to middle class corruption or compromise but due to a belief that radical principles and political co-operation had to be extended as widely as possible amongst all classes. Whilst O'Connor's brand of 'gentlemanly' leadership was hardly less 'middle class' in essence, however much he spoke to and for a large working-class audience, crude allegations were made and motives ascribed to O'Connor's fellow Chartist

¹⁰ Dorothy Thompson, 'Early Chartism', in *Outsiders*, p. 71; Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 32, 42, 49; Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 60-89.

¹¹ Stephen Roberts, 'Who Wrote to the *Northern Star*?', in *The Duty of Discontent*, pp. 64-65.

¹² Chris Yelland, 'Speech and Writing in the *Northern Star*', *Labour History Review*, 65 (2000), 22-40.

leaders. Regular personal attacks were made to ram home charges of dishonesty, insincerity and profiteering, all of which were 'middle-class' characteristics. Expediency had always been the bugbear of principled radicals and the Reform Act had served apparently to confirm the middle classes as susceptible to political self-interest. Thus W. E. Adams's grandmother 'was careful to explain to me', when discussing radical reformers, 'that Cobbett and Cobden were two different persons - that Cobbett was the hero, and that Cobden was just a middle class advocate'.¹³ It was an understandable tactic then for a 'friend of the people', such as O'Connor, to label opponents as 'middle class' and less democratic whilst presenting his own financial security as a source not of corruption or moderation but of independence and principled radical politics. To maintain a position as the people's mentor for more than a short time, though, meant the continued promotion of the demagogue's own politics at the expense of alternative leaders and strategies.

Whilst O'Connor co-operated with Chartist leaders who were happy in his shadow, any attempt to present an alternative position or to supplant his leadership was treated with withering attacks. The huge impact of O'Connor in forging the mass Chartist movement and ensuring its longevity has been acknowledged by labour historians in the last fifty years, replacing a worn out history that had cast disdain on the physical force language and domineering tactics of O'Connor. Glenn Airey's recent assessment of O'Connor's career from 1842 has pointed to his pivotal role as a personification of Chartist principles.¹⁴ This continuing positive reassessment of O'Connor and his relationship to his audience can broadly be accepted as an advance on previous historiography. However, the revision of O'Connor's radical leadership has sped on rather too uncritically. Whilst liberal accounts of O'Connor could not accept his style of politics, neo-Marxist historians have focussed closely on the social

¹³ W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom*, p. 163.

¹⁴ Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 1-6, 7-31, 40-44, 66-71.

base of O'Connor's support, seeing justification for O'Connor's methods in the existence of a mass movement using class language. But O'Connor's hagiography needs tempering. Airey and Epstein, promoting O'Connor's virtues as a people's champion, do so largely by scouring the pages of the *Northern Star* for evidence of its proprietor's positive qualities as a radical leader and as spokesman for the working classes. Whilst his undoubted oratorical and journalistic abilities and tireless political energy have to be recognised, his ability, too, to cast dissension and create division were also unequalled in the movement. Airey has noted the centrality of the defence of O'Connor to his mainstream acolytes but such defence also meant attacking fellow Chartists as corrupt radicals falling short of O'Connor's credentials.¹⁵ We have seen the truth of this with regard to Chartists on the moderate wing of the movement. But it is true also of O'Connor's relations with NCA Chartists and even with those who had 'O'Connorite' credentials.

William Hill had been a long-standing, close and admiring colleague of O'Connor and for six years the editor of the *Northern Star*. However, in July 1843, Hill's decision to criticise members of the NCA executive over financial irregularities and to attack McDouall's conduct over the Plug riots of August 1842, led to his removal by O'Connor from the editorship of the *Northern Star*.¹⁶ A disagreement over editorial policy had led to Hill's exit from his editorship and thus his position of influence in the mainstream movement. As editor from late 1837 to early 1843, Hill had consistently backed O'Connor's position in his editorials. Even an initial aghast reaction to O'Connor's 'new move' attacks, mentioned in chapter IV, was set aside. O'Connor, too, had consistently backed his editor as a loyal, hard working, thorough-going Chartist to be trusted with a free hand in the running of the *Northern Star*. And, immediately on Hill's

¹⁵ Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 44-52.

¹⁶ *Northern Star*, no.269, 7 January 1843, p. 1; no.270, 14 January 1843, p. 1; no.272, 28 January 1843, p. 4; no.273, 4 February 1843, p. 1; no.185, 29 April 1843, p. 4; P. M. McDouall, *Letter to the People* (Manchester, 1842).

departure from his post as editor, his relationship with O'Connor was not openly hostile. It was, after all, quite within the bounds of proprietorship to remove an editor on a point of difference of opinion and, in any case, O'Connor had offered Hill open access for his pen in the *Northern Star*. Thus Hill's editorship gave way quietly to that of Joshua Hobson, Harney becoming sub-editor and eventually editor in 1845.¹⁷

This situation did not last for long, however. Hill's first letters, reports from a radical tour, were indeed published in the *Northern Star* but the tone of those that followed led to their refusal. Hill had increasingly been at odds with the physical force rhetoric of the likes of McDouall, against whom he had advanced a policy of moderation with regard to Chartist support for political strikes during the 1842 Plug riots. Excluded from the editorship of the *Northern Star* for these 'divisive' opinions, Hill realised that he was therefore cut adrift as a Chartist leader and began to expand his criticism of Chartism as more fond of big words than sound sense. With language similar to the early LWMA, Hill urged Chartists to select their leaders from those 'of good moral character, and good general repute.'¹⁸ Furthermore, he claimed that Chartism had 'suffered more, as a body, from drunken, gambling, dishonest, immoral men, as lecturers, secretaries, and "leaders," than from all other causes put together.'¹⁹ Here, then, was something approaching a moral force critique of the mainstream movement from its very heart. Furthermore, O'Connor came to be at the centre of all that Hill felt was wrong with the Chartist movement:

¹⁷ Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, p. 124.

¹⁸ Feargus O'Connor, *A Letter from Feargus O'Connor, Esq. to the Reverend William Hill, (Late Editor of the Northern Star,) in Answer to Several Charges Contained in Recent Documents Published by that Gentleman* (London, 1843), p. 5.

¹⁹ Feargus O'Connor, *A Letter from Feargus O'Connor, Esq. to the Reverend William Hill*, p. 5.

Mr. O'CONNOR has now what he has long sought - a *perfect command* over every sentiment uttered in the NORTHERN STAR. It is his own property, subserves only *his* purposes; and expresses only *his* opinions.²⁰

Hill, like many other Chartist leaders, attempted to challenge O'Connor directly by establishing his own journal, the *Life Boat*, in late 1843. And he too, like others of moral force Chartist disposition, had high hopes that a rational, less brash tone would attract a Chartist readership base, reflecting that '... knowledge and thought and reflection ... form the only true foundation of a national temple to liberty'.²¹ By so doing Hill hoped that an alternative to the *Northern Star*, and thus O'Connor, would emerge and form a broader Chartist church including those marginalised from the mainstream. In his first editorial in the *Life Boat*, Hill made a point of emphasising his previous track-record at the *Northern Star* whilst distancing himself from denunciation:

... I am not of those who insolently write to you as if *they* did every thing for you, and you derived all your power from them; nor do I rank among "your enemies", and ask you therefore to crush for me, every man who may not in everything acknowledge the infallibility of my judgement.²²

Rather inconsistently, given Hill's preparedness to take an active part in the denunciations of the LWMA, NA, Vincent, Philp, Collins, O'Neill and O'Brien, he declared himself an enemy of 'arbitrary power and unprincipled aggrandisement'.²³ Just like O'Brien, who was examined in chapter V, Hill responded to marginalisation by attempting to found a journal upon 'principle'

²⁰ O'Connor, *A Letter from Feargus O'Connor*, p. 2.

²¹ *Life Boat*, no.5, 30 December 1843, p. 66.

²² *Life Boat*, no.1, 2 December 1843, pp. 1-2.

²³ *Life Boat*, no. 1, 2 December 1843, p. 2.

and against denunciation but in practice as a haven for anti-O'Connorite opinions. Whilst claiming that 'my defence will be *reply* and *explanation*; it will not be vulgar abuse', Hill launched attacks on O'Connor as a vendor of 'interested egotism' and asserted that '... I am not, and have no wish to become, the "lion" of any movement'.²⁴ J. R. Clinton has suggested that Hill was far more influential in the NCA than a critique of O'Connor's dominance will allow.²⁵ But while the NCA cannot be reduced to being the mere plaything of O'Connor it is clear that Hill's removal from the *Northern Star* spelt the end of his influence on the NCA, which must say little for the independent character of the NCA leadership that Clinton argues existed. Hill's attacks on O'Connor came to nothing because his journal and support base were insufficient to impact outside of a relatively small audience. O'Connor was always ready to lend support to other Chartist journals as far as they did not introduce 'division' in the form criticism of himself or of physical force.²⁶ Hill's *Life Boat* did not even get the courtesy of advertising space in the *Northern Star* - not that any amount of support, in all probability, would have saved Hill's journal. Even O'Connor's continued appeals on behalf of and free letters for Cleave's *English Chartist Circular*, which was careful to avoid controversy, could not prevent it from folding in early 1843 (having run from early 1840). The problem was that all journals that were not the *Northern Star* became associated with 'new moves'. Thus even O'Connor had to admit that his attacks on the LWMA and NA had led to a decline in Cleave's journal due to '... a supposition that certain parties, not in good repute, either edited it or contributed to it'.²⁷

Hill issued two pamphlets in 1843, the *Rejected Letters* and *A Scabbard for*

²⁴ *Life Boat*, no.5, 30 December 1843, pp. 64-65.

²⁵ Clinton, 'The National Charter Association', pp. 45-71.

²⁶ See *Northern Star*, no.52, 10 November 1838, p. 4; no.192, 17 July 1841, p. 3; no.201, 18 September 1841, p. 4 for O'Connor's early support for the *Charter* and the *Western Vindicator* and his support for the *English Chartist Circular*.

²⁷ *English Chartist Circular*, no.57, vol.2, p. 17.

Feargus O'Connor's Sword, both of which attempted to counter O'Connor's scathing response published in pamphlet form and in the *Northern Star*. O'Connor charged Hill with poor editorship, non-attendance to Chartist duties, divisive intentions and sacrifice of public principle for private feeling. Hill countered all of these charges but his central object 'to be useful than popular' summed up the problem of moral force critics within Chartism.²⁸ O'Connor could always shout the loudest and his position as the un-supplanted 'father' of Chartism meant that the outcome of any given dispute was generally a forgone conclusion. When John Ardill and Joshua Hobson came into dispute with O'Connor over internal affairs at the *Northern Star* in 1847 they too, despite lengthy periods of radical activism in the West Riding, stood little chance against O'Connor's withering personal attacks.²⁹

John Watkins, an ardent O'Connorite active in London from 1841, met a similar fate when he crossed swords with O'Connor from late 1842. An exponent of 'country Chartism' as against timid, profiteering 'cockney Chartists', Watkins was vigorous in his attacks on the 'new move' in 1840 and 1841. But Watkins's attraction to O'Brien and his disillusion with O'Connor's personal hold over the movement led to his quarrelling with O'Connor and suffering exile from the mainstream he had so vigorously sought to promote. Watkins, of a wealthy Whitby family, clearly saw a model to be emulated in O'Connor. Starting his radical career as a publisher and writer of tracts around his native town, Watkins became enamoured of O'Connor through the *Northern Star* and eventually moved to London as a newsagent in opposition to Cleave and Watson. Pursuing his anti-moral force agitation with great energy, Watkins became disillusioned with O'Connor's pro-Tory policy at the 1840 general election and his monopolistic deal with Cleave as London and southern England agent for the

²⁸ William Hill, *A Scabbard for Feargus O'Connor's Sword: Being a Reply to the Person's Fourpenny Pamphlet Entitled "A Letter From Feargus O'Connor, Esq., to the Reverend William Hill, &c. (Hull, 1843), p. 10.*

²⁹ *Northern Star*, no.526, 20 November 1847, p. 1.

Northern Star. Watkins was not elected to the 1842 Convention but claimed that if he had been he intended to attack O'Connor for his pro-Tory policy and personal control of Chartism.³⁰ Watkins's support for O'Connor as a Chartist demagogue had stemmed partly from coming to Chartism through the *Northern Star* and partly due to his own egotism, his own desire to act as lieutenant to the Chartist 'lion of freedom'.

Rather inevitably, Watkins's experience of the movement ran against his idealised image of O'Connor and Chartism. Despite some support for Watkins from O'Connor, particularly when Watkins fell ill in 1842 (his series 'legacy to the Chartists' being serialised in the *Northern Star*), the sort of recognition that Watkins desired was not forthcoming.³¹ Once outside O'Connor's trust, due to his support for O'Brien, Watkins found his advance in the movement blocked and sank into poverty until an inheritance allowed him to snipe from the mainstream margins. Watkins wrote, in an anti-O'Connor pamphlet of 1844, that 'the man who had the best means of puffing himself would be most likely to succeed'.³² As a fellow-puffer, Watkins, like Hill, hid sour grapes behind a stand for principle against personality. They were both prepared to accept O'Connor's embrace when it was offered but reeled when it was withheld. Indeed Watkins befriended Hill after his dismissal from the *Northern Star* and his letters appeared in the *Life Boat*.³³ Their stories reveal a very real problem within Chartism beyond mere personality clashes and petty squabbles. O'Connor's very dominance as a demagogue elevated the importance of personality and loyalty to a point where it was indistinguishable from principle, which was after all the basis of the People's Charter. Chartists who accepted the role of the demagogue

³⁰ *John Watkins to the People, in Answer of Feargus O'Connor* (London, 1844, reprinted New York, 1986), pp. 13-15.

³¹ *Northern Star*, no.242, 2 July 1842, p. 4;no. 254, 24 September 1842, p. 4.

³² *John Watkins to the People*, p. 3.

³³ *Life Boat*, no.3, 16 December 1843, p. 47; no.4, 23 December 1843, p.49; no.6, 6 January 1844, p. 72.

in the struggle for the Charter, fell just as easily as moderates to O'Connor's sword. Unity within an agreed democratic structure was just not possible in such a situation. Eileen Yeo has noted that

Even while he [O'Connor] was warmly supporting accountable structures, he was often living beyond effective control and sometimes even undercutting what he was trying to build.³⁴

Paul Pickering has noted that O'Connor's 'independent' leadership existed in tension with the class consciousness and self-organisation of the Chartist movement.³⁵ This points to O'Connor as a 'gentleman' radical leader rather than as the class warrior that he often presented himself as in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Yet we have seen that the recent historical rehabilitation of O'Connor's reputation has very much emphasised the positive qualities of O'Connor's Chartist career at the expense of the problems caused by his dominance. O'Connor's positive contribution to Chartism does not override the evident non-democratic and therefore problematic character of much of that contribution. John Mason was a prominent member of the NCA but complained in 1843 of the '*Moral Terrorism*' within Chartism, largely operated through the *Northern Star*, which prevented freedom of communication and elevated personality and ambition.³⁶ A conviction that O'Connor's dominance was not a positive aspect of the movement was pervasive and must not be discounted in assessing his Chartist leadership. A recognition of O'Connor partly as a problem for mainstream Chartist democracy begins to undermine the view of O'Connor as more 'working class' than his opponents. It is not possible to see the likes of Hill and Watkins as 'middle class', marginal or ungentlemanly in their disputes with

³⁴ Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy', pp. 358-59.

³⁵ Paul A. Pickering, 'Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain', in *The People's Charter*, pp. 20-34.

³⁶ *Life Boat*, no.2, 9 December 1843, p. 20.

O'Connor. Their previous proximity to O'Connor prevents them from being labelled as such. By extension, the anti-O'Connorism of moral force Chartists seems confirmed as part of a more general Chartist critique of O'Connor's leadership style.

At the 1842 NCA Chartist Convention the issue of denunciation and the role of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* came to the fore. William Thomason, a critic of O'Connor, put forward a resolution for the establishment of an arbitration committee to deal with disputes within the NCA. This was rejected as insufficient to tackle the scourge of personal denunciation amongst Chartists. O'Brien suggested a different resolution that the Chartist press - that is the *Northern Star* - should avoid personal denunciation unless both parties had been fairly represented. The subject provoked great controversy but the resolution was eventually passed, revealing the extent to which the privately controlled *Northern Star* created tension in a movement for democracy. O'Connor countered this with a resolution against private slander but the Convention had effectively censured the conduct of the *Northern Star*.³⁷ O'Connor's response was a resounding defence of the role of his newspaper:

... my friends, you must take up the *Star* and investigate it, and endeavour to point out to me and to the country the name of any one individual who has been denounced by Feargus O'Connor or the *Star*, who was not first denounced by the people, for some act of tergiversation or injustice to the people ... whenever I discover anything calculated to injure you, I will proclaim it from the watch-tower! I tell you that public censorship is necessary and requisite ...³⁸

Clearly O'Connor's view of himself as the 'father' of Chartism was not diminished. Though he acknowledged that 'every leader injured is an injury

³⁷. *Northern Star*, no.235, 14 May 1842, p. 7.

³⁸. *Northern Star*, no.234, 7 May 1842, p. 1.

done to all', he argued, untruthfully as we have seen, that all his denunciations of fellow Chartists were in self defence.³⁹ The NCA executive issued an address condemning denunciation emanating from O'Connor and the *Northern Star*, particularly his criticism of their proceedings and one of their number, Robert Kemp Philp, whose case will be examined later. O'Connor fended the executive off with a further defence of his duty to criticise public men.⁴⁰

Hill and Watkins were attacked by O'Connor as dishonest and divisive Chartists, charges of 'middle class' apostasy being too strong for Chartists who had been so close to O'Connor. But one admirer of O'Connor to whom the middle class label could be applied with effect was Thomas Cooper. Cooper had, from 1840 to 1842, been a disciple of O'Connor and a key Leicester Chartist leader. In fact, Cooper had done much to divide Leicester Chartism. John Markham, a local stockinger, had been the native Chartist leader and a firm admirer of William Lovett, demonstrating that moral force Chartism was not just confined to 'elitist' metropolitan organisations. Cooper, though, on arriving at Leicester in 1840 as a journalist, became a zealous Chartist convert and a fervent admirer of O'Connor, like Watkins doubtless through reading the *Northern Star* after attending local meetings. A man of great energy and egotism, Cooper did much to raise the profile of Leicester Chartism but in the process divided it between Markham's 'All Saints' and his own 'Shakespearean' Chartists.⁴¹

However, Cooper's experience in prison for incitement in the Potteries in 1842 profoundly changed the course of his life.⁴² An auto-didact, Cooper completed a

³⁹ *Northern Star*, no.234, 7 May 1842, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *English Chartist Circular*, no.46, p. 181; *Northern Star*, no.239, 11 June 1842, p. 1; no.239, 11 June 1842, p. 4; no.240, 18 June 1842, p. 1, 4.

⁴¹ J. F. C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leicester' in Briggs, *Chartist Studies*, pp. 99-146; Stephen Roberts, 'Thomas Cooper in Leicester, 1840-1843', in S. Roberts (ed.), *The People's Charter*, pp.133-51; Robert J. Conklin, *Thomas Cooper the Chartist (1805-1892)* (Manila, 1935), pp. 66-72, 86-98.

⁴² Conklin, *Thomas Cooper*, pp. 197-213.

poem, the *Purgatory of Suicides*, during his imprisonment and, on his release in 1845, determined to embark on a literary career in London. His efforts in this direction were assisted by O'Connor who, it seems, agreed to foot at least some of the costs of the publication of *Purgatory*. But O'Connor failed in his efforts to bring Cooper over to support for the land scheme, which had been attached to Chartism since 1843. The scheme involved the payment of subscriptions to O'Connor's land company, lots drawn from the subscribers to allocate small-holdings and the anticipated steady increase of the scheme to provide enough land to provide a renewed independence for the working classes.⁴³ O'Connor's scheme was viewed with scepticism by some Chartists as a diversion from the Charter and democratic principles.⁴⁴ Cooper was among them, though his opposition seems in part to have been fuelled by a desire to distance himself from O'Connor by any means. Indeed, Cooper lectured at the National Hall from 1846 and even received a gift of £100 from Lovett's patron, William Ellis.⁴⁵ His literary career quickly over, Cooper developed an inclination towards pacifist and 'knowledge' Chartism which was more than a reaction to the need to make himself more palatable to London publishers. Cooper, like other imprisoned Chartist leaders, seems to have come to reject the physical force theatre of Chartism, which had achieved only the repression of Chartist leaders. Rather, it was knowledge, didactic organisation and an aversion to violence that formed the basis of Cooper's Chartism from 1845.⁴⁶ Cooper had become '... a sincere believer in the great truth, that knowledge only can prepare men to win

⁴³. Malcolm Chase, '“We Wish Only to Work for Ourselves”: the Chartist Land Plan', in *Living and Learning*, pp. 133-48; Joy MacAskill, 'The Chartist Land Plan', in Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies*, pp. 304-41.

⁴⁴. John Humffreys Parry, *A Letter to Feargus O'Connor, Esq., Farmer and Barrister, by John Humffreys Parry, on the Plan of Organization Issued by the Birmingham Conference, September, 1843* (London, 1843).

⁴⁵. Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, pp. 271-84.

⁴⁶. Conklin, *Thomas Cooper*, pp. 252-319.

freedom and to hold it securely when they have won it'.⁴⁷

It was rather inevitable, then, that Cooper would draw fire from O'Connor and the *Northern Star*. Cooper's pacifism was attacked by Harney whilst O'Connor branded him a 'mischief-maker', a would-be leader whose '... nature never designed him for any more extensive movement than leader of three or four men who would surrender all self-thought and self-respect.'⁴⁸ O'Connor complained that Cooper had attacked the land plan and his financial integrity despite his generous literary patronage in backing *Purgatory*. Cooper's attempt at literary fortune made it easy for O'Connor to brand him as a 'respectable', especially as Cooper's imprisonment had put years between his fervent support for O'Connor and his shift of approach.⁴⁹ The impact of O'Connor's letters in the *Northern Star* can be gauged by a letter from the German Democratic Communists of Brussels (Marx, Engels and Gigot) printed on the front page of the *Northern Star* in July 1846. Taking O'Connor at his word, they offered a view of Chartism that was aligned closely to that which he was pushing. Drawing heavily on O'Connor's letters to the Chartists in the *Northern Star*, O'Connor was, they agreed, aware of the distinction between working class democracy and middle class liberalism and congratulated him on the defeat of the 'respectable' Cooper.

The Chartist party cannot but profit by the exclusion of such disguised bourgeois, who, while they show off with the name of Chartist for popularity's sake, strive to insinuate themselves into the favour of the middle classes by personal flattery of their literary representatives, (such as the Countess of Blessington, Charles Dickens, D. Jerrold, and other "friends" of Cooper's) and by propounding such base and infamous old women's doctrines as "non-resistance".⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Northern Star*, no.441, 25 April 1846, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Northern Star*, no. 448, 13 June 1846, p.1.

⁴⁹ *Northern Star*, no.441, 25 April 1846, p.7; no.449, 30 June 1846, p.1.

⁵⁰ *Northern Star*, no.454, 25 July 1846, p.1.

As with later historians, Marx, Engels and Gigot assessed the Chartist movement through O'Connor's eyes, excluding moderate Chartists from the 'real' movement arising from class struggle.

Yet Cooper still saw himself as a Chartist and tried to remain a member of the NCA, challenging O'Connor's leadership. He was dismissed from the 1846 Convention and thus the movement because his attack was frontal and direct and disruptive of Convention business, but also because the land scheme which he attacked was so central to Chartist activity and the NCA at that time, and O'Connor so central to the land scheme.⁵¹ This does not demonstrate the 'respectable' character of Cooper clashing against a more genuine and 'working class' mainstream but the power that O'Connor possessed to cast unwanted criticism as 'middle class' in character.

A. R. Schoyen has described the *Northern Star* as *The Times* of the working class during the Chartist years.⁵² In a real sense it was a tribune of working-class radicalism in that its pages were filled with reports of Chartist meetings from across the country. Its editorials and O'Connor's letters spoke a language of working-class radical independence and delineated the movement's friends and enemies in class terms. Like *The Times*, its editorial line influenced the interpretation of its audience of Chartist debates and struggles within the movement. O'Connor infused the commentary of the *Northern Star* with class rhetoric. He was not more class conscious than his opponents but on the winning side of a debate as to how to enact the People's Charter - a side that utilised the rhetoric of class but that was in fact conservative in its social vision. Just as moral force Chartists struggled against the lop-sided power of the *Northern Star*

⁵¹. *Northern Star*, no.456, 8 August 1846, p. 4.

⁵². Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, p. 125.

and O'Connor during early Chartism, so too did those in the NCA who adopted elements of their critique.

'Let *temperance* be the *partner* of our Democracy': Henry Vincent and temperance Chartism.

In chapter II we saw that Henry Vincent, a member of the LWMA and a powerful orator, admired and drew from O'Connor's example. Vincent was a member of the LWMA but was not averse during the early phase of Chartism to using physical force rhetoric in the same mould as O'Connor's. He was clear, in 1839, that government force would be met by physical resistance, that 'The people finding *moral* power useless in effect, are justified in the use of *physical*.'⁵³ However, a far more moderate radicalism existed alongside such exciting flourishes. The degree of unity and organisation necessary to pursue physical force was clearly inadequate to the task of overcoming government opposition. Vincent was, he wrote in 1838, '... preaching against force and violence - there are rifle clubs in all directions - and I fear government is at the bottom of them all'.⁵⁴ And the first issue of Vincent's and Philp's *Western Vindicator* urged the need for 'knots of patriots' to break down hostility to Chartism and effect 'a peaceful and bloodless change'.⁵⁵ It was imprisonment, though, that brought about a major shift in Vincent's Chartist politics. His confidence broken, Vincent rejected physical force and began to see the process for achieving political equality as one of intellectual development. 'Read books', he advised his fellow Radicals in a letter from his prison cell, 'get knowledge upon all subjects - and prepare yourselves in every way to take

⁵³ *Western Vindicator*, no.3, 9 March 1839, p. 1; no.5, 30 March 1839, p. 1; no.39, 16 November 1839, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Vincent-Minikin Papers, Vincent to Minikin, n.f., 18 August 1838.

⁵⁵ *Western Vindicator*, no.1, 23 February 1839, p. 1.

prominent positions in the mental and moral warfare for freedom.'⁵⁶ A didactic culture, he concluded, was needed to achieve and uphold democracy:

A Democratic government ... can only be upheld by intelligence and virtue. Ignorance and superstition are its greatest enemies; hence, under a representative democracy, would be encouraged the widest diffusion of education, art, science, religion, morals, and happiness, amongst all the people.⁵⁷

The emphasis of Chartist organisation, Vincent argued, should be on knowledge and education to spread 'a correct knowledge of your principles' as '... knowledge, after all, is the invulnerable weapon; it is that which must be wielded in defence of our *new system*, as soon as it is built up.'⁵⁸ The democratic revolution required, for Vincent, knowledge of radical principles and all Chartist societies needed a library, tract society, schools and lectures. Violence, real or rhetorical in the pursuit of the Charter, was rejected by Vincent and replaced by a belief that it was necessary to leave 'the further *progress of the Cause* entirely to the PROGRESS OF OPINION'.⁵⁹ Political inequality was, Vincent believed, partly due to 'the mental and moral *deadness* of the great body of mankind'

... to work out the emancipation of our fellow-creatures, we shall not content ourselves with bitter denunciations of the conduct of our rulers, *but we shall endeavour to make the people too wise and virtuous for our rulers to govern.* ... thousands upon thousands of *our own class* are heavy drags upon the wheel of improvement. They may occasionally be roused into activity by furious appeals to their passions; but when the storm of

^{56.} *Western Vindicator*, no.13, 18 May 1839, p. 1.

^{57.} *Western Vindicator*, no.15, 1 June 1839, p. 1.

^{58.} *Western Vindicator*, no.33, 5 October 1839, p. 1.

^{59.} *Western Vindicator*, no.35, 19 October 1839, p. 1; *National Vindicator*, no.2, 20 November 1841, p. 4.

excitement is lulled, *despondency* overtakes them, and they fall back into the mire only to curse those who are more virtuous and intelligent than themselves ... [However,] I know of no man who, once understanding our glorious principles ever abandoned them ...⁶⁰

Vincent, then, by late 1839, was a true moral force Chartist in the LWMA tradition, sceptical of the platform except in so far as it diffused clear radical principles, elevating education as central firstly to achieving democracy and then using it. The Chartist critique of the middle class was a critique of their social and economic selfishness and lack of philanthropic virtue rather than any consciousness of a fixed socio-economic struggle between competing working and middle class interests. Vincent's emphasis on a lack of sufficient virtue, therefore, does not point to a lack of class consciousness that separated him from the rest of the Chartist movement. Rather his view of Chartism was one that saw it as part of a great progress of the intellect of the benevolent of all classes. That the Charter was a just measure could be recognised by the benevolent non-working class but also, for democracy to work, the working classes needed to acknowledge their obligation to mental and moral improvement to enable democracy to improve the human condition. One way in which this could be done in particular attracted Vincent's adherence - temperance.

What distinguished Chartism from previous reform movements, for Vincent, was its moving beyond the exercise of the 'brute passions of the multitude'.⁶¹ By so doing it appealed beyond indignant fury to mind and morality and this was precisely the aspect of Chartism that Vincent came to believe was central to its success. 'We shall direct our attention not to the mere agitation of the people', Vincent declared, '*but to their mental and moral improvement.*'⁶² Temperance was central in Vincent's vision of such improvement as 'Every man saved from

⁶⁰ *English Chartist Circular*, no.3, n.d., p. 9.

⁶¹ *English Chartist Circular*, no.11, n.d., p. 42.

⁶² *English Chartist Circular*, no.11, n.d., p. 42.

the vice of drunkenness will become a better member of society, and be far better qualified to appreciate and give effect to those political principles which we desire to teach him.’⁶³ Vincent advocated Chartist teetotal societies as he believed that sober men would have a greater tendency to improve morally the whole population, teetotalism providing clearer heads and more time for reading.⁶⁴ In a letters to Lovett from Oakham gaol, Vincent argued that temperance tended in a democratic direction because it would ‘moralise, soberise, and intellectualise’ the people in preparation for political power.⁶⁵ In letters to the *Northern Star*, Vincent made his argument public, that ‘NO DRUNKARD CAN BE A GOOD RADICAL! ... he is the infatuated *slave* of a vice’, that temperance and democracy were mutually inclusive and that ‘*temperance be the partner of our Democracy*’.⁶⁶

Vincent, on his release from prison in 1840, did not join the NA but returned to his support-base in Bath. Here he was central to the formation of a strong branch of the NCA which was united in its opposition to moderate alternatives but also aimed to ‘elevate the intellectual, social and moral condition of the People’.⁶⁷ As such Vincent received a good deal of support from the mainstream Chartist press, including O’Connor, who praised Bath Chartism and ‘that excellent and enthusiastic leader Mr. Henry Vincent, who ... has confirmed the zealous and disarmed the timid.’⁶⁸ Support for temperance was also strong in the Chartist movement and expanded rapidly in 1840 and early 1841 with Chartist

^{63.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.11, n.d., p. 42.

^{64.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.11, n.d., p. 42.

^{65.} BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, ff. 114-15, Vincent to Lovett, 18 September 1840.

^{66.} *Northern Star*, no.151, Oct. 2, 1840, p. 7.

^{67.} *National Vindicator*, no.6, 18 December 1841, p. 4; no.7, 25 December 1839, p. 4; no.9, 8 January 1842, p. 1.

^{68.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.1&2, n.d., p. 6; *Northern Star*, no.216, January 1, 1842, p. 1.

temperance associations being formed in several locations.⁶⁹ The *Northern Star* backed temperance as a simple but effective means of increasing the resources of Chartists whilst reducing government income and the Chartist Teetotal Pledge was signed by the old LWMA comrades Vincent, Cleave and Hetherington as well as William Hill and the former LDA member turned moral force convert, Charles Neesom.⁷⁰ The Chartist Teetotal Pledge argued that time wasted over 'pint and pipe' should be devoted by Chartists to self-culture and the education of children, and that intellectual progress would spell the end of aristocracy by depriving the government of revenue and recruits for police and army. The Pledge was popular and re-issued with additional signatures, including William Ryder, the Sunderland Chartist leaders Williams and Binns, the Bath O'Connorite, G. M. Bartlett, and John Watkins.⁷¹ Temperance and teetotalism, then, were popular and influential aspects of Chartism within the early NCA.

We have seen that O'Connor's attacks on the 'new move' from April 1841, however, included teetotal Chartism and served to dampen enthusiasm for temperance Chartism by creating the suspicion that it was a diversionary crotchet. Despite the support for the Teetotal Pledge outlined above, O'Connor objected to Teetotal Chartism 'because all who do not join it ... will be considered as unworthy of their civil rights.'⁷² This was clearly at odds with the declarations and activity undertaken by temperance Chartists, whose concern was not to create new barriers to the suffrage but to speed along the People's Charter and the social conditions for its successful implementation. Despite O'Connor later taking a teetotal pledge in 1842, he continued to oppose

^{69.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.4, n.d., pp. 13-14.

^{70.} Neesom was elected to the NCA Convention of 1841, despite being a non-NCA Chartist and a temperance and knowledge Chartist advocate. He later joined the NA, being convinced that 'the enemy is not to be overcome but by perseverance, firmness, and union' (*Northern Star*, no.179, April 17, 1841, p. 7; no.182, May 8, 1841, p. 6).

^{71.} *Northern Star*, no.154, 24 October 1840, p. 3; no.159, 28 November 1840, p. 3; *English Chartist Circular*, no.9, n.d., p. 35.

^{72.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

teetotalism as a diversionary tendency such as at the 1842 Convention where he unsuccessfully opposed a resolution by Philp in favour of Chartist teetotalism, which Philp argued 'was only for the purpose of giving a high moral tone to the people; it would give them a wish for intellectual pursuits; it would teach them to think'.⁷³ Temperance was closely tied up with Chartism in the early 1840s and, as Brian Harrison has argued, 'Only in retrospect did the Chartist and teetotal roads appear to diverge'.⁷⁴ Vincent's turn to temperance was not a rejection of principles or of class consciousness but 'took middle class arguments against franchise extension at their face value and genuinely tried to remove them'.⁷⁵

However, Harrison also concludes that O'Connor's attack on Chartist teetotallers such as Vincent was not an attack on Chartist teetotalism but an understandable strategic move against the re-emergence of LWMA 'elitism'.⁷⁶ This chapter, though, has made clear that Vincent had no desire to work outside of the NCA mainstream but merely to present the Chartist case in a different way. What O'Connor's strategic move against teetotal Chartism achieved was to remove a talented and respected radical from the forefront of Chartist leadership. An absence of strategic debate meant nothing for Chartism but a fig leaf of unity. O'Connor did not push Vincent from the movement at this point - the widespread support for teetotalism and Vincent's centrality to the Bath NCA preventing his doing so. But O'Connor did create a suspicion of Chartist teetotalism as a move by cranks to restrict the suffrage to non-drinkers, an activity linked to the middle class temperance movement obsessed with the vices of the working classes. Thus Vincent ceased his open promotion of Chartist

⁷³. *Northern Star*, no.233, 30 April 1842, p. 6, 8.

⁷⁴. Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism', *History*, 58 (1973), 193. See also: Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London, 1971), pp. 388-89.

⁷⁵. Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism', 203.

⁷⁶. Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism', 206-09.

temperance organisation and it became easier, thereafter, to present Vincent and his close colleague R. K. Philp as 'middle class' agents of division.

The Complete Suffrage Union, the middle classes and the People's Charter.

In chapter IV we examined the attitude of the NA to the Complete Suffrage Union, concluding that their attitude of cautious welcome for the CSU was not the class compromise that the *Northern Star* presented it to be. Rather, the NA welcomed the CSU as fellow-travellers towards democracy but was critical of the refusal of the CSU to accept the People's Charter. The prominent Bath NCA leaders, Vincent and R. K. Philp, also adopted an accommodating stance towards the CSU. Philp had defended the NCA from accusations of its being an O'Connorite association and had been a foremost member of the executive from its first sitting in early 1842.⁷⁷ He was not to win a place on the executive again. O'Connor's opposition to Vincent's and Philp's position on the CSU condemned both to the margins of the movement and divided Bath Chartism. O'Connor attacked the CSU as a corrupt and compromising middle-class body, a 'Humbug Trap' advancing political reform on behalf of middle class interests.⁷⁸ O'Connor announced to a conference at Bath where the CSU had not been opposed that

Doubtless these gentlemen [Vincent and Philp] give the new converts to Complete Suffrage credit for a large amount of honesty and sincerity. We cannot do so ... we tell the people they must keep right on, swerving neither to the right hand nor to the left or they will be "used," left and laughed at.⁷⁹

⁷⁷. *Northern Star*, no.183, 15 May 1841, p. 7; 8 January 1842, p.5; *English Chartist Circular*, no.30, n.d., p. 117.

⁷⁸. *Northern Star*, no.223, 19 February 1842, p. 1, 5; no.224, 26 February 1841, p. 4.

⁷⁹. *Northern Star*, no.226, 12 March 1842, p. 4.

This chastisement was part of a general warning to Chartists, including the NCA executive, not to co-operate with non-Chartist radicals. The continued pursuit by Philp and Vincent of co-operation with the CSU in Bath, in the hope of drawing out support for the Charter, thus met with rigorous criticism from the *Northern Star*. A report of the Bath conference between the local NCA and CSU leaders was reported in the *Northern Star* in such a way by its Bath reporter, G. M. Bartlett, as to present Vincent and Philp as the compromised dupes of middle class reformers.⁸⁰ The effect was to split Bath Chartism and to display Vincent and Philp as naive 'fallen Chartists'. Despite the efforts of Philp and Vincent to fight back in their *National Vindicator* and in a pamphlet, Chartist opinion swung against Vincent and Philp.⁸¹ Indeed, Philp's swipes at O'Connor and the *Northern Star* served only to apparently confirm his status as a Chartist pariah.⁸² Letters came into the *Northern Star* condemning the conduct of Vincent and Philp, such as that of 'J' of Bristol who condemned Vincent's (alleged) acceptance of 'instalments'.⁸³ The *Northern Star*, assisted by G. M. Bartlett, had succeeded not only in winning the debate as to the correct Chartist position regarding the CSU but had driven Vincent and Philp from their prominent positions as national leaders with a firm base in Bath Chartism. Even with considerable local support and their own Bath-based journals, the *Western Vindicator* in 1839 and the *National Vindicator* in 1841 to 1842, Vincent and Philp could not counter their association, propagated through the *Northern Star*, with middle class compromise. Philp was rendered unre-electable to the executive, thanks to editorial advice in the *Northern Star* for 'careful' selection

⁸⁰ *Northern Star*, no.226, 12 March 1842, p. 7; no.227, 19 March 1842, p. 4; no.238, 4 June 1842, p. 7; no.240, 18 June 1842, p. 4.

⁸¹ *Northern Star*, no.228, 26 March 1842, p.4; R. K. Philp, *Robert Kemp Philp's Vindication of His Political Conduct and An Exposition of the Misrepresentations of the Northern Star* (Bath, 1842).

⁸² *Northern Star*, 4 June 1842, pp. 4-5; no.239, 11 June 1842, p. 4; no.240, 18 June 1842, p. 1.

⁸³ *Northern Star*, no.229, 9 April 1842, p. 4.

of representatives, and Vincent began a drift away from Chartism towards religion and full-time temperance lecturing.⁸⁴

The attacks on Vincent and Philp had little to do with principle for, as Philp argued, when the accused put their cases to Chartist audiences generally their positions were seen as consistent and thoroughly uncompromising.⁸⁵ Attacking the CSU and taking Vincent and Philp with it was, though, a shot by O'Connor across the bows of those who wished to shift the movement independently of himself or the *Northern Star*. It can be taken as little else as it did not merit its status as a 'move' towards the CSU. Indeed O'Connor backed the CSU leader, Joseph Sturge, in the Nottingham by-election in 1842 and went on to push for Chartist attendance at a second conference in December 1842 with precisely the same declared motives as Vincent and Philp, to draw out middle class support for the Charter.⁸⁶

The NCA Convention of 1842 serves to confirm that the position taken by O'Connor and the *Northern Star* towards the CSU was far from universal. The Bath delegate, Roberts, complained bitterly at the interference in Bath Chartism due to differences in personal opinions occasioned by the CSU debate. Political co-operation according to the radical measures laid down in the People's Charter gave way, Roberts argued, to a feeling 'that all who did not think similar to the *Northern Star* were traitors, &c., to their country.'⁸⁷ This occurred alongside the resolution passed against denunciation and also alongside a discussion on the merits of the first CSU conference. A considerable minority of the Convention came out in favour of expressing gratification at the adoption by the CSU of the

⁸⁴ *Northern Star*, no.237, 28 May 1842, p. 5; William Dorling, *Henry Vincent. A Biographical Sketch* (London, 1879), pp. 33-40.

⁸⁵ Philp, *Vindication of His Political Conduct*, p. 24.

⁸⁶ *Northern Star*, no.237, 28 May 1842, p. 4; no.250, 27 August 1842, p. 4; no.260, 5 November 1842, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *Northern Star*, no.232, 23 April 1842, p. 6.

six points of the Charter. Philp, O'Brien, Robert Lowery, William Thomason, Beesley and John Mason all supported a resolution favourable to the CSU. Defeated by twelve votes to six, the debate nonetheless highlighted that significant sections of the mainstream dissented from O'Connor's outright opposition to the CSU.⁸⁸

The movement may have rejected the CSU anyway but O'Connor, through the *Northern Star*, did not leave it to chance. Unfortunately, though, the affair ended with the rather needless loss of an influential Bath Chartist from the movement. Philp opposed Bath NCA Chartists going over to the CSU, even after his battle with O'Connor was lost. He opposed the free trade clause adopted by the CSU and its undemocratic decision to elect half middle class and half working class delegates to its second conference. Thus Philp was firmly a Chartist, countenancing no hint of compromise. Yet his experience of activism in the movement led him to recognise the lack of democracy at the heart of Chartist strategy and to lose faith in its prospects.⁸⁹ Further, criticism and suspicion of the CSU did little to encourage moderate radicals to flock to the Chartist ranks. Whilst suspicion of the middle classes was common to most Chartists, including Vincent and Philp, denunciation merely made enemies, deterred recruits and, as we have seen, alienated existing Chartists. Yet the philosophy dominant in O'Connor and Chartist leaders such as George White was that Chartism should be an avowedly working class movement and distance itself from more moderate reformers in order to preserve Chartist independence. Class unity, they believed, would be bought at the price of surrendering the leadership of the movement to self-interested 'free-traders'⁹⁰:

⁸⁸. *Northern Star*, no.235, 14 May 1842, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁹. *British Statesman*, no.16, 25 June 1842, p. 1; no.18, 9 July 1842, p. 1; no.32, 15 October 1842, p .9.

⁹⁰. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 263-309; Stephen Roberts, 'George White', in *Radical Politicians and Poets*, pp. 11-38; *Northern Liberator*, 5 December 1840, p. 6 in Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, p. 291 from PRO, TS 11/601 White to Cooper, 12 July 1842; George White, *An Answer to John Humffreys Parry, of the Middle Temple, Barrister at Law; and An Exposure of the Self-Styled Liberals and Free Traders* (London, 1843).

... an alliance with the middle classes ... is proposed as a means to an end ... what is that end? As a matter of course, a middle class Government, that is, middle class ascendancy ...⁹¹

But as Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis have pointed out in relation to the career of Robert Lowery, a militant turned CSU supporter, 'middle-class co-operation ... did not necessarily require ... an immediate or complete modification of ultimate objectives, nor did it require the abandonment of working-class-consciousness.'⁹² The *Northern Star* claimed that the aid of the middle classes should not be obstructed and the executive referred to the historic constitutionalism of Chartist demands and asserted that 'we reject no man on account of his creed, country, or class'.⁹³ Vincent and Philp and Lovett agreed. Their Chartism was not more 'middle class' but must be understood in terms of contests over strategy and disparities of power in the leadership of mainstream Chartism.

John Collins, Arthur O'Neill and Bible Chartism.

As with temperance and education, religion became a means through which democratic ambition could be expressed. In the early 1840s Chartist churches emerged which expressed a Christian, rather than rationalist or historical constitutionalist, basis for Chartism. Anti-clericalism and a radical interpretation

⁹¹. *Northern Star*, no.171, 20 February 1841, p. 4.

⁹² Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis, 'Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery', *English Historical Review*, LXXXII (1967), p. 531.

⁹³. *Northern Star*, no.244, 16 July 1842, p. 4; *English Chartist Circular*, no.28, n.d, p. 109.

of the Bible had long been features of radicalism but Christian Chartism extended into formally organised local churches. A Christian Chartist delegate from Campsie at a Scottish Chartist delegate meeting explained his creed:

... they ... did not preach the Chartist doctrines, but bible truths; they took the bible for their rule, which goes further than the Charter, consequently they embrace the Charter.⁹⁴

For Christian Chartists, as Eileen Yeo has explained, social repression was a repudiation of God rather than a repudiation of the rights of the people.⁹⁵ Challenges were made by Chartists to Anglicanism through demonstrations in churches, challenging its internal hierarchical character and anti-Chartist sermons. Christian Chartist branches emerged in Scotland in particular into 1840 and religious activity became a part of English Chartist activity. Christian Chartism became part of the cultural activism of NCA branches.

In Birmingham, however, one group of Christian Chartists emerged independently of the NCA. John Collins, we have noted, was a moderate and respected working-class Birmingham Chartist. In 1840 he combined with the Glasgow Chartist, Arthur O'Neill, to establish a Chartist Church in Birmingham. O'Neill was a supporter of O'Connor as late as January 1841 but the refusal of the Birmingham Chartist Church to attach itself to the NCA led O'Connor to view it with suspicion. Thus, when O'Connor launched his 'new move' attack on 'Bible Chartism', it was directed at the Birmingham Chartist Church. Despite the Birmingham Church's assertion that its non-NCA status was due to its doubts

⁹⁴ *Northern Star*, no.166, 16 January 1841, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Eileen Yeo, 'Christianity in the Chartist Struggle, 1838-1842', *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), 109-39. See also Harold Underwood Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches: a Study in Democracy* (London, 1916, 1970 edition).

as the legality of its structure, O'Connor branded it as 'fanaticism'.⁹⁶ Christian Chartism provides an example of another area where the strategic concerns of O'Connor to strike at alternative forms of organisation dominated over mutual toleration around the People's Charter.

There is little to suggest that Birmingham Christian Chartism aimed at much that was different from temperance Chartism. Collins and O'Neill issued an address to the middle classes in early 1841 appealing for an abandonment of prejudice and for government in the interests of all. An address to the working class followed, appealing for an increase in intellect and a spirit of enquiry en route to the Charter and calling for wariness of leaders. Chartism did not need vituperation, they argued, but 'steady morality'.⁹⁷ Their Christian Chartism was firmly committed to the Charter and had little that was 'middle class' about it. Such was the mainstream character of Christian Chartism that Hill in the *Northern Star* was very uneasy about O'Connor's attacks on 'Bible' Chartism. O'Connor charged that all forms of organisation separate from the NCA were sectional and likely to end in factional disputes and that 'Church Chartism' in particular would result in 'a new system of Chartist Churchism, to be ready cut and dry, as a substitute for a state establishment'.⁹⁸ Hill responded that O'Connor

... appears to us to have misconceived the whole matter. His reasoning goes entirely on the assumption that the advocates and votaries of what he calls "Church Chartism" rely on their religious services and ceremonies as an exclusive means of carrying the Charter ... in opposition to all other means of diffusing political knowledge, and of establishing the people in possession of their rights. ... but we cannot suppose that, even in Birmingham, so stupid an idea can have entered into any body's

^{96.} *Northern Star*, no.166, 16 January 1841, p. 7; no. 167, 23 January 1841, p. 1; no.171, Feb.20, 1841, p.3; no.173, 6 March 1841, p. 4, 7.

^{97.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.4, n.d., p. 13; no.6,n.d., p. 21.

^{98.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

head.⁹⁹

Christian Chartism, Hill argued, was the recognition by Christians that the Charter was just and in accordance with the principles of the Christianity. Such recognition would surely be the basis of a shift in public opinion in favour of Chartism. Christian Chartists had met with persecution from the established Christian denominations with whose exclusive creeds O'Connor unfairly linked them. It was a little hard, Hill complained, that persecution should also come 'from Mr. O'CONNOR, who recognizes all their principles and agrees with all their doctrines.'¹⁰⁰ Hill felt sure that O'Connor must be referring not to Christian Chartism more widely but only to

that bastard form of it which he supposes to exist in what is called "*The Christian Chartist Church*" at Birmingham, and which sets up the establishment of a new religious sect, *as a substitute for*, instead of as an accompaniment to, a political movement.¹⁰¹

Exclusion of itself from the NCA plan of organisation was enough to condemn the Birmingham Chartist Church to ignominy in the movement and to create tension in Birmingham Chartism between it and the local NCA organisation.¹⁰² The Birmingham Chartist Church offered precisely the same type of Christian Chartism as the Scottish Christian Chartists approved of by Hill and the same Christian Chartist creed that Hill lauded as 'sufficiently comprehensive to admit conscientious Christians, of whatever speculative opinion' but excluding those

^{99.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 4.

^{100.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 4.

^{101.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 4.

^{102.} *Northern Star*, no.179, 17 April 1841, p. 2; no.225, 5 March 1842, p. 4; no.229, 9 April 1842, p. 7; *British Statesman*, no.16, 25 June 1842, p. 9.

‘not prepared to go the whole hog of social, civil, and political, as well as personal, right and virtue.’¹⁰³ But the case against Christian Chartism was easily concluded on the side of the prosecution and the NCA executive issued an address critical of the religious exclusivity of the Birmingham Chartist Church.¹⁰⁴ The effect was to close out Christianity as a mode of Chartist organisation within the mainstream as well as without. Yeo’s study of Christianity in Chartism ends in 1842 for good a reason, that the end of formal Christian Chartist activity correlates with O’Connor’s attacks on the cultural challenges of the ‘new move’.

Christianity remained a part of the fabric of Chartism but had to be firmly shackled to NCA organisation and O’Connor’s leadership. The Swedenborgian minister, James Scholefield, a firm friend of O’Connor in the early 1840s, signed the Chartist Teetotal Pledge, had firm links to Manchester middle class anti-Corn Law campaigners, even attending the anti-Corn Law League ministers conference in 1841. He went on to quarrel with O’Connor and drifted into liberalism by the close of the 1840s. But his closeness to O’Connor in the early 1840s and his involvement with the 1842 NCA conference during the Plug riots have served to mark him as a true ‘Friend of the People’ in distinction to anti-O’Connor ‘moves’ such as the Birmingham Chartist Church. Likewise, the Reverend Benjamin Parsons was active in the CSU and anti-Corn Law League and supported class conciliation in the late 1840s but is marked as part of the mainstream, as a ‘genuine’ Chartist, by his support for the NCA and his tracts for ‘Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks’, though they were class conciliatory.¹⁰⁵ Others fell foul of O’Connor at an early stage of the movement with consequent ignominious historical status. In 1841 the anti-O’Connor, Reverend Patrick

¹⁰³ *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Northern Star*, no.204, 9 October 1841, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Owen Ashton and Paul Pickering, ‘“The Chaplain of the Manchester Chartists”: the Reverend James Scholefield (1790-1855)’, in *Friends of the People*, pp. 101-25; Ashton and Pickering, ‘The ‘Remarkable Work’ of the Reverend Benjamin Parsons (1797-1855), in *Friends of the People*, pp. 81-100.

Brewster was charged with 'Whig' politics in trying to advance Church Chartism in Scotland, putting a quick end to Brewster's renewed efforts at Chartist leadership, previously severely dented by O'Connor's attacks on moral force Chartism in 1838 to 1839.¹⁰⁶

Whilst education, temperance and religion were part of NCA branch activity, the dynamism and diversity of organisation that was a feature of Chartism up to the early 1840s was to a significant degree stultified by the suspicion cast by O'Connor, through the *Northern Star*, on Chartist organisation that attempted independence from the NCA. O'Connor's association of the 'new move' with household suffrage was effective. We have seen, though, that it was quite illegitimate. O'Connor's revived reputation has rested upon his being perceived as using such charges to unify Chartism against potential division.¹⁰⁷ Yet there is little evidence that checks on the dynamic local Chartist cultural democratic challenges of the early 1840s in any way benefited Chartist prospects. The centralised structure of the NCA took Chartist organisation forward but displaced more diffuse but equally vibrant Chartist 'new move' associations. These associations were part of a shared Chartist perception of the need for self-improvement, for political reform to translate into social improvement, which was 'the surest way to break down aristocratic privilege, which rested on superstition and ignorance.'¹⁰⁸ This approach encompassed moral force Chartism and the early NCA but was restrained by the need to be seen to be loyal to the NCA and O'Connor. Rather than unify and revive a flagging movement, O'Connor's 'new move' attacks served to deprive Chartism of some of its cultural dynamism and some of its most respected and effective adherents.

^{106.} *Northern Star*, no.207, 30 October 1841, p. 1; no.210, 20 November 1841, p. 1; no.220, 29 January 1842, p. 6.

^{107.} Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 260-61; Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, pp. 216-62.

^{108.} Christopher Godfrey, *Chartist Lives. The Anatomy of a Working-Class Movement* (New York, 1987), p. 233.

Chartism and political education.

Though O'Connor attacked 'knowledge' Chartism, the need to persuade non-Chartists of the case for the six-points necessitated popular political education. The importance of political organisation to radical reform for the working classes had long been realised. From such organisations radical principles could be put forth and political understanding spread - education was a critical function of organisation. There was a feeling, too, that merely achieving political reform would be ineffectual without an attendant increase in radical political understanding. For O'Brien, 'popular intelligence' was what would distinguish the democratic Chartist 'revolution' from that of previous factional political reforms. 'The objects of Chartism', O'Brien argued 'could only be achieved by the diffusion of sound knowledge, and the creation of an enlightened public opinion amongst the working and middle classes.'¹⁰⁹ The *Northern Star* sometimes rejected education and 'improvement' as something that smacked of middle class prejudice, arguing that improvement would happen after the Charter had been gained. But it also often recognised the importance of the diffusion of political ideas through discussion and didacticism:

One thing which may tend to accelerate the triumph of the people's cause is the establishment of news-rooms and libraries for the industrious classes; so that they may have places where they can meet together to gain and to import instruction.¹¹⁰

It even confessed that Chartist political education had not kept pace with the enthusiasm of its leaders:

^{109.} *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs*, no.12, second series, 19 December 1846, p. 1.

^{110.} *Northern Star*, no.84, 22 June 1839, p. 4; no.111, 28 December 1839, p. 4.

... the leaders were before the people, and far in advance of the people, and ... their folly consisted in endeavouring to direct the public will before the public will was organized. The men who were in the habit of witnessing the enthusiastic demonstrations of public meetings, calculated upon those exhibitions as resources on which they could scarcely depend for working out the principles of the Charter, and upon this false presumption the leaders have, many of them, been wrecked.¹¹¹

Kenyon, a Chartist present at the Manchester delegate meeting in March 1840, rejected all agitation except the diffusing of education.¹¹² Sheffield Chartists expressed their desire to build a Hall 'to implant in their minds the best principles of moral, religious, and civil science.'¹¹³ The *English Chartist Circular* backed the building of trades' halls to promote both organisation and intellect.¹¹⁴ Henry Solly drew up a plan of organisation for Chartism, presented to the Manchester conference in 1840, that was not dissimilar to that of the LWMA or NA. Though he disagreed with Lovett's standing outside the NCA, he wished for an organisation that would engage in rational enquiry into the political sources of social grievances, and later promoted democratic improvement societies.¹¹⁵

O'Connor's attack on 'knowledge' Chartism, therefore, cut across the grain of the Chartist mainstream, misleadingly claiming that 'knowledge' Chartism 'impliedly acknowledges a standard of some sort of learning, education, or information, as a necessary qualification to entitle man to his political rights.'¹¹⁶

^{111.} *Northern Star*, no.128, 25 April 1840, p. 4.

^{112.} *Northern Star*, no.122, 14 March 1840, p. 7.

^{113.} *Northern Star*, no.145, 22 August 1840, p. 1.

^{114.} *English Chartist Circular*, no.4, n.d., pp. 13-14; no.103, vol.2, n.d., p. 202; no.104, vol.2,n.d., pp. 207-08.

^{115.} BL, Lovett MS, Add. 78161, f. 132, Solly to Lovett, 15 October 1841.

^{116.} *Northern Star*, no. 177, 3 April 1841, p. 7.

This did not help, however, to delineate ways in which Chartism might persuade, might educate, public opinion in favour of radical reform based on the People's Charter. Rather it alienated several prominent, able and influential Chartists from the mainstream of the movement. The issue of 'political knowledge' did not die, though, with the ostracising of the NA from an 'inside' position in the Chartist movement. William Thomason, a prominent Scottish Chartist discussed above in relation to his sympathy for the CSU from within the NCA, wrote for Hill's *Life Boat* in late 1843. Thomason was deeply disillusioned with O'Connor's dominance of Chartism, later writing an anti-O'Connorite pamphlet, *O'Connorism and Democracy Inconsistent With Each Other*, in 1844.¹¹⁷ In his articles to the *Life Boat* Thomason, in a typical response to the experience of the failures and internal politics of Chartism, turned his thoughts to the world beyond the Charter. He, like many others, concluded that mere democracy, mere rule of numbers, was not what Chartism was about. Instead he argued that, even post-Chartism

A knowledge of politics ... is necessary to make our legislators really virtuous men ... the cultivation of personal, public virtue, on the part of the people, will produce a reflex of the same qualities among the men who frame the institutions under which we live.¹¹⁸

The effects of democracy, then, would be commensurate with the advance among the whole population of political knowledge. However, O'Connor's dominance of Chartism, his control of the executive and tendency to vituperation, meant that Chartism could make no progress towards this goal. Thomason concluded that it was

¹¹⁷ William Thomason, *O'Connorism and Democracy Inconsistent with Each Other; Being a Statement of Events in the Life of Feargus O'Connor* (Newcastle, 1844).

¹¹⁸ *Life Boat*, no.4, 23 December 1843, pp. 50-51.

... better to unite with any other section of the democracy of this country than to be one with a party of men who, under the guise of liberty, have made both reasoning and thinking an unpardonable crime.¹¹⁹

It was O'Connor's dominance of Chartism and his undemocratic conduct that dissuaded parliamentary radicals from supporting the movement. The essential characteristic of organisation, he persuasively suggested in his 1844 pamphlet, must be that 'the means employed bear some affinity to the end contemplated'.¹²⁰ This remained a central problem of Chartist organisation. Recent neo-Marxist historians of Chartism, assuming working class political power to be the end sought by mainstream Chartism have seen the NCA as a more class conscious political vessel than moral force Chartism. However, whilst great things most certainly were expected from the establishment of democracy for the unrepresented labouring population, it was not class politics, not the dominance by numbers of a distinct working class interest, that was thought, even by the most militant Chartists, to be the source of sustained social happiness. Rather, from democracy must be built a republic.

Chartism, class and land.

Political criticism of the middle classes was a characteristic of the Chartist movement. To some socialist historians, therefore, moral force Chartism 'indicated the strong influence of middle-class and artisan ideas and personnel' and physical force Chartism 'the untutored rawness of the new proletariat'.¹²¹ Lovett likewise is rejected as an authentic Chartist because 'he did not possess

^{119.} *Life Boat*, no.5, 30 December 1843, pp. 72-73.

^{120.} Thomason, *O'Connorism and Democracy*, p. 15.

^{121.} John Charlton, *The Chartists*, pp. 70-72.

even a spark of revolutionary temperament.’¹²² Even a more balanced historian such as James Epstein has claimed that Chartist class alliance was not possible in the 1840s because ‘Chartism was essentially a class movement’ and that O’Connor’s ‘intransigent class tone and class perspective’ was central to his Chartist status.¹²³ Such readings may emerge from an examination of the suspicions of many Chartists that co-operation with the middle classes would spell the dilution of the Chartist movement. Co-operation with those who merely desired a limited measure of suffrage extension was felt to compromise too much control to moderate middle-class radicals. The middle classes, from this perspective,

... will not even be influenced by fear to *co-operate* with the people, until they have sounded the ground where they are going, and find that they will still have a chance of securing to themselves a system of plunder.¹²⁴

But appeals for the Charter as a means to social equality were conspicuous for their rarity. J. C. Coombe was very untypical, even of Chartist militants, when he claimed that ‘Political equality means that the minority must submit to the will of the majority’ and that ‘the mountains of wealth must be pulled down, and the valleys of want filled up’.¹²⁵ And this was not just because such language was likely to achieve the destruction of the movement and make few influential friends amongst the upper classes. The insurrectionary tone and Jacobin posturing of the LDA was that of a small minority and did not last past early 1839.

¹²² Theodore Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism*, p. 35.

¹²³ Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom*, p. 272.

¹²⁴ *London Democrat*, no.1, April 13, 1839, pp. 1-2; no.7, May 25, 1839, p. 49.

¹²⁵ *London Democrat*, no.3, 27 April 1839, p. 20; no.8, 1 June 1839, pp. 60-61.

The LDA critique of moderation, however, as leading only to partial reform, was accepted by much of the Chartist mainstream.¹²⁶ That Chartism was a movement that needed to be led by the unrepresented, the working classes, was widely accepted. This was necessary in order to avoid the drift to expediency that was expected from a moderate middle-class leadership and to ensure that that labour was well represented in any reformed political legislature - hence an awareness of the need for Chartist trades' organisation.¹²⁷ Ultimately, though, this recognition was little different from that of the LWMA in 1836, which rejected Whig-Tory politics because 'the working classes, have little or no interest in the issue of the contest', representing partial and factious aims. The productive millions, Cleave urged, should 'now set themselves seriously to work for themselves.'¹²⁸ Class, then, if too narrowly framing the historians vision, can lead to elevating this class language of Chartism above politics and the skill of the rhetorician. O'Connor has succeeded, through his strategy of mass threat and his use of 'middle class' tags in attacking his opponents, in turning historians' attention away from the essential political similarities of between moral force and physical force Chartism - they both aimed at the achievement of the People's Charter.

Furthermore the Chartist mainstream was far from being more socially radical than moral force Chartism. O'Connor declared that his political aim was restore labour to the land and this object was pushed from 1840 in the *Northern Star*, eventually resulting in the Chartist Land Company as a key component of NCA activity.¹²⁹ Though for pragmatic reasons the LWMA and NA sought to exclude

^{126.} *London Democrat*, no.5, 11 May 1839, p. 33; no.8, 1 June 1839, p. 57.

^{127.} *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, no.1, 3 April 1841, pp. 1-2; *Northern Star*, no.217, 8 January 1842, p. 4; no.243, 9 July 1842, p. 1; *English Chartist Circular*, no.47, n.d., pp. 185-86; no.50, n.d., pp. 198-99.

^{128.} *Cleave's Weekly Police Gazette*, new series, no.3, 1 October 1836, p. 3.

^{129.} *Northern Star*, no.129, 2 May 1840, p. 4; no.139, 11 July 1840, p. 7; *English Chartist Circular*, no.136, vol.2, n.d., p. 333; no.137, vol.2, n.d., pp. 337-40.

their social radicalism from their political programme, several of their prominent members were land reformers of a more collectivist shade than O'Connor. Hetherington, for example, at an NCA meeting held in the NA National Hall in 1847, revealed that 'He considered the land and the principle of co-operation, carried into manufacture and trades, to be the only means of putting an end to the present state of things.'¹³⁰ The social aims of moral force Chartists were in advance of the Chartist mainstream even though in terms of strategy and rhetoric they were more moderate.

Divergence of views as to rhetorical stance, leadership style, organisation and the possibility of co-operation with more moderate radicals formed the basis of the dispute between moral force and physical force. Elements of this divergence existed within the NCA mainstream. We have seen that moral force concerns with the dominance of O'Connor and the *Northern Star* were as much a part of the politics of the NCA as they were of early Chartism. The need to persuade and conciliate the middle classes was just as much of an issue for the leaders of the NCA as it had been the for the LWMA. Conciliatory cultural means of appealing to this middle class support, we have seen, flourished in the NCA and were not the preserve of the NA or the Birmingham Chartist Church. Also, these cultural forms aimed not just at conciliation to achieve the implementation of the People's Charter but at the cultivation of republican virtue that would be necessary for realising social benefits for all from political democracy. The concerns that led to the formation of a separate moral force Chartist organisation were also a part of mainstream Chartism and therefore not restricted to untypical margins.

Ashton's and Pickering's *Friends of the People* outlines the careers of several 'uneasy radicals', most of whom, despite their associations with O'Connor and mainstream Chartist character, were committed to self-improvement, class

¹³⁰. *Northern Star*, no.529, 11 December 1847, p. 1.

conciliation and non-violence.¹³¹ Strategic debate and the use of a fluid language of class made up the content of the differences between Chartists rather than any real 'class' differences as to the anticipated outcome of the Charter. This was true of early Chartism and the NCA and, as chapter VII will make clear, it was true of the regrowth of Chartism into the late 1840s.

¹³¹. Ashton and Pickering, *Friends of the People*, pp. 149-63.

Chapter VII.

Late Chartism, Moral Force and Internationalism.

This thesis has contended that elements of moral force Chartist strategy were a feature of the development of prominent Chartists such as James O'Brien and of the NCA. Late Chartism saw moral force concerns continue as a central issue of contention in the mainstream. The revival of mainstream Chartism beginning in 1847 and accelerating into 1848 also saw the re-emergence and re-invigoration of formal moral force organisation. The NCA had attempted, with difficulty, to carry a mass support for Chartism into the late 1840s whilst the National Association was by then moribund as a potential source of Chartist revival along moral force lines.¹ However, renewed efforts were made to revitalise Chartism through a new moral force organisation, the People's Charter Union, distinct from the NA and the increasingly mild radicalism of William Lovett.

The fervour with which the European revolutions were generally greeted in 1848 extended to moral force Chartists. In the process much of their focus shifted from away from domestic educationalism towards support for radical principles organised around overseas Republican politics. The practicality of the central position of moral force Chartism still held - that the People's Charter was likely to be achieved only by an increase in support from middle class radicals and the popular understanding of radical principles. However, whilst class co-operation remained central to their strategy, moral force Chartists returned closer to their roots, rejecting the exaggerated moderation of the NA. This chapter will examine these renewed efforts at Chartist moral force organisation, which were

¹ BL, Add. 37,775, fol. 114, LWMA Minutes, 7 June 1848; fol. 114-15, 14 June 1848; fol. 115-16, 28 June 1848; fol. 126-27, 11 April 1848; fol. 127-28, 4 July 1849. The NA presented a petition in favour of the Charter to the Commons in June 1848 through George Thompson MP but little other activity is evident from the NA minutes. In July 1849 the NA effectively ceased to exist when the National Hall was transferred to the trustees and subscriptions were sought for its debts of over £400.

based upon class co-operation and intellectual persuasion but also socially radical in ambition. This strategy will be contrasted with the fate of a renewed mainstream agitation and the re-emergence of physical force Chartism.

Lovett and the People's League.

William Lovett, in 1848, put forward a proposal for a People's League, which was to consist of a 'cordial union among all classes of reformers'.² Formed shortly after the French Revolution in February 1848, the People's League arose from previous attempts by Lovett to establish a radical class-conciliatory project based on the demands of the Charter. Lovett had attempted to draw the NA into supporting a 'General Association of Progress' in 1847 but this had come to nothing.³ Several prominent members of the NA, such as Lovett, J. H. Parry and C. H. Elt, had also been involved in an attempted radical National Alliance along with Henry Vincent, which the NA agreed to co-operate with. The National Alliance was a progressive front whose object was to enlighten public opinion regarding suffrage extension based on the six points of the Charter with the support of, amongst others, Edward Miall, Dr. Epps, W. J. Fox and Douglas Jerrold.⁴ Failing to secure either the support of prominent parliamentary radicals or a wider support, the National Alliance soon folded.

The *Proposal* for a People's League (PL), though, came in the wake of the

² William Lovett, *Proposal for Forming a People's League, Addressed to the Radical Reformers of the United Kingdom* (1848, reprinted Claeys, Vol. IV), pp. 235-37.

³ BL, Add. 37775, LWMA Minutes, fol. 93-94, 18 August 1847; ff. 95-96, 8 September 1847; fol. 97-98, 29 September 1847; fol. 99-100, 13 October 1847; f. 100, 20 October 1847; fol. 101, 27 October 1847; fol. 101-102, 24 November 1847. This proposal was later printed by Lovett as *A Proposal for the Consideration of the Friends of Progress* (1847, reprinted, Claeys, Vol. IV), pp. 287-92.

⁴ BL, Add. 37775, LWMA Minutes, fol. 67-68, 29 December 1846; fol. 110-11, 22 March 1848. Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 4, fol. 280 g-i, n.d.; fol. 280 c-d, n.d.; fol. 280 e-f, n.d.

French Revolution and a revived domestic radicalism and produced a successful founding conference, gaining more support than earlier efforts at moderate radical organisation.⁵ The PL presented radical union as a source of national prosperity, security and constitutional improvement, naturally opposed to 'outrage or violence'. It argued not only that distress was linked to the need for parliamentary reform but also that it was peaceful and moral effort and self-improvement that at root formed the character of the state and thus were preconditions for the Charter. This was a shift away from the usual Chartist position that political monopoly was the major barrier to meaningful individual and social improvement.⁶ This shift was particularly noticeable in William Lovett who was now claiming that it was the combined character of the population that formed the character of national politics, that 'our combined industrial energies, our united capital, *our moral courage*, *our intelligence* and *will* alone, give strength to our state, and constitute the only power of our rulers'.⁷ Moral and intellectual improvement, according to this argument, would clearly spell an end to the effects of aristocratic privilege and would involve peaceful support for the People's Charter.⁸

Thus the PL represented the sort of moderate agitation tied to free-trade that is often attributed to Lovett and, by crude extension, moral force Chartism generally. Yet by the late-1840s it was still only Lovett and a very few Chartist moderates (such as the first secretary of the PL, Robert Lowery) who could live

⁵ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 4, fol. 289, n.d.; BL, Add. 37775, LWMA Minutes, fol. 112, 17 April 1848.

⁶ Lovett, *Proposal for Forming a People's League*, p. 235; Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 4, fol. 292, n.d.

⁷ Lovett, *Proposal for Forming a People's League*, p.235.

⁸ William Lovett, *Justice Safer Than Expediency: An Appeal to the Middle Classes on the Question of the Suffrage* (London, 1848, reprinted Claeys, Vol. V), pp. 77-82; William Lovett, *Doings of a Lunatic Aristocracy and the Subsequent Results of Universal Suffrage in the Moon to which is Appended the Poor Man's Legacy* (London, 1848); William Lovett, *The Peace Principle, the Great Agent of Social and Political Progress* (London, 1849).

with the withdrawal from standard Chartist principles that such a position involved. The PL consequently experienced difficulty in attracting support from either working- or middle-class radicals. Henry Vincent resigned from its council in November, claiming that the organisation was unworkable.⁹ As the with CSU, tension seemingly existed around degrees of commitment to the Charter, Robert Lowery, for example, writing to Lovett in April 1849, reflected that the People's League had failed due to a lack of middle-class effort.¹⁰ The People's League issued an address *To the People of London and its Vicinity* urging petitions favouring universal suffrage but, as Lovett describes, it was short lived, ineffective and signalled the end of his radical career.¹¹

The revival of moral force Chartism: the People's Charter Union.

Lovett, from the time of the failure of the People's League, can be considered to be outside of the ranks of formal moral force Chartism, placing as he did political reform as a derivative of self-improvement. Moral force Chartism, represented by the LWMA and to a lesser degree by the NA, was carried forward in late Chartism by the People's Charter Union (PCU). Indeed, Lovett's departure from Chartist politics freed up many of his moral force colleagues to form this new Chartist organisation. This body contained the core of the old metropolitan moral force Chartists such as Hetherington and Watson and some ex-LWMA members such as J. Hoppey and J. D. Collet as well as the ex-O'Connorite, Thomas Cooper. It also contained the increasingly influential radicals George Jacob Holyoake and William James Linton. Holyoake was a prominent Owenite who had entered the radical fray in 1846 with the *Reasoner*, a journal which blended socialism with radical-republicanism. Linton had been

⁹ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 4, fol. 296, Vincent to Lovett, 4 November 1848.

¹⁰ BL, Add. 78161, Lovett MS, fol. 267-68, Lowery to Lovett, 30 April 1849.

¹¹ William Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, Vol. II (London, 1920), p. 358.

a moral force Chartist since the earliest days of the agitation but had stayed aloof from the LWMA and NA, becoming prominent from the late 1840s as a proponent of Mazzinian republicanism.¹² Formed in March 1848 and owing its impetus to meetings of moderate Chartists in support of the February revolution in France, the PCU desired class conciliation on radical principles and aimed at 'peaceable and legal means' for achieving the People's Charter.

The Chartist activist Joseph Barker had rejected the People's League as lacking energy but was more encouraged by the PCU, though he suggested that they needed 'spirit and energy' to succeed in gathering support.¹³ The PCU, in aiming at persuasion rather than mere avoidance of controversy, was far better placed than the NA to excite the desire to exert political energy. The first six months of the PCU saw several public meetings, local activity in London, an address to fellow Chartists warning against government *agent provocateurs*, as well as a Petition to the House of Commons presented by Colonel Thompson protesting against the fact that just ninety thousand voters returned a majority of its members. The tone of warning against physical force also took on a less condescending tone than had, at times, been present in the literature of the NA. Panic amongst the comfortable classes, it was argued, would have a negative effect on the fate of the Charter. Violence was associated with events not only on the Continent but also in Britain 'by the vague declamation of those who display not wisely but too well their dissatisfaction with the present order of things'.¹⁴ Government machinations would lead only to physical force Chartists ending up in prison cells. The PCU, though, pointed out that this was not a moral failing on the part of the people but indiscretion brought on by injustice and misgovernment. The PCU owned that it had no practical political record to speak of but though

¹² F. B. Smith, *Radical Artisan. William James Linton, 1812-97* (Manchester, 1973), pp. 24-88.

¹³ *People*, n.d., p. 199; no.30, n.d., p. 239; no.32, n.d., p. 255.

¹⁴ *Republican*, vol. 2, n.d., p. 39.

we have no achievement to boast, at least we have not succumbed before the menaces of authority, if we have not challenged the enemy to mortal combat, we have not turned our backs or belied our promises ... our meetings have furnished no case for the magistrates.¹⁵

Physical force Chartism had played into the hands of the opponents of radical political reform, plausible charges of violent and levelling intent meaning that 'hundreds of thousands of well meaning reformers shrink from the name of Chartist'.¹⁶ Rather than encourage prejudice against Chartism, the PCU urged Chartists

to rally round the standard of Universal Suffrage, and by their orderly demeanour, as well as by their industry in their own private callings, to show how few are the advocates of disorder, and how visionary is the idea that Englishmen desire to live without labour, or to overthrow by violence the order of society.¹⁷

Moral force warnings against violence formed the bulk of an address issued by the PCU in August 1849 which warned that 'violent conduct would both disgrace our Cause and materially retard its triumph' and counselled that 'while you never flinch openly asserting your determination to obtain the People's Charter, that you will as resolutely avoid any secret proceedings'.¹⁸ Despite these warnings against physical force the PCU explicitly rejected the move of Lovett and the PL of putting the self-improvement cart before the political reform horse. Rather,

¹⁵. *Republican*, vol. 2, n.d., p. 39.

¹⁶. *Republican*, vol. 2, n.d., p. 40.

¹⁷. *Republican*, vol. 2, n.d., p. 40.

¹⁸. *People*, no.30, n.d., p. 239.

universal suffrage was the route to popular education instead of police; the ballot box instead of the pike; and to a free press.¹⁹

G. J. Holyoake, W. J. Linton and the *Cause of the People*.

The unofficial journal of the PCU, the *Cause of the People*,²⁰ was jointly edited by Holyoake and Linton and provides a useful enunciation of the philosophical basis of late Chartist moral force. Though something of a return to an authentic moral force Chartism located in the desire for social reform, late Chartist moral force drew as much from overseas Republicanism as from Owenism, in Linton's editorials in particular. Republicanism sought its end in the intelligence of the people and in the cultivation of civic virtue, which it was considered would be promoted by the achievement of political equality. As with the LWMA, NA and sections of mainstream Chartism, late moral force Chartism rejected class politics in favour of

The desire to make the cause of the whole the cause of each ... high and low, rich and poor, men and women ... the co-operation of all in their endeavour to show that what has hitherto been considered as the cause of certain men, is indeed the cause of all men and all women, of the whole People.²¹

This acceptance of a classical republican framework of active citizenship, though, did not preclude a belief that a government for the common good would produce a public opinion and a state embracing far-reaching social reforms. This

¹⁹ *Republican*, vol. 2, n.d., p. 40.

²⁰ Edward Royle, 'The *Cause of the People*, the People's Charter and 'Moral Force' Chartism in 1848', in J. Allen and O. Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press* (London, 2005), pp. 146-67.

²¹ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, vol. VIII, p. 5.

reflects a type of hybridised politics that was typical of most Chartists and that Holyoake enunciated in the opening issue of the *Reasoner*. It would be, Holyoake declared, 'Communitic in Social Economy - Utilitarian in Morals - Republican in Politics - and Anti-theological in Religion.'²² Each of these pillars of Holyoake's political career closed out class politics by emphasising the necessity for the dissemination of these ideas in the pursuit of social and political reform.

The LWMA had put considerable emphasis on the need for the understanding of radical principles and, similarly, Holyoake and Linton emphasised the importance of personal duty and organisation in the understanding of radical ideas and the pursuit of their realisation. Ideas, rationality and persuasion were at the centre of their struggle for human progress. A didactic core of reformers was needed to organise, not 'any great *number* of men, so much as the *quality* of the persons who associate'.²³ Holyoake and Linton form a line of moral force continuity from the ideas of the LWMA and the NA explained in Chapters I and III. All believed that, whilst democracy would offer far greater opportunities for social reform, it was necessary that the means adopted for achieving democracy should promote the qualities needed amongst the population at large for the greatest social benefits to result from political democracy. We have seen that Lovett deviated from this position to argue that the progress of political reform rested upon the moral improvement of the people. For Holyoake, Linton and the PCU, though, the struggle for political rights remained central to the moral improvement of the people, which would result from the achievement of political reform by moral force means. It was the desire to link closely the means of obtaining the Charter to its anticipated ends that formed an important component of moral force Chartism, early and late:

²² *Reasoner*, no.1, 3 June 1846, p. 1.

²³ G. J. Holyoake, *Organisation: Not of Arms but Ideas* (London, 1853), p. 1.

The democrat, in aspiring to democratic power, enters upon the study of democratic virtues, and should rise above those who are incapable of political inspiration. We expect therefore not to find the democratic politician coveting to be known as the unwashed, unshorn, and ill-dressed; we expect ... the purity of high purpose and the simplicity and gentleness of noble manners.²⁴

For social change to emerge from political reform, Holyoake was explicit: principles needed to be applied at a deep personal level before they could translate into effective action. Reflecting pessimism resulting from the failure of Owenite communitarian experiments, Holyoake concluded that rather than

the premature expectation of stepping at once out of the old world into the new ... A new state of society implies new character - and there can be no new character unless conduct precedes it.²⁵

The central need for Chartists, then, was personal improvement intertwined with the pursuit of radical reform. Discipline and consistency of principles and intelligent co-operation were central to this approach. Linton, too, was very clear that what Chartists were trying to achieve was a Commonwealth drawing on the spirit of Cromwell.²⁶ Linton appealed for 'the People's Charter, the foundation stone of the Commonwealth!' as the basis of 'The Republic - res publica - the public interest - the public business - the commonweal - the common welfare.'²⁷ To forge a movement based on 'deep and deliberate reasoning' and organisation based upon principle and a rejection of expediency,

²⁴ Holyoake, *Organisation*, p. 6.

²⁵ Holyoake, *Organisation*, p. 6.

²⁶ *Republican*, n.d., pp. 61-63.

²⁷ *Republican*, n.d., p. 103; n.d., pp. 125-26.

the importance of Republican Duty extended to all classes as 'in the nation should be no neglected and untutored corner'.²⁸ Household suffrage, for example, was a rejection of and not a step towards the fulfilment of principles of right. There could be, Linton insisted, no instalment of suffrage as this would merely increase the number of monopolists by still excluding more than half of the population (the poorest males and all women).

We will not disgrace a pure cause by these parliamentary diplomacies. ... Let those who will endeavour for nothing more than the representation of property cease to ask the co-operation of the People under pretence of moving in the RIGHT direction. They will never go beyond their own houses.²⁹

Those who did not move with the movement for 'Universal Right' were, however well intentioned, the enemies of those who did. That is, democrats who did not support universal suffrage were the enemies of the cause (though they were also potential converts). Rather than a contrived radical alliance there was a need for 'Honesty beyond all Policy' as the basis of radical reform.³⁰

The emphasis on principle was central, and the relationship of the Charter to wider principles of Rights and Republicanism was accorded considerable importance by Linton in particular. Drawing on the philosophy of the Italian Republican, Mazzini, Linton regarded radicalism as an idealist truth towards which humanity was progressing. The year 1848 saw Linton's idealistic view of radical progress seemingly budding across Europe.³¹ Writing on France, Italy,

²⁸ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 52-55.

²⁹ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 43.

³⁰ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 40-43.

³¹ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 147-49 records an 1848 meeting to celebrate the 'Martyrs to Social Progress', which saw Linton praise the contribution to human progress of Mazzini alongside Socrates, Jesus and Robespierre.

Switzerland and Poland, Linton considered the Nation to be a natural extension of organisation for a given people, lending duties to the rights accorded to the citizens within it.³² The Nation bound together 'all those individuals whose language and geographical position, whose historical traditions, whose continuous desire, whose natural genius and characteristics, whose common purpose and tendencies, prove them to have one identical mission.'³³ England, though, did not match its European neighbours in radical fervour in 1848, Linton concluding that England was not yet a nation (having been so only briefly during the reigns of Elizabeth and Cromwell).³⁴ Linton also noted soon after the French Revolution that a Republic could not be so in name only and his worst fears were realised with the election by manhood suffrage of Louis Bonaparte.³⁵

This idealist view of Republicanism saw the free association of equals as the basis of nationality of which universal suffrage was its outward symbol. Within such a Republic the free growth of the individual was assured alongside the security of a just polity that emphasised duty and usefulness.³⁶ Linton rejected communism, firstly because of the prior need to achieve political democracy and, secondly, because Linton believed that a natural hierarchy or 'rule of the wisest' would follow the removal of artificial autocratic political barriers to meritocracy.³⁷ Thus while most Chartists drew inspiration from overseas republican struggles, Linton differed from most moral force Chartists in drawing his philosophy of social progress from Mazzini rather than co-operative-

³² *Republican*, n.d., pp. 2-4; n.d., pp. 23-26; n.d., pp. 61-63; W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p.14-15, 19-21.

³³ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 28.

³⁴ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 113-15.

³⁵ *Republican*, n.d., 102-103; W.J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 48-51.

³⁶ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 19-21, 22-25, 26-28.

³⁷ *Republican*, n.d., pp. 43-45; n.d., p. 208-209; n.d., pp. 221-24.

socialism. This difference was to contribute to a disagreement with Holyoake into 1849³⁸ but did not otherwise affect the renewed moral force push in 1848.

Though imperfect, Chartism was a part of the progress of Republicanism for Linton as it demanded the recognition of popular sovereignty. But universal suffrage involved responsibilities as well as rights, which Chartist leaders must make clear 'not merely to advance the cry - "The Charter and nothing but the Charter!" - but ... to show why the Charter is wanted - what it is, and to what it will lead.'³⁹ In essence, to build not just an outward legal recognition of the suffrage 'but the inward conscience of the Universal Duty of the Suffrage', and to 'pass that Act through the intelligent hearts of the People, to make the People act'.⁴⁰ Chartism, as it stood, was not this conscientious realisation of duty but only a reaction against wrong and suffering;

the antagonistic spirit, the invective, the unruly conduct of some, the lukewarmness and apathy of others, the want of real organisation, of united and consecutive action, of calm strength and steady growth ... all these hindrances ... have made Chartism hitherto an AGITATION rather than a MOVEMENT ...⁴¹

The ignorance of radical and Republican principles amongst the broad Chartist movement meant that the role of bodies like the PCU was to 'make Chartists' in order to

³⁸ BL, Holyoake Pamphlets (E. P. Microform Ltd., Reel 1), *The Warpath of Opinion: Strange Things Seen Therein, As Shown in the "Life of Bradlaugh" and "Memories of Linton"*, (Leicester 1896), pp. 73-74; Linton, *Memories*, pp. 105-106.

³⁹ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 11.

⁴⁰ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 11.

⁴¹ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 12.

obtain the enactment of the Charter by persuasion, by convincing argument, as a consequence of the majority of the People becoming Chartists - that is to say, men knowing what Chartism is, men conversant with the subject of their demand, understanding its bearings, penetrated by the reasons for its necessity, filled with an intelligent faith in the justice and wisdom of their requirements.⁴²

Chartism, Linton argued, could not be won by the protests of a part of the people but had to be based on a clear and organised majority infused with the 'knowledge of the meaning and purpose of the Charter'.⁴³

Linton considered that three things were wanting from the Chartist cause - understanding, energy and organisation. Linton thought that the NA had a sufficient knowledge of the aim of the Charter and a plan of organisation but little energy, which meant that 'consequently the plan could not even be tried, and the understanding remained unproductive.'⁴⁴ The NCA had plenty of energy but little understanding or organisation. The result of disorganisation and 'really very few men in the country who know why they want the Charter' would be that control of political reform would pass to the middle classes 'who know what they want and how to organise' and favoured suffrage extension based upon property.⁴⁵ O'Connor lacked knowledge with his claims of immediate prosperity from the success of the Land plan and the Charter, and the *Northern Star* was loyal not to the Charter but to O'Connor. Meetings themselves, Linton reflected, did not make organisation and ten years of NCA energy, funds and press had 'done nothing for Chartism, save bringing upon it the contempt or dislike of

⁴² W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 12.

⁴³ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 13.

⁴⁴ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 33.

⁴⁵ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 36.

many earnest men, making even its name objectionable'.⁴⁶ Random gatherings and unscrupulous pandering to the 'feelings and impulses of the moment' amounted to an even less satisfactory lack of real organisation, a failure made worse by the fact that the support for the Chartist petitions had made clear the presence of a large measure of popular support for the Charter. Further, the mistake of both Lovett's and O'Connor's efforts was that they were centralised and did not grow from autonomous local associations of Chartists. Centralised bodies were useful to send out lecturers but organisation needed to be local with regular subscriptions, instruction, canvassing and contact with other local associations. By such means Linton believed that 'little by little, each man working where he is best known and has most influence ... the principles of the Suffrage will extend.'⁴⁷ Through such tangible moral force means Chartism could move from representing a vocal section of the people to forming an organised majority of the people with members from all classes, which could then 'assume the imperative tone which belongs only to the majority.'⁴⁸

The PCU existed to organise support for the political democracy that all of its members saw as essential to social progress, whatever its hue. This it did with only limited success but its existence has gone virtually unnoticed by recent historians of Chartism, receiving no mention in influential recent works such as Thompson's *The Chartists* (1984), Saville's *1848* (1987) or Goodway's *London Chartism* (1982). If the LWMA has been treated to a harsh analysis the PCU has, for the same reasons, barely been accorded even a footnote in recent historiography. Yet the PCU was composed of several prominent Chartists whose contribution to Chartism was as great as any of the NCA leadership outside of O'Connor.

⁴⁶ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 35.

⁴⁷ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 38.

⁴⁸ W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, p. 39.

Moral force internationalism, late social Chartism and state socialism.

Whilst the PCU promoted moral force from within domestic Chartism, interest in overseas republicanism motivated many of its members. The internationalist aspect of Chartism has been much studied and the movement has been influentially regarded by socialist historians as one of the precursors of later socialist internationalism. Class rhetoric formed a part of the internationalism of the republican Fraternal Democrats (FD), which included the prominent physical force Chartists G. J. Harney and Ernest Jones. This association has meant that it has subsequently been seen as the closest progenitor of modern Marxist socialist internationalism. The prevailing search for physical force antecedents for socialist internationalism has been challenged by Christine Lattek who has argued that internationalism was also a significant impulse for moral force Chartists.⁴⁹ Indeed, two early radical internationalist organisations which owed much to the exertions of moral force Chartists – the Democratic Friends of All Nations (DFAN) and the Mazzinian People's International League (PIL). Lattek has described the DFAN rather than the Fraternal Democrats as 'The Beginnings of Socialist Internationalism in the 1840s', although the internationalism of both were radical rather than socialist.

The Fraternal Democrats were merely a more militant version of a radical-republican internationalism represented also by the DFAN and PIL. The internationalism of the latter bodies drew on a tradition of transnational moral force radicalism from the LWMA to the NA. Moral force Chartism sustained an internationalist perspective from early to late Chartism, from the international addresses of the LWMA in the later 1830s and NA in the mid- to late-1840s to the activities of the DFAN and PIL, which had considerable membership overlap with the NA and PCU. The differences between moral force internationalism

⁴⁹ Christine Lattek, 'The Beginnings of Socialist Internationalism in the 1840s: The "Democratic Friends of All Nations" in London', in Frits van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830 to 1940*, Vol. I (Leiden, 1988), pp. 259-82.

and the Fraternal Democrats are not reducible to class consciousness but to differences in tone. The occasional use of the word 'proletarian' signified little beyond a desire to see and present the British working classes in a rhetorically more revolutionary and threatening way through the use of word play rather than literally representing a more socially revolutionary purpose. Marx and Engels, in fact, were indifferent towards the Fraternal Democrats as luke-warm proponents of class war.⁵⁰ The origins of the DFAN was as a collaborative body of Socialists and Chartists in support of political refugees, including Lovett, Hetherington and Holyoake alongside McDouall and Thomas Martin Wheeler, a close colleague of O'Connor. It was only Lovett's writing of a moral force address for the DFAN that led to the exit of the NCA members and the founding in 1845 of the Fraternal Democrats.⁵¹

By the last third of the 1840s we have noted that Lovett was ceasing to be a typical moral force Chartist. As with Lovett's attempt to rebuild Chartism upon moderate lines, his address for the DFAN was at the limits of Chartist moderation. Thus Lattek has noted that Lovett's attack on class-legislation and social and political inequality was beginning to sit uncomfortably with an exaggerated appeal to individual moral endeavour resulting in a practical programme of 'vague moral exhortations'.⁵² The PIL, though, represented a firmer moral force internationalism that drew on the influence of Mazzini and the events of February 1848 and attracted several radical politicians and moral force Chartists to its brand of nationalism.

Mazzinian nationalism and radical-republicanism appealed to many moral force Chartists because of its emphasis on the political, social and moral virtue of the

⁵⁰ Henry Weisser, 'Chartist Internationalism, 1845-1848', *Historical Journal*, XIV (1971), p. 59.

⁵¹ 'All Men are Brethren.' *An Address to the Friends of Humanity and Justice Among All Nations, by the Democratic Friends of All Nations* (London, 1845).

⁵² Lattek, 'The Beginnings of Socialist Internationalism', pp. 274-75.

radical citizenship of the future (which meant self-improving effort now) without recourse to the question of class. A political movement was needed to establish something more than a nominally Republican government, such as in the United States. 'The prestige is gone for ever which led men to believe that republicanism is a security for good conduct or political honesty', PIL member Colonel Thompson MP argued. 'The truth is', he continued, 'that honest republicans will make an honest republic; and the contrary.'⁵³ Class, as for Owenism, was a negative and artificial creation of self-interested rule by a few. Class and class interests were real enough but could not be broken down by ossifying such divisions in present political conduct. Rather co-operation of the enlightened of all classes was required to forge a new political and social harmony based on mutual interests. The possibility of human perfectibility was real for many early nineteenth century radicals. Faith in relatively unproblematic progress through the advance of ideas and rationality may seem hopelessly naive to those who have passed through the turbulence of the twentieth century. But to nineteenth century Chartists on the back end of the Enlightenment, with a belief in universal benevolence and the power of education, it was a reasonable, if optimistic, proposition.⁵⁴

Pacifism, though, was a thorny issue for most moral force Chartists. Firm supporters of non-violence in British conditions of gradual democratic advance supported intervention by force when it came to Europe, a position supported by Linton and Holyoake but also middle class supporters such as W. H. Ashurst. Linton, for example, favoured active intervention in later 1848 and 1849 when

^{53.} *Report of a Meeting, Held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand, on Monday, November 15, 1847, "To Explain the Principles and Objects of the People's International League,* (London, 1847), pp. 6-7.

^{54.} For example, David Stack's, 'William Lovett and the National Association' (*The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 1027-50) explains how, through the example of the widely popular phrenologist George Combe, William Lovett believed in the passing down of acquired moral characteristics and intellect to progeny. Pre-Darwin such ideas were scientifically acceptable and conducive to an optimistic view of human progress and a fervid pursuit of self-improvement.

Poland and Rome were under threat.⁵⁵ Also, ironically, those who supported physical force at home and abroad, such as Harney, were persuaded of the need for a moral force strategy by the failure of the European revolutions. Moral force Chartism was typified not by moralistic pacifism but by considered opposition to the use of force as a political strategy at home but a qualified acceptance of its use abroad. Thus opposition of the Fraternal Democrats to pacifism does not reflect an accurate attack on moral force Chartism. The Fraternal Democrats proffered that 'There are nations so tightly fettered that we can see no prospect of their chains being broken without the aid of the sword'.⁵⁶ This was physical force rhetoric of a new kind rather than any difference of ultimate aim. The Fraternal Democrats may have written of their desire to end 'bourgeois' rule but this did not amount to more than the establishment of popular sovereignty. The physical force internationalism of the Fraternal Democrats differed from that of many moral force Chartist only in that the tone of the former was more pessimistic of human progress short of a mass radical rising across Europe to sweep away the aristocratic obstacles to democracy. This is not to overlook the very real strategic differences that existed between these approaches but to establish the minimal difference in the outcome hoped for - an international confederation of people's republics based in considerable part on a classical republican notion of commonweal, political virtue and the public duty of all classes.

Whilst Lovett and a portion of the NA drifted towards moralism and pacifism, the PCU reoccupied an original, more vigorous, moral force Chartist perspective. The mild Chartism of the NA led to Thomas Cooper being dismissed as a lecturer for the NA at the National Hall following unscheduled attacks on Louis

⁵⁵ Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 124-5; W. J. Linton, *Prose and Verse*, Vol. VIII, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁶ Fraternal Democrats, *Address of the Fraternal Democrats Assembling in London to the Working Classes of Great Britain and the United States* (London, 1846, reprinted Claeys, Vol. IV), p. 84.

Philippe and an enthusiastic enunciation of Republicanism.⁵⁷ The 1848 NA address to France was pacifist and moralistic in tone rather than radical and was signed by Lovett, Vincent, C. H. Elt, R. Spurr, Parry and Neesom, all of whom were moral force Chartists who had made the journey from a staunch radical analysis to one of moralistic individual improvement as the source of social change.⁵⁸ The PIL by contrast, though nominally supported by the NA,⁵⁹ included several members of the PCU on its council (James Watson, Richard Moore and Thomas Cooper) and showed the influence of Linton with its language of nationalities rising through Europe. Intrinsicly democratic, the will of peoples to form nations clashed with old privilege and absolutism. It was the object of the PIL to raise public awareness of the nature of these struggles in Europe, to 'disseminate the Principles of National Freedom and Progress' and to facilitate bonds of understanding between countries.⁶⁰ Whilst the DFAN and later NA had aimed at the cultivation of a sentimental fraternalism, the PIL saw its role as radically influencing politics regarding overseas questions in the same way that the LWMA and early NA had with regard to domestic politics.⁶¹ This view of British domestic political progress was expressed as a gradualist strategy that aimed at the slow but sure radicalisation of British and international politics.

Gregory Claeys has suggested that the support attracted by Mazzini and Kossuth in Britain in the late 1840s and early 1850s signified a shift in British radicalism and may have been inspired by domestic disillusion which fed into the moderate and non-socialist character of British working class radicalism in the 'after

⁵⁷ BL, Add. 37775, LWMA Minutes, fol. 109-110, 15 March 1848.

⁵⁸ *Address to the French People, from the National Association, London* (London, 1848).

⁵⁹ BL, Add. 37775, LWMA Minutes, fol. 103, 8 December 1847, f. 103; f. 106, 19 January 1848.

⁶⁰ *Address of the Council of the People's International League*, p. 241.

⁶¹ *Address of the Council of the People's International League*, p. 244.

Chartism' period.⁶² In fact internationalism had long been a feature of radicalism in Britain, particularly in metropolitan circles, and it had always been a source of agreement between Chartists and the radical middle class. The difficulties for an agreement over democratic reform came when radical principles that were relatively easily applied to overseas situations were applied to domestic politics. Sir William Molesworth's support for the Canadian radical rebels in 1837 translated into a lukewarm support for the People's Charter, which being an explicitly working class demand was viewed with suspicion. The moral force Chartist contingent on the PIL council were joined by the middle class radicals Douglas Jerrold, T. S. Duncombe, Dr. Epps, W. J. Fox, Dr. Bowring MP as well as the moderate working class radical William Carpenter, all of whom were only qualified supporters of the Charter. Margot Finn has noted that Chartist interest in and enthusiasm for the French government's experiments with socialistic interventionism in the labour market through Louis Blanc was a source of middle class scepticism.⁶³ Enthusiasm in France for the efforts of Ledru-Rollin to create an umbrella democratic movement including all who hoped to build social reform upon a foundation of universal suffrage attracted only limited middle class enthusiasm in Britain (such as the Christian socialists, Charles Kingsley and J. M. Ludlow).

However, co-operation with middle class radicals in support of overtly political overseas radical movements (such as the nationalist republican struggles in Hungary, Italy and Germany) did not entail any difficulty for radical co-operation. Radicals like James Watson supported overseas republican movements in alliance with non-Chartist middle class radicals but maintained a separate but fervent and active role in support of communitarian socialism. Moral force Chartists, like other social Chartists, aimed at democratic reform from which they expected a Republic would emerge which, representing the

⁶² Gregory Claeys, 'Mazzini, Kossuth, and British Radicalism, 1848-1854', *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), 225-61.

⁶³ Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 60-103.

whole people, would be cognisant of the need for social reform. Ultimately, though, the emphasis was on politics, on democracy as a source of virtuous government rather than anything approaching a workers' state. As Claeys argues, 'A more complex theory of the relationship of economics to politics had emerged' compared to a general early Chartist 'old corruption' analysis which sought freedom from government interference and taxation.⁶⁴ But though some social Chartists advocated nationalisation of land and even railways, mines and fisheries, they did so to emphasise their belief in and anticipation of the actions that a popularly accountable government would take, of good popular legislation instead of bad class legislation.

Finn has described the *democ-soc* nature of late Chartism as a process tied up with interest in continental radicalism and socialism from the late 1840s.⁶⁵ But we have seen that moral force Chartism was in fact *democ-soc* Chartism from the late 1830s and did not require the spark of overseas revolutions and ideology. Like moral force *democ-socs*, other social Chartists looked back to Spence as much as forward to labourism and socialism and did not depart from a politically centred radicalism, though there was a firmer conviction, derived to an extent from European socialism and Louis Blanc in particular, regarding the use of the state for positive social ends.⁶⁶ Social Chartism amounted to a recognition of the essential need for social and economic reform if a Chartist republic was to emerge from democratic reform. Indeed, social reform did not emerge as a separate concern from increased political democracy in British democratic politics until the 1880s, and even then suffrage reform continued to be seen as a stepping stone to deeper social change.⁶⁷

^{64.} Gregory Claeys, 'The Early Socialist Critique of Democracy in Britain', in David McLellan and Sean Sayers (eds.), *Socialism and Democracy* (Basingstoke, 1991), p. 116.

^{65.} Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 106-141.

^{66.} Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, pp. 117-18.

^{67.} Mark Bevir, 'Republicanism, Socialism, and Democracy', in Anthony Taylor and

If we see Chartist internationalism in these terms, rather than through later expectations of emergent socialism, we are closer to understanding the nature of Chartism and its language. Rather than a class language, a working class movement entering politics to secure social and economic change, what we see is a political language, a radical movement entering into a discourse of social and economic reform to eliminate expected obstacles to virtuous democratic governance. Rather than a class movement that overlaps with politics we have a political movement that overlaps with class. Obstacles such as land reform remained central to the efforts of liberal democratic politics into the early twentieth century and reflect more faithfully the concerns of social Chartists than late nineteenth century state socialism.⁶⁸ These obstacles, we have seen, were central concerns of moral force Chartists as much as to the most militant proponents of physical force. What separated moral force Chartists from mainstream social Chartists was not a lack of class consciousness but a stratagem that consciously played down class and emphasised the need to secure the support of all democrats for the Charter. Issues of how a democratic state should behave were left until after the means of advancing ideas of social and economic reform into practice - universal suffrage - had been achieved.

O'Connor and internationalism.

The Fraternal Democrats have been put forward as a more class conscious version of radical internationalism than that of internationalist bodies supported by moral force Chartists. Mainstream Chartism, too, has been regarded as more working class in its radicalism than the LWMA, NA and PCU. Yet it was

David Martin (eds.), *Republicanism in Victorian Society* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 73-89.

⁶⁸ David Martin, 'Land Reform', in Patricia Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England* (London, 1974), pp. 131-58.

Feargus O'Connor - the Chartist leader above all others to promote the connection of physical force Chartism to a working class constituency - who made the strongest challenge to the Fraternal Democrats and radical internationalism. The editor of the *Northern Star*, George Julian Harney, was a leading English Chartist member of the Fraternal Democrats and had modelled himself in his early Chartist career as a Jacobin and continued to look overseas for radical inspiration and models. Writing as 'L'Ami du Peuple' in a column in the *Northern Star* reviewing European radical movements, Harney bemoaned the 'moderate democrats' such as Lamartine whom he considered were responsible for the fall of the French Republic, offered a defence of Louis Blanc's socialist ideas and lauded Ledru Rollin as a moderate but principled radical.⁶⁹

However, O'Connor disliked the shift of emphasis that notice of overseas Republicanism necessitated. Glenn Airey has argued that O'Connor's fervent support for Irish repeal and of the cause of labour in overseas political struggles renders his subject an internationalist hue, his attacks on Republicanism being merely a misjudgement of the radical mood.⁷⁰ O'Connor's attacks, though, went further and meant more than Airey concedes. Rather than a 'knife and fork' movement tied to the need for land reform and the immediate improvement of the economic circumstances of the working classes, Republicanism meant a more abstract commitment to a form of government. O'Connor could hardly attack the principle of democracy upon which the Charter was based. Rather he linked the attention of his editor to overseas radical movements and social reform to 'foreign' socialism. Such doctrines, O'Connor asserted, did not allow of natural variations of ability and work-rate and were not conducive to political democracy or to social reform based on small land proprietorship. 'I implore of you', O'Connor appealed, 'never to allow your Political or Social Movement, or

⁶⁹. *Northern Star*, no.559, 8 July 1848, p. 4; no.569, 16 September 1848, p. 4; no.571, 30 September 1848, p. 5.

⁷⁰. Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 105-40.

the Land and Labour Question, to be mixed up with Communism or Socialism.’⁷¹ O’Connor sought, too, to link Republicanism to a narrow anti-monarchism, which, he argued, would achieve nothing in itself. The British monarchy was, he recognised, of so little practical political influence that to remove it would do little to remove false class distinctions. Rather it was the Charter that would install popular sovereignty in British government:

... with the Charter ... there would be no difference - not a particle between Monarchy and Republic, provided THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE WAS GREATER THAN THE THRONE ITSELF.⁷²

The precise form of government, O’Connor argued, was not important so long as the Charter was in place to secure popular sovereignty.⁷³ In this argument O’Connor was firmly on the centre ground of British radicalism. Definite anti-monarchism was rare amongst nineteenth century radical republicans. Though monarchy could be conceived as a barrier to a British republic it could also, for most British radicals, preside over a republican government.⁷⁴ But O’Connor’s anti-Republican letter cut across his established rhetoric and was met with surprise by readers of the *Northern Star*. Nottingham Chartists wrote to O’Connor that they did not agree with his attack on Republicanism, which brought the forthright reply that the *Northern Star* ‘has recently been too much of

⁷¹ *Northern Star*, no.588, 27 January 1849, p. 1.

⁷² *Northern Star*, no.593, 3 March 1849, p. 1.

⁷³ Pickering, ‘The Hearts of the Millions’: Chartism and Popular Monarchism’, pp. 247-48.

⁷⁴ Paul A. Pickering, ‘The Hearts of the Millions’: Chartism and Popular Monarchism in the 1840s’, *History*, 88 (2003), 227-48.. Antony Taylor, *Down with the Crown’: British Anti-monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), pp. 52-79; Antony Taylor, ‘Medium and Messages: Republicanism’s Traditions and Preoccupations’, in D. Nash and A. Taylor (eds.), *Republicanism in Victorian Society* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 1-11.

a foreign organ, to the exclusion of domestic intelligence.’⁷⁵

Harney, though, was equally forthright in his response to O’Connor. Support for overseas Republics, Harney explained, did not entail a damaging anti-monarchism, as Chartist internationalists ‘properly keep their mouths shut as regards this nation’.⁷⁶ Further, Harney rejected O’Connor’s anti-monarchist assertions by arguing that Republics were in fact defined by popular sovereignty and that ‘*true* Republicans value forms of Government only so far as those forms are calculated to arm the people with *power* - the power necessary to enable the masses to work out their social emancipation.’⁷⁷ A defence of overseas Republics was not at the expense of Chartism, as ‘a blow struck at the liberties of one people is intended to strike down the liberties of all’.⁷⁸ O’Connor was pushed on to the defensive, having to proclaim that he was not afraid of middle-class opinions and Harney, using O’Connor’s old trick, fended off O’Connor’s unwarranted attacks by presenting himself as a principled friend of the people.⁷⁹

O’Connor and the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association.

O’Connor’s exchanges with Harney were part of a process whereby during 1848 and beyond O’Connor declined as the most influential leader of the Chartist movement. His attack on Republicanism distanced him from those militant rhetoricians like Harney with whom he had previously made common cause. O’Connor had been elected an MP for Nottingham in 1847 but his Land Company had been beset by legal difficulties and internal dissension, which he

⁷⁵ *Northern Star*, no.594, 10 March 1849, p. 1.

⁷⁶ *Northern Star*, no.594, 10 March 1849, p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Northern Star*, no.594, 10 March 1849, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *Northern Star*, no.594, 10 March 1849, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *Northern Star*, no.595, 17 March 1849, p. 1; no.596, 24 March 1849, p. 5.

regarded as ingratitude for his services. As it became apparent that 1848 was to be a pivotal year for the Chartist movement, the movement's favoured stratagem was as it had been in 1839 - the use of the mass platform and mass petitioning. But O'Connor was no longer prepared to be the 'lion' he once had been. The famous Kennington Common Chartist meeting of 10 April 1848 has often been seen as the final whimper of a windy demagogue. In fact O'Connor's handling of the meeting was assured, seeking and gaining accommodation with the authorities to enable the meeting to proceed but accepting that a mass Chartist procession into the heart of London was prohibited by the real physical force of the state. This was moderate leadership, pushing the principle of freedom of assembly but willing to forego a procession that could well end in disturbance and arrests. O'Connor had in fact become what the LWMA in the late 1830s had sought to attract to the Charter, a committed parliamentary radical.⁸⁰ O'Connor's leadership in 1848, though, became submerged beneath a myth of the defeat of a violent mob leader by the government and the middle classes.⁸¹ This myth was built on the previous ten years of O'Connor's leadership, a renewed rhetorically militant wing and the revival of secret insurrectionary activity after the rejection of the largest Chartist National Petition to date.

O'Connor was not as prominent a physical force proponent as he had been in the early movement. In 1848 the force behind the regeneration of the mass platform came from the efforts of Ernest Jones, a new 'gentleman' leader converted to the Chartist cause in 1846, as well as new figures such as G. W. M. Reynolds, who used the revival of the platform to launch their radical careers.⁸² Furthermore,

⁸⁰ Stephen Roberts, 'Feargus O'Connor in the House of Commons, 1847-1852', in *The Chartist Legacy*, pp. 102-118.

⁸¹ Henry Weisser, *April 10. Challenge and Response in England in 1848* (London, 1983), pp. 146-51.

⁸² Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, pp. 146-70; Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, pp. 107-111, 137-94. On Reynolds see: Rohan McWilliam, 'The Mysteries of G. W. M. Reynolds: Radicalism and Melodrama in Victorian Britain', in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds.), *Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison*, pp. 182-98.

O'Connor opposed the proposal for a National Assembly to follow the rejection of the National Petition, a move that meant that he was absent during a critical phase of Chartist deliberations during 1848 which provided a platform for unopposed attacks on his leadership.⁸³ With little sign of the movement being determined to back up such threatening postures, O'Connor effectively abandoned the physical force mass platform.⁸⁴ This move began the process of the ostracisation of O'Connor from mainstream Chartism that continued with his attacks on internationalism and socialism in early 1849.

O'Connor was elected to the executive of the NCA in 1848 but stood aloof from it. By then he had clearly reached the end of the *cul de sac* that, in the absence of a mass organised movement, the strategy of class rhetoric had taken his leadership and the Chartist mainstream. He became convinced of the need to draw out the shopkeeping section of the middle classes, which, because their profits were tied to the economic well-being of the working classes, he claimed he had always deemed possible and desirable. Thus O'Connor's class rhetoric had always been to show both the working classes and sections of the middle classes 'the ripe plum over the garden wall',⁸⁵ but he continued to oppose efforts to present an alternative radical programme short of the Charter. In October 1848 O'Connor attacked the 'little Charter' of Joseph Hume MP as an effort at self-interested middle-class radicalism.⁸⁶ This was combined with his underconsumptionist economic analysis which argued that the unfair distribution of the product of labour served eventually to depress the domestic economy. The elevation of the false logic of free-trade, O'Connor argued, benefited only

⁸³ Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 35-39.

⁸⁴ John Belchem, 'Feargus O'Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform', in *The Chartist Experience*, pp. 269-310.

⁸⁵ *Northern Star*, no.578, 18 November 1848, p. 1.

⁸⁶ The 'little Charter' consisted of a commitment to the ballot, triennial parliaments, household suffrage and more equal electoral districts.

middle men and served to depress wages by cheapening the price of bread.⁸⁷

In 1849, however, his opposition to Hume's efforts mellowed into non-opposition and acceptance that the 'little Charter' would spread knowledge and increase the suffrage even if it was partial and served as an obstruction to support for the Charter.⁸⁸ O'Connor's position mellowed even further when Hume supported his motion for the Charter in a hostile House of Commons. Such support, O'Connor claimed, 'will ... tend to accelerate the progress of the movement out of doors, and to unite the middle and working classes more cordially than they have been for many years.'⁸⁹ Somewhat surprisingly, given O'Connor's attacks on the LWMA, 'new move' and CSU, he urged Chartists to 'avail themselves of every legitimate opportunity of influencing public opinion, for urging the question upon the attention of Parliament.'⁹⁰

Such a shift serves to confirm that O'Connor's physical force had strategic rather than meaningful class content. O'Connor was not one of the new theorists of class exploitation in the vein of O'Brien or J. F. Bray but a popular politician with a desire to materially improve the lot of the British working classes and with an emphasis on individual small land holding. O'Connor spoke to the working classes because it was their poverty that he sought to eradicate and he spoke against the middle classes because it was their political economy that needed refuting in order to deny poverty. O'Connor was in this sense a politician of the working classes but he was in no sense socialistic. He rejected Owenism and the ideas of Blanc and his commitment to democracy was not abstract but extended only to the need for the political inclusion of the working classes in order that their representatives would have to answer for their welfare.

⁸⁷. *Northern Star*, no.574, 21 October 1848, p. 1; no.575, 28 October 1848, p. 1.

⁸⁸. *Northern Star*, no.590, 10 February 1849, p. 1; no.607, 9 June 1849, p. 1.

⁸⁹. *Northern Star*, no.611, 7 July 1849, p. 4.

⁹⁰. *Northern Star*, no.611, 7 July 1849, p. 4.

O'Connor's contribution to attacking *laissez faire* was considerable and based on a rejection of free-trade in favour of domestic protectionism and a practical solution of returning labourers to the soil to remove surplus labour from the labour force. This was powerful and emotive politics, meeting traditional radicalism and class language but avoiding socialistic ideology. It was what Joyce and Vernon have called populism, an identity including class but in several respects also going around and beyond it.

Thus in the second half of 1849 O'Connor could, without any internal ideological struggle, adopt a strategy of class conciliation. Airey has argued that O'Connor's political attitude towards the middle classes was consistent and based on avoiding self-interested moves by its exploitative section but favouring pragmatic alliance with its productive section based on the Chartist six points.⁹¹ While this explains O'Connor's attitude towards the Anti-Corn Law League, which was seen widely as a middle class diversion from suffrage agitation, it does little to explain O'Connor's vociferous opposition to the CSU, which came far closer to Chartism than did the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association (PFRA) which O'Connor was to support. O'Connor's political attitude to the middle classes was, rather, inconsistent and this was noted by Chartists who had followed O'Connor in the late 1830s and 1840s. O'Connor's commitment to mass politics had been in imitation of the intimidating working class tails of Henry Hunt and Daniel O'Connell and of the threat of social disorder deployed by the middle classes in 1832. His appeals to class unity had been in these terms. O'Connor's use of class rhetoric accorded with a heightened feeling of class amongst working-class radicals in the late 1830s and early 1840s but was an effective rhetorical construction combining class, 'knife and fork' and radical politics.

The self and collective image of Chartism as a 'pure' political movement with noble aims fighting against a corrupt political establishment with aristocratic

⁹¹. Airey, 'Feergus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 79-104.

aims allowed O'Connor to present the LMWA and NA as tainted by corrupt politics. The other side of rhetorical effectiveness was that Chartism, in deriving and borrowing so much strength from several rhetorical and ideological sources, could not muster a sustained coherency and political challenge to effect a 'new populist alignment'.⁹² By the late 1840s O'Connor's leadership had alienated several prominent middle-class and working-class radical leaders and Chartist populism had begun to give way to a smaller and more ideologically aware agitation. O'Connor's strategy of class confrontation and mass working-class radical mobilisation had run its course by 1849 and O'Connor had no compunction in offering his hand in a marriage with parliamentary reformers to effect a reduced Charter of manhood suffrage, the ballot, equal electoral districts, no property qualifications and triennial parliaments. O'Connor's move towards the PFRA was not a misjudgement based on an otherwise consistent line towards the middle classes but a desperate lurch from a leader who did not fit into an disintegrating, fractious but more politically self-confident movement.⁹³

In September 1849 O'Connor announced the new attempt at confederacy with the Chartists by the PFRA, a body that attracted the nominal support of Lovett, Vincent and Holyoake.⁹⁴ Its leading members such as Lord Nugent, Lord Dudley Stuart, Sir Joshua Walmsley and George Thompson MP were not, O'Connor claimed, amongst those who lived upon labour or by speculation. There was a need, O'Connor continued, for a debate about Chartist co-operation with the PFRA that should be conducted 'with moderation, and without the slightest vituperation or personal animosity'.⁹⁵ The jaws of those who had been subjected to O'Connor's very immoderate condemnation for suggesting class conciliation

⁹² John Belchem, 'Beyond *Chartist Studies*', p. 119.

⁹³ Airey, 'Feargus O'Connor 1842 - 1855', pp. 141-50.

⁹⁴ Nicholas C. Edsall, 'A Failed National Movement: the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, 1848-54', *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research*, XLIX (1976), 108-31.

⁹⁵ *Northern Star*, no.622, 22 September 1849, p. 1.

must have dropped and done so even further when O'Connor went on to claim that a moderate debate 'is a better mode of enlightening the public than mere platform orations. The people can calmly consider and judge in one case, whereas, they may be led away by enthusiasm in the other'.⁹⁶ O'Connor, contradicting his entire strategy of the past decade, now argued that there was a need to create public opinion before it could be directed. Further, given such an opportunity for radical co-operation, Chartists should not 'foolishly throw away such an opportunity as may never again occur'.⁹⁷

James Leach, an NCA stalwart, wrote to the *Northern Star* in astonishment at O'Connor's position. How could Lord Nugent and friends not be living on the poor, he asked, when O'Connor had always taught the movement 'that those who did not labour themselves, had nothing for it but to live upon the labour of others'.⁹⁸ Leach applied the same rules to the PFRA as O'Connor had to the CSU, that confidence could be placed in such radicals 'when they have shown, by their exertions and perseverance that they are in earnest'.⁹⁹ But the *Northern Star* now reported PFRA meetings and letters in favour of class co-operation. Hume, Walmsley and Parry, all of whom had been vilified by O'Connor as middle-class betrayers of Chartism, were all praised for their PFRA activity and O'Connor concluded the 'debate' in the *Northern Star* with an appeal to 'co-operate - not only cordially, but heartily and effectively - with our new allies, who have at length discovered, that with us they are powerful, without us they are powerless.'¹⁰⁰

^{96.} *Northern Star*, no.622, 22 September 1849, p. 1.

^{97.} *Northern Star*, no.622, 22 September 1849, p. 1.

^{98.} *Northern Star*, no.624, 6 October 1849, p. 1; no.625, 13 October 1849, p. 1; no.627, 27 October 1849, p. 1.

^{99.} *Northern Star*, no.623, 29 September 1849, p. 1.

^{100.} *Northern Star*, no.624, 6 October 1849, p. 1; no.625, 13 October 1849, p. 1; no.627, 27 October 1849, p. 1.

Though O'Connor had reversed his position and was attacking the PFRA by 1851, in the second half of 1849 he effectively abandoned the Charter as the uncompromising goal of his political activity and assisted the PFRA in promoting radical class co-operation to end government 'finality' regarding further political reform.¹⁰¹ Moral force Chartism had always argued against attacking more moderate agitations for political reform but had held to the Charter as the standard of principle against expediency. By 1849 O'Connor's position and indeed that of the *Northern Star* had fallen a long way from the heady days of the late 1830s and early 1840s. So too had the NCA which, having promised to organise Chartism into an effective force, had been torn apart by disillusion, disagreements over strategy and personal disputes. Moderates had long argued for a loose alliance based on a political commitment to the Charter leaving questions as to its effects until after its achievement. This approach had been pitted against those who favoured a more combative adherence to the Charter as a political movement with overt, if vague, social ends. We have examined this struggle in the early NCA around the leadership of O'Connor. In the late 1840s and into the 1850s it continued around Harney and Ernest Jones.

Moral force and the Chartist mainstream in late Chartism.

In 1848 three prominent NCA leaders emerged as moderate contenders for its leadership, Samuel Kydd, Thomas Clark and Philip McGrath, the latter two having been central figures in the Chartist Land Company and all having being close colleagues of O'Connor. With O'Connor's star declining and social Chartists becoming increasingly influential, it was these leaders who were moved to stand fast to the Charter and to emphasise its political character and appeal to all classes for support. Elements of moral force Chartism emerged as strong currents within the declining NCA.

¹⁰¹. Edsall, 'A Failed National Movement', pp. 130-31.

Kydd was foremost in the NCA as a lecturer specialising in tackling free-trade economics and promoting protectionism but in 1848 he occupied a central position in the Chartist movement as a proponent of moderation in the face of insurrectionary currents.¹⁰² After the failure of the revival of the Chartist mass platform in early 1848 an atmosphere of expectation of secret insurrectionary activity came to dominate the movement. In many ways this was similar to the atmosphere prevailing in late 1839 following the failure of the Petition and ulterior measures. The response of Kydd was to appeal for caution and peaceful organisation in the face of rumours of Chartist risings. 'In England', Kydd urged in July 1848, 'society nor government never can be changed by any secret conclave.'¹⁰³ Rather, Kydd argued

Open, determined, and firm action, supported by reason, and a respect for the rights of others, are the only legitimate means of effecting changes in our laws, institutions, and government' ...¹⁰⁴

Kydd was a member of the Chartist executive along with McGrath and Clark and it also took a cautious line in 1848. In October the executive urged that the only remedy for damaging misconceptions of the Chartist movement was in 'the character given to your body from your acts', which necessitated 'a persevering and peaceful propagation of your principles ... using reason as the only legitimate weapon in political discussion'.¹⁰⁵ This critique of the movement placed intellect at the centre of Chartist growth:

¹⁰² Stephen Roberts, 'Samuel Kydd', in *Radical Politicians and Poets in Early Victorian Britain. The Voices of Six Chartist Leaders* (Lampeter, 1993), pp. 107-27.

¹⁰³ *Northern Star*, no.560, 15 July 1848, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Northern Star*, no.560, 15 July 1848, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Northern Star*, no.573, 14 October 1848, p. 1.

Intelligence and organisation are as essential to success as are numbers and display. ... To beget and direct this intelligence; to gather together, and control the elements of this organisation is ... the only object of our existence as a political body ...¹⁰⁶

However, despite Kydd's moderating influence and his position as secretary of the NCA, the Chartist movement saw no sign of revival but, rather, continued to lose its mass character and to fragment. Kydd, seeing no sign of results from his exertions and citing a lack of support, resigned as secretary of the NCA in October 1849.¹⁰⁷ He continued as an active NCA member but now sought to link up with more intellectual Chartist politics, responding favourably to Cooper's proposal for a Progress Union in early 1850.¹⁰⁸ By now it was clear that reorganisation was the last hope of Chartist revival. Kydd reflected that what was wanted was thinking, which was a prerequisite of human progress:

... our workmen should become thinkers ... Nothing short of universal thought can save us: plug-plots, stack-burnings, and hunger mobs, will do nothing towards what is really wanted ... we have not yet got an application of means to wants. And how are we to get it, except by increased thinkings and increased knowings? ... the ignorant, of whatever faith, creed, or party, cannot save the people: the people must save themselves.¹⁰⁹

^{106.} *Northern Star*, no.578, 18 November 1848, p. 6.

^{107.} *Northern Star*, no.627, 27 October 1849, p. 1.

^{108.} *Cooper's Journal or Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom and Progress*, no. 2, 12 January 1850, p. 22. Kydd eventually transformed his democracy and protectionism into a Tory radicalism and his intellect into a successful career as a lawyer. His 1888 *A Sketch of the Growth of Public Opinion*, barely mentioned Chartism (Roberts, 'Samuel Kydd', p. 107).

^{109.} *Cooper's Journal*, no. 1, 5 January 1850, p. 4.

A meeting to revive Chartism in November 1849 was again dominated by moderates with O'Connor, McGrath and Clark pushing for a movement that would not attack the PFRA but act in harmony with middle class radicals. Harney, Reynolds and William Dixon, however, were in favour of the established mainstream position of opposition to the middle classes. A moderate line was adopted though, the meeting resolving that 'it is no example of violence nor menace that we would set you. The agitation we call upon you to resuscitate, is a peaceful and a moral one'.¹¹⁰ Both McGrath and Clark had emerged from the experience of 1848 as class conciliators having previously opposed the CSU and anti-Corn Law movements in the early 1840s and then being important activists for the Land plan.¹¹¹ A struggle for what remained of the Chartist movement took place in the early 1850s, a struggle which has often been told from the standpoint of the explicitly social Chartists as the last stand against class collaboration.¹¹² McGrath and Clark, though, were just as much a part of the late Chartist struggle and they represented a strand of Chartism that had always been prepared to co-operate with sympathetic movements. NCA politics, at its decline, contained proponents of vital tenets of moral force Chartism - the need for moderation to maximise radical class co-operation and popular understanding of radical principles.

Explicitly social Chartism, though, was on the offensive. O'Connor's support for the PFRA made him an easy target of hostility for Harney. At a meeting to establish a National Charter Union in 1849, Harney attacked O'Connor for dictating, through the *Northern Star*, a Chartist policy in favour of co-operation with the PFRA.¹¹³ In late 1849, O'Brien, who had appeared on the PCU platform

^{110.} *Northern Star*, no.628, 3 November 1849, p. 1.

^{111.} Stephen Roberts, 'Thomas Clark', in *Radical Politicians*, pp. 89-105.

^{112.} Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, pp. 171-98.

^{113.} *Northern Star*, no.634, 15 December 1849, p. 5, 8; no. 635, 22 December 1849, p. 8.

in 1848, began to urge social reform proposals as important policies linked to political rights.¹¹⁴ In founding the National Reform League (NRL) O'Brien attached his proposals for the state control of land, fisheries and credit and the establishment of exchange marts.¹¹⁵ Holyoake and Linton were supportive of the new association, linking as it did the political aim with the social end, though they never actively backed it. Rather they saw it as a welcome shot of principle into Chartism against the expediency of support for the PFRA and doubtless responded to the emphasis of the NRL on ideas, that 'the enlightenment of the people as to what they Charter ought and could do for them' and its commitment

to teach the people, if they could get at them, their just, natural, and inalienable rights – neither more nor less – and when the people fully appreciated those rights they would agitate for the Charter with that untiring constancy and enthusiasm which the cause required.¹¹⁶

Holyoake and Linton, we have seen, were certainly not proto-socialists in the same vein as O'Brien. But they felt enthused by his commitment to democratic principles and his recognition that these principles went beyond politics to social change. Holyoake, though, far more than Linton, was prepared to accept instalments on principles and went on to promote secularism, co-operation and political reform on a piecemeal basis over the next fifty years.¹¹⁷ Linton went on to write republican articles for Harney's *Red Republican* and publish the *English Republic* from 1853 to 1855, a Mazzinian journal, before emigrating to

^{114.} *Northern Star*, no.629, 10 November 1849, p. 1.

^{115.} *Northern Star*, no.630, 17 November 1849, p. 8.

^{116.} *Northern Star*, no.632, 1 December 1849, p. 7.

^{117.} Barbara J. Blaszak, *George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) and the Development of the British Cooperative Movement* (Lampeter, 1988), p. 79.

America.¹¹⁸ Both Chartists were active in post-O'Connor NCA politics in the early 1850s, Linton being elected to its executive in 1852 and Holyoake serving as its last secretary. Their relationship with more militant social Chartists was strained. Holyoake's relationship with Harney, for example, was complicated and, though Harney disagreed with what he perceived as Holyoake's haste to compromise with middle-class reformers, by 1853 Harney, too, had been forced to accept the practical necessity of moderation.¹¹⁹ Though Ernest Jones refused to compromise until 1858, the Chartist Republicans, Linton, Holyoake, Harney and W. E. Adams, had long since been under the patronage of the wealthy Newcastle radical, Joseph Cowen.

The PCU promoted true moral force Chartism in the late Chartist period. They recognised the need for radical class co-operation and for popular understanding of radical principles, possessed an optimism as to social reform to follow democratic reform that lent vigour to their politics and offered a critique of demagogic leadership and physical force rhetoric as damaging and misguided approaches to radical reform. Into the early 1850s the core of the defunct PCU survived to form a new association to repeal the remaining duty on newspapers. The LWMA had emerged from the first such campaign and PCU radicals such as James Watson and Richard Moore again elected to fight for the freedom of the press. Holyoake and Linton, too, appended their names to the campaign against the newspaper tax and reflected the commitment to social reform that had always existed behind the political moderation of moral force Chartism. Within the NCA, it was O'Connor's ex-lieutenants McGrath, Clark and Kydd who promoted class co-operation within a Chartist mainstream in decline. In April 1850 McGrath and Clark founded the National Charter League (NCL) committed to strenuous exertion for the achievement of the People's Charter with 'tolerance and fraternity' and only through 'moral agencies'. What is more the NCL argued

¹¹⁸. Smith, *Radical Artisan*, pp. 89-126.

¹¹⁹. Royle, 'Chartists and Owenites', 14-16.

that Chartism had emerged from the enlightened 'manual-labour classes' but had been stunted by its lack of 'sincere co-operation with that section of the middle-class, who are anxious to promote the cause of freedom'.¹²⁰ Important facets of moral force Chartism had finally become accepted by leading members of a declining mainstream.

¹²⁰ Birmingham Central Library, Lovett Papers, part 4, ff. 298 a-c, 3 April 1850.

Conclusion:

Chartism, Social Reform and Class Co-operation.

By the early 1850s Chartism was firmly in decline. Physical force Chartism had created an impressive popular movement but it was one that fixed the attention of the upper and middle classes on defeating it. Moral force Chartism had been left behind as a prominent strategy during the course of early Chartism when a populist mass movement grew up around O'Connor. But it was moral force Chartism, at the ebbing of the movement, that provided the example of radical strategy that would ultimately gain converts from the upper and middle classes and achieve political reform. Just as the LWMA owed its existence to the moderate political strategy of those with an co-operative-socialist social programme, Chartists 'and something more' such as Harney, Jones and O'Brien all eventually had to concede the limitations of pressing for political reform linked to an overt commitment to social reform. O'Connor's strategy of using class rhetoric on a mass platform to intimidate opponents, after its collapse in 1848, was no longer a viable strategic direction. In any case, if prominent social Chartists had supported O'Connor because of the appeal of his class rhetoric and the hope of rapid success, this had been, after 1839 - when even Lovett had co-operated with physical force - an act of hope over realistic expectation. We have seen in chapters II and III that, despite differences and tension over strategy, early Chartism had been forged around the expectation of success for a radical movement drawing on the tactics of the LWMA, BPU and the O'Connorite mass platform.

This thesis has conceded O'Connor's important contribution to the creation of Chartism as a mass movement and his political, oratorical and journalistic skill, but we have seen that we cannot take literally his skilful flourishes of class rhetoric. Even O'Connor, briefly in 1849, flirted with co-operation with the PFRA. His strategy had come to change as it met political reality but it was a

reality of which moral force Chartists - whom O'Connor dismissed so skilfully as 'middle class' - had been aware from the earliest days of Chartism. It has been shown in chapters II and IV that O'Connor's attacks on his moral force opponents have been taken by recent historians as a description of Chartist moderates as literally middle class in politics and outside a 'genuine' movement drawing on working-class consciousness. This had been sustained by references to the 'elitism' of the LWMA and NA but does not deal with the pervasive nature of aspects of moral force strategy which, as we have seen in chapters V, VI and VII, were also present in the career of the proto-socialist O'Brien and within the NCA mainstream.

Moral force Chartism had always been concerned with achieving lasting radical political reform and emphasised the importance of a protracted, gradual struggle to secure widespread understanding of radical principles and a large measure of public support. Central to this political method was education and the need to co-operate with those prepared to support political reform even if they did not wish to see radical social reform as its result. Moral force Chartism had always been concerned with making the misrepresentation of its political aims as difficult as possible in order to secure the maximum support and the least opposition possible and to promote an atmosphere conducive to an emphasis on the diffusion of radical political principles. But through such an approach the basis of further radical social reform would be secured through a state with an electorate extended to a large section of the working classes. We have seen that this approach had been the agreed strategy of the LWMA, NA and PCU but that elements of it had also been present within the mainstream movement. O'Connor did much to discredit the moral force Chartist strategy and isolate some of Chartism's most able and influential leaders from the movement that they had helped to create and sustain. But his class rhetoric belied a social vision that was paternalist and far more conservative than that of his moral force opponents. Whilst O'Connor had, in the early and middle years of the movement, refused to engage in debates about social theory - Owenism, for example - in the late 1840s his views were revealed through the Land Plan and

his attack on Harney over his republicanism and 'foreign' socialism. The veil was cast from O'Connor's class rhetoric - behind his popularity was revealed a relatively conservative and paternal vision.

Throughout this thesis we have seen that some recent historians of Chartism have established an orthodoxy whereby individuals and sections within the Chartist movement are judged according to assumptions of the centrality of class in the Chartist experience. This elevation of class struggle in Chartist history has resulted in Chartism being seen as 'an essential phase in the growth of working-class consciousness in Britain' and its success judged according to whether it 'helped or hindered the final emancipation of the British workers'.¹ In this interpretation Chartism is accorded the status of a class movement and O'Connor - because of his role as the most popular Chartist leader, despite this relating to his Tory radical social vision - a position as a spokesman for the politically conscious working-class. But Chartism was a movement for democratic advance in an undemocratic social and political environment.

Class consciousness was an important factor within the Chartist movement but moral force Chartism was concerned to avoid the use of class rhetoric in order to accent radical principles and persuade potential middle class and parliamentary supporters to back the Charter. This was not a deviation from 'true' class-based Chartism. An emphasis on cross-class radical co-operation, political education and gradualism was not an aberrant direction but a calculated strategy to secure radical political reform in a challenging social and political context. The background of the moral force Chartist strategy has been shown in chapter II to have been a belief in innate rationality and the centrality of knowledge in human progress. It therefore had little in common with the strategy of physical force and its threat of social disturbance. Moral force Chartists had always argued that social and political conflict would lead to the failure of radical reform. In such

¹ Dorothy Thompson, 'Chartism, Success or Failure?', in D. Rubinstein (ed.), *People for the People: Radical Ideas and Personalities in British History* (London, 1973), p. 96.

conditions middle-class radicals would withdraw support from all but their own, limited, political reforms and leave a turbulent working-class radical movement susceptible to demagoguery and reaction. What was needed instead of social division, moral force Chartists argued, was a recognition of and agreement on broad radical principles to unite radical reformers of all hues in a campaign for a large measure of political democracy. But such methods were far from being 'middle class', as from such beginnings it was expected that the achievement of radical reform - based as it would be on a groundswell of support and understanding amongst all classes - would be unassailable and the principles and benefits of democracy would extend slowly but surely to radical social reform.

Although the influence of moral force Chartism was limited due to the dominance of O'Connor, co-operation with moderate liberals was a serious and realistic path for Chartist activism. An insight into the nature of moral force Chartism and its position as a genuine Chartist current can be gained by a glance at the experience of late Chartism. Localities where Chartism remained strong after 1848 did not experience the easy absorption or co-option of Chartist radicalism into liberalism. Radicals who had been involved in a movement that had put so much emphasis on the radical principles of the Charter could not easily accept the need to co-operate with a reduced political programme. Tension existed between those who sought co-operation with moderates to achieve partial gains and those who wanted to stick to 'whole hog' radical principles. Miles Taylor has argued that Chartism was an interlude of radical class disharmony caused by a radical critique of middle class 'betrayal' in 1832 and, later, of middle class materialism.² It is suggested by Taylor that Chartist radicals could be absorbed into a democratic wing of mid-Victorian liberalism. However, the experience in localities such as Halifax, where Chartism remained strong after 1848, suggests otherwise. Support for local liberals was often too qualified to be labelled as absorption: 'The political passage of Chartism into

² Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 99-123.

popular Liberalism was never an easy, passive, untroubled or complete process in Halifax.³

Moral force Chartism had always been about achieving a qualified co-operation with influential middle class and parliamentary radicals. Although Liberalism gained the ascendancy from the 1850s and though many Chartists later became radical Liberals, the fierce independence that characterised Chartism remained, though it does not fit easily into narratives of liberal continuity. A re-convergence occurred between working- and middle-class radical politics in the 1850s to a significant degree based upon a shared belief in anti-aristocratic popular political reform. This was rendered possible only by the defeat of Chartism and the realisation on both working and middle class sides that class alliance had to be entered upon, even if with scepticism and lack of enthusiasm. This made possible the popular Liberalism of the 1860s and 1870s and gave credence to the Whig myth of gradual progress into which Chartism could be fitted as an agitation before its time. An alternative memory, however, of Chartism as an independent working-class radical movement persisted into the late nineteenth century.⁴ Chartism was neither an interregnum of class politics nor a bridge between the pre-Reform 'people' and mid-Victorian Liberalism. Chartism and its legacy continued to offer challenges to the expediency of the politics of Liberalism, which never managed total hegemony over the rankling feeling for independent working-class radical politics to achieve greater political representation. Moral force Chartism was at least as much a part of this tradition of independent working-class radical politics as was 'O'Connorite radicalism' and the Chartist mainstream.

Although political reform along the lines of the Charter was supported by

³ Kate Tiller, 'Late Chartism: Halifax 1847-58', in *The Chartist Experience*, p. 340; Benjamin Wilson, 'The Struggles of an Old Chartist' (Halifax, 1887), in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments of Radicalism*, pp. 193-242.

⁴ J. B. Leno, *The Aftermath* (London, 1892, reprinted NY, 1986).

members of the moderate radical-liberal middle class, radical commitment amongst social Chartists was always about achieving social reform in the long term. Despite the influence of Lovett's autobiography and O'Connor's attacks in the *Northern Star*, we have seen that moral force Chartists were not arch-moderates but generally advocates of social reform who adopted a pragmatic strategy of co-operation with middle class and parliamentary radicals. Chartism was, therefore, foremost a political movement but also, in a broad sense, a class movement. It was a political movement because the British legislature had in living memory provided partial law and could, at a stroke, be seen as a source of social improvement through equal representation. It was a class movement because the social inequality of early industrial Britain created vast social unhappiness which it was anticipated could be begun to be addressed by a radically reformed Parliament.

Politics and class were intertwined and it is difficult to separate social and economic experience from the analytical frame through which it was interpreted. Margot Finn has argued that, despite the similarity of language between working- and middle-class radicalism, middle class responses to working-class radicalism revealed a very real political class divide.⁵ John Saville has also argued persuasively for the drawing in of the ranks of property and the use of the full force of the British state in the face of a perceived serious Chartist threat in 1848.⁶ But no simple correlation existed between the working class and radicalism, and the ruling class and reaction. Social division was real, but democratic, Owenite-co-operative and Republican ideas were universal and expressed a class-transcendent vision of a possible future British republic. Though the revived post-Chartist political language of the 'people' may suggest a continuity from pre-Chartist politics and that the Chartist movement had to all appearances failed, there had been a seismic shift in British class politics.

⁵ Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 60-106, pp. 142-87.

⁶ John Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge, 1987).

Chartism cannot be explained simply as a class movement but neither could democracy be advanced without a huge change in the balance of class power. Post-Chartist politics witnessed not the absorption of working-class radicalism into Liberalism but negotiation between emergent democracy and its social implications. Moral force Chartism was an anticipation of this later problematic conciliation. Rejecting O'Connor's combative strategy, it attempted to steer a path between the desire to challenge social inequality and the opposition of the social and political establishment.

The social and economic experience of the early nineteenth century played a part in the formation of moral force ambitions every bit as critical as that of the existing language of political radicalism. Expressions of an awareness of class in ways that sought to bridge rather than widen the class divide were not an indicator of 'middle class' conciliation. Rather, they were part of an openly held belief that democratic reform was but a first step in securing a more equitable and just society. But for democratic reforms to be conducive of such social advances the support of all classes had to be gained to prevent social and political turbulence that might produce a return to class society. Moral force Chartism was a genuine and significant element in the Chartist movement and its importance in its history deserves more recognition than recent historiography has granted.

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