

# The Political Thought of the Chartist Movement

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## Thesis summary

Title: The Political Thought of the Chartist Movement

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The Chartist movement was the mass-movement for constitutional reform in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Chartism is one of the most written about subjects in modern British history, yet the ideas of the movement remain strangely neglected. This thesis tackles this problem by examining Chartist ideas along a broad front. By examining the political thought of a movement, rather than a select number of highly educated intellectuals, this thesis also makes a statement about how to study popular political ideas.

Chapter One locates the foundations of Chartist political thought in the movement's social and cultural context. It asks what the Chartists read and were able to read, how they viewed knowledge and education, and the religious basis of Chartist intellectualism. Chapter Two turns to Chartist political theory, in particular, the Chartist interpretation of the British constitution. It is shown that Chartists drew on a sophisticated conception of the common law that rooted the British Constitution in natural law. Chapter Three considers Chartism's economic ideas, which, it is argued, must be understood in relation to their understanding of classical political economy. Chapter Four examines Chartist natural-right arguments alongside the ideas of non-Chartist radicals. Finally, Chapter Five traces the careers of a number of Chartists and the influence of Chartist ideas in America. It also attempts to take account of what Chartism meant to Americans. By considering these topics, this thesis provides a clearer impression of why ideas were important to the Chartists, what sort of ideas the Chartists held, and the legacies of Chartist ideas for democratic politics later in the century.



## Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words, excluding notes.

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# Acknowledgements

When I told my then-supervisor, Malcolm Chase, that I intended to apply for a PhD he passed on a warning that J. F. C. Harrison had given to him: ‘Academia is a long and lonely road that many set out on and few finish.’ The road has indeed been long, but it has not been lonely. For that I have a number of people to thank. First, Malcolm himself, whose contagious enthusiasm for Chartism gifted me a subject. Second, my friends, both in Cambridge and back home in Preston. I am particularly grateful to St Catharine’s College for providing a welcoming and vibrant community. I am also grateful to my College for providing funds for fieldwork and conferences; to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for funding the bulk of my research; and to the Centre for History of Economics, for a generous research grant and countless cups of tea. My academic debts are too numerous to detail here. Deserving special praise is my advisor, Gareth Stedman Jones, whose intellectual influence on what follows will be clear. My greatest debt is to my supervisor Eugenio Biagini. Whether discussing the nineteenth century or our many digressions into contemporary politics, Eugenio is always insightful and engaging. I wish to thank him for his enthusiasm, dedication, but above all for making me a better historian. Finally, a special thanks to my parents who have not pretended to understand what it is that I do, but whose support has always been unconditional.

# Illustrations

1. Page: 141: Marshall's Mill, *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841
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5. Page: 243: Gen. M. M. Trumbull, c. 1890. Trumbull, *Articles and Discussions of the Labour Question* (Chicago, 1890).
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# Introduction

She alluded, in a soul-stirring manner, to what she termed ‘the glorious achievement of American independence,’ and gloried in the act, the principle which led to it, and the brave British descendants who, against all the odds, means, and appliances of indomitable tyranny, and peculating knavery, [that] accomplished it... She showed that ‘Liberty is the inherent right of man’ – a gift interwoven with his existence, by the unsullied hand of nature, one of whose brightest laws it constitutes; and that tyrant man, in setting himself up against it, is ‘traitor’ and ‘rebel’ to Nature’s God.

– *New York Herald*, 19 November 1842

## I. A Problem

Chartism was the mass movement for democratic constitutional reform that rose to prominence in the late-1830s and 1840s. Through its mass meetings and huge petitions, vibrant culture, and extensive network of print media, Chartism mobilised hundreds of thousands of people the length and breadth of the country. Chartism is also the subject of a wealth of accounts and histories written from a variety of perspectives, but the movement’s political thought has not received the attention it deserves. The power and reach of Chartist political thought is demonstrated by this introduction’s epigraph. Susan Inge, the secretary of the City of London Female Chartist Association, first came to the attention of the British public in July 1842 as the author of an address ‘to the women of England’.<sup>1</sup> Her profile then rose after a series of powerful speeches and lectures on the Charter and the right of women to participate in politics; at least one of these lectures made its way to America.<sup>2</sup> Inge’s short address and its American dissemination neatly capture the overlapping themes of this thesis. In her lecture, Inge defined Chartism in intellectual terms. Chartism was about liberty, which was an ‘inherent right of man’, and inextricably linked to God and nature.

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<sup>1</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 July 1842.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Crail, ‘Susan Inge (1820–1902)’, online at: <http://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/susanna-inge-1820-1902/>

Chartism was also about democracy, or self-government, and was inspired by the achievement of American Independence. The latter was of particular relevance for British reformers because it was carried out by ‘British descendants’ who had thrown off British tyranny; the very tyranny against which the Chartists were now contending.

In order to understand such utterances, this thesis places them in their discursive context and shows how Chartists drew on political languages to address key political issues. To do so, this thesis bridges two bodies of historiography. On the one side sits traditional Chartist historiography, which is firmly located within British social and cultural history. These approaches have produced a tremendous amount of scholarship on aspects of Chartist culture, Chartism’s national and local contexts, and the movement’s leading personalities. Unlike many areas of radical and labour history, Chartist historians have given sustained attention to the role of women and the gendered nature of Chartist discourse. Moreover, Chartist studies has also branched out into areas of literary history, especially concerning the movement’s poetry. Despite this diversity, the study of Chartism is rooted in an historiographical tradition which sees ‘the application of the methods of intellectual history to plebeian movements [as] inappropriate.<sup>3</sup> In consequence, Chartist historians tend to explain ideas in relation to something else, for example as a product of social class; or non-verbal language, the threatening nature of the crowd, or simply the embodiment of one of Chartism’s leaders, especially Feargus O’Connor.

On the other side is the history of political thought and intellectual history. A frequent accusation against intellectual history is that it is elitist: intellectual history is the study of intellectuals. John Burrow characterized this criticism as ‘What about the Workers?’ problem.<sup>4</sup> Intellectual historians resisted this charge by insisting that there is nothing necessarily elitist in intellectual endeavour: everyone is capable of thinking. If theory does not dictate a separation between elite and popular thinking, then practice often does. Since the 1960s, historians of political thought have focused on establishing the authorial intentions of a select number of highly educated and networked individuals and have sought to understand key texts within their local discursive context. The majority of studies have fallen in the early modern period. Few historians of political

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<sup>3</sup> Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Young, ‘Introduction’, in Brian Young and Richard Whatmore (eds.), *A Companion to Intellectual History* (Chichester, 2016), pp. 1–4, at p. 1.

thought have considered how political thought operated in popular movements like Chartism, which were staffed primarily by the self-educated.

To join these two historiographies, a critical perspective is taken on both. The following section places this thesis within the main contours of Chartist historiography and explains what Chartism was. Attention is then shifted to the most relevant historiographical debate to this thesis, which was initiated by Gareth Stedman Jones's seminal essay 'Rethinking Chartism' (1983). Heralding the so-called 'linguistic turn' in Anglophone historiography, Stedman Jones raised questions that would define the research agenda for historians for the next two decades. It is argued here that the response to 'Rethinking Chartism' by Chartist historians rested on an expansive and totalising conception of culture derived from the approach of E. P. Thompson. By highlighting the methodological presuppositions of Thompsonian social history and the way it clashes with the preconditions of intellectual history, a gap in the historiography where explanations of Chartist political thought belong is revealed.

To fill this gap, this thesis takes inspiration from political thought and intellectual history. 'Political thought' is an unstable concept. As Iain Hampsher Monk, Dario Castiglione, Stefan Collini, and others have highlighted, there is an important difference between the history of 'political thought' and 'the history of political thought'.<sup>5</sup> The former simply denotes interest in the study of past political thinking and encompasses a wide range of ways in which this can be achieved. The latter, at least in the English-speaking world, has a more prescriptive definition. In many universities the subject is largely taught outside of history departments, especially in political science and philosophy. In such hands, the 'history of political thought' is a resource of 'great thinkers' pondering universal questions of human existence, or at least that is how the accusation goes. In consequence, the field is only partly historical; even those who are strictly contextualist often still veer into discussions of contemporary political issues.<sup>6</sup> The first point that should be made clear is that this

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<sup>5</sup> Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (eds.), *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. introduction, and Stefan Collini's contribution to the same volume: Collini, 'Postscript. Disciplines, Canons and publics: the history of "the history of political thought" in comparative perspective', pp. 280–302.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Collini, 'General Introduction', in Stefan Collini, Brian Young, and Richard Whatmore (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society: Intellectual History in Britain, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–21, especially pp. 14–15.

thesis is concerned with Chartist ‘political thought’ not Chartism’s place within ‘the history of political thought.’

The validity of the category of ‘the history of political thought’ has also been questioned by some of its leading practitioners. J. G. A. Pocock, for example, has argued that ‘what was formerly, and by convention still is, known as the history of political thought is now more accurately described as the history of political discourse.’<sup>7</sup> This shift is partly a consequence of Pocock’s methodological writings since the 1960s, the influence of which few can doubt, and partly because of the flexibility brought to the practice of the history of political thought by an ever increasing number of historians.<sup>8</sup> The broadening of the history of political thought can also be seen as a consequence of contemporary cultural and intellectual change. Mark Goldie has highlighted how the ‘cultural turn’ inspired historians of political thought to mine sources beyond the great texts of political theory. This move ‘eroded the orthodox boundaries of “the history of political thought”, and... it is [now] less clear whether the subject survives other than as subsumed into intellectual history more generally, and in turn into cultural history.’<sup>9</sup>

In line with these developments, ‘political thought’ in this thesis is used as an umbrella term that incorporates several forms of Chartist intellectual engagement with contemporary political debates.<sup>10</sup> The central thrust of this thesis concerns the Chartists use of political languages, and in this respect is indebted to the approach of Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and those who followed in their footsteps. However, there are some major differences between the most prominent histories of political thought and the approach taken in this thesis, which will be outlined in this introduction.

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<sup>7</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The Concept of Language and the *métier d’historien*: Some Considerations on Practice’, in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of political theory in early-modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 19–39, at p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> John Toews, ‘Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Meaning’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 92, no. 4 (1987), pp. 879–907, at p. 891.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Goldie, ‘The context of the Foundations’, in Anabel Brett and James Tully (eds.), *Rethinking the Foundations* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> For a defense of a similar approach, see Richard Bourke, ‘Reflections on the Political Thought of the Irish Revolution’, *Transactions of the Royal Society*, vol. 27 (2017), pp. 175–191.

## II. A KNIFE AND FORK QUESTION

The narrative history of Chartism can be organised around its three great National Petitions, each of which was the culmination of peaks of activity and enthusiasm for the Charter. The first Petition in 1839 contained 1,280,958 signatures; the second, in 1842, and the largest, claimed 3,315,752 signatures; while the third, in 1848, a Parliamentary committee counted as having 1,975,496 signatures. The campaigns that accompanied these petitions consisted of almost every type of political action.<sup>11</sup> Huge outdoor ‘monster meetings’ gathered thousands under message-inscribed banners to hear speeches, sing Chartist hymns, vote for Chartist candidates, and pass motions and resolutions. Indoor meetings were comprised of Chartist schools, reading groups, and lectures, as well as the more mundane day-to-day organisation of the movement under the auspices of one of Chartism’s organisations, the largest being the National Charter Association. Chartism also encompassed illicit activities, most dramatically the Newport Rising in the summer of 1839, but also a range of conspiracies, riots, and various forms of intimidation.

The movement’s National Petitions called for, among other demands, the implementation of the six points of the People’s Charter, the manifesto after which the movement was named. Drawn up by a committee of the London Working Men’s Association and six radical MPs—but written mostly by the LWMA’s secretary William Lovett—the Charter embodied six points of constitutional reform: a vote for all men over the age of twenty-one who were of sane mind and ‘untainted’ by crime; annual parliaments; the secret ballot; the elimination of the property qualification for MPs; the payment of MPs; and the equalisation of electoral districts. These demands were first proposed as a package by Major John Cartwright in his 1777 pamphlet *Take Your Choice!*, and the core points of universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, and the equalisation of constituencies had long been at the centre of radical mobilisation.<sup>12</sup> What separated the Charter from its predecessors was that it gathered abstract reform into a commonly understood programme. To be a Chartist was to accept the Charter.

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<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Thompson, ‘Chartism and the Historians’, in *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London, 1993), pp. 19–44, at p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> John Cartwright, *Take Your Choice!: representation and respect, imposition and contempt: annual parliaments and liberty, long parliaments and slavery* (London, 1777)

It had once been a truism that Chartist was the political form of social discontent, fuelled by ‘hunger and hatred’.<sup>13</sup> This ‘knife and fork’ interpretation, however, fell out of favour because it failed to explain why Chartists formed a political movement.<sup>14</sup> In its place rose an explanation that highlighted how Chartists located both the cause and solution to their distress in the constitutional machinery of Parliament.<sup>15</sup> As Feargus O’Connor, the great Chartist Chieftain, told a meeting in 1838: ‘There was no vice in the people, for which he could not assign a legal reason... there was no complaint for which he could not name a remedy, and that remedy was his darling Universal Suffrage.’<sup>16</sup> What united Chartism, therefore, was not discontent *per se*, but a shared belief in the political cause of—and the political solution to—their discontent.

The de-emphasis of economic explanations in favour of a political one has also provided an alternative chronology of Chartism’s rise and, more controversially, fall. Rather than a response to the unfolding of industrialisation, or a particularly punishing downward phase of the trade cycle, Chartism can be located within a political chronology beginning with the 1832 Reform Act. By enfranchising the ‘middle classes’ and systematically excluding the ‘working classes’, the Reform Act divided a once united ‘people’ into classes. The sense of division, and the radicalisation of the unfranchised, was accelerated by the unpopular legislative programme of the reformed Parliament. Without this political context, it is impossible to understand why Chartism emerged when it did. Contributing to the intensity of the reaction to the reformed Parliament was a palpable sense of betrayal by the shortcomings of the 1832 Reform Act. As the first National Petition declared, the people felt ‘bitterly and basely deceived... The Reform Act has effected a transfer of power from one dominating faction to another, and left the people as helpless as before’.<sup>17</sup>

Chartism was not, however, simply reactive to poverty or bad government. Recent scholarship, partially in response to the ‘political turn’, has emphasised the cultural vitality of the Chartist movement. The breadth of explicitly Chartist activities remains

<sup>13</sup> G.D.H Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London, 1941), p. 1. For a summary see Thompson, ‘Chartism and the Historians’, pp. 19–44.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London, 1983), p. 12; Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90–178.

<sup>15</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, pp. 90–178.

<sup>16</sup> *Northern Star*, 15 September 1838.

<sup>17</sup> *Hansard*, 14 June 1839.

staggering. Chartists could send their children to Chartist schools, shop at Chartist stores, and read (and write) Chartist novels, poetry, and music. They attended Chartist rallies, Chartist lectures and reading groups, and joined Chartist Churches, temperance societies, and, as in Leicester, a Chartist Shakespearian group. Some parents even named their children after one (or more) of Chartism's leaders.<sup>18</sup> In this form, Chartism was 'a cultural system, a way of life.'<sup>19</sup> By taking the 'cultural turn', historians have broadened our knowledge of the diversity of activities that sustained the movement and creatively expanded our sources to encompass lyric, verse, music, symbolism, and ritual.<sup>20</sup> The cultural turn has also stimulated a renaissance of local studies, especially of English regions, Scotland, Ireland and Wales – an interest which is pertinent to the current political climate of national and regional politics within the

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<sup>18</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, *passim*; Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill, and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 173; Paul Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (New York, 1995), *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Pickering, 'A Wider Field in a New Country: Chartism in Colonial Australia', in Marian Sawer (ed.), *Elections Full, Free and Fair* (Sydney, 2001), pp. 28–44, at p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> James Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Languages and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003); Katrina Navickas, 'Political clothing and adornment in England, 1780–1840', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3 (July, 2010), pp. 540–65; Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorials, And Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2004); Paul Pickering and Kate Bowen, "Songs for the Millions": Chartist Music and Popular Aural Tradition', *Labour History Review*, vol. 74, no. 1 (April, 2009), pp. 44–63; Paul Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present*, vol. 112, no. 1 (1986), pp. 144–162; Pickering, *Chartism in Manchester*; Chase, *Chartism*; Matthew Roberts, 'Chartism, Commemoration and the Cult of the Radical Hero', *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (2013), pp. 3–32; Anne Jannowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge, 2005); Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism* (Cambridge, 2012).

United Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> Should the ‘What Next’ research agendas of four leading Chartist historians be taken up, localism is set to continue.<sup>22</sup>

Chartism, then, was a political movement that mobilised an unprecedented number of people behind a traditional radical programme of constitutional reform, with rich local variations. While Chartist activity correlated to the trade cycle, economics does not explain what Chartism was nor what it wanted. The apparent problem of why a social movement took the form of a political one is solved by the political nature of Chartism’s critique. Locating the cause of distress in Britain’s corrupt political institutions,

<sup>21</sup> Valerie Pattenden, ‘The Chartist Challenge in Chelmsford’ in Michael Holland and Jacqueline Copper (eds.), *Essex harvest: A collection of essays in memory of Arthur Brown* (Chelmsford, 2003), pp. 116–30; Malcolm Chase, ‘Chartist 1838–1848: responses to two Teesside towns’, in Robert Stephen (ed.), *The People’s Charter: democratic agitation in early Victorian Britain* (London, 2003); Joan Allen, “‘Resurrecting Jerusalem’: the late Chartist press in the North-East of England, 1852–1859”, in Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the people: a study of the Chartist press* (London, 2005); Robert Hall, ‘A United People?: Leaders and Followers in a Chartist Locality, 1838–1848’, *Journal of Social Science*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2004), pp. 179–203; Robert Hastings, *Chartism in the North Riding of Yorkshire and south Durham, 1838–1848* (York, 2004); Michael J. Turner, ‘Local Politics and the Nature of Chartism: The Case of Manchester’, *Northern History*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2008), pp. 323–45; Robert Fyson, ‘Late Chartist in the Potteries, 1848–1858’, *Labour History Review*, vol. 74, no. 1 (2009), pp. 111–29; Katrina Navickas, ‘Moors, Fields and Popular Protest in South Lancashire and the West Riding, 1800–1848’, *Northern History*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2009), pp. 93–111; Raymond Challinor, ‘Chartism and co-operation in the north east’, *North East History*, vol. 43 (2012), pp. 18–24; John A. Hargreaves, ‘Arresting the progress of this degrading and brutalising vice’: Temperance Methodism and Chartist in Halifax and its hinterland 1832–48’, *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society* (2012), pp. 130–60; Hamish W. Fraser, *Chartism in Scotland* (Pontypool, 2010); Hamish W. Fraser, ‘The Chartist Press in Scotland’, in Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the people: a study of the Chartist press* (London, 2005); Martin J. Mitchel, ‘The Catholic Irish and Chartism in the West of Scotland’, in Terry Brotherstone, Anna Clarke and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *These Fissured Isles: Ireland Scotland and the Making of Modern Britain 1798–1848* (Edinburgh, 2006). pp. 178–94; Anthony Daly, ‘The true remedy of Irish grievances is to be found in good political institutions’: English radicals and Irish nationalism, 1847–74’, *Historical Research*, vol. 86, no. 231 (2013), pp. 53–75; David Lloyd, ‘The Clachan and the Chartists: Irish Models for Feargus O’Connor’s Land Plan’, *The Irish Review*, vol. 47 (Winter 2013), pp. 28–43; Michael Huggins, “‘Mere matters of arrangement and detail’: John Mitchell and Irish charterism’, in Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (eds.), *Politics and power in Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp. 96–108; Michael Huggins, ‘Democracy or nationalism? The problems of the Chartist press in Ireland’, in Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (eds.), *Papers for the people: a study of the Chartist press* (London, 2005); Edward Parry, “‘The bloodless wars of Montgomeryshire’: law and disorder, 1837–1841’, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, vol. 97 (2009), pp. 123–64; Malcolm Chase, ‘Rethinking Welsh Chartism’, *Llafur*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2010), pp. 39–57; Joe England, ‘Unitarians, Freemasons, Chartists: The Middles Class in Victorian Merthyr’, *Welsh History Review*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2007), pp. 35–58; Joe England, ‘Engaged in the Righteous Cause: Chartism in Merthyr Tydfil’, *Llafur*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2010), pp. 58–75; Owen Ashton, ‘Chartism in Llanidloes: the “Riot” of 1839 Revisited’, *Llafur*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2010), 76–86; D. Osmond, ‘After the rising: Chartism in Newport 1840–1848’, *Gwent Local History*, vol. 98 (2005), pp. 8–52.

<sup>22</sup> Joan Allen and Owen Ashton, ‘Editorial: New Directions in Chartist Studies’, *Labour History Review*, vol. 74, no. 1 (April, 2009), pp. 1–5; Malcolm Chase, ‘What next for Chartist Studies?’, unpublished paper, Chartist Conference, University of Paris, 2010; Katrina Navickas, ‘What next for Chartist Studies?’, <[www.historytoday-navickas.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/whats-next-for-chartist-studies](http://www.historytoday-navickas.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/whats-next-for-chartist-studies)>

Chartists naturally sought its remedy in Parliament. What was unprecedented about Chartism was the way that it absorbed an array of existing political movements and concerns into a unified national campaign committed to constitutional reform. In its areas of greatest strength—the manufacturing districts, Scotland, and, in 1848, London—it could rally hundreds of thousands of people. Chartism reached almost every part of the country, but not all localities were active at the same time. Manchester Chartism, for example, was buoyant in 1839/40 and London was quiet, while London was the centre of the movement in 1848, but Manchester Chartism had declined. These local differences, however, should not be allowed to obscure Chartism's remarkable national reach. Although there were lots of Chartisms—including differences across regions and nations, and disputes over strategy and between personalities—Chartists were still able to unify behind the Charter.

The above is a somewhat consensual overview of Chartism that, while there may be disagreement in emphasis, few Chartist historians would reject entirely. It is within these parameters that most Chartist history is conducted and, it should be said, much excellent work is produced. There are, however, aspects that this consensus fails to adequately capture. What has been omitted is the place of ideas and the long-standing controversy over language. To address these issues, it is necessary to revisit the debate launched by Gareth Stedman Jones's 'Rethinking Chartism' thirty years ago.<sup>23</sup>

### **III. The Making of 'Rethinking Chartism'.**

The landmark study to which all Chartist historiography must refer is Gareth Stedman Jones's 'Rethinking Chartism', the full version of which was published in Stedman Jones's 1983 book, *The Languages of Class*. 'Rethinking Chartism' was not just an event in Chartist historiography, but in Anglophone historiography and society more broadly. In an argument that is now much more familiar, and much less controversial, Stedman Jones maintained that language could not simply reflect reality because it is actively involved in constituting people's understanding of that reality. The Chartists'

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<sup>23</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism'.

'experience' of distress could not, therefore, straightforwardly refer back to a pre-linguistic social reality. Rather language constituted how distress was interpreted.

Having become part of the canon of historiography, there is a danger that 'Rethinking Chartist' is read outside of the context in which it was conceived.<sup>24</sup> Revisiting the purpose for which Stedman Jones was writing, and the debates with which he was engaging, therefore repays attention. *Languages of Class* was a polemical assault on the approach to social history taken by E. P. Thompson, the most influential historian of the post-war years, who continues to have an enormous impact on Chartist historiography. To appreciate what Stedman Jones was attempting to undermine, it is necessary to take a closer look at Thompson's method. Thompson's most famous work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, was engaged in two polemics. The first was against the 'contaminated... capitalist ideology' that ran from Smith to modern economic history.<sup>25</sup> The second polemic was against economistic Marxists who treated class as a 'thing... which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production.'<sup>26</sup> The latter argument can be traced to Thompson's break with Stalinism in 1956. Thompson attacked Stalinism on three grounds: anti-intellectualism, moral nihilism, and the devaluing of individuals.<sup>27</sup> These errors were rooted in the soil of economism – the attempt to view society exclusively in terms of economic and class structures. Such a narrow view squeezed from sight the agency of past people. 'Roundhead, Leveller, and Cavalier, Chartist and Anti-Corn Law Leaguer, were not dogs; they did not salivate their creeds in response to economic stimuli; they loved and hated, argued, thought, and made moral choices.'<sup>28</sup> In stark contrast to 'Stalinist' mechanical Marxism, Thompson advocated socialist humanism, a creed that combined a libertarian concern for the individual with socialism's egalitarianism.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This danger was highlighted in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, 'Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language', *Social History*, vol. 18, no 1 (1993), pp. 1–15.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of Thompson and this tradition, see Donald Winch, *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy, 1848–1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 367–398.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to Philistines', *The New Reasoner*, no. 1 (1957), pp. 105–142, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1957/sochum.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism'.

<sup>29</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origin of Cultural Studies* (Durham, North Carolina, 1998), p. 52; Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson and the Critique of Capitalism* (Princeton, 2018), pp. 147–157.

Thompson's abandonment of economic formulations of class led to a rejection of the Marxist notion of base and superstructure, which he deemed 'a bad and dangerous model', and Marx's theory that history progressed through modes of production.<sup>30</sup> In their place, Thompson elevated Marx and Engels' axiom of the determination of social consciousness by social being, with 'experience' added to mediate between them.<sup>31</sup> It is at this point where class takes on added significance, for class became the single thread by which Thompson, and those who followed in his footsteps, could tie together social consciousness and social being. Having discarded Marx's model of class determination by location within the means of production, Thompson reconceptualised class as a complex inter-subjective relationship.<sup>32</sup> This hollowed from class its rootedness in the economic, for, without a base, the economic was present only as the product of experience. Thus, economic relations and capitalist exploitation were significant only in so far as they were *felt* by members of a class, with the verb "felt" denoting the category of experience.<sup>33</sup>

Economics' loss was culture's gain, for Thompson's stress on experience shifted attention to how exploitative relations were 'handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms.'<sup>34</sup> Class was thus a 'cultural as much as an economic formation.'<sup>35</sup> What Thompson meant by culture embraced the whole swathe of the everyday life and experience of ordinary people, a potentially limitless field of study.<sup>36</sup> Yet, despite his expansive conception of culture, Thompson's concept of class was still rooted in Marx's dialectic between social being and social consciousness. Culture and class were still, in other words, socially determined.

Turning to *Languages of Class*, Thompson's achievement of prising class consciousness from economics was acknowledged, but so was a need to advance this agenda further. In Thompson's formulation, two types of evidence were problematically joined: 1) reasons for discontent, and 2) the deployment of class

<sup>30</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Long Revolution, Part II', *New Left Review*, no. 10 (1961); Richard Johnson, 'Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese and Socialist-Humanist History', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 6 (1978), pp. 79–100, at p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 9–14.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Johnson, 'Socialist-Humanist History', pp. 89–92. See, in particular, Thompson, *Making*, ch. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 194.

language. When taken together, they are presented as inextricably linked because language is seen as a simple medium of expression. Drawing on Saussure's linguistics, Stedman Jones argued that language cannot fulfil this function.<sup>37</sup>

Language disrupts any simple notion of the determination of consciousness by social being because it is itself part of social being. We cannot therefore decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

This approach cut the single thread that linked 'social being' to class consciousness; a fact that alone explains the explosive reaction that 'Rethinking Chartism' received, for by undermining class, the whole superstructure of Thompsonian history fell with it.<sup>39</sup> It is for this reason, too, that the debate surrounding social history's demise disproportionately concerned class – and primarily class in the nineteenth century – which, as Feldman and Lawrence have pointed out, neglected social history's 'baggy heterogeneity'.<sup>40</sup> Thompson's expansive culturalist notion of class also explains its continued use in Chartist historiography, a topic which is discussed below.

For our present purposes, the significance of Stedman Jones's approach was that it insisted on the autonomy of the political, which freed Chartist political thought from the social structure. Thompson's formulation of social consciousness and social being extruded the political as such and with it an independent consideration of political ideas. That is not to say that Thompson ignored ideas; to the contrary, the *Making of the English Working Class* remains the most powerful statement of the intellectual culture of the nascent working class. However, his emphasis on culture blunted his characters' capacity for truly independent thought. This was because Thompson inherited from classical Marxism a theory of ideology that explicitly subordinated conscious intention.<sup>41</sup> The dialectical relationship between social being and social

<sup>37</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', *Languages of Class*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>38</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 21–22.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Robert Gray, 'Class, politics and historical revisionism', *Social History*, no. 19 (1994), pp. 209–220; Patrick Joyce, 'The end of social history?', *Social History*, no. 20 (1995), pp. 73–91.

<sup>40</sup> David Feldman and Jon Lawrence, 'Introduction', in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds.), *Structures and Transformation* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1–23, at pp. 1–8.

<sup>41</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The return of language: radicalism and the British historians, 1960s–1990', in Willibald Steinmetz (ed), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 331–49, at

consciousness assigned ideas such a reduced role that they are, in effect, superfluous; they are the product of something else: experience, the social structure, exploitation, and so on. In Thompson's narrative, these aspects coalesced in the concept of class consciousness. Put simply, the centrality attributed to the concept of class in the structuring of experience also underlay thought and action.<sup>42</sup>

By subordinating thought and action, Thompsonian social history was in methodological conflict with intellectual history. These two disciplines of history had largely been kept apart, primarily because their respective interests were located at opposite ends of the social spectrum. When they did clash, such as over C. B. Macpherson's materialist interpretation of Hobbes and Locke, the underlying tension was revealed.<sup>43</sup> Another clash, with more significance for our purposes, was between Thompson and Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff over Adam Smith's thought and the concept of 'moral economy'. This dispute not only revealed the points of conflict but also foreshadowed some of the reaction to 'Rethinking Chartism'. Hont and Ignatieff criticised Thompson for using a false polarity of moral economy versus political economy, which caricatured both ends. Attention to the debates that Smith and his traditionalist antagonists were engaged revealed a much more complex situation. Rather than a split along moral lines, as Thompson proposed, the use of police powers to intervene in subsistence crises was an issue that divided philosophers and political economists among themselves.<sup>44</sup>

Thompson was distinctly unimpressed with these criticisms. He detected, like 'economic history before it', an imperialistic motive behind intellectual history, such that it 'seeks to over-run all social life'.<sup>45</sup> Thompson urged Ignatieff and Hont, and by implication other intellectual historians, to pause and consider how ideas were represented as 'facts' in people's lived experience of market relations. Without considering the social, Ignatieff and Hont were simply operating 'in a detached

p. 333.

<sup>42</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', p. 101. Emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> C. B. MacPherson, *Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962); Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes's Leviathan', *Historical Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1964), pp. 321–333; Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1969), pp. 3–53, at p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, 'Needs and justice in the *Wealth of Nations*', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 15–16.

<sup>45</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London, 1991), p. 273.

discipline of political ideas and rhetoric,’ and their criticism amounted to ‘rebuking me for writing an essay in social history and in popular culture instead of in approved Cambridge themes.’<sup>46</sup>

Yet Thompson was engaging in intellectual history. He was attempting to locate the advent of capitalist ideas about the market and the crowd’s response to the implementation of those ideas. His bid to fence off this inquiry from the insights of intellectual historians was indicative of a broader hostility to their methodology, which clashed with his own. Thompson argued that approaching his subject from the perspective of intellectual historians would overlook ‘the vulgarity of the crowd’ because ‘They were not philosophers. They did, as my essay shows, have substantive and knowledgeable arguments about the working of markets, but about actual markets rather than theorised market relations.’<sup>47</sup> This perspective raises questions about the possibility of studying the thought of subaltern groups. However, the idea that we cannot study the political thought present in crowds rests on its own type of the ‘great condescension of posterity’.

Later in his response, Thompson cited the testimony of Walter Stephens, who was indicted for riot in 1766. Before the court, Stephens declared that ‘what the Mob had done was right and justifiable, and for all the Justices’ acting would have it all on a Level before it were long.’ Thompson then played on the reputation of both Cambridge’s (where he was an undergraduate) and intellectual history for elitism:

That certainly is not reputable political thought, and it will not be allowed to pass by King’s College, Cambridge. But Walter Stephens said this at a time when he stood in danger of being tried for his life for those questions (which, at the present moment, is not – so far as I know – the case with any Fellow of King’s) and his meanings deserve our respect.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, they do. But respect was never the issue of contention. The question, now as then, was how best to study past utterances like Walter Stephens’. In the same paragraph as the above, Thompson argued that we should seek discourses ‘almost beneath the level of articulacy, appealing to solidarities so deeply assumed that they

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 275.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 275.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 350–51.

were almost nameless'.<sup>49</sup> Stephens's testimony, however, was not almost beneath articulacy; his voice can be clearly heard. By beginning with inarticulacy, Thompson was working within a tradition of cultural criticism that can be traced to Thomas Carlyle through F. R. Leavis.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, as Rogan has recently argued, what Thompson had in mind were the solidarities he had formed with his neighbours and Workers' Educational Association students in Halifax. 'History from below' became a way of making these solidarities articulate.<sup>51</sup> However laudable, conscious intention slips from view.

The Hont-Ignatieff project has an additional significance for this story. For it was while participating in this project that Stedman Jones realised that Chartist ideology was not in any distinct way the property of an occupational group.<sup>52</sup> A comparison with the debates of the Scottish Enlightenment revealed striking similarities with Chartist economic discourse, especially the Chartists' central argument regarding the corruption of the state.<sup>53</sup> Viewed in the longer trajectory this implied, Stedman Jones was thus able to recast Chartism as 'the last, most prominent, and most desperate – though perhaps not the most revolutionary – version of a radical critique of society, which had enjoyed an almost continuous existence since the 1760s and 1770s.'<sup>54</sup>

Given that Stedman Jones sought to undermine the procedures of Thompson's method that collapsed the ideological and the political into the social and the cultural, and given that Stedman Jones was engaged in the project that Thompson found wanting precisely in terms of its detachment from the social and the 'real', it is of little wonder that this dispute was repeated in the debate that followed 'Rethinking Chartism'. Although Thompson never directly responded to Stedman Jones, James Epstein included a revealing extract from a letter he received from Thompson in 1989 in his 2003 book *In Practice*. Epstein asked Thompson to write a letter of recommendation for a grant proposal for his project on the 'constitutionalist idiom' in radical discourse. Thompson was not impressed:

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<sup>49</sup> Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 350

<sup>50</sup> Winch, *Wealth and Life*, pp. 367–398; Stedman Jones, 'Return to Language'.

<sup>51</sup> Rogan, *Moral Economists*, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> Ignatieff and Hont (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*.

<sup>53</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', pp. 102–103.

<sup>54</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', p. 168.

[sic throughout] Yr first para say some faux things about language. I can't believe that you believe that you have just discovered abt "language" and that "like many social historians" language had appeared unproblematic until Sewell, Pocock and Stedman Jones arose... the problem of "experience" is philosophically more complex than yr glib lines propose. You have just picked up the going cant. Raymond [Williams] wrestled with this one<sup>55</sup> – if you are going to sort attributes into "social being" and "social consciousness", then *of course* there is no way in which a human being can exist for 5 mins without language: i.e. social being... If you want to sort into being & consciousness, then this is a consciousness ballgame, and an elaborate & complex one (which takes in what werewolves used to talk about as "culture").<sup>56</sup>

That Thompson quickly equated language with social being is indicative of the problem discussed above, that of collapsing the political and intellectual into the social, as is his 'consciousness ballgame' which involved 'culture'. The letter went on to complain of a 'flight from cultural materialism to a revamped idealism', which nicely captures the conflicting perspectives of Thompson's sociocultural approach and intellectual history. These basic tensions of approach have continued into current Chartist historiography, a process that is charted in the next section.

#### **IV. Culture and Class, Clothing, Chiefs and Crowds**

'Rethinking Chartism' inspired responses from a range of different and conflicting perspectives.<sup>57</sup> In Chartist historiography, however, the most influential defended the Thompsonian orthodoxy. The latter can be separated into two camps, which overlapped at various points. The first, represented by Dorothy Thompson and Neville

<sup>55</sup> See especially, Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review*, no. 82 (1973), pp. 3–16.

<sup>56</sup> James Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Notable contributions include: Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge, 1991); Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A study in English political culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993); David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, 'Social history and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language', *Social History*, no. 18 (May 1992), pp. 165–88; Marc Steinberg, "A way of struggle": reformations and affirmations of E. P. Thompson's class analysis in the light of postmodern theories of language', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 3 (September, 1997), pp. 471–492.

Kirk, conceded nothing and mounted a trenchant defence of the old ways.<sup>58</sup> What is notable for our concerns is their hostility to intellectual history and political thought in general. Thompson, for example, described the approach taken in ‘Rethinking Chartism’ as ‘something much like the old – and now regrettably old fashioned – discipline of Political Thought.’<sup>59</sup> Kirk, in a much longer assessment of ‘Rethinking Chartism’, argued that Stedman Jones had ‘wrenched loose’ language and politics from ‘their material determination’ and thus his ‘rejection of a class-based reductionism has led not to materialism, but to an unconvincing idealism.’<sup>60</sup> Given that Stedman Jones’s declared intention was to separate the political from the social, the authenticity of his materialism is an inappropriate measure of his method. For Kirk, however, materialism is the only valid theory of history, and, as such, intellectual history and political thought can simply be dismissed as idealism.<sup>61</sup> Also revealing was Kirk’s rallying call for historians not to surrender ‘the considerable gains registered during the post-1950 radical phase in social history... to the importance of ideas and political concepts at their “natural” Cambridge home’, and instead continue ‘the materialist programme of work set by Edward Thompson, David Montgomery, and other examples of “best practice.”’<sup>62</sup>

Rather than crudely dividing methodology into idealism and materialism, the second approach attempted to defend the Thompsonian basis of Chartist studies by incorporating aspects of linguistic analysis. The most important proponents of this school are James Epstein, Paul Pickering, and John Belchem. Epstein described his approach as trying to ‘renegotiate the ground between an earlier notion of culture and the turn to language in historical and cultural studies, and to consider what we might gain by such a renegotiation—or alternatively, what we lose by an unrestrained turn to

<sup>58</sup> Dorothy Thompson, ‘The Languages of Class’, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 52 (1987), pp. 54–7; Dorothy Thompson, ‘Chartism and Historians’, in *Outsiders: class, genders and nation* (London, 1993), pp. 19–44, at pp. 34–37; Neville Kirk, ‘In defense of class: a critique of recent revisionist writing upon the nineteenth-century English working class’, *International Review of Social History*, no. 22 (1987), 2–47; Neville Kirk, *Change, continuity and class: Labour in British society, 1850–1920* (London, 1998), pp. 9–11, 81–83.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, ‘Languages of Class’, p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> Kirk, ‘In defence of class’, p. 47, see also pp. 5, 7 n. 11. Kirk’s critique is developed in Neville Kirk, ‘History, language, ideas and post-modernism: A materialist view’, *Social History*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1994), pp. 221–240.

<sup>61</sup> Kirk, ‘In defence of class’, p. 4 n. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Kirk, ‘History, language, ideas’, p. 237.

discourse.<sup>63</sup> These historians retained Thompson's totalising conception of culture and his insistence on culture as a field of class struggle by arguing that class impinged on discourse. In their formulations of class, however, Thompson's underlying Marxian framework of the determination of social conscious by social being was less evident. Freed from this structure, the categories of class and culture, already broad in Thompson's usage, were widened further.

Pickering's 'Class without Words' – the title of which was provided by Thompson – was the first to make what became a standard response to Stedman Jones; namely, that his narrow focus on printed sources overlooked the rich, symbolic ways that class could be expressed.<sup>64</sup> The full weight of Pickering's argument fell on Feargus O'Connor's fustian-clad shoulders. Pickering claimed that O'Connor's donning of a fustian suit, the uniform of the working man, at the ceremony celebrating his release from York Castle in August 1841 was a symbolic break with previous radical movements. It marked a transition from gentlemanly to working-class radicalism and personified 'a new-found working-class consciousness in popular radicalism'. Pickering went too far by claiming that fustian became the 'lingua franca' of radicalism. He had, after all, analysed a single, highly curated public event. He did, however, connect Chartism with important, anthropological ways of understanding non-verbal communication. This, too, has a distinct Thompsonian bent, explored in his eighteenth-century studies of folklore and practices such as 'rough music' and wife sales.<sup>65</sup>

Similar themes were also picked up by James Epstein in 1986, and then developed in two important articles, both of which represented significant advances in our understanding of radical and Chartist political thought.<sup>66</sup> The first was the rightly celebrated 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty', which traced the shifting meaning of the Phrygian cap of the French Revolution in post-Napoleonic-War Britain. Epstein's starting point was Stedman Jones's challenge to *The Making of the English Working*

<sup>63</sup> Epstein, *In Practice*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Pickering, 'Class Without Words'. Described as the most influential response by Joan Allen and Malcolm Chase, 'Britain: 1750–1900', in Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy (eds.), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (London, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Folklore, anthropology, and social history', *Indian History Review*, no. 3 (1978), pp. 247–66; Thompson, *Customs in Common*.

<sup>66</sup> James Epstein, 'Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History', *Labour/Le Travail*, no. 18 (1986), pp. 195–208

*Class*, noting how Stedman Jones's 'fine concerns for the formal properties of language' led to 'a flat, or univocal, interpretation of meanings'.<sup>67</sup> To avoid such pitfalls, Epstein drew on symbolic language beyond the printed word. In support of this approach, he cited Lynn Hunt's *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, a canonical text of the cultural turn.<sup>68</sup> However, Epstein's use of Hunt's authority was not followed through in his method. Unlike Hunt, whose 'culture' was constitutive of an expanded and central notion of the political, Epstein's 'culture' was an attempt to rehabilitate the social.<sup>69</sup> Where Hunt was consciously distancing herself from Marxism, Epstein was writing from a culturalist Marxist perspective to challenge Stedman Jones's understanding of language and class.<sup>70</sup> Epstein did this by arguing that the meaning attached to the cap of liberty can be read as a symbolic conflict over different ideas of the constitution. This seemingly intellectual debate between traditional constitutionalism and republicanism was in fact embedded in plebeian and working-class experience. Symbols like the cap of liberty were thus sites where 'classes define themselves in oppositional relationship with each other'.<sup>71</sup> Like O'Connor's fustian coat, the cap of liberty was another example of class without words.

Epstein repeated the move back to the social to explain the intellectual in another *tour de force*, 'The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth-Century England', which remains the finest account of radical constitutional discourse that we have. Epstein's contribution to our understanding of constitutional discourse will be assessed in later Chapters. For our purposes here, it is important to note the limitations of his approach for the study of Chartist political thought. After his subtle analysis of the use of constitutional discourse, Epstein returned to culturalist Marxism. Constitutionalism, he argued, was a 'truly revolutionary' idiom 'forged in the struggles of sections of the gentry and emergent bourgeois in opposition to Stuart attempts at absolutism'.<sup>72</sup> Yet despite its 'class-specific origins' the constitutionalist idiom during the first half of the nineteenth

<sup>67</sup> James Epstein, 'Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic practice and social conflict in early nineteenth century England', *Past and Present*, vol. 122, no. 1, (1989), pp. 75–118, at p. 76.

<sup>68</sup> Epstein, 'Cap of Liberty', p. 76, n. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkley, 1984).

<sup>70</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles* (Abingdon, 2014), p. 120.

<sup>71</sup> Epstein, 'Cap of Liberty', p. 117.

<sup>72</sup> James Epstein, 'The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1990), pp. 553–574, at p. 568.

century was not ‘the ideological property of any one class but was a contested terrain between classes.’<sup>73</sup> Like the Cap of Liberty, constitutional discourse was the site of class struggle.

As Joyce pointed out, the problem with stretching class to encompass contest within political discourses is that it is not clear why class should denote the conflict. We end up, in other words, with a concept of class that has ‘infinite elasticity’.<sup>74</sup> A further difficulty with this approach from the perspective of political thought is that, despite his sensitivity to the content of radical political discourse, Epstein still depicted ideas as a second-order phenomenon. Thus, the most important aspect of the radicals’ context was class struggle and ideas were one arena in which this contest was played out. To appreciate Chartist political thought, we must consider ideas in their intellectual context; that is, as part of an intellectual debate, not as a facet of social conflict. It is here that the relative autonomy of the political is essential. By rerouting his fine discussion of ideas back into the social structure, Epstein contorted this central aspect of the linguistic turn, and by doing so political ideas become something else. It is only a small step to claim that ideas do not matter at all.

A similar approach was taken by John Belchem, who did end up taking this step. Like Pickering and Epstein, Belchem used culture to broaden the range of meanings available to the Chartists. He also, again like Pickering and Epstein, chose the platform to demonstrate his case. Belchem argued that the culture of the platform was unruly and carnivalesque and cast in explicit opposition to a civilising polite culture. In Belchem’s reading, the platform’s culture was ‘working class’ and civilizing culture was intrinsically ‘middle class’.<sup>75</sup> Repeating Pickering, Belchem described the culture of the mass meeting as ‘a language of class without words, a lingua franca shared by orators and the rank and file’.<sup>76</sup> However, Belchem simply presupposed that ‘working’ and ‘middle’ class are the correct categories to describe what he sees as a division between ‘popular’ and self-improving culture. This division, however, overlooked entirely the

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<sup>73</sup> Epstein, ‘Constitutionalist Idiom’, p. 568.

<sup>74</sup> Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> John Belchem, ‘Radical Language and Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Challenge of the Platform’, *Albion*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1988), pp. 247–259.

<sup>76</sup> Belchem, ‘Radical Language and Ideology’, p. 257. See also, John Belchem and James Epstein, ‘The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited’, *Social History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1997), pp. 174–193, at p. 177

centrality of self-improving and ‘puritan’ strands *within* Chartism. A similar argument was made a decade later in his jointly authored article with Epstein on the radical leadership of Henry Hunt and O’Connor. Here, Epstein and Belchem argued that, in contrast to Eugenio Biagini and Patrick Joyce’s stress on the continuity of aristocratic popular leadership throughout the century,<sup>77</sup> the appeal of Henry Hunt and O’Connor was constructed in opposition to the middle classes (the real enemy of the people).<sup>78</sup>

The repeated focus on the platform and O’Connor raises questions regarding the meaning and understanding of popular thought. Like the front piece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, where the body of a Goliath-like sovereign is made-up of the population over which he rules, O’Connor is taken to be the mouth-piece of the Chartist mass. Malcolm Chase, for example, has argued that ‘The key to O’Connor’s popular and emotive leadership of Chartism, especially in the Pennine textile districts, was his capacity to reflect back to his audiences their own perceptions of their position in society... in a real sense his words were their own.’<sup>79</sup> The problem is that O’Connor’s words were not their own – and saying they were denies both a voice: the audience because it is O’Connor who is doing the talking, and O’Connor because he is stripped of opinions and motivations of his own. Reception, which was a central element of the ‘cultural turn’ is curiously absent here. Reception is a complex, multidimensional process that is critical, creative, and active. Chartists could reject and recreate, inscribe, supplant, and question what O’Connor said. Yet there is no space for that in this monolithic model.

Pickering, Epstein, and Belchem’s work significantly widened our notion of political language and has greatly enriched our understanding of popular politics. However, their attempt to use this expanded notion of language to reconnect Chartist discourse to a socially constituted concept of class repeats the procedure for which social history was being criticised in the first place. Language, whether expressed in text, speech, or

<sup>77</sup> Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 7; Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 44–7.

<sup>78</sup> Belchem and Epstein, ‘Gentleman Leader’, pp. 181–82.

<sup>79</sup> Malcolm Chase, “‘We wish only to work for ourselves’: the Chartist Land Plan”, in Malcolm Chase and Iain Dyck (ed.), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 133–46, at p. 137. Repeated in Malcolm Chase, “‘Resolved in Defiance of Fool and of Knave’: Chartism. Children and Children”, *Conflict and Difference in the Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 126–140, at p. 136.

symbol, cannot simply reflect social reality.<sup>80</sup> Also problematic in these accounts is the way that non-verbal language is placed in opposition to written language in such a way that, as Belchem and Epstein argued, 'The medium was indeed the message'.<sup>81</sup> This perspective inevitably clashes with the approaches to discourse used by historians of political thought and intellectual history that are founded upon the analysis of speech acts in public debate.

Despite their genuine efforts to integrate elements of the linguistic turn, the position they adopt ultimately ends up in the same place as Kirk's position of no surrender. Both approaches evidence a suspicion of intellectual history, and both insist on a distinction between the social and the intellectual. Analysing sources from such a perspective has led to a conflation between 'culture' and ideas, with the latter being crowded out. This is not to deny that Chartism had a rich culture, that the platform was governed by a distinct set of rules and tones, nor that meanings can be expressed 'without words'. However, when these aspects of Chartism's discursive context are set above the written and spoken word, we arrive at a perspective that discounts political thought and thinking. This was made clear in a 2005 article by Belchem, which argued that what 'had given Chartism its distinctive radical identity was not its language (which of course it shared with other reformers before and after) but its culture and conduct.'<sup>82</sup> As Chartist language was simply 'shared with other reformers', Belchem asserted that we should analyse the Chartists' 'conduct, not their texts' and the 'context, not content' of Chartist speech. What culture and context meant, much like in his 1988 article, was essentially class: 'The meanings generated by Chartism owed much to its meeting places and its leadership style, spatial and cultural factors which are perhaps best described as "working class", and which were proudly inherited from the post-war mass platform.'<sup>83</sup>

The neo-Thompsonian response to Stedman Jones informs the approach taken in modern Chartist historiography. In consequence, the basic tension between social and intellectual history continues. This can be seen by the use of class to explain Chartist

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<sup>80</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism', p. 181 n. 44.

<sup>81</sup> Belchem, 'Radical Language and Ideology', p. 257. Repeated in Belchem and Epstein, 'Revisiting', p. 180. See also Vernon, *Politics and the People*, ch. 3.

<sup>82</sup> John Belchem, 'Radical Language, Meaning and Identity in the Age of the Chartists', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1, (January 2005), pp. 1–14, at p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Belchem, 'Radical Language, Meaning and Identity in the Age of the Chartists', p. 8.

ideas. Recent scholarship, for example, has argued that Thomas Attwood's paper money theories 'underscored the working-class sympathies of Chartism'; claimed that democracy was an exclusively 'working class' cause in the period; argued that William Cobbett's popularity can be explained by the fact he was 'revered first and foremost for what he seemed to represent: a working man'; and that the desire to 'reclaim' elite literature was 'intrinsic to, and deeply rooted within, working-class culture'.<sup>84</sup>

Each of these topics – political economy, democracy, the influence of radical heroes, and literature – requires *intellectual* explanations. By reaching for class, these historians are continuing the practice of explaining the intellectual with the social and the cultural; an approach which passes over important intellective elements of Chartist discourse. Taking the above examples in turn, the most problematic from an epistemological perspective is Sanders's appeal to intrinsic aspects of class culture, which seemingly rests on an unjustifiable essentialist notion of class. Starting from this point means that ideas can simply be read off the social/cultural structure. Roberts's link between Attwood's currency proposal and 'working-class political economy' is dubious given that the Chartists' faith in the gold-standard was shared by both the Whigs and Tories. Democracy, which is discussed in Chapter Two, was, in fact, contested by groups from across the political and social spectrum, as recent scholarship has shown.<sup>85</sup> And, finally, Malcolm's Chase's conclusion that Cobbett was revered as a working-class totem is undermined by his own examples, which make clear Chartists' intellectual debt to the great journalist.<sup>86</sup>

Viewed through the genealogy set out here, the longstanding aversion to the study of Chartist ideas becomes more explicable. Ideas, and 'old-fashioned' political thought in particular, have been seen as threatening the culturalist approach favoured by British social historians. In Thompson's Marxian model, ideas are important only in so far as

<sup>84</sup> Matthew Roberts, "The Feast of the Gridiron is at Hand": Chartism, Cobbett and Currency', in Grande and Stevenson (eds.), *William Cobbett, Romanticism and The Enlightenment*, pp. 107–121, at pp. 113, 115; Peter Gurney, 'The Democratic Idiom: Languages of Democracy in the Chartist Movement,' *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (September 2014), pp. 566–602; Chase, 'Cobbett, His Children and Chartism', p. 134; Mike Sanders, 'From "Technical" to "Cultural" Literacy: Reading and Writing within the British Chartist Movement', in Ann-Catrine Edlund, T. G. Ashplant, Anna Kuismin (eds.), *Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity* (Umeå, 2016), pp. 285–300, at. pp. 294–5.

<sup>85</sup> Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (eds.), *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750–1850* (Oxford, 2013)

<sup>86</sup> On Cobbett's influence, see Josh Gibson, 'Natural Right and the Intellectual Context of Early Chartist Thought', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 84 (2017), pp. 194–213.

they link social being with social consciousness through experience. Ideas thus arise in particular social conditions. Historians of political thought could be dismissed as idealist because they began at the opposite end of the equation: ideas (or discourse) shaped the ways that the social could be viewed. Following the linguistic turn, the latter perspective is much more widely accepted. In Chartist historiography, however, there remains a resistance to linguistic-based analyses and as such the approaches of intellectual history and political thought. This opposition can be explained by the fact that attention to ‘culture’ by Chartist historians predated the cultural turn. The influential culturalist responses to Stedman Jones were made by avowedly Thompsonian historians, who defended the utility of the concept of class—if not Marxism—and above-all an expansive and socially-situated notion of culture. Approaching Chartism from this perspective provides a wonderfully comprehensive view of the inner-life of Chartism, but at the same time displaces consideration of Chartism as an intellectual force.

To illuminate the latter, this thesis returns to central themes of ‘Rethinking Chartism’: the relative autonomy of ‘the political’, the importance of ideas, and to ‘what the Chartists said and wrote’. The next section looks more closely at the methodology of the history of political thought and sets out how these techniques will be applied in this thesis.

## V. Chartist ‘Political Thought’

The most influential group of intellectual historians in the English-speaking world are informally known as the ‘Cambridge School’. The ‘Cambridge School’, however, is a problematic label because it is not clear what it is supposed to denote. Some see it as a ‘method’, others prefer the looser notion of a ‘style’, and recently the Cambridge school has been described in the very un-Cambridge terminology of a ‘mentality’.<sup>87</sup> Others still question the existence of a ‘Cambridge School’, including many who are associated

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<sup>87</sup> Both Skinner and Pocock have spoken of a ‘Cambridge method’, for example, J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge, 2009), p. vii. For ‘Cambridge style’, see Gary Browning, *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 4. For ‘Cambridge mentality’, see Ben James Taylor and Daniel O’Neill, ‘The Cambridge “School” (or “Mentality”) of Interpretation’, in Celment Fatovic and Sean Noah Walsh (eds.), *Interpretation in Political Theory* (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 47–70.

with it.<sup>88</sup> Using the label not only requires what Stefan Collini has called ‘a fine disregard for geography’ but also a willingness to shroud important methodological differences between its leading practitioners.<sup>89</sup> These problems begin to multiply when we expand to encompass succeeding generations of Cambridge (and non-Cambridge) historians. Who gets included?

In-so-far as there is a reality behind the label, the ‘Cambridge school’ denotes the early-methodological pronouncements of John Dunn, J. G. A. Pocock, and Quentin Skinner beginning in the 1960s, who built on the pioneering work of Peter Laslett and Duncan Forbes.<sup>90</sup> These historians were concerned above-all with locating past political thinking in past contexts to recover what John Dunn has called a text’s ‘historical identity’.<sup>91</sup> The most combative statement was Skinner’s ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, which has been described as the manifesto of the Cambridge School, not least by J. G. A. Pocock.<sup>92</sup> Skinner attacked the ‘sins’ of his predecessors, especially anachronism, teleology, and prolepsis. Skinner denies that there was any originality in his *historical* method, claiming that he ‘merely tried to identify and restate in more abstract terms the assumptions on which Pocock’s and especially Laslett’s scholarship seems to me to be based.’<sup>93</sup> While the advocacy of historicism is a cause shared by most historians, the attempt to articulate his approach in ‘abstract terms’ is what separates Skinner from the rest. For Skinner also justified his historical approach philosophically, something which historians generally studiously avoid. Indeed, more than mere justification, many of Skinner’s writings are explicit exercises in analytical philosophy. He asks not just the historian’s questions of ‘what happened,

<sup>88</sup> Most notably, Quentin Skinner:

[www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/interviews/Skinner\\_Quentin.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/interviews/Skinner_Quentin.html). See also Richard Bourke, ‘Revising the Cambridge School: Republicanism Revisited’, *Political Theory* (2016), p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Collini, ‘General Introduction’, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry’, in Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 182–202; John Dunn, ‘The Identity of the History of Ideas’, vol. 43, no. 164 (1968), pp. 85–104; Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’.

<sup>91</sup> John Dunn, ‘The identity of the history of ideas’, in John Dunn, *Political Obligation in its Historical Context* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 13–28.

<sup>92</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Quentin Skinner: The History of Politics and the Politics of History’, *Common Knowledge*, vol. 10 no. 3 (2004), pp. 532–550, at p. 538. Other examples include, Richard Whatmore, ‘Quentin Skinner and the Relevance of Intellectual History’, in Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *A Companion to Intellectual History* (Chichester, 2016), pp. 97–112, at p. 99; Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘A reply to my critics’, in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 231–288, at p. 233.

when, and why', but also what it is to speak about actions, intentions, meanings, and contexts. It is for this reason that Skinner has generated discussion far beyond university history faculties and departments.

The crux of Skinner's position is the idea that texts are linguistic performances. He draws upon the philosophy of language, particularly Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of a language game and John Austin's theory of speech acts.<sup>94</sup> Words are seen not only as a way of *saying* something but also of *doing* things; as Wittgenstein put it 'words are also deeds'.<sup>95</sup> In Skinner's philosophical jargon, what an actor *does* with and through speech is known as an 'illocutionary' act, which is performed with a certain intended 'illocutionary force'.<sup>96</sup> To recover meaning is to recover what an author was *doing* and their intended force of them so doing. The only way to establish this is to know what the common parlance in a given local context was, which requires authors to be set in a wider body of texts to ascertain the norms embedded in the language of the debate that they were engaging in. Skinner's broader point is that authors cannot be read as if they were addressing perennial questions. Ideas do not move through time independently of human agents and contemporaries can only think in the terms that are available to them. Political theory, therefore, should be understood as part of conventional discourse.

Skinner's approach necessitated studying the thought of minor as well as major thinkers, which expanded the range of subjects that were considered in the history of political thought. Indeed, the original title of 'Meaning and Understanding' was 'The Unimportance of the Great Texts in the History of Political Thought'.<sup>97</sup> By removing from the history of political thought its cast of heroes, Skinner not only severed the link between past thinkers and contemporary political issues, but also, at least in

<sup>94</sup> Skinner, 'A reply to my critics'; Quentin Skinner, 'The rise of, challenge to and prospects for a Collingwoodian approach to the history of political thought', in Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (eds.), *The history of political thought in national context* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 175–188. See also, Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, 'Linguistic philosophy and *The Foundations*', in Anabel Brett and James Tully (eds.), *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 20–33.

<sup>95</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1 Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 2; Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republic Liberty* (Cambridge, 2008), p. xvi.

<sup>96</sup> For its greatest elaboration, see Skinner, 'Social meaning and the explanation of social action', in *Visions of Politics*, pp. 128–44.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Goldie, 'The context of *The Foundations*', in Anabel Brett and James Tully (eds.), *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 3–34, at p. 8.

principle, undermined the justification for prioritising the study of the so-called great texts.

The broadening of the history of political thought is also apparent in the writings of the other founding father, J. G. A. Pocock. Pocock's central interest concerns the history of political languages, or discourses, that were available to past thinkers. Where Skinner brought attention to the properties of language, Pocock emphasised languages. These 'languages' do not overlap with ordinary vernacular languages. They are really sublanguages, that is, conceptual frameworks that can be translated from one language into another.<sup>98</sup> Alongside his substantive historical studies, such as *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (1957), *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), and *Barbarism and Religion* (1999–2015), Pocock has also written extensively on method.<sup>99</sup> Unlike Skinner, whose philosophical approach has remained consistent despite the occasional tweak or change of justifying vocabulary, Pocock has proven more open to conceptual change. In his earlier work, political languages were fairly rigid, akin to Thomas Kuhn's notion of a paradigm, a model to which Pocock appealed, albeit with qualifications.<sup>100</sup> Pocock has since shifted to a more fluid model based on the presence of multiple, overlapping languages in any given time or place.<sup>101</sup> Like a paradigm, these languages embody rules that determined what counted as reality and limited the possible ways in which these realities were connected. Language thus mediated experience and shaped the ways in which people could view the world. In contrast to a paradigm, people were aware of alternative languages, which they could creatively use for their purposes in public debate.<sup>102</sup> Pocock's conception of discourse is thus malleable, allowing space for human agency.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Reconstruction of Political Discourse: Towards the Historiography of Political Thought', *MLN*, vol. 96, no. 5 (1981), pp. 959–980, at p. 964.

<sup>99</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1957); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republic Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1999–2015).

<sup>100</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, 'On the non-revolutionary character of paradigms: a self-criticism and afterpiece', in *Political, Language, and Time*. For his subsequent shift, see 'Preface', in *Political Thought and History*, pp. xi–xiv.

<sup>101</sup> Pocock, 'The history of political thought', p. 14; Pocock, 'The History of Politics and the Politics of History', p. 546; Pocock, 'Reconstructing of Political Discourse', pp. 963–64.

<sup>102</sup> Pocock, 'The concept of language', p. 88.

<sup>103</sup> And thus, different to the notion of discourse used by historians such as Patrick Joyce and James Vernon.

Both Skinner and Pocock emphasise three features that are taken forward in this thesis. The first, is that political thought requires the study of local intellectual context. By attending to intellectual context – or the debates that historical people were involved in – we can ask what they were trying to do with the languages available to them. The second point is the fundamental emphasis on the role of *intentionality* and *agency* in thinking people. This model of agency is of a different kind to Thompson's, discussed above, which subordinated intention to social being. The third is that the language or discourse within which an author or speaker was working set the limits to the argument itself. Historical actors, therefore, were bound by linguistic constraints but were nevertheless free to use concepts and ideas within those constraints.<sup>104</sup>

It is at this point that we can see a convergence between contextual intellectual history and 'Rethinking Chartism', the central argument of which was that Chartism failed when the limitations of its discourse had been revealed. Indeed, Stedman Jones has subsequently admitted that the historical point he was attempting to make when he referred to the 'limits' of Chartism are 'perhaps better expressed in other terms'; namely:

What I wanted to suggest was that political movements cannot simply tailor available normative languages to suit each new grievance and remedy they decide to espouse, they must also tailor their articulation of grievances and remedies according to the normative language they have chosen to employ.<sup>105</sup>

The nudge in the direction of the Cambridge school is obvious, and, if it was not, Stedman Jones makes sure it is by citing Quentin Skinner.<sup>106</sup>

When interpreted in Cambridge terms, we can strip from 'Rethinking Chartism' its self-contained narrative of what Chartism was and why it failed. It is here, and not the treatment of Chartist ideas, where fault can be found in the analysis of 'Rethinking Chartism'. The primary 'other' that Stedman Jones positioned Chartists in opposition to was the state.<sup>107</sup> As Stedman Jones has conceded, however, his depiction of the state

<sup>104</sup> Hamilton-Bleakley, 'Linguistic Philosophy and *The Foundations*', pp. 26–30.

<sup>105</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism', pp. 179–90.

<sup>106</sup> Quentin Skinner, 'The principles and practices of opposition: the case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole', in Neil McKendrick (ed.), *Historical Perspectives: Essays in Honour of J. H. Plumb* (London, 1974), pp. 93–128.

<sup>107</sup> This aspects of 'Rethinking Chartism' was scrutinized most thoroughly in Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New "true" Socialism* (London, 1986), ch. 7.

was pre-discursive. He assumed that people's primary experience of oppression was that of the state but failed to demonstrate the ways that this experience was constructed discursively.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, as Stedman Jones has subsequently accepted, Chartist success and failure could not *only* be accounted for by the actions of the state. To properly situate Chartism, a much broader consideration of the discourses at play in the 1840s was required.<sup>109</sup>

Once shorn of its pre-discursive conception of the state and reductionist explanation for Chartist failure, 'Rethinking Chartism' can be repackaged as an exposition of one, or perhaps two, languages of politics that were available to Chartists: namely, the civic republican language concerned with corruption, and the closely related language of constitutionalism concerned with legitimising political authority. Building on this foundation, the task is to identify additional languages that were available to the Chartists, and then place the articulation of them in their discursive context; in other words, the undertakings of the history of political thought.

There are, however, some fundamental differences between the approach taken here and traditional history of political thought. The most influential accounts of the history of political thought have concentrated on a select body of texts that can be situated comfortably within extended Anglophone and European traditions of thought. The chosen medium of study is the treatise, usually penned by a highly educated and networked individual. The authors under study had ancient and modern languages and training in specialist discourses, such as the law and theology; access to the latest works and to the circles within which these works were discussed; and the time and resources necessary for deep thought and study. Within such confines, context predominantly means intellectual context; thus, ideas can be taken to supply the context for ideas.<sup>110</sup>

Chartists, however, did not write philosophical treatises that can be positioned in the canon of political thought. Rather than works that were engaged in explicit philosophical discussion, Chartists produced what Claeys has called 'literate but hardly high table or clubbable material'.<sup>111</sup> Even those Chartists who were more

<sup>108</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism', p. 177.

<sup>109</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Anglo-Marxism', p. 178.

<sup>110</sup> This point is made well by Bourke, 'Reflections', pp. 184–85.

<sup>111</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'Early Socialism as Intellectual History', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 40, no. 7

intellectually engaged, such as William Lovett, whom R. H. Tawney called ‘the brains... of Chartism’, should not be elevated to canonical status.<sup>112</sup> To do so would be to overlook the fact that neither Lovett nor the Chartist leaders considered Lovett to be a philosopher, and thus to treat him as one would distort what he was trying to do and how he was interpreted. The first methodological consequence of this fact is that the traditional approach of the ‘history of political thought’ of selecting a number of key texts for study has not been attempted. Chartist writers did not have an *oeuvre* that can serve as a point of study, and no Chartist left behind extensive collections of correspondence, papers, and diaries. The sources that have survived are patchy and often consist of newspaper cuttings or recollections written a long time after the fact.

A further weakness of the biographical approach is that it would fail to capture the remarkable democratisation of political debate that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, which expanded its scale and quickened its tempo. In its wake, political discussion – and therefore thinking – filtered through to every level of the population. It is this unprecedented proliferation of political debate that makes Chartist political thought a fertile area of study. To capture this phenomenon, we must move beyond the canonical texts and quarterly reviews that dominate the sources of ‘traditional’ political thought. In the Chartist case, Chartist thought is to be found in its own network of cheaply produced pamphlets and newspapers. This did not mean, however, that they believed that these means were any less intellectual. As Henry Vincent declared: ‘I have, it is true, but one instrument [with which] to level the high walls of aristocratic usurpation – but is sufficient – it is “THE PRESS”. The missiles which I shall propel against the powers of darkness derive their weight from the powder of “PUBLIC OPINION”.’<sup>113</sup>

For the study of this expanded public, Chartist sources have significant strengths, not least the tremendous number of printed sources that are available. Chartism was a movement steeped in the printed word. It took its name from a document, mobilised around its National Petitions, and was principally sustained by its network of fifty-plus dedicated Chartist newspapers, many more Chartist-supporting journals, and a

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(2014), pp. 893–904 at p. 895.

<sup>112</sup> R. H. Tawney, ‘Introduction’, in William Lovett, *Life and Struggles for Bread, Liberty and Knowledge* (London, 1920), p. xxviii

<sup>113</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 20 April 1839.

plethora of books, pamphlets, almanacs, and other printed materials. By far the most influential Chartist newspaper was the *Northern Star*. It was both the most circulated and enduring Chartist newspaper. O'Connor called his *Northern Star* ‘the mental link which binds the movement together; a paper which has, for the first time, concentrated the national mind into one body.’<sup>114</sup> Chartism’s print empire was kept afloat by a deep pool of committed activists who placed significant technical resources at the movement’s disposal. Among the most important were Chartism’s printers and publishers, many of whom cut their teeth in the ‘war of the unstamped’ in the early-1830s.<sup>115</sup> By the Chartist years, these men were the leading entrepreneurs in the business, and yet many sustained massive losses in the name of the cause. Also important were the armies of writers who churned out volumes of Chartist poetry, short-stories, and novels; journalism, reports, and polemics; political, social, and economic theory; and satires and plays.

Much of this material is readily available. Especially helpful has been Gregory Claeys’s six volume collection of Chartist pamphlets, *The Chartist Movement in Britain*. By bringing together ninety-two pamphlets, Claeys has enabled a greater number of Chartist voices to be cited. Also available are Chartist newspapers, which, as Eugenio Biagini has highlighted, can be considered ‘containers’ of sources of lots of different kinds.<sup>116</sup> The evidence one can draw from, say, a newspaper’s adverts is different from that contained in reports of meetings, editorials, and letters from readers. Many Chartist newspapers and tracts have been placed online by the digital revolution.<sup>117</sup> While there are some limitations to digital databases, the advantages are immense.<sup>118</sup> Digitisation allows historians to access an ‘archive’ of hundreds of newspapers and pamphlets anywhere (with internet) and at any time. The major databases used in this thesis are Gale’s *British Library Newspapers*, *Nineteenth-Century UK Periodicals*, *Nineteenth-Century Collections Online*, *The Making of the Modern World*, and

<sup>114</sup> *Northern Star*, 16 January 1841.

<sup>115</sup> Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press a Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1803s* (Glasgow, 1970); Joel H. Wiener, *The War of the Unstamped: The Movement to Repeal the British Newspaper Tax, 1830-1836* (Ithaca, NY, 1969).

<sup>116</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, p. 21.

<sup>117</sup> For insightful overviews of digitisation and Chartism, see Matthew Roberts, ‘Essay in Review Labouring in the Digital Archive’, *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no.1 (2012), pp. 232–55; Malcolm Chase, ‘Digital Chartists: Online Resources for the Study of Chartism’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2, (2009), pp. 294–301.

<sup>118</sup> James Mursell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (Basingstoke, 2012)

*Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers*, the ever-expanding *British Newspaper Archive*, the more-limited *Nineteenth Century Serials Editions*, the mighty Google Books, the extensive collection on archive.com, ProQuest's collection of American and British periodicals, the Library of Congress's newspaper database *Discover America*, and smaller newspaper-run archives such as those of *The Times*, *The Spectator*, and *The Economist*. By removing the *necessity* of visiting archives for *every* source, these databases save precious time and money, allow a greater number of sources to be consulted, and open the possibility of visiting smaller archives with perhaps only one or two relevant sources, rather than dedicating all archival time to the British Library newspaper room. These advantages are magnified for a thesis, like this one, with transnational interests. Studying America from Britain has obvious limitations, especially when one is trying to track down relatively unknown figures such as Chartist migrants. This does not mean, of course, that one does not—or should not—visit archives in America. A research trip to America in the summer of 2015 allowed archival material to be consulted. Digitisation, however, was an essential tool that guided where limited time should be spent.

This thesis, therefore, shifts attention away from individuals and great texts to popularly consumed sources such as newspapers and pamphlets. It is maintained that there is no reason why these types of sources should not be analysed as rigorously as a philosophical treatise. Accessing Chartist political thought in the movement's journalism leads to a second methodological injunction, which concerns the diversity of political thought. In Pocock's first methodological essay he argued that political thought occurred at various levels of abstraction. At its most basic, political thought can be defined as people 'thinking about politics just as in them fighting or farming or doing anything else'.<sup>119</sup> Pocock raised this point to counter historians and philosophers' tendency to prioritise abstract political thinking and, even worse, for turning past thinking *into* abstract thinking. This argument, however, can be pushed further. Political thinking in this broader sense operated at multiple levels. What this means in practice is that, on the one hand, Chartist arguments can be located within a historical pattern of thought. Chapters Two and Four, for example, situate Chartism within the natural law tradition stretching back to Hugo Grotius. On the other hand,

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<sup>119</sup> Pocock, 'The history of political thought', p. 9.

Chartist political thought must also be located at the level that it was consumed and debated, such as in newspaper columns and at public meetings. This means tracing not just the origin of Chartist political thought, but also the contemporary debates in which they were engaging. Although evident throughout the thesis, this approach is most explicit in Chapter Three, which places Chartism within a radical intellectual context beyond Chartism itself to show how the movement was defined by its ideas, and how these ideas shaped their relationship with other reforming groups.

Finally, this thesis also draws on a notion of context that is broader than that which is customarily used in the history of political thought. Intellectual context is, of course, central. However, Chartism's intellectual context was embedded in its social and cultural circumstances, a topic which forms the subject of Chapter One.<sup>120</sup>

To draw these strands together, this thesis takes the leading principles of contextual intellectual history to place Chartism within its intellectual and discursive contexts and identify the political languages and conceptual vocabularies that the Chartists used. To properly contextualise Chartist thought – and to establish its full significance – the history of political thought must be widened to consider political thinking at various levels of abstraction. ‘Political thought’ denotes both the genealogies of Chartist thought and the contemporary debates within which they were deployed. This more rounded approach to the history political thought allows it to escape the drawing room to explain a much broader range of past political thinking.

## Synopsis

This thesis is divided into five Chapters, which together are designed to explicate the multidimensional approach to Chartist political thinking that has been set out above. Each of the issues addressed has been chosen because of its prominence in Chartist discourse, or because of its centrality for the understanding of Chartist thought. There were, of course, many subjects that Chartists addressed and debated which have not

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<sup>120</sup> For arguments advancing the importance of the social for political thought, see Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*; Eugenio Biagini (ed), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and collective identities if the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1996); Eugenio Biagini, ‘Neo-roman liberalism: “republican” values and British liberalism, ca. 1860–1875’, *History of European Ideas*, no. 29 (2003), pp. 55–72; Bourke, ‘Reflections’, pp. 175–191; Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015).

been tackled here. Perhaps the primary omission is a detailed consideration of a crossover with Owenite thought, which can be justified on the grounds that Gregory Claeys got there first.<sup>121</sup> Claeys, moreover, tends to exaggerate the influence of Owenism; something which is understandable when the Chartist-Owenite relationship is analysed from an Owenite perspective. The accounts given here on natural law (Chapter One), political economy (Chapter Four), and the continued appeal of America (Chapter Five) can all be seen as alternatives to the Owenite perspective.

Some themes are addressed in multiple Chapters. An almost continuous topic is constitutionalism, the primary discourse within which nineteenth-century politics was discussed. The recognition of the centrality of the constitution was an important landmark in Chartist historiography. It enabled historians to establish a lineage within which Chartist arguments could be understood and recast Chartism as the heir to a long radical tradition. This thesis considerably extends the constitution's conceptual reach by showing how it structured the way that Chartists thought about a diverse range of topics including the law and the power of Parliament (Chapter Two), natural rights and historical development (Chapter Three), political economy and the right to subsistence (Chapter Four), and even American republicanism (Chapter Five).

Chapter One explores the foundations of Chartist political thought in reading, religion, and education. Chartism was a movement of the unfranchised, staffed primarily by the self-educated. Many Chartists were under severe material and physical restraints, which limited their ability to access texts. The Chapter outlines the texts that were available and considers the consequences of educational hardship on the movement's political thought. Alongside reading, for many Chartists religion provided a pathway into radicalism. Although Chartism was religiously diverse, a range of religious beliefs justified political equality and defined political radicalism in intellectual terms. The Chartists also held a late-Enlightenment belief in the inherent rationality of man. Truth was available to all who strived in pursuit of it. Such a belief, underwritten by their religious principles, informed what *they* believed Chartism was. Right across the movement, Chartists defined Chartism in intellectual terms: it was a movement of truth in pursuit of liberty. Ideas, therefore, mattered to the Chartists.

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<sup>121</sup> Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*

What were these ideas? Chapter Two concerns one of the key questions in the history of political thought and political theory: the location of, and limits to, political authority. For all the attention that constitutionalism has received as a site of struggle in Chartist historiography, the fact remains that constitutions are devices designed to define, and therefore delimit, the exercise of political power. Constitutions are also legal artefacts, and thus inextricably involve the power and discourse of the law. Chartism emerged in a context where Parliament had been conceptually crowned supreme and was believed to be exercising authority in unchecked and ever intrusive ways. Chapter Two highlights how Chartists drew on a sophisticated interpretation of the common law and natural law to argue that there were limits to government authority. It also places Chartist constitutionalism in a transatlantic context, and thus looks beyond the inward-looking dimensions of constitutional discourse.

Chapter Three examines what is usually considered as an alternative language of politics to constitutionalism, that of natural right. It is shown how Chartists located natural rights within an intellectual framework that incorporated elements of natural law jurisprudence and social contract theory. Rather than an alternative language to constitutionalism, it is argued that the Chartists articulated an anthropological view of historical development that saw the social contract *as* the constitution, the birth place of society. Such an account can be traced back to Locke and had been deployed in a wide range of different contexts since. What was significant about Chartist natural-right theory was the political and intellectual context in which it was used. Chapter Three shows how natural-right theories had been subjected to sustained and growing criticism in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This had two consequences: first, natural-right constitutionalism was left solely in the hands of popular radicals and their Chartist successors. Second, Chartist ideas were viewed as embarrassingly primitive by many of the movement's middle-class contemporaries. The Chapter explores the consequences of this intellectual context for the fortunes of the movement.

Chapter Four uncovers the languages that Chartists mobilised against Malthusian political economy. The nineteenth century was the age of classical political economy, a new 'science' of politics that radically reshaped how people viewed society, politics, and policy. The birth of political economy is customarily traced back to Adam Smith's

*Wealth of Nations* and Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*. For the Chartists, Malthus's population principle—that the rate of population growth exceeds the rate of subsistence—was anathema. It insulted their idea of God and nature and undercut the central premise of radicalism: that misery could be traced to a political source. As long as political economy was associated with Malthus, popular radicalism and the new 'science' were opposed. Popular radicals and Chartists responded to Malthus by arguing that his principle was empirically incorrect, that it was blasphemous, and that there was plenty of uncultivated land that could provide food for a growing population. If there was a subsistence crisis, it was not caused by the limits of nature's feast but the unfair distribution of land, propped up an aristocratic monopoly of power. It is in this context that Feargus O'Connor's Land Plan must be understood. O'Connor counterpoised the Chartist Land Plan to Malthus—and the Anti-Corn Law League, who many Chartists saw as two sides of the same coin—by arguing that a healthier, happier, and more independent future was available to all. The centrality of independence to Chartists is well-established. What has not been adequately recognised is that O'Connor, and other Chartist advocates of a 'return to the land', drew on republican discourse to contest the claims of political economy. It was out of the debate between proponents of 'commercial society' and its 'republican' critics that political economy emerged as an independent discipline. Chartist discourse should, therefore, be viewed as an echo of the long debate that pitted luxury against virtue, the towns against the countryside, and the moderns against the ancients.

Chapter Five takes a Pocockean leap to America. Inspired by the transnational and global perspectives of contemporary historiography, Chapter Five charts America's influence on Chartism and the Chartists. Following Chartism's demise, many Chartists left Britain for the freedom offered in the United States. This Chapter traces their careers and the continued influence of Chartist ideas in the causes of land reform, trade unionism, and anti-slavery. It also asks what 'Chartism' meant to Americans. It is shown that there was a positive and negative interpretation of Chartism in America. The former saw Chartism as an extension of American principles, and the latter as a European threat to American liberty. The American Civil War was, in many ways, the defining event of the nineteenth century. As Lincoln famously asked, would government of the people, by the people perish from the earth? There has been a long-running controversy over British public opinion on the American Civil War. This

Chapter brings a fresh angle to this debate by considering the opinions and actions of Chartists *in America*.

This thesis aims to broaden the approach pioneered by historians of political thought and intellectual history by applying it to a popular movement. To do so, a methodology has been adopted that cuts across social, political, and intellectual history. Taken as a whole, this thesis demonstrates that the Chartists staked out a range of notable positions in political thought, such as the sovereignty of the law over Parliament, consent as the guiding principle of government, resistance to political economy, and cosmopolitan republicanism around the world. The questions they asked about freedom, democracy, and political economy continue to resonate with us today. Studying the political thought of popular movements such as Chartism, therefore, provides new perspectives in the history of ‘political thought’.



## Chapter I

# The Foundations of Chartist Political Thought

Wisdom and Virtue [are] the Foundation of Liberty – Wisdom alone is the true power that is capable of checking the progress of oppression; it is the sword which God gave to man to drive violence out of the world. Therefore teach, instruct, propagate useful knowledge, wisdom and virtue; expel error and superstition, and injustice will gradually cease of itself to prevail the world.

(*Northern Star*, 1838)<sup>122</sup>

In his path-breaking *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Quentin Skinner traced the conceptual origins of modern politics through a sweeping study of medieval and early-modern political thought.<sup>123</sup> It is a masterly demonstration of how ideas can provide the context for ideas. The political thought of a popular movement like Chartism, however, was much less architectural than the thought of the thinkers studied by Skinner. The purpose of this Chapter is to advance an alternative approach to the ‘foundations’ of political thought, which considers a much broader notion of context. The Chapter is broken into three sections covering reading, religion, and education. Section One outlines the type of texts that were available to Chartists, and thus the sorts of political arguments they were reading and reproducing in their newspapers and pamphlets. The impact on Chartist political thought of the considerable educational hardship that many Chartists faced – particularly those who

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<sup>122</sup> *Northern Star*, 5 May 1838. This passage was quoting the French poet Jean de La Fontaine. Also, cited in *Material for Thinking: Extracted from the Work of Ancient and Modern Authors*, no. 7 (1836), p. 56. A similar remark by La Fontaine was quoted in *Chartist Circular*, 19 March 1842.

<sup>123</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978)

held leading positions – is also considered, as is the way that the Chartist press attempted to ameliorate this problem. Section Two locates Chartist political ideas within a religious and theological context. Chartism drew support from across denominational divides and had remarkable success in holding together diverse views in pursuit of the secular objectives of the Charter. This did not mean, however, that Chartist ideas were secular. To the contrary, it is shown here that Chartist principles could be justified from a range of different religious perspectives, all of which emphasised that radicalism was an intellectual commitment. Finally, Section Three outlines the Chartists' rationalist view of knowledge and their absolute faith in the power of the printed word to make converts for Chartism and, ultimately, win the Charter. Such beliefs, it is argued, powerfully underwrote the importance that Chartists placed in ideas. Section Three then outlines some of the problems latent in the rationalist strategy, such as an overly-optimistic view of progress.

## I. Reading

When approaching the limits of Chartist political thought, some aspects can be taken for granted. Most Chartists, for example, did not have specialist training in law or theology; and those that did had to adapt these specialist discourses to make them understandable to a wider audience. Likewise, most Chartists did not have ancient and foreign languages, nor even a formal education; although again, some did. More difficult to establish, yet no less significant for our attempt to ascertain the substance of Chartist political thinking, is the types of texts that were available to Chartists. What, in other words, did the Chartists read? Like all book and audience histories, an inquiry into Chartist reading material is hindered by the paucity and unreliability of evidence.<sup>124</sup> Audience histories are most successful when they are conducted over the *longue durée* and on broad social groups—like Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader 1830–1914* or Jonathan Rose's *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*—small

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<sup>124</sup> Mary Hammond, 'Book history in the reading experience', in Leslie Howsam (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book* (Cambridge, 2014) pp. 240–248; Jonathan Rose, 'A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Intellectual Life*, pp. 1–11; Robert Darnton, 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading', in *Kiss of the Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York, 1990); Stephen Colclough and David Vincent, 'Reading', in David McKitterick (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, vol. 6 1830–1914* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 281–323, p. 282.

concentrated groups, or individuals.<sup>125</sup> Another approach is to look at the reception of a particular work by a diverse group of readers.<sup>126</sup> For the Chartists, however, these approaches are unavailable. There is also the problem of the unreliability of evidence, much of which is derived from autobiographical testimonies written after the event.<sup>127</sup> How far can trust this evidence? Human memory is prone to error, falsification, and, with the passing time, reconditioning.<sup>128</sup> We also encounter what E. P. Thompson called the ‘folly of generalisation’: just because one reader or a group of readers studied certain works, it does not follow that all Chartists did.<sup>129</sup> While each of these objections is valid, their force depends on what question one is trying to answer. The idea that it might be possible to reconstruct a curriculum of texts that all Chartists read would indeed be illusory. It is nevertheless possible to establish a broad pattern of what the Chartist had available to read.

A good place to start is with Chartist intellect at its most impressive. By the age of twenty, the Leicester cobbler and Methodist lay preacher Thomas Cooper had mastered Latin and French, was competent in Hebrew and ancient Greek, and had memorised thousands of lines of poetry—including three books of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*—as well as several of Shakespeare’s plays.<sup>130</sup> Cooper’s ability, energy, and sheer determination was beyond the capabilities of most men. Despite being the son of a poor widow, Cooper was almost always in some form of formal education. He began at a local Dame School, before progressing to a Methodist School, followed by a scholarship at an Anglican Free School, and finally a neighbourhood school.<sup>131</sup> Cooper’s extraordinary abilities reached their fullest potential while he was

<sup>125</sup> Kate Flint, *Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford, 1995); Jonathan Rose, *Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven, 2001). See also, Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006); Ian Desai, ‘Books Behind Bars: Mahatma Gandhi’s Community of Captive Readers’, in Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (eds.), *The History of Reading: International Perspectives, c.1500–1990*, Volume 1 (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 178–191; Carolyn Steedman, *An Everyday Life of the English Working Class: Work, Self, and Sociability in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), Ch. 2.

<sup>126</sup> James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago, 2000).

<sup>127</sup> According to Rose, there were at least 900 working-class autobiographies in nineteenth-century Britain, Jonathan Rose, ‘Arriving at a History of Reading’, *History Speaking*, vol. 5, no. 3 (January, 2004), pp. 36–39 at p. 36.

<sup>128</sup> Kelly J. Mays, ‘Chartism, Selfhood, and the Nature of Truth-Telling in Two Chartist Autobiographies’, in Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson, and Stephen Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Brauton, 1999), pp. 196–231.

<sup>129</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 784.

<sup>130</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper: Written by Himself* (London, 1872), Ch. VI.

<sup>131</sup> Cooper, *Life*, pp. 7, 12–14, 32.

imprisoned for his alleged role in the 1842 strikes. Cooper devoted his time while incarcerated penning his epic poem *The Purgatory of Suicides*, which consisted of 944 Spenserian stanzas in ten books.<sup>132</sup> The first book alone mentioned:

EXORDIUM.—Chartist address to the Potters and Colliers, on strike, at Hanley, 15th August, 1842—Author's imprisonment. DREAM.—Voyage of Death and souls of Suicides—Landing on the Purgatorial shore—Tortuous journey—Cavern of wonders—Central dome—Hall of Suicide Kings—Its hieroglyphic shapes. Array of Suicide Spirits: Sardanapalus, Chow-Sin, Cambes, Oedipus, Nauplius, Ægeus, Saul, Zimri, Ajax Telamon, Codrus, Lycurgus, Charondas, Appius Claudius, Antony, Nero, Otho, Maximian, Bonosus, Mithridates, Juba, Nicocles, his wife and daughters, Althæa, Dido, Sisygambis, Cleopatra, Boadicea. Debate of Sardanapalus, Chow-Sin, Antony, Nero, Maximian, Mithridates and Lycurgus, on the prospect of an annihilation of Evil, and the universal reign of Goodness and Happiness, on earth and in Hades.<sup>133</sup>

Among its many glowing reviews, the *Kentish Independent* called it ‘the most extraordinary literary production of the... age’, which elevated Cooper’s reputation alongside Byron, Spenser, and Milton; the *Sheffield Iris* likewise believed it was a work that placed Cooper among ‘England’s greatest bards’; and the *Boston Herald* thought that Cooper was a genius who ‘must be remembered with his land’s language.’<sup>134</sup>

Although no Chartist approached the depth of Cooper’s learning of ancient history, mythology, and poetry, there was a broader knowledge of Greek and especially Roman history. The latter could be mined from a variety of sources including the Bible and the immensely popular plays of Shakespeare, ‘the people’s William’.<sup>135</sup> Andrew Carnegie, for example, recalled that his first encounter with republicanism was in Shakespeare’s

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of this topic by two other Chartists who also wrote while in prison, see William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism; a New Organization for 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 the Advocate of the Rights and Liberties of the Whole People as Set Forth in the 'People's Charter'* (London, 1840), p. 110.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Purgatory of Suicides: A Prison-Rhyme* (London, 1845).

<sup>134</sup> All quoted in *Northern Star*, 14 February 1846.

<sup>135</sup> For example, the ‘Chartism from Shakespeare’ series in *Northern Star*, 25 April, 2 May, 9 May and 23 May, 6 June 1840. See also, Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working Class Readers, 1800–1900* (Cambridge, 2008); Antony Taylor, ‘Shakespeare and Radicalism: The Uses and Abuses of Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Popular Politics’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2002), pp. 357–379,

*Julius Caesar*, when Brutus was praised for his opposition to dictatorship.<sup>136</sup> Access to history books was also commonly recollected in working-class autobiographies and Goldsmith's histories of Greece and Rome sold well at second-hand bookstores.<sup>137</sup>

One legacy of Rome was the use of Roman aliases by radical writers, both in Britain and the United States. The most famous examples were John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's 'Cato Letters' (1720–23), the anti-George III 'Junius Letters' (1769–72), and James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay's pro-Constitution *Federalist Papers* (1787–88), which were written in response to anti-Federalist polemics by 'Cato' and 'Brutus'. These letters were just one incarnation of a broader eighteenth-century captivation with ancient Rome. This fascination had a political bias. As Gordon Wood has argued, 'there is no doubt that the thrust of what the ancient world, and particularly Rome, had to say to the eighteenth century was latently and at times manifestly republican.'<sup>138</sup> Cato and Brutus led the resistance to the tyranny of Julius Caesar and were admired as models of self-sacrifice, patriotism, and virtue. 'Junius' referred to Lucius Junius Brutus, one of the four aristocrats responsible for the establishment of the Roman Republic; Hamilton, Madison, and Jay's *nom-de-plume* 'Publius', was another of the four, Publius Valerius Publicola.

The Chartist had their own Roman heroes. Out went Cato, who was depicted by the *Chartist Circular* as an ancient incarnation of the modern Whig (that is, somebody who spoke in the name of the people yet did nothing for the people), and in came the Gracchus brothers, who the 'page of classic literature—of ancient history—boasts no brighter luminaries of eloquence, nor yet more unflinching, uncompromising, champions of real democratic freedom.'<sup>139</sup> The *Northern Star* drew on the Gracchis' 'illustrious example', and Feargus O'Connor often drew parallels between his Land Plan and the Gracchis' Agrarian law.<sup>140</sup> *The English Chartist Circular* extracted

<sup>136</sup> Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (London, 1920), p. 10; Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Radicalism', p. 365.

<sup>137</sup> David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London, 1981), p. 120; Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1851), pp. 294–5.

<sup>138</sup> Gordon Wood, *Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (London, 2011), p. 59. See also, Peter Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), Ch. 1 and 2.

<sup>139</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 31 July, 28 August, and 4 September 1841.

<sup>140</sup> *Northern Star*, 20 May 1841; *Northern Star*, 14 November 1846; *Northern Star*, 6 July 1844; *Northern Star*, 20 May 1848; *Northern Star*, 6 April 1850. Cooper also compared O'Connor to the Gracchi, *Northern Star*, 15 November 1845.

Plutarch's account of how 'the blood thirsty land usurpers of Rome murdered the patriot, Tiberius Gracchus' and added 'God grant that a better fate may attend those who *now*, as the Gracchi did in days of yore, advocate Agrarian justice, or the people's right to support from what ought to be "the people's farm"—the soil of their nativity'.<sup>141</sup> Another writer in the same newspaper even celebrated Cornelia Gracchi, 'the mother of... two immortal sons of that name, [who] would alone suffice to establish the intellectual and moral endowments of the women of the Roman Republic'.<sup>142</sup>

Other examples of Chartists employing Roman aliases included the Whitby Chartist John Watkins' use of 'Junius Rusticus', a Stoic philosopher and teacher of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and 'Chartius'.<sup>143</sup> The name 'Publicola', referring to the same Publius Valerius Publicola that the Federalists' 'Publius' denoted, was also used by Chartists. One 'Publicola' was the Bath shoemaker George Bartlett, who wrote in the *Western Vindicator* and was credited as being 'the first to spread Chartist principles in the west'.<sup>144</sup> The most well-known 'Publicola' in this period was David Edward Williams of the *Weekly Dispatch*.<sup>145</sup> Although a supporter of the early-Chartist movement, Williams was not a Chartist, describing himself as first and foremost a republican. He criticised the Chartist leadership on a number of occasions, accusing them of leading the people astray with their violent rhetoric.<sup>146</sup> After William's death in 1846, 'Publicola' was assumed by William James Fox, the Unitarian preacher and radical.<sup>147</sup> We can only speculate on the extent to which Chartist readers identified the name with the Roman. One who did, however, was the Manchester Chartist R. J. Richardson, who knew both the meaning of the name – 'the very name of Publicola signifies "*a flatterer of the common people*"' – and referred to 'the patriotic Roman to whom the people awarded the name'.<sup>148</sup> More widely, however, it is likely that Publius's agnomen, 'Publicola', was chosen and known because it meant 'friend of the people'.

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<sup>141</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 74.

<sup>142</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 106.

<sup>143</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 119.

<sup>144</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 April, 25 June, 24 September 1842.

<sup>145</sup> *The Charter*, 31 March 1839.

<sup>146</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 January 1839; *The Operative*, 20 January 1839

<sup>147</sup> Edmund Richardson, 'Political writing and class' in Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace (eds.), *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, vol. 4: 1790–1880 (Oxford, 2015), pp. 103–130, at p. 124.

<sup>148</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 January 1839.

The Chartists' use of the classics has been read in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, it has been seen as an appropriation of elite culture for Chartist purposes.<sup>149</sup> Michael Sanders, for example, has argued not only that Chartists sought to 'reclaim' elite literature and high culture, but that their desire to do so was 'intrinsic to, and deeply rooted within, working-class culture'.<sup>150</sup> The opposite conclusion, however, was reached by Jonathan Rose, whose survey of British working-class reading highlighted that 'at any given point, the reading tastes of the British working classes consistently lagged a generation behind those of the educated middle classes, a cultural conservatism that often coexisted with political radicalism'.<sup>151</sup> Following Rose's observation, we can suggest that Cooper was able to attain knowledge of classical authors, impressive though it was, because these works were readily available. As well as displaying the 'cultural literacy' of working-class culture, therefore, the *Purgatory* also demonstrates its limits.

What were these limits? Cooper began on the staple reading diet of the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a copy of the *Fables of Aesop* passed down by his father. Despite his poor upbringing, he developed a talent for acquiring books. He soon began reading the gothic novels and romances and, through some boys at his school 'from a better culture than I', copies of Goldsmith's Histories of Rome, Greece, and England.<sup>152</sup> Cooper's reliance on others for reading was an experience shared by many autodidacts. The Chartist poet Gerald Massey, for example, was limited in his youth to the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* (which he read literally rather than allegorically), and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. When he moved to London as a young man, he was exposed to a greater corpus of texts, among which he named Cobbett's works, 'French Without a Master', and English, Roman, and Grecian histories.<sup>153</sup> Despite the broader opportunities London offered, Massey was still dependent on friends to provide literature for him or, more resourcefully, he stood for hours outside bookstalls reading whatever was to hand.<sup>154</sup> The Irish Chartist Thomas Ainge Devyr was also brought up

<sup>149</sup> Richardson, 'Political writing and class', p. 121.

<sup>150</sup> Sanders, 'From "Technical" to "Cultural" Literacy', pp. 294–5.

<sup>151</sup> Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 116.

<sup>152</sup> Cooper, *Life*, p. 33.

<sup>153</sup> Gerald Massey, Samuel Smiles (ed.), *Poetical Works*, (1861), pp. xi–xii, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=5417](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=5417)

<sup>154</sup> Gerald Massey, Samuel Smiles (ed.), *Poetical Works*, (1861), pp. xi–xii, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=5417](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=5417)

in a town where there was ‘a great famine of books’, but was able to acquire reading through his sister, who was a governess with access to her employers’ small library. His favourites included the poetry of Lord Byron and Walter Scott, the plays of Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, ‘But crowning above all’ were two stories of ‘old Chivalry’: *The Famous and Pleasant History of Parismus, the Valiant and Renowned Prince of Bohemia* and *The Famous and Delectable History Don Bellianis of Greece*.<sup>155</sup> In William Lovett’s native town of Newlyn, the only reading material available were ‘Bibles and prayer books, spelling books, and a few religious works, the only books in circulation for the masses were a few story-books and romances, filled with absurdities about giants, spirits, goblins, and supernatural horrors.’ The latter, however, he could not afford.<sup>156</sup>

The availability of books, therefore, was a serious problem. Although autodidacts could usually find something to read, they did not have control over which books were available. The poet Willie Thom complained that he would ‘pick up a loan where it can be had; so of course my reading it without choice or system.’<sup>157</sup> Charles Shaw, who was a child during the Chartist years, had a similar experience. The books he read, he wrote, ‘may look like a strange assortment’, but they were in fact ‘no assortment at all. They just happened to fall into my hands, and though I have read more elementary and educative books, these could not have moved the passion in me which these other books did.’<sup>158</sup>

The scarcity of reading materials also fostered a determined relationship with the written word, especially among the serious-minded young men who poured considerable devotional energies into the movement. The few books at their disposal were obsessively reread and usually committed to memory, a process that relied heavily on oral recitation, rigorous discipline, and the dedication of all available free time to reading. This dedication was necessary to overcome the considerable obstacles that stood in the way of education, including poverty, lack of time, inadequate lighting,

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas Ainge Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century, or, “Chivarly” in modern days, a personal record of reform* (New York, 1882), vol. 1, pp. 36–37.

<sup>156</sup> William Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (London 1876), p. 21.

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 118.

<sup>158</sup> Cited in Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 119–120.

and the absence of privacy.<sup>159</sup> Massey wrote how he ‘began to think that the crown of all desire, and the sum of all existence, was to read and get knowledge. Read, read, read! I used to read at all possible times, and in all possible places; up in bed till two or three in the morning,— and nothing daunted by once setting the bed on fire.’<sup>160</sup> Dedication, however, was often not enough. In the preface of his first collection of poems, *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love*, Massey acknowledged the shortcomings of his verse and the difficulties encountered by the ‘self-educated working man’, especially the limited access to poetry’s ‘great masters’. ‘No one knows better than myself,’ he wrote, ‘how unworthy [these poems] are of our common cause... but the builder can only erect his edifice according to his material, and I have not much book lore ... until of late, I have been quite shut out from the great masters of the lyre, and the mighty in the realms of thought.’<sup>161</sup> Cooper acknowledged the same in the preface of *Purgatory of Suicides*.<sup>162</sup> The sense that the struggle for knowledge was a precondition for learning was a powerful current within Chartism. As the London Working Men’s Association’s address on education outlined in 1838, ‘we consider the truth can only be elicited through the severest test of mental conflict’.<sup>163</sup> Or, as the Ashton-under-Lyne Chartist and school-master William Aitken put it, ‘the acquirement of general information cannot be attained without application and trouble—that the paths through which we have to pass are not all strewed with gentle flowers.’<sup>164</sup>

The radical press attempted to address this problem by printing a range of different types of reading, including politics, poetry, novel extracts, books reviews, crime reports, and scientific instruction.<sup>165</sup> Chartist newspapers also frequently serialised

<sup>159</sup> Martin Lyons, ‘New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers’, in Guglielmo Cavallo and Rodger Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 313–44, p. 339; Chris Baggs, ‘Radical reading? Working-class libraries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’, in Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 169–179, at p. p. 170; Harrison, *Living and Learning*, pp. 10–17, 44.

<sup>160</sup> Samuel Smiles (ed.), Gerald Massey, *Poetical Works* (1861), p. xii.

<sup>161</sup> Gerald Massey, *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love* (London, 1851), p. i.

<sup>162</sup> Cooper, *Purgatory*, p. 4.

<sup>163</sup> ‘An Address From the Working Men’s Association To the People of England, In Reply to the Objection in the Press’, (1838), p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> William Aitken, *A Journey Up the Mississippi, from its Mouth to Nauvoo, the city of the Latter Day Saints* (Ashton, 1845), p. 25.

<sup>165</sup> Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics, and the People, 1790–1860* (Cambridge, 2004).

texts and novels across several issues. Henry Vincent's *Western Vindicator*, for example, published Paine's *First Principles of Government* across numbers 4-10,<sup>166</sup> and among the many works the *English Chartist Circular* reprinted were Cobbett's *Sketch of the History of England*,<sup>167</sup> Rousseau's *Social Contract*,<sup>168</sup> and, over twenty-two non-consecutive issues, the 'Life of General Washington'.<sup>169</sup> It was also common for Chartist periodicals to print standalone quotes from 'the works of the best authors of the age... all bearing directly on moving principles of the present agitation'.<sup>170</sup> These quotes often appeared in a dedicated column, such as the *Chartist Circular*'s 'Thoughts for the Thoughtful', *The Charter*'s 'Materials for Thinking', *The English Chartist Circular*'s 'Political Aphorisms', the *Western Vindicator*'s 'Scraps Worth Reading', *Northern Star*'s 'Literary Scraps', and the *Midland Counties Illuminator*'s 'The Thinker's Note Book'.<sup>171</sup> Other publications consisted entirely of extracts, such as William Carpenter's *Political Text Book*, William Linton's *The People's Library*, and O'Connor's *National Instructor*, a format that had forerunners in the 1790s.<sup>172</sup> Linton's *People's Library* consisted of a wider range of contemporary content from across Europe than either Carpenter's or O'Connor's collections. Carpenter's *Political Text Book* was more heavily orientated towards political philosophy; and O'Connor's *National Instructor* was a mixed bag, containing essays, short stories, reviews, and 'Miscellaneous Information, suited alike for the amusement and instruction by the fireside'.<sup>173</sup> By printing these bitesize chunks of knowledge, these publishers believed that they were 'render[ing] a most essential service to truth, to freedom, and to humanity' in a format that could 'place within reach of the poorest classes that political

<sup>166</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 23, 30 March, 6, 13, 20, 27 April 1839.

<sup>167</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, Nos. 81–84.

<sup>168</sup> Translated by the Manchester Chartist Abel Heywood. *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, Nos. 92–95, 98, 100, 103–105,

<sup>169</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, Nos. 48–52, vol. 2, Nos. 53–54, 59–60, 62–64, 68–74, 83, 85–87, 89–91, 93, 96–98, 100, 102–103, 105–107.

<sup>170</sup> William Thomson, 'Preface', *Chartist Circular* (Glasgow, 1842). See also 'The Influence of the Chartist Circular on the Thinking Habits of the Scottish People', *Chartist Circular*, 18 September 1841.

<sup>171</sup> Matthew Roberts, 'Chartism, Commemoration, and the Radical Hero', *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (April 2013), 3–32 (8).

<sup>172</sup> *The People's Library* (1839); *National Instructor* (1848); *The Political Text Book* (London, 1833). Although published in 1833, James Watson continued to produce and sell the *Political Text Book* throughout the 1840s. The *Chartist Circular* also made use of *The Political Text Book*, for example, *Chartist Circular*, 26 October 1839. For the 1790s, *Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society* (1796); *Politics for the People*; and Thomas Spence's *Pigs Meat*. See Ian Haywood, *Revolution*, p. 28; Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 76.

<sup>173</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 August 1850.

and Social Information of which they are at present deprived by the Government “Taxes on Knowledge.”<sup>174</sup>

Alongside the Chartist press, Chartism’s associational culture also aimed to provide literature and knowledge. Chartists ran pubs, cafes, and reading groups. The London Chartists’ favourite coffee houses included the Charter Coffee House in High Holborn, Denny’s Coffee House in Seven Dials, and the London Coffee House in Ludgate Hill. The Arundel Coffee House on the Strand was hired by the Chartist National Convention.<sup>175</sup> Lovett also opened a coffee house in London, with a ‘large supply’ of newspapers, several hundred volumes of books, and separate rooms for conversation and reading.<sup>176</sup> Coffee houses were established by Chartists across the country as alternatives to pubs. However, the latter retained their traditional place at the heart of radical culture. Like coffee houses, pubs served as meeting places, centres of discussion, and arenas where radical newspapers would be read aloud. The Bradford delegate of the 1839 Chartist Convention, Peter Bussey, funded his expenses by sending reports to be read aloud in his beer shop, which, it was reported, was ‘like a theatre: there was a rush for early places, and all paid admission.’<sup>177</sup>

According to the *Westminster Review* in 1830, ‘every large’ and ‘almost every small town in England’ had subscription reading rooms that supplied newspapers.<sup>178</sup> In Carlisle alone, at least twenty-four reading rooms were founded between 1836 and 1854, catering for a combined total of almost 1,400 readers.<sup>179</sup> Some reading rooms were set up as an alternative to Mechanics’ Institutes,<sup>180</sup> but others happily coexisted alongside them. In many places, reading groups, mutual improvement societies, and shared libraries established by the people themselves were the only educational

<sup>174</sup> William Thomson, ‘Preface’, *Chartist Circular* (Glasgow, 1842); *Northern Star*, 3 August 1850.

<sup>175</sup> David Shaw, *Gerald Massey: Chartist, Poet, Radical, and Free Thinker* (2009), pp. 33, 239, available at <[http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/biog\\_contents.htm](http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/biog_contents.htm)>. See also, the 252 results for ‘coffee’ in Katrina Navickas’s wonderful Chartist meeting mapper:

[http://politicalmeetingsmapper.co.uk/maps/search?query=coffee&query\\_type=keyword&record\\_types%5B%5D=Item&record\\_types%5B%5D=File&record\\_types%5B%5D=Collection&record\\_types%5B%5D=SimplePagesPage&record\\_types%5B%5D=Exhibit&record\\_types%5B%5D=ExhibitPage&submit\\_search=Search](http://politicalmeetingsmapper.co.uk/maps/search?query=coffee&query_type=keyword&record_types%5B%5D=Item&record_types%5B%5D=File&record_types%5B%5D=Collection&record_types%5B%5D=SimplePagesPage&record_types%5B%5D=Exhibit&record_types%5B%5D=ExhibitPage&submit_search=Search)

<sup>176</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 88.

<sup>177</sup> Cited in Martin, ‘Popular Political Oratory’, p. 124.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Provincial newspaper press’, *Westminster Review*, no. 12 (1830), pp. 69–103.

<sup>179</sup> Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 65.

<sup>180</sup> Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 65; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 144–145; Baggs, ‘Radical Reading?’, p. 172; Colclough and Vincent, ‘Reading’, p. 305.

institutions available. Some of these were explicitly Chartist, a continuation under Chartist auspices of the already extensively spread mutual improvement societies, while others avoided any direct political affiliation. Nevertheless, as Emma Griffin has recently argued, mutual improvement societies, whether explicitly radical or not, provided a pathway into radicalism.<sup>181</sup> The Greenwich branch of the National Charter Association, for example, met to ‘promulgate the great political truths handed down to us by these immortal philosophers and patriots, Jefferson, Franklin, Paine, Cobbett, Cartwright, and Hunt.’<sup>182</sup> The school attached to the Birmingham Chartist Church, run by the Scot Arthur O’Neill, had a similar curriculum: namely, that of ‘properly instructing the young men, and bringing them up in the principles of Hunt, Cobbett, Paine, and Cartwright.’<sup>183</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Chartist press and the determined attitude of Chartist readers, Chartists could not close the gap of availability. A major obstacle was price. First-edition books were expensive, prohibitively so for poorer audiences. Books became cheaper after they had passed out of vogue, been overproduced to the same effect, or selected for cheap editions by specialist printers. Even in the case of cheap editions, demand usually determined which works were selected. The general pattern, however, was that, as Jonathan Topham notes, ‘If one wanted *cheap* reading, it to a large extent meant *old* reading’.<sup>184</sup> When Henry Mayhew asked what sold well at second-hand bookstores used by workingmen, the answer was dominated by the standard classics of the eighteenth century.<sup>185</sup> When Mayhew asked why fashionable works by authors such as Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth were missing the answer touched on an important consideration: ‘they haven’t become cheap enough yet for the streets, they would come in time.’<sup>186</sup> A similarly old list of works were advertised across the Chartist press. ‘Limbird’s British Novelist’, for example, was sold by Henry Hetherington in London, and was advertised in *The Charter*, *Northern Liberator*, and *Northern Star*.<sup>187</sup> Limbird’s project aimed ‘to publish at the lowest possible price,

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<sup>181</sup> Griffin, ‘The Making’, p. 583.

<sup>182</sup> *Northern Star*, 4 December 1847.

<sup>183</sup> *Northern Star*, 28 August 1841.

<sup>184</sup> Jonathan Topham, ‘John Limbird, Thomas Byerley, and the Production of Cheap Periodicals in the 1820s’, *Book History*, vol. 8 (2005), p. 78.

<sup>185</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour*, pp. 294–5.

<sup>186</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 295; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 120.

<sup>187</sup> *The Charter*, 11 August 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 11 March 1839; *Northern Star*, 26 May 1838.

works which ought to be in the library of every Englishman.<sup>188</sup> Limbird's selection 'In both form and content... draws inspiration from eighteenth-century sources.'<sup>189</sup> Only two works in the series were first published after 1800, and the majority were the gothic novels of the 1790s.<sup>190</sup>

The consequences of this gap are a theme that runs through this thesis and will be given greater consideration in subsequent Chapters. One example we can pursue here by way of demonstration is the reception of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Widely considered a masterpiece at the time and since, *Democracy in America* profoundly altered how American democracy was discussed. As John Stuart Mill explained in 1836, British debate on America and democracy had been stifled by British observers' reluctance to look 'at the United States with any other apparent purpose than to find arguments for and against popular government.'<sup>191</sup> America, he added four years later, had 'fallen among partisans, and had been pressed into the service of one party or another.' Tocqueville's work, however, 'achieved an easy triumph... Its reputation was as sudden, and is as extensive, in this country as in France'. It was, Mill continued, 'the first philosophical book ever written on Democracy, as it manifests itself in modern society'.<sup>192</sup> What so impressed Mill and other observers was Tocqueville's approach. Still considered one of the founding works of social science, *Democracy in America* appeared 'objective' and 'impartial'. This did not mean that parties did not attempt to claim Tocqueville for their purpose. However, as Robert Peel discovered after seizing upon the phrase 'tyranny of the majority', the crude reductions that characterised older accounts on democracy were no longer respected in more intellectual circles.<sup>193</sup>

Tocqueville presented democracy as a Providential fact, a result of irreversible historical forces. For the first time democracy was depicted as a distinctive feature of modern political experience. As the *Bradford Observer* stated, Tocqueville had 'almost

<sup>188</sup> Leigh Grey Dillard, "'The Cheapest Work Ever Printed": Illustrating the Classics in Limbard's *British Novelist*', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2016), pp. 533–557, at. 533.

<sup>189</sup> Dillard, "'The Cheapest Work Ever Printed", p. 534.

<sup>190</sup> For a full list see Dillard, "'The Cheapest Work Ever Printed", pp. 549-553.

<sup>191</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'State of Society in America', in John Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, 'Essays on Politics and Society, Part I' (Toronto, 1977)

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/233>

<sup>192</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, October 1840, pp. 1–3.

<sup>193</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, October 1840

made the word respectable.<sup>194</sup> The Radical *Leeds Times* referred the ‘day-dreamers of the Whig and Tory party’ to the work of ‘the philosophic Frenchman’, and cited at length passages from *Democracy in America* that preached the inevitable coming of democracy and the decline of the aristocracy.<sup>195</sup> Tocqueville’s belief in the inevitability of democracy also resonated with a group of Leeds Radicals who formed the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association in 1840. James Garth Marshall, the chairman of the Association, hailed Tocqueville for revealing ‘the new principle in modern European civilisation.’ Marshall accepted Tocqueville’s stricture that democracy was inevitable and urged Earl Fitzwilliam, a Whig grandee who held considerable political influence in Yorkshire, to accept the need for further Parliamentary reform. Fitzwilliam, however, declined Marshall’s invitation on the basis that he doubted that public opinion shared the Leeds reformers’ platform and that he did not want to see a repeat of the dangers posed during the years 1830-2; one revolution was enough for one lifetime.<sup>196</sup> Marshall’s reply switched between anti-aristocratic tropes and genuine concerns about the need to ‘meet the democracy face to face’. ‘The onward movement of Democracy’, he replied, ‘is irresistible. They of the Aristocracy and the Monarchy must make their choice of how they will meet it—with peace or war. Boldly and frankly meet Democracy, talk to it, study it, understand it, conciliate it, then on safe and honourable terms you may make peace and permanent alliance with it.’ Should the Aristocracy fail to do this, they will be ‘overwhelmed and swept away.’<sup>197</sup>

With democracy inscribed upon its banners, this rhetoric should have held great appeal to the Chartist. Tocqueville, however, registered very little attention at all.<sup>198</sup> When the *Northern Star* mentioned Tocqueville, it was in his capacity as a prominent French politician rather than as a philosopher. In one of the few instances where the *Star* did refer to the later Tocqueville, it was to complain of his influence:

We must confess that we are not pleased with the mode adopted by our contemporaries of arguing the important question of government; the friends

<sup>194</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 12 November 1840.

<sup>195</sup> *Leeds Times*, 28 November 1840, 26 June 1841 and 19 November 1842.

<sup>196</sup> Charles William Wentworth Fitzwilliam to J. G. Marshall, 23 December 1840, Goldsmiths, University of London.

<sup>197</sup> J. G. Marshall, *The People Still in Want of Good Government. A Letter from J. G. Marshall Chairman of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association to the Earl Fitzwilliam* (1841).

<sup>198</sup> For exceptions, *The Chartist Circular*, 25 July 1840 and 21 November 1841.

of the monarch bring forward a sentence from ARISTOTLE to the effect that a democracy is the worst of all governments, and they add extracts from the work of M. de Tocqueville, decrying the American Republic; their opponents generally answer them by a verbal quibble on the signification of democracy in the time of ARISTOTLE, and deny the premises as well as the conclusions of M. de Tocqueville.<sup>199</sup>

It was doubtful, however, that many Chartists read Tocqueville at all. Indeed, that is the point. Too expensive to buy, and not popular enough to mass produce, the work was simply passed over. The Chartists' exclusion from the 'dominant public', therefore, was not just the result of a 'violent expulsion'.<sup>200</sup> There were practical reasons why working-class politicians could not join the discussion.

## II. Religion

Another striking feature of the Chartists' testimonies on their reading was their religiosity. When Chartists encountered new reading, many described their experience using the evangelical terminology of 'conversions' and 'awakening' and the imagery of passing from darkness to light. The seriousness with which they treated the written word can also be seen as a broadly Protestant characteristic, which encouraged enquiry and reflection that could easily be extended from the theological sphere to more secular contexts.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, the most commonly read books were religious, with the King James Version and *Pilgrim's Progress* being near-universal.<sup>202</sup> The Bible provided popular radicals not only with a commonly understood and powerful language, but also, as Biagini argued, access to a source of 'Truth'. The *Pilgrim's Progress* also contained a political message and a subversive view of society, one where

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<sup>199</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 January 1841.

<sup>200</sup> Craig Calhoun, *Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movement* (London, 2012), p. 153; Geoff Eley, 'Edward Thompson, Social History and Political Culture: The Making of a Working-class Public, 1780–1850', in Harvey Kaye and Keith McClelland (eds.), *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspective* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 12–49.

<sup>201</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>202</sup> James, *Print and the People*, p. 28.

wealth was sin, judges were corrupt, and the artisans and widows were the heroes, the elect.<sup>203</sup>

The Christian features of Chartist intellectual culture raises broader questions about religious influences on Chartist political thought. The Chartist years were engulfed by religious controversy; a period of Tractarians railing against liberalism, evangelicals against immorality, and militant nonconformists against the establishment. In Scotland, the bitter dispute over the patronage rights of local gentry led to the founding of the breakaway Free Church in 1843. Methodism also experienced a number of divides that were caused by political and administrative issues – above all the form of church government – rather than doctrinal or theological differences.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, the Primitive Methodists, a democratic form of Methodism, more than doubled its membership during the Chartist period.<sup>205</sup> Historians of radicalism and Chartism have not been blind to this religious context. It is well documented that Chartists buttressed their arguments with voluminous quotations from the scriptures; that religion inspired many Chartists to take up the cause and provided many more with the education and leadership skills necessary to do so; that some Chartists established their own churches and congregations; and that religion was central to the culture from which Chartism emerged.<sup>206</sup> As Chase has argued, religious ideals ‘were never far from the surface of Chartism’.<sup>207</sup>

In the historiography of popular radicalism, the influence of religious ideas had been debated through a discussion about Methodism and its supposed influence (or otherwise) on Britain’s political stability.<sup>208</sup> This approach is now seen as inadequate

<sup>203</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, p. 37. More widely, see Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–88* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>204</sup> Harold Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches: A Study in Democracy* (New York, 1916), p. 83; Deborah Valenze, ‘Pilgrims and Progress in Nineteenth-Century England’, in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Politics: Essays in Honour of Eric Hobsbawm* (London, 1983), pp. 133–26; David Hempton, *Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, 1750–1900* (London, 1996).

<sup>205</sup> Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, p. 86.

<sup>206</sup> Eileen Yeo, ‘Christianity and the Chartist Struggle, 1838–1842’, *Past and Present*, no. 91 (1981), pp. 109–39; Eileen Yeo, ‘Chartist religious belief and the theology of liberation’, in Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel (eds.), *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* (London, 1987), pp. 411–21; Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (London, 1999), pp. 192–229; Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, *passim*; Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 341–68; Chase, *Chartism*, esp. pp. 25, 49–56, 97–98, 141–42.

<sup>207</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 58.

<sup>208</sup> Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, 80–110; Thompson, *Making*, pp. 50–100; Anthony

because of Chartism's religious heterogeneity. Indeed, it is this aspect of Chartism that was most remarkable. Dissenters and Churchmen, Trinitarians and Unitarians, Catholics and Protestants, all found their home within the movement. Some Chartist advocated a purely secular policy and espoused staunchly anti-clerical positions. Others saw religion as an emancipatory force. In general, Chartism adopted a policy of religious freedom and toleration, and advocated a non-sectarian approach to politics. In 1842, the NCA made this policy explicit and gave three justifications. First, they believed that 'one of the chief ends of the Charter will be the establishment of perfect religious liberty', and, as such, they did not have the *right* to give a preference to any one belief. Second, if they 'engrafted any peculiar creed upon Chartism, we should narrow the sphere of our actions, limit our usefulness, and close our breasts against all, except those who adopted our sectarian views'. And, third, they could not 'countenance the raising up of a religious body at the expense of a political association. Both can exist separate; but the one will destroy the other if united.'<sup>209</sup> The Irish Universal Suffrage Association's constitution also stipulated, 'That no religion or sectarian discussion shall be permitted at any of the meetings of this Association.'<sup>210</sup> In 1849 when an 'Irish Alliance' was established between the Irish Universal Suffrage Association and Irish Nationalists, this clause was carried over into the constitution of the new society.<sup>211</sup>

Rather than approaching the influence of religion on Chartism denominationally, we can ask how certain theological positions led to a commitment to radical polities. A growing body of historical scholarship has attempted to recover the theological dimensions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century politics. One extreme case is Jonathan Clark's argument that England was a confessional state until the sudden collapse of the *ancien régime* in the late 1820s. The thought-world of this society was dominated by the languages of the law and theology. In this argument, universal suffrage and annual parliaments, or 'Radical Reform', sprung from the theology of

Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodist and Society 1700-1850* (London, 1973); Nigel Scotland, 'Methodism and the English Labour Movement 1800-1906', *Anvil*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1997), 36-48; Alan Gilbert, 'Methodism, Dissent and Political Stability in Early Industrial England', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1979), pp. 381-399; John Rule, 'Methodism and Chartism among the Cornish miners', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, vol. 22 (1971), pp. 22-42.

<sup>209</sup> *Northern Star*, 9 October 1841.

<sup>210</sup> *Northern Star*, 7 August and 18 September 1841, 11 March 1848.

<sup>211</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 November 1849.

heterodox dissent in the 1770s and 80s. In particular, non-Trinitarian concepts of the authority of the state and Church led to the formulation of new notions of individual political status, which, in turn, spurred a demand for universal suffrage.<sup>212</sup> The theology that underpins this argument has received qualified support from A. M. C. Waterman.<sup>213</sup> The ‘heretical’ programme of democratic reform was then taken forward by Deistic radicals such as Major John Cartwright and Thomas Paine, and the Unitarian Richard Price, as an explicit attack against the Church.<sup>214</sup> It was only in the 1820s, however, that the term ‘radicalism’ was coined to denote ‘a theoretical critique of revealed religion, an institutional critique of the Church, and a political attack on the Church’s main supports: the unreformed parliament, the monarch, and the landlord.’<sup>215</sup> Radicalism, therefore, could not be traced back to the American Revolution, John Wilkes, nor any other eighteenth-century origin. It was a concept ‘freshly minted in the early nineteenth century’ that was ‘a fusion of universal suffrage, Ricardian economics and programmatic atheism’, and its founding father was Jeremy Bentham.<sup>216</sup>

The problem with Clark’s argument is that it ignores entirely popular radicalism and Chartist. Even if one was to argue that popular radicalism was not in fact ‘radicalism’—a shaky proposition—there is nevertheless a Chartist shaped hole in his account. To fill this hole, a better choice than Bentham and philosophic radicalism is the consciously Painite tradition of early-nineteenth-century freethought, the roots of which can be traced back to the rational Christianity of John Toland (1670–1722). As a term, ‘freethought’ encompasses a wide range of beliefs, including atheism, deism, rationalism, secularism, and other forms of irreligion.<sup>217</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, freethought’s key text was Paine’s *Age of Reason*. In the *Age of Reason*, Paine challenged the authority of Scripture by exposing its errors, historical inaccuracies, and inconsistencies. The doctrine of redemption was subject to

<sup>212</sup> J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660–1832: Religion, ideology and politics during the ancien régime* (Cambridge, 2000), Ch. 4; J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World, 1660–1832* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 303–304.

<sup>213</sup> A. M. C. Waterman, ‘The nexus between theology and political doctrine in Church and Dissent’, in Knud Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 193–218.

<sup>214</sup> Clark, *English Society*, ch. 4.

<sup>215</sup> Clark, *English Society*, p. 499.

<sup>216</sup> Clark, ‘Religion and the Origins of Radicalism’, pp. 241, 245.

<sup>217</sup> Edward Royle, ‘Freethought: The Religion of Irreligion’, in Denis Paz (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect* (London, 1995)

particular disdain. Paine continued, however, to celebrate Jesus, not as the founder of a new religion but as a preacher of the one god, moral virtues, and philanthropy.<sup>218</sup>

The *Age of Reason* was a scandal in its time. In the context of the backlash against radicalism in the 1790s, it was misrepresented by its critics and contributed to the decline of Paine's reputation in Britain and the United States. The tradition was revived by Richard Carlile, who reprinted the *Age of Reason* in 1818, and through the 1820s established Zetetic and freethinking societies. Carlile stood outside of political radicalism and Chartism. His prime objective was to divert attention away from political reform towards theological reform and the reformation of character.<sup>219</sup> The latter was also true of a second route from rationalism in religion to radicalism: Owenite socialism. Robert Owen advocated the complete reorganisation of society on basis of cooperation. Much like Carlile's brand of 'scientific' rationalism, Owenism was a quasi-secularised form of millenarianism. Owenites believed that society was on the verge of total change: a transition from the 'old immoral world' to the 'new moral world.' Vestiges of the old ways—the Church and theology, marriage and the family, competition and individual accumulation—would be swept away and replaced by rational communal living.<sup>220</sup> Like other 'secular' millenarians, such as the Spenceans and the English Jacobins, Owen and the Owenites saw little appeal in a reform programme that merely tinkered with the political machinery.<sup>221</sup>

The potentialities of freethought, then, tended to point beyond parliamentary reform to theology, community, and the reformation of man.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, Painite and Owenite traditions were influential for some Chartist, particularly in London. Carlile's campaign against the blasphemy laws was formative to Chartists such as Henry Hetherington and James Watson, both of whom worked for Carlile in their youth. With William Carpenter, John Cleave and others, Watson and Hetherington were central figures in the campaign against the stamp duty on newspapers in the early

<sup>218</sup> Paine, *Age of Reason*.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Carlile, *An Address to that Portion of the People of Great Britain and Ireland Calling themselves Reformers, on the Political Excitement of the Present Time* (Manchester, 1839), in Claeys (ed.), *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 2, pp. 121–136.

<sup>220</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for a New Moral World* (London, 1969); Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium* (Manchester, 1998).

<sup>221</sup> For the 1790s, Clark, *English Society*, p. 421.

<sup>222</sup> Royle, *Victorian Infidels*, p. 137.

1830s. The ‘war of the unstamped’ moved beyond Carlile’s focus on the blasphemy laws to broader impediments on the press.<sup>223</sup> For these men, freethought provided a pathway into political radicalism and Chartism. Universal suffrage would smash the oppressive state apparatus that curtailed free speech and free the constitution from priestly bondage and superstition. Likewise, as Gregory Claeys has shown at length, for some Chartist, universal suffrage was a means of achieving socialism; a belief that contradicted Owen’s teaching about the futility of politics.<sup>224</sup>

Another group of important Chartist who fit Clark’s heterodox definition were the various types of rational dissenters, including Swedenborgians such as William Hill, Bible Christians such as the ‘Chaplain of the Manchester Chartist’ James Scholefield, and Unitarians.<sup>225</sup> The latter were a loose group with roots in liberal Anglicanism and English Presbyterianism. In the nineteenth century, Unitarians largely put theological controversy behind them in favour of a simple scriptural approach to worship. They thrived in the burgeoning commercial centres, especially among the successful middle classes but also among intellectualised artisans.<sup>226</sup> Unitarians were also an ‘alienated intelligentsia’ with deep roots in radical political circles, as Clark’s argument outlined above testifies.<sup>227</sup> In London in the 1790s, for example, the circle that gathered around Paine’s publisher Joseph Johnson included Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, William Godwin, Anna Barbauld, and Mary Hays.<sup>228</sup> In the 1840s, a similar, if somewhat less eminent, group centred on William Johnson Fox’s South Place Chapel in Finsbury, including the Chartist William Cooper, William Lovett, James Watson, and John Parry, and the Chartist sympathisers such as W. H. Ashurst, John Bowring, and James Stansfeld; Cooper even served as the replacement preacher when Fox was attending to his parliamentary duties.<sup>229</sup> Outside of London, Unitarian ministers

<sup>223</sup> W. J. Linton (ed.), *James Watson, A Memoir*, <[http://gerald-massey.org.uk/linton/b\\_james\\_watson.htm](http://gerald-massey.org.uk/linton/b_james_watson.htm)>

<sup>224</sup> Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*.

<sup>225</sup> Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, p. 183; Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, “In the Thickest of the Fight”: The Reverend James Scholefield (1790–1855) and the Bible Christians of Manchester and Salford’, *Albion*, vol. 26, no. 3, (2016), pp. 461–82.

<sup>226</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp. 461–62.

<sup>227</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 461; Clark, *English Society*. See also, Stuart Andrews, *Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770–1814* (London, 2003); John Seed, ‘Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800–1850’, in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power, and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester, 1997).

<sup>228</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 461

<sup>229</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s*

involved in Chartist included James Taylor, the pastor of the Todmorden Methodist Unitarian Church who represented Rochdale at the General Convention of 1839, Henry Solly of Yeovil, John Cameron of Wakefield, and Joseph Barker, who was something of a wanderer.<sup>230</sup> Other well placed Unitarians included George Dawson in Birmingham; Abel Heywood in Manchester; Thomas Sideway in Gloucester; the father and son duo David John and David John of Merthyr Tydfil; Jones Jones in Tredegar; and Owen Evans in Cern Coed, Merthyr.<sup>231</sup>

Unitarians had available a theological justification for political radicalism. Boyd Hilton has described their denial of the divinity of Christ as ‘a stab at the symbolic heart of the Establishment’, because when the relationship between Church and State was defined in Erastian terms the rejection of the Trinity and the concepts of God the Son and God the Father denied the central justification for earthly authority exercised by kings, lords, magistrates, and heads of households.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, Unitarians dismissed original sin as irrational and unscriptural. Without original sin, the whole scheme of salvation—moral trial, the need for redemption, the Atonement, and eternal punishment—was without basis. Instead of the Fall, Unitarian theology rested on a God of love, the humanity of Jesus, the goodness of human nature. They were thus optimistic about the prospects of society and firm believers in progress.<sup>233</sup>

Joseph Barker drew on these theological themes to make an explicitly Unitarian case for Chartist in an open letter to his fellow Unitarians in 1848. The doctrine of Unitarianism was not that ‘men are naturally depraved,—that the masses of the People delight only in anarchy, confusion, and blood’. No, ‘Unitarianism taught that man is

*Rights Movement, c. 1831–1851* (London, 1995), p. 75; Joan Christodoulou, ‘The Glasgow Universalist Church and Scottish Radicalism from the French Revolution to Chartist: A Theology of Liberation’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (October 1992), pp. 608–623, at p. 621 n. 51; Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 77–78.

<sup>230</sup> Henry Solly, *These Eighty Years or The Story of an Unfinished Life* (London, 1983); Ashton and Pickering, ‘An “Earnest Radical”: The Reverend Henry Solly (1813–1903)’, in Ashton and Pickering, *Friends of the People: Uneasy Radicals in the age of the Chartists* (London: Merlin, 2002), pp. 29–54; Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, pp. 105–106; Seed, ‘Theologies of Power’, pp. 144–5. See also Joseph Barker’s article ‘Chartism and Unitarianism’, in *The People*, vol. 1, 27 May 1848.

<sup>231</sup> Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 512.

<sup>232</sup> Eugenio Biagini, ‘Politics and Social Reform in Britain and Ireland’, in Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas (eds.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2017), p. 409; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 462.

<sup>233</sup> Michael Ledger-Lomas, ‘Unitarians and Presbyterians’, in Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas (eds.), *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 108–113; Watts, *Dissenters*, Vol. 2, pp. 83–92; Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp. 460–64.

naturally pure,—that he is made in the image of God,—that the ruling faculties in man are intelligence, religion, benevolence, naturally humane, affectionate and generous’ and ‘the tendency of humanity is always to good.’ Step by step, and through great trials, humanity was cleaving towards ‘perfection and glory’. How, then, he asked, could Unitarians ‘glory in humanity in the pulpit, to boast of its worth and dignity in their writings’ but ‘libel it, to distrust it, to dread it in politics of common life?’ Did they believe that ‘all the intellect, virtue, and knowledge of the nation is confined to a handful of men in the upper and middle classes?’ This view, he argued, was unjustifiable in Unitarian terms, because all were equal before God and all had part of the divine within them. By supporting a system that denied ‘the masses’ power, they stood in the way of moral and intellectual progress. Indeed, Unitarian opponents of Chartism were ‘inconsistent, as to charge the orthodox churches with blasphemy against God for libelling humanity as naturally and utterly depraved; and yet themselves, in political matters, cherish a distrust, a suspicion, and a dread of humanity, which nothing but a belief in orthodox blasphemies could justify or excuse?’<sup>234</sup>

Closely related to Unitarianism was Universalism. In some places in the United States and Britain Universalist and Unitarian congregations amalgamated. Universalists also believed in human perfection and the inevitability of progress but did not necessarily reject the Trinity and the doctrine of salvation altogether, believing instead in the *certainty* of salvation for all.<sup>235</sup> In the 1830s and 40s, Universalism was prevalent in areas where Calvinism was strongest, such as New England and Scotland. In the latter, the overlap between Chartism and Universalism was extensive. An influential Chartist Universalist was John Fraser, the founder of *The Edinburgh Monthly Democrat*, who had been preaching a Universalist doctrine of civil and religious freedom from 1820.<sup>236</sup> For Fraser, civil and religious liberty and a fairer distribution of wealth were natural corollaries of the principle of universal redemption. ‘The spirit of liberty with which the gospel makes us free would dictate the necessity of giving all mankind that civil

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<sup>234</sup> *The People*, 3 June 1848.

<sup>235</sup> Christodoulou, ‘Glasgow Universalist Church’, p. 609.

<sup>236</sup> Christodoulou, ‘Glasgow Universalist Church’, p. 618.

and religious liberty to which they are entitled.<sup>237</sup> The same creed was propagated by the *Chartist Circular*. In March 1840, for example, the *Circular* declared that,

The Christian Chartists refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of priests. They believe that, when Jesus Christ appeared in the world, he abolished it... he taught them the doctrine of their universal redemption from ecclesiastical, political, civil and Satanic bondage, with the mild precepts of brotherly love, "peace on earth, good-will to men," political and religious liberty, and social equality.<sup>238</sup>

The *Chartist Circular* was established by the Universal Suffrage Central Committee of Scotland, the primary organising body of Scottish Chartism, and edited by a Universalist, William Thomson. The USCCS, moreover, was in turn founded by a convention hosted by Glasgow's Universalist congregation.<sup>239</sup>

The most influential Unitarian thinker in the 1840s was the American William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), whose writings were celebrated by a number of Chartists. The most enthusiastic were Unitarians such as Barker, who reprinted six volumes of Channing's works in 1845, and John Parry, who lectured on his life and writings at the National Association in 1842, which the *English Chartist Circular* printed over six-columns of tiny print.<sup>240</sup> Parry's lecture touched on the topics of Channing's theology and his hostility towards Calvinism, his biographical essays on Milton and Napoleon, his 'social labours' on behalf of the poor, belief in the mental equality of all men, and his commitment to the causes of temperance, education, and anti-slavery. 'He was the teacher of great moral truths to thousands of the population of these islands, who never heard them from other lips.'<sup>241</sup> The *Chartist Circular* credited to Channing its knowledge of 'the sublime doctrines of universal justice, virtue and religion'.<sup>242</sup> Channing also received attention beyond Chartist Unitarians. The *Northern Star*, for example, abridged a companion to Channing's essay 'The Present Age', which

<sup>237</sup> Cited in Christodoulou, 'Glasgow Universalist Church', p. 617.

<sup>238</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 29 August 1840. See also, *Northern Star*, 30 May 1840; *English Chartist Circular*, Vol. 1 No. 45.

<sup>239</sup> 'Preface', *Chartist Circular* (Glasgow, 1842); Chase, *Chartism*, p. 141; Christodoulou, 'The Glasgow Universalist Church', pp. 608–623.

<sup>240</sup> *The People*, 27 May and 3 June 1848; Joseph Barker (ed.), *The Works of William Ellery Channing in Six Volumes* (Newcastle, 1845).

<sup>241</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, Vol. 2, No. 99.

<sup>242</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 28 March 1840.

celebrated the increasing equality of education, political rights, and religion.<sup>243</sup> And the *Northern Liberator* quoted from Channing's 'Elevation of the Working Classes',<sup>244</sup> and carried an account of his appearance, intellect, and oratorical style, the 'vigorous beauty... [of which was] too well known and admired to be more than alluded to.'<sup>245</sup>

Like Owenites, Unitarians believed that social environment determined a person's character and actions, a form of environmental necessarianism that led to a strong belief in social progress and moral reform.<sup>246</sup> The source of improvement was knowledge, access to which was education. As the *Unitarian Magazine and Review* affirmed in 1841,

As Britons and as Christians we exceedingly rejoice in this promise of good; but we cannot forget another character which we sustain, namely, that of Unitarians. Ours is a peculiar interest in this subject, because we are confident that whatever promotes general intelligence will in the same degree promote the spread of our own views of Christian truth. Let it be our aim, then, to promote the cause of education by every possible means.<sup>247</sup>

The most comprehensive Chartist statement on education came from within this tradition. William Lovett had a background in Owenism and was a Unitarian. With the assistance of John Collins, an evangelical nonconformist, Lovett wrote the most detailed tract on educational theory produced by a Chartist. It opened with a bravado statement of rational progress:

The spirit which has awakened, pervades, and moves the multitude, is that of intellectual inquiry. The light of thought is illumining the minds of the masses; kindled by cheap publications, the discussions, missionaries, and meetings of the last ten years: a light which no power can extinguish, nor control its vivifying influence. For the spark once struck is inextinguishable, and will go on extending and radiating with increasing power; thought will generate thought; and each illumined mind will become a centre for the enlightenment of thousands, till the effulgent blaze penetrates every cranny of corruption, and

<sup>243</sup> *Northern Star*, 29 October, 5 November, 12 November 1842.

<sup>244</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 6 and 27 June 1840

<sup>245</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 23 May 1840.

<sup>246</sup> Hilton, *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 463.

<sup>247</sup> *The Christian Reformer; or, Unitarian magazine and Review*, vol. 8, no. 87 (March, 1841), p. 156.

scares selfishness and injustice from their seats of power. *Chartism* is an emanation of this spirit.<sup>248</sup>

Lovett's *Chartism; A New Organisation for the People* included discussions of other educational schemes, proposals for infant, child, adolescent, and adult instruction, and detailed lesson cards on subjects including geology, mineralogy, and human anatomy, as well as political topics such as 'Truth', 'Rights', and 'Duties'.

The *Unitarian Magazine*, although careful not to endorse Chartism, was enthusiastic about Lovett's pamphlet. 'We have never read a treatise which is more calculated to do good—none more replete with real eloquence, with clear and manly thought, and practical wisdom.'<sup>249</sup> William Shaen, also of Fox's circle, was so impressed by *Chartism; A New Movement of the People* that he wrote to his sister that he planned to use it as the basis of the curriculum of his Unitarian Sunday school.<sup>250</sup> Another Unitarian fan of Lovett was Samuel Smiles in Leeds, whose work *Self-Help* (1859) became the paradigmatic statement of the Victorian value of thrift.<sup>251</sup> In May 1841, Smiles declared that 'Chartism as set forth by WILLIAM LOVETT, *will* prevail. It is a thing "which has had many names which may yet have many more;" but it is a thing destined to endure long after aristocratic and unnatural distinctions'.<sup>252</sup> Smiles even offered Lovett the position of sub-editor of the *Leeds Times*, which he edited, but Lovett turned him down to stay in London.<sup>253</sup>

That deists, freethinkers, Unitarians, and even atheists held prominent positions in Chartism could be read as support for Clark's 'heterodox-radicalism' thesis. What Clark's thesis cannot explain, however, is that the majority of Chartists did not belong to these groups. Most Chartists were alarmed by Paine's *Age of Reasons* and were careful to separate Paine's politics from his deism. Moreover, many of those whose religious journeys took them into Unitarianism and beyond came from orthodox backgrounds. Lovett, Cooper, and Barker had all been practicing Methodists, and the

<sup>248</sup> Lovett and Collins, *Chartism*, p. 1.

<sup>249</sup> *Unitarian Magazine and Review*, vol. 8, no. 87 (March, 1841), p. 153.

<sup>250</sup> Gregory Vargo, 'Questions From Workers Who Read: Education And Self-Formation In Chartist Print Culture And Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 44, no. 1, (2016), pp. 133–61, at p. 137; Gleadle, *Early Feminists*, p. 76.

<sup>251</sup> Tyrrell, 'Class Consciousness', p. 123.

<sup>252</sup> *Leeds Times*, 8 May 1841.

<sup>253</sup> Lovett, *Life and Times*, p. 245.

latter two were lay preachers. How consequential their move from orthodox to heterodox religion was to their radical politics is, however, difficult to determine. Lovett abandoned Methodism at some point in the 1820s; a loss of orthodox faith that correlated with his increasing involvement in political radicalism.<sup>254</sup> Barker was a relative latecomer to Chartism. In the early 1840s, his time was spent dedicated to theological controversy. He was expelled from the Methodist New Connexion for refusing to administer baptisms. Barker then led a breakaway connexion, known as the 'Barkerites', numbering 4,348 members. It was only after moving to Unitarianism, via Quakerism, in 1845 that he began to 'dabble in politics'.<sup>255</sup> Cooper's career, however, travelled in the opposite direction: he entered Chartism as a fiery Methodist lay preacher and exited it as an atheist. Unlike Lovett and Barker, his enthusiasm for political reform waned as his scepticism increased.

James Bradley has challenged the 'heresy-radicalism thesis' by highlighting the importance of a common Nonconformist heritage of dissent. Dissenters of all theological views were committed to the notion that Christ was the sole lawgiver, that the Bible was the only source of religious authority, and that the primitive church was the ideal model of self-governance.<sup>256</sup> These beliefs challenged the hierarchical Anglican state. The sovereignty of God, and his immediate control over all earthly authority, was opposed to the High Anglican view that God's authority was *in* earthly authority.<sup>257</sup> An absolute belief in the equality of all in the eyes God, and the direct relationship between the believer and God, also led to a refusal to allow any civil or religious authority to exercise power over the individual's conscience.<sup>258</sup> The autonomy of conscience implied the innate rationality of all and, consequently, the existence of rights.<sup>259</sup> As the influential Congregationalist minister John Angell James wrote in 1834, 'The Holy Scriptures are the sole authority and sufficient rule in matters of religion, whether relating to doctrine, duty, or Church government. THE BIBLE, AND THE BIBLE ALONE, IS THE RELIGION OF DISSENTERS', and thus the axiom followed

<sup>254</sup> Lovett, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>255</sup> Barker, *Memoirs*, ch. 19.

<sup>256</sup> James Bradley, 'The Religious Origins of Radical Politics in England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1662–1800', in James Bradley and Dale Van Kley (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, 2001), p. 196.

<sup>257</sup> James Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Non-conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 136.

<sup>258</sup> Bradley, 'The Religious Origins', p. 195.

<sup>259</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (Ithaca, New York, 1986), p. 20.

that ‘it is every man’s indefeasible right, and incumbent duty, to form and follow his own opinion of the meaning of the word of God.’<sup>260</sup> ‘Revolutionist’ writing in *The Charter* newspaper put the same point in the following terms:

Every man may thus reason:—I find that I am endowed with intellectual faculties—with rationality to choose or reject; I am created also with an individual will;—this rationality and this will are faculties not primarily subjected to the control of any other human being. If, then, I am endued by my Creator with rational faculties, and a will self-existent, independently of the faculties or will of any other man—the attempt to exercise control over my faculties and will by any other man’s [sic]—by overt acts done, without my assent—is an assumption upon my natural right;—and if such control be actually enforced, in any degree whatsoever, it becomes tyranny, injustice, and oppression. No man has the right to urge my obedience to his will; because my own will is a faculty, or endowment of the individuality granted to me by God, in common with a like endowment equally granted to other rational man [sic], independent of *my* control.<sup>261</sup>

Or, as the 1842 national petition put it:

Your petitioners complain that it is unjust, and not in accordance with the Christian religion, to enforce compulsory support of religious creeds, and expensive church establishments, with which the people do not agree. That your petitioners believe all men have a right to worship God as may appear best to their consciences, and that no legislative enactments should interfere between man and his Creator.<sup>262</sup>

Chartist nonconformists mixed radical arguments with dissenting politics and theology. The Baptist John Jenkinson, for example, assailed the Church of England in a Chartist tract by drawing on both the traditional radical argument of ‘old Corruption’ and Nonconformist ecclesiology. In an open letter to the curate Rev. T. H. Madge on behalf of the Kettering Radical Association, Jenkinson complained that the labourers

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<sup>260</sup> J. A. James, ‘The Principles of Religious Dissent, 1834’, in Gerald Parsons and James Richard Moore (eds.), *Religion in Victorian Britain: Sources* (Manchester, 1988), p. 132.

<sup>261</sup> *The Charter*, 3 March 1839. This point was repeated in *The Charter*, 10 March and 5 May 1839.

<sup>262</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1842.

were forced to toil not only to support their families and the ‘imposts of the government’ but also to maintain ‘a church whose benefits are few and doubtful, but the evils of which are alas, too palpable.’ The Church establishment, moreover, was ‘unjust in principle, inimical to the temporal interests of the nation, and unfavourable to the progress of religion, we claim that Christianity shall be liberated from the trammels with which the state has bound her, and seek support upon the only principle ever recognised in scripture – the voluntary contribution of the people.’<sup>263</sup> Similar arguments were made by the *Chartist Circular*, which believed that ‘the church and state are unnaturally joined in union in support of the rich to oppress the poor. This is not, in their opinion, the pure Church of Christ, but the pampered church of the British government’.<sup>264</sup>

The Anglican establishment was seen to symbolise Old Corruption, not only because of its law-protected place within the political state, but because its compulsory Church rates and tithes were seen as religious taxes raised on the poor to pay for the Church’s sinecure cast of bishops and parsons. As William Dean Taylor declared before a meeting in Birmingham: ‘This Church was established by law, supported by law, and the system of priestly plunder and spiritual delusion was protected as the most sacred thing by law.’<sup>265</sup> Among the Chartist periodicals that advocated the separation of the Church and state were: *The Northern Star*, *The Chartist Circular*, *The Weekly Advertiser*, *The Moral Republic*, *Power of Pence*, *The People*, *The Reformer*, *The Divinerarian*, *The English Republic*, *The English Chartist Circular*, *Cooper’s Journal*, *Bronterre’s National Reformer*, and *McDouall’s Chartist and Republican Journal*.<sup>266</sup> Disestablishment was also part of the demands outlined in the 1842 National Petition, Feargus O’Connor and Henry Vincent’s platform for the 1847 General Election, Lovett’s proposal for a General Association of Progress, and the 1851 manifesto of the Chartist convention.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> John Jenkinson, *Our Rights; Or, The Just Claims of the Working Classes, Stated in a Letter to the Rev. T. H. Madge, Curate of Kettering*, 1839), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 2, p. 33.

<sup>264</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 29 August 1840. See also, *Northern Star*, 30 May 1840; *English Chartist Circular*, Vol. 1 No. 45.

<sup>265</sup> *Northern Star*, 13 March 1841.

<sup>266</sup> Adapted from Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>267</sup> Hansard, 2 May 1842; Floyd, *Church, Chapel, Party*, pp. 66, 85; Lovett, *A Proposal for the Consideration of the Friends of Progress* (London, 1847), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 290; Lovett, *Life*, p. 326.

The attack on the Church as a vestige of Old Corruption was joined by Chartists who were members of the Church of England, including the clergymen Arthur Wade and Humphrey Price. Much like his Nonconformist Chartist associates, the Anglican R. J. Richardson found little difficulty combining his choice of Church with radical arguments:

As a Protestant—a member of the Church of England, I am tolerant, supporting only the doctrines of the Reformation, and not the corruptions that defile many of its ministers; or the impurities that disgrace the sacred order of our religion. I am opposed to all church patronage, pluralies, clerical sinecures, and voluptuous dignitaries; the improper use of tithes, glebes, offerings, oblations, dues, surplice fees, and other clerical extractions.<sup>268</sup>

These Chartists were what John Stuart Mill called ‘Church Reformers’, who he believed were a growing grouping among the laity. In Mill’s view, the Church Reformers were ‘natural Radicals’, whose discontent was stimulated because ‘they see the religion which is theirs, corrupted in the way in which every religion has been corrupted, by the secular interests of its ministers; and this because those ministers spring from the aristocracy, and are part and parcel of the aristocracy’. To rid the Church of *secular* abuses, these reformers had be radicals, for only a Parliament cleansed of aristocratic corruption could purify the Church.<sup>269</sup> As Rev. Humphrey Price put, the Church was ‘very corrupt, and that if our Lord Jesus Christ were to come again upon earth, and meant to preserve the church, he would again take the whip of small cords to drive out the money-changers’.<sup>270</sup>

The authority of the Bible also served as a point of convergence for a multi-denominational movement. The pro-Church *Fraser’s Magazine* reminded Dissenters that Anglicans also held Scripture as the highest authority by pointing to Article Six of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which read ‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.’<sup>271</sup> At a meeting in 1839, William Hill, the first editor of the *Northern Star* and a Swedenborgian minister, set aside his Swedenborgian views by avowing ‘not to

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<sup>268</sup> *Northern Star*, 8 August 1840.

<sup>269</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘The reorganisation of the reform party’, in John Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 6 (Toronto, 1982), <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/245>>

<sup>270</sup> Price, *An Address on the People’s Charter*, in Claeys, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>271</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine*, October 1839.

seek after mystical meanings, or occult senses, or spiritual interpretations, or allegorical similitudes'. Instead, Hill appealed to Scripture, a source of authority that he declared was applicable to all regardless of whether 'they were Methodists or Calvinists, or Quakers, or Church-of-England men, or Catholics'. He then compared the laws of England with the laws of God, as revealed in the Bible, 'a comparison of our practices with the practices of purity and holiness enjoined by this book...the great and abiding principles whose application, and whose operation, is the same at all times, in all places, among all people, and under all circumstances.'<sup>272</sup>

As Hill's sermon indicates, religious and Biblical authority underwrote political thinking. Indeed, the Bible was read to support universal suffrage. Benjamin Parsons, a Chartist and Baptist minister, for example, argued:

From the days of the Saviour until now it may be said of all reformers, '*the common people have heard them gladly,*' and such will be the case until corruption and oppression shall come to an end. This was known by our Lord and his apostles, who always appealed to the *common sense* and *common justice* of the *common people*: and hence the doctrine of universal suffrage was not only taught but practiced by the apostles in the very first Ecclesiastical transaction of the church.<sup>273</sup>

Or as the Bible Christian James Scholefield put it, 'In short the Bible is the Book of all the books in the World, considering its inspiration and its doctrines, as eminently worthy of being entitled – RIGHTS OF MAN!'<sup>274</sup>

Whether one was a freethinker, rational Dissenter, or Orthodox Christian, each had available a pathway to radicalism that rested on intellectual engagement. Each of these strands stressed the individual's responsibility to gain knowledge and substantiated, or endorsed, the pursuit of political rights. For Painite freethinkers and Owenites, the championing of reason would topple the temple of superstition and lead to the new moral world. Rational Dissenters, such as Unitarians and Universalists, had an absolute faith in education as the motor of progress, and the inherent goodness and

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<sup>272</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>273</sup> Parsons, *Tracts for Fustian Jackets*, nos. 2 and 3, 'The Bible and the Six points of the Charter', in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 308.

<sup>274</sup> Cited in Pickering, *Chartism*, p. 114.

equality of all, which Chartist Unitarians linked to the attainment of the suffrage. And the orthodox Protestant concern for the autonomy of the individual led not only to a commitment to Scripture, but also the innate rationality of mankind and a theological justification of political rights.

### III. Education

Educational hardship and religious commitment came together to produce a view of knowledge itself. These aspects can be seen in the journey of Lovett. As we have noted, in Newlyn Lovett faced the impediments of few books to read and less time to read them.<sup>275</sup> After moving to London, he entered a new world. He joined a small literary association called ‘The Liberals’, participated in debates at coffee houses, and attended lectures at the Mechanics’ Institute. With these new opportunities, Lovett ‘became seized with an enthusiastic desire to read and treasure up all I could’. He began with religious works, including William Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, and engaged in the debates that swirled around London’s radical circles on Christianity.<sup>276</sup> He later wrote how he spent the night ‘till morning dawned reading and preparing myself with arguments in support of its principles.’<sup>277</sup> From religion, Lovett moved to ‘political works’, which fed ‘a great interest in the parliamentary debates and questions of the day.’ ‘In short,’ Lovett summarised, ‘my mind seemed to be awakened to a new mental existence; new feelings, hopes, and aspirations sprang up inside of me, and every spare moment was devoted to the acquisition of some kind of useful knowledge.’<sup>278</sup> This feeling of transformation, David Vincent notes, ‘is a phenomenon which we find whenever the autobiographies attempt to convey their feelings as they make their first contact with the world of books.’<sup>279</sup> Lovett wanted to pass on his transformative experience to others. For him, the aim of Chartism was ‘to purify the heart and rectify the conduct of all, by knowledge, morality, and love of freedom.’<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 21.

<sup>276</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 35.

<sup>277</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 35.

<sup>278</sup> Lovett, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 34.

<sup>279</sup> Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 135.

<sup>280</sup> Lovett and Collins, *Chartism*, p. 9.

Henry Vincent had a similar experience. Writing from his prison cell in 1839, he told his readers in the *Western Vindicator* how he became a radical at the age of 15 after reading ‘Cobbett, Bentham, Cartwright and other writings’. Inspired by these authors, the young Vincent committed himself to spreading the word. At the age of 17, he was appointed the vice-president of a society ‘upwards of one hundred in number, formed for the purpose of disseminating the principles embodied in the best political work ever written, THE RIGHTS OF MAN.’<sup>281</sup> He then declared that his principles, ‘planted within me by writers whose memories I revere’, were ‘beyond the reach of their puny touch.—They are deeply engrafted in my inmost soul—and every particle of my composition is Radical... and they cannot be eradicated but with my life!’<sup>282</sup> Thomas Cooper also traced his radicalism to reading, as did another Chartist poet, John Bedford Leno. Cooper recalled how he was ‘impregnated with the spirit of Radicalism’ by ““The News”—the most radical paper of that day’.<sup>283</sup> Leno became involved in Chartism after being subject to a competition between two friends from ‘different schools of liberalism’. One friend was an advocate of free trade as propagated by the Anti-Corn Law League; the other was a Chartist. After both friends supplied Leno with tracts and other propagandistic material, Leno declared for Chartism. Like Lovett, Vincent, and Cooper, Leno distributed Chartist tracts and edited a Chartist newspaper.<sup>284</sup>

In each of these examples, the power of print was looked upon as the tool that would unlock the sleeping political consciousness of the masses as it had unlocked their own. Lovett and Collins’s *Chartism*, for example, was a plan for the organisation of Chartism and to ‘create and extend an enlightened public opinion in favour of the *People’s Charter*’.<sup>285</sup> It called for the recruiting of missionaries to explain Chartist views, promote the Charter, and lecture on a range of subjects; the establishment of circulating libraries stored with ‘the most useful works on politics, morals, the sciences, history, and such instructing and entertaining works’ which would lend freely to members; the printing of tracts, pamphlets, and national periodicals; and the

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<sup>281</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 25 May 1839.

<sup>282</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 25 May 1839.

<sup>283</sup> Cooper, *Life*, p. 36.

<sup>284</sup> John Bedford Leno, *The Aftermath: With An Autobiography of the Author* (London: 1891), pp. 18–19.

<sup>285</sup> Cited in Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, p. 248.

erection of public halls and schools for the instruction of children in ‘physical, mental, moral, and political’ education, and for adults public lectures, readings, discussions, musical entertainments, dancing, and other ‘rational recreations’.<sup>286</sup>

These proposals were scornfully dismissed as ‘Knowledge Chartism’ by O’Connor and the *Northern Star*, and were lumped together with temperance, Church, and Household [Suffrage] Chartism as part of the despised ‘New Move’. O’Connor feared that Knowledge Chartism implied an educational qualification for the franchise.<sup>287</sup> O’Connor’s attack, however, was disingenuous.<sup>288</sup> All parts of the movement held education and knowledge in high esteem. Although they passed resolutions censuring the phantom ‘New Move’, local Chartist organisations simultaneously followed Lovett’s educational suggestions.<sup>289</sup> The O’Connor-backed NCA advocated similar schemes throughout its existence. Its first constitution recommended that ‘the appointment of Missionaries, the publication of tracts, and the employment of the power of the press, for the advancement of our views’ should be invested in the National Executive.<sup>290</sup> In the 1843 and 1844 NCA constitutions, this commitment was made more explicit. Under the subcategory entitled ‘Means’, it was stipulated that the cause would be advanced ‘By creating a public opinion in favour of those principles through the medium of public meetings, petitions to Parliament, discussion, lectures, cheap publications, and the newspaper press’.<sup>291</sup> Although absent from the much-reduced 1848 constitution, which included only the formal structures of the organisation, a similarly worded commitment was included in the address of the NCA’s Provisional Executive Committee. The 1848 NCA convention also expressed support for a central tract depot based in London, but the lack of funds prevented it from becoming a reality.<sup>292</sup> In 1851, the Executive was again empowered with the appointment of missionaries and the issuing of tracts.<sup>293</sup> Another example was the Chartist of Hunslet, who established a Chartist Loan Tract Society to circulate free of charge the *English Chartist Circular*. The scheme bought enough copies of the

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<sup>286</sup> Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, pp. 248–249.

<sup>287</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 April 1841.

<sup>288</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 170.

<sup>289</sup> Vargo, ‘Questions’, p. 141.

<sup>290</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 August 1840.

<sup>291</sup> *Northern Star*, 16 September 1843 and 27 April 1844.

<sup>292</sup> *Northern Star*, 20 May and 11 November 1848; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 332.

<sup>293</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 April 1851.

*Circular* to reach 480 families and over 1000 readers each week, ‘many of whom’, they believed, ‘would doubtless become converts to our principles, would join our ranks, and add to our influence.’<sup>294</sup>

This strategy, and the rationalist view of knowledge that underpinned it, depended on a belief that ‘man’ was inherently rational. In radical narratives, ignorance and despotism, which were synonymous, had captured man and deprived him of his natural liberty. William Carpenter explained in his popular *Political Tracts* that ‘Knowledge and ignorance, with their kindred attendants, good and evil, have maintained a perpetual struggle for supremacy, and been manifested in those corresponding actions and combinations of events which constitute in their aggregate the dismal and devious history of man.’<sup>295</sup> It followed that only if man became instructed in the principles of reason could ignorance and despotism be overthrown.<sup>296</sup> The advert that announced the establishment of the *Chartist Circular* was also full of Enlightenment tropes and phrases. It declared that the ‘despotic supremacy and aristocratic arrogance would soon be at an end’ because the ‘enslaved, insulted, plundered, and debased’ people were becoming ‘sufficiently enlightened as to know their rights—to appreciate the blessings of freedom, and to perceive the cause, nature, extent, and remedy of their grievances’. Freedom had not yet arrived because they had not ‘attained a degree of knowledge which would unite them indissolubly in one common interest, and render their concentrated energies omnipotent.’ The *Circular*, therefore, was launched for the ‘propagation of truth’, and the spreading of the enlightened knowledge that would lead to political emancipation.<sup>297</sup>

The faith in the power of the written word also drew on religious inspiration. Just as the Bible was praised for its simplicity and the accessibility of its teachings, so ‘that the most dull cannot misapprehend them’,<sup>298</sup> politics was also grounded in easily-inferred principles that everybody could understand. The *Northern Star*, for example, rejected as a ‘childish notion’ the idea that political participation required the study of Herodotus and Hume, law and Latin, and ‘that government must be inquired into from

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<sup>294</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1 no. 48.

<sup>295</sup> William Carpenter, ‘The Progress and Influence of Knowledge’, *Political Tracts*, no. 6, (1831), p. 22.

<sup>296</sup> Tygve Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London, 1976), p. 72.

<sup>297</sup> *Northern Star*, 28 September 1839.

<sup>298</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

the Mosaical dominion in the Old Testament to the American Republic'. Instead, it argued that 'the science of politics is the science of human nature', and was, therefore, accessible by 'the common sense possessed by all men; their reasoning powers exercised by reflection, by discussion, and experience, with a knowledge of their wants, and a rectitude of purpose.'<sup>299</sup> Truth was thus *always* available and *always* understandable to reason. It did not require a university degree, nor deep study of any kind.<sup>300</sup> As a writer in the *Charter* wrote, 'The beautiful simplicity and palpable justice of the doctrine that every honest man in Great Britain, high and low, rich and poor, ought to be a *freeman*, cannot fail to make converts.'<sup>301</sup> Therefore, simply knowing Chartist principles was enough to make an honest man, who was uncorrupted by special interests, a Chartist. Such views underpinned a common and uncomplicated rationalist view of progress: all that was needed for democracy to take root was the unimpeded dissemination of Chartist principles. As the same writer continued, 'Their efforts cannot fail... No sacred months—no bloody insurrection—is necessary for this purpose; a vigorous dissemination of Chartist principles is all that is necessary.' And thus, the way forward was clear: 'A political tract society should be formed for the gratuitous distribution of tracts; and frequent and orderly meetings should be held. A great portion of the people are as yet totally ignorant of Chartist principles;—let them be instructed—let that mighty engine the press be put into full operation, and there can be no doubt about the result.'<sup>302</sup>

Confidence in the power of education to make converts for Chartism was most strongly asserted during Chartism's early years but persisted throughout the movement's existence. In 1845, for instance, Aitken declared that

We live in an age when all who are anxious to make themselves intelligent may do so, as knowledge is cheap and universally disseminated. The press, that mighty civilizer of mankind, the destroyer of error and superstition hath shed its cheering rays over the civilised world—error is now soon detected and

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<sup>299</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 December 1840.

<sup>300</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 31 March 1838.

<sup>301</sup> *The Charter*, 28 July 1839.

<sup>302</sup> *The Charter*, 28 July 1839.

exposed, and fools and knaves stand wrecked upon the sand-bank they raised for others.<sup>303</sup>

What is remarkable about this statement is that Chartism in 1845 had declined into an ineffective pressure group. Aitken could not have known that Chartism would rise again in 1847/8. From the perspective of 1845, Chartism, like previous bouts of radical activity, had shone brightly and burnt out. Part of the reason for Aitken's confidence was his short visit to the United States where, he reported, 'The brand of inferiority had been removed from the brows of the working classes... the temple of knowledge is open to all, and by entering at its portals and drinking deeply of the invigorating streams of science, the path to honour, wealth, and fame lies before you.'<sup>304</sup> In 1848, the Executive of the NCA appealed to similar rhetoric. The Executive called for the 'Old Guards of Democracy'—those who had 'raised the standard of freedom and right, in opposition to despotism and wrong'—to supply Chartism with the 'ammunition necessary for this war of reason against brute power.' Chartism's previous failure was explained away as the machinations of the 'basest of ministers' who had deployed the 'basest tools to do the foulest deeds'. Such setbacks did not—could not—dent their rationalist faith in progress:

Their principles are indestructible, it is a truth supported by the evidence of ages. Thrones may be shaken—states destroyed—peoples annihilated—patriots sacrificed—rich lands become barren heaths—seas change to the lands, and lands to seas—but principles remain in their entirety-unchanged and unchangeable, undestroyed and indestructible.<sup>305</sup>

In 1851, when the movement was suffering from another lull of activity, the NCA still argued that despite fourteen years of propagandising about Chartist principles, 'the majority of the poor are too ignorant of the benefits that the Charter confers on them', that they were too poor to contribute to Chartist coffers, and that many were prevented from joining the movement's ranks by 'oppression from the masters and capitalists'. The solution, again, was 'to secure the people political freedom, we must make them wise respecting of their political degradation... Brother Chartists, we must enlighten

<sup>303</sup> Aitken, *A Journey Up the Mississippi*, p. 26.

<sup>304</sup> Aitken, *Journey Up the Mississippi*, p. 25.

<sup>305</sup> *Northern Star*, 18 November 1848.

the defenders of worn out political and social creeds; show him his true position, and his political and social power'.<sup>306</sup> Knowledge was intimately linked with liberty and progress, which, in turn, underpinned how Chartists thought about politics and the strategy they pursued to obtain the Charter.

The difficulty that Chartists faced was that they did not have access to certain types of knowledge. As was noted above, Chartist reading tended to be old reading, and as such was outdated. Worse still, Chartists openly acknowledged that the people had not yet attained the level of education that democracy required. As the preface to the Charter stated:

While, however, we contend for the principles of self-government, we admit that laws will only be just in proportion as the people are enlightened, on which, socially and politically, the happiness of all must depend; but as self-interest, unaccompanied by virtue, seeks its own exclusive benefit, so will the exclusive and privileged classes of society seek to perpetuate their power, and to proscribe the enlightenment of the people.—Hence we are induced to believe that the enlightenment of all will sooner emanate from the exercise of political power by all the people, than by their continuing to trust the selfish government of the few.<sup>307</sup>

Even O'Connor, who included 'educational mongers' on his list of political enemies, admitted that 'It is a fact, that the people are more unlearned than their friends could wish, but not so ignorant as their enemies would desire'.<sup>308</sup> The leading question for Chartist educationalists, therefore, was, as O'Connor put it, 'to whom the blame of this ignorance is attributable, whether to the government, or to the people themselves'.<sup>309</sup> Unsurprisingly, the majority blamed the former.<sup>310</sup>

The Chartists, nevertheless, were confronted with a considerable problem, which they were unable to navigate successfully. They had a deeply held belief that education would deliver universal suffrage, yet, at the same time, believed that universal suffrage

<sup>306</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851.

<sup>307</sup> *The People's Charter*, p. 1.

<sup>308</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 December 1840.

<sup>309</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 December 1840.

<sup>310</sup> Also, *Chartism versus the Church: A Letter to J. W. Whittaker, in answer to his "Sermon to the Chartists"* (Manchester, 1839), p. 19; London Working Men's Association, *To the Working Classes of Europe, And Especially to the Polish People* (1838), p. 8

was required to free the people from ignorance. The means and the end thus became entangled. The problem was exacerbated when they were confronted by the longstanding prejudices which associated democracy with the rule of ignorance. Concerns about democracy and the education of the people go at least as far back as Plato and have never really gone away.<sup>311</sup> While some Chartists dismissed these concerns as ‘education-mongering’ others took them more seriously. According to ‘PRO-CHARTIST’, a regular contributor to the *English Chartist Circular*, ‘the only argument against Universal Suffrage that carries with it even a shred of plausibility, is the alleged danger that would ensue were the ignorant multitude to be entrusted with the privilege of the electoral franchise.’<sup>312</sup> From liberal reformers to conservative reactionaries, all seemingly agreed that some form of educational attainment was a prerequisite for the franchise. Indeed, even working-class suffragists in the 1860s accepted some form of educational qualification (usually as a ‘moral qualification’).<sup>313</sup> As one of their spokesmen wrote, they sought to enfranchise only those with ‘sound common sense and honest intention’ and not ‘the ignorant lout, who looks upon the fox-hunting squire as a demi-god’.<sup>314</sup> The Chartists, however, staked their movement in reason, supported by an absolute faith that truth was available to all who sought it.

## Conclusion

This Chapter has argued that Chartist political thought cannot rest on intellectual context alone, and nor can that intellectual context be assumed. The ‘foundations’ of Chartist political thought have been located in the movement’s social and cultural context. Particular attention has been given to Chartist reading and educational hardship; the religious basis of Chartist intellectualism; and the Chartists’ rationalist faith in education. Three main conclusions can be drawn about Chartist political thought.

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<sup>311</sup> David Runciman, ‘How the Education gap is tearing politics apart,’ *The Guardian*, 5 October 2016; Jason Brennan, ‘Is this the end of democracy?’, *New Statesman*, 21 December 2016.

<sup>312</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1 no. 43.

<sup>313</sup> Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 268–275.

<sup>314</sup> Littlejon, ‘Reform and the Working Class’, *Weekly Times*, 11 March 1866, cited in Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 268.

The first is that ideas mattered to the Chartists. Indeed, Chartism was seen as an intellectual endeavour. The deep commitment to ‘Chartist principles’ can be located in Chartism’s reading culture, which encouraged both the study and propagation of Chartist ideas. The roots of Chartist intellectualism can also be traced to various forms of religious commitment. Religion provided not only a training in reading and speaking, but also theological justifications for political equality. Although we cannot agree entirely with Clark’s heterodoxy-radicalism thesis, we can go part of the way because heterodox beliefs underwrote the political principles of some important Chartists. Political radicalism and religion, however, were joined across the denominational spectrum, making Clark’s exclusive focus on heterodoxy untenable.

Second, when locating Chartist political thought, we must look to the more distant past. This leads to the conclusion that Chartist ideas should not just be *traced back* to the eighteenth century as if part of an ongoing tradition, because the evidence points to something more significant. Chartist sources – what the Chartist read and the arguments they made – were *from* the eighteenth century. It was not, therefore, necessary for radicalism to have continuous existence back to John Wilkes and the American Revolution. For every time radicalism was remade, it was done so on the basis of old texts. When we come to consider Chartist legal authorities in Chapter Two, natural right discourse in Chapter Three, their ‘republican’ rebuttal of Malthusian political economy in Chapter Four, and even the example of America in Chapter Five, each was rooted in eighteenth-century ideas and sources.

The final conclusion concerns Chartism’s intellectual milieu. Chartist political thought did not exist in a political vacuum, disconnected from a wider polemical context. Chartism was outward looking, and Chartists were engaged in debates with a range of opponents. It is in this context that the provenance of Chartism’s political thought had consequences. There was not, of course, anything intrinsically problematic with ideas emanating from the eighteenth century. The validity of ideas is, however, determined by context, such that the political thought of one era is not necessarily authoritative in another. Chartism was a nineteenth-century movement with eighteenth-century ideas. This temporal dimension to Chartist political thought was doubled edged. On the one hand, it marked certain ideas and arguments as distinctively Chartist, which gave the movement ownership over key positions. On the other hand, the vintage of Chartist

political thinking left Chartists vulnerable to the charge of ignorance, slow to respond to changes in intellectual context, and shut out of contemporary political debates. The consequences of these conclusions are developed in subsequent chapters.

## Chapter II

# A Movement of Natural Lawyers: Chartism and the Constitution

Although it had been said that there was no written Constitution—that there was no guide-post to shew its limits—yet there was a Constitution, drawn from the laws of Nature, and ratified by the laws of God, existing in the spirit of the English laws and in the hearts of the people, that could not be destroyed.

(Reginald Richardson, 1839.)<sup>315</sup>

The British constitution has long dominated our understanding of nineteenth-century politics. It was the master narrative that shaped both elite and popular politics, giving political parties their identities and radicalism its platform.<sup>316</sup> Although there was broad agreement on the sacred importance of the constitution, there was no single authoritative account of what the British constitution was, and how it should control government. This uncertainty left an empty space at the heart of the political nation, which different groups could fill with their constitutional interpretations. Political debate, therefore, centred on parties and movements casting themselves as the custodians of the true constitution and castigating their opponents as its assailants. A consequence of the constitutional bent of political discourse was the historicising of political debate, as precedents from Britain's constitutional past were pressed into the service of contemporary politics. Broadly speaking, there were two narratives regarding the origin of the constitution in the nineteenth century. The first, held mainly by Tories, traced Parliament to Edward I's summons in the thirteenth

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<sup>315</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1839.

<sup>316</sup> John Belchem, "Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Social History*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1981), pp. 1–32; James Epstein, "The Constitutional Idiom," in *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 3–28; Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 5–9, 100; Joyce, *Visions of the People*; James Vernon (ed.), *Rereading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

century. Parliament, therefore, was a Medieval creation of the monarchy. The second constitutional narrative, held by Chartists, most radicals, and, until the 1820s, the Whigs, argued that the constitution was Saxon in origin.<sup>317</sup>

The idea of an ancient Saxon constitution had a long history; it was fundamental, for example, in the struggles of the seventeenth century.<sup>318</sup> The democratic version of the Saxon constitution drawn on by the Chartists was first forwarded in the 1770s by radical writers such as Obadiah Hulme, James Burgh, and the father of reform, Major John Cartwright.<sup>319</sup> Indeed, the latter's 1777 pamphlet, *Take Your Choice!*, was the first appearance of what became the six points of the People's Charter in a single programme.<sup>320</sup> The democratic-Saxon narrative argued that the Saxon's 'glorious constitution' had included universal male suffrage and annual elections. This pristine constitution, however, had been subverted by the Normans and their system of feudal bondage, and, although remnants of the Saxon constitution survived, they were progressively eroded by later monarchs and governments.<sup>321</sup> What radicals from the 1770s to the Chartist demanded, therefore, was a restoration of lost rights, not the introduction of new ones. As the gigantic 1842 National Petition claimed:

your petitioners maintain that it is the inherent, indubitable, and constitutional right, founded upon the ancient practice of the realm of England, and supported by well approved statutes, of every male inhabitant of the United Kingdom, he being of age and of sound mind, non-convict in crime, and not confined under any judicial process, to exercise the elective franchise in the choice of Members to serve in the Commons House of Parliament. That your petitioners can prove, that by the ancient customs and statutes of this realm, Parliament should be held once in each year.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 347.

<sup>318</sup> The classic account is J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law; a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1957).

<sup>319</sup> [Obadiah Hulme], *A Historical Work on the English Constitution* (Dublin, 1771); James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions*, 3 vols. (London, 1774).

<sup>320</sup> John Cartwright, *Take Your Choice!: representation and respect, imposition and contempt: annual parliaments and liberty, long parliaments and slavery* (London, 1777).

<sup>321</sup> Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke," in *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in the Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1997), pp. 46–111.

<sup>322</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1842.

Despite its prominence, the understanding of the constitution in the historiography of Chartism and nineteenth-century popular politics has limitations. Most importantly, perhaps, and in contrast to the approaches of historians working on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century constitutionalism, historians concerned with nineteenth-century constitutionalism have not explored the ideas that underpinned constitutional discourse. Instead of the constitution's intellectual aspects, attention has focused on constitutionalism as a narrative form: *how* things were said has mattered more than *what* was said.<sup>323</sup> This approach has reduced the constitutional tradition into an inward-looking, exceptionalist paradigm of national political development where key events of English – very rarely British – history are rendered into a crusading struggle for popular rights over tyranny.<sup>324</sup> Although the British constitution certainly had peculiar characteristics, it was never self-contained and insular. Moreover, there is nothing unique about the emphasis that British constitutional discourse placed on national events. All constitutional traditions are stories of national political development that essentialise the national.<sup>325</sup>

This Chapter addresses these issues by placing Chartist constitutional thought alongside the American constitutional tradition. The latter was the model form of constitutionalism for both 'advanced' liberals and radicals throughout the nineteenth century and has been at the centre of recent comparative scholarship on the 'age of constitutions.' The basis of the American constitutional ideal was that constitutions were written texts that were separate from and placed above government.<sup>326</sup> American constitutionalism sprung from the American Revolution, which, in a 'fifteen-year burst of brilliance, never since equaled,' gave to the world constitutional documents in the form of the Declaration of Independence, the state constitutions, and the Federal

<sup>323</sup> James Epstein and John Belchem, 'The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited,' *Social History*, vol. 22, no. 2, (May 1997), pp. 174–93, at p. 180; John Belchem, 'Radical Language and Ideology in Early Nineteenth Century England: The Challenge of the Platform,' *Albion*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 1988), pp. 247–59, at p. 257.

<sup>324</sup> The best account of the nation within the constitutional idiom is Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and the nation in English radical politics, 1848–1874* (Cambridge, 1993), especially Ch. 1.

<sup>325</sup> Kelly Grotke and Markus Prutsch, 'Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power: Nineteenth-Century Experiences,' in Kelly Grotke and Markus (eds.), *Prutsch Constitutionalism, Legitimacy, and Power* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 3–19, at pp. 5–6; M. C. Mirow, 'The Age of Constitutions in the Americas,' *Law and History Review* 32, no. 2 (May 2014), pp. 229–235, at p. 229.

<sup>326</sup> Gordon Wood, 'The Origins of American Constitutionalism,' in *The Idea of America* (New York, 2011), pp. 171–188, at pp. 173–174.

Constitution of 1787.<sup>327</sup> These American examples inspired a ‘contagion of new-style constitutions’ across the Atlantic World.<sup>328</sup> In Europe alone, they helped inspire over sixty written constitutions by 1820, including the four revolutionary French constitutions of the 1790s. At least a further eighty constitutions had been implemented between 1820 and 1850, many of them in Latin America.<sup>329</sup>

American constitutionalism was forged in a conflict that threw open questions regarding taxation, representation, and sovereignty. Chartism was fired by the same grievances and, it shall be argued, drew on a common set of arguments. Like the Americans sixty years before, the Chartist were confronted by a parliament that they believed had superseded its constitutional authority, denied them representation, and trampled on the sovereignty of the people. This perception did not just rest on the conviction that the Saxon constitution had been violated, nor a straightforward appeal to natural rights. For Chartist constitutionalism was also powerfully informed by a strand of English legal theory that joined natural law—the basis of American constitutional law—with English common law. The latter was inextricably bound with the constitution. However, scholars have not asked how the Chartist viewed the law. The natural law interpretation of the common law allowed the Chartist to imagine that the British constitution was like an American-style constitution, that is, one that was visible, known to all, and capable of binding government. By drawing attention to the legal basis of Chartist constitutionalism, this thesis places the movement within an extended tradition of Anglophone political thought.

## I. THE EMPIRE OF LAW

The novelty of the American constitution was that it fixed the rules of governance in writing. Britain did not—and still does not—have a written constitution in the American sense; the British constitution is not a single document, but more a reading

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<sup>327</sup> George Athan Billias, *American Constitutionalism Heard Round the World, 1776–1989: A Global Perspective* (New York, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>328</sup> Linda Colley, ‘Empires of Writing: Britain, America and Constitutions, 1776–1848,’ *Law and History Review* vol. 32, no. 2 (May 2014), pp. 237–266, at p. 237.

<sup>329</sup> Colley, ‘Empires of Writing’, pp. 237–38; Henry Hill, ‘The Constitutions of Continental Europe: 1789–1813,’ *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1936), pp. 82–94, at pp. 82–84; David Armitage, *Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), pp. 103–105.

of history.<sup>330</sup> With popular radicalism clothed in the language of the British constitution, the simple conclusion is that radicals endorsed this state of affairs. There were, however, alternative readings of the constitution, not all of which celebrated constitutional indeterminism. The best-known British radical advocate of a written constitution was Thomas Paine, who in his famous challenge to Edmund Burke to produce the British constitution declared that if Burke could not do so, Britain had no constitution at all. Paine held that ‘A constitution is not a thing in name only, but in fact. It has not an ideal, but a real existence; and whenever it cannot be produced in a visible form, there is none.’<sup>331</sup> It had once been widely believed that Paine had persuaded the nascent radical movement of the 1790s to reject British constitutionalism for his more demanding American definition of a constitution.<sup>332</sup> The re-emergence of the tradition of British constitutionalism, however, has led historians’ to minimise Paine’s influence on Chartism.<sup>333</sup> The latter, however, raises the question of how a writer so widely read and praised could be ignored? One answer is that Chartists admired Paine uncritically.<sup>334</sup> Another is to question the influence of the *Rights of Man*.<sup>335</sup> And a third is that Paine’s influence was in fact restricted to a few ‘colourful and well-documented supporters’,<sup>336</sup> such as the London radical circles centred around Thomas Spence and Richard Carlile.<sup>337</sup> When confined to this group of ultras, Paine’s legacy was simply ‘perverted by... idiosyncratic, introverted, infidel republicanism.’<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Robert Saunders, ‘Parliament and the People: The British Constitution in the Long Nineteenth Century,’ *Journal of Modern European History*, no. 6 (2008), pp. 72–87, at p. 76.

<sup>331</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man, Part the Second* (1792), p. 194 and, more generally, Ch. IV [https://www.ucc.ie/archive/hdsp/Paine\\_Rights\\_of\\_Man.pdf](https://www.ucc.ie/archive/hdsp/Paine_Rights_of_Man.pdf).

<sup>332</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), pp. 84–110; James Vernon, ‘Notes Towards an Introduction,’ in James Vernon (ed.), *Re-Reading the Constitution* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–22.

<sup>333</sup> James Vernon, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 306; Epstein, ‘Constitutionalist Idiom’, p. 5; Gurney, ‘Democratic Idiom’, p. 566; Malcolm Chase, ‘Paine, Spence, Chartism and ‘The Real Rights of Man,’ in Alastair Bonnett and Keith Armstrong, *Thomas Spence: Poor Man’s Revolutionary* (London, 2014), pp. 13–25, at p. 14.

<sup>334</sup> Epstein, ‘Constitutionalist Idiom’, p. 9; Chase, ‘Paine, Spence, Chartism and ‘The Real Rights of Man”, p. 14; Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?: Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789–1848* (Manchester, 2000), p. 145.

<sup>335</sup> Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?*, p. 145.

<sup>336</sup> Vernon, *Politics*, p. 306.

<sup>337</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge, 1988)

<sup>338</sup> Matthew Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832–1914* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 34.

But such explanations are unconvincing. Paine was the most well-read author in the period, who George Jacob Holyoake called ‘the founder of political ideas among the people of England’.<sup>339</sup> His *Rights of Man* was a publishing phenomenon. Archibald Macdonald, the Attorney General prosecuting at Paine’s trial in 1792, believed that ‘In all shapes and sizes, with an industry incredible, it [*Rights of Man*, Part II] was either totally or partially thrust into the hands of all persons in this country... even children’s sweetmeats were wrapped in parts, and delivered into their hands, in the hope that they would read it.’<sup>340</sup> Henry Vincent printed the entirety of *First Principles of Government* across multiple issues of his *Western Vindicator*.<sup>341</sup> And, as one Bath bookseller put it, all of Paine’s works were ‘constantly on sale’.<sup>342</sup> Chartists routinely paid homage to Paine in their writings and frequently held dinners in his honour. At a dinner in 1841 to celebrate his birthday, after the toast of ‘Thomas Paine—we meet to respect his memory and extend his principles’, the audience sang ‘in good style’ ‘March, march, friends of great Thomas Paine.’<sup>343</sup> In 1848, George Julian Harney even lambasted John Campbell, the editor of the *British Banner*, for daring to call him ‘Tom Paine’ rather than Thomas, and reminded him that Paine had ‘numbered amongst his friends such men as Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald; and... will be held in veneration by millions, and his work will be numbered amongst the choicest gifts ever bestowed by genius upon mankind.’<sup>344</sup>

As a consequence of Paine’s historiographical fall, it has been suggested that radical and, later, Chartist constitutionalism was Burkean, in the sense that they believed that the constitution was the product of organic development over time.<sup>345</sup> This argument, however, exaggerates the influence of Burke and misunderstands the theoretical principles of Chartist constitutionalism. The use of Burke to elaborate a romantic conception of history and the organic development of constitutions was a phenomenon more of the European continent than Britain, where it was ‘hardly touched’.<sup>346</sup> In

<sup>339</sup> George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years an Agitators Life* (London, 1892), p. 115.

<sup>340</sup> Cited in, Chase, ‘Paine, Spence, Chartism and “The Real Rights of Man”’, p. 14.

<sup>341</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 23 and 30 March, 7, 14, 21, 28 April, and 5 May 1839.

<sup>342</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 November 1838.

<sup>343</sup> *Northern Star*, 6 February 1841. Four dinners in honour of Paine are recorded in this number, at locations as diverse as Kensington, Nottingham, Merthyr Tydvil, and Congleton. The quoted dinner was held at Kensington.

<sup>344</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 February 1848.

<sup>345</sup> For example, Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?*, p. 145.

<sup>346</sup> Hedva Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 116; J. J. Slack, ‘The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism Confronts its Past, 1806–

Britain, moreover, few accepted Burke's rosy depiction of the *ancien régime*, and his account of the French Revolution was seen as an exaggeration.<sup>347</sup>

More important, however, were the theoretical differences between Burke and the Chartists. Like the Chartists, Burke accepted the notion of an ancient constitution and even acknowledged that it was based on mutual consent. He emphatically denied, however, that the constitution embodied first principles, arguing that the implementation of natural rights would destroy society.<sup>348</sup> Rather than explicit consent, he proposed that 'social goods,' which included political rights, were the product of historical 'entailed inheritance'.<sup>349</sup> For Burke, therefore, the genius of the constitution lay in its development over time, not its supposed abstract foundation.<sup>350</sup> Burke never directly replied to Paine, but a Burkean response to Paine's argument would have been to insist that the constitution was something that could be understood through an appreciation of the institutions, traditions, and practices of society. Thus, a Burkean understanding of the constitution was that it was simply the institutions that had developed, regardless of whether the principles that underlay them were codified.<sup>351</sup>

Chartist constitutional thought did not follow this path. Indeed, Chartist constitutionalism was in many respects in agreement with Paine's political principles. Although Chartists did not accept Paine's rejection of the constitution's historical narrative, they did believe that the British constitution was rooted in first principles; and, to answer Paine's challenge to Burke, they believed that the constitution could be produced. Unlike Paine, on the other hand, the Chartists continued to appeal to iconic

1839', *Historical Journal*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1987), pp. 623–640; Donald Winch, 'The Burke-Smith Problem and Late Eighteenth-Century Political and Economic Thought', *Historical Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1985), pp. 231–247. For the development of Burkean conservatism after 1830, see Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>347</sup> Ben-Israel, *English Historians*, 117; Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Redemptive Power of Violence?: Carlyle, Marx and Dickens,' *History Workshop Journal*, no. 65 (Spring 2008), pp. 1–22, at p. 3.

<sup>348</sup> H. T. Dickinson, 'The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the 'Glorious Revolution',' *History*, vol. 61, no. 201 (February 1976), pp. 29–45, at p. 43.

<sup>349</sup> Patrick Riley, 'Social Contract and Its Critics,' in Mark Goldie and Robert Wolker (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 347–76, at p. 374. See also, Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'British Radicalism and the Anti-Jacobins,' in Mark Goldie and Robert Wolker (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 660–687, at pp. 673–77.

<sup>350</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution—A Problem in the History of Ideas,' *Historical Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1960), pp. 125–43.

<sup>351</sup> Robert Lamb, *Thomas Paine and the Idea of Human Rights* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 94.

texts, such as the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights of 1689, which they regarded as fundamental constitutional documents. The *English Chartist Circular*, for example, published both Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights in the early 1840s.<sup>352</sup> As Thomas Cooper, Chartism's *de facto* poet laureate, argued, 'in the legal enactments of our glorious Alfred and other Saxon monarchs—in our boasted Magna Carta and Bill of Rights—in brief, that, in all and sundry the civil and juridical institutions of my country there were to be found the luminous traces of a broad enlightened freedom.'<sup>353</sup> Indeed, the name People's Charter itself was an explicit reference to the Magna Carta that 'all politically aware contemporaries would have understood.'<sup>354</sup> In this respect, Chartists followed the example of another radical hero: John Cartwright, 'the English Lafayette.'<sup>355</sup> Cartwright is usually seen as the most devoted advocate of the mythic Saxon constitution.<sup>356</sup> He also argued, however, that the constitution should be made available 'to every eye... [and] rendered... visible and tangible, by having committed to print.'<sup>357</sup> As such, he suggested that proposals for a new constitution should be drafted, printed, and subject to an extensive national discussion. Once its principles were agreed upon, he wanted copies of the new constitution to be made available to all, and its articles inscribed in gold letters on the interiors of the Houses of Parliament.<sup>358</sup>

For some Chartists, the People's Charter itself was a new constitution. As Cooper went on to say, 'as far as my understanding enables me to judge, [the Charter] is neither more nor less than an embodiment of the principles contained in the theory of the British Constitution.'<sup>359</sup> This claim, however, rested on more than just its allusion to the Magna Carta and the Saxon constitutional tradition. For in its final form, the Charter did not merely contain the famous six points, but rather 106 points that set out exactly how the political machinery of a post-Charter electoral system would operate.<sup>360</sup> It began by stipulating that 'All Acts and Parts of Acts relating to

<sup>352</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1 no. 50 [n.d.], and vol. 2 no. 90 [n.d.]

<sup>353</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Address to the Jury By Thomas Cooper* (Leicester, 1843), p. 2.

<sup>354</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 8. See also, Saunders, 'The British Constitution,' p. 75.

<sup>355</sup> *The Charter*, 23 June 1839

<sup>356</sup> R. J. Smith, *The gothic bequest: medieval institutions in British thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 137–8. However, see George Owers, 'Common Law Jurisprudence and Ancient Constitutionalism in the Radical Thought of John Cartwright, Granville Sharp, and Capel Lofft,' *Historical Journal*, vol. 58, no. 1 (March 2015), pp. 51–73.

<sup>357</sup> John Cartwright, *An Appeal on the Subject of the English Constitution* (London, 1797), p. 35.

<sup>358</sup> Colley, 'Empires of writing,' pp. 251–252.

<sup>359</sup> Cooper, *Address*, p. 2.

<sup>360</sup> Miles Taylor, 'The Six Points: Chartism and the Reform of Parliament,' in Owen Ashton, Robert

Registration, Nomination, or Elections, as well as duration of Parliaments and sittings of members, must be repealed,' and set out in great detail their replacements, from the election of the returning officers to arrangements for nomination, registration, and election.<sup>361</sup> In this way, Chartists sought to revolutionise the operations of government.

This organisational aspect of Chartist constitutionalism was informed and put into practice by Chartism's own associations. While Chartism's outward-looking face was characterised by the spectacle of its monster meetings, massive petitions, imposing parades, and so on, Chartism's inner life was made up of a sprawling network of overlapping associations, committees, and unions. This Chartism was bureaucratically governed by an obsessive regime of agendas, motions, and carefully defined constitutions.<sup>362</sup> According to the *Northern Star*, the latter were an essential tool of Chartist organisation. Commenting on the National Charter Association's 1844 Constitution and Rule Book, a copy of which was issued to all members, the *Star* claimed: 'Without it, all will be confusion and uncertainty: with it, if the instructions be as they ought to be, clear and precise, all will be orderly and stable.'<sup>363</sup> The NCA, Chartism's largest and longest lasting organisation, is an excellent example of Chartist constitutional governance at work. During the 1840s the NCA issued four constitutions—in 1840, 1843, 1844, and 1848—as well as an amended constitution in 1841.<sup>364</sup> Each of these was the product of a process of discussing, drafting, and amending by delegate meetings and the wider membership. The NCA's first constitution was avowedly an amalgamation of a 'great number' of plans submitted for consideration.<sup>365</sup> The clearest influences were organisations and associational cultures with which many Chartist would have been familiar, such as the format of parish vestry meetings, Methodist-style classes, and the federal structure, rotation of office, and elected positions used by trade unions.<sup>366</sup> The practices of these organisations were

Fyson, and Stephen Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendlesham, Surrey, 1999), pp. 1–23, at pp. 11–13.

<sup>361</sup> *The People's Charter; being an Outline of An Act to Provide for the Just Representation of the People of Great Britain in the Common House of Parliament* (London, 1838), p. 2.

<sup>362</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 620.

<sup>363</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 April 1844.

<sup>364</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 August 1840, 27 February 1841, 16 September 1843, 27 April 1844, and 20 May 1848.

<sup>365</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 August 1840.

<sup>366</sup> Eileen Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy,' in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds.), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–60*, (London, 1982), pp. 345–380, at pp. 364–5; Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (London,

also evident in the constitutions of other Chartist bodies, such as the Northern Political Union and the Universal Suffrage Central Committee of Scotland.<sup>367</sup> All four NCA constitutions also attempted to incorporate the six points of the People's Charter with the use of universal suffrage, annual votes, the secret ballot, the weighting of regional votes based on the size of its population, a salaried executive, and, of course, no property qualification for elected office.

Beyond the operational and organisational aspects of Chartist thought and practice, however, a constitutional ideal was at work that placed constitutions above government, like the American model. It was to this ideal, and the sources in which it was rooted, that Reginald Richardson, a Manchester-based Chartist, referred when he claimed: 'Although it had been said that there was no written Constitution—that there was no guide-post to shew its limits—yet there was a Constitution, drawn from the laws of Nature, and ratified by the laws of God, existing in the spirit of English laws and in the hearts of the people, that could not be destroyed.'<sup>368</sup> Similarly, the *Northern Liberator* stated: 'The whole current of English law abounds with authorities unquestionable ... every English lawyer of eminence lays it down as a maxim, that legislation, in contradiction to the laws of nature and God, and to Revelation, as part and parcel of the law of the land, is null, void, and of no effect.'<sup>369</sup> Both Richardson and the *Northern Liberator* were asserting that the constitution consisted of a body of fundamental law, which seemingly rested on three sources: English law or the common law, divine law, and natural law. These sources, however, were not distinct in Chartist understanding.

The mythology of English common law contended that it was a self-contained legal doctrine based on the custom of England. Unlike continental (and Scottish) Roman law, which was rooted in natural law principles, the common law was not laid down by either will or by nature but rather a reflection of the rules and practices of society.<sup>370</sup>

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1971), p. 28.

<sup>367</sup> For the Northern Political Union's constitution, see *Northern Star*, 18 April 1840; for the constitution of the United Suffrage Central Committee of Scotland, see *Northern Star*, 31 August 1839, and for the delegate meeting that discussed and drafted it, *Northern Star*, 24 August 1839.

<sup>368</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1839. Richardson was possibly referencing St Paul's statement that the law was 'written in the hearts' of the Gentiles (*Romans*, 2:12–15), which was foundational to Augustine natural law theory.

<sup>369</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 12 January 1839.

<sup>370</sup> Gerald Postema, 'The Philosophy of the Common Law,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence*, eds. Jules Coleman and Scott Shapiro (Oxford, 2004), pp. 588–622, at p. 590.

As William Blackstone put it, the common law was ‘handed down by tradition, use, [and] experience.’<sup>371</sup> Despite the claims of its mythology, however, the common law was closely related to natural law. From the earliest times, the common law had embraced both English custom and Roman law principle and common-law lawyers insisted that the law conformed to reason and laws of nature as well as custom.<sup>372</sup>

Feargus O’Connor explicitly appealed to this relationship between common and natural law when he stood trial for libel against the Warminster Poor Law Guardians in 1840. In his defence, O’Connor, who was legally trained as a barrister, criticised the foundation of the libel laws because they had no basis in the ‘civil Roman laws, from which the common law of England has sprung.’ He then highlighted that the Attorney General, who was prosecuting his case, was unable to draw a precedent ‘from the institutes of Justinian, or from the Precedents,’ the key texts of Roman law, and instead relied on the precedent of judges who had ‘capriciously’ construed it from ‘the whims of their predecessors, when the dictum of the cabinet, the quibble of a judge, or the prejudice of the jury, constituted the law of the land.’<sup>373</sup> The ambiguities of the common law allowed radicals to draw upon legal doctrines that emphasised the common law’s conformity with nature. In the seventeenth century, for example, these claims underpinned radical interpretations of the ancient constitution that stressed contractual government and justified the right to rebellion and regicide.<sup>374</sup> The same doctrines were central to the American Revolution, which has been described by one historian as ‘a revolution of natural law against common law.’<sup>375</sup> While in Britain at the time of the American Revolution, reformers such as Cartwright used this strand of common law jurisprudence to push for democratic reform.<sup>376</sup>

Natural law was a mode of thinking that connected politics, morality, and law. It set a number of normative rules, before any human choices, to which all were subject.<sup>377</sup>

<sup>371</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Law of England*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1765), vol. 1, p. 68.

<sup>372</sup> Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, p. 3; Alan Cromartie, *The Constitutional Revolution: An Essay on the History of England, 1450–1642* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>373</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839. O’Connor made a similar point at another trial in 1843, Feargus O’Connor, *The Trial of Feargus O’Connor esq. (Barrister-at-Law) and Fifty-Eight Others at Lancaster on a charge of Sedition, Conspiracy, Tumult and Riot* (1843), p. ii.

<sup>374</sup> Janelle Greenberg, *The Radical Face of the Ancient Constitution: St Edward’s ‘Laws’ in Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 27–28.

<sup>375</sup> Clark, *Language of Liberty*, p. 4.

<sup>376</sup> Owers, ‘Common Law Jurisprudence’, pp. 51–73.

<sup>377</sup> John Finnis, ‘Natural Law: The Classical Tradition’ in Jules Coleman and Scott Shapiro (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 1–60, at p. 1.

Although natural law existed in ancient and medieval thought, the first systematic attempt to formalise natural law doctrine was the jurisprudence of the Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius.<sup>378</sup> From Grotius onward, natural law underpinned a diverse group of canonical works, such as the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, the natural right theory of John Locke, and the political economy of Adam Smith.<sup>379</sup> Although natural law can be secular, much of its power rested on its theological underpinnings.<sup>380</sup> Natural law was God's law for men, and as such enjoyed greater legitimacy than any man-made legislation. As the *Chartist Circular* stated, in an unattributed quotation from William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 'Life and Liberty are derived from the same Almighty source. They are the Creator's gift... No human laws are of any validity if contrary to the Law of Nature, which is coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself.'<sup>381</sup> There was, therefore, considerable cross-over between divine law and natural law. On the one hand, divine law could mean law inferred from Scripture. However, more generally it was used as a synonym for natural law. Because natural law and divine law were both expressions of divine design, there was no need to distinguish sharply between the two. A typical example of this joining of natural and divine law was the passage in the 1848 National Petition that simply stated: 'your petitioners regard the representation in Parliament of every man of sound mind as a right compatible with, and sustained by, the laws of nature and of God.'<sup>382</sup> When understood in this way, natural law could not be repealed nor circumvented by contingent circumstances: it bound Parliament, peer, and peasant equally.

Perhaps the most prominent expression of natural-law principles was the American Declaration of Independence, the famous second paragraph of which enduringly proclaimed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among

<sup>378</sup> Thomas Horne, *Property Rights and Poverty: Political Arguments in Britain, 1605–1834* (Chapel Hill, 1990), pp. 9–21.

<sup>379</sup> Horne, *Property*; Jeremy Waldron, 'Decline of Natural Right,' in Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn (ed.), *Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 623–50, 625.

<sup>380</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'Paine's Rights of Man and the Religiosity of Rights Doctrines,' in Rachel Hammersley (ed.), *Revolutionary Moments: Reading Revolutionary Texts* (London, 2015), pp. 85–92.

<sup>381</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 17 October 1840. Also quoted in: A Tyne Chartist, *The Way to Universal Suffrage* (Newcastle, 1839), p. 22.

<sup>382</sup> *The Times*, 6 April 1848.

these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.<sup>383</sup> As John Phillip Reid has argued, there was nothing in the Declaration that was not already widely understood to be ‘English rights, recognised and protected by British constitutional documents.’<sup>384</sup> Indeed, it was to protect their constitutional rights *as Britons* that the Americans rebelled against the British government. Recent scholarship, however, has sought to downplay the revolutionary influence of the Declaration of Independence, arguing that it was more about the rights of nations than the rights of man.<sup>385</sup> The Chartists, however, celebrated the Declaration because it was a clear statement of their own political principles, by a people they regarded as ‘the same Saxon race, transplanted to the new world’.<sup>386</sup> Both the (Scottish) *Chartist Circular* and the *English Chartist Circular* printed the Declaration in full, Chartists invoked it in their speeches and writing, and it was sold alongside the People’s Charter at radical bookstores.<sup>387</sup> As one former Chartist put it, the Declaration was ‘the most enlightened, the most humane, and the most important confession of political faith ever given to the world. On the very form of it blazes the sublime statement of human rights and the cheerful prophecy of human redemption, ‘all men are created equal.’’<sup>388</sup> The *Northern Star* put it even more passionately in 1844:

It was a day ever memorable in the annals of human kind when, amid the din of contending armies and the roar of mortal conflict, the sages and statesmen of America dared to meet and proclaim in the teeth of tyranny-ridden Europe, that long outraged but eternal truth, that ‘all men are born free and equal’: thus throwing down the gauntlet to oppression, and summoning the oppressed to the struggle for freedom... Yes, it was a day pregnant with blessed hope for the human race, when JEFFERSON proclaimed those principles, which, embodied

<sup>383</sup> Congress, U. S. ‘Declaration of independence.’ Available at: <<http://www.ushistory.org/documents/declaration.htm>>

<sup>384</sup> John Phillip Reid, *Constitutional History of the American Revolution*, 4 vols. (1986–93), vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>385</sup> Armitage, *Declaration of Independence*, pp. 18, 63, 104.

<sup>386</sup> William Lovett, *Justice Safer Than Expediency: An Appeal to the Middle Classes on the Question of the Suffrage* (London, 1848), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 5, p. 81.

<sup>387</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 1 February 1840; *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1. no. 58 [n. d.]; *Northern Star*, 1 July 1848; *Fraternal Democrats, Address of the Fraternal Democrats Assembling in London to the Working Class of Great Britain and the United States* (London, 1846), pp. 1, 4; Michael Turner, *Liberty and Liberticide: The Role of America in Nineteenth-Century British Radicalism* (Lanham, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>388</sup> Mark Matthew Trumbull, *Thomas Jefferson: The Father of American Democracy. His Moral, Religious and Political Philosophy* (Chicago, n. d.), p. 7.

in the immortal DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, rent the New World from the domination of the Old!<sup>389</sup>

The connection between the Declaration of Independence and the People's Charter was also recognised on the other side of the Atlantic. At a meeting in Philadelphia in 1847 to celebrate O'Connor's election to Parliament, a motion was adopted in the presence of a number of Chartist migrants that stated: 'we anticipate the day, when the principles of the People's Charter, will be the basis of the British constitution, inasmuch as those very principles are the exact embodiment of our own glorious declaration of independence.'<sup>390</sup> The American engagement with Chartism will be returned to in Chapter 5.

One of the main ways that natural law was expressed in Chartist arguments was the citing of common law legal authorities. As J. C. D. Clark has argued, many of the jurists venerated as champions of the common law, such as Henry de Bracton, Edward Coke, and William Blackstone—the authorities the *Northern Liberator* called unquestionable—'had a deep knowledge of Roman law, and their major works were attempts to systematize the common law with natural law.'<sup>391</sup> At his first trial, O'Connor argued that the Poor Law was illegal on the authority of 'Puffendorf' (whose name was always spelt with an extra f in Chartist usage), Montesquieu, Grotius, Locke, De Lolme, Paley, 'and your very own constitutional Judge Blackstone,' all of whom he described as 'writers on the constitution.'<sup>392</sup> The same argument was used by Joseph Rayner Stephens, a Methodist preacher and firebrand anti-poor law leader, and Peter Bussey, a leading Chartist in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Stephens, for example, repeated in the courtroom what he had frequently declared to anti-poor law and Chartist rallies: 'The new poor-law bill... was an act of Parliament that ought not to be obeyed, for, being contrary to the laws of God, it was no law at all.' In support of this statement, Stephens did not read from scripture, as might be expected from a Minister invoking the laws of God, but rather twenty quotes from 'high authorities,' nine of which were taken from Blackstone's *Commentaries*.<sup>393</sup> The first quote he read, for

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<sup>389</sup> *Northern Star*, 22 April 1844.

<sup>390</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 October 1847.

<sup>391</sup> Clark, *Language of Liberty*, p. 3.

<sup>392</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839.

<sup>393</sup> 'The Trial of the Rev. Mr. Stephens for Uttering Seditious Language. Before Mr Justice Patterson,' in Claeys (ed.), *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1, pp. 376–77. Stephens also quoted Willoughby Bertie,

example, was essentially the same as that cited by the *Chartist Circular* quoted above, namely: ‘The law of nature being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this.’<sup>394</sup> Bussey, who was in court for refusing to pay the Poor Law rates, likewise quoted from Blackstone three times, and once each from Edward Coke, Henry Hobart, Bracton, Lord Abinger, Francis Bacon, Locke, and Brougham.<sup>395</sup>

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was fundamental to the emergence of Chartism, particularly in the north of England where early-Chartism was strongest.<sup>396</sup> The Chartist movement argued that the right to relief was a *legal* right based on natural law and recognised by the common law. The most influential proponent of this ‘legal’ case against the Poor Law was the great radical journalist and Chartist icon William Cobbett.<sup>397</sup> According to his most extensive anti-Poor Law work, *The Legacy to Labourers*, the right to relief was affirmed by ‘the express and incessantly reiterated commands of God, in both Testaments; and according to the laws of England, Canon-Law, Common Law, Statute-Law, laws made by Protestants, as well as laws made by Catholics.’<sup>398</sup> By seemingly removing this right, or at least qualifying it, the Poor Law Amendment Act struck at the heart of the Chartist conception of society and the constitution. As an article on the ‘Rights of the Poor’ in the *Northern Star* declared, ‘to refuse the poor a maintenance, which shall be founded on liberal and charitable principles, is to destroy a portion of our Constitution, and change its very nature.’<sup>399</sup> The 1842 National Petition likewise declared, ‘with feelings of indignation’, ‘That your petitions conceive that bill to be contrary to all previous statutes, opposed to the spirit of the constitution, and an actual violation of the

John Somers, William Paley, John Locke, Bracton, Bishop Antony Ellys, Bishop Richard Hurd, and John Cartwright.

<sup>394</sup> ‘The Trial of the Rev. Mr. Stephens,’ p. 376; Blackstone, *Commentaries*, vol. 1, p. 41.

<sup>395</sup> *Northern Star*, 17 November 1838.

<sup>396</sup> Mark Hovell, *History of the Chartist Movement*, (Manchester, 1921), pp. 78–98; Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London, 1984), pp. 30–34; Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism,’ pp. 104, 151–54, 160; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London, 2004), p. 108; Miles Taylor, ‘Rethinking the Chartists’, p. 485; Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 17–19, 22–29.

<sup>397</sup> For example, William Cobbett, *Legacy to Labourers; or, What is the Right Which Lords, Baronets, and Squires have to the Lands of England* (London, 1834); Cobbett, *Cobbett's Poor Man's Friend: or, Useful Information and Advice for the Working Classes; in a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Working Classes of Preston* (London, 1826); Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men, and (Incidentally) to Young Women, in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life* (London, 1829). See also, Horne, *Property Rights and Poverty*, pp. 228–34.

<sup>398</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 106–7.

<sup>399</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839.

precepts of Christian religion.<sup>400</sup> The struggle against the Poor Law, therefore, lent urgency to Chartist attempts to limit the power of Parliament.

Although the Poor Law was never surpassed in Chartist demonology, it was far from the only way that Chartists believed that the government had violated the constitution. The 1842 Petition, for example, also complained that Parliament had denied the ‘undoubted right of the people, to meet freely, when, how, and where they choose, in public places, peaceably, in the day, to discuss their grievances, and political and other subjects, or for the purpose of framing, discussing, or passing any vote, petition, or remonstrance, upon any subject whatsoever.’<sup>401</sup> In defence of this ‘undoubted constitutional right,’ Bronté O’Brien quoted from Blackstone six times, Locke twice, and Abingdon once.<sup>402</sup> Other examples where Chartists quoted from legal authorities included the separation of the executive from the legislature, the constitutional right to bear arms, and the right to use them to resist tyranny.<sup>403</sup> In a wide-ranging editorial that touched on the legality of the Poor Law, the origin of property, the grounds for allegiance to the crown, and the right of resistance, the *Northern Liberator* cited Blackstone’s *Commentaries*, Edward Coke, ‘Puffendorf’, Grotius’s *de Jure Belli ac Pacis*, Paley’s *Moral Philosophy*, Hale’s *Pleas of the Crown*, Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, Baron Gilbert’s *Law of the Common Pleas*, Francis Bacon’s *Law Tracts*, and Locke’s *Dissertations on Government*.<sup>404</sup> A more unusual Chartist case was Richardson’s use of ‘Puffendorf,’ Grotius, Vattel, and Montesquieu to argue for female suffrage.<sup>405</sup>

While at first glance it appears that Chartists were drawing on an eclectic range of sources, they were, in fact, referencing primarily the English legal authorities mentioned above, those who ‘had a deep knowledge of Roman law,’ and the luminaries of an apparently congruent continental legal tradition, led by Grotius and Pufendorf,

<sup>400</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1842.

<sup>401</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1842.

<sup>402</sup> *Southern Star*, 15 March 1840. After he had been jailed, O’Brien requested a copy of Blackstone’s *Commentaries* to read, *Southern Star*, 31 May 1840.

<sup>403</sup> For example, *Northern Liberator*, 21 October, 16 December 1837; 2 June 1838; *Cleave’s Penny Gazette of Variety*, 21 July 1838; *Chartist Circular*, 19 October 1839, 22 May 1841; *Western Vindicator*, 19 October 1839; *Northern Star*, 30 June, 17 November 1838; 27 July, 7 September 1839; Richardson, *The Right of Englishmen to Have Arms: As Shown in a Speech Delivered in the National Convention...* (London, 1839), pp. 7–10, 11.

<sup>404</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 16 December 1837.

<sup>405</sup> Reginald Richardson, *The Rights of Woman: Exhibiting Her Natural, Civil, And Political Claims to a Share in the Legislative and Executive Power of the State* (Edinburgh, 1840), pp. 7, 8, 11.

alongside writers such as Locke who wrote in a natural-law framework.<sup>406</sup> By far the most cited constitutional authority, however, was William Blackstone. The Blackstone whom Chartists drew on in their speech and writing was the Blackstone who sought to impose order on the common law by shackling it to a natural-law framework.<sup>407</sup> Following this Blackstone, Chartist speakers blurred the boundary between common and natural law. A speaker at a Bury anti-Poor Law meeting, for example, stated that 'he did not intend to argue the question on an abstract view of the principle of natural justice, indeed on such a ground, it did not admit denial.' Rather, 'he would take up the right as expounded by the common law and fundamental statutes of the realm.' He then read to the meeting the following passage from *Commentaries*:

Those rights which God and nature have established, and which are therefore called natural rights, such as our life and liberty, need not the aid of human law, to be more effectually invested in every man than they are, neither do they receive any additional strength when declared by Municipal Laws to be inviolable. On the contrary, no human legislation has the power to abridge or destroy them, unless the owner shall commit some act which amounts to a forfeiture.<sup>408</sup>

This passage, however, was an abstract position, part of Blackstone's attempt to synthesise natural and common law. Because Blackstone was considered, in the words of Cobbett, 'the great teacher of our laws,' this statement passed for a binding legal judgment.<sup>409</sup> Thus, for the Chartists, the denial of suffrage, the qualification of the right to relief, and other constitutional infringements, were not just in breach of some ideal moral standard or natural right. Armed with quote after quote from English legal authorities, Chartists also argued that Parliament violated the common law and the constitution it embodied. Crucially, these two sources of law were one and the same thing.

<sup>406</sup> Clark, *Language of Liberty*, 3; Richard Tuck, 'Grotius and Seldon,' in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 499–529; Alfred DuFour, 'Pufendorf,' in Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 561–88; James Tully, 'Locke,' in Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 616–52.

<sup>407</sup> David Lieberman, *The Province of Legislation Determined: Legal Theory in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 33–55.

<sup>408</sup> *Northern Star*, 6 January 1838.

<sup>409</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 62–63, 72–73; *Northern Star*, 17 November 1838 and 27 July 1839.

## II. CHARTIST CONSTITUTIONALISM

When read through the principles outlined above, a form of constitutionalism emerges that is different from the way it is customarily understood in the historiography. Rather than a narrative tradition based on the authority of precedent, Chartist constitutionalism was firmly rooted in the fixed principles of fundamental law. From this position, the Chartists were able to produce, in writing, the British constitution, based on the ‘unquestionable authorities’ and fundamental statutes of the common law.

A comprehensive example of the way that Chartists did this was the thirty-nine point ‘Declaration of Rights’ adopted by the Chartist Convention of the Industrious Classes in 1839 and printed across the Chartist press.<sup>410</sup> The 1839 Convention met ostensibly to organise the presentation of the first national petition to Parliament, but it also functioned as a forum to discuss strategy, and, for some, it was an alternative parliament invested with the democratic authority that the Westminster Parliament lacked.<sup>411</sup> The idea of a convention had a long history in Britain and America. In the British context, the idea had a continual importance in radical politics from the 1770s to the Chartist period.<sup>412</sup> As the Chartists were well aware, however, the history of conventions should be stretched back to at least the seventeenth century, when they met on two occasions.<sup>413</sup> The first, the 1660 Convention Parliament, met to restore the monarchy, which had been abolished following the execution of Charles I in 1649. Despite its conservative intentions, the 1660 Convention turned constitutional procedure on its head. As the throne was vacant, the Convention Parliament assembled without royal summons, which was—and still is—the British constitutional custom, and then proceeded to summon the king, Charles II.<sup>414</sup> The second seventeenth-century convention met in 1689 following the Glorious Revolution. Like its predecessor, the 1689 Convention was also an irregular body that broke with

<sup>410</sup> *London Dispatch*, 18 August 1839; *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839; *Charter*, 15 September 1839; *Champion*, 15 September 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 21 September 1839; *Chartist Circular*, 29 September 1839.

<sup>411</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 57–86.

<sup>412</sup> T. M. Parssinen, ‘Association, Convention and anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771–1848,’ *The English Historical Review*, vol. 88, no. 348 (July 1973), pp. 504–33.

<sup>413</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 October 1839.

<sup>414</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts* (London, 2013, first published 1904), p. 318.

constitutional custom by transferring the crown, this time from James II, who had ‘vacated’ the throne, to William III and Mary II. Conventions, therefore, were extraordinary bodies. Unlike regular parliaments, assemblies, or conferences, they met to address fundamental constitutional issues.

In America, conventions served the same important purpose. A convention, in the form of the Continental Congress, declared, and to a large degree made possible, American independence. Conventions were also the vehicle through which the states discussed, drafted, and implemented their new constitutions; a mechanism that was repeated for the Federal Constitution of 1787.<sup>415</sup> By using conventions in this way, the Americans made reality the idea of popular sovereignty at the heart of Whig and radical political principles. For in order for their new constitutions to be seen to have emerged ‘from the people, for the people,’ they had to be based on the consent of the people. To achieve this, they pioneered large-scale forms of representative government by marrying democracy, representation, and constitutionalism; a framework for government that became the model for reformers around the world, the Chartist, of course, being no exception.

Placing Chartism’s 1839 General Convention in this longer historical context allows us to grasp its significance. For it was not just that the movement was following well established constitutional tactics, but that they convened to deal with fundamental constitutional matters in the only way that was constitutionally legitimate. The 1839 Convention was not the only Chartist convention. Two further General Conventions met in 1842 and 1848, and the NCA held numerous conventions throughout the 1840s and 1850s. They were not, however, conventions in the sense outlined above. Unlike the 1839 Convention, the General Conventions of 1842 and 1848 did not seek to deal directly with constitutional matters, but met primarily for organisational and promotional purposes.<sup>416</sup> They were, in effect, conferences concerned with party, rather than national, government.

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<sup>415</sup> Parssinen, ‘Convention,’ p. 508. For the formation of the state constitutions, see Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, *The Popular Sources of Political Authority* (Cambridge MA, 1966); Ronald Peters, *The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780: A Social Compact* (Boston, 1978). For both state and federal constitutions see Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 181–248; and Russell Caplan, *Constitutional Brinkmanship: Amending the Constitution by National Convention* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 1–40.

<sup>416</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 207, 289.

The significance of the Chartist Declaration of Rights, therefore, was not so much the program of reforms that it sought to commit the movement to, but the form it took, and what it confirmed about how the Chartists viewed the constitution. The long title of the document was ‘Declaration of the Rights of the People of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, according to the Ancient Laws and Customs of the Realm of England.’ Some newspapers, however, chose to call it the ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’ instead, an ironic nod towards the Anglican articles of faith.<sup>417</sup> Both these steps were probably taken to distance the Declaration, and by extension the Convention and the movement, from the French ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen’ of 1789 and 1793.<sup>418</sup> This was not just a matter of presentation. From the 1790s, British radicals faced government prosecution for various forms of conspiracy, unlawful assembly, seditious libel, and, as was the case for Joseph Gerrald in 1793 and Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall in 1794, high treason. Legislation also curtailed the form the Convention could take. Although the Seditious Meeting Acts of 1817 and 1819 had been repealed in 1824, they cast a long shadow over radical organisation, and Chartists took care to stay within their limitations. This meant that the number of delegates was capped at just forty-nine, each of whom had to be elected by a public meeting, but not by a specific organisation.<sup>419</sup> Stressing their constitutional purpose and intentions was, therefore, a necessary step to appease the watchful authorities, as well as their own fears and paranoias.

A further difference between the Chartist Declaration and its French predecessors was that each article was accompanied by references to constitutional authorities and fundamental laws. The first point, for example, read: ‘That the sovereignty of this United Kingdom is monarchical; not despotic, but limited,’ and was supported by reference to ‘Bracton on the laws and Constitution of England book i, and De Corona, book, iii.’ At first sight, the first point separates Chartism not only from Revolutionary France—whose 1789 Declaration invested sovereignty ‘essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from

<sup>417</sup> For example, *London Dispatch*, 18 August 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 21 September 1839; *Champion*, 15 September 1839.

<sup>418</sup> Unfavourable comparisons between the Convention and the French Revolution were made in unsympathetic quarters of the press, for example, *Brighton Patriot*, 9 July 1839, *The Age*, 3 February 1839, and *Derby Mercury*, 29 May 1839.

<sup>419</sup> Hovell, *Chartist Movement*, p. 119; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 58.

the nation'<sup>420</sup>—but also from republican America. It should be stressed, however, that neither American nor British radicalism was necessarily anti-monarchical.<sup>421</sup> An orthodox, eighteenth-century reading of the British constitution celebrated above all the way it balanced power between the Crown, Lords, and Commons. In a context where Parliament was perceived to have overreached its constitutional power, the monarchy represented a potential ally. Hence why Chartists occasionally petitioned Queen Victoria directly.

Chartist respect for the traditional role of the monarch did not mean, of course, that they tolerated arbitrary royal prerogative. As the second article of the Declaration read: ‘That the duties and allegiance of protection by means and goods and just government, are reciprocal and co-ordinate duties,’ and was supported by reference to ‘Grotius, Locke, Coke, Blackstone, &c. &c. 20 Edw 2, c. ‘original contract declared broken and throne vacant.’ This statute produced in parliament, 10 Rich. 2, 1398.’<sup>422</sup> Indeed, on the authority of Bracton, Somers, Seldon, and Sydney, Article IV declared that the sovereignty was ‘a trust’ invested in the monarch by the people, and was therefore ‘controlled, modified, and limited by the will of parliament.’ Further articles included the core Chartist demands of universal suffrage and annual parliaments; the right to carry arms; ten articles stipulating various legal protections for individuals, such as the banning of torture and the assumption of innocent until ‘convicted by the judgement of his peers and the laws of the land;’ and four articles that enshrined the inviolability of property. All thirty-nine points of the Declaration included references to constitutional authorities, common-law practice, and fundamental statutes.<sup>423</sup> By producing constitutions in this way, therefore, the Chartists married the claim that

<sup>420</sup> *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, (1789). Available from: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/rightsof.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp).

<sup>421</sup> Miles Taylor, ‘Republics versus Empires: Charles Dilke’s Republicanism Reconsidered,’ in David Nash and Antony Taylor (ed.), *Republicanism in Victorian Society* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 25–34, at p. 25; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1993), pp. 95–108; Gordon Wood, ‘Monarchism and Republicanism in the Early Republic,’ in *The Idea of America* (New York, 2011), pp. 231–50; Eric Nelson, ‘Prerogative, Popular Sovereignty, and the American Founding,’ in Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (ed.), *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 187–211; Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

<sup>422</sup> Chartists continued to cite this point, for example, *Northern Star*, 17 June and 8 July 1848, 3 and 24 February 1849.

<sup>423</sup> *London Dispatch*, 18 August 1839; *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839; *Charter*, 15 September 1839; *Champion*, 15 September 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 21 September 1839; *Chartist Circular*, 29 September 1839.

they wanted nothing new—the link with the constitutional past—with Paine's constitutional requirements; that is, that they were visible, confined to print, were able to be quoted line-by-line and article-by-article, and, crucially, were set apart from and above government.

The Declaration had a turbulent life; a fact that may explain historians' limited engagement with it. First, the *London Dispatch* published it prematurely and without the permission of its author, leading to a vote of censure against the paper by the Convention.<sup>424</sup> When it was finally introduced to the Convention, O'Connor, who is usually regarded to have had the firmest grasp of the movement's mainstream opinion, opposed its adoption, and proposed that the Convention recommend that the people study it instead.<sup>425</sup> Following the Convention's collapse, it was largely overlooked by the Chartists. There are, however, some noteworthy exceptions that suggest its continued importance. In 1841, for example, the NCA Executive referred to the Declaration as evidence of their respect for property rights.<sup>426</sup> Of even greater significance was the use of the exact wording of points VIII and XIX of the Declaration—those for universal suffrage and freedom of assembly—in the 1842 National Petition.<sup>427</sup> A more general reason why Chartists did not refer to the Declaration more frequently was highlighted by O'Connor's objection to its adoption. O'Connor's complaint did not regard the Declaration's substance; indeed, he believed that it was 'the most important document of our time.'<sup>428</sup> Rather, he argued that the Declaration 'contained principles which were by no means novel, on the contrary it contained the very principles for which the people were then contending.'<sup>429</sup>

On this score, O'Connor was surely correct; for the Declaration was one particularly clear manifestation of a more general belief that particular laws embodied the constitution. The logic that underpinned this broader position was set out by the *Chartist Circular*, which accepted that 'The laws of England undoubtedly form what we are accustomed to boast of as the British Constitution.' The *Circular*, however,

<sup>424</sup> *The Charter*, 1 September 1839; *London Dispatch*, 1 September 1839. The Declaration was written by Julius Schroeder, about whom little is known other than he was a German émigré lawyer and an associate of Henry Hetherington. He was not a Convention delegate. Chase, *Chartism*, p. 373 n. 38.

<sup>425</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>426</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 July 1841; *Cleave's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety*, 7 August 1841.

<sup>427</sup> *Hansard*, 2 May 1842.

<sup>428</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>429</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

identified two problems with how the constitution was understood. First, that the constitution was made-up of a body of statutes that was too voluminous and complex to be understood by ordinary people. And, second, that when laws become inactive, obsolete, or are subverted part of the Constitution became defunct. Both of these issues, as we have seen, formed part of Paine's criticism of the British constitution. As the *Circular* noted, they could lead to the conclusion that 'the British Constitution exists only in name; for what is law to-day may cease to be law tomorrow.'<sup>430</sup> The latter point, however, was unlikely to have been directed at Paine, but rather at the advocates of legal positivism, the doctrine which underpinned parliamentary supremacy and dominated discussions of law and politics in nineteenth-century Britain.

The *Circular* rejected legal positivism as a 'mass of crudities,' and insisted that they could 'recognize something deserving the name *laws*, which form, in fact, the real *bona fide* British Constitution.' These 'true principles' were those laws that conferred rights and immunities to all British citizens, had stood the test of time against tyrants, and were founded on principles that all could acknowledge. Statutes that met these criteria, the *Circular* argued, 'have now become fixed principles of law, which may truly be said to form the essential parts of the Constitution.'<sup>431</sup> It was this constitution that the Declaration sought to clarify, and to which Richardson referred when he stated that 'there was a Constitution, drawn from the laws of Nature, and ratified by the laws of God, existing in the spirit of English laws.'<sup>432</sup> William Lovett, the author of the People's Charter, made the same argument in 1839: 'From reading and reflection I am led to conceive that there are certain great constitutional boundaries which ought to be as sacred from the innovation of class, or the infringements of law, as if England had a written constitution.'<sup>433</sup>

This argument implied, first, that there were 'constitutional rights, or fundamental laws of the State... [that] Parliament itself has no right to abrogate.'<sup>434</sup> Secondly, that there were statutes that did not adhere to the principles of the constitution. These were laws that were 'partial in nature, and in their operations unjust.' Such laws, despite

<sup>430</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 30 May 1840.

<sup>431</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 30 May 1840.

<sup>432</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1839.

<sup>433</sup> William Lovett, *The Trial of William Lovett, Journeyman Cabinet-Maker, for Seditious Libel* (London, 1839), p. 10.

<sup>434</sup> *Southern Star*, 15 March 1840.

being enforced and obeyed, ‘cannot be said to form part of the constitution, which is founded on equity, and has for its chief end ‘the liberty and happiness of all its subjects.’<sup>435</sup> There was, in other words, a distinction between legality and constitutionality in Chartist thought, a distinction also central to American revolutionary readings of the British constitution. Like the Chartists, the Americans contested the constitutionality of certain Acts of Parliament, most notoriously the Stamp Act of 1765. They acknowledged that the principles of the constitution were also contained in Acts of Parliament, but they argued that these Acts were nevertheless of ‘a nature more sacred than those which established a turnpike road.’<sup>436</sup>

When cast in this way, Chartist constitutionalism must be understood as articulating one side of the enduring conflict within the common law tradition over whether Parliament could do as it pleased or was bound by the judgments of the common law.<sup>437</sup> Without a written constitution and a supreme court empowered with its sole authoritative interpretation, this conundrum needed to be resolved by judges, lawyers, philosophers, and Parliament itself.<sup>438</sup> Blackstone, to whom the Chartists looked for clarity, left this issue unresolved. On the one hand, he denied that human laws could subvert the law of nature and still be valid, but on the other hand, he insisted that Parliament was ‘absolute and without control’ and could ‘do every thing that is not naturally impossible.’<sup>439</sup>

In nineteenth-century Britain, it was the latter part of Blackstone’s argument—that which upheld parliamentary sovereignty and legal positivism—which was the most influential.<sup>440</sup> At the time that it emerged, however, Blackstone’s depiction of absolute parliamentary sovereignty was far from uncontroversial. The American revolutionaries, along with British radicals such as James Burgh and Richard Price, rejected Blackstone’s ‘absurd’ conception of absolute parliamentary sovereignty, while

<sup>435</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 30 May 1840.

<sup>436</sup> Wood, *Origins*, p. 176.

<sup>437</sup> For opposing views, see T. R. S. Allan, *The Sovereignty of Law: Freedom, Constitutionalism, and Common Law* (Oxford, 2013); Jeffrey Goldsworthy, *The Sovereignty of Parliament: History and Philosophy* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>438</sup> James R. Stoner, ‘Natural Law, Common Law, and the Constitution,’ in Douglas Edlin (ed.), *Common Law Theory* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 171–184, at p. 174.

<sup>439</sup> Blackstone, *Commentaries*, vol. 1, pp. 156–7. See also, Clark, *Language of Liberty*, pp. 6, 86; Goldsworthy, *The Sovereignty of Parliament*, p. 181.

<sup>440</sup> Michael Lobban, ‘Custom, Nature, and Authority: The Roots of English Legal Positivism,’ in David Lemmings (ed.), *The British and Their Laws in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 27–58.

Paine notoriously responded by arguing that Britain, in fact, had no constitution at all.<sup>441</sup> Indeed, according to Gordon Wood, Blackstone's model was 'the single most important abstraction of politics in the entire [American] Revolutionary era.'<sup>442</sup> This claim is supported by a citation count of Revolutionary-era pamphlets that found that Blackstone was the second most quoted figure after Montesquieu, who was entangled in the tug of war between federalist and anti-federalists on the viability of large republics.<sup>443</sup>

Instead of rejecting Blackstone, Chartists simply cited him selectively. Passages from the *Commentaries* that upheld the inviolability of the law of nature were freely circulated. Those that articulated the notion of Parliamentary sovereignty were either passed over or unknown. It was, after all, very unlikely that many Chartists read the whole of the *Commentaries*. Instead, they relied on the radical press, and popular writers such as Cobbett, who had no interest in printing passages that contradicted their position.<sup>444</sup> Despite their widespread use of his authority, the Chartists never celebrated Blackstone as a radical hero.<sup>445</sup> Indeed, part of Blackstone's appeal lay in the fact that *even he*, 'Tory though he was,' was 'compelled to admit that all government ought to be founded on the assent of the people.'<sup>446</sup>

There was, of course, another way that Chartists sought to control Parliament: namely, the establishment of a representative government based on the proposals of the People's Charter. This proposition rested, in part, on the firm conviction that only a legislature controlled by the people could be restrained from exercising arbitrary power against the people. This Chapter has argued that alongside this institutional fix

<sup>441</sup> David Lieberman, 'The Mixed Constitution and the Common Law,' in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought*, (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 317–346, at pp. 322–24.

<sup>442</sup> Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), pp. 344–54. See also, Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge MA, 1971), pp. 198–229; Thomas Grey, 'Origins of the Unwritten Constitution: Fundamental Law in American Revolutionary Thought,' *Stanford Law Review*, no. 30 (May 1978), pp. 843–893.

<sup>443</sup> Donald Lutz, 'Relative Influence of European Writers of late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,' *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (March 1984), pp. 189–197, at p. 193.

<sup>444</sup> On the development of this context, see Waldron, 'Decline of Natural Right'; Duncan Bell 'What is Liberalism?,' *Political Theory*, vol. 42, no. 6 (2014), pp. 1–34; Gregory Claeys, 'The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought,' *History of Political Thought*, vol. 11, no. 1, (1990), pp. 59–80; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty?*, pp. 64–110.

<sup>445</sup> On Chartist's radical heroes, see Matthew Roberts, 'Chartism, Commemoration, and the Cult of the Radical Hero, c. 1770–c.1840,' *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (January 2013), pp. 3–32.

<sup>446</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 16 December, 1837; *Northern Liberator*, 21 October 1837.

to the problem of Parliamentary sovereignty was a vision of the British constitution that embodied tenets of fundamental law. Parliament, then, was to be restrained not only from within by democratic institutions, but also from above. The Chartist, however, pushed their interpretation of the common law substantially further to unify these two aspects of their constitutionalism. For it was also commonly asserted that for statutes to be considered constitutional, they must have been introduced by a democratic Parliament.<sup>447</sup> Dr John Taylor, when introducing the Declaration to the Convention, rested its significance on exactly this point, claiming that 'If the Document were well founded every law and every Act of Parliament that had been passed since the people were deprived of Universal Suffrage were illegal, and need not, or indeed ought not, to be obeyed.'<sup>448</sup> *The Charter* newspaper likewise argued that 'universal suffrage, as founded upon the individual inherent right of every freeman, was the main and prominent feature of the constitution of England,' and its denial meant that there was 'no *moral* obligation on the part of Englishmen... to obey the laws made by Parliament as present constituted.'<sup>449</sup> Lovett explained the same point in an address to the middle classes in 1848, where he argued that the '*equal right* of every member of the community is paramount and stands superior to all laws, customs, forms, or ancient usage.' Thus, it was clear that 'all political laws and institutions are evidently to protect the inalienable rights of the whole people,' and those who confined the organs of government to 'any particular order, class, or portion of society' were 'violators of the laws of God, and despotic usurpers of the rights of man.'<sup>450</sup> It was for the same reason that O'Connor called the Convention 'the fountainhead of law,' and why Chartists such as William Barnett of Macclesfield could proclaim that they 'owe the British Government no allegiance but what I am obliged to give it. I declare, that I will obey the Convention; nor death nor hell shall prevent me from being obedient to them. They are my government. I had a hand in chusing them.'<sup>451</sup> The Chartist constitution, therefore, embodied not only a narrative of lost liberties but also a powerful intellectual synergy between the laws of England, the laws of nature, and the sovereign will of the people.

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<sup>447</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 30 May 1840.

<sup>448</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>449</sup> *The Charter*, 17 March 1839. Repeated on 31 March 1839.

<sup>450</sup> Lovett, *Justice Safer Than Expediency*, p. 80.

<sup>451</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 August 1839; Yeo, 'Some Practices,' p. 364.

### III. DEMOCRATISING THE CONSTITUTION

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of democratic discourse during the Chartist period. In a chapter that forms part of a larger project on the reimagining of ‘democracy’ in the Atlantic world between 1750–1850, Joanna Innes, Mark Philp, and Robert Saunders have detailed the rise of democratic discourse in Britain between 1820–1850, drawing attention to the debates around the 1832 Reform Act and Chartism.<sup>452</sup> Peter Gurney has gone one step further by conceptualising the Chartist use of ‘democracy’ as a discrete idiom that should be placed alongside constitutionalism and natural right.<sup>453</sup> On the one hand, he describes democracy as a contingent and contested concept, but this notion contradicts his central argument that the language of democracy became synonymous with Chartism and was viewed as a ‘quintessentially “working-class” cause.<sup>454</sup>

For the present Chapter’s concern with Chartist constitutionalism, Gurney raises two important issues: was ‘democracy’ a separate language of politics? And was democratic discourse exclusively (or characteristically) Chartist? The first point to note is that ‘democracy’ escapes simple definition. According to John Dunn, perhaps a little overdramatically, ‘There is no single word in the entire history of human speech to and through which more has happened than the word *democracy*, not even the word *God*.’<sup>455</sup> Thanks to Innes, Philp, and their collaborators, we are now in a better position to understand the shifting meaning of democracy in the century between 1750 and 1850. At the beginning of the period, ‘democracy’ was understood to be the worst form of government, and ‘democrat’ functioned as a term of abuse.<sup>456</sup> Even in the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1790s, most British radicals chose the traditional language of the constitution and its accompanying theory of balance between the King,

<sup>452</sup> Joanna Innes, Mark Philp, and Robert Saunders, ‘The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s,’ in Innes and Philp (eds.), *Reimagining Democracy in the Age of Revolution: America, France, Britain, and Ireland 1750–1850*, (Oxford, 2012), pp. 114–128.

<sup>453</sup> Gurney, ‘The Democratic Idiom’, pp. 566–602 at p. 567.

<sup>454</sup> Gurney, ‘Democratic idiom’, p. 572.

<sup>455</sup> John Dunn, *Breaking Democracy’s Spell* (New Haven, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>456</sup> Joana Innes and Mark Philp, ‘Introduction,’ in Innes and Philp (eds.), *Reimagining Democracy in the Age of Revolution: America, France, Britain, and Ireland 1750–1850*, (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1–11; Philp, ‘Talking about Democracy,’ p. 104; Innes, Philp, and Robert Saunders, ‘The Rise of Democratic Discourse,’ p. 128; Russell Hanson, ‘Democracy,’ in Michael Saward (ed.), *Democracy: Critical Perspectives in Political Science*, 4 vols. (London, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 57–76 at pp. 57–60; Gurney, ‘Democratic Idiom,’ pp. 570–573.

Lords, and Commons, rather than appeal directly to ‘democracy.’ Those who pushed for further reforms tended to express themselves in republican language, invoking both the revolutionary example of America and France, and the English ‘commonwealth’ of the seventeenth century.<sup>457</sup> Much the same can be said for the revolutionary period in America, where association with ‘democracy’ was also avoided.<sup>458</sup> As James Madison told the Constitutional Convention, the creation of a large republic would provide ‘the only defense against the inconvenience of democracy consistent with the democratic form of government.’<sup>459</sup>

The widespread hostility towards democracy, however, did not mean that the Chartists enjoyed a monopoly on democratic language. In fact, what was remarkable about the period from 1830 was the widespread use of what was a previously tarnished concept. As Innes and Philp concluded, by the mid-nineteenth century ‘democracy’ was fought over by contenders ‘from Marx to monarchs’ all of whom ‘quarrelled over whose cause was the most “democratic”’.<sup>460</sup> In this context, several explicitly non-Chartist variants of democracy emerged. In London alone, the Chartist version of democracy competed with Mazzinian democratic nationalism, the revolutionary democracy of the *Cracow Manifesto*, and Marx and Engel’s version of social democracy.<sup>461</sup> Furthermore, we saw in Chapter One how Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* appealed to a swathe of middle-class public opinion.<sup>462</sup> Another ideal was advanced in the 1830s by Disraeli, who associated democracy with advancement on the basis of merit and national and popular institutions. The Church of England, the House of Lords, and the monarchy were all ‘democratic’ institutions because they acted in the interests of, and with support from, the people, while the Tory party was ‘the really democratic party in England’.<sup>463</sup> The *Economist* in 1844 expressed support for democracy defined in utilitarian terms as the advance of reason and the happiness of the world, which it

<sup>457</sup> Philp, ‘Talking about Democracy,’ pp. 102–103.

<sup>458</sup> Hanson, ‘Democracy,’ p. 63; Seth Cotlar, ‘Languages of Democracy in America from the Revolution to the Election of 1800,’ in Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (eds.), *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750–1850* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 17–18. More widely, see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (London, 2005).

<sup>459</sup> Cited in Cotlar, ‘Languages of Democracy in America,’ pp. 19–20.

<sup>460</sup> Innes and Philp, ‘Introduction,’ p. 2.

<sup>461</sup> Salvo Mastellone, ‘Mazzini’s International League and the Politics of the London Democratic Manifestos, 1837–1850,’ in Biagini and Bayly (eds.), *The Globalization of Democratic Nationalism*

<sup>462</sup> Chapter One, pp. 61–63.

<sup>463</sup> Innes, Philp, and Saunders, ‘The Rise of Democratic Discourse,’ pp. 119.

distinguished from ‘*wild* democracy’.<sup>464</sup> Six years later the conservative *Aberdeen Journal* also came out for democracy, although not, it reassured its readers, in the form of ‘Chartism, republicanism, communism, socialism, or any other particular “ism” that the political dictionary can suggest.’<sup>465</sup> The *Journal* defined democracy as the ‘empire of the people’. The question was how to achieve it. Pointing to the ancients and France as examples, revolutions were swiftly dismissed as ineffective. Universal suffrage was also no guarantee of democracy, as France under Napoleon III showed. Rather, the ‘agents of true democracy’ were those who sought to elevate the intelligence of the people, taught ‘true religion’, embraced a paternalistic attitude towards the poor, and exhibited civic duty.<sup>466</sup> None of these suggestions were novel. What was significant was that by 1850, a conservative newspaper did not, in the words of the *Journal*, associate democracy with ‘anarchy, confusion, robbery, and bloodshed’, but sought to nail its cause to democracy’s mast.

Chartist uses of ‘democracy’, therefore, must be understood as just one prominent claim upon democracy in the period. Turning to Chartist usage, Gurney rightly highlights that ‘democracy’ had a range of meanings and associations within Chartist discourse. In the eighteenth century, ‘The democracy’ was a synonym of ‘the people’ or more often ‘the mob’ or ‘the mass.’ Thus, democracy could also mean crowd activity, popular pressure on government, demagogues bidding for crowd support, and so on.<sup>467</sup> Radicals seized these usages and invested them with positive content. Thus, Chartists sometimes referred to the people as ‘The Democracy of Great Britain’, or of a locality, for instance ‘The Democracy of Marylebone’, and some Chartists addressed letters to ‘To the Democracy’.<sup>468</sup> ‘Democracy’ as a political concept could connote the opening of individual opportunity in contrast to the corrupt politics of aristocratic government. In this usage, ‘democracy’ was a synonym of ‘republic’. Where democracy represented equal rights and equal laws, aristocracy was the rule of exclusivity and privilege. Nothing captured this clearer in radical demonology than undemocratic Parliament, which used its monopoly on law-making to protect the idle ‘tax eaters’ at

<sup>464</sup> *The Economist*, 9 March 1844.

<sup>465</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 11 December 1850.

<sup>466</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 11 and 18 December 1850, 9, 18, 22 and 29 January, 5 February 1851.

<sup>467</sup> Innes and Philp, ‘Introduction,’ p. 1.

<sup>468</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 July 1847; 10 November 1849; 28 September 1850; 29 March, 17 May, and 7 June 1851.

the expense of the excluded ‘productive classes’.<sup>469</sup> Democracy could also represent a commitment to a set of values, such as equality, open debate, and political participation.<sup>470</sup> In this sense, democracy extended beyond politics; it was a cause, like free trade or Dissenting religion, which was as much about the means as it was the end. The sense that democracy was a crusade can be seen in the Chartist use of mobile metaphors such as the ‘March of Democracy’ or ‘Progress of Democracy’.<sup>471</sup> Overlapping with democracy as a cause was democracy as a social and cultural phenomenon. Tocqueville saw democracy in the latter form manifested in the erosion of deference to traditional authority and the rise of public opinion.<sup>472</sup> For the Chartists, this cultural aspect of democracy could take the form of a preference for self-government over government intervention, a ‘free trade’ in politics as it has been described for a later period.<sup>473</sup> A second example, closer to Tocqueville’s analysis, was the practice of ‘democracy’ in Chartist associational culture, seen in the governance of their religious or trade organisations, participation in Chartist elections for conventions and officers of their associations, and the signing of the national petitions.

Chartists, then, used democratic language in multifaceted ways. It does not follow, however, that there was a discrete ‘democratic idiom’ that can be distinguished from, and possibly rival, constitutionalism. Detaching strands of discourse from the whole, as Gurney’s article ably demonstrates, has the advantage of isolating and highlighting neglected elements within Chartist discourse. It is important, however, that the discourse is then reassembled to take account of how it appeared. When we put the Chartist use of ‘democracy’ back into the way it was spoken, it is clear that the constitution was both important for defining what democracy was and a vector through which democratic ideals were expressed. For the Chartists, despite its many usages, democracy was necessarily constitutional: you could not have democracy without manhood suffrage and the other points of the Charter.<sup>474</sup> Within these constitutional limits, ‘democracy’ meant representative democracy. The *Northern*

<sup>469</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’.

<sup>470</sup> Mark Philip, ‘Talking about democracy’, p. 111,

<sup>471</sup> *Northern Star*, 6 October 1839; 9 October 1841; 3 August 1844; 30 January and 4 September 1847.

<sup>472</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Part II, p. 422.

<sup>473</sup> <[http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/De\\_tocqueville\\_alexis/democracy\\_in\\_america\\_historical\\_critical\\_ed/democracy\\_in\\_america\\_vol\\_2.pdf](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/De_tocqueville_alexis/democracy_in_america_historical_critical_ed/democracy_in_america_vol_2.pdf)>

<sup>474</sup> Eugenio Biagini, ‘Radicalism and Liberty’, in Peter Mandler (ed.), *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 101–124.

<sup>475</sup> Innes, Philp, and Saunders, ‘The Rise of Democratic Discourse,’ p. 128.

*Liberator*, for example, declared in its first issue that its ‘express purpose’ was the ‘maintaining pure democracy in the North of England.’<sup>475</sup> For the *Liberator* ‘pure democracy’ meant only that the government was established by the consent of the governed; a principle, it noted, that was acknowledged by Blackstone.<sup>476</sup>

The key question that emerges, therefore, is how did Chartists democratise the British constitution? Both ‘democracy’ and ‘representation’ were terms inherent in traditional constitutional discourse. The former was part of the terminology of the mixed constitution, with the ‘democratic’ element represented by the House of Commons. Democratic reform, therefore, was associated with reform of the Commons, as it remained in the Chartist period. ‘Democracy’ also connoted political phenomena associated with the democratic section of the constitution, such as elections. It did not mean democratic government in the Chartist sense.<sup>477</sup> Representation, meanwhile, was an integral part of the British constitution, and the extent to which its provisions achieved the ‘correct’ level of representation was perennially debated, especially after 1832.<sup>478</sup> There was no precedent, however, for the compound term ‘representative democracy.’ Indeed, such a formulation undermined the language of checks and balances and the notion that sovereignty was embodied in ‘crown-in-parliament’ upon which the constitution rested.<sup>479</sup> As Nadia Urbinati has highlighted, representation and democracy were rooted in alternative traditions. ‘Democracy’ is a ‘Greek word with no Latin equivalent’ that ‘stands for direct rule... by the people,’ whereas ‘representation’ is ‘a Latin word with no Greek equivalent,’ which ‘entails a delegated action on the part of someone on behalf of someone else.’<sup>480</sup> If democracy is understood to mean rule by the people, representation is, in principle, its antithesis. This is because representation must involve the transfer of political power away from the people to a relatively small number of representatives.<sup>481</sup>

<sup>475</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 21 October 1837.

<sup>476</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 21 October 1837.

<sup>477</sup> John Morrow and Mark Francis, *A History of English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1994), pp. 8–23; John Dunn, *Breaking the Spell*, p. 15; Philp and Innes, ‘Introduction,’ p. 2; Philp, ‘Talking About Democracy,’ p. 102.

<sup>478</sup> Hanna Pitkin, ‘Representation,’ in Michael Saward (ed.) *Democracy: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, 4 vols. (London, 2003), vol. 3, pp. 309–329; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, *passim*.

<sup>479</sup> John Francis and John Morrow, ‘After the Ancient Constitution,’ in *A History of Nineteenth Century English Political Thought* (London: 1994), Ch. 1.

<sup>480</sup> Nadia Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and its Critics,’ in Sonia Alonso, John Keane, and Wolfgang Merkel (eds.), *The Future of Representative Democracy* (Cambridge, 2011) p. 23.

<sup>481</sup> Lamb, *Thomas Paine*, p. 79.

The delegate/trustee debate has been described by Hanna Pitkin as ‘one of those interminable theoretical debates that never seem to get resolved, no matter how many thinkers take positions on the one side or the other.’ As Pitkin highlights, this controversy grows out of the paradox inherent in the meaning of representation itself: making present something which is not literally present.<sup>482</sup> The system of representation necessarily creates a divide between the represented and the representative, the governed and the governors. In Chartist formulations, the danger inherent in representation was to be mediated by an understanding that MPs were delegates sent to fulfil the instructions of their constituents, not trustees, which was underwritten by annual parliaments that enabled constituents to dispose of unfaithful MPs.<sup>483</sup> The need for constitutional calculation was also offset by the Chartists’ rational idealism. In short, it was believed that the inherent rationality of man meant that a democratic government, untainted by corruption and sectionalism, would have no difficulty in agreeing the common interest and the best means to attain it.<sup>484</sup> Only faction and selfishness could jeopardise man’s propensity for cooperation, and institutional arrangements based on popular principles ensured they were kept in check.

The extent to which representation was a ‘problem’ of Chartist democratic practice can be dismissed on the basis that for the Chartists representation *was* democracy.<sup>485</sup> In neither their aims nor their internal governance did Chartists call for forms of direct democracy. Although some Chartists lauded the heroes of ancient democracy and republicanism, no Chartist advocated ancient democracy as a useable model.<sup>486</sup> Indeed, this was not what the *People Charter* would have achieved. As its subtitle

<sup>482</sup> Hanna Pitkin, ‘Representation,’ p. 316; Hanna Pitkin, ‘Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance,’ in Michael Saward (ed.), *Democracy: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (Abingdon, 2007), vol. 3, pp. 330–338.

<sup>483</sup> Taylor, ‘Six Points’; Gurney, ‘Democratic Idiom,’ p. 582.

<sup>484</sup> This was also true of the seventeenth-century Levellers, as well as figures like Paine, see Wotton, ‘Leveller Democracy,’ p. 424; Lorenzo Sabbadini, ‘Popular Sovereignty and Representation in the English Civil War,’ in Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 164–186. For American Radicals of the Revolutionary years see Gordon Wood, ‘Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson Reconsidered,’ in *The Idea of America*, pp. 213–230; and for the Chartists inheritance of eighteenth-century rationalism, Tholfsen, *Working-Class Radicalism*, pp. 62–72, 100, 104.

<sup>485</sup> Yeo, ‘Some problems and practices of Chartist democracy’.

<sup>486</sup> For examples of Chartist praise of the ancient world, see *Northern Star*, 20 May 1841, 6 July 1844, 15 November 1845, 14 November 1846; 20 May 1848, 6 April, and 12 October 1850; *Chartist Circular*, 28 August, 31 July and 4 September 1841. On Cooper’s education see, Thomas Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper: Written By Himself*, (1872), Ch. VI; and Cooper’s lecture, *Northern Star*, 23 August 1845.

clearly stated, the *Charter* was ‘the outline of an Act of to provide for the just representation of the people of Great Britain.’<sup>487</sup> For its advocates, representative democracy was above all modern, juxtaposed to the failure of ancient democracy. This theory of democracy emerged in democracy’s ‘second transformation’ in Europe starting from the mid-eighteenth century, and was established above all by the American Revolution, a war fought over representation.<sup>488</sup> As Ellen Meiksins Wood points out, we have become so accustomed to the concept of ‘representative democracy’ that we overlook just how novel it was.<sup>489</sup> The Federalist architects of the American Constitution rejected the precedent of the ancient world and argued instead for the modern system of representation.<sup>490</sup> Although the Federal Constitution was not intended to be ‘democratic,’ it began the process of the modern recasting of ‘democracy’ to mean representation. This did not happen overnight.<sup>491</sup> As we have noted, few in America in the 1780s embraced the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘democrat’ and, moreover, all American states operated restricted franchises. Even Thomas Paine can be read as rejecting democracy in favour of representation. Paine argued that ‘original simple democracy... is incapable of extension, not from principle, but from inconvenience of its form; and monarchy and aristocracy from their incapacity.’ ‘The representative principle,’ on the other hand:

naturally [remedies] at once the defects of simple democracy as to form, and the incapacity of the other two (aristocracy and monarchy) with respect to knowledge... By ingrafting representation upon democracy, we arrive at a system of embracing and confederating all the various interests and every extent of territory and population.... The American government...is representation ingrafted upon democracy... It is the easiest of all forms of government to be understood, and the most eligible in practice; and excludes at once the ignorance and insecurity of the hereditary mode, and the inconvenience of a simple democracy.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> *The People's Charter* (London, 1838), p. 1.

<sup>488</sup> Robert Dahl, ‘The second democratic transformation: from the city-state to the nation-state’ in Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 213–244. See also, John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London, 2005).

<sup>489</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, ‘Democracy: An Idea of Ambiguous Ancestry,’ Michael Saward (ed.), *Democracy: Critical Perspectives in Political Science*, 4 vols. (London, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 319–336 at p. 321.

<sup>490</sup> See, for example, [James Madison], *Federalist Papers*, nos. 10 and 14.

<sup>491</sup> See, for example, Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (London, 2006)

<sup>492</sup> Paine, *The Rights of Man, Part the Second*, p. 180

From the 1790s, however, ‘representative democracy’ on the American model spread rapidly in Europe. It was embraced by the French Directory in 1795, and by the Sister Republics established at the foot of France’s Revolutionary armies. Although ‘democracy’ was discredited in Europe after 1800, when it re-emerged during the 1830s, ‘democracy’ was axiomatic with ‘representative democracy’.

America provided, therefore, not only the chief credible example of a working democracy, but also the concept of ‘representative democracy’. In 1830, as the word ‘democracy’ was being reimagined in Britain, William Carpenter, who became an important metropolitan Chartist, included extracts of Paine’s work in his *Political Textbook* under the heading of ‘democracy.’ As Philp notes, Carpenter’s ‘retrospective reinterpretation of Paine’s position in 1790-2’ was a foretaste of most modern treatments of Paine.<sup>493</sup> While Paine’s status as a ‘democrat’ can be questioned, the Chartists’ cannot.<sup>494</sup> Carpenter’s recasting of Paine as a democrat was just one element of a broader democratisation of the past by radicals and future Chartists. Lovett and Collins, for example, followed Paine when they argued that ‘popular representation’ was a ‘peculiar feature of modern democracy.’ ‘By this great improvement in legislation numerous evils which were felt in ancient democracies are avoided; for while every man can exercise influence over his representative, to effect his political desires, the passions and the prejudices of the multitude are kept back from the deliberations of legislation, or the decisions of justice.’<sup>495</sup> The *Northern Liberator* similarly rejected the relevance of ancient democracy, declaring that ‘The only attempt at real democracy which has ever been made, is to be found in the United States of North America.’ Yet, even there the existence of slavery meant that a ‘fair trial’ had still not been given.<sup>496</sup>

This process included a recasting of radical historical narratives. Chartists found a ‘pure democracy’ or ‘military democracy’ in Saxon institutions, led by the ‘democratic’ king Alfred.<sup>497</sup> Peter Murray McDouall, unusually for a Chartist, traced democracy further back to the primitive parliament Kyfr-y-then that was suppressed by the

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<sup>493</sup> Philp, ‘Talking about democracy,’ p. 106.

<sup>494</sup> Mark Philp, ‘Thomas Paine,’ in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2013) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/paine/>.

<sup>495</sup> Lovett and Collins, *Chartism*, p. 9.

<sup>496</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 21 October 1837. Similar comments are made in *Northern Star*, 1 June 1844.

<sup>497</sup> *Northern Star*, 7 September 1839; *Western Vindicator*, 7 September 1839.

Saxons in the fifth century.<sup>498</sup> Just as the Americans had ‘ingrafted’ democracy onto representation, the Chartist ‘ingrafted’ representative democracy onto the British constitution. Democracy was one strand of a constitutional ideal that synthesised the languages of natural and common law, and constitutional and natural rights. William Hill, the first editor of the *Northern Star*, captured this perfectly when he wrote in 1843, that the constitution could be preserved ‘by infusing the true spirit of rational democracy into our constitution, and giving every Briton his rights as a human being, and his privileges as a freeman.’<sup>499</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although the central place of the constitution in Chartist discourse has been accepted for some time, historians have not explored the ideas that underpinned constitutionalism. By turning attention to Chartist political thought, this Chapter has substantially widened our understanding of Chartist constitutionalism. Rather than merely a narrative of lost rights and liberties, British radicalism shared with America an intellectual heritage rooted in natural law jurisprudence, which became manifest in written constitutions. In the British context, as was the case in late-colonial America, this natural law element was embodied within the English common law. Like the American Revolution two generations before, Chartism was, in part, a reaction against the exercise of parliamentary sovereignty. And, like the Americans, Chartists drew on a sophisticated interpretation of the common law to argue that there were fundamental limits beyond which no power—parliamentary, monarchical, democratic, or a mixture of the three—must reach. The Chartists, therefore, advocated two checks on the exercise of power, that of constitutional law and democracy. The Chartist understanding of the latter was also indebted to the transnational influence of America. For it was Revolutionary America that provided the Chartists with the concept of representative democracy. The emergence of democratic discourse in the Chartist period is therefore best understood through the constitution, rather than as an alternative.

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<sup>498</sup> McDouall’s Chartist and Republican Journal, 8 and 15 May 1841

<sup>499</sup> Northern Star, 4 November 1843.



## Chapter III:

# The Charter and No Surrender? Natural Right and the Context of Chartist Thought

I know that *some* Parliamentary Reformers are accustomed to speak slightly of all *natural right* to the franchise; but this is a doctrine so firmly fixed in the convictions of intelligent workingmen in this country, that they would as soon think of denying their own existence as of denying its truth.

– Thomas Cooper, 1850.<sup>500</sup>

In the history of political thought, as well as philosophy, there are two distinct types of rights: legal or constitutional rights that are recognized and enforced by a legal system, and natural or human rights, which are intrinsic to all humans simply because they are human.<sup>501</sup> Our current understanding of Chartist discourse is trapped between them. It had once been accepted that natural rights had superseded popular constitutionalism as the language of radicalism at the end of the eighteenth century. Particularly influential was E. P. Thompson, who held that this shift was ‘necessary’ for the development of a working-class political movement.<sup>502</sup> Constitutional rights, however, have been decisively re-established as the dominant political language used by Chartists, and natural right has been relegated to a marginal position. As this implies, the two theories of right are not only distinct, but their fortunes are linked: as one rises, the other necessarily falls. An absolute division has been avoided by the recognition that Chartists and radicals could draw on both positions; that is, that they sometimes argued using natural rights and at other times using constitutional rights.<sup>503</sup> However, the way this relationship is conceptualized by historians remains

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<sup>500</sup> *Cooper's Journal*, 17 January 1850.

<sup>501</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 60–70.

<sup>502</sup> Thompson, *The Making*, pp. 84–110.

<sup>503</sup> John Belchem, ‘Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform’, p.2; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 21, 63, 71; Gurney, ‘Democratic Idiom’, p.567; James Vernon, ‘Notes towards

problematic, because radicals and Chartists are invariably described as ‘slipping’ between the two discourses. Thus, while historians have embraced the implausibility of intellectual coherence, they continue to see the two languages as distinct.

This Chapter offers an alternative interpretation. In Section One, it will be argued that the Chartists use of natural right was consistent with their constitutionalism; it was not, therefore, an alternative language of politics. Particular attention is given to the form of argumentation that Chartists deployed. Rather than being merely abstract claims for political equality, Chartist natural right discourse was embedded within a natural-law framework that provided a single trajectory for the development of society, namely: the state of nature, social compact, then society. Such an understanding of the birth of society allowed natural rights to be joined with constitutional rights.

Chartist natural right doctrines were relatively orthodox appeals to natural right theory, which had emerged in the seventeenth century. A properly contextualised understanding of Chartist political thought, however, requires the elucidation of the discursive context in which Chartist arguments were made, not just from where they came from. Failure to establish this broader notion of intellectual context overlooks what was most significant about Chartist natural-right arguments. In the eighteenth century, the doctrine of natural right was the leading principle of political legitimacy; by the nineteenth century it was rejected by many as untenable. The main focus of this chapter, therefore, is the way that this context shaped Chartist political thought. It will be shown how Chartist political thought operated at the level of political debate, how it defined Chartism against other groups, informed Chartist tactics, and helps explain why Chartism failed. The primary focus will be Chartism’s relationship with the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and the Complete Suffrage Union, both of which attempted to forge a radical alliance with the Chartists.

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an introduction’, in James Vernon (ed.), *Rereading the Constitution* (Cambridge, 1998), p.9; Matthew Roberts, *Political Movements in Urban England, 1832-1914* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 34.

## I. NATURAL RIGHT AND THE STATE OF NATURE

In Chartist historiography natural right is seen as a product of the late-eighteenth century, the French Revolution, and the writings of Thomas Paine. Natural right was ‘a new language of rational liberty’.<sup>504</sup> The natural right doctrine drawn-on by Chartists, however, was no different in form or content to the classical natural-right theories that rose to prominence in the seventeenth century.<sup>505</sup> Like the classical doctrine, Chartist natural-right theory was not merely premised on the idea that natural rights ought to be recognised by a legal system. Rather, their claims were rooted in a specific form of argumentation composed of natural law jurisprudence and social contract theory; what the *Northern Star* called ‘the common, yet excellent, hypothesis of a transition from a state of nature to a state of society’.<sup>506</sup>

In Chartist narratives, the state of nature was a condition of perfect equality. Civil society emerged after a ‘social compact’ had been formed; an agreement between individuals to secure ‘mutual assistance, protection, and support’.<sup>507</sup> ‘The social compact’ was, according to another writer in the *Northern Star*, ‘the grand focus on which all other arrangements depend. If wrong, wrong must follow; if founded on justice, it must be definite in its character; and so formed as to exclude none.’<sup>508</sup> The transition to civil society via the social compact was understood to be the actual condition of humanity at the dawn of society, not a thought experiment nor a convenient fiction. Crucial for our understanding of the relationship between natural and constitutional rights in Chartist thought was that the British Constitution was representative of the social compact. Without knowledge of ‘deep time’, Saxon

<sup>504</sup> James Epstein, "'Our Real Constitution': trial defence and radical memory in the Age of Revolution', in Vernon (ed.), *Rereading the Constitution*, p. 23; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, p. 5.

<sup>505</sup> John Dunn, *History of Political Theory and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1996), Ch. 3; Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979), Ch. 1; Jeremy Waldron, ‘Decline of Natural Right’, in Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn (eds), *Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 625; Patrick Riley, ‘Social Contract and Its Critics’, in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (eds), *Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 347–350.

<sup>506</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 January 1841.

<sup>507</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 28 September, 12 October 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 21 October 1837 and 31 March 1838; *Northern Star*, 7 September 1839. See also, William Carpenter, *Political and Historical Essays*, No. 3 (1833); The Kirkdale Chartist Prisoners [James Leach, John West, and George White], *Chartist Tracts for the Times: No. 5 What is Liberty? And How Do We Obtain It?*, (Wortley, c. 1850), in Claeys, *Chartist Movement*, vol. 5, p. 485.

<sup>508</sup> *Northern Star*, 24 December 1841.

'democracy' was believed to have been the society that either emerged from the state of nature or had preserved the essential conditions of the social compact. As the prominent Chartist leader Peter McDouall explained, 'Chartism conceives that no union could originally have been formed or ought to now exist without all being eligible to elect or be elected as law-makers...If the opposite principle is right, then the habits and customs of early tribes are fables, [and] the records and traditions of our country are unfounded.'<sup>509</sup> On the same basis, the *Chartist Circular* argued that universal suffrage was not new, for 'It is evident that every state, when emerging from nature's lawless liberty into civilisation and refinement, *must have practised it*, and beneficially too'. The evidence for this was contained in the 'ancient records of our country' where it is enshrined that 'our forefathers, when they gave up their natural right... still retained the power of choosing those who should represent them in the supreme parliament.'<sup>510</sup>

As this suggests, the Chartists were adamant that the transition to civil society was a cooperative and democratic process. The idea that society was formed without consent was swiftly dismissed. As the *Northern Liberator* reasoned, 'how can we conceive a body of men, just associated from a state of wild nature, all equal, all free, delegating a power to one individual above the rest, for the government of all, without at the same time believing that he was nominated and elected by all?'<sup>511</sup> William Carpenter, the editor of the *Charter* newspaper, likewise asserted that the social compact 'does not sacrifice any power or privilege or enjoyment, but proposes to increase their freedom and efficiency of action... to infer the converse, that he, in fact, would surrender the very constitution which identified him as a man is one of the utmost absurdities which a diseased imagination could possibly deduce or generate.'<sup>512</sup> It was thus 'common sense' that only a 'simple democracy' could emerge from the state of nature.<sup>513</sup> From this conception of the social compact, it was a straightforward step to argue, as a speaker at a Chartist meeting in 1839 did, that it was the 'inherent right of man to vote

<sup>509</sup> Peter McDouall, *The Charter, What It Means! The Chartists, What They Want!*, first edition. London, 1845; second 1848, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 5, pp. 1–18, at p. 8.

<sup>510</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 12 October 1839.

<sup>511</sup> Quote from *Northern Liberator*, 21 March 1838. Similar points made in, *Northern Star*, 2 January 1841; *Chartist Circular*, 12 October 1839 and 29 September 1839.

<sup>512</sup> William Carpenter, 'The Origin and Objects of Civil Government', *Political and Historical Essays*, no.3 (London, 1831), p.4.

<sup>513</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 29 September 1839.

in the election of his representative, as a civil right, to which he is entitled in a place of the natural rights which he surrenders by entering into the social compact.<sup>514</sup> Constitutional rights and natural right were therefore interlinked. As the *Northern Star* explained in an article entitled ‘Constitutional Rights of the People’: ‘Every member of a political state is entitled to certain privileges, which are either the residue of natural rights, whose surrender was not required for the public good, or those civil liberties, which society provides and guarantees in lieu of the natural rights, so given up.’<sup>515</sup>

The basis of the political aspects of Chartist natural-right constitutionalism was varied. Natural right, after all, was not a homogenous tradition. The leading thinker is widely considered to be John Locke, whose authority, as Richard Ashcraft has highlighted, Chartists frequently invoked.<sup>516</sup> In this respect, the Chartist social compact was broadly Lockean, although, it should be stressed, not in a straightforward sense. Although many Chartist arguments derived from Lockean principles, and although Chartist sometimes cited Locke their arguments were more often drawn from intermediaries, such as Thomas Paine and William Cobbett, or through multiple intermediaries. Like Locke, the Chartists believed that the state of nature was an idyllic state of perfect equality. Unlike Locke, however, and like Paine, the Chartists believed that the social compact was an agreement among the people about how society would be governed, rather than between the people and a ruler.<sup>517</sup> Moreover, unlike Locke, Paine explicitly linked natural right to universal suffrage.<sup>518</sup>

## II. THE DECLINE OF NATURAL RIGHT

Returning to the epigraph at the head of this Chapter, Thomas Cooper articulated one of the most significant divides between Chartists—or ‘intelligent workmen’—and other reformers.

<sup>514</sup> *Northern Star*, 20 April 1839.

<sup>515</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>516</sup> Richard Ashcraft, ‘Liberal Political Theory and Working-Class Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 2, (May 1993), pp. 249–272.

<sup>517</sup> Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (Abingdon, 1989) pp. 73, 94.

<sup>518</sup> Thomas Paine, *Dissertation on the First Principles of Government* (London, 1795).

I know that *some* Parliamentary Reformers are accustomed to speak slightlying of all *natural right* to the franchise; but this is a doctrine so firmly fixed in the convictions of intelligent workingmen in this country, that they would as soon think of denying their own existence as of denying its truth.<sup>519</sup>

That Cooper qualifies his use of ‘workingmen’ with ‘intelligent’ is significant. What ‘intelligent workingmen’ meant varied according to context. One usage aligns with the much-maligned concept of ‘labour aristocracy’, another is to distinguish the politically active from the apathetic: to be political was to be intelligent. In some places ‘intelligent workingmen’ was euphemism for Owenites. But in this example, Cooper linked intelligence with the holding of a particular idea: that all (presumably meaning all *men*) had a natural right to the franchise. What is of additional significance was that Cooper counterpoised the idea of a natural right to the franchise with the views of Parliamentary Reformers. That the latter spoke ‘slightlying’ indicates that there was an intellectual divide between Chartists and other reformers. Political ideas, then, were at the centre of the divide between parties.

Thomas Cooper was right: most parliamentary reformers *did* speak ‘slightlying’ of natural rights. The MPs responsible for moving the Chartist petitions in Parliament, Thomas Attwood in 1839 and Thomas Slingsby Duncombe in 1842, for example, avoided Chartist natural right arguments altogether, and focused instead on popular distress. As Saunders has argued, by doing so they ‘represented the charter not as a prerequisite to practical reforms but as an alternative to them.’<sup>520</sup> Joseph Hume, the leader of the campaign for the ‘little Charter’, also carefully distinguished between constitutional and natural right, whilst Cobden expressly disclaimed appeals to rights altogether, ‘even for taxpayers, insisting that reform was a question of “expediency”’.<sup>521</sup> The utilitarian radical John Arthur Roebuck, a signatory to the original draft of the Charter, declared his support for universal suffrage ‘not because I believe in any fancied natural rights, but because to me it appears that the workings of self-interest will lead the labouring classes... right in their attempts to construct a perfect machine of government, and to produce the effect which good government is intended to

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<sup>519</sup> Cooper’s *Journal*, 17 January 1850.

<sup>520</sup> Saunders, ‘Chartism from above’, p. 468.

<sup>521</sup> Saunders, *Democracy*, p. 33; *Hansard*, 22 February 1850.

produce.<sup>522</sup> Nor were the Parliamentary reformers alone. As the *Morning Chronicle* advised in 1838, ‘In this country we would recommend to all those who advocate universal suffrage to stand less on their abstract right, and to be more anxious to show that their claims may be safely conceded; and we know of no more effectual means of producing this persuasion than affording proofs of the possession of opinions compatible with the social order.’<sup>523</sup>

The intellectual reaction against natural right theory can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century, when the whole basis of natural right theory—from the social contract to the right to relief—was challenged and suffered a dramatic decline in credibility.<sup>524</sup> The decline of natural right was particularly pronounced in Whig thought, where natural right and constitutionalism had always been part of the Whig intellectual tradition.<sup>525</sup> Responding to the French Revolution, Edmund Burke sharply broke with this tradition by demanding that Whigs choose between adhering to ‘the British constitution’ or to natural rights *per se*.<sup>526</sup> Although natural right was defended by a number of Whig intellectuals, most influentially James Mackintosh, by the turn of the century Burke’s arguments had been accepted. One example of the effect this had was that, unlike in the 1780s, arguments for constitutional reform in Parliament leading up to the Reform Act of 1832 focused solely on the practical defects of the unreformed system, such as corruption and high taxation.<sup>527</sup> The Whigs, in neither their speeches nor in their private correspondence, made out a theoretical case for reform.<sup>528</sup>

The extent to which natural right had fallen more broadly can be gauged by contrasting the discussion of natural right in the 1790s and the late 1830s. When Thomas Paine outlined his version of natural right in his *Rights of Man*, it caused a dramatic public debate, which in the pamphlet literature alone Claeys estimates had over 600

<sup>522</sup> Bradford *Observer*, 21 February 1839.

<sup>523</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 22 August 1838. Emphasis added.

<sup>524</sup> Waldron, ‘Decline of Natural Right’; Duncan Bell ‘What is Liberalism?’ *Political Theory*, vol. 42, no. 6, (2014), pp. 1–34; Gregory Claeys, ‘The French Revolution Debate and British Political Thought’, *History of Political Thought*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1990), pp. 59–80; Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, pp. 10, 71, 91; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty?*, p. 107

<sup>525</sup> Owers, ‘Common Law Jurisprudence and Ancient Constitutionalism’, pp. 51–73

<sup>526</sup> Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, p. 71. For the difficulty Whigs had with the Lockean inheritance, see H. T. Dickinson, ‘The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the “Glorious Revolution”’, *History*, no. 61 (1976), pp. 28–45

<sup>527</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 420.

<sup>528</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 430

participants. Although this debate went beyond the narrow confines of the concepts outlined in Burke's *Reflections* and Paine's *Rights of Man*, it still involved serious discussion about the validity of the state of nature and the social contract.<sup>529</sup> This was not repeated in the Chartist period. When natural right was mentioned, it was often to dismiss the whole idea. 'Britannicus', a regular columnist in the liberal newspaper *The Era*, ably summed up this position. For him, 'An argumentation on the origin of the title and induction of government, being considered by many, perhaps by the majority of persons, as a subject of questionable importance, it is at once invidious and repulsive, and entered on with so much reluctance by an author, as it is read with reluctance by the public.'<sup>530</sup> In the *Athenaeum*, an author was chastised for even bothering to attack 'the hypothesis of a social compact', for, by doing so, 'he is merely fighting windmills. No man who has earned a reputation as a sound thinker, holds that position to be more than a convenient fiction.'<sup>531</sup> For the *Dublin Morning Register* the 'social compact was neither more or less than two well-sounding words without any meaning whatsoever'; the *Bradford Observer* dismissed natural rights as 'nonsense'; and the *Leeds Mercury* repeatedly, when debating with Chartists, denied 'that any man, either rich or poor, has a natural right to the franchise—just as we deny that any man has a natural right to be a Member of Parliament or a Minister of State.'<sup>532</sup>

A central criticism of natural right was its association with political violence. The link between natural right and political violence was dramatically publicised by the French Revolution. 'When I hear of natural rights', wrote Jeremy Bentham, 'I always see in the background a cluster of daggers or of pikes introduced to the National Assembly with the applause of the President Condorcet for the avowed purpose of exterminating the King's friends. Of late these pikes and daggers have been exhibited in broad day, and pointed out to reasonable and reasoning men, as gibbets used to be to murderers and thieves.'<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Claeys, 'The French Revolution Debate', p. 60.

<sup>530</sup> *The Era*, 30 December 1838.

<sup>531</sup> Cleave's *London Satirist and Gazette of Variety*, 17 March 1838 [article taken from the *Athenaeum*]

<sup>532</sup> *Dublin Morning Register*, 29 March 1841; *Bradford Observer*, 19 November 1840; see also, 21 February 1839 and 30 December 1841; *Leeds Mercury*, 13 October 1838 and 21 November 1841.

<sup>533</sup> Cited in Waldron, 'Decline of Natural Right', p. 624.

The use of violence is an important part of any explanation of Chartism. Chartists were involved in disruptions from small scale riots to armed uprisings, and appeals to force were made throughout the Chartist period. Historians have now moved beyond the crude polarity that divided Chartism into physical and moral force camps. It is now well established that Chartists held a range of positions, from pacifism to ‘war to the knife’. In the early period at least, a clear majority of Chartists defended the people’s *right* to use force, even if they disapproved of its use or tactical expediency.<sup>534</sup>

What has not been sufficiently grasped is the way that Chartist political thought conditioned their view of political violence. As the Chartists traced their rights to a pre-social compact, which made them antecedent to government, it followed that the people had a right to enforce their claims against any encroaching power. There could be no compromise, no expediency with natural rights: they were either acknowledged or infringed. When their demands were ignored, the Chartists invoked the ‘glorious’ principle of resistance.<sup>535</sup> It was for this reason that the *Northern Liberator* called resistance ‘the key-stone of all rational liberty’ that lay ‘at the roots of all others connected to civil affairs.’<sup>536</sup> The *Chartist Circular* declared that ‘every law that violates the equality of the common right is an infringement of the social compact; and the assailed is justified to resistance’, adding that ‘When the government betrays its trust, and throws off its allegiance to the SOVEREIGN PEOPLE, insurrection becomes the most sacred right, the indispensable duty of every member of the community.’<sup>537</sup> Robert Lowery, a prominent Chartist during the early period, similarly argued that: ‘all power is delegated for the good not for the injury of the people, and that when it is converted from its original purpose, the compact is broken and... resistance to power usurped, is not merely a duty which he owes himself and to his neighbour, but a duty he owes to God’.<sup>538</sup>

The Chartist position on the right to resistance provides another similarity with American constitutionalism. Sixty years before Chartism, Britons on the other side of

<sup>534</sup> Malcolm Chase, “Brothers Under Oppression”: Chartists and the Canadian Rebellions of 1837–8’, in *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies*, (London, 2015), pp. 28–46, at pp. 38–39.

<sup>535</sup> William Lovett, ‘The Working Men’s Association to the Canadian People’, (London, 1837), p. 1.

<sup>536</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 26 October 1839. Reprinted in *Western Vindicator*, 2 November 1839. See also, *Northern Liberator*, 2 November, 9 November, 23 November, and 7 December 1839.

<sup>537</sup> *Chartism Circular*, 9 November 1839.

<sup>538</sup> Robert Lowery, *State Churches Being Destructive of Christianity, and Subversive to the Rights of Man*, (London, 1839), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1, p. 93.

the Atlantic argued that there were limits to government authority, that government was based on the consent of the governed, and that denial of representation was tyranny. When their demands were denied, they also staked their claim on the basis of natural right and rose in arms. The Bradford Chartist Ibbetson made exactly this point when debating the merits of physical force with Edward Baines of the *Leeds Mercury*. ‘You are aware of how the American Revolution was accomplished? *Grievances*, not a thousand times the amount of those now complained of by the British people, *were refused to be redressed*. The moral principle of the people was not sufficient to effect their liberation *without another agency*, which they employed, effected a revolution, and emancipated their country—That agency was *Physical Force*.<sup>539</sup> George Bown, a Leicester Chartist, also asked opponents of physical force to ‘glance across the Atlantic’. ‘I ask, I emphatically ask, whether that revolt... has not, in the eye of reason, justice, and humanity, obtained its plenary justification?... Millions of unborn generations will have to bless the memory of FRANKLIN, JEFFERSON, PATRICK HENRY, HANCOCK, ADAMS, LAURENS, LIVINGSTONE, &c., &c., and last but not least, of THOMAS PAINE and GEORGE WASHINGTON!’ The Americans use of force had not only won them their freedom, but had ‘secured a safe refuge for the oppressed of all nations’ and ‘given birth to a form of political institution, which must henceforth, in whole or in part, be the model of the governments of all nations aspiring to be free.’<sup>540</sup>

Unlike the Americans, however, the Chartists’ appeal to the nation failed. Instead of rallying the whole people, Chartism increasingly became a movement of one class; or as Edward Baines put it: a movement of only ‘*a fraction of a section of one class* of the people’.<sup>541</sup> It is a commonplace in the historiography to attribute ‘middle-class’ hostility towards Chartism simply to their fear of violence and their concern for their property.<sup>542</sup> Contemporaries also frequently made this claim. According to the

<sup>539</sup> *Leeds Times*, 17 August 1839.

<sup>540</sup> George Bown, ‘Physical Force’, p. 22.

<sup>541</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 24 August 1839. See also, *Order! A Letter to the Chartist Leaders on their views of the Rights and Interests of the People* (Derby, 1839); and, *The Satirist; or, the Censor of the Times*, 18 August 1839.

<sup>542</sup> Hollis, ‘An introduction’, p. 9; Robert Sykes, ‘Physical Forces Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839’, *International Review of Social History* vol. 30, no. 2, (August 1985), p. 220; Epstein, ‘Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History’, p. 200; Chase, “Brothers Under Oppression”, pp. 41–42; Alexander Wilson, ‘The Suffrage Movement’, in Patricia Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without* (London, 1974), p. 80; Harrison, ‘Chartism in Leeds’, p. 83.

*Morning Chronicle* in 1839, it was ‘tolerably obvious’ that this was so.<sup>543</sup> Fear, however, was just one part of a broader response to the Chartist loose-talk about violence. More widely, commentators argued that physical force was unnecessary to achieve success, was an affront to liberal principles, and was doomed to failure.<sup>544</sup> As the *Leeds Times*, a paper which supported Chartist principles, wrote, ‘The attempt to propagate freedom by violence, and establish liberty of the subject by physical force, is chimerical in the extreme. That men should be found ready to recommend such a proceeding, merely proves their utter ignorance of the principles of social and political liberty.’<sup>545</sup> The *Sheffield Iris*, another paper that advocated Chartist principles, regretted ‘The violent and absurd doctrines of the Chartist leaders have done more injury to the cause of reform, in a few months, than the allied union of Lords, Bishops, Clergy, Corporations, and State Pensioners could have done in a century and the government gladly take advantage of them to stay the progress of further reform.’<sup>546</sup> Physical force, moreover, was seen by some as a facet of intolerant Tory politics. The liberal newspaper *The Era*, for example, pleaded with working men not to fall victims to the ‘Tory-Radical Plot’; the *Leeds Times* described physical-force Chartism as ‘Popery in the guise of Chartism... as much a tyranny as the Toryism, in both religion and politics that we have been so long striving to resist’; and the *Manchester Guardian* believed that ‘everybody in this neighbourhood’ knew that the ‘Tories’ Richard Oastler and Joseph Rayner Stephens were responsible for the recent outbreaks of violence.<sup>547</sup> This accusation was also made by Daniel O’Connell, the leader of the Irish Repeal movement, who some newspapers credited with coining the term ‘Tory-Radical’.<sup>548</sup> Tory newspapers, however, pointed the finger in the other direction, and blamed

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<sup>543</sup> Cited in the *Leeds Times*, 27 July 1839.

<sup>544</sup> For example, Alexander Somerville, ‘Warning to the People on Street Warfare’, in H/O, 40/42; *Report of the proceedings at the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes* (1842), pp. 6, 12; *Leeds Times*, 28 September 1839, 30 November 1839, 27 July 1839, and 3 August 1839; *Leeds Mercury*, 10 August 1839, 24 August 1839; *Spectator*, 1 June 1839; *York Herald*, 22 June 1839; *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 July 1839; *Morning Post*, 14 August 1839; *Manchester Times*, 5 June 1841; *Eclectic Review*, April 1842; *Nonconformist*, 4 January 1843; *Bradford Observer*, 5 October 1848.

<sup>545</sup> *Leeds Times*, 3 August 1839.

<sup>546</sup> Cited in the *Leeds Times*, 3 August 1839.

<sup>547</sup> *The Era*, 19 May; *Leeds Times*, 3 August 1839; *Manchester Guardian*, 22 May, 9 and 22 November 1839. See also, *The Satirist; or, the Censure of the Times*, 2 February 1840; *Morning Chronicle*, 17 July 1839.

<sup>548</sup> *John Bull*, 24 November 1839.

Whigs and liberals for sowing discontent against the institutions of the Church and state.<sup>549</sup>

On the question of Chartist social composition, what this suggests is that one of the reasons why Chartist was predominantly ‘working class’, was not because it expressed or harnessed working-class consciousness, but because of the political theory that the movement embraced. As a commentator writing under the name ‘Spectator’ in the *Leeds Times* recognised, the basis of Chartist claims ensured that there could be no cross-class radical alliance: ‘One class, like the Chartists, marks out the ground on abstract rights, with a determination not to enlarge an inch—sets up a formidable apparatus of agitation—becomes violent, illegal, and coercive.’<sup>550</sup> What is of interest here is that, like Cooper’s comments at the head of this chapter, class was defined not by social circumstances nor occupation, but by political theory. The Spectator also shared with Cooper a conviction that this prised ‘classes’ apart. In ‘Spectator’s’ view, a cross-class movement could only be achieved when reformers had ‘the common sense to set aside, (not abandon)’ abstract rights in order to unite behind what *could* be done. Until it did so Chartist would remain a class movement, and ‘Class movements are worse than useless, and the authors of them are the worst enemies of civil liberty.’<sup>551</sup>

The key to understanding the context in which Chartist political thought operated, then, was that, as Duncan Bell has concluded, ‘nineteenth century social and political thought was antithetical to rationalist deductions of Locke, and accounts of rights, natural law, and above all, the social contract, were all widely denigrated as embarrassingly primitive.’<sup>552</sup> The Chartists, therefore, were challenging the way that nineteenth-century political thought had developed. As ‘Publicola’ argued:

Permit me to make a few observations on the fallacy entertained by some writers in reference to the subject of government. It has ever been my belief that there are abstract rights upon which government should be founded, which rights are inherent in the People, inalienable and indestructible. There are some

<sup>549</sup> *The Age*, 21 July, 4 August 1839, 12 January and 1 March 1840; *John Bull*, 24 November 1839 and 31 July 1839.

<sup>550</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 May 1840.

<sup>551</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 May 1840.

<sup>552</sup> Bell, ‘What is Liberalism?’, p. 14.

“expediency” politicians who believe otherwise; though I never found that they could adduce any substantial arguments in support of them in so believing: they labour under the mistake that the object of Government should be to promote “the greatest happiness for the greatest number.”... We are contending, not for the “greatest happiness of the greatest number,” but for the liberty of all, knowing that as all are naturally equal in the point of RIGHT, they should be politically so.<sup>553</sup>

In a similar fashion, the *Northern Liberator* castigated ‘writers of the present day’ for ‘los[ing] sight of general rules and maxims, and to be always dabbling in matters of minute detail.’ ‘One of the distinctive characteristics which the political literature this country possessed fifty years ago’, it continued, ‘was the constant reference made to the elucidation of leading principles in political discussion.’ This decline, it argued, was not the result of an advance in political theory, but was because political writers were distracted by the country’s ‘troubles and difficulties’. Thus ‘all of our constitutional lawyers, civilians, and judges, have been thrown into the background, and have been supplanted by a host of writers who do not know a principle from a chest of drawers’.<sup>554</sup> The *Charter* newspaper even contended that ‘the members of the legislature are, generally speaking, possessed of less knowledge of human nature, and are of judgement far less sound—than are the men of the working classes’, and asked what their ‘illustrious countryman, John Locke’ would ‘make out of the immense masses of trash collected by the Chadwicks of this day?—How could he have borne to listen to the speeches of that “splendid quack.”’<sup>555</sup>

The Chartists’ call to return to ‘the political literature this country possessed fifty years ago’ dovetails with the evidence about Chartist reading presented in Chapter One, which outlined how Chartists only had access to old books. These ideas had been abandoned by other political groups. The following section traces this intellectual divide and its consequences for Chartism.

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<sup>553</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 4 May 1839.

<sup>554</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 26 October 1839. Also reprinted in *Western Vindicator*, 2 November 1839.

<sup>555</sup> *The Charter*, 23 June 1839.

### III. THE CHARTER AND NO SURRENDER

The first significant test for the Chartists' commitment to their ideas came from the home of the *Northern Star*. The Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was founded in September 1840 by the radical wing of the Leeds liberal party to bring together reformers of all stripes into a movement for household suffrage, triennial parliaments, equal electoral districts, and the secret ballot.<sup>556</sup> The Association was spearheaded by a group of prominent local politicians and businessmen, including James Garth Marshall (MP for Leeds 1847–1852), Henry Cowper Marshall (Alderman, Mayor of Leeds 1842–43), Hamer Stansfeld (Alderman, Mayor of Leeds, 1843–44), Samuel Smiles (editor of the radical *Leeds Times*), George Goodman (Alderman, Mayor 1836, 1846, 1850–2, later MP for Leeds 1853–57), and Joshua Bower (president of the Leeds Political Union during the Reform crisis). The political analysis of the LPRA reformers was similar to that of the Chartists. Stansfeld announced at the Association's inaugural meeting that 'We are met together because we feel that our interests have been sacrificed, our petitions despised, our sufferings laughed at, and there are none to help us but ourselves (cheers).'<sup>557</sup> 'It was the misery of classes,' he continued, 'that we, as an association, have more particularly to do; and nothing is clearer to my mind, than that the cause of such misery is bad government (hear, hear).'<sup>558</sup> At the same meeting, J. G. Marshall despaired at the 'dismal civil war' engrossing the nation, and the 'selfish interests' that had set 'man set against man; one class preying with remorseless cruelty upon another'. The 'great master cause' of this misery was 'the existence of the irresponsible government of a ruling class for their own selfish and exclusive benefit (hear, hear). Therefore the reform of this evil, the parent of all others, is the first duty of every man.'<sup>559</sup>

If Stansfeld and Marshall shared the Chartist critique of Old Corruption, they disagreed with the Chartists (and many within the LPRA) on how to remedy it. This difference of opinion can be boiled down to conflicting constitutional theories. At the

<sup>556</sup> For Chartist and the LPRA, see Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 173–175; J. F. C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leeds', in Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (1959), pp. 65–98, at pp. 83–85; Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, pp. 265–73.

<sup>557</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840.

<sup>558</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840.

<sup>559</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841. See also, J. G. Marshall, *The People Still in Want of Good Government* (Leeds, 1840).

Association's first meeting Stansfeld 'Frankly and fearlessly' declared that the 'true measure of the suffrage' should be based entirely on 'its utility and its capability of conferring happiness on the greatest number'.<sup>560</sup> The only 'right' that the people had was the right to good government.<sup>561</sup> Household suffrage—a vote for every male head of a household, which thus excluded paupers, tenants, and dependent children—he believed, produced 'a truer balance of the classes and interests' than did universal suffrage, and was thus more likely to create the 'right' of good government, the outcome of which would be the greatest happiness.<sup>562</sup> The notion of 'balance' was a central feature of traditional constitutional discourse. It was, however, largely absent from Chartist formulations. Both Whigs and Tories shared a view of the franchise as the representation of property interests, with the Whigs holding a more expansive definition than the Tories of what constituted property.<sup>563</sup> For the Chartists, the most outrageous deficiency was the (lack of) representation for the unfranchised masses. The counter argument was that it was not necessary for everyone connected with a particular interest to be directly enfranchised, provided that the interest received *some* representation. The latter was the theory behind the 1832 Act, which allegedly restored the old English constitutional system of representation to the 'glories' of pre-1715.<sup>564</sup> The unfranchised were represented in this system in two ways. First, by their parliamentary spokesmen, men such as John Fielden, Thomas Attwood, and, from 1847, Feargus O'Connor. And, second, by the 10-pound franchisers because middle- and working-class interests were the same: what John Stuart Mill called 'Government *by means of* the middle for the working classes'.<sup>565</sup> Where the traditional view of the constitution invested the franchise in property, interests, communities—through the system of boroughs and counties—and later classes,<sup>566</sup> the Chartists saw the franchise

<sup>560</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840. Also, *Leeds Mercury*, 28 November 1840.

<sup>561</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 28 November 1840.

<sup>562</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840.

<sup>563</sup> Miles Taylor, 'Interests, Parties and the State: the Urban Electorate in England, c. 1820–72', in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds.), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 64–66; Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p. 78; Ben Griffin, 'Women's Suffrage', in David Craig and James Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics: Mapping Britain's Long Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 168–190, at pp. 173–4; Robert Saunders, 'Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform, 1848–67', *English Historical Review*, vol. 120, no. 489 (December, 2005), pp. 1289–1315.

<sup>564</sup> Robert Saunders, 'Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform, 1848–67', *English Historical Review*, vol. 120, no. 489 (2005), pp. 1289–1315; Griffin, 'Women's Suffrage', pp. 174–5.

<sup>565</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'The reorganisation of the reform party', in John Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 6 (Toronto, 1982), <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/245>>

<sup>566</sup> Martin Pugh, *The march of women: a revisionist analysis of the campaign for women's suffrage*,

invested in each individual. As John Collins argued, ‘we are asking for our individual rights—we do not, as you have already been told, wish to take the power away from those who already possess it; but we say, “Give us the same right you yourselves enjoy.”’<sup>567</sup> The balance of classes that so preoccupied the constitutional thought of the period did not enter their thinking.<sup>568</sup>

Stansfeld added to his utilitarian equation—a balanced franchise produced good government which created the greatest happiness—Christian and moral arguments. Stansfeld, a Unitarian, confessed that he could not separate religion and politics. He claimed that his politics were guided by the ‘golden rule’: ‘do unto others as they are prepared to be done by’.<sup>569</sup> When all men are prepared to follow this ‘Divine injunction’ then ‘might the suffrage be universal; then might be realised a vision of government... where there should be no other force than the force of principle’.<sup>570</sup> Baines, a liberal opponent of the LPRA, argued that it was unclear how Stansfeld’s ‘golden rule’ was reflected in household suffrage. Was Stansfeld suggesting that householders were more moral than those without houses?<sup>571</sup> The moral effects of household suffrage were believed to be the product of two exclusions. The first was the exclusion of young males; who, because they were more likely to be unmarried, were still dependent on their parents, and, as in all ages, were widely deemed to be less moral.<sup>572</sup> The second exclusion was through a rental or rating qualification.<sup>573</sup> It is unclear whether Stansfeld had a rating qualification in mind—neither he or any other member of the LPRA specified what constituted a house. Since the household suffrage maintained the link between the vote and property, it kept open the possibility of excluding certain types of residences from the franchise. The trick, then, was where the limit would be set.

Baines’s criticisms of the LPRA programme extended to other areas. His overarching concern was that further franchise reform, and especially the equalisation of seats,

<sup>566</sup> 1866–1914 (Oxford, 2000), p. 121.

<sup>567</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>568</sup> For the later period, Saunders, *Democracy*, pp. 168–73, 198–200.

<sup>569</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840; *Leeds Mercury*, 28 November 1840.

<sup>570</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840.

<sup>571</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 21 November 1840.

<sup>572</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 264–275.

<sup>573</sup> For the distinction between renting and rating qualification, see Saunders, *Democracy and the vote*, pp. 119–123.

would swamp the liberal influence, which was concentrated in towns. Baines set out his objections to the LPRA in a public letter to Stansfeld on 21 November 1840, which sparked a debate between the two Leeds reformers that ran until 9 January 1841. In total, Baines penned a total of six letters to Stansfeld, who responded with five.<sup>574</sup> Further contributions to the debate were made by newspapers such as the *Bradford Observer*, *Morning Chronicle*, *Spectator*, the *Sun*, the *Liverpool Mercury*, and the *Belfast Northern Whig*; with the first two supporting Stansfeld, the rest Baines.<sup>575</sup> Both men agreed on the principle of good government but disagreed on how to achieve it. Against Stansfeld's objection that Parliament's failure to repeal the Corn Laws proved that Britain was misgoverned, Baines argued—and set out voluminous statistics to prove—that equalising the electoral districts would transfer power from the towns to the countryside, and thus make it harder to achieve repeal. Baines was astonished by Stansfeld's argument that mechanics possessed more knowledge than the middle classes because they had more time and discussed newspapers at work, and held firm to the traditional argument that extending the suffrage was dangerous because it admitted the immoral classes.<sup>576</sup> Baines also criticised radicalism more broadly by arguing that 'the grand sources of human misery lie much deeper than in forms of government. The truth is, that *bad government*, so far from being the only or chief cause of human misery, is itself one of the EFFECTS of human ignorance and depravity.'<sup>577</sup>

Within the LPRA there was another group of reformers that took a different position to the Chartists, Stansfeld, and Baines. This group advocated universal suffrage but were willing to accept household suffrage as an instalment. Among them was Joshua Bower, the president of the Leeds Political Union during the Reform Crisis; Joseph Middleton, a barrister and frequent contributor of poetry to the *Leeds Times*; and William Nichols jnr., a mechanic and former Chartist.<sup>578</sup> The most prominent among

<sup>574</sup> Baines: *Leeds Mercury*, 21 November, 5, 12, 19 December 1840, and 2 and 9 January 1841. Stansfeld: *Leeds Mercury*, 28 November, 5, 19, 26 December 1840, and 9 January 1841. Stansfeld's letters were published as a pamphlet, which was advertised in *Leeds Times*, 6 February 1841.

<sup>575</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 26 November 1840; *Morning Chronicle*, 17 and 21 December 1840, for the Baines's response, *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1840; *Spectator*, 5 December 1840. The other newspapers were listed in *Leeds Mercury*, 9 January 1841.

<sup>576</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 19 December 1840.

<sup>577</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 5 December 1840.

<sup>578</sup> *Leeds Times*, 5 September 1840; *Leeds Times*, 5 October 1839. See also, *Leeds Times*, 23 December 1837

the universal-suffrage cohort was Samuel Smiles, the editor of the *Leeds Times*.<sup>579</sup> The latter was a ‘thoroughly and essentially Radical’ newspaper which promoted ‘sound liberal principles’.<sup>580</sup> In 1839 its circulation was around 2,000 copies per week, but under Smiles stewardship the paper’s circulation had doubled by 1840.<sup>581</sup> Although Smiles did not identify himself or his paper as ‘Chartist’, he did declare that the *Leeds Times* ‘stood by their side on the ground of principle’.<sup>582</sup> Smiles was a philosophic radical who saw politics as a struggle between a selfish aristocracy and the people, the few versus the many.<sup>583</sup> He distinguished between ‘the moral-force Chartist and Radicals in the school of Bentham, Fox, Roebuck, and Colonel Thompson’ and ‘the physical-force pikemen and torchists of the school of O’Connor and O’Brien’.<sup>584</sup> As the names indicate, he saw in the former version of Chartism a reflection of his own brand of politics. On another occasion, he argued that Chartism ‘bases itself on utility; aims for the greatest happiness to all; and, while admitting the necessity of civil government, affirms that man has no right to enslave his brother.’<sup>585</sup>

Since Smiles saw Chartism in rationalist terms, he could not accept the view that Chartism was the product of short-term distress.<sup>586</sup> Instead, he explained Chartism as the product of a fifty-year advance of political knowledge. Stripped of its most alarming features, Chartism was a vehicle of progress. It was ‘truth—political and moral truth;—a truth which has long been dimly perceived by the gifted and far seeing.... a glorious truth too!—nothing less than the declaration and acknowledgement of the universal brotherhood of the human race.’<sup>587</sup> For Smiles,

<sup>579</sup> For Smiles and Chartism, see Harrison, ‘Chartism in Leeds’, pp. 83–85; Alex Tyrrell, ‘Class Consciousness in Early Victorian Britain: Samuel Smiles, Leeds Politics, and the Self-Help Creed’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (May, 1970), pp. 102–125. See also, H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Smiles, Samuel (1812–1904)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36125>, accessed 16 April 2015]; T. H. E. Travers, ‘Smiles, Samuel’, in Joseph Baylen and Norbert Gossman eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, vol. 2 (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984), pp. 455–460

<sup>580</sup> *Leeds Times*, 8 August 1840.

<sup>581</sup> *Leeds Times*, 8 August 1840.

<sup>582</sup> *Leeds Times*, 13 July 1839

<sup>583</sup> See, for example, *Leeds Times*, 10 April 1841, when he described Bentham and Jesus Christ as the two greatest utilitarians. More broadly, Tyrrell, ‘Smiles’, pp. 112–14; Tholfsen, *Working-Class*, pp. 127–129. See also, Burrow, Collini, and Winch, ‘Philosophic Whigs v. Philosophic Radicals’, in *That Noble Science of Politics*, pp. 102–105.

<sup>584</sup> *Leeds Times*, 3 August 1839.

<sup>585</sup> *Leeds Times*, 8 May 1841.

<sup>586</sup> *Leeds Times*, 8 February 1840. On the relative prosperity of Monmouthshire, the location of the 1839 rebellion, see David Williams, *John Frost: A Study in Chartism* (London: Evelyn, Adams and Mackey, 1969), pp. 110–111, 118.

<sup>587</sup> Samuel Smiles, *The Diffusion of Political Knowledge Among the Working Classes* (Leeds, 1842);

moreover, the franchise as an implement of utility, so he accepted lesser measures of reform that would increase happiness.

Smiles's position on the franchise received broad support at the LPRA's 'Grand Festival of Reform' in January 1841. The LPRA billed their festival as 'the first grand Conference which has been held by the middle and working classes, since the passing of the Reform Act.'<sup>588</sup> The *Northern Star*, however, dubbed it the 'Fox and Goose Club', that is, a cynical attempt by the powerful manufacturers to lure the unsuspecting worker-geese to supper.<sup>589</sup> The festival was hosted by the Marshals in their massive new mill (Figure 2), which was lavishly decorated for the occasion. Modelled on the Egyptian Temple of Edfu, and complete with a chimney shaped like Cleopatra's Needle, the mill was the largest in Britain and probably the world. The festival occupied just one-third of the mill's vast engine room, which would later occupy 7000 flax spindles and some 2600 workers. There was seating for around 8,000 guests and a husting for 500. By the *Leeds Times*'s estimate, this was the largest indoor meeting ever held anywhere in the world.<sup>590</sup> The Reform Festival brought together an array of radical voices from across the country. The majority of speakers advocated a franchise beyond household suffrage, including the keynote Joseph Hume, John Arthur Roebuck MP, Colonel Thompson, William Williams MP, and, of course, the Chartist speakers: John Collins, Arthur O'Neill, James Moir, Robert Lowery, and Deegan. Sharman Crawford, a member of the drafting committee for the Charter, declared that his preference was the Charter's suffrage. He was willing to support household suffrage, however, if it was defined 'in such a way as to include every working man who was a lodger, as well as every occupant of a house' – that is, in other words, if household suffrage meant Charter suffrage.<sup>591</sup> The only speaker who supported household suffrage was Sir George Strickland MP, who quickly moved to clarify that 'his principle' of household suffrage was 'the greatest possible extension of the franchise, which

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*Leeds Times*, 8 May 1841.

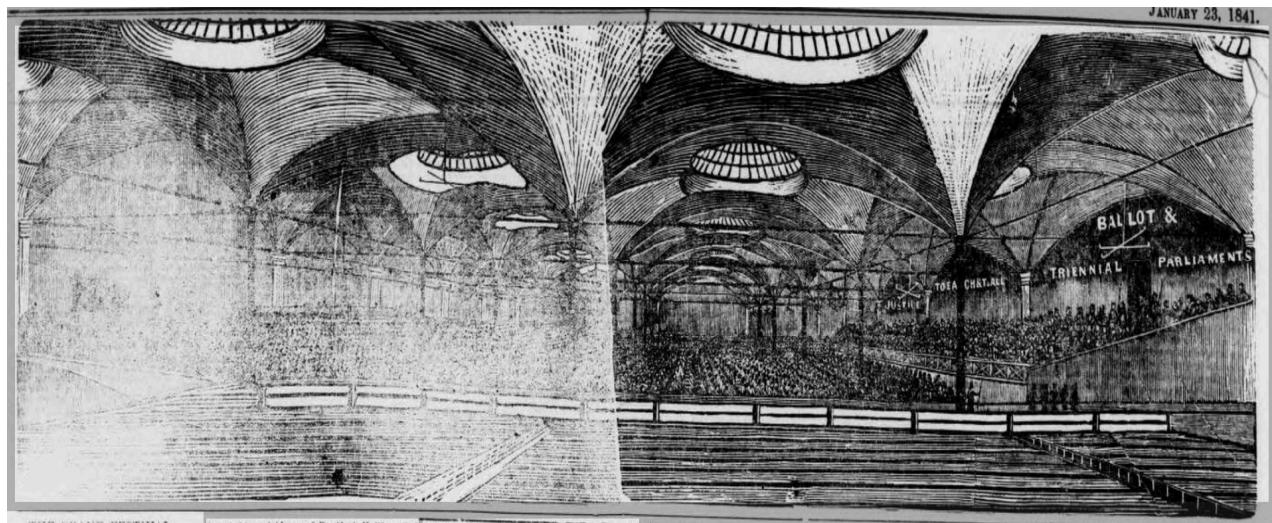
<sup>588</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>589</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 September 1840 and 23 January 1841.

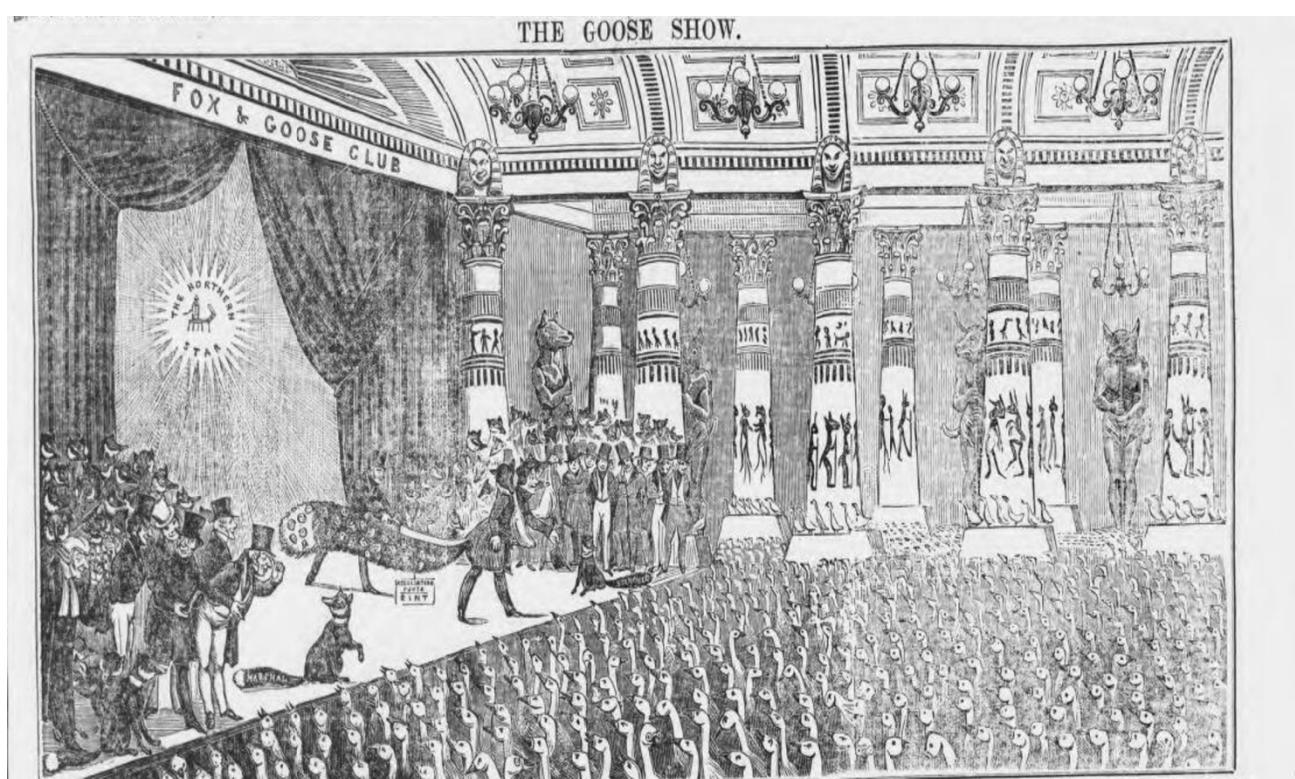
<sup>590</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>591</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

practically can be given to the people at large'.<sup>592</sup> As Baines concluded, this was a meeting where 'Household Suffrage dared not show its face'.<sup>593</sup>



Marshall's Mill prepared for the reform festival. *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841



*The Northern Star's* interpretation: The Goose Show. The LPRA members are depicted as foxes, while O'Connell, centre stage, is a peacock dressed as a fox. *Northern Star*, 23 January 1841. It is also notable how far the *Star's* sketcher took literally the Egyptian features of Marshall's Mill. On the evidence of the previous image, the reality would have disappointed.

<sup>592</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>593</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 January 1841.

Despite broad support for universal, or close to universal, suffrage there was nevertheless a clear distinction between the LPRA-invited speakers and the Chartists. The former identified maximum happiness as the purpose of reform and were in favour of strategic expediency. As Hume proclaimed, ‘we have one common object in view—good government’ which would make ‘happiness spread through this land as widely as its resources are capable of extending it.’<sup>594</sup> This was not, however, what the Chartist had in mind. James Moir was sent to the festival by the Glasgow Chartists to convey their determination to ‘oppose any public convocation for any extension of the suffrage, if the suffrage is short of that commonly called Universal Suffrage.’ Arthur O’Neill communicated the Birmingham Chartists’ motion that ‘they will neither countenance nor assist any body that shall, through expediency, seek any enactment short of the full measure of rights therein contained.’<sup>595</sup> And the same message was agreed by a large Chartist meeting in Leeds that preceded the Reform Festival.<sup>596</sup> Collins explained to the LPRA’s guests that the Chartists took their ‘stand upon principle’ and, as such, could not accept arguments rooted in expediency. ‘Would any man who understands the principle of right,’ he asked, ‘wish to take his stand on any thing against his principles? (hear)’. For Collins, there could be no distinction between what was expedient and what was right, and thus ‘to do that which is right is the best expediency that can be adopted.’<sup>597</sup> Lowery agreed, ‘If expediency is right, [and] Universal Suffrage is right; [then] anything short of Universal Suffrage is not expedient.’ O’Neill likewise declared that they ‘abhor the truckling expediency which has often marred the otherwise noble struggles of politicians’. The Chartists based their claims on ‘the high position of universal right’, and their position was ‘as inflexible as our principles are eternal... [A] union upon unjust and exclusive principles will not, cannot triumph’.<sup>598</sup>

What frustrated ‘expediency’ reformers was what they regarded as Chartism’s ‘hypocrisy’ on the issue of rights. Roebuck, for instance, pointed to the Charter’s exclusion of women as an example of a ‘necessary’ restriction to the suffrage. After all, no reformer believed that everybody—from a newborn baby to the criminally insane—

<sup>594</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>595</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>596</sup> *Northern Star*, 23 January 1841; *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>597</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>598</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

should get the vote. Roebuck himself favoured votes for women, yet was willing to accept a lesser measure of reform.<sup>599</sup> Just as he had conceded votes for women, the Chartists should accept a lesser reform to take a step forward. The Chartists, however, were unmoved by this argument. Although there was a current within Chartism that advocated female suffrage, it was never strong. The introduction of the People's Charter itself admitted that there was 'no just argument' against the enfranchisement of women, but conceded that calling for it may 'retard the progress' of male freedom.<sup>600</sup> Like subsequent generations of radicals, there was a great deal more support for female suffrage in principle than in practice.<sup>601</sup> The most influential Chartist treatment of the rights of women was John Watkins's *Address to the Women of England*.<sup>602</sup> After briefly sketching the familiar Chartist fantasy of the male breadwinner and his happy family living prosperously off his toil, Watkins committed about one-third of his four-column article to a typical Chartist attack on the degraded state of the country, which had made this 'natural' condition impossible. He then argued *in favour* of women's involvement in politics because their sphere, the home, had come under attack from bad legislation. Female political participation extended to the vote, 'not for wives—for they and their husbands are one; or ought to be as one—but maids, and widows.' These women, he reasoned, paid taxes like men and had a stake in the prosperity of the country. They were also the best judges over matters that affected children and the home.<sup>603</sup> Some female Chartists made the same argument.<sup>604</sup> As the often-quoted female Chartists of Ashton declared: 'We are determined that no man shall ever enjoy our hands, our hearts, or share our beds, that will not stand forward and advocate the rights of man'.<sup>605</sup> The Ashton female Chartists, however, went beyond the suffrage for unmarried women and looked forward to 'seeing intelligence the necessary qualification for voting, and then sisters, we shall be placed in our proper position in society, and enjoy the elective franchise as well as our kinsmen'.<sup>606</sup> Although some

<sup>599</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 21 February 1839. Also, *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>600</sup> William Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, p. 141.

<sup>601</sup> Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 306.

<sup>602</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, no. 13 (n.d); Chase, *Chartism*, p. 123.

<sup>603</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, no. 13 (n.d)

<sup>604</sup> Barbra Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 265–275; Rogers, 'Poetesses and Politicians', p. 100.

<sup>605</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1839.

<sup>606</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 June 1839. See also the Birmingham Chartist Sophia, *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, no. 16 (n.d)

Chartists were willing to grant female suffrage on the basis of intelligence, they tended to confine female intelligence to the home, where women were valued above all as educators of children.<sup>607</sup> As several historians have highlighted, the link between women's educative role and their civil rights—not to mention the denial of the vote when they married—rested on a gendered conception of citizenship where men could represent the people, both in the movement and in the post-Charter future, while women were welcomed only as representatives of the home.<sup>608</sup> This discourse did, as Anna Clark has argued, allow some Chartist women to politicise motherhood, and thus opened a pathway into activism.<sup>609</sup> For the most part, however, the Chartist attitude increasingly closed down female activism, which led to a steady decline in female participation in the movement.<sup>610</sup>

For our concerns here, it is notable that Chartists rarely supported female suffrage on the basis of natural right. An exception was Reginald Richardson, who ably highlights Chartism's intellectual failure to carry natural right to its logical conclusion, for Richardson did not go beyond advocating the vote for unmarried women, since married women were already represented by their husbands.<sup>611</sup> Although this was an established attitude in radical circles, it was an unsuitable conclusion to the natural right and natural law argument of Richardson's pamphlet. For this failure, Baines castigated 'the arrogant authors of "The People's Charter"' who could give no justification for the exclusion of women 'but one which will more than justify us in thinking that the Suffrage ought not to be universal even amongst men'.<sup>612</sup> Baines had a point. Chartists gave pragmatic reasons for disposing of the 'inalienable' rights of women, youths, the insane, and criminals. Did not, he asked, the exclusion of criminals suggest a moral qualification for the vote, the insane an intellectual qualification, and

<sup>607</sup> For example, *Chartist Circular*, 23 November, 1839; *Chartist Circular*, 7 December 1839; Lovett and Collins, *Chartism*, p. 62. For similar arguments, *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, no. 19; East London Females Total Abstinence Association, *Northern Star*, 1 January 1841. See also, Helen Rogers, 'Poetesses and Politicians: Gender, Knowledge and Power in Radical Culture, 1830–1870', D.Phil. Thesis, (University of York, 1994), pp. 4, 7–8, 17, 103, 104.

<sup>608</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Women, class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of Feminist History' *History Workshop Journal*, no. 17 (1984), pp. 125–49, esp. pp. 135–7; Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 265–75; Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', pp. 313–16.

<sup>609</sup> Anna Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (January, 1992), pp. 62–68, at p. 77.

<sup>610</sup> Thompson, *Outsiders*, ch. 3.

<sup>611</sup> Richardson, *The Rights of Women*.

<sup>612</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 October 1838.

women and minors an independence qualification?<sup>613</sup> And was it not possible to state that the household franchise, the £10 freeholder franchise, or any other limited franchise were also based on practical considerations? As the *Bradford Observer* concluded, ‘There is no definite plan known by the name of Universal Suffrage which does not exclude twice as many as it embraces. It is a sort of universality which consists of one-third of the whole;—a universal invitation to Tom, Dick, Harry; in which Dick and Tom are omitted.’<sup>614</sup>

Only one motion was proposed at the Reform Festival, and this only after Hume persuaded Marshall of its necessity. The motion was designed to avoid confrontation. It called for ‘a further enlargement of the franchise, as should make the interests of the representatives identical with those of the whole country, and by this means secure a just government by all classes of the people.’<sup>615</sup> As the motion was suitable vague, it achieved its purpose and was passed unanimously. The LPRA was not ‘humiliated’ nor drowned out by a united Chartist front.<sup>616</sup> The purpose of the Reform Festival was not, as has often been assumed, to commit all reformers to the *programme* of the LPRA. The Association, being internally divided itself, was much less doctrinaire than Chartism on the need for a carefully defined programme. Taking the agitation that led to the 1832 Reform Act as its model, the Association sought to build a nationwide movement for the principle of further reform. The Association itself expressed its satisfaction that it ‘effectually answered the purpose for which it was intended to accomplish, having tended to promote union between the middle and working classes, and to give an impulse to public opinion on the great question of organic changes and reforms.’<sup>617</sup> Moir, who had started the meeting threatening to shut it down, ended it by seconding a resolution of thanks to J. G. Marshall. Moir concluded that the Reform Festival was ‘one of the most auspicious ever occurred in England, as it would tend to unite the working and the middle classes in that bond of union which would ensure success to the progress of civil rights, and the ultimate establishment of the Charter.’<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1838. Similar arguments were made elsewhere, see, for example, *Bradford Observer*, 19 November 1840; *London Dispatch*, 6 January 1839; *The Times*, 28 December 1842.

<sup>614</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 19 November 1840. O’Connell also made this point in Parliament during the debate for the first petition: *Hansard*, 12 July 1839.

<sup>615</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

<sup>616</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 175.

<sup>617</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 February 1841.

<sup>618</sup> *Leeds Times*, 23 January 1841.

Two weeks later, Hamer Stansfeld looked back on the reform meeting ‘with pleasure and with pride, and as regarded the future, with the most sanguine hopes.’<sup>619</sup>

While the LPRA’s strategy may have avoided confrontation and division, strategic vagueness also had dangers. The first was giving the wrong impression. At an LPRA meeting in October 1841, a Chartist expressed his surprise that a proposal for household suffrage had re-emerged. It had been his understanding that the Reform Festival ‘was got up to concentrate the energies of the household suffrage party, but in the end they all turned Chartists (cheers).’<sup>620</sup> The Chartists at the meeting swiftly passed a motion calling for the Charter.

It was not Chartist hostility, however, that proved fatal to the LPRA. In September 1842, an LPRA meeting accepted that their strategy had failed. The working classes, it concluded, would never unite with the middle classes unless they set out a precise programme. The Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association finally adopted a creed: that of the Complete Suffrage Union. The latter was launched in 1841 by Joseph Sturge, the famous abolitionist and Christian radical. For the radicals within the LPRA, Sturge’s Complete Suffrage Union was attractive. Here was an association, founded, like the LPRA, to unite reformers, which had national ambition, and stood on a platform composed of the six points of the People’s Charter. The LPRA meeting decided to affiliate with CSU; it was the Association’s last act.<sup>621</sup> This was something of a coup by the LPRA’s radical faction. J. G. Marshall was out of town, so the erstwhile radical Joshua Bower took the chair. The other Marshalls were not present at the meeting, nor was Stansfeld. Whether the moderates knew that plans to join the CSU were afoot is unknown. What is on record is Marshall and Stansfeld’s decision to close the Association’s clubhouse and reading room.<sup>622</sup> The radicals of the LPRA would have to pursue their new endeavour without the patronage of the wealthy moderates.

Where the LPRA emerged out of the radicalism of Leeds municipal politics, the CSU was an offshoot of the increasingly militant Nonconformity of the 1830s. Dissenters had been empowered and emboldened by the sweeping constitutional reforms of 1828–1835 that transformed Britain’s political and ecclesiastical structure. The Repeal

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<sup>619</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 13 February 1841.

<sup>620</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 October 1841.

<sup>621</sup> *Leeds Times*, 24 November 1842.

<sup>622</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 November 1842; *Leeds Mercury*, 19 November 1842.

of the Test and Corporations Acts in 1828 admitted them into the constitution, the 1832 Reform Act gave them a national political presence, and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Acts handed over control of many townships.<sup>623</sup> The period leading up to Chartist witnessed a flexing of this newly acquired political muscle. Although Nonconformity was not unified—disputes between denominations raged over matters from state education policy to squabbles over the use of Church property—they nevertheless came together to agitate against parts of the constitution from which they remained excluded, especially opposition to compulsory Church rates.<sup>624</sup> A portion of Dissenters rejected the leadership of the compromising denominational leaders, the Dissenting Deputies, and pragmatic politicians such as Baines, and espoused voluntaryism; that is, not just the removal of Dissenters' disabilities but the disestablishment of the state Church.<sup>625</sup> The latter group tended to be provincial and evangelical, and saw politics through the binaries of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and sin, which gave them an 'inflexible extremism'.<sup>626</sup> As Joseph Sturge told the Anti-Slavery Society in 1830, 'When the Christian is convinced that the principle upon which he acts is correct, I believe it does not become him to examine too closely his probability of success, but rather to act in the assurance that if he faithfully does his part, as much success will attend his efforts as is consistent with the will of that Divine leader under whose banner he is enlisted.'<sup>627</sup> This was a language that the Chartists understood.

The vanguard of voluntaryism was composed of a group of 'moral radicals' who were involved in a range of overlapping reforming causes, such as anti-slavery, free trade, peace, the reformation of manners, and parliamentary reform. These reformers belonged to a tight-knit transatlantic network of overlapping societies.<sup>628</sup> In 1841, the American 'moral radicals' founded the Liberty Party to promote their concerns in elections, especially emancipation. In the same year, Sturge was in America, and was

<sup>623</sup> G. F. A. Best, 'The Constitutional Revolution, 1828–32: And Its Consequences for the Established Church', *Theology*, vol. 62 no. 468 (June 1959), pp. 226–234; J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660–1832* (second edition, Cambridge: 2008), pp. 527–564; Richard Floyd, *Church, Chapel and Party: Religious Dissent and Political Modernization in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2008); Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 97–98.

<sup>624</sup> Jacob Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: The Church Rate Conflict in England and Wales 1852–1868* (Philadelphia, 1994).

<sup>625</sup> Tyrrell, 'Personality in Politics', p. 388; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, p. 527.

<sup>626</sup> Tyrrell, 'Personality in Politics', p. 387.

<sup>627</sup> Joseph Sturge, *The Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, ed. by Henry Richard (London, 1865), p. 90.

<sup>628</sup> Tyrrell, 'Personality', p. 388.

deeply impressed with American democracy in action. It was on this trip that he was converted to universal suffrage.<sup>629</sup> On his return to Britain, he established the Complete Suffrage Union as a British equivalent of the American Liberty Party. In the autumn of 1841, Sturge wrote to Place that he had turned his ‘attention seriously to getting that part of the religious philanthropic public who do not commonly mix in politics to take the subject up, and the result has been most encouraging.’<sup>630</sup> Over two hundred Dissenting ministers signed Sturge’s petition, eleven of whom entered the conference.<sup>631</sup> Sturge was a Quaker with a background in radical Dissent, as was John Bright. Edward Miall, J. P. Mursell, John Ritchie, and John Childs were leading voluntaryists.<sup>632</sup>

Another language the Chartist understood was advanced in the key promotional document for the Complete Suffrage Union, Edward Miall’s *Reconciliation between the middle and working classes*. According to Jabez Villers, the ‘middle-class’ delegate for Reading, the pamphlet’s arguments were so convincing it had the potential to convert the whole ‘liberal constituency of the country’ to complete suffrage.<sup>633</sup> The *Eclectic Review*, an evangelical journal, called Miall’s tracts ‘one of the most purely philosophical dissertations which has ever come before us on such a subject and within such a compass’.<sup>634</sup> By 1848, over forty editions had been printed.<sup>635</sup> Miall believed he had set out ‘an entirely new position from which to view the subject of the franchise.’ His argument, however, would have been familiar to Chartist readers. He began by declaring ‘That government is made for man, and not man for government, we take to be a self-evident truth; and that “the people are the legitimate source of power,” we apprehend to be its proper corollary.’ Miall substantiated this maxim by drawing on a standard account of social contract theory. In parallel with Chartist arguments, Miall rejected the idea that man abandoned his natural rights when he left the state of nature and the notion that there was ‘no right to the franchise can be admitted, but such as

<sup>629</sup> Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to America in 1841* (London, 1841).

<sup>630</sup> Sturge to Place, n. d., Birmingham Reference Library, cited in Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 263 and David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780–1860* (Abingdon, 1991), p. 184.

<sup>631</sup> *Report of the proceedings at the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes* (1842), p. 6.

<sup>632</sup> Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, pp. 124–5.

<sup>633</sup> *Report of the proceedings at the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes* (1842), p. 61.

<sup>634</sup> *Eclectic Review*, no. 11, April 1842, 435.

<sup>635</sup> Edward Miall, *Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes* (1848), p. 2.

society confers.<sup>636</sup> Instead, he argued, like the Chartists, that society began with ‘a tacit compact’ that was formed ‘as a means to an end – that end comprehending all the advantages arising from social order. Government is his creature, framed exclusively for his benefit, and invested with powers delegated by himself to answer purposes essential to his welfare.’ This compact had its foundation ‘deeper than society itself’ and could not be given up because ‘the very essence of a bargain resides in the right of each party to demand the fulfilment of its terms.’ The right to the vote was therefore above ‘conventional law; ‘checked only by the higher laws of morality and religion.’<sup>637</sup>

With a shared commitment to principle over compromise, an ostensibly shared notion natural right theory, and, for many, similar denominational backgrounds, the signs for cooperation between Complete Suffragists and Chartists were good. O’Connor and the *Northern Star* attempted to wreck unity, as they did with all groups outside of O’Connor’s sphere of influence, but, nevertheless, nine members of the 1839 General Convention joined the conference, including those of the stature of Lovett, O’Brien, Vincent, Collins, and Lowery, as well as other significant local Chartists.<sup>638</sup> When the conference opened to denounce the ‘evils of class legislation’ and embraced each of the Charter’s six points as policy, many were hopeful that they were on the brink of a workable union.<sup>639</sup>

As with the LPRA, there were, however, some notable differences between the Chartists and CSU, such as their respective view of the constitution. The Chartist delegates, as was customary, made frequent references to the constitution and historical rights. These claims were greeted by the non-Chartist radicals with either indifference or hostility. Frederick Warren, a prominent member of the ACLL and delegate for Manchester, declared that ‘he cared little for the ground on which this right was based in the resolution which he held in his hand, he cared not what ancient statutes or the laws of by-gone days had said about the matter.’<sup>640</sup> Miall responded to R. J. Richardson’s long address on the historical claims for elective monarchy and self-government by stating that ‘it makes little difference whether the constitution, which

<sup>636</sup> Miall, *Reconciliation*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>637</sup> Miall, *Reconciliation*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>638</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 198.

<sup>639</sup> *Report of the proceedings at the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, pp. 14, 15, 23.

<sup>640</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 19.

after all is a conventional arrangement, sanctions or does not sanction that which is in itself just'.<sup>641</sup> O. J. Rowland, delegate for Dundee, argued that 'that it was of the utmost importance, that this conference in the affirmation of the right of suffrage, should base that right on an immutable foundation. The British constitution was anything but immutable foundation'.<sup>642</sup> James Adam said that 'Blackstone, and acts of parliament might be referred to, but only as minor arguments', for they only confirmed the principle, they did not grant it.<sup>643</sup> A Mr Gardner agreed, arguing that 'we must not content ourselves with drawing arguments from the practice of our ancient constitution', and, finally, Ritchie added that 'they were not now to appeal to old statutes and old precedents. They were met avowedly upon the principle that the statute books was heterodox, and, therefore, they were going to make one for themselves [loud cheers].'<sup>644</sup>

The Chartist and the CSU delegates, therefore, held different views on the constitution. This dispute, however, was a different kind to that which separated the Chartists from Stansfeld and Marshall, or, indeed, from Smiles and Hume. When it came to agreeing a programme there was, as one delegate put it, 'little difference of opinion between radical reformers'.<sup>645</sup> The only point of contention was over the length of parliaments. All agreed on the principle that parliaments should be short to ensure accountability to their constituents. However, Miall objected that annual parliaments were merely the *means* to achieving the principle, not the principle itself. As the Chartists could not prove that Parliaments *had* to be annual to guarantee accountability, Miall suggested that the Conference should back the principle and avoid, at least for the time being, endorsing any measure of realising it.<sup>646</sup> In the ensuing discussion, the Chartist held fast to annual parliaments, while the CSU delegates divided. With a majority in favour of annual parliaments, Miall withdrew his motion, and annual parliaments were accepted as CSU policy. John Collins was 'delighted' with the conference, especially the 'high principle' upon which it based its claim for the suffrage. Bronterre O'Brien likewise warmly praised conference: 'I have never been in any society, composed even

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<sup>641</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 27.

<sup>642</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 28.

<sup>643</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 20.

<sup>644</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 29.

<sup>645</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, pp. 29, 31.

<sup>646</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, pp. 45–47, 50.

exclusively of working men, in which he had found the democratic spirit more thoroughly developed.<sup>647</sup> He had predicted that—such was the indisputable logic of the Charter—‘whatever might be the complexion of the conference, it would eventually turn out to be a Chartist body.’<sup>648</sup> And so it came to pass. Writing to Cobden after the conference, Bright was also excited by its prospects: ‘I have never attended one more satisfactory’; he even conceded that ‘The Chartists were I think the best speakers’.<sup>649</sup>

Issues, however, remained. In addition to the better-known hostility of O’Connor and the *Star*, there were also some underlying tensions of principle. The first surfaced early in the proceedings. Holding different views of natural right—one Christian and bound up in notions of sin and morality, the other essentially rational and rooted in liberal political theory—led to different conclusions on the use of physical force. Christian radicals could not, under any circumstances, accept immoral means to achieve a moral end. The Birmingham Complete Suffrage Association, the mainstay of the organisation, warned that a ‘resort to physical force, in the view of many Christian men never justifiable, is, in all attempts at national reform, most disastrous in its course, most uncertain in its issue, and most perilous to the object, if attained’.<sup>650</sup> In response, John Dunlop maintained that, although he did not advocate the use of physical force, it was ‘the inalienable right of every British subject, as laid down by the Constitution’ to do so.<sup>651</sup> As noted above, the right to use of force was intimately bound up in the concept of popular sovereignty, a principle which the Chartists refused to consider compromising. For Christian radicals, there could be no compromise on this point either. Sturge declared that he could ‘not go one inch with any man who proposed any other’ than peaceable means for obtaining their object.<sup>652</sup> Rev. Arthur Wade, who had resigned from the 1839 Chartist convention because of the introduction of physical force doctrines, threatened to do so again should physical force be entertained, as did James Adam and Joseph Corbett.<sup>653</sup> Vines interjected that he ‘came to the conference with a full conviction that all idea of physical force would be denounced’, for not only

<sup>647</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 38.

<sup>648</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 51.

<sup>649</sup> Herman Ausubel, *John Bright, Victorian Reformer* (1966), p. 12; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 199.

<sup>650</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 7.

<sup>651</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, pp. 8, 12.

<sup>652</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 8.

<sup>653</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, pp. 9, 10.

had it proven counterproductive but also 'because they could obtain all they asked for by moral and Christian means.'<sup>654</sup>

The Chartist response to these statements was mixed. Dunlop stuck to his original point that they had a constitutional right to use force. Dewhurst, of Bradford, defended the Chartists against what he perceived as a middle-class attack on their conduct and blamed middle-classes' indifference for pushing the Chartists to extremes. Jon Parry, Barrister and editor of *National Association Gazette*, made the common Chartist case that public opinion consisted of moral and physical force. In some instances, 'the fact was that moral force was nothing less than physical force in perspective.' When he pointed to the Reform Bill as an example, he was greeted with 'cries of no, no'. Parry's point was not that they should rise in arms, but that the effectiveness of a given petition depended on the number of signatures it contained. The more signatures, the more intimidation the government was placed under. Campaigns that had successfully brought pressure from without upon Parliament, such as in 1832 or O'Connell's movement in 1829, were menacing because of the implied that consequences would follow should their demands be refused.<sup>655</sup> Collins, however, accepted that only peaceable means could be effective. The last word was given to O'Brien, who would not allow that 'they ought to deny the right to apply to physical force under certain peculiar cases', but conceded that the times for physical force 'were gone by', so consented to 'the exclusion of physical force from the [present] discussions.'<sup>656</sup> With that, physical force was not discussed again.

A more enduring obstacle to cooperation was that the non-Chartist reformers, although happy to endorse the reform programme of the Charter, would not accept the document itself, nor the name 'Chartists'. Sturge summed up their reasoning, 'some professed friends of the People's Charter' had so degraded its name that 'the great bulk of the electors and nine tenths of the middle class considered the word synonymous with violence and bloodshed.'<sup>657</sup> From the Chartist point of view, the Charter was essential. It was not just that it was a document for which they had campaigned and

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<sup>654</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 10.

<sup>655</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 10. See also, *National Association Gazette*, 19 February 1842.

<sup>656</sup> *Report of the... Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes*, p. 12.

<sup>657</sup> Peter Bailey, 'The Complete Suffrage Union of 1842', (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1967), p. 166; *Nonconformist*, 4 January 1843.

suffered for, although this, of course, was important. It was also, as T. B. Smith explained to the Complete Suffragists, ‘the working classes are still in advance of their middle class brethren [because] they have embodied those principles in a tangible and practical form. They rest in the Charter as their ark of security, and to that Charter, as containing the declaration of their political independence, they can appeal as to something which has a real and actual existence.’<sup>658</sup> Disagreements about the exact definition of the suffrage and other constitutional details had marred previous attempts at reform; and would continue to do so after Chartism’s decline.<sup>659</sup> For Lovett, the purpose of the *Charter* was to prevent long discussions of abstract principles. Before the Charter, Lovett explained, ‘radical reformers were pronounced to be impracticable, putting forth abstract bewildering theories, never to be realised, as they could never be understood by the great bulk of the people.’ By embodying the principles of parliamentary reform in simple language, ‘so that all who could read could understand, and understanding defend them’, the Charter was designed to ‘form, if possible, a concentration of [radical] principles in a practical form, upon which they could be brought to unite, and to which they might point’.<sup>660</sup> In this respect, the Charter was a remarkable success. Although there was the occasional grumble of dissent over particular points, most frequently the ballot on the basis that it was ‘unmanly’ and ‘unEnglish’, the integrity of the Charter as a whole was rarely challenged.<sup>661</sup> The Charter had become, the NCA declared in 1842, ‘a household word, its principles are engraven (sic) on the hearts of the millions’ and thus should be treated ‘like a fixed, immovable magnet, all attracting and never repelling influence. It should be the polarity of opinion around which all political matter should revolve, and upon whose stability all should depend.’<sup>662</sup>

The conference deferred the issue to a later meeting, which, they agreed, would discuss the Charter alongside other documents. This meeting convened on 27 December 1842, and, unlike the first CSU conference, O’Connor urged his followers to participate to ensure nothing less than the whole Charter was accepted.<sup>663</sup> The Council of the CSU

<sup>658</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 66.

<sup>659</sup> Saunders, *Democracy*, *passim*.

<sup>660</sup> *Report of the proceedings at the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes* (1842), p. 56; *The People’s Charter*, pp. 6, 8 [1848 edition]

<sup>661</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 170.

<sup>662</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 66; *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 59.

<sup>663</sup> For the Chartist perspective of this meeting, see *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842 and 7 January

had other ideas. Unbeknown to the Chartist members of the Council, Lovett and Charles Neesom, the Council had commissioned two barristers to draw up a ‘Bill of Rights’ that contained the six points. In contravention of the terms of the April truce, the CSU-Bill was given priority over all other documents; the Charter was not even mentioned in the meeting’s programme. For Spencer, the ‘People’s Bill of Rights’ was ‘an improvement on the Charter; more liberal, more generous, more for the people’s good, and more for the protection of their rights’. The Chartists, however, highlighted three issues. The first was that the Charter was an *outline* of an Act of Parliament that was written in plain language so all could read and understand it. The Bill, in contrast, was a full draft of an Act, was prepared in legal language, and was over-forty pages long. How, the Chartists asked, could they expect such a document to be disseminated and accepted by the people? Second, the Charter was preferable because it made this problem superfluous: it had already been embraced by the people, over three million of whom had that year attached their name to the National Petition. And third, by drawing up an alternative bill in secret and imposing it upon the Conference, the Council of the CSU had acted ‘undemocratically’. The latter problem especially concerned Lovett, who, burning with indignation at the way he had been treated, forwarded a motion to consider the People’s Charter alongside the Bill, which O’Connor seconded. Several Chartist delegates stood up for the Charter ‘in principle’, including O’Connor, who declared that he would ‘rather be a private in the ranks of principle, than a general leading on an inconsistent army in a battle of expediency’, and Parry, who ‘called upon the conference not to stultify itself, by surrendering the glorious principles of the Charter to paltry prejudice, and to a wretched and temporising expediency.’<sup>664</sup> Miall countered that ‘the struggle carrying on by the advocates of the Charter was not for the sake of principle, but merely for the sake of precedence, which amounted to nothing.’<sup>665</sup> Unlike their relationship with other radicals—like those of the LPRA and in Parliament—the dispute between Chartists and the CSU radicals was not one of principle versus compromise. Rather, it was a contest between two different conceptions of principle. This fact was highlighted by Lawrence

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1843; Cooper, *Life*, pp. 221–28; Lovett, *Life*, pp. 283–85; and Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 226–29. For the Complete Suffragist perspective, *Nonconformist*, 28 and 31 December 1842 and 4 January 1843; Tyrrell, ‘Personality’, pp. 383–384, 396–97; and Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, pp. 129–31.

<sup>664</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842.

<sup>665</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842.

Heyworth of Liverpool, who asserted that ‘the object of this Conference was to call over the working man to those leaders who would carry them on in a holy, righteous, and peaceable agitation, which would secure the people their just rights.’<sup>666</sup> Indeed, Spencer probably came closest to capturing the dispute when he compared it to that between a member of the Church of England and a Dissenter. ‘As a clergyman of the Church of England, he could converse with a dissenter on the principle of Christianity, without any sacrifice of his convictions, but if the dissenter asked him to turn to his way of thinking, he would not do so. Neither on the other hand would he ask the dissenter to come with him.’<sup>667</sup> Spencer supported the splitting of the conference into two groups. When the motion for the Charter was carried 193 to 94, this is what the Sturge group decided to do. Sturge wished the Chartists well, praised their commitment to ‘the excellent document, the People’s Charter’, and hoped that as ‘they were all aiming for the one and the same end they would be no hindrance to each other.’ Lovett forwarded, and O’Connor seconded, a motion of thanks to Sturge for his ‘patient and impartial discharge of his duties’ as chairman.<sup>668</sup> Henceforward there would be two national organisations campaigning on the platform of universal suffrage, annual Parliaments, vote ballot, equal electoral constituencies, no property qualification, and payment for MPs.

If their shared commitment to principle over compromise initially brought together Chartism and the CSU, in the end it proved a liability. As Tyrrell has highlighted, those Chartists who either left with Sturge or would later join him—Collins, O’Neill, Vincent, Lowery, Philp—were themselves evangelicals.<sup>669</sup> O’Connor had already denounced this group as ‘fanatics’ in his famous ‘New Move’ article in the *Northern Star*.<sup>670</sup> His lieutenant in Birmingham, George White, likewise charged the Birmingham Chartist Church of being ‘a parcel of fanatics and not Chartists or Christians.’<sup>671</sup> And O’Neill was strongly censured by Lovett and Parry as a ‘showy, empty and half-educated man’

<sup>666</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842.

<sup>667</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842.

<sup>668</sup> *Northern Star*, 31 December 1842.

<sup>669</sup> Tyrrell, ‘Personality’, pp. 391, 397. See also, *National Association Gazette*, 12 February 1842, for the explicitly evangelical statement of the Birmingham Chartist Church to which many of them belonged. Ashton and Pickering highlight that Rev. Henry Solly was an exception to Tyrrell’s observation, for he stayed with the ‘working-class’ Chartists. However, Solly was Unitarian, like Lovett and Parry, so did not belong in the evangelical camp: Aston and Pickering, ‘The Reverend Henry Solly’, p. 40.

<sup>670</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 April 1841

<sup>671</sup> *Northern Star*, 17 April 1841

who pursued ‘humbug religion’ after he refused to sell their *National Association Gazette* because it ‘wants religion’.<sup>672</sup> Scotland, where Chartism and evangelical Christianity were most closely aligned, also responded enthusiastically to the Complete Suffrage Union.

After shedding its Chartist contingent, the CSU launched into national and parliamentary campaigns for its reform programme. Sturge, Spencer, and the Chartist apostate Vincent embarked on lecture tours, while the council organised candidates to contest elections and issue tracts and pamphlets. In Parliament, Crawford and Duncombe introduced the Complete Suffrage’s Bill of Rights to Parliament on 18 May and 20 June 1843, and Crawford led a campaign to insert suffrage-reform amendments into the Queen’s Speech and Parliamentary financial items. The CSU received the endorsement of thirty-one newspapers and promises of support from fifty towns.<sup>673</sup> Moving into 1845, however, the CSU’s energy was spent; but, by this point, so was Chartism’s. When Chartism revived in 1847/8 so did the non-Chartist suffrage movement.

#### **IV. 1848 AND AFTER: EMBRACING EXPEDIENCY**

The great Chartist national petition of 1848 was just one of 510 petitions in the 1847–48 Parliamentary session that called for universal suffrage, while a further 7,350 called for a further extension of the franchise.<sup>674</sup> Chartism in 1848 was, in many ways, a repeat of the early stages of the movement.<sup>675</sup> The 1848 petition reiterated the Chartist constitutional precepts that ‘the principle of universal suffrage’ was ‘based upon those eternal rights of man’ and ‘sustained by, the laws of nature and of God’. The petition, moreover, declared that ‘the arguments pleaded against the admission of the people to the immunities which the social contract should guarantee are based upon class selfishness, prejudices, and contracted views of humanity’.<sup>676</sup> When Parliament refused this demand, Chartists slipped back into the same cycle of confrontational

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<sup>672</sup> *National Association Gazette*, 18 June 1842.

<sup>673</sup> Wilson, ‘The Suffrage Movement’, pp. 91–92.

<sup>674</sup> Taylor, *Decline*, p. 105. See also Roland Quinault, ‘1848 and Parliamentary Reform’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4 (December 1988), pp. 831–851, Saunders, *Democracy*, ch. 1.

<sup>675</sup> The best narrative account is Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 290–326.

<sup>676</sup> *The Times*, 6 April 1848.

tactics, talk of physical force, and ‘ulterior measures’. Adding to the febrile atmosphere—and Chartist confidence—were the Revolutions shaking the thrones of Europe. George Reynolds, the rising star of popular radicalism, was so inspired by the events in France that he interrupted his popular serial novel, *Mysteries of London*, mid-story to discourse on the Revolution. Reynolds was just one among many Chartists who believed that France had ‘shown that when moral agitation fails, violence *must* be used; – and if freedom can be gained by the loss of a few drops of blood – why, then, those drops should be shed cheerfully.’<sup>677</sup> William Cuffay, a prominent London Chartist, told the 1848 Convention that if the government rejected the Chartist petition, it would be ‘a declaration of war, and be prepared to go to war accordingly, and the Executive [of the NCA] should be prepared to lead on to liberty and death.’<sup>678</sup> Unlike many Chartist leaders, Cuffay was willing to practice what he preached. On the 18 August 1848, Cuffay was among a group of Chartists implicated in a plot to set fire to a number of prominent London buildings, which, they believed, would foment a general rising.<sup>679</sup> That Chartists resorted to such desperate measures was itself a testament to the failure of the constitutional strategy. The Christian Socialist newspaper *Papers for the People*, summed this up at the time: ‘The Chartists chose to take their cause upon a display of physical force, and by a display of physical force they were overwhelmed. They made number their argument, and it recoiled upon them.’<sup>680</sup> Like in 1839–42, Chartism did not have an answer to the question of what to do if (or when) the petition was rejected; unlike the previous episodes, they would not get another chance to answer.

If ideologically and tactically Chartism looked the same, geographically it was a different movement entirely. As Thompson’s figures show, of the 1009 places that had some form of Chartist activity in 1839, only 207 were also present in 1848, and only 60 places had a continuous Chartist presence throughout the period 1839–48.<sup>681</sup> Places such as Manchester, Leeds, and Scotland that were hives of activity in the early period were relatively quiet in 1848, whereas London passed from apathy in 1839–42

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<sup>677</sup> Cited in Chase, *Chartism*, p. 296.

<sup>678</sup> *Northern Star*, 8 April 1848.

<sup>679</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 309.

<sup>680</sup> *Papers for the People*, 6 May 1848; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 314.

<sup>681</sup> Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 341–68.

to the being the storm centre of 1848.<sup>682</sup> Miles Taylor has argued that Chartists had gradually drifted away from national agitation throughout the 1840s and returned to the pre-Chartist radicalism of local politics and class collaboration. Taking a sweeping view of the period as a whole, this argument is persuasive. However, such a broad lens misses what stood in the way of cooperation in the first place. The transition was not as smooth as Taylor suggests. As we have seen, it was not easy for Chartists to accept the case for piecemeal reform. To do so required them to leave aside, either temporarily or forever, their understanding of rights. This was, nevertheless, what the Chartists eventually did.

The first move in this direction was made in 1846, when Miall, Vincent, Lovett, and others, came together again to form the National Alliance for Promoting the Real Representation of the People in Parliament, which merged with the People's League in 1848.<sup>683</sup> Lovett proposed the Charter as the basis of the new organisation. When this was rejected—by former Chartist stalwart Henry Vincent no less—and the programme of the CSU was adopted instead, it looked like the CSU debacle of 1842 would be repeated. This time, however, Lovett backed down and agreed to join the League in hope ‘that it might grow in numbers and improve in principle’.<sup>684</sup> Of greater significance was O'Connor's change of heart. In May 1849, he warned the Chartist ‘Old Guards’ of the danger of cooperating with the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, which he likened to the CSU.<sup>685</sup> The NPFRA stood on a platform of fiscal retrenchment and Joseph Hume's ‘little Charter’ of triennial parliaments, the ballot, equal electoral districts, and household suffrage, that is, in other words, the programme of LPRA.<sup>686</sup> Adding to the symmetry of earlier radical attempts, Baines, true to form, opposed it.<sup>687</sup> By October 1849, however, O'Connor endorsed the NPFRA, supported Hume in Parliament, and shared platforms with NPFRA speakers. Writing in the *Star*, he implored Chartists ‘in the name of honour, justice, patriotism, and the CHARTER, to join the new Parliamentary Reform Association, heart and soul’.<sup>688</sup> As

<sup>682</sup> David Goodway, *London Chartism* (Cambridge, 1982); Taylor, *Decline*, pp. 103–104.

<sup>683</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 335; Tyrrell, ‘Personality’, p. 399.

<sup>684</sup> Lovett, *Life*, p. 340.

<sup>685</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 May 1849; Gammage, *History*, p. 347.

<sup>686</sup> Nicholas Edsall, ‘A Failed National Movement: the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, 1848–54’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 49, no. 119 (1976), pp. 108–121; Taylor, *Decline*, pp. 167–72; Saunders, *Democracy*, pp. 32–38.

<sup>687</sup> See, for example, *Leeds Mercury*, 13 May 1848.

<sup>688</sup> *Northern Star*, 13 October 1849; Gammage, *History*, p. 349; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 334. See also,

Robert Gammage highlighted, ‘O’Connor, who had kicked overboard so many men, not for dereliction of principle, but on point of policy, who would not have even the name of the Charter altered, who had collected thousands to defeat schemes for Household Suffrage, now gave in his adhesion to a Household Suffrage Association.’<sup>689</sup> O’Connor did not take this step alone. Two new Chartist organisations, the National Charter League and the People’s Charter Union, also supported cooperation with the NPFRA, as did a number of other influential Chartists, including Reynolds, George Jacob Holyoake, Thornton Hunt, and by 1852, W. J. Linton.<sup>690</sup>

There were others in the NCA who refused to abandon the Charter, including the London-based executive. The position adopted by the latter, however, was also a departure from Chartism as it was conducted over the previous decade. Under the slogan of ‘Charter and something more’, these Chartists, led by Harney, fastened the Charter onto a social democratic programme that included land nationalisation, Church disestablishment, universal secular education, and the settlement of the poor on the land. Chase is only the most recent historian of Chartism to see the ‘social turn’ of late-Chartism as a ‘natural development’.<sup>691</sup> Writing at the time, Howard Morton (pseudonym of Helen MacFarlane) celebrated the move in similar terms. ‘They have progressed from the idea of a simple *political reform* to the idea of a *Social Revolution*.’<sup>692</sup> While for some Chartism was a vehicle for ‘social revolution’, for many others it was not. Chartism was successful when it pursued an accepted programme of constitutional reform in the commonly understood language of the constitution. The fact remains that (some) Chartists only took a social turn after the movement had disintegrated. In 1850, the NCA’s membership was just 500. Indeed, as a handful of activists and very little mass appeal, ‘Chartism and something more’ looked remarkably like Owenism, the other party that sought a ‘social revolution’, with which many of the remaining NCA leaders were associated.

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*Northern Star*, 20 October and 10 November 1849.

<sup>689</sup> Gammage, *History*, p. 349

<sup>690</sup> *Northern Star*, 13, 20 October, 10 November 1849; Wilson, ‘Suffrage Movement’, p. 99; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 335; Taylor, *Decline*, pp. 109–110, 169; Royle, *Chartism*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>691</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 336.

<sup>692</sup> *The Red Republican*, 22 June 1850. Also, cited in Stedman Jones, ‘Class Struggle and the industrial revolution’, in *Languages of Class*, p. 61; Royle, *Chartism*, p. 50.

The Chartist Association of Manchester was among the first to protest against ‘Communistic’ Chartism.<sup>693</sup> They also declared that they ‘cannot read without pain’ the London-based NCA’s resolution ‘any extension of the elective franchise short of universal, would only render the people worse off’. This proposition was ‘based on a bad foundation, and in its tendency and operations selfish, isolated, and factious’. One Mr Donovan called the NCA’s position an insult to every working man, and Thomas Dickenson declared that it was ‘opposed to the good sense of every Englishman’.<sup>694</sup> John Leach, the first president of the NCA in 1840, described as ‘sheer nonsense’ the idea that four million more electors could leave them in a worse position. If this was the case, he argued, ‘let all progress cease, and give up agitating for an extension of the suffrage.’ Henceforward the policy of the Manchester Chartist Association was to ‘offer to aid and assist all men, or bodies of men, who profess and attempt to better the political condition of the great bulk of the people, be their endeavours great or small, their reforms broad or narrow’.<sup>695</sup> Chartist Associations of Glasgow and Birmingham came to the same conclusion.<sup>696</sup> While in Leeds, Chartists rebranded as ‘advanced Liberals’.<sup>697</sup> Four of the movement’s strongest centres, therefore, abandoned the ‘Charter and no surrender’. More were to follow.

If natural right was the ground upon which Chartists stood, it was also where Chartism fell. Unable to force its demands on an unwilling state and burdened with political theories that had little appeal beyond its base, Chartism never overcame the problems latent in its core belief. By abandoning ‘the Charter and no surrender’ for the politics of expediency, the Chartist movement fatally undermined the consistency of its political principles. With the Chartists no longer committed to the whole Charter, or the ‘Charter and something more’, the path was open to a new kind of politics. The shift away from principled non-compromise also helps explain the rapid decline of the movement, and why the multiple attempts to restart Chartism in the 1850s failed. As Chartists recognised throughout the period, once the Rubicon of expediency had been crossed, the Charter was in trouble. Never again would a movement on the scale of Chartism challenge the British state. When the reform movement revived in the 1860s,

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<sup>693</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 339.

<sup>694</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851.

<sup>695</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851.

<sup>696</sup> Wilson, ‘Suffrage Movement’, p. 97.

<sup>697</sup> Harrison, ‘Chartism in Leeds’, p. 98.

it fell under the fold of Gladstonian liberalism, accepted its gradualist programme, and traded the ‘The Charter and no surrender’ for ‘liberty, retrenchment, and reform.’<sup>698</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This Chapter has demonstrated the importance of Chartist political thought to explain Chartism’s place within the British political spectrum. A seismic intellectual shift against natural right at the end of the eighteenth century left it the sole property of popular radicals and eventually Chartists. Ideas about natural right lay at the root of the Chartist conception of the constitution, property, the economy, democracy, and citizenship. Non-Chartist radicals, however, thought in different terms. Having rejected natural right, these radicals did not share nor countenance the Chartists’ attraction to violence, their inability to compromise, and their seemingly ludicrous expectations. Political theory, therefore, mediated the relationship between Chartists and non-Chartist reformers, and kept the ‘classes’ apart during the Chartist period.

Taken as a whole, this chapter is a practical argument about the history of political thought that has pointed to ways that it can be widened beyond the great texts. It has shown how Chartist political thought operated at the level of political debate in newspapers and at political meetings, and how political theory manifested in tactical decisions. By taking this route, this Chapter has also shown that the study of Chartist political thought at all levels of abstraction is essential to our understanding of what Chartism was, what Chartists wanted, and the course the movement took throughout its existence.

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<sup>698</sup> Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*.

## Chapter IV

# Confronting the Dismal Science

All errors are mischievous; but some are more dangerous than others... Of this character is the doctrine of MALTHUS with regard to population. It holds the same position, and performs the same functions in modern Political Economy, as the doctrine of original sin in Theology. Upon each, as basal doctrines, rests the whole super incumbent mass. If the foundation be removed the whole must tumble to the ground, as easily as the fragile houses of cards which children build up for the pleasure of knocking them down again... The New Poor Law Amendment Act, which was its highest legislative triumph, is fated to be the instrument of its downfall. It has exhibited so unmistakably all of its latent evil tendencies... The allotment and small farm system... proceed upon a totally different basis to those assumed by the Adam Smith and Malthus school. They [the Chartist] aim at making the labourer comfortable at home—at making dear “fatherland” support all its children, and of emancipating, in a greater or less degree Labour from the fell gripe (sic) of merciless Capital.'

‘Young England’, December 1844.<sup>699</sup>

Political economy was not a science. It might one day be a science, but it was not so at present. Science admitted of no error and of no change in principles. The new poor law was a natural result of this system of economy. Malthus and Archbishop Whatley were only the natural disciples of Adam Smith. In contradistinction to the doctrines of these men, he enunciated the doctrine that the property of men was amenable to the poverty of men. That all men had a claim upon the land for their support; that it was the right derivable from God and Nature, and that any system which was opposed to it was false.

— Samuel Kydd, April 1851.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 December 1844.

<sup>700</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851.

The nineteenth century saw the onset of an ‘economic age’ as the language of political economy recast how politics and society were understood.<sup>701</sup> Historiographical advances in the 1980s considerably improved our understanding of this phenomenon. Historians of political thought placed political economy in a richer ideological context, and exposed its roots in the languages of moral philosophy, civic jurisprudence, and Christianity.<sup>702</sup> Overlapping with these developments in intellectual history, political historians have shed light on how ‘high’ economic theory was disseminated and popularised, and how economic ideas were translated into policy.<sup>703</sup> This scholarship has provided greater insights into the variety of political economies that competed and converged in the period, from Whig, Tory, and radical, to utilitarian, evangelical, and socialist.<sup>704</sup> Of crucial significance here, and for much else besides, is the understanding that the first age of political economy was an age of Christian political economy. From the evangelical-inspired policies of liberal Tories in the Treasury to the stump rhetoric of the Anti-Corn Law League, political economy was heavily underscored by providentialist ideas about God’s natural order.<sup>705</sup>

This improved historical understanding of political economy, however, has had little impact on the historiography of Chartism. This fact both underlines the transformation in the way that Chartism has been studied since the 1980s, but also

<sup>701</sup> Emma Rothschild, ‘Political Economy’, in Gregory Claeys and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds.), *Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 748–779, at p. 748.

<sup>702</sup> From a huge literature, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*; John Burrow, Stefan Collini, and Donald Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*; Claeys, *Machinery, Money, and the Millennium*; Collini, Whatmore, and Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society*; Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments Adam Smith Condorcet and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Donald Winch and Patrick O’Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>703</sup> J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795–1832* (London, 1969); Peter Mandler, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*’, *Past and Present*, no. 117 (Nov., 1987), pp. 131–57; Peter Mandler, ‘The Making of the New Poor Law *Redivivus*: Reply’, *Past and Present*, no. 127 (May, 1990), pp. 194–201; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*.

<sup>704</sup> For Tory, Hilton, *Corn, Cash and Commerce*; Mandler, ‘Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1 (March, 1990), pp. 81–103. For the Whigs, Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, Ch. 1–3; Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The ‘Edinburgh Review’, 1802–32* (Cambridge, 1983); Peter Mandler, *Aristocratic government in the age of reform: Whigs and liberals 1830–52* (1990). For radicals: Benthamites, William Thompson, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817–1841* (Oxford, 1979); Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, Ch. 2; for Owen and the Owenites: Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*; and (for want of a better term) popular radicals, Noel Thompson, *The People’s Science*; Stack, *Nature and Artifice*.

<sup>705</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*; A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion* (Cambridge, 1991); Mandler, ‘Tories and Paupers’.

reveals a significant problem. When Chartism was understood as an expression of class consciousness, political economy was centrally placed in accounts of Chartist ideology. The most popular view depended on a distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ analyses. The former centred on Paine and Cobbett’s critique of government finance, which blamed high taxes, expensive loan repayments, and paper money for the impoverishment of ordinary labourers. In the imagination of popular radicalism, these measures were ‘the Thing’, a self-reinforcing system of ‘Old Corruption’ sustained by a monopoly on political power.<sup>706</sup> This ‘old’ analysis gave way to the ‘new’ analysis of Robert Owen, William Thompson, John Gray, and Thomas Hodgskin. Although these thinkers wrote from a variety of perspectives, it was argued that they shared an anti-capitalist agenda that located exploitation in the economic system. These strands of thought were then taken up by the nascent working-class movement, synthesised by the unstamped press in the early 1830s into a ‘working-class political economy’, and given its most powerful articulations by the Chartists John Francis Bray and especially Bronterre O’Brien.<sup>707</sup> This narrative has a long pedigree. A variation of it was first forwarded by Robert Gammage, a follower of O’Brien and Chartism’s first historian, who argued that O’Brien had pioneered a ‘new analysis of property, power, and exploitation’ that looked beyond the political rhetoric of Old Corruption.<sup>708</sup>

Although historians have questioned the extent to which the new analysis had completely displaced the old, it was not until Stedman Jones’s ‘Rethinking Chartism’ that the two-stage development was significantly—for some, decisively—challenged. Stedman Jones exhaustively demonstrated that rather than abandoning the ‘old’ analysis, radicals stretched the terms of the latter to interpret an increasing range of new problems.<sup>709</sup> Stedman Jones did not argue that Chartist language was solely based

<sup>706</sup> ‘Old Corruption’ was, of course, a central theme of Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’. For the most recent exploration of this theme, see Roberts, “The Feast of the Gridiron is at Hand”, pp. 107–121.

<sup>707</sup> Patricia Hollis, *Pauper Press*, Ch. 7; Noel Thompson, *The People’s Science, passim*; Ashcraft, ‘Working-class radicalism in England’, pp. 260–63; Huzel, *Popularization*, Ch. 3; Ben Maw, ‘Bronterre O’Brien, Class, and the Advent of Democratic Anti-Capitalism’, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Swansea, 2005). For these authors, see Noel Thompson, *The People’s Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crises 1816–34* (Cambridge, 1985); David Stack, *Nature and Artifice: The Life and Thought of Thomas Hodgskin 1807–1869* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998); Jamie Bronstein, *John Francis Bray: Transatlantic Radical* (Pontypool, 2009).

<sup>708</sup> Gammage, *History*, pp. 75–6.

<sup>709</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’.

on ‘Old Corruption’, as it has recently been alleged.<sup>710</sup> As Stedman Jones explicitly noted, in the Chartist phase of radicalism ‘less emphasis was placed upon the state as a nest of self-interest and corruption – “old corruption” in Cobbett’s phrase; instead, it increasingly came to be viewed as the tyrannical harbinger of a dictatorship over the producers.’<sup>711</sup> Rather, his point was that newer strands of analysis did not break the fundamental radical premise at the heart of the old: that social misery was attributable to a political source.

It is here where matters remain.<sup>712</sup> On the one hand, those who accept Stedman Jones’s argument have seemingly concluded that political economy is unimportant for the study of Chartistism, an interpretation which dovetails with the shift in interests brought about by the ‘cultural turn’. On the other hand, those who disagree with Stedman Jones continue to argue that Chartist political discourse successfully transcended the political boundaries of the ‘old’ critique, and it is usually Bronterre O’Brien who is pressed into service to prove it.<sup>713</sup>

With the debate fixed to this dated axis, historians of Chartistism have been unable to capitalise on the insights outlined in the first paragraph of this Chapter. In contrast, this Chapter considers the influence of political economy on Chartistism by treating it as just one discourse of politics during the period. To do so, an attempt is made to look beyond the content of Chartist ideas—that is, what Chartists knew of political economy—to consider how political economy impinged on Chartist discourse in a broader sense. As a language that influentially shaped the politics of the period, it was inevitable that Chartist ideas clashed with those of its proponents. With focus attached

<sup>710</sup> Malcolm Chase, ‘Rethinking Welsh Chartistism’, in *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies* (London, 2015), pp. 93–110 at p. 94. The same point is made in Chase, ‘The Chartist Movement and 1848’, in *The Chartists*, pp. 162–189 at pp. 171–172.

<sup>711</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartistism’, p. 173.

<sup>712</sup> Although, the original approach of Peter Gurney on the politics of consumption successfully escapes the picture drawn here, Peter Gurney, *Wanting and Having: Popular Politics and Liberal Consumerism in England, 1830–1870* (Manchester, 2015)

<sup>713</sup> David Stack (ed.), *Lives of Victorian Political Figures no. II, vol. 4, James Bronterre O’Brien* (London, 2007), pp. xxix–xxxii; Michael Turner, ‘Bronterre O’Brien and the Meaning of Radical Reputation in the Age of the Chartists’, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Autumn, 2013), pp. 31–60, at p. 32; Ben Maw, ‘The democratic anti-capitalism of Bronterre O’Brien’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (May 2008), pp. 201–226; David McNally, *Against the Market* (London, 1993), pp. 133–38. Huzel, *Popularization*, ch. 4, is based on the ‘old-new’ analysis of Hollis, *Pauper Press*, despite being published in 2006.

narrowly to the state, Stedman Jones did not explore this avenue in ‘Rethinking Chartism’; nor has a subsequent historian picked up this strand of analysis.

It is here where we come to the two epigraphs at the head of this chapter. Both ‘Young England’ and Samuel Kydd shared a view about political economy that was consistently articulated by Chartists throughout the movement’s existence. Common features include joining Smith and Malthus, a link between political economy and the Poor Law Amendment Act, and a view that the land provided the basis for an alternative political economy. Starting with Young England’s and Kydd’s shared perception that Smith and Malthus belonged to the same school of thought, Section One details how the dominant interpretation of Smith’s ideas in the nineteenth century was antithetical to Chartism. Rather than reinterpreting Smith’s ideas for their own purposes, the Chartists accepted the ‘conservative’ reading of Smith, and by doing so severed any chance of reconciling political economy with their version of political radicalism. Section Two and Three considers the Chartist response to Malthus. Section Two shows how Chartists contested Malthus’s population principle empirically and by appealing to more a benign view of nature and God. Section Three turns to Chartist arguments, in particular their land-based alternative to classical political economy, which, as ‘Young England’ stated, ‘proceed upon a totally different basis to those assumed by the Adam Smith and Malthus school.’<sup>714</sup> The success of this vision lay, in part, in its rejection of Malthusian ideas of scarcity. It was argued that reforming the ownership of the land into a system of small farms would provide material plenty for all. This vision was rooted in the Anglo-American republican tradition, which is discussed in Section Four. It will be argued that republicanism survived in Chartist discourse as a language hostile to commercial society. Finally, Section Five places the Chartist view of political economy within Chartism’s constitutional framework.

## I. ‘THE ADAM SMITH AND MALTHUS SCHOOL’

The exact nature of Smith’s politics was the subject of a controversy at the time and has been ever since.<sup>715</sup> The controversy stems in large part from Smith himself. He was

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<sup>714</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 December 1844.

<sup>715</sup> For an overview of the contemporary debate, Rothschild, ‘Political Economy’, pp. 751–760. An early and authoritative attempt to plot Smith’s politics is Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics* (Cambridge,

notoriously elusive on political questions and provided only ‘oblique references and hints and these, suggestive as they are, often give the merest outline, and are full of gaps and obvious slips.’<sup>716</sup> According to Donald Winch, ‘much of Smith’s science of the legislator died with him, and any account of the branch of it that constitutes political economy must take account of that fact’.<sup>717</sup> This being the case, the more important historical question, especially for our interests here, is what happened to Smith’s ideas after his death? Like all canonical authors, there were multiple interpretations of Smith. The radical reading that featured in the British debates of the 1790s, most prominently by Paine, saw liberal economic doctrines as a weapon against established privilege in Church and state.<sup>718</sup> This vision was not, however, repeated by many Chartists. More limited uses of Smith included Thomas Dunning’s discussion of the *Wealth of Nations* in a series of articles on political economy for the *Charter* newspaper. Dunning, however, criticised Smith from a traditional radical standpoint by arguing that he failed to account for the deleterious effects of taxation.<sup>719</sup> Another example, at opposite end of the Chartist chronology, was the Liverpool Chartist and Owenite John Finch’s use of the *Wealth of Nations* to argue for a minimum wage.<sup>720</sup>

However, the prevailing image of Smith was as a philosopher narrowly concerned with *laissez-faire*. As ‘Young England’ put it, Smith ‘pandered to the selfishness engendered by antagonistic interests, and, in more measured, if less plain and pithy language, inculcated that principle which Alderman Brooks has since made so famous—“Lord love you! we’re all for ourselves in this world!”’<sup>721</sup> By following this view, the Chartists

1978), see also Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, pp. 33–90. For ‘left’ perspective, Rothschild, ‘Adam Smith and conservative economics’ and Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty*; for a ‘new right’ perspective, Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*. And for outside of Britain, Keith Tribe, ‘Natural Liberty and Laissez-Faire: how Adam Smith became a free trade ideologue’, in Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (eds.) *Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 23–44.

<sup>716</sup> Duncan Forbes, ‘Skeptical Whiggism, Commerce, and Liberty’, in Andrew Skinner and Thomas Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1976), p. 182.

<sup>717</sup> Donald Winch, ‘Science and the Legislator: Adam Smith and After’, *Economic Journal*, vol. 93, no. 371 (September, 1983), pp. 501–520, at p. 520.

<sup>718</sup> Richard Teichgraeber III, ‘Adam Smith tradition: the *Wealth of Nations* before Malthus’, in Collini, Whatmore, and Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society*, pp. 85–104, at p. 94.

<sup>719</sup> *The Charter*, 27 January–28 April 1839.

<sup>720</sup> *Northern Star*, 20 March 1852.

<sup>721</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 December 1844. Alderman John Brooks was a Manchester free trader. “Lord love you! we’re all for ourselves in this world!” was attributed to Brooks by William Ferrand, the protectionist Tory MP, in a public dispute regarding Peel’s coffee tariffs. As a speculator in coffee, Ferrand alleged that free trader Brooks was hypocritically opposed to a reduction in tariffs. See, *The Times*, 16 December 1843, reprinted in Oastler’s *Fleet Papers*, 10 February 1844. Brooks denied saying it: *The Times*, 21 December 1843.

echoed the dominant early-nineteenth reading of Smith. Although controversy remains over the ‘real’ Smith, the canonisation of the ‘conservative’ interpretation is better understood. In short, a mixture of political repression, fear of the French Revolution, and new writings succeeded in the battle of ideas over Smith’s reputation. Dugald Stewart, Professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh, was a close friend of Smith and his first populariser. Writing in the febrile atmosphere of the counter-revolution, which was particularly repressive in Scotland, Stewart obscured Smith’s political preferences, his religious scepticism, and removed from Smith’s writings all hints of political radicalism. By doing so, he inaugurated a divide between economic and political freedom that would characterise nineteenth-century political economy.<sup>722</sup>

It is here where we can identify the first problem for the Chartists. Chartist was a political creed that identified political reform as a solution to distress. With political freedom set aside, political economy became narrowly focused on managerial changes. As Stewart wrote, ‘The happiness of mankind depends not on the share which the people possesses, directly or indirectly, in the enactment of laws, but on the equity and expediency of the laws that are enacted.’ And thus, ‘The share which the people possess in the government is interesting chiefly to the small number of men whose object is the attainment of political importance’<sup>723</sup> Indeed, for Stewart, ‘democratical’ constitutions were unfavourable to enlightened systems of political economy. Only after ‘true principles’ had been absorbed by the population would reform become viable.<sup>724</sup> Owenism, which sought to integrate aspects of political economy, accepted this ‘social’ analysis. Indeed, disagreement over whether to pursue political or social solutions remained one of primary dividing lines between radicalism and socialism.<sup>725</sup> After the Napoleonic Wars, this trend was deepened by Ricardo, who rendered political economy into more narrowly deductive lines.<sup>726</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> Rothschild, ‘Adam Smith and conservative economics’, pp. 80–84; Teichgraeber, ‘Adam Smith tradition’, p. 96; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty?*, pp. 70–72; Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>723</sup> Cited in Teichgraeber, ‘Adam Smith tradition’, p. 96; Rothschild, ‘Adam Smith and conservative economics’, p. 82; Burrow, Collini, *That Noble Science of Politics*, p. 36.

<sup>724</sup> Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, p. 38.

<sup>725</sup> Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty*, pp. 182–87.

<sup>726</sup> Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, Ch. 1–3.

Further, more serious, barriers emerged between Chartism and this reading of political economy. By 1800, Smith's new economic ideas became closely associated with the more uncompromising views of Edmund Burke and, more decisively, Thomas Malthus. The latter's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, especially the second edition of 1803, was foundational for political economy.<sup>727</sup> Smith had seen political economy—a label he rarely used—as just one branch of the 'science of the legislator'. From Malthus onwards, political economy was established as an independent discipline, which further opened the divide between economic and political freedom. In the process, Malthus recast the subject in dramatic new terms. In defence of existing property relations, and against the utopian radicalism of Godwin, Malthus famously proposed that population increased at a rate faster than the food required to sustain it. As every increase in population led to an increase in demand for food that nature could not meet, poverty and misery were 'inevitable laws of nature', and attempts to remedy poverty were futile and self-defeating. In the first edition of the *Essay*, Malthus postulated that population pressure was a blessing in disguise that forced society to progress by forcing man to overcome the temptation of inactivity.<sup>728</sup> In the more detailed second edition, and all subsequent editions thereafter, this optimistic gloss was removed for a more orthodox Anglican solution to the dilemma of the population principle: self-restraint, delayed marriage, and sexual abstinence.

Malthus's writings are customarily described as 'bleak', 'gloomy', and 'harsh', and their author is depicted as a cold-hearted enemy of the poor. Scholars have attempted to rehabilitate Malthus's reputation by emphasising his liberal upbringing, education, and politics, and his concern for public morality.<sup>729</sup> In this interpretation, Malthus is lauded for finding middle ground between the ultra-Tory defence of the *ancien régime* and Whiggism's desire for reform. He achieved this by combining traditional Anglican formularies with new insights from Enlightenment thought. Malthus thus paved the way for liberal-conservatism that dominated the economic thought of the Treasury in the early-nineteenth century.<sup>730</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> Stack, *Nature and Artifice*, p. 25.

<sup>728</sup> Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, pp. 58–112.

<sup>729</sup> The most sustained argument of this type is Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, pp. 221–406, Winch, *Malthus*; and Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, Ch. 2.

<sup>730</sup> Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, p. 6, more generally, pp. 15–123.

If Malthus is easy to caricature and frequently misunderstood, it should also be emphasised that this was true in the nineteenth century as much as it is now. Indeed, this is exactly what the Chartist did. As Robert Lowery told a Chartist meeting in Scotland,

The doctrine of Malthus was theirs; the Whigs and Tories were his disciples. The people were too numerous! Population had a tendency to encrease (sic) faster than the means of subsistence, or in the plain words that blasphemers and tyrants say, that when God made the world he was not wise enough to know how many people would come into it (Hear, hear). Oh, this cold-hearted, damnable heresy was just fitted for the selfish souls of our oppressors: yet, it was preached by a parson of the Church of England, a pensioner of a corrupt Government, a trafficker in truth for wealth and honour, a traitor to his trust, a Judas that sold the rights of man and the Gospel of God. (Loud cheers).<sup>731</sup>

Chartist hostility towards Malthus can partly be attributed to the fact that Chartists did not learn their Malthus by carefully consulting the *Essay*, but through the polemic of the radical press. Cobbett was probably responsible for introducing Malthus to a popular audience, and Cobbett famously wrote that he hated Malthus more than any other man. The stream of invective he directed at Malthus and other ‘feelosphers’ turned into a torrent as Poor Law reform gathered pace.<sup>732</sup> The reason why Cobbett, and the Chartists after him, loathed Malthus and all he stood for can also be located within the *Essay* itself. Malthus targeted two sacred cows, which remained at the heart of popular radicalism. The first, as we saw in Chapter Two, was the existence of inalienable rights. The second, was the Christian duty to provide subsistence to those in need; a duty which, in one form or other, had been an important stand in Christian discussion on poverty since Aquinas. As Malthus put it in a notorious phrase, which was removed in the 1806 edition and every subsequent edition but never forgotten by his opponents:

A man is born into the world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has

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<sup>731</sup> *Northern Star*, 30 November 1839.

<sup>732</sup> See below, pp. 161–165. See also, Huzel, *Popularization*, pp. 114–47.

no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not work upon the compassion of some of her guests.<sup>733</sup>

By denying the right to relief in such stark terms, Malthus not only crossed a red line but leapt across it and vanished into the distance. When conceived in Malthusian terms, there could be no reconciliation between political economy and Chartism. It was in this form that 'political economy' became associated, not the modified-Smithian version championed by Paine. Indeed, in Chartist writing, Smith became a footnote of Malthusianism.

The principle of population was also an explicit attack on another radical precept. Written against the radicalism of Godwin, Condorcet, and, from the second edition, Paine, Malthus dismissed political reform as irrelevant. As one Chartist recognised, 'If we admit these gloomy dogmas, then farewell to our fondly cherished schemes for the amelioration of the condition of the human race—If Irish famines and Mexican wars, the potato blight and the malaria of typhus, be the agents of Providence, then must our visions of the future vanish into nothing'.<sup>734</sup> 'Not all the sermons ever preached by bishops in the Church of which Mr. Malthus was a minister,' wrote another, 'were half so efficacious in propping up a system based upon injustice as the carefully-compiled tables, by which it was shown that people bred too fast, especially the "*lower orders*," whose "early marriages" were the sole cause of their degradation and destitution.'<sup>735</sup> Or, as the *Northern Star* put it, Malthus 'offered a complete statistical, philosophical, and religious reply to all complaints. It whitewashed all out political and social institutions, and absolved "noble lords," "hon. gentlemen," and other ruling magnates, from all responsibility or blame'.<sup>736</sup>

Responses to Malthus ranged from acceptance by radicals such as Francis Place, to the scathing criticisms of the eminent literary figures Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, William Hazlitt, and Thomas Carlyle.<sup>737</sup> Place was an early advocate of birth

<sup>733</sup> Donald Winch (ed.), Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 249.

<sup>734</sup> *Northern Star*, 5 June 1847.

<sup>735</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 December 1844.

<sup>736</sup> *Northern Star*, 10 November 1849.

<sup>737</sup> Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, pp. 290, 325–332; John Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought: Property, Morality, and the Limits of Traditional Discourse* (Basingstoke, 1990), ch. 5; Stedman

control, which was a scandalous proposition in early-Victorian Britain that won few converts. Indeed, Place was an isolated figure during the Chartist period and for many years afterwards. Coleridge, on the other hand, looked to the establishment of the clerisy in the Church of England, Southey turned to ultra-royalism, and Carlyle called for a ‘new aristocracy’, none of which held much appeal for Chartists. A more promising route in this regard was laid by Thomas Hodgskin, who powerfully argued that nineteenth-century economists had betrayed Smith’s legacy by conflating the artificial laws of property with the laws of nature.<sup>738</sup> Hodgskin’s path, however, was not taken by the Chartists. One historian has called ‘younger and later’ writers’ failure to develop Hodgskin’s ideas a ‘remarkable phenomenon’.<sup>739</sup> Hodgskin’s writings, however, were poorly disseminated, and his association with the Anti-Corn Law League was unlikely to have endeared him to many Chartists. Indeed, Hodgskin chided Chartism as a perversion of the radical tradition.<sup>740</sup> The remaining sections of this Chapter will discuss and think through the Chartist response.?

## II. ‘CHRIST AND A FULL BELLY’

The most basic aspect of the Chartist response to Malthus was their protest that the population principle was empirically incorrect.<sup>741</sup> By investigating this aspect of the principle, the anonymous author of the popular anti-Malthusian tract ‘Marcus’ wrote,<sup>742</sup> ‘the fine-spun theories of Malthus and his Disciples fall to pieces’.<sup>743</sup> In 1844,

Jones, *An End of Poverty*, p. 232; Stedman Jones, ‘The Return of Language’, pp. 334–349; Hilton, *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 479.

<sup>738</sup> Rothschild, ‘Adam Smith and conservative economics’, p. 88. See also, Noel Thompson, *The People’s Science*, pp. 82–110; Stack, *Nature and Artifice*; Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, p. 135.

<sup>739</sup> John Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 216.

<sup>740</sup> Stack, *Nature and Artifice*, p. 213.

<sup>741</sup> William Godwin, *Of Population; An Enquiry concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, being an answer to Mr. Malthus’s Essay on the Subject* (London, 1820). Godwin’s attempt, however, was widely seen as a disappointment, see Winch, *Poverty and Riches*, pp. 280–82; Stack, *Nature and Artifice*, pp. 28–30.

<sup>742</sup> The identity of Marcus is unknown, see Josephine McDonagh, *Children Murder and British Culture* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 107. Claeys attributes authorship to the Owenite journalist George Mundie, probably because Mundie was cited multiple times in the text. Another candidate is Richard Oastler, who posed with the Marcus pamphlet alongside another tome bearing ‘white slaves’ on the spine for his *Northern Star* portrait, see National Portrait Gallery, NPG 39349:

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw200195/Richard-Oastler?LinkID=mp55711&role=sit&rNo=1>

<sup>743</sup> [Anon], *The Book of Murder* (1839), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1, p. 390.

proof of the fallacy of the population principle was mined from the unlikely source of Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report of the Health of Towns*. Chadwick's statistics, it was claimed, dealt 'the unkindest blow ever aimed at the population theory'. Instead of poverty checking population increases, it was shown that poorer areas had greater population growth than richer areas. Prosperity, therefore, led to fewer deaths, longer lives, and fewer births.<sup>744</sup> Further evidence for this conclusion was provided by a comparison between Ireland, 'the most pauperized and degraded country in Europe', and Norway and Switzerland. In the former, the population had doubled in 45 years, while in latter countries population was stationary. For Thomas Frost, these statistics provided the basis for a new and emphatically anti-Malthusian law of population: 'that poverty does not check the increase of population, but rather acts as an incentive; and that, as the condition of the people become more and more ameliorated, births will be fewer, and the average duration of life greater.'<sup>745</sup>

A more detailed case was made by William Atkinson, a City of London merchant and friend of Richard Oastler, whose *Principles of Political Economy* the *Northern Star* recommended as a work of 'TRUE political economy' in 1842.<sup>746</sup> In 1837 Atkinson was nominated by the Spitalfields Operative Weavers to give evidence to the Commission on Hand-Loom Weavers (1837–41), but his attempt to testify was repeatedly rebuffed.<sup>747</sup> In contrast to most Chartist objections, Atkinson engaged with the key works of political economy. *Principles* was broken into three sections. The first and longest attempted to refute the free-trade arguments of John McCulloch, David Ricardo, Poulett Scrope, and parts of Smith (who he concluded was contradictory). Atkinson strategy consisted mainly of selecting passages from the economists' works that contradicted one another.<sup>748</sup> Malthus was then given a separate Chapter. Atkinson highlighted that the population of England in 1086 was around 1,000,000, so if Malthus's principle was correct England's population in 1836 should have stood at the

<sup>744</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 December 1844; *Northern Star*, 5 June 1847.

<sup>745</sup> *Northern Star*, 5 June 1847.

<sup>746</sup> His intervention on behalf of the handloom weavers appears to be the only occasion which William Atkinson appeared before the public. Some biographical information was reported by Oastler in *The Fleet Papers*, vol. 1, no. 35 (28 August 1841), pp. 271–80. Atkinson also penned an anti-emigration letter in *Northern Star*, 26 November 1842.

<sup>747</sup> *The Fleet Papers*, vol. 1, no. 35 (28 August 1841), pp. 271–80. Atkinson did not make the report, *Hand-Loom Weavers: Report of the Commissioners* (London, 1841).

<sup>748</sup> William Atkinson, *Principles of Political Economy; or, The Laws of the Formation of National Wealth: Developed by Means of the Christian Law of Government; Being the Substance of the Case Delivered to the Hand-Loom Weavers Commission* (1840), pp. 8–153.

impossibly high 1,068,852,224,000,000.<sup>749</sup> Atkinson either missed or refused to accept Malthus's point that population *could not* reach this number because periodical subsistence crises kept population in check. Not content with merely dismissing geometric population increases, Atkinson then attempted to turn Malthus on his head by arguing that it was capital and food that increased geometrically and population arithmetically. The empirical evidence he gave for this proposition was shaky, being based on a single table of wages put forward at a meeting of the London Historical Society in 1836.<sup>750</sup>

The bulk of *Principles* rested on an alternative system to classical political economy: what Atkinson called the 'Christian law of government'. Starting with the state of nature, Atkinson argued that as man—he does not mention women—was incapable of providing all his needs by his own labour and was thus required to exchange his labour for the labour of another. The exchange between individuals, however, was not just driven by the satisfaction of basic needs. As men were naturally dependent on each other, it followed that it was God's will that this was so. Exchange was thus governed by 'the moral law of God' and if practised as God intended all benefitted from each other's labour, moral actions would lead to good outcomes, and immoral actions to bad outcomes. It also followed that Malthus's population principle was impossible, because in conditions of scarcity, the principle of exchange would break down. It therefore followed that the available food to feed the population always *preceded* the increase of people; a proposition, he declared, that 'must never be lost sight of' as it allowed the 'right notion of the welfare of any society of people, and, by parity of reasoning, of all mankind.'<sup>751</sup> This proposition was asserted rather than demonstrated, and relied above all on a benevolent view of God. After all, he reasoned, should his assertion be untrue, it 'would be to infer that God has ordained an imperfect or immoral law as necessary to guide the practice of man... placing him in alliance with evil, or declaring him to be the cause of evil.'<sup>752</sup>

Atkinson, then, attempted to talk the language of political economy but in fact relied on alternative systems of thought. The Chartists, too, inferred contrary principles from

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<sup>749</sup> Atkinson, *Principles*, p. 61.

<sup>750</sup> Atkinson, *Principles*, pp. 64–66.

<sup>751</sup> Atkinson, *Principles*, p. 156.

<sup>752</sup> Atkinson, *Principles*, p. 161.

the state of nature and contested Malthus's view of God and nature. The former is discussed in Section Four, below. The latter, however, cannot be understood outside of the religious context within which political economy developed. During the 1790s, economic discourse was appropriated by Anglicans to reinforce their traditional message of the duty of obedience and contentment with one's station in life, underlined by an emphasis on man's depravity, original sin, and the Fall.<sup>753</sup> First Burke, and then Parson Malthus and his followers Bishop Charles Sumner, Rev. Thomas Chalmers, and Bishop Richard Whatley, rendered political economy into an Anglican framework. It was from these writers that many priests learnt their political economy.<sup>754</sup> In the nineteenth-century, as Hilton has shown, this message was heavily underscored by evangelicalism.<sup>755</sup> It was in this form, not the technical language of Ricardo, that political economy was popularised. And it was also this form to which Chartists responded.

Anglican protest against Chartist did not reach the volume generated by the French Revolution, nor the 1832 Reform Act.<sup>756</sup> The reason may simply be because Chartist was less of a threat: unlike the Reform Act, few people believed that the Chartists would succeed in transforming the constitution. Many of the sermons preached against Chartist followed Chartist provocations, such as the Church occupations in the summer of 1839.<sup>757</sup> The latter were held across the North as the Convention was deliberating over whether to press forward with the one-month general strike. These occupations followed a set pattern: the priest would be sent a passage from the Bible in advance, the Chartists would then march *en-masse* to the Church and take occupancy of the pews regardless of who owned them. The most frequently requested text was James v. 1-6, which can be read as turning the evangelical message about

<sup>753</sup> Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty*, pp. 82–85.

<sup>754</sup> Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, *passim*; Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, *passim*; Norman Vance, 'Improving Ireland: Richard Whatley, theology, and political economy', in Collini, Whatmore, and Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society*, pp. 181–202

<sup>755</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, *passim*.

<sup>756</sup> Saunders, 'God and the Great Reform Act: Preaching against Reform, 1831–32', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2014), pp. 378–399.

<sup>757</sup> For examples, see Francis Close, *The Chartist Visit to the Parish Church...* (Edinburgh, 1840); Francis Close, *A Sermon Addressed to Females Chartists of Cheltenham...* (London, 1839); J. W. Whittaker, *Sermon to the Chartists...* (Blackburn, 1839); 'Chartism and Church', *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1839, provides a review of several anti-Chartist sermons. For Chartist responses, *Chartist Circular*, 22 August, 22 September, 7 November 1840; 'An Englishman', *Chartism versus the Church: A Letter to J. W. Whittaker, in answer to his "Sermon to the Chartists"* (Manchester, 1839). See also, Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, pp. 60–65; Yeo, 'Christianity', pp. 123–137.

poverty on its head: ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten.’<sup>758</sup> In response to these disruptions, Christian political economy was levelled at the Chartists. In Stockport, for instance, the Rev. Prescott preached on the question: ‘What must I do to be saved?’, to which he answered: ‘not to struggle for temporal things, but for eternal salvation’. ‘This manifestation’, the *Northern Star* noted, ‘gave rise to considerable alarm, lest a brawl might take place in the Church, but all passed off exceedingly well’.<sup>759</sup> In Preston, the Chartists were told that they had no grounds for discontent because England ‘possessed the most enlightened, the most pious, the most industrious clergy, and the most tolerant church in the Christian world’. Instead, they should ascribe ‘the evils of their condition to their own misconduct, they were too apt to lay them at the door of the virtuous and the Godly’.<sup>760</sup> Elsewhere, several priests chose Philippians 4:11: ‘For I have learnt in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.’<sup>761</sup> A more sympathetic sermon was preached by Rev. Francis Thornburgh, who admitted that it was tough for ‘the fore pinched labourer, or the starving mechanic’ who was willingly but unable to find work; especially when contrasted to ‘the destiny of others present who are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, and are in king’s courts.’ He concluded, however, that although ‘imperfection lies somewhere’ it was not a problem that ‘human laws can cure’ because ‘It is a designed imperfection, for it is the appointment of Providence’.<sup>762</sup> Thornburgh, however, was rebuked by *Fraser’s Magazine*, which asked: ‘Did you not read that all the mischief and misery that are in the world were produced by sin; and were, consequently, never designed by Providence at all?’<sup>763</sup> *Fraser’s* preferred the sermon of a ‘more able man than Mr. Thornburgh’, who declared: ‘It is the declaration of Divine wisdom, and dictated by Divine mercy, that the poor shall never be removed out of the land’.<sup>764</sup> Evan Jenkins, in a tract widely disseminated by the Religious Tract Society, castigated Chartism as ‘diametrically opposed to the word of God as the former, is the following, namely, that poverty is not the result of the everlasting purpose and appointment of a

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<sup>758</sup> Yeo, ‘Christianity’, p. 133.

<sup>759</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839.

<sup>760</sup> Cited in Yeo, ‘Christianity’, p. 134.

<sup>761</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 98.

<sup>762</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1839.

<sup>763</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1839.

<sup>764</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1839.

Sovereign God, but is only the result of unjust human laws'. The only basis on which humanity was equal was that 'mankind are equally sinful and depraved by nature, equally fallen and alienated from God, and equally incapacitated to return to Him, and thank God!'<sup>765</sup>

The Chartist, however, saw notions of scarcity as an affront to the benevolence of God. The Rev. William Hill, the first editor of the *Northern Star*, argued that 'until it is shown to me that the fountains of eternal goodness are so far dried up as that God has neglected to provide, in the aggregate, a sufficiency of food and raiment for all his children.' The problem facing society was one of distribution, not design; a problem God had resolved with his command: 'Give to every one that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away; let him that hath two coats give one to him that hath none; receive not honour from each other, for one is your Master and Father, and ye are brethren.' Had God's command been acted upon it would 'secure universal plenty, universal satisfaction, and universal peace.'<sup>766</sup> Indeed, the finger of blame was pointed in the other direction. 'Is it not', a Chartist at a meeting in Oxfordshire asked, 'the callous hearted selfishness of the clergy... and the blasphemous doctrine many of you preach; that God has placed us in the miserable situation in which we are now in? Why it is your class, and the aristocracy, that rob us of the fruits of our labour and then charge it upon God!'<sup>767</sup> Abram Hansom had a similar message for the people of Leeds, for which he was expelled from the Methodism Connexion for delivering: 'They preached Christ and a crust, passive obedience and non-resistance. Let the people keep from those churches and chapels. Let them go to those men who preached Christ and a full belly, Christ and a well-clothed back – Christ and a good house to live in – Christ and Universal Suffrage.'<sup>768</sup> In 1846 O'Connor told a tea party at Newton Abbot, Devonshire, that:

the parsons tell us that there must be tribulation, and weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and suffering, and woe, and sorrow in this lovely world, which God gave as a cherished gift, and not as a seduction to guilt before man can insure salvation in the next world, in God's name, let the bishops, parsons,

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<sup>765</sup> Evan Jenkins, *Chartism Unmasked*, 19th Edition (Merthyr Tydfil, 1840), p. 8.

<sup>766</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>767</sup> *Northern Star*, 30 October 1841.

<sup>768</sup> *Northern Star*, 9 June 1839; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 23.

luxurious, voluptuous, and the idle now qualify themselves for eternal salvation, by taking their share of tribulation, of sorrow, and of woe. (Loud cheers.) But, alas! my friends, their assignment and division of the good things of this life are like the prize money and the bullets in the navy, the officers getting the largest share of the prize money, and the sailors more than their fair proportion of the shot. (Cheers and laughter.)<sup>769</sup>

O'Connor was not just criticising the hypocrisy of the clergy, but the whole idea that pain and suffering were necessary in God's 'lovely world'. This can be taken as a more general Chartist premise. For Chartists understood misery not as the working out of God's plan, but as its subversion. As the first petition outlined: 'We have looked upon every side, we have searched diligently in order to find out the causes so sore and so long continued. We can discover none, in nature, or in providence. Heaven has dealt graciously by the people; but the foolishness of our rulers had made the goodness of God of none effect.'<sup>770</sup> Or as John Walker stated:

What is Chartism? We answer it is of Divine origin; for mercy, justice, and truth are the great attributes of God; and what has this structure been reared for? We again answer—to let every man have his rights, to defend the poor man against the usurpation of the rich. Now, we ask—how is one man rolling in the lap of plenty, while another, equally industrious, moral, and ingenious, is struggling with grim, wretched, racking poverty? It is because our class legislation has so arranged matters, that selfish man hath willingly shut his eyes, his ears, and the remonstrances [sic] of his own bosom against the doctrine of equality, which was, is, and ever shall be, a law of the Great Author of our being.<sup>771</sup>

The Chartists' defence of God, as they saw it, took on a more poignant significance as the extent of the Irish famine began to become known in England. The idea that famine was the will of God enraged O'Connor and further convinced him that only by enabling man to feed himself could such travesties be avoided: 'I tell you, my friends, that famine is not the dispensation of God; and the reason why I wish to locate you on the

<sup>769</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 September 1846.

<sup>770</sup> National Petition, presented to Parliament on the 12 June 1839, online: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1838chartism.asp>

<sup>771</sup> *Chartist Circular*, 5 March 1842.

land of your own is, to enable you to contend against the dispensations of man.<sup>772</sup> The next Section takes a closer look at Chartism and the land.

### III. ‘THE LAND IS THE ONLY MEANS OF SALVATION.’<sup>773</sup>

Chartists also rebutted the population principle by arguing that there was plenty of unused land, that improvements in technology would increase the amount of food that the land could produce, and that small holdings were more productive than large farms.<sup>774</sup> These arguments were made by radicals throughout the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>775</sup> George Mundie, for example, argued that every farm labourer could produce enough food for twenty people; Henry Hetherington believed that the land could support four times the country’s present population; Ernest Jones calculated that there was enough land in Britain for every family to have two acres, which he believed could provide a comfortable existence; and the Chartist lecturer J. T. Lund insisted that the land of Great Britain and Ireland could maintain in affluence 123 million people.<sup>776</sup> One early-Chartist newspaper even pointed to the fact that potato yields improved if its flowers were removed as soon as they sprouted as information ‘worth a thousand Malthusian volumes against population. The resources of nature’, it concluded, ‘are unbounded.’<sup>777</sup>

Such arguments were part of a wider radical interest in the land.<sup>778</sup> Before Chartism, those who became Chartists had been involved in a range of agrarian schemes, some Owenite, some trade union, and others Tory.<sup>779</sup> Chartist manifestations included O’Brien’s call for land nationalisation, the pastoral millennium of Ernest Jones’s

<sup>772</sup> *Northern Star*, 3 October 1846; *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848.

<sup>773</sup> *Northern Star*, 14 January 1843.

<sup>774</sup> Malcolm Chase, ‘Chartism and the Land: “The Mighty People’s Question”, in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1950* (London, 2010), pp. 57–73, at p. 62; Chase, *People’s Farm*, Ch. 5; Ashcraft, ‘Lockean ideas’, p. 62; Horne, *Property and Poverty*, pp. 217, 230; MacAskill, ‘The Chartist Land Plan’, pp. 305–306; Huzel, *Popularization*, p. 172.

<sup>775</sup> Chase, *People’s Farm*, pp. 113–121; Huzel, *Popularization*, pp. 172–73.

<sup>776</sup> [Anon], *The Book of Murder* (1839), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1, p. 391; George Mundie, *Advocate of the Working Classes*, (nos. 1–8, February–April, 1827), p. 46; Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, p. 141; *Northern Star*, 5 February 1842.

<sup>777</sup> *London Dispatch*, 13 August 1837.

<sup>778</sup> Alun Howkins, ‘From Diggers to Dongas: The Land in English Radicalism: 1649–2000’, *History Workshop Journal*, no. 54 (2002), pp. 1–23.

<sup>779</sup> Gregory Claeys, ‘A Utopian Tory Revolutionary at Cambridge: The Political Ideas and Schemes of James Bernard, 1834–1839’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 25, no. 3 (September, 1982), pp. 583–603, at. pp. 598–601; Epstein, *Lion of Freedom*, pp. 43–48.

poetry, W. J. Linton's call in 1849 to confiscate that year's harvest to redistribute it to the poor, and more modest proposals for building societies.<sup>780</sup> By far the most significant product of the Chartist interest in the land was O'Connor's Land Plan.<sup>781</sup> O'Connor began to advocate 'Chartist Agricultural Associations' in 1840, but claimed that he was 'advocating no new doctrine, but to explain and enforce principles to which I have been long wedded.'<sup>782</sup> His eighteen-month prison sentence put his plans on hold, but also gave him the time—as it did for Lovett and Collins in 1839 and Cooper in 1842—to flesh out his ideas.<sup>783</sup> From 1843, the Land Plan was placed at the heart of the NCA constitution and led to 'a fundamental departure for the NCA'.<sup>784</sup> The Plan was enormously popular. At its peak in 1847, it had over 20,000 shareholders and 70,000 weekly subscribers.<sup>785</sup> In many localities, the NCA branch merged with the Chartist Land Company branch, of which there were over 600, and in some localities, the Land Company branch was sole Chartist body. Although the Plan further divided O'Connor and his Chartist critics, it effectively carried the movement through the difficult years between the 1842 and 1848 National Petitions; injecting back into Chartism much needed energy, purpose, and activism.

O'Connor offered his land plan as the 'only remedy' partly in reply to Malthus and his followers and partly to the free-trade school of the Anti-Corn Law League—which, like many Chartists, he saw as two sides of the same coin.<sup>786</sup> For Land Plan enthusiasts like Kydd, O'Connor's plan was 'the best test of Chartist political economy'.<sup>787</sup> O'Connor maintained that a system of small farms would not only feed a growing population but also drive up wages for those who remained in the towns by drawing out surplus

<sup>780</sup> Claeys, Machinery, p. 159; Chase, 'Chartism and the Land', pp. 59, 62; Taylor, *Ernest Jones*, pp. 145–46; 'Alastor', *An Address to the Chartists of the United Kingdom, on the Attainment of the Charter by Means of Building Societies* (1847), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, pp. 253–261; W. J. Linton, *The People's Land, and an Easy Way to Recover It* (London, 1850); [Linton], *Red Republican*, 26 October and 9 November 1850

<sup>781</sup> For the land plan see, Chase, 'Chartism and the Land'; Chase, "We wish only to work for ourselves"; Alice Hadfield, *The Chartist Land Company* (Newton Abbot, 1971); Joy McAskill, 'The Chartist Land Plan', Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959). For a history of Land Plan historiography, see Chase, "Wholesome Object Lessons": The Chartist Land Plan in Retrospect', *English Historical Review*, no. 475 (Feb. 2003), pp. 59–85.

<sup>782</sup> *Northern Star*, 25 April 1840; O'Connor, *The Land and its Capabilities*, p. 3; *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 67.

<sup>783</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 166–168, 247.

<sup>784</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, p. 248.

<sup>785</sup> Chase, "Wholesome Object Lessons", p. 59.

<sup>786</sup> O'Connor, "The Land": The Only Remedy, pp. 14–15, 22–23; O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 92.

<sup>787</sup> *Northern Star*, 11 September 1847.

population.<sup>788</sup> Against Malthus's nature of scarcity and impending crisis, O'Connor offered a nature of super-abundance. He was adamant, and went to great lengths to prove, that small plots could produce 'an abundant consumption' for labourers and their families *and* a surplus to sell to others.<sup>789</sup> He produced guides, in the style of Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, that detailed exactly how a labourer could make the most out of his little plot, with information on topics including which crops to plant and when, to the efficiency of spade husbandry and the importance of keeping a diary.<sup>790</sup> At its greatest extent, O'Connor envisaged a society where *every* labourer had available a plot of land from which he could draw a comfortable existence. Manufacturers would then only be able to acquire the services of labourers by offering more than they could draw from their land, and thus wages would have to increase dramatically. Appropriating the language of political economy, he labelled this higher level of wages the 'natural' level, not the subsistence wage offered by Ricardian political economy, and the system of small farms as the 'real' system of free labour.<sup>791</sup> O'Brien, who was more versed in political economy, held a similar position. He wrote in 1837, 'Let us as little as possible exchange the healthful and harmonising pursuits of the field for the withering and demoralising occupations of the factory. Every human being ought by rights to be taught agriculture, and as Mr Loudon<sup>792</sup> says, "to be a master of a garden to walk in", and the perfection of society will be when in addition to that consummation being obtained, every individual of society will also know some one trade well [sic], with as much division of and subdivision of labour as you like.'<sup>793</sup>

In O'Connor's analysis, and the Chartist case more generally, the problem lay not in nature's limited feast, but rather the distribution of land. The solution thus shifted from nature to politics. O'Connor accepted that 'England, according to her system of

<sup>788</sup> O'Connor, *The Land and its Capabilities*, pp. 11, 34; O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 99; *Northern Star*, 3 October 1846; *Northern Star*, 1 January 1847; *The Labourer*, vol. 1, January 1847, p. 37.

<sup>789</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 September 1846.

<sup>790</sup> O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, pp. 103–232; O'Connor, *A Treatise on the Small Proprietary System and the National Land and Labour Bank*, in *The Labourer*, in *ibid*, pp. 145–191;

<sup>791</sup> O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 93; O'Connor, "The Land": The Only Remedy, pp. 12–13; O'Connor, *The Land and its Capabilities*, p. 24.

<sup>792</sup> Jean Claudius Louden was a writer of horticulture texts, see Chase, *People's Farm*, p. 122–23, n. 39.

<sup>793</sup> *Bronterre's National Reformer*, 7 January 1837.

government, is over-populated', but where 'ten millions may constitute an over-population under unwholesome restrictions and bad system, forty millions may prosper in the same country under a good system.'<sup>794</sup> The landlords could only return a profit from their uncultivated land through their monopoly on law making, a power they received because of their ownership of the land. By removing their power to make laws, and thus their power to make 'artificial wealth', O'Connor argued that it would be in the landlords' economic interest to open their estates to his small farm system.<sup>795</sup> Food, therefore, could be produced at a greater rate than subsistence, if only the landowners would let them.<sup>796</sup> The Charter, therefore, was the means by which the ownership of the land be transformed for all. As another Chartist put it, 'Let us labour, then, zealously for the People's Charter. It is the only remedy for our grievances... Want and poverty will be banished from the land, and all will sit down at nature's table and partake of the delicious fare which she abundantly prepared.'<sup>797</sup>

The same cluster of issues was at stake in the Chartist position on the Corn Laws. While Chartism represented the last form of popular protectionism of the century, the claim that they had a 'purely protectionist attitude' can be disputed.<sup>798</sup> The reasons Chartists gave in support of abolition tended to be political rather than economic. Many Chartists despised the Corn Laws, seeing them as a corrupt aristocratic intervention in the economy, but in contrast to the ACLL's position, the Charter was given priority.<sup>799</sup> As one Chartist argued, the Corn Laws were 'but a branch of the evil, and they can soon as get to the root as lop off the branches'.<sup>800</sup> Extending the metaphor, as but one branch, there were other 'evil' branches that concerned the Chartists. The *Northern Star* summarised this position when it stated if 'the Charter [only] means free trade and nothing more; if so, abandon it, and range yourself under the bloody

<sup>794</sup> O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 92.

<sup>795</sup> O'Connor, "The Land": *The Only Remedy*, *passim*.

<sup>796</sup> *Northern Star*, 12 September 1846; *Northern Star*, 30 January and 5 June 1847; *The Labourer*, vol. 1, January 1847, pp. 104–110;

<sup>797</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 November 1840.

<sup>798</sup> Paul Bairoch, 'European Trade Policy, 1815–1914' in Peter Mathias and Sidney Pollard (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Volume VIII: The Industrial Economics: The Development of Economic and Social Policies* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1–160, at p. 129.

<sup>799</sup> This was also the position of Robert Lowery, Harrison and Hollis, 'Robert Lowery', p. 523. See also, Brown, 'The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League'; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 272.

<sup>800</sup> *Northern Star*, 9 October 1841. The same metaphor was used by David Ross, 'The State of the Country, as the Effect of Class Legislation; and the Charter as a Remedy', in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 3, pp. 103–113, at p. 107.

standard of Malthus and political economy.<sup>801</sup> Chartists also argued that the APLL were wasting their time, for only a post-Charter Parliament *could* command a majority for repeal. While more sceptical Chartists made the democratic case that only a Parliament elected under the rules of the Charter *should* decide on such a momentous matter.<sup>802</sup>

A significant number of key opinion formers, including John Leach, O'Connor, Ernest Jones, John Campbell, O'Brien, Philip M'Grath, and Kydd, went substantially further, and argued that repeal was at best meaningless but probably harmful to the working classes without the legislative protection that only the Charter could bring. Their reasoning tended to be economic. The *English Chartist Circular*'s position was that 'the Corn Laws are "part and parcel" of "the system"—that their repeal, unaccompanied, or preceded by certain necessary remedial measures' would leave the 'wealth producers to the tender mercy of the wealth gorgers.' Remedial measures included control of machinery, the establishment of an equitable currency, and the adjustment of the national debt, together with 'protective measures, as propounded by Cobbett especially', all of which, it added, 'can only proceed from none other than a *Charter elected* legislature.'<sup>803</sup> O'Connor went as far as to call protection the 'keystone of the arch', which 'if once struck without securely propping the centre, must result in the ruin of the whole social fabric.'<sup>804</sup> This was because the fall in the price of corn following repeal would have a knock-on effect throughout the economy. Wages would fall with food prices, profits would accrue in the hands of the manufacturers who held a monopoly over machinery, and labourers would be forced to compete with foreign workers in the international market and agricultural labourers at home, who would flock to the towns in search of work after repeal had thrown them out of employment.

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<sup>801</sup> *Northern Star*, 7 March 1846.

<sup>802</sup> Each of these arguments was included in a Chartist motion at an APLL-Chartist debate between Cobden and Bright, and O'Connor, *Northern Star*, 10 August 1844. See also, *Northern Star*, 12 January 1850; Leach, *An Address on the Protection of Native Industry*, p. 79; *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1, no. 41 and vol. 2, no. 66. The statement of the NCA in 1842 regarding the APLL was printed in *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 59: cooperation based only on the Charter; the corn laws can only be repealed by a democratic Parliament.

<sup>803</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 59. See also, *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 2, no. 105, vol. 2, no. 107, and vol. 2, no. 109.

<sup>804</sup> *Northern Star*, 10 August 1844.

Reduced prices would lead to a loss of custom for shopkeepers and loss of rents for the landlords, who would still have to pay his taxes, tithes, poor rates, and so on.<sup>805</sup>

What is striking about this analysis is that it accepted the Malthusian and Ricardian emphasis on the natural limit of wages, the key difference being that Malthus and Ricardo attributed it to natural laws whereas Chartists blamed human laws. In Ricardo's system, the natural wage was the lowest possible required for workers' subsistence, for high wages depleted the store of capital available for investment, which was required to sustain economic growth. For Ricardo and his followers, Corn Law repeal was necessary to allow wages to fall with prices.<sup>806</sup> This was how many Chartists interpreted the message of the League.<sup>807</sup> The League, however, did not pursue the Ricardian line. From the 1840s, a more optimistic version of political economy gained ground, one which escaped from the Malthusian straightjacket that had contained the ideas of the previous forty-year. The popularisation of the new political economy was Richard Cobden's polemical achievement. Cobden contended that the abolition of the Corn Laws would benefit all classes by producing economic growth, which would increase the demand for labour and thus allow wages to rise despite falling prices.<sup>808</sup> This message was not accepted by most Chartists, particularly those in the mainstream around O'Connor and the *Northern Star*, much to Cobden's fury.<sup>809</sup> Faced with a future of subsistence wages regardless of whether the Corn Laws were repealed, the idea of an international division of labour had little appeal to Chartists. For them, what was required was a *slow down* to the introduction of machinery and competition, the prioritisation of the development of home

<sup>805</sup> [John Leach], *Stubborn Facts for the Factories, By a Manchester Operative* (1844), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 3, 367–406; [John Leach], *An Address to the People of Great Britain on the Protection of Native Industry* (1846), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, pp. 71–80; *Northern Star*, 10 August 1844; Samuel Kydd's lectures, republished in Stephen Roberts (ed.), *Radical politicians and poets in early-Victorian Britain* (Lewiston, 1993), pp. 107–27; John Campbell, *An examination of the Corn and Provision Laws* (Manchester, 1841); O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, p. 97; J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement, 1830–1855* (London, 1962), p. 302;

<sup>806</sup> Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, p. 73.

<sup>807</sup> For example, O'Connor, *Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms*, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, pp. 97, 99–101; *Northern Star*, 19 February 1842; Leach, *An Address on the Protection of Native Industry*.

<sup>808</sup> Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp. 345–346.

<sup>809</sup> For Cobden's thoughts on Chartist hostility to Corn-Law repeal, Richard Cobden to Sir John Easthope, 15 September 1842, in Anthony Howe (ed.), *The Letters of Richard Cobden: Volume I: 1815–1847* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 291–293; Richard Cobden to John Bright, 20 September 1842, in *Ibid*, pp. 294–95; Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, 24 October 1842, in *Ibid*, pp. 295–96.

consumption over the pursuit of foreign markets, and the development of agriculture; policies that should be pursued even if it caused a decline in production.

The Chartists' rejection of the lessons of political economy was also a refusal to transfer what they considered to be political issues into a de-politicised conception of economics. Part of the reason for this was that the Chartists were not, generally speaking, literate in political economy in so far as it involved a technical discussion of money, wages, prices, markets, rents, and so on. O'Connor even boasted that he denied political economists a basis from which they could disagree with him because he used 'the very roughest and most discoursing calculation' rather than 'the new arithmetic of scientific production'.<sup>810</sup> This refusal, however, was also because they clung to a set of values that political economists ignored or redefined in unrecognisable ways. The most important value in this context was independence, what O'Connor called the 'grand principle of self-reliance'.<sup>811</sup> 'The sum and substance of my Chartism', O'Connor wrote,

is independence and contentment, neither of which you can by any possibility enjoy under the present system. Again, again, and again, I will keep hammering into the brains of the working people, the fact, that while all other classes are increasing in wealth and luxury, as if by magic, the labourers are moving backwards in both.<sup>812</sup>

It was in the service of this ideal that O'Connor offered his land plan. Independence was thus tied to the land and an economic vision centred on the patriarchal household rather than the market.<sup>813</sup> This vision borrowed heavily from the Anglo-American republican tradition, to which our attention will now turn.

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<sup>810</sup> O'Connor, "The Land": The Only Remedy, p. 5.

<sup>811</sup> *The Labourer*, vol. 1, January 1847, p. 81.

<sup>812</sup> *Northern Star*, 29 August 1840.

<sup>813</sup> For the most explicit reference the latter theme, see O'Connor, *Practical Work*, pp. 101–102.

#### IV. ‘VOX POPULI, VOX DEI’<sup>814</sup>

Uncovered by a generation of ground-breaking historical scholarship, the republican paradigm—or discourse, or tradition—was an essentially continuous classical mode of thought (primarily Roman), that was remodelled by Niccolò Machiavelli in the sixteenth century, and survived to influence European politics and eventually the foundation of America.<sup>815</sup> The republican paradigm, however, reached a point of historiographical overextension as scholars exposed its heterogeneity.<sup>816</sup> Rather than a self-contained alternative to liberal individualism, republicanism is now seen as just one language of the early-modern period, which mixed with other political language and took a variety of forms.<sup>817</sup> By the end of the eighteenth-century British republicanism was transformed, for some beyond recognition. The American and French Revolutions remodelled republicanism again, as its links with the classical world were severed and republican citizenship was extended to include the poor.<sup>818</sup>

A great deal more attention, however, has been given to republicanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century than the nineteenth. Turning to Chartist sources, we saw in Chapter One the Chartists revered certain Romans—albeit the Gracchi rather than Brutus or Cicero.<sup>819</sup> Alongside ancient heroes, the Chartist pantheon honoured the English patriots of the seventeenth century, Irish and Scottish freedom fighters such as Robert Emmett and William Wallace, and, as one toast at a radical dinner declared, ‘the illustrious dead of every nation, who by their acts and deeds have

<sup>814</sup> Vox populi, vox dei—or its translation, ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God’—was a popular slogan of radical and reform movements. From 1848, Samuel Kydd signed NCA executive statements using the Latin version. *Northern Star*, 29 July 1848, 18 November 1848. For other examples, *Northern Star*, 8 January 1842; 23 January 1847; 13 May 1848; 7 July 1849.

<sup>815</sup> The classic account is Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. For America, Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*.

<sup>816</sup> Daniel Rodgers, ‘Republicanism: the Career of a Concept’, *Journal of American History*, vol. 79, no. 1 (June, 1992), pp. 11–38; David Wootton, ‘The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth Tradition to Common sense’, in David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 1–44. For the nineteenth century, Gregory Claeys and Christine Lattek, ‘Radicalism, republicanism and revolutionism: from the principles of ’89 to the origins of modern terrorism’, in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 200–256, at pp. 204–205; Biagini, ‘Neo-Roman Liberalism’.

<sup>817</sup> Antony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>818</sup> Mark Philp, ‘English Republicanism in the 1790s’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 3 (September, 1998), pp. 235–262; Gregory Claeys, ‘The Origins of the Rights of Labor: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796–1805’, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 66, no. 2 (June, 1994), pp. 249–290.

<sup>819</sup> Chapter One, pp. 50–51.

contributed to the cause of liberty.<sup>820</sup> The Age of Revolutions provided new model citizens such as Washington, Jefferson, and Lafayette; even Napoleon and, more scandalously, Robespierre.<sup>821</sup> ‘The sturdy democrat of Republican America’, Andrew Jackson was the latest recruit, who, the *Northern Star* enthused, showed ‘real patriotism, manly independence, and true genius—both military and statesman-alike—in contrast with the truculence, perfidy, and a hungry *grasping* at public money, combined with a total disregard of the interests of the nation’ that characterised British politicians.<sup>822</sup> And in the later period, the momentous events of 1848 enrolled patriots such as Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Kossuth.<sup>823</sup> ‘Who does not envy the death of a Sidney, of a Hampden, or an Emmett?’, asked the *Western Vindicator*, ‘or contemplate with pride, exulting pride, the names of a Paine, a Washington, or a Franklin? The shades of these great men—the glory of their country, and honour of the human species, will ever throw a lustre over the past, and inspire us with a love of our country.’<sup>824</sup> Other ‘republican’ facets evident in Chartist discourse included their disapproval of a standing army, their belief that a militia was a superior fighting force, the ‘County’ discourse of Old Corruption, the identification of freedom with the franchise, and the continued pull of the tradition of the gentleman leader.<sup>825</sup>

It has been objected that the expansion of republicanism to include non-classical influences broke the discourse; it was no longer a recognisable language.<sup>826</sup> Of great importance here was the American experiment, whose leading theorists—not least Thomas Paine—redefined ‘republicanism’ to narrowly concern representation. As Philp has argued, representation was ‘not republican in any of the technical sense of the term’.<sup>827</sup> Moreover, themes that have been identified as republican or ‘Country’—

<sup>820</sup> *Northern Star*, 16 November 1839; *Chartist Circular*, 28 September 1839; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 147–65; Hall, ‘Creating a People’s History’; Roberts, ‘Chartism, Commemoration, and the Radical Hero’.

<sup>821</sup> Napoleon, for example, was praised alongside Cromwell and Washington in *Chartist Circular*, 9 November 1839. The rehabilitation of Robespierre was the mission of O’Brien, but did not appear to gain much traction, James O’Brien, *The Life and Character of Maximillian Robespierre* (London, 1837).

<sup>822</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845. Also, *London Dispatch*, 20 November 1836.

<sup>823</sup> Marcella Sutcliffe, *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2014), pp. 31–58; Gregory Claeys, ‘Mazzini, Kossuth, and British Radicalism, 1848–54’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3 (July, 1989), pp. 225–261.

<sup>824</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 24 August 1839.

<sup>825</sup> Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, esp. pp. 102–103; Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 13, 63; Belchem and Epstein, ‘The Gentleman Leader Revisited’.

<sup>826</sup> See especially, Philp, ‘English Republicanism’, *passim*.

<sup>827</sup> Philp, ‘English Republicanism’, p. 252.

patriotism, independence, an obsession with corruption—could emanate from a variety of languages. One did not need to look to Rome or Washington to love one's country and distrust politicians. This perspective helps clarify the Chartists' 'republicanism'. For the Chartists did not want to return to the virtue of ancient polis—as we have seen, they were more comfortable with the language of rights to pursue their political claims—nor did they believe, with Aristotle, that man was a political animal who could only be fully free when operating in this capacity. Nor, indeed, did Chartists believe that leisure was a necessary precondition for political participation. And, *pace* Rousseau, Chartists were content to place their political liberty in the hands of representatives. The Chartists were, therefore, a relatively unpromising group of classical republicans, in the Machiavellian, civic-humanist sense of the term.

The significance—or appropriateness—of the republican tradition is apparent when we consider its relationship with political economy. A further factor in the breakdown of republicanism at the end of the eighteenth century was the success of political economy, which undercut many republican premises. Political economy emerged out of the long moral and political debate about the desirability of luxury. This dispute pitted luxury against virtue, commerce against agriculture, the ancients against the moderns, and the towns against the countryside. For its critics, luxury corrupted the morals of the nation, eroded love of country, divided rich from poor, and sacrificed the countryside to the cities. These 'republican' critics looked to the stoic, patriotic, and virtuous citizens of the ancient world as the model to which all should aspire. For its advocates, luxury was the engine of economic development, that spread manners, civilisation, and peace, enabled the arts and sciences to develop, and advanced the happiness of the people.<sup>828</sup> It was as a discourse that was suspicious of commerce and luxury that republicanism was dusted down and kept alive by the Chartists.

The *Northern Star*, for example, maintained that despite political economy creating a massive increase in the productive powers of the country, life had not improved for most people. 'Before Adam Smith and Arthur Young had inoculated the nation with love of political economy... studying the science of growing rapidly rich, the more

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<sup>828</sup> Istvan Hont, 'The early Enlightenment debate on commerce and luxury', in Goldie and Wolker (eds.), *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 377–418, at p. 380. For a longer view, Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994).

important branch of knowledge, that of promoting domestic happiness, and a spirit of pecuniary as well as patriotic independence, was forgotten.<sup>829</sup> O'Connor likewise dismissed 'those luxuries for which he feels not the want, or the enjoyments of those vices he would not imitate'. When man was reunited with the land, however, he 'at once becomes a civilised being, panting for knowledge, in order that he may stand distinguished in that community of which he is a free member.'<sup>830</sup> The *Northern Star* pointed to the hundreds of pounds pouring in the coffers of the Chartist Land Company as evidence of the nation's rejection of the need for riches. Instead, the people

look fondly backwards to the time when a less rich, but more virtuous, independent, and happy people, by honest labour on their own little plot of ground, earned a living, amid purer and better influences than those which now poison the moral atmosphere. Their hearts yearn within them to get back to kind mother Nature again. The manufacturing and commercial system is discovered to be rotten and unsubstantial, though brilliant and exciting, and after a brief divorce from a natural and a healthy system, the people are evidently returning to the point from which they set out BACK TO THE LAND AGAIN.<sup>831</sup>

The 'natural and healthy' properties of the land were also appealed to by republican critics of commerce in the eighteenth century. It was as a response to these critics, and in defence of commerce, that Smith wrote his *Wealth of Nations*. Smith argued that the Arcadian societies of the republican imagination had never existed. The agrarian republics had, in fact, delegated production to slaves, both in the classical world and the modern United States. Even if the condition of the ancient republics—with their equality, virtue, and leisure for citizens to participate in public affairs—could be replicated in the modern world they were still undesirable, for they purchased the liberty of an elite with the bondage of the many. In contrast to republics, then, commercial societies offered independence in the most direct sense of the term—freedom from bondage. As J. G. A. Pocock has summarised, the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers abandoned the 'search for liberty in self-sufficiency in favour

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<sup>829</sup> *Northern Star*, 28 November 1846.

<sup>830</sup> O'Connor, *Practical Work*, p. 118.

<sup>831</sup> *Northern Star*, 28 November 1846.

of one for liberty in increasing sociability and exchange'.<sup>832</sup> Following this usage, freedom was distanced from a particular form of government. What was important was the regularity by which the law protected individuals and their property.<sup>833</sup> As both Smith and Hume pointed out, freedom in this sense was present in absolutist France as it was in England, and it was driven by commercialisation.<sup>834</sup> Liberty, in other words, marched hand in hand with commerce.<sup>835</sup>

The Chartist, however, continued to associate freedom with independence in a more total sense. In the Chartists' vision, slavery—of both the factory and the plantation—was unnecessary because nature was bountiful enough to sustain an economy based on individual appropriation. Smith argued that societies that were organised so that each kept the full product of their labour were pitifully poor. Although they were equal, this was an equality of poverty. In contrast, in a commercial society all were wealthier, even though the labour of the poorest maintained a gigantic cast of unproductive citizens. As Smith famously put it, the condition of the English day labourer 'far exceeds that of many an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages'.<sup>836</sup> To explain this paradox, Smith put his finger on the productive power of the division of labour, which created enough wealth to raise the condition of all.<sup>837</sup> In the Chartist imaginary, the abundance of nature rendered a complex division of labour unnecessary. As the *Northern Star* put it, 'a large amount of the labour of a people to the soil of the country, would secure the greatest amount of riches to each individual member of the community, and render the aggregate *independent* and *free* of all other people'.<sup>838</sup> Chartist proposals, then, risked the unravelling of the very mechanism that rose the condition of all.

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<sup>832</sup> Pocock, 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Restoration to Reform', in *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 253.

<sup>833</sup> Dario Castiglione, 'Meanings of liberty in the discourse of the North', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 48–69.

<sup>834</sup> Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice', p. 7.

<sup>835</sup> See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, BK. III; Castiglione, 'Meanings of liberty in the discourse of the North', pp. 48–69; Mark Goldie, 'The English System of Liberty', in Mark Goldie and Robert Wolker (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 40–78, at pp. 75–78; Burrow, Collini, and Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics*, pp. 30–32.

<sup>836</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1., Ch. VIII.

<sup>837</sup> Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and justice,' pp. 2–4, 7, 28; Claeys, *Machinery*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>838</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845.

Full bellies, total independence, and all the benefits of republican citizenship for all was an attractive offer; little wonder it proved popular. Conceiving economics in such terms, however, left Chartism vulnerable to the charge of utopianism and ignorance. The practical consequences of the Chartist's faith in nature's copious plenty were plain for all to see with the Land Plan's rather inglorious decline and fall. With expectations of bountiful harvests, O'Connor and his Land Plan operators levied hefty rents on their tenants, which they could not afford, not least because the estates were purchased on cheap and unproductive land that were cut off from markets. Tenants were evicted, estates mortgaged, and finally Parliament declared the whole scheme illegal and wound it up. The thousands of Land Plan subscribers, therefore, learnt the hard way the lesson on the limits of nature.<sup>839</sup>

## V. 'THE FUNDAMENTAL CONDITION OF THE CONTRACT'<sup>840</sup>

Both the Chartist interest in the land and the influence of republicanism has been attributed to the ideas of Thomas Spence (1750–1814).<sup>841</sup> The most forceful proponent of this view is Malcolm Chase, the most prominent historian of Chartism, who has recently asserted that Chartism was 'neo-Spencean', that Spence was the 'pivotal transitional figure in the development of radical ideas about property', and 'Chartists nailed their political colours firmly to the mast not of Tom Paine but of Tom Spence', because Spence's criticism of Paine's proposals showed that 'the radical political agenda for which Paine argued had to become more radical still'.<sup>842</sup> That Spence's ideas survived his relative obscurity and were taken forward into the nineteenth century we can be confident.<sup>843</sup> It is less clear, however, that he had a pivotal influence on Chartism. There are problems of both doctrine and dissemination.

<sup>839</sup> Chase, 'We Wish only to Work for Ourselves', p. 144.

<sup>840</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 November 1840.

<sup>841</sup> Chase, *People's Farm*, *passim*; Malcolm Chase, 'Paine, Spence, Chartism and the "Real Rights of Man"', in Alastair Bonnett and Keith Armstrong (eds.), *Thomas Spence: The Poor Man's Revolutionary* (London, 2014), pp. 13–26; John Marangos, 'The Economic Ideas of Thomas Spence: The Right to Subsistence', in Bonnett and Keith, *Thomas Spence*, pp. 65–75, at p. 75; Bronstein, *Land Reform*, pp. 23–51; Claeys, *Machinery*, pp. 159–60; Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', pp. 154–57

<sup>842</sup> Chase, 'Paine, Spence, Chartism', pp. 14–15, 19, 25; Malcolm Chase, '"The Real Rights of Man": Thomas Spence, Paine and Chartism', *Miranda*, vol. 13, online: <https://miranda.revues.org/8989>, para. 4; Chase, *People's Farm*, pp. 153–162; Chase, *Chartism*, p. 167.

<sup>843</sup> Chase, *People's Farm*, *passim*; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*; David Worrall, 'Spencenas', in

Chase's attempt to assert Spence's prominence by juxtaposing him with Paine follows the tactic used by Spence himself, who lived in the shadow of his more illustrious contemporary.<sup>844</sup> The comparison with Paine, however, is not especially instructive on Spence's influence on the nineteenth-century. It was, after all, Spence's works and not Paine's that were out of print after 1800; which probably explains why Spence—unlike Paine—was known to only a tiny minority of Chartists. With Spence's works unavailable, the dissemination of Spence's principles rested on a single thread: namely, Allen Davenport's *Life, Writings and Principles of Thomas Spence* (1836). Davenport read the *Spencean System* in 1805 and sought to fuse Spence's ideas with those of Robert Owen.<sup>845</sup> Davenport was, however, a marginal figure, and only 1000 copies of his Spence pamphlet were printed. It is likely that it was from this source that George Julian Harney became aware of Spence, for, despite the claims of Bronstein and Mary Kemp-Ashraf, no works by Spence were among the thousands of books Harney had collected over his lifetime.<sup>846</sup> Harney's mention of the Spencean trope, 'The People's Farm', a phrase that Spence never used, was one of just thirteen mentions of Spence across the entire 13 year run of the *Northern Star*, and it appears to be the only time that Harney himself name-checked the author.<sup>847</sup>

It could have been the case, of course, that Spence's principles extended beyond the reputation of their author. Serious doctrinal problems, however, make this unlikely. The first issue was that Spence believed that political rights were meaningless without rights to the land, whereas for Chartists, this proposition was usually put the other way around. There was also a fundamental difference in the status they attributed to private property. Spence argued that there could be no exclusive rights to property in

Iain McCalman, John Mee, Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, Kate Fullagar, and Patsy Hardy (eds.), *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>844</sup> Thomas Spence, *Rights of Infants; Or, the Imprescriptible Rights of MOTHERS to such a Share of the Elements as is Sufficient to enable them to Suckle and Bring up Their Young. In a Dialogue between the Aristocracy and a Mother of Children. To Which are Added, by way of Preface and Appendix, Strictures on Paine's Agrarian Justice* (1796)

<sup>845</sup> Allen Davenport, *Life, Writings, and Principles of Thomas Spence* (1836), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1, pp. 1–26.

<sup>846</sup> Harney left behind three large collections of books. One was gifted to Boston Public Library and is now held at Vanderbilt University; another to Newcastle Public Library; and a third collection for his family which is still in private hands. The first collection has been catalogued by Margaret Hambrick in *A Chartist's Library* (London: Mansell, 1986). David Goodway, the leading authority on Harney, has records of the other two collections as well as further information of Harney books that have been lost. I thank David for confirming that Spence was absent.

<sup>847</sup> Bronstein, *Land Reform*, p. 260, n. 54.

the land: God had given the world to man in common and in common it should remain. He denied that consent (as in Grotius and Pufendorf) could justify private property on the basis that one could not consent to give up something which was not theirs to give; nor could labour (as in Locke) because labour did not produce the land. Like the right to air, light, and the heat of the sun, land must remain open to all.<sup>848</sup>

To return the land to common ownership, Spence's proposed placing it under the democratic control of the parish, so that 'each parish is a little polished Athens.'<sup>849</sup> The land would then be rented out in small farms, which would maximise employment and provide an alternative source of revenue to taxation.<sup>850</sup> Although Spence did not advocate land *nationalisation*, which he likened to putting everyone 'to work under guard masters',<sup>851</sup> the theoretical premise from which he argued—a positive community of goods—was consistent with the arguments for later land-nationalisation schemes. Rather than the Chartists, Spence and his nineteenth-century followers were closer to the analysis of Robert Owen, with whom contemporaries often conflated him.<sup>852</sup> Tellingly, the two major issues of contention between Chartists and Owenites were the primacy of political *vis-a-vis* social analyses and the status of private property.<sup>853</sup>

In contrast to the Spencians and Owenites, the Chartists, by-and-large, accepted private property.<sup>854</sup> It was of tactical importance for the Chartist to separate political equality and an equality of property as opponents of democracy never tired of linking the two. As Edward Baines put it, 'it is a general belief that *property is threatened* by the proceedings of the Chartists; and, believe us, this is the very worst possible impression *for you* that could prevail... Men who are cowards otherwise become lions in the defence of their property.'<sup>855</sup> Beyond tactical reasons, the Chartists had a more philosophical justification. As we saw in the previous Chapter, there was a second

<sup>848</sup> Horne, *Property Rights*, pp. 220–21.

<sup>849</sup> Cited in Chase, *People's Farm*, p. 34.

<sup>850</sup> Claeys, *Machinery*, pp. 25–26; Horne, *Property Rights*, p. 221.

<sup>851</sup> Cited in Horne, *Property Rights*, p. 235. See also Chase, *People's Farm*, p. 2.

<sup>852</sup> Chase, *People's Farm*, p. 8.

<sup>853</sup> Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, pp. 212–218.

<sup>854</sup> *London Dispatch*, 18 August 1839; *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839; *Northern Star*, 24 July, 1841; *Cleve's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety*, 7 August 1841. For another instance, *Western Vindicator*, 5 October 1839; *Western Vindicator*, 5 October 1839; *The Charter*, 28 July 1839; *Western Vindicator*, 26 October 1839; Wilson, 'The Struggles of an Old Chartist', in David Vincent (ed.), *Testaments to Radicalism*, p. 210. See also, Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, pp. 212–218.

<sup>855</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 3 August 1839.

route out of the state of nature; namely, a social compact that constitutionally secured certain rights. The social compact was also regarded as the origin of property rights, which were thus tied into a broader conception of the constitution. As McDouall explained:

Chartism conceives that society did not apparently commence by making all produce common property, but rather afforded opportunity and protection for each to benefit by his skill, industry, and perseverance, it was not designed that the successful forgot all their duties, and the unsuccessful lose all their rights. On the other hand it was ordained, that the more property a man acquired the more duties he owed to society for the protection it gave him, and the more the poverty of a man the more claims he had. In other words, common sense and interest imposed rates and taxes as just fines upon exorbitant (sic) wealth and undue accumulation of property.<sup>856</sup>

This route out of the state of nature was taken by Thomas Paine, Spence's nemesis, as well as Paine's contemporary John Thelwall.<sup>857</sup> Unlike Spence and his ilk, Paine did not propose a return to the state of nature nor to an earlier stage of civilisation.<sup>858</sup> Rather, he accepted Smith's argument that great benefits had flowed from Europe's advance from hunting, to shepherding, agriculture, and eventually to commerce.<sup>859</sup> Not least of these benefits was the increased productivity of the land, which allowed society to support a population far larger than the state of nature was able.<sup>860</sup> Where Paine disagreed with Smith was on the latter's contention that the condition of the English day labourer 'far exceeds that of many an African king'. Paine contested the latter point by contrasting the condition of those who lived in what was 'perhaps erroneously, called civilisation' with the primitive state of man as represented by the

<sup>856</sup> McDouall, *The Charter, What it Means!*, p. 8.

<sup>857</sup> Iain Hamphreys Monk, 'John Thelwall and the Eighteenth-Century Radical Response to Political Economy', *Historical Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1 (March, 1991), pp. 1–20; Claeys, 'Origins of the Rights of Labor', pp. 263–274.

<sup>858</sup> Thomas Paine, *Agrarian Justice* (1795), p. 7.

<sup>859</sup> Thomas Paine, *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), pp. 2, 8, 22–23, 35, 40–41. Paine's use of the 'Four Stage' theory of human development, Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, pp. 8–9, and of his declaration that he is 'a friend of commerce', Paine, *Rights of Man. Part the Second*, p. 82. See also, Richard Whatmore, 'A gigantic Manliness', pp. 147–48; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty*; Philp, *Paine*, pp. 44–48, 78–80.

<sup>860</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 7, 8, 9. For a discussion of this aspect of Paine's thought, see Robert Lamb, 'Liberty, Equality, and the Boundaries of Ownership: Paine's Theory of Property', *Review of Politics*, vol. 72, no. 2 (2010), pp. 483–511.

Native Americans.<sup>861</sup> On the one hand, the life of the Native American was ‘abject when compared with the rich’ of the civilised world. Yet, on the other hand, ‘the life of an Indian is a continual holiday, compared with the poor of Europe.’<sup>862</sup> Commercial society, then, was found wanting. Not only were millions worse off than they would have been if society did not exist, but they were in a worse condition than they would have been if they ‘had been born among the Indians of North America at the present day.’<sup>863</sup> Paine did not dispute that commercial society *could* provide more for all, rather that society as it was currently constituted did not. To solve this problem, Paine outlined welfare proposals in both the *Rights of Man, Part the Second* and *Agrarian Justice*. In the former work, the poor laws were to be abolished, army and navy disbanded, and taxes redefined to pay for an allowance for poor families and the old, education for the young, payments for births, marriages, and funeral expenses, the employment of London’s unemployed, and an allowance for the disbanded soldiers and sailors.<sup>864</sup> *Agrarian Justice* added to these proposals a ten-percent ‘ground rent’ on landed property that would fund a one-off payment of £15 for all adults when they reached the age of twenty-one, and a further £10 annually from the age of fifty-onwards.<sup>865</sup> Although both works advanced similar welfare schemes, they proceeded on different theoretical lines. The proposals set out in the *Rights of Man* were based on the argument that current taxation was unjust and could be reoriented for the benefit of all. The new tax system was to be progressive because surplus income—that which was not required to support their family—was a luxury.<sup>866</sup> The land tax of *Agrarian Justice*, on the other hand, was a flat tax that was reliant on arguments taken from natural law.

As has already been noted, Paine did not believe that society could return to the social structure of the Native Americans, or that the latter was preferable anyway. Nor did

<sup>861</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man. Part the Second*, p. 79; Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 7. In this he followed Locke’s example. However, Paine was a resident of America, so it likely that he would have come into contact with the indigenous population. For the fascination of primitive society more generally, Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1983); Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society*. For a Chartist example of the same comparison, see Ross, ‘The State of the Country’, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 3, pp. 105–106.

<sup>862</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 7.

<sup>863</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 8.

<sup>864</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man, Part the Second*, Ch. V.

<sup>865</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*.

<sup>866</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man, Part the Second*, pp. 141–148.

he think that grinding poverty was a defect inherent in commercial society.<sup>867</sup> The cause and the solution lay in the way that property had developed over time. In contrast to the views of Spence and Owen, Paine saw private property as a natural development of society from which many benefits had been derived. He distinguished between natural property, or that which ‘come to us from the Creator of the universe’, and artificial or acquired property, which was the invention of man.<sup>868</sup> The latter property-type was a private institution which should be protected by law. Any attempt to equalise acquired property was unjust, for it failed to account for the different degrees that men had contributed to improvements over time.<sup>869</sup> Artificial property, however, had been erected upon natural property, which continued to be the *property* of all.<sup>870</sup> The ground rent was thus designed to extract the natural part of private property and return it to the community. The rich, in other words, were only paying for the use of the land which belonged to all in common.

Importantly, Paine imagined that everybody’s property in the common grant was transferable. The purpose of the land was to provide subsistence in the state of nature. As society advanced, the condition of all should rise too. If everybody’s material needs were *adequately* attained—which in Paine’s thought was expanded beyond mere subsistence—then direct ownership of the land was unnecessary. Justice fell not on whether man had the means, but whether the end was fulfilled.

There were some similar schemes proposed by Chartists, including a fairly comprehensive pension plan, W. J. Linton’s proposal for a national rent, and O’Connor’s 1848 ‘manifesto and budget’.<sup>871</sup> The latter, O’Connor proclaimed, was based on ‘bold and unequivocal truths’ that the ‘Free Trade School’ were unwilling to divulge. It included the seizure of the Church lands—‘as they are uncontestedly the property of the poor’—the abolition of the tithes, a salaried clergy, restructuring of the debt, the conversion of the workhouses into agricultural schools, the abolition of the excise and custom duty, the settling of the poor on the land, and the introduction of a

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<sup>867</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man. Part the Second*, p. 79.

<sup>868</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. iii.

<sup>869</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 9.

<sup>870</sup> Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, p. 8.

<sup>871</sup> Thomas Bailey, *The Rights of Labour: With Proposals for a New Basis for the National Suffrage* (1844), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 4, pp. 1–42, at pp. 18, 26–28, 38; Linton, *The People’s Land, and an Easy Way to Recover It*.

progressive property tax. In O'Connor's estimation, following these steps would raise £50.1 million per annum, of which £25.6 million was earmarked to pay off the national debt, leaving £29.1 million (he lost 5.5 million somewhere along the way) to conduct government business.<sup>872</sup>

Although direct links between these schemes and Paine's are difficult to establish, *Agrarian Justice* was on sale throughout the period, quoted in the radical press, invoked by Chartist lecturers, and toasted at radical dinners.<sup>873</sup> That said, it is also true that *Agrarian Justice* failed to grab hold of the British radicalism in the way that the *Rights of Man* and *The Decline of British System of Finance* did. Part of the reason may be that Paine was addressing a French debate and was primarily informed by French sources.<sup>874</sup> When it came to the state of nature and the right of subsistence, British radicalism had its own idiom. The master of this language was William Cobbett, who, like O'Connor, 'was enthusiastically attached to the land, always preaching up the system of Small Farms'<sup>875</sup> Cobbett planted at the heart of the constitutional idiom the natural law vocabulary of the original commons. Like Paine, Cobbett upheld the institution of private property while insisting that everyone still had a property claim in the commons, and, moreover, that this property claim was transferable. As he put it in 1826: 'however poor he may be, *he has a share in the land*, through the poor rates'.<sup>876</sup> Cobbett was so successful in preaching this message that in 1851, seventeen-years after his death, Herbert Spence complained that, 'The notion popularized by Cobbett, that every one has a right to a maintenance out of the soil'.<sup>877</sup>

This strand of Cobbett's thought developed through the 1820s in defence of the English Poor Law. Alongside numerous articles in his newspapers and his bestselling *History of The Protestant "Reformation"* (1824-1828), Cobbett set out his case against Poor-

<sup>872</sup> *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848.

<sup>873</sup> For examples of *Agrarian Justice* advertised for sale: *London Dispatch*, 29 July 1838; *Cleave's London Satirist*, 3 November 1838; *Cleave's London Satirist*, 16 April 1842; *Northern Star*, 15 June 1844; *Northern Star*, 4 April 1846. For it being quoted and toasted: *Northern Star*, 20 December 1845; *Northern Star*, 20 November 1847; *Northern Star*, 12 February 1848; *Northern Star*, 21 April 1849; *Northern Star*, 28 April 1849; *Northern Star*, 17 November 1849.

<sup>874</sup> Richard Whatmore, "A gigantic manliness": Paine's republicanism in the 1790s', in Collini, Whatmore, and Young (eds.), *Economy, Polity, and Society*, pp. 135-57. See also, John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London, 1995), pp. 425-26; Stedman Jones, *An End of Poverty?*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>875</sup> *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845.

<sup>876</sup> Cobbett, *Poor Man's Friend*, para 87.

<sup>877</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: or, The Conditions essential to Happiness specified, and the First of them Developed* (London: 1851), p. 278. <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/273>>

Law reform in two major pamphlets: *Poor Man's Friend* (1826) and *Legacy to Labourers* (1834).<sup>878</sup> Both works featured the same compact that was present in Chartist arguments: in the beginning all men were born equal and the world was the common ownership of all. This state ended with a social compact to forward interests of mankind, after which property rights were introduced, and all were subject to the law.<sup>879</sup>

The poor's natural right to relief, as opposed to merely their legal right under the laws of England, was taken up in the *Poor Man's Friend*. Here Cobbett attacked the canonical English jurists Matthew Hale (1609–1676) and William Blackstone (1723–1780), who had argued that the poor did not have a claim on the property of the rich in cases of necessity.<sup>880</sup> Against this doctrine, Cobbett cited extensively from 'the greatest author[ties] upon all subjects connected with the law of nature and of nations', and in particular the natural law jurists Hugo Grotius and Samuel von 'Puffendorf'.<sup>881</sup> By doing so, Cobbett popularised for a nineteenth-century audience a way of thinking about poverty and property that dated back to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>882</sup> This tradition wrestled with how to justify private property within God's original grant to all of mankind. Grotius transformed natural law by introducing the idea of a contract from which exclusive property rights sprung. Grotius interpreted the original grant as giving each a *property claim* in the commons. As population increased, and under the direction of humanity's vices—jealousy, lust, ambition—land was carved up between tribes and distributed to families within those tribes. As disputes arose, a compact was agreed that either recognised existing occupation or divided what was considered common. Since the compact had been made to extend natural equity, not eliminate it, it followed that subsequent laws must remain close to mankind's original equality.<sup>883</sup> To provide for those without property, who had previously enjoyed the usage rights of

<sup>878</sup> William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Poor Man's Friend: or, Useful Information and Advice for the Working Classes; in a Series of Letters, addressed to the Working Classes of Preston*, (London, 1826); William Cobbett, *Legacy to Labourers; or, What is the Right Which Lords, Baronets, and Squires have to the Lands of England*, (London, 1834).

<sup>879</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 43–49.

<sup>880</sup> Cobbett, *Poor Man's Friend*, paras 53–72.

<sup>881</sup> Cobbett, *Poor Man's Friend*, paras 73–78, quote from para. 76.

<sup>882</sup> The most comprehensive discussion is Horne, *Property and Poverty*. See also, Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and justice in the *Wealth of Nations*', pp. 28–43.

<sup>883</sup> Horne, *Property Rights*, pp. 14–15.

the original grant, Grotius maintained that the poor had a right to take from the rich in times of necessity. In such times, property rights were thus suspended.<sup>884</sup>

Pufendorf developed the argument of Grotius on two major grounds. First, Pufendorf introduced a distinction between positive and negative forms of ownership. In contrast to Grotius's positive community, where each had a property claim on the commons, Pufendorf insisted that individuals only had a negative right, that is, they were free to take from the state of nature, but usage did not confer ownership. With no ownership in the state of nature, property could only be created by consent. Pufendorf, however, avoided Grotius's historically dubious notion of a single contract by proposing that property developed gradually as a series of contracts over time. These moves marked a decisive shift; which, it appears, Cobbett missed. Without a positive claim on the original common, Pufendorf argued that to speak of the needs of the poor in the terms of property rights was a dangerous misuse of language. For, rightly understood, the needs of the poor fell under the moral law that governed humanity, not laws that regulated property. Thus, the poor did not have an absolute claim on the property of the rich in times of necessity, but the rich had a moral obligation to attend to the poor.<sup>885</sup>

That Cobbett's conception of the social compact was essentially Grotian in shape is confirmed by *Legacy to Labourers*, Cobbett's most fully developed and radical work.<sup>886</sup> Cobbett deemed *Legacy* to be his finest work; he even sent a copy to President Andrew Jackson, who he believed would understand its contents because he was a lawyer.<sup>887</sup> *Legacy to Labourers* became the bible of the anti-Poor Law movement. It was memorised by Oastler and cited *verbatim* at anti-Poor Law meetings.<sup>888</sup> According to Lovett, *Legacy to Labourers* was the 'charter and title-deed of [the people's] legitimate rights'.<sup>889</sup> The major difference between this work and *Poor Man's Friend* was that it came after the Poor Law Amendment Act. In 1826 Cobbett aimed to shore-up the existing Poor Law by linking its provisions with the duties that natural law imposed on society. The 1834 Reform forced him to change tack. Blackstone's legal

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<sup>884</sup> Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice', pp. 28–31; Horne, *Property Rights*, pp. 12–18.

<sup>885</sup> Horne, *Property Rights*, pp. 32–40; Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and justice', pp. 30–35.

<sup>886</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 41–42. See also, *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 31 January 1835.

<sup>887</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 14 February 1835.

<sup>888</sup> *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety*, 20 January 1838.

<sup>889</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1 no. 8 [n.d.]

arguments, assailed in the *Poor Man's Friend*, were now enrolled in support of the Old Poor Law. Blackstone's position on the rights of the poor to subsistence was essentially the same as Pufendorf's. In Blackstone's account, property was placed on an absolute foundation. He also claimed, however, that the natural law obligation to the poor was unnecessary in England because the Poor Laws 'furnishes him with every thing necessary for their support'.<sup>890</sup> This was not something which could be said of the harsh provisions of the post-1834 poor-law regime. *Legacy to Labourers* was Cobbett's longest articulation of how property was acquired in the state of nature. It was based almost entirely on Book II, Chapter I of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.<sup>891</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, Blackstone followed Locke's argument that labour conferred property rights in the state of nature. The major difference between Locke's account and those of Grotius and Pufendorf was the issue of consent. Where Grotius offered a single compact and Pufendorf multiple, Locke denied that consent was necessary. All that was required to grant title was labour.<sup>892</sup> Faced with these conflicting accounts, Blackstone dodged the issue, describing it as 'a dispute that savours too much of nice and scholastic refinement'.<sup>893</sup> What mattered was that property was governed by civil laws, regardless of whether they were underwritten by some form of primitive communal consent. Cobbett, however, continued to insist that consent was necessary. Indeed, he implied that only after 'some agreement' had created 'civil society, and laws, made by the common assent of any community of men' that property *in name* came into being.<sup>894</sup> It is at this point where we can see the apparent tension between constitutional and natural rights, which was discussed Chapter Three. Following the Grotian schema, however, this was a perfectly consistent argument for somebody who held that the right to subsistence took priority over the claims of property. Denying the natural right of subsistence broke the compact upon which society rested, and thus justified the dissolution of property rights that the compact had created.

Cobbett wove this seemingly abstract account into a narrative of national and constitutional history. He contested the histories of Hume, 'and other Scotchmen', that

<sup>890</sup> Blackstone, *Commentaries*, Bk. I, p. 131.

<sup>891</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 43–50; Blackstone, *Commentaries*, Bk. II, pp. 1–15.

<sup>892</sup> Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice', pp. 38–41.

<sup>893</sup> Blackstone, *Commentaries*, Bk. II, p. 8.

<sup>894</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, p. 46.

depicted early Englishmen ‘as a mere band of beggars’.<sup>895</sup> Where Scottish conjectural history traced the *advance* of civilisation through the four stages of history, and Whig history the *progress* of British political institutions, Cobbett’s history was a narrative of *decline*. England had been a land of plenty whose common people had feasted on eggs, beef, pork, mutton, veal, and honey washed down with red wine and beer—the very plenty which O’Connor promised would flow from the Land Plan.<sup>896</sup> This happy land had stood on the edifice of its wise Poor Laws, that had guaranteed the poor their natural right to the soil. He traced the right to relief from the compact back to Saxon times and on through the Norman Conquest, the Reformation, the seventeenth-century Civil Wars, and the Glorious Revolution.<sup>897</sup> Through this history of great change, conquest, and revolution ‘no man ever dreamed of questioning’ the right to subsistence ‘until the day which afflicted this kingdom by the writings of the hard-hearted MALTHUS, and his merciless followers’.<sup>898</sup> The only aberration was the ‘so-called “Reformation”, which crippled the Church’s capacity to attend to the needs of the poor.<sup>899</sup> The poor were eventually compensated, and their right to relief recognised, by the Poor Law of 1601, which, Cobbett was at pains to emphasise, was ‘no gift to the poor: it only gave them, in another shape, that which the Christian religion, and the law of the land, had given them before’.<sup>900</sup> Cobbett’s historical account was repeatedly echoed by Chartists, including those of the stature of O’Connor, O’Brien, Ernest Jones, McDouall, John Frost, Lovett, and Lowery.<sup>901</sup> As the latter stridently put it, ‘The people had been robbed of immense tracts of land, which was theirs from time immemorial, both by the laws of man and the laws of God; there have been portioned out among our rich oppressors. They have thus created a mass of

<sup>895</sup> Cobbett, *Poor Man’s Friend*, para 84 and 93.

<sup>896</sup> Cobbett, *Poor Man’s Friend*, paras 93–97, 100–111, 126

<sup>897</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 99–141.

<sup>898</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, pp. 110.

<sup>899</sup> The fullest account of this argument was William Cobbett, *History of the Protestant “Reformation”*, 2 volumes (London, 1826–1828).

<sup>900</sup> Cobbett, *Legacy*, p. 116.

<sup>901</sup> [Frost] *Western Vindicator*, 30 March 1839; *The Charter*, 17 March 1839; [Lowery], *Northern Star*, 30 November 1839; [Deegan], *Northern Star*, 21 November 1840; [McDouall], *Northern Star*, 22 January 1842 and McDouall, *The Charter, What it Means!*, p. 8; [O’Connor], *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848; [Lovett], *English Chartist Circular*, vol. 1 no. 8 [n.d.]; James Bronterre O’Brien, *The Rise, Progress, And Phases of Human Slavery: How Came Into The World, And How It Shall Be Made To Go Out* (London, 1885; first published in *Reynolds Political Instructor*, 1849–50), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 6, pp. 365–366, 414; Ernst Jones, *Evenings with the People*, no. 3, ‘The State Church, Part I’, in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 6, p. 168. Also, *Northern Liberator*, 13 January 1838.

poverty and destitution that never would have existed had it not been for bad institutions.<sup>902</sup>

Both Paine and Cobbett, the two most popular radical authors of the early-nineteenth century, therefore, argued that everybody continued to hold a property claim in the original grant to mankind. Unlike Spence's plan, Paine and Cobbett's vision was compatible with private property, and did not require each person, individually or collectively, to own part of the soil. Moreover, this right was embedded in a contractarian account of private property, and then integrated into the Chartist conception of the constitution.

Residual paternalism, the acceptance of a utilitarian case for relief, and the political difficulties of achieving it, combined to ensure that the New Poor Law did not take Malthusianism to its logical conclusion and abolish relief altogether. Instead, the drafters of the Bill settled on 'less eligibility', which consisted of the bare minimum of relief in exchange for the misery of the workhouse, where the sexes were separated, arduous work performed, and a 'coarser type of food' administered.<sup>903</sup> The fact that relief was technically still available did not satisfy the Chartists. As a Chartist lecturer argued, 'The rich tell us that we have no right to relief; that we ought to be very grateful when they give us the smallest pittance that we should view it as charity, and not in the light of an undeniable claim which we have upon society by the original constitution, and which is agreeable to the laws of nature, and the eternal and immutable principles of Christianity.'<sup>904</sup> Or, as the *Northern Liberator*, put it, 'the bill denies that principle upon which social order rests; that is to say, the right to subsistence. Upon this alone rests the partition of real property amongst the few: it being clear that society could only consent to such partition, and abandon the original right of *all* to an equal share in the land upon the ground of a subsistence for all under all circumstances secured.'<sup>905</sup> After all, as the *Charter* concluded, 'This is in reality the

<sup>902</sup> *Northern Star*, 30 November 1839.

<sup>903</sup> Joanna Innes, 'The Distinctiveness of the English Poor Laws, 1750–1850', in Donald Winch and Patrick O'Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914*, (Oxford, 2002), pp. 381–408, at p. 394; Horne, *Property Rights*, pp. 185–200; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, pp. 589–598. Winch attributes this shift to statistician John Richman, Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 314.

<sup>904</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 November 1840.

<sup>905</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 13 January 1838. See also, *Northern Star*, 30 November 1839; *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839; *Northern Star*, 21 November 1840.

very basis of the social compact. The people must be fed; they must be clothed; they must be housed.<sup>906</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The social compact brings us back to this Chapter's epigraphs. As Kydd proclaimed, 'all men had a claim upon the land for their support; that it was the right derivable from God and Nature, and that any system which was opposed to it was false.'<sup>907</sup> By denying this right, the political economy of the 'Smith and Malthus school' was false. Political economy nevertheless had a powerful external influence on Chartist thought. In their opposition to its doctrines, Chartists reaffirmed their commitment to a political diagnosis for distress and their pursuit of political remedies; their conception of a benevolent God and a bountiful nature; and an ideal of citizenship based on 'real' independence, rooted in a vision of society that political economists were unable to offer. Opposition to political economy also inspired O'Connor to formulate his Land Plan, and thousands of Chartists to invest in it. Hostility to political economy was, in other words, a central part of what defined Chartism.

Samuel Kydd was the last paid executive of the National Charter Association. His attack on the Smith-and-Malthus school of political economy, and his articulation of the Chartist alternative, was delivered in a lecture tour designed to rekindle support for a fading movement. Chartists, therefore, stuck to the central themes until the end. Hostility to political economy did not, however, survive Chartism. Future mobilisation would rally to the standard of a new popular political economy based on ideas of 'fairness' and free trade.<sup>908</sup> It was the latter vision—and not the Chartist's—that powerfully underwrote British ideas about democracy in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>909</sup> The story of the breakthrough of popular free trade belongs to

<sup>906</sup> *Charter*, 16 February 1840.

<sup>907</sup> *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851.

<sup>908</sup> Antony Howe, 'Popular Political Economy', in Craig and Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, pp. 118–141.

<sup>909</sup> Anthony Howe, 'Restoring free trade: The British Experience, 1776–1873', in Donald Winch and Patrick O'Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 193–213, at p. 211. For free trade and democracy, see Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. pp. 84–192; Biagini, 'Popular Liberals, Gladstonian finance and the debate on taxation, 1860–1874', in Biagini and Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism*, pp. 134–162; Frank Trentmann, 'National identity and consumer politics: free trade and tariff reform', in Donald Winch and Patrick

the later period. For our concerns here, what is significant is that Chartist hostility to free trade was a barrier to cooperation between Chartists and other reform-minded radicals and liberals. This Chapter has suggested that this barrier can be traced to the development of political economy in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Here the nascent ‘science’ of political economy was distanced from political radicalism. When conceived in Malthusian terms, there could be no reconciliation between Chartism and political economy. As John Leach, John West, and George White put it in 1850,

Under our various European governments, the few derive all the benefit, whilst the many have to endure the privation consequent on the infraction of the original compact. The position of the toiler being merely to supply the wants and extravagance of the idle. Now, not all the books, speeches, or fine-drawn theories on earth, shall reconcile us to such a system. Deck it out in all the finery which language can supply, still humanity, reason, and common sense condemns it as a flagrant injustice.<sup>910</sup>

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O’Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688–1914* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 215–242.

<sup>910</sup> The Kirkdale Chartist Prisoners [John Leach, John West, and George White], *Chartist Tracts for the Times: no. 5. What is Liberty? And How Do We Obtain It?* (Wortley, c. 1850), in Claeys, *Chartist Movement*, vol. 5, p. 485.



## Chapter V

# American Dreams: Chartism and Chartist in the United States of America

‘Where are the armies of stalwart men that tramped over and changed the face of England some forty years ago? Transplanted, I fear, to other lands, cast out by England to build Australia, New Zealand, Canada and, mainly the United States.’<sup>911</sup>

George Julian Harney, 1883

Over fifty-years ago, R. R. Palmer set out in great detail a single framework in which to understand the otherwise disparate struggles for popular sovereignty and civil and religious freedoms in the second-half of the eighteenth century. At the centre of his narrative were the American and French Revolutions, which he linked to a number of lesser revolts that they inspired and shared their characteristics – namely anti-aristocratic politics, constitutionalism, and freedom of religion.<sup>912</sup> In recent times, there has been a resurgence of interest in Palmer’s ‘Democratic Revolution’. The newer historiography has qualified and expanded *The Age of Democratic Revolution* in important ways.<sup>913</sup> Perhaps most crucially, the rise of Atlantic and global history has greatly expanded Palmer’s framework in both time and space to include events such as the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804 and the early-nineteenth century Latin-American independence struggles.<sup>914</sup> The latest work of this type is Jonathan Israel’s

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<sup>911</sup> Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, 7 October 1883.

<sup>912</sup> R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959–64), vol. 1, p. 240.

<sup>913</sup> Armitage, ‘Foreword’; Marvin Cox, ‘A Reassessment of R. R. Palmer’s *The Age of Democratic Revolution*’, *The History Teacher*, vol. 24, no. 3 (May, 1991), 343–352; William Pencak, ‘R. R. Palmer’s The Age of Democratic Revolution: The View from America After Thirty Years’, *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 60, no. 1 (January 1993), pp. 73–92

<sup>914</sup> Robin Blackburn, ‘Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 64 (October, 2006), pp. 643–674; Aaron Fogleman, ‘The Transformation of the Atlantic World, 1776–1867’, *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (April 2009), pp. 5–28; David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington, 2002); Lester Langley, *The Americas in the Age of*

*The Expanding Blaze*, which carries the narrative of the age of democratic revolution from American Revolution to the revolutions of 1848. Like Palmer, Israel argues for the central significance of the American Revolution, which ‘exerted an immense social, cultural, and ideological impact on the rest of the world and proved fundamental to the shaping of democratic modernity’.<sup>915</sup> In tune with Israel’s trilogy of works on the intellectual origins of democracy, *The Expanding Blaze* attempts to organise the Enlightenment into two neat categories, ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’, which in this account is transposed onto the categories of ‘mixed government’ and ‘democracy’.<sup>916</sup> Despite choosing a picture of Peterloo for his front cover, Israel sees the British component of the radical enlightenment as a disappointment, with few living up to the internationalism of Jeremy Bentham or Harney. Without considering any of their writings, the majority, including the Chartists, are dismissed as ‘antagonistic to the wider revolutionary movement, circumscribed by narrow aims, insularity, and short-termism.’<sup>917</sup>

This Chapter offers a different perspective. America had a special place in British radicalism. It was an inspiration, a depository of ideas, and blueprint for action. As Chapter Two argued, Chartists looked to America as a source of natural-law constitutionalism and as the chief credible model of democracy. To place Chartist more firmly within the transnational context of the ‘age of democratic revolution’, this Chapter traces the fortunes, careers, and ideas of a number of Chartist migrants in America. That many Chartists left Britain for pastures new has not been lost on historians. Paul Pickering’s studies of Chartist in Australia, for example, have convincingly demonstrated the continued relevance of Chartist arguments in a colonial setting.<sup>918</sup> A different historiographical logic, however, has governed our

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*Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven, 1996); David Shields and Mariselle Meléndez (eds.), *Liberty! Égalité! Independencia!: print culture, Enlightenment, and revolution in the Americas, 1776–1838* (Worcester, MA, 2007); Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in the Age of American Revolutions* (New York, 2016); James Kloppenberg, *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought* (Oxford, 2016); Janet Polasky, *Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Heaven, 2015).

<sup>915</sup> Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775–1848* (Princeton, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>916</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001); Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006); Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1650–1790* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>917</sup> Israel, *Expanding*, pp. 542–43, 571.

<sup>918</sup> Paul Pickering, “The Oak of English Liberty”: Popular Constitutionalism in New South Wales,

interpretations of the Chartists in America. Although America's influence on British reformers has attracted significant commentary, studies of radical migrants have been dominated by a negative view.<sup>919</sup> The tone was set by Ray Boston's influential 1971 study *British Chartists in America*, which was followed by Gregory Claeys, Jamie Bronstein, and most recently Michael J. Turner in emphasising the declining standing of America in the eyes of British radicals.<sup>920</sup>

In contrast to these accounts, this Chapter argues that Chartist migrants represent the key to understanding the transnational reach of Chartist ideas. The political thought that this Chapter pursues is necessarily disparate, as it traced through the patchy record left behind by these Chartists, a process which involves the reconstruction of their biographies as well as their thought. This approach is an extension of the thesis's broader argument that the history of political thought should not refer exclusively to a handful of elite thinkers. Like previous Chapters, the Chapter proceeds on the basis that the local context within which the Chartists were operating requires establishing. Section One thus asks what 'Chartism' meant on the other side of the Atlantic. It is shown that there were two narratives about what Chartism was—one positive, the other negative—which informed how Americans viewed former Chartists. The negative narrative saw Chartism as a foreign intrusion, part of a wider European politics that was alien to American liberty. The positive narrative, in contrast, saw Chartism as an extension of American principles. The terms of the latter narrative allowed Chartists to extend their 'Chartist principles' to American politics, in

1848–1856', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 3, no. 1, (April 2001), pp. 1–27; 'A Wider Field in a New Country: Chartism in Colonial Australia', in Marian Sawer (ed.), (Sydney, 2001), pp. 28–44; "Ripe for a republic": British radical responses to the eureka stockade,' *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 121 (2003), pp. 69–90; 'Mercenary Scribblers and Polluted Quills: The Chartist Press in Australia and New Zealand', in Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (eds.), *Papers For The People: A Study of the Chartist Press* (London, 2005), pp. 190 – 215; 'An After Thought: Why should we tell stories of the British World?', *Humanities Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, (2006), pp. 85–90; Was the "Southern Tree of Liberty" an Oak?', *Labour History*, no. 92 (May, 2007), pp. 139–142.

<sup>919</sup> An exception being, George Lillibridge, *Beacon of Freedom: The Impact of American Democracy Upon Great Britain, 1830–1870* (Philadelphia, 1955).

<sup>920</sup> Ray Boston, *British Chartists in America* (London, 1971); Gregory Claeys, 'The Example of America a Warning to England? The Transformation of America in British Radicalism and Socialism, 1790–1850', in Malcolm Chase and Iain Dyck (eds.), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison* (London, 1996), pp. 66–80; Bronstein, 'From Land of Liberty to Land of Monopoly: The United States in Chartist Context', in Stephen Roberts, Robert Fyson, and Owen Ashton (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Merlin Press, 1999), pp. 147–170; Michael J. Turner, *Liberty or Liberticide: The Role of America in Nineteenth-Century British Radicalism* (Lanham, 2014). See also, Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, pp. 307–9; R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2001), pp. 11–12.

particular to land reform, trade unionism, and abolition of slavery. Attention then turns to the American Civil War, where a number of Chartists played prominent roles. These Chartists' participation is then linked back to the long-running historiographical debate on British public opinion on the American War. Finally, the Chapter concludes with a discussion of Chartism and the Chartists—and their continued relevance—in postbellum America.

## I. ‘CHARTISM’ IN AMERICA

In 1839 an editorial of the *New York Spectator* asked whether ‘there is at present a more interesting question to consider than this – “what is the end of the Chartist movement in England?”’<sup>921</sup> Seven years later the *Barre Gazette* recalled the ‘excitement which attended the early developments of Chartism some years ago’, when ‘Grave men on both sides of the water looked on fearfully, as if the last day of the English aristocracy were about to dawn in terror only to close in blood.’<sup>922</sup> News about Chartism was in demand on the Western shore of the Atlantic, which newspapers across America diligently ensured was met by routinely reporting on Chartist meetings.<sup>923</sup> The American press also paid particular attention to climactic events such as the Bull Ring Riots in Birmingham,<sup>924</sup> the proposed ‘national holiday’ of August

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<sup>921</sup> *New York Spectator*, 26 August 1839. Reprinted in *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, 14 September 1839.

<sup>922</sup> *Barre Gazette*, 20 November 1846.

<sup>923</sup> For example, *Portsmouth Journal*, 25 May and 22 June 1839; *Newport Mercury*, 1 June 1839; *Rhode-Island Republican*, 26 June, 3 July 1839; *New Bedford Mercury*, 28 June 1839; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 24 July and 2 August 1839; *Boston Courier*, 22 August 1839; *Essex Gazette* (Massachusetts), 23 August 1839; *Newport Mercury* (Rhode Island), 24 August 1839; *Farmer’s Cabinet*, 7 February 1840; *Liberator*, 6 November 1840; *The Emancipator*, 25 November 1841 and 28 July 1842; *New Hampshire Patriot*, 16 April 1841; *Newport Mercury*, 11 December 1841; *New York Spectator*, 23 July and 9 November 1842; *New York Herald*, 15 January 1843; *Pittsfield Sun*, 10 August 1843; *New Hampshire Patriot*, 5 October 1843; *The Cleveland Herald*, 3 April 1848; *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, 10 April 1848; *Pittsfield Sun*, 11 May 1848.

<sup>924</sup> *Rhode-Island Republican*, 24 July 1839; *Newport Mercury*, 27 July 1839; *The Hudson River Chronicle*, 30 July 1839; *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 31 July 1839; *Barre Gazette*, 2 August 1839; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 22 August 1839; *The Farmers Cabinet* (New Hampshire), 23 August 1839; *New-Bedford Mercury*, 30 August 1839; *Niles’ National Register*, 31 August 1839

1839,<sup>925</sup> the Newport Rising of 1839,<sup>926</sup> the Plug Plot strike wave of 1842,<sup>927</sup> and the presentation of the national petitions to Parliament.<sup>928</sup> Other newspapers printed biographies of Chartist leaders and even Chartist hymns.<sup>929</sup> The events of 1848 received by far the most attention, both because of the scale of the Chartist revival and its place within the unfolding European-wide series of events.<sup>930</sup> As Timothy Roberts has shown, Americans initially welcomed the 1848 Revolutions, seeing them as an extension of their revolution. When the Europeans failed to replicate their success in creating a stable government that upheld the rights of property, many Americans concluded that republican liberty was a peculiarly American achievement.<sup>931</sup>

The perception that Chartism was a facet of a broader European conspiracy of ‘socialism’, ‘communism’, or anarchy led to the movement being attacked in some corners of the American press.<sup>932</sup> In 1844, the *Northern Star* complained that the American press ridiculed them ‘for seeking to establish the very principles of the Declaration of Independence.’<sup>933</sup> Nor was the *Star* alone. Other Chartists wrote to the

<sup>925</sup> *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 21 August and 16 September 1839; *Boston Courier*, 22 August 1839.

<sup>926</sup> *The North American*, 7 December 1839; *The Albion*, 7 December 1839; *Rhode-Island Republican*, 11 December 1839; *The Emancipator*, 12 December 1839; *Essex Gazette*, 13 and 27 December 1839; *Pittsfield Sun*, 19 December 1839; *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 1 January 1840; *Newport Mercury* (Rhode Island), 11 January, 14 March 1840; *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 15 March 1840; *Pittsfield Sun*, 22 September and 20 October 1839.

<sup>927</sup> *The Farmers Cabinet*, 23 September 1839; *Newport Mercury*, 22 October 1842; *New York Herald*, 2 July 1843.

<sup>928</sup> *New-Bedford Mercury*, 26 July 1839; *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, 29 July 1839; *Barre Gazette*, 2 August 1839; *Richmond Enquirer*, 27 May 1842; *Pittsfield Sun*, 16 June 1842; *Democratic Standard*, 1 November 1842. For the third petition, see footnote 957. The third national petition was also the subject of a short article in 1905 in *The Holt County Sentinel* (Oregon, Missouri), 3 November 1905.

<sup>929</sup> *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, 3 July 1844 [O'Connor], 10 July 1844 [Vincent]; *The Emancipator*, 26 December 1839.

<sup>930</sup> *The Cleveland Herald*, 3 April 1848; *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, 10 April 1848; *The New York Herald*, 24, 27, 28 and 29 April 1848; *The Pittsfield Sun*, 27 April 1848; *Morning News* (New London, Connecticut), 25 April 1848; *Barre Gazette*, 28 April 1848; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 1 May 1848; *The Daily Union*, 2 May 1848; *The Camden Journal*, 3 May 1848; *The Evansville Daily Journal*, 5 May 1848; *Sunbury American*, 6 May 1848; *The Cecil Whig*, 6 May 1848; *The Daily Crescent*, 8 May 1848; *Edgefield Advertiser*, 10 May 1848; *The Boston Daily Atlas*, 1 and 8 May and 1 June 1848; *The Ohio Observer*, 3 May 1848; *The North Star*, 5 May 1848; *The Floridian*, 6 May 1848; *The Cleveland Herald*, 6 May 1848; *North American*, 9 May 1848; *Liberator*, 30 June 1848; *The Daguerreotype*, July 1848.

<sup>931</sup> Timothy Robert, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville, 2009), p. 15.

<sup>932</sup> *The Albion*, 28 March 1840; *Vermont Chronicle*, 31 December 1845; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 25 November 1848; *The Ohio Observer*, 21 March 1849.

<sup>933</sup> *Northern Star*, 20 April 1844. The *Working Man's Advocate* agreed with the *Star*'s complaint, but ensured that the American press were unrepresentative of the American people as a whole, *Workingman's Advocate*, 25 May 1844.

US press to complain about inaccurate and distorted depictions of the movement.<sup>934</sup> One Chartist wrote to the *Pennsylvania Inquirer* to complain that a New York newspaper's harsh treatment of Chartism was based on the 'libellous portraits of the London *Times* and Liverpool *Mail*', and ensured that the majority of Chartists only sought to 'protect the industrious poor'.<sup>935</sup> In this, the writer had a point. American newspapers were reliant on the mainly unsympathetic London journals for news, which, as the *New-Bedford Mercury* came to conclude, 'considerably exaggerated' the alarm caused by Chartist meetings.<sup>936</sup> Extracts on Chartism, for example, were drawn from the *Spectator*,<sup>937</sup> *British Review*,<sup>938</sup> *London Sun*,<sup>939</sup> *John Bull*,<sup>940</sup> *The Times*,<sup>941</sup> *Morning Chronicle*,<sup>942</sup> *The Examiner*,<sup>943</sup> and *Frazer's Magazine*.<sup>944</sup> Thomas Carlyle's *Chartism* was also widely sold in America, and, his writing style aside, was generally favourably reviewed.<sup>945</sup> It was for this reason that the more sympathetic *Boston Courier* endeavoured to find other means to become 'conversant with the true meaning [of Chartism], separate from the perversions of party newspapers of London.'<sup>946</sup>

<sup>934</sup> *Boston Investigator*, 4 November 1840; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 2 September 1841; *The Ohio Statesmen*, 26 April 1843; *The Liberator*, 21 June 1844 and 28 March 1845; *North American*, 9 May 1848.

<sup>935</sup> *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 2 September 1841

<sup>936</sup> *New Bedford Mercury*, 28 June 1839.

<sup>937</sup> *Boston Courier*, 15 July 1839; *New York Spectator*, 26 August 1839; *Niles' National Register*, 31 August 1839; *The Museum and Foreign Literature, Science and Art*, September 1839; *Christian Register and Boston Observer*, 21 September 1839; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 4 September 1839 and 25 July 1843

<sup>938</sup> *Boston Courier*, 26 October 1840; *Rutland Herald*, 10 November 1840; *Barre Gazette*, 11 June 1840;

<sup>939</sup> *Scioto Gazette*, 7 February 1841.

<sup>940</sup> *New York Spectator*, 16 January 1841; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 18 January 1841; *Boston Courier*, 18 January 1841.

<sup>941</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, 7 October 1842; *The Daily Union*, 2 May 1848; *Sunbury American*, 6 May 1848; *The North Star*, 14 July 1848; *The New York Herald*, 7 September 1848.

<sup>942</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, 22 October 1842; *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette*, 28 November 1842; *The New York Herald*, 12 April 1848.

<sup>943</sup> *The Corsair*, 26 October 1839.

<sup>944</sup> *The Daguerreotype*, 8 July 1848; *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, 11, 18, 25 October 1848.

<sup>945</sup> Advertised in: *The North American*, 22 May, 1 June 1840, 4 and 13 May 1847, and 29 September 1848; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 18 December 1840, 4 August 1847, and 6–11 November 1848;

*Scioto Gazette*, 7 and 21 January 1841. Reviewed favourably in: *The Knickerbocker*, June 1840; *Western Messenger*, June, July and August 1840; *The United States Magazine, And Democratic Review*, July 1840; *The Boston Quarterly Review*, July 1840; *The American Eclectic*, January 1841; and unfavourably in: *Christian Examiner*, September 1840. On the influence of Carlyle's pamphlet in America, see Jeffrey Makala, 'Carlyle, Chartism and Reform in Transcendental America', *Literature and History*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Autumn 2015), pp. 18–37.

<sup>946</sup> *Boston Courier*, 31 July 1839.

The enmity of some American newspapers towards Chartist was fuelled by the participation of Chartists in American politics. In 1846, for example, a North Carolinian newspaper decried what it called the ‘swarms of pedantic Philosophers, political speculators and “social theorists”’ who had left their own countries and ‘come to the United States in the expectation of finding a freer and an unmolested field for the prosecution of their unwelcomed labors.’ The latter were spreading doctrines ‘of the most atrocious in nature and principles... [which] could only have originated in the dark holes and alleys of Paris, or the purlieus of London Chartist, in the loathsome locality of St. Giles, are preached and urged upon the consideration of the laboring classes here.’<sup>947</sup> There was a significant and growing Chartist presence in a number of US cities, especially Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. In the latter, Chartists established inns, taverns, lyceums, debating clubs and, in 1845, the Chartist League of Philadelphia. Founded by the Chartist veterans John Campbell, Joseph Smith, David Johnston, and William Butterworth, the League brought together British Chartists and radicals from other countries.<sup>948</sup> In 1847, Campbell wrote to the *Northern Star* that a crowded meeting of Philadelphia’s ‘Progressive Democracy’ celebrated O’Connor’s election as MP for Nottingham. The meeting’s first resolution, passed unanimously, hailed ‘with joy every Democratic victory, achieved by the people over their oppressors, whether in this country, or in Europe.’ The meeting went on to declare that ‘we anticipate the day, when the principles of the People’s Charter, will be the basis of the British constitution, inasmuch as those very principles are the exact embodiment of our own glorious declaration of independence.’<sup>949</sup>

In New York, the Chartists Peter Bussey and John Ruecastle ran a boarding house in the early 1840s, decorated ‘in the style of the old country’, that was advertised in the *Northern Star* as a place where newly-arrived Chartists could receive assistance.<sup>950</sup> Bussey also organised ‘Chartist and socialist meetings’ in Manhattan in 1840 and 1841.<sup>951</sup> One such meeting on the ‘Prospects and Progress of Chartism’, which was reported in the *Leeds Times* and *Sheffield Iris*, was attended by over forty ‘exiled’

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<sup>947</sup> *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Gazette*, 8 May 1846.

<sup>948</sup> Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 165.

<sup>949</sup> *Northern Star*, 2 October 1847.

<sup>950</sup> *Northern Star*, 13 June 1840, 16 January 1841, and 7 October 1843.

<sup>951</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), p. 340.

Chartists.<sup>952</sup> In 1845, the *New York Herald* reported that 'English Chartist' had established 'Accumulation societies'—probably a friendly society—in Brooklyn.<sup>953</sup> And, in 1856, the *New York Times* noted that 300 'English residents of the City... nearly all of them, English Chartist' held a meeting to celebrate the pardoning of John Frost.<sup>954</sup>

The most prominent example of Chartist political activity in America was the National Reform Association, founded in New York in 1844 in large part by British migrants.<sup>955</sup> The NRA called for the granting of free homesteads to the landless on the public lands, an 160-acre limit on the amount of land each citizen could own, and the exemption of land from debt repayments.<sup>956</sup> The *New York Courier and Enquirer* called the National Reform Association a 'revolutionary club led by foreign Chartists'; the *New York Herald* charged that the NRA was composed of 'foreign Chartists', and the *New York Investigator* claimed that the National Reformers had too many 'noisy Chartists' among them.<sup>957</sup> Outside of the NRA's New York stronghold, the Washington D.C. based *Daily National Intelligencer* complained that the 'Agrarian Society of New York' was 'nothing more nor less than *English Chartist* transplanted to this country... and we presume most of the members are English Chartists.'<sup>958</sup> For their part, leading figures in the NRA and Chartistism embraced each other as kindred movements, and frequently printed articles from each other's journals in their own.<sup>959</sup>

The leading figure of the NRA was the Welshman George Henry Evans. Through his editorship of *The Man*, *The Workingman's Advocate*, *Young America*, and other newspapers between 1829 and 1849, Evans became 'the thinker of the working man's

<sup>952</sup> *Leeds Times*, 9 May 1940 [from the *Sheffield Iris*].

<sup>953</sup> *New York Herald*, 28 December 1845.

<sup>954</sup> *New York Times*, 19 March 1856.

<sup>955</sup> The longest study on this theme is Bronstein, *Land Reform*. Bronstein, however, sees land reform in both the United Kingdom and the United States as 'working class' movements emanating from their 'experience' of 'industrialization'. A less problematic treatment is provided by Lawrence Goldman, 'Republicanism, Radicalism, and Sectionalism: Land Reform and the Languages of American Working Men, 1820–1860', in Rebecca Starr (ed.), *Articulating America: Fashioning a National Political Culture in Early America, 1750–1850* (Lanham, 2001), pp. 177–233, at pp. 181–212. See also, Yearly, *Britons in America*, p. 36; and Cynthia Szwajkowski, 'The Chartist Contributions to the American Workers', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, George Washington University, (1996), pp. 157–234.

<sup>956</sup> Goldman, 'Republicanism', p. 189.

<sup>957</sup> *New York Courier and Enquirer*, 20 August 1845; *New York Herald*, 4 December 1844 and 3 January 1845; Szwajkowski, 'Chartist Influence', p. 195.

<sup>958</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, 16 August 1844.

<sup>959</sup> Goldman, 'Republicanism', p. 210; Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829–1862*, p. 77.

party.<sup>960</sup> The most prominent Chartist National Reformer was Thomas Ainge Devyr, an Irish Chartist active in Newcastle before fleeing arrest. Devyr was born in Donegal to a Methodist mother and Catholic father. From a young age, he identified land monopoly as the cause of Irish distress. In 1836, he self-published his land-reforming ideas in a pamphlet entitled *Our Natural Rights*, which argued that man had a natural right to the land.<sup>961</sup> In 1842, Devyr published an American edition of *Our Natural Rights*, which included an appendix that extended the narrative to consider the decline of independent property holders in England. Devyr followed Cobbett's historical narrative of England, which was discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>962</sup> Despite America's advantages over England in the size of its territory, the absence of aristocratic laws such as primogeniture and entail, and the free spirit of its people, Devyr warned his American audience that it was also on the path taken by 'the entire page of past history': 'Wealth, Vice, Corruption, Barbarism at last'.<sup>963</sup> The only way to avoid the common fate of older nations, was to outlaw land monopoly, by a constitutional amendment if necessary.

Unlike the Chartists, the NRA could use democracy to their advantage. With the slogan of 'vote yourself a farm', the Association lobbied candidates to sign pledges for homestead laws, and ran candidates against those who refused.<sup>964</sup> The *Northern Star* looked upon the NRA as an effective example of democratic political mobilisation in action. 'In America, the people feel the evil, see the remedy, and as citizens and freemen are preparing, through the peaceful medium of the ballot-box, to TAKE and ENFORCE that which justice and necessity demands. Hurrah for the Charter! It will enable the workers of England to do likewise!'<sup>965</sup> By 1847 at least fifty newspapers endorsed land reform, including the mighty *New York Tribune*, and NRA branches had been established in at least a dozen states. By 1850, it has been estimated that over 600 newspapers supported the Association.<sup>966</sup> And later in the decade, the newly

<sup>960</sup> John R. Commons and John B. Andrews (eds.), *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 11 vols (Cleveland, 1910-11), vol. 7, pp. 30-33, 288, 291, quote from p. 30.

<sup>961</sup> Thomas Ainge Devyr, *Our Natural Rights* (Belfast, 1836).

<sup>962</sup> Thomas Ainge Devyr, *Our Natural Rights: A Pamphlet for the People* (Williamsburg, New York, 1842), pp. 40-41.

<sup>963</sup> Devyr, *Our Natural Rights* (American ed.), pp. 58, 59. The quote is from Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Fourth* (1812), para. cvii <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/charold4.html>

<sup>964</sup> Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 7, pp. 32-33.

<sup>965</sup> *Northern Star*, 27 April 1844.

<sup>966</sup> Steven Piot, *American In Dissent: Thirteen Influential Social Critics of the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, Maryland, 2014), p. 45; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the*

formed Republican Party embraced homesteads for free farmers. For Republicans, the strategy of populating the west with free farmers killed two birds with one stone, for it blocked the extension of slavery into those territories, while also drawing surplus labour from the overcrowded eastern cities.<sup>967</sup> The land as a refuge for surplus population was, of course, a central argument made in favour of Chartist land schemes. The major difference between the Republican homestead policy and the Chartist land plan was the availability of vast tracts of relatively unpopulated land. In Britain, fears about overpopulation led to the promotion of emigration *abroad*, which the Chartists opposed. In America, migration could stay within the country.<sup>968</sup>

As Lawrence Goldman and others have emphasised, the primary reason why Chartist migrants could seamlessly cross from British to American radicalism was the extensive overlap of American and British radical discourses.<sup>969</sup> This was also true of perhaps the most well-accounted group of former Chartists in America: the trade unionists. Britons were the acknowledged founding fathers of American trade unions generally, and individual Britons rose to prominent positions within the American movement.<sup>970</sup> As Clifton Yearley wrote in one of best books on the subject, 'like pieces of the old clod, their spirit and understanding of their purposes and methods clung to the English, Scotch, and Welsh, and to a lesser extent to some of the Irish, who transplanted their fortunes to the New World. ... [and] altered and affected the course of American democratic thought.'<sup>971</sup> Prominent Chartists in American trade unionism include Robert MacFarlane, a dyer from Glasgow who founded the Mechanics' Mutual Protection Society in Albany in 1845; James Dillion, a Stockport shoemaker, who became the Vice-President of the Lynn Mechanics' Association and made 'Chartist speeches in the local labour movement'; and John Bates, who founded the first miners' union in America on 'Chartist principles'.<sup>972</sup> The Glaswegian weaver John Cluer led the

*Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), p. 27; Goldman, 'Republicanism', pp. 189–90.

<sup>967</sup> Foner, *Free Soil*, pp. 27–29.

<sup>968</sup> For the parallel economic developments of the American and British 'Wests', see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>969</sup> Goldman, 'Republicanism', pp. 198, 202–212.

<sup>970</sup> David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872: With a Bibliographical Afterword* (Chicago, 1967), p. 199.

<sup>971</sup> Clifton Yearley, *Britons in American Labor: A History of the Influence of the United Kingdom Immigrants on American Labor, 1820–1914* (Baltimore, 1957), p. 21.

<sup>972</sup> Boston, *British Chartists*, p. 30. For a speech by Dillion see, *Boston Post*, 27 February 1860; Andrew Roy, *History of the Coal Miners of the United States* (Columbus, 1907), p. 72; Yearley,

ten-hour movement in New England, sent resolutions from America to the *Northern Star*, and lectured on anti-slavery and Chartism.<sup>973</sup> At one of these lectures, he told his audience that 'Chartism is republicanism in its truest sense!'<sup>974</sup> The Bradford Chartist John Hinchcliffe went from weaving in the West Riding, to the National Miners' Association's lawyer, newspaper editor, a national trade union official, and Illinois State Senator.<sup>975</sup>

Perhaps the most distinguished British trade unionist in America was the Cornishman Richard Trevellick. Before migrating to Australia and then New Zealand in 1854, Trevellick was a Chartist, ten-hour activist, temperance advocate, and Methodist lay preacher. He eventually made it to America in 1855, settling in New Orleans until the Civil War forced him to move North.<sup>976</sup> Trevellick has been credited with establishing over 200 local unions and three national trade assemblies. He was integral to the conventions that led to the establishment of the National Labour Union, the first states-wide trades federation of the postbellum period, for which he served as President in 1869 and again in 1871 to 1873.<sup>977</sup> He was also elected the National Labor Union's delegate to the International Workingmen's Association in 1867, but was unable to make the trip to Europe.<sup>978</sup> He was an advocate of land reform, an inflationary currency based on notes rather than gold, and an independent labour

*Britons*, p. 32; Anthony Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with Disaster-prone Industry* (Ithaca, 1988), pp. 281–282.

<sup>973</sup> Mary H. Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston, 2000), p. 84; *True Workingmen*, 31 January and 7 February 1846; Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 8, p. 115.

<sup>974</sup> *Liberator*, 1 August 1845.

<sup>975</sup> *Workingman's Advocate*, 1 September 1866, 20 July 1870, 6 June 1875; *Belleville Advocate*, 22 February 1878; Commons et al., *Documentary*, vol. 9, pp. 127, 140; Yearley, *Britons in American Labor*, p. 107; Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, p. 217; Gutman, *Power*, pp. 141–42.

<sup>976</sup> *St Paul Daily Globe*, 27 June 1886; *The Scranton Tribune*, 16 February 1895; *The Dawn*, 9 March 1895; Obadiah Hicks, *Life of Richard Trevellick: Labor Orator* (New York, 1896), pp. 13–14, 33, 44–45, 49, 50, 59, 88–91; Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 9, pp. 117–125, 170; Yearley, *Britons in American Labor*, p. 96; Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, pp. 222–223; Robert E. Weir, 'Trevellick, Richard F. (1830–1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); Robert E. Weir, 'Trevellick, Richard F.' in *American National Biography Online*, [www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00702](http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00702).

<sup>977</sup> Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 9, pp. 120, 170, 175–183, 242; *Public Ledger*, 29 March and 1 April 1869; *The Ottawa Free Trader*, 3 July 1869; *The Bloomfield Times*, 7 November 1871.

<sup>978</sup> *The Fourth Report of the General Council*, 1 September 1868, reproduced in *The Times*, 9 September 1868 and

[www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_First\\_International.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_First_International.pdf); Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 9, p. 194.

party.<sup>979</sup> He became a leading figure in the Knights of Labor, the largest trade organisation in the world at the time, where he was an organiser-at-large and a ‘Grand Orator’ until his death.<sup>980</sup> The Knights named one of their cooperative towns ‘Trevellick’ in his honour (the town is now a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama).<sup>981</sup>

The historiography of American trade unionism and labour movement has centred on the concept of ‘Labor Republicanism’.<sup>982</sup> Much like the constitution in Britain, the language of republicanism was the primary mode of American political discourse. American labourers’ version of republicanism drew on the founding ideals of liberty, equality, and above all independent citizenship to combat industrialisation which, they argued, placed republican ideals in jeopardy.<sup>983</sup> As we have seen in previous Chapters, the Chartists took the synergies between the American and British constitutional traditions seriously. British radicals venerated the Declaration of Independence and celebrated American heroes—like the ‘immortal’ Jefferson and the ‘good and Godlike Washington’.<sup>984</sup> Indeed, for some, the great republic of the west was the greatest achievement of Anglo-Saxon statecraft.

The fluency of British migrants in the language of American republicanism is also attested by the fact that some of the most important statements of labor republicanism were penned by British migrants and former Chartists. One author was Trevellick, who wrote the Industrial Brotherhood and Knights of Labor’s platforms, both of which

<sup>979</sup> Richard Trevellick, *Money and Panics* (Detroit, 1881); Commons and Andrews (eds.), *Documentary History*, vol. 9, p. 210; ‘Must the Masses Starve? What is to be the Outcome of the Present Financial Condition?’, *The Advocate*, 17 January 1894; *Spirit of Jefferson*, 30 September 1873; *The Bloomfield Times*, 7 November 1871; *The True Northern*, 8 September 1876; *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 12 May 1880; *Weekly Expositor*, 28 August 1884; Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865–1879* (Princeton, 1964)

<sup>980</sup> *Bozeman Weekly Chronicle*, 14 December 1887.

<sup>981</sup> *The Abilene Reflector*, 22 March 1888.

<sup>982</sup> See especially, Wiltenz, *Chants Democratic*; Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1980). For helpful overviews, Rodgers, ‘Republicanism: the Career of a Concept’, pp. 24–31 and Goldman, ‘Republicanism’, pp. 177–181. For the latest attempt to rehabilitate labor republicanism, see Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2014). Gourevitch draws on Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit’s notion of republican liberty, Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge, 1997); Skinner, ‘A Third Concept of Liberty’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, no. 117 (2002), pp. 237–68; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1997); Frank Lovett, ‘Republicanism’, in Edward Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition)

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/republicanism/>.

<sup>983</sup> Goldman, ‘Republicanism’, pp. 194–95

<sup>984</sup> Devyr, *Our Natural Rights* (American ed.), pp. 56, 60. See Chapter Two, pp. 96–97.

were based on the Declaration of Independence.<sup>985</sup> Another was Daniel Weaver, a miner from the Staffordshire coalfields who migrated in 1848 or 1849. According to contemporaries, Weaver was a self-taught ‘disciple of the Chartist gospel’ and ‘a deep thinker, logical reasoner, forcible in expression and a plain, energetic speaker.’<sup>986</sup> In 1860 Weaver put these characteristics to use in his address ‘What might be done?’, which laid the foundations of the American Miners’ Association, the first national trade union in America.<sup>987</sup> Weaver was subsequently elected president and another Chartist, Daniel Lloyd, its secretary. In ‘What might be done?’, Weaver argued that trade unionism was an outgrowth of nature. He described union, meaning sociability, as the ‘natural condition of man’ who ‘left by himself, in an isolated condition, would be one of the weakest creatures’. Just as men were forced to combine in the state of nature for their mutual protection, workers now had to unite to defend themselves against the ‘insatiable maw of Capital’. He called on his peers to set aside their ‘frivolous nationalities’ that divided them for brotherhood of Union, not just of labour, but that of the United States. ‘Let there be no Englishmen, no Irish, no Germans, Scotch, or Welsh. This is our country... Come, then, rally around the standard of Union—the union of States and the unity of miners.’ Given the imminent secession of South Carolina from that Union, Weaver’s appeal must also be read as speaking directly to this context. For Weaver, self-governing unions were the republics of the coalfields, a miniature of the continental republic of the United States.<sup>988</sup>

If the languages of republicanism and radicalism gave Chartists a voice in American politics, republicanism also provided a framework for a positive image of Chartism in America. We have seen how Chartism received hostility when it was depicted as a European other. An alternative interpretation was that Chartism was an extension of American principles. After all, the *Utica Daily News* pointed out, ‘The Chartists ask for themselves and their children no more than John Hancock, John Adams and George Washington, asked for them and their posterity; the eternal, holy right of “life,

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<sup>985</sup> *Constitution and Rules of Order of the Industrial Brotherhood of the United States for the National Congress, State Associations and Local Lodges* (1874); Robert E. Weir, ‘Trevellick, Richard F.’ in American National Biography Online [www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00702](http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00702); For the Industrial Brotherhood, see John Curl, *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA, 2009), pp. 73, 81 and 89.

<sup>986</sup> George McNeil, *The Labor Movement: The Problem of Today* (New York, 1892), p. 247.

<sup>987</sup> Yearley, *Britons*, p. 33.

<sup>988</sup> Daniel Weaver, ‘Address’, in *Constitution and Laws for the Government and Guidance of the American Miners’ Association* (Belleville, Ill, 1864).

*liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, nothing more.*<sup>989</sup> For the *Boston Courier*, ‘Chartism in England is tantamount to Republicanism in the United States’. *The Pittsfield Sun* called Chartism ‘the only party organised in Great Britain on the basis of American principles’, the *Cincinnati Weekly Herald* called it ‘The American Party in England’, and *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* ‘a synonyme [sic] of Democracy’.<sup>990</sup> Other newspapers rejoiced at certain Chartist events. A letter published in the *New York Plebeian* and the *Ohio Statesman*, for example, celebrated the acquittal of Feargus O’Connor in 1843, and stated that it would be ‘read with satisfaction, by the patriotic class of your subscribers who take a deep and abiding interest in the proceedings in the great Republican or Chartist party throughout the United Kingdom’.<sup>991</sup> In a detailed analysis of Chartism, the Unitarian monthly the *Western Messenger* supported the Chartists’ refusal to compromise on principle, which ‘we do not hesitate to say are right—and that the practical adoption of these principles is essential to every just government.’<sup>992</sup>

Chartism also received the backing of American abolitionists, especially members of the hard-line American Anti-Slavery Society. Founded by William Lloyd Garrison in 1833, the AASS advocated the immediate and total abolition of slavery, denounced the Constitution, and advocated disunion as preferable to the continued association with the slave states. The anti-slavery movement spanned the Atlantic in a dense network of connections that brought American abolitionists into close contact with a wide range of reform movements in Britain, including Irish Repeal, Corn Law Repeal, teetotalism, and Chartism.<sup>993</sup> While on a trip in England in early 1840s, Garrison attended Chartist meetings in Glasgow and London.<sup>994</sup> Although he refused to endorse the Chartist claim that their ‘white slavery’ was tantamount to chattel slavery, and disapproved of their tactic of shutting down meetings that did not endorse the Charter,

<sup>989</sup> Quoted in *Boston Investigator*, 13 April 1842

<sup>990</sup> *Boston Courier*, 31 July 1839; *Cincinnati Weekly Herald*, 18 October 1843; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 3 October 1856.

<sup>991</sup> *The Ohio Statesman*, 26 April 1843 [Extract from the *New York Plebeian*]. Similar sentiments were also expressed in *Emancipator and Free American*, 30 March 1843.

<sup>992</sup> *The Western Messenger*, October 1839.

<sup>993</sup> Betty Fladeland, “Our Cause Being One and the Same”: Abolitionists and Chartism’, in James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and Society* (London, 1982), pp. 69–99; W. Caleb McDaniel, *The problem of democracy in the age of slavery: Garrisonian abolitionists and transatlantic reform* (Baton Rouge, 2013), p. 12.

<sup>994</sup> Fladeland, “Our Cause”, pp 85–86, 97. The *Chartist Circular* featured a short biography of Garrison, 9 May 1840.

he nevertheless accepted that the British workers were oppressed.<sup>995</sup> As he wrote in his *Liberator*, ‘The Chartists, in their struggle for emancipation, are the abolitionists of the United States’.<sup>996</sup> When he returned to Britain in 1846, he again addressed Chartist meetings, including one at Crown and Anchor, where he told those gathered ‘we are with you’.<sup>997</sup>

Alongside Garrison, the most prominent Garrisonians were Fredrick Douglass and Wendell Phillips, both of whom also encountered Chartism while in Britain. Douglass befriended William Lovett and Henry Vincent, with whom he attended meetings. He also contributed to the Chartist press and even called himself a Chartist.<sup>998</sup> Like Garrison, Phillips was in Britain between 1839 and 1841.<sup>999</sup> The inequality of European society sharpened his awareness of economic as well as racial prejudice.<sup>1000</sup> Phillips attended Chartist meetings and endorsed the Chartist argument regarding the political cause of poverty.<sup>1001</sup> When he returned to the United States, he wrote to the British radicals Elizabeth Pease and William Henry Ashurst with questions about Chartism. Pease and Ashurst put him into contact with ‘three leading Chartists’, one of whom was Lovett, who sent Phillips a parcel of Chartist tracts.<sup>1002</sup> From this material and his impressions of the movement while in Britain, Phillips compiled a lecture on Chartism which he delivered to audiences in various North-Eastern towns from late-1842 until at least early-1844.<sup>1003</sup> In this lecture, Phillips traced the roots of Chartism back to the 1640s. The Chartists were ‘the spiritual child of the Puritans’ and British bearers of an ‘unquenched torch of civil liberty’. As a Bostonian abolitionist, Phillips was powerfully linking Chartism with the Puritan tradition of New England. The spirit of freedom that the Pilgrim Fathers had brought to the northern states of America lay dormant in England in the bosoms of the English people, waiting for a spark to ignite it once again.

<sup>995</sup> *Liberator*, 23 October 1840; McDaniel, *Problem of Democracy*, p. 146.

<sup>996</sup> *Liberator*, 23 October 1840.

<sup>997</sup> McDaniel, *Problem of democracy*, p. 147.

<sup>998</sup> Lovett, *Life and Struggle*, p. 321; Fladeland, “Our Cause”, p. 97; Richard Bradbury, ‘Fredrick Douglass and the Chartists’, in Alan Rice and Martin Crawford (eds.), *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transnational Reform* (London, 1999), pp. 169–186; Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (Liverpool, 2007), pp. 42, 73.

<sup>999</sup> James Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty’s Hero* (Baton Rouge, 1986), Ch. 5.

<sup>1000</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 79–80, 83.

<sup>1001</sup> *Liberator*, 31 January 1842; *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, 3 March 1843.

<sup>1002</sup> McDaniel, *Problem of democracy*, p. 150.

<sup>1003</sup> *New York Tribune*, 26 December 1842; *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, 3 March 1843; *The Liberator*, 9 February 1844

This spark was provided by American Revolution, which ‘quickened these ideas into fresh activity’. Chartism, he concluded, was the latest outgrowth of this spirit and thus part of a broader struggle to establish government ‘of the people & for the people’. Americans should therefore ‘feel a brotherly love in the cause of the Chartist, and to recognize the prophet in his peasant’s garb.’<sup>1004</sup> The Chartists could not have put it better themselves.

## II. CHARTIST ABOLITIONISTS

The Bostonian abolitionists were also associated with Chartist migrants. The previously mentioned Cluer devoted his attention to abolition from 1845 and often shared platforms with the Garrisonians.<sup>1005</sup> In 1850, Cluer was involved in the high-profile attempt to free the captured fugitive slave Anthony Burns, who had been detained under the infamous Fugitive Slave Act. Alongside him was another former Chartist, Richard J. Hinton. Hinton was born in London on the 23 November 1830 into a family of Welsh descent. His father was a mason whose great skill led to a number of important commissions, including the installation of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum and Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square.<sup>1006</sup> He was also a trades’ union president who turned to Chartism in the second half of the 1830s.<sup>1007</sup> Richard Hinton was introduced to Chartism by his father. He later wrote how he had ‘learned my “facings” and how to handle and load a musket in the ranks of a seditious company of “physical-force” Chartists, just before Feargus O’Connor led us all to folly and disaster’ in 1848.<sup>1008</sup> The truth of this statement is difficult to verify. Although there were plots for risings in London in the year of revolutions, they were not led by

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<sup>1004</sup> Wendell Phillips, *Chartism*, Wendell Phillips Papers, item 1586, Houghton Library, Harvard University; *New York Tribune*, 26 December 1842.

<sup>1005</sup> *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 15 June 1848; *Boston Post*, 5 April 1851; *The Republic*, 7 April 1851; *Boston Daily Current*, 27 May 1854; *The Daily Union*, 30 May 1854; *Anti-slavery Bugle*, 10 February and 9 June 1855; *Vermont Phoenix*, 21 April 1855; *The National Era*, 14 December 1854; *The Daily Dispatch*, 11 December 1854; *Vermont Phoenix*, 21 April 1855.

<sup>1006</sup> *Springfield Republican*, 8 December 1901; C. R. Roseberry and Diana S. Waite, *Capitol Story* (Third Edition: New York, 2014), p. 101.

<sup>1007</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report... upon the Relations between Capital and Labour*, 48th Congress, 1885, II, pp. 405, 433, 437.

<sup>1008</sup> Hinton, ‘Wendell Phillips: A Reminiscent Study’, *The Arena*, July 1895, vol. 12, no. 2.

O'Connor. Indeed, this statement looks suspiciously like a common retrospective attack on O'Connor.

Hinton left Britain for America in 1849. Some historians have written that Hinton absconded with his father because of their Chartist activities.<sup>1009</sup> Chartist migrants are often alleged to have fled, often based on very little evidence. In Hinton's case, several factual errors make it improbable. Hinton travelled alone rather than with his father and the only evidence of an 'escape' was, he told a reporter later in life, from 'his hard stepmother, who denied him the thing that he chiefly wanted—education.'<sup>1010</sup> We saw in Chapter One how Chartists valorised education. For many radicals, access to education was one of the primary benefits of republican government. In a classic articulation of republican educational values, Hinton wrote how in America 'little schoolhouses proved themselves the laboratories of free institutions. The ability to read, sedulously cultivated in the free states, at least, was as the "pillar of smoke by day," and of "fire by night," to arouse and guide the people. From the schoolhouse door and the clattering whir of free presses comes the mightiest armament of liberty.'<sup>1011</sup> On two other occasions, Hinton explained that he migrated to America, not because of his overbearing stepmother, but because of his 'intense republicanism'.<sup>1012</sup>

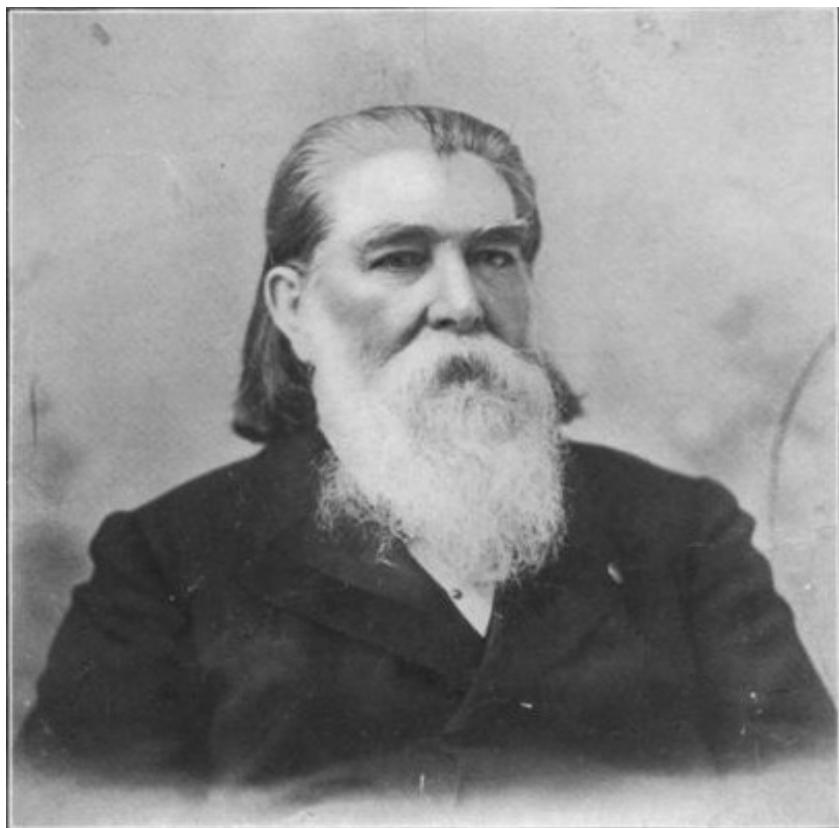
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<sup>1009</sup> Von Frank, 'John Brown, James Redpath and Revolution', p. 148; Von Frank, 'The Secret World of Radical Publishers', p. 58; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, p. 187

<sup>1010</sup> *Springfield Republican*, 8 December 1901

<sup>1011</sup> Richard Hinton, 'Pens that made Kansas Free', *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society*, vol. 6 (Topeka, 1900), pp. 371–382, at p. 371.

<sup>1012</sup> Col. Richard Hinton', *Current Literature*, July-December, vol. 20, no. 1, 1896; Hinton, 'Pens', p. 381.



Richard Hinton (1830-1901). *Kansas State Historical Society*.

When he arrived in New York, he learned the printer's trade, enrolled on a topographical engineering course at what became the Columbia School of Mines, and perfected his shorthand writing.<sup>1013</sup> Instead of pursuing a career in engineering at this stage in his life, he followed his calling and sought opportunities in journalism, which he believed was the 'best [way] of fulfilling my duty to myself and to my fellow man'.<sup>1014</sup> His search for a steady job in the press led him to Boston, where he became assistant editor of the *Boston Intelligence*. After that paper folded, he became desperate for work. He tried for several weeks to find employment, always fearing the 'dreaded case of poverty... [which] constantly stares me in the face; like a hideous nightmare it haunts me and each day but adds to its effect.'<sup>1015</sup> Unlike the Chartists studied by Ray Boston, Hinton's experience of poverty did not lead to the conclusion that American's republican institutions were chimerical. At one point, he did come close to 'tearing up' his citizenship papers, not because of poverty but rather the injustice of the Fugitive

<sup>1013</sup> Connelley, 'Col. Richard Hinton', p. 488.

<sup>1014</sup> Richard Hinton to Rev. Theodore Parker, May 1856, Parker Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>1015</sup> Hinton to Parker, May 1856.

Slave Law that revealed ‘what a hideous farce a republic might sometimes be.’<sup>1016</sup> The Fugitive Slave law forced Northerners to return runaway slaves to their masters. In the North, the law was incendiary, particularly in Boston, the cradle of American abolitionism. When Hinton arrived in the town he attended a meeting addressed by the famous abolitionist speakers Wendell Phillips and Theodore Parker, and their oratory, ‘fit for Attic philosophers’, persuaded him to remain in America and join ‘the Cause of Humanity’ and ‘the army of Freedom’.<sup>1017</sup> Hinton became intimately involved in abolitionism, and was associated with Phillips, Parker, Douglass, Garrison, Charles Sumner, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.<sup>1018</sup> Within days of hearing Parker and Phillips speak, Hinton joined Cluer to try and break free Burns. Their attempt failed. Burns was carried back into captivity by US marshals backed by US soldiers and marines. His freedom was eventually bought by Boston abolitionists, after which he made for Canada.<sup>1019</sup>

Canada was a haven for America’s free black population and fugitive slaves. An estimated three thousand blacks left the North in last three months of 1850 alone, and by the end of the decade the black population of Ontario had doubled to eleven thousand.<sup>1020</sup> For some former Chartists, such as the Yorkshireman William Brown, the freedom Canada offered to American fugitives proved the superiority of British over American institutions. When resident in America, Brown himself assisted a fugitive with passage to Canada in, he emphasised, an English steamer. A year later, Brown had a chance meeting with the now free man in Toronto. When the man fell to his knees in tears extolling his gratitude, Brown replied that he ‘had done nothing more than my duty, which any other Englishman would have done under the same circumstances.’<sup>1021</sup> While the veracity of individual cases cannot be established, there was an organised network of sympathetic anti-slavery activists across the North that

<sup>1016</sup> Hinton, ‘Wendell Phillips’, p. 226.

<sup>1017</sup> Hinton, ‘Wendell Phillips’, pp. 226–7; Hinton to Parker, May 1856. He used the later phrase again in a letter to Charles Sumner: Richard J. Hinton to Charles Sumner, 12 December 1861, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>1018</sup> ‘Col. Richard Hinton’, *Current Literature*, July–December, vol. 20, no. 1, 1896; Hinton, ‘Wendell Phillips: A Reminiscent Study’, *The Arena*, July 1895, vol. 12, no. 2.

<sup>1019</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 81–82; Albert J. Von Frank, ‘The Secret World of Radical Publishers: The Case of Thayer and Eldridge of Boston’, in James O’Toole and David Quigley, eds., *Boston’s Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O’Connor* (Boston, 2004), p. 53.

<sup>1020</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 81.

<sup>1021</sup> William Brown, *Four Years’ Residence in America and Canada* (Leeds, 1849), pp. 52–4

constituted what was known as the ‘Underground Railroad’, which assisted blacks to Canada.<sup>1022</sup> Cluer and Hinton were both involved, as were the former Chartists, James Redpath, Henry Clubb, and Allan Pinkerton.<sup>1023</sup> Pinkerton was born Glasgow in 1819 and migrated in 1843. It is alleged, again on uncertain grounds, that he did so to escape the authorities because of his Chartist activities.<sup>1024</sup> He settled in the Scottish settlement of Dundee, near Chicago, Illinois, where he established his famous detective agency.<sup>1025</sup> Pinkertons, as his detectives were known, became infamous as labour union spies and strike breakers. One Chartist noted the ‘bitter irony’ that Pinkerton established ‘the most dangerous order of spies that ever preyed upon the social freedom in America... an army of illegal soldiers not under the command of the nation or the state, an imprudent menace to liberty: an irresponsible brigade of hired banditti, equipped with rifles and threatening every American working man.’<sup>1026</sup> Yet this was not how Pinkerton saw things. Pinkerton was a staunch Republican and abolitionist. Although he was opposed to trade unions, which he believed were repressive of workers’ individual freedom, he continued to boast of his connection with ‘the Chartist party’ and declared that his ‘feelings are still, and always will be, with the working population.’<sup>1027</sup>

In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act shifted the abolitionist struggle to the territory Kansas. The Act was both a setback and an opportunity for abolitionists. Kansas-Nebraska opened vast mid-western tracts of land for settlement, but, in violation of the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited the extension of slavery above the 36°30 parallel, it gave the people of the territories the right to decide whether to permit slavery. After repeated attempts to block the Act in Congress failed, the Northern advocates of free states seized the opportunity that popular sovereignty offered.<sup>1028</sup> As

<sup>1022</sup> For the latest history, see Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>1023</sup> James Redpath to Aaron Dwight Stevens 21 December 1859, in Stevens Family Papers, Boston Historical Association; McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand*, p. 43; Mark Lause, *Race and Radicalism in the Union Army* (Chicago, 2009), p. 39. For Clubb, *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1905.

<sup>1024</sup> Boston, *Chartists*, p. 26; Al Benson Jr. and Walter Donald Kennedy, *Lincoln’s Marxists* (Grenata, 2011), p. 163.

<sup>1025</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, ‘Pinkerton, Allan (1819–1884)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49497>]

<sup>1026</sup> *Open Court*, vol. vi, 1892, p. 3316; Boston, *Chartists*, pp. 78, 81–82.

<sup>1027</sup> Cited in Herbert George Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York, 1987), p. 117.

<sup>1028</sup> Nicole Etchseon, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2004).

Charles Sumner, Senator for Massachusetts declared in the Senate: ‘Since there is no escaping your challenge, I accept it on behalf of the cause of freedom. We will engage in competition for the virgin soil of Kansas, and God give the victory to the side which is stronger in numbers as it is in right.’<sup>1029</sup> Across the North, emigration companies were established to flood Kansas with free settlers. Hinton took up Sumner’s call in 1856. He reached out to the well-connected Parker, who arranged a position on the *Boston Traveller* as its Kansas correspondent. Soon afterwards, Hinton left for the territory in an armed company of the Massachusetts Emigration Society determined to fight the slave-power with ‘the pen and the rifle’.<sup>1030</sup> The struggle in Kansas, he later wrote, was ‘an all-sufficient reply’ to Macaulay’s suggestion that ‘democracy carried no romance with it.’ ‘We give the history of our continental union’, he continued, ‘as a refutation of that piece of class arrogance. No warriors clad in pot iron ever bore themselves with more of chivalry than did the ragged settlers of Kansas... What holier victory can come than “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”?’<sup>1031</sup>

Hinton was joined in Kansas by the British journalists William Phillips, Richard Realf, and James Redpath, who were also committed anti-slavery writers sent to the territory by the Eastern press. The Colchester Chartist Henry Clubb, who is discussed below, also arrived in Kansas in 1856 to establish a vegetarian colony, but, it appears, was unconnected with Hinton’s group.<sup>1032</sup> William Phillips was the oldest of the group.<sup>1033</sup> He was born in Perth in 1824 and migrated to America in 1838 or 1839 with of his parents. Despite spending most of his life in America, he retained his Scottish ‘characteristic intonation and burr until his death’<sup>1034</sup> In Kansas, Phillips was the special correspondent for the *New York Tribune* and the *Chicago Tribune*. In comparison to the other journalists, Phillips’s politics were moderate—Hinton described Phillips as a ‘Whig’—which in this context meant he was committed to

<sup>1029</sup> Cited in Mcpherson, *Battle cry of Freedom*, p. 145.

<sup>1030</sup> Richard J. Hinton to Theodore Parker, May 1856; Richard J. Hinton to Charles Sumner, 12 December 1861, Charles Sumner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Hinton, ‘Pens’; Richard Hinton, ‘Making Kansas A Free State’, *The Chautauquan; A Weekly Newsmagazine*, July 1900; Connelley, ‘Col. Richard Hinton’, p. 490.

<sup>1031</sup> Hinton, ‘The Nationalization of Freedom’, p. 185.

<sup>1032</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 July 1856; *New York Herald*, 28 May 1856; *Vegetarian Messenger*, January 1896; *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1905.

<sup>1033</sup> In 1856, Phillips was 32, Hinton was 26, Realf 22, and Redpath 23.

<sup>1034</sup> Hinton, ‘Pens’, p. 376.

fighting slavery through the ballot box and the courtroom, rather than with violence. Phillips was a staunch Republican as Hinton was; both were involved in establishing the nascent Kansas Republican Party. Phillips took a more active role than the others in the tribulations that surrounded the Kansas constitution and admission into the Union. In 1856, Phillips published an ‘unhappy history’—at one point he was lynched and sold as a slave at a mock auction<sup>1035</sup>—of this struggle, the front piece of which bore Sumner’s acceptance of the challenge to the slave states, quoted above.<sup>1036</sup> Phillips later served as the first Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court and as a Republican Congressman between 1873–79.<sup>1037</sup>

While Williams migrated before Chartism reached its peak, Realf and Redpath were too young to have been involved in its early phase. Both, however, were connected in some way. Realf was born in Framfield, Sussex, in 1834. He was from a poor peasants’ background, but his poetic talents brought him to the attention of the literary circles of Brighton, from whom he received patronage. Among this group was Lady Byron, who arranged for the young Realf to work on one of her estates in Leicestershire. When Realf became romantically involved with one of Byron’s relatives, a scandal broke, the exact details of which remain unclear. Whatever happened, the episode concluded with Realf following his ‘republican principles’ and left for New York.<sup>1038</sup> According to one associate, Realf’s departure was hastened by his Chartism, but this reason is difficult to square with the events.<sup>1039</sup> Hinton, however, confirmed that Realf was ‘a radical also in the English sense, and of the period. The glamor of ’48 was still in the

<sup>1035</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, 2004), p.

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<sup>1036</sup> William Philips, *The Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and her Allies. A History of the Troubles in Kansas from the Passing of the Organic Act Until the Close of July, 1856* (Boston, 1856); ‘Colonel William A Phillips’, *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, vol. 5 (1889–96), pp. 100–113.

<sup>1037</sup> Hinton, ‘Pens’, pp. 376–77; Hinton, *John Brown and his men*, pp. 677–79; ‘Phillips, William Addison (1824–1893)’, *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress*, <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000315>>; *New York Tribune*, 2 May 1863.

<sup>1038</sup> [Realf letter] *New York Tribune*, 30 January 1860; Richard Hinton, *Poems by Richard Realf: Poet, Solider, Workman* (New York and London, 1898), pp. ix–cxiii; W. M. McDevitt, *Ambrose Bierce on Richard Realf* (San Francisco, 1948), esp. pp. 12–19; Rossiter Johnson, ‘Richard Realf’, *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, vol. 23, January 1879, pp. 293–300; John Stauffer, ‘Richard Realf (1834–1878)’, in Junius Rodriguez (ed.), *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political and Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 435–36.

<sup>1039</sup> John E. Cook, ‘Statement by John Edwin Cook of his Connection with John Brown’, in Hinton, *John Brown and his men*, pp. 700–714, at pp. 712–14.

mental atmosphere.<sup>1040</sup> It was likely that Realf was introduced to Chartism while resident in Brighton, where he frequented the Mechanics' Institute. He was introduced to the latter by the Anglican evangelical Rev. Frederick William Robertson, who had a great influence upon the young Realf.<sup>1041</sup> In New York, Realf was involved with the Methodist missionary Lewis Pease, the head of the Mission in the notorious Five Points neighbourhood.<sup>1042</sup> It was while moving in New York's evangelical and reform circles that he became involved in radical abolitionism. Like Hinton, he joined a company of free-state farmers making for Kansas.

James Redpath had a similar story. Born in Berwick-on-Tweed in 1833, not much is known about his English life, other than that his father was a teacher.<sup>1043</sup> He did, however, describe himself in Chartist language to Garrison, when he wrote that he was 'Born a member of a disfranchised class... I have always opposed oppression, in every form in which I have encountered it'.<sup>1044</sup> In America, his radicalism is made clear in his newspaper the *Pine and Palm*, which was 'devoted to the interest of freedom' and had 'for its chief object the complete and abiding triumph of the Democratic idea on this Continent and its Islands'.<sup>1045</sup> In the *Pine and Palm*, Redpath outlined his radical programme that included the immediate abolition of slavery by the federal government and the calling of a National Convention to revise the Constitution to 'erase from it its linger remnants of royalist ideas'; a Union with the 'British American Provinces'; and the destruction of political corruption, the establishment of absolute free trade, the substitution of direct taxation, and the abolition of the exclusive privileges enjoyed by the 'monied aristocracy' that was 'threatening the purity of its democracy, and extinguishing the aspiration to which free institutions gave birth'.<sup>1046</sup> Given the extensive overlap between British and American radical idioms, whether Redpath learnt his radicalism in Britain or America is a moot point.

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<sup>1040</sup> Hinton, *Poems of Richard Realf*, p. xxvi.

<sup>1041</sup> Hinton, *Poems of Richard Realf*, p. xxxii; Johnson, 'Realf', *Lippincott's Magazine*, p. 295.

<sup>1042</sup> For Lewis Pease, see Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century New York City Neighborhood that Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York, 2001), p. 105, 245–67.

<sup>1043</sup> Hinton, 'Pens', p. 378.

<sup>1044</sup> James Redpath [John Ball, Jr.] to William Lloyd Garrison, 25 November 1854, cited in James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York, 1859), p. 299. Also printed in *Liberator*, 8 December 1854.

<sup>1045</sup> *Pine and Palm*, 18 May 1861.

<sup>1046</sup> *Pine and Palm*, 18 May 1861.

Redpath emigrated with his family in 1849, and within a year found work in the career that would sustain him throughout his life: journalism. His first job was collating stories on slavery from cuttings of Southern newspapers for Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Like most Northerners and migrants, having never experienced slavery, he saw it as an abstract and distant evil. Reading the reports from the Southern papers stirred his interest in the 'peculiar institution' so in 1854 he set off on the first of three undercover trips to the South to interview slaves.<sup>1047</sup> Witnessing slavery first hand had a deep and lasting impact. As James Huston has shown, many of the most committed Northern abolitionists had, at some point, travelled to the South and seen slavery first-hand, the experience of which fired their abolitionism.<sup>1048</sup> While on these trips to the South, Redpath sent letters back to the Northern newspapers under the pseudonym 'John Ball Jr', after the fourteenth-century priest of the great Peasants' Revolt.<sup>1049</sup> As well as eluding to Redpath's English background, which he believed made the slaves trust him more, John Ball was an appropriate name for his developing purpose. For Redpath sought to sow the seeds of rebellion amongst the slaves and convince Northerners that the slaves were ready to throw off their chains. As he wrote in 1859, 'I doubt the ultimate efficacy of any political anti-slavery action which is founded on Expediency—the morals of the counting-room—and hence, also, I do not hesitate to urge the friends of the slave to incite insurrections, and encourage, in the North, a spirit which shall ultimate in civil and servile wars.'<sup>1050</sup>

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<sup>1047</sup> Collected in his book, Redpath, *The Roving Editor*

<sup>1048</sup> James Huston, 'The Experiential Basis of the Northern Antislavery Impulse', *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Nov., 1990), pp. 609–640, at pp. 620–40.

<sup>1049</sup> McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand*, p. 10. First letter in *Liberator*, 4 and 11 August, 1 and 8 September 1854. Further John Ball letters were sent to Sydney Howard Gay, see James Redpath to Sydney Howard Gay, 6 and 17 November 1854, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University Library. *New York Anti-Slavery Standard*, 11 and 25 November, 2, 9, 16, and 23 December 1854. Also, James Redpath to William Lloyd Garrison, 24 July 1854, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>1050</sup> Redpath, *Roving Editor*, pp. iii–iv, see also, pp. v–vii.



*James Redpath (1833–1891). Kansas State Historical Society.*

Like Hinton, Redpath came to Kansas in an armed company from Massachusetts.<sup>1051</sup> With a determination to fight slavery, Redpath, Realf, and Hinton soon became followers of John Brown, for which they would later receive great fame.<sup>1052</sup> According to a friend of Hinton, being an associate of Brown was ‘about the highest honor to which an otherwise ordinary man might aspire in the USA in the 19th century.’<sup>1053</sup> Brown was a shepherd, tanner, and failed businessman from the wilderness of Ohio. From these humble origins, Brown emerged as the emblematic figure of the North’s struggle against slavery; a man, according to Pinkerton, who was ‘greater than Napoleon and as great as Washington.’<sup>1054</sup> Brown was a Calvinist who saw the fight against slavery in apocalyptic terms. Redpath called him ‘the last of the old Puritan type of Christians’, Higginson described him as ‘a high-minded, unselfish, belated Covenanter; a man whom Sir Walter Scott might have drawn,’ and George Luther

<sup>1051</sup> Redpath to Seward, 17 December 1856.

<sup>1052</sup> Hinton and Redpath both account for their involvement in their biographies of Brown. For Realf’s involvement, see Hinton, *John Brown and his men*, pp. 110, 116–17, 136–37, 145, 153, 157, 176–78, 180–85, 197, 468–70, 473, 481, 636, 676–77, 701–703, 712.

<sup>1053</sup> McDevitt, ‘Bierce on Richard Realf’, p. 4.

<sup>1054</sup> Benson Jr. and Kennedy, *Lincoln’s Marxists*, p. 164.

Stearns, another wealthy Massachusetts's backer of Brown, believed him 'a Cromwellian Ironside introduced in the nineteenth century for a special purpose'.<sup>1055</sup> The latter description, Brown would have agreed. He saw himself as the instrument of God, sent to fulfil His sacred purpose. Redpath wrote that 'Christendom will recognize in John Brown a translation of the Old Testament, not into English words, but American flesh and blood.'<sup>1056</sup> Like the Old Testament prophets, he resolved to strike at the heart of Babylon. Brown had studied military tactics and had travelled to Europe to inspect fortifications; he was impressed by how a small number of soldiers could hold off superior forces in mountainous terrain. Using similar tactics, he planned to establish a new republic in the mountains that cut through the South from Maryland through Virginia and into Tennessee and Alabama. He anticipated that once his banner was unfurled the slaves would rally to his cause. In preparation for the raid, a secret convention was held in Canada in 1858, where a provisional constitution for this new republic was drafted. Brown was elected its Commander-in-Chief, and Realf Secretary of State.<sup>1057</sup>

In 1859, Brown led a daring raid into Virginia to capture a Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. Both Hinton and Redpath planned to be with him but were caught up elsewhere; while Realf converted to Catholicism and renounced violence. The raid, however, was a disaster. After a short siege, Brown and his followers were either killed or captured. They were then swiftly tried and executed. If Brown failed to fulfil his purpose in life, he was more successful in death. Brown's actions drove a wedge between the North and the South. In the South, Brown was seen as a traitor and a madman. In the North, however, he was hailed as a martyr. On the day of his execution, Northern Church bells rang out, minute guns fired salutes, and ministers preached sermons of commemoration.<sup>1058</sup> Some even compared Brown to Christ. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, called him 'The Saint, whose... martyrdom, if it shall be perfected, will make the gallows as glorious as the cross'.<sup>1059</sup> The myth of John Brown was fed by his followers, and especially Redpath. In 1860, with the assistance of Hinton, Redpath

<sup>1055</sup> James Redpath, *The Public Life Captain John Brown* (Boston, 1860), p. 39; Stephen Oates, *To Purge this Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (Boston, 1984), p. 237.

<sup>1056</sup> Redpath, *Captain Brown*, p. 46.

<sup>1057</sup> J. H. Kagi, 'Journal of the Provisional Convention Held on Saturday 8th May, 1858...', in Hinton, *John Brown and his men*, pp. 634–637, at p. 636.

<sup>1058</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 209.

<sup>1059</sup> James Redpath, *The Public Life of Captain John Brown* (Boston, 1860), p. 4.

published *The Public Life of John Brown*, a heroic tale of Brown's courageous sacrifice. Redpath was so influential in defining the popular image of Brown that James Malin has described the next fifty years as 'the James Redpath Period of John Brown biography'.<sup>1060</sup> At the end the century, Hinton, too, published a biography of Brown, which was more detailed than Redpath's and included more information about Brown's followers.<sup>1061</sup>

In 1860, however, Hinton recognised that events were moving beyond Kansas. As Redpath was cultivating the cult of John Brown, Hinton was preoccupied writing campaign biographies of the Republican politicians William H. Seward and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>1062</sup> Hinton's hastily prepared biography of Lincoln was the first biography of the future President.<sup>1063</sup> His decision proved justified. In the febrile atmosphere of 1860, Lincoln was swept to the White House. In response, South Carolina led six other states out of the Union, eventually to be joined by four more to form the Confederate States of America. When the Confederates fired on the Federal garrison of Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay, South Carolina, in April 1861, Lincoln issued a proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers to suppress this 'insurrection'. Brown and Redpath had their war.

### III. THE WAR OF ALL NATIONS

The Civil War was the most dramatic, violent, and defining event in American history. At least 620,000 American soldiers lost their lives, a total greater than the American death toll in all other wars combined.<sup>1064</sup> The America that emerged from this fiery trial was transformed into a powerful unitary nation state. America's Civil War, however, was not just an American affair. For the Confederates, the path to independence went through Paris and especially London. If they could secure diplomatic recognition, the Confederate States of America would gain sovereignty

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<sup>1060</sup> Cited in McKivigan, *Forgotten*, p. 54.

<sup>1061</sup> Hinton, *John Brown and his Men*.

<sup>1062</sup> Hinton to Seward, 25 October 1860 and 14 May 1861; Hinton, 'Pens that made Kansas free'

<sup>1063</sup> Carroll Hollis, 'Richard J Hinton: Lincoln's Reluctant Biographer', *The Centennial Review*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Winter, 1961), pp. 65–84.

<sup>1064</sup> James McPherson, 'Foreword', in Margaret Wagner, Gary Gallagher, and Paul Finkleman, *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference* (New York, 2009), p. xvii.

under international law, the power to make commercial treaties, guarantee loans, form military alliances, and, Southern diplomats believed, mediation to end the conflict.<sup>1065</sup>

The contest was also fought over British public opinion, about which there is a long running historiographical controversy. Two general positions have developed.<sup>1066</sup> The first sees British reaction to the War largely determined by class. The aristocracy, the upper middle class, and political conservatives supported the Confederacy because they saw the North as a threat, both because of its democratic institutions and its growing economic strength. Democracy, they had long believed, was a recipe for anarchy and social collapse and America's descent into war was the crisis they had long predicted would come. On the other side were the working classes and the majority of the middle classes, particularly professionals and Dissenting ministers. These groups supported the Union because it stood for liberty and democracy around the world. The heroes of this narrative were the working classes of Lancashire, who stoically held firm for 'freedom' despite the wide-spread unemployment, hardship, and suffering of the cotton famine caused by Union blockade of the Southern ports.<sup>1067</sup>

The 'traditional' interpretation came under attack 'from above' in the 1950s by W. D. Jones and H. C. Allen who questioned the extent to which the British upper-class supported the South.<sup>1068</sup> Further doubts were raised by Joseph Hernon Jr. and D. P. Crook.<sup>1069</sup> The most influential challenge to the traditional narrative 'from below' came from Royden Harrison, who highlighted that important trade union leaders and elements within the labour press were pro-South. Harrison, however, did not argue that the working classes themselves were pro-South, citing the numerous public meetings as evidence of wide-spread pro-Union sentiment, especially after Lincoln's

<sup>1065</sup> Don Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York, 2013), pp. 5–6, 28; Duncan Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2003), pp. 163–193.

<sup>1066</sup> Two useful surveys of this debate—written from opposing perspectives—can be found in Foner, *British Labor*, pp. 11–25; and Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 1–16.

<sup>1067</sup> Harrison, *Before*, p. 41; Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 69–70. Peter d'A Jones, 'Epilogue: History of a Myth', in Ellison, *Support of Secession*, pp. 199–219.

<sup>1068</sup> W. D. Jones, 'British Conservatives and the American Civil War', *American Historical Review*, no. 58 (April, 1953), pp. 527–543; H. C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations* (London: 1954).

<sup>1069</sup> Joseph M. Hernon, Jr., 'British Sympathies in the American Civil War', *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Aug., 1967), pp. 356–367; D. P. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers, 1861–1865* (London: 1974)

Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>1070</sup> This argument was taken up by Mary Ellison in her influential *Support for secession*. For Ellison, Lancashire workers, confronted by the shortage of cotton and lost jobs, acted out of self-interest and supported the Confederacy. The areas hit hardest by the cotton famine were most vociferous in their support of the secessionists. Workers at meetings demanded that the government intervene to break the Union blockade of Southern ports that had cut off the flow of cotton to Lancashire mills, valorised the Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson instead of Lincoln, and called for the recognition of the Confederacy as an independent nation. They were not, however, proslavery, rather both antislavery and pro-South.<sup>1071</sup>

Parts of the traditional account were reasserted by Eugenio Biagini and Phillip Foner, both of whom highlighted deficiencies in Ellison's account, such as the ignoring and misrepresenting of evidence that did not support her argument.<sup>1072</sup> For Biagini, the Civil War was crucial episode in the emergence of broad-based popular liberalism. He argued that liberals, radicals, Dissenting ministers, and the majority of the labour leadership supported the Union because it was identified with democracy; and it was Lincoln, not the Confederate generals, who was the most widely celebrated figure.<sup>1073</sup> Some historians, however, remain sceptical. Duncan Campbell's 2003 book *English Public Opinion* represents the most sustained attempt to debunk what he describes as the 'unsustainable traditional interpretation and that of its heavenly kingdom containing the small group of English partisans in their sublime, but lonely, campaign for freedom, equality, democracy, and emancipation'.<sup>1074</sup> For Campbell, evidence for the traditional account is drawn narrowly from the testimonies of the staunch Unionist John Bright, the *Beehive trades*' journal, and reports of pro-Northern meetings.<sup>1075</sup> Defining radicals as all who supported constitutional reform 'from mild reformers to resolute republicans', Campbell unsurprisingly finds no unanimity of opinion among

<sup>1070</sup> Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861 – 1881* (London, 1965), pp. 40–77.

<sup>1071</sup> Mary Ellison, *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* (Chicago, 1972).

<sup>1072</sup> Philip S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (London, 1981), pp. 19–24; Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 75–76. Also, Harrison, 'Introduction to the Second Edition', in *Before the Socialists* (London, 1994), p. xxxi.

<sup>1073</sup> Biagini, *Liberty*, pp. 69–83.

<sup>1074</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 246.

<sup>1075</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 195.

them on the Civil War.<sup>1076</sup> The main argument of the book is that most Britons remained apathetic, backing neither the North nor the South.<sup>1077</sup> By the time it appeared in print, however, many of Campbell's arguments had been disarmed by R. J. M. Blackett's *Divided Hearts*, which was published two years before *English Public Opinion*. Based on voluminous evidence, including over 125 newspapers from across the country, Blackett's account is by far the most detailed analysis of British public opinion on the Civil War. The traditional narrative survives largely intact. Blackett found that abolitionism remained a major force in British politics; that liberals, radicals, and Dissenting ministers *tended* to support the North; while the South drew support *mainly* from Whig and Tory aristocrats, cotton manufactures, and Anglican clergy. Blackett also endorses Biagini over Garrison by concluding that the War did not split radicals along generational lines, and Biagini over Ellison on the status of Lincoln.<sup>1078</sup> On the central issue of Lancashire, he concludes that 'the friends of the Union carried the day'. And, finally, most identifiable Chartists were found to be advocates of the North.<sup>1079</sup>

But what about Chartists in America? As the *Leicester Guardian* recognised, Britons eagerly pursued details about the Civil War 'not on account of the great commercial interests involved but a feeling that those taking part in the contest are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.'<sup>1080</sup> Surprisingly few historians, however, have asked what Britons *in America* thought about the War, despite the fact that the British-born were the third largest foreign-born group in the Union army, and the Irish and Canadians were second and fourth largest respectively.<sup>1081</sup>

Both sides in the Civil War professed to be fighting for freedom. The South, argued Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, was 'forced to take up arms to vindicate the political rights, the freedom, equality, and State sovereignty which were the heritage purchased by the blood of our revolutionary sires.'<sup>1082</sup> In Britain, many

<sup>1076</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, p. 194.

<sup>1077</sup> Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, Ch. 6.

<sup>1078</sup> On the latter, see also, Richard Cardwell and Jay Sexton (eds.), *The Global Lincoln* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>1079</sup> Blackett, *Divided*, *passim*.

<sup>1080</sup> *Leicester Guardian*, 9 September 1861, cited in Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 6.

<sup>1081</sup> Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations*, p. 159; Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 32.

<sup>1082</sup> Cited in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. vii.

were receptive to this message, including some radicals.<sup>1083</sup> Among them were William Aitken and Joseph Barker, Chartists who had visited the United States and became paid agents of the Confederacy in Britain.<sup>1084</sup> Barker even claimed that the war ‘cured him of his Garrisonian abolitionism and his democratic republicanism.’<sup>1085</sup>

Turning to the Chartists in America, Ray Boston argued that the idea that radicals supported the North ‘belong[s] more to the mythology of Anglo-American relations during the Civil War than to the facts of history.’<sup>1086</sup> He then explores the views of the ‘pro-South’ Chartists Bray, Campbell, and Devyr, who, Boston argues, were hostile to the capitalist North and its system of wage-slavery.<sup>1087</sup> These three figures, however, held three different views on the South and slavery. Of the three, only Devyr fits Boston’s description. Devyr had a long record of hostility to abolitionism, which he believed was a distraction from the real issue of land reform. He detested the Republican Party who he believed had stolen and watered down the NRA’s homestead policy. When Lincoln was elected, he concluded that the South had every right to leave. Although he was no friend of the ‘Southern Senators, and “chivalrics” generally’ who ‘were indeed insolent, inflated aristocrats’ and ‘required a lesson which would teach them man’s equality’, ‘the Northern slave-drivers of the factories... were even more detestable—adding hypocrisy to inhumanity’.<sup>1088</sup> This view was an established strand of British radical discourse that had been powerfully articulated by figures such as Cobbett and O’Brien.<sup>1089</sup> Another who held it was Campbell, who saw abolitionism as a plot by the English aristocracy and ‘pseudo-philanthropists’ to destabilise the United States and safeguard monarchical institutions.<sup>1090</sup> Campbell did not, however, endorse secession. He argued that the South was waging war ‘to destroy the best system of

<sup>1083</sup> Blackett, *Divided*, pp. 9, 17–18, 22–23, 25, 26, 71, 91, 93, 108–110. See also Horace Greeley’s support for the right of secession in 1860, *New York Tribune*, 17 and 20 November, 7 December 1860.

<sup>1084</sup> Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Reform Industrialization*, pp. 132–70; Robert Hall and Stephen Roberts, ‘Introduction,’ *William Aitken*, pp. 10–11; Blackett, *Divided*, pp. 117–119, 170, 173–74, 176–77, 186, 211

<sup>1085</sup> Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 119.

<sup>1086</sup> Boston, *British Chartists*, p. 57.

<sup>1087</sup> Boston, *British Chartists*, ch. 6.

<sup>1088</sup> Devyr, *Odd Book*, p. 111.

<sup>1089</sup> Hollis, ‘Anti-Slavery and Working-Class Radicalism’; O’Brien, *The Rise, Progress, and Phases of Human Slavery*, esp. parts 7 and 8; Turner, ‘Chartism, Bronterre O’Brien and the “Luminous Political Example of America”’, pp. 63, 66–69; Boston, *British Chartists in America*, Ch. 6; Garrison, *Before the Socialists*, pp. 40–45.

<sup>1090</sup> For Campbell, see Andrew Heath, “The producers on the one side, and the capitalists on the other”: Labor Reform, Slavery, and the Career of a Transatlantic Radical,’ *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 13, no. 2 (August, 2012), pp. 199–227.

government that was ever founded in the ingenuity of man'. He thus supported the Union during the War, if not the Republican Party, and bitterly denounced Northern Democrats who refused to support Lincoln and the Union as traitors.<sup>1091</sup> So, Devyr was anti-abolitionism and pro-secession while Campbell was also anti-abolitionism but anti-secession. Bray completed the set, for he was pro-abolition and pro-secession. Bray defended secession as a republican right to nationhood and argued against the Unionist cause on the basis of the old-Painite shibboleth that previous generations could not bind the present.<sup>1092</sup> On the issue of slavery, he argued that as the Union was founded on a compromise with slavery, and thus only by changing the Constitution could the 'well-meaning crusade against African slavery' succeed.<sup>1093</sup> The same argument had been loudly promoted by Garrisonians, who maintained that *Northern* secession from the Union was the best way to secure emancipation. The American wing of the movement swiftly dropped this position as the war fervour took hold, but scores of their British colleagues continued to see the break-up of the Union as the most effective path to emancipation, while many more refused to endorse war as a tool to implement it.<sup>1094</sup>

The South's right to secede, then, attracted support for multiple reasons. Few Britons, however, took up arms in its defence. Ideology aside, the South was at a disadvantage compared to the North because, ironically, the slave-based labour force it was fighting to maintain deprived it of a share of the stream of European migrants who made up around 40% of the North's fighting force. The US census of 1860 recorded 433,294 English, 108,518 Scots, and 45,763 Welsh in the United States, but just 25,559 of them lived in those states that would form the Confederacy (17,119 English, 7,109 Scots, and 950 Welsh).<sup>1095</sup> There were, nevertheless, a few instances of Chartists residing in the South. Matthew Mark Trumbull, for example, worked in Richmond for a brief time, but he was chased out of town for his abolitionism.<sup>1096</sup> Robert Crowe was likewise nearly lynched in Georgia after he was identified as an abolitionist, as were Redpath,

<sup>1091</sup> Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization, 1606-1865* vol. 2 (Third Edition: New York, 1966), pp. 962–63.

<sup>1092</sup> [John Francis Bray], *American Destiny: what shall it be Republican or Cossack* (New York, 1864).

<sup>1093</sup> Bray, *American Destiny*, p. 11.

<sup>1094</sup> Blackett, *Divided*, pp. 17–18, 26, 56–57, 75, 107–109.

<sup>1095</sup> Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 85.

<sup>1096</sup> Matthew Mark Trumbull, *Articles and Discussions on the Labour Question* (Chicago, 1890), p. 34.

Realf, and Clubb.<sup>1097</sup> When the War started, many of the Britons who did live in the South used the British consulates to escape conscription.<sup>1098</sup> These men had married, voted, acquired property, and, in some cases, joined the militia, and the South understandably considered them *de facto* citizens. Britain's declaration of neutrality, which forbade British subjects from participating on either side, offered them a way out.<sup>1099</sup> One example of a Briton who took this escape route was Trevellick. When the Confederates attempted to press him into their navy, he refused to 'bear arms against Freedom' and used his British citizenship to secure passage to the North.<sup>1100</sup> The Confederates would later close the exit door by expelling the British Consuls.<sup>1101</sup>

The South's version of freedom, therefore, attracted advocates but not soldiers. The Northern cause rallied both. The most eloquent framer of the Union's fight for freedom was President Lincoln. In his first annual message to Congress in 1861, Lincoln asserted that 'the insurrection is largely, if not exclusively, a war upon the first principle of popular government—the rights of the people.'<sup>1102</sup> Cast in such terms, many European migrants saw the Civil War a continuation of the struggles they had participated in their home countries. Indeed, America's republican ideals were the reason they migrated in the first place.<sup>1103</sup> An English-born corporal in an Ohio regiment, for example, explained to his wife that the reason why he re-enlisted was because 'It will be not for my country and my children but for liberty all over the world that I risked my life. If liberty should be crushed here, what hope would there be for the cause of human progress anywhere else? '<sup>1104</sup> An Irish private likewise told his father back in Ireland that 'This is my country as much as the man who was born on the soil. I have as much interest in the maintenance of... the integrity of the nation as any other man... This is the first test of a modern free government in the act of

<sup>1097</sup> Robert Crowe, *The reminiscence of Robert Crowe*, pp. 22–26.

<sup>1098</sup> Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 86.

<sup>1099</sup> Milledge Bonham, *The British Consuls in the Confederacy* (New York, 1911), pp. 79, 91 and 137; Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 86; Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkleman, *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*, pp. 205–206.

<sup>1100</sup> Hicks, *Life*, p. 35.

<sup>1101</sup> Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkleman, *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*, p. 206.

<sup>1102</sup> Abraham Lincoln: 'First Annual Message,' 3 December 1861, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29502>.

<sup>1103</sup> Don Doyle, *Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York, 2013)

<sup>1104</sup> George Hovey Cadman Papers, no. 122, *Southern Historical Collection*, The Wilson Library, University Carolina at Chapel Hill [http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/c/Cadman,George\\_Hovey.html](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/c/Cadman,George_Hovey.html)

sustaining itself against internal enemys [sic]... if it fails all tyrants will succeed the old cry will be sent forth from the aristocrats of Europe that such is the common lot of all republics.<sup>1105</sup> The Welshman Thomas Prosser wrote to a friend in Wales in 1863 that the War was 'the most important in the history of all governments of the world because the rebellion endangers human rights not only in America but throughout the world – so pray for us.'<sup>1106</sup>

After Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, the North was also fighting for a 'new birth of freedom'. The Proclamation, however, was not welcomed by all. Many were fighting to maintain the Union, not free the slaves. Dean Mahin has suggested that the English and Scots (but not the Welsh) were lukewarm on abolition. Conceding a scarcity of evidence, he cites just two Scottish soldiers in Mississippi who were hostile.<sup>1107</sup> The Welsh are spared due to T. G. Hunter's research, which has uncovered thousands of letters and articles written in Welsh about the Civil War.<sup>1108</sup> The anti-slavery tradition, however, was a deeply ingrained part of British culture that cut across class, political, and national divides.<sup>1109</sup> Although anti-slavery sentiment may have waned by the 1860s, slavery was an important filter through which Britons understood the Civil War. A Confederate agent working to secure British diplomatic recognition likened the British sensibility on slavery as 'akin to patriotism'. In an effort to win over British hearts and minds, Confederate agents were forced to concede that the South would work towards gradual emancipation.<sup>1110</sup> After the Emancipation Proclamation, however, British opinion swung overwhelming behind the Union.<sup>1111</sup>

Most of the Chartist exiles surveyed in this Chapter were abolitionists. Robert Crowe was active in the New York Central Republican Club, the Lincoln Club, and the Union League.<sup>1112</sup> Another New Yorker, Henry Clubb, volunteered for the Union Army in

<sup>1105</sup> Cited in McPherson, *Cause and Comrades*, p. 113.

<sup>1106</sup> Cited in Alan Conway, *Welsh in American: Letters from the Immigrants* (Cardiff, 1961), p. 293–94.

<sup>1107</sup> Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 30.

<sup>1108</sup> Mahin, *Blessed*, p. 31.

<sup>1109</sup> Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, 2012)

<sup>1110</sup> Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, p. 54

<sup>1111</sup> James McPherson, "'The Whole Family of Man': Lincoln and the Last Best Hope Abroad', in Robert May (ed.), *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim* (Gainesville, Florida, 1995), pp. 131–158. Also, Blackett, *Divided*, pp. 24–35, 75, 87 95–96.

<sup>1112</sup> Crowe, *Reminiscences*, pp. 24, 26, 27.

1862. Clubb migrated to America in 1853 and soon gained minor notoriety for a series of anti-slavery articles in the *New York Tribune*.<sup>1113</sup> In 1856, he founded a colony in Kansas committed to abstinence from meat and alcohol and anti-slavery.<sup>1114</sup> After the colony had failed, he moved to Grand Haven, Michigan, where he edited the Republican newspaper *The Clarion*, which had the largest circulation in north-western Michigan.<sup>1115</sup> Despite his pacifism, Clubb volunteered for the Union Army in 1862, serving as a Captain and Assistant Quartermaster in the 17th US Army Corps. He survived a bullet wound at second Battle of Corinth (3 October 1862), which reportedly shredded his naturalisation papers. At the Siege of Vicksburg (18 May–4 July 1863), he served General Ulysses Grant as master of river transportation, but lost two sons in the fighting.<sup>1116</sup>

For the Chartist cabal in Kansas, the Civil War had begun in the mid-1850s, and each was ready to step-up when the conflict was nationalised. Each, that is, except James Redpath. As Hinton wrote, Redpath had done ‘so much to make the conflict between freedom and slavery inevitable, [but] he failed utterly to make himself a perceptible favor in the great struggle that arose’.<sup>1117</sup> On the eve of war, his attention turned to Haiti, the independent republic founded by a slave revolt, where he spent the first two years of the war as the official Haitian lobbyist for diplomatic recognition and the director of Haiti’s campaign to attract free-black emigrants from the United States and Canada.<sup>1118</sup> Realf, Williams, and Hinton, however, served with distinction. Realf was a captain in the Union army and was discharged as a brevet lieutenant-colonel.<sup>1119</sup> Phillips turned down a well-paid job as a war correspondent to fight for the Union. After raising troops in Kansas, he served as a Colonel and Brigade commander of the Union Cherokee Indian Regiments.<sup>1120</sup> Richard Hinton also helped raise soldiers in

<sup>1113</sup> *Vegetarian Magazine*, January 1898.

<sup>1114</sup> *New York Herald*, 28 May 1856.

<sup>1115</sup> *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory* (Michigan, 1863), vol. 1, p. 41.

<sup>1116</sup> *Vegetarian Magazine*, January 1898; *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1905; James Gregory, ‘A Michegander, A Patriot, and Gentleman: H. S. Clubb, President of the Vegetarian Society of America’, *The Kansas Collection Online*: [www.kancoll.org/voices\\_2001/0701gregory.htm](http://www.kancoll.org/voices_2001/0701gregory.htm)

<sup>1117</sup> Hinton, ‘Pens’, p. 379.

<sup>1118</sup> James Redpath Collection, Schomberg Centre for the Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand*, pp. 61–83.

<sup>1119</sup> Hinton, *John Brown and his men*, p. 567; Rossiter Johnson, *Little Classics: Biographical Sketches of Authors Represented in this Series* (Boston, 1876), p. 215

<sup>1120</sup> Hinton, ‘Pens’, pp. 376–77; ‘The War in the Far West: Movements of Col. Phillips, with the Indian Brigade’, *New York Times*, 2 May 1863.

Kansas and served as a Colonel. His regiment, the First Kansas Colored Volunteers, was the first in America to recruit black troops, and Hinton was the first authorised to do so.<sup>1121</sup> He led the First Kansas Colored Volunteers through three years of warfare, and published an account of the war in Missouri and Kansas in 1865.<sup>1122</sup> In February 1862, Hinton also established the Kansas Emancipation League to 'bring about emancipation throughout the whole land'. Its more immediate purpose, however, was to establish 'a practical organisation where we may prove that liberty knows no color.'<sup>1123</sup> Responding to the influx of four thousand 'contrabands', the name given to fugitive slaves by the Union Army, that had fled to Kansas, the League sought to provide relief, education, and jobs.<sup>1124</sup> After the War, Hinton was appointed Inspector General of the Freedman's Bureau, the body responsible for the welfare of former slaves.<sup>1125</sup>

It was later reported that Hinton worked as an undercover agent in the South, where he posed as a sympathetic Englishman.<sup>1126</sup> If he did so, he was probably sent by Pinkerton, who became Lincoln's first director of intelligence. Pinkerton famously foiled an assassination plot against the President in 1861.<sup>1127</sup> The most prominent Chartist Civil War soldier, however, was Matthew Mark Trumbull. Born in Westminster in 1826, Trumbull spent his teenage years roaming London and the Home Counties 'on the tramp' in search of work as a bricklayer. He recollects in his old age how he 'flung' himself 'headlong' into Chartist movement. 'Its high purpose, and its delirious enthusiasm attracted me', he wrote, 'We were ready to storm the Tower of London as Frenchmen stormed the Bastille.'<sup>1128</sup> One Sunday evening in 1846, Trumbull met with other Chartists to study that week's *Northern Star*, which

<sup>1121</sup> 'The Kansas Negro Regiment', *Liberator*, 21 November 1863; Richard Hinton to *Boston Herald*, 7 August 1887; Richard Hinton, 'Negro Enlistments and the Negro Element', *Belford's Magazine*, May 1889; *Springfield Republican*, 23 June 1901 and 8 December 1901; *Albuquerque daily citizen*, 2 January 1902; *Dundee Evening Post*, 26 December 1901; *Aberdeen Journal*, 1 January 1902; Connelley, 'Col. Richard Hinton', p. 491; Hollis, 'Richard J Hinton: Lincoln's Reluctant Biographer', p. 76.

<sup>1122</sup> Richard Hinton, *The Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas* (Chicago, 1865).

<sup>1123</sup> Hinton to Sumner, 24 February 1862.

<sup>1124</sup> Richard Hinton, *Address of the Kansas Emancipation League: To Friends of Impartial Freedom* (Topeka, 1862)

<sup>1125</sup> Evidence to the Freedmen Inquiry Commission, United States American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission Records, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>1126</sup> *Springfield Republican*, 23 August 1901; Hollis, 'Reluctant Biographer', pp. 75–76.

<sup>1127</sup> Davenport-Hines, 'Pinkerton'; Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkleman, *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*, p. 454.

<sup>1128</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, pp. 18–19.

contained a copy of the constitution of Wisconsin. In the ensuing discussion, one of his party asked ‘here is a land where the Charter is already law; where there is plenty of work and good wages for all; why not go there?’ Trumbull recalled that ‘the question sounded logical; if the Charter was not to be obtained in England, why not go to America?’ Shortly afterwards, ‘I was on board an emigrant ship a-sailing Westward, Ho !’<sup>1129</sup>

In America, Trumbull worked a variety of labouring jobs, taught at a school, and fought in the American-Mexican War of 1846-7; he then became a lawyer, a representative in the Iowa State Congress, District Attorney, and the Collector of Internal Revenue, before retiring as a man of letters in Chicago, where he also practiced law.<sup>1130</sup> He received notoriety for his role as one of the lawyers for the anarchists charged for the Haymarket tragedy, a case which led to the establishment of Amnesty International.<sup>1131</sup> The achievement of which he was most proud, however, was rising to the rank of Brigadier General in the Civil War.<sup>1132</sup> His success, he wrote, illustrated ‘the variety of opportunities which existed in America at the time, and the chances offered to the “lower orders” for promotion to a higher social plane.’<sup>1133</sup> For Trumbull, the Civil War was first and foremost a struggle for freedom. As a friend noted, ‘Some may have joined the army in those days simply to preserve the union of State—not so General Trumbull. He joined the army and participated in that great conflict for the purpose of freeing the negro.’<sup>1134</sup> Trumbull took pride in freeing every slave that entered his camp, not because they were ‘contraband of war’, ‘a mischievous pre-tense, which proved to be a sophism both in ethics and politics’, but ‘because he was a man.’<sup>1135</sup> When a hundred-gun salute rang out to celebrate Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Trumbull ‘easily

<sup>1129</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, p. 20.

<sup>1130</sup> Ray Boston, ‘General Matthew Mark Trumbull: Respectable Radical’, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, vol. 66, no. 2 (Summer, 1973), pp. 159–176.

<sup>1131</sup> Matthew Mark Trumbull, *Haymarket: Was it a Fair Trial?* (Chicago, 1887); Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1984), pp. 117, 305–306, 409, 420.

<sup>1132</sup> The most detailed account of Trumbull service can be found in Guy Logan, *Roster and Record of Iowa Troop in the Rebellion*, 6 vols. (1908–1911), <http://iagenweb.org/civilwar/books/logan/mil609.htm>. See also, Kenneth Lyftogt, *Iowa’s Forgotten General: Matthew Mark Trumbull and the Civil War* (Iowa City, 2005).

<sup>1133</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, p. 39.

<sup>1134</sup> *Open Court*, 17 May 1894

<sup>1135</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, p. 272.

translated the speech that came from the lips of those hundred guns. It was this, "All men are created equal."<sup>1136</sup>



Gen. M. M. Trumbull, c. 1890. Trumbull, *Articles and Discussions of the Labour Question* (Chicago, 1890).

Like Hinton, Redpath, Realf, and Williams in Kansas, Clubb and Crowe in New York, and Ernest Jones, George Julian Harney, and many other Chartists in Britain, Trumbull did not distinguish between the fight against slavery and the struggle for democracy. As he wrote in his autobiography,

consciousness that I was a free citizen whose vote was equal in power to that of a millionaire, made life not only worth living, but a revelry of enjoyment. When the high-caste party challenged the low-caste party to fight it out, I stood by my order, the low-caste party, and fought it out on that line, not only all summer, but for four summers,

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<sup>1136</sup> Trumbull, *Jefferson*, pp. 7–8.

and four winters too... At the end of the dispute it was my supreme luxury to "stand up stiddy in the ranks," as the low-caste banner went up and the high-caste banner went down, and I saw the flag of slavery furled forever.<sup>1137</sup>

The opinions and actions of Chartists in the Civil War fit, broadly speaking, with radicals and former Chartists back in Britain. On both sides of the Atlantic, Chartists can be found advocating the Confederate cause. They were, however, a minority. On the whole, Chartists proved more receptive to the North's narrative of freedom and democracy than to the South's narrative of freedom and nationhood.

#### **IV. 'CHARTISM IN BOTH WORD AND SENTIMENT'**

In the postbellum period, the Chartists in America took up new causes in the name of liberty. Hinton followed many abolitionists into socialism; Redpath embraced Fenianism; and Devyr continued his life-long commitment to land reform.<sup>1138</sup> Many others, as we have seen, participated in trade unionism; while Pinkerton became their nemesis. Andrew Carnegie, 'the child of Chartism', represented another strand of the Chartist legacy.<sup>1139</sup> For Carnegie, his accumulation of vast riches was itself a tribute to democracy, and he probably spoke for many others with more modest success. As Paul Krause has argued, Carnegie held throughout his life Chartism's 'most reductive principle' that linked prosperity with free access to the ballot, and thus 'did not recognize that inequality might arise from sources other than the denial of the suffrage.'<sup>1140</sup> Yet in the name of the same republican values, he denounced inherited wealth, endowed thousands of libraries across America, Britain, and around the world, bankrolled Gladstone's Liberal Party, and even funded a syndicate of newspapers in Britain to spread American republicanism.<sup>1141</sup>

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<sup>1137</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, pp. 82–83.

<sup>1138</sup> For Hinton, see *New York Times*, 29 September 1887, 30 July 1887; *Northern American Review*, January 1885. For Redpath, McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand*. And Devyr see his autobiography, Devyr, *Odd Book*.

<sup>1139</sup> For Carnegie and Chartism, see Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography*, p. 10; Letters to Cousin Dos, 18 August 1853; Letter to Uncle Lander, 30 May 1853, and box 248: 'Autobiography notes', fols. 1, 4, in Andrew Carnegie papers, Library of Congress; Burton Hendrick, *The Life of Carnegie* (New York, 1932), pp. 6–40;

<sup>1140</sup> Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880–1892, The Politics and Culture of Steel* (Pittsburgh, 1992), p. 234.

<sup>1141</sup> A. S. Eisenstadt, *Carnegie's Model Republic: Triumphant Democracy and the British-American Relationship* (New York, 2007)

The competing narratives of what Chartism was also continued into the Gilded Age. Was Chartism a foreign ‘Other’ or the extension of American principles? Among those who argued it was the former was *Morning Oregonian*, which complained in 1891 about ‘noxious American growths that have come up from emigrant, transplanted English Chartism.’ The newspaper explained how ‘the popular industrial vagaries and economic errors of the day in England and the United States had their root in English Chartism of 1837 to 1848... much of what was evil survives in the popular unreason of the day, on both sides of the ocean.’ This included ‘the communism, socialism and paternalism’ of the ‘Farmers Alliance, the labor unions and the G. A. R. [Grand Army of the Republic]’, which ‘not only [go] back to English Chartism for its origin, but even for its stock phrases and shibboleth.’<sup>1142</sup> Similarly hostile, *Galveston Daily News* drew on the example of ‘the sober, honest, and moderate people of England as an instance of what can be done by the concerted action of good citizens in this country against those deadly foes of law and liberty—Communism and Trade Unionism.’<sup>1143</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, the negative narrative was also propagated by old General Trumbull. ‘Much of the communistic, socialistic passion now throbbing in American controversy’, he wrote, ‘is Chartism in both word and sentiment. It is greatly indebted to the Chartist both for popular epithets and literary style.’ In Trumbull’s analysis, Chartism was defeated in 1848, but ‘staggered about England for some time after that, and then emigrated to America, where it is becoming active and aggressive under another name.’ Trumbull defined the American version of Chartism as ‘the political form of social discontent’ which ‘Though honest in purpose and just in principle... its character has changed very little even under the freedom of republican institutions.’<sup>1144</sup> In the labour struggles of the Gilded Age, Trumbull saw a repeat of the moral force versus physical force debates of his Chartist days. Addressing America workers, he wrote how ‘the labor struggles of my childhood, youth and early manhood, [have] covered [me] all over with bruises and scars, and with some wounds that will never be healed.’ He resisted, however, justifications for political violence. ‘It is neither wise nor

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<sup>1142</sup> *Morning Oregonian*, 29 August 1890. A nearly identical article was also published four years later in *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 31 May 1894. See also, *Morning Oregonian*, 15 November 1887. See also, *Public Ledger*, 27 May 1872; *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 8 February 1891; *The Weekly Sentinel and Wisconsin Farm Journal*, 12 February 1891

<sup>1143</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 5 August 1877.

<sup>1144</sup> *Belford's Magazine*, July 1890.

patriotic to persuade working men that their moral resources are exhausted, and there is no reform power in the ballot, in the press, and in public opinion. The statement is not true; and the men who make it present us with a dilemma of double despair.' Unlike in the 'labour struggles of my childhood', American workers had the vote and thus the power to effect change. 'So long as I have the ballot', he concluded, 'I am a friend of order; take it away from me and I become a revolutionist'.<sup>1145</sup>

If Trumbull feared much of what he saw in 'American Chartism', he rejoiced at the progress of British Chartism. Unlike Chartism in America, British Chartism had 'bore wholesome fruit under [the] wiser cultivation' of the Liberal Party, the statesman of which had examined 'how much political truth lay in the principles of Chartism, and how much justice was contained in its demands.' 'Stripped of its ragged and rough exterior,' he continued, the Liberals 'saw Chartism inspired by justice, charity, self-sacrifice, and an earnest love of liberty. Reforms in harmony with ethical Chartism were begun, and they have steadily continued until the essential demands of the Charter are nearly won.'<sup>1146</sup> For this old Chartist at least, by the century's end, America had much to learn from democratic Britain.

The progress of democracy in Britain was also celebrated by sympathetic elements within the American press.<sup>1147</sup> The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* wrote in 1882 that 'The souls of the Chartists of Great Britain are marching on very rapidly at present. There is no immediate prospect of the abolition or rank and title, but universal suffrage has become almost an accomplished fact.' This was, the paper believed, the fulfilment of 'fidelity to the principles of Anglo-Saxon growth' which could be traced back to the Barons wrestling the Magna Carta from King John at Runnymede, through the Puritans of the seventeenth century, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the American Revolution, before beginning its modern period with the Reform Act and the Chartist movement. Although America 'had gone ahead a little. Great Britain has almost caught up with us'.<sup>1148</sup> Two years later the same newspaper noted that 'the England of to-day would, to the English governors of a few years ago, have seemed to have been a thoroughly revolutionary institution. The moral is, that Englishmen have

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<sup>1145</sup> Trumbull, *Articles*, pp. 72, 88.

<sup>1146</sup> *Belford's Magazine*, July 1890.

<sup>1147</sup> *Gunton's Magazine of American Economics and Political Science*, February 1896.

<sup>1148</sup> *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, 2 January 1882.

learned some valuable lessons from America, among which is the truism that the people know pretty much what they want, and are the safest political guides where they are completely trusted'.<sup>1149</sup> This was a judgement with which the remaining Chartists on both sides of the Atlantic would have agreed.

## CONCLUSION

America loomed large in the Chartist imagination as an inspiration of actually-existing-democracy, a source of ideas, and a refuge to which many Chartists eventually migrated. In America Chartism had admirers and detractors, supports and opponents. It was seen as both a swarm of 'pedantic Philosophers' hostile to the principles of American liberty and as the heir to the politics of the Founding Fathers. What was common to all of these depictions, positive and negative, is that they interpreted Chartism as a body of ideas. To properly situate Chartism in the transatlantic context in which it belongs, it has been argued here that we must do so too. Another reason for the latter was given by Richard Hinton in 1883. Hinton was called to testify before a Senate Committee investigating the relationship between labour and capital, established in the midst of widespread industrial unrest. Hinton told the committee, 'I am an American by choice and by brain, feeling, [and] conviction', but also, 'I am an Englishman by birth... [and] I have been backward and forward, and have kept up the interest that belongs to my birthright'.<sup>1150</sup> Despite being called the 'Grand Old Man of America' by a British newspaper upon his death, Hinton, according to an American abolitionist friend, 'never entirely threw off his English accent, nor those traits of the English class from which he sprung'.<sup>1151</sup> Hinton and the other Chartists surveyed in this Chapter are a demonstration of why we should take seriously British-American radicals.

To bring this chapter to a close, we should revisit the story of another transatlantic radical, Henry Clubb. After the War, Clubb returned to Michigan where he edited newspapers, became a State Senator, and an official of the Universal Peace Union.<sup>1152</sup>

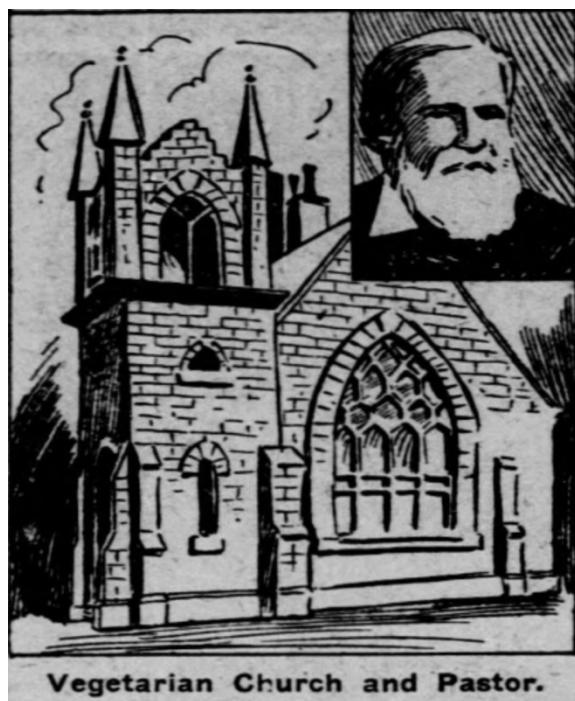
<sup>1149</sup> *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, 17 February 1884.

<sup>1150</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report... upon the Relations between Capital and Labour*, 48th Congress, vol. II (1885), p. 434.

<sup>1151</sup> *Springfield Republican*, 24 December 1901.

<sup>1152</sup> *Vegetarian Messenger*, January 1896; *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1905.

His last calling was as the pastor of the Philadelphia Bible Christian Church, a vegetarian congregation, and as President of the American Vegetarian Society.<sup>1153</sup> Clubb's vegetarian church also had a Chartist connection. It was one of only two Bible Christian Churches in the world, the other based in Manchester.<sup>1154</sup> During the Chartist years, the latter Church was the centre of Manchester Chartism. Led by the 'Chaplain of the Manchester Chartists', James Scholefield, the Church provided the Chartists with an organisational base and school. In 1842, the Church hosted the National Chartist Convention.<sup>1155</sup> We return to Clubb here because he was, as far as we are aware, the last living Chartist. As an agrarian, abolitionist, republican, and migrant, Clubb embodied many of the important strands of Chartist political thought on both side of the Atlantic.



Henry Clubb and his vegetarian Church. *Western Kansas News*, 21 November 1903

<sup>1153</sup> *Evening Times-Republican*, 20 December 1902; *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1905; *Western Kansas World*, 21 November 1903; *Manchester Democrat*, 7 January 1903; *San Francisco Call*, 16 October 1904; *The Western News*, 28 January 1903; *Evening Bulletin*, 28 September 1909.

<sup>1154</sup> *Manchester Democracy* (Iowa), 7 January 1903; *Western News*, 28 January 1903.

<sup>1155</sup> Pickering and Tyrrell, "In the Thickest of the Fight"



# CONCLUSION

Chartism was the largest and most important popular political movement of the nineteenth century. It mobilised, in different ways, hundreds of thousands of people across the United Kingdom. Behind the political demands outlined in the People's Charter, 'the political textbook of the millions', Chartist was made up of a dense bureaucratic network of organisations, governed by written constitutions, committees, and elections. Chartist was also a rich associational culture, which in some places was a total way of life. Chartists could educate their children at a Chartist school, worship at a Chartist Church, and seek recreation at Chartist soirees, pubs, and cafes. Central to this culture was education, provided by institutions such as reading groups, shared libraries, and lectures, and a plethora of reading material. Under Chartist's auspices, a generation learnt about politics, organisation, and leadership. As Malcolm Chase concluded, if Chartist was a failure in its own terms—none of the six points were enacted during its lifetime—the movement can nevertheless be considered a multitude of small victories, as Chartists took the skills honed during the tumultuous 1840s into local government and later Liberal Party activism.<sup>1156</sup>

This thesis has added to this picture an account of Chartist political thought. It has argued that the Chartists were theoretically articulate to a far greater degree than historians have appreciated. Rejecting the idea that *how* Chartists said things mattered more than *what* they said, this thesis has examined Chartist ideas along a broad front and placed the movement in its intellectual, political, and transatlantic contexts.

At the core of Chartist thought was the constitution. As historians of nineteenth-century politics have long recognised, the constitution was the master narrative of political discourse. What has not been satisfactorily uncovered until now is the depth of political thought that was expressed through constitutional language. The

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<sup>1156</sup> Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 340–360.

constitution was more than a narrative of politics or a populist discourse.<sup>1157</sup> It was also a way into, and a way of answering, deep questions about politics, liberty, and sovereignty. Although constitutional discourse was shared by the majority of political actors, Chartist constitutional language and arguments were distinctive. As Gareth Stedman Jones's argued, radicalism can be defined in terms of a critique of corrupt power. Unchecked power was not just corrupt but was corrupting, and thus only radical reform could purify the constitution. The central thrust of this critique was the economic argument that a venal political establishment had burdened the nation with taxes to pay for its debasement. As Stedman Jones, Peter Mandler, and Philip Harling have demonstrated, by the 1840s this discourse of 'Old Corruption' was outdated. Not only had Peel effectively removed visible forms of state intervention from the economy, but the policies of the fiscal-military state had been wound up in previous decades.<sup>1158</sup>

Chartist political thought, however, extended beyond corruption and taxation. After the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 the problem of state power became much more fundamental. The new Poor Law has received attention from historians exploring the development of social policy and the 'revolution in government', and social historians have explored the experience felt by communities at the loss of customary rights. From the perspective of this study, the new Poor Law must also be seen as a sweeping *constitutional* change, as consequential as the 1832 Reform Act. Chartists argued that it was as an unchristian attack on the poor that violated the laws of God and man. The perception that Parliament was not only corrupt and tyrannical but also in rebellion against the natural order did much to create an atmosphere of crisis in the 1830s. It was in this context that the *Book of Murder*, an anti-Poor Law tract which 'revealed' that the commissioners were preparing to use infanticide to control population numbers, became believable, for the limits of legislative power was an open question.<sup>1159</sup> It was also in this context that radical arguments became persuasive to an unprecedented number of people.

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<sup>1157</sup> For example, Joyce, *Visions of the People*; Vernon, *Politics and the People*.

<sup>1158</sup> Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism'; Philip Harling and Peter Mandler, 'From "Fiscal-Military" State to Laissez Faire, 1760–1850', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 32., no. 1 (1993), pp. 44–70; Philip Harling, *The Waning of "Old Corruption": The Politics of Economic Reform in Britain, 1779–1846* (Oxford, 1996).

<sup>1159</sup> [Anon], *The Book of Murder* (1839), in Claeys, *The Chartist Movement*, vol. 1.

The most influential anti-Poor Law theorist was William Cobbett, who popularised the precepts of natural law and, forced along by events, pushed them to evermore radical conclusions. In some senses, Cobbett has been well served by historians, but he is not usually considered for his political thought. This thesis, in contrast, has shown how Cobbett constructed a sophisticated, legally and historically grounded case against poor-law reform, which was then taken forward by the Chartists. We now require a more systematic enquiry of Cobbett's political thought.

Cobbett's and the Chartists' thought was a mixture of historical, legal, and theoretical arguments. The historical dimensions of Chartist thought have received by far the most attention. Historians have shown how nineteenth-century radicals and Chartists used key events of Britain's (usually England's) past to mobilise the people to action. By doing so, Chartists were placing themselves within a heroic time-spanning narrative of the people's struggle to 'recover' lost rights and liberties. This thesis has expanded the historical content of Chartist constitutional thought by revealing the central place of the law. As Chapter Two has maintained, Chartist constitutionalism rested on a synthesised reading of natural and common law. Much like Parliament, the law had been captured by wicked and corrupt men. However, properly conceived, the common law had an essential constitutional function. The Chartists believed that the common law was a source of popular authority that was rooted in the laws of nature and God, and thus outside of Parliamentary control. This understanding of constitutional law allowed Chartists to imagine that the British constitution was codified by laws of nature and, therefore, binding against Parliament. Chapter Three, moreover, showed how Chartists also took from natural law the framework of the state of nature–social compact–civil society, within which they theorised an account of the origin of the constitution. This account supplied the Chartists with a second argument against Parliamentary power, namely that political authority could only be exercised on the consent of the governed.

The concepts of a state of nature and social compact also provided the starting point of Chartist political economy. In response to the economic doctrines of Malthus (and Smith), the Chartists argued not only that nature *could* provide subsistence for all, but that the social compact guaranteed it. The conception of the state of nature that Chartists appealed to most often was first forwarded by Hugo Grotius. Grotius argued

that in society all 'men' continued to hold a property claim within God's original grant of the land to all mankind. In times of scarcity, this right superseded the right to private property, and thus the needy could legally take from the rich to survive. The new Poor Law was seen to deny the God-given right to subsistence, which broke the compact upon which society rested, and thus justified the dissolution of the property that the compact had created. Ideas of material plenty and a natural right to a stake in the soil also informed the Chartist's 'republican' ideal of citizenship, which valorised the independent male property holder, who lived by his own toil, was armed against domestic and foreign foes, and benefited from the natural and healthy properties of the land. These ideas were trumpeted by O'Connor's Land Plan, an ambitious attempt to pre-empt the introduction of the Charter by reforming the ownership of the land into a system of small farms that would provide material plenty for all.

Chartist political theory also, of course, concerned democratic rights. In the historiography, radical and Chartist theories tend to be divided between the distinct categories of natural and constitutional rights. Chartists, therefore, argued *both* that they had a lost constitutional right to the suffrage *and* that the suffrage was a natural right that belonged to all. The authority of a constitutional right rests on its legal existence, and the form of argumentation it supports relies on precedent. Natural rights, in contrast, emanate from the laws of nature and God and thus, at least in theory, do not derive authority from laws that are made by men. As Chapter Three argued, however, Chartists used a conception of rights that combined constitutional and universal categories in both practice *and* theory. The framework was again taken from natural law and social contract theory. The original contract that created society was believed to be an actual historical event, which the British Constitution either represented or included the essential rights that the contract had secured. In this form, Chartists were not slipping between different categories of right. Rather, natural rights were read into the historical narrative of constitutional development, and the latter was understood within a natural-right framework.

Chartists were adamant that only universal male suffrage *and* the other points of the Charter would suffice. Although there were traces of voting qualifications based on moral fitness—seen, for example, in the Charter's exclusion of the young, criminals, and the insane—in general, Chartists firmly rejected disqualifications for the franchise.

The major exception to restrictions on the vote was sex. Although there was a current within Chartism that advocated female suffrage, it was never strong and was easily surrendered to prioritise male rights. Moreover, those Chartist who did advocate female suffrage usually failed to do so on the basis of right. Instead, they made gendered arguments, such that female suffrage would lead to the better education of children and would better protect the domestic sphere. In the early phase of the movement, unprecedented numbers of women were mobilised. Female involvement, however, dropped over time as they faced increasingly marginalisation. Thus, although a protest against exclusion—namely of working-age men from the suffrage—Chartist thought maintained other types of exclusions. This had lasting consequences because in future male and female political radicalism would follow different paths.

Alongside the content of Chartist political thought, this thesis has also emphasised the centrality of an expanded notion of intellectual context. The latter includes the heritage of Chartist political thought and the sources from which it was drawn, the polemical context that Chartist arguments were a part of, and the social conditioning of Chartist intellectual culture. Stedman Jones's argument that radicalism was an extension of eighteenth-century political thought needs broadening beyond where Stedman Jones himself left it. Chartist political thought was not just traceable to the eighteenth century, for much of the material which Chartists read and reproduced in their newspapers was *from* the eighteenth century. By far the most popular authors were Paine and Cobbett. Although the latter was a near-contemporary of the Chartists, his thought was similarly rooted in eighteenth-century ideas. As one letter to *The Times* in 1834 put it, '[Cobbett] was the advocate of barbarism – he belonged to another age, to an age that was past, and he was happy to find him among his opponents.'<sup>1160</sup>

Chartism's eighteenth-century perspective informed their defence of a codified constitution and natural rights, and their opposition to influential nineteenth-century doctrines such as parliamentary sovereignty and Malthusian (and other forms) of political economy. Taking the temporal dimension to the Chartists' intellectual context further, it can be seen how Chartism was a product of a disjunction in the *intellectual*

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<sup>1160</sup> *The Times*, 17 June 1834. The letter was written by the political economist and Whig MP Robert Torrens.

condition Britain, a divide 'between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets.'<sup>1161</sup> The two nations were separated, of course, between the rich and the poor; a divide that was transferred into politics by the 1832 Reform Act's ten-pound franchise. However, there was also an intellectual dimension to this story. The widening of this void can be traced back to the French Revolution, the response to which changed how politics and society were viewed. It was in this context that critiques against natural right made a decisive breakthrough and questions of political legitimacy, which were so important to the Chartists, fell from the centre of political debate. The harsh backlash against political radicalism during the counter-revolution also led to the de-politicisation of political economy, a reimagining which led directly to a confrontation with political radicalism. Chartist, therefore, must be seen as a rejection of the way that nineteenth-century political thought had developed.

If Chartist political thought was viewed as hopelessly outdated in Britain, it is also important to note that this was a narrow British perspective. At the time, most Americans and Irish nationalists would have dismissed the view that there were no fundamental rights or laws.<sup>1162</sup> Furthermore, Chartist ideas belonged to 'the future' as much as to 'the past', for they re-emerged in the twentieth century, in the form of human rights, and would be powerfully asserted by movements for de-colonisation, nationhood, and civil rights, and ratified into national legal codes around the world, Britain, of course, being no exception.

Chartist political thought, therefore, should also be located in the transatlantic context of democratic movements in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Throughout this period, America exerted an immense influence. For the Chartists, America was not a historical model like the Anglo-Saxon past or Ancient Athens, nor a static example in the distant West. Rather, it was a democratic experiment, carried out by their kin, that was rooted in doctrines that they endorsed, shared, and attempted to replicate. Chartist constitutional thought drew on a strand of American political thought and Chartists appealed directly to American practices and documents

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<sup>1161</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845), part II, p. 76.

<sup>1162</sup> Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), pp. 97-99.

such as the Declaration of Independence. America was also essential to the Chartist conception of democracy. What the Chartist meant by ‘democracy’ was representative democracy, which was linked to America both in the history of ideas—it was the Americans who crafted the concept—and by the Chartists themselves. Finally, the close links between Chartist thought and America were perpetuated by Chartist migrants on the other side of the Atlantic. These Chartists were, in effect, Britain’s democratic exiles, who crossed the Atlantic at the same time as their better studied European counterparts. To better establish Chartism within this transnational context, further research is now required on the synergies between Chartism and the *popular* constitutional traditions of nations around the world.<sup>1163</sup>

Although Chartism has lost some of its paradigmatic significance since the ‘fall’ of class, it still has the potential to inspire and lessons to teach. One of the latter regards the inherent constitutionality of politics. The laws by which we are governed, and how we elect our masters, matter. Britain still celebrates its uncodified constitution, underwritten by a Whiggish narrative of history and clothed in Burkean platitudes. Yet major constitutional issues – national, institutional, democratic – remain unresolved. Under the watch of Britain’s creaking institutions, the democratic legitimacy of Parliament is being challenged in ways unseen for generations. On both the left and right of the political spectrum, there has been a revival of the category of ‘the people’ as the ultimate source of political authority, and a renewed discussion of sovereignty now lies at the centre of mainstream politics. The resurgence and proliferation of this rhetoric was itself the product of constitutional issues, first the national question in Scotland and then Britain’s relationship with the European Union. To understand the revival of popular constitutionalism in contemporary politics, and to think clearly about constitutional challenges, we might cast an eye back to the rich historical tradition of British constitutional thought. If we do so, Chartist political thought may prove to be as valuable as the canonical works of the history of political thought.

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<sup>1163</sup> For Europe, and especially France, see: Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830–1870* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 22–45; Iorwerth Prothero, ‘Chartism and French Radicalism in the 1830s and 1840s: A Comparison,’ *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (January 2013), pp. 33–49; Benoît Agnes, ‘A Chartist Singularity? Mobilizing to Promote Democratic Petitions in Britain and France, 1838–1848,’ *Labour History Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (January 2013), pp. 51–66.



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