The Imagined Community of Chartism

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ABSTRACT

In 1838, the London Working Men's Association published the People's Charter, based upon six fundamental points that would reform the electoral system and, by doing so, would improve the desperate, poverty-stricken conditions of the working-class. The campaign quickly became known as Chartism and would formally exist for twenty years.

During its lifetime, Chartism failed to achieve any of these six basic aims, an outcome that has led to much of the historical assessment of the movement focusing upon the causes of this 'failure', with a primary contributing factor being the internal disagreements and dissensions that lead to a perceived lack of unity.

This thesis does not attempt to dismiss the internal disputes that affected the movement, and recognises the impact they had upon its leadership and membership. However, it challenges the argument of disunity by asserting that twenty years of active campaigning that continued the struggle for electoral reform begun in the previous century and which laid the foundation for those reformers who came after it, would not have been possible within a fractured and discordant movement incapable of united action.

This thesis proposes that to recognise this strength of purpose, we should consider Chartism as more than a movement, that it was a community of common beliefs, common practice, shared ambitions and shared values, but also that, as it was a community that encompassed nearly all parts of Britain, it has to be considered as imagined. The concept of the imagined community was first proposed by Benedict Anderson in his analysis of the conditions that developed nations of 'horizontal comradeship' between peoples who have never met each other, and it is Anderson's work that provides the fundamental concept upon which the arguments in this thesis are based.

Contents

Acknowledgements iv

Chapter 1 Introduction and Historiography 1

Chapter 2 The events that shaped Chartism: Radicalism, Economics and Legislation 65

Chapter 3 Who were the Chartists? The people and ideas that created a movement 126

Chapter 4 How Chartism saw itself and how it was seen by others 180

Chapter 5 Tolerance and Loathing: Chartism's relationship with the middle-classes 229

Conclusion 300

Bibliography 330

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Firstly, I must express my thanks to the University of Strathclyde for providing me with this incredible opportunity; I was a long time out of education but the university was prepared take a chance on my staying the course and meeting the intellectual and academic challenge of postgraduate research. In particular, I’d like to thank Douglas Brodie for approving my application but, most of all, Richard Finlay for suggesting the idea in the first place, for championing my application, for acting as my supervisor and, as a result, for providing me with a level of encouragement, ideas, knowledge and constructive feedback without which I would not be able to present this thesis for examination. When I’ve had doubts, Richard has allayed them and when I’ve needed advice, he’s always been available to provide it. I cannot thank him enough.

I must also thank the staff at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. I spent so many hours there, asking for help, advice and material and they were always patient and courteous……and they always found the material I required.

I could not have contemplated undertaking this M. Phil without the support of my family. My children, all now adult, have frequently questioned my sanity and feigned an interest in Chartism for my benefit, but they have always provided words of encouragement when needed. It is a special thanks to my wife, Suzanne, without whose patience, understanding and good humour I may not have got past the first year.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late parents who provided me with quiet and unassuming encouragement throughout my life. I hope I have made them proud.

Chapter One: Introduction and Historiography

In 1976, J.F.C Harrison and Dorothy Thompson published the "*Bibliography of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1976*",[1] a comprehensive listing of the manuscript sources, contemporary printed sources (which included books, pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers, reports of trials, parliamentary papers and fiction, among others), unpublished secondary material (mainly theses for higher degrees) and published secondary material (mainly books and articles) that had been written directly about Chartism or on subjects upon which Chartism had a significant and substantial impact. It was a book that ran to two hundred pages of source material, of which the published secondary sources, material produced by historians following the demise of the Chartist movement, accounted for twenty per cent of the complete bibliography. In 1995, Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson and Stephen Roberts published "*The Chartist Movement: A New Annotated Bibliography*".[2] This built upon the work of Harrison and Thompson, and slightly widened the definition of what should be included beyond the version of 1976. The new bibliography showed that, in the intervening nineteen years, over 350 books and pamphlets had been published, over 250 articles written and over 130 theses on subjects that either were directly about Chartism or significantly related to it. In 2018, this bibliography was revised and updated with material either discovered or published since 1995 although, as Roberts notes ‘It will be seen that only a small amount of new manuscript material has been unearthed in the last two decades’.[3] Despite the lack of original source material, the number of secondary sources has significantly increased since the Roberts’ original edition in 1995. Within these secondary sources, many of the books have told the story of Chartism from its radical beginnings to its slow decline, highlighting both significant events chronologically and the dominant personalities that contributed to a movement that lasted approximately twenty years, with interpretations, on occasion, reflecting the political outlook of the author or challenging the prevailing orthodoxy.[4] Other books on Chartism have focused upon its place within the wider social, political and economic events of the Victorian period, some on its legacy and impact, while others have taken a narrower geographical view and looked at it from a local perspective, either nationally, as Scotland and Wales, or regionally, as England.[5]

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[1] Harrison JFC and Thompson Dorothy: *Bibliography of the Chartist Movement 1837-1976*, (Sussex 1978)

[2] Aston Owen, Fyson Robert and Roberts Stephen: *The Chartist Movement: A New Annotated Bibliography*, (London 1995)

Regardless of approach or emphasis, Dorothy Thompson was correct to say in the introduction to the 1976 bibliography, that ‘Chartism is a richly documented subject…’. As we shall see in this chapter, historians, in both general accounts and focused articles, have dissected Chartism and analysed each theme for its contribution to the movement's progress. This thesis endeavours to re-assemble it, to consider Chartism as a whole, still recognising the significance of its constituent parts but viewing it as a single entity and from a different analytical perspective. The chronological story of Chartism has been told on many occasions, particularly in the early histories, so there is limited scope for another narrative approach; rather, this thesis aims to consider whether there is a new way of assessing Chartism holistically, one that accepts its description as a movement but considers whether it can also be considered as something more substantial, one that provides a greater sense of collective identity and belonging. To consider this, we have turned to the idea of community and, particularly, Benedict Anderson's construct of the 'imagined community'.[6]

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[3] Roberts Stephen: *Annotated Bibliography of Chartism 1995-2018*, (Self Published 2018) 4

[4] See Saville, John: *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement*, (Cambridge 1990); Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*, (New York 1984); Hobsbawm, Eric: *The Age of Revolution 1789 – 1848*, (London 1995); Foster, John: *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, (London, 1974); Clark, JCD: *The Language of Liberty 1660 – 1832*, (Cambridge 1994); Ward JT: *Chartism*, (London, 1973) et al

[5] See Wright, Leslie: *Scottish Chartism*, (Edinburgh 1953); Wilson, Alexander: *The Chartist Movement in Scotland*, (Manchester 1970); Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies*, (London 1963): Thompson, Dorothy: *Chartism in Wales and Ireland*, (New York 1986); Barnsby, George: *The Working-Class Movement in the Black Country 1750-1867*, (Wolverhampton 1977); Cannon, John: *The Chartists in Bristol*, (London 1964); Frow, Edmund & Ruth: *Chartism in Manchester 1838-1858*, (Manchester 1980); Goodway, David: *London Chartism 1838-1848*, (Cambridge 1982)

The focus of Anderson's book is the rise of nationalism in colonial countries and, within this, he develops the idea of the nation state as an imagined community:

> 'it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[7]

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[6] Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London 1983)

[7] *Ibid.* 7

It was the capacity of people to visualise unknown others as somehow connected to themselves that defined the nation as an imagined community. Whilst Anderson focused his ideas on the development of post-colonial nations in South America and the Far East, Linda Colley believes the nation as an imagined community can be seen much closer to home:

> ‘By contrast, if we accept Benedict Anderson’s admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as ‘an imagined political community, and if we accept also that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties’. [8]

Anderson’s concept of the imagined community has achieved widespread intellectual acceptance in relation to the forging of national identity; this thesis will examine whether the idea can be applied to a movement such as Chartism as it can to a nation.

Anderson’s imagined community can also be seen as a constructivist idea, it is not the result of a long-held sense of national identity but rather arises from the shared experiences of its people, experiences that can foster strong feelings of *us* and *them*. This latter aspect is important when we consider Chartism as an imagined community, particularly in its relationship with the middle class and the rhetoric that accompanied it, for the portrayal of the middle class as the *other*, acting against the interests of the working class, is a recurring motif in the history of the movement. As Willie Thompson states in a chapter on Imagined Communities:

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[8] Colley, Linda: *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (Yale 1992) 5

> 'The identification in public discourse of supposed alien groups within a community, whether or not they are citizens of the state in question, who then serve as scapegoats for all manner of economic and social trouble and difficulties, has provided a major historical theme in twentieth and twenty-first century politics and social relations. This occurred most notoriously with reference to Jews but has been far from limited to them alone…'[9], an approach that allows for 'the conceptual identification of individuals with their social and communal grouping'.[10]

The idea of the *other*, the common enemy, as a focus for communal bonding is recognised by others as well as Anderson. In his book on social power, Michael Mann describes how the landowning wealthy in Athenian society self-identified in opposition to the inferior, unpropertied citizen community, the hoi polloi,[11] while Thompson notes that 'in earlier times the notion of Roman citizenship as a binding cement of identity surpassing those of class division, was a favourite trope of senatorial orators contrasting the strong, upright moral Roman citizen with feeble and degenerate easterners and Carthaginians or savage northern barbarians',[12] an attitude that was redolent of the middle class view of the working class in Victorian Britain, as we shall see later.

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[9] Thompson, Willie: *Work, Sex and Power: The Forces that shaped our history*, (London 2015) 150

[10] Ibid 150

[11] Mann, Michael: *Sources of Social Power, Volume I: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD1760,* (Cambridge 1996) 126

[12] Thompson, Willie: *Work, Sex and Power*, 148

These examples from Mann and Thompson introduce class as a perceived differentiator, something that would stimulate a collective identity against a common enemy, whether middle or working class, and the presence of class consciousness, particularly within the working class, has been the subject of extensive debate among historians of Chartism, something that will be addressed later in this chapter. However, there is no doubt that the language used by both classes to describe the other focused heavily on the perceived negative characteristics of the other – working class language was vituperative and damning, while that of the middle class was mainly patronising and critical. A common, vernacular language is a key element in Anderson's theory of imagined community – for him, it was the development of local languages and dialects that would supplant that of the controlling colonial power and help to bind the indigenous people together. For Chartism, it helped leaders and members focus upon a common enemy in a way that hid real differences within the movement, and these will also be discussed in later chapters. Such language was supported by the advent and growth of written material in the language of the people and made readily available to them through the advent of what Anderson describes as print technologies; as with language, the impact of the Chartist press cannot be underestimated in the dissemination of information and the reinforcement of ideas and prejudice.

Finally, Anderson also recognises the power of symbolism, whether as a visible entity or an action; for nations and their people these can be, for example, flags, standards and statues or, more potently, they can be a willingness for self-sacrifice: ‘The nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible……for so many millions, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings’.[13] As we shall see, while Chartists expressed a willingness to die for their cause, evident in occasional violent conflicts, they also found unity in the promotion of strikes, marches, direct dealing and mass rallies, accompanied by banners, pikes and red caps of liberty, while the establishment of Chartist churches, schools, reading rooms and assembly halls demonstrate a membership determined to assert its independence from the middle class.

Any community will encompass varying views and opinions, at times manifesting in disagreements; Chartism, as we shall see, was no different and sometimes worse, its internal leadership disputes descending into a war of words that was personal, vicious, and frequently more savage than the attacks on its external enemies. Yet, a community can accommodate difference by having a bedrock of fundamental beliefs or goals that encourage unity, and actions that then reinforce this; this thesis will examine if this applies to Chartism, to assess whether the appeal of electoral reform, and the social and economic benefits it was believed this would bring, was sufficient to bring Chartism together as a community and sustain it as a radical force.

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[13] Anderson Benedict: *Imagined Communities* 7

The research has drawn upon both primary and secondary sources. This opening chapter will focus exclusively upon secondary sources by looking at the historiography of the movement to identify the common themes about which historians have written and which are relevant to the specific topic of the thesis. The other chapters will lean heavily upon primary sources – newspapers, pamphlets, lectures, Hansard and autobiographies – with a particular emphasis upon the words and actions of those actually involved. As the thesis looks at the movement as a national entity, it will reference Chartist meetings and events across the country, drawing upon local and national newspapers, Chartist and non-Chartist, to provide reports and articles. There is no bias towards any geographic region but it is important to note that Scotland had a particularly active Chartist press and this is strongly represented in the primary sources. There were certain elements of the movement that, although present throughout the rest of the movement, were stronger in Scotland: in his early work on Scottish Chartism, Leslie Wright identifies the belief in moral force arguments, what may be termed enlightenment rather than violence, the development of Chartist churches with their consequent impact upon the established Church, and a strong belief in temperance.[14] The strength of the Chartist message and ambition was such, however, that the movement could embrace national preferences of focus and still maintain a consistent identity across the country. James Young, when looking at the radical involvement in agitation around the 1832 Reform Act, may be correct in claiming that the Scottish working class was the most class conscious and politically aware in Europe and carried a flame of nationalism resulting from the debate between Scottish economic prosperity and the influence of English legislation[15] but there is no substantial evidence to show that such sentiments drove the direction of Scottish Chartism or significantly influenced its contribution to the wider movement. As T.C. Smout described it, Chartism in Scotland remained firmly within the British movement and campaigned for reform at Westminster, not Scottish liberty. [16]

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[14] Wright, Leslie: *Scottish Chartism*, (Edinburgh 1953) 65-66, 87, 96-101

This thesis will, as stated, examine the concept of Chartism as an imagined community. To do this, it is necessary to identify the major themes that run through the history of the movement, themes that impact, positively or negatively, upon the ambition to create a unified community from an heterogenous membership, and which have been identified through a review of secondary sources. These themes, which will be briefly discussed in this chapter, are those events and ideas, both national and international, that influenced Chartist thinking, the wider aims of Chartism beyond franchise reform, the impact of class, class consciousness and its identity as a working class movement, the movement's relationship with other classes and campaigning organisations, together with the tactics employed, and finally the historiographical view of the movement's success or failure, and its legacy.

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[15] James Young: *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class 1774-2008*, (London 1979) 68-69
[16] Smout T.C.: *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, (London 1986) 238

It is essential to an appreciation of how Chartism developed as a movement, both intellectually and organisationally, that we recognise the ideas and events that so influenced the thinking of radicals and reformers that they were motivated to draft the People's Charter in 1837 and publish it the following year. Unsurprisingly, no single issue or event was responsible for this; these ideas and events were cumulative, each adding a layer but none in themselves so decisive that it triggered the decision to write the Charter. Most historians see Chartism as an extension and development of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century radicalism, where social and economic change and increasing working class consciousness saw older, traditional radicalism transformed into well organised political agitation.[17] For John Host, Chartism was a natural progression and reflected the changing times, particularly the development of manufacturing towns that saw the rapid growth of an urban working class. Gareth Stedman Jones traces this radical link back to the settlements of 1688 and 1714, identifying Chartism as a vehicle of mass aspiration for those he describes as excluded [18] although he is unconvinced by the arguments of a developing working-class consciousness or Chartism as a class movement. In Scotland, the influences may have been earlier; Edward Cowan & Richard Finlay link the movement's roots back to the Covenanters and the rebel tradition,[19] T.M. Devine makes a similar link to the Covenanting movement, suggesting that the latter's strength of religious ethos may explain the Chartists suspicion of physical force,[20] whilst Ian Donnachie and Gordon Hewitt identify Scottish Chartism as part of a tradition going back to Thomas Muir (1765-1799), The Scottish Friends of the People, Corresponding Societies and the United Scotsman of the 1790s.[21] The Friends of the People are particularly significant on the path to Chartism for, at their formation in 1792, they called for universal suffrage and annual parliaments. The link, however, between radical reform movements of the late eighteenth century and the reform movements of the first half of the following century needs to be qualified, according to Miles Taylor,[22] by the motives that drove each and he makes a distinction between Whig reformers and Chartists. Taylor believes that their demands were very different in what each wanted from parliamentary reform; Whig reform focused upon the restoration of the sovereignty of Parliament as an antidote to the growth of Crown and Executive power, citing a decline in the frequency of parliamentary elections, increasing absenteeism in the

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[17] Host, John: *Victorian Labour History*, (London 1998) 8-9

[18] Stedman Jones, Gareth: *Rethinking Chartism in Languages of Class in Studies in working class history 1832-1982*, (Cambridge 1983) 103

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[19] Macdonald, Catriona: *"Women and the Scottish Radical Tradition"* in Cowan, Edward and Finlay, Richard: *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, (Edinburgh 2002) 226

[20] Devine T.M: *The Scottish Nation 1700 – 2000*, (London 1999) 278-279

[21] Donnachie, Ian and Hewitt, Gordon: *A Companion to Scottish History,* (London 1989) 40

[22] Taylor, Miles: *Chartism and the Reform of Parliament* in Ashton, Owen, Fyson, Robert and Roberts, Stephen: *The Chartist Legacy*, (London 1999) 3-13

House of Commons and increasing interference by the Crown, leading to what William Cobbett (1763-1835) described as ‘old corruption’. Whilst two of the solutions proposed by the Whig reformers (shorter parliaments and a limited extension of the suffrage to enfranchise males liable to serve in the militia) would have met with the qualified approval of later Chartism, it is clear from the underlying argument that the Whigs did not regard Parliament as the problem but as the solution to restricting executive power. Chartists, however, saw Parliament and the electoral system as the problem and its reform as the solution, something that only Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832) at the time promoted albeit with little impact, although, as Taylor points out, his ideas did resurface in the 1830s as reform focus moved from ‘old corruption and towards the working of the House of Commons, providing the context for the People’s Charter’. Although Chartism may not have seen Parliament as the solution to the malign interference of the Crown and aristocracy, the movement was influenced by events in France at the end of the previous Century, and the social and political upheaval that could be effected by radical action. While Georges Soboul’s interpretation of the French Revolution as ‘essentially a political revolution of the bourgeoisie who were overthrowing a feudal *Ancien Regime*’ [23] has been challenged by later historians of the Revolution, many historians documenting the Chartist movement are content to recognise the impact of, for example, Jacobinism and the ready availability of Thomas Paine’s (1736-

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[23] Wallerstein, Immanuel: *The French Revolution as a World Historical Event*, Social Research, Volume 56 Number 1, (John Hopkins University. 1989) 33

1809) *The Rights of Man*, on Chartist thinking. Indeed, Devine suggests that the September 1792 massacres in France and the defeat of Brunswick's European army by French revolutionaries in the same year gave impetus to the belief in Britain that its own 'ancien regime' could be destroyed and replaced by a new order.[24] While Devine takes a macro view of the Revolution's influence, Edward Thompson sees it at a more practical, basic level, believing that the Revolution's principles contributed to the way Chartism actually functioned, particularly in the running of meetings, that every citizen would play his part, that the chairmanship was rotated, that leaders were watched for pretensions, that proceedings were based on the belief that every man was capable of reason and growth in his abilities, and that deference and distinction of status were an offence to human dignity.[25] Thompson's reference to personal growth is also recognition of an important principle that the movement promoted, particularly in its later years. As a final comment upon the influence of the French Revolution, its impact upon Chartist thinking and actions can be seen in the frequent wearing of caps of liberty at large outdoor Chartist meetings, and references to the principles and outcomes of the Revolution that were constantly made at local association meetings. While the French Revolution influenced radical thinking across Britain, historians have recognised other events, particularly in Scotland, that preceded Chartism and which greatly affected the thinking of reformers and radicals whose actions would culminate in the publication of the Charter. James Young, in his history of the Scottish Working Class, believes that prior to the Chartist movement, working class radicals were already engaged in the struggle to influence the thinking of unorganised workers,[26] an opinion Devine would likely support when he comments upon working class moves towards political radicalism following the 1812 legislation that repealed the right of Justices of the Peace to set wage levels. This was a moderate, unsuccessful movement whose failure lead to radical working-class links to the United Irishmen, which, in turn, alienated middle class support fearful of the violence that could emanate from such a potential alliance. This early indication of middle-class reticence should not be underestimated, since it was to dog Chartism throughout its life and ultimately prevented the movement from achieving the support critical to its success. Also in Scotland, the 1820 Insurrection, known as the Radical War, had a significant effect on the emergence of non-violent political reform movements in the 1830s including Chartism, although, as Devine notes, its failure channelled working class energy into trade unionism in the immediate period after the Insurrection, rather than electoral reform. The aims of the Insurrection, captured in the *Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*, called for a unity of classes, urged the army to stop supporting despotism and instead fight for freedom, and called upon workers to strike until their rights as free men were restored. Although the Insurrection was a failure, its significance was a recognition by the working class that they had a shared interest in reforming the electoral system to deliver social improvement. As Devine rightly stated, ‘these were the essential ideas that were to inspire Chartism two decades later and were to form the backbone of working-class politics for the rest of the nineteenth century’.[27] Fiona Watson, in her history of Scotland, agrees that the Radical War encouraged non-violent protest for political change marking the start of a genuine working-class movement with its own identity and social agenda.[28]

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[24] Devine T.M: *The Scottish Nation* 206

[25] Thompson, E.P: *The making of the English Working Class*, (London 1970) 201

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[26] Young, James: *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* 66

Whilst accepting that influences upon reformers were multiple, it is impossible not to recognise the overwhelming impact that the 1832 Reform Act had in the formation of the Chartist movement; this was a seminal moment when the working class determined its exclusion from the franchise could only be resolved through direct action driven by itself without reliance upon any other body or class, a determination that was still potent twenty years on from the Act when any talk of an alliance with the middle class continued to elicit verbal accusations of historical treachery. The importance of the Reform Act on the Chartist movement will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter but it’s clear that, not only did the Act fail to deliver suffrage for the working classes, it also omitted sections of the middle and lower middle class from the vote, unsurprising as a predominantly aristocratic and landed House of Commons was unlikely to extend the franchise to an extent that could impact upon their own position and standing. For those professions such as artisan and shopkeeper, who did not fit neatly into a classification of middle class but aspired to do so, this discontent lead to sympathetic support for Chartism in the early days of the movement, although the inflammatory rhetoric and threat of violence from within the movement, together with their own desire for upward social mobility engendered a wariness that discouraged long term commitment. Dorothy Thompson recognised the importance of the 1832 Act in the birth of Chartism but also credited other events and movements as significant, in particular the town radicals associated with the Reform Act agitation, who lead protests against the sentences given to the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834 and Glasgow Cotton Spinners in 1838, against the New Poor Law and in support of the Ten Hours Act and the repeal of the Corn Laws.[29] It is clear that, though discontent was not new, there were evolving additional ways to express it beyond the traditional routes of demonstration and mass meetings; the emergence of societies of benefit and mutual improvement, night schools, Sunday schools, trade unions and non-conformist churches all created opportunities for the working class to come together, share their dissatisfaction and begin to create movements that articulated this discontent. As Emma Griffin said, without them 'it is hard to envisage how the mass political movements of the 1830s and 1840s could ever have come into being'. [30]

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[27] Devine, T.M: *The Scottish Nation* 230

[28] Watson, Fiona: *Scotland: A History 8000 BC to AD 2000,* (Bristol 2001) 180-181

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[29] Thompson Dorothy: *Chartism as an historical subject* in *The Dignity of Chartism,* (UK 2015) 8-9

When the People's Charter was published in 1838, its six demands were wholly focused upon electoral change. Universal male suffrage, secret ballot, equal electoral districts, non-property qualification for MPs, payment for MPs and annual parliamentary elections appear to fall completely into the political arena, and the initial reaction from those in the Establishment and positions of authority who prophesied the end of democracy as a consequence of any franchise extension in Britain would seem to confirm that assessment. However, if we look at the preamble to the document titled *The People's Charter, Being the Outline of an Act to provide Just Representation of the People of Great Britain in the Commons House of Parliament*, we get a further insight into the motives behind its drafting and publication. Specifically, we see a widening of the ambition that drove electoral reform; the document asserts that the 'social and political' happiness of the people depends upon their enlightenment, that 'political and social evils' are the result of corrupt legislation, and that universal suffrage 'would be practically found to be a simpler, cheaper and better mode of securing to the people their elective rights, than the present expensive machinery, by which the rich and ambitious few are enabled to pauperize and enslave the industrious many'.[31] It is clear that this is not a document whose sole purpose is to widen the franchise; these changes are intended to bring about social change by ensuring those most in need of such change are represented in Parliament. By the time of the second Chartist petition to Parliament in 1842, those demands had become more explicit; in addition to the original six demands, the petition also sought, among others, repeal of the Irish Act of Union, the ending of the financial maintenance of the Established Church, and repeal of the Poor Law Amendment Act. The petition complained bitterly about the economic and social ills affecting the lowest paid, in particular the high rates of taxation for the poorest, the cost of Government, the disparity of income between the highest and lowest paid in society, and the working hours and unsafe conditions in factories. The petition even saw fit to compare the daily incomes of the Queen and a working-class labourer. The movement's first historian, Robert George Gammage (1821-1888) recognised that the disenfranchised knew their exclusion from political power was the reason for their social and economic situation[32] - 'Political power is the cause, opulence is the effect',[33] - that those without the vote and thus no influence were condemned to a life of hardship and poverty, while the enfranchised would continue to vote for their own interests and the aristocracy would legislate accordingly. Most of the movement's historians have shared Gammage's view, to varying degrees,

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[30] Griffin, Emma: *Liberty's Dawn, a People's History of the Industrial Revolution*, (Yale 2014) 240

[31] *The People's Charter, Being the Outline of an Act to provide Just Representation of the People of Great Britain*

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in the Commons House of Parliament

[32] Gammage R.G: *History of the Chartist Movement 1837-1854* (London 1969 – reprint of 1894 edition) 9

[33] Stedman Jones: *The language of Chartism*, 100 quoting Gammage

encapsulated by G.D.H Cole that it was 'an economic movement with a political programme'.[34] 'Varying degrees' because while many will agree with Cole's opinion, others, such as Stedman Jones, either believe it to fundamentally be a political movement, or they quote contemporaries to highlight its social and class dimensions, as in these words by Ernest Jones (1819-1869) following his release from prison in 1850 and, by then, *de facto* leader of the movement: 'The war of the age is a social war; it is a war of labour against capital, of co-operation against monopoly, of the poor against the rich'.[35] It was no longer a movement just for electoral reform and wage improvements. Ernest Jones clearly believed that, by 1850, the fight had moved well beyond the constitutional and had become a class struggle, something that during the life of the movement, was never widely expressed or seemingly desired. It's true that the leaders all had slightly different ambitions beyond securing the franchise; for William Lovett (1800-1877), Chartism was one element of a wider social improvement programme; for Feargus O'Connor (1796-1855), it was a way to re-establish the working man back onto unlawfully expropriated land and the creation of a new peasantry, as seen in his Land Plan; for Joseph Raynor Stephens (1805-1879) and John Frost (1784-1877), it was repeal of the New Poor Law of 1834; for Bronterre O'Brien (1805-1864), it was currency reform and nationalisation of land rents; and for Ernest Jones, it was proletarian socialism. However, the contemporary quotation that has resonated among historians in addressing the question of Chartism's purpose, is that attributed to Stephens when he stated that 'Universal Suffrage meant the right for the working man to have a good coat, a good roof over his head, a good dinner on his table',[36] a sentiment that has become known as the *knife and fork* or *bread and cheese* question. For Stephens, suffrage was an economic and social issue.

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[34] Cole GDH: *A short history of the British Working-Class Movement 1789-1947* in Host, John *Victorian Labour History,* (London 1998) 13

[35] *The People's Paper* 3 March 1856

Differences did not just occur at leadership level, however, and Hamish Fraser referenced the *Scottish Patriot* of 1839 which, as well as advocating the six points, also called for a programme that included abolition of the hereditary principle, primarily primogeniture and entail, the end of military flogging, free trade, abolition of the corn laws, post office reform, abolition of capital punishment, a national system of education free from influence of sect or party, and the right of the working class to unite to protect their labour against unjust aggression of capitalists.[37] Malcolm Chase, in a passage similar in meaning to Cole's, argued that Chartism could not have developed in an economic vacuum, that the public agitation and the support for *The People's Charter* would not have happened without the influence of the prevailing economic conditions;[38] this is the view that most historians have taken during the last forty years, that Chartism was a social and economic movement in which the primary aims of improving the squalid living conditions of the disenfranchised working class would be achieved through political reform and expressed through political language, and a brief description of life in Scotland illustrates these conditions in which the working class lived during the years of industrial growth and technology development, in particular through the growth of the towns and cities of the Scottish central belt, fuelled by an influx of displaced peasants from the Highlands and the migration of Irish workers. Population growth was explosive – in 1750, there were four towns in Scotland with a population above 10,000 but, by 1820, there were thirteen – but this was needed to sustain a workforce demanded by the expanding industries of coal mining, engineering, shipbuilding, cotton, linen, wool, chemicals and iron. The results were appalling sanitary conditions in the industrialised urban areas. There were five fever and two cholera outbreaks in Scotland between 1818 and 1848, and rising mortality rates in the inner cities (by 1850, 50% of all annual deaths in Glasgow were children under ten years of age) whilst the towns could only accommodate the growing population by subdividing houses so that most were overcrowded, with few amenities and many lacking indoor water. As Stedman Jones and others recognise, these appalling social conditions, coupled with periods of high unemployment, were beneficial to the popularity of a movement able to ascribe working class misery to its lack of political power: ‘Knaves will tell you that it is because you have no property, you are unrepresented. I tell you on the contrary, it is because you are unrepresented that you have no property…your poverty is the result not the cause of your being unrepresented'.[39] The challenge for Chartism came when economic conditions and employment improved; demand for skills allowed trade unions to increase their influence with employers and grow their membership, reducing the focus on universal suffrage and towards improved working conditions and wages. As William Cobbett declared, 'I defy you to agitate any fellow with a full stomach'.[40] As the movement developed, so different strands also developed within it, each representing a particular interest, faction or approach, but all potentially diverting the focus of the movement from the fundamental ambition of electoral reform and increasing the difficulty of maintaining a unified community. Many of these strands reflected a perceived need within the membership to portray to the world that the working man was worthy of the franchise by demonstrating his value as a responsible citizen, an issue that seemed to resonate particularly in Scotland. Collectively, such value can be summarised as self-respect and personal responsibility, within which Devine identifies self-reform and improvement, education, temperance, morality, co-operation and self-help, all encompassed with a strong religious ethos, which reflected the importance of Christian belief among the skilled working class and its links back to the dissent of the seventeenth century,[41] and to an Enlightenment that encouraged greater independence of thought, challenging the view that an individual's station in life was unalterable.

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[36] Slosson, Preston: *The Decline of the Chartist Movement*, (New York 1916) 27
[37] Fraser Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland*, (London 2010) 99 & 215
[38] Chase, Malcolm: *Chartism, A New History*, (Manchester 2007) 19-22

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[39] Bronterre O'Brien in Stedman Jones: *Languages of Class* 109

[40] *The Birmingham Journal* 12 November 1836: quoted by Thomas Attwood

[41] Devine T.M: *The Scottish Nation* 279-280

Alexander Wilson agrees with Devine, describing Chartism as a movement that ‘aimed at fostering habits of reason, self-respect and sobriety among the working class’ and he highlights the specific Scottish focus on education, organisation, self-respect and self-improvement, ambitions that were reflected in the strong growth of temperance societies, co-operatives, Chartist churches and the Chartist press,[42] while George Pryde ascribes the flourishing of a distinct Scottish movement to the values of abstinence, pacifism, opposition of capital punishment and its principle of non-intrusion in church affairs. [43]

The drive for self-improvement also reflected the ambitions of skilled artisans within the movement with their desire for social mobility and improved status within society, ambitions that earned them the soubriquet *the aristocracy of labour*, a contemporary phrase now widely adopted by historians. Skilled artisans were not prepared to accept their allotted place in the working class - in today’s language they would be described as *upwardly mobile* – and it is assumed they adopted bourgeois values to further their ascendancy into the middle class. There were contemporary, often unflattering, views of this group, fuelled by comments such as this from Thomas Wright, a skilled metalworker, who stated in 1855 that ‘The artisan creed with regard to the labourers is that the latter are an inferior class and that they should be made to know and kept in their place' [44] while George Potter (1832-1893), soon to become President of the Trade Union Congress, wrote in 1870 that 'the working man belonging to the upper-class of his order is a member of the aristocracy of the working-classes. He is a man of some culture, is well read in politics and social history.... his self-respect is also well developed'.[45] While historians have acknowledged the term *labour aristocracy*, they are divided on its role and influence. Marxist writers would concur with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) view that it had become a privileged and protected minority; Eric Hobsbawm described it as 'a distinctive upper stratum of the working-class, better paid, better treated and generally regarded as more 'respectable' and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat…….it identified with the lower middle class'[46] while John Foster records how labour aristocrats were seen by the unskilled classes as collaborators with the bourgeoisie, sharing their interests with the employer and being 'exposed to the constant ridicule reserved for the bosses' men. Foster quotes William Marcroft (1822-1894), acknowledged leader of the adult education movement, who 'on several occasions I had to suffer much abuse…To be released, I removed my place of living several times'.[47] These views have not gone unchallenged. Stedman Jones does not accept that the idea of a stratum of skilled workers was unique to Victorian

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[42] Alexander Wilson: *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester 1970) 266
[43] George Pryde: *Scotland from 1603 the present day*, (Edinburgh 1962) 199

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[44] Perkin, Harold: *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London 1985) 324

[45] *The Reformer 5th November 1870*

[46] Hobsbawm, Eric: *Labouring men: studies in the history of labour*, (London 1964) 272

[47] Foster, John: *Class struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English Towns* (London 1974) 238

industry but had existed before in other guises and that its value has been overplayed,[48] while Patrick Joyce and Margot Finn both refute the idea that artisans were actually members of the bourgeoisie. Joyce, like Stedman Jones, feels its importance has been over-emphasised and there should be more focus upon what working people had in common than what was believed to divide them; furthermore, he sees artisans as defending traditional work practices, not a sentiment usually associated with the aspiring middle class.[49] Finn is not convinced that a labour aristocracy played a significant role in working class segmentation, believing that gender segregation, paternalist practices and ethnic tension with Irish workers were more important in this process. It is her view that skilled workers were not quiescent with the middle class and that their values of thrift, respectability and independence were reflective of their own status and not those of a group associated with the bourgeoisie.[50] It is clear that artisans and small shopkeepers shared many of the working class, Chartist values of self-improvement, education and moderation, as well as recognising the need to change an electoral system that left them unenfranchised. Where they differed from many of their fellow Chartists and working-class colleagues was in their overwhelming support for change by peaceful means and a disavowal of physical force, their presence in the movement being not only a moderating influence upon the direction taken but also another element of potential disunity. Mark Hovell's description of Chartism's ultimate purpose as '……the social and economic regeneration of society……social Chartism was a protest against what existed, not a reasoned argument to set up anything in its place'[51] encapsulates the view of most historians that this was a movement to effect change to personal circumstance, albeit on a wide scale, rather than to radically change the social structure by revolution or class war. This was a movement to secure rights that would be exercised individually but which could only be secured by a concerted and co-ordinated effort by those excluded. This brings us to one of the major debates surrounding Chartism and the type of movement it was; whether there was a class consciousness within the working population and, if there was, whether it was sufficiently strong and widespread to create a homogenous working-class movement.

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[48] Stedman Jones: *Languages of Class* 36-37

[49] Joyce, Patrick: *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England*, (London 1982) xiv & 111

[50] Finn, Margot: *After Chartism* (Cambridge 1993) 4

J.T. Ward described Chartism as 'the first working class political movement',[52] a logical conclusion when viewed solely through the lens of its social composition, as Ward intended. However, for us to go further and identify Chartism as a movement in which the membership actively identified as working class and used this as a driving force, requires us to accept that it possessed a level of class consciousness which engendered a feeling of working-class solidarity. This argument, that Chartism was a class movement beyond its membership, has divided historians, their thinking unsurprisingly influenced by their own political bias (Ward was a Conservative, whereas Hobsbawm, Foster, John Savile and Dorothy Thompson, among others, were either socialist or communist). While most left-wing historians advocated for Chartism as a class-conscious movement, there were divergent views on its origins. A number saw it as a continuation of earlier industrial development and working-class agitation, and so not originating with the Charter. Thus, for Hobsbawm, the Industrial Revolution turned independent men into 'hands', leading to the destitution of labour and the pauperisation of the previously skilled, where the new factory proletariat may have been materially better off but were under the strict control of masters. A situation akin to slavery, the solution was the development of a class consciousness and class ambition that no longer pitted rich against poor but one class (labouring class, workers or proletariat) against another (employers or capitalists).[53] The view that traditional radicalism was giving way to an increasing working class consciousness and a weakening of any attachment to authority embodied by the propertied classes and Parliament, was shared by Edward Thompson, who placed the beginnings of a skilled working class and a consequent growth of consciousness in the 1820s, believing that, during this period, working men saw their lives as part of the history of conflict between the industrious classes and the House of Commons which matured into class consciousness in the 1830's. [54]

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[51] Hovell, Mark: *The Chartist Movement*, (Manchester 1918) 303
[52] Ward, JT: *Chartism*, (London 1973) 7

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[53] Hobsbawm, Eric: *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (London 1995) 253-258

[54] Thompson, Edward: *The History of the English Working Class* (London 1970) 712

However, not all historians shared the view that Chartism was a class-conscious movement. Francis Thompson believed the 'respectable working man' was indifferent to class war, was largely apolitical and the working class was satisfied with the status quo and a subordinate role, political apathy going hand in hand with independent respectability.[55] In his view, Victorian society was multi-layered without the conventional notions of class and this allowed mobility between these layers, with respectability providing the glue to hold society together, an opinion shared by Eric Evans, for whom status consciousness rather than class consciousness was most important - where class antagonism existed, it was localised and short term.[56] Stedman Jones traced the antecedents of Chartism back to the earlier radical response to corruption and saw the movement more as an extension of that agitation than as a class movement with a defined consciousness.[57] For him, Chartism was a political movement and, as such, cannot satisfactorily 'be defined in terms of the anger and disgruntlement of disaffected social groups or even the consciousness of class'.[58] Stedman Jones' narrow view of Chartism as solely a political movement did not seem to consider the wider social ambitions that those in the movement and the working class held, and those historians who advocated the argument for class consciousness also credited it with a wider and longer-term influence than just the immediate agitation for reform. For Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis, it promoted self-help, popular education and political awareness,[59] and for Malcom Chase it increased the awareness of what working people held in common, despite the contrasting experiences of different occupational groups.[60]

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[55] Thompson, Francis: *The Rise of Respectable Society: Social History of Victorian Britain 1830*-1900 (USA, 1988) 198-201

[56] Evans, Eric: *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870* (London 1983) 173

[57] Stedman Jones: *Languages of Class* 102, 121-126

[58] *Ibid.* page 96

Reference to different occupational groups returns us to the influence of the labour aristocracy within the movement and its impact upon the development of working-class consciousness. As we have seen, this group was largely comprised of 'skilled craftsmen, independent artisans and small-scale domestic workers',[61] who, according to Hobsbawm, lead a movement of labouring poor united by 'hunger, wretchedness, hatred and hope'. If this 'distinctive upper strata of the working class, better paid, better treated and generally regarded as more 'respectable' and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat' [62] were indeed leading the labouring poor, then it should be unsurprising there was a lack of revolutionary zeal among the working class, assuming these *aristocratic* views were shared.

Foster shares this view; he believes the revolutionary class consciousness of the 1840's degenerated into sectional consciousness in the 1850's because of subdivisions within the workforce brought on by the emergence of a labour aristocracy. It is Foster's belief that the labour aristocracy was not a victim of bourgeois manipulation but, as Hobsbawm asserts, brought such values into the Chartist movement, finding common interest with employers rather than the unskilled workers of its own class. Such shared interest resulted in the undermining of the labour movement's integrity following the demise of Chartism, leading to the erosion of class consciousness and the containment of the working class' bid for political power.[63] Unsurprisingly, as most historians studying Chartism identify a class consciousness within the working population, so the majority concur with Preston Slosson's description of it as a 'class conscious proletarian agitation' movement, although not all would agree with his comparison that is was "similar to modern Socialism in spirit'.[64] Stedman Jones' view that it was not a class movement is not shared by the majority of historians writing on the subject and the refutation of his argument is best illustrated by Dorothy Thompson, when, in a review of his article on language, she wrote that 'if the concept of class means anything, Chartism was a working-class movement. Its language at all levels was a class language: the concepts of manhood suffrage, the rights of man and of equality of citizenship were only held by the lower orders, the working class or classes'. [65]

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[59] Harrison, Brian and Hollis, Patricia: *Chartism, Liberalism and the life of Robert Lowery* in Host, *Victorian Labour History* 14

[60] Chase, Malcolm: *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies* (London 2015) 9-10

[61] Hobsbawm, Eric: *The Age of Revolution* 259

[62] Hobsbawm, Eric: *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964) 272

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[63] Foster, John: *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* 238

[64] Slosson, Preston: *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* 28

[65] Thompson, Dorothy*: The Language of Class* in *The Dignity of Chartism* (London 2015) 19

There was, however, recognition of the difficulty in creating and maintaining a homogenous movement, one that represented the interests and constituents of the entire working class. Eileen Yeo identifies the difficulty of wholly engaging the working class when there were material inequalities and cultural divisions within the class itself,[66] an aspect that Asa Briggs further highlights by recognising that, whilst Chartism tried to create a sense of class identity binding the three key groups of 'superior craftsmen and artisans, factory operatives, and domestic outworkers', the difference in economic interests between the groups including salary, social security, regularity of earnings, status in the local community and prospects for advancement made this a substantial challenge.[67] F. C. Mather makes a similar point but argues further that Chartism did not even speak for the whole of the working class or entire labour movement and that, by 1839, the Trade Unions were no longer supporting Chartist demonstrations but instead focusing upon working conditions and wage rates, not political reform.[68] Emma Griffin also recognises that Chartism did not include all members of the working class although her observation centres upon those who were excluded – the very poor (long term unemployed, beggars and vagrants), farm workers, domestic servants and the armed forces – rather than those who chose to exclude themselves, as Mather argues.[69] With the notable exceptions we have highlighted, most historians of Chartism believe it to be a working class movement, but one that was not homogenous; its representation of a wide cross section of professions and occupations made unity of purpose and organisation difficult at a national level. This struggle to achieve a united movement leads us to another theme in the literature of the movement; the relationship between Chartism, its membership and the middle class.

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[66] Yeo, Eileen: *Some practices and problems of Chartist democracy* in Epstein and Thompson, *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-60* (London 1982) 374

[67] Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies* (London 1963) 4

[68] Mather, F C: *Chartism and Society: An anthology of documents* (London 1980) 32

[69] Griffin, Emma: *Liberty's Dawn* 235

The relationship between Chartism and the middle class, and the influence of the latter upon the movement will be addressed in greater depth later in this thesis but it is important to recognise here its significance in the historiography of the movement. An examination of Chartist newspapers and speeches would lead an historian to believe that the movement saw the middle class as its enemy, determined to thwart the ambition of universal male suffrage. There is some truth in this assessment but, as with most arguments, it is more nuanced than may first appear. Prior to the Reform Act of 1832, working class radicals would likely have regarded the aristocracy and landed classes as the enemy, those whom Stedman Jones refers to as the 'idle and unproductive',[70] the 'oppressive aristocracy which is founded on wealth and which is nourished by profit' [71] and, in contrast to whom, the middle class would have been seen as victims, like themselves. The Reform Act changed this relationship; during the agitation for the Act, the working and middle classes campaigned on the same platform for electoral reform. When legislation was passed, it restricted the franchise extension to those owning or renting a borough household to the value of £10; the overwhelming feeling among working class campaigners was one of betrayal, not only by Parliament but by their middle-class colleagues. We must recognise that the extension did not enfranchise the whole of the middle class; those aspiring to join, those skilled artisans and shopkeepers we have previously identified as the labour aristocracy, were also excluded on property grounds, an undoubted reason for their continued support for further franchise extension, although this did not translate into long term support for the movement itself. That the newly enfranchised middle class now withdrew its support for any further extension of the franchise only added to the anger and frustration of working-class campaigners. As Slosson comments, they were now seen as members of the legislative class, part of the very process that required reform; the Act had increased the number of Chartism's opponents in Parliament.[72] Despite this, the desire to develop a co-operative relationship between the classes was not dead, and the history of Chartism shows this to be so, although unsurprisingly it was an ambivalent, turbulent relationship, where, despite the best endeavours of individuals both within and outside the movement, dissension, disagreement and, at times, physical violence were never far from the surface. Although the Charter was published six years after the Reform Act, memories of that time combined with middle class support for the Poor Law Amendment Act and a lack of support for legislation that would improve factory working conditions during the intervening years, lead the working class to regard the middle class as both untrustworthy and hostile. The difficulty for Chartism was that it needed middle class support to deliver the franchise for the working class, not just by voting for reform minded parliamentary candidates but also by taking an active and positive role in the movement; without the middle class on board, further extension of the suffrage was more than unlikely. It is difficult to see, however, what benefit the middle class would gain by supporting Chartism; they had achieved their primary ambition in 1832, so any further extension would dilute their influence within Parliament and potentially impact both their position in society and standard of living. However, we know that eighteenth century middle-class radicalism was not solely concerned with its own class interest but regarded the improvement of all levels of society as its greater ambition; to that end, despite the advances made in 1832, there continued to be a strong sense of social responsibility among middle class reformers to effect greater change, both politically and socially. Their issue was not the goals of Chartism but the tactics and rhetoric that the movement displayed to achieve them; Chartism was acceptable when it campaigned for the franchise and the resulting social and economic reforms that would improve the lives of workers, but any traumatic upheaval that threatened the social order and strayed into the realms of socialism was unsupportable. Thus, there was strong support for the 1848 revolutionary movements in Germany, Hungary and Italy, as they were seen as politically inspired, but not for the French Revolution which was regarded as economically motivated and linked to socialism; the Chartist movement's alignment with the *demos-socs* (democratic socialists, also known as republican socialists) reinforced these views although, throughout the history of Chartism, there was little appreciable appetite for revolutionary social change among the membership or the leadership, despite its advocacy by a small number of high profile individuals. There was also a reluctance to engage the middle class for fear of diluting working class values and needs by people who did not share or understand working class aspirations and frustrations. Attempts to broker alliances with other organisations often failed because these organisations were ostensibly middle class and so lacked empathy with the hardships and ambition of the working class. Slosson points out that radical leadership association with the middle class after 1832 meant it was no longer seen as representing the masses; George Julian Harney's (1817-1897) comment that 'other classes, (*other than the working class*), have no right even to exist' encapsulates this view.[73]

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[70] Stedman Jones *Languages of Class* 132

[71] Hodgskin, Thomas: *Labour Defended* (1825) in Stedman Jones *Languages of Class* 120

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[72] Slosson, Preston: *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* 23

Chartism's relationship with middle class reform organisations, such as the Anti Corn Law League (ACLL) and the Complete Suffrage Movement (CSM), will be examined in greater depth in chapter five but we should note here historians recognise that most Chartists were supportive of the repeal of the Corn Laws as a means of reducing the price of bread, whilst the CSM were campaigning for most of the six points and, at one point, went so far as to endorse universal suffrage. The issue Chartism had in allying with both was its belief that universal suffrage was the most fundamental of all demands and that, by campaigning for alternative reforms, the ACLL and the CSM were detracting from Chartism's own campaign. This was not just hubris; Chartism firmly believed that the Corn Laws would never be repealed in a Parliament so composed and that only an influx of working class sponsored MPs could deliver it. History would prove otherwise, but, while the campaigns were active, both sides indulged in a war of vitriol and meetings disruption, often descending into brawling. Chartism's relationship with the Complete Suffrage Movement involved little of the unpleasant rhetoric of its relationship with the ACLL and none of the violence, ostensibly due to the fact that both sought electoral reform. Whilst the issue of middle-class interference was again critical – the CSM wanted the Chartists to drop the title 'Charter' and to accept middle class leadership as the price of alliance (neither was remotely acceptable) – it was the CSM's rejection of physical force as a means of achieving change that ensured a merger was never likely. Chartism's rallying cry of *Peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must* was never acceptable to the moderate middle class membership of the CSM, a membership boosted both by those aspiring working class men of the labour aristocracy, and working class Chartists who had, by this time, rejected the ulterior measures of Chartism; advocacy of physical force not only created a split within the Chartist movement but significantly influenced the level of support of the moderate middle classes, so when the Irish Chartist Thomas Devyr (1805-1887) warned the middle class at the Chartist Convention that its failure to support the Charter would mean 'your warehouses and your homes would be given over to the flames',[74] it drew a response from Patrick Matthew (1790-1874), landowner and leading Chartist in Scotland, that even talk of physical force prevented the middle class and 'the more intelligent of the Liberal Party from joining the Chartist Cause'.[75] The threat to adopt physical force, one element of an approach that collectively came to be known as *ulterior measures*, had a significant impact upon the willingness of the middle class and labour aristocracy to provide active and financial support. Exclusive dealing and mass meetings were tolerable, strikes less so but physical force was unacceptable, strongly suggestive of a wider fear of social upheaval and revolution. Internal opposition to physical force was strong within Scotland; in a response to O'Brien and Henry Vincent (1813-1878), William Villiers Sankey (1793-1860) declared at the 1839 Convention of the Industrious Classes that 'the people of Scotland were too calm, too prudent and too humane to peril this cause with bloodshed',[76] although he later adopted the modified position of physical force being legitimate if first attacked by Government forces. James Young did not accept that Scottish Chartism was characterised by moderation and commitment to civil obedience, citing the infantry barracks riots of 1841, illegal mass meetings, raids on farm fields and strikes as examples of violent dissent,[77] but his is very much a lone voice among historians, the majority view being that the movement recognised the threat of physical force made middle class support impossible. When this threat became a reality, as in the Newport and Birmingham riots, there was a further weakening and withdrawal of middle-class support for Chartism;[78] this did not mean that middle class reformers completely withdrew backing for franchise extension, and the formation of the Complete Suffrage Movement shows that such support was still strong, but it reinforced their opposition to any use of force to achieve this ambition.

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[73] Slosson, Preston: *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* 197

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[74] Devyr, Thomas Ainge: *Appeal to the Middle Classes* (1839)
[75] Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 55
[76] Wilson, Alexander: *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester 1970) 74

Historians recognise that while O'Connor could continue to describe moral force as 'a milk and water, toadying approach to the middle class',[79] the wider movement recognised the need for an accommodation. Following the failure of the 1848 Petition and the abortive London centred insurrection that resulted in the transportation of its leaders, there is evidence of increasing collaboration between Chartists and middle-class radicals, particularly over social issues such as temperance, the opposition to capital punishment and the anti-slavery movement, campaigns that had consistently been popular within Chartism. As Wilson and Finn recognised, the issue of electoral reform was moving back to the pre-1834 position as Chartist leaders became involved in movements that brought radicals of all classes together over liberal and humanitarian issues[80], with an increasing focus on social democracy and the legitimacy of working class social needs and demands beyond the Charter and suffrage.[81] By 1852, with O'Connor committed to an asylum, there was, as Cole and Raymond Postgate, record 'a further split in the Chartist ranks. A majority of the Chartist Executive favoured an attempt to secure an alliance with the middle-class Radicals',[82] leading to the resignation of Ernest Jones who, with the demise of the *Northern Star*, launched the *People's Paper* in 1852 which, for the next six years, continued to strongly advocate for the Charter, while preaching 'social revolution to a working class that had turned away from it'.[83] Yet even Jones, after the last Chartist Conference of 1858, recognised that there was a need for a change of direction and an accommodation with middle class Radicalism. In 1861, he began a new movement for electoral reform in collaboration with middle class radicals, standing unsuccessfully for Parliament as a radical candidate in Manchester in 1867. As Cole and Postgate observed, 'in 1869 Jones died, and almost the last link between Chartism and the new working-class radicalism was snapped'.[84] As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, there are no agreed dates for the life of the Chartist movement but most histories allocate a period of approximately twenty years. It is generally agreed it was in decline after the 1848, and last, parliamentary petition, that it became increasingly involved with wider, middle class issues beyond suffrage -although it never renounced this fundamental ambition or ceased to campaign for it – and that, by 1858 and the last, somewhat insignificant, conference, it was finished. It is this point that has led historians to the final major theme in this historiography; Chartism failed to make any substantive progress on the six points, so what did it achieve, what, if anything, was its legacy?

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[77] Young, James: *The rousing of the Scottish Working Class* 79-80
[78] Stedman Jones: *Languages of Class* 162
[79] Smout T.C: *A Century of the Scottish People* 27

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[80] Wilson Alexander: *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* 252-253

[81] Although the Chartist movement was still active and the Charter was still the overriding ambition, after the failure of the 1848 petition there was an increasing focus upon wider social issues affecting the working class and Finn captures these developments expertly in *After Chartism*

[82] Cole, GDH and Postage, Raymond: *The Common People 1746 – 1946* (London 1938) 395

[83] Miliband, Ralph in *The Economist*", 14th June 1952

[84] Cole and Postgate: *The Common People 1746-1946* 395

During its existence, the Chartist movement failed to secure any of the reforms set out in the six points; by the end of the last Chartist Conference, only twenty percent of the adult male population of Britain had the vote, Parliament was still controlled by wealth, although the balance was moving from old money to new money, and the process of voting was still completely open to corruption. And, of course, of those one in five males voting, none of them were working class. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the focus of historians has been upon the reasons for this failure and what, if any, successes can be attributed to the movement; what, if anything, did it achieve? This thesis will consider the reasons why Chartism did not achieve its political aims in a later chapter, not as a separate question but rather as part of the wider consideration of it as a unified community but here we will look at its legacy, as commented upon by historians of the movement.

Whilst Mark Hovell wrote that ‘contemporaries deemed it fruitless – there has been general agreement in placing Chartism among the lost causes of history’, [85] this was not his personal view but rather a reflection of the period in which he was writing – ‘a wider survey suggests that in the long run, Chartism by no means failed…..it deserves a much more respectful consideration than it has generally received’ [86] – and, in the main, later historians have recognised that Chartism has a legacy worthy of the commitment shown by those who took part. The impact of Chartism has usually been evaluated by assessment through two lenses; the substantive reforms and changes that can be attributed to its campaigning and the harder to measure influence it had upon working class political and social awareness, which in turn resulted in wider changes of attitude in society. Although it is difficult to firmly ascribe later reform to the prior efforts of the Chartists, we should recognise that the 1867 Reform Act, which doubled the electorate in England and Wales and extended the franchise, the 1872 Ballot Act, which guaranteed secret voting, and the 1884 Act, which enfranchised all male house owners in rural and urban areas, as well as adding up to six million to the electoral roll –

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[85] Hovell Mark: *The Chartist Movement* 300
[86] *Ibid*. 300

legislation passed within thirty years of the final Chartist Convention - owed much to consistent Chartist campaigning over twenty years.

Both Julius West and Dorothy Thompson, commenting almost one hundred years apart, acknowledged the movement's contribution to advances made beyond electoral reform, West believing that its influence in changing attitudes within the working class 'made possible the renascent Trade Union movement of the 1850s, the gradually improving organisation of the working class, the Labour Party, the Co-operative movement…'.[87] Karl Marx (1818-1873), however, while a strong supporter of Chartism and who described himself as a Chartist, believed Chartism was a missed opportunity for dramatic social change through universal suffrage; in an 1852 article in the New York Tribune , he described the aim of such upheaval as 'the political supremacy of the working class',[88] and later historians and commentators have developed this narrative, ascribing the movement's failure to effect social change to the timidity and conservatism of the leadership when there was both a level of working class consciousness and the social conditions for revolution. (It should be noted that Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), by 1925, was reassessing earlier opinions of Chartism and its perceived failure: 'The era of Chartism is immortal in that over the course of a decade it gives us in condensed and diagrammatic form the whole gamut of proletarian struggle').[89] Dorothy Thompson, although a recognised left-wing historian, challenges the view of Chartism as an opportunity missed, believing that more recognition should be given to what the movement achieved rather than what it should have been doing. Thompson credits it with 'the modification of many of the most brutal and confrontational actions of the post 1832 governments and, above all, laying the foundation of sources of social and political power in the form of national trade unions, co-operative societies, building societies and other bases from which working class political structures were to emerge'.[90] For Thompson, these were tangible achievements and reflected Hovell's earlier view that the movement stimulated improvements in social and personal conditions by forcing public opinion on factory reform, mitigating the application and worst excesses of the Poor Law, swelling demand for popular education, as well as influencing later political thinking through the involvement of moderate Chartists in the Liberal and Radical sphere: 'it gave those parties a wider and more populous outlook…the vast extension of state intervention which has been growing ever since, was a response on thoroughly Chartist lines for the improvement of social conditions by legislative means'.[91] It is possible that Hovell had in mind the words of the Durham Miners Leaders and Lib-Lab MP, John Wilson (1837-1915), who, in 1910, described Chartism as being 'ever present to the progressive mind', also quoted by Malcolm

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[87] West, Julius: *A History of the Chartist Movement* (London 1920) 295

[88] Marx, Karl: *Free Trade and the Chartists*, New York Daily Tribune, August 10th, 1852

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[89] Trotsky, Leon: *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain, Volume II*, (London 1974) 93-94

[90] Thomson, Dorothy: *Reflections on Marxist Teleology* in *The Dignity of Chartism* 195

[91] Hovell, Mark: *The Chartist Movement* 311

Chase who recognised that ‘Chartism was celebrated in the later nineteenth century for its manifest merits rather than deplored for its flaws. Chartism’s vision of a more equitable society…was of enduring significance and a reference point for future generations’.[92]

Chase’s observation that, in the longer term, Chartism’s ambition for a fairer society began to bear fruit is, however, in contrast to the historical assessment of its immediate impact upon the social and economic conditions of the working class and any improvement in social inequality. As well as having a negligent impact upon the franchise during its lifetime, historians have seen Chartism as having minimal influence upon the material lives of working people, that political power and wealth remaining in the hands of a narrow elite, and the poorest of the working class still suffering appalling housing, bad health, poor schooling and low incomes; Alexander Wilson remarks that fifteen years of the movement had left the mass of the people disenfranchised and politically apathetic, and whilst living standards had been raised, there were still high levels of poverty and misery.[93] While Dorothy Thompson acknowledged the legacy of Chartism in the longer term development of mutual societies and trade unions, she also recognised its lack of progress in improving the personal situation of the working class, in particular the increased difficulty for working/non Establishment men to break into the non-Parliamentary elements of Government (Judiciary, Civil Service etc), and the ambition of providing free universal education controlled by local communities – the 1867 Factory Act included a provision three hours of schooling but delivered by religious bodies, the aim being to teach religion and social virtues, and lessen parental influence. Finally, while some of the harsher aspects of the Poor Law were ameliorated, the workhouse test persisted and the concept that relief was a right and matter of dignity for those unable to work, was never considered.[94] Where improvements and progress were made, Thompson attributes this to the ability of working people to separate political and industrial activity - something she believes Chartism failed to do – so that a refocusing upon social and economic conditions, lead to gains in trade union recognition, trade union regulation of apprenticeships and wage bargaining: 'With this new division, they made certain advances in the industrial sector which ensured some share for the workers in the great industrial expansion of Victorian Britain'.[95]

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[92] Chase, Malcolm: *Chartism: A New History* 359

[93] Wilson, Alexander: *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* 256

In 1889, on his eightieth birthday, George Julian Harney was asked to reflect upon his lifetime as a Chartist and how, in looking back, he would describe the movement. He commented that:

> 'It may be said the Chartist agitation – which had for its object the reform of Parliaments – was so much energy wasted. I think not. The Chartist influence extended beyond the six points, and to it we largely owe the extirpation of innumerable, some of the abominable, abuses, and a great widening of the bonds of freedom'.[96]

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[94] Thompson, Dorothy: *Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York 1984) 334 - 337

[95] *Ibid* 337.

[96] Schoyen, Albert: *The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of GJ Harney* (London 1958) 285

It is clear that from Harney's comments that there was a desire to go beyond improving the immediate situation of the working class and to plant a deeper seed that would strengthen its awareness of, and desire for, greater influence and power within all spheres of life. This legacy in the areas of influence, awareness and changing attitude may be more difficult to quantify but generally gets a sympathetic hearing among historians, reflecting the view that the movement was not a failure or 'one of the lost causes of history'. The earlier historians recognised its ground-breaking achievement as a class movement; for Hovell, 'Chartism marks a real new departure in our social and political history. It was the first movement of modern times that was engineered and controlled by working men…it helped to break down the iron walls of class separation',[97] and he attributes a wider influence when he writes: 'It was the first genuinely democratic movement for social reform in modern history…and was thus the unconscious parent of Continental social democracy'.[98] Although not examined in this thesis, the impact of the Chartist movement on continental Europe, both through its support for nationalist movements and in its membership of the Fraternal Democrats, together with its influence on thought and action in nations as far reaching as the United States and New Zealand [99] reinforces its significance as a catalyst for other democratic movements. Writing shortly after Hovell, Julius West wrote on the uniqueness of the movement: ‘It is strange that in the evolution of Continental socialism the Chartists should have played a more direct part than did Robert Owen…it was from the Chartists and their forerunners that Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864) learned much of the doctrine which was only to come back to these islands when its British origin had been forgotten’.[100] When Harney reflected upon his political life he was not using the benefit of hindsight to rewrite his own history; Ward quotes him from 1852: ‘Chartism itself will survive the wreck of parties and the ruin of politicians…its spirit has begun to exercise an influence over the country’s politics; and all parties have come to acknowledge the potency of the democratic opinion…’.[101] Ward himself acknowledges the impact of the movement; having recognised ‘its efforts to enhance the dignity and self-respect of working people by means of self-help’, and citing the impact of Chartist journals, Chartist churches and temperance societies to support this, he summarises by saying ‘If the six points proved unattainable in the 1840s…Chartism was not without influence. Successive governments might fear the movement but were also led to ameliorate conditions as part of their response, as they gradually realised that foul living standards lay at the root of much agitation’.[102] Chartism’s most recognised legacy among historians is the sense of empowerment that the movement gave to working people, whether in terms of personal development or political awareness. Chase describes Chartism as ‘a movement that unquestionably failed on its own terms but succeeded in empowering many of its adherents to participate, often with marked effect, in a wide range of civic, political, educational and associational activities',[103] echoing the views of Slosson ninety years earlier, who wrote '…the unenfranchised classes had come to know themselves; to be conscious both of their strength and their weakness'.[104] The movement's impact in awakening a sense of self-worth was particularly notable in Scotland where, according to Devine, it enhanced the Scottish radical tradition and its values of justice, fairness, morality, self-help and co-operating for the common good greatly influenced the Labour movement of the later nineteenth century and beyond,[105] while Smout also references the Scottish working class radical tradition and its continuation into the twentieth century, captured in the values of individual dignity, and Eric Evans captures many of the historiographical views in his opinion that the self-improvement ethos passed into mass political education, ensuring that a strong egalitarian element became part of labour based politics in the later nineteenth century. After 1850, nothing in working class politics was unaffected by Chartism.[106] There were also tangible outcomes ; Devine and John McCaffrey both believe the Liberal Party benefited by gaining the loyal support of a skilled working class that had previously advanced Chartism,[107] while Smout points out that, though there was middle class liberal and radical support for the Liberal Party's 1868 Reform Act, there was opposition to Factory legislation, reform of the Poor Law and any extension of trade union rights as these did not accord with their free market beliefs. If we can take anything from this, it may be that these views reflect the views of the *labour aristocracy* and skilled tradesmen, rather than those of the working or labouring man. In his New History of Chartism, Chase paraphrases Robert Kennedy (1925-1968), when, in summarising the impact Chartism had upon society, he wrote:

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[97] Hovell, Mark: *The Chartist Movement* 311

[98] *Ibid* 312.

[99] See Griffiths, John and Evans, Vic: *The Chartist Legacy in the British World: Evidence from New Zealand's Southern Settlements 1840s – 1870s* in *History,* Volume 99, Number 5, (Wiley, 2014) 798-818

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[100] West, Julius: *The Chartist Movement* 312
[101] Ward, J.T: *Chartism* 235
[102] *Ibid* 245.

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[103] Chase; *Chartism, A New History* 358

[104] Slosson, Preston: *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* 210

[105] Devine, T.D: *The Scottish Nation 1700 – 2000* 280

[106] Evans, Eric: *The Forging of the Modern State* 262

[107] McCaffrey, John: *Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* (London 1998) 47

> 'At the century's turning, there was an abiding sense that Chartism had been an epoch-defining movement. It had moved society closer to the recognition of a profound truth, that our essential humanity and dignity are protected and preserved only where governments answer not merely to the propertied and wealthy but to all the people'.[108]

In these words, Chase captures many of the enduring characteristics and outcomes that historians have seen in Chartism; that it demonstrated the dignity and pride of the working-class during times of abject poverty and degradation, and commitment to a campaign for fundamental change that was dependent upon those in authority willingly sharing their power but having the means, physical, financial and electoral, to refuse this if they choose to do so. Whilst acknowledging the failure of the movement to achieve any of the six points, history recognises the legacy of Chartism in paving the way for later political and social change, that it was part of a journey that, with regard to universal suffrage, would not be realised until ninety years after the Charter's publication. The campaign for electoral reform did not achieve any of the six points in its lifetime but, for the unenfranchised working class it provided a voice and an ambition. As Edward Royle has written:

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[108] Chase: *Chartism a New History* 360

> ‘Chartism was about the lives – the aspirations and fears, pleasures and disappointments – of people who wished to be full and equal citizens in their own country…historians obsessed with the ‘failure’ of Chartism……are missing the point that the Chartists’ greatest success was Chartism, a movement shot through not with despair but hope’.[109]

These themes – influential events and ideas, the wider ambitions, class, relationships and legacy – are those most consistently identified by historians but they are not exhaustive. Chartism is often described as having movements with the movement, the significance of which is the impact upon its capacity to sustain a united and homogenous movement. These internal movements focused upon formal religion and the decision to establish Chartist churches, the attitude to alcohol, drunkenness and advocacy of temperance, the promotion of education and self-improvement, and the involvement of women in the movement; these will be discussed in a later chapter that looks in more depth at who the Chartists were, their stated, and at times conflicting, ambitions and the approach to campaigning that had such an influence on those outside the movement, particularly those whose support they were hoping to secure.

There are two further themes that consistently surface in Chartist studies; leadership, usually from an individual and not collective basis, and the role of the Chartist Press. As with the other themes, these will feature prominently in this thesis but not as separate themes, for both are so intrinsically woven into the fabric of the movement that an examination of any of the major issues must incorporate those who led and those who reported, commented and publicised the message. However, as leadership and the press will not have the same individual focus as other issues, it is important to provide some basic information at this point to contextualise future references. The historiographical importance of the nationally recognised leaders of the movement can be judged by the number of biographies that have been published. While the highest profiled – O'Connor, O'Brien, Lovett, Harney and Jones – have had their lives and work documented, the less significant or well known within the membership – Thomas Cooper (1805-1892), Robert Lowery (1809-1863), Francis Place (1771-1854), Frost, William Cuffay (1788-1870) and Stephens - have also been the subject of substantial biographies, while brief biographies and pamphlets have been written about local association leaders. Within any movement or group, the membership looks to its leadership to provide not only structure, organisation and direction but also consistency of message and purpose, together with an image of unity that shows all are committed to the ultimate success of the organisation. Without that strong and unequivocal leadership, it becomes increasingly difficult to prevent factions forming, internal dissension and the breakdown of unity. The Chartist movement suffered from a number of these issues as a result of disagreement at the most senior leadership level, disagreements usually attributed to the leadership of Feargus O'Connor. O'Connor dominated the movement; other leaders were influential but no-one could inspire the membership and reflect its desires and ambitions like O'Connor, particularly in the first ten years of its existence. But while O'Connor was loved by the members and local associations – some even named their children after him – there was a constant struggle at the top of the movement between O'Connor and his supporters, one side typified as favouring direct action, physical force and implacably opposed to any accommodation with other campaigning and reform groups, and the other considered as moderate, wedded to change by constitutional means and prepared to engage other groups if they felt an alliance would further the cause of suffrage. The latter did not have a clear leader like O'Connor but included Lovett, Place, and O'Brien among others. The differences were clear from the outset, even prior to the publication of the Charter. The London Working Mens Association, of which Lovett was a prominent member, was markedly more moderate, if still as passionate, in its approach to reform than O'Connor's Great Northern Union, which adopted a more aggressive and militant stance, and this led to disagreement both over the six points – O'Connor was not keen to include secret ballots – and tactics, where he was much more in favour of direct action than in supporting the LWMA's more measured approach. In these early days, tensions between O'Connor and Lovett were subsumed by a desire to establish the movement and secure a parliamentary Petition but they came to a head in 1840, with the establishment of the National Charter Association (NCA), often described as ‘O’Connor’s Party’ and which Lovett refused to join. In the same year, he published *Chartism: A New Organisation for the People* which drew intense criticism and personal attacks from the *Northern Star*, O’Connor’s newspaper, accusing Lovett of endeavouring to demean both the NCA and O’Connor’s ambitions for a Land Plan. There was a brief rapprochement two years later at the Complete Suffrage Movement Conference but, following that, Lovett effectively withdrew from the movement, ending both his feud with O’Connor and his involvement with the formal movement. The early historians of the movement have sided with Lovett in this dispute and frequently cast O’Connor as a demagogue, reflecting Lovett’s description of him as ‘The great ‘I Am’ of Politics’, and Gammage’s comment that, while O’Connor genuinely wanted to improve the lives and happiness of working people, this could only be on the basis of him leading any movement designed to achieve this.[110] Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was more vituperative, declaring him to be ‘the worst enemy of those very people whose cause he was supposed to serve. No matter how much he fancied himself to be saviour of the working class, his activities were accompanied by the contempt and disapproval of the man in the street’.[111] Hovell acknowledged the pull that O’Connor exerted with the membership but also recognised this as a weakness for the movement: ‘The great Chartist following had, we may safely say, no policy at all. It followed its leaders with touching devotion into whatsoever blind alleys they might go. The plain Chartists had nothing to contribute to Chartist doctrine…hence the incoherence as well as the sincerity of the whole movement'.[112] Julius West shared Hovell's view, most likely because he was using the same limited source material in the autobiographies of Lovett and Cooper together with Gammage's history of the movement. Malcom Chase, in an excellent chapter entitled 'The Leading Question in Chartist Historiography' highlights the comments of influential political figures whose opinions of O'Connor and Lovett are strikingly similar to those of previous historians. Thus would James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) be quoted in 1928, saying that O'Connor was 'an orator of violent description…he had no original ideas but caught up whatever was in the wind…he beat nobler partners out of the ranks…Lovett's guidance was the nobler and has proved the more beneficial in the long run', while one year later Hugh Gaitskell (1906-1963), after describing Lovett as 'serious, conscientious, almost painfully honest', portrays O'Connor as 'rebellious and egotistical…he cared neither for education nor morals, having neither in great measure himself'.[113] An increased availability of source material, leading to an increase in Chartist studies, combined with a greater interest from left leaning historians, has resulted in a reappraisal of the leadership question and, in particular,

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[109] Royle, Edward: *Chartism Seminar Studies in History* (London 1980) 87

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[110] Gammage, RG: *History of the Chartist Movement 1837 – 1854* 246
[111] Martineau, Harriet: *A History of the Thirty Years Peace 1815-1846* Volume II (London 1877) 489

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[112] Hovell, Mark: *The Chartist Movement* 307

[113] Chase, Malcolm: *The Chartists, Perspectives and Legacies* 20

O’Connor’s actions, and a subsequent restoration of his reputation. John Saville acknowledges O’Connor’s appeal to the mass of the membership and the effectiveness of his populist approach:

> ‘…the confidence that O’Connor generated among the poor and downtrodden. His extravagant language was a necessary part of the rapport between himself and the Chartist masses.……to the stockingers of the Midlands, the miners of the North-East, the oppressed and exploited everywhere, this man radiated hope and offered the vision, however incompletely defined, of a better order’.[114]

For Saville, O’Connor was ‘the voice of the prophet bringing the tablets down from the mountain’, but he goes further, asserting that O’Connor also brought direction and order to the movement by offering ‘dramatic guidance to the Chartists of a kind no one else was capable of…in the early years of the movement, his political leadership was shrewd and intelligent’.[115] His view, that, particularly in the early years, O’Connor created a unity within the movement by promoting a national perspective and focus, has merit, but this has to be balanced by the conflict he caused, conflict that lead to vicious personal attacks and lost friendships. Chase also recognises the restoration of O’Connor’s reputation and remarks that it has resulted in the tendency to ‘evict Lovett from a place of eminence in the Chartist pantheon’[116] and Dorothy Thompson, while not an uncritical admirer of O’Connor, shared Saville’s view of his place in the movement as a leader and unifier:

> ‘so far from bring the exploiter and distorter of the Chartist movement, O’Connor was so much the centre of it that, had the name Chartist not been coined, the radical movement between 1838 and 1848 must surely have been called O’Connorite Radicalism. Remove him and his

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[114] Saville, John: *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge 1990) 212-213

[115] *Ibid* 213.

[116] Chase, Malcolm: *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies* 23

> newspaper from the picture, and the movement fragments, localises and loses its continuity…For good or ill, he was the main inspiration and guiding force of the movement.'[117]

It is undeniable that O'Connor's popularity within the membership was overwhelming as this song of the time illustrates: 'The Lion of Freedom is come from his den; We'll rally around him, again and again; We'll crown him with laurel, our champion to be, O'Connor the patriot, for sweet Liberty!'[118] However, he was also a divisive figure and the cause of so many of the disagreements on policy, tactics and alliances that continually beset the movement and had such a dramatic impact upon its capacity to act as a community of shared interests and ambitions. As J.T. Ward notes: 'Throughout its history, it was constantly weakened by bitter personal disputes among its leaders. The leadership's quarrels compounded the weakness caused by the variety of political divisions'.[119]

The influence of the Chartist press among the membership is difficult to overstate. In an age when communication of news or messages could only be done by physical presence or written word, and when the Government, recognising the power of Chartist rallies, did its utmost to disrupt mass gatherings, then a press that was wholly dedicated to reporting Chartist news and influencing Chartist opinion was critical to a national movement that required consistent messaging to thrive. 'The first national report on literacy in 1840, based on marriage registers, estimated that 67% of males and 51%

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[117] Thompson: *Chartists, Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* 96
[118] Gregory, James: *The Poetry and the Politics: Radical Reform in Victorian England* (London 2014) 222
[119] Ward, JT: *Chartism* 235

of females were literate';[120] as these figures cover all classes, regions and professions, we can reasonably assume that literacy levels for the working classes would have been below fifty per cent overall. Although it does not appear that literacy was measured specifically for the working class, Robert Webb found that, in an analysis of 567 persons, almost certainly working men, 'tried before a special commission in October 1842 as the result of a rising in the manufacturing districts of Cheshire, Lancashire, and Staffordshire', twenty-seven percent were unable to read or write and only twelve percent could read well.[121] Considering how well informed the membership was on the issues of prime importance for the movement (evidenced through discussions at local association meetings across the country), we can confidently assume that copies of Chartist papers were purchased and then read to a gathering of men, most of whom would have been illiterate. Despite the imposition of a stamp tax upon newsprint, Chartism published more than 120 newspaper titles between 1837 and 1859, many of them reflecting the views of their patron or owner. Thus, the *Northern Star*, owned by O'Connor, was selling 10,000 copies within four months of its launch and, at its height, was the biggest selling daily newspaper in Britain at 48,000 copies per day despite a relatively expensive cost of four and a half pence as a stamped newspaper. In addition, there were the *Democrat* and the *Red Republican*, edited by Harney, the *Southern Star* and *Northern Liberator*, edited by O'Brien, the *Illuminator* and the *Extinguisher* edited by Cooper and the *Notes for the People*, edited by Jones, while in Scotland, the *Chartist Circular* sold 22,000 copies per week at the height of its popularity. Many papers had a very short existence and even those with a substantial circulation eventually succumbed to falling sales – the *Chartist Circular* ceased publication in July 1842 with circulation down to seven thousand per week, even though, as an unstamped paper, its selling price was only half a penny per copy. Despite these failures, the Chartist press was vital to the movement's leadership in combatting the negative reporting of the commercial press and in invigorating the membership with articles and reports designed to bolster confidence and reinforce prejudices. As newspapers were read communally, usually in private dwellings or public houses, it is clear that a comparatively low level of literacy was not a significant barrier to working men receiving Chartist information and news, particularly when we consider the number of available Chartist papers and their circulation figures, as indicated above. As the Western Vindicator noted in 1839: 'The press, in a moral sense, is the only instrument we can now employ to beat down the strongholds of oppression and those formidable barriers to the happiness and liberty of the People….it is the only instrument with which we can successfully combat and subdue the enemy…while we are without such a powerful communication, we cannot expect to succeed in the endeavour to turn the tide of public opinion'.[122]

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[120] Lemire, Devon: *A Historiographical Survey of Literacy in Britain between 1780 and 1830* (University of Alberta 2012) 249

[121] Webb, Robert: *Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England* in *The English Historical Review* Volume 65 Number 256, (July 1950) 335

The historiography of Chartism shows us a movement that has generated substantial differences of interpretation by historians. The early histories told the movement's story but with little analysis, although when opinions were expressed, they judged it a failure, and ascribed this largely to O'Connor's leadership. Later historians, particularly those on the left, continued this holistic view of the movement, highlighting the diversity of internal challenges and interests that beset the leadership, but they apportioned blame for the lack of tangible success upon those leaders who were reluctant to act decisively, who steered towards moderation and who were prepared to accommodate alliance with other groups and classes. In doing so, they endeavoured to restore O'Connor's reputation, an approach that accorded with the developing view of Chartism as a class conscious movement, for it was O'Connor, and those most closely aligned to him, who were seen as in tune with and reflecting the ambitions of the working class membership, the 'fustian jacket, blistered hands and unshorn chin' of the working man, and who were the most vociferous in rejecting any accommodation with the middle class. It is difficult to argue that class did not play a major role in the history of Chartism but this was as much due to the influence of the middle class as it was to a possibly class-conscious working class, an issue we will address in chapter five of this thesis.

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[122] Allen, Joan and Ashton, Owen: *Papers for the People, A study of the Chartist Press* (London 2005) xi

As we have seen in this opening chapter, historians have examined the movement from most angles; general histories which cover all the major themes of tactics, leadership, internal groups, and relationships with other classes and campaigning organisations, but also other publications focusing upon specific and important aspects of Chartism not covered in depth within the general accounts. In this regard, we have already cited Joan Allen's and Owen Ashton's work on the Chartist press but there is also an excellent anthology of Chartist fiction by Ian Haywood,[123] a collection of Chartist poetry by Mike Sanders[124] and, as importantly for current historians, autobiographies and biographies of the leading Chartists that provide invaluable insights into the leadership struggles that enveloped the movement. We have cited the biographies of O'Connor, Harney and Lowery earlier in this chapter but other significant publications are cited below.[125]

When Asa Briggs published *Chartist Studies* in 1963, it signalled the development of a further avenue of research for historians, by widening the focus of study from Chartism as a single entity to

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[123] Haywood, Ian: *The literature of Struggle* (Aldershot 1995)

[124] Sanders, Mike: *The Poetry of Chartism* (Cambridge 2009)

[125] See *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (autobiography 1872); *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett* (Autobiography 1870); *John Frost: A Study in Chartism* (David Williams 1939); *Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working-Class Politics* (Fred Leventhal 1971); *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics 1819-1869* (Miles Taylor 2003); *The Life of Francis Place 1771 – 1854* (Graham Wallas 1898); *Chartist Portraits* (GDH Cole 1941)

Chartism as a collection of local associations, from top down to bottom up. This encouraged historians to explore localised activities within the movement and led to the publication of regional accounts, primarily focused upon the industrial areas and cities of England (Wright had published his account of Scottish Chartism in 1953 and Wilson his account in 1970), and giving a voice to the ordinary, working class members who had largely been ignored in the earlier, general histories.

As this chapter has endeavoured to show, the historiography of Chartism, incorporating not only books but articles and essays, has covered a multitude of aspects but, to our knowledge, has not studied it from the perspective of community. It is upon this that the thesis will focus, examining whether Chartism displays those factors that take it beyond being a movement to an imagined community. In doing so, it will address the topics and issues that have been highlighted in this initial chapter, issues that are central to a resolution of the thesis title. Firstly, however, it is important understand the antecedents of the movement, so chapter two will focus upon the economic ideas, radical movements and individuals that shaped Chartist thinking, together with significant events that influenced the membership's continued anger with those in authority. It was these ideas and events that helped to bring the movement together in the first instance and then sustained it, albeit sometimes shakily, during its existence; whether these were sufficiently unifying and widely accepted, however, to move Chartism beyond being a movement and into being a community will be considered as the thesis develops.

Chapter three will look at the movement in detail by considering the composition of its membership, Chartism's geographical reach and, within that, the contribution made by local associations, as well as the internal interest groups that provided focus and leadership but which also threatened division and divergence from the fundamental aims of the movement. It will also examine Chartism's struggle to accommodate women, particularly the roles it expected them to play and the ones they actually did play, and finally it will consider the issue of ulterior measures, those actions that Chartism believed could effectively influence those in society who were outwith the movement and wavering in their support for reform. Also discussed within chapter three will be the issue of physical force versus moral force, an argument that not only divided the internal membership into 'for or against' but also influenced external middle-class opinion, and upon whose support, success was dependent. The chapter will also examine Anderson's ideas of an imagined community in more depth, referencing those issues that may have worked for or against creating unity within the membership, and which will be covered in the chapter content.

If chapter three could be subtitled *Who were the Chartists*, then chapter four could be titled *How the Chartists saw themselves and how they were seen by others*. It will question what the movement saw as its most fundamental purpose; accepting that the immediate goal was the Charter, was the longer-term ambition social change and improvement for the working classes and, if so, how was this envisioned by the movement? It will also look at the movement's attitude to the upper stratum of society – the aristocracy and the monarchy – as well as its views on the political establishment that was denying it universal suffrage. In doing so, it will also consider how others in society regarded Chartism, and how such views influenced the actions and words of both parties. Finally, chapter four will describe the impact that the Chartist and non-Chartist Press had upon the debate and how it influenced, and entrenched, views on both sides. The chapter will also consider these issues in relation to one of the important elements in the creation of an imagined community, the existence of those who are in opposition and how this can bring the membership together to create mutual solidarity.

Chapter five will examine Chartism's relationship with the middle class, arguably the most important one that it endeavoured, and struggled, to forge. It is for this reason that it has been separated from the relationships with other classes within society and which will be described in chapter four. Specifically, it will revisit the historiographical arguments over the importance of class and class consciousness in Chartist history, not only from a working-class perspective but also in consideration of those professions whom we would regard as middle class; did they see themselves in the same light? Did the middle class regard itself as an entity, with a level of class consciousness, in the same way that the working class undoubtedly saw itself? If we believe it did, then it is likely that this would have influenced its attitude towards Chartism, and we will examine whether this was the case, with particular reference to three parallel organisations to Chartism – the Anti Corn Law League, the Birmingham Political Union and the Complete Suffrage Movement, all of whom were regarded by Chartism as middle class in leadership and membership.

The final chapter will endeavour to bring together all the issues, arguments and evidence from the previous five chapters and to determine whether we can claim, with any certainty, that Chartism was not a loosely organised movement with social and political ambitions, but rather was a community of like-minded people with clear shared goals and values, and for whom the issues of geographical separation, different occupations and separate skills were an imaginary but insignificant barrier to the greater ambition of electoral suffrage.

Chapter Two: The Events that shaped Chartism – Radicalism, Economics and Legislation

> ‘…it is not the *mere possession of the franchise* that is to benefit our country; that is only *the means to an end* – the election of the best and wisest men to solve a question which has never yet been propounded in any legislative body – namely, *how shall all the resources of our country be made to advance the intellectual and social happiness of every individual*? It is not merely *the removing of evils,* but *the establishing of remedies* that can benefit the millions…’.[1]

William Lovett spoke these words in 1841 as part of his address to the ‘Political and Social Reformers of the United Kingdom’ and they captured for the majority in the movement the essence of the Chartist campaign. Lovett does not make specific reference to the working class but addresses ‘every individual’ and ‘the millions’; for Lovett, even though the most disadvantaged within the existing electoral system was the unenfranchised working class, reform would benefit the whole of society. Nevertheless, when Lovett talked about ‘the social happiness of every individual’ and the ‘removing of evils’, he was clearly referencing the plight of poor working families, their unsanitary living conditions, their lack of job security and their low wages when in employment; and yet, while he was less concerned about the more privileged and wealthy parts of the population, he believed a more equitable and fair society brought with it a stability and contentedness that would provide security for all social classes. Lovett was not campaigning to destroy the social structure, even if his opinions of the aristocracy would most likely reflect those who referred to it as the ‘idle rich’; Lovett and his fellow

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[1] Lovett, William (1876): *Life and Struggles of William Lovett* (London 1967) 209 - 214

Chartists wanted a re-ordering that recognised the contribution of all and which shared the ensuing benefits, and this would only come from a change to the electoral system**.** Lovett's words indicate the Charter and the subsequent petitions to Parliament encouraged the movement to promote ambitions beyond the headline six points; chapter three will examine these in greater depth but it is worth noting here that any community, whilst united by a commitment to a set of fundamental principles or beliefs, can also hold a variety of views across a multiplicity of issues. In this respect, Chartism was no different from any other community of its type.

Understanding these ambitions is fundamental to understanding the Chartist movement; when Harney referred to their aims as 'The Charter and something more' in the late 1840s, he was likely considering the movement's adoption of a much more radical and socialist agenda but for ordinary members 'something more' meant something more personal – food on the table, a roof over the family's head, education for the children and a safe working environment, what Stephens defined as 'a knife and fork question'.[2]

This chapter aims to provide the context for the examination of Chartism that will take place during the remainder of the thesis, in particular how the movement for reform came into being, how it arrived at an agenda that was more than just electoral change and why it then struggled for twenty years to make any tangible impact upon such ambitions. To answer these questions, we need to examine the ideas and events that influenced the thinking of not only those who favoured change but also those who opposed it, particularly within Government. So, this chapter will focus upon three main areas: the radical thinkers, organisations and events that shaped the aims and the tactics of Chartism, the economic and social ideas that shaped the milieu in which those opposing and those advocating change developed their thinking, and two key pieces of legislation that specifically influenced the agitation for reform and working-class attitudes towards the rest of society.

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[2] Speech on Kersal Moor, Manchester in September 1838, quoted in Wright, David*: Popular Radicalism: The Working Class Experience 1780-1880* (London 1988) 115

The campaign for electoral reform did not begin with Chartism; rather Chartism was one element in a journey whose beginning has been vigorously debated by historians but whose conclusion we can reasonably assert to be the Representation of the People Act of 1928 which delivered universal suffrage when women were finally granted equal voting and representational rights as men.[3]

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[3] Norbert Gossman captures the competing historical views in an excellent article *The origins of Modern British Radicalism: The case for the Eighteenth Century* in *European Labor and Working-Class history*, May 1975, Cambridge University Press

If the beginning of the journey is debatable, then so are the steps involved, although the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, the Peasants Revolt of 1381, the Levellers of the 1640s fighting against the ‘Norman Yoke’, the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688, and the revolutions in France and America have all been cited as significant events, at various times, in the writings of Chartism. But is there a thread that leads us Chartism, or are they discrete events, highly significant but not providing a clear continuity towards the publication of the Charter? They all involved dissent with the status quo but mostly sought a realignment of power and restoration of lost liberties, with perhaps only the Peasants Revolt, with its complaints of unfair taxation upon the lower classes and calls for greater freedom and equality coming closest to the ambitions of Chartism. The movement was not reticent in looking back to a seemingly ‘golden age’ of liberty as seen in Ernest Jones’ rousing speech in 1847:

> ‘Liberty is a tree of long growth in England; it was sunned by the fires of Smithfield; it was watered by the blood of Marston Moor and the veins of Charles I; it was fanned by the prayers of the Puritan and dewed by the tears of the Exile – and now it is beginning to bloom beneath the fostering hand of the Charter’. [4]

While Jones’ speech is the most well-known on this particular issue, other Chartist leaders also invoked the image of the freeborn Englishman when wishing to rouse the membership, and in doing so, were quite prepared to rework, or reinterpret, history to create a narrative that strengthened the resolve of their fellow Chartists. Regardless of the hyperbole of Jones’ words and the melodramatic references to Mary Tudor (reign 1553-1558) and the Civil War, it is clear that Chartism saw itself as the next, and hopefully final, stage of the struggle for civil rights and personal liberty. We should, therefore, see Chartism as it saw itself, as part of a ‘radical tradition’, one that embraced a continuum of ambitions, that was at times conservative and nostalgic and at others, particularly during the latter half of the eighteenth century, one that was prepared to increasingly challenge the established order of society and embrace parliamentary reform for the benefit of the poorer and disadvantaged elements of the population, even if this rarely translated into direct action. Chartism was not created in a vacuum and whilst Ernest Jones may have focused upon specific, dramatic historical events that he regarded as landmarks on the journey to reform, of equal significance to such events were the philosophical ideas and theories, some that Chartism embraced and others that it rejected, which influenced the political, economic and social environment in which radicals and reformers sought to realise change within society. These ideas were the raw materials that helped forge the ideas upon which Chartism was born and provided the basis for the communal beliefs that sustained it.

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[4] Ashton, Owen; Fyson, Robert; Roberts, Stephen: *The Chartist Legacy* (London 1999) 232

However, just as Chartism was another stage of a journey, so the ideas that influenced it were also formed by building upon those that had gone before. Thus, Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) theories on wealth, taxation and trade reflected his understanding, and mostly rejection, of the Mercantilist economists of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, while Thomas Malthus' (1766-1834) views on poor relief were strongly influenced by his rejection of the Poor Laws of Elizabeth I (reign 1558-1603). This chapter, therefore, while focusing upon the ideas generated during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, will recognise the importance of those that predated them.

Firstly, however, we should recognise that there is no universal agreement among historians on a timetable for radicalism. S. Maccoby believed that radicalism began in the second half of the century: 'It was during the struggle against George III's increasing domination of politics and Parliament between 1762 and 1782, that modern British Radicalism was born',[5] although radical activity during this period, should not overshadow the growing dissent during the first half of the eighteenth century, which so concerned the authorities among the lower classes. Henry Hallam (1777-1859), writing in 1827 and reflecting upon the reign of George II (reign 1727-1760), wrote that Government supporters complained 'both in parliament and in pamphlets, of the democratical spirit, the insubordination to authority, the tendency to republican sentiments, which they alleged have gained ground among the people'.[6] Linda Colley also recognised this dissent but believed it was not a campaign for radical change, either then or later in the century: '…while American Radicals increasingly stress the need for autonomous civic action to secure redress, the English are content with superficial reformism' and, in referencing E. P. Thompson, she noted that 'the self-activating plebeian' crowd rejected direct action and instead appealed for redress to the established local hierarchies.[7] At this early stage, we are perhaps getting an insight into a very English nature of dissent; dissatisfaction, and a willingness to voice it, but without the drive to direct physical action, an issue that was to challenge Chartism during its lifetime. [8]

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[5] Maccoby. S: *The Radical Tradition 1763 – 1914* (New York 1957) 1

[6] Hallam, Henry*: The constitutional History of England, from the Accession of Henry VII to the death of George II* (London 1930) 177

While Maccoby highlighted the activity of individuals and organisations in his analysis of the second half of the century, Colley focused upon an aspect that has received less attention; the role of the Tory party in the history of dissent and reform, significant when we consider the support given to Tory candidates by Chartists during the elections of 1841 and 1847, which can be partly explained as a reaction against the Whigs for the outcomes of the 1832 Reform Act and their perceived betrayal of the disenfranchised working classes. Colley is clear that Tory advocacy for even limited reform – the party promoted franchise extension in Norwich, London and Bristol, while the pamphlets of 1742 and 1743 called for the repeal of the Black and Riot Acts, together with representative change – was not born of a deeply held belief in the unfairness of the political system but rather 'they tolerated this ideological bias for the sake of the grass roots support the Independents could give them'. [9] In truth, when Chartists and Tories briefly united one hundred years later, it was not a meeting of minds, it was through opportunism, expediency and, in all likelihood, contained an element of revenge. As Colley remarks, when Constituency Instructions in the 1720s demanded of Tory candidates that, if elected, they work to restore triennial parliaments, 'populist rhetoric should not obscure the fact that most Tory Instructions were synthetic';[10] although no champions of reform, they did favour the redistribution of seats and increased representation within the growing towns, such as Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham. These seemingly small steps were important if we regard the route to reform as a journey; every debate, pamphlet or speech raised awareness of the issues and allowed others to build upon them.

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[7] Colley, Linda: *Eighteenth Century English Radicalism before Wilkes*, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Volume 31, 1981, (Cambridge University Press) 2

[8] For an insight into the nature of dissent in Scotland, and the similarities and differences with the debates in England, see Pentland, Gordon: *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland 1820-1833* (Suffolk 2008). This work will be referenced further in this thesis.

If we return to Hallam's observations, it's clear that an inability to exert any influence within society was causing increasing dissatisfaction among the working population, a frustration given a voice by the publication in 1740 of *The Livery-Man: Or, Plain Thoughts on Publick Affairs*.[11] The significance of this address is that it both aired these grievances and proposed a remedy, sowing the seeds of later arguments for manhood suffrage. The unknown author stated his intention to:

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[9] Colley, Linda: *Eighteenth Century English Radicalism before Wilkes* 9

[10] *Ibid* 13.

[11] *'The Livery-Man: Or, Plain Thoughts on Publick Affairs: In which the present situation of things, some late writings concerning the liberty of the Press, the General Disposition of the People, the Insults Offered to the City of London, and the true nature and Infallible Characteristicks of Publick Spirit, in Contradistinction to that of a Faction, are Consider'd and Explain'd to the Lovers of Truth and Liberty',* James Smith publisher,1740

> '…vindicate the rights of a free people from the mistakes, or rather the misrepresentation, of some who make their own notions of Government the standards of this nation' and to show 'the People of Britain in general have an Indubitable right to canvass Publick Affairs, to express their sentiments freely, and to declare their sense of any Grievances under which they labour'.

The dominant concept was of a free nation, which he defined as one 'where the Government acts for the Good of the Whole, and those Nations are Slaves where such as are instructed with the Government mind no Body's benefit but their own' and he raised four issues that would resonate with Chartism a century later – the growth of lucrative Government jobs through preferential placement, funded by the tax payer with complainants regarded as enemies of the Government; the liberty of the Press ('…and this I do assert to be so essential to Freedom that I will undertake to prove our liberties cannot be safe if ever it should be taken from us'), with no-one denied the power of complaint; the need for the People to have access to assemblies and corporations that allow them to air grievances, and recognition of the need to ensure the widest possible political representation:

> 'To say that Chandlers, Weavers, Bookbinders, Coachmakers, Smiths, Wine-Coopers and such like are no fit Judges of Publick Affairs, is stating the question falsely' (trades and professions that can be found in Chartist membership rolls); finally, the liberty of the people to speak out, since '…in a country of Freedom, if a man have nothing at heart but the recommending of a sincere love of Liberty, and a publick-spirited zeal for the Constitution, he is certainly in the right to express himself as clearly, as fully, and as distinctly as he can…'.

Though not a widely known publication, ‘The Livery-Man’ provides an important bridge to the growth of Radicalism in the second half of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth centuries, and forms one of the threads leading to Chartism, both in its direct references to freedom of expression and its intimation of political representation for the working man. The years following the publication of ‘The Livery-Man’ saw a marked increase in reform agitation, with specific events, publications and individuals all playing significant roles, and we will briefly look at some of the most noteworthy of these.

The ‘Livery-Man’ also highlighted the growing importance of the Press, and the printed word became increasingly influential in the dissemination of Radical ideas. In 1817, Thomas Wooler (1786-1853) founded an unstamped paper, *The Black Dwarf*, and, although only having a short life, – it was forced to close in 1824 on the death of its sponsor, Major John Cartwright (1740-1824) – it was significant through its influence on contemporary opinion and on later Chartist publications. Its success can be measured by its expansion from eight pages to thirty-two and its rapid circulation increase to 12,000 within months of its first edition, mirroring the later growth of O’Connor’s flagship, the *Northern Star*. As James Epstein notes: ‘*The Black Dwarf* was one of the most influential radical journals of the post-war years. The journal's tone was satiric; its politics were those of radical constitutionalism' [12] and its reach was such that a copy could be found 'in the hat crown of every pitman you meet'. [13] Wooler used sarcasm and ridicule but his message was serious; he was a strong advocate of electoral reform but recognised, as did Chartism later, that to achieve it would be a struggle: '…the rich and the timid will not generally enlist under the banners of Universal Suffrage is what we expect; and in truth it is everything but a misfortune'. [14] The anticipated conflict, however, did not dissuade Wooler from continuing *Black Dwarf's* campaign:

> 'Whatever oppression or despotism militates against, or is the ruin of the one, it must in the end be the destruction of the other; we therefore entreat them... it should be too late, to stand forward and espouse the constitutional rights of the people, by obtaining a radical reform in the system of representation, which alone can save both the trading and labouring classes from ruin'.[15]

The influence of *Black Dwarf* and similar Radical publications on the population can be gauged by the reaction of the established Press: 'The spirit of the people [is] in a violent ferment from the sufferings of real distress, from the industrious propagation of seditious falsehoods, and the perpetual inculcation of imaginary remedies. The shop of WROE, the printer of the Manchester Observer . . . is perpetually beset with poor misled creatures, whose appetite for seditious ribaldry, created at first by distress, is whetted by every species of stimulating novelty. Medusas, Gorgons, Black Dwarfs, and all the monstrous progeny begotten by disaffection upon ignorance'.[16] This assessment of the influence of the radical press was not misplaced, for in comments that could equally be applied to the Chartist Press, Wentworth Sturgeon wrote in 1865: 'I think it of great importance that the class of publications, of which The Black Dwarf was one of the most popular, should not be lost sight of. They were the political instructors of the people at a period of great excitement and much suffering. And they constituted a power in the country, of which those who move in more peaceful times have no conception…'. [17]

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[12] Epstein, James 'Thomas Wooler' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-2014)

[13] Thompson E.P*: The Making of the English Working Class* 758.

[14] *Black Dwarf* 8th April 1818

[15] *Black Dwarf* 28th July 1819

As referenced in the above comment in *The* Times, The *Black Dwarf* was not the only regular, radical publication; as well as the *Manchester Observer*, *Medusa* and *Gorgon* (the last two being shortlived derivatives of *Black Dwarf*), there was also the *Weekly Political Register* edited by William Cobbett, which ran from 1802 until 1836 and provided Cobbett with a vehicle for his views on society, in particular his ambition to rid the country of the oligarchy that ran it. At first glance, it can be difficult to identify Cobbett as a Radical since his desire to return England to the type of idyll captured in *Rura*l *Rides* and his distaste for the development of factories and urban manufacturing, would lead us to see him as conservative, possibly even reactionary. Nevertheless, he was an influential voice among those campaigning for parliamentary reform, even if he was less concerned with enfranchising the working class and more for reducing the privilege of the wealthy; his parliamentary oratory, which we will see in a later chapter, and his writing in the *Weekly Political Register* were powerful interventions in the reform debates. His articles, in particular, use language and phrasing that Chartist speakers and papers would later adopt when addressing its working class audience:

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[16] *The Times* 11th August 1819

[17] Sturgeon, Wentworth*: Notes and Queries*, 3rd Series, VIII, 28th October 1865 in Hendrix, Richard: *Popular Humour and the Black Dwarf* in *Journal of British Studies,* Volume 16, (Autumn 1976, Cambridge University Press) 128

> '…with what indignation must you hear yourselves called the Populace, the Rabble, the Mob, the Swinish Multitude…. you have been represented by the Times newspaper, by the Courier, by the Morning Post…as the scum of society…these insolent hirelings, who wallow in wealth, would not be able to put their abuse of you in print were it not for your labour. You create all that is an object of taxation…'.[18]

We cannot overestimate the importance of the printed press in the development of Chartism as a community; Anderson coined the term 'print capitalism' to define the importance of the printed word in developing a common language that a country's inhabitants would adopt to forge the nation as an imagined community. This would happen in a free market with publications (books, newspapers, pamphlets etc) available to all, a criterion the Chartist press was able to fulfil by providing the membership with both language and ideas that created that sense of unity.

Cobbett was not an early proponent of universal suffrage, although he later came to champion the principle, but he was a consistent campaigner against working class poverty and hunger, believing that a large Radical presence in Parliament would allow him and others to highlight their plight. In this regard, he was not dissimilar to his contemporary, John Wilkes (1725-1797), another highly important figure in the history of Radicalism but no great advocate of universal suffrage. Unlike Cobbett, however, Wilkes harboured no desire to return to a rurally based England but rather petitioned for the reform of a system that still tolerated rotten boroughs ('the mean and insignificant boroughs') which should be removed and their representation reallocated to the developing manufacturing towns such as Manchester and Birmingham.[19] Wilkes may not have supported universal suffrage but he did promote the greater involvement of the working man in the legislative process and, for this, he is rightly seen as a significant contributor in the journey towards Chartism. In a speech to the House of Commons when introducing his Parliamentary Reform Bill in 1776, he declared he wanted:

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[18] Cobbett, William: *To the Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, on the Cause of their Present Miseries*… in *The Weekly Political Register*, 2nd November 1816

> '…an English Parliament to speak the free, unbiased sense of the body of the English people, and of every man among us…The meanest mechanic, the poorest peasant and day-labourer, has important rights respecting his property, however inconsiderable, his wages, his earnings, the very price and value of each day's hard labour…we ought always to remember this important truth, acknowledged by every free state, that all government is instituted for the good of the mass of the people to be governed; that they are the original fountain of power…'.[20]

Slightly less well known but of great significance to the reform and future Chartist movements were Major John Cartwright and Francis Burdett (1770-1844). As well as sponsoring the *Black Dwarf*, Cartwright published treatises on reform; *Take Your Choice* (1776) which promoted the principle of manhood suffrage, and *The People's Barrier against Undue Influence and Corruption of the Commons House of Parliament according to the Constitution* (1780), which reiterated his views on suffrage and advocated equal electoral districts, vote by ballot, annual parliaments, the payment of MPs and the removal of any property qualification for those standing in elections – in effect, the points of the 1838 Charter. However, despite publishing *Take your choice*, his commitment to full manhood suffrage is questionable - he never expected it to be conceded but rather saw its advocacy as a starting, or bargaining position, for the more modest reforms that were later granted in the 1832 Act. Likewise, 'the abolition of property qualifications was meant to allow merchants and businessmen to become MPs, not to open up politics to working class men'.[21] Whether true or speculation, we should recognise Cartwright as an ardent campaigner for reform, for, in addition to his publications, he was a founder, together with other middle-class Radicals, of the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information in 1780, aimed at enlightening the populace on the loss of traditional liberties and promoting Paine's *Rights of Man* in support of his arguments. In 1812, he founded the Hampden Club, which grew into a national network of similarly named clubs, and while the impetus for its formation came from middle class radicals, its aim was to engage the working man, through discussion and debate, in a campaign for parliamentary reform. This desire to marry middle class and working-class radicalism becomes increasingly relevant when we examine the struggle of the Chartist movement to effect this accommodation two decades later.

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[19] John Wilkes speech to Parliament on 21st March 1776 in MacCoby*: The Radical Tradition* 28-32

[20] *Ibid* 28-32.

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[21] Vallance, Edward*: A Radical History of Britain* (London 2009) 219

Burdett, although a member of the aristocracy who married into great wealth, was not an advocate or apologist for the Establishment and his decision to act as an Independent rather than join either of the two main parties, allowed him the freedom to challenge the Government and press for reform. Outspoken in his support for Catholic Emancipation, opposed to the suspension of Habeas Corpus and demanding of an independent inquiry into the events at Peterloo (for which he was prosecuted for sedition, and imprisoned), his most significant contribution to the debate on electoral change was his motion in the House of Commons for a Plan of Reform. His speech introducing the motion focused upon corruption, generally tolerated within Parliament but which he described as 'an intolerable evil'; corruption for Burdett was epitomised by the continued existence of rotten boroughs and 'borough-mongers' who effectively bought or sold these parliamentary seats, for while 'the People of England cannot be legally and constitutionally taxed without their consent', this right had been destroyed by the House and by this corrupt group 'who have usurped and hold as private property, the sovereignty of England.'[22] As others remarked, the result was an environment of discontent caused by the …certain knowledge that People now have of the corrupt state of the House, and their exclusion from that share in the Constitution to which they are, by law, entitled…[23] Burdett's solution was the removal of rotten boroughs, the subdivision of counties based upon the taxed male population, with each subdivision sending one MP to Parliament, and franchise extension to tax paying householders and freeholders. As with Cobbett, Cartwright and Wilkes, Burdett did not advocate universal suffrage but, like the others, campaigned against corrupt and unfair methods as practised by Government; that they did not openly champion universal suffrage should not diminish their contribution to the longer-term campaign for franchise reform and their influence upon Chartism.

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[22] HC Debate 15th June 1809 Volume 14 cc1041-70

The second half of the eighteenth century was also notable for the growth of reform societies. The Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights was founded in 1769 specifically to raise funds in support of Wilkes, following the Government's refusal to allow him to take his seat after his successful election as MP for Middlesex, and also to further the campaign for greater democracy by making the population aware of the parliamentary restrictions placed upon their rights. The Society's distribution of pamphlets and broadsheets to publicise its campaign, its use of the press, network of locally affiliated groups and pressuring of MPs, provided Chartism with an effective blueprint for campaigning.

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[23] *Ibid.*

The Yorkshire Association was established in 1779 as a protest against the handling of the American war by the government of Lord North (Frederick North 1732-1792), the consequent increase of taxation to pay for the conflict and the belief that public money was being used to fund MPs whose fundamental role was to support the Executive, resulting in a parliament that never challenged the Government and thus emasculated the power of the MP. To rectify these abuses, the Association advocated electoral reform, launching a programme that called for universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts and secret ballots, all of which would later form part of the Charter. Its belief, as Stephen Conway writes, was ‘why should a man risk his life for his country yet be thought unworthy of a suffrage in the election of his representative?’ [24] Significantly for Chartism, here was a campaign for economic reform that quickly grew into one for parliamentary reform, led by an influential society formed in the provinces and breaking the London metropolitan domination of radical activity. Initial support for its proposals reflected the dissatisfaction within the country at the progress of the American War and its impact upon public opinion; Conway cites examples of merchants whose businesses were badly affected through lost trade, and individuals whose personal circumstances were impacted through the loss of family and staff to the militia (a ratio of 1:7 or 1:8 of the male population served in the armed forces during the American War, greater than any previous conflict and only surpassed by the Napoleonic Wars).[25] To pay for the war, the Government increased the national debt in eight years from £127 million to £232 million, to service which it increased both land tax and excise upon basic consumption items, the latter disproportionately affecting the poorest in society. Further taxes upon glass and wallpaper severely affected building trades (bankruptcies in this industry rose from fifteen in 1772 to fifty-eight in 1778) while the Government also reduced spending upon public construction, such as roads and canals. Unsurprisingly, trade with America declined, and Conway cites the example of wool exports which fell from £900,000 in 1772 to £58,000 in 1776. Taken together, these measures lead to increased unemployment within the affected trades and industries, although we should recognise that a number of those displaced would have found employment by enlisting in the armed forces. As often happens in an economic downturn, for those who remained in employment, wage rates increased as a result of labour scarcity in some professions, although any increase in wages was not sufficient to compensate for the increased cost of living.[26] However, after the initial success of the Association's protest, increased military success in the Revolutionary War improved the mood of the country and lessened the level of dissatisfaction, with a consequent decline in support for, and influence of, the Association.

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[24] Conway, Stephen: *Britain and the Impact of the American War*, in *War in History,* Volume 2, Number 2, 1995, (Sage publications.) 143 - 144

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[25] *Ibid.* 130

[26] *Ibid.* 130 -136

Although, for all intents and purposes, it had ceased to be influential by 1783, we should recognise the importance of the Yorkshire Association, and the influence of the American War, on radical and reforming ideas. In particular, the widening of the geographical reach of radicalism grew in the years following its founding, so that when the London Corresponding Society (LCS) was formed in 1792 to campaign for electoral reform, it quickly forged links with groups in Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and Derby, as well as with Cartwright’s Society for Promoting Constitutional Information and the Friends of the People (we will later see the impact of other provincial organisations such as the Hampden Clubs, the Birmingham Political Union and the Great Northern Union). Whereas the Yorkshire Association was founded primarily by the clergy, gentry and freeholders of the county (which explains its call for an increase in the number of County representatives in Parliament), the LCS was founded to engage working men in the fight for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, although as the Society grew it attracted membership from professional, middle class men and members of the minor aristocracy, all of whom increased its acceptability within wider society. Whilst not comparable to the Chartist movement in size (records of the LCS are not readily available but, at its height, it likely numbered about five thousand members), in its ambition for the extension of the franchise and its mixed social membership (physicians, barristers and surgeons sat alongside mechanics, shoemakers, tailors, shopkeepers and weavers) we can see strands of Chartism. Indeed, this 1796 description of the LCS membership as 'Blackguards and Ragamuffins…whose sole aim was to subvert our glorious Constitution, and to hurry us into all those scenes of blood, confusion and plunder which have laid waste the once fertile and well-governed kingdom of France', [27] could be taken from an attack on Chartism in a commercial newspaper in the 1840s. Francis Place, one of the accredited authors of the Charter, was chairman of the general committee of the LCS in 1795, confirming the link between Chartism and the earlier Radical movements Although not as marked as those that afflicted the Chartist movement, the LCS also had its own internal struggle between peaceful and physical agitation; prominent members, including Alexander Galloway (1776-1847 and Society President in 1797), John Bone (Secretary in 1797) and Thomas Evans (1763-1831 and Secretary in 1798) were associated with the United Englishmen, a secret organisation advocating armed rebellion to establish a republic, and also with the Loyal Lambeth Association, founded by John Francklow and John Shelmerdine of the LCS, an organisation '…set up on the model of a voluntary armed association or parish militia, ostensibly to be called out only in case of riot or invasion, but by later imputation to achieve parliamentary reform by force of arms if necessary'.[28] The debate within the LCS on the use of force was never as pronounced nor as heated as that within Chartism but it’s clear that radicalism and the desire for reform during the latter years of the eighteenth century was moving in directions that were not always constitutional, and which would influence many Chartist Leaders and their followers demanding an alternative to moral force methods.

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[27] *The Decline and Fall, Death, Dissection and Funeral Procession of His Most Contemptible Lowness the London Corresponding Society,* London, 1796 in Pickering, Paul: *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular politics in the Age of Reform* (London 2007) 28

[28] Barrell, John*: Imagining the King's Death; Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-179* (Oxford 2000) 220

In considering the role of Tory and Whig factions in the events that lead to Chartism and to the legislative reforms of the nineteenth century, we must be careful not to assign labels of ‘for or against’ reform, based upon perceptions of being either conservative or radical, since both are relatively loose descriptors. Both factions had reform minded individuals who promoted change, and both used the opportunities of being in opposition to further such calls. Thus, the dominance of the Whigs in Government during the first half of the eighteenth century allowed the opposing Tory faction to propose limited reforms of Parliament, ostensibly to repair a corrupt system as they saw it, while from 1770 through to the Reform Act of 1832, Whigs in opposition became the main proponents of parliamentary reform, founding the Society of the Friends of the People, whose aim was ‘a more equal representation of the people in Parliament’. The scepticism applied to earlier Tory proposals can be equally applied to this Whig initiative for its audience was middle class and its purpose the reinforcement of aristocratic influence and authority; when proposing a measure of householder enfranchisement in 1790, Henry Flood (1732-1791) declared householders to be ‘exclusive of the rabble, the great mass of the People' and that 'The higher classes of every state are subject to be debauched by ambition and the low by necessity; the middle classes alone can be depended upon'.[29] By deferring to aristocratic leadership, a newly enfranchised middle class would be the bulwark against any threat to the natural order of society, a view still present during the Reform Bill debates of 1832 and evident in Russell's comments that the aristocracy performed important civic duties, relieved the poor through charity and demonstrated private worth and public virtue. [30]

Chartism owed a debt to those individuals and organisations that came before in the cause of reform, although the argument for universal suffrage was a relatively late position for radicalism. Despite isolated calls for an extended franchise, of greater focus for those in the eighteenth century had been the reform of Parliament, whether in limiting the influence of the aristocracy or ridding the Commons of corrupt practices and rotten constituencies. Such arguments, however, encouraged the wider discussion on representation and the franchise, ultimately leading to the organised campaigns for suffrage and Chartism.

Of the events in the eighteenth century that most influenced Radical and Chartist thinking, the French, American and Industrial revolutions are of great significance, the first two providing examples of what could be achieved in terms of political change, and the latter creating the conditions of urban working-class poverty and deprivation that drove the agitation for franchise reform – without the vote, such pitiful conditions were never likely to change. The French and American revolutions brought to prominence the writing of Thomas Paine, whose publications, particularly *The Rights of Man* with its rejection of hereditary government, the assertion of the people having the right to choose their own government and its proposals for family allowance, old age pensions and a progressive taxation system, found a receptive audience among the working classes, support that continued within the Chartist movement. Not all of Paine's views were shared by Radicals and Chartists; his advocacy of a democratic republic was not supported by those who campaigned for reform, rather than abolition, of a corrupt monarchy, cabinet and parliament. Likewise, Paine's support for the two revolutions, particularly the American rebellion against the British Crown, was not indicative of a lack of patriotism in Britain. There was undoubted support for the Americans' actions, particularly as they were linked to the imposition of punitive taxes, but that should not be conflated into a lack of love for the home country. John Thelwall (1764-1834), a member of the LCS, commented in 1794 that 'there must be something in the constitution of this country which a Briton will ever love and venerate'[31] and we know that, even as working people marched to Peterloo to demand a change to electoral representation, accompanying bands played ‘Rule Britannia’ and the National Anthem, during which protesters removed their hats in respect.

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[29] Ellis, Harold: *Aristocratic Influence and Electoral Independence: The Whig Model of Parliamentary Reform 1792-1832,* in *Journal of Modern History* Volume 51 Number 4, (University of Chicago Press, 1979) 1271 - 1272

[30] *Ibid*. 1274-1275

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[31] *The Times* 6th December 1794

Paine’s writing provided an opportunity for those opposing reform to paint a doomsday scenario should it ever come to fruition; thus could Edmund Burke (1729-1797) declare that the experience of France would result in anarchy in Britain should the lower classes assume greater influence and power, and he accused Paine of levelling, of proposing a re-distribution of wealth, and of wishing to change the very nature and values of British society and limit its economic growth (Burke was supportive of the American argument against the British Government as its revolution did not entail destructive social change, whereas the French Revolution was ‘a revolution in sentiments, manners and moral opinions…As things now stand, with everything respectable destroyed without us, and an attempt to destroy within us every principle of respect ‘ [32]). Burke’s dramatic warnings of future social destruction were repeated ad nauseam by Government ministers when addressing the challenge of Chartism fifty years later.

While these revolutions provided emotional inspiration for Chartism during its lifetime, evidenced by references in articles and speeches, of greater practical influence upon the movement were those social changes driven by technology that encouraged the migration from rural to urban areas – in 1700, one tenth of Scotland's population lived in a town but, by 1820, this had risen to one third, a change mirrored across Britain. The impact of technological change upon agriculture was as dramatic as that upon manufacturing, for improvements in husbandry and the development of mechanisation meant that, as profits rose for the landholder, so the need for unskilled rural labour declined, driving many of these redundant workers into the towns and into factory employment. Although a significant change for Chartism, with the movement growing dramatically on the back of an urban working class and a displaced artisan population adversely impacted by this growth of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, we should not see it as an exclusively urban movement.[33] Although limited in reach, Chartism had a presence in rural areas as the expansion of farms and estates lead to the enclosure of common land and the loss of smallholdings essential for grazing and vegetables,[34] greatly reducing the ability of the farm labourer to be self-sustaining. It is no surprise that the genesis of O'Connor's Land Plan, an unrealistic project based upon a sentimental picture of idyllic rural life, was the restoration of the factory labourer back to the country by providing a cottage and small plot of land.

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[32] Burke, Edmund*: Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) 70

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[33] For further reading on the presence of Chartism in rural England and the changing balance of society in the early nineteenth century, see Hammond, John & Barbara: *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* (1911) and *The Town Labourer* (1917), (London 1920); Brown, Arthur: *Chartism in Essex and Suffolk*, (Essex Record Office Publications, 1982); Peacock AJ: *Village Radicalism in East Anglia 1800-1850* in Dunbabin JPD: *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London 1974); Fearn, Hugh: *Chartism in Suffolk* and Pugh RB: *Chartism in Somerset and Wiltshire* in Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies*; Morris, Max: *Chartism and the British Working-Class Movement,* in *Science & Society* Volume 12, Number 4, Guildford Press, 1948; Briggs, Asa: *A Social History of England* (London 1983)

[34] Davies, David (1795): *The care of the labourers in husbandry* in Inglis, Brian: *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution* (London 1971) 77-78

The influx of workers into towns lacking suitable accommodation, unsurprisingly lead to low quality overcrowded housing and insanitary living conditions, whilst the demand for work among the growing population, coupled with employers' ambition for profit, lead to poor and unsafe working conditions, low wages, insecure employment, long hours and child labour. There are many descriptions of the appalling living conditions in the towns; this one, by Dr Lyon Playfair (1818-1898), who wrote a report on Lancashire towns for a Health Commission in 1844, describes the situation in Bristol and is illustrative of many at the time: '…the dwellings of the lower classes were generally abominably filthy, full of vermin, and in a condition such as I have not seen in any of the large towns of Lancashire'. [35] Significantly, unlike many of the contemporary politicians who were ready to blame the poor for their own degradation, Playfair stated that it was 'wholly to the want of means, and not to any inherent habits in the people themselves, from whom we, in very many instances, received loud complaints on this subject.' [36]

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[35] Hammond, John and Barbara: *The Bleak Age* (London 1934) 71

[36] *Ibid.* 71

In their preface to “The Bleak Age”, John and Barbara Hammond stated that ‘The Chartist movement, if the argument of this book is correct, was the revolt of the mass of the population against the bleak conditions to which this view of society reduced them’ [37] and such wretched living conditions combined with lowly paid employment were significant driving forces behind support for Chartism among the poorest working classes; the vote was the route to change. However, while Rayner Stephens declared at a rally on Kersal Moor in 1838 that ‘This Universal Suffrage is a knife and fork question’, we must recognise that this was not the only motive among radicals and Chartists advocating reform. Prior to the publication of the Charter, Cobbett had written a letter to Francis Burdett in 1816, entitled *What Good would a Reform of Parliament now do? And in what Manner can it take place without Creating Confusion?* in which he outlined the benefits that a reformed parliament would bring, most of which were political and social, and not necessarily economic. In language akin to that of the Tories in the first half of the previous century, Cobbett identified issues of ‘notorious bribery and corruption, meanness, lying, violence, fraud and false-swearing’ that needed to be addressed although his ideas went well beyond those advocated by the Tories, believing that reform would improve ‘a system of election which necessarily produces every species of crime known to the law’. He demanded the removal of profligacy, bribery and perjury at elections, that decisions on promotion and reward, including within the armed forces be based upon merit and personal influence, the examination and, where appropriate, removal or reduction, of publicly paid pensions, sinecures, grants and salaries, the establishment of a free Press, and the revision/reduction of the Civil List. While Cobbett took aim here at what he regarded as a corrupt system, we should recognise that his motives were not solely driven by the rooting out of undeserved privilege but reflected middle class radical views for alleviating the situation of the poorest: 'If a reduction such as I have spoken of were made, a million of pounds a year would thereby be left in the pockets of the people, instead of that sum being annually taken from them by the tax-gatherers. This would be the true way of enabling the farmers and tradesmen to pay wages sufficient to keep labourers out of the poorhouse'.[38] Such sentiments would have found a ready audience with working class Chartists in the North and Midlands of England, Scotland and Wales where the mechanisation of manufacturing and mass employment in factories was an accepted fact of life – what they wanted was improvement in their pay and living conditions. However, for the artisans and self-employed craftsmen of the south-east and London, such mechanisation threatened the very skills and businesses upon which they relied for their livelihoods. Unsurprisingly, their focus was upon their status and skills, rather than the pitiful state that working -

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[37] *Ibid.* 5

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[38] Cobbett, William: *Letter to Francis Burdett* in *Weekly Political Register,* October 1816

class factory workers were enduring. Consequently, there was little obvious sympathy from either party towards the other: as Elie Halevy declares:

> ‘As a delegate (to the Birmingham Convention in July 1839) regretfully admitted, it was only among the worst-paid workers that Chartism found unanimous support. Those who earned thirty shillings a week cared nothing for those who earned fifteen, and the latter cared as little for those who earned five of six shillings. Like the middle class, the working class had its aristocracy’.[39]

For those skilled workers who aspired to join the middle classes, their support for reform was strongly driven by their exclusion from the franchise as a result of the 1832 Reform Act; it was not in support of their fellow Chartists employed in northern mills and factories. [40] So, considering Chartism as an imagined community is not a straightforward argument; it was clearly not a homogenous movement and the motives for advocating reform of the electoral system differed by location, by profession and, seemingly, by social status. If we consider these factors, are we then simply describing a movement, or can we describe it as a community, one where there was widespread buy in to the principles but divergence in motivation and a plan of action?

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[39] Halevy, Elie: *The Triumph of Reform: History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century,* 322

[40] The geographical disparity between the perceptions of working-class conditions is captured in *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell published in 1854; an insight into the link between Chartism and its social environment is well represented in Rosenblatt, Frank: *The Chartist Movement in its social and economic aspects* (London 1916); for an understanding of the economic and social climate that promoted the growth of support for Chartism among the poorest classes, we suggest Hammond, John and Barbara: *The Bleak Age*, originally entitled *The Age of the Chartists*; for a short article that captures the changing historiographical views of the political, social and economic causes of Chartism, see Royle, Edward: *Chartism* (Recent Findings of Research in Economic & Social History), Economic History Society, 1986

Given what would seem to be favourable circumstances, and in the light of the examples set by the revolutions in America and France, historians have questioned why there was no physical rebellion in Britain against a system and society that denied representation and kept the working class largely in poverty. Craig Colhoun suggests this was due to the availability of regular employment for the mass of workers, allowing them to put food on the table, which was of greater concern for them than electoral reform.[41] They may have resented their own living conditions and the visible wealth of factory owners, wealth generated by their efforts, but, as was frequently remarked, men don't rebel on full stomachs. We should, however, also recognise the fragmented nature of the movement as a contributing factor; abortive risings/riots in Llanidloes, Newport and Birmingham that petered out as quickly as they began, the failure to implement an effective national holiday, and the lack of consistency in implementing measures such as exclusive dealing, point to a movement where internal differences, particularly over the use of physical force, were highly influential in determining its direction of travel. As Anderson indicates, coalescence around fundamental beliefs is an important element in establishing and sustaining a community but if these do not then translate into actions, it is not unreasonable to question the level of commitment of the members to these principles.

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[41] Calhoun, Craig*: British and French Workers Movements and the mid nineteenth century crisis* in *Theory and Society* (Volume 12, Number 4, 1973) 488 - 493

These momentous events, movements, and social changes occurred within a framework of economic liberalism, one that required minimal or no state interference in the market as the accepted principle for the operation of trade and commerce, and which formed the basis upon which Government set its financial and taxation policies. It was eighteenth century economists, above all others, who forged the economic ideas that so underpinned society, influencing both the attitudes of parliamentarians and radicals, and the resulting legislation that impacted the poorest in society.

An appreciation of these liberal philosophies will aid our understanding of the environment in which Chartism sought change. Although Chartism largely accepted the social and economic philosophy of the day, seeking a greater degree of fairness within the system rather than a radical change to the system itself, there were some in the movement who sought a more radical and socialist vision as the foundation of the movement's ambitions, arguing that success could never be achieved within the existing arrangements. In an article that predated the publication of the Charter, O'Brien wrote in the *London Mercury*:

> 'What means a social revolution? I mean by it a radical reform in the relative duties and positions of the different classes of society. Political revolutions seldom go beyond the surface of society. They seldom amount to more than a mere transfer of power from one set of political chiefs to another. At best they only substitute one aristocratic form of government for another….'

and, in a direct reference to the American Revolution, he declared that:

> 'It was ... a mere political revolution. In leaving the institution of property where it found it, it left all the germs of social evil to ripen in the womb of time, and these germs remaining, it was of little consequence what the particular form of government was or might be'.[42]

This was not, however, the view of the majority of the membership. Chartism was not opposed to the free market of liberal economics but rather to the way that those with wealth and power governed a society that excluded those without either; what it wanted was fairness, the opportunity for personal improvement, fair wages and security of employment, none of which could be achieved without political influence delivered by the vote. While Chartist papers and speeches were full of criticism and ridicule of the aristocracy and the monarchy who were seen as wasters, freeloaders and useless, there was respect for those entrepreneurs and business men who had built their companies through hard work and graft; Chartism's issue was how they then treated their employees, that there was little or no recognition of who had generated that wealth. To appreciate the economic environment in which Chartism agitated and Government legislated, it is helpful to briefly examine these key economic philosophies; as with Radicalism, we will see how these ideas benefitted from those that preceded them.

Adam Smith and David Ricardo (1772-1823) dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century economic thought respectively. Like most thinkers, Smith both built upon and rejected ideas of his predecessors, particularly Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), James Steuart (1712-1780) and Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) of the mercantilist school, while David Ricardo reinforced and expanded upon much of Adam Smith's work, with his ideas becoming as influential as Smith's in the history of Victorian commerce and trade; we will cover Ricardo's ideas later in this chapter but firstly we must consider the contributions of Adam Smith and also David Hume (1711-1776)

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[42] *London Mercury* May 1837

Mercantilism is not covered in detail since the economic theories that most influenced the period with which this thesis is concerned were provided by those philosophers that came after the Mercantilist thinkers, although reading on Mercantilist and Enlightenment economists is suggested in the footnotes. However, it is important to recognise its contribution to the development of economic theory, if only because it provided Smith and Hume with a focus for their own ideas, albeit mainly by rejection, although Smith was not wholly opposed to all Mercantilist ideas; he disagreed with the fundamental principle of government intervention in trade and the economy to support domestic industry, but sympathised with its promotion of personal responsibility and self-improvement, as well as its advocacy of government funding for infrastructure projects and education. Unlike Thomas Malthus, whose views we shall also cover later in this chapter, Smith did not blame the poor for their situation, although neither did he support government intervention that would alter the nature and relationship of employment, that had to be regulated by the market. Smith's and the mercantilist school's views in the area of personal improvement and education reflect the later ones of Chartism, which unsurprisingly was sympathetic to other mercantilist ideas, particularly Mandeville's, of government funding projects to alleviate unemployment.[43]

In the work of David Hume, we begin to see the decisive move away from mercantilist thinking and towards the philosophy of political economy, in particular his rejection of Steuart's advocacy of state intervention to ensure a balanced economy. However, Hume was no advocate of a society based upon inequality arising from privilege; he promoted unfettered trade, believing that it would create no greater level of inequality than would be found naturally in a capitalist society, but regarded gross inequality resulting from unearned social status as unacceptable and creating a damaging imbalance within society, views later reflected in Chartist thinking on the aristocracy and inherited wealth. Hume's solution was to increase taxation on both basic and luxury commodities, a move that would impact the poorest disproportionately, and which lost him support among radicals whose counter proposal was the taxation of property and income, a position advocated by Chartists in the following century. Although Hume's views on extreme inequality and unearned wealth placed him within the realms of Whig philosophy, his natural home would appear to be with the Tories; in the dispute over an appropriate style of government, Hume sided with the Tory argument that a strong monarchy should be preferred to a constitutional government, although there is no evidence that he supported the idea of an absolute monarchy favoured by those further right on the political spectrum. Neither did Hume support John Locke's belief (and that of the Whigs) that it was legitimate to overthrow a Government if it has failed to protect the rights and liberties of the people. Hume's view of himself was that he was neither Whig nor Tory but rather attempted to steer a passage between the two:

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[43] For an in-depth study of Mercantilism, we would recommend Heckscher, Eli: *Mercantilism*, (1935) (reprint Isha Books, 2015); for an overview of Mercantilism, we would recommend Horrocks, John: *A Short History of Mercantilism*, (London 2018); for an understanding and general overview of the economic theories as relevant to this thesis, we would recommend chapters 3 – 7 of Backhouse, Roger: *The Penguin History of Economics* (London 2002); for an overview of the Enlightenment, we would recommend Porter, Roy: *The Enlightenment* (London 2000); for an understanding of the significance of the Scottish Enlightenment and the ideas that influenced wider society, we would recommend Wood, Paul (editor): *The Scottish Enlightenment (Essays in Re-interpretation),* (USA 2000); for economic thought within the Scottish enlightenment, we would recommend Sakamoto, Tatsuya: *Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Abingdon 2003.)

> 'With regard to politics, and the character of princes and great men, I think I am very moderate. My views of things are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of persons to Tory prejudices. Nothing can so much prove that men commonly regard more persons than things, as to find that I am commonly numbered among the Tories'. [44]

Adam Smith is primarily associated with the economic treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (published 1776) and the impact of this will be discussed shortly, but his earlier work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, provides an insight into his moral and philosophical views that underpin his economic theories laid out in the later work. Importantly, it also provides us with an understanding of the middle class values we can see at play in its dealing with the working class in the following century – a rigid acceptance of economic liberalism and unconstrained trade tempered with a recognition of the hardships caused by poverty, the need for the poor to be responsible for their own improvement and development but with help from the middle classes, provided such assistance did not interfere with the market or drive reliance upon state support. Unlike others, both contemporary and later, who regarded the working class as inherently idle and feckless, Smith had a more positive view of his fellow man, seeing him as a social animal, one willing to co-operate, promote happiness, demonstrate compassion and self-control, and take personal responsibility. This required an inner moral code but one supported by a legal framework to ensure compliance, which is where the state could positively intervene.

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[44] Letter from David Hume to John Clephane, physician, in 1756 quoted in Price, John: *Hume's Concept of Liberty and the History of England*, in *Studies in Romanticism*, Volume 5, 1966, (John Hopkins University Press) 146; in 1758, Hume published *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* in two volumes and they contain his collected works in these areas. It is available as *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* edited by Eugene Miller and published in 1985 by Liberty Fund in the USA.

At a superficial level, *The Wealth of Nations* has progressively come to be seen as a bible for free trade capitalism, in which any state interference in commerce, the operation of markets or how individuals use their own wealth is both unwelcome and damaging:

> 'The statesman who should attempt to direct people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it'.[45]

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[45] Smith, Adam*: An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the* Wealth of Nations, Book 2 *Of the Nature, Accumulation and Employment of Stock* Chapter 3 *Of the Accumulation of Capital or of Productive and Unproductive Labour*, 1776) Charleston, Createspace Independent Publishing, 2014) 24

However, to read the treatise solely at this level would be to ignore Smith's wider comments upon profits, the distribution of wealth and taxation, comments that resonated with radicals at the time of publication and later with working class Chartists. Although Smith's arguments were intended to facilitate a 'wealth of nations' rather than display an ethical concern for those affected, he recognised the danger for a society,

> 'of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged'.[46]

As with his comments on wealth distribution, these views on taxation aligned with his views on good economic practice, as Deborah Boucoyannis notes in an article on Smith: 'A fair distribution of taxation was key to the soundness of the English economy in Smith. The rich, he claimed, should be taxed 'something more than in proportion' to their wealth. 'The inequality of the worst kind' was when taxes must 'fall much heavier upon the poor than upon the rich'. The reasons were not moral. Bad taxes were simply bad economics'. [47]

Neither should we always regard Smith as the implacable enemy of Government; in an article published in 1927, Jacob Viner identified twenty seven examples of acceptable state intervention within the *Wealth of Nations*, interventions that ranged from those clearly intended to facilitate trade (enforcement of contracts by a system of justice, regulation of institutions, such as company structures, joint- stock companies, co-partneries, regulated companies and so on), temporary monopolies, including copyright and patents, of fixed duration, and laws against banks issuing low-denomination promissory notes et al, those aimed at improving the lives of individuals, particularly the low paid and poor (wages to be paid in money, not goods, ensuring the 'cheapness or plenty of provisions', and the education of people of all ages et al) and others that were wide ranging in their contribution to an improved society ('Police', or preservation of the 'cleanliness of roads, streets, and to prevent the bad effects of corruption and putrifying substances', patrols by town guards and fire fighters to watch for hazardous accidents, the encouragement of martial exercises, and erecting and maintaining certain public works and public institutions intended to facilitate commerce).[48] These were views with which Chartism would have strongly agreed as will become clearer in later chapters of this thesis. When Smith wrote that 'it is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion',[49] this could have been written by a Chartist at any time during the movement's existence.

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[46] Smith Adam: Adam: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the* Wealth of Nations, Book I *On the Causes of Improvement in the Productive Powers*, Chapter 3 *On the Wages of Labour* 33

[47] Boucoyannis, Deborah: *Contrary to popular belief, Adam Smith did not accept inequality as a necessary trade-off for a more prosperous economy*, in the *London School of Economics Blog, February 2014*

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[48] Viner, Jacob: *Adam Smith and Laissez Faire*, in *Journal of Political Economy* Vol. 35, No. 2 April 1927 (University of Chicago Press) 222 - 225

[49] Smith, Adam: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the* Wealth of Nations, Book 5 *On the Revenue of the Sovereign or Commonwealth*, Chapter 2 *On the Sources of the General or Public Revenue of the Society* 355

Two further theories of Smith’s philosophy had a substantial impact upon later thinking among both working class and employers. The Labour Theory of Value contended that the value of a product should be accounted by the labour taken to produce it, so that the wages paid to the worker should reflect this value. Although this argument was superceded by what has become known as the ‘marginalist theory of value’ in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, whereby value is determined by how the buyer determines its value to him or her, Smith’s theory was important to those struggling to obtain a fair wage and became a focal point for those campaigning for change, highlighting the excessive profits of the employer at the expense of the worker. In his Theory on the Division of Labour, Smith’s radical ideas on the process of manufacturing had significant impact upon employer and worker alike. Using the example of the pin factory, Smith contrasted the performance of a single worker, carrying out each task required to produce a single pin, with that of the division of labour in a modern factory, in which individual workers were assigned a specific element of the production process. Becoming highly proficient in one operation and not having to move between different tasks or skills, reduced time and cost, and increased efficiency, productivity and, of course, profit; unsurprisingly, factory owners enthusiastically endorsed and implemented Smith’s thinking. For artisans, skilled craftsmen and factory workers this approach had serious implications. Depending upon their trade, artisans and craftsmen could see their professions disappearing and their skills becoming redundant as their work was broken down into discrete tasks that could be performed more cheaply by an unskilled worker. Harry Dickinson commented that: '…economic crisis and social dislocation were capable of recruiting many of the skilled craftsmen and artisans into the campaign for political reform'; [50] as we have noted, those early years of the Chartist movement, particularly in leadership, were driven by this group of workers, concerned for their livelihoods and status, and currently powerless to influence the direction in which industry and manufacturing was travelling.

Although David Ricardo built upon Smith's opposition to protectionism in developing his own ideas on free trade, he was not an imitator of Smith, and his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation published in 1817* provided the basis of Britain's approach to free trade during the Victorian period. In the book, while he was fulsome in his praise of Smith and acknowledges his influence upon his own thinking, he was also prepared to take issue with his ideas: in the section *Value and Riches*, having accepted Smith's definition of riches as consisting of 'necessaries and enjoyment', he challenged his explanation of rich or poor being defined by the amount of labour that an individual can purchase as 'certainly incorrect'.[51] Likewise, Ricardo took Smith's *Labour Theory of Value* (LTV) as it related to the price of a commodity and developed it to include not just the cost of the labour but also the cost of production (raw materials, machinery etc) and while it was by no means perfect (it could not be reliably applied to non-reproducible products and took no account of utility) it was highly influential as a model for determining pricing and cost within manufacturing industries in Britain during the Victorian period. An unintended outcome of the theory on labour was recognition of the importance of the labourer in the manufacturing process and the value of his contribution to the profits made by factory owners, an issue utilised both by Chartism in its campaign for the vote to improve working class living conditions, and also by Marx in his condemnation of employers making excessive profits by paying their workers less than their value.

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[50] Dickinson, Harry Thomas*: British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789 – 1815* (London 1985) 1

[51] Ricardo, David: *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), (London 1974) 185

Similarly, Smith's theories of absolute and comparative advantage, in which he asserted that nations should focus on manufacturing and trading only those goods or commodities in which they have a total dominance with regards to production (cost, quality, volume etc), and citing the example of Britain manufacturing textiles and Spain making wine to illustrate his point, were adopted and refined by Ricardo. His development of Smith's theory proposed that a country did not have to possess an absolute advantage to trade with a partner nation but should be prepared to diversify its offerings to take account of opportunity costs – a nation could trade with another when both made similar commodities, where one could produce a cheaper product but the other produced a higher quality or uniquely designed product. Such flexibility was required because trading conditions were never constant; in the chapter *On Sudden Changes in the Channels of Trade*, Ricardo identifies factors ranging from taxation, changes in consumer taste and warfare that could lead to a downturn in demand or increase in cost. In such circumstances, companies had to be ready to adapt.[52] Nevertheless, Ricardo was a strong believer in Smith's theory that you should maximise your strengths:

> 'Under a system or perfectly free commerce, each country naturally devotes its capital and labour to such employments as are most beneficial to each. This pursuit of individual advantage is admirably connected with the universal good of the whole…it diffuses general benefit and binds together, by one common tie of interest and intercourse, the universal society of nations throughout the civilised world. It is this principle which determines that wine shall be made in France and Portugal, that corn shall be grown in America and Poland, and that hardware and other goods shall be manufactured in England'.[53]

The significance of both Smith's and Ricardo's theories, particularly that of comparative advantage, can be seen in the industrial and commercial growth of Britain. The technological developments of the Industrial Revolution, the country's unique talents and natural resources, combined with the ideas of Smith and Ricardo, allowed Britain to develop into one of the world's most powerful commercial and trading nations during the nineteenth century. Industrial output in Britain grew by an average three per cent per year between 1800 – 1830,[54] and exports rose from £12.7

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[52] *Ibid*. 175 - 181

[53] *Ibid*. 81

[54] More, Charles: *The Industrial Age: Economy & Society in Britain 1750-1985* (London 1985) 67

million in 1786 to £35.3 million only forty years later.[55] Steel production rose from 49,000 tons in 1850 to 5,000,000 tons by 1900, with 1,000,000 tons being exported[56], while iron production increased by 25 – 30% from 1825, reaching 1,000,000 tons in 1850[57]. The Great Exhibition of 1851, intended to showcase 'The Works of Industry of all Nations', inevitably became:

> '…nothing less than a great national beauty pageant, a gathering designed to show off Britain and her achievements to the world…. the building was filled to the brim with cotton spinning machines, steam hammers, locomotives, telegraphs, steam turbines, printing machines, scientific instruments and other emblems of British industrial prowess.' [58]

Unsurprisingly, this period has been described as '…an era of prodigious energy, growth and expansion'[59] and within this period '…the British economy became the world's largest. Its pre-eminence remained unchallenged until the 1870s.' And yet, despite this growth at a macroeconomic level, benefits to the population in terms of personal income were marginal; between 1801 – 1831, income per head grew by only 0.52% per annum – a low rate of growth even with an increasing population factored in.[60] Unsurprisingly, those at the bottom of the social scale saw little or no improvement in their standard of living and for some there was possibly even a reduction due to wage cuts; inevitably Chartism was vociferous in its condemnation of the profits made by industrialists and employers, seemingly at the expense of their workers. For all that Chartism accepted the concepts and benefits of free trade as promoted by Smith and Ricardo, it demanded a greater degree of fairness in the distribution of the wealth arising from it in order to alleviate the poverty of the working classes. Just as the Labour Theory of Value had highlighted the unacknowledged importance of the working man and woman to wealth generation, so the marked lack of personal benefit arising from the nation's economic success confirmed that living standards would not improve for the working classes without an increased say in the legislative process affecting taxation, wealth distribution and trade, and this could only happen with a change to the franchise.

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[55] *Ibid*. 32
[56] Paxman, Jeremy: *The Victorians* (London 2009) 168
[57] Wilson A N: *The Victorians* (London 2003) 15
[58] Paxman, Jeremy: *The Victorians* 168
[59] Wilson A N: *The Victorians* 15
[60] More, Charles: *The Industrial Age* 67

Alongside Smith and Ricardo, Thomas Malthus is significant in the development of social policy and legislation in the nineteenth century. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA), which will be covered later in this chapter, was a highly contentious piece of legislation against which Chartists bitterly objected and which they used in their campaign to highlight the callousness of the ruling elite. The PLAA, and its attendant regulations on eligibility for poor relief and the provision of workhouses, was heavily influenced by Malthus' theories on population growth. Although providing no empirical evidence, he maintained that population growth was exponential but food production growth was arithmetical, leading to a situation in which the country would be unable to feed itself. His solution was population reduction, initially through positive checks, which entailed society, or Government not taking any steps to prevent accidents, either of a natural or a manmade source, that would impact the adult population:

> ‘we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavouring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality… instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations. But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases’.[61]

He later enhanced these ideas to include preventative checks, by lowering the birth rate to encourage later marriages and, thus, produce fewer children - as he was opposed to birth control, delaying matrimony served the same purpose, although also likely to lead to an increase in illegitimacy.

Although Malthus reserved some criticism for ‘the higher classes of people’, within whom ‘the fear of being an old maid, and of that silly and unjust ridicule, which folly sometimes attaches to this name, drives many women into the marriage union with men whom they dislike, or at best to whom they are perfectly indifferent,’ [62] the target of Malthus’ solutions were the poor, the unemployed, and those in receipt of outdoor relief, and his ideas found a ready audience in Parliament when drafting the 1834 Act. Malthus was a severe critic of poor relief:

> ‘Among the lower classes of society, where the point is of the greatest importance, the poor-laws afford a direct, constant and systematical encouragement to marriage, by removing from

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[61] Malthus, Thomas (1798): *An essay on the Principle of Population* Book 4, Chapter 5, (Oxford 2008) 214
[62] *Ibid.* 412

> each individual that heavy responsibility, which he would incur by the laws of nature, for bringing beings into the world which he could not support.' [63]

Although radicals, particularly Cobbett, attacked both Malthus and the provisions of the Act, Parliament was supportive of both the man and the ideas that had so influenced this legislation, Lord Brougham (Henry, Lord Brougham 178-1868) describing him as 'an estimable man' and declared his character 'has been foully slandered by some who had the excuse of ignorance, and by others, I fear, without any such palliative, and simply for having made one of the greatest additions to political philosophy which has been effected since that branch of learning has been worthy of the name of a science…'. [64] As we shall see, the Act passed comfortably.

The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act applied to England, not Scotland. Both countries based their poor relief provisions upon sixteenth century legislation, although they differed in their approach; while both had set out to remove beggary by imposing draconian punishments ranging from imprisonment, through mutilation by branding to banishment, by the end of the seventeenth century the English system was granting relief to the able bodied without the requirement for work and a century later, the Speenhamland System – not universally applied – allowed poor relief to be used to supplement low wages. Neither of these developments was applied in Scotland, leading a House of

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[63] *Ibid.* 120

[64] Hansard 1803-2005: HL Deb 21 July 1834 vol 25 cc211-75

Lords committee in 1817 to praise 'the admirable practice of Scotland' and that 'the Scotch have uniformly proceeded on the Principle that every individual is bound to provide for himself by his own labour as long as he is able to do so….'[65]

We know from Anderson that common language is a critical element in the forging of a community; while it is assumed that this applies to the language it uses, it is also clear that derogatory descriptions used against its members, made by those seen as enemies, are powerful tools in creating and sustaining unity within the community, particularly when they are then played back to the membership as evidence of external threat and hostility. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the language used by those supporting the Act in describing the poor working-class recipients of relief. While the original Elizabethan act was intended to protect the 'the old, lame, blind, and impotent,' it was now seen as maintaining 'those who, by the practice of frugality, sobriety and industry, might have supported themselves, but who have become chargeable by their crimes and misconduct…' [66] a speech from 1817 that sets the tone of what was to follow two decades later in the 1834 Parliamentary debates – that the poor were indolent, immoral, tended towards crime and saw children as a way of obtaining relief.

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[65] Mitchison, Rosalind*: The Making of the Old Scottish Poor Law* in *Past and Present,* Number 63, (Oxford University Press, 1974) 58

[66] Speech by John Curwen, MP for Carlisle: Hansard 1803-2005, HC Deb 21 February 1817 vol 35 cc506-29

The Act was the outcome of the Poor Law Commissioners Report of 1834[67], whose language was mirrored in Parliament. The authors, Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890) and Nassau Senior (1790-1864), cited countless examples across England of the poor obtaining relief, using language that our present tabloid press would use to describe 'benefit cheats'. While one overseer in London questioned the overall system, as 'there must, from the very nature of it, be an immense deal of fraud,' [68] the authors cited numerous individual examples, littering the report with descriptions of 'intemperance; drunkenness; fraudulence; indolence; profligate dishonesty; insubordination; disgraceful and ignorance.'[69] While there were undoubtedly fraudulent and spurious claims, there is no recognition of the value afforded by the system or the desperation of those laying claim upon it, rather that every man who receives support '…is tempted, by the enjoyment of subsistence without labour, to conceal his convalescence, and fraudulently extend the period of relief.' [70]

Parliamentarians, suffused in the language and ideas of Malthus, seized upon this report as evidence both of the idleness of the poor working class and the inadequacy of the existing poor relief system. As a result, debates focused upon the nature of relief provision, in particular the creation of workhouses, the immorality of the poor, their lack of personal responsibility and the bastardy laws;

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[67] *Poor Law Commissioners Report of 1834,* Online Library of Liberty

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] *Ibid.*

with the exception of a handful of sympathetic members of both Houses, there was no consideration of the plight of the poor or solutions to positively ameliorate their situation. The act was punitive.

All speeches attacking the poor are too numerous to cite but the following quotations typify the mood of Parliamentary debate: George Grote (1794-1871), member for the City of London, asserted that '…every page of the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners teems with evidence that the Poor-laws… afford a premium on idleness and improvidence…'[71] while Sir William Clay (1791-1869), member for Tower Hamlets, maintained that, as a result of the existing Poor Laws, '…the labouring population had been sunk into such an abject condition, that when they roused themselves from their state of slavery, it was only to plunge into crime.'[72] Neither offered any empirical evidence for these accusations.

There were also unsubstantiated reports that the poor had children solely to assist them in obtaining relief, imputations that echoed the words of Thomas Malthus. Thus would Lord Brougham claim that current arrangements provided for the 'English peasant…… a fund at your command—you have only to marry—only to get children—and here is a fund for the support of yourselves and your children, to be doled out in proportion to their numbers,'[73] while Joseph Hume declared '…if a woman got one bastard, it was well… and by the time she had furnished the parish with half-a-dozen children, she made quite a little fortune for herself.'[74] These accusations linked neatly to the wider issue of immorality; Wolryche Whitmore (1787-1858) claimed at a parliamentary committee on 21st June, '…the Bastardy-laws…leave the woman with little or no inducement (so far as law is concerned) to preserve her chastity… I am afraid that the present law raises up a motive in the breast of the woman rather to yield than to resist…'[75] This did not go unchallenged: John Bennett (1773-1852), the MP for Pythouse, Wiltshire disputed the view that women would lie about the paternity of their child in order to financially profit: '…in the whole course of thirty years' practice as a Magistrate, he had never reason to suspect, that any woman who had sworn her child before him acting as a Magistrate had perjured herself,'[76] while changes to the Bastardy Laws, aimed at transferring responsibility for the upkeep for a child from the father to the mother, were challenged by the Bishop of Exeter (Henry Phillpotts, Bishop 1830-1869): '….the maintenance of his illegitimate child was a duty imposed upon the father as much by the divine law as it was by human legislation…the men were to be pardoned in their career of vice and profligacy—were to be excused from the consequences of seduction—no check was to be put upon their immoral proceedings.'[77] But these were isolated views; for the Act's supporters, it was a practical and much needed piece of legislation: 'Its basic assumption was that there was work for all if only labourers had sufficient incentive to seek it.'[78]

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[71] Hansard 1803-2005, HC Deb 09 May 1834 vol 23 cc805-42

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] Hansard 1803-2005, HL Deb 21 July 1834 vol 25 cc211-75

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[74] *Ibid.*
[75] Hansard 1803-2005, HC Deb 21 June 1834 vol 24 cc715-9
[76] Hansard 1803-2005, HC Deb 18 June 1834 vol 24 cc520-49
[77] Hansard 1803-2005, HL Deb 28 July 1834 vol 25 cc580-613

During the debates, William Cobbett, in opposing the Bill, raised the issue of social division, fearing the legislation would drive a wedge between rich and poor that could result in physical confrontation and robbery when the latter endeavoured to address their plight:

> '…the sacredness of property would no longer be protected, and how would the House like the idea of that?..... they were now about to dissolve the bonds of society; they were going to break faith with the poor man; and then what claim could they pretend to have upon him in return?[79]

While this argument did not sway the House, it was a foretaste of what was to come during the Chartist era, when the middle class, influenced by the language of the movement's leaders, declared itself fearful for the safety of its property and its lives.

The passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act was a triumph for those who advocated the scrapping of systems, such as Speenhamland, and who supported the population theories of Malthus, as the Act's emphasis upon indoor relief encouraged an increase in the building of workhouses organised to separate married couples, thus reducing the opportunity to procreate. Beyond that, however, it was not a success, primarily because its implementation across the country was inconsistent; one of the primary intentions of the Act was to reduce expenditure on outdoor relief by driving the needy into workhouses. J.L. and Barbara Hammond described the public meetings and demonstrations against the Act, particularly in the north of England and concluded that 'The results of this opposition are evident in the reports and decisions of the Poor Law Commission in 1839…'four-fifths of the money now expended on relief is still outdoor relief'' and by 1842, those receiving outdoor relief had risen by 200,000 to 1,200,000.[80]

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[78] Hollis, Patricia*: Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815-1850* Section 10 *The New Poor Law*, (London 1973) 206-207

[79] Hansard 1803-2005, HC Deb 01 July 1834 vol 24 cc1027-61

The economic and social impact of the Act is well summarised in an article entitled *Welfare Reform, 1834: Did the New Poor Law in England produce significant economic gain?* [81]:

> 'This deliberately induced suffering gained little for the land and property owners who funded poor relief. Nor did it raise wages for the poor, or free up migration to better opportunities in the cities. One of the first great triumphs of the new discipline of Political Economy, the reform of the Poor Laws, consequently had no effects on economic growth and economic performance in Industrial Revolution England'.

One unintended consequence of the Act was to provide a continuous focal point for collective Chartist anger. At a meeting on 1st January 1838, Rayner Stephens declared that 'He was speaking the words of God when he declared he would roast to death any man who attempted to separate a husband from his wife…God, by his Book, had declared that he had given to all men, not the rich alone…' and he exhorted the crowd to arm themselves 'before they submitted to this degradation',[82] and Chartist speakers continued to reference, in similar language, the PLAA as a prime example of the Government's hostility to the working class and indifference to its suffering. Only electoral reform would change this.

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[80] Hammond JL and Barbara: *The Bleak Age* (London 1934) 101-102

[81] Clark, Gregory and Page, Marianne*: Welfare reform, 1834: Did the New Poor Law in England produce significant economic gains?* In *Cliometrica Journal of Historical Economics and Econometric History*, (September 2019) 241

'The right of suffrage should depend upon a pecuniary qualification---- I oppose universal suffrage because I think it would produce a destructive revolution. I support this measure because I am sure it is our best security against a revolution'.[83] Thomas Babington Macaulay's (1800-1859) fears were shared by many of those who opposed reform: 'Lord Francis Leveson Gower (1800-1857), MP for Sutherland, claimed to remember the anarchy caused by the French Revolution, and was alarmed by the open display in Britain of the tricolour flag 'the emblem and forerunner of revolution in other countries'.[84] The Act, as Macaulay argued, tied the franchise to a property qualification; for the boroughs, it was those householders who paid an annual rent of £10 or more, while in the counties it was extended to those who owned land in copyhold worth £10, those who had long term leases on land worth more than £10 and those on medium leases on land worth more than £50. For those campaigning for universal suffrage on the basis of a system not linked to wealth or property, the Act delivered nothing.

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[82] *Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser*, 6th January 1838

[83] Speech by Macaulay in Parliament on 2nd March 1831 in *The Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches of Lord Macaulay* (London 1853) 11-26

[84] Pentland, Gordon: *The Debate on Scottish Parliamentary Reform 1830-1832* in *The Scottish Historical Review* Volume 85 Number 219 (Edinburgh University Press 2006) 107. Pentland's article focuses upon the debate in Scotland regarding the Reform Act and the subtle differences to the debate in England, in particular the accepted need for reform to Scottish Parliamentary arrangements ("what was often debated was not whether there ought to be reform but rather to what extent and along what lines it ought to be carried" 102), the added dimension of how reform would impact the Union - the balance of parliamentary influence between the four countries of Britain and the Empire – an issue, and argument, particularly pertinent for those opposing reform, and the threat that reform would deliver to "the singularity of Scotland's position after 1707, retaining peculiar institutions and an increasingly educated people…" (110). These arguments and issues are often ignored, as the historiographical focus tends to be upon the debate in England.

It is important to recognise that this Act did not create the Chartist movement; as we have seen, the impact of earlier overseas revolutions, the 1834 Poor Law Act and the significant work of radicals and reformers in the preceding years, all influenced the movement's launch in 1838. The Reform Act is highly significant but it is one among a number of setbacks that social and political reformers endured; however, it did show that a more co-ordinated and concerted effort would be required to persuade Parliament into conceding further political reform. The most immediate effect of the Reform Act was to create a fissure in the relationship between the working and middle classes, a mistrust so deep within the Chartist movement that, twenty years later, Ernest Jones could still publish an article entitled 'The middle class franchise: why it will injure the democratic process'.[85] The anger felt by those demanding universal suffrage was driven by the expectation created in advance of the Act; the working and middle classes had campaigned together but now the latter were the sole beneficiaries of the legislation. Considering Macaulay's words prior to the Act, was the working class being naïve in expecting the franchise? Six months after Macaulay's speech, the *Poor Mans's Guardian* had declared the working class should expect nothing from any forthcoming Bill, that it would be window dressing, 'a mere trick to strengthen against your rightful claims to the tottering exclusiveness of our 'blessed' constitution…'. [86] When its warning was proven correct, the paper identified the primary issue for the working class in this relationship: 'their support (the middle-class) …is no longer secured to you by mutual wrong and mutual necessity, but now depends solely on their pleasure; that which was till now an obligation on themselves, becomes a benefit to you, at their own expense…'. [87]

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[85] *The Friend of the People*, 24th May 1851

The Reform Act is significant for the focus of this thesis because the animosity and accusations of betrayal and treachery directed at the middle class by those left disenfranchised, emphasise two of the important elements of Anderson's ideas on community – those who were excluded, in this case the middle class who came to be seen as the enemy, and the language a community collectively uses to form a common bond and common vocabulary. A later chapter will look in detail at the difficult relationship between the two classes but it is useful here to briefly recognise the depth of the vitriol directed at the middle class and the type of language used to portray it. Language is important in the creation and maintenance of a community, and criticism of the middle class came from across the entire movement – leadership, membership and press; the *True Scotsman* reported a meeting of the Kilbarchan Working Men's Association which declared '…the 1832 Reform Bill has been an illusion. Whig and Tory are two names for one faction, both duplicitous; the people have discovered they can expect nothing from either', [88] whilst the same paper later reported a speech by Robert Lowery in Edinburgh in which he asserted that '...as a working man, his class could never again be reconciled to those who had first betrayed them…'.[89] It also expressed the anger of many when commenting upon how quickly the middle class had turned against their co-campaigners:

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[86] *Poor Man's Guardian*, 24th September 1831

[87] *Poor Man's Guardian*, 5th November 1831

> '…the middle-classes were then with them because they knew the battle was to be fought and won for them…it is now otherwise. They are deserted by that class and when sections of the people now exhibit their rage at the injustice of the desertion, they are spoken of as lawless ruffians, worthy only of being hunted down and chained like dogs to their kennels',[90]

while the *Chartist Circular* referred to 'hollow hearted, deceitful knavery, brother tricksters'. [91] The language also veered from anger to threats aimed at the middle class; thus, *The Charter*, would declare that '...the working men have been insulted, cheated and betrayed by their pretended friends, the Reformers, and still you think it strange that they are not satisfied. They will not be duped again…',[92] and the *True Scotsman* admonished them with a warning:

> '…to assist you to gain the Reform Bill, which conferred the suffrage on you, we consented to waive our wrongs. We now expect you to do the same by us…the middle class now find that

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[88] *True Scotsman* 3rd November 1838

[89] *True Scotsman* 9th November 1839

[90] *True Scotsman* 30th November 1839

[91] *Chartist Circular* 14th December 1839

[92] *The Charter* 2nd June 1839

> their strength, apart from the people, is vanity. They refused to listen to the people's terms, they have refused to their cost'. [93]

However, there was no direct action, just strong and direct language, with Peter McDouall's (1814-1854) insult that the working class '…have as much use for them (the middle class) as a cart has for a third wheel or a pig has for an umbrella' [94] being the most memorable.

This chapter has endeavoured to position Chartism within the 'radical tradition', to highlight the indebtedness that the movement owed to those radicals, reformers and even political party activists whose actions and words added to a journey that lead, almost inexorably, to the demands for universal suffrage. In doing so, they also motivated those opposing reform to attack the ideas and denigrate the middle and working classes advocating them, thus, in turn, providing contemporary agitators and later Chartists with evidence of the need to continue the struggle – it was clear that those in power and with privilege would never willingly concede anything, their language was testimony to that and Chartism quoted it verbatim.

It is also clear that such radicalism did not exist within a vacuum but fed off the events and ideas around it. So, Paine's ideas to improve the dire situation of the poor and elderly, the technological changes of the Industrial Revolution that made entrepreneurs and factory owners wealthy but created the conditions for urban poverty and slum housing, liberal economic theories that encouraged parliamentarians to refuse any interference with the free market, including legislation to alleviate appalling factory working conditions, ideas on population control that provided the bedrock for punitive poor relief provision, and a view of the unenfranchised working class as untrustworthy, feckless and ignorant that inevitably lead to their exclusion from the franchise extensions of the 1832 Reform Act – all of these provided radicals and, later, Chartists with the motivation and the ammunition to increasingly agitate for change.

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[93] *The True Scotsman* 4th April 1840

[94] *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* 11th April 1841

It is clear that language – what it said and how it was used, and whether spoken or printed – was fundamental to the development of radical thought, possibly even more than action. The increasing availability of papers, pamphlets and bulletins, and the willingness of those publishing them to openly attack the Government, the monarch and the aristocracy (evidenced by a proliferation of bills regarding sedition, treasonable practices and the unstamped press, and the willingness of Government to enforce them), demonstrated the power that language had in creating a narrative to unify those agitating for change. There were internal struggles within radical societies and organisations but they were able to coalesce around shared goals and a common vocabulary.

In the next chapter, the influence of language will become increasingly obvious as we examine the Chartist movement in more depth. Having acknowledged its antecedents, we will look at its structure, its geographical distribution, its class composition and the occupational breakdown of its membership, all of which are important when considering Chartism as a community. We know that, even within actual, as opposed to imagined, communities, there are disagreements, so the chapter will also look at what united and what divided both the leadership and the membership. This, in turn, will provide the basis for chapter four – how the movement saw itself and how others viewed it.

Chapter Three: Who were the Chartists? The people and ideas that created a movement

Definitions of what constitutes a 'community' vary. It is a term that has evolved and is still evolving, although it has always included factors such as interests, shared benefits, and a sense of commonality. These interests often include aspects of religion, values, and customs, and historically a grouping of people would be considered a community if it was geographically close together, to the extent that its members knew each other personally. Such physical proximity has usually been the primary determinant for our understanding and definition of a community but this is now changing. Thus, as the Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines a community, it can also be:

> 'a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society' [1]

a definition later developed by the Cambridge online dictionary to reflect our changing environment:

> 'on social media, a group of people who have similar interests or who want to achieve something altogether'[2]

Clearly, to be a community no longer requires proximity, but shared interests and, as the Cambridge Dictionary defines it, a desire to 'achieve something together' as in present day communities as diverse as the LGBTQ community, the Sikh, Moslem and Jewish communities, and who identify themselves as the global Star Wars community - all have shared interests and, for some, shared ambitions to change social attitudes of racism or bigotry. Community is not a description Chartists used to define themselves. They were a movement, a term they frequently used, and described their fellow members as comrades, friends or colleagues. They would not have used the term ‘community’ to describe Chartism because, at that time, a community would have been a local entity with the same connotation we would now use to describe a neighbourhood – primarily a population grouping which may have had connections of ethnicity or social status. With no access to the instant forms of international communication we have now, Chartists relied upon locally organised gatherings addressed by itinerant lecturers and Chartist newspapers for their information on developments within the movement; local Chartist associations would have been the closest description of a community in terms of shared interests, ambitions and values but members would still not have described their associations as communities. Nevertheless, despite this local focus, Chartists were fully aware they were part of a much bigger, national movement; they knew the leaders, they sent delegates to the national Conventions, they debated locally the arguments and strategies proposed nationally, and they were clear on the ultimate ambition of electoral reform.

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[1] *https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community*

[2] *https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/group*

If Chartists did not describe themselves as members of a community, is it appropriate that we should do so? Benedict Anderson uses the construct of an Imagined Community to define a nation, not a movement but his definition includes elements that we can apply to entities smaller than countries. He believes:

> ‘the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible……for so many millions, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings’. [3]

Can we see in Chartism that level of comradeship, that level of commitment leading to personal sacrifice described by Anderson that would take Chartism beyond being a movement of loose affiliations? Current technology makes it easy for us to create virtual, or imagined, communities on social media but this does not mean that the principles applied to today’s online communities cannot be seen in earlier forms. To determine whether this is the case, however, we must have a clear understanding of the principles, values and beliefs that Chartists held and whether they were sufficiently consistent and important to hold the movement together in the face of not only the practical challenges of communication, but also the internal disagreements and factions that continually wracked the movement.

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[3] Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities* 7

This chapter will examine the movement in detail; it will identify the membership both by profession and by location, it will look at the internal groups that arose to promote causes important to the membership, specifically religious belief and temperance, it will assess how a predominantly male organisation both viewed and accommodated the contribution of women, it will discuss the initiatives on education and self-improvement, two facets as important to the movement's external image as they were to the internal membership, and it will assess the importance and impact of one of the most contentious issues, that of the adoption of ulterior measures. Understanding how the movement approached these will help us to answer the question 'Who were the Chartists?', what mattered most to the membership and whether the depth and breadth of feeling on each of these issues was so strong as to either unify or divide the movement.

Before looking at each of these themes, however, we must acknowledge the significance of the People's Charter itself, the document that laid out the fundamental ambitions of Chartism and which, throughout the life of the movement, was the rallying point that brought the membership and leadership together when disagreements occurred. Asa Briggs described its 'power to unify discontented people in all parts of the country', [4] that it was a 'symbol of unity'. [5] It was the one constant upon which all were agreed, or at least nearly all, for the Six Points were not without dispute.

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[4] Briggs Asa: *Chartist Studies* 25

[5] *Ibid.* 26

Although proposed nearly sixty years earlier both by Major John Cartwright (1740-1824) and the Associated Counties, the 1838 Charter was the first succinctly written and easily understood manifesto for franchise reform to be widely published. During that sixty years period debate continued over the desirable level of reform so by the time the Charter was published, while accommodation had been reached, wholehearted agreement had not. In its initial draft, the Charter called for universal suffrage but then amended to exclude women as female suffrage was regarded as a reform too far and would dilute the potential support for male suffrage; achieve male suffrage and then campaign for female suffrage, the inference being that the latter was morally correct but tactically wrong, although any examination of the movement's attitude to women does not reveal widespread support for female suffrage as a morally correct principle. The demand for the secret ballot also caused disagreement, with O'Connor describing it as putting 'a mask on an honest face' [6] while the call for equal electoral districts garnered only lukewarm support, not overly surprising as previous legislation had already gone some way to tackling the problem of rotten boroughs thus making it less of a pressing issue than male suffrage or the property qualification. As Asa Briggs has commented, the Charter 'concealed as much as it proclaimed – the diversity of local social pressures, the variety of local leaderships, the relative sense of urgency among different people and different groups'. [7] This notwithstanding, the

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[6] Chase, Malcolm: *Chartism, A New History* 172

[7] Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies* 26

Charter provided the focal point around which the members could coalesce, particularly at those times when the movement acted with a national, not local, focus. Thus, the 1842 General Strike, also known as the Plug Plot riots and which affected industrial districts in the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Scotland, began as a trade dispute over wage reduction but quickly incorporated the passing of the Charter into the demands of those striking; the Trades Conference held in Manchester during this period refused to separate the demand for wage restoration from the call for the Charter, and, by doing so, dragged the Chartist Convention, somewhat reluctantly, into supporting the General Strike. Inevitably, the strike was defeated and most strikers returned to work on reduced wages but not before their continued demand for the Charter had been heard – in reality, this ambition had less chance of success than the reversal of wage cuts.

Understanding the composition of the membership helps our wider understanding of the movement's approach and attitude to the themes identified above and provides an insight into the strength of support that each of them gained. When the *Scottish Patriot*, in response to a complaint by O'Connor of a lack of support within the movement, explained that 'The great body of Chartists are but plain, uneducated, hard-working tradesmen and artisans', [8] it may have been an observation that reflected the early years of membership but it cannot be applied to the lifetime of the movement.

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[8] Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 191

While tradesmen and artisans were influential in the launch and early growth of Chartism, as the movement grew it embraced alternative views and, consequently, disagreements, with many in these groups drifting away, attracted by more moderate organisations such as the Complete Suffrage Movement. However, the movement was not wholly comprised of those workers described by O'Connor as the 'fustian jackets and unshorn chins', the ill-educated rough working man whom O'Connor often saw as an army of willing foot soldiers. It is true that the membership was predominantly made up of working-class men but, within it, there was a cross-section of trades, professions and status. The challenge for the historian is to accurately represent this membership since few, if any, membership rolls for local associations have been preserved to allow us to definitively list jobs, industries and social positions. What we do have are press reports of association meetings that provide, on occasions, an indication of the background of those present and the records for delegate nominations to the General Council of the Chartist Convention in 1841, as published in the *Northern Star* [9].

It is the latter that provides the most in-depth look at membership composition. It is important to recognise that the nominations listing only states job title, so we are required to extrapolate from these sometimes ambiguous terms to determine an individual's status. However, based upon 853 nominations and 174 separate occupations, it is reasonable to deduce that, of those nominated, 56% were unskilled, 38% were artisan/skilled, 5% were sales and shopkeepers and 1% was professional.[10] If we then move from status to specific jobs, we find a not unexpected wide cross section within each of these four categories; the largest representation of the unskilled came from the textile and weaving industries, often as outworkers, together with mining and factory workers, while, within those classed as artisan and skilled, there is significant representation from trades such as shoemaking, tailoring, millinery, printing, pottery and carpentry. Sales and shopkeeping includes booksellers, newsagents, grocers and publicans, while the small number of professionals includes schoolmaster, overlooker, book-keeper and veterinary surgeon. The breadth of occupations is illustrated by the fact that, of the 174 separately listed, 111 are represented by only two or one nominations each. We also know that there was fluidity, depending upon the economic situation, as this observation from the *Poor Man's Guardian* illustrated: 'Almost every individual when he is kept out of employment by machinery or any other contrivance, turns his attention towards merchandise and becomes a trader or little middleman'.[11] We have seen that active support for Chartism by the working class could be variable as a result of these same economic conditions, with support for reform seemingly greater when employment was scarce but increased support for trade unionism when skills were in demand.

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[9] *Northern Star* 1841 quoted in Jones, David: *Chartism and the Chartists* (London 1975) 30-32

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[10] *Ibid*. 30-32

[11] Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartists* 152

However, we must be careful not to place too much reliance on such a simple equation – Peter Taylor is right to point out that , ‘circumstances that led to the loss of the mass influence of the working class vanguard, were produced in the years 1846 and 1847, during a depression which John Foster ranks as perhaps the worst of the second quarter of the century…’ [12] and suggests that the decline of the membership was also linked to demoralisation, confusion and internal leadership divisions following the unsuccessful petitions to parliament. Nevertheless, the responses to an 1839 Convention questionnaire aimed at local associations and intended to identify the main grievances occupying the membership revealed that, of the twenty-three association responses, only two cited the electoral system as their primary issue, the others citing low wages, lack of employment and other problems related to working conditions ; these were challenges that affected, above all, the low skilled, poorer paid members of the movement, and which may provide further insight into the composition of the mass of the membership.

Further analysis by David Jones and, in particular, George Barnsby, of local associations provides us with a clearer picture of the membership and confirms the view that the Convention delegates were primarily drawn from the ‘productive classes’, as the working class was described in Chartist newspapers. In his research on the working class in the West Midlands, Barnsby found that representation was overwhelmingly driven by unskilled and working-class jobs. Thus, the Convention nominations for Bilston in 1841 and 1842 were represented by tallow chandlers, cordwainers, moulders, screw turners, miners, tinplate workers, furnacemen, labourers, blank makers, brass founders, sawyers and carters; Wolverhampton nominations included hinge makers, forgemen, miners, file cutters and cordwainers, whilst Tipton and Walsall included vice makers, iron moulders, millmen, brass founders, platers, hammer makers and miners. Although nominations from these areas also included artisans, shopkeepers and professionals, including tailors, locksmiths, schoolmasters, chemists and grocers, the listings strongly point to the dominance of the mining and iron trades, typical of the manufacturing and industrial strength of the region.[13]

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[12] Taylor, Peter: *Popular Politics in Early Industrial Britain, Bolton 1825-1850* (Keele University Press, 1995) 15

This geographical distribution together with the industrial and commercial base of each area also helps our understanding of the membership composition. Thus, in Brighton, of the forty radicals associated with the Chartist Association, two were labourers and the majority craftsmen and shopkeepers, whereas in Great Horton, Bradford, of the 113 new members of the Association joining between November 1840 and July 1842, three quarters were woolcombers and weavers and the rest mainly masons and miners.[14] In Scotland, regional variations meant that membership was notable among the woollen weavers in the Ochils area, stocking makers in the Borders and flax dressers in

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[13] Barnsby, George: *The working-class movement in the Black Country 1750-1867* (Wolverhampton 1977) 84-96

[14] Jones, David: *Chartism and the Chartists* 24

Dundee and Forfarshire, and whilst there was artisan representation from trades such as tailoring, shoemaking and printing, there was a marked lack of factory workers and few cotton spinners. There was a concerted drive to recruit unskilled workers from an Irish background into the Chartist movement in the West of Scotland, but a strong devotion to Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) and opposition by the Roman Catholic Church meant that the movement failed to secure any meaningful support from that quarter, although wider support was given to working class and trade union activities.[15] The strength of Chartism lay in large urban areas such as Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle, and in the smaller, industrial towns of the East Midlands, South Lancashire, West Riding of Yorkshire, West of Scotland and the Black Country; where it was weakest or largely non-existent was in rural and agricultural communities, such as the south-west counties of England, the Welsh Borders and the rural counties of eastern and south-east England, areas where it failed to get the support of agricultural labourers, in part due to the structure of local rural society and the historical levels of deference, together with economic pressure exerted by landlords and farmers who quashed any moves towards trade unionism or labouring co-operation.

There is little disagreement among historians that the majority membership comprised working and labouring men but there is less consensus on the composition of the leadership. Dorothy

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[15] Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 194

Thompson believed that the image of middle class leadership was misplaced and that ‘the great mass of the membership…and the majority of the leaders, both national and local, came from among the working members of the trades and crafts of the manufacturing districts’, and that whilst ‘independent tradesmen and professional men were an important element in the Chartist movement…they did not, in the main, make up the leadership but rather provided a network of premises, communications centres and meeting places…’. [16] It is difficult to challenge this view with regard to local association leaders since detailed information at that level is difficult to find; as we know, it was not customary to take attendance rolls at meetings and even where we have press reports that identify the name of the Chairman, we cannot assume this person was recognised as the association leader. As the *National* declared in an 1839 article:

> ‘We want not leaders but representatives. We want, not Parliament men to chalk out their own especial benefit, but men to do our work, under our direction, men who can honestly represent the people’s wishes’, [17]

so it’s likely most associations did not appoint a ‘leader’, even if there were members who played a more dominant role and may have been regarded as such by their fellow Chartists. An in-depth study of the local Chartist association in Ashton-under-Lyne in Lancashire between 1838-1848 supports Thompson’s view regarding leadership in local areas; it found a significant presence of skilled working class and lower middle class within the leadership group: '…shopkeepers, master artisans, and the small time professionals of the lower middle classes represented a proportionally high percentage (40 percent) of the leaders of Ashton Chartism', but '…the majority of leaders came from the manual working classes; at the time of their involvement, twenty four of the forty Chartist leaders (60 percent) were members of the manual working classes'.[18] With regard to this research, two further points are worth noting: the middle classes are completely absent from this leadership profile which Hall puts down to 'the mass arming campaign in the Ashton and Stalybridge area and the violence of the rhetorical attacks on the 'over grown and all devouring capitalists' that sent a collective shiver of fear through the ranks of 'owners of property' and had thoroughly alienated them from the movement'.[19] The significance of this alienation will become clearer later when we examine the relationship between Chartism and the middle class. Secondly, using the census of 1841, the author identified that those 'shopkeepers, master artisans, and small -time professionals' which made up forty percent of the local leadership, only account for seventeen percent of the total number of adult males in Ashton, while the 'manual working classes' accounted for seventy-five percent of the adult male population but sixty percent of the local Chartist leadership. This would support Thompson's view that 'independent tradesmen and professionals' were important to the movement but not necessarily her second assertion that their contribution came mainly through the provision of facilities rather than leadership; based upon Robert Hall's, admittedly singular, observation, their presence was disproportionate and their contribution was direct involvement in the association's policy and actions.

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[16] Thompson, Dorothy*: The Chartists* 172

[17] *The National* 1839

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[18] Hall, Robert: *A United People? Leaders and Followers in a Chartist Locality 1838-1848*, in *Journal of Social History*, Volume 38, Number 1, (Oxford University Press, 2004) 182 - 183

[19] *Ibid*.182

This analysis of Ashton's local association membership and leadership seems to confirm the wider geographical picture that local associations reflected the commercial strength of their area. Thus Barnsby, in reviewing ten Black Country leaders, identifies an even split between those in unskilled manufacturing and labouring jobs (chainmakers, barber, miner) and those in trades or professions (publicans, newsagent, accountant),[20] whilst Richard Brown identifies Bath Chartism having artisan leaders but cloth trade workers as the rank and file, and Aberdeen having artisan leaders, with handloom weavers as the main membership.[21] If we examine Scotland as one area, then Thompson's theory does not hold since its leadership was heavily represented by independent tradesmen, skilled craftsmen and professionals and, like Ashton, was under represented by the working or labouring classes. Hamish Fraser identifies sixty-seven 'Chartist activists' within Scotland, men and women within the movement who were either leaders or influential figures representing their association at conventions and meetings. Of the fifty-three where it is possible to positively identify their trade or profession, thirty-nine would be classed as skilled artisans, shopkeepers or professionals and only fourteen coming from the working or productive classes. [22]

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[20] Barnsby, George: *The Working-Class Movement in the Black Country* 119-121

[21] Brown, Richard: *Chartism (Perspectives in History)* (Cambridge 1998) 25

At a national level, it is even more difficult to support Thompson's view, since an analysis of the most well- known and senior national leaders of the movement, indicates a strong majority of professional men and remarkably few working class, either by background or by trade. So, while Thomas Cooper's father was a dyer, Harney's a sailor and John Collins' was identified as from the lower orders, O'Connor's father claimed to be a descendant of the Kings of Ireland and was an estate owner and merchant, Jones' was a cavalry officer and estate owner, Stephens' was President of the Wesleyan Conference, Richard Oastler's a linen merchant and steward of the Yorkshire Estates, John Fielden's (1784-1849) a business owner and yeoman farmer and Villiers Sankey an aristocrat. Other leaders with paternal occupations listed included wine merchant, overseer, linen merchant and tailor. These are not leaders who, at first glance, met the *National's* criterion of being able to 'honestly represent the people's wishes', if, by people, we take it to be the majority of the working-class membership. Whilst individual leaders enjoyed both a high profile and enthusiastic support within the movement, their actions and decisions, frequently the result of argument and disagreement, did not always benefit the interests of those same working-class members. What this analysis of the membership and leadership likely tells us is that the movement, whether through geography, profession, background or class, was not homogenous, that for those London artisans and middle classes that supported electoral reform, there was little appreciation of the hardships endured by factory workers elsewhere in the country, no obvious sense of togetherness. The situation within London itself was a microcosm of the wider national picture; as Robert Hartwell (1810-1875), a printer and compositor from London, told the Chartist Convention in 1839 when explaining the city's position:

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[22] Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 220-226

> '…there was not sufficient consideration for the position of London, which possessed many conflicting interests, where the people were strangers to each other, engaged day and night in their various trades; whereas the people of manufacturing cities knew each other individually…the enormous extent of the city prevents the people assembling and acting'.[23]

We can see from an examination of the membership that the movement comprised regional, professional and social groups and associations, with a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. Maintaining unity with this level of diversity would have been sufficiently challenging even if the movement had been completely focused upon a single purpose with an unquestioned strategy, an agreed set of tactics and no dissent, individual disagreements or internal groups, but this was not the case. During its existence, Chartism struggled to accommodate a range of personalities and interests that went beyond the goal of universal suffrage; members were unwavering in their ambition for reform but, as part of their membership, they also brought their beliefs and principles driven by their own personal circumstances, as would be the case in any national movement. Issues such as education, teetotalism and, as discussed below, religion became important programmes for many within the movement but irritants for others, causing unwanted distraction from the main purpose.

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[23] Brown, Richard: *Chartism (Perspectives in History)* 35

One such distraction was religion, in particular how faith and belief were practiced within the movement. The culmination of this issue was the formation of Chartist Churches but the journey to reach that point involved both a schism with the established Church and, less predictably, when we consider the background of many Radicals and Chartists, major disagreements with the dissenting churches.

In 1917, Maude Royden (1876-1956), suffragist and campaigner for the ordination of women, declared that ‘The Church should ….no longer be satisfied only to represent the Conservative party at prayer’. [24] Had she said those words eighty years earlier and perhaps substituted ‘parliament’ for ‘Conservative’, it would have been as relevant a comment then as it was when she spoke them. The Church of England’s dependence upon the existing social order to sustain its living meant that it could be relied upon to not only support Government policy regarding maintenance of the status quo but also to use its influence to denigrate all those who campaigned to change it. Thus, the Church recognised the deprivation afflicting the poor but, reflecting Malthus' philosophy, apportioned the responsibility on to those suffering: 'When we think of the physical wretchedness of vast masses of our dense population, we cannot wonder that they are open to the seductions of designing men'.[25] These 'designing men' were either radicals and reformers petitioning the Government to spend public funds for the alleviation of poverty, or Chartists. The Reverend Francis Close (1797-1882) used a sermon on the Israelites to equate Chartist demands for electoral reform as an attack on the established order: 'Their sin (the Israelites) was their rebellion against the established government, against the order of things, against the sway of God, and preferring the rule of man…', and he felt compelled to say this 'from a humble desire to contribute, as far as in him lies, to dispel the delusions of the working classes'.[26] The following week, in a sermon to female Chartists, he argued Chartism was not only morally wrong but also 'illegal, unconstitutional, and contrary to the laws of the realm'. [27]

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[24] *Oxford Dictionary of Concise Quotations* (2011) 311

This desire to protect the working class from the designing men of Chartism who would lead them astray was a commonly, and forcefully, expressed sentiment; in an address to 'the inhabitants of the West of England', the curate of Stroud, Mathew Hale (1811-1895 and later Bishop of Adelaide) described Chartists as deceivers and hypocrites and dismissed their protestations of peaceful protest by quoting Psalms: ‘the words of his mouth are smoother than butter but war is in his heart…they are stirring up the people to shed the blood of their fellow countrymen, and to plunge the whole nation into riot and confusion’. Should they not repent, ‘they will certainly receive the judgement due to their doings in the world to come’.[28] This was not confined to England; when Patrick Brewster (1788-1859), minister at Paisley Abbey and a Chartist, delivered a sermon in 1841 in a Chartist Church, he was condemned by his Presbytery for having committed

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[25] *Christian Observer* September 1839 in Mather F.C: *Chartism and Society* 282

[26] Rev F Close: *The Chartists visit to the Parish Church. A Sermon addressed to the Chartists of Cheltenham on Sunday August 18th 1839*, (London 1839)

[27] Rev F. Close: *The Female Chartists visit to the Parish Church. A Sermon to the Female Chartists of Cheltenham, Sunday August 25th 1839*, (London 1839)

> ‘a gross violation of ecclesiastical order, a contempt of decency, a profanation of the Lords Day, a desecration of the office of the Christian ministry, and a mischievous encouragement to misrule both in Church and State’. [29]

Accusations of immorality, deception and a desire to foment social upheaval were met, in full force, by Chartists who countered with their own charges against a Church seen as a defender of the social order, beholden to the aristocracy and wealthy, and a barrier to any measures designed to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Church ministers were described as ‘a time-serving, sycophantic class, sacrificing these principles (of eternal truth) at the altar of tyranny and superstition’; [30] in the same the newspaper, O’Brien called the clergy ‘infidels…rapacious, cruel, ambitious, fraudulent, hypocritical…the reverse of Christianity'. [31] The *Chartist Circular*, which was the most vociferous of all Chartist publications in its condemnation of the clergy, accused the Church of having:

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[28] Reverend Mathew B Hale: *First Letter shewing the Wicked and Rebellious intentions of the Chartists, addressed to the inhabitants of all places in the West of England, where their destructive principles are upheld* (Richard Bailey 1839)

[29] *Manchester Times 26th June 1841* in Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 87

[30] *Chartist Circular*, 28th March 1840

> 'clothed herself ostentatiously in the gorgeous trappings of royalty…they minister at the altar to establish ..the earth belongs not to the Lord but to the aristocracy who have an incontrovertible right to tax everything as they please, that the working millions ought to be content with the modicum of bread the lords of this world would deign to spare them', [32]

a theme amplified by Abram Duncan (1798-?), pastor at Arbroath Chartist Church who declared:

> 'The Tory parsons are our modern Pharisees; they make long prayers; they pray at the corner of the streets but devour widows' houses. It is thus that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is abused. The tyrant pays the priest and the priest deludes the people for the sake of the tyrant'. [33]

Brewster accused the Church of an attitude to the poor was un-Christian, opposed to the teachings of God and one that allowed the hungry to die for want of basic provision; this was an act of murder[34], a view amplified by McDouall that the aristocracy and priesthood 'would hang Jesus Christ if he appeared as a Chartist'. [35] Opposition was not confined to the Chartist press; the membership, in organised demonstrations throughout England during the summer of 1839, occupied Anglican services en masse, ignoring the traditional reserved seating arrangements, and demanding to hear sermons on topics they had previously submitted to the minister – topics usually focused upon the importance of the labouring classes, the oppression of the poor and the abuse of power and privilege by the wealthy. Rather than preach upon such issues, the clergy would remind the congregation of its allotted station in life and the need for duty, whereupon the Chartist portion would leave as one body, peacefully and with minimal disruption for the remaining regular worshippers.

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[31] *Chartist Circular*, 7th August 1841

[32] *Chartist Circular*, 23rd January 1842

[33] Gammage, R G: *History of the Chartist Movement* 81

[34] *The Reverend Patrick Brewster: his Chartist and Socialist Sermons,* (Glasgow 1839)

[35] *The True Scotsman* 26th September 1840

This attitude to the established Church reflected the diversity of belief within the movement, often the result of locality and circumstance. There was a tradition of non-conformism within working class communities prior to the advent of Chartism and as the membership's access to debate and informed opinion grew, so did its opposition to the Anglican Church, with Chartist Church meetings recording Primitive Methodists, Quakers, Baptists and Congregationalists among the attendees. This was not a uniquely Chartist position; the 1851 national census recorded that 5.2 million people regularly attended Church of England services but 4.9 million attended other forms of Christian service.

The dependency of Church of England clergy for their living upon the financial beneficence of the aristocracy lead to its critical attitude towards Chartism and dire warnings of social revolution which, in turn, encouraged non-conformist beliefs within the membership. More surprising, however, was the movement's relationship with dissenting churches, which was also difficult, and where the issue focused upon approach rather than principle. Where the established Church regarded reform as immoral and was largely unsympathetic to the plight of the poor; the dissenting churches accepted reform as a means of redressing social ills but opposed Chartism's approach. Thus could Andrew Marshall of the United Associate Church in Kirkintilloch declare that:

> '…the people are incensed against the country and its institutions because of the denial of their just rights; in particular, they are incensed against the national clergy…this is demonstrating an argument in favour of Dissent; the Established Church is inefficient and is helping to propagate, not restrain, this immorality…', [36]

yet, in a previous sermon, he could declare his opposition to Chartism because it challenged the social order:

> 'I am trembling when I think of the danger to which they are exposed…I mean the danger in a moral and religious point of view to which they are exposing themselves and to which the whole country is exposed through their disaffection'. [37]

As with their view on reform, so the dissenting churches shared the movement's commitment to the principles of hard work, honesty and self-reliance but differed in the fundamental issue of state involvement in people's lives, opposing parliamentary legislation on electoral reform to improve social conditions, and supporting instead the natural social order as they saw it, and with the exception of the Quakers, their support for the Anti Corn Law League put them further at odds with Chartism.

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[36] Marshall, Andrew: *A Further Address by Andrew Marshall to Dissenting Ministers of Scotland, based upon his previous sermon 1840*

[37] Marshall, Andrew: *The duty of attempting to reconcile the unenfranchised with the franchised classes, a speech to the dissenting ministers of Scotland 1840*

The reaction of the Chartist press to non-conformism had less of the contempt reserved for the regular clergy but more anger, borne of disappointment and betrayal; thus the *Chartist Circular* wrote that 'almost as one man they have set their face against the extension of the franchise….they must be set down as the enemies of freedom' [38] and, in a later article, having stated that it expected such an attitude from the established Church, expressed its disgust that 'dissenting ministers savour much of this rank hypocrisy', that they were 'tyrants who did not sign the Petition' and while they 'profess to be more liberal than their sanctimonious brethren of the globe' they were really just 'a sneaking sort of profession'.[39] These were harsh words but they reflected a wider frustration, well captured by the *True Scotsman* in an article attacking the dissenting clergy for their part following the 1832 Reform Act:

> '…they served you, they trusted you…that you might from gratitude serve them in return. You, of the middle class then bore a better character for sincerity than you do now; they now find, from whatever cause it arises, that, as their trustees, you are either unable or unwilling to ameliorate their grievances in detail'. [40]

Despite Henry Solly's (1813-1903) assertion, through his fictional character James Woodford, that most Chartists cared little for religion – 'We Chartism) …thought it humbug and not worth a sensible man's troubling his head about' [41] – and O'Connor's comment that 'Church Chartism (as well as Teetotal Chartism, Knowledge Chartism and Household Chartism)….I mean to denounce one and all as trick, farce and humbug', [42] it is clear that many Chartists had a strong religious faith, one that aligned with their desire for social and political change and set them against the established Church. Thus would Robert Lowery write that:

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[38] *Chartist Circular* 7th March 1840

[39] *Chartist Circular* 28th March 1840

[40] *True Scotsman* 20th October 1838

> 'I generally took some acknowledged principle in religion or morals, and endeavoured to show the evils we complained of and sought to remove…..yet they (the privileged classes) unjustly denied us equal privileges before *their* laws and in *their* high courts of legislature because we were poor….my favourite expression was, the Bible is the People's Charter',[43]

while the *Chartist Circular* saw Christ as a 'friend of the people, exalter of the humble, the divine deliverer of the oppressed', one who taught Chartists to demand political rights as an act of justice.[44] Many would have agreed with 'Radical Jack' Dennis' interruption of a sermon in Durham Gaol with 'Sir, Jesus Christ was the first Chartist, He was the best man that ever came into this world. He taught the doctrines of humility and equality…'. [45]

Dissatisfaction with both established and non-conformist religions lead the membership to seek alternative arrangements for worship - the formation of its own churches that preached a faith and philosophy in line with Chartist beliefs. The first Chartist churches were founded in Hamilton and Paisley in 1839 and, by the following year, thirty areas across the country had Chartist congregations. It is important to recognise them as congregations for there was little or no construction of new buildings; services were held in houses, schools and public halls, while worship was markedly different from the established Church – no specific doctrine only the word of the Bible, no seat rents and so no preferment, the Church was run by electable elders and the preacher ('an honest, wise, intelligent, temperate, prudent, zealous and well educated Chartist')[46] would also be elected, paid for by voluntary contribution. Nevertheless, they carried out baptisms, marriages and funerals, depriving the established and non-conformist churches of revenue and so attracting the description from Andrew Marshall as being 'pretended churches…proceeding to dispense pretended sacraments on the ground of political creed'. [47]

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[41] Solly, Henry: *James Woodford, Carpenter and Chartist*, 1881, reprint British Library, Historical Print Editions, (United States, 2011 Volume 1) 214

[42] *Northern Star* 13th March 1841

[43] Harrison, Brian and Hollis, Patricia: *Robert Lowery, Radical and Chartist* (London 1979) 129-130

[44] *Chartist Circular* 29th August 1840

[45] *Northern Liberator* 7th September 1839 in Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartists* 158

The life of the Chartist churches was short. By 1851, the numbers had declined to only two in Scotland, while their presence in England had always been much smaller in comparison to Scotland with records for only approximately twenty during the same period. Nevertheless, Chartism's solution to the challenge of formal worship in the face of concerted opposition is illustrative of the strength and cohesion of those members for whom religious faith was important, a faith that justified the principles of the movement by which they created a bond that set them apart from the rest of the religious community, a separation that only strengthened their commitment to reform.

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[46] *Chartist Circular* 17th October 1840

[47] Marshall Andrew: *A Further Address by Andrew Marshall to the Dissenting Ministers of Scotland based upon his previous sermon of 1840*

The use of alcohol and the consequent drive for temperance were not issues unique to Victorian Britain. William Hogarth's graphic drawings of Gin Lane in 1751 illustrating the degradation caused by gin consumption among the working classes, predate by almost ninety years an article in the *True Scotsman* which regretted 'to see such a noble being as man become a more loathsome exhibition of degraded existence than the most obnoxious reptile that crawls on the ground; these exhibitions are produced by intoxicating drink'.[48] Such reports allowed the working class to be portrayed as feckless, drunken wasters, evidence of its inability to exercise the vote responsibly, and it was the impact of these images upon potential middle class support and the concern that drunkenness was having upon working class family life, that drove the campaign for temperance and abstinence within the movement. In 1839, a visiting speaker at the recently formed East London Chartist Temperance Association spoke of the 'necessity of the working classes abstaining from all intoxicating drink in order to assist themselves in obtaining their political rights', [49] while three years earlier the London Working Men's Association's publication *Address and rules of the Working Men's*

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[48] *True Scotsman* 20th October 1838

[49] Shiman, Lillian Lewis: *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (New York 1988) 33

Association, for benefitting politically, socially and morally the useful classes declared that membership would be restricted to those who ‘possess the attributes and characters of men; and little worthy of the names are those who…..forgetful of their duties as fathers, husbands and brothers….drown their intellect amid the drunken revelry of the pot house’. (ironically, the LWMA was founded in the Crown & Anchor Tavern). In 1840, John Fraser (1794-1879) expressed his disgust at ‘pot-house politicians hiccupping for liberty, while they make themselves degraded slaves’ [50] and temperance remained an issue; in 1841 a *Chartist Circular* article, signed by seventy-nine of the movement’s leaders, urged their ‘fellow countrymen, in the name of injured humanity we appeal to you, in the name of liberty we call upon you to dedicate this year to total abstinence; it will then be our year of redemption’.[51] At the same time as Fraser’s speech, teetotal societies, strongest in the North of England, London, the Midlands and Scotland, were being formed as part of a wider programme of teetotal Chartism, inspired by Henry Vincent’s *Address to the working men of England, Scotland and Wales*, in which he advocated the move from temperance and moderation to abstinence and teetotalism. Teetotalism, however, was not a unifying campaign and there were high profile Chartists who rejected the focus upon alcohol, many endorsing the view of George Bartlett (?-1842) from Bath who declared that ‘upon inquiry we should find that nearly the whole of our evils, even that of intemperance, are to be attributed to misgovernment. Men are first poor, then intemperate'. [52] Others believed that the emphasis upon temperance was misplaced and diverted the focus upon other more important issues; we have already seen O'Connor's opinion and Ernest Jones also challenged the belief that teetotalism would contribute to electoral reform: speaking on his release from prison in October 1850, he declared 'Some will tell you that teetotalism will get you the Charter: the Charter don't lie at the bottom of a glass of water', echoing views he had aired many years earlier about the poor: 'Virtue would bring them nothing…be they good as the angels in heaven, they would never gain political power or social regeneration'.[53] We should not dismiss the impact of teetotal Chartism and this will become more apparent in the later themes on the role of women and the use of ulterior measures, but we should also recognise that it was divisive, particularly when adopted internally as a moral indicator for the movement, as in Peter McDouall's description of the teetotal movement at the 1842 Convention as 'more of a religious than a political body', highlighting the issue of interest groups detracting from the primary purpose, and echoing O'Connor's argument that:

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[50] *True Scotsman* 16th May 1840

[51] *Chartist Circular* 9th January 1841

> 'Once you make non-conformity grounds for exclusion, you establish sects and affiliations, instead of one universal corps of regenerators'. [54]

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[52] Jones, David: *Chartism and the Chartists* 45
[53] *Ibid*. 46
[54] *Northern Star* 3rd April 1841

If religion and temperance were important issues that touched the lives of some but not all, the position adopted by, and accorded to, women within Chartism affected many more. Judged by the mores of today, it is likely we would be shocked by the male membership's attitude, even though its views were reflective of the wider social standing accorded to women in society and, with notable exceptions, largely accepted by them. Thus, could the previously quoted Reverend Francis Close preach the words of St Paul to the female Chartists of Cheltenham, 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence'.[55] While such views were not unexpected from those linked to established society, more disappointing was O'Connor's declaration that a woman's role was to be 'a housewife to prepare meals, to wash, to brew, and look after my comforts and the education of my children', [56] as telling a comment on his attitude to education and its relative importance to other, weightier matters, as it was on his view of women. Nevertheless, O'Connor's words reflect the wider view of a woman's role within society in the mid-Victorian era.

Despite such attitudes and barriers, women played an important role in the Chartist movement. We cannot say their presence was divisive since the male membership had a fairly uniform view of their involvement; they were tolerated except when participating in 'unfeminine' activities such as speaking at meetings, lecturing or attending demonstrations, activities that attracted a high degree of criticism and opposition. They were rarely valued, so, in line with the focus of this thesis, it is more relevant to consider what they contributed to the sense of community within the movement, rather than any divisions their presence created.

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[55] Rev Francis Close: *The Female Chartists visit to the Parish Church*

[56] O'Connor, Feargus: *Speech in the Hall of Science, Manchester, 7th March 1842*, in Cooper, Glynis: *A Century of Female Revolution: From Peterloo to Parliament* (Barnsley 2020) 66

Women were most active in the first ten years of the movement, seeing their primary contribution as supporting their male colleagues, husbands, brothers and fathers in their campaign for reform, and accepting the amendment of the Charter from universal to universal male suffrage as an appropriate tactic to achieve any form of reform, as recorded in the Charter preface's response to the call for female suffrage: 'Against this reasonable proposition we have no just arguments to adduce, but only to express our fears of entertaining it, lest the false estimate man entertains for this half of the human family may cause his ignorance and prejudice to retard the progress of his own freedom'.[57] This was an honest response to developments in the social and working environment that had changed the position of women; the expansion of mill and factory working had brought increased opportunities and the continual struggle against poverty meant that a working mother was no longer an exception. The image of the woman as mother and homemaker and the husband as sole breadwinner became difficult to sustain when the need for income and the insecurity of employment sent more women and children out to work. Nevertheless, Chartist women accepted the movement's focus upon male suffrage; in an address to a Female Political Union, Margaret Robinson encouraged her audience to support their men 'to disenthrall themselves from political bondage and to snap asunder those chains that, at present, bind them to the chariot's wheels of a rapacious and tyrannical aristocracy', [58] while the *Northern Star* reported a meeting in West Yorkshire to establish a female association whose purpose was 'to give and receive instruction in political knowledge, and to co-operate with our husbands and sons in their great work of regeneration'.[59] This willingness to accept a subordinate position should not, however, be seen as a lack of ambition, and they put the male membership on notice of this; the Ashton Female Political Union, declared that:

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[57] *The People's Charter*, London 1838 in West, Julius: *A History of the Chartist Movement* 83

> 'we are determined that no man shall ever enjoy our hearts or share our beds, that will not stand forward…we do not despair of yet 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…'.[60]

The general unease felt by society at the changing role of women from homemaker to breadwinner, was mirrored within the movement, despite the involvement of female associations within the wider Chartist campaign. We have already seen O'Connor's remarks on a woman's 'rightful position' and his opinion was not unrepresentative of the wider male membership. Jutta Schwarzkopf in her study of women in Chartism argues that the role of women was always seen as supplemental; securing male suffrage was the means of protecting the position of women in a domestic, non - commercial, setting, and that female activism was subordinate to, but always supported, the male political ambition, as well as other domestic, non-political causes particularly in the later years of the movement. To illustrate her point, Jutta Schwarzkopf quotes the Hull Working Men's Association's call to action, in which the men would campaign politically and the women would 'cheer us on with their smiles of their approbation, and to encourage us with their support'. [61]

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[58] *The Charter* 7th April 1839

[59] *Northern Star* 2nd February 1838

[60] *Northern Star* 2nd February 1839

Schwarzkopf describes women's role in Chartism as ambiguous, that they were not just passive bystanders, and that the history of women in the movement evidences a wide and active involvement, despite male opposition. Definitive numbers are difficult to ascertain, but it is clear that separate female associations made a significant contribution to the movement (Dorothy Thompson and Malcolm Chase both believe there were more than one hundred such associations in the early years of the movement while David Jones has identified at least than eighty), even if their role, as West describes it, was closer to 'giving moral support to their male relatives and, in some cases, assisting the families and dependents of imprisoned Chartists'.[62] This supporting role seems to have been the dominant one for women, it accorded with their social status, and reflected how they saw themselves; they collected signatures for the Petitions, canvassed, made banners and sashes and organised parties for fundraising and to pay visiting lecturers, as well as taking a prominent role in the implementation of exclusive dealing, all within the wider package of ulterior measures –the *Northern Star* commented that:

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[61] Schwarzkopf, Jutta: *Women in the Chartist Movement* (New York 1991)174

[62] West, Julius: *A History of the Chartist Movement* 156

> ‘no persons…are so well qualified to bring these very important personages (shopkeepers) to their senses as the women of England upon whose minds we would impress as a public duty the necessity of expending their money only with the people or shopkeepers friendly to the cause of freedom, justice, Universal Suffrage’, [63]

reinforcing the movement’s view of a woman’s role and the division of domestic responsibilities.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to ascribe contributions as solely pacific; during the Plug Plot Riots there were reports of women being prominent in the demonstrations, stoning the police and shouting obscenities at the military. The *Halifax Guardian* carried a report of the meeting on Skircoat Moor in which ‘the women were extremely excited, and we heard several of them urging the men to rescue the prisoners: one exclaimed ‘If I wor a man, they sudn’t be there long’, and another said ‘Ye’re soft, if ye don’t fetch ‘em out to neet’ ‘, [64] while the *Northern Star* reported that Elizabeth Cresswell, when demonstrating for the National Holiday, was arrested for carrying a loaded gun for which she was sentenced to one month's hard labour.[65] Neither were these working women afraid to challenge either the expected behaviours of the time or those in authority when confronted by them, as the following conversation between Mrs King and Mr Webb, registrar, demonstrates when the former attempted to record the birth of her child:

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[63] *Northern Star* 8th December 1838

[64] Mather F.C: *Chartism and Society* 116

> Mr Webb: 'What is the child to be called'"; Mrs King: 'James Feargus O'Connor King'; Mr Webb: 'Is your husband a Chartist?'; Mrs King: 'I don't know but his wife is'; Mr Webb: 'Are you the child's mother?'; Mrs King: 'I am'.[66]

This assertiveness and the increasingly important role of women as breadwinners, was problematic for a male membership campaigning for radical electoral change but holding the traditional, conservative views of wider society. For many, the growing influence of women within the home and their participation in the movement signalled an emasculation of their own importance and contribution; when the *English Chartist Circular* published an *Address to the Women of England* stating that 'The proper sphere of woman is home; and a proper woman should be suffered to rule there. Man goeth forth to work and returneth for that rest and refreshment which his labour at once needeth and procureth', [67] it was echoing the *Ashton Chronicle's* lament that 'the man stands here all the day idle, whilst the woman toils yonder that she may carry back a crust and share it with her shamed and dishonoured husband', [68] the latter point reflecting its owner, Rayner Stephens', view that, if women were to cease work and focus upon their rightful position in the home, then there would be sufficient employment for all men.

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[65] *Northern Star* 27th April 1839

[66] *Northern Star* 13th March 1841

[67] *English Chartist Circular* Volume 1, April 1841

These passages highlight the contribution and difficulties of working-class women as they attempted to balance the needs of domesticity, work and activism but middle-class women were able to gain a national profile within the movement in their roles as lecturers, organisers and authors. These women did not challenge the authority of the men by their presence on demonstrations or their employment in the factory, they made their contribution – and their challenge - through public speaking and the written word, with a message not of domestic servitude but of equal rights and equal contribution within the movement. Thus would Elizabeth Pease (1807-1897), with Jane Smeal, write and publish the *Address to the Women of Great Britain*, encouraging them to form female political associations and stating her view that:

> '…Chartists generally hold the doctrine of equality to women's rights – but I am not sure whether they do not consider that, when she marries, she merges her political rights with those of her husband', [69]

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[68] *Ashton Chronicle* 14th April 1849

[69] Kingsley Kent, Susan: *Gender and Power in Britain 1640 – 1990* (London 2002) 172

while Anne Knight (1781-1862) asked, ‘Can a man be free, if a woman be a slave?’ [70] Despite their oratorical skills, educated backgrounds and solid radical roots, they found acceptance difficult and their contributions were frequently demeaned; Emma Matilda Miles, who was once praised as delivering a speech so good it could have been delivered by a man, was described by the *Sunday Observer* as ‘rather a pretty looking creature of some two or three and twenty’ when she delivered a lecture in the National Charter Hall[71]. Coming from a non-Chartist newspaper, these remarks were not unexpected but these by the *Northern Star* about Chartist lecturer Mary Ann Walker demonstrate that such sentiments were also present in the movement, one that purportedly would be championing female suffrage once the male franchise had been achieved: ‘The body of her dress was partially and becomingly low, displaying a very graceful bust and tending to set off to greater interest a figure and form of interesting proportions’.[72] As underwhelming as it appears to be, female Chartists did receive support from some of the male membership, albeit not in the same proportion as the negative comments. *The Charter*, in an article entitled *The Inherent Right of All Englishmen to the elective franchise* declared the notion that such rights should only apply to men ‘would be unnatural, impracticable and absurd’, [73] while R.J. Richardson (1808-1861), in a recurring theme, declared that:

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[70] Crawford, Elizabeth: *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866 – 1928* (London 2000) 327

[71] *Sunday Observer* 6th November 1842

[72] *Northern Star* 10th December 1842

[73] *The Charter* 3rd March 1839

> 'If a woman's qualified to be a queen over a great nation, armed with the power of nullifying the powers of Parliament, if it is to be admissible that the Queen, a woman, by the constitution of the country, can command, can rule over a nation, then I say. A woman in every instance ought not to be excluded from her share in the executive and legislative power of the country.'[74]

Women members were at their most politically active during the early years of the movement, even while they battled against society's expectation of them as homemakers, an expectation that remained throughout the life of the movement regardless of their contribution. However, as significant reform failed to materialise and Chartism sought the approval of the middle class as the need for an alliance became apparent, so the participation of women gradually moved away from the movement's political agenda and became more socially focused upon the churches, the temperance movement and education/self-help, all of which played better with an external middle-class audience and a male dominated internal membership. There was also an increasing domestic role, particularly with an improving economy and lower male unemployment that encouraged women to stay at home, care for their husbands and nurture future respectable citizens. We should not assume, however, this was a role forced upon them for, as Dorothy Thompson points out, Chartist women had always been concerned with domestic issues and what they wanted more than the opportunity to agitate for the Charter was to have 'the chance to stay at home and mind their children, instead of working at a mill, to be allowed to receive poor relief in their homes and not to hand their children over to the Poor Law authorities'.[75] It is worthy of note that the number of Female Chartist Associations Women peaked in 1839 when opposition to the New Poor Law was running at its strongest within the movement.

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[74] Richardson, R J: *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)

Although women rarely played a prominent role in Chartism - even the lecturers who toured nationally were seldom mentioned in contemporary press accounts or histories of the movement - their contribution was not insignificant; aside from their domestic role as home provider, they earned income, were present in numbers at outdoor meetings and demonstrations, actively supported the initiatives in fundraising, religion, temperance, education and, where appropriate, ulterior motive activities. These interventions allowed Chartism to function as a movement; though there were clear disagreements over policies and tactics, the movement never split into separate factions and while the men may have had reservations about their wives' non-domestic involvement, the contribution that women made as part of the glue that held it together was as important as those made by their male counterparts.

When National Charter Association member J. Wood wrote that 'Chartism must represent the best intelligence and the best morals of the people', [76] he was recognising an issue that confronted the movement during its lifetime; the external belief that the working class was unfit to exercise the vote. As we have seen, this definition of fitness included morality, fecklessness and conformity – the working class was responsible for the poverty it endured due to its levels of breeding and its laziness in tolerating unemployment and accepting poor relief, while its opposition to the doctrine of the established Church made it a spiritual lost cause. Wood's observation is significant because this image was influential in the eyes of the middle class, it coloured their perception of the working class and so made Chartism's ambition of securing its support more difficult.

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[75] Thompson, Dorothy: *The Dignity of Chartism* 195

[76] *Notes to the People Volume II* in Mather F.C: *Chartism and Society* 42

Included within the definition of unfitness was the sin of 'ignorance', that the working class was uneducated, lacked the intelligence to know how to exercise the franchise and was open to corruption; granting the suffrage to such working men to potentially affect the balance of power and influence within society was unthinkable. Chartism recognised this issue early on; in 1840, Lovett and Collins co-authored the publication *Chartism: A New Organisation for the People*, a proposal to set up the National Association of the United Kingdom for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, and which predominantly focused upon education and personal improvement. The document advocated the establishment of schools for all ages, circulating libraries, the publication of tracts and pamphlets and the funding of educational missionaries in working class communities, and include costs, suggested lesson plans and school building layouts. Also, importantly, it rejected the notion of working-class ignorance:

> ‘While proposing these various means for the political and social amelioration of the people, let it not for a moment be supposed that we agree with those ‘educationalists’ who consider the working classes ‘*too ignorant for the franchise’.* So far from giving countenance to such unjust and liberty-destroying notions, we think the most effectual means to *enlighten* and *improve* them is to place them on a footing of political equality with other classes’. [77]

Although the authors emphatically rejected the notion that access to the franchise should be determined by the educational level of the working man, they accepted that working class education was deficient and required improvement, which would both help comprehension of the Chartist message and demonstrate a desire for self-advancement to improve the movement’s image. The Association established reading rooms, discussion classes and schools, for children and adults, usually meeting on a Sunday and often linked to a Chartist Church. In the schools, no specific religious creed or faith was taught, teaching focused upon basic literacy and numeracy, together with lectures on politics, science and industry, and corporal punishment was forbidden.

Lovett’s initiative, whilst garnering active support, also attracted internal opposition. McDouall attacked him for believing that ‘intelligence and morality ought to be at the basis of all change, and revolutions are ruin unless the people are first possessed of intelligence and morality’ and that ‘we cannot remove the effects of misgovernment by books instead of political power’,[78] unfair criticism for this was not Lovett's position, as his earlier comments on the intellectual fitness of the working class to exercise the franchise demonstrate. The *Northern Star* took issue with Lovett's stated ambition for a national education system, reflecting the views of its editor, Feargus O'Connor, that any initiative not linked directly to the franchise deflected the focus from the movement's primary ambition:

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[77] Lovett, William and Collins, John: *Chartism; A New Organisation of the People: Embracing a Plan for the Education and Improvements of the People, Politically and Socially…Written in Warwick Gaol*, London, J. Watson, 1841, page 63

[78] *McDouall’s Chartist and Republican Journal*, 1st May 1841

> 'National Jackass! You may as well talk of a national Jackass, a national pig, a national cow…as talk of National Education, or anything national, till we have a nation…there is no such thing as national institutions in England, therefore she has no pretensions to the name of nation. Get the Charter and then call England the GREAT NATION…' [79]

External educational initiatives were met with equal hostility and suspicion; Mechanics Institutes, founded in 1823 and intended to educate and improve working men/mechanics through the provision of lectures, a library, a reading room and, on occasions, a museum, were described by the *People's Magazine* as:

> '…institutions for the 'diffusion of knowledge', where rich and the poor are on the committees *together* (!) are all so many traps to catch the people; and by lectures, experiments, papers, books and all the mountebank exhibitions of pretended science mixed, perhaps, with a little coaxing and flattery, to pervert their understanding, and prevent their attaining a knowledge of the true cause of their miserable and degraded state. We warn all the people to shun this as a pest'.[80]

Although the numbers of Institutes flourished, they struggled to achieve their ambition of educating the working man: 'Out of 204 mechanics' institutes in England and Wales in I849, only 43 were mainly supported by operatives and mechanics. The Manchester Mechanics' Institution was 'beyond the reach of the great manufacturing population of Manchester'. The same was true of Liverpool and London. Of 32 institutes in Lancashire and Cheshire, only four were attended by 'considerable numbers' of the working classes, and of 21 in the Midlands, the number was only three’. [81] The reasons are unclear; while Engels agrees with Rayner Stephens that middle class, bourgeois domination meant ‘working men naturally have nothing to do with these institutes, and betake themselves to the proletarian reading-rooms and to the discussion of matters which directly concern their own interests’,[82] other views focused upon the student and not social composition to explain a perceived failure that ‘the original aim of the institutes was too high and assumed a basic knowledge which the working classes lacked’.[83] Nevertheless, the Institutes and the Chartist schools, reading rooms and libraries provided educational resources that supported the movement’s ambition to raise the ability of the working man and his image in the eyes of a middle class that regarded a personal drive for self-improvement as a requirement of respectability.

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[79] *Northern Star* 10th October 1840

[80] *People's Magazine* March 1841

Education, self-improvement, temperance and religion were important to Chartism and, for many in the movement, one or more of them occupied a position of priority equal to electoral reform.

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[81] *Evidence to the Select Committee on Public Libraries* in Royle, Edward: *Mechanics’ Institutes and the Working Classes 1840-1860*, in *The Historical Journal, Cambridge University Press,* (June 1971) 305

[82] Engels, Friedrich: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) (London 2009) 244

[83] Royle, Edward: *Mechanics Institutes and the Working Classes 1840 – 1860* 306

Despite the disagreements these subjects occasionally engendered, feelings never ran so high that they became divisive but the adoption of ulterior measures, in particular, the struggle between moral and physical force, created such overt and at times violent disagreement that it threatened the unity of the movement. Ulterior measures encompassed a wide range of initiatives: the withdrawal of savings from banks, the conversion of paper money into gold and silver, the implementation of a 'sacred month' or general strike, refusal of payment for rates, rents and taxes, the use of arms, support for Chartist candidates at elections, exclusive dealing with those traders and shopkeepers who overtly supported the movement's ambitions (and a boycott of all those that did not), and a refusal to purchase any newspaper that opposed the movement. Even temperance and religion became part of this initiative, for abstention from alcohol would deprive the Exchequer of excise revenue and Chartists would boycott any church in which the minister would not express his support for universal suffrage. Of these measures, the most significant were exclusive dealing, the general strike and the use of physical force.

It is difficult to find data that quantifies the impact of exclusive dealing and the boycotting of those businesses that refused to support the movement but there is anecdotal evidence of its effect in working class areas. The action was based upon Peter Bussey's (1805-1869) simple belief that 'the way to a middle -class man's head was through his pockets', for most shopkeepers were middle or lower middle-class status. In a speech in Glasgow in 1839, John Taylor (1805-1842) encouraged women to take the lead in this initiative, suggesting that ‘if they chalked up the doors on each side of the streets, and marked every shopkeeper who would not assist them to gain their freedom, they would soon bring them to think that the working class were fit for the exercise of the franchise’. [84] Others took a more direct approach; Paul Pickering, in an excellent article on Trade Agitation, describes the activities of William Tillman, Secretary of the Manchester Political Union and first Secretary of the Provisional NCA Executive, during a tour of business establishments in Deansgate in August 1839:

> ‘After reading a political address calling for (financial) assistance, Tillman produced the 'Black Book' which was drawn up into three columns: 'favourable', 'scoundrel' and 'call again'. Tillman's effectiveness can be measured in more than subscriptions of shillings and pence: when he was dragged before the local magistrates for his actions not a single shopkeeper could be found who was prepared to appear for the prosecution’,[85]

one indication of the effect and fear of exclusive dealing. Chartists understood that driving small businesses to closure and bankruptcy could be counter-productive by severely impacting those working people who were either employed by them or shopped with them but this hardship was seen as a necessary if unfortunate outcome, as the alternative was a working class that would ‘passively submit to all the injustice, poverty, distress and misery which you are labouring under, on pain of transportation or imprisonment'. [86]

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[84] Fraser, Hamish: *Chartism in Scotland* 59

[85] Pickering, Paul: *Chartism and the ‘Trade of Agitation’ in Early Victorian Britain* in *History* Volume 76 Number 247, (Wiley, 1991) 232

Pickering's article also highlights the development of a trade in agitation as a consequence of exclusive dealing. Also known as 'blacking', this was the encouragement to members to purchase goods from Chartist sympathisers, who would then donate a percentage of the sales to the movement, goods that included Chartist pills, beverages, breakfast powders and ink among many others. These consumables were supplemented by more overt political products such as rosettes, scarves with mottos, and Chartist portraits, with enterprising spirits also producing frames to in which to mount these pictures.[87] While perceived as a threat by the middle class to its livelihood, exclusive dealing was a popular initiative within the movement and was able to bring all parts of the membership together without dissent. The National Association Gazette may have condemned blacking as 'quackery' and those practising it as 'a number of degraded men attached to the noble army of Chartists' [88] but for the movement exclusive dealing was a legitimate tactic that 'encouraged' middle class shopkeepers to recognise that the needs and concerns of their customers went beyond the purchase of goods.

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[86] *The Charter* 8th September 1839

[87] Pickering, Paul: *Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain* 223 - 224

[88] *National Association Gazette* 26th March 1842 in Pickering, Paul*: Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain* 221

The proposal of a general strike, also known as a national holiday or sacred month, had been suggested as early as 1832 by William Benbow (1787-1864) in his *Grand National Holiday and Congress of the Productive Classes*. Benbow was a member of the National Union of Workingmen described by Max Beer as 'the birthplace of Chartism',[89] and a proponent of armed insurrection, who allegedly manufactured pikes and staves for that purpose, and was regarded by O'Connor as a trustworthy individual. Although not a prominent figure in the movement, his ideas for a strike found a ready audience in the early years, being regarded as an effective weapon against those employers who opposed the Charter and maintained unacceptable working conditions. However, there was little evidence to support the idea that a strike would have the impact upon employers that the movement anticipated; after an abortive attempt to organise a sacred month in 1839 – the membership supported the principle but a lack of readiness meant that only five out of forty-three Scottish associations at the National Convention were prepared to proceed, resulting in a three days strike with no impact – a more serious attempt occurred in 1842. Following the rejection of the second Petition, a local dispute began in the Midlands coalfields and spread across the country, taking in Scotland and the textile factories in the north of England. Although the strike received only lukewarm support from the National Convention, this was sufficient to turn it into a national strike, which lead to the mobilisation of Government troops, the deaths of strikers and the arrest of the leaders. The strike collapsed within one month, with no change to working conditions and no prospect of reform legislation. Although this was a more serious threat to public order than 1839, it was clear that a general strike would make little material difference to either the situation of the working class or the attitude of the employers. As a result, despite ever present discussions, the movement never attempted again to mobilise its members for similar action.

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[89] Beer, Max: *A History of British Socialism* (London 1920) 299

While exclusive dealing and the threat of a sacred month generated genuine concern among the middle class, they remained popular options with the movement, helping to create a sense of purpose, even among those leaders seeking alliance with the middle class. The threat of physical force, however, was different and undoubtedly became the most divisive issue that beset Chartism, one that, unlike other ulterior measures, continued to afflict the movement, at national and local level, until its latter years.

Peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must became the slogan or mantra of the Chartist movement throughout its life but this simplicity encompassed interpretations and emphases that caused some members and leaders to desert the movement, others to stay but aggressively oppose each other; equally significantly it also ensured that the middle classes would always hold Chartism at arm’s length. Most Chartists wanted to secure the franchise constitutionally, without any resort to arms or violence (there was a small minority that saw in the movement the opportunity to agitate for more profound social change, not just reform, change that would undoubtedly require physical insurrection to achieve its end). Among those who sought peaceful reform, one group adamantly refused to contemplate *forcibly if we must* under any circumstances while others accepted this alternative but as a last resort. Those who opposed the use of force did so largely on the grounds of morality (the use of violence was not justified under any circumstances), protection (the use of arms would inevitably lead to the defeat and ensuing misery of working people), or pragmatism (the use of force was guaranteed to alienate middle class opinion).

With the notable exception of Rayner Stephens, the Chartist clergy and those ministers external to the movement, opposed the use of force. For Patrick Brewster, the law, regardless of its flaws, must be obeyed while it was still in operation and to refuse to do so would send society into a state of anarchy and barbarism,[90] while Church of England curate, Mathew Hale, took a more doom-laden view of Chartism's threat of force:

> 'There can be no mistake here as to their designs or intentions…the people rising in arms against the legal force of the nation! Englishmen take the lives of each other', with the outcome being 'strewing our streets and our villages with the wounded, the dying and the dead. May God defend us, my friends, from these dreadful scenes'. [91]

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[90] Brewster, Patrick: *Chartist and Socialist Sermons*, Sermon 2 *The snare of armed revolt* 1839

[91] Reverend Mathew B Hale, Curate of Wotton-Underedge: *First letter shewing the Wicked and Rebellious Intentions of the Chartists, addressed to the inhabitants of all places in the West of England, where their destructive principles are upheld* 1840

While most of the Chartist clergy supported those ulterior measures that stopped short of violence, including exclusive dealing, peaceful strikes, and the refusal to pay tithes to support the established Church, there is no evidence that they differed from Brewster in their view on physical force or the arming of the working class, even though many came from those communities hardest hit by poverty, and some been present at the violent disruption of both Anti Corn Law meetings and regular church gatherings. The clergy’s opposition, however, did not prevent the membership from invoking the spirit of Christ in their support of armed resistance, as seen in these words at a Bradford Chartist meeting in 1839:

> ‘What did Christ say to the rulers? He said that they did not do justice between man and man, and the rulers then went about to kill him (as our rulers now do to us); and yet for all that, he went to as large a meeting as this is. Christ tried moral force, and when he found that failed, what did he say? Why he said, "if t'hesn't gotten a sword, go an sell the' coit and buy one’: an I'll give ye t'same advice. Some said this meant the sword of the spirit, but it was a sword that cut a man's ear off’. [92]

Brewster’s opposition to physical force was concerned as much to protect the working man from the physical and social impact of insurrection as it was to protect his soul; revolt would bring no more freedom to the masses than already existed in England and France, for people’s resistance did not transfer power to the masses but rather restored and maintained governments of inherited privilege, allowing them to augment their existing powers, both political and military, by calling for additional strength to suppress a revolution. [93] Abram Duncan took Brewster's historical argument further by citing the English Civil War and describing Oliver Cromwell as 'an absolute dictator…under him the people armed, bled and died for liberty; he left then, to his successor, a nation of the most wretched slaves in Europe during that period', [94] while Thomas Attwood (1783-1856), founder of the Birmingham Political Union of the Lower and Middle Classes and erstwhile ally of Chartism, highlighted the issue the middle class had with the use of physical force :

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[92] Yeo, Eileen. *Christianity in the Chartist Struggle 1838-1842* in *Past & Present*, no. 91 (1981) 109-39.

> 'they (the people) had not money to buy bread for themselves or their families; and yet they are gravely recommended to buy arms for their country…their disease was poverty and the remedy which rich men can only make use of was recommended to them. What is the result? The people are delivered up into the hands of the oppressors'. The outcome has been that 'they have set every jury in England against them, they have set the middle class against them'. [95]

Attwood's comment illustrates a pragmatic objection to physical force, the alienation of the middle class. Throughout its lifetime, the movement wrestled with the need to engage the middle class and physical force was always a major barrier in achieving this. Thus, would the *True Scotsman* write after the Newport riots:

> 'The whole object of the movement should have been to have diffused information abundantly and continually among working men; and to have conciliated and converted, by the same means, the middle and upper classes of society without the co-operation of whom, working men cannot obtain the liberty for which they so anxiously desire', [96]

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[93] Brewster, Patrick: *Chartist and Socialist Sermons*, Sermon 2 *The snare of armed revolt*
[94] *True Scotsman* 24th November 1838
[95] *True Scotsman* 4th January 1840
[96] *True Scotsman* 16th November 1839

sentiments supported within the movement by John Fielden and Henry Hetherington (1792-1849). Fielden, radical MP for Oldham, told an electoral address in 1840 that ‘it was the threat of physical force and the threats and intimidation that were used, that alienated the middle class from the working class to a great extent’, while Hetherington, publisher of *The Radical* and the *Poor Man’s Guardian*, declared that many people had been deterred from engaging with Chartism because of the way that physical force had been discussed and that such language had been a boon to their enemies, that ‘in his late mission he found that the middle classes invariably raised objections against them in consequence of this constant recurrence to physical force’. [97]

The counter argument to those who opposed physical force was that its use was a necessary, if regrettable, option and one which must not be withdrawn, for without it there was no incentive for any government within the existing social structure to willingly reform an electoral system that worked overwhelmingly for its own benefit. Thomas Kemnitz described this dilemma as: ‘The problem facing the Chartists was that of a pressure group without political power trying to force a resistant and hostile government to grant political rights. The Chartists could not exercise direct political pressure because they could not vote’. [98] Like their moral force opponents, they recognised the need for middle class support but were prepared to countenance violence if an appeal to a sense of justice failed. While the argument has usually focused upon the use or non-use of physical force, Kemnitz makes a compelling argument that there was a third approach, namely, to threaten to use it, but with no real desire to carry this through, an approach he describes as 'the language of menace'. Kemnitz identifies O'Connor as the leading exponent this approach:

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[97] *Northern Star* 27th April 1839

[98] Kemnitz, Thomas: *Approaches to the Chartist Movement: Feargus O'Connor and Chartist Strategy* in *Albion.* Vol. V (Spring 1973) 68

> 'He used a careful blend of calls for legal behaviour and threats of what might happen and thereby tried to maintain the credibility of his language of menace while avoiding actual violence. He issued ringing warnings to the authorities, such as, 'The first shot fired upon the people would set fire to every manufactory in the kingdom.' And he went in for some aggressive sloganeering: It is better 'to die free than to live a slave.' On the other hand, he warned his audiences over and over again to avoid 'a premature outbreak', and he told them that they must try every moral means first'.[99]

In a study of Chartism in North-East England, William Maehl supports Kemnitz's view that the use of violence was a threat rather than an intended reality: '…weapons were seen as a psychological weapon which would force the government to attend more seriously to their demands. Remarks such as O'Connor's heightened tension, purposefully, and caused discomfort among "respectable" people, but they were not a call to revolution'. [100] Whatever the motive, the outcome was a middle class fearful of revolution and a Government willing to enact measures to prevent such an occurrence; the membership may have endorsed the views of the *Chartist Circular* that when a Government loses the trust of the people and discards any allegiance to its sovereignty, then insurrection becomes a sacred right,[101] and those of the *Charter* that when the constitutional rights and liberties of the people were violated 'it will be the bounden duty of every Englishman to resist even unto death, the imposition of such a disgraceful thraldom',[102] but it also understood the impact of airing such inflammatory statements upon public opinion. The *True Scotsman* accepted some members and leaders held such views but they must keep them private and not publicly express them as members of a movement committed to peaceful means of change; the movement had begun under the auspices of moral force so anyone who departed from this principle was a traitor.[103]

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[99] *Ibid.*

[100] Maehl, William Henry: *The Dynamics of Violence in Chartism: A Case Study in Northeastern England* in *Albion,* Vol. 7, No. 2, (Summer 1975) 108

Chartism was an heterogenous organisation, in which the diversity of ideas, the groups that sought to achieve more than just the Charter, the differences and disagreements over strategy and tactics, the spectrum of membership reflecting geographical and sectoral divergence across the country all contributed to what we might now call a 'broad church'. We should not, however, assume that these differences resulted in a fractured movement; there were groups passionate about temperance, faith and education while others did not share their zeal, but these were not issues for the leadership rather than the membership. For while members will have different interests within any community, there will be usually a common element around which they will coalesce as the reason for which they formed the community at the outset. This was the role that the Charter played and we should not underestimate its importance, for while radicals and reformers had promoted parliamentary change at various times in the previous century and, indeed, Major John Cartwright had, in the course of his two publications, already outlined the six points that became the People's Charter, when the Charter was published, this was the first time that these demands had been laid out in one document and in language that the unenfranchised working man could easily understand. It provided the movement's fundamental manifesto, principles that bound the members together; thus, could a working-class Chartist millworker from Yorkshire engage in conversation with a Chartist clockmaker from the Black Country and a Chartist schoolteacher from Bristol, and despite the differences in their lives and their accents, they shared a common understanding of, and ambition for, electoral reform. It may have been one of the few things they had in common but it was powerful enough to keep all three in the same movement. While there were disagreements from the outset with the Charter itself, ranging from the inclusion of female suffrage to the secret ballot, the final document provided an ideological focal point around which these divergent ideas and groups could coalesce; without the Charter, it is hard to imagine a convergence of such different interests and that is probably its greatest strength.

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[101] *Chartist Circular* 9th November 1839
[102] *The Charter* 11th August 1839
[103] *True Scotsman* October 1840 and December 1838

When people form communities or movements, they bring with them their personal experiences, beliefs, values and ambitions, which make any aspiration for uniformity challenging. So it was with Chartism; it was a diverse movement but one that wanted things to be different, for an unfair system to be radically changed to the advantage of a working class disenfranchised and ignored by the elite, and to achieve this it had to develop a shared consciousness that made differences irrelevant. The members had to see themselves as part of a unified movement, a community that was clear on its purpose and to which they were committed. The next chapter will continue to explore Chartism as a community by examining how the movement saw and defined itself, and whether there truly was a clarity of purpose; importantly, it will also look at those who opposed them, how Chartism regarded these 'enemies' and if this helped develop unity and a shared feeling of mutual exclusion.

Chapter Four: How Chartism saw itself and was seen by others

> ‘When we contend for an equality of political rights, it is not in order to lop off an unjust tax or useless pension, or to get a transfer of wealth, power, or influence for a party; but to be able to probe our social evils to their source, and to apply effective remedies to prevent, instead of unjust laws to punish’ [1].

So said the London Working Mens Association at its founding in 1836, an organisation that provided both the ideas and the authors for the Charter which was published two years later... Although the Charter’s demands were outwardly constitutional, it was social change that underpinned the six points; this was not reform for its own sake, it was change that would benefit the whole of society but, above all, the disenfranchised working class. And yet, if we briefly refer back to chapter one, we recall that, within the leadership of the movement, there was a diversity of purpose and ambition – Lovett was for social improvement, O’Connor for a return to the land, Frost for a repeal of the 1834 Poor Law Act, O’Brien for currency reform and Jones for proletarian socialism. This diversity is reflected in the historiography of the movement and while most historians will identify the movement as seeking social improvement above all else, those on the left have defined the argument as an economic one (the ‘knife and fork’ question), while others have regarded it as a political and, or, constitutional one. We also know that the membership itself held differing and, at times, competing views on what it wanted franchise reform to deliver beyond the vote and, thus, where the leadership priorities should lie, evidenced by the number of interest groups that existed under the Chartist umbrella. To understand how Chartism reconciled these divergent ambitions, they must be seen in the wider context of a community, where the clarity and consistency of the message, and the acceptance of an underlying purpose, is supported and shared by its members and communicated in a common language that legitimised actions. Such understanding is enhanced if we are aware of how the movement saw and defined itself following the initial definition of its purpose contained in the Charter and in the light of the differences identified in the previous chapter.; was there a conscious sense of unity that bound the membership together when differences became apparent and for which the ultimate ambition of social reform and suffrage was that unifier? A sense of belonging is not only dependent upon inclusivity and shared aims, it can also be supported by determining 'what are we not?'; which principles and facets of society do we not accept, how do we see those working against us and does this opposition strengthen both our resolve to achieve our ambition and the bonds that tie us together as a community? This chapter will consider both sides of the issue: it will look at what the movement saw as its purpose and the means it used to promote it, and it will examine those opposed to reform and how Chartism reacted to them. In doing so, it will look at the fundamental social issues that motivated the movement, its attitude to the monarchy, aristocracy and privilege, and if, or how, that impacted the unity of the movement (in doing so, it will also touch upon the issue of republicanism within the movement), and it will examine the power of the press, both commercial and Chartist, how it influenced external attitudes towards Chartism and how it created a sense of internal unity in the face of external attack.

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[1] Lovett*, William: The Life and Struggles of William Lovett* 78

The campaign for electoral reform touched upon a fundamental aspect of society. As the *Charter* explained in March 1839 'no man has the right to urge my obedience to his will…this cannot be aggregated so Parliament cannot control my will without my consent', [2] a sentiment echoed in a later edition when commenting upon the link between Chartists and Radicals: '…no Radical will deny the abstract right of man to political freedom'. [3] The principle of rights runs through the movement, uniting those otherwise differing in their ambitions; thus Harney's *Red Republican*, with its arguments for socialism, could comment that it was 'quite possible to pass laws that give every man his rights without encroaching on the rights of his fellow men', [4] reflecting a speech ten years earlier by the moderate John Collins in Dunfermline, stating his ambition for equal rights and how 'he would oppose power taken from irresponsible Whigs and Tories and given to irresponsible Radicals and Chartists'.[5] These ambitions were not new but, as we have already seen, built upon the work of former radicals who recognised the loss of these basic rights and campaigned for their restoration. At this point, it is worth briefly discussing these rights, regarded by radicals as fundamental to every citizen in the kingdom and which underpinned many of the principles upon which the Charter was later written.

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[2] *The Charter*, 3rd March 1839

[3] *The Charter,* 27th October 1839

[4] *The Red Republican*, 12th October 1850

[5] *True Scotsman*, 7th November 1840

When radicals talked of rights, they highlighted Magna Carta of 1215 and the principles of Habeas Corpus and Trial by Jury, the Petition of Rights of 1628 which included no taxation without parliamentary consent, and the Bill of Rights of 1689 which reinforced Parliament's authority, demanded free elections, the abolition of a financial levy without parliamentary consent, regular Parliaments, parliamentary free speech, and the right to petition. The following quotes, spread over a period of 170 years, illustrate the importance of these historical landmarks:

> '…for really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and, therefore, truly Sir, I think it is clear that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent put himself under that government' (spoken by Thomas Rainsborough (1610-1648), leader of the Levellers at the Putney debates in 1647), [6]
>
> 'The absolute rights of any Englishman' (written by William Blackstone (1723-1780) in 1765)[7]
>
> 'We are perfectly satisfied that our excellent Constitution, in its original purity, as it was bequeathed to us by our brave ancestors, is fully adequate to all the purposes of good government; we are therefore determined not to be satisfied with anything short of that Constitution, the whole of our Constitution, and nothing but our Constitution (*Black Dwarf* 1819)'. [8]

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[6] Brailsford, H.N: *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham 1983) 274

[7] Blackstone, William: *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) (University of Chicago Press 1979) 120 – 141

[8] *Black Dwarf* 28th July 1819

Black Dwarf captured the mood of increasing frustration among many radicals at the seeming futility of Parliamentary petitioning when invoking those earlier, influential events:

> 'Would petitioning ever have obtained the Constitution?......was John petitioned to sign Magna Charta? Was Charles petitioned to lay down his head upon the block…was James petitioned to abdicate the throne?......NO! NO! The right to petitioning with our ancestors meant the right of laying down their grievances before the higher authority, and demanding, or ENFORCING, an attention to their wrongs'. [9]

As John Belchem has written, 'In the popular mind, notions of historical precedent, natural right and constitutional sanction all congealed to justify physical resistance';[10] from these quotations above and Belchem's analysis, we can see the consistent theme that runs through radical thinking from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, and which so influenced Chartism, including the frustration of those advocating physical force with those who rigidly opposed it.

Seventy years before Harney's article, the Society for Constitutional Information had declared:

> 'The Law to bind all, must be assented by all' and that 'It is the aim of this Society….to revive in the minds of their fellow citizens, THE COMMONALTY AT LARGE, a knowledge of their lost rights; so that, knowing the value of their inheritance and the absolute necessity of exercising their Election Rights as *extensively* and as *constantly* as our sacred Constitution and its great Founders intended…'.[11]

The Society published and distributed four thousand copies of John Cartwright's *Declaration of those Rights of the Commonalty of Great Britain without which they Cannot be Free*, a document advocating universal male suffrage and annual parliaments, while Benjamin Wilson (1824-1897), reflecting upon his life as a Chartist almost fifty years after Collins' speech, captured what it meant to be a member of the movement:

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[9] *Black Dwarf* 12th February 1817

[10] Belchem, John: *Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in the Nineteenth Century* in *Social History*, Volume 6 Number 1, (January 1981) 9

[11] Black, Eugene: *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organisation 1769-1793* (Harvard University Press, 1963) 178

> 'The Chartists were called ugly names, the swinish multitude, unwashed and levellers. I never knew levelling advocated amongst the Chartists, neither in public nor in private, for they did not believe in it…what they wanted was a voice in making the laws they were called upon to obey; they believed that taxation without representation was tyranny, and ought to be resisted; they took a leading part in agitating in favour of the ten hour question, the repeal of the taxes on knowledge, education…'.[12]

The further significance of both Collins' and Wilson's words is this denial of any desire to deprive other members of society of what they possessed in favour of the working class; they wanted parity not revolution although, as we shall see later, this was distorted by those in authority to create a picture of impending bloodshed, theft and anarchy. As the *Charter* stated:

> 'The movement is social not political; the desired change is not theoretical but practical…the people do not speculate on any particular type of government but what that government does and how it affects their personal situation', [13]

Any declaration of the desired change as 'social' would likely have created more fear than anything constitutional. As we shall see later, the movement was swingeing in its attacks on the aristocracy and privilege, but with very few exceptions – the *Friend of the People* declared for a class war with

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[12] Wilson, Benjamin: *The struggles of an old Chartist*, 1887 in Hollis, Patricia: *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815 – 1850* 217

[13] *The Charter,* 26th May 1839

‘victory going to the revolutionary proletariat’ [14] – there was no strong indication of a wish to overthrow society, rather association meetings would dispense criticism and loyal addresses in equal measure. In an article in the *Red Republican*, Howard Morton’s (nom de plume of Helen Macfarlane 1818-1860) description of society in 1850 – jails full of the starving poor, prostitution driven by hunger, long hours for starvation wages, workhouses full of the able-bodied unemployed, the poor dying of hunger in the streets and poor and filthy housing – would have been endorsed by the members but his solution which included the nationalisation of land and the state ownership of railways, canals, gas and waterworks was not one that attracted support, even at this late stage of the movement when any element of reform success was missing. [15]

The thought of a better life united the membership in seeking reform, not social revolution. Of course, regardless of how often Chartists made clear their ambition was fairness and equality not rebellion, the commercial Press continued to portray Chartism as the destruction of everything that Society held to be precious: ‘Universal Suffrage in reality means nothing else but universal pillage’.[16] ‘Fairness’ and ‘equality’ feature prominently in Chartist writing, but the members also demanded ‘opportunity’; the opportunity to earn a living without the pressure of dismissal, to enjoy clean and safe housing, to see their children educated rather than working twelve hours in a factory, and to be paid a wage that allowed them to put food onto the table, instead of having to forego their own meal to feed their children. Such opportunities would only arise with the franchise.

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[14] *The Friend of the People* 28th December 1850

[15] *The Red Republican* 12th October 1850

[16] *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1839

There was no disagreement within the movement that these opportunities were dependent upon the franchise, even when disagreement arose over the means of achievement. Thus, could Rayner Stephens, one of the most vociferous advocates of physical force, declare the Charter's aim was to improve the lives of those disenfranchised by the political system, not social revolution. At a meeting on Kersal Moor on 24th September 1838, he provided what is the most succinct description of Chartism's fundamental ambition: 'Chartism, my friends, is no political movement, where the main point is your getting the ballot. Chartism is a knife and fork question: the Charter means a good house, good food and drink, prosperity, and short working hours'.[17] His 'knife and fork' analogy was frequently repeated as a reminder of what suffrage meant: a roof over the head, food on the table and security for the family, a basic, simple and effective message reiterated by O'Brien in the following year:

> 'Universal suffrage means meat and drink and clothing, good hours, and good beds, and good substantial furniture for every man, woman and child who will do a fair day's work'. [18]

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[17] Joseph Rayner Stephens quoted in Brown, Richard and Daniels, Christopher: *Documents and Debates: The Chartists* (London 1984) 61

[18] *The Operative* 17th March 1839 in Morris, Max: *From Cobbett to the Chartists 1815 – 1848* (London 1948) 144

The principles of social improvement, fairness and equality were the consistent bedrock beliefs of the movement during its lifetime. So, when the LWMA, whose leaders included future Chartists Lovett, Vincent, Harney, Henry Hetherington and John Cleave (1790-1847), declared their goal of electoral reform in 1836, their stated reasons included the equalisation of political and social rights, the removal of restrictions upon a free and unstamped press, the promotion of education and educational facilities and a clearer understanding of the social situation of the working class, particularly wages and living conditions. In a speech in Glasgow in 1839, one Chartist told the meeting that ‘Toryism just means ignorant children in rags, a drunken husband, and an unhappy wife. Chartism is to have a happy home, and smiling, intelligent and happy families’,[19] while in a Chartist tract published in 1840, a fictional conversation between ‘A Radical’ and ‘Mr Doubtful’ offers a definition of the social benefits that the Charter would bring, including the replacement of bad laws with good, reduced taxation, removal of abuses of the law which deny justice to the poor, a general system of non-sectarian education, and a reduction of the civil list, arguments that constantly recur within the movement: ‘I think we might be as well or better governed for less money *by half* than we pay at present’ states the Radical from the same tract, echoing criticisms of the level of taxation, and the funding of pensions and sinecures.[20] The issue of an unfair taxation burden, combined with no right in determining such an imposition, and the detrimental impact it had upon the living standard of the working class, consistently angered the movement; an address by the Executive Committee of the National Charter Association and quoted at Feargus O'Connor's trial in 1843, in support of an impending general strike, forcefully expressed this anger:

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[19] *Scottish Patriot*, 14th December 1839 in Clark, Ann: *The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity; Gender, Language and Class in the 1830s and 1840s*, in *Journal of British Studies*, (January 1992) 62

> 'He (the working man) knows that the Charter would remove by universal will, expressed in universal suffrage, the heavy load of taxes which now crush the existence of the labourer, and cripple the effects of commerce; that it would give cheap government as well as cheap food, high wages as well as low taxes, bring happiness to the hearthstone, plenty to the table, protection to the old, education to the young, permanent prosperity, long-continued protective political power to labour…'.[21]

Engels recognised that the working class and the middle class saw the outcomes of Chartism differently; for the 'radical bourgeois', achieving the six points was 'the beginning and end of the matter, which are meant, at the utmost, to call forth certain further reforms of the constitution' but for the working class it was 'a mere means to further ends. 'Political power our cry, social happiness our end' is now the clearly formulated war cry of the Chartists'. Engels confirmed that 'Chartism is of an essentially social nature'.[22] By 1851 the movement had seen three petitions dismissed by Parliament, the collapse of O'Connor's National Land Company, abortive and quickly suppressed public disturbances leading to the transportation of William Cuffay and the imprisonment of Jones, and the drift towards both ends of the political spectrum with the foundation of the moderate National Charter League and the launch of the more militant *Red Republican*. These developments lead the *Northern Star* to recognise that attempts to fully integrate the divergent groups into one democratic organisation 'have failed, much to our individual regret…there is in fact an essential difference between a struggle to obtain political rights and the use of those rights after they are obtained' [23] and, in words that would have been unthinkable years earlier, the paper encouraged members to engage with other reforming organisations:

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[20] *What is a Chartist, Answered?* (Finsbury Tract Society 1840)

[21] Heywood, Abel: *The Trial of Feargus O'Connor (Barrister at Law) and fifty-eight others at Lancaster, on a charge of Sedition, Conspiracy, Tumult and Riot* (1843) (Franklin Classics, USA, 2018) 194

[22] Engels, Friedrich: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* 241

> 'It does not follow that Chartists…because they confine themselves strictly to the Charter in their capacity as members of the Chartist movement, are therefore to take no part in any other movement having in view the elevation and improvement of their fellow men. On the contrary, the more they mix with others, the better for the great cause of political freedom' [24].

This was clearly a recognition that reform would not come without the active support of other, predominantly middle class, groups.

Yet, despite these setbacks and differences, the social ambitions of the movement remained and were expressed in language consistent with that of two decades earlier. In an article in the *Friend of the People*, Harney accepted the popular focus was upon industrial and social issues, not political ones, even though his own desire was to move the debate towards the latter. In his article, he reiterated the overwhelming need for universal suffrage but acknowledged that the social focus of the debate reflected the failure of political agitation,[25] whilst, in a later edition of the same publication, 'Servo' recognised that political rights were worthless unless they lead to social change: 'Political reform means profit, increased comfort, social amelioration to the suffering millions…the people want reform'. [26] We can see, therefore a consistency running through the movement during its lifetime when the members and supporters address its purpose; it is electoral reform to bring economic and social improvement for the working class. While there were other perspectives on teetotalism, religion, education, self-help and republicanism, the primary ambition remained constant. This held the movement together, providing a sense of belonging, and allowing the members to see themselves as part of a bigger community, not just as a member of a local association. The *Northern Star's* view that divergence over tactics combined with a widening gap between the moderate and militant wings of the movement meant effective unity was unachievable, had become a reasonable conclusion by 1851; at this point, the movement had been in existence for thirteen years, with much energy expended for little tangible reward, and yet, the movement never wavered from its ambition of achieving a fairer and better society for working families, and throughout all the internal, bitter arguments, this desire was never challenged. The significance of this single-mindedness becomes clear when reading Anderson's work on the independence movements in those South American countries governed by Spain. Their resolve was fuelled by the repressive, disadvantageous measures taken by Madrid which 'increasingly frustrated, angered and alarmed the upper creole classes', [27] and such anger could be universally understood and communicated because 'All, including the USA, were creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought'. [28] So, whether creating a national identity that reflected the needs of an indigenous people, or, for Chartists, changing social and constitutional structures to create a fairer society for those most disadvantaged, clarity of purpose and shared understanding through language were essential to generate the sense of community needed to effect such change.

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[23] *Northern Star* 11th January 1851

[24] *Ibid.*

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[25] *The Friend of the People*, 25th January 1851

[26] *The Friend of the People*, 5th July 1851

The strength of an idea, guiding principle or ambition is illustrated by the language that a community or organisation adopts within its membership, for language can reinforce the message and create unity in the face of a determined opposition. The power of language was something of which radicalism was aware and from which Chartism benefitted. As early as 1834, we can see this in an emotional article by William Cobbett when, recognising Parliament's refusal to listen to those 'irrelevant voices' that sat outside the electoral system and commenting upon the Poor Law Amendment Act and hostility towards unionised labour highlighted by the transportation of the

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[27] Anderson: *Imagined Communities* 50

[28] *Ibid*. 47

Tolpuddle workers, he wrote: '….Pass this bill (the PLAA) and you destroy the constitution as far as it relates to the necessitous . . . you dissolve the social compact as far as it relates to the working people'.[29] Cobbett was not one to promote class division as a means of change and he was often portrayed as a nostalgic reactionary with a desire to return to a pre-industrial revolution England without political parties or factories, while his campaigning focused upon specific abuses such as flogging in the military or the scandal of low wages for agricultural workers rather than radical social change. So, his recognition that punitive government would bring unforeseen outcomes, particularly the creation of a working-class identity with the potential for social and political upheaval, is significant. Three years after Cobbett's article, George Loveless (1797-1874), reflecting upon his transportation, reinforced Cobbett's views on working class agitation when he wrote: 'I believe that nothing will ever be done to relieve the distress of the working classes, unless they take it into their own hands. With these views I left England, and with these views I am returned'. [30] It is this language of working-class struggle and the need to take control that begins to present in the writing, speeches and meetings of the movement and which, in turn, fuelled the fears of the wealthy and propertied classes and found expression in parliamentary debate and the non-Chartist press. Anderson would recognise Loveless' sentiments expressed in 'unless they take into their own hands'; the aristocratic elites that ruled colonial nations had created a solid controlling network that enabled the retention of power, often through strategic marriages and alliances,[31] a situation that would only change when local people, whether peasant or middle class, seized the opportunity for liberation. Although Anderson's work makes only limited reference to the European 1848 Revolutions, the actions and language of those revolutionaries demonstrate the dissatisfaction with the ruling elite that lead to violent rebellion from the classes below the aristocracy and show Anderson's general assessment to be valid for Europe in 1848. The actions of middle class professionals advocating franchise extension together with skilled workers and labourers lead to the flight of the King and the proclamation of the Second Republic in France; students, workers and middle class liberals provoked the flight of the Emperor Ferdinand and the implementation of a constituent assembly in Austria within a rising tide of nationalism and demands for greater social freedoms; the threat of a peasant army marching upon Pest in Hungary lead to the country's diet freeing the peasantry from their dependency upon the nobility by passing the April Laws, while a group of liberal nobles under the leadership of Kossuth drove through social changes including equality of taxation, demands for increased civil liberties including universal suffrage, the granting of land titles to the peasantry and the abolition of censorship, all contained within an overarching desire to end the rule of Vienna that retained control over Hungary's foreign affairs and fiscal policies.[32] The nationalist movements that furthered revolutions in Italy, Prussia and Germany were also drawn from a cross section of society, usually lead by radicals and intellectuals but engaging all classes, trades and professions. With the exception of the revolution in France (this was essentially an internal rebellion), the other European revolutions of 1848 largely failed in their attempts to end their countries' subjugation to external rule and the existing elites were able to restore their political and social control; nevertheless, Anderson's views hold true, that, if the establishment of a national identity was to be realised, it would be achieved by those without power challenging those who possessed it. The significance for Chartism is clear; those in power had little or no incentive to relinquish it unless forcibly challenged by an unenfranchised working class, or by middle class radicals for whom electoral reform was the gateway to a fairer society. In reality, the Chartist movement embraced both in its campaign for change, despite its own difficult relationship with the middle classes.

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[29] *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 12th July 1834

[30] Loveless, George: *The Martyr's Account; the Victims of Whiggery* (1837) 42,

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[31] Anderson *Imagined Communities* 50: "Through the general principle of verticality, dynastic marriages brought together diverse populations under new apices" and he quotes Oscar Jaszi, who lists fifty-two of the titles of the Head of the House of Habsburg, describing it as being "not without a certain comic aspect…the record of the innumerable marriages, hucksterings and captures of the Habsburgs"

And yet the movement continued to place its faith in the existing political system even as it campaigned for its reform. Unlike the European revolutions that resulted in rioting, violence and political change, and despite those within the movement advocating physical intervention as the means to achieve the Charter, the membership continued to disavow the use of force. While there were serious riots in Newport and Birmingham, these were largely unco-ordinated and localised, and Chartists continued to use the peaceful, but ultimately highly ineffective, method of petitioning Parliament to grant universal suffrage. Despite the rhetoric of some of its more vociferous leaders, the movement continued to trust in the decency of those in power to effect a fairer society, even when there was little or no evidence to support this, and, consequently, it never wavered from a path of constitutional change.

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[32] Deme, Laszlo: *The Society for Equality in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848* in *Slavic Review,* March 1972, (Cambridge University Press) 71-74

Although the leadership had little expectation the 1839 Petition would be approved by Parliament, its outright rejection without any serious consideration, and the drift of more moderate ex-LWMA leaders out of the movement, lead to a hardening of attitudes that made the 1842 Petition more radical and strongly worded than its predecessor. It chronicled thousands across the country as dying from poverty and starvation and viewed 'with mingled astonishment and alarm the ill provision made for the poor, the aged, and the infirm; and likewise perceive with feelings of indignation, the determination of your honourable House to continue the Poor law bill in operation…' and in language that reflected membership meetings across the country, confirmed the view that the Charter was more than a demand for political reform:

> 'Your petitioners would direct the attention of your honourable House to the great disparity existing between the wages of the producing millions and the salaries of those whose

> comparative usefulness ought to be questioned, where riches and luxury prevail amongst the rulers and poverty and starvation amongst the ruled. . ..'

Three weeks after the presentation of the Petition, O'Connor wrote an article in the *Northern Star*, reinforcing the movement's focus upon the split between master and workman:

> 'Our mission is with the sons of poverty and suffering; from them we must gain converts and disciples. Wherever tyranny and oppression exist on the part of the landlord, the master, the manufacturer, there should our missionary be…...the nailors, ironworkers and colliers of that vast district, embracing the whole of South Staffordshire, and extending across Shropshire, nearly to Wales, are coming out in thousands for the Charter'.[33]

Given the composition of the membership, this was language in tune with the mood of the time. Chartist press reports of local association meetings provide us with an insight into those attending and the issues that concerned them; the *Northern Star*, in May 1842, reported a meeting in Dudley of '…upward of two thousand…chiefly of nailors and the poor operatives who now are starving', in Overton 'Mr West (John West 1811-1887) lectured here on Monday to the miners of the district…', in Bradford a vote of thanks was given to Mr Jackson (William Vickers Jackson 1803-?) 'for his able and talented advocacy of the rights of the working classes', in Bethnal Green '…though everything was unfavourable and calculated to damp the ardour of the people – the wind being high, the weather stormy and the notice to the public short – yet the weaving population about the quarter, deeply impressed with the importance of the subject, assembled in good numbers…', in Leicester 'On Tuesday night, Mr Cooper (Thomas Cooper 1805-1892) met the shoemakers and commenced the work of forming them into a section of the association', whilst, in Bilston, 'Mr Linney (Joseph Linney 1807-1887) lectured here on Friday to a great concourse of miners'.[34] We can see from these few examples that poverty, rights and the continual need to promote agitation through local membership were of the greatest importance but a further examination of association meeting reports also identify working conditions, the unfairness of the electoral system and the external world's negative view of Chartism as seen through the Press and parliamentary debates, as discussion topics that generated debate and much anger.

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[33] *Northern Star*, 28th May 1842

In the light of the events in Europe in 1848 and the traumatic outcomes for continental monarchies, there has been much speculation as to why there was no such revolution in Britain.[35] Although it is not the intention of this thesis to examine this question, raising it does allow us to consider one important element; Chartism's attitude to the monarchy and to the aristocracy. What becomes clear is that, although attitudes within the movement differed between the two – loyalty tinged with criticism for the monarch and disdain and loathing for the aristocracy –there was rarely any suggestion that either should be abolished.

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[34] *Northern Star*, 7th May 1842 and 14th May 1842

[35] Reasons vary between historians on this point but encompass such diverse reasons as a Chartist focus on a constitutional route to change (moral force Chartism), a lack of co-ordination and strategy by the leadership, Government intervention (legislation such as the Aliens Removal Bill and its use of coercive authority to mobilise resources to quell unrest), the natural conservatism of both the country and the movement, a supine and loyal middle class (in comparison to France), a geographically distant empire that allowed the transportation of criminals and political dissidents, and a comparatively settled social structure. Halevy was the first to seriously consider this question but there have been many other analyses and we would suggest the following as providing a varied insight: Halevy, Elie: *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century Volume IV*, (London 1951); Smith, F.B: Great Britain and the Revolutions of 1848, in *Labour History* Number 33 November 1977, Liverpool University Press; Taylor, Miles: *The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire,* in *Past & Present* Number 166 February 2000, Oxford University Press; Saville, John: *1848 The British State and the Chartist Movement*, (Cambridge 1987); Gash, Norman: *The Age of Peel* (London 1968)

In many ways, Chartism's view of the monarchy epitomised the wider differences within the movement, encouraging historians to debate Chartism as anti-monarchical, republican, both or neither. Early opinion identified it as loyal to the Queen, as J Holland Rose commented in 1912: 'Radicals knew full well that the queen's heart beats in sympathy with the people's cares and aspirations', [36] reflecting a prior comment made in 1879 by a correspondent to the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, a markedly republican paper, who reflected on the differences between radicalism in the 1840s and the times in which he was now living, noting that those radicals of the Chartist period 'were certainly not advocates of a Republican form of government'.[37] Later historians contested this view; Kingsley Martin believed the abolition of the monarchy would have been included in the Charter but it was 'assumed that monarchy, like other medieval relics, would disappear when the working class attained political power'.[38] For Dorothy Thompson, although Chartist attitudes to the Crown were relatively neutral with no significant vein of republicanism in the movement, she shares Martin's view that radicals saw the monarchy as a marginal institution that would disappear 'once the deeper and more fundamental problems of society have been solved'. [39] In an excellent and highly credible article, Paul Pickering examines, in depth, Chartism's attitude to the monarchy and addresses issues of republicanism within the movement.[40] He fully recognises elements and examples of anti-monarchical sentiment and cites the interest in Oliver Cromwell as a Republican Parliamentarian, W.E. Adams using the nom de plume 'Ironside', the sales and reprints of Carlyle's *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* and G.J. Harney's lectures on Cromwell which were so evocative that 'you could hear the sound of the great man's jack boots'.[41] Beyond these few examples, however, Pickering notes that Cromwell did not figure at all in toasts at Chartist dinners (unlike Voltaire, George Washington, Paine and others), nor did he appear on any of the banners displayed at Chartist marches or meetings, symbols which we know were extremely important to the membership. Pickering acknowledges the dissent shown in Manchester and Salford at the celebrations to mark the Coronation when a number of trades refused to march in the procession, although they did preface their address with 'We are not wanting in love and loyalty' – this was a protest on the wider issue of privilege, rather than a show of republicanism – but he also cites examples of high turnout for these celebrations in notable Chartist cities (Liverpool, Preston and Nottingham). What is clear from Pickering's research is that the movement was not anti-monarchy, it was supportive of the Crown but wanted to maintain a constitutional monarchy, one that was answerable to Parliament. When the General Convention of the Industrious Classes met in 1839, it produced a 'Declaration of Rights', signed by both O'Connor and O'Brien, declaring that 'The prerogatives of the imperial crown of this United Kingdom are a constitutional trust vested in the person of the monarch for the benefit and service of the people, and may be controlled, modified and limited by the will of parliament' [42]; there was no reference to reforming the institution, per se, and certainly no inference of abolition. O'Brien, an avowed Republican, accepted that the will of the people was such that they regarded 'the monarchical form of government as essential to a nation's safety and prosperity'.[43]

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[36] Holland Rose J: *The Rise of Democracy* (London 1912) 90

[37] *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 8th February 1879

[38] Martin, Kingsley: *Britain in the Sixties: The Crown and the Establishment* (London 1963) 28

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[39] Thompson, Dorothy: *Queen Victoria: Gender and Power* (London 2001) 103

[40] Pickering, Paul A: *The Hearts of the Millions: Chartism and Popular Monarchism in the 1840s* in *History* Volume 88, April 2003, Wiley

[41] *Ibid*. 31

However, O'Brien's view was not universal and there was criticism of the monarchy. The *Chartist Circular* declared that 'Kings are seldom a blessing but usually an unmixed evil. The monarchy is the foe of freedom…..the age of delusion is gone and the people do not believe kings are advantageous', [44] while five months later, in an article promoting the benefits of a republic, it declared: 'Monarchy is the child of ignorance, the mother of decay…..the vices of monarchy are upheld by the swords of an interested faction…it hatches evils and fortifies itself with them'. [45] She was 'the puppet of the aristocracy' which 'uses up the proletarians for its own profit and that of the middle class who support the system because they share the plunder'. [46]

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[42] *Chartist Circular*, 28th September 1839

[43] *The Operative*, 28th April 1839

[44] *Chartist Circular*, 2nd May 1840

[45] *Chartist Circular*, 24th October 1840

Criticism, however, tended to focus upon the cost, rather than the principle, of monarchy, as one Chartist in Sheffield, whose father was an ex-soldier, had fought for his country and had to work excessive hours for low pay bitterly declared: 'Her Majesty, who had done nothing for her country, in comparison, had her thousands'.[47] Nevertheless, O'Brien would still declare that the 'people complain not of the Sovereign – but their hatred is enkindled against a life-destroying and avaricious aristocracy'[48] and the faith retained in petitioning Parliament was motivated by the belief that the Queen would intervene on behalf of her disenfranchised subjects to ensure the implementation of the Charter. It was clearly a naïve view, but illustrates the trust placed in the institution, even if contradicting the principle of constitutional monarchy, since Parliament had already rejected the petitions of 1839 and 1842. It did not prevent Ernest Jones and Julian Harney exhorting Victoria in 1848 to dissolve Parliament, dismiss her ministers and 'call to your aid men who will make the People's Charter a cabinet measure', no doubt for the pragmatic reasons of maintaining pressure upon those institutions, since there was clearly no possibility such pleas would be considered, let alone actioned.[49]

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[46] *The Red Republican* 22nd June 1850

[47] *Sheffield Iris*, 12th November 1839

[48] Pickering, Paul": *The Hearts of the Millions: Chartism and Popular Monarchism in the 1840s* 234-235

[49] *Northern Star*, 15th April 1848

Opinions were divided but not sufficiently so as to create a meaningful split, and they did not approach the strength of feeling that, for example, typified the debate over the use of physical force. The membership was loyal, it took a pride in being British and fealty to the monarch was an essential part of that belief. It is notable that, during the 1848 European revolutions that so markedly affected the Continent's monarchies, there were no discernible comments upon either the Queen's or the Prince Consort's national origins. As we have noted, there was a republican element to Chartism but it was never particularly significant, the great majority of the membership displaying loyalty to the rule of law embodied in the figure of the Queen; removal of the monarch was never a widespread consideration and any thoughts of emulating the events in France would have been unthinkable.

While the membership's attitude to the Crown was predominantly supportive, its view of the aristocracy and the wider Establishment was wholly different. The relationship between working class Chartism and the aristocracy was one of mutual contempt but before examining this, we should also recognise that the latter was equally disdainful of the newly enfranchised and increasingly wealthy middle class. Although the1832 Act had widened the franchise, the initial composition of the post-Act Parliament was barely altered to reflect the change but, by the middle of the decade, the balance was clearly altering, reflecting the growth of manufacturing towns and the rise of a factory owning middle class, an unwelcome development that threatened the aristocracy's position as both the traditional land owning class and the historic, rightful legislators for society:

> 'The ancient feeling of contempt entertained by the country gentlemen towards the burghers…seems still to rankle in the breasts of many members of our aristocracy, is still fostered by the panegyrists of their order, and displayed itself, not equivocally, in the later parliamentary crusade against the factories'. [50]

Land was now being replaced by commerce and manufacture as the dominant source of wealth. Unlike the mutual dislike shared between the aristocracy and working-class Chartists, there are few published examples of middle-class antipathy towards the upper class, beyond Ure's (Andrew Ure 1778-1857) comments, for the aspiring middle class and tradesmen were still dependent upon those above them for their livelihood and an opportunity to advance their own social status. Indeed, so keen were they to ascend the social ladder and be accepted into the next level that manuals such as *How to Behave* and *Hints for a Gentleman* were published to aid such a transition:

> 'Here you would find everything you needed to know: when to shake hands; how to bring a conversation politely to an end; how to sit and stand gracefully; what was meant by 'RSVP'; how to deal with dirty nails or bad breath; how to style your beard; or how to conduct yourself at a dinner party, a picture gallery or church. Armed with one of these books, the newly-hatched middle-class gentleman could avoid making any social gaffes in polite society'.[51]

With such aspirations, the middle classes remained largely silent on their opinions of the aristocracy.

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[50] Ure, Andrew: *The Philosophy of Manufactures*: Book the Third, Chapter 1, *Moral economy of the Factory System* (1835), (India, Facsimile Publisher 2019) 277

[51] Hughes, Kathryn: *The Middle Classes: Etiquette and Upward Mobility*, (*The British Library*, video published online, 15th May 2014)

Chartism felt no inhibitions in airing its opinions, though most of its attacks came via Press articles rather than through membership meetings, where discussions focused more upon the desperate condition of working families, the impact of the Corn Laws upon prices and the duplicity of the middle class than the behaviour of a remote landed class. While a visiting speaker to the Glasgow Chartist Debating Society might identify the enemies of Chartism as the aristocracy, the Church and 'a race of old men, the relicts of the last century who must die out to get rid of their whims', all of whom were 'cemented by interest, ignorance and prejudice,' [52] it was usually left to Chartist newspapers to articulate why the aristocracy was both a burden to society and a barrier to reform. While working class anger with the middle class focused upon perceived treachery and broken commitments, its contempt for the landed class was based upon its role in sustaining an unfair representation system for its own aggrandisement. The overwhelming view of Chartism was that the aristocracy believed it had a divine, pre-ordained right to rule, that this was despotic, that it conferred wholly unjustified advantages, that the hereditary principle was immoral and yet, despite all these advantages, the aristocracy made no meaningful contribution to society. Add to this the demeaning attitude of the aristocracy towards the working class, demonstrated by its single-minded retention of exclusive power through the denial and frustration of any semblance of electoral concession, and it's not difficult to understand how the movement's membership was united by loathing. As the aristocracy challenged the principle of universal suffrage as well as attacking the membership, so Chartism challenged both the value and the behaviours of this class.

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[52] *Chartist Circular* 11th September 1841

For the *Chartist Circular*, as unacceptable as the Divine Right of Kings had been as a constitutional arrangement, what existed in 1840 was worse since it was based upon the belief that '…wealth and titles, or in other words, the aristocrats of a country are the sole possessors of intelligence and that they alone have any stake in its prosperity…it is their imprescriptible right not only to make but to irresponsibly administer the laws of the whole community'; for the author, despotism was preferable since it was usurpation by one man, not an entire class.[53] Such exclusivity was part of a wider issue of rights and heredity; the same newspaper declared that 'The titled aristocrat is the creation of man…he is created by dishonesty and by treachery, usurping the natural and inalienable rights of man". The time would come when titles would be swept away since 'virtue is the only nobility'.[54] At a soiree in Kilmarnock in 1840 to honour Collins, McDouall and White, John Duncan (1810-1845) continued this theme of legitimacy:

> 'No class has the right to legislate for another class. The people might, with as much right, institute a government over the other classes, as those classes did over them……we are treated as rebels when we oppose the laws of the aristocracy. The people, being the majority, ought to have the power'.[55]

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[53] *Chartist Circular* 15th February 1840

[54] *Chartist Circular* 20th June 1840

[55] *The True Scotsman* 18th October 1840

In these articles and speeches, there seems to be a desire to 'sweep away' the aristocracy, and a further review of Chartist Press articles reveals epithets and descriptions that include 'corrupt judiciary, ignorant legislature, hustlers, sycophants, knaves, debauchery, treachery, extravagance, plunder, oppression, dishonesty, wallowing in luxury and the pauperisation of the working class'. Yet, we also know that the membership had a strong belief in the institutions of the country and, at times, an almost sentimental view of English society. It would seem Chartism was comfortable with the social structure of the country, that it provided a reassuring stability, but regarded the way it was enacted as unacceptable, that the movement wanted to change attitudes, behaviours and practices of the upper class rather than abolish the class itself.

One such practice was hereditary succession, an arrangement 'as repugnant to human wisdom as to human rights and is absurd as it is unjust',[56] '…that a man should be looked up to with servility and awe because the King has bestowed on him a spurious name or decorated him with a riband; that another should revel in luxury because his ancestor, three centuries ago, bled in the quarrel of Lancaster and York…do we imagine these iniquities can be practised without injury?' [57] The *Chartist Circular* was the most vociferous in condemning aristocratic privilege, frequently publishing articles attacking the principle of heredity, as in this one written by Tom Paine: ‘it is an insult and imposition on posterity…. for all men being original equals, no-one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever…’. The unfairness of the hereditary system extended beyond the denial of voting rights, it permeated all aspects of life for those excluded from such privilege; many sons of the working classes served in the army at the lowest rank but had little hope of advancement due to the pervasiveness of patronage and nepotism. In an address to potential recruits and in words that would have resonated with all working-class parents with a serving son, Peter Bussey accused the army of existing to maintain a corrupt social order: ‘I object to your enlisting on the ground that the only benefits to be derived from the maintenance of a standing army, are those which accrue to the aristocracy of the country’. For Bussey, the law of primogeniture ensured that, for those aristocratic sons who did not inherit a title, there was the compensation of officer roles, salaries and pensions in the armed forces and, in a biting conclusion to his address, he attacked the wider establishment: ‘Here we have it. A standing army, a state church and a British navy, a trinity-in-trinity, constructed *by* the aristocracy *for* the aristocracy’.[58] The hereditary system was most strongly associated with the monarchy and, as we have seen, Chartists retained a loyalty and faith to that institution; it did not, however, discourage them from opposing the same hereditary practice with the aristocracy.

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[56] *Chartist Circular* 6th June 1840
[57] *Chartist Circular* 12th October 1839

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[58] Bussey, Peter: *An Address to the Working Men of England especially those from eighteen to thirty years of age, who are capable of serving in the standing army*, (Bradford 1838)

As we know, the unequal imposition of taxation and the unfair distribution of wealth were ongoing issues for Chartism and well illustrated in the movement's view of aristocratic privilege. Although *The Charter* ironically 'complimented' the aristocracy by declaring that 'thick-headed as are the aristocracy upon every high-minded subject, there are none more shrewd in matters affecting their own interests, none who look more closely after their own pockets',[59] the *Chartist Circular* was more direct and less ironic in its observations. In an article entitled *The Production and Distribution of Wealth*, it asserted that in a country of twenty-six million and a created wealth of £500 million, one million of the population (identified as landowners, large capitalists and soldiers) contributed nothing, while one quarter consumed half of the country's wealth – using figures from 1815, the paper declared that the working class received £99 million but the 'rent, pension and profit class' received £330 million. The author condemned 'a system which compels them (the working classes) to produce this vast amount for the enjoyment of those who treat them with derision and contempt….shall the working man everlastingly toil and sweat, and be forever thus plundered, and degraded and trampled upon',[60] comments that built upon a previous article in the same paper which declared that the aristocracy ‘is determined to maintain the system at the expense of every other class of the community’.[61] Perpetuation of this system was concomitant with an absence of any consideration for those outside the privileged elite, particularly those at the bottom of society. In 1841, the *Chartist Circular* wrote that ‘inflated with pride and power, intoxicated with the love of sensual gratifications, they hear not, they see not, they care not for the frightful waste of life and happiness which their enormities produce’,[62] echoing Thomas Attwood’s speech two years earlier when presenting the first Petition to Parliament:

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[59] *The Charter* 31st March 1839

[60] *Chartist Circular* 13th June 1840

> ‘All they (the Petitioners) say is, that the members of this House, in consequence of their birth, parentage, education, wealth and habits of life, have not shown that anxiety for the suffering of the lower classes, which they think is absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of their rights as British subjects’.[63]

As George White (1812-1868) declared, in a speech in Kilmarnock, ‘There is abundance in the land for this purpose (to feed and clothe each man) but it is wasted by a profligate aristocracy…the dogs of the landed gentry are better fed than their tenants’;[64] for O’Brien, the aristocracy was irredeemable: ‘The rich have no sympathy or fellow feeling with the poor…they never had any and they never can have any. The history of the world proves this to be the case….’. [65]

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[61] *Chartist Circular* 18th April 1840
[62] *Chartist Circular* 20th March 1841
[63] *The Charter* 16th June 1839
[64] *True Scotsman* 10th October 1840
[65] *Chartist Circular* 14th May 1842

Unsurprisingly, a campaign intended to change the constitutional arrangements to the advantage of the disenfranchised and which would weaken the influence of those with power and privilege, combined with a stream of speeches and articles that accused this ruling elite of profligacy, selfishness, heartless cruelty and disinterest in the suffering of the poor working class, attracted a robust response from its opponents. Their response focused upon the unsuitability and lack of fitness of the working class to responsibly exercise the vote, and the havoc that would be wreaked upon society by the proposed changes to the electoral system and its accompanying campaign, all accompanied by ad hominem attacks upon the movement's leadership and delivered by politicians and a supporting press. Thus would *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* describe Chartists as those '…who would put the power of electing members of Parliament into the hands of the ignorant, the brutal, and the vile, who might send into the House of Commons, as their representative, a Jack Sheppard (notorious thief hanged at Tyburn in 1724 aged 22) or a Jack Ketch' (Executioner died 1686),[66] while Lord Palmerston (Henry Temple, Lord Palmerston 1784-1865) declared that any change to the property qualification would lead to the 'overpower of intelligence and property by ignorance and poverty',[67] an outcome that would lead to bribery, intimidation and the submergence of existing honest and conscientious voters.

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[66] *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 8th May 1842

[67] Bell, Herbert: *Palmerston and Parliamentary Representation* in *The Journal of Modern History,* Volume 4, Chicago University Press, (June 1932) 196

For the commercial press, universal suffrage was nonsensical and dangerous, an existential threat to the very fabric and natural order of society, an unpatriotic campaign that would lead to tyranny by the working class. The Chartist movement was accused of advocating disruption and being a proponent of violence and criminality. Thus could the *Aberdeen Shaver,* no advocate for the establishment or the aristocracy, comment that 'We do not hesitate to record our opinion that Chartism is a dangerous doctrine, that some of the Chartists are dangerous members of society and that their manifesto is fraught with the most destructive propositions', and dismissed the 'unreasonable dogmas as are contained in that useless bombast and nonsense, the People's Charter'[68] while *Blackwood* magazine, as reported in *The Charter*, claimed that working men were aiming for 'universal liberation from taxation and division of property', that they would 'pillage all the property of the kingdom and divide the whole possessions of the wealthy classes amongst themselves'.[69] That universal suffrage would lead to social chaos was a uniform view across the newspapers, *The Sun* described Chartism as a criminal confederacy with its aim being 'a violent overthrow of the laws, and an entire revolution of property by force of arms'[70] and *The Atlas* predicted that '…..there are few men of any weight in the country who are not quite satisfied that such a change as that now proposed by the Chartists will involve the country in utter ruin'.[71] Years later, *The Sun* continued to dismiss the Charter, describing the 1848 Petition as 'the merest mouse of a grievance' and 'the fabrication of an odious minority'.[72] In its reporting, the press proved itself a staunch ally of parliamentary opinion and faithfully reproduced the speeches of prominent members; the 1842 strike was described by the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham (1792-1861), as 'the mad insurrection of the working classes' and that, as a result, 'treason is stalking the land' [73] while MacAulay regarded universal suffrage to be 'utterly incompatible with the very existence of civilisation' as this rested upon the security of property and granting suffrage would threaten it.[74] In the light of such comments, it is small wonder that *Bell's New Messenger* could hysterically declare that granting the Charter would signal the end of civilisation in England:

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[68] *Aberdeen New Shaver*, February 1839

[69] *Blackwood Magazine* as reported in *The Charter,* 15th September 1839

[70] *The Sun*, 7th November 1839

> '…the concessions of all the demands of the Chartists would expose the country to the horrors that were pictured; that rank, honour, and distinctions would be sacrificed in the wild desire of the empowered masses for revenge, that property of all kinds would be confiscated and the empire become a wreck under the new order of things the Chartists would create'.[75]

When politicians and Press focused upon individuals rather than the principle of suffrage, it was rarely to attack the membership within which they saw little or no revolutionary tendency; rather it was regarded as an object of pity to be patronised rather than condemned. *The Sun*, in endeavouring to persuade the working class to abandon its agitation for reform, condescendingly informed its readers how much better it would have been '….had they (the working classes) followed our advice, humbly but sincerely tendered, to unite with the middle-class in demanding repeal of the Corn Laws',[76] while Lord John Russell (1792-1878), when arguing against the widening of the franchise to the working class in 1849, commented that its members were as 'easily affected by misrepresentations and delusions' and lacked 'sufficient political information to enable them to make the right choice of Members', [77] echoing sentiments from ten years earlier when, commenting upon the intellectual capacity of those struggling with poverty to make an enlightened choice at the ballot box, he declared they would be gullibly seduced by Richard Oastler and John Fielden who 'will lead them to a happy valley, where their labour will be light and their wages high'. [78]

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[71] *The Atlas*, 5th January 1839

[72] *The Sun*, 14th April 1848

[73] Mather, F.C: *The Government and the Chartists* in Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies* 386

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 8th May 1842

If politicians and Press attacked the membership as a gullible, ill-educated and misguided mob, they saw something more sinister and threatening in the movement's leadership. The *Sun* believed that Chartism had been 'disgraced by the ravings of a few political incendiaries'[79], the *Arbroath Guide and Weekly Advertiser* described the leaders as 'dangerous demagogues, making up in noise and violence what is wanting in knowledge and prudence, as being unable to control the crowd once raised to excitement'[80], while the *Ayr Advertiser* linked such demagoguery to the French Revolution, a connection guaranteed to raise the fear level of its readership, by blaming the Birmingham riots upon 'Those desperadoes, the physical force men of the Chartists…to urge the populace to carry their designs by violence is the very tyranny of Jacobinism, to which society cannot submit'. [81] In a direct accusation of malevolence by the leadership and stupidity by the membership, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* wrote a vitriolic article on the presentation of the second Petition to Parliament in which it stated:

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[76] *The Sun* as reported in *The Charter* 7th April 1839

[77] Sanders, Robert: *Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform 1848-1867*, in *English Historical Review* Volume 120 Number 489, Oxford University Press, (December 2005) 1294

[78] *Letter to the Electors of Stroud on the Principles of the Reform Act* (London 1839)

[79] *The Sun,* 11th April 1848

> '…the fierce, the malignant, the cowardly…there are many such detestable scoundrels in the ranks of the Chartists still; men who with glozing tongues, fawn upon the working classes in order to pick their pockets….(these people are) destitute of principle, of honour, of heart; they have no sympathy for distress – no feeling for poverty; they make a profit of human wretchedness, and draw the means of feasting and rioting from the ill-fed, the over-worked and the honest-hearted poor'.[82]

The response of the movement to the opprobrium emanating from Press and Parliament was to both attack and defend. We have already seen its attacks upon politicians, aristocracy and, to some extent, monarchy but there were harsh words for a commercial press that uncritically backed both the existing electoral system and the Government and was rarely willing to acknowledge any merit in an argument for suffrage. At a meeting in Bradford in 1839, a Mr Briscoe, having described special constables as 'sneaking, intriguing fellows', challenged the 'venomous *Mercury*,….that little snarling cur *The*

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[80] *Arbroath Guide and Weekly Advertiser*, 15th April 1848
[81] *Ayr Advertiser*, 4th July 1839
[82] *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* 8th May 1842

Bradford Observer, or that squeaking trumpet *The Halifax* Express' to take down his words and publish them,[83] while the *Leeds Times* reported that, at an open air meeting:

> 'no accommodation was provided either for the speakers or the reporters, and some of the latter were subjected to the most unmannerly interruptions and annoyances from a portion of the Chartists present, who elbowed and jostled them, and who evidently only wanted a very slight pretext to induce them to create a disturbance. Several stones were thrown from the crowd, which were evidently aimed at the place where the reporters for this paper and the Leeds Mercury were standing……'. [84]

The antipathy towards the non-Chartist Press continued unabated throughout the life of the movement: at a Chartist tea party held in Openshaw, Manchester in May 1842, the speaker, Mr Dixon, responding to a toast to the 'democratic press', 'exposed some of the base methods which were adopted by the Whig and Tory press to misrepresent and calumniate the Chartist body', [85] while the same newspaper reported an association meeting in Bedworth, Coventry in April 1848 where '….this meeting views with disgust, the attempt made by the editors of the News of the World and editors of the other metropolitan newspapers, to cast odium upon Mr Feargus O'Connor MP and the Chartist body generally, relative to the signatures attached to the National Petition'.[86]

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[83] *The Bradford Observer* 9th May 1839

[84] *Leeds Times* 29th June 1839

[85] *Northern Star* 28th May 1842

[86] *Northern Star* 29th April 1848

Demeaning comments upon the membership's unfitness to receive the vote were answered by the membership, defending themselves and identifying as valuable members of society. Thus, would one member state at a Finsbury Association meeting that:

> 'The working class was the most industrious class on the face of the earth, yet there was not a class of people half so ill paid, half so ill fed, or half so ill grown (*hear, hear*). This did not arise from immorality, drunkenness or ignorance, but from political degradation…', [87]

While, in language both inflammatory and highly descriptive, a meeting in Liverpool demanded the Queen dismiss her ministers, albeit through constitutional means:

> 'Let the people give a helping hand to raise a superstructure of freedom, and to elevate the working classes to that position which God and nature intended them to occupy. Let them, like the receding tide, gather fresh strength at every flux and reflex, and wash away every foul and filthy corruption from the face of the earth', [88]

Attacks on the membership by the commercial press would have had little or no direct effect since working class Chartists did not, in all likelihood, read these papers, and, in truth, the articles were not aimed at them but at those outside the movement who may have been tempted by the principle of universal suffrage to support the campaign, perhaps the unenfranchised artisan and middle-class professionals. The Chartist press was aware of the impact that negative reporting could have upon the potential support from these groups, particularly when aimed at the movement's leadership – for those outside the movement, the most visible and potent representatives of Chartism. Consequently, while the membership proposed laudatory toasts at local meetings, named their children after their favourite leaders and turned out in their hundreds to greet them on their release from prison, the movement's papers worked diligently to refute such attacks by promoting their image and their words. The *Northern Star*, for example, printed portraits which they included in their paper and which members pinned to their walls, while members had to be turned away from their meetings due to excess numbers. Gammage wrote of O'Connor: '…the sight of his person was calculated to inspire the masses with solemn awe',[89] and Press reports of association meetings testify to the affection and respect accorded both to him and to other Chartist leaders. The *Northern Star* was the Chartist paper that consistently carried association reports and, being under O'Connor's patronage, was never less than supportive, portraying an image of him that reinforced Gammage's description. It assiduously reported local meetings verbatim, particularly where there was strong backing for the leadership, as well as opposition to those not supportive of Chartism. All the following were published on one day in the *Northern Star* under the title *State of the Country* and they are typical of association reports to be found in other Chartist papers such as the *Chartist Circular*, *True Scotsman* and *The Charter*: '…the renegade Daniel O'Connell…we record our determination to have nothing to do with him'; '…we will not join in the ranks of any such miscreants as that political apostate Daniel O’Connell, the Rev Mr Brewster, Mr A Duncan or any of the O’Connell Sham radical portion of the Birmingham Council’ (Wigton and Nottingham associations); ‘base Whigs, arch traitor Daniel O’Connell, noble minded patriots and friends of the people Stephens and O’Connor…we fearlessly and unflinchingly give them our support’; ‘…Stephens, Oastler (Richard Oastler 1789-1861) and O’Connor are worthy of possessing our fullest confidence…a vote of the bitterest censure be passed on the great Dan Beggarman, the public miscreant O’Connell’; ‘…we regard the mean truckling policy of Mr O’Connell with the utmost disdain…by his denunciation of the English Radicals and his attacks on the trades unions, he has clearly demonstrated that he is the most deadly enemy of the working classes of any public man in existence…we support those brave champions of Universal Suffrage, Messrs O’Connor and Stephens, with our money, our voices and with our right arms…’; ‘we view with indignation the tyrannical conduct of the Whigs, and the no less censurable conduct of Daniel O’Connell and the Sham Radicals…we eulogise the patriots of the present day such as O’Connor, Stephens, O’Brien and others’ (Wellingborough, Ramsbottom, Liverpool and Halifax associations); ‘…this association regards the proceedings of the Whig government relative to the arrest of Mr Stephens, as a declaration on their part of hostility to the rights and liberties of the working classes’…; ‘we look upon the persecution of the Rev J.R. Stephens by the Whigs as an overt act of treason against the working people of this realm….we regard the persecutors of Stephens as the enemies of God and man…'[90] (Merthyr Tydfil and Barnsley).

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[87] *The Sun*, 2nd January 1839

[88] *Northern Star*, 29th April 1848

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[89] Gammage R G: *History of the Chartist Movement* 45

We know there were internal, occasionally disrespectful, disagreements between the leaders and it is clear that the membership had favourites and took sides – although O'Connor was the dominant, most visible and most loved leader, particularly when he aligned himself with the 'fustian jackets and unshorn chins' of the working members, there was also great support for O'Brien, Harney, Lovett and Jones among others. Yet, when the leadership was under attack from the non-Chartist press, there was a closing of ranks and unconditional rejection of any criticism; internal disagreement was trumped by support for the movement and for those who espoused its cause, as we saw earlier in the *Northern Star's* reporting of the membership meeting in Bedworth. An association meeting in New Mills went further, expressing its thanks to 'those able and unflinching patriots O'Connor and Stephens, and that we are prepared to support them to the death, if necessary' [91]. The description of O'Connor and Stephens as 'patriots' was not accidental; as we have already seen in the movement's loyalty to the Crown and faith in constitutional change, there was a devotion to the nation and a strong belief in its institutions. Calling O'Connor and Stephens 'patriots' was a rebuff to those in the commercial press who regarded all Chartist leaders as disloyal for not accepting the existing electoral arrangements. Chartist language could be vitriolic, patronising, sentimental and rousing but it was rarely misplaced; speeches and press articles were considered, descriptions thought through and words used appropriately.

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[90] *Northern Star* 19th January 1839
[91] *Northern Star* 19th January 1839

The unending attacks upon the movement, its leaders and its membership influenced the middle classes; though many sympathetic to reform of the electoral system and inclined to lend their support to a movement striving to achieve this, the vilification of the movement's leaders in the commercial press and the description of their motives as base and revolutionary meant that their sympathy did not extend to actively campaigning for reform. For the middle classes, change had to come peacefully and without any substantial alteration to the social system, including any impact upon their chances to raise their own social status.

While the opposition of the commercial press had an adverse impact upon middle class opinion, such criticism only served to strengthen the resolve of the membership and reinforce a communal spirit. The Chartist press was central in helping generate this "us against them" mentality and pulling the membership together, but its approach was less helpful in encouraging that middle class involvement and support identified previously. As Anderson would recognise, by identifying and highlighting the vocal opposition outside the movement, the press was able to create one of those important, invisible threads that form part of the community's feeling of solidarity; it is not just what you are for, it's also what you are against.

So often in the history of Chartism, a strength was also a weakness. While its press successfully vilified external opposition, it also sowed disagreement among the movement's own leadership, which, in turn, influenced membership opinion. The stance taken by individual papers was strongly influenced by patronage and ownership, as individual newspapers were often associated with specific leaders – Harney with the *Red Republican*, Jones with *The Friend of the People*, McDouall with *The Chartist* and *Republican Journal*, O'Brien with *The Northern Liberator* and O'Connor with the *Northern Star* – which not only reflected that individual's views but also challenged those of other publications and leaders, often using highly critical language and personal attack. Those not affiliated to a specific leader were able to adopt a neutral position, directing criticism against any with whom they disagreed. Thus, *The Charter* commented upon the '…empty ravings of Feargus O'Connor and Methodist Stephens' and claimed that Chartist members …confidence have they none in any set of men or any man', [92] and *The True Scotsman*, in language redolent of the commercial press, railed against Harney as an agitator bent on revolution who should be avoided by the members: 'He may be an honest man, but he is a fool; he is utterly ignorant of society and the condition of the working man'. [93] So, while the membership defended its leaders against external criticism, those same leaders were not above using their own newspapers to launch attacks on each other in furtherance of their own particular arguments; at times it seemed that only an overwhelming hatred of Daniel O'Connell and a fundamental belief in universal suffrage united them.

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[92] *The Charter*, 18th June 1839

[93] *The True Scotsman* 18th June 1839

This chapter has examined how the Chartists saw themselves, what they believed they stood for, what they wanted, and whom they saw as their opponents. In doing so, it enabled us to understand what brought the membership together and which issues created division, some of which had been identified in the previous chapter. Importantly, as well as understanding what united or divided the movement, we have also seen how such states were arrived at, primarily through the influence of the Chartist press, but also through the availability of peripatetic speakers addressing both mass meetings and small gatherings, and all built upon a network of active associations reflecting the regional economy and run by local working men. From all this, it is clear that language was a unifying factor, whether in the vocabulary used or the subjects discussed and debated, with consistent and derogatory language used to describe those opposed to reform. Those speaking to meetings or writing in Chartist papers understood their audiences, which were mostly composed of ill-educated men or women, although some were literate and many were intelligent; audiences were made up of hard working, impoverished, insecure working people who did not appreciate highly articulate, complex ideas or language. They needed to hear passion and commitment, expressed in language that was down to earth and easily understood, which they got that from orators such as O'Brien, Stephens and Harney, and from papers such as the *Northern Star* and the *Chartist Circular*. Benedict Anderson identified the need for language and technology to align as a key factor in the development of an imagined community; undoubtedly, this happened in the Chartist movement. To take just one of these papers as an example: at the height of its popularity in 1839-1840, the *Northern Star* was purchasing forty thousand stamps per week but was purported to be read by seven times that number of people. That reach and its use of consistent language and messaging was critical in building a united movement, however disparate; anger at the perceived unfairness of the system, the continual reports of poverty and degradation of the working class, the disinterestedness of the aristocracy, and the active opposition of political parties to reform, forged a powerful narrative for the working class that developed a unity that crossed regional boundaries. Does this provide evidence that Chartism was an imagined community? Anderson is clear that 'imagined' does not mean 'imaginary'; it is a community of the imagination and it exists if its members believe it to do so, based upon their experiences and perceptions. These, in turn, create kinship and sense of belonging and it is difficult to deny that that a consistent language, purpose and enemy did not forge that togetherness and unity that would define a community.

The following chapter will examine the movement's relationship with the middle class; it is the one that had the most profound impact. If we consider Chartism's attitude to the aristocracy to be unalloyed contempt, then its approach to the middle class was more ambivalent, veering between outright hatred and passionate courtship. The movement recognised that universal suffrage would be unachievable without middle class support but it resented reliance upon what it regarded as a treacherous and unreliable 'ally'. The chapter will look at how the relationship influenced the tactics of the movement, how the courting of the middle class created division and, in the light of this thesis, whether it provided a key element of unity for the membership. It will also revisit the historiographical arguments over the importance of class and class divisions; although Chartism is often regarded by historians as the first working class movement, the significance of class goes beyond the movement itself. Historians of Chartism have tended to focus the issue of class consciousness upon those we would traditionally describe as working class but we should also consider whether those outside this description – professionals, business owners, landed interests, the nobility – also considered themselves as part of a class, to the extent that it influenced their behaviour and attitude towards Chartism. Did they have a sense of middle-class consciousness or belonging in the same way and, if we hold to the Marxist view that such consciousness is indicative of being part of a wider struggle, did they regard themselves as allied in opposition to a working-class movement that was seeking, in their eyes, to diminish their influence and authority? It is clear in Anderson's writing that the inclusive sense of community is enhanced by exclusion, those who do not share a collective sense of belonging and who sit outside the community, possibly in opposition to it. So, when we examine Chartism's relationship with the middle class, we will reflect upon whether the latter saw itself as an entity, whether it was a sociological 'other' in the way that Anderson would recognise. We know that language was a powerful tool for Chartism, that it not only referred to a 'working class' struggle for the franchise but also reserved its most derogatory and inflammatory language for the 'middle class', using this collective term to describe those whom it felt had denied the working class the vote in the 1832 Reform Act. What is less obvious is how the 'middle class' saw itself; was this a term that those professions traditionally included in such a description would normally use about themselves, or was it one that came more easily to Chartists as a stick with which to beat them? For all the loathing that Chartism held for the aristocracy, it was the middle class that became the movement's bete noire; Chartism expected no support from the nobility or landed classes and its language reflected this – disdain, mockery and outrage at its perceived excesses and lack of any meaningful contribution to society – but it was the middle class' betrayal after the 1832 Reform Bill, having previously been seen as allies struggling for the same ambition, that attracted the greatest opprobrium.

Chapter Five: Tolerance and Loathing - Chartism's relationship with the middle-class

This chapter focuses specifically upon Chartism's relationship with the middle class. It was characterised by anger, rejection, mistrust, violence in action and language, expectation, false hope and ultimately disappointment, and it was the relationship, above others, that has allowed historians to highlight class as a key element of the Chartist story, particularly by emphasising the language that each party used to describe its own actions and those of the other. We discussed in depth the historiographical arguments of class and class consciousness in the opening chapter of this thesis but it is worth briefly returning to these to provide further context.

Working men and women with shared values and ambitions and speaking a common language punctuated with vocabulary and imagery that spoke to, and reflected, their class, were more likely to see themselves as part of a wider community. As important were those with whom they could not identify, whom they saw as their enemies, those not part of their class in society.

Most historians see Chartism as a class movement by composition but disagree over how this class element influenced its purpose and ambitions. Historians who have been left-leaning in their political views – Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, Preston Slosson, Julius West, Dorothy Thompson, Mark Hovell et al – saw Chartism as a working-class movement with a shared consciousness that drove its ambitions for social improvement and greater social fairness, to be delivered through political reform. Others disagreed, notably Gareth Stedman Jones who saw Chartism as a political movement, in particular one of political exclusion, 'in which the main focus…was the monopoly of power enjoyed by the aristocracy, or 'Old Corruption', as it was known', [1] although he accepted it was a working-class movement in which 'the discontents that the movement addressed were overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, those of wage earners…'. [2] For Stedman Jones it was a class movement but without a defined class consciousness forged through working men's shared industrial backgrounds; rather it was the result of the successful way 'its leaders adapted an older language of radicalism to the industrial discontents of the 1830s and 1840s'. [3]

We have also seen the argument that skilled workers or artisans constituted a labour/working class aristocracy has divided historians, with Engels, Hobsbawm and John Foster supporting this view but Stedman Jones, Patrick Joyce and Margot Finn challenging it. This proposition also plays into the same argument of class consciousness; was it feasible for this section of the working class to feel a sense of community with their fellow members when it aspired to join the very class that was seen by the movement as resisting its ambitions for electoral reform?

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[1] Taylor, Miles: *Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism,* in *The Historical Journal* Volume 39, June 1996, (Cambridge University Press.) 486

[2] Stedman Jones, Gareth: *Languages of Class* 95

[3] Taylor, Miles: *Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism* 481

Class and class consciousness have dominated the debate among historians when assessing the impact and demise of Chartism, but while, the focus of Chartist historians has been upon the homogeneity or otherwise of the working class, there has been little discussion on the middle class as an entity, except in relation to how it interacted with the working class. Indeed, it is difficult to find a definition of the middle class in the historiography of Chartism, most likely because its members did not regard themselves as a class in the way that working men and women did. For the middle classes, what mattered were values - hard work, self-improvement, education, philanthropy and patriotism among others -social aspiration and materialism, while membership of a particular group, community or section of society, unless it could confer respectability or advantage, had limited value. Such attributes stayed the course within political debate; when Margaret Thatcher campaigned in the 1983 General Election, she drew upon her own childhood values learned from her grandmother, herself a Victorian:

> ‘We were taught to work jolly hard. We were taught to prove yourself; we were taught self-reliance; we were taught to live within our income…you were taught self-respect. You were taught always to give a hand to your neighbour. You were taught tremendous pride in your country. All these things are Victorian values’ - a definition she later changed to ‘virtues’. [4]

Such virtues would have been fully recognised by the middle classes 150 years earlier.

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[4] James, Lawrence: *The Middle Class: A History* (London 2006.) 231

Engels did define the middle classes; for him, they were the bosses, those factory owners, manufacturers and industrialists who had made their fortunes on the back of their underpaid and starving workers:

> 'The bourgeoisie has more in common with every other nation of the earth than with the workers in whose midst it lives. The workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie'. [5]

To reinforce his view of the indifference of middle-class employers to their workers, he related an exchange during a visit to Manchester:

> 'I once went into Manchester with such a bourgeoisie, and spoke to him of the bad, unwholesome method of building, the frightful condition of the working-people's quarters and asserted that I had never seen so ill-built a city. The man listened quietly to the end, and said at the corner where we parted, 'And yet there is a great deal of money made here; good morning, sir'. It is utterly indifferent to the English bourgeoisie whether his working-men starve or not, if only he makes money'. [6]

When he wrote this in 1845, the middle class had been slowly increasing its influence from the turn of the century, not by representation in Parliament but through business and commercial acumen, although the wealth of these industrialists and businessmen employing thousands in urban factories was still small in comparison to those owning landed estates,[7] and only in the final quarter of the nineteenth century was there a marked change in the balance between new money and old. Nevertheless, while the aristocracy and landed interests still held firm control over the levers of constitutional power, after 1858 we see a significant increase in wealthy middle-class entrepreneurs (in the years between 1858 and 1879, the number of millionaires in Manufacturing, Food, Drink, Tobacco and Commerce had risen from eight to thirty)[8] and with this growth in affluence came increasing influence, including the purchase of land and estates. This was the middle class, and those aspiring to join it, to which Engels referred; it may not have used the vocabulary of unity of a working-class Chartist movement but it shared language, political views, values and ambitions that helped one member identify with another. Indeed, E. P. Thompson identified a middle class consciousness which he believed was formed between the French Revolution and the Reform Bill of 1832, one that was 'more conservative, more wary of the large idealist causes, more narrowly self-interested that in any other industrialised nation'.[9] The particular significance of this loose sense of homogeneity is that it allowed the Chartist movement to identify the middle class as a sociological other, an external enemy and, as a result, an important element in our examination of Chartism as an imagined community.

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[5] Engels, Friedrich: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* 150

[6] *Ibid*. 275

[7] *Millionaires 1809-1858*: Manufacturing, Food Drink and Tobacco (5); Commercial (3); Professional, Public Administration and Defence (1); Land (181). Millionaires 1880-1899: Manufacturing, Food Drink and Tobacco (36); Commercial (23); Professional, Public Administration and Defence (0); Land (38). Figures based upon probate records at Somerset House and the Public Record Office between 1809 and 1939, and quoted in

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Rubinstein, William: *Wealth, Elites and the Class Structure of Modern Britain*, in *Past and Present*, August 1977, (Oxford University Press) 100 - 102

[8] *Ibid*. 102

[9] Thompson E.P: *The Making of the English Working Class* 820

By the time Engels published *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, the Chartist movement had petitioned parliament twice, had been associated with rioting in Birmingham and Newport, and had seen its leaders imprisoned; it had also grown into a national movement with hundreds of local associations and thousands of members, and established a number of newspapers, one of which, at its height in 1839, had the highest circulation of any provincial paper in the country. Yet, despite these undertakings, it had not achieved one point of the Charter and it failed to do so for the remainder of its existence. Internal dissension, disagreement over tactics, factions within the movement that deflected from the primary aims, and leadership tensions and external pressure applied by the establishment – factors we have covered in previous chapters – all contributed to this situation. Equally damaging was the absence of active and continual support from other parts of society, most notably the middle classes, for without the willingness of those with both vote and power to share their exclusive privileges, and to accept a change to the electoral system that would, in the long term, drastically impact their own status in society and ability to rule in their own interests, there was little prospect of success for Chartism. This was also the movement's dilemma, that change could only be achieved with the agreement of those who, seemingly, had much to lose by this concession and little to gain.

This chapter will explore the tensions that existed between the two classes and the efforts made by both parties to accommodate the other, but particularly those efforts made by the movement either internally or through engagement with external organisations. In doing so, it will look at the language, spoken and written, that each class used to describe the other, providing a strong indication of both difference and agreement, and, within the Chartist movement, it will examine attitudes at national leadership and local membership levels. An examination of Chartism's relationship with three specific campaigning organisations, the Birmingham Political Union, the Anti Corn Law League and the Complete Suffrage Movement, will aim to illustrate these issues and challenges. Finally, an understanding of this critical relationship will throw further light upon the examination of Chartism as an imagined community, whether the perception of a common enemy or potential ally did indeed forge a feeling of solidarity within the membership, and whether language and actions influenced such ambition. An imagined community, particularly one so diverse by geography and internal interest, will always struggle to maintain the core discipline and focus needed to be an effective campaigning movement, and we have seen already that the diversity of groups within Chartism deflected that focus, pulling the membership in different directions and creating both tension and divergence.

It is also important to state that, whilst we have quoted the language of historians when discussing class, we are using contemporary language when examining the relationship within this chapter. So, when we refer to the *middle class*, this term is used as it would have been by the protagonists; there has been no attempt to redefine any of the classes.

The tension between the two classes would seem to require little analysis or explanation; the working classes supported middle class aspirations in the campaign for the 1832 Reform Bill, the middle class then not only abandoned them when it achieved some level of electoral influence but argued against any further extension of the franchise to its previous allies, focusing instead upon Corn Law Repeal. The sense of betrayal felt by the working class became a driver for the creation of the Chartist movement, whose consideration of the use of physical force further alienated middle class thinking and entrenched its opposition to the demands of the Charter. Seen through this lens, the gulf between the classes seems unbridgeable; anger and rage from working class Chartism and fearful opposition from the middle class. In reality, however, the relationship was much more nuanced and complex; many middle class radicals continued their campaign for franchise reform begun in the previous century despite their wariness of Chartist tactics, the separation between suffrage and corn law repeal was a bigger issue for Chartism (it regarded the latter as a lesser ambition than electoral reform and, consequently, a serious distraction) and, throughout the life of the movement, middle class reforming organisations endeavoured to find common ground. To all appearances, it was a relationship with nowhere to go yet both parties, and particularly the middle class, were reluctant to divorce, but specific initiatives failed, usually because of fundamental disagreements over the level to which reform should be pursued, and the general relationship never appeared to be one of equals. For, while Chartism clearly had much to gain, it’s difficult to see why the middle class would agitate for reforms that, on the face of it, would not work to its benefit but set it against the established order of society that exercised power and authority. This was the challenge for Chartism; how to make the cause of electoral reform attractive to a wider middle class that was mainly apathetic and often antagonistic to this ambition, but knowing that, without such support, reform would, in all likelihood, not happen.

An apparently insurmountable challenge but one that Chartists felt worth pursuing. While outright opposition to an alliance with the middle class was frequently expressed in vitriolic and censorious language, there were many articles, speeches and meetings that recognised its importance and sought a solution. Neither was it an issue limited to the national leadership but one that involved the whole community, and it was frequently discussed at local association meetings, becoming the subject of countless articles in those Chartist papers so influential in forming membership opinion. Many issues were passionately debated within the movement, but the relationship with the middle class dominated all others; the disagreements over physical or moral force, religious service and the advent of Chartist churches, or the initiatives on self-development, formal education and personal responsibility were all individually important to members but of greatest significance was how they influenced middle class opinion. The movement's leaders recognised this; their debates, speeches and articles, particularly on contentious issues, recognised they understood how their words and actions affected opinion. Their language was not always conciliatory or appeasing, quite the opposite; at times, the criticism and vitriol directed at the middle class could lead a listener to believe that the movement was seeking division rather than support, but the interpretation of such language could be misleading as it often played to a particular audience. Thus, when Peter McDouall, during an 1840 speech in Manchester at a dinner to celebrate his release from prison, made this statement it was, ironically, in the context of promoting closer ties between the two classes.

> 'I, for my part, entertain the most supreme contempt for the opinions and character of the middle classes; I entertain the greatest pity for their ignorance and I entertain sorrow for their desertion of those men who only can maintain their position', [10]

Previously, we briefly considered a definition of the middle class, highlighting the comments of Engels and referencing the growth in numbers of wealthy industrialists and employers. Before we look more deeply at the critical relationship between this class and Chartism, it is helpful to better understand who constituted the ‘middle class’ during this period. There has been debate and disagreement over a definition, the date of its ‘birth’, even its role in the 1832 Reform Act, to date the most significant piece of legislation that had affected this class of society (rather than the accepted view that the middle class, together with the working class, was the primary driver that enabled this Act, there is an alternative view that the Act itself formally established the rising middle class[11]). There is general agreement, however, that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the growth of the middle class mirrored the development of towns and cities, itself a result of the growth of commerce and manufacturing: ‘How different is the England of the present age from the England of feudal times, when our towns were in their infancy, and when the Commons or middle class were too unimportant to hold a share in representation’. [12] As Simon Gunn also notes, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the concept of the middle class ‘lacked a clear or consistent social referent. It could denote variously major manufacturing and mercantile interests or the bulk of small independent tradesmen, shopkeepers and clerks; it might include or exclude professionals and the military’. [13] The definition was fluid and would remain so throughout the century, so, recognising this, and to maintain the focus of this research upon the words of the protagonists, we shall, as previously stated, adopt the descriptions and definitions used at the time, and Gunn's description is as good as any in reflecting these. It is also important to note that the use of the actual terms *middle class* and *working class* in this chapter refer directly to their usage at the time; these are not terms that have been retrospectively applied by historians, they were descriptions and terms in everyday use within society and feature consistently in both Chartist and commercial publications and newspapers. The middle classes encompassed both wealth and respectability; so, large and small employers, self-employed skilled artisans, professionals such as lawyers, teachers and doctors, civil servants and Members of Parliament, as well tradesmen and shopkeepers - what the movement termed the 'shopocracy' - were all included. Including artisans could be deemed contentious, since many were active in the Chartist movement but their presence can be attributed as much to a resentment at being excluded from the 1832 franchise extension as it was from any strong identification with the Charter or universal suffrage. Neither should we regard a willingness to agitate as a differentiator between the classes; prior to the formal establishment of the Chartist movement, prominent middle-class members such as Attwood, Richard Cobden and John Bright were active campaigners for electoral reform, whilst the reforming activities of Robert Owen (1771-1858), Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), Jeremy Bentham and Edwin Chadwick, among others, in the first half of the century, paved the way for the philanthropic era of later Victorian Britain. Nevertheless, in Clive Behagg's description of the situation in Birmingham, it was not a particularly agreeable position:

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[10] *Manchester Times* 22nd August 1840

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[11] Wahrman, Dror: *Imagining the Middle Class: The political representation of class in Britain, c 1780-1840* (Cambridge 1995)

[12] Lowe, Joseph: *The Present State of England in Regard to Agriculture, Trade and Finance*, 1822 quoted in Gunn, Simon: *Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England c.1790-1950* in *Urban History* Vol.31, No 1 May 2004, (Cambridge University Press) 33

[13] Gunn, Simon: *Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England c.1790-1950* 34

> 'The town's middle-class radicals found themselves in an uncomfortable duality of roles. On the one hand, they espoused unity of class interests within the workplace via the concept of the 'productive classes' including both masters and men. On the other hand, they fulfilled the role of employers at a time of reduced wages and structural economic change'. [14]

When members and leaders of the Chartist movement spoke of the need to ally with the middle class, their language ranged from grudging necessity to bitter concession; the reason for alliance was solely utilitarian, there was little warmth and even less respect. Quite simply, it was a recognition that 'we cannot do this on our own', as the *True Scotsman* summarised in an article entitled *Union with the Middle Classes*:

> 'We deeply regret, to see a spirit of hostility manifested by Chartists against what is called a union with these men. *We* approve of such union, because we believe Chartism cannot be obtained without it…If not by reason and argument, how are the Chartists to gain the Charter? By force of any kind they cannot. Without the aid of the middle classes they cannot. Why then encourage hostility between the classes?' [15]

This was the reality for Chartism that will become clear during this chapter; the middle class had to be wooed for the pressure it could bring to bear upon Government. Despite the financial strength of organisations such as the Anti Corn Law League, Chartism did not see the middle class as a source of money, expertise, or leadership. It was recognition that, without the support of a class that had influence with and, increasingly, more wealth than, the traditional legislators of the country, any form of suffrage extension was unrealistic. The *True Scotsman* used a similar argument when it wrote:

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[14] Behagg, Clive: *An alliance with the Middle Class; the Birmingham Political Union and early Chartism* in Epstein, James and Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartist Experience (Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860)* (London 1982) 61

[15] *The True Scotsman* 6th March 1841

> '(the working classes) are too poor, too oppressed and too little educated to be able, of themselves, to effect their own deliverance – they should strengthen their cause with every means within their power; and one is to make as many friends of the middle-class as possible. We do not weaken our position by seeking others to occupy it'. [16]

The same paper may have defiantly asserted in an earlier edition, when addressing the middle class that 'with you if we may, without you if we must' [17] but the membership recognised this sentiment as unrealistic. Thus, at an 1848 'camp meeting' and in the presence of thousands, Richard Pilling (1799-1874) declared that:

> 'if the working and middle classes united together, then the Charter would be the law of the land in three months, and that by moral means too' and he raised the possibility of this becoming a reality by referring to 'the meetings which had been held, which, in his opinion, showed that the middle classes were about to join the working classes in agitating for the Charter…'.[18]

One week later, the *Northern Star* reported a meeting in Doncaster which advocated support for Cobden's 'Little Charter' and for the adoption of 'some efficient mode of uniting the middle and working classes, for the procuring of an extension of the suffrage and other political privileges'.[19] These last two articles are significant because they show that, seven years on from the *True Scotsman* articles, whilst overtures were still being made to engage the middle class, there was now a growing recognition that universal suffrage was possibly unrealistic and that the household suffrage option contained in the 'Little Charter' had a greater chance of success. The one fundamental principle that had held the Chartist community together had been universal manhood suffrage 'peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must' but even this had now been compromised through a failure to obtain middle class support. Ten years later, at the final Chartist conference, Ernest Jones, a long term and vehement opponent of an alliance with the middle class, was forced to accept that:

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[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *The True Scotsman* 20th February 1841

[18] *Northern Star* 22nd April 1848

[19] *Northern Star* 29th April 1848

> 'Times altered, and as times altered, so results altered, also, and he now begged to read the second proposition of the programme. He considered that they should meet the middle classes half way and take what was offered, if what was offered was a reasonable proposition from the middle classes......he had opposed one-sided middle-class movements but he would not oppose middle class movements that were of benefit to the working class. If the middle classes did not first give the hand and first make the advance, let the Chartist body make the advance. It was competent upon them to do so. If they joined, they could go forward together; and if not they the Chartists would go forth alone, and no time was to be lost…'. [20]

His ambition remained universal suffrage but his advice to 'meet the middle classes half way and take what was offered' was household suffrage.

Although accepting the need for an alliance with the middle class was difficult, the leadership, barring some notable opposition, worked hard to persuade local memberships of its value and instil a willingness in the associations to support it; and while there were some dissenting voices, the members were willing to back initiatives that the leadership advocated. The real challenge was selling the benefits to the middle class and the fact that Ernest Jones, as late as 1858 was urging the movement's members to pursue this alliance indicates that Chartism failed, in any meaningful way, to achieve this.

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[20] *The People's Paper* 13th February 1858

The movement's argument to the middle class was one of mutuality, that it faced the same challenge in trying to effect change as did the working class and could not succeed on its own. Just as Chartism accepted it needed middle class support for reform, so the middle classes, argued Chartists, could only achieve Corn Law Repeal and a meaningful exercise of political power by working with Chartism. The *Chartist Circular* in an article entitled *To the 'intelligent' middle class*, outlined what these shared rewards could be:

> 'The middle class has to recognise it cannot repeal the Corn Laws on its own, they have been tried and found wanting…… the working class feels the pain of the Corn Laws more than the middle class but will not work for their repeal, only for universal suffrage so, if the middle class want to repeal the Corn Laws then they need to support the working class agitation for universal suffrage'.[21]

The article also referred to the undelivered promises made to the working class in the agitation for the 1832 Reform Act, an admonishment that had already appeared in *The Charter* eight months earlier in an article 'The middle and working classes'. Having claimed the middle class could not 'wage a successful war against that aristocratic power that has so long ruled the country, unless they have the cordial aid of the masses', the author declared the working class would not give up everything for the middle class as they had done in 1832 – the price of support for the repeal of the Corn Laws was its active support for universal suffrage.[22]

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[21] *The Chartist Circular* 30th November 1839

This reference to the aristocracy reflects a desire to drive a wedge between the middle and landed classes, arguing that the latter not only had little intention of granting further electoral concessions to the middle class, but that it was reluctant to recognise those already secured in 1832. An article that first appeared in the *Ayrshire Examiner* under the title *Land monopolists coming to close grips with men of the money-bag*, claimed the once close relationship between aristocracy and capitalists was now breaking down, with the demise of the former being to the advantage of the working class, for 'the interests of the great majority of the middle-class are decidedly the same with those of working men'. [23] Nine years later, in a letter from the National Charter Association to the Merchants, Manufacturers and Shopkeepers of Nottingham, the NCA urged the middle class to unite with the working classes because 'you are bound inseparably with us. If wages decline, so must profits fall; and if profits fall altogether, 'capital must disappear, and the means of employing us cut off altogether'. This was the result of 'an aristocratic government, that neither knows nor cares for our losses and sufferings, have made it their principle to sow jealousy and hatred between us, so that they may the more safely rule us for their own advantage'.[24] There was no reason for friction between the classes: ‘their (the middle and working classes) legitimate opponents, the monarchy and landed aristocracy, only exist while workers and traders differ’. [25]

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[22] *The Charter* 3rd March 1839

[23] *Ayrshire Advertiser in The Chartist Circular* 24th February 1839

[24] *Northern Star* 15th April 1848

For all these contentions, however, the middle class was reluctant to fully engage with Chartism, so the movement tried an alternative argument, that a lack of support would lead to adverse economic consequences for the middle class, that failure to support reform would damage middle class prosperity as its trade was derived from the custom of a thriving working class: ‘do you fondly believe that the aristocracy and moneyocracy will maintain you and your connections when the whole of the operatives have become paupers….?’ [26] The Charter continued this argument in a later edition: ‘it will also be clear to the middle-class in their businesses that consumption of the upper classes is not enough and that it requires an improvement in the situation of the working class’, that it was the latter who maintained the position of the middle class, not the aristocracy.[27]

Although the arguments had little impact upon middle class opinion, we should recognise there were middle class reformers who did challenge the existing electoral system, even when personally benefiting from it, and who openly advocated reform on the basis of justice. These reformers, usually of a strong Christian faith, were most often associated with reforming movements such as the Birmingham Political Union and the Complete Suffrage Union, both of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

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[25] *The Friend of the People* 31st May 1851

[26] *The Charter* 14th April 1839

[27] *The Charter* 25th August 1839

If the middle class did not fully recognise why it should ally with Chartism, it had less difficulty in identifying reasons why it should not, citing, in particular a loss of personal property and influence within any future political system. While the movement did not accept these assumptions, it did recognise their importance to the middle class, so did not dismiss them out of hand but addressed them directly. The image of dramatic social upheaval through insurrection was stark and terrifying; the verbal threats that change would come ‘forcibly if we must’, platform and newspaper rhetoric that both demeaned and attacked the middle class, the ongoing debates within the movement on the need to retain the option of change by physical force, the imprisonment of leaders for inflammatory speech and sedition, the riots in Newport and Birmingham, and public meetings portrayed by the Government as unmanageable gatherings by a riotous mass. The middle classes developed a picture of Chartism as the bringer of social revolution and destruction - and it was damaging to the movement. To limit the damage and allay further fears, William Villiers Sankey, himself an aristocrat and Edinburgh’s representative at the first Chartist Convention, published a letter *To the noblemen, gentlemen and middlemen of England, Scotland and Wales*, in which he assured his audience that ‘giving the vote to adult males will not deprive you of any rights or property, neither would annual parliaments’, although he reproached it for objecting to the secret ballot because, in doing so it would 'unblushingly declare to the world (they) still wish to tyrannise over the consciences of the weak, or bribe the voices of the profligate and the base'. [28] It was an impressive intervention by a member of the very class he sought to pacify, although few of the middle class would have read the letter as the *Charter* was probably not on its preferred reading list.

Nevertheless, Chartist leaders believed the middle classes could be encouraged through personal engagement. To encourage the membership to undertake this role, articles similar to Sankey's appeared in the Chartist Press, aimed at providing its readership with positive arguments for Chartism that could be used when in discussion with, for example, employers, shopkeepers or tradesmen. An article entitled *Prospects of Chartism* encouraged its readership:

> '…to show the manufacturers and the middle class that universal suffrage would not lead to the destruction of property or confusion but would lead to the end of bribery and corruption – the working class are as honest as any other class of society'. [29]

In the same edition a different article addressed the issue of language, in particular the intemperate language used occasionally by Chartists when referring to the middle class, stating that:

> '…it recognises middle class opposition to Chartism because of the violent language used by some in the movement' but asserting that this was not indicative of the movement as a whole and that 'the working class is opposed to the invasion of other's rights and wishes only peaceful agitation'. [30]

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[28] *The Charter* 19th May 1839

[29] *The Charter* 28th July 1839

[30] *Ibid.*

In an extension of the previous arguments of mutuality, the *True Scotsman* published an article that argued such destruction would be disastrous for both classes and self-defeating for the working class. The article, entitled *The remonstrance of a slave to the unfortunate slaveholders: An address to all to whom the Reform Bill gave the franchise*, declared the middle class had nothing to fear since 'the working man sustains himself and his family though his labour, this is his wealth and without capital he could not put his labour into motion; so he would never endanger capital as it would be harming his own family'. [31] Ten years later, in the previously quoted letter to the Merchants, Manufacturers and Shopkeepers of Nottingham, the NCA repeated its desire to see an alliance between the two classes, one that 'must regenerate this country and redress our common grievances in a peaceful, legal and constitutional manner……your property, your persons and your houses shall be religiously respected and protected……'.[32] Despite the fears of the middle class, there was a greater desire to win it over through peaceful persuasion rather than violent threat; when the paper declared that 'when the last extremity is forced upon us by an aristocratic government….an alternative we wish to avoid but which we fear is inevitable',[33] it was a display of frustration, not an outright threat; that it was made ten years after Chartism came into being is perhaps testimony to such frustration and indicates that little substantial progress had been made in those intervening years. These efforts and arguments show the depth of concern the middle class felt with regard to the threat of social upheaval and Chartism's recognition that such fears were a major barrier to any alliance.

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[31] *The True Scotsman* 22nd December 1838
[32] *True Scotsman* 15th April 1848
[33] *Ibid.*

The middle class' other significant concern was a loss of the status and influence it had gained from the Reform Act, that its vote would be subsumed within an extended franchise to the point where its needs and demands would be disregarded, swamped by a working class vote that would render its own irrelevant. As with the concerns over physical force and intemperate language, Chartism recognised this fear and endeavoured to allay it; in *Prospects of Chartism*, as well as addressing fears if revolution, the author sought to reassure the middle class that its voice would not be lost as 'due and proper respect would be paid (by the working class) but undue and illegitimate influence would be prevented by the ballot', [34] a point *The Charter* repeated later, noting that all three classes of society would have a vote so any working class men 'so ignorant and besotted as to make those the least fitted to discharge the functions of legislation', would only comprise a small part of the total electorate and so would be unable to exercise undue influence.[35] However, this was not really relevant since the working class did not wish to deprive one section of the community of power and give it to another, but rather to confer power on all who were rightly entitled to it. [36]

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[34] *The Charter* 28th July 1839

[35] *The Charter* 3rd November 1839

[36] *True Scotsman* 6th February 1841: an article titled *Address number one to the middle class of the UK* by John Collins and Arthur O'Neill

It should be clear that Chartism endeavoured to persuade, not threaten. It recognised that only a positive, willing middle class could be brought on board and it was for this reason that it promoted the mutual benefits of a dual approach - the commercial prosperity delivered by the working class, and the reassurances of peaceful agitation and the guarantees of preserved status and property. It is also clear that such reasoned arguments were unsuccessful, either because they failed to convince the middle class of their sincerity or because they were subsumed by a continual barrage of vitriolic, accusatory and demeaning articles and speeches from Chartist leaders that undid any of the positivity. This was the antithesis of the charm offensive.

As the reasons for alliance were multiple, so were those for division. The assumption that the perceived betrayal of 1832 was the only barrier to a strong relationship is misleading; while clearly important, the movement also had issues with the basic principle of allying with the middle class, and its indifference to working class struggles, its desire to seek close ties with the aristocracy, and its gullibility in believing that such a relationship with the landed class could, in any way, realise its ambitions for influence.

Within the movement, however, there was a strong belief that working class and middle-class ambitions had been, and always would be, incompatible, even conflicted. In an article in the *Red Republican* in 1850, George Julian Harney criticised ‘our Scottish friends’ for seeking an accommodation with the middle class, the issue not being a matter of differing opinion between the classes but a matter of principle.[37] Similar views were expressed later by Ernest Jones in his *Notes to the People*, only more forcefully:

> '......the capitalists of all kinds will be our foes as long as they exist and carry on against us a war to the very knife. Therefore, they must be put down. Therefore, we must have class against class – that is, all the oppressed on one side, and all the oppressors on the other. An amalgamation of classes is impossible where an amalgamation of interests is impossible also….'. [38]

Jones' definition of the two classes is, by his own admission, very wide and within the class incorporating working men he included 'small shopkeepers, small farmers, soldiers and policemen' while, in the capitalist class, he included 'landlords, mine-owners, factory-lords, bankers, usurers, merchants, state church parsons, placemen, great pensioners and sinecurists'. It's clear from these listings that division was not made solely on the basis of income or wealth, but also upon his assessment of status within society. Regardless of how this division was reached, for Jones 'These two portions of the community must be separated, distinctly, dividedly and openly from each other. Class against class – all other mode or proceeding is mere moonshine' [39]. By this time, Jones had largely given up on a possible working relationship with the middle class and rejected its proposals for franchise extension, a measure which, if adding ten Chartists to the register, would then add twenty middle class enemies: 'the middle-class franchise, instead of planting our soldiers in the citadel of the enemy, would recruit for the enemy in the ranks of our soldiers'.[40] This was no longer a matter of finding accommodation, it was now a fundamental issue of trust between two classes. It is telling that these sentiments from Harney and Jones were published during the later years of the movement when it was undoubtedly splitting, with some elements moving towards accommodation with organisations advocating household suffrage while others, as evidenced by Harney and Jones, were agitating for a more socialist movement and an emphasis on class differences, a departure from the earlier years of the movement when criticism of the middle class was less ideological and based upon evident manifestations of betrayal, selfishness and apathy towards the working class.

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[37] *The Red Republican* 22nd June 1850

[38] Jones, Ernest: *Notes to the People* (1851) 312

[39] Jones, Ernest: *Notes to the People* (1851) 342

The accusation of betrayal was significant; the suspicion and distrust that came from this anger influenced the judgement of even moderate Chartists and reinforced a dilemma previously highlighted, the recognition of the need for middle class support but a lack of trust and belief it would actually materialise. On such foundations a lasting relationship could never be sustained.

As early as 1838, this issue of trust had been raised as a caveat to the chances of unity between the classes; in an address entitled *Letter from the editor of the True Scotsman to the Central Board of*

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[40] *The Friend of the People* 24th May 1851

Scottish Dissenters, the author advised middle class recipients of the franchise not to forget the debt owed to the working class for the 1832 Act:

> 'They served you, they trusted you…. that you might from gratitude serve them in return. You, of the middle-class then bore a better character for sincerity than you do now; they now find, from whatever cause it arises, that, as their trustees, you are either unable or unwilling to ameliorate their grievances in detail'. [41]

Two years later, there was a further reminder: 'We remind you (the middle class) that to assist you to gain the Reform Bill, which conferred the suffrage on you, we consented to waive our wrongs. We now expect you to do the same by us'.[42] As late as 1850 resentment was still strong, while the intervening years had sharpened the language; in the article *Middle class dodgers and proletarian gullibility*, Howard Morton, writing in the *Red Republican*, itemised the treachery as the:

> 'refusal to give universal suffrage, the sneering of the Manchester School against the organisation of labour, that they refuse you a just share of the products of your labour, the prevalence of unhealthy, insanitary housing and that they legislate for their own aggrandisement'".

And he warned his readers:

> 'I tell you these men are your deadliest enemies……you, my humbugged proletarian brothers, are a set of egregious and hopeless fools, if you expect help in this matter from your friends belonging to the middle and higher classes of society'. [43]

With betrayal went indifference; having achieved the franchise, the middle class had little interest in supporting other, unenfranchised elements of society, including those aspirant trades and skilled craftsmen that would have identified as lower middle-class and who were often referred to as the ‘labour aristocracy’. Middle class indifference was reported in the Chartist press either through its behaviour towards the working class or its pursuit of a relationship with the aristocracy, at the expense of the unenfranchised. There was a strong belief the middle class cared little for working class problems, as cited in this article in the *Chartist Circular*; describing the middle classes as ‘the real tyrants of society’, it accused them of having:

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[41] *The True Scotsman* 20th October 1838
[42] *The True Scotsman* 4th April 1840
[43] *The Red Republican* 3rd August 1850

> ‘no pity, no sympathy, no remorse…. they talk of executions or slaughters of their fellow creatures when necessary, in defence of their power or profits, with the sang-froid of a carcass butcher’. [44]

When the Chartist press wrote about middle class attitudes, it veered either between mollifying speech and entreaties to secure its support, praising its values and allaying its fears, or it excoriated it, attacking its lack of principles, its behaviour and its treachery, as illustrated by this article in the *Chartist Circular* from 1839:

> ‘…they retire, after a few years toil, to their comfortable little country seats, to enjoy themselves for the rest of their lives on the produce of the toil of a hundred weavers, or a thousand factory boys and girls worn out in their service, cut off in their prime or, if perchance they survive, shown to the poor-law bastilles’.[45]

In the eyes of Chartists these behaviours were exacerbated by a desire to ally with the aristocracy, creating a unified opposition to electoral reform and reinforcing the established order. The anger and cynicism that pours out of the following Press quotations can be found in the minutes of any association meeting across the country and at any point during the movement's existence; *The Charter* describes the middle classes as 'galley slaves who tug at the oar strenuously for the advancement of their masters (the aristocracy) …', [46] while *The Chartist Circular*, in a response to a sermon by Andrew Marshall, refers to middle class 'obsequiousness to the aristocracy, those hereditary enemies of freedom' and lays the blame for working class opposition to the Whig government firmly at the door of the middle class, since it has:

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[44] *Chartist Circular* 16th January 1841

[45] *Chartist Circular* 2nd November 1839

> '…filled the House of Commons with imbeciles, sycophants and oppressors who meet but to aggrandise themselves and the aristocracy, by taxing, starving and persecuting the people'. [47]

Middle class apathy towards reform had become middle class opposition, seeking closer union with the established and privileged orders for its own elevation and pursuit of wealth, at the expense of the working classes.

Middle class desire for aristocratic approval did not escape censure in the Press but, unlike the vitriolic language used to condemn the alleged betrayal of 1832, this wooing of the aristocracy attracted ridicule and sarcasm. For Chartist newspapers, the Reform Act had only affirmed the gullibility and powerlessness of the middle class within the electoral system. The middle classes may have secured the right to vote but without middle class representation in parliament, 'they cannot carry a single measure of reform…the middle class now find that their strength, apart from the people, is vanity', [48] and the Chartist Press could not understand how the middle class failed to see this. The *Chartist Circular* declared:

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[46] *The Charter* 21st July 1839

[47] *Chartist Circular* 10th April 1841

> 'The political apathy of the middle class really startles us……. the aristocracy laughs at them and they feel no indignation, fleeces them and they tamely submit, tramples upon them and they kiss the feet of their antagonist', [49]

while *The Charter* asked, 'How is it that the middle-class cannot see what all the rest of the world see, that it is the rights of all – the property of all – the social wellbeing of all – that are menaced by the factions who hold the powers of the stake in their hands', [50] the author later accusing the middle class of 'slavish obsequiousness' to the aristocracy, unable to shake off its servitude and submission, leaving it both 'weak and mean'.[51]

The message was clear; the middle class should recognise the rights given to it in 1832 were a sham, that it delivered little influence or meaningful power, and the only way it could fully realise the complete benefits of the franchise was to unite with Chartism for a level of suffrage that would deliver meaningful change. However, the middle class must realise there would be consequences for refusal: '… the working men have been insulted, cheated and betrayed by their pretended friends, the

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[48] *The True Scotsman* 4th April 1840

[49] *Chartist Circular* 9th July 1842

[50] *The Charter* 11th August 1839

[51] *Leeds Times* quoted in *The Charter* 6th October 1839

Reformers, and still you think it strange that they are not satisfied….' and if, after realising this, the middle class:

> 'is resolved to take part with the deceivers and betrayers of your countrymen, it will be your own fault; and then you will have made common cause with traitors and will deserve their punishment'.[52]

It is not clear what Oastler regarded as appropriate punishment and there is no inference in his article that this would involve violence; perhaps, as the members of the Shaksperian (sic) Association of Leicester Chartists described, it would be wonderment and slight nervousness: '…we hold our meetings beneath the blue canopy of heaven, singing of the Charter and O'Connor in the open streets, till the middle class stare and quake at the noise'. [53]

Much of Chartism's criticism of the middle class was based upon assumption and commercial press copy, since dialogue was limited and frequently unfulfilling. It is right to consider, therefore, whether this perception of a negative middle-class attitude was both consistent and justified?

We know that middle class representation in parliament regarded Chartist petitions with a combination of mockery and disdain; the accusations of forged signatures and wildly exaggerated numbers, the contempt for those who were unable to write and so required others to sign for them, the knowledge that Petitions could be ignored since those signing were powerless, and the reality that the middle classes, with the exception of longstanding radical reformers, would be neither supporting nor agitating for the implementation of the Charter – all this allowed the Government to disregard any calls for reform and paint Chartism as an existential threat to democracy and society. Thus, could Robert Peel (1788-1850) write to the Queen in August 1842:

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[52] *The Charter*: *To the nobility, clergy, farmers and shopkeepers*, Richard Oastler, 2nd June 1839
[53] *Northern Star* 28th May 1842

> 'The accounts received this morning from Manchester with regard to the state of the country in that neighbourhood are very unsatisfactory…a Cabinet has just been held and it proposed to send a battalion of Guards by the railway this evening. The 16th August (Tuesday next) is the anniversary of a conflict which took place in Manchester in the year 1819 between the Yeoman cavalry and the populace, and it is feared that there may be a great assemblage of persons riotously disposed on that day'. [54]

Describing Peterloo as a 'conflict' between armed yeomanry and unarmed protesters shows a Government spinning past history and present protest, with Peel dismissing the argument that the disturbances were driven by poverty and citing the drop in the price of basic foodstuffs as proof. Not all in Government shared Peel's view; Melbourne (William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne 1779-1848), writing to Victoria only four days after Peel's original letter, informed her that 'there is a great mass of discontented feeling in the country arising from the actual state of society. It arises from the distress and destitution which will fall at times upon a great manufacturing population…',[55] a view supported by Sir James Graham speaking in the House of Commons during the presentation of the 1842 petition, who accepted that 'the distress was great' and the complaints 'founded in fact'.[56] Nevertheless, and expectedly, Parliament overwhelmingly rejected a debate on the Petition; Lord John Russell whilst 'expressing my respect for the petitioners', felt any concession to the Petition would 'shake property' and 'unhinge that constitution of society which, complicated and intricate as it is, has produced so many blessings to this country'.[57]

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[54] Benson, Arthur and Esher, Viscount: *The letters of Queen Victoria 1837-1861* Volume I (London 1908) 422

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Heffer, Simon: *High Minds, the Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain* (London 2013) 123

Russell's use of 'shaking' and 'unhinging' is illustrative of middle and upper class fears of disturbance, to the extent that Chartist plans for an open air meeting on 10th April 1848 to deliver the next Petition lead to heightened levels of panic and hysteria; the Queen and her family were evacuated to the Isle of Wight two days earlier as a precaution against expected violence, whilst on the day before the demonstration Lord John Campbell, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1779-1861), wrote to his brother, declaring 'This may be the last time I write to you before the Republic is established! I have no fears of revolution but there may be bloodshed…'. [58] This panic, if irrational, played well to the Government's desire to create a climate of fear to further discredit Chartism - sending the Royal Family to a place of safety, swearing in thousands of Special Constables and having armed battalions of troops in full public view, were dramatic gestures that exaggerated the threat to public safety and helped to demonise Chartism, fears fuelled by the events unfolding in continental Europe.

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[57] *Ibid*. 124

[58] West, Julius: *A history of the Chartist Movement* (London 1920) 245

By 1848, it was clear that, with the exception of some local incidents of disorder, the country had no reason to expect a Chartist revolution. Nevertheless, those events in Europe, aided by press reporting, raised public fears that London was about to become Paris; Lord Malmesbury's (James Harris, 3rd Earl of Malmesbury 1807-1889) diary entry for the 10th April 1848, the day of the petition, is not untypical of the concerns occupying the Establishment: 'My five keepers have arrived at my house this morning, armed with double-barrelled guns, and determined to use them if necessary'. [59] To no surprise and least of all the Government's, the meeting and the presentation of the Petition to parliament passed without incident, allowing Russell to describe the Kennington Common meeting as a total failure, and to use the opportunity to belittle O'Connor in a letter he wrote to the Queen the same day:

> 'Feargus O'Connor, upon arriving upon the ground in a car, was ordered by Mr Mayne (Richard Mayne 1796-1868 and then the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police) to come and speak to him. He immediately left the car, looking pale and frightened…upon being told that the meeting would not be prevented but that no procession would be allowed to pass the bridges, he expressed the utmost thanks and begged to shake Mr Mayne by the hand'. Russell also claimed that O'Connor said 'Not a man (policeman) should be taken away (from the bridges). The Government have been quite right. I told the Convention that if they had been the Government, they would never have allowed such a meeting'.[60]

Scaremongering did not shake the belief of the membership, it only reinforced its view of 'us against them': 'the middle-class had shown great virulence to the working-class. If they were determined to carry on a war of extermination against the people, he would say let them. He thought 7 millions of people would be more than a match for 700,000'; [61] and a *True Scotsman* article condemned the middle class for its attitude of superiority towards:

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[59] *Ibid*. page 246

[60] *The letters of Queen Victoria 1837-1861 Volume II*, 168

> 'those whom you supposed birth, rank or riches placed below you. It has prevented you from examining our principles; we fear you have too often cherished groundless prejudices…'. [62]

The Chartist papers continued a relentless attack upon the Government and middle class, for it sold copy and propounded a consistent message that helped unify the members. The commercial press, although not directly linked to the Establishment in the same way as, for example the *Northern Star* was to O'Connor, adopted a comparably strong pro-Government, loyalist and anti-reform approach. The commercial Press often ignored Chartism, probably correctly believing that reporting its campaigning would provide unwelcome publicity; consequently, any reporting was never positive, and the press rarely missed an opportunity to reinforce the message that Chartism was a doctrine to be feared. Loyalty to the established social order also allowed the Government to influence and, at times, manipulate Press content, such as those reports of the 1848 Kennington Common meeting: 'a freelance reporter working for *The Times* admitted that:

> 'the Commissioners of Police on Monday evening last sent round to the papers a document marked *private*, requesting them to state that there were only 15,000 persons present at the meeting', even though Monday's evening papers, sent to press before that communication arrived, had already reported attendance at between 80,000 and 150,000'. [63]

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[61] *The Charter* 28th July 1839

[62] *True Scotsman* 6th February 1841

[63] Chase, Malcolm: *Chartism A New History* 314

If Chartist newspapers used mockery and ridicule in their reporting of the middle and landed classes, then the commercial Press adopted the same approach towards Chartism; reporting a Chartist meeting at Belper, Derbyshire, under the banner *Extraordinary Chartist Intrepidity*, the *Halifax Guardian* informed its readers that:

> '…whilst one of the orators was vehemently denouncing the Government, and pretending he didn't care for their cannonballs and their muskets, some person in the crowd threw a clod of earth at him. The valiant hero instantly disappeared and has not since been heard of'. [64]

Unremitting attacks by Chartism upon the middle class, and the latter's disdain towards the working class, preferring instead a closer tie with the aristocracy to further its own ambitions, would give the impression that, despite the occasional conciliatory article or speech, an alliance between the classes was beyond improbable. And yet, despite this catalogue of mutual animosity, there were serious attempts to create formal unions, attempts that went beyond either verbal platitudes or sparring. Unsurprisingly, the most intense efforts occurred where there were perceived mutual interests and benefits, in particular within the campaigning activities of the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) and the formation of the Complete Suffrage Movement (CSM). However, with both initiatives, ambition was tempered by rivalry and disagreement, resulting in a failure to achieve any meaningful or lasting alliance and these will be examined shortly. Prior to these, however, Chartism had flirted with the Birmingham Political Union (BPU) and it is worth examining this short-lived relationship as it provides an insight into the challenges that would confront later attempts at unity with the ACLL and the CSM. As we examine the relationships with all three organisations, we will see how a potentially positive alliance with an external organisation also became a negative factor and subsequent rallying cry to strengthen the movement's internal unity.

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[64] *Halifax Guardian* 15th April 1848

An alliance with the BPU should have been straightforward as it had a track record of campaigning and petitioning for electoral change since its founding in 1830 by Thomas Attwood. Its goal was limited reform based upon shorter parliaments, payment for MPs, removal of the property qualification and the vote for all tax paying men, less ambitious than the Charter published eight years later, but still a radical and determined attempt to reform the system. As importantly, although Attwood was a middle-class citizen, the son of a West Midlands business man and a successful banker, he never wanted the BPU to be a middle-class movement, rather a union of the middle and lower classes organised into a single political force. Building upon his original work in Birmingham, Attwood envisaged the birth of further political unions across the country, united by the common aim of reform, an ambition borne of his admiration for the Catholic Association of Ireland that had fought successfully for the repeal of anti-Catholic discriminatory laws. The challenge for the BPU was to widen its membership; although the number of local political associations across the country eventually exceeded one hundred, the strength of its membership remained in Birmingham and West Midlands, restricting Attwood's ambition to lead a unified and national organisation of the two classes. This limited reach would suggest that, whilst influential in the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, its impact should not be overstated. Following the 1832 Act, the BPU fell into decline, its attempts to exercise national leadership of a united middle and working class rejected by those of the former class who felt the Act had not delivered what it promised, with merchants and professionals deserting it due to Attwood's dire, doom laden warnings of establishment conspiracy and economic disaster. More unexpected was the resignation of shopkeepers who, for reasons of expediency by the Union, had been reclassified as middle class, indicating it had little understanding of, or empathy with, the difficulties and poverty facing the working class.

In reality, the BPU became moribund immediately following the Reform Act when the economy continued to prosper and its membership deserted it - the middle classes leaving to enjoy their prosperity and new electoral rights, and many of the working class to join trade unions in pursuit of improved wages during times of increased demand for labour, although it was Attwood's belief that such prosperity could not continue and the BPU's time would come again. By 1837, a recession was looming and Attwood's optimism was vindicated. By June of that year, a reconstituted BPU had published a further proposal for electoral reform, pre-empting the Charter and demanding five of its six principles (equal electoral districts was omitted), although it sought household suffrage, not universal, and parliaments were to be called triennially, not annually. Surprisingly for a publicly declared non-partisan organisation, but unsurprisingly in light of its middle-class leadership and roots, it contained 'no workingmen on the governing body and no provisions for consultation with the membership of the union, evidence that the aristocratic propensities of the founders remained unchanged, despite the almost exclusive working-class enrolment of the society'.[65] However, when the Union refined its demands by rejecting household suffrage in favour of universal suffrage, as well as advocating repeal of the New Poor Law, these changes should have made alliance with the recently constituted London Working Mens Association (LWMA) more straightforward. Indeed, its council went further by agreeing to drop the issue of currency reform (Attwood had insisted that repeal of the 1819 Act that returned the country to the Gold Standard be part of the initial demands), an issue seen as a distraction to the wider issue of electoral reform that now formed its primary focus. From its inception, the BPU had shunned offers of help from other reform organisations and had never sought assistance, but it now realised that progress was unlikely if it continued to act in isolation. So, when the BPU council publicly declared '*The Men of Birmingham* will either lead or follow. Our name and our achievements might well entitle us to claim the van; but we shall cheerfully take our station wherever we can render most efficient service',[66] this was a major concession in reaching out to others, most notably the LWMA. (although it should be noted that, whilst the address stated the Union's willingness to serve, what it saw as its rightful position is apparent from the wording, a sentiment not lost on potential partners).

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[65] Flick, Carlos: *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-1839* (Connecticut 1978) 119

By February 1838 a tactical agreement had been reached whereby the BPU would bring a Petition for reform to parliament and the LWMA would introduce the Charter, in the form of a parliamentary bill with the support of sympathetic MPs. By May the two documents had been sufficiently aligned for the Union Council to call a joint meeting in Glasgow and declare that it had the beginning of a concerted move for democracy in Britain. The alliance between the two organisations was now to be tested by the emergence of the Great Northern Union (GNU), formed by Feargus O'Connor, based in the West Riding of Yorkshire and incorporating many of the existing working mens associations in the north of England. Initially, O'Connor's approach was highly conciliatory, describing the BPU Petition as having the 'imprint of the manly Attwood and his manly followers, and urging the audience to then and there swear allegiance to their leaders', [67] but a fundamental disagreement was emerging between the moral force stance agreed by the BPU and LWMA, and the increasingly bellicose language of both O'Connor and J.R. Stephens, with the latter publicly declaring his possession of a cache of five thousand guns but desiring fifty times that number. This uneasy alliance was further strained by O'Connor's public promotion of the GNU to the exclusion of his erstwhile partners; he rarely mentioned the LWMA's Charter in his speeches and felt no requirement to encourage his own followers to sign the BPU's Petition. Instead he engaged in a series of speaking engagements across the country, including London and Birmingham, thus encroaching upon the geographic strongholds of his supposed allies.

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[66] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 11th December 1837

[67] Flick, Carlos: *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-1839* 143

All three organisations expected the Petition and Charter of 1839 would be rejected by Parliament but were unable to reach an agreed response to that predicted outcome; the BPU and Attwood proposed a programme of abstinence to deny the Government tax revenues, together with a General Strike in which employers would agree to pay their workers in order to further the campaign for reform – a wholly unrealistic proposal bordering on fantasy, the LWMA, still strongly wedded to moral force, proposed an increase in petitioning, despite the expected rejection of the current petition, while O'Connor, who did not publicly accept the inevitability of rejection, demanded the petition be delivered to parliament by an army of half a million men as a show of strength by the working class, an action that undoubtedly result in a confrontation with Government troops and reinforce his position as an advocate of physical force. Although such a proposed show of force may have been symbolic, Henry Vincent saw in Parliament's rejection, a potentially violent outcome; in a letter to his brother-in-law, he wrote:

> 'I tell you…plainly…. that if we fail in our present efforts to obtain a peaceful Radical change, *one of the most bloody revolutions the world ever saw will take place in England*…..That a change *must come*, and *come quickly*, all men who have *eyes* must *see*'. [68]

Thus did the issue of physical versus moral force, even at this early stage, create a fundamental difference between those seeking reform.

The BPU Council challenged O'Connor on his proposed use of force and his aggressive language; this, in turn, lead to counter accusations of moral cowardice and the BPU being staffed by 'shuffling and false' traitors. Yet, despite this hostility, the loose alliance between the three organisations somehow stumbled through to the joint Convention in February 1839, when this fragile unity finally ended. The tide was running against the BPU; its petition delivered only half a million signatures against a projected three million while the National Rent, necessary to fund the Convention and its activities, had raised only £967 against a projected £10,000. The immediate consequence was to delay the petition, while the longer-term outcome was a decline in the influence of the moral force argument within the alliance. While the focus of reform now moved decisively away from the BPU's petition and towards the Charter, it also boosted O'Connor's promotion of physical confrontation when, as expected, the Charter was rejected by parliament. O'Connor's statement that 'physical force was treason only when it failed, it was glorious freedom when it was successful' [69] and Richard Oastler's accusation that members of the BPU were 'agents employed by the Government to silence the Northern cry against the new poor law,[70] precipitated the withdrawal, and later resignation, of the BPU delegates from the Convention, an act hastened when their call for its suspension was condemned by O'Connor's supporters as cowardice. O'Connor declared that anyone who campaigned for reform but opposed the use of physical force to achieve it was an enemy.

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[68] Epstein, James: *The Lion of Freedom* (London 1982) 105

The demise of the BPU – to all effects it ceased to function after April 1839 – had implications for the struggles of the Chartist movement to sustain itself as a community open to all; although regarded as middle class, the BPU was formed by Attwood as a non-class based organisation and strove to achieve that objective, although integration of the classes within the organisation was never wholly successful. While it had working class, tradesmen and skilled workers representation within its membership, its leadership was drawn from a cross section of Birmingham's middle class, including bankers such as Attwood and Joshua Scholefield, and manufacturers such as Thomas Salt (1789-1859), Benjamin Hadley and George Muntz (1794-1857). In addition, Attwood's desire to create an association of Political Unions, with Birmingham at its hub leading a unified national approach, was never achieved, for while there was success in creating regional Unions, their membership naturally focused upon local issues and problems, and only engaged with the centre when national and local challenges aligned. This was a lesson for Chartism; the difficulty of maintaining a national focus and consistent strategy when the organisation's strength was based upon a dispersed structure, either by distance or interest. The challenge for the BPU was to keep the campaign for electoral reform at the forefront of its activities when its membership was wrestling with local issues that overshadowed the national picture; for Chartism, it was less of a geographic problem – although we should not underestimate how the battles fought by local associations with employers and other reforming organisations impacted their ability to focus their energies upon supporting a unified national campaign – and more a series of philosophical and tactical challenges at the highest levels within the movement's leadership. These weakened the focus on the primary demands contained in the Charter, leading to personal feuds, influential leaders leaving to join other reforming organisations, and a movement that contained a number of factions promoting religion, temperance, education and self-improvement, as well as fundamentally disagreeing over tactics and the threat or use of violence.

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[69] Flick, Carlos: *The Birmingham Political Union and the Movements for Reform in Britain 1830-1839* 170
[70] Epstein, James: *The Lion of Freedom* 126

By April 1839 the BPU was no longer an influential contributor to the national campaign for reform, although Attwood continued as an MP for Birmingham, ironically presenting the first Charter to the House in June. However, hopes that an accommodation could be achieved between the remaining partners, the Great Northern Union and the more moderate LWMA, whose qualified support for physical force was based solely upon the principle of self-defence and who otherwise rejected violence and militant language, were dashed by O'Connor's continued rhetoric. The resignation of George Julian Harney from the LWMA in March 1838 to form the East London Democratic Association with a focus upon the unskilled poor rather than skilled tradesmen, and with no apparent desire to gain middle class support, indicates the direction of travel that a Chartist movement under the more radical leadership of O'Connor, Harney and Stephens would pursue; one that concentrated upon the support of the disenfranchised working class and which was largely hostile to any accommodation with the middle class. The outcome was that was Place, Hetherington and Lovett, founders of the LWMA and originators of the Charter, resigned from the movement over the course of the following two years in response to O'Connor's leadership, denying it the restraining influence they may have brought to an increasingly strident leadership. They were not lost, however, to the principle of reform; Hetherington became a founder of the Peoples Charter Union, Place focused his energies into the repeal of the Corn Laws and Lovett, in keeping with his passion for education and self-improvement, founded the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, while also having a brief and inconsequential involvement with the CSM.

Chartism's relationships with the ACLL and the CSM are particularly significant in the context of middle-class rapprochement since both are rightfully seen as having closer alignment with that class of society than had the BPU. There was also a cross-over between the two organisations, particularly in the figure of Joseph Sturge who was an active member of the ACLL and the founder of the CSM, although for the purpose of examining their relationship with Chartism, we will separate their activities and deal with each individually.

While the relationship between the ACLL and the Chartist movement is often seen as one of unremitting conflict and hostility, mainly verbal but occasionally physical, in reality it was more nuanced than this with positive relationships at regional, occupational and personal levels. Nor should it be assumed the campaign for electoral reform was uniformly opposed to the repeal of the Corn Laws; in January 1819, at a meeting in St Peter's Field in Manchester, Henry Hunt (1773-1835) called on the Royal Family to appoint ministers who would abandon the Corn Laws, while during a Sheffield meeting in 1839 a trade unionist called for the abolition of the Corn laws since 'it would give the working men greater strength to resist other evils…considering these things, though there were many Chartists among them, they were of opinion that if they could overcome the corn laws first, other evils would fall…. '.[71]

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[71] *Sheffield Iris*, 12th November 1839

Free Trade and Corn Law repeal divided opinions and changed outlooks within Chartism; Bronterre O'Brien, a man who made his radical reputation writing for the *Poor Man's Guardian* in the mid-1830s and who had been at the forefront of leadership in the movement from its outset, by 1841 was declaring in his election address to the voters of Newcastle-upon-Tyne that he was now a 'Conservative Radical Reformer' who was 'opposed to all restrictions on trade, commerce and industry for mere purposes of revenue and doubly so when imposed to create monopolies for particular interests. I am more particularly hostile to our corn and provision laws, which I consider most iniquitous, unchristian and inhuman…'.[72] Unlike O'Connor and other leaders, O'Brien did not form his general views of society based upon class identity but upon his experience; the middle classes were not evil or inherently opposed to the working class but should be judged individually and by their behaviours. While this set him apart from fellow leaders such as O'Connor, Stephens, Harney and McDouall for whom any alliance with, or even concession to, the middle class would be a form of betrayal, there were like minded others within the membership who were prepared to suspend judgement upon the middle class, recognising the benefits of pursuing a relationship; while the movement was overwhelmingly working class in its composition, there was no uniform opposition to the middle class, and certainly not on the basis of its social position. Those who regarded any rapprochement as the breach of a fundament principle were loud in their opinions but few in number.

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[72] *Northern Star*, 10th July 1841

Disagreement with the ACLL focused primarily upon two aspects, one linked to the motives behind its campaign leading to an issue of trust, and the other to the actions of the League and their impact upon the wider campaign for electoral reform.

The working-class poor appeared to have little to lose and much to gain by repeal of the Corn Laws since removal of tariffs on imported grain should, it was argued, reduce the artificially high price of bread, a price designed to protect domestic landowners and farmers. Not only would prices be lowered but, as an additional benefit to the campaign for reform, repeal would also strike a blow at the upper classes by reducing one of its protected privileges. Repeal was not uniformly accepted across the Chartist movement, for while many, such as Harrison in Sheffield, argued it would lead to cheaper prices and an improved life for the working class, others disagreed. Most notable was James Leach (1806-1869), who, in a published speech to the Mechanics Institute in Birmingham that was based, he declared, upon data not rhetoric, stated that:

> '…he would, therefore, show them in the first place, that a repeal of the Corn Laws would not increase the wages of the workmen; for although the export trade of the country was rapidly increasing from the year 1793 to 1815, yet within that period the wages of manufacturing operatives had sunk from 33s 3d to 14s, and at that period the present Corn Laws were not in existence. What then of the argument that the Corn Laws were the sole cause of low wages? From the year 1815 to 1842 trade had increased to a very great extent, and still the wages of the operative were reduced to an alarming extent…'.[73]

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[73] Jones, David: *Chartism and the Chartists* 124

Leach was not the only dissenting voice, but most Chartists, both membership and leadership, accepted the argument that repeal would economically benefit the working classes.

The movement may have largely accepted this argument, but it questioned the ACLL's motives for making it. The League's actions, and the support it received from employers and industrialists, lead Chartists to suspect ulterior reasons, a suspicion encapsulated on a placard at a Chartist meeting in Manchester in March 1841: 'Why do these liberal manufacturers bawl so lustily for a repeal of the corn laws? Because, with the reduced price of corn, they will be enabled to reduce the wages of the working man'. Put simply, if the worker didn't need to spend so much, then he didn't need to be paid so much, an interpretation endorsed by Engels:

> 'the Corn Laws keep the price of bread higher than in other countries, and thus raise wages; but these high wages render difficult competition of the manufacturers against other nations in which bread, and consequently, wages are cheaper. The Corn Laws being repealed, the price of bread falls, and wages gradually approach those of other European countries', [74]

This was an argument accepted by many Chartists. The ACLL was an overwhelmingly middle-class organisation - Cobden commented that Chartism had compelled the League 'to make our agitation a middle-class agitation' [75] – and O'Connor and other leaders highlighted this fact to bring accusations of duplicity, creating discord between the two classes. When Francis Place suggested that Chartism should accept less than the six principles to gain the support of the ACLL, Lovett's reply expressed this wider feeling of distrust:

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[74] Engels, Friedrich: *The Condition of the Working Class in England* 278

[75] *Manchester Guardian* 27th August 1842

> 'And when I remember that the agitation for the alteration of the Corn Laws did not commence till after the people were actively engaged in contending for the suffrage, and when I know that a vast number of those who talk of giving the people cheap bread, spurn the idea of giving them the suffrage, I very much doubt the sincerity of their professions…'.[76]

This belief in a hidden motive gained further traction after the 1842 General Strike, a disruption that Chartism blamed upon the ACLL. Chartists believed that the employers, with a strong presence of League members and supporters, did little to discourage the stoppage at a time of difficult trading conditions of low demand and high costs, since reducing costs in the immediate term would allow them to re-engage workers at lower rates of pay when business improved. Thus it was that Thomas Storah, at his trial in Lancaster in 1843, could link the owners and the League when he described himself as 'a severe opponent of the manufacturers or, in other words, the ACLL', an accusation that stuck - as late as 1879, Thomas Cooper, in his autobiography, was claiming 'The Plug Plot' of 1842, as it is still called in Lancashire, began in reductions in wages by the ACLL manufacturers, who did not conceal their purpose of driving the people to desperation, in order to paralyse the Government'.[77]

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[76] Hovell, Mark: *The Chartist Movement* 204

[77] Cooper, Thomas: *The Life of Thomas Cooper (1872)* (Leicester 1971) 190-191

The Chartist view that the middle classes could never achieve wider reform ambitions without working class support found particular expression with regard to Corn Law repeal. As early as 1839, before hostilities had fully erupted between the Chartists and the League, the Chartist press was making this point:

> ‘It should be clear to the middle class that repeal of the Corn Laws won’t happen without a reform of representation. The middle class may attempt some petty reform to achieve Corn Law repeal but their plan is absurd and their hopes are groundless since Parliament regards the 1832 Act as final…’[78]; ‘…it would be to the benefit of the middle class to support the working class in achieving the franchise; universal suffrage would lead to the repeal of the Corn Laws which have so damaged the financial interests of the middle class and manufacturers’. [79]

The Chartist was less critical, focusing its attack upon the aristocracy while still chiding the middle class:

> ‘Never, never will the bread tax be taken off as long as the House of Commons continues to be a parlour full of country squires, and that obsolete feudalism, the House of Lords, is suffered to control the will of the nation……Are you, then, galloping on to ruin, Ye Master Manufacturers? Are you goaded down the steep by the tyrant agriculturalists? Hoist then the banner of the People’s Charter!......We are united by a bond of interest; but these lazy drones, these vermin-breeding squires they are of use to no-one – they are a dead weight upon the kingdom – an incubus upon the industry of the earth…’.[80]

At this point there was still the possibility of an alliance between Chartism and the League, a hope not just expressed by the press but also the membership, as seen by these remarks at a meeting in Pollockshaws, Glasgow in November 1839: ‘Will the middle class get relief without the people? No! I say to the working men, you are suffering, you want relief, will you get it alone? No! Ought that not to be a motive for burying in oblivion all that is past and let us meet each other as reformers'. However, by 1841, a marked lack of progress had led the *Chartist Circular,* previously so conciliatory and positive, to declare that 'if we look at the middle class, we will be disappointed as few rise above their petty interests and party prejudices; in their support for Corn Law Repeal, they were unable to see the fundamental source from where the problem arose'. [81] While O'Connor had consistently rejected the ACLL and its motives – in early 1840 he was warning his fellow Chartists not to ally with the League: 'Join them now and they will laugh at you; stand out like men and THEY MUST JOIN YOU FOR THE CHARTER' – there was now a growing and widespread hardening of attitude within the movement; at a Chartist meeting in Leeds in September 1840, the Chairman, in rejecting the middle class promotion of household suffrage, urged his working class colleagues ' to stand aloof from this and go for universal suffrage',[82] while Thomas Cooper warned that:

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[78] *The Charter* 18th August 1839
[79] *Chartist Circular* 30th November 1839
[80] *The Chartist* 23rd February 1839

> 'Operatives should parry every thrust of their opponents with that argument which even the least subtle among them find unanswerable…give us the suffrage and we will help you abolish the Starvation Law…but since you deny us the means of helping us, help yourselves'.[83]

During its early years, the movement desired a working accommodation with the middle class ACLL, with campaigners such as Thomas Perronet Thompson (1783-1869) acting as the honest broker between parliamentary reform and free trade, but the Newport riot and General Strike marked a dramatic decline in attempts to forge a positive relationship, with each side blaming the other for its failure. As Lucy Brown points out, after 1842 the ACLL newspaper *The League* rarely referenced Chartism or concerned itself with working class issues and when the ACLL launched a registration drive, its focus was upon those already enfranchised. [84] Suffrage for the working class was no longer a consideration.

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[81] *Chartist Circular* 3rd April 1841

[82] *The True Scotsman* 19th September 1840

[83] *The Midland Counties Illuminator* 29th May 1841

The movement now regarded the ACLL as a direct opponent and diversion to its own campaign, deflecting and detracting from its ambition to achieve the Charter. Consequently, verbal and physical attacks upon the League intensified, with the invective matched by physical disruption at local League meetings. Chartist involvement in ACLL meetings followed a set pattern – League representatives would debate a motion on repeal and call for a vote at the end of the meeting; those Chartists who had managed to gatecrash would demand to be heard and propose an alternative motion for a vote, one that called for universal suffrage ahead of repeal as a priority. In most instances, the meeting would then end in uproar, sometimes violently. The *Manchester Guardian* quoted one ACLL member: 'We have not had a meeting where the public were admitted which has not been upset by the Chartists',[85] a tactic encouraged by O'Connor who urged his supporters to challenge 'the humbug claptrap of the League'. Francis Place described a meeting in the Crown & Anchor Tavern, London on 1st March 1841:

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[84] Brown, Lucy: *The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League* in Briggs, Asa: *Chartist Studies* (London 1959) 367
[85] *Manchester Guardian* 3rd September 1842

> 'I have seen much ill-will, much bad feeling, much evil disposition, much malignity exhibited, much that was atrocious, but I never saw anything which would bear even distant comparison with what I saw last night. There I sat thinking of the terrible evils of the French Revolution in its earlier periods'.[86]

While O'Connor encouraged Chartist disruption, we should not assume the ACLL were passive participants in these disturbances; one League supporter reported on a repeal meeting in May 1841: 'We had as pretty a row as ever I witnessed. Our associates and the Irish and other Repealers of the Union and the Corn Laws mustered in full strength…The Chartists were driven out of the hall four times. We regularly thrashed them and passed our resolutions', while another report mentioned that 'All the furniture was smashed to atoms; forms, desks, chairs, gas pipes were used as weapons'.[87] The ACLL was prepared to physically respond to Chartist disruption, despite its leaders being at pains to stress it was promoting a legal approach to repeal, in contrast to the violence of the Chartists. It was with a deep sense of unintended irony that Edward Miall (1809-1881), a leading ACLL campaigner, said after a lecture by O'Connor in Manchester had ended in disarray and fighting, 'Deeply as we regret this outburst of physical force, we think Feargus O'Connor should be the last man to complain of it',[88] for, while the middle class League may have openly advocated the constitutional route to repeal, it was not averse to considering the use of working class ‘muscle’ as a means of furthering its aims. Thus, could Charles Pelham Villiers (1802-1898), a staunch repealer and leading member of the ACLL, refer to the working class in 1840 as ‘the brickbat argument…the only one that our nobles heed’ and Cobden, in 1841, regard the same class as ‘something in our rear to frighten the aristocracy’. While these comments were made in private correspondence, other repealers were quite prepared to publicly air their views, as in the *Bolton Free Press* in April 1840:

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[86] Longmate, Norman: *The Breadstealers, The Fight against the Corn Laws 1838-1846* (London 1984) 90

[87] *Ibid*. 86

[88] *The Nonconformist* 16th March 1842

> ‘We are convinced that nothing but fear will convince the legislature that the Corn Laws ought to be repealed…The ‘Physical Force’ of the masses under the control of and guidance of the middle class, is the power that has gained every great measure of reform that has been wrested from the aristocracy’.[89]

In truth, middle class disdain towards Chartism and its fear of violence and revolution, together with working class distrust of repealers, meant that a meaningful alliance between the ACLL and Chartism was always unlikely. And yet attempts continued, although mostly initiated by the middle class; we have previously referenced Perronet Thompson’s endeavours to bridge the gulf between the ACLL and Chartism – he regarded repeal and suffrage as ‘two weights both dragging the same way’ – but there were others. Thomas Thomasson (1808-1876), a radical manufacturer in the north west believed ‘employers and workmen had a common interest. They sailed in the same boat, and they would sink or swim together. They must either put down the Corn Laws or the Corn Laws would put them down',[90] while one of the most powerful exhortations for co-operation came from Edward Miall, who wrote a series of articles for the *Nonconformist* that were, in effect, admissions of error on the part of the middle class. Although Miall's argument reflected his position as a dissenter from the established church, he was a strong believer in manhood suffrage and a committed supporter of the ACLL. His articles did not attempt to justify middle class attitudes towards the working class but rather tackled them head on, exhorting his readership to recognise an unarguable case for electoral reform and actively support those campaigning for it. With reference to the Reform Bill, Corn Laws and the Poor Law, Miall declared that the middle class had let the working class down, that:

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[89] *Bolton Free Press* 18th April 1840 in Taylor, Peter: *Popular Politics in Early Victorian Britain, Bolton 1825- 1850* (Keele 1995) 109

> 'they asked to partake of the privilege, or rather to enjoy the right we had secured for ourselves by their instrumentality – the right of being represented in the national legislature. We refused to hear of it'.[91]

Miall addressed each of the arguments against working class suffrage – threats of physical force, the vote being a right not a privilege, the middle class knowing what was best for the unenfranchised, the alleged low morals and corruptibility of the working class, its ignorance and lack of education, and the fear of a revolution – and rebutted each of them. It was a cogent, honest and factual series of articles and while other middle-class writers and speakers expressed some level of contrition, none went as far as Miall or made any significant effort to right such wrongs.

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[90] *Bolton Free Press* 7th December 1839 in Taylor, Peter: *Popular Politics in Early Victorian Britain, Bolton 1825-1850* 114

[91] Miall, Edward: *The suffrage: or Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes*, published in the *Nonconformist,* London 1848

Unfortunately for the prospects of alliance, Miall's honest endeavours yielded little of any great note because, for all of his conciliatory words the suspicions that existed between the leaders of both organisations, and which filtered through to the membership of the Chartist movement, had a more profound impact upon the relationship than his well-meaning efforts. This distrust provided a focal point for the movement's anger and campaigning, a factor channelled by O'Connor to further unify the movement:

> 'The struggle against the ACLL and against the ideas of political economy, as O'Connor stressed, had been particularly important in solidifying the forces of working-class radicalism; Chartist unity had been forged, given definition, in opposition to the efforts of middle-class reform'.[92]

Howard Morton, reflecting on Chartism's journey, spoke for the majority of the remaining membership when he wrote in 1850: 'We have outlived the two great middle class bubbles, the Reform Bill and the League, and we have seen that there is no help to be expected from the bourgeosie', and he attacked Cobden and Bright as 'sleek financial hypocrites' and described 'our reforming middle class friends' as wolves in sheep's clothing.[93] Morton's article appeared one year after the Corn Laws were officially repealed so it is difficult to know whether there was any element of regret or bitterness in his words but the hint of triumphalism in 'outliving the two great middle class bubbles' cannot mask the fact that the ACLL had succeeded, while electoral reform was still a distant ambition.

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[92] Epstein, James: *The Lion of Freedom* 272 - 273

[93] *Red Republican* 22nd June 1850

The Complete Suffrage Movement (also referred to as the Complete Suffrage Union – CSU) was one of several organisations that campaigned for electoral reform and which challenged the position of the Chartist movement as its leading proponent. While the BPU, the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association (NPFRA) and Joseph Hume's (1777-1855) campaign for the Little Charter after 1848 were all significant, it was the CSM that most directly played on the same field as the Chartists.

Although it existed for barely two years – the same as the NPFRA – the CSM was an important influence upon Chartist leaders and members, illustrated by Thomas Cooper's dismissal of it as a 'new dodge of the League' and 'Complete Suffrage was Complete Humbug', the accusations of insignificance belied by the amount of time spent attacking it. While the potential relationship between the CSM and Chartism ultimately foundered on disagreements over policy, tactics and personalities, the fundamental issue, as with the ACLL, was Chartist mistrust of a middle-class organisation threatening to derail its campaign. Unlike the ACLL, its proposals were more relevant to the movement's ambitions, and its approach of moderation and advocacy of peaceful, constitutional change appealed to an audience within Chartism. It was also willing to publicly declare that the working class had been mistreated, both by the 1832 Reform Bill and a subsequent lack of support from the middle class; to quote Miall again in the *Nonconformist*:

> 'We can give no reason for our enjoyment of the franchise, which is not equally forcible in their mouths. Not a single legitimate ground can we assign for our possession of the right to a voice in public matters, which is not available to an equal extent for them'.[94]

Joseph Sturge (1793-1859), founder of the CSM, published a pamphlet entitled *Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes* mirroring Miall's views.

In an age of dissembling and self-serving, Sturge stands out as a genuine and honest reformer. He was a devout Christian, a campaigner against slavery and a firm believer that free trade would benefit all sections of society, not just those accumulating wealth in commerce or industry; like Miall, he believed the existing franchise to be both unfair and immoral, an opinion that resonated with other middle class reformers. The *Northern Star* reported a meeting of 'the gentlemen of the middle classes' in Leicester where a resolution was passed 'that it is not only desirable but absolutely essential to the peace of Society, and to the progress of enlightened reforms, that a union be effected between the working and middle classes of society,[95] whilst the *True Scotsman*, reporting on a meeting in Pollockshaws, stated:

> 'the middle-class here, as in other places, see it to be in their interest and duty to make common cause with the working man; as a proof, we may mention that there were several of them at this meeting and they appeared to take a lively interest in the proceedings'.[96]

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[94] Miall, Edward: *The suffrage: or Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes*

[95] *Northern Star* 22nd April 1848

[96] *True Scotsman* 26th October 1839

Despite opposition from its leadership, these ambitions found an audience within Chartism; in March 1839, *The Charter* declared that ‘If the working and middle classes remain separate and disunited, agitation will continue, trade will be damaged, public confidence will decline and convulsions will ensue. Union can prevent this……there is no reason this cannot happen…’[97] and two years later it published similar sentiments: ‘We seek the aid of the middle-class, not only for our own special benefit but also for theirs. It is important to convince the middle-class that Chartism is not a dangerous principle…’[98]. This was a recurring theme that reached its apogee with the CSM.

With such positive intentions, therefore, we may wonder why an alliance between the CSM and Chartism failed to materialise; to fully appreciate why it didn’t, we need to look beyond aspiration and into the detail. The most tangible starting point was the resolution proposed at the reconvened CSM Conference in December 1842 and the response to it given by William Lovett on behalf of the Chartist members present. The Resolution declared that:

> ‘This conference …. having for its paramount object the consideration of the necessary details of a bill embodying the principles…extension of the suffrage to all male adults…vote by ballot, equal electoral districts, abolition of a property qualification for MPs, payment of members…and annual Parliaments, so now declare its adoption of these principles; pledges itself to employ such means…as are of a strictly just, peaceful, legal and constitutional character’.

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[97] *The Charter* 24th March 1839
[98] *The Charter 6th March 1841*

All six points of the People's Charter are captured in this pledge, along with a commitment to pursue their enactment through legal and peaceful means but, for those Chartists present, this declaration encapsulated the issue they had with the CSM; its acceptance of electoral reform but no recognition of the Charter. It was as if the Charter did not exist. Lovett proposed an amendment:

> 'That the document entitled the People's Charter…having been before the public for the last five years has, in the opinion of this meeting, a prior claim over all other documents professing to embrace the principles of just representation'.

This amendment was passed by a majority of ninety-nine votes. It is difficult to comprehend why the CSM would consider adopting a seemingly impermissible stance unless we accept Dorothy Thompson's view that the CSM had little interest in an alliance with the Chartist movement but rather saw the Conference as an opportunity of enticing the more moderate Chartist leaders into the CSM[99]. There is merit in the argument that the CSM was supportive of electoral reform but not of Chartism - at the same Conference, the Reverend Thomas Spencer, a committed CSM member, declared that 'If I had wished to become a Chartist, I could have done so at Bath…we are called together not to concede anything to one class…we have gone so far with our Chartist friends that we ought not to be asked to go further'.[100] If Sturge's motive was to attract Chartist leaders away from their own movement, there is evidence he had some level of success; Hovell lists O'Brien, Lovett, Vincent, Collins, Patrick Brewster,

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[99] Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartists* 263

[100] *Report of the Proceedings of the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes* (London 1842)

William Roberts (1806-1871), Arthur O'Neill (1819-1896), Lowery, Zephaniah Williams (1784-1877) and Robert Philp (1819-1892) as all, in varying degrees, expressed their support for the CSM. Specific comments also give an insight into the source of the issues; Roberts, while displaying some scepticism of middle class overtures, declared 'he would not be led by Feargus O'Connor nor the *Star*; he was not to be tyrannised over by a dictator', whilst Williams, under threat of censure by O'Connor should he sign the CSM Declaration, admitted he had already done so, and Lowery stated 'he had acted honestly and he would rather cut off his hand than retract his signature'.[101] Earlier, Collins and O'Neill, writing in the *True Scotsman*, told the working class they should 'receive all men who admit the principles of your Charter, without distinction of sect or class; nay more, we say invite all'.[102] It is clear that, for the short period of its existence, the involvement of the CSM in the campaign for electoral reform created division within the Chartist movement.

In their comments, Roberts, Williams and Lowery provide us with one of the major internal barriers to collaboration, the presence of Feargus O'Connor as the de facto leader of Chartism. A speech by Lawrence Heyworth, a leading CSM member, confirms this was also the CSM view: 'We will espouse your principles but we will not have your leaders…I say again, we will not have you, you tyrants'.[103] (Surprisingly, O'Connor did not respond to ad hominem attacks but rather expressed his admiration for Sturge; although being suspicious of CSM motives, he described Sturge as ‘a most excellent person – a man – as the world goes – a century before his order in all the distinguishing qualities which mark progression’,[104] although there was a sting in the tail: ‘In fact I declare at the outset that I esteem Mr Sturge more than the whole party with which he is mixed up’.[105])

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[101] Epstein, James: *The Lion of Freedom* 289

[102] *True Scotsman* 20th February 1841

[103] Hollis, Patricia: *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815 -1850* 277

This gets to the heart of the problem for Chartism – the belief that the CSM wanted working class support for reform but only under its own, middle class leadership, and under no circumstances would it countenance leadership by O’Connor, a situation redolent of the relationship with the BPU. This was confirmed by erstwhile Chartist supporter, Perronet Thompson who, on reflecting upon both the violence at Newport and Chartism’s hostility to other reform movements, wrote that the best route to reform should not visibly involve the working class any more than was necessary: ‘the result will be a necessity for accomplishing the utmost that can be done for the working classes with the least possible exhibition of themselves as agents on the scene’. [106]

In the end, the demands of the CSM at the reconvened Conference, in which they insisted the term ‘complete suffrage’ replace universal suffrage and the title *The People’s Charter* be dropped, vindicated O’Connor’s opinions and, despite the views of other leaders in the movement, validated the wider membership’s distrust of yet another middle-class organisation. This statement from the

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[104] *English Chartist Circular* Volume 2, 1842 in Thompson, Dorothy: *The Chartists* 264

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] *Sheffield Iris* 17th July 1845

Chartist Association in Middleton gave a clear indication of this strength of feeling as well as a gentle warning to O'Connor:

> 'The Chartists have long been taunted with being the slaves of Mr O'Connor; but if Mr O'Connor should deviate one iota from the principles contained in the People's Charter we should be as ready to denounce him as any other man'. [107]

In the same edition of the *Northern Star*, Peter McDouall attacked a potential alliance, seeing in it a relationship that would threaten the working- class unity that bound the movement together: 'the middle-class man was fighting against his neighbours for profits but the working classes were interested in being united….'

The differences over suffrage, the abandonment of the Charter as a title, the barely disguised antipathy from a middle class CSM towards the membership of the movement, the continual middle-class fear of violent Chartist tactics and the rejection by the working-class membership of an imposed middle-class leadership which they believed was using Chartism as a flag of convenience, all led to an inevitable divorce. It was this and other unsuccessful initiatives with middle class organisations that caused Howard Morton to reflect years later:

> 'Parliamentary and Financial supporters of bourgeois supremacy or persons who pretend to be friends of the proletarians, whose very lifeblood they suck……consciously or unconsciously, all mere political reformers are shams, quacks…'[108]

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[107] *Northern Star* 23rd April 1842

[108] *Red Republican* 13th July 1850

During the first half of the century, society experienced a growth in organisations campaigning for reform or repeal, building on the radical traditions of the previous century; most were middle class in leadership and membership, and they attracted wider middle-class support. As a genuinely working-class movement, Chartism was the outlier in this picture. If its class make up provided a bond of unity, it also contributed to one of its major problems; the failure to create lasting and beneficial relationships with other campaigning organisations that were seeking to change aspects of society but whose middle-class composition inevitably lead to deep seated, if understandable, distrust.

It was during the early years of the movement that an alliance would have been most beneficial to both classes, when Chartism was at its most influential in forming public opinion and perception; these were also the years when the greatest damage was done to such an ambition. A reluctant leadership with a determination of no compromise or concession, allowed opportunities for a united reform campaign to slip by. It was to be the People's Charter or nothing, a stance guaranteed to alienate middle class opinion, particularly with the threat of physical force in the background. As the movement progressed into its later years, there was a greater willingness to accommodate middle class involvement and even compromise on universal suffrage, but by then it was too late. An increasingly affluent middle class had moved on, and with the Corn Laws now repealed, they had little incentive to support a movement that had continually spurned its advances.

This chapter has endeavoured to show that a meaningful relationship with the middle class, in particular with reforming organisations whose ambitions were similar, if not, at times, identical, to those of Chartism, was possible, although difficult; the genuine attempts made to find a common platform and approach are testimony to the contemporary belief that alliances were both achievable and necessary. That such attempts failed despite the recognition within the movement that middle - class support was the key to electoral reform, tells us that the reasons for failure were not trivial and that they were also multi-faceted. We can see that the middle class did not trust the movement to pursue solely constitutional, peaceful means for change, a view undoubtedly influenced by a commercial Press that equated Chartism with the violent destruction of a society within which the middle class wanted to advance its standing and wealth. For its part, Chartism regarded the middle class as an unreliable ally, one that had already reneged on its commitments after 1832 and which, as a result, could not be relied upon to deliver its word. This lack of trust on both sides never disappeared and newspaper editions separated by twenty years reflected these arguments and fears, even when the evidence for both was weakening.

Yet, despite suspicion, distrust and fear, individuals on both sides genuinely tried to move beyond these prejudices and find common ground to enable a unified approach for reform, one with a greater chance of success than the fractured, sub optimal outcomes that actually occurred. To understand why they also failed, we must look at the leadership of the movements during the 1830s and 1840s, and, although we cannot ignore the, often, patronising and unreasonable attitudes of the BPU, ACLL and CSM leaderships, the focus falls inevitably upon Chartism and, in particular, Feargus O'Connor.

The middle class saw in O'Connor all that it feared about Chartism; his depictions in the commercial press variously as demagogue, monster or tyrant may have been grotesque and wildly exaggerated but it found traction with a middle-class audience seemingly willing to focus its fears of the movement onto one individual. It can be argued that O'Connor did little to dispel this image; his stinging attacks upon other reform-minded organisations, his unwillingness to consider any compromise of his own or the movement's beliefs, his destructive disagreements with fellow Chartists, his imprisonment for seditious libel, his provocative language with his willingness to 'die for the cause', his promise to 'lead people to death or glory' and his determination that 'no house shall cover my head tonight. I am quite ready to stand by the law, and not to give our tyrants the slightest advantage in attacking us in sections; but should they employ force against us. I am repelling attack by attack',[109] all created an image of an all-powerful, even despotic, leader with whom the middle class could neither engage nor find common cause. However, if he was seen by the middle classes as

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[109] *Northern Star*, 25th May 1839 (speech at Peep Green)

‘the foremost advocate of intimidation’,[110] his image with mainstream Chartism was very different; for the membership, O’Connor spoke in language with which they could relate, his oratory ensured packed meeting halls and his declared willingness to die for the cause touched an emotional nerve that was echoed in local associations. So, when O’Connor attacked the middle class for its treachery and its willingness to do the bidding of parliament and the aristocracy, he took working class members with him. In doing so, however, he alienated many of his fellow leaders, thus doing little for the overall unity of the movement.

We cannot, however, ascribe the failure of a relationship with the middle class solely to O’Connor’s intimidatory language, indeed, Harney, Taylor and Peter Bussey were frequently more violent in their speeches and more committed to armed revolution. Yet as the movement’s most prominent and most popular leader, his influence upon the outcomes of any initiative for alliance was greater than any other single factor. In the eyes of the middle class, Feargus O’Connor was the embodiment of all that was wrong with Chartism but for the membership he epitomised the cause, he ensured the focus remained on universal suffrage, and he understood the working man’s needs. In the context of this thesis, O’Connor’s commitment, determination and visibility, above all other Chartist leaders, contributed hugely to keeping the membership together as a functioning movement.

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[110] Kemnitz, Thomas Milton: *Approaches to the Chartist Movement: Feargus O'Connor and Chartist Strategy* in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 1, Violence and Social Control, Spring, 1973, (The North American Conference on British Studies) 69

The final chapter will aim to bring together all that we have referenced in this thesis; the influences that shaped the movement’s thinking, the internal struggles, the growth of internal interests, some which became formal organisations and were so influential with the membership, the pressures upon the movement exerted by external authorities that both restricted its freedom and influenced the members’ attitudes, the abortive alliances with other reforming organisations and movements that often divided fellow Chartists, and the unsuccessful relationships with other strata of society, particularly the middle class. Such factors would seem, on the face of it, to militate against the creation and maintenance of a unified movement; how could the membership stay sufficiently united to campaign as one when there were so many competing and conflicting views, both internally and externally? If the answer to that question is that it could not, then it clearly challenges the argument that Chartism was a community, imagined or real. The concluding chapter will endeavour to bring all these factors together and provide a conclusion that addresses this question.

Conclusion

This thesis has endeavoured to examine Chartism as one body; recent writing on the movement, whether books or articles, has tended to dissect it and look at specific issues or individuals within the wider picture. This research has taken a macro view and asked whether Chartism, as a whole, can be seen as a community with the spirit and cohesion that one would expect within such an environment, rather than as a loosely connected grouping within which many different agenda and factions were active.

It is clear we should not see Chartism as a homogenous entity, either by action, opinion or ambition. From its beginning in 1838, different views and priorities lead to heated, often vicious, ad hominem attacks between its leaders resulting in several leaving the movement and being lost to the struggle. Historians will often look at a movement, society or organisation and focus upon failure, conflict and difference and this has often been the case with the histories of Chartism; we don't always seek to identify what binds and unites, what drives a group of people forward, even when success seems distant or possibly unachievable;

> 'During the last half century or so, the conventional wisdom that 'the history of humanity is based upon the immemorial divisions of its people' has been reinforced by a growing academic insistence on the importance of recognizing the 'difference' between collective groups…….historians have focused their attention upon the creation, perception, working, meaning and significance of what they varyingly describe as 'difference' or 'otherness', or 'altereity', or 'unlikeness', or 'dissimilarity'…'. [1]

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[1] Cannadine David: *The Undivided Past* (London 2014) 5-6

However, to understand what unites, we must understand what divides; this thesis has not avoided discussing conflict, for we cannot examine Chartism without recognizing the separate factions and beliefs that flourished within the movement, and those individuals whose contributions united and divided in equal measure. And yet, despite the disagreements that frequently threatened to tear it apart, and the fact that it failed to secure its stated ambitions, Chartism remained an active political movement for twenty years, even when competing for working class and middle-class membership with other reforming and radical interests (the BPU, the ACCL, Owenism and Co-operation, Trades Unions et al). After the failed 1848 Petition Chartism began an accelerated decline, but maintained a presence in the reform movement for another ten years, indicating that strong bonds of cohesion had been developed and sustained during its lifetime. For a movement that failed, if measured only by empirical achievement, such longevity is creditable.

So, this thesis has tried to understand what kept Chartism together as an active force, rather than to identify why it failed to deliver the Charter, and we have used Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community to explore this. Anderson applied his thinking to the development of the nation state, and explained why it is imagined: 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[2] To reiterate, 'imagined' does not mean 'imaginary';

> 'He (Anderson) is nevertheless crystal clear when he links 'invention' not to fabrication and falsity but to imagining and creation. The work of imagination, here, consists not in making things up but envisioning something that we cannot see, but which is nonetheless real'. [3]

It is a communal spirit based upon shared ambition and common beliefs enabling strangers to see themselves as part of something much bigger than their immediate circle. By considering Chartism in the same way helps our understanding of the cohesive bonds that held it together.

We will return to Anderson's work later but must at this point consider the concepts of 'movement' and 'community', and determine if there is any significant difference between them and whether such difference matters. To do this, we must examine the sociological characteristics of Chartism as well as the historical.

Chartism has been uniformly recognized by historians as a social movement – an earlier chapter alluded to the narrower debate as to whether, within this classification, it was a political or economic movement – and Chartists themselves used the term 'movement' to describe their organisation. Although there are several definitions of a ‘movement’, Charles Tilly’s in 1984 seems relevant not only to our current times but also when defining Chartism:

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[2] Anderson *Imagined Communities* 6

[3] Eriksen, Thomas: *Ben Anderson, the anthropologist*, delivered as part of *Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities: a symposium* (London School of Economics 2016) 4 - 5

> ‘(it is) a sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support’.[4]

This is a twentieth century description that would seem to capture the essence of nineteenth century Chartism. Sidney Tarrow went further by highlighting the aspects of clear purpose, challenge and collective action: ‘they (social movements) are better defined as collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities’,[5] particularly highlighting the need for such movements to maintain cohesion and unity or risk failure:

> ‘It is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement. Common purposes, collective identities, and identifiable challenges help movements to do this; but unless they can maintain their challenge, movements will evaporate into the kind of individualistic resentment that James Scott calls “resistance”‘.[6]

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[4] Tilly Charles: *Big structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Russell Sage Foundation 1984, quoted in Stoecker Randy*: Community, Movement, Organisation: The Problem of Identity Convergence in Collective Action*, in *The Sociological Quarterly,* (Volume 39, Number 1, 1996) 112 - 113

[5] Tarrow Stanley: *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge 1998) 9

[6] *Ibid*. 12

Within Chartism, we can see that those characteristics that Tilly, Tarrow and others identified as essential to a social movement (lack of formal representation, demands for change, public protest, a common purpose and sustainable collective action) were present throughout its life.

If we accept that Chartism can be defined as a social movement, can it also be defined as an imagined community, using Anderson's definition? It is obvious that Chartism as a geographically dispersed movement on a national scale can only be 'imagined', so the more fundamental question is whether it was a community.

Much has been written on all aspects of community and many definitions exist, with *belonging* and *shared experience* central elements. Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) published work on community[7] provided much of the basis for later writing and theories on the subject; Tonnies defined community as a group of people sharing a commonality of belief, aspiration, values and shared ambition (gemeinschaft) that, in turn, created a sense of support and collectivity, and which he contrasted with self-interest (gessellschaft) that resulted in actions that weakened those characteristics he identified within community, particularly those of co-operation and kinship. Although Tonnies believed such communal relationships began through personal interaction within small groups, he did not limit his definition of community to these relatively parochial beginnings, and this is important for our consideration of Chartism as a dispersed, imagined community. Prior to mass media and online communications, Chartists needed local physical interactions to understand the movement's ambitions and the progress it was making; it did this through association meetings (Chartist newspapers consistently record a high number of enthusiastic members at local meetings) where members, many illiterate, met in pubs or domestic houses to hear another member read articles from Chartist papers. It was these same papers with their reports of national activities and personalities that helped create the sense of belonging to something bigger and imagined, for most Chartists would never venture beyond their local neighbourhood or leave their own town. This didn't matter, what counted was the knowledge that thousands of other similarly minded men (and occasionally women) were having identical conversations and meetings, and listening to the same reports, all for the same purpose. As Craig Colhoun comments:

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[7] Tonnies Ferdinand: *Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft*, 1887, translation and reprint *Community and Society* (Dover 2011)

> 'Reading the newspaper gave common news content to the discussions of a nation, but also a ritual demonstration of a kind of belonging. Each person who read the morning paper over tea or coffee could imagine his countrymen doing the same'.[8]

Anderson equates this to the actions of a people striving for a national identity, and consistent messaging and collective assembly was equally important to Chartists, who, although not a nation, undoubtedly identified as something greater than just a movement:

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[8] Colhoun, Craig: *The Importance of Imagined Communities – and Benedict Anderson*, in *Journal of Culture, Power and Society,* (December 2016) 12 - 13

> ‘We will stand firm and united – We will listen to no coalition, no half measures. Mahomet must come to the mountain…We are the mountain – we are the people’. [9]

Of course, there was also self-interest, Tonnies’ gessellschaft. Whether the lukewarm and peripheral support for reform from those artisans and middle classes excluded from the franchise following the 1832 Reform Act and who cared little for the situation of the lower skilled, or the working-class enduring poverty and poor housing, employed in industries where guaranteed work was precarious, and who had an immediate need to put food on the table for their family, every individual had his own reasons for seeking franchise reform. For the working class, it was the belief that its dire situation could be radically changed by gaining the franchise through communal effort, even if those striving for the same ambition never met. For Tonnies, the establishment of community relied upon creating relationships and bonds derived from personal interaction, a theory that would seem to deny the concept of Chartism as an imagined community because it was a geographically disparate movement. But we know those necessary personal interactions happened within the local associations, where individual members not only created such personal relationships but also gained an understanding of their wider community through the reporting of national activity and visiting Chartist missionaries.

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[9] Feargus O’Connor to a St Pancras Chartist Meeting September 1842 in the *Northern Star* 10th September 1842

Communities, whether imagined or physical, are usually regarded as mainly informal, being loose and diverse rather than highly organised or highly regimented. Stoecker described social movement communities as 'informally organised networks of movement activities',[10] while Glaser described the '…fluid and indeterminate membership'.[11] Barbara Taylor believed that:

> 'Chartism developed as a loose alliance of reform-minded people with only a limited programme of democratic demands in common (and widely differing views on other ideological or social issues, such as religion or women's status)….'.[12]

This contrasts starkly this with Owenism, where membership required acceptance of:

> 'the entire doctrinal package advocated by the Owenites, from the Doctrine of Character Formation through to the demand for female equality. Chartism therefore remained a much more loosely knit movement than Socialism, incorporating a far wider range of views'.[13]

We have seen how Chartism embraced this diversity of interests (temperance, education, religion, female suffrage) previously referred to as 'movements within a movement' and, while O'Connor railed at these for diluting the message of Chartism and unnecessary distractions from the fight for suffrage, they indicate a community that valued other issues important to the membership whilst still focusing upon the primary ambition of reform. During the same period, campaigners in the United States were pulling together a previous network of activists involved with abolition and temperance into a suffrage movement, and a century later the women's liberation movement formed 'a social movement community of like-minded, informally linked activists who are capable of rapid and intense mobilization around specific issue areas in the absence of formal movement organisations'.[14] It is clear that the concept of the community embracing several strands under one umbrella was not unique to Chartism.

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[10] Stoecker, Randy: *Community, Movement, Organisation: The Problem of Identity Convergence in Collective Action*, in *The Sociological Quarterly,* (Volume 36, Number 1, 1995) 112

[11] Glaser, Jochen: *Social movements as Communities* at *The Australian Sociological Society* (2004) 7

[12] Taylor, Barbara: *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London 1983) 111

[13] *Ibid*. 265

In line with Glaser's concept of 'fluid membership', we know that the personnel within Chartism changed greatly over its lifetime, that some of the founding members left to focus upon other reforming activities, others flirted with their involvement, often divided between versions of the suffrage, while many stayed the course until the movement ended. This is an important difference between Chartism as a community and as a social movement; it encompasses levels of informality and diversity not always present in the latter:

> 'Thinking about movements as communities allows us to capture their diverse structures and participants, including informal and cultural as well as formal political elements….In relatively democratic contexts, SMCs (Social Movement Communities) are better able to establish diverse networks of movement organisers and supporters, create collective identity, sustain campaigns, and keep a movement in abeyance'.[15]

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[14] Buechler Stephen: *Women's Movements in the United States* (Rutgers University Press 1970) 70

[15] Hassan Hatem and Staggenborg Suzanne: *Movements as Communities* in *The Oxford Book of Social Movements,* (Oxford University Press 2015) 340 - 355

Hatem Hassan's and Suzanne Staggenborg's reference to 'collective identity' is an important aspect of community. As already acknowledged historians have written extensively on class consciousness during this period, both in regard to working people and its impact upon Chartism, but class consciousness and collective identity are not identical expressions for the same concept. Although Marx did not expound a theory of class consciousness by name, it's clear he believed the wrongs and injustices perceived by workers initially against their capitalist employers and later against a middle-class bourgeoisie, developed into a shared awareness built upon class identity and from which these workers became known as the proletariat; this can fairly be described as a collective identity albeit one based essentially upon social status. When defined in a wider sense, collective identity usually goes beyond this limited interpretation to include other aspects of shared experience to explain the sense of belonging within a group. Alberto Melucci, credited as a pioneer of the theory of collective identity, defined it as a process which:

> 'involves cognitive definitions concerning the ends, means, and field of action. These different elements or axes of collective action are defined within a language that is shared by a portion or the whole of a society or that is specific to the group; they are incorporated in a given set of rituals, practices, cultural artefacts; they are framed in different ways but they always allow some kind of calculation between the ends, means and rewards…….finally, a certain degree of emotional investment, which enables individuals to feel like part of a common unity, is required in the definition of a collective identity…' .[16]

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[16] Melucci Alberto: *The Process of Collective Identity* in Johnston, Hank and Klandermans, Bert: *Social Movements and Culture* (University of Minnesota 1995) 44

Melucci has added ‘ends and means’, which we can define as ‘purpose and action’, something often missing from the narrower definition of class, allowing us to recognise people may also join movements or communities to achieve something tangible. For Chartism, this is a more appropriate descriptor, reflecting the diversity of the membership for we know that, while the movement’s membership was strongly working class, it also drew from the professional, artisan and trade functions, as well as attracting support, albeit limited, from members of the middle class. What forged this collective identity as Chartists was the desire to deliver the Charter; the community had a purpose that was clear, which seemed deliverable and which went beyond association based upon who they were or were not; it was not limited to the working class.

Melucci’s ‘certain degree of emotional investment’ is clearly present within Chartism; we have captured the internal disagreements and ad hominem attacks, the passionate arguments and dismissal of opposing views, but such emotional investment can best be illustrated by Chartism’s defence and aggressive promotion of the Charter with those outwith the movement. As we have seen, Chartists violently gatecrashed Anti-Corn Law League meetings to ensure universal suffrage was given higher priority than corn law repeal, while the proposed union with the Complete Suffrage Movement collapsed when Lovett refused to remove the title of the People’s Charter, even when Sturge was prepared to accommodate all original six points on condition the name was dropped. For Lovett and the Chartist leadership, there was a non-negotiable emotional investment in the Charter, not just the content but the title itself. We have seen the willingness of Chartists to go to prison rather than give up the campaign for reform, for the members – men and women – to violently demonstrate and risk imprisonment, and, in extreme circumstances, to riot leading to loss of life and transportation, as at Newport, Llanidloes and Birmingham. When O'Connor declared he was prepared to die for the cause of Chartism and would lead the movement to death or glory, we may question his personal commitment to this course of action, but these sentiments undoubtedly reflected the emotions of his audience. These were people who demonstrated more than a passing interest in securing the vote, they had a commitment to collective action to deliver an ambition that superseded any issues and arguments that divided them.

Theodore Abel declared collective effort 'may be properly called a social movement only if it operates within the medium of a community…the most significant social movements are those which take place on a national scale, and affect political, religious and moral folkways and institutions',[17] while Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier in their work on social movements and communities defined a community as a social movement with a collective identity.[18] So, when Anderson describes the members of the imagined community as not physically knowing each other ‘yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community’,[19] he is acknowledging a communal picture, a collective identity essential for the community to exist. As Yael Tamir noted in his review of Anderson’s work: ‘The paramount common denominator of all nations is a national consciousness fostering feelings of belongingness and national fraternity’.[20] Chartism maintained that collective identity, sense of belonging and collective effort across a national movement for twenty years and, while it ultimately failed to deliver the Charter, it forged a national community that continued to strive for reform. As the *Scots Times* commented at the time:

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[17] Abel Theodore: *The Pattern of a Successful Social Movement* in *American Sociological Review* Volume 2 Number 3, (1937) 348

[18] Taylor Verta and Whittier Nancy *Collective identity in Social Movement Communities* in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, (New Haven 1992) 349

> ‘We look to Birmingham, to Bath, to Newcastle, to Brighton, to Carlisle, to Liverpool, to Macclesfield, to Todmorden and to Huddersfield, whose thousands, and whose hundreds of thousands, have re-echoed the single note of liberty’.[21]

Societies and communities encompass a wide range of experiences, backgrounds, views, jobs and interests, and so it was with Chartism. Chartists developed a highly diverse community, there was no element of group speak or monoculture; at times it resembled a badly behaved family. Though O’Connor wanted a stricter, tighter movement with minimal or no dissent from the primary aim of universal male suffrage, a membership of several thousand was never going to form a homogenous community, even if united around a single aim; the diversity of the membership reflected in its professions, geographic locations, and separate interest groups is captured by John and Barbara Hammond:

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[19] Anderson Benedict *Imagined Communities* 6

[20] Tamir Yael: *The Enigma of Nationalism* in *World Politics* Volume 47, Number 3, April 1995, (Cambridge University Press) 424

[21] *Scots Times* 10th October 1838 in Rowe D.J. *The Failure of London Chartism*, in *The Historical Journal* Volume 11 Number 3, (1968) 476

> ‘The history of the movement is confused and perplexing, because, though it had a definite programme with its six points, it embraced not merely divergent but mutually hostile schools of reform. We give the name of Chartist to the London artisan who shared Lovett’s enthusiasm for education and a cheap press; to the Birmingham politician who supported Attwood’s campaign for reform of the currency; to the Lancashire handloom weaver or the Yorkshire collier who listened to Oastler denounce the new Poor Law; to Feargus O’Connor, self-styled descendant of Irish Kings, spinning project after project from his active and ill-ordered brain, to the South Wales miner who followed Frost, with a pike, to Newport and to prison’.[22]

Such diversity is important in a community: ‘Thinking about movements as communities allows us to capture their diverse structures and participants, including informal and cultural as well as formal and political elements’.[23] Chartism was more than a social movement formed to achieve a single purpose and rarely stepping outside of that focus; it may have started with that intention but the profile of its supporters, its birth as the merger of a number of reform initiatives, the geographic spread of its local associations often dealing with localised issues, and the proliferation of internal interests, required its members to organise and work together in a way that both tolerated and valued diversity. They did this in the way that Anderson states individuals managed to forge their own nation, for ‘in the minds of each lives an image of their communion’.[24]

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[22] Hammond JL and Hammond Barbara: *The Bleak Age*, (London 1934) 176

[23] Hasan Hatem and Staggenborg Suzanne: *Movements as Communities* 340-355

[24] Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities* 6

> ‘The processes by which SMCs emerge vary in different settings. In relatively democratic contexts, SMCs are better able to establish diverse networks of movement organisers and supporters, create collective identity, sustain campaigns and keep a movement in abeyance’.[25]

Though Chartism became ‘the scattered fragments of organisation, just alive in the localities’,[26] Chartists had always seen themselves as part of something more than their local association and local interest, they were part of a national campaign with a strong sense of camaraderie among the members and a desire to extend their awareness of Chartism beyond the activities of their immediate locale.

The desire for information and news is central to Anderson’s work, namely the influence of language and print capitalism in the formation of a nation as an imagined community, and the influence of Chartist poetry, Chartist fiction and the Chartist press, both in language and reach, are an important link to Anderson’s analysis of the power of the printed word.

To illustrate the influence that a common and recognisable language can have in forging an identity among a population – in this case, the Philippines – Anderson contrasts the settings and language of two novels by Philippines authors; *Noli Me Tangere*, written by Jose Rizal (1861-1896) in 1886, and *Pingadaanag Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Cahariang*, written by Francisco Balagtas (1788-1862) in 1861. Rizal’s novel is set in the Philippines shortly before its declaration of independence from Spain, at a time when the population was awakening to the thought of the country as a nation, and not a dependency or colony. *Noli Me Tangere* was significant in helping create a national identity through its positive and recognizable depiction of the indigenous people, portrayed by the heroine Maria Clara, and contrasted with a negative representation of the colonizing Spanish, portrayed by the priest Father Damaso. Unlike Rizal's novel, Balagtas' work is not set in the Philippines but Albania with a story and setting completely alien to his domestic readership; as Anderson comments:

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[25] Hasan Hatem and Staggenborg Suzanne: *Movements as Communities* 340-355

[26] Jones Ernest: *Notes to the People*, (Volume 2, 1852)

> 'Where Rizal deliberately sprinkles his Spanish prose with Tagalog words for realistic, satirical or nationalist effect…it never occurs to Balagtas to situate his protagonists in society or to discuss them with his audience. Nor, aside from the mellifluous flow of Tagalog polysyllables, is there much Filipino about his text'.[27]

Rizal's novel illustrates something that Chartist writers recognised and which we have reflected upon in earlier chapters, that a common vocabulary, with recognisable examples and stories, was an essential component in creating a unified movement and community: 'Language is not an instrument of exclusion……on the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive'.[28]

Chartism had no need to create a common language, for all spoke English, but rather it used expressions, adjectives and phrases that consistently resonated with the membership and which were adopted by Chartists across the country either to glorify their leaders ('fearless', 'heroic', 'brave champions', 'patriots'), or to damn their opponents, particularly the middle class ('ignorant', 'oppressors', 'the enemy'). Throughout the life of the movement, Chartist leaders understood the impact of language; thus, McDouall declared in 1841 that the working class 'have as much use for them (the middle classes) as a cart has for a third wheel or a pig for an umbrella' [29] while ten years later, Ernest Jones maintained Chartism's suspicion and enmity towards the same class:

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[27] Anderson: *Imagined Communities* 28-29

[28] *Ibid*.134

> 'You cannot consort with enemies without being betrayed. Not their enmity but their friendship is what we have to fear….no union, therefore, with capitalists! It is inserting the virus of pestilence into the body of democracy'.[30]

Words and phrases were not idly chosen or randomly committed to print; McDouall, Jones, O'Connor, O'Brien, Harney and others understood their audience, the language of their speeches and articles reflected this. They also recognised its impact upon those outside the movement, particularly those middle classes whom they frequently insulted but whose support they needed, so there are many examples of placatory, positive speeches portraying a warmer, welcoming message to potential allies, and offsetting the more vitriolic language.

The leadership's words, however, were primarily aimed at the membership, providing a consistency of message to create and sustain a community united around the People's Charter and best illustrated in Chartism's rallying cry *Peaceably if we can, forcibly in we must*. This was intended to ease the general fear of Chartism as a revolutionary movement bent on destruction of life and property, but also to reinforce the will of those unwilling to accept the end of their ambition should the constitutional route fail.

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[29] *Chartist and Republican Journal* 11th April 1841

[30] *Notes to the People* May 1851

While the impact of language was greatest within speeches and newspaper articles, we must not ignore the influence of Chartist prose, poetry and hymns. As Anderson recognised in his analysis of *Noli Me Tangere*, stories set in a familiar environment, expressing sentiments that the readership recognised and in a language it understood, were powerful influences in building shared, communal beliefs. We have previously referenced the Chartist influenced novels of established authors such as Gaskell, Eliot and Kingsley, but there were also short stories, some written by Chartist leaders such as Cooper, Jones and William Linton (1812-1897), and others written by little known or unknown Chartists. They were printed in Chartist newspapers and read aloud at a meeting of members; the stories were highly melodramatic, usually focusing upon good versus evil, and promoted the Charter as the solution to the misery portrayed in the story. Ian Haywood's anthology *The Literature of Struggle: An Anthology of Chartist Fiction* provides a limited collection of short stories, and briefly highlighting one of these illustrates the style and message of the majority. The story is called *The Poor Man's Wrongs*, written by Mary Hutton (1794-1859) in 1839. In the story, Albert (our hero) is described as ‘an honest man and a Christian’ whose ‘heart bled over the wrongs of his distressed country. He daily saw around him some hundreds of starving labourers and mechanics, honest, worthy and respectable men, blasted in prospects and broken in spirits’. He is visited one stormy night by a stranger in need of shelter who declares that ‘Tis almost o’er my life of toil, And England’s happy glorious soil, That blessed spot where I was born, Has left me wretched and forlorn…’ and he declares that ‘Yet I shall never see that day, When liberty makes glorious way…’ Albert identifies the problem and, thus, the enemy: ‘I once entertained some hopes from the Reform Bill…but it has made the condition of the laboring population ten times worse…..for now the non-electors are the slaves of the ten-pounders, who have little else but impudence and ignorance to bear them through’, and also the solution: ‘Universal Suffrage alone can redeem the poor man from his thralldom…Universal Suffrage is the beacon star that will lead the working classes of England into a haven of rest….’The stranger replies with ‘Amen……with my latest breath, I pray that it may speedily arrive’.[31] Such stories were largely formulaic, consistently reinforcing the same Chartist message.

In his book on Chartist poetry, Mike Sanders states that during its lifetime ‘the poetry column of the leading Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*……published almost 1500 poems (or excerpts from poems) …...these poems were the work of at least 390 Chartist poets, the vast majority of whom were working men'[32]. As Sanders points out 'as the readership of the *Northern Star* numbered hundreds of thousands, these poems were amongst the most widely read of the Victorian era'.[33] As with newspaper articles, Chartist poetry was shared in groups although, as Timothy Randall identifies, these were not just indoor gatherings but 'mass open-air gatherings, the anniversary celebrations, the reading groups, the feasts, the evening teas, the workplace lunches, the public house meetings, the extempore singing in prisons'.[34] The paper's poetry column published work on individual leaders, specific events or the wider issues of poverty and desolation; those published in the first three months of 1838 included *Working Men's Rhymes* concerning the principles of Chartism and the need for reform, *Lines of the Conviction of the Glasgow Cotton Spinners*, *Sonnets addressed to a certain Lord* which was a warning against the military repression of Chartism, *The Portrait of Arthur O'Connor* the United Irishman, and *The Victim of the Lash* which opposed the practice of flogging as a punishment.[35]. There are dedications to John Collins, William Lovett, Henry Vincent, Peter McDouall, Rayner Stephens and, of course, Feargus O'Connor, the 'Lion of Freedom', as well as poems commemorating the Newport Riots and the strikes of 1842 and the 1848 revolutions in Europe. No significant Chartist event or individual went unrepresented.

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[31] Hutton Mary: *The Poor Man’s Wrongs*, 1839 in Haywood, Ian *The Literature of Struggle: An Anthology of Chartist Fiction* 186-190

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[32] Sanders Mike: *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge 2009) 70

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Randall Timothy, *Chartist poetry and song* in Ashton O, Fyson R and Roberts S: *The Chartist Legacy* 172

[35] Sanders: *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* 66-67

Poems were also put to music and a number became hymns, although we have few surviving examples. We do know, however, that hymns were written specifically for the Chartist cause, reflecting those consistent Chartist messages: titles such as *Great God, is this the Patriot's doom?*, *Sons of Poverty Assemble* and *Britannia's sons, thou slaves ye be* reference the suffering of the labouring classes ('crushed by oppression's heavy load, in slavery and want we groan'), the exploitation of child labour ('How long shall babes of tender years, be doomed to toil for lazy Peers'), the allegiance of God to the movement ('Spread the Charter far and wide, Truth is with us, God himself is on our Side'), and an exhortation to continue the campaign ('God is our Guide! Our cause is just! Nature's immunities we claim; While in the living God we trust, We'll spread our Charter's glorious fame').[36] Anderson recognised the communal value of song and poetry in creating 'an experience of simultaneity', in which 'at precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody', whether this be national anthems or '…listening to, and maybe silently chiming in with, the recitation of ceremonial poetry, such as sections of the Book of Common Prayer'.[37]

Whether through platform speeches, newspapers reports and articles, published pamphlets, poetry or hymns, Chartists recognised that which Anderson posited 140 years later in *Imagined*

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[36] University of Manchester online article 23rd September 2011

[37] Anderson Benedict *Imagined Communities* 145

Communities; that using the printed word with the appropriate language and narrative, was fundamental to forging a disparate and geographically widespread membership into a community that could unite around one clear purpose and, despite other associated interests and internal disputes, always saw itself as part of the one Chartist movement. Nowhere was this better illustrated, as we have seen, within the Chartist Press but it was not unique. During the debates in Scotland on the Reform Bill, the country's:

> 'broad liberal press, through national publications such as the Scotsman, and provincial papers such as the Dundee Advertiser, played a crucial role in sustaining the campaign and showing reformers that they were engaged in a truly national struggle. Newspapers encouraged this sense of collective endeavour by offering their readers reports of reform activity from around the country…'[38]

For *The Scotsman* read *The Northern Star* and for *reformers* read *Chartists.* In an article entitled *Community and Imagination*, Joep Leerssen made the observation that 'the narrative genres (whether in the theatre, on the printed page or on screen) weave a web of stories and personal interest that can unify a far-flung diversity of readers into a reading community';[39] printed sources created such a reading community within Chartism.

> 'The visual representation of sacred communities (reliefs and stained-glass windows) – the shepherds who followed the Star bore the features of Burgundian peasants, the Virgin Mary is a Tuscan merchant's daughter, and the commissioning patron kneels alongside the

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[38] Pentland Gordon: *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland 1830-1832* 127

[39] Leerssen Joep: *Community and Imagination; Anderson and literary studies* delivered as part of *Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities: a symposium*, (London School of Economics, 2016) 639

> shepherds in full burgher or noble costume. The figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural'.[40]

Symbols and ritual are, in Anderson's view, important in establishing a community for, as with language, they bring people together around items, events, emblems or tokens that represent important elements of their culture or history, which they recognise and which create a feeling of collective identity. This has been recognised in recent studies of communities:

> 'The community's identity distinguishes it from others, establishes rituals and events, creates a sense of interdependency and self-sufficiency among activists, builds bonds of personal commitment upon which mobilisations depend, provides the base upon which national movement networks develop, and maintains a collective memory from which future activists can draw'.[41]

Prior to the formation of Chartism, visual symbols had played an important role in the history of radicalism, allowing supporters to identify with their cause by the wearing of colours, the manner of their dress or the bearing of placards; 'The most cursory reading of the British Home Office papers or the press files of the period 1815-1820 suggests the continued political weight given to flags and banners, hats and caps, ribbons and medals, songs and toasts'.[42] The Peterloo tragedy lead to the Seditious Meetings Act of October 1819, which prohibited the display at any gathering, of flags, banners, badges or emblems associated with radicalism, and during the passage of which George Canning (1770-1827) declared that ‘Who did not know that banners, ribbons and other such devices, might be as clear indication of purpose as words? Such things had great significance’.[43] Referring again to Scottish agitation for the Reform Bill, in which meetings and demonstrations ‘bolstered the unity of the movement……petitions, processions and political unions were more often carefully choreographed displays of patriotism and unity’, while the use of visual symbols (banners, intertwined roses, shamrocks and thistles, cockades, ribbons and fasces) ‘underlined the purpose of meetings and processions, which were not deliberative assemblies but public displays of united will’.[44] The significance was not lost upon Chartism.

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[40] Anderson Benedict: *Imagined Communities* 22

[41] Stoecker, Randy: *Community, Movement, Organisation: The Problem of Identity Convergence in Collective Action* 112

[42] Epstein Peter: *Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early 19th Century England*, in *Past & Present,* Number 122 (February 1989) 76 - 77

We have seen the importance of both language and print media and the use of other visual symbols reinforced, and likely enhanced, this sense of national community. As Navickas notes:

> ‘Clothing was an optimum means of public communication. Colours, shapes and styles of dress were more instantly recognisable to the illiterate or mass crowds than the rhetoric of textual and oral propaganda…’.[45]

Thus, at a mass rally in Manchester to celebrate the release of McDouall and Collins from prison, ‘women wore green and white scarves and favours in the traditional radical style, but the procession also included green flags showing the Irish Harp….to appeal to both radical and Irish constituencies'.[46]

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[43] Navickas Katrina: *That sash will hang you: Political clothing and Adornment in England 1780-1840*, in *Journal of British Studies,* Volume 49 Number 3, (July 2010) 552

[44] Pentland Gordon: *Radicalism, Reform and National Identity in Scotland 1830-1832* 127 - 128

[45] Navickas 541

The best known use of clothing as a symbol of collective identity was Feargus O'Connor's fustian suit, which he believed identified him with his working class followers of the 'blistered hands, unshorn chins and fustian jackets'. At a rally in York:

> 'Mr O'Connor was habited, as he had promised, in fustian. He wore a full suit, made out of one piece which had been manufactured expressly for the occasion, and was presented by those who had not only his welfare at heart but were imbued with his principles and with his spirit – the blistered hands and fustian jackets of Manchester'.[47]

O'Connor began his address with 'I have appeared, Brother Chartists and working men amongst you in fustian, the emblem of your order, in order to convince you, at a single glance, that what I was when I left you, the same I do return to you'; [48] for the membership, O'Connor was its undisputed leader, reinforced by his understanding of how language and symbols connected with the audience. As Paul Pickering notes: 'it is unlikely that the significance of his suit was lost on many who saw him that day….in the parade, the fustian of every day working-class life was the central feature of a scene rich with symbolism',[49] and that 'Sharing in this dress allowed unrepresented groups to feel they were participating to some extent in a wider body politic'.[50]

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[46] Navickas 553

[47] *Northern Star* 4th September 1841

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Pickering Paul: *Class without words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement*, in *Past & Present*, Number 112 August 1986, Oxford University Press 157-158

[50] Navickas Katrina 564

In a present-day example, the online website Wikipedia demonstrates how loyalty can be reinforced by such means: 'The development of specialized language (with words like wikipedian, wikify, wikiholiday) or products (T-shirts, mugs) that allow fans to display their allegiances and support the project, are another indicator of a community with a rich and constantly evolving culture';[51] Chartism had previously recognised the value of such mementos, producing portraits, medals and printed ballads, as well as banners and caps of liberty to achieve the same sense of identity among the membership. Symbols and language reflect another of Anderson's attributions of the imagined community, that of the excluded other not regarded as supportive or friendly. Willie Thompson identified this as the:

> "conceptual identification of individuals with their social and communal groupings which is promoted not only by language, beliefs, ceremonies, co-operative labour and social interaction, but by contrast and distinction with non-members and outsiders" and that the 'auditory and visual markers……all serve to produce a sentiment of social identity and common purpose between some individuals - and to exclude others'.[52]

Chartism recognised this and was never afraid to deploy such markers.

'Few historians would nowadays dissent from a general overview of Chartism that emphasized its national, unified working-class character, its coherent political message'.[53] While not all agree with

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[51] Konieczny Piotr: *Wikipedia: Community or Social Movement?* in *Interface*, *a journal for and about social movements*, November 2009

[52] Thompson Willie: *Work, Sex and Power* 163

[53] Taylor Miles, *Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism* in *The Historical Journal* Volume 39 Number 2, June 1996, Cambridge University Press 494

Miles Taylor's statement, Chartism was undoubtedly national, stretching from north-east Scotland to the south-west of England, and incorporating Ireland, it had a coherent message based upon the Charter which was fundamentally consistent for twenty years, and its membership was overwhelmingly working class, whether measured by status, income or job. To justify describing it as an imagined community, however, not only requires it to be 'unified', as Taylor asserts, but also to demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and collective identity.

Benedict Anderson described his imagined community, in the form of the nation:

> 'always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity which makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings'.[54]

Chartism, while possessing a cadre of national leaders, was essentially a flat, loosely structured community; its local associations had no discernible hierarchy beyond a nominated chairman, they adopted the national messages delivered by Chartist papers and peripatetic speakers but reflected a strong local direction. The internal movements, whether religious, temperance or educational, functioned on a similar basis. What held this loose community together was not only the desire for the Charter, built upon historical resentment and current hardship, but also a collective spirit of being a Chartist, and the identity that provided. There was a powerful sense of belonging; read the press reports of association meetings or platform speeches to understand this, with continual references to comrades, brethren, fellow Chartists. These were not empty phrases; we have seen the support given to demonstrations, often leading to injury, the willingness to endure the effects of the law, whether prison or transportation, the support given to exclusive dealing, to strikes and, at great cost, to providing funding where, for the lowest paid operative, even one penny was unaffordable. In 1961, John Macmurray published *Persons in Relation* in which he focused upon personal relationships and their impact on the formation of community. In the book he states that ‘Community which does not express itself in co-operative activity for common purposes is illusory, mere sentimentality’.[55] Chartism could never be seen in such light; the actions of its members, men and women, were united, supportive and purposeful, often in the face of extreme poverty and outright opposition from Parliament, Press and Society.

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[54] Anderson Benedict *Imagined Communities* 7

Benedict Anderson wrote *Imagined Communities* as his ‘reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism’. Chartism never saw itself as the nation, or even speaking for the nation but it did see itself as a movement, united around a clear purpose, a community representing an unenfranchised stratum of society for whom there was no-one else to speak.

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[55] Macmurray John: *Persons in Relation* (London 1961) 176

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