CONSERVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE CHARTIST PRESS

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ABSTRACT

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In the later 1830s and early 1840s British political life was undergoing the first stages in the drama of a struggle for universal sufferage. A politically oriented movement known as Chartism had arisen and its ideology was based on the tenets of modern mass participation democracy. Since then it has been cited as a revolutionary movement. An attempt to evaluate this judgment is the focus for this study.

Chartism was not only unique in promoting the initial (though unsuccessful) mass movement for democratic change in Great Britain, it was also the first to employ a truly popular political press. Breakthroughs in printing technology and relaxation of the rigid press censorship of the Napolenic period allowed this era to inaugurate a state of affairs in which three factors were to govern and shape political affairs: politicians, public opinion, and an informed press to help form this public opinion. This is a particularly relevant aspect of Chartism because it was the first political movement in Britain to employ the press in the popular

cause. They produced a lasting record of their thought whereas previously mass political movements were transient affairs leaving only scattered remnants of their ideology which was often shrouded in legend and hyperbole. With the Chartist movement all this changed and an historian can objectively analyze its ideology from a perspective of events judged worthy of comment by the editors of their radical press.

What follows is an explication of the attachment of these so-called revolutionary figures to doctrines more easily associated with reactionary social figures and the ultra-Tory faction. An attempt will be made to outline the nature of this connection and to analyze what it meant for democracy in Great Britain in this period of social upheaval.

PREFACE

There are two divergent views of Chartism to be seen in the historiography of the movement. One points to subsequent political developments in the British culture and indicates that this was a revolutionary departure, the advent of mass participation in the governing process. The other implies thatgiven the time and place it was a regression from the general thrust of developments, that is, a reaction based on demagoguery and obfuscation in the name of reform. Although I have come to appreciate the merits of both positions, I believe the revolutionary aspect has the greater significance. However, the latter stance is certainly a defensible one and some of the evidence that supports this theory serves as the focus of this study.

Lawrence Stone, discussing 17th century British politics in The Causes of English Revolution 1529-1642, indicates that political leaders are creatures whose habits are dictated by the emerging cultural and social trends. This conception has a universal relevance and functions adequately as an explanation of how even the more advanced radicals in the Chartist camp could utter shopworn and trite conservative dogmas diametrically opposed to the professed goals of Chartism. Only the rarest of individuals possesses the acumen to look beyond the here and now to discover which forces will determine the shape of things to come. Yet it is sufficient to accept that some do and the question for this study is how

to apply this logic to the Chartists.

Both Max Beer in his A History of British Socialism and E. P. Thomson in The Making of the English Working Class contend that Chartism was not a progressive force; Beer going so far as to label it reactionary. In perusing the autobiography of a Chartist official, W. E. Adams' Memoirs of a Social Atom, one is given further evidence of the unregenerate nature of the Chartist experience from the reform perspective. Here we learn that Adams, and others loyal to the Chartist principle, became political moderates only a decade after the eclipse of the Chartist movement. Also found here, as well as in numerous other sources, is testimony alluding to the sponsorship of Chartists by arch-Tories. The compatibility of ultra-Tory and Chartist ideology is another phenomenon suggestive of the nature of their politics that counters the somewhat inadequate interpretations of the movement which only sees its progressive tendencies. On wonders what breadth of understanding prompted Lenin to inaugurate a strong Soviet interest in this topic which contends that Chartism was a proto-Bolshevik movement. According to a Chartist work, An Anthology of Chartist Literature, edited by I. V. Kovalev, Lenin called Chartism "the first broad and politically organized proletarian revolutionary movement of the masses". Much of what will be cited in the following thesis will contradict this conclusion.

Without doubt the Chartist position as political outlaws gives their doctrine a special power to reflect and illuminate the history of the age; peculiar quirks and cherished maxims give a fuller exposition of the nature of the period.

All too often historians are interested in these "outlaws" only for their alleged crimes against the social order and the revolutionary nature of their vision of society. To take this attitude one must remain blind to the many other aspects of leading Chartists whose political philosophy will be analyzed in this study. Many authors have done an admirable job of outlining the genesis of the radical thought spawned by this political movement. My intent is to reveal the burdens of an undemocratic past which the individual Chartist leader could not help but carry with him and--as is the way with political leaders--was willing to express. I intend to illustrate those opinions that have long been neglected and which are easily identifiable as something other than progressive.

The bulk of the Chartist opinions that will be discussed is drawn from their weekly journals of news and party ideology. A rigorous supression of the radical press by the government in response to the upheavals of the French Revolution and Napolenic war period was partially relaxed in 1834. This facilitated the growth of a popular press which would deal with unorthodox political views precisely at a time when the radical movement was entering the Chartist phase. Three journals representing distinct individual political theorizations within Chartism are dealt with here. They are The Chartist Circular of Glasgow, McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal of Ashton-under-Lyme and Manchester, and The Northern Star of Leeds and London. All were stamped broadsheets which were, supposedly, not to carry news items. They

were under constant scrutiny of government censors though none of the editors was prosecuted for the paper's content.

If one were attempting to explicate properly the themes of Chartist philosophy an examination of major works on the subject would be more fruitful. Newspapers such as these were forced to operate under twin demands: 1. that they be popular, and 2. they meet a weekly deadline. These realities prohibit a well thought out critical response to their content as one would be able to respond to a more detailed considered text. Much preferable for a student of political philosophy would be a more measured and calculated expression of thought to be found in a Chartist magnum opus. Unfortunately such a product of the movement does not exist and the researcher has to be content with these efforts while recognizing the limitations inherent in the genre. However, these weeklies are better suited to the task I assumed here than some would suppose and I feel that some fair degree of accuracy in interpretation of their political philosophy and the impact they believed it would have on their culture is possible by employing these sources.

I.V. Kovalev, a modern Soviet scholar, made a cogent appeal for a fuller study of Chartist literature in his An Anthology of Chartist Literature. He contends that the full flavor of the subculture has remained obscured and that in these journals all the components of their literature are available, whether one seeks editorial writings, allegory, or poetry. The Northern Star, Bible of the movement, has received a cool reception by the critics, yet all the major

political thinkers were given space in it. A utilitarian production, it contains many highly significant comments. Glasgow's Chartist Circular is one of the most politically regressive of all such journals and reveals many of the political antecedents of Chartism. Therefore, it is quite useful in portraying many of the unprogressive aspects similar to those in The Northern Star and in McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal, which is the focus of this work. The Chartist and Republican Journal was a much less popular paper than the other two which paired the talents of two of Chartism's premier writers. Curiously, it is very ambiguous about political philosophy as the editors were quite eclectic promoting contradictory doctrines. From these three papers all of the basic philosophical tenets of Chartism are easily grasped.

What follows, then, is a brief exposition of some of that which is essential to any valid comprehension of the Chartist experience, disregarding the progressive aspect. I hope to make it understood that what will be presented here cannot, in my view, be explained away as conservatism which is transmuted into radicalism by their juxtaposition with obviously revolutionary sentiment. I contend that this element has a life of its own, and an influence of its own, distinct from that in the Journals discussed here. These papers stood for a progress toward political democracy and a more just distribution of the wealth of society among all the classes. These will be the traditional inegalitarian components of the various editors' philosophies which were imparted to the

reader because even the erstwhile radical could not escape their import.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Reform Bill of 1832, designed to preempt radical protest, provoked greater turmoil which climaxed in 1839-1842, the critical period of the Chartist Revolt. As with most compromises, this Act satisfied neither of the extreme elements about the issue of democratizing the government. Being more frustrated by the reform's limits, the radical democrats began agitating as soon as the Reform Bill's intent was known.[1] Originally the Reform camp had been composed of elements of the middle ranks and the working class against the entrenched reactionary landed elite in a struggle for control of the reins of power. What emerged after a tumultuous period was the willingness of the elite to co-opt elements of the middle powers in order to broaden their base of power. This was not meant to be--though often taken as--an attempt to create a democracy in Britain.[2] Those who were still alienated from the governing process rallied to the old radical slogans. They devised a program of reform highlighted by Universal Suffrage, known as Chartism. It flourished from the late 1830s through the early 1850s.[3]

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[1]David C. Moore, "The Other Face of Reform," Victorian Studies, Vol. 5 (Indiana University Press), 26.

[2]John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974), p. 21.

[3]Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1974), pp. 15-20.

The tense atmosphere which prevailed prior to 1832 prompted many politicians (who would later regret it) to employ the most extravagant language. Their hyperbolic speech was aiming for a French-style revolution to liberate the masses. Once brought into the ruling circle these same figures were most adamant against diluting their privileges by further broadening of the franchise.[4] Their apostasy was not sufficient to stifle the less fortunate. The new ruling coalition goaded the radicals further by sponsoring such unpopular acts as a New Poor Law and a rigorous Coercion Bill for Ireland, both in 1834. Initially the masses looked to the radicals for leadership. Then, in 1837, a joint committee of Parliamentarians and worker activists united to produce the People's Charter which featured Six Points considered to be sine qua non before a lasting peace between the classes would emerge.[5] Soon, however, the new union foundered as the head of the Parliamentarians for the Charter, Daniel O'Connell, switched his allegiance to the Whig Party in the crucial Litchfield House compact. Other radical Parliamentarians followed O'Connell's lead and they would become as ardently anti-Chartist as once they had been supportive.[6]

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[4]Walter Arnstein, "The Myth of the Triumphant Victorian Middle Class," Historian (Phi Alpha Theta International Honor Society) 37:217.

[5]J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Age of the Chartists 1832-54, (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1967), p. 268.

[6]R. G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), p. 5.

A second source of anti-governmental sentiment was a faction of the Tory Party. The two principals of this agitation were a Rev. Joseph R. Stevens and Richard Oastler, who was known as the "King of the factory children" because he sponsored unpopular legislation to protect them. Not at all enamored by democratic precepts this group were moralists and idealists, self-professed champions of a bloody revoultion. Their dissatisfaction was not with the established forms but with the way the dominant Whig Party employed the existing system.[7] Genuinely democratic figures who dominated the working class politics came to associate themselves with the Tory revolutionaries. In spicing their protest with these dogmas as a way of legitimizing it, the lower classes failed to comprehend that using such standards could be as much a deficit as an asset. At the same time that it made their protest against social conditions more telling it allowed the reform message to lose its democratic vigor. An emerging consensus for a rapid democratization became diluted with traditionalist and loyalist concerns stemming from the Tory ideology.

Chartism, in itself, was a departure from past practice for an artisan class who were, from the 1820s through the mid-1830s, engrossed with Robert Owen's Trade Union and its cooperative concepts. Chartism had distinct goals: Universal Suffrage, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts,

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[7] F. Rosenblatt, The Chartist Movement in Its Social and Economic Aspects, (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1967), p. 38.

payment of members (in Parliament's House of Commons) no property qualifications for Members of Parliament, and the secret ballot. Owen, who was a paternalistic mill owner, dealt in millennial prospects while the masses had matured and were looking toward specific goals.[8] The disenfranchised were not unanimous in the nature of their dissent, but initially all joined in to support the Charter. Some who wished it to be only a non-violent agitation were labeled "Moral Force". Their counterparts, who believed that any protest would lead to an inevitable armed struggle, promoted army drilling and obstreperous behavior. This was the "Physical Force" camp. Other noticeable radical factions associated with Chartism were collectivists, anti-collectivists, teetotalers, deferentials, and non-deferentials.[9]

The curious thing about the Chartists was that they presaged that form of democracy which Britain would come to have, as if they were realists rather than social visionaries. Any prescience notwithstanding, this movement failed in its day, though it did help shape a democratic way of life. The disparity between positions taken by elements in the movement was partly to blame for its failure. But perhaps even more to blame was the amalgamation of Chartism with reactionaries blindly opposed to any modernization of society. Both factors served to blunt this initiative. Many Chartists,

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[8]J. T. Ward, Chartism, (London: B. T. Bratsford Ltd., 1973), pp. 75-85.

[9]Gammage, History, p. 196.

often labeled as proto-democrats, are more easily distinguished by the slogans and sentiments of their protest as traditionalists enamored of oligarchial notions. The internal friction between the individual radical's own interest, and his loyalty to the large society whose norms were inegalitarian, would determine the nature of his support for a more egalitarian society.[10] Beyond their inability to free themselves from the mold of caste, the Chartist leaders further diffused the movement's impact by permitting petty personal feuds to fester.[11]

Since the politics of the age were extremely polarized, the democratic content of Chartism has led to its depiction as the conscious expression of the proletariat to free itself. Their plight was relieved by piecemeal reforms such as the regulation of Women's and Children's Labor (1842) and the abolition of duties on corn (1846) due in part to the pressure they employed.[12] Yet, as it stood, the Charter was not an engine for the redressing of social wrongs since there was no implicit provision for the redistribution of wealth. Socialistic and communistic schemes were extant and Chartist

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[10]R. S. Neale, Class and Class Consciousness in Early Nineteenth Century England", Victorian Studies (Indiana University Press) 12:12.

[11]West, History, p. 175.

[12]G. Kitson-Clark, "Hunger and Politics in 1842", Journal of Modern History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 360.

leaders, by and large disowned them. Upon closer analysis of the Charter's provisions it would seem to favor the ambitions of the broad cross section of the middle classes more than any other.[13] Undeniably the Charter would have altered the conditions of life for all for the better; but it would not be correct to view it, as the establishment did, as a sufficient innovation to enthrone the masses. Not aware of the subtle nuances of the argument, the populace gave enough support to make Chartism the "greatest popular movement since the days of the Commonwealth".[14] The oligarchy refused to make any distinctions as to whose interests this change would serve, knowing well enough that their monopoly was threatened. The judiciary, throughout the 19th century the bastion of the landed aristocracy, was employed with vigor to crush the agitation.[15] Though the Ship of State was never in grave peril it was blown about a bit by the fluctuating breezes and slowly drifting toward the modern political arrangement, with many a tack into and against the prevailing wind.

The Industrial Revolution unleashed many developments in Victorian society which were very powerful but not sufficient to destroy the aristocratic ideal of a landed gentry class

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[13] Neale, "Class and Class Consciousnes...", p. 14.

[14] Rosenblatt, Chartist Movement, p. 21.

[15] Richard W. Davis, "Deference and Aristocracy in the Time of the Great Reform Act", American Historical Review, (New Haven: Yale University Press) 81:636.

ruling society. At most, industrial wealth gained a secondary role in the governing alliance of these two classes.[16] The first half of the 19th century saw the complete triumph of industrialization in the economic sphere. To cite an instance: cotton mills consumed three times as much cotton in 1850 as they had in 1790. Crucial to a comprehension of the politics of the age was the fact that there was no corresponding increase in profits. Although profits did escalate by one-third, this was not due to an increase in productivity; instead a 50% drop in wages throughout the period provided the margin of gain.[17] Because the rise of industry had created large urban manufacturing districts peopled by the poor, these people acting in concert as a political mob were exerting a new influence on the elite. By the 1830s the masses were beginning to jeopardize the hegemony of the old elite which had won large victories in the Napoleonic era, such as outlawing of Trade Unions and imposition of other constraints. The ruling orthodoxy was Adam Smith's doctrine of laissez faire.[18] For the great mass of the population this meant a gradual degradation of their condition. As outcasts they would seek a political voice, one which would speak lovingly of the past but would also serve as a clarion call of a new democratic

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[16]Arnstein, "The Myth", p. 215.

[17]Foster, Class Struggle, p. 35.

[18]Trygve Tholfson, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 90.

future.

Had British society been able to employ the masses gainfully and fairly many problems would not have arisen; indeed, when it did, the great majority were visibly content with their lot. Instead the notorious boom-bust cycle of capitalism, which Karl Marx outlined in his critique, operated with a devastating effect on those who lived in filth, squalor, and hunger.[19] Major depressions came with very frightening regularity in the early 19th century: in 1826, '31, '36, '38, '39, and '41. Each one brought a major catastrophe for the people who should be more widely acclaimed for the restraint they exercised. Even at the height of the industrial disturbances of 1842 worker mobs would occupy factories and whole towns without any vandalism or theft occuring.[20] Their misery, along with their sobriety and respect for property and other traditional institutions, were the stuff which motivated the thoughts and actions of Chartist agitators.

As the century developed the British working class was depicted as more and more a burden on the rest of society. Poor Law reform was necessary in 1834 because the wealth of the nation could not support large numbers of cyclically unemployed workers. The new Act attempted to reduce the

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[19]Hammond, Age of the Chartists, p. 269.

[20]W. H. Crook, The General Strike: Labor's Tragic Weapon, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1935), pp. 4-10.

standard of life for many and, more than any single factor, was responsible for the groundswell of protest that followed.[21] Class antagonisms were spawned by these economic conditions which were alarming to both the rich and the poor. In the uneven advance, society was treated to the visions of future marvels and the spectacle of gross dislocation. At the base of the upheaval in society economic considerations were perhaps more important to Chartists than were abstract theories of democracy. This is easily noted in the tentative and contradictory statements about democracy in Chartist prose.

The Legacy of Paine's Rights of Man, printed in 1797, was such that many radicals identified with his demands for a republican society.[22] Undoubtedly they learned to look upon their potential political opportunity as leading to their economic salvation. The allure of democratic principles provided a rallying point against the expanding depredations of the oligarchy. The aristocracy, in turn, intent on maintaining their own levels of wealth at the expense of the masses, learned to blame social unrest not on their own peculations or the genuine unconscionable misery of the poor but on the bogey of democracy which was depicted as soaked in the blood of all that was fair and decent in revolutionary France. Each side chose to confuse itself about the true

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[21] Hammond, Age of the Chartists, p. 70.

[22] E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 102.

intentions of the other, obscuring the real nature of democracy in Chartism. Throughout the period in question democracy was an unsavory term and even its advocates were only half-hearted.

Old ways are changed only by the passage of time and through the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s the Victorian establishment's ethos maintained a strict allegiance to the British tradition of deference. More important by far, family ties and social rank were of greater concern than an individual's achievements or wealth in determining who would wield power in the state. The overwhelming aristocratic consensus had been that the events of 1832 had doomed them; in actuality their being superseded by individuals of the lower ranks was an event far in the future.[23] In the society of the early 19th century the triumph of the middle class was an illusory one; despite all the blustering notions of the inherent superiority of certain families remained sacrosanct. A very popular expression of some of these themes came in the 1860s from the pen of Walter Bagehot. His position was that all civilized life emanated from the social mores developed by the British society. Deference to one's superiors, founded on terror, ignorance and awe was absolutely vital; such democratic precepts as open discussion and national discourse were dangerous.[24] Blind obedience was crucial if one accepted Walter Bagehot's

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[23] Arnstein, "The Myth", p. 222.

[24] David Spring, "Walter Bagehot and Deference", American History Review (Boston, Mass., American History Society), June, 1976, p. 526.

thinking, and since he was a competent student of society, his ideas reflect the reality of British society. Bagehot saw the age as an apprenticeship of the middle class in the art of governing.[25] Often unnoticed is how greatly the discourse of the radical speeches resembled his denigration and contempt for democratic ideals.

Not surprisingly then, the upper and middle classes, with blind allegiance to the theories of Jeremy Bentham, produced the crisis of the 1830s. His disciples, the Utilitarians, seeking the "greatest good for the greatest number", produced the Poor Law Amendment Act. It was based on the conclusion that contraception, confinement and coercion were the proper and humane methods with which to deal with the burgeoning pauper class. With an eye on the goals of thrift and efficiency, and armed with Malthus's grim prediction that population would inevitably outstrip food supply, such ultra-conservatism was a revolutionary departure.[26] Master had not always looked on servant as a subspecies of unimprovable wretches. Once the ties that bound them together had been reciprocal; indeed, the Old Poor Law, the 43rd of Elizabeth, was an explicit statement of the rights of the poor to be treated kindly and paternally by the nobility. This had once been viewed as the undeniable right of Englishman. Paradoxically,

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[25] Spring, "Bagehot and Deference", p. 530.

[26] Dorothy Thompson, The Early Chartists, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p. 46.

the masses were more prepared to struggle for the old bonds than for new ideals. That the privileged were willing to abandon the old norms of paternal responsibilities became the source of grievance in the ensuing class struggle.[27]

Generally the greatest attention has been given to the challenge democracy presented to the customary mode of existence in Britain. Since the alienation of the poor from the established orders can be traced to discontent over the economy, as well as to the political state of affairs, more emphasis ought to be placed on economic trends. Chiefly, this was the age of the complete triumph of the Protestant ethic in British mores. The defence, by the new oligarchy, of the individual entrepeneur's liberties over those of the laboring class remains as the hallmark of that victory.[28] More than any assault from below, the abandonment of paternalism (sanctioned by deference) shattered the fragile peace of society. Chartists and radicals played astutely upon the disloyalty of the nobility and toyed with ideas of democracy.

The new attitude of the ruling class did not set well with either conservatives or radicals. The ravages of the laboring classes by these developments were unbearable to conservatives as well. As noted, they initiated the campaign of violence against the depredations of the wealthy industrial

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[27] Gammage, History, p. 33.

[28] Tholfson, Working Class Radicalism, p. 190.

class. In doing so they were able to influence the democratic aspirations of the masses with conservative shibboleths. These agents of the conservative assault seemingly became Chartists. However, the response of the elite was to downplay the conservative element of Chartism by insinuating that their criticism was not based on traditional morality but on the "red herring" of democracy. Naturally their ploy was to discredit all Chartists by ignoring the sizeable conservative group in the Chartist protest. As the establishment of that era hoped to deal with the threat by obfuscation, so they have set the tone for historical discussion of these events in a misleading fashion.

The social setting detailed here produced a social phenomenon peculiar to the period. A large expansion of the middle classes had occurred in the fifty years before 1800, and after 1800 these groups participated in the population explosion. Their children grew up in an uncertain economic age and, bred to the ambitions of upward mobility, they discovered they were no longer even able to hold their own. Partially educated and given the skills to be managers and the like, they still were not similar to the aristocracy who were certain their talents were exclusively the possession of title and rank. This second generation middle class was not the product of a rigid mold and they fully speculated about political ideologies and came to be citizens apart from what had

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[29]Rosenblatt, The Chartist Movement, p. 187.

been the norm. This social strata, antagonistic to those both above and below their own social rank, became the major participants in radicalism, especially the Chartist struggle against the upper classes. After their sense of self-worth was reinforced by their success in life (following the economic upward trend in the middle of the century) they would become adherents of the status quo. In their heyday as sponsors of the democratic revolution their disdain for wealth and peace was no more conspicious than their contempt for the poor whom they felt to be especially distasteful.[30] Lacking confidence in the democratic bias, this group was never as wholeheartedly espoused to their cause as their enemies thought. Yet, as spokesmen for radical causes their beliefs predominated.

One individual, cited as a member of this "uneasy class", John Stuart Mill, decried the harrassment of the poor who were under constant attack. Yet he too was against giving laborers a vote. Scorn and contempt were the accepted manner of dealing with radical theories and ambitions.[31] Against this onslaught a true workers' party had little chance of survival. Indeed, once the masses were fully and finally dissuaded from the Charter's principles, they themselves opted to define the working class in a highly stratified fashion.[32]

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[30] Neale, "Class and Class Consciousness", p. 15.

[31] Gammage, History, p. 158.

[32] Preston Slossen, The Decline of the Chartist Movement, (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.), p. 155.

In this synthesis the tentative groping toward the liberalization of attitudes was forwarded by spokesmen who were unable to assert their position without recourse to the traditional reactionary norms of behavior.

Although consistently defeated on every proposal in the 1830s, the worker interest was still not so impotent as to be unable to carry on the struggle for basic reform. One article of reform which, if gained, would have facilitated other more sweeping measures was the reduction of the Stamp Duty on political literature from 4d to 1d, which was advanced in 1836. This would have allowed the working masses to support a press whose role would be to agitate for reforms.[33] The Chartists were able to develop this literary protest so fully that theirs became a model for all subsequent journalism of this kind and they were the ones who initially realized the potential of this format for promoting the emancipation of the working class.[34]

The audience for this literature was the 66% of the working class who were functionally literate despite the formidable obstacles that faced a person of this rank who wanted to learn to read and write.[35] As is usually the case in such

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[33]Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 84-85.

[34]David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 97-100.

[35]R. K. Webb, "Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England", English Historical Review (English Historical Association), 65:335.

situations, the number of those sophisticated enough to be able to present the political ambitions of this class, having themselves experienced that class's existence, comprised a select few. Understandably, those who did write for the workers found that the vehicle for their improvement had not only raised them above the level of their class but had inculcated values alien to their role as the workers' champions.[36] The ethos of the age held that education and culture were exclusively the possession of the elite. In this manner an additional burden was placed on those, such as the Chartists, who were attempting to raise the political standards of the working class to the level of the general society. To understand how difficult this would be in light of these cultural trends is the principal objective of the study of Chartist literature.

As could be expected, reformers clothed their response in the jargon of democracy juxtaposed with the conservative maxims more characteristic of their age. Some writers, following the example of William Cobbett, assumed that their message would appeal to a larger audience than the working class. Feargus O'Connor was one representative of those who tempered their democratic statement with large doses of reactionary patriotism and social concerns.[37] Others

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[36] Neale, "Class and Class Consciousness", p. 15

[37] Max Beer, A History of British Socialism, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1940), pp. 148-152.

were so alienated from the general culture that they were able to advance ultra-democratic proposals unencumbered with the sentiments of the dominant culture. On occasion the unfettered spirit of British democracy toyed with the notion that even the children be given a vote so as to have the outcome at the polls be as near an expression of the whole society's wishes as possible.[38] One key to understanding why radical opinion assumed this makeup is to remember that the hostile judiciary used every coercive means to restrain this press, even after restraints were supposedly relaxed in 1836-37. Usually no distinction was made as to the degree of an author's loyalty, it being enough to condemn him that he aimed an appeal at the masses in the name of their political freedoms. The orthodox viewpoint held that, by nature, the radical press was a disruptive element which imperiled the state.[39] No apparent care was taken to discriminate as much as it would have vindicated their position to do so, as to which organs of the Pauper Press were inimical to their oligarchical system's stability.

Mark Hovell in his book, The Chartist Movement, states: "By 1838 the Radical program was recognized as no longer an end in itself but as a means to an end--the social and economic regeneration of society."[40] The writer of this statement,

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[38]Gorgon, 23 May 1818, p. 1.

[39]Hollis, Pauper Press, pp. 29-31.

[40]Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), p. vii.

writing in the early 19th century, was generalizing about the press and insofar as it may be presumed to have served any positive function, this is it. This author's view failed to take into account the many strands of traditionalism perpetuated in the radical program. One ought not to assume that this meant that all conservative philosophy in the press was anamolous; clearly it was not. Paradoxically, many authors branded as ochlocrats were mainly, or at least in good part, basic conservatives. This phenomenon can be established by examining Chartist newspapers of the 1839-1842 period, the time of greatest danger for the establishment when it was most threatened by popular revolt and, therefore, acted most ruthlessly in defence of a social contract made on its own terms.

Three journals of great interest were: The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser, published in Leeds; Glasgow, Scotland's Chartist Circular; and McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal of Ashton-under-Lyme and Manchester, England. The question as to why these were significant will be answered by way of critical analysis of the extent of their anti-democratic opinion. The pursuit of this thought will demonstrate the incomplete nature of British democracy as exhibited in the Chartist movement. Many of the determinations to be made will highlight the ambiguous nature of the Whig dominated establishment depiction of Chartist ideology as alien and as a threat to British traditions. Not only did the Chartists agitate for a truly democratic culture they also, in turn, buttressed the aristocratic ideal.

Also to be borne in mind is the fact that these digressions, as significant as they are, were not sufficient by themselves to deflect the will of the masses from its desire for a democratic social order. The legacy imparted to the coming generations who were able to construct that new order included an uncertain, hesitant, groping manner, all of which is mirrored in the Chartist experience.

CHAPTER II

Scotland's Chartist Circular

Thirty-four and a half million tons of cotton were consumed by the Scottish textile mills in 1834, twice the amount that had been processed in 1814. Virtually the entire textile industry, Scotland's largest manufacturing concern, was concentrated within a twenty-five mile radius of Glasgow.[41] Life in Glasgow was fully geared to the factory regime by the mid 1830s.[42] This meant all the ills of early industrial Britain were present: endemic overcrowding due to the population boom coupled with an influx of Irish labor. As early as 1810 trade unions had sponsored a long and bitter strike. That year management triumphed and the all male Handloom Weavers Union was crushed. One of the largest of the outlawed Trade Combinations, it was deemed responsible for violent tactics (including assassination and acid-throwing) by a Parliamentary report of 1825 on Combinations.[43] Glasgow, a typical early Victorian industrial urban complex, displayed the potentialities and mounting miseries of the late 1830s and early 1840s. Its working class was known as belligerent and independent. Yet, due to the vagaries of that age and this setting, the

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[41] J. A. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp. 51-52.

[42] Ward, Chartism, p. 46.

[43] Clapham, An Economic History, p. 215.

radical organs of Scotland served to hinder the emergence of a truly democratic culture.

Many parallels can be drawn between Glasgow and Birmingham or Manchester, though by themselves they do not tell the whole story. Scottish opinions about class issues were regressive by English and Welsh standards. To indicate the nature of that society, the absence of a felt need for a national system of poor relief is one revealing trait. Charity was the responsibility of the parish board of elders much more than it was to the South and "great obloquy was placed on being a pauper".[44] Therefore, though the standard of life in Scotland was lower than in England or Wales, there was a great deal less concern given to closing the gap between the rich and the poor. Bearing this in mind, it is worthwhile to gauge the ideology of the organized reform groups, such as Scottish Chartism, for what they reveal about emerging democratic consensus in Great Britain.

The climate in Glasgow and vicinity was polarized after a long unsuccessful strike in 1834 which, combined with a deep recession, plunged the lower ranks into a dismal state.[45] Due to the advance of technology the handloom weaving craft, the mainstay of Scotland's independent working class, was doomed to extinction. Steam driven factories superseded the small

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[44] Alexander Wilson, The Chartist Movement in Scotland, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1970), pp. 9-11.

[45] Ibid., p. 5.

entrepreneur's cottage looms in the weaving process. As would be predictable, the long drawn out process of the weavers' demise exacerbated existing social tensions wherever textiles were an important part of the local economy.[46] Due to their strong conservative traditions Scottish workers clung stubbornly to old quasi-feudal loyalties without benefit from a reciprocal loyalty of the oligarchy.

William Thomson, at one time Secretary of the Scottish National Association for the Protection of Handloom Weavers, and a Glasgow radical, became a national Chartist personality. With Robert Owen and others he helped develop the cooperative movement, even cosponsoring with Owen the first National Cooperative Convention held in Manchester in 1831. Prior to that, in 1824, Thomson wrote An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness, a book which provided the intellectual inspiration for the fledgling cooperative movement.[47] The utopian Thomson was a rare figure who, when he came to support Chartism, did not abandon Owenism but tried to incorporate the one into the other. The Charter, a blueprint for the restructuring of society, rejected millennialism and looked to political action to replace the longing for a moral regulation. Thomson was elected director of the Universal Suffrage Committee of Scotland in 1837,

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[46] Rosenblatt, Chartist Movement, p. 60.

[47] Ward, Chartism, p. 34.

which indicated the popularity of his viewpoint. Indeed, that body chose him to edit their political journal, The Chartist Circular, which first appeared September 14, 1839.[48] Apparently official Scottish Chartism was comfortable with his bent for paternalism and economic rather than political goals, though such ideals were becoming outmoded in other areas of Great Britain.

At the outset the paper did quite well and the peak circulation of 22,500 was reached early. Since, like all radical press, it was distributed through a network of alehouses, coffee shops, union halls, and discussion clubs, it has been estimated that more than a million read (or had read to them) its opinions each week. At this peak of its popularity it was one of the largest such organs in Great Britain.[49] Then, in 1839, Feargus O'Connor began to attack Scottish Chartism for its allegedly reactionary thought. Feargus found Thomson and his cohorts especially inimical, denouncing them as the "Saints of Glasgow". As O'Connor was at the height of his popularity at this point, his criticism was telling. Soon the circulation of The Chartist Circular plunged dramatically, never to recover, though it lingered until the July 6, 1842, edition, which was the 145th.[50] As a clue to the nature of The Circular's content,

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[48] The Chartist Circular, 14 September 1839, p. 1.

[49] Royden Harrison, Gillian Woodven, Robert Deuncan, eds., The Warwick Guide to Labor Periodicals 1790-1970, (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press Inc., 1977), p. 73.

[50] Ibid., p. 74.

O'Connor, in The Northern Star, declared this organ to be the most reactionary aspect of the depressingly conservative Glasgow scene.[51] Given O'Connor's tremenduous ego it might be charged that perhaps the success of a rival paper was enough to instigate his tirade, but he may have been accurately labeling the nature of the Circular's prose. This latter conclusion is borne out by a review of the content of that paper.

How did Chartism differ in Glasgow from the Southern version? One Circular plea: "Peace, Law, and Order instead of the insane war to the knife of Oastler and Stephens"[52] is a concise expression of the principal divergence. Oastler and Stephens were prime favorites of Feargus O'Connor. A deep attachment to patient suffering and an attitude of resignation to a gradual amelioration of their lot were emotions bitterly denounced by O'Connor's Chartism. This should not be taken as an indication that conditions were in any sense better for the working class. All the petty trappings of class conflict were visible and the Document--a device used to break unions--was employed with great frequency to hamper the progress of the lower classes. Unlike those in the rest of the Kingdom, Scottish laborers were docile enough to suffer such indignities and did not offer the counter-threat of revolt. Nonetheless, a sophisticated--albeit quiescent--radicalism did emerge. Glasgow

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[51]Gammage, Chartist, pp. 84-86.

[52]Wilson, Chartism in Scotland, p. 27.

Chartists attached the Six Points to the head of the list of reforms. These included free trade, direct taxation, reduction of defense spending, and a national system of education. Those who favored legal forms of agitation and had reverence for the established order favored this brand of Chartism. The loyalty of the masses was a paradox as average weekly wages were forced down from 25 shillings a week in 1834 to 18 shillings a week in 1837 due to the power of the bourgeoise.[53] In such a plight it would have seemed the working classes needed protection by government regulation to restrain business rather than Free Trade which would benefit the middle class at the expense of the working class.

Scottish nationalism also contributed to the passive attitudes of reformers. It was a hallmark of the national character and Glasgow became the center of the society. All this was reflected in The Chartist Circular's dissemination of of reactionary concepts regarding democracy and the existence of aristocratic government. Destined to be an anachronism by 1839, The Chartist Circular program of reform was a curious pastiche of British political philosophy combining the aspirations of the middle ranks with a call for order and security of property as well as halfhearted demands for an immediate democraticization of society.[54]

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[53]Rosenblatt, Chartist Movement, pp. 60-65.

[54]Chartist Circular, 15 August 1840, p. 3.

Rather than gaining ground the devotion of the laboring mass to Thomson's strain of Owenism bore little fruit. Faced with the reality of the workhouses, the popular mood was for direct action not millennial cant. Revolutionary ideas were popular; the more violent, the more popular.[55] In the face of this, for whatever reasons, The Circular promoted their Owenism under the guise of Chartism. The vast majority of moderate and left wing Chartists tended to view the attainment of Universal Suffrage as a prelude to a wholesale reordering of the Constitution.[56] The Glasgow functionaries imagined it to be only the first step toward the long awaited moral regeneration.[57] The Circular attitudes failed to mirror the frustrations and bitterness which animated Chartism elsewhere. As a policy theirs reflected the subservience to the status quo which benefited only those who had some measure of wealth, offering little succor to the masses. This pattern of thought reflects more clearly than in any of the other papers the ability of reformers in the age to cling to middle class dogmas while mouthing phrases of egalitarianism. It provides the most extreme instance of the often overlooked regressive tendencies of Chartism.

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[55] David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 154.

[56] Ibid., p. 58.

[57] The Chartist Circular 12 October 1839, p. 1.

A preeminent distinction here is that the Scottish organ attempted to make it clear that its editors believed that their agitation was permissible and complied with the law. Greater space and frequency was given to establishing the constitutional precedents for the Six Points than in recording how the upper classes were willing to use any extra-legal means to prevent even the most modest reforms from coming about. Elaborate references were made to works such as the Saxon Institutes, Magna Carta, and Tacitus' De More Germanium, and to those of Locke, Blackstone and Coke; and such phrases as "ancient practices" were used to signify the legality of the Charter's claims. Although basic liberties were said to flow from the Charter's provisions the delusion was maintained that this would make the Charter appealing to the aristocracy.[58] In reality, no matter how the author phrased the Charter to correspond to his sense of aristocratic propriety, these proposals would never gain favor with Parliament since that body was the expression of a class interest. At its very core the nature of this prose was fraudulent, permitting rambling dissertations about the glories of education, etc., which offered nothing concrete to the lower classes but instead a further buttressing of the sham legalisms used to oppress the poor.

In constant dread of being branded criminal because of their actions the editors catered to upper class sensibilities.

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[58]The Chartist Circular, 20 November 1839, p. 1.

They went so far as to clothe the demands of the Six Points in the humbug of British paternalism.[59] In that era the deferential caste of the British character was overwhelming; therefore, appealing to such motivations conditioned the readership to await action on their behalf from the appropriate British institutions. Often reiterating the mindless chauvinism of the aristocracy The Circular pointed to only one proper channel, that being reform from above. Whatever might be presumed to have been the wisdom of this policy it contradicted the essential aspects of the Charter.

The Circular argued that to grant the right to vote to every man would have the effect of making "the soldier patriotic, lawgiver wise, judge just, monarch virtuous, and people submissive".[60] This bold assertion was accompanied by the usual Circular references to ancient statutes and practices which were thought to bolster the argument. In a similar vein, a few editions later, it was argued that the extension of the franchise would usher in the reign of virtue.[61]

To square the heartfelt desire of a spokesman for a "virtuous monarch" with the republican cause is a difficult task. Even more difficult to comprehend is the hope for a

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[59] The Chartist Circular, 28 September 1839, p. 2.

[60] Ibid., 14 September 1839, p. 1.

[61] Ibid., 28 September 1839, p. 1.

"people submissive" as one might expect a true democrat to call for a "people wise and aware" or "independent and free". Little wonder there was such a wide divergence of opinion between this group and O'Connor's histrionics as the latter called for the people to arm in order to boldly reshape the future. Once again, it is evident The Circular serves as the classic case of tradition-oriented Chartism devoted to social democracy based on the deference network.

Other forms of unabashedly conservative doctrine, antithetical to the revolutionary democratic element in Chartism, abound in The Chartist Circular. Thomas Atwood, a Tory and the founder of the Birmingham Political Union, built a career by advocating the exclusive use of specie in public exchange. In Reform Bill days Atwood was considered by Francis Place to have been the most popular politician in the kingdom. His notoriety culminated in his election to Parliament where his allegiance to currency reform was so extreme that it was considered an eccentricity.[62] Oddly, while no serious Chartist leader accepted these views on currency, The Circular promoted them. Atwood's position was representative of a small minority of the Tory Party and, although his stance might have forwarded the cause of the working class, it was most beneficial to wealth based on equity in land, that is, the landed gentry. Beyond advancing the notion that all should receive a decent livelihood the

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[62]Asa Briggs, "Thomas Atwood and the Economic Background of the Birmingham Political Union", Cambridge Historical Journal, 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 191-192.

editorial position of The Circular was that the lower orders should accept their basic inferiority as human beings. The nature of ultra-Toryism promoted by some articles in this journal was bound to promote the dependency of the lower orders on the paternalistic benevolence of an elite group whose ideals were deemed irreproachable by this journal. As this is an habitual mode of response in The Circular it registers as their compliance with the presuppositions of the inegalitarian dominant culture. This would mean Chartism without the levelling or erasure of class distinctions, a rendering of the movement which denies the obviously revolutionary intent of its program.[63] To put it in another fashion: The Circular attempted to make democratic fervor subservient to the neo-feudal social contract contained in the Reform Bill.

One allegory in this journal, entitled "Albert" or "The Spirit of Freedom", expressed many of its fundamental attitudes. The fact that, in the allegory, Albert founds a republic by leading a revolt against his monarchy is only part of the story, one of a sequence of events that belies the author's real intent. Further details reveal the ambiguous nature of Chartist philosophy.[64]

Albert of Alhasen is a son of the aristocracy of the mythical kingdom of Buetraria. He worships the ideals for which his illustrious forefathers, who were great warriors, had died. Albert's father, on his deathbed, gives Albert his

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[63] The Chartist Circular, 21 September 1840, p.2.

[64] Ibid., 12 September through 30 October, 1840.

sword and tells him he might have to use it, not against a foreign power but against the enemy within the kingdom. Not so subtle allusions make it easy for the reader to grasp the fact that the fable of Buetraria is a metaphor describing Britain's current condition. Once her monarch and nobles had been her pride because they loved liberty and justice above all. The allegory continues that alone, Albert enters his manhood and is perplexed because he finds that, just as in his father's dire prediction, the state is in decay, corrupted by a proud vain aristocracy, a degenerate elite; precisely all that their patrimony should have prevented them from becoming.

Albert, and a compatriot, a dear friend, Noble Fitzallen, are both products of the finest educational system in the world: proud jewel possessed by a corrupted aristocracy. In manner and bearing these young stalwarts are depicted as anything but common. In all ways they surpass all others.[65] Therefore when Albert is the unanimous choice of the people to lead their republic much of the force of their democratic motivation is lost. One feels that Albert, the rightful king, has been crowned, not that a republic has been instituted. These cautious reformers in Buetraria are not prepared to make a leader of a common person. Alien to their conceptualizations is the belief that society contains a multitude of individuals with the competence to govern.[66]

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[65] The Chartist Circular, 12 September 1840, p. 2.

[66] Ibid., 26 September 1840, pp. 2-3.

The whole fable is simplistic; the popular cause triumphs without a struggle over the predatory materialistic ruling class. A mindless presentation is made of a romance between Albert and a captive of the King, a maiden named Barbara. She has been kidnapped to prevent her inheritance of the estate of her noble father. As one would expect in a tale of this type her tremenduous beauty and nobility of character had made her a rallying point for the people's cause. When they marry the people are given an unimpeachable royal couple. The author obviously revered the current social arrangements so much that he made every effort in this curious story to maintain the continuity of tradition after the democratic revolution. Of course, this in no way inspired the reader's egalitarian passions. He knew, as did every honest British aristocrat of that period, that only one of that select body, educated in their prescribed manner, would make a fit leader.[67]

Morality tales like this one were popular in that age, especially among the working classes which Chartism claimed to represent in their struggle for legal equality. This one is an excellent primer in conservative principles. An example of the correct posture of a worker toward his superiors is sketched here. Laborers instantly recognize Albert as their leader and are prepared to defer to him.[68] What were his personal attributes? He exceeded all others in degree of perfection,

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[67] The Chartist Circular, 14 September 1840, p. 2.

[68] Ibid., 3 October 1840, pp. 2-3.

possessing all the earmarks of glorious nobility. Where other workers had succumbed to venality he retained a Christian conscience, a positive distinction. The respect the people had for his station was benign because, in the recent past, this caste had been magnificent. Only the latest monarch, not the institution of monarchy, was discredited. As it stands this was only a democratic idealization on The Circular's part. More typical were the propositions that there was no need for a democratic revolution to depose the monarch. Still, the incongruity of many notions about society that were linked together in this story about the Spirit of Freedom was not apparent to the editorial board.

> "What is a Whig?--a political shuffler without honor, integrity, or patriotism. Dissumulation, selfishness, and baseness are his prime moving purposes. In private life he is a stately despot and surly tyrant; cunning and hypocrisy are too frequently familiar to his mind. . .[68]

It was decided in an early issue that the nation's malady, which caused all the discontent, originated with Whig government. This was logical, the Whigs had been in power over seven years, and it was a typical Chartist refrain. An objective analyst of the political parties of that period believed not a "shadow of a shade" of real distinction in policy existed between the Tory and Whig factions. The Circular was prepared to go further by a deification of the Tory Squire. Apparently able to delude themselves about the reality of party politics and the democratization of society, the editors of this journal tended to decieve the readership as well. By discovering an

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[68] The Chartist Circular, 21 May, 1840, p. 3.

affinity between the democratic ideal and Tory reactionary idealism, the ideology of The Circular could not break away from the dominant culture to produce a set of dogmas that would facilitate the erection of a democratic counterculture.

How far this paper departed from the mainstream of Chartism was evidenced by the preference which Glasgow book-dealers gave to a Northern Star franchise over that of The Circular. O'Connor forbade the sale of his paper alongside The Circular because he feared it would promote Scottish un-Chartistlike deliberations.[70] The Circular was an unpopular production because it was so obviously reactionary; yet it serves to show how Chartism could be viewed.

The Circular's presentation documents the ineptitude of the editorial board to print what the masses wanted to hear. This was an age when the British were fascinated with democratic reforms and the dream of what kind of society they might produce. The Scottish character, which clung to the rugged individualism of Presbyterianism, dictated that Scottish Chartists disavow a collective response by revolt. The Chartist Circular was anxious to preserve the system as it was. Their attention to legalism was out of step with those revolutionaries who were willing to scrap past precedents in order boldly to revise the future. Instead, this digest maintained allegiances to doctrines of Moral Force, submission, and constitutionalism the principles the most reactionary elements of the aristocracy wanted the people to hear. This propaganda by the

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[70] Wilson, Chartism in Scotland, p. 71.

leading Scottish Chartist journal illuminates the paradox of this "foreign" brand of radicalism. Cries from The Northern Star that this was a sham radical paper emanating from a conservative political force are, therefore, not solely The Star's usual hyperbole. The editors of The Star were accurately concluding that the aristocratic principle in particular, and elitism in general, were defended as much as they were questioned in The Chartist Circular. This is not meant to imply that The Star exhibited the virtues The Circular lacked. The position of The Star and The Circular as rival organs, and the policies of their respective editors as leaders of contending factions within the Chartist movement, cannot be discounted as motivating factors in their editorial content.

No democrat who believed in the collective wisdom of the masses could be comfortable with The Circular. In Thomson's perfect society the people chose in an intelligent fashion to follow a master figure who would govern. Obviously this vision of a leader resembles a king more than it does an elected official--such as a president. The democratic tradition maintains that the chief official is not above, but of, the people, and is no way like a god as Albert is depicted in The Circular. This paper's solution to the spiritual and political dislocation of the age is couched in fantasies about the glory of the aristocracy and the eminence of the royalty in bygone days. Even their preference for Robert Owen's philosophy is a retrogression. Owen was known to be a conservative on many social issues and treated the laborers in his model communities

paternally.[71] Discussion of the Charter's Six Points and the democratic implications of its achievement are obscured by relating them to the sagacious statutes of this or that monarch's reign. Indeed, this paper was adamant in assuring the reader, as in no other Chartist journal, that a monarch was wholly compatible with British democracy; this is ample indication of what cautious piecemeal reformers it was composed. As in some other Chartist political journals the conservatism of The Circular is a more engrossing feature than its liberalism. Should it be said they were democrats nonetheless, it must be added "of a sort"; for they did not believe the common man was fit to rule. The Circular's assumption of an innate inferiority of the great mass of men to a few select individuals gives one an approximation of how completely this period was oriented toward the idealizations of the upper classes. The rigid mold of custom was a constraint this body could not shake off.

Since the dominant culture inculcated every order with a reverence for the elite's reactionary opinions, it was improbable that Chartists could avoid falling into the error of repeating the mistakes made under the influence of such thoughts. Some few exceptional characters almost completely purged their political thought processes of these principles, and became genuine democrats. The overwhelming majority were only partially effective on this score, mixing their democratic

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[71] P. Hollis, Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England 1815-1850, (London: Rutledge and Keegan Paul, 1973), p. xxvi.

propaganda with rather incongruous conservative maxims and generalizations. The Chartist Journal of Glasgow, Scotland, was a rare specimen due to the fact that its divergences from the norms of the Establishment were relatively small for a radical political digest of its stripe. It is an excellent example of the persuasiveness of the aristocratic appeal in parts of Britain (such as Scotland) where the political culture was still essentially reactionary.

CHAPTER III

McDouall's Republican Journal and Trades Advocate

A handsome young Chartist agitator, 25 year old Peter McDouall, was sentenced, in August, 1839, to twelve months in jail at Chester Castle.[72] The child of comfortably situated middle class Scottish parents, he had a lucrative medical practice before he was arrested. Before his premature death in 1854 while he was on the run, a political refugee in Australia, this young man poured his great talents into promoting Chartism. In both 1839 and 1842 he gained notoriety as England's most dangerous radical in the government's opinion.[73]

The Attorney General of England, Chester Hill, prosecutor at the 1839 trial of McDouall, accused him of "filling his own pockets at the expense of the poor".[74] McDouall chose to defend himself--a tactic adopted by many leading Chartists, most notably "Bronterre" O'Brien. McDouall, who was one of the movement's leading orators, was especially eloquent at his trial; many were tremenduously moved by his presentations. His only motivation, he explained, was the urgent need for a relief of the poor. Being a doctor to the working classes in the manufacturing district of Rainsbottom, he was well acquainted

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[72] Thompson, Early Chartists, p. 41.

[73] Gammage, Chartist, p. 228.

[74] Ibid., p. 158.

with the degraded physiques of the masses. By describing several pathetic cases he aroused the pity and sympathy of all present in the thronged courtroom. Attorney General Hill, in his summation, referred to the defendant's gifted addresses as ample evidence of how extremely dangerous he was to society. All the more reason, said the prosecutor, to return a guilty verdict, thereby preventing McDouall from being released. Hill's wishes were complied with when two guilty verdicts were handed down. To the original charge of unlawful assembly had been added a second of conspiracy that stemmed from McDouall's conduct at the trial.[75]

Confined to a felon's cell, the Scotchman received the harshest legal treatment permissible. The jail at Chester Castle was one of the worst in the kingdom. Those incarcerated there found an excessively damp condition gravely compounded by the strain on one's health brought on by the customary meager diet and other harsh conditions.[76] From his cell he wrote melancholy verses in a romantic vein:

> An thus they are lying, in lone dungeons dying,
> The seven friends of freedom, the tried and the true.
> By slow famine wasted, life's bright vision blasted,
> 'Tis summer's prime shaded by winter's dark hue.[77]

He emerged from prison with his "excessively impulsive" nature

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[75]Gammage, Chartist, p. 159.

[76]Ibid., p. 187.

[77]Ibid., p. 189.

supposedly under better control. He had sworn to keep the peace for five years after his jail term, but in two years he was preparing to flee to France. Not only had he broken the peace but, in 1845, he was considered the most extreme Chartist by the government.

In a short career as a radical politician, McDouall had earned the reputation as the personification of the left of Chartism by 1842, the year of the greatest discontent. Many aspects of his personal philosophy, among them his inflexible defense of the capitalistic ethic, belie this rather facile characterization. Undoubtedly the legend surrounding McDouall's activities distorted his real positions. Actually he was the kind of Chartist who accepted the traditional class-oriented society along with its implied subordination of the working class interest.[78]

Life as a political exile began after his conduct during the great unrest of 1842. An address urging the masses to arm and prepare for a struggle with the establishment was issued in the name of the Chartist National Assembly: "Cowardice, treachery, womanly fear, would cast our cause back for half a century."[79] Lines like this startled the reactionary regime in the midst of a crisis. It was not sure it could survive. Major riots had broken out in that year in Preston, throughout

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[78]Rosenblatt, Chartist Movement, pp. 113-119.

[79]Gammage, Chartist, p. 228.

Lancashire and the Pottery districts. Disturbances had occurred in all the manufacturing districts. It was the year of the Plug Plot, an idea which is considered a revolutionary act even in the 20th century. Indeed, the Chartist Executive Committee issued a call for a revolution full of the usual lurid denunciations and an especially strident order for mass insurrection. Immediately thereafter the authorities made the author of that piece the most hunted man in the kingdom. McDouall, who was not on the Executive Committee, was the man responsible for what became the notorious Executive Order.[80] In great haste he made his way to France. Those left behind and known to be his close consorts were the victims of magisterial harrassment.

In the short period following his release from prison and prior to his defection under duress, McDouall edited a Chartist weekly. The first twenty-two issues, beginning on April 3, 1841, were titled McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal. A different masthead, McDouall's Chartist Journal and Trades Advocate, appeared on the final five issues.[81] Neither the format nor the editorial policy was altered when the title changed. The paper was published and released simultaneously in Ashton-under-Lyme and in Manchester. The former town was the editor's base, and it had the reputation of

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[80] Gammage, Chartist, p. 230.

[81] Harrison, Woolven, Duncan, Warwick Guide, p. 300.

being the most radical town in the kingdom.[82] Abel Haywood, a veteran democratic bookdealer and printer, produced the paper in Manchester. By the reputation of the author and the location of the journal, one could have expected this to be a left-wing organ. Since only twenty-seven issues appeared it apparently could not attract a readership. This was often the case with extremist organs; a more moderate appeal aimed at the middle class audience was usually required to gain a large readership.[83] An organ with appeal solely to the working class could not survive the hard times when laborers could not spare the minimal cost of subscriptions.[84] This paper gave every indication that it was ultra-radical.

Collaborating with McDouall in this venture was James O'Brien, who was a "Chartist and something more".[85] Earlier, in the summer of 1839, this duo had shared the platform on a nationwide speaking tour. Their speeches were the "best excitement" for a rural police force according to the Manchester Times.[86] One would expect their joint publication to be an extremist's digest.

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[82] Jones, Chartism and Chartists, p. 78.

[83] Ibid., p. 101.

[84] Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 110.

[85] Jones, Chartism and Chartists, p. 97.

[86] Alfred Plummer, Bronterre, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 105.

An essayist in his youth, James O'Brien had been judged outstanding and given a medal by Sir Walter Scott. He was the son of a lower middle class wine merchant whose family had struggled to maintain its respectability. O'Brien became disenchanted with Kings Inn as a young adult, and since he found legal circles corrupted he turned to radical pursuits. As an expert on the French Revolution he wrote a celebrated history, Babeouf's Conspiracy for Equality, published in 1836. His sympathies made him well known as the "Champion of Robespierre". He had brought his education to a dedicated service as editor of the radical papers: The Poor Man's Guardian, The Northern Star, and his own organ, The Southern Star, before joining McDouall.

A member of the Physical Force camp, O'Brien advocated violent revolutionary policies in his early Chartist career. His arrest in February, 1840, removed him from the editor's chair at The Southern Star permanently. At that time he was acquitted due to a spirited intelligent self defense. Shortly after, he was jailed on a similar charge stemming from his extreme pronouncements. Often he offered "to try any means from marbles to manslaughter to carry the Charter".[87] Like McDouall, the Irishman was celebrated for his excessive zeal in pursuit of the popular cause. He came to renounce the Physical Force concept after his release from eighteen months of imprisonment in 1842.

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[87]Plummer, Bronterre, p. 115.

O'Brien also indicated in many ways that his thoughts mirrored the sensibilities of the dominant culture. The institution of private property was sacrosanct to his eyes. A hallmark of his ideology was a rigid rejection of socialism which included an endorsement of capitalistic motivations balanced with Christian moral precepts. His thoughts on these themes were not, for this era, radical; but, somehow, his presentation of them branded him as a criminal. Unlike some Chartists, who were collectivists, O'Brien was a basic economic conservative who could not tolerate socialistic schemes.[88] Instead he exalted the competitive natures of the predominant Protestant ethic so dear to the ruling classes.[89] Though he wished, as did McDouall, to soften the more brutal features of the system, he could not countenance a rejection of the system as unethical. He chose to dress his complaints in rhetoric about a Christian diety, exactly as McDouall did. In this manner both affirmed their faith in, and loyalty to, British traditionalism.

McDouall had come to the first Chartist Convention in 1839 as a representative of Ashton-under Lyme's radical populace. The community's local favorite was the Rev. J.R. Stevens, the first orator to be arrested in 1839. At Stevens's trial

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[88] Plummer, Bronterre, p. 201.

[89] Ibid., p. 204.

the defendant testified that he loathed all democratic proposals.[90] He uttered the most fantastic oaths and calls for retribution soaked in blood, combined with numerous references to Old Testament tyrants and their fall. Though he was convicted and given a year in prison he remained at rock bottom a Tory fundamentalist. This entire period saw an assault on the forces that carried the Reform Bill from both the political left and the political right. Archconservative Tories had always assumed that no amount of juggling with the franchise would alter the one pressing need--to relieve the burdens of the poor.[91] Stevens represented this interest which, though it had no enthusiasm for democracy, made large contributions to Chartism. It would be unwise to presume that because McDouall's intellect appealed to these political groups he was undemocratic. To go to the other extreme (as the Whigs chose to do) and propose that McDouall's was the most democratic outpouring ignores that content of his rhetoric which appealed to the far right. Rather, it seems best to assume, due to the many conservative elements in his thought, that McDouall represented the essence of Chartism which was neither left nor right but a melange of popular social protest.

In the very first issues of The Chartist Journal its

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[90]Dale A. Johnson:, "Between Evangelism and a Social Gospel: The Case of Joseph Rayner Stevens", Church History 42, (American Society of Church History, 1973), p. 242.

[91]Kitson-Clark, "Hunger and Politics", p. 360.

conservatism is latent. On the front page of the inaugural issue McDouall asks what the Reform Bill has accomplished. Like Wellington, he was outraged by the political prominence which the middle class claimed they had gained. Their victory in the struggle with the glorious old order could only mean that labor, "the supporters and defenders of all", would suffer further degradation. He implies that "place hunting maggot-like aristocrats" have relinquished their position to even more despised bourgeoise. A further delineation of his position in successive issues indicates that his objections are aimed at only a fraction of the aristocracy who were recognized not only for their breeding or station in life but by their avarcious nature which made them unfit, even incapable, of ruling.[92]

Though the Chartists dabbled in democratic concepts, only an extremist editor of a Chartist paper would have dared to employ the term "Republican" in the title of a political digest. Of obvious interest then, given McDouall's choice of masthead, is the serialization started in the original issue: "What is Republicanism?". As it turned out many of the statements that could be related to the then current political situation are ambiguous on the subjects of democracy and deference. One assumes, after close study of this man's expressions and beliefs, that McDouall, like the average Chartist, is at best

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[92]McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal, (hereafter referred to as MCRJ), 3 April 1840, p. 1.

a half-hearted republican.

He advanced a proposition that mankind's natural state would be one where every individual had enough to satisfy himself. In an unspecified period of the past life had gone along in this fashion. He asserted that government in those days was in the hands of men renowned as the most honest. Accordingly, popular assent was given fully to a naturally exclusive elite. Only a rare few possessed the tremenduous intelligence and virtue necessary to enter this narrow circle. He explained that these rules no longer applied since a long period of decay in the public spirit had permitted ruffians and hoodlums to monopolize politics. In his first two articles on Republicanism no mention is made of a republic. What is inescapable is the inference here that if people were wise they would reverently submit to being governed by an admirable and exclusive elite.

In the third article he argued that there were three basic types of government: Republic, Monarchy, and Despotism. Monarchical government is quite tolerable if the monarch receives the popular support associated with republicianism. A despot would be unbearable. As for the will of the mass, it should always be "Let us find virtue and we will honor it, obey it, and protect it."[93] Following the pattern of thought outlined here, if a monarch were bound to the majority of his subjects with ties of mutual affection and trust,

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[93]MCRJ, 17 April 1840, p. 18.

there could be no just cause for complaint. Undeniably the author associated himself, as a political figure, with all he had discovered best in his analysis of government. Since he purported himself to be a fit judge of these matters one can only assume that he identified his own character with the natural elite rather than with the masses. A preference for republicanism would not only imply an assault on deference by any fair interpretation of the dialogue presented here. Similarly, British aristocratic opinion assumed that the upper classes were synonomous with the elite of virtue and intelligence.[94] Unable to associate the governing principle with the will of the mass, McDouall did very little in the early pages of his discussion to buttress the cause of popular democracy. Obviously his principal concepts are inegalitarian.

From that point on the major feature of The Chartist and Republican Journal details the glories of the ancient republic of Rome. An apotheosis of the Gracchi Brothers becomes the focus of many issues. Considered excellent statesmen because they championed the cause of the Plebes and slaves, "they are the most intelligent demagogues of ancient times".[95] Considering that Chartist leaders proudly labelled themselves demagogues this reference seems vain. The choice of patricians to be the popular champions seems a peculiar one for a person whose sympathies allegedly were with the common man.

94J. G. A. Pocock, "The Classical Theory of Deference", American Historical Review, 81, (American Historical Association, 1976), p. 517.

95MCRJ, 19 June 1840, p. 97.

The lessons he felt should be taken from these features by the early Victorians included many examples of how the people ought to respond to current political development. What should count for them were the programs devised by reformers for the general welfare. Always such reforms should come from above. The Roman Republic, the greatest model for reformers, had been agrarian. The reform proposal there was that every free man was to be given an equal share of the estates of the degenerate aristocrats which were seized by the Gracchi in the name of the people. The implications of such a proposal agreed with the moribund philosophy of the Chartist Land Scheme. It assumed that rural life was the cradle of virtue and civilized manners.[96] McDouall was thoroughly committed to this strain of popular agrarian idealizations associated with the current period of British right wing politics. His proposals for the salvation of the proletariat reiterated a traditionally conservative myth.

Many Chartists were men of the new age, proposing the future of abundance for all classes held out by the advance of technology. Already the urban dweller presumed himself to be more of a sophisticated character than his country bumpkin counterpart. He would resent returning to a life of dependency which would be the best he could hope for were he to farm a miniscule plot.[97] Many British radicals accepted,

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[96] MCRJ, 26 June, 1840, p. 107.

[97] Jones, Chartism and Chartists, pp. 128-137.

as Karl Marx did, that the industrial cities could provide an intellectual atmosphere beneficial to even the exploited laborer whose thoughts were broadened by the urban experience. They would have been relieved to have escaped "the idiocy of rural life".[98] Chartism foundered in the mid-1840s because it abandoned political goals in favor of just such an ill-conceived Land Plan Scheme. Highly impractical, due to a shortage of arable acreage, the Scheme was based on a presumption that the simple laboring man would inevitably be ensnared in the immoral climate of the city. Harking back to the values of a bygone era, these agrarians reinforced a nostalgia for a fallacy based on feudal mores. The dynamics of this mythology were negative for the advance of democracy. These were exceptionally undesirable considerations for the common man's cause. They dictated that the Chartist hierarchy support the landed aristocracy's position on the Corn Laws. In reality, the victory of the Manchester School over the aristocracy on this issue was a triumph for the working class as well.

McDouall found many solutions to difficulties in Roman practices, all of them with a conservative cast. Slaves had been grateful and submissive due to the institution of public granaries, a gift of the aristocracy. McDouall believed the Roman rulers were more humane, actually more Christian, than their British counterparts. Never once is the reader of

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[98] Karl Marx, Economy, Class, and Social Revolution, (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), p. 263.

these treatises instructed that the poor had a right to their grain; he was only told that in a well ordered state the wealthy would assume their obligation selflessly. It is not indicated that the presence of an aristocracy was an obnoxious feature, rather it was a blessing. Republicanism becomes the acceptance of the benevolent rule by the elite. That these considerations could be seen as contradictory to the democratic ethos is not apperent to the author, McDouall.[99]

In a later issue a piece signed by Peter Murray McDouall can only be seen as enhancing the allure of monarchial principles. He declared that through the reign of Elizabeth there is nothing with which a democratic reformer can find fault in the British system. All segments of society were in perfect harmony then as the aristocracy was content to exercise its paternalistic responsibility thereby benefiting the lower classes as well as themselves. The controversy over the New Poor Law should not be forgotten when one reads this piece. By inculcating the masses with a reverence for the ancient customs of deference, McDouall once again does a disservice to the democratic cause. It appears he was more concerned with an amelioration of the class struggle than with a triumph of the masses in the political sphere.[100]

Paternalistic concern for the working class animates much of McDouall's radicalism in The Journal. He despaired

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[99] MCRJ, 19 June 1841, p. 100.

[100] Ibid., 3 July 1841, p. 107.

that, in a most unchivalrous age, women and children have been sacrificed on the altar of materialism. A traditionalist tried and true, he demanded that they be protected from the ravages of an unscrupulous amoral faction. Clearly women, like children, are charges, the maintainence of their welfare the duty of society.[101] Unlike other Chartists he did not see in women the prerequisites of citizenship; again this is an indication of his more basic conservative authoritarianism. Similarly, the worker is depicted as a subspecies requiring protection, too lacking in understanding of the politics of the time to fend for himself. McDouall deplored that handloom weavers, who were "a race of useful and patriotic men", were being ruined.[102]

As the conservative Times of London would, he discussed the worker as if such people were a distinctly inferior caste.[103] By advancing these allusions The Chartist Journal reinforced a rigidly stratified vision of the social order. With their author truly believing in these tenets, the occasional radical statements in this article are insignificant. More convincing to the reader was the basic conservative bent of the editor.

Respecting traditionalism and all that it implied in

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[101] MCRJ, 7 August 1841, p. 146.

[102] Times, 18 May 1839, p. 4.

[103] MCRJ, 17 July 1841, p. 120.

the British situation, the frustrated loyalist in McDouall went to great lengths propounding the constitutional precedents for his opinions. This is typical Chartist wooden radicalism. All six points of the Charter were associated by him with the legend of Saxon democracy extinguished by the arrival of the Norman banditti. Not capable of advancing the democratic synthesis, he mired it in anachronistic deliberations which could be taken as a paean to the ancient deference network. He argued that Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments and the Secret Ballot were all esteemed because they were a part of an irreplaceable legacy. This viewpoint was one encumbered with many things a genuine radical would not wish to have venerated, but it was all well and good to McDouall. Therefore the reader is justified in imagining that feudalism and democracy are naturally related. The deification of long dead monarchs by revering their legalisms was a double-edged sword. McDouall and William IV held opposing views on the ballot but each personally believed he was loyal to the British national character and Britain's ancient practices and customs.[104] This is further proof that McDouall's radical thought processes did not set him apart from other non-liberal thinkers.

The contempt of the editor of The Chartist and Republican Journal for British royalty originated in his estimation of their progress after the reign of George III. From that date he felt monarchs had begun to infringe on the

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[104]Davis, "Deference and Aristocracy", p. 539.

inalienable liberties of the subjects. They, not the working class, had violated the deference contract. Believing his own loyalties to the glories of the traditional order to be unimpeachable, he cited this manifestation of the monarchial spirit as inferior, though he did not condemn monarchism. All he required from the monarchy was a guarantee of human rights which would be returned with the loyalty of grateful subjects.[105] This was precisely the justification conservative opinion offered for the existence of deference; that is, the lower orders would submit to rule by the elite who would respect them and wisely plan for the future welfare of both.[106] McDouall's argument was in basic agreement with conservative idealism.

Richard Oastler, the Tory radical, believed that the noble British character, heritage of past greatness, was corrupted by a new spirit in the age.[107] He, like McDouall, saw hiring of unemployed workers as police spies as especially degrading.[108] Oastler, ardent admirer of Wellington and of the reactionary McDouall, denigrated the progress of the age. Looking to the past for their inspiration these men all inculcated their audiences with their convictions that it was

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[105] MCRJ, 10 April 1841, p. 1.

[106] Ibid., 10 July 1841, p. 114.

[107] Fleet Papers, 6 Feb. 1841, p. 41.

[108] MCRJ, 24 April 1841, p. 17.

there that answers could be found to the problems confronting the populace.

A quote in The Chartist Journal explains how closely aligned McDouall believed conservatism and Chartism were as political forces. One heard, from T. Peronnet Thompson, M.P., that loyalty should be "to the England of old, never these new-fangled laws which [my] father and grandfather would have declared the people of England would never submit to". [109] McDouall took this to mean that Toryism was infinitely preferable to Whigism.

One short serial was entitled "Whig Bastille, the Model Prison Torture". In this we are informed that no true Tory would have devised the Workhouse. The most outrageous feature here was the attempt to sever the inmate from all social intercourse; that was to treat him more brutally than the lowliest felon.[110] It was typical of the legislation produced by the upstart middle class. Several times McDouall determined that the rise of this group could only mean the degradation of the masses. The Whig party was un-English, a crisis of the moment in the national spirit. Unlike any rational Republican, he saw Tory philosophy as a safeguard of of the interest of the masses.

Much of the space in his articles exuded a confidence in the inherent superiority of Toryism. His personal report

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[109] MCRJ, 24 July, 1841, p. 133.

[110] Ibid., 24 June, 1841., p. 95.

on his candidature for Parliament in the election of 1841 showed how overwhelming this could be. McDouall finished a distant fifth and, bitter in defeat, he charged the Whig candidates with bribery. Since it was common practice for candidates of all parties to supply voters with a cash payment to insure the victory of the faction, the justification for this editor's outrage is questionable.[110] At one time when making a speech in Birmingham McDouall had turned back an angry mob who were armed with iron railings and intent on a conflict with the constabulary.[111] Even though he advised the people to arm (as a last resort)[112] he was a reluctant revolutionary as is proven in this article because at the end he dampened revolutionary fervor further by blessing his Tory opponents as "sincere and honorable men".[113] It is to be remembered that such virtues were, for McDouall, the only vital qualities necessary for a leader. An astute reader will note that this editor saw the authoritarian reactionary strain of Tory politics to be compatible with his democratic views.

Again and again McDouall reinforces the allegiance of Chartism to Tory notions of deference. One short article purports to relate the casual dialogue typical of the 1841 election

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[110] MCRJ, 17 July 1841, p. 122.

[111] Gammage, Chartist, p. 93.

[112] MCRJ, 14 August 1841, p. 159.

[113] Ibid., 17 July 1841, p. 121.

scene. In this article Candidate Smith, a Whig, is bitterly renounced at the hustings by the crowd which would put straw in his mouth if they could. Smith is made to say he believed the poor could exist on "coarser food and lower wages". The Whig model is shown as a "Prussianized peasantry". Conversely Squire Partridge, the Tory, is depicted as no menace but as a kindly, though dated, figure, a "Hampden radical". His great concern is for the church, he is the type of bigot who would not forgive Wellington for the Catholic Emancipation of 1828. Radical Holdfast, a man of basic British common sense, emerges as the hero of the piece.[114] Sympathies toward the Establishment are for Partridge only. McDouall's cherished belief that good radicalism is akin to the Tory position is not the product of a conscious democratic reformer. The attempt to placate a faction of the elite merges the campaign for a popular franchise with a renaissance of romantic theories concerning the feudal order. McDouall apparently could not identify the legitimacy of the Charter with an expression of the popular view unless it was framed in the Tory manner.

A reader of this journal, looking to form his own opinions after the vision of the legendary extremist McDouall, would discover himself to be fundamental conservative on many issues. McDouall's radical proposals were half-hearted, with more passion than direction to them. These proposals constantly reinforced the class system and deference network produced

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[114] MCRJ, 17 July 1841, p. 124.

the evolution of British politics. For him, wise citizens would know their place and submit to their superiors. In the morass of opinion from this angry young man there is more in the way of Cobbett-like reaction than the alternate radical synthesis.

James O'Brien, in his small weekly article, never consciously paraded his Toryism as his cohort did. "Bronterre's" criticisms, however, were reserved for Whigs alone. At this stage in his radical career O'Brien's concern was the "Money Monster", and like many Chartists he believed the Tories were the party with a conscience. This idea was not all wrong since the ultra-Tory faction, who were against all democratic reform, realized that ameliorating working class distress was the first priority for any government.[115] O'Brien, like Thomas Carlyle, felt that all old sympathies that bound men of different classes together had been sacrificed to the "Moloch of Materialism".[116] Once again the complaint was not that monarchism and deference were, by nature, flawed but that, in the new age, they were being corrupted. The chief distinction in class relations in this current age, as compared with previous ones, was in the eyes of an observer independent of the movement, that class relations were all vertical, never horizontal, as before.[117] O'Brien wanted to return to past practices

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[115] Davis, "Deference and Aristocracy. . .", p. 537.

[116] MCRJ, 17 July 1841, p. 127.

[117] G. J. Holyoake, Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, 2 Vols., (London: J. Fisher and Unwin, 1867), Vol. I, p. 83.

which were antithetitical to democracy.

O'Brien quoted Alexander Pope as a supreme authority on social distinctions. Pope believed that self-indulgence could ruin an aristocracy. "Bronterre" postulated that this had occurred in England. Unlike a republican, he did not dismiss the old arrangement with contempt. Aristocratic venality, not the institution of class structure itself, produced bad administration. This lay at the root of all unrest.[118] Moreover, like any good right wing Tory, he preached that the current decline was the product of the political ascendancy of the middle class. The success of the "shopocracy" depended more on treachery and cunning than did that of any other class. One recognizes that the author meant to exalt the traditional deference relationships over the freedom of such institutions as could be assumed to be the result of the advance of democracy. The old aristocracy's paternalism would be healthier for the poor than the rugged individualism of the rising bourgeoise ethic.

O'Brien was also dismayed by his own electoral loss to a Whig candidate at Nottingham in 1841. "Whiggery", as he knew it, was certain to "undermine the ancient foundation of British Freedom".[119] Here again Chartism becomes another form of nostalgia for the attitudes of the past golden age of Britain. All in the reading public of that era knew about the

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[118] MCRJ, 24 July 1841, p. 132.

[119] Ibid., 31 July 1841, p. 142.

feudal caste system. By proposing that the oppressed classes look to the past deferential order instead of forward to a democratic society they could create, O'Brien retarded progress toward democratic ideals. What kind of threat, if any, his writings posed to the established order is not easily grasped. He was always one to enthusiastically embrace capitalistic dogmas, such as the primacy of individual initiative, over solidarity. He would go so far as to state sponsorship of entrepreneurs.[120] Had he not been so bound to the dictates of Christian conscience O'Brien would have had no quarrel with establishment attitudes. He reluctantly came to the conclusion that he had to oppose the brutal treatment of the poor which, for him, was an unnecessary byproduct of an otherwise admirable social order. In this period his views were not ardently democratic.

Although O'Brien proposed the nationalization of arable land he was being neither socialistic nor excessively democratic. Socialism, as it implies a leveling of class distinctions, seemed despotic to both O'Brien and to Feargus O'Connor, the latter the leading Irishman of the Chartist movement. When the state took the accumulated wealth of one individual and gave it to another it negated the value of personal initiative by giving encouragement to idleness and dissipation.[121]

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[120] MCRJ, 26 June, 1841, p.102.

[121] Northern Star, (Hereafter NS), 28 December, 1839, p. 1.

After being jailed O'Brien disavowed all his former revolutionary epithets. He developed an enormous attachment to William Cobbett's philosophy.[122] Counselling gradualism, he turned his early anti-collectivist conservatism into more and more uninspired reactionary idealism. Shifting toward the right in his later career "Bronterre" took his following in an opposite direction from that of the emerging mid-Victorian political moderation and left liberalism.[123]

O'Brien and McDouall went in separate directions following a brief five and a half months together. As the last gasp of revolutionary Chartism expired in 1848 the two were poles apart. "Bronterre", in decline, was a "beery" agitator slowly "slumping into the West". He had made his peace with Victorian society and rested easy on small fees given him for his lectures.[124] Peter McDouall continued to rave about the government but his opinions were so obnoxious to his fellow Britons that he could find no safe quarter in his homeland. Events of 1848 surrounding the presentation to Parliament of the last great Petition had McDouall hovering in the background, attempting to form a revolutionary Ulterior Committee. A wanted man, he fled the country and went to Australia.

122Plummer, Bronterre, p. 248.

123Ibid., p. 192.

124Ibid., p. 254.

125Gammage, Chartist, p. 253.

Obviously these men were not the dire threat to the established principles that government propaganda depicted them as being. Both attempted to align Chartism with undemocratic conservative idealizations. This allowed them to accept the British Constitution as sacrosanct. It needed only slight revisions in their opinion which, by implication, were compatible with past practice. They presumed their roles to be defenders of the anachronistic social institutions. As patriot defenders of the deference network they counseled a willing submission to an executive of the masses. This was not combined with a rejection of the monarchy or to hereditary aspects of the aristocratic ideal. To them, the greatest grievance with their nation was the Whig Party's success and the new governing consensus the Whigs created which both defined the parameters of political conduct of both Whig and Tory adherents in this time, and was biased against egalitarian idealists. Basically their complaint was derived from their anti-modernism. Fundamental conservatives, they, like Wellington, feared a nation governed by the bourgeoise. Yet the triumph of the upper middle class was also a success for democracy in that it broadened the base of the government's mandate to rule. It was an advance toward the egalitarianism that good Chartists, as democrats, would applaud. Not champions of the proletariat as other leaders such as William Lovett and John Collins were, these two figures who dominated The Chartist and Republican Journal were often essentially reactionaries. Neither O'Brien nor McDouall attempted to

explode the stratified vision of society accepted by the dominant group but only to reduce the brutality associated with it. The Chartist Journal was not a clear expression of the emerging democratic or working class culture of Victorian Britain.

CHAPTER IV

Feargus O'Connor and the Northern Star

In 1850 Leeds was a smaller version of Manchester with all the problems of factory towns. In 1851 just over half the adult population of 95,000 were second generation natives.[126] Here, in regular times, the adult male head of the family could earn enough to remain above the poverty level. Still, advancement beyond a very low order was out of the question for the majority.[127]

In this environment workers gave enthusiastic support to a strong trade union movement. The towns of the North--Leeds to a much greater degree than most--were in favor of violent revolutionary doctrines.[128] Leeds went totally for the Charter as soon as the agitation began. "Physical Force" tenets were expected from the leaders, the more hysterical and rabid the delivery the better.[129] Life in this West Riding town held out a dreary prospect for the majority, so they were more prone to militancy.[130]

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[126]Clapham, Economic History, p. 537.

[127]Ibid., p. 554.

[128]Thomas Milton Kemnitz, "Attitudes and Allegiances of the Unskilled North," Albion, Vol. 10 (Applachian State University Department of History, 1978), p. 170.

[129]West, Chartist Movement, p. 105.

[130]Ward, Chartism, p. 85.

In addition to their intense devotion to the democratic cause, Leeds radicals could boast of possessing the largest Chartist newspaper in the heyday of that agitation, 1839-1842. The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser carried the word to every corner of England, Scotland and Wales. From 1838 to 1844 it gave this medium-sized factory town an image appropriate to the brand of radicalism derived from its position and past experience.

In 1836 a Protestant Irishman who had served since 1832 in the House of Commons lost his seat. Though he owned an estate he had not been able to meet the property requirement of 600 pounds necessary for a member of Commons. This man, Feargus O'Connor, who possessed the talent and political acumen to replace Daniel O'Connell as the popular favorite of the Irish people, found himself out of politics and vexed.[131] When he looked around for a political journal in which to broadcast his views Leeds provided the vehicle, a proposed paper to be launched by a small local radical group. This project became The Northern Star after O'Connor assumed control of the organizational efforts. He owned the paper when publication started and employed it, personally, in the Chartist cause for fourteen years. It featured the Six Points as a radical program that differed from O'Connor's pre-Chartist views by only one feature, that being the additional demand

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[131] D. Read and E. Glasgow, Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist, (London: Edw. Arnold Ltd., 1961), p. 182.

made by Chartism for Annual Parliaments.[132] Beyond his radical idealism the energy and literary ability he brought to this paper (in the eyes of one sober analyst) would have made it a success no matter what party line he wished to promote.[133]

Unlike most other prominent Chartist leaders, Feargus O'Connor had no direct hand in formulating the Six Points, though he had been associated with radical circles all his life. His father, Arthur O'Connor, was a leader of the United Irishmen of 1798. One uncle became a general in Napoleon's army and eventually married one of Condorcet's daughters. Another was a lifelong arch-Tory who amassed an estate of which Feargus inherited a portion. Feargus, born in 1798, was a leader in the infamous White Boy outrages of 1820. Legend has it that in those days he and his brothers robbed the mail coaches on the highways at night to save the family holdings from being seized for debt.[134] Born with these connections and nurtured in the lawlessness of Irish politics he was, by nature, suited to radical reform ideas.

The intellectual basis for his convictions was given to him by Sir Francis Burdett. Burdett, an associate of Feargus's father, took charge of the lad's formal education in England as a favor to his friend. A famous Tory and reformer, co-founder of the National Political Union in 1831, Burdett

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[132]G. D. H. Cole, British Working Class Politics, (London: Rutledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1954), p. 19.

[133]Read and Glasgow, O'Connor, p. 12.

[134]West, Chartist, p. 85.

greatly influenced O'Connor's attitudes.[135] By nature emotional and impulsive, O'Connor was unsuited to be a great systematizer or political theorist. From his days as a pupil through his captaincy of the Charter movement he proved himself a most eccentric figure. His adult political triumphs were due to his charisma and knack for interpreting the popular mood. Throughout his life he was a robust figure known to delight excessively in food, drink, and the company of ladies, especially actresses. This made him a favorite and also typical of a class of politicians in that era.[136] Tragically, Feargus's second stint in the House of Commons, from 1847 to 1852, was cut short by illness. A slow descent into insanity came upon him in his later years, as had been his father's fate. A spokesman for unpopular proposals, Feargus became an easy prey for the ridicule of his political enemies. On the floor of the House, in 1852, he raved until he was ejected. His death two years later came too late. After a decade and more as the unanimous choice of the Chartist rank and file, he was dropped from the executive committee uncermoniously in 1851. One year prior to that he relinquished control of The Northern Star, based in London and quite unpopular, to Ernest Jones because of declining health.[137]

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[135]Read and Glasgow, O'Connor, p. 14.

[136]Ibid., p. 19.

[137]Adams, Social Atom, p. 157.

In the glory years The Northern Star sold upward of 50,000 copies weekly. The paper was twice as large as any other Chartist journal in the days of 1839-1842 when the movement attained its peak popularity. Eagerly awaiting each issue was an audience of over a million people.[138] All the leading radical theorists were given space in print as long as their views did not openly contradict the owner's. By bringing his digest to support the Charter he made it the official organ of the movement, turning a handsome profit on his investment.

Many of the founders of Chartism were disgruntled at Feargus's success and his domination of the movement. William Lovett scornfully labelled him the great "I am" of British politics. Actually O'Connor believed himself to be a missionary for the ultimate popular alliance between the long-oppressed Irish peasants and the British workers. Whatever the progressive radical community had wished to the contrary, this Irishman became the beloved leader of the people, the symbol of Chartism.[139]

Linked together in the literature of this movement are the names of O'Connor and the Reverend Joseph Stevens. The latter became a demagogue after the Methodist community excommunicated him due to his political dissent.[140] On a speaking

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[138]Adams, Social Atom, p. 162.

[139]Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 7.

[140]Rosenblatt, Chartist, p. 108.

tour in the late fall and early winter of 1838-1839 he carried Tory agitation against the New Poor Law to unheard of extremes. A typical passage by Stevens, the kind that drew lavish praise in The Northern Star, gives a clue to the nature of this self-confessed reactionary's appeal: "And then it would be law for every man to have his flintlock, his cutlass, his sword, his pair of pistols or his pike, and for every woman her pair of scissors, and for every child to have its paper of pins and box of needles, and let the good men with a torch in one hand and a dagger in the other put to death any and all who attempted to sever man from wife."[141] As he uttered such passages audiences would work themselves into a frenzy, shouting themselves hoarse. Much of the ex-minister's cant was shrouded in Old Testament allusions and theology. Feargus went beyond heaping praise on Stevens in The Northern Star, he joined him on many podiums and chimed in. A sample of the oratory that made O'Connor "The Physical Force Chartist" came when, on a platform in Birmingham, he "counseled them against all rioting, all civil war", but then he would say, in the hearing of the House of Commons, that "rather than see the Constitution violated he would himself lead the people to death or glory."[142] Reports of other speeches like this one were staples of The Northern Star in 1839.

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[141] Johnson, "Between Evangelism and Social Gospel", p. 231.

[142] Ibid., p. 235.

When Stevens and O'Connor made a joint appearance they were delivered by a coach and four, attired in top hat and tails; that is with the flourish and style of vain aristocrats. Naturally both were among the first to be arrested when the Whigs broke the back of the protest movement in 1839-1840. Removal of the leadership of talent had the effect of smashing the agitation.[143] Because Stevens recanted and disavowed any democratic beliefs he got one year of imprisonment in a comfortable well-furnished cell.[144] O'Connor was was treated much worse because he remained unwilling to espouse the dogmas of the oligarchy.

Like the years he spent as the Irish member of Parliament, this period of O'Connor's life was turbulent. Often his contributions to Chartism were deprecated. The only full history of the movement written concurrently with its happening was done by one of its officials, R. G. Gammage, and his account inaugurated the disparaging anti-O'Connor trend of historiography. His, and subsequent, criticisms were based on Feargus's propensity to inflame the rabble with calls for violent uprisings and his biting satire aimed at public officials. Since that time this disparagement has been attributed to O'Connor's "ill-regulated brain" and all this has been claimed to be "the ruin of Chartism".[145] Not one to cave in

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[143]Kenmitz, "The Chartist Convention", p. 152.

[144]Rosenblatt, Chartist Movement, p. 127.

[145]Gammage, Chartist, p. xxix.

to pressure, O'Connor clung to his style of democracy. He did, however, bow to the Victorian respectability that made Gammage criticize Physical Force and claimed that he had always believed in Moral Force.[146] Nevertheless, he held on to his irreverent manner of addressing his superiors which assured him of much support. This flipflop was characteristic of O'Connor in that he sees him, when under pressure, abandoning his extremism for conservative mannerisms.

Torrential rain drenched Monmouthshire on the early morning of Nov. 4, 1839. In the predawn hours of that day, John Frost, a local magistrate, led a Chartist revolt believing that--as Feargus had promised--it would be the first skirmish of a national uprising. Others collaborated in this view, saying that a plot had been formed by a cabal which included O'Connor. Quite peculiar was O'Connor's later abrupt departure for Ireland, less than a week before events unfolded in Wales. In 1848 when the well known symbol of reaction, the 79 year old Lord Wellington, prepared a defense of London against Chartist petitioners O'Connor was proclaiming that he would lead a great riot to the House of Commons with the Petition; but at the last moment he dispersed the mob, having no stomach for revolution. Physical Force, as a strategy, proved bankrupt time and again since O'Connor, the leader of Chartism, was not by nature prepared to take charge of an army

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[146] West, Chartist, p. 97.

of workers.[147] By promoting a policy of avoiding a revolution whenever events offered the opportunity he made a realistic conservative's decision. The only man equipped with the personal magnetism and sympathy for the masses that would have enabled him to lead the early Victorians to revolt, he chose not to do so. The rationale of his actions in this period under examination (1839-1840), a period of great class strife, was quite conservative; therefore, the prose used in The Northern Star was also acceptable to the government censors.[148]

All shades of opinions appeared in The Northern Star: Tory reformers, Owenites, and avowed revolutionaries were all given space; anyone or anything that was connected with the movement and that pleased Feargus. A claim has been made that O'Connor opportunistically exploited the passions of revolutionaries like George Julian Harney. Surely Feargus's personal doctrines were not easily associated with such comments. In 1848, looking back at the early days of Chartism he would proudly proclaim, "I have never been a republican".[149] Though he entertained and presented all types of opinions, and gave conflicting statements about his own loyalties, he was not so complicated a figure as to preclude a ready appraisal of his bias. Reputedly a mindless militant, and as the chief of a

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[147] Kemnitz, "The Chartist Convention", p. 170.

[148] Gammage, Chartist, p. 416.

[149] Northern Star (hereafter NS), 28 December 1839, p.5.

teeming mass of labor, he reveals himself in his own prose to have a conservative tendency incorporated in his political ideas. His journal, by seeming to sponsor a revolution while contradicting the logic of that position, circumvented the growth of a viable revolutionary party. He and The Northern Star became a tool of reactionary elements who wished to delay the advent of a democratic social order.

"The Cult of the Leader" is one of the elements of totalitarianism most opposed to the democratic tradition. Exalting a leader, especially if carried to the extent of an apotheosis, runs counter to egalitarian inclinations. In The Northern Star some disturbing references were printed regarding the divine attributes of Feargus O'Connor. The adjective "supernatural" was used in an editorial to describe the owner's efforts at campaigning for the release of John Frost and his co-conspirators.[150] This manner of hagiolatry is a direct indication that the paper indulged in fantasy, ignored the danger of "The Cult of the Leader" and, thereby, undemocratically prompted a mythology of O'Connor.

Responding to the adulation of the masses who yearned for political liberties, O'Connor radiated paternal benevolence. He remarked "never a man of my order has devoted himself as I have done to the working class".[151] Their "chosen

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150NS, 30 November 1839, p. 6.

151Adams, Memoirs, p. 207.

representative" worked for them "at great sacrifice to himself".[152] As he expressed it, the working masses who gave him support were "my children". Rather than preparing the people to discern the qualities that made a man fit to be a democratic leader, O'Connor promoted himself in this vain manner. He went to great lengths to indoctrinate his adherents with notions of his personal grandeur, rather than with the greatness of the principles to which they, as democrats, should be dedicated. As his father had, O'Connor claimed to be the descendant of the last King of Ireland, Roderic O'Connor. Undoubtedly his blusterings added to his mystique. Britain's laborer's, despised and reviled by their own aristocracy, must have responded to O'Connor's claims from the well of their own grievances. They were backing a man they felt to be the rightful monarch of an oppressed people and were, in turn, willing to die for him (or so he said) in a struggle to insure justice for the little man.[153] So enamored was O'Connor of this fantasy that he often signed his articles "Feargus Rex".[154]

After the fashion of a tyrant, he used his popularity with the crowd to discredit other sincerely democratic radicals because he saw them as potential rivals. A master of

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[152] NS, 6 July 1839, p. 7.

[153] West, Chartist, p. 97.

[154] William Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), p. 200.

duplicity, he used The Northern Star as an instrument for personal aggrandizement, injuring the cause. As an instance: in the spring of 1839 he used his influence at the Chartist National Convention to sponsor extremely revolutionary proposals.[155] Although he proclaimed he had not intended to create violence he pursued his support among the faction that styled itself after Marat, St. Just, and other French Jacobins. Feargus was despised by the moderate intellectual wing exemplified by William Lovett and William Cobbett, the latter being the delegate from Birmingham and also the son of the editor of the Political Register. Cobbett's wing of the Chartist National Convention wanted to present a petition in the most legal manner possible.[156] Therefore, O'Connor took the lead in hurling oaths and reciting dire imprecations of what could happen to the government should it refuse the People's Petition. A man who feigns support for a position he knows to be unsound is unprincipled. Beyond that, by encouraging false hopes of a successful revolt he endangered his constituency. Had more laborers followed the example of "Jack" Frost, who led a local Chartist revolt such as O'Connor seemed to imply would be worthwhile they, like Frost, would have received a sentence of execution.[157] O'Connor did grave disservice to the democratic cause playing the role of head bully

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[155]West, Chartist, p. 111.

[156]Kemnitz, "Chartist Convention", p. 170.

[157]David Williams, John Frost: A Study in Chartism, (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1969), p. 286.

boy and providing an offensive caricature ready made for the oligarchy's propaganda.

Others of his actions strengthen a negative appraisal of O'Connor as a democrat. Lovett stayed with the Convention but, due to the fact that he openly attacked the O'Connorites' official line, he became the object of a campaign of villification wholly unwarranted by the nature of his original criticisms. Articles in The Northern Star crudely depicted him as as an enemy of the people, a police spy, etc.[158] Obviously the pattern of thought sketched here is diametrically opposed to the free, open and honest debate democracy is supposed to foster. O'Connor's antics about revolution helped to destroy the Chartist movement by leading it into a dead end.[159] The anti-Corn Law League, and later associations for an extension of the franchise, restricted themselves to Moral Force tactics and succeeded in their aims. Seeking to advance himself at the expense of other democrats, conceitedly posing as royalty, O'Connor and his weapon, The Northern Star, are easier to see as reactionary elements than are the Lovett school.

James "Bronterre" O'Brien was at one time one of O'Connor's favorites. He gave to "Bronterre" the apellation of "the Schoolmaster of Chartism" due to O'Brien's intellectual achievements.160 But, in 1841, O'Brien resigned his position

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[158]Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 316.

[159]Preston Slossen, The Decline of the Chartist Movement, (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 152.

[160]Plummer, Bronterre, p. 85.

as editor of The Northern Star because he could no longer tolerate what he considered unprincipled support of Tory candidates advocated by O'Connorites. "Bronterre" objected on democratic grounds stating that if a Whig were a true patron of the political rights of the majority he would receive support from them, and that these supporters would not then give blind loyalty to a Tory candidate who could be a hidebound reactionary.[161] Again The Northern Star was used as a mouthpiece of denunciation, this time of O'Brien. A similar dispute, in 1842, drove home the wedge between the two. As before, the "schoolmaster" was the vindicator of democracy by proposing Chartist support for the Complete Suffrage Union of Joseph Sturge. Sturge's Union was a middle class body of people who favored political liberties for all, but stopped short of advocating all the Charter's Six Points though in spirit they were equally democratic.[162] At first O'Connor vacillated about supporting Sturge but, when he came out against the alliance, he excoriated all who disagreed. O'Connor was very undemocratic in his electoral alliances, choosing Tories over the Complete Suffrage Union, and using his paper both to bolster the images of reactionaries and calumniate democrats.

As with O'Connell's United Irishmen, O'Connor Chartism had bands of thugs who enforced the leader's wishes at public

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[161] Plummer, Bronterre, p. 159.

[162] Slossen, Decline, pp. 72-77.

meetings.[163] With relish unbecoming a democratic leader, he recounted in The Star the brawls his boys had with O'Connellites. O'Connor argued that of all the democratic radicals, O'Connell was an apostate, known as a Judas because he abandoned the Charter he had framed in order that he might receive Whig patronage. In 1842 the enemy became another Irishman, "Bronterre" O'Brien, but this time a man who was a tried and true Chartist. An infamous group, known as the "Shakespearean Brigade" of Leicester, entirely devoted to O'Connor's whims, continually interrupted, harassed and finally forced O'Brien from the podium when he was on a speaking tour because he had dared to contradict the official line the Brigade read every Saturday morning in The Northern Star.[164] The very antithesis of democratic leadership, this action showed (as Gammage noted) that the lure of The Star's program was a combination of ignorance and fanaticism.[165] Political actions such as these are not uncommon in the 20th century, long after the advent of a democratic culture in many nations. But they were then, and remain now, undemocratic methods. The display by "Feargus Rex" of these tactics indicates how reactionary he was.

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[163]Philip A. W. Collins, "T. Cooper, Byron and Poets of the Poor", Nottingham Byron Lecture, (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1969), p. 12

[164]Plummer, Bronterre, p. 175.

[165]Lovett, Life and Struggle, p. 256.

General of the "Shakesperian [sic] Brigade" was one Thomas Cooper, who was converted and became a Baptist minister at the age of 50. He was a young man in the 1840s. In the 1860s he proved to be a brilliant literary figure and his autobiography was recommended by the editor of The Times as a primer in prose style.[166] Cooper began his public life as the head of an O'Connorite band known for its belligerence and intolerance. His excesses were the product of the emotional anti-democratic populism of The Northern Star. This political journal pandered to this element of society and posed a genuine threat to civil liberties.[167] The Star was unique among Chartist papers in that it published harsh criticisms of brothers in the cause. Since it was both a sterile and an anti-intellectual critique, one can judge the negative influence it had by examining the force of its antilibertarian sentiment.

Since O'Connor was so critical about the errors of his comrades, his unqualified endorsement of Tory radicals is shocking. Not once does The Northern Star preface its commendations of Tory activities with an admonition that Chartists ought to take exception to that party's antipathy to self rule by the artisam class. Instead, unstinting adulation is recommended. James Raynor Stevens was lionized in this paper; his arrest and conviction were expanded upon at great length in The Star. He was the people's own, no mention of his apostasy

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[166] Collins, "T. Cooper", p. 16.

[167] NS, 23 February 1839, p. 7.

from the democratic cause was ever included.[168] Indicative of this approach was a printed testimonial to Richard Oastler. "King Oastler" was also the people's friend. Oastler was another Tory reformer who harbored arch-conservative views.[169] In designating these individuals as praiseworthy The Northern Star associated popular democracy with reactionary idealism. Evidently O'Connor could not conceive how detrimental to a democratization of society this could be; or, if he did, that is more conclusive evidence of his incapacity for democratic leadership. This should make one skeptical about labelling his digest democratic propaganda.

A case might be made on this score that O'Connor, as a policymaker for The Northern Star, gave adequate expression of the level of democratization achieved by Britain in this period. Because the paper printed only what it obviously thought the population wanted to read, a review of its contents can make one think of this organ as a sounding board by which one can discover what things were identified by the masses with their cause. By such reasoning it is possible to assert that the populace saw Tory conservatives as sympathetic to their plight. Yet this journal undertook to revise ideas of society and government, and it must be held responsible for its failure to shape opinions. If one chooses to carry on the thinking of The Northern Star really identified with the cause of the masses, the editorial content of the paper will offer

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[168] NS, 29 June 1839, p. 8.

[169] Thomson, Early Chartists, pp. 43-44.

contradictory sentiments, more inclined to a conservative point of view, and not nearly those one would expect from a democratic organ. Edward Thompson, a man who obviously did not pride himself as an intellectual, offered a sincere critique in a letter to The Northern Star, stating that he despised "the Bible burning French radicals". An author eager to defend the English Constitution, his thoughts exude loyalty to and confidence in the past arrangements. Radicalism in England was not a matter of who represented whom so much as a question of "bread, beef, and ale". That he was to be taken seriously is inescapable since his letter was prominently displayed.[170] As was the fashion in this kind of prose, the working class was always depicted as most loyal subjects. A typical claim that a Chartist "was actuated by strong feelings of loyalty and attachment to [his] most gracious sovereign as any workman or gentleman"[171] indicated the underlying meaning of such prose. The inference drawn by a reader might be that republican and related doctrines were window-dressing, a way of obfuscating the legitimate demands of the lower classes for paternal benevolence from their superiors. Why this organ would choose to direct Chartism, inherently a program of political action, in this way it is difficult to comprehend.

An editorial printed in 1841, entitled "The First

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[170] NS, 21 November 1840, p. 7.

[171] Ibid., 2 January 1841, p. 2.

Principles of Government", gave a more complete picture of what The Northern Star thought of current political demands. The anonymous author sagaciously assumed "in the present age and the present character and opinion of the nation, the only means of avoiding a republic. . . is giving every Briton his rights as a human being". In its context this quote implies that it would be in the best interest of all to avoid a republican government.[172] Why should the editor of a democratically oriented broadsheet fervently wish to avoid a republic in Britain in 1841? Given the hostile rejection of even small schemes of social reforms by an antagonistic oligarchy, perhaps only a republican revolution could have brought any democracy in Britain. A clue as to the significance of this attitude is given in an earlier issue. Universal Suffrage was always the plank accorded reverential awe by Chartists. Their dogma decreed that once that was achieved all other needful reforms would follow in due course.[173] Concerning the paper's support of this doctrine it was remarked: "Ours is a joint all may dine from, the Prince, the Peasant, and the Peer, and if they have an appetite for justice and good digestion they may make a hearty and profitable meal." A realist who was aware of the social climate of that period would have seen this as a folly, and have noted there was

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[172] NS, 23 January 1841, p. 4.

[173] Hammond, Age of Chartists, pp. 267-269.

[174] NS, 19 September 1840, p. 4.

small chance of it coming about.

That O'Connor dabbled in an eccentric brand of reaction is irrefutable. A consistent monarchist, he held that principle as a prominent part of his creed. A speech he made in Glasgow in March, 1840, was reported in The Northern Star which in turn expanded on Feargus's rationale: "Aye, majesty, for I am for the monarchy, and a hereditary one. (Loud cheers) The one curbs ambition, prevents revolution and keeps the grosser powers in subjection." [175] Employing a minimal amount of critical analysis one will reach the conclusion that this speaker was neither an ardent democrat nor a very persuasive proponent of egalitarian principles.

The body of the opinion exposed in The Northern Star in 1839-1842 is all that has been extensively examined here. The events of 1842 saw O'Connor reject an alliance with the middle class who wanted a democratic agitation. It was more Whig treachery in his eyes.[176] Tragically, he impeded the advance of democracy by splintering the reform body on a class issue. He then turned away from a political agitation to mire Chartism in his reactionary Land Plan schemes under which a private corporation (to be owned by O'Connor) would follow a policy of minifundia and would permit workers to buy a small plot of land on an installment plan. Failure of this scheme had the effect of discrediting the entire Chartist movement.

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[175] NS, 21 March, 1840, p. 3.

[176] English Chartist Circular, 8 April 1842, p. 46.

Even in the early years O'Connor gave hints about his thought processes on this score. "All save the land is artificial . . . The Englishman's sentry box has been abandoned, his rightful protection from, and title to, the soil has been stolen from him, and in the Poor Law Union. . .he recognizes a poor substitute for his castle."[177] The only way to review these remarks is to call them traditional. Embedded in the Tory psyche was the concept that the greatness of the English nation was maintained by the stewardship of the soil.[178] O'Connor's employment of this cant denoted his reactionary nature.

Readers, no matter how discriminating they might have been, could not have filtered out the innate conservatism in The Northern Star's message. To give O'Connor his due, his appeal was intended to, and did, touch the heartstrings of the masses. He knew, and could micmic, the popular mood very closely. If one chooses to believe that O'Connor's democracy is more in line with modern totalitarianism than Victorian reaction, a closer inspection of the democratization of a society is required. Modern day parties habitually beguile the public about a candidate's true abilities just as The Northern Star did for Feargus. Though O'Connor employed

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[177]English Chartist Circular, 8 April 1842, p. 46.

[178]Robert Robson, ed., Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), pp. 268-270.

unethical practices to maintain his power, no mention is made of his ever wanting to suspend or do away with the democratic process of selecting leaders common to the bodies with which he was associated. Of course, many were envious of his common touch. More of a paternal reactionary than a totalitarian, he was an expression of his age. Due to his unique attributes he fit the people's bill as a leader for their democratic crusade, one who exhibited the old culture's mark of distinction. He suited the tenor of the time and his passions can be said to function as a barometer indicating the acceptability of democratic ideas.

These concerns in no way detract from the conservative heritage he wished to preserve throughout his career as a radical journalist. Destined to be the subject of an ongoing and bitter dispute about his character as a leader, he undoubtedly symbolized democratic leadership in an age inclined against such innovations. A tall, well-built, handsome, redheaded man with a very pronounced noble profile, he was an enigma, and due to his protracted mental decline while in the limelight, a tragic figure. Though projected in a conceited, paternalistic, and inegalitarian manner, his concern for the sufferings of the poor is irrefutable. Equally undeniable is his inherent bent. A landed aristocrat, he founded his appeal on nostalgia for the past order. As is usual in such cases he found more in the past than it really had to offer. How greatly he valued totalitarianism with regard to the deference network is inescapable. Never, in

this period, did the paper promote sophisticated republican doctrines or other than lame democratic ones. One stands on safe ground in proposing that The Northern Star did as much to detract from the luster of truly democratic doctrines as it helped to project them.

CHAPTER V

Summary

The Chartist political program has been shown in this exposition to have been an amalgam of several strands of the popular discontent. A peculiar juxtaposition of conservative and liberal doctrines, it sought to acclaim the good sense of the former without compromising altogether the ideals associated with the latter. By maintaining a tenuous support for constitutional methods it inaugurated the transition that created a Labour Party with an evolutionary approach to social reform. This has been cited as an indication of a peculiar reluctance of British society to shatter traditions, and is carried to such an extent it remains deferential. Outlined in this study are early indications that the masses would respond as well to appeals based on traditional stereotypes about class relations as they would to democratic revolutionary ones. In the examples presented here two of them adopted a paternalistic approach toward the masses not easily distinguishable from Tory idealizations. In the case of The Chartist Circular it was Owenite in tone, while that of The Northern Star was more akin to Cobbett's doctrines; both were very paternalistic and often labelled reactionary. McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal was not so clearly a product of this ideology but, as noted, tended to foster related inegalitarian notions. What remains after some study is a political phenomenon that displayed attitudes which can be construed as fortifying Marxist-Leninist-like doctrines as well

political reforms that countered orthodox assumptions and, when opposed, attempted to align itself with traditionalism. Because events followed this pattern a truer conception of this era is possible. Even more, it is safe to assume that the conservative ideals that Chartists would not abandon in their crusade for democracy and social justice were doctrines so vital to the essence of the culture that they could not be extinguished. They may also be taken as expressions of the broad guidelines of the consensus that emerged in Britain following the clash between the aristocratic and the democratic ideal. The individual Chartist becomes the agent of this cultural transformation as he represents the liberal challenge. Therefore, an attempt to appreciate the complexity of his political thought is of great importance.

These journals, then, reflect the genesis of a radical democratic culture allowed for the first time in Britain to legally publish and disseminate the views of their counter-culture. Highly relevant to any discussion of this reform party is its ability to draw upon the sympathies of the masses, who had heretofore looked to Tory paternalism as a buffer against the transgressions of an industrial society founded on extreme doctrines of laissez-faire capitalism. To be successful, Chartists had to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Tory reactionary's concern even though it countered the democratic thrust of their ideology. In the end, the many comments of the agitators were echoes of stereotypes fostered by the oligopoly, so pervasive was the notion that the poor

needed to be saved and provided for rather than be given the opportunity to save and provide for themselves. This attitude of thought dictated that Feargus O'Connor and others ape the mores of the status bearing elite even to the point of adapting (while not fundamentally altering) traditional political ideology to suit the circumstances. As this alone provided the public support necessary to prolong the struggle it perforce became the radical tone associated with Chartism. There exists now the need to indicate clearly the state of the British political culture of the mid-nineteenth century from the perspective of the working masses. Given the non-revolutionary intent of much of the journalism discussed here, there is some question as to the accuracy of labelling this movement as revolutionary; but in attempting to classify the ideology of these authors one's perception of events is enhanced.

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